

BOOK REVIEW

Dirty Love: The Genealogy of the Ancient Greek Novel. By TIM WHITMARSH. Oxford, UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xviii + 201. Hardback \$45.00. ISBN: 9780199742653.

“**D**irty love” (which probably recalls the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas on concepts of purity and dirtiness, but stirs my memories of the Frank Zappa song) refers to those forms of amatory behavior that transgress normative socio-cultural values and echo cultural anxieties. Whitmarsh stresses not only cultural transfer, but particularly how Greek literature (and sometimes influential non-Greek texts) reflected on that transfer, with exogamous marriage and its problematics being a metaphor for hybridizing cultural transfer, whether it be the Syracusan Callirhoe married (for a while) to the Ionian Dionysios, the Hebrew Joseph married to the Egyptian Asenath, or Petta of Massilia choosing to marry Euxenos of Phocaea. This book accords with Whitmarsh’s ongoing project to reconfigure the conceptual spaces wherein we process works of Greek literature, for example, showing how all the tropes connected with the Second Sophistic can be seen in the literature of other Greek periods as well as in non-Greek writing. In an earlier chapter¹ Whitmarsh drew metaphors from quantum mechanics, and here metaphors come from music, with a “Prelude” chapter followed by five “Movements.”

In “The Prelude” Whitmarsh defines his radical program; tracing the literature of romantic love back to Classical times as part of an attempt to reconfigure the history of Greek literature, one whose focus on poetry underestimates the amount of literature which was less elite, ethnocentric and heteronormative, quite “dirty.” For the impossible-to-define novel, a hybrid located largely at cultural junctures, product of polygenesis, Whitmarsh seeks a Foucaultian genealogy offering developmental models as alternatives to the standard Hellenonormative account. Whitmarsh is influenced by Bruno Latour’s concept of the social group as a

[1] See “Hellenistic and Early Imperial Continuities” in Daniel S. Richter and William A. Johnston (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic*. Oxford University Press, 2017, 11-24.

particular conglomeration of voices without discreet identity. Whitmarsh defines the novel as an imaginative space in prose where certain (inter)cultural interactions and interconnections tend to occur.

Whitmarsh's first movement, "Hellenism and Hybridity" largely considers the origins of the ancient novel. Whitmarsh sees the novel as having no definite point of origin, or even definition, but it is rather a "field" defined above all by what it does, especially in the matter of displacement, the traversing of cultural boundaries and presenting of Bakhtinian polyglossia. It stands in contrast to Homeric epic, which suppresses its non-Helladic content to enforce a more monocultural perspective, although I think Homeric epics are less monocultural than Whitmarsh depicts them. *Quellenforschung* has not served the novel well. The earliest extant novel, *Callirhoe*, compared with the expanded and often erotic stories found in Josephus and with the insecurely dated *Joseph and Aseneth*, suggest intercultural sharing predates Chariton, as Whitmarsh's later comments on the *Ninus and Semiramis Romance* suggest.

The second movement, "Persians" turns to another set of influences, considering first the story of Zarinaea and Stryangaeus, found in Nicolaus of Damascus, which contains a surprising number of motifs common to the Greek novels, but is even more tolerant of exogamy. The bicultural Ctesias, claiming Herodotean inspiration, produced a novelistic "tragic history," which, if the story of Zarinaea and Stryangaeus is indicative, very much concerned itself with issues of transcultural mixture. Did the Persians have their own freely circulating love stories which influenced the Greek novel? Not impossible. Whitmarsh suggests that Herodotus' eastern versions of the abductions and aftermaths culminating in the Trojan War underscore how different cultures produced their own biased accounts and may in fact have reflected opinions of Easterners who lived among Greeks in contact zones. A similar story is found in the Persian *Shahnameh*, as well as in the Sanskrit romance *Vasavadatta*. The common theme to all these stories is two lovers from different regions who fall in mutual love through dreams, a love that usually triumphs over politics. Athenaeus quotes Chares' of Mytilene's romantic tale of Zariadres and Odatis, which he claimed was so popular that scenes from it decorated homes, providing a model of how such tales could be transmitted. Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* is a novelistic experiment, its tale of Pantheia and Abradates being particularly influential; several romance writers styled themselves Xenophon. For Whitmarsh particularly important is the blurring of Greek and non-Greek especially marked in Xenophon's culturally hybridized, ambivalent Cyrus, product of a Median/Persian education. Whitmarsh interprets Xenophon's

epilogue to indicate that, successful as Cyrus' rule was, its hybrid nature did not bring true stability which vanished as soon as Cyrus died. Important too for Whitmarsh is Xenophon's setting of erotic tales in Mesopotamia and Iraq, and how Desire in various forms is at the heart of Xenophon's narrative. Cyrus, untouched by desire, provokes desire in others and this desire, verging on the erotic, compels obedience, ideas central to Xenophon's theory of government. Thus, the Pantheia narrative is no digression.

