TIM WHITMARSH, *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel.*
Returning Romance
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Tim Whitmarsh's new book will strike some familiar notes with readers acquainted with the scholarly output of this prolific author. Issues of cultural identity, narrative structure, and theory of narrative have preoccupied him since at least his 1998 article on Heliodorus ("The Birth of a Prodigy") and have remained central in subsequent studies of his, as reflected in the rich bibliography of the author's own work appended to *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel*. Although the book descends from and incorporates earlier work, it is not just a clever repackaging but offers a comprehensive and re-focused interpretation of the five Greek romances in their cultural context and of the Greek romance as narrative form. Because of the richness and complexities of the demonstration, I will begin with broad strokes.

If the book has an overarching thesis, it could perhaps be identified in the claim that the dominant centripetal thrust in the novel's narrative, the desire for closure and return, which has invited definitions of the genre as "conservative", is countered by centrifugal tendencies, the desire for the episodic and for wandering, which in turn have invited definitions of the genre as "progressive". The title well captures a central argument of the book, namely, that identity in the novel is constructed in ways in which the *narrative* encompasses and articulates a range of conflicting desires in its movement. The tension between opposite drives, towards and away from the center, towards and away from "home", builds the novels' structural elasticity.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, in three chapters, is a diachronic treatment of the representations and perceptions of identity in each novel. An important point that emerges from these chapters (supplemented by further discussion in the second part of the book) is that the earlier romances (*Callirhoe* and the *Ephesiaca*) articulate a more stable and traditionally Hellenocentric notion of self in relation to (the Greek) community, to which corresponds a narrative that ends in a homecoming. The protagonists' desire is to go home: they invoke their homeland in moments of distress and do not enjoy the trip. In contrast, with *Daphnis and Chloe*, *Leucippe and*

Clitophon, and the *Aethiopica*, identity is no longer defined in relation to one's homeland but becomes more fluid and ethnically less marked. It is tied up with family (especially in *Leucippe and Clitophon*) but not with community. The protagonists of Achilles Tatius' novel look around when they travel and even enjoy the trip: witness, for instance, Clitophon's enthusiasm in touring Alexandria at the beginning of Book 5. They are not prey to nostalgia. Clitophon is a Phoenician but seems to be aloof from local customs. This trend towards decentralization culminates in the *Aethiopica*, which returns (the author's term, *passim*) the Hellenocentric model of the return-romances by complicating the very notion of where or what home is.

I find much to commend in these arguments. In particular the point about the decreasing importance of home in perceptions of identity from the earlier to the later novels (further developed in chapter 4) deserves notice. The author perhaps could have nuanced it a little (for instance, Leucippe's self-definition at 6.16, *when she thinks no one is hearing her*, that is, when she does not fashion herself for an audience but gives voice to her true feelings, puts emphasis on her city as well as on her family); apropos Heliodorus Whitmarsh could have added more evidence to shore it up (for instance, Charicleia's lament at 5.2, when she calls her wandering life with Theagenes "the sweetest of all lives" and seems to have forgotten that they were heading for Ethiopia). The overall demonstration is, however, convincing. Methodologically, it reminds us how important it is to differentiate between the novels rather than lumping them all together.

The author seeks to connect those changes in perceptions of the self with social and political realities. Specifically, he argues that the shift to the less center-oriented outlook of the later romances is related — though, he wisely insists, not deterministically — to the more malleable notions about identity which develop in the second and third centuries (71), and which in turn are grounded in social phenomena. He mentions the increasing Hellenization of Easterners as a factor and the parallel Romanization of the citizens of the empire, culminating in the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212. While there can be little doubt that such phenomena impacted perceptions of identity, it might, however, be asked whether we should expect these modified perceptions to be so strongly reflected in *Leucippe and Clitophon* or *Daphnis and Chloe* and not at all in the *Ephesiaca*, as the book argues. The chronological distance is there, but is it enough? Don't perceptions take a long time to take roots?

I would like now to tackle a few matters of detail. While the author is surely right to say that "almost all…characters want to go home and live a

stable life of marital happiness with their partners", he might be less on the mark in arguing that Thelxinoe and Aegialeus (in Xenophon) are the exceptions because they choose love over home (19). The fact rather seems to be that, contrary to the main hero and heroine, they are *forced* to choose between love and home. I think that all the protagonists of romance would make the same choice if forced to. Clitophon and Leucippe indeed elope for love, but they are luckier because their families end up on their side; Charicleia in the end is luckier, too, but she and Theagenes also elope, and though one purpose of their flight is to seek Charicleia's family, she would choose a homeless life with her lover rather than a homecoming without him. Furthermore, the predicament of Thelxinoe and Aegialeus chimes with the more tragic destiny of Hippothous and Hyperanthes, who also flee for love but lose both love and fatherland.

