

The Copyist as Novelist Multiple Versions in the Ancient Greek Novel

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No book is ever published without some variant in each copy. Scribes take a secret oath to omit, interpolate, vary.

Jorge Luis Borges, *The Babylon Lottery*

1. Purpose

The present essay has two objectives: on the one hand, to show the existence of multiple versions in the textual transmission of several of the Greek novels that have come down to us; on the other, to investigate the causes for such multiplicity. This shall require that this case of multiple versions be placed in relationship with other similar cases of works which do not pertain to the genre of the novel, but yet are related to it, which in turn will lead to certain consequences in the field of literary studies.¹

2. Greek novels and their multiple versions

The genre of the Greek novel developed in the first centuries of our era, a period in which the Greek-speaking world was a part of the Roman Empire. The only five novels which have survived in their entirety all belong to this period, as well as the quite numerous papyrus fragments of other novels which have been lost. The peak of the genre seems to have been somewhere around the second or third century A. D., judging from the probable date of many of these novels.² As for their literary form, the

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² The titles and approximate dates are as follows: *Callirhoe*, by Chariton Aphrodisiensis (first or second century A.D.), *An Ephesian Tale or Anthia and Habrocomes*, by Xenophon of Ephesus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, by Longus of Lesbos and *Leucippe and Clitophon*, by Achilles Tatius (second century), and *An Ethiopian Story or Theagenes and Chariclea*, by Heliodorus of Emesa (third or fourth century). The fragments of other novels are relatively abundant: see the editions of S. A. Stephens-J. J. Winkler *Ancient Greek Novels: the Fragments*. Introduction, text, translation and commentary (Princeton: 1995), and M^o. P. López Martínez *Fragmentos papiáceos de novela griega* (Alicante:1998).