FROM *MYTHOS* TO *LOGOS*. PROGRESS OF EROTIC CUSTOMS IN LONGUS' *POIMENIKÀ*

Abstract: *My paper intends to demonstrate that ancient novels, though often employing mythical patterns, sought to mark a progression away from the ambiguous ethics that informed issues of eroticism in most of the mythical tradition by moving toward a more egalitarian conception of the relationship between the sexes. This progression is particularly evident in Longus'* Poimenikà.

In the first three books of this novel we find three mythical excursus *which describe virgins undergoing a process of metamorphosis in order to escape a god's rape or other kinds of abuse. The god Pan is regarded as the emblem of* eros*, purely physical desire, which is something sterile and degrading. On the contrary, the last book offers a positive model of the relationship between men and women: Daphnis and Chloe's love reaches marital union, the proper place to experience sex as a divertissement with the crucial goal being that of procreation.*

The dichotomy between mythos *and* logos *is implied earlier in the novel. If the* excursus *are classified as myths and they conclude with the virgins losing their human status, Longus underlines that his story is a truthful* logos*, and he gives it a happy ending: Chloe gains a role in society. Against the trend of looking at* mythos *as a container of ideal behavioural schemes and at a mythical Golden Age, Longus celebrates the development of erotic customs in his time through the means of a recent mimetic literary genre consisting of human characters. Although the* Poimenikà *take place in an idealised past, they give account of a contemporary social reality that is more respectful of female volition and they evoke a yearning to substitute the primeval mythical erotic code with the hope of becoming the new paradigm for erotic literature.*

1. Introduction

In this paper I will talk about perspectives on the mythical past as they are expressed in Longus' *Poimenikà*, a novel written around the II century A.D. and better known as *Daphnis and Chloe*.

The *Poimenikà* are constructed on a series of parallelisms and oppositions (city vs. countryside, art vs. nature, experience vs. innocence). However, there is an opposition that has been neglected by many commentators and on which I aim to shed light: that is the contrast between an essentially positive view on the present and a disturbing representation of the mythical bucolic world. This is particularly clear in relation to the description of the erotic behavior of the young shepherds Daphnis and Chloe in comparison with the accounts on the bucolic god Pan, here presented as an ἀκόλαστος, a brutal figure incapable of controlling his instincts and sexual desires. As declared in the prologue, in this novel the experience of *eros* has a central role. Hence, by allusively stating an improvement in the erotic interactions between men and women in the 'present' of the fiction, the author wants to state the superiority of his time against the barbarity of a continuously evoked mythical age. Quite surprisingly, Longus recalls the mythical world not to nostalgically regret a lost Golden Age, but to cast a doubtful shadow on its alleged idyllic dimension. Yet on the other hand, he eventually recreates this dimension in his novel and sanctions the success of this model in the final scenes of his book.

2. Analysis of common structures of the three *excursus* in the *Poimenikà*

Each of the first three books of the *Poimenikà* includes a mythical *excursus*, significantly related to the others and to the novel as a whole by some common features.

The first story told in the *Poimenikà* is that of a young shepherdess, stolen of eight of her best cows and transformed into a ring-dove by the gods. It is Daphnis to tell this legend to Chloe during a break from their work in the pasture (1.27).

> [2] Once, my girl, there was a girl as beautiful as you who herded many cows in a wood, just as you do. She was a singer too, and her cows were entertained by her music; she herded them not by the stroke of a crook or the prod of a goad, but sitting beneath a pine and garlanded with pine twigs she would sing of Pan and Pytis, and the cows stayed in range of her voice. [3] Not far off a boy herded cows, and he too was fair and a singer like the girl. He vied with her in singing and countered with a voice as strong as a man's but as sweet as a boy's, and charming her height best cows into his own herd he herded them away. [4] The girl was distressed at the loss to her herd, the defeat of her song, and prayed to the gods to become a bird before she got home. The gods granted her prayer and turned her into this bird [a φάττα, cf. 1.27.1], a dweller in the mountains like the girl and musical like her. And to this day her song recounts her misfortune, that she is looking for her stray cows (transl. J. Henderson).

