

Fictionalised Antiquity

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CHAPTER I

AN AMBIGUOUS GENRE: THE NOVEL AND HISTORY

1

“Come travel with us”. This typical and recurring travel agency slogan could also be the motto of many novelists. The invitation to a journey—entertaining, sentimental, mysterious—is among the staple lures of the novel, whether it might be classified as romance, adventure, mystery, science fiction or historical intrigue. “Come aboard” and the narrative will take you, my dear reader, to other places, other beaches, other times.

Journeys to faraway, ancient, memorable times. This is what so-called ‘historical’ novels – set in a past time - propose, and we shall try to analyse and discuss this in the following pages. Presenting ancient and well-defined settings and horizons, these fictionalised recreations of Classical Antiquity (Greek and Roman) craftily combine historical documentation and dramatic imagination to lure readers on an extraordinary journey through time and space. They invite them to evade the present, although sometimes in order to reflect upon it from a slanted perspective, and to immerse themselves in an attractive, colourful and turbulent environment that is breathtaking in its movement and its conflicts. A historical setting is thus recreated, and not only the vicissitudes of its characters, but the setting itself is designed to be appealing.

These novelists usually seek historical moments of crisis that are particularly attractive due to their intense dramatic qualities, either because past conflicts mirrored current ones, or because the historical framework achieved a special emotional intensity. To entertain, move, intrigue, sometimes even to teach, this is what, in different and variable combinations, novelists aim at. Professional historians, a much more respectable sort of people, ignore such recreations and

are scandalized by such excursions. The combination of historical material and literary phantasmagoria provokes their disdain and exasperation. They accuse the historical novel, probably quite rightly so, of being the illegitimate child of History and Romanticism. However, like so many illegitimate children, this one also enjoys a surprising degree of vitality and the cheerful character of a combative parvenu. The possible settings of fiction in this genre are many: the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the period of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, for example, are quite often resorted to. As already pointed out, within this array of settings, Greek and Roman Antiquity (leaving aside the Egyptian setting, which has itself produced a very long list of novels) has produced a sub-type or particular class of fiction which has well-defined features and its own personality.

This is the most ancient type, pardon the pun, in terms of its emergence as a literary form, and it still enjoys a curious vibrancy. Scholars of Antiquity, researchers, academics, historians of various kinds, and amateur mythologists, show a certain disdain towards this fictional pseudo-historical literature, which plays with the data and the characters and the settings of Antiquity for their bold impostures. Certainly, history is something quite different from fiction, as Polybius, Cicero and Plutarch well knew, as do readers of such melodramas. Such a distinction is not the arrival point, but the point of departure. All in all, a good historical recreation can be presented in a novel, and there are excellent examples of it. Nonetheless, the value of a novel is most certainly not measured by its accurate reconstruction of the settings and the historical framework, but rather by its dramatic interest and its literary quality. It is, as a Greek person would say, *plasma* and not *aletheia*.

Among all the studies on the tradition of the genre, I still consider G. Lukács' *The Historical Novel* (1936; Spanish trans. México, 1965) to be fundamental, not only for its general approach, but also for its Hegelian weight and stylistic tone. I disagree with him on certain aspects, as when he asserts that the first historical novel is already to be found in the Hellenistic world (and not after Walter Scott), but I do consider valid his general considerations and his penetrating analyses. We could even say that it may also be true that the *genre* of the historical novel as such emerges with the historical consciousness of Romanticism, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and endures with the characteristics imprinted in that period, although there were already "historical novels" in earlier times as remarkable and shining manifestations of a pioneering spirit. Lukács, I believe, did not know the history of the novel well (he knew nothing, for example, about the ancient Greek novel or the medieval novel) and his theorising is hampered by this gap in his knowledge. In this regard, the contrast with the broad perspective of the great Russian theorist M. Bakhtin is remarkable. It is not my intention, however, to expand on this criticism, but to pay tribute to and honour the memory of such a formidable scholar.

I do not wish to discuss at length either theoretical questions on the novel and history, or the protean character of the novel, as these are issues I have written enough on elsewhere. It will suffice to remember that, as K. Kerényi pointed out, in the novel the *experience proposed* to the reader is rather more interesting than the concept, as it is a type of literature designed for personal

use, like an invitation to a emotional experience and a “broadening of existence”. The “experience of the novel” (*Romanerlebnis*) implies a “broadening of existence” (*Existenzerweiterung*). And this is particularly relevant when dealing with historical novels, which invite the reader to travel across the historical setting, though a particular time tunnel, to other times. A somewhat trivial manner, maybe, of extending our existence or our consciousness of the past, but a memorable broadening nonetheless and, in many cases, an invitation to a colourful and fascinating journey.

The novel is a modern genre par excellence, and it is not by chance that it is the most omnivorous, informal and modern of all literary genres. Nonetheless, the novel was born in the Hellenistic world about two thousand years ago, and there are Latin authors of astonishing modernity, such as the novelists Petronius or Apuleius. “Modernity” is in itself quite a relative concept.

2

What we call the historical novel is a fiction set within a historical framework. Not only does it narrate a distant event—inasmuch as all evidence about it comes from historical tradition—, but its development is evoked in a precise time set in this past. It is not the accuracy of the data, nor the quantity that defines the character of the novel, but rather the intention of recreating a *historical atmosphere*, which in general is much more lively and colourful than the succinct data usually provided by historiography. Fiction invites us to take a much freer approach to facts and characters than the concise historical narrative would ever allow. What the novelist proposes is less to do with great deeds than with their repercussions on the protagonists’ lives. The protagonist might well be an average hero, or an attractive character, but not one who deserves a place in the historical foreground, and the novelist invites us to share their sorrows and their triumphs with them. Or, possibly, if the protagonist is indeed a great hero, and a first-rate royal character, the novel affords us a closer, more intimate, more sentimental view than those provided by the chronicles. In either case, dramatic vicissitudes are presented within a historical context that determines, to a certain extent, the fate of these characters.

