

CHAPTER 1

Chariton

Individuality and Stereotype

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Nothing is known for sure about Chariton of Aphrodisias except what the author himself tells us, namely, that he was a *hypographeus* of the *rhetor* Athenagoras in what we know well to have been a flourishing city in Caria (Erim 1986). Since much of the novel is set in Asia Minor, the author was on familiar ground, though very little such background detail is necessary. Attempts at dating vary from the late first century BC to the early second century AD: any time during that period is consistent with the limited degree of Atticizing we find in the author's relatively unpretentious style (cf. Ruiz-Montero 1994, 1046ff.; Reardon 1996, 319–323). The single MS ends by calling the story *Callirhoe* rather than the familiar and formulaic *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, which it uses for the individual book headings (Reardon 1996, 315). A papyrus colophon to Book 2 reinforces this title, focusing on the heroine alone.

Chariton's work is generally regarded as the earliest fully extant Greek novel, and this has often given it the status of a paradigm for the genre itself. It certainly answers to standard formulations for the ingredients of the genre: a faithful loving couple, melodramatic adventures, including apparent death, capture by pirates, threats from lustful admirers, and an overall sentimental ethos, but there is a great deal of nuancing, not to say discreet subversion, of what readers of an ideal novel might expect.

Plot and Structure

The plot is in places too dense to allow easy summary, but can be outlined as follows:

Chaereas and Callirhoe, the noblest and most beautiful young people in Syracuse, fall in love and are married. Jealous rivals foment Chaereas' suspicions that Callirhoe is

unfaithful, and in a fit of jealousy he kicks her during pregnancy. She is buried, but comes to and is rescued by pirates and sold in Miletus to the local seigneur Dionysius; she bigamously marries him to safeguard the child, whom she passes off as his. However, her kidnapper, the pirate Theron, is found and confesses. Chaereas goes in search of her and is captured and falls into the hands of Mithridates, a Persian satrap who exploits Dionysius' insecurity. The plot culminates in a showdown before the Persian king Artaxerxes in Babylon: Chaereas is dramatically produced in court, and the king reserves judgment on whose wife she is now to be, while indirectly pressuring Callirhoe to yield to himself. A timely war resolves the situation: driven to desperation, Chaereas now becomes a somewhat improbable hero, and captures the king's own wife and Callirhoe. She can now abandon Dionysius, but leaves him the child she has pretended is his, and returns to Syracuse with her original husband. Her son will have the prestige of his foster-father in Asia as well as his real parents in Syracuse.

There is never the sense that the plot is a mere string of random adventures, one of the worst features of Chariton's apparent imitator Xenophon of Ephesus: it is controlled throughout by the focus on the heroine herself, the fact that she has become pregnant by her lawful husband Chaereas, and her being forced to remarry abroad to protect the child. This leaves us always with the question: how can there be a satisfactory conclusion, once she is married to another husband in another country, who believes the child to be his? And what will happen to the child? Chariton's eventual solution is in some respects unexpected, and perhaps not altogether satisfactory; however, we are in the hands of a craftsman who knows how to make the most of a genuinely well-contrived story with carefully controlled suspense.

The author's technical skill extends from the careful escalation of events themselves to the contriving of book divisions at "exciting" moments in the plot. Book 1 sets up the mainspring of the story to the point where Callirhoe has been sold into Dionysius' household (1.14); by the end of Book 2, she has reached the decision to accept Dionysius' marriage proposal in order to save her child by Chaereas (2.10). By the end of Book 3, Chaereas himself has arrived in Asia, but Callirhoe thinks him dead (3.10); by the next break, the intrigues of Mithridates and Dionysius demand that she be taken to Babylon by the latter, but without being told the reason, and with both Dionysius and herself unaware that Chaereas himself will be there alive and in person (4.7). Book 5 sees the dramatic and climactic production of Chaereas, but we still have no inkling whose husband Callirhoe is to be (5.10); Book 6 sees the intrigue develop as the eunuch Artaxates tries to bring about the seduction of Callirhoe by the king; just before the beginning of Book 7, Tyche decides to start a war, in which Callirhoe is assigned to the king's royal ladies. At the end of the same book, Chaereas has captured Callirhoe and the others, but she is as yet unrecognized. Book 8 begins with the assurance from the author that a happy ending is in sight, but we are still not told how, or indeed what will happen to the child.

