

The Re-creation of a Narrator:

Nonnus of Panopolis *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* 1.1-45

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Abstract: This study considers the voice of the narrator in the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*, written by Nonnus of Panopolis in the fifth century, focusing on his self-presentation as both Johannine and Homeric narrator. The *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* lacks explicit statements of poetic intent similar to the prefaces of other poetic paraphrases, such as Juvenus' *Evangeliorum libri quattuor* and the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*, but a close reading of Nonnus' poetic version of the so-called 'Hymn to the Logos' and the gospel original (Jo. 1:1-18) reveals similar strategies at work. The paraphrastic narrator incorporates to his reading of the gospel later exegesis, reserves John's characteristic repetition of vocabulary for significant terms, and signals his ambivalence towards Homer through his avoidance of Homeric vocabulary in the first lines of his poem.

Key words: Nonnus of Panopolis, Gospel of John, Homer, paraphrase, narrator, intertextuality, orthodoxy, exegesis

Epic paraphrases of biblical texts were popular in the Western¹ and Eastern² halves of the Mediterranean in Late Antiquity and pose a number of narratological questions. One that is particularly thorny is that of the identity of the narrator. A poetic paraphrase of a Bible text implied transforming the original prose narrator into a vicarious poetic one. The poet could then claim this new voice for him-/herself, for instance in a preface in which s/he vindicated his/her own poetic authority, or he could pretend that the narrator of the poem was still that of the base text. The choice was complicated by the fact that writing epic hexameters was always a gesture of continuity with Homer in the East and Virgil in the West: Quintus of Smyrna, to name just one example, toyed with the notion that the narrator of his *Posthomerica* was *still* (but not quite) the poet of the *Iliad*, before he proceeded to write the *Odyssey*.³ The voice of the narrator, no matter its assumed identity, was meant to be heavily intertextual in literary terms. In the case of the Christian paraphrasts, the new poetic voice responded at the same time both to the originator of the content of the narrative (Biblical narrators) and the originator of the form of the new

¹ Juvenus composed a Latin epic based on the Gospels (*Evangeliorum libri quattuor*) under Constantine, and Sedulius a *Carmen Paschale* under Valentinian III (425-55) and Theodosius II (408-50). Arator's *Historia Apostolica* was recited in public in Rome in 544. Paulinus of Nola *Carm. 6 (Laus sancti Iohannis)* is essentially a paraphrase of Luke 1.

² The *Paraphrase of the Psalms* attributed to Apollinaris and Nonnus' *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*.

³ For how Quintus addresses this notion in his programmatic spaces, see Bär (2007). See also Maciver (2012, 7-38) on how Quintus tries to be Homer later, and the rest of the book on descriptions, *gnomai* and *similes*.

narrative (Homer, Virgil), offering further opportunities for narratorial enrichment by means of heavily layered intertextual overtures.

Narratorial tension featured in different ways in Christian epics. Juvencus fitted his *Evangeliorum libri quattuor* (ELQ), an epic based on the four gospels, with a preface in which he addressed the question of his relation with Virgil. He starts by stating that nothing on earth is immortal (Praef. 1) and everything will perish in the final conflagration determined by the Father (4-5), including vain poetry such as that of Virgil that reported fame to its authors (6-16). In contrast, Juvencus' song will bestow on him eternal glory (17-20). The subject of his work, Christ's deeds, a source of life (19 *Christi vitalia gesta*),⁴ and Juvencus' own firm faith (17 *certa fides*), are the ones without guilt or deception (20 *falsi sine crimine*), in opposition to the falsehoods of the deeds of men of old sung by the ancient poets (15-16). Virgil and Juvencus share poetic language, but Juvencus is superior to Virgil because of his faith and the immortal topic of his poem.⁵

Juvencus does not pay so much attention to the transformation of the gospel narrative (Matthew is his basic text, but he intersperses a few passages from Mark, Luke, and John): what matters to him is that the topic is Christ himself (Praef. 19-20), but in the conclusion of the poem he notes that his only addition to the divine text is earthly ornament, and that in his addition he is guided by faith, fear of God, and Christ's grace.⁶ This means that the narrative is still that of the gospels (all treated with the same reverence) and is only different in form. Juvencus prizes the combination of respect for the matter and beauty of earthly ornament and Jerome actually claims that Juvencus rendered the four gospels 'almost verbatim',⁷ implying that the narrative of the *ELQ* can be still attributed to the evangelists. Consequently, it can be stated that the preface introduces Juvencus as the narrator of the poem and disavows an ideological connection with the Virgilian narrative otherwise notably influential in the *ELQ*. Juvencus' authority does not derive so much from the intertextuality with the Gospel texts as from the direct connection with their main character, Christ.

In the East, the Psalmic Metaphrast portrays himself in the *protheoria* of his poem as a blind bard like Homer, but one who tries to convey another light (3 φάος ἄλλο).⁸ The Christian inspiration of the poem emphasises both its prophetic content and the distance from Homer's poems.⁹ The universality of the Christian message allows the presentation of the Psalms in Ionic

⁴ Green (2004, 214-16). Edition Huemer (1891); Translation McGill (2016).

⁵ Compare Nonn. *D.* 25.253-60: Homer sang of mortal Achilles and is inferior to Nonnus who extols Dionysus.

⁶ ELQ 4.802-5, to be read with Jerome's reflection in *Ep.* 70.5, on which see Green (2006, 7-8).

⁷ Jerome *On Famous men* ch. 84: "Juvencus... rendering the four gospels in hexameter verses almost word for word composed four books". After Green (2006, 2-3).

⁸ Edition Ludwig (1912). Translation: my own.

⁹ *Met. Ps.* 1 ἀθανάτοιο θεοῦ κεκορυθμένος οἶμη ("armed with the song of immortal God"), 110 Χριστὸν ἀειζώντα λαχὼν ἐπαρωγὸν ἀοιδῆς ("having secured Christ as constant helper of my song").

language because this too was created by God in the beginning (105-6a).¹⁰ In the *Metaphrasis of the Psalms* the relationship with the original text is more complicated because the paraphrast attempts to redress the ‘injustice’ of the previous rendering of the Hebrew text in the prose translation of the Septuaginta, which retained the true words of the base text but lost the grace of metre (18-21).¹¹ As a ‘literal’ translation, the Septuaginta was still the Psalms, but the loss of the original poetic form discredited the result. From this preface we can anticipate that the poetic translation of the psalms that follows will be closer to the original, and therefore closer to the original narrator.

Both Juvenecus and the Metaphrast present their poems as faithful versions of the original (still the Bible) and at the same time as their own poetic work, influenced by Homer and Virgil, respectively, but not subdued by the supposedly pagan bias of their models. A proof of the importance of the chosen forms is the fact that the wrong formal choices can devalue not only the aesthetic appreciation of the poem, but even the perception of the structural fidelity to the original. All this reflects the process of the paraphrasis (a preliminary ‘exegetical’ phase of interpretation of the base text and a stylistic reworking of the skeleton produced in the first step), and its aim of trying to surpass the model, in terms of content and style.

