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Pontano's Focilla:

**A protagonist of female agency and
power in neo-latin erotic poetry?**

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Pontano's Focilla:

A protagonist of female agency and power in neo-latin erotic poetry?

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1 Introduction

Neo-latin erotic poetry is a genre of Renaissance literature. It was written by humanist scholars as a display of their intellectual prowess and as a provocation of cultural norms. As part of their radical humanism they confronted the restrictive Christian culture of their time with antiquity's more liberal attitude towards sexuality. The Latin language the poetry is composed in came along with the ancient literature these scholars adopted from. Particularly inspiring sources of the erotic were e.g. Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, Apuleius, Martial and last but not least Catullus. The humanists read these authors and engaged in the process of *imitatio et aemulatio veterum*. This, in turn, means that writing as well as reading their poetry required profound knowledge of the Latin language, leaving less than three percent of the population capable of engaging with it.¹ In this context the function of Latin can be regarded as an artistic language.²

The origin of neo-latin erotic poetry goes back to fifteenth-century Italy and a man called Antonio Beccadelli (1394–1471). His *Hermaphroditus* can be regarded as the pioneering opus of the genre and led to a huge scandal when published in 1425.³ Its erotic content is rather unpleasant, depicting ugly sexual organs as well as shady, greedy and lusty characters. Neither men nor women appear in a particularly good light, but with regard to its female characters the work can be described as misogynistic.⁴ Despite all the scandal Beccadelli became secretary to the king of Naples and established a network of intellectuals at his court which he later turned into an official institution called the Academy.⁵

This Academy would later be named Accademia Pontaniana after his succes-

¹cp. Enenkel, Karl A. E.: *Neo-Latin Erotic and Pornographic Literature (c. 1400–c. 1700)*, in: Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Neo-Latin World, General Editor Craig Kallendorf. Consulted online on 30 August 2023

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004271296_enlo_B9789004271012_0039>, p. 2–5.

²cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*. Übersetzung & Nachwort: Tobias Roth. Berlin: Verlagshaus Berlin 2016, p. 180.

³Kidwell, Carol: *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd. 1991, p. 54.

⁴cp. Enenkel, Karl A. E.: *Neo-Latin Erotic and Pornographic Literature (c. 1400–c. 1700)*, p. 5f.

⁵Kidwell, Carol: *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister*, p. 54f.

sor and protégé Giovanni Gioviano Pontano (1426–1503).⁶ It still exists today.⁷ Pontano's life was that of an exemplary self-made man in Quattrocento Italy. He was born in rural Umbria and became secretary of the kingdom of Naples and finally prime minister until his retirement. Despite the responsibilities of his office, he managed to write a vast corpus of literature, both prose and poetry, and he considered himself a poet first and foremost, or as Carol Kidwell expresses it in her biography: "Poetry was his true vocation, royal service his bread and butter".⁸

Pontano wrote several works that can be regarded as erotic poetry, among them his early work *Pruritus*, which is stylistically close to Beccadelli's *Hermaphroditus*, and *Parthenopeus*, followed by the later *Eridanus*, dedicated to his mistress Stella, and finally his late *Hendecasyllaborum seu Baiarum libri duo* which will be referred to as *Hendecasyllables* or *Baiae* in the present work.⁹

In addition to the Latin language, the use of the hendecasyllabic meter alone can be seen as a reference to antiquity. It is most famous as the meter of the ancient Roman poet Catullus. Pontano thought of himself as a follower of Catullus¹⁰ and the style of the *Baiae* does not leave any doubt about that, e.g. through the excessive use of diminutives.¹¹ However, Pontano does not merely imitate Catullus, rarely quoting him word for word.¹² He also goes beyond the ancient paradigm in terms of sexually explicit content. Kisses, for example, function as a synecdoche for love in Catullus, while they are concrete kisses in Pontano and thus receive a more detailed description.¹³ Within these descriptions Pontano adds

⁶His birth date is uncertain. Tradition dates it to 1426, while some modern scholars believe it to be 1429, cp. Kidwell, Carol: *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister*, p. 22. For a detailed biography consult this work.

⁷From its foundation till 1542, 1808–1934, 1944 till today, cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p. 190.

⁸cp. Kidwell, Carol: *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister*, p. 80.

⁹For an overview of Pontano's works see Roick, Matthias: *Pontano's Virtues. Aristotelian Moral and Political Thought in the Renaissance*. London: Bloomsbury Academic 2017, p. 183, and Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber.*, p. 187–193.

¹⁰cp. Kidwell, Carol: *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister*, p. 41.

¹¹cp. Schmidt, Ernst A.: *Catullisch, catullischer als Catull, uncatullisch – Zu Giovanni Pontanos Elfsilbergedichten*. in: *Pontano und Catull. NeoLatina (4)*. ed. by Thomas Baier, Tübingen 2003, p. 208. See this work for a quantitative analysis of Catullan style markers in Pontano.

¹²cp. Lefèvre, Eckard: *Pontanos Hendecasyllabi an Marino Tomacelli*. in: *Pontano und Catull. NeoLatina (4)*. ed. by Thomas Baier, Tübingen 2003, p. 200.

¹³cp. Schmidt, Ernst A.: *Catullisch, catullischer als Catull, uncatullisch – Zu Giovanni Pontanos Elfsilbergedichten*, p. 215.

the teeth¹⁴ and the tongue to the erotic devices which are missing in Catullus.¹⁵ Furthermore, Pontano delivers erotic depictions of female breasts frequently while Catullus abstains from doing so.¹⁶ All in all, there is only one sexually explicit poem that is not an invective in the corpus of Catullus, carmen 32, dedicated to a girl called Ipsitilla. This outlier comes closest to a direct model of Pontano's *Hendecasyllables*.¹⁷

Catullus himself considered the hendecasyllables "nugae", playful ditties, nothing too serious. Pontano's *Baiae* present themselves in the very same manner.¹⁸ After all, the title refers to Baia, a thermal spa resort close to Naples that has been frequented by those seeking rest and pleasure since antiquity. It has always been known as a place for erotic encounters, to both Pontano and Ovid, and is said to have turned a chaste Lucretia into a hedonistic Cleopatra time and again.¹⁹ In contrast to his mentor's work that highlights the distasteful aspects of sexuality, the *Baiae* take a novel approach to the genre. Pontano shifts the focus towards sensuality, beauty, especially beautiful women, and sexual fulfillment. He includes female arousal, sexual interest, active sexual practices and satisfaction. Furthermore, he illustrates scenes that are consensual and reciprocal.²⁰ These aspects lead Roth to calling it a "sozialerotische Utopie", drawing a comparison to the maxim of reciprocal satisfaction in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*.²¹

Nonetheless, despite all the benefits the girls of *Baiae* enjoy, Eckard Lefèvre comes to the conclusion that they are not individual characters but mere types. He underlines this statement by quoting Sainati, who compares Catullus' Lesbia, whom he considers an individual, to the women Pontano addresses, who he deems

¹⁴Charles Senard makes the case that Pontano receives the *dens* as an erotic device from Catullus and refers to CATUL. 37, 20, which, however, clearly is an invective poem and the tooth is without any sensual quality.

cp. Senard, Charles: *Les représentations sexuelles dans l'oeuvre de Giovanni Pontano (1429-1503)*. in: *Lille-thèses*. France 2013, p. 133.

¹⁵cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 22*. Trans. Rodney G. Dennis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2006., p. xvii.

¹⁶cp. Schmidt, Ernst A.: *Catullisch, catullischer als Catull, uncatullisch – Zu Giovanni Pontanos Elfsilbergedichten*, p. 216.

¹⁷cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 22.*, p. xvi.

¹⁸cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p. 174.

¹⁹cp. *ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁰cp. Enenkel, Karl A. E.: *Neo-Latin Erotic and Pornographic Literature (c. 1400–c. 1700)*, p. 12f.

²¹cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p. 179.

interchangeable and obedient according to their gender role.²² The present work will take this assessment to the test by looking at one of Pontano's female characters in particular. A certain Focilla is eminent in the second book of the *Baiae*. Her individuality will be analyzed in a close-reading approach. Each poem dedicated to her will receive a summary, an analysis of form and style and an interpretation. Following this, the selected poems will be investigated from an intertextual perspective. Finally, biographical aspects will be taken into consideration in order to get a detailed picture of the character of Focilla. Her individuality will be measured according to two parameters: agency and power. For this purpose agency is defined as the ability to consciously act upon one's own will and express one's emotions and desires. Power is defined as the capacity to have an impact on the behavior and emotions of others. These qualities function as markers of subjectivity and individuality in contrast to objectiveness and exchangeability. A detailed analysis of the poems dedicated to Focilla under these premises will show whether she is a protagonist of female agency and power, transcending the limitations of a mere type.

The textual basis for this work will be the 2006 Harvard edition of the *Baiae* from the I Tatti Renaissance Library including the English translation by Rodney G. Dennis. For the discussion of specific sections, the 2016 edition including a German translation by Tobias Roth will be used for comparison. Both editions are based on the 1978 Latin text by Liliana Monti Sabia that contains a critical apparatus.²³ Furthermore, a digital copy of the 1513 reprint of the Venetian original edition of 1505 was consulted for insights into deviations concerning spelling and punctuation of the modern editions.²⁴ According to Monti Sabia, the original Venetian print edition is based on an autograph of Pontano's.²⁵ Hence, the given textual basis approximates the way the poet intended his poetry to be read.

²²cp. Lefèvre, Eckard: *Pontanos Hendecasyllabi an Marino Tomacelli*, p. 199.

²³Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Hendecasyllaborum Libri*. ed. by Liliana Monti Sabia. Naples: Associazione di Studi Tardoantichi 1978.

²⁴Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Opera*. Venice: Aldus and Andrea Torresani 1513.

²⁵Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Hendecasyllaborum Libri*. ed. by Liliana Monti Sabia, p. 1.

2 The Poems dedicated to Focilla

Pontano's *Baiae* consist of two books totalling 71 poems, 32 in book I and 39 in book II. A large portion of the second book, i.e. 10 poems out of 39, is dedicated to a girl called Focilla. Her name is probably derived from the diminutive of 'focus' which would make her the "little fire" or "little hearth".²⁶ It can be regarded as a telling name as will become clear in the following. Even though the selected poems fit the style of the *Baiae*, the baths are not mentioned in any of these poems. They explicitly appear in 30 out of the 71 poems and the additional title referring to Baia was not chosen by Pontano himself, but by his editor Summonte.²⁷ Nevertheless, the absence of the baths from all the poems to Focilla in addition to their number and proximity within the second book make them appear as an autonomous unit within the opus.

2.1 *Baiae* II.4 De Focillae puella ocellis

The first of these poems is II.4, which focuses on Focilla's eyes. It consists of 22 lines and is of medium length in comparison.

There are two main characters: Focilla, who is addressed in the second person, and the god Amor, who is referred to in third person. The poem can be structured by paying attention to the change of both the subject and the person of the verbs. It begins with the mention of Amor dwelling in Focilla's eyes and him doing damage in an unusual way, not acting on his own accord or using his own weaponry. However, he becomes active whenever Focilla looks around or smiles. Her actions and especially her eyes turn into various weapons ("sagittis", l7; "spicula . . . facesque", l9) Amor makes use of, fiercely hurting anonymous lovers (l8). In conclusion everybody she looks at is hurt (l10.)

This conclusion leads to a turning point, however, marked by "At tu" (l14). From this point onwards the poem is written in the prohibitive addressed at Focilla, warning her not to get hurt by her own gaze when looking at herself in the mirror. It is said that she does so in order to double-check her appearance or to even

²⁶cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 22.*, p. xiii.

²⁷cp. Stärk, Ekkehard.: *Theatrum amantum: Pontanos Baiae und Catull. in: Pontano und Catull. NeoLatina (4).* ed. by Thomas Baier, Tübingen 2003, p. 297.

admire herself, which is due to the ambiguity of the verb “probas” (l17). The second part of the poem climaxes in a direct reference to the myth of Narcissus,²⁸ implying that her mirror image could have the same fatal effect of creating an unattainable longing for herself.

The relationship between Amor’s destructive powers and the protagonist’s potential to evoke it is supported by a vast array of stylistic devices. This array needs to be investigated in detail in order to understand the exact dynamics of the relationship and to illustrate the full amount of pain it might inflict.

At the very beginning of the poem, Amor is the subject and in lines 2 and 3 two alliterations are used to point out his behavior in this particular case: “ab arte” (l2) refers to the unusual, specific manner in contrast to “suetas . . . sagittas” (l3), which refers to how Amor does things usually. The latter is set in hyperbaton to emphasize that he keeps his hands off the arrows in his quiver. Moreover, he also keeps away from his bow, which is added by the anaphora “nec . . . nec” (l3f). By these means it is made very clear that Amor acts in an odd fashion.

The next line, however, brings Focilla into play, whose actions mark the antithesis (“sed”, l5) between Amor’s initial passiveness (l3f) and his activity evoked by Focilla (l7ff). Focilla herself does not do much. She seems to playfully look around (“huc illuc agis”) and smile, implying that the extraordinary quality is somehow innate to her eyes. They are referred to as “lumina poetulosque ocellos”, which is first of all a synonymous expression that might be called a hendiadys, consisting of two words for “eyes”, both the metaphoric “lumina” and the concrete “ocellos”. Second, these eyes receive the attribute “poetulos”, granting them a secretive or even mysterious quality. In any case, it is these eyes Focilla only uses for light gestures, which nonetheless lead to Amor doing serious damage.

This next passage is structured by two anaphoras: lines 7–9 start with a polypoton of “istis” / “isti”, which is picked up again in line 13, while lines 10–12 in between start with “quoscunque” and “omnes”, which can be regarded as synonyms. All instances of “Isti(s)” (l7f) refer to “ocellos” (l5), “ocelli” (l9) and

²⁸cp. Bremmer, Jan N. and Bäbler, Balbina: *Narkissos*, in: *Der Neue Pauly*, ed. by Hubert Cancik, Helmuth Schneider, Manfred Landfester. Consulted online on 30 August 2023 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_dnp_e816960>

“oculi” (l13) on the one hand and to “sagittis” (l7) “spicula . . . facesque” (l9) and “faces” (l13) on the other.

By these means her eyes are identified with the weapons employed by Amor. In line 7 the word “sagittis” is reiterated from the beginning, only that now he uses arrows (l3). Line 8 illustrates how he strikes the lovers with an example of chiasm (“corda quatit feritque amantum”). Line 9 exchanges “sagittae” with the pars pro toto “spicula” and adds fire (“faces”) as a weapon. Line 13 finally repeats the fire of line 9 as a kind of punchline, ending this section of the poem. In all lines starting with inflections of “iste”, Amor is the subject. However, it should be kept in mind that “iste” is the demonstrative pronoun associated with the second person, which again represents Focilla as the subject in this poem.

With regard to the subject, the inserted lines 10 to 12 starting with the second anaphora are a bit different. They also shift the focus from identifying the eyes as weapons to the way these weapons are put into effect. In all of these lines, there are two subjects and it is always a verb of seeing (“aspicis” ll10f, “tueris” l12) in second person that is done by Focilla. On the other hand verbs expressing the damage done are used, first “vulnerantur” (l10) from the perspective of the lovers, then “vulnerat” (l11) and finally “ustilat” (l12), both going with Amor as the subject.

