

Both the satyricon  
and daphnis and  
chloe have a dense  
literary texture essay  
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It is clear upon reading these novels that both Petronius and Longus draw deeply on previous literature to enhance their texts. However, the two novelists differ considerably in their handling of these literary predecessors. Longus, for example, mainly based his work on the poems of Theocritus, whilst there do not appear to be any Greek or Roman antecedents for *The Satyricon*. Possibly because of this Petronius has a far richer literary tapestry throughout his novel and his references are mainly to evoke amusement from the reader.

Longus, on the other hand, uses the literary allusions as a means of setting the tone for the novel and furthering the development of his characters. When comparing the literary textures of these two novels, we must begin, naturally, with a conception of what the authors intended to achieve. Much scholarly speculation has gone into the authors' purposes, particularly Petronius, in writing these texts. However, in an essay of this length it would be foolish to recount all the various arguments on this issue whilst attempting to examine all the literary reference alluded to in the two novels.

Rather I shall examine the role that the literary texture of the novels plays in helping to define our interpretation of the authors' objectives, and the methods that they used to achieve them. Petronius was almost certainly writing for comic effect, and his references would have been designed to evoke a feeling of amusement from the reader. As Keith Preston observes, nowhere else in Latin literature is such a premium put on laughter<sup>1</sup>, and the keynote of the text is struck in chapter 19, when "The entire place resounded with the laughter of the low stage." [Sat 19].

Although scholars have disputed the exact nature of the original literary predecessors Petronius would have used, modern critics generally agree<sup>2</sup> that he uses a number of models, for example Menippean satire, mime, epic, Greek erotic romance, and Milesian tales, to develop the tone, structure and subject matter of the work, reshaping these sources with originality and wit. Longus maps out his aims in writing the novel in his prologue; to ‘ heal the sick and cheer the desponding, bring back memories to those who have loved and give needful instruction to those who have not.

Ronald McCail, in his introduction to this edition, feels no reason not to take these words at anything but face value, that the novel is to be a ‘ sweet and pleasant tale’ – a satisfying pastoral romance. Although it is tempting to read the novel in this manner, Paul Turner has suggested that his echoing of Thucydides’<sup>3</sup> words in the prologue hints that the novelist’s purpose was as serious as that of the great historian.

Like Thucydides, Longus is writing about human nature (though examining love rather than war) and his ‘ romantic elements’, absent from Thucydides, ensure that the piece will be easier to read (or more conducive to learning) than the earlier historical work. This would of course change our reading of the novel – It is no longer simply to entertain, but requires a deeper examination. The literary references are to be regarded as something more than a simple diversion from the plot. Here we see the main connection between the use of literary texture in the two novels.

Although evoking different ideas, the references to earlier styles and writers are there to suggest a significance beyond the literal, and ask the reader to

examine the situation on another level. Although the two authors may have different aims for their books, an awareness of earlier literary genres is necessary to fully appreciate the works, and the authors are able to direct the readers' attention without directly intruding into the narrative.

As P. G. Walsh has noted, Petronius had an extensive knowledge of Greek and Roman literature, and must have regarded literary texture as the staple feature of his fiction. E. Courtney stresses this point, and notes that Petronius extends far beyond the references to Homer, tragedy and New Comedy seen in the Greek Novels, but alludes to a vast spectrum of ancient authors and styles. <sup>6</sup> Virtually every extant scene of *The Satyricon* has some literary point of reference, and elements of Latin authors (such as Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Cicero, Sallust, Livy, Phaedrus, Seneca, Persius, Plautus, etc. ) as well as Greek antecedents (Herodotus, Aristophanes, Theocritus, Callimachus, etc. ) can be seen throughout the work. <sup>7</sup>

Todd is surely, therefore, missing the point when he claims that Petronius 'owed something to the Satire, and something to the Milesian Tale. But there, so far as can be discerned, his specific indebtedness ends. ' <sup>8</sup> Petronius would have wanted to express his originality and versatility to the greatest possible extent. He even hints to his own attitude on the matter when his character, Eumolpus states that ' a person who tries his hand at the lofty theme of the Civil War must be steeped in literature, or he will sink under the burden of the subject. ' [Sat. 118].

Perhaps the most obvious form of literary reference in *The Satyricon* is the parody of Greek and Roman epic. Throughout the narrative the companions

find themselves in situations reminiscent of the Homeric and Virgilian volumes. Conte expresses the comparisons well when he describes Encolpius as the ‘ Mythomaniac narrator’, constantly dramatising the situation so that he is placed in the position of one of the idealised heroes.

