Power of the Prude:
Configurations of the Feminine in the Greek Novel

KATHARINE HAYNES

The Open University

Introduction

My choice of topic would first seem to merit some sort of *apologia.* 'Configurations of the feminine' seems perilously close to previous investigations of the prominent female protagonists. Such readings have ranged from a sensitive utilisation of reception theory to test the possibility of female reader identification[1] through to analyses of the influence of religion, sometimes offered by advocates of the *Mysterientexte* theory.[2]

Why then revisit such an apparently well worked field? Part of the answer must lie in the fact that however useful the insights into generic gender patterning produced by these approaches, no one totalising theory can fully explain the ambiguities and tensions inherent in the novels' presentation of

---

[1] The 'female readership' hypothesis has, in the past, functioned as the most popular means of explaining the prominence of the heroines. Such an approach will often take as its starting point the vexed questions of improvements in status, and levels of female literacy, and focus upon the centrality of the heroine as a possible point of identification for a female readership. See for example Sandy 1982, 61, Hägg 1983, 95–96, Johne 1987, 24; 1989, 158; 1996, 204, 207, Holzberg 1995, 35, and Fusillo 1996, 304. For a more overtly theoretical approach see Winkler 1990, Elsom 1992, Montague 1992, and Egger 1994.

[2] For the strong heroines as manifestations of the goddess, most famously see Merkelbach 1962, 337. By identifying novelistic character types as '... *nur Figuranten in einem heiligen Drama...*' he seemed to deny the genre its status as literature. For a similar stance see Witt's 1971, 245 identification of Anthia as Isis Lysikomos and Hani's 1978, 272 reading of Heliodoros as cultic narrative. Doody 1996, 172 has more recently provided a far more fluid interpretation of 'religious influence' that has interesting consequences for our reading of the heroines. She states that the novel '… has a religious grounding in the sense of the holy in human existence. And it has a high sense of the holy in all that may be called 'feminine'…'

gender. My own methodology then, is necessarily pluralistic. Here I have chosen to fuse an anthropological approach to my broadly historicist orientation, enabling me to recast the debate as the 'constructed feminine' rather than the well-worn 'images' or 'portrayal of women'. Shifting the focus away from the vexed question of improvements in female status and from 'real women' may generate a new realisation of the polysemic qualities of gender, and how its intersections with the shifting categories of race and status may function as part of a wider discourse of self-definition.

The Constructed Feminine

At the outset I wish to clarify what I mean by the 'constructed feminine'. This has been formulated in different ways, by scholars working in different areas, though it rests upon the basic assumption that gender is capable of functioning as a means of communication, or basic organising principle of culture or society in general. To focus upon one of the more famous expressions of this belief, Lévi-Strauss 1963, 61 visualised the regulations surrounding marriage and kinship-systems '… as a kind of language, a set of processes permitting the establishment … of a certain kind of communication'. The 'mediating factor' being

> … the *women of the group,* who are *circulated* between clans, lineages, or families, in place of the *words of the group,* which are *circulated* between individuals …

Woman may thus be reduced to sign, and the closed body of the chaste woman may come to signify or embody the cultural integrity of a particular social group.[3] My application of anthropological theory does not, however, seek to deny socio-historical specificity. For example, I recognise that the utilisation of the female as projection of the male self would be less likely to

---

[3] This Levi-Straussian conceptualisation of woman as sign is hardly new, though it remains a fruitful way of investigating gender patterns in Classical texts. See for example the comments of Sorkin Rabinowitz 1993, and Zeitlin 1996. See also de Beauvoir's 1972 realisation of the woman as Other, and in a different context Higonnet's discussion 1994,11 of the female body as metonymy for the nation in nationalist texts of the Renaissance onwards.

occur at times when gender politics themselves had become the focus of social anxiety.

18th/19th century novels

In passing we might mention the English novel of the 18th and 19th centuries as a rather neat exemplification of this differing sexual ideology. Narrative patterns relating to the significance of physical integrity and female subjectivity appear to be grounded in a particular brand of political reality that goes hand in hand with an interest in social reform. So in Richardson's *Pamela*[4] as in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* the locus of chastity is firmly established as the heroine's body. Pamela, the poor servant, struggles to keep her virtue intact, and is rewarded both financially and socially by becoming her master's wife. This novel was criticised at the time of its first publication for its so-called levelling tendencies: encouraging poor women to set as great a store by their honour as the rich. *Tess* too was perceived as an attack on bourgeois *mores,* for to the story of a girl seduced when young and later rejected by her hypocritical husband the author chose to add the provocative subtitle *A Pure Woman.* In both texts the female protagonist is permitted to emerge as subject in a far more direct and unproblematic manner than ever encountered in the Greek Novel. In *Pamela* the epistolary form privileges the heroine's thoughts and feelings, functioning as the textual antithesis of Kleitophon's first person narration, a technique which persistently situates the heroine as object of the male gaze. The eponymous *Tess* is also allowed to insist upon her individuality in a manner which has interesting implications for our readings of the novelistic heroines. Thus, when for her husband Angel, Tess is

> … no longer the milkmaid but a visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one typical form… He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names.

Tess is allowed to reassert her identity, her sense of self as a woman, with all her faults, rather than an ideal:

---

[4] This was first published in 1740.

'Call me Tess', she would say askance, and he did.[5]

In contrast, more secure identifications of the female protagonists with various female deities regularly punctuate the texts of the Greek Novels. Although such narrative cues have of course been a focus for any scholar wishing to read these fictions as cultic allegory, it is perhaps more significant that these identifications will often, though admittedly not exclusively, occur in the public sphere, situating the heroine as silent civic spectacle.[6]

Real Women?

