

A NOVEL COMPENDIUM

Gareth Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996. Pp. x + 876, incl. 5 plates and 12 maps. ISBN 90-04-09630-2. Gld395.00/US\$255.00.

John Hilton

Department of Classics, University of Natal
Durban 4041

This ambitious collection of contributions by twenty-six scholars of many different nationalities attempts to 'take a comprehensive look at the ancient classical Greek and Roman novel' and 'to provide . . . in a single work more information and in-depth studies than are currently available' (p. 1). The question of definition immediately arises, but despite extensive discussion (e.g., Gareth Schmeling, 'Preface', pp. 1-3; Niklas Holzberg, 'The Genre: Novels Proper and the Fringe', pp. 11-28; Consuelo Ruiz-Montero, 'The Rise of the Greek Novel', pp. 29-85, esp. 29-37; Massimo Fusillo, 'Modern Critical Theories and the Ancient Novel', pp. 277-305, esp. 277-80) none of the contributors offers a positive definition and the prevailing view of the genre as 'works of extended prose narrative fiction' (p. 1) is upheld. The most important consequence of this is that a tension between the aims of providing 'in-depth' and 'comprehensive' coverage of the genre is introduced. When the scope is broadened to include 'Novel-like Works of Extended Prose Fiction' (p. viii), a category that embraces genres that may legitimately be held to be independent of the novel, such as fable and epistolography, and when the Byzantine and modern heritages of ancient fiction are added in, then the reader may rightly feel that the plan of the work is entirely misconceived. The problem does not lie so much in the bulk of the book as in the inevitable superficiality of the discussion and in the impression of incoherence; there are, in fact, a number of embryonic books within the body of this tome, such as works of literary theory; critical appreciations of the individual novels; surveys (complete with discussions of the manuscript tradition and catalogues of editions and translations going back to the Renaissance); studies of culture, gender and race in ancient fiction; and investigations of the *Nachleben* of the genre. All this when

numerous monographs and collections of articles have recently appeared that cover much the same area.¹

The collection falls into four recognisable parts: general discussions of the literary and cultural character of the genre; short studies of the 'major authors' (p. viii); discussions of fringe elements and fragments; and the tracing of the heritage of the ancient novel. To review all of these adequately is an almost impossible task for any individual and most of my comments will be focused on the first section, which is in many ways the most interesting.² Massimo Fusillo's discussion of literary theory, 'Modern Critical Theories and the Ancient Novel' (pp. 277-305), is particularly important in view of the tendency that philologists have to ignore the abstract; Fusillo gives a survey of the debate on genre (pp. 277-80), the narratology of *histoire* and *récit* (pp. 280-88), reader-response criticism (pp. 288-93), psychoanalytic interpretations (pp. 293-300) and poststructuralism (pp. 300-05) as these may be applied to the five canonical ancient novels. More could have been made of structuralist analyses of the novels, particularly the apparent thematic duplication in Heliodorus, and greater weight could have been attached to the problem posed by the composition of Xenophon's extraordinary text.³ But Fusillo's chapter is also marred by poor expression and outright mistakes, many of which can be attributed to the editorial decision to publish his contribution in English. It is true that the study of classical literature and ancient history demands much of students outside Europe in terms of being able to read the European languages,⁴ but accurate expression of the author's meaning in these languages is preferable to a poorly edited English version replete with errors such as the following selected examples: 'on the contrary' for 'on the other hand' (p. 282; cf. p. 227 n. 9); 'the discover of sexuality' for 'the discovery of sexuality' (p. 282); 'reduced exaltation' (p. 282, an oxymoron); 'if . . . then . . .' for 'although' (p. 283); 'ellypsis' for 'ellipsis' (p. 283); 'causing a very original parodic effect' for 'having a very original effect' (p. 287); 'sounds' for 'states' or 'puts it' (p. 294); and the tautologous 'omnicomprehensive' (p. 298). Some of these infelicities are such that the reader must struggle to work out the author's meaning: what, for example, is meant by 'transphrastic' (p. 280), 'lateral stories' (p. 287), 'aural fruition' (p. 289), 'ductility' (p. 292) and 'specular' (p. 295)? Others, such as 'deciphrement' for 'decipherment' (p. 285), 'cronotope' for 'chronotope' (p. 282 n. 14, making

¹ E.g., J. Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel* (Baltimore 1994); N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction* (London 1995); J. R. Morgan and R. Stoneman (edd.), *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context* (London 1994).

² A review of the third and fourth parts of this book by Suzanne MacAlister is forthcoming in *Scholia Reviews*.

³ Cf. J. N. O'Sullivan, *Xenophon of Ephesus: His Compositional Technique and the Birth of the Novel* (Berlin 1985), which is not cited.

⁴ In South Africa the study of the European languages is rapidly being squeezed out of the curriculum, ostensibly in line with the promotion of the other ten indigenous languages, but in practice English is increasingly becoming the sole language of communication.