The second *excursus*, contained in the second book, is told by Lamon, Daphnis' foster father, during a sacrificial banquet. This time Pan is not just cursorily mentioned, but represents the protagonist of the myth, together with the Nymph Syrinx (2.34).

> [1] The syrinx was originally not an instrument but a fair maiden with a musical voice. She grazed goats, played with the Nymphs, and sang as she still does. As she was grazing, playing and singing, Pan approached her and tried to talk her into what he wanted by promising to make all her she-goats have twins. [2] But she scoffed at his love and refused to accept a lover who was not a full-fledged goat or a man. Pan started to chase her with force in mind. Syrinx started running from Pan and his force. When she tired from running, she hid in some reeds and vanished into a marsh. [3] Pan angrily cut away the reeds, could not find the girl, realized what had happened to her, and thought of the instrument after he had bound reeds together with wax, of unequal lengths just as their love had been unequal. And that was once a fair maiden is now a musical syrinx.

In the third *excursus*, contained in the third book, we find again Pan and a Nymph, Echo, as the protagonists of the myth (3.23).

> [1] Manifold is the race of the Nymphs, my girl: there are Meliae and Dryads and Heleii, all beautiful, all musical. One of them had a daughter, Echo, mortal in having a mortal father but beautiful in having a beautiful mother. [2] She was brought up by Nymphs and thought by Muses to play the syrinx and the pipes, <to sing> tunes for the lyre, tunes for the cithara, every kind of song. So when she reached the flower of maidenhood she danced with the Nymphs, she sang

with the Muses. She shunned all males, humans and gods alike, *loving her virginity* (translation mine). [3] Pan grew angry with the girl, being jealous of her music and unsuccessful at winning her beauty. He afflicted the shepherds and goatherds with madness, and they tore her apart like dogs or wolves and scattered her limbs, still singing, over all the earth. [4] As a favor to Nymphs, Earth hid all her limbs and preserved their music, and by will of the Muses, she has a voice and imitates everything just as that girl once did: gods, humans, instruments, animals. She even imitates Pan himself as he plays the syrinx, [5] and when he hears her he jumps up and chases over the hills, yearning only to know who his invisible pupil is.

Significantly, these three *excursus* share some common features; moreover, they have a similar narrative structure, a pastoral setting and an aitiological purpose. In each of them we read about a beautiful maiden who lives quietly absorbed by virtuous activities: herding the cows just through the power of music or playing instruments, dancing and singing. This idyllic framework is eventually broken down and the maiden is transformed into a non human being by the gods. The status of *parthenoi* (παρθένοι) associates the shepherdess with the Nymphs Syrinx and Echo. There is a *climax* in the importance attributed to *parthenia* (παρθενία) by the three maidens. While it is simply stated through the formula παρθένος καλὴ (2.34.1) that the shepherdess and Syrinx were beautiful maidens, implying that for them virginity was a temporary status perhaps linked to their young age, in the case of Echo the attachment to παρθενία reveals all the characteristics of a virginity obsession typical of some figures of Greek mythology such as Hippolytus, Atlanta, Artemis and Athena. Echo "shunned all males, humans and gods alike, loving her virginity" (φιλοῦσα τὴν παρθενίαν, 3.23.2). I believe that, because of this haughty bearing, the punishment of the god Pan is much more tremendous for this Nymph and is configured as a group violence, according to the logic: Echo shunned all males, all males punish Echo.

The three maidens have in common remarkable musical abilities,[1] but it is also true that in the account of their tragic metamorphosis music can represent a black mark.

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[1] ἦν δὲ ἄρα καὶ ᾠδικὴ (1.27.2); παρθένος καλὴ καὶ τὴν φωνὴν μουσική (2.34.1); παιδεύεται δὲ ὑπὸ Μουσῶν συρίζειν, αὐλεῖν, τὰ πρὸς λύραν, τὰ πρὸς κιθάραν, πᾶσαν ᾠδήν (3.23.2); Εἴκασεν ἄν […] τοὺς ἀνέμους συρίττειν ταῖς πίτυσιν ἐμπνέοντας (1.23.2).

