

K. Haynes: *Fashioning the feminine in the Greek novel*.
Pp. VIII + 214. London – New York: Routledge, 2003.
Hardback, £ 50,-. ISBN 0-415-26209-7.
Paperback, £ 15.99. ISBN 0-415-26210-0.

Reviewed by Tim Whitmarsh, University of Exeter
E-mail: T.J.G.Whitmarsh@exeter.ac.uk

The Greek novel has proven a happy hunting-ground for studies in the fields of gender and sexuality. Michel Foucault devoted his closing chapter in *The care of the self* to the novels, which he saw as paradigmatic of the new, predominantly conjugal, erotics of the period; book-length studies by David Konstan and Simon Goldhill have explored and refined Foucault's interpretation; a series of articles by Brigitte Egger have (among other propositions) proposed an identifying female readership; Helen Elsom and Helen Morales have mapped out the gender asymmetries of the novels' representations of desire; an important chapter by Kate Cooper sites the novels in relation to the gender economy of the emergent Christians.¹ This, however, is the first book-length study specifically devoted to the question of gender in the five central Greek novels; as such, it represents an important landmark.

¹ M. Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, volume 3: *The care of the self*, trans. R. Hurley (London, 1990); D. Konstan, *Sexual symmetry: love in the ancient novel and related genres* (Princeton, 1994); S. Goldhill, *Foucault's virginity: ancient erotic fiction and the history of sexuality* (Cambridge, 1995); H. Elsom, 'Callirhoe: displaying the phallic woman', in A. Richlin (ed.) *Pornography and representation in Greece and Rome* (New York, 1992): 212–230; H. Morales, 'The taming of the view', *GCN* 6 (1995): 39–50; 'Sense and sententiousness in the ancient Greek novels', in A. Sharrock and H. Morales (eds.) *Intratextuality: Greek and Roman textual relations* (Oxford, 2000): 67–88; K. Cooper, *The virgin and the bride: idealised womanhood in late antiquity* (Cambridge MA, 1996); B. Egger, 'Zu den Frauenrollen im griechischen Roman: die Frau als Heldin und Leserin', *GCN* 1 (1988): 33–66; 'Looking at Chariton's Callirhoe', in J.R. Morgan & R. Stoneman eds *Greek fiction: the Greek novel in context* (London, 1994): 31–48; 'Women and marriage in the Greek novels: the boundaries of romance', in J. Tatum ed. *The search for the ancient novel* (Baltimore, 1994): 260–80. See also S. Wiersma, 'The ancient Greek novel and its heroines: a female paradox', *Mnemosyne* 43 (1990): 109–123; R. Johne, 'Women in the ancient novel', in G. Schmeling (ed.) *The novel in the ancient world*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 2003): 151–207. A book-length study of gender in Achilles Tatius by Helen Morales is anticipated imminently.

The book contains seven chapters: 'Reading the feminine', principally addressing questions of methodology; 'Contextualising the feminine', which deals with historical frames, both pagan and Christian; 'Heroines'; 'Heroes'; 'Minor female characters'; 'Minor male characters'; 'Telos', which deals with the central role of marriage and questions regarding the conservatism or subversiveness of the genre. H (resemblances to the other 'H' are fortuitous, despite the shared interests) has produced a readable account of women in the novels that ranges impressively widely in terms of both ancient material and modern scholarship.

H's approach, as the title suggests, is principally 'constructionist'. The novels' representation of women embodies a set of socially determined values and protocols, 'spun' by literary sophistication; the aim of criticism, for her, is to expose the ideologies of marriage and gender paradigmatics, while remaining alert to the insuperable slipperiness and obliquity of this devious genre (see especially p. 15). In pursuit of this aim, she advances an eclectic mix of theoretical positions: an emphasis upon the ideologically implicated position of any critic, which she associates with new historicism (p. 10); a feminist practice centred on reading against the grain of male-authored texts, for slippage and contestation (pp. 12–13); and, most innovatively (for Classical criticism, at any rate), what she calls a 'psychoanalysis of culture' (p. 14, and see below), using Freud, Klein and Lacan to illuminate historically and culturally specific phenomena.

