

## And There's Another Country: Translation as Metaphor in Heliodorus

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Much of what still shapes our discussion of Heliodorus's extraordinary *Aethiopica* flows from two seminal articles published in 1982, by John Morgan and Jack Winkler.<sup>1</sup> Both called attention to the remarkable interest the author took in the polyglot nature of the novel's world and to the problems of translation or mutual incomprehension which that polyglot world entailed. While Morgan emphasized the role Heliodorus's portrayal of translation difficulties played in fashioning a realistic affect for the novel's narrative mode, Winkler saw the same comments primarily as further evidence for the hermeneutic comedy of the novel's complex narrative and the perpetual problems of interpretation. It would be easy but unhelpful to play up the differences between these two approaches: Winkler's formulation was more eye-catchingly postmodern and has consequently gotten much more play in subsequent discussions, but it is clear that the two narrative effects are by no means mutually exclusive.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Judith Perkins has argued for a performative notion of identity in the novel, suggesting that Heliodorus offers a model for dual identity.<sup>3</sup> Appealing as this model is, I believe that the novel's representations of translation, both in its successes and failures, demonstrate that not everyone translates or is translated as well as the heroine Charicleia. The narrative effects of translation within the novel, especially the issues raised through the narrative embroidered by Persinna, Charicleia's mother, onto the cloth left with her abandoned child, foreground

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan 1982, Winkler 1982.

<sup>2</sup> The valuable discussion of Saïd 1992, which concentrates on Philostratus and Heliodorus, acknowledges realistic and hermeneutic effects, but emphasizes the latter in Heliodorus. I am most grateful to Ewen Bowie for calling my attention to this article.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins 1999.

the role of language in cultural identity and translation as a metaphor for cultural exchange. Whether all identities are translatable remains to be seen.

The *Ethiopica* notoriously begins with a tableau of visual and verbal incomprehension. An unnamed band of brigands comes upon the two individuals we will subsequently identify as Theagenes and Charicleia, surrounded by a scene of slaughter. The young woman wears a garland and quiver and sits leaning on a bow, gazing down at a wounded young man at her feet. As readers, we see and interpret through the narrator's eyes, then hear the young people speak to each other—in Greek. Only then do we return to the “men in brigand gear” (ἄνδρες ἐν ὅπλοις ληστρικοῖς, 1. 1. 1)<sup>4</sup> who appeared in the very first sentence and focalize the narrative again through their eyes—and ears—as they approach Charicleia.

Tim Whitmarsh<sup>5</sup> reminds us how Charicleia is compared to a goddess: (θεὸν Ἄρτεμιν ἢ τὴν ἐγγώριον Ἴσιν, 1.2.6, “Artemis or the native (local) Isis” (my translation). If we do indeed see from the point of view of the brigands, it seems curious that Artemis is just Artemis, apparently familiar, but Isis merits an adjective, ἐγγώριον. That adjective might be interpreted in at least two ways. She could be the goddess native to the country—a reminder, building on the mention of the Nile, that this country is Egypt. Yet, following an Artemis who seems familiar, ἐγγώριον might mean the goddess of that country which is not the narrator's, implying a distance between the worlds of observer and observed, and opening up the question of whether we really see from the brigands' point of view. We shall return to the problem of who is ἐγγώριος—and where—later.

This female figure leaps up to speak to the brigands, and the well-known tragic metaphors of this text<sup>6</sup> appear in a scene of mutual incomprehension:

“λύσατε τῶν περιεστηκότων ἀλγεινῶν φόνῳ τῷ καθ' ἡμῶν δράμα τὸ περὶ ἡμᾶς καταστρέψαντες.” Ἡ μὲν ταῦτα ἐπετραγῶδει, οἱ δὲ οὐδὲν συνιέναι τῶν λεγομένων ἔχοντες (1. 3. 1–2)

<sup>4</sup> The text is quoted from the Budé edition. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are those of John Morgan in Reardon 1989.

<sup>5</sup> This volume, pp. 87–105.

<sup>6</sup> The classic study of stage metaphor in Heliodorus is Walden 1894 (on this passage, p. 6). Heliodorus can even be self-consciously ironic about his use of such metaphors. Knemon accuses Calasiris of trying to distract him from the main narrative thus: “wheeling on this subplot which, so the saying goes, has nothing to do with Dionysos” (2. 24. 4). A fortiori, a prose narrative has nothing to do with Dionysus! Cf. Walden 1894. 38–39.

