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Discourses and narrative in the ancient novel: theater and amphitheater as spaces for debate

Discursos e narrativa no romance antigo:
teatro e anfiteatro como espaços de debate

Abstract:

In the texts of the ancient novel, scenes set in the theater and, to some extent, in the amphitheater are countless and recurring. There are judgments, sentences, tortures, but especially reports and narratives. At various points in the plot, the characters, especially the protagonists, tell their misfortunes, lamentations, adventures and loving adventures to an audience that simultaneously watches and judges the actions and speeches narrated. The relation between public and accounts, in addition to the rhetorical effects engendered, seems to indicate a search for correspondence with the expected reception of the works. This paper aims to analyze scenes of report and judgment of some novels, aiming to clarify and verify which functions and senses acquire the spectacularization of the actions of the characters, as well as the presence and the constitution of the dramatic in these texts.

Keywords:

Ancient novel; ancient theater; rhetorical discourses.

Resumo:

Nos exemplares do romance antigo são abundantes e recorrentes as cenas ambientadas no teatro e, em certa medida, no anfiteatro. Aí acontecem julgamentos, sentenças, torturas, mas especialmente relatos e narrativas. Em vários momentos do enredo, os personagens, mormente os protagonistas, contam suas desventuras, lamentações, peripécias e aventuras amorosas para um público que, ao mesmo tempo, assiste e julga as ações e discursos narrados. A relação encetada entre público e relatos, além dos efeitos retóricos engendrados, parece indicar uma busca de correspondência com a recepção esperável das obras. Este trabalho se propõe analisar cenas de relato e julgamento de alguns romances, visando dirimir e verificar que funções e sentidos adquirem a espetacularização das ações dos personagens, bem como a presença e a constituição da dramaticidade nesses textos.

Palavras-chave:

Romance antigo; teatro na Antiguidade; discursos retóricos.

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In the studies of the ancient novel, the influence of Rhetoric in general and the Second Sophistry in particular on the novelistic genre is widely recognized (See Race, 2007: 526-561; Brandão, 2005). The numerous discourses of the characters corroborate this ubiquitous use of instrumental, normative and rhetorical exercises. Therefore, the situations of judgment and deliberation are refunctionalised by the novelistic dynamics, often set in the theater space, bringing to the public space questions related to the adventures of the protagonists, their erotic and amorous adventures. In this dramatic performance, the presence of the audience does not seem merely ancillary: members of the crowd express their feelings, sometimes express their opinions, and in some situations there is a clear separation between a female and a male audience. Moreover, these public assemblies are positioned at moments of narrative inflection and therefore serve as markers of narrative structuring.

The spectacularization of character actions and audience reactions is part of a narrative strategy to highlight and draw attention to important moments in the plot. This reference to dramatic aspects and theatricality broadly encompasses four dimensions: 1) references to dramatic texts by allusions, quotations, and intertextual procedures more generally; 2) relationships between ritual and drama; 3) reference to actual aspects of the theater (or amphitheater) of the Roman Hellenistic era; 4) discursive strategies, through elements, practices and spaces of the theatrical universe, to allude the processes of evaluation, reception and diffusion of the work. Each of these dimensions receives a greater or lesser investment in the superstitious texts of antiquity's novels and hybrid narratives. Let us comment on some of these works from these categories.

I will cite examples of three paradigmatic works of the novelistic narrative: 1) *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, work of Chariton de Aphrodisias, is one of the five Greek novels considered canonical and considered by most experts as chronologically the first novel written, at first, in the first half of the century. I A.D.; 2) the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, written in the second half of the 2nd century d. C., is a representative of the Latin novel, whose plot probably is based on a Greek narrative, to which Lucian de Samosate would also have used for the making of his work *Lucius or the donkey*, also in the century. II d. ; 3) *Life of Aesop* or *Romance of Aesop*, a hybrid work in which characteristics of both the novel and the ancient biography are mixed².