This brief *excursus* has allowed us to focus upon the extent to which novelistic chastity has become dislocated from the bodies of real women and transformed into some sort of social signification. Narrative patterns such as Kallirhoe's bigamous second union with Dionysios alert the reader to the instability of the conceptualisation of chastity in the genre; formulated as loyalty by Chariton, innocence by Longos and purity by Heliodoros. Whatever the precise configuration there is a sense in which the whole canon has become suffused with an aura of σωφροσύνη: an impression strengthened by linguistic analysis of the usage of this word and its compounds in the extant texts. Although it refers to women on 27 occasions, on a further 18 it specifically relates to male behaviours. There still exists an imbalance in the standards of sexual continence set for men and women, yet scenes such as Theagenes' chastity test[7] demonstrate a surprising concern with the purity of the male body. Goldhill 1995,4 has viewed these generic patterns as symptomatic of

_____

[5] Hardy 1891, *Tess of the D'Urbevilles,* 135. For an interesting parallel see Chariton 2,3 where Dionysios mistakes Kallirhoe for the goddess Aphrodite. In this case the heroine's discomfiture is very much bound up with her loss of real status: her new master's mistake being juxtaposed with the steward's sharp reminder of her new status as slave.

[6] See for example Chariton 3,2 where Kallirhoe is identified as Aphrodite at her wedding to Dionysios, and 4.7 for a similar reaction as she travels to Babylon. At Xen. *Ephes.* 1,2 Anthia is closely identified with Artemis as she walks in procession with the other maidens at the festival of the goddess. The situation is more complex in Heliodoros, as the bandits mistake Charikleia for Artemis or Isis (1,2) though the omniscient narrator is quick to assure us of the superficiality of this observation (1,2, 1,7). While it is true that this identification does not occur in the civic context, the coding of the beach as liminal space might make this display of Hellenic superiority, juxtaposed to barbarian incredulity, even more significant.

[7] Hld. *Aithiopika* 10, 9.

an on-going dialogue on the subject of self-control. Although this discourse is as much playful as serious, its centrality to the constitution of the elite male subject, as readers of Foucault 1985, 1988 will be aware, does not appear in doubt.

A preliminary survey of the Greek canon isolates several passages where the female as object is co-opted as part of the construction of the male subject. Think of Kallirhoe, who conceptualises herself as a burden, a piece of household furniture, a desirable commodity passed from hand to hand, from man to man. Her complaint makes it clear that the exceptional beauty which renders her valuable has also diminished her: 'That is why I have been handed over like a mere chattel to I know not whom…' [8] The famous scene where she debates the fate of her unborn child defines the overriding consideration in the question of life and death as loyalty to Chaireas:

> I shall give my view first: I want to die Chaereas's wife and his alone. To know no other husband – that is dearer to me than parents or country or child.[9]

The equally stirring scene at Ach. Tat. 6.11 where Leukippe bemoans her fate and articulates her feelings for the hero in contrast situates the heroine in terms of her relationship to those very social structures rejected by Kallirhoe. She states:

> Thersandros, cease to regard me as a slave. I am the daughter of a Byzantine general, and wife of one of the leading men of Tyre. I am not Thessalian, and my name is not Lakaina. This is an insult imposed by pirates who robbed me even of my name. My husband is Kleitophon; my country Byzantium; Sostratos is my father and Pantheia my mother. [10]

---

[8] Chariton 1,14: 'διὰ τοῦτο ὡς σκεῦος παρεδόθην οὐκ οἶδα τίσιν...' The heroine is also termed φορτίον or freight, another graphic image of objectification at 1.10 by the tomb robbers, and on another six occasions through the text.

[9] Chariton 2,11: 'ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν πρώτη τὴν ἐμὴν γνώμην ἀποφαίνομαι· θέλω γὰρ ἀποθανεῖν Χαιρέου μόνου γυνή. τοῦτό μοι καὶ γονέων ἥδιον καὶ πατρίδος καὶ τέκνου, πεῖραν ἀνδρὸς ἑτέρου μὴ λαβεῖν.'

[10] Ach. Tat. 6,16,4-6: 'μή με νομίσῃς ἀνδράποδον εἶναι, Θέρσανδρε. στρατηγοῦ θυγάτηρ εἰμὶ Βυζαντίων, πρώτου τῶν Τυρίων γυνή· οὐκ εἰμὶ Θετταλή. οὐ καλοῦμαι Λάκαινα. ὕβρις αὕτη ἐστὶ πειρατική· λελήστευμαι καὶ τοὔνομα. ἀνήρ μοι Κλειτοφῶν, πατρὶς Βυζάντιον, Σώστρατος πατήρ, μήτηρ Πάνθεια.'

It is also surely significant that her name is only indirectly alluded to, thus aiding in the general sense of self erasure. Of course, it is not my intention to claim that the question of female subjectivity in the novel is simple and un-problematic. To take such a stance not only threatens to swamp the subtler insights of feminist influenced theory in a deluge of generalisations but also seeks to deny the complexity of the texts themselves. If we are prepared, in Fetterly's terminology,[11] to 'read against the text' we may, in our first exam-ple, view an object whose keen articulation of events could function as a small yet significant assertion of her own subjectivity. Yet even with this coda, it surely remains true that any selection of passages chosen to illustrate the heroines' outspokenness or 'independence' will equally well highlight the issue of individuality. In this context it is not the nature of the speech or act which becomes important, but the question of on whose behalf it is being enacted.

