By a curious coincidence Professor Miroslav Marcovich and I both published discussions of this famous poem which not only appeared almost simultaneously\(^1\) but which proceeded along rather similar lines of interpretation. While our ultimate conclusions do not entirely coincide, they are closely related and we share a general agreement in dismissing certain earlier interpretations of this much-discussed poem. Few there are who would not be pleased to find their own views so much in harmony with those of the distinguished scholar who is being honored in the present volume.

In 1991 Hayden Pelliccia published yet another discussion of this poem,\(^2\) in which he takes as his starting point the two papers just mentioned. The problems of interpretation are of sufficient interest that I do not hesitate to reconsider the poem in the light of Pelliccia’s remarks. Unfortunately my own views as set forth in my *CP* article seem to have been misunderstood, and I am represented as expressing certain opinions which I did not express. Let it be stated at once that I consider Professor Pelliccia a serious scholar and I take it as certain that there was no intention on his part to misrepresent deliberately my position.\(^3\) If my English was not clear enough and the fault for any misunderstanding is mine, I sincerely regret it.


\(^{3}\) In fact, if my memory is correct, Professor Pelliccia had courteously sent me a typescript of his article before publication for my criticisms. Unfortunately at the time I was in poor
Pelliccia begins his piece by referring the reader to Marcovich’s paper and mine for “the refutation of previous errors” (30). He then states his own position: “The view advocated both by Marcovich and, with the qualification to be noted, by me is the well-established one that takes ἀλλην τινα’ in the last line to refer to another female, and thus makes an ethnic and sexual joke out of the Lesbian girl’s origins and behavior” (30). That is to say, Pelliccia agrees with Marcovich (and many others) that there is a joke in the final verse: The girl, it turns out, is both Lesbian and a lesbian and accordingly rejects Anacreon in favor of another woman. The main competing interpretation is, of course, that which supplies κόμην with ἀλλην τινα’ in verse 8. Not a few understand the poem in this way; readers of Pelliccia’s article are likely to include me in their number. “Renehan argued at length that the μὲν . . . δὲ antithesis in lines 5–8 made it ‘all but unavoidable to supply mentally’ κόμην in line 8” (34). And again, “. . . suppose that with Renehan and others we think it possible to supply κόμην with πρὸς δ’ ἀλλην τινα’ . . . ” (32). The fullest statement of my views (30 n. 2) differs from these accounts in that some other opinions, mutually incompatible, are also attributed to me: “Renehan first argues from the μὲν . . . δὲ structure of the last four lines that κόμην (referring to a younger man’s head of hair) must be supplied with πρὸς δ’ ἀλλην τινα’; then, on the last page, he surprisingly says that ἐστὶν γὰρ ἀπ’ εὐκτίτου / Λέσβου can have led the audience to understand ἀλλην τινα’ as referring to another girl; and he finally proposes that the ambiguity cannot be resolved and that the poet may have intended it that way” (emphases added here).

The reader may be excused if he concludes from Pelliccia’s language that I expressed different, and contradictory, views in different sections of my paper. Actually all his remarks refer to several consecutive paragraphs on the last two pages of my discussion (31–32; no page citation given by Pelliccia). On page 31, in the course of analyzing the structure of verses 5–8, I stated in part: “When one then proceeds to πρὸς δ’ ἀλλην τινα’ (no further), it is all but unavoidable to supply mentally a corresponding κόμην.” Ignoring the crucial qualification “no further,” Pelliccia misrepresents me as arguing that “κόμην . . . must be supplied with πρὸς δ’ ἀλλην τινα’.” My actual point was that, when one then goes on to the last word of the poem, one meets an unexpected verb which makes it quite likely that ἀλλην τινα’ does not after all refer to κόμην, but rather to another woman. On page 32 I entertain two possibilities: 1) Verses 5–6 contain no allusion to lesbianism and κόμην is to be understood with ἀλλην τινα’. On this view, as I wrote, “Anacreon’s revenge consists solely in the use of an unflattering expression (χάσκειν πρὸς) to describe her misdirected attentions (as he sees it). The poem is heterosexual on this reading; the sense is acceptable.” With this interpretation the verb χάσκει is still