The word order is also varied in all three lines. Line 10 begins with the second person passage and continues with the one in third person, while for lines 11 and 12 it is vice versa. Still, there is a small variation between this line, the parts in second person being “aspicis quot ipsa” (l11) and “ipsa quot tueris” (l12). This tendency to vary the parallelisms, chiasms and anaphoras with such meticulous attention to detail evokes the impression that there is something very close, reciprocal and complex about the relationship between Amor and Focilla; yet the very core of this relationship is that her eyes are his torches (l13).

The next line marks a turning point of the poem by employing an antithesis to line 13. Her eyes are his torches but she might be wounded by these eyes as well. Furthermore, lines 14 and 15 are structured in a very detailed parallel manner that requires a closer inspection. The first line starts with “at”, the latter with “in”, followed by an inflection of “tu” in both, “ne” respectively “neu”, “pereas” and

“propriis”, which form an alliteration, “tuis”, which stands for Focilla’s perspective, and “Amor”, and finally once again the matching pair “ocellis” and “sagittis”. These two lines show once more how deeply intertwined Amor and Focilla are and “propriis” emphasizes that the arrows belong to her, even if she is hurt herself.

The remainder of the poem is dominated by the term “speculum”, which is used four times (ll16–18, l21). These lines appear to be a long climactic build-up to the final punchline comparing the mirror to the surface of the water in the myth of Narcissus. While the rest of the vocabulary remains in the same semantic field of eyes, arrows and fire, the term “vita” (l16) sticks out. It seems to be an apposition attached to Focilla. Moreover the reader is informed that Focilla’s eyes are dark or even black (“nigris”, l18). Pontano connects lines 18 and 19 through a creative version of an anaphora repeating “ex” with the prefix of “excussas”. This rhetorical figure is expanded through “atque” (l20), creating a tricolon, which is most ostensible when observing the final word of each of the three lines: It starts with the eyes (“ocellis”, l18) and thus with Focilla, continues with “Amor” and “sagittas” and is finally reflected back at Focilla as “flammis” (l20). The final couplet then picks up the notion of the mirror and compares the fates of Focilla and Narcissus through a parallelism (“sit tibi . . . fuit Narcisso”). The poem is concluded with the alliteration “figura fontis” (l22).

An in-depth stylistic analysis clearly shows that the power Focilla possesses must be immense. First of all, love in its personified, divine form dwells within her eyes. Despite the fact that he is a god and she is a mortal girl, he does not really act on his own accord. He behaves in an unusual way, differently from what would be expected of Amor. He lays off his bow and arrows and will only act if she does.

The question that remains in this regard is how intentional her glances and smiles are, since they are very subtle actions. Nonetheless, she creates her own weapons for Amor and makes him put them into use. Thus she can attract people very actively and make them fall in love in a way that hurts them. Of course it is Amor who shoots the arrows and flames but it seems that in this case he is unwilling or even unable to do so without her initiative. It is also interesting what Pontano’s idea of the hurting is: Is the level of falling in love simply so intense that

it hurts or does the poet imply that this love will remain unrequited? However, these incidents of a hurtfully attractive gaze do not occur in certain rare cases, but everyone she looks at will be hit.

Still it remains uncertain whether this eye-contact is intentional. It could either mean that every time she chooses to look at someone they will receive pain or it could mean she cannot help it, hurting everybody without having any control over it in a Medusa-esque manner. In any way we do not know her own thoughts on this. We don't know if she enjoys it, suffers from it or is not even aware of her destructive powers. In addition, the warning not to get hurt by her own gaze hints at the possibility that she might lose control over her power on the one hand but it does not say that she necessarily will on the other. Also, the fact that she looks at herself in the mirror only suggests vaguely that she might be aware of the effect her eyes have on others.

Finally the allusion to the myth of Narcissus remains rather ominous. The mirror image might do the same thing to her that Narcissus' reflection in the water did to him. In his case he fell in love with himself and died because of the unattainability of this love. It happened due to a curse cast upon him because he detested and scorned everyone who fell in love with him. This evokes the question of whether Focilla's case is the same in every aspect. Does she willfully repel all lovers' advances and finally become obsessed with herself to a self-destructive degree? She could potentially be cursed by a scorned lover the same way Narcissus was. However, while she faces the same outcome, the cause for it might be different. Either it is the obsession with her own eyes that leads to her demise, or she is horrified by the damage she is able to inflict. In any way, what can be said with certainty is that the second part of the poem reaching its climax in the allusion to Narcissus is a strong testimony to the attractive power of her gaze and her behavior; even stronger, perhaps, than the first part of the poem.

All in all, while the exact level of her agency remains a matter of speculation, it is absolutely clear that Focilla possesses a huge amount of power by means of her eyes. She has power not only over lovers of unspecified gender, potentially everyone, but also to a certain degree over the god Amor himself.

2.2 Baiae II.5 Ad Focillam de capillis ad frontem sparsis

The following poem of book two is also the second one dedicated to Focilla. It deals with her hair or her bangs as the title suggests. Similar to the first poem it is of medium length, consisting of 22 lines.

As one would expect considering the title “Ad Focillam”, the poem is written from the perspective of a lyrical I and directed at Focilla. Thus it is mostly written in second person or imperatives. The poem does not really have stanzas but it can be divided into two parts which again can be subdivided in two smaller portions each. The beginning of each of these parts is marked by a rhetorical figure that will be analyzed in detail later.

The first part (ll1–4) comprises three questions the lyrical I asks Focilla: Why does she gather and arrange her loose hair, if this would mean torturing a lover and destroying an old man. The reader gets the information that the lyrical I, being a “senex”, must be a lot older than her, a “puella”. He also considers himself her lover.

In the second part (ll5–9) he switches from asking questions to giving orders: She should not tie her hair up so that the wind can toss the loose bangs around, leading to her eyes casting fire which again arouses him. Then suddenly, at about half of the poem, there is a harsh caesura (l12).

The third part (ll12–15) is written in the same communicative manner, only that the orders aim at the opposite now: The lyrical I wants Focilla to do exactly what she was doing in the first place, namely tying her hair up and arranging it. Apparently, he became overwhelmed by his arousal.

This leads to a change of the addressee in the fourth and last part of the poem (ll16–23). The old man now asks tender girls who water herbs to help him by putting out the fire his heart has caught from Focilla’s gaze. There is no further mention of Focilla in this last section, however.

As mentioned earlier, the poem is structured by means of stylistic markers for each part. The first part (ll1–4) is a little different from the remaining three and has an introductory function. The three questions it consists of appear to be somewhat rhetorical, rather being wishes than questions. “Please don’t tie up

your hair. Please don't hurt me, your lover", they could be rephrased. The first line is composed of two interlaced hyperbata "sparsam ... comam" and "digito ... reponis" while the second line features a single larger hyperbaton "effusum ... capillum". Of course, hyperbata may accidentally occur in poetry in order to stick to the meter. These two examples, however, visually illustrate how Focilla puts her fingers in between unordered loose strands of hair to separate and rearrange them. The principle of the span is continued in lines 3 and 4 as well, in these cases using separated alliterations ("anne ... amantem" (l3), "perdas ... puella" (l4)). The first part is concluded with the antithesis between "senem" and "puella" (l4), underlining the difference in age between Focilla and the lyrical I by juxtaposing these words.

The beginning of the second part in line 5 is marked by the peculiar rhetorical figure "Ne tu ne, (mea)". It is a tricolon consisting of three monosyllabic words, the first and last of which are the same. In addition to that, it is a kind of anaphora, being repeated at the beginning of each following part and twice in the last part of the poem: "Iam tu iam, (mea)" (l12), "Vos, o vos" (l16) and "hoc vos, hoc" (l18). This device makes for a good introductory technique since it has potential to catch the reader's or listener's attention through its rhythmicity. Three monosyllabic words perfectly fit into the first three long quantities of the hendecasyllabus, thus gaining significant emphasis. Since they do not contain any nouns or verbs, these figures are not very meaningful with regard to content.

On the other hand, they set the tone for each part of the poem quite elegantly: The first two instances form an antithesis ("Ne tu ne, mea" (l5) / "Iam tu iam, mea" (l12)), hinting at the antithetical content of the parts. The latter two instances contain the pronoun "vos" (ll16, 18), making clear that there is a new addressee in the last part. The a-b-a form of the tricolon can also refer to the motif of the taming of the locks as if a finger in between two strands of hair.

All in all, this is the core structural element of the poem, binding content and form together. In the case of the second part it is "ne tu ne" (l5) followed by the prohibitive forms "collige" (l5) and "sine" (l6). The remainder of the section is mostly written in subjunctive with a iussive semantic function ("diffluat" (l6), "ventilet" (l7), "succendas" (l10), "revoces" (l11)). Thus, all of the verb

forms indicate that this part deals with whatever the lyrical I wishes, orders and forbids. Furthermore, hyperbata and an alliteration in the fashion of the first part reoccur, shifting from Focilla's hair ("circum . . . crinis" (17)) over her eyes ("blandis . . . ocellis" (19)) to his arousal ("extinctum . . . calorem" (111)).

Just like in the first part, the perspective wanders from her hair to his point of view. What is new is the mention of her eyes. Looking at the vocabulary employed in this part one can see different elements at play: "Diffluat" (16) can simply mean "to part", but it is commonly associated with water, "ventilet" (17) and "auram" (18) refer to air and "faces" (18) as well as "calorem" (111) to fire. Among these water is represented in the most subtle manner while air gets the most attention through an allusion to a divine entity responsible for air ("auram qui pariat", 18), that is not further specified.

Nonetheless, the call upon a god's intervention just to let Focilla's hair get blown by the wind points out the intensity of the senex' desire to behold this sight. In contrast, the element of fire is interesting with regard to Focilla's own action. While she remains passive apart from tying her hair, it is her who actively tosses flames from her eyes ("faces . . . iacularis ex ocellis", 118f) and points her powerful gaze in different directions (110). At the same time, his "heat" is gone and only reawakened through this very gaze of hers ("extinctum . . . senis calorem", 111).²⁹ Hence, the element of fire associated with the potential to arouse is under her control, which might be the cause of the antithetical character of the third part in particular and the second half of the poem in total.

The third part is also written in imperatives and iussives ("collige et reponere" (112), "contege, subliga" (113), "ne citet exciatque" (114)), however the wishes of the lyrical I change to the opposite. This part is also stylistically denser, which could be an indicator for the rising intensity of those wishes. In line 12 there is a repetition of "collige" (15) and the simplex "legis" (12) as well as "reponis" (11). Together with "contege" and "subliga" (113) they form an instance of pleonasm, further emphasized by the chiasmus "crinem . . . capillum / contege . . . subliga" and the alliteration "crinem contege . . . capillum". All of this shows how now that he has felt the rekindled fire, he really wants her to take care of her attractively

²⁹cp. Senard, Charles: *Les représentations sexuelles dans l'oeuvre de Giovanni Pontano (1429-1503)*. in: *Lille-thèses*. France 2013, p. 294.

loose hair. The next line explains why in more detail: Parallely to line 13 it is in arranged in a chiasmus (“auram . . . flammas / citet exciat”) with a kind of polyptoton of the simplex “citet” and the complex “exciat” in the center. The causal connection between the elements of wind and fire is made clear. It is the vivid image of the strands of hair in the wind that spawns the arousal. An arousal that can lead to a fire “prope pectus”, as line 15 concludes with an alliteration. A fire that is probably hurtful, considering his wish for her to arrange her hair and his behavior in the last part of the poem.

As mentioned before, the fourth and last part begins with a variation of the anaphoric tricolon to “Vos, o vos” followed by the alliteration “precor, puellae” (l16), which also creates an alliteration with the prior “prope pectus”. He now addresses his wishes to these “puellae” which leads to verbs in imperative plural (“rigate” l18, l21, “extinguite” l23, “subrigate” l23) and second person plural (“rigatis” l17, “cernitis” l21). It is striking that the word “rigare” is repeated several times (l17, l18, l21, “subrigate” l23), making water the prevalent element in this last part.

Line 17 gives some information on the girls he addresses, alluding to a poem from book I, which is about a girl named Batilla who tends to marjoram (“amaracum”, cp. *Baiae* I.14). He wants them to water his chest or his heart, which – as we have learnt earlier – is burning. This wish is underlined by an extra repetition of the anaphoric tricolon (“hoc vos, hoc”, l18). By repeating the same verb (“rigate”) as in the previous line, the poet implies that there is a commonality between the heart and the herbs. It is interesting that this heart burns “procul ab medullis” (l19), which sounds antithetical to “prope pectus” (l15). This could mean that the fire in its essence remains with Focilla and not really with him.

The next line adds another weapon to the fire: arrows. It is also structured in a chiasmic manner (“flammas . . . sagittas” / “simul . . . simul”), pointing out what flames and arrows have in common: they are weapons. Together with the remaining three lines it forms a parallel structure in alternating order: Line 20 and line 22 are almost identical except for the variation from “en . . . en” to “et . . . et” while line 19 and line 21 start with the anaphora “ipsae”. Line 21 features the repetition “hoc rigate pectus” of the original favor the lyrical I asks of the girls

while line 23 intensifies the meaning of “rigate” to “extinguite” and “subrigate” which basically all mean the same: The girls should first behold (“cernite” l21) the flames and arrows and then neutralize these weapons.

Focilla herself remains rather inactive in this poem. Her power symbolized by the element of fire is displayed rather as a potential, effectively influencing the senex through her attractive looks and the playful sight of her loose hair in the wind. However, the metaphors of fire and arrows allude to the previous poem about her eyes (*Baiae* II.4) and it is finally the mention of her eyes and her gaze (“blandis . . . ocellis . . . agitans et huc et illuc” l9f) that show her at her most active in this poem.

While the eyes are linked with fire, the hair itself seems to be associated with water (“effusum . . . capillum” l2, “diffluat capillus” l6) but the wind bears the potential to make the hair evoke fire. Yet she does not only have the power to make an old man whose own fire is extinguished aroused again. By mentioning the arrows, the symbol of Amor, Pontano indicates quite clearly that the same power nexus between Focilla and the god of love is of relevance in the situation depicted in this poem.

Nevertheless, the aspect of extinguishing the fire is added and it is of interest which role the other girls the lyrical I turns to play. They can put out the fire that Focilla has caused although that is not their usual job. They are used to water herbs, which is a less dramatic and way more soothing task. And this is exactly what the senex appears to be after: Unable to deal with the heat he feels towards Focilla he looks for something lighter, something to soothe him.

It is not made explicit how this is achieved, though. A rather direct approach would be the interpretation that he simply looks for other girls who can please him emotionally or sexually without making him feel strong feelings or arousal. A more subtle conclusion could be drawn, when keeping the herbs in mind which the girls water. In *Baiae* I.14 Batilla waters the marjoram so that bees can harvest its nectar to produce honey. This procedure again is a metaphor for the process of writing poetry. If one interprets myrtle and marjoram as a poetological reference in this poem as well, it could also mean that the lyrical I looks for sexual

or romantic gratification rather in art than in real life because he can no longer handle the feelings the sight of an attractive girl evokes in him. In any way the poem is another testimony of Focilla's power to inflict serious damage by her sheer presence.

2.3 Baiae II.7 Ad Focillam de cohibendis ocellis

With the seventh poem of book II, Pontano returns to Focilla's eyes. This time the title already suggests a certain dangerous potential they have, urging her to restrain them. The poem consists of 15 hendecasyllables which are not divided into stanzas. However, it is written in two sentences which can be read as two different parts (ll1–10 and ll11–15).