As I have stated, there are, in principle, two basic schemes of historical fiction, whether the protagonist is a great character or a discreet and doubtful hero. Clear examples of both types are already to be found in Hellenistic Greek literature, and we have clear examples of both nowadays. In terms of narrative forms—which can be homodiegetic or heterodiegetic, epistolary, abundant in dialogues, or as a “historical” narration of a faked witness—variation is greater, and we will return to this point later. Moreover, historical novels tend to recreate certain past periods, perceived as particularly meaningful and critical. This feature should also be taken into consideration.

In its strictest sense, therefore, the label of “historical novel” is usually applied to romantic or realist fictions that emerged from the beginning of the nineteenth century under the influence of Sir Walter Scott—who wrote almost thirty novels which were quickly distributed across Europe and were soon emulated by others. The development of a “historical consciousness”, which sees

the past as a time different from ours, “a faraway realm”, to which we are united and at the same time removed by the progress of History, seems to be a necessary condition that is only fulfilled from that time onwards. Under the impression that human destiny is determined by such historical occurrences, which affect both individuals as well as nations, the novelist will try to meticulously reconstruct the past, showing that the destiny of his or her fictional character is fatally determined by this historical development, intertwined in the plot of collective fate, and that they take part in this historical drama that envelops their personal dramas. The novelist evokes that past and is conscious of it being a time different from ours; however, simultaneously, he or she aims to bring that past closer to us, representing the experiences of those distant figures as if they were close to hand, near and intimately familiar, thanks to the freedom of invention provided by the novel genre. This is the source of the curious basic anachronism of the story: archaeological effort and psychological immediacy are combined. Its heroes live in an ancient setting, but they feel and speak like us. According to romantic conventions, passions are eternal, although habits and clothes can change over time. This anachronism is formulated on the subtle combination of fiction framed within History, that is, the factual evidence of a real past, whose traces endure in documented and present times.

If we use the label in a less strict sense, but with identical basic references, as we will do here, we could notably bring forward the emergence of the “historical novel”. In a wider sense, the first Greek novel we know, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* (first century B.C.) was a historical novel already.

Rather than the quality as novels of these fictions, and rather than their literary context, I am interested at this point in highlighting how those fictional recreations of the ancient world offer us images and views of the classical past with a surprising vivacity. Changing over time, those romantic visions of the Greek or Roman world invite the reader to enter Antiquity through portraits that are perhaps of doubtful accuracy but that are fresh and direct representations. Fictionalized Antiquity thus becomes more lively, colourful and ordinary—also more arbitrary, problematic and influenced by the present—than the one registered by historians, and rather more austere, succinct and less free than novelists in their remembrance of the past. Because the historical novelist seeks to depict, present and evoke certain characters from within or from their immediate circle and since he or she invents them, they are provided with a modern vivacity and sensibility—hence the usual anachronism of the genre—framed in a furnished historical setting with exceptional and uneven care.

The reconstruction of the atmosphere is usually more complete than in historians’ texts, which focus on great events and memorable deeds and disdain the sentimental and more human aspects. There is a dramatic quality specific to the novel that distances it from historiography to bring it closer to the dramatic scene. Abundant in scenes, dialogues, monologues and psychological analyses, both great figures and minor characters are depicted with a familiarity and an emotional proximity that are forbidden to the historian. The novelist not only seeks out great settings, but also paints humble and private scenes with the same light, and accompanies his or her heroes—great or small—through the most varied settings. He or she is interested in ordinary lives, in the exotic and

in local customs, but also in the emotional and the intimate. Since novelists do not seek the *aletheia*, but credible fiction, the *plasma* or even the *pseudos*, their freedom to reconstruct the past is ample and it is only limited by their archaeological information. Hence every good historical novelist should keep within the limits of his or her recreation of a certain atmosphere. Historical documentation is indispensable for the setting and also for the plot and vicissitudes of the narrative itself.

In considering the first Greek novel, that is, the first novel of our Western literary tradition, as a historical novel (*lato sensu*) we push back the emergence of the genre that G. Lukács studied in his abovementioned work by about eighteen centuries. It is not my intention to enter into controversial definitions. The sense of the historicity of events and the awareness that History is unrepeatably and ineluctably distances one time from another is, most certainly, a modern feeling, one that perhaps emerged after the French Revolution and was disseminated by Romanticism. Nevertheless, this does not prevent us from seeing in *Chaereas and Callirhoe* a clear precedent of the type of fiction that we call “historical novel”, as I hope will be clear in this essay.

I will include within this concept of fictional recreations a couple of famous texts of late Greek literature, already from the third century B.C., as examples of a subtype of novel that was to enjoy considerable success afterwards. Both the *Life of Alexander of Macedon* by Pseudo-Callisthenes and the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus can be seen as fictionalised biographies that oscillate between history and fiction, which, nevertheless, from my point of view, belong rather to the literary realm of the historical novel than to the field of rigorous biography of Plutarch or Cornelius Nepos. As I will try to underline later, the remembrance of both historical characters —of undoubted relevance and significance in their own time—is made, in both narratives, from the point of view of the novelist, although neither Philostratus nor Pseudo-Callisthenes would know what this epithet, or its corresponding literary genre, really meant.

