

Narratives of Failure

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‘Just because I’ve made it all up doesn’t mean it isn’t true.’
(Hill 2005, viii)

This paper does not examine the failures of novelists to relate engaging narratives, rather it looks first at narratives about failures, narratives which deal with individuals who fail, and secondly at characters who cannot succeed completely because of structural arrangements in the narrative. In short, it is a successful narrative about persons who fail or do not enjoy lasting success.

Narratives of failure in the ancient novel for my purposes come to us in two General Ways.¹ Since the first General Way, the simplest, focuses on a major figure who judged by common standards, is one of life’s failures, I shall start there and use Petronius’ Encolpius, who most readers would agree fails at almost every level at everything and in embarrassing ways.² For comparative purposes or for parallel readings I would like to discuss some performances of Lucius in the *Metamorphoses*, which I would also like to

¹ The term General Way is coined just for this paper to help make distinctions and categories.

² How might we best understand the relationship of Petronius (the hidden author, Conte 1996) to Encolpius *auctor* and Encolpius *actor* (Beck 1973) in the light of the fact that Encolpius the narrator frequently interlards his story with humiliating information about himself (e.g., 138.1 Oenothea inserts a dildo into his rectum)? Petronius seems to feel that he can tell a more entertaining story about Encolpius, if he relates some of his embarrassing moments: naughty characters appeal to a wider audience. Such a stance, however, for Encolpius the first-person narrator strikes us as modern, privileging the *Satyrical* among classical works, an artist viewing himself with detachment throughout an extended narrative and offering a confession/autobiography without a sense of guilt. At the other end of the spectrum of self-revelation we find Seneca (*de Ira* 3.36.3) having retired to his bed, talking to himself (not to his penis as Encolpius does), and reviewing his day’s deeds, unafraid to discuss anything with himself. The *errores* of Seneca, however, are not the interesting materials which constitute a novel.

use to effect a transition in our discussion to the Second General Way in which characters fail because of problematic (intentional or unintentional faults) narrative structures. The Second General Way in which a reader might appreciate a narrative of failure is through the manipulation of structure by the author, i.e. the time before, during, and after Bakhtinian adventure-time, which adventure-time is generally equal in the ancient novel to the core. The Second General Way of looking at narratives of failure is more complicated to discuss and explain.

Encolpius fails to come to grips with his actual situation (e.g., his regularly betrayed trust in Giton), while at the same time imagining himself to be larger than life, almost a reincarnation of characters from myth, epic, and tragedy (at 82.1–4 he straps on a sword to avenge himself but is immediately stripped of it by a passing *miles*), and then (for comparison) where Lucius turns to Isis, Encolpius trusts himself to priestesses/witches of Priapus. All such I classify in the First General Way as personal failure.

In the Second General Way – each novel of course shows more or less of both General Ways – I place devices such as the destabilizing triadic structure of characters: Encolpius, Giton, Ascyltus. As an aside, the triadic structure in Chariton offers an interesting wrinkle: he begins with *ein Liebespaar* and adds Dionysius as the third actor in the triad which for some time remains stable (unlike in the *Satyrica*) and static (except for the problematic addition of Callirhoe's child), until a fourth (Mithridates), fifth (Pharnaces), and sixth person (Artaxerxes) are added, none of whom replaces the third actor; at the end of the novel the Callirhoe circus drops in number from six (plus child) to three (plus child) to the original *Liebespaar* (without child). No matter how well Encolpius might have managed his affairs, he has been written into a highly unstable (triadic) structure. A second structural limitation placed on him and which he shares with other novel protagonists is that he is beautiful and that he proceeds through the story attached in some way or other to other beautiful people. And as we know from the ancient novel and other genres, beauty cannot be hidden or protected: it is sought out, exposed to the view of competitors, and rises up to cause problems from Danae to Helen to Bathsheba to Giton to the Pergamene Youth. And while at first it might seem perverse to categorize beauty under the rubric failure, beauty like the triadic structure leads the actors to fail or to encounter more tragic twists than are usual, all the while permitting the author to expand the scope of his novel. Failures and difficulties for actors are generally opportunities for authors.

