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Charicleia's Dream: Interpreting the Heroine of a Greek Romance

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Introduction Dreams, Oracles, and Interpretation

This thesis will analyze the ways in which Charicleia, the heroine of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, is characterized, using an oracular dream as a guide to interpretation.

About the *Aethiopica*

The *Aethiopica*, or “An Ethiopian story,” is the only known work of Heliodorus of Emesa, composed about 350 A.D. Little is known about the life of Heliodorus apart from the information he provides at the end of the *Aethiopica*: “[the *Aethiopica*'s] author is a Phoenician of Emesa, of the race of the Sun—the son of Theodosius, Heliodorus” (277). Emesa stood on the same ground as the modern city of Homs, Syria, and was known for the local cult of the god ‘LH’GBL or Elahagabal.¹ The church historian Sokrates refers to a bishop named Heliodorus, living in Thessaly around 385, who may have started the practice of married men entering the church becoming celibate.²

Synopsis

Persinna, the queen of Ethiopia, conceives a child while consorting with her husband Hydaspes and looking at a wall painting of Andromeda. The child is born white as a result, in spite of both of her parents' having dark skin, and Persinna embroiders the story of her conception on a ribbon. Gathering the ribbon and some unique jewels, she sends the child to be exposed. Sisimithres, a sage who is an advisor to the Ethiopian court, finds the baby and takes her to be raised by shepherds outside the Ethiopian capital city of Meroe. When she is seven, Sisimithres takes her to Egypt and gives her to a Delphic priest named Charicles whom he meets

¹Whitmarsh 2011, 109.

²Morgan 2003, 420 surveys other apocryphal stories about Heliodorus.

there. Charicles takes her home to Delphi, gives her the name Charicleia, and raises her as his daughter.³ When Charicleia is seventeen years old and a priestess of Artemis, she participates in a religious festival where she meets a young man named Theagenes, who is from Thessaly. They fall in love at first sight and suffer from lovesickness. Calasiris, an Egyptian priest, is visiting Delphi after receiving a secret charge from Persinna to bring her long lost daughter home. He confirms Charicleia's identity by reading the ribbon and reveals the story of her Ethiopian birth. Calasiris facilitates the elopement of Charicleia and Theagenes, taking them to a fishing village for the winter, which they leave only to be captured by pirates and taken to Egypt. Turning the pirates against each other during a banquet on a beach in the Nile Delta, Calasiris saves Charicleia from marriage to their leader and leaves the scene of the battle that breaks out. Charicleia and Theagenes, the only survivors of the battle, sit on a beach amid the corpses of the pirates. This is the opening scene of the novel, and its high level of detail and complexity is emblematic of the novel as a whole.

After only a moment's rest, Charicleia and Theagenes are taken prisoner by a group of local bandits. The leader of the bandits, Thyamis, wishes to marry Charicleia, but he and his men are all scattered or killed in a battle before he can accomplish it. Charicleia, Theagenes, and their new friend Cnemon survive the battle. Cnemon goes to a neighboring town where he meets Calasiris, who tells him the story of Charicleia and Theagenes up to the battle among the pirates. Meanwhile, Charicleia and Theagenes are taken prisoner and separated. Charicleia is taken to the

³A note on spelling: the romanization of Greek names is consistently inconsistent. The title *Aethiopica* is sometimes spelled "Aithiopika" or "Aethiopika." The name "Charicleia" can also be spelled Charikleia or Kharikleia. "Calasiris" is often spelled "Kalasiris." Heliodorus himself is also known as "Heliodoros." I have chosen to preserve the different spellings used by the critics whose writing I quote. For the main narrative, I have chosen to use the spellings, "Aethiopica," "Charicleia," and "Calasiris," since those are the ones used by Moses Hadas in his 1957 translation.

house where Cnemon and Calasiris are staying, and they free her from her captor. Theagenes ends up in Persian-occupied Memphis, where Charicleia and Calasiris find him. Calasiris dies, and Charicleia and Theagenes enter the house of Arsace, the wife of a Persian commander. Arsace desires Theagenes and holds the lovers prisoner while trying to bend him to her will. They are eventually freed and taken south to Syene, where Charicleia's birth father Hydaspes is in the process of winning a war. Charicleia waits to reveal her identity to him until she is outside Meroe, about to be sacrificed to the Moon as a victory offering. After seeing multiple proofs of her word, Hydaspes accepts her as his daughter. The assembled Ethiopian men vote to abolish human sacrifice and save Charicleia from being offered to the Moon. Hydaspes grants her permission to marry Theagenes, and everyone leaves for Meroe to celebrate their wedding.

This plot summary smoothes out the narrative structure of the text for the sake of clarity. The novel opens with the moment when Charicleia and Theagenes are left on the Egyptian beach in the midst of corpses, and the reader must wait until Book 5 for a full explanation of it.⁴ When Heliodorus returns to the scene in the middle of the novel, he has provided enough information to build a completely different understanding of the scene. Heliodorus is known for his complex flashbacks and inset narratives, which are discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Charicleia, the heroine and protagonist, is at the center of the narrative. Her journey home to Ethiopia defines the novel, in spite of the dazzling array of plot elements that seem to overshadow it in summary.

Date and Textual History

Scholars have dated the *Aethiopica* based on the resemblance of Hydaspes' battle at Syene to a real siege that occurred in 350 A.D. When the Roman emperor Julian besieged the

⁴ The *Aethiopica* is traditionally divided into ten books of roughly equal length. Book 5, therefore, is in the middle of the novel.

city of Nisibis, he diverted the course of a nearby river to surround the city with water. Hydaspes uses the same tactic to break down the defenses of Syene and wins the battle. For this reason, J.R. Morgan argues that Heliodorus must have written the novel in about 360 A.D., close enough to the siege to “exploit public awareness and interest,” and that he became a Christian and entered the church at least forty years later.⁵

Of the twenty-four extant manuscripts of Heliodorus, the text as we have it is drawn from six, dating from the eleventh to sixteenth centuries. The novel was first printed in 1534 in Basle, and editions appeared regularly until the middle of the twentieth century. The standard text today is the 1935 edition by Rattenbury and Lumb.⁶

Reception History

Since its publication, the *Aethiopica* has enjoyed two periods of intense popularity. The first, in the sixteenth century, was sparked by its translation into modern languages. Heliodorus’ influence on early modern literature was wide-reaching, as Jonathan Crewe writes: “The literary works for which *Aethiopika* served as a prototype include Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), Miguel de Cervantes’ *Persiles y Sigismunda* (1617), Robert Greene’s *Pandosto* (1588), Abraham Fraunce’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Yviechurch* (1591), Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* (1590), and Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596). Traces of the *Aethiopika* persist in William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (1623) and *Cymbeline* (1623), and in *The Winter’s Tale* (1623) via *Pandosto*.”⁷ After this period of popularity, the *Aethiopica* faded into obscurity again.

⁵ Morgan 2003, 418 discusses the dating of the novel in detail.

⁶ See Morgan 2003, 425 for a more complete overview of the textual history.

⁷ Crewe 2009, 602.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, widespread scholarly interest in Heliodorus has been fueled by its surprising adaptation of the Greek romance novel genre. The *Aethiopica* is typically classed with four similar books, which as a group are known as the Greek novels or Greek romances. The Greek romance is discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis, and in recent decades Heliodorus has typically been studied in context with these other four works that predate his novel. The extant examples of the genre predate Heliodorus, and the *Aethiopica* is almost always studied in conjunction with the rest of the genre. The novel deals with subject matter that has become mainstream in the field of classics in recent decades: race, colonial power relations, and gender.⁸

Interpretation in the *Aethiopica*

John Winkler's 1982 essay, "The mendacity of Kalasiris and the narrative strategy of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*," is one of the most influential scholarly works about the novel. Winkler uses the various lies Calasiris tells as a starting point for his analysis of how the novel demands interpretation, patience, and participation from the reader. Ultimately, he proves that Calasiris' lies are moral. In the process, he advances a theory of the function of ambiguity and interpretation in the text that has shaped readings of the novel ever since. In support of his thesis, he introduces the term "incomplete cognition," saying "Heliodorus regularly manipulates points of view so as to contrast and highlight states of relative knowledge and ignorance. These are calculated to produce neither pure suspense nor pure surprise, but rather states of partial knowledge: provocative uncertainties, riddle oracles, puzzles and ambiguities. All these forms of relative knowledge and ignorance are cases of *incomplete cognition*, a phrase which I will use to

⁸ See, for example, Perkins 1999, Burrus 2005, and Lye 2016.

analyze several conscious strategies of the author, and which I regard as the fundamental principle of Heliodoros' narrative technique.”⁹ In the introduction of the second section of his article, Winkler writes, “interpretation is a complex and difficult process, and Heliodoros often describes the problems which characters have in interpreting what they see or read. He constructs several scenes as debates about the meaning of a dream or oracle and elsewhere exploits to great effect amphibolies (either/or's) which pose alternative explanations for a single event.”¹⁰ He concludes, “the *Aithiopika* is an act of pure play, yet a play which rehearses vital processes by which we must live in reality—interpretation, reading, and making a provisional sense of things.”¹¹ I take Winkler's conclusions about the centrality of interpretation in the novel as a starting point for my analysis of Charicleia in this thesis.

Interpreting Charicleia

Charicleia, who passes between cultural groups and geographic areas multiple times in the novel and dons multiple identities in the process, is a carefully constructed character. She appears as a priestess, a lover, a beggar, a princess, an acolyte of Artemis, an object of erotic desire, a chaste daughter, a lovesick maiden stricken by *eros*, and a cool headed lawyer advocating for herself. Heliodorus characterizes his heroine by the omission of certainty and detail more than the inclusion. He releases information about her slowly, carefully, and with multiple false starts. As a result, the reader must constantly revise her impression of Charicleia. She resembles Odysseus, Penelope, Andromeda, and the women of the other romances. Charicleia defines the *Aethiopica*, but defining her is a Sisyphean task.

⁹ Winkler 1982, 95.

¹⁰ Winkler 1982, 114.

¹¹ Winkler 1982, 158.

We can look to a scene in Book 1 for a model for how to interpret Charicleia, when information about her is thin on the ground. Both the reader and the other characters have little to go on but the descriptive passages in the opening scene, and Heliodorus withholds even the basic outline of her story until long after this point. Charicleia and Theagenes, after fighting the pirates on the beach in Egypt, have been taken prisoner by bandits and brought to their camp. Thyamis, the leader of the bandits, becomes inflamed with passion after seeing the beautiful Charicleia. He decides to ask for permission to marry her from his crew. Thyamis analyzes the mysterious girl in a speech to his men, in which he convinces them to grant permission for the marriage:

‘In the first place I think her nobly born. I base my conviction on the wealth that was found about her and the fact that she was not crushed by misfortune but from the beginning bore adversity with a high spirit. Next, I conjecture that she possesses a good and chaste character. If she surpasses all womankind in beauty and yet by the modesty of her glance awes all beholders into respect, how can she not establish a high opinion of herself? But the most effective of my arguments is that she appears to be a priestess of some god. Even in her misfortune she deems it a grave impiety to lay aside her sacred robe and fillets.’ (21)

Thyamis uses multiple context clues to piece together an image of a rich, tough, chaste, modest, beautiful priestess. When he argues that she is nobly born based on the circumstances in which they found her on the beach, saying, “I base my conviction on the wealth that was found about her,” he recalls the romance novel tradition of exposed babies discovered with expensive objects. Charicleia, it turns out, was just such a baby. She is in fact nobly born, although even the most perceptive reader could not discern that she is royalty. When Thyamis says, “she was not crushed by misfortune but from the beginning bore adversity with a high spirit,” he obliquely links her to Odysseus, who experiences many struggles and is often described as tough and hard as a result.

Echoes from the *Odyssey* resound through the novel, not least in the overall shape of Charicleia's journey home. When Thyamis adds, "I conjecture that she possesses a good and chaste character. If she surpasses all womankind in beauty and yet by the modesty of her glance awes all beholders into respect, how can she not establish a high opinion of herself," he touches on what will emerge as a crucial part of Charicleia's character: her unswerving commitment to chastity. He also correctly identifies the fact that she is "a priestess of some god" and extremely pious. Of course, at this point, the reader has no way of knowing how accurate his analysis is. Nevertheless, Thyamis acts as a role model for the reader as she learns how to navigate the text and interpret its contents in general as well as its heroine.¹² As we will see, Thyamis' analysis of Charicleia, proceeding point by point and based on limited evidence, parallels the approach that readers and characters must take to grapple with the other ambiguous elements that appear in the novel. By setting part of the narrative in Delphi, Heliodorus foregrounds interpretation.

Delphi and Prophecy

Although Heliodorus brings his protagonists to the African continent and leaves them there at the end of the novel, a substantial amount of the story takes place in Delphi, including the beginning of the love story. Delphi is traditionally the center of the Greek world. According to Joseph Fontenrose, the Pythian oracle there was issuing prophecies from about 750 B.C. to 275 A.D. Its appeal was pan-Hellenic by 700 B.C., and attracted both individuals and delegations

¹² Thyamis also turns out to be not what he seems. He is one of Calasiris' two sons, and Heliodorus characterizes him as his father's son in many respects. His career as a bandit chief is the result of an unjust exile from his home city, based on a false accusation of sexual impurity. Thyamis returns to Memphis, takes back his hereditary priesthood from his malicious brother, and is cleared of all accusations. His story neatly parallels Charicleia's, both in the details of his departure and return and in the resulting difficulties other characters face in determining who he is.

coming to ask questions on behalf of cities.¹³ Fontenrose categorizes the oracle's responses based on the ease with which they can be understood, ranging from "clear commands" to "ambiguous predictions."¹⁴ Fontenrose, after analyzing the responses, states that "the Historical responses, therefore, lend no support to the view that the Pythia spoke or that the Delphic priests composed extraordinary responses, marvelous and clever prophecies or directions, often ambiguous. Rather, we find simple commands and statements, none requiring uncommon foresight or cleverness."¹⁵ The responses that Fontenrose categorizes, as "Legendary," however, have different qualities and are occasionally ambiguous.¹⁶ Some of the most famous examples of legendary ambiguous oracles, the type that Delphi is most closely linked with in literature, appear in Herodotus. For example, Herodotus reports the oracle's pronouncement in 481/80 that "All Attica will be taken, but Zeus grants Athena a wooden wall that shall alone be untaken and will help you and your children... O divine Salamis, you will lose many children of men either at sowing time or at a harvest."¹⁷ The ambiguity of this oracle, only clear once the Athenians had lost all their territory to the Persians and then defeated them at Salamis, is typical of the legendary oracles reported in literature.¹⁸ This literary association with mysterious prophecy is one of the key functions of Delphi in the novel, which is full of narrative elements that are difficult to interpret.

¹³ Fontenrose 1978, 1-5. Fontenrose catalogues all the responses and operations of the oracle, including legendary ones (those that do not have historical support).

¹⁴ Fontenrose 1978, 23.

¹⁵ Fontenrose 1978, 22.

¹⁶ Fontenrose 1978, 23.

¹⁷ Fontenrose 1978, 317.

¹⁸ See Fontenrose 1978, 294 for another famous example, that of Croesus, who asked the oracle what was best for man and received the answer "Know thyself." He thought it meant that his way of life was the best, rather than that knowing oneself is the best for men.

Interestingly, Heliodorus provides two Pythian oracles that are relatively easy to understand. One tells Calasiris that he will return home to Egypt. The other has a broader scope. The story of the *Aethiopica* as a whole is predicted and summarized in a prophecy from the Pythia, given during the festival of Neoptolemus, where Charicleia and Theagenes first meet, and told to Cnemon by Calasiris:

Her who is first in grace, in fame last,
Celebrate, ye Delphians, and also him sprung from a goddess.
When they have left my temple and cloven the waves
They will arrive at the dark earth of the Sun.
There will they obtain the great prize of noble life,
White garlands on dusky brows. (66)¹⁹

This prophecy, containing a command to the Delphians (“celebrate”) and a prediction (lines 3-6), tells the basic story of the novel. It also, however, emphasizes travel itself and arrival at the destination in Ethiopia, eliding the misfortunes that befall the protagonists on their journey. This prophecy also reveals the extent to which translation can shape interpretation. The first line of the prophecy identifies Charicleia and Theagenes by means of a word puzzle—Charicleia’s name means “grace-fame” and Theagenes’ means “goddess-born.” Although the reader easily recognizes the man and woman who should be celebrated and will cross the ocean as Charicleia

¹⁹ I chose to refer to Moses Hadas’ 1957 translation of the novel in my research because it was the path of least resistance, having been assigned to me for a class in the spring of 2018. Hadas’ is not the only modern translation, but I thought it would be best to work with only one. I leaned heavily on Hadas’ work throughout the writing process. By cross referencing with the Greek text throughout the process, I was able to ensure that I was not basing large amounts of my argument on things that Hadas invented. However, I cannot underestimate the translator’s power to create a new and different version of the original work, entirely their own and a product of their their culture and time. Had I worked primarily with the Greek text of the novel, I might have written a very different thesis. All citations of quotations from the English text of the novel refer to the University of Pennsylvania Press edition of Hadas’ translation.

and Theagenes, it is much easier in the context of the Greek prophecy. Moses Hadas creates a new puzzle by his translation of the original one. Interpreting “the dark land of the Sun” to mean Ethiopia is not necessarily difficult either, but without knowledge of lore about Ethiopia the line could be completely abstruse. Heliodorus later connects the concept of darkness to Ethiopia in the interpretation of a dream of Charicles, that his daughter was snatched by an eagle and carried off to a dark place. Nevertheless, this line does contain the seeming paradox common to many Delphic prophecies. The reference to “the great prize of noble life” can be taken to refer to chastity, to the patient suffering of the lovers, or to multiple other things. The final image “white garlands on dusky brows” is the most enigmatic, but introduces the concept of contrast and combination. Charicleia and Theagenes are introduced as having white skin, so this final line is the most open to interpretation.