In what follows, I will consider the voice of the narrator at the beginning of the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John*, written by Nonnus of Panopolis in the fifth century, and how it presents itself *qua* Johannine and Homeric narrator. The *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* lacks explicit statements of poetic intent similar to the prefaces of other poetic paraphrases.¹² Nonnus’ poem begins, like the Gospel of John, with the so-called “Hymn to the Logos” and follows the gospel narrative faithfully, incorporating along the way a number of theological and ornamental additions.¹³ The fictional narrator of the *Paraphrase* is still John, which is compatible with a heavy Homeric imprint, frequently in the form of an evocation of a passage or well-known phrasing without actually citing a Homeric line.¹⁴

The fourth gospel uses a third-person anonymous narrator who never refers to himself by name, but in the final chapter (21:20-23) Peter asks Jesus about the destiny of the disciple he loved,¹⁵ and the gospel comes to an end with the attribution of the narrative to this disciple.¹⁶

¹⁰ Agosti (2001, 89) notes that ‘Ionic’ here means ‘Homeric’ (the epic verse was considered of divine origin) and emphasises two programmatic lines: poetry in the Homeric style is chosen because it is a universal *medium*, i.e. it is understood by all (not only the Christians), and it is as ancient as God.

¹¹ See Faulkner (2014, 204-205).

¹² There is only a certain authorial self-awareness in the final lines of the poem (21.139-43). Agosti (2001, 95-6) reads Nonn. *P.* 21.142 βιβλους... νεοτευχέας as self-referential to the composition of the poem in the ‘new style’. Faulkner (2014, 107-8) is sceptical. The only complete edition of the *P.* is Scheindler (1881). Translations are my own.

¹³ Detailed catalogues in Agosti (2003, 149-74); Livrea (1989, 54-7); Accorinti (1996, 45-55); Livrea (2000, 92-105); Greco (2004, 28-35); Caprara (2005, 59-64); Spanoudakis (2015, 68-87).

¹⁴ Overview of Homer’s influence on the *P.* in Spanoudakis (2014, 5-9).

¹⁵ The “disciple whom Jesus loved” is mentioned a number of times: Jo. 13:25, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20.

The ancient sources consistently refer to John, son of Zebedee, as ‘the disciple Jesus loved’, the author and narrator of the fourth gospel, the seer of the book of Revelation and the ‘elder’ of the Johannine epistles.¹⁷ Because antiquity supposedly lacked a strong sense of ‘the narrator’ as distinct from ‘the author’,¹⁸ the ancient readers of the Gospel linked the figure of the apostle John in the Synoptics and the ‘beloved disciple’ of the fourth gospel to the particularities of the narrator of the fourth gospel: John’s closeness to Christ¹⁹ effectively meant that his gospel, unlike the Synoptics, was written from closer to God, less focused on human affairs and details and more intent of the depths of God revealed by the Spirit.²⁰ John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria went as far as to attribute this narrative depth to John’s desire to counteract the heresies caused by the failure of heterodox teachers to grasp the concept of the Incarnation.²¹ The prologue of the Gospel (1:1-45), the so-called “Hymn to the Logos”, which has attracted much contemporary discussion for its differences with the rest of the Gospel,²² was considered paradigmatic of his narration of these ‘things of the Spirit’.²³

In what follows, I will compare the narrative voices of the first three sections of the Hymn to the Logos: the origin of the Logos (Jo. 1:1-5, Nonn. *P.* 1.1-13a), the introduction of the Baptist (Jo. 1:6-8, Nonn. *P.* 1.13b-23) and the incarnation (Jo. 1:9-14, Nonn. *P.* 1.24-45), to explore how Nonnus behaves *qua* Johannine and *qua* Homeric narrator?

1. Hymn to the Logos I (Jo. 1:1-5, Nonn. *P.* 1.1-13a)

A comparison of the first verses of the gospel (Jo. 1:1-5) and the beginning of Nonnus’ poem (*P.* 1.1-13a), the definition of the Word, gives us an immediate clue of the similarities and differences between the two narrators.

<i>P.</i> 1.1-13a	Jo. 1:1-5
Ἄχρονος ἦν, ἀκίχητος, ἐν ἀρρήτῳ λόγος ἀρχῆ, ἰσοφυῆς γενετῆρος ὁμήλικος υἱὸς ἀμήτωρ, καὶ λόγος αὐτοφύτῳ θεοῦ φάος, ἐκ φάεος φῶς· πατὴρ ἦν ἀμέριστος, ἀτέρμονι σύνθρονος ἔδρη· 5 καὶ θεὸς ὑψιγένεθλος ἦν λόγος. οὗτος ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἀενάῳ συνέλαμπε θεῶ, τεχνήμονι κόσμου, πρεσβύτερος κόσμοιο· καὶ ἔπλετο πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ,	1 Ἐν ἀρχῆ ἦν ὁ λόγος καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. 2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῆ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. 3 πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο

¹⁶ Jo. 21:24 “This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true” (NRSV).

¹⁷ Overview in Wiles (1960). The ‘other disciple’ known to the high-priest of John 18:15 is also assumed to be John: e.g. Jo. Chr. *Hom.* 83 (in Jo. 18:1-36); Cyr. *Comm. in Jo.* 18:15 (III.29).

¹⁸ Whitmarsh (2013).

¹⁹ Jo. 13:25 “One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him”.

²⁰ Eusebius *HE* 6.14.7; Jo. Chrys. *Hom.* 1 *In Jo.* (Goggin [1957]).

²¹ Jo. Chrys. *Hom.* 4 *In Jo.* (Jo. 1:1-3); Cyril *Comm. in Jo.* Preface book 1 (I.14-15, Pusey [1872]; transl. Maxwell – Elowsky [2013-15]).

²² See van der Watt – Culpepper – Schnelle (2016).

²³ Jo. Chrys. *Hom.* 4 *In Jo.* (Jo. 1.1-3); Cyril *Comm. in Jo.* Preface book 1 [I.15].

<p>ἄπνοα καὶ πνείοντα· καὶ ἐργοπόνου δίχα μύθου οὐδὲν ἔφυ, τόπερ ἔσκε· καὶ ἔμφυτος ἦεν ἐν αὐτῷ 10 ζωὴ πασιμέλουσα, καὶ ὠκυμόρων φῶς ἀνδρῶν ζωὴ πάντροφος ἦεν. ἐν ἀγλυόεντι δὲ κόσμῳ οὐρανίαις σελάγιζε βολαῖς γαιήοχος αἴγλη, καὶ ζόφος οὐ μιν ἔμαρψε.</p>	<p>καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὁ γέγονεν 4 ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. 5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.</p>
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P. 1.1-13a “In the ineffable beginning was the Word, timeless, unattainable, / a motherless son, of the same nature and age as his father, / and the Word was the light of the Father self-born, light of light. / He was indivisible of the Father and sat with him on the same throne without end. / [5] And the Word was God on High. He, from the beginning, / shone together with God eternal, artificer of the cosmos, / older than the cosmos. And everything came to be through him, / what is lifeless and what lives. And without the laborious word / nothing would exist, of what came to be. And inborn with him was / [10] life dear to all, and the life that nourishes all / was the light of short-lived men. In the gloomy cosmos / with heavenly rays shone the light, protector of the earth, / and the darkness did not seize it.” (Greek: De Stefani 2002; transl.: my own).