The last of the structural elements in the Second General Way which I would like to examine, arguably the most significant, is one which can lend itself, perhaps unwittingly, to a narrative of failure: it is a modified Bakhtinian tripartite structure of (1) pre-adventure-time [protagonist at home before the action], (2) adventure-time, as it were the action of the story away from home, (3) post-adventure-time [protagonist back home].³ The model protagonist for such a tripartite structure might be the proto-novel heroine Helen: (1) she is apparently the good wife of Menelaus in Sparta, (2) she leads an immodest life with Paris in Troy, (3) she returns to the status of dutiful wife in Sparta.⁴ Had Helen been plain but politically powerful, Paris homely and smart enough (did he have a choice?) to keep his opinions about the relative beauty of women to himself, we would have had no creative narrative fiction called the Trojan War. The narrative of failure arises here from the design: in the second section of the tripartite structure Helen blooms, has a decisive role in the story, and leads an exceedingly provoca-

³ Scholars of Bakhtin 1981, 84–258, will immediately recognize that I am not one of them but rather an interloper, someone who has taken a small bite of the Russian’s work and made of it what he will. I have consulted with pleasure and profit Branham 2002, 2005, 2005a; Ballengee 2005; Smith 2005. It seems to me that Bakhtin makes the division between the frame (beginning and end) and the contents (adventure-time) of the ancient novel too sharp and underrates the importance of events in adventure-time on the protagonists. Though in this discussion I label the structure of the ancient novel tripartite, I see a stronger relationship than Bakhtin credits in the various parts which create the characters who walk into the novel’s aftermath.

⁴ Austin 1994, 72: ‘... with the Trojan War concluded, Helen is safely at home in Sparta ... she is not wife and mistress, but simply a wife ...’ I might have constructed a similar tripartite adventure program for Odysseus. A point which I wish to make, however, is that the structure is different for heroine and hero: after having experienced many adventures, Helen returns home to a sequestered life in which her adventure-time is just a (fond?) memory; for Odysseus the return home entails killing suitors of his wife and then beginning another adventure-time. In *Odyssey* 4 Helen in Sparta refers to herself as ‘shameless’ (145), drugs her guests (220), sees to beds for her guests (296ff.), remembers fondly the excitement of discovering Odysseus in disguise in Troy, bathing and anointing him (249–256), and thinks that it is time to return to Sparta (259–264). Menelaus answers Helen’s reminiscences by telling the story of how she tried to trick the Greeks hiding in the Trojan Horse into giving themselves away (265–289). Life in Sparta for Helen is something less than it was in Troy. If I wish to build a tripartite structure for Odysseus based on the evidence of Lucian *True History* 2.27ff., I would observe that he is bored by his post-adventure-time on the Isle of the Blest and because of this gives Lucian a note to deliver to Calypso as he travels near Ogygia (35): ‘... I am on the Isle of the Blest, thoroughly sorry to have given up my life with you ... if I get a chance, I shall run away and come to you’ (transl. Harmon 1916).

tive life,⁵ but in the third section she retreats from the center of attention and returns to Sparta to be Menelaus', if not faithful, then at least discreet, wife. In the third section there is no indication that she is a personal failure, but after playing such a momentous role at Troy and in the Trojan War, her life's drama back in Sparta is so reduced so as to be unimportant. I could observe that she and Menelaus lived happily ever after in good novel-ending style, but I suspect that such an aftermath for Helen would not be forever attractive.