“... Set us free from the woes that best us! Kill us and so bring our story to a close!”

But of this tragic outburst they could understand not a word ....

It thus would not be strictly true to say that Heliodorus introduces the problem of translation and linguistic comprehension at the very beginning of his novel. In fact, he lets us see the scene and understand spoken Greek before we discover that those whose point of view we have adopted cannot themselves understand Greek.

Conveniently, these Greekless brigands are quickly superseded by Thyamis and his band of robbers, who drive the first group away and seize booty and prisoners alike. Thyamis himself seizes Charicleia, and they establish a minimal communication:

Ἡ δὲ τῶν μὲν λεγομένων οὐδὲν συνιῖσα τὸ δὲ προσταττόμενον συμβαλοῦσα ... (1. 4. 1)

She could not understand a word he said, but guessed what it was that he was commanding her to do.

Συνεῖς οὖν ὁ λήσταρχος τὸ μὲν τι τοῖς λεγομένοις, πλέον δὲ τοῖς νεύμασι (1. 4. 2)

The chief understood what she meant, partly from her words, but mainly from her gestures.

Though the narrator does not explicitly say so here, Thyamis has understood enough to identify their language as Greek.<sup>7</sup> As a result, he orders the Greek captive Knemon to be put in their tent “so that they [the prisoners] might have someone to talk to” (τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι ἔνεκεν, 1. 7. 3). Their mutual Greek identity immediately establishes a bond among the fellow captives:

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<sup>7</sup> His ability to recognize a language as Greek is made explicit later when, despairing over a defeat, Thyamis returns to the dark cave wherein he has left Charicleia and kills a woman “who spoke to him in Greek” (1. 30. 7).

“καὶ ἅμα Ἑλληνας ὄντας οἰκτεῖρω καὶ αὐτὸς Ἑλλην γεγονώς.” “Ἑλλην; ὦ θεοί” ἐπεβόησαν ὑφ’ ἠδονῆς ἅμα οἱ ξένοι. “Ἑλλην ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ γένος καὶ τὴν φωνήν· ...” (1. 8. 6)

“... I feel sympathy for you because you are Greek, and I am a Greek myself.”

“A Greek! Heaven be praised!” exclaimed the strangers in joyful unison. “Truly a Greek in birth and speech!”

Note, however, that speaking Greek is not a sufficient guarantee of sympathy: Knemon asserts, and the young couple explicitly welcome, his claim to have been born a Greek as well. He might just have been a quick study at languages—as is hinted by a later passage. Our readerly expectations that we might learn Theagenes and Charicleia’s story are here frustrated, and instead Knemon tells his own story, fleshing out the details of his Greek birth and subsequent exile. The next day all are summoned before the robber chieftain:

...τὰ λεχθησόμενα φράζειν τὸν Κνήμωνα καὶ τοῖς αἰχμαλώτοις προστάξας (συνίη γὰρ ἤδη τῶν Αἰγυπτίων, ὁ δὲ Θύαμις οὐκ ἠκρίβου τὰ Ἑλλήνων).... (1. 19. 3)

Instructing Knemon to interpret to the prisoners what he was about to say—for Knemon could by now understand Egyptian, whereas Thyamis was not fluent in Greek ....

Thyamis has the physical power here, but he must rely on one Greek prisoner to translate his words and will for other Greek prisoners. The ability to learn other languages, and thus to perform other identities, is not common to all.

On the historiographical and realistic level a number of tropes appear in this scene with Thyamis that will recur, especially at the end of the novel, where Theagenes and Charicleia are again captured, this time by the Ethiopian forces under King Hydaspes who are besieging Syene. Under orders, the Persian eunuch Bagoas is taking them back to Egypt, but they are intercepted by an Ethiopian scouting party which happens to include “an Egyptian who could also speak Persian” (Αἰγύπτιον τε ἀπὸ σφῶν ἓνα τε καὶ περσίζοντα τὴν φωνήν, 8. 17. 2). Theagenes and Charicleia are taken to Hy-

daspes, who declares the captured pair will be the first sacrifices for this victorious campaign but also provides them with a guard troop capable of speaking Greek (μοῖραν αὐτάρκη τῶν ὁμογλώσσων, 9. 1. 5). Presumably one of these guards is later explicitly identified as a “half-caste Greek” (μιξέλληνά, 9. 24. 2) who informs them when they are summoned before the king.

