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**Edited by Franco Moretti: The Novel, Volume 1**

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## The Ancient Greek Novel: A Single Model or a Plurality of Forms?

### *Theme with Variations*

A handbook description of what is generally called “the Greek novel” of antiquity, or more specifically, “the ideal Greek novel,” might sound like this:

These are novels of travel, adventure, and romantic love, taking place in a vaguely realistic Mediterranean or Near Eastern setting. A boy and a girl, both exceptionally attractive and of noble birth, meet and fall in love. A cruel fate separates them, and they are tossed around by land and sea, constantly longing and searching for one another. They are shipwrecked, attacked by pirates, sold as slaves, violently courted by brigands and masters, but would rather die than sacrifice their chastity. Finally, after the long series of tribulations, they are reunited and return home to a life of marital bliss.

A handbook writer who has actually read these novels, or attentively listened to those who have, will hasten to add that there are considerable variations on this theme; no two surviving novels are in fact equal in plot or attitude.

Take time, for instance. Chariton’s *Callirhoe*, presumably the oldest among the five that have come down to us in its full original form (50 B.C.–A.D. 50?), is a historical novel, set in the Classical period of Greece. So is the latest one, Heliodorus’s *Aithiopika* (A.D. 350–375?), though it lacks Chariton’s precise references to historical characters and events.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Achilles Tatius’s *Leucippe and Clitophon* (A.D. 150–200?) is set in the author’s own time: he pretends having met the hero and heard the story

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<sup>1</sup> All the dates, and in particular those of Chariton’s and Heliodorus’s novels, are open to debate, since none of the authors is identified. For details and bibliography, see the handbook edited by Gareth Schmeling, *The Novel in the Ancient World*, Mnemosyne, Suppl. 159 (Leiden, 1996; rev. paperback ed., 2003). Shorter introductions to the ancient novels are provided by Tomas Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford, 1983); and Niklas Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel* (London, 1995). Translations of all the texts are to be found in B. P. Reardon ed., *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989).

from him.<sup>2</sup> The remaining two, Xenophon's *Ephesiaka* (A.D. 50–150?)<sup>3</sup> and Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe* (A.D. 150–250?), are enacted in a diffusely contemporary world, meaning the first two centuries of the Roman Empire, though the Romans themselves are curiously absent.

Or take the geographical setting and the travel motif. Longus's pastoral, though admitting pirates into the plot, restricts the actual traveling to the groves and meadows of the island of Lesbos and the waters immediately off its coast. Xenophon's story, in contrast, chases its young travelers around the greater part of the Mediterranean, with beginning and end in Ephesus and intermediate stops (for one, or both, of the protagonists) in Samos, Rhodes, Phoenicia, Cilicia, Cappadocia, Egypt, Sicily, South Italy, Crete, and Cyprus (all in seventy pages). Achilles Tatius's novel has a north-south axis (Byzantium–Ephesus–Phoenicia–Egypt), and so has Heliodorus's (Delphi–Zacynthus–Crete–Egypt–Meroe); whereas Chariton, who notably excludes Egypt from his couple's itinerary, prefers a movement from west (Sicily) to east (Persia), with Ionia as the cherished middle.<sup>4</sup>

No less variable is the love motif. Although reciprocal love at first sight is usually the spectacular start of the love story, Achilles lustfully dwells on the hero's prolonged courting of his beloved. Consummated marriage precedes the separation of the lovers in Chariton and Xenophon, whereas it epitomizes the happy ending in the others. Fidelity and chastity, for male and female alike, are the professed ideals in all; but Achilles' hero is successfully seduced by Melite, the enchanting widow from Ephesus. Chariton's heroine even marries the Ionian gentleman Dionysius to be able to give birth, in legitimate marriage, to her son by Chaereas, her first (and last) husband. To escape such a fate, Xenophon's Antheia takes poison, only to become one of these novels' notorious instances of apparent death, and Heliodorus's Theagenes defiantly endures endless torture.

Xenophon creates suspense by a breathless series of outer events. Chariton, though actually admitting a similar sample of violence, torture, and

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<sup>2</sup> Helen Morales, in her introduction to Tim Whitmarsh, trans., Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, (Oxford, 2001), pp. xv f., argues for a “designedly indeterminate” date of the action; but, whatever sophisticated ideas we might have about the nonidentity of the narrating “I” and author, Achilles Tatius clearly invites his readers to make such an identification and regard the story as authentic as well as contemporary.

<sup>3</sup> It has usually been dated in the second century A.D., but James N. O'Sullivan makes a good case for removing the supposed *terminus post quem* in Trajan's reign; see his *Xenophon of Ephesus: His Compositional Technique and the Birth of the Novel* (Berlin, 1995), 1–9.

<sup>4</sup> The plots are excellently mapped by Jean Alvares in Schmeling, ed., *The Novel*, 801–14.

death, embalms it all in a humane discourse, emphasizing throughout the feelings and reasoning of the characters involved. Achilles is ironic where Heliodorus is serious (though some modern critics would find him, too, more ambiguous in attitude).<sup>5</sup> Chariton devotes most of his attention to his heroine, while Achilles—by uniquely adopting a first-person perspective—makes his narrating hero the central character. Longus smilingly shows his readers the charming naïveté of his children of nature, in contrast to Heliodorus’s missionary ethos and model characters.

The degree to which descriptive detail is allowed to slow down the tempo of the narrative is another distinctive factor—in other words, how far spatial form intrudes on the basic temporal structure.<sup>6</sup> Whereas Xenophon uses half a dozen lines to inform us, in his plain style, of the motifs embroidered on the canopy over the bridal couch (1.8.2–3), Achilles, with precious words, arranged according to rhythm and euphony, creates a piece of verbal art to represent, in minute detail, the erotic painting his hero is looking at (1.1.2–13). In Chariton, Tyre is captured with a fair amount of oratory but little concrete detail (7.3–4); in Heliodorus the siege of Syene is graphically depicted to fill a whole book (9). This addiction to *ecphrasis*, graphic description—be it of works of art, natural phenomena, or man-made spectacles—are among the stylistic features that have earned Achilles, Longus, and Heliodorus the epithet “sophistic” novelists, a label drawn from the dominating cultural movement of the period, the so-called Second Sophistic.<sup>7</sup>

In that way, the handbook writer might go on characterizing each of the novels by comparison with the others, and trying to group them by means of various distinctive criteria. But the ideal Greek novel of the general description, it turns out, is nowhere to be found.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Massimo Fusillo on the *Aithiopika* in volume 2 of this work and Gerald N. Sandy, *Heliodorus* (Boston, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> On spatial form in the novels, see Ingela Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos, Rhetorical Pleasure: Narrative Technique and Mimesis in Eumathios Makrembolites’ Hysmine & Hysminias*, *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia*, no. 7 (Uppsala, 2001), 40–43, 141–44, 242.

<sup>7</sup> On *ecphrasis* in the sophistic novels, see Shadi Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Princeton, N.J., 1989). On the distinction between sophistic and pre- or nonsophistic novels, see J. R. Morgan, “The Greek Novel: Towards a Sociology of Production and Reception,” in Anton Powell, ed., *The Greek World* (London, 1995), 130–52, at 140–43.

<sup>8</sup> See B. P. Reardon, *The Form of Greek Romance*, (Princeton, N.J., 1991), for an attempt at defining the genre in terms of ancient critical categories by using Chariton as the primary object of analysis.

*A Single Model?*

A general description of a genre, such as the ideal Greek novel, might perhaps be described as a verbal lowest common denominator. But this is a halting analogy. Even the most general description conceivable of the ideal novel appears to need some modification to be truly applicable to any of the extant exemplars. What lurks behind that description is perhaps the (mostly unspoken) belief that there “originally” existed a work that completely answered to the description, and that the surviving novels are all individual adaptations of that model itself, or of other works that ultimately go back to the model—the lost archetype.