Jo. 1:1-5 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (NRSV)

The paraphrastic narrator is clearly more expansive than the evangelical one: nearly fourteen lines against five verses of the Gospel. The difference is particularly glaring in the first lines: where the Gospel only has 1:1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, Nonnus takes three lines (*P.* 1.1-3). At first look these lines are the product of deductive exegesis,²⁴ a stretching to the limit of the implied meanings of the words ἀρχῇ, ἦν and λόγος: the Word becomes ἰσοφυῆς γενετῆρος ὁμήλικος (‘of the same nature and age as the Father’) because it was with God the Father in the beginning, and is ἄχρονος (‘timeless’) because he existed (ἦν) from the beginning and therefore has non-finite temporality. However, some of these additions match what late antique commentators say on the gospel passage: in particular, Cyril explains the connotations of ἦν²⁵ and Gregory of Nazianzus uses ἄχρονος to describe poetically Christ, the Spirit, and the Father, meaning that they are all ‘timeless’ because they existed before the creation of time and are

²⁴ Young (1997, 208) on deductive exegesis. Note Faulkner (2014, 196): “one must perhaps be careful of the term ‘exegesis’, for what is meant by most scholars who use the term of Nonnus’ style is theological exegesis in line with the commentary of St Cyril of Alexandria on St John’s gospel. Less narrowly defined exegesis as explanation and interpretation of a text is an element of almost all translation”.

²⁵ Cyr. *Comm. in Jo.* 1:1 (I.18). Analysis in De Stefani (2002, 103); Franchi (2016, 245-246). On the influence of Cyril’s commentary on the *P.*, see De Stefani (2002, 20-24); Agosti (2003, 52-70, 145-147); Livrea (1989, 41-2); Spanoudakis (2014, 18-22); Franchi (2016, 243-244). Generally on the influence of patristic exegesis, see Simelidis (2016).

therefore not subjected to it.²⁶ Nonnus thus incorporates to his paraphrase previous exegesis on the base text, just as late antique epic poets reworking Homeric motifs incorporate earlier exegesis on relevant Homeric passages.²⁷

Nonnus also invokes an extra-Biblical text, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed:²⁸

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα, ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων. Καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ Πατρὶ· δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο (“We believe in one god, the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is visible and invisible. And in one lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, born of the Father before all ages, light from light, true god from true god, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the father; through him all things were made”)

P. 1.2 ἰσοφυῆς ~ Creed ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ

P. 1.3 ἐκ φάεος φῶς ~ Creed φῶς ἐκ φωτός

P. 1.6 ἀνάφ... θεῶ, τεχνήμονι κόσμου ~ Creed Πατέρα παντοκράτορα, ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς

P. 1.7b-8a καὶ ἔπλετο πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ / ἄπνοα καὶ πνεύοντα ~ Creed δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο

When commenting on the references to the Creed, De Stefani (2002, 14-15) concludes that Nonnus needs to establish his position regarding divisive issues, such as the nature of the Son, his rapport with the Father and the mystery of the Incarnation, from the beginning of the poem. This may be a personal choice, but we have noted that both John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria read the fourth gospel, starting with its very prologue, as an orthodox exposition to counteract heresy: Nonnus replicates their approach and explicitly presents an orthodox Johannine that refers to the cornerstone of orthodoxy in his period, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

More generally, Nonnus proceeds along the usual Christian lines of interpretation of the Bible: Gospel commentaries sought to go beyond the story narrated to enhance the understanding of the text by revealing dogmatic conclusions (the σκοπός or main aim of the Scripture was to reveal Jesus as Messiah)²⁹ and its moral and spiritual meaning (i.e. a paraenetic reading of Scripture).³⁰ Nonnus, *qua* Johannine narrator, behaves like the Christian

²⁶ Christ: Greg. Naz. *Carm.* I.1.2.7, I.1.5.55, II.1.11.649. The Spirit: II.1.14.48. The Father: I.1.2.18-19, 21. Overview of parallels in De Stefani (2002, 104), who suggests that the adjective may be derived from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed (τὸν ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων).

²⁷ E.g. on Triphiodorus, see Miguélez-Cavero (2013, 42-44). On the *P.* as heir to the tradition of exegesis and spiritualisation of Homer, see Agosti (2009, 331-332); Spanoudakis (2014, 3-5).

²⁸ For the adaptation of the creed in the *P.*, see De Stefani (2002, notes ad loc.); Franchi (2016, 246). Sieber (2016, 310-312), is sceptical.

²⁹ Young (1997, 181-184, 211). On Cyril, see Keating (2004, 14-17); Young (1997, 263); Kerrigan (1952, 87-110). Cf. Franchi (2016, 243): “From Cyril Nonnus takes a symbolic exegesis combined with an orthodox Christology, which underlines the divinity of the Son of God”.

³⁰ Overview in Young (1997, 203-5, 209-10, 219, 235-7, 285-99). The marked theological context of the poem implies that even if the paraenetic aim is not explicit, at least Christian readers would have taken it for granted: Young 1997, 237.

commentators of his day and implements, in poetic form, what would have been perceived as the dogmatic and theological potential of the gospel text.

Regarding Nonnus *qua* Homeric narrator, Nonnus gives his poem an unhomeric beginning, by filling his first lines with vocabulary that eludes a connection with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: ἄχρονος (*P.* 1.1), ἰσοφυῆς, ἀμήτωρ (*P.* 1.2) and αὐτοφύτοιο (*P.* 1.3) never feature in the Homeric poems; for ἀκίχητος, ἄρρητος, λόγος (*P.* 1.1) and ὀμήλικος (*P.* 1.2) there are not enough parallels nor a clearly Homeric phraseology that establish a clear connection with the Homeric poems.³¹ However, Nonnus positions two characteristically Homeric words in line 1.10 (ζωὴ πασιμέλουσα, καὶ ὠκυμόρων φάος ἀνδρῶν). πασιμέλουσα recalls the only reference to the ship Argo in the Homeric poems (*Od.* 12.70 Ἀργὸν πᾶσι μέλουσα),³² contraposing ancient myth and Christian transcendence by means of *Kontrastimitation*.³³ ὠκυμόρων... ἀνδρῶν are Achilles in the *Il.* (1.417, 1.505, 18.95, 18.458) and Penelope's suitors in the *Od.* (1.266, 4.343, 17.137): none of them will be redeemed,³⁴ whereas the mortal men of the gospel can acquire eternal life granted by God and transmitted first by the Gospel and then by the *Paraphrase*. Nonnus' double movement, away from Homer and highlighting Homer's spiritual irrelevance against the salvific power of the gospel and his own poetry, is similar to those exhibited by Juvencus and the *Metaphrasis*.

However, the defection from Homer in the first lines of the *Paraphrase* does not automatically imply the choice of a 'Christian-only' vocabulary. These first lines are packed with terms popular in oracles similar, for instance, to the description of the self-generation of the inhabitants of Beroe in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*:

Nonn. *D.* 41.51-3 ἐνθάδε φῶτες ἔναιον ὀμήλικες Ἑριγενείης,

οὓς Φύσις αὐτογένεθλος ἀνυμφεύτω τινὶ θεσμῷ

ἦροσε νόσφι γάμων, ἀπάτωρ, ἀλόχευτος, ἀμήτωρ

"Here dwelt a people agemates with the Dawn, whom Nature by her own breeding, in some unwedded way, begat without bridal, without wedding, fatherless, motherless, unborn" (Greek text from Vian 1976-2006; translation from Rouse 1940)

Nonn. *D.* 41.51 ὀμήλικες Ἑριγενείης ~ *P.* 1.2 γενετήρος ὀμήλικος; Nonn. *D.* 41.52 αὐτογένεθλος ~ *P.* 1.3 αὐτοφύτοιο; Nonn. *D.* 41.53 ἀμήτωρ = *P.* 1.2 ἀμήτωρ (same sedes). Also the existence from the beginning of time (*D.* 41.51 ~ *P.* 1.5b-7a).