The narrative of pre-adventure-time in this design is so varied among the ancient novels that it gives the lie to the notion that all of them are cut from the same cloth. Though Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus, and the *Historia Apollonii* employ many of the same motifs, the *Historia* begins brutally in repeated acts of incest; Xenophon moves too rapidly in offering a skeleton of a plot, one with meat on few of its bones; Chariton too begins his story in a rush of events but soon slows down, becoming expansive and, e.g., carefully qualifying the blame on Chaereas for Callirhoe's *Scheintod*.⁶ Chaereas is torn between duty to father and bride; he is dealt with treacherously by disappointed suitors; he strikes out at his wife while he is tired, then angry (Sourfield 2003), in the dark and not seeing clearly, and, with the verb ἐλάκτισε (1.4.12) Chariton probably implies that he kicked her while turned away from her. For Callirhoe adventure-time starts early, for Chaereas not until he leaves Syracuse at 3.5.9.⁷ This asymmetrical pairing of adventure-times is more sophisticated than that of some other novelists, and we might wish to revisit a comparison with the *in medias res* of Heliodorus. The fragmentary state of Petronius' *Satyrice* might have made analysis by adventure-time hopeless, but it did not, since in a real sense in the *Satyrice* Petronius

⁵ Schmeling 2005, 45 for Helen and Callirhoe; Morales 2005, 7 notes that the '...casting of the heroines [of Greek novels] as Helen makes adultery an ever-present possibility ...' This is especially true for Callirhoe to whose adventure-time Dionysius' presence clearly adds excitement and a note of scandal without deteriorating to the sordid. Young women from Syracuse (or Aphrodisias) do not expect to have experiences similar to those of deities from myth.

⁶ Hunter 1994, 1080, notes that Chariton's construction of this scene echoes a broad literary tradition in which tyrants are portrayed attacking their wives. Within this tradition the reader is expected to recognize (1082) 'an interplay of various codes' (historical, comic, rhetorical).

⁷ When Callirhoe awakens in her tomb, she cries out (1.8) 'Wicked Chaereas.' His jealousy caused them to be separated. For this as a motif in New Comedy, see Konstan 1995, 109: the separation of Polemo and Glycera (Menander *Perikeiromene*) is the 'result of Polemo's fit of jealousy and his humiliating treatment of Glycera.' Konstan 62 alludes to the tripartite structure of comedy.

assembles the ultimate mosaic (*tesserae* borrowed from every type of literary work, the composite equaling the sum of all the forces attacking the reader's senses – the ultimate mosaic evoking inevitably James Joyce). Even fragments of mosaics can express, if not the precise structure of the whole, then the charm of the structure.

In the adventure-time Chariton slows down the pace of events after a whirlwind beginning and forces the reader to listen to feelings and hopes of many characters, but as he does so, the simple elegance of his structure begins to fail. Such a conflict, however, is unavoidable. Virginia Woolf (1966, 101) notes that 'For the most characteristic qualities of the novel – that it registers the slow growth and development of feeling, that it follows many lives and traces their unions and fortunes over a long stretch of time – are the very qualities that are most incompatible with design and order.'

The three-part structure which I have been examining accounts for most of the bulk of each ancient novel, and whether part one flows into part two and two into three, or parts one and three frame part two (adventure-time), the three parts constitute an ensemble or an organic whole. At the conclusion of the third part (post-adventure-time) there is, however, just a little bit of the novel left over, but a little with which it is devilishly difficult to come to grips. This left-over piece, often called the epilogue/aftermath, whether a paragraph or some pages, can set the tone in a manner all out of proportion to its size for the way the reader feels about the whole novel. The satisfaction of the flavor of the epilogue can be the taste which the reader takes away after finishing the novel.

It is often observed about the ancient novels that the impact of the epilogue is to make them conclude with a 'happy ending,' and of the protagonists that 'they lived happily ever after.' But what happens in the narrative of this happy ending? Difficulties are quickly resolved, the unbalanced balanced, the separated united, conflicts resolved.⁸ In the last sentence of the composite ancient novel the doors of the bedroom close, and the reader, like the reader of Fielding's *Tom Jones*, is left to imagine the magic transpiring behind the closed doors, magic which the reader is encouraged to believe will irrationally continue forever. The route to heaven-on-earth traveled by our young protagonists has been replete with failures, but the conceit is that all's well that ends well. Post-adventure-time plus epilogue seem to create the necessary post-climax afterglow, in which there are enough episodes to allow for a graceful exit.