Ben Edwin Perry has come closest to expressing in concrete terms, perhaps unwittingly, the idea of the archetype.<sup>9</sup> In his Sather lectures published in 1967, fed up with the evolutionary view of the origin and development of the ancient novel that had been prevalent for a hundred years, Perry envisaged the “birth” of the Greek novel in this way: “The first romance was deliberately planned and written by an individual author, its inventor. He conceived it on a Tuesday afternoon in July. . . .”<sup>10</sup> Earlier, Erwin Rohde had looked upon the creation of the Greek novel as a combination of two Hellenistic genres, love elegy and fabulous travel books (*Reisefabulistik*). The ground was prepared, he imagined, in the schools of rhetoric where students were trained to extemporize on fictitious topics, among them love themes in exotic settings. Eduard Schwartz, a specialist in historiography, preferred to see the novel as a result of a gradual development within that genre, from a political to an increasingly personal interest, and towards sensationalism, sentimentality, in one word: entertainment. Otmar Schissel von Fleschenberg argued for a succession of stages from short story via frame story with inserted short stories to episodic novel. Bruno Lavagnini emphasized the role of local legends as a source of material and point of departure for the first novelists. Others called attention to New Comedy, with its fictitious characters and love intrigues, as a close antecedent to the novels. Euripides’ “romantic” dramas with a happy ending were also adduced. There was

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<sup>9</sup> The appearance of Ben Edwin Perry, *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-Historical Account of Their Origins* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), was an important stimulus for the development in ancient-novel studies that has gradually led to today’s boom, although most scholars are now anxious to dissociate themselves from Perry’s scenario. Cf. Bryan Reardon, “The Ancient Novel at the Time of Perry,” *Ancient Narrative* 2 (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Perry, *Ancient Romances*, 175.

hardly a genre that did not lend itself to figuring, in one respect or another, as an “ancestor” of the new form.<sup>11</sup>

As a reaction to this kind of biological thinking among historians of Greek literature, Perry now proposed a different model of explanation. For him, the decisive driving force in the creation of any new genre is radical changes in social conditions and cultural outlook. He saw the Greek novel as the “latter-day epic for Everyman,” a result of the cultural equalization and superficiality of the Hellenistic age. The closed tribal community that had fostered the epic and the classical city-state, with tragedy as its civic literary form, had given way to Hellenistic society, a vast conglomerate without common values or interests. The creation of the novel is looked upon as almost inevitable. The “spiritual and intellectual nomads” of late Hellenistic society needed this, the most formless of all so-called literary forms, the open form for the open society.

Both Perry’s characterization of Hellenistic society and his view of the Greek novel as a vapid and trivial literary product would need (and have since received) much qualification. In this context, the interesting thing is that he sees fit to replace the (literary) autogenesis of the form with a (man-made) monogenesis. Yet if the social climate dominating in the vast Hellenistic world demanded this new form, might not the same idea have sprung up in more than one mind, so that there were several “inventors,” a veritable polygenesis? This question of mono- or polygenesis—or something less clear-cut?—will underlie much of the discussion in this essay.<sup>12</sup>

### *Fragments and Reflections*

So far, we have looked at just the five extant ideal novels—the “canon”—in isolation. Clearly, they alone are an insufficient basis for forming a theory of the emergence of the new form(s), not least because they all, or at least four of them, belong to the Imperial period, whereas there are good reasons to believe with Perry that the decisive period is late Hellenism.<sup>13</sup> One need not

<sup>11</sup> For the research history, see Simon Swain, “A Century and More of the Greek Novel,” in Simon Swain, ed., *Oxford Readings in the Greek Novel* (Oxford, 1999), 3–35.

<sup>12</sup> The whole question of the novel’s origins, once considered the only one worth pursuing with regard to this genre, is now bluntly dismissed as “an insoluble and vain enquiry” by E. L. Bowie and S. J. Harrison, “The Romance of the Novel,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 159–78, at 173.

<sup>13</sup> This early beginning is now doubted, on insufficient grounds, by several scholars, e.g., Swain, “A Century,” referring to “current thinking on the dating of the novel” (27).

subscribe uncritically to Perry's parallels with the rise of the novel in eighteenth-century England, connected with increased literacy and leisure, to find the last century(ies) B.C. the likely formative period. It is an unduly reductionist view to believe that only what has survived has ever existed, seeing, in particular, that Hellenistic literature generally disappeared from the book market with the classicistic movement of the early empire, and has been lost ever since.

Luckily, it is not necessary only to theorize about this. There are fragments of a couple of other novels that may with some confidence be dated before the extant ones, and there are reflections of the new form in other literature. Let's begin with the latter category of *testimonia*.

Already in Neronian Rome, in the middle of the first century A.D., appear what looks like two satirical responses to the ideal Greek novel. Petronius's *Satyrical*, the fragmentarily transmitted Roman novel, seems to have had at least one of its satirical points directed against the naive idealism of the early Greek novels.<sup>14</sup> Like them, it features a couple of young Mediterranean travelers (from Massilia to Baiae/Puteoli and Croton in south Italy, possibly ending in Lampsacus on the Hellespont). But these are homosexual males, and chastity is replaced by promiscuity. Shipwrecks, attempted suicide, rhetorical lament, pursuing deities, and court proceedings are further common themes, though played in different keys. At about the same time, the Roman satirical poet Persius attacks popular fiction and, as a climax in his scornful denunciation of the prevalent literary taste, mentions a work entitled *Callirhoe*, which has to be Chariton's.<sup>15</sup> How long does it take for a new literary form to merit a parody (even in another language) or to foster a classic of its own? In the ancient literary system, we should probably reckon with (at least) several generations.

Another argument for the existence of more than has been directly transmitted may be deduced from the anonymous Latin novel *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri* (early third century A.D.?). It is more likely than not—though some would look upon such a claim as another instance of Hellenists' cultural imperialism<sup>16</sup>—that the *Historia Apollonii* is an adapted translation from a Greek original of unknown age. That book, to judge from the Latin version, was of a literary standard below any of the novels that have been transmitted in Greek; Xenophon's *Ephesiaka* comes closest but is still well structured in

<sup>14</sup> Cf. P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel*, 2nd ed. (London, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Persius 1.134. See G. P. Goold in the introduction to his bilingual edition of Chariton, *Callirhoe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 4–5.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Gareth Schmeling in Schmeling, ed., *The Novel*, 529–31.

comparison. The *Historia Apollonii* is lacking in logic and uneven in composition and narrative style; nevertheless it had such qualities as a popular story that it experienced a successful afterlife in various languages in the Middle Ages. This would support the idea that there was a subliterate current of popular novels in Greek that never achieved even the inglorious status of those that survived. Another indication pointing in the same direction would be some of the so-called apocryphal Acts of Apostles, like *Paul and Thecla*, that may be suspected to have functioned as a Christian continuation of a popular tradition of unpretentious stories of love, travel, and adventure.<sup>17</sup>

These are, admittedly, speculations. But it is better to try to formulate hypotheses on the basis of all the odd traces that may be found than to be content with constructing one's building using exclusively the few blocks that have survived in their complete original shape. In the latter case, the power of selection exercised by the transmission process and its arbiters of taste is allowed to dictate unchallenged how we apprehend the ancient literary structure.

The most effective challenge, however, to the received picture does not come from internal differences within the canon or from indirect reflections in later literature, but from the fragments of lost novels. In the case of the novels, "fragments" almost always means papyrus fragments. While quotations in later literary works supply the majority of fragments in genres like historiography and biography, the novelists were not quoted by other ancient literates, at least not explicitly (the only exception is Antonius Diogenes). Some *testimonia*, it is true, have come down through Byzantine lexica and commentaries, and the Byzantines (some of whom were not afraid of admitting that they read novels) have also supplied us with epitomes of a couple of lost ancient novels and illuminating critical discussion of others;<sup>18</sup> but the papyrus fragments are our primary peep-hole into what lay behind the facade.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Jan N. Bremmer, "The Novel and the Apocryphal Acts: Place, Time and Readership," in H. Hofmann and M. Zimmerman, eds., *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel* (Groningen, 1998), 9:157–80.

<sup>18</sup> For critical discussion, see Michael Psellus, *The Essays on Euripides and George of Pisidia and on Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius*, A. R. Dyck, ed., *Byzantina Vindobonensia*, no. 16 (Vienna, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> All the fragments discussed in this essay are to be found, with translation and commentary, in Susan A. Stephens and John J. Winkler, eds., *Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments* (Princeton, N.J., 1995). Cf. also the indispensable critical survey by J. R. Morgan, "On the Fringes of the Canon: Work on the Fragments of Ancient Greek Fiction 1936–1994," in Wolfgang Haase and Hildegard Temporini, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* (Berlin, 1998), vol. II.34.4, pp. 3,293–390.

*Not-So-Ideal Greek Novels*

For a long time, the fragments were duly classified according to which of the extant novels they resembled most and interpreted within that framework; a fragment that did not resemble any of them enough, risked being excluded from the category “novel (or romance) fragment” and relegated to “historiography” or simply “prose fragment.” This critical *circulus vitiosus* was broken, if not earlier, with the publication in 1969 of fairly extensive papyrus fragments of a work that, though in some ways alarmingly untypical of a “Greek novel,” could still hardly be denied that label. This was Lollianus’s *Phoinikika*, and the papyri—one fragment from a papyrus roll, long known, and one codex fragment newly identified—were written around A.D. 200, the novel itself most probably in the preceding century.<sup>20</sup>

Human sacrifice and cannibalism as part of rustic initiation rites, described in unemotional factual prose, are among the surprising ingredients of this story:

Meanwhile another man, who was naked, walked by, wearing a crimson loin-cloth, and throwing the body of the *pais* (boy or servant?) on its back, he cut it up, and tore out its heart and placed it upon the fire. Then, he took up [the cooked heart] and sliced it up to the middle. And on the surface [of the slices] he sprinkled [barley groats] and wet it with oil; and when he had sufficiently prepared them, [he gave them to the] initiates, and those who held (a slice?) [he ordered] to swear in the blood of the heart that they would neither give up nor betray [———], not [even if they are led off to prison], nor yet if they be tortured nor yet if [their eyes] be gouged out.<sup>21</sup>

There is, it is true, a similar sacrificial episode in Achilles Tatius (3.15); but there, the macabre spectacle is described through the horrified eyes of the hero and is later revealed to have been a fake sacrifice. The reader must already have suspected so much, for the would-be victim is the heroine herself, and the incident occurs less than halfway through the novel. As far as can be seen from the fragments, no similar miracle saved the nameless boy (?) in Lollianus’s novel.

