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The Narrative Turn against Metaphor

Metonymy, Identification, and Roger Boyle's *Parthenissa*

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Roger Boyle's *Parthenissa*, published serially throughout the 1650s, is one of a group of mid-seventeenth-century British prose romances that share a penchant for political allegory. In keeping with generic predecessors such as Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, Mary Wroth's *Urania*, and especially John Barclay's *Argenis*, these long and narratively complex romances use their fictions of aristocratic lovers and soldiers to debate contemporary problems in ethics and political theory and to represent national and international political events. Most mid-century romance became obscure within a few years of the Restoration, but *Parthenissa* was read well into the eighteenth century, when by conventional literary history its outmoded genre would seem to have been replaced by the more sophisticated and entertaining form of the novel. Its extended popularity was probably due in part to the notoriety of its author: Roger Boyle, brother of the now more famous Robert and a moderate Royalist, was expected to go into exile after the execution of Charles I, but instead defected suddenly to Oliver Cromwell's employ in 1650 and became a member of Richard Cromwell's inner circle, only to convince Charles II at the Restoration that he had been a loyal servant of the crown all along. Doubtless part of the attraction of *Parthenissa*'s generically typical roman à clef form was the access it seemed to promise to the inside story of Boyle's political career.¹ But *Parthenissa* is also intensely self-conscious about literary form and interpretation, and at several moments it begins to construct a model for prose narrative structure that in retrospect turns out to have been oddly modern. Against type, as it were, in these moments Boyle blocks allegorical reading, substituting metonymic contiguity for metaphoric correspondence as the paradigm both for his own narrative structure and for the kind of interpretation it requires. In this essay I will read *Parthenissa*'s pronounced rejection of metaphor as itself a metaphor,

speculating on its function for Boyle as historical fantasy and critique. At the same time, though, I will also approach *Parthenissa's* turn away from conventional figural representation on its own terms, as a gesture toward a kind of anti-interpretive poetics that has more in common, perhaps, with the narrative forms that followed it than with those of its own genre.



Romance in England after Sidney and Spenser was already established as a genre both allegorical and highly self-reflective, but Barclay's phenomenally popular 1621 *Argenis* (published in Paris in Latin, but written after Barclay had spent a decade in James I's court) lays out its allegorical mission with a clarity no imitator could miss. In these troubled political times, declares the court poet who is Barclay's fictional counterpart, he will embark on a "new kind of writing" and produce a "Fable like a Historie," in which readers both famous and ordinary will see themselves "as in a Looking-glasse," come to new understanding of the events of their time, and be moved to confirm or reform their behavior accordingly.² Like its exact contemporary *Urania*, by Mary Wroth, *Argenis* offers not only one-to-one representations of its handful of prominent readers but a collection of variously signifying episodes for its lay audience, which is supposed to realize Barclay's didactic aims by tracing both the internal correspondences of one episode to another and also their varied external correspondences to the world outside the narrative. In the 1640s and '50s romances such as Percy Herbert's *The Princess Cloria* and the anonymous *Theophania* followed this model closely, offering a variety of lightly fictionalized stories of erotic and military allegiance among their aristocratic protagonists in an effort to represent and thus rationalize the chaos of contemporary political events. *Parthenissa* adds another layer to the pattern, resorting to a collage of episodes and figures from ancient history as the starting point for its narrative. Embroidering liberally on information in Livy, Tacitus, Polybius, and Plutarch, Boyle takes as his ostensible subject the early life of the Parthian King Artabanes (historically, probably Artabanes II, whose reign is sketched only rudimentarily in Tacitus and Plutarch) and his friends and rivals in the Parthian court. Most of the romance's first and second books Artabanes narrates in retrospect to a hermit on a deserted island, while he is still a young man with few political responsibilities and is lingering in despair over the apparent loss of his beloved Parthenissa to a rival. Over the course of this set of his adventures, Artabanes tells the hermit, he has encountered Hannibal, Pompey, Marcus Crassus, and a whole host of lesser figures from ancient history, whose stories Boyle

weaves together by supplementing them with erotic rivalries and military exploits, all without regard to discrepancies in historical time.³

