

LESBIANTIQUITY

ISSUE 34

c. 400–480 AD / September 2024 AD



NONNOS

KALLISTO

ARTEMIS

AURA

TO LOOK LIKE
A VIRGIN...

LESBIANTIQUITY © Georgina Barker (Portknockie: Sapphizdat, 2024)

Nonnos translation, introduction, and notes © Stella J. Fritzell 2024

Greek text from: R. Keydell, ed., *Nonni Panopolitani Dionysiaca* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1959), unless otherwise noted

Back cover art: 'Archer & Bear' © Emily Setzer 2024

THE TRANSLATOR

Stella J. Fritzell

As an enthusiastic reader of Greek and Roman literature, I have relished this opportunity not only to translate a bit of Nonnos, but also to work alongside and gain insight from other queer female classicists. My research, while generally falling within the realm of mythology, also engages with narratology, landscape theory, classical art and performance, and digital scholarship. I currently live in Philadelphia with my two cats, where I also practice and teach Doshinkan Aikido.



ΝΟΝΝΟΣ Ὁ ΠΑΝΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ

Nonnos (often latinized as Nonnus) is known as the author of both the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* and the *Dionysiaca*. Little is known about the specifics of his life, except that he was a Christian, born in Egypt in Panopolis (modern-day Akhmim), who traveled during the 5th century C.E., spending a significant amount of time in Alexandria, where he most likely wrote his two notable works. The *Dionysiaca* is almost certainly the later of the two, composed during the final years of Nonnos' life.¹

The *Dionysiaca* is a 48-book epic written in dactylic hexameter that tracks the life, incarnations, and journey to godhood of Dionysus. Numerous literary influences are evident in the poem's composition – Nonnos' use of metrics and language clearly draws upon the Homeric works and likely upon additional (now lost) cyclic poems. Its loose chronology and digressive episodic structure in particular recall the organization of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Like the *Metamorphoses*, the content of the *Dionysiaca* is broadly mythological in scope, with thematic threads of war, metamorphosis, reincarnation, birth, love, and rape playing in the background of its multifaceted narratives. Among the narratives of sex and attraction which Nonnos weaves into his epic poem, the stories of both Kallisto and Aura suggest that certain instances of female homosexuality or lesbian attraction may have been well known to any consumers and transmitters of ancient mythology.

¹ An early tradition in scholarship read the *Paraphrase* as a later work than the *Dionysiaca*, and thus as evidence of Nonnos' conversion to Christianity, however commentators of the past 50 years have effectively quashed this reading. For further information on the history of Nonnian scholarship, including the life of the poet, the dating of his works, and major structural and thematic arguments, I recommend *Brill's Companion to Nonnus of Panopolis* (ed. Accorinti, 2016), particularly Accorinti's chapter on the Nonnian biography.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Accorinti, Domenico, ed., *Brill's Companion to Nonnus of Panopolis* (Leiden: Brill, 2016)

Boehrer, Sandra, *Female Homosexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome*, trans. by Anna Preger (New York: Routledge, 2021)

Keydell, R., ed., *Nonni Panopolitani Dionysiaca*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1959)

Rouse, W.H.D., ed., *Nonnos: Dionysiaca* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940)

Vian, Francis, ed., *Nonnus de Panopolis: Les Dionysiaques* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1976)



ROOT & BRANCH READING GUIDE

Our translations branch out to explore
a variety of options for the text:
any variants in the original <Greek
Latin> texts
and the various possible meanings in English.

Our translations are rooted in the words
of the original text, replicating when possible
word order, root meanings of words, and
grammatical gender $\left(\begin{matrix} [n] \\ [f] \\ [m] \end{matrix} \right)$ of words about people.

You, the reader, will choose which branches you prefer to follow.

KALLISTO & ARTEMIS

An Arkadian maiden, daughter of Lykaon, and hunting companion of Artemis, Kallisto¹ is, like all of the goddess' retinue, an avowed virgin. She is seduced and impregnated by Zeus, discovered by Artemis and exiled from the goddess' band, and gives birth to a son, Arkas. At some point she is transformed into a bear, hunted down and killed (or nearly killed), and commemorated as the constellation Ursa Major (her son, Arkas, becomes Ursa Minor).

