

## WATER, DESIRE, AND THE ELUSIVE NATURE OF MARTIAL, IV 22

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En estas páginas se exploran las múltiples implicaciones del epigrama IV 22 de Marcial, a la luz del libro completo y de las reminiscencias de Ovidio en dicho poema. Mientras que la influencia de la historia ovidiana de Sálmacis y Hermafrodito se ha reconocido y estudiado ampliamente, no se había prestado atención suficiente a los ecos de la elegía amorosa latina. Las convenciones eróticas de este género tiñen este epigrama de nuevas posibilidades interpretativas.

These pages encompass the manifold implications of Martial IV 22, both in the light of the whole book IV and its Ovidian reminiscences. Whereas the influence of Ovid's tale of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus on this passage has been widely recognised, not enough attention has been paid to the echoes of the Latin love elegy. The elegiac conventions in the erotic field colour a new reading of this epigram.

Primos passa toros et adhuc placanda marito  
 merserat in nitidos se Cleopatra lacus,  
 dum fugit amplexus, sed prodidit unda latentem:  
 lucebat, totis cum tegetetur aquis.  
 Conditae sic puro numerantur lilia vitro,  
 sic prohibet tenuis gemma latere rosas.  
 Insilui mersusque vadis luctantia carpsi  
 basia: perspicuae, plus vetuistis, aquae.

After tasting the bridal bed, and yet to be appeased by her husband,  
 Cleopatra had plunged into a gleaming lake,  
 fleeing from his embrace, but the stream betrayed her hiding-place:  
 she was shining, although totally covered by the waters.  
 Thus one can reckon some lilies enclosed beneath a clear glass,

thus a delicate precious stone never lets the roses hide.  
 I jumped in, and diving in the depths I stole struggling  
 kisses: ye, translucent waters, forbade me more<sup>1</sup>!

According to the most widespread interpretation of this poem, a recently married young lady has fled from her nuptial bed out of modesty. Trying to hide from her husband, she has plunged into a lake, but her scheme is useless, since the transparency of the waters betrays her. The poetic voice, accidental beholder of the scene –or her husband for the purpose of this epigram, according to some scholars–, is aroused by this vision, by the almost paradoxical conjunction of beauty and coyness, conveyed by the exquisiteness of the similes describing her as seen through the gleaming water (l. 5-6). He jumps in and tries to possess her, gets a few reluctant kisses, but it is the translucent nature of the waters that prevents him from going on<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on other possible interpretations and nuances of this epigram, by placing it in its context within Martial's book IV and by drawing on its literary sources and echoes. The protagonist's modesty has always been taken for granted and the love triangle has not been sufficiently explored, although the poem has received insightful attention on the part of scholars. A new coherent reading of the epigram will be offered, which need not necessarily gainsay previous views: it is precisely the sundry symbolical associations of the physical medium around which the poem revolves, water, that allow different, and even opposing, suggestions to coexist and complement each other.

Let us begin with the symbolic connotations of water, as presented in Martial's book IV: the structure of the book of epigrams is so tightly interwoven, that it would not be fair to isolate a single epigram and deprive it of its context. Interpretation, then, would be faulty. Water may be a fortuitous deadly element, as in IV 18, the pathetic description of a boy's death caused by an icicle, and in IV 63, the account of the death of a matron, drowned in the otherwise calm waters of the Lucrine Lake<sup>3</sup>. In each poem a paradoxical aspect of this element, water, is explored. Thus, in IV 18, after killing a young boy

<sup>1</sup> Two English poetic versions of this epigrams by Sir Richard Steele and Peter Whigham, can be found in Sullivan, 1996a,: 173; 368. For Whigham's translation see also, Sullivan, 1996b: 171.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Shackleton Bailey, 1993; Ruiz Sánchez, 1998; Greenwood, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Greenwood (1998) focuses on these two epigrams and links them to IV 22 on account of their final address to waters, which is unique in Martial's work.

