

Divine Epistemology: the relationship between speech and writing in the *Aithiopika*.

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1. The perspectives presented in the recent Cambridge *Studies in Heliodorus* (1998) demonstrate how complex and interpretively challenging it can be to read the *Aithiopika*.¹ For instance, John Morgan sees the triumph of Hellenism in the novel's ending as 'the hero and heroine become Ethiopian [and] Ethiopia becomes ideally Greek'.² Tim Whitmarsh, on the other hand, argues that the novel contests its own genealogy and identity as it plays with hybridities of genre, culture, and perspective. The dominance of Greek mainstream culture is undermined as the story's trajectory leads away from Greece to the far side of the world and as Greek culture takes a back seat to the cultures of Egypt and Ethiopia. Whitmarsh ties his reading into the blurring and overlapping of cultural identities during this period in the broad Roman Empire. Heliodorus' novel, then, mirrors his culturally diverse society.³ That two such respectable scholars can conceive of such divergent readings shows the novel's ability to accommodate contradictory orientations.

2. Another facet of culture at this time that surely shares this diversity of orientation is religion. Mystery cults – including those of Mithras, Isis and Christ – joined more traditional state/civic religions and personal cults in the richest variety of creeds yet seen in the empire. That most of these religious options were inclusive instead of exclusive increased the possible configura-

¹ I would like to thank Vicky Rimell, Jason König, and the other scholars whose comments on earlier drafts were indispensable.

² Morgan 1998, 75.

³ Whitmarsh 1998, 93–124.

tions of belief. The ancient novels reflect this religious plurality: Olympian gods dwell alongside minor deities, such as Eros, nymphs, Pan, δαίμονες ('spirits'), and τύχη ('chance'), as well as foreign gods, such as Isis, Apis, and the Nile river.⁴ Various religious practices, beliefs and belief systems appear throughout the novels: in *Leucippe and Clitophon* bandits have their own religious traditions that involve human sacrifice (3,12 and 3,15), and the Ethiopian ceremonies for the phoenix are explained (3,25); in Xenophon's novel an oracle predicts that Isis will have a hand in the couple's salvation (1,6), and an oracle of Apis foretells the couple's reunion (5,4); Heliodorus' novel features the high priesthood of the temple of Isis at Memphis in Egypt (1,18; 2,24; 7,2; 7,8; 7,11), an Egyptian necromantic ritual (6,14–15), the festival of the Nile river (9,22), and an Ethiopian thanksgiving celebration that includes human sacrifice (10,2–40). Though the *Aithiopika* was once considered the most religious novel for the apparent religious metaphor in its story,⁵ the scholarly trend now is to view religion as another power game being played in the novel.⁶ But how that game is played is quite interesting and important. By creating a fluid boundary between the divine and the secular through use of words like ἐκθειάζειν ('to make a god out of' something; we shall revisit this later), the novel complicates the issue of what should be considered divine.

3. For this article I would like to focus on the representation of the divine in the *Aithiopika*. I am not so much interested here in syncretism or the plurality of belief systems seen in all the novels, though these undoubtedly inform this novel's perspective. There are two modes of representing the divine in this novel: an oral mode, through the characters' speech, both direct and indirect, and a written mode, through the narrator's description of events. As the representation of the divine oscillates between these two modes, the oral and the written, so too does the identity of the divine fluctuate among several

⁴ Longus' novel features Eros, the nymphs, Pan, and Dionysos; Xenophon's novel has Eros, Aphrodite, Artemis, Helios, Isis, the Nile river, and Apis; Achilles Tatius' novel has Eros, Zeus, Helios, Aphrodite, Artemis, Tyche, and Pan; Chariton's novel has the smallest range, just Eros, Aphrodite, and Tyche.

⁵ Such as in Kerényi 1927, Merkelbach 1959, Kovendi 1966, Hani 1978, Yatromanolakis 1988, and Hidalgo de la Vega 1988.

