

Introduction

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In my Oxford undergraduate days in the late 1960s and early 1970s it was possible, but not really encouraged, to include the *Cena Trimalchionis* and the first two books of the *Metamorphoses* among the optional texts studied for Honours Moderations. The Greek novels were nowhere to be seen. My schoolboy tastes for the decadent and countercultural led me towards the Latin novels, of course, but also to Hellenistic literature, Roman elegy, and Silver Age Latin (I still adore Lucan). In those days intertextuality was not a thing, but nevertheless we were learning that these texts did not spring straight from their authors' experience on to the page, but were mediated through intense erudition and allusivity, that they were shaped by their place on the library shelf at least as much as by their authors' individuality. At the time, that seemed a hard pill to swallow, and literariness felt somehow antithetic to authenticity, like an effacement of the writer's self. Eventually, however, I got the hang of it, thanks to Virgil mainly, and came to enjoy more and more the sheer density of reading and the apparently endless mutual enrichment of classical texts.

Through reading around Petronius and Apuleius I became aware that there existed lengthy fictional narratives in Greek, but it was difficult to find out more about them. The first book I was pointed towards was B.E. Perry's *The Ancient Romances*,¹ and it taught me two things: first that the Greek novels and the Latin novels were fundamentally different beasts, and secondly that the Greek novels operated at a lower literary level, and catered to a less educated readership, including (horror of horrors) women. Rohde's big book in German was beyond me at that point, but I discovered Bryan Reardon's article in *Phoenix*, and it was possible to order up his *Courants littéraires* from the stacks of the Bodleian.² The combined allures of the non-canonical, the understudied and the ever-so-slightly illicit were too strong to resist, and when I had the opportunity to go on to doctoral

¹ Perry 1967.

² Rohde 1876/1914; Reardon 1969/1984; Reardon 1971.

research I had already decided that I wanted to work on the Greek novels. I quickly discovered that these texts were both underrated and extraordinarily interesting, but at first, under the influence of Tomas Hägg's excellent book, my interest was primarily in how the novels told their stories, a kind of embryonic narratology, although that word was not yet in my lexicon.³ By the end of my research, however, I had come to sense that the novels were not an isolated outcrop of a sublittary substratum, but rather were part of a cultural continuum and could potentially repay the sort of close and learned reading we take for granted with Hellenistic poetry and its Latin affiliates.

Much of my own later work has followed along this path, particularly my commentary on *Daphnis and Chloe*.⁴ I've also learned a great deal from students and colleagues, who have taught me that the novelists were actively engaging with a whole spectrum of cultural, literary and philosophical currents, and I shall now shamelessly advertise their work. For example, Meriel Jones's work on masculinity demonstrates not only that contemporary discourse on gender provides a tool which can be used to situate the novelists in their socio-cultural context, but that the novelists were in dialogue with that discourse, extending and testing it imaginatively.⁵ Similarly Rachel Bird's work on *sophrosyne* in the novels has traced how they exploit existing discourses from philosophy and literature to explore imaginatively the limits and contradictions of an apparently conventional moral category.⁶ Sarah Maguire's dissertation *Charikleia in Context* shows how Heliodoros exploited a series of literary patterns and philosophical-religious tropes to create the character of his heroine.⁷ Koen De Temmerman's work on characterisation in the Greek novels has shown that the novelists knew and creatively exploited the techniques of contemporary rhetoric.⁸ Maria-Elpiniki Oikonomou and Aldo Tagliabue have both done important work on Xenophon of Ephesus, and have convinced me that, although his novel is less showily allusive than most of the others, it is nevertheless intertextual in a different way.⁹ Nicolò d'Alconzo has investigated the place of the visual arts in the novels, and shown how the novelists creatively interpret and respond to painting and sculpture, but also how they play a crucial role in the on-going theoretical conceptualisation of art criticism in rhetoric in Late Antiquity.¹⁰ Mai Musie's dissertation on Persians in the Greek novels

³ Hägg 1971.

⁴ Morgan 2004.

⁵ Jones 2012.

⁶ Bird 2020.

⁷ Maguire 2005.

⁸ De Temmerman 2014.

⁹ Oikonomou 2010, Tagliabue 2017.

¹⁰ d'Alconzo 2015.

argues that the novelists' representations of ethnicities not only draw on traditional literary stereotypes, but interrogate those stereotypes in surprisingly rigorous and intelligent ways.¹¹ My long-term colleague Ian Repath has explored in minute detail how the novelists respond to the writings and teachings of Plato, both on a lexical and stylistic level, and on a philosophical one, often inverting and subversively distorting central Platonic images and discussions.¹² Saiichiro Nakatani and Gillian Bazovsky have studied the afterlife of the novels and shown how they crop up in unexpected places later on, respectively in the French theatre and early twentieth-century English children's literature.¹³

All this is by way of saying that my earlier self would have been as surprised as my later self is delighted by the contributions in this volume, linked as they are by the theme of the connection of the novels, Greek, Roman and Byzantine, to literary traditions. The range of connections charted is remarkable, identifying new perspectives on some of the usual suspects and also bringing some new players into the frame: Homer, tragedy, epithalamia, Sappho (even in the Byzantine novel), rhetorical teaching, historiography, Plato, Roman satire, the fabulist Phaedrus and the epigrams of Martial. The forms taken by these connections vary, of course, in terms of intention, intentionality and specificity, and the editors have not tried to impose any conceptual strait-jacket on the contributors who analyse them here. The theoretical debate over the semantic distinction between allusion and intertext is ultimately a rather sterile one, and in a way we have sidestepped it by using the term 'literary memory' in our title. No single key opens all the doors, and what matters is working out flexible critical strategies of reading and interpretation that will enable us to put the observation of specific instances to productive and interesting use, regardless of the labels we might attach to them.

To go back to the things I learned from Perry. First, it is clear that the novels, both Greek and Latin, are *not* lacking in sophistication, and that even the least obviously literary of them shows an awareness of literary tradition and an engagement with the agenda of contemporary higher education. Second, although the surviving Greek novels clearly do differ from the surviving Latin novels in many respects, in the matter of literary memory they are playing in the same broad park, albeit with different team-mates. We have reflected this continuum in the basically chronological ordering of the papers in this volume, interleaving the Latin novelists with the Greek, to stress the point of their contemporaneity and kinship.

¹¹ Musie 2018.

¹² At greatest length in Repath 2002.

¹³ Nakatani 2005, Bazovsky 2007.

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