

The ‘Aura Of Lesbos’ and the Opening of *Daphnis and Chloe*

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Although *Daphnis and Chloe* is a work of fiction, its first sentence names as its setting the ‘real’ island of Lesbos, which can be found on any map around the coordinates 39° N and 26° E. In the view of many, including residents of the island, Longus portrayed its geography with considerable accuracy.¹ But the literary treatment of places inevitably encompasses far more than just their physical features, since, as Elytis observed, ‘a place...is not just the sum of its earth, plants and waters, but also the effect of the material on the soul of a people.’² The portrayal of non-imaginary places in works of fiction also incorporates, beyond their physical features, political history and cultural associations, whatever the creative imagination of the author may choose to include. Places are often the crucial element in the ‘selective transforming of reality’ that constitutes fiction in the view of many of its practitioners;³ ‘Lyra’s Oxford,’⁴ the setting of Philip Pullman’s ‘Dark Material’ novels, is a wonderful amalgam of the actual university city and the author’s vivid imagination. Authors and critics of fiction routinely assert that ‘the spot on which [a work of fiction] grew,’⁵ is simultaneously true and imagi-

¹ Green 1982; Kloft 1989; Mason 1979, 1995. Among residents who have addressed the issue, note Kontis 1972, Koumarelas 2000. The opposite view is espoused by Merkelbach 1988, 137, who characterizes the island as a ‘Fairy Tale landscape’ (*Märchenlandschaft*), and by Scarcella 1993, 12, who calls Longus’ portrait ‘exaggerated, incoherent and fantastical.’ Morgan 2004 offers a balanced assessment.

² Elytis 1992, 335. Similar ideas are expressed by Lawrence Durrell 1969, 156–163; 1980, 214.

³ ‘For the sake of greater truth, I would turn Portugal into a fiction. That’s what fiction is about, isn’t it, the selective transforming of reality?’ Martel 2002, v–vi.

⁴ Pullman 2003.

⁵ Pinchin 1977, 7.

nary: according to Hunter, for example, the setting of Theokritos' *Idyll* 7, 'both is and is not Cos, i.e. there is both a reconstructable and "real" geography and a "geography of the mind";' in *Moby Dick*, Queequeg's home 'is not down on any map. True places never are.'⁶

What Hunter calls the 'geography of the mind' includes some notable 'places of the imagination,' whose fictional versions seem more significant than their 'real' analogues: 'Venice,' for example, as portrayed by Thomas Mann or Shakespeare; the 'Alexandria' of Lawrence Durrell's novels; or the 'Ithaca' of Cavafis' poem.⁷ Comparable examples in antiquity would be the 'Thebes' projected by Athenian tragedians,⁸ the 'Arcadia' of pastoral, or the luxurious 'Corinth' of Apuleius' Book 10.⁹

To employ Elytis' terminology, by the time that *Daphnis and Chloe* was composed, the 'material' of Lesbos had had an 'effect on the souls' of its Greek inhabitants for over a millennium.¹⁰ Since Lesbos had been a full participant in broader Greek culture during those years, many facets of the island's history and culture will have been familiar to most ancient readers. For many Greeks 'Lesbos' must have been a 'place of the imagination' as significant as 'Thebes' or 'Arcadia.'

MacQueen's claim that Lesbos was 'not...a likely place to go hunting...and...not a likely place to find oneself in an idyllic grove consecrated to the Nymphs'¹¹ cannot be sustained in the light of what is known about hunting and Nymphs on Lesbos;¹² but he was on the right track with his as-

⁶ Hunter 1999, 146. Melville 1962, 54. For the significance of the quotation, see Chamberlin 2003, 74.

⁷ Durrell 1968; Cavafy 1963, 1,23–24.

⁸ Zeitlin 1990.

⁹ Mason 1971.

¹⁰ The traditional date of the 'Aeolian migration' to the island is around 1100 B.C.E.; Pliny described Mytilene as 'powerful for 1500 years' (*annis MD potens*, *HN* 5,139).

