

The Cinematic Nature of the Opening Scene of Heliodoros' *Aithiopika*

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I. Heliodoros' Opening and Cinematic Technique

The *Aithiopika* of the Greek novelist Heliodoros of Emesa, written around 360 A.D., is the last in a series of surviving ancient Greek novels combining romance, adventure, and mystery. Heliodoros' *Ethiopian Story* excels over all its predecessors with an extremely clever plot of almost fiendish complexity. Heliodoros puts his readers *in medias res*, then returns to his opening scene exactly halfway through the text; he also provides two first-person narratives embedded in an otherwise authorially told story. Given such a narrative structure, it is not surprising that Heliodoros should present us with a prime example of mystery fiction. He is the first author in the Western tradition to employ a wily and not always trustworthy detective, Kalasiris, who gives us a detailed account of his search for a missing person.¹

This missing person is the Ethiopian princess Charikleia, who had been exposed at birth by her mother, the queen. When she grew up, Charikleia became the priestess of Apollo at Delphi. One year, at the Pythian Games, a young man called Theagenes falls in love with her, as she does with him. They elope together with Kalasiris, who had found Charikleia, and eventually, after a number of adventures both preceding and following Kalasiris' death, they reach Ethiopia, where Charikleia is recognized and acknowledged as the daughter of the king and queen, marries Theagenes, and lives with him happily ever after.

¹ On him see J. J. Winkler 1982. On Heliodoros' novel as a mystery cf. Morgan 1994. Cf. further Haight 1950. The *locus classicus* on ancient mystery fiction is the 1935 lecture "Aristotle on Detective Fiction" by Dorothy Sayers, in Sayers 1947, 222–236.

But none of this is my subject. Instead I will concentrate on the novel's most famous scene, its opening. Heliodoros begins his story at daybreak near the mouth of the Nile. A gang of bandits are coming over the top of a hill and stumble upon a strange scene. They discover a ship at anchor, loaded with cargo and without a soul on board—an ancient *Marie Celeste*, as it were. On the beach they see the aftermath of a feast which has turned into a massacre, with corpses and half-dead people lying along the beach. When they come closer, the bandits notice among the carnage a beautiful maiden, at her feet a handsome young man so seriously wounded as to be near death. These, of course, will soon turn out to be Charikleia and Theagenes, the lovers and our heroes.

This opening is designed in such a way as to arouse our curiosity by showing us a fascinating mystery. But what twentieth-century readers who come to Heliodoros for the first time may not have expected is that the opening of this ancient text appears almost exactly like the transcript—the 'novelization,' as it is often called today—of a scene in a mystery film or thriller. I will address the cinematic quality of Heliodoros' opening scene by adapting it into a film script and then compare Heliodoros' highly visual opening with the opening shots of two famous cinematic mysteries, both created by master directors in complete command of their medium. Their narrative purpose is the same as Heliodoros': to draw the audience irresistibly into the story. But unlike Heliodoros' romantic adventure story, these films are nightmarish thrillers which suck their unsuspecting and helpless viewers into a dark world of crime, corruption, and abnormal psychology. Both, appropriately, are milestones of *film noir*: Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Finally, to round off my discussion of Heliodoros and cinema, I will examine the novel's midway return to its opening as an analogy to a flashback in film.

In doing so I do not, of course, claim any conscious influence of Heliodoros on the filmmakers or any imitation of his text in their films; in fact, their writers and directors are unlikely ever to have heard of this Greek author. Rather, I intend the similarities in the ancient literary and modern visual modes of storytelling to illustrate that certain key strategies to unfold a mystery or adventure plot were and are fundamental to the genre then and now.²

My claim that Heliodoros' opening is inherently cinematic may be substantiated by a long tradition of visual storytelling in literature. Looking back

² In general see on this Cawelti 1976.

on literary history from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, we can easily see that literature has always used techniques comparable to those employed in the cinema. A case in point is the 1944 essay in which Sergei Eisenstein, one of the pioneers of film in both practice and theory, has conclusively demonstrated the affinity of the nineteenth-century novel to early film.³ Moreover, the perspective on cinematic style on the part of two of the greatest mystery and adventure storytellers in the history of film is directly applicable to Heliodoros' literary mode of presentation. As early as 1936 Alfred Hitchcock described his approach to cinema as follows:

I played about with 'technique' in those early days [the 1920s and early 1930s]....I have stopped all that today....Nowadays I want the cutting and continuity to be as inconspicuous as possible, and all I am concerned with is to get the characters developed and the story clearly told without any directorial idiosyncrasies.⁴

Parallel to his words are the following observations by Howard Hawks, made in 1962:

I don't like tricks....most of the time my camera stays on eye level now. Once in a while, I'll move the camera as if a man were walking and seeing something. And it pulls back or it moves in for emphasis when you don't want to make a cut. But, outside of that, I just use the simplest camera in the world.⁵

Action director John Sturges concurs:

The perfect camera technique is one the audience doesn't even know is existing. The whole idea is, they become so engrossed in what's going on, they don't even know they're looking at a movie. It's *happening*. That on most films you try to do....you do things that by themselves have

³ Eisenstein 1949; cf. further Eisenstein 1942. In general see Fell 1986, 1–86, with additional references. For an application of Eisenstein's principles to classical literature see Mench 2001 and Newman 2001.

⁴ Hitchcock 1936, quoted from Gottlieb 1995, 247.