² For a more in-depth appreciation of Greek canonical novels, see Brandão, 2005; for the different aspects and readings of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, see Nagore, 2005. For discussion of gender, structural, narrative and literary elements of *Romance of Aesop*, see Ipiranga Júnior, 2015 and 2018.

In *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, soon after the initial scene of falling in love with the protagonists, who fall literally sick in view of the loving passion, *pathos erotikón*, that affects both, the people gathers in assembly; I quote the passage:

A regular assembly took place at this time. When the people had taken their seats, their first and only cry was: “Noble Hermocrates, great general, save Chaereas! That will be your finest monument! The city pleads for the marriage, today, of a pair worthy of each other!” Who could describe that assembly? It was dominated by Eros. Hermocrates loved his country and could not refused what it asked. When he gave his consent, the whole meeting rushed from the theater; the young men went off to find Chaereas, the council and the archons escorted Hermocrates, and the Syracusans’ wives too went to his house, to attend the bride. The sound of the marriage hymn pervaded the city, the streets were filled with garlands and torches, porches were wet with wine and perfume. The Syracusans celebrated the day even more joyously than the day of their victory. (*Chaereas and Callirhoe*, I, 5) (Translation by B. P. Reardon)

In the Roman-Hellenistic period, theater was used as a space for assemblies in Hellenized cities. Hermocrates, Callirhoe's father, the plot's heroine, is the general responsible for Syracuse's famous victory against the Athenians in the failed Athenian invasion of 415-413 BC. Thus, the novel is historically set after this event. Although with some historical ballast, the plot focuses on the loving adventures of Callirhoe on the one hand, and of Chaereas, on the other. The narrator is nonetheless patenting and showing discursive procedures typical of the genre of political history, starting with the proem that seeks an explicit intertextual relationship with the beginning of 'Thucydides' work: “Chariton de Aphrodisias, secretary of Athenagoras, the retor, a loving passion in Syracuse, I will narrate”.³ Compare: “Thucydides of Athens wrote the war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians (...)”.⁴ One way or another, these orchestrated speeches in the assembly evoke both the speeches engendered by Thucydides in his work, and rhetorical exercises, *progymnasmata*, in which speeches of historical characters were composed seeking a likelihood in the composition of his ethos, as in the characterization of the character of Evagoras by Isocrates. According to Connors, this theater-centered setting would be a strategy of the author to specify the democratic character of Greek practices as opposed to the Persians, who would be subliminally identified as the Romans (Connors, 2008: 165).

One way or another, this court scene is linked to both the preceding scene, the meeting of the two young men who fall in love at first sight, and the next at the

³ See in the edition of Loeb, Chariton. *Callirhoe*. Χαρίτων Ἀφροδισιεύς, Ἀθηναγόρου τοῦ ῥήτορος ὑπογραφεύς, πάθος ἐρωτικὸν ἐν Συρακούσαις γενόμενον διηγήσομαι.

⁴ See Thucydides: *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1.1.1) Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ξυνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων.

wedding. That is, it participates in a ritualistic sequence of actions and discourses in the narrative. As I have argued in other works, the ritual is refigured in the novel so that it fits within the narrative dynamics, that is, the ceremony in honor of Aphrodite is not just an event that would serve as an opportunity for the encounter, but becomes an element of a narrative ritual in which the spectacularization of the love encounter is a kind of ritualistic apex, whose subsequent stages are well demarcated in the narrative.

Richard Schechner (2012: 49-198) is a theater theorist who elaborated a conception of performance in broader terms, the scope of which would encompass: a) rites and ceremonies; b) shamanism; c) entertainment; d) games; e) process of artistic making; f) generic ritualization. For our view, it is important to stress the interrelationships he makes between performance and ritual. Initially, the act of performance would be based on the ritualization of sounds and gestures, representing doubly exercised, coded and transmissible behaviors. In this sense, performance, according to him, would be the ritualized behavior conditioned and permeated by the game. In turn, the ritual would be a kind of action-coded memory; The use of ritualization would concern the regulation of interactions that are perceived as dangerous, turbulent, or ambivalent. One of the main functions of the ritual would be to mark passages, transport from one phase to another, demarcate the passage from one state of life to another. Sophie Couraud-Lalanne deals specifically with this relationship between theatricality and ritual in Greek love-themed novels: the theatricality employed by novelists would serve as a way of “providing a ritualized picture of the events responsible for a particular role in the *παίδεια*/paideia of heroes” (Couraud-Lalanne, 1998: 7), ie, events concerning trials, apparent deaths, extreme suffering, torture, reduction in servitude, which evoke a ritualistic process of initiation in any of its phases, receive a narrative investment from a theatrical set design of the actions and speeches of the characters.

