

THE *EPHESIAN STORY* OF XENOPHON OF EPHESUS

The simplest novel of the corpus, but very similar to Longus' novel. The aim of his author, in fact, is to educate his protagonists and, possibly, also his readers to love.

What would I like to do with you this afternoon?
To read the most important steps of this erotic education.

THE PLOT

VERY TRADITIONAL:

- Protagonists: Habrocomes and Anthia, both from Ephesus.
- They fall in love when young and get married in Ephesus.
- Following an enigmatic oracle, they are forced to leave Ephesus and to undergo a long journey far from home, where they are attacked by many dangerous enemies.
- With the help of their servants, they manage to meet again in Rhodes and then to go back to Ephesus, where they will live all their life happy and together.
- Two nights as the crucial elements of the plot: the protagonists' journey begins and ends with a night: we will discover how much these events are important for the novel!

THE BEGINNING

“In Ephesus there was a man named Lycomedes, one of the most powerful people in the city. This Lycomedes and his wife Themisto, also a local, had a son Habrocomes, a paragon of handsomeness without precedent in Ionia or anywhere else” (1.1.1).

What we can say about this beginning? Is the novel presented as a fiction?

Yes and no!

NO, as Xenophon accommodates the story in Ephesus, a very common Greek city.

YES, since Xenophon introduces beauty as the first key topic. There is here the subtle interplay noticed in Longus' prologue.

THE ARROGANCE AND THE REVENGE

“The young man held a high opinion of himself. [...] He did not even recognize Eros as a god but rejected him [...], holding that no one at all would ever fall in love or submit to this god unwillingly” (1.1.4, 5).

“Eros grew furious at this. [...] He got himself fully armed and, equipping himself with a complete arsenal of love potions, set forth against Habrocomes” (1.2.1)

Is the action of Eros successful?

THE FALLING IN LOVE

“A local festival for Artemis was underway. [...] Heading the line of girls was Anthia, whose beauty was marvelous and far surpassed the other girls. [...] Often when seeing her at the shrine, the Ephesians worshiped her as Artemis. [...] (1.2)

“And so when the procession was over, the whole crowd repaired to the shrine for the sacrifice. [...] There they saw each other. Anthia was captivated by Habrocomes, and Habrocomes was bested by Eros.

Is the action of Eros successful?

YES, the two fall in love!

THE MARRIAGE

Anthia and Habrocomes try to resist for a while, experiencing lovesickness. Their parents don't understand why they are suffering and they ask help to Apollo's oracle. The god suggests them to get their sons get married and then departure from Ephesus, where they will experience inevitable suffering.

The parents immediately obey the oracle and the whole city celebrates the protagonists' wedding.

“Already the city was full of revelers, everything was festooned with garlands. [...] Everyone saw a blessed future for him in marrying such a wife” (1.7.3).

THE WEDDING NIGHT

Habrocomes and Anthia enjoy a lot the celebration and they also have their sexual consummation in their wedding night. This is an important event, since it is the **first night** shared by the protagonists.

“Anthia was escorted to the bridal chamber with torches. The chamber had been prepared for them: a golden bed had been spread with purple sheets, and above the bed a Babylonian canopy had been finely embroidered: there were Cupids at play, some attending Aphrodite, some riding mounted on sparrows, some plaiting garlands, some bearing flowers.”

THE WEDDING NIGHT

“These were on one part of the canopy; on the other was Ares, not armed but garlanded and wearing a fine cloak, dressed for his lover Aphrodite; Eros, holding a lighted torch, was leading him on his way. Under the canopy itself they brought Anthia to Habrocomes, put her on the bed, and closed the doors”.

AFTER A ROMANTIC DIALOGUE, THE PROTAGONISTS
“... relaxed in close embrace and for the first time enjoyed the gifts of Aphrodite, and all night long they competed with each other, ambitious to be revealed as the one more in love”.

THE WEDDING NIGHT

This passage is very important: it contains an “ekphrasis”, which is the introduction in the narrative of a description of a piece of art.

Since Xenophon of Ephesus is describing an erotic education, which kind of love the protagonists are experiencing in their wedding night?

Let us answer your sheet's questions.

Let us answer the questions

a) What is exactly the object described by Xenophon?

A Babilonian canopy.

b) What impression was this object making upon Greek readers?