Boyle's historical method makes it difficult to read *Parthenissa* as straight political roman à clef in the style of *Argenis* and *The Princess Cloria*. Indeed, in the dedication of the first book to Lady Northumberland, via a conventional disclaimer about his inability to represent her true glories, Boyle disavows any allegorical referentiality for his characters and hints that readers should approach them instead as companions.⁴ But Boyle's most extraordinary and sustained demonstration of his anti-roman à clef method comes shortly afterward in Book 1, during Artabanes's account of his life to the hermit. About sixty pages into his story, Artabanes and his servant, sharing narrative duties, begin reciting, in the first person, Plutarch's account of Spartacus, from his *Life of Marcus Crassus*, and suddenly the reader, along with the shocked and thrilled hermit, is brought up short by the realization that Artabanes and Spartacus are the same man. "O gods," cries the hermit, "is it then Artabanes . . . who so fill'd the world with his generous Actions, that not to have heard of him is as great wonder as any he perform'd?" "This," replies Artabanes's servant, with a gesture toward his master that functions doubly within Boyle's narrative frame and his own embedded one, "is that same Spartacus" (89). Fleeing Parthia because of Parthenissa's apparent infidelity, Artabanes had been captured at sea by Pompey and sold to the Roman who trained Spartacus and other prisoners of war as gladiators, and from there he was launched on the brief career that to the hermit is already legendary. At the hermit's urging Artabanes and his servant continue the story, taking a detour into the history of the Second Punic War to bring Spartacus into contact with Hannibal and one of his Capuan opponents, a young man named Perolla mentioned only briefly in Livy for his political opposition to his own father.⁵ Artabanes embeds within his narrative the very long story of Perolla's star-crossed love affair, recounted at one remove in the first person by Perolla's lover and eventually adjudicated by Spartacus himself, and then he resorts again to Plutarch to narrate his own (that is, Spartacus's) last campaign against Marcus Crassus. At the point of Spartacus's ostensible death, obscure in the classical sources, Boyle has him resume the name of Artabanes and set sail for Parthia to rejoin his previous narrative trajectory.

One of the few historical surveys of seventeenth-century literature to take any account of *Parthenissa*, obedient to the allegorical hermeneutic norms that govern most seventeenth-century romance, concludes that Artabanes is a "Spartacus-figure" (and both characters, as rebels against established authority, probably also figures for Cromwell).⁶ A figure for

Spartacus, however, is exactly what Artabanus is not. On the contrary, in this scene Boyle brings together two characters from distinct and non-intersecting historical narratives and then, against all convention, asks the reader to understand them not as parallel but as identical. It is almost as if Boyle sets out to make entirely literal the representational project Barclay provides for modern romance: as story-teller, Artabanus peers into the "Looking-glasse" of Plutarch's account and finds not an alternative version of his story but his very own self. *Argenis* and its generic heirs offer their audience a mimesis, a re-presentation; *Parthenissa* offers, in contrast, a model of absolute identification—identification, that is, not as the mostly metaphoric process we often mean by the word, according to which a reader or character feels such affinity with another's position that she sees the world as if through the other's eyes, but rather a complete collapse of one character and his narrative into the identity and the narrative of another. And the identification occurs between characters who seem to share almost nothing. Not only is there no indication, before his capture by Pompey, that Artabanus has any militaristic ambitions or Spartacan canniness, but after his stint as Spartacus he reverts entirely to his identity as despairing lover, as if his own legendary feats had nothing to do with him. Within a genre that so frequently, carefully, and explicitly exploits the techniques of roman à clef, it is difficult to read this model of identification as anything but a deliberate departure, Boyle's notification that he means to block the kind of analogical correspondence romance has taught us to expect.

If the peculiar manner in which Boyle incorporates Spartacus into Artabanus's narrative will not allow us to read one character as metaphor for the other, *Parthenissa*'s Spartacus story is also antifigurative in another sense. In his careful revision of Aristotle's relation between plot and character, Julius Caesar Scaliger argues in his own 1561 *Poetics* that while the good poet cannot be said to teach "character" per se, since in a typical plot "many things are done contrary to character," the poet does nonetheless teach "disposition," as nothing can be done in a plot unless a character is disposed to do it. "Action, therefore," Scaliger concludes, "is a mode of teaching," and disposition, that which within the plot spurs a character to action, is "that which [readers] are taught."⁷ While it would be going too far to claim that Scaliger reverses Aristotle's primacy of plot over character, it is clear that disposition for Scaliger—a kind of fore-conceit for action, what he also calls, quasi-Platonically, a "form" or conception—is the object the poet means to convey (7.1.3), and that this fore-conceit is lodged as firmly in the poet's literary characters as it is in his or her mind. Erich Auerbach's well-known

summation of Christian figurative practice defines the work of the figure as the establishment of a temporal relation between one event or person and a second, the goal of which is to encompass or fulfill the first, in both a spiritual and a concrete, even "carnal" sense.⁸ And Galenic humoral theory, a dominant model for understanding human behavior in the early modern period, held that people were disposed by their constitutions toward certain actions.⁹ If we combine these theories, all part of the bedrock of early modern conceptions both of poetics and of psychology, it becomes possible to understand a character's disposition as itself a figure, an outline that a well-constructed plot then fulfills through its action. Effective narrative needs to surprise its audience through anagnorisis, but it also needs to confirm the audience's expectation, in effect convincing the audience to be surprised at what, in some sense, it has known all along. In the Aristotelian-Scaligerian tradition inherited by early modern romance, character as figure is one of the essential tools in this task, a device by which poets may adumbrate and thereby justify their design.

