

The Representation of Philosophers in Greek Fiction

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This volume of papers is an addition to an already extensive bibliography on the presence of philosophy in ancient novels. On the one hand, one does not have to look far to discover the novelists pervasively intertexting with canonical philosophical texts: the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* are particularly appropriate because of their central concern with the nature of love. This engagement covers a spectrum running from decorative and playful allusion, through appropriation of the characteristic language of various philosophical schools, to a rather more profound association with specific philosophical doctrines.¹ On the other hand, from late antiquity onwards, the strategy of allegorical reading has enabled at least some of these narratives to be read didactically as disguised philosophy in their own right.²

This paper, however, approaches the theme of ‘philosophical presences’ rather more literally. Its subject is the part that ‘philosophers’ play as characters in the stories of Greek fiction, and how they are represented; in short, what it means to be a philosopher in a Greek novel. Some of these characters are explicitly termed philosophers by the texts which they inhabit, while others can easily be thought of as philosophers, even if their texts do not attach that precise label to them. Given the religious nature of late antique philosophy, it is often not possible to make clear distinctions between philosopher and priest or *theios anēr*. The texts we shall be looking at cover a range of literary levels, and exhibit a corresponding diversity of conceptions of philosophy and attitudes towards philosophers and their activities. In his introductory essay, Michael Trapp has sketched the ambivalence towards philosophy entertained by the Greco-Roman world at large in the Imperial period. We shall see that the portraits of philosophers in fiction are similarly problematic.

¹ Compare the essays by Doulamis, Herrmann, Ní Mheallaigh, and Repath in this volume.

² As, for example, by Dowden and Kahane in this volume.

1. *Chariton's Demetrius*

Philosophers are in the cast list of even the earliest Greek romances. Chariton's *Callirhoe* may date from early in the second century.³ The plot is set in a vague historical past, in which the Syracusan statesman Hermocrates and the Persian king Artaxerxes are contemporaries.⁴ It takes the protagonists to Babylon, where the king of Persia himself inevitably falls in love with the heroine Callirhoe. At this critical juncture, news comes that Egypt has rebelled from the Persian Empire. The hero Chaereas runs off to join the rebels, while the king takes Callirhoe to war with him, leaving her for safe-keeping on the island of Aradus, along with the other Persian women who have accompanied the army, including the Persian queen Statira and the beautiful aristocrat Rhodogune. Chaereas rises to the command of the Egyptian navy, and, although the rebellion as a whole is defeated, he emerges victorious by sea and takes possession of Aradus. In due course, the protagonists are reunited, but they are left with the problem of what to do with Statira and Rhodogune. At first Chaereas proposes taking them to Syracuse to be his wife's servants, but Callirhoe modestly and magnanimously asks for them to be sent back to Persia. The task of taking them there is allocated to a certain Demetrius, who is introduced as follows:

There was among the Egyptians a man called Demetrius, a philosopher (*philosophos*) who was known to the king of Persia (*basilei gnōrimos*); he was advanced in years and superior to the other Egyptians in culture and virtue (*paideiai kai aretēi*). Chaereas called this man to him and said, 'I wanted to take you with me, but instead I am asking you to undertake an important mission for me: I am sending the Queen in your charge to the Great King. This will also make you more honoured by him and will assure a pardon for the rest.' At this he appointed Demetrius commander of the ships that were being sent back.⁵

Preparations are made; Chaereas writes a letter to the king and Callirhoe one to her second husband, Dionysius. At the moment of departure, our philoso-

³ I am inclined to see a connection between Chariton's character Dionysius and the sophist Dionysius of Miletus, attested as active under Hadrian. As noted by Jones 2007, 65 n.155, given the stress placed on the connection between *paideia* and right action in the portrayal of the character of the novel, it is hard to see that the real Dionysius would have been offended, as suggested by Bowie 2002, 54 n.2.

⁴ On *Callirhoe* as a historical novel, see Hägg 1987.

⁵ Chariton 8,3,10–11; the translation is that of Reardon 1989, slightly modified.

pher reappears: ‘Demetrius had set up a royal tent on the ship, with its sides made of purple, gold-stitched Babylonian cloth’.⁶ The Persian king is now in Tyre, when news reaches him of the capture of Aradus, causing him to despair over the loss of his ladies:

The next day the Egyptian ships were seen approaching. Not knowing what the situation really was, they were surprised to see them. They were even more puzzled when the royal standard was broken from Demetrius’ ship; usually it was flown only when the King was aboard. This caused confusion, since they were thought to be enemy ships. They ran at once to tell Artaxerxes. ‘Perhaps it will turn out to be a king of Egypt,’ they said. The King jumped up from his throne, rushed to the shore, and gave the signal for battle; he had no warships but posted all his forces on the harbour ready for battle. They were already drawing their bows and were ready to throw their spears, had not Demetrius realised the situation and reported it to the Queen. Statira came out of her tent and showed herself.⁷

The situation is saved and the Persian ladies are safely returned. That is the last we hear of Demetrius: he is not such an important character that the narrative camera should remain on him when there are more important issues to be resolved.

The passages quoted above are the sum total of Demetrius’ part in the novel. His role is easily overlooked, but it raises several questions. Why has Chariton gone out of his way to characterise the man responsible for returning the queen as a philosopher? Indeed, in this novel what does it mean to be characterised as a philosopher? And in this work, which has been called a historical novel and in which real historical personages appear, what sort of historical plausibility attaches to Demetrius the Egyptian philosopher?

Demetrius may have only a walk-on part, but the role is not unimportant. He is part of the apparatus that characterises the hero and heroine as truly Greek in their magnanimity. Despite the queen’s well founded jealousy of Callirhoe’s beauty, an intimacy of sorts has arisen between the women. During the dramatic trial at Babylon, Statira was entrusted with Callirhoe’s care, and comforted her with sincere good will.⁸ On Aradus, Rhodogune had tried

⁶ 8,4,7.

⁷ 8,5,3–5.

⁸ 5,9,2–3.

to console her,⁹ and conversely after the capture of the island Statira had laid her head in Callirhoe's lap and wept, and Callirhoe had comforted her, 'like a cultivated Greek woman' (*Hellēnis kai pepaideumenē*).¹⁰ Immediately before the introduction of Demetrius, Callirhoe assures Statira that she will be treated honourably, and calls her 'dearest friend' (*philtatē*).¹¹ If Chaereas originally wanted to keep these Persian noblewomen as his wife's servants, that was an index of his love, and he is willing to accede to her request that they be returned to their husbands. In that his magnanimity is directed towards his enemy, his decision not to press his victory to the point of inhumanity is all the more praiseworthy. The care shown over the method of returning Statira and Rhodogune further highlights the generosity and humanity of Chaereas and Callirhoe. The dangers of entrusting two fabulously beautiful and wealthy women to just anyone are obvious. Someone absolutely trustworthy is needed, and Demetrius' status as a philosopher effectively immunises him against the temptations of both degenerate sex and luxury; it is a bankable guarantee that he will neither tamper with the goods nor dip his fingers into the treasure-chests. He is chosen as someone who can be relied upon to be decent and honest as no other class of person could be.

Lurking just beneath the surface here is a traditional connection between philosophy and sexual self-control, originating no doubt with Socrates' resistance to the allurements of Alcibiades as described in the *Symposium*. This connection was subjected to much subversive irony in texts of roughly Chariton's period. Achilles Tatius several times has a character use the verb *philosopheō* of unwilling sexual continence, but equally hints that 'philosophy' can be a cloak for seduction.¹² For Chariton and his readers, however, Demetrius' philosophy is clearly a profession of honour and dignity, a dig-

⁹ 7,5,5; the verb παρεμυθεῖτο is restored here to fill a lacuna in the text, but this must be the incident Callirhoe has in mind when she recalls Rhodogune's kindness at 8,3,8.

