

THE ΣΩΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ OF PERSINNA AND THE ROMANTIC STRATEGY OF HELIODORUS' *AETHIOPICA*

MICHAEL J. ANDERSON

THE DISCOVERY OF a mysterious letter in Book 4 of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* reveals the heroine Charicleia to be the product of a bizarre experiment in optical fertilization.¹ Many years ago Persinna, the queen of Ethiopia, having glanced at a painting of Andromeda during intercourse with her husband Hydaspes, consequently conceived a child in the very image of the painted figure. Like the heroine of the painting, the child was born with white skin, a glaring anomaly among the black-skinned Ethiopians. Fearing accusations of adultery and grim consequences for herself and her daughter, the distressed mother had the infant secretly removed from the palace, accompanied by a wealth of jewels and a ribbon inscribed with the strange story of the child's conception and birth. Years later, now living in Delphi, where her foster-father serves as the priest of Apollo, Persinna's daughter discovers her true parentage when a visiting Egyptian priest named Calasiris translates the hieroglyphic inscription on the ribbon (4.8). Accompanied by the learned visitor and her young lover Theagenes, the heroine embarks on a journey back to her original home in Ethiopia.

However preposterous the tale of Charicleia's birth may sound to modern readers—and no doubt it surprised earlier readers too—Heliodorus nevertheless decided to lavish his artistic powers upon this fantastic invention and to fashion Persinna's letter into one of the most pivotal and provocative episodes of his novel.² First, the events recorded in the letter, although they occurred several years before the novel opens, exert an unparalleled influence on the movement of the plot: Heliodorus exploits the tale of Charicleia's birth as a tantalizing secret to be disclosed to the curious reader only

1. Greek passages are cited from the text of R. M. Rattenbury and T. W. Lumb, *Héliodore: Les Éthiopiennes (Théagène et Chariclée)*² (Paris, 1960).

2. We must assume a wide range of possible reactions to the anomalous birth among Heliodorus' ancient audience. While many probably found the idea humorous or ridiculous, there is indeed evidence to suggest that several ancient doctors maintained the belief that objects viewed by the mother at conception or during pregnancy could influence the appearance of the child. For an entertaining review of evidence for belief in the "Andromeda Effect" in classical antiquity and more recent ages, see M. D. Reeve, "Conceptions," *PCPS* n.s. 35 (1989): 81–112, and esp. 83 and 100 for speculation on the currency of this belief in the ancient world. Although Heliodorus suggests no irreverence in his treatment of the heroine's anomalous birth, I suspect that, if pressed, our sophisticated author would recognize a similarity between his inventive narrative of Charicleia's conception and Calasiris' ingenious theory of the evil eye (3.7–8). It is a most expedient and artfully crafted fiction. Even for those ancient readers who entertained belief in the "Andromeda Effect," it can hardly have been regarded as a routine occurrence, and the revelation of Charicleia's parentage must have provoked no small amount of wonder.

after a suspenseful investigation; and it is through the revelation of this precious secret in Book 4 that Heliodorus sets in motion the heroine's perilous journey back to Ethiopia. Second, as it houses an assortment of erotic topics while resolutely sponsoring chastity as the cardinal virtue among women, the tale makes an unusually potent contribution to the novel's exploration of ἔρως, a fundamental yet insufficiently explored aspect of Heliodorus' work.³ This essay then has two related aims. The first section measures the significance of this crucial chapter within the plot structure of the novel's first four books and demonstrates in particular how Heliodorus deftly funnels the reader's attention toward Persinna's climactic tale. Once the narrative centrality of the letter and its secret has been established, the second section of the essay explores the delicate erotic material that Heliodorus has chosen to exhibit in this most significant of chapters. In the calculated convergence of narrative artistry and erotic sensibility upon Persinna's letter—a harmonious marriage of form and substance—Heliodorus displays his genius not merely as a weaver of tales, but as a master of romance.⁴

I. NARRATIVE ENGINEERING

The opening pages of the *Aethiopica* issue to the reader a cunning invitation to join a search for buried facts, chief among which is the identity of the novel's heroine.⁵ The first chapter launches a carefully controlled inves-

3. I use the term "erotic" to mean merely "relating to ἔρως." Though generally inseparable from sexual desire, the term need carry no implication of sensuality or physical indulgence. Heliodorus politely sanitizes the term ἔρως itself, when, for example, he proclaims his hero Theagenes "weaker than ἔρως but stronger than pleasure" (ἔρωτος μὲν ἐλάττω ἡδονῆς δὲ κρείττω, 5.4.5).

4. Narrative ingenuity and the synthesis of eroticism and chastity are two of the principal peculiarities upon which the literary fame of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* rests, but I know of no work that recognizes the convergence of these two characteristics upon Persinna's letter. For discussion of the former, see esp. J. J. Winkler, "The Mendacity of Kalasiris and the Narrative Strategy of Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*," *YCS* 27 (1982): 93–158, to which the first section of my paper is deeply indebted; G. N. Sandy, *Heliodoros* (Boston, 1982), 21–74; and J. R. Morgan, "The *Aithiopika* of Heliodoros: Narrative as Riddle," in *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context*, ed. J. R. Morgan and R. Stoneman (London and New York, 1994), 97–113. The erotic decorum of the *Aethiopica* has attracted less interest; but see esp. J. R. Morgan, "The Story of Knemon in Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*," *JHS* 109 (1989): 99–113, who persuasively demonstrates how Heliodorus' narrative advances the chaste, reciprocal, and rewarding love of Charicleia and Theagenes in opposition to the adulterous, mercenary, and disastrous affairs witnessed in Knemon's tale. More generally, David Konstan's *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres* (Princeton, 1994) explores the treatment of heterosexual love in all the novels, noting especially that male and female protagonists are not divided according to sex into the classical roles of lover and beloved, but instead enjoy relationships of relative reciprocity.

In a stimulating book entitled *Foucault's Virginity: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1995), Simon Goldhill chastises Michel Foucault and his homiletic assessment of sexuality in late antiquity by uncovering in the novels of Longus and Achilles Tatius an erotic discourse neither so simple nor so chaste as Foucault suggests. Goldhill naturally finds little room for discussion of Heliodorus, although he does emphasize the irreconcilable differences separating the chastity tests that conclude the works of Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius (pp. 118–21); and in likening Heliodorus' sexual principles to those witnessed in the Christian martyr acts, he perceptively suggests that "[t]he very mainsprings of the plot are turned—with notable rhetorical care—to show this awe for chastity" (p. 120). In the following pages I hope to complement Goldhill's remarks, not by coupling Heliodorus with the philosophically promiscuous Achilles or the coyly lascivious Longus, but by observing, in contrast, how strictly Heliodorus regulates eroticism within his text, designing the magnificent narrative architecture of his novel not merely to dazzle and bewilder the reader, but also to center within his erotic tale the elevated ideal of chastity.

5. W. Bühler's sensitive analysis of the opening tableau, "Das Element des Visuellen in der Eingangsszene von Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*," *WS* n.s. 10 (1976): 177–85, focuses on the author's quasi-cinematographic technique and points out that the visual descriptions approach a climax as Heliodorus directs our vision for the first

tigation that will steer us through three books of adventures in Egypt and Greece, and deliver us eventually to our long-awaited destination with the reading of Persinna's ribbon in Book 4 and its revelation of Charicleia's parentage.⁶ To captivate his readers' attention at the outset and pique our curiosity for this quest, Heliodorus paints before our eyes a dazzling and puzzling picture: a ship lying at anchor near the Nile Delta, an array of corpses strewn among the remains of a banquet evidently interrupted by violence, and nearby an oddly clad and remarkably beautiful maiden attending a wounded youth of similarly remarkable appearance. A reader familiar with the conventions of the Greek romance might provisionally identify these two characters as the conventionally good-looking protagonists; but at this point we readers know with certainty little more than the group of newly arrived Egyptian bandits, who are arrested and perplexed by the curious sights, and particularly by the maiden, whom they at first comically mistake for a goddess.⁷ Rather than formally introducing us to the heroine and her lover, Heliodorus invites us instead to scratch our heads in confusion, and we must read much further before we eventually discover, through information imparted to us by internal narrators, who these characters are and what sequence of events has led them into this predicament.