The Christian Context

It appears to make sense that the anthropological notion of 'woman as sign' might gain more currency in any time-period where a particular group feels the need to define itself within the larger social context. To establish whether the Second Sophistic, as the *floruit* of the Greek Novel can be viewed as such a time it seems wise to marshal some other literary comparanda from the same era, which might lend themselves to such a reading. To this end I will now turn to my second control, that of Christian texts circulating outside the boundaries of the orthodox community, and to another set of prominent heroines. In this case my focus lies on the manner in which the conceptuali-sation of the ideal female as bride or as virgin or male can come to stand as the clearest expression of the early church's divided attitude to social con-formity. At one end of the spectrum we find the exhortation to the Ephesians (5.28–29)[12] emphasising reintegration, conformity and stability:

---

[11] Although Fetterly's work focuses on American novels, her invitation to scholars to 'un-pack' or 'resist' the dominant discourse as represented in a text, by choosing to concen-trate upon those areas which may (incidentally) empower female characters, remains use-ful for those working on more ancient fictional forms. See especially 1978, xxiii.

[12] *Ephesians* 5.28–9: Οὕτως ὀφείλουσιν οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπᾶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας, ὡς τὰ ἑαυτῶν σώματα. Ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα, ἑαυτὸν ἀγαπᾷ· οὐδεὶς γάρ ποτε τὴν

So, in this way husbands ought to love their own wives, as they love their own bodies. The man who loves his wife loves himself, for no-body ever hated his own flesh, but cares for it and cherishes it, just as Christ cares for the church.

The social institution of marriage is elevated as the most appropriate emblem of Christ's relationship with the congregation. In total contrast, at the other end of this ideological spectrum the Christian experience is explored through the representation of the assumption, by females, of traditionally male roles and prerogatives.

Strong female figures such as Thecla and Perpetua, have, like the novelistic heroines, generated much speculation with regard to possible female reader identification,[13] and with possibly more justification, given the emphasis on the themes of female friendship and solidarity. The power that they possess does also, however, in its reversal of normal biological and social roles, come to signal the transformative power of salvation.

Thecla rejects her suitor Thamyris to follow Paul (20), and reinforces her abandonment of her allotted social function by her cutting of hair (25) and later by her adoption of male attire (40). She definitively demonstrates her new found autonomy with her aggressive counter attack on the civic dignitary Alexandros, ripping his cloak and throwing his crown from his head (26). This offence causes her to be condemned *ad bestias,* the ultimate confirmation of her place beyond social boundaries (27).

Perpetua also emerges as a powerful figure, assuming a leadership role in prison and the events leading up to her death in the amphitheatre. This is in spite of the fact that she is only newly baptised as a Christian, there are men present in the band of prisoners, and she does not hold a formal office. On one occasion she persuades the prison officer not to maltreat the Christian prisoners (16,2), and on another she objects when the Christian woman are forced to dress as priestesses of the goddess Ceres (18,4). What is most significant, however, is her almost complete disassociation from her normal biological function. Perpetua, the young mother, hands over her infant son to the care of her father, and in answer to her prayers the child feels no more need for her milk, and she experiences no further discomfort in her breasts

---

ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει αὐτήν· καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν·᾽

[13] See Kraemer 1992,153 and Bremmer 1996, 1998.

(6.10). This abandonment of her femininity is emphasised by Perpetua's dream of her forthcoming ordeal in the arena. Instead of being thrown to the beasts she is ordered to fight a gigantic Egyptian. She is stripped and finds herself to be male.(10,7)[14]

So here we have the ultimate affront to patriarchal sensibilities: the woman who acts male, and the one who becomes male. Perpetua's denial of her maternal role, and Thecla's determined virginity also send out a different social signal from that of the chaste woman. MacDonald 1996, 180, referring to Thecla claims that

> The woman whose chastity was beyond question to such an extent that she neither married nor remarried came to symbolise the boundaries that separated the whole community from the outside world.[15]

Virginity is a desirable characteristic in the potential citizen bride. Perpetual virginity though is desocialising.

Reading Woman

What implications does this have for our reading of woman in the novel? Scholarly interpretations of the relation of the novel to society have so far fallen into two categories. On the one hand the perceived difference between the sterile virginity of a Thecla and the marital fidelity of the novelistic protagonists has prompted those working in the field of early Christian literature to polarise these particular Christian texts and the pagan novels into asocial and social standpoints.[16] Marriage, the means of the production of the next generation of citizens, is a reassuring microcosm of the social order. The association of romantic love with marriage in the genre is viewed as an attempt to render it palatable, and thus act as a goad to civic responsibility.

---

[14] Salisbury 1997, 109 interprets this as a metaphor of her change from catechumen to baptised Christian. She states '… the most compelling part of this image is its signalling of transformation. If one is looking for a metaphor of personal change, one cannot do better than a transformation of one's gender, which is at the heart of one's self-identity.'

[15] Similarly see Clark 1998,107: 'The closed body of the committed virgin symbolised the triumph over generation and corruption, and thus over mortality.'

[16] See Cooper 1996, 24. For a similar view from a scholar working in the area of the novel see Segal 1984,90.

This is a very neat hypothesis, and at first glance a convincing one. It is true, as we previously observed, that the heroines are often conceptualised in a manner which seems to reinforce their civic role, displaying their outstanding beauty and superiority as representatives of the city's elite at public festivals.[17] It is equally true that marriage plays an important part in the plot dynamic, functioning as it does as the narrative *telos*.