⁸ James 1962, 658, describes the happy ending as 'a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks.'

‘And they lived happily ever after’ must convey to the imagination of the reader an idea of continuation. The narrator behind the *Historia Apollonii* informs the reader how long the protagonists lived, that they wrote down and deposited in the temple of Artemis at Ephesus an account of their adventures, and that their children succeeded them in high office. The intention is to show that generations of descendants of the protagonists continued to hold positions of power and wealth and thus to live happily ever after.

In his article ‘How Novels End’ Fusillo concludes that a happy ending is a ‘non-specific category, which does not exclude deep tensions and contradictions,’⁹ and Roberts in looking at just the ends of epilogues about the happy endings, a section which she first terms a ‘prophetic prolepsis’ and then more generally the ‘aftermath,’ finds that the novels and other works in ancient genres are not that dissimilar from their modern incarnations. She lists the three most common aftermaths: (1) refusal to speak of the aftermath, (2) hints that there is an aftermath, and (3) complete silence about the aftermath.¹⁰

My interest here in the third section of the tripartite division of the novel is not in the section itself, but rather in the space between the adventure-time and the post-adventure-time and thus in the comparison/contrast of a challenging life exposed to new experiences, for example in the case of Callirhoe, during her adventure-time, with the insignificant role she will play in the post-adventure-time back in Syracuse as Chaereas’ wife, i.e. someone who is not courted by Persian princes, not the center of attention of Persian mobs (4.7.5).¹¹ Callirhoe has been unveiled, experienced exotic life, treated like a goddess, and traveled widely. Can she now live a segregated and sequestered life far from the excitement of her previous adventure-time existence of driving men to distraction like an ancient Zuleika Dobson? Travel allows and enables Callirhoe to develop a richer and more complex personality than had she remained in Syracuse, the wife of a jealous Chaereas (8.4.4). Her life abroad and with Dionysius gives Chaereas something real about which to be jealous. As a wife to Dionysius and during her travels and adventures, she is worshipped by him; upon her return Chaereas can no longer afford to kick her around. As travel creates adventures away from home with

⁹ Fusillo 1997, 227. He writes comprehensively (theoretically and practically) on the endings of all the ancient novels. I venture into this patch only out of perversity.

¹⁰ Roberts 1997, 257–258. She knows more than is decent for a young woman about classical closure.

¹¹ I am assuming that Callirhoe finds at least some of the attention shown to her by high officials to be flattering. Chariton surely flatters Greeks at the expense of Persians (5.3.9–10).

which Chariton can fill blank pages in his novel, so it permits Callirhoe to fill pages in her otherwise almost blank (early) diary.

I would like to return now to the First General Way of presenting narratives of failure and analyze the personal failures of Encolpius in the *Satyrica*, and then set against these some parallel texts involving Lucius in the *Metamorphoses*, from where I will effect a transition again to the Second General Way, observing how the two General Ways, as it were, complement each other.

The first-person narrator Encolpius relates his own life's story as a confession, if you will, of almost unrelenting failure. A confession, whether fact or fiction – fiction in the case of Encolpius and St. Augustine – assumes original and early failure. Failures, after all, not successes, sustain a comic plot.¹² Successes/resolutions at the end of the novel which lead to happy endings are easiest to achieve if there are significant failures at the beginning. Such is the structure for my definition of a confession.¹³ And as the ultimate mosaic (i.e. the *Satyrica*) evoked James Joyce, so this aspect of confession recalls Henry Miller. Though the all-important beginning and ending of the *Satyrica* are not extant, I shall assume that what is missing is similar to what we have. If the adventure-time for Encolpius begins at Massilia, and if the plot begins there also, and if Encolpius serves as a public scapegoat and is thrown out of the city together with the sins of its citizens,¹⁴ he begins his confessions as a consummate failure.