This division will also be backed by the stylistic analysis. There is no lyrical I in this poem, only Focilla and her anonymous lovers who are not further specified and always mentioned in plural. Except for the last three lines, in which her eyes are the grammatical subject, Focilla is being addressed in the imperative, iussive subjunctive or prohibitive. In the first part, she is simply being told what to do and what not to do with her eyes in order to prevent inflicting pain on her lovers. She shall neither glance nor avert her gaze, neither look angry nor flirtatious nor sad. The second part then concludes what is already implicitly clear: She has no harmless option left. Once her eyes come into play, damage will be done to her lovers because to them her eyes are fire and death.

Pontano arranges this rather simple idea in a very complex and dense stylistic pattern. The first part is shaped by a thorough parallelism, most prominently the alternating epiphora "ocellos" (ll1, 3, 5, 7, 9) and "amantes" (ll2, 4, 6, 8, 10). Every line ending in "ocellos" contains an instruction for Focilla ("cohibe" l1, "habe" l3, "comprimas" l5, "sponde" l7, "tingas" l9) whereas every line ending in "amantes" is a negative final clause, explaining which kind of damage can be prevented by heeding the respective instruction. The first three pairings are structured rather differently from the last two: Each first line starts with an attribute to "ocellos", creating a hyperbaton. Every second line then is the exact same ("ne perdas miseros . . . amantes") except for a gerund responding to the attribute and

the instruction of the preceding line.

So, for the first couplet we have lustful or naughty eyes (“lascivos”, l1) that she should restrain (“cohibe”, l1) because she might hurt by looking (“videndo”, l2). Antithetically, in the second couplet, modestly averted or coy eyes (“summissos”, l3) might hurt by making the lovers feel ashamed (“pudendo”, l4). As a third aspect the angry eyes are added (“iratos”, l5). She should not pose a threat (“minando”, l6) by squinting (“comprimas”, l5). Now that lust, modesty and anger are covered, the next two couplets come with a few stylistic variations.

The two “ocellos” lines start with “nec” and the attribute is placed behind the instruction. The two “amantes” lines antithetically start with “de spe” (l8) and “luctu” (l10), while the conjunction “ne” moves to the second position and “perdas” changes to the synonymous “perimas”. In all four lines the second to last word is a predicative adjective, creating the antithesis of “benigna” (l7, 8) and “misella” (l9, 10). In the first couplet Focilla’s eyes are ‘easy’ (“faciles”, l7), probably in the sense of “open for communication”. Thus, she should not make promises (“sponde”, l7), because hope (“de spe”, l8) could cause damage. In the second couplet it is tears she must not water her eyes with (“tingas lacrimis”, l9) since her lovers could not bear the sight of her sadness (“luctu”, l10). All of these intertwined parallelisms and antitheses underline that no matter what she does with her eyes and how different the emotions she conveys with them might be, it will be hurtful to those lovers.

The second part is introduced by a line that is visibly of stylistic extravagance as it is perfectly symmetric (l11). The protagonist’s name is in the center of the line, mirroring the words “noli (crede . . . crede) noli” and thus building up momentum for the warning to follow. Furthermore, her name is repeated in every remaining line of the poem. In lines 12–14 it is placed at the penultimate position, but it is back at the center position in the final line. In the latter it is also put in brackets together with “crede” as if it was an echo of line 11, creating a frame. Within this frame several devices of parallelism can be found. In the horizontal dimension lines 12 and 13 are characterized by the hyperbata “istos . . . ocellos” and “isti . . . ocelli” which vertically creates an anaphora of the two forms of “isti” and at the same time an epiphora of the respective forms of “ocelli”.

By the means of the repeated hyperbaton the attribution of Focilla's eyes with the pronoun associated with the second person is emphasized. In certain contexts, this pronoun is used with a pejorative connotation. In this case it is probably not pejorative in a derogatory kind of way but rather something along the lines of "those damn eyes of yours", beautiful but dangerous. Glancing downwards, another epiphora occurs ("amantum" ll14, 15), creating an anthithesis between the "ocelli" and the lovers they are pointed at. On a larger scale this creates another structural antithesis when compared to the first part of the poem consisting of the epiphora of "ocellos" and "amantes" in alternating order (ll1-10). In fact the symmetrical line (ll11) is the only one in the entire poem not to end on an inflexion of either "ocelli" or "amantes". Moreover, the final word of each line is preceded by a word ending in a vowel, except lines 5, 11 and 15. Since both "ocelli" and "amantes" also start with a vowel, this causes elision when reciting the poem. Thus it creates a certain flow and a stronger tie between the last and the second to last word of each line, which in many instances is Focilla's name (ll1, 3, 12, 13, 14).

With regard to imagery, however, the second part of the poem introduces the fire metaphor ("incendia", ll14) and the hyperbolic "funus" (ll15), being a metonymy for death. Both are identified with Focilla's "ocelli". They are even 'hyper-identified' by the repeated use of "sunt" (ll14, 15) which is employed three times even though syntactically two times would be sufficient. Both metaphors have a character of exaggeration, of course. However, fire, as a potential cause of death, is trumped by the grave as the actualization of death.

The fire metaphor, of course, alludes to *Baiae* II.4, the first poem dedicated to Focilla's eyes, in which this metaphor has been explored in depth. In II.4 both the reader and Focilla were informed about the potentially destructive force of her eyes. II.7 then goes one step further. Worded as a warning, it urges Focilla to restrain her eyes and gives her a rather extensive series of commands. She must not initiate (ll1-2, 7-8) nor avoid eye-contact (ll3-4) and is not allowed to express any strong emotion like anger (ll5-6) or sadness (ll9-10).

What if she were to adhere to this list of demands? She would be rendered entirely devoid of any agency. She would either have to walk around blindfolded or

seclude herself from the presence of any potential lover. The lyrical I who voices these demands seems to be aware of her lack of options ("isti quicquid agunt", l13). However, he does not tell her what to do, only what not to do. Looking at her perspective, what is she supposed to do then? Or perhaps more interestingly: What does she want to do?

The question is whether she cares about the damage she might do to a lover. She could be motivated by sympathy, not wanting to be harmful; she could just as well be entirely careless about it or at least unwilling to conceal her eyes or live in solitude. We do not get any information on her thoughts and intentions. The closest we get is the adjective describing her eyes, "lascivos", the very first word of the poem. "Lascivus" can mean cheeky, bold and unrestrained as well as lustful or voluptuous. Though not necessarily intentional, all of these qualities contain a certain potential for individual agency, rather than being something passively beautiful that is arousing to look at. If her eyes really express her own sexual interest, she might decide not to listen to any warning and to put this interest first, no matter the damage she might inflict. Hiding her sexuality does not help anyway (ll3-4) and it must be in her interest to have the chance to express strong emotions.

With regard to the hyperbole the lyrical I uses to urge her to conceal her eyes, it is apparent that all of these polyvalent implicit characteristics of her eyes are expressions of her very nature. She is being confronted with an absurd demand to hide her entire individuality from anyone who could potentially qualify as a "lover". On the flipside this means that she has a great impact on people's emotions. She has the power to convey her own feelings and desires and thereby move people. Hence, the urge to constrain her expressiveness is a hint at the agency she actually possesses: She is able to shape her environment through her own subjectivity, using her eyes as the device to do so. Nevertheless, it remains unclear how consciously or intentionally she might do so.

2.4 Baiae II.8 Ad Focillam

The next encounter with Focilla takes us closer to the realm of the sexually explicit as well as the divine again. While it was Amor in II.4, Venus comes into

play this time. The poem is rather short, consisting of 9 lines in a single stanza only. However, similar to the preceding II.7 it can be divided into two parts, the caesura being marked by “At” (l6).

The lyrical I addresses Focilla, mentioning an array of activities she engages in: Laughing, singing, dancing, playing, talking. All of these activities are identified with “veneres”, the plural form of “Venus” that might be translated as “things associated with Venus” or “acts of love” in a broader and “acts of sexual love” in a narrower sense. All of these are “veneres”, the poem continues, but she, when lying naked in bed, having sex, is not merely “veneres” but “Venus”.

Despite being very concise in terms of lines and content the poem has a stylistic depth to it, creating its wit. As already mentioned, it can be divided into two parts, the second part starting with “At” (l6). The first part (ll1–5) is again subdivided by the two sentences (ll1–3 and ll4–5). These two sentences can be read as the two elements of a syllogism, the first sentence consisting of three premises while the second sentence appears to be the conclusion, introduced by “demum” (l4).

The first three lines are aligned in a very densely parallel manner, each starting with a conditional clause consisting of “si” and a verb, followed by the object “veneres” and the apposition “Focilla” and concluded by the verb of the main clause which is identical with the verb of the conditional clause. Thus, we have the epiphora “si” and the repetition of “veneres, Focilla” vertically and the repetition of “rides. . . rides”, “cantas. . . cantas” and “saltas. . . saltas” horizontally. The former “veneres, Focilla” is also repeated a fourth time in the following line.

In terms of logic “demum” (l4) introduces the conclusion and “quicquid” (l4) has the function of a quantifier and applies the principle of induction. This is further illustrated in line 5 which consists of a pleonasm of four additional activities, that are rather nonspecific and vague. “[L]udis” and “loqueris” create an alliteration and “facis” and “agis” are synonyms. The line is structured in a rather chaotic polysyndeton, combining “-que” and “et”, which is probably due to meter. However, all of these stylistic elements suggest that the activities in the list are interchangeable.

The second part is then introduced by “at” (l6) which makes clear that it

is antithetical to the first part. The terms “nudula” and “lectulo” (16) are two juxtaposed diminutives, emphasizing the tender character and creating a certain playful tone. The same holds true for “delicias” and “libidines” (17), which are almost synonymous and placed next to each other, too. In contrast to the Platonic activities of the first part, the choice of vocabulary and tone in lines 6 and 7 is close to explicitly sexual.

Nevertheless, the full extent of the antithesis between the two parts is elaborated in the final two lines of the poem. The structure of the two lines, which need to be read as one, is symmetrical and antithetical in itself. It is basically “tunc non es veneres [...], Venus [...] tunc es”, with two parentheses. One of these parentheses doubles and thus highlights the most important word in the poem, “Venus”, the other mentions the protagonist’s name who is identified with Venus. “Tunc” is unnecessarily repeated with regard to content, however it helps to reveal the symmetrical structure, being in the first position of line 8 and the penultimate of line 9.

The core antithesis of the poem culminates in the juxtaposition of “veneres, Venus” and the emphasis “Venus sed ipsa” (18). There is a humorous quality to this line: If you read from line 6 until “veneres” and pause there, it might sound something like “but in bed there are no “veneres”, she is rather shy...”. Then “Venus sed ipsa” has the effect of a punchline, playing on the expectation of the reader. In this direct comparison the singular “Venus” appears as a climax to the “veneres”. Hence, the poem is concluded with an apotheosis of Focilla as the goddess of sex.

Not only grammatically speaking, Focilla is very active in this poem. However, in the pursuit of all these different activities, her demeanor adds a certain erotic quality to whatever she does. Some of the activities mentioned are very expressive ones, like dancing or singing. They make it easy to convey sexual interest or flirtatious gestures. Yet once again, we do not know whether she is aware of these qualities and intentionally acting in a sexy way or whether that lies in the eye of the beholder.

But with the second part it becomes clearer that she is at least aware of her

sexiness. Even though the verb of line 6 is the rather passive sounding “recumbis”, it is still only about Focilla. There is no mention of any lover or the role they play, implying that this is a secondary matter. In addition, it is hard to believe that the goddess of sex herself would not be aware of her erotic qualities or not actively and willfully pursuing her sexual interests. Thus, unless this apotheosis has been wrongfully ascribed to her, Focilla appears to have the power and the high ground in bed.

2.5 Baiae II.11 Ad Focillam

Yet another poem simply titled “Ad Focillam” brings a very basic weapon to the erotic battleground: the teeth. The poem, however, starts with the lips and moves to the teeth via the tongue. It consists of 14 lines without any partition into stanzas. In this case there is more of a plot twist content-wise than any stylistically marked structure. The twist occurs in line 7 and is followed by an instance of direct speech of Focilla (ll10–13) as another structural element.

In the beginning Focilla is sleeping and the lyrical I lightly kisses her lips (he claims that she is offering them to him; we do not get to know if he is wide awake or maybe half asleep himself, as the adverbial “in somnis” (l1) leaves this unclear. Then she starts to cry, he wipes her tears away and licks them, then suddenly bites his tongue and keeps it between her teeth. Then she speaks up and urges him to make the playful imaginations of their nighttime relationships real during the day. He reacts by formulating the terms of an agreement: She gets his tongue, he gets her lips.

The stylistic devices Pontano employs in this poem come across as more subtle than in the poems analyzed so far. Its effect is created by blending melancholy with humor and the element of surprise. The lack of structural devices adds to the mood of everything happening “in somnis”. In line 1 “mihi” is inserted between “tenerum ... labellum”, creating a hyperbaton that anticipates him or his tongue being between them. Regarding the meter, “mihi” could as well be placed in front of “tenerum”. This anticipation is followed up by the elision in “suaviorque utrumque”, which ties these words together. In addition to that, the reduplication

of “-que” and the explicit mentioning of both lips give the kissing a visual quality.

In contrast to the positive mood of the kissing, tears fall in line 3, creating the first of several antitheses. The line is introduced by the word “decursim”, which is a neologism or hapax legomenon. Evidently, it is derived from “decurrere”, describing the way the tears flow. Together with the verb and final word of the line, “exciderunt”, the shedding of the tears becomes very visual. Almost paradoxical and hyperbolic, the tears “fall down in a downrunning manner”.

However, the real hyperbole follows when the wetness of her face is described: The verb “tingis” (14) would suffice to express that she moistens her face, but she does so with moisture (“madore”, 14) and in abundance (“largo”, 14). “Madore” is then referred to through a figura etymologica (“madenti”, 15) and the ‘overflowing mouth’ (“madenti ... ore”, 15) creates a synecdoche with the moistened face (“faciem”, 14). Furthermore, there is a repetition of the tears (“lacrimas”, 15; “lacrimae”, 13).

The word groupings “largo faciem madore” (14) and “lacrimas madent(i) ab ore” (15), including the figura etymologica and the synecdoche already mentioned, read very much alike with regard to flow and sound, almost feeling like a rhyme. All of this creates the pleonastic image of her face being soaking wet with tears, when he reacts: “detergo simul et simul relingo” (16) sticks out from the rest of the poem through its flawless chiasm. Stylistically, this is a moment of order before the twist (17).

Reminiscent of “decursim” (13), the plot twist is then introduced by “surreptim” (17), an adjective Pontano derived from “surripere”. It could be translated to “grabbing...” or “stealing in a stealthy manner”. Together with “rapis” (18), the verb of the sentence, a kind of hendiadys is created, accentuating the level of surprise she takes him by. The two lines are linked by an enjambement “linguam ... exceptam”, adding the element of speed to the element of surprise.

Furthermore, Focilla’s “weapon” or device of power is mentioned, first through “mordicus” (17), describing how she steals the tongue and then through “dente” (18). “Mordicus” and “dente” form a pair similar to “surreptim” and “rapis”, being an adjective / noun counterpart to the adverb / verb combination. This also overemphasizes the way she bites, since biting requires teeth. The masculine

genus, however, of “mordicus” is peculiar. Since there is no congruent antecedent to “mordicus”, it can only be a predicative referring to Focilla, since the verbs “rapis” and “opteris” are in second person singular. The latter is certainly not the conjunctive of “optare” but the indicative of “obterere” in an alternative spelling. “Obterere” means “to crush” and speaks for the amount of force the tooth bears.

