

Romancing the Classics: The Hellenic Standard and its Vicissitudes under the Empire

FROMA I. ZEITLIN
Princeton University

Travel and adventure is, in a broad sense, the topic of this essay, which I have entitled ‘Romancing the Classics.’¹ To begin with, these two elements are, of course, the staple ingredients of the Greek novel that began (we think) in late Hellenistic times and flourished under the Empire. Its conventional plots depict a young (elite) couple who fall in love but undergo a number of vicissitudes, including, for the most part, both travel and adventure (with attendant mishaps), until the novel reaches its expected conclusion, that is, the happy ending in their legally sanctioned matrimony. But in a larger sense, I take travel and adventure in two senses: first, as the undertaking of a voyage into a less charted area of Greek literature in space and time – beyond the comfort zones of the archaic and classical canon – and second, adventure in the sense of discovery that leads to a rich and to many, often still strange, manifestations of literary possibilities and attitudes in a vastly expanded Hellenized world.

The Development of a Field

As I undertook to write this piece on the subject of marginality, canonicity, and passion (the latter utterly germane to my topic), I realized two important considerations: the first is that the last twenty-five years has seen a monumental increase

¹ This piece was originally presented at a conference at Yale University in 2012, entitled ‘Marginality, Canonicity, and Passion.’ Mine was the only one to treat the ancient Greek novel. While in essence this is a survey was originally meant for the uninitiated, my hope is that it will reach a wider audience of cognoscenti in this journal.

in the bibliography pertaining to ancient prose fiction.² While the novel was formerly relegated to the margins of Greek literature and its products often scorned as unworthy heirs to the classical tradition (more on this below), today's climate of opinion has undergone a quite drastic shift in the assessment of the value of these works as cultural artifacts. They not only prove to offer precious testimony for the intellectual and social climate of later antiquity and the tastes of their readers (although we are not certain who these might be). They can also be shown to have genuine literary merit, once the age-old prejudices are swept away in favor of a more sophisticated approach to literary and extra-literary matters in a world of cultural syncretism, hybrid identities, and varieties of religious experience. 'To be honest,' one critic remarks, 'fictional narratives in prose have traditionally proved something of an embarrassment, because they conform neither to our own preconceptions of what a "serious" novel should be like nor to the canons by which we define the excellence of classical literature.'³

My second reason, perhaps a corollary to the first, to account for this shift is the consonance of this field with contemporary intellectual preoccupations, such as eros, the body, gender, self-representation, literary self-consciousness, intertextuality, and rhetoric, along with interest in cultural margins, ethnic identity, and literary reception. We live in an age we might rightly call multicultural, and the voluminous Greek literature under the Empire in a world of competing values and religious beliefs and its broad expanse of territory (for our purposes, especially in what has become known as the 'Greek East'), is a fertile area for exploration, even though agreement on a number of issues is hard to come by (as we will see).

The field has also benefited from a certain bi-directionality: on the one hand, there is its previously humble position vis à vis what we think of as the mainstream of classical literature; on the other hand, *qua* fiction, there is its position with regard to the genre of the novel itself, which from the 18th century on became the premium creative accomplishment in European letters, but which, for the most part, gave no place to its ancient counterparts,⁴ despite its marked influence on the development of Continental fiction in the Renaissance and beyond (Heliodorus, in fact, was the first translation into French by the great humanist, Jacques Amyot [1547], best known for his renderings of Plutarch and Longus).⁵

² One sign of legitimation perhaps has been the publication of two Companions to the ancient novel (Whitmarsh 2008, Cambridge, and Cueva and Byrne 2014, Blackwells).

³ Morgan 1995, 130.

⁴ See, e.g., Doody 1996. Heiserman 1977 deserves a mention here for his quirky but brilliant book.

⁵ It was an important moment in the history of French Renaissance humanism for the transmission of Greek texts in the West, and, as the first of the ancient romances to reach a

And, as it happens, the field has benefited too, not only by a preoccupation with the matter of theory in a number of domains (e.g., formalism, structuralism, post-structuralist, narratology, post-colonialism, feminism, reader-response, etc.) but with two towering figures, who turned their attention to the ancient novel and put it, as it were, on a world stage. I am thinking here, first, of Mikhail Bakhtin, the noted Russian formalist, who elevated the novel over the epic and the well-known terms he coined, such as dialogism, heteroglossia, chronotope, and polyphony, to account for his approach to this multiform and flexible genre.⁶ Second, is Michel Foucault in the third volume of his *History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self*, where he argues that ‘the literature of the period celebrates a hitherto unthinkable focus on the heterosexual relation, that organizes itself around the symmetrical and reciprocal relationship of a man and a woman, around the high value attributed to virginity, and around the complete union in which it finds perfection, that is marriage.’⁷ This system, Foucault argued, replaced a previous area of privileged concern that emphasized the hierarchy of male same-sex relations. What emerged then was a ‘revolution in sexual fashioning, a “new erotics”,’ as Morales has put it.⁸ Neither critic has been immune to dissent and revision, I hasten to add, but each served as a point of departure, the first, for literary criticism. and the second, for cultural history that elevated the study of the ancient novel to a new respectability. To these two we might also add Northrop Frye’s influential study, *Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, first published in 1976,⁹ which claimed archetypal, even mythic, forms embedded in conventional plots

reading public, it exerted a strong influence on the transformation of European prose fiction as the leading model for the heroic romance. Called ‘l’Homère des romanciers,’ Heliodorus was admired by Rabelais, Montaigne, Cervantes, Tasso, Scudéry, Sir Philip Sidney, and many others, down to the 17th century and beyond. His appeal, in fact, is summed up in Amyot’s own Proem to his translation, which, among other virtues, praised the ingenuity of the storytelling ‘de sorte que tousjours l’entendement demeure suspendu, jusques à ce que l’on vienne à la conclusion, laquelle laisse le lecteur satisfait, de la sorte que le sont ceux, qui à la fin viennent à jouir d’un bien ardemment désiré, & longuement attendu’ (fol. Aiii). An anecdote, related by the son of Jean Racine, tells how in 1655 his then 16-year-old father was caught reading Heliodorus by the sacristan of the Jansenist school of Port Royal, who ‘snatched the book from him and tossed it in the fire.’ A second copy met with the same end. Finally, he procured a third copy, which he committed entirely to memory, and only then surrendered the book. Considering the substantial length of the work, if true, this would have been no small feat.

⁶ Bakhtin 1981 and see, e.g., the relevant essays by Whitmarsh, Ballengee, and Smith, in Branham 2005 along with Nimis 1994 and 1999. Other critics have also engaged with Bakhtin’s various essays, first written, it should be added, in the 1930s.

⁷ Foucault 1986, 232. See further Goldhill 1995, Konstan 1995, Swain 1996, 118-31.

⁸ Morales 2008, 41.