These musings on his misadventures undoubtedly highlight the farcical nature of his ‘ Odyssean’ wanderings – Encolpius is no Homeric hero, yet he depicts himself variously as a second Achilles [Sat. 1 & Iliad i. 348ff], a second Aeneas [Sat. 82 & Aen. ii. 671ff], and a second Odysseus [His encounter with Circe under the Odyssean pseudonym of Polytaenus, Sat. 126]. His tribulations seem to be the result of a pursuing god, but the wrath is not Poseidon or Juno’s, but the phallic figure of Priapus, a personification of lust and sexual excess. The role of these allusions is not to satirise the Epics themselves, but rather to accentuate the depravity of the anti-hero and his companions by using language and literary connotations totally inappropriate to what is being described<sup>10</sup>, thereby adding to the irony and humour of the novel.

One of the finest examples of this is shown in Encolpius’ triple attempt at self-castration, mimicking Aeneas’ three attempts to embrace the shades of the dead [Sat. 132 & Aen. 6. 700ff]. Petronius deliberately uses Virgilian terms as Encolpius takes on his unresponsive penis, but replaces the original image of ‘ hard flint and Marpessian crag’ with a comic reference to ‘ pliant willow, or poppy with its drooping head’ – an expression far more fitting to the present situation. A further example can be found in the pastiche of the Odyssean recognition scene [Sat 105 & Od. ix. 467].

Again the author replaces the traditional epic imagery with a much baser (and therefore more entertaining) picture. Now our hero is identified, not by his scar, but by his genitals, the constant downfall of this debauched protagonist. Longus also makes a number of references to the Homeric epics, treating the material in a similar manner, but on a much smaller and less impudent scale. Like Petronius, he uses the images to provoke a humorous or ironic image, but they are passing references during the narrative, rather than main themes of the plot.

For example, the attack on the Methymnaeans [D & C. 2. 17] is described as being like a “ cloud of starlings or jackdaws” and is a clear allusion to the Achaeans fleeing from Aeneas and Hector in Iliad xvii. 755. Here, however, the roles have been reversed, and the smaller birds are now the aggressors. Similarly, Lycaenion’s story about twenty geese and an eagle [D & C. 3. 16] noticeably echoes Penelope’s dream towards the end of The Odyssey [Od. 19. 536ff]. This is probably a humorous device designed to underscore the gaping chasm in the characters of the two women.

In terms of marital fidelity, the chaste Penelope and the libidinous Lycaenion are at different ends of the spectrum. 11 These literary pointers could be seen to act, therefore, both as humorous asides to the educated reader, and subtle guides to the tone of the work. For instance, the Nymphs’ rebuke of Daphnis and Chloe for failing to worship Pan [D & C. 2. 23], reminds the reader of the identical reproach by Pan to the Athenians before the battle of Marathon<sup>12</sup>. The reference is clear, and signifies that, like the Athenians, the lovers have the support of the gods, and justice is on their side. 3 There are a number of other instances displaying this literary undercurrent in Longus’ <https://assignbuster.com/both-the-satyricon-and-daphnis-chloe-have-a-dense-literary-texture-essay-sample/>

novel, but I shall limit myself to examining just two, which are particularly noteworthy to our examination of the novel. The first of these is the evocation of Sappho evident both in D & C 1. 17 and with the description of the solitary apple in 3. 33.

This apple, when read in the light of Sappho 105a, becomes a symbol both for love and for Chloe's still intact virginity. Daphnis' frustrated desire at this point is therefore evident as he "made to go up and pluck it, and took no notice of Chloe when she tried to hold him back. The tone is becoming darker and highlights the violence and animalistic nature of love. The image suggests that Daphnis' erotic yearnings could force him to commit an aggressive act, and serves to intensify the action as we enter the final book of the novel. The second important reference, as noted by Chalk14, is the allusion to the Homeric Hymn to Dionysus in 1. 28. Here the tone of the novel is again challenged as we are forced to identify our young hero with the god, Dionysus, both of whom were abducted by pirates as they 'walk idly near the sea'.

