

Religious Narratives and Religious Themes in the Novels of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus

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1. Introduction

The prominence of religious themes in the Greek novels has elicited a variety of views about the relationship between the novel and religion:¹ 1) the novels are cult texts of mystery religions;² 2) particular cults indirectly influence the novels;³ 3) the novels are religious in a more general sense;⁴ 4) religious themes are a resource for narrative technique with no reference beyond the boundaries of fiction.⁵ Recently, Merkelbach and Bowersock have proposed that religious themes reflect the novel's origin in religious narratives.⁶ Merkelbach concludes that religious themes reflect not only the novel's symbolic meaning but also its origin in pagan aretalogies.⁷ Bowersock suggests that religious themes are inspired by Christian miracle narratives but the novel remains a "secular scripture."⁸ Interestingly, each critic isolates a different type of religious narrative as the source of the novel's origin but admits that other genres are at play. According to Fusillo, multiple hypotheses concerning literary influences may be plausibly advanced, since the novel seems to derive from the disintegration of previous literary forms.⁹ Thus, these conclusions raise a far different issue than they in fact address:

¹ Morgan 1996.

² Kerenyi 1927; Merkelbach 1962.

³ Altheim 1948; Weinreich 1962; Griffiths 1978; Edwards 1985.

⁴ Beck 1996; Reardon 1969; Heiserman 1977; Hägg 1983.

⁵ Winkler 1980; 1982; Morgan 1978; 1996.

⁶ Merkelbach 1994; Bowersock 1994a.

⁷ Symbolic meaning: Merkelbach 1962; Origin in pagan aretalogy: Merkelbach 1994, 290.

⁸ Bowersock 1994a, 143 .

⁹ Fusillo 1988, 17–18.

the variety of voices in the genre and the relationship between the novel and religious narratives. Abandoning questions of origin, I hope to address this issue by looking at key passages discussed by these scholars in the context of religious themes in the early phase of the novel represented by Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus and the later phase represented by Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius.

2. Religious Narratives

Religious narratives which have precise contacts in the novels tend to be miracle stories of one kind or another. Merkelbach refers to aretalogies, both pagan and Christian.¹⁰ Bowersock refers to Christian works, such as the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the novel and hagiography.¹¹ Although it is common to refer to different types of religious narratives using categories such as “epiphany reports,” “aretalogies,” or “miracle narratives,” the ancients seem not to have recognized them as distinct genres.¹² They did distinguish among different kinds of encounters with the gods: an unseen presence; a face to face encounter between god and man; visits of gods in unperceived disguises; the appearances of gods in dreams.¹³ These types of religious experience are well represented in literature and inscriptions. From Homer until the times of the Greek novelists, the details of such encounters follow a fixed pattern and the language used to describe them regularly reflects the language used in the epics.¹⁴ It is reasonable to assume a more complex relationship than direct borrowing, that a thought pattern associated with this type of religious phenomenon became crystallized in literature and inscriptions and that the resulting religious narrative patterns were occasionally enhanced by a return to Homeric language.¹⁵ At the same time, Homer and other writers used these narrative patterns for their own literary effects.¹⁶

¹⁰ Merkelbach 1994, 283–285.

¹¹ Bowersock 1994a, 141.

¹² Smith 1981, 174–99; Winkler 1985, 235–238.

¹³ Lane Fox 1985, 127; Mussies 1980, 1–18.

¹⁴ Lane Fox 1985, 110; I follow the generally accepted dates, e.g., as in Schmeling 1996: Chariton, mid-first century A.D. or earlier; Xenophon, probably second century A.D.; Longus, second to third century A.D.; Achilles Tatius, second half or third quarter of the second century A.D.; Heliodorus, between 350 and 375 A.D.

¹⁵ Lane Fox 1985, 110.

¹⁶ Lane Fox 1985, 107.

Christians recognized that they shared with pagans these types of experience and their rich literary tradition. Thus, the typical thought patterns and their tell-tale narrative patterns may be observed in Christian writing as well.¹⁷

Such narrative patterns occur in the early phase of the novels but become more pronounced in the richer literary elaboration of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus, suggesting that references to religion are part of the novel's literary development.¹⁸ For the purposes of this paper, I shall confine myself to examples of religious narratives commonly referred to as epiphany reports, aretalogies and martyrologies, which have precise contacts with the novels. Allusions to specific narrative patterns are rare. Instead, we find combinations of typical elements. For example, in Chariton and Heliodorus, several passages echo elements of epiphany reports such as the trademarks of specific deities, unusual beauty, luminous clothes and great height.¹⁹ In addition, the endings of the novels, particularly those of Xenophon, Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius, contain aretalogical elements such as the public recitation of miracles, acclamations, the amazement of a crowd of witnesses and confessions.²⁰ Finally, in Heliodorus, a specific narrative pattern from a martyrology is echoed, along with typical elements of martyrology.²¹ These passages will be the point of departure for a discussion of the relationship between religious narratives and religious themes in the novels of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus.