¹⁰ 7,6,5.

¹¹ 8,3,7–8.

¹² Ach. Tat. 5,16,7; 8,5,7. Compare the use of the noun *philosophos* at 6,21,3. At 5,27,1, on the other hand, the verb is applied to Melite's seduction of Cleitophon in his cell. For discussion of the way in which the austere mask of philosophical renunciation could often be deconstructed as a means to sexual satisfaction, see Goldhill 1995, 46–111. From the Roman novels we may compare the scenes in which Petronius' Eumolpus relates how he has abused his position as tutor to gain access to and exert leverage on the boy he desires.

nity enhanced by his maturity.¹³ It manifests itself in the two elements in which he is superior to the common people around him: *aretē* and *paideia*.¹⁴

Aretē denotes the general moral virtue to which philosophy leads.¹⁵ Chariton does not need to be any more specific. Demetrius only needs to be virtuous enough to resist the temptations which the plot requires someone to resist; there is no need to know precisely what kind of philosophy he practises in doing so. The second aspect of his philosophical persona, his *paideia*, is more interesting as a literary motif. *Paideia*, of course, was to become a *leitmotif* of Greek culture in the Second Sophistic. Chariton may have been writing before that performance culture of immersion in and recreation of the glories of the past really got moving, but *paideia* is nonetheless a prominent theme in this novel.¹⁶ Dionysius, the novel's main secondary character plays a role which is structurally that of a villain: he is a rival to the hero and an unwanted suitor of the heroine. He finds himself the owner of a dazzlingly beautiful woman, with whom he falls in love. But he is endowed with a *paideia* that enables him to resist his impulses, master his emotions to some extent, and behave like a gentleman with romantic decency and dignity.¹⁷ We are talking here of a vaguely defined humane and liberal system of learned behaviour, which even at this period serves as an important marker of elite masculinity. It is interesting that Dionysius also attaches importance to *aretē*:

He was ambitious (φιλότιμος) by nature, and did not consider *aretē* an irrelevance (οὐ πάρεργον τὴν ἀρετὴν τιθέμενος); on the contrary he esteemed it one of the noblest things.¹⁸

¹³ 8,3,10: ἡλικία προήκων.

¹⁴ Though there is a sly Hellenocentrism in the phrasing: to say he was 'superior to the other Egyptians' hints that his excellence is only relative, and that he might not measure up to a real Greek philosopher.

¹⁵ Reardon and Goold both translate it as 'character', but, despite the attractions of seeing Dionysius' characterisation in terms of a nature-nurture antithesis, *aretē* does not necessarily denote innate quality as opposed to acquired behaviour. The whole point of philosophy is that 'virtue' is something which can be attained through the practice of philosophy.

¹⁶ I have learned a great deal about Chariton's thematisation of *paideia* from supervising Jones 2007.

¹⁷ He is termed *pepaideumenos* at 2,4,1; 3,2,6; 4,7,6; 5,5,1. *Paideia* is attributed to him at 1,12,6; 2,1,5; 2,5,11; 5,9,8; 8,5,10.

¹⁸ 6,9,2. The primary connotation of *aretē* in this context, where Dionysius expects to distinguish himself militarily in the king's service, is 'courage' (as in Reardon's translation) or 'bravery' (as Goold). But Chariton has chosen his vocabulary deliberately to

Dionysius may not be a philosopher by profession, but his resistance to Eros is described as a sort of philosophy:

But Eros contended against him as he reasoned well, and considered his *sōphrosynē* an insult; and for this reason inflamed even further a soul that philosophised in love (ψυχὴν ἐν ἔρωτι φιλοσοφοῦσαν).¹⁹

So Demetrius, his philosophy, and the qualities associated with it recall precisely the system of Hellenic values that Dionysius most prominently embodies in this novel. Demetrius' cameo appearance is as a miniature *Doppelgänger* of the novel's most interesting and sympathetic character and we are thus implicitly assured that he will act as Dionysius (whom we know better) would have acted in his place.

At this point, however, issues become more complex. In the first place, although Demetrius – by his philosophy, his *paideia*, and his alignment with Dionysius – is identified with archetypal Greek values in a novel which structurally, and in its latter stages thematically, revolves around the cultural confrontation of Greek and barbarian, he is not in fact Greek. Although he has a common Greek name, he is ‘among the Egyptians’, never distinguished from them, and the contrast made between him and ‘the other Egyptians’²⁰ implies that he is himself Egyptian. We are told nothing directly about his ‘back-story’, and never discover how, for example, he acquired his Greek name and *paideia*. However, we are given one further detail: Demetrius is already an acquaintance of the king.²¹ This is an additional factor that makes him particularly suitable for this mission, clearly because he is likely to be trusted and will carry some influence in negotiating an amnesty. We are given no clue as to the nature or extent of the previous acquaintance, but the phrase *basilei gnōrimos* is an august title, and his appointment as leader of the mission would be counter-productive if the king did not think well of him. It appears that we are invited to imagine that Demetrius has already spent time in the Persian court and has been unwillingly caught up in the revolt. So, as far as we can glimpse them, both the past and the future of this

make connections; there is no single English word that occupies the exact semantic range of ἀρετή.

¹⁹ 2,4,5.

²⁰ 8,3,10, quoted above.

²¹ 8,3,10: βασιλεῖ γνώριμος. The absence of the definite article here, as well as narrative logic, confirms that the king in question is Artaxerxes, not the leader of the Egyptian rebellion who is also referred to as a *basileus*. Dionysius too has connections with the Persian king; see Jones 2007, 50ff., on the link between *paideia* and kingship in the novels.

Egyptian philosopher with a Greek name, characterised by his Hellenic culture, are happy and honoured ones in the court of an oriental autocrat. In terms of achieving a satisfactory closure to the plot, the complexity and marginality of Demetrius' status make it impossible for him to return to Syracuse with Chaereas: he could not settle on the land, as the Egyptians who go to Sicily do,²² but equally he could not fit comfortably into the Syracusan democracy. This is why it is sufficiently important that he and his colleagues should be pardoned by the Persian king for the issue to be raised in the text.

In the second place, Demetrius shows his consideration for his charges by erecting 'a royal tent on the ship, with its sides made of purple, gold-stitched Babylonian cloth'.²³ Babylonian cloth is richly ornate oriental tapestry. Pliny tells us that 'weaving different colours into a pattern was chiefly brought into vogue by Babylon, which gave its name to this process', and records that Nero paid 4,000,000 sesterces for a single piece of Babylonian tapestry.²⁴ According to Josephus, the door of the Temple in Jerusalem was covered with a magnificent Babylonian tapestry picturing the entire cosmos.²⁵ Arrian records that the tomb of Cyrus was covered with Babylonian cloth.²⁶ Cato the Censor, having come into the ownership of a piece of Babylonian cloth disposed of it in order to finance the re-plastering of his farm buildings.²⁷ Other writers refer to Babylonian cloth with moralistic disdain as a byword for opulence and luxury.²⁸ In Greco-Roman perceptions, therefore, this royal tent is not a neutral object: it reeks of barbarism, despotism, and luxury, the antitheses of the Hellenic values Demetrius ostensibly embodies. At the end of the novel there are two contrasting geographical movements: the protagonists sail into the west, to resume their existence in a democratic *polis*, while the king and his court head back to the barbarian east.²⁹ The tent more or less embodies the moral issues in which the cultural difference underpinning narratological resolution consists, and could hardly make its appearance at a more significant juncture. It is an anti-philosophical icon.³⁰

²² 8,8,14.

²³ 8,4,7.

²⁴ Plin. *Nat.* 8,196.

²⁵ Jos. *BJ* 5,212.