³¹ For *P.* 1.1 ἀκίχητος (only *Il.* 17.75-6), ἄρρητος (only *Od.* 14.466), λόγος (only *Il.* 15.323, *Od.* 1.56, in both cases in plural); *P.* 1.2 ὀμήλικος (*Il.* 9.54; *Od.* 15.197, 16.419, 24.107).

³² The expression is a Homeric *unicum*, but relates to well-known Homeric phrase: *Il.* 6.493-4 πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει/ πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί, with variations in *Od.* 1.359, 11.353, 21.353.

³³ See also *P.* 6.136-7; 15.50-1; 19.178-9. Also *D.* 4.92 (παρθένε π.), 5.128 (Ἑρην π.), 19.195 (νίκην π.), 31.94 (π. Θέμις), 40.351 (ὦ πόλι π.), 48.709 (πέρσω πασιμέλουσαν ὄλην πετρώδεα Πυθῶ). On *Kontrastimitation*, see Thraede 1962, 1039-40.

³⁴ See especially the Nonnian take on the Homeric comparison of the human generation and the leaves in *D.* 3.349-55. The adjective recurs in the *D.* to describe humans condemned to have short lives: 7.35; 8.150, 8.385-6; 26.19-20; 32.219-20 Adonis; 38.432 Phaethon; 44.201-2; 46.302 Pentheus.

Both the beginning of the *Paraphrase* and the oracular passage of the *Dionysiaca* refer to widespread notions of the divine that would ring a bell beyond Christian circles. These expressions developed in the so-called ‘theological’ oracles which reflected on the nature and epithets of the divine, creating a pool of poetic vocabulary that could be invoked in all creeds.³⁵ For instance, the beginning of the *Paraphrase* and the oracle of the *Dionysiaca* share some vocabulary with an oracle of the *Theosophia Tubingensis*, a Byzantine epitome of a collection of oracles supposedly gathered in the late fifth century in Alexandria, to prove that pagan prophecies supported the existence of one god and predicted Christian doctrines such as that of the Trinity:³⁶

Αὐτοφύης, ἀδίδακτος, ἀμήτωρ, ἀστυφέλικτος,
οὐνομα μηδὲ λόγῳ χωρούμενος, ἐν πυρὶ ναίων,
τοῦτο θεός... [I.2.27-9 Beatrice = §13.14-16 Erbse]

“Self-generated, untaught, motherless, undisturbed, / whose name cannot be held in words, who dwells in the fire, / this is god”

Αὐτοφύης ~ P. 1.2 ἰσοφύης γενετῆρος, 1.3 αὐτοφύτοιο; ἀμήτωρ = P. 1.2; ἀστυφέλικτος ~ P. 1.1 Ἄχρονος, ἀκίχητος.

At least some of the oracles of the *Theosophia* were chosen precisely because their wording was similar to the Christian naming of God,³⁷ and the fact that Gregory of Nazianzus refers to this particular oracle³⁸ suggests that orthodox Christians felt comfortable with its wording.

The main conclusion we can extract from comparing the first lines of the *Paraphrase* with its evangelical and Homeric backgrounds is that Nonnus chooses to remain a Johannine narrator, informed by the orthodoxy of his time, and brings early attention on the differences between his paraphrastic narrator and the Homeric one. Nonnus’ narrator does in practice in the first lines of the *Paraphrase* what other paraphrasts such as Juvencus and the Psalmic Metaphrast theorise in their programmatic passages.

2. John the Baptist (Jo. 1:6-8, Nonn. P. 1.13b-23)

The fourth gospel is the only evangelical narrative to include a lengthy treatment of John the Baptist.³⁹ The Gospel only states that a man appeared, sent by God, whose name was John and whose mission was to give testimony of the light to all, not being the light himself (1:6-8).

³⁵ Lane Fox (1986, 168-261); Salzman (2007).

³⁶ On the *D.* and the *Theosophia* see Miguélez-Cavero (2008, 182-186); Gigli Piccardi (2016, 434-435).

³⁷ Busine (2005, 51): “some oracles of Apollo describe pagan gods with epithets that are not dissimilar with the Christian way of naming God and for this reason were used in the Theosophy. For instance, in Clarian and Didymeian oracles, Zeus is often presented as the supreme god by terms such as ὑψιμέδων γενέτης (‘begetter ruling on high’, in Theosophy I 37 Beatrice = § 41 Erbse); πανδερκής (‘seen by all’, in Theosophy I 19 Beatrice = § 22 Erbse); βιοδώτωρ (‘furnishing a livelihood’, in Theosophy I 20 Beatrice = § 23 Erbse); ζωοδότης (‘giver of life’, in Theosophy I 21 Beatrice = § 24 Erbse)”. Note Nonn. P. 1.5 θεὸς ὑψιγένεθλος, 10 ζωὴ πασιμέλουσα, 11 ζ. πάντροφος.

³⁸ Greg. Naz. *Carm.* 2.2.7.253-5 = PG 37.1571 (Apollo forecasts the destruction of the oracle).

³⁹ The narrative on him in the Gospel of Mark (1:2-11, 6:17-29) is shorter and less elaborated.

Nonnus elaborates the introduction of the Baptist with information about his life in the desert, and develops the Gospel's brief description of John's mission:

- ...μελισσοβότῳ δ' ἐνὶ λόχμῃ
 ἔσκε τις οὐρεσίφοιτος ἐρημάδος ἀστὸς ἐρίπνης,
 15 κῆρυξ ἀρχεγόνου βαπτίσματος· οὄνομα δ' αὐτῷ
 θεῖος Ἰωάννης λαοσσόος· οὗτος ἐπέστη
 ἄγγελος ἐμπεδόμυθος, ὅπως περὶ φωτὸς ἐνίψη
 μαρτυρίην, ἵνα πάντες ἐνὸς κήρυκος ἰωῆ
 ὀρθὴν πίστιν ἔχοιεν, ἀτέρμονα μητέρα κόσμου·
 20 οὐ μὲν κεῖνος ἔην νοερὸν φάος, ἀλλ' ἵνα μόνον
 πᾶσιν ἀναπτύξειε θεηγόρον ἀνθρεῶνα
 καὶ φάεος προκέλευθος ἀκηρύκτιο φανείη,
 ξυνήν μαρτυρίην ἐνέπων θεοδέγμονι λαῷ.

“But from a thicket which feeds bees / came one mountain-dweller, citizen of the deserted crags, / [15] herald of the primeval baptism. His name was / John, divine saviour of the people.⁴⁰ He was / the messenger steadfast to the word, because he gave testimony / of the light, so that all by the voice of a single herald / received the true faith, eternal mother of the cosmos. / [20] He was no light intellectual himself, but [he came] only so as to / open for the sake of all his god-inspired mouth / and to appear as forerunner of the light not previously heralded, / giving public testimony to the people willing to receive God.” (Greek: De Stefani 2002; transl.: my own).

