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Personages of the Pastoral Literature: Subject of Songs or Subject of Pictorial Depictions

Abstract

The article traces the attitude to music in the Hellenistic Greek novels, namely the pastoral novels and tries to outline the significance of music and musical improvisation in the ancient world. It is shown against the backdrop of the representations of visual images. The text follows an excursus from there on and it is aimed at explaining the fate of music within the tradition of the aesthetics of the Enlightenment. With this purpose in mind, it considers the distinguishing between the varying signs and the divergent content of different arts as it is done in Winkelmann, Lessing and Herder. Visual art is privileged in the whole tradition of aesthetics. This is true mostly for aesthetics, which considers itself to be a philosophy of art and not a science of perceptive faculties and intuition. This tendency reaches its peak in Hegel's *Aesthetics*.

Keywords: pastoral, music, aesthetics, sculpture, painting, signs of arts, antiquity

The paper considers the issues of the Greek novel of Antiquity and its world. This world has been subject to many controlling procedures on the part of the Christian attitude. On the one hand it can be subject to criticism because of its frivolousness and sexuality, on the other hand because of its naivety and its simple and undeveloped characters – as if they were retarded and lagging in reaching their spiritual maturity. The German classical philologist Erwin Rohde says about the novel *Daphnis and Chloe* quite an important thing. He claims for the novel to be simultaneously childish and secretly obscene. And he is not the only one to say such things, many others do it and some of them shall be mentioned in the text.

Two traditions of representation of the “shepherd world” coexist. On the one hand, it is the subject of songs. For example, the shepherd songs of the idyll are examined by Wolfgang Iser in his book *Fictive and Imaginary*. On the other hand, there is another tradition that views the pastoral world as subject of pictures and of topoi. I said topoi meaning rhetoric and poetic topoi. For example, the

emblematic example from the beginning of the novel *Daphnis and Chloe*. The picture from the Cave of Nymphs is used as an etiological myth and as a source of literariness. Yet the two traditions, the one of music and songs and the one of pictures, maps and topoi, are by no means equal in the judgment of philosophy and aesthetics. Music is backward, paradoxically frozen in time since it is a successive art as we know pretty well, while pictorial representations symbolize cultural continuity with the past and spiritual development. This text is dedicated to the said opposition, to tracing it in a brief excursus, to trying to outline the cultural choices and what they meant. I will also try to feature an interpretation of classical aesthetics focused on the different signs of arts in the book *Critical Forests* (Herder 2006) by Johann Herder. Music is again bestowed an inferior position. Finally, the issue is the role of literature torn apart into two main tendencies. On the one hand, it is providing poetic work, and on the other – doing deeds and expressing like in musical improvisation.

The Hermeneutics of the Old Painting

At the beginning of the Greek Hellenistic novel *Daphnis and Chloe* the narrator enters the Cave of the Nymphs and there he beholds an unforgettable picture¹, possibly a mural that frames the plot of the whole novel. The picture, on the one hand, brings impetus to the narration, on the other – all the things it shows are somehow familiar to the narrator. But what are those “things”, let us make some further considerations of that. Let us quote something from the Prologue of the novel:

(1) WHEN I was hunting in Lesbos, I saw, in a wood sacred to the Nymphs, the most beautiful thing that I have ever seen – a painting that told a love-story. The wood itself was beautiful enough, full of trees and flowers, and watered by a single spring which nourished both the flowers and the trees; but the picture was even more delightful, combining excellent technique with a romantic subject. It had become so famous that crowds of people used to go there even from abroad, partly to pray to the Nymphs, but mainly to see the picture. In it there were women having babies and other women wrapping them in swaddling clothes, babies being exposed, sheep and goats suckling them, shepherds picking them up, young people plighting their troth, pirates making a raid, enemies starting an invasion.