Early modern English narratives play self-consciously and frequently with this idea. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, for instance, is the playwright's exuberant retort to Scaligerian poetics, the warrior who outrageously defies any disposition that could possibly inhere in his shepherd-identity as he improvises himself into being, right in front of the play's audience. Boyle challenges convention via a different path, by introducing into his narrative a character who brings with him a long tradition of being dispositionless. Eventually western culture will adopt Spartacus as a historical figure—in retrospect he becomes an anticipatory paradigm for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European movements against African slavery and imperialist domination, and even later (via Stanley Kubrick's film) for the cause of gay liberation in the United States¹⁰—but in the early modern period he is still a cipher. In Plutarch and Appian, the fullest classical sources, his story appears riddled with gaps and inconsistencies. He is a Thracian, known to the Romans and their sympathetic historians as mercenaries and cowards, and the success of his escape from the sure death of the gladiators' pit and then of his three-year campaign against some of the best generals Rome has to offer is seemingly without precedent, not only for a Thracian slave but for anyone. (As Boyle comments in his preface to the second part of *Parthenissa*, "Past ages cannot Parallell" him, "neither doe I beleive the Future will."¹¹) In most classical accounts his motivations remain shadowy—perhaps he meant to challenge the Romans, but perhaps instead he was simply trying, Odysseus-like, to usher himself and his fellow-slaves back home. Appian asserts that

after his final defeat by Marcus Crassus his body was never found, one last mystery in his mysterious life.¹²

By sidestepping the ancient prejudice against Thracians and offering a substitute for the frustratingly shadowy account of Spartacus's death in the classical sources, Boyle's revision does ostensibly answer some of the problems in the historical record. It seems unlikely, however, that Boyle expected his audience to understand these changes as making any claim to facticity or adding much ballast to the conventional story. On the contrary, *Parthenissa* frustrates closure by emphasizing Spartacus's lack of disposition. Mid-century romance, as I have argued elsewhere, tends to translate characterological disposition into self-interest, understood in early modern thought as the impulse toward those actions that it is most fundamentally in a creature's nature to perform.¹³ *Parthenissa* is less prepared than any other romance of the period to offer an ethical justification for self-interest and more concerned to disengage from the necessity felt to inhere in interest: where *Cloria* or George MacKenzie's *Aretina* condones self-interest as a transparently rational political motive, *Parthenissa* repudiates it as inimical to true friendship. In this light Boyle's story of Spartacus might be read as *Parthenissa*'s epitome. Spartacus becomes a rebel by accident, because he is at the wrong place at the wrong time in his melancholy wandering. He has no intention of challenging the Roman empire, and indeed, near the close of his campaign he chooses not to advance on the city of Rome because he does not wish to "insult" his enemy. Apparently without ambition or any kind of desire that could establish a trajectory for him, in Boyle's account he fails even to effect the suicide he has planned, via hand-to-hand combat, because the opponent he has lighted on turns out to be an old friend from Parthia who refuses to fight him. It is Spartacus's nature in *Parthenissa*, even more than in the classical sources, to be inadequate to his own extravagant story; that he is so exactly adequate to Artabanus is Boyle's Marlovian joke at the expense of conventional figural narrative.



Jacques Amyot, in the preface to his French edition of Plutarch's *Lives*, which Thomas North included when he translated Amyot's edition into English in 1579, asserts that the distinguishing feature of "lives," as opposed to histories, is that they represent not men's "doings and adventures" but their "consultations," "the things that proceede from within" and lead them to do what they do.¹⁴ "Lives," for Amyot, are about Scaligerian disposition at least as much as Aristotelian action. If it is fair to assume that Plutarch's *Lives* was understood in the early modern period as a sustained

examination of disposition, then even in its relation to its source, *Parthenissa*'s first book seems to work aggressively against type. Not only does Boyle ostentatiously signal, by Spartacus's relation to Artabanus, that we are not to read the heroes as conventional allegorical figures for one another, but he also resorts to a veritable catalogue of dispositions from which to borrow his dispositionless character. In one of the anti-romances following on Charles Sorel's parodic *The Extravagant Shepherd* (1627–28; translated into English 1654) such ironic emphasis might be its own end, but *Parthenissa* is too well-disposed toward romance, and too interested in its hermeneutics, for the reader to stop there. If Boyle's characters are not allegorical representations of one another, and the narrative of one is not constructed as a reflection of that of the other, how might *Parthenissa* work instead? Or, to put the question another way, what alternative hermeneutic does the romance make visible?

For modern readers, one obvious starting point is the antithesis between metaphor and metonymy that Roman Jakobson famously posits as the structural foundation of virtually all semiotic systems. Extending figural analysis from words and tropes to the far broader category of *topic*, which in practice comes to include even character, Jakobson argues that every topic in a given discourse is in figural relation to another, and that all figural relations can be reduced to two primary kinds—metaphor, which relates topics by similarity, and metonymy, which relates them by contiguity. Adapting Saussure's system of axes, Jakobson plots metaphor on the vertical, synchronic axis of "selection" and metonymy on the horizontal, syntactic, diachronic axis of "combination." Metaphor, for Jakobson, is a signifying practice essentially independent of time (polysemy is a state, not an event), while the process of metonymy cannot unfold except through time, as one topic follows or precedes another.¹⁵ Following Saussure, Jakobson holds that selection connects terms "in absentia," terms "conjoined in the code [i.e., Saussure's *langue*] but not necessarily in the message [*parole*]," while metonymic combination conjoins terms "in the actual message" (119). Even Jakobson cannot quite sustain this absolute distinction between metaphor and metonymy—as he concedes elsewhere, "any metonymy is slightly metaphoric and any metaphor has a metonymic tint"¹⁶—but he does claim that one or the other tends to predominate in a given literary form. In general he associates poetry with synchronic, selective metaphor, and prose (by which he seems to mean mainly narrative) with diachronic, syntactic metonymy.