By *Satyrica* 9–10 we realize that Encolpius is in a triadic relationship so constructed that it cannot remain stable for longer than one natural/unnatural act, or longer than it takes either Encolpius or Ascyltus to notice that Giton is in the bed of the other. Giton at least twice chooses Ascyltus for a partner over Encolpius (is he already impotent at 9–10 and 80?), who compounds his failures by continuing to forgive Giton's every betrayal.¹⁵ It seems that Encolpius is potent when he plans affairs with Giton, Circe, or Philomela's son, but that when the time comes to perform, even the stunning beauty of Circe cannot arouse him. But no matter how often he fails sexually, he believes for some unknown reason that the next time will be different. Then near the end

¹² In commenting on Aristotle *Poetics* 5 Halliwell 1987, 86, notes that comedy has an 'inherent tendency to imply an adverse evaluation of its object.'

¹³ The definition of confession here is that used by St. Augustine to apply to the first of three parts of his *Confessions*, i.e. the presence of the past.

¹⁴ For a reconstruction of the *Satyrica* built on Massilia as its starting point and Encolpius as a citizen of that city, see Jenson 2005, 96–116.

¹⁵ Encolpius' failure to appreciate Giton's faithlessness is puzzling; see Courtney 2001, 127–131, 144.

of the *Satyrica* in an especially lacunose section (140.12) he seems to be potent one more time, and for his return from sexual death he thanks not Priapus but *dii maiores* and *Mercurius*, and adds that he is luckier than Protesilaus. Bowersock (1994, 112–113) perhaps places too much confidence in the reliability of Encolpius' utterances and in his reference to Protesilaus to mark the resurrection of his member from the dead. His use of the name Protesilaus says more about his wild imagination to associate himself with mythical heroes than it does about Protesilaus' renewed novelistic role as a resurrection deity.¹⁶ Judging from his past performances, I believe that Encolpius will fail again, even after invoking Protesilaus. The humor arising from Encolpius' failures resides in his confidence that the next time will be different. And, of course, it never is.

Encolpius is a conspicuous failure also in other areas: (1) having stolen or found some gold coins, he loses or is suspected of having spent them (13.4), only to have them recovered (15.7), but then there is a hint (15.8) of again losing them. (2) Though Encolpius' ear does not fail him in recording the various levels of the language of freedmen in the *Cena*, he fails often to understand Trimalchio's attempts to imitate the dining practices of the elite, and finally resolves to cease asking for explanations lest he appear a social failure (41.5): *damnavi ego stuporem meum et nihil amplius interrogavi, ne videar nusquam inter honestos cenasse*. (3) After the episode on Lichas' ship (100–115) where his hair and eyebrows are shaved and stigmata painted on his bald head which is then covered by a woman's blond wig, Encolpius on entering Croton fails to live up to the image he has of himself as Aeneas the shipwrecked warrior entering Carthage.

A reading of Lucius in the *Metamorphoses* within a narrative of failure yields results different from those of Encolpius. It is often the people around Lucius and the people in the stories told within his hearing and not Lucius himself who fails [the first two characters we meet after Lucius, Aristomenes and Socrates, are failures; an interesting example of stressing failure by comparing it with success are the four gangs of robbers at 4.8: one gang succeeds (4.8) but is overbalanced by the three gangs which fail utterly (4.8–21)], while those around Encolpius succeed, thus setting off his failures by contrast. Ascyllus, Giton, and Eumolpus, though scoundrels all, succeed in many ways. Photis' failure to mix the correct potion to turn Lucius into a bird (3.25) has lasting effects from Books 3 to 11. The Widow of Ephesus succeeds in living, while Charite succeeds only in revenge and suicide.

¹⁶ On Protesilaus and the ancient novel, see Bowie 1994.

