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Review: The Roman Novels

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## THE ROMAN NOVELS

H. HOFMANN (ed.): *Latin Fiction. The Latin Novel in Context*. Pp. xi + 277. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Cased, £45. ISBN: 0-415-14721-2.

The ancient novel has become more popular among scholars than ever. In recent decades numerous editions, commentaries, and translations, both of the preserved complete novels and of fragments, have been published. Scholarly studies on the genre and its representatives have become prolific, and their range is quite impressive. One only needs to think of the Groningen Colloquia on the Novel (of which H. was the founder) and the recent Third International Congress on the Ancient Novel (Groningen, July 2000).

Given the present abundance of publications, handbooks for students become necessary. For the Greek novels, we already possessed J. R. Morgan, Richard Stoneman (edd.), *Greek Fiction. The Greek Novel in Context* (London and New York, 1994). The present volume is intended as a companion, and covers the wide field of the 'Latin novel'. The editor, H. (now professor of Latin at the University of Tübingen), has assembled sixteen well-written essays, in which renowned specialists reflect on the current state of research concerning the Roman novelists.

Petronius' *Satyricon* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* are, of course, prominent: there are four contributions on each. After a general introduction by H., there is an opening essay on Petronius by Gareth Schmeling. In a piece on the *Cena*, John Bodel analyses the rather complex structure and main themes of this most famous part of the *Satyricon*. The various other inserted stories in the novel, such as that of the 'widow of Ephesus', are covered in an essay by Graham Anderson, while Catherine Connors uses a medieval work inspired by Petronius, called the 'Petronius redivivus', to cast light on the rôles of *arbitrium* (judgement) and poetry in the *Satyricon*. The essays on Apuleius show a similar division: a general essay by Gerald Sandy, a piece on the Greek sources by Hugh J. Mason, one on the central story of Cupid and Psyche again by Sandy, while the other inserted tales are dealt with by Nancy Shumate.

The remaining essays cover areas decidedly less familiar to most readers. There are rather brief essays on the late Latin *Historia Apollonii regis Tyrae* by Schmeling, and on the *Ephemeris belle Troiani* of Dictys Cretensis and the *Acta diurna belli Troiani* of Dares Phrygius by Stefan Merkle. These are followed by two longer pieces on 'the Latin Alexander' (from Curtius Rufus to fourth-century works) by Richard Stoneman, and on the entertaining qualities of hagiographic texts by Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich.

The final part of the book contains a group of four papers highlighting aspects of the 'Nachleben' of Latin fiction. Claudio Moreschini studies the history of the interpretation of Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche (dealing with Fulgentius, Boccaccio, and

Renaissance writers). The reception of *Historia Apollonii* is studied by Elizabeth Archibald. Stoneman again writes about Alexander, but now 'the Medieval Alexander'. The 'rediscovery' of Petronius and Apuleius by the humanists is central in a concluding piece by Robert H. F. Carver.

As in any collection of essays, the quality and complexity of contributions differs, although clearly an attempt was made to produce a well-balanced volume that would prove useful to students. Scholars approaching the volume in the hope of finding revolutionary insights or discussions of literary theory will inevitably be disappointed. Those, however, who wish to acquaint themselves with the broad field of Latin fiction will find much in this book that suits them. Most essays are conveniently short and well-structured, and provide readers an easy access to the texts and the main problems concerning them.

One or two desiderata may perhaps be added here. In a volume such as this, a separate essay on the earliest Roman texts, such as the Roman version of the Milesian Tales by Sisenna, would have not have been out of place. After all, Roman fiction does not begin with Petronius. Some remarks on, for example, Roman satire, narrative poetry, and letter writing (one readily thinks of some 'novelistic' letters by Pliny) could have been added as well. The special Roman inspiration of Petronius and, particularly, Apuleius, deserves more attention.

The essay on hagiography is particularly welcome and is well placed in the volume as a whole. It deservedly highlights texts such as the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. But what about the canonical Acts? Or, indeed, of the whole Bible, a book so full of narrative? (This is acknowledged on p. 189: 'The literary influence of this text simply cannot be overestimated'.) Surely, then, a short contribution on the *Vetus Latina* and Vulgate would seem required.

Given the introductory nature of most essays, one would expect clear bibliographical notes referring to the standard editions, commentaries, and (above all, perhaps) translations, but surprisingly this practical information is mostly missing. Few users of the book will have immediate access to texts like Dictys or the *Historia Apollonii*, and more suggestions for reading the primary texts would have been helpful.

Finally, the contributors are distinguished experts and there is hardly room for complaint here. Nonetheless, it is surprising to find no scholars from Groningen among them, although Groningen certainly counts as a centre of ancient novel studies. One wonders whether it was really necessary to have three contributors represented with two essays each.

A collection of essays could always have been better, and there is always still work to be done. But this is a convenient and thorough volume that covers a wide field of Latin texts and will be of use to many students of the ancient novels, particularly those on university courses.

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