⁹ Frye 1976.

and to some extent, has seemed to justify the notion that the romance served as the new myth of its so-called deracinated and individual-centered age.¹⁰ At least, Frye's universalizing theory met a favorable response in those who would believe that the novel, including Christian texts with novelistic elements, answers to a higher calling: 'Journeys out and back, descents to suffering and disintegration, ascents to joy and reintegration, these are the stuff of mysteries and of novels too.'¹¹

Nevertheless, serious work on the novel seems to have evoked a recurrent preamble, an apologetics for the subject, as it used to be rated: 'a specialist and slightly furtive business, garnering sympathy with their repetitive and artificial plots, or with their idealistic and sentimental values.'¹² John Morgan, for example, recalls: that 'when, as an undergraduate in the 1970s [in the UK], I first declared my interest in doing my doctoral research in the area of the Greek novel, I was reassured, in all kindness, by a very senior Oxford classicist that I need not feel downhearted at the prospect of spending three whole years reading silly love stories.' All was not lost, however, 'because there were some very interesting uses of the optative to be discovered in Heliodoros.'¹³ Small comfort indeed. When in 2010, the Petronian Society Newsletter celebrated its 40th year, it reported that at the first meeting (and paper reading session) at the APA in 1971, the president at the time (Agnes Kirsopp Lake Michels) proposed a ban on the society and its activities from participating in the Association in the future. The grounds: it was a 'splinter group,' not subject to quality control, and even more important, 'its interests were on the fringe [*that loaded word*, my addition] of classical studies.'¹⁴ But this kind of preamble was inevitably matched, indeed eventually superseded, by a certain triumphalism, a success story, as it were.

It is a story, however, that owed more for its success than the dicta of external authority to endorse its worth, nor did it happen by itself in the scheme of things. True, one attraction may have been, as Bowie and Harrison suggested in 1993, that 'as the 'central' texts of the classical period have become progressively overgrazed, scholars have looked to new pastures. This rediscovery,' they proposed,

¹⁰ See, e.g., Perry 1967, 48, and Reardon 1971 and 1991, who calls the novel a new 'Hellenistic myth,' More recently, see Dowden 1999, 223, and Bierl 2009, among others, for variations on the idea.

¹¹ Beck 2003, 150, citing Frye 1976, 97-157. I omit here consideration of the novels as coded religious texts, promoted by Kerényi 1927 and Merkelbach 1962.

¹² Morgan 1994, 1. Harvard refused for the longest time to put Plutarch on the graduate reading list on the grounds that he would corrupt students' prose composition style.

¹³ Morgan 1996, 63.

¹⁴ Schmeling 1996:2003, 3.

‘is part of the rediscovery of Imperial Greek literature as a whole,’ in a new emphasis on the diffusion of Hellenic identity and Hellenization itself.¹⁵ (I shall return to this topic). True, the rise of interest met with a post-modern sensibility that valued transgressiveness of accepted norms, especially regarding sexuality, but also including playful irony and high self-consciousness. But what seems to me to be especially remarkable in any discussion of the margin vs. the canon is that the notable successes in revising and revisioning our perceptions of the field of Greek prose fiction – to redeem it against charges of so-called ‘lewdness, marginality, and inconsequentiality’¹⁶ – were largely due to a like-minded community of scholars, mainly in the Anglo-Saxon world. These, it may be said, created an entire sub-specialty, replete with running bibliographies, newsletters, organized colloquia, international gatherings, publication series, and review essays¹⁷ that assessed current accomplishments and outlined future areas of research. This was a self-conscious struggle for legitimation, to find a place amidst the so-called Classical canon. The pioneers in this endeavor deserve mention as the heroes of this story: the late Bryan Reardon, Gareth Schmeling, Gerald Sandy, John Morgan, and the late John Sullivan (his work on the Roman novel. Petronius and Apuleius, should also be part of this narrative, but its career follows a different trajectory, which I cannot address here). Bryan Reardon should especially be singled out for his enterprising efforts: his masterful *Courants littéraires grecs des IIe et IIIe siècles après J.-C.* (1971), his organization of the first international conference on the novel (1976), and the production of an essential publication, the massive translation of relevant texts, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (1989, 2d ed. 2008), which made English versions available to all.¹⁸

Although a number of other European scholars have contributed monographs entirely devoted to the topic, each in his own national tradition (e.g., German, French, Italian, Spanish, Swedish),¹⁹ they too have joined this community through

¹⁵ Bowie and Harrison 1993, 159.

¹⁶ Despite due diligence, the author of this irresistible phrase remains anonymous.

¹⁷ Review essays: Sandy 1974, Bowie and Harrison 1993, Morgan 1996.

¹⁸ Since then, there are new or updated Loeb (Chariton, Longus, Xenophon of Ephesus, Achilles Tatius). Heliodorus has been assigned to John Morgan. For now, the best edition of that work still remains the Budé. The earlier Loeb were noteworthy for translating vulgar or obscene Greek into Latin, and Latin into Italian. Achilles Tatius was the most vulnerable of the novelists to this prudery. There is now also a four-volume lexicon of the Greek novel: Conca, de Carli, and Zanetto 1983-1997.

¹⁹ Hägg 1983, Holzberg 1986, Fusillo 1989, Ruiz Montero 1988, Kuch 1989, and Billault 1991. See now Graverini et al 2006, with an excellent introduction. These are only the most noteworthy. See also Les Belles Lettres’ new French translations of the ancient novel: Brethes and Guez 2015 with introductions and bibliography.

their own and their compatriots' participation in what has become a common international enterprise. I will mention only a few of these endeavors: the International Conference on the Ancient Novel, ICAN (1976, 1989, 2000, 2008, 2015),²⁰ the Groningen Colloquia (Netherlands, proceedings published 1988-1998), the bi-annual Rethymnon Conferences in Crete (2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2016), and the Colloques Internationaux de Tours sur L'ancien Roman, whose proceedings are published in the Collection de la Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée (Lyon: 2001, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2015).²¹

Also note that the aforementioned Petronian Society Newsletter, which rapidly expanded beyond a single author to include the entire range of Greek and Roman prose fiction, followed with an immediately successful journal, *Ancient Narrative*, founded in 2000, which took advantage of the newer technologies in online publication in addition to printed versions.²²

The titles of its numerous supplements, often the published versions of previous conferences, give some idea of the fruitful kinds of sophisticated approaches and collaborative endeavors that have emerged in recent years, which generally include essays on Latin novels as well.

Space in the Ancient Novel (2002) S. 1

The Bakhtin Circle and Ancient Narrative (2005) S. 3

Metaphor and the Ancient Novel (2005) S. 4

Authors, Authority, and Interpreters in the Ancient Novel. Essays in Honor of Gareth L. Schmeling (2007) S. 5

Seeing Tongues, Hearing Scripts. Orality and Representation in the Ancient Novel (2007) S. 7

The Greek and Roman Novel: Parallel Readings (2007) S. 8

Philosophical Presences in the Ancient Novel (2007) S. 10

Readers and Writers in the Ancient Novel (2009) S. 12

Echoing Narratives: Studies of Intertextuality in Greek and Roman Prose Fiction (2011) S. 13.