⁶ Such as Winkler 1982, Sandy 1982, and Morgan 1979. Current Heliodoran scholarship does not give prominent consideration to religion for the novel's interpretation: see Morgan 1994 and Hunter 1998.

alignments and functions. I want to examine the relationship between speech/writing and the representation of the divine. Eventually I will argue that the opposition of speech and writing in the novel collapses, and that this collapse raises another question: to what extent does the novel promote the belief that gods or divine entities have anything to do with human life?

4. The interaction of the divine and human spheres is a basic premise of the ancient novels. In Chariton's, Xenophon's and Longus' novels, gods are clearly active: Aphrodite, Tyche, and Eros variously cause mischief, as chronicled by the narrators.⁷ Moreover, the characters themselves believe that gods intervene in their lives, and their beliefs are accurately reflected by their novels' realities.⁸ For instance, there is a reciprocal attachment in *Callirhoe* between Aphrodite and Callirhoe, in Longus' novel between Eros and Daphnis and Chloe, and in Xenophon's novel between Eros and Habrocomes. This correspondence between human and divine perspective fosters a sense of comfort and safety for the reader; the world exists and operates precisely as the characters expect. The divine is rendered human-friendly; the gods' power remains formidable and unapproachable, but at the very least the characters are secure in the knowledge that the gods' attention revolves around them and their lives. Heliodorus' novel presents a different perspective on gods. Though references to the divine abound in the novel, nearly all of them occur in speech (either direct or indirect), and only a scant percentage can be found in the narrative itself. The authority of the divine in many of these instances, furthermore, is undermined by juxtaposition with a naturalistic or scientific explanation. Thus the novel contrives a situation in which the characters profess faith in the gods, while the narrative displays an ambiguous attitude toward divine activity. This discrepancy undermines the sentiment prevalent in the other novels that the world is a friendly place, full of helpful gods who ultimately shepherd characters to a beneficial outcome. Not only is Heliodorus' world unfriendly, but as we shall see, its rules are difficult to define. Before we take a closer look at the representation of gods in the *Aithiopika*, it will first be necessary to consider more fundamentally what it means to be divine in the novel.

⁷ Chariton 1,1; 2,2; 2,8; 6,8; 8,1; Xenophon 1,1–4; 4,2; Longus 1,11; 2,5–7; 3,27.

⁸ In Achilles Tatius' novel, the first person focalization hampers this discussion, though Clitophon and Leucippe certainly profess belief that gods routinely affect human lives.

5. In the other Greek novels, the categories of mortal and divine are discrete, and within each subset the players are clearly demarcated.⁹ In the *Aithiopika* the divine itself is hybrid and complex. There are not only traditional Olympian gods and secondary deities that rival their power: Eros, Tyche, δαίμονες ('love', 'chance', 'spirits') – these two groups populate the other novels as well – but there are also other more vague sorts of divine entities. For instance, ἀνάγκη ('necessity') is an independently operating entity, so too βασκανία, δίκη, εἰμαρμένη, οἱ κρείττονες, μοῖρα ('evil eye', 'justice', 'fate', 'the mightier ones', 'destiny') and an assortment of occasionally appearing beings, such as οἱ μείζονες, ἐχθρός τις, πεπωμένον and δυνάμεις ('the greater ones', 'some enemy', 'fate', 'forces'). These powers fall into three functional categories: the mischief makers, including δαίμονες, τὸ δαιμόνιον, τύχη and ἐχθρός τις ('spirits', 'the divine', 'chance', 'some enemy'); the providential yet punitive gods, including τὸ θεῖον, θεοί, οἱ κρείττονες and οἱ μείζονες ('the divine', 'gods', 'the mightier ones', 'the greater ones'); and the guiding forces, such as εἰμαρμένη, μοῖρα, and πεπωμένον ('fate', 'destiny', 'fate'), and sometimes δαίμονες and τύχη ('spirits', 'chance'). There is overlap between these categories, notably with δαίμονες and τύχη.¹⁰ The deities of the other novels perform functions identical to those in the *Aithiopika*, but the gods themselves are much fewer, usually one or two to a category. In the *Aithiopika* furthermore there is complete agreement between the characters and the narrator as to the *functions* of the gods. This correlation is surprising, and it is vital for what I will argue later – that the novel is intentionally vague about the nature of gods but quite specific about their function so that there is room for ambitious and enterprising characters to achieve elevated status within the novel.