In the *Satyrica* there are few (perhaps no?) sexual successes for Encolpius, whereas Lucius' first love affair (2.7–17) with Photis is literally a swinging success. Photis is a servant of Pamphile, and in order to get close to Pamphile, a witch, Lucius must first get to know Photis. For a parallel text, Encolpius must first make the acquaintance of a witch, so that he can try to know Circe. Where Encolpius fails, Lucius succeeds, but in reverse order. Where Encolpius' failures with priestesses/witches of Priapus result in continued impotence, Lucius, while failing to become a bird, succeeds in gaining a *vastum genitale* (10.22), about which he comments (he pauses in his complaint about not being a bird) 3.24: *nec ullum miserae reformationis video solacium, nisi quod mihi iam nequeunti tenere Photidem natura crescebat* ('I saw no consolation in my wretched metamorphosis except for the fact that, although I could not now embrace Photis, my sexual organ was growing'). Encolpius would have given a lot to have had one of Lucius' problems; his metamorphosis into an impotent being has no silver lining like the metamorphosis of Lucius.

Just prior to his conversion back to human form (11.13) Lucius has the opportunity to enjoy a diet of rich food fit for humans (a foreshadowing of his return to human form), and from human food to human sex is but a small step (witness the actions of the Widow of Ephesus). And after the human food but before conversion to man and priest, Lucius the ass with the *vastum genitale* is allowed once to use that special gift before it reverts to human dimensions. It is almost as if the rich food and good sex are some kind of reward for earlier humiliation, but also as a last satisfying fulfillment of appetites which will be curtailed in his final conversion, which marks also the beginning of his movement out of adventure-time. Life for Lucius after adventure-time, when he becomes a priest, loses the violent, the erotic, the marvelous, i.e. the stuff of which good novels are made: *lector intende : laetaberis* cannot be used for the *Metamorphoses* after 11.13. The last scenes are novelistically flat, hinting only that living happily ever after for Lucius is a combination of funding priestly fees and pride in carrying out priestly duties by sporting a shaved head before the eyes of all.¹⁷

Had Apuleius, however, continued to write of Lucius' sexual successes with Photis (2.7–3.21) or with the *matrona quaedam pollens et opulens* (10.19) who is so pleased with Lucius' *vastum genitale* that she makes an appointment for a return visit, his narrative of fresh excitement would finally amount to repetitions of the same acts, the narrative of which could be liter-

¹⁷ For an analysis of Lucius' failures and Apuleius' sophistic entertainment, see Harrison 2000, 219, 238–252.

ary pornography, which we might characterize as ‘gestures that fascinate ... not merely ... entertain’ (Sontag 1970, 45), that ‘are more concerned with the “use” of erotic material than the “expression” of it ...’ (49), or just pornography which would show a ‘... failure ... of the imagination ...’ (38), or degenerate to a tiresome narrative, one which is attributable ‘to sheer physiological ignorance.’ But Apuleius understands the tensions required in adventure-time (before 11.13), and by constantly adding new material avoids having Lucius fail to entertain because of repetition until almost the very end.

Thus I might divide the *Metamorphoses* (= Lucius’ life) into three parts: (1) his pre-ass existence, 1.1–3.24, which is an exciting life of travel, good food/wine/sex with Photis, but with unfulfilled curiosity [Horace and Ovid would have settled for the food, wine, sex, and damned the curiosity, the former being real appetites, the later a contrived conceit, and religion a wish-fulfillment]; (2) 3.25–11.13, life as an ass or adventure-time; (3) post-ass life (11.14–30) as a priest which might have spiritual rewards but is not the stuff of which good novels are made. Lucius’ post-adventure-time where he should by convention live happily and interestingly ever after seems to be a structural failure. The new voice of part 3 is different from that of parts 1 and 2, and it is not playful.¹⁸

I would like to conclude this study of the Two General Ways of dealing with failure in narratives by examining parts of the novel of Achilles Tatius, generally acknowledged as the Greek novel most marked by irony, parody, and moral elasticity (Fusillo 1997, 220; Reardon 1994). First I would like to look briefly at just a small section of the novel, which I will consider for my purposes here only as the efficient structure for the end of the novel – this examination I would label as a diagnostic experiment. Secondly I would like to consider (again) the perplexing structure involved in the ending/beginning of Achilles Tatius.

