

# Introduction

MARÍLIA P. FUTRE PINHEIRO  
University of Lisbon

When, in the mid-70s, the time came for me to choose a topic for my PhD, I was advised by one of my former masters, Prof. Joaquim Lourenço de Carvalho, to embark on an area that was practically unexplored in the field of Classical Studies: the ancient novel. There was, at that time, among classicists, a general idea that the essentials of Greek literature lay before the death of Alexander and that all subsequent production was nothing but an epilogue, an appendix, an imitation of more or less doubtful quality. The authors of late Greek Literature appeared to us as virtually indistinct figures, in an undifferentiated limbo, from which stood out, for a brief moment, a few more resonant (*e.g.* Lucian or Plutarch), like points of light in an obscure and uniform literary panorama. Study of the literature of that period concentrated on those few outstanding figures, thus making impossible an overview of the literary culture as a whole, and obscuring its originality and the close relationship between authors and their contemporary society.

This prejudice was manifested, in the first place, by the disproportionate weight that was attributed to the classical period, to the neglect of later ones. A. Lesky's monumental work, *A History of Greek Literature*,<sup>1</sup> is a very illuminating example of this fact. Secondly, the ancient authors themselves often accentuated their debt to their predecessors in the golden centuries, and thus were also responsible for the dissemination of this value judgment. This dependence, repeatedly assumed, emphasized the scholarly and derivative aspect of this post-classical literature and led to its authors being categorized as mere epigones and imitators of the past, and to their works being viewed through a prism of relative merit, underestimating their real value and subordinating them to their models.

There is no doubt that Greek literature of the late period does not have the sparkle or follow the rhythm of frantic creation of the literature of the classical period. With its archaic bent, more focused on the conservation and transmission of tradition, born under the sign of conquest and exploitation, its main concern is

---

<sup>1</sup> Lesky 1963.

to preserve the unity and continuity of *paideia*, the main source of cohesion in Greek culture and education, which the Romans would adopt as a cultural standard for the entire empire. Distanced from the contingencies of geography and the turmoil of historical becoming, the culture of this society, rooted in a vast geographical and temporal space, extending from the foundation of the library of Alexandria by Ptolemy to the closing of the Platonic school in Athens by Justinian, was based on the dialectic between unity and diversity, between change and continuity.

Therefore, when the Greek novel appeared on my horizon as a possible theme for a doctoral dissertation, the moment seemed to me opportune to start a dialogue between two worlds, culturally and chronologically very distant, and to reconcile the two aspects of my academic background: on the one hand, the classical component; on the other, a fascination (inculcated in me, in the last year of my undergraduate studies, by the Professor of Theory of Literature, the poet and writer David Mourão-Ferreira) with the modern currents of literary criticism, and the desire to break new paths, supported by analytical methodologies not normally used in the study of ancient literature. And so, inspired by the innovative work of Tomas Hägg,<sup>2</sup> I proposed to undertake a reading of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, using the methodological toolbox of modern discourse theory or *narratology*. In the past, Otto Schissel von Fleschenberg<sup>3</sup> had advocated and rehearsed an outline of a formalist-type approach to *The Aethiopica*, which found echoes in the monograph by Thomas R. Goethals<sup>4</sup> and, above all, in the essay by Victor Hefti,<sup>5</sup> who argued that formal particularities of Heliodorus' work justified, by themselves, a detailed analysis of the author's narrative technique. His formalist approach to *The Aethiopica* mirrors this new analytical trend.

Gérard Genette's work, *Figures III*, was, for me, one of the main repositories of information and a decisive lever for the analysis of Heliodorus' narrative technique and his novel's narrative syntax.<sup>6</sup> I came to the conclusion that Heliodorus distanced himself from the general pattern and structure of the other novels, thus anticipating the more subtle and daring narrative games of the genre. Due to its high level of technical perfection and artistic elaboration, *The Aethiopica* presents original characteristics that afford it not only a special place in the set of ancient fictional narratives, but also elevate its author to a prominent position in the entire panorama of fictional literature. For Heliodorus, the art of narrating is a game, a

---

<sup>2</sup> Hägg 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Schissel von Fleschenberg 1913.

<sup>4</sup> Goethals 1959.

<sup>5</sup> Hefti 1950.

<sup>6</sup> Futre Pinheiro 1987.

challenge that tickles his ingenuity and imagination. For the reader, on the other hand, *The Aethiopica* is a mental exercise and a permanent challenge to his patience, tenacity and intelligence. However, a different approach to the Greek and Latin novel consists in identifying and analyzing the intertextual dialogue that authors hold with the literary tradition. Admittedly indebted to ancient literature, as mentioned above, the ancient novel develops itself within a diachronic process in which every text is a crossroad of semic elements in permanent dialogue.<sup>7</sup> This dialogue between *hypotexts* and *hypertexts*<sup>8</sup> creates, through a web of allusions and intertextual references, a sort of set of ‘inner boundaries by means of which the fictional prose texts... interact with and respond to other texts that support them and serve as their models...’<sup>9</sup> ‘These border crossings sometimes merge in an intricate pattern of dialogic relationships...which defines the polysemic and complex ambiguity of the genre’.<sup>10</sup>

The papers in this volume discuss, at different levels, the meeting of the ancient novels with their predecessors and aim to identify the marks and the more or less remote resonance of texts that influenced them, in light of some of their most frequently echoed antecedents (Homeric epics, traditional and nuptial poetry, the historiographical tradition, Greek theatre, Latin love elegy and pantomime) as part of an intertextual and metadiscursive play.

### *Bibliography*

- Bakhtin, M. 1978. *Esthétique et Théorie du roman*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Futre Pinheiro, M. P. 1987. *Estruturas Técnico-Narrativas nas Etiópicas de Heliodoro*. Universidade de Lisboa, Ph.D.
- Futre Pinheiro, M. P. 2018. ‘Landmarks and turning points in the study of the ancient Novel since the Fourth International Conference on the Ancient Novel, Lisbon, 2008’, in: E. Cueva, S. Harrison, H. Mason, W. Owens & S. Schwartz (eds.), *Re-Wiring the Ancient Novel*, volume 1: *Greek Novels*. Ancient Narrative Supplementum 24.1. Groningen: Barkhuis, XIII-XXXIV.
- Genette, G. 1972. *Figures III*. Paris: Seuil.
- Genette, G. 1982. *Palimpsestes*. Paris: Seuil.
- Goethals, T. R. 1959. *The ‘Aethiopica’ of Heliodorus: A Critical Study*. Columbia University, Ph.D.
- Hägg, T. 1971. *Narrative Technique in Ancient Greek Romances. Studies of Chariton, Xenophon Ephesius and Achilles Tatius*. Stockholm: Svenska Insitutet i Athen.
- Hefti, V. *Zur Erzählungstechnik in Heliodors Aethiopica*. 1950. Wien: Adolph Holzhausens.

---

<sup>7</sup> On the concept of dialogism, see Bakhtin 1978, 99 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Genette 1982.

<sup>9</sup> Futre Pinheiro 2018, XXV.

<sup>10</sup> Id. Ibid. XXV.

Lesky, A. 1963<sup>2</sup>. *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*. Bern, München: Francke.

Schissel von Fleschenberg, O. 1913. *Entwicklungsgeschichte des griechischen Romanes im Altertum*. Halle: Niemeyer.