Other divisions of the text have been argued, for example, to superimpose the scheme of a (Hellenistic) five-act drama to correspond to frequent comparison in the text to the unfolding of a drama (Perry 1967, 141f.); Reardon (1982, 8) argues for a fourfold division, rightly emphasizing the escalation of *agones*. The most cogent consideration for this author is a threefold escalation between the two husbands and the royal threat to the heroine, abruptly resolved by a fortuitous but obviously convenient war; the writer's own brief intervention at the start of the last book draws a firm line between the real action and the final tidying up.

The Story Itself

There is a widespread assumption that the plot itself is Chariton's own invention: this can scarcely be so in general outline, and need not be the case for much of the detail either. It belongs to a group of popular narratives that can be described as "The Innocent Slandered Maid," which focus on this or that part of Chariton's plot (Anderson 2000, 83–89; cf. Aarne-Thompson-Uther's 2004 revised numbering of Folktale Types 881–883A). Prominent among these materials is an image of the heroine, which provides a key element of recognition, corresponding to Chariton 3.9.1. Most of them tend to solve the plot by making the heroine rise to high authority in her new home while disguised as a man, and find her betrayer and relatives in her power. However, other examples share with Chariton the motif of the heroine's forced marriage and pregnancy in a strange land, sometimes with the question of custody of a child destined for future eminence. One of these, the Old French tale *La Fille du Comte de Pontieu*, which dates from the thirteenth century at the latest, is far too early to have been influenced by the rediscovered text of Chariton himself, and has been recognized clearly enough as a thinly concealed folktale (Matarasso 1971, 109). There are at least some analogs in antiquity to either *Callirhoe* or *Pontieu*, buried in the mythographer's variants to the tales of Danae, Auge, Semele, Helen, and others. Cueva (2004, 16–19) provides a detailed overview of the versions of the story of Ariadne, to which Chariton himself makes explicit allusion, again with a quasi-historical basis, but that of a much earlier age. Taken together, there is enough evidence that a folktale core in *some* form at least is older than any possible fifth-century historical tradition.

If we view or suspect that the story is a popular tale promoted into sophisticated literature, then we should be able to admire the author's skill accordingly, and without too much trouble with genre description; otherwise, we are stuck with Perry/Reardon labels such as "latter-day Epic for everyman" (Reardon 1982, 15). *Callirhoe* seems to me to make perfect sense as a variant of a fairly familiar traditional tale cleverly, carefully, and still fairly unpretentiously told. We only find ourselves bogged down at a theoretical level if we feel the unnecessary urge to explain why it is not a tragedy. "It doesn't seem very cathartic to us," observes Reardon (1982, 23) about the selling short of the second husband Dionysius. Here, however, I agree with Perry (1967, 138f.) that there may well be some fixture in the initial plot; the *Count of Pontieu* author has similar difficulty at the same point: his heroine had two children by the Sultan of al-Marie and none by her first husband, and she still takes one back home to France!

Some are inclined to see this kind of plot as little more than a recurrent psychological cliché (Egger 1994a, 34f.): "If this storyline sounds familiar, it only indicates how immutable popular themes can be, and how little perhaps some female fantasies have changed"; but readers must judge for themselves between her own summary of the plot and that suggested earlier.

Intrigue and Melodrama

Amid the overall plot, with its tripartite moves from action in Sicily to Ionia to Babylon, there is a great deal of scope for individual intrigue: the initial attempts to frame Callirhoe are meticulously described (1.2ff.), as are the Persian satrap

Mithridates' moves against Dionysius of Miletus. His accidental recovery of Chaereas in particular triggers off a complex chain of events: Persians had attacked the hero's ship and sold the survivors; when some had escaped the resulting slavery, all were condemned to be crucified, and only a chance remark of Chaereas' friend Polycharmus elicits the satrap's attention. It is worth noting that concentrating the intrigue in much shorter compass than the expansive psychological reactions of the characters makes for a fast narrative pace, and so helps to foster a sense that the intrigue is intensifying (cf. Hägg 1971, 89–92).