For this diagnostic experiment the pre-adventure-time would be everything from the beginning of Achilles Tatius to 5.11.5 and the advent of Melite: the adventure-time would then run from 5.11.5, the introduction of Melite (‘Aphrodite has driven a woman crazy for him – a woman of such great beauty that you would think her a statue if you saw her’) through the episode

¹⁸ Van Mal-Maeder 1997 is dissatisfied with the end of the *Metamorphoses* and suggests that Apuleius might have written a 12th book. In a most provocative article Finkelppearl 2004, 330, making much of Lucius’ year-long stay in Rome after initiation (11.26, the first ending), suggests that there are as many as three endings to the novel, and then recasts the ending in the structure of an epilogue: ‘This section, 11.29–30 was in one sense the third ending, but in another sense the end of the Epilogue designated as the section from 11.26.4 to the end.’

of sex with Cleitophon, about which he himself observes (5.27), ‘The casual in sex is far more sweet than the carefully prepared: its pleasure springs up like an untended plant.’ If for diagnostic purposes we would consider this section to be the core of the novel, then sex with Melite, with whom Morales (2004, 220) compares Lycainion in Longus, is the climax of the novel. As a narrative of success or failure, does the novel of Achilles Tatius after Book 5 proceed up or down in interest for the reader? Everything after Book 5 and the actions of Melite seems to constitute a drawn out adventure-time which lasts for three books, framed by the episode of Melite’s sex with Cleitophon and her suspenseful trial by ordeal which concludes that she did not have sex with him (the ordeal of Leucippe lacks the entertainment value of that of Melite). There follows the light operatic narrative in three books of who did what to whom: scenes of cross-dressing, abduction of the heroine, servants in major roles, the hero in prison, the hero attacked by the villain, the hero in court. The last pages of the novel are taken up with the virginity ordeals of Melite and Leucippe, in which the reader enjoys the lying of, and lying with, Melite more than the truth and purity of Leucippe. The last and short paragraph of the novel (8.19) contains the dénouement, the marriage of the protagonists, and a kind of aftermath, all of which makes up the briefest summation of the most material of any ending of an ancient novel.¹⁹

The narrative of failure is indicated by the fact that the roles of hero and heroine, which the passive Cleitophon and Leucippe had held, are hijacked for almost three books by the aggressive pair Melite and Thersander. By the final paragraph of the novel, however, the original protagonists have resumed the positions of importance: the actions of Melite and Thersander had held center stage and the attention of the reader and showed that they are the exciting stuff of novels – the erotic, the marvelous, and the violent.

After the above brief diagnostic experiment, which I hope illustrates how structure might be used to point to the failures of the original protagonists in comparison with the novelistic successes and dominance in a large part of

¹⁹ Fusillo 1997, 220, speculates that the ending of Achilles Tatius might be a parody of novel endings, an intentional authorial failure; see note 8 and the comment of James 1962. The opposite of the hurried epilogue of Achilles Tatius is that of Chariton who takes the leisure to describe for the reader all the many activities of Chaereas and Callirhoe after their reunion; Smith 2005, 185, connects this long epilogue to the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope, the ancient paradigm for reunions; Montiglio 2005, 247, holds that Chariton (for example, but not Achilles Tatius) provides a more reassuring closure than that of the *Odyssey*.

the story of Melite and Thersander,²⁰ I would like to return to a consideration of the final chapter, but now in relation to the opening pages, and to note that Achilles Tatius treats these two sections in ways unique in the ancient novel. I assume throughout that he gives his novel the precise format which he wishes it to have.

