Pan et la Syrinx, ou l'invention de la flûte à sept tuyaux

Laforgue was interested in the figure of Pan from early on. He had read Mallarmé's "Après-midi d'un faune" (1876), featuring the same legend and themes: the faun's pursuit of the nymphs who escape him, desire as the pursuit of the unattainable, and the consolation provided by art. It had definite Decadent associations, since Huysmans made it a favorite of des Esseintes and described it at some length in A Rebours. The subject may also have been suggested to him by the recently completed Persée et Andromède, which has the same source, Ovid's Metamorphoses. It of course is prominent in history painting from the Renaissance onward, in works, for example, by Jordaens, Poussin, Pellegrini, Tiepolo, and Boucher.

The legend of Pan and Syrinx as told in Metamorphoses I (689–712) recounts the god's pursuit of the chaste nymph in the mountains of Arcadia, and her metamorphosis into marsh reeds by the nymphs of the stream Ladon, her father, in answer to her prayer. Pan's sigh of disappointment at losing the object of his desire produces sweet music as it stirs the reeds and inspires him to invent the reed-pipe; his relations with the maiden are in this way consummated but displaced to the level of art. The story arises in answer to a question posed by Argus to Mercury, disguised as a shepherd, about the origin of the reed-pipe, and thus functions as a myth.

Pan et la Syrinx carries no epigraph but, like Hamlet and Persée et
Pan et la Syrinx

Andromède, has a subtitle which, qualifying the original title, immediately signals the parody: “L'invention de la flûte à sept tuyaux” identifies the outcome of the story avant la lettre and likens it to its Ovidian model. The subtitle validates the pretext of the original and makes it a central theme of the parody. Indeed, Laforgue gives to Pan’s music making as important a place as his more traditional pursuit of Syrinx. Pan et la Syrinx ou l’invention de la flûte à sept tuyaux recounts the Artist’s desire, his search for an expression equal to his ideal, but ever fugitive, inspiration.

Several aspects of the traditional story make it relevant to Laforgue’s aesthetic and metaphysical concerns. As we have seen, the impossibility of sustained love constitutes a major theme of Decadence, which he treated in all his writings. Pan’s failure to possess Syrinx except through his art lends itself easily to a Laforguian interpretation of the relation between love and artistic creation, woman and poet. Art provides a substitute for love, which is ever fugitive and unattainable, an Ideal glimpsed and vigorously pursued but inaccessible except in song. Furthermore, it compensates for the loss of love by ensuring poetic creation: the metamorphosis of Syrinx into marsh reeds furnishes the instrument by means of which Pan produces his music; and her disappearance is likewise the source of his inspiration, in the form of nostalgia. The conventional aspects of the legend correspond well to the pessimism of the late nineteenth century. Pan’s relentless pursuit is futile and wins him only the pis-aller of art; but art is nevertheless the greatest of compensations and, as Syrinx herself remarks, the most viable and durable source of human happiness.

Mallarmé’s treatment of the myth in “L’Après-midi d’un faune” features many of these themes. The faun’s wish to “perpetuate” the nymphs, expressed in the first line of the poem, reflects both his erotic and his aesthetic desire. Laforgue puts this idea more directly—“l’art, c’est le désir perpétué” (304)—but parodically makes it the wisdom of Syrinx herself, who condescendingly imparts it to Pan. The faun’s uncertainty, throughout Mallarmé’s poem, about the reality of his erotic experience (“Aimai-je un rêve?”, l. 3), and the italicized verse in which he remembers and reenacts it, resemble Pan’s songs at the beginning of Laforgue’s story:
Both works represent the essence of desire—the unattainability of the object—and its sublimation into art, the "solo long" and "sonore, vaine et monotone ligne" of the poem, the "long et unique sanglot" (290) and "gamme nostalgique" (310) of the story.

Like the other Moralités, Pan et la Syrinx modernizes the story and its significance by converting traditional themes and topoi into contemporary Decadent ones. The relatively simple theme of art as a product of loss is inserted into the complicated evolutionary and pantheistic metaphysics of Decadence. Pan's pursuit of Syrinx becomes a metaphor not only for the inevitable failure of love but also for the general condition of man, endlessly in pursuit of an unattainable ideal toward which everything in the universe aspires. The elusiveness of love reflects on a larger scale the metaphysical problem of the late nineteenth century. But it is in the very nature of love both to disappoint and to inspire: hence Laforgue's Syrinx, in contrast to the original heroine, personally urges the breeze to hand over her soul to the inconsolable Pan. The Ideal gives over some of its mystery, in the form of inspiration and aesthetic emotion, to one who has suffered loss.

Laforgue parodically undercuts even this already pessimistic consolation by suggesting that the artist's new creation, product of his loss, has no practical significance, makes no change in the world whatsoever, except to restore him to his futile pursuit. Pan's new song—a vehement imprecation against the sterile, insensitive moon—has no effect on the immovable Diana; it merely sets him once again on a quest for the ideal and with it, a new round of desire and frustration. Art dispels the illusion of our hopes for the Ideal but creates another one and returns us to the quest, enabling, or rather obliging, us to live. Pan's experience reflects and confirms the workings of parody itself, undermining our belief in the truth or authority of one work but making from that a new one which enables the process to continue.