⁵ Quoted from Bogdanovich 1998, 262.

visual interest, but mostly you try to do it in a way that's so called for that you're not even aware of it [as a member of the audience].⁶

II. Heliodoros' Opening: The Screenplay

I now turn to demonstrating in detail the visual quality of Heliodoros' opening scene, as if for a film whose credits might read: 'Written for the Screen and Directed by Heliodoros.'⁷ In my translation of the individual details which he reveals to us one after the other into a film's continuity script, I juxtapose to the text directions for filming and editing. I use the most recent English translation of the *Aithiopika*, giving page and line references for all quotations.⁸ For reasons of economy I do not include detailed descriptions of static moments or of costumes (cf. on these my comments in Section III), nor do I include any of the sparse dialogue which Heliodoros gives his heroes. I present my adaptation of the opening scene with as little technical detail as possible. Individual shots, numbered 1–8, are indicated in boldface. Shots 1 and 4 are further subdivided into segments. Such segmentation occurs here only to make a shot of some duration clearer to a reader; the shots themselves are continuous and involve no editing. All editing—i.e. cutting from shot to shot—is specifically identified, also in boldface. Camera movements are either lateral ('pans') or vertical ('tilts'). The following abbreviations will serve as cinematic shorthand:

ELS = extreme long shot

LS = long shot

⁶ Quoted from the director's audio commentary on the Criterion Collection laserdisc edition of his 1954 film *Bad Day at Black Rock* (Santa Monica: Voyager, 1991). Cf. Stephenson and Phelps 1989, 28: 'Not only are many technical effects in a film extremely subtle, despite their contribution to the total impact, but part of a director's job is to ensure that they do not beg for attention, but affect the spectator even though he remains unconscious of their presence. In most cases technique is, and should be, invisible.'

⁷ The first to observe the cinematic nature of the opening scene was Otto Weinreich in his 1950 'Nachwort' to a German translation of the novel; he expanded this afterword in Weinreich 1962, reprinted in part in Gärtner 1984, 408–431. Weinreich was followed by Hägg 1983, 55, among others. Bühler 1976 provides a more detailed but still rudimentary cinematic appreciation of Heliodoros' opening.

⁸ Morgan 1989. In the text below, the numbers in square brackets refer to page 353, line 1 through page 354, line 39 (= *Aith.* 1,1–2a). Morgan 1996 gives a detailed introduction to the novel.

MLS = medium long shot
 MS = medium shot
 MCU = medium close-up
 CU = close-up
 POV = point of view
 REV = reverse-angle shot

A close-up is a shot of an actor whose head or head and shoulders fill the screen, or it shows us a close view of an object. A medium shot reveals an actor's whole body, e.g. standing up. Long shots display actors or scenes from a distance. All of these are flexible and admit numerous variations and intermediate camera positions, such as ELS, MLS, or MCU.

AETH. 1,1–2a as a continuity script

1.

TEXT: 'The smile of daybreak was just beginning to brighten the sky, the sunlight to catch the hilltops, when a group of men in brigand gear peered over the mountain that overlooks the place where the Nile flows into the sea....They stood there for a moment...' [353.1–5]

1.1. EXTERIOR, DAY. Dawn. Nile landscape near the sea coast.

ELS or LS (depending on specific location), eye-level or slightly higher: Group of brigands approaches and walks past camera (LS to MS); camera PANS to keep them in view and then (LS) FOLLOWS behind them as they ascend a hill where they stop.

TEXT: '...scanning the expanse of sea beneath them: first they gazed out over the ocean, but as there was nothing sailing there that held out hope of spoil and plunder, their eyes were drawn to the beach nearby.' [353.5–7]

1.2. Camera (LS) RISES above bandits' heads or shoulders (medium high-angle shot) and reveals (bandits' POV in ELS) the sea and the mouth of the Nile; camera PANS over horizon and empty sea (ELS), then TILTS down closer to shore (LS).

TEXT: 'This is what they saw: a merchant ship was riding there, moored by her stern, empty of crew but laden with freight. This much could be surmised even from a distance, for the weight of her cargo forced the water up to the third line of boards on the ship's side.' [353.8–11]

1.3. LS from bandits' POV, ctd.: camera reveals merchant ship at anchor, loaded but without crew; camera MOVES in for a closer look at the ship (ZOOM into MLS).

TEXT: 'But the beach!—' [353.11]

1.4. MLS from bandits' POV, ctd.: camera TILTS further down and momentarily STOPS to reveal the scene on the beach: aftermath of a massacre.

TEXT: 'a mass of newly slain bodies...' [353.11–12]

1.5. Camera MOVES closer (MLS to MS).

TEXT: '...some of them quite dead, others half-alive and still twitching, testimony that the fighting had only just ended....Amongst the carnage were the miserable remains of festivities....In that small space the deity had contrived an infinitely varied spectacle, defiling wine with blood and unleashing war at the party, combining wining and dying, pouring of drink and spilling of blood, and staging this tragic show for the Egyptian bandits.' [353.12–13 and 353.23–354.5]

1.6. Camera PANS along the massacre scene, showing details in CU: people lying about dead or dying (twitching); they have obviously been attacked during a banquet, as tables with food, tables overturned or held as weapons by some of the corpses indicate [this information at 353.13–23].

CUT TO

2.

TEXT: ‘They stood on the mountainside like the audience in a theater, unable to comprehend the scene...’ [354.6–12]

REV (MCU): Reaction of bandits staring at the aftermath.