As to melodrama, which for Reardon (1982) is the principal emphasis of Chariton, we have Chaereas right at the outset pleading for ever-harsher penalties against himself for having supposedly killed Callirhoe (1.5.4f). And at each successive twist of fortune, both hero and heroine expostulate, at what can seem like increasing length, carefully reminding the reader of the unfolding plot as they do so:

Νῦν ὡς ἀληθῶς Καλλιρρόη τέθνηκεν. Ἐκ τοῦ τάφου μὲν ἐξήλθον, οὐκ ἔξαξει δέ με ἐντεῦθεν λοιπὸν οὐδὲ Θήρων ὁ ληστής. ὦ κάλλος ἐπίβουλον, σύ μοι πάντων κακῶν αἴτιον. διὰ σέ ἀνῆρέσθην, διὰ σέ ἔπράθην, διὰ σέ ἔγγραμμα μετὰ Χαιρέαν, διὰ σέ εἰς Βαβυλῶνα ἤχθην, διὰ σέ παρέστην δικαστηρίῳ. πόσοις με παρέδωκας; τάφῳ, λησταῖς, θαλάττῃ, δουλείᾳ, κρίσει. Παντῶν δέ μοι βαρύτερον ὁ ἔρως ὁ βασιλέως. καὶ οὐπω λέγω τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως ὀργήν: φοβερωτέραν τὴν τῆς βασιλίδος ζηλοτυπίαν. (6.6.3ff.)

Now Callirhoe truly is dead! I left my tomb once; not even the pirate Theron will take me from here now. My beauty, my treacherous beauty, you are the cause of my troubles. It was because of you I was carried off and sold; because of you I married another after Chaereas; because of you that I was taken to Babylon and brought into a courtroom! How many times have you handed me over to pirates, to the sea, to the tomb, slavery, judgment? But the heaviest burden I have to bear is the king's love! And I have not even mentioned the king's anger yet; to me, yet more frightening is the queen's jealousy.

The last of these fears is not actually developed, but the eunuch Artaxates clearly threatens that the king's anger could extend to harming Chaereas, and it is this genuine breaking point that is just about to be reached by the stroke of the opportune Egyptian war. Chariton's assurance at the beginning of Book 8 that all the melodrama is as good as over is not quite true: Chaereas is still offered to Callirhoe as spoils of war without knowing who she actually is (8.1.6ff.); the king still wants to pursue his intrigue with Callirhoe (though gently dissuaded by Stateira, 8.5.6f.); and Dionysius has still to be left with the delusion that it is he whom Callirhoe really loves (8.5.13f.). Reardon (e.g. Reardon, 1982, 22) sometimes criticizes aspects of the plot: "The Montagu and Capulet theme is a very damp squib in this story." However, in fact, this serves to ignite the whole action: without the rivalry between the couple's fathers Hermocrates and Ariston, there would be no initial difficulty to afflict the lovers and paradoxically hasten their marriage.

The Literary Texture

It was until quite recently assumed that Chariton presented an unsophisticated simplicity tailored to a very simple and undemanding readership. That is now no longer tenable as a point of view: the texture of quotation and allusion is substantial (Hunter

1994, 1056–1071 *passim*) without being stifflingly learned. Homeric quotations are used as an epicizing feature in their own right, though that in itself might be dismissed as the lowest common denominator of literary currency. However, a phrase from Demosthenes’ *de Corona* 169 (1.3.1, cf. 8.1.5) or from the *Cyropaedia* demands recognition on a different level. Some of the historical allusions too seem very pointed in their implication: Chaereas’ being taken down from the cross after the mention of the name Callirhoe (4.2f.) offers an amusing distortion of the celebrated rescue of Croesus by Cyrus after his mention of Solon, so memorably described by Herodotus (1.85–89); and there is an air of learned absurdity about Chaereas’ taking of Tyre, not simply for military reasons as in the case of Alexander the Great, but as something so trivial as a lover’s vengeance.

