

BELLARIA XLIX



Monument commemorating Lucian of Samosata from Nordkirchen, Germany

LUCIAN 5

DIALOGUES OF THE COURTESANS (*hetairai*)

The basic meaning of *hetaira* is ‘companion’, while a prostitute was a *pornê*, derived from a Greek word meaning ‘sell’. These terms give an important clue to one way in which these relationships were distinguished. The *pornê* was bought, for cash. In a comedy we hear of a scale of charges for her favours: ‘bent over’ is cheapest (the man standing behind her), then ‘bent back’ (she leans back against the man’s chest), and the most expensive, ‘race-horse’ (the woman sits on top of the man). The point about cash-transfer is that it defines a transaction as one that is by its very nature impersonal, done and dusted. We learn of one *pornê* called Clepsydra, the word for a water-clock functioning rather like a modern sand-filled egg-timer. She stopped when the water-clock ran out.

The educated, independent, tax-paying *hetaira*, however, dealt in ‘gifts’ given by ‘friends’ who wanted to ‘benefit’ her, as the *hetaira* Theodote said to Socrates. This looked like a personal relationship—there was no ‘going rate’ for it—and it put the power in the woman’s hands. She could have as many lovers as she liked, playing one against the other, and offering or withdrawing her services as she saw fit. The whole point was her fickleness. It kept her ‘friends’ hungry—and, even better, intensely jealous. Such relationships were the focus of those ancient love epigrams expressing love for a woman. They depict a world of the slavishly love-struck males, desperate for the commitment of their *hetaira* to them alone, fighting off her other lovers or singing tear-laden songs outside her locked doors.

In this very contemporary dialogue, Lucian pictures the young man Klonarion (‘little twig’—make what you like of that) discussing with his *hetaira* Leaina (‘lioness’) rumours about what happened between her and the wealthy woman

Megilla (from—note—Lesbos) and a female friend of Megilla's called Demonassa from Corinth (famous for its immorality) who was 'in the same business'. The relationship, as it emerges, also involves gift-giving, as it would with a male lover. In other words, it is a typically amusing Lucianic inversion of the normal teasing male-female *hetaira* relationship, leaving the hapless Klonarion begging for more, as usual, thought for a quite different reason ...

Leaina and Klonarion



Klonarion

I have heard something new said about you, Leaina, that Megilla, the wealthy lady from Lesbos, is in love with you, as if she were a man, and that the two of you couple up doing I don't know what with each other. What's up? Are you blushing? But tell me if it's true.

Κλωνάριον

Καινὰ περὶ σοῦ ἀκούομεν, ὦ Λέαινα, τὴν Λεσβίαν Μέγιλλαν τὴν πλουσίαν ἐρᾶν σου ὡσπερ ἄνδρα καὶ συνεῖναι ὑμᾶς οὐκ οἶδ' ὅ τι ποιούσας μετ' ἀλλήλων. τί τοῦτο; ἠρυθρίασας; ἀλλ' εἶπέ εἰ ἀληθῆ ταῦτά ἐστιν.

Leaina

It is true, Klonarion. I am ashamed, for it is very unusual.

Λέαινα

Ἀληθῆ, ὦ Κλωνάριον· αἰσχύνομαι δέ, ἀλλόκοτον γάρ τί ἐστι.



Young man surrounded by courtesans (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples)

Κλοναριον

By the great Aphrodite, what's it all about or what does that woman require of you? Exactly what do you do when you get into bed together? Do you see [what I'm getting at]? You don't love me. For you would not think of hiding such things from me.

Κλωνάριον

Πρὸς τῆς κουροτρόφου τί τὸ πρᾶγμα, ἢ τί βούλεται ἡ γυνή; τί δὲ καὶ πράττετε, ὅταν συνῆτε; ὄρᾳς; οὐ φιλεῖς με· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἀπεκρύπτου τὰ τοιαῦτα.