Laforgue's hero has three major concerns, from which derive the
main parodic alterations to the story. The first carries to an extreme—and renders ludicrous—the frustration of the Mallarmean faune vierge: "Immortel et jeune, Pan n’a jamais aimé comme lui et moi l’entendons" (283). The ancient master of seduction—a companion in revels of Dionysus, and renowned for his lasciviousness and eroticism—becomes in Laforgue’s version a lovesick, love-starved, lonely insomniac who whiles away the hours voicing his complaint on a very inadequate pipe, and imagining the ideal lady who would come adoringly into his “bras prospères” (286). As with Hamlet, Pan’s fantasies are exaggerated, egotistical, and wholly unsuited to the reality that will present itself to him in the delicious, but resistant, form of Syrinx.

Pan’s second parodic problem lies in the metaphor of his erotic life, his music making. This god of woodland song is dissatisfied with his rudimentary pipe, with its limited four-note range, and wants a better one. His “imparfait et monotone pipeau-galoubet” (283) does not suffice to express his current inspiration, the pain of unfulfilled desire: “Que faire, quand on **aime**, sinon attendre ainsi en plein air en essayant de s’exprimer par l’art?” (283). He indeed awaits and sings, but the old and faithful companion, the “vieux biniou,” the “galoubet à deux sous,” will not even communicate his desire, much less satisfy it. Laforgue’s unhappy artist longs for a more sophisticated means of expression, “une flûte plus compliquée” (288), and he will get one, ironically, with the loss of Syrinx, whose metamorphosis engenders the new invention. Pan is fulfilled in one way as he is frustrated in another: his wishes for his art come true, but only at the cost of his beloved.

Pan’s love and his music are repeatedly associated with his third problem, a typically Decadent, Laforguian, and parodic one. The Mallarmean ambiguity of the faun’s past experience—dream or reality—is here converted into Pan’s fundamental inability to grasp the present, particularly where Syrinx is concerned: “Qu’il se persuade et se pénètre d’abord qu’elle est là, et que c’est du présent!” (288). This recurrent wish accounts for both his failure with the nymph and the failure of his art to express “la chose qu’est la chose” (300). Pan indeed has trouble dealing with reality. When he finally ventures a declaration of love, he immediately discredits it, re-
tracts it, or provides Syrinx with objections to use against him (290). He considers throwing himself at her feet to dazzle her, but refrains, and instead of returning her smile with a "brave sourire" (291) of his own, shrugs his shoulders and feigns a nonchalant look. In the end, after losing her to the river, he reproaches himself for not acting more decisively from the beginning:

... Et c'est encore une fois que je n'aurai pas eu la présence d'esprit de me pénétrer du fait de la présence des choses! J'aurais pu la dévisager pour toujours et l'écouter pour jamais et prendre sa formule sur le vif! Au lieu de cela, j'ai pensé, à quoi? à tout? Et c'est passé. Oh! que je suis donc incurablement en Tout! Que je suis insouciant! Oh! qui jettera un pont entre mon cœur et le présent! (308)

Pan's rhetoric gives an idea of his problem. His free mélange of clichés is comical—présence d'esprit / présence des choses, and the double-entendre in prendre sur le vif—but it also reflects the love of talk and the reluctance to act that Laforgue consistently mocks in the sensibility of his age. Pan is too busy thinking and talking to seize reality when it offers itself. The story provides an answer to his question of bridging the gap between his heart and the present, by implying that reality and the present may only be grasped once they have passed. Only when Syrinx has escaped him does he manage to act decisively and effectively; "sans hésiter, sans se gratter l'oreille ni tirer sa barbiche pointue" (306), he captures her spirit as it floats through the reeds in his arms and encloses it within the brand-new flute. He ultimately learns that reality is best understood in art and that the most perfect art derives from nostalgia and regret. Only after he has loved and lost does he invent a perfect flute, create a purer song, express "la chose qu'est la chose," the soul of the lost Syrinx, and live tolerably, if not happily, ever after as an artist.

Through these three related themes, Laforgue explicitly threads the one of modernity. Pan is concerned with the modern quality of his love: "Et tout l'Olympe parlera du génie de Pan et de ses amours si nouvelles, si pleines d'un caractère moderne" (300). Syrinx herself has the characteristics of a "new woman," and her determination to preserve her indépendance and solitude reflects the wave of the future, "un signe de temps nouveaux" (305). Pan worries that his genius will not meet the challenge of the new era,
“cette révélation de temps nouveaux auxquels son génie ne va peut-être pas suffire” (305). All this calls attention to the principle of the story itself, by which the ancient legend is modernized, and suggests the relevance of the parody as a modern creation. Pan’s hopes for a modern love are disappointed, but he creates a modern flute ("des plus nouvelles") and a modern song, a "miraculeuse gamme d’ère nouvelle" (306), paradoxically expressing "la chose qu’est la chose" with the aesthetic distance provided by time. Pan’s song grasps the spirit of the present through a backward glance and produces modern song, the soul of Syrinx preserved in the new flute and transformed into sound. The story argues for the importance of memory in seizing the quality, significance, even truth of an ephemeral moment, and in producing thereby a truly modern art.