The prophecy, taken as a whole, predicts Charicleia and Theagenes’ arrival in Ethiopia and good fortune there. To some extent, it deflates the suspense of the plot to have a prophecy predicting a happy ending. The prophecy also, however, creates a sort of contract between Heliodorus and the reader. Heliodorus promises to get his hero and heroine through the novel and to their destination alive, and to deliver a happy ending. The prophecy does not need to be completely decoded to create this contract, and some parts of it remain unclear even at the end of the novel. Heliodorus does point out that the prophecy has been fulfilled on the last page, saying “Charicles recalled the oracle he had received in Delphi and found that the divine prophecy was confirmed by events...” (277).²⁰ This resolution of the prophecy, long after it was given, is an example of the interpretive processes that fill the novel.

²⁰ Charicles tracks Charicleia to Ethiopia and wants to bring her back home to Delphi. He unexpectedly appears after the recognition scene but is easily persuaded that she is with her true parents now and should remain there.

Dreams

Winkler focuses on interpretation in the novel, as does Shadi Bartsch, who discusses the necessity of the reader's engaging with descriptive parts of the narrative that could have multiple meanings. Among these polysemic narrative elements are the many oracles and dreams that shape the novel. Bartsch describes the *Aethiopica* as "framed by oracles and prophecies..."²¹ She classes dreams and oracles together based on their co-occurrence and identical narrative functions.

Bartsch also points the reader of Heliodorus toward the work of Artemidorus, a second century writer whose handbook of dream interpretation enjoyed enduring popularity. She writes, "[Artemidorus] tells us that there are two basic types of dreams, the *enupnion* and the *oneiros*; they differ in that the former signals present circumstances, the latter future circumstances. As such, the *enupnion* has no hidden meaning and only reflects one's waking state of mind. But the *oneiros* is a... "movement or moulding of the soul that takes many forms and is significant of future benefit or misfortune." The *oneiros* itself may be literal... or allegorical... An allegorical dream, like an allegorical painting, presents a riddle... that demands decoding and acts also as a proleptic simile, this time of future events."²² Bartsch's statement that an allegorical dream requires decoding is supported by the multiple scenes of dream interpretation in the novel.

Interpreting Dreams in the *Aethiopica*

²¹ Bartsch 1989, 94.

²² Bartsch 1989, 34.

The dreams in the novel operate on several different levels, some with far-reaching impact on the plot and others that matter for only a moment.²³ There are certain dreams in the novel that do not demand much of the reader in the way of interpretation. For instance, Charicles' dream that Charicleia will be taken by an eagle and carried to a faraway land, and Charicleia's dream informing her that a ring she is carrying will protect her from fire, are both straightforward. As Bartsch observes, "these oracles offer little to be interpreted, but instead supply the idea of a grand design in which all is moving to a predestined end..."²⁴ On the other hand, dreams that require engagement, often fruitless, from the reader, destabilize the sense of everything being part of a unified scheme.

For example, the brigand chief Thyamis has an oracular dream near the beginning of the novel.²⁵ Thyamis, asleep after taking Charicleia and Theagenes prisoner, has the following dream:

He seemed to be in Memphis, his own city. He entered the temple of Isis, which was all illuminated with torches. The altars and hearths were filled and overflowing with the blood of many sorts of animals. The entry hall and colonnades were filled with people and resounded with mingled and confused noises. When he came into the inner sanctuary, the goddess came to meet him, placed Charicleia in his hands, and said: 'Thyamis, I deliver this maiden to you. You shall have her but not have her. You shall be cruel and kill this foreign girl, but she shall not be killed.' (19)

Thyamis, waking up, immediately attempts to interpret his dream. He decides that it means he will have her as a wife as opposed to a maiden, and "kill" her virginity. Ultimately, Thyamis

²³ Bartsch 1989, 99 writes "In the *Aethiopica*, there is no one process for interpretation, and the relation of dream or oracle to plot varies considerably from one to the next."

²⁴ Bartsch 1989, 101.

²⁵ Morgan 2003, 427 notes "These bandits are Boukoloi, or Herdsmen, an historically attested group, who also figure in the novels of Achilleus and (perhaps) Lollianus."

accidentally kills another woman, mistaking her for Charicleia. Heliodorus emphasizes the role of desire in the interpretive process, saying “So he interpreted this dream, his desires governing his exegesis” (20).²⁶ Ultimately, not every aspect of the dream has a symbolic resonance, and the reader has no way of knowing which parts are relevant to the story as a whole, or if Thyamis’ interpretation is correct. Why his dream takes place in the temple of Isis, why there is a noisy crowd in the temple, and why a sacrifice has just taken place there, all remain unexplained. By including a dream early on that contains symbolic “noise” as well as literal noise, Heliodorus muddies the interpretive waters for the reader.

Bartsch comments on the impact of this dream on the novel as a whole, saying, “As far as [readers] can tell, their own interpretations may or may not be correct... the author reveals truths by hindsight, a process, as said before, that awakens in the readers an awareness of their own vulnerability to false readings, rather than a feeling of equality with the author himself.”²⁷ Bartsch points out a crucial tension in the relationship between author and reader. Although Heliodorus may have promised to bring his protagonists home safely, he does not provide a comfortable narrative landscape for the reader on the way there. He not only disseminates information slowly but also foments doubt about veracity of the information he provides.

Part of what makes the characters in the *Aethiopica* so realistic is the clarity of what they want, and their readiness to interpret any signs they receive as foreshadowing either the fulfillment or the destruction of their hopes. They comment on each other’s optimism or pessimism often. For instance, Cnemon scolds Charicleia for always expecting the worst when her friends are slow to reveal their news about Theagenes, saying “How troublesome you are,

²⁶ Winkler 1982, 118 comments that Thyamis “lacks the patient attentiveness and the ability to suspend the demands for immediate completion which every reader of a long and sophisticated novel must have.”

²⁷ Bartsch 1989, 95.

Charicleia! You are always ready to divine the worst, and are wrong, for you are in no trouble” (145). Much later in their adventures, when Charicleia and Theagenes are interpreting dreams in a dungeon in Memphis, she chides, “Long familiarity with misfortune always leads you to the worst interpretations and conjectures; man naturally turns his mind in accordance with events,” (209). She then interprets the dream as foreshadowing their safe arrival in Memphis. Heliodorus does not comment on which lover is right in this scene, but leaves the reader to fill in the blanks: Charicleia and Theagenes are near Ethiopia, being unexpectedly delivered from a dungeon is not unparalleled, and Charicleia has been right in all of her predictions about the future up to this point. Their discussion reminds the reader yet again that even dreams that seem simple are open to multiple interpretations.

Charicleia’s Dream

A dream that reveals the necessity of interpreting some of the dreams and oracles without the assistance of Heliodorus comes very early in the novel, in Book 2. Charicleia and Theagenes, together with their new friend Cnemon, are sheltering in a cave on an island off the northern coast of Egypt. They go to sleep, and Charicleia has a bad dream: “A man with long sword and unkempt hair, bloody in look and hand, drew a sword and thrust out her right eye” (44). The dream itself is simple, short, and apparently unconnected to any events in the novel so far.

What is interesting is that Charicleia, Theagenes, and Cnemon immediately begin interpreting the dream. This is an example of the “process of interpretation” that Winkler identifies as being central to the novel and the narrative strategy. The first interpretation of the dream is that it is not a dream at all: “Charicleia put her hand to her face and felt about in search of the member she dreamed she had lost. When she realized it was a dream she said, ‘It was a

dream, I have my eye” (44). And yet the interpretation of the dream as literally true is discarded as soon as Charicleia has proof that her eye is intact. Next, Charicleia moves on to a figurative interpretation of her dream, saying to Theagenes, “I am terribly afraid that the dream may refer to you, whom I reckon my eye and my soul and my all” (45). Heliodorus gives Charicleia no time to explore or reject this idea. Cnemon, interrupting their conversation at this point, says ““Stop... it appears to me that the dream has a different significance. Tell me, are your parents alive?’ She said that to the best of her knowledge they were, and Cnemon continued, ‘Then you must believe that your father is dead. The basis of my conjecture is this. We know that our begetters are responsible for our entry into this life and our enjoyment of the light. It is quite likely then that dreams allude to father and mother through the symbolism of eyes, through whose agency we perceive light and all things visible’” (45). I will use this dream as a guide to interpreting Charicleia’s characterization. I argue that each interpretation of this dream highlights a different element that Heliodorus uses to characterize his heroine.

Previous Scholarship on Charicleia’s Dream

John Winkler highlights the dream in “The Mendacity of Kalasiris,” linking it to the death of Calasiris later in the novel: ... "since neither Theagenes nor the king of Aithiopia dies, and the dream is not mentioned again in the novel, critics have concluded that the episode is a meaningless scare. There is however a solution to the dream, one which is clearly marked by every sign *except* a tediously explicit ‘So *this* was the meaning of that dream in the cave!’ Charikleia has many ‘fathers’ in this novel... Of these the only one who dies is Kalasiris, and it is his death which her dream foretells." ²⁸ Winkler emphasizes the way Heliodorus expects the

²⁸ Winkler 1982, 115.

reader to keep up and put the pieces together to interpret the dream, saying “Both Charikleia’s dream and Thyamis’ are placed early in the novel as prominent examples of the kind of image or text which is incomplete and requires interpretation.”²⁹

Bartsch also highlights this dream and focuses on the stretch of narrative time that elapses between the dream and Calasiris’ death, and the interpretive void in which Heliodorus leaves the reader. She writes, “Thus, not until five books have been read is the truth of the dream finally show; throughout this long period the readers do not know what standards of truth and accuracy they may apply to the descriptions of dreams, because the first two are presented so differently, and because fulfillment follows quickly in one case and apparently not at all in the other.”³⁰ She notes that Heliodorus is more of a trickster than a helpful guide where dreams are concerned, since he presents a variety of dreams of different levels of importance and accuracy with respect to future events, and in this case allows the reader to spin her wheels about them for a long time before providing the necessary interpretive tools.

Both Bartsch and Winkler have identified important narrative functions of the dream, and both emphasize the extent to which Heliodorus leaves the reader to construct an interpretive framework in the absence of direct authorial comment. I will offer a new interpretation of the dream, taking Shadi Bartsch’s statement, “Here, involvement at the cost of error is the pivot on which authorial strategy turns. To refuse involvement is to not-read,” (99) as my directive. The dream itself is less interesting than the conversation in which the characters work together to interpret it. They recognize the ambiguity of the dream and its possible meanings, and Charicleia ends the discussion by telling Cnemon ‘be [my father having died] the true interpretation. Let

²⁹ Winkler 1982, 122.

³⁰ Bartsch 1989, 100.

your oracular gift take precedence over mine, and let me be proved a false prophetess” (45). Cnemon responds, ‘So it shall be and so must we believe’” (45). This exchange again emphasizes the importance of a person’s desires in interpretation, as well as the possibility of leaving things unresolved. I will attempt to interpret the dream in the full awareness that I am working along the lines of what I want the dream to mean. Nevertheless, I am performing the interpretive exercise Heliodorus continually models for his readers, inviting them to come up with multiple explanations for parts of his text. My reading of this dream hinges upon considering in turn what it would mean for Charicleia to lose her eye, her fiance, and her father. Although Charicleia herself says that losing Theagenes would be worse than losing an eye or a father, the scene draws attention to the importance of all three for her characterization. Since, as we learned from Thyamis, Charicleia herself as a character requires interpretation and participation, considering the major aspects of her characterization highlighted in this scene is a useful starting place.

The Dream as a Guide to Charicleia

The character of Charicleia is at the heart of the *Aethiopica*, and she is a changeable, multifarious literary creation. From start to finish, she is unpredictable, and Heliodorus never stops introducing new information about her. Even in light of all this information, she remains enigmatic. She herself is like an oracular dream, demanding interpretation in order to make sense. Heliodorus leaves instructions for the reader on how to interpret dreams and oracles at multiple points in the novel. He seems to advise considering multiple possibilities, keeping an open mind, and accepting uncertainty. Treating Charicleia as an oracle in need of decipherment facilitates an interpretive process that uses the tools Heliodorus provides. Many aspects of the

novel shape Charicleia's character, and her dream of losing an eye, along with her interpretations of it, provides a model for exploring them. I will connect her first interpretation, that she has actually lost an eye, to the significance and ambiguity of her appearance throughout the novel. The second interpretation, that Theagenes is in danger, resonates because of its implications for Charicleia's characterization as a romance heroine. The third interpretation, that losing her eye represents the death of her father, is part of the complicated question of Charicleia's paternity. I will present these interpretations in the order in which the characters discuss them, starting with the first, the literal interpretation.

Chapter One

The eye as an eye: The difficulty of seeing Charicleia

Charicleia's first interpretation of her dream highlights the role of vision with respect to her character. As Charicleia wakes up from her dream of a man putting out her eye, she immediately checks to make sure that it is not real: "Charicleia put her hand to her face and felt about in search of the member she dreamed she had lost. When she realized it was a dream she said, 'It was a dream, I have my eye'" (44). Dreaming of having her eye put out while sleeping in a dark cave has a particular resonance for Charicleia as a character in the broader context of the *Aethiopica*. Charicleia's appearance is a site of ambiguity and confusion, a quality that is central to her characterization and to the story of her life. Heliodorus frequently draws attention to Charicleia's physical appearance, but consistently restricts information about her appearance. With a few exceptions, discussed in this chapter, the only thing the reader learns about Charicleia is that she is extremely beautiful. Heliodorus describes many objects and people in great detail in the novel, but Charicleia is not one of them. He uses vivid imagery to direct the reader's attention to things that are either insignificant or provide incomplete information. These choices emphasize the fact that sight is not a reliable way to learn about Charicleia. As we will see, she is not what she seems.

Visual detail in the opening scene

A part of the *Aethiopica* that critics have often been drawn to is its detailed but enigmatic opening scene. Winkler uses the opening scene as an example of the interpretive process and

incomplete cognition that resonates through the entire novel.³¹ Following his example, I will return to the scene in each chapter of this thesis. The beginning of the novel places its heroes, Charicleia and Theagenes, on an Egyptian beach, in the midst of a field of corpses. Although the scene introduces the novel, Heliodorus does not fully explain it until halfway through his story. Engaging with the opening scene and trying to figure out what happened to cause it is a crucial aspect of reading the first half of the novel. Heliodorus resolves many questions about Charicleia's identity shortly before explaining the opening scene, which becomes more and more legible with the availability of more information about Charicleia.

The opening scene contains many intersecting and overlapping gazes, and the rich visual detail grounds the reader in the world of the novel, compelling her to continue reading.³² As the story develops, the reader comes to realize that vision is a deeply unreliable way to understand Charicleia. In this scene, however, vision is the only sense that Heliodorus uses to reveal information about her. The first phrases use two contrasting images in quick succession to create a startling effect:

Ἡμέρας ἄρτι διαγελώσης καὶ ἡλίου τὰς ἀκρωρείας καταυγάζοντος, ἄνδρες ἐν ὄπλοις ληστρικοῖς ὄρους ὑπερκύψαντες, ὃ δὴ κατ' ἐκβολὰς τοῦ Νείλου καὶ στόμα τὸ καλούμενον Ἡρακλεωτικὸν ὑπερτείνει, μικρὸν ἐπιστάντες τὴν ὑποκειμένην θάλατταν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐπήρχοντο καὶ τῷ πελάγει τὸ πρῶτον τὰς ὄψεις ἐπαφέντες, ὡς οὐδὲν ἄγρας ληστρικῆς ἐπηγγέλλετο μὴ πλεόμενον, ἐπὶ τὸν πλησίον αἰγιαλὸν τῆι θεῇ κατήγοντο.
(1.1.1.)

Day had begun to smile and the sun was shining upon the hilltops when a band of armed pirates scaled the mountain which extends to the mouth of the Nile called the Heracleot, where it empties into the sea. They halted for a little while to survey the waters which stretched before them. Out at sea, where they first directed their attention, not a sail was

³¹ Winkler 1982, 103-106 argues, "What interests Heliodoros most in the opening tableau is the *process of interpretation*, particularly in the forms of misapprehension and failed understanding."

³² Multiple scholars have studied the intense visuality of the opening scene and the novel in general from different analytical standpoints. See in particular Bartsch 1989, 45; Telo 2011, 1; and Webb 2009, 181.

stirring to whet the pirates' appetite for plunder; but when they turned to look at the coastline nearby their eyes encountered a strange spectacle. (1)

In the first sentence, numerous details give the reader a clear sense of topography, light, elevation, and location. The peace of the calm dawn scene drawn by the first few words is shattered by the unexpected phrase, "a band of armed pirates scaled the mountain." Here, Heliodorus emphasizes their act of looking, saying "... when they turned to look at the coastline nearby their eyes encountered a strange spectacle" (1).