Two important points in this section deserve mention. First, the double meaning and narrative role of love, as both an agent of disruption, the embodiment of individualistic stances and of "narrative energy," and as a centripetal force, pushing the narrative toward and to its closure (36 ff.). Simply put, love divorces its victims from their community but also drives them back.[1] Related to this point is the author's emphasis on the essential function of community in defining the self, which is not conceptualized as an individual subjectivity. The second point may be less original than the first (Judith Perkins had made it strongly in her book *The Suffering Self*), but the author effectively invokes it to explain the notorious "lack of character development" often lamented in the case of the ancient novel. If community participates in defining the self, the model of the "rite of passage" is more apt to explain the kind of maturation the protagonists undergo than is the model of the *Bildungsroman* or of anachronistic psychological grids (41).

The articulation between self and community in the novels is also reflected in their "symbolic geography" (45 and 50). The author convincingly shows that, in the earlier romances, "abroad" is exclusively the negative pole, the absence of home, whereas in the later ones this polar opposition does not apply. Though I agree with the outlines of this argument, I do not, however, share the author's view of the final journey in Xenophon's novel as "the culminating return" (49). I think that the novel's climax rather resides with the lovers' reunion in Rhodes, which is narrated in an unusually (for Xenophon) slow pace, whereas the final journey and the couple's reintegra-

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[1] In discussing the importance of religious festivals as the occasion for the lovers' first meeting, the author makes a small mistake (38): Callirhoe and Chaereas meet before, not after she goes to the temple.

tion are hastily recounted. The author himself seems to be of two minds on this, since he also maintains that the main desire of Xenophon's hero and heroine is to recover each other ("getting back one's own," 147) rather than to go back home. This detail notwithstanding, however, I found the section illuminating, and in particular the observations on the tripartite world mapped by Chariton (Sicily, Ionia, Persia) and on Callirhoe's growing feeling of alienation, as she is taken farther and farther from the sea, with a reversal of the Greek cliché "sea=bad, land=good" (52): a cliché, we might add, that Callirhoe herself had endorsed earlier (1. 13: "Anywhere is better than the sea or the tomb"). In his discussion of "the stereotyping of Persia" in the same section (57) the author makes another intriguing observation: that such stereotyping is complicated by the depiction of Artaxerxes as a sympathetic character and in particular one resisting divinization. It is true that Artaxerxes displays moderation and recognizes Eros as more powerful than he is, but it should also be noted both that, before he was wounded by love, he did think of Eros as his inferior (6. 3: "I did not believe that anyone could be more powerful than I"),[2] and that he puts so much pressure on Artaxates to obtain for him Callirhoe's favors that the eunuch finds the job hard to handle. What would Artaxerxes have done or tried to do if the war had not broken out?

The section on Achilles Tatius in this part includes a fascinating development on "Art and Interpretation" (93 ff.), which makes a strong case for *ekphrasis* as a mark of elite behavior: "artworks involve the viewer in a power relationship" in which "the disempowered are subdued into passive silence, mere wonder, while the empowered respond actively and emulously" (95). This statement stimulates further questions: if wonder is not, and should not be, an elite response to art, is silence the appropriate response to a poetic or narrative performance? It may be noted that in Heliodorus, when Calasiris interrupts his compelling, Odysseus-like, narrative, on the Odysseus-like grounds that it is time to go to sleep, Cnemon is not reported to "marvel in silence", as the Phaeacians are when Odysseus stops. Does this reflect a change in the expected audience response? Another question that may come to mind in connection with the elitist ideal of *nil admirari*, present also in the novel, is: how can it be articulated with the celebration, by philosophers (therefore addressed primarily to the elites), of the wondering gaze, in existence since at least the famous Aristotelian claim that wonder is the origin of knowledge (*Metaphysics* 982b)? *Nihil admirari* is only one side

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[2] Allow me the inelegance of referring to my own article on dilemmas in the Greek Novel (*AN* 2010), in which I treat this episode.

of the coin. Even the Stoics are conflicted about the correct attitude vis-à-vis extraordinary sights: while Diogenes Laertius (7.123) claims that the Stoic sage does not wonder at any such sight, Seneca's sage has a naïve gaze (he wonders at nature), and Cicero claims that one of the Stoic arguments for the existence of the gods was "our wonderment at celestial and terrestrial things" (*De nat. deor.* 2.75-76). But we might be getting too far afield now.