²⁰ ICAN 1976 (Bangor, Wales), 1989 (Dartmouth), 2000 (Gröningen), 2008 (Lisbon). Proceedings in whole or in part have been published: Reardon 1977, Tatum 1994, Panayokatis et al 2003, with 10 volumes projected for ICAN 2008 under the editorship of Marilia Futre Pinheiro, seven or more of which have already been published. Schmeling 2012 now gives a detailed account of these four conferences and subsequent publications of that date. Full references in the Bibliography.

²¹ See bibliography for these publications under 'Pouderon.'

²² The publisher, Barkhuis (Netherlands) under the astute guidance of Roelf Barkhuis deserves special mention for its continuing support of *AncNarr* and its Supplements in addition to proceedings of RICAN.

- Fictional Traces: Receptions of the Ancient Novel* (2 vols.) (2011) S. 14.1-2.
The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East (2012) S. 15
The Ancient Novel and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative: Fictional Intersections (2013) S. 16.
The Construction of the Real and the Ideal in the Ancient Novel (2013) S. 17.
The Ancient Novel and the Frontiers of Genre (2014) S. 18
Holy Men and Charlatans in the Ancient Novel (2015) S. 19.²³

The latest addition to these enterprises is KYKNOS, the Swansea and Lampeter Centre for Research on the Narrative Literatures of the Ancient World (inaugurated 2004 under the leadership of John Morgan). Its mission statement demonstrates still further directions in ways of incorporating the novel into a broader context: Their manifesto reads as follows:

First, to stimulate, co-ordinate and promote research on the narrative literatures of ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Near East, through collaborative work, conferences and publications; second, to form the centre of national and international networks of scholars working in this field, and third, to raise the profile of the subject area and to attract top-quality research students to its constituent universities, with appropriate resources for funding.²⁴

Note especially two significant developments: the recognition that narrative, the chief component of prose fiction, extends to a number of other forms of literature, and second, perhaps even more important, is the insistence on including Egypt and the Near East, along with ancient Greece and Rome, in its purview.

I will return to this latter issue, as one of cardinal concern, with important ideological implications that were manifest from the very start of serious research in the field. First, however, I would like to return to my original point – that is, what seems to me the unprecedented influence a scholarly community in the making can have in the development and legitimation of a perhaps more marginal area of study. I have tried to think of other parallels to this phenomenon: there are numerous other societies, often devoted to a single author (e.g., the Plutarch Society with its own international congresses and publication, *Ploutarchos*) or a field (The Society for Ancient Medicine, UK, Society for Late Antiquity, Society of

²³ Full references in the Bibliography under names of editors. See also www.ancientnarrative.com under Archives.

²⁴ <http://www.kyknos.org.uk>. Morgan's many own contributions to the field deserve mention.

Ancient Mediterranean Religions). The only one, perhaps not entirely comparable, would be the activities stemming from the Archive for the Performance of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD), based in Oxford, which by its lectures, conferences, publications, theatrical events, and archival research facilities has done much to promote the reception of performances of ancient drama across all periods and national boundaries. This ambitious effort is a relatively new phenomenon – although reception studies is one of the latest burgeoning areas of interest in more than one genre.²⁵

But now to some literary history before turning to the three significant areas of concern with regard to the present status of studies in the ancient novel: to anticipate, first, gender and sexuality; second, relations, real or presumed, both with the ancient Near East as with Greek literature more generally under the Empire. This latter topic includes the impact of that movement, the so-called Second Sophistic, including the very concepts of *Hellenismos* and *paideia*, with its awareness of its own belatedness and its veneration of the Classical canons of the past, tempered by creative revisions and appropriations. Thirdly, the question of canon and margin within the field itself and the place of ancient prose fiction in the broader literature of the Empire.

Chronology and Origins

The question of chronology is mostly solved (except for that of the last novel, Heliodorus). The origins of the genre (the riddle of its appearance on the literary stage), is a tempting if ultimately fruitless pursuit, and the type and extent of ancient readership has not and probably never will attain any firm consensus, although we will discuss this matter further below. What complicates matters and spurs speculation is the simple fact that ‘not only was there no term for the genre, but the “novel” was also without any theoretical codification in ancient sources, hence its character of “open form,” embodying all ancient literary genres and, through metaphor, allusion, revision, and other sorts of intertextual engagement, transferring them into the dimension of the everyday, the private and sentimental.’²⁶ As Otto Weinrich so archly put it in the metaphors of family and filiation:

²⁵ It is worth noting that reception studies seem to have largely displaced the more typical work in the so-called Classical tradition.

²⁶ Fusillo 2002, Brill’s New Pauly, adapted.

Greek love-romance was the fruit of an affair between aged Epic and capricious Hellenistic Historiography [relying on Rohde's formulation as discussed below]. The bastard child was charming – to its mother – and received christening gifts from the Muses of drama and love elegy. As a youngster it read joyfully of distant lands and learned practical lessons in the School of Rhetoric. The blemish of its illegitimacy was so conspicuous, however, that no ancient *Ars Poetica* ventured to admit it to the Select Society of Literary Nobility, no ancient Philologia provided it with a *carte d'identité*. Subsidized by a papyrus dealer, the child found its way in the world even without papers. It was surprisingly long-lived and had an immense number of descendants.²⁷

More soberly, however, erotic prose fiction, which seems to have arisen in the latter years of the Hellenistic era and thrived under the Empire, was never considered a genre in its own right, certainly not in antiquity. Its variety of names: *drama*, *logos*, *diegêma*, *plasma*, *suntagma*, among others, and perhaps more to the point, *logoi erôtikoi*, attest to its fluid and uncertain nature, stressing either story-telling, narrative, theatrical elements, and fictional make-believe, or just a written work in prose of one sort or another, with or without amatory inference. Adding to the confusion in terminology is even a certain undecidability about actual titles. Are they named after places (e.g., *Ethiopika*, *Ephesiaka*, *Lesbiaka*) or by the names of their main characters, or even by the name of the female heroine (e.g., *Charicleia*, *Leucippe*)?²⁸ Several authors (e.g., Philostratus and Julian) seem to allude to the genre (although Whitmarsh contests this attribution), but otherwise the general silence has led critics to assume it was beneath literary consideration, without aspiration to higher status.

The field in some sense came into its own in the modern period with Erwin Rohde's monumental *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*, originally published in 1876 (with further editions in 1900, 1914, and 1960, reprinted again in 2009 and 2011).²⁹ The fact that it is still in print (although never translated into another language, as far as I know) attests to its magisterial pioneering role, whose research on its chosen topic is still unmatched. The centenary of its publication in 1976 was the occasion, in fact, for the first International Conference on the Greek Novel (ICAN), launched by Bryan Reardon in Bangor, Wales. The Anglicized

²⁷ Weinreich 1950:1962, translated in Sandy 1974, 330.

²⁸ See Whitmarsh 2005a.

