

‘Philip the Philosopher’ on the *Aithiopika* of Heliodorus

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The prefatory letter to Anatolius which introduces Porphyry’s *Homeric Questions*¹ begins with a statement of principle: ‘Frequently in our conversations with one another, Anatolius, questions concerning Homer arise, and while I try to show that although he regularly provides the explanation of his own verses, we, because of our childhood instruction, read into him rather than reflect upon what he is saying (περινοοῦμεν μᾶλλον ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ νοοῦμεν ἃ λέγει)’. Porphyry proceeds to issue a challenge: no ‘interpretation’ (ἐξήγησις) may be offered until the interpreter has made absolutely clear to himself what the verses actually mean – we might be tempted to speak of their ‘literal meaning’; such clarification will require the closest attention to the poet’s language (φράσις). Porphyry explicitly distinguishes between this exercise in interpretation and the ‘higher criticism’ of Homer (τὰς ... μείζους εἰς Ὅμηρον πραγματείας). Critical interpretation is thus assumed to take place within a clear hierarchy of possible scholastic situations, and this hierarchy – however porous it may have proved in practice – was the necessary ‘institutional’ support for all academic criticism: ‘higher’ criticism builds on ‘lower’ foundations, of greater or less solidity, such as detailed linguistic exegesis.

We recognise here a version of the familiar progression along the stages of ancient education. Homer is, of course, in every way a special case, but his very specialness allows us to see how paradoxical might be the very idea of ‘interpretation of the novel’, given that there were no ‘lower’ exegetical foundations upon which to build; as far as we know, novels never permeated into the educational system in which such exegesis was rooted, at least be-

¹ Cf. Schlunk 1993. The translation which follows is an adapted version of Schlunk.

fore the Byzantine period. The textual transmission of the novel in fact suggests that a relatively low premium was put on the maintenance of ‘the actual words’ of the text.²

‘Higher’ interpretation aims, for the most part, at ‘higher’ art forms. Interpretation of genres which could be represented as offering an ‘imitation of life’ (comedy, iambic poetry etc) was on the whole restricted to linguistic exegesis and to the highlighting of moral and social lessons to be learned by the award of praise or blame to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ characters; this after all is what such ‘realistic’ forms themselves regularly claimed to do. Such a mode could, of course, be transferred easily enough to the novel, and the text with which this essay is concerned indeed offers, in one part, just such a case. Nevertheless, certain of the novels stand out among ancient narrative texts for the manner in which the discourse of (more or less) ‘higher’ interpretation is incorporated into the extraordinary texture of the works themselves, thus also pushing readers (ancient and modern) towards the practice of such interpretation. The case of Heliodorus has been very much discussed in the last couple of decades,³ that of the *Metamorphoses* for much longer. Apuleius not only himself offers a ‘high’, Platonising interpretation of an apparently ‘low’ Greek text, but – again taking his cue from Plato – also creates in *Cupid & Psyche* an allegorical narrative which itself both requires interpretation (as a remarkable tradition beginning with Fulgentius bears ample witness) and seems also to offer an interpretation of the narrative in which it is embedded; the *Metamorphoses* both teaches and requires interpretation.⁴ If Apuleius thus shows us very clearly how ‘interpretative’ and ‘compositional’ allegory may be fully merged,⁵ the included narratives of the *phatta*, of Syrinx, and of Echo in *Daphnis & Chloe* gesture rather more tentatively towards ways of drawing out the meaning of the *mythos* of Chloe (cf. 2.27.2), of finding the general within the particular – which was indeed the aim of all higher interpretation; in a different mode, the *ekphrases* and ‘scientific’ disquisitions of Achilles Tatius’ novel put ‘interpretation’ and its discontents very obviously at the centre of readers’ concerns.⁶

² Cf., e.g., Reeve 1986, xi–xii.

³ Cf. Sandy 1982, Winkler 1982, Hunter 1998b.

⁴ Particularly suggestive is Dowden 1998.

⁵ For these terms and further bibliography cf. Dawson 1992, 4 with 245 n.12.

⁶ Cf. Bartsch 1989, Morales 2004.

When, however, novelists themselves – to put it very crudely – overtly write ‘interpretation’ into their own works, they are not merely challenging the scholastic hierarchy, they are also challenging us to have the critical courage and/or naivete to take them seriously. The history of the interpretation of – to use the strongest case – Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* shows that the interpretative community (both before and after J.J. Winkler’s *Auctor & Actor*) is far from making up its mind on this matter. This critical uncertainty arises in large part precisely from the fact that, as the novelists (and, we may assume, at least many of their readers) knew only too well, the practice and modes of interpretation to which they direct us arose from and were designed for texts which occupied a very different cultural position.