the icicle melts into harmless water (l. 4-6 *cumque peregisset miseri crudelia fata, / tabuit in calido volnere mucro tener*); in IV 63, Caerellia has been drowned when crossing the Lucrine waters, famous for their dead calm: they did not kill Agrippina when her son Nero contrived her death and she was able to swim to the shore and save herself momentarily. Epigram IV 22, though revolving around different subject matter, also explores the disturbingly contradictory nature of water, as both enhancing desire and blocking fulfilment. They all end in a very similar way, with an unusual address to water: IV 18, 8 *aut ubi non mors est, si iugulatis, aquae?*<sup>4</sup>, IV 22, 8 *perspicuae, plus vetuistis, aquae*, IV 63, 3-4 *haec monstra Neroni / nec iussae quondam praestiteratis, aquae*. Symbolically, water can be related thus to the brittleness of existence, to the thin line which divides life from death, aspiring desire and resulting disillusionment, success and failure. Congealed water is also related to death and the afterlife in epigram IV 3, dedicated to the dead son of the emperor. The snowfall is referred to by means of three periphrases, all of them involving an oxymoron: l.1 *tacitarum... aquarum*; l.4 *concretas... aquas*; l.7 *siccis... aquis*. The snow, which causes troubles under different circumstances, is focussed on as a source of solace, for it is assumed to be the toy with which the deified son of the Emperor is amusing himself. The symbolic nuances of the word *aqua* in this book are manifold. It is primarily related to life and love (IV 13, 6 *nec plus lotos aquas, litora myrtus amat*); it is an ubiquitous element in the landscapes evoked by the poet and pictured as *loci amoeni* and as yearned for retreats (IV 25, 4; 25, 6; IV 55, 13-14; IV 55, 18; IV 55, 21-22; IV 57, 1; 57, 8). Water is menacing as well, both playfully (IV 19, 10 *neve gravis subita te premat Iris aqua*), and in earnest, for it evokes the waters of the underworld (IV 73, 2 *Stygias... aquas*)<sup>5</sup>.

Bearing all these impressions in mind and going back to our epigram, its first lines are certainly misleading in a sense, partly due to the deadly connotations of the verb *mergere*<sup>5</sup> (l. 3). The suggestion of danger, as Ruiz Sánchez (1998: 106) states, reinforces the links

<sup>4</sup> Closely related to poems IV 18 and IV 63 is epigram IV 60, about the death of a man in a most renowned summer resort, *Tibur*, famous for its salubrity. In a single line, the various symbolic connotations of water are brought forward: IV 60, 4 *Inter laudatas ad Styga missus aquas*.

<sup>5</sup> Caerellia is said to have been drowned (IV 63, 2 *mersa*) in the Lucrine Lake; the verb is also pronounced by Leandros, precisely addressing the sea waves where he is about to be drowned (Mart. *Sp.* 29 (25b), 3-4; XIV 181). In some other passages the verb *mergere* denotes a shipwreck: IX 40, 7; X 85, 5.

between this poem and some compositions of the same book dealing with death and beauty: IV 32 and IV 59<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the combination of water and beauty causes death in some mythical tales: Narcissus, having rejected Echo's embrace (Ov. *Met.* III 389-390)<sup>7</sup>, sees his own reflection on a watery surface and falls desperately in love with an illusion, dying subsequently out of despair (Ov. *Met.* III 402-510). There is also the story of Hylas, the beloved of Hercules: he was drowned in a fountain because the Nymphs had been fatally attracted by his beauty (Prop. I 20). Martial himself, when mourning the death of the young Castricus in the Lucrine Lake, recalls the myths of Hylas and Hermaphroditus: Castricus was so beautiful that the aquatic Nymphs could have fallen in love with him and kept him forever: VI 68, 7-10 *Numquid te vitreis nudum lasciva sub undis / vidit et Alcidae nympa remisit Hylan? / An dea femineum iam neglegit Hermaphroditum / amplexu teneri sollicitata viri?* The poem begins, thus, in a disturbingly misleading way, as the introduction seems to prepare the reader for the narration of an accidental death<sup>8</sup>.

It is precisely Ovid's account of the tale of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus that Martial took as a model for the elaboration of his poem<sup>9</sup>. If the protagonist of our epigram is likened to Hermaphroditus, her portrait must definitely be one of chastity and coyness. The young

