

Narrative Spaces

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Providence

Impressed by the broad geographical sweep of the ancient romances, and disappointed by what he perceived to be a lack of character development comparable to that found in modern novels, Mikhail Bakhtin drew the conclusion that space was the primary dimension of the genre, with the temporal axis reduced virtually to zero. For reasons I have discussed elsewhere, I do not consider this judgment to be justified.¹ Time does matter in the ancient Greek novels: if *erôs* is to serve as the basis, not just of an infatuation, but of a lasting bond sealed by marriage, it must be put to the test, proved able to endure, and in the process transformed into a stable emotion that transcends the allure of physical beauty that was its origin. Space, however, is also crucial to this evolution, not simply as a way of marking the stages of the protagonists' progress, but also because it separates them and hence obliges them to follow independent trajectories. This independence is, in turn, fundamental to the theme of the Greek novels, which is to exhibit a romance based on mutual and symmetrical passion; hence, it must be tested in each of the protagonists, not just in one.

Space, then, is not just a matter of distance travelled, but also of the creation of separate spheres of action for the hero and heroine. The couple are initially brought together by a mutual attraction based on little more than good looks. This phase is preliminary to the main action, and is accomplished before the end of the first book. Once they have been united, there begins the core of the story, in which the pair resist or overcome obstacles to their bond. In the end they are reunited, and begin their married life as two mature and loyal individuals who have been tried by experience.

¹ See Konstan 1994, 11, 46–47; for a spirited defense of Bakhtin's view, see Branham 2002.

Not all the novels, however, make use of space in the same way. For the sake of clarity, let me introduce the idea of a ‘continuous action space.’ Every action requires an agent, and that agent, in turn, must be somewhere. If the agent stays in the same place – under a fixed spotlight, so to speak – then the action space is continuous. Of course, new characters may enter or leave the circle illuminated by the spotlight and interact with the primary agent, but this does not affect the spatial continuity.

Now, it may happen that all the characters leave the initial scene of action. Imagine – to continue with our theatrical image – that the spotlight tracks them (or one of them), following their actions as they go. According to my definition, such a sequence of actions still constitutes a continuous action space – ‘space,’ rather than ‘place,’ because the place clearly changes. Though characters move from one spot to another, as long as they (or some of them) are continually in sight, so to speak, their movements constitute what I call a trail. If any agent leaves a trail, the action space is continuous.

A character may enter the action space and report events that have occurred outside it, as in the case of a messenger speech in tragedy. Such reports do not interrupt the spatial continuity (though they may represent considerable digressions in the narrative), since the action – that of reporting what happens – goes on in the primary space. The effect of such reports is to integrate actions going on elsewhere into those occurring in the action space. Let us call such reports channels. Neither trails nor channels affect the continuity of the action space.

An action space is discontinuous if there is temporal interval – a jump to next week or next year – even if the scene remains constant; we may imagine a spotlight winking out to indicate the passage of time. For the sequence of actions is broken or interrupted. If the action resumes in another location, the discontinuity is more radical. If the agents remain the same, however, there may be a kind of implicit trail, since we can imagine that we have followed them, or kept them in view, as they moved from one place to another, despite the leap in time. If the new scene involves different characters, it constitutes a new action space, although if the original characters enter at a later stage, they may connect the two spaces by a kind of splice.

Finally, and most importantly, a narrative may contain two or more action spaces that overlap temporally. The theatrical analogy for this is not a spotlight that goes off and on again, but rather two spotlights simultaneously illuminating separate and independent scenes. Here, there is no continuity by

means of trails, channels, or splices. Of course, a narrative, unlike the stage, cannot represent two action spaces at the same time; one must be recounted after the other. The narrator simply informs the reader that event Y occurred while event X was happening, as in the stereotyped formula, ‘Meanwhile, back at the ranch...’ Some narratives (and a few plays) are marked by a significant use of multiple action spaces, whereas others are limited to a single space. In the balance of this paper, I comment briefly on how the several ancient novels make use of action spaces (with a glance at some other genres as well), and then offer some suggestions concerning their function in three of the Greek novels. We shall then see whether the concept of action space has at least heuristic value.