This unsettling gap is in fact crucial to the literary effects of these techniques. All of our extant novels lay claim, with varying degrees of explicitness and persistence, to the Homeric mantle, and as Homer is the privileged font and subject of all interpretative practice, so an internal discourse of interpretation must be considered as a (ludic or otherwise) part of those generic and cultural claims. Here, Heliodorus is both the most obvious and a special case: most obvious, because of the novel’s persistently overt hermeneutic concerns,⁷ and special because one of its principal characters and narrators is a (self-confessed) expert in Homeric interpretation (cf. especially 3.12–15). Heliodorus has, of course, a good claim to be the first interpreter of his own work, but it is the extraordinary sense within the text of an existing tradition of interpretation, of already competing explanations of the novel, which is so striking. It is thus perhaps not surprising that one of the most interesting (and familiar) texts from the reception of the ancient novel is an example of ‘higher’ criticism practised upon the *Aithiopika* itself.

The ‘interpretation (ἐρμηνεύμα) of “Charicleia the virtuous” from the voice (ἐκ φωνῆς)⁸ of Philip the philosopher’ survives in a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Aithiopika* from southern Italy;⁹ the end of the work is lost.

⁷ Cf., e.g., the works listed in n.3 above.

⁸ On the meaning of this phrase cf. Richard 1950, Tarán 1992, 229–30. Tarán properly reminds us that the title may be later than the work itself.

⁹ Venetus Marcianus gr. 410, D in Colonna, X in Rattenbury-Lumb, who do not, however, cite its readings (cf. pp. xxix–xxx); the manuscript is described in Mioni 1985, 166–7. The text of ‘Philip’ is most easily accessible in Colonna’s edition of Heliodorus (pp. 365–70); proper attention was first called to it in Hercher 1869. There is an English translation in Lamberton 1986, 306–11. The best modern discussions are Gärtner 1969, Lam-

The date and authorship of this essay remain matters of fierce dispute.¹⁰ Both Hans Gärtner¹¹ and Nigel Wilson¹² have accepted Colonna's identification of Philip as a Sicilian cleric who became Theophanes, Archbishop of Rossano in Calabria, in the first half of the twelfth century; as, however, it has been shown that Theophanes' *Homilies* are in fact the work of Philagathos of Cerami (Sicily), whose 'secular' name had been Philip, authorship of the essay on Heliodorus has been re-assigned to that twelfth-century cleric.¹³ Strong voices have, however, also been raised in favour of a date in late antiquity, most probably in the fifth or sixth century,¹⁴ although such a discussion of one of the novels at this early date would be remarkable indeed. If the dating were secure, then we would be able to site the essay within a specific intellectual and political context, as indeed Hans Gärtner did on the assumption of a twelfth-century date; with such a date the essay would take its place within the history of Byzantine debate about whether and how one should read pagan, and particularly pagan erotic, literature.¹⁵ Without that security, much that can be said concerning Philip's essay must remain provisional. Nevertheless, the critical practices on show in the essay were familiar both in late antiquity and the Byzantine world – and were indeed, as the *Aithiopika* makes clear, familiar to Heliodorus himself – and so we may cautiously hope to understand what 'Philip' is doing, even in the absence of a known context.

In a close imitation of the opening of the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus*, a work which teaches that death is a liberation of the soul to be welcomed (a Platonic theme particularly close to the hearts of Christians),¹⁶ the first-person narrator tells how, once upon a time, two friends, one a royal scribe, urged him to come with them to defend 'Charicleia', for many 'students of literature' (*philologoi*) had gathered outside a temple and were reading the novel (presumably aloud) and subjecting it to mockery and ridicule, although

berton 1986, 148–56 (Lamberton seems not to have known Gärtner's article), and Tarán 1992. On the Byzantine reception of the *Aithiopika* see also Agapitos 1998.

¹⁰ Cf. Colonna 1960, Lamberton 1986, 148, Longo 1991, Tarán 1992, Sandy 2001, 170–1.

¹¹ Cf. Gärtner 1969, 61.

¹² Cf. Wilson 1983, 216.

¹³ Cf. Lavagnini 1974, Tarán 1992, 207–8.

¹⁴ Cf. especially Tarán 1992.