Jakobson insists on the figural nature of both metaphor and metonymy, but there are moments in his work that provoke the sense metonymy might

be somewhat less figural than metaphor. Although he argues that both metaphor and metonymy can “revitalize” conventional perception or conception, which is part of what he believes art means to do, nevertheless in line with many theorists after him (and with the American New Critics’ preference for poetry over prose) he finds metaphor to be more revitalizing, because “selection” seems to him more agential or creative than combination.¹⁷ As a result, he says, narrative featuring a high degree of contiguous relation can give the impression that it is operating on autopilot, independent of a shaping consciousness—one result of which, as he notes in a fascinating essay on Pasternak, is that active, agential voice and even agential character often seem to drop out of highly metonymic narrative.¹⁸ Jakobson wants to retain the complex syntactical possibilities of metonymic combination, and he tries to avoid reducing contiguity to simple parataxis. At the same time, though, the relation described by metonymy at Jakobson’s pole, purified of selection (a limit case, as he concedes, not achievable in practice), seems to consist of little more than nearness, so that tautologically, contiguity at this extreme signifies little beyond itself. Unlike metaphor, at its limit metonymy seems virtually nonfigural, right at the boundary where words stop being in relation.

Jakobson’s theory has been criticized for its reductive generality, which leads him into oversimplifications and inconsistencies particularly on the subject of metaphor. But his use of figuration as itself a metaphor, if rarely precise in a theoretical context, is often usefully suggestive, and for my purposes here his broad dichotomy between metaphor and metonymy offers a provocative characterization of a central antithesis in early modern narrative. If we apply Jakobson’s logic to narrative structure in a broad sense, we might call narrative metaphoric insofar as its characters and episodes refer to stories and ideas outside the narrative proper (such as *roman à clef* or parable) or function internally as versions of one another (as in Shakespearean drama, which famously addresses one question in several different contexts). Or, we might call narrative metaphoric to the extent that its action or resolution can be seen to “fulfill” the shape it outlines at the outset through devices such as characterological disposition, in the model I traced earlier that emphasizes disposition. Separately or together, these three options probably characterize the large majority of literary narratives. By contrast, we can call metonymic the narrative that foregrounds local, immediately contiguous relation and generates its form through the continuous unfolding of events. Narrative is metonymic insofar as its elements are linked by “and then,” Jakobson’s quintessential paratactic tool.

In general, what I am calling metaphoric narrative tends to produce a pronounced readerly impression of agency. In any metaphorical structure, the vehicle delivers us to the tenor, but the process also works the other way, the fact of the tenor bringing the vehicle more closely into focus as such, and for this reason metaphoric narrative shows a significant degree of self-reflection, a quality often realized or emphasized through a strong narratorial presence. (The many definitions of literary language as intrinsically self-reflective—Jakobson himself makes this point—privilege metaphor over metonymy.¹⁹) Correspondingly, and perhaps too because selection can be understood as more agential and creative than combination, as I suggested earlier, there is a stronger readerly presumption of design behind metaphoric narrative, whether authorial or divine. Insofar as arrival at the tenor “answers” or fulfills the vehicle, or action fulfills character, metaphoric narrative gives the impression of being (or asking to be made by the reader) a closed, coherent system, one that has been “thought” in advance. All these traits contribute to the sense that metaphoric narrative represents or inhabits a realm governed by aesthetic necessity (thematic or, more prestigiously, formal), rather than by contingency—witnessed, for instance, in Angus Fletcher’s description of allegorical figures as agentive “daemons” bent on realizing their signifying destiny, or Paul de Man’s association of metaphor and analogy with necessity in contrast to contiguity’s openness to chance.²⁰ In literary history, metonymic narrative is most often metaphoric narrative’s poor relation. Its plot appears to have been put in motion by accident, rather than by destiny or the interests and designs of a narrator, and it proceeds as if independent of a narrator’s guiding hand, sometimes seemingly even without any narrative voice. Like Spartacus’s story in *Parthenissa*, which does not answer or reflect anything in Artabanus’s before it, the elements in metonymic narrative seem connected only arbitrarily, as if they happened to fall along the same line by pure chance. At its most extreme such narrative appears simply to describe the world as it presents itself randomly through time, in an endless paratactic sentence that is as far as can be from Aristotelian plot.