CUT TO**3.**

TEXT: ‘So they cast themselves in the role of victors and set off down the hillside. They had reached a point a short distance from the ship and the bodies when they found themselves confronted by a sight even more inexplicable than what they had seen before.’ [354.12–16]

REV (from the beach uphill): MCU of bandits rejoicing [laughter and brief exclamations to indicate their anticipation of booty]: they begin to walk (camera now MOVING back into MLS), then run downhill toward camera, which MOVES out of their way and PANS 180 degrees (still MLS) to follow them as they approach the beach where they all suddenly come to a halt; camera pan STOPS.

CUT TO**4.**

TEXT: ‘On a rock sat a girl, a creature of such indescribable beauty that one might have taken her for a goddess. Despite her great distress at her plight, she had an air of courage and nobility.’ [354.16–19]

4.1. MLS, bandits’ POV: young woman, armed [this information from 4.2, below], sitting on rock among the dead and dying, with young man, severely wounded, lying at her feet on the ground [this information from 4.3, below].

TEXT [key words indicating the direction of the observers’ gaze in italics]: ‘On her *head* she wore a crown of laurel; from her *shoulders* hung a quiver; her *left arm* leant on her bow, the *hand* hanging relaxed at the wrist. She

rested the *elbow of her other arm* on her *right thigh*, cradling *her cheek in her fingers*. Her *head* was bowed...’ [354.19–22]

4.2. Camera (still bandits’ POV) MOVES into ECU of young woman’s bowed head, then (all in ECU) TILTS down from her head along left side of her body, across and up the other side back to her head. Camera now MOVES around her into MCU to follow her gaze and reveal what she sees.

TEXT: ‘...and she gazed steadily at a young man lying at her feet...’ [354.22–29; description of Theagenes omitted here, since on film it is only a briefly held static shot.]

4.3. MCU of young man, wounded, lying at her feet. He, in turn, is looking up into her eyes [this information from 354.27–29].

CUT.

5.–6.

TEXT: Dialogue between Theagenes [354.30–33] and Charikleia [354.34–36], here omitted.

5. MCU of man’s face. He is speaking.

6. REV (MCU) of woman’s face. She is speaking.

CUT TO

7.

TEXT: ‘As she spoke, she leapt up from the rock.’ [354.37]

MLS: Woman leaping up suddenly.

CUT.

8.

TEXT: ‘Thunderstruck with wonder and terror at the sight, the bandits on the hillside scattered and dived for cover in the undergrowth.’ [354.37–39]

REV (MCU to MLS from woman's POV) of bandits' reaction: scared by her sudden movement, they run off and hide.

III. Comments on the Screenplay

Now for some comments on the preceding. Heliodoros' opening, a panoramic view from a raised vantage point, finds numerous parallels in the history of Western literature. Two examples from the nineteenth-century British novel, whose cinematic quality scholars have noted, appear in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (both 1886).⁹ A comparison of the passages, considerably briefer than Heliodoros', will throw the ancient author's artistry in greater relief. To indicate the cinematic nature of the two modern passages I have italicized their key words or phrases, including those indicating the transitions from panoramic overview (extreme LS, LS) to detailed view (MCU, CU) and, in the case of Hardy's text, back out to LS. First Stevenson, the opening of Chapter 2:

On the afternoon of the second day, coming to the top of a hill, *I saw all the country* fall away before me down to the sea; and *in the midst* of this descent, on a long ridge, *the city of Edinburgh* smoking like a kiln. *There was a flag upon the castle, and ships moving or lying anchored in the firth*; both of which for as far away as they were, I could distinguish clearly.

The viewer's eye zooms in to the very center of the picture, the castle flag, then moves further on to the harbor in the distance beyond. Vivid as it is in its brevity, the passage is outdone by the moment in Chapter 4 of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, in which Hardy describes Susan Henchard's and her daughter Elizabeth-Jane's view of the town:

⁹ Cf. Fell 1986, 61 (on Stevenson) and 65–66 (on Hardy); he comments on Hardy's rationalizing the long shot of Casterbridge in the mention of the soaring birds especially well. On Hardy's text as cinema cf. O'Connor 1956, 245–246, quoted by Fell, *ibid.* Readers will notice the hint at painting ('rectangular frame') and the extraordinary vividness of the colors in Hardy's description, which reinforce the shot's cinematic beauty. John Schlesinger's 1967 film version of *Far From the Madding Crowd* does full justice to the latter aspect of Hardy's art. His phrase 'the level eye of humanity' relates Hardy to Howard Hawks; cf. the quotation from Hawks given above.

It was on a Friday evening, near the middle of September, and just before dusk, that they reached the summit of a hill within a mile of the place they sought....The spot commanded a *full view* of the town and its environs....

To birds of a more *soaring* kind Casterbridge must have appeared on this fine evening as a mosaic-work of subdued reds, browns, greys, and crystals, held together by a rectangular frame of deep green. To *the level eye* of humanity it stood as *an indistinct mass* behind a dense stockade of limes and chestnuts, *set in the midst of miles* of rotund down and concave field. *The mass became gradually dissected by the vision* into towers, gables, chimneys, and casements, the *highest glazings shining* bleared and bloodshot with the coppery fire they caught from the belt of sunlit cloud in the west.

From the centre of each side of this tree-bound square ran avenues east, west, and south into the wide expanse of corn-land and coomb *to the distance* of a mile or so.

