

The Ancient Novel at the Time of Perry

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Gareth Schmeling began his work on ancient fiction about the time when one of the major modern studies was published: Ben Edwin Perry's *The Ancient Romances* of 1967 (here *AR*). It marked an epoch, and established itself as one of the authoritative statements on ancient fiction. That is not to say that it was in all respects 'right,' that it cannot be challenged; it constituted, itself, a challenge to an earlier authority, namely Rohde's long-lasting *Der griechische Roman* of 1876. *AR* is in its turn subject to later examination, and since 1967 much work has been done on the novel. Gareth has been as energetic in this as anyone, in his own work as editor and interpreter, and in encouraging work on the genre nationally and internationally – not least in founding, in 1970, the *Petronian Society Newsletter*, which (run largely by himself) soon broke its nominal bounds and became in effect the first journal to be devoted to ancient fiction. He is now one of the editors of the recently established international journal *Ancient Narrative*.

In this course of this work Gareth set up, for the APA meeting of January 2003, a panel under the title of *The Ancient Novel since Perry*, intended to take stock of developments in the field in our time. It seems appropriate that in a *Festschrift* entitled *Authors, Authority and Interpreters in the Ancient Novel* this initiative be recognized specifically. Accordingly, when invited to contribute to the volume, I suggested that a modified version of my own introductory contribution to the APA panel, entitled *The Ancient Novel at the Time of Perry*, might perform that function suitably.¹ It may thus offer a

¹ The other papers given at the 2003 APA were published on the *Ancient Narrative* website (<www.ancientnarrative.com>), and are to appear in printed form in *Ancient Narrative*. I thank the editors of *Ancient Narrative* for acceding to my request that this paper appear in the present volume.

background for the recognition in the present volume of the work of Gareth Schmeling.

Rohde, immensely learned, and culturally conservative, had no taste for sentimental stories, and little interest in what he regarded as the decadent Greece of the imperial period and the ‘barren desert’ (Preface) of its literature. These attitudes were in greater or lesser degree shared by many later classicists, and underlie the authority his book acquired. Furthermore, in his day little was known about the chronology of the Greek novelists, and the scheme he worked out proved to be in some respects wildly wrong. Consequently, even had he any sympathy with these writers, he could have had but little idea about what relationship they might have either to the society that produced them or to antecedent literature. From around the turn of the century, with the crucial discovery of *Ninus* and the Chariton papyri, voices began to be raised against *Der griechische Roman*, but they were not numerous at first; and above all, nothing, no one book that could meet Rohde’s learning and comprehensive treatment, took its place as the voice of authority on the topic of ancient fiction.

So much for Rohde as authority, the first modern authority; but the principal focus of this paper is *The Ancient Romances*. Perry’s book is indeed often taken as the most significant starting point for recent study of ancient fiction. That is a fair judgment, inasmuch as it was the first comprehensive modern treatment of the whole genre – ‘modern’ in the sense of, say, post-WWII; ‘comprehensive’ in the sense that it dealt with Latin as well as Greek, even though it was not very much concerned with the Greek sophistic texts. But we should not forget that there was already, by 1967, a quite extensive body of valuable work in the field, going back fifty years and more, before WWI in the case of Calderini.² Lavagnini in 1921, Ludvikovsky in 1925, though concerned specifically with the origins of romance, were none the less comprehensive in a useful sense. Still in the 1920s, there was Kerényi in 1927; misdirected as it was, it sprang from a valuable idea. In the thirties and forties several useful texts appeared; Blake’s Chariton (1938) and the Budé Heliodorus of Rattenbury and Lumb (1935–1943) were of particular value. In the fifties came a breaking out, with the collections of Grimal and Cataudella in 1958, and in the same year Lesky, the first literary history to treat the topic seriously. One will find more in Sandy’s 1974 bibliography.

² Where no specific reference is given, see Bibliography.

Perry is very much in this company. The roots of his book, though it was not published until 1967, go back not just to his 1951 Sather lectures but ultimately to his 1919 thesis on the *Metamorphoses*, several articles on Apuleius in the 1920s, and a major article in *AJP* 1930 on Chariton which was the real starting point of *AR*. He had learned from Wilcken and *Ninus* and the papyri, from Lavagnini and Ludvikovsky; but he saw Chariton as the key to the question of the origins and the nature of the form. It is relevant at this point to remember that Perry was born in 1892 – that is to say, the year before *Ninus* was published – and was already a student when the second of the Chariton papyri was published, in 1910; he died, in his mid-seventies, within a year of the publication of *AR*. He was thus forming his basic views not so very long after the early papyrus discoveries. Today those discoveries have been digested, and others, some just as spectacular, have been made. This already puts *AR* in a certain perspective. Fundamental as it seems to our own time, it is rooted in another age, another world. If it is surprising that Rohde's influence lasted so long, the shadow of Ben Edwin Perry is also long.