On the other hand, in the dramatic and theatrical sphere, ritualization is of another order. In the actual ritual there would be three phases: the preliminary, the liminal or margin, the post-liminal. The central phase would be the threshold, in which transitions and transformations occur in specially demarcated spaces; At this stage, the purpose would be twofold: to strip those involved of their identity and place in the world, to reduce them to a state of vulnerability, leaving them fit for change and transformation. According to Scherchner (2012: 63-74, 88), ritual performance seeks to expand this state of liminality and situate performers in a “being among,” that is, performance requalifies the experience of ritual transformation on aesthetic grounds, though not devoid of a deep ethical and existential sense. Similarly, in the texts in question the ritual performance, although it may refer to actual rituals, is due to its framing in the narrative and its role in the intrigue. From this I adopt the following conception of narrative ritual for the analysis of the works: refiguration of a ritualistic activity, religious in nature or popular revelry, in an aesthetic and cultural form through its appropriation by

performance or literary discourse, which is linked by certain steps that allow a narrative framing.

As stated earlier, in these novels there are several recurring narrative sequences that reveal their ritualistic character. One of the most prominent concerns marriage, where it is possible to discern the following steps: a) some sign of divinity in the case, the references are to Eros and Aphrodite since the beginning of the novel *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, for example; b) the action of fortune and / or providence; c) meeting of the protagonists in a party with passion at first sight; d) effects of *pathos erotikón*; e) enunciation of a myth or some mythical association; f) pronouncement of or before the community or judgment before the assembly of citizens; g) wedding ceremony or at least the reunion of lovers.

According to Catherine Connors (2008: 163-167), although set in a supposedly pre-Roman world, the ancient novel, like *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, was nonetheless explicit in various aspects of the imperial socio-political regime: the villain Teron is executed by crucifixion, the which denotes a Roman rather than Greek practice; Dionysius, with whom Callirhoe had contracted his second marriage, is a wealthy landowner, assisted by free men, a situation closer to the Roman context; imperial functions would function as a metaphor for the Roman empire⁵, while descriptions of judgments in the palace of the Persian king would evoke Roman practices. Moreover, the representation of Eros would give a glimpse of a properly political language, in which the god would behave like an absolute lord, thus being associated with the figure of the emperor. In any case, an audience, subdivided into feminine and masculine, expresses their ideas and emotions also in the Persian context, which we can notice in the following passages:

For the thirty days ordained, men and women alike in Persia talked of anything but this trial; if the truth be told, Babylon was nothing but a law court. (...) Plangon replied: "Take courage, madam — you be glad! (...) Go off to the King's courtroom as if it were Aphrodite's temple (...). (...) Chaereas himself stepped forward. When she saw him, Callirhoe cried out, "Chaereas! Are you alive?" (...) Who could fitly describe that scene in court? What dramatist (*poietés*) ever staged (*skené*) such an astonishing story (*mûthos*)? It was like being at a play packed with passionate scenes (*théatron*), with emotions tumbling over each other — weeping and rejoicing, astonishment and pity, disbelief and prayers. (*Chaereas and Callirhoe*, V, 4-8)

⁵ The readers' identification of Persian characters with the Romans is an interpretation of the scholar based on some evidence in the narrative. In spite of this, it is important to emphasize how the space of the theater is revived in the novels in view of the readers' perception.