After these two very intense lines, there is another brief moment of relief. The tears from lines 3 and 5 are brought back, yet they are put between “risus” and “iocos” (l9), creating another antithesis of sadness and joy (cp. ll2, 3). This core “risus lacrimis iocos” is framed by “mox ... miscens” which creates an alliteration and round out a very clearly shaped line, similar to line 6. With “lacrimis” at the very center of the line, “coated” by laughter and jokes, it sets the tone for Focilla’s direct speech that follows (ll10–12).

This direct speech is characterized by another two antitheses. The first is the rather obvious contrast of night (“noctis”, ll10) and day (“die”, ll11). The second is that of fantasy and play (“ludicra imaginesque”, ll10) on the one hand, which is attached to the night, and reality and publicness on the other (“veras faciamus et probemus”, ll12), which is linked to the day. The first-person plural conjunctive shows that Focilla appeals to the lyrical I, expressing a wish of hers to resolve these antitheses in a synthesis.

The final two lines are the response of the lyrical I, in which he employs a very specific kind of language. “[T]e in iudicium voco” (ll13) means he takes the matter to court while “voco fidem” (ll13) uses the very same instance of “voco” for a different phrase, appealing to her trustworthiness. This manner of speaking seems to pick up the “probemus” and take it to hyperbolic level of sincerity. The final line then reads like a contract formulated in this air of sincerity. It is divided into two groupings of three words, separated by a comma. “En linguam tibi” is his part of the deal, “porge mihi labella” (ll14). The pronouns “tibi” and “mihi” seem to function as markers for the respective responsibility, while the items traded are both parts of the mouth and start with the letter “l”, thus creating an alliteration (“linguam”, “labella”). The word order has a loose feeling of a chiasm (“linguam tibi ... mihi labella”). When read out aloud, the line seems to have one excess syllable to fit into the meter of the hendecasyllable. A solution to this could be

omitting the “-hi” of “mihi”. In any case, the line sticks out both stylistically as well as content-wise. It is a contract over tongue and lips achieved by using the weapon of the teeth.

Focilla displays a multitude of very different emotions in this poem. Obviously, she is sad, shedding many tears. This sadness is triggered by the lyrical I kissing her lips. Thus, she seems to have ambivalent feelings for him. When she cries, he does not only console her by wiping away the tears, he also licks them, not dropping his erotic pursuit. The discrepancy between her sadness and his continued acts of love make room for a second emotion of Focilla's: A certain aggression is fuelled which amounts to her biting his tongue forcefully. After this short discharge of aggression, the negative emotions seem to slowly subside, allowing her to be funny and playful.

The mix of emotions depicted right before her direct speech make it very difficult to interpret her words. Without this information about her emotional state and the way she speaks in between laughter and tears her words as such sound rather sincere and serious. If, on the one hand, she was only crying, they might sound like an expression of the underlying conflict causing her sadness; as if standing up for herself, demanding that she does not want to be treated just as a nighttime plaything; that she, on top of that, wants something like a proper relationship during the day and possibly also in public. On the other hand, if she was only laughing, it could simply mean that she wanted more sex more frequently, not only rare encounters at night.

Nonetheless, it is a mixture of both. And this is where Focilla's power lies: Even though she is very sad and utters that she wants their relationship to change, she does so in a playful way. After establishing a certain level of dominance, she is able to laugh despite her sadness. By biting his tongue she definitely makes clear that he cannot use his tongue as he pleases. First, her lips are the object of his tongue, but then his tongue becomes the object of her teeth. In the end he does not directly comment on her wishes concerning their day and night relationship.

Still, he solemnly declares in the peculiar judicial language, that he agrees to a *deuce* in this game. His tongue and her lips are the objects of the contract.

But her teeth are the regulatory force that made the contract happen. All in all this poem shows a high level of agency and power within the character of Focilla. She clearly has a will of her own, is able to express it verbally and even fight for it physically. She does all of this without losing either her sense of humor or – judging from her lover’s reaction – her sex appeal.

2.6 Baiae II.12 Ad Focillam

While II.8 did not go further than depicting Focilla naked in bed and II.11 illustrated only playful interactions which could be regarded as foreplay, this poem takes it all the way to sexual intercourse. Similar to its predecessors, it consists of 18 lines which are not grouped in any stanzas. The poem, however, is written in three sentences. The first sentence (ll1–8) is a question (ll3–8) introduced by a subclause (ll1f). The second is a much shorter statement (ll9–11) and the third a long build – up to an exclamation in direct speech (ll12–18). Both the first and the last two lines stand out from the rest of the poem, the first functioning as a premise and the latter as a climax.

The premise brings back the theme of Focilla’s eyes (l1) in contrast to the lyrical l’s blindness due to his old age (l2). Yet this theme is not further elaborated in the remainder of the poem. It rather gives him reason to ask if he may not touch her breasts and kiss her, even though they lie next to each other, because he is too old. He also accuses her of ‘stealing a kiss’ from him. In the second sentence he basically warns her not to run or resist. Finally, in the third sentence he depicts the punishment she is going to receive unless she returns the stolen kiss: She will be entirely naked and endure a “*senem ... verpulentum*”³⁰ (l16). The poem then climaxes in the final lines of her screaming “I give” and him screaming “Take that.”

By means of style Pontano gives this rather rough and sexually explicit poem a more playful note. It starts off with a metaphor, calling Focilla’s eyes “*vitreos*” (l1), which could be read as “clear as glass”.³¹ This creates a strong antithesis to the

³⁰ “[V]erpulentum” is a quasi-neologism and thus difficult to translate. It will be discussed in the stylistic analysis below.

³¹ Dennis assumes it refers to her eyes and translates “your clear eyes”. Tobias Roth offers a different interpretation: She has stolen his glasses. In both cases the word “*ocellos*” can function as a recurring motif throughout the poems and there is no effect on the

lyrical I's blind old age ("caecae... senectae", l2). The second line is furthermore characterized by the assonance of the "ae"-sound which is repeated five times. Hence, the line reads very smoothly as if emphasizing the skillful guidance her sight grants him.

The two following lines switching from the premise to the question that results from it then employ a pleonasm of detail, describing him fondling her breasts ("tuis papillis manus iniciam trahamque prensas", l3f). The sudden shift to sexual action in detail creates an element of surprise to the reader who started with the premise of the recurring motif of Focilla's eyes. The poet, however, continues to overwhelm the reader even more by using a long sentence consisting of several sub-clauses introduced by "quod" (l15-8). Moreover, this sentence contains a chiasm ("supina quod des, quod des ipsa supina", l5f) and a parallelism ("quod des ipsa", l6, "quodque ipse", l8). Yet most importantly, the word "supina" is repeated three times (l5, l6, l6) and another fourth time as the polyptoton "supinus" (l8). The chaotic structure of this sentence with its seemingly unnecessary repetitions visualizes the back-and-forth of the making-out of the couple. And yes, it has been made clear to the reader that they are lying in bed together. Moreover, the object of all verbs in this sentence is a little kiss ("basiolum", l5) that she repeatedly offers ("des", l5, "des", l6, "excipias", l7) and that he finally steals or robs ("eripiam", l9).

In the following line "supina" (l9) echoes once more, however in a different meaning because the lyrical I draws a different scenario, starting with "moneo... ne" (l9f). This "fight-or-flight" scenario of her resisting his erotic pursuit is stylistically backed through two instances of alliteration placed in parallel: "ruas repente" (l10) and "renisa restes" (l11). Both are located at the end of the respective line and both are alliterations of "r". The first can be considered a hendiadys since the element of suddenness ("repente") is natural to tripping or slipping ("ruas"). The latter is a combination of synonyms. The stylistic density creates an intensity of the idea of flight or resistance. In contrast to that, the images of the slipping feet ("lapsis pedibus", l10) and Focilla taking cover behind

interpretation of the poem at large. However, the latter translation slightly changes the vein of humor, making it more slapstick.

cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p.177.

her desk (“in scriniolo”, l11) add a playful tone as well.

This rather comical style is further pursued in the next line which is introduced by another alliteration (“nam nec”, l12). Together with line 13 the poet creates a tricolon of options for Focilla to get away (“vocare matrem”, “furtum reddere”, “flere”) – none of which will work. Instead she will be naked and the intensity of this nakedness is underlined by three different means: The first is a simple repetition of “nudo” (l14f). Secondly, there is the threefold alliteration “crede, crure, coxa” (l14). Finally, the poet employs an enumeration of several naked body parts (“crure, coxa, ... pectine ... umbilicum”, l14f). From a modern point of view this depiction of the naked Focilla (at least naked from feet to belly) could be described as a camera revealing more and more as it moves, giving it a truly pornographic quality.

This quality is then further explored in the last three lines of the poem. “senem” (l16) reminds us of the “senectae” (l2) of the lyrical I, creating a figura etymologica. The actual sex is then illustrated as the senem being “verpulentum” and her enduring (“perpetiere”) him. The word “verpulentum” is a complex device itself. It is derived from “verpa” (“cock”) or “verpus” (“the circumcised”), two words Catullus uses in his invective poetry (28, 12 and 47, 4). Pontano puts them in an unprecedented diminutive.³² Dennis translates it with a metaphor (“old man’s tool”) while Roth goes for a literal approach (“Schwänzlein” / “cocklet”).³³ Both treat the word as a noun and handle “senem” as a genitive instead of an accusative, which could be regarded as case attraction serving the poetic context. A simple diminutive of “verpus”, however, would be “verpulus”, and “verpulentum”, in congruence with “senem”, has the appearance of a present participle form. Alternatively, it could be a blend of “verpulus” and “lentus”, making him the “slow-cocked old man”. All in all, the bottom line is that the poet makes fun of the lyrical I by employing this allusion to Catullan invective and thus adds a humorous spin to the seemingly aggressive act.

Notwithstanding, the final couplet of the poem then can be seen as a climax. The two lines are structured in parallel, creating a short dialogue. The first half determines the speaker and in the center there is a colon. Then both times

³²cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p. 177.

³³ibid., p. 85.

direct speech consisting of one word repeated three times follows (“Reddo, reddo, reddo’”, l17, “Subdo, subdo, subdo’”, l18). These two tricola make a blunt yet very effective stylistic device to convey the idea of the compromised linguistic capacities one has during sex. The word “clames” makes clear that these final words of the poem are being screamed. Furthermore, the fact that both words are compounds of “dare” and that the respective suffixes end in a consonant each give the repetitive use of both words a similarity to each other as well as a rhythmical quality. To express it in a musical manner, they could be described as spoken with a staccato accentuation, underpinning a certain shortness of breath.

Finally, the word “reddere” appeared before in association with “furtum” (l13) as well as in the very first line of the poem. Hence, this theme of thievery creates a thread throughout the poem, from the denied sight in line 1 over the stolen kisses (“excipias”, l7, “eripiam”, l8), the mentioning of returning the loot as pointless (“furtum . . . reddere”, l13) to the ultimately futile attempt to return it anyway (“reddo”, l17), which is answered by “subdo” (l18), the punishment she receives for it.

What, however, is the theme of this poem that escalates in terms of bluntness and roughness in a manner that is surprising in comparison to the poems discussed so far? One important aspect is certainly the age difference between the two lovers. He calls himself an old man. He talks about his old age and on the one hand there is a symptom of this old age, diminished sight. On the other hand, however, he appears to have quite a youthful sexual appetite.

Moreover, the age difference seems to practically manifest in this issue of sight: Focilla has clear eyes (or his glasses) but apparently she refuses to help him out with seeing clearly. To help him see what exactly? This question remains by all means unanswered so it might just be considered a premise to what the poem is actually about. After all, the clear sight is not the only thing she denies him. She also denies him sex, which he seems to be quite capable of, in contrast to the sight.

We need to keep in mind that the whole poem except for the premise consisting of the first two lines is a daydreaming scenario imagined by the lyrical I. In this

scenario Focilla is depicted as ambivalent. In the first part she gives him a kiss which he on his part steals from her. In the second part he imagines her refusing him and warns her not to do so. He then escalates this warning to a threat of using sex as a punishment for her behavior. He wants her to scream “I give!”. Give – or return – what, exactly? Her clear sight? This leads us back to the aporia of the question, what he might need her sight for. Nevertheless, it is plausible to interpret the clearness of sight as an expression of the difference in age. This difference appears to be a major conflict between the two lovers, which might be regarded as the core theme of this poem.

Consent is an issue, of course. From our contemporary perspective this poem could be seen as somewhat misogynistic. In contrast to her conduct in other poems, Focilla appears to be quite passive and helpless except for her initial refusal of the lyrical I. Nonetheless, one should keep in mind that she is the same character that has shown to have a will of her own and a lot of power over men; even to have a sexual interest in the lyrical I of her own. On his part, the self-incestive of “verpulentum” makes him appear as far less of a threat. According to Tobias Roth it does not even evoke any aggression.³⁴ Senard concurs with Roth in this matter. While he admits that the scene as such appears to be brutal, he considers it an example of a broader “game” of erotic encounter typical for Pontano – and one part of this game is to play fights.³⁵ Hence, this issue needs to be evaluated on the broader level of interpretation of all poems addressed to Focilla and her relationship with the lyrical I in general.

2.7 Baiae II.13 Ad Focillam

The intense poem II.12 is followed by a contrastingly mellow poem that appears almost conciliatory in comparison. It bears the same simple title “Ad Focillam”, and is very short, with a length of only seven lines. It is again written without any division into stanzas and consists of five sentences. The first two sentences thereof constitute a first part and the final couplet structurally stands out as well. This softer poem starts with Focilla giving the lyrical I a kiss. Then she demands

³⁴cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p. 177.

³⁵cp. Senard, Charles: *Les représentations sexuelles dans l'oeuvre de Giovanni Pontano (1429-1503)*, p. 263.

it be returned to her and keeps it locked away. She complains about theft and weeps. Finally the lyrical I tells her not to cry or else he will give her three kisses in exchange for one tear.

The term “exchange” is in this case an allusion to what is stylistically striking about the overall poem: It employs a vast vocabulary about possession and trade which it applies to kisses and tears or, more generally speaking, to human expressions of emotion. There is reclaiming (“repetis”, l2) and reselling (“revendicatum”, l2) as well as protection of possession (“obserans locasti”, l3) and theft (“furto”, l4) going on. Payments are made in kisses (“basium rependam”, l6) and tears (“lacrimam resolves”).

Another interesting overall aspect is the use of tense which can help to structure the poem. The first two sentences are written in perfect tense (“dedisti”, l1; “locasti”, l3) and create a premise to the third sentence, which starts with “nunc”. It is written in present tense (“quereris”, l4) and states the situation at hand. The fourth sentence, still in present tense but in prohibitive (“ne fle”, l5), then introduces the final couplet. The latter is written in future tense and functions as a response of the lyrical I to resolve the situation at hand.

Moreover, the alliteration “repetis rivendicatum” (l2) underlines two of the words associated with trade and possessions. It is followed by the pleonastic emphasis on Focilla’s locking away the kiss through “clauso . . . obserans” (l3). At the same time the little desk in which she locks it reminds the reader of the desk she used for cover in II.12 (scriniolo, l3). Another reminder is the motif of theft (“furto”, l4), which has occurred in the preceding poem II.12. The alliteration “subinde . . . subreptum” creates a smooth enjambement towards the caesura that is due to the end of the sentence in the middle of line 5. Then the introduction to the final couplet is underlined by the repetition of “ne” (l5).