Leaina

I do love you, Klonarion, if ever I loved another [woman]. That woman is so terribly like a male.

Λέαινα

Φιλῶ μὲν σε, εἰ καὶ τίνα ἄλλην. ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δεινῶς ἀνδρική ἐστίν.

Κλοναριον

I don't understand what you are saying, unless she is one of those ladies' women. They say there are those man-like females of Lesbos who will not put up with it from men, but prefer to find pleasure with women, as if they themselves were men?

Κλωνάριον

Οὐ μανθάνω ὅ τι καὶ λέγεις, εἰ μή τις ἐταιρίστρια τυγχάνει οὔσα· τοιαύτας γὰρ ἐν Λέσβῳ λέγουσι γυναικας ἀρρενωπούς, ὑπ' ἀνδρῶν μὲν οὐκ ἐθελούσας αὐτὸ πάσχειν, γυναιξὶ δὲ αὐτὰς πλησιαζούσας ὥσπερ ἄνδρας.

Leaina

Something like that.

Λέαινα

Τοιοῦτόν τι.

Κλοναριον

In that case, Leaina, tell me it in detail, how she seduced you in the first place and how you were lured into it and everything after that.

Κλωνάριον

Οὐκοῦν, ὦ Λέαινα, τοῦτο αὐτὸ καὶ διήγησαι, ὅπως μὲν ἐπέειρα τὸ πρῶτον, ὅπως δὲ καὶ σὺ συνεπέισθης καὶ τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα.

Leaina

She herself and Demonassa a Corinthian were putting together a drinking party. She was herself rich and in the same business as Megilla, and they took me along too to play the lyre for them. When I had finished and it was late and time for bed and they were drunk, 'Come on, Leaina', Megilla said 'since it's a fine thing to bed down, sleep here between both of us'.

Λέαινα

Πότον τινὰ συγκροτοῦσα αὐτὴ τε καὶ Δημόνασσα ἡ Κορινθία. πλουτοῦσα δὲ καὶ αὐτὴ καὶ ὁμότεχνος οὔσα τῇ Μεγίλλῃ, παρέλαβον κάμῃ καθαρίζειν αὐταῖς· ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐκίθάρισα καὶ ἄωρὶ ἦν καὶ ἔδει καθεύδειν καὶ ἐμέθυσον, Ἔγε δὴ, ἔφη, ὦ Λέαινα, ἡ Μεγίλλα, κοιμᾶσθαι γὰρ ἤδη καλόν, ἐνταῦθα κάθειυδε μεθ' ἡμῶν μέση ἀμφοτέρων.

Κλοναριον

And did you? What happened after that?

Κλωνάριον

Ἐκάθειυδες; τὸ μετὰ ταῦτα τί ἐγένετο;



Leaina

At first they kissed me as men do, not just joining their lips to mine but opening their mouths a little, and threw their arms around me and fondled my breasts. Demonassa even bit me as she kissed me and I could not make out what was going on.

In time Megilla, sweating and very hot, pulled off her wig from her head—it was situated realistically and firmly attached—and I saw her smooth, very like male athletes, her head complete shaved. I was quite disturbed to see this. But Megilla said:

‘Tell me, O Leaina, have you ever seen so good looking a young man?’

‘But I see no young man here, Megilla!’ I told her.

‘Don’t you effeminize me!’ she said. ‘My name is Megillos and I married this Demonassa here long ago and she is my wife.’

Λέαινα

κατεφίλουν με τὸ πρῶτον ὡσπερ οἱ ἄνδρες, οὐκ αὐτὸ μόνον προσαρμόζουσαι τὰ χεῖλη, ἀλλ’ ὑπανοίγουσαι τὸ στόμα, καὶ περιέβαλλον καὶ τοὺς μαστοὺς ἔθλιβον· ἡ Δημόνασσα δὲ καὶ ἔδακνε μεταξύ καταφιλοῦσα· ἐγὼ δὲ οὐκ εἶχον εἰκάσαι ὅτι τὸ πρᾶγμα εἶη.

