

R. BRETHERS, *De l'idéalisme au réalisme. Une étude du comique dans le roman grec*, préf. (en anglais) de David Konstan.

Cardo 6.

Helios: Salerno Editrice, 2007. Paperback, € 48.00

ISBN 88-88123-33-4

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This book is the sixth publication in *Cardo*, a series focussing on cultural identity in late Antiquity and founded in 2004 by scholars affiliated with French, Italian, and Swiss universities. Whereas its previous publications are edited volumes and editions of texts (including translations and commentaries)<sup>2</sup>, Brethes (henceforth B.) is the author of the first monograph sailing under *Cardo*'s colours<sup>3</sup>. This book offers the first comprehensive analysis of comic elements in four of the five canonical ancient Greek novels (Longus is excluded, see below), and should be welcomed as an interesting and subtle contribution to the study of thematic and, to a lesser extent, technical differentiation and variation in this genre.

The book consists of four chapters, preceded by an English preface (by D. Konstan; pp. xi-xiv), a short avant-propos (pp. xv-xvi) and an introduction (pp. 1-12). The chapters are followed by a conclusion (pp. 269-76) and a comprehensive bibliography (pp. 277-98). Whereas chapter I ('L'héritage des Anciens: un dialogue ludique avec la comédie nouvelle', pp. 13-63) systematically explores a number of thematic and intertextual connections between the novels and New Comedy, chapters II-IV focus on comic elements in particular novels. More specifically, chapter II ('Spécificités et écarts du roman grec: un genre vivant', pp. 65-124) distinguishes three predominant modes of comic representation in Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesus and

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<sup>2</sup> The edited volumes are E. Amato & J. Schamp (eds.), *Ethopoia. La représentation de caractères entre fiction scolaire et réalité vivante à l'époque impériale et tardive* (2005) and C. Saliou (ed.), *Gaza dans L'Antiquité Tardive. Archéologie, rhétorique et histoire* (2005). The text editions include P. L. Malosse (ed.), *Lettres de Chion d'Héraclée* (2004) and C. Bost-Pouderon (ed.), *Dion de Pruse. Trois discours aux villes (Orr. 33-35)* (2006, 2 vols.). All are published by Helios Editrice in Salerno.

<sup>3</sup> The second monograph is A. J. Guiroga Puertas, *La retórica de Libanio y de Juan Crisóstomo en la Revuelta de las estatuas* (2007).

Achilles Tattius, while chapter III ('Les sophistes s'amuse: étude de procédés comiques chez Chariton, Xénophon d'Éphèse et Héliodore', pp. 125-86) approaches comic representation in these narratives from intertextual, intratextual, and extratextual points of view. Finally, chapter IV ('Glissement progressif du comique: Achille Tattius, l'autre voix du roman grec', pp. 187-267) deals exclusively with comic elements in Achilles Tattius.

The introduction offers, among other things, a brief overview (pp. 7-10) of comic representation in the novels and it explains B.'s choice to exclude Longus from this study (pp. 11-12). In itself, this choice is understandable and does not entail any methodological problems, given the book's focus on differentiation and variation in individual novels. Its motivation, however, which presents Longus' exclusion as necessary for thematic coherence, is problematic. B. sees *Daphnis and Chloe* as too specific, because it is part, as he maintains, of a different literary universe altogether – a bucolic rather than a novelistic universe. This claim is not only unnuanced<sup>4</sup>, but also internally inconsistent, since B. elsewhere explains the exclusion of some of the so-called 'fringe novels' by referring to two generic characteristics which are discussed in ancient testimonies and undoubtedly apply to Longus as well ('le motif amoureux' and 'l'univers de la fiction', pp. 71-5). Significantly, the latter section does not even mention Longus.

In chapter I, B. demonstrates how the novelistic adoption of and the deviation from comic material invest passages with meaning or ideological overtones. His main areas of investigation are character types (in Chariton, with a special interest in Chaereas' depiction as *akolastos*), the interconnections between *Tyche* and self-reflexivity (primarily in Chariton and Heliodorus), the position of female characters, and the importance of love and erotic elements. Although B.'s effort to match passages from the novels to exact intertexts may sometimes neglect the possible importance of material that is

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<sup>4</sup> Contributions suggesting a more nuanced stance about the mixture of bucolic and novelistic elements in Longus are conspicuously absent from B.'s bibliography. See, among others, L. R. Cresci, 'Il romanzo di Longo Sofista e la tradizione bucolica', *A&R* 26 (1981), 1-25 (translated in English as 'The novel of Longus the sophist and the pastoral tradition', in: S. Swain (ed.), *Oxford Readings in the Greek Novel*. Oxford 1999, 210-42), M. C. Mittelstadt, 'Longus: Daphnis and Chloe and the pastoral tradition', *C&M* 27 (1966), 62-77 and M. C. Mittelstadt, 'Bucolic and lyric motifs and dramatic narrative in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*', *RhM* 113 (1970), 211-27.

more varied than he allows<sup>5</sup>, this chapter is well documented and often makes for stimulating reading. Its focus on New Comedy compensates for the rather marginal role which this genre will play in the subsequent chapters.