The Latin novels – to begin with them – by and large restrict themselves to a single action space. Petronius’ *Satyrical* and Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, like Homer’s *Odyssey*, are structured on the linear principle of a journey: the narrator follows the trail of the chief character from one place to another like a camera tracking an actor. Since both novels are first-person narratives, moreover, in which the narrator is also a character in the story, the action space is in a sense identical to the place where the narrator stands: he may report events that have occurred elsewhere, like the tales overheard by Lucius in the form of an ass, but these stories function like messenger speeches, bringing news from outside into the primary space. Put differently, situations in these novels do not normally unfold in parallel narrative domains. Within the inset tales, the narrator may recount simultaneous actions in two different spaces, as in the story of Cupid and Psyche, where the scene shifts from Cupid’s mysterious mansion to the homes of Psyche’s sisters, who are plotting her ruin.² There are also shifts between earth and Olympus, but these are often connected by a trail, as we follow a deity ascending or descending from one realm to the other. The device is familiar from the *Iliad*, where Thetis’ trips to and from Olympus connect the action on earth to the councils of the gods, or again from the fifth book of the *Odyssey*, where Hermes carries the orders of Zeus to Calypso, instructing her to release Odysseus.³

² It is indicative that the word *interea* appears in Apuleius’ novel for the first time at 4,32,1 and again at 5,4,14, 5,11,9, 6,1,1, 6,22,1, all in the Cupid and Psyche story; after that, only at 8,19,1, 9,34,11 (an inset tale), and 10,15,10.

³ If the Roman novel, and particularly Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, prefers a more continuous action space than the Greek, it compensates by rendering the locale, and particularly

Among the Greek novels, Achilles Tatius's is like the Roman novels in being a first-person narrative,⁴ and in this sense is characterized by a single action space: everything is filtered through Clitopho's awareness and reported from his perspective, so that even events that have occurred simultaneously are manifested sequentially in the narrator's own space. Despite the radical experiments with suspense and narrative order in the first five books of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, in which past events are revealed piecemeal and in reverse sequence,⁵ once the hero and heroine elope they remain together for virtually the entire journey southward from Thrace to Ethiopia. This linear motion constitutes the trail that defines a continuous action space.

The remaining Greek novels, by Xenophon of Ephesus, Chariton, and Longus, exhibit a more pervasive doubling of the action space as the narrative focuses alternately on the activities of the hero and heroine, who follow independent paths that merge only when the couple is reunited at the end of the story.⁶ These novels make use of discrete action spaces, I suggest, precisely as a way of representing the hero and heroine as autonomous narrative agents in a way that is not paralleled in the other novels. In what follows, I examine the multiplication of action spaces in the final book of Xenophon's *Ephesiaca*, preceded by a brief look at illustrative passages in Chariton and Longus.⁷ After indicating how these novels manage the construction and intersection of multiple action spaces, I conclude with a suggestion about a possible model for this narrative procedure.

At the beginning of the fourth book of Chariton's *Callirhoe*, the heroine stages a mock funeral for her husband Chaereas, who, she believes, has died at sea. Callirhoe is at this point a slave in the household of Dionysius, the regent of Miletus, who is enamored of her. As it happens, Mithridates, the satrap of Caria, is on a visit to Miletus at the time, and falls in love on the spot with Callirhoe. In fact, as the reader knows, Chaereas is a prisoner in Caria, where he working, under compulsion, on the land of Mithridates. 'Now, Callirhoe [*men oun*],' Chariton writes (4,2,1), 'was burying Chaereas

the beginning and end points of the narrative, geographically more indeterminate than its Greek counterparts; see the article by Niall Slater in this issue.

⁴ On the role of the first-person narrator in this novel, see Reardon 1994.

⁵ On Heliodorus' complex narrative technique, see Winkler 1982; Morgan 1989.

⁶ For the narrative structure of these novels, see Hägg 1971; Fusillo 1989.