<sup>6</sup> IV 32 is a refined and witty account of a fossil, that of a bee, fatally trapped within a drop of amber, which, paradoxically, endows it with imperishable beauty. Martial gives a twist to this theme in IV 59: the description of a similar object, a fossilised viper in amber (l. 1-4), makes way for the final reflection on the inexorable nature of death and the futility of richness, in the form of a reproach to a well-known historical figure with multifarious connotations for the Roman (and Western) imagination: *Ne tibi regali placeas, Cleopatra, sepulchro, / vipera si tumulo nobiliore iacet* (IV 59, 5-6). This epigram cycle, in conjunction with VI 15, has been studied by Bonvicini (1986), Ramelli (1997) and Watson (2001). The last of them points out that the object described in IV 59, if real, must be a forgery; otherwise, the poem is a fictional construction on the same topic of IV 32. If IV 59 is a poetic construct, the object described not having a material realisation in actual life, it could be linked to IV 22, in the sense that, as will be argued, the event recalled could likewise be a real episode transferred to an ideal milieu, reality being aesthetically enhanced. It is noticeable that these two epigrams are the only passages in which Martial mentions the name Cleopatra (the historical character in IV 59).

<sup>7</sup> Note the conceptual similarities between IV 22, 3 *dum fugit amplexus* and the Ovidian account: *Met.* III 389-390 *ibat, ut iniceret sperato brachia collo; / ille fugit*.

<sup>8</sup> Some critics have actually been deluded. Berends (1932: 19) states that IV 22 deals with "die Tod einer Frau".

<sup>9</sup> On Ovidian influence on Martial's epigrams see Zingerle, 1877; Siedschlag, 1972; Pitcher, 1998. For more details on this borrowing from Ovid in Martial's epigram, see Maselli, 1994.

boy is inexperienced in erotic terms; when Salmacis compliments him, he blushes, and it is this flushing that makes him all the more desirable: Ov. *Met.* IV 329-330 *pueri rubor ora notavit; / nescit, enim, quid amor; sed et erubuisse decebat*. The protagonist of Martial's epigram IV 22 is also thought of as inexperienced and newly acquainted with love<sup>10</sup>: In fact, she apparently flees from her husband's embrace in their wedding night: l. 1 *primos passa toros*<sup>11</sup>. *Patior* suggests, indeed, a traumatic experience of the act of sex<sup>12</sup>. However, the rest of this first hexameter (*et adhuc placanda marito*) begins to undermine this first impression: it might suggest that she is difficult to tame and unwilling to comply with her marital duties; however, the meaning of *placare* is quite close to that of "satisfy", and can be applied to strong feelings<sup>13</sup> and appetites<sup>14</sup>. At this point the reader still does not know the girl's name, with her disturbing and paradoxical connotations: for, how can a coy maid bear the name Cleopatra<sup>15</sup>, antiquity's prototype of *femme fatale*?

Just as Hermaphroditus, Cleopatra dives into a lake (l. 3 *merserat in nitidos... lacus*, cf. Ov. *Met.* IV 352 *desilit in latices*). Like Martial's, Ovid's depiction of the place dwells on its limpid water and their translucency: Ov. *Met.* IV 297-298 *stagnum lucentis ad imum / usque solum lymphae*, IV 300 *perspicuus liquor est*. Both characters have chosen a wrong hiding place: through the crystalline waters not only are their bodies perfectly visible, but also their beauty is enhanced and their attractiveness intensified. The effect is described by Ovid by means of an exquisite simile:

in liquidis translucet aquis, ut eburnea si quis  
signa tegat claro vel candida lilia vitro (IV 354-355).

<sup>10</sup> On the disparity of age between bride and groom in Roman society, see Hopkins, 1965; Saller, 1987. On marriage in general in Roman society and Latin literature, see Treggiari, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> This must allude to the first sexual encounter, as in Mart. VII 74, 8 *primis quo coiere toris*, and in Prop. III 20, 14 *longius in primo, Luna, morare toro*.

<sup>12</sup> *Patior* belongs to the semantic field of sex (see ThLL s.v. 731.71-732.25; Rodríguez, 1981: 108; Adams, 1982: 189-190; Montero, 1991: 150) and alludes mainly to a female passive role: cf. Ov. *Epist.* XVII 26-8; *Fast.* V 156; Sil. XIII 829. The verb connotes a certain degree of violence, and it is often present in the context of divine rapes: cf. Ov. *Met.* IX 332; XI 309; XII 197; IX 740 *Fast.* II 178.

<sup>13</sup> As anger: cf. e.g. Ov. *Met.* XII 28 *sanguine virgineo placandam virginis iram*.

<sup>14</sup> As body necessities: Mart. I 49, 17 *arvidam... placabit... sitim*; Hor. S. 2.8.5 *quae prima iratum ventrem placaverit esca*; Stat. *Ach.* I 773 *Ut placata fames epulis bis terque repostis*.

