

A SENSE OF THE ENDING: THE CONCLUSION OF HELIODOROS' *AITHIOPIKA*

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1. ENDINGS AND MEANINGS

Modern criticism stresses the importance of endings as producers of meaning in narrative.¹ Just as we interpret our lives in retrospect, unable to see sense in the contingent experiences of daily existence until we can review what went before in the light of what happened in the end and so perceive a pattern of significant relations; even so the meaning of a story flows back from its ending, which constitutes a goal towards which the narrative can be seen to have been directed. Because an omniscient narrator in the past tense by definition knows how the story ends, his narrative discourse is itself an act of implicit structuration towards the ending, retrospective for himself, prospective for the reader, who is led back along an already mapped path through the maze of contingencies and unrealized possibilities and follows eagerly in his desire to achieve the meaning which only the end can bring.

But the "meaning" of a story is not an external encoded into it. For most readers novels exist "simply to tell a story,"² but even for them endings are of supreme importance. We go on reading or listening to a story because we are curious to know what happens next, and that curiosity is only satisfied when we reach the end and there is nothing left to happen. Readers are driven onwards by a desire for meaning which need be nothing more than complete knowledge of the story. But novels are read for pleasure: we *enjoy* the emotions of suspense, excitement, frustration, puzzlement, even fear which a well-told story induces. So the ending we are so eager to reach is the extinction as well as the goal of our pleasure. A skilled storyteller therefore will adopt various strategies to defer the ending and so prolong the delicious anticipation of it, perhaps by introducing material that forms no part of the dénouement, perhaps by unexpectedly complicating the plot. Such strategies of prolongation and postponement are much in evidence towards the end of the longest and most sophisticated of the ancient Greek novels, the *Aithiopika* of Heliodoros.

¹ See, e.g., D. A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents* (Princeton 1981) and the references given p. xii n. 3 to works by Genette, Tomashevsky, Kermode, Barthes, Kristeva and Grivel; M. Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel* (Princeton 1981) 3ff.; P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (Oxford 1984) esp. 90ff., with the quotation of the modern *locus classicus* from Sartre's *La Nausée* on p. 93. F. Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford 1967) was a seminal and still important treatment of the indispensability of an ending to the creation of meaning, in both literature and life.

² Cf. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Abinger edn., London 1974) 17ff.

Although it is now clear that Greek fiction was more diverse at the margins than once believed,³ the five complete extant novels form a solid generic core. A rigid element of the generic conventions they embody seems to be the "happy ending." The experienced reader of such novels would have brought to them firm expectations of how they should end: he would, in a sense, "know" the ending before he read it. Where does that leave the curiosity that motivates his reading? Greek romances of course are not alone in having generically determined endings: vampires are disintegrated by crucifix or daylight, handsome young doctors requite the love of a nurse. The paradox is that those types of novel more concerned with pure storytelling than with the articulation of ideas, where one might have expected the cultivation of unpredictability for its own sake, tend to be precisely those that fall most comfortably into the generic categories.

Generic rules do not govern every detail of a work. There is room for some variation, and hence curiosity, in the way in which ideal forms are to be individuated in any particular work. More important, genre rules are not the subject of legislation: although they create a strong presumption as to what is the "right" ending of a novel, and at the same time project into the reader a desire for its attainment, they can never eliminate a residual fear that something will short-circuit in the plot and precipitate the wrong ending at the wrong time. The reader has to stay with the narrative to satisfy himself that he is not reading the one maverick text that breaks the rules by having its hero and heroine die on the last page. At the same time, there is a distinction to be made between the reader as a real person in the real world and the reader as he engages with the text. In the former guise he is aware that stories of certain kinds end in certain ways; in the latter he is prepared to suspend that knowledge and read each novel as something fresh and unique, surrendering himself to its thrills and fears.

So the reader both knows and does not know the ending, and desires both to know and not to know it: the former to satisfy his curiosity and ease the discomfort of suspense, the latter to prolong his pleasure. Because the reader can be counted upon to bring a certain set of expectations to the text, these can be encouraged or threatened. A skilful storyteller like Heliodoros can control his audience's disposition to foreknow the ending, not only by conforming to genre rules, but also by including elaborate but ambiguous systems of prediction and deploying signs that point (or seem to point) the story alternately towards the "right" or "wrong" ending. The reader's responses and expectations are thus part of the text, and the persona of the implied reader is constituted by the sum total of the signs that the text contains. Description and analysis of these predictive systems and directive signs form the major part of the treatment of the *Aithiopika* presented here.

By focusing on the reader's responses, I shall inevitably be considering the *Aithiopika* primarily as a piece of narrative engineering. It may be more than that: it has been argued of Greek romances in general that they are allegorized representations of the beliefs and rituals of mystery religions;⁴ and of Heliodoros

³ Papyri have presented us with distinctly sleazy variants on the ideal romance, such as the "Iolaos Romance" (P.Oxy.3010) and the *Phoinikika* of Lollianus (P.Colon.inv.3328, P.Oxy.1368). These are reminiscent of Petronius' *Satyricon* in tone, but in none of these cases do we know whether the ending of the story was in any sense subversive.

⁴ K. Kerényi, *Die griechisch-orientalische Romanliteratur in religions-geschichtlicher Beleuchtung* (Tübingen 1927); R. Merkelbach, *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike* (Munich and Berlin 1962) esp. 234-98 on Heliodoros.

in particular that he is in some degree a literary theorist, his romance a self-referential parable of the business of reading and making sense of a novel.⁵ My approach does not in itself invalidate these readings, though it will insist on the primacy of storytelling in the economy of the novel as a whole.

2. THE ENDING OF THE *AITHIOPIKA*

Charikleia and Theagenes are in love. Charikleia used to live as the daughter of Charikles, the Delphic priest of Apollo, although in fact she had been entrusted to his care at the age of seven by an Ethiopian gymnosophist, who had rescued her after she was exposed as a baby along with certain recognition tokens. Although he knew her true identity, he did not have time to communicate it to Charikles. It is discovered in the plot by Kalasiris, an Egyptian priest, who is able to read the narrative embroidered by her mother on a silken *ταϊνία*, one of her recognition tokens, which reveals that Charikleia is the child of the Ethiopian king Hydaspes and his wife, Persinna. It then transpires that Kalasiris has been commissioned by Persinna to track down her lost child. Aided by Kalasiris, the lovers elope from Delphi and head towards the land of Charikleia's birth. In Egypt they fall into the hands first of bandits, then of Arsake, the lustful wife of the Persian satrap, Oroondates. Refusing to comply with Arsake's sexual demands, Theagenes is imprisoned, as is Charikleia, wrongly accused of poisoning Arsake's nurse. The couple are released when Oroondates, away on campaign against the invading Ethiopians, learns what is going on in his palace and sends for them. On their way to Oroondates they hear that Arsake has committed suicide, and allow themselves to be captured by an Ethiopian reconnaissance party (8.16.7).

By this stage the reader is in possession of several signs predicting the way the novel will end. Most important by far is the oracle delivered by the Delphic priestess just before Theagenes and Charikleia see one another for the first time:

τὴν χάριν ἐν πρώτοις αὐτὰρ κλέος ὕστατ' ἔχουσιν
φράζεσθ', ὦ Δελφοί, τὸν τε θεῶς γενέτην
οἱ νῆον προλιπόντες ἔμὸν καὶ κῶμα τεμόντες
ἵξοντ' ἡελίου πρὸς χθόνα κυανέην,
τῇ περ ἄριστοβίων μέγ' ἀέθλιον ἐξάψονται
λευκὸν ἐπὶ κροτάφων στέμμα μελαινομένων. (2.35.5)

The meaning of this emerges in stages. Kalasiris recognizes the allusion to the names of Theagenes and Charikleia in the first two lines (3.5.6). The third line is elucidated by Kalasiris' dream (3.11.5), in which he receives instructions from Apollo and Artemis to take the lovers to Egypt, although their ultimate destination is not revealed. The reader may already have guessed the identity of the "black land of the sun" from his knowledge that Charikleia had come to Charikles via an Ethiopian ambassador, but certainty is attained when Kalasiris reads the *ταϊνία*, expressly to discover Charikleia's origin which he suspects is her destination; this not only identifies her parents as the king and queen of Ethiopia, but also stresses the blackness of the inhabitants of Ethiopia and singles out the sun as the founder of the Ethiopian royal family (4.8.2–3). When Kalasiris explains her true identity to Charikleia, he holds out to her the prospect of return to the land of her birth, where she may marry Theagenes and

⁵ J. J. Winkler, "The mendacity of Kalasiris and the narrative strategy of Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*," *YCS* 27 (1982) 93–158.

reign with her beloved at her side (4.13.2); it seems natural to read this as an answer to the riddle of the last two lines of the oracle. The fifth line suggests that the chastity which forms so notable a part of the central relationship is a guarantee of a happy ending, so reinforcing the reader's preconceptions about romantic morality. Other references, which precede the oracle in the text although they are later chronologically, have already impressed on the reader that marriage is the natural end of the lovers' relationship:⁶ these allusions are now seen to originate in the suggestions of Kalasiris at 4.10.6 and the oath of chastity till marriage which Charikleia makes Theagenes swear at 4.18.5. The commission that Kalasiris has received from Persinna to locate her long-lost daughter and return her to the land of her birth (4.12.1ff.) looks forward naturally to its own fulfilment; one way to deal with its apparently anomalous position in Kalasiris' motivations⁷ is to read it as nothing more sophisticated than a sign to control the reader's proleptic construal of the ending.