Heliodorus' hermeneutic mode of narration is an innovative adaptation of the familiar *in medias res* structure, inaugurated in classical literature with Homer's *Odyssey*: an opening at a mid-point in the story supplemented eventually by an internal narrative that recounts events chronologically prior to that opening. Homer starts not with the fall of Troy and the beginning of his hero's voyage, but in the tenth year of Odysseus' adventures, with the hero stranded on Calypso's island and affairs in Ithaca reaching a crisis. By opening the curtain at this midpoint rather than at the earliest point in the adventure, the poet confronts the audience with two plot-related objectives instead of one: to follow a chronological progression of events from this opening to the end of the tale, and also somehow to discover the sequence of events that have led to this opening point. So during the course of Odysseus' return to Ithaca, Homer allows the hero himself to spend four books narrating earlier events to the Phaeacians and simultaneously to Homer's own listeners. A similar displacement of chronological events doubles the plot-objectives of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*—the opening places us in the middle of the protagonists' adventures, and Calasiris eventually brings us up-to-date on earlier events. The extreme bewilderment, however, to

time upon the hero and heroine. For further discussion of the many tantalizing narrative techniques employed in the opening scene, see esp. Winkler, "Mendacity," 96–106. Despite its familiarity and the abundance of discussion it has generated, I venture to review the opening once more because it first raises the questions that Persinna's letter answers.

6. We must, of course, read to the end of Book 5 for answers to the other questions posed by the opening scene—to discover the circumstances that led to the feast and the slaughter.

7. J. R. Morgan, "Reader and Audiences in the *Aithiopika* of Heliodoros," *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel*, vol. 4 (Groningen, 1991), 85–103, esp. 90–95, offers a sophisticated assessment of how the behavior of the bandits—Heliodorus' internal audience—reflects, conditions, and ultimately diverges from the response of Heliodorus' implied reader.

which Heliodorus' opening scene subjects his readers marks a radical departure from the objectives of his epic predecessor. While the latter announces the identity of his hero in the proem and presupposes his audience's basic familiarity with Odysseus, Ithaca, and the fall of Troy, Heliodorus instead exploits the anonymity of his characters to perplex his readers, and the proem-less opening *in medias res* launches us on a journey into the unknown. While Homer, by distorting the chronological sequence of events, ultimately succeeds in winding ten years of adventures into a compact narrative package, poisoning the audience from the start on the verge of Odysseus' homecoming and the tale's resolution, Heliodorus displaces his chronology to confuse the tale and disorient the reader. Instead of simply asking how the hero reached the island of Calypso and how the hero will reach Ithaca, Heliodorus' opening poses also the more fundamental questions: Where have these people come from, where are they going, and who are they?

The answers to these questions eventually emerge in the long tale that Calasiris narrates to Cnemon, Heliodorus' loose modernization of Odysseus' tale to the Phaeacians: the home of the seafarer Nausicles replacing the royal palace of Alcinous, and the eventual alliance between his daughter Nausicleia and his guest Cnemon faintly echoing the princess Nausicaa's infatuation with Odysseus.⁸ Not surprisingly, however, the same characteristics differentiating poet and novelist also color the tales told by their respective narrators. Although Odysseus has previously withheld his identity from his hosts, he immediately releases his secret at the beginning of the formal narrative of his adventures. Calasiris, on the other hand, while not withholding his own identity, nevertheless abides by the conventions of his manipulative author, keeping secrets concealed until well into his narration, and releasing essential information only bit by bit. Furthermore, unlike Odysseus' predominantly chronological narration, beginning with the fall of Troy and proceeding to the present, Calasiris' narrative shuffles both forward and backward in time, relating events as they occurred in Delphi, but interspersing within the Delphi narrative further regressions to previous events in Ethiopia. Calasiris presents the past as a mystery still to be investigated, relating events not in their order of occurrence, but as he himself discovered their occurrence.

As Calasiris' game of concealing and revealing slowly advances, as he begins to offer answers to the questions posed by the aporetic opening tableau, Charicleia's identity soon emerges as the single most important and cleverly guarded secret, and therefore as a major objective of the investigation presently undertaken by the curious reader. Theagenes' identity, though concealed at the start of the novel, already lies exposed by the end of Book 2. The hero, in fact, proudly parades his identity before us at the festival in Delphi, his direct descent from Neoptolemus having earned him the lead-

8. I refrain from discussing further the tactics with which Heliodorus postpones disclosure of the heroes' background prior to the introduction of Calasiris. For this subject see Winkler, "Mendacity," 103–12. At the camp of the βουκόλοι, for example, instead of allowing Charicleia and Theagenes to recount the events that led them to Egypt, Heliodorus entertains us first with Cnemon's account of his exile from Athens.

ing male role. The heroine, in contrast, remains rootless for two further books, until Heliodorus eventually honors her with an equally illustrious ancestry. This postponement by no means indicates the relative unimportance of Charicleia's parentage in comparison with that of Theagenes. On the contrary, Heliodorus raises the status of her origins by making the information a more elusive goal of his narrative search. If we were to unravel the novel and summarize the plot event by event in the chronological order of occurrence, Charicleia's strange conception and birth would belong at the very beginning; this is the momentous event that precedes and paves the way for all subsequent events. But to draw even greater attention to this influential episode, Heliodorus has chosen to enfold it at the center of his novel, cradled within the mysterious letter of Persinna, which is in turn entwined within Calasiris' experiences at Delphi, which the priest then narrates to Cnemon while the party of protagonists is midway between beginning and endpoint of their journey. This multiple folding of the plot obscures the heroine's identity behind a series of veils, to be shed one by one as the reader inspects page after page, advancing closer and closer to the secret. Just as Charicleia, deposited at the heart of a labyrinthine cave near the close of Book 1, waits for Theagenes to recover her from the darkness, so too the secret of the heroine's identity lies at the heart of a narrative maze, waiting for the reader to penetrate to the core. While this maze conceals no frustrating dead-ends, the corridors of the maze do occasionally take treacherous turns, and its uneven paths require delicate navigation, repeatedly alerting us to the importance of the secret lodged at its heart.

Within Calasiris' narrative there are two main stages in the investigation of Charicleia's origins, the first centered upon Calasiris' account of a long interview with Charicles, the priest of Pythian Apollo (2.29–33). Before beginning his tale, Calasiris has agreed to tell Cnemon all about Theagenes and Charicleia, specifically their ancestry and the adventures that have brought them to Egypt (ὁπόθεν εἰσὶν ἢ ἐκ τίνων φύντες, ἢ πῶς δεῦρο ἀφιγμένοι καὶ ποίαις κεχρημένοι τύχαις, 2.23.4). And after entertaining Cnemon with several preparatory details—his forced departure from Memphis, his auspicious arrival in Delphi, and his learned conversations with Greek philosophers about the flooding of the Nile—Calasiris drops the first discernible clue to the heroine's identity when he introduces the priest of Apollo and knowingly adds that his name was Charicles (2.29.1). To the reader hungry for information this morsel will suggest that priest and heroine are father and daughter (as with Chryses and Chryseis, Nausicles and Nausicleia); and the discerning reader might now suspect some link between Charicleia's Delphic origin and the remarkable costume she wears in the novel's opening scene, complete with bow and quiver. But just when the mystery seems to be unraveling before us, Calasiris leads us to a deeper mystery, reaching back even farther into the past. Charicles, we soon learn, is not Charicleia's biological father, as the similarity in their names might have led us to believe, but rather her foster-father. Instead of directly disclosing Charicleia's identity, Calasiris' narration of events in Delphi leads to a second

internal narrative (a story within a story within a story), in which Charicles shares with Calasiris his own limited knowledge of the child's true origins. Like a pirate's map, Heliodorus' narrative guides us on an expedition in which the first clue points not to the buried treasure, but to a second clue, which points to the third, and so on.