Chapters II and III belong together. Chapter II shifts focus from intertexts to intratexts and discusses Xenophon of Ephesus (pp. 75-86), Chariton (pp. 86-103) and Heliodorus (pp. 103-24) against the background of generic conventions (pp. 68-75). B.'s aim is to establish the specific character of comic representation in each of these novels. Therefore, he focusses on different techniques through which comic elements are constructed – realism in Xenophon of Ephesus, irony in Chariton and an interplay between various registers in Heliodorus. Chapter III, then, sets out to examine three levels of comic elements (intertextual, intratextual, and extratextual levels, p. 127) in the same novels. In practice, this results in detailed analyses of a rather diverse collection of thematic areas – dramatic irony, knowledge and power in Chariton (pp. 128-43), sensation, horror and *sôphrosyne* in Xenophon (pp. 143-63), and realism and enigmatic communication in Heliodorus (pp. 163-86). B.'s analyses are often well-corroborated and convincing. His reading of Cnemon as a comic variant of the novelistic character type of the helper (pp. 115-24), for example, is persuasive, as is the suggestion that the *corpus Hippocraticum* is implicitly present in Xenophon's depiction of Anthia's disease (pp. 150-51). In other instances, B.'s points remain somewhat indeterminate (for example, the interconnection between Anthia's punishment in X. Eph. 4.6.2-3 and Lucius' punishment in Apul. *Met.* 6.31.1-2).

B.'s approach tends to pay much attention to the individual authors and the originality of their constructions of comic realities. In the case of the much-veiled Xenophon, for example, B.'s patient discussions of Habrocomes (pp. 77-80) and Hippothous (pp. 81-6) temptingly question the widely-held assumption that this novel is the purest and most stereotypical representative of the genre. Moreover, the analyses of knowledge and dissimulation in Chariton (pp. 134-43) convincingly draw attention to the notion of what I would call epistemological relativism: since Chariton's characters construct their own 'truths', the notions of truth and reality are no longer absolute or even stable but become the objects of shifting cognitive

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<sup>5</sup> Similar efforts to trace direct intertextual influence are evident also in other chapters. For example, direct influence of Chariton on Achilles Tatius is repeatedly suggested (pp. 198-9, 206, 231, etc.) but not systematically demonstrated.

boundaries. Interestingly, this notion has recently also been identified in Chariton by Smith, who adduces different examples to make a similar point<sup>6</sup>.

The breadth and the depth of most analyses demonstrate that B. is well acquainted with both primary and secondary literature<sup>7</sup>. In the treatment of irony as a comic instrument in Chariton, the narratological distinction between *argument function* and *key function* could have been better employed to pinpoint more clearly the exact difference between ‘ironie pratiquée à l’échelle du texte par les personnages du roman’ (p. 130) on the one hand, and ‘l’ironie dramatique, qui consiste pour un auteur à laisser ses personnages dans l’ignorance tout en partageant un savoir supérieur avec un public de lecteurs’ (p. 132) on the other<sup>8</sup>.

Chapter IV centres upon the comic effects generated by Clitophon’s homodiegetic narration (Achilles Tatius). B. points out that Clitophon, as a narrator, consciously and repeatedly shapes his own character in the story as a young lover (pp. 191-202) and as a novelistic hero (pp. 191-212), and that this self-presentation is likely to be a deliberate response both to specific character traits of his *narratee* in Sidon and to the communicative situation in which he tells his story. Moreover, B. argues that Clitophon’s self-presentation is systematically *deconstructed* by various characters in the story (pp. 212-29). The same incongruity between Clitophon’s views and those of the other characters underlies B.’s subsequent analyses of the motifs of recognition (pp. 231-4) and *Scheintod* (pp. 234-45) and of the interplay

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<sup>6</sup> S. D. Smith, *Greek Identity and the Athenian Past in Chariton: The Romance of Empire*. Groningen 2007, 85, 101-3 and 155-63.

<sup>7</sup> In the preface (p. xiv) Konstan rightly refers to the elaborated footnotes. In one or two instances, however, useful secondary literature seems to have been overlooked. The analysis of open-endedness in Achilles Tatius (pp. 245-7), for example, could have been given more focus by references to S. Nakatani, ‘A re-examination of some structural problems in Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon*’, *Ancient Narrative* 3 (2003), 63-81 and I. Repath, ‘Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Cleitophon*: what happened next?’, *Classical Quarterly* 55 (2005), 250-65. Furthermore, the discussion of base and divine knowledge in Heliodorus (pp. 169-70) could have benefited from consultation of M. Jones, ‘The wisdom of Egypt: base and heavenly magic in Heliodoros’ *Aithiopika*’, *Ancient Narrative* 4 (2004), 79-98.