Already we have a fairly explicit armature of expectation for the implied reader: the couple will reach Ethiopia; their chastity will be rewarded with marriage and lifelong happiness, and royal status of some sort. One other signpost should be noted. When the Ethiopian gymnosophist entrusted Charikleia to Charikles, he offered wonderful jewels as enticement (2.30.3); these turned out to be γυνώρισματa, tokens of recognition that the child's mother had had the foresight to expose with her. They are mentioned again in Persinna's embroidered narrative, in particular a ring set with a magic pantarbe stone which was a courtship gift from Hydaspes (4.8.7). And part of Kalasiris' cunning scheme is to trick Charikles into giving Charikleia the fabulous jewellery (of which she apparently knew nothing until learning the contents of the ταῖνιά) on the pretence that it is a gift from her cousin, whom her foster-father is trying to induce her to marry (4.15.4, where their function as instruments of recognition is again stressed). The care with which these γυνώρισματa are handled and the prominence afforded them create the presumption that they will have some significance later in the story. They are most naturally read as preparation for and foreshadowing of a recognition scene between Charikleia and her parents; they are tokens of plot-development as well as of recognition. The very typicality of the scenario thus projected can only reinforce the reader's assumption that, whatever intermediate difficulties may arise, the ending is more or less predictable and "right."

A further hint of this ending is supplied by Charikles' dream that an eagle released from the hand of Apollo carries Charikleia off to the world's end, to a place teeming with dark and shadowy phantoms, which Charikles takes to be the Underworld (4.14.2). Knowing what he does, however, the reader can see that it really symbolizes the "abduction" of Charikleia and her arrival in Ethiopia, and can savor the irony of Charikles' pessimism and the misleading, though literally true, interpretation given by Kalasiris. In itself this dream offers

⁶ E.g. 1.25.4 (Charikleia speaking): "εἰς δεῦρο διετέλεσα καθαρὰν ἑμαντὴν καὶ ἀπὸ σῆς ὁμιλίας φυλάττουσα...τὸν δὲ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἡμῖν συγκείμενον τε καὶ ἐνώμοτον ἐπὶ πᾶσι γάμον εἴ πῃ γένοιτο περισκόπουσα."

⁷ This has become a notorious crux in *Aithiopika*. The difficulties, first expounded by V. Hefti, *Zur Erzählungstechnik in Heliodors Aethiopica* (Diss. Basle, Vienna 1950) 74ff., are succinctly posed by B. P. Reardon, *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 302 n. 20. Winkler (above, note 5) 137ff. offers an attractive way out of the problem.

nothing new, but does underwrite the prominence of Ethiopia and marriage in Charikleia's future.

The next important foreshadowing comes at 5.22.3, when Kalasiris describes a dream vision of Odysseus. After prophesying various ordeals awaiting Kalasiris as a result of his failure to pay Odysseus due respect in his homeland, the vision conveys a message from Penelope to Charikleia: after wishing her joy because of her love of chastity, Penelope promises her a happy ending (τέλος αὐτῇ δεξιὸν εὐαγγελίζεται). Again it is natural for the reader to associate this τέλος δεξιόν with what he has already presumed—recognition and marriage; but there are ambiguities here waiting to be triggered by later turns of the plot.

Two general points need to be made here. The first that, while the predictive devices outlined here offer an optimistic set of expectations, a negative view is also available from the text through the medium of the lamentations in which the characters of the *Aithiopika* are so prone to indulge.⁸ Not only do these communicate the character's despair, the rhetorical skill of the author drawing the reader into experiencing for himself the impact of momentary misfortune; more importantly their implicit theology sets up a counter-model to the divine providence, manifested by dreams and oracles, that seems on other occasions to be operating to direct the story to its proper ending; they hypothesize a world governed by a malign deity whose sport it is to delude human beings and cause them to suffer.⁹ In every case the pessimistic fears voiced in the lamentations prove, as the story progresses, to have been misplaced. Nevertheless a theory of teleological malice and a vocabulary of concepts by which to express it have been insinuated, and they might at any moment be given substance, should the plot take the wrong course. So, although at any given moment the positive direction may seem to have authoritative sanction (from the gods, or Providence, or the author himself—which in a novel is the same thing), the reader has been made to entertain the possibility of a radically different perspective in which everything that encourages hope turns out to have been a cruel trick and the authoritative sanction itself mere delusion.

The second is that the focus of the plot shifts with the conclusion of Kalasiris' retrospective narration at 5.33.3. The impulse of the first half of the novel is primarily hermeneutic: the reader's desire is directed not so much at learning what happens next and how the story ends as at discovering what has already happened and how the story began. By 5.33.3 all the enigmas of the mysterious opening have been resolved; from 5.33.4 onwards *récit* and *histoire* coincide, and the novel becomes end-directed. Its complexities acquire bite: although there is plenty of potentially dangerous incident in the area of the plot conveyed through Kalasiris' narrative, the danger is not felt as immediately threatening because the lovers' safety is guaranteed at least as far as the point that the story had reached before Kalasiris' narration began. From now on, that

⁸ 1.8.2–3, 2.1.2–3, 2.4.1–4, 4.19.6–9, 5.2.7–10, 5.6.2–4, 5.29.4, 6.8.3–6, 7.14.4–8, 7.25.4–6.

⁹ Thus the references to malevolent powers at 2.5.4, 2.25.3, 4.19.3, 5.2.7, 5.6.2, 5.27.1, 6.8.3, 6.12.1, 7.25.7; the reference to a deluding δαίμων at 10.13.5, however, should be deleted; cf. J. R. Morgan, *Philologus* 127 (1983) 98–100. At 5.4.1 Knemon is described by the omniscient narrator as the victim of τι...δαιμόνιον, ὃ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα χλεύην ὡς ἐπίπαν τὰ ἀνθρώπεια καὶ παιδιὰν πεποιήται; similar authority is given to malevolent fate at 7.12.2. On Heliodoros' demonology see J. Puigali, *AFLD* 11 (1981) 62–67.

guarantee is removed, and Heliodoros can exploit the residual fear that with each successive danger the plot might short-circuit at any moment and precipitate an ending opposite to that which the reader expects and desires. Immediately before the capture of the lovers by the Ethiopians, there occurs one more foreshadowing, whose proximity to the events it foretells naturally colors most strongly the reader's prediction of the ending. Charikleia and Theagenes are languishing in Arsake's dungeon, expecting the present night to be their last, reflecting on Charikleia's miraculous failure to be burned alive at the stake, when Charikleia suddenly recalls a vision of Kalasiris which she experienced the previous night and which can now be seen to have predicted and explained her deliverance. This reminds Theagenes that he also dreamed of Kalasiris, who gave him the following prophecy:

Αἰθιόπων εἰς γαῖαν ἀφίξειαι ἄμμιγα κούρη
 δεσμῶν Ἀρσακέων αὐρίον ἐκπροφυγών. (8.11.3)

He interprets this pessimistically: Ethiopia signifies the Underworld, the κούρη Persephone, the release from chains the release from earthly life.¹⁰ His pessimism is countered by Charikleia, who understands the dream literally: the κούρη is herself, and Theagenes will escape from Arsake's jail and reach Ethiopia with her. Her interpretation of the dream appears the more plausible because her reading of her own dream is patently the correct one, whereas Theagenes can find in it nothing more cogent than nonsensical self-contradiction (8.11.4). The conversation in the dungeon ends on a confident note, with Charikleia suggesting that the gods' prophecy is a guarantee of their future (8.11.11). The goal of their journey seems within sight and, of course, the carefully nurtured assumption is that arrival in Ethiopia will be followed by recognition and marriage.