⁷ On Xenophon's narrative technique, see O'Sullivan 1995, who emphasizes the oral elements in Xenophon's style; Kytzler 1996. I agree with O'Sullivan that Xenophon is probably the earliest of five novelists; contra Ruiz-Montero 1994, 1996.

in Miletus, but Chaereas [*de*] was bound and toiling in Caria.’ The transition from one action space to the other is effected by a simple contrast: the resumptive pair of particles, *men oun*, summarizes the event immediately preceding, while *de* announces the topic of the following paragraph.⁸ Shortly afterwards, Chariton continues (4,2,4): ‘Now they [Chaereas and his loyal friend Polycharmus] were [*men*] in this extremity, having lately learned to forget their freedom; but the satrap Mithridates [*de*] returned [*epanêlthen*] to Caria a different man from what he was when set forth [*exêlthen*] for Miletus.’ Here, the two spaces are joined by the movement of Mithridates, whose departure and return constitute a round-trip trail between Caria and Miletus. Chaereas’ independent action space is thus more like an interlude, sandwiched in as it is between Mithridates’ travels to and fro. It may be that Chariton employed the formula for simultaneous action, rather than make Mithridates’ movements the hinge for the transition, just in order to emphasize the simultaneity of the two spaces. Later, when the focus again returns to Miletus, Chariton manages the shift of scene by way of a letter from Chaereas to Callirhoe that falls into the hands of Dionysius (4,4–5).

In Longus’ novel, the hero and heroine are never very far from one another, since the entire story is contained on the island of Lesbos, and mostly within the confines of a small vale. On one occasion, Chloe is carried off on a ship by young men from Methymne, while Daphnis is away in the woods. Daphnis weeps and prays at a shrine of the nymphs, and when he is reassured by a dream of her safe return, he spends the night with his foster parents: ‘He thought this the longest of all nights. During it [*ep’ autês*], the following things happened. The commander of the Methymnaeans, having pushed on for about ten stades, wished to relieve his soldiers, who were weary after the raid’ (2,24,4–2,25,1). The change of scene is introduced by an explicit marker of simultaneity; the new narrative segment, moreover, begins in asyndeton, indicating the start of an independent episode.⁹

Toward the beginning of Book V of the *Ephesiaca*, Xenophon reports (5,2,1): ‘Habrocomes [*ho men*] bewailed his fortunes, as Aegialeus consoled him, and *he remained in Syracuse*, where he *now* [*êdê*] shared the profession

⁸ On the structural function of ‘transitional’ *men oun ... de*, see Denniston 1959, 472; Immerwahr 1966, 58–62 notes that Herodotus commonly employs the conjunctions *men dê* or *men nun* to terminate the first segment.

⁹ For a similar use of asyndeton to introduce a new incident, cf. 4,7,1. Longus, however, favors this construction even within a continuous stretch of narrative; cf. 1,1,2 for another formula involving a distance marker in stades.

of Aegialeus [i.e., fishing]; but Hippothous and his companions [*hoi de*] had by *now* [*êdê*] acquired considerable loot, and *decided to leave Aethiopia* and *apply themselves to still greater affairs* (parallel expressions are indicated typographically). To expedite their movements, it is decided that Anthia, whom the gang is holding captive, should be killed. The shift of focus from Habrocomes' situation in Sicily to the separate action space in Aethiopia, where Anthia and Hippothous are acting out their drama – two sites about as far removed from each other as romantic fiction can conceive – is accomplished by the simple antithesis of *men* and *de*, reinforced by the contrast between Habrocomes' unhappy resolve to stay where he is and the optimism of Hippothous' men as they prepare to move on (note too the repetition of *êdê*).

We are then told how Anthia is rescued by Polyidus, the archon of Egypt, who organizes an expedition and cleans out the bandits, although Hippothous manages to escape and reach Alexandria by night; here he hides out until he can board a ship that is heading for Sicily, where, he believes, he can best repair his fortunes (5,3,3). Unfortunately, Polyidus takes a fancy to Anthia, with the result that his wife, Rhenaea, arranges to have the girl murdered. The slave Clytus, to whom the task is assigned, takes pity on her, however, and sells her instead to a brothelkeeper in Italy. Up to this moment, the action space has been continuous, as the narrator follows Anthia's movements, which intersect with those of Polyidus, and tracks her to Alexandria and thence to Italy.

