

T. WHITMARSH (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*

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Tim Whitmarsh, the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, declares in the introduction that the essays collected in the volume are meant as a “sophisticated yet accessible point of entry” and that the work does not hope to perpetuate a single vision but instead “consists of a series of state-of-the art provocations, interlocking in overall design but written from a range of intellectual positions” [p. 1].¹ The volume covers a tremendous amount of ground, with the contributions organized by topic rather than by ancient author and divided into four categories: contexts, the world of the novel, form, and reception. Although many of the essays from different categories significantly overlap and can beneficially be read side-by-side, the division is useful for a new reader approaching these texts for the first time. While some of the essays focus on a recapitulation and summary of earlier arguments, for readers who are new to the novel these chapters provide a survey of foundational material that will help them approach the more ground-breaking chapters, which seasoned scholars will receive enthusiastically.

“Genre” (Simon Goldhill), “Literary milieu” (Ewen Bowie), and “Approaching style and rhetoric” (Andrew Laird) address the way in which the genre of the ancient novel (although the term “novel” is not fully accepted by all of the contributors) fits into the larger cultural and literary matrix of the imperial period. Goldhill takes issue with the idea of genre as a classification based merely on form. Instead, he argues, genre is also defined by “audience, context of performance, circulation of texts, and self-aware critical discussion” along with the “emotional expectations” of readers [pp. 186-7]. Thus for Goldhill, genre ought to be brought “into contact with essential frames of politics, desire and cultural change” [p. 189]. Goldhill accordingly

¹ Each essay in the volume is followed by suggestions for further reading, which offer both a useful set of materials for those new to the novel and identify areas that have remained overlooked by scholars. As a small, but not insignificant point, the volume is consistent in how it titles ancient texts, making it much more understandable to a broad audience. Finally, the summaries of the novels given in the appendix will prove helpful to those less familiar with the plots of these texts, especially the non-canonical ones.

defends the position that the texts categorized as ancient Greek novels deserve such a grouping because of their “parallels of structure, form and theme...and also...apparent manipulations of the expectations established by such parallels” [p. 191]. The ancient Roman novels on the other hand, although they grow from earlier Greek models, ought to be separately categorized because “their aggressively vulgar, sexually explicit, and socially varied narrative world, full of inset narratives, satiric extremes, and shifting linguistic registers, seem peculiarly Roman” [p. 194]. According to Goldhill, recognizing ancient prose fictional texts as representatives of a single genre called the “novel” has had significant implications for our modern interpretation of their “narrative techniques,”² for positioning the novel within literary history, and for understanding the “major ideological shifts in empire culture” [p. 196]. He then goes on to illustrate both the uses and the limitations of applying the idea of genre to the Greek novel, taking just one generic trait, sexual activity, and discussing its representation in Chariton, Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Heliodorus. Goldhill argues that the erotic element in each of these can best be understood against the generic backdrop. For instance, the valorization of ‘sophrosunē’ in *Chariclea and Theagenes* “can only be properly understood against the generic tradition of the ideal novel, and its games of sexual license and chaste lives” [p. 198]. Despite the importance of genre to the understanding of these texts, Goldhill also stresses that the most dynamic model for interpretation is one in which these works are also considered within the larger literary environment of their period.

Ewen Bowie’s “Literary milieux” excellently demonstrates the richness of interpretation enabled precisely by viewing these texts not only within their generic boundaries but also within their cultural moment.³ Turning away from the long-standing (although lately unpopular) search for the “origins” of the novel, he instead places Greek and Roman novelists and novels within their contemporary context of “literary production and consumption” [p. 17]. Focusing predominantly on the Greek novels of Chariton, Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Heliodorus, Bowie considers the following questions: “what sort of literature was already prevalent when a choice to write a novel

² Tim Whitmarsh and Shadi Bartsch’s “Narrative” offers an exploration of the narrative techniques employed by the ancient novelists that moves beyond a summary of earlier “formal analyses” and instead “seeks to show how a grasp of narrative and narrative theory can offer a sharply defined critical vocabulary permitting a subtler grasp of wider issues of literary and cultural interpretation” [p. 237].