¹⁵ Brief summary in Dyck 1986, 80–5.

¹⁶ Cf., e.g., Basil, *On Greek Literature* 9.1–6 (Wilson 1975, 30–1). At ll. 64–5 Colonna Philip's phraseology is very close to 5.38–9 of Basil's essay.

the grounds for this ridicule are not stated. The friend, who describes himself as ‘a lover (*erastes*) of Charikleia’, pleads with the narrator to use his wisdom to prevent ‘the chaste maiden from being outraged’ by demonstrating that ‘the narrative of Charikleia is beyond all reproach’. The language of ‘loving’ literature is entirely standard,¹⁷ but the friend’s apparently playful rhetoric which fuses the novel *Charikleia* and ‘Charikleia’, the chaste maiden with whom all men fall in love and some would wish to outrage (*hubrizesthai*) and others to protect from outrage,¹⁸ picks up a stylistic trick of the novels themselves.¹⁹

It also perhaps suggests a rather simple-minded ‘emotional engagement’ with the heroine and her novel, which is to be shown to be very different from Philip’s higher, intellectual understanding. In his naïve enthusiasm, the friend is in fact the counterpart of Heliodorus’s Knemon, who ‘lives’ the stories which he hears (and tells) and for whom stories of love and love itself are virtual equivalents (cf. 4.4.2–3).²⁰ What follows will show that, just as in the novel itself, the ‘Knemon-figure’ is here set against a ‘Kalasiris’.

That critical mockery of the book is tantamount to the rape of its heroine might perhaps also help us with the grounds for that mockery. The criticism of the *philologoi* may simply have been the self-conscious contempt of an élite for allegedly ‘trashy literature’ or it may, more particularly, have been aimed at the damage which the reading of such fictional ‘erotic’ narratives could do; Gärtner helpfully pointed to a late Byzantine ‘Protheoria’ on the *Aithiopia* by Johannes Eugenikos,²¹ in which Heliodorus’ novel is defended against the charge of being ‘damaging to the bodies, or even more the minds, of the young’. The lusts on display in the *Aithiopia* will promote the vices of those who read Heliodorus’ words too literally.

The existence of such criticism seems also to be implied by Psellus’ earlier defence of the morality of both Charikleia and Kalasiris, whom, in Psellus’ reading, Heliodorus has cleared of ‘the blame (μέμψις) attaching to

¹⁷ Cf., e.g., Porphyry, *Homeric Questions* Proem διὰ σὲ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλοὺς Ὀμήρου ἐραστάς.

¹⁸ Thus Thamyras, the noble bandit, gives orders to his men τὴν κόρην ἀνύβριστον ἀπὸ πάντων διαφυλάττειν ‘to preserve the maiden free from all outrage’ (1.7.3). Gärtner (1969) 67 identifies analogies in biblical interpretation for this play on the doubleness of the name.

¹⁹ Cf., e.g., *Aith.* 4.4.3, Hunter 1994, 1066–7 on Chariton.

²⁰ On Knemon cf. Winkler 1982, Hunter 1998b.

²¹ For the text see Bandini 1770, 322–3.

being a pander'.²² Nevertheless, there may be more at stake here than just simple 'literalism'. A way of reading characterised by the 'wanton licentiousness of pigs' (l. 36 Colonna), as 'Philip' (playfully) teases the *philologoi*, suggests that it may have been the high (and perhaps highly implausible) moral tone of the *Aithiopika*, in which the pair of lovers are constantly together and yet remain entirely chaste, that was the object of the mockery of the *philologoi*. The *philologoi*, then, like Thersander in Achilles Tatius,²³ may be cynical 'realists' who apply inappropriate standards to their reading of the text and thus drag it down to their own 'swinish' level. If one of them were left alone with 'Charicleia', she would certainly not long remain a virgin; the cloak in which she wraps herself for protection against 'those who wish her harm' (ll. 77–8 Colonna) is certainly needed when there are such readers about. It is clearly not only modern readers who have been struck by the extraordinary tension powering Heliodorus' narrative between the drive towards sexual fulfilment and its constant deferral; Photios (50a17, chap. 73) observes how the *Aithiopika* 'displays the longing for chastity' (σωφοσύνης δείκνυσι πόθον), and this oxymoronic phrase well captures something of the flavour of this creative tension. Eugenikos dismisses readers who read 'simply, or only superficially, or are quite knocked out by any low realism'; this last phrase is an uncertain guess at the meaning of πρὸς εἴ τί που μεταξὺ τῆ φύσει ἐπόμενον ἐμπαθῶς κεχηνόσιν,²⁴ but an enthusiasm for, say, the 'diarrhoea' episode would sit easily beside an impatience with the improbably 'unnatural' physical control of the central couple.

