

Greek Literature in Late Antiquity

Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism

Edited by

SCOTT FITZGERALD JOHNSON



GREEK LITERATURE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

To James
ἐσμέν συνεργοί

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SCOTT FITZGERALD JOHNSON
Harvard University



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My wife Carol and daughter Susanna have lived with these papers for many months. I am grateful to them and the rest of my family for their unfailing support and love during this busy season.

Scott Fitzgerald Johnson
Cambridge, Massachusetts
November 2005

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A Note on Transliteration, Spelling, and Abbreviations

The question of how to render Greek words in transliteration always appears more taxing than it probably should be. In the present case I have taken the *laissez-faire* approach while also attempting to maintain the consistency of the volume as much as possible. Individual contributors were allowed to choose for themselves how they rendered Greek (e.g., whether to signify long vowels) and whether to Latinize proper names or not. Also, I was not doctrinaire about English spelling: this is a transatlantic venture and is reflected as such in the individual papers. Finally, short titles of classical works employed in this book can be found in the 'Authors and Works' sections of Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (rev. ed., Oxford, 1996), the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1996), or Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1879). Abbreviations for journals and series are listed below.

ABBREVIATIONS

BDAG	F.W. Danker, ed. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Chicago, 2000)
BHG	F. Halkin, ed. <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca</i> , 3rd ed. (Brussels, 1969)
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London</i> (London, 1954–)
BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i> (Oxford, 1975–)
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i> (Oxford, 1907–)
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> (Paris, etc., 1900–)
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> (Vienna, 1866–)
FrGrHist	F. Jacoby et al., eds. <i>Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> (Leiden, 1954–)
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i> (Cambridge, Mass., 1958–)
GCS	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte</i> (Leipzig and Berlin, 1899–)
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i> (Cambridge, Mass., 1890–)
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i> (Cambridge, Mass., 1908–)
J ECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i> (Baltimore, 1993–)
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i> (London, 1880–)
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik</i> (Vienna, 1969–)
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i> (London, 1911–)
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> (London, 1899–)
OS	<i>Ostkirchliche Studien</i> (Würzburg, 1952–)

PBSR	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i> (London, 1902–)
PG	J.P. Migne, ed. <i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca</i> , 166 vols (Paris, 1857–1866)
PL	J.P. Migne, ed. <i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina</i> , 221 vols (Paris, 1844–1864)
PLRE	A.H.M. Jones et al., eds. <i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , 3 vols (Cambridge, 1971–1992)
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i> (Paris and Turnhout, 1907–)
RE	A.F. von Pauly et al., eds. <i>Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , 49 vols (Stuttgart, 1894–1980)
REA	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i> (Paris, 1899–)
REG	<i>Revue des études grecques</i> (Paris, 1888–)
SC	<i>Sources chrétiennes</i> (Paris, 1941–)
SIFC	<i>Studi italiani di filologia classica</i> (Florence, 1893–)
SO	<i>Symbolae Osloenses</i> (Oslo, 1924–)
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i> (Berlin and Leuven, 1957–)
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i> (Boston, etc., 1870–)
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i> (Amsterdam, 1947–)
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i> (Stuttgart, 1876–)
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche</i> (Berlin, 1900–)
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i> (Bonn, 1967–)

Introduction

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I. BACKGROUND

The majority of the papers in this volume were originally prepared for a conference held at Keble College, Oxford on 5 June, 2004. The conference was organized by myself and a colleague at Keble, James George, to address the topic of ‘Greek Literature in Late Antiquity’ from a definitional point of view. Our basic questions were, What are the characteristic features of Greek writing in our period? and How can late antiquity be understood through the multifarious Greek literature that period produced? We did not attempt to limit the term ‘literature’ to high literature only, such as epic poetry, but rather we let the category of literature be defined more or less for itself. After all, one of the traditional ways of denigrating late antiquity has been to claim that no great literature was produced in the period. Not only is this a spurious assertion on any standard, but it hinders the study of late antiquity’s natural ways of talking about literature and literary creation. It was an interest in these broader issues which led to asking a group of experts on the period—half established scholars and half younger innovators—to speak to our topic from specific perspectives of their own choosing.