However, the double interpretation of Theagenes' dream merits comment. The two very different prognoses derived from a single dream point possible paths along which the plot might move: one points towards the "right" ending, the other to a catastrophically "wrong" ending. If the right ending looks the more probable at the moment, nevertheless the possibility of something diametrically opposite has been shown to exist, and not to exist without sanction. The negative prognostication can (and will) be activated by details that appear to conform better to it than to the positive one. Thus the dangers presented by apparent obstacles on the path to the right ending can be felt as very much more alive; and the reader's desire and curiosity acquire a new dimension: not just discovery of how the plot ends but adjudication as to which of the two rival prognostications was the correct one.

When Theagenes, Charikleia and their Persian escort are surprised by an Ethiopian reconnaissance party, Theagenes sees the fulfilment of his dream as interpreted by Charikleia, and suggests that they allow themselves to be captured; this he envisages as the mechanism by which they will reach Ethiopia (8.16.7). Charikleia's confidence is even greater. She *knows* that her steps are guided by Destiny (8.17.1) and hopes for a turn for the better in their fortunes, so that she regards their captors as friends not foes. These twin confidences find a response in the reader, who will see them as signs that the predicted happy ending, if not exactly at hand, is at least within sight. The confidence receives

¹⁰ A familiar and thus plausible image; cf. Plato, *Kratylos* 400c, *Phaidon* 62B; M. L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford 1983) 21–24.

further reinforcement when we are told that the reconnaissance party think that their beautiful young captives will be a gift to adorn the service and court of their king (8.17.4).¹¹ For anyone who has read the novel once this will jar somewhat, for it will soon become clear that Ethiopian custom reserves a rather different fate for beautiful young virgins who happen to be the first captives of a campaign. But, rather than agonize over how it might be that these scouts are the only Ethiopians ignorant of custom, we should read their thoughts as being directed at the reader, and intimating to him (falsely, as it transpires) a channel by which Charikleia and Theagenes may be brought into contact with the king and queen, whereupon recognition and the rest will no doubt ensue. Book Eight ends with a theatrical tableau whose symbolism receives authorial endorsement, of Theagenes and Charikleia being not so much led to captivity as escorted in honor by those who are shortly to be their subjects (8.17.5).¹²

All this builds up the expectation of a happy ending, but the possibility of the contrary is not excluded. Although Theagenes sees the Ethiopians as the fulfilment of his dream and so argues that he and Charikleia should allow themselves to be captured, he still sees the future as uncertain. It is simply that the fate that awaits them after capture is less certainly evil than what they can expect at Oroondates' hands.¹³ And although his uncertainty is immediately set against Charikleia's confidence, her reactions too are cannily differentiated between certain knowledge (that Destiny is guiding her footsteps) and mere hope (that the future will be better).

At the beginning of Book Nine, Charikleia is presented to her father. At the sight of her he is filled with joy as the unconscious intuition of his soul exerts its force (9.1.3). This reaction can scarcely be read as anything but a precursor to recognition: Hydaspes' unconscious and uncomprehended predisposition towards his own daughter will surely lubricate the process of establishing her identity. But it is immediately undercut, first by the irony of his conscious interpretation of his feelings (he takes the fact that his prisoners are already in chains to foretell the submission of his enemies), and then more drastically by

¹¹ Accepted by the reader in part at least because it fits into patterns established by a) the intention of the Persian Mitranes to send Theagenes to wait on the Great King (5.8.6, 5.9.2, etc.) and b) the intention of the merchant Nausikles to sell his Athenian girlfriend to the Ethiopian court, where there was clearly a demand for cultivated and attractive young Greeks.

¹² The exact tenor of the tableau is difficult to gauge because of the obscurity of the technical terms *προαναφώνησις* and *προεισόδιον*; there seems to be some reference to the practice of announcing the title and other details of the play and parading the actors in front of the audience before the performance began [cf. E. Rohde, *RhM* 38 (1883) 264ff. = *Kleine Schriften* (Tübingen and Leipsig, 1901 repr. Hildesheim and New York 1969) II.394ff.]. The point of the image lies in the sudden changes of identity and status to which actors are subject. Before the play an actor is an ordinary man among other ordinary men; but in the drama he may become a king and his colleagues his subjects. So the status of Theagenes and Charikleia is to be altered by the drama to come. However, a powerful irony undermines the apparent certainty of the prediction: having but a moment ago escaped death (τὴν σφαγὴν ὀλίγω πρόσθεν τὴν αὐτῶν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς τολαντεύσαντες), they are presented to a king—whose first reaction is to condemn them to death again.

¹³ καλὸν οὖν ἐγχειρίζειν ἑαυτοὺς καὶ ἐπιτρέπειν ἀθλοτέρᾳ τύχῃ τοῦ προδήλου παρὰ Ὀροονδάτῃ κινδύνου. Compare the uncertainty of the words which he speaks to the Ethiopians (8.17.3): τὸ παρὸν δὲ Αἰθίοψιν ὑπὸ χρηστοτέρας ἴσως τύχης ἐγχειριζομένους.

his pronouncement that as the first fruits of the war they are to be set aside for sacrifice in celebration of his coming victory, ὥς ὁ πάτριος Αἰθιοπῶν βούλεται νόμος. This death sentence reactivates and reauthorizes Theagenes' pessimistic interpretation of his own dream, with its pregnant association of Ethiopians and death. Its imprecision about the identity of the "maiden" admits the hitherto unspoken possibility that Charikleia will die with him. The significance of the demarcation of her reaction into knowledge and (misplaced) hope now becomes apparent.

It is striking on a second reading of the novel that Theagenes and Charikleia are assigned to be sacrificed because they are the first captives of the war; the reference to the Ethiopian νόμος, be it legislated or customary, suggests that whoever had been the first captured would automatically have become the sacrificial victims. This is contradicted later when greater stress is placed on the need for the victims to be sexually pure. This inconsistency is not the product of carelessness, but part of the careful way in which Heliodoros controls his reader's expectations. Sacrifice instead of recognition is clearly a "wrong" ending to the story, but one that suddenly seems in real danger of occurring. For the sacrifice to be felt as a real possibility—which it must if the suspense of uncertainty and fear is to make its proper impact—Theagenes and Charikleia have to be suitable victims. They are this either way, because they are both virgins and first captives, but this is not the moment for the qualification of virginity to be introduced, for three reasons. First, it would simply be unrealistic for an expeditionary army to have with it the specialized magical apparatus required to detect a virgin; if this qualification for sacrifice were introduced now, it would have to be shelved immediately, with inevitable loss of the sense of urgent danger. Second, the scene of trial by ordeal in Book Ten is an icon of the novel's central values; it requires climactic positioning. Third, so long as virginity is not specified as a required qualification to be sacrificed, the reader is free to imagine that somehow the lovers' virtue will prove their salvation; something like this was, after all, the implication both of the oracle which has guided his reading since the end of Book Two (τῇ περ ἀριστοβίων μεγ' ἀέθλιον ἐξάψονται) and of Penelope's linking of Charikleia's chastity with her τέλος δεξιόν. The first-fruits idea is substituted for as long as it is needed. then quietly forgotten.

The reader's fears are accentuated in the next chapter, when the Ethiopians remove the chains from Theagenes and Charikleia and replace them with gold ones. This provokes eloquently grim laughter and sarcasm from Theagenes. Charikleia tries to reassure him by reminding him of the gods' predictions. This is a moment of some significance. We recall Theagenes' dream in which Kalasiris appeared to prophesy that he would reach Ethiopia after escaping from Arsake's chains (8.11.3, quoted above, p. 305). This seemed to be fulfilled when orders arrived from Oroondates for the release of the couple. However, attention was drawn to the fact that a few chains were left on (8.14.1), and were still on when the lovers were presented to Hydaspes, providing the basis for the king's ironically wrong interpretation of his reaction to his own daughter. In its most literal sense then the prediction is not fulfilled until the last of Arsake's chains are removed at 9.2.1. But the immediate replacement of the old chains by new ones, even if they are made of gold, suggests that the dream, while literally true, was deceptively partial in its prediction of the future. Events seems for a moment to be cohering under the influence of the malevolent powers of the darker lamentations.

The narrative now leaves Theagenes and Charikleia, with Charikleia referring to the predictions of the gods. The reference is primarily to the dream of

Book Eight, already characterized as divine-sent prophecy (8.11.6, 11), but that, we remember, predicted only that Theagenes would reach Ethiopia in Charikleia's company, which now seems to be true in a duplicitous sense. The reader's attention is also being directed back over the whole apparatus of divine prediction on which his optimistic assumptions have been built,¹⁴ particularly to the fundamental oracle at the end of Book Two. Knowledge that the lovers now face sacrifice awakens two ambiguities that have lain dormant in the general presumption of and desire for a happy ending. First, the oracle predicted a *μεγ' ἄεθλιον*: the natural first reading of this is as a "a great reward," a sense implied particularly by the dependent genitive *ἀριστοβίων*. But *ἄθλον* can also serve as a synonym for *ἄθλος*, a "struggle" or "ordeal"; even the Homeric form *ἄεθλιον*, employed by Heliodoros for metrical reasons, can be found in this sense.¹⁵ Alternatively, a reader may think of reconstruing *ἄεθλιον* as an abstract neuter of the adjective *ἄθλιος*, "wretched." Even if untempted by these verbal ambiguities, he will nevertheless sense the sarcasm of a "great reward" which has turned out to be participation, as victim, in a ceremony of human sacrifice.