'Theory', indeed, is given a central, driving role in this book. There is something of the idiom of the social sciences here: throughout *Fashioning the feminine*, appropriate theories and comparativist discussions are identified, debated and justified, before being applied (*à la* inductivism) to the ancient material. There are occasions when this technique can come across as rather overdutiful ('I now intend to turn from a psychoanalytical to a more directly sociological approach', p. 99; 'we need now to look at the problem from a socio-historical perspective', p. 121; 'Psychoanalytic theory having proved useful ... it seems appropriate to ...', p. 147); but the overall impression is of a commendably honest, and indeed meticulous, commitment to methodology.

Another central virtue of this book is its commitment to a broad base of historically contextualising material. The second chapter offers a wide-ranging survey of women both in earlier and contemporary literature and culture. This material is inevitably rather sketchy in places (e.g. two and a bit

sides on women in Athenian drama and Hellenistic literature, respectively); but there is a full, and most welcome, survey of the early Christian material. H is certainly not the first to propose that the early Church – with its simultaneous promotion of women in narrative, restrictions on their activities, appetites and power, and hyper-sensitivity to issues of sexuality and the body – offers a useful backdrop for the concerns of the novel;² but there is plenty of new material here, which is moreover relevant to her particular understanding of the novels' gender economy.

H's central thesis is that the novels offer a challenging, new representation of feminine and masculine. Female protagonists are presented as surprisingly powerful (notwithstanding the episodes that present them as the objects of the male gaze), male protagonists as relatively weak and passive. Minor female characters are generally presented in traditional guises; minor males are more diverse, and offer in some cases hyper-macho figures for the partial identification of a male readership suffocated by social conventions. The texts' emphasis upon marriage is partly conservative, in that it reaffirms the social order; but also in part subversive, in that it challenges the anticipated dominion of male over female.

This brief summary belies the multifariousness of H's particular discussions, which is tough to encapsulate. This is partly the result of the survey-like structure of the book. All the central characters (female and male) are dealt with in turn, and then the subordinate character-types (mothers, slaves, friends and so forth). The various, heterogeneous theories, too, are sequentially tried on for size. H manifests an exemplary judiciousness here, regularly adverting to problems with or limits of the theory in question.

The downside is, however, that we are left with something of (what Psellus might have called) a nest of snakes. At times, the theoretical propositions are subsequently qualified almost to the extent of negation ('However, it cannot provide a full explanation ...', p. 78; 'However, the connection of the feminine with the personal is ... unstable ...', p. 79; 'I do not claim exact equivalence ...', p. 122; 'it is fair to comment [by way of contradiction] that ...', p. 132). H is so radically and cautiously eclectic that one can leave her discussions with a stronger sense of what is not than what is said. 'There is no single magic key with which to unlock all the subtle nuances in presentation' (p. 78), she writes at one point, before commending

² See esp. Cooper 1996 (see n. 1); P. Brown, *The body and society: men, women, and sexual renunciation in early Christianity* (London, 1988): 155–156.

a ‘pragmatic and eclectic utilisation of different theories’. Well, fair enough; but a cogent central theme need not be anything so mechanical or mystical as ‘a magic key’.

Another aspect that readers will find intermittently frustrating is H’s tendency to avoid detailed engagement with the text. Often, for sure, this leads to a welcome concision: no need, for example, to rehash the well-known opening scene of the *Aethiopica* (p. 69). But there are also occasions where oversimplification is the result. This is most prominent in, but not confined to, the passages where she uses psychoanalytical criticism, passages that will inevitably be considered among the most debated aspects of the book. As Miriam Leonard shows in a forthcoming paper, many of the reasons why Classicists have tended to forswear psychoanalysis have more to do with the historical development of Classics as a discipline than with any intrinsic flaws in psychoanalysis itself.³ But all the more reason to make the case thoroughly, surely ...

Not that all psychoanalysis has proven *verboten*. An anthropologist friend once told me that the only thing Classicists ever asked her about was van Genep and ‘the rites of passage’; I imagine a psychoanalyst might say the same thing about Laura Mulvey and ‘the gaze’.⁴ H has (I hope this is fair) little that is new to say on this subject (Elsom’s article on Callirhoe seems to have been influential; odd not to have cited Morales’ on Achilles).⁵ It will surprise few that the heroines are often objectified by the male gaze; and without the more detailed analysis (such as Elsom and Morales offer), the analysis seems rather flat. It is, rather, in the more traditionally Freudian sphere that H is most innovative, identifying underlying desires for mother- and father-figures in the representation of various females and males in the text.

