

Metaphor, Gender and the Ancient Greek Novel

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‘Metaphors are dangerous. Metaphors are not to be trifled with. A single metaphor can give birth to love.’

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

Metaphors are dangerous in other ways too. Metaphor plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning.¹ Feminist scholarship in particular has analysed the dangers and disadvantages for women in how metaphors are used to shape concepts and experiences. It has been observed that metaphor routinely enshrines and enacts power relations, and, more often than not, works to celebrate male supremacy and female oppression.² This can be all the more dangerous when a metaphor becomes used so often that it becomes ordinary and barely visible. ‘Faded’ or ‘dead’ metaphors naturalise the power relations they enact.³ No metaphor is ever *just* a metaphor. Some writers have viewed metaphor as ‘dangerous’ in a more liberating way. Inextricably linked as it is to metamorphosis, metaphor carries with it the promise of transformation. In Mary Daly’s distinctive prose, ‘metaphors evoke action, movement. They Name/evoke a shock, a clash with the “going logic” and they introduce a new logic. Metaphors function to Name change, and therefore they elicit change.’⁴ This approach stresses the radical operations of metaphor and their potential to subvert and challenge. It is, of course, important, when looking at metaphors, that we should attempt to consider

¹ See especially Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Black 1977.

² Andrea Dworkin’s discussion of how intercourse is routinely represented as possessing, nailing, screwing, ‘doing’ (i.e. killing), rather than, for example, enclosing, is a particularly urgent demonstration of this: Dworkin 1987, esp. 1–93.

³ Cf. Mary Daly on the ‘sexual politics of fading’: Daly 1984, 28.

⁴ Daly 1984, 25. See also Daly 1987 under ‘Metaphors, Metatriarchal’.

them, so far as we can, in their (literary and social) contexts. As Quintilian put it, ‘metaphor cannot be accepted without reference to its context’ (*Tralata probari nisi in contextu sermonis non possunt* 8.3.38). It is in the interactions between the metaphoric and the ‘real’ or experiential, between the rhetorical and the social, that meaning is constructed.⁵

This article aims to explore some of the ways in which metaphors in the ancient Greek novels are gendered. That is to say, it questions whether and, if so, how, metaphors are deployed to enforce – or challenge – gender asymmetries. However, underpinning this agenda are bigger and broader questions: does the Greek novel have a special relationship to metaphor? Is there anything distinctive about its metaphoricity? I am, of course, aware that our term metaphor is not synonymous with the Greek *metaphora*, the ancient definitions of which will play some role here, but without much regard for the (often tedious) divisions and distinctions that they make. I use ‘metaphor’ in a loose and inclusive way to refer to a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another. Of course, language is essentially metaphoric; very simply, metaphor involves seeing something as something else. This analysis will be far from systematic. To speak of ‘the ancient Greek novel’ always risks making unhelpful generalisations, and my examples are largely taken from Chariton, Achilles Tatius, and Heliodorus. Nevertheless, I think the risks are worth taking, not least because metaphors in the novels have tended to be examined individually,⁶ or in relation to individual authors,⁷ with relative neglect of bigger questions and broader perspectives.

The Greek novel and the drama of metaphor

One of the problems in thinking about metaphor is its uncontrollability, as here expressed by Ricoeur (following Derrida): ‘the paradox is this: there is

⁵ The work of Carol Dougherty is fundamental here. She reads ‘first-hand testimony from Bosnian women together with the mythical accounts about the Sabines to explore the dynamic relationship between the historical experience of rape and its metaphorical role in representing ethnic conflict and territorial conquest’: Dougherty 1998, 268. See also Dougherty 1993 on metaphor and colonisation.

⁶ E.g. theatrical metaphors, on which see Walden 1894; Bartsch 1989, 109–43.

⁷ Mignogna 1994 is a superlative study of metaphor in Achilles Tatius (though it largely ignores gender issues).

no discourse on metaphor that is not stated within a non-metaphorical standpoint from which to perceive the order and the demarcation of the metaphorical field.⁸ In other words it is difficult to talk about metaphor without becoming enmeshed in metaphor. This is a difficulty that might be put to constructive use. The metaphors which Aristotle, and other ancient writers, use to describe metaphor are themselves telling.⁹ The figurative language used to characterise metaphor might have implications for thinking not just about metaphor, but also about the novel and its relation to metaphor. There are remarkable similarities between the activities of metaphor and what happens in the Greek novels.

Both the workings of metaphor and the plots of the ancient Greek novels pivot around some sort of exchange, transfer and displacement, and both are centrally concerned with negotiating relations between the familiar and the foreign. The Greek term *metaphora* means a carrying over, transference or transport. Aristotle describes how the analogical metaphor should work by ‘exchange’: ‘But in all cases the analogical metaphor should set up a reciprocal exchange between each of the two things of the same genus; for instance, if the cup is the shield of Dionysus, then it is fitting for the shield to be called the cup of Ares.’ (*Rhet.* 3.4.4)¹⁰ (ἀεὶ δὲ δεῖ τὴν μεταφορὰν τὴν ἐκ τοῦ ἀνάλογον ἀνταποδιδόναι καὶ ἐπὶ θάτερα [καὶ ἐπὶ] τῶν ὁμογενῶν, οἷον εἰ ἡ φιάλη ἀσπίς Διονύσου, καὶ τὴν ἀσπίδα ἀρμόττει λέγεσθαι φιάλην Ἄρεως.). Aristotle defines metaphor simply as the ‘introduction of an alien term’: ὀνόματος ἀλλοτρίου ἐπιφορὰ¹¹ (*Poetics* 1457b7). (Classical theory is limited by the assumption that a word has a single primary meaning, and that all other uses of it are in some sense metaphorical).¹² Aristotle characterises metaphor as a word exiled from its proper object, which is its home.¹³ This language is later echoed by Cicero. In one of his letters he takes issue with

⁸ Ricoeur 1978, 214, quoted in Goldhill 1984, 21. See also De Man’s comments on Locke’s discussion of metaphor in De Man 1978.