3. The Early Phase of the Novels

To evaluate the role of religious narratives in the more elaborate novels of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus, it is useful to survey the religious themes in the early phase of the novels represented by Chariton and Xenophon. In these authors religious themes cluster around the descriptions of the romantic heroines and the endings.

In Chariton, religious narratives are rewritten to assimilate Callirhoe's appearance to that of a goddess. At the beginning and throughout the novel,

¹⁷ Lane Fox 1985, 109; 375–418; Versnel 1987, 42–55; Merkelbach 1994, 283–285.

¹⁸ On the development from an early phase to a richer literary elaboration, see Kuch 1985, 3–19.

¹⁹ Mussies 1980, 8; Dietrich 1983, 53–79.

²⁰ Kerenyi 1927; Merkelbach 1962; Pervo 1987, 107; Merkelbach 1994.

²¹ Bowersock 1994a, 121–131.

she resembles Aphrodite and those who see her react as if they are experiencing an epiphany.²² On her wedding day, she resembles Artemis, and the crowd is amazed and worships her.²³ On another occasion, Chaereas' sudden collapse upon seeing her image on a temple dedication in Aphrodisias is mistaken for a reaction to one of the many epiphanies of Aphrodite that occur in the area.²⁴ Her resemblance to goddesses and people's reactions recall typical elements of epiphany reports where the appearance of a deity is met with typical reactions such as amazement, *proskunesis*, and collapse.²⁵

In these passages, typical elements of epiphany reports articulate the remarkable beauty of the romantic heroine. At the opening of all the extant novels except Longus, the heroine is compared to a goddess.²⁶ Chariton develops this motif by repeatedly comparing Callirhoe to Aphrodite. The rewriting of the epiphany report also belongs to Chariton's narrative technique. Throughout the novel, he relies on elements from historiography and epic to ennoble his story.²⁷ In these passages, epiphany reports serve the same semantic function. They also contribute to the novel's visual strategy.²⁸ The references to epiphany not only invite the readers to gaze at Callirhoe, but also inform their responses to this gaze. The range of emotions associated with epiphany – amazement, falling on the knees in adoration and fainting – provides readers with an emotional lens through which to view her. So religious narratives are yet another intertext through which Callirhoe's passive eroticism is constructed.

In Xenophon's novel, religious themes are more prominent. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator says that whenever the Ephesians used to see Anthia in the sacred enclosure, they would worship her as Artemis.²⁹ So at her first appearance, the crowd gives an acclamation. Some are amazed and say that she is the goddess in person, others that she was made by the goddess in her own image. All pray and prostrate themselves. At the begin-

²² Chariton 1,1,1; 1,14,1; 2,2; 2,3.

²³ Chariton 1,1,15.

²⁴ Chariton 3,6–8.

²⁵ Amazement: *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 84; 180–195; Worship: *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 292–293; Collapse: *Acts* 25, 12–16.

²⁶ Chariton 1,1; Xenophon *Ephes.* 1,2; Achilles Tatius 1,4.

²⁷ Fusillo 1988; Fusillo 1989.

²⁸ Egger 1994, 37.

²⁹ Xenophon *Ephes.*, 1,2,7.

ning of their travels, Anthia and Habrocomes arrive in Rhodes.³⁰ The Rhodians are amazed at their beauty. Some say it was a visitation of auspicious gods; some worship and adore them. Not only do the lovers seem divine but the crowd's responses to their appearance mirror typical reactions to epiphany such as acclamation, amazement, prayer and worship. As in Chariton, elements of epiphany reports emphasize the beauty of the romantic heroine and inform readers' responses. However, in Xenophon, they are amplified to include Habrocomes and events in the lives of the lovers.

Elements of aretalogy are also used to shape events in the lovers' lives. In Book 4, when Habrocomes is condemned to the pyre, he prays to the god of the Nile that he be spared, and the waters rise and put out the flames. The event amazes those present.³¹ When at last the lovers are reunited at the temple of Isis, the crowd gives an acclamation, hailing Isis as a great goddess.³² Upon their return to Ephesus, the lovers dedicate a picture or inscription (*graphie*) in honor of the goddess, commemorating all their sufferings and adventures.³³ In these passages, elements of aretalogy cast pivotal events in the story as miracles: the rescue of Habrocomes from death and the final reunion of the lovers. Thus, these elements function in the same way as those drawn from epiphany reports: they contribute to Xenophon's narrative strategy by ennobling the story and informing readers' responses. While, in Chariton, Callirhoe says a prayer thanking Aphrodite for her return home and reunion with Chaereas, in Xenophon, the attribution of the lovers' rescue to Artemis and the storage of their adventures in her temple characterize the entire novel as an aretalogy.³⁴ The aretalogical ending, in which the reunion of the lovers is attributed to a god, serves a variety of semantic functions in the genre.³⁵ In Chariton and Xenophon, the closing references to aretalogy serve to unravel the plot and ennoble the ending.