The strange spectacle, dead men lying among the remains of the feast, ends up being incidental to the plot of the novel, in spite of the great detail in which Heliodorus describes it. At this point, however, the reader has no choice but to try to figure it out, and the same is true for the bandits. In addition to the pirates, Charicleia, and Theagenes, the reader is also a visual actor in the scene.³³ When the bandits have decided they do not know what the scene means, they see another, "stranger than the first" (2).

Upon a rock sat a maiden of such inexpressible beauty as to be supposed divine. Grieved by her surroundings, she yet breathed an air of noble courage. Her head was crowned with laurel, a quiver hung at her shoulder, to her left arm a bow was attached, and the other hung negligently down. She rested her left elbow on her right knee, her cheek leaning against her open hand. Her head inclined forward without moving, for she was looking fixedly at a young man who lay at her feet. (2)

The maiden is Charicleia, the heroine of the novel, although Heliodorus takes his time revealing that information. In the opening scene, Heliodorus uses general wording to describe Charicleia's appearance, saying only that she has "inexpressible beauty" and "breathed an air of noble courage." He does, however, go into great detail to describe her posture and the objects around

³³ Whitmarsh 2011, 108.

her body. “Inexpressible beauty” is a remarkably vague way to describe a new character, and it is difficult to imagine what grief mixed with noble courage might look like on a person’s face. Her laurel wreath, bow, and quiver, objects anyone can picture, are more useful clues to what the scene before the pirates looks like. Heliodorus’ extremely specific description of her posture allows the reader to build an image of Charicleia based on the visual texture of her current circumstances rather than her past or future, both completely obscured. Next, Heliodorus uses her gaze to direct the reader’s attention away from her and onto the man at her feet. Heliodorus describes his critical condition, white skin, and drowsy state before directing attention back to Charicleia, “Pain had clenched his eyes, but the sight of the maiden drew them toward her; they must needs see because they saw her” (3).

Charicleia seems completely real, in spite of Heliodorus’ omission of her face, in the first description of her. The man’s mistrust of his own eyes, demonstrated when he says, “are you truly safe, or are you too a casualty of war? Could you not endure separation from me even in death, and does your ghostly phantom hover over my fortunes” (3), is the first clue to the reader that everything is not what it looks like in the world of this novel, in particular Charicleia.

Heliodorus gives the illusion of completeness with the panoramic gaze of the pirates, but all the details fill the page without satisfying any curiosity. The important questions of how and why the lovers arrived on the beach and how the men around them died go unanswered until Book 5. Heliodorus also uses the distribution of narrative focus in the scene to deemphasize Charicleia’s identity. He spends more time describing the aftermath of the slaughter on the rest of the beach than he does describing his heroine, and quickly jerks the reader’s gaze away from her and onto Theagenes. He leaves the relative importance of the different elements of the scene

unclear. In the first scene, Heliodorus reveals his skill at saying little with many words, and makes a personal and frustrating proof for the reader of how uninformative even a richly detailed visual experience can be.³⁴

Misleading descriptions

Heliodorus continues to provide a high level of visual detail as the novel unfolds. An ekphrastic passage describing an amethyst ring that Persinna exposed with Charicleia is an especially striking example:

The circlet was of amber, and the gem in its setting was a brilliant Ethiopian amethyst the size of a maiden's eye... An animated design was engraved upon it in intaglio. A young shepherd was represented as pasturing his sheep. He was standing on a slightly raised rock to survey his flock and was directing them to their pasturages by the notes of his transverse flute. The sheep seemed to hearten and to regulate their pace by the pasturing signals of the pipes.³⁵ One would imagine that their heavy fleeces were of gold; this effect was not produced artificially, but the native ruddiness of the amethyst tinted the backs of the sheep. The light frolicking of lambs was also represented. Some scampered up the rock in a troop, others gamboling friskily about the shepherd in a ring gave the rock the appearance of a rustic theater. Some wantoning in the flame of the amethyst as in the sun bounded over the rocks on the tips of their hooves. The rock was not counterfeit but real; at the edges of the stone the artist had marked off the space he desired, thinking it otiose to feign stone in stone. (121)

Heliodorus takes a significant detour from the narrative by describing the design on the stone, striking a surprising pastoral note in the midst of a business transaction between Calasiris and the Greek merchant Nausicles. The detail with which he outlines the design on the amethyst suggests

³⁴ See Whitmarsh 2011, 109 for the shared *aporia* of the pirates and the reader. He writes, "They then spy a beautiful woman and man, 'a sight more *aporetic* (*aporoteron*) than the previous one. Their *aporia* is ours too."

³⁵ Compare with the skillful piping of the goatherd Daphnis in *Daphnis and Chloe*, a Greek romance of much smaller scope than the *Aethiopica*. Whether intentionally or not, Heliodorus has captured the essence of *Daphnis and Chloe* in an ekphrastic passage that is completely incidental to his much larger work.

that it has a significance in the broader scope of the plot. Calasiris, however, offers the ring to Nausicles as a ransom for Charicleia, in order to buy her out of slavery. As far as the reader is concerned, the ring is probably significant because it has been described in so much detail. And yet, this is the only mention of the ring in the entire novel. Nausicles accepts the ring as payment for Charicleia, protesting that he would not actually have asked for a ransom from Calasiris, and although characters go to and from Nausicles' house multiple times after the exchange, the ring does not come up again. In his description of the amethyst ring, Heliodorus uses extensive imagery to misdirect the reader's attention, emphasizing something that ultimately does not matter in the plot. He devotes far more words to the amethyst, something easily understood simply by looking, than to the physical appearance of his heroine, a truly significant part of the novel.

Heliodorus does not reserve his vivid but unimportant imagery for landscapes and inanimate objects: he also creates a specific image of Theagenes when Calasiris meets him.

Calasiris describes Theagenes as follows:

He did have the true air of an Achilles in his forthright look and his proud spirit. His neck was erect, his hair flowed straight back from his forehead, his nose proclaimed his impetuous spirit and his nostrils snuffed the free air. His eyes were not blue but a bluish black; his glance was austere but not unamiable, like the sea smoothed to tranquility after a tempest. (65)

A police sketch artist could create a picture of Theagenes from this description, with the possible exception of his glance looking like the sea after a storm. Heliodorus makes Theagenes fully accessible and visible to the reader the first time he appears in the narrative. To some extent, this first description contains all one needs to know about Theagenes. Far more specific than the narrator's initial designation of "noble courage" to Charicleia, this passage maps personality

traits onto Theagenes' physical features with the words, "his nose proclaimed his impetuous spirit and his nostrils snuffed the free air." Heliodorus also gives him a hairstyle, posture, and eye color, things never specified for Charicleia. Theagenes, like the amethyst, can be analyzed accurately simply on the basis of his appearance. This rush of detail about Theagenes primes the reader to expect a similar description of Charicleia, but Heliodorus is toying with our expectations again. Theagenes is ultimately much less important to the novel than Charicleia, and the personality traits Heliodorus maps onto his facial features barely materialize. The reader will never get a similarly detailed description of Charicleia's appearance.

Not seeing Charicleia

As Cnemon encourages Calasiris to describe the procession where Charicleia and Theagenes first met, Heliodorus depicts Cnemon as confused about what matters in the story, and his insistence on knowing what things look like as foolish. Cnemon's insistence on hearing every detail of what the procession was like, along with Calasiris' partial compliance, leads the reader to expect an account of all the visual stimuli Calasiris experienced. Theagenes has already been thoroughly described, so Charicleia should be next. Charicles tells the story of his adoption of Charicleia without mentioning her skin color, but it is clear from the adoption narrative that she was born in Ethiopia. The reader does not yet know her birth story. The morning of the procession, Charicles tells Calasiris, "Today you will see Charicleia, if you have not already done so" (65). Calasiris tells Cnemon that he had already met Charicleia, an event that he completely elided in his earlier narrative. Although Charicles builds up the experience of seeing Charicleia as the most important, Heliodorus ultimately deemphasizes it by making Calasiris, wiser than Charicles on balance, skip over the moment when he first met her.

Finally, after a lavish account of the sacrificial animals and maidens and young men at the procession, Calasiris starts to describe Charicleia. Calasiris paints a vivid picture of her clothing and hairstyle:

She rode in a carriage drawn by a yoke of white oxen and was dressed in a purple robe picked out with golden rays which reached to her feet. Under her bosom was fastened a cincture on which the artist had bestowed all his skill; never before had he fashioned anything so fine, nor could he ever again afterward. Two serpents had their tails interlaced behind her back, while their necks crossed under her breasts and formed a winding noose... Her hair was neither all braided nor all loose. The greater part, gathered behind her neck, floated in waves on her back and shoulders; that which descended from her crown and brow was wreathed with soft branches of laurel, which prevented the breezes from disturbing it more than was seemly and gave an appearance of roses in bright sunlight. In her left hand she carried a bow covered with gilt, over her right shoulder a quiver was slung, in her right hand was a lighted torch—but the beam from her eyes shone brighter than any torches. (70)

Heliodorus draws the reader's gaze up from the oxen that draw the carriage, to the hem of her robe, to her girdle. At the crucial moment, however, he skips over her face, leaving out the sort of description he gave to Theagenes, and climbing to her hairstyle.³⁶ He then describes the objects in her hands. This view of Charicleia follows the form of the opening scene in several ways. First of all, it also occurs at dawn. The things Charicleia carries are the same objects she has in the opening scene. The reader has now received far more information about Charicleia and Theagenes, and the fact that this scene is taking place in Delphi itself seem to make her clothing, laurel wreath, bow, and quiver intelligible. Their significance is now clear: Charicleia is a priestess of Artemis at Delphi and these are her religious accessories. The twin snakes on her girdle, described in far more detail of color and texture than Charicleia's own body:

³⁶ Whitmarsh 2013, 133 compares this description to that of the heroine in *Leucippe and Clitophon*, saying "Charicleia is indeed proclaimed beautiful, but she is never anatomized as Leucippe is." He adds that the account is "not unerotic... but its eroticism is metonymically transferred from her body parts to her clothing."

The heads emerged from the noose at either side like knobs for the knot. You would have said not that the serpents seemed to glide but that they did glide. Nor did they have a rigid and terrifying look, but rather did they float in a languid slumber, as if they had been lulled to sleep by the loveliness of the maiden's bosom. Their material was gold, their color a dark blue. The gold had been artificially darkened so that the alternation of black and yellow should imitate the rough and changeable scales. (70)

On the one hand, the snakes link Charicleia securely to Apollo and his sanctuary. On the other hand, they also suggest a doubleness that the reader will come to associate with Charicleia. The gold, darkened to blue to imitate real snakeskin, is in disguise as something else but still legible to Calasiris as gold. The snakes may be a symbolic representation of the necessary awareness that Charicleia is not as she seems. It is clear that they are made of gold but the material has been crafted into a startlingly lifelike imitation of snakes, not golden but blue. The ability to understand that the snakes are not alive and are made of gold although they look blue parallels the dual perception the reader now has of Charicleia.

The image of Charicleia that Heliodorus has constructed so far is that of a Delphian priestess, and this description of Charicleia reaffirms her Greek identity by linking her so closely with Apollo, Artemis, and Delphi. At this point in the novel, however, the image prompts the reader to remember that looking is not a reliable way to determine the truth about a person, particularly Charicleia. Here, her Delphian attributes conceal her Ethiopian birth, as they did in the first scene, but the reader has now been let in on part of the secret. Taken together, disproportionate attention to the snakes, which are never mentioned again, and to Charicleia's Delphian attributes, which do not tell the whole story of her life, emphasizes the fallibility of sight in determining the truth about her. Heliodorus continues to withhold information from the

reader about what Charicleia looks like, while making constant reference to how other characters respond to the sight of her.

Supernatural beauty

Heliodorus peppers his narrative with assertions that Charicleia is the most beautiful woman anyone has ever seen. Although this is a strategy employed by other romance authors to characterize their heroines, it takes on an additional significance in a story that revolves around the heroine's appearance but depends on its misinterpretation. Charicles is the greatest proponent of Charicleia's beauty, which he centers in all his descriptions of his daughter. Charicles describes his first encounter with Charicleia as follows: "... he took me to his house and showed me a girl of indescribable, and indeed heavenly beauty. He said she was seven years old but to me she seemed nearly of marriageable age, so much did her superlative beauty enhance even her stature. I stood dumbfounded, ignorant of what was happening and ravished by what I saw" (60).

Charicles reveals that his daughter's beauty was powerful enough to warp even the most basic aspects of her appearance when he says, "she seemed nearly of marriageable age." This passage suggests, once again, that Charicleia's appearance is deceiving. While Charicles' ignorance of what is happening around him is caused by his reaction to Charicleia, he has a more important, broader ignorance of her origins. His ignorance matches that of the pirates at the beginning of the novel, also described as ignorant because they did not know Charicleia's history. While the other romance heroines are largely defined by their beauty, Charicleia's attractiveness itself ultimately means very little. Mentioning how beautiful she is creates the illusion that beauty is the most important thing about her. Charicles formally introduces Charicleia to the reader, and he too focuses on Charicleia's beauty to the exclusion of other

characteristics. Charicles shows no interest in finding out why Charicleia was exposed, instead celebrating the fact that he has found such a good replacement for his dead biological daughter. These and other references to Charicleia's indescribable beauty also create narrative tension as the reader waits in vain for a description that never comes. In spite of Charicleia's supernatural beauty, other characters often misidentify her.

Mistaken categorizations

Surprisingly, Theagenes, Charicleia's fiance and constant companion, makes the most dramatic mistakes as he looks at Charicleia. His first error comes slightly before Charicleia dreams of having her eye put out. Entering the cave where he knows that she is hidden, he sees the body of Thisbe, a minor character who has been accidentally killed.³⁷ Assuming the body is Charicleia's, he immediately begins to mourn her death.³⁸ The reader might well think the dead woman is Charicleia, since her fiance Theagenes thinks so too. Theagenes actually refers to Charicleia's appearance as something that should have deterred the murder, saying "Extinguished are those bright orbs whose brilliant beauty dazzled the world; the murderer can never have seen them, I know it well" (35). When Theagenes hears the voice of the real Charicleia echoing through the cave, he cries out, "I come, darling soul. Plainly you still hover about the earth, partly because you cannot bear to be separated from this body, from which you were so violently wrenched" (36). Reunited with Charicleia moments later, he says, "Are you alive, my Charicleia?" (37). His doubt about whether or not she is alive, even as he embraces

³⁷ Thyamis killed Thisbe as a result of mistaking her for Charicleia, since he was unable to see her in the dark and she spoke Greek to him. Thisbe, introduced as a character in Cnemon's Athenian backstory, travelled to Egypt to inform him that his wicked stepmother was dead and he could return to Athens. Cnemon returns home in the middle of the novel, paralleling Charicleia's *nostos* plot.

³⁸ Compare a similar moment in *Leucippe and Clitophon*, in which Clitophon witnesses the execution of another woman and thinks that she is Leucippe.

her, emphasizes the uncertainty of her existence and the unreliability of the senses. Theagenes mistakes her a second time when he sees Charicleia at Memphis a few days later, this time not recognizing her as herself rather than recognizing someone else as her.

Charicleia and Theagenes are taken prisoner and separated when they emerge from the cave where they were reunited and Charicleia had her dream. Having been freed from her captor, Charicleia intentionally disguises herself for the journey to find Theagenes. Her disguise is the first instance of intentional deception in terms of her appearance.³⁹ The narrator says, “[Calasiris and Charicleia] demeaned themselves with rags which they had got ready, and then Charicleia defiled her face by rubbing soot on it and smearing mud over it. On her head she stuck a tattered veil whose hem hung crooked from her brow over one eye” (153). This disguise seems superficial at most, and ineffective at best. Charicleia’s supernatural beauty should be able to shine through any coat of soot and mud. And yet, when Charicleia sees Theagenes again outside the city walls of Memphis, he fails to recognize her.⁴⁰

In the lead-up to their reunion, the narrator repeats a sentiment that was first stated in the story of Charicleia and Theagenes’ first infatuation: “Charicleia... had recognized Theagenes at a distance; the lover’s eye is quick to recognize the beloved; often a gesture or a posture, seen even from a distance or from the back, confirms a fancied resemblance” (166). The first time this quickness of the lover’s eye was cited, it referred to Theagenes. This time, Theagenes proves this vaguely proverbial statement wrong. The sentence, “When he saw her face, begrimed and

³⁹ Her ability to make up false stories about her past and future is discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴⁰ See Perkins 1999, 201 for a discussion of this scene. She argues that “the scene works rhetorically to demonstrate the fragility of any identity. Charicleia is only able to demonstrate her identity through passwords the couple had agreed to earlier in the story. Heliodorus’ narrative explicitly displays the slippery nature of ‘identity’ and shows how easy it is to move from one into another, even suggesting that such central cultural categories as Hellenic and barbarian, elite and lowly are mutable.”

purposely discolored, and her torn and tattered garments, he took her for a shameless beggar,” (166) overturns the reader’s expectation of a seamless reunion of the lovers and again raises serious questions about the ability of other characters to look at Charicleia and draw accurate conclusions about her. Theagenes is not the only person to put Charicleia into the wrong categories based on snap judgments. Her birth parents do the same when they see her in Meroe.

