CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

XENOPHON OF EPHESUS

J. Morgan

The *Ephesian Story* is narrated by an anonymous external narrator who is far less perceptible than Chariton's.[1] On no occasion does the narrator speak of himself in the first person or to his narratee in the second, and there is virtually no overt self-referential commentary on the quality of the narration, with just two scenes being described, in the same phrase, as 'a pitiful spectacle' (1.14.2; 2.6.3). Since he refers at the very end of the novel to the protagonists' lives after the end of the story (5.15.3), the narrator is not configured as a contemporary of the events he narrates; but there is no indication by how much the story antedates the act of narration, nor in what circumstances the latter should be imagined as occurring.

Like Chariton's, this narrator knows the story in its entirety, and communicates it fully to his narratee. The heroine Anthia, like Callirhoe, falls into a death-like sleep and is entombed alive: but the narrator has already explained that the poison with which she believed herself to be committing suicide was in fact a sleeping-potion given her under false pretences by a kindly physician (3.5.11). He also disposes of full information about events on the divine plane, telling us that the jealousy of Eros begins the plot (1.2.1), that Eros is enraged by Habrocomes' resistance (1.4.4), that Fate had not forgotten (1.10.2), and that the god of the Nile took pity on Habrocomes' prayer (4.2.6).

[1] We must immediately enter the *caveat* that the exact status of the extant text is disputed. It has been argued that we have only an epitome of a once more extensive text (Bürger 1892). Although this thesis is untenable in the form in which it was originally argued (see the assaults on it by Hägg 1966 and O'Sullivan 1995), almost every modern reader has the sense that the narrative is cripplingly bare and undeveloped. O'Sullivan's hypothesis of residual oral technique suggests that our text may be just one realization of a fluid *texte vivant*, or a skeletal summary on which oral performance could be improvised. Either way, a text whose function is to record the story in the simplest way possible is precisely the kind of text that is likely to minimize the visibility of a potentially more interesting narrator.

Oddly the gods' role in the dénouement is merely implicit. The narrator has access to the thoughts and emotions of his characters,[2] though he does not always explain why they do what they do. In contrast to Chariton's, however, this narrator is often content to let the characters speak for themselves: roughly two-thirds of the text can be classified as showing rather than telling.[3] Similarly the narrator can offer opinions about events and characters: for instance, Manto is beautiful, but 'not nearly as beautiful as Anthia' (2.3.1), Cyno is 'hideous to look at and much worse to listen to' (3.12.3), and Anchialus 'pays the price for his wicked passion' (4.5.6).[4] But, to a surprising extent, the narrator as often maintains a laconic objectivity, offloading the judgments on to his characters. To take a single example, it is the character Habrocomes, not the narrator, who describes Cyno as a murderess (3.12.5).

Communication between the primary narrator and his primary narratee coheres with this pattern. There is, for instance, a short digression about the temple of Apis at Memphis, which serves to locate the story in relation to the narratee's knowledge of the real world. The narrator offers a couple of *sententiae* stressing the difference between Greeks and barbarians (2.2.4; 3.11.4), and a number of explanatory parentheses, particularly when a new character is introduced (2.9.1, 2.14.1, 3.5.9, 5.2.2, 5.4.5, 5.5.2, 5.9.7, 5.12.1). These occur particularly at points of transition between the narrative lines and are a by-product of Xenophon's extravagantly primitive interlace technique: the pretence is maintained that a strand is resumed not at the point where it was left, but at a time exactly coinciding with that reached by the strand to be dropped. There are thus many fictitious gaps in each strand, which the explanatory asides appear to fill. One might say, in fact, that the most visible function of this barely visible narrator is precisely to control the rapid transitions between the novel's two storylines.

In one respect, however, Xenophon marks a clear difference and arguably an advance over Chariton. This is in the matter of embedded narratives. Sometimes these, like Chariton's, concern events within

[2] E.g. at 1.9.6, 1.14.7, 1.15.4, 2.4.1.

[3] The figure is from Scarcella [1979] 1993: 175–177.