Religious narratives in the early phase of the novel have straightforward semantic functions: they ennoble the story, inform readers' responses and unravel the plot. While Chariton uses interlocking literary codes such as epic, historiography and religious narratives, Xenophon prefers religious

³⁰ Xenophon *Ephes.* 1,12,1–3.

³¹ Xenophon *Ephes.* 4,2.

³² Xenophon *Ephes.* 5,15,3–4.

³³ Xenophon *Ephes.* 5,15.

³⁴ Merkelbach 1994, 285.

³⁵ Chariton 8,8; Xenophon *Ephes.* 5,15; Achilles Tatius 8,9; Longus Prologue; Heliodorus 10,39; See Merkelbach 1962; Pervo 1987, 107.

narratives to other literary codes. A more detailed analysis would show how he consistently uses temple dedications and aretalogical elements to structure his story. This abbreviated analysis of the role of religious narratives in Chariton and Xenophon demonstrates that religious narratives are already important building blocks in the early phase of the genre and that their use depends on the narrative techniques of individual authors.

4. Achilles Tatius

In Achilles Tatius, religious narratives are concentrated at the end of the novel and, as in Xenophon, assimilate the ending to aretalogy: the reunion of the lovers is cast as a miracle. However, Achilles Tatius incorporates aretalogy as part of his ironic play on the rules of the genre.

Near the end of the novel, the lovers are poised for disaster: Clitophon has been condemned to torture and death for Leucippe's murder and Leucippe is being held as Thersander's slave. Just as Clitophon is about to be tortured, the arrival of the Byzantine Embassy to Artemis postpones his punishment and Leucippe's arrival at the temple as a slave seeking asylum proves that he is no murderer. Clinias and Sostratus tell the story to a crowd of witnesses, who bless the name of Artemis.³⁶ The priest brings the lovers to stay with him at the temple and, that evening, Clitophon gives an account of their adventures³⁷

The crowd's acclamation and Clitophon's confession recall typical elements of aretalogy and characterize the lovers' reunion as a miracle of Artemis. At this point, the ending of Achilles Tatius' novel is assimilated to an aretalogy in the same way as Xenophon's novel. However, the novel doesn't end on this note. One of the elements of aretalogy hints that this ending is equivocal: Clitophon's confession is not straightforward, but omits mention of his tryst with Melite to maintain his chastity. By alluding to a crack in the genre's ideal of chastity, this confession becomes part of Achilles Tatius' ironic play on the rules of the genre. Since it is also one of the elements that characterizes the lovers' reunion as a miracle, it prepares readers for a crack in the novel's aretalogical ending.

³⁶ Achilles Tatius 7,14; 7,16.

³⁷ Achilles Tatius 8,5.

This crack widens during the trial scene that follows: each element of aretalogy is undercut in the speeches of Thersander, the priest and Sosthenes. Thersander complains that pimps have desecrated sacred embassies and whores have polluted sacred temples, accuses the priest of usurping Artemis' power by offering asylum to Leucippe and freeing Clitophon from jail, insinuates that the priest did so to sleep with the lovers and complains that the temple of Artemis has become an adulterer's home and a whore's bedchamber.³⁸ The priest responds with a speech emulating the plays of Aristophanes that pokes fun at Thersander's lechery. He questions the legitimacy of Thersander's accusations against Clitophon and Leucippe, announcing that the great goddess Artemis has saved them both.³⁹ Sosthenes reiterates some of Thersander's points.⁴⁰ Each element of the aretalogical ending is called into question. The crowd's praise of Artemis is undermined by an invective against the priest and lovers. Artemis' embassy and asylum, the interventions that saved the lovers, are now considered desecrated and polluted by them. Artemis' saving miracle is recast as the libidinous priest's usurpation of her power. Finally, the priest's pronouncement of the miracle is strangely couched in an obscene comedy and Sosthenes' speech completely contradicts it. Thus, the story of Artemis' miraculous rescue of the lovers is revealed to be the story of their bawdy adventures with Artemis' priest.

Interestingly, these two versions of the ending correspond to the two types of aretalogy that seem to be implied in sources. Although aretalogy was never a genre with fixed rules of style and content, there were persons called *aretalogi*, "interpreters of miraculous events."⁴¹ At the same time, in Suetonius, Augustus entertains his company with musicians, actors, low-brow jugglers from the circus and *aretalogi* and, in Juvenal, Ulysses' role as narrator of his adventures to Alcinoos is compared to the role of a lying *aretalogus*.⁴² In other words, some *aretalogi* were pious private practitioners who produced collections of miracle stories while others were performers who told entertaining stories after dinner and aretalogies were either accounts of a god's deeds or entertaining tales.⁴³ If we may adduce Manetho as

³⁸ Achilles Tatius 8,8.