An ancient text which dramatises the manner of reading which 'Philip' may ascribe to *Charikleia's* critics is Seneca, *Controversia* 1.2 which concerns a girl who, like Tarsia in the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyrii*, preserved her virginity in a brothel, but (unlike Tarsia) killed a man who tried to rape her, and now wants to be a priestess.²⁵ The main arguments put forward by the lawyers against the girl's story are that it is *incredible* (Did every potential customer pity the girl?, 1.2.8) and that there is no way of confirming it: *cetera nescio* (1.2.1, with a nice echo of the end of Ovid, *Amores* 1.5), *quid*

²² Cf. Psellus, *Synkrisis* 43–53 Dyck. Psellus also defends Heliodorus against the allegedly widespread charge (πλείστοις ἐξαιτιωμένους) that Charicleia's language is too elevated and 'sophistic' for a woman (36–42 Dyck). It seems unlikely that it is this which lies behind the mockery of Philip's *philologoi*.

²³ See the discussion of Thersander in Morales 2004.

²⁴ Gärtner 1969, 65 sees a passion for the novel's 'anrühliche Episoden'.

²⁵ Recent discussion in Panayotakis 2002.

inclusa feceris nec quaerere debemus nec scire possumus (1.2.2), or ‘How do we know that she did not bargain with her visitors to keep her virginity at the expense of some other brand of lust?’ (1.2. 22), and the brilliant *bon mot* of Mureddius, *fortasse dum repellit libidinem, manibus exceptit* (1.2.23). These jurists, like Thersander and perhaps like Philip’s *philologoï*, do ‘violence to the text’. The author of the *Historia*, incidentally, has blocked off the possibility of such a reading: in this text, through the use of the ‘spying’ motif *we know* what happened in the brothel.²⁶

Philip at first seems unwilling to help his friend because, as he explains, he has left ‘childish toys’ behind and is now concerned with the higher mysteries of philosophy; ‘erotic narratives and stories’ (ἔρωτικά ἐξηγήσεις καὶ διηγήματα) are suitable for young men in their prime, not for the elderly. There is perhaps here an echo of the scene in *Republic* 1 in which Cephalos recounts with approval an anecdote in which Sophocles expresses his thankfulness at being too old to be subject to erotic desire (*Rep.* 1.329b6–d6); as Philip’s friend is a ‘lover of Charikleia’, so Philip himself claims to be too old for both *eros* and *erotika diegemata*. The rhetoric here, if not necessarily the tone, is not dissimilar to that of Macrobius who scornfully dismisses ‘fictional narratives of the doings of lovers’ (*argumenta fictis casibus amatorum referta*), of which Petronius and Apuleius are prime examples: ‘a philosophical treatise banishes that whole class of stories, which aim only to gratify the ear [cf. Apuleius, *Met.* Proem], from its sanctuary and relegates them to the infant nursery’ (*Comm. Somn. Scip.* 1.2.8). The claim is a special case of the familiar positioning of ‘literature’ as (at best) ‘childish’ preparation for philosophy, a claim reversed, for example, by the Platonic Callicles in his attack upon ‘childish’ philosophy (*Gorgias* 484c–6d). We may remember Horace’s

*nunc itaque et uersus et cetera ludicra pono;
quid uerum atque decens, curo et rogo et omnis in hoc sum.*
(Horace, *Epistles* 1.1.10–11)

As Horace shows just how such claims may be readily adapted to different levels of irony, so we must ask about the manner in which ‘Philip’ accedes

²⁶ On this scene cf. further Hunter, forthcoming.

to his friend's request.²⁷ He cites Plato's *Phaedrus* as an authorising model for the wise man devoting time to the discussion of *erotika*, and it is important here that the *Phaedrus* was already an element in the 'myth of origins' which Longus, Achilles Tatius, and Heliodorus himself (cf. 2.21.6) construct for their novels. 'Philip' had already set himself as 'a Socrates' through the opening quotation of the *Axiochus*, and Socrates is clearly one 'wise man' after whom Philip fashions himself. Just, however, as the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* can reproduce the Lysianic rhetorical manner to perfection, the Socrates of the *Protagoras* is fully at home in 'literary criticism', and the Socrates of the *Cratylus* in etymology,²⁸ so Philip's *epideixis* of the higher criticism reproduces a familiar didactic style with uncanny precision. Not content with placing his performance under the sign of the ironic Socrates,²⁹ he actually advertises it as a mixture of 'gravity' and 'playfulness' (Il. 26–7 Colonna), though his modern readers have tended to overlook the smile on his face.³⁰ This is all the more surprising as, together with Socrates, Philip's most important model is Heliodorus' knowing Egyptian priest Kalasiris.