Linguistic identity is self-consciously made the basis for recognition in the novel also. Fearing possible separation, Theagenes and Charicleia agree in advance on an overdetermined system of recognition signs. They will write (ἐπιγράφειν, 5. 5. 1) what “the Pythian” (masculine or feminine, the text dutifully notes!) has done, where and at what time. They choose conspicuous places for these messages and show each other recognition tokens (a ring for Charicleia, a scar for Theagenes) for later use. Finally they choose code names or symbols for themselves:

ἐκ δὲ λόγων σύμβολα ἢ μὲν λαμπάδα ὁ δὲ φοίνικα συνετίθεντο (5. 5. 2)

They also agreed upon certain verbal signs: Charicleia chose the word “torch;” Theagenes “palm.”

Her use of this word “torch” forces Theagenes to recognize a dirty and disguised Charicleia at 6. 6. 7, when he (rather improbably) fails at first to see through these surface blemishes to the beloved for whom he has been searching.<sup>8</sup>

Winkler suggests that “Heliodoros uses knowledge and ignorance of a language in a dramatic and significant way to underscore the cross-purposes, complications and dénouements of his plot.”<sup>9</sup> In his view plot complications cause mention of language issues to cluster at the beginning and end of the novel because of the concentration there on themes of interpretation and decoding. The passages we have looked at so far do not necessarily entail

<sup>8</sup> Perkins 1999. 201 cites this scene while arguing for “the slippery nature of ‘identity’” in the novel, but language, and specifically the Greek language, seems to be the unshakable core of identity here.

<sup>9</sup> Winkler 1982. 104 [1999. 297]. The earliest mention of the problem of translation in Greek literature occurs in the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* 113–115, where Aphrodite, disguised as a mortal, explains to Anchises that she knows the Trojan language because she was raised by a Trojan nurse. See Smith 1981 50 and 118 n. 54. Allen et al. 1936. 360–361 (*ad* 113) compares later scenes of translation also.

such a connotation and are largely consistent with the building of a historiographical illusion. Yet other mentions of translation and interpretation complicate the picture. Historiographical realism can easily be dispensed with when it might interfere with the immediacy of the narrative, while other passages point us further toward language's intimate relation with cultural identity.

Historiographical realism seems to be at the fore at the beginning of the encounter with the witch of Bessa in Book VI. Theagenes has been captured and separated from Calasiris and Charicleia. Pursuing him and his captors, Calasiris and Charicleia come across the aftermath of a battle near Bessa and find an old woman clasping one of the fallen bodies littering the field. The narrator notes that Calasiris speaks Egyptian to the old woman (τοῦ Καλασίριδος πρὸς τὸ γύναιον αἰγυπτιάζοντος, 6. 12. 3). She tells the story of the battle, supplying news of Theagenes, and concludes by offering to accompany them to the next village—after she has performed the rites for her dead son, for which she requests privacy. Calasiris translates all this for Charicleia:

Ταῦτα εἰπούσης ὁ Καλάσιρις ἅπαντα πρὸς τὴν Χαρίκλειαν φράσας καὶ παραλαβὼν μεθίστατο (6. 14. 1)

Calasiris repeated to Charicleia all that the old woman had said, and together they moved away.

The old woman turns out to be a witch who reanimates the corpse of her dead son and questions him about the fate of her other son. Here there is no mention of translation: both Calasiris and Charicleia seem to understand immediately the questions the witch is putting to the corpse (6. 14. 5). Charicleia proves her comprehension by begging Calasiris to question the corpse about the fate of Theagenes (6. 14. 7), though Calasiris refuses. The corpse, which has only been nodding answers heretofore (6.14.6 ἐπινεύσας, νεύμασι), now speaks directly to his witch mother, prophesying that both her other son and she herself will die, in punishment for her black magical practices. The corpse calls attention to the witnesses and considers it a further outrage that a girl has been eavesdropping on this necromantic rite:

κόρη τις τῶν ἐπ' ἐμοὶ γίνεται θεωρὸς καὶ πάντων ἐπακροᾶται...  
(6. 15. 4)

a young girl is also witness to your necromancy and can hear every word that is spoken ...