However, certain textual signals still serve to disrupt this reading. Narrative cues such as the seeming dominance of the heroines, and the constant privileging of *eros* over *gamos* generate some discomfort. Does the genre act as confirmation of an improvement in female status, if such a nebulous phenomenon could ever be so quantified, or is it rather expressive of the new emphasis on the personal and the individual?[18] To argue our way out of this closed circle, perhaps we need to do some conceptual re-coding. Instead of labelling patterns 'personal' or 'female', perhaps they make better sense when envisaged as 'transgressive' or 'provocative.'

It is too easy to identify the upper class Greek male (the most likely candidate as primary intended reader)[19] as somehow synonymous with the amorphous mass labelled the 'social order'. Perhaps the situation of the civic elites in the Greek East under Roman rule is more subtle and complex than the apparent cultural assimilation or domination that scholars have been happy to locate.[20] Instead of a nostalgic retreat into a pre-Roman Classical

---

[17] In the Roman period the image of female virtue could be exploited by the Greek elites in the context of *euergetism*. Women from the best families achieved a certain amount of prominence as civic benefactors. It is important to remember though that such behaviour was securely hemmed in by convention: inscriptions stress traditional female virtues and family connections. Even though women could become magistrates in certain circumstances they are rarely found occupying positions which would require them to speak in public. See in general MacMullen 1980, 216, Lefkowitz 1983, 56–57 and van Bremen 1996, 166, 186.

[18] Certainly there has been a school of scholarly interpretation, perhaps in part influenced by Dodds'1965 characterisation of the period as an 'Age of Anxiety' which has viewed the novelistic gender dynamics as expressive of individual fears and aspirations. See Reardon 1971, 401; 1982, 6, and more recently MacAlister 1991, 40 and Konstan 1994, 231 for slightly different expositions of the same basic standpoint.

[19] For recent expositions of this view see Stephens 1994 and Bowie 1994. See Bremmer 1998 for the most up-to-date discussion of 'external' evidence for a female readership.

[20] For a subtle analysis of the situation see Woolf 1994, 135. He defines the cultural positions occupied by Greece and Rome not so much as distinct division or cultural fusion, but rather a 'dynamic tension' which functioned as a principal structuring element of both societies. This situation continued until the barbarian invasions and Christianisation of the Empire necessitated the re-drawing of the cultural map.

Golden Age,[21] maybe the genre is, as Swain 1996, 109 has recently hypothe-
sised '… another outlet for the cultural ideals and formulas of the elite, …
another expression of their cultural hegemony.'[22] The presentation of the
heroine becomes an important weapon in this cultural conflict. Conventional
enough to confirm male subjectivity, her carefully circumscribed reversal of
the usual gender dynamic may be a deliberate and calculated affront to the
bourgeois Imperial version of civic morality.

Interactions with the Barbarian Male

The heroines' interactions with figures such as the barbarian male function
as the best expression of the genre's somewhat ambiguous relation to social
structures, and to more traditional representations of masculinity and femi-
ninity. Consider first, at one end of the ideological spectrum, Anthia, whose
violent defence of her honour appears to exemplify the genre's cautiously
subversive stance towards convention. Margaret Doody has categorised
Anthia's stabbing of the would-be rapist Anchialos as substantially similar to
Thecla's lively counter attack on Alexandros, member of the civic elite. She
reminds us that 'Rome's Lucretia exhibited her chastity and propriety by
killing *herself*.' (Doody 1996, 76) However, there remains some significant
differences in both the characterisation of the male attacker, and the concep-
tual coding of the space in which the attack occurs. Firstly Alexandros' iden-
tification with the social order appears relatively straightforward, while An-
chialos appears, superficially at least, to be a more marginal figure, function-
ing beyond the social pale. Secondly, Thecla's appearance in the public
street, in a space traditionally coded as male destabilises normative percep-
tions of status, respectability and availability.[23] Anthia, on the other hand, is
unwilling, and in some senses unable, to leave the robbers' cave after the
attack. We are told that despite her fear, and desire to quit the scene: '… that
was impossible; she could scarcely travel alone, and there was no-one to

---

[21] See Scobie 1973,19 and Holzberg 1995, 47.
[22] Similarly see Levin 1977, 26 on the novel as perpetuating a set of cultural values. More
   generally on the conscious archaism in the literature of the Second Sophistic as sympto-
   matic of a Hellenic drive towards re-definition see Alcock 1993, 7.
[23] On the coding of the public realm in Roman Greece as elite and male see Økland 1998,
   128.

show her the way…' [24]. Possessed of enough spirit and presence of mind to defend herself, she cannot leave her allotted sphere even to save her life.[25] Metaphorically she would be as unable to make her way along a street in her native Ephesos as she would be in a barbarian landscape.[26]

This streak of seeming conventionality in the face of extreme adversity at first sight confirms the conservatism sometimes ascribed wholesale to the genre. However, perhaps ultimately more telling is the heroines' appropriation of another 'typically male' attribute; eloquence. Leaving aside these rare displays of aggression, the most significant tactic employed by the heroines in the defence of their honour has to be their use of rhetoric. Brigitte Egger 1988, 60 has focused upon the female protagonists' emotional omnipotence as the defining characteristic in their apparent predominance, and yet coupled with this unconscious erotic power is the ability to manipulate situations on the social level. See for example, Kallirhoe's well-judged response to the preliminary advances of the Great King, made through his eunuch Artaxates.