[4] Quotations come from the translation by G. Anderson in Reardon 1989. A complete list of the narrator's observations can be found in Scarcella [1979] 1993: 172–174.

the novel and clarify who knows what and when. So, at 3.3.4 the bandit Hippothous (a structurally important figure who acts as girder between the two story-lines) tells his new friend Habrocomes about his earlier encounter with Anthia. There is no new information for the primary narratee here, but it is a vital part of the story that Habrocomes should now learn what the primary narratee has known for some time; the news motivates his journey to Cilicia. Similarly at 3.9.4 an old woman called Chrysion (whose only reason for existence is to transmit this information) tells Hippothous' men the tragic story of the death of a woman whom Hippothous recognizes as Anthia, and the theft of her body from its tomb by pirates. The narrator has already made it clear that Anthia is still alive, but the partial information provides motivation for Habrocomes' voyage to Alexandria. It is also worth noting that this embedded character-narrative avoids the kind of omniscience that the primary narrator takes for granted. Thus Chrysion shows uncertainty over the motive for Anthia's suicide by giving alternative explanations ('either because she was mad or because she was in love with someone else'). Chrysion's narrative precipitates an extreme emotional reaction and lament from Habrocomes, which the primary narrator and narratee are able to read, from their positions of superior knowledge, as dramatic irony.

Three embedded narratives cover events outside the story and are of no organic relevance to it. One of these is Anthia's tale of a childhood encounter with a ghost, which she uses to account for the epilepsy she has feigned to frighten off the clients of the brothel into which she has been sold (5.7.7–9); this is clearly marked as a fiction, but nonetheless stands in analogic relation to the main narrative, the horrific assault of the ghost corresponding to the sexual assaults intended by the customers of the brothel. The other two embedded narratives, both external analepses, function more clearly as didactic analogies. The first is Hippothous' account of his love for and loss of the beautiful boy Hyperanthes (3.2.1–15). This is set up as being equivalent to the story of the hero Habrocomes, for which it is exchanged (3.1.5). Like the main story it concerns passionate love disrupted by the aggression of a rival, resulting in separation and travel; as in the main story, the first meeting occurs at a festival, and the lovers are more or less equal in age. However, the homosexuality of the embedded narrative forms a clear contrast to the love of Habrocomes and Anthia; and Hippothous' story embodies a quite different paradigm of sexual relations, substituting for the equality of the main story a division of roles into active and submis-

sive partners on the classic pederastic model.[5] Its argument function is very limited; it elicits Habrocomes' narrative of his adventures (given in extreme summary at 3.3.1), which in turn prompts Hippothous to recall his encounter with Anthia; Habrocomes shows no signs of understanding its importance as a counter-paradigm to his own experiences, but for the primary narratee it shapes the understanding of the main story in as profound a way as this novel ever achieves. Again we can note that the secondary narrator avoids the omniscience of the primary one: at 3.2.4 Hippothous talks of the envy of 'some evil spirit', rather than attributing events to the agency of a specific deity in the manner of the primary narrator.[6]

The second external analepsis is the narration by the old fisherman Aegialeus of his love for and elopement with the young girl who became his wife, and whose embalmed corpse he keeps in his bedroom (5.1.4–11). Aegialeus has no function in the novel other than to tell this story. Again the motifs of the embedded narrative reflect those of the main story: inamorations, rivalry, separation, and reunion. By casting the theme of separation and reunion in its most extreme form (the separation of death redeemed by the continued presence of the mummy), this narrative succeeds in producing a profound learning experience in the protagonist, who realizes 'that true love knows no age limits' (5.1.12).[7]

Although they differ widely in the visibility and the characteristics of their primary narrator and in the uses to which they put embedded narratives, the novels of Chariton and Xenophon stand together, in this as in other respects, as relatively straightforward examples of their genre. As we move to the three sophistic novels of Achilles Tatius, Longus and Heliodorus, we shall encounter far more complex narrators and narrative situations.

[5] On this see Konstan 1994: 26ff.
[6] Virtually the same phrase recurs in Aegialeus' narrative at 5.1.6.
[7] On this see Morgan 1996: 174–175.