Moreover, because Chariton’s mannerisms are not sophistic, it should not be assumed that his work is any less rhetorical (8.6.12): ὥστε ἐνεπλήσθη πᾶσα ἡ πόλις, οὐχ ὡς πρότερον ἐκ πολέμου τοῦ Σικελικοῦ πενίας Ἀττικῆς, ἀλλὰ, τὸ καινότερον, ἐν εἰρήνῃ λαφύρων Μηδικῶν (“so that the whole city was filled, not as previously after the Sicilian war, with the poverty of Attica, but a real novelty, with Persian spoils in time of peace!”). There is also a discreet use of ekphrasis (cf. Hägg 1971, 93–97). In comparison with sophistic novelists, Chariton is not noted for extravagant descriptions; but what he does provide should not be ignored, nor indeed should his technique of setting such scenes. They include the funeral of Callirhoe in Book 1.6, or the furor of the trial scene in Babylon: “Who could fitly describe that scene in court? What dramatist ever staged such an astonishing story? It was like being at a play packed with passionate scenes, with emotions tumbling over each other—weeping and rejoicing, astonishment and pity, disbelief and prayers...” (5.8.2).

To these, we should add the final spectacle of the arrival of Chaereas and Callirhoe (8.6). The emphasis throughout such scenes tends to be on people and their human reactions rather than precious objects or novelties, though the improvised beauty contest between Callirhoe and Rhodogyne might be seen as a novelty in its own right (5.2f). Sometimes Chariton’s phraseology is rather stale: τίς ἂν ἐρμηνεύσειε τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἐκείνην (who would explain that assembly?), or similar exclamations (1.1.12) seems to occur rather too often, but he is able to let the pressure of characters and events speak for themselves.

The Arts of Recapitulation

One matter of literary technique concerns the problem of reminding the reader what has actually taken place, a problem all the ideal novelists have to face (Hägg 1971, 245–287). Chariton is not content with the *Liebespaar*’s expostulations. He also presents Hermocrates at the end of Book 8, encouraging Chaereas to tell his story: he himself skips over the embarrassing beginning in short order, but dwells just long enough on events to remind the reader how it all began. Chaereas is then able to take over (8.7), giving a distinctly “Syracusan” gloss on Dionysius’ marriage to Callirhoe: it was to preserve the life of a citizen of Syracuse (the child) that Callirhoe has allowed herself the feigned marriage to Dionysius. And, characteristically for the curious crowd, the Syracusans more than once interrupt the narrative so that Chaereas will be able to leave nothing out.

Humor

Chariton's handling is now acknowledged to show some lightness of touch, though there is a good deal of variation in the way scholars are prepared to formulate such an effect: the prejudices from Rohde to Perry, based first on wildly wrong dating and then on prejudgment of the audience, have now largely faded. What seemed to Reardon to be opera (1989, 20) seems to this author to be operetta (Anderson 1982, 21), given the consistency with which grand gestures are able to be undermined. Much will depend on how incidental comic touches are seen to be: they seem in particular to be applied with some frequency to the situations of the lovers themselves, so that at least some of their pathetic monologues are smiled at with reference to "those not in love," as when Polycharmus has to prise the lovers from each other (8.1.9f.):

ἄφρονος δὲ καὶ Πολύχαρμος τὸ πρῶτον εἰστήκει πρὸς τὸ παράδοξον, χρόνου προϊόντος “ἀνάστητε” εἶπεν, “ἀπειλήφατε ἀλλήλους” τοῖαυτα ἐμβοῶντος, ὥσπερ τινὲς ἐν φρέατι βαθεῖ βεβαπτισμένοι μόλις ἄνωθεν φωνὴν ἀκούσαντες.