(2) After gazing admiringly at many other scenes, all of a romantic nature, I was

¹ On the descriptions of pictures (also known as *ekphrasis*) in Ancient fictional prose see Paskaleva 2024. She develops the concept with a view of Olga Freidenberg’s concept of metaphor as identificatory thought that predates the distinction between myth and language, between concept and object. *Ekphrasis* has an important place in ancient culture. “As a verbal phenomenon, *ekphrasis* is a form of transmedial semiological structure... It has the function of complementing or even substituting the verbal structure with a visual one, understood through the rhetorical idea of *enargeia* (completeness)” (Paskaleva 2024: 8).

seized by a longing to write a verbal equivalent to the painting. So I found someone to explain the picture to me, and composed a work in four volumes as an offering to Love and the Nymphs and Pan (...) (Longus 1968: 17)

First, I would like to make notice of the “obvious meaning” of “all that”. The narrator looks very fluent in the topics upon consideration. I refer to the way he names all events happening in the painting. “Babies being exposed and sheep and goats suckling them” and “pirates making a raid, enemies starting an invasion”, all those are *love things* if we may venture to translate the word like that. Since the word “romantic” (a Latin one) could hardly translate the Greek *erotike*, that is why I would prefer “of love” as translation. But how are raids of tramps and babies left in the wild related to love? Is it related in this context only and because of the narrative that encompasses all its elements into one? And is it something of a *comic book*, a pictorial narrative? Well, not exactly – that is how I would answer both questions.

The painting’s perspective in Antiquity is not linear and is not unified throughout the whole picture. There is something of cloaks, or should I say cocoons, of loosely related spaces – I mean they are not united and arranged by one perspective (Sinisgalli 2012)². Hence, they do not have to be arranged in a line in order to tell a story. They do not have to be ordered along a single line as in a comic book in order to form something resembling a narrative. The pirate raid, the babies fed by sheep, the oaths of love, they are all poetic topoi of the narrative of love. In this sense they are neither fixed in space as it is with pictorial representations in the Modern Times, nor are they fixed in time one after another as in poetry and music. Poetic topoi are in loose harmony. Here I am using the concept of poetic topos (quite similar to the concept of rhetorical topos) as it is defined by the German classical philologist Ernst-Robert Curtius³. Topoi are at the same time themes, motifs, figures, visual allegories, images and they transcend the cultural epochs. The key thing is that one and the same construction

² There is a hypothesis by the Italian scholar Sinisgalli, claiming that this peculiar partitioning in ancient painting is due to using the ancient mirrors and its halos and deformities (Sinisgalli, *Perspective in the Visual Culture of Classical Antiquity*, 2012).

³ Let us quote a definition of *topos*, made by the German classical philologist Ernst-Robert Curtius: “They are intellectual themes, suitable for development and modification at the orator’s pleasure. In Greek they are called *koinoi topoi*; in Latin, *loci communes*... Lessing and Kant still use the word. To elucidate its meaning – a topos of the most general sort is “emphasis on inability to do justice to the subject”; a topos of panegyric: “praise of forebears and their deeds.” In Antiquity collections of such topoi were made. The science of topoi – called “topics” – was set forth in separate treatises... But we have seen that the two most important oratorical genres, the judicial and the political, disappeared from political reality with the extinction of the Greek city-states and the Roman Republic, and took refuge in the schools of rhetoric; that eulogy became a technique of praise which could be applied to any subject; that poetry too was rhetoricized. This means neither more nor less than that rhetoric lost its original meaning and purpose. Hence it penetrated into all literary genres” (Curtius 213: 70).

can be an innovative metaphor in one epoch, and a fixed topos in another, and in a third time it can be borrowed from reality. For example, the topos of abduction of women in the novel *Daphnis and Chloe*.

But in the above quote there is something else and that is the hermeneutical procedure. At first glance it may also seem to be similar to the modern ones – there is an unknown pictorial sign and there is its meaning waiting to be uncovered or to be revealed by someone who knows. Yet the man who is local and possesses better knowledge of the myths of the woods of the nymphs says nothing definite to provide an unambiguous reading of the iconic script of the picture. Moreover, the elements seem to be already properly recognized by the narrator. As if the story tells itself by itself.