When Charicleia arrives in Ethiopia in chains, her face is clean and shining. When Persinna sees her, she says to Hydaspes, “ ‘Perhaps the poor girl is Greek; her face is not Egyptian.’ ‘She is Greek,’ said Hydaspes to her, ‘and presently she will say who her parents are. Show them she cannot; how could she?’”(248). Their conversation presupposes multiple things about Charicleia. Although Persinna correctly identifies Charicleia as “not Egyptian,” her second guess that she is Greek reminds the reader, yet again, that Charicleia looks Greek. Hydaspes’ response, bolstered by Theagenes’ earlier assertion to him that the lovers are Greek, increases the dramatic irony of the scene.

Charicleia’s appearance elicits an even more profound confusion in many characters, who often wonder what type of being she is. Their sense of sight is not even enough to put her in the correct category of human woman at first glance. Other characters identify Charicleia as a statue, a goddess, an adolescent when she is seven, a ghost, a demon, and a male god in disguise as a girl. This questioning continues from the first scene to the last. While describing the beauty of heroines and heroes as supernatural or divine is a convention of the romance genre, there is never any sincere doubt about the human status of the people being described in the other novels. Heliodorus, however, exaggerates the concept of divine beauty, depicting an aporetic response in

other characters that emphasizes not only the beauty of Charicleia but also the variety of possible explanations for a given sight.

Girl, ghost, or god?

The first instance of other characters showing confusion about what type of being Charicleia is takes place in the opening scene. Theagenes asks her if she is a ghost or really alive and with him. When the pirates catch sight of her, they discuss possible identifications of her:

... [they] were more affected by what they saw because they were ignorant of what had gone before. Some declared she was a goddess, either Artemis or that native Isis; others held she was a priestess whose divine frenzy had worked the carnage they saw. Such were the opinions they ventured: the facts they did not know. (3)

Heliodorus states outright that their ignorance of the facts of the situation makes all their conjectures simply guesses. Just as Theagenes assumes Charicleia is a ghost and then accepts she is real, they cycle through multiple possibilities.

Another moment of confusion about Charicleia's appearance comes soon after this: the brigands at the camp of Thyamis, seeing Charicleia for the first time, believe she is a statue:

When they saw the wealth of plunder and observed that the appearance of the girl possessed a certain holy beauty, they supposed that their fellow craftsmen had plundered some temple or rich shrine and had abducted the priestess or carried off the breathing image of the deity, believing, in their simple credulity, that the maiden was such (7).

Heliodorus uses this passage not only to reiterate that Charicleia is extremely beautiful, but also to show for the third time that she can be put in various categories by people who look at her (maiden, priestess, cult statue) in spite of being simply a mortal woman. There is also a half truth concealed in their guesses: Charicleia is a priestess and collaborated in her own abduction from

Delphi. The pirates and Theagenes are not the only other characters to wonder if Charicleia is what she looks like.

As Charicleia makes her case to Hydaspes at the end of the novel, proving that she is his daughter, he raises a suspicion that recalls other moments of ambiguity about Charicleia. He says, “Perhaps some deity is making sport of us. He has taken on the appearance of this girl and is amusing himself with our eagerness for posterity” (254). Hydaspes’ concern that Charicleia may be a god in disguise is different from the pirates’ guess that Charicleia is a goddess. He suspects that she is not showing her true form, even as she explains that she is his daughter in spite of her white skin. Hydaspes is not the first character to be mistaken or confused about Charicleia based on her appearance, but he is the first to state outright that his perception may be wrong. Other characters simply accept their first impressions of Charicleia as fact, but Hydaspes is able to consider multiple possibilities. Although he has not accepted her story of the true doubleness of her identity, suspecting her of being a god in disguise puts him a step closer to accepting her story. Knowing things about Charicleia by sight is significant for Hydaspes because he knew what she looked like before he met her.

A dream image of Charicleia

When Hydaspes first meets Charicleia in the aftermath of a battle he has won, he recognizes her from a dream. He says, “I dreamt that just such a girl was born to me and that she suddenly grew to womanhood... I paid no attention to the dream, but the striking resemblance recalled it to me” (239). Heliodorus has decided to keep Charicleia’s identity a secret from her father for a little longer, so this speech serves to intensify the suspense and dramatic irony as Hydaspes comes very close to guessing the truth. When Charicleia promises him that her parents

will be present at her sacrifice, however, he says, “This dream-born daughter of mine is surely herself dreaming...” (240). Charicleia’s first interaction with Hydaspes is laden with the importance of her personal appearance. The scene, however, is complicated by Hydaspes’ distrust of dream images. Seeing Theagenes at her side, he asks his advisor, “But why was not a son, too, born to me in my dream if this youth is the girl’s brother and, as you say, we must look upon dreams as presages of the future?” (240). His logical rejection of his dream as prophetic vision recalls Charicleia’s multiple interpretations of her dream.⁴¹ Just like his daughter, Hydaspes cannot decide what the significance of his dream is. However, once he sees what he thinks is proof of its inaccuracy, he again decides it means nothing. Seeing Theagenes at Charicleia’s side and hearing the claim that they are brother and sister, he is misled by appearances.

The limitations of seeing

The mystery, ambiguity, and confusion surrounding Charicleia’s appearance are significant from the beginning of the novel to the end. These questions serve as a figure for the important questions about Charicleia: what parts of her identity are real. Her marital status, her paternity, and her cultural background are all problematized in the novel. Moments when she is mistaken for a goddess or statue emphasize the importance of questioning first impressions and considering multiple explanations where Charicleia is concerned. Heliodorus also uses these moments to distract the reader from the important questions.

⁴¹Reynolds 2006, 34 connects Hydaspes’ dream to Charicleia’s image based conception, saying, “Hydaspes is right to call her a child of dreams, in that her form derives not from her mortal father, but from the mental image of a portrait. But she is like a child generated in a prophetic *oneiros* because this event, far from being random, was an act of divine intervention analogous to the gift of an authoritative vision.”

Heliodorus frequently emphasizes the difficulty of making accurate conclusions about Charicleia by looking at her. When Heliodorus chooses to describe the scene on the beach, the amethyst ring, Theagenes, and Charicleia's festival outfit in great detail but leaves Charicleia's personal appearance shrouded in mystery, he not only increases the reader's interest in knowing what she looks like, but also suggests that her appearance is not important, or at least difficult to interpret. He uses confusion about whether she is human or not to emphasize the unreliability of sight for determining even basic truths about her. By leaving Charicleia's appearance ambiguous and depicting other characters as confused by it, Heliodorus develops the deep ambiguities that define Charicleia. Seeing her is problematic because she is difficult to understand as a character: her physical appearance does not tell her story. Heliodorus also creates ambiguity around Charicleia by mixing genres throughout the *Aethiopica*, complicating his heroine along with the literary context in which she appears. Charicleia's second interpretation of her dream highlights the genre complications that permeate the novel.

Chapter Two

The eye as Theagenes: Charicleia as a romance heroine

Charicleia's second interpretation of her dream highlights her identity as a romance heroine. Just like her appearance, that identity is often difficult to define, because Heliodorus characterizes her in ways that set her apart from the other romance heroines. Deciding that she has not actually lost her eye and that her dream was only a dream, Charicleia comes up with a symbolic interpretation that distresses her even more than believing the dream was real. She decides that her eye represents Theagenes, crying out "I am terribly afraid that the dream may refer to you, whom I reckon my eye and my soul and my all" (45). This prompts the question: what would Charicleia's story be like if she lost Theagenes? The *Aethiopica* can only be fully understood in the context of four similar texts, known today as the Greek novels. Each has a hero and a heroine, who survive, against all odds, for the entire novel. Having Theagenes at her side for her journey home identifies Charicleia as a romance heroine, and Heliodorus mostly characterizes her in a way that aligns with that generic identity. And yet, he adds certain complexities to her characterization that link her more closely to Odysseus and Penelope than the other romance writers do when constructing their heroines.

Defining Romance

Before exploring specific parts of the *Aethiopica* as they relate to genre, it will be useful to sketch the outline of what has come to be known as the Greek romance novel. Five texts, written in late antiquity, are traditionally grouped together based on the similarities of their plots, themes, and styles. The five texts, *Anthia and Habrocomes* by Xenophon of Ephesus, *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* by Chariton, *Leucippe and Clitophon* by

Achilles Tatius, and the *Aethiopica*, vary from one another in many ways, but share certain core elements.⁴² In each, a preternaturally attractive young Greek man and woman fall in love. After some pining, suffering, and confusion they pledge their loyalty to one another. Various threats to the new relationship ensue, sometimes separating the couple for years, but they remain faithful to one another and live happily ever after.⁴³ The concept of the romance novel genre as such did not exist in the period in which these books were written and is difficult to define even now.

Nevertheless, scholars have consistently engaged with them using the framework of genre in recent decades, acknowledging the problematic implications.⁴⁴ The *Aethiopica* is typically dated later than the other four novels, and I will discuss it with the assumption that Heliodorus had read all of them, possibly along with other examples of the genre that are now lost.⁴⁵ His skilled manipulation of romance themes and plot elements along with ones borrowed from the *Odyssey* gives his heroine a complex identity with respect to genre as well as geographic origin.

The opening scene revisited

⁴² The *Aethiopica* is also known as *Theagenes and Charicleia*, and some of the other romances are also known by place names.

⁴³ These threats include sexual rivals, enslavement, the staged death of one of the lovers, accidental live burial, abduction, attempted rape, war, trial with life or death stakes, and sham engagement to a rival.

⁴⁴ See Holzberg 2003, 13 for a detailed history and analysis of genre frameworks as applied to the Greek novels. Holzberg documents the vicissitudes of genre theory surrounding the five texts and those that share some, but not all, of their characteristic. Describing an approach that he considers superior to the others in his study, he writes, "Scholars following this [approach first taken by Wehrli and Perry] base their examination of the genre on a comparison of the texts, focusing on the authors' treatment of the subject-matter, on their use of motifs, and on narrative structure." Holzberg goes on to say that even those who see the five Greek novels (and occasionally three Latin texts) as a coherent group do not ignore the similarities between them and the similar works known as "the fringe."

⁴⁵ Whitmarsh 2011, 13, objecting to claims that the Greek novels are an anti-genre, says "it only works if we define genre in an antiquated, essentialist way. Genres are in general, as constructivist scholarship has taught us, fluid things, liable to continuous reinvention; they are structured by 'family resemblance' rather than phylogenetic classification. In the case of the romances, shared themes, topoi, and language make it certain that these writers were self-consciously constructing their own relationship to a tradition. The crucial point is to think of genre not as an ossified 'form' but as a flexible system allowing for reinvention and reorientation."

Returning to the opening scene will provide a useful starting place for the examination of generic categories in the novel as a whole and their role in characterizing Charicleia along genre lines. This scene includes not only characterizations of her that play on the reader's conception of what a romance heroine is, but also elements that connect her to Odysseus and Penelope. The same passage that mysteriously omits any detailed description of Charicleia's appearance also begins to establish her romantic relationship with Theagenes, suggesting that she is a romance heroine:

Her head inclined forward without moving, for she was looking fixedly at a young man who lay at her feet. The young man was disfigured with wounds, but seemed to rouse himself a little as from a deep sleep, almost of death itself. Even so, he showed the bloom of manly beauty, and the flowing blood made his white cheek shine the more brilliant. Pain had clenched his eyes, but the sight of the maiden drew them toward her; they must needs see because they saw her. (2)

Heliodorus packs his introduction of Charicleia with the stuff of Greek romance.⁴⁶ The narrator's description of the lovers' symmetrical gaze, "she was looking fixedly at a young man who lay at her feet," reflects the mutually passionate nature of their romantic relationship.⁴⁷ Although the exact nature of their relationship is not completely clear from this first description, the couple on the beach bears many of the hallmarks of the romance genre. The heroes and heroines of all the other novels are also very beautiful, so Charicleia and Theagenes are not unusual in this respect. Their symmetrical gaze suggests that they are equally important to the story that will follow, but as we will see, this is Charicleia's story from first to last.

⁴⁶ "The opening tableau leaves us both certain *that* this is a romance and quite uncertain as to *how*" (Winkler 101).

⁴⁷ Konstan 1994, 33 writes "Uniquely in classical love literature, the novels as genre portray *eros* as a fully reciprocal passion between equals."

Charicleia's response to Theagenes' inquiry about whether or not she is a ghost (discussed in Chapter 1) confirms the impression given in the first description that the two are lovers. This also prompts the reader to think of them as the central lovers of a Greek romance.⁴⁸

'My preservation or the reverse,' said the girl, 'depends upon you. This (pointing to a dagger on her knee) has not penetrated only because your breathing has restrained it...'
She now flew to the young man, enveloped him in her embrace, wept, kissed him, wiped off the blood, sighed deeply, could not believe she held him. (3)

Charicleia's declaration that she would kill herself if Theagenes died has precedents in the other novels, where the lovers routinely plan suicide at the slightest sign that the beloved is dead.⁴⁹ This declaration, along with her affectionate touch, suggests to the reader that Charicleia's relationship with Theagenes is the most important part of her characterization and the basis for her story. As usual, Heliodorus has set out to mislead. He does, however, leave indications throughout this scene that link Charicleia directly to the *Odyssey*, interspersed with the things that tie her to the other romance heroines.

Charicleia and Theagenes, when the reader first encounters them, have already had multiple adventures and bear the physical signs of them. Theagenes' battered appearance in this first scene, however, is an interesting twist on the physical pain and injury the lovers in many of the novels go through. The other novelists introduce their lovers at a point before anything bad happens to them, and go on to inflict various types of hardship on them. At this point, both lovers resemble the careworn Odysseus who first appears on the shores of Ogygia much more than the undamaged hero and heroine who appear at the beginning of each Greek romance.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Winkler 1982, 103 writes "[the first conversation] is an intimate exchange between the seated young woman and the wounded young man (both as yet unnamed) which tells us that they are devoted to each other and probably romance heroes."

⁴⁹ Compare similar episodes in *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, and *Anthia and Habrocomes*.

⁵⁰ For this similarity between Charicleia and Odysseus see Whitmarsh 2011, 113.

The first image of the novel, the remains of a feast and battle, echoes a climactic scene in the *Odyssey*.⁵¹ The pirates scan the shore and the narrator describes the destruction they see: “... intermingled with the carnage were the wretched remains of a feast whose conclusion had been so fatal. Tables were still loaded with victuals... Diverse as were their wounds, the greater number had been inflicted by darts and arrows” (2). The scene resembles the *mnesterophonia* in Book 22 of the *Odyssey*, but Homer places a feast turned to battle near the end of the story and Heliodorus places it at the beginning. This choice is disorienting, especially because the combatants are not yet known to the reader. The emotional punch of the *mnesterophonia*, in which both sides of the battle are comprised of fully developed characters, is much stronger than that of this scene. However, what Heliodorus loses in emotional impact by opening with this cryptic image rather than leading up to it, he makes up for in the increased suspense and mystery. The misleading thoroughness of the visual detail describing the corpses was discussed in Chapter 1, but some of the details are important for this discussion too. The fact that many of the dead were killed by arrows links the scene even more closely to the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus uses a bow to kill the suitors. As discussed in Chapter 1, Charicleia is holding a bow and quiver when the pirates’ gaze moves on to her. Although the connection between the arrows in the bodies around her and the arrows in her quiver may not be immediately clear, Heliodorus closes the loop in a passage that follows quickly on the first.⁵² Wondering if the pirates approaching her are ghosts, Charicleia says, “Most of you were killed by your fellows’ hands; those that fell by mine

⁵¹ See Telo 2011, 583-600 for an in-depth exploration of this resemblance. Telo argues that the ekphrastic qualities of the opening scene constitute a “Homeric visual artifact” that gives the story its thrust in the beginning. He connects the gaze of Heliodorus’ bandits at the scene on the beach to the gaze of Odysseus at the suitors, and finally to the author’s predatory relationship with Homeric literary remains. “The idea of Homeric epic as an inexhaustible feast feeding all the subsequent generations of poets is a deep-seated trope that dates back to Aeschylus’ presentation of his plays as “slices from the big symposium of Homer.”

⁵² Winkler 1982, 98 compares this concealment of a relevant detail in a list of similar things to a detective story.

I killed in self-defense and in repelling outrage to my chastity” (4). Charicleia reveals that she did indeed kill multiple men with arrows, but her reasons for doing so are appropriate to a romance heroine.⁵³ She combines the commitment to chastity of Penelope and the other romance heroines with the archery of Odysseus.

Romance and the *nostos* plot

As Heliodorus unfurls the rest of his story, he keeps up the multifaceted characterization of Charicleia, keeping her within the world of romance and regularly emphasizing traits that make her more like the characters in the *Odyssey*. Just as in the first scene, plot elements from the *Odyssey* continually overlap with elements from romance novels. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive categorizations. In fact, the *Odyssey* and the romances share many narrative elements, although the way the romance authors deploy them varies from the Homeric model.

The common element of the *nostos* plot links the romances to the *Odyssey*. According to Tim Whitmarsh, a romance plot requires a return narrative, even if the distance travelled is short. Whitmarsh writes,

The defining feature of the romance plot is, I argue, the return narrative... Crucially, return narratives also operate as parables of identity, normative articulations of relationships between self and society: they imply the destiny of the individual (human or divine) in a particular context... What romance distinctively superimposes onto the common return plot is the narrative of heterosexual desire. Greek romances, without exception, begin with the excitation and conclude with the satisfaction of such desires. This combination is not without precedent in the Greek tradition, although the parallels are inexact. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the protagonist’s yearning for homecoming is merged with his desire for his wife, a desire that blends the sexual and the social.⁵⁴

⁵³ None of the heroines of the other four novels kill another person or even come close to it. They repel threats to their chastity by nonviolent means such as pleading. Charicleia’s strategies vary from theirs in multiple ways.