Promiscuous sex is another topic. One Androtimus, who has just vomited

<sup>20</sup> After prepublication in 1969, the definitive edition is Albert Henrichs, ed., *Die “Phoinikika” des Lollianos: Fragmente eines neuen griechischen Romans*, Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, no. 14 (Bonn, 1972).

<sup>21</sup> Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 339.

out on the table the human heart he had been forced to eat, is also a witness to the brigands' after-dinner pleasures:

When all had passed in and there was no longer anyone outside, closing the [———], they sang, drank, had intercourse with the women in full view of Androtimus. [Some] slept exhausted, while the eleven [stationed] by the corpses did not drink very much—just enough to get warm (cool off?) [———] When it was midnight, first they stripped the bodies of the dead and not even leaving the band with which the girl bound her breasts; then hoisting them up over the windows, they let them down into [———].<sup>22</sup>

Tone and topics no doubt come closest to Petronius's and Apuleius's novels among those we possess from antiquity. The neat distinction previously made between the "ideal Greek" and "realistic Roman" novel is proven to be (at least) unduly generalized.<sup>23</sup>

That this was a full-length novel is indicated both by the genre-typical title given in the codex fragment, *Phoinikika* [*Phoenician Tales*], and by the fact that the surviving text happens to include two different book breaks, between books 1 and 2, and between book 2 (or higher) and 3 (or higher). The same does not apply to another fragment of similar type, usually referred to as *Iolaus*, after the name of the main character in the surviving episode. It was first published, in 1971, under the title "A Greek *Satyricon*?" because both content (mock initiation for erotic purposes) and form (mixture of prose and verse) are reminiscent of Petronius's novel.<sup>24</sup> But it is in the nature of papyrus fragments that they only seldom provide enough clues to judge the larger structure of the work to which they belong, unless they are connected with a formally well-defined literary genre. Prudently, Peter Parsons in his definitive edition of the same fragment resorted to a more neutral title, "Narrative about Iolaus."<sup>25</sup> If *Iolaus* was in fact a shorter composition, the find is not so sensational; we already possessed, in much fuller form, one such comic-realistic, erotically explicit story in Greek, *Lucius or the Ass* (second century A.D.), a condensed version of the story on which the Roman Apuleius based his novel *Metamorphoses*.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Alessandro Barchiesi, "Traces of Greek Narrative and the Roman Novel: A Survey," in S. J. Harrison, ed., *Oxford Readings in the Roman Novel* (Oxford, 1999), 124–41.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Parsons, "A Greek *Satyricon*?" *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 18 (1971): 53–68.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Parsons, "Narrative about Iolaus," in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London, 1974), 42:34–41.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Walsh, *The Roman Novel*.

This is perhaps enough to demonstrate that the ideal novel as known through the canon of five was indeed not alone on the market, and that “erotic” as a label for ancient Greek novels may sometimes correspond more to the modern understanding of the term than to what Rudolf Hercher meant when he edited the *Erotici Scriptores Graeci* in 1858–59. Susan Stephens, who lumps the *Phoinikika*, *Ioalus*, and a couple of other fragments together as deriving from “Criminal-Satiric Novels,” interestingly suggests that Julian the Apostate, in a famous letter where he warns pagan priests against reading novels (89.301B), is in fact thinking primarily of this erotic type.<sup>27</sup> He says, and this is one of the very few references to the existence of novels that we find in the whole of ancient literature, “As for those fictions (*plasmata*) in the form of history (*en historias eidei*) that have been reported by earlier writers, we should renounce them—love stories (*erōtikas hypotheseis*) and all that kind of stuff.”<sup>28</sup> Julian has first warned against the licentiousness of Archilochus, Hipponax, and Old Comedy, and when he now proceeds to the novels—lacking a generic term he has to be loosely descriptive—it is indeed natural to think that it is vulgarity and obscenity he denounces, rather than chaste love stories or “fictions” as such.<sup>29</sup> But it has not seemed so to anyone who has been accustomed to regard the ideal type as *the* Greek novel and taken for granted that he referred to them. Saying “in the form of history” he need not mean more than “prose narratives of book length”; that he should warn specifically against “historical novels” of Chariton’s type is unlikely.

Another piece of late-antique evidence that now seems to fall into place concerns Iamblichus’s *Babylōniaka*. The plot of this novel, written in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, is known chiefly through the detailed epitome that Photius, twice Patriarch of Constantinople in the ninth century, produced for his *Bibliothēke* (cod. 94). While the five extant ideal novels consist of five to ten books, or seventy to three hundred printed pages, this one ran to sixteen (Photius) or even thirty-nine books (the Byzantine lexicon *Suda*). Some of its thrilling contents, as cataloged in Photius’s epitome, are vividly summarized by Susan Stephens and Jack Winkler:

<sup>27</sup> Susan Stephens, “Fragments of Lost Novels,” in Schmeling, ed., *The Novel*, 669n.36.

<sup>28</sup> Trans. adapted from Morgan, “The Greek Novel,” 132.

<sup>29</sup> Though he first contrasts the novels to “narratives [ . . . ] about deeds that have actually been done,” he soon returns to what looks like a denunciation of erotic themes: “For words breed a certain sort of disposition in the soul, and little by little it arouses desires” (trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, *The Works of the Emperor Julian* [Cambridge, Mass., 1913], 2:327). The influence from Christian ethics is evident.

The hero and heroine roam throughout the Near East pursued by two eunuchs whose noses and ears have been cut off. They encounter bees with poisoned honey, a Lesbian princess of Egypt, a cannibalistic brigand, look-alike brothers named Tigris and Euphrates who happen to be exact doubles for the hero, and a rather dignified farmer's daughter whom the heroine forces to sleep with an executioner who is really a priest of Aphrodite who helps his son Euphrates break jail by dressing in the farmer's daughter's clothes. Considering the emotional tension that is constantly breaking out between the hero and heroine, culminating in her leaving him to marry another man before their final reconciliation, it is a wonder that anyone could ever refer to this work as an "ideal romance."<sup>30</sup>

True. We may even go one step further by trying to look behind Photius's epitome. True to his notorious interest in paradoxical phenomena and events, Photius is rather detailed about the exotic elements of the plot (the bees, for instance, 74a40). He patiently follows the countless twists and turns of the couple's adventures and conscientiously summarizes the subplots as well, where such occur. The erotic topics, on the other hand, are passed over in a rather perfunctory fashion: "the slave who is her lover and murderer," "at the beginning of their lovemaking," "how she consorted with Mesopotamia," and "she slept with Euphrates."<sup>31</sup> Does this reticence really reflect the true character of the novel?

It may be so. Iamblichus may well have told all this in as unerotic a manner as Xenophon of Ephesus. The extant literal fragments of the text are not particularly devoted to sexual description. Photius himself says that Iamblichus is more shameless (*aischros*) and indecent (*anaidēs*) than Heliodorus, but less so than Achilles Tatius (73b24). This would mean about the level of Xenophon. But there is a piece of evidence that points in another direction. The medical writer Theodorus Priscianus (ca. A.D. 400) recommends reading the novels of Iamblichus and similar authors as a cure for men who suffer from impotence (2.11.34).<sup>32</sup> This is the reverse, then, of Julian's advice to his priests. Given the recovered fragments of the *Phoinikika* and *Iolaus*, where scenes of deflowering, promiscuous sex, and

<sup>30</sup> Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 179.

<sup>31</sup> Phot. *Bibl.* 76b10, 76b31, 77a20, 78b38, trans. Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 195–98.

<sup>32</sup> Uti sane (sc. convenit) lectionibus animum ad delicias pertrahentibus, ut sunt Amphipolitae Philippi aut Herodiani aut certe Syrii Iamblichi, vel ceteris suaviter amatorias fabulas describentibus (p. 133.9–12 Rose).

clever seduction throng in the few surviving pages, it is easier to fill out the hints and possible omissions in Photius's epitome and let Theodorus's prescription make real sense. The *Babylōniaka*, then, while on the face of it adhering to the love-travel-adventure scheme, may have been another of those texts that negate the very concept of the ideal novel.