This reappearance of Chaereas, as dead by Calirrhoe and Dionysius, is one of the apexes of narrative tension, and the description of the scene as a spectacle also serves to underline and intensify the way the story would have been learned by the public and how it could be felt by readers. Metatextual and self-referential references are not lacking in the passages cited: here appear terms such as *skené*, *théatron*, *poietés*, *mûthos*, from which the narrator compares the composition of the narrative with the montage of a play. According to Stefan Tilg (2010, p. 139, 168-171), with this comparison with a drama composer, Chariton would evidence a competition between him, as a prose writer, and a theater author, from which his *diégesis*, prose narrative would surpass *mûthos* as the story and plot of a dramatic play. Thus, the use of reporting the emotions and reactions of the crowd, audience in the theater, or viewed as an audience in a theatrical performance would be a kind of reading guide for their own reception, as a way of drawing attention to the innovative character of the work. I believe this can be considered in the case of Chariton; What is most important, however, is that the orchestrated spectacularization in the ancient novel proved to be a strategy for thinking about reception and ways to guide expected reading and interpretation.

In more satirical novels, such as those related to the plot of transformation into donkey, theatricalization recaptures the universe of Roman spectacles, especially those with animals. This can be exemplified by the great dramatic scene from Book X of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. At this point in the plot, the Donkey was discovered by its owner as it devoured plates of food and was induced to do and perform other skills beyond the animal's nature, such as having sex with a woman. Accordingly, in order to introduce him to the general public in his sexual performance, he enlists a doomed criminal, which generates great anguish and anxiety in Lucio's character, still under the donkey's skin. Thus, before his alleged performance, he describes the properly dramatic episodes staged in the theater, such as the judgment of Paris, in the form of a kind of pantomime. Let's look at the excerpt:

Now the day of the games had arrived, and I was led to the theatre in ceremonial procession, escorted by crowds of people. While the show was being formally inaugurated by a troupe of professional dancers, I was left for a while outside the gate, where I had the pleasure of cropping the lush grass which was growing in the entrance. At the same time, as the gates were left open, I was able to feast my eyes on the very pretty sight inside. First I saw boys and girls in the very flower of their youth, handsome and beautifully dressed, expressive in their movements, who were grouping themselves to perform a pyrrhic dance in Greek style. (*Metamorphoses*, X, 29, 3-4; translation by E. J. Kenny)

According to Perrino (2017: 94), there is in the novels a use of dramatic strategies arising not only from tragedy and comedy, but also from pantomime and

various kinds of *mimus*⁶. He lists the various similarities in theme and plot between the mime *Moicheutria* and the novels *Ephesiaka* by Xenophon of Ephesus and *Aithiopika* by Heliodorus: a) a protagonist while stepmother in love with the stepson (in the case of mime, the main character does not have the role of stepmother, but of adulteress in love with the slave, named Aesop, who is in love with Apollonia, his fellow servant); b) the presence of a husband; c) the erotic proposal made explicit to the beloved; d) the fact that the character, the target of her wish, is already in love with another; e) a revenge as punishment for non-return of affection; f) the salvation through divine intervention. Book X of *Metamorphoses* also tells a story with similar plot elements, not to speak of a direct influence of mime, but simply of similar aspects of a common thematic repertoire⁷: for example, the rescue takes place there by the intervention of a human character, the wise doctor. Nevertheless, the story is named by the narrator as tragedy: “*And with that, dear reader, you know that it’s a tragedy, no mere tale, that you’re reading: from the sock we mount the buskin.*” (X, 2, 4)⁸. The reference here would be to the tragedies linked to the myth of Phaedra, though in a more burlesque context that does not shy away from a happy ending, for the boy is saved at the last moment and the stepmother is condemned to perpetual exile. The latin term *fabula* (in the meaning of narration or narrative) used here at the same time draws attention to the prosaic character of the narrative and to the statute of the work of Apuleius, intended for reading rather than staging. In addition to evoking tragic dramas, the emphasis on tragic quality undoubtedly seems to co-opt the reader into a place in this imaginary assistance, to imagine himself as a spectator and, in the opposite corresponding sense, to bring the sphere of theater as a strategy to drive reception from a framework of expected prospects.