Longus', Achilles Tatius', and Heliodorus' romances, the author maintains, are transformative in the sense that the conclusion marks, not a return to the initial status before the travels, but the transition to a new status. This is apparent in the relocation of marriage from the beginning of the narrative to the end (101). I agree, but would have liked to see the argument slightly nuanced. In Chariton's novel at least the reunion is a second marriage, recalling Odysseus' and Penelope's, and that re-marriage acknowledges Chaereas' transition to adulthood (as Sophie Lalanne has shown). The author also spots the transformative quality of the later romances in the inset stories, for instance in the sudden and total transformation of Callisthenes (in Achilles Tatius) and in the forgiveness granted to Lampis (in Longus), which implies that he regretted his actions (106). While Callisthenes' story is doubtlessly one of "conversion" (and one challenging the claim that no character-change at all occurs in the novel), I do not think that Lampis experiences contrition. The text does not say so. Rather, he is forgiven because *Daphnis and Chloe* ends with a total reconciliation of all parties in a comic mood.[3]

The second part of the book is primarily synchronic. It focuses on the romance's structure, which plays out the characters' and the readers' desires. In spite of appearances, however, the two parts form an organic unity. Issues approached from a diachronic and broadly cultural-historical perspective in the first part reappear but tackled from within the novels' narrative impetus. The author felicitously defines the novel as "a tale of desire fulfilled" (139). The opening chapter of this part is aptly entitled *Pothos*: aptly because this term, as opposed, for instance, to *himeros*, implies an absence to be filled, and thus represents the force driving the narrative forward, to the fulfillment of marriage and return. The theme of nostalgia reappears, though from the angle of the process of narration, and with specific reference to the foundational model of Odysseus. The author suggestively opposes the Odysseus of Homer (and this hero's novelistic reincarnations), whose method is narrative because he is driven forward by nostalgia, to the Odysseus of Epictetus, who

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[3] See E. Bowie, "Vertus de la campagne, vices de la cité dans *Daphnis et Chloé* de Longus," in B. Pouderon and C. Bost-Pouderon, eds. *Passions, vertus et vices dans l'ancient roman*. Lyon: Maison de l' Orient et de la Méditerranée, 2009, 13-22.

should not feel nostalgia but be self-sufficient (144). The author might have added that the Odysseus of another philosophical school roughly contemporary to the novels, Middle-, then Neo-Platonism, is closer to the novelistic model because he does not suppress the hero's nostalgia, although of course his destination is not wife and country, but a metaphysical homeland.

If desire is a driving narrative force in each novel, it has, however, slightly different objects: in Chariton sexual desire is translated into social desire, in Xenophon it is for each other, in Longus and Achilles Tatius it is primarily for sex, while in Heliodorus sexual longing is in tension with the desire for moral purity (145-153). In this novel for the first time in the genre society is not the force controlling sexual desire, but, the author argues, that desire produces an alienation "from the traditional structures of Greco-Roman community" that brings *Paul and Thecla* to mind. The parallel with the Christian narrative is productive and could have been developed further by highlighting both similarities and equally important differences, for after all Charicleia decides to elope not to adopt an antisocial lifestyle but to obtain her family's imprimatur to her marriage (although she also conceives of sex/marriage without her family's endorsement, should her quest fail.) While both heroines leave social structure behind, Charicleia does not reject it altogether. At the end family is integrated in her life, whereas Thecla does not even rejoice in seeing her mother again. She returns home but as an evangelist, then leaves on another mission. In Heliodorus' novel desire may produce an alienation from traditional Greek social structures, but not a definitive alienation, and not from any social community and its traditional structures, those of power included. The author could have invoked *Paul and Thecla* again when he asks the question, again in connection to Charicleia's voluntary elopement, "can one describe as *phugê* a self-willed state?" (222)

The following section, "desire and the other," centers on the alternatives to the "main *pothos*," namely pederastic love and the protagonists' rivals. These alternatives represent narrative options reflecting and fulfilling different desires, and are not entirely eradicated by the main narrative. I found of great interest the discussion of Chariton's ending (167). Callirhoe's relationship with Dionysius and her final "intrigue" (the author's word), when she writes him the letter unbeknownst to Chaereas, creates instability in the postnarrative time because Callirhoe will not be able to forget her past. This observation is to be added to those of other scholars concerning the problematic ending of this novel,[4] and complements the author's own comment

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[4] To be added to the bibliography: G. Schmeling, "Narratives of Failure," M. Paschalis *et al.* eds., *The Greek and the Roman Novel. Parallel Readings*, *AN* Suppl. 8, 2007, 23-37.

on that ending in the first part of the book (67), showing again the organic integration of the two parts.