At first Polycharmus too could only stand there, struck speechless by this miracle. But after a time he said "Get up! You have recovered each other" He had to shout: they were like people plunged deep in a well who could scarcely hear a voice calling from above.

Attitudes to humor often affect the way we interpret other details. Reardon, on the whole opposed to it, says of the resolution by Tyche (1982, 22): "To do him justice, Chariton seems acutely conscious of the operation of tyche in his story, and one suspects that he is embarrassed by it." Why should he be? It is just as barefaced as his break in the illusion to say there will be no more of this sort of thing in the final book. In both cases, he seems to me to be smiling at the creaking mechanics of the plot.

Historical Flavor

Much has been made of the historical coloring of the story; it has long been noted that an incident in the reign of Dionysius I of Syracuse had a bearing on the events. Here, an unnamed daughter of Hermocrates who marries the tyrant is outraged by a group of soldiers, and commits suicide (Plut. *Dion* 3; cf. Perry 1967, 137ff.); and the layers of historical veneer have been steadily mounting (Plepelits 1976, 14–19; Hägg 1987; Hunter 1994, 1056–1064 among others). Hunter (1994, 1056) notes the progressive deviation from historically not quite compatible names Hermocrates and Artaxates (Mnemon) and his wife Stateira to simply plausibly historicizing ones. That is all that is needed to pull off the stroke of marrying off Hermocrates' daughter, who did indeed marry *a* Dionysius, to a Chacreas who smartly combines feats of Xenophon, Leonidas, Chabrias, Alcibiades, and Alexander the Great, all in pursuit of a love affair in which he has so far been almost an arch-weakling! A general air of the *Cyropaedia* may be significant not only for Chariton but for the history of the genre (Hunter 1994, 1058f.). It has gone unnoticed that the distinctive gang-rape motif that attends the daughter of Hermocrates in the historical record corresponds to the gang-rape of the Count

of Pontieu's daughter in the Medieval tale, and is toned down to a mere false *accusation* of immoral behavior in Chariton. There is clearly more to be done on the comparative front.

However, the anti-historical spirit is the author's own gloss: democratic assemblies seem to serve no better purpose than to decree a "celebrity marriage" for Chaereas and Callirhoe (1.1). There is a cheerfully chauvinistic flavor to much of this: after all, Callirhoe's father Hermocrates had famously beaten the Athenians in the Sicilian campaign, as they themselves had the Persians, so what does a daughter of Hermocrates have to fear? Some wish to see in this approach a kind of provinciality (as in Theron's gibe at Athens, 1.11.6f.), but another explanation is possible: the power of Eros devalues and trivializes any historical event, to the author's own evident delight:

"Noble Hermocrates, great general, save Chaereas! That will be your finest monument! The city pleads for the marriage, today, of a pair worthy of each other!" Who could describe that assembly? It was dominated by Eros. Hermocrates loved his country and could not refuse what it asked. When he gave his consent, the whole meeting rushed from the theatre. (1.1.11f.)

Characterization

Chariton has long been recognized for his care with characterization, but the hero and heroine have been interpreted in different ways. Chaereas used to be taken to task for his fecklessness and for relying on his sidekick Polycharmus (cf. Rohde 1914, 527f.; also Bowie 1985, 47); there might also be inconsistency when he is spurred to devil-may-care desperation that leads to military success. However, here we have the lover as hero rather than the hero as lover. He is basking in epic or historical comparison with Achilles, Hector, Theseus, Alexander, or his own near-homonym the Athenian mercenary Chabrias, only to wallow in despair, suicidal rhetoric, and sheer ineptitude, until put on the right track by his ever faithful Patroclus, Polycharmus. He has the appearance of a man in the New Comic street forced into a heroic mold which the author and his readership know to be completely incongruous: that does not really have to make him either a new type of hero or a less satisfactory one (cf. Bowie 1985, 47). The author relies on the principle that all the world loves a lover, to make that lover as inept as possible: he is an expert at encompassing his own death, wishing grotesque punishment for his initial kick to Callirhoe (1.5.5), begging to be re-crucified by Mithridates (4.3.9), or to commit suicide in front of the royal palace as an affront to the great king (7.1.6). Nor, for that matter, is the much more self-possessed Dionysius a stranger to amorous suicide plans in his turn (3.1.1).

