

# Introduction

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The present volume contains ten expanded and revised papers presented at the Fourth International Conference on the Ancient Novel (ICAN IV), held in Lisbon at the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian in July 2008. The work presented at ICAN IV was at the forefront of scholarship in the field, and the emphasis on the interdisciplinary character of ancient fiction helped to encourage new approaches and directions for further research. Under the heading, ‘Philosophy and the Ancient Novel’, the papers assembled in this volume explore a relatively new area in scholarship on the ancient novel: the relationship between an ostensibly non-philosophical genre and philosophy. This approach opens up several original themes for further research and debate. As Richard Fletcher states, ‘discussions of the origins of the novel-genre in antiquity have centred on the role of Socratic dialogue in general and Plato’s dialogues in particular as important precursors’ (p. 99 of the present volume), and he notes that ‘Platonising fiction was popular in the Second Sophistic and it took a variety of forms, ranging from the intertextual to the allegorical’ (p. 98 of the present volume). In turn, Vernon Provencal observes: ‘The presence of Plato in the ancient Greek novel reflects his renewed status among the Greek elite as an intellectual pillar central to their cultural hegemony under Roman rule’ (p. 110 of the present volume). The papers in this collection cover a variety of genres, ranging from the Greek and Roman novels to utopian narratives and fictional biographies, and seek by diverse methods to detect philosophical resonances in these texts.

Ourania Molyviati, ‘Growing Backwards: the *Cena Trimalchionis* and Plato’s Aesthetics of Mimesis’, explores the figure of the labyrinth to reinterpret the *Cena Trimalchionis*. Starting from Socrates’ claim that a ‘name’ is an imitation which, when used properly, reveals the essence of things, Molyviati’s paper has a threefold purpose: to connect the significance of the name *labyrinthus* with Socrates’ theory of language and *mimesis*; to examine the analogy between the labyrinthine Trimalchio and contemporary teachers of rhetoric, who have

corrupted the true rules of eloquence and use rhetoric as a mere exercise of *psychagogia*, instead of searching for the true meaning of all that exists ; and to demonstrate that the fictional author claims for his written *monumentum*, his literary *labyrinthus*, the status of true rhetoric, ‘because the incorruptibility and stability of the written world discloses the truth about Trimalchio’s art of *psychagogia*’.

Peter Möllendorff, in ‘Stoics in the Ocean: Iambulus’ Novel as Philosophical Fiction’, revisits one of the most renowned utopian accounts in Hellenistic literature, which was summarized by Diodorus Siculus. Möllendorff takes the utopian nature of the Diodoran excerpt and the references to social-Utopian motifs as the basis for an analytic-hermeneutic reading of the text as a philosophically oriented fictional narrative. This ideological dimension is consistent with Diodorus’ own affinity to Stoic doctrines and with the practice of allegorical interpretation. Nevertheless, Möllendorff concludes that there is no evidence that Iambulus’ novel was intended as a fictional model of a Stoic ideal society.

The role of divine *pronoia* in the plot of Longus’ novel, *Daphnis and Chloe*, is the subject of the next paper, ‘The Caring Gods: *Daphnis and Chloe* as *Pronoia* Literature’, by Ursula Bittrich. The idea of divine intervention in human affairs has haunted Greek philosophers ever since Plato, and is also a central issue in Longus’ novel. Starting from the discussion of the philosophical roots of the concept, Bittrich examines how the notion of divine providence operates on the protagonists and is manifested in the reciprocity between the human and the divine. Merciful, caring and benevolent deities, whether personified or mere abstract entities, like Eros, are also agents of transformation: ‘In Longus’ novel discordant elements are not violently demolished, but rather tamed in a process of gentle transformation’. Although destructive forces are present, they are not a real danger for the harmony of the whole. *Daphnis and Chloe* is thus a novel of rescue, reconciliation and salvation through divine intervention.

*On the Life of the Brahmans* is a short Greek text usually assigned to Palladius, probably the 5<sup>th</sup> century Bishop of Helenopolis, in Bythina. It is a slightly reworked version of an independent *opusculum* preserved on a papyrus of the mid-second century AD (Geneva papyrus inv. 271), which is included in a collection of Cynic diatribes. Palladius’ work describes one of Alexander’s most memorable encounters: the episode with the Naked Philosophers or Brahmans, who live what we may call an ideal life, set apart from the rest of the world, and in accord with the laws of Nature. In ‘Tales of Utopia: Alexander, Cynics and Christian Ascetics’, Richard Stoneman presents a conspectus of ancient utopian thought and examples of attempts to create an ideal society in practice. He argues that

early Christian ideas borrow from Cynic thought, which was also one of the motive forces for early Christian anchoritism, and ‘that the model of the Brahman’s society lay somewhere behind some early Christian views of ascetic life.’