A treatment of "readerly desire," that is, "what kind of readers would choose what kind of sense?" (171), concludes the chapter on desire. It focuses on the relationship between readers' desire and vision, arguing that immoderate visualization of the beloved is stigmatized as barbaric and a sign of moral weakness across the novels' spectrum. The author could have added one more example to the many he musters (173): Arsace, luxuriating in the "sight" of Theagenes (*Aeth.* 7. 6. 1; 7. 6. 3; 7. 8. 6; 7. 9. 2).

Discussion of the closural drive and its opposites occupy the rest of the book. This is a crucial section for the main argument, the tension in the novel between centripetal and centrifugal impulses. The author introduces the tension excellently by a concrete example from the simplest of the novels: Xenophon's. He shows how the contrasting responses of the two couples of parents to the oracle encode two opposite ways of reading a novel: one couple looks to the end, the other "to the interminable, unresolved middle" (181). The author wisely concedes that readers aware of generic rules know that the happy ending is bound to come, and that, as he beautifully puts it, "the promise of closure overhangs the wandering narrative" (183). That said, however, he suggests that ancient readers might have been attracted to episodic narratives more than modern readers tend to be, and proceeds to map the centrifugal forces operational in the novels: wandering, episodicity, digressivity. This is all subsumed under the rubric "*limen*," a term inspired by the language of anthropology, and quite appropriately chosen if we consider the importance of the rite-of-passage subtext for the structure and ideology of the novel. Questions asked include: what happens in the middle? How do the hero and heroine perceive themselves while traveling? The "exiled subject" (120) is both alienated and creative, adopting disguises, refashioning herself. This matches broader notions about wandering as a source both of utter unhappiness and of transformative powers (the author's emphasis on the ambivalence of wandering finds me in perfect agreement).

This part has many more thought-provoking developments, such as the appreciation of (some of) the novels' liking for episodes and digressions against the background of ancient sources (such as Athenaeus) generally hostile to episodic narratives on the grounds that they are a waste, that "time is money" (237). But I would like to retain in particular the author's imaginative recasting of the novel's closural and anticlosural thrusts in psychoanalytical, then linguistic, terms: as superego, the provider of meaning, and as id, the vital drive (204 ff.). Or: as paradigmatic and syntagmatic. This is just

one example among many of the author's impressive nimbleness in crossing over from ancient texts to modern theories and from theory to theory. As another example I could mention his treatment of Tyche (246 ff.), which develops from a discussion of ancient perceptions of fortune (essentially as an interpreting criterion marking lack of certainty, the limits of knowledge), to its role in the novelistic narrative as a creative force, again the Freudian id, or, with a captivating formula, "the syntagmatic plotter" whose inventiveness the novel's players cannot appreciate as such.

Let me conclude with a brief mention of the author's own inventiveness in forging new words and composing striking phrases. In addition to those already quoted, a small sample will suffice: "Hellenofugality" (213); "Newtonianisation of erotics" (160); "microecologies of desire" (168); "Odysseanism" (233). Sometimes I felt that the author underestimated the extraordinary richness of the English language, and that his presence was too up-front in his writing. At other times acrobatics of language obfuscate the thought. But much more often the author's creations seem appropriate indeed to capture the expressed ideas.

Last but not least, the bibliography is rich and tantalizingly varied. A few additions are suggested in the notes.[5] I had to apply myself very hard to find missing items, and I did it more in the spirit of a reviewer's pedantry than because I really thought that a handful more titles would add significantly to the quality of this highly sophisticated work. The book will be required reading for students of the ancient novel, among other reasons because it covers almost all the important issues raised by previous studies and treats them from original and fascinating angles.

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[5] We can add N. Marini, "*Drama*: possibile denominazione per il romanzo Greco d'amore," *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 9 (1991): 232-43, relevant for the author's discussion of the novel as genre; M. Biraud, "L'hypotexte homérique et les rôles amoureux de Callirhoé dans le roman de Chariton," *Publications de la Faculté de Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Nice* 29 (1985): 21-27, on Helen and Penelope as models for Callirhoe (see p. 190); M. Sanz Morales and G. Laguna Mariscal, "The Relationship between Achilles and Patroclus according to Chariton of Aphrodisias," *CQ* 53 (2003), 292-295, relevant for the discussion on p. 159.