

SHORTER NOTES

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACHILLES AND PATROCLUS
ACCORDING TO CHARITON OF APHRODISIAS

From the fifth century B.C., the nature of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus as presented by Homer was a matter for discussion among writers and scholars in antiquity: was it a relationship of homosexual love or was it simple friendship? Out of this debate came discussion of a more specific question as well: whether, assuming a homosexual relationship, Achilles took the part of the lover (*erastés*) or of the beloved (*erómenos*). At no point does Homer make explicitly clear the nature of the relationship between the heroes, as noted already by Aeschines in his speech *Against Timarchus* 1.142. This uncertainty brought about the controversy, but the view that they were lovers prevailed.¹ The main points in the history of the debate, given briefly and in chronological order, are as follows.

In the first place, in Aeschylus, the homoerotic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is the principal theme of the tragedy *Myrmidons*, as emerges explicitly from two fragments (*TrGF* 3, 135–6 Radt). Aeschylus presents Achilles as the lover, speaking to his dead beloved Patroclus. Plato for his part puts in the mouth of Phaedrus the opinion that Achilles and Patroclus were lovers (*Symp.* 179e–180b), though Phaedrus, expressly refuting Aeschylus, specifies that Achilles, who was younger than Patroclus, was the young beloved. Aeschines, in his speech *Against Timarchus*, presents the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus as a noble, loving relationship, in contrast to the prostitution of which he accuses Timarchus (*Aeschin.* 1.141–2). In support of his thesis, Aeschines resorts to the Homeric example, giving a pederastic reading of the friendship between the two heroes, for which he extensively cites the text of the *Iliad* (*Aeschin.* 1.145–50).² Later allusions, in Theocritus, Martial, Meleager, and Ps.-Lucian agree in presenting the relationship between the heroes as homosexual.³ The single relevant piece of evidence for the contrary view is from Xenophon, who puts in Socrates' mouth the opinion that the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus was not erotic in character (*Symp.* 8.31).

It is clear that there was a polemical tradition concerning the nature of the relationship between the two heroes, a tradition which is attested by texts that are still extant. It is logical, therefore, that an author like Chariton, who felt such an affection for the Homeric poems, whose text he cites very frequently,⁴ would have formed an

¹ For a summary on the debate, see B. Sergent, *Homosexuality in Greek Myth* (Boston, 1986 [Paris, 1984]), 250–8; K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (New York, 1999 [London, 1989]), 196–9. M. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in love', *Hermes* 106 (1978), 381–6 argues that Achilles and Patroclus are presented as lovers in Homer. More sceptical is F. Buffière, *Eros adolescent. La pédérastie dans la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1980), 366–73.

² On the role and value of these quotations, see M. Sanz Morales, 'El Homero de Esquines', *AC* 70 (2001), 49–67, who rebuts the view that the text of the quotations had been doctored by Aeschines, in contrast to M. Van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad* (Leiden, 1964), 2.326–32, especially 328.

³ Theoc. 29.31–4, Mart. 11.43.9, *A.P.* 12.217 (Mel.), Lucianus, *Am.* 54.

⁴ On the role of Homeric quotations in Chariton, cf. C. W. Müller, 'Chariton von Aphrodisias und die Theorie des Romans in der Antike', *A&A* 22 (1976), 115–36, esp. 127–33 (he calls Chariton 'Homeride der Prosa', 131–2); M. Fusillo, 'Il testo nel testo: la citazione nel romanzo greco', *MD* 25 (1990), 27–48, esp. 34–41; G. Manuwald, 'Zitate als Mittel der Erzählens—zur

opinion in this matter. Our intention is to show that he characterized this relationship as erotic. If this view is accepted, we will know something more both of the literary ideas and of the reception of Homer in Chariton, and at the same time we will be able to add to the ancient testimonia that support the interpretation of the relationship between the two heroes in a pederastic light.⁵

As a first piece of evidence, it is worth noting various passages which describe moments when Chaereas and Callirhoë find themselves in a state of separation and grief, a condition which is in any case habitual for the protagonists of a Greek novel. Indeed in these passages Chariton cites illustrative verses from the *Iliad* which express the grief of Achilles, resulting from Patroclus' death. Here is a résumé of the five passages:

1.4.6: a trickster fools Chaereas, telling him that Callirhoë is committing adultery. Chariton cites *Il.* 18.22–4, where Achilles throws ash on his head as a sign of his grief on being informed of Patroclus' death.

2.9.6: while she is asleep, an apparition of Chaereas appears to Callirhoë, which she tries to embrace. The quotation is *Il.* 23.66–7: the soul of Patroclus appears to Achilles while he is asleep; in the Homeric passage (97–8), Achilles asks Patroclus to come nearer so that they can embrace and weep together.

4.1.3: Dionysius, believing that Chaereas is dead, advises Callirhoë to construct a tomb for him. His words are: 'Imagine that he himself appears to you and says: "Bury me as soon as possible, because I wish to go through the gates of Hades."' This is said by Patroclus at *Il.* 23.71 in the same context already mentioned in 2.9.6.