Laforgue makes his Pan and Syrinx a thoroughly modern couple, who interrupt their legendary chase to discuss the nature of love and art, the perpetual misunderstanding between the sexes, the metaphysics of the Ideal, even the etymology of aimer. The chase itself is as much a battle of wits as a contest of strength and endurance. Pan retains his traditional half-goat, half-human form, but otherwise is a frustrated 1880s artist. He is neurotic, obsessed with love, and filled with the principles of Decadent philosophy, especially a pervasive fatalism, which he evokes constantly and indiscriminately: “arrivera ce qui doit arriver” (290), “tout est dans tout,” and “Je saurai la prendre par quelques considérations fatalistes” (301). He pities himself for being misunderstood and unwanted, and insists on his “bon grand coeur” (294), his “belle âme” (285), his “âme d’un grand pasteur” (296), and his “tristesse de génie” (294). He has difficulty sleeping, suffers from fever, and is troubled by dreams. He has mournful eyes and the traditional expression of tension and stress, clenched teeth (288). We are told parenthetically that he no longer does exercises: although “immortel et jeune” (283), Pan is old before his time, worn out by the “antinomies irréductibles” of his endless meditations (288). The extent of his desperation at the point where Syrinx enters the story may be measured by the fact that he is willing to accept “la Femme” without further ado: “Et aujourd’hui, malade de grand amour comme il l’est, il accepterait la Femme sans discuter. . . .” (288).

But the text parodically associates this Decadent, Hamletic hero
with a less complicated character, whose legendary violence and crudity call into question the innocence of Pan’s behavior: Shakespeare’s Caliban (“il se roule devant elle dans les thyms, comme un sale Caliban, et gémit,” 292). The integration of the rough primitive of The Tempest into the suffering hero undermines Pan’s careful metaphysical arguments for the inevitability of his love for Syrinx and suggests his real motivation, the thoroughly more Pan-like sensuality of Caliban. But the choice of Caliban is not arbitrary: in the end, Pan inverts his role, from Caliban to something more like Ariel, a true artist, who, “au-dessus du Présent,” seizes the present only in being detached from it in regret.4

The beauty of Laforgue’s Syrinx is calculated to throw Pan into the sort of frenzied panic that he traditionally inspires in others. She has the qualities of the typical Laforguian lady: predictably large “heavenly” (288) eyes, an “otherworldly” (288) mouth, her hair put up in a large diadem atop her head, long, perfect legs, and pale “lunar” breasts.5 She is fair, modest, and virginal, with a nostalgic, clear voice, a disarmingly direct and intelligent gaze, and, much to Pan’s surprise, a streak of independence and pride reminiscent of Andromède’s. If Pan is Caliban, Syrinx is a Wagnerian Valkyrie, as much a warrior maiden as a helpless victim, who repeatedly cries the famous “Hoyotoho, Heiaha!” (298 passim) of Brunnhilde herself. She resists his advances with scornful hauteur and guards her independence jealously; a companion of chaste Diana, and as hard-hearted, she is untroubled by the sexual desire that so torments Pan. She inspires a love like that of Diana herself, “dont les amours n’ont pas de lendemain, mais seulement des veilles” (303), to be approached but never fulfilled, as Pan later learns. Unlike him, she lives an orderly life with adequate, uninterrupted sleep, no fevers, plenty of exercise, and a clear moral code to follow, all of which will serve her well during the chase. She resists the sensuality of the night: “O crépuscule, tu ne me touches pas, tu ne me toucheras jamais! la volupté positive ne saurait filtrer dans le ciboire de mon être!” (302); unmoved by Pan’s pragmatic arguments about loneliness and oncoming winter, she proclaims her ability to live on new-fallen snow (304). She is repeatedly described as “inhumaine” (305), “surhumaine” (288, 295), a “divine
enfant” (299) and “déesse” (291), not only because she is a nymph, but also because she embodies an Ideal well out of the reach of men, even half-men, half-gods, like Pan. She represents the lunar ideal that has attracted and tormented most of the heroes of the Moralités, here transformed, according to the legend, into an elusive beloved.

Laforgue plays with the old pun by which Pan is associated with the all. According to his name, the hero should be everything, but is actually rather little:

— Je suis Pan.
— Pan qui?
— Je suis . . . bien peu en ce moment, mais en général je suis tout, je suis le tout s’il en fut. Comprenez-moi, c’est moi qui suis et la plainte du vent . . .
— Et Éole, alors?
— Mais non, comprenez-moi! Je suis les choses, la vie, les choses, classiquement, en un sens. Non, je ne suis rien, rien. Ah, je suis bien malheureux! Si, du moins, j’avais un instrument plus riche que ce galoubet! je vous chanterais tout ce que je suis! (291t.)

The exchange comically points up all the contradictions in Pan, who rather than everything is nothing at all, except perhaps unhappy; whose name leaves little trace in reality of its sense of “les choses” except for the “realistic” character that Syrinx notices in him; whose “all” is so unapparent as to demand a surname (“Pan qui?”); who, alleged symbol of the universe, is less well-known as the wind’s lament than Aeolus and suffers the added indignity of a hint of superfluity. Pan has a problem of identity because he cannot express himself properly, a relation underscored by the punning “je vous chanterais tout ce que je suis”: not only all, but the All, Pan, ultimate subject of his own song.