Many versions of this story survive from antiquity.² Of the versions which offer an explanation for how Zeus was able to seduce a

¹ Proper names are rendered following Greek pronunciation, rather than using a Latinized spelling. Thus Καλλιστώ will appear as 'Kallisto' and not 'Callisto'.

² The other versions are: Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 3.100; Eratosthenes [*Catasterismi*] 1.2; Hyginus *Poeticon astronomicon* 2.1 (summarizing a lost play by Amphis) and *Fabulae* 177; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 2.409–531 and *Fasti* 2.155ff; Pausanias 8.3.6. (Statius also alludes to Zeus' adoption of Artemis' appearance in *Thebaid* 4.293ff and *Achilleid* 1.263ff, but without mentioning Kallisto.)

The versions differ on the agent of Kallisto's transformation. Generally, Zeus (Apollodorus; Hyginus), Hera (Pausanias; Hyginus *Fabulae*; Ovid), or Artemis (Eratosthenes; Hyginus *Poeticon astronomicon*) are held responsible.

The versions also differ on the exact nature of events. Most accounts that provide a narrative description follow one of two clear traditions:

1.) Kallisto's son, Arkas, comes close to killing his mother, but is prevented thorough divine intervention by which Kallisto is transformed into Ursa Major, sometimes accompanied by Arkas as Ursa Minor (Eratosthenes; Ovid);

2.) Artemis, being either enraged at Kallisto's broken oath of virginity, or persuaded by Hera, shoots Kallisto in the form of a bear and kills her (Apollodorus; Pausanias; Hyginus *Poeticon astronomicon*).

The lost play by the comedian Amphis offers a slight variation on the first tradition, in that both Kallisto and Arkas, in bear form, were pursued by hunters and rescued by Zeus when they took shelter in his sanctuary. Boehringer (2021 p. 65) points out that Amphis likely played up the lesbian content of the story for comic effect, since the accusation of a goddess impregnating a young girl must have seemed quite funny.

devout virgin, the vast majority plainly state that the god took on the appearance of Artemis so that he, in the guise of her patroness, was welcomed by the virgin nymph, who realized his deception too late. While Zeus is famous for changing his shape in order to get close to mortal women without arousing suspicion, he typically assumes the form of an animal (Europa, Eurymedousa, Leda, Phthia), a male individual known to his victim (Alkmene) or a male-coded being (Antiope), or simply dampens the radiance of his own divine body (Semele). Only in the case of Kallisto does Zeus assume a female form, and one which he knows will be intimately welcomed by his target.

Nonnos makes a number of passing references to the story of Kallisto at various points in the *Dionysiaca*, three of which specifically mention how Zeus disguised himself as Artemis. In each of these passages Nonnos draws attention to the fact that Zeus took on the appearance of Artemis in order to get closer to the nymph, indicating not only the poet's own familiarity with a commonly known narrative tradition for the myth of Kallisto, but also suggesting that in this tradition the nymph harbored a lesbian attraction to her goddess which allowed Zeus' deception to succeed.

DIONYSIACA 2.120–123

120 No longer do I seek out these shrubs, now I dwell
in the < ^{far-seen}
high-shining > mountains, after [living in] a tree, where
Artemis the virgin-loving herself also hunts; but Kronion
obtained Kallisto's bed by changing his < ^{image}
appearance > into Artemis.



120 οὐκέτι ταῦτα κόρυμβα μετέρχομαι, ὑψιφανῇ δὲ
οὔρεα ναιετάω μετὰ δένδρεον, ἧχι καὶ αὐτὴ
Ἄρτεμις ἀγρώσσει φιλοπάρθενος· ἀλλὰ Κρονίων
Καλλιστοῦς λάχε λέκτρον ἐς Ἄρτεμιν εἶδος ἀμείψας.

NOTES

A dialogue between two nymphs concerned about their future in light of Typhon's destructive rampage. One reflects on different places where she might live, but concludes that nowhere is safe for a virgin like herself, or like Kallisto, who was deceived by Zeus in the form of Artemis.

2.120 ὑψιφανῇ: some editors have supplied ἡμιφανῇ meaning 'half-seen' or 'half-visible' (see Rouse 1940). I join with Keydell (1959) and Vian (1976) in preferring ὑψιφανῇ, 'far-seen' / 'high-shining', which better illustrates the scale of mountains on the landscape.