<sup>15</sup> Apart from the famous Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra was the name of one of Claudius' concubines (Tac. *Ann.* 11.30).

Whether it refers to some real-life object or not<sup>16</sup>, the comparison stresses the alluring appearance of a precious object as seen through a transparent or gleaming surface. Both the ivory and the whiteness of the lilies evoke the lovely hue of Hermaphroditus' complexion, whiteness being one of the key elements of the classical canonical portrait of ideal beauty. Moreover, it recalls previous appearances of the terms *ebur*, *eburneus* utilised by Ovid to describe his body: IV 332; IV 335 *eburnea colla*. White lilies are a traditional metaphor for purity and virginity<sup>17</sup>, and this implication is reinforced by the symbolical qualities of both the notion of transparency and the fragility of the glass<sup>18</sup>.

Martial has beautifully recreated and expanded this passage, highlighting the paradoxical implications of translucency:

Sed prodidit unda latentem:  
Lucebat, totis cum tegetetur aquis.  
Condita sic puro numerantur lilia vitro,  
sic prohibet tenuis gemma latere rosas (l. 3-6).

The variations on the model are highly significant: lilies, an emblem of purity themselves, are said to be beneath *puro vitro*. The connotations of the adjective deepen the symbolical qualities of the figure: *purus* obviously means transparent<sup>19</sup> (Ov. *Met.* II 856 *puraque magis perlucida gemma*: cf. Ov. *Met.* IV 355 *claro... vitro*), as well as clean (cf. Hor. *Epod.* II 15; Mart. XI 11, 3); for that reason it is an appropriate epithet for clear waters (Verg. *G.* III 522; Mart. IV 55, 22). But it also adds the nuances of purity and chastity<sup>20</sup>. Similar suggestions are evoked by the allusion to glass: it is a common metaphor for a gleaming surface like water<sup>21</sup> and a symbol for brittleness<sup>22</sup>. A further departure from the Ovidian model is the substitution of *condita* for *candida*, which has not been so far a matter of editorial debate. In fact, most editors accept *condita*, the reading of nearly all the

<sup>16</sup> See Bömer, 1976: 123.

<sup>17</sup> See e. g. Mart. I 115, 2-3 *Loto candidior puella cycno, / argento, nive, lilio, ligustro*; V 37, 6 *Nivesque primas liliūque non tactum*.

<sup>18</sup> See Bömer, 1976: 105; 124.

<sup>19</sup> See OLD, s. *purus* 6b.

<sup>20</sup> See OLD, s. *purus* 5.

<sup>21</sup> See Hor. *Carm.* I 18, 16 *perlucidior... vitro*; III 13, 1 *splendidior vitro*; Ov. *Met.* XIII 791; *Epist.* XV 157-158 *Est nitidus vitroque magis perlucidus omni / fons sacer*.

<sup>22</sup> See Pub. *Sent.* 24 *Fortuna vitrea est: tum cum splendet frangitur*; Porphyrius on Hor. S. II 3, 222 *vitrea fama: aut fragilis, aut splendida*.

manuscripts, although the juncture *condita lilia* is unique. *Candida* is, however, only attested in manuscript *T*<sup>23</sup>. Although the preeminence of this manuscript is generally accepted, no editor, as far as I know, has selected this reading. They usually adduce similar passages by Martial in support of *condita*: IV 32, 1 *et latet et lucet Phaethontide condita gutta*; VIII 68, 5 *Condita perspicua vivit vindemia gemma*; II 40, 6 *Condantur parco fusca Falerna vitro*. Furthermore, *condita* relates syntagmatically with other elements in this epigram: *latentem; tegetetur; latere*. *Candidum*, on the other hand, is the ever-present epithet for *lilium*<sup>24</sup>, which is often used as a metaphor for the whiteness of a beautiful woman's complexion: the combination of the whiteness of the lilies with the red colour of the roses is a traditional emblem of beauty and purity, for they resemble the blushing of an ivory countenance<sup>25</sup>. *Candida* is, as a matter of fact, the *lectio facilior* and it leaves *vitro* insufficiently explained, but it should not be thoughtlessly discarded. *Condita*, on the other hand, might suggest that there is no escape for Cleopatra, thus recalling Salmacis' cry, when she realises Hermaphroditus has entered her realm: Ov. *Met.* IV 356 '*vicimus et meus est*'.