⁵⁴ Whitmarsh 2011, 14-16.

Heliodorus makes several significant variations on the romance novel while still writing a story that follows the genre-defining outline described above. He complicates the Greek identity of his heroine, borrows elements of epic narrative structure, and moves the happy ending to Ethiopia.

Like the lovers in the other Greek novels, Charicleia is Greek. Even in the face of startling revelations about her parentage, she does not relinquish her Greek upbringing or her name. She does not learn any language other than Greek during her travels and continues to wear her Delphian clothing up to the time of her reunion with her birth parents. At the same time, Heliodorus gives her an Ethiopian identity that defines her as a character more than her Greek one, because it initiates her *nostos* plot. She still shares her cultural foundations with Callirhoe, Chloe, Leucippe, and Anthia, but translocating the conclusion of her adventures to Ethiopia changes the landscape of the novel. As Whitmarsh writes, “[The *Aethiopica*] constitutes a radical reorientation, relocating the idealised marriage-based community from Greece to the edges of the earth.”⁵⁵ In the other novels, travel out from the point of origin and return to that same point are two different legs of a journey. By moving his protagonists towards Ethiopia and not back to Greece in the course of the novel, Heliodorus merges the concepts return and travel away from the point of origin.

Another significant difference between the stories of the other romance heroines and that of Charicleia is the subordination of her love story to her return narrative. For each of the other heroines, the question of paramount importance is how she will reunite with her lover or husband and live happily ever after. Charicleia and Theagenes are united fairly easily and have little difficulty staying together, but take the entire book to get home to Ethiopia. The main source of

⁵⁵ Whitmarsh 2011, 14.

suspense in the novel is not the kidnappings and false engagements and apparent deaths that drive the other novels, but rather the question of whether Charicleia will make it to Ethiopia.⁵⁶ This larger question is not answered until the very end of the novel, and its constant presence pushes Charicleia's characterization closer to that of Odysseus than to that of the other romance heroines.

Hybrid narrative structure

Another significant difference between the *Aethiopica* and the other four romances is the narrative structure, which imitates the *Odyssey*.⁵⁷ The chronological plot summary that I provided in the introduction smoothes out the complexity of the narrative for the sake of clarity. As the reader experiences the story, it is even more confusing and intricate. Heliodorus' almost parodic virtuoso performance of the genre is comprised of a large number of romance plot elements deployed in very quick succession and resolved as quickly. In other novels, the characters believe that their lover has died or married someone else, and the situation continues for months or years. Romantic rivals also persist for weeks or months in the other novels. Heliodorus, on the other hand, sets up the stock situations and fixes them in a very short space of narrative time. This also has the effect of downplaying each romance plot element. These plot devices provide the entire emotional impact of the other romances. For Heliodorus, they are mostly an entertaining backdrop for a different kind of story, not completely focused on the lovers and their happy ending.

⁵⁶ Winkler 1982, 109 writes, "The overarching question of the *Aithiopika* turns out to be whether (and how) Charikleia will return to her homeland. This question very slowly and sinuously winds toward its answer in the final book."

⁵⁷ See Morgan 2003, 436: "Heliodoros' greatest debt is to Homer. The whole structure of the novel, beginning in the middle of the story and filling in the earlier portions by means of a retrospective narration, which concludes about halfway through the whole work, is modelled on that of the *Odyssey*."

Heliodorus borrows the technique of starting a story *in medias res* from the *Odyssey*, but cuts straight to the adventures of the central characters rather than spending time in exposition first. The other novels begin with a straightforward description of the home city of one or both lovers, an introduction of the two, and the story of their meeting, sometimes set in a nondescript frame tale or sparked by an ekphrastic passage.⁵⁸ Heliodorus releases the important details about Charicleia slowly, rather than allowing the reader to know all about her at the beginning of the story. Unlike Anthia, Chloe, Callirhoe, and Leucippe, Charicleia's parentage and life story cannot be told in a single introductory sentence. Heliodorus uses narrative structure to reflect this complexity in his heroine. From the cryptic scene on the beach, the story follows Charicleia and Theagenes through a period of captivity and a battle. They escape from the pirates who held them captive and camp in a cave for the night. Their new friend, Cnemon, leaves the lovers in the cave and goes on a scouting mission inland, where he meets Calasiris and learns Charicleia's backstory, including how she fell in love with Theagenes. The reader learns about a significant portion of Charicleia's adventures first, and her love story second. This ordering emphasizes the adventures of the *nostos* plot and relegates the love story to the background. Heliodorus accomplishes this epic characterization partly by detailed depiction of his heroine's calm reactions to the twists and turns of her adventures, which resemble those of Odysseus.

Charicleia and Odysseus

In Book 1, Charicleia shows remarkable presence of mind and cleverness when asked by the brigand chief Thyamis who she is and where she comes from. With the confident facility of Odysseus saying he is a man from Crete, Charicleia tells a made up backstory for herself and

⁵⁸ See the opening of *Daphnis and Chloe*, featuring ekphrasis.

Theagenes.⁵⁹ At this point, the reader has no basis for judging the story's veracity other than the brief exchange between the lovers on the beach. Charicleia says that she and her brother, sailing on a treasure-laden ship from Ephesus to Delos where they were to end their terms of service to Artemis and Apollo, were driven off course by a storm.⁶⁰ She says that the carnage of the opening scene was the aftermath of a fight between the sailors who wanted their treasure and their family and friends who tried to defend them. Charicleia accepts Thyamis' offer of marriage but asks that she be allowed to lay down the signs of her priesthood in a city with a shrine to Apollo. Charicleia's intricate story perfectly explains everything Thyamis knows about her and contains a helpful grain of truth. Charicleia's lie echoes the lying tales of Odysseus, since she invents both a troubled past and a false place of origin for herself. No other romance heroine shows such inventiveness in a crisis, although false names are common in their stories. Yet again, Heliodorus pushes his heroine closer to the world of the *Odyssey* than to that of the other romances.

With the kidnappings and false engagements stripped away, Charicleia's ten year absence from Ethiopia and protracted journey home (after spending the first seven years of her life raised by anonymous Ethiopian shepherds) resembles Odysseus' return from Troy more than the travels of any other romance character. Charicleia returns home deeply changed by her travel, just as Odysseus does. Travel is the one aspect of the romance novel plot that Heliodorus enhances rather than shrinking it down to fit inside his narrative, since at its heart this is a different type of

⁵⁹ Winkler 1982, 111 discusses the story and notes, "Her account is not only a lie, it is nearly a parody of the Greek romance as a genre, conflating typical motifs from several novels, as a sort of least common denominator of what such a story could be expected to be."

⁶⁰ Ephesus is the start and end point of the adventures in *Anthia and Habrocomes*. It is interesting that Charicleia's made up journey is between two points solidly located in the Greek world, and that she claims to have been blown off course and drifted to the Nile Delta. The implication seems to be that a young woman and her brother could have no reason for traveling to Egypt on purpose.

travel. The geographic distance and expanse of time are greater, and the impact on her identity is too. Leucippe, Callirhoe, Anthia, and other characters spend time away from home, but return more or less unchanged.⁶¹ Charicleia, however, receives a Greek name that she considers her own, learns a new language and is educated in it, and forges powerful bonds with her adoptive father. The complexity introduced into her character by her travel and Greek upbringing before returning home raises the level of participation required of the reader. While he expands the importance of travel and return, Heliodorus skillfully manipulates the stock situation of romantic rivals competing for the protagonists' affections to create a unique effect that recalls both the *Odyssey* and the other romances.

Charicleia and Penelope

The other Greek romances include both men and women who express interest in one of the lovers. The eternal faithfulness of the lovers is not compromised even by their marriage or sexual contact with other people.⁶² Charicleia, accordingly, fends off rivals for their affections on a regular basis. Heliodorus gives Charicleia no respite from the covetousness of the men she meets on her journey. No fewer than nine men compete for her over the course of the novel. Several other romance heroines have multiple suitors, but Charicleia's comically long roster outstrips them all, almost matching Penelope's numberless horde. Being courted by rivals is a central challenge both for heroines of romance novels and for Penelope. The stream of competitors for Charicleia most closely parallels the host of suitors who besiege Penelope's house, and so does her response to them. Charicleia's intelligence and ingenious strategy in dealing with her suitors echoes Penelope's. Like Penelope, Charicleia appears to be available for

⁶¹ See Whitmarsh 2011, 17 on the changes the romance storyline can cause in the hero and heroine. He concludes, "Returning romance enacts a paradox: a text in which the protagonists both are and are not the same at the end."

⁶² Konstan 1994, 53.

marriage or sex but insists on remaining faithful to a man to whom she is only tenuously connected. Her elaborate deceptions, for instance the claim that she needs to lay down the symbols of her priesthood before marrying, are far more creative than the honest pleading or simple acquiescence of Leucippe and Callirhoe, and closely resemble Penelope's strategy of the endless funeral shroud. Charicleia also resembles Penelope in her reaction to a short separation from Theagenes.

The separation of the lovers, a plot device that powers three of the other four novels, lasts for a remarkably short time in Heliodorus' world.⁶³ Although this is shorter than the multiyear separation of Leucippe and Clitophon, Charicleia's response to it is on a Homeric scale. When a scouting expedition to find Theagenes returns without him but reports that he is alive and safe, Charicleia responds as if she has heard he is dead:

She pulled her hair loose and ripped her garments and said: "Oh! I too will dance after the fashion appropriate to him, to the demon who holds me in sway. To him will I chant dirges and writhe in a dance of lamentation. Let murky gloom pour over and let unilluminated light preside over my ritual... Such is the dainty marriage canopy he has rigged for me, such the bridal bed to which he leaves me. Solitary he keeps me, and unwed—in name Theagenes' bride, but, alas, a widow..." So saying she flung herself upon the bed, face down, and embraced it close with moans and broken sobs. Her excess of agitation induced torpor and dizziness and clouded her reasoning faculties. (149)

Her anguish is depicted in more detail than that of any other romance heroine, and most nearly recalls the misery of Penelope when she believes Odysseus is unlikely to return. Charicleia's outsize sorrow would be more appropriate to someone separated from her lover for a longer space of time. Her allusion to an ambiguous marital status also connects her to Penelope, whose

⁶³ Morgan 2003, 440 says that "Heliodorus has replaced the romantic pattern of separation and reunion with one of return and recognition. It is notable that the protagonists are physically separated for only a short period in the novel."

central concern is if she is still married to Odysseus after twenty years of his absence. Penelope also describes her own suffering as inflicted by an unspecified god, and spends time crying bitterly in bed:

αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ καὶ πένθος ἀμέτρητον πόρε δαίμων:
ἦματα μὲν γὰρ τέρπομ' ὄδυρομένη, γοόωσα,
ἔς τ' ἐμὰ ἔργ' ὀρόωσα καὶ ἀμφιπόλων ἐνὶ οἴκῳ:
αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν νύξ ἔλθῃ, ἔλῃσί τε κοῖτος ἅπαντας,
κεῖμαι ἐνὶ λέκτρῳ, πυκινὰ δέ μοι ἀμφ' ἀδινὸν κῆρ
ὄξειαι μελεδῶνες ὄδυρομένην ἐρέθουσιν. (*Odyssey* 19.512)

But to me has a god given sorrow that is beyond all measure, for day by day I find my joy in mourning and lamenting, while looking to my household tasks and those of my women in the house, [515] but when night comes and sleep lays hold of all, I lie upon my bed, and sharp cares, crowding close about my throbbing heart, disquiet me, as I mourn.⁶⁴

This connection to Penelope in Charicleia's lament for her own fate calls attention to the similarities between her story and that of the *Odyssey*.

Charicleia's generic awareness

Heliodorus also allows Charicleia to analyze her own adventures in a way that draws attention to the genre signals encoded in them, and has implications for her characterization as well. Standing on the beach and watching an approaching band of armed men in Book 5, Charicleia and Theagenes have a remarkable conversation just before being captured and separated.⁶⁵ Theagenes, again showing himself to be a hero of romance through and through, proposes that they go quietly, since they have had such terrible misfortune up to this point.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Tr. A.T. Murray, 1919.

⁶⁵ The beach outside the cave discussed in Chapter 1, where Charicleia has her dream.

⁶⁶ Konstan 1994, 14-25 documents the lack of gender dimorphism between heroes and heroines in the novels. Both men and women in the romances are emotional, hastily suicidal, occasionally bird-witted, and ready to express sadness with tears.

Charicleia, on the other hand, bases her opinion of what they should do next on the actual situation at hand, not on the past. She assesses the problem like a military strategist, again more like Odysseus than like Callirhoe or Leucippe.

Charicleia's more optimistic take on the pattern of their adventures, "let us take hope for the future from our experiences of the past, for many times now have we survived situations more desperate," (116) is tempered by a realistic prediction. She matter of factly informs Theagenes that, "Probably [the deity] preferred to preserve them for slavery, and it might be a fate more bitter than death to be delivered to cruel barbarians and be exposed to unspeakable and nameless outrages" (116). She is much closer to guessing the truth than Theagenes, and it is almost as if she has read the other romances, where the protagonists are very likely to be sold into slavery. Heliodorus allows Charicleia a deeper insight into his plans for them than Theagenes has when she says that the deity is likely to keep them in misery and suspense for some time. A romance heroine can expect to survive even a long and suspenseful string of adventures where a tragic character cannot, and in this moment Charicleia shows a preternatural awareness of the type of story she is part of.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Charicleia's story does not center on her relationship with Theagenes and her struggles to be with him. Instead, Heliodorus puts Charicleia through the twists and turns of a romance plot while reminding the reader at regular intervals that, above all, she is on a long journey home that is the stuff of epic. Charicleia's characterization is modelled on that of Odysseus and Penelope as much as on that of the romance heroines who came before her. Charicleia has a dual generic identity, and often exists in an ambiguous space between the world

of the *Odyssey* and the world of the romance novel. This multiplicity parallels that of her cultural identity. The question of who Charicleia is, where she comes from, and what her Greek upbringing and white skin mean in the context of her travel home to Ethiopia is closely connected to the question of who her father is, raised by the third interpretation of her dream.

Chapter Three

The eye as father: Charicleia's complicated paternity

Just as Heliodorus problematizes Charicleia's appearance and her status as a romance heroine, he also complicates the question of Charicleia's paternity, and the third interpretation of her dream includes the first reference to a father in the novel. After Charicleia suggests that the eye she lost in her dream might represent Theagenes, Cnemon interjects with another interpretation:

‘... Tell me, are your parents alive?’ She said that to the best of her knowledge they were, and Cnemon continued ‘Then you must believe that your father is dead. The basis of my conjecture is this. We know that our begetters are responsible for our entry into this life and our enjoyment of the light. It is quite likely then that dreams allude to the father and mother through the symbolism of eyes, through whose agency we perceive light and all things visible.’ ‘That too would be a heavy blow,’ said Charicleia. (45)

Charicleia's vague response to Cnemon's proposal, “That too would be a heavy blow,” does not explicitly refer to a single father. Neither Cnemon nor the reader has been let in on Charicleia's backstory up to this point. Charicleia, on the other hand, knows at this point that she was adopted by Charicles, born to Hydaspes, and taken to Egypt by Calasiris. As the novel unfolds, Heliodorus gradually introduces the three different men who act as father figures to Charicleia. Her paternity needs as much interpretation as her dream. Each father contributes something vital to the novel and to Charicleia's characterization.⁶⁷ This chapter will explore the significance of the three men Charicleia calls “father.” Heliodorus uses both their similarities and their differences to complicate the construction of his heroine with respect to her origins, social status, skin color, and cultural background. Calasiris the Egyptian priest, Charicles the Delphic priest,

⁶⁷ See Elmer 2008 for a study of Charicleia's fathers as symbolic of epic, history, and tragedy.

and Hydaspes the Ethiopian priest king are the three men Charicleia addresses as “father” at different points in her story. Hydaspes is her birth father, Charicles her adoptive father, and Calasiris her guide as she travels from Delphi to her birthplace in Ethiopia. I will analyze the significance of each father, in the order in which they appear in the text (the reverse of the order in which they enter Charicleia’s life), and the impact of each on the characterization of their daughter.

The opening scene again

To approach the subject of Charicleia’s three fathers, it will be helpful to go back one last time to the opening scene. Just as it is packed with generic signals and powerful but deceptive visual imagery, the opening scene is resonant in terms of the cultural categories that emerge in the novel, and the ways Heliodorus uses them to shape Charicleia as a character from this first scene. Heliodorus reveals that the scene is taking place on a seashore in the Nile delta, and that the bandits who approach on the hill above his lovers are Egyptian. Throughout the opening scene, he carefully avoids specifying where the lovers come from or what language they speak, centering Charicleia’s present and immediate past as she refers to her troubles. The only clues to her origin are her laurel wreath, quiver and bow. These signs are both accurate because she is coming from Delphi and misleading because her true place of origin is in Ethiopia. We learn that Theagenes has white skin within moments of his appearance, when the narrator says “the flowing blood made his white cheek shine the more brilliant”(3) . Information about what Charicleia looks like, however, is conspicuously lacking. The effect of this reticence is twofold: on the one hand, Heliodorus directs the reader’s attention to other aspects of Charicleia’s character, for instance her association with Apollo and Artemis. On the other hand, he increases

any curiosity the reader may have about her appearance and its implications, as discussed in Chapter 1.