<sup>8</sup> The key function of a narrative device is its function as understood by the reader of the story. It is opposed to the argument function, which is the function for a/the character(s) in the story. On this distinction, see Ø. Andersen, ‘Myth, paradigm and ‘spatial form’ in the *Iliad*’, in: J. M. Bremer, I. J. F. de Jong and J. Kalff (eds.), *Homer: Beyond Oral Poetry. Recent Trends in Homeric Interpretation*. Amsterdam 1987, 1-13. I. J. F. de Jong, ‘Homer and narratology’, in: I. Morris and B. Powell (eds.), *A New Companion to Homer*. Leiden – New York – Köln 1997, 305-325, applies this distinction to embedded narratives in Homer.

between marriage and virginity (pp. 247-67). Although most of these analyses are extremely incisive and will be fundamental for further research into this novel, one general remark is that the hermeneutical process of reading Clitophon's narration and characterization is more problematic than B. allows. Since *all* character speeches are part of Clitophon's narration, they cannot be 'objective' touchstones, as B. sees them (p. 230). Given that the entire story, including speeches, is communicated to us by Clitophon, his narratorial control over what 'his' characters say (or better: what he makes his characters say) makes things more complex than is suggested by B.'s straightforward juxtaposition of narrator text (labelled as 'subjective') and character text (labelled as 'objective'). This blurring of the boundary between narrator text and character text adds an extra layer to the 'esthétique de l'incertain, de l'instable' that B. sees operating in this novel (p. 275) and may ultimately even result in hermeneutical irretrievability of the 'true' story.

As B. stipulates in the conclusion, the four novelists adopt 'du comique' in strongly divergent ways. Although this is indeed the main subject of the book, B.'s treatment of what exactly makes certain novelistic passages distinctly 'comic' is sometimes disappointingly limited. It is true, for example, that Habrocomes' contempt of Eros (X. Eph.) is a deviation from generic conventions, but B.'s point that this contempt is therefore also comic (pp. 77-80) is debatable. Similarly, some people would disagree that Xenophon's preference for sensation and violence is interconnected with 'procédés comiques' (p. 144). Moreover, even if Chariclea's (Hld.) moral engagement is 'hyperbolique' (p. 108), what exactly makes it also 'comique' (ibid.)? These examples reflect the rather limited space dedicated in the introduction to a theoretical underpinning and an exact definition of 'le comique' (pp. 4-7). There, B. briefly draws attention to the absence of ancient typologies and focusses on the importance of laughter, which is illustrated with passages from Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian. A fuller contextualization of different forms of humour and their representation and interpretation in literature could have been useful.

One of the most stimulating aspects of this book, on the other hand, is B.'s qualification of the commonly-accepted distinction between Greek, 'ideal' novels and their Latin, 'realistic' counterparts. In fact, the book's starting point is the interconnection between this distinction and the different comic dimensions in these two types of narrative (pp. 3-4). Although B. repeatedly stipulates that the distinction between ideal and realistic narrative

is valid to an extent<sup>9</sup>, he points to the combination of realistic and idealistic elements in comic representation in Heliodorus (pp. 164-75) and demonstrates that comic elements in Achilles Tatius and Xenophon may add a more realistic flavour to these novels than has been appreciated so far (pp. 144-63). It is, therefore, surprising that he ultimately distances these novels from the fragments of *Iolaus* and Lollianus' *Phoenicica* ('absolument rien n'indique formellement que de telles œuvres eussent trouvées leur place dans un canon aussi codifié que celui du roman grec orthodoxe', p. 276; his italics), instead of adducing these fragments, as Barchiesi does<sup>10</sup>, as arguments indicating that the 'orthodox' Greek novel in general and its opposition to Latin realistic prose in particular may be modern constructions.

As I hope to have demonstrated, B.'s book is a learned and much-needed piece of scholarship, both well-written<sup>11</sup> and elegantly conceptualized. In my view, its rich, detailed, and thought-provoking analyses are important contributions to the appreciation of a genre that is more differentiated and nuanced than some scholars are willing to concede.

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<sup>9</sup> At the outset of the introduction he states that this distinction 'n'est pas dénuée de tout fondement' (p. 4). He reiterates this point at the end of the book's conclusion: 'cette étude ne permet pas de la [the distinction, that is] bouleverser radicalement' (p. 275).

<sup>10</sup> A. Barchiesi, 'Romanzo greco, romanzo latino: problemi e prospettive della ricerca attuale', in L. Graverini, W. Keulen and A. Barchiesi, *Il romanzo antico. Forme, testi, problemi*. Rome 2006, 193-218.

<sup>11</sup> From a technical point of view, some finishing touches could have been dealt with more carefully. There are several typographical errors in the text (p. 145 φοβερὰ), the footnotes (p. 89 n. 285 the Genealogy, p. 93 n. 301 Antiquity, p. 117 n. 375 00-00, p. 169 n. 532 Decoding) and the titles (p. 35 title 2.2.3, p. 154 title 2.2). Furthermore, two titles in the table of contents do not match the titles in the book: Chapter 1, § 3.1 ('Une dimension théâtrale' should be 'Fonctionnalité du divin: un retour sur le rôle de la Tyche') and Chapter IV, § 2.2.2 ('To be or not to be a virgin' should be 'To be or not to be a virgin: l'étrange cas de...Leucippé').