The principal topics of *AR* are:

1) the *Origins* of the romances, to use Perry's term: but in English there is already a problem in the nomenclature of the genre. It is not a problem in other European languages: *romanzo*, *Roman*, *roman* are readily enough applicable alike to stories about princesses and dragons, late Greek prose fiction, and stories about railway engines or coalmines. But in English the term 'romance' queers the pitch, loads the dice; 'romance' is princesses and dragons; it is not realistic, not serious – unless one has the breadth of vision of a Northrop Frye and can see *Germinal* as a romance. Trivial as it may now seem, I think that this nomenclature is a matter of substance, and helps explain the earlier neglect of the form in English-language scholarship. In Perry's day 'romance' was the common (though not universal) usage; nowadays, however, 'novel' is employed fairly generally. Be that as it may, Perry looked beyond literary history, beyond Rohde's 'biological' solution, to the evolution of society as the force behind the creation of the genre, which he saw as essentially a popular form, created consciously. Whether he was right or wrong in this assessment, he completed the overthrow of assumptions based on Rohde's analysis, assumptions which Lavagnini and Ludvikovsky in particular had already undermined. The question of origins is not now fashionable; in contemporary scholarship there is often a note of helpless

acquiescence in Perry's dictum that the first novel was born of a conscious decision, taken on a Tuesday afternoon in July – one of those happy phrases that occur in Perry, like 'passing through zero' and 'latter-day epic for Everyman.' But it has not gone away with modern reassessment of the genre; rather, in studying not the origins but the matter of these texts we are only reflecting current critical interests. We should perhaps reconsider what 'the question of origins' means; there is room for further discussion in the light of later discoveries, particularly in the matter of the dating of the early works. In general, however, Perry's work on this matter was important in that it constituted an important theoretical challenge to Rohde, and offered a new, thoughtful approach to the relationship of the novel to epic, drama and historiography, not just to Hellenistic love-poetry and *Reisefabulistik*; a broader approach, based not on literary culture – almost on bibliography – but on perception of new social and cultural impulses in the Hellenistic world.

2) As the second main theme of *AR* we may consider *Academic Tradition*. For Perry, tradition imposed restrictions on a writer; the sophistic novelists were not primarily interested in the story, which was a peg on which to hang Second Sophistical decoration, such as ecphrases. We would say that this is a serious misinterpretation: tradition enriched the novel. The current weasel word for this process is 'intertextuality.' Perhaps I am wrong in suspecting that it constricts the process unduly, confines it too fine, in suggesting primarily verbal reminiscence; in fact the process whereby Chariton, for instance, calls up the *Cyropaedia* is what the Greeks termed *mimesis*. Perry was right, however, in saying that novel writers wanted to fit into the Greek tradition; and this made it easier to see them – as Rohde did not see them, and given his chronology could not see them – in the context of contemporary writers: Lucian notably, Plutarch, Dio, Philostratus, Aelius Aristides, others. Something of a minor galaxy, a worthwhile context; 'it is not a genuinely brilliant period, admittedly,' said Wilamowitz; 'all the same, overall there is a brilliance to it.'³ This continuity of tradition was perhaps not sufficiently understood when Perry was writing. The Sathers are fifty years old now; New Classics had not yet taken off – in seven straight years as a student at Glasgow and Cambridge, immediately after WWII, I scarcely heard the name of any post-Hellenistic Greek author. This is perhaps the main

³ Wilamowitz 1925a, 35: 'Es ist zwar kein echter Glanz der über dieser Zeit liegt; aber Glanz liegt doch über allem.'

difference between the ‘novel climate’ then and now. It is not only a matter of new discoveries, new datings, but of the way in which we now look at things already known, the proportions we attribute to them. A corollary of this is that if in his day Perry was right to see the rise of the novel as a function of the development of society – I think he was – it is equally necessary for us to see our own assessment of it in function of our own society; we are not necessarily more right than Perry was. The point is that the novel seems to be essentially a phenomenon of the imperial Roman world. But since the relatively recent disappearance of modern empires, our Western view of the Roman Empire has changed; we are less bemused by the grandeur that was Rome, and more prepared to look at life in the provinces of the Roman Empire. This makes it easier to see continuity in the Greek tradition; easier for Western countries which have often been reluctant – for whatever reasons – to abandon an idealized picture of Greek and Roman antiquity; and no doubt easier for Protestant countries, in which there has often been a similar reluctance to study pre-Reformation Christianity and consequently the Hellenic world in which it grew.