³⁹ Achilles Tatius 8,9.

⁴⁰ Achilles Tatius 8,10–11.

⁴¹ Reinach 1885, 257ff.; Crusius 1895, cols. 670–672; Aly 1935, cols. 13–15; Smith 1971, 179; Winkler 1985, 235–236.

⁴² Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 73; Juvenal 15,16.

⁴³ Smith 1971, 176; Winkler 1985, 236–238.

further evidence, some *aretalogi* were “tellers of myth and shameful, nonsensical stories, leaders in mockery and scornful laughter, who have in their aretalogies all sorts of (deceitful) yarns.”⁴⁴ It is even possible that some of these stories were parodies of aretalogies, such as are found in Petronius and *Iolaus*.⁴⁵ The scornful humor in the speeches of Thersander, the priest of Artemis and Sosthenes resemble Manetho’s *aretalogi*. Thus, two types of aretalogy are rewritten into Achilles Tatius’ ending: the lovers rescue and reunion through Artemis’ intervention corresponds to the aretalogies written in praise of a deity, while the trial scene corresponds to the mocking aretalogies told for entertainment. By incorporating two types of aretalogy, Achilles Tatius ironically plays on the religious ending of the novel. The rescue and reunion of the lovers, at first ennobled by a serious aretalogy, is now undercut by a humorous aretalogy. This presents an ironical view of the genre’s aretalogical ending: the miracles that rescued the chaste lovers were in fact a cover for their sexcapades with a priest. Strikingly, this dissonance between serious and humorous aretalogy matches the dissonance between Homeric epic and Achilles Tatius’ parody of epic.⁴⁶ Thus, the relationship of Achilles Tatius’ novel to religious narratives is similar to its relationship to Homeric epic: both are rewritten as part of his ironical pastiche of the novel.

5. Heliodorus

In Heliodorus, religious narratives cluster around Charikleia’s portrayal, which is rich in details from religious life because of her transformation from the priestess of Delphic Artemis into the priestess of the Moon in Ethiopia. In particular, passages where she wears the outfit of her priesthood are replete with elements of epiphany reports and aretalogy.

5.1 The Opening Scene

At the opening of the novel, the rewriting of typical elements of epiphany reports assimilates Charikleia’s appearance in the novel to the epiphany of a deity. The narrator describes through the eyes of bandits an as yet unidenti-

⁴⁴ Translation of Manetho *Apotelesmaticorum* 4.445–9 in Smith 1971, 176.

⁴⁵ Merkelbach 1994, 287

⁴⁶ Fusillo 1989, 23–24.

fied Charikleia, a girl of such indescribable beauty that she might be mistaken for a goddess.⁴⁷ Wearing the outfit of her priesthood, she appears like Artemis. Her crown of laurel and her clanging weapons evoke Apollo's descent from Olympus in the *Iliad*.⁴⁸ Leaning over a corpse-like Theagenes, she recalls Isis mourning Osiris.⁴⁹ Her comparison to a possessed priestess or a breathing statue also echoes epiphany reports, since Bacchic frenzy and animated statues were regarded as epiphanies.⁵⁰ Other details in the description, such as her unusual beauty, luminous clothes and great height, are stereotyped elements of epiphany reports.⁵¹

The bandits' reactions mirror typical reactions to epiphany.⁵² Their wonder and terror at her appearance parallel the amazement and fear of mortals familiar from Homer on.⁵³ Their lack of certainty as to whether she is Artemis, Isis, a possessed priestess or a breathing statue reflects the ambiguity of epiphany reports, where mortals are never really sure what they are encountering.⁵⁴ The skepticism of some, who question whether she is a goddess, represents yet another reaction and the narrator echoes this skepticism when he says that the bandits suspect that she is a living statue of a goddess because they are boorish. In many accounts of epiphany, certain types of people were considered more prone to these types of experience and their reports might be met with such skepticism.⁵⁵

In this passage, the repetition of different elements of epiphany emphasizes the beauty of the romantic heroine. The rewriting of the epiphany report is also an integral part of the narrative technique. This opening describes a puzzling scene that must be deciphered according to not only the laws of nature but also the rules of the genre.⁵⁶ The narrator tells readers what the bandits saw, what they inferred, and what left them confused, and leaves it to them to solve the scene.⁵⁷ The bandits' display of incomplete cognition in-

⁴⁷ Heliodorus 1,2.

⁴⁸ Hom., *Iliad*, 1,46–7.

