

L. GRAVERINI, W. KEULEN & A. BARCHIESI, *Il romanzo antico. Forme, testi, problemi*, Roma: Carocci editore
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Luca Graverini, Wytse Keulen and Alessandro Barchiesi (henceforth G., K. & B.) offer an interesting and subtle introduction to an ancient literary genre whose delineation has been a much-debated issue in scholarship over the last decades. Exactly thirty years after the first *International Conference on the Ancient Novel*, which was organized by Bryan Reardon in Bangor, Wales, and which the authors of this book rightly consider (p. 11) one of the signposts flagging the beginning of a spectacular revival of scholarly interest in this genre, this volume provides a welcome overview of much of the road that has been covered since.

In the ‘premissa’ (pp. 11–3), the authors state that this volume “vuole essere un’introduzione allo studio del romanzo antico, destinata agli studenti universitari ma anche a un pubblico più generico interessato alla storia della narrativa” (p. 12). Accordingly, accessibility of the material has been one of the authors’ primary concerns. The chapters centering upon individual novels, for example, offer ample summaries of the texts discussed. Moreover, not only the primary texts but also the non-Italian secondary literature is quoted in (mostly the authors’ own) Italian translation. The structure of the book as a whole and of its individual chapters is transparent, and the overall flow of the discussion is clear and straightforward. Finally, each chapter is followed by a section which systematically offers detailed bibliographical information on every single paragraph of the preceding chapter. These ‘approfondimenti’ are, I think, bound to become useful tools both for advanced students of the genre and for newcomers in the field. Since, however, the language of the book is likely to prevent a considerable part of the authors’ ‘ideal readers’ from reading it in its entirety, a translation of this book into one of the languages which most university students around the world are more likely to master might be desirable, if the authors want to reach their entire intended audience outside Italy.

In Italian scholarship on the ancient novel, a number of earlier, introductory studies, such as Janni 1987, Moreschini 1973, and Marcovaldi 1969, precede the present volume.¹ Since most of these were published before the exponential growth of scholarship in the 1980's and 1990's, no one will be surprised to hear that G., K. & B. provide the most comprehensive and detailed Italian introduction to the ancient novel so far. On the international scholarly scene, there is one other book whose aim is explicitly similar to the aim of this volume. This is N. Holzberg's *Der antike Roman. Eine Einführung*, first published in 1986 (München, Artemis Verlag). As it happens, the third (revised) edition of this book (2006) appeared almost simultaneously with G., K. & B.'s volume. Broadly speaking, a comparison between both books reveals that G., K. & B. offer a richer picture on the thematic level. On the other hand, Holzberg covers a broader (and more complete) corpus of so-called 'fringe' texts. In contrast to G., K. & B., he deals, albeit shortly, with *The Life of Aesop*, Ps.-Callisthenes' *Life and Deeds of Alexander of Macedonia*, the fictionalized 'eye-reports' from Troy by Dictys and Dares, and the early Christian apocryphal Acts and the Ps.-Clementines.²

G., K. & B.'s study consists of six chapters (pp. 15–218), followed by an extensive bibliography (pp. 219–47). Whereas the first two chapters tackle broad issues such as the definition and delineation of the ancient novelistic genre, its literary background, its reading public and its ancient testimonies, chapters three to five give an overview of individual texts, traditionally sailing under the colours of 'ancient novel' and 'fringe novels'. The sixth, concluding, chapter surveys connections between the Latin novels and their Greek cognates.

G. provides the first three chapters of this book. Since the generic label 'ancient novel' has been a controversial issue, the first chapter ("Una visione d'insieme", pp. 15–60) sets out to offer a "definizione e delimitazione del campo d'indagine". After presenting a useful overview of the authors and works traditionally regarded as constituting the ancient novel (p. 16), G. draws upon Photius and Macrobius to single out a number of criteria met by

¹ P. Janni (ed.), *Il romanzo greco. Guida storica e critica*, Roma – Bari 1987; C. Moreschini, *Il romanzo greco*, Firenze 1973; G. Marcovaldi, *I romanzi greci*, Roma 1969. Only Janni 1987 is mentioned in the bibliography of G., K. & B.'s volume.

² Apart from the early Christian texts, these titles are mentioned in G.'s overview of the novelistic corpus on p. 16. They are, however, not dealt with in the remainder of the book.

this literary genre. Secondly, G. completes this picture by focussing on markers of generic self-consciousness in (some of) the novels themselves. He then briefly deals with the origins of the genre, foregrounding the famous opposition between Rohde's and Perry's views and explaining why both are "simmetricamente insoddisfacenti" (p. 29). Subsequently, he contextualizes the ancient novelistic genre by drawing the Second Sophistic into the picture, and the rhetorical climate in which these texts were both conceived and received. The largest part of this chapter (pp. 31–53) is dedicated to exploring the connections between the ancient novel and other literary genres (epic, tragedy, comedy, mime and pantomime, historiography, novella, Egyptian narrative, and Alexandrian poetry). A short paragraph on the reading public of the novelistic genre concludes the first chapter.