I claim that the pictorial representation, or the pictorial narration for that matter, performs a similar function as the musical improvisation described in the novel, and in many other Greek novels, the so-called idylls.

The Playing Competitions and Playing Together

The pictorial depiction in the woods of the nymphs is taken as an object of reading improvisation similarly to the musical improvisation. They are highly dependent upon the context or, to use an innovative (at least for humanities, not for music) concept by Marijan Dović, they are time-related art, or “extemporation”⁴ and improvisation. As the reading of the picture is always correct and compatible with any other – since it is all composed of topoi of love, albeit nonrelated directly to love, – likewise the reading functions by way of outplaying and playing music together.

Considering the plot of the novel *Daphnis and Chloe*, it is a very simple one. Two small children are foundlings and before they are found by goatherds and shepherds, they are taken care of by sheep and goats. They grow together from the youngest age and develop an affectionate friendship. The two shepherds start kissing each other and spend time in long-lasting hugs, but sexuality remains secret to them. In order to discover it, the boy and the girl pass through many adventures. In the meantime, they often indulge in musical outplaying and playing and singing together with the other shepherds. The old Philetas plays the syrinx and sings with them and besides, he gives them valuable erotic advice.

Philetas speaks of many things – he says they have to undress naked and stick to each other. Yet most impressive is a story of him meeting the god Eros and the moral we derive from it. All matters of love are in the hands of Eros. He says, Daphnis and Chloe are now his primal concern. And the old Philetas does not think one has to force things within the realm of erotic matters. Everything goes on like a musical improvisation, it is not completely within human control. Humans, gods and the right moment (*kairos*) work together.

⁴ In his paper for the conference *Sound and Text* Marijan Dović made use of the concept extemporation with regard to musical and poetic improvisation. It is most appropriate when the topic or theme is given right before the improvisation itself (Dović 2024).

I had a glimpse of wings growing out of his shoulders and a tiny bow slung between his shoulders and his wings. The next moment I couldn't see either the bow or him. But unless I've grown these white hairs for nothing and am getting weak-minded in my old age, you, my children, are dedicated to Eros, and Eros is looking after you. (Longus 1968: 47)

The word “dedicated” here does not mean “devoted”. They are dedicated not according to their own will, but apart from it and against it. They are a votive offering to the god Eros from life itself. It is in the spirit of the late Hellenistic stoic ethics not to oppose your fate. Some of it is indifferent to the human effort or the so called indifferents⁵. But that does not mean that humans must abide by total rest. And here comes the doctrine of harmony which, in my opinion, is closely related to the idea of musical improvisation.

The musical outplaying of the shepherds happens here and now and it endows the improvisation with an air of something fleeting and vital. One should relate to the moment of improvisation and resign to one's fate. Yet he/she should not be impassive but follow the guidance of the gods. In the predicament of *Daphnis and Chloe* where the two characters have to discover eroticism and love, music functions in a twofold fashion. On the one hand, it intensifies the affectionate communication between Daphnis and Chloe, moreover, it is often combined with the intermissions of talking and erotic counseling by old Philetas.

I broke my Pan-pipes, because although they charmed my cows they didn't bring Amaryllis to me. For there's no medicine for Love, nothing you can drink and nothing you can eat and no magic spell that you can say. The only remedies are kissing and embracing and lying down together with naked bodies. (Longus 1968: 48)

Phineas broke his Pan-pipes (syrinx) because music cannot alone lead to making love. But it can conjure the appropriate gods; it can facilitate Eros in his divine labor. It makes love happen easily and at the same time *prevents* it from happening to the end. And thus the narrative of the novel is prolonged and thriving. It is in the book *The Fictive and the Imaginary* by the renowned proponent of literary hermeneutics Wolfgang Iser that the role of music in the genesis of the fictional narrative is outlined. In the interpretation of the classical and renaissance idyll, Iser points out that its dynamics is based upon singers singing about singers⁶.