What is the function of culture (*paideia*) and the role of the ‘intellectual’ (*pepaideumenos*) in the Greco-Roman world of the first centuries AD? In his paper, ‘Targeting the “Intellectuals”’: Dio of Prusa and the *Vita Aesopi*’, Stefano Jedrkiewicz discusses the notion of *paideia* and the parallel quest for ‘authentic’ knowledge by way of an intertextual dialogue between two works which, for all their apparent differences, seem to share some common ideological assumptions: the *Vita Aesopi* (or *Aesop Romance*), an anonymous text written in the first centuries AD, and Dio of Prusa’s erudite *Discourses*. The *Aesop Romance* is a polemical and popular text, which reflects a widespread satirical discourse targeting ‘intellectuals’, i.e. the philosophers, whose image remains rather controversial throughout this period (as is evident in many of Lucian’s dialogues). ‘The *Vita* apparently doubts that institutionalized *paideia* can provide the right instruments: something different is needed, and this is what Aesop apparently puts forward.’

The next two essays offer a Platonic exegesis of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*. In ‘Only Halfway to Happiness: a Platonic Reading of Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*’, Walter Englert argues that the reason why Apuleius, in Book 11, depicts Lucius’ conversion as sincere but still incomplete is that he means to indicate that Lucius needs to move beyond a literal or superficial interpretation of Isis and Osiris and take on a more Platonic, allegorizing, view of them. Englert points to a number of jarring features in the final book that cause us to question Lucius’ conversion to Isis. After exploring the Middle Platonic context in which Apuleius developed his Platonism and examining the major Platonic elements in the *Golden Ass*, Englert argues that Apuleius, as a *philosophus Platonicus*, has written a text that portrays Lucius as a superficial follower of Isis, unable to understand the deeper truths that lie beneath the symbols and rituals of the cult he is practicing, and that he is, therefore, only halfway to happiness.

The next paper focuses on the topic of Platonic demonology and Socrates’ *daimonion*. Taking as a starting point Apuleius’ lecture *De deo Socratis*, in ‘*Ex Alienis Vocibus*: Platonic Demonology and Socratic Superstition in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*,’ Richard Fletcher investigates how Apuleius’ fiction is related to the rest of his Platonic *corpus*. Apuleius approaches Socrates’ *daimonion* as the basis for a general theory of Platonic demonology, stressing the ethical import of Socrates’ exemplary model. According to Fletcher, the focus on the authority and transmission of Plato’s views, the decision to begin with Platonic demonology move from there to the Socratic *daimonion*, and the concluding ethical protreptic,

are key features of Apuleius's Platonic project. However, the *Metamorphoses*, rather than taking the form of an allegorical version of Platonic doctrine, introduces some major challenges to Platonic demonology, and illustrates how philosophical thought is reflected in a fictional text.

Apuleius is not alone as a writer of 'Platonic fiction' in antiquity. In 'The Platonic Eros of Art in the Ancient Greek Novel', Vernon Provençal reads the ancient Greek novel as a new art form from a Platonic perspective. At first sight, the harsh reality of lived experience depicted in these fictions seems to undermine the Platonic subjection of the erotic impulse to the divine principle of beauty, *to kalon*. However, as Provençal stresses, the ancient Greek novel is best characterized as a quasi-Platonic erotic fantasy, wherein the 'transcendent divinity of *to kalon* is imagined as immanent in the idealized humanity of heroic lovers'. Assuming that the union of godlike human beauty, art, and eros is a sublimation of the erotic impulse toward *to kalon*, Provençal considers that 'the erotic fantasy is itself a Platonised world of idealized appearances, of heroes and heroines whose only virtue is their Platonic devotion to the beautiful, the just and the good, now as immanent in the idealized world of appearances rather than transcendent of ordinary reality'.

Steven Smith, in 'Platonic Perversions: Horror and the Irrational in the Greek Novel', also considers the presence of Plato in the Greek novel, but explores deviations from Platonic idealism and from the novels' putatively noble aims, focusing rather on the narrative's indulgence in the grotesque and the irrational. Starting from the Platonic dual nature of the soul, which by nature tends toward the good despite the presence of the irrational within the soul itself, Smith analyzes two scenes of extreme violence (Leukippe's violent *Scheintod* in Achilles Tatius' *Leukippe and Kleitophon* and the scene of necromancy and the old woman's gruesome death in Heliodoros' *Aethiopica*), through which we witness the 'darker side' of certain characters, whose souls are continually bound up in a struggle between the noble and good and the perverse fulfillment of their basest desires. The appeal to Platonic theory is expressed through allusions to Plato's *Symposium*, a prime intertext, and is consistent with the literary and philosophical irony that pervades Achilles' and Heliodorus' novels.

The final paper brings focus on the interaction between famous historical characters (Alexander and now Apollonius) and the so-called 'naked' (*gymnoi*) philosophers, hailing from India. The main focus is on the travels and adventures of Apollonius of Tyana, a famous thaumaturge of the first century AD, which Philostratos narrates in his fictional biographical work, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. In 'Apollonius of Tyana and the *Gymnoi* of Ethiopia', Gary Reger concentrates on the encounter of Apollonius with an exiled group of Indian sages in

Ethiopia (Nubia, on the Nile south of Egypt). Relying on evidence of various kinds, Reger demonstrates that many of the geographical details in the account of Apollonius' visit to these sages are demonstrably wrong, which leads him to affirm that 'Philostratus takes us into a world of geographic fantasy.' Reger argues that the confused Egypto-Ethiopian geography serves Philostratus' purpose of portraying Apollonius as a new and better Alexander, 'in search not of conquest but of sacred knowledge and wisdom', and that the background for this competition is inevitably the realm of the marvelous, a 'geography of the imagination'.