Even closer to Heliodoros than this scene is one in Hardy's earlier novel *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), whose setting and wording parallel, at least to a certain degree, Heliodoros' opening. In Chapter 47, entitled 'Adventures by the Shore,' Sergeant Troy ascends a hill and overlooks the sea; his gaze proceeds along virtually identical lines of vision as did the Egyptian bandits':

Troy toiled up the road....At last he reached the summit, and a wide and novel prospect burst upon him with an effect almost like that of the Pacific upon Balboa's gaze. The broad steely sea...stretched the whole width of his front and round to the right, where...the sun bristled down on it....Nothing moved in sky, land, or sea, except a frill of milkwhite foam along the nearer angles of the shores, shreds of which licked the contiguous stones like tongues.

He descended....

Over 1500 years before Stevenson and Hardy, Heliodoros had created and sustained a comparable scene, but at far greater length. More importantly, it is fully integrated into the plot and is not simply an instance of virtuoso pictorialism. Readers know that Heliodoros was aware of the visual nature of

his scene because at the very outset he directs their attention to it, employing words and phrases such as ‘spectacle’ and ‘staging this tragic show’ and comparing the bandits to an ‘audience in a theater’ (all quoted above).¹⁰ The words underlined in the text for Shot 4.2 clearly show us both the direction of the brigands’ gaze when their eyes glide over Charikleia and their undivided attention; this is the literary equivalent for a combination of a film director tilting and panning his camera in close-up. This moment is as implicitly cinematic as anything in literature could be. Moreover, the detailed description of what the aftermath of the banquet on the beach looks like—this is the text for Shot 1.6, quoted in excerpts—provides such precise information that it could serve as the basis for a blueprint or sketch according to which a film’s set decorator and his crew could build and dress the entire set and costume the extras. We can compare this to the practice of storyboarding which many directors employ, most famously Alfred Hitchcock, whose general practice since the 1950s was to have completed all his creative work before beginning the actual filming. Even the dialogue between Charikleia and Theagenes, uncomplicated as it is, could be kept virtually unchanged.

More specifically, however, Heliodoros’ opening is the literary equivalent of a kind of sequence which appears regularly in mystery films when someone comes upon the scene of a crime. Corpses and clues are scattered about, and neither the observer on screen nor the viewer in the theater can understand anything yet. In cinematic mysteries such an observer is usually a policeman or the detective rather than, as in our case, a gang of outlaws. When the Egyptian bandits piece some of the evidence together for a partial explanation, as Heliodoros describes them as doing (cf. text for Shot 1.3), they resemble fictional detectives. Even more importantly, they resemble film audiences shown a similar setting and carrying out the same mental exercise—after all, such scenes are staged primarily for the viewers’ benefit to increase their sense of mystery and suspense. Only much later, usually at the end of the narrative, can all the loose threads be pulled together and explained. But initially the clues must not present a coherent picture; the scene has to remain mysterious to all observers both inside and outside the narrative. Nevertheless, viewers and readers ought to be well-informed about the scene both as a whole and in its details; otherwise they would feel cheated

¹⁰ On this aspect see, among others, Walden 1894; Paulsen 1992, 21–41; Morgan 1996, 437.

later because vital information has been withheld. (Short or incompetently presented mysteries, such as installments of television crime series, often work according to this principle, and the solution is likely to induce groans in viewers.) Competent mystery authors take pains to familiarize their audiences with key locations for the solution of a mystery, often including even charts or diagrams in their texts—a regular feature of the golden age of the detective story in the 1920s and 1930s. Careful film directors, too, who want to create suspense built on characters and their environment rather than merely aiming for sudden shocks, e.g. with explosions or special effects, show us the exact surroundings of mystery scenes or of action sequences in great detail. Recent examples are the pool hall in Brian de Palma's *Carlito's Way* (1993) and the diner in Curtis Hanson's *L.A. Confidential* (1997). A major example in a film set in Greco-Roman antiquity, although not a mystery, occurs with the detailed overview of the racetrack in William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (1959). Wyler intentionally added the charioteers' parade before the race because he wanted to ensure his audience's close familiarity with the set not only to enhance their anticipation but also to increase their suspense during the large-scale and spectacular action sequence which followed.¹¹

Now on to Welles's and Hitchcock's films.

IV. *Touch of Evil* and *Psycho*

Touch of Evil is rightly famous for the intricate crane shot which opens the film and lasts for three minutes and twenty seconds without a single cut or dissolve.¹² Except for the absence of editing, the film's opening is analogous to what Heliodoros' opening would have been in a film, as my adaptation, with only little editing and fluid camera movement, has shown. In fact, a

¹¹ On this cf. Herman 1995, 402.

¹² A description of the scene as part of the film's continuity script appears in Comito 1995, 49–52; see *ibid.* 8–10 and 260–262 (critical descriptions) and 10 and 263 (diagrams) by the editor and by film scholar Stephen Heath. The filming is described in an interview with actor Charlton Heston (*ibid.*, 216–217).—*Touch of Evil* was taken away from Welles by the studio and released with cuts, changes, and additional scenes added against Welles's intention. (Cf. below.) Welles's version was restored in 1998 according to a detailed memorandum he had written in 1957. For excerpts see Welles and Bogdanovich 1998, 491–504; its full text is on the digital video disc of the restored film, released by Universal Studios in 2000.

director wishing to be Wellesian could even film Heliodoros' opening entirely without cuts if he treated the text slightly more freely than I did above. The opening shot of Paul Thomas Anderson's *Boogie Nights* (1997) and the continuous shot which moves around a film studio in Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992) leave no doubt that Heliodoros' opening would present no technical problem at all for an adaptation without editing. Each of the films just mentioned imitates and pays homage to Welles's virtuosity.