Both Philip (at Rhegium or wherever the work is set) and Kalasiris (at Delphi) hold learned conversations in front of temples, subject texts to 'higher' interpretation, and play games with those less intellectually quick than themselves. Philip's eulogy of Kalasiris as 'orderly in word and deed ... a teacher who draws the soul to the good'³¹ and leads it to initiation into the knowledge of the divine ... a good counselor in practical things, leading the soul in a state of calm through the salt sea and the waves of life' (Il. 111–14 Colonna, trans. Lamberton) is clearly how Philip sees himself also. If Philip's interpretation of the novel, in Bob Lamberton's words, 'verges at times on parody',³² then this is a playful mode very familiar from Kalasiris himself. 'Philip' begins by distinguishing two ways of reading and two kinds

²⁷ Lavagnini 1974, 9 rightly notes that the fact that the request came from a friend with court connections increases the apologetic force of the opening narrative.

²⁸ Socrates' etymologising in the *Phaedrus* (244c–d, 251 c5–7), in a passage which is in 'Philip's' mind, is also to be noted.

²⁹ Philip's irony is, of course, not quite the same as that for which Socrates is most famed, but both the link between 'irony' and 'allegory' (cf., e.g., Lausberg 1960, 442) and the intellectual superiority which the ironist may claim for himself (cf., e.g., Nehamas 1998, 51–2) are relevant here.

³⁰ Thus for Tarán 1992, 229, Philip is 'an eclectic dilettante'; Sandy 2001, 176 finds his hermeneutics 'puerile'.

³¹ 'Kalasiris' is here etymologised as $\acute{\omicron} \pi\rho\delta\varsigma \tau\grave{\alpha} \kappa\alpha\lambda\grave{\alpha} \sigma\acute{\upsilon}\rho\omega\nu$.

³² Lamberton 1986, 152.

of reader: ‘This book, my friends, is very like Circe’s brew (*kukeon*): those who take it in a profane manner (βεβήλως), it transforms into licentious pigs, but those who approach it in a philosophical way, in the manner of Odysseus, it initiates into higher things’ (Il. 35–7 Colonna, trans. Lambertson). In comparing Heliodorus’ novel to Circe’s potion, Philip places himself within a long and familiar interpretative tradition,³³ but – however familiar the rhetoric – it is Kalasiris who is directly invoked. Heliodorus’ holy man distinguished between two Egyptian ‘wisdoms’, one vulgar and common, ‘pandering to wanton pleasures’ (cf. Philip’s accusation of ‘swinish *aselgeia*’), and another ‘true wisdom’ which ‘looks upwards towards heavenly things’ (3.16).³⁴ Kalasiris himself had distinguished between the ways in which the many and the profane (πολλοί, βέβηλοι) understand Homer, and the phenomena to which the great poet refers, and the higher readings of interpreters such as himself (3.12.2–13.3). In applying Homeric hermeneutics to the *Aithiopika*, Philip acknowledges the generic and cultural claims which Heliodorus himself had made.

Such doubleness of reading (in all its different varieties) is, of course, a staple of late antique and Byzantine hermeneutics, in no way limited to Kalasiris and his admirers. A key text, as Gärtner has rightly emphasised,³⁵ is the *Song of Songs*, together with its very rich interpretative tradition. Philip implicitly (Il. 23–4 Colonna) and Eugenikos explicitly compare the proper way to approach the *Aithiopika* to the proper way to read *Song of Songs*, a way which is founded, in the language of Rufinus’ translation of Origen’s commentary on the *Song*, on the distinction between ‘literal’ and ‘inner’ meaning, between *historica intelligentia* and *interior intellectus*. As love itself may be spiritual or carnal, so may ways of reading. Part of Origen’s introduction to his commentary is worth quoting in this context:

‘Just as in childhood we are not affected by the passion of love, so also to those who are at the stage of infancy and childhood in their interior life ... it is not given to grasp the meaning of these sayings [i.e. the mystical utterances of *Song of Songs* which require explication]. ... If those whom we have called children were to come on these passages, it may be

³³ Cf. Kaiser 1964, 200–13. ‘Philip’s’ version finds a close parallel in Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Quaest. Hom.* 72.2; cf. also Hor. *Epist.* 1.2.23–6.