²⁶ Arr. *An.* 6,29.

²⁷ Plu. *Cat. Ma.* 4.

²⁸ E.g. Lucr. 4,1029; Mart. 8,28,17; Petr. 55,6.

²⁹ On Chariton's narratological deployment of geographical space, see Morgan 2007.

³⁰ Chariton plays with this idea a little further: Chaereas' ship is adorned with a similar tent as it sails into harbour at Syracuse (8,6,5). This trades on the non-Greekness of the object

Thirdly, and most puzzlingly, this is not the first Demetrius the reader of the novel has encountered. At an earlier stage, the tomb-robber Theron, the only really bad man in the novel, plunders Callirhoe's tomb, finds her alive, takes her to Asia, and sells her to Dionysius' steward. Later, he is apprehended by a Syracusan search-party and taken back for public interrogation. Thoroughly bad lot that he is, he lies, and like Odysseus claims to be Cretan. The false name he gives is Demetrius.³¹ This may be nothing more than a random coincidence, an oversight on the part of the author: Demetrius, after all, is a very common name. On the other hand, it may be deliberate.³² Either way, it stains the name of Demetrius, so that when we encounter the apparently estimable philosopher of the same name, the name has acquired connotations of deceit and dishonesty, suggesting perhaps that his philosophical discourse is tinged with charlatanry, that his too is a performed identity constructed for personal advantage. We might even conceive this situation in terms of a narratological distance between author and narrator, with the irony and ambiguity lying with a sophisticated author hiding behind a narrator constructed within the text as a straightforwardly Xenophontic contemporary of the events he describes.³³ In any case, small as Demetrius' role is, there is a deconstructive turn in the way that it is handled that renders Chariton's own attitude to philosophy equivocal.

Finally, there is the issue of historical plausibility. The story of course is not true, and even its first readers will have been aware that they were reading fiction. Nonetheless it is a fiction which poses as filling in the gaps in the historical record, so winning for itself a certain authenticity. It does this in a number of ways. Not only do some historical individuals (Hermocrates, Artaxerxes) appear within the fiction, but some of its action seems designedly reminiscent of real history. The Egyptian revolt cannot simply be identified with a single historical event, certainly not one close to the dramatic date of the novel. But Chariton's narrative does contain a number of resonances of fourth-century history, particularly with the Egyptian revolt of 360 B.C., in which the Athenian general Chabrias played a part which seems to be echoed in that of his near namesake Chaereas.³⁴ The anachronism is com-

to postpone the city's realisation of who is on board, and to heighten the drama of the moment when Callirhoe is revealed. Virtually the first thought of Chaereas on disembarking on to Greek soil is to disencumber himself of oriental luxury and donate his riches to the polity (8,6,11).

³¹ 3,4,8.

³² Compare Repath 2007 on the double appearance of Callisthenes in Achilles Tatius.

³³ On Chariton's narrator see Morgan 2005a.

³⁴ See Salmon 1961.

pounded in that Chaereas' capture of Tyre recalls Alexander's siege of the reportedly impregnable city. As Demetrius is part of this scenario, it is worth investigating what sort of resonances Chariton might have intended to play on.

Although the text figures Demetrius as an Egyptian, his Greek name might make him more at home in a context after the foundation of Alexandria. It is perhaps not too hard to believe that Chariton has replicated the cultural circumstances of his own period in a fiction whose dramatic date is several centuries earlier. If we look for a real-life philosopher called Demetrius with Egyptian connections, the most likely candidate is Demetrius of Phalerum, who was active in Egypt under the first two Ptolemies, and who as an ex-monarch himself was certainly eminent enough to be counted as a friend of kings. Virtually nothing else in the role of the fictional Demetrius fits with the career of Demetrius of Phalerum, and one certainly could not argue that this is another historical personage who has found his way into the pages of fiction, but the vague effect of verisimilitude may be enough.

Another possibility might be that Chariton had a more contemporary Demetrius in mind, just as the sophist Dionysius of Miletus might lie behind the Milesian Dionysius in the story, and the lawyer Adrastus, who is mentioned in passing but never appears in person, might reflect Chariton's contemporary and fellow-townsmen, the philosopher Adrastus of Aphrodisias.³⁵ Diogenes Laertius mentions a Cynic philosopher, Demetrius of Alexandria, as a pupil of Metrocles (so late third or early second century B.C.).³⁶ Lucian refers to a Platonic philosopher named Demetrius who was accused before Ptolemy Dionysus (i.e. Auletes) of being a water-drinker and compelled to take part in the king's Dionysiac revels.³⁷ Nothing more is known of these individuals: they do not carry the cachet of familiarity that would be needed to make the allusion work in terms of historical verisimilitude, and are as awkwardly distant from Chariton's own time as from the dramatic date of the action. An epigram by the first-century Nicarchus, active in Alexandria, lists the victims of the physician Zopyrus, whose names have a peculiarly philosophical resonance: Damis, Aristoteles, Demetrius, Sostratus, Arcesilaus, and Paraetionius,³⁸ but, although this suggests that the name of Demetrius has a philosophical flavour, it is not evidence for a real-life philoso-

³⁵ 2,1,6; see Repath (forthcoming).

³⁶ D.L. 6,95.

³⁷ Lucian *Cal.* 16

³⁸ *AP* 11,124; the roster is also redolent of the novels: Zopyrus is the name Chariton gives to Rhodogune's father (5,3,4); Sostratus is the father of Achilles Tatius' heroine; Damis is the possibly fictional source elaborated in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*.

pher of that name in Alexandria in the first century, as the premise of the epigram and the individuals named in it are presumably fictitious. Diogenes Laertius mentions the sophist Demetrius, ‘who lived in Alexandria’ and wrote a treatise on rhetoric,³⁹ dates are uncertain, and again we seem to be dealing with a figure too unimportant for any allusion to function. A contemporary of Chariton’s would be Demetrius the Cynic, who was active in Rome, exiled by Nero, but returned under Vespasian; he features prominently in Philostratus’ biography of Apollonius.⁴⁰ But here again, nothing fits apart from the name.

It seems then that the name of Chariton’s Demetrius may be intended to resonate with vague memories of Demetrius of Phalerum, but without any identification with him being intended.

2. *Anaximenes in Metiochus and Parthenope*

If Demetrius remains a fictional philosopher in a quasi-historical context, our next case is exactly the reverse. Herwig Maehler’s publication of a fragment of papyrus connecting two previously known but hitherto unconnected fragments from the same roll produced a reasonably extended and continuous extract of what has become known as the *Metiochus and Parthenope* romance.⁴¹ It became clear that we have a scene set in the court of Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos famous from Herodotus. His daughter, who is mentioned but not named by the historian, is named in the fragment as Parthenope. As romantic heroines do, she has fallen in love with a young visitor to her father’s palace: we now know that he is Metiochus, son of Miltiades, who has had to flee from his home because of the machinations of his step-mother, Hegesipyle. Another proper name that appeared for the first time in the new fragment was that of Anaximenes. The fragment concludes with a discussion about Eros which had previously been interpreted as a scholastic exercise or as the *ekphrasis* of a painting.⁴² In fact the discussion takes place at a symposium in Polycrates’ palace at which Anaximenes is acting as a symposiarch. The philosopher’s name is first mentioned in a very fragmentary passage where Polycrates is making arrangements for the symposium. Then we

³⁹ D.L. 5,84: ὁ διατρίψας ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ σοφιστὴς.

⁴⁰ Full discussion of his career in Kindstrand 1980.

⁴¹ Maehler 1976.