> Artaxates' words struck at Callirhoe's heart like a sword. She pretended not to understand. 'May the gods continue to be gracious to the King', she said, 'and he to you, for taking pity on an unfortunate woman. Let him release me all the sooner from my worry, I beg, by deciding the issue, so that I may no longer be a burden to the Queen either.' [27]

---

[24] Xen. *Ephes.* 4, 5: '... τοῦτο ἀμήχανον ἦν· οὔτε γὰρ ἡ ὁδὸς αὐτῇ εὔπορος ἦν οὔτε ὁ ἐξηγησόμενος τὴν πορείαν …'

[25] For an interesting parallel see the behaviour of the eponymous Kalligone PSI 981:35–42, whose reaction in the face of adversity is more confident: threatening to kill the man who has removed her sword to prevent her harming herself. Evidence from the fragmentary novelistic texts reinforces the impression that, in their representation of gender, as in so many other respects, the fully extant novels stand as a relatively homogeneous group.

[26] Similarly see Kallirhoe's attitude when left alone in the shrine of Aphrodite: she does not dare leave on her own, and has to be led away by Leonas (Chariton 2, 3). She is ashamed (αἰδουμένη). The conceptual dynamic is different in Longos: the woods may function as alternative 'private sphere' given the association of nature with the feminine principle. The arrival of the townsfolk causes Chloe to flee and take refuge in the countryside (Longus 4, 14): '… αἰδεσθεῖσα καὶ φοβηθεῖσα …'

[27] Chariton 6, 5: 'Καλλιρόη δὲ εὐθὺς τὴν καρδίαν ἐπλήγη καθάπερ ὑπὸ ξίφους τοῦ λόγου· προσεποιεῖτο δὲ μὴ συνιέναι καὶ "θεοὶ" φησὶν "ἵλεῳ βασιλεῖ διαμένοιεν, σοὶ δὲ ἐκεῖνος, ὅτι ἐλεεῖτε γυναῖκα δυστυχῆ. δέομαι, θᾶττον ἀπαλλαξάτω με τῆς φροντίδος, ἀπαρτίσας τὴν κρίσιν, ἵνα μηκέτι ἐνοχλῶ μηδὲ τῇ βασιλίδι."

Biting back her justified anger, this and later delicate evasions stress her intelligence, good breeding and heightened social awareness, and avoid the violent retaliation that would follow any direct refusal.[28] The sparse nature of Xenophon's prose means that we lack such detailed displays of rhetorical persuasiveness, yet there are repeated references to Anthia's ability to concoct a lying tale. She is easily able to pander to her captors' preconceptions. Psammis, with his barbarian credulity in matters religious is capable of reading her as consecrated virgin (3, 11), while for the brothel-keeper she expertly creates an alternative history that emphasises violence and possession (5, 7). In Achilles Tatius' novel Leukippe, far from being cowed by the threats of her master Thersandros, and Sosthenes' suggestions of further torture, takes ownership of these threats in a speech full of fire and passion:

> 'Bring on the instruments of torture: the wheel – here, take my arms and stretch them, the whips – here is my back, lash away; the hot irons – here is my body for burning; bring the axe as well – here is my neck, slice through! Watch a new contest: a single woman competes with all the engines of torture and wins every round.' [29]

The repeated imperatives generate a feeling of immediacy and urgency in a portion of text that has the flavour of a Christian martyr account. The speech has the effect of upsetting Thersandros' equilibrium and so helping her remain chaste. Finally we may turn to Heliodoros for a playful manipulation of the stereotypical image of the respectable woman. The remarkable Charikleia deceives the audience of assembled bandits with a demure display of apparent compliance in which she demonstrates a keen awareness of male attitudes to female speech. Before an accomplished display of rhetoric designed to delay the celebration of her marriage to the bandit King she disingenuously claims that : 'It would have been more fitting for my brother

---

[28] See also 1, 11 where Kallirhoe's remains acutely aware of her true plight on Theron's vessel, but plays along with his plans to ensure her own safety. At 2, 5 she flatters the urbane Dionysios with appeals to his cultured background.

[29] Ach. Tat. 6, 21: 'τὰς βασάνους παράστησον, φερέτω τροχόν· ἰδοὺ χεῖρες, τεινέτω. φερέτω καὶ μάστιγας· ἰδοὺ νῶτον, τυπτέτω. κομιζέτω πῦρ· ἰδοὺ σῶμα, καιέτω. φερέτω καὶ σίδηρον· ἰδοὺ δέρη, σφαζέτω. ἀγῶνα θεάσασθε καινόν· πρὸς πάσας τὰς βασάνους ἀγωνίζεται μία γυνή, καὶ πάντα νικᾷ.'

Theagenes here to speak, for I think that silence becomes a woman, and it is for a man to respond among men.'[30]

These examples may have highlighted the heroines' ability to persistently out-manoeuvre their would be seducers, and yet they have also drawn attention to the apparent diversity of the male antagonists as a category. Previously assembled under the umbrella term 'barbarian male' we find genuine upper class foreigners such as Psammis and the Great King, next to bourgeois bandits like Thyamis, and Greek citizens like Thersandros. Barbarity, of course, cannot itself function as a stable category in a canon where texts may be authored by those living on the periphery of the Greek world.[31] Instead of isolating barbarity as a significant classification, it might be more fruitful, in our examination of the male antagonists, to focus on those traits which are *alien* to the novel's admittedly idiosyncratic version of correct masculine behaviours.

