

Asymmetry and Variety in *Ephesian Tale*

David Konstan's influential study *Sexual Symmetry* (1993) places the ancient Greek novels within an Imperial-era shift in the discourse of the erotic. His argument connects the "symmetry" of affect between male and female protagonists to the equitable marriage relationship and its replacement of pederasty as an erotic ideal. In Konstan's interpretation, *Ephesian Tale* uses the character Hippothous and his relationships with other men as a foil and counter-example to the married protagonists Anthia and Habrocomes. While this reading is not without its critics (Whitmarsh 2011; Morales 2008; Watanabe 2003), no previous study has asked whether or not the novel privileges marriage to the detriment of other types of erotic relationships. In this paper I will differ from Konstan, demonstrating how *Ephesian Tale* juxtaposes different types of love narratives to create variety and asymmetry. Three criteria illustrate how desire for variety precludes moral framing or didactic contrast. First, persistent narrative asymmetry focalizes the story through Habrocomes more than Anthia, focusing on bonds between male characters. Second, the narrative's straightforward style and unobtrusive narrator provides little explicit moral framing (de Temmerman 2014; Ruiz-Montero 1982). The phrasing of Hippothous' tale also creates positive parallels with the novel's central love plot and with the tale of Aegialeus, the other extended tale of married love. Third and finally, these two longer inset narratives align the text more closely with the compilations by Parthenius and Pseudo-Plutarch, which collect a thematically similar variety of short accounts of "erotic suffering" (Lightfoot 1999). Combined, these considerations find that the text privileges marriage by centering it in the plot, but explores a greater range of masculine eroticism within the narration. While the *Ephesian Tale's* content recalls Second Sophistic debates of the love of women opposed to the love of boys (Fleury 2007), its lack of formal argument betrays a delight

in variety for its own sake and makes the text a valuable source for studying Imperial sexuality beyond prescriptive norms.

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