Laforgue also gives a Decadent twist to Pan’s name by exploiting the Hartmannian sense of “Tout,” the universal law: “Voulez-vous vous laisser être tout pour moi, au nom de Tout?” (292). Pan’s declaration is, as Syrinx remarks, realistic, based on the practical consideration that it is in the nature of things for them to love (“Oh, vous, là! Et moi, ici! Oh, vous! Oh, moi! Tout est dans Tout!” 296). This last, his favorite expression, occurs at least eight
times; the old axiom, used in normal circumstances to express the
comical futility of complicated cosmic theories, becomes a serious
expression of the Decadent one. Pan speaks in a “pantheistic”
voice not only because of the obvious play on his name, but also
because he is a pantheist in the most literal nineteenth-century
sense, a follower of Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Hartmann, who
subscribes to the doctrine that the All—be it God, the Will, or the
Unconscious—is the immanent cause of everything, and every­
thing is contained in it. Syrinx, on the other hand, is “spiritualiste”
(296), believing in the superiority of spirit over matter, and the
total separation of the two. Laforgue’s allegory suggests that,
though the artist may be a pantheist, ever pursuing the Ideal, the
Ideal remains resolutely, like Syrinx, spiritualistic, forever distinct
and beyond his reach.6

The two main characters present striking similarities to those of
Laforgue’s other lunar story, Lohengrin, except that the roles are
reversed. Syrinx has many of the characteristics of Lohengrin him­
self: egoism, chastity, a cult of sterility, devotion to the moon, re­
sistance to love, associations with images of purity. Pan, on the
other hand, has the sensuality and earthiness of the “terre-à-terre”
Elsa. This inversion suggests a certain self-parody on Laforgue’s
part, with the consequences that always derive from such: calling
attention to the parodic status of the work at hand and its suscepti­
bility to parody in its turn. If Pan et la Syrinx can invert another
Moralité, surely it, as a Moralité itself, may be treated likewise. In
his final story, Laforgue implies that the earlier scheme of Lohen­
grin may be changed, or interpreted differently, as easily as it al­
tered its Wagnerian model. The Decadent myth of the pure, inno­
cent, sincere man ever at odds with the fearsome sexuality of the
Eternal Feminine is here inverted, and its truth therefore under­
minded. Laforgue demonstrates the pliability of any commonplace
belief, the adaptability of any story; but he also brings out the cre­
ative possibilities of parody, which may regenerate itself in the par­
ody of a parody, producing ultimately another fiction.

The Story
Laforgue preserves in his plot the main events of the legend: Pan’s
meeting with Syrinx as she comes down from Mount Lycaeus, his
pursuit, her metamorphosis into the marsh reeds, and his invention of the reed-pipe. The text twice reminds the reader explicitly of its alleged fidelity to the original, thereby drawing attention to the parody, to the distance between the story and the original. As Pan sets off in pursuit of the fugitive Syrinx, the narrative comments: “Et la légendaire poursuite de la nymphe Syrinx par le dieu Pan dans l’Arcadie commence” (294); and later, when Syrinx takes up her flight again: “Et la légendaire poursuite de la nymphe Syrinx par le dieu Pan continue . . .” (299). The latter phrase provides a surprise for there is no “continuation” in the traditional version, where the chase is a single event; it expresses the status of the parody itself as a continuation of that first “legendary pursuit.” Similarly, Laforgue often signals the distinction between present and past, a device which seems to preserve the original and to deny the modernization of the parody, whereas it actually points up a conspicuous relation between them. For example, an acknowledgment of historicity, such as “O longue journée légendaire, tu es loin, tu ne reviendras plus! . . . Cela se passait en Arcadie avant la venue des Pélasges” (294), actually reminds the reader of the present time of the narrative and thus calls attention to the parodic modernization that it is meant to deny. Here, the assertion is further belied by “légendaire”: the chase and the day are legendary in so far as they have already been told and relate to the present; although they will not happen again, they may nevertheless be retold, reenacted, as in this Moralité légendaire.

The first sentence places the story in Pan’s conventional Arcadia (283), but it is immediately undermined by the narrator’s comment that this might just as well be anywhere: “Tout le monde a passé par une belle matinée d’été dans une vallée folâtrement merveilleuse, tout le monde dira: ‘Je sais ce que c’est’” (283). This aside serves Laforgue’s parodic and modernizing purposes by destroying the specificity of the story’s time and place, universalizing them, and thus likening Pan’s situation (if not his story) to that of “tout le monde,” including ourselves. If we recognize the setting and surroundings, perhaps it is because we have seen them before, in the original, for example, or even in our own experience: this is the legend of Pan, but transposed into the world of the contemporary reader. Moreover, if we know Pan’s lovely summer country morn-
Pan and the Syrinx

ing, perhaps we are also implicated in what goes on there. Laforgue thus subtly works the reader into the parody.

Laforgue’s insistence on the unspecificity of Pan’s surroundings, however, does not prevent him from dwelling lyrically on the beauty of the setting: warm sunshine pouring its rays into the valley like the full waterfalls of spring, a foaming flood of Champagne bathing the groves and hillsides; a radiant summer morning with fragrant thyme, buzzing bees, chirring cicadas, grazing animals, warbling birds, lush vegetation, all reminding Pan of the “universal bonheur si insaisissable” (285) that eludes him. Laforgue’s Arcadia is the idyllic one of Virgil and, later, the European Renaissance, a land of youth, beauty, harmony, and happiness reflected in the interior rhymes of the language itself: “O milliards de prismes d’optimisme! O Jeunesse, ô beauté, ô unanimité! Oh, du soleil!” (283). The subjectivity typical of Laforguian narrative here serves the theme of universal harmony, and emotion is integrated easily into the description of the fine weather: “il fait heureux à perte de vue” (285). The well-being of Nature reminds Pan all the more clearly of his inability to follow its example: “— Et c’est la radieuse matinée, et tout le soleil et l’universel bonheur si insaisissable! Et voilà; à lui de s’arranger pour être heureux, comme cette matinée s’est arrangée pour être heureuse” (285). “Insaisissable” provides a conspicuous clue to the sense of Pan’s later chase: that primary “être insaisissable,” Syrinx, represents the “universal bonheur” which he strives in vain to possess and express.