In addition to the negative portrayal of sexual aggression we also discover a lack of full authorial endorsement for the traditional brand of heroic masculinity that elevates martial prowess. This may be clearly seen in Chariton's novel where Dionysios is awarded the heroine as a prize for his bravery (7, 5). His glorious *aristeia* actually avails him nothing, since Aphrodite has already ensured Kallirhoe's return to her first husband. For the mannered Achilles Tatius the undoubted courage of a Dionysios is replaced by the mindless aggression of a Thersandros[32] while in Longos' pastoral physical force descends to the level of farce. The Dorkon-wolf is attacked by dogs (1,

---

[30] Hld. *Aith.* 1, 21–22: 'ὁ μὲν λόγος ἥρμοζεν ἀδελφῷ τῷ ἐμῷ Θεαγένει τούτῳ· πρέπειν γὰρ οἶμαι γυναικὶ μὲν σιγὴν ἀνδρὶ δὲ ἀπόκρισιν ἐν ἀνδράσιν·'

[31] See for example Briquel-Chatonnet 1992, 194 for a useful discussion of the representation of Phoenicians within the genre, containing the observation of a tension between two competing ideological strands. On the one hand the deployment of a set of well-worn clichés including an inclination towards luxury, debauchery and piracy seems to be needed to provide foreign flavour, and to induce a feeling of disorientation: allusion to known stereotypes may create the illusion of 'reality'. On the other hand the Phoenicians are Hellenophones with enough affinities with the Greeks to ensure some possibility of identification for a Greek reader. For a discussion of the set of stereotypical characteristics that might safely be ascribed to foreign characters in literature of this period see Kuch 1989, 82.

[32] Although see Ach. Tat. 8, 17 for the approving account of Kallisthenes' unproblematic transformation into model citizen: a transformation which entails bravery in martial exploits, in addition to the traditional manifestation of the superiority of the elite- *euergetism*.

21) in his pursuit of Chloe, while her later abductor Lampis is beaten by the parasite Gnathon, himself a ridiculous figure (4, 29).

It is significant that eloquence, as the outward expression of the education of the elite male remains a privileged literary site, and as such is possessed by the more positive of the male antagonists. For example, Dionysios provides an emotional yet carefully balanced speech in his suit against Mithridates (Chariton 5, 6) while Mithridates himself is capable of putting on a spectacular performance (5, 7). Similarly, Thersandros' court-speech, while not endearing him to the reader, is an accomplished rhetorical display (Ach. Tat. 8, 8) demonstrating the author's love of the narrative set-piece. While such skills are not privileged to the extent that they enable the antagonists to steal either the heroine or reader interest away from the protagonists, the neutral or positive coding this trait receives acts as a semi-reliable indicator of the extent to which the heroes subvert traditional definitions of masculinity.

Given the emphasis placed on the heroines' ability to persuade, the heroes' lack of confidence in this sphere is striking. So Habrokomes is unable, at a very basic level to put together a convincing enough argument to persuade the pirates to take his *paedagogus* on board ship (Xen. *Ephes.* 1, 14). Daphnis, after attempting to construct a reasonable speech in his own defence when accused by the Methymneans, immediately undercuts any impact his words might have made, by bursting into tears (Longus 2, 16) in a scene reminiscent of Telemachos' behaviour in *Odyssey* 2:80–81. Seemingly devoid of defensive strategies, their apparent passivity in the face of adversity may strike a discordant note in comparison with the heroines' ingenuity. So, when Chaireas' ship is captured we are told that he and Polycharmos begged to be sold to one master (Chariton 3, 7): indicative of a commendable sense of loyalty, but completely lacking in dignity. It is Kleitophon's behaviour though, that perhaps provides the key to understanding the heroes' seeming inferiority. His willingness to submit to the unreasonable and violent attacks of Thersandros (Ach. Tat. 5, 23, 6, 5, and 8, 1) may locate this element of novelistic heroism as a parody of the self-restraint expected of the upper class male.[33] Narrative elements such as the protagonists' extreme youth may

---

[33] On Ach. Tat. 5, 23 as parody see Durham 1938, 5 and Anderson 1982, 32 contra Rohde 1914, 511, and Merkelbach 1962, 152.

render their behaviour more acceptable,[34] yet I maintain that it is better understood as a deliberately playful sexual construct than as a failed attempt to depict a more traditional heroism.

Understanding the heroes' behaviour is vital to our reading of gender as a relational sign system. Both male and female protagonists subvert normative behavioural patterns. Novelistic femininity has appropriated one of the defining characteristics of Hellenic male culture in its confrontation with a more traditional brand of forceful masculinity. It would be tempting to read this, at some subliminal level as a veiled challenge to Imperial might and ambition. To suggest some programmatic transformation of the archetypal Roman into uncouth bandit is, of course, an untenable position, although it is possible that there could have been some transference of characteristics occurring in the shared imaginaire. Recovery of anything so vague as 'attitudes' to a particular racial grouping is of course difficult, although Forte's 1972 collection of material relating to the different stances taken towards Roman rule remains useful. She claimed a strong tendency to conceive of the Romans as '… descendants of uncivilised nomads, murderers and fugitives who had sought asylum in primitive Rome…'(Forte 1972, 186). The genre's somewhat ambiguous stance towards authority figures is also significant in this context.[35]

Even if we choose to remain sceptical about any direct equivalence, preferring to view the fictional generic world as a completely de-politicised entity, the heroines' possession of an unusual degree of power, however informally exercised, still hints at a playful attitude to convention. In conclusion I wish to refer briefly to another narrative pattern which de-stabilises a favoured way of representing an ordered universe. As previously mentioned, marriage could often function as an emblem of the continuation of the social

---

[34] As youths around the age of the formal *ephebia* the inversion of normative sexual constructs may be perhaps explained by the notion of liminality and gender inversion in rites of passage. For a reading of the novel influenced by this theory see Dowden 1999, 224 following the insights of van Gennep 1960, and Vidal-Naquet 1986. Aberrant behaviour will always jar less when it occurs in the so-called liminal space, and yet this general theory cannot fully explain the novels' strange mix of conventional and countercultural behaviours.