The lovers speak to each other, but the language they speak is not specified. The pirates approach and the narrator reveals that they have “strange skin” and “a piratical look.” She takes a second look at them and sees that they have “black skin” and a “rough look.” These qualities are revealed only when she looks at the pirates. This could suggest that she has a different skin color from them, if she thinks their black skin is “strange” and that they look “rough.” The maiden speaks to them and reveals that she has had terrible sorrows, inviting them to kill her, but the narrator reveals that they do not understand what she says. This exchange makes it clear that there are language barriers in this text and that the maiden is from somewhere other than Egypt.⁶⁸ The pirates do not speak the language she is speaking, and she does not try multiple languages, suggesting that she only knows one.

Next, a new band of robbers approaches, scaring off the first. Their leader, later revealed to be Thyamis, communicates with Charicleia using gestures, and she responds. He commands her to follow him and she successfully indicates that she will kill herself if made to leave Theagenes behind. They speak along with their gestures, and in spite of the language barrier they are able to understand each other as much as necessary. The narrator says, “She did not understand his words, but she comprehended his meaning... Her gesture even more than her words made her meaning clear to the brigand...” (5).

As always, Heliiodorus toys with the reader’s expectations and reasonable assumptions. On the most basic level, the book itself is in Greek. All the events and speeches are filtered

⁶⁸ Winkler 1982, 105 analyzes the many scenes that portray language barriers and argues that “This purblind consciousness of what a language, a speech, or a text means is another form of incomplete cognition and rightly takes its place in the Heliiodoran universe of steadily expanding meaning.”

through the prism of the Greek language. However, Heliodorus leaves several scenes of ambiguity at the beginning of the novel before he establishes that Charicleia and Theagenes are Greek. The reader, desperate at this point for any information about the young people, has no choice but to accept this statement at face value. Later on, however, Heliodorus reveals that this identification of both Charicleia and Theagenes as Greek was misleading. In this first scene, he makes it seem as if the monolingual Charicleia comes from a single place where one language is spoken. He uses their shared language to connect her to the white-skinned Theagenes, while holding back information about her skin color. Charicleia's successful communication with Thyamis suggests that cultural boundaries can be broken down with the aid of creativity. The information he provides about language, skin color, and communication across language barriers is an excellent starting point for exploring these topics in the novel as a whole. In this scene, the language barrier makes cultural divisions clear. When Heliodorus first introduces one of Charicleia's fathers, however, these boundaries are both thrown into relief and made more fluid.

Calasiris

Calasiris is the first father figure to appear in the story, soon after Charicleia's dream. Leaving the lovers on an island beach, their friend Cnemon goes on a scouting trip and meets Calasiris on the banks of the Nile. Cnemon greets Calasiris and asks about his origins. Hearing Calasiris speak Greek, Cnemon asks Calasiris if he is "a Greek or a foreigner" (50). For Cnemon, the dichotomy between Greek and foreigner persists even in Egypt. Calasiris corrects Cnemon's Hellenocentric assumption when he responds, "Neither Greek nor foreigner, but an Egyptian of Egypt" (50). Calasiris draws attention to the misconceptions of Cnemon's question by saying that he fits into neither of the two categories Cnemon has proposed. In his own land of Egypt,

Calasiris is not a foreigner. A more accurate question to put to a stranger in Egypt would be “Are you an Egyptian or a foreigner?” Cnemon, in fact, is the foreigner in this situation. His baffled response, “Why is your dress Greek?,” (50) suggests that he has not immediately become comfortable with the concept of a person who sends out a mixture of cultural signals. Calasiris’ slightly ironic question, “How do you speak Greek in Egypt?” implicitly tells Cnemon that if Calasiris has to justify his Greekness, so does he. Calasiris continues to disrupt the concept of everyone remaining in his homeland and carrying out its cultural practices. Calasiris also resists Cnemon’s assumption that speaking Greek outside Greece requires no explanation. He questions the universality of Hellenistic culture and viewpoints.⁶⁹

Their conversation deepens the sense created in the opening scene that a character’s place of origin may not be instantly legible to others, and that a person can inhabit several cultural spheres at once. Just as Charicleia can have white skin, speak Greek, and work as a priestess in Delphi but still see herself as Ethiopian when she learns her birth story, Calasiris is still Egyptian even though he speaks Greek with Cnemon and is dressed in Greek clothing.⁷⁰ Skin color, language, clothing, and homeland do not necessarily align in the world of the *Aethiopica*. Heliodorus uses Calasiris’ ambiguous identity to introduce the concept of a person who exists between and among different cultural categories, and leaves it to him to reveal that Charicleia is such a person.

After taking Cnemon to the house of his friend Nausicles, Calasiris tells him the story of how Charicleia and Theagenes met in Delphi and eloped. Calasiris’ time in Delphi allows Heliodorus to further disrupt Hellenocentric paradigms in advance of the revelation that

⁶⁹ See Whitmarsh 2011, 10 on Heliodorus’ challenges to Hellenocentric ways of thinking.

⁷⁰ At this point, the reader does not know Charicleia’s backstory or that she is Ethiopian.

Charicleia is Ethiopian in spite of her Greek upbringing and white skin. Calasiris uses his Egyptian identity to his advantage in Delphi, capitalizing on the fact that his hosts believe that he has magic powers. When Charicles asks him to, “Bring to bear upon [Charicleia] some Egyptian science or magic,” Calasiris agrees to help. Although he knows that he cannot cast a spell on Charicleia to get her to agree to marriage, he needs access to her in order to carry out his mission of bringing her home to Ethiopia.

A conversation with Theagenes gives Calasiris the occasion to tell Cnemon how he was perceived in Delphi:

I supposed that Theagenes, who had heard at the banquet that I was an Egyptian and a priest, had come to find a helper for his love affair. He labored, I supposed, under the common and ill-informed error which regards all Egyptian wisdom as the same. One form of it is vulgar... It involves the service of idols and is preoccupied with the bodies of the dead⁷¹; it pores over herbs and mumbles incantations. Neither this science nor those who employ it reach any good end... It represents illusion as reality, disappoints hopes, invents lawless practices, and ministers to licentious pleasures. But the other, my son, is the true Egyptian wisdom, of which the vulgar science is the bastard progeny... Its look is upward to heaven, it is a companion of the gods and a partner in the nature of the divine, it studies the motion of the stars, and from them gains foreknowledge of the future. It is remote from the earthy matters of our world, and concerns itself with all that is noble and profitable for mankind (81).

Calasiris offers a corrective to a common stereotype of Egyptians and proceeds to describe how he exploited the stereotype to accomplish his goals. Comical scenes in which he performs nonsense rituals over a lovesick Charicleia and pretends to use divination to help Theagenes show the Greek characters all too willing to believe that Calasiris can create love potions and manipulate other people’s behavior with magic. Calasiris, just like Charicleia, is frequently

⁷¹ A scene of necromancy in which the corpse speaks two accurate prophecies occurs later in the novel.

misunderstood based on his appearance and background. He turns stereotypes to his advantage, but Heliodorus implicitly criticizes them by naming them as misconceptions. Apart from explicitly identifying cultural stereotypes, Calasiris also complicates them by navigating easily among cultural spaces.

Calasiris speaks Greek and Egyptian and can read if not speak Ethiopian. His multiple language competencies, unique among the major characters in the novel, reflect the ease with which he moves among cultural groups. He travels from his homeland in Egypt to Ethiopia and gains the trust of Persinna, learning the story of Charicleia's birth and setting out to bring her home. Once in Delphi, he becomes the confidant of Charicles, Charicleia, and Theagenes. He even orchestrates a plan to spirit Theagenes and Charicleia away from Delphi by working with Phoenician merchants. Winkler's analysis of Calasiris positions him as the ideal reader both of Charicleia and the novel, because of his ability to handle ambiguity and wait for resolution: He argues, ... "Kalasiris alone has the necessary doubleness of mind to read the events around her, and so he alone can adequately cooperate in the slow emergence of an unexpected sense—her plot—which is complex and hard to fathom." ⁷² After documenting the different moments when Calasiris lies, Winkler writes, "Kalasiris' *sophia*, by which he has foreknowledge of important developments in the future, is not a clear and complete knowledge but an incomplete cognition. It allows both a latitude for eluding a possible future (Rhodopis), and a certain indeterminacy, of which oracular riddles are the best example. They do not unambiguously picture the future but hint at a general outline of things to come." ⁷³ Winkler links Calasiris to his broader framework

⁷² Winkler 1982, 137.

⁷³ Winkler 1982, 147. Rhodopis is the woman Calasiris fled Memphis to escape, fearing that he would not be able to resist the sexual temptation she offered.

of interpretive processes in the novel, and identifies him as a model for the reader of the romance.

Calasiris' comfort in many social contexts mirrors Charicleia's ease in handling multilingual situations in the course of her journey. His multiple cultural competencies and his travel through many regions parallel Charicleia's multiple transitions among cultural groups. Although Calasiris is able to adapt his talents to any cultural environment, Heliodorus consistently ties him to Egypt. While Heliodorus sets up Charicleia's racial identity as a Greek-Ethiopian dichotomy, he situates her in Egypt for a significant portion of the novel. Heliodorus represents Egypt as a place full of magic, disguise, familiar Homeric narratives like the return of Calasiris, and above all as a place where different cultures collide and intermingle. This portrayal of Egypt as a place full of ambiguity, deception, and juxtaposition may not be accurate, but Heliodorus uses it to create a liminal space where a character can exist at the junction of multiple identities. This is crucial for the development of his complex heroine. From Calasiris' presence in her story and his paternal role, Charicleia inherits the ability to carry multiple cultural identities at once and navigate through different societies. Although Charicleia is comfortable in a bandit camp, Persian-occupied Memphis, and Ethiopia, the starting point of her journey is Delphi and the house of her adoptive father, Charicles. Calasiris introduces Delphi to the reader, saying "When I learned that there was a city in Greece called Delphi ... , that it was a laboratory of sages and remote from the tumult of the mob, I took my way thither, judging that a place devoted to sacred mysteries was a suitable lodging for the prophetic kind" (56). Calasiris emphasizes intellectual inquiry and mystery in his description. His almost ethnographic summary of Delphi's reputation reverses the unidirectional Greek gaze fixed on Egypt and

places a Greek city under the same sort of scrutiny as Herodotus' Egyptian *logos* subjects Egypt to.

Charicles

As Calasiris tells the story of his visit to Delphi, he introduces Charicles, Charicleia's adoptive father. Charicles, a priest of Apollo at Delphi, first appears when he asks Calasiris to help him convince Charicleia to marry the man he has chosen for her. He tells the story of how he adopted Charicleia. The adoption story is full of references to the importance of Charicles' being Greek, and indeed Greek identity is one of the most important things he passes on to Charicleia. Charicles describes how he was traveling in Egypt, mourning the loss of his wife and biological daughter, when he met a man who spoke Greek to him.

The man was Sisimithres, an Ethiopian sage who had found Charicleia after her exposure and taken her to be reared by Ethiopian shepherds. As he tells Calasiris, "At first everything was kept secret, but as time went on her bloom of beauty surpassed all expectations. Not even in the bowels of the earth could her loveliness, I think, be hidden... so I managed to be sent as an ambassador to the satrap of Egypt" (61). Sisimithres emphasizes the importance of a Greek upbringing when he explains his reasoning for handing over the girl to Charicles: "I trust in your pledges and in your character, which in the many days you have sojourned here, I have carefully observed and found to be truly Greek" (62). Heliodorus does not have Sisimithres specify the reasons he wants Charicleia to be raised Greek, leaving the reader to fill in the gap. Language is the easiest reason to supply: the Ethiopian elite learn to speak Greek, as Charicleia discovers when she talks to her birth father, Hydaspes, and he responds to her in Greek. If Sisimithres

wanted to make sure Charicleia could reunite easily with her parents, sending her to be raised by a Greek man would be a logical choice.

Charicleia experiences a cultural rebirth in Delphi, where she learns Greek and rhetoric. Charicles describes her education in glowing terms, saying “She was quick in learning Greek, and quickly did she reach maturity, like the scion of noble stock” (63). Learning to speak the language allows Charicleia to pass for Greek, and her education in rhetoric proves useful when she needs to escape from dangerous situations and prove her identity to her birth parents. Charicles also gives her his name. The combination of her Greek name, Greek language ability, and pale skin puts Charicleia in a position where nobody would think to question her Greek identity.⁷⁴

Charicleia becomes a priestess of Artemis at Delphi and is of central importance to religious life there, as Heliodorus demonstrates by depicting her in a prominent position at the festival of Neoptolemus. Charicleia’s seamless integration into the city life of Delphi in particular is not without significance.⁷⁵ Delphi, traditionally the center of the Greek world, is a place where prophecies and riddles are made, to be solved in other places.⁷⁶ Their ambiguity and multiple meanings resemble the complex identity of Charicleia, which often prompts questions and misinterpretations. Although Calasiris is a father figure who himself sends multiple cultural signals at once, Charicles also introduces the concept of ambiguity to the novel. By raising Charicleia in Delphi, he gives her the foundations to approach seemingly unsolvable problems with an open mind, be patient when faced with situations that seem to have no good resolution, and trust that oracles will come true somehow. These concepts, which the reader, as well as

⁷⁴ Perkins 1999 identifies Charicleia as racially passing.

⁷⁵ Whitmarsh 2011, 115

⁷⁶ See Dougherty 1992 for a study of colonization oracles.

Charicleia, needs to navigate the action of the rest of the novel, continue to frame the events Heliodorus puts his heroine through.

Even after Charicleia leaves Delphi, Heliodorus does not allow the reader to forget that her journey started there. The most explicit reminders of her time in Delphi and their ongoing effect on her are her clothes, bow, and quiver. At pivotal moments in her adventures, Charicleia puts on her priestly clothes. The first time Theagenes sees Charicleia she is dressed in them. The first time the reader meets Charicleia, she is wearing her sacred robe. The pirates on the hill cannot identify the robe as such, but Calasiris explains what it is when he tells the part of the story leading up to the opening scene: “She wore a crown of laurel upon her head and was resplendent in a gold-embroidered robe; she had dressed herself in the priestly vestments of Delphi, to serve as the habiliments of triumph or of death” (137). As Charicleia arrives in Egypt, seeking a new cultural background, Heliodorus explicitly links her to Delphi. When Charicleia disguises herself as a beggar in Egypt, Heliodorus makes quite a business of her concealing her connections to Delphi:

Under her arm hung a wallet which appeared to contain broken victuals and crusts but actually held the Delphian priestess’ robe, the fillets, and the jewels and tokens her mother had exposed with her. Charicleia’s quiver Calasiris wrapped in a worn-out sheepskin and carried across his shoulders like a piece of baggage. He loosened the strings of the bow, and when it lost its curve he used it as a stick... (153)

Although Charicleia is disguising herself, this passage highlights the lengths she must go to to hide her Delphic identity, and therefore highlights that identity. It would be simpler to leave some of the objects behind at the house of Nausicles, but she and Calasiris camouflage them

instead. Charicleia holds onto her Greek identity as she sets out for the penultimate leg of her journey.

Finally, when she is about to be sacrificed to the moon in Ethiopia, Charicleia puts on her priestess robe again. Theagenes has just been urging her to reveal that she is really Ethiopian, and she is on the point of proving her chastity by stepping onto an enchanted brazier. Heliodorus specifically refers to the fact that her clothes come from Delphi as he describes her actions:

Without waiting for the order of the guards she took out of the scrip which she carried the sacred robe of Delphi, woven with gold thread and embroidered with rays. She loosened her hair and like a woman inspired ran forward and leapt upon the brazier. There she stood for a long while, without hurt. Her beauty shone forth more resplendent than ever; mounted upon the brazier she was observed by every eye, and her impressive vestment made her seem more like the statue of a goddess than a mortal woman. (250)

Here, Charicleia uses her priestess robe to accentuate her beauty and draw attention to herself. Just as she dressed up to maximize her effect on the pirates and to make sure she was dressed appropriately for her death if it came, she decides that for this momentous occasion she should be wearing her priestess robe. Heliodorus does not allow the reader to forget that he has created a heroine whose identity is multifaceted. He emphasizes Charicleia's Greek background by dressing her in her robe and mentioning that it comes from Delphi as she prepares to make her case for being truly Ethiopian by proving her connection to her birth father.

Hydaspes

Hydaspes, Charicleia's biological father, is the last to appear in the novel. After Charicleia and Theagenes fall in love and Charicles asks Calasiris to heal his daughter's lovesickness, Calasiris finally gets access to the ribbon that Charicleia's mother, Persinna, made to accompany her baby daughter when she exposed her. Calasiris reads the Ethiopic embroidery

on the ribbon and it confirms his hunch that Charicleia is the lost princess he is looking for. On the ribbon, Persinna tells the story of how she conceived Charicleia while looking over her husband's shoulder at a painting of Andromeda, portrayed with white skin on her bedroom wall. When Persinna gives birth to a white skinned daughter, she realizes that the painting has caused it. Fearing that her husband will suspect her of infidelity when he sees the white baby, she gathers together precious jewels, including a uniquely engraved ring, and writes the baby's story on a ribbon. Sending the baby to be exposed outside the city, Persinna despairs of ever seeing her again. Seventeen years later, she meets Calasiris when he visits Ethiopia in his wanderings. She charges him with finding her long lost daughter and returning her to Ethiopia. Calasiris translates the writing on the ribbon for a readily believing Charicleia, introducing the first and last father to the story.