5.2.4: Mithridates tells Chaereas not to see Callirhoë. Chaereas throws himself on the ground, and tears his clothes. The quotation is again *Il.* 18.23–4, as in 1.4.6.

5.10.9: Chaereas, in a state of despair because of his separation from Callirhoë, tries to kill himself. At death's door, he quotes (and adapts) *Il.* 22.389–90, verses in which Achilles promises to remember Patroclus always, even though in Hades there is no remembrance of the dead.

From these passages we can see how Chariton establishes a clear parallel between the two couples Achilles–Patroclus and Chaereas–Callirhoë. He uses such parallelism as an artistic means for characterizing the vicissitudes that happen to the protagonists of the novel, vicissitudes that are amorous in character but with a pervasive element of misfortune. The frequent use of the Homeric model suggests that Chariton interpreted Achilles' grief for Patroclus, as presented by Homer, as erotic in character. As to why Chariton chose this model and not another, the answer could be that in addition to being very famous on account of the importance of the individuals

Darstellungstechnik Charitons in seinem Roman *Kallirhoe*', *WJA* n.F. 24 (2000), 97–122. Secondarily, A. Scarcella, 'La tecnica dell'imitazione in Longo, *GIF* 23 (1971), 34–59, esp. 54–9. We have not been able to consult the article in Polish by M. Pałcińska, 'Motywy homerowe w romansie Charitona', *Meander* 21 (1966), 149–57. Müller ('Chariton von Aphrodisias', 131), who has read it, refers to its contents.

⁵ Only Müller ([n. 4], 130) and Fusillo ([n. 4], 35–7) mention this issue, and they agree in inclining towards this interpretation, though without actually offering proof.

concerned, the association of Achilles and Patroclus offered the novelist considerable opportunities for grief and pathos, something very necessary for the erotic atmosphere of the novel.⁶

The hypothesis proposed might receive additional support in a piece of neglected evidence concerning this question. The novelist cites a passage from Homer in 6.1.8, when the Persian king finds himself sleepless, because on the following day he has to give a public pronouncement on who will marry Callirhoë—Chaereas or Dionysius. A few lines further on Chariton explicitly declares what is already evident to the reader: in the soliloquy that the insomnia gives rise to, the king recognizes that he is in love with Callirhoë: *τίς εἶ; Καλλιρόης ἔραστῆς ἢ δικαστῆς; μὴ ἔξαπάτα σεαυτόν, ἀγνοεῖς μὲν, ἀλλὰ ἔρᾶς* (6.1.10). Love causes his suffering and, as a result, it is the true cause of his insomnia.⁷ Moreover, a few lines before (6.1.8), Chariton had quoted *Il.* 24.10–11, perhaps the text that best describes the impossibility of getting to sleep for Achilles, who longs for the dead Patroclus: *ἄλλοτ' ἐπὶ πλευρὰς κατακέιμενος, <ἄλλοτε δ' αὐτε / ὕπτιος,>⁸ ἄλλοτε δὲ πρηγῆς*. We believe that Chariton's choice of a quotation leaves no grounds for doubt: he regards the insomnia of Achilles as having an erotic motivation, and for that reason illustrates the king's insomnia with this very quotation.

In certain cases Chariton applies to erotic situations Homeric verses that are taken from different contexts, particularly those to do with warfare, through a technique that implies an adaptation of the Homeric context directed towards other aims; on other occasions, the Homeric quotation comes from a context which is parallel to or equivalent to that of the novel.⁹ This is the case with 6.1.8. Chariton could have cited *Il.* 10.1–6, where Agamemnon is unable to sleep, because of his anxieties over the situation of the Achaean army after Achilles' withdrawal from battle. But the novelist does not have recourse to this passage, in spite of its being well known.¹⁰ He prefers to cite *Il.* 24.1ff, a passage that, with its erotic background, the novelist chose to associate, perhaps unconsciously, with the insomniac condition of the Persian king.

We do not claim that Chariton deliberately uses the Homeric model of Achilles and

⁶ Chariton uses an Homeric model for conjugal love, that between Odysseus and Penelope in 8.1.17 (he cites *Od.* 23.295), on the occasion of the reunion of Chaereas and Callirhoë.

⁷ Insomnia (*ἀγρυπνία*) is traditionally a conspicuous sign of love (*signum amoris*) in classical literature. See Pl. *Phdr.* 251e; Theoc. 10.10, 30.5ff.; Plaut. *Merc.* 4–5; Ter. *Eum.* 219; *A.P.* 5.152, 5.166, 7.195, 7.196 (Mel.), *Catul.* 68.5–8; Prop. 1.1.33, 1.11.5, 1.14.20–2, 2.7.11, 4.3.29; Tib. 1.2.75–8 (with note of K. F. Smith, *The Elegies of Albius Tibullus* [New York, 1913], 227), 2.4.11; Ov. *Am.* 1.2.1–4 (with J. C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores* [Leeds, 1989], 2.34–5), *Ep.* 13.3. On this, see also R. Pichon, *Index verborum amatoriorum* (Hildesheim 1902, repr. 1966), 294, s.v. *vigilare*; K. Preston, *Studies in the Diction of the Sermo amatorius in Roman Comedy* (New York and London, 1978), 11–12; R. F. Thomas, 'New comedy, Callimachus, and Roman poetry', *HSCP* 83 (1979), 179–206, esp. 195–9.

