

This paper argues that Parthenius' book of love stories is an erotic text itself, not merely a scholarly compendium of obscure mythography, as it has usually been read. Recent work has emphasized its links with the traditions of Greek mythography. Cameron shows the continuity of Parthenius' citation practices and those of the prose mythographers, and stresses EP's functional similarity to mythographic scholia and mythographic companions intended to help readers cope with obscure and allusive poetry (Cameron, *Greek Mythography*, 2004, 106-116). Lightfoot's commentary stresses EP's affinity with the work of other prose mythographers like Conon, and treats it as a piece of antiquarianism, concluding that "Parthenius hardly intends his collection to be read for anything more than curiosity and delectation" (Lightfoot, *Parthenius of Nicaea*, 1999, 233).

True, EP lacks all the traditional apparatus of erotic poetry, but seen against similar material in the mythographers its prose is audaciously erotic. In some ways the "softness" of its narratives looks forward to the Greek novels. The high narrative genres will not risk their dignity by portraying consummated erotic pleasure more than fleetingly, or without shrouding it in symbolism. EP is titillating in dwelling on the achievement and satisfaction of desire (e.g. Hemithea in 1, Leucippus in 5, Antileon in 7, or compare Pyramus and Thisbe with Anthippe and her lover in EP 32), and its preoccupation with the first erotic awakening of the adolescent.

EP also parades its *mollitia* in comparison with other prose erotic short stories, for example the *Narrationes Amatoriae* ascribed to Plutarch (*Mor.* 771F-775E). Here *eros* leads inevitably to *bia*, force, and political feuds and aristocratic marriages predominate. EP is highly urbane and teasing by comparison. (e.g. the light comedy of 2 and the faux moralism of 3). In EP 1, 2, 3 and throughout, the transgressing of *xenia* by sleeping with a host's daughter, or (from the opposite perspective) by having sex with an attractive *xenos*, is a key recurrent motif, which may be a reflection of Parthenius' own experience as a visiting *xenos* in Roman noble houses. These *xenia* narratives are all different, but cumulatively they should be read as wickedly erotic, rather than shocking or cautionary.

Konstan (*Sexual Symmetry*, 1994) argues that love in the ancient novel is distinguished by being symmetrical, while in the other Greek genres it is "transitive." It is difficult to fit EP into this schema, since so often what starts out as a one-sided seduction ends up being quite mutual. The consistent recurrence of seduction leading to mutual pleasure suggests a reading of EP as a gift to seduce Gallus. Any gift of erotic stories presupposes intimacy. But the preface to EP is more informal and intimate than scholars have allowed. Like Catullus' poems to his friends who are also writers, it emphasizes the personal pronouns as a way of stressing the intimacy of their relationship (cp. 50 *passim*, 95.1, 96.6). Like Catullus 50, EP presents a literary friendship in an eroticized way. The reader looks over the shoulders of two learned, clever men whose writings suggest a life of love and pleasantly soft self-indulgence.