⁴² A suggestion clearly based on the analogy of the *ekphrasis* that begins the novel of Achilles Tatius.

find him proposing a topic for discussion (*zētēsis*) at the symposium itself; this sentence is not complete but the word *philosophou* is clearly legible:

Polycrates
] said: ‘My child, it is time for drinking
] intoxication (?) should ... our sorrows
 in] independence (?) ... we are at leisure ...’
] ... to Anaximenes ...
] ‘... to us’, he said, ‘today
] ... since the boy (Metiochus) has come ...
] I envisage a ... muse, pro-
 posing as topic] a philosopher’s inquiry⁴³

The lines where Anaximenes actually proposes the topic are missing from the fragments, but we are told that the lovers’ souls are confused. Metiochus speaks first and, after a disclaimer of inexperience, proceeds to attack the traditional conception of Eros as an eternally young child and offer a rationalistic explanation of love; it is thus clear that the topic proposed by the philosopher is the nature of Eros. When Metiochus concludes, Anaximenes tries to bring Parthenope into the discussion, and we are told that she is angry that Metiochus claims never to have felt the effects of love, and then she begins to defend the traditional notions.

Additional information about this scene came in the 1980s with the startling discovery that a fragmentary eleventh-century Persian verse romance, *Vāmiq and ‘Adhra* by Abu’l-Qāsim’Unṣurī, is a reworking (in places a fairly literal translation) of the Greek novel, which had evidently found its way, somehow, to medieval Iran. As chance would have it, there is an overlap between the Greek fragments and the Persian fragments at exactly the point which concerns us; we can, with caution, use the Persian version to supplement our understanding:

There was an outstanding sage who used to sit together with Fuluqrāt
 An experienced man, Nakhminūs by name, whose hand was kissed by
 knowledge.
 Nakhminūs often looked at ‘Adhrā, who had become shiny like the
 cock’s eye.
 He saw their furtive glances of the great love uniting them.
 He wanted to make the loving Vāmiq speak in order to get from him

⁴³ Lines 26–34; the translation is taken from Hägg & Utas 2003.

Words about his love, all its roots and branches, to broaden the road of vision into his heart.

Nobody speaks until he knows, except the one who has not got much brain.

That man of wise speech asked Vāmiq: ‘Who was born with you and still old in knowledge?’

To what in the world did the wise man compare the effigy of love?

What does its figure look like, how do they portray him in the temple?⁴⁴

In this version the response of the young man is rather different from that of Metiochus in the Greek fragment: there is no rationalistic deconstruction of a mythological conception of Eros, but instead he introduces an odd image of an alternative aged Love. But oddly the girl’s response is aimed directly at the arguments used by the Greek Metiochus, and thus presumably reproduces the substance of the original. In the Persian version the symposium then moves on to the minstrel Īfūqus (plausibly identified as Ibycus), who gives an unusual version of the story of Hermes’ invention of the lyre.

This is another historical novel, whose action, like Chariton’s, was fixed in the vacant spaces of real history.⁴⁵ There is a small amount of evidence to associate Ibycus with the court of Polycrates, but none whatsoever in the case of Anaximenes, although the chronology as such is plausible enough. Nevertheless, one basic function of the appearance of a historical philosopher in this text is to provide historical verisimilitude. To judge by the Persian text, his wisdom enables Anaximenes to see the signs of love at first sight in the protagonists, perhaps when they were unrecognised by anyone else. In other words, his status as philosopher has a definite plot-function. This is apparently exactly analogous to the episode in Heliodorus when the Egyptian wise man Calasiris alone recognises that the protagonists have fallen in love at a public occasion, and subsequently acts to facilitate their liaison.⁴⁶ Anaximenes chooses the topic of the *zētēsis* precisely to give Metiochus the opportunity to communicate his love to Parthenope, and there is an ironic moment when, presumably to avert suspicion, he instead pretends never to have experienced the feelings of love, to the obvious chagrin of his beloved. Although Anaximenes is not named again in the extant Per-

⁴⁴ 144–153, quoted from Hägg & Utas 2003, 99–101; it is easy enough to see Polycrates in Fuluqrāt. Nakhminūs is a reconstructed Arabic/Persian form of the Greek name Anaximenes; see Hägg & Utas 2003, 227.

⁴⁵ Cf. Hägg 1987.

⁴⁶ Hld. 3,5,4 ff.

sian fragment, it is tempting to speculate, on the analogy of Calasiris, that he continued to be instrumental in the erotic intrigue, possibly, like Calasiris, arranging and abetting the lovers' elopement.

In the material at our disposal there is no trace of the philosophy of the real Anaximenes, who, as far I can see from the surviving fragments and testimonia, never had anything to say about Love which would have made him an appropriate choice for this romantic role. Again speculation is tempting. Stephens & Winkler have already suggested that Metiochus' rejection of 'the notion that Eros is a little boy who flies about causing a "breathy wind" (*pneuma ti*) ... may be an oblique reference to the philosophy of Anaximenes himself, who taught that the fundamental principle of all things was "air".⁴⁷ It is not clear whether they think that Metiochus knows something of Anaximenes' philosophy, and is deliberately refuting (or pretending to refute) it; or whether the allusion is lodged at the level of the reader rather than the character. But perhaps after the two lovers have spoken, there ensued a more philosophical disquisition on love, in which Anaximenes was made to voice a theory of love as an aspect of the world-soul or breath. Again we might compare Calasiris, who describes the moment of inamoration in quasi-philosophical terms, and later concocts an explanation of the heroine's symptoms of love-sickness on the basis of a theory of physical emanation.⁴⁸ If such a speech ever existed in the lost section of the Greek original, it has vanished without leaving a trace on the Persian version. As things stand, we have another philosopher, a vague perception of whose profession as the embodiment of wisdom and intelligence makes him suitable for a particular role in a fictional narrative, which otherwise demonstrates little interest in philosophy as such.

Nevertheless, there are philosophical resonances which attach to the role of Anaximenes. In the first place, the idea of a symposium at which the nature of love is discussed is an obvious allusion to one of the central philosophical hypotexts, Plato's *Symposium*. But the way that the discussion is structured is based on the rhetorical *progymnasma* of *anaskeuē* and *kataskeuē* (refutation and confirmation), and there is evidence that the nature of Eros was a theme that was actually subjected to this treatment in the schools as early as the fourth century B.C.⁴⁹ So, in a period when the distinc-

⁴⁷ Stephens & Winkler 1995, 72–73.

⁴⁸ Hld. 3,7,3 ff.

⁴⁹ This was first noted by Reitzenstein 1906, 167–168, even before the discovery of the third fragment and the reassembly of the context. Stramaglia 1996, 124 provides the evidence for scholastic exercises. For such discussions of love in romantic contexts, compare Maehler 1976, 16 n.35 and Kussl 1991, 167 n.7.

tion between philosophy and rhetoric was often blurred, Anaximenes would appear to be acting in a duly philosopher-like fashion, even if anachronistically. It is striking, though, that true philosophical concerns are made subordinate to the imperatives of romance, and philosophers themselves espouse romantic rather than spiritual or intellectual values.

3. *Pythagoras in Antonius Diogenes' Wonders beyond Thule*

Antonius Diogenes' *Wonders beyond Thule* (Τὰ ὑπὲρ Θούλην ἄπιστα) is known to us in outline from the summary made in the ninth century by Photius, as well as a handful of papyrus fragments which can be associated with it with a fair degree of certainty, and some citations in rather unexpected authors.⁵⁰ This was a long and episodic work, in an Odyssean 24 books, with a highly complex structure of concentric reported narrations. The longest of these concerns the adventures of a sister and brother called Dercyllis and Mantinias, which Dercyllis related to her lover Dinias in Thule. Her adventures included a *katabasis* to the underworld, from where she returned to the upper world at Naples, in the company of a certain Astraeus, who discoursed to her about Pythagoras and Mnesarchus (the father of Pythagoras). She travels for a while with Astraeus, whose eyes grow larger and smaller according to the phases of the moon. After a short separation, during which she is reunited with her brother, Dercyllis meets Astraeus again at Rhegium, and they travel together to Thrace to visit Astraeus' friend Zalmoxis, whom Herodotus mentions as being connected with Pythagoras;⁵¹ here they part company for good.