As the story opens, Pan is playing out his “doléances très personnelles” (283) on his pipe. This gives him the occasion to develop his philosophy of love, which he derives in a ludicrous display of typical etymological ingenuity:

— O femme, femme! toi qui fais l’humanité monomane! Je t’aime, je t’aime! Mais qu’est ce mot: Je t’aime? . . . Aime ne me dit quelque chose que lorsque j’associe à ce son, et par une inspiration non fantaisiste, le son du mot britannique aim qui veut dire but! — Ah! but, oui! “Je t’aime” signifierait ainsi: “Je tends vers toi, tu es mon but!” (286)

The verbal trick points up the flaws in Pan’s method: if he associates the French aime with the English “aim” (but), he might also associate the French but with the English “but” (mais), which fits
nicely into his own exclamation, "Ah, but, oui!" Pan uses the etymological argument repeatedly to justify his behavior to Syrinx: "Mais, que je t'aime, que je t'aime, que tu es donc mon but!" (295); "Parce que je vous aime, vous êtes mon but!" (296, cf. also 297, 303). The argument is wrong, however, like the philosophy which it is evoked to support; if to love means to aim toward, to take the beloved as a goal, it follows, contrary to what Pan thinks, that the object must remain out of reach. Only Syrinx, ironically, understands the consequences of this, as she will observe later: "Le bonheur est dans la poursuite de l'idéal" (297). 8

Pan's songs paint a portrait of the lady of his dreams in recognizably Laforguian free-verse lines, many direct from Laforgue's own poems: 9

L'Autre sexe! L'Autre sexe!
Oh! toute la petite Eve
Qui s'avance, ravie de son rôle
Avec les yeux illuminés
D'hyménée . (284)

One might have expected Syrinx, or Echo, or at the very least a classical name, but Pan's ideal feminine is the model of the Eternal Feminine, Eve. However, Pan's image is not the standard destructive woman, but the adoring lady, eager to play out her role of victim and to throw herself into his prosperous arms:

Oh! dites, dites!
La petite Eve descendant des cimes,
Avec sa chair de victime
Et son âme tout en rougeurs subites!

Puis, proclamant, fièrement campée:
"Je ne suis pas un petit paon,
"Je ne suis pas une poupée!
"Je me suis tout échappée
"Pour venir échouer sur le coeur du grand Pan!
"Oh! je suis pure comme une tulipe
"Et vierge de toutes espèces de principes!
"Avril! avril!
"Mon bonheur ne tient qu'à un fil!"
As in all the other stories, this autocitation implicates the author, and with him the reader, in the parody. The fact that it is Pan who recites them makes the self-parody all the more ironic. The parodist may be an artist and a lover, like Pan, dissatisfied with his art, disgusted with his song, always seeking an Ideal that remains resolutely out of reach; but he may also, like Pan at the end, produce from that effort a song eminently adequate to the "ère nouvelle," the parody itself.

Pan's essential problem of misjudging reality is apparent from the comical discrepancy between the image of the beloved in his songs and the harsh reality of Syrinx that they miraculously conjure up. She indeed "descend des cimes," of Mount Lycaeus (292) and approaches him in the sunshine; he will have ample occasion during the chase to remind her of her "chair de victime" and the cool deep wood where he plans to lead her; she has "regards ravis" (287), and is as "pure" and "fièrement campée" a lady as he is ever likely to encounter. But the resemblance ceases there, for the independence attributed to her in the song will rebound upon Pan himself. The proudly proclaimed "Je ne suis pas un petit paon" of the song finds its parodic equivalent in her haughty accusation: "Me tenez-vous pour un animal, un petit animal classé? Savez-vous que je suis inestimable!" (296). Pan, of course, would love to consider her a little animal, particularly "aux abois," as he fantasizes several times, but Laforgue turns this back on the hero by giving Syrinx total control over the pack: she has a "voix habituée à lancer et retenir les meutes de Diane" (296). The comical echo of "Pan" in "paon" further turns Pan's song against himself. Syrinx is not a figurative little Pan, a child of his imagination, a creation of his
fantasies to serve the same, but rather an individual, “toute vivante et en chair et en os” (287). Even Pan notices a contrast between her appearance and his image: “elle ne paraît guère pressentir qu’elle est au monde pour s’abandonner comme cela à la belle saison dans l’étourdissement des cigales” (287f.). The words come from his verses; the reality of Syrinx will largely parody the illusion of his songs.

Here Laforgue revises a standard Decadent theme—the deceptive innocence of the lady’s face which belies her sexual function—to point to the parody: Syrinx does not look as though she was born to abandon herself, or otherwise to fulfill Pan’s fantasies, precisely because she has no intention of doing so. On the contrary, she has an extraordinary determination to preserve her virginal solitude: “Sachez que mon orgueil de rester moi-même égale au moins ma miraculeuse beauté” (296). Pan misjudges reality because he interprets it according to his own desire, in flagrant contradiction to the facts, especially that of Syrinx’s will. His experience with her is a series of disappointed expectations, humorously portraying not only the inevitable misunderstanding between the sexes and the folly of the egotistical sensibility, but also the lesson of parody itself. Pan interprets reality according to a fiction and thus functions as a warning lest the reader do likewise. Unlike the hero, however, the reader of parody, constantly reminded of the fiction on which it is based, benefits from the aesthetic distance and hindsight that Pan will find only in loss.