¹¹ MacQueen 1990, 160–161.

¹² Faunal remains from the Demeter sanctuary in Mytilene include such stereotypical quarry as Fallow Deer, European Hare, Partridge, and Quail (Ruscillo 1993, 203–208). Silvanus, a patron of hunting, was worshipped in Mytilene (*JG* 12,2, 122, 208, 211, 514), and hunting plays a major role in the island's later history: note the narratives of hunting by Demetrios Kydonos in 1373 (Tinnefeld 1982, 1,2, letter 114); and Christoforo Buon-delmonti in 1404 (1974, 76), and the fact that in Vitzentzos Kornaros' *Erotokritos* (2,150), the emblem of Dimophanis, Prince of Mytilini, is a deer slain with an arrow. There are two important epigraphical attestations of Nymphs on Lesbos (Charitonidis

sumption that Longus' audience would draw on familiar *topoi* about the island when they responded to his portrait. The existence of such *topoi* is confirmed by Catullus' use in poem 51 of the pseudonym *Lesbia* for his lover, about which Havelock astutely observed that 'She...was not another Sappho; but the aura of Lesbos was round her head.'¹³ Catullus and his readers, in Havelock's view, shared certain *topoi* about Lesbos and understood their applicability to his beloved; but what was the 'aura of Lesbos' to which Catullus alluded, and how does it help us evaluate Longus?

The name 'Lesbos' clearly had many associations in the ancient world; but we can probably eliminate some of them from our discussion of Catullus and Longus. Aristophanes' verb *λεσβιάζω*, and Anakreon's joke (13 [358]) that a girl from Lesbos *πρὸς δ' ἄλλην τινὰ χάσκει*, show that in antiquity the name 'Lesbos' certainly could allude to matters of sexual practice and preference;¹⁴ but the sexual associations of the name do not contribute very much to our understanding of either Longus or Catullus.

In contemporary culture, Lesbos' extensive tree-coverage and plentiful water-supply have given it a substantial and distinctive reputation as the 'Green Island.'¹⁵ Longus' description of many copious springs may reflect this important feature of the island's ecology,¹⁶ but I have been unable to discover any evidence that Lesbos' environment played much part in the island's reputation in antiquity.¹⁷ Other Greeks treated the Lesbians, whose cities never achieved political unity, as paradigmatic of conflict and faction.¹⁸ This is a tradition that may be recalled in Longus' narrative of war between Mytilene and Methymna in Book 3, but it does not explain the Lesbian aura of Catullus' lover, or the general tone of Longus' novel as a whole.

1968, 29; *IG* 12,2,129). Stavrakis Anagnostis 1850, 10 mentions groves of the *Nymphs* in line 26 of the *Lesvias Odi*.

¹³ Havelock 1967, 130.

¹⁴ Page 1955, 143 and n. 3.

¹⁵ Lesbos is called *πράσινο νησί* in popular songs (Vyras 1984) and *Χλωρονήσι* in Eftaliotis 1989, 47. Note also Venezis' contrast 1999, 23 between the 'shining, liquid' hills of Lesbos and the dry hard rocks of much of the Aegean. The *nomos* of Lesbos usually elects at least one Communist deputy, and Lesbos has been called 'Red Island,' *κόκκινο νησί*, since the Civil War (Green 1984, 22), at least partly in ironic response to the older and more traditional epithet.

¹⁶ Besides the spring in the Grove of the Nymphs, note: 1,4,3; 1,20,3; 2,3,5; 3,17,1; 4,4,1, in Dionysophanes' *paradeisos*. See Mason 1995.

¹⁷ Lesbos has probably experienced less environmental degradation than other areas in Greece, and its 'green' qualities may have been less distinctive in antiquity.

¹⁸ Aelius Aristides 24,45–56; see Mason 1993, 225; 1995, 400.