Xenophon then reports (5,5,8–5,6,2): '(1) When the brothel-keeper [*ho de*] saw in Anthia a beauty such as he had never before beheld, he realized that he stood to gain great profit from the girl, and within a few days he restored her, exhausted as she was from the journey and from the attacks of Rhenaea. (2) Clytus [*ho de*], in turn, went back to Alexandria and reported to Rhenaea what had happened. (3) Hippothous [*ho de*] completed his journey and *landed in Sicily, not in Syracuse, however, but rather in Taormina*, and here he sought an opportunity to acquire new resources. (4) But when Habrocomes [*tôi de*] had spent some considerable time *in Syracuse*, he began to experience discouragement and to despair that he would ever find Anthia or return safely to his country. He decided, accordingly, to sail *from Sicily and reach Italy*, and if there he could not find what he was seeking, to make the sad journey back to Ephesus.'

There is a great deal of movement and shifting of focus in these few, spare sentences, in which the only connective is the particle *de* (joined with the pronominal article). Clytus' return to Alexandria (2) opens a potential trail to that location, but the focus changes abruptly to Hippothous. Now, we know that Hippothous set sail from Alexandria for Italy (3), so in a sense we have a point of contact here: the camera, as it were, tracks Clytus and Anthia to Italy, follows Clytus back to Alexandria, then makes an abrupt turnabout and catches up with Hippothous as he arrives in Taormina. It is a complex sequence, but perhaps it can just qualify as a continuous action space. The switch to Syracuse (4), however, has no such link, and Xenophon motivates it by the arbitrary device of recording that Hippothous landed 'not in Syracuse,' where we left Habrocomes at the end of the previous continuous action, 'but rather in Taormina.'

There is nothing intrinsically new or radical in such a shift from one action space to another. While Homer prefers in general to maintain continuity, for example by tracking a character to and from the battlefield as in Hector's return to Troy in Book 6 of the *Iliad*, he is nevertheless quite capable of representing two simultaneous actions in different locations.¹⁰ Thus, in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, while Telemachus is being entertained by Menelaus in Sparta, having set out in search of his father, Homer shifts the scene abruptly back to events in Ithaca, where the suitors are arranging their plot to assassinate the boy on his return journey (4.624–26): 'While they [*hoi men*] were going about [*penonto*] their *dinner* in the *halls* [of Menelaus], the suitors [*de*] were playing [*terponto*] at *discus* in front of the *hall* of Odysseus,' and so forth.¹¹ The transition is softened by the repetition of the term *megaron*, just as in Xenophon the notice that Hippothous was *not* going to Syracuse connects his movements indirectly with the place where Habrocomes is in fact living. In Xenophon, the device seems more mechanical or arbitrary, since there are any number of places to which Hippothous is *not* travelling,

¹⁰ See Rengakos 1995, Bakker 1997 chh. 4–5, both challenging Zielinski 1899–1901 (followed by Fränkel 1968), who argued that Homer could only narrate events in succession, so that narrative time in epic moves uniformly forward. Aristotle states the case for simultaneity clearly (*Poetics* 1459b27–27): 'in epic [as distinct from tragedy], because it is narrative in character, it is possible to represent many parts [or episodes] as occurring simultaneously' (*esti polla merê hama poiein perainomena*).

¹¹ Cf. also *Iliad* 15,390–394: *Patroklos d', heiôs men...*, *tophr' ho g'*, etc.; 16,1–2: *hôs hoi men per nêos.... Patroklos d'*, picked up at 16,101–102: *hôs hoi men toiauta.... Aias d'*, etc.

but I suspect that he was concerned to emphasize the coincidental proximity of two distinct action spaces, which would soon intersect in the narrative. So too, Habrocomes' intention to sail to Italy (4) reminds the reader of the separation between his space and that of Anthia.

Following immediately upon the last sentence quoted above, Xenophon introduces still further changes of locale (5,6,2–3): 'By now, their parents and all the Ephesians were consumed by grief, since neither a messenger nor letters had arrived from Habrocomes and Anthia, and they kept sending people everywhere to seek them. Being unable to endure because of their discouragement and their advanced age, the parents of both departed this life. Habrocomes [*ho men*], then, set off for Italy, but Leucon and Rhode [*ho de ... kai hê*], who had been reared with Habrocomes and Anthia, once their master in Xanthus had died and had left them his property (which was substantial), decided to set sail for Ephesus.' In fact, Leucon and Rhode terminate their voyage in Rhodes, once they learn that Habrocomes and Anthia have disappeared and that their parents are now dead, and it is in Rhodes that both Anthia and Habrocomes will turn up as well, thus bringing the several strands of the story together and simultaneously uniting three distinct action spaces. The mention of the fortunes of Habrocomes' and Anthia's parents can be seen as a parenthetical aside on the part of the omniscient author, since it has no consequences for the action at this point. Where it does have an effect, namely in inducing Leucon and Rhode to cut short their homeward journey, we are told that it was precisely in Rhodes that they learned (5,6,4, *mathontes*) the fates of their erstwhile masters and their parents, and so the information concerning events in Ephesus here takes the form of a report (or what I have called a channel).