²⁹ It is also available online: <https://archive.org/details/dergriechischer01rohdgoog> or <https://archive.org/details/dergriechischer00rohduoft>. To be fair, the quest for origins begins much earlier with P.-Daniel Huet's 'Lettre-traité de l'origine des romans,' 1670, updated in a tricentennial edition, 1971. Huet claimed an oriental origin to the novel, the exact opposite of Rohde's theory. See Whitmarsh 2011, 212.

title, *The Greek Novel and its Precursors*, indicates its focus on a theory of origins: Rohde proposed that the Greek novel was the result of a merger of Alexandrian love elegy and utopian travel and adventure literature that had occurred in the so-called Second Sophistic II-III CE.³⁰ The theory itself, however, collapsed at the start of the 20th century under the pressure of papyrus finds that pointed to a much earlier chronology. So, for example, Rohde dated Chariton to the 5th century CE, because he took the relative simplicity of its structure as the product of an experienced rhetor's affectations. Papyri (notably the *Ninus* romance and *Metiochos and Parthenope*), however, prove that the works circulated in the 1st-2d CE, with other scholars claiming an even earlier date in the 1st century BCE).³¹ We know now, of course, that of the five extant romances, two (Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus) predate the other far more rhetorically inflected three exemplars (Longus, and Achilles Tatius, II CE; Heliodorus, mid III-mid IV CE), so that while the initial emphasis on the Second Sophistic as the single context for the genre may be misplaced, it is utterly significant for the underlying ideology of Rohde's approach.

This approach has two sides to it: on the one hand, Rohde insists that the novel is free of foreign cultural elements, notably, of the Near East, but rather represents 'the disposition of the Greek national spirit' (*die Disposition des griechischen Volksgeist*)³² – in other words, a purely Hellenic invention born out of its Greek literary antecedents and composed in strong resistance to both Oriental and Roman influences. On the other hand, he deemed the novel as debased, 'a decay of the major straightforward [canonical] genres.'³³ He reserved some of his harshest comments, for example, for Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, scorning its phony love of nature, its sophist language, style, and storyline, and the passion of its lovers as 'loathsome, canting affectation.'³⁴ In his treatment of the Second Sophistic, a movement, Rohde believed was one of 'cultural revivalism,' he nevertheless considered the novel a decadent form of Hellenism – slavishly imitative of the past and combining a pure Atticism (Attic Greek) with an 'Asianist' or baroque style. 'There is a strong connection in Rohde's mind,' Swain observes, 'between the rise of prose fiction and the decline – *das sinkende Altertum* – (as he called it) of the Greek world from the classical through the Hellenistic to the Roman period.'³⁵

³⁰ A term Rohde himself seems to have invented.

³¹ Fusillo 2002, adapted. On papyrus finds, see, Stephens and Winkler 1995 and among others, most recently, Henrichs 2011, with relevant bibliography.

³² Rohde 1876:1914, 4-5, as quoted in Whitmarsh 2011a, 213. I am indebted to Whitmarsh more generally on Rohde (as for much else).

³³ Bakhtin 1981, 64.

³⁴ Swain 1999, 16.

³⁵ Swain 1999, 19.

Whitmarsh has more recently argued that Rohde's outlook, adhering to a German nationalism of his own, uses both sexist and orientalist (even anti-semitic) metaphors in his characterization: So, for example, 'Asianism is referred to as the "softer, more weakly daughter of the ancient, glorious Attic oratory, overly concerned with ornamentation and display, that is, not manly."³⁶ Beneath these metaphors lurk a cultural anxiety that the vitality of true (previous) Hellenic manhood is diminished by the influence of Eastern effeminacy: West vs. East; male vs. female.

While this is not, of course, a new nexus of associations, as we know well from Greek classical attitudes towards barbarians in its standard (but often nuanced) opposition between East and West, this formulation, unconscious or otherwise, takes on an added *frisson* when it is applied to the romance. For, as we know, one of the key features of the romantic plot is the prominence of women, most often strong, resourceful women, who are caught far from home in often desperate straits, but who manage to survive, most often intact, whereas their male partners, are less active, often more moody and despairing – even suicidal – in the face of adversity. At any rate, it must be of some significance that the titles of these works, as mentioned above, may have simply been known by the names of their heroines. Even more substantial perhaps is the fundamental erotic ideology of the novel that is based on the reciprocal amatory engagement of male and female, to the exclusion of any other considerations, with its only goal a fortuitous reunion and legitimate matrimony at the end.³⁷ Whatever contemporary social factors support this quite conventional teleology (no sex before marriage, fidelity and constancy as the cardinal virtues), the focus itself on the passions of eros are often decidedly located in the feminine and ascribed to feminine interests.

Sex, Gender, and Erotics

Hence it should come as no surprise that the upsurge of scholarly interest in *erôs*, sex, and gender rapidly became one of the most important aspects of the current flourishing interest in ancient prose fiction, where a rising incidence in treatments of the 'feminine' has decisively contributed to renewing that interest and is one of the key components in the genre's rehabilitation (or more accurately perhaps, its rediscovery). In fact, given this central role of male-female relations in romance plots (and their often parodic refractions in the Roman novel – and for some, in Achilles Tatius), it was inevitable that the topic would attract serious and

³⁶ Whitmarsh 2005b, 50.

³⁷ Konstan 1994 is the *locus classicus* for this argument.

sustained attention, especially in the wake of expanded approaches in feminist criticism and queer studies.³⁸ Commonly used methods now address issues of gender identity, both masculine and feminine, along with constructions of the body, and investigations of emotions. Not only do males and females alike pursue erotic experience, undergoing a series of harrowing ordeals, unexpected vicissitudes, and near-tragic outcomes, especially in the favorite *topos* of the *Scheintod*. It is in essence a plot, in which the gods and fate conspire to finally bring about the desired reunion of the lovers, thus validating, and even in a sense promoting, both the ordinarily transgressive expression of a woman's desire in an androcentric society and the man's dedication to love above all else in place of public life and its rewards. This characterization is more than a little accurate, although we hasten to add that nothing in the romance plot seriously subverts masculine hegemony and the teleological emphasis on marriage as a social institution or questions the privileged status of the elite in the larger scheme of things.

The power of the erotic, of course, has a long history in Greco-Roman culture. It was celebrated in theogonies, hymns, lyric poetry, drama, and iconography, sustained by a mythological repertoire, as well as serving as a topic of discussion for philosophers and gaining ever-increasing attention from the Hellenistic period onwards. Earlier precedents such as Euripidean rescue plays,³⁹ New Comedy, and even the Ur-text that is the *Odyssey*, which subtends the entire romance genre, all give hints of future social and political developments that take root in the Hellenistic era and seem to come to full flower under the early Empire, developments that, as has been argued, place greater emphasis on the individual and on private life. However, no prior literary genre, as is agreed by all, can account in full for a transformation of ideological and cultural attitudes that gives such single-hearted attention to erotic passion as the core of one's being and the center of public interest.⁴⁰

The issue of gender has also been engaged in the contested area of readership as well. Who read these works? As novels with spirited independent heroines, were they meant for a female audience, as some have claimed⁴¹ – (a not untypical gendered stereotype)? We know at least that the three novels roughly assigned to the Second Sophistic (II-III CE) and beyond were sufficiently elaborate to require a highly literate Hellenized following, and it would be useful to be able to gauge the extent of female literacy among the elite during this period. But in this context,

³⁸ See, e.g., Haynes 2002 and Morales 2008, but the bibliography is far more extensive.