[35] Billault 1996, 121, in his discussion of enforcers of the law notes both the unreliability with which they wield their power, and their more positive qualities such as eloquence and honesty.

order,[36] a symbol routinely employed in Imperial iconography. So, a study of numismatics demonstrates that the wives and children of the Imperial family could function as symbols of legitimacy and prosperity.[37] In a slightly different context the image of the *dextrarum junctio* could become displaced from the iconography of marriage, and re-deployed, as at the triumphal arch at Lepcis Magna, as an image of political union.[38]

I would suggest that the sexual asymmetry of novelistic marriage deliberately de-stabilises this imagery. Kallirhoe's military advice to Chaireas,[39] like Anthia's erotic predominance[40] can be seen as functioning in the same way as the heroines' appropriation of rhetoric, and might be the cheeky response of the Greek ruling classes to the ultimate representation of order and Imperial superiority. The manner of novelistic consumption becomes pertinent here: rather than civic propaganda, this fictional form designed for private contemplation is perhaps better viewed, to borrow John Morgan's phrase, as ever so slightly illicit.[41] In place of the prudery of my title,[42] the manner in which the heroines defend their honour is deliciously provocative.[43]

---

[36] For the image of marriage as the ultimate expression of *concordia* see Brown 1988, 16–17, Veyne 1987, 165 and Perkins 1995, 48.

[37] Fullerton 1985, 482–483, focusing on the coinage of 13–12 BCE demonstrates how images of the *princeps'* family form part of a unified scheme emphasising the peace and prosperity of Augustus' rule. More generally on the inclusion of women in Imperial iconography to highlight values such as clemency and security see Lefkowitz 1983, 61 and Fantham 1994, 313.

[38] See Walker's 1979 study.

[39] See Chariton 8, 2 where Kallirhoe restrains her impetuous husband from broadcasting the news of the Egyptian defeat, thus ensuring calm in the ranks, and a safe retreat.

[40] See for example the description of the couple's wedding night in Xen. *Ephes.* 1, 9. Although it is Habrokomes who initiates contact, it is noteworthy that Anthia is depicted as kissing him passionately, and indulges in two declarations of love, to his one.

[41] Morgan 1995, 132.

[42] For Wiersma 1990, 119 Kallirhoe remains '… a paragon of prudishness.'

[43] Please note that all translations of the Greek Novels in this paper have been taken directly from B. P. Reardon. 1989. *Collected Ancient Greek Novels,* Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. The proper names of characters from the novels used therein sometimes differ slightly from those versions used in the main text, where I have generally preferred Hellenic spelling variants.

Bibliography

Alcock, S.E. 1993. *Graecia Capta,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, G. 1982. *Eros Sophistes: Ancient Novelists at Play,* Chicago: Scholars Press.

De Beauvoir, S. 1972. *The Second Sex* (Eng. Trans. H M Parshley), London: Penguin.

Billault, A. 1996. 'Characterisation in the Ancient Novel' in: G. L. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World,* Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 115–130.

Bowie, E. 1994. 'The Readership of Greek Novels in the Ancient World' in: J. Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel,* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 435–459.

van Bremen, R. 1996. *The Limits of Participation: Women and Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,* Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben.

Bremmer, J.N. 1996. 'Magic, Martyrdom and Women's Liberation in the Acts of Paul and Thecla' in: J.N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla,* Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 36–49.

Bremmer, J.N. 1998. 'The Novel and the Apocryphal Acts: Place, Time and Readership', in: H. Hofmann, M. Zimmerman (eds.), *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel* 9, Groningen: Forsten, 157-180.

Briquel-Chatonnet, F. 1992. 'L'image des Phéniciens dans les romans grecs' in: M.-F. Baslez, P. Hoffmann and M. Trédé (eds.), *Le Monde du Roman Grec*, Paris: Pr. de l'école normale supérieure, 189–197.

Brown, P. 1988. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity,* New York: Columbia University Press.

Clark, G. 1998. 'Bodies and Blood: Late Antique Debate on Martyrdom, Virginity and Resurrection' in: D. Montserrat (ed.), *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity,* London and New York: Routledge, 99–115.

Cooper, K. 1996. *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealised Womanhood in Late Antiquity,* Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press.

Dodds, E.R. 1965. *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Doody, M.A. 1996. *The True Story of the Novel,* London: Fontana Press.

Dowden, K. 1999. 'Fluctuating Meanings: "Passage Rites" in Ritual, Myth, *Odyssey* and the Greek Romance', *Bucknell Review* 43, 221-243.

Durham, D.B. 1938. 'Parody in Achilles Tatius', *CPh* 33, 1–19.

Egger, B. 1988. 'Zu den Frauenrollen im griechischen Roman: Die Frau als Heldin und Leserin', in: H. Hofmann (ed.), *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel* 1, Groningen: Forsten, 33–66.

Egger, B. 1994. 'Looking at Chariton's *Callirhoe*' in: J.R. Morgan and R. Stoneman (eds.), *Greek Fiction: the Greek Novel in Context,* London and New York: Routledge, 31–48.

Elsom, H.E. 1992. 'Callirhoe: Displaying the Phallic Woman' in: A E. Richlin (ed.), *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome,* New York: Oxford University Press, 212–230.