2.122 φιλοπάρθενος; virgin-loving: although this adjective could be read as a double entendre, there is little in Nonnos to suggest that Artemis had a romantic or sexual love for virgins herself; she is only ever cast as the object of sexual attraction. Most likely, φιλοπαρθενος here is meant to suggest a platonic love or affection toward the virgins that were Artemis' companions and more generally under her influence as a virgin goddess.

2.122 Kronion: the son of Kronos, Zeus.

DIONYSIACA 33.288-292

- 288 Then drawing his much-wandering eye to the < ^{polar circle}
foot of the axel >
he spied Kallisto and the unresting < ^{track}
orbit > of the Wagon,
290 < ^{perceiving}
realizing > that a female < ^{received}
entertained > a female
< ^{paramour}
bedfellow > [m],
plying the < ^{counterfeit}
illegitimate > body of a mimic Archeress
with [his] < ^{unfamiliar}
unknown > limbs.



- 288 ἀξονίῳ δὲ τένοντι πολυπλανὲς ὄμμα τιταίνων
Καλλιστῶ σκοπίαζε καὶ ἄστατον ὀλκὸν Ἀμάξης,
290 γινώσκων, ὅτι θῆλυς ἐδέξατο θῆλυν ἀκοίτην
μιμηλῆς μεθέποντα νόθον δέμας Ἴοχεαίρης
ἀγνώστοις μελέεσσιν·

NOTES

The Indian warrior Morpheus recognizes the Bear (Ursa Major) among other constellations and recalls the story of Kallisto, finding that a transformation like Zeus' might be a useful way of 'wooing' the subject of his own erotic interest.

33.289 *Kallisto*: here the reference to Kallisto is not of the nymph herself, but rather of the constellation Ursa Major, for which her myth and transformation is a traditional *aition* (origin story).

33.289 *the Wagon*: another name for the Ursa Major constellation.

33.290 *paramour/bedfellow* [[m](#)]: while the gender of Ancient Greek nouns is a grammatical concept more than it is a means of identification, Nonnos' use of the masculine ἀκοίτης here is intentional, and serves to illustrate that the cis-gendered female Kallisto (θῆλυς) had intercourse with the female-appearing, yet male Zeus (θῆλυν ἀκοίτην).

66

But also

cease <priding
thinking highly of> yourself on account of your chaste girdle,
since plying <a replica
an impression> of your limbs, high-ruling Zeus
takes unwed virgins to bed. Still the

- 70 Arkadian woods <cry out
bellow> about your <adulterous
wedding-stealing> likeness,
the <wedded union
tryst> with unwed Kallisto, and
the hills still groan of your <intelligent
thinking> bear, the witness,
who <scolded
reproached> the <counterfeit
illegitimate> form of the
<enamored
love-maddened> Archeress,
when a female <paramour
bedfellow>[m] <made his way
slipped> into the bed of
one more female [f].



66

ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῆς

λῆγε μέγα φρονέουσα σαόφρονος εἵνεκα μήτρης,
ὅττι τεῶν μελέων μεθέπων τύπον ὑψιμέδων Ζεὺς
παρθενικὰς ἀγάμους νυμφεύεται· εἰσέτι κείνην

- 70 εἰκόνα σὴν βοόωσι γαμοκλόπον Ἀρκάδες ὕλαι,
Καλλιστοῦς ἀγάμοιο γαμοστόλον, ὑμετέρην δὲ
ἔμφρονα μάρτυρον ἄρκτον ἔτι στενάχουσι κολῶναι
μεμφομένην νόθον εἶδος ἐρωμανὲς Ἰοχεαίρης,
θηλυτέρης ὅτε λέκτρον ἐδύσατο θῆλυς ἀκοίτης.

NOTES

Hera makes a vitriolic speech to Artemis, after defeating the virgin goddess in a battle fought between the gods supporting Dionysus and those supporting the Indians.¹ Attacking not only Artemis' status as a hunter and her influence over childbirth, Hera also calls into question the validity of Artemis' virginity, since Zeus assumed her form to seduce Kallisto.

36.67 φρονέουσα σαόφρονος: some editors have shortened this to **σαοφρονέουσα** (see Rouse 1940), which makes a slight change in translation: 'cease [with] your chaste-thinking on account of your girdle'.