The corpse's speech is reported in Greek, though within the fiction he must surely have answered his mother in Egyptian, yet no reference to translation is made to mar the immediacy of the scene's impact.<sup>10</sup> The corpse even answers the question Charicleia wanted to ask, prophesying her reunion with Theagenes and ultimate happy fate. No reader will object to this proceeding: in the thick of this hair-raising tale no one wants to stop for simultaneous translation. Yet the suppression of an issue deliberately raised at the beginning of the same episode serves neither historiographical realism nor hermeneutic complexity.<sup>11</sup> Rather, Calasiris's use of Egyptian at the beginning of the sequence establishes a gulf between the observers (himself and Charicleia) and the alien scene of necromancy observed. Calasiris refuses to participate in black magic, as even the corpse acknowledges. Any allusion to his translating the words of either the witch or the corpse would undermine the separation of observers and observed.<sup>12</sup>

Greek can be used to conceal the truth from dangerous or unsympathetic audiences. The Greek merchant Nausicles whispers in Greek to Charicleia in front of his Persian host Mitranes when he falsely identifies her as Thisbe:

ἡρέμα καὶ ἑλληνιστὶ παραφθεγγόμενος ὡς ἂν λανθάνοι τοὺς παρόντας  
... ἢ γὰρ δὴ Χαρίκλεια γλώσσης τε ἑλληνίδος αἰσθομένη καὶ τι καὶ  
συνοῖσον ἀνύεσθαι πρὸς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς στοχαζομένη... (5. 8. 4)

... beneath his breath he whispered to her in Greek so that his companions would not know what he was saying ... Charicleia, hearing the

<sup>10</sup> Compare an earlier instance at 5. 9. 2, where Mitranes sends Oroondates a letter that is quoted in the text. Since both are Persians, the text should be in Persian, but nothing is said about its presentation to us in Greek..

<sup>11</sup> Though the implications are more comic, one might compare the scene in Apuleius where another corpse has been reanimated and then accuses his adulterous wife of murdering him. Some in the crowd believe him; others clamor that the lies of a corpse should not be believed (*alii mendacio cadaveris fidem non habendam*, *Met.* 2. 29).

<sup>12</sup> See also Reardon 2001. 324 on structural analogy to the *Odyssey* in this scene.

Greek tongue and guessing that the man might help her in some way  
 ....<sup>13</sup>

Nausicles is not a completely sympathetic character. The narrator suggests that his motivation here is “a merchant’s eye for profit” (ἐμπορικόν τι καὶ δραστήριον ἐννοήσας, 5. 8. 3), but displays even less sympathy for the “barbarian” Mitranes. Charicleia plays along, in the first instance because she hears him speak Greek, and secondly because she hopes for her own advantage. The Ethiopian king and the gymnosophist philosophers similarly speak Greek to conceal their dealings from the crowd at the end of the novel, passages to which we shall return later.

The traditional enmity of Greeks and Persians underlies the deception of Mitranes. Both enmity and respect inform the scene where the captive Theagenes is brought before the Persian Arsace and refuses to prostrate himself. Arsace, forgives him because, as she explains to the court:

“Σύγγνωτε” εἶπεν “ὡς ἀπείρω καὶ ξένω καὶ τὸ ὅλον Ἕλληνι καὶ τὴν ἐκεῖθεν ὑπεροψίαν καθ’ ἡμῶν νοσοῦντι.” (7. 19. 2)

“You must forgive him. He is a stranger and does not know our ways. He is every inch a Greek and is afflicted with the scorn that all Greeks feel for us.”

Language is cultural identity in their subsequent dialogue, and neither is willing to yield. Arsace is:

εἰποῦσα διὰ τοῦ ἐρμηνέως, συνειῶσα γὰρ τὴν Ἑλλάδα γλωτταν οὐκ ἐφθέγγετο (7. 19. 3)

speaking through an interpreter, for though understanding the Greek language, she did not speak it.