Significantly, Syrinx’s presence inspires him only to parodic lyricism, as he succeeds in singing the “antique ballade,” “Je suis dégoûté des fraises des bois”:

\[
\begin{align*}
   & Je suis dégoûté des fraises des bois, \\
   & Depuis que j’ai vu en rêve \\
   & Ma petite Eve \\
   & Me sourire mais en mettant un doigt \\
   & Sur les lèvres. \\
   & . . . \\
   & Mystère et sourire, \\
   & O mon beau navire! \\
   & Sourire et puis chut \\
   & Ah! tais-toi, mon luth! (287)
\end{align*}
\]
The first line makes clear that the song is a parody, all the more ironic coming from the lips of the pastoral woodland god. The comical final couplet, with its “chut”/“luth” rhyme and its inde­licate command to the instrument, parodically undercuts not only the preceding song but also the most basic symbol of lyric poetry itself. This poet does not take up his lute, according to poetic con­vention, as in the famous formula of Musset (“Poète, prends ton luth”), but tells it unceremoniously to shut up. The parody within the parody reflects on the larger story, all the more so in that it is, like the Moralité, an “antique ballade,” the ancient story retold comically by a modern poet; it also provides an example of Pan’s unsatisfactory songs, his inability to create a lyric adequate to the seriousness of his desire and inspiration.

The interview between the two is characterized by awkward si­lences, misunderstandings, and a repartee that threatens to become outright bickering. Her frank gaze, clear, direct speech, and resolute actions contrast sharply with his periphrasis, changes of mood, and uncertainty. Syrinx herself reproaches him for being oblique and refuses to let him blame his inadequate flute for it:

— Voyez, les hommes ne peuvent jamais être clairs devant la femme! Ils devraient faire leur déclaration en bon français, c’est-à-dire en noble et léger dialecte ionique. Non, il leur faut tout de suite de la musique! la musique si communément infinie!

Pan se dresse furieux!

— Et vous autres! Rien que le son de votre voix! Vous, tenez, la seule musique de votre voix! Est-ce plus loyal, ça? Oh! oh! misère! misère des deux côtés, en vérité! (292)

Pan throws the ball back by evoking one of his idées fixes, the stock Decadent deception of women, whose very voices charm like mu­sic, but this does not gain him much of an edge. Syrinx remains self-composed while he vacillates between shyness and aggression, embarrassment and audacity, mournful lamentation and disinter­ested nonchalance, cries of love and dry philosophical argu­ments, pleas for pity and harsh sarcasm. Finally he resorts to more practical means and makes his declaration with the help of his old stand-by, the philosophy of necessity:

— En somme! Voyez, ô noble vierge, ô qui que vous soyez, vous qui avez pourtant une forme connue! La journée s’avance et je n’ai jamais aimé. Voulez-vous vous laisser être tout pour moi, au nom de Tout?
La nymphe Syrinx se dresse lentement de toute sa beauté. Elle dit sobrement:
— Je suis la nymphe Syrinx; un peu naïade aussi, car mon père est le fleuve Ladon au beau torse, à la barbe fleurie. Je revenais du mont Lycée . . .
— Ah! Ah! une naïade, je vois! Vous devez me trouver bien laid, bien Caliban, bien capricant! Une naïade! Une cousine du beau Narcisse, fils du fleuve de Céphyse! Peste! Il était beau, hein, Narcisse? et distingué!

But if Pan intends his clever sarcasm to wound her, it once again rebounds parodically upon himself. Taunting her with the Narcissus story is not likely to dispose her any more favorably toward his advances; it may rather remind her of the fate of the other nymph relevant to that story—Narcissus’s mother, Liriope, ravished by the river-god Cephisus—and is apt to put her on her guard. Pan’s mocking reminder of Narcissus’s beauty, as opposed to his own Caliban-like ugliness, actually prepares Syrinx for his next move, and, instead of defeating her by humiliation, sends her, with a prayer to Diana, off in flight.

In typical fashion, Pan interprets the situation badly by calling on an inappropriate literary parallel:

il vient de lui passer sur le coeur, d’un éclair, la révélation de la grande et légendaire douleur de Cérès parcourant toute la terre et, poudreuse et mendiane, interrogant les bergers, cherchant sa fille Proserpine disparue un matin comme elle faisait un bouquet de fleurs pour sa mère.

Pan inaccurately compares his own misfortune to the legendary sorrow of Ceres, wandering the earth in search of her daughter. But although he may consider himself as unlucky as Ceres, Syrinx’s feelings toward him can hardly be compared to Proserpine’s devotion to her mother. The comparison may even work against him; the motif of abduction suggests that Pan is actually closer to Pluto than to the suffering Ceres. The humor of his sulking and self-pity permits the reader to see through the comparison altogether. Perhaps the hero is as much a Caliban as he sarcastically admits to Syrinx, not simply the bestial primitive but, more tellingly, the potential ravisher, as here and in the Narcissus story above.