health (which necessitated major surgery) and my life was so disrupted that I did not read the piece until after it had appeared in print.
unexpected and delivers a παρά προσδοκίαν effect. 4) Verses 5–6 do allude to the lesbian interests of the woman. I stated, “... then ἄλλην refers to a woman and the παρά προσδοκίαν is even more pronounced” (emphasis added here). It is not apparent to me how anyone could conclude from such language that I was an advocate of the “κόμην” interpretation in explicit opposition to the “κόρην” interpretation. 5 In other words, Marcovich and Pelliccia are among those interpreters who understand ἄλλην τινά in verse 8 as referring to some other woman. I differ from them not in rejecting this interpretation—quite the contrary—but in continuing to believe that the “κόμην” interpretation is also possible, if less pointed. I thought that I had made it clear in my CP paper that I preferred the other interpretation, if an absolute choice had to be made (see below). Perhaps not. Let us come to the crux of the matter: ἐστὶν γὰρ ἐπ’ ἐνστίτου Λέσβου.

“Interpretation of the poem is chiefly complicated by the statement in lines 5–6 that the girl is from Lesbos.” So I wrote in my CP paper (30) and it is clear from Pelliccia’s remarks in his paper that verses 5–6 continue to present difficulties. To illustrate the sentence-structure seen in verses 5–8 I had adduced a passage not hitherto cited in this connection, namely Aristophanes Ecclesiazusae 37–39:

ο γὰρ ἄνήρ, ὃς ἐξείλατι,
Σαλαμίνος γὰρ ἔστιν ὃς ἔνεμεν ἕνα,
τὴν νύχθη ὄλην ἠλλανε μ’ ἐν τοῖς στρώμασιν.

Pelliccia will make much use of this passage, but first he observes that “Renhan does not draw any inferences from the passage but simply quotes

4 Marcovich (above, note 1) 375–76, argues that Greek idiom regularly requires that χάσκειν πρός refer “to an animate object” and hence κόμην is unlikely to be the object of the preposition here. I do not believe that this “rule” has any validity and Marcovich himself adds some evidence that argues against it. Nothing either in the nature of the Greek language in general or of this word in particular favors putting χάσκω in such a semantic straitjacket.

5 It seems to have become customary among defenders of this interpretation to contrast specifically the word κόρην with κόμην in this connection. Thus Pelliccia on p. 33 writes of “understanding κόρην in the last line.” Marcovich uses similar language more than once. This should be avoided because it is both inexact and misleading. Precisely because there is a neatness to the jingle κόρη—κόμη, a reader is liable, consciously or no, to attribute the play on words to Anacreon himself, which would, of course, itself go a long way towards validating this interpretation. The “evidence” is illusory. 1) Anacreon calls the girl a νήνις, not a κόρη. 2) In Anacreon’s dialect the form would be κόρη, not κόρη, and the slight extant evidence for his own usage clearly points to κόρη (PMG 390, 418), a form which hardly forms a striking jingle with κόμη. 3) If ἄλλην τινά refers (as I think it most likely does) to a woman, no substantive need be mentally supplied; the feminine termination -νις suffices. For an unambiguous example of this see Aesch. Ag. 1268 ἄλλην τιν’ ἀτές ἀτέν’ ἐμοῦ πλουτίζετε. (Cassandra is the speaker, ἀτές is Stanley’s correction of the meaningless ἀτεν of the MSS.) 4) If a Greek supplied any substantive here it would most likely be γυναικα, the natural word to contrast female with male. Theocritus 6. 25–26: ἄλλα καὶ αὐτός ἐγὼ κνίζων πάλιν οὐ ποθόρημι, ἄλλα ἄλλοι τινά φαμὶ γυναῖκ’ ἐξει. (Note, incidentally, ποθόρημι, a polite equivalent to the vulgar χάσκω in Anacreon.)
it as ‘an exactly parallel sentence’” (31 n. 4). This is somewhat imprecise; again I am misquoted. On pages 30–31 I discuss the elaborate structure of verses 5–8 and state what I take to be the purpose and effect of the several parenthetic clauses. Having done this, and only then, do I cite the Aristophanes passage as “an exactly parallel sentence-structure” (emphasis added). Pelliccia omits the crucial word “structure,” which ought to have removed any doubt as to my main reason for producing the parallel. But he believes the parallel to be even more significant than I did: “The function . . . of the interposed γάρ-clause . . . (‘for he is from Salamis’) is perfectly clear: it provides the ethnic information that sets up and makes possible the obscene punchline . . .” (31). And again, “The first γάρ-clause in Anacreon resembles that in Aristophanes in an even more significant way: both interrupt their sentences in order to tell the ethnic origin of the subject; in Aristophanes this ethnic information serves to set up the obscene punchline that follows, and that is its only purpose. There is an obvious point to be made from all this: an interposed or anticipatory γάρ-clause demands a ‘pay-off,’ comic or otherwise; when the interposed clause contains ethnic information, the pay-off must present action associated with the ethnic group” (32). I have no quarrel with the basic point made here, for I was under the impression that I was making much the same point on pages 30–31 of my paper, where I conclude the section by explicitly alluding to a παρά προσδοκιάν ending (= Pelliccia’s “punchline”).6 Surely he could not have imagined that I failed to observe the “ethnic” adjective in the Aristophanes passage. That was precisely what made it so apt a parallel.