*Parthenope: Doomed to Maidenhood?*

So far we have mainly explored the diversity of novel production in the first two centuries of the Imperial period. It is time to try to reach further back in time, toward what has traditionally been called the "origins" of the Greek novel. Fragments, of various kind and age, will again be the principal guide, beginning with an inscribed potsherd, an ostrakon, from Egypt. Its Greek text may be understood thus:

"Are you [ . . . ], Parthenope, [he said], and forgetful of your Metiochus?  
For my part, from the day you [went away], I [ . . . ] and [can]not sleep, my  
eyes wide open as if glued with gum."<sup>33</sup>

It names the hero and heroine of a Greek novel otherwise known through some papyrus fragments and some references in later (mainly Byzantine) texts. On account of its letter forms, it has recently been given a fairly precise date, the first decades of the first century A.D.<sup>34</sup> Whether this ostrakon is a school exercise, a private copy of a memorable passage of the novel, a free variation on a popular theme, or a quotation from a stage performance based on the novel, it necessarily presupposes that the novel in question had, by the beginning of the first century A.D., acquired a certain reputation and reached Egypt. In other words, provided the date of the ostrakon is reasonably accurate, it would probably have already been written in the late Hellenistic period.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> All the translations in this section are from Tomas Hägg and Bo Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover: Fragments of an Ancient Greek Novel and a Persian Epic Poem*, Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures, 30 (Leiden, 2003). Most of the Greek texts, with English translation, commentary, and full bibliography, are also available in Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 72–100, 497–99.

<sup>34</sup> Guglielmo Cavallo as quoted in Antonio Stramaglia, "Fra 'consumo' e 'impegno': Usi didattici della narrativa nel mondo antico," in Oronzo Pecere and Antonio Stramaglia, eds., *La letteratura di consumo nel mondo greco-latino* (Cassino, 1996), 123–24.

<sup>35</sup> A date in the middle of the first century B.C. had already been suggested, on linguistic and cultural-historical grounds, by Albrecht Dihle, "Zur Datierung des Metiochos-Romans," *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* n.f. 4 (1978): 47–55.

This novel retained its popularity for hundreds of years. Papyrus fragments of the second and third centuries A.D. indicate that it continued to be read and copied. Pantomimic dance performances, exploiting the sentimental and tragic potentials of the plot, were staged at various places in the empire. Around A.D. 200, a wealthy man of Antioch chose to decorate a floor in his summer house at the falls of the Orontes with figures from the novel, while another man manifested the same literary inclinations in the twin towns of Zeugma on the Euphrates. And, as has recently been discovered, the novel survived long enough to serve, in the eleventh century, as the basis for a Persian epic poem by ‘Unsurī the court poet of Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna (in modern Afghanistan). Yet, in spite of its obvious popularity, it has not come down to us through the ordinary channels of medieval textual transmission. Consequently, we have to use all the sources mentioned, plus the Byzantine *testimonia*, in attempts to reconstruct its original plot and character. How this has been done in the past hundred years is revelatory for the way scholars have conceived of the genre of the ideal Greek novel, so the three principal stages in this modern recovery of the novel deserve a closer examination.<sup>36</sup>

When the first papyrus fragment, containing the proper names Metiochus and Parthenope, was published in 1895, the connection was immediately made with the Byzantine scholar Eusthatus’s reference to an ancient love story with a hero and heroine thus named. It was also recognized that the two lovers were here engaged in a discussion of the nature of Eros. First it was supposed that the argument took place in a school of rhetoric—an idea no doubt inspired by the view prevailing since Erwin Rohde’s seminal book of 1876, *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*, that the ideal Greek novel itself, as a literary genre, was a creation of the rhetorical schools of the early Roman Empire. Later it was instead suggested that the couple were discussing in front of a picture of Eros, in its turn a notion based on the important role of erotic paintings at the beginnings of Achilles Tatius’s and Longus’s novels, before the narrative proper starts. Both suggestions lacked support in the actual text and were to be proven wrong. They show how this novel was assimilated into the current view of the Greek novel, largely formed on the three “sophistic” specimens (and systematically disregarding the earlier ones by Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus).

It was also taken for granted that Metiochus and Parthenope were private individuals with purely fictitious names, as seemed to be the case with all the protagonists of the five extant novels. Only Bruno Lavagnini, true to

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<sup>36</sup> Details and references in Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin*, Chap. 1.

his own view of the origins of the genre, sought for connections with the Parthenopes known from Neapolitan and Samian local traditions.<sup>37</sup> The surprise was proportionally great when Herwig Maehler in 1976, by combining papyrus fragments then housed in East and West Berlin, respectively, succeeded in showing that this Parthenope was in fact the daughter of Polycrates, the sixth-century tyrant of Samos, and that Metiochus was the son of the Athenian general Miltiades.<sup>38</sup> So this was a historical novel, it was concluded, with Chariton's as its closest cognate. While Chariton had attached his love story to Thucydides, locating it in Syracuse after the defeat of the Athenian expedition in 413 and making his heroine the daughter of the Syracusan general Hermocrates, the author of *Metiochus and Parthenope* (as it was automatically called, without actual support in the ancient sources) had chosen Herodotus; for hero and heroine both appear already in his *History*, though Polycrates' daughter does so anonymously.

A date close to Chariton, that is, in the late Hellenistic or early Imperial period, was now generally accepted; and with the support of Eusthatus and Byzantine scholia, a plot similar to Chariton's was imagined. The discussion of the nature of Eros was shown to have taken place, not in a classroom or in front of a painting, but in a symposium at Polycrates' court on Samos—so, in fact, none of the extant novels but rather Plato's *Symposium*, provided the right association. The scene was located close to the beginning of the novel: the youngsters had just met and fallen in love, but they were soon to be separated and tossed around the Mediterranean in search of each other. A scholiast's reference to "Parthenope of Samos, who searching for her husband came to Anaxilaus" indicated that the tyrant of Rhegium in south Italy would be one of the stations on her way. Other parts of her itinerary were glimpsed as the scholiast added: "Parthenope is so named because she preserved her virginity (*parthenia*) in spite of falling into the hands of many men. From Phrygia, having fallen in love with Metiochos and cut off her hair, she came to Campania and settled there."<sup>39</sup> Another papyrus, tentatively attributed to the same novel, suggested that she passed Corfu as well. A happy ending of the usual type was taken for granted.

The normality of this reconstructed plot was, however, to be called into

<sup>37</sup> In an article written in 1921, republished in Bruno Lavagnini, *Studi sul romanzo greco* (Messina, 1950), 85n.3, 88 (suggesting a novel called *Kampanika*).

<sup>38</sup> Herwig Maehler, "Der Metiochus-Parthenope-Roman," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 23 (1976): 1–20.

<sup>39</sup> Scholion on Dionysius Periegetes v. 358, in K. Müller, ed., *Geographici Graeci Minores* (Paris, 1861), 2:445.

question by the discovery that the Persian epic poem *Vāmiq u 'Adhrā* ["The Ardent Lover and the Virgin"], of which a substantial manuscript fragment had been published in 1967,<sup>40</sup> was based on *Metiochus and Parthenope*. This now makes it possible to discern, or surmise, further parts of the plot; and they do not always turn out to have been predictable.

First, Parthenope's fate seems to have been more closely tied to the historical events and the change of rulers on her native Samos than was expected. Following Polycrates' death, she is imprisoned by his successor, the tyrant's former agent Maeandrius, and it seems that she has later also experienced her uncle Syloson as ruler of Samos. Chariton's attachment to history had appeared much looser than that. Yet it should be remembered that some of the less conventional elements of his plot have by some been explained as corresponding to (partly unknown) details of Syracusan internal history or legend.<sup>41</sup> Thus, when Chariton's hero and heroine are steering toward their happy homecoming, Callirhoe's infant son by Chaereas is against all expectation left behind in Miletus with her second husband Dionysius, and the boy's later return to Syracuse as a married man is foreshadowed (8.4.5–6). This constitutes a loose end in the novel and is perhaps best explained as reminiscences of a historical (or legendary) course of events. A corresponding closeness to actual history may in a more fundamental way have influenced the plot of *Metiochus and Parthenope*, making some lost parts of the novel perhaps irretrievably lost.

In particular, this may be true for its end. Parthenope, formed on *parthenos*, "virgin," is a telling name for Polycrates' daughter whom her father, according to Herodotus (3.124), condemned to a long period of maidenhood because she opposed his intention personally to meet Oroetes, the Persian satrap of Sardis. (That the scholiast thinks she is so called because she spurned unwanted suitors, is a fair guess on his side, based on Charicleia and her like.) Thus we cannot be sure that the novel really provided a happy ending in the manner of the others; perhaps she remained a virgin? We do not know, it is true, how 'Unsurī's epic ended either; but later adaptations of the story in Muslim literature exhibit a heroine who died a virgin.<sup>42</sup> None of the quotations in Persian lexica deriving from *Vāmiq u 'Adhrā* appears to be

<sup>40</sup> Muhammad Shafī, *Wāmiq-o-Adhrā of 'Unsurī*, Shahanshah of Iran's Grant Publications Series, 3 (Lahore, 1967).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Consuelo Ruiz-Montero, "Chariton von Aphrodisias: Ein Überblick," in Haase and Temporini, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* (Berlin, 1994), vol. II.34.2, pp. 1,006–54, at 1015–16.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Bo Utas, "Did 'Adhrā Remain a Virgin?" *Orientalia Suecana* 33–35 (1984–86): 429–41.

culled from an impressive happy ending. Many quotations, on the other hand, are from martial contexts, so a war in which the hero—and perhaps the manly heroine as well—played an active part, may have led up to the end, much as the case is in Chariton. But that Metiochus really got his beloved after triumphing in the war, as Chaereas did, is far from certain. We may find ourselves in a period prior to the generic stereotypes that governed the extant five novels. Perhaps we are closer to the kind of romantic love story with a tragic ending that the Athenian Xenophon inserted as a subplot in his *Cyropaedia*:<sup>43</sup> in short installments, he tells the story of Pantheia, the faithful and loving wife, who takes her own life beside the corpse of her fallen husband Abradatas.