Chalk sees this passage as evidence of an Orphic-Dionysiac undercurrent, which can be seen throughout the work. Although the point is a thorny one (and one I shall not discuss here), he argues convincingly and extensively on the subject, and in the light of the prologue's Thucydidean reference, it is not too demanding to see the novel in this context. Without a doubt, the most obvious influence on Longus' novel is the bucolic poetry of Theocritus. As Valley emphatically stresses 'There can be no other Greek or Latin author who has plundered Theocritus' Idylls to the extent that Longus has'.

The Sicilian poet Theocritus was the most venerated writer in the pastoral tradition, whose works featured characterised, but ordinary, people in an idealised setting, including the lovesick rustic hero, Daphnis, in his first Idyll. The parallel is therefore made clear from the start. This debt to Theocritus is acknowledged in D & C 2. 33, when Lamon claims to have heard the tale of Syrinx from a 'Sicilian goatherd'<sup>16</sup> and also in 2. 3, when the teacher of the love torn pair reveals himself to be called Philetas – a founder of Hellenistic love poetry, and widely accepted to be Theocritus' mentor. <sup>17</sup>

However, despite being undoubtedly 'pastoral' in nature and basing his novel heavily on the earlier poems, Longus firmly marks the work out as his own. Not only does he write in the prose form and expand on the characterisation of the hero and heroine, he also incorporates various elements of New Comedy and Greek Romance into the action. For example, the main characters are seen in an idealised (almost divine) form, echoing the contemporary Greek romances, and they encounter the standard New Comedy figures of the parasite (Gnathon), the 'party-girl' who acts as a kind of heroine (Lycaenion), and the rivals for the heroines attention<sup>18</sup>.

It is noteworthy that Longus' novel has been seen by a number of scholars as the first to combine the genres of pastoral mime and romance<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, Petronius is unique in combining the two genres of romance and satire, though unlike Longus, there is no evidence that he was basing his work on a single Greek or Roman antecedent. It is therefore much harder to define The Satyricon in any particular literary bracket. Courtney notes that Petronius often builds upon the humour of his satires by using previous writers who have also written in a humorous or satirical vein. <sup>0</sup> For example, the most <https://assignbuster.com/both-the-satyricon-and-daphnis-chloe-have-a-dense-literary-texture-essay-sample/>



complete extant episode, the *Cena Trimachionis*, can be seen as a direct descendant of Horace's *Cena Nasidieni* [Horace. *Sat.* 2. 8]. Both are scathing satires mocking nouveau riche social climbers, and both adopt a mocking tone when dealing with the undesirable behaviour of the host. However, unlike Horace, the host of Petronius' *cena* can be perceived in a sympathetic light. Petronius mocks the guests as well, and does not seem to be taking a moral standpoint.

Although Petronius employs the models, themes and techniques of the genre, in this sense he is not a truly classic satirist.<sup>21</sup> Rather, this arbiter *elegantiarum* – the advisor to the Emperor's taste – turns his biting wit on the lack of sophistication, rather than morals, in contemporary Roman society. It has been suggested that *The Satyricon* was a parody of the Greek love romances<sup>22</sup>, with the licentious homosexual partnership of Encolpius and Giton comically replacing the traditional heterosexual pairings of the Greek romances. However this theory seems misplaced.

As Perry observes<sup>23</sup>, although it is supported by the resemblance between the adventure style and romantic relationship of the works, the vast differences in the pattern and substance of *The Satyricon* and the romances it is alleged to have parodied cannot bear out this claim. Furthermore, it appears, from the literature from the period<sup>24</sup>, that homosexuality would have been more acceptable to Petronius' Roman readers than to the readers of Heinze's era. Instead, Petronius amuses his audience through a combination of satire on society, epic parody, and farcical themes.

It is to Petronius' credit that he seems able to weave these genres together so effortlessly and to such effective comic effect. Similarly, Longus blends a number of literary allusions throughout his work, adding to the overall texture and enjoyment of the novel. However, despite the similarity in layering their texts with literary references to indicate another meaning or subtext to the reader, it can be seen that the essential handling of these references differs a great deal.

Longus, basing his novel mainly on the writings of a bucolic poet, generally alludes to love or pastoral poetry to enhance the tone of the narrative, whilst his references to epic are simply to aid the characterisation or to provide an amusing aside to the educated reader. Petronius, by contrast, rarely uses these allusions to display the mood of the character or situation. Rather they enhance the comic effect of the novel by the parodic use of epic in debased situations, the farcical misfortunes of our debauched protagonists and a burning satire on the contemporary Roman society.