The ensuing papers and discussions on site quickly convinced us of the value of publishing the conference. There was general agreement among the speakers that too few collective efforts had been made to emphasize the vitality of Greek literature in late antiquity. Thus, with publication in mind, we commissioned three new papers to fill out the volume (Christopher Jones, Mary Whitby, and myself), and we set about trying to delineate the overarching themes of the conference. Three major categories emerged as organizing principles—Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism—which now orient the argument of the present volume. While we do not pretend that these ten papers are *in toto* encyclopedic for the period—such an enterprise would run the risk of leaving out critical analysis altogether—we nevertheless comfortably claim that each of the papers has something to say concerning these broad categories. The same is true of the Greek texts they discuss, which is precisely the point that we hope to convey. We believe our ‘Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism’ subtitle to be crucial to our arguments about the characteristics of Greek literature in late antiquity, and we have chosen three or four papers to illustrate the value of each of these categories.

II. PAPERS

Averil Cameron's paper, 'New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature, A Title Revisited', comes first in the volume and serves as something of a bibliographical introduction to our subject. In revisiting the topic of a seminal paper that she published in 1992, she illustrates the dynamic interaction of Greek literature with multiple modes of writing in late antiquity, ending with an excursus on the biographical and panegyric modes. Throughout the paper a number of period-defining characteristics are on display: the sheer bulk of Greek writing in late antiquity, literary experimentation, theological genres, and perennial difficulties of taxonomy and nomenclature. Furthermore, for Cameron the dynamism of late antiquity includes not only Greek's engagement with Latin—a traditional binary opposition inherited from the discipline of Classics—but also with multiple eastern Christian languages, such as Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, and Arabic.

The suggestion that we can hardly understand what 'Greek literature' means in late antiquity without taking account of adjacent eastern languages and literatures is corroborated by the second paper in our collection. In 'The Dynamic Reception of Theodore of Mopsuestia in the Sixth Century: Greek, Syriac, and Latin', Adam Becker investigates Junillus Africanus' sixth-century *Handbook of the Basic Principles of the Divine Law* (*Instituta Regularia Divinae Legis*) and exposes its deep roots in Syriac exegesis. The process of dissemination was facilitated by Greek and thus illuminates a little appreciated role of Greek literature in the East. Greek was a vehicle which carried eastern thought (Syriac, Armenian, etc.) to the West, and returned the favor by bringing Roman thought and institutions to the East. From the works of Theodore of Mopseustia to the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes, the fourth to sixth centuries saw Greek continue to expand its role as avatar of what Becker has evocatively termed the 'translinguistic Christian literary *oikoumene*'.

The theme of cross-linguistic reception and translation continues in Christopher Jones's paper, 'Apollonius of Tyana in Late Antiquity', which considers the late antique afterlife of the itinerant philosopher-magician Apollonius of Tyana, principally through the dominant literary biography of him written by Philostratus of Athens in the 220's AD. This seminal Greek text underwent numerous translations and conflicting evaluations from the third to sixth centuries. Jones's survey of these reactions brings to the fore the diversity of literary opinion in late antiquity, particularly as regards the engagement between late classical, or Second-Sophistic, and early Christian literature. Apollonius clearly takes on a heightened persona in our period, and the dynamic role of Philostratus' Greek *Life*, even among several writers who clearly misread or misunderstood it, is significant and is demonstrated not least by the remarkable number of Byzantine manuscripts which have preserved the work for us.

In Aaron Johnson's contribution, 'Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* as Literary Experiment', our focus shifts back to the Constantinian empire of the early fourth

century and the virulent debates between Christians and pagans. Whereas Eusebius appears earlier in Jones's paper as the confirmed author of the polemical tract *Contra Hieroclem*, in Aaron Johnson's paper we see Eusebius attempting something more constructive in his approach to pagan learning. Compiling enormous tracts from Greco-Roman philosophers—over seventy percent of the work is quotations—Eusebius achieves a new form of literary endeavor, the *apologia* as *eisagoge*. He stretches boundaries of genre and form for the sake of a new educational context and he uses texts, not so much as weapons, but as the bulwark for a new curriculum of Christian learning. As was adumbrated by Averil Cameron's paper, the didactic context of Greek literary reception, evaluation, and manipulation appears here as a crucial aspect of the period.

The educational context of Greek literature in late antiquity is invoked as well by Yannis Papadoyannakis in his paper 'Instruction by Question and Answer: The Case of Late Antique and Byzantine *Erotopokriseis*'. Likewise, the accumulation of texts as a basis for late antique argument and learning is also highlighted by Papadoyannakis. The method of the *erotopokriseis* emerged in the technical schoolrooms of ancient philosophy, but like much else in late antique culture it broadened out, or became 'democratized' (see Averil Cameron's paper). To accompany this broadening, Papadoyannakis also acknowledges the growth of encyclopedic literature, embedded in the *erotopokriseis* and enmeshed in their literary form. Snippets of astrological, medical, and other lore—for example, in the *erotopokriseis* of Ps. Caesarios from the 550's AD—'personalize' the collected Greek knowledge of late antiquity. As in Aaron Johnson's paper, the master-student relationship is on display in the very literary form of these dialogic Greek 'microtexts'.