The concluding lines are stylistically more dense. First of all there is the alliteration “triplex tibi” (l6). Then there is a strong parallel structure between both lines, consisting of three antitheses and one subordinate parallelism: The first is an antithesis of number (“triplex” / “unam”, l6f), the second of person (“tibi” / “mihi”) and the third between the kiss as an expression of positive emotion and

the tear as one of negative emotion (“basium” / “lacrimam”). Each line concludes with a verb for payment (“rependam” / “resolves”) which completes the parallelism mentioned above and creates a vertical alliteration at the same time. The only structural variation of the two lines is the position of the connector (“vel” / “si”), which is rather insignificant.

The use of the merchandising terminology implies that the acts of intimacy exchanged between the two are items of a certain value: items that can be promised, given, demanded back, stored away in secure places and stolen. In addition, these transactions also reveal a power dynamic if one considers the reciprocity of the exchange. Focilla appears to play the more active part in them. She is the one who promises, demands back, locks away and accuses of theft.

On top of that, the final couplet rather explicitly states that her tear is three times as valuable as his kiss. Hence she seems to have more value to offer than him, which explains why she gets to play the more active part. The lyrical I, in contrast, is more of a passive observer, describing how the situation of her crying came about until finally he makes the offer to compensate her with three kisses. Again, the mercantile language Pontano uses and the stylistic juxtaposition of his three kisses versus her one tear make it sound like an investment on his part. In order to soothe her he is willing to make that investment. However, it remains unknown whether he succeeds. In contrast, Focilla can change her mind and her mood, express herself and get away with it. Thus, ultimately, Focilla has the upper hand in this trade-off.

2.8 Baiae II.14 Ad Focillam

Titled in the same manner as its predecessors, the poem II.14 appears as a different take on the same premise as II.12: the relationship between Focilla’s eyes and the lyrical I’s old age. It consists of 16 lines without any division into stanzas and its underlying structure will be subject to stylistic analysis. The poem begins with Focilla turning her sexy eyes away from the lyrical I, not granting him any mercy considering his age. He then concedes that she might enjoy other, younger lovers as long as she does not abandon him completely as her lover. Even though

he has given up on pursuing sexual endeavors, he claims that she has the power to rekindle his youth. With only three kisses she could cure him from his old age.

This plot twist is developed very subtly and humorously through Pontano's use of style. The very first word of the poem, "Lascivos", quite bluntly sets its erotic tone while immediately creating tension through the hyperbaton to its antecedent "ocellos", which is the last word of line one. Hence, the first important motif of the poem, the sexy eyes, is established and emphasized. It is then linked to the second motif, the old age, through the alliteration "nec nostrae" (l2). First of all, this alliteration is created by using the pluralis modestiae "nostrae" instead of "meae". Moreover, "nostrae" is the antecedent to "senectae" (l2) which is like "ocellos" the last word of the line, creating another hyperbaton. Thus, the first two lines can be considered a premise presenting the two main motifs of the poem.

This premise is followed by a section of four (ll3–6) lines that are defined as a unit through both syntax and style. They form one sentence syntactically and are characterized through the anaphora "dum ne me" followed by the verb of the sentence which each second line is introduced by (l4, l6). In addition to that, these four lines are characterized by several antitheses. First, the object of the lines starting with "dum" is the lyrical I ("me", l4, l6) while the object of the two other lines are other lovers ("iuvenes", l3; "hos"/"alios", l5). Second, the verbs of lines three and five are acts of love in the imperative or coniunctivus iussivus ("ama foveque", l3; "ames", l5) while those of lines four and six are acts of abandonment in prohibitive ("ne ... fugias", l4; "ne ... abicias", l6). Third, there is an antithesis between the old age of the lyrical I ("senem", l4) and the youth of her other lovers ("iuvenes", l3) as well as herself ("puella", ll4, 6). Finally, she loves others ("alios ames", l5), while he loves her ("amantem", l6). This array of antitheses combined with said anaphora shows the enormous clash between Focilla's anonymous young lovers, the "winners", and the old lyrical I, the loser.

However, Pontano adds another layer of hyperbole to this passage, making it almost ridiculously humorous. The close to synonymous verbs "ama foveque" (l3) in juxtaposition are a small detail in this regard but what is more striking is

the enormous number of Focilla's lovers implied by "Quantum . . . iuvenes" (13) and the phrase "atque hos atque alios" (15). Furthermore, this phrase together with "ames" reads like one long alliteration, considering the elisions between each "atque" and the respective following word ("atqu-(h)os atqu-alios ames"). By using these stylistic means Pontano creates a passage that makes fun of the lyrical I's situation in a tongue-in-cheek manner.

The next four lines are characterized by a similar structural approach, however not in alternating order, but as two couplets. The first couplet is marked by the epiphora "libidinesque"/"libidinemque" (17f) and the second by the anaphora "lascivos" (19f). Both lines of the first couplet are strongly parallel in structure. They each start with a negating verb ("Nolo", 17; "amisi", 18), followed by a hendiadys with the sexual lust ("libidines") being the more specific form of, respectively, delights ("delitias", 17) and the things attributed to Venus (venerem, 18). Thus, Pontano very strongly emphasizes that the lyrical I is absolutely done with engaging in sex.

Nevertheless, quite antithetically, he wants to be looked at by Focilla's sexy eyes. As mentioned above, the second couplet is introduced by the anaphora "lascivos" which is a repetition of the first word of the poem. In addition to that, "ocellos" from line 1 also echoes in line 9. By then adding the verb "volo", the whole line in a way mirrors line 7 and points out the underlying antithesis as if the lyrical I wanted to say: "Nolo delitias libidinesque sed lascivos oculos volo". The usage of "Nolo" versus "volo" isolated from their verses makes it look almost blunt. However, it points to a certain paradox that the poet plays with. He does not want sexual lust but simultaneously wants her lustful eyes.

On top of that, the structure of an epiphora followed by an anaphora juxtaposes "libidines" and "lascivos", creating an alliteration if read as an enjambement. Thus, these four words function as an axis of symmetry of the four lines. Also note that line 9 ends with a full stop. Hence, the anaphora "lascivos" ties the new sentence starting in line 10 to it. While lines 7 to 9 revolve around the lyrical I's sexual paradox mentioned above, line 10 forms a bridge to the actual plot twist of the poem that is built on said paradox. First of all, it reestablishes contact between Focilla and the lyrical, making her the subject turning her eyes at him ("reflectis",

l10). Moreover, the antecedent of “lascivos”, is only found at the very end of line 11, creating a vast hyperbaton. It is, of course, the eyes once more, this time in the diminutive “ocellos” (l11) as in line 1.

While the variation between the diminutive “ocellos” (l1, l11) and the regular form (l9) is probably due to meter, it is interesting to look at the difference between the direct juxtaposition of the antecedents in line 9 (“lascivos oculos”) and the very obvious hyperbaton in lines 10 and 11 (“Lascivos . . . ocellos”). In the first case the lustful eyes are simply the object of his desire while in the second the hyperbaton makes space for all the things she does with her eyes: She turns them at him (“reflectis”, l10), she laughs (“rides”, l11) and also weeps or in some way expresses sadness (“doles”, l11). The antithesis between laughing and weeping appears in the phrase of “et . . . simul et” that Pontano repeatedly uses and that – paired with such a strong antithesis – might be regarded as a Petrarchism.³⁶ Thus far the two lines framed by the hyperbaton “Lascivos . . . ocellos” have only covered the sub-clause of the sentence they belong to.

The following line finally brings the main-clause about which at the same time is the punchline bringing about the plot twist of the poem. By looking at him and expressing these conflicting emotions through her eyes she rekindles the power of youth in him. In the next line he goes even further, saying that he thus sheds all of his old age. The word “simul” (l13) from line 11 echoes here, evoking the impression that everything happens all at once, her glance and his metamorphosis.

Furthermore, the last words of lines 10 and 11 highlight the most important antithesis of the poem, that between old age and the vigor of youth. However, there is still a set of conditions to make him entirely shake off the “senectam” he found worthy of pity at the beginning of the poem (“senectae”, l2). This set of conditions is the subject of the final three lines of the poem which are notably grouped together through the anaphora “si” (l14ff). Interestingly, this threefold

³⁶Throughout this work, the term ‘Petrarchism’ will be used in this broader sense. It has been pointed out, however, that the core element of these antithesis in Petrarch is *dolendi voluptas*, taking delight in suffering from unrequited love or sexual rejection. In Pontano this device amplifies erotic sensation and is integrated in successful sexual pursuit.

cp. Thurn, Nikolaus: *Neulatein und Volkssprachen. Beispiele für die Rezeption neusprachlicher Literatur durch die lateinische Dichtung Europas im 15. - 16. Jh.*. München: Fink 2012, p. 203, p. 206.

cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p. 181.

anaphora is further underlined by “ter” (l14), creating a unity of word and form. Another interwoven parallelism is the final word of each line being the respective verb, each a part of the overall making out that is depicted in these three verses. The first is kissing (“suaviaris”, l14), the second the more detailed sucking of the tongue (“suggis”, l15) and the last one her hanging about his neck (“pendes”, l16). Focilla is the subject of all these verbs, hence the second person singular. Two of them, “suaviaris” and “suggis” also form a vertical alliteration and repeat the s-sound of the “si” beginning each line. Conclusively, the hyperbaton “collo . . . complicata” creates an auditive alliteration with “quoque” in between, giving the line a dense and unique sound when read out loud.

These last three verses appear as one big tricolon. It seems as if Pontano is playing with a kind of numerology, turning these verses into a magic formula that has the power to rejuvenate the lyrical I. It is striking how the poem progresses from a mere description of Focilla’s eyes to making out. However, before this communion, the two characters could not be any further apart with regard to their attractiveness and sexual activeness.

The lyrical I’s primary attribute is his old age. He not only claims to have given up on pursuing sexual pleasure, he is not even motivated by jealousy. In contrast to that, Focilla is described as highly promiscuous. Since one receives this information through the perspective of the lyrical I, it remains uncertain whether she really does flirt and love “these and those” young men or if this is his imagination, a remainder of his jealousy, perhaps. Nonetheless, Pontano portrays a promiscuous woman who is able to use her lascivious gaze to seduce at will and who “can get away” with this behavior without suffering any negative comments or repercussions.

In any way, the picture drawn of Focilla shows her as highly attractive and sexually active – the exact opposite of the lyrical I. At the same time her sexy eyes are the last straw of hope he clings to as a sexual agent. However, the capabilities of her gaze seems to go beyond mere sexiness. The Petrarchism of her simultaneous laughing and weeping suggests that it is not only her sexual attractiveness that is rekindling his youth, but rather her whole personality as well as her own youth. So far the rekindling sounds like a psychological and hormonal

change in the old man, yet when the numerological magic formula comes into play, his transformation almost sounds like an Ovidian metamorphosis: If she kisses him three times he will shed his old age – and appear as a young man in her arms.

2.9 Baiae II.16 Ad Focillam

The next poem dedicated to Focilla seems to take a different approach to the same topic of rekindling youth. Consisting of 28 lines it is the longest of all poems dedicated to her. Despite its length, it is still written without any division into stanzas. It is, however, written in rather long sentences, the first consisting of eight lines, the second of five lines and the third of six lines. The remainder of the poem then is written in shorter syntax units. Hence it can be subdivided into four parts that slightly differ in stylistic means, perspective and semantic fields as well.

Throughout the poem the main theme is the reintroduction of Amor, the god of love, Focilla's relationship with him and the divine as such. This theme is, of course, reminiscent of II.4. In the first part (ll1–8) the lyrical I warns Focilla not to bring her companion Amor along whenever she visits the temples. In the second part (ll9–13) he wonders why he is warning her anyway since she and the god are inseparable. In the third part then (ll14–19) he shifts to advising her to conceal her eyes with a veil because they are too dangerous and might hurt lovers with flames and arrows. Nonetheless, in the last part (ll20–28) he ponders a little more and comes to the conclusion that she should make a small exception for him. Since he has been frozen by old age he in turn could use some fire. Thus her gaze could restore his youth.

Pontano underlines the different stages in the train of thought of the lyrical I by employing different stylistic devices as well as semantic fields in each part. He starts with a seemingly descriptive scenario of Focilla visiting the temples that is actually foreshadowing the theme of the divine. The poet does so by mentioning the synonymous "sacras . . . aedes" (l1) and "templa" (l2) as well as the gods associated with temples ("deos", l2). Furthermore, there is an alliteration "ad aedes" and the recurring prefix "ad-" ("Accedis", "ad aedes", "adis" (l1f)) and three verbs describing Focilla going somewhere ("Accedis", "invisis", "adis"). Hence, the first

two lines are stylistically dense, emphasizing that Focilla is entering the realm of the divine.

Yet in the third line the god Amor is referred to as her companion (“comitem”, 13). A hyperbaton is created by separating this attribute of his through an insertion of Focilla’s name. This also directly juxtaposes Focilla and Amor. Even though Amor is a god himself, Focilla should keep him away from the divine places. This antithesis is further elaborated by the advice that she should keep him at home (“domi”, 14) and – as if that was not sufficient enough a precaution – locked in her bedroom (“in thalamo”, 15). This is phrased using a peculiar choice of words. The expression “servari . . . iube” (15) implies that Focilla is able to order that the god be locked up. Technically, she might not give direct orders to the god, but she certainly has power over him. All in all, a contrast between the public, divine space of the temples and the private, secular space of Focilla’s bedroom is significant in the first five lines, with Focilla and Amor moving in both spaces.

The following three lines explain why these precautionary measures are necessary. In line 6 there is first an antithesis between gods (“divos”) and men (“homines”), which is resolved by the possibility of both falling in love with Focilla. Then an expression for falling in love follows, “Amore captos”, which in this context plays with the ambiguity of the abstract noun within the latin idiom and the god whose domain it is. Thus, it refers to the feeling of love as well as the god of love, whom she should keep at home in the first place. Line 7 then further explains that there will be trouble and fighting among those gods and men. However, it is interesting that Pontano makes Focilla the active subject of a call for arms and fighting by using the second person singular (“cieas”, “voces”, 17). The whole line is arranged as a chiasm with the verbs “cieas vocesque” in the center and the objects “ad rixam” and “ad arma” on both sides. Moreover, it is an example of pleonasm, since the verbs and the objects are each semantically very close.

The outcome of this stylistically dense struggle is then illustrated in the following line 8. Focilla’s own ravishing (“rapinae”, 18) is the hyperbolic consequence of her hyperbolic call to arms. However, by adding the attribute “volens” to “causa . . . rapinae” (18), Pontano explicitly states that she is the acting force behind this. Overall, the sub clause introduced by “ne” (16) that consists of these three lines

can be considered a tricolon and a climax: Line 6 explains, why Focilla should keep Amor at home, line 7 shows that it would mean more trouble if she does not do so and line 8 finally illustrates how it is going to backfire and end in the most trouble for herself. This climax concludes the first part of the poem.

The second part is then introduced by a repetition of “moneo” (l9, l4), this time phrased as a question. Essential to this part is the parallelism “Nec ipsa Amorem . . . fugies, Amor nec ipse . . . relinquet” (ll9–12). It defines the relationship between Focilla and Amor and shows their closeness. In Amor’s case, the certainty that he will stay close to her side is solidified by the pleonasm of using two verbs expressing that he will not leave (“deseret”, “relinquet”, ll12). On Focilla’s part, however, there is the puzzling notion that she will not flee from “Amorem . . . invitum” (l9ff), from unwilling or reluctant love. This attribute is also separated from its antecedent by a long hyperbaton that spans a whole line.