Margaret Reynolds asserts that Lesbos had 'for centuries...been known as a place of sensual delights.'¹⁹ Such claims do not begin with Reynolds; Denys Page quotes an over-the-top description by Symonds of the 'luxuries and elegancies of life which that climate and the rich valleys of Lesbos could afford.'²⁰ If true, this supposed tradition about Lesbos would indeed constitute an important element of Havelock's 'aura' of Lesbos. Sappho's poetry is certainly full of vivid imagery that appeals to almost all the senses, but she does not explicitly associate these things with Lesbos, and we should remember that many of her companions were associated with other places such as Sardis and Miletos. I have looked for, but failed to find, evidence of centuries of commonplaces about Lesbos' 'sensual delights.' Anacreon's poem about his rejection by a young Lesbian might have been expected to reflect this tradition; but he calls the island εὐκτιτος, a variant of the conventional Homeric city-epithet εὐκτίμενος 'well-built,' traditionally applied to something enhanced by human art and labour.²¹ The commonest epithets for Lesbos in poetry are derived from *oinos*, e.g. οἴνηρός in *AP* 7,501 and εὔοινος in *Hermesianax* 5,55,²² and do not distinguish Lesbos' aura sufficiently from those of its rivals in the wine-trade such as Chios and Samos.

A more serious possibility is represented by Alfonsi's proposal that Catullus called his lover *Lesbia* because of her beauty.²³ The basis for this claim goes back to *Iliad* 9,129–130, which describes women captured by Achilles as Λεσβίδας...αἱ κάλλει ἐνίκων φῦλα γυναικῶν. Griffin comments that 'they came from Lesbos, where women were famous for their beauty,'²⁴ recalling the scholiast's reference to Lesbian beauty-contests: παρὰ Λεσβίοις ἀγῶν κάλλους ἐν τῷ τῆς Ἥρας τεμένει, λεγόμενος καλλιστεΐα. The contests are recorded by Alkaios (130 [G2], 31–32), who describes a shrine where Λ[εσβί]δας κρινόμεναι φύαν / πῶλεντ' ἔλκεσίπεπλοι, and are also men-

¹⁹ Reynolds 2001, 72.

²⁰ Page 1955, 140–142; Symonds 1880, 1:308.

²¹ This quality is generally associated with the city of Mytilene: Cicero, *Leg. Agr.* 16,40; *urbs et natura et situ et descriptione aedificiorum et pulchritudine in primis nobilis*; Vitruvius, 1,6,1, *oppidum Mytilene magnificenter est aedificatum*; Strabo 13,2,2 (617), κατεσκευάσται δὲ τοῖς πᾶσι καλῶς.

²² Powell 1925, 99.

²³ Alfonsi 1950, 64, 'Rimani quindi che le Lesbie erano proverbiali per la loro bellezza e che "Lesbia" poteva dire "bella come una donna di Lesbo".' Quinn 1970, 244 describes this association as a 'nice touch of urbanitas.'

²⁴ Griffin 1995, 91.

tioned in *AP* 9,189.²⁵ But does this prove that the beauty of Lesbian women was proverbial? The Homeric passage may mean only that the beauty of these specific captives surpassed that of all other women; a present form of the verb would have been more appropriate for a more general claim of Lesbian beauty. The argument that the existence of the *Kallisteia* proves that Lesbian women were proverbial for their beauty depends on the uniqueness of the Lesbian contest; but there were similar events in Elea and Tenedos.²⁶