Although Astraeus appears to be Antonius Diogenes' invention, his account of Pythagoras and his teaching was used as a source by Porphyry for his biography of Pythagoras. Diogenes is twice cited by name by Porphyry.⁵² The first time, which includes the full title of the work, is in connection with the biography of Astraeus, who was discovered by Pythagoras' father Mnesarchus as a baby who could stare at the sun without blinking, and thus marked out from the cradle as a *theios anēr*. The second citation introduces a

⁵⁰ Fragments and testimonia are gathered by Fusillo 1990, Stephens & Winkler 1995. To these can be added two recently published fragments, P.Oxy. 4760–4761, in *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* vol. 70 (2006).

⁵¹ Hdt. 4,94–96; Herodotus himself is sceptical of the story that makes Zalmoxis a human being and an erstwhile slave of Pythagoras. On Zalmoxis in the novel, see Fauth 1978, Dana 1998–2000.

⁵² Porph. *VP*. 10 and 32.

section on Pythagoras' daily regimen: a few paragraphs later comes an unattributed passage on his injunction to abstain from beans, which corresponds word for word to a paragraph in John Lydus, which he cites as from the thirteenth book of Diogenes' *Apista*.⁵³ This reference to a book number is not in Porphyry, so Lydus must have derived the paragraph directly from Antonius Diogenes, and the fact that it is identical in the two authors indicates that it is a direct quotation. The material which in Porphyry comes between the citation by name of Diogenes and this unattributed quotation from him is likely to derive in whole or in part from the novelist. Porphyry's sections about Astraeus, which deal in part with the survival of the school after the Cylo-nian conspiracy, must also emanate from Antonius Diogenes. It is impossible to be sure how much else of Porphyry's biography depends on him, and thus doubly impossible to know exactly how much and what kind of material about Pythagoras appeared in the novel, but the essential point here is that there certainly was some. Furthermore Lydus' reference to the thirteenth book locates this Pythagorean section, which he and Porphyry evidently took seriously, at the very centre of the text's elaborate structure. It becomes imperative to interpret these facts. Was there a Pythagorean *Tendenz* running through the entire work? Was this a systematically philosophical novel?⁵⁴

Reconstructing lost works is a hazardous business, and it is doubly hazardous to use a reconstruction as the basis of an interpretation. But here goes. The title of the novel is important. It is usually taken as meaning 'wondrous things geographically more remote than the island of Thule', which stood on the very margin of cartographic reality. This is how Photius understood the title, and he is perplexed that the action only moves beyond Thule in the very last book, including apparently an approach to the moon.⁵⁵ But it can also mean 'things incredible beyond Thule': hinting that it goes to the limits of believability, and then a little further.⁵⁶ The title plays with the double sense of the word *Apista*: it can denote both things which are hard to believe but true (the staple trope of paradoxography, of which there was ostensibly plenty in the novel, is that 'truth is stranger than fiction'), and also things which are simply incredible and therefore blatantly fictional. I have argued

⁵³ Lyd. *Mens.* 4,42.

⁵⁴ Views are surveyed by Morgan 1998, 3315–3317.

⁵⁵ Phot. *Bibl.* 110b: 'And so ends the twenty-third book of Antonius Diogenes' work entitled 'Wonders beyond Thule', even though the text has revealed nothing, or just a few things at the beginning, about Thule'. This sentence is omitted by Stephens & Winkler 1995, 126.

⁵⁶ Cf. Stephens & Winkler 1995, 107, who see a possible reference specifically to the work of Pytheas of Massilia, and talk of a 'friendly liars' contest'.

elsewhere that Antonius was exploring the boundaries of credibility, and hence the very nature of fiction, in a deeply meta-literary fashion.⁵⁷ He certainly seems to have drawn attention to the fictionality of his work in a prefatory letter, and explicitly to have sourced some of his wonders from the arch-liar Antiphanes of Berge. According to Photius he also referred to himself as a ‘poet of old comedy’ though it is not clear what exactly this means.⁵⁸

Although two ancient writers took the Pythagorean sections of the novel as serious historical evidence, and modern scholars have been inclined to see them as genuinely aretalogical even when shying away from a Pythagorean interpretation of the whole work, any reading of them is crucially destabilised by the position they occupy at the structural centre of this deeply ambivalent, possibly comic or parodic, text. This looks like the reverse of a straightforward authorial endorsement of Pythagorean philosophy, particularly when we remember the importance attached to truth-telling in Pythagorean doctrine: this is the least suitable philosophy possible to proselytise through fictional narrative. If the work was exploring the boundaries between fact and fiction, between the credible and the incredible, then Pythagoreanism must have been centrally subjected to critical scrutiny. In effect, the fiction was asking its readers to think not only about the nature of belief in factual historico-geographical truth, but about belief in religious and philosophical truth as well. Given that Antonius was satirising geographical paradoxography, we might imagine that Astraeus himself was an exaggeration of the motifs typically associated with the *theios anēr*, and that Antonius was also satirising certain forms of aretalogy. The inclusion at all of the life and doctrines of Pythagoras in this work, particularly when promulgated through this mouthpiece, brands them as just one more form of *hyper Thoulēn apista*, of things even less credible than the stories about Thule, and the centrality of the philosophy’s positioning has the effect of critically problematising its truth-status rather than privileging it as the work’s ‘message’. This text appears to have offered a deeply intellectual engagement between fiction and philosophy: it looks like a novel of ideas. But not all ideas are philosophical ones. Antonius’ awareness of the protocols and potentialities of his own literary form, of its indeterminacy, ambiguity, and ambivalence, appears to have deconstructed the philosophy his novel includes.

⁵⁷ Morgan 1993.

⁵⁸ On these points, see Morgan 1985.

4. *Heliodorus' Epicureans and Calasiris*

Although there is no one in the cast list of this novel explicitly designated as a 'philosopher', the most important of the secondary characters, the Egyptian priest Calasiris, is in many ways configured more like a Greek philosopher than like an authentic priest of Memphitic Isis.

By way of preliminary, however, there is a minor philosophical presence in the secondary narrative of the Athenian Cnemon, near the beginning of the novel. His story concerns the Phaedra-like passion of his stepmother, and the intrigue contrived by her shrewd and seductive slave girl, Thisbe, first to arrange for her mistress to sleep with Cnemon, and then to secure her own safety. I have argued that this story defines the pure and holy love of the protagonists, by systematically counter-pointing their romantic values with the corrupt and corrupting atmosphere of Cnemon's Athens.⁵⁹ It ideologically diminishes the culture of classical Athens in order to substitute a new world view relevant to its time and place of composition. Philosophy is part of the characterisation of the rejected Athenian culture. As Thisbe's intrigue reaches its climax, she is arranging to take her master, Cnemon's father Aristippus, to a house outside the city where he will be able to catch his wife with her lover, though in fact she is waiting in the belief that she will be joined by Cnemon, who in reality is in exile. The place where Thisbe arranges to meet Aristippus is the Garden (*kēpos*) where the monument of the Epicureans stands.⁶⁰ The choice of the word *kēpos* indicates that this is not just an open space with a monument in it, but the very centre of Epicurus' teaching. The location of the Epicurean garden is apparently authentic.⁶¹ However, there is a serious anachronism here: the dramatic date of Heliodorus' novel is the sixth or fifth century B.C., but Epicurus died in 270 B.C. It is hard to believe that Heliodorus, that most erudite and intellectual of novelists was unaware of the inconsistency; in fact the anomaly seems designed to draw attention to the Garden of the Epicureans, and elevate it from an incidental landmark into an icon of what Athens represents. Athens, in this novel the embodiment of selfish and sterile pleasure, is characterised by association with the philosophical school that could be represented as con-

⁵⁹ Morgan 1989; Bowie 1995 argues further that Cnemon's name is a deliberate reference to Attic New Comedy, employed to distance the novel from the Athenian literature which is part of its generic pedigree.