Thus in the ancient novel, in its Greek and Latin variants, there is a whole theatrical repertoire used, through simple allusions, direct quotations, intertextual games, references to the coeval spectacles of the Roman context, relationships between drama and ritual, metalliterary and metateatrical indications. narrative forms and procedures to implicate the reader as an imaginary participant as a public of a theatrical representation. There are intrigues typical of the New Comedy, as well as several of the standardized comic characters, as happens in Chaereas and Callirhoe; Dramatic patterns and techniques from *mimus* are widely used, such as *Metamorphoses*, Petronius Satyricon, and Leucipe and Clitophon of Achilles. As seen, the pantomime, by its use and refunctionalization of myths, is referenced in

⁶ Under the sphere of *mimus* there is an overwhelming range of dramatic performances in Antiquity, from the performance of a soloist to shows with small groups of actors. Unlike pantomime, the actor or actress of the *mimus* could, at the same time, dance, sing and play a role. The *mimus* were very successful in the Roman-Hellenistic period, but they also attracted many detractors, in view of the supposedly indecent and overly realistic character of their presentations. For more information, cf. Hunter, 2008: 221-242.

⁷ See Andreassi, 1997: 1-21. Andreassi refutes a direct dependence between the mime *Moicheutria* and this early excerpt from Book X of *Metamorphoses*, but nonetheless points to the common elements from a diffuse and common inheritance of such topics.

⁸ *Iam ergo, lector optime, scito te tragoediam, non fabulam legere et a socco ad coturnum ascendere.*

some works, as a subsidy to set the narrative in the perspective of staging. One way or another, these four dimensions of theatricality seem moreover as ways of accentuating certain injunctions of an ideological agenda, either of maintenance or of protest against the power structures and the socio-political conjuncture of the time. Let us look at this in a peculiar narrative, still within the scope of the novel but with a biographical background, the *Life of Aesop* or *Novel of Aesop*:

"Men of Samos, it is unreasonable for a slave to explain an omen to a free people. Hence grant me the so-called freedom of speech, so that, if successful, as a free man he will receive the proper honors, and if fail, not as a slave, but as a free man, be punished. If, therefore, you grant me the freedom of speech characteristic of the free condition, I will surely make my speech." The Samians said to Xanthus, "We ask you, Xanthus, to free Aesop!" And the chairman of the council said to Xanthus: "Grant freedom to Aesop." And Xanthus: "I will not free a slave who has not been in my service for a long time." At Xanthus's reply, the chairman of the council said, "Receive his price and give it to him. I will make him free in the name of the city." Reflecting that he had bought it for seventy-five denarii, not to appear to the mass that freed Aesop out of greed, Xanthus stood in the center and said, "When requested by the people of Samos, Xanthus gives Aesop freedom." This having happened thus, Aesop went to the center and said, "Men of Samos, come to your aid and deliberate about your freedom. The omen indicates siege and enslavement. First, you will face a war. I would like you to know this: the eagle reigns over those who have wings, and he can do more than the others on his own. "In a brush, he seized the (seal) ring of the judiciary from the law and threw it into the lap of a servant slave. He dragged the credibility of free men into the yoke of the lack of credibility in slavery. The interpretation of the omen is thus: surely one of the kings will want to subdue his freedom, annul the laws and affix the seal of your own power." (*Life of Aesop*, 89-91)⁹

Deborah Kamen (2005: 137-147) presents, in her study on manumission, innumerable evidence from inscriptions about the role of the polis in the process of