Both narratives have biography as their basic structure, although the historical part is combined with fiction in such a way we might label them simply as fiction, applying the same criteria as we would to M. Renault’s trilogy on Alexander as a fictional cycle, in contrast to Alexander’s biography written by the same author. So, already in Antiquity there were the two narrative types or schemes that are considered usual in the genre: the history of wandering lovers (*Chaereas*) and biographical fiction around a great historical figure (*Life of Alexander, Life of Apollonius*).

The reconstruction of the past made by a novelist is different from that made by a historian. The latter is restricted to certain documents and, as difficult as it might seem (cf. A. Schaff, *History and Truth*, Spanish trans., México, 1974) he or she attempts to construct history by presenting the facts as they were and seeking the truth in them. Novelists are freer, mixing fiction with history, making up characters and facts; within a certain real framework, they imagine new evidence, penetrating into the intimacy of the protagonists’ lives, whether these are ordinary people or great kings; by using their own fantasy, they colour the past, etc. They have a lucid willingness different to that of chroniclers. Nonetheless, both the novelist and the historian are alike in employing the

imagination in recreating facts from a personal perspective. As D. Lowenthal wrote in his book *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, 1985 (p. 224): “Some novels use history as a backdrop for imaginary characters; others fictionalise the lives of actual figures, inserting invented episodes among real events; still others distort, add, and omit. As in science fiction, some fictional pasts are paradigms of the present, other exotically different; both invent pasts for readers’ delectation [...]

Many historians consider analogies with fiction even more insidious than comparisons with memory. Their distaste is the greater because, as we have seen, they cannot avoid ‘fictional’ rhetoric in their own narratives. By equating novelists with story-tellers, historians seek to distance themselves as scholars, emphasizing that history is scrupulously faithful to the facts of the past and open to the scrutiny of other observers, whereas fiction is heedless of both constraints.”

3

In this volume, I have not intended to be formalistic or exhaustive in the treatment and selection of the narratives that, in my opinion, constitute the development of the fictionalised vision of Antiquity over several centuries. However, I have tried to discuss the most relevant tales and highlight the most remarkable novelties in them. Indeed, I am more interested in outlining the evolution of the genre —and pointing out its forerunners— than in offering a detailed outlook. This is the reason why I have relinquished the presentation of a longer list of titles and works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the production of historical novels was, and still is, quite abundant. My interest is not in providing a catalogue of the large amounts produced but rather in singling out what is most attractive and memorable.

From a certain point of view, the inclusion of Fénelon’s *The Adventures of Telemachus*—which does not evoke a historical setting, but a mythological and epic one— and the fact that I do not analyse, for instance, Wieland’s *Agathon*, a novel with an apparently classical setting, may be open to question. The reasons for such choices are not strictly formal, but rather motivated by the perspective in which novels are framed, and in accordance with this perspective, which I think I have made clear in general, the attention paid to one narrative or another should be justified. Through the novels, a perception of the Ancient world is being sketched, and that imaginary representation, that *idea* of the Greek and Roman worlds, is what I have tried to follow by means of some meaningful texts of unequal literary repercussion.

Furthermore, I have tried to emphasize the originality of these novels, and even their more humorous aspects, and to show that they do not seek primarily to educate the reader, but rather to pleasantly entertain, though without neglecting certain didactic and sentimental information. I hope the readers will share this intention of re-encountering the pleasure of the texts and certain sympathy towards them.

The present volume is, above all, an essay based upon the reading of a few fictional texts. It does not aspire to be an exhaustive guide nor a catalogue of all the novels about Greeks and Romans; neither does it offer a general theory of historical fiction as a literary genre or sub-genre. It does not even offer a synthesis of all the novels analysed or commented upon. It is, therefore, something quite different from other works, such as G. Lukács *The Historical Novel* (México, 1966) and H. Riikonen *Die Antike im historischen Roman des 19. Jahrhunderts*, (Helsinki, 1979), which have proven so useful.

It is not a work aimed at specialists or literary critics—although I would like them to find it useful too—but to those interested in the history of the novel and those enthusiasts of recreations of Antiquity. It would have been possible to write a longer book with more detailed notes and references to the works and their authors, but I did not want to extend the comments further. I have tried to provide suggestions rather than to give detailed explanations. In a certain manner, it attempts to provide a comparative perspective, both as regards the evolution of the genre and the different, and sometimes contradictory, views of the ancient world, without forgetting its interest for the present one, or the different presents in question. Nonetheless, I think it does invite reflection, and also reading, rather than academic theorising. I have not used technical terms nor have I conducted formalist analysis. I think there is scope for development along those lines, of course, but this was never my intention. I think that both in its approach and in the issues raised it opens up some new perspectives on the subject at hand. Finally, it proposes a journey through some books that were expressive of a conception of the past imagined according to the fantasy guidelines of their writers and that were extremely significant at a certain point in history. I have paid more attention to the most famous novels of the nineteenth century than to those of the twentieth, since the former are less accessible, in general, and also because I have deemed them more significant for the development of the genre.

CHAPTER II:

THE FIRST NOVEL: “CHAEREAS AND CALLIRHOE”

1

Callirhoe is the oldest of the five Greek novels of romance and adventure that have been preserved in manuscript form. Among the romantic tales of late Hellenistic times it certainly occupies a well-deserved first place. It is the first example of an anonymous genre of ancient Poetics that is characterised by its long prose form and takes as its main topics the vicissitudes of romance and travelling. *Callirhoe* inaugurated a literary form that was to become the most prolific modern genre of later tradition. It is, by chance or by accident, the first European novel.