36.67 girdle: in Homeric poetry **μίτρα** refers to a metal piece of armor worn around the waist (*Iliad* 4.137), but in later texts the term refers either to a headband, diadem, or headdress worn by either gender (Pindar *Olympians* 9.84; Herodotus 1.195), or to a belt or girdle worn by women above the hips, much like **ζώνη**, for which it might arguably be substituted (*Epigrammata Graeca* 319). It is this second sense which makes the most sense here, as the girdle is a traditional marker of maidenhood and female chastity, and it is this attribute of Artemis which Hera attempts to throw into doubt in this passage.

36.72 intelligent/thinking bear: an interesting reference to Kallisto, who, in the narrative suggested here will become a bear, but would not have been one when Zeus approached her in Artemis' form. Although this reference somewhat distorts the order of events, the use of **εμφρων** emphasizes the rationality, or humanness of the bear, allowing us to think of Kallisto both as the mortal nymph who attempted to resist Zeus once she realized his deception, and as the bear that she will become while still retaining elements of her human consciousness.

36.74 paramour/bedfellow [m]: the effect of **ἀκοίτης** here is the same as that in 33.290, it demarcates the separation between the female-appearing, yet male Zeus (**θῆλυς ἀκοίτης**) and, by comparison, the more feminine Kallisto (**θηλυτέρης**).

¹ As a model, Nonnos draws upon the battle between the pro-Greek and pro-Trojan gods depicted in book 21 of Homer's *Iliad*.

AURA & ARTEMIS

A virgin huntress, a member of Artemis' retinue, and the goddess' charioteer, Aura takes pride in her maiden status, like, presumably, much of Artemis' band – but excessively so. She dares to compare her body to that of Artemis, saying that the goddess could not be a true virgin on account of her overly feminine form (not unlike the accusations leveled against Artemis by Hera in 36.66ff). In claiming to be more or better than her patron goddess, Aura commits an act of hubris not unlike that of Arachne against Athena, the Pierides against the Muses, or Marsyas against Apollo. Like other tales of hubris, Aura's story is disturbing. Rather than exacting vengeance herself, Artemis seeks out Nemesis, who with the aid of Eros arranges for Aura to be raped by the god Dionysus as punishment. In her distress, Aura takes to hunting down mortal men, lashes out in anger at figures of Aphrodite, and wanders in the wilderness. Eventually Aura gives birth to twins, one of whom she eats, and then, having thrown herself into a river, is transformed into a spring by Zeus. Her other child is rescued by Artemis.

Aura is known principally through Nonnos' lengthy treatment of her character in the *Dionysiaca*, particularly in Book 48. Nonnos devotes a substantial amount of narrative attention to Aura and her downfall, and two passages treat her verbal and physical molestation of Artemis in particular. They stand as an excellent example of the overt sexualization of a female individual through female eyes.



DIONYSIACA 48.335-369

- 335 She, whiling away the midday hour, <sup>preserved<sup>guarded> the virgin-loving
sacredness of her <sup>modesty<sup>shame>
in the <sup>outpouring<sup>river-mouth>, wading through its rivulets
- 337 with <sup>careful<sup>frugal> steps, and from her foot up to her head,
- 339 raising up her <sup>frock<sup>shift>, wetted just at the hem, little by little,
- 338 on each side squeezing together her feet along with her twin thighs,
- 340 [measure] by measure the maiden cleansed her whole
<sup>concealed<sup>covered> body.

But, peering sideways through the water, that inconsiderate Aura,
with the <sup>daring<sup>bold> eyes of her unashamed face,
took measure of the <sup>holy<sup>chaste> body of the unviewable maiden,



- 335 ἡ δὲ μεσημβρίζουσα ... σέβας φιλοπάρθενον αἰδοῦς
ἐν προχοαῖς ἐφύλαξε, διερπύζουσα ῥοάων
- 337 ἵχνεσι φειδομένοισι, καὶ ἐκ ποδὸς ἄχρι καρήνου
- 339 ἀκροβαφῇ κατὰ βαιὸν ἀναστείλασα χιτῶνα,
- 338 ἀμφιπερισφίγγουσα πόδας διδυμάονι μηρῷ,
- 340 κρυπτόμενον μετρηδὸν ὅλον δέμας ἔκλυσε κούρη.
λοξὰ δὲ παππαίνουσα δι' ὕδατος ἄσκοπος Αὔρη
τολμηροῖς βλεφάροισιν ἀναιδῆτοιο προσώπου
ἀγνὸν ἀθηήτοιο δέμας διεμέτρεε κούρης,

NOTES

A voyeuristic description of Artemis as she bathes, and Aura's abuse of her.