Fantham, E. et al. 1994. *Women in the Classical World,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fetterly, J. 1978. *'The Resisting Reader': A Feminist Approach to American Fiction,* Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press.

Forte, B. 1972. *Rome and the Romans as the Greeks saw them,* Rome: American Academy in Rome.

Foucault, M. 1985. *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume Two* (Eng. Trans. Robert Hurley), Paris: Penguin.

Foucault, M. 1984/1988. *The Care of the Self: the History of Sexuality, Volume Three* (Eng. Trans. Robert Hurley), New York: Penguin.

Fullerton, M. D. 1985. 'The *Domus Augusti* in the Imperial Iconography of 13–12BC', *AJA* 89, 473–483.

Fusillo, M. 1996. 'Modern Critical Theories and the Ancient Novel' in: G. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World,* Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 277–306.

van Gennep, A. 1960. *The Rites of Passage* (Eng. trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Goldhill, S. 1995. *Foucault's Virginity: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hägg, T. 1983. *The Novel in Antiquity,* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Hani, J. 1978. 'Le Personnage de Chariclea dans les "Éthiopiques": Incarnation de l'idéal moral et religieux d'une époque', *BAGB* , 268–273.

Higonnet, M. R. 1994. 'New Cartographies, an Introduction' in: M. R. Higonnet and J. Templeton (eds.). *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space,* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1–19.

Holzberg, N. 1995. *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction,* London: Routledge.

Johne, R. 1987. 'Dido und Charikleia. Zur Gestaltung der Griechischen Liebesroman', *Eirene* 24, 21–33.

Johne, R. 1989. 'Zur Figurencharakteristik im antiken Roman' in: H. Kuch (ed.), *Der antike Roman,* Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 150–177.

Johne, R. 1996. 'Women in the Ancient Novel' in: G. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World,* Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 151–208.

Konstan, D. 1994. *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres,* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kraemer, R.S. 1992. *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World,* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kuch, H. 1989. 'Die "Barbaren" und der antike Roman', *Das Altertum* 35, 80–86.

Lefkowitz, M.R. 1983. 'Influential Women' in: A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity,* London and Canberra: Routledge, 49–64.

Lévi-Strauss, C. 1963. *Structural Anthropology* (Eng. Trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf), New York and London: Basic Books.

Levin, D.N. 1977. 'To Whom did the Ancient Novelists Address themselves?', *Rivista di Studi Classici* 25, 18–29.

MacAlister, S. 1996. *Dreams and Suicides: The Greek Novel from Antiquity to the Byzantine Empire,* London: Routledge.

MacDonald, M.Y. 1996. *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacMullen, R. 1980. 'Women in public in the Roman Empire', *Historia* 29, 208–218.

Merkelbach, R. 1962. *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike,* Munich and Berlin: Beck.

Montague, H. 1992. 'Sweet and Pleasant Passion: Female and Male Fantasy in Ancient Romance Novels' in: A.E. Richlin (ed.), *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 231–249.

Morgan, J.R. 1995. 'The Greek Novel: Towards a sociology of production and reception' in: A. Powell (ed.), *The Greek World,* London and New York: Routledge, 130–152.

Økland, J. 1998 '"In publicum Procurrendi": Women in the Public Space of Roman Greece' in: L. L. Lovén and A. Strömberg (eds.), *Aspects of Women in Antiquity: Proceedings of the First Nordic Symposium on Women's Lives in Antiquity,* Göteborg 12–15 June 1997, Jonsered: Paul Astroms Forlag, 127–141.

Perkins, J. 1995. *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era,* London and New York: Routledge.

Rabinowitz, N. S. 1993. *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women,* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Reardon, B.P. 1971. *Courants Littéraires Grecs des IIe et IIIe siècles après J C,* Paris: Belles Lettres.

Reardon, B.P. 1982. 'Theme, Structure and Narrative in Chariton', *YCS* 27, 1–29.

Rohde , E. 1914. *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer,* Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel.

Salisbury, J.E. 1997. *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman,* New York and London: Routledge.

Sandy, G.N. 1982. *Heliodorus,* Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Schmeling, G. (ed.), 1996. *The Novel in the Ancient World,* Leiden, New York and Köln.

Scobie, A. 1973. *More Essays on the Ancient Romance and its Heritage,* Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain.

Segal, C. 1984. 'The Trials at the End of Achilles Tatius' *Cleitophon and Leucippe:* Doublets and Complementaries', *SIFC* 77 (3rd series), 83–91.

Stephens, S.A. 1994. 'Who Read Ancient Novels?' in: J. Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel,* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 405–418.

Swain, S. 1996. *Hellenism and Empire,* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Veyne, P. 1987. 'The Roman Empire' in: P. Veyne (ed.), *A History of Private Life* 1: *From Pagan Rome to Byzantium,* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 5–254.

Vidal-Naquet, P. 1986. *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World,* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Walker, C. 1979. 'The Dextrarum Junctio of Lepcis Magna in relationship to the iconography of marriage', *Antiquitiés Africaines* 14, 271–283.

Wiersma, S. 1990. 'The Ancient Greek Novel and its Heroines: A Female Paradox',
   Mnemosyne 43, 109–123.
Winkler, J.J. 1990. *The Constraints of Desire: the Anthropology of Sex and Gender in
   Ancient Greece,* New York and London: Routledge.
Witt, R.E. 1971. *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World,* London and Southampton: Thames
   and Hudson.
Woolf, G. 1994. 'Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity and the Civili-
   sing Process in the Roman East', *PCPhS* 40, 116–143.
Zeitlin, F.I. 1996. *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literatu-
   re,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.