³⁹ Notably, *Helen* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

⁴⁰ The foregoing two paragraphs are adapted from Futre Pinheiro, Skinner, and Zeitlin 2012, 'Introduction,' 1-2.

⁴¹ See the relevant discussions in Wesseling 1988, Morgan 1995, 1996, and Bowie 1994, 1996:2003. Most suggestive is Egger 1999.

I can't resist quoting a relatively recent suggestion regarding what we now take to be the earliest extant novel, namely, Chariton's *Callirhoe and Chaereas*. This is in an essay by Stephanie West (2003) with the title "Who Read Chariton?." Its claims are based on the so-called oral rather than readerly quality of the novel, with the simplicity of popular literature implied as a founding feature of the genre. West is convinced that Chariton's work was meant to be read aloud. But to whom? And I quote:

I believe that *Callirhoe's* vicissitudes would be rather suited to the milieu of spindle and loom, to a group of women spanning three generations, the youngest members of the workforce being perhaps mere children learning to spin. In such a situation what is most likely to hold the group's attention over many sessions will be classifiable as light literature. If this is the environment in which the novel developed, it should cause us no surprise that it attracted so little notice. Two great women novelists, Jane Austen in Georgian England and the lady known as Murasaki Shibuki, author of *The Tale of Genji*, in eleventh-century Japan, in presenting their characters reading novels create an opportunity to defend their art against the accusation that time wasted reading novels could be far better devoted to reading history. Their compositions were intended for women with leisure hours to fill. Providing light relief for a workforce calls for no such defense, and indeed middlebrow fiction would be ideal for the purpose; the excursus which can serve to connect the novel with ethnographic or historical literature could offer an easily digested educational element to a group who would lack time to satisfy their curiosity about the wider world.⁴²

True, West relies on Tomas Hägg's argument, based on both stylistic and structural grounds, that Chariton's work may have been meant to be read aloud to a group, probably within the household or among friends, a group, whose members had not yet moved definitively from orality to literacy at this early stage, while attesting as well to a more popular vein of story-telling. But West goes still further to suggest that:

For many scholars, though admittedly there have been some recent protests, it has been difficult to resist the impression that Chariton targeted a female audience, principally, it seems, because of the prominence afforded to the obviously idealized *Callirhoe*, faithful, resourceful, and resolute, certainly a far

⁴² West 2003, 66-67 referring to Hägg 1996.

more interesting character than Chaereas. We should probably allow also for an assumption that women are more enthusiastic readers of novels than men.⁴³

West's assumption in the first instance is an evolutionary model that posits a first, oral, stage of the novel that gives way to a more literate and literary production, which presumably would also attract elite male readers. How and why that transition could have come about is not addressed. This imaginary group of women at their looms (to keep them busy and out of mischief), toilers, who need relief from boredom and edification of their values in listening to novels, is based on the idea that women favor works that feature attractive females. In truth, this supposition is not that far removed from the theory that the *Odyssey* was addressed to a female audience,⁴⁴ or to take it still further, was, in fact, composed by a woman, as argued by Samuel Butler long ago.⁴⁵ And the larger point of a readership divided between novels for women and history (or other forms of non-fiction) for men is not so easily dismissed, given today's statistics on literary consumerism and long-lived gendered stereotypes. However, this formulation only increases the unsolved mysteries of the romance's appeal to a highly sophisticated audience in its own time, except perhaps when it is conjoined with Rohde's (and others') conviction that the genre of romance itself was indicative of a debased Hellenism in a world in decline.⁴⁶ Gender, it seems, continues to be the elephant in the room.

Other Cultures: Egypt and the Near East and/or Hellenismos and paideia

I will let the matter of gender rest here and turn to an even more intractable beast, one that is an even more ideologically freighted matter, this time, of the relations between the Greek romance and the Near East – its contacts with and influences from and to other cultures. This is a vast topic, riddled with conjectures and uncertainties, which I can hardly touch upon in this essay. But there are several lines

⁴³ West 2003, 66.

⁴⁴ See, e.g. Bentley 1713:2010.

⁴⁵ Butler 1897:2003.

⁴⁶ For the best recent discussion of the issue, with relevant bibliography, see Morales 2004, 2-4. A theory of female readership (not oral audience), on a more positive side, could promote the idea of an improved status of women in later antiquity. I can't resist mentioning the medical writer Theodorus Priscianus (ca. 400 CE) who recommends reading the novels of Iamblichus and similar authors as a cure for men who suffer from impotence (2.11.34). "Let the patient be surrounded by beautiful girls or boys; also give him books to read, which stimulate lust and in which love-stories are insinuatingly treated."

worth pursuing, if only in brief. This is an especially timely topic in our current climate of research that seeks to integrate Hellenism and Greek experience, from the very start, within a broader matrix of Mediterranean culture and has expanded its geographical and ethnographic range, especially when it comes to the period of the romance. It has now become habitual, for example, to consider interactions between paganism, Judaism, and Christianity, with regard to the style and content of prose narrative. No longer are these three belief systems to be walled off in their separate domains, or arranged in a distinct hierarchy of influence. Rather, they are seen both as sites of contested authority and as a marketplace for the trading of ideas in a multicultural (and polyglot) world that transcends national boundaries. The turn itself to a recent project, ‘The Literatures of the Roman Empire’ (with emphasis on the plural), is indicative of a still newer trend, which in true post-colonialist fashion, is designed to ‘investigate the literatures of other cultures in Hebrew or Syriac, for example, alongside the Greek and Latin corpus and to situate the writings of the Empire within a broad context of literary and cultural production.’⁴⁷ I will, however, restrict my purview to the debate about origins, which we have already explored in part, and with it, the extent and influence of the Hellenized world, with its emphasis on *paideia* and claims to hegemonic superiority.

The titles of two recent lectures in a conference on the topic of narrative⁴⁸ perhaps sum up the issues at stake. The first: “What is Greek About the Greek Novel,” (Tim Whitmarsh) uses the example of the strangely hybrid *Alexander Romance* to express a certain skepticism about the genre’s entirely Hellenic pedigree or rather to challenge the insulation of the novel from contact zones between Greece and the East.⁴⁹ From this perspective, ‘imaginative storytelling often can

⁴⁷ Ph. Vasunia (2012) at APA convention, 2012: panel organizer, “The Literatures of the Roman Empire.” The full text reads: ‘The Literatures of the Roman Empire examines the richness and diversity of the many literatures that flourished under Roman imperial rule. The plural form Literatures in the title is crucial: it marks the contrast between our panel and other treatments, which would typically concentrate on works in Greek and Latin but ignore or marginalize literatures rooted in subject cultures. Our idea is to investigate literatures in Hebrew or Syriac, for example, alongside the Greek and Latin corpus and to situate the writings of the Empire within a broad context of literary and cultural production’. An Oxford Handbook is currently in development, with individual articles publishing online in advance of print publication.