I think we should not assume that the cultured and powerful Arsace cannot speak Greek,<sup>14</sup> or (like Thyamis) cannot speak it well. She can be generous

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<sup>13</sup> I have modified the translation of Morgan 1989 to preserve the parallelism of the participles.



in forgiving Greek cultural limitations (the refusal of *proskunesis*), but she speaks Persian both for the benefit of the court audience and to reinforce the position of Persian cultural superiority.<sup>15</sup>

Ability to speak or understand Greek is elsewhere a measure of character sympathy in the novel.<sup>16</sup> One of the most treacherous villains, the robber Thermouthis, whose very name means a poisonous serpent, knows exactly one word of Greek: the name of the equally treacherous Thisbe: “for her name was the one word of Greek he knew” (ὄνομαστί τε Θίσιβην ἐκάλει, μέχρι τοῦ ὀνόματος ἑλληνίζων, 2. 12. 4).<sup>17</sup>

The greater one’s ability in Greek, the greater the sympathy the character evokes. The Persian eunuch Bagoas and his fellows “understand a little of what was said” (συνίεσαν γὰρ ἡρέμα τῶν λεγομένων, 8. 13. 5) by hero and heroine at the Persian court. Later Bagoas speaks to them:

ψελλιζόμενος τὴν Ἑλλάδα φωνὴν καὶ παράσημα τὰ πολλὰ ἐπισύρων (8. 15. 3)

... in a faltering Greek with many grammatical errors and a thick accent.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Morgan 1989 here translates “she could not speak it.” The Greek οὐκ ἐφθέγγετο could—but need not—imply that she lacked the ability to. Seth Benardete (*Encounters & Reflections*, Chicago, 2002, p. 54) tells an apt story about language and cultural identity shaped by war:

At the dinner, Lady Beazley was about to be introduced to [Peter von] Blanckenhagen and she said in a loud voice, “If he is one of those Germans who came over after the war, I shall not speak to him.” So they didn’t meet, you see. Then they all sat down to dinner, and somebody was telling a story about a hedgehog. Blanckenhagen asked, “What’s the German for hedgehog?” All these professors sitting around the table don’t know. Then Lady Beazley said, “I know. But I haven’t spoken German since 1933 and I don’t intend to start now.”

<sup>15</sup> One might also compare Cato speaking Latin to the Athenian assembly in 191 BC (Plutarch *Cato* 12. 5) or Aemilius Paullus declaring to the Macedonians the peace terms of 168 in Latin, although he had previous demonstrated his fluent Greek (Livy 45. 29. 1–3; 45. 7. 4–45. 8. 8; see also Gruen 1992. 245 and *passim*).

<sup>16</sup> Saïd 1992 sees a similiar connection in Philostratus’s *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, noting “le lien qui s’établit entre la connaissance de grec et la valeur morale” (172) and how “les fautes de langue sont toujours associées à un manque de culture ou à un défaut de caractère et vice versa” (171).

<sup>17</sup> Otherwise, Knemon must translate for him (2. 18. 3), and in translating shows his own dismay at what Thermouthis has said.

<sup>18</sup> As Morgan 1982. 259 notes, there are no noticeable errors in what is reported of Bagoas’s Greek.

His status as a sympathetic character grows throughout the narrative, and the refusal of Theagenes and Charicleia to abandon him when he is injured in battle (8. 16. 6) is a key reason why they are all captured by the Ethiopians.

In the inset narrative of how Charicles acquired his foster daughter Charicleia in Egypt, the Ethiopian envoy first speaks to him “in faltering Greek”, ἑλληγίζων οὐ βεβαίως, 2. 30. 1). Later in their private negotiations the envoy says that he has carefully observed Charicles and “found your character to be that of a true Greek” (Ἑλληνικὸν ὄντα τῷ ὄντι περιειργασμένος, 2. 31. 5).

Can genuine Greek identity be acquired? Charicleia’s experience suggests that it can. When Charicles becomes the foster father of this seven year old child, she naturally does not yet understand Greek (οὐπω τῆς Ἑλλάδος συνειῶσα φωνῆς, 2. 33. 1). She acquires it very rapidly, however (οὕτω τάχιστα μὲν τὴν Ἑλλάδα γλωτταν εἴλκυσε, 2. 33. 3). In fact, Charicleia acquires a rhetorical and philosophical education which equips her to defend her choice of virginity over marriage, as Charicles explains to Calasiris!

...τὴν ἐκ λόγων πολυπειρίαν, ἣν ποικίλην ἐδιδασκάζαμην πρὸς κατασκευὴν τοῦ τὸν ἄριστον ἠρήσθαι βίον, ἐπανατείνεται... (2. 33. 5)

... she makes great play with that subtlety in argument whose various forms I taught her as a basis for choosing the best way of life.

