

THE ROMAN NOVEL*

*Excerpts as follows: (1) = Petronius, Satyricon (tr. J.P. Sullivan/Penguin Books), chs. 61-62; (2) = Quintus Curtius Rufus, The History of Alexander (tr. J. Yardley/Penguin Books) Book Six, Chapters 24-32; (3) = Apuleius, The Golden Ass (tr. J. Lindsay/Indiana University Press), from Book Seven; (4) Longus, Daphnis and Chloe (tr. J. Lindsay/London, 1948), from Book One.

(1) A Story within a Story

Niceros was delighted by his friend's affable request and said:

'May I never make another penny if I'm not jumping for joy to see you in such form. Well, just for fun - though I'm worried about those schoolteachers there in case they laugh at me. That's up to them. I'll tell it all the same. Anyway, what do I care who laughs at me. It's better be laughed at than laughed down.'

'*When thus he spake,*' he began this story:

'When I was still a slave, we were living down a narrow street - Gavilla owns the house now - and there as heaven would have it, I fell in love with the wife of Terentius the innkeeper.

'You all used to know Melissa from Tarentum, an absolute peach to look at. But honest to god, it wasn't her body or just sex that made me care for her, it was more because she had such a nice nature. If I asked her for anything, it was never refused. If I had a penny or halfpenny, I gave it to her to look after and she never let me down.

'One day her husband died out at the villa. So I did my best by hook

or by crook to get to her. After all, you know, a friend in need is a friend indeed.

62. 'Luckily the master had gone off to Capua to look after some odds and ends. I seized my chance and I talked a guest of ours into walking with me as far as the fifth milestone. He was a soldier as it happened, and as brave as hell. About cock-crow we shag off, and the moon was shining like noontime. We get to where the tombs are and my chap starts making for the grave-stones, while I, singing away, keep going and start counting the stars. Then just as I looked back at my mate, he stripped off and laid all his clothes by the side of the road. My heart was in my mouth, I stood there like a corpse. Anyway, he pissed a ring round his clothes and suddenly turned into a wolf. Don't think I'm joking, I wouldn't tell a lie about this for a fortune. However, as I began to say, after he turned into a wolf, he started howling and rushed off into the woods.

'At first I didn't know where I was, then I went up to collect his clothes - but they'd turned to stone. If ever a man was dead with fright, it was me. But I pulled out my sword, and I fairly slaughtered the early morning shadows till I arrived at my girl's villa.

'I got into the house and I practically gasped my last, the sweat was pouring down my crotch, my eyes were blank and staring - I could hardly get over it. It came as a surprise to my poor Melissa to find I'd walked over so late.

"'If you'd come a bit earlier,'" she said, "at least you could've helped us. A wolf got into the grounds and tore into all the livestock - it was like a bloody shambles. But he didn't have the last laugh, even though he got away. Our slave here put a spear right through his neck."

'I couldn't close my eyes again after I heard this. But when it was broad daylight I rushed off home like the innkeeper after the robbery. And when I came to the spot where his clothes had turned to stone, I found nothing but bloodstains. However, when I got home, my soldier friend was lying in bed like a great ox with the doctor seeing to his neck. I realized he was a werewolf and afterwards I couldn't have taken a bite of bread in his company, not if you killed me for it. If some people think differently about this, that's up to them. But me - if I'm telling a lie may all your guardian spirits damn me!'

(2) Alexander and the Amazons

[24] On the border of Hyrcania, as was observed above, lived a tribe of Amazons. They inhabited the plains of Themiscyra in the area of the river Thermodon. [25] and their queen, Thalestris, held sway over all those between the Caucasus and the river Phasis. Passionately eager to meet Alexander, she journeyed from her realm and when she was not far off she sent messengers ahead to announce that a queen had come who was longing to see him and make his acquaintance. [26] Granted an immediate audience, she ordered her company to halt while she went forward attended by 300 women; as soon as she caught sight of the king she leaped unaided from her

horse, carrying two spears in her right hand. [27] The dress of Amazons does not entirely cover the body: the left side is bare to the breast but covered beyond that, while the skirt of the garment, which is gathered into a knot, stops above the knee. [28] One breast is kept whole for feeding children of female sex and the right is cauterized to facilitate bending the bow and handling weapons.