⁴⁹ Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 357d9–11.

⁵⁰ Versnel 1987, 46–50.

⁵¹ Mussies 1980, 8.

⁵² Heliodorus 1,2; 1,7.

⁵³ *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 84; 180–95.

⁵⁴ Versnel 1987, 48.

⁵⁵ Lucian, *Alexander* 12,16; 38,14.

⁵⁶ Winkler 1982, 97–102.

⁵⁷ Winkler 1982, 97–102.

volves readers in the game of reading the romance.⁵⁸ The elements of the epiphany report, which must be read and interpreted and which provoke a variety of responses ranging from awe and terror to skepticism and *aporia*, provide the perfect structure for misleading readers as they come to learn that Charikleia is not a goddess, but a romantic heroine.

5.2 Escape from Bandits

Later in the novel but chronologically before the opening scene, the rewriting of typical elements of epiphany reports assimilates Charikleia's appearance to the contrived epiphany of a deity. Here, we learn why Charikleia was dressed as a priestess at the beginning of the novel.⁵⁹ Kalasiris devised a stratagem to keep Trachinos, a bandit chief, from forcing Charikleia to marry him. He asked Trachinos if Charikleia might use the bandit's ship as a bridal chamber to add greater ceremony to the rite. Then he told Peloros, the bandit second-in-command, that Charikleia was in love with him and that if he saw her in her bridal chamber, he would see Artemis in person. Peloros saw her "with a crown of laurel on her head, refulgent in her gown of golden weave – she had dressed herself in her sacred robe from Delphi, to be either a mantle of victory or else a funeral shroud – everything around her was radiantly beautiful, creating the illusion of a nuptial bedroom."⁶⁰ He was consumed by passion and jealousy and started a fight among the bandits. Charikleia joined in by shooting arrows from the ship. The bandits had no idea what this mischief was and some even supposed that their wounds were divinely inflicted. Eventually all the combatants were killed except for Theagenes and Peloros, who fought one on one. Charikleia helped Theagenes by telling him to take courage and he gained strength from her voice. Finally, he killed Peloros.

This stratagem recalls contrived epiphanies such as that engineered by Pisistratus, who tricked the Athenians. He had a tall, beautiful woman named Phue outfitted in a suit of armor, mounted in a chariot, and driven into Athens.⁶¹ Messengers preceded her and urged the people to welcome Pisistratus back because the goddess Athena herself had shown him extraordinary honor and was bringing him home to her own Acropolis. The people, convinced

⁵⁸ Winkler 1982, 97–102.

⁵⁹ Heliodorus 5,28–33

⁶⁰ Morgan 1989, 469

⁶¹ Herodotus 1,60.

that Phue was indeed the goddess, offered her prayers and received Pisistratus with open arms. Such contrived epiphanies occur elsewhere in historiography, where they are a war trick used to gain an upper hand in battle.⁶² Kalasiris plays a similar trick on the bandits by telling Charikleia to put on her outfit and Pelorus that if he looks at Charikleia, he will see Artemis. Like Phue, Charikleia dresses as a deity. Just as Pisistratus' messengers broadcast the idea that Phue is Athena, so Kalasiris gives Pelorus the idea that Charikleia is Artemis. Like the Athenians, Pelorus is impressed by the "epiphany". Her similarity to Artemis, her shining cloths and her aura recall stereotypical details of epiphany reports.⁶³ Her appearance in battle, shooting arrows at the bandits and still wearing the outfit of her priesthood recalls Apollo's epiphany in Book One of the *Iliad* evoked earlier in the novel.⁶⁴ The bandits' reactions recall the confusion of Homeric heroes who experience the intervention of a deity in battle but remain ignorant of the particular god.⁶⁵ Her subsequent appearance beside Theagenes urging him on recalls Homeric epiphanies where deities instill confidence in their favourites.⁶⁶

As in previous episodes, elements of epiphany are here used to draw attention to the beauty of the romantic heroine. However, the rewriting of the contrived epiphany of historiography adds a new twist: it is used to structure an exciting escape from bandits. Thus, the epiphany report contributes to yet another one of Heliodorus' characteristic narrative strategies, namely his use of historiographic elements.⁶⁷ Contrived epiphany is transposed into the world of romance to lend plausibility to the lovers' battle escape from bandits.

5.3 The Miraculous Ending

At the end of the novel, which Merkelbach has described as a long, elaborate aretology about the miraculous workings of the sun god, the rewriting of religious narratives has a variety of semantic functions.⁶⁸

⁶² Pritchett 1975.

⁶³ Mussies 1980, 8.

⁶⁴ Hom., *Iliad* 1,2,5.

⁶⁵ Dietrich 1983, 54.

⁶⁶ Dietrich 1983, 59.

⁶⁷ Morgan 1982.