Laforgue transforms the simple chase and capture of legend into
a sustained test of wits and wills, broken by frequent discussions and repartee. Pan fails to move Syrinx with his “Tout est dans tout” rhetoric (“Ah, ces gens à formules!” 296), and his pantheistic and deterministic explanation that they are meant to give themselves over to the universal law of nature. Her request to have him describe her beauty becomes an exercise in late-nineteenth-century metaphysics:

— Soyez donc bon à quelque chose, soyez mon miroir comme la conscience humaine essaie d’être celui de l’Idéal indéfini . . .
— Ah! pas ainsi, mon idéal enfant! Cela vous donnerait trop de droit à l’insaisissable! (A pédante, pédant et demi!)
— C’est reconnaître en passant que le bonheur est [d]ans la poursuite de l’Idéal, sans plus.11
— A cela, je ne puis répondre que par une impolitesse.
— Dites.
— C’est que vous déplacez la question, le but. Vous n’êtes pas le but de ma poursuite; sous couleur de ce but même, vous n’en êtes qu’une étape entre nous. D’ailleurs, cela revient au même, puisque tant que je ne vous sais pas, vous êtes pour moi le but même, l’Idéal. Quand je vous aurai traversée, ô étape, pourtant absolue, je verrai au delà! (A pédante et demie, la vérité toute entière!) (297)

The terms and ideas come directly from the philosophy of Hartmann.12 Human consciousness strives to reflect the Ideal; love represents the same effort; however, the beloved is not the ultimate goal, but only an intermediate one from which to gain access to the Ideal. The ideal promised by love is thus illusory, although, as Pan explains, still an ideal in relative terms. His parodically triumphant “A pédante, pédant et demie!” and “A pédante et demie, la vérité toute entière!” are weakened by the fact that he again does not see the implications of the argument. If Syrinx is an ideal, she can never be reached, however intermediate an “étape” she may be in absolute terms. The philosophy suggests what will in fact happen in the story: attaining the intermediate ideal must involve disappointment. Syrinx will be possessed, but only in loss and by her transformation into art.

Laforgue humorously exploits the theme of Arcadia to provide yet another instance of Pan’s parodic inability to interpret reality. He looks on from the hilltop as Syrinx stops at a tombstone on the
plain below, as if inhaling the scent of a flower, and then takes off again in flight:

Il s'arrête à son tour un instant à ce tombeau de marbre blanc. Il se penche comme l'objet de sa poursuite, il n'y a pas de fleur à sentir, mais cette inscription à méditer:

ET IN ARCADIA EGO

"Et moi aussi, je vivais en Arcadie!"

— Pauvres mortels, que de raisons ils ont de s'aimer, eux!
Mais Pan et Syrinx sont immortels, rien ne presse. (300ff.)

Laforgue thus inserts the famous subject of Poussin's painting into the story of Pan and Syrinx. This free recycling of materials calls attention to the parody and, as we have seen, is a common feature of the Moralités' method. The harmless, typical pastoral scene (Pan assumes that Syrinx has stopped "pour y sentir une fleur") is actually a more sinister reminder of death, the "Et in Arcadia ego" of the epitaph. As usual, he does not see the significance of the discrepancy between what he imagines and reality; if he did, he would know that his vision of pastoral revels with Syrinx will likewise meet with death. He translates the epitaph correctly, according to the convention of the painting: the dead man warns the carefree passers-by that he, too, once enjoyed the pleasures of Arcadia as they now do. But his conclusion—that because of death "poor mortals" have particular reason to love—shows a typical lack of self-knowledge, for he does not see that the "Je" may apply to himself. The incident holds a foreboding message for his own situation: Pan and Syrinx, too, live in Arcadia. They may be immortal, as the narrative ironically reminds us here ("Mais Pan et Syrinx sont immortels, rien ne presse," 301), but the story demonstrates that their relationship is not. Like the subject of the epigraph, it will live on only in art, in the music of the flute, and ultimately in the parody at hand.

Laforgue places Pan's pursuit of Syrinx in the larger context of the night's stalking the world of nature: twilight weaves an invisible net and weakens the nymph's resistance, the landscape trembles and languishes with expressions of tenderness, and Pan, in his desire, is "ivre de nuit" (303). Once again, he calls upon a literary
model to describe and explain his own sensual frenzy, the stories
told by his companion Bacchus of his legendary conquest of India:

—... Quoi, ne respires-tu pas cette nuit d'été par tous tes organes
libres? O nuit d'été, maladie inconnue, que tu nous fais mal! Je ne sens
plus que nous, moi! O riche nuit d'été, je me rappelle, maintenant, les
everrants récits que me faisait Bacchus de sa conquête de l'Inde! Je me
souviens, et ne puis m'arracher de Delphes! Oh, furie de la flûte grêle
crevant l'orage sulfureux de la fin du jour des vendanges et appelant les
averses lustrales! Thyrses, et cheveures enmêlées! Mystères de Cérès,
mystères et kermesses, et fosse commune! Astarté! Astaroth! Derceto!
Adonai! En rond dans la prairie déjà tiède de danses, avec tous les pen­sionnats des Sulamites, au charivari de toutes les flûtes salamboennes!
Tout est dans Tout! (303)

Pan's legendary association with Dionysus here becomes yet an­other instance of his problematic habit of living according to his
imagination. This parodic Pan knows no frenzy, no panic, at all,
except for what he has been told, and has thus imagined. He can­not overcome the frustrating discrepancy between his own life and
the stories told to him by Bacchus, between his uneventful exis­tence in Delphi and the exciting stories that he has heard there.
However, the fact that Delphi is not in Arcadia, Pan's traditional
home and the setting of the parody, considerably undercuts the
pathos of the contrast that he tries to draw. Pan's slip gives him
away: he falsely sees himself as Dionysus (who does belong to
Delphi). Although the images, with their erotic connotations, in­deed derive from Dionysiac ritual, Pan adds his own peculiarly
modern touches: the Laforguian "pensionnats des Sulamites," of
whom Elsa is a good example,14 and the "flûtes salamboennes,"
recalling Flaubert. Ironically, Pan will get a flute, but not the kind
associated with the orgies of Dionysus, rather a product of the
strictest, unhappiest chastity.

