

“A BIRD IN THE BUSH”

The erotic and literary implications of bucolic and avian imagery in two related episodes of Longus’

Daphnis and Chloe

Longus’ romance is distinguished for its rustic, pastoral imagery and for the pervasive workings of the god Eros: Longus fills his landscape appropriately with a variety of plants and birds whose presence enlivens and complements the novel’s bucolic setting. Certain species of birds that appear in Longus were popular in Greco-Roman literature as erotic symbols; hence their appearance becomes even more congenial to a novel in which winged Eros and the sexual awakening of the two heroes play so prominent a role. My purpose in this article is to examine the bucolic and avian imagery in the Philetas-Eros episode of Book 2 (especially 2.4–6) and the Lykainion episode of Book 3 (in particular 3.15–17, 20). These two passages, as will be shown, are linked by several common images. Furthermore, both episodes, which stress the force of Eros and the power of sexuality, contain several suggestive allusions. Recent work on Longus¹⁾ has emphasized his often tongue-in-cheek reminiscences of well-known works representing epic and pastoral. There are also passing allusions to works of history, rhetoric and, possibly, Attic Comedy²⁾. My hope is to provide, within this paper’s limited scope, another assessment of Longus’ use of his sources, which may shed more light on the novelist’s literary purpose.

The *locus amoenus* and the *laus horti*, as literary and philosophical *topoi*, have received lengthy critical treatment, which need not be reproduced here³⁾. We may consider briefly, however, the broader implications of *Daphnis and Chloe*’s bucolic imagery.

1) See especially R. L. Hunter, *A Study of Daphnis & Chloe* (Cambridge 1983); also M. Brioso Sánchez, *Notas sobre Longo*, *Habis* 10–11 (1979–80) 105–118.

2) Hunter (n. 1 above), pp. 7, 12, 21, 69 and 70.

3) E. R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Munich 1961), pp. 192–209, provides a good summary of the main features of the *locus amoenus* in Greco-Roman epic and bucolic poetry. H. Riikonen, *The Attitude of Roman Poets to the Countryside*, *Arctos* 10 (1976) 75–85, offers a more specialized

The novel takes place in a lush pastoral setting; rural quietude serves as a foil to certain outside, "urban" forces which at times irrupt violently into the peaceful countryside, a typical *locus amoenus* filled with both vegetable and animal life including a number of birds⁴). The story of Daphnis and Chloe progresses with the seasons. In each season we can note various activities that have to do with birds: their singing betokens the rebirth of spring (1.9.1; 3.12.3); in the summer they chirp and pursue insects (1.26); in the wintertime birds are trapped for food (3.5 ff.). The epiphany of Eros in Philetas' garden takes place in autumn, the time of harvest. The god is likened to a number of raptorial and other birds. Indeed the flight and deftness of birds become suitable metaphors for human as well as divine activity: Daphnis watches a boat move with the swiftness of a bird (3.22.1); the Mytileneans set upon the Methymnaeans like starlings or jackdaws (2.17.3)⁵).

Again, this is not the place for a lengthy discussion of the full implications of earth and natural forces as erotic images. To state it broadly, however, the land had long and wide currency as a sexual metaphor⁶). Birds too provided ready erotic symbols⁷). The winged phallus often appears in ancient iconography, symbolizing that organ's ability to rise in the air; similarly we find many examples of surrealistic phallic birds on Attic vases⁸) and of winged phallic *tintinnabula* that survive from Pompeii⁹). Eros in his cosmogonic manifestations has a close affinity with birds¹⁰), while the more popular representation of the god is that of the winged putto. Both aspects of Eros are combined in *Daphnis and Chloe* 2.4–6. Several

treatment in Latin literature. See Hunter (n. 1 above), pp. 66–67, for Longus' borrowings from Greek bucolic prose.

4) Hunter (n. 1 above), p. 21, regards Ar. Pax and Ach. as fitting analogues to Longus, especially in their contrasts between war and peaceful countryside.

5) Cf. *Il.* 17. 755.

6) E.g. κῆπος, ἄλοξ and λεμών. For a discussion of these and other agricultural metaphors in Attic Comedy, see J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (New Haven and London 1975), pp. 135–136.

