

Readerly Curiosity: theorizing narrative experience in the Greek novel

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Abstract

This thesis proposes that the ancient Greek novels theorize their readers from within themselves. The novels self-consciously promote and construct a reader who is curious, or *polypragmōn*, and lead this reader towards a recognition of that fact. The reader becomes aware of his or her experience of reading as a process. Drawing on Plutarch's suggestion that the best way to turn curiosity into a force for good is to turn it on oneself, this thesis puts forward the idea that the novels lead a curious reader to engage with his or her encounter with the text, to identify him or herself as curious, and in so doing come to a position of self-analysis.

Attention is drawn to the experience of reading, and the lessons that can be learnt from it, by the embedding of narratives within the novels. Embedded or partial narratives can suggest alternative storylines and encourage the curious reader to pry and collaborate with the narrator. The experience of interior space maps the reader's encounter with the novel, constructing him or her as curious as s/he is encouraged to peep through gaps in doors, follow the narrator through doors, and think about his or her status as voyeur and eavesdropper. Deceptive narratives lead the reader to follow suggested storylines and to interrogate the text to try to discover the 'truth' that may lie behind the narrative. Finally, the presence of female characters incites the curious reader to find out what s/he can about them, pushing the narrative to its limit.

In going through this process of interrogating the text and actively striving to find out more by reading between the lines, the reader becomes aware of reading as a process, and of his or her curiosity, thus becoming able to analyse him or herself. The novels thus promote a theory of how their readers approach them.

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