We know the name of its author, our first novelist, because he signed his work on the first line, following the custom of Ancient Historians. The first line of the text reads as follows:

I, Chariton of Aphrodisias, secretary of the rhetor Athenagoras, am going to tell a tale of love that took place in Syracuse (I,1)

And the last line reads:

I wrote all this about *Callirhoe* (VIII,8)

However, it is common, and it was so from Antiquity, to name novels using the names of the hero and heroine. The manuscript that preserves the work of Chariton gives the title of *Chaereas and Callirhoe* to the work—and the title, as with similar novels, is chosen according to the young lovers, hero and heroine, whose adventures are told: *Anthia and Habrocomes*, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Theagenes and Chariclea*. It is not paramount to our purposes to choose between labelling the work with the name of the heroine or with those of the hero and heroine. It is only worth mentioning that the novelist, that is, Chariton, was giving clear priority to the feminine character, and that is because *Callirhoe* is the main character in the story; this is true even at certain moments and in certain sections of the work in which *Chaereas* assumes the leading and active role in the narration. The leading role given to a feminine figure is one of the significant features of that exceptional Hellenistic spirit that found in the novel an appropriate means of expression.

Chaereas and Callirhoe is, as some scholars have commented, a “historical novel” in which Chariton wants to tell us a “tale of love” that happened in a well-defined historical past. He writes in the first century of our era about certain events that took place at the end of the fifth century B.C., that is, in the middle of the Classical period—and the erudite discussion of whether it was at the beginning or at the end of the century is beside the point now. *Callirhoe* is the daughter of a famous *strategos* from Syracuse mentioned in Thucydides’ historical narrative, and other renowned historical characters, such as the King of Persia, Artaxerxes II, and his wife, Queen Stateira, appear in the novel. The framework of this romantic and eventful journey is set about four or five centuries before Chariton’s own time. And at the time when Chariton was writing this was seen as a prestigious and “Classical” period to which writers and orators from the late Hellenistic period did not cease to draw on; as a setting for their fictions or as an object of imitations and recreations, it was a period that was both removed and exemplary.

Chariton, who, as we now know thanks to the archaeological digs in Aphrodisias, lives in subjugation to the Roman Empire in a city in Asia Minor of remarkable cultural splendour, evokes a historical world in which Syracuse, Athens and Persia were powerful and magnificent. In an attempt at evading his own time, he tries to recreate a prestigious Mediterranean realm as the setting of his romantic plot. And it is no coincidence that the very same realm had been written about by the Greek historians with masterly style. Chariton uses that imagined past, highly valued in itself, to give prestige to his tale—which is not about History, but about Love—enveloping the adventures of the wandering

lovers in the respectable mantle of such a classical and historical setting.

Much has been written by critics specialising in the origins of the novel as a genre about the recourse to historicity in Chariton's work. His eagerness to provide his fiction with a memorable setting, the weight of historiographic tradition, its derivation from local, romantic, somewhat pathetic tales and his liking of the mimesis of great prose writers, are certainly factors that might have played a part in this scholarly interest. Chariton, a keen reader of Homer and of the tragedians, interweaves tones and references to the classics in his works, and echoes of the Classical epic, drama and historiography can be found there, so that these reflections function as evidence of intertextuality, recognisable by the educated reader, *pepaideumenos*, which endorse, to a certain extent, the quality of his work.

Simultaneously naive and sentimental, the novelist tries a suspiciously new genre, embellishing it with enticements and flourishes of other well-established ones. If, on the one hand, the novel, as a long narration in prose, is related to historiography, inasmuch as it is written *en historias eidei*, in "the form of history", it is evident that, insofar as it is fiction, *plasma* or *drama*, it is removed from historiography, which only seeks to bear witness to well-documented and attested truth. The novel implies, from its very inception, a certain ambiguity. The travels and loves of Callirhoe and Chaereas are something that "took place in Syracuse"—*genomenon*, like the "events", *genomena*, that Herodotus collected to save them from oblivion, according to his well-known prologue. The characters of the story refer to historical figures—though not the protagonists, as any sharp reader will notice—but calling the narrative a "love story" already removes it from the sphere of historiography to bring it closer to other genres (tragic, lyric, or even epic). This love story is, in Greek, *pathos erotikon*, two words that do not evoke historicity, but rather a different thematic field. And, indeed, there is a lot of *pathos* and a lot of *eros* here inasmuch as Eros' and Aphrodite's divine powers preside over the tale.

2

Let us look at how the novel begins, after that first sentence which the novelist signs, like a historian who gives his name and the name of his city as a guarantee of the authenticity of his evidence. After the seriousness of that first sentence, in which Chariton defines himself as a "secretary", *hypographeus*, that is, as a notary's clerk, who, by signing his name proves the veracity of a document, the tale commences in a completely novelistic tone:

Hermocrates, *strategos* of Syracuse, victorious over the Athenians, had a daughter named Callirhoe, a marvellous young girl and the jewel of all Sicily, since her beauty was not so much human as divine, not that of a Nereid or mountain nymph, either, but of Aphrodite Virgin herself.

The fame of her extraordinary beauty spread far and wide: suitors came pouring into Syracuse, kings and tyrants' sons, not only from Sicily, but even from Italy, and from Epirus, and from the towns of the continent. But Eros wanted to bind her in an indissoluble union to an ordinary citizen.

Now there was a certain youth named Chaereas, whose handsomeness surpassed all, resembling the statues and pictures of Achilles and Nireus and Hippolitus and Alcibiades. His father Ariston was second in Syracuse, after Hemocrates, and there was between them certain political animosity, so that they would have sealed an allegiance by marriage with anyone but each other. But Eros is keen on struggles and pleased by unexpected successes, and looked for an occasion like the one I am going to relate ...