⁵ The doctrine of indifferents as presented by Diogenes Laertius: “They say that some existing things are goods, others bads, and still others neither of these. The virtues, namely wisdom, justice, courage, temperance, and the like, are goods, whereas their opposites, namely folly, injustice, and the like, are bads. Neither good nor bad are all things that neither benefit nor harm, such as life, health, pleasure, physical attractiveness, strength, wealth, good reputation, and good birth; their opposites include death, disease, pain, ugliness, weakness, poverty, ignominy, low birth, and the like, as Hecaton says in the seventh book of his work *On the Goal*, as do Apollodorus in his *Ethics* and Chrysippus” (Diogenes Laertius 2018).

⁶ Wolfgang Iser develops his theory of the singing of shepherds in the pastoral as a

Thus, the narrative and the fiction itself are codified within one and the same realm with the author, i.e., the singer, and the public, which is represented in the public of the shepherds taking part in the playing competitions and the playing together. Musical improvisation and fictional narrative are conjoined to form an integral life form. Syncretic art has, of course, some peculiarities that do not allow it to exist in the modern life. First and foremost, it does not have an articulated end and it cannot be defined, i.e., it cannot be given a specific place. It is given an inferior place of immaturity and laziness by some of the Enlightenment and romantic philosophers. And to this process is dedicated the present text.

Winkelmann, Lessing and Herder

In the mid-eighteenth century Johann Joachim Winkelmann codified the representation of the cultural epochs as related primarily to visual representation. Being assigned to the excavations of Herculaneum, he gathered his impressions only of Roman Antiquity and in his *The History of Ancient Art* he claimed that the Greek statues are white. Despite the evidence for them being painted dating back to every excavation in Greece, he based his interpretation on them being mature and of composed demeanor. That led to the idea of the “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur” (Winkelmann, Guttenberg 2020) of Greek sculpture. Hence the visual arts can most clearly express the spirit of the time and place they were created in. Winkelmann does not speak about music. Then came an interpreter of his, the famous Gotthold Lessing, who tried to define the place of music within culture in his essay *Laokoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. There he makes the distinction between coexistent arts and successive arts. Painting and sculpture fall into the realm of the coexistent ones, and music and poetry are successive. Yet music and sound in general does not have its own realm of classification. Music is again transient and unimportant if it is not closely related to poetry and to poetic lyrics. Music has one and the same types of signs as poetry, namely the successive signs that develop in time. It acquires signs of its own type in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder in his essays *Critical Forests* and *On Image, Poetry and Fable*.

In his *Critical Forrest I* Herder develops a typology of the poetic content, which we are going to examine. First, one has to bear in mind the fact that Herder, unlike Lessing before him, distinguishes between the signs of an art and its content. Thus, three types of content appear in his essay *On Image, Poetry and Fable*, namely coexistent content for painting, successive content for music and the content of force for poetry. On the one hand the division is heavily metaphysically laden, and yet it is understandable. While painting and music are bound to use coexistent and successive content accordingly, the linguistic signification is aimed at the force, meaning involving the mind and moving the

figure of the autoreflexivity of literature in the chapter “Pastoralism as the Paradigm of Literary Fictionality” from his book *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (Iser 1993: 22).

soul. But the content of all three arts can be put into poetry – in this way one type of content can express another type of content. As we said, Herder develops this typology in *Critical Forrest 1*.

Herder's typology is an elaborate semiotic effort since the conception of one type of signs (content – if we equalize the terms for a moment) expressing another type of content, or even with a triple mutual expressing, is a complex semiotic system. A similar system was developed by Charles Sanders Peirce, but it is not the subject of this text. The subject is how music finds its own place and what are the consequences of that.

In *Critical Forrest 1* Herder tries to speak Ancient Greek to define the three types of poetry with double expression of content. The taxonomy is *epopoios*, *melopoios* and *eidopoios*. Those words do not exist in the Ancient Greek language except for the word-roots. They should mean the following: “poet of narratives”, “poet of songs” and “poet of pictures”. The three model poets are Homer, Anacreon and Pindar.