The *Liebespaar* have much in common with the New Comic hero and heroine: boy and girl straight out of a Syracusan soap when they are not luxuriating in their ancestry (cf. Konstan 1994, 74f.). The pregnancy if nothing else ensures a greater prominence for Callirhoe, and here there is no balancing lustful overture from either sex for Chaereas to fight off on his own account: the plot itself dictates the characterization and not vice versa. Both principal characters are masters of melodramatic rhetoric (4.1.11f.): "First you buried me, in Syracuse, and now I am burying you in Miletus. Our misfortunes are

not only great, they are also hard to believe: we have buried each other's dead body." Reardon (1982, 13f.) still harbors a trace of Rohde's and Perry's contempt:

If Dionysius and the King are too civilised, Chaereas and Callirhoe themselves are even less effective; they are really attitudes, sensitized personality-matter rather than people with real emotions ... the principal people are only half-alive. Perhaps we cannot really maintain that Chariton has consciously profound things to say about life or love, or people, in universal terms.

To suggest that somehow Chariton *should* have seems to me to miss the point. Of course, Chariton manipulates homunculi in the grip of love or, in the case of minor characters, personal gain or ambition, but he has to be acknowledged as a skilled puppeteer.

Minor characters too are given meticulous attention. Theron, in particular, is both entertaining and flamboyant, and a consummately professional villain; it is illuminating to contrast him with his opposite number, Thyamis in Heliodorus: idealistic, noble, and a good deal more verbose (*Aethiopica* 1.19f.). Even the possible recruits to Theron's pirate band are not consigned to mere anonymity: Zenophanes of Thourii and Menon of Messina have their advantages and disadvantages carefully reviewed by their lively master (1.7.2). We are never actually told, and will never know, whether these two made Theron's final selection. There are carefully contrived cameo roles too for Dionysius' servant Leonas and his steward Phocas' wife, Plangon, who play a key part in contriving Callirhoe's bigamous marriage to Dionysius in the first place.

He himself, as seigneur of Miletus and innocent dupe of Callirhoe's plans, is given an unusual role as the novelists go: a rival to whom neither the reader nor even the heroine can be unsympathetic: one thinks of the much more fleeting threat Melite in Achilles Tatius. And here we have a critical detail: because he is of impeccable good manners, we cannot so confidently know or anticipate as we can with the King of Persia that he is destined to drop out of the running when he does: in the end, his Ionian Greek breeding, his *paideia*, and his impeccable good manners avail him nothing, except the delusion that Callirhoe loves him (8.5.13f.). Reardon (1982, 13) suggests that "Dionysius and the King are too civilised to set the world, or this story, on fire." However then, the plot is so strongly contrived that they do not need to.

The mass of mankind are drafted in frequently to act as a kind of chorus able to comment on the action at critical points. The Syracusans are able to match-make for the *Liebespaar* before they themselves exercise any initiative at all; and they are there again at the end to cheer on Chaereas' return in triumph to the Grand Harbor in Syracuse (1.1.11f., 8.6.10f.). In between, we find the crowd in Babylon improvising a beauty contest between Callirhoe and Rhodogyne, a local Persian beauty (5.2f.).

Chariton is noteworthy for his observations of the emotional reactions of all his characters. Time and again, he exploits the devastating effect of Callirhoe's beauty on those who have not set eyes on her: Leonas contrives her exhibition to Dionysius, while the Persian women warn Stateira of her beauty and are not believed. We are constantly assured that this or that pattern of behavior is natural in a lover, or a barbarian, or a woman: a Menandrian sense of *to prepon* is hard to avoid.