This chapter is an interesting and stimulating opener. Although, by its very nature, it is in the first place concerned with presenting a broad picture of the material in a comprehensible way, G. often succeeds in approaching issues from an original and refreshing angle. One of the strengths of this chapter is certainly that the author consciously treats the material with a sense for differentiation and is careful not to fall into the trap of advancing broad generalizations about the genre. On a more detailed level, however, I sometimes had the impression that G. could have gone a little further than merely touching upon certain issues. I doubt, for example, whether a mere overview of the traditional 'loci' for rhetorical display in the novels (*ekphraseis*, *excursus*, court speeches, etc.) (pp. 33–6) is sufficient to do full justice to the pervasive presence of ancient rhetoric in these texts.

In the second chapter ("Critici e lettori antichi: un'antologia", pp. 61–74), G. gives a nice overview of a selected number of ancient testimonies of novelistic texts, in an attempt to reconstruct a fragmentary picture of ancient readers' perception of them. When it is uncertain whether or not the ancient novels are to be included in the direct reference of a testimony, G. briefly lists the arguments for and against, and presents a careful conclusion, which is in line with the *communis opinio* in present-day scholarship. In general, the ancient testimonies are provided with clear and accurate contextualization. In some cases, one might want to nuance certain details. I am not sure, for example, that G.'s claim that the narrative texts under consideration offered useful material for the construction of the so-called *progymnasmata* (preliminary rhetorical writing exercises, p. 68) fully accounts for the com-

plex and dynamic interaction between education and literature in antiquity.³ The chapter ends with a short paragraph discussing passages in which the novelists themselves (Antonius Diogenes, Achilles Tatius, Heliodorus, and Apuleius) point towards their ‘ideal readership’.

The third chapter, “Il romanzo greco” (pp. 75–130), deals with a number of ancient Greek novels which have come down to us in complete form, in substantial fragments or in small excerpts cited in indirect tradition. G. discusses Chariton’s *Callirhoe*, *Ninus*, *Metiochus and Parthenope*, Xenophon of Ephesus’ *Ephesian story*, Antonius Diogenes’ *Wonders beyond Thule*, Lucian’s *True Histories*, Ps.-Lucian’s *Lucius or the Ass*, Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Iamblichus’ *Babylonian story*, Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*, and, finally, Heliodorus’ *Ethiopian story*. Some titles which are conspicuously absent (for instance, *Iolaus* and Lollianus’ *Phoenician story*) are dealt with in the final chapter of the book. G.’s discussion of each novel generally starts with a short overview of the available sources and a summary of the novel’s content, followed by an ample discussion of its distinctive features. Remarks on language and style conclude each section.

By focussing on what distinguishes each novel within the genre, G. succeeds in presenting a lively and colourful picture of the corpus. Often, his broad set-up is complemented with interesting insights on details (for example, the note on Phocas’ discourse on p. 80). There are, of course, some points which one might discuss further or with which one might disagree. For instance, I do not believe that G.’s suggestion that Xenophon of Ephesus simply did not care about the consistency of his story (“più che la mano di un epitomatore malaccorto, si può vedere un autore attento soprattutto all’azione e ai colpi di scena e che non si preoccupa eccessivamente di sottili caratterizzazioni psicologiche o di dettagli poco significativi, un po’ come il regista di un moderno film d’azione”, p. 88) satisfyingly accounts for the peculiarities in this text, some of which are all but “poco significativi”. I also find it difficult to agree with the view that Achilles Tatius at the end of the novel does not return to the main narrative frame (i.e. the encounter with Clitophon in Sidon) because he “semplicemente [...] considerasse più oppor-

³ On one of the *progymnasmata*, cf., for example, J. Ureña Bracero, ‘El uso de la fuentes literarias, recursos retóricos y técnicas de composición en etopeyas sobre un mismo tema’, in: E. Amato & J. Schamp (eds.), *Ethopoia. La représentation de caractères entre fiction scolaire et réalité vivante à l’époque impériale et tardive*. Cardo/3. Études et Textes pour l’Identité Culturelle de l’Antiquité Tardive, Salerno 2005, 93-111.

tuno lasciare alla libera fantasia del lettore la spiegazione” (p. 103). Generally, I think that the reader could have profited from more references to recent secondary literature on these and other subjects.⁴