In addition, there are two relative clauses (ll10, ll13) that are inserted in the parallel structure mentioned earlier. Both of them end on the epiphora “ocellis” (ll10, ll13), which alludes, of course, to earlier poems about Focilla’s eyes. The first instance regards her eyes as the place from which Amor does damage (“vulnerat”, ll10). This damage is underlined by the quality of the sound the line creates when read aloud. Regarding the elision between “qui” and “ex”, there is a quick succession of hard velars (“usque **qu**(i) **ex** ocellis”) that makes it very bulky to pronounce. The second instance then regards her eyes as Amor’s kingdom. Here the reference to II.4 becomes clear (“In tuis Amor insidens ocellis”, II.4, l4), yet in that poem he was only residing in her eyes. Thus, Pontano certainly takes it one step further, declaring that Amor has his kingdom there.

Since the lyrical I concludes that Amor and Focilla are inseparable in the second part of the poem, he comes up with a different strategy in the third part (ll14–19). This part is again subdivided into the strategy itself (ll14–16) and the reason for this strategy (ll17–19). Said strategy entails that Focilla should cover her eyes with a veil. It is striking how this process of veiling is described in a pleonastic fashion. There are three words for veil (“velo”, ll14; “nubem”, ll16; “vitta”, ll16) and three corresponding verbs for the process of veiling (“tege”, ll15; “vesti”, ll15; “obice”, ll16). Moreover, each of the three lines ends with a word from this

semantic nexus that starts with “v”, creating a vertical alliteration (“velo”, l14; “vesti”, l15, “vitta”, l16). On the one hand, there is a hyperbole that Focilla’s eyes should be “compressos” behind the veil (l15). On the other hand, three attributes emphasize that the veil should only be a light and tender one (“tenui . . . velo”, l14; “molliterque vesti”, l15; “tenuiore vitta”, l16).

Hence, there is an antithesis within the different stylistic devices employed here. The consequence that would result if Focilla did not veil her eyes is again introduced by a “ne”-clause, similar to line 5. Reminiscent of poem II.4 again, that consequence would be arrows and flames cast from her eyes. Note that the semantic field “heat/fire” is dominant throughout the remainder of the poem (“flammas”, l17; “calfacies”, l18; “ures”, “flamma”, l19; “calor”, l20; “ustilante flamma”, l24; “calore”, l27). Line 17 is shaped by a hyperbaton of these flames and arrows, “flammas” being the first word and “sagittas” the last. On top of that, the last words of line 16 and line 17, “vitta” and “sagittas” almost have a rhyming quality to them.

These flames in turn will burn her lovers, as is then illustrated in the last two lines of the third part. In order to do so Pontano uses “calfacies” (l18), which in itself carries the double meaning of “to warm up / to heat up” and “to evoke passion”. In this case, both the metaphorical as well as the literal meaning fit. In the next line, however, he shows that the heat is too strong by using a litotes (“non. . . impotente”, l19) which only shows how intense these flames are. It is also striking that Focilla is the subject to “calfacies” and “ures” (l18f), making her the active agent of the burning.

Yet in the last part of the poem (ll20–28), the lyrical I himself so to speak enters the scene. The part consists of two rhetorical questions (l20f; l22ff) he asks and the conclusion (ll25–28) he draws from them. In the first question he basically asks whether it would be any different for him, since he lacks heat (“calor. . . destituit”, l20f). He supports this lack of heat by referring to himself in a self-deprecating manner as a miserable old man (“misero seni”, l20).³⁷ Furthermore, his phrasing gives the impression of him pondering, pausing in between words or mumbling through the repetition of “quid” (l20), the parenthesis “quid misero seni” (l20)

³⁷cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 22*, p. 218.

and the reduplication “iam iam” (l21). While this first rhetorical question ends with the verb “fiet” (l21), the second question starts with the very same word (“fiet”, l22), placing it even before the pronoun introducing the question. Hence, it underlines a continuous train of thought. On top of that, the notion of “misero seni” is repeated (l22).

Nonetheless, the second question is quite different. In contrast to the pondering, uncertain style of the first one, it deals with the topic of heat and the lack thereof in a much more elaborate fashion. At its core is an antithesis between the predominant fire and the harsh contrast of ice: The lyrical I claims in a hyperbolic manner that the cold (“frigus”, l23) has almost frozen him entirely (“congelavit omnem”, l23). Thus he has long been seeking a flame (“longe est opus ustilante flamma”, l24). The conclusion he draws from these two questions repeats the “misero” (l25) from the expression “misero seni” (l20, l22) encountered in both rhetorical questions, only omitting “seni”.

This repetition is a cue to the three-step method or the tricolon nature of the last part of the poem. However, the first line of this part also brings back the veil from the third part of the poem (“velum”, l25, “velo”, l14). Another structural element of this last part is “furtim” (l25) and the figura etymologica “furtivo” (l27), which sets a mood of secrecy for this last part. Furthermore, Focilla’s eyes recur with the attribute “obliquis”, that is highlighted through a hyperbaton spanning the whole line (“obliquis . . . ocellis”, l26). Most striking, however, is that all verbs in this part start with the suffix “re-” (“reclude”, l25, “refice”, l26, “refove”, l27, “referet”, l28). The first three of them are also in the imperative and their subject is Focilla, creating another tricolon of commands, while the last verb describes the outcome if she adheres to these commands. She is asked to partially remove her veil, reestablish eye-contact, and in that way rekindle the old man’s heat – all secretly, only so that he, the miserable wretch, can see her eyes. Ultimately, this should restore his youth.

Taking a look at the poem as a whole again, it is peculiar how in the first and second part Amor’s name is mentioned four times (l3, l6, l9, l11), while Focilla’s is mentioned only once (l3), directly next to Amor’s. In the third and fourth part, however, her name is mentioned five times (l14, l18, l21, l22, l26), which leads to

the impression that the focus shifts from Amor to Focilla throughout the poem. Finally, the “poor old man” enters the stage as well (l20, l22, l25, l27).

As mentioned before, the poem re-explores two themes from other poems dedicated to Focilla. On the one hand, we have the relationship between Amor and Focilla as well as her eyes as a transmitter of divine power, which has been laid out in poem II.4. On the other hand, the theme of restoration of the lyrical I’s youth is put forward as already discussed in II.13. Here these two themes are linked together since it is the flames that are being cast from Focilla’s eyes together with Amor’s arrows that reinstall his youth. In II.4 the flames were merely of destructive quality, hurting Focilla’s lovers and eventually herself. In II.13 it was only her glance that rekindled his youth, without any flames involved.

This poem adds the element of ice as a metaphor for the lost youth and the old age of the lyrical I. The ice bears the potential to give the destructive flames a constructive quality as a counterpart to their force. Senard suggests that Pontano adopts this idea from the ancient physician Galen who proposed the therapeutic effect of contrasting elements in general and the rejuvenating quality of heat in particular.³⁸ Yet before the ice is brought to the table, the potential danger of Focilla’s proximity to the divine is further elaborated in this poem. She is advised to restrict her friend Amor to her private sphere, her home, and, even better, her most private sphere, her bedroom. She should not bring him to the public sphere. However the public sphere mentioned here is not just the forum, the public sphere of man, but the temples, the public sphere of the gods. Her potential to make not only humans but even gods fall in love with her could be regarded as a hint at the theme of hubris. The warning that this might lead to her own ravishing also speaks for hubris. Nevertheless, it is difficult to accuse her of hubris when she is so closely tied to Amor and he regards her eyes as his kingdom. She might be human, but she is so close to this god and hence the gods, that she – again – receives a quasi apotheosis.

Taking a step back, it would be interesting, of course, to know whether she was intentionally doing any of this; whether she wanted to put not only people but

³⁸cp. Senard, Charles: *Les représentations sexuelles dans l'oeuvre de Giovanni Pontano (1429-1503)*, p. 294–298.

gods to the test and take her companion Amor everywhere she goes. Yet she is at least portrayed as active in this regard: Actively calling the gods to arms and unwilling to cut her ties with Amor. In contrast, the lyrical I, despite presenting himself in a self-deprecating and humbling manner, displays a clandestine hubris: Unlike everyone else, including the gods, he is able to endure Focilla's fire because his element is the ice. Hence, he is the only one who can behold her gaze that is highly attractive but at the same time highly dangerous.

From a different perspective it looks more like a very sly, tongue-cheek-way of flirting: He flatters her massively by putting her on a ridiculously high pedestal but warns her that she is just too attractive for her own good. Hence, she should tone down her attractiveness, cover it behind a veil and make an exception only for him – a very convincing way to flatter, boost her confidence and still try to have her exclusively for himself.

2.10 Baiae II.17 Ad Focillam

This is the last poem of the Baiae dedicated to Focilla. It spans 14 lines and can be regarded as of medium length. In accordance with the preceding poems, it is not divided into stanzas, but it can be grouped in three parts marked by steps in its train of thought and by syntax units. The first part (ll1–6) is a regular clause of statement, observing Focilla's temperament, her change of mood and how it is reflected in her eyes. The second part (ll7–10) is a set of three questions asking for a connection between her change of mood and the change of daylight. Finally, the third part (ll11–14) is a request: The lyrical I asks her to bring back the daylight with the help of her eyes.

Stylistically the poem is most strongly characterized by several antitheses. Throughout the first part, there is a recurring contrast between joy and sadness or laughter and tears ("risu" / "lacrimas", l1; "risum" / "lacrimis", l3; "tristitiam" / "gaudium", l6). This contrast is followed by the antithesis between light and darkness in the second part ("lux", "dies", l8; "luce", l10 / "tenebrae", l7; "nigrescit", l8). Lastly, the third part is free of antitheses and is shaped by parallelisms. Hence, it appears as a kind of synthesis of the first two parts.

A closer look at the first part reveals additional, subtler antithetical structures and parallel structures intertwined with them. Lines 1 and 3 are perfectly parallel, both begin with a preposition, followed by “risu” / “risum”, another preposition, “lacrimas” / “lacrimis”, Focilla’s name in parentheses and finally the respective verb (“vertis” / “mutas”), both of which are synonymous and in the second person singular, Focilla being their subject. A notable variation is the direction in which the prepositions lead: In line 1 it is “e . . . in” and reversed in line 3 the “in . . . e”. If one continues to read the line in the manner of an enjambement, each verb at the end is directly followed by another verb at the beginning of the next line, creating a kind of anaphora (“avertis”, l2; “convertis”, l4).

In the first case, “avertis” (l2) is the direct negation of “vertis” (l1), which forms an antithesis. In the second case, “mutas” (l3) and “convertis” (l4) are synonymous. On top of that, lines 2 and 4 are another perfectly parallel pair, in this case starting with the verb, followed by “quotiens”, and then an antecedent attribute (“gravata”, l2; “benigna”, l4) and finally “ocellos”. Note that the verbs in the first position and the attributes in the penultimate position are antithetical as well. Hence, the first four lines create a pattern of two parallelisms in alternating order, carrying a dense network of antitheses within and across lines.

The first part is then completed by a couplet starting with the anaphora “quis” (l5f). The first line of this couplet has the form of a chiasm (“pacem geris et geris duellum”, l5) that bears another antithesis at its core, the one of peace (“pacem”) and war (“duellum”). The second line of the couplet is structurally strongly polysyndetic (“et”, “-que”, “-que”, l6), yet above all it adds two more objects that align with the antithetical theme of the first part: “tristitiam” and “gaudium” (l6).

As mentioned above, the following second part (ll7–10) revolves around the antithesis of darkness (“tenebrae”, l7; “nigrescit”, l8) and light (“lux”, “dies”, l8; “lucem”, l10). This antagonism is underlined by the use of three verbs which all share the prefix “ob-” (“obortae”, l7; “Obiecit”, l9; “obvoluit”, l10). Furthermore, it consists of three questions. The first two of these are introduced by the anaphora “Cur” (l7f). In line 7, this causal question is repeated for emphasis (“Cur, o cur”). Line 8 is shaped by a parallelism supporting the antithetical theme of the part: A

noun standing for light as the subject followed by a verb of gradual decline or in the latter case explicit blackening (“lux destituit, dies nigrescit”, l8).

In contrast to the first two questions, the third one concluding the second part of the poem does not start with a pronoun. However it brings back Focilla’s eyes, this time not in the diminutive, with an alliteration (“Obiecitne oculis”). Focilla’s name recurs as well, not as an apostrophe, as common with Pontano, but referring to her in third person. Here the thematic antithesis switches from light against darkness to a covering of the eyes and thereby the light (“oculis”/“velum”, l9; “lucem”/“vitta”, l10). By using the exact words “velum” and “vitta” for “veil”, the poet alludes to the preceding poem II.16. These words function as a vertical alliteration as well as a kind of epiphora (l9ff). On top of that, they provide a link to the last part of the poem, being repeated in juxtaposition (“velum et vittam”, l11f). As mentioned above, this last part (ll11–14) is in itself no longer antithetical.

However, it is antithetical to the second part, answering to the veiling with an unveiling. This is supported stylistically by a figura etymologica of “detege” (l11) in response to “tegente” (l10). All in all, it is “Obiecit . . . velum” and “tegente vitta” (l9f) in contrast to “detege . . . velum et vittam remove” (l11f). The chiasm in line 12 (“vittam remove et reclude ocellos”) then illustrates the actual objective behind removing the veil which is uncovering Focilla’s eyes, of course. It is the fourth time the eyes are mentioned, here again in the diminutive. Hence, the eyes occur in every part of the poem. Note that in the same manner as in line 4f, “ocellos” is the last word of the line, followed by a relative clause starting with “quis”. In this case it is “quis lucem” (l13) instead of “quis pacem” (l5), but nonetheless both lines are structured parallelly with a slight variation of the last two positions. Moreover, line 13 and the following final line are strongly parallel, with “lucem” at the second and “diem” at the penultimate position in both cases. They are no longer contrasted by any darkness, sadness or veils and thus strike as a synthesis of the preceding antithetical dialectic.

It is peculiar how Focilla’s gaze seems to have an ambiguous quality in the beginning of the poem while at the end its presence seems to be unequivocally desired, even existential. Her eyes possess the power to convey her own emotions

so strongly that she invokes them in others. Hence, she turns laughter to tears when she is saddened (“gravata”, l2) herself and she does so by turning her gaze away.

So, apparently, if she is present, you would want her to look at you as well and you would want her to be in a good mood (“benigna”, l4). This leads to the question of whether the peace and war, the sadness and happiness are all a matter of her looking or averting her gaze. Within the confines of this poem, it certainly seems this way since concealing her eyes takes away the daylight and leaves virtually nothing but darkness. The lyrical I explicitly claims that Focilla can control the daylight with her eyes (“lucem simul et diem ministras”, l13).

Despite all the ambiguities, antitheses and Petrarchisms³⁹ he faces, he ultimately comes to the conclusion that the greatest of all evils is Focilla looking away or even concealing her eyes. He would rather encounter her full personality than not encounter her at all. Such is the synthesis Pontano has led the reader to in a stylistically dense manner. Such is the last poem dedicated to the mysterious character of Focilla.

³⁹cp. Thurn, Nikolaus: *Neulatein und Volkssprachen*, p. 203.

3 Focilla's devices of agency and power

After having investigated each of the poems dedicated to Focilla in detail, taking a step back and re-evaluating the whole set of poems as a narrative arc makes it possible to get the full picture of Focilla's character. By summarizing all the information given on her and considering the relationship between her and the lyrical I with all its plot-twists and changes, her subjective space as well as the amount of her agency and power can be measured.