⁸ Hercher's supplement, following the text of the Homeric manuscripts.

⁹ For example, *Il.* 21.114, quoted at 1.1.14, 3.6.3 and 4.5.9, comes from a context of fighting. On the other hand, in the cases of 5.4.6 (where *Il.* 4.1 is cited), 7.2.4 (*Il.* 22.304–5), and 8.1.17 (*Od.* 23.295), the contexts of the Homeric model and of the novel are comparable. See Manuwald (n. 4), 113: 'Insgesamt ergibt der Überblick über Charitons Verwendung von Homerzitatzen, dass er sich auf vielfältige Weise bemüht, sie in seinen Text zu integrieren.'

¹⁰ Note, for example, the influence of *Il.* 10.1ff on A.R. 3.744–60, a passage that deals with the insomnia of Medea. The imitation of *Iliad* 10 and *Odyssey* 15 was noted by F. Vian, in F. Vian and E. Delage, *Apollonios de Rhodes. Argonautiques. Tome II, Chant II* (Paris, 1995²), 132. Cf. R. L. Hunter, *Apollonius of Rhodes. Argonautica Book III* (Cambridge, 1989), 177, who draws attention to the precedents from *Iliad* 2 and 10, and *Odyssey* 15, pointing out that the echo of *Iliad* 10 is particularly important.

Patroclus in order to introduce a homosexual element into his novel, in view of the fact that references to pederasty are veiled in it.¹¹ Rather we believe in an unconscious allusion to Homer, arising from the association of Achilles' grief with an erotic cause, and its subsequent application to the argument of the novel. In any case the upshot is that we would therefore have a new stage in the pederastic interpretation of the relationship between the two heroes in an author who is writing in the first or second century A.D.¹²

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¹¹ This is the received opinion: cf. B. Effe, 'Der griechische Liebesroman und die Homoerotik', *Philologus* 131 (1987), 97; M. Brioso Sánchez, 'La pederastia en la novela griega antigua', *ExcPhilol* 9 (1999), 17, does not depart from it, but he modifies it, arguing that there is a complete silence about pederasty in Heliodorus and mere allusions in Chariton (on whom see *ibid.*, 28–30), while in the other three novelists it appears only on a secondary level. Effe (103–4) believes that the reason is to be found in a literary restriction which arises from Homer, and which the genre of the novel would later tone down. *Contra*, Brioso Sánchez, 48–9.

¹² On the possible dating of Chariton, see B. P. Reardon, 'Chariton', in G. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne, 1996), 317, who thinks that the first century A.D. is the most probable date. Recently, E. P. Cueva, 'The date of Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* revisited', *C&M* 51 (2000), 197–208, has offered a full discussion of the question, and favours a dating between A.D. 116 and 150.

THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY ARE: AGATHIAS *MYTHISTORICUS* AND THE LAST LAUGH OF CLASSICAL CULTURE*

Agathias is known today primarily as a historian, a title earned by his narrative of the years 552–9, replete with valuable ethnographic digressions and glimpses of intellectual life. Yet it is not clear that he viewed himself first and foremost as a historian. He presents a complex literary persona, more so, I believe, than that of any ancient or early Byzantine historian. Every aspect of this persona contributes to the structure and aims of his narrative. In Book 3, for example, he presents himself as an overworked lawyer in Constantinople, lacking the leisure to become an accomplished scholar: his readers will have to make do with what he writes in his meagre spare time (3.1.1–7).¹ Yet the long account of the trial of two Roman officers, with rhetorically contrived speeches and paeans to the principles of Roman law (4.1–11), reveals the lawyer's hand. Agathias' view of justice, which shaped his moral judgement, also has a legal slant.²

* The title of this paper was a saying of the late Seth Benardete, 1930–2001, who, more than anyone, exposed the poetry of philosophy and the philosophy of poetry. I trust that Agathias would have been an author after his own heart.

¹ Cf. the similar complaints of Cassiodorus' in the preface of his *Variae*.

² See A. Kaldellis, 'The historical and religious views of Agathias: a reinterpretation', *Byzantion* 69 (1999), 206–52, at 220–1. For the professional background, see G. Greatrex, 'Lawyers and historians in late antiquity', in R. W. Mathisen (ed.), *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2001), 148–61. The standard text is R. Keydell, *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum Libri Quinque* (Berlin, 1967 = *CFHB* 2). Translated passages are quoted from J. D. Frendo, *Agathias: The Histories* (Berlin and New York, 1976 = *CFHB* 2A).