The shepherdess loses the best part of her herd because she vies in singing with a young herdsman whose voice is "as strong as a man's but as sweet as a boy's" (1.27.3). One of the reasons for Pan's anger against Echo is her outstanding musical skill (do not forget that Pan is himself a musical god).

In the mythical world evoked by Longus, there is no other way to escape rape or dishonor than to be turned into a non human being. Even though the maidens do not lose their virginity, they have to give up their human status and are defeated in a violent attack involving the loss of the completeness of their body. This process of dismemberment is symbolically transferred to the loss of part of the herd in the case of the first *excursus*,[2] whereas it is more explicit in the myth of Syrinx, whose metamorphosed body is cut into pieces by Pan,[3] and in that of Echo, who undergoes an actual process of σπαραγμός, perhaps recalling the myth of Dionysus Zagreus.[4] I believe that this image of dismemberment wants to suggest and substitute that of the loss of the *integritas*, a Latin word probably not unknown to the writer, a Sophist who read Latin authors and perhaps spoke Latin. *Integritas* has two meanings: the literal one is *completeness* (especially of the body, according to Cicero's use),[5] the figurative one is *virginitas*. Having failed to have the *parthenìa* (or better the *integritas*) of the Nymphs, Pan is satisfied with breaking the material *integritas* of their bodies. There is always an act of violence behind the metamorphosis: a sexual assault, a horrible murder in which the *parthenos* is helpless and alone against a group of mad and raging men, or a singing contest that the boy wins thanks to the strength of his voice. The only element which is eventually saved, even beyond the moment of the maidens' transformation, is their musical capacity, which grows gradually towards an immaterial

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[2] καὶ τῶν βοῶν ὀκτὼ τὰς ἀρίστας ἐς τὴν ἰδίαν ἀγέλην θέλξας ἀπεβουκόλησεν (1.27.3).
[3] Πὰν τοὺς δόνακας ὀργῇ τεμών (2.34.3).
[4] Οἱ δὲ ὥσπερ κύνες ἢ λύκοι διασπῶσιν αὐτὴν καὶ ῥίπτουσιν εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἔτι ᾄδοντα τὰ μέλη (3.23.3).
[5] lit. completeness (*corporis*, Cic. *Fin.* 2.11.34); fig. innocence or chastity (Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.25).

dimension: the shepherdess gets an animal body;[6] Syrinx is transformed in the characteristic musical instrument of Pan and shepherds,[7] while Echo becomes a pervasive acoustic phenomenon: her ability to play any instrument is turned into the ability to reproduce any sound, even the music and the voice of her killer Pan.[8]

3. Fetish of virginity and dehumanizing desires

As Goldhill has pointed out in his *Foucault's Virginity*, staying a virgin until marriage was a *fetish* in the Imperial Age (1995:3-4). The importance of virginity was valid not only, as one would expect, among the Christians, but also in pagan ambits, as the Ancient Greek Novel clearly shows. The *Poimenikà* are particularly interesting in this regard, because the issue of *parthenia* is contemporarily explored in relation to the mythical erotic code (in second diegetic level narratives) and in relation to the 'reality' of the story (at a first diegetic level). A past where brutal sexual assaults happened at the hands of the gods is opposed to a timeless present where beautiful maidens like Chloe are still in relative danger, but they eventually come pure to the θάλαμος.

I think we have enough textual evidence of this concern for virginity. In the novel, Echo personifies the virginal adolescent in love with her chastity and blind to men's charm. Another model - that of illicit sex before marriage - is proposed by the courtesan Lycaenium, the woman who initiates Daphnis into sexual activity. She supposes there is no chance for the young shepherds for regular marriage and so she exhorts Daphnis to possess Chloe in the deep of the woods. The courtesan depicts the moment of