3) the *Audience* of the genre. For Perry, ideal Greek romance was ‘the open form for the open society,’ ‘latter-day epic for Everyman,’ written initially for the ‘poor-in-spirit.’ One of Perry’s attributes was intellectual openness. But it was inevitably an openness that reflects his age, his just-post-WWI age; he speaks of serving in the military – presumably in 1917–1918, when he was already a graduate student in his mid-twenties – and of already then being occupied with his dissertation. It reflects, in fact, the pre-WWI assumptions of his seniors, such as William Abbott Oldfather, but not leavened by any academic experience of the world outside the United States. Perry’s Everyman, his poor-in-spirit, was not our modern, democratic Everyman: he was a person of small understanding and no ambition, a person of emotions – or rather sentiment – of triviality, ‘passive...the plaything of fortune’ (48). And for Perry this is manifest in the Greek novels, at least in their earliest stage. But this attitude did not affect the Latin texts, for ‘the literary language of the poor-in-spirit was not Latin but Greek,’ and the Latin writers ‘wanted to win reputation as high-class writers’ (89–90); so the Latin texts were entirely different. They were comic novels born of chance genius, not culturally-generated: the *Satyrical* (and he already observes, in passing, that that is the logical form of the title) was *sui generis* as non-ideal, realistic text; while Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* was an ingenious but inconsistent

farrago of comic and sometimes salacious episodes. For Perry, it did not really count in any tradition of narrative fiction; it too is 'satirical.' To us, Latin and Greek traditions seem closer to each other; we have seen non-ideal Greek texts – *Phoenicica*, *Iolaus* – and they imply a very different kind of audience. A series of conferences has stimulated the elaboration of quite different modern views on these matters. The Groningen group must take much credit for this, not only for ICAN 2000 but also for its long and valuable series of Colloquia and for its work on Apuleius over the last thirty years. The *Metamorphoses* in particular now seems highly sophisticated, particularly since Winkler's 1985 bombshell *Auctor et Actor*. In Perry's account we are in a different world – and there is a world of difference.

4) *Evaluation*. For Perry, Chariton's novel was primarily a document in cultural history. I agree, though not altogether in his sense. I am inclined to suspect that *Callirhoe*, which appears to have been something of a best-seller, was the most successful of a group of early texts – say early to mid-first century A.D. – that included *Ninus*, *Chione*, *Metiochus* and *Parthenope*, and perhaps some small fragments that appear to use a language similar to Chariton's;⁴ a 'School of Chariton,' as it were (or perhaps 'School of *Ninus*'); and that their appearance did indeed mark an important cultural development, namely the arrival on the social scene of narrative fiction. Of course this can only be a suspicion, given the aleatory nature of evidence in these matters. The relative and absolute dating of early texts, some only putatively within the scope of this paper, is a field much fought over.⁵ This is particularly true of *Callirhoe*, whose date has wandered in our day over a century and a half, from the late Roman Republic to the time of Hadrian. I should put him where Perry does, 'in the early part of the first century rather than later' (344); not later, given Persius' probable reference (1,134) to a work of some kind called '*Callirhoe*,' than the early years of Nero. But if I am right, that would imply that an audience had been identified around the time of Chariton. How poor in spirit it was, if it could be credited by writers with the ability to recognize bits of Greek history, is perhaps another matter; Perry's thesis is questionable in this respect.

⁴ A bibliography of these fragments would be out of place here. Some appear in Stephens-Winkler and López Martínez; recently, see especially Stramaglia in *ZPE* and elsewhere (noted in *PSN*).

⁵ See, for instance, Bowie's paper for the APA panel; at the meeting Stramaglia expressed disagreement with a number of points.