³⁴ Cf. Hunter 1998b, 56–7.

³⁵ Gärtner 1969, 66–8.

that they would derive neither profit nor much harm, either from reading the text itself, or from going through the necessary explanations. But if any man who lives only after the flesh should approach it, to such a one the reading of this Scripture will be the occasion of no small hazard and danger. For he, not knowing how to hear love's language in purity and with chaste ears, will twist the whole manner of his hearing of it away from the inner spiritual man and on to the outward and carnal; and he will be turned away from the spirit to the flesh, and will foster carnal desires in himself, and it will seem to be the Divine Scriptures that are thus urging and egging him on to fleshly lust. For this reason, therefore, I advise and counsel everyone who is not yet rid of the vexations of the flesh and blood and has not ceased to feel the passion of his bodily nature, to refrain completely from reading this little book and the things that will be said about it. For they say that with the Hebrews also care is taken to allow no one even to hold this book in his hands, who has not reached a full and ripe age.' (Origen, *Commentary on Song of Songs, Prologue* p.62.1–24 Baehrens, trans. R.P. Lawson).³⁶

So, too, Eugenikos argues that the chance to read the *Aithiopika* can be withheld from those who are 'young, whether physically or, even more, intellectually' (νεωτέροι εἴτε τῷ σώματι εἴτε μᾶλλον τῷ φρονήματι), on the same principle on which *Song of Songs* is withheld from them, and the *philologoi* who mock *Charikleia* show how right he is. Throughout the interpretative tradition, it is a persistent theme that the *Song* is to be made available only to those who have mastered and internalised the 'true meaning' of less provocative texts; this is the Christian version of the pagan system from which I began – 'allegorical' reading (however we understand that) is the highest form of interpretation, whether it be seen in the progression in the books of Solomon from *Proverbs* to *Ecclesiastes* to *Song of Songs* which Origen again traces in his *Commentary*³⁷ or, for single works, in Origen's three levels of 'literal' (σωματικόν), moral (ψυχικόν), and spiritual (πνευματικόν) interpretation of Scripture,³⁸ a system which finds a clear counterpart in

³⁶ R.P. Lawson, *Origen. The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* (Westminster, MD/London 1957).

³⁷ *Prologue* pp. 75–79 Baehrens (= pp. 39–46 of Lawson's translation).

³⁸ Cf., e.g., Hanson 1959, 235–58.

'Philip''s progression from a moralising/ethical reading of the *Aithiopia* to an allegorical/spiritual one.³⁹

Philip proceeds to offer two forms of 'higher' reading, of which one (ll. 37–76 Colonna) is a moralising, but 'non-mystical' or 'non-allegorical' reading, of a kind familiar, for example, from Plutarch's *How to Study Poetry*; it stands comparison with, say, Horace's 'ethical' reading of Homer (*Epistles* 1.2) or Pseudo-Heraclitus' summary of why Homer is 'chock full of proper virtue: there is prudent Odysseus, brave Ajax, chaste Penelope, the always just Nestor, Telemachos who shows piety towards his father, and Achilles who is the most loyal friend' (*Quaest. Hom.* 78.2–3).⁴⁰ Heliodorus' novel becomes an educational introduction to ethical philosophy and a protreptic to virtue, working through clearly delineated 'good' and 'bad' characters, and the sharply distinguished ends which they meet (it is hard not to recall Miss Prism's 'the good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means'); the novel becomes indeed 'an archetypal portrait of the four cardinal virtues' (ll. 61–2 Colonna).⁴¹ It is no surprise, if somewhat disappointing, that the morality which Philip apparently rejoices in seeing triumphant is a conservative and hierarchical one ('If a woman wishes secretly to betray her husband's bed, let her consider the passions of Arsake which ended in inglorious strangling; if someone is plotting against his masters (δεσπότες), like Achaimenes he may not escape the Ethiopian spear ...'), backed up by some (? amusingly) banal sententiousness ('vice is more endemic in women than men', l. 43 Colonna); virtue *will be* rewarded.