Our disagreement here is small, but perhaps significant. The reader will have observed that in the quotations from Pelliccia’s paper just given he refers twice to “the obscene punchline” in the Aristophanes passage. The two passages from Anacreon and Aristophanes have in common 1) a parenthetic γάρ-clause and 2) an “ethnic” (perhaps better “geographic”) reference in this clause. Aristophanes also has 3) an obscene ending. While Pelliccia does not quite say so in so many words, the reader naturally infers from his language that this is a third detail which the two passages must share, because such a γάρ-clause, specifically containing an ethnic or geographic reference and leading up to an obscene punchline, constitutes, as it were, a formal pattern: “The Aristophanes parallel adduced by Renehan . . . does prove that the formal structure common to it and Anacreon 13 was suitable for the kind of joke that the ‘lesbian’ interpretation creates” (33 n. 8). Parenthetical γάρ-clauses can be used for humorous effect and doubtless often were. The interesting presence in them, on occasion, of an ethnic

6 In addition to “punchline” Pelliccia uses not only “pay-off” but also introduces the contrasting pair “apparent logic” versus “joke logic” (see especially 34). All this seems to me but a roundabout way of describing the familiar παρά προσδοκιαν pattern, although Pelliccia apparently believes that his language introduces some new insight (32: “given this newly strengthened intuition”).
word followed by an obscene ending does not prove that an obscene ending must always, or even usually, follow. The formal structure common to Anacreon 13 and Aristophanes Ecclesiazusae 37–39 is neutral in this regard. It was of set purpose that I did not draw any further inferences along these lines.

Let me attempt to clarify the point. Γάρ-clauses with an ethnic or geographic element also occur elsewhere, both 1) where the clause is not parenthetic and thus there is no “punchline” following and 2) where there is no obscene content. Epigram 6 (Pfeiffer) of Callimachus has to do with the dedication of a nautilus shell to Arsinoë Aphrodite by Selenia, daughter of Kleinias. Verses 11–12 go thus: Κλεινίων ἄλλα θυγατρὶ δίδου χάριν· ὁδὲ γὰρ ἑσθλὰ / ἰδέες εἰς Σμύρνης ἔστιν ἀπ’ Αἰολίδος. This epigram has no erotic content and these verses conclude the epigram. (That is, the “ethnic” γάρ-clause is not parenthetic.) More significant, because of its provenience, is the following passage, from the Anacreontea (14. 10–14 West), where the imitator is telling off all his “affairs” or ἔρωτες: ἔπειτα δ’ ἐκ Κορίνθου / θές ὄρμαθοις ἑρῶτοποι· Ἀχαίης γὰρ ἔστιν, / ὅπου καλαί γυναῖκες· τίθει δὲ λεσβίας [sc. ἔρωτας] μοι κτλ. The “ethnic” γάρ-clause is not parenthetic; it concludes one section. Nor is it, despite occurring in an “erotic” poem, in any way obscene. Such γάρ-clauses, it appears, show considerable structural variety.