⁶⁸ Merkelbach 1994, 290.

Charikleia and Theagenes are about to be sacrificed and, since only virgins are acceptable victims, they must first undergo a chastity test by walking across a glowing hot grate. Only men and women who have never had a sexual experience can withstand the grate's heat. When Theagenes steps on the grate and remains unharmed, everyone is astounded that so handsome a man has never experienced the gifts of Aphrodite.⁶⁹ Before Charikleia steps on the grate, she puts on her Delphic robe.⁷⁰ Her beauty also impresses the crowd: "A thrill of wonder ran through the crowd, who in unison made the heavens resound with their cry, wordless and unmeaning, but expressive of their astonishment."⁷¹

In this passage, many of the same elements of epiphany as were used in Book 1 and 5 are again used to emphasize Charikleia's beauty. Other details are drawn from aretalogy: the amazement and acclamation that are the typical responses of the crowd of witnesses. These details underline the chastity of the lovers, a paradigm that informs the corpus of the novels, and to characterize it as a miracle. Aretalogical elements are also an integral part of the narrative technique. The episode describes a common occurrence in the novel where the romantic heroine faces execution at the hands of bandits or, as in this case, at the hands of barbarians. In such scenes, religion is brought into play to reinforce the horror and melodrama.⁷² Since the lovers' miraculous chastity approves them as sacrificial victims, the aretalogical elements reinforce the horror and melodrama of the scene. The hopelessness of the lovers' predicament is further emphasized by the fact that the crowd's only hope for their rescue is another miracle.

Other miracles follow as, throughout the ending of the novel, aretalogical elements are multiplied. Charikleia jumps down from the grate and says that it is not lawful for her to be sacrificed because she is Ethiopian, not a foreigner. Hydaspes is amazed and does not believe her.⁷³ She explains that he is her father, they resort to legal proceedings and she produces her recognition tokens. Persinna recognizes her in astonishment.⁷⁴ Everyone present applauds and shouts; everyone is surprised, and even Hydaspes is convinced

⁶⁹ Heliodorus 10,9,1.

⁷⁰ Heliodorus 10,11,1 ff.

⁷¹ Morgan 1989, 564.

⁷² Winkler 1980, 174.

⁷³ Heliodorus 10,12,1.

⁷⁴ Heliodorus 10,13,1.

and seized with amazement.⁷⁵ The people raise a shout that reaches heaven.⁷⁶ Hydaspes says that the gods, through their miraculous workings, have brought about the marvelous recognition of his daughter.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, because she has been consecrated as a victim for Helios, he must sacrifice her anyway. The crowd of Ethiopians cries “Save the girl.”⁷⁸ A series of acclamations follows.⁷⁹ Hydaspes acknowledges the acclamations and does not sacrifice Charikleia. Next, about to be sacrificed, Theagenes leaves the altar to capture an escaped sacrificial bull.⁸⁰ The narrator questions whether he does this out of courage or divine inspiration and Charikleia is bewildered. The crowd, however, responds with amazement and acclamation and demands that Theagenes wrestle with a huge Ethiopian athlete.⁸¹ When Theagenes is victorious, the crowd again responds with amazement and acclamation.⁸² At this juncture, it is not clear whether he will be exempted from sacrifice or not. Finally, Charikleia withdraws into a tent with her mother who wants to hear the story of her fate. Charikleia confesses that Theagenes is her spouse but that the two have remained chaste.⁸³ Charikles appears and accuses Theagenes of abducting Charikleia and Theagenes confesses.⁸⁴ Those in the crowd who understand him are astounded by what they see.⁸⁵ Charikleia rushes from the tent and a happy ending follows. The people utter words of good omen and dance.⁸⁶ Sisimithres demands that they recognize the miraculous workings of the gods and that they not only spare Theagenes, but also abolish human sacrifice.⁸⁷ Hydaspes agrees and betroths the lovers. The people respond with shouts and applause.⁸⁸

Throughout the ending, elements of aretalogy are repeated to raise and lower our expectations of the lovers’ rescue and reunion. During Charik-

⁷⁵ Heliodorus 10,15,1.

⁷⁶ Heliodorus 10,16,3.

⁷⁷ Heliodorus 10,16,6.

⁷⁸ Heliodorus 10,17,1.

⁷⁹ Heliodorus 10,17,1–2.

⁸⁰ Heliodorus 10,30,5.

⁸¹ Heliodorus 10,30,5.

⁸² Heliodorus 10,32,5.

⁸³ Heliodorus 10,18,3; 10,29,4; 10,33,4; 10,38,4.

⁸⁴ Heliodorus 10,36,1; 10,37,1.

⁸⁵ Heliodorus 10,35,2.

⁸⁶ Heliodorus 10,38,3.

⁸⁷ Heliodorus 10,39,3.