This antithesis in narrative structure is paralleled by the early modern generic antithesis between epic and romance. Epic will not map exactly onto metaphoric narrative as I have been describing it, but there are several similarities: most significantly, epic’s emphasis on destiny and teleology; the allegorical relations it establishes among its own narrative, those of its predecessors, and history; and its tendency to rationalize its represented world into a coherent system of analogies (the paradigm for which, by

David Quint's powerful analysis, is the *Aeneid's* elaborate analogic structure).²¹ At the other end of the dichotomy, many of the faults for which prose romance is often blamed, from the seventeenth century onward—its linking of one episode to the next by little more than parataxis, its attraction to contingency and avoidance of closure, its lack of literary self-consciousness—belong to metonymic structure. Broadly speaking, it seems fair to say that if all prose narrative is to some extent metonymic, as Jakobson hypothesizes, then early modern prose romance (and much medieval romance before it) is especially so. Those early modern romances that aspired to cultural prestige within a narrative culture that intensely privileged typology and allegory over other forms of representation—Sidney's epic revisioning of the genre, for instance, or Mary Wroth's canny adaptation of episodic structure for allegorical purposes—had to work hard to position themselves well away from the metonymic end of the continuum.

If my application of Jakobson's bipolar figural scheme to early modern narrative structure were simply another way to name the familiar antithesis between epic and romance, it would not be of much use. Its value inheres, instead, in the model it offers for reading early modern prose, especially romance. Interpretive criticism, as Jakobson notes, is itself a metaphoric discourse, a "meta-language" with the aim of inscribing another version of its object, and insofar as it mirrors poetry's own metaphoric operation it constructs a "homogenous" system that answers the critical drive for coherence and closure. Jakobson calls for something "comparable to the rich literature on metaphor" for metonymy, but as he implicitly concedes, metonymy does not call for interpretation as such—indeed, an interpreted metonym has become a metaphor.²² As a result, attempts to read early modern prose figurally tend to privilege metaphoric structures over metonymic, even when they strive to construe figuration as something more than local ornamentation. So, for instance, in Brian Vickers's sophisticated reading of figuration in Francis Bacon's prose, the local metaphors that stud the prose serve as analogies for and thus keys to the argumentative structure as a whole.²³ Locating figuration at the level of narrative structure itself, by contrast, focuses our attention on the seams between elements or topics in prose narrative, encouraging us to see the narrative as a complex system of episodic units in a variety of relations to one another. *Parthenissa*, by this model, is the sum of a vast number of narrative units, through which Boyle makes a path by linking and differentiating them in a variety of ways. And Jakobson's bipolar model reminds us that analogy is not the only criterion according to

which relationship can be constructed: contiguity itself may be an ideological or aesthetic choice on the part of the narrator, with the potential both to signify meaning and to structure readers' apprehension of the text.



In blocking the metaphorical correspondence that his fellow romance-writers usually cultivate, then, Boyle positions *Parthenissa* at what we might describe as the far metonymic end of Jakobson's continuum. By its nature *Parthenissa's* unusually metonymic structure offers little by way of internal explanation for itself, but even in the absence of self-reflexivity such a structure begins to make a demand on meaning. One of the central issues in recent scholarship on early modern prose narrative has been the relation between fiction and history, a relation that in early modern thought seems only sometimes to have to do with their relative faithfulness to fact. According to Michael McKeon's now all but canonical account, a large share of fiction's energy in seventeenth-century England is devoted to the "categorical instability" between itself and history—an uncertainty about the essential distinction between them—that is not successfully resolved until the novel emerges around 1720 to define history as factual in contradistinction to the novel itself.²⁴ Extending McKeon's logic, we might read *Parthenissa's* juxtaposition of Spartacus's ostensibly historical narrative with Artabanus's fictional one, a juxtaposition too dramatic to be merely naïve, as instead ironic, a recognition that fiction and history can no longer be metaphorically assimilated into one another. Itself a metaphor, that is, Boyle's metonymic link between Spartacus and Artabanus would signify a more general tension in seventeenth-century narrative between factual history and imaginative fiction, and an effort to open that tension to scrutiny.

From the retrospective point of view of the novel such an interpretation seems sensible, but I am doubtful that facticity was really at issue for Boyle. In his preface to *The Princess Cloria*, Percy Herbert argues that romance is the only genre in which it is possible to express such historical events as those of the 1640s and '50s that defy belief, and by this dictum *Parthenissa's* incorporation of Spartacus's unprecedented and unaccountably successful rebellion looks not anomalous or random but entirely appropriate.²⁵ For Herbert it is not romance's fictitiousness that separates it from other kinds of narrative but its departure from probability, a quality that history predicated on facticity sometimes shares, as Boyle may mean to point out in borrowing Spartacus for romance. As I have suggested, Boyle and Herbert were