7) See again Henderson (n. 6 above), p. 147. The fullest treatments of birds in Greek (and Roman) literary and other sources are given in D. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (1936; rpt. Hildesheim 1966), and J. Pollard, *Birds in Greek Life and Myth* (London 1977).

8) See K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass. 1978), R414.

9) Depicted in C. Johns, *Sex or Symbol: Erotic Images of Greece and Rome* (Austin 1982), pp. 68 and 70.

10) Discussed in H. H. O. Chalk, *Eros and the Lesbian Pastorals of Longos*, *JHS* 80 (1960) 36. Positive Orphic implications in *Daphnis and Chloe* seem scant, however. See again Hunter (n. 1 above), p. 32, and M. Berti, *Sulla interpretazione mistica del romanzo di Longo*, *SCO* 16 (1967) 343–349.

of the birds that appear in the novel are popularly associated with love or sexuality: the wood-dove (1.27; 3.5.3) can be a term of endearment¹¹); the swallow (1.26; 2.5.1) functions as a lubricious metaphor in Attic Comedy and elsewhere¹²); the partridge (2.4.3) often denotes salacity¹³); and the goose (3.16.2) is an erotic bird¹⁴) sacred to the ithyphallic god Priapus¹⁵). The nightingale, an apparent sexual double-entendre in Attic Comedy¹⁶), appears several times in *Daphnis and Chloe* (1.14.2; 3.12.4, 3.24.2). Birds made suitable love gifts¹⁷). Dorcon woos Chloe with a present of young mountain birds (ὄρνιθων ὀρείων νεοττούς, 1.15.3).

It is evident at the outset that Longus had a great store of erotic pastoral, agricultural and avian imagery from various sources to draw on. Let us now consider these images specifically as they appear in the Eros and Lykainion passages of *Daphnis and Chloe*, Books 2 and 3.

The episode featuring the god of love begins appropriately with a description of Philetas' fertile garden, which is thickly shaded (συνηροφῆς γὰρ καὶ κατάσκιος, 2.3.4) and watered by three fountains. The birds come each morning to the garden to feed and sing. If you took away the wall, says Philetas, you would think that you were in a grove (ἄλλος). Thus the garden, even in the lush atmosphere of *Daphnis and Chloe* as a whole, is set apart by a barrier, and is therefore special. It is in fact a *locus sacer* which Philetas enters (εἰσελθόντι, 2.4.1), beneath the roses and myrtles. Eros first appears in the pomegranate and myrtle groves holding myrtles and pomegranates in his hand. He escapes the pursuing and love-smitten Philetas easily, like a bird, runs beneath the poppies and rose bushes and hides himself in the myrtle like a partridge chick (πέρδικος νεοττός, 2.4.3). Eros emits a loud, clear laugh unlike the sound of a nightingale, a swallow or a swan that has grown old like Philetas (2. 5. 1). Later the winged deity springs up

11) E.g. Ar. Plut. 1011.

12) Ar. Lys. 770, 775; Poll. 2. 174; Suda; cf. in Latin Juv. Sat. 6. The diminutive Chelidonium is an appropriate hetaera-name (Luc. Dial. meretr. 80,10).

13) Arist. GA 746b1, 749b7; Ael. 4. 1, 7. 19.

14) E.g. Ael. 5. 29, 7. 41; Ar. Av. 707 (a lover's gift); Artem. Onir. 4. 83 (in dream prophecy a goose portends the birth of a wanton woman); Plin. N. H. 28 (19). 80 (on goose fat as an aphrodisiac).

15) Petron. Sat. 137. 1-3.

16) Ar. Av. 207, 664.