Perry had hardly more sympathy than Rohde for what he saw as the novel's original audience; he did, however, see merit in the conduct of the story. He speaks, in fact, with two tongues on Chariton – as did even Cobet a couple of decades before Rohde, contemptuous as he was of the 'Graeculi' of the imperial age and their debased language; as Rohde himself did in his way.⁶ He was not greatly concerned with the later texts – his subtitle is, after all, *A Literary-Historical Account of their Origins*. In our day they have all been closely analysed, and the genre is commonly seen as something more like 'the relaxation of the literate.'⁷ This is assuredly true of the more sophisticated texts. Whether it was always true may be another matter. I am not prepared to abandon altogether the idea, fundamental to Perry's book, that in its earliest manifestations the novel incorporated something of the relationship that late Hellenistic people felt towards the world they lived in. In its earliest form, what we now call 'novel' was indeed what Schwartz had already in 1896 called a *Zersetzung*, a dissolution, of historiography⁸ – Perry characteristically called it 'a disease of historiography' – that made it attractive to people who could recognize in events so set out something of the undistilled emotions they felt in their own lives. The historian's truth, of course, suffered. But emotions also have their truth; and they did not suffer. At first they were no doubt crude enough; and that is the stage at which we can begin to talk about fiction. Then, one Tuesday afternoon in July, romantic history finally mutated into historical romance – as Rattenbury said long before 1967.⁹ To this extent, Perry was right in his assessment of the nature and initial impact of the new genre.

Several questions arise from these remarks: for instance the following:

1) What was good or bad about *AR*? I start with the 'bad' – not that that is the right word, but simply to get it out of the way – by recapitulating what I have already said: namely, that Perry did not put the novel fully into its

⁶ Cobet 1859, 229–230: 'non illepidum ut pro illis temporibus libellum...' 'a quite charming little story for its time'; but the study of antiquity by the Greeks of that period 'putidam et ineptam aemulationem pariebat[...modo risum tibi modo fastidium movebit' ('produced only rotten silly imitation...you don't know whether to laugh or to throw up'); Rohde 526³/494¹: 'Chariton hat es gewagt, seine erotische Erzählung rein durch sich selber wirken zu lassen' ('Chariton ventured to let his love story produce its own effect').

⁷ Reardon 1974a, 28; cf. Bowie 1985, 688, 'lighter reading for the intelligentsia.'

⁸ Schwartz 1896, 156.

⁹ Rattenbury 1933, 222; the idea is not expressed in Perry 1930.

contemporary context. But it must also be said that that was not his aim; he was talking about origins. That was, in all conscience, already a big enough morsel to bite off. He did not, however, seem to see the possibilities for interpreting the whole genre. He simply did not look very hard at, or think very hard about, the sophistic writers. The other ‘shortcoming’ one might find in Perry’s book, if one is looking for shortcomings, is that he was often wedded to his own ideas. That can of course be said of many of us; Perry carried it farther than some; he can be vehement, almost blind, even pig-headed. His views on Petronius and Apuleius – surely seriously wrong – are a good example; they obscure many acute observations, make them face the wrong way. But to turn from his limitations, they are really the obverse of his massive common sense; in particular, in rejecting Rohde’s biological approach to the genre of romance. I reiterate what I have said above: Perry opened up the whole question. He was not the first, nor the only, scholar to take it seriously, but he made it a major part of his work, he published a major book on a little-visited topic. *AR* is soaked in sound scholarship, not only in Classics; and in its construction, its intellectual architecture, it shows above all breath of mind. Perry related the novel to the whole development of Greek literary history; and in so doing he underlined, as others had not, the new importance of prose form in creative literature. My own view then was that it was the most important contribution to the study of the novel since Rohde and Lavagnini,¹⁰ and I still think that. Any subsequent claimants to that eminence have reached it by standing on his shoulders.

2) Did *AR* start a ‘novel revolution?’ It would be an overstatement to say that it did. There was real interest a decade earlier, as I have observed (and not only collections, but articles – Chalk on Longus, for instance). Rather, the time was ripe for ideas like Perry’s, ideas about society and culture. The date of *AR* says it all; Berkeley, France; one could even invoke the Beatles. Similar groundbreaking work was appearing in the field of social history and culture, by Glen Bowersock, Ewen Bowie, Christopher Jones, more recently by Thomas Schmitz and Simon Swain, to name only those. *AR* was a marker for a burgeoning interest in post-classical Greek society.