The most original addition made by Martial is the image of the roses covered by a thin translucent surface: whatever the exact real-life referent Martial is alluding to<sup>26</sup>, *gemma*<sup>27</sup> highlights the preciousness of the object beheld. There is no need to further stress the symbolic implications of the roses, as representative both of beauty, and, like the lily, of transience and frailty. The ambivalence of the rose as a symbol functions as pivotal point in the poem: it evokes coyness, for the poetic combination of the roses with the lilies suggests the delicate

<sup>23</sup> For a succinct and accurate account of the manuscript tradition of Martial's epigrams, see Reeve, 1990: 239-244.

<sup>24</sup> See André, 1949: 353; cf. Verg. *A.* VI 708-9; Prop. I 20, 37-8; Ov. *Met.* V 392; XII 411 *canentia*; [Tib.] III 4, 34 *alba*; Calp. *Ecl.* III 53; VI 33.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Verg. *A.* XII 68-69 *si quis ebur, aut mixta rubent ubi lilia multa / alba rosa, talis uirgo dabat ore colores*; Ov. *Am.* II 5, 33-7 *at illi / conscia purpureus venit in ora pudor, /... / quale rosae fulgent inter sua lilia mixtae*.

<sup>26</sup> Friedländer and Ker suggest that the image is a greenhouse or a glass protection for flowers: cf. Mart. VIII 14, 1-4; VIII 68,5-6 *Condita perspicua vivit vindemia gemma, /et tegitur felix nec tamen uva latet (vid. Schöffel ad loc.)*.

<sup>27</sup> The most common meaning of *gemma* is that of precious stone, but it may also refer to some other substances of translucent nature, such as crystal (see *OLD s.v.3*; *TLL s.v.* 1757.4-8) or amber (*OLD s.v.5*; *TLL* 1756.81-83; cf. Mart. IX 12, 6; Serv. *ad Verg. Ecl.* 8.54 *sucinae gemmae*). In some of Martial's epigrams its meaning is close to that of *vitrum*: VIII 68, 5; XIV 94.

chromatic blend of the blushing of a white skin, as already stated, but, as a symbol of the ephemeral<sup>28</sup>, it is one of the traditional elements in the poetical invitations to enjoy life, love, and sex, that is, the *carpe diem* motif. Moreover, death is subtly present in the core of our epigram (l. 4-6), with its luminous touches and its building on paradox, which anticipates verbally poem IV 32 (IV 32, 1 *Et latet et lucet Phaethontide condita gutta*; cf. l. 4-5 *Sed prodidit unda latentem / lucebat totis cum tegetetur aquis*). The subject of IV 32 is a bee in a crystallised drop of amber, and can be related to a long tradition of *epicedia* on the death of animals. Death, subliminally present in the first lines through the echoes of *merserat*, can be perceived here, urging the poetic voice to make the most of life and love.

Once Cleopatra has dived into the lake, the ecstatic contemplation of the beauty of her naked body leads progressively on to sexual arousal, and it is the more so because bashfulness is traditionally regarded as more exciting than boldness in erotic terms, and resistance as more stimulating than compliance<sup>29</sup>. At this point, Martial surprises the reader by revealing that the beholder of this aesthetically enhanced scene is his own poetic persona: his wild desire is represented by the abrupt irruption of the first person (l. 7 *insilui*). Traditionally, the first person, the poetic voice, has been linked with the *marito* in verse one<sup>30</sup>. This interpretation, however, deprives the poem of one of its main topics: the alluring quality of the forbidden. The water, as compared with a solid translucent surface, acts apparently and symbolically as an obstacle for the fulfilment of sexual desire. Translucency, which prevents (l. 6 *prohibet*) Cleopatra from concealing herself completely, also inhibits the poet from satisfying his yearnings (l. 10 *vetuistis*). It stands thus for the obstacles that make love an exciting adventure and are inherent to the concept of love as reflected in Roman love elegy, and also anticipates the idea that resistance (cf. *luctantia*) increases desire.