With Ruth Webb's paper, 'Rhetorical and Theatrical Fictions in Chorikios of Gaza', we stay within the broader didactic arena, but shift our focus to the genre that she claims bears 'the closest relationship to the fictional and the literary' in late antiquity. The Greek epideictic rhetoric of the orator and writer Chorikios of Gaza offers an opportunity to discuss explicit formulations of fictionality in our period, particularly through his speech *In Defense of the Mimes*. This speech demonstrates Chorikios' acute awareness of the persona he is adopting in declamation and engages the ambiguities of theatrical production in a Christian empire. While declamation (oratory on set themes) in any context requires the audience's imagination—no less for the original audience than for us—Chorikios' speeches demonstrate a special 'intensification' of the innate literary nature of declamation. They also underline the 'rich potential' of late antique rhetoric, which 'survived because it remained relevant', and they allow us to read Chorikios as an internal commentator on the rhetorical art of declamation. The significance of Chorikios' literary self-reflexivity in the late fifth century should not be underestimated: Jones's paper also highlights the fifth century as illustrative of competing late antique receptions of earlier Greek literature.

We find this same conclusion, if pushed slightly later, in Elizabeth Jeffreys's paper on 'Writers and Audiences in the Early Sixth Century'. She highlights three provincial writers—Christodorus of Coptus, Colluthus of Lykopolis, and John Malalas of Antioch—who all ended up in Constantinople under the emperor Anastasius I (AD 491–518). For Jeffreys, each of these writers takes a different approach to appropriating classical Greek literature: Christodorus, a poet, represents the full tradition personified; Colluthus, also a poet, represents a tactful, mitigated position; and Malalas, a chronicler in prose, incorporates a completely Christian reworking of classical myth. The form and style of their engagement with classical Greek literature differs substantially between the writers, but it is precisely through such a disparate selection that Jeffreys is able to demonstrate the breadth of approaches to the Greek past which were undertaken with skill and imagination in the early sixth century.

Adrian Hollis's paper, 'The Hellenistic Epyllion and its Descendants', expands our discussion of Greek poetry in late antiquity to consider the *longue durée* of the genre of the mini-epic, or epyllion. As in Jones's and Jeffreys's literary histories, it is in the reign of Anastasius that the epyllion shows itself to be especially strong. However, that apex is only the culmination of a long history extending back to Callimachus and Hellenistic Alexandria. While it may come as little surprise that the erudite poets of the fifth century, such as Nonnus and Musaeus, are harkening back to the aetiological poetry of Callimachus, the literary history of the epyllion has never been traced with the close attention it receives here. Greek literature is predominant in Hollis's analysis, especially from the Roman period, but important Latin contributions to the genre are noted as well, not least of which is the Pseudo-Virgilian *Ciris*. Through this detailed study of the history of an enduring Hellenistic genre, Hollis demonstrates above all the elevated role that classical poetry continued to play in late antiquity.

Poetry is also the object of Mary Whitby's paper, which is entitled 'The St. Polyeuktos Epigram (AP 1.10): A Literary Perspective'. She thus continues the theme of Jeffreys and Hollis while tackling a contested text that is as crucial as any to our understanding of the early sixth century literary world. The St. Polyeuktos epigram, surviving complete in the *Greek Anthology* (abbreviated AP), was originally inscribed on large blocks inside and outside the lavish Church of St. Polyeuktos, constructed in the 520s by Anicia Juliana. Whitby analyzes the themes and structure of the poem and compares it to a wealth of Greek poetry from the period in an attempt to come to a better understanding of the style, authorship, and argument of the poem. The value of the epigram rests not least in its attempt to compete on a very advanced level of literature in verse. A number of late antique *comparanda* are brought to bear on the question: Quintus of Smyrna, the anonymous *Vision of Dorotheus*, the poems of Gregory of Nazianzus, the Empress Eudocia's paraphrase of the *Martyrdom of St. Cyprian*, the *Dionysiaca* and *Paraphrase of John* by Nonnus, the *Paraphrase of the Psalms* attributed to Apollinarius the elder, Christodorus of Coptus, John of Gaza, Paul the Silentiary's *Ekphrasis on St. Sophia*, and George of

Pisidia. Such a cast of important poets produces not just a specialist's inquiry into the authorship of the epigram, but comprises a profound summary article on the history and quality of original Greek poetry in late antiquity.