At one point in his fascinating article on “The Genealogy of Hellenism,” Tim Whitmarsh discusses the construction of Charicleia’s Hellenic nature and focusses on Charicles’ comparison of her effect on observers in this context to that of an “original statue”:<sup>19</sup>

καθάπερ ἀρχέτυπον ἄγαλμα πᾶσαν ὄψιν καὶ διάνοιαν ἐφ’ ἑαυτὴν ἐπιστρέφει. (2. 33. 3)

... just like an original statue she draws all eyes and hearts to herself.  
(trans. adapted from Morgan and Whitmarsh)

<sup>19</sup> Whitmarsh 1998. 107–109.

Whitmarsh highlights the clichéd register of comparison (Charicleia is like a statue) and the oxymoron of ἀρχέτυπον ἄγαλμα, an “original statue.” It is indeed a phrase that, if we concentrate on it long enough, will fall apart under our gaze: is not a statue always a copy of something else, not an original? That, and the Platonic discourse easily mobilized by thoughts of originality and copying, may depend on the angle from which we view the ἄγαλμα. Whitmarsh sees this as a statue fashioned by Charicles, an attempt to make her “really” his daughter, even though she has a natural father elsewhere. The passage quoted, though, focusses on her effect on observers: she is not so much a thing made as a sight demanding to be seen. Moreover, this comes immediately after a previous simile with καθάπερ, comparing her to “a vigorous young plant” (καθάπερ ἔρνος τι). Perhaps she is a self-made ἄγαλμα. Her eventual mastery of rhetoric suggests that she has become a better Greek than Charicles himself.<sup>20</sup>

Making a Greek out of an alien child may differ from remaking an alien adult. The character of Calasiris constitutes one of the most interesting puzzles of the extent to which knowledge of Greek language confers Greek identity and values. Our view of him is first focalized by Knemon, who sees an old man pacing by the Nile whose “clothes were of a Greekish appearance” (στολή καὶ ἐσθῆς ἢ ἄλλη πρὸς τὸ ἐλληνικώτερον βλέπουσα, 2. 21. 2). He addresses the old man and is answered, both presumably in Greek, though the narrative is indirect discourse here. Then:

θαυμάσας ὁ Κνήμων “Ἐλλην δὲ” εἶπεν “ὁ ξένος;” “Οὐχ Ἐλλην” εἶπεν  
 “ἀλλ’ ἐντεῦθεν Αἰγύπτιος.” “Πόθεν οὖν ἐλληνίζεις τὴν στολήν;”  
 “Δυστυχήματα” ἔφη ... “Ἰλιόθεν με φέρεις ... καὶ σμῆνος κακῶν...  
 (2. 21. 4–5)

<sup>20</sup> In the process, her original Ethiopian linguistic identity is erased, as Perkins 1999. 206 notes: when she arrives in Ethiopia, she requires an interpreter to speak to the Ethiopians and shows not the slightest trace memory of her original speech. She was seven years old (2. 30. 6) when handed over to Charicles, about the age at which Greek male children left the women’s quarters and began to learn outside the home (Garland 1990. 134; cf. Aristotle, Politics 7. 15. 6 [1336b]). The age of seven is a traditional dividing line from Solon (fr. 19. 2) onward. Aphrodite apparently learned Trojan from her nurse throughout her childhood (*Hom. Hymn Aphr.* 114–115; cf. n. 9, above), as well as Greek, thus accounting for her continued bilingualism. Prolonged residence abroad could corrupt the Attic even of adults, according to Solon fr. 36. 11. I am grateful to my colleague Louise Pratt for much guidance in these matters.

“This stranger is a Greek,” exclaimed Knemon in astonishment.

“No, not a Greek,” said the other. “I come from hereabouts. I am an Egyptian.”

“How do you come to be dressed like a Greek then?”

“... my misfortunes! ... It is an *Odyssey* of woe... a hornets' nest of suffering....”

The typically Heliodoran puzzle here is why a man claiming to be Egyptian wears Greek garb, speaks Greek well enough to mislead a native speaker, and even alludes to Homer and a Greek proverb. Morgan's “*Odyssey of woe*” certainly captures the tone of the proverb *κακῶν Ἰλιάς*, “an *Iliad* of evils.” The other echo here is of *Odyssey* 9. 39: Ἰλιόθεν με φέρων ἄνεμος. A reader or hearer needs not only to know the proverb but also Homer's text to appreciate this non-native speaker's play with form as well. Might we then not also render Calasiris's “Ἰλιόθεν με φέρεις” as “you translate me from Ilium”? The verb *ἐρμηνεύω* and related nouns are standard terms for translation in later Greek, but in earlier periods *μεταφέρω* is the verb.<sup>21</sup> Certainly no one is moved around as much in this novel as Calasiris, not even our peripatetic heroine and hero, and his translatability from one cultural system to another, like that of Theagenes and Charicleia, is central to the novel's meaning.