Nonnus transforms the Johannine narrator by homogenising the narrative with that of the Synoptics:⁴¹

- 1.13b μελισσοβότῳ δ' ἐνὶ λόχμῃ (“from a thicket which feeds bees”) is a reminiscence of the comment that John lived on wild honey (Mt 3:4 ἡ δὲ τροφή ἦν αὐτοῦ ἀκρίδες καὶ μέλι ἄγριον; Mk 1:6 ὁ Ἰωάννης... ἐσθίων... μέλι ἄγριον).
- 1.14 ἔσκε τις οὐρεσίφοιτος ἐρημάδος ἀστὸς ἐρίπνης (“came one mountain-dweller, citizen of the deserted crags”) develops Mt 3:1 παραγίνεται Ἰωάννης... ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τῆς Ἰουδαίας (“John appeared in the wilderness from Judaea”) and Mk 1:4 ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης... ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (“John appeared... in the wilderness”).
- 1.15 κῆρυξ ἀρχεγόνου βαπτίσματος (“herald of the primeval baptism”), transforms the verb of speech with which the Synoptics describe the beginning of John's mission (Mk 1:4 κηρύσσων; Mt 3:1 κηρύσσων) into a noun.⁴²
- 1.17a ἄγγελος ἐμπεδόμυθος (“messenger steadfast to the word”),⁴³ after the quotation of Mal. 3:1 in Mk. 1:2 (Καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ, Ἴδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου “As it is written in the prophet Isaiah: ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you [Mal. 3:1], who will prepare your way [Is. 40:3]”).

⁴⁰ Or “stirrer of the people”. See De Stefani (2002, 120).

⁴¹ See De Stefani (2002, 118-19).

⁴² Again in 1.60 πιστὸς Ἰωάννης ἐτυμόθροος... κῆρυξ, 67 κῆρυξ; 3.130 πρωτόθροε κῆρυξ.

⁴³ Again in 1.46-7 πρωτάγγελος ἀνὴρ / ἀγνὸς Ἰωάννης.

Nonnus' incorporation of details from the Synoptics is a reminder of the general reflection among ancient Christian scholars that the four evangelists tell the same narrative.⁴⁴ It is therefore not surprising that Nonnus often reinforces his narrative with information from other books of the Bible,⁴⁵ which has the effect of turning the Johannine narrator into a micro Biblical narrator, just as the Biblical commentators transform the reading of a particular passage into a pattern of Biblical citations. Indeed Nonnus' micro-Biblical John is also a Cyrillian John:

1.14 ἔσκε τις οὐρεσίφοιτος ἐρημάδος ἀστὸς ἐρίπνης, seems to refer to *Cyrl Comm. in Jo.* 1:8 (I.94) "The Baptist preferred spending time in the desert to living in the cities".

The Gospel only defines John's action as μαρτυρία 'testimony' of the light (1:7-8) – Nonnus develops this concept and does not eschew for stylistic reasons the repetition of the term (17b-8a ὅπως περὶ φωτὸς ἐνίψη / μαρτυρίην, 23 ξυνήν μαρτυρίην ἐνέπων θεοδέγμονι λαῶ), which matches the emphasis on the legal context of the witnessing in Cyril's commentary (*Cyrl Comm. in Jo.* 1:6-7 = I.89-91).

The presentation of the Baptist as God's messenger (ἄγγελος – Nonn. *P.* 1.17) was discussed by John Chrysostom (*Hom. 6 in Jo.* [1:6-8]) and Cyril (*Comm. in Jo.* 1:6-7 = I.91-2), who both insist that the Baptist did not have the nature of the angels, but that he was only God's messenger, not speaking his own mind, but reproducing the word of God (as in Nonn. *P.* 1.20b-1 ἀλλ' ἵνα μόνον / πᾶσιν ἀναπτύξειε θεηγόρον ἀνθερεῶνα).

The Baptist's objective in the Gospel is that all come to believe through him (1:7 ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ), which in Nonnus' hands becomes a call for orthodox faith (18b-19 ἵνα πάντες ἐνὸς κήρυκος ἰωῆ / ὀρθὴν πίστιν ἔχοιεν, ἀτέρμονα μητέρα κόσμου). This follows on Cyril's presentation of the evangelist as a champion of orthodoxy and of his gospel as a correction of heretical teachers (*Comm. in Jo.* Preface book 1 = 1.14-15).

The contradiction in Nonnus' text between a broad target audience for John's words (18-19 ἵνα πάντες ἐνὸς κήρυκος ἰωῆ / ὀρθὴν πίστιν ἔχοιεν) and a more restricted one, limited to those willing to receive God (23 ξυνήν μαρτυρίην ἐνέπων θεοδέγμονι λαῶ), is absent in the gospel text. In contrast, Cyril (*Comm. in Jo.* 1:6-7 = I.93) claims that John's intention is that all believe, but that because each person has the power over their own choice, only those who chose to listen hear and are converted.

Nonn. *P.* 1.20 οὐ μὲν κεῖνος ἦν νοερόν φῶς ("he was not light intellectual") – the adjective is neither prompted by the gospel text nor by the parallels of the Synoptics. De Stefani (2002, p. 122, n. to 1.20) notes that the cluster φῶς/φέγγος νοερόν/νοητόν has Neoplatonic connotations. Nonnus may have chosen it by taking them into account, but Cyril is his most probable source, as 'the light of intelligence' and 'the light of understanding' recur frequently in his commentary.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jo. Chrys. *Hom. 4 In Jo.* (Jo. 1.1-3). *Cyrl Comm. in Jo.*, preface to book 1 (I.12).

⁴⁵ E.g. for the healing of the paralytic of Bethesda, in *P.* 5.6b-56, Nonnus takes into account other miraculous healings (see Agosti [2003, 107-10]).

⁴⁶ *Cyrl Comm. in Jo.* 1:9 (I.113); 6:68 (I.574); 8:12 (I.711-12); 9:5 (II.155).

Nonnus insists on the divinity of John's mission (16a θεῖος Ἰωάννης λαοσσόος, 21 θεηγόρον ἀνθερεῶνα),⁴⁷ matching one of the central lines of argumentation in Cyril's theology, the deification of the believer.⁴⁸

The pervasive influence of Cyril's *Commentary* on the narrative voice of the *Paraphrase* would not have meant a diminution of its 'Johannine-ness' in the eyes of late antique readers. Just as Homeric criticism informed the creative approaches to epic, the Cyrillian veneer would have been interpreted as the orthodox approach to the gospel text.

Nonn. *P.* 1.13b-23 also testifies to the doings of Nonnus *qua* Homeric narrator. The presentation of the Baptist as 'herald' (κήρυξ) and 'messenger' (ἄγγελος) would be at home in the Homeric tradition that called the heralds "messengers of Zeus and of men" (*Il.* 1.334=7.274 κήρυκες Διὸς ἄγγελοι ἠδὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν),⁴⁹ and considered them illustrious (*Il.* 3.268 κήρυκες ἀγαυοὶ = *Od.* 8.418) and divine (*Il.* 4.192 θεῖον κήρυκα, 10.315 κήρυκος θεῖοιο). Also, theirs, like the Baptist's, is a public trade (*Od.* 19.135 κηρύκων, οἱ δημοεργοὶ ἔασιν).