The ensuing narrative, in which Charicles recounts how he adopted Charicleia while journeying in Egypt, leads us several steps closer to the heroine's origins, but here again Calasiris leaves us tantalized with only a hint at the truth, once more whetting our appetite for the ultimate disclosure yet to come. According to Charicles, as reported by Calasiris, an Ethiopian ambassador to the Egyptian court (later to return to the stage as Sisimithres, leader of the gymnosophists) entrusted to him an unidentified girl, together with birth tokens: jewelry and a silk ribbon inscribed with mysterious characters forming a narrative about the child (διηγῆματι τῶν κατὰ τὴν παῖδα κατὰστικτος, 2.31.2). The ambassador, whose time that day was limited by his business at court, agreed to provide Charicles with precise details about the child on the following day (τὰ σαφέστερα δὲ καὶ ἀκριβέστερα τῶν κατὰ τὴν κόρην εἰς αὐρίον μαθήσῃ, 2.31.5), but political danger forced him to flee Egypt before delivering the promised information. The episode is a supreme example of Heliodorus' clever manipulation of his audience's curiosity: like Charicles when abandoned by the Ethiopian ambassador, the readers are left hanging, fully aware that the truth lies in the writing on the ribbon, but prevented from reading that truth now. A timely interruption from Calasiris' listener Cnemon, grieved at not hearing the further details of the child's background (ἀσχάλλω γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς οὐκ ἀκούσας, 2.32.3), at once both reflects Charicles' vexation at not learning the truth, and conditions the same response in Heliodorus' readers; and Calasiris' reassuring promise to Cnemon, "You will hear" (ἀκούσῃ), simultaneously reassures the readers that we too will eventually hear.

With the goal of our quest for information now substantiated into a physical object, codified in the writing on the mysterious ribbon, only one major task remains: to procure access to the document. And after several intervening chapters, in which Calasiris befriends the heroes, witnesses their passion for one another, and determines to further their relationship, he at last rewards our patience and proceeds to the climactic final step in the investigation. The hieroglyphic characters, while they prevent Charicles from reading the message and enhance the air of mystery surrounding the ribbon, are not likely to impede the learned and worldly Calasiris, a master of language who moves comfortably and confidently through Greece and Egypt. Extracting the ribbon from Charicles, however, demands delicate planning; for the foster-father, perhaps fearful of a revelation that might threaten his paternal influence over the heroine or interrupt his present plans for her marriage, does not of his own volition offer to share the band with Calasiris. So Heliodorus engineers a clever fraud, and allows Calasiris to exercise his powers of manipulation in finessing the information from his adversary. The reader waits anxiously while the cunning sage, by suggesting to Charicles that his daughter's present perceived illness may stem from a curse in-

scribed on the mysterious ribbon, swindles him into yielding the writing for inspection. While further inflating the value of the ribbon's contents in the eyes of the curious reader, this trick of procurement simultaneously prepares us for the significant parental transition that those precious contents will soon provoke. Calasiris' ruse is a bold move forward in a clandestine competition for paternity. While Charicles entertains the hope that Charicleia will marry his nephew and enlists Calasiris' magical powers to render her susceptible to the plan, Calasiris himself already demonstrates a more acute and sympathetic understanding of the heroine, accurately perceiving the debilitating spiritual struggle between her staunch idealization of virginity and her adolescent desire for the beautiful Theagenes. The passage of the band from Charicles to Calasiris, together with the information regarding her Ethiopian parentage, precipitates the passing of Charicleia herself from one foster-father to the next, from the somewhat naïve and self-interested Charicles to the worldly and sensitive Calasiris. Whereas the first foster-father transported her as a child from Egypt to Greece, the message on the band now permits the second foster-father to return the young adult to her true, biological parents in Ethiopia.

In revealing, finally, who Charicleia is and why, as daughter of the king and queen of Ethiopia, she was secretly sent away from home to be adopted eventually by the priest of Apollo at Delphi, the letter explains the fundamental motives behind the movement of the plot. We now know that both the maiden shipwrecked on the shore of North Africa and the adorable child adopted by Charicles in Egypt are in fact the princess of Ethiopia. And we understand at last the goal of the mysterious journey in which we find her and her companion engaged at the novel's start; for in specifying the heroine's origins, the letter simultaneously identifies the ultimate geographic objective toward which the tale is directed, the Ithaca of the *Aethiopica*. Dividing the episode into its component narrative layers, we see that while the letter itself narrates the circumstances that prompted Charicleia's journey from Ethiopia to Greece, Calasiris' account of the letter's discovery explains to Cnemon the motivation for Charicleia's complementary journey from Greece to Ethiopia. Persinna's letter thus illuminates the two major geographical movements encompassed by the novel. It is here that the remotest endpoints of the plot are unearthed: where the tale ultimately originated and where the tale will presumably end.⁹

9. After his brilliant discovery of Persinna's letter, readers may feel deceived when in 4.12 Calasiris tells Charicleia that he has visited Ethiopia and been secretly commissioned by Persinna to search for her long lost daughter. Rather than being guided blindly to discover Charicleia's true identity by an invisible divine hand, he in fact knew the story of Persinna's daughter and must have already suspected Charicleia's identity well before procuring and deciphering the ribbon. Had Calasiris disclosed his secret commission to the audience any earlier, however, he would have significantly diminished the suspense surrounding Persinna's letter and the surprise it finally affords to Cnemon and the reader. As mere confirmation, rather than information, the letter would have lost much of its importance in the search for Charicleia's origins. So the manipulative Calasiris deliberately postpones relating his interview with Persinna: "I omit my intervening peregrinations, my son; for they contribute nothing to your inquiry" (παράλειπω τὴν ἐν μέσῳ πλάνην, ὃ νεανία· συντελεῖ γὰρ οὐδὲν εἰς τὴν παρὰ σοῦ ζήτησιν, 2.26.1). Persinna's letter thereby remains the climax of Calasiris' detective story.

This distortion in Calasiris' narration was first discussed by V. Hefti, *Zur Erzählungstechnik in Heliodors Aethiopica* (Vienna, 1950). Although it has often been regarded as a flaw in the novel's plot structure,

II. ΕΡΩΣ AND ΣΩΦΡΟΣΥΝΗ

As the principal objective of so lengthy an investigation, the tale of Charicleia's birth holds a highly privileged place within Heliodorus' complex narrative architecture. Here is the final exchange in a protracted process of give and take between author and reader, the discovery of a missing parcel of information that has provoked the reader's curiosity since the opening scene. The cunning author and his cunning narrator Calasiris gently beguile the reader with hopes of discovering Charicleia's identity, slowly unwinding the tangle of clues that enclose the precious information, until Calasiris finally rewards the reader's patience by translating the mysterious letter of the Ethiopian queen. But for Heliodorus it was not enough simply to exploit Persinna's letter and its secret as a clever plot device. Within the complex narrative framework of the novel must lie also some palpable thematic substance. And thus, while exercising his mechanical virtuosity in positioning the letter, Heliodorus has also colored its message with distinctly erotic hues, assembling within it an assortment of observations on love, marriage, and his favorite virtue, σωφροσύνη.