⁸⁸ Heliodorus 10,41,3.

leia's trial, these elements, previously used to heighten the inexorability of her plight as a sacrificial victim, are now rewritten to characterize her homecoming and rescue from being sacrificed as miracles. During Theagenes' acts, they are also rewritten to emphasize the hopelessness of his situation by characterizing his feats as open to competing interpretations. While each of these acts is greeted with the crowd's amazement and acclamation, it is not clear how to read them as signs. Although the crowd's responses characterize them as miracles and we know that only a miracle can save Theagenes, the responses of the narrator and Charikleia leave us wondering: are they miracles or mere acts of courage? It is only when Charikleia confesses that it becomes clear that Theagenes will be saved. This confession adds another aretalogical element to the ending. Aretalogies couched in the form of confessions were customarily recited by candidates of mystery cults before they began their new lives as initiates.⁸⁹ Charikleia's confession, Hydaspes' recitation of the miracle and the crowd's responses of amazement and acclamation now unequivocally characterize Theagenes' feats as miracles. They also assimilate the wedding to an initiation into a cult. This comparison is pressed further when the narrator says that the couple was escorted into the city to perform the more mystic parts of the ceremony.⁹⁰ Thus, while aretalogical elements at first elaborate on different narrative segments whose relationships aren't quite clear, by the end, the two stories of Theagenes and Charikleia are interwoven into one extended aretalogy about their progression towards marriage.

Heliiodorus's references to religious narratives provides yet another variation of the aretalogical ending of the genre. By weaving together multiple elements of aretalogy into an extended pattern, Heliiodorus assimilates his novel to an aretalogy and raises and lowers readers' expectations for reunion. Finally, at the end of the novel, the function of aretalogy becomes clear: the narrative of the god's saving miracle is the best structure to use to formalize the ending of an edifying love story.

⁸⁹ Merkelbach 1994, 286.

⁹⁰ Heliiodorus 10,41.

5.4 Escape from the Pyre

It is in the context of these passages that rewrite religious narratives for different semantic functions that we can best understand Heliodorus' rewriting of an episode from a Christian miracle narrative.⁹¹ In this passage, Charikleia is condemned to burn at the stake.⁹² First, she says a prayer, declaring her innocence and begging to die. "Then, she climbed onto the pyre and positioned herself at the very heart of the fire. There she stood for some time without taking any hurt. The flames flowed around her rather than licking against her; they caused her no harm but drew back wherever she moved toward them, serving merely to encircle her in splendor and present a vision of her standing in radiant beauty in a frame of light, like a bride in a chamber of flame."⁹³ The city is in an uproar, her deliverance seems to show the hand of god. When she leaps down from the pyre, the city exclaims in joyful awe and invokes the god's majesty.

This passage recalls a scene from the account of Polycarp's martyrdom (c. 150 AD) where he is condemned to be burned at the pyre. Instead of immediately doing him in, the flames form into a vault-like shape and surround him like a wall so that he is unharmed.⁹⁴ While there are no direct verbal echoes, the flames' behavior, which is taken as a divine intervention, is close enough to suggest that Heliodorus was familiar with this story. Other details such as Charikleia's willingness to die and eagerness to mount the pyre more generally recall accounts of martyrs such as Agathonike, who throws herself willingly on the pyre.⁹⁵ The crowd's amazement and acclamation echo typical elements of martyrologies, which shared these characteristics with aretalogy.⁹⁶

Strikingly, this narrative pattern functions in the same way as the elements of epiphany reports in the episode where Charikleia's beauty is assimilated to that of a bride in her wedding chamber and her resemblance to Artemis is exploited to engineer an escape from bandits. Here, the narrative pattern from martyrology is rewritten to assimilate her beauty to that of a bride in a wedding chamber and structure her escape from barbarians. It is

⁹¹ Bowersock 1994a, 141.

⁹² Heliodorus 8,9.

⁹³ Morgan 1989, 526.

⁹⁴ Bowersock 1994a.

⁹⁵ Bowersock 1994b.

⁹⁶ Merkelbach 1994, 283–285.

also part of Heliodorus' complex narrative strategy. While Polycarp is done in, Charikleia survives. The use of the narrative pattern from martyrology is therefore similar to the use of the aretalogical pattern: it lowers and raises readers' expectations that Charikleia will be saved. Thus, Heliodorus uses religious narratives for the same semantic functions, regardless of their original religious context.