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[6] Πείθονται οἱ θεοὶ καὶ ποιοῦσι τήνδε τὴν ὄρνιν, ὄρειον ὡς ἡ παρθένος, μουσικὴν ὡς ἐκείνη (1.27.4).
[7] ἡ τότε παρθένος καλὴ νῦν ἐστι σῦριγξ μουσική (2.34.3).
[8] Καὶ τὰ μέλη Γῆ χαριζομένη Νύμφαις ἔκρυψε πάντα. Καὶ ἐτήρησε τὴν μουσικὴν καὶ γνώμη Μουσῶν ἀφίησι φωνὴν καὶ μιμεῖται πάντα, καθάπερ τότε ἡ κόρη, θεούς, ἀνθρώπους, ὄργανα, θηρία· μιμεῖται καὶ αὐτὸν συρίττοντα τὸν Πᾶνα (3.23.4).

defloration as a bloody, traumatic and painful one, in accordance with the tradition.[9]

Keeping one's virginity could signify money as well. This is the point of view of Nape, Chloe's foster mother, who wants to "marry Chloe off and not to keep a girl her age at home any longer, when pretty soon she would lose her maidenhood in the pasture and make a man of some shepherd in return for apples or roses" (3.25.2). She aims to make a good match and cash in a great amount of richness to put it aside for her own natural child. Actually, Chloe's virginity is endangered twice in the novel. In the first book the herdsman Dorcon does not even come to touch her; his clumsy attempt miserably fails and the girl's innocence is preserved, since she and Daphnis exchange the assault with a shepherds' game (1.20-21). In the fourth and last book, Chloe falls victim of the designs of another herdsman, the rude Lampis. This man first destroys the wonderful garden cultivated by Daphnis and his family in order to get rid of his rival Daphnis (4.7.3-4) and then kidnaps and tries to rape Chloe (4.28-29). He is stopped just in time by another ambiguous character, Gnathon, a parasite who had previously assaulted Daphnis, proposing a homosexual experience to him. The episode of the destruction of the garden has symbolic implications that the connection with the fragment 105b by Sappho, the intertext of this sequence, can clarify.[10] In Sappho the hyacinth trampled down by shepherds represents the wasted virginity. Through this allusion, Longus offers us another implicit image of substitution: Chloe's virginity is saved, but the flowers are dug up, broken off and trampled down.

As the study of Borgeaud (1988:155-6 [1979]) has revealed, the god Pan – as the goat, his sacred animal – "displays an exaggerated and distorted sexuality, which never achieves its object. Indeed, this god is paradoxically sterile". This statement is

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[9] "[2] When Chloe has this sort of wrestling match with you, she will scream and cry and lie bleeding heavily [as if murdered]. [3] But don't be afraid of the blood, though when you convince her to surrender herself to you, bring her to this spot so that if she yells no one will hear it, if she weeps no one will see it, and if she bleeds she can wash in the spring. And just remember that I made you a man before Chloe did" (3.19.1-3).

[10] οἴαν τὰν ὑάκινθον ἐν ὤρεσι/ ποίμενες ἄνδρες/ πόσσι καταστείβοισι, χάμαι δέ/ τὸ πόρφυρον ἄνθος ... [κεῖται].

confirmed by the three *excursus* analysed: Pan never reaches his goal and has to make do with acts of pure violence to calm down his instincts. Longus, as Epstein has remarked (2007:37), revolutionary puts on the same level divine, human and animal experience of sex, but eventually identifies the more correct model in the relationship between men and women.

4. The *pars construens*: the myth of Chloe

If it is true that the *Poimenikà* are constructed on a series of parallelisms, we may ask which is the *excursus* of the fourth and last book. We do not get any actual digression. The rhythm has changed and we have the sensation that everything is about to happen. There is no time to stop and tell a myth. Indeed, I would like to demonstrate that this whole book can be considered as the account on Chloe, a *pars construens* opposed to the *pars destruens* which has seen Pan as protagonist. That the story of Chloe is a *mythos* is told once in the novel by the god Eros, quoted by Pan, who has just intervened to save the girl from Methymnaean raiders: "you dragged from a shrine a girl of whom Eros intends to make a *mythos*".[11] However, I think we have to take this word as a synonym of "story". Indeed, the dichotomy between *mythos* and *logos* is implied earlier in the novel. If the *excursus* are classified as myths, Longus remarks that his novel is a truthful *logos* through the words of the *erotodidaskalos* Philetas.[12]

If the approach to sexual sphere reveals its traumatic and violent side to the maidens of the *excursus*, we can read a joyful description of Daphnis and Chloe's first wedding night at the very end of the novel (4.40).