Homeric appearances are thus well kept, but the differences between the Homeric and the evangelical context are glaring. In Nonnus' times, the word ἄγγελος maintained its original meaning ('messenger') and at the same time referred specifically to God's messengers, the angels. As Cyril and John Chrysostom's commentaries make clear, the Baptist was considered an angel of God, either in nature (he was not a man, but an angel) or for his mission (he was a specific type of messenger, God's messenger). To complicate the picture further, imperial officials and monks were often compared with angels and angels were seen as heavenly administrators.⁵⁰ This meant that some *angeloi* were figures of the imperial court, which would be at odds with their Homeric variants who served households of some standing, and with the figure of the Baptist, who announced God's message not in a war, or in the houses of the powerful, or in a town setting, but in the desert, where people flock to listen to him.

Nonnus highlights the differences with Homer with his presentation of John the Baptist as θεῖος Ἰωάννης λαοσσόος (1.16). In the Homeric poems λαοσσόος is applied to the pagan gods stirring war,⁵¹ but could also be interpreted as 'saviour of the people'.⁵² The *Kontrastimitation* between the pagan usage of this particular word (and a more general interpretation of pagan divinity) and the Christian one draws a line between the two faiths: John the Baptist is λαοσσόος like the pagan gods, and a θεῖος ἀνὴρ (1.16, 129) like the Homeric

⁴⁷ Also 1.94 θέσκελος ἀνὴρ, 103 ἀγνὸς Ἰωάννης, 113 στόμα θεῖον, 133 ἅγιος Ἰωάννης.

⁴⁸ In Cyril's writings humanity is recapitulated in Christ and the Sacraments enable the believer to participate corporeally in Christ and to live with the divine life (the deification of the believer is correlative to the incarnation of the word): Russell 2000, 18-21; Keating 2004.

⁴⁹ Zeus' messenger, Iris, is always called ἄγγελος: *Il.* 2.26=24.133, 2.786, 18.182, 24.296.

⁵⁰ Kelly 2004, 232-9.

⁵¹ *Il.* 13.128 Ἀθηναίη λαοσσόος, 17.398 Ἄρης λαοσσόος (~ Nonn. *D.* 32.173, 34.125), 20.48 Ἔρις... λαοσσόος, 20.79 λαοσσόος... Ἀπόλλων; *Od.* 22.210 λαοσσόον... Ἀθήνην.

⁵² *Lith. Orph.* 10.58; Theod. Prodr. *Carm. Hist.* 3.1, 84. Indeed of Jesus' voice (*P.* 8.1 λαοσσόον αὐδὴν – see also *D.* 13.506=43.69, 27.166) and of Christ (*P.* 7.117, 11.217-18). According to De Stefani 2002, pp. 119-20, n. to 1.16, "il parafraste... si sarebbe poi appropriato del valore anfibolo di -σοος".

heralds (*Il.* 4.192 θεῖον κήρυκα, 10.315 κήρυκος θείοιο) and the pagan saints,⁵³ but he is only the φάεος προκέλευθος (22), the precursor of Christ the θεὸς ἀνὴρ (1.39, 157).

The paraphrastic narrator is thus both distant from the Johannine narrator and the Homeric narrator, but in different ways. The incorporation of the Synoptic gospels and the readings of Biblical commentators (especially Cyril of Alexandria) would not have been perceived by late antique readers as a form of discontinuity from the Gospel text. In contrast, the distance from Homer is more visible, not only because of the use of *Kontrastimitation* (highlighting the gap between the Christian and pagan versions of things), but also because of the distance between the pre-classical world of the *basileis* at war and the late antique Empire. And the Homeric herald is aesthetically commended for his voice,⁵⁴ whereas there is no hint of aesthetic enjoyment in the description of the voice of the Baptist, only the serious intent of giving human voice to the orthodox faith. As in Juvencus' case, the *ornamenta... terrestria linguae* (4.805) come second to firm faith (*Praef.* 17 *certa fides*).

3. "Hymn to the Logos" II (Jo. 1:9-14, Nonn. *P.* 1.24-45): the Incarnation

After the presentation of John the Baptist comes the second part of the "Hymn to the Logos", which describes the Incarnation:

Jo. 1:9-14 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. 10 ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. 11 εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. 12 ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, 13 οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν. 14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας ("The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth") (Transl. NRSV).

I will compare the gospel passage to its poetic equivalent, focusing on the strategies of the paraphrastic narrator to create his own narrative style, both similar and different from the Johannine and Homeric way of narrating.

Nonn. *P.* 1.24-45 καὶ γὰρ εὖ μετὰ πατρός ἐτήτυμον ἀρχέγονον φῶς
25 μονογενῆς λόγος ἦεν, ὃς ἀνέρα πάντα καθαίρει
πνευματικῆς ἀκτίσι καταναγάζων φύσιν ἀνδρῶν

⁵³ De Stefani (2002, 28). In general, Agosti (2003, 102-127).

⁵⁴ Homeric heralds are 'clear-voiced' (*Il.* 2.50 κηρύκεσσι λιγυφθόγγοισι = *Il.* 2.442, 9.20, 23.39, *Od.* 2.6), or 'loud-voiced' (*Il.* 18.505 κηρύκων ἐν χέρσ' ἔχον ἠεροφώνων).

ἐρχομένων ἐπὶ γαῖαν· ἔην δ' ἐν ἀπειθεί κόσμῳ
 ἀπροϊδής, καὶ κόσμος ἀπείριτος ἔσκε δι' αὐτοῦ,
 καὶ λόγον οὐ γίνωσκεν ἐπήλυδα κόσμος ἀλήτης.
 30 ἐγγὺς ἔην ἰδίων, ἴδιοι δέ μιν ἄφρονι λύσση
 ὡς ξένον οὐκ ἐγέραιρον· ὅσοι δέ μιν ἔμφροني θυμῷ
 ἀπλανέες δέξαντο καὶ οὐ νόον εἶχον ἀλήτην,
 οὐρανίην πάντεσσι μίαν δωρήσατο τιμὴν
 τέκνα θεοῦ γενετῆρος ἀειζώντος ἀκούειν,
 35 οὓς φύσις οὐκ ᾔδινε λεχριάς, οὐ βίος ἔγνω
 ἀνδρομέου βλάστημα θελήματος, οὐδὲ καὶ αὐτὴ
 σαρκὸς ἐρωτοτόκοιο γαμήλιος ἤροσεν εὐνή,
 ἀλλὰ θεοῦ γεγάασιν ἀνήροτα τέκνα τοκῆος.
 καὶ λόγος αὐτοτέλεστος ἐσαρκώθη, θεὸς ἀνὴρ
 40 ὀπίγονος προγένεθλος, ἐν ἀρρήτῳ τινὶ θεσμῷ
 ξυνώσας ζαθέην βροτοειδέϊ σύζυγα μορφὴν.
 καὶ θεὸς οἶκον ἔναιε σὺν ἀνδράσι, καὶ κλέος αὐτοῦ
 εἶδομεν ἀνδρομέοισιν ἐν ὄμμασιν, οἷά τε τιμὴν
 υἱοῦ μουνογόνοιο παρ' ὑψίστοιο τοκῆος·
 45 καὶ χάριτος πέπληθε καὶ ἀτρεκίης γενετῆρος.