The beginning may also have deviated from the later uniformity. The novels that seem to offer the closest resemblance to *Metiochus and Parthenope* are all one-generation stories: the action starts when the hero and heroine have reached marriageable age and ends a few years later when they settle at home after their travels and tribulations. The atypical Longus is atypical in this respect too by commencing at the moment when the herdsmen find the exposed babies who are to grow up as Daphnis and Chloe. *Metiochus and Parthenope*, to judge from *Vāmiq u 'Adbrā* (the reservation is necessary), was still more radical, taking as its point of departure the magnificent preparations for the wedding of Parthenope's parents, Polycrates of Samos and his bride. The wedding feast itself, the subsequent conception and birth of the heroine, and her education in various martial and liberal arts then form the first part of the novel, before the love story proper begins with the arrival of Metiochus on the island. The kind of family "prehistory" that Heliodorus incorporates in retrospect and the others lack, thus seems to have been linearly narrated in the first part of *Metiochus and Parthenope*.

The family history in question is, significantly, that of the heroine. In the Greek fragments and *testimonia* of the novel, hero and heroine seem to play equally important roles. From the Persian material—the manuscript fragment and lexical quotations as well as a summary elsewhere of part of the plot—it becomes clear that everything in fact revolves round Parthenope. Metiochus is just her preferred suitor. Before he arrives on Samos together with a trusted friend, only so much has been told about his family background as to explain why he fled from his father's home on the Chersonesus: his stepmother Hegesipyle, the Thracian woman whom Miltiades had married, machinated against him in favor of her own children. Reciprocated love at first sight, in front of the temple of Hera, is among the *topoi* that this novel

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<sup>43</sup> On this pre-novel novel, see James Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction: On "The Education of Cyrus,"* (Princeton, N.J., 1989).

shares with most of the others we know; but its continuation at Polycrates' court is much dependent on Parthenope's relationship with her parents and old teacher. When her parents have finally understood their lovesick daughter's predicament (another future topos) and promised to let her marry Metiochus, her mother suddenly dies and her father changes his mind (another untypical turn of events). Then, apparently, follows Polycrates' fatal journey to Oroetes at Magnesia in Asia Minor, where he is murdered as—according to Herodotus (3.125)—his daughter had foretold. Imprisonment and separation come next, and of Metiochus we hear little more. The ostrakon quoted above, though, may give a glimpse of his lonely longing for his beloved.

### *The Evidence of the Titles*

From what we have deduced about the character and emphasis of the novel, there is every reason to believe that it was originally simply called *Parthenope*. Likewise, Chariton's novel was most probably called *Callirhoe* rather than *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, the name it carries in the medieval *codex unicus*.<sup>44</sup> Chariton too is most interested in his heroine—in contrast to the more symmetrical *Ephesiaka* among the earlier novels—and his last words are, “So ends the story I have composed about Callirhoe.”<sup>45</sup> The stereotyped double-name titles, with the hero's name first, were no doubt applied to these two novels later. In *Parthenope*'s case, the dual-name title is in fact just a modern guess; but the circumstance that the Persian epic poem was called *Vāmiq u 'Adhrā*, with 'Adhrā meaning “virgin,” as the equivalent to Parthenope, makes it likely that its Greek model later circulated under the name *Metiochus and Parthenope*. Renaming, then, was part of the process in which the genre, when consolidated in the Imperial period, was retroactively made to include earlier compositions as well.

In fact, no titles consisting of the names of two lovers are recorded from the Classical and Hellenistic periods.<sup>46</sup> No epic, tragedy, or comedy carried such a double-title; there is no *Perseus and Andromeda*, no *Jason and Medea*. The common practice, if personal names were used at all for reference, was to choose the name of just one of the protagonists. In Hellenistic love elegy, this habit continued, and the female name seems to have been preferred.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. B. P. Reardon, “Chariton,” in Schmeling, ed., *The Novel*, 309–35, at 315–17.

<sup>45</sup> Char. 8.8.16, trans. G. P. Goold, ed., Chariton, *Callirhoe*.

<sup>46</sup> See the useful survey in Wilhelm Schmid's “Anhang” in Erwin Rohde, (appendix), *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig, 1914), 616–18; cf. also Otto Weinreich, *Der griechische Liebesroman* (Zurich, 1962), 28–29, 60.

Parthenius's prose compendium of love stories, the *Erōtika pathēmata* (first century B.C.),<sup>47</sup> features a number of heroines of myth and legend who lend their names to typical love plots. We are then close in time to *Parthenope* and *Callirhoe*, whatever their exact dates, and it is no wonder that writers of novels used the same formula.

Writers of novels—or *some* writers of novels. It may be that the traditional titles of the novels have further clues to offer in an exploration of diversity and plurality in the early history of the novel. Titles of the type *Daphnis and Chloe* or *Leucippe and Clitophon* do not reign supreme in the Imperial period. On the contrary, to judge from the lists in the Byzantine lexica, the *Suda* in the first place, many novels seem to have circulated under an *ethnikon* of the type already encountered in the *Phoinikika* and Iamblichus's *Babylōniaka*.<sup>48</sup> A combination of both kinds of title also occurs in the manuscript tradition, as when Xenophon's novel is called *Ta kata Anthian kai Abrokomēn Ephesiaka* in the *codex unicus* (while the *Suda* favors just *Ephesiaka*). Heliodorus ends with a similarly compound title: "So concludes the book of Aithiopian Tales [*Aithiopika*] about Theagenes and Chariclea." On the other hand, *Callirhoe* is never referred to as *Sikelika* (or similarly), nor is there any indication that *Parthenope* was ever called *Samiaka*. Is this titular manifold perhaps an indication of the genre's polygenesis?

Now, the geographical type of title was used for several different kinds of works, apart from these novels. There were historical epics called *Iōnika*, *Messēniaka*, and so on. In prose, regional and local histories naturally often carried such a name. More specifically, Ctesias's *Persika* (ca. 400 B.C.E.), in twenty-three books, narrated stories from Persian history in an entertaining fashion, probably using oral sources. Aristides' notorious *Milēsiaka* (ca. 100 B.C.E.) was a collection of lascivious stories;<sup>49</sup> Apuleius, at the beginning of his *Metamorphoses*, states that he will "weave together different tales of this Milesian mode of story-telling [*sermone isto Milesio*];"<sup>50</sup> and the tale of "The

<sup>47</sup> See J. L. Lightfoot, ed., Parthenius of Nicaea, *The Poetical Fragments and the "Erōtika Pathēmata,"* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> Henrichs, ed., *Die "Phoinikika" des Lollianos*, 11–12, contends that the type *Phoinikika* dominated throughout antiquity and that both single and double names are a Byzantine invention; this is to dismiss the evidence of papyri and medieval manuscripts as well as the concluding sentences of Chariton and Heliodorus. H. Morales in T. Whitmarsh, trans., Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, xvii, follows Henrichs (ibid.) in arguing that *Phoinikika* is likely to have been the original title of Achilles' novel; there is no manuscript (or other) evidence supporting that suggestion.

<sup>49</sup> On the implications of its title, cf. Stephen J. Harrison, "The Milesian Tales and the Roman Novel," in Hofmann and Zimmerman, eds., *Groningen Colloquia*, 9: 61–64.

<sup>50</sup> Trans. P. G. Walsh, ed., Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (Oxford, 1995), 1.

Ephesian Widow” that Petronius inserted in his *Satyrica* is regarded as typically “Milesian.” Incidentally, his title *Satyrica* itself is no doubt best understood as coined on the Greek novels’ geographical model. Another play on the geographical type occurs when Longus’s *Daphnis and Chloe* is called *Poimenika* [“Pastoral Tales”] in a couple of manuscripts, in competition with the standard coinage *Lesbiaka*. This other use, though diverse, may perhaps aid in grasping the implications of the geographical titles as applied to some of the novels. But we need first to define the nature of a complete text surviving under such a title. Leaving the fragments for the present, I will turn to Xenophon’s *Ephesiaka*.

*Ephesian Tales: The Formulaic and the Episodic*

Anyone who reads *Callirhoe* and the *Ephesiaka* in succession, will have a curiously mixed experience. The two novels are similar enough in plot and specific motifs, or combinations of motifs, to have forced most scholars to conclude that one imitates the other. On the other hand, they are so different in style, composition, and attitude that one doubts that any one author has read the other or, at least, appreciated what he read so much as to make it his model. Did Chariton perhaps decide to “improve” upon Xenophon (if that should be the correct order), or was Xenophon poor enough a writer to misunderstand and piteously misuse the material he was so happy to take over?