⁴⁸ The 7th Leventis Conference in Greek: What’s Greek About the Ancient Greek Narrative?”, University of Edinburgh, Oct 27-30, 2011. Both Whitmarsh and Morgan kindly sent me the drafts of their papers. My original surmises about their content and points of view turned out to be mostly correct. Morgan’s essay has now been published in 2014.

⁴⁹ See the magisterial essay of Whitmarsh 2011a on the intellectual history of debates on the origins of the Greek novel.

be shown to emerge from the friction between Greek history and exotic cultural traditions (e.g., bizarrereries of local Greek cult, non-Greek traditions, or even invented locales).⁵⁰ The second, 'Heliodorus the Hellene,' (John Morgan) contends that despite the author's ethnic identity, a Syrian from Emesa, and the setting of his novel that situates the scene of its heroine's homecoming in Ethiopia, the work is nevertheless a reliable product of a Hellenic education and worldview, as will be discussed further below. These issues, of course, are not exactly commensurate, I hasten to add, and I doubt that either would frame the issues I am raising as so oppositional in nature. Whitmarsh is looking mainly to theories about the origin of the novel. Morgan, is interested in the end of the tradition, as we know it, in the latest of the Greek romances. Whitmarsh, arguably the most significant youngish scholar in Greek literature under the Empire,⁵¹ takes the exoticism of the form of romance as a product of cultural fusion with the Near East, along with Egypt, where evidence points to a long tradition of story-telling, narrative patterns and common metaphors shared with its Greek counterparts, buttressed by evidence of papyri and novels that celebrate non-Greek protagonists (e.g., Ninus and Semiramis).⁵² While this latter trend has sometimes been exaggerated in the happy hunting grounds of presumed parallels, however tenuous they may be,⁵³ there is no denying the opportunities for cultural interaction and porousness to other influences or indeed, for what Whitmarsh calls 'fusion,' especially in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Rohde's single-minded pursuit of entirely Greek sources behind the invention of the novel is, at heart, as already suggested, marked by a Hellenocentric (and androcentric) bias that sees the novel as a manifestation, indeed, a defense of Hellenic identity in a fictional world that puts elite Greeks at risk in encounters with exotic others, who are quite literally outlandish and culturally far beneath them. The insistence on the primacy, even exclusivity, of previous Greek literary genres, allowed Rohde to claim how Greece was able to produce 'this most un-Greek of forms.'⁵⁴

Morgan's title looks to the fundamentally Greek pedigree of the novel under the sign of *paideia*, whose literary markers consist of 'a recombination of Hellenic conventions, patterns, and generic mixtures in Hellenistic and Roman-Greek prose and poetry. To write Greek literature meant to display Greekness via mi-

⁵⁰ Whitmarsh 2010, 409.

⁵¹ Among his numerous publications and editorship of the *Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, 2008, see his own full-length study of the novel, 2011.

⁵² Whitmarsh 2010.

⁵³ A prime example would be Anderson 1984.

⁵⁴ See further, Whitmarsh 2010, 395, and his general critique in 2011 of Rohde's German nationalist (and even anti-semitic) ideology.

metic sophistication as set in relation to the venerated classical tradition of canonical texts.⁵⁵ Heliodorus' work may well be both the prime example of *paideia* in its intertextuality with the most prestigious genres of Greek literature (epic, tragedy, New Comedy). But it also may be its possible exception, both by reason of its late date, its self-conscious awareness of a polyglot world (where not everyone speaks Greek), and the decentering of the classical Greek world (Athens and Delphi) in favor of Egypt and the remote and exotic Ethiopia. The case of Heliodorus is worth considering in more detail.

The Case of Heliodorus

Here is a brief outline of this long and convoluted plot: The *Aithiopika* is a long tale (ten books) of a girl born white to black parents, the king (Hydaspes) and queen (Persinna) of Ethiopia. The reason for this strange outcome was due to the scene at the moment of conception in the couple's bedroom when the mother happened to gaze at a portrait of Andromeda, deemed one of the founders of the Ethiopian dynasty, being liberated by Perseus. Fearing suspicion of adultery, the queen tells her husband that the baby died at birth, but instructs one of the gymnosophists to hide the infant. This sage, Sisimithres, eventually travels to Egypt and hands on the child, now seven years old, together with her birth tokens, to a Greek priest, Charicles, who himself is wandering in Egypt. Charicles rears the child as his own at Delphi. Time passes, and the beautiful girl, now named Charicleia, dedicates herself at adolescence to Artemis and virginity.

An Egyptian priest of Isis, Calasiris, arrives just before a deputation from Thessaly, led by the handsome Theagenes, descendant of Achilles, to participate in the Pythian games. The two young people fall in love at first sight, and the wily Calasiris, divining Charicleia's destiny, engineers their escape from Delphi on a Phoenician ship and accompanies them on their further journeys. Calasiris had previously deciphered the girl's infant swaddling band, which was exposed with Charicleia, written in Ethiopian royal script. The text revealed her origins and explained the phenomenon of her gleaming white complexion as a result of her mother having gazed upon a painting of fair-skinned Andromeda, one of the ancestors of the royal family, at the moment when the couple made love in the light of day.

After a series of mishaps, trials and separations (including Calasiris' death from old age), the pair eventually make their way to Ethiopia, as directed by a

⁵⁵ Miller 2010, 780, n. 2, emended. He rightly cites Whitmarsh 2001 among others.

previous, if riddling, oracle of Apollo at Delphi (Book 2). They are, now, however, prisoners of the Ethiopian king, who in Book 9 had captured them in the war against the Persians on the Egyptian border. The couple's situation is precarious: Ethiopian law dictates that human sacrifice be offered to the deities, Helios (Sun) and Selene (Moon), as a thanksgiving offering for military victory, and the two captives are the designated victims. But the law also decrees that they be chaste as well. Accordingly, both are tested for their virginity on a fiery grid, and their success in this ordeal leads finally to the recognition of Charicleia by the royal couple as their legitimate daughter. Theagenes at the end through a heroic exploit wins consent to marry her and the work concludes with the marriage of the young couple and their investiture as priest and priestess of the Sun and Moon respectively, but not before the barbaric custom of human sacrifice is formally abolished, thus removing the taint from this otherwise utopian community.