Homer composes his poem as a narrative: “It happened! There was!” In Homer, then, everything can be action and must rush to action. This is the direction in which the energy of his Muse strives; wondrous, heart-stirring *events* are his world; he has it in his power to utter the words of divine creation: “There was!” Anacreon oscillates between song and narrative; his narrative becomes a short song, his short song an *epos* of the god of love. His expression can thus be “There was!” or “I want!” or “Thou shalt!” – it is enough that his *melos* resounds with delight and joy: the energy, the Muse of his every song is a feeling of gladness. Pindar intends a large lyrical painting, a labyrinthine ode that shall become, through apparent digressions, through secondary figures rendered in different shadings, an energetic whole where no part exists for itself, where each shall appear ordered in terms of the totality: an *eidos*, a poetic picture... (Herder 2006: 151)

Of the three poets, Homer is the narrator, Anacreon is the singer and Pindar is the painter, but the role of the visual artist, namely of Pindar, is privileged. He depicts the whole of his contemporaneity; he depicts the totality of his epoch. Pindar creates a panorama of his time, a “labyrinthine ode”. For the first time in German aesthetics the visual and the historical stand on one side. On the opposite side stands the emotional, the singular – the articulations “I want!” and “Thou shalt!” – namely the song. Songs are singular and transient. The division of Herder demotes the music as moment-related and affect-related. Musical improvisation is just the opposite to history of art. In *Critical Forrest 2* Herder goes on to banishing the idyll, the ode, the lyric from the realm of the high poetry.

The visual sided with the historical – maybe it sounds a bit unclear, why would they stand together? This understanding of Herder is in line with and even preceding one understanding of Hegel, i.e., the concept of the plastic as classical and as trans-historical. And in German *Plastik* means sculpture. In an essay of Herder entitled *Sculpture* (Plastik) (1778) he develops an elaborate hermeneutics of the Ancient sculptures, which should encompass both the coexistent and the

successive. The successive is given as a task not to the artist, but to the lover of art. The effect of the three-dimensionality of sculpture is that through impeding the perceptive process, sculpture speaks to the lover of art about his own epoch by using the epoch of the artist. Or if we try to translate it to *Critical Forrest I*, the panorama of Pindar, being hard to grasp as a whole, manages to speak to us about our own age. I am quoting the hermeneutical procedure from *Sculpture*:

For this reason [because sculptures are three-dimensional], he [the lover of art] shifts from place to place: his eye becomes his hand and the ray of light his finger, or rather, his soul has a finger that is yet finer than his hand or the ray of light. With his soul he seeks to *grasp* the image that arose from the arm and the soul of the artist. Now he has it! (...) the lover of art responds and creates after their [of the sculptors] example. Submerged in the expanse and sea of life, he stammers out what is important for him in that sea. (Herder, *Sculpture*, 41)

The speech is “stammering” or babbling; the vision is blurred by circling around the statue – the lover of art does just that; Herder says that *it*, the experience, is like music, but there is not a single trace of anything musical. All other arts are subdued, the lover of art seems to be dizzy and overwhelmed, and that is how art works.

Hegel

In his course of lectures *Aesthetics* Hegel cherishes the ambition to make aesthetics a philosophy of art⁷. In order to do so he needs to set certain things straight and to provide if not definitions, then at least a good general framework. He is trying to hijack aesthetics from the idea of a science of intuition as it is in Baumgarten and Kant. The questions that need answers are: What is art? Who are the lovers of art? Why art is important?