“And in fact, together with his Father, the authentic primeval light / was the only-begotten Word, who purifies all men / illuminating with spiritual rays the nature of men / who come to the Earth. It was unforeseen in the unbelieving world / and the immense world came into being through Him / and the vagrant world did not recognise the word nearby. / [30] It was close to his own, but his own people with senseless madness / did not receive him, as if he were a foreigner. To those with sensible mind / who received him unerring and did not have a vagrant mind, / he gave a celestial honour, / to be called children of God, the ever-living Father. / [35] To these nature did not give birth in childbed, life did not recognise / as offspring of human desire, nor did that / marital bed of flesh that produces love plough them, / but they were the unploughed children of God the Father. / And the Word self-begotten was made flesh, God, man, / [40] late-born, engendered earlier, in an ineffable manner, / bringing together the divine form and the mortal. / And God set his home among men, and we have seen / his glory with human eyes, such as the honour / to the only-begotten son from the Father on high. / [45] And he was full with grace and truth from the Father.”

The comparison of the gospel and the *Paraphrase* reveals in the first place how the paraphrast refers to earlier and subsequent verses of the gospel in order to build a more cohesive narrative, clearly different from the disjointed Johannine one:

P. 1.24-5 καὶ γὰρ ἐοῦ μετὰ πατρός ἐτήτυμον ἀρχέγονον φῶς / μουνογενῆς λόγος ἦεν (“And in fact, together with his Father, the authentic primeval light / was the only-begotten Word”), reminds us of Jo. 1:2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν (“He was in the beginning with God”).

P. 1.25 μονογενῆς λόγος ἦεν, anticipates the attribute from Jo. 1:14 δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός (“the glory as of a Father’s only son”).

P. 1.40 ὀπίσθιος προγένεθλος, prepares us for the following verse: Jo. 1:15 Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν (“He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me”).

Secondly, one of the salient stylistic features of the Gospel is the penchant for word repetition as a means of narrative advancement. Nonnus does not replicate the majority of the repetitions of the gospel passage:

Jo. 1:9 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον – Nonnus reproduces the first φῶς (1.24) and gives a longer paraphrase for the verb (25b-6 ὃς ἀνέρα πάντα καθαίρει / πνευματικαῖς ἀκτίσι καταργάζων φύσιν ἀνδρῶν)

Jo. 1:11 εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον – this can be retained as a polyptoton (30 ἐγγυὸς ἔην ἰδίων, ἴδιοι δέ μιν ἄφρονοι λύσση)

Jo. 1:11-12 καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτὸν – substitution of both verbs (31 οὐκ ἐγέραιρον, 32 δέξαντο)

Jo. 1:13 οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν. The P. has again three periods on the birth from the flesh, but now each with its own subject and verb (35a οὐς φύσις οὐκ ᾔδινε λεχῶιάς + 35b-36a οὐ βίος ἔγνω / ἀνδρομέου βλάστημα θελήματος + 36b-37 οὐδὲ καὶ αὐτὴ / σαρκὸς ἐρωτοτόκοιο γαμήλιος ἦροσεν ἐνὴ – note the avoidance of the repetition of θελήματος) and one on God (ἀλλὰ θεοῦ γεγάασιν ἀνήροτα τέκνα τοκῆος). Nonnus introduces a new verbal repetition (οὐδὲ... ἦροσεν vs. ἀνήροτα).

Jo. 1:14 ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός – the repeated word disappears altogether (42 κλέος, 43 τιμήν)

However, repetition is retained to highlight key concepts. In particular, the repetition of the noun κόσμος becomes a standard stylistic feature of the *Paraphrase*.⁵⁵

Jo. 1:9-10 ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω becomes P.1.27-9 ἐρχομένων ἐπὶ γαῖαν· ἔην δ’ ἐν ἀπειθεί κόσμῳ / ἀπροϊδής, καὶ κόσμος ἀπείριτος ἔσκε δι’ αὐτοῦ, / καὶ λόγον οὐ γίνωσκεν ἐπήλυδα κόσμος ἀλήτης.

Finally, one of the most notable features of the “Hymn to the Logos” is the contraposition of God’s light and darkness outside of God, which Nonnus develops further by adding an extra link between darkness and the *kosmos*:

Jo. 1:5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν (“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it”), expanded by Nonnus: 1.11b-13a ἐν ἀγλυόντι δὲ κόσμῳ / οὐρανίαις σελάγιζε βολαῖς γαιήοχος αἴγλη, / καὶ ζόφος οὐ μιν

⁵⁵ Already 1.6-7 τεχνήμονι κόσμοι, / πρεσβύτερος κόσμοιο and subsequently 3.87-8 (x2), 8.51-4 (x3), 9.23-4 (x2), 12.123-4 (x2), 15.73-9 (x5), 16.107-8 (x2), 17.14-16 (x3), 17.48-50 (x3), 17.70-1 (x2), 17.78-9 (x2), 18.169-70 (x2).

ἔμαρψε (“In the gloomy cosmos / with heavenly rays shone the light, protector of the earth,
/ and the darkness did not seize it”)

Nonnus develops the opposition between light (φῶς) and world (κόσμος) already present in the gospel. The light (as the word and the Son) is associated to truth (24 ἐτήτυμον... φῶς ~ Jo. 1:9 τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν), purification (25 ὃς ἀνέρα πάντα καθαίρει), illumination (26 πνευματικαῖς ἀκτῖσι καταυγάζων φύσιν ἀνδρῶν ~ Jo. 1:9 ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον), and creative action (28 κόσμος ἀπείριτος ἔσκε δι’ αὐτοῦ ~ Jo. 1:10 ὁ κόσμος δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο).

The contraposition of light and darkness occurs in a few other passages of the fourth gospel,⁵⁶ but is recurrent in the *Paraphrase*: it becomes the articulating motif in the episode of the healing of the blind man in book 9⁵⁷ and occurs systematically when the narrator mentions the transition from disbelief to belief, often through baptism.⁵⁸ Indeed, the polarisation of opposites is a standard stylistic trait of the *Paraphrase*. They are introduced when the gospel does not mention them:

Jo. 1:3 πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο (“all things came into being through him”), in which Nonnus introduces the opposition: 1.7b-8a καὶ ἔπλετο πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ, / ἄπνοα καὶ πνεύοντα (“And everything came to be through him, what is lifeless and what lives”)

When the gospel displays an opposition, it is often emphasised and elaborated. For instance, the gospel mentions, but does not elaborate on, the opposition of believers and non-believers (Jo. 1:11-12 “he came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But all who received him ...”) as the paraphrast does (29-32):⁵⁹ disbelief (27 ἀπειθεί), instability (29 ἀλήτης) and madness (ἄφρονη λύσση) lead to lack of recognition of the Incarnate Logos (29 λόγον οὐ γίνωσκεν) and the opposite qualities enable listeners of Jesus to accept him (31-2 ὅσοι δέ μιν ἔμφορον θυμῷ / ἀπλανέες δέξαντο καὶ οὐ νόον εἶχον ἀλήτην). The contrast between believers and non-believers is elaborated in these terms throughout the poem.⁶⁰

Similar strategies of stylistic homogenisation seem to inform Nonnus’ choices of epic vocabulary. The disbelievers are governed by a madness (30 ἄφρονη λύσση) that causes them not to recognise one of them (ἴδιοι .../ ὡς ξένον οὐκ ἐγέροιον). λύσσα is not present in the Gospel text, and has epic connotations, as it is associated with the extreme behaviours of Hector

⁵⁶ Jo. 3:19-21 after which Nonn. *P.* 3.98b-109; Jo. 8:12, after which Nonn. *P.* 8.2-5; Jo. 9:4-5, after which Nonn. *P.* 9.19-24; Jo. 12:35-6, after which Nonn. *P.* 12.138-46; 12:46, after which Nonn. *P.* 12.181-3.