It thus seems to me that Pelliccia attempts to prove too much from a single overworked Aristophanecan passage. He states the following (32): “Now, given this newly strengthened intuition, suppose that with Renahan and others we think it possible to supply κόμην with πρὸς δ’ ἄλλην τίνα: What kind of pay-off, then, will be the clause ‘but she gapes at another . . . head of hair?’ How does the information that ‘she is from well-built Lesbos’ set up such a climax? The answer must be, it does not; and that failure to account for the structure, especially as illuminated by the parallel from Aristophanes, constitutes a serious defect in any interpretation that supplies κόμην in line 8” (emphasis in each instance mine). These assertions are certainly couched in too confident language. After all, Marcovich (372 n. 1) had given what he correctly described as “a generous selection of scholarship (1899–1979)” on this little language. His useful, but incomplete, list contains almost forty items, representing a remarkable variety of opinions and theories.

The plain fact is that the clause ἔστιν γὰρ ἀπ’ εὐκτίτου Λέσβου, taken in the most innocent way, makes sense here. The epithet is modelled on Homeric language and is both elevated and honorific. A woman from “well-built Lesbos” can mean a woman from a sophisticated and cultured center of Greece (Sappho! Alcaeus!); she would be no rustic. A woman from Lesbos also comes from a region famous for beauty contests, which is
to say from a region associated with beautiful women. Such a woman might well assume a condescending air towards the old poet past his prime. She can do better. Take the poem that way and the final word χάσκει still produces a “punchline,” an unexpected and uncomplimentary jibe directed towards the young lady. The structure is flawless and no one has succeeded in proving beyond any doubt that such cannot be the sense of the poem.

To come to the alternative, “lesbian” interpretation of verses 5–6. In contemporary classical studies, where a cottage industry dedicated to the detection of hitherto unnoticed obscenities in Greek and Latin literature (many of them imaginary) flourishes, there is a risk of being too quick to see, and even of insisting upon, sexual innuendoes which may not have been apparent to the ancient Greek hearer or reader. Nevertheless many, including myself, have believed that an allusion to lesbianism is likely to be present in this poem. Marcovich advocates this position and Pelliccia

7 For the evidence for beauty contests on Lesbos see my CP paper (above, note 1) 30. In an extraordinary paragraph (32 n. 7) Pelliccia attempts to argue away this possibility: “The evidence for the Lesbian reputation for feminine beauty rests on ll. 9. 129–30 Λεσβίδας, ἢς ὀπὲ Λεσβῶν ἐνυκτιμένη Ἰλεν αὐτὸς / ἤξελόμην, αἵ κάλλες ἐνίκων φῶλα γυναικῶν—where the imperfect ἐνίκων shows that the antecedent of the relative in αἵ κάλλες ἐνίκων is not Lesbian women in general, but a particular group—and on the attestations in Alcaeus fr. 130. 32–33, et al... that beauty contests were held on the island. Do beauty contests necessarily imply singular beauty?” The attack is thus two-pronged: 1) The Homeric passage refers only to a certain few women from Lesbos and 2) beauty contests do not necessarily “imply” beautiful women. For the first argument to have any validity one would have to assume against all probability that these particular women were the only beautiful women from Lesbos. Otherwise it proves nothing contra. Surely no one would really care to defend such a position. (If one wished to pursue this line of argument seriously, merely note the language used: ἤξελόμην means “I selected, picked out for myself”—obviously from a larger group of such.) One might as well argue that, because Anacreon does not explicitly describe the young lady in his poem as beautiful, we are meant to conclude that she is ugly. Or that in Anacreontea 14. 10 ff. (see above), a passage almost certainly ijimating our poem, one is to conclude that only the women from Corinth are beautiful because they are singled out as such, and not also the women from Athens, Lesbos, and elsewhere (see the whole poem). Rather, the Homeric passage is some evidence that Lesbos enjoyed a reputation for beautiful women. Surely one is also entitled to take into account the fact that in this passage, where Homer mentions beautiful women from Lesbos, he describes it as ἐνυκτιμένη and that Anacreon employs the corresponding epithet ἤξιττιός. His literary allusion, if not certain, seems very probable. (Note that in Anacreontea 14. 12–13 [cited above], Ἀχαϊτῆς γάρ ἐστιν, ἱποῦ καλαὶ γυναικὲς, there is an analogous Homeric precedent, ll. 3. 75 = 258 Ἀχαϊτῆς καλλιγυναικιᾶ.) The rhetorical question which forms the second prong of Pelliccia’s attack is, if anything, even more curious: “Do beauty contests necessarily imply singular beauty?” Clearly he intends the answer to be “No,” and in the schools of the logicians that might be the correct answer. In the real—or literary—world the answer is “Yes.” What sort of fool would hold a beauty contest if he or she believed that beautiful contestants could not be found? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and the existence of such beauty contests on Lesbos tells us what the beholders there thought they were beholding.