³ John Morgan and Stephen Harrison’s “Intertextuality,” which demonstrates how awareness of a novel’s intertexts can change our readings, would be particularly well appreciated alongside Bowie’s essay.

was made; what features in that literature might have encouraged or contributed to the novelist's project; and...whether there are any traces of the novel impinging on literature in other genres" [p. 17]. As he further observes, despite the fact that the intellectual environment of the novels can partially be recaptured, there are yet unexpected elements in many of them. For instance, Achilles Tatius' "sophisticated handling of erotic and other commonplaces, occasional play with the game of fiction and persistent inversion of Platonic dialogue" [p. 25] cannot be explained entirely by his contemporary literary context. And like Goldhill, Bowie emphasizes the differences between the Greek and the Roman novels, stressing that the Roman novels, too, are products of their times but also in many ways are outliers that "could hardly have been predicted" based solely on their literary milieux [p. 38].

In "Approaching style and rhetoric" Andrew Laird asserts the importance of the long-ignored category of "style" in understanding the ancient novels. Though the style of the modern novel speaks primarily to authenticity and realism, the style of ancient prose fiction can actually work against realism. Laird suggests that this may be one reason why criticism of the ancient novel avoids discussion of style: critics shy away from analyzing the ancient novel in a way that may reveal its distance from the modern novel, thereby reducing its perceived significance. As Laird notes, the lack of critical discussion of style in the ancient novel may also follow from the fact that these texts are read mostly in translation, which allows for analysis of their "narrative technique" but can eclipse many of their most distinct stylistic elements, observable only in the original (e.g. diction, unique syntax, rhythm, and rhyme). An appreciation of these stylistic elements can enrich our understanding of how an ancient reader would have approached these texts arguably even more than a focus on genre, as "in antiquity there was evidently far more abundant and explicit critical reflection on *style*" [p. 208]. Further, Laird rejects the frequent conflation of style and rhetoric, arguing that rhetoric was a foundational part of ancient fictional prose rather than a "supplementary tool" [p. 210]. He adduces Dio's 'Euboean' oration and the Elder Seneca's *Controversiae* to demonstrate the intimate (and perhaps two-way) relationship between rhetoric and Greek and Roman prose fiction. This argument posits a softer generic divide between these two categories: "both work on the levels of content and form; both of them can trick us in a disquietingly similar way" [p. 215]. Laird also reminds the reader that "[f]irst-person fiction is closer to oratory than any other kind of writing" [p. 213], suggesting that this could be a fruitful line of more thorough inquiry, particularly in respect to Apuleius, both novelist and orator.

Richard Hunter's "Ancient readers" and Tim Whitmarsh's "Class" both explore issues of readership. Hunter offers a useful summary of our changing understanding of the novel's ancient readership as well as of the way in which these novels self-consciously characterize authorship and readership within their own narratives. Recognizing that questions addressing the gender, class status, etc. of the ancient readers cannot be definitively answered, Hunter nevertheless emphasizes that the ancient novels cannot have had "popular readership" in our modern sense of the phrase and that we ought not imagine a monolithic readership, as the variety in the novels themselves "might suggest a diverse and complex audience" [p. 270]. Given the real boundaries of our knowledge of ancient readership, Whitmarsh, while fully acknowledging the lived reality of class for the reader of the ancient novels, focuses instead on the way class is constructed by the texts themselves. For Whitmarsh, class cannot be separated from learnedness and education and through this lens he reflects on how the novels engage with notions of literary elitism among their readers and both construct and manipulate what it means to be 'pepaideumenos' or 'doctus.' He writes: "the reader's social class (defined in literary rather than economic terms) is not an absolute position that he or she possesses before unfurling the papyrus, but a shimmering mirage generated in the act of reading itself" [p. 76].

Whitmarsh makes clear that from the fourth century BCE, literature and elite status were conjoined and asserting oneself as a high status individual required learnedness as well. The novels themselves demonstrate direct engagement with this dynamic insofar as they employ "[t]extual abstruseness [as] a way of testing readers' sophistication, of allowing them to define themselves through their reading" [pp.75-6]. Thus, in *Daphnis and Chloe*, clever Longus lures his reader into that certain smugness that comes from feeling more literarily sophisticated than the novel's naïve characters but ultimately deprivileges this position, thrusting his reader very much into the role of aggressive urban voyeur. Likewise, in Petronius' *Satyrica*, which simultaneously displays and undermines the intellectual arrogance of Encolpius, the author places the reader (both ancient and modern) in the uncomfortable position of self-scrutiny in relation to his or her own (perhaps latent?) snobbishness. So too, as Whitmarsh shows, Lucian's *True Stories* keeps the reader guessing about the author's allusive practices and therefore his or her own learnedness. Whitmarsh also makes the point that some novels – less interested in probing the readers' intellectual sophistication – should perhaps be interpreted as "leak[ing] into popular literature" of a na-