The *Ephesiaka* is a short text (seventy printed pages), but packed with narrative material. For large stretches, the tempo is accordingly high; many cities and countries are seen flashing by; forty-four characters are introduced, and thirty-three of them are given a name, but most immediately disappear from sight when the short episode in which they take part is over and the hero or heroine hastens to his/her next stop. The style is mostly unadorned, and a striking repetitiousness characterizes both themes and phraseology. A typical sequence sounds like this:

But Habrocomes remained immured in the prison (in Phoenicia), and Antheia was taken to Syria, along with Leucon and Rhode (their servants). When those in Manto’s party reached Antioch, which was Moeris’ country, she dealt maliciously with Rhode, and hated Antheia bitterly. She gave orders at once that Rhode and Leucon should be loaded on a ship and sold in some place remote from the Syrian country. Antheia she planned to join to a slave, and at that to the vilest sort, a rustic goatherd; this she thought a suitable

vengeance. And so she summoned the goatherd, whose name was Lampon, and delivered Antheia to his hands and bade him take her to wife, and she ordered him to use force if Antheia should be unwilling. Antheia was carried off to the country to cohabit with the goatherd. But when she arrived where Lampon kept his goats she fell at his knees and begged him to pity her and preserve her chastity. She explained who she was, and told of her high birth, her husband, her captivity. When Lampon heard these things he took pity upon the girl and swore that he would verily keep her chaste and bade her take heart. And so Anthia lived at the goatherd's in the country, lamenting Habrocomes all the while. Apsyrtus (Manto's father), rummaging through the cubicle where Habrocomes had lived before his punishment, came upon Manto's letter to Habrocomes. He recognized the writing, and realized that Habrocomes had been unjustly punished. He ordered that [ . . . ]<sup>51</sup>

In another novel, this material would have sufficed to fill a book or two. In particular, the monologues and dialogues just reported here would have been developed into scenes, with their emotional and rhetorical potentials fully exploited.

The peculiarities of the text have led not only to almost universal condemnation of the author's literary talents (as always, critics have considered the three sophistic novels as the norm), but also to various efforts at explanation. The unevenness in descriptive detail and rhetorical elaboration has prompted the theory that this work may be an abbreviation of an originally fuller novel, more homogeneous and (in short) "better."<sup>52</sup> Others have spoken of the folktale character of the novel or suggested that it had an oral background in the practice of the *aretalogoi*, tellers of miracle stories in cultic contexts, or of other professional storytellers. Repetition and formulism have also been thought to indicate what kind of audience the first novelists addressed, people more used to listening than to reading, and thus helped in their consumption by simplicity and a certain degree of predictability.<sup>53</sup>

A recent study by James O'Sullivan has revealed the extent to which the *Ephesiaka* is formulaic at the thematic as well as the phraseological level:

<sup>51</sup> Xen. Eph. 2.9.1–10.1. Trans. Moses Hadas in William Hansen, ed., *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998), p. 22.

<sup>52</sup> See the discussion in Tomas Hägg, "The 'Ephesiaka' of Xenophon Ephesius—Original or Epitome?" in my *Parthenope: Selected Studies in Ancient Greek Fiction*, L. B. Mortensen and T. Eide, eds. (Copenhagen, 2004), 159–98.

<sup>53</sup> For the last explanation (and references to the others), see Tomas Hägg, "Orality, Literacy, and the "Readership" of the Early Greek Novel," in Roy Eriksen, ed., *Contexts of Pre-Novel Narrative* (Berlin, 1994), 47–81.

The *Ephesiaca* is to a great extent a complex of a fairly narrow repertoire of recurrent simple happenings and concepts. These are used as building-blocks in the story, sometimes singly, sometimes in varying combinations, often in more or less standard and extensive combinations that go to make up those scenes, or themes, that recur in the romance. These building-blocks, which I shall call “theme-elements,” are regularly expressed with the aid of more or less stereotyped word-combinations or at least marked by recurrent standard keywords. Thus the romance consists largely of repetitions at various levels: of verbal formulae, of theme-elements, and of themes (or scenes).<sup>54</sup>

Some parts, in particular book 1 and the beginning of book 2, are less formulaic in character, because, as O’Sullivan explains, they “have subject-matter that for the most part does not recur within the *Ephesiaca*” (ibid.): the couple meet, fall in love, are married, and so forth. It is the episodic structure of the rest, with a long succession of single events built up of a few recurring theme-elements (robber attack, erotic persuasion, cruel punishment, etc.), that constitutes the breeding ground for the linguistic formulae. Though seventy pages cannot house anything approaching the Homeric store of formulae, and though formulae in prose function differently from those developed within a metrically fixed form, O’Sullivan makes a convincing case for his main conclusion: the *Ephesiaka* has a background in oral composition.

This does not necessarily mean that its author was himself a practitioner of oral storytelling. We need not suppose that this novel was first told orally, then committed to writing. But, like no other extant novel, the *Ephesiaka* bears the mark of a popular, nonliterary beginning. And it is not only the formulaic structure that reveals its otherness: “Xenophon’s language abounds in elements of an un-attic *Volkssprache* (the syntax in general being extremely simple and unperiodic), his work is strikingly without the texture of literary allusion typical of the other novels, and it is very strongly characterized by compositional techniques and weaknesses that link it to oral as opposed to literary practice.”<sup>55</sup>

O’Sullivan is inclined to look for the origin of the whole genre in this same direction and to place Xenophon before Chariton and the others, at least typologically. Yet a solution that frees us from the idea of a single line

<sup>54</sup> O’Sullivan, *Xenophon of Ephesus*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 98. On Xenophon’s style, see also Consuelo Ruiz-Montero, “Xenophon von Ephesos: Ein Überblick,” in Haase and Temporini, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* (Berlin 1994), vol. II.34.2, pp. 1,088–1,138, at 1,114–19.

of development seems preferable. If Xenophon represents oral and popular narrative, Chariton is altogether more bookish and literary, writing in what may be characterized as a historiographic style. It is true that his novel too exhibits a repertoire of repetitive material (recapitulations, in particular), but it has much less formulaic expression (there is some, for instance, in the transitions between different lines of action). Rather than viewing this as representative of a later stage in a development from popular to literary fiction, we should—with *Parthenope* in mind as well—consider the possibility that Chariton and Xenophon are exponents for two parallel novel traditions, one of bookish and one of popular origin.

Instead of a common origin with successive stages of development and gradually diverging lines, we might envisage convergent lines arriving from different directions. Chariton and Xenophon are fundamentally different (literary/popular) because they represent different lines, but superficially similar (sharing some distinct strings of motifs) because the lines have approached one another. This is not, of course, to say that Chariton's type of novel would have lacked earlier contact with popular themes. Like historiography proper (and epic, drama, elegy, etc.), and presumably to a greater extent than the other genres, it drew narrative material from popular sources; but that material was differently molded and put into a different kind of narrative framework than in Xenophon and his oral predecessors.

One external indication of their different origins, then, would be the different kinds of title they bear. The psychological, emotional, and individual-centred type of narrative that Chariton represents would choose as title a personal name, preferably (but maybe not exclusively) that of the heroine. The episodic travel-and-adventure story displaying a wider range of characters and places and with more stereotyped lovers in the lead would traditionally be called by an *ethnikon* in the collective neuter plural. The episodic structure in itself, the character of a "collection of stories" in a narrative framework, it would have had in common with other categories of works carrying the same kind of title, like Ctesias's *Persika* and Aristides' *Milēsiaka*. As we have already seen, such a description fits eminently the *Babylōniaka*, and presumably the *Phoinikika* as well. Two different lines have tentatively emerged. To find more, I turn again to the papyrus fragments.

#### *Oriental Heroes: Ninus and Sesonchosis*

The novels of Chariton and Xenophon are firmly rooted in Greek soil. Egypt is used as an exotic playground in the *Ephesiaka*, as is Persia in

*Callirhoe*, but the main traveling takes place between Greek cities of the Mediterranean, and the main characters as well as the other good guys participating in the action are reassuringly Hellenic (as are, to be sure, some of the villains). Two of the three sophistic novelists, it is true, were themselves non-Greek: Achilles Tatius (according to the *Suda*) was a native of Alexandria, and Heliodorus in his envoi poses as a Phoenician from Emesa (while Longus may have been a Roman). Iamblichus, according to a marginal note in one of the manuscripts of Photius's *Bibliothēke*, was a Syrian. Still, this seemed to matter little to scholars, as long as the two presumably oldest extant novels were so Greek: the genre was from the beginning Greek, and the theories of an Oriental (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Indian) origin could be easily dismissed.