⁹ On Aristotle on metaphor, see especially Kirby 1997; Silk 2003.

¹⁰ See also Aristotle on similes: ‘it is here that poets fail worst when they fail and succeed best when they succeed: I mean when they set up an exchange [or ‘response’] (ἔταν ἀποδιδῶσιν) *Rhet.* (3.11.13).

¹¹ On the different meanings of *allogrios* here see Silk 2003, 145.

¹² Critiques of this include Kennedy 1993 who prefers to talk in terms of ‘tenors of signification’, and Ferrari 2002, 61–6 who discusses the advantages to moving away from Aristotle’s ‘substitution’ model of metaphor to an ‘interactive’ model which looks instead at the associative force of metaphor.

¹³ Derrida discusses the anxieties which this provokes: Derrida 1972, 247–324.

the appropriateness of his friend's use of the word *fideliter*, 'faithfully', in the context of the phrase *valetudini fideliter inserviando* 'faithfully studying my health'. Cicero asks 'What is faithfully doing in such a context?'; literally 'from where did 'faithfully' come into such a place?' *unde in iste locum 'fideliter' venit?* He talks in terms of the 'home territory of the word' *verbo domicilium* (i.e. its typical usage) but notes that it 'makes many migrations elsewhere' *migrationes in alienum multae* and gives some examples of these 'within the bounds of decent metaphor as approved by Theophrastus' *quo modo Theophrasto placet, verecunda tralatio*.¹⁴ The terminology of place in ancient writings on metaphor is remarkable. As Patricia Parker discusses in *Literary Fat Ladies*, metaphor 'depends upon "the notion of place" – of territory already staked out, of the tropological as inseparable from the topological'.¹⁵ Characters in the novels are repeatedly exchanged, transferred and displaced, both through what has become known as 'the traffic in women', and through other types of return. For example, Melite, echoing the language of Aristotle, says to Clitophon that her love 'has given you back Leucippe' (σοι Λευκίππην ἀποδέδωκεν) (*Leucippe and Clitophon* 5.26.8).¹⁶ The plot of Heliodorus' novel pivots around a girl's exile, and displacement of the couple from their home is a staple of the genre. In Chariton, Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus at least, the vocabulary of otherness (of being *allogrios*) and of displacement and migration is marked.

Metaphor is characterised as involving cultural relations and negotiation between the familiar and the foreign. Aristotle discusses metaphor in similar terms. In *Rhetoric* he describes the style of speech appropriate for an orator: 'Of nouns and verbs it is the proper ones that make style perspicuous; all the others which have been spoken of in the *Poetics* elevate and make it ornate; for departure from the ordinary makes it appear more dignified. In this respect men feel the same in regard to style as in regard to foreigners and fellow-citizens (ὥσπερ γὰρ πρὸς τοὺς ξένους οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρὸς τοὺς πολίτας, τὸ αὐτὸ πάσχουσιν καὶ πρὸς τὴν λέξιν). Wherefore one should give our language a 'foreign' air; for men admire what is remote, and that which excites admiration is pleasant' (διὸ δεῖ ποιεῖν ξένην τὴν διάλεκτον· θαυμασταὶ γὰρ τῶν ἀπόντων εἰσίν, ἡδὺν δὲ τὸ θαυμαστόν ἐστιν). Metaphor excels, says Aristotle, in clarity (τὸ σαφές), sweetness (τὸ ἡδύ) and unfamili-

¹⁴ *Letters to Friends* 16.17.1. Theophrastus discussed metaphor in his treatise *On Speech*.

¹⁵ Parker 1987, 36.

¹⁶ See also eg. Chariclea being fought over as pirate's booty: *Ethiopian Tales* 5.31–2.

arity or foreignness (τὸ ξενικὸν) (*Rhetoric* 3.2.8). As Doreen Innes puts it, ‘metaphor is especially recommended because it is in effect a mean between the ordinary and the over-exotic.’¹⁷ The ancient novels, like these characterisations of metaphor, are works that involve encountering and admiring (sometimes with a pleasing frisson of fear) τὸ ξενικὸν. They dramatise relations between home and abroad in vivid ethnographical tales that grapple, with varying levels of sophistication, with what cultural translation means.¹⁸

The novels themselves, and their protagonists, concern themselves both with their origins and their new identities. When Callirhoe, abducted, sold, and now ensconced in a new home, keeps silent about her origins for she is what she has now become (*Callirhoe* 2.5.7), she echoes the rhetoric of assimilation that Cicero uses to talk about metaphor. He considers metaphor successful if it seems to belong in its new home: ‘you would say it had not invaded an alien place but had migrated to its own’ *non irruisse in alienum locum sed migrasse in suum* (*Brutus* 274). Aristotle and Cicero suggest that *to xenikon* should be embraced by the familiar. This resonates with what is one of the most striking, and innovative, features of the novels: the incorporation of much that earlier configurations of Greek and barbarian would have excluded, what Glen Bowersock calls the ‘emergence of new standards of otherness’.¹⁹ He writes: ‘The old standard of Hellenism broke down in the second and third centuries, and in doing so it made way for a new kind of Hellenism, an ecumenical Hellenism that could actually embrace much that was formerly barbaric’.²⁰ Bowersock puts a particularly kindly gloss on this process (‘ecumenical’ and ‘embrace’ are positive terms). Thinking in terms of co-option might give us a different frame for what could be seen as a quietly aggressive, colonialist dynamic.²¹ Novels, we might say, then, enact or dramatise the operations of metaphor. Viewing them thus puts into sharper relief their mechanisms and allures as ethnography.

The relationship between metaphor and novel is also given particular focus through a figure who shines through the heroines of many of the nov-

¹⁷ Innes 2003, 13.

¹⁸ Heliodorus is obviously the most complex in this regard, on which see Whitmarsh 1998, Selden 1998, and Perkins 1992. See also Hall 1995 on the *Onos* and, generally, Bowersock 1994, 29–53.

¹⁹ Bowersock 1994, 53.

²⁰ Bowersock 1994, 53.