⁶⁰ Hld. 1,16,5.

⁶¹ Clarke 1973.

doning and justifying the choice of such a life.⁶² A page or so later, the mistress is being taken away for trial, but when she reaches the Academy she slips free of her guards and hurls herself to her death in the *bothros*.⁶³ Here too the topography is accurate on a literal level, but is also symbolic. The centre of Platonism is chosen as the appropriate place for punishment to be exacted on wicked, Epicurean pleasures. Philosophical sites are being used symbolically to underline the ideology of the text.⁶⁴

Cnemon's story artfully draws simple philosophical lines. Calasiris is more complex, but I can be brief as he has been much studied.⁶⁵ He is nowhere called *philosophos*, though he is persistently characterised by his *sophia*. He lacks the shaven head of a true Egyptian priest, and his outward appearance, described in some detail at his first appearance and before his true identity is revealed, recalls a stereotypical Greek priest or philosopher, with flowing white hair and beard.⁶⁶ His story takes him into self-imposed exile from Egypt to Ethiopia, where like Apollonius of Tyana he learns the wisdom of the Naked Sages, and then to Delphi, where he joins the 'workshop' (*ergastērion*) of the philosophers (*hoi philosophountes*) who gather around the temple of Apollo.⁶⁷ As far as we can see from his narrative, however, the discussions in Delphi concern topics of natural science such as the cause of the Nile floods or the mechanics of the Evil Eye, rather than profound metaphysical or ethical issues.⁶⁸ If Delphi is represented in the novel as a centre of philosophy, it nonetheless stands near the bottom of Heliodorus' geographically-ordered hierarchy of wisdom, which ascends as the action moves southwards.

The characterisation of Calasiris conforms in many ways to that of the typical holy man of late antiquity. Neoplatonists and Neopythagoreans constantly looked to eastern wisdom (as is figured in Philostratus' account of the travels of Apollonius of Tyana to India), and Calasiris' asceticism – he eats no meat and drinks no wine, and exiles himself to avoid sexual temptation –

⁶² Bowie 1995, 273 notes that Aristippus' name may remind the reader of 'the pupil of Socrates from Cyrene who followed a very different philosophical path from Plato and made pleasure, ἡδονή, the τέλος'; the suggestion is expanded by Jones 2006, 558.

⁶³ Hld. 1,17,5.

⁶⁴ For Heliodorus' Platonism, cf. Dowden 1996, Jones 2005 and 2006, and Repath in this volume.

⁶⁵ Winkler 1982; Sandy 1982; Futre Pinheiro 1991; Fuchs 1993, 174–188; Anderson 1994, 178–187; Edsall 1996, 86–113; Baumbach 1997.

⁶⁶ 2,21,2.

⁶⁷ The 'workshop' is at 2,26,1; *hoi philosophountes* are mentioned at 2,27,2.

⁶⁸ Nile floods: 2,28,2–5; the Evil Eye (deliberately misleading) 3,7,2–8,2.

brings him very much within the ambit of those philosophical schools.⁶⁹ In an important passage he makes a programmatic distinction between two types of Egyptian wisdom, the vulgar and the true, which is intended to recall and extend the Platonic distinction between pandemic and heavenly love and provide a Platonist foundation for his activities.⁷⁰ Calasiris' allegorical readings of Homer are also reminiscent of Neoplatonist methods. In all of these respects, he is the portrait of a late antique mystic philosopher. He certainly plays a privileged role in the novel, and his *sophia* provides him with special insight when the truth remains hidden from all other characters.⁷¹

At the same time, he is a charlatan, whose Odyssean persona is written into the novel's narrative structure. Although his assistance is indispensable in guiding the protagonists towards the required happy ending, his characteristic method of proceeding is through deception, trickery and a showmanship that sometimes arouses even his own mockery or dismay.⁷² All this has been thoroughly digested by the scholarship, and the recognised ambivalence of Calasiris coheres perfectly with the wider attitudes to the philosopher being traced in this paper. Rather than replough the same furrows, I will concentrate briefly on a single passage, which encapsulates the intellectual and moral complexity of his character, and the novelist's subversive use of philosophical discourse.

Calasiris is about to bribe the Greek merchant Nausicles with a precious ring which is one of the heroine's recognition tokens. Rather than simply give him the ring, however, he goes through an elaborate and theatrical charade of performing a sacrifice, mumbling magic words, and pretending to draw the ring out of the altar fire. He prefaces this deceptive performance by telling him: 'A philosopher never wants for anything. His will is his existence. He knows what he may properly ask of the gods, and he receives all that he asks'.⁷³ A *TLG* search for the keywords of this sentence (*boulēsis*, *hyparxis* in close proximity) comes up with a surprising total of 35 matches, the earliest of which is from a second-century text, *Quaestiones Christianorum ad Gentiles* ascribed to Justin the Martyr. Even more surprisingly, many of the later citations are quotations of this same passage, which clearly acquired canonical status in Christian dialectic. In the third of these ques-

⁶⁹ Porphyry's *De abstinentia* is the central ancient text of vegetarian ideology.

⁷⁰ 3,16,2–5; cf. Jones 2005.

⁷¹ So he perceives the moment of the protagonists' inamoration, and can understand more of the Delphic oracle than any of the other bystanders.

⁷² 3,15,3; 3,17,1–3; 4,5,3–4.

⁷³ 5,12,1: οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτε ἐνδεής ἐστιν ὁ σοφὸς ἀλλ' ὑπαρξιν ἔχει τὴν βούλησιν.

tions the writer is taking issue with the view propounded by a pagan interlocutor that in the case of God there is no distinction between His will and His existence. A short extract from the beginning of the response will suffice to show the importance of the words which Heliodorus has used:

We must not suppose, he [i.e. the Greek interlocutor] says, that as with us being and willing are different, so it is with God. But in God being and willing are absolutely the same. For what he is, he also wills, and what he wills he is; and there is no distinction in the case of God because God is self-producing. So we must reject the distinction of being and willing in the case of God. [Here begins the Christian refutation] As the essence of God is directed to existence (*hyparxis*) and His will (*boulēsis*) towards creation, anyone who rejects the distinction between essence and will, also rejects the existence of God and his creation, the existence of Himself and the creation of things which are not.⁷⁴

Whether or not Heliodorus knew this precise passage, it appears that he is using key terms from contemporary theological debate in a mischievously distorting way.⁷⁵ Like God in the Greek view, the philosopher, according to Calasiris, exists because he wishes to, but only in the sense that he gets whatever he asks for: heaven sees to it that he never goes short. Even this debased version of the doctrine is undercut, because it is no more than obfuscation to dupe the gullible into thinking that a conjuring trick is a miraculous sign of divine favour. Calasiris is, then, another problematic philosopher, one who perverts philosophy to serve his own ends.