Second, the one line of the original oracle which has not yet been explicitly explained, *λευκὸν ἐπὶ κροτάφῳ στέμμα μελαινομένων*, now takes on a sinister import. Rather than the crown of royalty, the *στέμμα* has become the chaplet worn by the sacrificial victim;¹⁶ and the puzzling word *μελαινομένων*, "turning black," might be counted upon to call to the reader's mind its Homeric application to blood from a wound staining flesh, and thence the common Homeric formula of "black blood."¹⁷ That is to say, it can now be read as a prediction of sacrificial slaughter.

In addition, the *τέλος δεξιόν* promised by Penelope is open to reinterpretation: instead of a "happy ending" (to Charikleia's story) it can now be construed as a "death of good omen," an easy euphemism for sacrifice.

So the theme of sacrifice and the motif of the chains prompt radical reconsideration of assumptions that the plot has fostered hitherto, and compel a provisional reinterpretation of the predictive signs that have underpinned the flow of the narrative. The fact that they can quite plausibly be read as having predicted the death which now threatens the protagonists¹⁸ lends fearsome point to the menace. This is the most extreme crisis of confidence that the reader has yet

¹⁴ The "ideal" reader of course has perfect powers of recall, but a photographic memory is not a prerequisite for the kind of effect that I have in mind. Most readers recall some things reasonably exactly if not all things perfectly. Predictive oracles with their conventional implications of importance in building and following plots could be relied upon more than almost anything else to impress themselves on the reader's mind.

¹⁵ *Od.* 24.169.

¹⁶ Cf. 10.7.3, where Theagenes and Charikleia appear *τῶν τε δεσμῶν λελυμένοι καὶ κατεστεμμένοι*; also 10.32.3 for the custom of crowning sacrificial victims. A suggestive passage is *Hdt.* 7.197, where the human sacrifice is *στέμμασι πᾶς πυκασθεῖς* and the account of the rite is introduced by the words *ἄεθλους τοιούσδε*.

¹⁷ *Il.* 5.354: *μελαίνετο δὲ χροῖα καλόν*; for *μέλαν αἷμα* cf. *Il.* 4.149, 18.583, 20.470, 10.298, 23.806, 11.813, 16.529, 13.655, 21.119, 7.262; *Od.* 3.455, 24.189.

¹⁸ An equivalence between Ethiopia and death has already been established by Charikles' and Theagenes' pessimistic interpretations of their own dreams, which in a very real sense prepare the way for the reversal of interpretation of the central oracle.

faced: will the plot end "right" after all, or is it about to short-circuit and end tragically? The urgency of the question derives from its corollary. If it does end wrongly, it will not be simply an individual tragedy, hurtful enough though that is, but will reveal that the apparently benevolent universe is in fact governed by malicious and duplicitous powers who care nothing for man and his virtue. The whole romantic teleology is in jeopardy.

And it is at precisely this juncture that Heliodoros has chosen to interrupt his narrative of the lovers' adventures. They will be "off-stage" for most of the ninth book while he describes Hydaspes' spectacular siege of the town of Syene and his victory over the Persian army. It is not hard to recognize the "cliff-hanger" effect, and there is no reason to despise it. The alternatives are even signed dramatically for us just before the break: on one side the pessimism of Theagenes with his laughter and gold chains; on the other the reassurances of Charikleia and her reliance on the predictions of the gods. If the last seem rather shaky for a moment and the balance seems tilted all of a sudden towards pessimism, the motive for reading on is only strengthened. Will Theagenes and Charikleia be sacrificed? Will the oracles turn out to have been misleading? Have all their suffering and virtue been in vain?

The siege meanwhile is not just an interlude allowing the doubts and fears of the reader to accumulate. It has become a piquant part of the central drama. Its excitement does not reside entirely within itself and the reader is invited to feel an interesting schizophrenia about its outcome. In one sense he wants the decadent, cruel Persians, whose leader already has lascivious designs on Charikleia (8.2.1f.) to be resoundingly defeated by the just, god-fearing Ethiopians, the philanthropy of whose sovereign grows ever more apparent as the siege progresses. But, on the other hand, it is in honor of the Ethiopian victory that Theagenes and Charikleia are to be sacrificed. So another part of the reader's psyche will be hoping that victory is not forthcoming, so that the occasion for sacrifice will not arise. It is important to understand that, although in an organic sense the narrative of the siege may appear to be something of an appendage to the rest of the work, it nonetheless has a place in the carefully controlled ebb and flow of hope and fear which the author has contrived.

Charikleia and Theagenes re-enter the narrative at 9.24.1, when Hydaspes is busily assigning rewards to his soldiers after his victory. In due course the captors of the lovers appear before him and Hydaspes commands that the young pair be fetched from the baggage-train. This is the occasion for them to consider their future strategy in the most explicit terms, thus offering—or seeming to offer—the reader, at whom of course the whole exchange is aimed, a detailed map of the way the plot might be expected to develop. The lengthy dialogue between the lovers on their way to the king's presence (9.24.3–8) signs two major developments of the reader's expectations about the end of the novel.

The first is the need for postponement, length and complexity. When Theagenes asks whether Charikleia will not reveal herself to her father, she replies that a story as convoluted as hers cannot be precipitately unravelled (ὦν γὰρ πολυπλόκους τὰς ἀρχὰς ὁ δαίμων καταβέβληται, τούτων ἀνάγκη καὶ τὰ τέλη διὰ μακροτέρων συμπεραίνεσθαι, 9.24.4). The complexity of Charikleia's experience, however, is nothing other than the structural complexity of Heliodoros' novel,¹⁹ so that it is impossible not to see here a self-referential comment on the literary desirability of deferring the conclusion

¹⁹ The word she uses of her experiences considered as narrative (ὑπόθεσις, 9.24.4) is also used of what appear to be novels by Julian (*Epist.* 89.301b).

and thus prolonging the reader's desire and pleasure. In effect, Heliodoros is signing to his reader that, while the plot is moving from δέσις to λύσις, resolution is not to be immediate and the much advertised recognition scene is not to be by-passed. At the same time, the postponement must be seen to be motivated, and so authorized, from within the narrative frame, and not imposed from without as calculated titillation. So Charikleia adds that premature disclosure of her identity would actually be dangerous, since so preposterous a claim would justifiably antagonize the king. This reasoning is validated by a notable formal device. The wording which Charikleia uses to describe the king's likely reaction (χλεύην, ἂν οὕτω τύχη, καὶ ὕβριν τὸ πρᾶγμα ἡγησάμενον, 9.24.6) is recalled later, in authorial narrative, in a form too close for coincidence, at exactly the point where Charikleia makes her first explicit claim to be the king's daughter (ἀγανακτῶν ἐφαίνετο, χλεύην τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ ὕβριν ποιούμενος, 10.12.2). Likewise, Charikleia's oracular assertion (9.25.4) that the identity of her parents will be revealed at the altars of the gods to whom she is to be sacrificed both postpones and predicts her recognition and is explicitly recalled at the time to which it referred (10.7.5).

The second major theme concerns the conditions under which recognition can take place and the mechanisms by which it may be effected. Of paramount importance here is Charikleia's mother, Persinna. At 9.24.4 she is said to be the crucial element of the intrigue, so that her absence serves as a reason for deferring revelation. And at 9.24.7, when Theagenes suggests that Charikleia's γνωρίσματα would prove that they are who they say they are, she replies that these tokens are proof only for those who recognize them, so that their efficacy is confined to Persinna; and, moreover, that the one certain token of recognition which can make all the others convincing is maternal instinct, μητρῴα φύσις, which they would lose were they to try to effect a recognition scene prematurely. Here then is an intimation that the role of Persinna, her γνωρίσματα and her maternal instinct will provide the channel by which the plot may reach its expected conclusion. The reader is alerted specifically to the significance of Persinna's first reaction to Charikleia as a moment of cardinal structural importance.²⁰

This exchange induces an optimistic set of expectations. First, the threat of sacrifice is relegated so far that it even becomes a guarantee of safety in the short term (9.24.5), and, astoundingly, Charikleia is even allowed at one point to forget it altogether, seeing their worst-case future as one of slavery (9.24.6); this may be an unconscious authorial lapse, but even so is symptomatic of the horizons of expectation being delineated in this chapter, part of a strategy for creating a confidence for later events to shake. Second, it is assumed throughout that recognition will be successful, given the right timing and conditions: the danger of sacrifice is presumably allowed to recede so far precisely to foster the assumption that reprieve will be an automatic corollary of recognition. Third, the fates of Theagenes and Charikleia are implicitly inseparable; recognition applies to them both (cf. 9.24.3 τὰ καθ' ἡμᾶς; 9.24.4 Persinna is crucial to τῆς ὅλης καθ' ἡμᾶς ὑποθέσεως; 9.24.8 μὴ προώμεθα, κτλ.).

