

POST-CLASSICAL Λέσβιαι

It has long been recognized that in classical Greek λεσβίζω and λεσβιάζω have nothing to do with lesbianism; they mean *fello*, as is clear from a number of passages recently quoted by H. D. Jocelyn in his exhaustive monograph on λαικάζω.¹ Admittedly tribadism was connected with Lesbos, and not only on account of Sappho's *mores*; Luc. *dial. mer.* 5. 2 is especially interesting in this respect because of the general statement *τοιαύτας γὰρ ἐν Λέσβῳ λέγουσι γυναῖκας ἄρρενωποὺς . . . γυναιξὶ . . . αὐτὰς πλησιαζούσας ὥσπερ ἄνδρας*. However, λεσβίζω/λεσβιάζω and Λεσβίς always refer to a quite different sexual practice.

It is generally believed that the current sexual meaning of 'Lesbian' has come into common use only in modern times. According to Professor Jocelyn the error of taking λεσβίζω as referring to tribadism is 'as old as the fifteenth century',² but there was still a long time to go before such adjectives as 'lesbian', 'lesbien' etc. in the sexual sense gained currency in European languages. In French and Italian, for example, they do not seem to occur before the nineteenth century, as B. Gentili pointed out some years ago,³ and the same can apparently be said of English.⁴

I should like to draw attention to an instance of Λεσβία meaning *tribás* quoted long ago by F. G. Welcker in an essay devoted to 'freeing Sappho from a prevailing prejudice',⁵ but apparently neglected thereafter. It can be found in a scholion on Clem. Alex. *paedag.* 3. 3, p. 249, 4 Stählin (*γυναῖκες ἀνδρίζονται παρὰ φύσιν*) which reads (p. 337, 3 f. Stählin): *τὰς μιὰρὰς τριβάδας λέγει, ὥς καὶ ἑταιριστρίας καὶ Λεσβίας καλοῦσιν*.

After the studies by Gebhardt and Stählin we know far more about that scholion than Welcker did. It was written by Arethas in his own copy of Clement's *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus* and other works of church fathers (Paris. Gr. 451, copied by Baanes and dated 914).⁶ There are strong reasons for believing that Arethas was not drawing on ancient sources for his comments on the *Paedagogus* except for one instance;⁷ so his note is likely to reflect current Byzantine usage, as does, for example, the one on *Σαρδιανικόν* (*paedag.* 2. 10 p. 222, 14 Stählin): *τὸ βέγετον λεγόμενον* (p. 333, 5 Stählin).

Clearly the ill repute of Lesbian women in antiquity was not exclusively due to their alleged propensity to *fellatio*, and female homosexuality may well have been regarded as typical of Lesbos, though tribads from other parts of the Greek world are also known.⁸ Whatever the truth, Lucian enjoyed wide popularity in the tenth

¹ H. D. Jocelyn, 'A Greek indecency and its students: λαικάζειν', *Proc. Cambr. Philol. Soc.* 206 (1980), 12–66.

² Jocelyn, n. 66; see also n. 205.

³ 'La ragazza di Lesbo', *Quad. Urb.* 16 (1973), 125 n. 4, a statement repeated by A. M. Komornicka, *Quad. Urb.* 21 (1976), 37.

⁴ The earliest example quoted by *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, 2 (Oxford, 1976), s.v. Lesbian, dates from 1890 and s.v. Lesbianism, from 1870. No instances of the sexual meaning can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* itself s.v. Lesbian.

⁵ 'Sappho von einem herrschenden Vorurtheil befreit', *Kleine Schriften* 2 (Bonn, 1845), p. 86 n. 14.

⁶ Clemens Alexandrinus 1, *Protrepticus und Paedagogus*, hrsg. von O. Stählin (3 Berlin, 1972, durchges. von U. Treu), p. xvi.

⁷ Stählin, op. cit. p. xxiii: 'Seine Randnotizen sind für die Kenntnis des Altertums und das Verständnis des Clemens fast ganz wertlos'.