²¹ Dougherty’s observation that metaphor ‘is itself emblematic of the colonial experience’, is pertinent here: Dougherty 1993, 161.

els: Helen of Troy. Chariton's Callirhoe is explicitly cast as a new Helen, with numerous references and comparisons such as this reflection from Dionysius: 'I was dreaming that I should be happier than Menelaus was with his Spartan wife, for I cannot believe that even Helen was as beautiful.'²² When Achilles Tatius' Leucippe hides her identity from Melite and her household, she assumes the name Lacaina, which means 'The Spartan' and which is one of the names used to refer to the mythological Helen, who was originally from Sparta. Most obviously, it is the heroines' extraordinary beauty that casts them in Helen's role. Heliodorus' Chariclea is described as the 'brightest of human beauties (τὸ φαιδρότατον τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις)' (1.29.4), who, even at seven years of age, was described as 'a girl of inconceivable, celestial beauty' (κόρην ἀμήχανόν τι καὶ δαιμόνιον κάλλος) (2.30.6). Like Helen, she is portrayed as the most beautiful woman in the world: ὠραιότητι δὲ σώματος οὕτω δὴ τὰς πάσας ὑπερβέβληκεν ὥστε πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς Ἑλληνικὸς τε καὶ ξένος ἐπ' αὐτὴν φέρεται καὶ ὅπου δὴ φαινομένη ναῶν ἢ δρόμων ἢ ἀγορῶν καθάπερ ἀρχέτυπον ἄγαλμα πᾶσαν ὄνιν καὶ διάνοιαν ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν ἐπιστρέφει, 'in physical beauty she is so superior to all other women that all eyes, Greek and foreign alike, turn towards her, and wherever she appears in the temples, colonnades, and squares, she is like a statue of ideal beauty that draws all eyes and hearts to itself.' (2.33.3).²³

Scholarship which has noted the similarities between the heroines in the novels and Helen of Troy has tended to do so in the context of establishing the Homeric epics as major intertexts for the novels, but there is much more going on in these descriptions. The novels reclaim for 'real' women what has previously been the privilege of a solitary figure from myth: being the most beautiful woman in the world. In doing so, we might say that they demythologise the fantasy of 'being the most beautiful'. This fantasy has strict limits and is far from democratic: the girl must be from an aristocratic family, and her erotic powers elevate her to a position of superiority over other women and men.²⁴ Even so, it is still the case that, within the elite, it is a fantasy open to all: it could be you, dear reader. Helen becomes 'real' as Callirhoe, Anthia, Leucippe, and Chariclea steal her crown. As they do so,

²² For fuller discussions of Chariton's use of Homer, see Laplace 1980 and Biraud 1986.

²³ See also the descriptions of Chariclea's beauty at 2.4 and 10.9.

²⁴ Callirhoe's superiority is couched in the metaphors of political power. Her visual magnetism renders her a kind of *demagogue*: ἐκείνη μόνη τοῦς ἀπάντων ἐδημαγώγησεν ὀφθαλμοῦς 4.10. On this description see Egger 1994; Morales 2004, 159–60.

these girls, in their turn, write themselves into myth. Moreover, the casting of the heroines as Helen makes adultery an ever-present possibility on their parts, despite their avowed and sometimes obsessive commitments to chastity and fidelity. It is part of the novels' flirtation with the fantasy that their virgins really are whores. But it is not just Helen's outstanding beauty, nor her notorious sexuality, which make her a figure through and against whom the novels' heroines are repeatedly fashioned: it is her metaphoricity. As Matthew Gumpert has written: 'Transported from Sparta to Troy, and from Troy back to Sparta, Helen's own story literalizes the metaphor implicit, etymologically, in all metaphor.'²⁵ And, we might say, Chariclea's story, Anthia's story, Leucippe's story. He continues, 'Metaphor is always a journey across an epistemological space, a cognitive wandering, a way of being led astray. Helen is led astray, just as those who gaze upon her are.'²⁶ As are Callirhoe, Leucippe, Chariclea and those who gaze upon them.

In Aristotle's formulation metaphor depends on an ability to see likenesses. 'To use metaphors well is to discern similarities' τὸ γὰρ εὖ μεταφέρειν τὸ τὸ ὅμοιον θεωρεῖν ἐστίν (*Poetics* 22 1459a5–8). Helen forces us to speak in terms of likeness. In the *Iliad*, the elders look upon the face of Helen and comment, 'she is terribly like the immortal goddesses to look on' αἰνῶς ἀθανάτησι θεῆς εἰς ὅπα ἕοικεν (3.158). They cannot say who she is; they can only say what she is *like*. So, too, the heroines in the novels are repeatedly described through comparisons – to goddesses, statues, and figures from myth. So Leucippe is *like* Europa and/or Selene (Ach.Tat.1.1.2, 1.4.3). In Plato's *Cratylus*, Socrates asks 'Can we rightly speak of [an absolute beauty] which is always passing away and is first this and then that? (439d–e). Plato calls this indeterminacy the flow or flux (ῥεῖν) of beauty (τὸ καλόν). We might call it *Calli-rhoe*. Was Chariton's heroine named for this episode? Whether she was or not, she symbolises the impulse towards comparison, towards likeness, that is a feature of descriptions of Helen and of heroines in the novels, and is at work in the employment of metaphor.

The point that I am making is that the Greek novels can be read as an acting out of the *mises-en-scene* of the activity of metaphors. I am not, to be sure, arguing that the novels are thematically devoted to concerns in poetics; to deconstructing and exposing in an overt, self-conscious, and clever-clever literary game, the mechanics of metaphor. Rather, I have been concerned to

²⁵ Gumpert 2001, xiii.

²⁶ Gumpert 2001, xiii.; see also 19–21.

trace how the pleasures which Aristotle and other writers ascribe to metaphor are, in certain significant ways, the same as those on offer in the Greek novels. In doing so, the aim has been to defamiliarise and reframe our picture both of how metaphor works, and also of how some constituent features of the genre might better be appreciated. Of course, the features that I have discussed also occur in other genres; they are not exclusive to the ancient Greek novel. However, no other genre, I think, does so as centrally and strikingly. The novels have a special relationship with metaphor.