Welles introduces us to a tawdry town which straddles the border between the U.S. and Mexico and to two of his three protagonists. (The third one, to whom the film's title makes oblique reference, will soon appear.) The two are the Mexican 'Mike' Vargas, a drug fighter for the Mexican government, who has just concluded a major case, and his American wife Susan; the two are on their honeymoon. We follow them as they are crossing the border to the U.S. During their walk a car passes them and shortly after explodes, killing an American businessman and the strip-tease dancer who is with him. Welles creates suspense in this shot by first showing us the bomb being activated and placed in the car trunk and by following the car's journey from the Mexican parking lot through the checkpoint to the American side. As was the case with Heliodoros, Welles's opening may be said to embody, *in nuce*, the nature and essence of the mystery about to unfold. Indeed, Welles intended nothing less. As he stated many years later: 'the whole story was in that opening shot.' He went on to point out its significance:

The directors I admire the most are the least technical ones...I think great shots should conceal themselves a little bit. But that, by its nature, had to show it [a director's technique], because it told the plot. There was no way of not doing a kind of virtuoso shot that announced itself. But I prefer the ones that don't, that conceal themselves.¹³

These words remind us of the quotations from Hitchcock, Hawks, and Sturges which I gave earlier. Heliodoros' visual technique is equally unobtrusive; indeed, we can best discern the full extent of its intricate simplicity, to put it in an apparent but nevertheless appropriate oxymoron, when we look at it in cinematic terms. In subordinating their style to the narrative, both

¹³ Both quotations are from Welles and Bogdanovich 1998, 308–309; see *ibid.*, 297–301, on the film's themes of corruption and betrayal and on its moral meaning. On Welles's approach to technique see also *ibid.*, 318 ("hide the mechanics").

Welles and Heliodoros are in complete agreement with one of the best-known fundamental ancient perspectives on artistic creativity, the concept that *ars est celare artem*: true skill lies in the artist's very hiding of his technique, rather than in calling attention to it. Ovid pays his Pygmalion's art the highest compliment in the phrase *ars adeo latet arte sua* ('so much is his art hidden by his art'; *Met.* 10,252). Hitchcock's words about technique being 'as inconspicuous as possible' is a modern restatement of Horace and Ovid. Welles, even in what now looks to us to be an obvious case of cinematic fireworks, has managed to hide his virtuosity underneath the action which we observe; the continuous camera movement and the absence of all editing are often lost on film audiences watching the scene for the first time. From the first moment on, we are absorbed in the narrative events themselves, as Welles wants us to be. The constantly moving camera, the snippets of background noise, and the sparse exposition dialogue all form a non-stop assault on our eyes, ears, and minds with their intricate and incessantly changing visual and aural points of orientation; they demonstrate the very constancy of flux—another appropriate oxymoron—which *noir* thrillers require, both in their visual style and to uphold the element of suspense in their plots. In such a world little if anything ever turns out to be what it originally had appeared to be.

The objection might be raised that the style of Welles's opening is too elaborate to be considered an analogy to the less intricate but visually equally effective opening in Heliodoros—an objection which I will address shortly. Still, the narrative function of both is identical, as we have seen. A consideration of the opening of Hitchcock's *Psycho* will reinforce my argument for such parallelism. There is indeed every reason to consider the opening scenes of these two films together; they share thematically significant features. Hitchcock originally wanted to outdo Welles with 'the longest dolly shot ever attempted by helicopter'—a 'four-mile scene,' which proved technically impossible.¹⁴ While they are the sole creative artists in their respective films, both Welles and Hitchcock had to be able to rely on accomplished technicians to carry out their vision. In our case the cinematographer of *Psy-*

¹⁴ Quoted from Rebello 1990, 80. Twelve years later, Hitchcock's *Frenzy* (1972) opened with a long helicopter shot surveying London, traveling above and along the Thames, and finally focusing on a small crowd of people on the bank shortly before a corpse is discovered floating down the river. The shot, which contains one dissolve, lasts for two minutes and thirty-four seconds.

cho, John L. Russell, had been the camera operator on *Touch of Evil*. Russell and his crew were chiefly responsible for the fact that Welles's vision of his opening could actually be put on film.¹⁵

The composite opening shot of *Psycho* after the film's credits lasts 59 seconds. The camera, panning right, shows us the skyline of Phoenix, Arizona, in extreme long-shot, then, via a zoom, hesitatingly singles out a particular building by going from its lateral pan into a close-up of one of the building's windows, even creeping through this window into a darkened room and now again panning right. This last pan reveals two lovers after an erotic encounter in their hotel room: Marion Crane and Sam Loomis. The remainder of the scene explains their plight and serves as exposition to the plot: they can only see each other occasionally; on this day Marion even had to give up her lunch hour to be together with Sam. While their dialogue gives us the necessary background information—Marion's motivation to embezzle a large sum of money—the earlier visuals have already determined the atmosphere and tone of the whole film. In the words of Robin Wood:

Arbitrary place, date, and time, and now an apparently arbitrary window: the effect is of random selection: this could be any place, any date, any time, any room: it could be *us*. The forward track into darkness inaugurates the progress of perhaps the most terrifying film ever made: we are to be taken forward and downward into the darkness of ourselves. *Psycho* begins with the normal and draws us steadily deeper and deeper into the abnormal; it opens by making us aware of time, and ends (except for the releasing final image) with a situation in which time (i.e., development) has ceased to exist.¹⁶

¹⁵ Welles has said about the importance of Russell and his crew: 'I had a great camera operator—one of the last great ones....And we had a marvelous key grip...he's the man who steadies that arm [of the camera crane] on its truck marks, and he's as important as the operator. And if he hasn't got a marvelous touch and absolutely sure grasp of what he's doing, you're lost' (Welles and Bogdanovich 1998, 308).—The fact that, among other connections between the two films, the roles of Susan Vargas and Marion Crane are played by the same actress (Janet Leigh) is telling but not relevant to my argument. Leaming 1986, 516 and 519, discusses further analogies between the films.