The switch from Habrocomes' movements en route to Italy to Leucon and Rhode's decision to abandon Xanthus, however, is an authentic change of locale, and it is marked by contrastive *men* and *de*, analogous to the earlier cut (in cinematic terminology) from Habrocomes and the old fisherman in Syracuse to Hippothous and his men in Aethiopia. At this point, in a transition marked simply by *de* (5,7,1), Xenophon returns to the fortunes of Anthia in the possession of the brothelkeeper in Italy. Later, Xenophon will turn the spotlight briefly on Hippothous in Taormina, the shift of locale marked once more by a simple *de* (5,9,1). He wraps up events in that town, where Hippothous marries a rich old lady who obligingly dies shortly afterwards, leaving him her money, and then notes Hippothous' decision to sail from

Taormina to Italy (5,9,2, with the tell-tale verb, *diagignôskô*), where he will intersect with Anthia and end up purchasing her from the brothelkeeper.

What conclusions can be drawn from this abbreviated survey of the novelists' technique in multiplying action spaces? First, I suggest that all three deliberately highlight the distinctness of the action spaces as a way of emphasizing the autonomous actions of their characters, above all the hero and heroine. In this sense, Xenophon, and to a lesser degree Chariton and Longus, manifest through their use of space the sexual symmetry that, I have argued, is characteristic of the Greek novels, at least, as I would now stress, up to the point of the reunion or marriage of the protagonists, when the traditional structures of male authority are typically reasserted¹² – though this is least the case, it should be said, in Xenophon of Ephesus' narrative. That is, Xenophon's spatial arrangements are as complex as they are because he is expressing by means of them one aspect of his theme.

Second, we have noted that the use of multiple action spaces is atypical of drama, for more or less obvious reasons, and also of epic (with certain exceptions). If Xenophon and Chariton had a model for this kind of narrative pattern, what genre might have furnished it? One possibility is historiography, where writers characteristically shifted the focus from the military activities of one side to the other in accounts of war. Herodotus in particular marks such shifts of locus by the paired particles *men* and *de*; thus (6,25–26): 'When *Miletus* was captured the Persians immediately took Caria as well.... These events, then [*tauta men dê*], occurred in the manner described. *Histaeus the Milesian* [*de*], however, was in the area of *Byzantium*, where he assembled the ships of the Ionians that had sailed out of the Pontus and reported what had happened at *Miletus*.' The shift from Miletus to Byzantium is facilitated by the echo of 'Miletus' in 'Milesian'; in addition, Histaeus acts as a channel, reporting in Byzantium what occurred back at Miletus. A little later, Herodotus writes (6,30–31): 'This [*ta men*] is what happened with Histiaeus [*peri Histiaion*]. But [*ho de*] the Persian fleet wintered at Miletus [*peri Milêton*],' etc. The technique for switching from one action space to another is comparable to that exploited by the novelists.¹³

¹² See Couraud-Lalanne 2000.

¹³ Immerwahr 1966, 59 suggests that 'the term 'parallel action' should not be applied to the work of Herodotus,' on the grounds that 'the *Histories* are based on the single chain of events, with single attachments of smaller accounts, rather than on elaborate synchronous structures' (60–61). Certainly, there is nothing so sophisticated in Herodotus' deploy-

If the novelists found in the historical writers some guidance and motivation in representing the intersection of two independent spheres of action, this might be one additional reason why the earliest of them, at least – that is, Xenophon and Chariton – chose to cast their tales in the form of histories.¹⁴

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ment of simultaneous action spaces as what is found in Xenophon of Ephesus and Chariton.

¹⁴ On the relationship between the Greek novels and Greek historiography, see Hägg 1987; Hunter 1994. See also Luginbill 2002 for Longus' debt to Thucydides.

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