The third movement, "Jews", begins by returning to the story of Joseph Aseneth and its central theme of Jewish/non-Jewish interaction. It is novella about a major inflection point in Hebrew history, and an expression of hope for a unified Israel. Whitmarsh more generally handles the problematical question, "Were there Jewish novels?" Hebrew culture was complex, multilingual and Diaspora concerns were complex as well, as were forms of cultural hybridization which the mutable Jewish novels display. While in the canonical Hebrew bible Joseph is little mentioned outside *Genesis*, in Hellenistic and later times when intercultural issues were paramount for Jews, there were many texts with novel-like material about Joseph, most particularly *Aseneth* whose focus is more on Aseneth than Joseph. It is a text which claims a multiplex origin and history due to its ability to be adapted in a wide variety of contexts. *Aseneth*, "a text born in hybridity" (120), shares the Greek novels' concern about the nature of desire, although possessing a definite and somewhat mystical Jewish core. The intermarriage issue is paramount, with Potiphar's wife Aseneth's antitype. The romance solves the issue by playfully problematizing ethnicity through language and symbolic actions, with Joseph sort-of-also-Egyptian, and Aseneth sort-of-also-Hebrew, with correct religious practice and marriage able to overcome mere biological ethnicity, with the *metanoia* that makes Aseneth a "City of Refuge" (for converts) deified.

The fourth movement "Egyptians," first considers "The Long Hellenistic," a set of cultural recalibrations, differing from region to region, a process beginning long before the canonical Hellenistic period. The changes were most pronounced in cities like Alexandria. Hints of cultural interchange are best seen in Greek prose, especially in the *Alexander Romance*, which came into being as a multigeneric text responsive to (sometimes radical) reconfigurations for varied audiences and leading to its multiple traditions. Alexander, like Cyrus earlier, becomes a figure useful to think with. "Alexander in Kohl" shows how persistent cultural hybridity is figured by Alexander's triple fathers (Philip /Nectanebo/Ammon). The subversive Alexander is the product of adulterous exogamy, and, being his own archetype,

embodies self-invention; and we note his mastery of disguise. Alexander manages to avenge Philip and restore the pharaonic line. Alexander is figured as both Egyptian and Greek – the Persians are the romance’s Others. But its revocation of earlier Greek and Egyptian tales underscores the artificiality of this vision. “Whose Paradigm? examines which model(s) for Alexander the *Romance* employs. Its Alexander is very aware of the Hellenocentric model he (and the romance’s authors) are crafting. Alexander is both Greek conqueror of the East and continuator of Eastern kingship traditions, already interpenetrated by Greek influence, presenting options (accepted and rejected) for empire. And speaking of empire, an awareness of Rome and Alexander as a rival and model for Romans hovers over the text.

In the fifth movement “How Greek is the Greek Romance?” (also the title of its initial essay) Whitmarsh denies that the Greek romance was a logical evolution of canonical Greek literature such as the *Odyssey*, but part of a tradition of stories of hybridity and exogamy, features particularly evident in the romances Iamblicus, Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius, with the earlier romances of Chariton and, to a lesser extent Xenophon of Ephesus, more Hellenocentric. In “Romancing Semiramis” Whitmarsh offers his own reconstruction of the *Ninus Romance*, which was being read and copied at the time when Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus were composing, as proof of how stories of exogamous and transgressive love (Whitmarsh suggests Semiramis as Ninus’ second wife, and with her also having another husband as in Diodorus) existed beside more Hellenocentric of writers like Chariton. “Dirty Love in late antiquity” focuses on Musaeus’ *Hero and Leander* (5th/6th century CE), whose union is archetypally exogamic (East vs. West) and irregular, enacting a “marriage that is at once no marriage” (172).

“Conclusion: The foundation of Marseilles, Some Broach Pins and the History of the Novel” begins with the story of how Euxenus, a trader from Ionian Phocaea, unexpectedly married Petta, the daughter of King Nannus, ruler of the area where later Massilia was founded as a result of that cross-cultural union. Such stories, as well as grave goods, hint at such cross-cultural mixings, the very cultural unity of the parties involved and their sense of identity being problematical. Whitmarsh stresses the improvisational quality of such colonial spaces, where items and identity can be repurposed in unforeseen, but productive, ways. The novels came to be in a similar way, through an improvisatory, tactical use of varied cultural materials. Whitmarsh makes a convincing case that they all are to a greater or lesser extent, about that very process of cross-cultural mixing, with results good, bad or simply weird. For contrast, consider Swain’s (*Hellenism and Empire*:1996)

assertion that a central purpose was to encourage elite marriage and extend the glories of the canonical Hellenic past.

Dirty Love provides a well thought out and researched, engaged and provoking, maximal summation of Whitmarsh's views, although some scholars will argue (with some cause) that the normative nature of earlier Greek literature was more a later scholarly misreading than a reality. Whitmarsh has done good service in providing valuable new perspectives to the study of Greco-Roman literature and culture.

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