

Steve NIMIS

Narrative Redirection: the Case of Chariton and Longus

This paper examines the heuristic and experimental character of the ancient Greek novels, something Bakhtin foregrounds in his discussion of novelistic discourse (M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981)). I focus on how the character of the narrative is often redefined and redirected, so that the purpose and design of the story actually evolves in the very process of articulating it. It is often said that the ancient novels have a standardized plot, but the fact is that they often display a remarkable ability to shift narrative trajectories and change direction contrary to expectations. Of particular interest among such moments is the middle of the novel, where some sort of reassessment often coincides with a new beginning, a place of both temporary closure or evaluation and some opening up of new possibilities. Taking my cue from Mabel Lang's discussion in *Herodotean Discourse*, I will argue that the halfway point marks the moment where the initial impulse that gave rise to the novel exhausts itself and thus even more than the beginning raises the question, what kind of story is this going to be? To illustrate this characteristic of the ancient novels I will identify in Chariton and Longus examples where an explicit attempt to give shape to the story is signaled by a thematization of narrative organization, each occurring at exactly the middle of the work (Chariton 4,7,3-5,1,2; Longus 3,1-3,4). In both cases, a close reading indicates the complex and contradictory character of these programmatic moments.

The passage in Chariton's *Callirhoe* contains a dense accumulation of references to narrative agents (Pheme, Tyche, Eros), of allusions to other narrative trajectories (Homer, Menander, myths of metamorphosis) and an extensive summary. Taken together, these elements signal an intense focus on how the story will be continued in a way that is a satisfying extension of what has been composed so far. The course of the last half of the novel, with its shift of focus from the heroine to the manly exploits of those who compete for her, is anticipated in this section, which functions as a kind of "proem in the middle" (G. B. Conte, "Proems in the Middle" *YCLS* 29 (1992), 147-59). This observation dovetails with Brigitte Egger's examination of the novel's contradictory representation of its heroine ("Looking at Chariton's *Callirhoe*" in *Greek Fiction*, ed. Morgan and Stoneman (1994), 31-48).

In Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe*, the exchange of oaths between the protagonists at the end of book 2 is the last action mentioned in the proem to the work. The brief war episode at the beginning of book 3, with its unexpected beginning and end (adoketon archen kai telos) is a thematization of narrative organization, especially focusing on proper beginnings and endings. The following sections articulate a differentiation of adult desire from the naive desires of the protagonist children, aligning the male Daphnis with the former and thus inaugurating the asymmetry between the two main characters that will typify the last half of the novel. This reading dovetails with David Konstan's discussion of this novel as representing two opposing views of the purpose of sexual activity, one conventional and one utopian (*Sexual Symmetry*, 85-90).

Bakhtin's assertion about the heuristic and experimental character of "novelistic discourse," should perhaps be sought more in the first half of these Greek novels, since their endings tend to fall back on more conventional narrative expectations.