¹⁶ Wood 1991, 142–143; cf. also *ibid.*, 211–213, on the opening's documentary-like realism.

Hitchcock achieves his goal of completely involving the viewer in his dark story by putting him in the position of a voyeur: throughout the film, his gaze will continue to intrude on the secrets of the main characters. *Psycho*, not least because of its opening, has rightly become a textbook example for the power of cinema to turn audiences into Peeping Toms.¹⁷

But it is technically impossible even for the virtuosity of a Hitchcock to survey the downtown of a large city and to steal inside the room of one of its buildings in one single camera take. His solution to the problem of moving the camera over such an impossibly far distance without breaking the viewer's spell is most ingenious, as well as being an instance of simplicity itself. Hitchcock identifies for us place and time, the latter down to the minute, by means of intertitles which reinforce our sense of becoming intimately and inextricably involved in the film's nightmarish plot. But these titles disguise three dissolves, which in turn disguise the different camera set-ups Hitchcock needed for the panoramic view of Phoenix and the hotel up to the moment when he focuses the viewer's attention on a particular window.¹⁸ A somewhat awkward cut then signals the transition from location filming to the studio forty seconds after the opening; this cut occurs in the close-up of the window before the camera enters the room.¹⁹ Except for this one unavoidable cut, the opening of *Psycho* is intended to deceive the viewer into believing that everything is continuous. It does so quite successfully, because no viewer is likely to notice that the window on the screen is really two windows, one on a real building and one on a studio set. The opening's cinematic technique is artfully disguised—cf. Hitchcock's words quoted earlier—and can be fully discovered only through careful and repeated viewing of the opening on videotape or disc. This cleverly created continuity in turn parallels the whole first part of the film, which, despite the changes in settings from city to country, highway, and finally to a lonely and deserted motel, gives us a seamless and uninterrupted narrative. The film's first half, until the search for the now dead and missing Marion begins the long and

¹⁷ Hitchcock himself said so to François Truffaut; see Truffaut 1984, 266. In general see on this Rothman 1982; he examines the opening of *Psycho* at 250–255.

¹⁸ The dissolves occur, respectively, after 11, 23, and 34 seconds from the shot's beginning under the information PHOENIX, ARIZONA; FRIDAY, DECEMBER THE ELEVENTH; and TWO FORTY-THREE P.M.

¹⁹ The next cut shows us Marion's uneaten lunch, an image prepared for one second earlier when Sam begins to say to Marion: 'You never did eat your lunch, did you?' These are the first words of dialogue in the film.

equally terrifying dénouement of the story, is one of the best illustrations of how effectively the old Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action can be applied to a modern medium. As Heliodoros had done in a longer opening scene and Welles in his yet longer one, Hitchcock, too, hides his technique for the sake of compelling and irresistible storytelling. Through his largely unobtrusive use of technique, the principle that *ars est celare artem* applies to Alfred Hitchcock's cinema even more than to the cinema of Orson Welles.

V. Ancient Rhetoric and Cinematic Style

Heliodoros' novel is famous not only for its intricate plot but also for its author's highly accomplished style. Heliodoros wrote under the influence of the Second Sophistic, as scholars have come to call it, in which the style of a literary presentation, orally or in writing, is at least as important as its substance. That the manner of presenting an argument or a story is as important as its content is, of course, an insight which authors have followed since the time of Homer. Ancient rhetorical theory was familiar with the concept of *enargeia*, vividness of presentation. ('Energy' derives from *enargeia*.) The literal meaning of *evidentia*, the Latin equivalent of *enargeia*, explains this vividness as the author's intention to bring his material out (*e-*) before his listeners or readers and to enable them to see (*vide-*) it in their mind's eye.²⁰ A fundamental strategy to achieve *enargeia* is to make one's audiences eye-witnesses of what is being described; Cicero calls this 'an almost visual presentation of events as if practically going on' at the moment at which it is being mentioned.²¹ The author, of course, is the first of such eyewitnesses: his powers of imagination conjure up a scene to himself, and when he puts it into words, he must draw his audience's imagination into the scene as well. Direct speech and, even more, detailed descriptions are required tools for the author. Long sentences convey these details, including minutiae.²² Cicero best summarizes the power and effect of *enargeia* in almost cinematic terms:

²⁰ Lausberg 1990, 399–407, gives a systematic overview of *evidentia*, with extensive quotations from ancient sources. See in particular Quint. 4,2,63–64, 6,2,32–33, and 8,3,61–70.

²¹ Quint. 9,2,40. The quotation is from Cic., *De Or.* 3,53,202 (Rackham 1942, 161). Cf. also Cic., *Or.* 139.

²² Lausberg 1990, 403, with Quint. 8,3,63–65. On minutiae cf. Quint. 8,3,70.