In a few strokes, the novelist evokes a Syracuse victorious over the Athenians—an episode well-described by Thucydides in famous passages—and the noble origin of both handsome protagonists. The topic of family animosity serves well the purpose of suggesting difficulties prior to the wedding, but it is the presence of Eros and the comparisons on account of the beauty of both youngsters that provokes the memory of other horizons and other literary genres.

Callirhoe is compared to Aphrodite Virgin, model of feminine loveliness. Aphrodite *Parthenos*, that is, the young goddess who seduces with all the power of her splendid and radiant beauty, was represented in the famous Aphrodite of Cnidus, and was not a goddess of virginity but of the divine allure combined with the youth of the maiden still untamed by marriage. The comparisons with Aphrodite are abundant throughout the work. Callirhoe fears the goddess, to whom so many compare her. And it is Aphrodite who, once the many severe trials evidencing the courage of the lovers have been successfully overcome, takes pity on them and leads both to the happy ending.

Thus, at the beginning of the eighth and final book of the narrative, the same number as Thucydides' *History*, Chariton makes a brief compilation and allows for a short *excursus*, hinting to the reader of the necessary happy ending of the novel. I shall quote these paragraphs, as evidence of the author's disposition, which is far removed from the examples of historians:

How Chaereas, suspecting that Callirhoe had been handed over to Dionysius, had deserted to the Egyptian in order to revenge himself on the Persian king; how he had been appointed admiral and gained control of the sea; how after his victory, he captured Arados, where the king had secluded his wife and all her retinue, including Callirhoe, all of which has been described in the preceding book. Fortune was now planning a blow, not only incredible, but sorrowful: though in possession of Callirhoe, Chaereas was to remain ignorant of this fact and, sailing away with other men's wives aboard his triremes, was to leave his wife there alone, not, like Ariadne, asleep, for Dionysus to marry, but as booty for his own enemies.

Aphrodite, however, thought this excessively terrible, since by now she was already reconciled with Chaereas, with whom she had been intensely angered due to his intemperate jealousy; and because, having received from her the fairest of gifts, surpassing even that given to Alexander Paris, he had repaid her favour with insult.

Since Chaereas, however, had now made full amends to Eros by his wanderings from West to East amid countless sufferings, Aphrodite took pity on him and,

after having chased over land and sea those two loveliest of beings, whom at the beginning she had joined in marriage, she decided to bring them back together again.

I believe this last part of the story will be the most pleasant for readers, since it will purify it from the sorrows of the first books. There will be neither piracy nor slavery in it, or judgements, battles, attempts at suicide, wars or captivities, but rather legal love and legitimate marriages. How, then, the goddess shed light on the truth, and showed the lovers, who knew not they were near one another, I will tell hereafter...

This type of authorial intervention, combined with a brief summary in this case—in a prominent place such as the beginning of a new book and that may correspond to a new papyrus roll—is a feature that is characteristic of Chariton, and is not to be found in other novelists. At this moment, he warns the reader (probably both male and female readers are included in this plural, a very curious and rare reference) that the happy ending is about to come, which will constitute a “purifying” element, *katharsion*, of past sorrows. It is quite likely that, by using this term, the novelist is echoing the famous cathartic effect that tragedy could have, according to Aristotle, on the mood of the audience. To this tragic *katharsis* corresponds the sentimental catharsis of the melodramatic novel, with its indispensable “happy end”, placed here under the patronage of the goddess of love.

It is possible, nonetheless, to find here a tragic echo. Aphrodite chases those who disregard her, such as Hippolytus, or those who do not appreciate her favours—also exemplified by Venus, Psyche’s cruel mother-in-law in Apuleius’ famous tale. And yet another echo: she gave Callirhoe to Chaereas doing him a greater favour than the one granted to Paris, to whom she had handed the famous Helen. A certain parallel between Helen of Troy and Callirhoe of Syracuse underpins the romantic structure: as with Menelaus, Chaereas retrieves his kidnapped wife, who has been taken to the Asian and Oriental world, and like the Spartan king, he also manages to be victorious in war, and, like Helen, Callirhoe returns after her second marriage, having been rescued by her first husband. In any case, there is no point in taking parallels with the *Iliad* too far: there is no Paris in the plot, nor is Callirhoe an infidel, as Helen was.

Still, Chariton loves evoking such echoes and some other, mythological ones are also to be found. Thus, the reference to Ariadne, whom Theseus abandoned in Naxos, and who later became Dionysus’ wife, seems to be particularly suited to this case. We even find the play on words in the similarity of names of the second husbands: Dionysus in the myth and Dionysius in the novel.

It is Aphrodite who grants the lovers, and the readers who have shared their misfortunes and adventures, the happy endings, putting to rights the eventful course of Fortune, another Hellenistic deity that the author mentions felicitously. The *Tyche* or Fortune, we should remember, the great goddess who seems to nonchalantly preside over ruined human destinies. At the time, she was a highly regarded goddess of an ambiguous cult that had influence throughout the Hellenistic world. Fortunately, both Eros and Aphrodite are already on the side of the unfortunate lovers, and these have paid dearly and in

full with the required sufferings. Chariton's last book will serve to show how the new reunion takes place and everything leads to a happy end. Readers can wipe away their tears, and, in any case, they know, from the beginning of this last book, that they will be able to shed tears also of happiness, if they are very sentimental: in the last scene of the narrative, Callirhoe visits the temple of Aphrodite to piously thank her for her protection.