True art is the classical one. Hegel distinguishes only three architectonic art forms: the symbolic form, the classical form and the romantic form. The symbolic art form encompasses the primitive art, the Egyptian art and the Indian one. The classical form is related to the Greek and Roman Antiquity in general. And the romantic art comprises everything that is Christian up to the times of German Romanticism. The definition of the classical that Hegel provides in his *Aesthetics* is that it is what is always contemporary in every epoch by speaking of its own epoch. Thus, the classical art is the timeliest art in the sequence of hieroglyphics, sculpture and romantic poetry, theology and philosophy. The paramount art is, of course, the Greek statue. The artist is a sculptor, the lovers of art are dazzled and confused worshipers who cannot figure out why the old Greek speak directly to them. Philosophers explain art. In this strict pathway of producing and explanation the public cannot be the artists and they cannot provide insufficient improvised explanations and echoes of the pieces of art – be it sculpture, poetry, music...

⁷ The process of aesthetics becoming philosophy of art in German classical philosophy is considered in a detailed fashion by Ognian Kassabov in his book *Technique of Nature, Organics of Art*.

In his *Aesthetics*, Vol. 2 speaking about genres, he speaks of the modern idyllic works and of the Greek one combined. About the idyllic herdsmen and women, he says the following:

The occupation of the shepherds consists in tending their beloved flock the whole livelong day with their faithful dog, providing their food and drink, and all the time nursing and cherishing, with as much sentimentality as possible, such feelings as do not disturb this peaceful and contented life; i.e., in being pious and gentle in their own way, blowing on their shawms and their noisy pipes, etc., singing in chorus, and especially in caring for one another with the greatest tenderness and innocence. On the other hand, the Greeks in their plastic productions had a merrier world, Bacchus and his train, satyrs, fauns who, harmlessly courting a god's favour, raised animal nature to human joviality with a life and truth quite different from that pretentious idyllic innocence, piety, and vacuity. (Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Vol 2, 1975: 1091)

Here Hegel reveals the standstill of pastoral life. Fishermen and herdsmen, pristine and beautiful landscape, pastoralists fall in love, but there is a significant delay in the fulfilling of the erotic desire and even in its sole emergence. And hence the herdsmen and herdswomen turn to singing and playing music. This is an innocent life (and particularly the songs) that caused great outrage in the field of aesthetics. And that outrage was built upon the fake innocence of the Renaissance pastoral. I give examples only from a relatively late Hellenistic pastoral novel, *Daphnis and Chloe*, and by doing so, considering the limited space of the present article, I am trying to outline the way music existed in ancient times exactly by tracing its disappearance. The questions of this text are the following. How come aesthetics hated songs so much before Nietzsche and Kierkegaard? How does that influence the placement of pastoral within the cannon of literary history? About the distribution of the arts according to their sign vehicle and content – visual, auditory, olfactory, – we have already said enough. The postulation of the philosophical science of aesthetics gives answers to the above questions. Music and improvisation, the practices that are described in the Greek novel, are related to a moment in time and it is even more so in the ancient times when there is no developed musical notation and musical recording. Music relates to the singular – what is unary in time and space – and not to the universal, which is the aim of Herder and Hegel. According to my opinion, what is most remarkable is what happens in Herder. After excluding music as too emotional, the “lover of art” circles around the statue (Herder, *Sculpture*) and the visual also disappears. The enthusiast has only a “soul finger” to search for the universal. He thus discovers the universal in his own epoch, but the development of his own soul, as through education (*Bildung*), is not allowed to him. Thus, one can delineate the rupture between visual arts and musical improvisation as coinciding with the rupture between high aesthetics and *Bildung* albeit it may be quite a speculative conclusion⁸.

⁸ Speculative or not, but one can research the negative response (not the positive one) to the paramount *Bildungs* novel, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*.

Aesthetics chooses its fate by rejecting music and the time-related art in general. First, art is not oriented towards the act of reception, but towards the whole process of the development of artistic spirit or habits. In its German versions aesthetics cleaves to history of mind (*Geistesgeschichte*) and philosophy of mind (*Geisteswissenschaft*). In British aesthetics more important turns out to be the forming of habits. The sharing of music making and music listening, characteristic of the novel of Antiquity, is no longer possible.

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