It is this department of oratory which almost sets the facts before the eyes—for it is the sense of sight that is most appealed to, although it is nevertheless possible for the rest of the senses and also most of all the mind itself to be affected....The one helps us to understand what is said, but the other makes us feel that we actually see it before our eyes.²³

According to Quintilian, it is a great achievement to present one's topics clearly (*clare*) and in such a way that they appear to be seen (*ut cerni videantur*) or shown to the mind's eye (*oculis mentis ostendi*).²⁴

It is evident that such highly visually oriented strategies of successful presentation are fully applicable to film—indeed more so, because a film director puts his material immediately and literally before his audience's eyes. From the perspective of classical rhetoric, we may now better be able to appreciate the baroque nature of Welles's opening shot in *Touch of Evil*: it is an example of *enargeia* in the classical as well as in the general sense ('energetic'). In terms of style, the film is fully comparable to Heliodoros' novel, whose literary nature J. R. Morgan summarizes as follows:

The style is florid and artificial, but exuberant and alive, employed with a zest and love of words and the games that can be played with them. The vocabulary is wide and highly nuanced.²⁵

This succinct description could well be a summary of Welles's cinematic style, his filmic 'vocabulary.' If we consider the sentence of a text to be analogous to an individual shot in a film, we may yet again compare both works from a Heliodoran perspective: 'The formal patterns within sentences can often become quite complex,' Morgan has observed. He concludes: 'taken at its own terms it is a richly nuanced prose of great exuberance and emotional effect, whose devices combine with the author's characteristic narrative technique to produce an experience of immediacy and involvement with the action.'²⁶

²³ Cic., *Part. Or.* 20 (Rackham 1942, 327).

²⁴ Quint. 8,3,62.

²⁵ Morgan 1989, 351 (introduction to his translation).

²⁶ Morgan 1996, 455 and 456.

Here now is Morgan's characterization of Heliodoros' opening and its connections to the gradual unraveling of the initial mystery in the course of the novel:

The opening paragraph alerts us...to another feature of the novel. The narrator knows what the scene on the beach means, but he is not telling. The reader is compelled to share the ignorance of the bandits; their eyes are our eyes. So throughout the novel the narrator stays very much in the background. The truth emerges dramatically from the characters, and their learning is our learning. This quality in its turn entails another of the *Aithiopika's* greatest delights: its sheer convolution and intricacy....As connections emerge, seemingly of their own accord, over long spans of text..., we are invited to admire the virtuoso skill of the self-concealing author who has engineered the whole complex mechanism.²⁷

This, too, fully applies to Welles; we have only to make minor adjustments in regard to setting and characters involved and to exchange the literary terms in the quotations ('paragraph,' 'novel,' 'reader,' 'words') for cinematic ones ('scene,' 'film,' 'viewer,' 'images'). Heliodoros' rhetorical and stylistic flourishes heighten his readers' powers to imagine the scene presented verbally and increase their emotional ties to the story's mystery and to its protagonists. The sinuous camera movement in Welles's opening serves the same purpose. Just as a casual reader may pay no heed to Heliodoros' phrasing, beginning with the seductive 'smile of daybreak,' the casual viewer of Welles's film does not notice how Welles shows him what he sees. In both cases, the style remains partially hidden and affects its audiences only subliminally.

By contrast, the deceptive artlessness of Hitchcock's opening is balanced by a highly emotional dimension which is instrumental to produce apprehension and suspense in the viewer. This is the music, famously played by strings only. The score is the chief rhetorical aspect of the opening of *Psycho*, if less so than in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). Overall, then, there is a direct stylistic parallel between our ancient novel and *Psycho*, too. In Heliodoros, we find the simplicity in the plot of the opening scene complemented by verbal fireworks; in Hitchcock, the simplicity of what we see on the screen is complemented by what we hear at the same time. In both works,

²⁷ Morgan 1989, 350 (introduction to his translation).

the two sides round off each other to make for one perfect whole; anything added or subtracted would only destroy this balance.

For the release of *Touch of Evil*, the studio altered Welles' version of the opening in two ways, entirely against his wishes: it superimposed a credit sequence on most of the tracking shot and added a jazzy soundtrack. From the point of view just discussed, however, this aural 'rhetoric' is out of place: it utterly detracts the viewer from the scene's visual quality. Ironically, the only artistic justification for the soundtrack can be that the credits have almost completely ruined all the elegance in Welles's virtuosity and turned the opening into a visually boring beginning to the film, thereby turning it into no more than a standard 'B movie' thriller. (The studio even marketed *Touch of Evil* as such.) By contrast, in his own opening Welles had aimed at an almost documentary-like atmosphere, without credits and with natural background sound. The realism which he achieves makes the seamy black-and-white world into which he draws us much more authentic and for that reason more terrifying.

VI. Flashbacks

There is one additional cinematic parallel to Heliodoros' opening scene which is important. The second part of Kalasiris' story (*Aeth.* 5,17–33) contains a detailed recapitulation of the opening scene from an entirely different point of view at 5,33. We now learn that there had been another observer, the 'detective' Kalasiris himself, who had been watching the bandits watching the aftermath of the massacre. Heliodoros prepares his readers for this return to the opening by a first indication at 5,27 that he will now take us back to the narrative's beginning for the long-awaited explanation of its mystery. We may compare this technique with the identical purpose of flashbacks in cinema, correcting what we have seen earlier and revealing what had 'really' happened. (I exclude from my present consideration those flashbacks which merely fill in a gap in the narrative, another of their primary functions.) The flashback, often with a voice-over narration from the perspective of the person giving us the information contained in the flashback, makes a character or characters live through an earlier part of the plot again, and in this way a viewer witnesses a dramatic re-enactment. As scholars have observed, the first-person stories which Knemon, a secondary hero who eventually turns into a 'bad guy,' and in particular Kalasiris tell their listeners in the *Aithio-*

pika are just such detailed re-enactments rather than merely factual summaries of necessary information. In mysteries, both in texts and on film, the flashback technique is a ubiquitous part of the dénouement, when the detective takes his listeners through the case and then reveals the guilty party. A representative example is Sidney Lumet's film of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974).²⁸