Metaphor, gender, and power

This section considers the metaphors of sex. It examines a variety of metaphors in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius used to depict sexual relations and seduction: privileged areas for configuring gender. Two interrelated questions inform my exploration here: do metaphors always function to inscribe male dominance? Are metaphors ever employed, to return to Mary Daly's formulation, to name change, and therefore to elicit change? My starting point is metaphors that stage sex as wounding or killing. In Book Two of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Leucippe's mother Pantheia, 'was disturbed by a dream in which a brigand carrying a naked blade kidnapped her daughter and carried her off; then he laid her down on her back and cut open the middle of her belly with the knife, starting down below at her most intimate parts' (2.23.5). She bursts into her daughter's room just at the moment when the lovers are about to have sex, and then realises what her dream portended.²⁷ In an equally famous and lurid scene in Heliodorus, the bandit chief Thyamis dreams that the goddess Isis entrusts Chariclea to his care and says: 'Thyamis, I deliver to you this maiden. You will have her and not have her; you will be a wrongdoer and will slay your guest (καὶ φονεύσεις τὴν ξένην); yet she will not be slain (ἢ δὲ οὐ φονευθήσεται).' Thyamis interprets this as follows: 'The words 'you will have her and have her not' he supposed to mean 'as a woman, and no longer a virgin'; and 'you will slay' he took to signify the wounding of virginity (τὰς παρθενίους τρώσεις) which would not be fatal to Chariclea' (1.18.4–19.1). The phrase 'the wounding of virginity' substitutes one metaphor for another; we do not get beyond metaphor. Both descriptions are contained in dreams and both, notoriously, invite other in-

²⁷ It also predicts the fake murder of Leucippe, where she is laid down and cut open.

terpretations and revisions (for Thyamis, after all, ‘it was his desire which was interpreting’).²⁸

James Heffernan, in his discussion of representations of rape in *Leucippe and Clitophon* and *Daphnis and Chloe*,²⁹ argues that descriptions of sexual violence ‘show where male metaphors for sexual intercourse lead, what sort of violence these metaphors implicitly authorize.’³⁰ This must be true, but his next step, to suggest that ‘in so doing, they invite the reader to imagine alternative metaphors – as well as alternatives to sexual violence itself’ is a surprisingly upbeat conclusion to draw. Is being faced with the violence that certain metaphors authorise really an invitation to imagine alternative ways of thinking and acting? Or, rather, do metaphors for sex which involve wounding and killing, and the more extended descriptions of sexual violence, do little more than reinscribe and reinforce male dominance? It is worth asking at this juncture whether there are ‘alternative metaphors’ for sex imagined in the novels themselves, as there are in another text that Heffernan discusses, William Blake’s *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793). There, he argues, ‘male metaphors of violent penetration give way to female metaphors of reception and enclosure’.³¹ One extraordinary episode in *Leucippe and Clitophon* stands out. It is when Melite is on board a ship with Clitophon, and tries to seduce him by describing the vessel in erotic terms:

‘It seems to me that our surroundings are symbols of marriage, this yoke dangling above our heads and the bonds taut around the yardarm. The omens are good, my master: a bridal suite lying under a yoke and ropes bound tight. Even the rudder is close to the bridal suite: see, Fortune is piloting our marriage!...The breeze is whistling sweetly around the rigging: it seems to me that the wind’s pipings are leading the wedding-hymn. See how the sail billows out like a pregnant belly. I take even this as a favourable omen: you will soon father me a child, too.’

ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ δοκεῖ τὰ παρόντα γάμων εἶναι σύμβολα· ζυγὸς μὲν οὗτος ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς κρεμάμενος, δεσμοὶ δὲ περὶ τὴν κεραΐαν τεταμένοι. καλὰ γε, ὦ δέσποτα, τὰ μαντεύματα· ὑπὸ ζυγὸν ὁ θάλαμος, καὶ κάλω δεδεμένοι. ἀλλὰ καὶ πηδάλιον τοῦ θαλάμου πλησίον· ἰδοὺ τοὺς γάμους

²⁸ He revises his interpretation at 1.30.4.

²⁹ Heffernan 1993, 53–61.

³⁰ Heffernan 1993, 55.

³¹ Heffernan 1993, 54.

ἡμῶν ἢ Τύχη κυβερνᾷ. νυμφοστολήσουσι δὲ ἡμᾶς Ποσειδῶν καὶ Νηρηίδων χορός· ἐνταῦθα γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς Ἀμφιτρίτην γαμεῖ. λιγυρὸν δὲ συρρίζει περὶ τοὺς κάλως καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα· ἐμοὶ μὲν ὑμέναιον ἄγειν δοκεῖ τὰ τῶν ἀνέμων αὐλήματα. ὄρᾳς δὲ καὶ τὴν ὀθόνην κεκυρτωμένην ὥσπερ ἐγκύμονα γαστέρα· δεξιὸν μοι καὶ τοῦτο τῶν οἰωνισμάτων· ἔση μοι ταχὺ καὶ πατήρ. (5.16.4–6)³²

In this remarkable speech, Melite uses symbolism, simile, and metaphor to sexualise her and Clitophon's environment. She describes the ship using images of female fertility and marriage. Some of them are as vivid (or crude) as the images in the dreams of Pantheia and Thyamis, but they are a far cry from the metaphors of violent penetration in those descriptions. For Melite, sex connotes marriage and pregnancy. Its intimate and life enhancing properties contrast strongly with the division and death featured in the sex-as-stabbing images. The phrase *πηδάλιον τοῦ θαλάμου πλησίον* merits closer attention. Tim Whitmarsh translates *thamos* as 'bridal suite',³³ one of its common usages and one that fits well among the 'symbols of marriage'. However, *thamos* has connotations that better convey the physical import of the metaphors used here. It is often used to mean 'chamber' or 'inner room' and frequently signifies a 'woman's apartment'. It is not a gender-neutral term for space. In ships, it is commonly understood to refer to 'the lowest, darkest part of the ship, the hold'³⁴ and that must be part of the play of meaning in this passage. It can also, though much less frequently, have mystic connotations, with the sense 'innermost shrine' (as in Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess* 31). All of these associations more strongly suggest that the metaphor is one for a physical (as well as social and religious) union. 'Hold', 'woman's chamber', and 'inner sanctum' are all translations which capture a greater sense of the innuendo here. *Thamos* is a metaphor for the vagina (Melite's) and, with its function as a place of containment, protection and, possibly even sanctuary, it can indeed be read as a 'female metaphor of