<sup>28</sup> Also in conjunction with the lily: Hor. *Carm.* I 36, 16 *breve lilium*; Ov. *Ars* II 115-6 *Nec violae semper nec hiantia lilia florent, / et riget amissa spina relicta rosa*; Sen. *Phaedr.* 768-9 *languescunt folio lilia pallido / et gratae capiti deficiunt rosae*; Stat. *silv.* III 3, 128-9 *qualia pallentes declinant lilia culmos / pubentesque rosae primos moriuntur ad austros*.

<sup>29</sup> Lier, 1914: 36-38 § 20. cf. Mart. V 46, 1 *Basia dum nolo nisi quae luctantia carpsi*. See Ruiz Sánchez, 1998: 106.

<sup>30</sup> See most recently Shackleton Bailey, 1993 (*ad loc.*); Greenwood, 1998: 369. On the debated biographical issue whether Martial was married, see Ascher, 1977; Schnur, 1978; Sullivan, 1978; Watson, 2003.



Let us now temporarily leave this idealised milieu, this *locus amoenus* as represented by the transparent lake that enhances both beauty and desire. Nakedness as seen through water was, apart from a highly stylised poetic motif, part of everyday life, at least until Martial's times. There was no ban on men and women bathing together in the public baths until the reign of Hadrian<sup>31</sup>, though not everyone liked the idea and moralists attacked this custom as dissolute and decadent<sup>32</sup>. Martial alludes to several erotic scenes in the baths, although always in satirical, almost grotesque, contexts<sup>33</sup>. Sex in the swimming pool, as Cameron (1973) calls it, is mentioned several times in imperial literature<sup>34</sup>: Mart. XI 21, 11 (*vid. Kay ad loc.*); Suet. *Tib.* 44; *Dom.* 22. Furthermore, in his *Ars Amatoria* Ovid refers to the baths as a place suitable for love affairs<sup>35</sup>, especially those which imply adultery: *Ars* III 639-640 *Cum, custode foris tunicas servante puellae, / celent furtivos balnea multa iocos*<sup>36</sup>. The scene described in this epigram could be interpreted as a recreation of a daily life event, a furtive relationship or the mere contemplation of a beautiful woman in the baths, which has led to an erotic fantasy in the poet's mind, and it could be the more so inasmuch as the term *lacus* could also refer to an artificial pond or even a swimming pool<sup>37</sup>.

However, the situation is highly literary and it could be read in the light of the amatory elegy. Taking into account Ovid's idea that a woman can meet her lover in the baths, the traditional interpretation of Martial's epigram begins to weaken. First of all, there are three characters in the epigram: the girl, her husband, and the beholder, the poet who adopts the stance of the elegiac lover. There is a semi-clandestine setting that prompts an illicit love affair. The figure of the husband is, as a matter of fact, quite vague: he is not focused on at all; there is no adjective pertaining to him; no clue about why she avoids his marital embrace (*amplexus*). On the historical and mythical level there is a reminiscence of Cleopatra of Egypt's incestuous marriage to

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, Carcopino, 1939: 298-300; Marquardt, 1892: § 281-283.

<sup>32</sup> Plin. *Nat.* XXXIII 153; Quint. *Inst.* V 19, 15

<sup>33</sup> See Mart. III 51; III 72; VII 35.

<sup>34</sup> See also Baldwin, 1981.

<sup>35</sup> See Fagan, 1999: 34-36.

<sup>36</sup> See Gibson's (2003: 344) comments on this passage.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. CIL I 1529.9 *BALINEARIVM LACVM*; cf. Colum. II 21, 3; Petron. LXX 4; Auson. *Mos.* 342. See more examples in *TLL s.v.* 802.67-803.59. The obvious explanation for her jumping in water is to wash herself after sexual intercourse. In that case, however, she would have used a *solium* instead of the baths, and the context would have been completely private, rather than semi-public, as the poem suggests.

her brother and of her love affairs with both Caesar and Anthony. On the level of literary tradition Martial's wording (l. 3 *dum fugit amplexus*) is highly suggestive of Tibullus' I 9, 74 *et senis amplexus culta puella fugit*. The reason why the bride escapes might be that her husband is too old, or impotent, unable to satiate her youthful nature (cf. l. 1 *placanda*)<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, this would not be the only passage in ancient literature where the protagonist bathes in order to cool down her passions (cf. Longus *Daphnis and Cloe* I 23)<sup>39</sup>.