In a textually difficult transitional passage (ll. 76–9 Colonna), Philip appears to say that his moralising reading has enabled them to see the 'sacred *chiton* which Charicleia wore beneath the brilliant robe which protected her from evil-wishers'. Here the familiar neo-Platonic⁴² (and other) idea of interpretation as a process of revealing layers, an idea which resonates with the textual experience of reading books and which takes its classical authority from the description of the Platonic Alcibiades of the necessity of 'getting inside' the words with which Socrates *logoi* are 'clothed' (*Symposium*

³⁹ Plato's practice in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* was crucially influential upon later hermeneutic practice (both pagan and Christian); I offer some brief remarks in Hunter 2004, 129–30.

⁴⁰ Pseudo-Heraclitus' point here is a comparison of Homer and Plato, very much to the former's advantage.

⁴¹ This too is a central theme of Eugenikos' essay.

⁴² Cf., e.g., Sandy 2001, 174–5.

221e), playfully hints at the possibility that we readers, all of course ‘lovers of *Charikleia*’, are actually taking Charicleia’s clothes off; the allegorical interpretation which follows is to do precisely that,⁴³ thus allowing her beauty to be revealed ‘in its pure glory (ἀκραφνές)’. Philip is obviously alluding to the sacred *chiton* which marks Charicleia as a priestess of Artemis (cf. 3.4.2, 6.11.3), a *chiton* which she dons just before the virginity test of the ‘gridiron’ where her superhuman and undefiled beauty dazzles the onlookers (10.9.3). Here too the critical essay follows the path of the novel, for the ‘gridiron’ test is the event which moves the novel to its denouement, to the revelation of the truth. That truth is, of course, inscribed on the band exposed with Charicleia and available only to those able to read ‘royal Ethiopian script’ (4.8.1). For the bulk of the novel this truth is a mystery understood only by Kalasiris, thanks to his position and learning, and by Charicleia herself (thanks to Kalasiris). As the end of the novel dramatises both revelation and (in the character of Sisimithres) interpretation,⁴⁴ so the critical essay proceeds up the hierarchy of interpretation to culminate with that known only to the truly *sophos*.

As for Philip’s allegorising interpretation itself,⁴⁵ this is a Neo-Platonically flavoured mixture of familiar hermeneutic tools which are used to read the novel as (another) ascent of the soul (i.e. Charicleia) to the intellectual world: metaphor and allegory (Kalasiris guides Charicleia/the soul ‘in calm’ (ἀκύμονα) through ‘the salt and the waves of life (τῶν βιωτικῶν κυμάτων)’), protecting her from the plots of Trachinos, i.e. ‘the rough (τραχεῖα) confusion of the emotions’⁴⁶), numerology (‘Charicleia’ adds up to the triply holy number of 777), and etymology (‘Arsake’ as ‘carnal pleasure’, ἡ ἡδὸνη ἡ σαρκικὴ, etc.) all play their part. Here again, Philip takes his impetus not just from contemporary critical practices, but from the *Aithiopia* itself. Thus, numerology confers special status on the Nile according to the priests who show Hydaspes around: the letters of Νεῖλος add up to 365, the number of days in the year (*Aith.* 9.22.6). The etymology of names is

⁴³ Lamberton seems to mistranslate ἀναπετάσαι as ‘to take wing’. For the image here cf. again Macrobius, *Comm. Somn. Scip.* 1.2.11, approving fictions in which *rerum sacram notio sub pio figmentorum uelamine honestis et tecta rebus et uestita nominibus enuntiatur*.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hunter 1998b, 56–9.

⁴⁵ There is a helpful account in Tarán 1992, which should be consulted for the details.

⁴⁶ That τραχὺς may be used of the sea and στάσις of the winds is relevant to Philip’s extended metaphor.

central to the crucial Delphic oracle (2.35.5–36.1–2) which is to guide Kalasiris’ searches for the ‘accurate meaning’ (2.36.2) and which is recalled to bring narrative closure to the novel (10.41.2). The meeting of Charicleia and Theagenes at Delphi (3.5.4), as described/interpreted by Kalasiris, itself gives impetus to Philip’s Platonising reading of the soul’s pursuit, under the power of *eros*, of the higher understanding which it now craves (ll. 101–110).⁴⁷

‘In that instant it was revealed to us, Knemon, that the soul is something divine and partakes in the nature of heaven. For at the moment when they set eyes on one another, the young pair fell in love, as if the soul recognised its kin at the very first encounter and sped to meet that which was worthily its own’