Chapters four and five are provided by K. The overall design of the fourth chapter, “Il romanzo latino” (pp. 131–77), corresponds to its counterpart on the Greek novel. It starts with a brief discussion of the Latin novels and their position towards their Greek cognates, and discusses, chronologically, Petronius’ *Satyricon*, Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, and the anonymous *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*. In the section on Petronius, K. primarily explores the ‘satirical’ aspect of this text and its position towards the Greek novel, Menippean satire, and the figure of the satyr. He makes insightful and thought-provoking remarks about Petronius’ playing with genre and irony in order to construct characterization. The discussion of the *Metamorphoses* primarily revolves around its value as literary entertainment and its philosophical-religious nature. Especially in connection with the famous last book, K. depicts well the broad tendencies of modern scholarship. Furthermore, he explores the connections between the two Latin novelists by focussing on the so-called *fabulae tabernariae* and the narrative motifs of sex, death, ritual initiation, women’s dominance and the passivity of the protagonists in both novels. The last section of chapter four deals with the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*. K. pays attention to the characteristics which inscribe this text in the novelistic tradition, and specifically emphasizes the similarities between this text and Xenophon’s novel. The origins of this text and its recently acknowledged literary merits are also discussed.

The title of the fifth chapter, “Narrativa di confine” (pp. 179–92), is somewhat misleading. K. deals only with Philostratus’ *Vita Apollonii*, without touching upon other texts which are equally eligible for being treated under this label (cf. G.’s overview on p. 16). He centers upon the position of Philostratus’ text in the literary field, exploring links with the Greek novelistic genre, Apuleius, biography and hagiography. The similarities between Apollonius and Apuleius on the one hand and between Apollonius and Apuleius’ protagonist Lucius on the other, are puzzling and open up prospects

⁴ See, e.g., on the end to Ach. Tat., S. Nakatani, ‘A Re-examination of some Structural Problems in Achilles Tatius’ Leucippe and Clitophon’, *AN* 3 (2003), 63–81; I. Repath, ‘Achilles Tatius’ Leucippe and Cleitophon: What Happened Next?’, *CQ* 55 (2005), 250–65.

for further study, especially since a number of the mentioned characteristics also provide a link with Calasiris in Heliodorus' *Ethiopian story*.

The sixth chapter of this book, "Romanzo greco, romanzo latino: problemi e prospettive della ricerca attuale" (pp. 193–218), is written by B. It deepens the information provided in the previous chapters by problematizing and nuancing a number of connections between the Latin and the Greek novels. As such, it is a good closing piece of the book, bringing together some of the lines set out earlier. The chapter is divided into two parts.

Firstly, B. explores some connections between the Latin novels (primarily Petronius) and a number of fragmentary Greek novels (Lollianus' *Phoenician story*, *Iolaus*, etc.) which clearly differ from the canon of the idealistic novels. He sets out to compare so-called 'functional' similarities (i.e. recurrent formal patterns) rather than similarities on the level of content. At some points, there is redundant information, overlapping with chapter four. B.'s comparative analysis points towards the rejection of a rigid distinction between the idealistic and the comic novel, which is an important strength of this chapter.⁵

Secondly, B. offers a nuanced examination of connections between the Latin novel and the idealistic Greek novel. From this starting point, he addresses broader issues about cultural identity and the geopolitical situation in which the novels flourished. Drawing upon, among others, Bakhtin, he regards the Greek novels as "storie d'identità" (p. 210), in which the themes of recognition and reunion play a predominant role. This makes them 'closed stories', in contrast to their Latin cognates, which are more 'open', dealing with "decadenza, identità precaria, passaggio tra mondi diversi" (p. 216) – a conclusion which is in line with a recent study on the presence of so-called Bakhtinian centrifugal and centripetal voices within the Greek novel.⁶

To conclude: this is a very interesting and sound introduction, which I would not hesitate to recommend as essential reading to anyone who wants to become thoroughly acquainted with the ancient novel. Moreover, I think that the authors have been pretty modest in limiting their intended audience explicitly to university students and a broad public of people interested in

⁵ In my opinion, Holzberg's book endorses this sharp distinction too much by its very structure.

⁶ Cf. T. Whitmarsh, 'Dialogues in love: Bakhtin and his critics on the Greek novel', in: R. B. Branham (ed.), *The Bakhtin Circle and Ancient Narrative*. Ancient Narrative Supplement 3, Groningen 2005, 107-29. This study argues for the acknowledgement of centripetal voices in the Greek novel.

this genre. In my view, *Il romanzo antico* provides also a useful and up-to-date reference tool for scholars working on these texts.