8 For the force of χάσκω here (crude, but not obscene), see my CP paper (above, note 1) 29–30 and 31.
quotes him with approval. "Marcovich states the case well: those who believe that κόμης is to be understood in line 8 ‘have rightly objected that there is just no evidence for the assumption that “coming from Lesbos” would imply “being a lesbian.” I feel, however, that such an assumption is [certainly] possible in the time of Anacreon in view of the unmistakable homosexual inclinations of Sappho from Lesbos, as expressed in her poetry’" (32–33). I agree completely with Marcovich’s position here and expressed comparable views (see my CP paper, 30 and 32). Yet directly after quoting Marcovich Pelliccia states in a footnote, “Renehan rejects this [i.e. Marcovich’s] argument as circular” (33 n. 8). I repeat verbatim my words as a cautionary tale: “It is also quite possible that Lesbos in Anacreon’s time already suggested female homosexuality. Sappho’s fame alone could adequately account for that. Unfortunately, if such were the case, this poem is the only extant evidence for it, and any formal argument as to the meaning of the poem based on the mention of Lesbos in lines 5–6 runs the risk, unavoidably, of circularity” (30). The key words here (ignored) are “any formal argument” and my statement is perfectly correct. To attempt to prove formally that verses 5–6 refer to lesbianism on the basis of verses 5–6 alone is a logical fallacy, a petitio principii. I do reject such a move. This does not mean that one cannot make an assumption about the probable meaning of verses 5–6 based on their context. What Pelliccia has done, by stating, specifically in connection with the statements of Marcovich cited above, that I “reject this argument,” is to make it appear that I reject the legitimacy of assuming (as Marcovich does) that a lesbian interpretation is possible. In fact I proceed immediately to argue against those who stress the absence of contemporary evidence for a reputation among women from Lesbos for lesbianism: “That . . . is true enough, but, given the scanty remains from this period, it is hardly significant, much less decisive” (30).