In any case, the warning given by the novelist —an intrusion of the author in the narrative that distances the tale— is aptly introduced. There are other summaries in the novel (at the beginning of chapter five, for example), and more references to Homeric Helen as a precursor of beautiful Callirhoe (in ch. V, 2, 7), and some other interruptions by the author in commenting on some passages, such as the wonderful moment when, already in the middle of the novel, a great effective scene takes place in Babylon (V, 8, 2).

It is the highest point of *intrigue*, which has been prepared for quite some time and is an extraordinarily striking scene that occurs in the middle of the novel. At last, the protagonists are going to find each other again at the Babylonian court. Before the impressive throne of king Artaxerxes, surrounded by the splendour and the amazement of courtesans and dames, beautiful Callirhoe and Dionysius of Miletus and a distressed Chaereas, escorted by the satrap Mithridates, finally meet. At long last, everything is going to become clear. The two spouses, kept apart since they left Syracuse, are ultimately in the presence of the other after their long-endured hardships in Persian lands.

Who would have been able to properly describe the aspect of such a tribunal? Which dramatic author brought such an extraordinary story to the stage? You would have thought you were in a theatre full of thousands of different emotions, since there is everything at the same time: tears, happiness, astonishment, compassion, incredulity, pleas...They congratulated Chaereas, rejoiced with Mithridates, suffered for Dionysius and, with respect to Callirhoe, they were undecided. And she felt terribly perturbed, standing erect, looking only at Chaereas with eyes that flew towards him. And I think the King himself would have wanted to be Chaereas at that very moment. (V, 8, 2-4)

The comparison with a dramatic scene is crystal clear. "You would have thought yourself in a theatre" says Chariton to the reader. And, driven by his enthusiasm, he considers the effect of his scene to be unsurpassable. "What type of poet has dramatised such a surprising story (a plot or a myth)?"—The Greek sentence is very resonant: *poîos poitès epì skenês parádoxon ûthon hoútos eiségagen*. *Poietés* could mean both poet and dramatic author, and *mûthos* could either be "myth", "plot" or "traditional story". By comparing himself to a classical dramatic author, Chariton also defines himself as a *poietés*, a poet in prose who creates a scene of memorable pathetic quality. Who else, he says, has achieved a similar dramatisation, with such a range of characters, with such a build up of intrigue and such picturesque settings?

In what we call the “historical novel”, the historical is not part of the form, but rather of the content. In the novelistic plot, History appears as a decisive element: a historical setting is sought as background, but also the novelistic process is intertwined in the course of History, so that historical events affect the destiny of the protagonists. The novelistic action not only develops in the past, but also in a very well “historically” delimited past. The historical setting is not a carnivalesque colouring, in which actors simply move around wearing period costume; it is much more, it is a decisive factor in the construction of the novel. Romantic fiction is integrated in the course of History and quite intentionally evoked, in contrast to other tales in which action develops in a historically undetermined past.

And in historical novels, though documentation cannot be overlooked, it is not as relevant as the recreation of a setting and a framework endowed with a certain degree of likelihood. As K. Kerényi already pointed out, the setting is “less defined by the accurateness of historical data as by the pretension of a historical atmosphere”. In this sense, it is worth dismissing in full a statement such as B. Lavagnini’s: “A common feature of all these novels (the five preserved) is that they are historical novels as well, inasmuch as the action is projected backwards to a weakly depicted past, which is ideal and distant”. This reference to a remote, ideal past is not enough to define a narrative as “historical”. And, besides, not all our novels refer to a “remote past”. I do not believe that could be said either of the novel by Xenophon of Ephesus (although the time in which it takes place is far from precise), or the one by Achilles Tatius (the narrator is the protagonist and the setting is not well-defined), or in the case of Longus (which narrates an idyllic romance, somewhat removed from any historical setting). It is arguable whether such an adjective is applicable to Heliodorus’ long novel, in which the protagonist is an Ethiopian princess and the setting worthy of a new Herodotus. However, in its strictest sense, only in *Chaereas and Callirhoe* does “historicity” seem clear.

It is quite curious, and symptomatic of his aspirations, that Chariton should refer more than once to the famous defeat of the Athenians in Syracuse, during the Peloponnesian War, where the heroine’s father attained everlasting glory. With a certain degree of ingenuity, he tells us that the people of Syracuse were happier with the fortunate encounter and happy ending of the adventures of Chaereas and Callirhoe than with the memory of the famous military victory, when, at the end of the story, the two protagonists congregate all the people at the great Syracusan theatre to relate to them their romantic vicissitudes; thus, triumphantly, the novel concludes.

Chariton is keen on pathetic and multitudinous scenes, with a certain theatrical aftertaste, and certainly his novel could have been the script for a Cecil B. de Mille’s film. It does have a film aftertaste *avant la lettre*. Though the work is divided into eight books (the same number, albeit shorter, as Thucydides’ *History*), its division into five acts makes it clear and easy to provide a schematic summary of it.

First Act: meeting of the lovers in Syracuse. Falling in love, wedding, quarrel, Callirhoe's false death, burial, assault of the tomb by bandits, taking of the young woman to Miletus, where she is sold as a slave.

Second Act: Chaereas discovers the empty tomb and departs in search of his wife. He is also finally sold as a slave in Asia Minor.

Third Act: the two spouses, after curious misfortunes, end up meeting at the Babylonian court before King Artaxerxes, in a spectacular scene full of *intrigue*, which could be seen as the centre point of the plot.

Fourth Act: Chaereas, by chance, ends up commanding an Egyptian squadron that has rebelled against Artaxerxes, and thus obtains an outstanding victory against the Persians.