Sexuality

Each of the literary Greek novels has its own individualizing of sexuality. Chariton's can be seen as the most strait-lacedly romantic, with virtually no hints of impropriety or breaks in the moral fabric: the author's own programme in Book 8 underlines as much (ἔρωτες δίκαιοι...<καὶ> νόμιμοι γάμοι: "legitimate unions and sanctioned marriage" [8.1.4]). We have a reticent treatment of the marriage itself, so much so that Callirhoe's pregnancy is actually the cue for the first admission that there has been any sexual activity at all (2.8.4; cf. Hunter 1994, 1072f.). We have also a very coy submission of Callirhoe to the overtures of Dionysius: it is, she stipulates, to be for the sake of procreation not for pleasure. Theron and his crew think in terms of profit, and not of enjoying Callirhoe for themselves, while the great king's flirtations or attempts at such are very much in the mind of the reader rather than in any explicit detail.

Several decades of feminist scholarship have naturally underlined the feisty character of Callirhoe (Egger 1994a, 37: "subtle traces of Callirhoe sabotaging a few gender norms"), though it has to be underlined that part of this is actually defined in terms of her being the daughter of Hermocrates. However, Haynes (2003, 51) formulates the matter succinctly: "female intelligence and initiative are less upsetting to authorial sensibilities when firmly connected with conjugal loyalty and displayed well off the public stage." Although there is some objectification of Callirhoe, it is as much a Persian one (6.4) as a universal "male gaze": even if Dionysius' servants admire her when bathing, would Dionysius have objectified her in anything like the way the king is made to do? For the determined feminist, even this all-female audience of Callirhoe's bathing seems to stand in for "the male gaze...". Much of the rest of the time, the heroine, like Chaereas, is prone to despairing expostulation, typical enough of the novels' female protagonists, but of their heroes as well. And in extant ancient fiction, it is only in Chariton that there is an actual abortion debate, first between Plangon and Callirhoe, and then a three-way debate between the unborn child, Callirhoe, and the absent Chaereas (2.10).

Cultural Norms and Ethos

The social hierarchies of the story are insisted upon and yet subverted throughout. Dionysius is quick to insist to Leonas that the as-yet-unseen Callirhoe cannot be beautiful, as she is only a bought slave (2.1.5): the reader already knows he will be bowled over at the sight, and that "love levels all ranks." In general, there is a sense that Eros is in charge of the plot, and is able to rewrite the rules whenever an opportunity presents itself.

Moreover the human characters tend to be governed by a defensive sort of jealousy: Chaereas' own suspicions are easily fuelled by the slanders about Callirhoe in Book 1, and Dionysius is even more inclined to feel insecure, especially once Chaereas is known to be in Asia. He brings down the court case on himself when he could have left well alone and might easily have dealt with Chaereas on his own initiative, but instead exposes himself to the unhealthy interest of the great king (4.7.7). The other force might be described as amorous curiosity: time and again everyone wants to see Callirhoe, on whatever pretext. The result is that love turns the whole political and diplomatic machinery

upside down; even during a war, the king is thinking of Callirhoe, shameful or unworthy as he might realize this to be (6.9.5).

There has been some determination in the past to brand Chariton as “Hellenistic” (notably Reardon 1982 and 1989), and his outlook as narrow and provincial: even dating to as late as the second century AD would not of itself rule out such a characterization. However, it would be hard to insist too strongly on insuperable differences between *Callirhoe* and the romantic interludes in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, for example. What is clear is an emphasis on hierarchy and propriety and a Hellenistic value system, even when the characters as lovers can be expected repeatedly to undermine their own standards of behavior.

There is no obvious religious agenda in Chariton, such as to call for the explanations in Merkelbach’s *Roman und Mystrium*, but recourse to Aphrodite is prominent, symmetrically opening and closing the novel. There is an interesting nuance in the use of Aphrodite and Eros: in general, Aphrodite is the protectress of Callirhoe, and Eros the arch-contriver and intriguer, who traditionally regards moral scruple or hesitation as a form of arrogance against himself.