Remember that for Greeks Eastern objects were seen as luxurious and extravagant. Habrocomes and Anthia are behaving as luxurious people.

c) What are the main sections and the key theme of this object?

There are two sections: a sequence of Cupids and Ares' and Aphrodite's Love. ,
Eros is of course the key topic!

Xenophon is using the canopy to speak about the protagonists' love.

Let us answer the questions

d) What is the connection between Ares and Aphrodite?
Have you ever heard anything about their love story?
If yes, where?

Although Aphrodite was Hephaestus' wife, she betrays him with Ares. Demodocus, the Phaeacian singer, tells us about this story in the *Odyssey*, which makes Hephaestus upset and the other gods laugh.

e) Since Anthia is brought to Habrocomes exactly after the description of Ares and Aphrodite, the protagonists are compared to the gods. How does this parallel affect the description of the protagonists' love?

Throughout the Greek tradition, Ares' and Aphrodite's love was seen as the example of a enjoyable but also pretty physical love.

Let us answer the questions

Read this source:

“Demodocus at the Phaeacian court sings of the amours of Ares and Aphrodite, not in approval of such passion but to deter his hearers from **illicit desires**, or else because he knew that they had been brought up in a luxurious mode of life and therefore offered for their **amusement** what was most in keeping with their character ”
(Ath. 1.14 c-d).

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Xenophon uses this mythical and literary parallel from the *Odyssey* to stress that Anthia and Habrocomes are experiencing a love **full of enjoyment and sexual desire**, like the gods.

It is important to note how the *Odyssey* helps Xenophon to develop his erotic education.

THE DEPARTURE

Is this form of love the highest stage of love?

Xenophon does **not** seem to suggest so, so soon after the wedding night the protagonists are forced to leave Ephesus in obedience to the oracle.

Both Anthia and Habrocomes feel that in this journey a separation might come.

THE OATH

“Again the sailing was favorable, and they had many conversations: “Will be allowed to spend our lives together?”

Then Habrocomes said: “Anthia, dearer to me than my own life, my fondest hope is that together we will be happy and safe, but if fate has some misfortune in store and we are somehow separated, let’s take an oath, dearest, that you will stay chaste for me and submit to no other man, and that I will live with no other woman”.

When she heard this, Anthia shrieked and said: “[...] I swear you by our ancestral goddess [...] and by this sea that we are crossing, [...] that should I be separated from even even for the briefest moment, I will not continue to live or look upon the sun” (1.11).

Which new feature of love emerges in this feature?

FIDELITY, which is proposed as the new step of the protagonists’ love!

THE PIRATES' ATTACK: FIRST ENEMIES

After few days of journey, a ship of pirates attacks Anthia and Habrocomes and capture them. These pirates are Phoenician, an uncivilised people in comparison to the Greek one.

The protagonists are brought to the pirates' master Apsyrtus, whose daughter, Manto, takes care of them. However, this is not good for them...

BARBARIC LOVE vs. FAITHFUL LOVE

“Manto was captivated through daily contact with Habrocomes, was uncontrollably smitten and did not know what to do about it. [...] When she could contain herself no longer, she decided to write a letter to Habrocomes”. (2.4)

BARBARIC LOVE vs. FAITHFUL LOVE

“Manto is in love with you and no longer able to stand it. [...] I beg you not to disdain or mistreat the girl who has taken your side, for if you say yes, I will convince my father Apsyrtus to betroth me to you, we will get rid of your present wife [...]; but if you say no, think what will happen to you when the mistreated girl takes her revenge, and what will happen to those who abetted your own arrogance” (2.5).

BARBARIC LOVE vs. FAITHFUL LOVE

What is interesting here?

The protagonists' faithful love is threatened by a very different kind of love.

How can define it? Uncontrollable, instinctive, barbaric.

However, what is hidden behind Manto's revenge and Habrocomes' "arrogance"? Manto is working for Eros. The god of love has not completed yet his action against Habrocomes: he wants to lead him to discover what means to be real lover. He is testing his fidelity to Anthia.

BARBARIC LOVE vs. FAITHFUL LOVE

And Habrocomes offers Eros a good answer. He says his no to Manto, which leads him to prison and to experience crucifixion and flames. But his fidelity is preserved and strengthened.