5.5 Religious Narratives in Heliodorus

Heliodorus uses religious narratives more extensively than previous novelists. When rewriting epiphany reports or aretalogies, he piles detail upon detail as part of his distinctive narrative strategy. Religious narratives are used not only to ennoble and structure his story, but also to involve readers in the game of reading a romance. These narratives, both pagan and Christian, are linked through their theme of miracles and usefulness in particular narrative situations. This interchangeability suggests that their choice depends on their narrative situations rather than their original religious context. Nevertheless, writing at a time when Christian forms of literature were proliferating, Heliodorus prefers pagan religious narratives to Christian, betraying nostalgia for polytheistic forms of religious expression. While these narratives are transposed into a world of everyday romance and love, there is no dissonance between their tone and Heliodorus' novel: the relationship of his novel to religious narratives is similar to its relationship to epic: both are rewritten as part of his reinterpretation of the edifying love story.⁹⁷

6. Conclusion

These findings demonstrate an overall similarity in the novelists' use of religious narratives. References to religion reflect the kaleidoscope historical context of the novel somewhat randomly: they are rewritten for different narrative ends and are therefore used in connection with their treatment of the erotic plot rather than out of any close engagement with the religious trends of their times. The theme of miracles common to these narratives is useful for ennobling and structuring the endings of the novels. Heliodorus' and Achilles Tatius' use of religious narratives mirror their use of other gen-

⁹⁷ Fusillo 1988, 23.

res.⁹⁸ Heliodorus transposes literary borrowings into a world dominated by domestic and erotic experience. Achilles Tatius transposes them into a world dominated by irony. Both Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius treat religious themes in distinctive manners: Heliodorus offers a nostalgic and idealistic vision of religion, connected with his edifying reinterpretation of the love story and Achilles Tatius offers an ironical view of religion connected with his “pastiche” of the love story.

Neither are these narratives dominant voices in the earlier phase of the novels nor are they in the final phase, when their prominence is due to greater literary elaboration. That we cannot privilege these narratives over each other or any other genre indicates that questions about the origin of the novel must remain open. Therefore, it is unlikely that either aretalogy or Christian miracle narrative played a significant role in the development of the genre. On the other hand, the variety of voices explains why references to religious phenomena are inconsistent: different religious narratives are selected not out of any theological interest *per se* but as resources for the narrative techniques of individual authors. Thus, these references are not so coherent or pervasive as to support the contention that the novels are cult texts, are indirectly influenced by particular cults or are “religious” in a more general sense. At the same time, these findings reveal interesting interconnections among the different religious narratives favored by the novelists. Their interchangeability as building blocks suggests that the novelists did not discriminate between pagan and Christian forms. Nevertheless, the frequent and elaborate references to aretalogy and epiphany indicate that the impact of pagan narrative forms on the imaginations of the novelists was far greater than the impact of Christian literature. It is tempting to speculate that these religious themes in the novel have a reference beyond the boundaries of fiction. Perhaps this contrast between the attitudes of the novelists and Christian writers qualifies Bowersock’s conclusion that fiction expressed the nexus between polytheism and Christianity. While Christian writers were indebted to the rich narrative tradition of the Greek novel, Greek novelists self-consciously limited their references to Christian literary forms just as they avoided explicit reference to the Roman Empire. Thus, this increasingly nostalgic fiction was one way of guarding and preserving pagan religious traditions.

⁹⁸ Fusillo 1988; 1989.

More specifically, religious themes in Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus provide us with a window on two moments in the history of mentalité. Although we have little information that is certain or undisputed about Achilles Tatius, the *Suda* article maintains that that he became a bishop and a Christian.⁹⁹ His ironic play on the aretalogical ending betrays an ironic view of pagan cult that would be particularly appealing to Christian readers prepared to claim him as their own and even make a bishop of him. We are fortunate to have slightly more information about Heliodorus, if we are to accept Socrates Scholastikos' statement that Heliodorus wrote the *Aithiopika* in his youth and later became the bishop of Tricca in Thessaly who enforced celibacy in his clergy.¹⁰⁰ How are we to reconcile this biographical tradition with Heliodorus' dense references to pagan religious narratives? Perhaps an important historical moment has been captured in fiction: the imagination of a pagan on the cusp of conversion to Christianity. Writing at a time when his hometown was rapidly becoming a center of Christianity, Heliodorus had a special interest in incorporating pagan religious themes into a genre that seemed to celebrate pagan religious beliefs and practices.¹⁰¹ At the same time, he was becoming familiar with Christian works such as Philo's *Life of Moses* and the martyrologies and did not resist the impulse to use them when they suited his narrative purposes.¹⁰² Finally, after writing the *Aithiopika* in reaction to the Christian works that were rapidly proliferating, Heliodorus became Christian, just as the Greek novel was claimed by the Christians as their own.¹⁰³

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⁹⁹ Plepelits 1996, 387.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan 1996, 420.

¹⁰¹ On Emesa as a center of Christianity in Heliodorus' times, see Morgan 1978.

¹⁰² On Heliodorus' familiarity with Philo's *Life of Moses*, see Morgan 1978.

¹⁰³ Bowersock 1994a, 142.

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