⁵⁷ The reference in the introduction of the scene in the gospel (Jo. 9:4-5) becomes a leit-motif in the Nonnian episode: 9.28-9, 39-40, 42, 43, 65, 71b-2, 74a, 91b, 97, 102, 127b-8a, 155b-7a, 177b-80a, 184-6.

⁵⁸ 1.124-5 (after Jo. 1:33); 3.5-7 (after Jo. 3:1-2 Nicodemus visited Jesus during the night); 4.4-5a (after Jo. 4:1 the Pharisees found out that Jesus was baptising more disciples than John); 4.60b-1 (after Jo. 4:13); 4.245-6 (after Jo. 4:53 the noble man and all his household believed); 14.65b-6 (after Jo. 14:17); 17.15-16 (after Jo. 17:6); 18.18-24 (description of a lamp in the darkness of the garden where Jesus is arrested – after a brief reference in Jo. 18:3 to the soldiers carrying lanterns, torches and weapons).

⁵⁹ The antithetical characterisation or technique of dual polarity, i.e. the setting up of agents of action one against the other, occurs in the gospel text and is elaborated by Nonnus, see Spanoudakis (2015, 78-81).

⁶⁰ E.g. for non-believers: 5.57 Ἑβραῖοι μανιώδεις ἄφρονη θυμῷ (“the Hebrews, frantic with senseless anger”); 8.43-44; 8.141-2; 15.93-4. For believers: 7.174-5.

and Achilles in the *Iliad*,⁶¹ and in the *Dionysiaca* with Dionysus' influence, especially on the members of his *thiasos*.⁶² In the *Paraphrase* λύσσα explains the poor behaviour of the Jews,⁶³ of the disciples in bleak moments⁶⁴ and of those who will refuse to believe in the future.⁶⁵ Conversion is described as an abandonment of λύσσα.⁶⁶

When the Word is made flesh (1.39-42b), those who believe do not contemplate the δόξα of the gospel text (1:14 ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός), tainted by deceptive connotations inherited from Parmenides into Platonic thinking and then Christian apologetics.⁶⁷ Nonnus has instead proper epic κλέος and τιμή (1.42b-4), which, together with κῦδος, are the leading notions of the discourse on glory in the *Paraphrase*,⁶⁸ constantly commenting on the interdependence of the glory of the Father and the Son. This is most appropriate as in the Homeric poems Zeus is the owner and dispenser of the ultimate glory.⁶⁹

These strategies for narrative cohesion leave behind the disjointed style of the fourth gospel (lack of connectors remedied; excessive word repetition suppressed, while significant concepts are highlighted by repetition) and help create a new narrative style characterised by the systematic contraposition of opposing concepts and the systematic choice of relevant Homeric vocabulary. They reveal the narrative voice of the *Paraphrase* as stylistically less Johannine than in terms of content. The adoption of a Homeric veneer, especially in cases such as the basic gospel concept of *doxa*, is an invitation both to appreciate the epic potential of the gospel (as narrated by the paraphrast, it is as epic as the Homeric poems) and to realise that changes in the form of the gospel do not distort its content.

4. Conclusions

Although its lack of programmatic spaces has traditionally discouraged metapoetic reflection, the *Paraphrase* emerges from a close reading of the “Hymn to the Logos” as a text that has much to contribute to studies of narratology, intertextuality and generally late antique (Christian) poetics. The narrator of the ‘Hymn to the Logos’ presents himself as a new literary voice who inhabits and illuminates the interstice between the classical tradition and the

⁶¹ Hector: *Il.* 9.239, 305. Achilles: *Il.* 21.542.

⁶² *D.* 15.152, 21.64, 29.319, 32.137, 43.267, 46.124, 46.189 (Pentheus).

⁶³ 4.10, 5.114b-15, 5.173, 10.109b, 10.117, 18.114 (Caiaphas).

⁶⁴ 6.182-3a. Jesus of those who will betray him: 6.197-201. On Judas: 13.10, 13.124. The disciples can be affected by similar suffering when Jesus is not with them: 16.1-2. See further Franchi (2016, 257).

⁶⁵ 16.9-10.

⁶⁶ 2.114, 17.64-5.

⁶⁷ Smolak (1984, 9-10); De Stefani (2002, p. 139, n. to 1.42); Agosti (2003, pp. 488-9, n. to 5.120).

⁶⁸ *P.* 2.58 (Jo. 2:11); 5.119b-23a (after Jo. 5:30-1); 5.169-71 (after Jo. 5.44); 7.64-6 (Jo. 7:18); 11.16-19a (after Jo. 11:4); 13.128-9 (after Jo. 13:31).

⁶⁹ *Il.* 1.278-9 (and 8.216, 11.300, 12.437, 19.204, 21.570); 2.197; 5.33 (and 12.174); 5.225-6; 8.141-2 (also 17.566); 16.84-5; 17.251. For κλέος, see *Od.* 8.74 (19.108); 9.20.

‘unlearned’ Gospel text: he claims at the same time to be still a Johannine and Homeric presence but both older voices are reconfigured and transformed to suit a late antique context that necessarily (in chronological and aesthetic terms) goes beyond a simple intertextuality with the classical tradition and the gospel text. The paraphrastic narrator is ‘still’ Johannine in the faithful rendering of the gospel text, while at the same time reflecting the late antique perception of John as an orthodox, present also in contemporary exegetes such as John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria. In terms of style, the new voice retains some characteristically Johannine repetitions (especially of κόσμος), but generally avoids them, and develops the contraposition of light and darkness characteristic of the Gospel to become a stylistic trademark of the new poem within a broader strategy of polarisation of opposites.

Nonnus’ first lines are conspicuously unhomeric, thus illuminating the distance with the ‘pagan’ classical tradition, in a similar way as the programmatic passages of Juvenecus and the Psalmic Metaphrast. Beyond this first appearance, the narrator of the *Paraphrase* is presented using a number of Homeric concepts alien to the Gospel (ἄγγελος, κῆρυξ, κλέος, τιμή, κῦδος) that elevate the gospel text into what late antiquity still considered to be the highest literary category: Homeric epic.

Multi-layered intertextuality is the key stylistic trait of the narrator of the *Paraphrase*. In this, he is not different from earlier poets who attempt to find their own epic voice vis-à-vis Homer, or indeed from the narrator of Nonnus’ other poem, the *Dionysiaca*. What is significant is that he is trying to create a Christian narrative voice that speaks a similar language, and that he is not alone in this, as Juvenecus and the Psalmic Metaphrast testify. The Christian element brings intertextuality to an entirely new level.

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