[29] Thalestris looked at the king, no sign of fear on her face. Her eyes surveyed a physique that in no way matched his illustrious record – for all barbarians have respect for physical presence, believing that only those on whom nature has thought fit to confer extraordinary appearance are capable of great achievements. [30] When asked if she had a request to make she unhesitatingly declared that she had come in order to share children with the king, since she was a fitting person on whom to beget heirs for his empire. A child of the female sex she would keep, she said, but a male she would give to his father. [31] Alexander asked if Thalestris wished to accompany him on his campaigns, but she declined on the grounds that she had left her kingdom unprotected, and she kept asking him not to let her leave disappointed in her hopes. [32] The woman's enthusiasm for sex was keener than Alexander's and she pressed him to stop there a few days. Thirteen days were devoted to serving her passion, after which Thalestris headed for her kingdom and Alexander for Parthene.¹⁴

(3) A Bandit's Life

The whole company applauded this speech, and they passed a resolution to accept the new man as a thoroughly satisfactory recruit and to canvass the countryside for further additions to their depleted ranks. The newcomer left the cave and returned in a few minutes, ushering in a sturdy young fellow who came fully up to specifications; for there was no other man present worthy of comparison with him. Besides his mighty thighs he was a whole head taller than all the others; and yet the down was only beginning to spread across his cheeks. He was poorly clad with patched odds and ends of cloth strung anyhow together, through which his broad breast and brawny belly seemed bursting.

Such was the man that strode in. 'Hallo,' he said, 'vassals of the warrior-god Mars and henceforward my trusty fellow-

campaigners. Welcome merrily a merry lad – a dare-devil that takes a stab in the body as cheerfully as a gold-coin in his hand, and laughs at bugbear death. Don't think that I'm a beggarly crawling fellow; and don't estimate my merits from my rags. Once I was captain of a valiant band that devastated Macedonia from one end to the other. I am that famous freebooter Haemus the Thracian, whose name is enough to overawe a whole province. Theron was my father, who in his time was also a robber of renown. I was nourished on human blood and reared among the choicest groups of the profession, the heir and rival of my father's power. But I lost in a short time the whole of that numerous and valiant band and all its magazines. For I made an attack, frowned-at by Mars, upon a high functionary of Caesar's who had fallen on evil days. But I'd better start at the beginning or I'll muddle the tale.'

When they discovered the flocks grazing dutifully, both sheep and goats, they sat down on the stump of an oak and searched whether Daphnis had wounded himself anywhere when he fell. But there was no injury, no wound to be seen, though there was dirt and mud plastered all over his hair and body. So they thought that it would be as well for him to wash before they carried news of the mishap to Lamon and Myrtale.

He went therefore with Chloe to the Cave of the Nymphs; and he handed her his smock and wallet to hold while he stood in the spring-pool and gave his hair and body a good wash. Now, his hair was dark and thick, and his body sunburnt, so that he seemed to be tinged all over with the shadow of his hair. As Chloe watched, she thought how beautiful he was, and she wondered why she had not thought him beautiful before. She decided that the washing must be the cause of his beauty; and, as she washed his back and shoulders, the flesh felt so soft and supple that she secretly kept touching her own body, to test if hers were the more delicate. Then, when the sun was dipping down, they drove their flocks home; and Chloe had only one thought all the while, and that was a wish to see Daphnis washing again.

Next morning, when they had come to the pastures, Daphnis sat under their favourite oak and played his pipe; and at the same time he watched the goats who lay around as if to listen to his tunes. Chloe sat near and kept an eye on her flock of sheep, but she kept a still keener eye on Daphnis. She thought once more that he was beautiful as he sat piping; and, once more asking herself why, she decided that the music was the cause of his beauty. So when he stopped, she took the pipe in turn, hoping that she also might become beautiful. Then she persuaded him to have another wash; and, as she looked on, she touched him; and, before they went back, she praised him; and that praise was the beginning of love.

She did not know what her emotion was; for she was a young girl, reared up among peasants, who had never heard the name of Love on anybody's lips. But there was distress in her soul, and she could not control her eyes, and she babbled of nothing but Daphnis. She disliked her food, she tossed at night, she neglected her flock. One moment she laughed, and the next she wept. One moment she drowsed, and the next she started up. Her cheek was pale, and then it burned with blushes. Never was a heifer plagued by a gadfly so restless.