³² I also discuss this scene in Morales 2004, 224–6 but without analysis of the *πηδάλιον τοῦ θαλάμου πλησίον* metaphor. I argue there that the Melite's description uses similar nautical metaphors to those often found in degrading descriptions of women (for example, the description of Timo in an epigram by Meleager: *Pal. Anth.* 5. 204. 1–8), but to very different ends.

³³ Whitmarsh 2001, 87.

³⁴ *LSJ* s.v.

reception and enclosure'. Sex *can* be redefined through metaphor. This is one (exceptional) instance where metaphor names and elicits change.

More commonly, 'resistance' (of a kind) comes in the form of female characters using metaphors typically reserved for the men. A good example is found in the series of images that depict viewing as eating, what has been called 'the consumptive gaze'. In *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Clitophon consumes Leucippe with his eyes. Ignoring his dinner – 'I was like someone eating in a dream' (ἐώκειν γὰρ τοῖς ἐν ὀνείροις ἐσθίουσιν) – he instead gazes at the girl, 'and that constituted my dinner' (τοῦτο γάρ μου ἦν τὸ δεῖπνον) (1.5.3). After the meal is over, Clitophon elaborates upon the metaphor:

οἱ μὲν δὴ ἄλλοι τῇ γαστρὶ μετρήσαντες τὴν ἡδονήν, ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν εὐωχίαν ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς φέρων τῶν τε τῆς κόρης προσώπων γεμισθεὶς καὶ ἀκράτῳ θεάματι καὶ μέχρι κόρου προελθὼν ἀπῆλθον μεθύων ἔρωτι.
 'The others has measured their bliss by their bellies, but I departed savouring the banquet of my eyes, stuffed with the girl's face, and drunken with desire.' (1.6.1–2)

Viewing women as food is one of the most common, and (from a modern perspective) pernicious, metaphors in ancient Greek literature, so it is, perhaps, an unsurprising metaphor to find in the novel.³⁵ However, later in the novel Melite is described as gazing at Clitophon in the same vocabulary of metaphor as was earlier employed to describe Clitophon gazing at Leucippe. In the fifth book, Clitophon recalls how Melite was so desirous of him that she was unable to eat. 'She began to kiss me', he relates, 'and I accepted her kisses with no small pleasure. Then she drew apart. "That", she said, "is what I call sustenance (Αὕτη μοι τροφή)" (5.13.5). This is just one example of how Melite is given metaphors which are normally, in Achilles Tatius and in Greek literature more widely, used by men of women. Through her, an objectifying perspective is shown not to be an exclusively male prerogative.³⁶ In *Ethiopian Tales*, it is Arsace, queen of Persia, whose gaze is characterised by a metaphor of consumption. Inflamed with desire for Theagenes, she gazed at him and 'none looked upon him more hungrily than she': (πλέον τῶν ἄλλων τῆς ἐκείνου θεάς ἐμπορουμένη) (7.8.6).

³⁵ See Henry 1992; Henry 2000; Morales 2004, 32–4, 165–6. On metaphorical uses of food more generally, see Gowers 1993 *passim* esp. 8 and 41–6.

³⁶ For Melite's use of metaphors involving art, see Morales 2004, 221–6.

However, these are not simple examples of gender reversal. Rather, the transgressions of Melite and Arsace operate to reassert the norm. Women use ‘male’ metaphors (metaphors typically used by men) when they are seducing; when they are taking the male role. It is telling that the metaphor of the consumptive gaze is used of the female antagonists, never of the heroines. Both Arsace and Melite are powerful women, women with status, money and age. If certain metaphors are only given to characters in positions of dominance, metaphor becomes an index of social status. The social statuses of Melite and Arsace are part of their exceptionality. With Arsace, her power, (and oriental decadence) stigmatise this usage of metaphor by women. Her hungry gaze is part of her characterisation as ‘a woman generally addicted to ignoble pleasure’ (γύναιον καὶ ἄλλως πρὸς ἄσεμνον ἡδονὴν ἐπίφορον)(7.9.2). Melite is not as easily pigeon-holed. She is not a despotic ruler, nor a loser in love, nor is she eventually driven to suicide. Through her more engaging characterisation, her perspectives and the metaphors that create them come across as attractive and accessible to women. She is unusual, if not unique, in the novels, in breaking the gender rules of metaphor, without being demonised for doing so. She is still, however, an exception which proves the rule.

The final group of metaphors in this section are metaphors of different kinds of dominance; of ‘capturing’, ‘hunting’, and ‘enslaving’ through the gaze. It is a frequent motif in descriptions of viewing that the viewer (usually male) is ‘captivated’ in some way (the precise terms differ) by the sight of a beautiful youth (usually female). Chariclea ensures that Trachinos spares the lives of Calasiris and Theagenes by looking at him: ὑπὸ τῶν βλεμμάτων πρὸς τὸ ὑπήκοον ἐδουλοῦτο, ‘her glances reduced him to abject slavery’ (5.26.4). In Achilles Tatius, Callisthenes sees Calligone and is ‘abducted by or ‘carried away by’ the sight of her: ἦν γὰρ ἐαλωκῶς ἐκ τῆς θέας (2.16.2). Calasiris, in *Ethiopian Tales*, describes the Thracian courtesan Rhodopis as ‘fully equipped for the sexual hunt’ (πᾶσι δ’ ἀφροδισίοις θηράτροις ἐξησκημένη) (2.25.1). We are told: ‘Any man who crossed her path was trapped, for there was no escaping or resisting the net of sensuality that she trailed from her eyes.’ (οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἐντυχόντα μὴ ἡλωκέναι, οὕτως ἀφυκτόν τινα καὶ ἀπρόσμαχον ἐταιρίας σαγήνην ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἐπεσύρετο)

