CHAPTER 5

An Overview of the Literary Criticism of Chariton

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is in no way intended to replace the standard introductions to Chariton and/or the ancient Greek novel. Rather, the chapter has a limited two-fold purpose:

Firstly, to provide any non-specialist reader with the minimum amount of information needed as a backdrop to appreciate my subsequent chapters. Such information would include the standard literary-critical issues of genre, provenance, characters, plot, structure, theme, style, etc. (The issue of textual criticism is reserved for separate treatment in chapter seven of my monograph.)

Secondly, I will focus on certain literary critical issues that are especially pertinent to speech margins and are more conveniently treated in this preliminary chapter. Anyone undertaking discourse analysis should be aware of the author’s overall stylistic concerns, since these have the potential to constrain the form of lower-level features such as speech margins.

By way of a preliminary orientation to Chariton’s novel, we may choose as our entry-point the author’s own introduction, since this effectively suggests many of the issues that have properly occupied the literary critics of his work. Chariton 1.1.1 states:

Χαρίτων Ἀφροδισιεύς,
Ἀθηναγόρου τοῦ ῥήτορος ὑπογραφεύς,
pάθος ἐρωτικὸν ἐν Συρακούσαις γενόμενον διηγήσομαι.
Ἑρμοκράτης ὁ Συρακοσίων στρατηγός, οὗτος ὁ νικήσας Ἀθηναίους,
eἶχε θυγατέρα Καλλιρόην ...

I, Chariton of Aphrodisias,
clerk of the lawyer Athenagoras,
am going to relate a love story which took place in Syracuse.

Hermocrates, ruler of Syracuse, victor over the Athenians,
had a daughter Callirhoe ... 

These opening lines provide a virtual check-list of many (though by no means all) of the topics discussed in the standard introductions to Chariton. The personal reference is one of many ways in which the work echoes the Greek historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides. The geographical reference invites discussion of the ‘Aphroditian’ ideology of the novel. The professional reference anticipates the author’s rhetorical skill in crafting his characters’ speeches, as well as the climactic court-room scene (in 5.6–5.8). The historical reference (to an event of 413 BC) invites reflection on the author’s interest in a world that long predated him. Lastly, the narratological reference to a ‘love story’ compels us to locate the novel within the genre of ancient Greek romances. All these (and other) topics will be discussed below, beginning with the latter.

---

2 Goold, Chariton, 29.
3 Some scholars have questioned the historicity of the biographical statements that open the novel, positing that Χαρίτων (‘man of graces’) is a nom de plume. Inscriptions attest the existence in Aphrodisias of the citizens Athenagoras and Chariton, whilst falling short of positive identification. J.R. Morgan’s assessment of the claims of the novel seems judicious: “We cannot be sure that this genuine biographical information, although, I think, the balance of probability favours it.” (“The Greek Novel: Towards a Sociology of Production and Reception,” in The Greek World, ed. A. Powel (London: Routledge, 1995), 136.)