Fifth Act: After his naval victory, Chaereas takes possession of the royal Persian harem, where, among the captives, is his beloved Callirhoe. He finally discovers and is reunited with his wife again. He returns with her, happy and triumphant, to Syracuse.

As may be seen, the novel is easily adapted into a dramatic scheme, as a comedy in five acts. However, with its varied and remote settings, no ancient theatre could have possibly staged it. (Certainly it lends itself to film; and I repeat that Chariton deserved Hollywood). Elsewhere I have highlighted the modernity of this somewhat melodramatic tale, with its well-calculated tricks and intrigues.

At this point it should be remembered that, while the romantic plot—the adventures of Callirhoe and her husband Chaereas—is a novelist's invention (maybe based upon some local legend, as some have suggested), there is no doubt that the novelist has sought to find a "historical" background, with resonant geographical references. It does not matter much whether there are some shortcomings in particular details, which some historians might disapprove of, but which fall within the poetic licence allowed to the historical novelist, which he can make use of to his liking. Thus, for example, in the chronology. As it happens, Hermocrates of Syracuse died in the year 407 B.C., while the reign of the Persian Artaxerxes II Memnon lasted from 404 to 363 B.C. and Miletus was not under Persian rule until after 387 B.C., while the rebellion of the Egyptians that Chaereas leads in the novel could echo either the revolts of 405, 389, 360 and 332 B.C., or even maybe the one of 460-454 B.C., in the time of Artaxerxes I. Nevertheless, Sir Walter Scott himself could be accused of similar inaccuracies and other novelists of far worse inconsistencies, as well.

The accuracy of the data presented, however, does not matter as much as the setting and the impression left on the reader, and that seems to have been well achieved. It is not the same case as that of Heliodorus. He also seeks a prestigious past, populated with regal and princely characters, and an exotic setting, like the Ethiopian court, for his tale. He does it, however, without any historical precision, as in so many Baroque novels, such as those by Madame de Scudéry. It is interesting to ponder for a moment the influence a work such as Chariton's (rediscovered at the beginning of the eighteenth century) could have,

or perhaps could have had, if it had been known during the Renaissance, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Heliodorus enjoyed such enormous prestige. Would it have anticipated the emergence of the “European historical novel”?

If plausible reasons have been given to explain the fact that our first novelist looked for a historical background for his tale, in order to wrap the romantic plot in a prestigious setting and shelter his novelistic invention under an accredited genre it is no less intriguing the disregard for the historical setting by other novelists, such as the four mentioned above who, on the other hand, follow so strictly the novelistic scheme of the two handsome young lovers subjugated to the rigours of Fortune until they reach the deserved, happy end.

There is no ancient theoretical study of these first novels available, nor did the Greeks have a proper name for the genre. Nevertheless, something can be extracted from these plots: the authors had read other novels. Despite lacking formal programmes, there was most certainly some tradition of tales of romantic fiction. Already the straightforward and complex narrative of Xenophon of Ephesus, quite a mediocre writer, evidences a conventional template for the adventure episodes and erotic motifs of the plot. Subsequently, in the phase called Sophistic, Longus, Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus, more subtle authors, trained in rhetoric and narrative techniques, play with that narrative prototype, changing its ingredients—for example, changing the journey through broad spaces for an idyllic and bucolic setting, in the case of Longus— or complicating the rhythm and the order of the narrative—as masterfully done by Heliodorus— or showing preference for a first person narrative, as Achilles Tatius.

We do not know if all of them had read Chariton (or other novels in particular, such as *Nino* or *Metiocus and Parthenope*), but the abandoning of historical settings could be viewed as a deliberate choice rather than a casual feature. Such reliance upon historiography and such a precise and brilliant past setting were not necessary in a romantic plot, and may have been too complicated for the author and his readers. Even when the action was set in a more or less distant past, historical accuracy was superfluous to their aims.

We do have, however, other novelistic fragments that inform us about more novels with a historical setting. The *Novel of Nino* is recounted in three papyrus fragments (A and B were published by U. Wilcken in 1893; C was published in the collection of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri in 1932). Each depicts a typical scene of a novelistic plot, despite the fragmentary character of their material support. In fragment A we read how the protagonist, supposedly, the young Nino, an Assyrian prince and the heroine, an unnamed princess (tentatively identified as Semiramis), go each on their own to their respective mothers to confess to them their reciprocal love and request permission for their wedding. Perhaps this fragment corresponds to an initial chapter in the novel. In fragment B, after a badly deteriorated papyrus full of holes, a few lines suggest the separation of the lovers, and there is some reference to the advance of the Assyrian army, with their Persian and Carian allies, led by Nino, who is going to fight the Armenians. Fragment C is briefer and presents Nino in a desperate situation, shipwrecked off the coast of Colchis, far away from his troops and his beloved Semiramis.

The first words alone of the damaged fragment A will suffice to suggest novelistic *topoi*. We read isolated words such as “passionate lover”, “shame”, “hope”, “danger”, “trust”, “wandering journey” and “test”. Diodorus (II, 20, 3-5), Plutarch (*Eroticus*, 753 d-e) and Claudius Aelianus (*Varia Historia*, VII, 1) provide us with references to this fabulous Semiramis, who had such an impact upon the Greek imagination. She has been identified as Queen Shammur-amat, who was the first lady in the Assyrian harem of Shamshi-Adad (823-810 B.C.) and afterwards regent queen during the childhood of Adad-Nirari III. However, the usurper evoked by Greek historians and the heroine of the novel of *Nino* had nothing in common, apart from the name. Nevertheless, the intention of the novelist to take his narrative backwards to a deeply remote and prestigious historical or legendary past seems quite clear. It could be interesting to call this narrative *Ninopaedia*, thus evoking the shadow of Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*. Nino appeared as an adolescent prince and as a military leader, shipwrecked in the end, heading towards the *de rigueur* happy ending of the romantic genre. The role that love plays, however, was already far superior here to that granted by Xenophon in his “*education of Cyrus*”, a para-novelistic text at times, and much less fantastic than ours.