⁷⁴ This discussion continues for several pages, in which the key terms recur constantly. The Greek text of the passage translated in the text is as follows: οὐκ οἰητέον, φησίν, ὡς περ ἐν ἡμῖν ἄλλο μὲν ἐστὶ τὸ εἶναι, ἄλλο δὲ ἐστὶ τὸ βούλεσθαι, οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ θεῷ· ἀλλὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ἄντικρυς ὑπάρχει τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ βούλεσθαι ἐν τῷ θεῷ. ὃ γὰρ ἔστι καὶ βούλεται, καὶ ὃ βούλεται ἔστι· καὶ οὐδεμία διαίρεσις ἐπὶ τοῦ θεοῦ, διὰ τὸ αὐτοπαρακτὸν εἶναι τὸν θεόν. ὥστε τὴν διαίρεσιν τὴν τοῦ εἶναι πρὸς τὸ βούλεσθαι ἐπὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπορρήπτειον. τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχοντος οὐσίαν μὲν πρὸς ὑπαρξιν, βούλησιν δὲ πρὸς ποιήσιν, ὁ ἀπορρήπτων οὐσίας τε καὶ βουλῆς τὴν διάφοραν καὶ τὴν ὑπαρξιν ἀπορρήπτει τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ποιήσιν, ὑπαρξιν μὲν τὴν αὐτοῦ, ποιήσιν δὲ τῶν οὐκ ὄντων.

⁷⁵ For what appears to be another polemical or ludic confrontation with contemporary Christian discourse, cf. Morgan 2005b.

5. *Xanthus in the Aesop Romance*

The so called *Aesop Romance* raises many intriguing issues, none of which I intend to address. The longer and better of the two recensions is headed *The book of Xanthus the philosopher and Aesop his slave*, perhaps retaining the title of an earlier work which has been absorbed into our present composite text.⁷⁶ In any case, it is significant that the philosopher is given equal or even higher billing than the text's conventional eponym. Xanthus has a school on Samos, which attracts students from Asia and Greece.⁷⁷ He becomes Aesop's master, and around half of the extant text concerns their relations.

The dynamics of their relationship are *prima facie* simple. At the very beginning of the text, in a gleeful accumulation of splendid adjectives, Aesop is described as:

... of loathsome aspect, worthless as a servant, potbellied, misshapen of head, snub-nosed, swarthy, dwarfish, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, liver-lipped, a portentous monstrosity.⁷⁸

He is the archetypal ugly outsider, constructed as the antithesis of everything conventional and respectable; his literary forbears are Thersites, Strepsiades, and Socrates. Xanthus functions in the story as the embodiment of all the conventions which Aesop is there to deconstruct, and his name aptly points the antithesis between the 'golden boy' of the academic establishment and the black, twisted creature that challenges its values.⁷⁹ Aesop repeatedly outwits and teaches Xanthus, and in so doing illustrates to the text's readers the fatuity of academic philosophy and the superiority of quick wits and common sense.⁸⁰ A good example of this is when Xanthus takes Aesop

⁷⁶ This is recension G in Perry 1952; the most conveniently accessible translation is that of L.W. Daly in Hansen 1998, 111–162. The suggestion about the provenance of the title is from Hägg 1997, 184 (= 2004, 51).

⁷⁷ G 20.

⁷⁸ G 1.

⁷⁹ *Aisōpos* = 'burnt face' (cf. *aithiops*); Xanthus is named as the first master of Aesop in a fragment of Heraclides Lembus' collection of excerpts from Aristotle's lost *Politeiai*, printed as a fragment of Heraclides Ponticus in Müller's *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* 2, 215–216 (for authorship see Daebritz in *RE* 8,490,64 ff.); the same information is found in *Σ. Ar. Av.* 471. This seems to extend the tradition of a Samian Xanthus as owner of Aesop back to the fourth century B.C., but there is no certainty that Aristotle characterised him as a philosopher.

⁸⁰ Compare the comic figure of the *scholastikos*, who features so prominently in the jokes of the *Philogelōs*.

shopping for vegetables.⁸¹ The market gardener offers to waive payment in return for the answer to a problem (*zētēmation*; an ironic diminutive of an authentic scholastic term) about why weeds grow stronger than cultivated plants. Xanthus immediately protests that as a philosopher he has no practical skill, like a ‘craftsman or smith to make you a hoe or a leek-slicer; I’m a philosopher’. When he falls back on clichés about divine providence, Aesop guffaws, but explains that his scorn is directed not at Xanthus but at his teacher. Xanthus proclaims that he studied at Athens under *philosophoi*, *rhētores*, and *grammatikoi*, and thus the whole academic establishment is written off as useless. Aesop of course provides a satisfactory if homespun answer to the problem: like a stepmother, the earth favours her own children. However, even though Xanthus cuts a rather ridiculous figure, he is not represented as personally unpleasant or unscrupulous. He wants to pay for his vegetables and honestly disclaims the practical knowledge that he thinks the gardener wants. He makes no false claims for philosophy, does not intrude it into contexts where it does not belong, and does not abuse his social position. It is only when he is embarrassed that he claims that after having debated in many great lecture-rooms, it is beneath his dignity (*aprepes*) to argue in a garden.

Although this is an episodic, composite, and inconsistent text, containing elements of various provenance and emanating from various periods, we can say something in broad terms about the way that Xanthus is represented. Firstly there is no attempt at authentic period colouring: although Aesop belongs in the sixth century B.C., Xanthus’ daily life is typical of the Imperial period, with visits to the baths (redolent of Romanisation) playing a prominent role in several anecdotes. The currency in use is the denarius. His academic career, noted above, is that of the rhetorical schools of the Second Sophistic, and we shall see that he conceives philosophy in Second Sophistic terms, as a performance, an *epideixis*. Secondly, he is clearly a man of some substance: his school attracts many visitors to Samos; he runs a sizeable domestic establishment and his wife rides around the town in a litter; in his professional capacity he parades through the streets attended by a pack of students.

His status as a professional philosopher requires him to play a role, to be seen by the world at large doing the things that philosophers are supposed to do. Sometimes this takes the form of delivering a vacuous and pompous scholastic disquisition on whatever topic circumstances demand, greeted with fawning adulation by his students. Here he is in the slave market:

⁸¹ G 35.

Gentlemen and scholars (ἄνδρες φιλόλογοι), you must not think that philosophy consists only in what can be put in words, but also in acts. Indeed, unspoken philosophy (ἡ σιωπηρὴ φιλοσοφία) often surpasses beyond expectation that which is expressed in words. You can observe this in the case of dancers, how by the movement of their hands they surpass that which is communicated by many words. Just as philosophy can well consist in acts, in the same way this display too expresses an unspoken philosophy. You see, this man had two handsome slaves and one ugly. He put the ugly one between the handsome ones in order that his ugliness should make their beauty noticeable, for if the ugliness were not set in contrast to that which is superior to it, the appearance of the handsome ones would not have been put to the test.

The students: You are marvellous, professor (καθηγητής). How fine of you to perceive so clearly his purpose.⁸²

At other times he affects a studied austerity, which is in tension with the demands of his social standing. He has two conflicting sets of appearances to keep up. On the one hand, simply because he is a philosopher, he must appear to avoid extravagance and live a life of sensible moderation; but, on the other hand, there comes a point where sensible moderation might give the impression either of genuine penury, which in a performance society would entail loss of status, or of gratuitous stinginess, which would give rise to personal opprobrium. So Xanthus turns away from the first two slaves in the market when he learns their high price (1,000 and 3,000 denarii respectively), remarking that it is his principle (*dogma*) not to buy expensive slaves (*polytima ... paidaria*) but to be served by *eutelē sōmatia*.⁸³ Nevertheless he is reluctant to buy Aesop at a knock-down price, because his wife demands good-looking slaves in the house. When the sale is clinched and tax has to be paid on the transaction, Xanthus is embarrassed to admit to the officials that he paid only 75 denarii. In a rather acute way, the text draws attention to the contradictions in a philosopher's life, and the delicate negotiation involved in cultivating the appearance of not caring about appearances.

The theme of philosophy as a carefully posed performance recurs in one of the most amusing sections of the life, where Aesop is training his master to be precise in the use of words. The setting is the bath-house, which in itself neatly encapsulates the contradiction and paradox of Xanthus' self-positioning: he must avoid the suspicion of luxury, while engaging in the

⁸² G 23.