Although a large amount of narrative time elapses between the revelation of Charicleia's true parentage and her reunion with her birth parents, this information drives the second half of the novel. By the time Charicleia, dressed as priestess of Delphi, leaps onto the brazier in Ethiopia, the reader has gotten used to considering her the white, culturally Greek child of royal Ethiopian parents. In the Greek romance *Daphnis and Chloe*, and in tragedy, for example Euripides' *Ion*, a child has only to present recognition tokens and be approximately the right age for their birth parents to accept them without question. Charicleia says to an impatient Theagenes, "Sweetheart, affairs of weight require weighty preparations. Where the deity has involved the beginning in an intricate skein, the denouement requires long unraveling..." (239). Theagenes, persistently dense as usual, presses her "But the tokens which I know that you have saved and carry with you will prove that there is no fiction or deceit" (239). For Theagenes, the

tokens are guaranteed to sort everything out. Charicleia, however, informs him that he is being too optimistic, saying, “Tokens are tokens only to those who recognize them or exposed them with me. To those who do not or cannot recognize them they are merely treasures and jewels, which might, indeed, attach a suspicion of thievery or brigandage to those who carry them. Even if Hydaspes should recognize them, how could he believe that it was Persinna who gave them to me, that they were a gift from mother to daughter?” (239). She emphasizes her relationship with her mother in this justification, foreshadowing Persinna’s important role in the recognition scene. This passage also reminds the reader of how incredible Charicleia’s story is, and suggests that she is in a realistic world where an incredible story will be difficult to sell.

Charicleia’s pragmatism is matched only by her very close approximation of what Hydaspes will say when she presents the tokens. His questions upon reading the ribbon echo her predictions almost exactly: “Who took her up, preserved her, brought her up? Who brought her to Egypt where she was made prisoner? How do I know that this is the same girl? The exposed child may have perished and another may have come upon the tokens and exploited her opportunity” (254). Each of these questions has a different answer, and reveals the difficulty of interpreting Charicleia’s appearance, location in the genre landscape, and paternity.

Charicleia’s awareness of what will happen when Hydaspes sees the token suggests that she has inherited his ability to think ahead and consider alternate explanations and paths. As discussed in Chapter 1, Hydaspes is able to consider multiple explanations for Charicleia’s presence in Ethiopia. He first appears in the novel during the final battle of a war that the Ethiopians win under his direction. His strategic thinking, necessary for war as for determining the identity of his daughter, also has echoes in Charicleia’s characterization.

When Charicleia and Theagenes are on the beach in the Nile Delta, her assessment of what will likely happen to them if they are captured by the advancing group of men is rapid and accurate. She also shows an ability to analyze and think ahead when she interprets a prophetic dream for Theagenes. He tells her, “Calasiris or some deity in Calasiris’ form visited me and seemed to say the following: ‘To the land of the Ethiopians you will go, in the company of a maiden; tomorrow will you be delivered from Arsace’s prison’” (208).⁷⁷ Theagenes convinces himself that the dream means he will die. Charicleia corrects him, saying, “To me the prophecies seem to foretell much happier things than you think” (208). Charicleia’s correct interpretation of the dream, “The girl is very likely myself; what is prophesied is that you will escape Arsace’s chains and go with me to my own country of Ethiopia,” (209) is based on her faith in the gods and her awareness of their location close to Ethiopia. Theagenes’ pessimism causes him to overlook the obvious meaning of his dream, while she is able to keep a firm grasp on the relevant facts. Just as Hydaspes dismisses his dream of Charicleia as meaning nothing when he sees evidence to contradict it, Charicleia is able to do the opposite when she knows she is close to accomplishing what Theagenes’ dream predicts. She bolsters her interpretation with a reference to the gods, saying, “How [this will happen], we do not know and cannot imagine, but to the gods all things are possible, and they will take care for the fulfillment of their oracle” (209).⁷⁸ This dream is one of the ones Bartsch categorizes as a sign that everything is proceeding according to a divine plan. Charicleia, true to her analytical characterization in other moments of crisis, says, “Already, by the will of the gods, the prophecy which relates to me is, as you know,

⁷⁷ When Theagenes recounts his dream, he and Charicleia are being held in the dungeons of the wife of the Persian satrap of Memphis, Arsace.

⁷⁸ Charicleia may be referring either to Theagenes’ dream or to the oracle from the Pythia at Delphi that foretells their entire adventure.

fulfilled. Beyond all expectation I am alive and with you” (209). She also cites her own prophetic dream as evidence of their improving fortunes, one which predicted her miraculous escape from execution by means of a magic charm. Charicleia also refers to Ethiopia as “[her] own country” in her dream interpretation, reminding Theagenes that going there should not necessarily represent death.

Truth in Ethiopia

On the contrary, Charicleia’s life begins in Ethiopia and continues there after the end of the novel. A significant part of the role of Hydaspes in the novel is that he ties her genetically to Ethiopia. When Charicleia sets out to prove her identity as his daughter and as an Ethiopian, she has several obstacles to overcome. The tokens, as discussed above, are problematic as a mechanism of proof. The other major obstacle is her skin color. Charicleia, predicting that a foreign sacrificial victim’s claim to be related to the royal family will not be taken seriously, secures her audience with the king by saying that she has a case to plead. She claims to be Ethiopian first, and then that she is the daughter of Hydaspes and Persinna. She carefully controls the flow of information in her conversation with Hydaspes:

‘Is it natives or foreigners, your majesties, that the law prescribes for sacrifice?’
‘Foreigners,’ said the king. ‘Then must you seek other victims,’ said she, ‘for you will find that I am native born.’ The king was surprised and declared she was romancing, but she said, ‘You wonder at lesser things, but there are greater to come. Not only am I a native, but of royal blood and very closely related to the king.’ This speech aroused Hydaspes’ contempt as being mere folly... ‘The girl is downright crazy. She is trying to put her death off with the most brazen lies. In her desperation she introduces herself as my daughter, like a *deus ex machina*.’ (252)

Interestingly, Hydaspes’ first objection is that she must be inventing the story because she is about to be sacrificed, not because she is white. After reading the ribbon, Hydaspes is

unconvinced that Charicleia is actually the child Persinna wrote about (see above). After hearing Sisimithres say that Charicleia is the right age to be the long lost princess, Hydaspes says that there is still an unsolvable problem with the identification and asks one last question: “how could we two, both Ethiopians, produce a white child?” (256).

Hydaspes’ statement that the problem of Charicleia’s complexion is insoluble is less a doubt about Charicleia’s identity as Persinna’s lost daughter, and more about whether she is his daughter. If she is not his daughter, then she must not be fully Ethiopian. Sisimithres proposes another proof of identity, one that could not be transferable to another person. He tells Hydaspes, “If you wish to convince yourself further, the original is available; examine the Andromeda; the picture will show an unmistakable resemblance to the girl” (256). When the picture is produced, Charicleia resembles it to the satisfaction of everyone, including Hydaspes. The narrator describes his reaction to this final proof in emotional terms, saying “Even Hydaspes could no longer doubt, and mingled surprise and delight held him speechless” (256). The silence of his moment of acceptance echoes that of Persinna’s earlier on in the scene. At this point, Hydaspes believes his wife’s story of maternal impression and believes that Charicleia is his biological daughter.

Sisimithres, however, insists on producing another proof of her identity. When he says, “The issue concerns royalty and the legitimacy of succession, and, above all, it concerns truth itself. There was a black birthmark etched out above the elbow,” (256) he reveals a proof of identity never mentioned in the text up to this point. The black circle on Charicleia’s arm is more than an indelible link between her as a baby and her as a teenager. It proves that some part of her remained Ethiopian throughout her time in Greece, and could not be changed even by her Greek

education and her ten years in Delphi. Successfully claiming Hydaspes as a father allows Charicleia to claim her legitimate Ethiopian birth and lineage, a defining part of her character.

Manifold and changeable identity

A scene in Book 10, sandwiched between Charicleia's recognition by Hydaspes and Persinna and the happy departure for the city center, reveals the complexity of her cultural identity even in the context of her Ethiopian home. Unexpectedly, Charicles appears in Ethiopia to reclaim his daughter, who has just been accepted into the Ethiopian royal family by her birth parents. Her reaction to his plea for her return reveals the complexity of her position between cultures. She rushes to Charicles, falls at his knees as a suppliant, and says, "O my father, no less revered than my begetters, punish me as you like; I have been impious and a parricide. It does not matter that some god has brought this about and that all has been effected by divine providence" (275). Even though she has been accepted into the royal family, the soft ties of feeling that connect her to Charicles remain. Heliodorus uses her clinging to Charicles and addressing him as father even after meeting Hydaspes to illustrate the difficulty of casting off Greek culture and family and immediately stepping into an Ethiopian life. Some part of Charicleia is still Greek.

Although Charicleia discovers her true father in Ethiopia, her identity remains heterogenous. Her choice to wear and carry the signs of her priesthood from Delphi and her acknowledgement of Charicles as her father both highlight this fact. Judith Perkins, analyzing the complexity of Charicleia's identity in the context of American "passing" novels, writes,

This story of the white Ethiopian passing as the quintessential Greek maiden appears to define identity as more the assumption of a role, a performance dictated by changing circumstances, than as a fixed essence. The reader's discovery of Charicleia's multiple

identities in the *Aithiopika* works to destabilize any easy understanding of identity as a unitary state. (2)

Perkins' analysis of Charicleia's identity as unfixed and affected by circumstances sheds light on the significance of the three fathers. Each exemplifies different aspects of the performance of her identity. As Heliodorus introduces each father figure to the reader, he paves the way for a nuanced understanding of his heroine. Charicles provides access to the Greek and specifically Delphic parts of Charicleia as a character, Hydaspes to the basic truths of her existence and her Ethiopian identity. Calasiris is the key to the ambiguity and fluidity of Charicleia's life between the Greek and Ethiopian worlds. The three fathers and their contributions, taken together, are yet another representation of the enduring complexity of the novel's plot and heroine. Her skin color, the language she speaks, her birthplace, her clothing, and her education do not match each other, and Heliodorus uses her three father figures both to highlight and to resolve the contradictions. By the end of the novel, the reader can look back at Charicleia's dream and understand that her exclamation that it would be a heavy blow to lose her father could have many meanings. Even as many as three fathers, however, cannot conceive a child. Charicleia's mother, Persinna, is as necessary and significant for Charicleia's characterization as any of the father figures.

Conclusion

Maternal impression: The implications of Charicleia's birth

Exploring the significance of each aspect of Charicleia's dream provided a useful lens through which to look at Charicleia as a character and the novel as whole. Nothing is monolithic or singular about Charicleia, from beginning to end. Her appearance is difficult to read, and even placing her in the category of human woman presents a problem. She is caught between epic and romance, genres that have disparate elements but are not as different from one another as they seem. Her Greek and Ethiopian identities interweave to create something neither completely Greek nor completely Ethiopian, but with elements of both. Calasiris demonstrates the possibility of a multipart cultural identity, and the power of stereotypes to control perception, while Charicles and Hydaspes represent the two cultural absolutes Charicleia must navigate between. Despite all this, Charicleia is able to exist comfortably at the nexus of identities both literary and cultural and genetic. Heliodorus' portrayal of characters from different cultures ultimately suggests that a person can take on the characteristics of one culture and set aside those of another.⁷⁹ In the final scenes of the novel, Heliodorus throws all these aspects of Charicleia's identity into relief. Charicleia's mother, Persinna, plays a major role in the events of last book, and her story encapsulates the complex parts of Charicleia's characterization explored in this thesis.

⁷⁹ Perkins 199, 201.

Charicleia reaches Ethiopia nine tenths of the way through the book, bound in gold chains as a prisoner of war. She escapes being sacrificed to the Moon by revealing and proving her identity to Hydaspes and Persinna. Ethiopia is the scene of the truth being revealed and the resolution of contradictions after close examination. Charicleia's reentry into her birth family concerns both of her parents equally. The character of Persinna has so far played a minor role in this thesis. At this point, however, I would like to examine the narrative elements that her presence in the novels introduces and their impact on Charicleia as a literary character.

Persinna

There is, however, an allusion to Persinna in the conversation in which the eye dream is interpreted. Cnemon asks her "... Tell me, are your parents alive?" She said that to the best of her knowledge they were, and Cnemon continued "Then you must believe that your father is dead" (45). When Cnemon switches from referring to Charicleia's parents to her father only, it seems as if he is ranking fathers above mothers, at least in terms of dream interpretation. When he backs up his interpretation, however, he seems to assign them equal importance in the creation of a child: "The basis of my conjecture is this. We know that our begetters are responsible for our entry into this life and our enjoyment of the light. It is quite likely then that dreams allude to the father and mother through the symbolism of eyes, through whose agency we perceive light and all things visible" (45). This somewhat clunky explanation, with its alternation between referring to two parents and one, forces the issue of who Charicleia's parents are and suggests that they have substantially different significance. And yet, Charicleia's mother, curiously elided in the interpretation of the dream, holds the keys to Charicleia's identity. These keys more fully explain the contradiction of her appearance and her upbringing and her genetics,

rather than eliminating them. Persinna and her story are essential to understanding the characterization of her daughter.

Characteristically, Heliodorus holds back the fact of Persinna's existence for almost half the novel. References to other mothers crowd the text up to that point, emphasizing the absence of one in Charicleia's life. From the wicked stepmother of the lovers' friend Cnemon to the dead mother of Thyamis and his brother (Calasiris' wife), the side stories of the *Aethiopica* are packed with mothers. Closer to Charicleia, Charicles' wife died of grief after the death of her daughter. When the reader first meets Calasiris and learns of his connection to Charicleia and Theagenes, he refers to them as "my children... born to me without a mother." He continues, "Through fortune the gods designated them mine, and the travail of my soul brought them to birth" (52). Calasiris' gratuitous references to mothers and his intriguing statement that his soul was in labor with Charicleia and Theagenes draws attention to the question of who Charicleia's real parents are, but focuses more explicitly on her mother.

The reader learns of Persinna's existence halfway through the novel, at the same time as she hears Charicleia's birth story from Calasiris. All that emerges about Persinna from the writing on the ribbon is that she looked at the painting of Andromeda at the moment she conceived Charicleia, that she was afraid of being suspected of adultery, and that she arranged to have her newborn exposed as a result.⁸⁰ Calasiris fills in the intervening years of Persinna's life when he reveals that he met her in Ethiopia. He tells Charicleia, "She then implored me to see you out and prevail upon you to return to your native land. After her travail with you, she had lived without chick or child, and was now resolved, if you should come to light, to confess the

⁸⁰ Winkler 1982, 120 argues that "The deepest anxiety which informs this novel is the fear of *misinterpretation*. Persinna's case is exemplary and of course central."

whole transaction to your father. She knew that he would now believe her, for their long life together had supplied proof of her fidelity, and that he would seize upon the unexpected realization of his hope for a successor of his own blood” (99).⁸¹ Although it is based on motives and calculations that might not pass a moral purity test today, Persinna’s desire to bring her child home sparks Charicleia’s *nostos* plot and thus the entire story.

Maternal instinct

After weeks of travel, Charicleia arrives in Ethiopia. As she prepares to be shown to her father as a prisoner of war, Theagenes desperately asks her when she is going to reveal her identity. The reader, too, expects the public revelation of Charicleia’s true identity to happen any minute. Heliodorus, however, is not going to rush his story to a premature conclusion. Charicleia says, “The only infallible token of recognition, Theagenes, is a mother’s instinct. From the first contact the maternal instinct conceives a tenderness for its offspring and is moved by an inexpressible affinity” (239). As an argument for delaying the recognition scene, this claim is relatively specious. Charicleia does not cite any reasons for believing in the infallibility of maternal instinct, but her claim that her father will be more suspicious of her tokens turns out to be astute. This sentence is especially poignant in the context of Charicleia’s struggle to be correctly understood by those around her, since she expects that Persinna, if nobody else, will be able to do so without difficulty. John Reynolds points out that “This 'secret' instinct is the very opposite to the irrational force that had first appeared to form Charikleia, in that it is not a selfish passion but is aligned with the ordering powers of the gods.”⁸² Charicleia imagines her mother

⁸¹ When Charicleia returns to Ethiopia, her parents have been married for twenty-seven years. This calculation is based on Persinna’s statement that they had been married for ten years when Charicleia was born, and Charicleia’s stated age of seventeen when she returns.

⁸² Reynolds 2004, 33.

acting as a mother should act. If this statement serves only to delay the recognition scene for dramatic effect, it is not out of place. That does not seem to be the case, since Heliodorus' description of Persinna's reaction to meeting her daughter seems to substantiate Charicleia's statement.