We would like to have more fragments of this narrative. It precedes the other preserved novels, since it is usually dated before the year 100 B.C. Would Chariton have read it? Would C.B. de Mille have liked it?

Closer in time to Chariton’s novel there is another, usually named *Metiocus and Parthenope*, from which only brief fragments have been preserved, but which must have been a work of certain renown, since its protagonists are depicted in some mosaics in Antioquia. The heroine, whose name was most likely the title of the novel, is Parthenope, daughter of Polycrates, the famous tyrant of Samos, and her lover is the son of Miltiades the Younger, the winner at Marathon (see Herodotus, III, 124 and VI, 39-41). The longest papyrus fragment depicts a curious scene: a *symposion* where the conversation focuses on *eros* (as in the Platonic *Symposium*). The toasts are commanded by the philosopher Anaximenes of Miletus and the poet praising the beauty of the protagonists is no other than the lyric poet Ibycus of Rhegium. Once again we find poets and philosophers in topical discussion. As is well-known, Parthenope was present in the gathering and this is most striking because in the Greek classical world it was unusual for decent women to be present at this sort of discussion. In the work of Achilles Tatius, women of the house are also present at this sort of social party. A Hellenistic feature rather than a Classical one, it would seem. At this gathering in particular, Metiocus supports a moderate and somewhat disdainful vision of Eros. Probably this opinion, which draws the terrible look that passionate Parthenope throws at him, was to bring upon him serious punishment from the vindictive god and his penance throughout the rest of the novel. We can only hope that some day a new piece of Egyptian papyri will be brought to light, and we will be able to finally find out how the plot developed.

As far as we know, it seems that this story also evoked a precise historical framework, in which characters and families remembered by historians were also mentioned. Maybe its setting was reminiscent of the one in *Chaereas and Callirhoe*—some scholars have even suggested that its author could have been

the same Chariton of Aphrodisias, a hypothesis so far impossible to confirm. Perhaps it was closer to the tone of Achilles Tatius' work, where the influence of rhetoric was greater.

The fact is that both in *Callirhoe* as in *Parthenope*, which can be dated to the first century of the beginning of the second century B.C., as well as in *Nino*, from the beginning of the first century B.C., we find a historical setting that we do not encounter again in other novelistic narratives. Scholars who specialise in the subject have highlighted the connection between historiographic narratives and the first novels, as was pointed out before. From what we can tell from the preserved texts, much less has been written, however, on the abandoning of the historical setting. Xenophon of Ephesus, Longus and Achilles Tatius do not make use of those settings and backgrounds. They did not consider them necessary anymore, and they certainly were not. The *páthos erotikón* and the *historía érotos* (in Longus' words) do not require historical flourishes in order to attract their own audience, although a baroque novelist could play with regal and picturesque settings, as if they had been taken from History, as Heliodorus does.

In a more precise sense, in his awareness of human destiny as intertwined in collective history, which is a decisive ingredient of the historicist spirit developed in the nineteenth century, Chariton becomes a brilliant precursor of the genre, which was to acquire its definitive features in Chateaubriand and W. Scott. According to G. Lukács in *The Historical Novel*, "[the] so-called historical novel before Walter Scott lacks precisely what is specifically historical: deriving from the historical singularity of each time the exceptionality of action of each of its characters". Modern historical novels imply an awareness, spurred by nostalgia and distance, that ancient novels, precursors of the genre, could hardly foresee. These encapsulated, however, the essence of their generic formulation.

AUTOR'S NOTE

I have used the translation into Spanish of *Chaereas and Callirhoe* in the 'Biblioteca Clásica Gredos' (Madrid, 1979) done by Julia Mendoza. At the time, I wrote a brief introduction on the structure of this novel, with a succinct bibliography. The same volume contained the novel by Xenophon of Ephesus and the *Novelistic Fragments* (those of *Nino* and *Metiocus and Parthenope*) in Spanish translation.

On Greek novels, I refer to my *Los orígenes de la novela* (1972; re-edited 1988, Madrid, Istmo). And, as more recent collective works, J.R. Morgan and R. Stoneman, (eds.) *Greek Fiction. The Greek Novel in Context*, London-New York, Routledge, 1994, and J. Tatum (ed.) *The Search for the Ancient Novel*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

On Chariton as "historical novelist", see the articles by T. Hägg "Callirhoe and Parthenope: the Beginnings of the Historical Novel" in *Classical Antiquity*, 6 (1987), pp- 184-204 and by R. Hunter "History and Historicity in the Romance of Chariton", *ANRW* II, 34.2, pp.1055-1086. I have myself devoted some articles to the topic, the last one in *Compás de Letras*, Madrid, 1994, pp.57-70, "Novelas griegas con transfondo histórico".

On Chariton's heroine and the particular tone of the work linked to a possible feminine audience of the novel, see the interesting article by B. Egger "Looking at Chariton's Callirhoe" in the above-mentioned volume, *Greek Fiction*. On the novelistic fragments with a possible historical background, very clear treatment can be found in G. Sandy "New Pages of Greek Fiction", *ibid.* pp. 130-145.