both working in the quasi-Aristotelian tradition of Scaliger, whose influential *Poetics* classifies all discourse as philosophical, rhetorical, or pleasing, and puts fiction and history together in the last category as dual examples of *narratio*, by its very nature delightful. For Scaliger fiction is distinct from history as much because it is instructive as because it lacks basis in fact—an idea that Philip Sidney, of course, would later develop at length.²⁶ And Scaliger comes close to arguing that the object of fiction's mimesis is itself imaginary, that the "forms" the poet imitates are found chiefly not in nature but in other texts.²⁷ My point is not that early modern thought lacked any distinction between history and fiction on the grounds of facticity, but rather that there is generic and hermeneutic context for Boyle that makes facticity only one criterion by which the two genres might be differentiated from or likened to one another. Indeed, in the preface to the second part of *Parthenissa* Boyle concedes that he violates historical veracity by putting Hannibal in the same time frame with Spartacus, but also counters that the lessons usually offered by the stories of these two men are in no way vitiated by his own narrative play.²⁸ Fiction in *Parthenissa* may not be an allegorical figure for history, but neither does it get in history's way, because history for Boyle is a series of episodes that retain their nature and value in a variety of settings.

If the point of Boyle's metonymic structure, then, is not to draw special attention to any distinction between fiction and history, what else might it signify? Besides its episodic and open-ended nature *Parthenissa* manifests several of the other characteristics Jakobson associates with metonymic narrative, especially its disinclination to represent narratorial agency. One of the striking formal features of mid-seventeenth-century romances such as *Cloria*, *Eliana*, and *Aretina*, in comparison with their predecessors by Ariosto, Spenser, and Sidney, is that they rarely foreground their authorial narrators, but *Parthenissa* takes this to an extreme, recounting almost all of its plot via first-person reminiscence by its characters and sometimes embedding its stories three frames deep. Boyle's romance also echoes at the level of theme the metonymic association with "free" plots rather than those that present themselves as governed by necessity or fate. One of the central arguments of *Parthenissa*'s male lovers, for instance, is that male friendship is ethically superior to heterosexual erotic love, on the (Montaignean) grounds that it proceeds from "inclination," by which Boyle means something close to reasoned choice, as opposed to the seeming fatedness of erotic love (e.g. 566, 573).²⁹

As we might expect of someone enslaved, Boyle's Spartacus himself asserts the value of freedom, but in oddly narrative terms. Contemplating a march on Rome, he tells his company that its real advantage would lie not in victory but in its indication to the Romans that the rebels act according to "our election, not our necessity" (242), that they transcend the narrative ambit usually prescribed for slaves. Shortly thereafter Spartacus decides against the march, because if he won he would insult the Romans and because, as his servant concludes, he is suffused by a deep "Melancholy" (244). Spartacus's repeated disinclination or inability to act, which is echoed by several of Boyle's other heroes, might seem at odds with his valorization of freedom, but it may well have been more conventional in the early modern period, nervous as it was about the ethics of a self-interest independent of providence or community, to associate agency with necessity than with choice. We might think, for instance, of the stoic embrace of necessity as the only basis for virtuous, disinterested agency. Throughout *Parthenissa* its heroes express the wish to free themselves from necessity and fate, but like Boyle-as-narrator, hiding in the wings, they are reluctant to claim their own interest and the corresponding power of design. Perhaps, with Jakobson, we can read this reluctance as a sort of psychologization of metonymic structure, or, vice versa, as the thematic ground for the formal abstraction into metonymy. Ironically, the correspondence of the two provides evidence of an urge toward metaphoric coherence that may be inescapable in narrative.

There are also several possible analogues available outside the text for *Parthenissa's* metonymic structure. One is what we know of Boyle's biography: as I noted earlier, he took the Royalist side until 1650, when, probably en route to France, he was arrested and "persuaded" by Cromwell to switch allegiance, and then at the Restoration he somehow managed to restore himself to royal favor and became a servant of the crown in Dublin. Throughout Boyle's political career his opponents derided what they took to be his expedience. Though it is possible only to speculate, a person with his history might well have seen a reason to obscure or disavow his own agency and self-interest, or (more charitably) have felt a sense of his failure to effect his own narrative design in any theater but the most local. Another, more textual analogue for the romance's metonymy is suggested by the work of revisionist historians of the mid-seventeenth century, who in the 1980s and '90s criticized both Whig and Marxist accounts of the period for being totalizing and deterministic.³⁰ In the revisionist view the conflict of mid-century was produced not by an ineluctable shift in the zeitgeist toward parliamentary democracy or against social oppression, but by myriad local

tensions and events, working sometimes in harmony and sometimes in opposition. As in Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England*, reclaimed for its sense of the power of historical contingency, in revisionist history the execution of Charles I was almost accidental, the result of immediate constraints on and decisions by a small group of people who did not intend to kill the king almost until they did so. Part of the critique of conventional history revisionists meant to make is that conventional historical narrative produces the effect of causality simply by stringing events along a timeline, which draws attention to their similarities and differences and in turn makes later events seem responses to earlier ones. One complicating factor is that not only characters in history and fiction but people in the world act as if they were in metaphorical narratives, organizing events according to the principle of causality in order to decide what to do next. To resist this tendency, revisionist historiography recalled us to metonymic narrative as I have been describing it, narrative that demands attention to the absence of anything but contiguity between or among its elements and denies the existence of coherent, systemic agency. A fully metonymic historical narrative, as revisionists well knew, would approach a contradiction in terms, if history's task is concerned with causality, and post-revisionist historians have recuperated long-term causality and insisted on the analogies, for instance, between social and political thought and between the ideologies of political elites and the middling sort.³¹ But perhaps Boyle, like Clarendon after him, found at least some precedent in the events of his own lifetime for a view of history as random and contingent, and perhaps, too, the attraction of that precedent registers not just a biographical but a more general cultural wish to escape historical agency or responsibility.