A more productive assessment of Catullus' *Lesbia* belongs to Peter Wiseman, who argues that the name alludes to 'Lesbos' traditional association with refinement and sophistication, for example in music, poetry and dress.²⁷ He too does not supply detailed proof of this 'traditional association,' but it is not hard to find. Sappho herself provides ample evidence of Lesbian concern with matters of dress, and Alkaios' ἐλκεσίπεπλοι, and the ποικιλοσάμβαλος Lesbian who pokes fun at Anakreon's white hair point in the same direction. But it is Lesbos' claim to musical and poetical superiority that can be shown to be approach the proverbial. For Sappho, the superiority of Lesbian poetry was sufficiently established to form the basis of a simile: πέρροχος, ὡς ὅτ' ἄοιδος ὁ Λέσβιος ἀλλοδάποισιν (106). The related proverb μετὰ Λέσβιον ᾠδόν (Zenobius 5,9; [*CPG* 1,118]) is traditionally associated with Terpander. In the Roman period, when every Greek community actively promoted its particular image to the greater world, Mytilene went out of its way to honour Sappho, Alkaios, and Pittakos on its coinage.²⁸ Contemporary residents of the island point with justified pride to its cultural traditions 'from Sappho to Elytis,' poets both.²⁹ The importance of music and poetry to Lesbos' image can be seen in Strabo's account of the island (13,2), in which the geographer lists a remarkably large number of literary ἔνδοξοι from the island, many of them poets: Pittakos, Alkaios, Sappho, Diophanes, Potamo, Lesbokles, Krinagoras, Theophanes, Theophrastos, Phantias, Arion, Terpander, Hellanikos, and Kallias. The superiority of Lesbian poetry was given a mythical *aition*: it is because the head and lyre of Orpheus were carried to Lesbos after his death that the nightingales sing

²⁵ The contests are discussed by Page 1955, 168 and Jackson 1995, 100–106.

²⁶ Athenaeus 13,90,609F–610A, discussed by Jackson 1995, 100.

²⁷ Wiseman 1985, 135.

²⁸ Head 1967, 562–563.

²⁹ Talianis 1995. In the preface (5), the mayor of Mytilini notes that 'it is a matter of common knowledge that since ancient times Lesbos has stood out for its important achievements in culture and the arts and letters.'

sweeter there than anywhere else in the world, and *μολπαί τε καὶ ἱμερτὴ κιθαριστῶν / νήσον ἔχει, πασέων δ' ἐστὶν ἀοιδωτάτη* (Phanokles 1,22). The story, which is known also to Ovid (*Met.* 11,50–55), was probably first popularised by Myrsilos of Methymna.³⁰ Myrsilos is just the right type of learned source to provide an image of Lesbos that might be shared by the readers of Latin neoteric poetry and second sophistic Greek prose, and his *Lesbiaka* the kind of work likely to have associated with the whole island qualities and narratives that had previously been identified as Antissan or Mytilenean.

If Lesbos' sophistication in music and poetry underlies Longus' emphasis on the island in the introduction, we might expect to find some evidence of this elsewhere in ancient fiction. The mention of Lesbos as the burial-place of Hippothoos' lover Hyperanthes in Xenophon of Ephesus (3,2,12–13; 5,15,4) does not tell us very much. The poem on Hyperanthes' tomb matches many in the *Anthology* for those lost at sea but buried on shore; although we do know of another example set in Lesbos (*AP* 7,562), neither poem stresses anything distinctively Lesbian, and Xenophon's mention probably reflects nothing more than Lesbos' geographical position in a region subject to sudden squalls but nevertheless on major maritime travel corridors.

On the other hand, the extended account of Mytilene in the anonymous *King Apollonius of Tyre* (33–47) can shed some light, especially if one accepts Kortekaas' supposition of a date early in the third century C.E. for the original Greek version of the story.³¹ In its abbreviated state, the text does not explain why Tarsia is taken to Mytilene by pirates in 33, nor why Apollonius should be driven there by storms in 39; but the city does not seem to be chosen casually, and is well north of the story's primary localisation in the region of Tarsus.³²

The principal feature of Mytilene in the narrative is its brothel; but this does not correspond to any specific tradition about the city or the island of which I am aware. 'Virginity preserved in a brothel' is one of those paradoxes so characteristic of Greek novel; the comparable scene in Xenophon of Ephesus (5,7) is set in Tarentum, but does not reflect any specific tradition about the Italian city. What is distinctive about the narrative in *Apollonius* is

³⁰ Phanokles is cited from Powell 1925, 107. See Jackson 1995, 65–78.

³¹ Kortekaas 2004, 53–72.