The image of the flute gives us pause: there is no flute in
Salammbô, whose heroine plays the lyre, and no harp, as Laforgue
himself reminds us in Salome. "Salamboennes," rather, evokes the
object of the heroine's devotion, the feminine principle, goddess of
love and fertility: Tanit. Indeed, the names that Pan invokes ("As­
tarté! Astaroth! Derceto! Adonai!") directly recall Salammbô's
prayer to the goddess in chapter three of the novel: "Anaïtis! As­
tarte! Derceto! Astoreth!" Pan transforms Salammbô’s virginal hymn to Tanit into a licentious plea for sexual fulfillment, and uses it as a reason for such. His “flûtes salamboennes” are supposed to express the sensuality of Salammbô’s Tanit, like the more traditional flutes of Dionysus. But once again, he chooses his model badly. Salammbô dies in the end, and Syrinx will, for all practical purposes, follow suit; Pan’s moon will turn out to be not the sensual Tanit, but the harshly chaste Diana.

Indeed, after Syrinx’s plunge into the river, Pan takes advantage of his new flute to fulminate against the moon for her role in the misfortune of men, for attracting them under the false pretense of sex only to ensure her own chastity, for being no better than a man in a woman’s form, for enslaving the Syrinx-like keepers of her cult and destroying their sexual desire with her spells:

— ... Jamais tu n’as rêvé de notre sexe, de notre sexe si légitime! Non, tu as été élevée dans les forêts et les grandes chasses en toute saison, et les rudes soirs des sangliers, et le sang et les abois, et les douches des fontaines au fond des bois. Tu es un homme, un homme sublime et pâle, un planteur à pauvres esclaves blanches, et tu fouailles cruellement tes compagnes en chasse, et, par des incantations inavouables, tu leur cauterises leur pauvre sexe au fond des forêts claustrales! Oh! va, je sais tout! je ne suis pas un halluciné. Tout est dans Tout et j’en suis la brave sentinelle empirique!”

Mais la Lune reste là, rondement aveuglante, seule dans tout le ciel ... (309)

But Pan’s supposedly enlightened attitude is belied by both the terms in which he acknowledges it and the events themselves. He expresses his new pessimistic understanding with precisely the same “Tout est dans Tout” argument that he has used throughout the story as a reason for loving. Although he maintains that he is not an halluciné, this claim is undermined by the narrative’s conspicuous ambiguity about the reality of the recent events: we are told that Syrinx’s plunge hardly rippled the surface of the water; the metamorphosis is described in the uncertain form of a question, suggesting that it may be simply an optical illusion (“Oh, là-bas, en face au ras de l’eau, est-ce encore sa tête adorée qui regarde encore immobile, ou simplement un bouquet de lys d’eau qui jouit dans
son genre?" 305); and the breeze that whispers in Pan's perked-up ears conjures up a host of disparate, synaesthetic images:

O frisselis alise, baisers d'ailes, paraphe de rumeurs, événails pulvérisant en chœur un jet d'eau du fond des parcs de l'Armide, mouchoirs de fées froissés, le silence qui rêve tout haut, éponge passée sur toute poésie! . . . (306)

Pan soon falls into another series of feverish nightmares ("des Mille et Une Nuits d'abjection," 309), and the text poses the question explicitly:

O enchantement lunaire! Climat extatique! Est-ce bien sûr? Est-ce l'Annocation? N'est-ce que l'histoire d'un soir d'été? (310)

Laforgue strongly suggests that the whole story may have been only a mid-summer night's dream, thus parodying the Mallarmean "Aimai-je un rêve?"; perhaps Pan's miraculous conception of the new flute may be explained only by recourse to the questionable reality of the Annunciation.

But if, following the Mallarmean model, the reality of the events is cast in doubt, that of the new flute is not. It may not be able to move Diana, but the final sentence, realizing the creative function of parody, suggests that it may be able to produce more stories, however unreal, however fictional:

Heureusement, et désormais, il lui suffit, dans ces vilaines heures, de tirer une gamme nostalgique de sa Syrinx à sept tuyaux, pour se remettre, la tête haute, les yeux larges et tout unis, vers l'Idéal, notre maître à tous. (310)

The story is not only a _gamme nostalgique_ like Mallarmé's poem, the experience revived in memory and song. "Désormais" explicitly indicates that the story does not end but will have a sequel, or even a replay, in Pan's future unhappy hours. The portrait of the sorrowful hero mournfully playing the flute returns us to the beginning, to the "Sur son galoubet matinal, Pan se plaint, Pan donne cours à des doléances très personnelles," with which the story opened; but here he plays on his new instrument. "L'art, c'est le désir perpétué": Laforgue perpetuates Pan's desire indefinitely and thereby guarantees future stories. The parody gives rise to an endless series of strivings and disappointments, as in the frustrated pur-
suit recounted here, and thus to an endless series of works like itself. Perhaps the traditional story of Pan’s many loves has only just begun, or begun to be retold, so many future “gammes nostalgiques,” like the parody, to brighten one’s “vilaines heures.” It would thus follow the model of another famous example of continuous storytelling here parodically reduced to quantifying Pan’s unhappy dreams, *Les Mille et Une Nuits*. 