The Greek novel, or as it is sometimes aptly labeled, the Greek romance, is at its core a literary representation of ἔρως.¹⁰ Each of the five surviving works around which this category is built features a youthful hero and heroine graced with beauty and smitten with desire. Each chronicles a series of dangers that separate the lovers and test their devotion, and each inevitably ends with the union or reunion of the happy couple and the promise of a lasting and blissful marriage.¹¹ While more austere critics sometimes condemn these works for what is perceived as naïve or juvenile sentimentality, in its better moments the novel eloquently dramatizes love's tender sway over the human soul, and probes and dissects the pleasures and pains of its love-sick characters with wit and charm. The shepherd and shepherdess whose adolescent games comprise Longus' pastoral romance, for example, far exceed the heroic couples of all the other novels in their rustic simplicity and sexual naïveté, and yet Longus composes a thoroughly sophisticated and self-consciously artistic lesson in love, charting the enigmatic collaboration of nature and nurture in the erotic education of these "simple" heroes.¹² A potential deterrent to many readers of this genre is its unmistakable concern with chastity (expressed by the Greek term σωφροσύνη), a tendency that, while sharply dividing the Greek novelists from their wanton imperial coun-

Winkler, "Mendacity," has argued that it can be understood as part of a deliberate narrative strategy consonant with Calasiris' duplicitous character.

10. Throughout this paper I will employ the semantically promiscuous term "romance" to refer generically to the five surviving Greek novels, and more specifically to connote their preoccupation with ἔρως.

11. Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus differ from their colleagues in marrying their heroes at the beginning of their novels. Both couples, however, are soon subjected to abduction and prolonged separation, and only at the close of the novels do the authors reunite the heroes under a permanent marital yoke.

12. E. Rohde, in his magisterial opus *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*³ (Leipzig, 1914), rebukes Longus' artificiality with notorious severity. But such distaste is now less common. For discussion of Longus' playfully self-conscious artistry, see in particular F. Zeitlin, "The Poetics of Eros: Nature, Art, and Imitation in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. D. M. Halperin, J. J. Winkler, and F. Zeitlin (Princeton, 1990), 417–64.

ins Petronius and Apuleius, also exposes them to charges of simplistic, bourgeois, tedious idealism.¹³ With more or less reverence, each of the novelists expects from his heroes a developed respect for chastity, and Heliodorus, in particular, thrusts the principle upon his readers with overwhelming vigor, not merely by maintaining the physical integrity of his protagonists throughout, but by parading their virginity publicly as a kind of sacramental purity at his novel's close. More than mere prudery or dogma, however, this consistent regard for propriety should be read as a complex component of the novelists' investigations into the nature of love and its function in society: chastity is not the antithesis or enemy of ἔρως, but rather a measure and order attached to its more physical manifestations, socially determined and self-imposed. By regulating the progress of love, chastity helps sustain the attention of the reader as the narrative progresses slowly toward its inevitable goal: the novel continually stimulates the reader's interest with images of desire, but postpones the description of physical consummation until the wedding of the lovers in the closing pages. And chastity need not always blind the reader with the light of incontrovertible moral truth; Chariton, for example, tests the limits of σωφροσύνη by forcing his heroine Callirhoe to weigh her fidelity to her husband Chaereas against the welfare of their child.

As the stars of the novels, the hero and heroine naturally dominate the discussion of ἔρως: it is their love for one another and the obstacles threatening it that determine the course of the drama. Well aware, however, that no banquet consists solely of a main course, the novelists regularly complement the love of their heroes with a series of erotic side-dishes, and generously season the whole with aromatic allusions to erotic myth and literature. Thus Longus, within his account of the growth of desire between Daphnis and Chloe, recounts the erotic myths of Phatta (1.27), Syrinx (2.34), and Echo (3.23). As the marriage of his heroes draws near at the close of Book 3, they enact their own rustic adaptation of a Sapphic epithalamium (3.33–34, Sappho frag. 105a).¹⁴ And although the love of Daphnis and Chloe for one another remains always intact, Longus threatens his heroine with the violent advances of the brutish Dorcon and Lampis, and exposes his hero to the deceitful seduction of the urbane Lycaenion and the drunken propositions of the homosexual parasite Gnathon. The novel is thus a polyphonic erotic text, discourse rather than simple monologue, and while elevating the chaste, heterosexual love of its hero and heroine, it does not ignore other, sometimes conflicting manifestations of ἔρως.¹⁵

Heliodorus too has rounded out his narrative with an array of subsidiary but significant erotic subplots and allusions. One of the longest inset tales is

13. On the concept of σωφροσύνη in Greek literature of late antiquity, see Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity*, 3–4.

14. See R. L. Hunter, *A Study of Daphnis and Chloe* (Cambridge, 1983), 59–83 on the “literary texture” of the novel, and 74 for the allusion to Sappho frag. 105a.

15. Although the varieties of ἔρως exhibited by the actors and displayed within the inset tales seem to fit neatly into a hierarchy of respectability, with the chaste love of hero and heroine situated distinctly at the top, we should perhaps treat the polyphony of erotic voices as “a negotiation of ideas” rather than as a simple ranking of forms, in accordance with Goldhill's emphasis on the complexities of erotic discourse in the texts of Longus and Achilles Tatius and other contemporaries (*Foucault's Virginity*, 144).

the story of Cnemon, in which the young hero falls victim to the perverse lust of his wicked stepmother and is forced into exile from his Athenian homeland: an easily discernible adaptation of the Hippolytus-Phaedra myth. As J. R. Morgan has argued, this tale engages with the primary plot in a debate about proper and improper sexual behavior; the subject matter in this and the main tale is similar—erotic attraction—but the attitudes of characters like Cnemon and the consequences of their behavior contrast sharply with the idealized romance of Charicleia and Theagenes. The story of Calasiris' departure from Memphis offers a much shorter but still poignant example (2.25). Already troubled by a prediction that his two sons will battle against one another—Eteocles and Polynices in Egyptian garb—Calasiris is further distressed by the irresistible charms of a traveling Greek courtesan, presently visiting Memphis and apparently bent on entangling the priest in a web of desire. The noble but vulnerable ascetic flees his metropolis and his country to reduce the risk of dishonoring himself and his priesthood. Ἐρως, or rather resistance to an erotic danger, triggers the journey that will eventually lead Calasiris to Delphi and into the lives of Charicleia and Theagenes. The politics of ἔρως have thus set adrift both Cnemon and Calasiris, our two principal interlocutors, and the same proves true for the infant Charicleia.¹⁶

Persinna's ribbon, dramatically brought to our attention by the author's game of concealment and discovery, stands as a monument in the erotic landscape of the *Aethiopica*. Though this episode is brief, the accumulation of finely interwoven and complementary erotic threads around this mysterious object makes an unusually concentrated and narratologically sophisticated contribution to the novel's exploration of desire, sex, marriage, and chastity. First of all, the letter functions as a catalyst in the courtship of Charicleia and Theagenes. One of Heliodorus' intentions in concealing the secret of Charicleia's origins until Book 4 is to generate suspense and sustain the reader's curiosity; another is to time the reading of the letter to coincide precisely with Charicleia's revelation of her love for Theagenes, to intertwine the discovery of identity with the awakening of desire. Calasiris procures the ribbon from Charicles while simultaneously eliciting from Charicleia acknowledgment of the passion that has now overwhelmed her. Calasiris and Heliodorus both, it seems, intend to use the story of Charicleia's origins in combination with her desire for Theagenes to launch the heroes on their romantic journey. For Charicleia, dreading Charicles' plan for her to wed his nephew, the revelation of her true identity offers valid grounds for escape from Delphi in the company of her beloved Theagenes. Her mother's letter thus appears to legitimize her flight, permitting elopement as part of her pious quest for her true home and family in Ethiopia. Daughter and lover appear to run away together with the mother's consent.