(2.25.1).³⁷ In these descriptions, with differing degrees of agency and deliberation, whether manipulatively or unwittingly, the women seem to be accorded power through their eyes; their appearance or gaze. By comparison, a description of Habrocomes' captivation by Anthia in *Ephesian Tales*, puts the youth in the power of *eros*, not Anthia: 'she revealed what she could of her body for Habrocomes to see. And he was captivated at the sight and was a prisoner of the god.' (1.3.2). This dynamic is reinforced in the terms in which Habrocomes reasons to himself about his 'imprisonment': 'Now I must conquer this worthless god. The girl is beautiful; but what of it?' (1.4.2–3). It is Anthia's appearance which captivates Habrocomes, but the precise terms of the description afford *eros* mastery, not Anthia. There is a triangulation of power play in this description that is lacking in those quoted above from *Ethiopian Tales* and *Leucippe and Clitophon*.

So, do these metaphors of capturing, enslaving, hunting and imprisoning, empower women in the novels? Interpreting these metaphors as according women mastery over men reflects a broader trend in classical scholarship of reading metaphors as constituting challenges to power asymmetries. Alison Sharrock, in a discussion of the 'unarmed' and 'wounded' lover in Ovid's *Amores* 1.2, writes: 'The lover, even when he is a rapist, is himself the victim of a wound...[t]he point, then, is that even though Roman sexuality is constituted on the basis of penetrability or otherwise, nonetheless even the penetrator himself can be characterised as suffering a *vulnus* through being a lover, and so the gendered categories will not stay neatly separate.'³⁸ The worry is not that this is *wrong*, exactly; rather, that it implies that confusing the gender categories through metaphor in some way provides a counter-attack, or equivalence to, the rape.

A recent contribution to the debate about how pederasty was practised also pivots (in large part) around how to weigh metaphor. Thomas Hubbard, starting from a reading of Pindar's Theoxenus poem, argues that '[t]alk of a "power differential" between men and boys is fundamentally misguided. Whatever advantage an older lover might have in experience and social connections (and as many vases show, the age differential between wooer and beloved was sometimes minimal), the youth had the countervailing power of

³⁷ Hunting metaphors are commonly used of the *hetaira*. In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Socrates advises Theodote to become an expert at the 'hunt', and compares her body to hunting nets: 3.11.10–14.

³⁸ Sharrock 2002, 98.

Beauty on his side.³⁹ At stake here is how to interpret descriptions of viewing and, within them, metaphors of powerlessness. For Hubbard, metaphors constitute empowerment, an empowerment he sees also evinced in some homoerotic representations of viewing on Greek vase painting and in the more reciprocal dynamics involved in the visual theories of intromission and extramission. He accuses David Halperin of dismissing ‘references to Love’s devastating power over men in this poem and many others’ as ‘merely an empty convention’⁴⁰ when he writes that ‘[t]he citizen-lover could afford to luxuriate in his sense of helplessness or erotic dependency precisely because his self-abandonment was at some level a chosen strategy and, in any case, his actual position of social preeminence was not in jeopardy.’⁴¹ But Halperin is not dismissing the references to the power of Love as ‘an empty convention’. Rather, he is insisting on the need to view the metaphors chosen to trope feelings and emotions as embedded in, and crucially framed by, social practice (as Hubbard also does, though the two critics give different weight to different ‘evidence’). At the heart, then, of our understanding about how ancient sexualities were constructed and experienced, are the questions of how to evaluate metaphor, and, more precisely, how we perceive rhetoric’s interrelation with social practice. These debates raise crucial and difficult questions. How does being *characterised* as something relate to the lived experience of it? Can metaphors really have any meaningful impact when set against more tangible indices of power, such as social status, or being a rapist? How much *choice* do we have (not) to ‘live by’ our metaphors?

Unlike the metaphors for sexual intercourse, and those for viewing that involve consumption, both of which reflect and reinforce power structures in the wider world (of the novels and their readers), metaphors for men viewing women that involve the men being overpowered by the women typically do not. The moment where Chariclea ‘reduces [Trachinos] to abject slavery’ through her eyes comes just after the scene where Trachinos and his pirate band have captured the ship and Chariclea, Calasiris, Theagenes, and the other passengers. They are now all literally his slaves, a point underlined a little later on when Trachinos advises Calasiris that he will marry Chariclea, rather than asks his permission, for, he says, ‘my position is sufficient guar-

³⁹ Hubbard 2002, 289.

⁴⁰ Hubbard 2002, 290.

⁴¹ Halperin 1990, 32.

antee that my will will be done...’ (5.28.2). After Callisthenes is ‘carried away’ by the sight of Calligone, he carries her away – literally. In these two examples, the striking thing is the *difference* between the figurative and the literal acts. Rhodopis, the sexual huntress, is ultimately denied any power through her gaze. In Calasiris’ self-serving and revisionist narrative (he succumbed to her seductions and went into exile out of shame), her agency – her status as a human being even – is taken away. He portrays her as little more than a cipher for a supernatural power: ‘it was clear to me that she was but acting a part in the drama of destiny, a mask, as it were, worn by the malign power that guided my fate at that time.’