As I have been emphasizing, these ideological motives for *Parthenissa's* structure are only speculative, merely hypotheses about what Boyle's metonymy might signify as itself a figure. One of the questions *Parthenissa* challenges us to ask, by so blatantly blocking metaphorical correspondence, is whether it is inevitable that metonymy register as a metaphor, and here once again Boyle's treatment of the Spartacus story is illuminating. If *Parthenissa's* Spartacus does not call for figural interpretation, what does Boyle ask of his audience instead? In this case, as I suggested earlier, the answer seems to be identification. When Artabanus first acknowledges that he is Spartacus, Boyle has him pause in his account for a full page while the hermit models for the reader his wonder at encountering this historical legend in the very

flesh. What is strange about the reader's relation to Spartacus at this extended moment is that, with the hermit's, it feels unmediated by the apparatuses of narrative. In effect Spartacus steps out of his historical frame into Boyle's fiction, suddenly materializing in the narrative present without any set-up or context. And in the state of surprise Boyle has fostered by withholding narrative preparation, we as readers are momentarily precluded from summoning up our own series of frames (Plutarch, ancient Roman history, tales of rebellion, etc.) with which to locate Spartacus and instead seem to join him there, as if we were suddenly inside the familiar story ourselves. Just as Artabanes identifies himself absolutely with Spartacus, so our world seems to become conflated for an instant with the narrative we are reading, Barclay's mirror dropping away.

This uncanny sense dissipates quickly, but Boyle reminds us of its presence several times in the romance, at various moments when our attention is brought to the process of reading or listening. One of the oddest is a brief episode recounted to Spartacus by Izadora, the fictional lover Boyle devises for Perolla. Izadora is in the middle of telling Spartacus her own complicated history when she pauses to discuss the remarkable Amazora, an inhabitant of a city Hannibal besieged on his way to Rome. During the siege Amazora recognized that the city's women were consuming the limited supply of food without doing anything to resist Hannibal, and true to her name she decided to rally all the women of the city "to whom Glory was more pleasing than Life" and lead a nocturnal escape over the city walls. Unfortunately Hannibal's army "cruelly murther'd" the entire party (111). When Perolla arrived after the fact and heard the story (before he met Izadora), he killed fifteen hundred Lybians in retaliation and then fell in love with the dead woman. Amazora's "Fire was of so peculiar a quality," recounts Izadora, "that when it had reduc'd her to ashes, those very Reliques retained heat enough to inflame him, and perhaps there has been seldom heard of a Love so strange in the Birth, in the Life, and in Death. For it was created by an object that was dead, the Effect remained when the Cause was taken away, and having no material sustenance to preserve it selfe alive" (111). In fact, Izadora generously concludes, of Perolla's heart she herself has now "onely the reversion" (111)—a word that when used with the definite article in this period often means a leftover, as from a meal (*OED* II 4.a). Izadora does not make any of the rationalizations about dead lovers usually summoned when new ones have already taken their places: Amazora did not lay the ground in Perolla for a better or even an equivalent love, nor did Perolla turn her memory into a Neoplatonic stimulus toward virtue. On

the contrary, though she was present to Perolla only through a story, she was nevertheless so real to him that she all-but-literally consumed a part of him, her "Effect" as material as the original "Cause."

As at the moment of Spartacus's recognition, Boyle in the *Amazora* story seems to be trying to conjure an apprehension of literary or narrative character not as signifier or vehicle but as the almost-material real. *Amazora* will never join Perolla within his own temporal frame, but she acts on him as if she had, arousing all the responses that might be produced by a woman in the flesh. Boyle may find a precedent in Mary Wroth's 1621 romance *Urania*, especially in the extraordinary moment when the Wroth-figure Pamphilia enters an elaborately allegorical palace and literally "metamorphoses" the allegorical figure of Constancy and the conceptual virtue she represents into her own breast, reversing the trajectory of much allegorical interpretation and hinting that character, rather than concept, must be the reader's interpretive endpoint.³² But Boyle goes even further than Wroth, in that whereas Wroth sustains the sense of literary character as a mediator between conceptual idea and the real, extrafictional person in the world with the reader, Boyle reaches to put the reader on virtually the same plane with the literary/historical character. If metaphorical characters perform presence, reminding us of their distinction from the referent even as they assert their similarity, characters in Boyle's metonymic narrative simply assert it, as if to trick us momentarily into forgetting the artificiality of historical narrative, or of history itself.