⁹ See the translation of recension W by Anthony Alcock: "Worthy citizens, since fortune, which loves beauty, has arranged a beauty contest between master and slave, the slave, even if he appears better than the master, will be flogged. If you will please allow me to speak freely for my freedom, I will speak without any trepidation on all matters required." The crowd, as one, cried out; "Free Aesop. Listen to the Samians. Give the city its freedom." Xanthus said: "I will not free a slave who for some little time has been living with me," The president of the assembly said to him: "If you listen to the people, I will make him a freedman of Hera, and he will have the same status as you." The friends advising Xanthus said to him: "Set him free. If he becomes a freedman of Hera, he will have the rights of freedom and will have same status as you." Under pressure Xanthus gave Aesop his freedom. The herald announced: "Xanthus son of Dexicrates, philosopher, liberates Aesop to the Samians." And Aesop's saying was fulfilled: "You will have to do this to me unwillingly." In the midst of this Aesop went into the middle of the theatre and asked for silence: "Philosophers, since the eagle is the lord of birds, like a king among men, his seizure of the ruler's ring and casting of it into the lap of a slave means that one of the current rulers is planning to rob you of your freedom and to render the laws of the gods null and void." (*Life of Aesop*. Translation of the text edited by Anton Westermann. Available at: <https://independent.academia.edu/anthonyalcock>. Access on Oct 30 2019).

formal slave liberation. The polis acts as consenting manumission, as an institution that consecrates an earlier decision, as a protector or as a witness in the process. The main function would be to publicize the new liberated status to the community members for control and information purposes. There were categories of gods that provided their protection in the manumission: local gods like Zeus in Dodona or Apollo in Delphi; helper gods such as Asclepius, Apollo and Serapis, the latter sometimes associated with Isis; foreign gods as the Dea Syria. In the second category of helpers, such gods will manifest themselves as healing healers and therefore saviors for those who find themselves in a situation of great difficulty, disease, or threat. Like Asclepius, Isis is also referred to in the cure of everyday illness as well as through incubation. As a saving goddess, it would have the virtue of bringing people from death to life and, consequently, to remove the slave from his condition of servitude, categorized at the time as a death in life.

In the first half of the work, Aesop remains a slave: first in the field, then belonging to a slave trader, and finally servant of the philosopher Xanthus. At first, as seen, Aesop cannot speak. The cause not of its muteness is unclear, but there is an allusion that it may have been caused by some divine punishment. Likewise, his slave state is declared as of the order of fortune by τύχη (*tykhe*), and not born naturally slave. There is in the ancient Greek mentality a desired relation between freedom and openness of speech, the impossibility of speaking frankly, *parresía*, indicates a condition of the slave. In this way a link is created between the scene in which speech (φωνή/*phoné*) and the gift of composing discourses (*lógoi*) and fables are bestowed upon Aesop (in recension G by Isis and the Muses; in recension W by the figure of Τύχη/*Tykhe* or *Philoxenia*) and this scene in which freedom is conferred upon it. As the scene makes clear, only in his free time could he express himself frankly without fear of reprisal from the master and others. According to Kamen's view (2005: 160-167), the process of manumission is referred to in both cases: in the first, as a helping and healing goddess, Isis cures Aesop of muteness; in the second case, the city confers freedom in a proper process of manumission, in which the publicizing of all the citizens of a polis was a necessary element of the protocol.

Making use of the ambiance feature in the theater, the author draws attention to this primordial narrative scene, which reveals itself as an axis and a narrative marking and augurs a new phase for the protagonist's life, which will become an itinerant sophist. and a political adviser to sovereigns. Mention is made of the specific procedures and protocol of a slave's manumission in the context of the Roman empire, and is a way of leading readers to position themselves and take the public's place in the narrative.

One way or another, in all these novel narratives there is the use of the four aspects of theatricality according to various functions. In addition to the rhetorical character underlying the various discourses of the characters, the discursively staged spectacularization, frequent recurrence of quotations, allusions, and intertextual

games with the dramatic works, the evocation of Roman coeval spectacles constitute the various threads of the narrative fabric of novelistic forms in antiquity. In such a way that, in addition to terms such as *plasmata* (modeling, fictions), *diegémata* (narrated stories) and *diégesis* (narrative), the term *dramatikón* is used as a reference to the genre of the ancient novel which, in addition to evoking the characteristic intrigues of the dramas, especially from the Old Comedy, reveals itself as a way of referencing the work in view of the readers' reception, from their experience, their imaginary, their dreams and nightmares with judgments, courts and speeches set in the theater .

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