

Homeric Utopias, Women in Power, and Pitiabale Husbands: New Readings of the
Ancient Greek Novels

Although the novel is a dominant literary form in the modern world, for many decades its study was detached from its early roots in Greco-Roman antiquity. In the last forty years, however, this attitude has changed. The *International Conference on the Ancient Novel* (ICAN) is a witness to this rise of interest (Schmeling 2012). While the first three editions of ICAN were relatively small (1976, 1989 and 2000), the fourth and fifth hosted many scholars (2008 and 2015), which demonstrates the increasing interest in the ancient novel.

Nowadays, the study of the ancient novels is no longer only a pioneering area of research, but requires a critical assessment of the published scholarship, and the identification of new research avenues. This panel, which is born from the work of a graduate class, addresses both of these tasks: it offers new approaches to intertextuality and gender, two well-established features of novelistic scholarship, and stresses the importance of undertaking literary analyses of Early Christian novels.

In recent decades, scholars of the ancient novel have focused their attention on the ‘Big Five’ novels, namely those which were written by Chariton (1 CE), Xenophon of Ephesus (2 CE), Achilles Tatius (2 CE), Longus (2-3 CE), and Heliodorus (3-4 CE). Most scholars have approached these novels with an interest in their intertextuality with Homer and Plato (Doulamis 2011), and in their portrayal of love and gender. More recently, scholarly interest has extended to the fragmentary novels, and to the comparison between the ‘Big Five’ and the contemporary *Apocryphal Acts* (Pervo et al. 2012).

This panel will promote further discussion about intertextuality, gender and the Early Christian novels. Classicists have successfully applied to the ancient novels the model of

intertextuality used for Latin poetry, which focuses on the identification of close verbal connections (Citroni 2011). However, the prose form of these texts and the wide reception of Homer and Plato in the Imperial Era add further layers of complexity to their intertextuality. The first paper of this panel will argue for a broader thematic model of intertextuality, according to which Longus uses the land of Phaeacia in the *Odyssey* to locate the dialectic between nature and culture at the core of his novel.

The study of love and gender within the Greek novels has been dominated by Konstan's identification (1994) of sexual symmetry, or reciprocity, as the key and stable feature of the protagonists' relationship. Konstan's pattern of symmetry nicely highlights the difference between the protagonists' *eros* within the Greek novels and the asymmetrical *eros* of Classical Athens. However, on closer examination, in each of the novels sexual symmetry is often subverted. The second paper of this panel uses Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* to show new nuances of the presence (or lack) of sexual symmetry in the protagonists' relationship. It goes on to suggest that in the last part of the novel Chloe, the female protagonist, becomes the dominant figure, thus challenging Konstan's argument for stable, symmetrical love.

The third paper promotes discussion of the comparative study of the 'Big Five' and Christian novels. Scholarship in this area has identified clusters of similarities and differences between these texts, which has led in a rigid dichotomy between the heterosexual love of the 'Big Five' and the chastity of the early Christian novels. However, few scholars have offered individual literary analyses of the Christian novels. This paper offers a new interpretation of the *Apocryphal Acts of Andrew*, focusing on the characterization of Aegeates, the husband of the woman converted by Andrew. As a heterosexual lover, Aegeates is comparable to the protagonists of the 'Big Five', but, as this paper argues, he has a complex characterization that

activates different responses in the Early Christian reader, including sympathy for his love, which challenges this text's alleged focus on chastity.

The panel starts with the presider's five-minute introduction, and is followed by the three abovementioned papers, each of which is fifteen minutes long, and each of which will be followed by five minutes of questions. The panel ends with a fifteen-minute response by a leading scholar in the field of postclassical literature, and with ten minutes of open discussion.

I expect this panel to attract the interest not only of scholars of the ancient novels, but also of classicists and religious studies scholars more generally, since it addresses topics of general interest, such as intertextuality, gender and characterization.

Bibliography

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