A glance at the titles shows that while the last seven poems (II.8 – II.17) are plainly titled "Ad Focillam", the first three poems (II.4 – II.7) have more elaborate titles. Only the first poem grants Focilla the attribute "puella", which raises the question of whether she is younger in this poem than in the others. However, the quality and effect of her eyes is congruent with that of the later poems (e.g. II.7, II.16, II.17). Moreover, the term "puella" is generally used very vaguely by Pontano. On top of that, the age difference between her and the lyrical I seems to be the more important aspect and several poems refer to it as quite large (II.5, II.12, II.14, II.16).

The second poem (II.5) has the additional title "de capillis ad frontem sparsis" and is the only poem that deals with Focilla's hair. In the same manner, the third poem (II.7) is additionally called "de cohibendis ocellis", which, as a reference to the title of the first poem, introduces the ongoing dialectic of disclosing and concealing her eyes on the level of the titles. Her eyes, of course, are the most dominant motif across all the poems dedicated to her. Hence, they will receive a conclusive discussion at a later point.

Yet another interesting aspect that varies over the course of the narrative arc is the level of sexual explicitness. The first three poems (II.4 – II.7) are not very explicit at all. They do not go past attractive looks and lustful glances. However, II.8 mentions nudity and sex, II.11 continues with depictions of making out including the use of tongue and teeth and II.12 appears as a climax displaying punishment sex with direct speech attached to it. II.13 and II.14 then tone it down to kisses and notions of sex. II.16 is free of anything explicit except for warning her from the possible ravishing ("rapinae") she might cause and II.17, the last poem, is finally free of anything sexual. One could describe these findings

as an intensity curve of sexual explicitness that has a turning point in the middle of the arc.

Throughout this arc, an array of devices of agency and power Focilla has at her disposal has been pointed out. These devices grant her the possibility to encounter the lyrical I as an autonomous player and to shift the power dynamics between her and the much older man. Some of them also show her own interest in sex, making her a protagonist of female sexual desire. In addition to her eyes and her gaze on the concrete level or her arrows and flames on the metaphorical level, the list of devices comprises: Hair, mouth including kisses, lips, teeth and words, humor and sadness, nudity and promiscuity and – last, but not least – her apotheosis.

In the following, these devices will be reviewed one by one in juxtaposition to each other so recurrences across poems can be pointed out. This will give us the full picture of Focilla's agency and power.

3.1 Hair

Focilla's hair is only mentioned in II.5. It is referred to as an ancillary device to the eyes and they seem to have a similar function and irritation they evoke in the lyrical I. Moreover, this poem is an interesting account of a Quattrocento perspective on women's hairstyles. In accordance with a modern view, wearing the hair loose gives her a more attractive, wild look. In contrast to that a tidy bun or ponytail seems to tone down the attractiveness a little, giving her a more chaste appearance.

The lyrical I has a hard time deciding what he would prefer, however, since the stunning effect of her loose hair could overwhelm him. Nonetheless, he would regard it a pity if she were to tie it up. In the end, Focilla gets to decide what hairstyle she wants to go with. Knowing the effect it has gives her a certain level of control over the sexual attraction she wants to convey. Thus, altering her appearance grants her agency and using these means in an encounter with somebody attracted to her gives her power.

Despite all the similarities between her hair and her eyes, the hair is a lot easier for her to control, since it is less of an active device than the eyes. After all, it is much more drastic to wear a veil than to comb and tie up one's hair.

3.2 Mouth: kisses, lips, teeth and words

The mouth is a manifold device used for soft kisses, aggressive biting and verbal communication. While it is most prominent in poem II.11, with the explicit use of lips, teeth and words limited to it, her mouth is also mentioned in II.12 and II.14.

Kisses appear in II.11, II.12, II.13 and II.14. Apart from the intrinsic romantic or sexual qualities of the kisses as such, they seem to have some additional extrinsic relevance to the relationship between her and the lyrical I. II.14 is, on the one hand, interesting in that it depicts a scenario in which Focilla is initiating the kiss and making it actively very sexual, sucking his tongue in. This level of initiative definitely speaks for her agency. But on the other hand, there is more to this scenario since the kiss is part of a kind of magic ritual that restores the old man's youth. Having such a magical impact on him gives her an enormous amount of power. After all, he is dependent on her acting.

The kisses receive an entirely different twist in II.11, II.12 and II.13. Here they are considered items of value the lovers trade with each other – or steal.⁴⁰ II.13 shows that the lyrical I, after being accused of stealing a kiss from her, is willing to exchange three kisses on his part for one tear on hers, which leads to the conclusion that her currency is more powerful than his. In II.12 it is the other way around: He accuses her, in addition to not giving him her eyes, of stealing a kiss, which in the end leads to him overpowering her. The resistance depicted in this poem, however, speaks for her agency. Moreover, his need to apply this level of force also implies that she is actually the more powerful player.⁴¹ All in all, the metaphor of trade and its aberration into theft reveals a lot about the underlying power dynamics of the relationship. The kiss appears to be the most important currency within this metaphor. Nonetheless, his tongue and her lips also appear as items that are being traded within the context of this extended metaphor in

⁴⁰The stealing of kisses is a motif Pontano has taken from Catullus (carmen 99) and already employed in earlier works, cp. Vogt-Spira, Gregor: *Küssen und Schreiben. Pontanos Imitatio von Catulls basia-Gedichten*. in: *Pontano und Catull. NeoLatina (4)*. ed. by Thomas Baier, Tübingen 2003, p. 164.

⁴¹The present author disagrees with Senard's and Galand's assessment that the lyrical I always ends up in the dominant position after these power games. cp. Senard, Charles: *Les représentations sexuelles dans l'oeuvre de Giovanni Pontano (1429-1503)*, p. 263.

II.11. Focilla's lips are the exterior part of her mouth which is more passive. The most active thing she does is to offer them, in II.11. If at all, this can only be considered a very small space of agency.

However, the same poem brings a very active oral counterpart of the lips into play: her teeth. The ability to bite his tongue widens her space of agency by far and even puts her into a place of power where she gains dominance over him. On top of that she gets to make demands, which leads on to the spoken word as the last subordinate device of the mouth. Focilla's direct speech is the most overtly striking device of agency and power she has at her disposal. On top of that, the situation in which she speaks, right after having taken him by surprise and bitten his tongue, can be considered a climax of her agency and power throughout the arc. By using this moment to speak her mind and establish rules for their relationship she makes absolutely clear that she has the confidence, capacity and will to speak on her own behalf. The additional information that she does so with a mixture of playfulness and sincerity widens the space she can claim even further. She is able to stand up for herself while she continues playing, not spoiling the sexual encounter. In this very instance Focilla is said to mix laughter and tears with jokes, which leads on to another of her devices.

3.3 Humor and sadness

Humor and sadness, often exemplified as laughter and tears, mark the two extremes of the spectrum of emotions Focilla displays. Interestingly, these extremes often appear in juxtaposition, rendering her emotional expression quite complex. In II.7 the lyrical I refers to her anger, good mood and sadness in direct succession, pointing out that all of these contrasting emotions, conveyed through her eyes, have a very powerful effect on others.

II.11 is characterized by the interplay of humor and sadness. Focilla is softly crying half asleep when she suddenly bites the lyrical I's tongue. This move itself could be regarded as sassy. However, directly in between this sudden twist and her direct speech, laughter, jokes and tears are directly juxtaposed and she is explicitly described as mixing them. In this way, a very unique emotional display is created.

Furthermore, in II.14 Focilla is laughing and suffering at the same time. Fi-

nally, in II.17 she is turning laughter to tears and vice versa, and her eyes induce grief and happiness. The different instances show her either displaying the emotion, evoking it in others or both. Hence, her appearance has a powerful impact since her emotions are highly contagious. In addition to that, her emotional expression is multi-dimensional. That makes her a complex, round character that is not easy to read. Her personality demands attention and openness.

Overall, the contagion of her emotions grants her a great deal of power, yet the agency that comes with it is rather limited. After all, she cannot control her own emotions. Humor, however, goes beyond that, enabling us to take ourselves less seriously, mentally step back and open up new perspectives and courses of action. It empowers Focilla to pull off the tongue-biting and joke around even though she is sad. Ultimately, it enables her to talk about her vision of their relationship from a place of confidence and power. So all in all, Focilla's emotional broadness and expressiveness make her very powerful. Her humor in particular adds another layer of agency to it, which results in an emotionally unique female character.

3.4 Nudity and promiscuity

Focilla is not only sassy and expressive in her emotional display, she is also outgoing in her sexual demeanor. The first example to support this claim is quite straightforward: In II.8 as well as in II.12 she appears completely naked. The latter case even includes details to underline her very nakedness. A modern day reader might easily overlook these facts as significant information on her sexual conduct.

Considering the socio-cultural background of Pontano's time, however, makes the nudity stand out. While his poetry uses the more liberal culture of antiquity as a backdrop, his Renaissance reality was shaped by moral standards according to the Catholic church. These standards brought with them specific rules for sexual behavior, rendering complete nudity inappropriate. As Karl Enekel puts it: "To see the sexual partner entirely naked was considered to be somewhat exaggerated if not indecent and obscene, something that would be more likely to occur in a brothel than in the bedrooms of honest people."⁴² Within this context, Focilla's

⁴²Enekel, Karl A. E.: *Neo-Latin Erotic and Pornographic Literature (c. 1400–c. 1700)*, p. 2.

nudity can be regarded as bold.

Still, she dares to take it even farther than that. As Senard points out, Pontano's female characters appear as always available for sex and display an insatiable sexual appetite.⁴³ Focilla is a stellar example to support his claim. Poem II.14 depicts her as interested in flirting and having sex with a multitude of lovers, as the stylistic analysis has underlined. This promiscuous behavior is, of course, an even bolder transgression of Christian social norms that define sex as a means of procreation among married couples.⁴⁴ Therefore, she displays the agency and power to defy cultural norms that are restrictive of sexual activity and claim her sexual gratification by doing so. In her relationship with the lyrical I she has the power to engage in promiscuity on her own terms and get away with it. Nevertheless, social norms are not the only boundaries she transgresses.

3.5 Apotheosis

Focilla even transcends her humanity, being closely linked to a god or even identified with one on several occasions. The first poem dedicated to her, II.4, is all about the god Amor living in her eyes. As shown in the detailed analysis of this poem, there is a complex nexus between Amor and his weapons on the one hand and Focilla's eyes on the other hand. This nexus is taken up again in the second to last of the poems, II.16. Here Amor is referred to as her companion, whom she may give commands and order him to stay at her place. Yet he is so close a companion that he would always stay by her side. While in II.4 Amor only resides ("insidens") in her eyes, II.16 even declares them as his kingdom.

The fact that he is so closely intertwined with and grants her the power to make even gods fall in love and wage war makes her appear more divine than human herself. With regard to Amor, the relationship is very complex, but when it comes to Venus, the poet puts it quite simply: In II.8 he comes to the conclusion that she is Venus.⁴⁵ Now, Amor is the god of love and Venus the goddess of sex. Both apotheoses speak for Focilla's powerful impact on people. The identification

⁴³Senard, Charles: *Les représentations sexuelles dans l'oeuvre de Giovanni Pontano (1429-1503)*, p. 209.

⁴⁴On the commonalities and discrepancies of the theological, philosophical and medical discourses on sexuality during the Quattrocento see *ibid.*, p. 217–233.

⁴⁵*cp.* Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p. 180.

with Venus in particular speaks for a great sexual prowess on her side. Such a kind of prowess implies confidence (as seen in II.11) and comes along with the ability to give and receive pleasure, which opens up the space of agency to create the sex life she wants.

It is interesting how Pontano arranges Focilla's association with Venus (sex) in this simple, straight-forward manner of identification while it takes him two poems and a dense network of stylistic devices to portray her relationship with Amor (love). In order to get a full grasp on this relationship, it is necessary to finally review Focilla's most prominent device of agency and power that is the transmitter of Amor's flames and arrows: her eyes.

3.6 Eyes, flames and arrows

Focilla's eyes are the most important motif throughout the poems dedicated to her. They appear in seven out of the ten poems (II.4, II.5, II.7, II.12, II.14, II.16, II.17) and are central to all of these seven (except for II.5, the poem on her hair, and II.12 where they serve as a premise). Her eyes are described with a set of attributes.

First of all, they are dark or, literally translated, black ("nigrisque ocellis", II.4, l18). This appears to be a historical beauty standard or at least a personal preference of the poet. In addition to Focilla, the muse in the very first line of the collection is said to have dark eyes ("Nigris . . . ocellis", I.1, l1), Drusula, the beautiful companion of Alfonsus has them ("nigra . . . lumina", I.16, l39) as well as Pontano's wife Ariane ("nigris ocellis", I.13, l65).

Another attribute Focilla's eyes share with those of other girls is "poetulus", which Dennis deems an alternative spelling of "paetulus" and translates as "glancing" or "slanting".⁴⁶ The word describes a particular enamored gaze, slightly squinting. In addition to Focilla herself (II.4, l5), a girl called Deianira (I.8, l3), the aforementioned Drusula (I.16, l39) and a handmaid of Venus called Opsiglycea (II.24, l43) have these glancing eyes.

Notwithstanding, Focilla's eyes in particular inspire the poet to attach them

⁴⁶cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 22*, p. 21, p. 51, p. 103, p. 153.

with further attributes. In poem II.12, l1 they are referred to as “clear” (“vitreos ocellos”⁴⁷) and in several instances they are described as “lustful” or “sexy” (“lascivos ocellos”, II.7, l1; II.14, l1, l9, l10;), giving them an explicit erotic quality.

All of these attributes give an impression of her eyes and her gaze on a concrete level. On a metaphorical level, however, they are the residence (II.4, l1) and kingdom (II.16, l13) of the god Amor and at the same time the place he (or she?) casts flames and arrows from. In II.4 this motif is developed in detail, with the arrows mentioned four times and the flames three times. It is then briefly alluded to in II.5 (l8f) and taken up again in II.16 (l17). Note that Focilla is not the only girl shooting arrows. Batilla, whom the reader already knows for tending to the marjoram (I.14), is another “comes” of Amor and steals his bow to shoot arrows at lovers (I.3, ll7–11). Neera gets even closer to Focilla, casting the arrows from her eyes while Venus adds sparks to them (I.24, l5f). Nonetheless, both of these depictions strike the reader as more light-heartedly humorous. In contrast, the motif is central to Focilla and more elaborate in the poems dedicated to her.

Furthermore, the illustration of Amor using arrows and flames simultaneously recalls the way the god is portrayed in Apuleius’ account (MET. 4, 30, 4f). There the god is presented as a naughty boy who defies moral standards, sneaks into the houses of honest people by night and wreaks havoc by making them fall in love through the force of his flames and arrows, which in turn leads to adultery, etc. From this perspective, even though falling in love is not necessarily a bad thing, the potential danger it is accompanied by is highlighted.

Pontano plays with this ambivalence. He definitely points out the power Focilla has with her flames and arrows and warns from the dangerous potential they possess. On top of that, assuming the Amor residing in her eyes is of an Apuleian nature, she might be considered defiant of social rules in the same manner, which would be in concordance with her conduct regarding nudity and promiscuity. Defiance, as a willful decision, adds agency to her power. Hence, it is very tongue-in-cheek of Pontano, after all the warnings of Focilla’s destructive power, that the lyrical I should not only be immune against this defiant character but even profit

⁴⁷unless we follow Roth’s translation, see chapter 2.6.

from her flames: In II.16, the reprise of the Amor motif, he appears as a representative of the element of ice, antagonistic to “the little hearth” and thus nullifying the destructive side of her power (Pontano omits the arrows in this passage).