The young shepherds consummate marriage in the θάλαμος, after their union has been approved by their natural parents. An image of breaking is here evoked: people in

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[11] ἀπεσπάσατε δὲ βωμῶν παρθένον, ἐξ ἧς Ἔρως μῦθον ποιῆσαι θέλει (2.27.2).
[12] Πάνυ ἐτέρφθησαν ὥσπερ μῦθον οὐ λόγον ἀκούοντες καὶ ἐπυνθάνοντο τί ἐστί ποτε ὁ Ἔρως, πότερα παῖς ἢ ὄρνις, καὶ τί δύναται (2.7.1).

the bridal procession begin "to sing with voices rough and harsh, as if they were breaking up the ground with pitchforks instead of singing a wedding hymn (ὑμέναιον)". However, nothing remains of the brutality of the mythical erotic code proper of Pan and the pastoral world. Rather, we can note that Chloe's condition is improved after marriage: she has been recognised by her birth parents and thus, no longer foster child of poor shepherds but natural child of rich gentlemen, has become the owner of the land where she previously served. Furthermore, she is now independent from her family and Longus anticipates with a flash-forward that she will give birth to two children. At last, she understands also how to put into effect the third remedy to the ἐρωτικός νόσος suggested at the beginning of the second book by the *erotodidaskalos* Philetas. She loses her virginity and innocence, but gains the knowledge of *eros*, that is the most relevant object of the protagonists' research.

5. Progress of Erotic Customs in the Imperial Age

In the last section of this paper, I would like to underline that the purpose of Longus is to mark a progression away from the ambiguous ethics that informed issues of eroticism in most of the mythical tradition by moving toward a more egalitarian conception of the relationship between the sexes. Even though it has been often stated that the *Poimenikà* are set in a timeless pastoral world, slightly resembling the social, historical and cultural features of a specific epoch, I wish to point out that some considerations implied in this book are to be related to the social context in which the author lived and wrote. Brigitte Egger (1994:267) has wrote an interesting essay on women's condition in the Imperial Age, acknowledging a considerable change in Greco-Egyptian marital law, definitely *frauen freundlich*, if compared to classical Attic

norm.[13] For the heroines of the novel marriage is a way to sexual and sentimental freedom. That is the case of Chloe too.

Just some conclusive remarks to ground my thesis: what we call the "myth of Chloe" has a happy end, while the three *excursus* set in a mythical past culminate in tragedy. Against the trend of looking at *mythos* as a container of ideal behavioral schemes and at a mythical Golden Age, Longus celebrates the development of erotic customs in his time through the means of a recent mimetic literary genre consisting of human characters, a *logos*. Thus modern fiction is opposed to ancient myths. Although the *Poimenikà* take place in an idealised past, they give account of a contemporary social reality that is more respectful of female volition and they evoke a yearning to substitute the primeval mythical erotic code with the hope of becoming the new paradigm for erotic literature. Finally, after having mixed the plans of erotic dynamics among humans, gods and animals, the author identifies the only acceptable model of love in the male-female relationship. The mythical idea of the gods who seduce or harass young maidens is seen as something terrible and primitive.

To conclude, let us consider briefly the role of Pan in the novel. At first, the god personifies *eros* as purely physical desire, which is something sterile and degrading, against the model offered by the protagonists, for which marital union is the proper place to experience sex as a *divertissement* with the crucial goal being that of procreation. However, at the very end of the novel, we find Daphnis and Chloe "giving Pan a temple to dwell instead of the pine, dubbing him Pan the Soldier" (4.39.2). The refunctionalization of the god corresponds to the transfer of his sexual energy into the channel of martial force. The same had happened with Gnathon, the pederast architect of the rescue of Chloe from Lampis. Everyone obtains his own proper place in the world of Longus and, in every case, we must expect a happy end.

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[13] See also Johne (1996), Jones (2012) and Konstan (2014).

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