17) Cockerels and other birds were offered by Greek men to boys. See Dover (n. 8 above), p. 92; also Petron. Sat. 85. 5-6, where Eumolpus promises the boy of Pergamum a pair of doves in return for sexual favors.

into the myrtle grove and, like a young nightingale (ἀηδόνας νεοπτός, 2.6.1), skips from branch to branch to the top of the myrtle tree. Eros' appearance makes his nimble and darting, that is birdlike, motion appropriate. The god is called ποιμίλον τι χοῦμα . . . καὶ ἀθήρατον, i.e. "a clever thing and not to be caught" (2.4.3). Certainly this attests to his nimbleness and subtlety. We may add that the adjective ποιμίλος could refer to birdsong¹⁸) and that a ποιμίλις was a species of bird which, according to Aristotle¹⁹), ate larks' eggs. Eros' laughter, strangely, resembles neither that of a nightingale nor a swallow nor an old swan. The swallow could be described as λάλος²⁰), but in fact had a barbarous twitter²¹). The nightingale, on the other hand, was the proverbial songbird²²) and could be used as a metaphor for poetic strains²³). The swan, whose voice as well as its white color made it sacred to Apollo²⁴), was itself called μελωδός²⁵). The so-called aged swan might recall the myth that wild swans sang before they died²⁶). Longus seems in fact to be exhibiting a rather encyclopaedic knowledge of birdsong and behavior here. His description of nimble Eros skipping about the myrtle like a young nightingale is strikingly similar to a Theocritean account of Erotes flitting in the trees like nightingale chicks testing their fledgling wings²⁷).

Certainly Longus' extensive and "literary" avian metaphors are meant to underline Eros' status as some remarkable kind of bird, perhaps even the representative of the strains of song, which would have special relevance to Philetas' popular reputation as the father of Hellenistic poetry²⁸). But we can perhaps detect some pointed allusions to sexuality. Let us recall, first of all, the general ambience of Eros' garden. The foliage and plants amid which he appears possess an erotic significance: roses and figs especially (2.3.4–5) are common symbols of the female genitals²⁹); the pome-

18) E.g. Apoll. Rh. 4. 1298.

19) HA 609a6.

20) AP 9. 122; Nonn. Dion. 2. 134; Ar. Ran. 92–93, 680–681.

21) E.g. Aesch. Ag. 1050–52; AP 9. 70.

22) E.g. Aesch. S. 60, Ag. 1142; Soph. El. 107; Eur. Rh. 546.

23) Callim. Ep. 2. 5.

24) Hymn. Hom. 21; see also Pollard (n. 7 above), p. 146.

25) Eur. I. T. 1103.

26) Ael. 9. 36, 5. 34.

27) Id. 15. 120–122 and see Hunter (n. 1 above), p. 60; cf. Theocr. Id. 29. 14–15 and Bion 13 (Gow) in which a young bird catcher tries to ambush Eros who hops about in the trees like a bird.

28) Hunter (n. 1 above), pp. 76 ff.

29) See Henderson (n. 6 above), p. 135; V. Buchheit, Feigensymbolik im

granate seed (cf. *ξοιαί*, 2.4.5), according to Hesychius³⁰), indicates the female pudenda. The myrtleberry (*μύρτον*, 2.3.5) is linked with Aphrodite³¹) and is a sexual double-entendre in Attic Comedy³²). Myrrhine (“Myrtle”), aside from being a courtesan’s proper name³³), may denote the male pubic hair³⁴). Eros is expressly compared to a young partridge and a nightingale chick. The partridge, as I have mentioned above, was commonly regarded as salacious.

Given this, then, we may reconsider in particular the description of Eros in *Daphnis and Chloe* 2.6.1 as he escapes from Philetas: ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἀνήλατο καθάπερ ἀηδόνας νεοττός ἐπὶ τὰς μυρρίνας καὶ κλάδον ἀμείβων ἐκ κλάδου διὰ τῶν φύλλων ἀνεῖρπεν εἰς ἄκρον, and its already recognized resemblance to Theocr. Id. 15. 120–122:

οἱ δέ τε κῶροι ὑπερπωτῶνται Ἔρωτες
οἷοι ἀηδονιδῆες ἀεξομενᾶν ἐπὶ δένδρῳ
πωτῶνται περὺγων πειρῶμενοι ὄζον ἅπ’ ὄζω.