In the final contribution our volume returns to prose and, specifically, to the late antique reception of the Greek Novel. In my own paper I consider the continued vitality of narrative fiction in the mid-fifth century and I take the experimental *Life and Miracles of Thekla* as my test case. I describe briefly the fundamental literary nature of this text before turning to a detailed comparison between the literary techniques of the Greek Novel (specifically, Chariton and Achilles Tatius) and those of the *Life and Miracles*. I note the considerable affinity in their use of authorial voice, which appears most strongly in the *Life and Miracles* through the character of the apostle Paul: he both recapitulates the story 'thus far' and predicts Thekla's future martyrdoms and (extra-textual) reception as a female apostle. By examining the role of apostolic succession (*diadoche*) in the *Life and Miracles*, I also highlight the theme of education, religious and sexual, which is an essential theme of the Greek Novel. At the end, I note how important it is to reconsider the currently fashionable disjunction between early Christian Greek literature and late antique Greek literature. The continuity of form, evidenced by a number of the papers in this volume, directly contradicts this accepted dogma. Literary form has been neglected by scholars of Christian origins yet it is a highly significant category both for the emergence of Christian discourse and for the history of Greek literature writ large.

III. CONSENSUS?

In their classic textbook *Theory of Literature*, the literary critics René Wellek and Austin Warren include as their very last chapter a discussion of the concept and practice of 'Literary History'. They make the following claim in the progress of that chapter: 'The problem of writing the history of a period will be first a problem of description: we need to discern the decay of one convention and the rise of a new one.'¹ Drawing on the work of Russian formalists of the 1920s and members of the Prague Linguistic Circle of the 1930s and 1940s, Wellek and Warren make a case for the practice of literary history which is based first and foremost on critical engagement with the literature itself.² The history of the literature in a given period

¹ René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (London: 1993 [1963]), p. 266.

² Wellek was a junior member of the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1930s and gave an important paper on literary history at one of their meetings: 'The Theory of Literary History', *Travaux de Cercle linguistique de Prague* 6 (1936), pp. 173–191. However, the major figure whom we associate with the theory of 'literary evolution' in Prague is Jan Mukařovský: for a survey of his thought and career, see René Wellek, 'The Literary Theory and Aesthetics of the Prague School', in idem, *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: 1970), pp. 275–303. For the history and conclusions of the school as a whole, see F.W. Galan, *Historic*

is not any more legitimately based on external forces, such as political or social movements, than it is on 'the system of literary norms, standards, and conventions whose introduction, spread, diversification, integration, and disappearance can be traced'.³ Therefore, if we want to begin to think about the characteristics of a given period, one way of going about it is to try to understand the literature itself on its own terms: to trace conventions and norms in the period, and not to seek to impose norms from the outside. Once that (synchronic) engagement has been initiated, the connections between literary forms, genres, and subject matter can begin to be understood across time (diachronically).

This is what we collectively attempt to do in this volume, our papers having arisen out of a felt absence of close readings of the literature of our period—especially *qua* literature and not merely as evidence for social, religious, or political phenomena. Of course, we are not the first to have attempted something in this vein: one thinks of the twenty-seventh volume of *Yale Classical Studies* (1982),⁴ the Cambridge Philological Society volumes on Nonnus (1994) and Heliodorus (1998),⁵ and two recent collections on biography and panegyric.⁶ While this heightened interest is a welcome development, it is safe to say, I think, that the field is still in its infancy, especially as regards literary criticism and analysis. As an example of late antiquity lagging behind literary scholarship on other periods, it is instructive that, in the recent multi-volume collection of studies on Greek literature edited by Gregory Nagy, only a few papers deal directly with the fourth to sixth centuries. This is not for lack of comprehensiveness or interest on the part of the editor—the collection is in nine substantial volumes—rather, there is simply too little in the way of serious literary scholarship available which could have been included.⁷

Returning briefly to the question of periodization, I would like to ask whether we have achieved a consensus in this volume about the characteristics of Greek

Structures: The Prague School Project, 1928–1946 (London: 1985), Jan K. Broekman, *Structuralism: Moscow–Prague–Paris* (Dordrecht and Boston: 1974), pp. 43–69, and Jurij Striedter, *Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1989).

³ Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p. 265.

⁴ The *Yale Classical Studies* volume was edited by John Winkler and Gordon Williams and is entitled *Later Greek Literature*. In the brief introduction, the editors note that the original call for papers was for 'The Second Sophistic and Later Greek Literature' (vii) but that Ewen Bowie's contribution on 'The Importance of Sophists' convinced them to change the title (ix). The rhetoric of introductions notwithstanding, it is significant that there are only two papers in the volume that consider the fifth century and later.

⁵ Neil Hopkinson (ed.), *Studies in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus*, Cambridge Philological Society Supplementary Volume 17 (Cambridge: 1994); Richard Hunter (ed.), *Studies in Heliodorus*, Cambridge Philological Society Supplementary Volume 21 (Cambridge: 1998).

⁶ Mary Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: 1998); Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau (eds), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 2000).

⁷ Gregory Nagy (ed.), *Greek Literature* (9 vols, New York: 2001), esp. vols 8–9.

literature in late antiquity. Is there some definable *ethos* which we can point to and thus claim to have discovered the soul of the period? Can we claim to have set, through literary analysis, the boundaries of late antiquity once and for all? Unsurprisingly, the answer to both questions is no. However, we do believe that the investigation of the Greek (and other) literature of late antiquity is a necessary element for the future growth and success of the field, and this neglected area of scholarship has ramifications for neighboring disciplines such as Classics, western medieval studies, Byzantine studies, and studies of the Islamic world. The specialization of a 'late antiquist' was not even available forty years ago, and we feel privileged now to have the opportunity to offer this volume as a sign of the maturity of the discipline. We have identified 'Dynamism, Didacticism, and Classicism' as three categories under which the Greek literature of late antiquity can be shown to flourish, both in its native creativity and in its interactions with other literatures, past and present. We also feel that, by concentrating on traditional genres such as epic poetry, declamations, biography, and the Greek Novel, we have demonstrated the vibrancy of classical literary reception in the period. Nevertheless, new genres and new literary experiments are also on display in this volume, as are the shadows of the huge corpora of Syriac and late antique Latin—we only wish Aramaic, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, and Arabic could have been represented as well, since all of these languages have a role to play in defining 'Greek literature' in our period.

The question of literary value or valuation must not be neglected either, but, as with the question of periodization, it is impossible to suggest that ten separate scholars would ever be able to agree unanimously. To return to the Prague School theorists mentioned above, they argued that one way of understanding literary history is as a dialectic of attraction and repulsion: as soon as an attractive literary form becomes too predominant, new innovators react and seek ways of altering it.⁸ Some of these new forms are successful, of course, but others fall by the wayside. This may seem too formulaic an approach in the context of our contemporary (post-)poststructuralist cynicism, but, for the purposes of this introduction, it is a helpful schema: since, if there is any single thing that all the contributors have agreed upon, implicitly or explicitly, it is the rise and value of minor genres in late antiquity. Sometimes these genres, as perhaps with Eusebius' *apologia-cum-eisagoge*, the *Praeparatio Evangelica*, are true experiments and do not survive longer than the examples that we have, but other typically late antique genres, such as the *florilegium*, the *erotapokriseis*, or the narrative saint's Life, achieve a prominence in Greek literary history that is significant and influential on later writers and eras. Even with the epyllion and the literary epigram, traditional genres, we see the inherited style being actively manipulated in late antiquity: in both of the latter cases the legacy appears to be that of the experimental Hellenistic world interpreted through the gigantic figure of Nonnus.

⁸ See Galan, *Historic Structures*, pp. 22–23.

Thus, in all of the papers in this volume we see evidence of literary hybridity, of compilation (or at least consolidation), of engagement with languages and literatures beyond Greek itself, of intense reception and adaptation of older literature (classical, Jewish, and early Christian), and especially of experimentation with form. It could be argued that these elements are simply signs of 'literature' going on and being written, rather than characteristic aspects a specific period. If so, then I think we are satisfied merely to have demonstrated the vitality of Greek literature in late antiquity—contrary to traditional evaluations—even though the pioneering papers in this volume do much more than just that. To reiterate, we have not attempted to be encyclopedic in scope, but rather to investigate the broader characteristics of late antiquity by bringing together Greek writers and literary works that have never before been analyzed side by side at this level of detail. We hope that others will find more to say on this topic and that our collective contribution here will foster new awareness and provoke fresh questions in the years to come.

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PART 1

Dynamism

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