It is the same poem that brings about the veil. As mentioned above, there is a dialectic throughout the Focilla arc that tries to find a solution for the ambivalence of love and destruction that is central to her, specifically to her eyes. Poem II.4 introduces this ambivalence and II.7 suggests that her gaze should be absent entirely because no matter where she directed it, it could go wrong. However, II.14 takes matters into the opposite direction. The lyrical I longs for her sexy eyes without any care about looming chaos. On the flipside, II.16 restricts Amor, whom Apuleius deems contemptuous of public order, to Focilla’s private quarters and introduces the veil as an effective measure to finally achieve the goal of II.7. She can make an exception for him, of course, since he is the “iceman”. Unlike the subtle move to tie up her hair to have a more modest look, wearing a veil in public is quite absurd. The level of this absurdity speaks for the level of power she possesses.

Nevertheless, the veil is not the final answer. It is discussed again in the last poem of the arc (II.17) and finally lifted. The poem still recognizes the ambivalent nature of Focilla’s eyes but comes to the conclusion that they are as fundamental to life as the daylight. The dialectic is resolved in reconciliation with Focilla as a complex, defiant character who is not easy to handle. Her eyes are the most impressive display of her power, but ultimately it is the whole array of devices that make her a powerful and unique agent. As shown above, her eyes share certain characteristics with other girls. The same holds true for the daylight motif at the end of the Focilla arc.

The very same metaphor is explored in I.8 in which a girl called Deianira influences daylight and darkness with her eyes:⁴⁸ “et quod sol radiis, id ipsa ocellis / praesta, Deianira, amantibusque / et lucem pariter diemque redde.” (I.8, l10ff). The final line of this poem is the exact same line as that of II.17, the last poem to Focilla! However, the metaphor is not limited to Deianira either. Towards the end of book I, the reader encounters a poem *Ad Stellam puellam* (I.28) which

⁴⁸Thurn considers this instance a Petrarchism, cp. Thurn, Nikolaus: *Neulatein und Volkssprachen*, p. 203.

revolves around the dimming and brightening of daylight controlled by her eyes. It contains a striking parallel to II.17 as well:⁴⁹

I.28 Ad Stellam Puellam, l12f II.17 Ad Focillam, l7f
Cur ah, cur tenebrae repente nobis, Cur, o cur tenebrae repente obortae?
Cur nox exoritur, nigrescit aura? Cur lux destituit, dies nigrescit?

In addition, Stella is looking in her mirror (I.28, l15) and so is Focilla in II.4 (l16). In Focilla's case, she is warned not to get burned herself and suffer the fate of Narcissus, while in Stella's, "defeated eyes are terrified by the sun", which, however, appears to refer to the eyes of the lyrical I. In both cases the mirror brings about some form of destruction.

More generally, both girls have an incredibly powerful impact on the lyrical I. An impact that is illustrated in a very similar fashion by the poet. At this point it might be fruitful for further interpretation to dispose of the distinction between lyrical I and poet. While book II of the *Baiae* is definitely Focilla's territory and Stella only appears once in the first book, the latter has received a whole opus dedicated to her called *Eridanus*. Furthermore, she is with certainty thought to be a historical person Pontano had a relationship with.⁵⁰ Considering the apparent parallels to Stella, a biographical perspective of the author will be taken into account to gain additional insight into the character of Focilla.⁵¹

⁴⁹cp. Pontano, *Giovanni Gioviano: Baiae. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 22*, p. xiii. also see *Eridanus* I.10.

⁵⁰cp. Pontano, *Giovanni Gioviano: Baiae. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 22*, p. xi.

⁵¹cp. *ibid.*, p. xiii.

4 A biographical perspective on Focilla

Since the ten poems in the second book of the hendecasyllables are practically the sole source of information on Focilla, it is very difficult to obtain any historical data on her. However, among a collection of grave epigrams Pontano wrote there is a distich dedicated to her:

De tumulis II.44
*Frigidulo iaceo in thalamo, licet ipsa Focilla,
Ligna nec extincto est qui ferat ulla foco.*

The epigram plays with Focilla's telling name and the word it is derived from, "foco". For one last time it employs the antithesis between heat and cold. To the knowledge of the present author this is the only reference to her except for book II of the *Baiae*. In one instance Dennis declares her "almost completely absent from Pontano's other poetry",⁵² also mentioning the epigram above,⁵³ while in another he states that she is not mentioned in other poems at all.⁵⁴ Roth, on the other hand, claims that Focilla (together with Fannia and Stella) appears in several of Pontano's works, yet does not mention any loci.⁵⁵ Hence, the ten hendecasyllabic poems and the one additional epigram are all available reference points.

Dating the poems is another difficult matter. In her comprehensive biography Carol Kidwell suggests that Pontano wrote book I of the *Baiae* in the 1470s, i.e. in his forties, and book II in the 1480s and 90s, i.e. in his fifties and sixties.⁵⁶ According to Sainati the whole work was composed in the last decade of the 15th century and according to Schmidt in the 1490s up to 1503.⁵⁷ Both Roick and Thurn simply date the *Baiae* to the 1490s as well.^{58,59} Finally, Dennis considers the poems to Focilla specifically late, "perhaps quite late in the 1490s".⁶⁰ Despite all this relative consensus that the poems discussed have been written in the

⁵²Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae*. *The I Tatti Renaissance Library* 22, p. xiii.

⁵³cp. *ibid.*

⁵⁴cp. *ibid.*, p. 216.

⁵⁵cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baie*. *Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p. 175.

⁵⁶cp. Kidwell, Carol: *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister*, p. 125.

⁵⁷cp. Lefèvre, Eckard: *Pontanos Hendecasyllabi an Marino Tomacelli*, p. 188.

⁵⁸Roick, Matthias: *Pontano's Virtues. Aristotelian Moral and Political Thought in the Renaissance*, p. 183.

⁵⁹Thurn, Nikolaus: *Neulatein und Volkssprachen*, p. 203.

⁶⁰Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae*. *The I Tatti Renaissance Library* 22, p. xiv.

last decade of Pontano's life, Roth notes that even though historical persons are mentioned throughout the *Baiae*, it is not possible to date singular poems with certainty,⁶¹ on which Dennis generally concurs.⁶²

However, it can be taken as a working hypothesis that Pontano wrote the poems to Focilla towards the end of his life when he was in his sixties and seventies. That means the reference to himself as a "senex" is not a hyperbole at all, taking the general life expectancy of the time into account.⁶³ Nonetheless, even in his seventies he was in good health,⁶⁴ except for losing teeth,⁶⁵ and made up for his old age with an "extremely attractive personality".⁶⁶ Due to a lack of biographical information on his (most certainly decades younger) female counterpart Focilla, the closest available source of data is to conclude from the lyrical parallels between her and Stella to the historical. This approach, though speculative, should be considered for a conclusive interpretation of the poetry.

According to Kidwell, Pontano met Stella in 1484 in Ferrara⁶⁷ and "does not attempt . . . to disguise the fact that he is old and she is young"⁶⁸ – Kidwell suggests 16 or 17.⁶⁹ Apparently, they established a happy relationship⁷⁰ (i.e. an extra-marital affair on his part) which went on for about 15 years.⁷¹ He even took her to Naples⁷² and they had a son who, however, only lived for 50 days.⁷³ At some point she left him and he exposed that she had been a courtesan afterwards, i.e. a high-class, educated prostitute.⁷⁴ She returned to Ferrara and finally died earlier than him, before 1502, receiving a grave epigram as well (*De tumulis* I.43).⁷⁵ If their liaison really lasted until 1499, there may have been an overlap between Stella and Focilla.

⁶¹cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p. 166.

⁶²cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 22*, p. xiv.

⁶³cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber*, p.177.

⁶⁴Kidwell, Carol: *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister*, p. 290.

⁶⁵cp. *ibid.*, p. 302.

⁶⁶cp. *ibid.*, p. 304.

⁶⁷cp. *ibid.*, p. 163.

⁶⁸cp. *ibid.*, p. 164.

⁶⁹cp. *ibid.*, p. 382.

⁷⁰cp. *ibid.*, p. 167.

⁷¹cp. *ibid.*, p. 306.

⁷²cp. *ibid.*, p. 274.

⁷³cp. *ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷⁴cp. *ibid.*, p. 172, p. 381.

⁷⁵cp. *ibid.*, p. 217, p. 282.

On the lyrical side of the matter there are more parallels in addition to the ones within the *Hendecasyllables* to be drawn between both characters. In Eridanus I.2 Stella steals Amor's weapons and fires two arrows at Pontano, one of which is wounding, the other is soothing.⁷⁶ Here the arrow motif as well as the pseudo-Petrarchism is already present. Furthermore, in Eridanus I.22 and I.27, "[b]ites, tears and struggles excited Pontano in his relationship with Stella"⁷⁷ – all of which excite him in his relationship with Focilla as well, especially in II.11.

Kidwell makes another very interesting observation (on Eridanus I.17): "The elderly Pontano treats Stella like a child, like a plaything, so that the final lust almost appears child abuse, although she is far from innocent and laughs and participates whole-heartedly. The poem gives a remarkably convincing, sensuous picture of an old man besotted with the beauty and freshness of youth and of the enchantment of desire."⁷⁸ A similar verdict could be made regarding the relationship dynamics between Pontano and Focilla, e.g. when juxtaposing II.11 and II.12. The style and language in which Pontano writes about these two might appear in other instances as well, e.g. as shown for Deianira in I.8, but "nowhere does he do so as obsessively".⁷⁹

The parallels between Focilla and Stella together with the grave epigram mentioned above give Dennis reason to suggest that Focilla was a historical person, too. He continues by arguing that Focilla replaced Stella and is certain that "behind all this splendid language there were real experiences".⁸⁰ There are two important aspects to this quote. On the one hand, there is the splendor of the language. Its stylistic density and tongue-in-cheek wit has been shown in detail in the analyses above. The number of ten poems that all exemplify the particular use of this language imply that Focilla was important to Pontano and that he was intensely infatuated with her. On the other hand, there is the reality of the experiences. Even though the poems were written by a man from a male perspective, the more lived reality has inspired them, the less they are a mere product of male fantasy. Hence, Pontano portrays female sexual behavior that is active, self-determined, sassy, hu-

⁷⁶cp. *ibid.*, p. 166.

⁷⁷*ibid.*, p. 381.

⁷⁸*ibid.*, p. 219.

⁷⁹Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 22*, p. xiii.

⁸⁰*ibid.*, p. xiv.

morous, emotionally complex and potentially pleasure-oriented and promiscuous when painting the picture of Focilla. She behaves this way in spite of her counterpart being an infinitely older poet and politician, i.e. a man of infinitely greater power and agency. She also defies sexually restrictive societal norms to such an extent that she can be considered a female role-model of unconventional sexual behavior. On top of that, the poet does not condemn her behavior morally or draw her in a bad light personally. He rather seems to regard her self-determination and defiant tendencies as an erotic enhancement similar to his re-interpretation of the Petrarchism.⁸¹

Nevertheless, Pontano faces some inner conflicts with respect to his judgment of female sexual mores. At a very young age, attending school, he wrote an essay proposing that marriage had unnatural aspects and contradicted the human instinct to choose a sexually attractive mate rather than a socially approved, well-behaved wife. He rejects ideas in the lines of sexual property, praises free love and considers marriage a yoke imposed on women. As Kidwell points out, these “views on the unnatural limitations of matrimony remained unchanged, to the fury of his wife”.⁸²

However, Pontano would himself marry in his thirties and become a father, also of daughters. His opinions on their education were quite the contrary of his juvenile essay and his own conduct – not to mention Focilla. They should abstain from make-up and piercings and he warned them that “a seductive girl easily becomes a wanton”^{83,84} He was especially concerned about their eyes: “They should keep their eyes lowered, for passion enters the soul through the eyes. To preserve their liberty, their eyes must be restrained”.⁸⁵

Time and again, Pontano clarifies that he thinks of the female gaze as extremely powerful. When it comes to his affairs, e.g. Stella and Focilla, he considers this power attractive. When it comes to his daughters, however, he regards it as a danger to their respectability and well-being. Taking all of these opinions from

⁸¹cp. Pontano, Giovanni Gioviano: *Baiae*. Zwei Bücher Elfsilber, p. 181.

⁸²Kidwell, Carol: *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister*, p. 31f.

⁸³ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁴Thurn regards these measures as moderate acts of fatherly love according to the educational standards of Pontano’s time. Nonetheless they philosophically clash with the ideas put forward in said essay which are radically progressive in the same historical context.

cp. Thurn, Nikolaus: *Drei neapolitanische Humanisten über die Liebe*. St. Katharinen: Scripta-Mercaturae-Verlag 2002, p. 323.

⁸⁵Kidwell, Carol: *Pontano: Poet & Prime Minister*, p. 103.

very different stages of his life into account, the youthful essay, the education of daughters and the late poetry, Pontano has to reconcile the contradictions of a liberal thinker and lover, a conservative father and an adulterous husband. In the light of these contradictions one might consider Focilla's freedom the questionable freedom of a courtesan, which in turn is speculative as well.

Pontano's thinking and his poetry in particular grant space for female sexual lust, agency and power. It is remarkable how Focilla gets to express her desire to live her sexuality out in the open, making her a true protagonist.

5 Conclusion

There certainly are reasons for the modern reader to dismiss the poems dedicated to Focilla as reprehensible and patriarchal, especially the huge age difference between the two lovers. However, such a verdict is in denial of Pontano's humor and self-irony as well as the dynamics of the relationship and the space of agency in which Focilla can move. Neither is she a mere type. She is more than just a beautiful object. She is not simply the male fantasy of a sex goddess, when she is declared Venus. She goes beyond the copy of a Petrarchan character as well, putting the Petrarchism in a new context where there is sexual gratification and humor added to the equation.

The stylistic analysis has shown her to be very active down to the grammatical level. Her potential for subjectivity is partly encrypted in the figures and tropes the poet employs and impacts the reader in a way that is light-hearted at times and infatuating at others. On top of that, she has a vast array of devices at her disposal that grant her the power and agency to impact the relationship dynamics between her and her male counterpart. On the flipside, he seems to take a liking to her self-confident behavior. Interestingly, to the present author the pinnacle of Focilla's agency and power does not lie in her poetically praised eyes but rather occurs suddenly in II.14 when she bites his tongue and speaks up afterwards. It is at this moment that she appears the most multi-dimensional. She uses her power and agency to establish dominance without losing her humor – a move that a mere type would not be able to pull off. The old man is shown that he cannot just do as he pleases and that she has her own ideas of how their relationship should look like. The ability to do so is backed up by the other devices she employs, foremost her eyes and her attractiveness. These grant her the power that supports the agency to speak her mind in such a successful manner.

All in all, Focilla displays the power to influence the lyrical I as well as virtually everyone else – not even the gods are spared – in such a way that she can convey her own emotions and make them feel attracted to her. She possesses the agency to engage in the sexual encounters she likes to, including promiscuous behavior. She defies social norms pertaining to sexuality and negotiates the terms of her relationship with the lyrical I. Above all, she is able to play with an old powerful

high-status man.

Thus, the figure of Focilla contradicts the assumption that the women of the *Baiae* are mere types short of individuality in the specific case. In the more general realm of neo-latin erotic poetry she is a protagonist of female agency and power.

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