χρόνῳ δὲ ἡ Μέγιλλα, ὑπόθερμος ἤδη οὔσα, τὴν μὲν πηνήκην ἀφείλετο τῆς κεφαλῆς—ἐπέκειτο δὲ πάνυ ὁμοία καὶ προσφυής—καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ ὠφθη αὐτὴ καθάπερ οἱ σφόδρα ἀνδρώδεις τῶν ἀθλητῶν ἀποκεκαρμένη. καὶ ἐγὼ ἐταράχθην ἰδοῦσα.

ἡ δὲ, ‘ὦ Λέαινα,’ φησίν, ‘ἑώρακας ἤδη οὕτω καλὸν νεανίσκον;’

‘Ἄλλ’ οὐχ ὁρῶ,’ ἔφην, ‘ἐνταῦθα καλὸν νεανίσκον, ὦ Μέγιλλα.’

‘Μὴ καταθῆλυνέ με,’ ἔφη, ‘Μέγιλλος γὰρ ἐγὼ λέγομαι καὶ γεγάμηκα πρόπαλαι ταύτην τὴν Δημόνασσαν, καὶ ἔστιν ἐμὴ γυνή.’



Leaina

I giggled at this, Klonarion, and said:

‘Can it be, Megillos, that you are a man and lived among us under the disguise of a woman, just like Achilles, who stayed hidden among the girls? And is it true that you possess a man’s organs, and that you do to Demonassa what any husband does to his wife?’

‘That thing Leaina,’ she replied, ‘I don’t have. I don’t need it either. You will soon see how we shall couple up in a fashion that is much more voluptuous.’

‘In that case,’ I said, ‘you are not a hermaphrodite. They, I have been told, have both a man’s and woman’s organs.’

For I still did not know, Klonarion, what it was all about.

‘No,’ she said, ‘I am all man.’

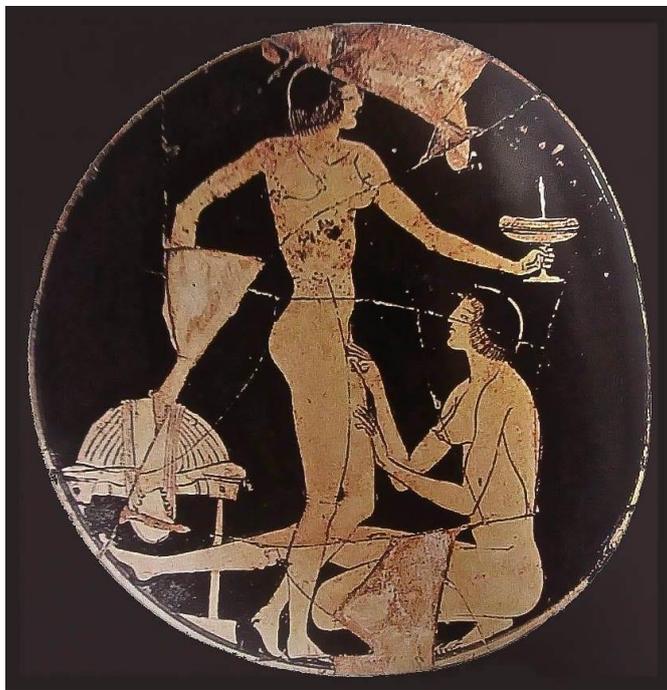
Λέαινα

έγέλασα, ώ Κλωνάριον, επί τούτω και έφην, ‘Ούκοϋν σύ, ώ Μέγιλλε, άνήρ τις ών έλελήθεις ήμās, καθάπερ τον Άχιλλέα φασίν κρυπτόμενον έν ταϊς παρθένοις, και τὸ άνδρεϊον εκείνο έχεις και ποιεις την Δημόνασσαν άπερ άπερ οί άνδρες;’

‘Εκείνο μέν,’ έφη, ‘ώ Λέαινα, ούκ έχω. δέομαι δέ ούδὲ πάνυ αύτοϋ· ίδιον δέ τινα τρόπον ήδίω παρὰ πολυ όμιλοϋντα όψει με.’