48.335, 351 *virgin-loving*: see note 2.122 above.

48.341 *inconsiderate*: some editors replace ἄσκοπος, 'inconsiderate', with εὔσκοπος (Rouse 1940), meaning 'watchful'. I prefer the former, in that the ἀ-, 'in-', retains the sense of ill-intent in the gaze of Aura, which is illustrated throughout the passage, whereas εὖ-, 'good-', suggests something more well-meaning.

48.343 *unviewable maiden*: recall here both the care which Artemis takes to avoid exposing her body as she bathes (48.335–40), as well as the story of Actaeon, which illustrates that even unintentional viewership of the goddess' body constitutes a severe transgression (Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 3.30), and the similar story of Siphon (Antoninus Liberalis *Metamorphoses* 17).

⟨looking upon
eyeing up⟩ the divine ⟨image
appearance⟩ of her chaste
⟨mistress
queen⟩;

345 and unfolding from her outstretched palms to her feet,
the virgin Aura swam alongside the swimming deity.

.....

half-visible on the inner part of the riverbank, the ⟨unending
eternal⟩ one
⟨wrung
wiped⟩ the moist drops from her hair,

Artemis ⟨the huntress
the Wild⟩; and beside her ⟨the huntgirl
wild⟩ Aura,

350 fondling her breasts [m], ⟨hissed
shrieked⟩ a ⟨blasphemous
god-fighting⟩ utterance;
“Artemis, you only have the virgin-loving name of a maiden,



θέσκελον εισορώσα σαόφρονος εἶδος ἀνάσσης·
345 καὶ πόδας ἀπλώσασα τιτανομένων παλαμάτων
δαίμονι νηχομένη συνενήχeto παρθένος Αὔρη.

.....

ἡμιφανῆς ἀτέλεστος ἔσω ποταμηίδος ὄχθης
ἰκμαλέας ῥαθάμιγγας ἀποσμήξασα κομάτων
“Ἄρτεμις ἀγροτέρη· σχεδόθεν δέ οἱ ἀγρότις Αὔρη
350 μαζοὺς ἀμφαφώσα θεημάχον ἴαχε φωνήν·
“Ἄρτεμι, μούνον ἔχεις φιλοπάρθενον οὔνομα κούρης,

48.346–7 Some editors follow a tradition in placing this lacuna after line 348 (Rouse 1940), however I follow Keydell (1959) and Vian (1976) in finding that the earlier placement accompanies a more obvious break in the narrative.

48.349 Ἀγροτέρα, ‘the Huntress / the Wild’, is a cult epithet of Artemis. The opposition of ἀγροτέρη and its diminutive, ἀγρότις, ‘huntgirl/wild’, in this line serves to highlight the difference in status between the goddess and her follower, and prepares the stage for Aura’s hubristic tirade.

48.350 *hissed/shrieked*: ἰάχῳ is generally encountered as a reference to loud vocalizations, such as shrieking or shouting, or to otherwise resonant sounds, such as the twang of a bowstring or proclamations. However, it can also suggest the hissing of steam produced when hot iron is quenched in water during the process of forging. This sense of the word not only suits the riverine setting of the passage, but also characterizes the hotheadedness of Aura as she molests the damp goddess, who has just emerged from her swim.

- 353 since, across your chest [n], drooped along the curved edge of
 your < ^{bosom}_{teat} > [f],
- 352 you have a < ^{femininity}_{tenderness} > of the Paphian [goddess], not a
 masculine breast [m] of Athena,
- 354 and your cheeks < ^{emit}_{shoot} > rosy sparks;
- 355 then in plying the body of a longing-struck goddess,
 you too should rule over < ^{sexual unions}_{weddings} > with lush-haired
 Cythereia,
 and < ^{receive}_{entertain} > some bridegroom in your chambers; and if
 you wish,
 sleep beside Hermes and Ares; leave Athena;
 and, if you are willing, take up the < ^{bolts}_{arrows} > and bow of the Erotes,
- 360 if you would < ^{ply}_{seek after} > the passionate < ^{sting}_{madness} > of the
 arrow-plumed quiver.