³² Kortekaas 2004, 83–91.

the personality of Athenagoras, *princeps eiusdem ciuitatis* (33). He conforms to the type of distinguished older man, exemplified by Dionysios of Miletos in Chariton, or indeed Longus' Dionysophanes. Like Dionysophanes, and unlike Apollonius, he is a member of the local aristocracy, not a king.³³ Both authors accurately portray Mytilene's political situation, but the Latin novel goes much further with the suggestion that the city's leader exemplifies the city as a whole. All the city's men follow Athenagoras' example in respecting Tarsia (35), and at the end Apollonius praises the *fides* and *pietas* of the entire city for saving his daughter (47), although it was Athenagoras who had taken the lead. At the very beginning of the narrative, Athenagoras observes that Tarsia is *nobilem et sapientem et pulcherrimam* (33); it is another mark of the abbreviated state of the text is that there is no indication of how he discerns so quickly that she is, as we know her to be, wise and noble as well as beautiful. Despite his perception of her status, he allows her to be bought by the *leno* (in contrast to Dionysios' complicated scruples about Kallirhoe [Chariton 2,1]), expecting to enjoy her fully as her first client. Two days later, he arrives at the brothel with a musical accompaniment: 34, *antedecente turba et symphonia ducitur ad lupanar*;³⁴ here we have the first suggestion that we are on Lesbos, where music has a special role. Once Athenagoras enters the brothel, Tarsia appeals rhetorically to his *pietas*, and so preserves her virginity; her speech follows much the same lines as Kallirhoe's to Dionysios (Chariton 2,5), but is repeated to virtually every male in Mytilene. We then meet the next distinctively Mytilenean event; to meet the pimp's demands for a decent return on his substantial investment in her, she proposes to generate income by her musical talents:

Habeo auxilium studiorum liberalium, perfecte erudita sum: similiter et lyrae pulso modulanter inlido. Iube crastina in frequenti loco poni scamnia, et facundia sermonis mei spectaculum praebeo. (36)

With these musical and rhetorical skills, she not only earns enough money to satisfy the pimp, but also wins the *amor* of the whole city, male and female; love of her music has replaced male sexual lust. It is these skills, described as *ars studiorum*, that Athenagoras begs her to use (40) to convince Apollo-

³³ As translated by Sandy 1989, 758 and elsewhere.

³⁴ This is the reading of recension B; the Oxford MS β has *tuba*.

nus to give up his excessive grief. When she comes to him, she not only exchanges riddles with him, she also sings *modulata uoce* (41).

Apollonius of Tyre devotes much attention to its characters' learning and culture, as much as their birth and beauty, and is unusual in giving these qualities not only to Apollonius, but also to his wife and daughter. These are, to put it mildly, unusual qualities for women, either in its imaginary setting in the Hellenistic period, or at the likely time of the creation of the Greek original around 200 C.E.; the present Latin text developed around 500.³⁵ Nor is there anything known about the great culture of women from Tarsus or Cyrene; but there was one place in the ancient world which cherished its reputation as a place that valued the literary achievement of a woman: Mytilene, the home of Sappho, θαυμαστόν τι χρῆμα, without a rival among women ποιήσεως ἔνεκα, according to Strabo (13,2,3). It must have been because of Sappho, and because Lesbos was known to be πασέων...ἀοιδότητη, that the author of *King Apollonius* chose to have his cultured heroine display her talents to such effect in Mytilene.

The 'aura of Lesbos' as perceived by Catullus and the author of *Apollonius of Tyre*, was its pre-eminence in poetry and music. It goes beyond the aim of this paper, which focuses simply on the first mention of Lesbos in *Daphnis and Chloe*, to show in detail how Longus' narrative incorporates this musical/poetical aura, and its association with Lesbian myths about Orpheus; I restrict myself to noting Daphnis' control of his animals, illustrated at the end of the novel (4,15), a power he shares, of course, not just with Pan, but with Orpheus, who, like Echo and Syrinx, is physically present in the soil of Lesbos.

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³⁵ Kortekaas 2004, 94.

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