‘Άλλά μη Έρμαφρόδιτος εί,’ έφην, ‘οίοι πολλοί είναι λέγονται άμφοτέρα έχοντες;’ έτι γάρ ήγγόουν, ώ Κλωνάριον, τὸ πρᾶγμα.

‘Οϋ,’ φησίν, ‘άλλά τὸ πᾶν άνήρ ειμι.’



Leaina

'I heard', I said 'Ismenodora, the Boietian flute player, telling me a story she'd heard at home about a Theban woman who was changed into a man, and that was the man himself, the famous soothsayer called Teiresias. Did any accident like that happen to you by chance?'

'No, Leaina,' she said. 'I was born with a body entirely like that of all women, but I have the mind and desires and everything else of a man.'

'And are those desires at any rate satisfied?' I said.

'Submit to me, Leaina, if you don't believe me,' she answered, 'and you will soon see that I fall short of no men. I have something of the male about me. Submit. You'll see.'

And so I did, Klonarion, so hard did she beg me, and gave me one of her costly necklaces and tunics of the finest material. Then I embraced her as if she were a man and she got to work and kissed me and gasped for breath and seemed to me to enjoy overwhelming pleasure.

Λέαινα

“Ἦκουσα’ ἔφην ἐγώ, ‘τῆς Βοιωτίας αὐλητρίδος Ἴσμηνοδώρας διηγουμένης τὰ ἐφέστια παρ’ αὐτοῖς, ὡς γένοιτό τις ἐν Θήβαις ἐκ γυναικὸς ἀνὴρ, ὁ δ’ αὐτὸς καὶ μάντις ἄριστος, οἶμαι, Τειρεσίας τοῦνομα. μὴ οὖν καὶ σὺ τοιοῦτόν τι πέπονθας;’
‘Οὐκουν, ὦ Λέαινα,’ ἔφη, ‘ἀλλὰ ἐγεννήθην μὲν ὁμοία ταῖς ἄλλαις ὑμῖν, ἡ γνώμη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα ἀνδρὸς ἐστί μοι.’

‘Καὶ ἰκανὴ γοῦν σοι,’ ἔφην, ‘ἐπιθυμία;’

‘Πάρεχε γοῦν, ὦ Λέαινα, εἰ ἀπιστεῖς,’ ἔφη, ‘καὶ γνώση οὐδὲν ἐνδέουσάν με τῶν ἀνδρῶν· ἔχω γάρ τι ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀνδρείου. ἀλλὰ πάρεχε, ὄψει γάρ.’

παρέσχον, ὦ Κλωνάριον, ἰκετευούσης πολλὰ καὶ ὄρμον τινά μοι δούσης τῶν πολυτελῶν καὶ ὀθόνας τῶν λεπτῶν. εἴτ’ ἐγὼ μὲν ὥσπερ ἄνδρα περιελάμβανον, ἡ δὲ ἐποίει τε καὶ ἐφίλει καὶ ἡσθμαινε καὶ ἐδόκει μοι ἐς ὑπερβολὴν ἡδεσθαι.

Klonarion

But what exactly did she do, Leaina, and how? Tell me that most of all!

Κλωνάριον

Τί ἐποίει, ὦ Λέαινα, ἢ τίνα τρόπον; τοῦτο γὰρ μάλιστα εἰπέ.

Leaina

Don't ask me for details. They are very shameful so that, by Aphrodite, I wouldn't ever tell you.

Λέαινα

Μὴ ἀνάκρινε ἀκριβῶς, αἰσχρὰ γάρ, ὥστε μὰ τὴν οὐρανίαν οὐκ ἂν εἴποιμι.