- 353 ὅττι διὰ στέρνων κεχαλασμένον ἄντυγι θηλῆς
 352 θῆλυν ἔχεις Παφίης, οὐκ ἄρσενά μαζὸν Ἀθήνης,
 354 καὶ ῥοδέους σπινθῆρας ὀιστεύουσι παρειαί·
 355 ἀλλὰ δέμας μεθέπουσα ποθοβλήτοιο θεαίνης
 καὶ σὺ γάμων βασίλευε σὺν ἀβροκόμῳ Κυθερείῃ,
 δεξαμένη θαλάμοις τινὰ νυμφίον· ἦν δ' ἐθελήσης,
 Ἑρμείῃ παρίαυε καὶ Ἄρει· λείψον Ἀθήνην·
 ἦν δ' ἐθέλης, ἀνάειρε βέλος καὶ τόξον Ἑρώτων,
 360 εἰ μεθέπεις θρασὺν οἶστρον ὀιστοκόμοιο φαρέτρης.

48.353 *curved edge*: the use of ἄντυξ here to describe the curve of the female breast (θηλή) is an initially confusing choice, as in Homeric and Classical Greek the term is often encountered in connection with the shield and chariot, both implements belonging to the traditionally masculine occupations of athletics and war. The noun itself, however, is feminine in gender and generally refers to the curved edge or rim of any object.

48.353–2 *bosom/teat [f] ... femininity/tenderness*: in the Greek, these words are almost identical (θηλῆς and θήλυν), and occur right next to each other across the two lines.

48.352 *the Paphian*: Aphrodite. Paphos was a town in Cyprus famous for its temple to Aphrodite.

48.352 *breast [m]*: although μαστός is most commonly seen as a reference to female breasts, or as a means of describing something's roundness, it can refer to male breasts as well. Nonnos' use of this masculine noun is intentional, as it creates contrast with the feminine θηλή, translated here as 'bosom' or 'teat', which suggests that part of the breast which provides suck to an infant, the female nipple. Στέρνον, referring generally to the breast or chest, is a neuter noun which Nonnos utilizes to set up this opposition between feminine and masculine attributes in the voice of Aura: both Artemis and Athena have breasts, but Artemis' are of a female kind or shape, and Athena's a masculine. Note that Aura consistently uses μαστός to indicate masculine breasts in this passage, and one might be encouraged to understand each use as a reference to the pectoral muscles.

48.355 *the longing-struck goddess*: Aphrodite.

48.356 *Cythereia*: Aphrodite. Kythera, or Cythera, is an island located between the Greek mainland and Crete, and was held to be particularly sacred to Aphrodite.

48.358 *Ἀθήνην*: Keydell supplies <Ἀθήνη ...>. I follow Rouse (1940) and Vian (1976) in adopting the accusative rendering, which better understands Athena as the object of λείψον.

48.359 *Erotes*: winged love-gods and poetic derivations of Eros, the Erotes lack a distinct narrative mythology, but are often encountered in similar contexts to Eros, appearing as children and attendants of Aphrodite.

May your < image
appearance > be gracious; [but] I am much < better
tougher >
than you,

see how I direct a mighty body; behold, the masculine
form and the step swifter than Zephyros that is Aura's;
see, how her arms bulge; behold her breasts [m],

365 like unripe grapes [still] swelling [and] < unfeminine
athletic >; or perhaps
you might say

that yours are bursting with milky dew;

how do you ply such soft-skinned palms? How do your breasts [m]

not have some < round
circular > curve, such as those of Aura,

self-evident heralds of (unspoiled
unsullied
unplundered) maidenhood?"



ιλήκοι τεὸν εἶδος· ἐγὼ σέο μᾶλλον ἀρείων,
δέρκεο πῶς μεθέπω βριαρὸν δέμας· ἥνιδε μορφήν
ἄρσενά καὶ Ζεφύροιο θωώτερον ἵχνιον Αὔρης·
δέρκεο, πῶς σφριγώωσι βραχίονες· ἥνιδε μαζοὺς
365 ὄμφακας οἰδαίνοντας ἀθήλεας· ἦ τάχα φαίης,
ὅττι τεοὶ γλαγόεσσαν ἀναβλύζουσιν ἔερσην·
πῶς παλάμην μεθέπεις ἀπαλόχροα; πῶς σέο μαζοὶ
οὔ τινα κύκλον ἔχουσι περίτροχον, οἶά περ Αὔρης,
αὐτόματοι κήρυκες ἀσυλήτοιο κορείης;'

48.361 *May your image/appearance be gracious*: ἰλήκοι τεὸν εἶδος is a colloquial way of asking for mercy or compassion – much like ‘may you look upon me kindly’, which here stands as a sort of half-hearted appeal to the goddess that Aura seems otherwise intent on offending.