These particular arguments, however, are more problematic. Let me take a couple of examples (more could be cited). On pp. 97–98, H discusses gender as a construct, in psychoanalytical terms that seek to explain the underlying desire for any particular ‘masquerade’ or ‘parade’ of gender identity. After citing, without further comment, an extraordinarily sexist-sounding (I

³ M. Leonard, ‘Antigone and “the political”’: Lacan, Irigaray and the ethics of psychoanalysis’, *PCPS* 49 (forthcoming 2003).

⁴ L. Mulvey, ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema’, *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6–18; reprinted in *Visual and other pleasures* (Basingstoke, 1989): 14–27.

⁵ See n. 1 for references.

confess I have not sought it out) article from 1929 on flirty female academics, H now passes from femininity to masculinity, to Lacan's concept of 'paraded' masculinity; her tentative suggestion is that the macho exploits of Chaereas (as a general) and Theagenes (as a bull-jumper) might be explained as such a parade, particularly given the presence of father-figures in both scenes. It is left to an end-note (p. 176) to explain that the father-figure in the case of Chariton is Dionysius, 'in that he possesses the "mother"/heroine Kallirhoe'. There may well be a serious point lurking in here, but I suspect that few readers will be willing to accept without further argument H's claim that Dionysius represents a father-figure (or an aspect of the father) for Chaereas, let alone that Callirhoe represents a mother-figure for him (though see my following paragraph). Indeed, even H seems to partially contradict this assessment in a later chapter (p. 148).

The following section on the 'segmentation of the masculine' (pp. 98–99) is, if anything, more bewildering still. H begins by proposing to discuss the fragmentation of masculinity, but supports it by citing an article on *maternal* segmentation (many Greek myths present segmented aspects of the mother, embodying the subconscious desire for incest).⁶ 'Can the heroines be read as the "mother" in disguised form,' H asks, since they often appear to have taken on her nurturing role, without being aggressively or even actively erotic?' This assessment belies even H's own recognition that the novels' heroines are given a surprisingly active role in the text, and sometimes allowed to initiate (Chloe) or collude in (Leucippe) the pursuit of sex. She then proposes that segmented masculinity might work in the same way, with pirates and bandits assuming the role of fathers. The problem is not that such *hors-la-loi* figures could or should not be treated as embodiments of hyper-masculinity,⁷ but that H finds herself committed to a particular formulation of the issue that strikes one as at best counterintuitive – and, crucially, offers no supporting reading in the text.

I do not wish to overemphasise the role of psychoanalytical criticism in H's argument: I have gone into this detail principally because such arguments bring into sharpest focus the dangers of H's strictly inductive, theory-

⁶ A. Farber, 'Segmentation of the mother: women in Greek myth', *Psychoanalytical Review* 62: 29–47.

⁷ An unfortunate omission is K. Hopwood, 'All that may become a man: the bandit in the ancient novel', in L. Foxhall and J. Salmon (eds.) *When men were men: masculinity, power and identity in classical antiquity* (London, 1998): 195–204.

first method. Firstly, there is the problem of 'fit' between pre-ordained 'theory' and 'practice'. It may be that this issue is particularly acute in psychoanalysis, where the gap between surface and underlying meaning may be especially marked (and so the exoticism of the interpretation may be difficult to assimilate); but H's method always risks exacerbating the problem. Secondly, in privileging theory as structure (rather than, say, as process), one downplays (or risks downplaying) the role of sources, of detail.

This is, overall, a book that will find a wide readership, for its important subject-matter, the thoroughness of its treatments, and its fresh approaches to some of heavily debated issues. Some of its argumentation is, as I have indicated, too sketchy to convince, and even at times opaque; and her commitment to eclecticism makes in places for a rather frustrating read. It would be surprising if H's words on the topic are the last; but in the meantime, this book will be a useful point of reference for scholars and students alike.