tional or religious bent.⁴ The genre of the novel, in fact, can accommodate the full spectrum of voices, from high to low, a trait often described as “polyphony.” In Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, for instance, elite voices combine with what Whitmarsh calls the “folksy” and the novel thereby embodies the tendency of the genre to introduce its reader to “the widest range of social types” [p. 84]. And although the novels rarely present a sustained subversion of the elite voice to the sub-elite, they can and do on occasion play with the reversal of their characters’ perspectives from “top-down to bottom-up” [p. 85]. All in all, Whitmarsh concludes that social class in the novel may be read as either “socially conservative” or “evidence for the permeability of social boundaries and the fragility of status” [p. 86].

Lawrence Kim’s “Time” takes a nuanced approach to Bakhtin’s reading of time in the ancient novels, offering a good overview of earlier approaches while also demonstrating how in the Greek novels “other temporalities [e.g. “erotic time”] intervene to complicate adventure time” [p. 154]. When he turns to Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, Kim argues that Bakhtin’s “everyday adventure time,” although meant as an overarching theory of time in Petronius and Apuleius, does not apply equally well to both. In basing his theory too much on Apuleius, Bakhtin passes over the fact that one of the central qualities he attributes to “everyday time,” namely that it somehow changes the protagonist, works only for Apuleius (and not for the Greek *Ass* or Petronius’ *Satyrica*). In order to salvage the designation of “everyday time,” Kim, building on the earlier work of Branham (2002), argues that the “everyday time” of Apuleius must be augmented by a separate “moral” or “religious” time that enters the text in the final book, where Lucius’ moral-religious “change” takes place. Therefore, Lucius’ transformation back into a man and into a priest of the cult of Isis is not primarily to be associated with “everyday time” but rather with a special kind of time that intervenes at the end. In this way, the religious element in Apuleius’ novel shapes the temporal element, “transform[ing] the *Metamorphoses* into a hybrid form, rather than the model, of the adventure novel of everyday life” [p. 160].

Froma Zeitlin’s “Religion” asks: “Is there...any intrinsic relationship between the erotic and the sacred, the sexual and the spiritual, the carnal and the transcendent, whereby literal and metaphorical levels may change places or interfuse with one another?” [p. 93]. This question suits the ancient novels particularly well because of the profusion of religious material within their pages, material that, as noted by Zeitlin, has been interpreted on a continuum

⁴ As Whitmarsh is careful to point out, this is not to say that they had a “mass market” or were “read by the sub-elite” [p. 83].

of secular to sacred. In her deft analysis of Chariton, Achilles Tatius, Longus and Heliodorus, Zeitlin makes clear the value of considering the role of religion within the novels anew, especially “how [the] interaction [between religious information and fictional imagination] serves the purposes of the genre’s erotic themes” [p. 100].

By so effectively reappraising religion in the Greek novels, Zeitlin’s essay also demonstrates that it is perhaps time to do the same for Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, which, although it has been the subject of an abundance of good scholarship, still I think demands a fresh look, especially at how religion is in conversation with some of the central themes of the text (e.g. magic and identity). Excepting Winkler’s influential analysis (which virtually demands that religion in the novel not be taken seriously), religion in the *Metamorphoses* has tended to be examined as a teleological movement from (false) magic to (true) religion, with Lucius’ conversion to Isis as the culmination – and closure – of his adventures. This makes good sense, as the narrative arc of prose fiction and actual mystery initiations (teleological in the extreme) have been shown to be parallel in many ways. Despite this, however, it could be argued that a teleological approach, which has been fairly entrenched since Merkelbach, distorts the text by privileging closure over the messy process of reaching it. There is potential for the discourse to be enriched by looking more closely at the conflict between magic and religion throughout the novel.⁵ An analysis that eschews both the assumption that the magic/religion tension is employed primarily as a source of narratological complexity and the assumption that the movement toward religion privileges conversion could offer a new perspective on Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*.