A polygenesis hypothesis, however, should more seriously take into account, perhaps not those theories of Oriental origins, because they tend to be both global in their claims and supported by the wrong arguments,<sup>56</sup> but at least the extant papyri that feature non-Greek heroes. Ninus, the legendary Assyrian conqueror and eponymous founder of Nineveh, is the hero—only seventeen years old—of a war-and-love story fragmentarily preserved in the most extensive (and best preserved) novel papyrus hitherto discovered.<sup>57</sup> The papyrus guarantees a *terminus ante quem* in A.D. 100, but it has been generally recognized that this is probably the earliest novel of which tangible traces exist, to be dated in the first century B.C., perhaps even in its first half. No title is recorded; it is usually referred to as *Ninus*, which might be correct, if the hero played the same dominating role all through the novel as in its extant parts. Ninus's thirteen-year-old cousin Semiramis, his beloved, is not only modestly silent in the fragments, but also remains unnamed (she is just referred to as "the girl," *korē*). Some identify the novel with the *Babylōniaka* by a Xenophon of Antioch referred to in the *Suda* or suggest that its supposed thematic emphasis on the ruler's childhood and education would motivate the name *Ninoupaideia* (after Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*).

There are obvious links to the canonical novels: romantic love and initially skeptical parents; separation of the lovers and obstacles sent by the

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<sup>56</sup> The most recent full-scale attempt to prove an Oriental (Sumerian etc.) origin is that of Graham Anderson, *Ancient Fiction: The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World* (London, 1984), with its proud conclusion: "Rohde's great problem, the origins of the Greek novel, is now substantially solved" (217).

<sup>57</sup> Main papyrus first published in 1893. Other fragments have since been added; recent critical edition by Rolf Kussl, *Ninos-Roman*, in Mario Capasso, ed., *Bicentenario della morte di Antonio Piaggio*, *Papyrologica Lupiensia*, no. 5 (1996), 143–204. Cf. also Rolf Kussl, *Papyrusfragmente griechischer Romane*, *Classica Monacensia*, no. 2 (Tübingen 1991), 13–101.

goddess of chance, Tyche; a shipwreck scene; emphasis on emotional reactions; and rhetorically well-rounded speeches, as when Ninus tries to persuade his beloved's mother that it is now time to allow marriage:

“O mother,” he said, “faithful to my oath I have now come into your sight and into the embraces of my cousin who is so dear to me. And first let the gods know this, as indeed they are aware, and as I shall myself confirm by this present declaration: Having traversed so much land and become master of so many peoples who submitted to my spear or because of my father's power served me and paid obeisance to me, I could have taken my full satisfaction of every pleasure. If I had done so my desire might be weaker perhaps for my cousin. But though I have returned in fact with my chastity intact, I am being defeated by the god and my maturing years. I am in my seventeenth year, as you know, and have been enrolled among the men for a year; yet to this day am I still a helpless child? Had I not become aware of Aphrodite, I might still have been rejoicing in my impregnable strength. But now, as your daughter's prisoner of war—an honorable captivity, of course, and blessed by your consent—how long must I deny that I have been captured? That men of such an age are ready to wed, no one doubts; for how many past fifteen keep their purity? But I am made to suffer by a law unwritten, one stupidly sanctioned by foolish convention, since our maidens as a rule marry when they are fifteen. But that nature itself is the best law for deciding such conjunctions, what sensible man would deny? Women at fourteen years can get pregnant, and some (God knows) actually bear children. Will your daughter not even marry? ‘Let us wait for two years’, you might say; let us accept this condition, mother, if Chance too will wait. I am a mortal man and have joined myself to a mortal maiden; I am subject not only to the common calamities—I mean diseases and Chance, which often strikes even those sitting quietly by their own hearth—but sea journeys too await me, and wars upon wars; and I am certainly no coward nor as an assistant to my safety will I hide behind a veil of cravenness. I am the man you know me to be, so I need not tiresomely proclaim it. Let royalty urge some haste, let strong desire urge some haste, let the uncertainty and incalculability of the times that lie ahead of me urge haste.”<sup>58</sup>

Ninus goes on for still some time, and he speaks to willing ears, we are told. Semiramis, however, “though her feelings were similar, had no eloquence

<sup>58</sup> P. Berol. 6926 A.I.38–III.30 (+ 4.20–25). Trans. Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 35–43.

comparable to his as she stood before Thambe (her aunt, Ninus' mother). For as a virgin [living] within the women's quarters she was unable to fashion her arguments with such finesse."<sup>59</sup> She cries, blushes, but cannot produce a word. This scene of silence is elaborated with similar skill and care as the preceding one of oratory. Then the two mothers meet, but the fragment (A) breaks off; presumably they decide to let their children marry.

Among all the typical elements in the speech quoted, there is also an unfamiliar ring. This hero is not, like Chariton's Chaereas, involved in war as a lover—to win back his beloved or avenge having lost her—but he is a warrior who is pursuing his personal love in the meantime, before his royal duties will again bring him out to war. His martial role is the topic of another fragment (B), describing part of Ninus's campaign against the Armenians in an informed historiographic tone, combat elephants and all. The plot thus follows, partly at least, the political course of actions traditionally connected with Ninus. It is as if Polycrates himself, rather than his daughter, had been the hero of *Parthenope* and the prime mover of its plot. Romance and history are combined in a bold synthesis. A concession to romance is the age and character of the protagonists. Semiramis, in particular, has gone through a metamorphosis from an experienced and ruthless woman, who takes Ninus as her second husband, to the archetypal maiden. Ancient Assyrian and Babylonian traditions, first presented in a Hellenized form in Ctesias's lost *Persika* (and known chiefly through Diodorus of Sicily), have obviously been further adapted to suit a Hellenistic romance concept.

Why this was done—why an ancient Assyrian king and a Babylonian queen were chosen as the hero and heroine of a Greek novel written in the first century B.C.—is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *Ninus*. Martin Braun has suggested that the novel has a background in Syrian-Mesopotamian popular narrative literature, stories of national heroes that were first developed in the period of Persian domination and could in their later Hellenized form function as Seleucid cultural propaganda: “for the historical element appealed to the national feeling, the mythical to the need for religious background, and the novelistic to the desire for entertainment amongst the masses in the kingdom of the Seleucidae.”<sup>60</sup> Though a Hellenized local elite rather than any “masses” would have been the primary audience (listen to Ninus's rhetoric!), the idea of a nationalistic purpose is attractive. An attempt has even been made to find a more precise historical

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 41–43.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature* (Oxford, 1938; repr., New York, 1987), 8.

context in “the growing independence of the reformed kingdom of Babylonia after the defeat of Antiochus VII by northern invaders in 129 B.C., accompanied by an assertion of cultural identity.”<sup>61</sup>

What makes such a nationalistic context credible is not least the fact that there seem to have been parallels in other Hellenistic countries of the East, in particular (as Braun demonstrates) in Jewish and Egyptian narrative literature. Plutarch, in his *Isis and Osiris* (360B), notes that “great deeds of Semiramis are celebrated among the Assyrians, great deeds of Sesostris in Egypt.” Even if by mentioning Semiramis he does not necessarily refer to this novel (if so, its heroine must have developed into something more manly later on), this shows the strength and endurance of the nationalistic tradition; and the fact that other papyrus fragments feature precisely the Pharaoh Sesostris-Sesonchosis,<sup>62</sup> in situations of war and love reminiscent of those of Ninus, confirms that the Seleucid national promotion in novel form had its Ptolemaic counterpart.

A couple of the convergent novelistic lines, then, seem to have had their origin in Mesopotamian and Egyptian storytelling about national heroes. Having passed a process of Hellenization under the successor monarchies to Alexander, some of these nationalistic legends appeared as romantic love stories. Whether this happened under the influence of Greek novels of the *Parthenope* type, or vice versa, is an open question. It is anyway tempting to see the nostalgia for the Classical period of Greek history that a Chariton displays as in some way interrelated with the celebration of non-Greek national heroes in *Ninus*, *Sesonchosis*, and their likes. Was there an ideological competition, or is it rather in each case just a question of using the attractive novel form for one’s own cultural purpose?

### *Novels without Love*

Graeco-Egyptian self-assertion seems to have been an important factor behind another creation of the Hellenistic period as well, the *Alexander Romance*.<sup>63</sup> If Sesonchosis is a figure molded out of pharaohs of the Middle and New Kingdoms, the Nectanebo whom the *Alexander Romance*

<sup>61</sup> Pierre Grimal, review of B. E. Perry’s *The Ancient Romances*, *Latomus* 26 (1967): 840–45, at 842, as reported in Morgan, “On the Fringes of the Canon,” 3,336.

<sup>62</sup> Text and Eng. trans. of the fragments in Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*.

<sup>63</sup> Eng. trans. by Richard Stoneman, ed., *The Greek Alexander Romance* (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1991).

constructs as Alexander's real father belongs to contemporary history: he was the last native king of Egypt, who succumbed to the Persians in 343/42 B.C., and disappeared. National myth predicted his glorious return, and the author of the *Romance* made him reappear, rejuvenated and magnified, in his son Alexander, world conqueror and founder of Alexandria.