The letter does not, however, completely unleash Charicleia's passion, does not deliver her altogether from the constraints of propriety into an

16. Heliodorus is unusual among the novelists in his repeated use of erotic events to initiate plot movement. Compare also Charicles' journey to Egypt, motivated by his grief at the tragic death of his daughter on her wedding night and the consequent loss of his wife (2.29).

illicit liaison with her lover; for Persinna, as if having anticipated Charicleia's abduction from Delphi,¹⁷ instructs her daughter in no uncertain terms to "honor chastity" as "the sole mark of virtue in a woman" (τιμῶσα σωφροσύνην, ἥ δὴ μόνη γυναικείαν ἀρετὴν χαρακτηρίζει, 4.8.7).¹⁸ Like the magical παντάρβη jewel, which Persinna's next sentence instructs Charicleia to keep with her always, and which will miraculously preserve her life from the flames when Arsace condemns her to be burned alive (8.9), chastity too is a precious treasure, and must be guarded assiduously against sensual temptations.¹⁹ Only after their virginity has chaperoned them safely across the gridiron test in Book 10 will the desire of hero and heroine reach an appropriate physical fulfillment in marriage. Before that time, however ardently their souls may be devoted to one another, the novelist demands that their bodies remain pure. Persinna's letter thus offers a timely reminder of the physical limitation propriety sets on erotic activity. As Charicleia emerges from an erotic fever and passion overwhelms her previously unshaken veneration of virginity, as hero and heroine depart together from the sanctuaries of Delphi into a world not uniformly regulated in accordance with their virtuous Greek upbringing, Persinna's call for σωφροσύνη reminds Heliodorus' readers that this is no simple journey into hedonism. The letter balances liberation and constraint. The ribbon is not, as Calasiris slyly suggests to Charicles, inscribed with a curse of sterility: "Perhaps some enemy schemed at her birth that she should live a life without love and die without child" (ἐχθροῦ τινος αὐτὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀνέραστον ἀποβῶναι καὶ ἄγονον ἐπιβουλεύσαντος, 4.7.13), but it does confront Charicleia, as well as Heliodorus' readers, with a powerful appeal for physical temperance in erotic pursuits.²⁰

Persinna's command may seem unexpectedly blunt, only one of many wishes a concerned mother might convey to a distant daughter, but it is hardly out of place after her woeful tale of sexual politics, a tale which clearly hails σωφροσύνη as woman's cardinal virtue. The cause of Charicleia's separation from her homeland, the letter reveals, is the anomalous pigmentation of her skin: a white child born to black parents, the result of Persinna's ill-timed glance at a painting of the white-skinned Andromeda. It is not the abnormality per se that causes alarm, but rather the obvious and emphatically anticipated sexual implications of the abnormality: that the queen committed adultery. While readers might start at the genetic aberration, Persinna's concern focuses rather on the reactions that the child's color will surely provoke from others—accusations of adultery and condemnation to a shameful death as her punishment—and she therefore conceals the child to protect honor and life (ἐγνων οὖν ἐμαυτὴν τε ἀπαλλάξαι τοῦ μετ' αἰσχύνης

17. Calasiris stages the departure as an abduction to mislead Charicles and the Delphians (4.17), and Heliodorus thereby smuggles into his tale another erotic topos, without, however, subjecting his heroine to any real sexual violence.

18. I quote from J. R. Morgan's superb translation, printed in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1989), 433.

19. While the primary function of the παντάρβη jewel is to save Charicleia from Arsace's murderous designs, Heliodorus also incorporates this ornament into the novel's erotic decor by making it a courtship gift from Hydaspes to Persinna (4.8.7).

20. Morgan's translation, p. 432.

θανάτου, πεπεισμένη τὴν σὴν χροιάν μοιχείαν ἐμοὶ προσάψουσιν [οὐ γὰρ πιστεύσειν οὐδὲνα λεγούσῃ τὴν περιπέτειαν], 4.8.6). The tale of Charicleia's birth thus complements Persinna's explicit command to honor chastity with a dramatic illustration of the perils of infidelity. After losing her child and nearly losing her life because of the mere perception of adultery, Persinna naturally wishes for her daughter a life free from such dangers.

In exposing Persinna to the potential accusation of adultery, Heliodorus raises an issue explored in all of the Greek novels: women's fidelity and infidelity. Simpler examples in the *Aethiopica* are Demaenete and Arsace, stereotypical and caricatured unfaithful wives whose unbridled desire and wicked sexual advances lead them eventually to their deaths—both characters modeled in part on Euripides' Phaedra. More evocative of anxiety and concern from the reader of the romance, however, are faithful women unjustly denounced, women who have committed no act of infidelity, but are nevertheless threatened by allegations of betrayal: much ado about nothing. Achilles Tatius' Leucippe, for example, when her claims of virginity are challenged, must ultimately submit to a lie-detector test to prove her innocence. Significantly, the accusations come not from her lover Cleitophon, but from a frustrated rival, whose condemnation of Leucippe is ultimately proven false, while he himself is cuckolded by the novel's hero. Achilles justly makes the jealous male the loser in the game of sexual intrigue. Chariton also brilliantly manipulates the adultery motif: Chaereas' mistaken suspicion of his bride Callirhoe's betrayal separates hero and heroine near the beginning of the novel and launches their perilous travels. The lovers are, of course, eventually reunited, but only after Chariton has temporarily wedded his heroine to a second husband, thereby giving Chaereas a real object for jealousy and forcing him to swallow the bitter fruits of his past reckless behavior.²¹

While Charicleia herself rarely falls victim to suspicions of infidelity or promiscuity (her virginity is rarely if ever doubted, and the gridiron of Book 10 is more of a demonstration than a test), Heliodorus' plot, similar in this respect to Chariton's, relies heavily on the suspicions of adultery to which he subjects Persinna. It is the potential accusation of adultery that prompts her to remove the suspicious child from her home, leaving a void in the royal house of Ethiopia, the domestic and dynastic rift that Heliodorus' narrative will eventually fill by gradually transporting the lost princess back to her parents. The cause of Persinna's fear, the birth of a white child to black parents, will of course strike the critical reader as an unlikely occurrence if not a logical absurdity; but it is the very implausibility of the event, masterfully harnessed by Heliodorus, that gives Charicleia's birth its powerful effect on Persinna and on the plot. If the rational reader can hardly entertain

21. Male characters are not wholly excluded from this chastity game. The novelists exercise a notable degree of symmetry in their treatment of the sexes (see Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry*), and occasionally toy with the idea of male chastity. Theagenes, more than any other romantic hero, prides himself on his virginity (contrast Cleitophon's questionable "virginity," as discussed by Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity*, 94–98). But even within the *Aethiopica* virginity remains predominantly a feminine trait and σοφροσύνη a feminine ideal, "the sole mark of virtue in a woman." On at least one occasion Theagenes' desire for intercourse, indicated by the gender-specific verb ἀνδρίεσθαι ("to behave like a man," 5.4.5), calls for gentle restraint from Charicleia. (Compare the use of this verb in very similar circumstances at Achilles Tatius 4.1.2.)

the possibility of the birth of the white child to black parents, then how could Hydaspes and the Ethiopians believe it (οὐ γὰρ πιστεύσειν οὐδένα λεγούσῃ τὴν περιπέτειαν, 4.8.6)? With adultery as the only remotely reasonable explanation, Persinna has no choice but to send her child away, and so the implausibility of the event sets the plot in motion. Furthermore, while laying the groundwork for the novel's plot, Persinna's reactions to the feared accusations of adultery simultaneously offer a cogent explanation for the narrator's game of concealment and revelation. As a deliberate and carefully concealed act of suppression, intended to hide the truth from Hydaspes and the Ethiopians, the removal of Charicleia from her family motivates the hermeneutic structure of the text itself, in which both characters and readers must investigate to uncover the hidden secret. Not only Heliodorus, but Persinna too has worked to suppress the truth of Charicleia's origins, thereby making the novel a prototypical detective story rather than a mere hunt for unknown or forgotten facts. Without the false inference of adultery there would be no *Aethiopica*.

