



eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago
Loyola eCommons

Classical Studies: Faculty Publications and
Other Works

Faculty Publications and Other Works by
Department

9-1986

Review: Ancient Fiction: The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World

John F. Makowski

Loyola University Chicago, jmakow1@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/classicalstudies_facpubs



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Makowski, JF. "Review: Ancient Fiction: The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World" in *The Classical World* 80(1), 54-55.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications and Other Works by Department at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Classical Studies: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
© Classical Association of the Atlantic States, 1986.

Austin/Vidal-Naquet (p. 43):

“The word *emporos* which later referred to the maritime trader *par excellence* still only means ‘passenger’ (on a ship).”

Curtin (p. 75):

“The word *emporos*, which later meant a maritime trader, then meant only a passenger on a ship.”

Classicists and ancient historians need not look to this book, then, for particularly enlightening or original information. By using sources that question the existence of much commercial activity in the early Greek world, Curtin avoids the need to devote attention to the increasing evidence pointing to the commercial role of colonies (they were “mainly for agriculture rather than commerce,” p. 78), and writes off Greek trading communities like Massalia, Al Mina, and Naucratis as “exceptional.” Beginning with the fifth century B.C. and culminating in the Hellenistic period, Greek commerce was so “homogenized” and “ecumenical” that “open” trade did away with the need for even such trading settlements as had existed previously (pp. 80-81, 88-89, 127). The same reasoning allows the author to ignore all but the India and China trade of Rome. Roman colonies and the groups of foreign traders at Ostia and at Roman Delos, Alexandria, and elsewhere are not referred to, since Curtin can think only in terms of a “homogenized” Mediterranean in the Roman period. Rostovtzeff, Frank, Wheeler, Tarn, and Hatzfeld, all still useful for their rich store of references, are not included in the Bibliography, and the rapidly growing body of archaeological evidence (especially from underwater finds) bearing on ancient trade is all but ignored. While the book and its many maps will doubtless be of interest to readers concerned with trading diasporas in more modern times, its treatment of the topic in Greek and Roman antiquity is disappointing.

University of Massachusetts at Amherst
CW80.1 (1986)

ELIZABETH LYDING WILL

Graham Anderson. *Ancient Fiction: The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World*. Totowa, NJ: Croom Helm Ltd., c/o Barnes and Noble, 1984. Pp. vii, 248. \$28.50.

In this book the author of *Eros Sophistes* hopes to afford laymen an introduction to the ancient novelist as serious artist, while to specialists he addresses technical discussions about the novel's origins and its relation to far older texts as well as about the impact of recently discovered papyri and cuneiform tablets upon our understanding of the genre's development. It is difficult to write a study which will speak simultaneously to both neophyte and scholar, doubly difficult when the subject matter until recently has been neglected even by the professional, who tended to assign Longus, Achilles Tatius, and Heliodorus to the literary periphery. Disappointingly, this book is only a mixed success: the layman will find much bewildering, while the specialist will find its positive aspects hedged with reservation.

Anderson maintains that much of the material in the ancient novel derives from the religious and literary texts of the Akkadians, Sumerians, Babylonians, and Egyptians, and exhibits an impressively wide-ranging command of world literature, from materials as diverse as the Dumuzi-text, the myth of Enlil, and the *Cycle of Petubastis*. Unfortunately, he is parsimonious with dates, backgrounds, and contexts not only for the oriental literature but for the discussions

of the Greek and Roman novels themselves, and relegates all primary references and much essential matter to the footnotes at the end of each chapter.

Anderson aligns columns of quotations from middle-Eastern texts alongside excerpts of novels to show that many motifs, like capture by pirates, sexual experiment, and problems of parentage, hark back to a great ancient tradition. However, not every reader will find the parallels either as self-evident or as fraught with significance as does Anderson. Furthermore, in emphasizing the oriental connection, the author gives little or scant notice of the novelists' debt to epic, historiography, Hellenistic erotic poetry, or comedy, much less to their own originating geniuses. A case in point: Anderson claims that Trimalchio's death-obsessed banquet in the *Cena* has many parallels with the lament in *Ecclesiastes* as well as with the story of the Ugaritic King Keret from the Ras Shamra tablets. Limiting himself to the oriental influence, Anderson makes no mention of the findings of recent Petronian scholarship which indicate that Trimalchio's banquet *cum* funeral was probably intended as a parody of Seneca the Younger's stoic philosophy of death. The intermediate steps of the long leap from ancient Canaan to Neronian Rome Anderson does not attempt to explain, nor does he explain Petronius's own originality and purposes in fashioning the scene.

The best book on the subject of the novel, especially for the beginner, is still Thomas Hägg's *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford 1983).

Loyola University of Chicago
CW 80.1 (1986)

JOHN F. MAKOWSKI

Calvin M. Carmichael. *Law and Narrative in the Bible: The Evidence of the Deuteronomic Laws and the Decalogue*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985. Pp. 356. \$35.00.

Carmichael's thesis is that "The laws in both Deuteronomy and the decalogue arise not as a direct, practical response to the conditions of life and worship in Israel's past, as is almost universally held, but from a scrutiny of historical records about these conditions. The link is between law and literary account, not between law and actual life." The laws, in other words, are a literary response to a literary narrative, not a social response to social conditions. It is an interesting proposal, and Carmichael manages to find some sort of connection between almost every law in Deuteronomy 1-26 and a narrative passage from another part of the *Old Testament* (primarily *Genesis*, *Exodus*, 1 and 2 *Samuel*, 1 and 2 *Kings*). The precise nature of these connections, however, is often unclear. Carmichael claims that the origin of the laws "lies in the Deuteronomist's reflection upon patriarchal incidents," but it is not at all clear just how (to take one example) reflection on the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, in which Joseph's garment plays an important role, might lead the author to create the law requiring tassels on the four corners of one's cloak (*Deut.* 22:12). Carmichael does plausibly explain an occasional detail; more often he sheds light on the arrangement of the laws in a given chapter. But the complete lack of concern with possible connections between the laws and social conditions (in the Deuteronomist's own time or in earlier times) makes it difficult to accept Carmichael's approach as a whole. Interesting and different though it may be, it has not won and is unlikely to win many adherents.

University of Texas
CW 80.1 (1986)

MICHAEL GAGARIN