As if to underline the potential power of μητρῴα φύσις, we are immediately given a sight of paternal instinct in action: Hydaspes experiences another strong reaction when he sees Charikleia for the second time (9.25.1). He is

²⁰ ἡ μητρῴα φύσις, ὅφ' ἧς τὸ γεννῶν περὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἐκ πρώτης ἐντεύξεως φιλόστοργον ἀναδέχεται πάθος, ἀπορρήτῳ συμπαθείᾳ κινούμενον (9.24.8).

reminded of a dream in which he had a daughter exactly like Charikleia. In the short term this generates irony; neither the king nor his courtiers can see that the dream is true in the most literal way. In the long term it has to be read as a sign of his predisposition to recognize his daughter, a foreshadowing of a recognition scene that will prove less abortive. This dream forms a pair with one related by Persinna (10.3.1): she gave birth to a daughter who matured instantly to marriageable age. Again the dreamer seeks to allegorize what the reader knows to be literal truth: Persinna reads her dream as a symbol of the Ethiopian victory which has just been reported to her. This time the irony is cranked one degree higher, tantalising the reader by playing on the inextricable links between the themes of recognition as daughter and marriage, but stopping just short of anything that could be read as confirmation that the marriageable daughter will actually marry.

The individual books in the *Aithiopika* are the basic units of composition²¹ and hence, presumably, of reading also. It is at the end of a book, if anywhere, that a reader can pause and reflect on what he has read. The textual signs in the last section of Book Nine have been pointing towards an elaborate scene of recognition centred on Persinna and her maternal love, leading to the reprieve of the lovers. This is the ending the reader wants to read, and, if he is allowed to reflect on the text from the outside for a moment, the one which would be most characteristic of the genre. By the beginning of the last book the issues around which the plot can work are fairly precisely delineated, and we can say in advance of detailed discussion that the narrative of Book Ten conforms to expectation at least in the sense that it concerns itself almost exclusively with recognition, escape from sacrificial death, and marriage. The handling of these themes, however, is contrived so as to maintain forward-looking curiosity, anxiety, and, within narrow limits, unpredictability.

The first hint of unexpected developments occurs when the Ethiopian cabinet of gymnosophists prophesy that some commotion will disrupt Hydaspes' victory celebrations, but that this will end for the good since the royal house has lost a part of itself, which Destiny is about to restore (10.4.2). This, of course, prefigures the recognition and recovery of Charikleia, but the fact that this is to be accompanied by *θόρυβός τις καὶ ταραχή*, both potentially destructive forces, holds out the prospect of a more dramatic and volatile recognition sequence than has previously been envisaged. The reader's motivating curiosity is redirected at discovering the precise nature of the disruption and whether it will subvert or promote the right ending. A detail reveals how Heliodoros is manipulating the reader's perceptions and expectations. The gymnosophists conclude their prophecy by saying that Destiny will enable Persinna to find that for which she seeks (*τοῦ πεπρωμένου...τὸ ζητούμενον ἀναφαίνοντος*); but the only sense in which Persinna has been "seeking" Charikleia is through the elusive commissioning of Kalasiris, which, as we have seen, is an end-directed narrative device, deployed to sign its own fulfilment; it also stresses Persinna as a center of the plotting (as, indirectly, the agent of Charikleia's return to Ethiopia), consistently with the emphasis already laid upon her role in the recognition. It seems that the loose end of Persinna's search is about to be taken up again, and that her active engagement in seeking her child will have some part to play in the promised drama. But the drama would be dissipated if Persinna as a player in it were allowed to perceive too early the sense of the gymnosophists' prediction. So she simply dismisses it with an honorific

²¹ Cf. E. Feuillâtre, *Études sur les Éthiopiennes d'Héliodore* (Paris 1966) 14.

formula (10.3.3). The effect is aimed at (mis)directing the reader's attempts to construe an ending for the plot, but at the expense of a fully stable or convincing psychology within the characters. The motif of Persinna's commission is not treated at all consistently in the final section of the plot. In fact it is *not* going to be important and fails to resurface in contexts where naturalistically it might have been expected,²² and is even contradicted at the climax of the whole work (εὐρισκόντων οὓς μὴ ἐζήτουν, 10.38.4).

Charikleia appears at 10.7.3. She is smiling and fixes her eyes on Persinna. We have been alerted to expect the effects of maternal instinct, and these are duly forthcoming, though Persinna does not understand the cause of her feelings. With extreme irony and pathos she remembers her own child, which would be about Charikleia's age, had it lived. She asks if there is any way for Charikleia's life to be spared; Hydaspes replies in the negative, but then he introduces a new and particularly menacing danger by mentioning for the first time the ἐσχάρα, a magical gridiron on which only virgins may tread unharmed. The only way for Charikleia to be spared, he says, will be if the ἐσχάρα shows her to be unclean and unsuitable for sacrifice. This is the first mention of the need for victims to be sexually pure. It has until now been an easy presumption that virtue will somehow lead to salvation, a presumption apparently sanctioned by the chief oracle. This presumption is now suddenly demolished. Virtue is suddenly an immediate danger to the heroine's life. The reader knows that she can never be shown to be impure (barring miraculous malfunction in the testing apparatus), but according to the king impurity is now the only surety of survival. The pessimism which we have already seen flickering into life on several occasions is now reactivated. This is made explicit at 10.9.1, when Theagenes, after surviving the ordeal of the gridiron, sarcastically remarks to Charikleia that virtue is well rewarded in Ethiopia: καλὰ τὰπίχειρα παρ' Αἰθίοσι τῶν καθαρῶς βιούντων· θυσίαι καὶ σφαγαὶ τὰ ἔπαθλα τῶν σωφρονούντων. The reader is clearly intended to associate these words with the oracle of 2.35.5: τῇ περ ἀριστοβίων μέγ' ἀέθλιον ἐξάψονται—ἔπαθλα echoing ἀέθλιον; ἀριστοβίων picked up by τῶν καθαρῶς βιούντων and τῶν σωφρονούντων. Again for a moment it seems that the oracle foretold the "wrong" ending, with its concomitant subversion of the novel's moral system and romantic teleology.

This effect scarcely has time to register before Theagenes poses the vital question. Why does Charikleia not reveal her identity? This refers us back to 9.24.3, where he put the same question to Charikleia, though with rather less urgency. The reply then was that they should wait for Persinna's presence so as to exploit her μητρώα φύσις. The conditions desiderated in 9.24 now pertain, and signs are being given to the reader that the recognition scene postponed earlier is now about to take place. In a moment we must examine how it is handled, but first another important structural motif is introduced: the fate of Theagenes is carefully separated from that of Charikleia. "Once you have been recognized for who you are," he tells her, "you might be able to intercede for my life too. But even if you cannot obtain that grace, you at least will assuredly be spared." (10.9.2). Hitherto the implication has always been that the reprieve

²² I think particularly of Persinna's failure to respond to Charikles' mention of Kalasiris' name at 10.36.4, or ever to clear the Egyptian priest of accusations which apply only given Charikles' distorted point of view.

of Theagenes would be automatically consequent upon that of Charikleia.²³ Now we are being told that Charikleia will have to exert herself to save Theagenes, and even so may not succeed. One purpose of this is to give the reader his bearings: the monolithic resolution is going to be divided into two parts, which will be dealt with serially, first the recognition of Charikleia, then the rescue of Theagenes. Another, more important, is to realign and sharpen end-directed curiosity. The recognition of Charikleia has ceased to be the end of the story; even if it were to be assured, the reader's interest would not flag because he is now looking beyond the recognition to the next problem. Charikleia's recognition is in itself no longer a central issue, for without Theagenes her life would be meaningless, for her and for the reader.²⁴ Theagenes himself now seems to face greater danger than before: if his salvation is not to be carried on the back of Charikleia's identity, how is it to be achieved? By her intercession, is one possible answer, signalled here. That motif will be taken up and played with later.