The shame of infidelity is compounded in Persinna's case by the fear of illegitimacy, as she and her husband Hydaspes want desperately to produce an heir to the Ethiopian throne. For ten years prior to Charicleia's conception the attempts of the king and queen to produce a child had proved unsuccessful; and after such a long period of despair the news of Persinna's pregnancy naturally gave rise to public festivals and sacrifices of thanksgiving, "for the king hoped for a successor to the line" (ὥς τοῦ βασιλέως διάδοχον τοῦ γένους ἐλπίζοντος, 4.8.5; cf. 4.12.3). Occasionally Heliodorus can joke about illegitimacy, as with Calasiris' facetious identification of Homer as the illegitimate son of Hermes and the wife of an Egyptian priest (3.14). The unequal union of god and mortal (ἀνομοίου μίξεως, 3.14.2) leaves on the body of the bastard son a sign of his illegitimacy, a tuft of hair on his thigh; and from that branded body part (ὁ μῆρος) derives the poet's name. But the king and queen of Ethiopia, determined to sustain their illustrious and semi-divine ancestry, cannot disregard the threat of illegitimacy so casually; and for Persinna, fear of even false accusations of illegitimacy is sufficient motivation to release her child to the uncertainty of fortune (ἐγνων οὖν . . . καὶ σοὶ τὸ ἐκ τῆς τύχης ἀμφίβολον χάρισασθαι, θανάτου προδήλου ἢ πάντως ὀνόματος νόθου προτιμότερον, 4.8.6). Calasiris' apparently idle Homeric joke, incidentally, at first sight intended merely to flatter his own priestly heritage and epic pretensions, eventually meets a clever inversion in Charicleia and the solemn disavowal of her suspected illegitimacy at the novel's conclusion. Homer's illegitimacy, according to Calasiris, first came to light at the time of his passage from youth to adulthood when he enrolled in the priesthood of his supposed father—his nakedness at the time of initiation presumably necessitating the exposure of his mark of illegitimacy. Recognizing the illegitimacy, his father drove him away, and hence arose the wandering bard of Greek legend. Charicleia, in contrast to the bard, is exiled from her homeland not because of actual illegitimacy, but only because of her mother's fear of the accusation of illegitimacy. While the physical stigma on Homer's thigh exposes his illegitimacy and bars him from his father's priesthood, a distinctive black circular mark

on Charicleia's upper left arm ultimately confirms her identity and secures her enrollment in the priesthood of her parents (10.15).²² Having previously raised questions regarding Charicleia's true identity, the novel concludes by emphatically affirming its heroine's legitimacy before her parents and the Ethiopian masses.²³

Persinna's letter, then, tells a tale of almost erotic intrigue: no adultery actually takes place, but the idea of adultery nevertheless exerts an overwhelming influence on the story, forcing a mother to abandon her child. What ultimately gives life to this tale, of course, is not the theme of adultery by itself but the modulation of this theme through the voice of Persinna; for while the erotic intrigue itself is only perceived, Persinna's shame and fear are real, as is her consequent distress at parting from her child. By disclosing the story of Charicleia's birth through a letter composed by Persinna, Heliodorus presents it in the most compelling and rhetorically effective way, putting it into the mouth of the woman who has herself experienced the events, the chaste wife who dreads the potential shame and the inevitable punishment, and the mother who already suffers the initial pain of bidding her daughter farewell.²⁴ Well aware of the importance of the persona through which information is revealed, Heliodorus has previously allowed the flirtatious prostitute Thisbe, though irretrievably distanced from the scene by death, to explain her presence in Egypt in her own words through a posthumous epistolary appeal to Cnemon, wherein her cunning flattery exposes her self-serving and mercenary character (2.10). Similarly in the case of Persinna, Heliodorus employs the medium of the letter to transplant into the here and now the words of a character distant in both space and time, thereby adding a voice of feminine virtue to the already complex polyphony of Calasiris' narrative. The tale would lose half its appeal if related through the voice of Calasiris alone, or if related by Sisimithres to Charicles at the time of Charicleia's adoption.

Persinna frames her statement rhetorically as a blend of personal lamentation and public apology. On the one hand, the letter is an intimate communication between a distressed mother and her lost daughter. The initial address to the "daughter whose name I cannot know, a daughter only until the pain of childbirth" (τῇ ὅ τι δὴ κληθρομένη καὶ μέχρι μόνων ὠδίνων θυγατρί, 4.8.1), draws immediate attention to Persinna's grief at the separation. In classifying her epistle a "written dirge" (ἔγγραφος θρῆνος, 4.8.1) and calling it her "last gift" to her daughter (δῶρον ἔσχατον, 4.8.1), Persinna likens herself to a mother mourning the death of a child. And she repeats the comparison at the letter's close, stating that, should the child die, this rib-

22. Winkler, "Mendacity," 102–3 notes in passing the similarity of the two stories but does not mention the important distinctions between them.

23. Longus similarly appropriates the New Comedy convention of birth tokens to establish the nobility and marriageability of his rustic heroes, as discussed by Zeitlin, "Poetics," 427–28.

24. Heliodorus perhaps accentuates the feminine voice also through the ribbon's material, fine silk cloth. But the occasionally encountered inference that the letter is embroidered (Sandy, *Heliodoros*, 10; Winkler, "Mendacity," 120, a witty remark on the queen's "fine needlepoint"; Morgan's translation, p. 404, as a translator's liberty) finds no support in the language of the text. The verbs (κατα-)στιζειν (4.5.1, 4.8.1; cf. κατάστικτος at 2.31.2) and χαράττειν (4.8.1, 4.8.6), according to LSJ, denote writing or stamping rather than stitching.

bon will function at the grave in place of her tears (ἐπιτύμβια καὶ μητρὸς ἐπικήδεια δάκρυα, 4.8.8).²⁵ At the same time, Persinna feels compelled to acquit herself from any allegations of sexual transgression, and therefore addresses herself also to a much larger audience, to whoever might judge her actions critically: "I defend myself before you, daughter . . . and before whoever takes you in . . . and before the very whole of humanity, by revealing the reason for the exposure" (ἀπολογοῦμαι πρὸς τε σέ ποτε, θύγατερ, . . . πρὸς τε τὸν ἀναιρησόμενον . . . πρὸς τε αὐτὸν ὅλον τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίον, ἀνακαλύπτουσα τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς ἐκθέσεως, 4.8.2). To the genre of lament is added the legal apology, and Persinna offers her testimony specifically as proof that she is innocent of any wrongdoing (ὥς μὲν οὐδὲν ἀδικοῦσα, 4.8.2). Persinna has thus adapted her letter to both of the audiences that will eventually hear it: Charicleia, who learns of its contents only shortly after Calasiris procures it from Charicles, and the Ethiopian assembly, to whom the band is presented as evidence of Charicleia's parentage during the recognition scene in Book 10 (10.12–13).