With these two opposing impressions, Cleopatra's coyness vs. her fiery desires, we come to the final distich. The poet has jumped into the water and there he has been able to steal some kisses. The expression *carpere basia* (or *oscula*) is frequent in amatory contexts, especially in the elegiac mode: Prop. I 20, 27 *oscula suspensis instabant carpere plantis*; Ov. *Am.* II 11, 45 *excipiamque umeris et multa sine ordine carpam / oscula*; *Epist.* XI 117 *non oscula frigida carpsi*; *Met.* IV 358; *Phaed.* III 8, 12. It suggests passionate, furtive, unfulfilled ephemeral loves, and is highly reminiscent of the *carpe diem* motif (cf. Mart. VII 47. 11 *fugitiva gaudia... carpe*), especially here, as it is placed just after two similes involving flowers (*lilies, roses*). The expression *luctantia basia* is extremely ambivalent. On the one hand, it conveys reluctance and resistance (cf. V 46, 1 *Basia dum nolo nisi quae luctantia carpsi*): by enallage it means "the kisses of someone who withstands" (cf. Ov. *Epist.* XV 27-28 *oscula luctanti tantummodo pauca protervus / abstulit*). On the other hand, it evokes the erotic kiss or *suavium* (cf. Ov. *Am.* III 7, 9 *osculaque inseruit cupida luctantia lingua*), the more so because *luctari* is one of those military terms which are used metaphorically in erotic contexts, denoting sexual enjoyment<sup>40</sup>: Prop. II 1, 13 *seu nuda erepto mecum luctatur amictu*; II 15, 5 *nam modo nudatis mecumst luctata papillis*. It is a highly erotic instant which comes to nothing: the climactic moment of the poem (with a significant enjambment which leaves *basia* at the beginning of the last line) is precisely the impossibility for the poet of accomplishing his assault. The poetic voice cannot then be

<sup>38</sup> The situation could be then comparable to the events recalled in Catullus 67: in view of her husband impotence, the *domina* resorts to her father-in-law and to subsequent lovers in order to satiate her lustful desires.

<sup>39</sup> A closer parallel can be found in Martial's epigrams: XI 7, 11-12 *Diceret hystericam se forsitan altera moecha / in Sinuessano velle sedere lacu* (*vid. Kay ad loc.*). There is a double entendre between the medicinal properties of the waters and other, less legitimate, measures against *hysteria*. Significantly, there is another hysterical woman in Martial's book XI married to an elderly husband (XI 71 *vid Kay ad loc.*).

<sup>40</sup> See Montero, 1991: 212 and *TLL s.v.* 1731.43-49.

equated with the husband: the former can only gain some clandestine kisses from his beloved; the latter has the right to consummate their marriage (*amplexus*). The final verse again destabilises the girl's supposed modesty, for it is not she but the water that stops the ardent lover: *perspicuae, plus<sup>41</sup> vetuistis, aquae!* This is a paradoxical corollary, fitting into the rest of the poem: obstacles are essential for love and desire, and the lover feels an inexorable attraction to the forbidden: cf. e. g. Ov. *Am.* III 4, 17 *nitimur in vetitum semper cupimusque negata<sup>42</sup>*.

Apart from the implications discussed above, there is a further, though subtle, joke in the reference to the lake. On the one hand, it recalls the Lucrine Lake, in the environs of *Baiae*, a famous holiday resort and also a renowned den of dissoluteness<sup>43</sup>, ever-present in Martial's epigrams. In I 62 chaste *Laevina* becomes wanton through contact with the waters:

Casta nec antiquis cedens Laevina Sabinis  
et quamvis tetrico tristior ipsa viro  
dum modo Lucrino, modo se permittit Averno,  
et dum Baianis saepe fovetur aquis,  
incidit in flammis: iuvenemque secuta relicto  
coniuge Penelope venit, abît Helene.

The allusion is reinforced by the fact that Martial links the Nymph Salmacis with this lake (X 30, 10 *Nec in Lucrina lota Salmacis vendit<sup>44</sup>*). On the other hand, while there is a hint that the coy girl in this epigram might have turned lewd, the final verse is also playing with other properties of the mythical lake Salmacis, which according to Ovid, is said to affect men's virility:

Unde sit infamis, quare male fortibus undis  
Salmacis enervet tactosque remolliat artus,  
discite (Ov. *Met.* IV 285-286).

