

WORDS OF A WISE MAN. *GNOMAI* IN ACHILLES TATIUS

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Brief Summary:

This paper contributes to the study of characterization in Achilles Tattius by offering an analysis of the many *gnomai* or "wisdom sayings" in this ancient Greek novel. I argue that a close reading of the *gnomai* in Clitophon's narrator text and character text raises questions about Clitophon's reliability as a narrator.

Abstract Body:

The background of my paper consists of ancient rhetorical theory on *gnomai*. The construction of *gnomai* was one of the so-called *progymnasmata*, preliminary rhetorical school exercises in writing and composition. These *progymnasmata*, discussed by, among others, Aelius Theon, Ps.-Hermogenes, Aphthonius and Nicolaus, were an essential part of rhetorical education in antiquity from the first century BC onwards and undeniably influenced imperial literature. Scholarship on the Greek novel in general and on Achilles Tattius in particular has paid attention mainly (if not exclusively) to the illustrative, descriptive and prescriptive functions of wisdom sayings. Ancient rhetorical treatises, however, explicitly link the use of *gnomai* to the characterization of the person in whose speech they appear. Aristotle (*Rh.* 1395b.16), for example, points out that *gnomai* make speech "*êthikos*" because they reveal the speaker's moral disposition. In this paper, I examine how *gnomai* contribute to the characterization of Tattius' narrator and protagonist Clitophon.

Adopting the narratological distinction between author (Achilles Tattius) and narrator (Clitophon), some scholars have suggested that the author takes a critical and ironical stance towards his narrator/protagonist. In line with this approach, I offer some further steppingstones towards mapping Clitophon's characterization, both as a narrator and as a character. My analysis of Clitophon's *gnomai* draws upon some additional insights of narratology. I distinguish between the *gnomai* used in Clitophon's narrator text on the one hand (that is, his narration of the story to his narratee in Sidon), and the *gnomai* used in his character text on the other (that is, his direct speech as a character in his own story). A second distinction to be made is that between argument function (a *gnomê's* function for the characters in the story) and key function (a *gnomê's* function for the reader of the story). The representation of a narrator's or character's *êthos* through his/her use of *gnomai* is situated on both levels: key function deals with the information that *gnomai* in a narrator's/character's text offer the reader about his/her character (i.e. characterization). Argument function, on the other hand, deals with a narrator's/character's attempt to display his/her own character by using specific *gnomai* (i.e. self-portraiture).

I argue that, whereas Clitophon adopts *gnomai* to portray himself as an expert in erotic affairs before his narratee in Sidon, the *gnomai* used by the protagonist and other characters *within* the story suggest that, as a character in his own story, Clitophon does not assume the authoritative position that he claims to have in this field. Thus, a close reading of Clitophon's *gnomai* seriously questions his reliability as a narrator. This, in turn, enhances our knowledge about the characterization of one of the Greek novels' protagonists, an area which in itself is still largely untrodden territory in modern day scholarship on this genre.

Key Citations:

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