Parthenissa's suggestion that reader and character might inhabit the same narrative frame, however briefly, is on the surface an odd mechanism toward identification. Usually readerly identification is associated with realistic characters, characters who through richness of descriptive and narrative detail resemble "virtual persons" and thereby seduce readers into believing temporarily that they have entered another world.³³ And realist characters, by most accounts, are metaphorical rather than metonymic. In Georg Lukács's prescription for historical realism, to cite one well-known example, character must be "typical," by which he means not "commonplace" but "possessing capacities and propensities which when intensified illuminate the complex dialectic of the major contradictions, motive forces and tendencies of an era."³⁴ Realistic character, for Lukács, is a sort of microcosm, reproducing in little within itself the enormous burden of history. Tzvetan Todorov too defines realistic character as metaphorical, arguing that the imputation of "psychology" that turns character from a mere narrative agent to a person is a metaphorical recapitulation of the narrative action. Whereas

in "a-psychological" (pre- or non-novelistic) narrative a state or quality of character is merely a precipitating condition, with no existence independent of the action it provokes (something very close to what Scaliger means by disposition), in psychological narrative such as the novel the causal relation between psychological state and act is so "diffuse" that the psychological in effect detaches itself from the action, which was in fact causally self-contained already, and shows itself to be a mirror, a "duplication," of the relations among the various actions in the narrative.³⁵ *Parthenissa*, by contrast, is entirely lacking in the kind of historical and psychological detail cited by Lukács and Todorov; not only is its character nonrepresentational, but there is no content, in the realist sense, for it to represent. But even so, *Parthenissa* suggests, the reader can be persuaded to believe for a moment that she inhabits the fictional frame; against our retrospective, novelistic expectation, metonymic narrative does have the power to enlist the reader in identification.

Identification is a complex process, enacted in many different ways, and at first glance Boyle's version might seem like a footnote to literary history, only one strange facet of a narrative unusual even among its historically obscure contemporaries. But *Parthenissa's* mode of enlisting readers, and indeed its metonymic strategies more generally, are probably not as singular as they appear. In concluding I want to glance at their similarity to the narrative strategies of an early novel with profound and as yet not fully understood debts to seventeenth-century romance, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. Richardson, as is well known, happened upon the project of *Pamela* in the process of producing a conduct book, and in the novel he goes to great lengths to insist that he is only the editor, not the author, of Pamela's history. But Pamela is not a mimetically realist character, and in fact Richardson encourages readerly identification with her by means of a mechanism quite similar to Boyle's. Like Spartacus's successful rebellion, Pamela's marriage to Mr. B is a social outrage, a narrative marvel that cannot be anticipated by such tools as characterly disposition. *Pamela*, following in the steps of all real romances, protests that it and its heroine are innocent of design: the novel has no authorial narrator, and Richardson's brilliant technique of having Pamela write "to the moment," in a mode that parallels the sexual and social passivity forced upon her, means that Pamela cannot be said to know the narrative's ends or retrospectively shape its form any more than Richardson can. To the extent that readers suspend disbelief in reading the novel, they acquiesce not to Pamela's reality per se, as a person in the extrafictional

world, but to the narrative process by which the novel purports to be happening, its unfolding as if in the same “real time” in which its audience encounters it. Certainly the contemporary readers who made Pamela’s character such a publishing phenomenon identified with her, when they did, in part as a form of social wish-fulfillment, and also probably because of her vulnerability. But readers also identify with Pamela because Richardson compromises our ability to see her as a type, a figure either for her audience or for the action in her own narrative. It is not accidental, in this context, that the strategy of the novel’s skeptical debunkers from Fielding forward has been to read her metaphorically. It becomes impossible to put ourselves in Pamela’s shoes, Fielding’s *Shamela* insists, when we invoke the misogynist stereotype that Pamela must have been from the beginning—the scheming, self-interested woman who buys her way with her sexuality—and when we recognize her as a type we see that her disposition has cast the novel’s end as inevitable from its very beginning.

In a recent symposium on the problem of early modern dramatic character, Jonathan Crewe observed that the popular (and to some extent even scholarly) sense of Shakespeare’s characters as “virtual persons” seems to resist all attempts at theory. Although we know at some level that his characters are literary and theatrical effects, in most cultural forums we continue to treat them as if they were people in the world with us. This resistance, Crewe concludes, has proved so persistent that perhaps it is time to move from dismissing it as naïve to engaging its history.³⁶ *Parthenissa*, I have been arguing, offers one episode in that history, a demonstration that “virtual persons” can be produced not just by drama and realist fiction but by kinds of narrative in which we have not expected them to appear. It reminds us too that identification is not just a default effect, the result of uneducated reading practices; on the contrary, in Boyle’s romance it is backed by its own technology, a complex set of metonymic practices that may have more to do with the relation of romance to novel than we have yet understood.