Bakhtin an unwitting supporter of the ancient view that fiction was only suited to old women), 'physionomy' for 'physiognomy' (p. 288) and 'grandguignolesque' (p. 284), merely show the influence of the author's first language and culture on his English. The problem is not limited to Fusillo's article: even Antonio Scarcella's translated contribution, 'The Social and Economic Structures of the Ancient Novels' (pp. 221-76), does not escape the charge of obscurity (my favourite solecism here is 'nosey poker' [p. 242] for 'Nosy Parker'); in addition, Scarcella does not translate the French and Italian of the quotations he cites in his footnotes. This results in one situation in which a quotation from an article written in French by C. P. Jones,⁵ who normally publishes in English, appears in a footnote to a contribution in English by an author who normally writes in French or Italian. Doubtless students outside Europe will welcome the publication of the work of European scholars in English, but this does mean that the author, editor and publisher must take additional care over the readability of such contributions.

More substantive criticisms can be made of Scarcella's discussion: the chapter is over-long (56 pages) and overburdened with a mass of unnecessary detail: the reader does not need to be told of the movements of Oroondates in the *Ethiopian Story* (p. 262: '9.19.1 the satrap flees; 9.20.5 he is captured', etc.) or that Arsake is 'a young and pretty woman' (p. 263), for example; the catalogue of references, many of which are entirely irrelevant, merely exhausts the reader's patience. Scarcella's account of Delphi in this novel is particularly weak: no mention is made of unhistorical details, such as the presence of the acolyte of Artemis at the Pythian Games (Hld. 3.5.3), and no allowance is made for literary inspiration, as in the case of the ring of Persinna (Hld. 4.8.7; cf. Philostr. VA 3.46.10-18). In addition, Scarcella does not contextualise his discussion by referring to the historical background often enough: for example, he describes Psammiss' presence in Alexandria as 'unlikely' (p. 245) although there is considerable evidence for the trade in Greek girls between India and Egypt (cf. *Peripl. M. Rubr.* 49); he fails to define the notion of 'class' (according to him, sailors belong to the 'middle class', p. 248); and he does not give any general discussion of the ethics of child exposure in antiquity.⁶ Even the plain meaning of the texts themselves is not always accurately represented: Scarcella states that Psammiss 'falls in love' (p. 245) with Anthia, whereas in fact he buys her from slave-traders and immediately attempts to rape her (X. Eph. 3.11). Slabs of information for each author in turn are set down in an indiscriminate jumble: for example, the private party of a group of Phoenicians (Hld. 4.17) is lumped under the rubric of the social and economic position of Delphi (pp. 261f.).

⁵ C. P. Jones, 'La Personnalité de Chariton' in M. F. Baslez, P. Hoffmann, and M. Trédé, *Le Monde du Roman Grec* (Paris 1992) 161-67.

⁶ Cf., e.g., W. V. Harris, 'The Theoretical Possibility of Extensive Infanticide in the Graeco-Roman World', *CQ* 32 (1982) 114-16; A. Cameron, 'The Exposure of Children and Greek Ethics', *CR* 46 (1932) 105-14.

Renate Johné's chapter, 'Women in the Ancient Novel' (pp. 151-207), resembles Scarcella's in being over-long and expressed in rather clumsy English, for example, 'destination' for 'destiny' (p. 195); Chloë's παίγνια ('playthings') before her marriage were 'foreplay' (p. 189); and Cnemon is Nausikleia's 'fixture husband' (p. 192). The discussion is mainly descriptive rather than analytical, there are some inexplicable misjudgements (Charikleia is said to have been motherless, p. 203) and curious omissions.⁷ Johné also appears to accept without question (pp. 189, 191) the rather implausible hypothesis of Kerényi-Merkelbach that Melite and Lykainion are mystagogues in the initiation ritual of marriage.⁸ This theory is given excellent treatment by Roger Beck, 'Mystery Religions, Aretalogy and the Ancient Novel' (pp. 131-50), who provides an insightful formulation of the problem, contextualises his discussion by comparing and contrasting ancient narrative fiction with aretalogies and biographies of holy men, and concludes that the novels cannot be described as true mystery texts since they are not properly allegorical or systematic. Nevertheless, Beck allows that the ancient narratives, especially inasmuch as they are stories of journeys, do resemble the mysteries in that they constitute the responses of 'individuals in their encounters with divine providence and human fate' (p. 149). While it would not be true to say that Beck has reopened the question of the religious character of much ancient fiction (like Merkelbach, Beck does not discuss awkward cases such as Chariton or Achilles Tatius adequately), he has provided nevertheless a much-needed counter-balance to the prevailing emphasis on the literary character of these works.

Heinrich Kuch, 'A Study on the Margin of the Ancient Novel: "Barbarians" and Others' (pp. 209-20), gives a brief account of the cultural identities of the authors of the novels and their attitudes to 'barbarians'. Kuch's discussion is careful and well considered, but, while he rates Heliodorus' innovations in the novelistic tradition highly (pp. 214f.), he does not adequately deal with the complexities of cultural identity in the *Ethiopian Story*. Some mention of race as a determinant of cultural identity in the work deserves to be made (cf., e.g., the enigmatic oracle, 2.35.5; the paradoxical birth of the heroine, 4.8; Sisimithres' condemnation of racial prejudice, 10.10.4). Some assessment of the author's critical attitude to the inhabitants of Athens and Delphi would also have been relevant.