Jason König’s “Body and text” is one of the most interesting, forward-looking contributions in the volume. Gleason (1995) and Wyke’s (1998) analyses of the inextricable link between physicality and political identity serve as a foundation for König’s discussion of the way “these texts both proclaim and problematise the status of physical appearance as a guarantor of inner identity” [p. 127]. In the Greek novels, the “inviolability” of the bodies of the hero and heroine is “championed,” while these texts simultaneously “show a constant awareness of the instability of beauty and of the elite virtue and identity it is taken to guarantee” [p. 130]. In contrast, of course, is Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (and, likewise, Petronius’ *Satyricon*), which emphasizes the violability of the hero’s body. In fact no body in the text is exempt from all manner of disfiguring harm. For König, this is connected to

⁵ A comparison of the *Metamorphoses* with other fictional texts that discuss magic and religion (such as Lucian’s *Philopseudes*) could also bear fruit.

Apuleius' posing of "blatantly grotesque and humorous questions about the stability or otherwise of human selfhood" [p. 136]. And, although the novels in general "present [bodies that] are so often equivalent in form to the texts themselves" [p. 127], Apuleius takes this association even further: he binds the physical transformations of his characters' bodies to the multiple linguistic metamorphoses he is enacting – including in turning a Greek text into a Latin one – and thereby demonstrates his preoccupation with the (im?)possibility of personal and cultural continuity.

The way the novels confront questions of identity is further discussed by Susan Stephens' "Cultural identity," which states, "[a]t the formal level of narrative, themes like infant exposure, travel to distant lands, shipwreck, capture by pirates or bandits provided a vocabulary of action through which all too real experiences like loss of status or confrontation with different social mores might be safely imagined and resolved" [p. 59]. Stephens' treatment of the Greek novels centers on how these texts construct Greekness through "Greek/non-Greek oppositions" [p. 66]. Her perceptive analysis reveals that many of the novels paint a picture of Greek identity that is founded on a "superficial Greek culture," available to most residents of the vast Greek-speaking world [p. 66]. Further, by "present[ing] Greeks and non-Greeks as indistinguishable in action or moral fiber, [some novels] act to undercut notions of ethnic essentialism" [p. 66]. Overall, Stephens states, "'Greek' identity however asserted or enacted...is central to the fiction-writing enterprise in antiquity" [p. 70]. Paired with Catherine Connors' statement in "Politics and spectacles" that "nostalgically chaste or decadently contemporary, all the ancient novels are *Roman*" [p. 180], Stephens' assertion makes clear the complexity of the dynamic between Greece, Rome, and "Other" so prevalent in the novels.⁶ One particular strength of Stephens' argument is that it demonstrates that similar dynamics are at play in several non-canonical texts in which the behavior of foreign heroes is "assimilated to that of the Greek-speaking educated classes within the Roman empire" [p. 68]. This fictionalized assimilation to Greek mores, Stephens argues, may be a response to the threat to their perpetuation posed by Rome or a way of non-Greeks asserting equality with their Greek counterparts. Regardless, the reader is forced to acknowledge the cultural hybridity of these individuals.

This reading of the Greek novels may offer a useful angle from which to approach Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* as well. Apuleius' Lucius, a Greek man who speaks both Greek and Latin and is, in all likelihood, a Roman citizen,

⁶ For full disclosure, I served as Catherine Connors' research assistant during the writing of her contribution.

embodies hybridity even before his asinine transformation, conversion to Isis, and emigration from Greece to Rome. This novel, then, presents neither Greek nor Roman cultural identity in a straightforward way. So perhaps the novel can be seen as partly an exploration of this exact negotiation: what is the source of cultural identity and how can the boundaries of that identity be both constructed and policed when they are so porous? Just as scholarship on the Greek novel plumbs the depths of Greek cultural identity, there remains room in novel scholarship to ask questions such as: Is there a “Roman” cultural identity expressed in the Roman novels? And, if so, how is this constructed in relation to Greekness? As do many of the Greek novels, Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, too, I think, enacts a problematization of the boundary between “Greek” and “Roman” identity.