Aithiopika 3.5.4, trans. Morgan

Of particular interest is Philip’s reading of Charicleia’s suffering at the hands of Arsake: ‘Carnal pleasure in the form of Arsake plots against her, with Cybele for her pimp, representing the senses, who conceives the weapons for the assaults, showers logic with arrows, and draws contemplation to herself in order to debauch the thoughts of the mind. Here let the strong will be made yet tougher! Let it be cast into the fiery furnace of temptation! The ruby [παντάρβη] will keep her unblemished, for the ‘ruby’ is that which ‘fears all’ or ‘is afraid’ and hints at the fear of god, since God is all things [τὸ πᾶν]’ (ll.119–125, trans. Lambertson). This interpretation of the events of *Aithiopika* 8.9–11 again draws directly upon the novel itself. Charicleia is indeed saved by the gods acting through the ‘pantarbe’ jewel (8.11.8), and by her piety and virtue, but Philip has here chosen an episode of the novel which precisely foregrounds problems of interpretation and the conditions which govern individual interpretative choices.⁴⁸ In 8.10–11 the couple debate the rôle of the gods in Charicleia’s miraculous rescue and each remembers a dream prophecy delivered by Kalasiris or a god in his shape (itself an allusion to contentious matters of dream-interpretation). Charicleia speaks first:

⁴⁷ Cf. also 4.2.3 where Theagenes explains that the sight of Charicleia ‘gives [him] wings and draws [him] uplifted (μετάρσιον) towards herself’. On ‘Platonic’ elements in Heliodorus cf. especially Dowden 1996.

⁴⁸ Cf. Dowden 1996, 274–5.

“Such a dream I dreamed last night – if dream it was and not reality! At the time it somehow slipped from my thoughts, but now it comes back to me. The dream was in the form of a line of verse, and it came from the lips of Kalasiris, most blessed among men. Either I fell asleep without realizing, and he came to me in a dream, or else I saw him in the very flesh. It went something like this, I think:

If you wear *pantarbe* fear-all, fear not the power of flame:
Miracles may come to pass: for Fate ‘tis easy game.”

Theagenes shook like a man possessed ... “I have an oracle from the selfsame prophet; be it Kalasiris or a god in Kalasiris’s shape, he appeared to me and seemed to speak these words:

Ethiopia’s land with a maiden shalt thou see:
Tomorrow from Arsake’s bonds shalt thou be free.

Now, I can guess (συμβάλλειν) the meaning of the prophecy as it affects me: by ‘Ethiopia’s land’ it signifies, I think, the netherworld,⁴⁹ ‘with a maiden’ means I shall be with Persephone, and the release from bonds is the departure of my soul from my earthly body. But what sense do your lines make? They are full of contradictions! The word *pantarbe* means ‘fearing all things’, but then the commandment requires you not to be afraid of the pyre.”

“My darling Theagenes,” replied Charicleia, “misfortune has been so constant a companion that you have grown used to putting the worst construction on everything, for people are apt to allow their circumstances to shape their thoughts. But it seems to me that the words of the prophecy presage a brighter future than you are disposed to see. Perhaps ‘the maiden’ is me, and you are being given an assurance that, at my side, you will come to Ethiopia, my fatherland, free of Arsake and her bonds.”

Aithiopika 8.11.1–5, trans. Morgan

Theagenes’ ‘allegorical’ (almost neo-Platonic) reading of his dream prophecy proves amusingly wrong; the words (for once) mean what they appear to

⁴⁹ This passage may already have been in Philip’s mind at 1.92–3 where he interprets Charicleia’s Ethiopian birth as a sign that man moves from ‘the darkness’ towards the light.

mean. Philip could, of course, appeal not just to the whole shape of the episode for his view that the ‘pantarbe’ is really ‘fear of god’, but also to Charicleia’s own interpretative move at 8.11.11: ‘we have a second *pantarbe* in the prophecy the gods have made. So let us trust in the gods ...’. Nevertheless, Philip’s choice of this episode will not be innocent. Interpretation and its aims are contextually determined – Charicleia wants to cheer Theagenes up – and Philip is a master of the rhetoric of interpretation. He sets out to show that Heliodoros’ novel is an improving work ‘beyond all reproach’; perhaps if he had been set a different task he would have accomplished that too with equal ease.

The ἐρμηνεύματα of Philip thus takes its place within one of the central questions in the history of interpretative practice, a question to which texts such as the Derveni papyrus have given new impetus: what should be the relation between the work being studied and the hermeneutic tools to be applied to it? If Philip does more explicitly what Kalasiris all but did in the course of the novel itself, we may see this as a remarkable anticipation of modern critical practice.

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