It might be argued that these metaphors of abducting, enslaving and hunting through the gaze could be read as fantasies, as a means of transforming and transcending the power dynamics of the ‘real world’. We could even see this as a Stoic reading strategy. You might not be able to exercise control over your external environment, but you can control your internal reactions to it: how you view that environment and what metaphors you use to determine and colour your experiences. But it is hard to ignore that these are fantasies (psychological power) that are consolatory for lack of more tangible and concrete forms of power (social, economic and legal status, and bodily integrity). These metaphors can even be viewed as providing eroticised *justification* for the violence that women undergo in the novels. Persinna says of her daughter, Chariclea that ‘[her] very beauty is an incitement to violence against her – if indeed she has suffered anything of that kind – which accompanies her everywhere she goes’, ἐν τῷ κάλλει τὴν καθ’ ἑαυτῆς βίαν, εἰ καὶ τι τοιοῦτον ὑπέστη, περιηγούσης (10.7). If beauty is an incitement to violence, how much more so a beauty that hunts, abducts, imprisons, and enslaves?

Metaphor, literalisation, and the active eye

In the sophisticated novels, we enter a world of hypermetaphoricity, in which everything promises to be significant, where surfaces and gestures can be pressed to gain access to an inner world of significance. Everything in the realm of the real becomes a sign – belts, drinking goblets, pomegranates, crocodiles, gardens – and this creates a world of excess signification, of vigilance to the significant. What Peter Brooks writes of the novels of Balzac and Henry James, is also true of the sophisticated Greek novels. ‘If we often

become perilously close, in reading these novelists, to a feeling that the represented world won't bear the weight of the significances placed upon it, that is because the represented world is so often being used metaphorically, as a sign of something else.⁴² Mysteriosophic language heightens our sense that there are mysteries to be solved, languages in which to become initiated. Hence the drive towards – and also the difficulties involved in – reading the novels allegorically,⁴³ as Platonic allegories, Stoic allegories, or *Mysterientextes*.

Another distinctive, if not exceptional, characteristic of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus is, as Ewen Bowie has observed in relation to the vocabulary and imagery of the term *phoinix* in *Ethiopian Tales*, 'the way in which [the novelists] sustain[] the impact of metaphorical uses of words or of similes by interweaving these with literal uses.'⁴⁴ This interweaving means that metaphors become literalised, a process that draws attention to the literariness of the narratives and their uncanny instabilities, as Simon Goldhill has discussed in relation to the *Oresteia*. 'The notion of substitution (sign for sign) as outlined first by Aristotle depends upon a sense of 'narrative contract', that is a level of accepted referentiality in the text beyond which we define the code as metaphorical, symbol, fantasy, etc. A text, in other words, defines its *effet du réel*. The 'literalisation of metaphor' challenges that process of production of meaning by challenging the produced level of referentiality. It resists the move through language to a stable referentiality, forcing us by such realignments of referentiality to recognise the literariness of the text as an unstable verbal object, with a self-produced level of referentiality – or rather to recognise our production of the levels of referentiality.'⁴⁵

Moreover, the literalisation of metaphor has ramifications for gender. It cracks open what might otherwise be catachretic; it brings back to life, as it were, 'dead' or 'faded' metaphors and in doing so exposes the social reality (within the world of the novel) which those metaphors have naturalised.

The juxtaposition of metaphors for abduction and 'real' abductions discussed in the last section are examples of this, but perhaps the most striking instance is the cannibalistic 'murder' of Leucippe in Achilles Tatius (3.15.4–

⁴² Brooks 1976, 11.

⁴³ 'When there have been more metaphors in a continuous stream, another kind of speech clearly arises: and the Greeks call this kind 'allegory' (*ἀλληγορίαν*): Cicero *Orator* 94.

⁴⁴ Bowie 1998, 1.

⁴⁵ Goldhill 1984, 68–9.

6). Egyptian bandits tie Leucippe down, disembowel her, and then gather up and cook her innards before distributing and eating them. (We later learn that this is all staged, through the contrivance of an animal's stomach and theatrical knife.) In the description of the sacrifice and consumption of Leucippe, the literal eating of the woman (as it is perceived by Clitophon and the naive reader) literalises the recurrent metaphor of the consumptive gaze.⁴⁶ These episodes in the ancient novels where metaphors are literalised are shaped by, and in turn impact upon, a particular device in Roman imperial representation which uses the literalisation of metaphor as one means of characterising an emperor as a good ruler or a bad one. Mary Beard argues that '[i]n Roman imperial ideology one of the characteristics of monstrous despots is that they *literalize* the metaphors of cultural politics – to disastrous effect'.⁴⁷ One example of this is the emperor Elagabalus who 'responded to the religious metaphors of ambivalent gendering in his eastern cult by 'really' attempting to give himself a vagina.'⁴⁸ In both historical and novelistic accounts, characters are marked as beyond the pale not just by the extremity of their actions, but because those actions render cultural metaphors *literal*.

Other metaphors in the ancient novels are not literalised exactly, but do become spotlighted and defamiliarised, their meanings pressed out for examination. In *Ethiopian Tales*, Chariclea is described as 'the crowning glory and the real eye of the procession', τὴν δὲ κορωνίδα τῆς πομπῆς καὶ ὀφθαλμὸν ἀληθῶς (3.6.3). To speak of something as 'the eye of' is a faded metaphor, indicating excellence and splendour.⁴⁹ Thus John Morgan translates the phrase as 'the real jewel of the pageant'. But this description of Chariclea is anticipated and framed by the earlier account of her dream in which her eye is plucked out (2.16). Her subsequent attempt to interpret the dream constitutes a debate about what an eye symbolises and why. Chariclea understands it as being about Theagenes, 'whom I have come to regard as my eye, my soul, my all', ὃν ὀφθαλμὸν ἐγὼ καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ πάντα ἐμαυτῆς πεποίημαι (2.16.4). Cnemon interprets it instead as symbolising parents: 'it is likely that our dreams subtly present our father and mother in our wedded pair of eyes – our luminous sense, enabling our perception of the visible

⁴⁶ For more on this, and the ethnocentrism of this episode, see Morales 2004, 166–69. On the theatricality of the *Scheintod*, see Liviabella Furiani 1985.

⁴⁷ Beard 2003, 39.

⁴⁸ Beard 2003, 39. She also discusses the emperor Commodus.