James Romm, in introducing his essay “Travel,” states that he wishes to offer a sketch of some of the “associations between distant places and alien phenomena that the ancient novelist clearly counted on his audience to make” on the grounds that it is important for readers “to know about the character, history and atmosphere of the places frequented” in the novels [p. 109]. Discussing not only the core Greek novels but also those on the fringe that depict travel to farther-flung locations like the moon (Lucian’s *True Stories* and Antonius Diogenes’ *Wonders beyond Thule*), Romm demonstrates the complex interaction these novels portray between their characters and “the foreign, the exotic and the marvelous” [p. 112]. Romm’s in-depth work on the importance of travel in ancient prose fiction establishes a critical foundation from which further questions about the role of distant (and not so distant) lands in the novel can (and should) be asked. Given that the novelists themselves tended to originate at the geographical margins and their readership may well have also, the “mysteries” of exotic places may not be presented or received in a uniform way. If Achilles Tatius, for instance, was indeed from Alexandria, as most scholars agree, then his exoticized portrayal of Egypt perhaps could fruitfully be read in a couple of different ways. It could be interpreted as a self-conscious literary conceit and therefore more an exploration of the author’s relationship to earlier literature than of the reality of the place itself. It could also be read as ironic, like many other aspects of Achilles’ novel. Both these possibilities should perhaps inform the way we read travel in *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Romm rightly notes the significant differences between the novels that include far-flung travel and those that do not, remarking that for the Greek author of the *Ass*, Petronius, and Apuleius, the travel element is “best plotted not horizontally, on the axis of geographic space, but vertically, in terms of moves up and down the lad-

der of social status” [p. 111]. Nonetheless, Apuleius’ Lucius does travel to Rome at the end of his adventures. Although Rome is presumably not an “exotic” locale to Apuleius’ readers, it is worth asking what travel to the very heart of the Roman world could have meant to an ancient audience.

Helen Morales’ “History of sexuality” stands out both for its valuable contextualization of the history of the question and for its introduction of new ways of approaching the novels. Morales evaluates the way that the history of sexuality has shaped the interest in and understanding of the Greek and Roman novel, making very clear that the history of sexuality is both a “literary history” and a “history of cultural identity.” Of course, one of the central concerns of this essay is coming to terms (again) with Foucault’s influential analysis of the evolution of ancient sexuality in the period in which the novels were written. Morales refreshes the discussion, à la Goldhill, of Foucault’s naiveté in his approach to sexuality in the novel, which is oversimplified and teleological, and therefore fails to acknowledge that “[m]uch of the pleasure in the narratives comes from the tension between the destructive, wilful, *erōs*, and the cohesive, social bonds of marriage” [p. 43]. Morales also rejects Foucault’s interpretation of pederasty and male-male homoerotic desire in the novels, which he views as “deproblematized” and less vital than the depictions of earlier periods, a conclusion that reinforces his notion that these novels are more interested in a movement toward codification of male-female offspring-producing unions. One especially eye-opening aspect of Morales’ treatment is her integration of novels that fall outside Foucault’s purview, novels that paint a different picture of sexuality, such as Iamblichus’ *Babylonian Affairs*. Morales convincingly demonstrates that this novel’s treatment of female-female erotic desire is interpretable both as a depiction of women’s sexuality (rare in its exclusion of the male) and as a metaphor for Roman subjugation of Mesopotamia, showing how the female body can be used in an emblematic way to represent contested political territory. Likewise, by drawing the *History of Apollonius, King of Tyre* into the discussion, Morales is able to emphasize the centrality of sexual violence against women – even if “disavowed” – to the novel. Morales’ essay offers, as she says, a “new erotics” for the ancient novels, presenting innovative directions in which scholarship on the topic should move.

Similarly, the essays on the reception of the Greek and Roman novels after their contemporary period are outstanding contributions to present and future scholarship. Although they cannot be discussed in full here, Joan Burton’s “Byzantine readers,” Michael Reeve’s “The re-emergence of ancient

novels in western Europe, 1300-1810,” Gerald Sandy and Stephen Harrison’s “Novels ancient and modern,” and Massimo Fusillo’s “Modernity and post-modernity” develop a robust understanding of the “modern” life of ancient fiction. Whitmarsh well conveys the centrality of reception in general – and these essays in particular – when he says in the introduction, “the process of meaning-making is ever ongoing” [p. 14]. In fact, taken as a whole, *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, by simultaneously offering a critical survey of earlier approaches and advancing new and stimulating methodologies, has itself already become a milestone in the ongoing, meaning-making scholarly conversation about the ancient novel.