48.361 *better/tougher*: Aura here implies that she is the better virgin in that she is less feminine than Artemis.

48.363 *Zephyros*: god of the West-wind. Other wind divinities include Boreas (North-Wind), Notos (South-Wind), Euros (East-Wind), as well as Aura herself, ruling over the morning breeze and generally related to the Aurai, the nymphs of the breezes (Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 37.70ff, 47.302ff). Aura here uses the traditional narrative device of comparing herself to one of the winds in order to highlight her speed.

48.365 *unfeminine/athletic*: ‘unfeminine’ is the literal translation; as femininity is expressed as softness or weakness, being un-soft or un-weak is to be firm and strong, so – when talking about the body – athletic.

48.366 *bursting with milky dew*: ‘with’ is grammatically deceptive here. In the Greek the drops or dew (ἔρσα) is the direct object, which is burst or gushed by the breasts. Milk (γάλα or γάλαγος) carries with it certain unvirginal connotations due to its association with fertility and nursing or breastfeeding. One distinction between the female and male breast, which Nonnos is likely playing with here (see 48.353–352), is the ability of the female breast, or teat, to produce the milk on which young are suckled.

48.367 *breasts [m]*: this is the sole instance in this passage of μαστός being used in reference to Artemis, but the masculine noun serves to emphasize the type of breasts which the goddess does not have.

48.368 *round/circular curve*: of course, Artemis does have curved breasts, as Aura pointed out in 48.353, which causes a bit of a problem with interpretation here. Rather than a reference to the curved drooping of the bosom, which emphasizes a ripe, feminine breast in Aura’s mind, the roundness referred to by Aura in this line should be understood to suggest the pectoral musculature, which she believes herself to possess and Artemis to lack. Other contexts of κύκλος may also aid our understanding of this line, as κύκλος (like ἄντυξ in 48.353; see my note above) not only indicates the general shape of a ring or circle, but may also be found in reference to the shield, an implement of the traditionally masculine occupation of war. If read in opposition to the milky description of Artemis’ breasts in 48.366, κύκλος here is more easily understood with these masculine connotations in mind.

DIONYSIACA 48.420–423

420 But, by sneering with sharp speech, the <burdensome
heavy-mouthed>
child of Lelantos <vexes
grieves> me, that bad-virgin Aura.
But how can I recount all this to you? For I am ashamed
to describe the <shame
disgrace> of my limbs and the <insults
slanders> of
my breasts [m].



420 ἀλλά με κερτομέουσα βαρύστομος ὀξεί μύθῳ
ἤκαχε Ληλάντοιο πάις, δυσπάρθενος Αὔρη.
ἀλλὰ τί σοι τάδε πάντα δίδωμαι; αἰδέομαι γὰρ
αἴσχος ἐμῶν μελέων ἐνέπειν καὶ ὀνειδέα μαζῶν·

NOTES

An extract from Artemis' conversation with Nemesis following her assault.

48.421 *bad-virgin*: while the prefix $\delta\upsilon\sigma\text{-}$ is best translated into English as 'bad', it brings with it an additional sense of impurity. Artemis does not mean here that Aura is bad at being a virgin, or that she is bad in character and also a virgin, but rather that her behavior has tarnished the idea or virtue of virginity itself. In his narrative of the interaction between Aura and Artemis in Book 48, Nonnos thus presents two attributes that limit the definition of a virgin. Firstly, from Aura's critique of Artemis' appearance we learn that a virgin should not inspire lustful behavior in others. This idea is also echoed earlier in Hera's questioning of Artemis' virginity in 36.66–74. Secondly, a virgin should not act upon, let alone possess, lustful urges herself, as Aura the bad-virgin ($\delta\upsilon\sigma\pi\acute{\alpha}\rho\theta\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$) does.



LEVERHULME
TRUST

Sapphizdat
PORTKNOCKIE