At some stage, not necessarily at 10.9.2, but at any rate when attention has shifted wholly to Theagenes, the reader may think back over the various predictions he has encountered and ask how they apply when only Theagenes' life is in question: they are disconcerting. The oracle of 2.35.5 has two possible interpretations—coronation or sacrifice—and the possibility now arises that both may be correct, one for Charikleia and the second for Theagenes. Other predictions, we only now realize, have applied to Charikleia alone: Penelope's promise of a τέλος αὐτῇ δεξιὸν seems to exclude Theagenes; Charikleia's own confident perception of the hand of fate at 8.17.1 is grammatically restricted to herself; and the presentiments of the gymnosophists at 10.4.2 concern only her. Or else they have said nothing of Theagenes' ultimate fate: his dream of Kalasiris at 8.11.3 foretold nothing beyond arrival in Ethiopia, which has already been achieved; and Charikles' dream at 4.14.2 expressly left the end of the story undiscernible. The predictive apparatus is cunningly arranged so that, even after Charikleia's fate is settled, the reader can still entertain real anxieties as to what will become of her beloved.

For the moment, though, Theagenes is relegated to the back of the stage and the spotlight is on Charikleia. The recognition sequence proper starts in 10.10, when Charikleia appeals to the gymnosophists to hear her case, since they alone have judicial authority over the king. The most important thing to realize about the whole quasi-judicial sequence is that it does not run along the course the reader has been led to expect. First, a new and unexpected piece of information is introduced at 10.11.1: Sisimithres, the president of the gymnosophists, is the self-same man who rescued the baby Charikleia and entrusted her to Charikles. This detail has been artfully withheld until this point²⁵ because earlier disclosure would have signed the mechanism of Charikleia's reprieve and thus defused the tension surrounding it. Charikleia reacts to

²³ It is interesting to compare 9.24.3 ἐρεῖς...πρὸς βασιλέα τὰ καθ' ἡμᾶς with 10.9.2 μήνυε τὴν σαύτης τύχην.

²⁴ The lovers have forfeited everything to gain each other (4.18.2); Charikleia's most secret prayer is that they will be preserved for one another (5.14.3); separation from Theagenes is tantamount to the loss of Charikleia's own life (1.19.3); when she loses Theagenes she clings to life only in the hope of finding him again (5.2.9); he is her soul (10.20.2).

²⁵ The Ethiopian gymnosophist in Charikles' narrative (2.30.1ff.) remains anonymous. Sisimithres is first named at 10.4.2.

Sisimithres' name with joy and confidence, and expects to have his collaboration and corroboration (συνήγορόν τε καὶ συνεργὸν ἔσθαι, 10.11.2), thus signalling to the reader the centrality of the part he is about to play.

She begins her case by claiming to be first a native Ethiopian, then a member of the royal house, and finally the king's daughter. This draws an angry response from Hydaspes, precisely echoing Charikleia's prediction of his reactions (9.24.3). The verbal echo now has the effect of reminding the reader of the supposedly crucial role of Persinna and her maternal instinct, which was posited as essential for recognition and counteracting the king's annoyance. But a surprise is in store, because Persinna's much advertised leading part in the drama never materializes.

The ground is laid when, in 10.12.4, Charikleia announces that her identity can be confirmed by proof of the two kinds most conclusive in any suit: documentary evidence and corroboration by witnesses. The reference is to the ταῖνιά and Sisimithres, whose special status as both witness and arbitrator is stressed. The declaration looks like a signpost to factors which will prove decisive, but, as with Persinna, this is a false trail. Charikleia produces the ταῖνιά at 10.13.1. It elicits the expected violent reaction from Persinna. This is the moment when her recognition of her child becomes conscious, but far from acting on that recognition and exerting a decisive influence on the course of events, she lapses into silence at 10.13.3 and plays no further part in the scene, other than passively confirming that she recognizes the other γνωρίσματα, which have been brought into the argument by Sisimithres (10.14.2).

The abortion of Persinna's putatively decisive role is the first surprise. The second is the way that Hydaspes responds to the narrative on the ταῖνιά, just now characterized as one of the "greatest proofs." He simply refuses to accept it as proof that Charikleia is who she claims to be: it proves that his child was exposed, but leaves awkward gaps in her history and could easily have fallen into the hands of an impostor. These remarks cue Sisimithres, who has also been marked out as having a vital role to play. He is able to fill the gaps between his discovery of the royal baby and the time he passed her to Charikles; he also brings in the other tokens, including the pantarbe ring, so picking up the thread from 4.8.7, where this ring was given special prominence. But he cannot convince Hydaspes that Charikleia is not an impostor (10.14.3). And so a second trail, that of the γνωρίσματα, heavily signed as a channel to dénouement, turns unexpectedly into a cul-de-sac. Sisimithres' own special role is the next to abort. When Hydaspes asks how two Ethiopians could have a white-skinned child, Sisimithres claims to see similarities between Charikleia and the child he rescued, but, as Hydaspes rather brutally points out, this is too subjective to constitute legal proof. Only when his own evidence has failed does Sisimithres refer the king to the account of Charikleia's conception on the ταῖνιά (4.8.3ff.: the child was formed in the likeness of a painting of the white-skinned Andromeda which Persinna had seen at the instant of impregnation). And to clinch the point he suggests that the picture be fetched from the royal quarters. The resemblance is exact, and Hydaspes' disbelief is at last overcome. For good measure, Sisimithres adduces a final proof, a black birthmark on Charikleia's arm (10.15.2).

This sequence is deliberately contrived to keep the reader guessing. One by one the factors which have been signed as decisive are shown up as inconclusive or ineffective: Persinna's μητρώα φύσις, the documentary evidence of the ταῖνιά, the γνωρίσματα, Sisimithres' corroboration. Only two items to

which no predictive signs have been attached come surprisingly to the rescue: the painting of Andromeda (which has been mentioned once before in the novel to account for Charikleia's color, but has never been said to be an exact likeness of her in other respects) and the birthmark, which here makes its first and last appearance in the text.

On a realistic level there is much that is implausible or illogical, particularly over the way that Hydaspes and Sisimithres deal with the color of Charikleia's skin, and the king's failure to connect her (and his dream of her) with an identical painting that has been hanging in his bedroom for at least seventeen years.²⁶ In fact Heliodoros' disposition of his material allows him to control suspense and surprise by building up various factors as of crucial importance only to dispose of them without a resolution occurring. The narrative is designed for the emotive, manipulative effects which its unpredictable twists and blind alleys produce in the reader rather than for logical or psychological coherence. Μῦθος takes precedence over ἥθος.

Even now Heliodoros has one last turn to the screw. It has always been implied that Charikleia need only be recognized to be safe. At the very last this assumption is dismantled, and reprieve is separated from recognition. Hydaspes has recognized Charikleia as his daughter, but he is not altogether deflected from what he has to do (10.16.3), and in a tearful speech voices his resolve to sacrifice his own daughter on his nation's behalf, and obey, even against the wishes of his subjects, the dictates of the πατριος νόμος. This is a development which could never have been guessed at and which threatens to undo everything. The full paradoxical horror of the prospect is stressed in Hydaspes' pathetic speech, a subtle piece of rhetoric intended to produce a result the opposite of its ostensible aim (10.17.1). It has its desired effect: the Ethiopian populace erupts to demand her reprieve. This too is an unexpected turn of events, but one for which the ground has been carefully, but unobtrusively prepared. At 10.7.2 Hydaspes does not commence the ceremony of human sacrifice until the crowd demands ἡ νενομισμένη θυσία; there seems to be an element of popular discretion in the proceedings. At 10.7.6 he says that the νόμος demands the sacrifice of a male victim to the Sun and a female to the Moon; and as Charikleia was the first captive of the war the crowd would not tolerate her replacement by a substitute. This careful demarcation marks an important difference from the first reference to the νόμος at 9.1.3, where it was said simply to require the sacrifice of the first prisoners. Again the rephrasing has left space for the exercise of popular discretion. This lack of precision about the νόμος allows it to slip from mandatory law to optional tradition, and progressively broadens the limits within which it can be properly observed. The finally decisive intervention of popular opinion on Charikleia's behalf against her own father is the end-product of a chain of institutional causation of which the reader only becomes aware in retrospect.

The last twenty two chapters of the novel are taken up with the fate of Theagenes. It is obvious that the action has been prolonged in order to hold back the ending and allow the reader to extend his enjoyment of the tensions of the text for as long as possible. As already mentioned, one strategy to achieve this is to interrupt the action with unrelated or marginally related material. So, from 10.22.6 to 10.27.4 the narrative concentrates on Hydaspes' reception of embassies from the nations subject to him, and the gifts they bring; from 10.28.4 to 10.30.5 comes a spectacular display of bull-tossing by Theagenes;

²⁶ See Hefti (above, note 7) 90ff.

and from 10.31.1 to 10.32.2 a wrestling match between him and an Ethiopian giant. These insertions are not without their relevance to the main narrative, particularly as regards its subtext of the reader's expectations and responses. But they are far more detailed than their relevance strictly requires, and the two contests especially are built as sub-narratives in their own right, generating desire to know the result in exactly the same way as a real-life sporting event.