Seeing Charicleia is a powerful experience for Persinna even without knowing who she is. When Charicleia looks at her from the crowd of sacrificial victims, she says to Hydaspes, "I think I have never seen such beauty. How noble is her look! How proudly she bears her fortune!" (248). These are stock responses to Charicleia that other characters have already displayed. However, she goes on to identify Charicleia with her own lost baby, saying "If my own little girl, my sole offspring, had chanced to survive she would be about the same age" (248). Persinna's painful nearness to realizing the truth about Charicleia increases the dramatic irony already present in this scene. She also touches on a key question about Charicleia when she says, "Perhaps the poor girl is Greek; her face is not Egyptian" (248). Persinna's highlighting of the important aspects of Charicleia's identity, including her beauty, similar age to the lost child, and ambiguous ethnicity, seems to affirm Charicleia's statement that a mother's instinct is the only true token of recognition. However, Persinna does not get all the way to recognizing her daughter on her own, providing yet another example of the incomplete cognition Winkler discusses.⁸³ Persinna suggests two possible options for Charicleia's ethnicity when she says "Perhaps the poor girl is Greek; her face is not Egyptian." These options are based on the fact that she is a foreign prisoner of war. The dramatic irony of the moment is enhanced by the fact that she offers two incorrect possibilities, and this highlights the difficulty of guessing

⁸³ Winkler 1982, 95.

Charicleia's background from her appearance. A reminder that Charicleia is not what she looks like is hardly necessary at this point, and foreshadows the difficulty Charicleia will have in proving her identity. Nevertheless, in offering two options, neither of which quite fit, Persinna has identified the ambiguity and complexity of her daughter, and the fact that she requires interpretation.

The recognition scene, revisited

When Charicleia begins to reveal her identity to her parents, she begins with an appeal to both of them, saying "I have a suit to plead before the king and queen" (251). She assigns Hydaspes and Persinna equal importance in the suit, although Hydaspes ultimately requires more convincing. Heliodorus emphasizes Persinna's role in the recognition scene when Charicleia presents her written proof of her identity: "So saying she brought forth the ribbon which had been exposed with her and which she wore around her waist, unrolled it, and handed it to Persinna" (253). Charicleia acknowledges her mother in this moment, confident that she will facilitate her reintroduction into the family. The gesture of unrolling the ribbon is symbolically resonant as she reveals her identity to her parents.

"As soon as she saw it Persinna became speechless and numb. For a long time she stared alternately at the writing on the ribbon and at the girl" (253). Heliodorus highlights Persinna's gaze, and her instinct to check Charicleia's appearance against the ribbon. Only the version of Persinna who wrote the text on the ribbon speaks in this moment, a fact accentuated when she says to Hydaspes, "... there is nothing for me to say. Take it and read. The ribbon will tell you all" (253). Persinna's powerful emotional reaction, vividly depicted when Heliodorus writes,

“She trembled and quivered and flowed with perspiration,” (253) creates a sharp contrast with the analytical response of Hydaspes discussed in Chapter 2.

The ribbon and its story

The ribbon that allows Persinna to speak to many characters over many years without saying anything out loud has multiple symbolic resonances. The actions of weaving and embroidering the ribbon are gendered feminine in the same way as giving birth to a child. Persinna’s creativity in producing not only the story, if it is untrue, but also the ribbon and the child it explains, parallels that of Heliodorus. The ribbon itself is metaphorically resonant, since its creation involves the weaving together of multiple threads of different colors, just as Charicleia’s conception involves multiple sources of form and matter coming together.⁸⁴ The ribbon preserves Charicleia’s Ethiopian origins even as she grows up in Delphi, and it waits to divulge its secrets to the right reader. The story on Persinna’s ribbon involves the unexpected consequences of being seen that hound Charicleia throughout the novel, the erotics that define a romance novel, and the multipart paternity that reveals the complications of Charicleia’s identity.

Persinna’s ribbon is the interpretive key to Charicleia that allows both the reader and Calasiris to understand her. After reading the story of Charicleia’s birth, understanding Charicleia is easy. When Persinna looked at the painting of a white Andromeda at the moment she conceived Charicleia, she transferred the painting’s form to her child. This story, however, seems incredible to the modern reader, and Jonathan Crewe comments, “Proclaiming innocence, Persinna’s “record of woe” may nevertheless strike us as a thoroughly guilty, manipulative performance... Furthermore, practically every statement made and action described in the letter

⁸⁴ Reynolds 2004, 26.

seems more incriminating than exculpatory... If we want to insist on the facts, against the grain of romance, Persinna must surely have been embroidering her story, in every sense of the word, throughout her pregnancy."⁸⁵

Crewe engages with the text to create an alternate interpretation of Charicleia's birth story. Although maternal impression is precedented, Crewe finds multiple clues that suggest Persinna is lying when she claims it happened to her, in order to cover up adultery. It would be characteristic of Heliodorus to leave signs of this type for the reader to interpret. Although all the other characters accept Persinna's story, the strength of Crewe's argument is difficult to deny. Even if Persinna did commit adultery and attempted to cover it up with the maternal impression story, there is no doubt that she gave birth to Charicleia. All the concerns about Charicleia's identity discussed above would continue to be relevant. As Crewe says, this type of probing is "against the grain of romance."⁸⁶ Nevertheless, Heliodorus himself goes against the grain of romance in multiple places, and Crewe's identification of the weak parts of Persinna's story is in tune with Heliodorus' infusion of ambiguity into the romance genre.

Winkler connects the story of Charicleia's conception with the novel's overarching concern with interpretation, saying:

Why does Heliodorus pay attention to various kinds of misinterpretation, failed communication, and especially the role of private desire in forcing a text to mean what the interpreter wants rather than what it wants? The answer is that the originating event, Charikleia's conception and birth, is a marvel which cannot adequately and plausibly be conveyed in ordinary terms... Charikleia herself is the message or communication of the queen to the king, at the time a failed communication, wrapped in her own story and sent away as a challenge to the higher powers to make the child's birth seem believable.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Crewe 2009, 608.

⁸⁶ Crewe 2009, 608.

⁸⁷ Winkler 1982, 119.

Winkler's identification of Charicleia as a message situates her on the same level as the dreams and oracles in the *Aethiopica* that must be interpreted, and recognizes the difficulty of explaining her existence. The story that makes the child's birth seem believable is not unique: other examples of the process known as "maternal impression" were documented at the time of the novel's composition. Tim Whitmarsh quotes Dionysus of Helicarnassus, a Greek rhetorician writing in the first century B.C.:

It is said that a fear arose in a farmer who was ugly to behold that he would become the father of similar children. This fear taught [edidaxe] him an artifice [tekhnēn] to produce good children. He fashioned [plasas] some handsome pictures [eikonas] and habituated his wife to look at them. Afterward, he coupled with her and was blessed with the beauty of the paintings. In the same way, in the mimēsis of words too resemblance [homoiotēs] is born (6.1 U-R).⁸⁸

Charicleia looks similar enough to the painting of Andromeda that her identity can be checked against it, suggesting that Heliodorus' choice of Andromeda as a model for his heroine was not coincidental. Although Andromeda is portrayed with white skin in the painting, she is an important ancestor of the Ethiopians. Simon Reynolds suggests that "the reader can imagine the Queen looking anxiously, if not enviously, at the portraits of the heroes of the royal line, and desiring to add to their number, something that could not be called a "shameful desire."⁸⁹ Being born white does not preclude Charicleia from having a meaningful connection to her ancestry, even if the connection to previous generations of her family is closer than the one to her father.⁹⁰ Andromeda's story, of being offered as a sacrifice for the benefit of her homeland and rescued

⁸⁸Whitmarsh 2013, 130.

⁸⁹ Reynolds 2004, 32.

⁹⁰ Olsen 2012 argues that Persinna's gaze at the painting creates an erotic triangle that destabilizes the paradigm of the dominant heterosexual dyad proposed by the novel. Olsen focuses on the power of Persinna's gaze, which brings Andromeda into the sexual encounter between Persinna and Hydaspes and catalyzes Persinna's conception of Charicleia.

by the miraculous arrival of Perseus, is interesting both for the ways it parallels and does not parallel Charicleia's. Although Charicleia is almost offered as a sacrifice, she rescues herself. The eroticism of the story of Perseus and Andromeda, however, parallels the romantic pairs in the Greek novels. The fact that Charicleia took her form from an image of Andromeda "just as Perseus had brought her down from the rock" (94) pinpoints the moment of mutual erotic connection that links her story to Andromeda's. Although Charicleia's journey involves a love story, she balances it with her devotion to chastity, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Chastity

Persinna includes advice to Charicleia in the ribbon, telling her, "... if you survive do be mindful of your good birth and honor chastity, which is the sole virtue that distinguishes womenkind, and cultivate the queenly temper appropriate to your high descent" (95). Charicleia's literary inheritances from each of her father figures are paralleled by the preoccupation with chastity she inherits from her mother. Persinna's concern that Charicleia remain chaste is far from the only reference to chastity in the novel. From her, Charicleia inherits a focus on chastity as the other elements of her identity and history are sites of impurity and ambiguity.

After learning Charicleia's adoption story from Charicles via Calasiris in Book 2, the next things the reader discovers about Charicleia are her opinions on love, marriage, and chastity. Charicleia's resistance to marriage vexes Charicles, and he tells Calasiris, "She rejects matrimony and insists on a virgin life... I had hoped to marry her to my sister's son, an amiable young man, accomplished in speech and character, but have no success because of her stubborn decision..." (43). Charicleia's resistance to marriage is not her only rhetorical position.

Lamenting his daughter's use of her Greek education to argue against him, Charicles says "Virginity she glorifies and represents as an approach to the immortals. She calls it immaculate, untainted, uncorruptible..." (64). Charicleia not only rejects marriage but also defends virginity itself, characterizing it as a positive state rather than a holding pattern that she must leave to continue her life cycle.

Charicleia's first concern when she elopes with Theagenes is ensuring that she can remain a virgin until reaching Ethiopia. She demands an oath from him "that he will not consort with me in the uses of Aphrodite before I have recovered my own family and house, or, if some deity prevent such recovery, not before I myself consent to be his wife" (105). Charicleia ties her reproductive and sexual life to her birth family in the terms of this oath, indicating that it would be inappropriate to move from one stage of life to the next by having sexual intercourse without parental approval. Since she is between families, she suspends herself between moments in the life cycle.

In the course of reassuring Theagenes that she remains faithful to him in the bandit camp, Charicleia says "... to this day I have kept myself pure, avoiding intimacies and frequently resisting your solicitations. I have looked forward to the legitimate wedlock, if ever it may come, which we agreed upon and pledged ourselves by all things sacred" (25). Charicleia's emphasis on legitimate wedlock echoes the fear of illegitimate desire and sexual contact that surrounded her birth. Even though she has changed her stance on marriage, she maintains her interest in doing things correctly. She is not ready to start the biological clock of pregnancy until she restores order to her birth family.

A moment of ambiguity in which Charicleia's chastity seems to be at risk occurs in the middle of the novel, when Charicleia and Theagenes are finally left alone. "Plunged into oblivion of all else, they clung to one another as if they grew from a single root, satiating themselves with a chaste and virginal love, mingling their hot, wet tears, and cleaving to one another with pure caresses. When Charicleia felt that Theagenes' virility was stirring, she restrained him by admonishing him of his oath, and he, for his part, was easily checked..." (114). Heliodorus takes care to emphasize the propriety of their physical contact, creating a love scene that is no love scene. Charicleia reiterates her desire to wait until she reaches Ethiopia to consummate her relationship with Theagenes, implicit in her reference to his oath. Again, she uses the concept of "not here" rather than "never" to reject his advances.

Time and the family

The importance of the normal passage of time as reflected in the birth and growth of children is reflected in the dreams of both Persinna and Hydaspes. In Hydaspes' dream, discussed in Chapter 3, Persinna gives birth to a daughter who rapidly grows up. Persinna's dream, apparently on the same night as Hydaspes', depicted a similar situation "This, then, was the dream I saw last night. I imagined I was pregnant and in labor and brought forth a daughter who was straightaway ripe for marriage. The travail of my dream doubtless symbolizes the agonies of war..." (244). Persinna's reference to her dream-daughter's being immediately ready to be married highlights the importance of marriage and having children for the continuation of the royal family, and is perhaps supposed to reflect her longing for that outcome. Persinna's interpretation of the dream seems slightly wide of the mark, but Heliodorus does not intervene to say that she was wrong. This dream could serve the dual functions of representing the Ethiopian

victory in war and foreshadowing Charicleia's return. The fact that Charicleia grows up suddenly in both dreams reflects the strange ellipsis of time that results from her return after seventeen years of life abroad.

Persinna's command that Charicleia be "mindful of [her] good birth" emphasizes the importance of keeping the royal line legitimate, and Charicleia seems to take this concern to heart. She repels the advances not only of her unwanted suitors but also those of Theagenes, as discussed in Chapter 2. The significance of her focus on chastity is not limited to generic purity, however. On a literal level, her chastity matters because of who she is in society. The same holds true for Persinna, but the importance of being chaste is matched only by the importance of having an heir, as Crewe points out: "The loss or absence of the daughter/heirress threatens both the model royal family and the well-governed kingdom. This circumstantial loss resonates within and beyond *Aethiopika*, however, inasmuch as the retrieved child of romance functions as a talisman against the power of time and death."⁹¹

When Persinna sees the adult Charicleia for the first time, she exclaims, "What a pity to perish in the bloom of life!" (248). Her explicit concern at the prospect of an untimely death is part of a thread of references to things happening at the wrong time, lives lived out of order, and natural processes halted or cut short. If Charicleia appears at home and has already crossed into the territory of marriage and motherhood, her parents will have been unable to mediate her transition between stages of life. Spending time with her parents, however brief, in the role of unmarried daughter and child, is important for the reconstitution of the family, which depends on life events proceeding in a certain order. Persinna, Hydaspes, and Charicleia all reveal anxiety

⁹¹ Crewe 2009, 611.

about the possible consequences of their daughter arriving home having already lost her virginity.

Chastity and hybridity

Hydaspes' concern about the propriety of bringing Charicleia (still not identified as his daughter) into his house to serve Persinna, which she suggests to him, foreshadows his concern about his wife's faithfulness: "But consider whether it would be proper for a woman who was proven to have had sexual relations to be received into your house" (249). Persinna's reply gives a clear indication of her values "Let her be proven unchaste," said Persinna, "provided only she be saved. Captivity, war, long wandering away from her native land would excuse a slip, and especially in a girl whose beauty must have exposed her chastity to constant attack" (249). By referring to "long wandering away from her native land" Heliodorus yet again shows off the hard-won dramatic irony of this scene. This also hints at the changes Charicleia's identity has undergone in the course of her travels: she may be physically chaste but other aspects of her identity have been changed and replaced. She may have been a completely Ethiopian baby in spite of her appearance, but after living in Delphi she has taken on a Greek cultural identity.

Hydaspes' worries about purity and female sexuality emerge again after the recognition scene, when he takes an unconscionable amount of time to understand the relationship between Charicleia and Theagenes. Throughout the last book of the *Aethiopica*, concern about Charicleia's chastity functions as a figure for concerns about her cultural and generic hybridity. Much of Book 10 is taken up with the explanation of the relationship between Charicleia and Theagenes. Hydaspes and Persinna have multiple conversations with Charicleia in which they attempt to figure out why their daughter has brought a Greek man home with her. This is the last

scene in which other characters interpret Charicleia, and Heliodorus intersperses the interpretive process with other events that suddenly occur. It is as if Persinna and Hydaspes are aware of Charicleia's status as the hero of a *nostos* story but cannot grapple with her other identity as a romance heroine.

Persinna reassures her daughter, "Do not hesitate to speak out to your own mother. Even if there is some youthful stirring which is indecorous for a maiden, a mother's instinct understands how to forgive her own daughter and a sympathetic woman how to veil the frailty of her own sex" (267). Persinna has done an about face from her enjoinders to chastity on the ribbon. Crewe reads this scene as incriminating, since if Persinna is able to interact with her daughter in this sympathetic way it must suggest that she also has experience with inappropriate desire and womanly frailty.⁹² This statement may also have an additional meaning: Persinna may be signaling her willingness to accept the hybridity of her newfound daughter. Nothing is pure in the *Aethiopica*. Ambiguity and doubt are part of this fictional world as much as the real one.

Reifying complexity and moving forward

Ultimately, the characters in the *Aethiopica* must accept ambiguity and move forward. The Ethiopian people accept Charicleia into the family of their rulers, and their choice to abolish human sacrifice prevents the cutting off of young lives. Hydaspes says, "I declare this pair united by the laws of marriage and authorize them to live in procreative wedlock" (276). The wedding of Charicleia and Theagenes sets the biological clock of the royal family running again, and time can proceed as usual. The *Aethiopica* ends with a wedding for a reason: order is restored to the family by the timely and parentally supervised union of Charicleia and Theagenes, which will

⁹² Crewe 2009, 608.

presumably result in children of mixed Ethiopian and Greek heritage. Their wedding does not erase the complications of Charicleia's birth and characterization, but reifies them in a marriage that will produce legitimate mixed race children.⁹³ The multiple interpretations of Charicleia's dream resonate in the final scenes of the novel, as her appearance is explained, she marries Theagenes, and she rejoins her birth family. Heliodorus concludes Charicleia's *nostos* plot in a way that emblemizes the complexities of her identity.

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⁹³ Elmer 2008 447 argues, "Kharikleia's marriage to Theagenes will repeat and bring social recognition to the fusion of Greek and Ethiopian that defines her identity. It is the synchronic, social reality of union in marriage that ultimately puts a point on Heliodoros's elaborate reflections on hybridity, including the hybridity of his own text."

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