<sup>41</sup> The use of the euphemistic *plus* further associates this epigram with the elegiac mode. In the amatory elegy pronouns such as *aliquid*, *cetera*, *quiddam*, refer indirectly and elegantly to the act of sex (Montero, 1991: 252): cf. Prop. II 4, 2; II 33c, 42; Ov. *Am.* I 5, 25 *cetera quis nescit? Lassi requievimus ambo*; *Ars* I 230; I 669 *Oscula qui sumpsit, si non et cetera sumet*; *Met.* II 863 *oscula dat manibus; vix iam, vix cetera differt*.

<sup>42</sup> Further uses of *vetere* in amatory contexts in Mart. I 34, 10; XI 78, 7; Ov. *Am.* I 8, 44.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Var. *Men.* 44; Cic. *Cael.* 35; Prop. 1.11.27-30; Ov. *Ars* 1.255.258; Sen. *Ep.* 51; Mart. I 62.

<sup>44</sup> See Maselli, 1994: 52-53.

In the end, the poetic voice's sexual drive diminishes: by swimming into the water and coming into contact with the object of his desire, the bold beholder is liable now to be observed and has turned into a shy creature<sup>45</sup>, failing to consummate his goal<sup>46</sup>.

This poem can be viewed as an extraordinarily sensual account of the emotions provoked by the attractiveness towards what is forbidden, of the dilemma between calm contemplation of beauty and the desire to possess it. At the same time and due to the instability of Cleopatra's portrait, a slightly satiric and parodic intention might be perceived. Thrice in this book of epigrams the poetic voice complains of the contemporary girls' behaviour towards the male sex: they are either constantly arousing their expectations of sexual success and subsequently frustrating them (IV 71), or adopting a pose of chastity which does not become them (IV 38; IV 81). Cleopatra is pictured both as a coy girl, refusing her husband and a potential lover, and as an insatiable ardent woman who delights in tantalising men<sup>47</sup>. As often, Martial cannot be understood without Ovid<sup>48</sup>: both the episodes of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus and his amatory poetry provide this epigram with harmonising, albeit somehow opposite, literary echoes. Martial's IV 22 could be regarded as one of his best literary achievements, for its combination of poetic, visual, and amatory motifs

<sup>45</sup> There is an effective double entendre in *perspicuae*: these waters are not only transparent, but also personified: they can watch (*perspicere*). In amatory contexts objects become witnesses of sexual encounters. The lantern and the couch are said to behold what happens in the bedroom: e. g. Mart. X 38, 6-7 *O quae proelia, quas utrimque pugnas / felix lectulus et lucerna vidit*; XI 104, 5-6 *me ludere teste lucerna /... iuvat*; XIV 39 *Dulcis conscia lectuli lucerna, / quidquid vis facias licet, tacebo*. The door in Catullus 67, having witnessed and heard her *domina's* misdeeds and adulterous affairs, reveals them to a passerby. Waters, then, stand for the possible onlookers that can see through them. On Martial's opinions about voyeurism and exhibitionism, see, for instance, I 34 and VII 62.

<sup>46</sup> See also Kay's commentary (*ad XI 21, 11*) on the traditional difficulties involved in water sex (cf. Ps. Arist. *Probl.* 4.14).

<sup>47</sup> The subtle blend of tones perceptible in this epigram is not unparalleled in Martial's work. A remarkable instance can be found in IV 30: the traditional interpretation of this poem as an obsequious compliment to the emperor has recently been reviewed by Urso (1989), who suggests an erotic, slightly parodic, reading.

<sup>48</sup> And *vice versa*. According to La Penna (1992: 350-351), Ovid's passage on Hermaphroditus has been best understood by Martial: "Uno dei figli poetici nell'episodio di Ermafrodito è costituito dalla smaterializzazione del corpo, dal dissolvimento della massa: il corpo diviene un elemento luminoso in una fantasia pittorica que ha reso tutto sfuggente, impalpabile. E questo uno dei non rari casi in cui un poeta ha interpretato un altro poeta meglio di tanti critici. Fra i poeti del suo secolo Marziale e quello che ha ereditato meglio la vocazione plastica e pittorica di Ovidio".

and echoes, make it a complex poem, suggestive more than assertive, beautiful, luminous, and alluring as the object described, enigmatic and puzzling for the reader and the critic alike. He has succeeded in recreating water, for when we try to apprehend the poem, so as to give it a univocal interpretation, it slips through our hands, like water, elusive<sup>49</sup>.

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