Greek and Barbarian

Interest in ethnicity has increased in the past decades, and Chariton provides a spectrum of contrasts between Greek and barbarian. Occasionally, there is a touch of nobility on the Persian side, and the great king is sometimes presented in that light, but Persian servility is emphasized, especially when Callirhoe’s honor is threatened (6.7.12). Lower ranks are thoroughly despised, none more so than the eunuch Artaxates, who brings out Callirhoe’s most feisty gestures of defiance. And Egyptian overvaluing of royalty also comes in for a swipe (7.6.6): “Given the innate superstition that barbarians feel towards the royal title, he could not bring himself to approach her...” However, the beauty contest is not as straightforward either as it might have been: while there is the obvious chauvinism of Greek triumphing over barbarian beauty, the female audience divides on grounds of moral approval, with the attractive ladies jealous and so against Callirhoe, and the less attractive approving of her outshining the local beauties (5.4.2). Here, as so often, Chariton’s interest in human motivation overrides mere caricature. Similarly, Stateira as the Persian queen, especially in her rapport with Callirhoe, is as often as not human first and only incidentally Persian (8.4.10): “The women would have gone on talking and weeping and embracing each other if the helmsman had not given the orders to put to sea.” Women are women first and foremost, and so they must gossip and be emotional to the last. On the other hand, the King of Egypt is treated with total neutrality, since Chaereas conveniently allies to him.

Readership

The readership of Chariton cannot be divorced from that of the ideal novels in general. Few would now argue for Perry’s notorious formula that these works were destined for “the poor in spirit,” or exclusively insist on the still more widely held

notion of a female readership. Such comment as we may have on Callirhoe (as in Philostratus *Ep.* 66) is distinctly patronizing, and seems to hold the popularity of Callirhoe against its author. Lesky had long ago suggested that the two women of Theocritus 15 could have been suitable readers for Greek novels; rising valuations of the genre might not hesitate to suggest that it could have won the approval of Plutarch, or for that matter of his wife. However, recent views as of Stephens (1994), Bowie (1994), and Hägg (1994, with Bowie's reply in Schmeling 1996) testify to the difficulty of agreeing on the cultural level of readership, and throw some doubt on the notion of a "reading public" of the kind we ourselves so readily take for granted. More than one level of readership, including an oral audience, cannot be ruled out, though cultivated private reading seems appropriate to the overall educational level. Bowie's (1985, 48) succinct "they had the *paideia* of Dionysius and might dream of having his rank" is smartly appealing, but can only raise further questions. Moreover, modern reading habits can themselves hardly be generalized upon with much confidence.

Conclusion

So how does Chariton handle the conventions of the genre? Before the end of the first book, we already have what could easily have been the *grand guignol* of *Scheintod*, followed by capture by pirates. However, Chariton is able to avoid farce, other than of his own contriving, by the foil effect of his characterization of the pirate Theron. His scheming in effect masks the obvious absurdity of two such melodramatic events in quick succession (compare the ineptitude of such successions of events in Xenophon of Ephesus). And once that difficulty has been negotiated, the inexorability of events takes over. The next absurdity we might see in the parallel events that happen to Chaereas when he is saved from crucifixion. However, on that occasion, the melodrama has been "allowed" by the possibilities opening up: now that Chaereas and Callirhoe are near each other, the games of "who knows what when" can take their course, and will in effect last until Book 8. Chaereas' military career again beggars belief, but the frustrated lover can by this time readily combine the careers of the 300 Spartans on the one hand (Chaereas can claim to be Dorian), and Xenophon's 10,000 on the other, at an actually convincing pace. And Hermocrates' defeat of the Athenians who beat the Persians, which no one could refute, lends credibility (of a kind) to any military and naval escapades to rescue his daughter.

The relationship to the other ideal novels has something to tell us. Often, it is tempting to bracket Chariton with Xenophon of Ephesus as "presophistic," but the two are really poles apart in technique and spirit, and although both begin with marriage and end (almost) with the lovers reunited in bed, the key difference is that Xenophon appears as naive as his characters and cannot smile at anything or anyone. Chariton can find something to smile about—albeit often quite affectionately in any situation. And the plot is also quite different, despite the undoubted similarity of melodramatic clichés.

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