There are two serious logical flaws in this situation, which seem not to have drawn critical attention: I myself find them insoluble (we are in the realm of fiction, however, after all). Strictly speaking, how does one account for Andromeda's whiteness to begin with, if she is a founder of the [black] race? Second, Perseus and Andromeda cannot exactly be ancestors of the Ethiopian race in any literal sense, since Greek mythology inevitably links the future of Andromeda to Greece, where Perseus is to reign over Argos. Nevertheless, we might say that this myth of undisputable Hellenic provenance, which originally linked the two cultures through its principal characters, is recuperated, in some sense, by the sharing of its ownership now between both Greek and Ethiopian milieux. Andromeda and Charicleia, it turns out, are both doubles and opposites. Both are born in Ethiopia; both are daughters of the royal family; both are virgins whose sacrifice is only narrowly averted; yet, one departs from her native land, never to return, while the other, discovering her identity, follows her destiny to make the homeward journey. Each acquires a Greek husband: Andromeda will become Perseus' consort and rule with him in Hellas. Theagenes, on the other hand, of illustrious Greek pedigree from Achilles' line, follows the reverse route. He accompanies Charicleia from Hellas and will wed her finally in Ethiopia, where he will take up permanent residence and assume both the throne and the priesthood. But, whatever the destination, Charicleia, the replica of Andromeda in appearance as in heredity, 'will be renewing ancient ties and recreating close connections which existed between Ethiopia and Greece in mythical times.'⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Waring 1996, 7. Unpublished ms. quoted by permission of author. . On further common elements between the myth of Perseus and the narrative of Charicleia and Theagenes, see Billault 1981, 71-75.

But there is more to Heliodorus' vision of cultural rapprochement. What of the contest between nature and nurture, *physis* or *nomos*? What counts more? Charicleia's origins in Ethiopia or her upbringing by the Delphic priest, whose name she bears, whose language she speaks, and whose customs and manners she follows, to such an extent that Hydaspes, her real father, originally assumes without a moment's hesitation that she is entirely Greek? Or have we reached a new configuration of genetic and cultural mixtures that can embrace hybrid identities?⁵⁷

The continuing values of the so-called Hellenic standard in a multicultural universe is finally the central issue. However we may decide it, what is beyond doubt is that the boundaries of the known world have shifted decisively, from center to the periphery, from Delphi, the heart of Greece, to Meroe, situated at the ends of the earth. Or better yet, a world in which the Delphic priest, Charicles, who has journeyed to Ethiopia in search of his lost 'daughter,' Charicleia, can declare as an argument in his supplication to Hydaspes: 'Apollo is one and the same as Helios, the god of your fathers' (10.36.3). When an Ethiopian king can incarnate the image of the ideal ruler in a utopian society; when an Egyptian priest can lay claim to the highest wisdom (and even insist that Homer too was originally an Egyptian); and the author himself is a Hellenized Syrian; and when the figure of the Greek hero, Theagenes, descended from Achilles, the greatest of forebears, is destined to make his new home in Ethiopia as the consort of his spouse, the question of that hitherto claimed essential difference between Greek and barbarian (as between white and black) undergoes a dramatic change, in keeping with the changed world of Greeks under the Roman Empire, and by now, with the advance of Christianity.

What, then, might this all mean? Are we witnessing a new cosmopolitanism at this late date in a fusion of Helios and Apollo? Or does the decisive role of Sisimithres, leader of the Ethiopian sages, who both saves Charicleia at birth and now pronounces the gods' will, indicate a shift from Hellenic hegemonic standards to endorse an 'alien wisdom'?⁵⁸ Or conversely, given Charicleia's education at Delphi, does nurture trump nature, as I queried above, so that it is 'the absorption of rational, civilized Greeks into their community that redeems the culturally ambivalent Ethiopians from the savage excesses of their own religion,'⁵⁹ or better perhaps, restore them to the traditional image of their famous piety (known from Herodotus on) that this ritual aberration of human sacrifice had compromised?

⁵⁷ On this last point, see especially Perkins 1999.

⁵⁸ This paragraph quoted from English version of Zeitlin 2009 (in French). Cosmopolitanism: Bowersock 1994, 48. 'Alien Wisdom': Whitmarsh 1999, 16-40; 31-32.

⁵⁹ Lowe 2004, 237.

Morgan in another essay comes down squarely on the side of Hellenism, but not without nuance:

At one level Charicleia's journey to Ethiopia reverses the Hellenocentric worldview of the genre: at the end of the novel the center of Charicleia's world is in Meroe, on the cartographic limits of the Greek cosmos, and the Ethiopian king in the final pages talks of Greece as the ends of the earth (10.16.6). But this geographic re-centering of the journey is more an act of cultural colonialism than an adoption of an alternative perspective. Charicleia has been to finishing school in Greece and at the end goes home with all the cultural values of the land where she grew up. The Ethiopian court is already Greek speaking, and once it is cured of its regrettably barbarian tendency to immolate its captives, Ethiopia becomes an idealized Hellenic community, symbolized by Theagenes' victory over an Ethiopian giant in a wrestling competition, Greek skill triumphing over barbarian brutishness.⁶⁰

Yet, as Morgan continues,

At the same time as Ethiopia becomes fully ideal, Theagenes and Charicleia become fully Ethiopian. It becomes clear as well that Ethiopia, whose sovereigns trace their descent to the Sun, is a displaced version of Syrian Emesa, center of the sun cult and home of Heliodorus, who declares himself at the end as also a descendant of the Sun (10.31.3). The author resolves the issue of Hellenism and Hellenocentrism, it would seem, not by replacing one hierarchical view of the world with another, but by assimilation and identification.⁶¹

I have quoted Morgan's views at length to show how adroitly one can negotiate the shoals of the dilemma that hovers between an 'either/or' solution. But however one grapples with the issues raised by this work that has been called the last great masterpiece of Greek literature, one can only admit that it has everything – a *nostos* that upends the *Odyssey*, which figures so largely as a running obligato beneath the text, a vast intertextuality with Greek literature deployed to other, often unexpected, uses, a polyphonic and geographical *parcours* through other locales that raises the themes of travel and adventure to new heights, and a plot whose dizzying twists and turns complicates the conditions of the obligatory

⁶⁰ Morgan 2001, 155.

⁶¹ Morgan 2001, 159, n. 18.

happy ending. All this in a remarkably original literary style with whiffs of Neoplatonism and much else besides. Center and margin, both serious and ironic, get full play in Heliodorus.

Center and Margin Within the Field: Horizons of Expectation

There is another side, of course, to the idea of center and margin – what belongs within traditional definitions and what does not. Within the field itself there are certain continuing debates about the canonical status of the five extant ideal or love romances with regard to other types of prose fiction. These others are relegated to their own margins, known to us for the most part in late epitomes or the papyrus finds, which, in addition to expanding the corpus with unfamiliar names and outlying plots, revolutionized the chronology of the extant exemplars. This is a matter of increasing interest to critics, especially with regard to the ever-present problem of genre. The *Life of Aesop*; Lucian, *Onos* or the *Ass*; Diogenes, *Wonders Beyond Thule*; and the *Alexander Romance*, for example, along with fragments such as those of Lollianos and Iolaos immediately come to mind. Even Iamblichus' *Babyloniaka*, for all its inclusion among prose romances (known to us mainly in Photius's 9th c. summary), seems to follow a very different track.⁶² It is entirely possible that further investigation (and discovery) of novel or novelistic fragments might change the picture again.⁶³ While I cannot do justice to this issue in the present context, I can only point to the latent possibilities in expanding our own horizons of expectation and studying post-classical revisions of traditional categories.⁶⁴

I also earlier alluded to the importance of incorporating the Greek novel into the literature of the Empire and its numerous new (or newish) genres, such as epistolography, panegyrics, deictic oratory, revisions of Homer in quasi-fictional modes,⁶⁵ spiritual biographies, and ekphrastic displays. Virtually, everything attributed to Philostratus in the 3d c. CE (I assume a single figure named Philostratus) holds interest for those interested in fictional romance: the *Lives of the Sophists* (regarding the so-called Second Sophistic), The *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, the wonder-worker who travelled throughout Greece, Asia Minor, India and elsewhere, and the *Heroicus*, the brilliantly bizarre account of a Phoenician merchant meeting a Greek vinedresser, who through contact with his patron, the thrice-born

⁶² On the anomalies see, most recently, Morales 2006.