Calasiris translates as well as being translated. We have seen him at work with the witch of Bessa, but earlier and even more crucial is his role as the translator of Charicleia's story as it is embroidered on band of cloth left with her (τὸ κατ' αὐτὴν διήγημα κατεστήχθαι, 4. 5. 1). Given the band by Charicles, Calasiris first reads it by himself:

...ἐπελεγόμην τὴν ταινίαν γράμμασιν Αἰθιοπικοῖς οὐ δημοτικοῖς ἀλλὰ βασιλικοῖς ἐστιγμένην, ἃ δὴ τοῖς Αἰγυπτίων ἱερατικοῖς καλουμένοις ὁμοίωται. (4. 8. 1)

I began to read the band—it was embroidered in the Ethiopian script, not the demotic variety but the royal kind, which closely resembles the so-called hieratic script of Egypt.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Plato *Critias* 113a.

I believe that readers are meant to recognize here, by analogy with the hieroglyphs of Egypt, a writing system which is pictographic rather than alphabetic.<sup>22</sup> After reading it on his own, Calasiris speaks to Chariclea, establishes that she has not read the band herself, and then does so for her:

Ὡς δὲ ἀνακαλύπτειν ὅσα ἔχω γινώσκειν ἰκέτευεν, ἔλεγον ἅπαντα τὴν τε γραφὴν ἐπιὼν ἐν μέρει καὶ πρὸς ἕπος ἐρμηνεύων. (4. 11. 4)

“She begged me to reveal all I knew, so I told her everything, reading through the document in detail and translating it word by word.”

There is no clear explanation of how Calasiris knows Ethiopian hieroglyphs. I believe we are meant to assume, though I cannot prove it, that the Ethiopian and Egyptian hieroglyphs are closely related, the former perhaps even borrowed from the latter. Analogously to Japanese and Chinese ideograms, a competent reader of Egyptian hieroglyphs could decipher the meaning of Ethiopian hieroglyphs without necessarily knowing the words of spoken Ethiopian to which the hieroglyphs corresponded.<sup>23</sup>

The hieroglyphs, however, are not the secret language of Ethiopia. The real secret language is revealed almost casually and in passing when the captive Theagenes and Charicleia are brought before king Hydaspes at his field headquarters:

τὴν φωνὴν ἐλληνίζων, σπουδάζεται γὰρ ἴδε ἢ γλώττα παρὰ τοῖς Γυμνοσοφισταῖς καὶ βασιλεῦσιν Αἰθιοπῶν... (9. 25. 3)

<sup>22</sup> Calasiris prefaces the account he gives in Greek with the phrase τὸ γράμμα διηγούμενον. (“the following narrative,” Morgan). What precisely does τὸ γράμμα mean here? I can find no precise parallel for the singular noun γράμμα meaning “narrative” or “text.” Does it emphasize the pictorial quality of the script as a whole, or is it by analogy an “inscription,” like the Delphic inscription in Plato, *Phaedrus* 229e?

<sup>23</sup> Historically, Meroitic peoples did use a hieroglyphic script borrowed from Egypt: Morgan 1989. 432 n. 111. I do not believe it is necessary to establish that the original reader of Heliodorus was likely to know this, even less to establish that a competent reader of Egyptian hieroglyphs could sort out Ethiopian hieroglyphs. Both are eminently plausible conjectures a reasonably well educated reader could make on the basis of Heliodorus’s text alone. Saïd 1992. 175 believes that Heliodorus’s text displays inconsistencies about the mutual comprehensibility of spoken Egyptian and Ethiopian, but it seems likely the instances she mentions are simply more examples of what she herself acknowledges as “la convention littéraire qui abolit magiquement la barrière des langues ....”

... he ... asked in Greek (for this language is cultivated among the naked sages and rulers of Ethiopia)....