3) Have we moved ahead since *AR*? This is the heart of the matter. Progress was not, is not, inevitable, and has not always been steady, this past thirty or forty years. But progress there has been. The reason corresponds to what I have suggested were Perry’s limitations. Principally, detailed atten-

¹⁰ Reardon 1968, 480.

tion has been paid to all the novels.¹¹ Of course, there have been major chance discoveries, realized through outstanding philological work, that have shaken whatever foundations were left of Rohde's construction – perhaps Perry's too. I have mentioned *Phoenicica, Iolaus*; one should add the growing number of fragments, ranging from Michael Haslam's *Tinouphis* to tiny items that seem in some way related to the romance genre. They constitute an increasing noise in the background, as it were, and tend to suggest that the proportions of the genre are more impressive than we thought. Above all, there is an increased willingness to see the genre as a whole. Along with this, there is taking place an expansion into other fields, notably the New Testament, to the advantage of both. In short, the field has opened up; it exists, now. It seems astonishing that Rohde ruled it for so long, even after the early papyri were published. The learning in *Der griechische Roman* was of course powerful in that respect; it still is powerful, and always will be. But the perspective has changed radically. Inevitably there are limitations to progress in the field. The most notable is simply that the corpus is after all very limited, unlike the corpora of some other genres. It can be squeezed too much. Papers on 'X in the Ancient Novel' are not always enlightening. They sometimes fill a much-needed gap.

4) Where are novel studies going, and where should they go? As I have said, they are to some extent being fitted into social analysis, opening up perspectives on the High Empire; their *Sitz im Leben* is receiving some attention. This is partly a matter of cultural fashion. We are full of social theory; so, of course, is Perry's book, though it is not our theory. This is perhaps especially noticeable in the matter of what is called 'feminism.' There, there has been a lot to learn, even in the view of culprits – for the simple reason that the novels were not written about men only, nor were they written altogether in a male perspective (though I should not be surprised to be challenged on that point); and if they are seen only in male perspective they shrink. How this idea is applied is of course another matter. But much more visibly, studies are taking the path of literary analysis: as regards, in particular, the internal organization of each text, but also to some extent in respect of their relation to each other and their place in the literature of the period. This is certainly laudable, if fruitful questions are asked; they often enough

¹¹ Less to Xenophon than to the others; it is not a very tempting subject for modern literary criticism. Though full of interest of one kind or another, in that respect it stands rather to the side of the other four texts of the canon.

are, although sometimes excesses are committed in the name of theory. Perry himself was innocent of literary theory; one suspects that if he had heard the words he would have reached for his gun, and I can sympathize with that. Modern literary theory can help, however, for instance in the field of narratology. I have mentioned Winkler's book on Apuleius, and one can add his long article, along similar lines, on Heliodorus; I will mention also Morgan's series of articles on Heliodorus. But sometimes it seems to be forgotten that ancient novels were not written with post-Romantic, indeed post-modern, assumptions and conditions in mind, notably about the personal reception of texts; in that respect I have myself some reservations, for instance about Winkler's 'first-time' and 'second-time' reader. These works were written as rhetorical products, in a not too enlarged sense of that term. They were consumed in the same way; if it is true that it is the reader who determines the meaning of a text, we must remember the different nature of ancient audiences, and avoid importing anachronistic assumptions into our assessments.

There has also been some analysis of the language of the period – vocabulary, syntax, style – and that is a very important development. In general, the computer can help a good deal – obviously TLG is a major instrument here, though it has its limitations. For the novel specifically, there is now available a more useful tool in the long project, now completed, of Conca and his colleagues, the four-volume *Lessico dei romanzieri greci*. Reeve's fundamental article on hiatus in *CQ* 1971 makes it clear once and for all that none of the major texts is without stylistic ambition, and that is a major step in their study. There remains, and seems likely to remain, the very troubled question of Atticism, its nature, its extent, its incidence; it is hardly possible to analyze the development of the Greek language in the whole of the vast body of early imperial Greek literature. Wilhelm Schmid's huge study *Der Atticismus*, over a century old by now – and compiled before papyrology invaded that territory – was soon criticized: it was useless, it needed redoing, it was a 'dreary collection of material.'¹² But how many are now as well-equipped for such work as a Schmid, or *a fortiori* a Cobet? Some useful work has none the less been done: on Chariton, for instance, by Ruiz Montero and Hernández Lara. This is a direction in which novel studies could go very usefully. Beyond that, we can of course always hope that the patient teasing-out of increasingly rare papyrus fragments will bring some

¹² Wilamowitz 1925b, 127: 'öde Stoffsammlung.'

valuable information, especially about dating; but we can scarcely hope for another *Phoenicica*.

Interpretations change, one authority supersedes another. But there will always be some juice left in this topic, as in others. The questions change because we change.

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