The more literary questions are, on the whole, much better dealt with in the collection. Alain Billault, 'Characterization in the Ancient Novel' (pp. 115-29), provides a succinct and interesting analysis of new character types, the naming of

⁷ On Hypatia, M. Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria* (Cambridge, Mass. 1995) is not mentioned and M. Foucault, *Le Souci de Soi: Histoire de la Sexualité* (Paris 1984) is conspicuous by its absence in the discussion of the shift in gender relations in the late Roman Empire, for which S. Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginité: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* (Cambridge 1995) is also relevant.

⁸ K. Kerényi, *Die griechisch-orientalisch Romanliteratur in religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* (Tübingen 1927); R. Merkelbach, *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike* (München 1962).

characters, and the use of literary comparisons and dramatic adventures in the characterisation of the protagonists and gods in the novels. Ewen Bowie, 'The Ancient Readers of the Greek Novels' (pp. 87-106), revisits the question of readership that he has discussed before,⁹ but nonetheless manages to put the matter in sharper focus. Bowie divides the novels into 'sophistic' (Longus, Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus), 'early' (*Ninus, Parthenope and Metiochus*, Chariton, Xenophon and the Greek original of *Apollonius, King of Tyre*) and 'other' (Antonius Diogenes, Apuleius). This classification confuses the criteria of style (or content) and chronology (itself a matter that is often in dispute) and is therefore not entirely satisfactory, but Bowie's analysis of these categories in terms of their 'intended' and 'actual' readership, while fully acknowledging the looseness of the first of these terms (p. 89), is useful. Bowie appears to ignore evidence of a shift in reading habits from early to late Empire as shown by altered attitudes towards writing in the later period (cf., e.g., Apul. 11.22; Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 1.15.69).¹⁰ However, he sensibly concludes (pp. 105f.) that there must have been a range of readers for the different kinds of novels, but a narrower range than others, such as Anderson, would allow. In contrast to Bowie, Graham Anderson's brief sally, 'Popular and Sophisticated in the Ancient Novel' (pp. 107-13), is prepared to recognise a greater overlap between 'popular' and 'sophisticated' elements in the novels and to attach greater importance to the former. The argument, though, is of limited value: it is perhaps significant that Anderson does not mention Heliodorus at all.

This collection of articles on the ancient novel contains much good, even excellent matter. Ruiz-Montero's study in particular provides a much-needed synthesis of the numerous generic sources of influence that shaped the heterogeneous corpus of ancient narrative fiction. Her careful and wide-ranging chapter avoids describing the growth of the genre in evolutionary terms but at the same time argues that the very lack of an adequate definition of the genre rules out Perry's view that it was the creative act of a single person on a specific occasion.¹¹ Utopias, history, biography, tragedy, New Comedy, epic, elegy, local legend, rhetoric, epistolography, Egyptian tales, aretology, the apostolic acts, and the general socio-economic conditions under the Roman empire all played their part in the development of prose fiction, but none can be considered by itself to have been the starting point. Instead the reader must consider each work on its own merits.

The second section of the book addresses this need admirably. B. P. Reardon ('Chariton', pp. 309-35), Bernhard Kytzler ('Xenophon of Ephesus', pp. 336-59), Richard Hunter ('Longus, *Daphnis and Chloë*', pp. 361-86), Karl Plepeltis ('Achilles

⁹ Cf., e.g., E. L. Bowie, 'The Readership of Greek Novels in the Ancient World', in J. Tatum, *The Search for the Ancient Novel* (Baltimore 1994) 435-59.

¹⁰ Cf. F. Altheim, *Der unbesiegte Gott: Heidentum und Christentum* (Hamburg 1957) 47-66.

¹¹ B. Perry, *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-historical Account of Their Origins* (Berkeley 1967) 3-43.

Tatius', pp. 387-416), J. R. Morgan ('Heliodoros', pp. 417-56), Gareth Schmeling ('The *Satyrica* of Petronius', pp. 457-90 and '*Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*', pp. 517-51) and S. J. Harrison ('Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', pp. 491-516) are all scholars who have made significant contributions to the study of these authors. Each work is treated fairly uniformly: the plot is summarised, questions of authorship, dating, textual transmission, critical editions, language and style, intertextuality and *Nachleben* are discussed and brief interpretations of the novels are put forward. A generous amount of space has been allocated to each work and the contributions are without exception skilful and judicious in their assessments. This section of the book can be recommended without hesitation both to students at the beginning of their studies and to scholars seeking a fresh perspective on the major landmarks in the extensive but still (in many areas) uncharted terrain of ancient fiction. It is regrettable that the defects in the first section somewhat negate this achievement. There have been enough compendia in the field of ancient narrative fiction that have to a greater or lesser extent satisfied the short-term need for surveys and assessments. It is time to move on to more detailed investigations of the many interpretative problems associated with this youngest and dynamic field of classical scholarship.