⁸³ There is a lacuna in G at this point; the action is supplied from the other recension, W 24.

social role expected of a man of property. Encountering some friends in the baths, Xanthus invites them to dinner – a display of social standing – and sends Aesop home to prepare it, taking care to avoid anything which Aesop might deliberately misinterpret:

‘Aesop, go on home, and since my wife trampled the vegetables in her temper, go out and cook us lentil (*phakon*). Put it in the pot, put some water in with it, put it on the cooking hearth, put some wood under it, and light it; if it starts to go out, blow on it. Now do as I say’.⁸⁴

The use of the collective singular for a dish of lentil soup is good literary Greek: in fact it looks as if the writer of the text has precisely in his sights a line of Theocritus.⁸⁵ But it enables Aesop pedantically to cook a single lentil in order to embarrass his master. The dish is chosen to set up the joke, but this simple, rustic food is also made into an element of Xanthus’ philosophical self-construction.

‘Gentlemen, will you share my simple fare (*eutelōs aristēsai*)? There will be lentil. We ought to judge our friends by their good will and not by the elegance (*polyteleia*) of their food. On occasion the humblest dishes afford a more genial pleasure than more pretentious ones if the host serves them with a gracious welcome’.⁸⁶

Elsewhere Xanthus eats at greater expense: on one occasion he sends Aesop out to buy the finest things imaginable (Aesop prepares a meal consisting entirely of tongues, prepared in ways of increasing disgustingness).⁸⁷ On another Aesop is sent out to find a man who is not a *polypragmōn*, and brings back a rustic who sits through a meal of several courses, including fish in spicy sauce and rich sesame and honey cake, contentedly shovelling back food that he has never even seen a picture of before, oblivious to his host’s outrageous behaviour.⁸⁸ At a party, Xanthus gets so irresponsibly drunk that he wagers he can drink the sea dry.⁸⁹ The narrative, then, con-

⁸⁴ G 39.

⁸⁵ Xanthus’ words φακὸν εἴησον echo Theoc. 10,54 τὸν φακὸν εἴπειν.

⁸⁶ G 39

⁸⁷ G 51.

⁸⁸ G 59–63. Xanthus’ final outrage is to build a pyre in the dining-room and threaten to burn his wife; the rustic’s response is to ask him to wait while he finishes his drink, and then give him time to fetch his own wife so the two women can be burned together!

⁸⁹ G 69.

structs a satirical picture of a philosopher as someone whose profession depends on the sustained performance of a delicate public role, but whose private life does not embody the values he professes in public. This image of the philosopher is not an altogether unfamiliar one, but we are not quite dealing with the typical literary exposé of philosophical hypocrisy familiar from Lucian and others. In the first place, though it is misleading to think of the *Life of Aesop* as ‘popular’ literature, we are given a view of the scholastic establishment from the outside, and that view is a mixture of resentment, awe, and amused bewilderment. Secondly, Xanthus does not exploit his profession for financial gain or for sexual purposes, the two accusations most commonly levelled against philosophers who hypocritically wear the cloak of austerity. If he has anything to hide, it is stupidity and pretension, not dishonesty or perversion. Even on his own terms, Xanthus is an intellectually-challenged intellectual; there is more than a little of the Bertie Wooster about him, though Aesop makes a peculiarly scruffy and insubordinate Jeeves. His ineptitude in the accurate use of words, and his inability to decipher portents or to solve problems, are part of his comic characterisation. This aspect of him is summed up in one of the most scurrilous passages of the life, where he has to answer a call of nature at a drinking party.

‘Can you tell me [he asks Aesop] why it is that when we take a shit we often look at our own business?’ Aesop replied, ‘Once upon a time there was a prince who because of his fine dining and gourmandising sat for ages a-shitting, so long that eventually, without realising, he shat out his brains. And from that time when men take a shit they peer down in fear that they too might shit out their brains. But there’s no need for you to worry: you won’t shit out your brains: you haven’t got any’.⁹⁰

Another aspect of Xanthus’ inconsistency is his relationship with his wife. In the slave market, when he is worried about his wife’s reaction to the hideous Aesop, his students object that most of his teaching has been about not being subject to a woman.⁹¹ Here too his public pronouncements do not reflect the reality of his own life. The more we see of his home life, the clearer it becomes that he is not in control of his wife, who is lecherous and quarrelsome. To some extent the text re-enacts, with aptly chosen names, a philosophical stereotype on the model of Socrates and Xanthippe, but the portrait is rather more nuanced than that would suggest. When Xanthus

⁹⁰ G 67, a fable incomprehensibly excluded from the usual collections.

⁹¹ G 24.

wants to send some food home to his wife from a party, he tells Aesop to take it to 'the one who loves me'.⁹² Aesop feeds the delicacies to the household dog, to make the obvious misogynistic point, but Xanthus himself continues to demonstrate a touching affection for his wife, and is distinguished from the ideological misogyny voiced by Aesop and the text as a whole.

In fact, Xanthus adds up to a rather sympathetic character, whose weaknesses and inconsistencies only serve to humanise him. He occasionally drinks a bit too much and makes a fool of himself, but there is nothing really gross in his behaviour. There is no hint of any infidelity on his part, though his wife has a weakness for handsome slaves and even forces Aesop to have sex with her. He is not dishonest, and despite extreme and repeated provocation he does not use violence on his slaves. Although this text approaches the figure of the philosopher from a different direction than do the ideal romances, there is a similar ambivalence and complexity in the way in which it chooses to represent him.

Conclusion

In all of the cases we have examined, the philosopher is a problematic figure, neither wholly positive nor wholly negative, but ambiguous and ambivalent, expressing exactly the kind of anxieties described by Michael Trapp in this volume. Even the least developed is a character of some complexity. What is particularly striking is that, although these novels frequently evoke philosophical intertexts, and are not shy of ideas and big issues, philosophers as characters are not used as vehicles of those ideas. Indeed, the ideas attributed directly to the philosopher figures are more often than not undermined or even satirised. It is almost as if there is a consistent and deliberate disjunction between philosophy as a profession and the ideas that the texts articulate, even when those ideas are not alien to philosophy as such. In broad terms I think there are two things happening here, neither of them very surprising.

Firstly, although there is still work to be done on the philosophical image – the multi-faceted role that the philosopher had to project to the scrutiny of the world at large –, it is amply clear that the philosopher as a type was viewed with some equivocation by the entire culture in which these texts originated. Philosophers who use their austerity to mask their financial or sexual wrongdoings, who sell their principles to ingratiate themselves with

⁹² G 44.

the rich and powerful, who strike pompous poses all over the place, are familiar satirical figures. The novels are not alone in treating philosophers as compromised figures rather than culture-heroes, and novels are actually rather less polemical than other literary types.

Secondly, narrative is by its very nature a dynamic artefact, whose effect depends on the representation of change, movement, and flux towards a correct ending. The more complex the mechanics of a plot become, the less simple its moral lines must also be. Narrative processes of complication and resolution cannot work with two-dimensional ciphers, and even if a work as a whole ends up validating a particular moral or philosophical position, that position is constituted by the dynamic interaction of all its constituent parts, and is not to be found explicit and complete in any single figure. By its very nature, the novel gravitates towards openness and indeterminacy, while philosophy strives for intellectual closure and fixity. The generic conventions of the Greek romance – from which *Aesop* is to some degree exempted – also restrict the central thematic. Its philosophers are necessarily secondary characters, whose actions and concerns can exist only in relation to an idealised erotic relationship. In examining a few of them, I hope to have provided a context of sorts within which less obvious and straightforward philosophical presences in ancient prose fiction can be investigated.

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