Let us note that Longus has introduced a specific tree, the myrtle, and that he has glossed the unusual ἀηδονιδῆες with good Attic ἀηδόνας νεοττός³⁵). Ἀηδονίδες is Housman’s conjectural emendation of Callim. Aet. 1.16: there it would mean “little poems” (cf. Ep. 2.5: ἀηδῶν). But the word “nightingale,” or possibly “little nightingale,” seems to have had an erotic connotation. Hesychius gives the following lexical entry for ἀηδονίς: τόπος ἔνθα (οὐκ εἰσὶν) ἡδοναί, ἐργαστήριον, καὶ τὸ τῆς γυναικὸς αἰδοῖον παρ’ Ἀρχιλόχῳ³⁶). Longus’ own gloss might be considered “Archilochian,” especially in light of the close proximity of ἀηδόνας νεοττός to μυρρίνας and of the erotic ambience of Philetas’ garden.

Daphnis and Chloe, after being told the story of Eros by

antiken Epigramm, RhM 103 (1960) 200–229; E. O’Connor, A Note on *fici suavitatis* in Priapea 69, Mnem. 35 (1982) 340–342.

30) S. v. κόκκος.

31) W. E. McCulloh, Longus (New York 1970), pp. 86–90, discusses the quasi-religious and erotic significance of several plants in *Daphnis and Chloe*, particularly the myrtle, pomegranate, ivy, vine and oak.

32) As the *pudenda muliebrīa*, see Ar. Lys. 1004; Poll. 2. 174.

33) Ar. Lys. 69; Eup. 50 K.-A. (adn.); Timocl. 27.3 K.-A.

34) Ar. Eq. 964.

35) Cf. again *πέροδικος νεοττός*, D. & C 2. 4. 2, and *ὄρνιθων . . . νεοττούς*, D & C 1. 15. 3, and see n. 36 below.

36) I follow the reading of M. L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci*, vol. 1, ad Archil. 263. The form of the lemma ἀηδονίς (ἀηδονιδεύς, ἀηδόνιον) is uncertain, however. Latte athetizes the gloss καὶ τὸ τῆς . . . Ἀρχιλόχῳ after ἀηδόνιον = ἀηδόνας νεοττός.

Philetas, ask whether the god is a boy or a bird and what he can do (2.7.1). They are then given an “Orphic” account of Eros’ nature and power. But Love has been described also as a mischievous putto, who combines human and avian characteristics. Here the comparison of Eros specifically to a young nightingale carries with it suggestive connotations. Theocritus’ passage about the flitting Erotes constitutes merely a single facet of the Adonis festival described in Id. 15. Longus takes that Theocritean reference and modifies it, thereby transmuting it into an integral part of the Philetas passage which, with its many erotic overtones, conveys more strikingly the specifically sexual force of Eros-as-bird. Further, the image of the love-god *qua* bird, especially nightingale, has “musical” or poetic implications. We have observed already how the nightingale’s status as songbird *par excellence* is enhanced by the connection of Eros-as-ἀηδόνος νεοττός with Philetas, the putative father of Hellenistic poetry. Later in the novel (3.12.4 and 3.24.2) Daphnis and Chloe “vie with the nightingales” in music³⁷. This might represent another, more allusive, reference to the “musical” aptitude of the Philetan Eros as ἀηδών in Book 2. Therefore, by “competing with the nightingale,” Daphnis and Chloe vie, indirectly, with the god of love himself.

The Lykainion episode of Book 3 again features a bird in the bush. It has already been noted³⁸ how the excuse Lykainion uses to get out of the house recalls that used by Praxagora in Ar. Eccl. 528–529. Lykainion’s self-concealment in the thicket reminds us as well of Salmacis’ own hiding in the woods to spy on the unsuspecting Hermaphroditus in Ov. Met. 4.338 ff. *Daphnis and Chloe* 3.15 ff. bears several resemblances to the scenes with Eros already discussed. First of all, Lykainion hides next to a thicket (λόχμη) to overhear the young lovers (3.15.4). We recall how Eros conceals himself (ὑποκρυπτόμενος, 2.4.2–3) amidst the poppies like a partridge chick and at times is only partly visible in the leaves of trees (2.6.2). Secondly, Lykainion invents the story of the eagle that has snatched away the most beautiful of her twenty geese (3.16.2), in a conscious parody of Od. 19.536–553³⁹. Eros boasts that he is faster than an eagle, a hawk or any swifter bird of prey (2.5.2). In both episodes we discern images of flight and pursuit: Eros is

37) Longus might be recalling here Theocr. Id. 1. 136 and 5. 136; such expressions as “Would an owl compete (ἐρίζειν) with a nightingale?”, implying an impossibility, appear to have been proverbial (cf. AP 9. 380).