⁶³ Indeed, many fragments still remain to be deciphered.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Holzberg 2003, Hägg 2006, and Morales 2009.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Zeitlin 2001 and Kim 2010 on Homer.

Protesilaos, has remarkable access to the true story of what happened at Troy and its heroes. Finally, there is the *Imagines* (and its continuation by his grandson), a purported stroll through a gallery of images with descriptions of paintings, mostly of classical myths. Likewise, Lucian is a vast treasure trove of relevant material. And one could continue with Plutarch, Pausanias, Athenaeus, Dio Chrysostom, and Galen.⁶⁶ The novel by its variegated contents, after all, touches on matters that pertain to geography, paradoxography, aesthetic criticism, medicine, philosophy, rhetoric, religion, and anthropology.

Romancing the Classics: Passion

The title of this essay, ‘Romancing the Classics’ entailed a double and recursive meaning: On the one hand, I asked how does the genre of ancient romance incorporate, challenge, rewrite, and revisit the canonical texts of classical Greek culture and to what effect? Canonicity and marginality were two of the three themes of the original conference. How about the third one, passion? So in this spirit, let me ask why do some of us fall in love, as I have done, with this field, starting with Petronius, in fact, as long ago as 1970, and continuing on with Longus some twenty years later, and active today with other essays (on Chariton, Achilles Tatius, and Heliodorus) as well as with work in progress?⁶⁷ In each case, albeit for quite different reasons, I was initially thunderstruck (*thauma* and *ekplexis* come to mind) at the novelty and the self-conscious creativity of these texts. This all came to me not without a certain sense of illicit pleasure – the sheer bawdiness and transgressiveness of Petronius in a Roman context (that coincided with the sexual revolution of the late 60s) and the cunning pastiche of Longus’ appropriation of the entire erotic world in a dazzling display of intertextual (and intermedial) virtuosity. Starting from the narrator’s declaration of having fallen in love with a painting that depicted the history of a love story and his subsequent desire to rival the image in words, I was immediately smitten (thanks to the late lamented Jack Winkler, who recommended the work to me), and the continuous play with the categories of nature and culture, art and life, simplicity and sophistication, charmed me from the outset. For one nourished on the staples of classical epic and drama, I followed these new paths of perception with undisguised delight. Passion met passion, one might say in this context.

⁶⁶ All these authors have attracted renewed interest in recent years with promising results.

⁶⁷ Zeitlin 1971a, 1971b, 1990, 1994, 2003, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, and 2017a, 2017b.

En guise de conclusion (as the French would say)

Two further thoughts in conclusion: the first voiced by John Morgan in a review article of 1996, in the context of considering the ideological reasons for the initial renewal of interest in the topic of the ancient novel:

Our interest in the novels is no less a historical phenomenon than they are themselves. Something about these works made them speak to a period. The growth in interest in them coincided with a painful period of readjustment and self-redefinition for Classics as a profession. The politically led deprivileging of the subject's traditionally perceived values opened the door to these non-civic, subversively erotic, above all innovative inhabitants of the canon's chronological and geographical margins. Contemporaneously, the growth of new critical theory seemed to provide a conceptual framework within which iconoclastic thinking could take place. But these same ideological frameworks all too often denoted a withdrawal from engagement with moral substance: a system that deconstructed and privatized hierarchies of value and meaning, applied to texts that themselves marked a disengagement from public systems, was, perhaps, our equivalent of minimalist music and post-modern architecture, not altogether unconnected with the cultural and political dislocations of the unspeakable eighties.⁶⁸

In the same review, Morgan correctly diagnosed the subsequent turn away from a post-structuralist attitude to some of the newer approaches I have addressed in this essay: generic uncertainties (fringe vs. canon), social history (including sexuality), relations with the ancient Near East as with Rome, and appeal to inclusion of Christian (and Jewish) sources, which has since 1996, become an expanding field (a topic I did not address here in any detail). Nevertheless, whether the study of ancient fiction will transform the discipline's teaching and research goals, despite the increase of courses in the universities and the widening community of scholars, is a more debatable issue.

To this end, let us turn to my second quotation, one by Simon Swain in his introduction to *Oxford Readings in the Greek Novel* in 1999, who declared quite realistically, I think, that

The Greek novel will never attain a dominant position within Classics. To ensure its future, it must always appeal to students of other literatures and be seen to offer scope for discovering the contemporary ideological formations

⁶⁸ Morgan 1996, 73.

that are ever sought in these. For the novels are part of a total cultural system, neither literary, nor cultural, nor historical.⁶⁹

While, one might argue with Swain's insistence on the novel's appeal to a broader audience than that of the Classics as the only hope for the future of the field, what cannot be gainsaid, I think, is that it is unlikely that we will see a displacement of the canonical Greek texts (epic, drama, philosophy, oratory, historiography, etc.) in the curriculum with a shift to the products of later Greek literature. After all, any real understanding of these later texts depends on familiarity with their illustrious forebears and awareness of the sophisticated politics and poetics of imitation, subversion, and revision. From my own experience in teaching, I can report that more than one student has confessed to loathing these works, citing as their reasons the very ones that originally derided the ancient novel for second-rate frivolity and yes, marginality, in favor of what 'really counts.' To be fair, however, I hasten to add, others have fallen in love with them too, as I have. The most that can be said in this current context is the appeal to an enlargement of what we take to be 'classical,' or better put, an appeal to an awareness of the riches that await those who venture beyond the traditional norms to, for want of a better word, the 'post-classical,' with its profusion of other kinds of engagement with the intellectual and literary culture to which they were heir. In this sense, the 'secondariness' of the novel (and of the Second Sophistic) is also its virtue. 'The form of fictional narrative seems particularly suited to the re-creation of the past' under Roman hegemony 'in a displacement of contemporary concerns to a revered and safely distanced setting', while at times reading imperial power between the lines.⁷⁰ Travel and adventure may not literally take us to experience in person the lands in the *Wonders Beyond Thule* (or to visit the fantastic zones of Lucian's mischievous, *True Tales*) but the journey itself might persuade us that, like the figure of Odysseus, there is more to the story than a return to Ithaca.

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⁶⁹ Swain 1999, 35.

⁷⁰ Morgan 2008, xii.

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