Where does all this leave us? Pelliccia seems convinced that the poem must be given a “lesbian” interpretation. His arguments strike me as not fully persuasive, indeed, in places fallacious. I believe now, as I did when I wrote my earlier paper, that certainty is not attainable. The mention of Lesbos may have more to do with social standing than sexual proclivities and κόμης may be understood with ἀλλὸν τινά. This will give a satisfactory sense. I still believe, however, that the “lesbian” reading produces an “even more pronounced” παρὰ προσδοκίαν, as I wrote on page 32 (although readers of Pelliccia’s paper would never discover that). What impressed me most, however, was the fact that both the Lesbos-clause and ἀλλὸν τινά admitted of two interpretations; that is to say, the Greek seems to show not one but two ambiguities which can significantly affect our understanding of the entire poem. I considered this, if a coincidence, a “remarkable” one (32), which is to say highly improbable—and, therefore, suggested that the poet intended a deliberate ambiguity culminating in a highly effective παρὰ προσδοκίαν.
Pelliccia writes (30 n. 2): “[Renehan] proposes that the ambiguity cannot be resolved and that the poet may have intended it that way. I find the suggested ambiguity unappealing . . . and the argument that produces it self-contradictory.” The problem of conscious ambiguities is of no little importance in poetry. Some twenty years ago the great American Pindaric scholar, Elroy Bundy, wrote of “ambiguity of this sort” as “being one of the most powerful instruments of meaning in poetry.”9 In the case of Anacreon 13 I proposed an interpretation along such lines. The poet, by an elaborate and careful structuring of verses 5–8 (discussed on pages 30–31 of my CP paper), deliberately misleads his audience. As one goes through the sentence, ἐστὶν γὰρ ἄπ’ εὐκτίτου Λέσβου is first understood to refer to the girl’s illustrious homeland. (The epithet εὐκτίτου, because of its usual associations [see above], may itself be deceptive.) Then, especially because of the emphatic “centerpiece” of the sentence, τὴν μὲν ἐμὴν κόμην, one instinctively supplies κόμην with the contrasting πρὸς δὲ ἄλλην τινὰ—until one sees the unflattering verb χάσκει, at which point one realizes that ἐστὶν γὰρ ἄπ’ εὐκτίτου Λέσβου can admit of a quite different (lesbian) meaning and that κόμην need not be supplied, thereby making ἄλλην τινὰ refer to a person. I find the poem so understood ingenious and elegant; I see nothing “self-contradictory” therein.10

Before dismissing out of hand an interpretation of the poem along these lines one ought to be aware that conscious ambiguities are well attested in Greek literature (to go no further). Let me conclude by calling attention to but one particularly striking parallel (or so at least it seems to me), Sophocles, OT 337–38. Tiresias is the speaker; he knows the awful truth about Oedipus who, still in the dark, has just angrily rebuked the blind seer:

ὄργην ἐμέμψα τὴν ἐμὴν, τὴν σὴν δ’ ὁμοῦ ναϊοῦσαν οὐ κατείδες, ἄλλ’ ἐμὲ ψέγεις.

Richard Jebb (ad loc.) says: “ὁμοὸ ναϊοῦσαν while (or though) it dwells close to thee . . . the words have a second meaning: ‘thou seest not that thine own [τὴν σὴν, thy kinswoman, thy mother] is dwelling with thee [as thy wife].’ The ambiguity of τὴν σὴν, the choice of the phrase ὁμοὸ ναϊοῦσαν, and the choice of κατείδες, leave no doubt of this.” Long before Jebb Eustathius (ad II. 9. 342) had observed ἐνθα δοκεῖ μὲν λέγειν ὁ Τειρεσίας ὅτι τὴν σὴν ὀργήν οὐ κατείδες τὴν σύμφωνον σοι, ἀληθῶς δὲ λέγει ὅτι τὴν σὴν ἀλοχὸν οὐκ οἶδας, ἡγοῦν τὴν μητέρα σου, ἣ συμβίοις.


10 For reproducing the general effect of the poem in English one can hardly do better than David Campbell’s Loeb rendering (Greek Lyric II [1988]) with its final dash: “. . . but she—she comes from Lesbos with the fine cities—finds fault with my hair because it is white, and gapes after another—girl.” But no English version can fully recapture the ambiguity of the inflected Greek.
Note how ὀργήν ... τὴν ἐμὴν parallels τὴν μὲν ἐμὴν κόμην, how the contrasting τὴν σὴν δὲ with the inherent ambiguity of its feminine case-ending corresponds to πρὸς δὲ ἄλλην τινά, and how there is a second ambiguity in ὑμὸν νοίονσαν, just as we have suggested there is in ἐστὶν γὰρ ἀπ’ εὐκτίτου Λέσβου. Finally, observe the a b a pattern: ἄλλα ἐμὲ ψέγεις repeats ὀργήν ἐμέμψω τὴν ἐμὴν—but with a significant difference. ὀργήν ... τὴν ἐμὴν is replaced by the personal pronoun ἐμέ, which makes it all the more likely (when one has read the sentence to the end, exactly as in Anacreon) that the ambiguous, and contrasting, τὴν σὴν is to be taken as really referring to a person, not a thing. That not everyone will accept an interpretation on such lines in either passage is only to be expected. The Greek in both places is, after all, ambiguous.

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