As yet the only hint as to how Theagenes' rescue might be accomplished has been in his own words at 10.9.2, when his fate was separated from Charikleia's: she might be able to intercede for him once her identity is known, although it is acknowledged that even her intercession may not succeed. This is our starting-point: there is doubt and fear about Theagenes' future, but Charikleia is his best hope. She must explain to her parents who he is and confess her love for him. This is where a second strategy for prolongation is applied. Charikleia is not able to make her confession, and her parents are not allowed to understand what she is able to say.

The game begins straightaway at 10.18.2. Hydaspes asks about Theagenes, and Charikleia says he had better reveal his own identity: *άνήρ τε γάρ ἐστίν ἐμοῦ τε τῆς γυναικὸς εὐθαρσέστερον ἐξαγορεύειν οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσεται*. Hydaspes misunderstands this and apologizes for embarrassing her. Apparently she intends the words *άνήρ* and *γυνή* to mean, in a veiled sense at least, "husband" and "wife" (compare her claim to have a husband at 10.21.3, and Theagenes' statement to the same effect at 10.33.1); but Hydaspes takes them in a less specific sense as "man" and "woman" and understands her words as a reference to the commonplace that it is a man's place to do the talking,²⁷ so failing to perceive that there is something in this particular instance that she finds hard to speak of in public. At 10.19.1 she again tries an indirect approach, but although she gets as far as saying that it is her destiny to live and die with Theagenes, Hydaspes still does not see what is behind her words and interprets them as mere *φιλανθρωπία* (10.20.1). At 10.20.2 she asks to be allowed to slay the victim with her own hand (a suicide threat?); perplexed, Hydaspes says that only a married woman may perform the ceremony. This is a "feed-line" to elicit Charikleia's claim to have a husband, if her parents consent (10.21.3), but Persinna takes this as a request for them to find a husband for her. At 10.22.1 she is on the verge of explaining herself more fully and ignoring the qualms of virgin modesty, when Hydaspes explodes in exasperation at the maniac quality of her dialogue and orders her off stage.

The technique here is clear enough. To postpone her confession Charikleia has suddenly become invested with such modesty that she is not able to do more than hint at her relationship with Theagenes. For the full irony to be felt the reader must understand what she is trying to say, while her parents repeatedly fail to do so (10.18.3, 10.20.1, 10.21.1). As each indirect attempt to communicate fails, the danger facing Theagenes is restated (10.18.3–19.1, 10.20.1, 10.22.1). The urgency for her to speak out clearly becomes more keenly felt as anticipation of an effective intercession is aroused only to be thwarted. Frustration and impatience grow at her coyness. Inevitably there is psychological implausibility—particularly as some of her supposed ambiguities are actually rather transparent—but characterization here is no more than a by-product of the author's manipulation of the reader's responses to the plot.

²⁷ Cf. 1.21.3; also Soph. *Aias* 293, Fr. 61 N, Eur. *Herakleid.* 476, Aes. *Septem* 232, Demokrit. Frag. 274D.

The game of ambiguity and incomprehension resumes at 10.29.2, when Charikleia and Persinna are watching Theagenes' exploit with the bull. Persinna sees her daughter's agitation, but takes her request for the man's life to be spared as mere erotic infatuation. In a self-referential allusion to the game of ambiguity, Charikleia laments that her words are unintelligible to the intelligent (τοῖς συνετοῖς ἀσύνετα φθέγγομαι, 10.29.5), and is for a second time on the brink of making a clear confession when she is for a second time interrupted, this time by the clamor of the crowd (10.30.1). It is only at 10.33.4, when Theagenes is led back to the altar after his wrestling-match, that Charikleia finally overcomes her reserve and proceeds to unambiguous disclosure. This, however, takes place off-stage, chiefly because by this point the plot is complicating itself in such a way as to make the confession dramatically superfluous.

The preceding overview of one strand of the narrative demonstrates how Heliodoros has blocked and complicated the only signed path to the desired but still doubtful dénouement. We must now examine the other important thread of his narrative strategy in this section: the introduction of unexpected twists and difficulties.

When the game of ambiguity is interrupted for the first time by Hydaspes' outburst of frustration, Charikleia is on the verge of revealing all. The reception of the embassies is introduced expressly as a time-filler while a substitute victim is found for her (10.22.5). The reader's expectation, then, is that when the embassies have been dealt with the action will revert to Charikleia's confession. However, they introduce two new developments. The first is Hydaspes' nephew, Meroebos, in whom the king sees a potential husband for his new-found daughter. From the reader's point of view this is the worst possible eventuality, because it raises the fear of a short-circuit that would cut Theagenes out of the plot altogether (i.e. Charikleia married, however reluctantly, to another man), or else cause her confession and its redemptive role to be overridden by a father who does not share the twin audiences' sentimental preconceptions about the paramountcy of true love. But if Meroebos is a rival for Charikleia's hand, with an endorsement from her father, his role as such remains potential: it is restricted to receiving the hint of betrothal, and to a decisive intervention at 10.33.2-4, which curtails a dialogue in which Theagenes seemed about to broach for himself the question of his status vis-à-vis Charikleia, and results in the hero being returned to the sacrificial altar, thus effectively restoring the narrative to the position before the two combats. In the end Meroebos simply vanishes: he is an untied loose end in the plot, but that perhaps is the point, because, for the reader who is still not absolutely certain of the "right" ending, he constitutes an unneutralized hazard to the proper dénouement, just waiting for the plot to activate him. In this sense we can read his very appearance as a false sign, a promise of a complication that never arises.

The second new development is the pair of combats. The Axumite ambassadors bring a giraffe, which causes a stampede among the sacrificial animals, providing the occasion for Theagenes' bull-fight, which in its turn leads, by popular request, into his bout with the Ethiopian man-mountain. From the vantage-point of the ending we can see that the combats are a redundant loop in the plot, contributing nothing to the progress of the story. It is consequently tempting to categorize them as merely devices for the deferment of the ending, elaborated for their intrinsic excitement. This would be only part of the truth, however; we must also consider how a reader who does *not* know the ending would respond to what he is reading. On one level he will feel anxiety for Theagenes' safety, as expressed within the narrative frame by Charikleia at

10.29.2 and, indirectly, by Hydaspes at 10.31.2. On another level the effect is rather subtler. The reader has already encountered one hint that the key to Theagenes' salvation, like Charikleia's, may lie in the feelings of the populace (10.20.1). The combats, for almost the first time in the novel, exalt Theagenes to truly heroic stature. Charikleia has dominated the novel—as she seems to dominate responses to it—but now that her fate is secure, Theagenes can be given his ἀπιστεῖα. The crowd saved Charikleia because she was the king's daughter, and because they were moved by her beauty and purity. But would their acquiescence in Theagenes' reprieve be adequately motivated by an announcement that he is Charikleia's beloved? The two exploits enlist their fundamental sympathy for him, conveyed at length and with emphasis (e.g. 10.30.5–7, 10.32.3). It seems a natural first reading that these exploits should somehow contribute to his reprieve by the assertion of popular will. The motif is played with once, at 10.30.7, when the anticipated appeal for his release turns into a demand for him to be matched against the Ethiopian wrestler. The idea that his two victories might have been instrumental in securing his release is legitimated retrospectively at 10.33.4, where it is said that Charikleia's spirits had been lifted by his victory but her optimism was dashed when he was returned to the altar. The technique is very similar to that employed in the recognition scenes, when an avenue towards the ending seemed to open up, only to turn into a no-through road.

At 10.33.4 Theagenes is back at the altar, but Charikleia is at last making the confession which is heavily signed as being about to produce the desired ending: in Persinna's words, if only you could bring yourself to tell me more plainly what you have so far left unsaid about yourself, the young man could probably be saved. But while Charikleia makes her confession, the narrative leaves her and moves back to Hydaspes and the reception of a final embassy. At first this looks like a time-filler, but, just as the first group of embassies influenced events in an unforeseen way, there is a surprise here too. The embassy brings a letter from Oroondates, asking Hydaspes' help in tracking down the daughter of an old man. It rapidly becomes apparent that the "daughter" is Charikleia, and the old man her foster-father, Charikles.²⁸ This is a quite unlooked for turn of events, and threatens to bring about a drastic upheaval in the ending. Charikles cannot see his "daughter", but recognizes Theagenes, on whom he performs a citizen's arrest, accusing him of kidnapping and sacrilege. If it seems improbable that Charikles will be able to prise Charikleia away from her parents, he nevertheless poses a distinct threat to Theagenes, whom he has been empowered to put to death (10.36.4). The threat is the more pressing because Theagenes' abduction of Charikleia from Delphi has always been characterized as morally ambivalent, so that the reader must concede that Charikles' case has some force.²⁹ Theagenes admits the charge, and for a moment it seems

²⁸ Probably as early as 10.34.3; Charikles would be identified at the latest by his accusations against Theagenes at 10.35.2, though he is not named until 10.36.1. The whole episode is structured like a riddle; the answer is withheld for as long as possible, but in the end has to be given in case there is any reader dull enough not to have worked it out for himself. This is a reader-oriented game, similar to the description of the sacrificial giraffe, only belatedly named as such (10.27.4).