⁴⁹ Cf. Pindar *Olymp.* 2. 9–10, *Pyth.* 5.18; Aesch. *Pers.* 168. At Achilles Tatius 2.1.2, Leucippe describes the rose as 'the eye of all flowers', on which see Morales 2004, 142.

world.’ The metaphorisation of the eye as a person is related to and sustained by descriptions in which the eye is personified. People become eyes; eyes become people.

In Clinias’ discourse on *eros*, after the notorious image of looking as ‘a mixing of bodies – a novel form of intimate embrace’ he characterises the eye as a *proxenos* ‘a go-between’ or ‘ambassador’ of *philia*, ‘affection’ or ‘love’ (ὀφθαλμὸς γὰρ φιλίας πρόξενος) and thus reassures that ‘the habit of daily sharing encourages reciprocity’ (*Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.9.5). Simon Goldhill has discussed this passage as one of several representations of a Stoicising and sexualised gaze in Greek imperial writing.⁵⁰ He juxtaposes this passage with similar accounts in very different writers: Clement of Alexandria and Philo. Philo uses the same image and extends it when he says ‘the senses are the pimps and ambassadors (*proxenoi*) for pleasure’ (*de gen.mundi* 166) and Clement develops the image and the personification when he rants: ‘your eyes have whored. Your sight has committed adultery before you have embraced.’ (*Protrepticus* 4). The comparisons between the descriptions in Achilles Tatius, Clement and Philo are well made, but a point of contrast is also instructive. The account in Achilles is relatively restrained. There is a repertoire of metaphors that personify and sexualise the eye which the novelists, despite their preoccupation with configurations of vision, refrain from employing with any extravagance.

Longinus complains at some length about writers who fail to demonstrate similar economy with metaphors of the eye, and his analysis is worth a pause, not least for its insights into how metaphor can be misread and domesticated. In his fourth chapter, Longinus criticises what he calls ‘frigidity’ of style. One of his illustrations is from the historian Xenophon: ‘Xenophon writes in *The Constitution of the Spartans*: “You could hear their voice less than the voice of the stone statues, you could distract their eyes less than the eyes of bronze images; you would think them more modest than the very maidens in their eyes.” (αἰδημονεστέρους δ’ ἂν αὐτοὺς ἠγήσαιο καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς παρθένων) (*On the Sublime* 4.4.8). The Greek word *kore* means both ‘pupil’ (of the eye) and ‘girl’. Instead of using *kore*, Xenophon has replaced it with *parthenos*, which has only one of the meanings of *kore*: ‘girl’ or ‘maiden’. In doing so, Xenophon cashes out, as it were, the pun latent in *kore/kore*, and so makes explicit the word’s metaphoric possibilities. Stobaeus and the L manuscript reject ὀφθαλμοῖς and insert instead

⁵⁰ Goldhill 2001, 169–80.

θαλάμοις which gives the rather prosaic reading ‘girls in their chambers’, and ‘produces an anticlimax which is probably absurd’.⁵¹ It is a telling example of the impulse to domesticate metaphor. Longinus, missing the play in Xenophon’s description, criticises the line on literalist grounds: ‘what an absurd misconception to think of everybody’s pupils as bashful! The shamelessness of a person, we are told, appears nowhere so plainly as in the eyes.’ He illustrates this by quoting *Iliad* 1.225 where Achilles describes Agamemnon as being ‘with a dog’s eyes’. He then goes on to criticise the terms in which Timaeus laments the actions of Agathocles, the ruler of Syracuse. Agathocles was said to have eloped with his cousin from the unveiling ceremony of her wedding to another man. ‘Who would have done this,’ rails Timaeus, ‘if he had not had whores in his eyes instead of maidens?’ (ὁ τίς ἂν ἐποίησεν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς κόρας, μὴ πόρνas ἔχων;) (4.4.5).

This set of metaphors, which are provoked by and elaborate upon the pun inherent in the word *kore*, are used to similar effect by Clement in the passage quoted above. Longinus rails against these uses of metaphor, judging them, ‘lapses of dignity [which] arise in literature through a single cause: that desire for novelty of thought which is all the rage today’ (4.4.5). The ancient Greek novelists might exhibit ‘lapses in dignity’ elsewhere, but not through labouring metaphor in quite the way as, in Longinus’ view, Timaeus does. The double sense of *kore* might be detected by the reader, for example in the description of Chariclea’s dream, where *diakoresas* can be read as the forcible extraction of an eye and (if we interpret the dream as symbolising rape⁵²) ‘defloration’,⁵³ but this is left latent, not laboured.

What Longinus might have thought of metaphor in the Greek novel can only be conjectured. His interests are primarily stylistic; mine have been ideological (not that the two can be separated). This chapter has been centrally concerned with two issues. The first is the genre’s special relationship to metaphor. It has argued that the novels dramatise the operations of metaphor as characterised by Aristotle and other ancient writers. Tracing this can better illuminate the workings and pleasures both of metaphor, and of certain features of the novel, such as its ethnographical operations. The second is gender and, in particular, the metaphors of sex and seduction. These mostly reaffirm the traditional gender hierarchy, but on occasion can be read as sites

⁵¹ So D.A. Russell’s commentary ad loc.

⁵² As Hunter suggests; Hunter (1998), 48.

⁵³ Cf similarly Lollianus *Phoenicica* A2 recto 10 διακορήσεως.

of resistance. I have considered the literalisation of metaphor in the novels, and its role in exposing the social realities behind metaphorical representation. I have also argued against the tendency in scholarship more generally to read metaphors as constituting effective challenges to power asymmetries, and have insisted on the importance of trying to ascertain how rhetoric relates to social practice (at least) within the novels. Through the covert violence of metaphors that objectify, the flamboyant violence of metaphors for sexual intercourse, and the eroticised justification for violence provided by metaphors of hunting, abducting, and enslaving, metaphors can indeed be dangerous.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ My thanks to Michael Paschalis and Stavros Frangoulides for providing the opportunity to think harder about metaphor, to Stephen Harrison for his kind editorial eye, and to Anthony Boyle and Simon Goldhill for their generous criticism.

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