Related to the use of cinematic flashbacks just described is the recapitulation of a particular narrative moment from multiple points of view. The director, as it were, turns back the narrative clock not once but several times. A well-known literary example is Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*; the most famous instance in cinema is Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), itself the inspiration of several other films, of which Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956) is an American example. Both of these films in turn are the models for the same thing happening, if on a less complex level, in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Jackie Brown* (1997), followed by Steven Soderbergh's *Out of Sight* (1998). *Rashomon* is a philosophical murder mystery, while the others are thrillers.²⁹ As Kurosawa's example shows, the technique of using flashbacks for narrative complexity and temporal dislocation is not at all restricted to the cinema of the West; as Heliodoros' example shows, it is certainly not restricted to modern modes of storytelling, either.

Two well-known examples of flashbacks from a perspective which contradicts a scene shown earlier occur in John Ford's Western *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1961) and in Hitchcock's mystery *Stage Fright* (1950). In Ford's film, which has a framing narrative set in the modern West, the flashback revealing the truth about the outlaw Valance's death occurs within the long flashback which tells the film's story about order and civilization coming to the Western frontier. In a comparable manner, Kalasiris' story of his earlier adventures occurs as a lengthy insert into the novel's main narrative; its climax is the revelation of what had caused that massacre

²⁸ Cf. the director's own description at Lumet 1996, 78–79.

²⁹ One of the most involving and elegant cases of a film unfolding the true meaning of its opening only at the end is David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945). Although it is not a mystery film, its flashback structure is an object lesson in the mystery storyteller's fundamental task of successfully withholding important information at the beginning and gradually revealing it in the course of the narrative. As uninvolved and uninformed observers, we are first shown the scene only on the surface level of social proprieties being observed; when we return to it again, we are shown, and now feel, its complex emotional and psychological undercurrents.

whose aftermath the Egyptian bandits had witnessed.³⁰ Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* is remarkable for a particularly shrewd and, at the time of its making, unique use of flashback in a mystery plot: to the audience's surprise, the evidence given in the opening flashback by one of the suspects in a murder case turns out to have been a deliberate lie.³¹ The hostile reaction of some contemporary critics to this plot twist seems to indicate that, in their opinion, Hitchcock violated an unwritten rule of cinematic storytelling—that a flashback must reveal the truth, must tell 'what really happened': as if such a rule had ever existed.³² The one compelling rule for creative artists at any time and in any narrative medium is to tell their story in the most effective way. How they achieve this is left to their creativity.

In the Western tradition, the close ties between literature and the visual arts were an integral part of ancient thought about literature and painting. The Greeks held poetry to be painting which talks, while painting was silent poetry, as Simonides of Keos had put it.³³ Centuries later the Roman poet Horace summarized this idea in his *Art of Poetry* in its most famous and influential restatement: *ut pictura poesis* (*Ars Poetica* 361). I have here at-

³⁰ Narrative structures involving more complex flashbacks may occur in cinema as well, both in mainstream Hollywood films (e.g. in John Brahm's *The Locket* [1946]) and in modern, especially French and Japanese, films of the 1950s and later. A well-known example, with different levels of flashbacks and flash-forwards, is Alain Resnais's *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* (1980). See in general Turim 1989, who discusses the connections of flashbacks to literature, primarily modern, at 210–226. Aronson 2001, 105–183, devotes four chapters to detailed examinations of various uses of the flashback and analyzes several examples. On equivalents of, or parallels to, cinematic flashbacks and flash-forwards in Heliodoros cf. Futre Pinheiro 1998, 3148–3173.

³¹ On this see Rohmer and Chabrol 1979, 105, and the perceptive comments at Wood 1991, 81. Turim 1989, 165–168, provides a detailed discussion. Hitchcock's invention of the lying flashback, greatly expanded, reappears in Bryan Singer's mystery thriller *The Usual Suspects* (1995), where it structures the entire plot and leads to a clever dénouement.

³² Hitchcock to Truffaut: 'Strangely enough, in movies, people never object if a man is shown telling a lie. And it's also acceptable, when a character tells a story about the past, for the flashback to show it as if it were taking place in the present. So why is it that we can't tell a lie through a flashback?' (Truffaut 1984, 189). But Hitchcock had by this time come to believe that the lying flashback was a dramatic mistake (Truffaut, *ibid.*).

³³ Plut., *Mor.* 346F–347C (in his treatise 'On the Fame of the Athenians'); cf. *Mor.* 17F–18A (in 'How to Study Poetry'). See further Pl., *Phaedr.* 275D and *Rep.* 595A–608B; Ar., *Poet.* 1447A8–1448A18, 1450A24–28, and 1450A37–1450B3; Vitruv. 5.6.9; Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 1,1–2, and Philostratus the Younger, proem to his *Imagines*. These are only the most prominent references.

tempted to expand this concept to include within its compass two temporally distant but narratively related ways of storytelling which flourished after Horace, the ancient novel and modern cinema. To put my perspective on novel and film in classical terms I close by expanding Horace's phrase: *movens ut pictura poesis Heliodori*.

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