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The Erotics of the Hunt: a Xenophontean trope in Chariton

Chariton's indebtedness to Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* has long been acknowledged, perhaps most memorably by Perry, who suggests Xenophon as Chariton's primary inspiration (1967: 175). I argue that Chariton was not only inspired by Xenophon, but that in fact his novel enters into a sophisticated dialogic relationship with the *Cyropaedia*, reaccentuating latent elements in the Xenophontean model to suit the purposes of romance. I focus specifically on the hunting scene in Chariton's novel (6.4.1 ‐ 7) as an inversion of fundamental themes from Xenophon's fictional biography of Cyrus. While the hunt represents a positive, didactic practice in Xenophon's idealizing biography, the hunt in Chariton's novel represents the futility of ethical discipline in the face of Eros. In Xenophon, the hunt idealizes the biographical subject, while in Chariton, the hunt idealizes Eros, the ultimate subject of romance.

In Xenophon's text the hunt is given a programmatic significance in the ethnography of book 1. Among Xenophon's fictitious Persians, hunting is taught at public expense as training for warfare (Xen., *Cyr.* 1.2.10). Later, the hunt provides discipline for the unbridled passions of a youthfully impetuous Cyrus (1.4.8ff.). Cyrus' war-games in the hunt lead seamlessly into real warfare against the Assyrian prince, whose own hunting expedition into enemy territory was to provide game for his wedding celebration (1.4.16). Sexuality simmers just beneath the surface of Xenophon's ethical narrative, as Cyrus' grandfather watches his grandson enter the battle, dressed for the first time in the new armor which fits his body beautifully (1.4.18). Cyrus' pride in success gets the better of the young warrior, though, and he seems to his grandfather "frenzied" (*mainomenon*) with daring (1.4.24), but his grandfather's lesson in humility tempers the potentially destabilizing recklessness. Ultimately Cyrus' military and ethical training in the hunt is successful.

Chariton's depiction of the Persian hunt is, by contrast, parodic. Emphasizing the eroticism latent in Xenophon's text, Chariton transforms the traditionally didactic hunting scene into merely a royal diversion, an elaborate pastime. The hunt provides the king Artaxerxes with a way of framing himself as an object of desire, a thing to be seen. Chariton's description of the hunt focuses on the King's vain preening (Ch. 6.4.3) and underscores the importance of seeing and being seen (6.4.3 - 5). Xenophon's Cyrus becomes the perfect hunter, whereas Chariton's Persian King becomes himself the hunted. When Eros accompanies the King to the hunt (6.4.5) and whispers into the King's ear a pornographic description of the novel's heroine, the King is conquered by the image of his erotic obsession.

Chariton cleverly inverts the image of the hunt as it appears in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. In Xenophon's fictional biography, the hunt is a king-making process, but in Chariton's romance the hunt is ironically the very process of the King's undoing.