⁸ Demonassa, the second tribad in Luc. *dial. mer.* 5, comes from Corinth; in Asclep. *Anth. Pal.* 5. 207 the tribads are Samian. I doubt, however, if Asclepiades' epigram can be regarded as sufficient proof that tribadism was also connected with Samos; and there is no reason to regard

century,⁹ and I should not be surprised if his short dialogue between Clonarion and Leaena, with its clear statement about the existence in Lesbos of homosexual women, had been instrumental in giving currency to the new meaning.¹⁰

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as homosexual, as Wilamowitz did (*Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin, 1913), p. 72 n. 3), the Samian γυναῖκας... ὑπὸ τρυφῆς καὶ ὕβρεως ἀκόλαστα ποιούσας of Plut. *quaest. gr.* 54. W. Kroll in his article *Lesbische Liebe* (*RE* 12 col. 2101) is more cautious ('vielleicht').

⁹ See K. Mras, 'Die Überlieferung Lucians', *Sitzb. Ak. Wiss. Wien, Philos.-hist. Klasse* 167 n. 7 (Wien, 1911), 233 f.

¹⁰ I am very grateful to Professor H. D. Jocelyn, who improved this note both in form and in content, and to Mr N. G. Wilson, who kindly answered letters concerning Arethas.

CATULLUS' DIVORCE

Why does Catullus in his eleventh poem tell Furius and Aurelius to take an unpleasant message to his girl-friend? After all, in the eighth poem he imagines himself able to do the job alone: 'uale puella' (12). Has his courage just evaporated? Or is it that he wants to put his messengers, whom he perhaps does not like, in an awkward position (so Baehrens, and more tentatively Fordyce)? Kroll is not sure why the poet chooses intermediaries. Some think they came in the first place from the girl, who wanted reconciliation, and that this poem is Catullus' response. But the poet is usually able to make it plain, as in poems 7 and 85, that he is replying to a question (cf. Prop. 2. 1 and 31); here that standard device is missing, and should not be introduced. This note offers a new solution to the problem, and identifies the imagined situation in such a way that the eleventh poem can be seen to be in harmony with the poet's attitude to his idealised love-affair.

Marriage dominated Catullus' imagination. He has given us two marriage poems, 61 and 62, his little epos, 64, describes the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, and he translated a poem of Callimachus, 66, that was dedicated to a bride. More daring is his way of regarding his love-affair as a sort of marriage and adopting some of the language of an actual Roman marriage; this is well described by G. Williams in *JRS* 48 (1958), 25. That idealised affair, however, came to an end, and in the eleventh poem the repudiation is made plain. It has not been appreciated that here too Catullus persists in seeing the affair as a sort of marriage: to break it off he has adopted the Roman legal form of 'diuortium per nuntium'.

Whenever the *affectio maritalis* upon which Roman marriage was based broke down, divorce could be agreed by both partners. But a unilateral *repudium* had to be announced either *per litteras* or *per nuntium* (v. M. Kaser, *Das röm. Privatrecht* i [1971], p. 327; at *De Orat.* 1. 183 Cicero tells of a man who failed to send the messenger and so confused inheritance). Catullus has an eye to the proper form and appoints Furius and Aurelius to be the *nuntii* of his divorce (*nuntiate*, 15). A husband did not have to give grounds, but Catullus does so in line 17: his 'wife' has committed adultery. *Moechis* are not just lovers, as Baehrens said; the choice of word keeps to the metaphorical view of the love-affair as a sort of marriage. There was no fixed formula for divorce when the marriage was entered into *sine manu* (v. A. Watson, *The law of persons in the later Roman Republic* [1967], pp. 53 f.), so *uiuat ualeatque* would probably suffice for dismissal.

Catullus therefore was consistent in his vision of his relationship with his mistress. It was a sort of marriage, and its ending required a sort of divorce, formal, *per nuntium*.