And if Achilles Tatius is credited with being a competent writer, then he never intended his novel to be a ‘framed narrative,’ in which the anonymous author and Cleitophon would appear as a bookend at the beginning, Cleitophon relates his story, and then the anonymous author and Cleitophon would complete the frame by appearing at the end of the novel (after post-adventure-time, in the epilogue or in the they-lived-happily-ever-after period) as the other book end. Once the reader arrives at the end of 8.19 and, though there are no more words in the novel, realizes that he is not at the end of the novel, but that he passed through the end at the beginning of the novel, when Cleitophon (after post-adventure-time and in the aftermath: living happily ever after? without Leucippe? and commenting about himself at 1.2.1 τσσαύτας ὕβρεις ἐξ ἔρωτος παθών) appears and begins his narrative at 1.3.1. The total time given to aftermath is very brief and sketchy and occurs between 1.2.1 and 1.3.1, and by its position indicates that Achilles Tatius did not intend that his novel end at 8.19. In fact at 1.3.1 and the end of what passes for the aftermath, the reader finds that he is at the combined ending and beginning. Because there is no frame at or after 8.19 Achilles Tatius appears to have constructed a ‘narrative circle,’ in which the ending and beginning are not individually stressed, and the narrative life of Cleitophon is presented to the reader as a continuum because of its circularity.²¹

It seems to me that Repath (2005, 258) is generally correct when he concludes that ‘the discrepancies between the beginning and the end constitute a deliberate device to subvert, or at least endanger, the conventions of the “ideal” Greek novel ...,’ and when he notes that Achilles Tatius is ‘playing

²⁰ To refer to Melite and Thersander, who in the end do not obtain everything they want, as heroine and hero might not seem to conform to the standard definition of heroine and hero in ancient novels, i.e. lovers who live happily ever after, once their problems have been sorted out in the epilogue. But in Achilles Tatius the reader seems to be encouraged at least to suspect that the other set of heroine and hero, Leucippe and Cleitophon (Schmeling 2003, 439), also do not live happily ever after (Repath 2005, 258ff.).

²¹ My ‘narrative circle’ is not the same as circularity discussed by Fusillo 1997, 214: ‘...the most typical feature of novelistic closure is circularity ... all the erotic novels end by re-establishing the initial situation.’ Circularity is confined to establishing a barrier at the end of the novel which is defined by the situation at the beginning. My term ‘narrative circle’ blends beginning and ending so that there are no barriers. And to reinforce this notion the ‘narrative circle’ marks new ground after the novel ‘begins’ at 1.3.1.

with the generic expectations which a reader would have brought to an ancient Greek novel.’

Though acknowledging the problematic ending in Achilles Tatius, Nakatani (2003, 74) calls attention to the careful construction of the beginning/ending of the novel, ‘... at the purely lexical level the whole story is put between the names of two cities;’ the first word of the novel is Sidon, the last Byzantium; the narrative structure is put between a storm in Sidon and winter in Tyre; and Clitophon’s narrative begins and ends with Tyre. Citing other theories about the difficult closing/opening in Achilles Tatius, Nakatani notes that not returning at the end of the novel to the original setting is not unique (Plato *Symposium* and *Protagoras*; Theocritus 13; Apuleius *Metamorphoses*), and (78–79) that by not concluding his novel with a happy ending but leaving it open-ended, Achilles Tatius might be encouraging the reader to consider that the anonymous narrator would continue his frame story, in which the narrative of Clitophon was but one part.

I would like to suggest, however, that Achilles Tatius has done more than parody the form of the ancient Greek novel and subvert reader expectations. He has created a new form for the novel, a narrative circle, to replace the linear novel of pre-adventure-time, adventure-time, post-adventure-time, aftermath, because he had a better idea how to handle post-adventure-time and aftermath than ‘they lived happily ever after,’ which he appears to have viewed as an inherent failure of the form. Instead of providing a structure like Chariton’s, for example, which requires an extended aftermath, Achilles Tatius alters the structure and leads the reader almost directly from adventure-time back to the beginning of the narrative. The reader perhaps is not expected to believe that, or to question whether, the protagonists lived happily ever after. The reader *is* expected to rethink how he understood the novel, to realize that he passed through the ending at the beginning of the work, and thus to appreciate that he is participating in a cyclical rather than a linear narrative. Achilles Tatius has created a new framework for narrative time into which he has re-cast the novel, and offers it to the reader as an alternative, or perhaps better, form.

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