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing Heliodorus in shaping Persinna's voice lay in formulating the substance of her narrative, in presenting the details that establish her innocence. Compelled to explain to her readers just how two black-skinned parents could give birth to a white-skinned child, the prudent wife of Hydaspes finds herself in the embarrassing and precarious situation of having to address in a semi-public medium the very private activity of sexual intercourse—a skill that the polite society of Heliodorus' novel would rarely encourage its ladies to exercise. While Persinna defends herself from allegations of adultery, her intimate testimony will nevertheless contribute a distinctly erotic flavor to the letter, potentially antipathetic to the manners expected of a woman of her dignified social rank.²⁶ A less prudent author like Achilles Tatius could conceivably exploit the potential in such a situation for lascivious humor, but Heliodorus treats the letter instead as an exercise in the maintenance of moral decorum. Persinna discloses the details of her daughter's conception with extreme caution, demonstrating a sense of verbal σωφροσύνη compatible with her chaste behavior. Having framed her revelation in terms of lament and legal defense, she now apologetically prefaces her account of the afternoon's sexual activity with news of a divine injunction: the king swore (ἐπομνύμενος, 4.8.4) that a dream commanded him to have intercourse with his wife at this precise moment. While we observe here the hand of the divine at work on the plot, we hear also within the brief reference to the oath the queen's subtle disavowal before her readers of impropriety, and perhaps even her demure hesitation to accept her husband's unorthodox request. Exaggerated, the message might read: "Lest any of you imagine that we would act thus under normal circumstances, know that he *swore* to me that

25. Further evidence for her grief is offered in the form of blood and tears, with which she claims to have inscribed the band (ἀπὸ δακρύων τῶν ἐπὶ σοὶ καὶ αἵματος ἐχάρατον, 4.8.6).

26. At 4.10.4, for example, both Charicleia and Calasiris acknowledge that it is improper for a woman to communicate desire; and in Book 10 Heliodorus again cultivates Charicleia's reluctance to announce her relationship with Theagenes, although his very life is at stake. Alciphron's *Letters of the Courtesans* and related works, of course, display a standard of behavior associated with women of a distinctly different social class.

a dream commanded it.”²⁷ A mere physical urge of Hydaspes or Persinna would not excuse this daytime activity, but divine commands must not be disobeyed. Desire is not entirely suppressed from the queen’s report, but it is the long unfulfilled yearning for offspring that motivates the king and queen, rather than desire for the momentary gratification derived from physical pleasure. Instead of “We had intercourse,” Persinna couches the activity within the less discomfiting phrase, “We wanted to produce a child.” And although silent over the pleasures of the act itself, Persinna recognizes immediately that she is pregnant (4.8.4), suggesting that conception, and not a temporary physical pleasure, is the goal of the act described. Both the act and Persinna’s account of it are impeccable.²⁸

Persinna’s tale is thus a brilliant exercise in σωφροσύνη, at once a collage of erotic themes and a chaste narration of chaste activity. The appearance of adultery is merely an appearance, and the sexual encounter of Persinna and Hydaspes is divinely sanctioned for the purpose of begetting children. Persinna molds her tale, moreover, into a didactic epistle, intended both to record and to inspire σωφροσύνη. After presenting herself as a model of σωφροσύνη, and offering her experience as a tragic warning, Persinna crowns her message to her daughter with an explicit instruction to honor chastity. Although Calasiris and Cnemon elsewhere interrupt the narrative with witty conversation, neither dares to provoke laughter during the reading of this somber tale. The humorous Cnemon, after all, though he demonstrates far less reserve in his own tale of erotic intrigue, will naturally sympathize with Persinna’s dilemma, having himself experienced at first hand the potential dangers accompanying false allegations of adultery.

Only one distinctly erotic component of Persinna’s tale remains to be explored: the painting of Andromeda’s rescue, the work of art that initiates Persinna’s hazardous brush with erotic scandal. Although Persinna’s description of the painting is remarkably brief—the circumstances under which Persinna writes allow no formal ecphrasis or prolonged discussion—this artwork stands apart from the many others featured in the Greek novels by virtue of its unique involvement in the plot. Longus begins his pastoral romance with a painted representation of the events he is about to set down in words, and Achilles Tatius launches his novel in a picture gallery with an elaborate ecphrasis of Europa’s abduction; but these artworks are designed primarily as programmatic introductions, establishing an amorous or ominous tone for the tale which follows, but exercising no direct influence on the story. Whereas Longus and Achilles Tatius employ paintings to initiate the process of story-telling, Heliodorus employs the painting of Andromeda to initiate the plot itself. The painted figure of the naked Andromeda, the object of Persinna’s ill-timed and highly consequential glance, bears ultimate responsibility for the irregular pigmentation of the child, forcing Persinna to

27. Theagenes similarly resorts to an oath when, while confessing to Calasiris his passion for Charicleia, he nevertheless insists that he has never shared intimacy with a woman (πολλὰ διοινόμενος, 3.17.4).

28. For a survey of regulatory attitudes toward sex among late pagan authors, see P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Princeton, 1988), 5–32. On pp. 155–56 Brown notes how readily the Greek novels, especially the chaste *Aethiopica*, lent themselves as models to early Christian Apocryphal Acts.

relinquish her daughter and thereby laying the foundations for the novel's plot. While the painting exerts its influence most forcefully in the remote past, it again proves useful in Book 10, when to verify Persinna's story and Charicleia's legitimacy, the Ethiopians bring the painting onto the stage and compare their captive with the image of her mythological ancestress. Having first stimulated the child's separation from her parents, the painting also serves as a key piece of evidence in her final recognition.

The process of optical influence whereby Persinna conceives her child in the image of Andromeda seems to have depended on her seeing the painted figure naked from head to toe. She notes that the painting featured Andromeda πανταχόθεν . . . γυμνήν (4.8.5), literally "naked from all sides," or as Morgan translates, "stark naked."²⁹ Precisely how a two-dimensional representation could engender a three-dimensional human form, is a question that the delicate qualification, πανταχόθεν, will not adequately answer. More important, however, than the ultimate implausibility of this fantastic physiological effect is Heliodorus' demonstration of just how deeply beauty can impress the eyes and soul of the observer. The optical theory proposed by Calasiris in his discourse on the evil-eye (3.7–8), though only semi-serious, calls attention to the powerful influence of vision, active and passive, over the human soul. Indeed the intense desire shared by Theagenes and Charicleia arises initially through visual contact. When they first meet during the sacrifice performed in honor of Neoptolemus, they gaze longingly at one another, unwilling to avert their eyes, and each soul seems to recognize its long lost other half (3.5). Interpreted in line with Heliodorus' philosophy of vision and ἔρως, Persinna's experience may be regarded as an instance of Platonic conception in the presence of beauty.

The powerful effects of this painting on both Persinna and the reader derive not only from the simple fact that Andromeda is depicted completely naked, but also from Heliodorus' subtle evocation of the themes of love and marriage traditionally associated with the Andromeda myth, themes especially prominent in literary ecphrases of the myth's visual representations. Lucian in *On the Hall* (chap. 22), for example, describes a painting that, though focused on the battle between Perseus and the sea-monster, nevertheless delicately explores the erotic relationship between the mythological hero and heroine. While clearly fascinated with the progressing petrification of the horrific monster, Lucian's exegete does not overlook the painter's more intimate attention to the emotions of the human protagonists: to the shame and fear of the maiden (αἰδῶ παρθένου καὶ φόβον) and the specifically erotic impetus propelling the young hero to action (νεανίου τόλμαν ἐρωτικὴν). And in observing the defeat of the monster, he anticipates already the marriage to follow (μετὰ μικρὸν γαμήσει καὶ ἄπεισιν αὐτὴν ἄγων). Philostratus, recording an (imaginary) depiction of the immediate aftermath of the monster's defeat, pays even greater respect to the role of love in Perseus' achievement, including the god of love as the hero's patron divinity (*Imag.* 1.29). While Perseus recovers from his exertion, reclining in a luxurious meadow and gazing steadily at Andromeda, the winged Ἔρως

29. Morgan's translation, p. 433.

himself releases the maiden from her bonds. Ἔρως personified thus is rarely so prominent in actual visual representations of the rescue, but the power of the paintings does often depend heavily on the erotic energy generated between hero and heroine, particularly in a series of works featuring the couple's first encounter after the battle.³⁰ Andromeda's partial and occasionally complete nudity reveals her beauty to her admiring rescuer, and one of the pair sometimes gazes cautiously at the other, as hero guides heroine gently down from the rock where she was chained.