38) Hunter (n. 1 above), p. 69.

39) Hunter (n. 1 above), p. 61.

chased but cannot be caught; the eagle has snatched Lykainion’s goose and lifted it into the air, but has fallen with its prey into a neighboring wood. This wood, like Eros’ garden, is densely grown; it is in fact to the thickest (πυκνότεατον, 3.17.1) part of the wood, next to a fountain (cf. 2.3.5), that Lykainion leads the goatherd under the pretext of finding a lost bird, and where she seduces him. The choice of the goose, therefore, is appropriate, for it is an erotic symbol⁴⁰). We may observe as well the description of Daphnis’ motion into the wood: he stands up, lifts his staff (καλαῦροψα, 3.17.1) and accompanies Lykainion. Daphnis’ lifting of the staff, like the bogus search by Lykainion for her lost goose, may be looked on as a humorous epic allusion: we recall how Athena takes hold of her “mighty lance” (ἄλκιμον ἔγχος) as she prepares to depart from Olympos (Od. 1.99).

The word καλαῦροψ occurs but once in Homer (Il. 23.845) and only occasionally in the period from the fifth to the first century B.C.⁴¹). From Lucian onward, καλαῦροψ occurs far more often, with twenty appearances in Nonnus alone. Longus himself uses it five times. Most often this word denotes a shepherd’s crook, meant for coercing or striking animals, but may occasionally refer to a king’s scepter⁴²). Eustathius ad Il. 501.21 connects it etymologically with ῥόπαλον (from ῥέπειν, “to incline”), which could also mean “staff”⁴³), but more often meant “cudgel” and, at least once, was used as a metaphor for the *membrum virile*⁴⁴). Indeed any word designating a pole or staff may assume, in an erotic context, suggestive or obscence connotations. Many examples can be adduced from Greek and Latin, many of them mock-epic, e.g. δόρυ (cf. *hasta*) and σκήπτρον (cf. *sceptrum*).

That Daphnis should be accompanied by his καλαῦροψ is appropriate, for it is most often used of a rustic staff⁴⁵). But again, given the context, it may also be assumed to have a lubricious double meaning, particularly as Daphnis accompanies Lykainion into the thick wood (3.17) where, as part of his erotic education, the goatherd’s (presumably) raised and swelling (σφριγῶντα,

40) See n. 14 above.

41) Antim. 61; Apoll. Rh. 2. 33 and 4. 974; D. S. 34/35. 2. 29. 9; D. H. 1. 39. 4, 14. 2. 2; AP 6. 106 (Zonas). 3. It is not found in Theocritus.

42) E.g. Apoll. Rh. 2. 33.

43) Hdt. 7. 63.

44) AP 9. 261 (Leon).

45) D & C 1. 8. 3, 1. 12. 1; 3. 17. 1; as an offering to the Nymphs, 4. 26. 2 (cf. AP 6. 106).

3.18.4) penis is “directed” by Lykainion the *magistra amoris*. Shortly before this, Lykainion had spied on Daphnis and Chloe’s love play from near a λόχμη, or thicket. Λόχμη and other such agricultural terms can, in the Greek *sermo eroticus*, designate the “thick growth” of the female or male pubes⁴⁶). The densely grown wood (ύλη), used elsewhere in the novel as a place of nurture (2.20.2) or of escape and refuge (2.37.3; 4.14.1, 4.15.3), here becomes the scene of *res venereae*. Daphnis’ entering into the woods with Lykainion (συνεισελθῶν εἰς τὴν ὕλην, 3.16.3; recall Philetas’ own entry into the garden of Eros at 2.4.1) and his egress from it (ἐξέβη τῆς ὕλης, 3.20.2) may suggest the entering into and the completion of the sexual act between Lykainion and the goatherd which is unambiguously described in 3.18. Two well-discussed passages from Attic Comedy⁴⁷) which, incidentally, use ἀηδῶν in a sexually suggestive manner, may be adduced to illuminate the possible significance of ἔρχομαι and ἐκβαίνω. A humorous pun in Ar. Av. 207 uses εἰσβαίνειν to denote sexual congress and λόχμη to represent the female pubic area: εἰς τὴν λόχμην εἰσβαίνει κἀνέγειρε τὴν ἀηδόνα, i.e. “Go into the thicket and awaken the nightingale.” In Av. 664 the joke, now employing the causal form of βαίνειν, is slightly altered: ἐκβίβασον αὐτοῦ, πρὸς θεῶν, αὐτήν, ἵνα καὶ νῶ θεασώμεσθα τὴν ἀηδόνα, i.e. “Make her walk out here, by God, so that we two may also see the nightingale.” Such Greek as well as Latin verbs of coming or going, in various erotic settings, could be used as euphemisms for the coarser βινεῖν or *futuere*⁴⁸).