Now we must flash ahead to the victory celebrations in Ethiopia where Theagenes and Charicleia are to be sacrificed. After Charicleia puts on her Delphic robe and awes the crowd, Persinna wants to save her from being sacrificed, but Hydaspes believes it is impossible and presses the gymnosophists to begin the ceremony. Though nothing is reported by the narrator, presumably Hydaspes is speaking Ethiopian at this point. Then the narrative says:

Καὶ ὁ Σισιμίθρης “Εὐφήμησον” ἀπεκρίνατο, ἑλληνίζων ὥστε μὴ τὸ πλῆθος ἐπαίειν,.... (10. 9. 6)

“Do not speak such words,” answered Sisimithres in Greek, so that the people should not understand what he was saying ....

After Sisimithres and Persinna have together explained the birth of the white Charicleia and her subsequent abandonment, attendants bring out the picture of Andromeda from the palace and match Charicleia to it, bringing a response from the crowd:

ἄλλων πρὸς ἄλλους, ὅσοι καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν συνίεσαν τὰ λεγόμενα καὶ πραττόμενα, διαδηλούντων.... (10. 15. 1)

those members of the crowd with the slightest understanding of what was being said and done explained it to their neighbors ....

The suddenly arrived Charicles seizes Theagenes and accuses him of kidnapping Charicleia. Some in the crowd understand some of this; others simply follow the gestures and action:

τὰ μὲν ῥήματα οἱ συνιέντες τὰ ὄρώμενα δὲ οἱ λοιποὶ θαυμάζοντες. (10. 35. 2)

the few who could understand his words were no more astounded by what he said than were the rest by what they saw.

When Hydaspes finally acknowledges Theagenes as the legitimate husband of Charicleia, the crowd cheers wildly:

τὰ μὲν πλείστα τῶν λεγομένων οὐ συνιέντες, τὰ ὄντα δὲ ἐκ τῶν προγεγονότων ἐπὶ τῇ Χαρικλείᾳ συμβάλλοντες, ἢ τάχα καὶ ἐξ ὀρμῆς θείας ἢ σύμπαντα ταῦτα ἐσκηνογράφησεν εἰς ὑπόνοιαν τῶν ἀληθῶν ἐλθόντες. (10. 38. 3)

for though they had understood very little of what was said, they were able to surmise the facts of the matter from what had already transpired concerning Charicleia; or else perhaps they had been brought to a realization of the truth by the same divine force that had staged the whole drama ....

The final stages of the drama must be played out in Ethiopian to make sure all understand:

ὁ Σισιμίθρης, οὐχ ἑλληνίζων ἀλλ' ὥστε καὶ πάντας ἐπαίειν αἰθιοπίζων, ... (10. 39. 1)

Sisimithres, speaking Greek no longer but Ethiopian for the whole assembly to understand ....

and Hydaspes replies in kind:

ὁ Ὑδάσπης τὴν ἐγχώριον γλῶτταν καὶ αὐτὸς νῦν ἰεῖς ... (10. 40. 1)

Now Hydaspes too spoke in the native tongue ....

But it is precisely that category of the ἐγχώριον, the “native,” “indigenous,” “in-country” which the novel’s play with translation interrogates. When we first encounter the woven *taenia* or band that tells Charicleia’s story, the Ethiopian envoy describes it as written in “native characters” (γράμμασιν ἐγχωρίοις, 2. 31. 2), and this piece of writing itself is ultimately carried back to its native country. There, however, as Whitmarsh notes, neither the writing itself nor Persinna’s acknowledgement of authorship suffices to connect

the text infallibly to Charicleia herself.<sup>24</sup> Where is she ἐγγώριος? The answer to that question requires further actions and further discussion—all of which we as readers experience in Greek.

For all of Heliodorus's acknowledgement of a multilingual world, the movement of the novel seems to be toward a fusion of at least two languages and cultures. Some in the crowds witnessing the final event have understood Greek well enough to follow what has been going on verbally, while the majority have understood it visually. Visual language supplies the broad outlines, while Greek conveys the details. All the Ethiopians may not yet speak Greek, but it looks like the tendency is in that direction.

Does Heliodorus then dream of a world where everyone ultimately speaks Greek? The answer is by no means a clearcut "yes." I do think, however, that at some level he does dream of a universal translatability, in part through a universal visual language constituted by the novel's theatrical themes and metaphors, and in part through the novel's own return, after every diversion, to the language shared by all the protagonists, Hellenes and Ethiopians alike: Greek.

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<sup>24</sup> Whitmarsh 1998. 120–122.



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