

# Epilogue

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The final chapter in this book (on Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*) provides the perfect 'bridge' to our epilogue. It nicely teases out how a limited number of (fictional) characters are gradually built up from their introduction into the story right through to their last appearance. It shows that a subtle close-reading of techniques of characterization is crucial to come to grips with characterization in narrative but at the same time demonstrates that characterization is always more than the sum of individual techniques; rather, it is a dynamic process in which the reader continually acquires, evaluates and re-evaluates a multi-form body of information (new or known). Characterization, in other words, is to an important degree a readerly competence. As other chapters in this book also have highlighted, part of the fussiness and fluidity of a concept like literary character(ization) has to do precisely with the fact that it is continually 'in progress': it involves constant, often simultaneous, readerly activities of interpretation, comparison, negotiation, balancing, compilation, accommodation, assessment, and re-assessment of multiform (and often diverging) cues.

At the same time, our volume has addressed not only the importance of readerly competence but also, and mainly, the construction of characters *by narrators*—thereby focusing on the important questions of who, when and, mainly, how. More often than not, characterization is sensibly analysed as a complex, narratorial strategy. As the underpinning in ancient rhetoric of techniques of characterization central to this book suggests, and as many chapters of this book show, the way in which character is constructed is not neutral; it is a rhetorical phenomenon involving strategies of (c)overt/implicitness/explicitness, and (intertextual, intratextual or 'internarrative') association/dissociation.

Readers familiar with earlier volumes will have realized that we have followed some but not all editorial policies underlying the *SAGN* series. (For our take on the notions of genre and narrative in this context, we refer to the introduction to this book.) We have followed (more or less) the previous editorial line in the chronological delineation (starting from Homer and ending with the novels) and selection of authors/texts, even if those are (inevitably) open to debate to some extent. The chronological delineation is, as always, porous: Heliodorus (probably mid-third or mid-fourth century CE) is included, for example, but Quintus of Smyrna (probably third century CE) is not. And

within the period of eleven or twelve centuries (depending on when exactly we date Homer and Heliodorus), exhaustive coverage has of course been impossible. Absent authors who could have made very fine and interesting chapters in this volume are Isocrates and, of course, Theophrastus (although in the latter case the inclusion of his *Characters* would have stretched the definition of narrative even more than we have already done). That said, we have aimed primarily to preserve the continuity built over the first three volumes. The fact that the same authors are analysed throughout the series has the advantage that readers are provided through the different volumes with insights into different narratological matters in these authors and can more easily detect patterns in the use of individual concepts and narratorial strategies by them. This is arguably how a thematically organized series such as *SAGN* works best.

In other instances it was more difficult to adhere to editorial choices made in previous volumes. The diachronic merit of large-scale narratological analyses as discussed in the epilogues of *SAGN* 1 and 2, for example, has been less our focus than that of previous editors. One reason for this is obvious enough: it is much more difficult to establish diachronic lines tracing evolutions for a compound, multiform and fluid concept such as character(ization) than for concepts that are more delineated and more tangible such as, say, narrators and narratees. Another reason is that the individual chapters aim first and foremost to contribute to the micro-level of literary analysis: they mainly explore how a detailed and subtle in-depth narratological analysis of characterization can help to take stock of the characteristics of and tendencies in individual authors (or better: narrators in individual authors) and enrich the interpretation of individual texts.

This epilogue is not the place to summarize all these readings of individual texts or to group them in general (and, no doubt, generalizing) observations. Rather, we briefly address some of the questions that in our introduction we have identified as central to this volume. In respect to our question of 'what', various chapters have drawn attention (unsurprisingly) to the moral aspects of character; at the same time, they have done their fair share to complicate straightforward readings of such aspects. The notion of morality itself is bound up, often in complex ways, with psychological introspection and other aspects of 'understanding' rather than 'assessing'—to use Gill's terminology. More generally, this and other notions evoked by the concept of character (performance/observability, permanence, shapeability/external influence, habituation) have in a number of cases been seen to be not simply a given, but rather constructs themselves consciously designed and used by narrators and/or characters in larger rhetorical agendas.

As in the previous volumes, the totality of the chapters suggests that a profound analysis of narrative techniques (of characterization, in our case) is bound to question and challenge existing boundaries between genres. Although the relative importance of different techniques of characterization, for example, varies in different authors, it is difficult to see how these differences coincide with different genres—rather, indeed, the predominance of certain techniques seems to be directed differently (e.g. prominent metaphorical characterization is bound up with more elaborated literary refinement in general). There are also no clear-cut qualitative differences between genres as to how detailed the narrator's access to the minds of characters is or can be. Narrators of historiographical and biographical narrative, it is true, in some cases show doubt about the precise motifs underlying the behaviour of a given character, or present alternative versions existing alongside their own, tropes which serve to validate the truthfulness of their account, while also being suggestive of inscrutability or ambiguity. But the same strategies are also used by Pindar, Apollonius of Rhodes, and Heliodorus—with (as is clear from our contributors' careful assessment of each of these authors) varying aims and effects.

Obviously, this book is not (and cannot be) the last word on characterization in ancient Greek literature. Rather, it is the first systematic study of a set of questions that help to conceptualize and illuminate the complex concept of characterization from a narratological point of view in a broad and generically diverse corpus of ancient Greek narrative. As the chapters in this book have shown, characterization is not only a complex but also a dynamic phenomenon, involving different aspects continuously building on each other. Addressing in detail the questions of 'what' and 'how', we have argued, is an important first step to understand this complexity in each case. In this respect, we hope that the book will stimulate further research into characterization in narrative. It is not just that the model of techniques of characterization provided in this book can be used to analyse other narrative texts (Greek and other); it is also that it foregrounds a number of techniques (direct, metonymical and metaphorical) each of which can be studied and examined in its own right: a study of how exactly a technique like *ēthopoïia*, for example, is used in different genres and throughout different eras could considerably enhance our understanding of narrative practice and rhetorical texture in literary history. And of course, our approach can stimulate and enrich comparative studies of how individual characters are represented in different authors/genres/literatures. Books about, say, Themistocles in Herodotus and Thucydides exist, of course, but perhaps not about how exactly differences and similarities in techniques and strategies of characterization contribute to different or comparable portrayals. There is, in short, ample room for further work on this complex

topic. If this volume does anything to spur on such work, or adds anything to the growing understanding of Greek narrative that the *SAGN* series has as its aim, we will consider it a success.