It is this moment, or seconds later, that Heliodorus has chosen to capture in his fictive Ethiopian painting, Perseus having just assisted the naked Andromeda down from the rocks (ἄρτι . . . αὐτὴν ἀπὸ τῶν πετρῶν ὁ Περσεύς κατήγευ, 4.8.5). Despite the absence of further details from the description, an informed reader would easily recognize this popular image and appreciate its erotic charm. Even readers unfamiliar with the standard iconography will sense the amorous qualities of the painting when Persinna refers to the story as "the romance of Andromeda and Perseus" (τοῖς Ἀνδρομέδας τε καὶ Περσέως ἔρωσιν, 4.8.3).³¹ And the location of the painting in the bed-chambers of the palace further underlines the myth's associations with ἔρως and marriage. The eroticism of the painting is, however, discreetly regulated in accordance with Heliodorus' consistently chaste principles of decorum. The absence of detailed ecphrasis for the painting, motivated in part by the circumstances under which the image is introduced, neatly avoids any excessive indulgence in sensual details, protecting the erotic image from charges of pornography. Heliodorus seems subtly to challenge the visual artist on moral rather than mimetic grounds, not striving to surpass the painted image with a verbal imitation, but choosing instead to reduce representation of the naked body to a minimum. Even when exhibiting this same painting before the assembled Ethiopians in Book 10, Heliodorus withholds vivid description from his readers, thereby shielding his heroine from unnecessary embarrassment (10.15). While at least one doctor of antiquity prescribed the reading of novels as an antidote for impotence, Heliodorus would hardly have sanctioned this practice for his *Aethiopica*.³² Once again tempering ἔρως with σωφροσύνη, he invites us to wonder, and not to gawk at the naked heroine.³³

30. Images of Andromeda's sacrifice and rescue have been conveniently catalogued by K. Schauenburg, "Andromeda I," *LIMC*, vol. 1 (Zurich and Munich, 1981), 774–90; for Perseus releasing Andromeda from the rock see pp. 781–82, nos. 67–89.

31. With the word "romance" I follow Morgan's translation, p. 432.

32. Theodorus Priscianus, *Res Medicae* 2.11, fully cited by Rohde, *Roman*, 242, footnote, and frequently referenced by subsequent scholars. Interestingly, Rohde cites the passage not in a context of eroticism or during a discussion of the novel's reception in antiquity, but as part of an argument establishing the nationality of the novelist Iamblichus. An amusing irony arises from Theodorus' recommendation if, as E. Bowie suggests ("The Readership of Greek Novels in the Ancient World," in *The Search for the Ancient Novel*, ed. J. Tatum [Baltimore, 1994], 447), the mysterious Herodian cited by the doctor as an author of erotic fiction is in fact Heliodorus, the victim of textual corruption. My thanks to the anonymous referee who supplied the preceding observation.

33. Heliodorus' most provocative description of Charicleia shows her beautifully adorned during the festival at Delphi (3.4). Although the bodice of her garment attracts particularly detailed commentary, she remains fully clothed; and the prime reason for her participation in the pageant is, of course, her ranking membership in the Delphic cult of Artemis.

In addition to setting the novel's plot in motion and enhancing the erotic scenery of the romance, the Andromeda painting performs one other major literary function: while influential in the context of Charicleia's birth, the painted myth also parallels and anticipates her later adventures with Theagenes. Achilles Tatius had previously tested the analogical potential of this Ethiopian myth in the third book of his novel *Leucippe and Cleitophon*, where a painting of the maiden's near sacrifice serves as a proleptic parallel to his own heroine's near sacrifice at the hands of her Ethiopian captors.³⁴ Heliodorus' analogical employment of his Andromeda painting is a degree less sophisticated, less riddling, than that of Achilles Tatius, but he too makes use of the painting to parallel and foreshadow the experiences of his protagonists. Just as the painted mythological heroine provides a physical model for Charicleia, so too the relationship between the mythological heroes reflects the relationship between the romantic heroes, Ethiopian princess and Greek prince; and the prominence of Andromeda in Persinna's account of the painting accords well with the dominance of Charicleia's character in Heliodorus' narrative. The analogy is not dramatically comprehensive—although he does wrestle a frenzied bull to the ground, Theagenes is never called upon to rescue Charicleia from a sea-monster—but the basic similarity is clear: both pairs of heroes pass through trials and tribulations before securing mutual happiness in marriage. And like Perseus, Theagenes is instrumental in returning the princess to her parents, thereby proving himself a worthy suitor. Moreover, the sacrifice from which Andromeda narrowly escapes seems to have suggested to Heliodorus the subject matter of his protagonists' final trial in Book 10: their hopes for marriage are nearly derailed when they are designated sacrificial victims of Helios and Selene. Like the painting of Andromeda and Perseus, the novel too designates the marriage of its protagonists as its final goal and inflates the importance of that goal by threatening it with a ghastly human sacrifice: ultimately, it is not to be immolated as gifts for the gods that the protagonists' purity has prepared them, but to be joined to one another as husband and wife. The painting thus embraces both beginning and endpoint of Heliodorus' tale, initiating the plot dramatically while simultaneously pointing analogically to the marriage with which the novel concludes.

* * * * *

To read Persinna's ribbon merely as the magic hat out of which miraculously appears the secret of Charicleia's origins is to ally oneself with Naucles as Calasiris conjures forth the amethyst from the fire (5.13–15). The

34. I summarize below the intriguing arguments of S. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Princeton, 1989), 55–62. By pairing the image of the shackled Andromeda awaiting the sea-monster with a painting of the chained Prometheus tormented by Zeus' eagle (3.8), both works situated at the temple of a prophetic god (3.6), Achilles predicts visually the (sham) sacrifice and disembowelment that the heroine herself will suffer shortly hereafter. The narrating hero now gazes upon painted images evoking the theme of sacrifice, and will soon gaze upon a corporeal manifestation of this visual prophecy, the sacrifice of his beloved (3.15). But as he and the temporarily misled reader soon discover, both sights belong to the realm of art, the first graphic and the second dramatic; and like the mythological heroine, Leucippe has been rescued from the intended sacrifice.

merchant marvels at the hocus-pocus and the value of the stone, rather than the beauty of the engraved image and the delicate interplay of nature and art that breathes life into the surface of the gem. Persinna's ribbon is certainly one of Heliodorus' most spectacular narrative tricks, but it is also an intimate and provocative erotic collage, a delicate synthesis of eroticism and σωφοσύνη. Within it lies the novel's initial act of ἔρως—the conception of the heroine, the very start of the tale and the foundation from which all subsequent action arises. And behind this momentous event lies an erotic painting which, in proclaiming love the inspiration for heroic accomplishments and marriage the ultimate reward, anticipates the eventual consummation of desire at the novel's close. At the same time the letter projects also a darker image of ἔρως in the accusations of adultery and illegitimacy that disclosure of the oddly pigmented child would surely provoke. As with Cnemon's exile from Athens and Calasiris' flight out of Egypt, the dangers of illicit ἔρως here too drive the action of the novel, as shame and fear force Persinna to surrender her daughter to an unknown future. The letter is thus a supreme demonstration of Heliodorus' romantic technique. It is not merely by chaperoning a pair of beautiful and virtuous lovers through a series of perilous adventures that Heliodorus earns fame as an author of romance, but by sculpting ἔρως into a fundamental functional and aesthetic motif, by imbuing his work with erotic charm and intrigue, while polishing and softening the novel's erotic texture with a generous application of σωφοσύνη.³⁵

Yale University

35. I gratefully acknowledge the helpful criticism of the Editor and referees for *CP*, and of an audience at the University of Minnesota. Many thanks are due also to E. L. Bowie, who supervised my earliest studies of the Greek novels and first fostered my interest in Heliodorus.