²⁹ Compare the regrets expressed by Kalasiris at 3.15.3, which cast all his later machinations in a rather callous light; also 4.9.1, where awareness of Charikles' position is one element in Kalasiris' complex emotional state; pity for Charikles

that the death sentence is confirmed (10.37.2). Then comes the revelation that it is Hydaspes' own daughter to whom Charikles is laying claim, and the final resolution is achieved when Sisimithres, who has understood all along, embraces Charikles, Charikleia falls at her foster-father's feet, and Persinna emerges to tell Hydaspes that Theagenes is to be Charikleia's husband; thus the confession is fed into the dénouement, but only to corroborate what has already been revealed by other means.

The narrative ends with a cross-reference back to the oracle which has structured the reading of so much of the novel. Only now can the significance of the last two lines become clear: the λευκὸν στέμμα is neither the crown of royalty nor the chaplet of sacrifice, but the insignia of solar and lunar priesthood into which Theagenes and Charikleia are now ordained. And the elusive last word, μελαινομένων, which at one point had seemed to allude to the blackness of sacrificially shed blood, acquires new meaning. It is not just that the brows on which the white crown is set are black: they are *turning black*. With their ordination Theagenes and Charikleia *become* Ethiopian; the white crown makes their white skins metaphorically black. The text concludes with the departure of all the *dramatis personae* (except poor Meroebos) to celebrate τὰ ἐπὶ τῷ γάμῳ μυστικώτερα.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND CLOSURES

And so the plot reaches its expected conclusion after all, but by an unforeseen path. The most characteristic quality of the plotting towards the end of the *Aithiopika* is its scrupulous unpredictability.³⁰ Charikleia's recognition and Theagenes' reprieve are both brought about by the intervention of unforeseen agencies (unsignalled proofs and Charikles). In both cases, the expected instruments of dénouement have proved inadequate to their task; or, to put it more accurately, the text has created a set of expectations about them with which it never had any intention of complying. The narrative is full of signs that point wrong trails. Maternal instinct, γνωρίσματα, Charikleia's confession, for example, all fail to play the decisive role promised of them. The expected avenues of resolution are blocked: Hydaspes refuses to accept the validity of Charikleia's "greatest proofs," a sudden access of virgin modesty renders the otherwise formidable heroine incapable of making the confession that would save her lover's life. Assumptions that from a distance appeared safe and reasonable prove from a closer perspective not to apply at all: the Ethiopians are not agents of salvation, virtue does not bring its own reward, reprieve does not automatically follow from recognition, Theagenes is not automatically spared when Charikleia is recognized. The happy ending itself is kept in doubt as long as possible. Obstacles to its achievement are constantly and unexpectedly encountered: the sacrifice and the Ethiopian νόμος, Meroebos, Charikles, who threatens a radically "wrong" ending on virtually the last page. The system of predictive

is evoked at 4.14.2 and especially at 4.19.6ff., in his tearful speech to the assembly at Delphi after the abduction of Charikleia.

³⁰ The analysis by G. N. Sandy, *Heliodorus* (Boston 1982) esp. 33ff., of the way that Heliodorus manipulates the presentation of his narrative complements my description of the way he manipulates his reader's responses to it. In particular Sandy touches on devices such as narrative red herrings and cheated expectations in his account of the role of Thisbe in the early books of the *Aithiopika*.

signs that at times seems an authorial guarantee that the story is going to end as it ought has a way of changing its meaning. The fundamental oracle from Book Two, for instance, which provides a predictive armature around which the reader can construe the movement of the plot, is shown, as the narrative proceeds, to be open to radically polarized interpretations. Does it foretell coronation or sacrificial death in Ethiopia? Only in the last paragraph of the whole work does its richest meaning become fully available.

In short, Heliodoros avoids the closure of his plot until the last possible moment. The reader's residual fear that generic laws may be broken is never allowed to atrophy. Hope and fear are alternately evoked for his pleasure, and the delights of uncertainty are never allowed to stale into a complacency that everything is sure to turn out right in the end. So Heliodoros avoids the dangers inherent in a generically imposed ending.

The previous section tried to trace a subtext to the *Aithiopika* by plotting the reactions of a reader objectively constituted by the sum total of signs contained in the text. The analysis tended to confine itself to what Barthes called the "proairetic" code, signs that direct the way the reader follows and integrates the plot.³¹ It is clear that Heliodoros is as deft and devious a manipulator of proairesis in the final section of his novel as he is of hermeneusis in its beginning. It is also clear that he has gone to this trouble in order to make the story pleasurable and exciting. This does not preclude the expression of values inherent in the story, but it suggests that readings which de-emphasize or subordinate the function of the novel as provider of narrative entertainment or reduce the story to mere vehicle for supratextual meaning are failing fully to address the principles on which the text is organized.

But besides dwelling on the unpredictability of the path by which the end is reached, we must also take account of the fact that the ending *is* the predictable one. We have seen that fear of a wrong ending involves fear that the whole romantic teleology might be mere delusion. So there is an ethical point too about the ending. The pleasure we take from the text is not simply one of riding the switchback of the plot; it has to do with the "rightness" of the destination. This "rightness" resides in two elements, significantly and deliberately positioned in the two final sentences of the text (not counting the author's self-identifying colophon). First, in 10.41.2, through the mind of Charikles, we are reminded of the oracle. This has come true in an unexpected but literal way. The providence of the gods is vindicated; the random counter-world of hostile spirits is finally exploded. The operation of the world is benevolent, and god sees clearer than man. I do not see this, however, as a religious "message" to the novel, although religious wholeness is certainly one of the *Aithiopika's* official values. Rather, I think, the religious ending is there precisely to convey the sense of an ending, just as people build eschatological or millennial fictions to give real life a sense of end-generated meaning. The religious structure of the *Aithiopika* is nothing more than a cypher for the control of its author. In the words of Henry James, "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so."³² The novel is an artificially closed world, spatially and temporally, cleanly contained by its own structure. The

³¹ R. Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris 1970; trans. R. Miller, London 1975); commentary by J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London 1975) 202–5.

³² *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P. Blackmur (London 1935) 5–6 (= Preface to *Roderick Hudson*).

religious apparatus forms the Jamesian geometry which provides "the presumability *somewhere* of a convenient, of a visibly appointed stopping-place."³³

Second, the work ends with marriage, an affirmation of its profoundest social and sexual values. The marriage about to be enacted when the text closes is the end to which all the experiences of hero and heroine have been directed, and which alone can make their experience bearable and senseful. It is a sacramental ending to a novel which has elevated love to the status of sacrament. The last sentence of narrative coincides with the attainment of the novel's truest value: the consummation, under the auspices of marriage, of true love.³⁴

Narrative is deviance. It cannot exist except when the stasis of normality is disrupted by the abnormal, the dynamic, the narratable. Before the beginning and after the end we can only assume a state of non-narratable quietude. The *Aithiopika* ends when the abnormal is purged, and the stasis from which the story deviates can be resumed. The dynamic and deviant event which brought the whole story to life was the birth of Charikleia, white in Ethiopia. At the end of the story Charikleia has returned, to her family and her nation. The deviance of her whiteness is absolved by the fulfilment of the oracle; this is why there is so much emphasis at the end on the image of κροτάφων μελαινομένων. The white child returns to blackness in the service of the gods who have steered her destiny. Her story has come full circle and can now relapse into non-narratability. Likewise in her relations with Theagenes, we as readers can only presume that nothing narratable ever happens to Charikleia again. Their story only makes moral sense if they pass the rest of their lives in a happiness so complete and so uniform as to present no purchase for narration. This is in fact a classic closed ending; no questions are left to be asked, the text closes because there is nothing more that could be told.

³³ (above, note 32) 6; cf. also E. M. Forster (above, note 2) 102ff.

³⁴ Cf. J. R. Morgan, "The story of Knemon in Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*," forthcoming in *JHS*.