In contrast to the nationalistic novels encountered so far, however, the *Alexander Romance* lacks an overall love intrigue. It thus serves well, as this essay draws toward its close, as a transition from novels of love to those with other basic themes. Some scholars speak of "novels proper" as opposed to "the fringe."<sup>64</sup> The canon of five "ideal" novels, and such fragments as may be believed to derive from similar compositions, are Greek "novels proper." As we have seen, diversity is the rule even within this group—still more so, if the "not-so-ideal" fragments and summaries are added. But Greek fiction included works of quite different character as well, "fringe novels" as Niklas Holzberg calls them, and for these the negative label "novels without love" may serve better than any more sophisticated attempt at definition. A brief survey follows, just enough not to give the impression that the texts discussed were isolated in a literary world otherwise consisting of well-defined "serious" forms such as epic, drama, and historiography. Particularly in prose, the ancient "fringes" were broad and richly cultivated.

Some of these works, like the *Alexander Romance*, had the life of a historical person as their structuring principle, they were (more or less fictionalized) biographies. Love in one form or other was of course not absent, but it was not fundamental to the plot. The Athenian Xenophon, as we have already seen, included in his *Cyropaedia* the tragic love story of the beautiful Pantheia and her soldier husband Abradatas; but this was as a subplot, with only tangential connection with the hero of the work, Cyrus the Great of Persia. The basic themes of that novel are education and leadership. The *Alexander Romance* too admits erotic topics, notably in the introductory story of how, thanks to his magical skills, the exiled Pharaoh Nectanebo in King Philip's absence succeeds in seducing Queen Olympias and fathering Alexander. But the quest that governs Alexander's life and moves the action of the novel is not for love, but for political power and wisdom.

Another novel in the form of a life story, the *Aesop Romance*, is a curious mixture of humorous satire, wisdom book, and antiquarianism; its hero, Aesop the slave and fabulist, is among other things a sexual athlete of Cynic

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<sup>64</sup> See the discussion in Niklas Holzberg, "The Genre: Novels Proper and the Fringe," in Schmeling, ed., *The Novel*, 11–28.

description; but personal love has no place in his life.<sup>65</sup> Apollonius of Tyana, the Pythagorean sage whose largely fictitious biography by Philostratus (ca. A.D. 220) has much in common with contemporary novels, is a celibate by choice and another traveler for wisdom and political influence.<sup>66</sup> Among them, however, these four biographical novels have (like their heroes) little in common, except the basic biographical structure and the purely incidental role of love in their plots. Biography is a chameleonic genre, if a genre at all, and this is true of its novel-like exponents as well. Each has its specific aim and is formed by its own cultural context rather than by any inherited literary conventions, and there is little to support a view that any of them had one of the others as its model. The fringe, then, supplies further evidence of novelistic polygenesis.

The novel-in-letters is the penultimate example to illustrate that thesis. Pseudoepigraphic letters, that is, letters written in the name of a political or literary figure of the Classical period, was something of a Greek literary industry in late Hellenistic and Roman times. In the cases where collections of such fictitious letters aspire to telling a continuous story, they may be considered ancient forerunners to the modern genre of epistolary novel.<sup>67</sup> The best surviving example is *Chion of Heraclea*, a collection of seventeen letters from a young man who is a student of Plato in Athens. Its basic theme shows his gradually growing conviction that it is his duty to assassinate the tyrant of his hometown Heraclea (on the Black Sea). The connection with historical happenings in Classical Greece and the nostalgic attitude toward its glories makes a comparison with *Parthenope* and *Callirhoe* natural. Yet, far from being a love-and-adventure story, this is a philosophical novel, with Stoic elements mixed into the basic Platonism, and it may be that the tyrannicide topic had political actuality in the author's early Imperial milieu. Among the surviving letter collections, this is the one that comes closest to a novel, using the succession of letters for chronological development and the ego-narrative form and the different addressees for psychological characterization of the

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<sup>65</sup> Eng. trans. by Lloyd W. Daly in William Hansen, ed., *Anthology*; discussion by Richard I. Pervo, "A Nihilist Fabula: Introducing 'The Life of Aesop,'" in R. F. Hock et al., eds., *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative* (Atlanta, 1998), 77–120.

<sup>66</sup> See Ewen Bowie, "Philostratus: Writer of Fiction," in J. R. Morgan and R. Stoneman, eds., *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context* (London, 1994), 181–99. There is a new edition and English translation of Philostratus's *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

<sup>67</sup> See Niklas Holzberg, ed., *Der griechische Briefroman: Gattungstypologie und Textanalyse*, *Classica Monacensia*, no. 8 (Tübingen, 1994); and Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge, 2001).

letter writer. Still, it is basically a collection of letters, and thus another instance of the generic lines that, in the period around the birth of Christ, converge in the Greek novel.

### *Incredible Things*

It is suitable to end with the greatest puzzle among Greek novels, Antonius Diogenes' *Incredible Things beyond Thule*. Probably the largest one, and certainly the most complex in structure, it has survived in some extensive quotations, a couple of papyrus fragments, and an epitome in Photius's *Bibliothēke*. It shares some of its basic elements with other novels, but again, its totality is unique. There is a separated and reunited couple, Mantinias and Dercyllis, but they are not extremely young, and they are brother and sister. The chief narrator, Deinias, falls in love with Dercyllis (as do other characters as well), but this circumstance does not seem to have influenced the continuation of the plot. All the main characters travel extensively, but not only in the familiar Mediterranean surroundings: the description of their journeys into the northern *terrae incognitae* resembles more the utopian and fantastic travel accounts of the Hellenistic age that Erwin Rohde looked upon as an ancestor of the Greek novel than anything in the surviving ideal novels themselves (the *Alexander Romance* is closer).

Some have asked if Antonius in fact meant to write a parody of the *Reisefabulistik*, as Lucian did in his *True Histories*. But some Pythagorean passages—for this is also, at least to some extent, a philosophical novel—were serious enough to be massively quoted by Porphyry in his *Life of Pythagoras*. It is a quest that sets this novel in movement too, a quest for knowledge (*kata zētēsīn historias*, 109a13), and “encyclopedic” is a characterization that fits at least part of the contents. Bibliographic information about sources at the beginning of each book (111a38–40) is indeed a feature unheard of in the more typical novels. Some, wishing to give both aspects their due, talk of Antonius's “playful scholarship.”<sup>68</sup>

The enigmas abound, and the difficulty of dating this polyphonic composition does not help in forming tenable theories. Photius thought that it was older than any novel he knew, that it was “the root and source” of both Lucian's *True Histories* and *Lucius or the Ass*, and that the “adventures and

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<sup>68</sup> Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 109. See the discussion of the various views and proposals regarding this “eccentric amalgam” in Morgan, “On the Fringes of the Canon,” 3,303–18.

wanderings and loves and captures and perils” in Iamblichus, Achilles Tatius, and Heliodorus were modeled on Antonius Diogenes.<sup>69</sup> Since the earliest papyrus fragments make Antonius manifestly prior to A.D. 200, he anyway precedes Heliodorus, whose complex narrative structure his work resembles. But even Heliodorus looks simple in comparison: Antonius’s system of chinese-box narratives comprises no less than eight different levels, if Photius’s epitome is correct (and correctly understood);<sup>70</sup> it has been suggested that this structure was influenced by Indian narrative techniques, one of the more desperate reactions to the novel’s anomalies.

Erwin Rohde made *Incredible Things beyond Thule* the cornerstone of his theory of the origins of the Greek novel: Antonius was the author who actually implanted the eroticism of Hellenistic poetry in a narrative framework of fantastic traveling, and all the other novelists built on him (much as Photius had suggested). This can easily be disproved (particularly on chronological grounds), but it is interesting as the ultimate single-model hypothesis. You take a work that is composite enough to house both serious and satirical elements, both love and paradoxography, both adventures and encyclopedic learning, both magic and philosophy, both linear narration and complex retelling, and there you have the origin of the satirical as well as the ideal novel, of simple love-and-adventure stories no less than a work as sophisticated in design and pretentious in thought as the *Aithiopia*.

It has been argued in the present essay that the reverse process is more likely. Several different lines converged in “the Greek novel”: sentimental love stories in a Classical historical setting, narrated with historiographic accents, as in *Parthenope* and *Callirhoe*; popular love-and-adventure stories originating in an oral tradition and emerging in literate form in the *Ephesiaka*; erotically more explicit storytelling as in the *Phoinikika* and (perhaps) the *Babylōniaka*; nationalistic hero narratives of diverse Oriental origins as in *Ninus* and *Sesonchosis*; fabulistic travel accounts as in *Incredible Things beyond Thule*. In other words, I suggest a polygenesis that presumably took place in late Hellenistic times, with each of the forms adapting to the common cultural environment and assimilating traits from the others to create the confusing picture of similarity and diversity that face us in the surviving specimens.

From this converged “genre,” in turn, each of the sophistic novelists devised his idiosyncratic variation on the theme, though keeping safely within

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<sup>69</sup> Photius, *Bibl. cod.* 166, p. 111b32–42, trans. Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 128.

<sup>70</sup> Its structure is displayed in *ibid.*, 115.

the boundaries of the now consolidated genre. Too much emphasis on these second-stage novels—in which a divergent movement replaced the earlier convergence—has vitiated much modern scholarship on the emergence of the ancient Greek novel. Any attempt at reconstructing that process must start from the nonsophistic specimens and, in particular, from the fragments, however hazardous it may seem to build on such a fragile basis.