Finally, as Daphnis emerges from the “thick wood” of Lykainion, he rejoins Chloe who, during the couple’s ensuing love play, is expressly compared to a young bird (νεοττός ὄρνιθος, 3.20.3). This expression reminds us of πέριδικος νεοττός and ἀηδόνοϋ νεοττός, used earlier as metaphorical descriptions of Eros, and so reinforces the already established image of the god-as-bird, particularly as he represents sexual potency.

The countryside with its plants and animals had long furnished a series of natural sexual metaphors which Longus appropriated for his erotic novel. The Eros and Lykainion scenes con-

46) E.g. ἀμφίκανιστος (early barley), Cratin. 409 K.-A.; χνοῦς (the down on fruits), Ar. Nub. 978.

47) Henderson (n. 6 above), pp. 136, 147 and 155; Thompson (n. 7 above), p. 22.

48) For Latin verbs of coming or entering (e.g. *venire, ingredi*) as euphemisms for *futuere*, see J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore 1982), pp. 176–177.

tain several sexually loaded symbols embodied in thickly shaded woods and gardens, vegetation and various birds. Within such an atmosphere the reader inevitably comes alive to particular instances of erotic double-entendre. The activity of birdlike Eros in the myrtle tree contains distinct sexual overtones; similarly the entrance of Daphnis into the woods to find a lost goose and his egress from it possess a great deal of suggestive vocabulary which aptly frames and enhances the actual scene of seduction in 3.18. Some of Longus' erotic metaphors may derive from Attic Comedy or iambic poetry, but he avoids the more overt obscenities in which these genres often abound. It is in keeping with the spirit of *Daphnis and Chloe* that the *sermo eroticus* be muted but still recognizable. It is also perfectly consonant with Longus' literary practice, following recent studies⁴⁹), that certain words and expressions remind us of other authors. Often the literary reminiscences become wry or parodic in their context. Lykainion's invented story of her lost goose, for example, is a humorous reworking of Od. 19.536–553. The comparison of Eros to a young nightingale flitting about the myrtle combines a “learned” allusion to Theocritus with a possible sexual double-entendre.

This paper has demonstrated that the Philetas and Lykainion episodes of *Daphnis and Chloe*, Books 2 and 3, are linked by several common images which reinforce the workings of Eros. We have also stated how Longus, after having established the link between Eros and birds in his capacity to fly and to be musical, as well as in his role as a sexual power, possibly suggests this connection later in the novel, at 3.12 and 24, where Daphnis and Chloe vie with the nightingales. Thus Eros-as-bird becomes for Longus not only a powerful image but a significant leitmotif. This repetition of imagery which we have noted in our own study accords well with Longus' literary practice as observed elsewhere⁵⁰), for instance the correspondences between Dorcon's wolf-disguise and concealment in the bushes in preparation for his planned seduction of Chloe (1.20) and the “wolf-lady” Lykainion's own hiding in the brake to trap Daphnis⁵¹).

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49) Again Hunter (n. 1 above).

50) Hunter (n. 1 above), p. 69; D. N. Levin, *The Pivotal Role of Lycaenion in Longus' Pastorals*, RSC 25 (1977) 5–17.

51) My thanks to Prof. Dr. Carl Werner Müller for his sound criticisms and helpful suggestions.