“Mistress, do what you will and use my body as that of a slave; if you wish to apply your choice of torture, then use torture. But I could not come to your bed and I would not consent to such a thing if you ordered it” (2.5).

BARBARIC LOVE vs. FAITHFUL LOVE

These attacks to fidelity concern Habrocomes and later on Anthia throughout the entire novel, where many other enemies appear.

As with Manto, the other enemies are:

- Uncivilised people
- Moved by an uncontrollable and instinctive love.

As with Manto, the protagonists are able to resist and discover more what fidelity is.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FAITHFUL LOVE

This leads them to the final night, where their reunion happens.

We need to read carefully this passage: since this is the only other night of the novel, Xenophon is certainly comparing this event to the first one in Ephesus.

Let us read and answer your sheet's question.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FAITHFUL LOVE

After the almost casual reunion, the protagonists share their misadventures in a very important speech:

“Husband and master” Anthia said “I have found you again after wandering over many land and sea, after escaping threats from bandits, plots from pirates, insults from pimps [...]. But [...] no one has persuaded me to misbehave. [...] No, I am still chaste, since I used every stratagem of virtue.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FAITHFUL LOVE

“But what about you, Habrocomes? Have you remained true or did some other beauty surpass me? Has no one made you forget your vows, and me?”

“No, I swear to you” Habrocomes replied “by this day of ours, so longed for and hard won, that I found no girl attractive nor any other woman pleasing to my eyes. No, you have recovered Habrocomes just as pure as when you left him in Tyre”.

Let us answer the questions

a) What is the main topic of this dialogue?

Fidelity. But not just the desire or promise for fidelity as in the initial oath, but the successful preservation of it.

b) Do you remember any other Greek characters who experienced a similar reunion?

Penelope and Odysseus at the end of the *Odyssey*. Again this epic model is echoed by Xenophon. This is an example of **intertextuality**, when a text exploits elements of another text.

c) What is the meaning of this literary echo, which completes the parallel and contrast between the two nights of the novel?

As Penelope and Odysseus' reunion happens at the end of the *Odyssey* and highlights their maturity, Anthia and Habrocomes are here presented as mature lovers, as lovers who know from experience what fidelity is.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FAITHFUL LOVE

Reassured by this dialogue, Anthia and Habrocomes can travel back to Ephesus, where “they went on to spend lives together that they celebrated like a festival” (5.15).

The return to Ephesus is very important.

The protagonists’ life and love begin and end in Ephesus.

FAITHFUL LOVE, THE PRESERVATION OF GREEK WORLD IN THE IMPERIAL ERA

This is very interesting:

the novels are written in the Imperial Era, when the society was changing a lot and the Greek cities were experiencing a new multicultural dimension, if not a crisis.

>> Xenophon is reassuring his readers: in this changeable context a peaceful and Greek world can still exist. How?

Through MARRIAGE and through LOVE!

As Longus was saying, the novel will heal people and free them from all their worries.

THIS IS THE IMPORTANCE OF
THE GREEK NOVEL.

BUT WHY IS CONIUGAL FIDELITY SO
EMPHASISED IN THESE NOVELS?

WHAT LIES AT THE ORIGIN OF THIS EMPHASIS?

In our reading of the novel, we discovered how
Xenophon is comparing his protagonists to PENELOPE
AND ODYSSEUS, who had their reunion after the
latter's many years of separation and troubles.

Throughout the entire ancient literature, but especially in the Imperial Era, the love of Penelope and Odysseus was considered ideal symbol of conjugal fidelity.

In addition, at Ephesus, Xenophon of Ephesus' possible homeland, in the temple of Artemis Penelope was worshipped with a statue.

But what are the key elements of the *Odyssey*?

- ADVENTURE

- LOVE

Would you not agree that these are also the ingredients of the *Ephesiaca*?

Since the *Odyssey* constitutes the Bible of the Greeks and was constantly read by them throughout their entire existence, Xenophon is placing his new story of fidelity (a new novel) under the memory of an old story of fidelity.

This choice is not casual but deliberate: because
of the discovered interconnections,
I would conclude that
Xenophon was personally interested in promoting
fidelity as the main value of his work.

1900 years ago, already, people were
promoting this value – fidelity in love – that
every one of us desires.

For this reason, I would conclude it is worth
studying the novel and **reading antiquity**.