6. There is a high degree of functional redundancy among Heliodorus' gods; that is, several gods perform any given function. In the first group, the chaos-causing gods, there seems to be little functional distinction. In fact, several of these deities are said to 'stage a drama' at some point (2,29,4 Ἐπετραγῶδει τούτῳ τῷ δράματι καὶ ἕτερον πάθος ὁ δαίμων – 'the spirit staged a

⁹ Of course the heroines of the novels are often mistaken for goddesses, but in the case of Callirhoe and Anthia their humanity is well known to the reader before other characters think that they are divine.

¹⁰ For instance, both δαίμονες and θεοί are said to descend to earth and take on human form (3,13,11).

second act to my tragedy’, and 7,6,4 εἴτε τι δαιμόνιον εἴτε τύχη τις ... καινὸν ἐπεισόδιον ἐπετραγώδει τοῖς δρωμένοις – ‘either some divine power or some fortune ... added a new episode to the action’).¹¹ In the second group, the providential and punitive gods, οἱ κρείττονες (‘the mightier ones’) appears to be a functional subset of οἱ θεοί (‘the gods’). For instance, both sets of deities require propitiation,¹² express wishes,¹³ protect¹⁴ and punish mortals,¹⁵ but οἱ θεοί in addition reveal or predict things,¹⁶ possess mortals,¹⁷ control human life,¹⁸ know all things¹⁹ and reward mortals.²⁰ In the third group, which guides the fates of mortals, the deities are virtually interchangeable: they determine the future of mortals and their will is ineluctable. The organization of divinities in the *Aithiopika* resembles a federation more than a hierarchy. In the other novels, which follow mythological tradition, humans are equally at the mercy of the gods, and the divine hierarchy allows for Olympians to trump minor deities, as Aphrodite does Tyche in *Callirhoe* (8,1,2–3). Despite the high numbers of gods coursing through the *Aithiopika*, there are no conflicts among them, almost as if the divine were an amorphous construct, the sum of its parts rather than any one of its parts. If there is any hierarchy in the novel, it is among humans in terms of vulnerability to divine whim; we shall address this topic later.

7. The complexity of the divine in Heliodorus’ novel affects the reader’s understanding not only of the gods’ operation but also of the gods’ nature. The novel gives the impression of running a divine bureaucracy of sorts, in which all events are ascribed to the gods, but the agency of any particular god is uncertain, as the text continually shifts among a variety of deities. Between the characters’ ideas of what gods do and what the narrative attributes to them there is a clear correspondence: the function of divine beings is to control the mortal realm – by toying with mortals, protecting them, pun-

¹¹ The conflation of τύχη and δαίμων also occurs in other novels, such as Chariton 2,8,3.

¹² Κρείττονες: 1,8,4; 8,9,16; θεοί: 2,22,5; 2,23,1; 2,27,2; 10,39,1.

¹³ Κρείττονες: 7,26,9; 5,17,2; 4,15,2; θεοί: 3,11,5; 3,12,1; 4,13,3; 6,9,5; 10,40,1.

¹⁴ Κρείττονες: 10,9,7; θεοί: 2,31,4; 4,8,2; 4,13,4; 5,12,1; 6,7,9; 8,9,16; 10,17,1.

¹⁵ Κρείττονες: 4,18,6; θεοί: 1,14,1.

¹⁶ Θεοί: 2,7,3; 2,9,5; 2,10,3; 2,25,5; 2,23,3; 2,29,3; 2,36,1; 4,10,5; 4,12,3; 4,16,7.

¹⁷ Θεοί: 1,2,6; 10,22,4; 10,28,4.

¹⁸ Θεοί: 1,26,4; 3,16,5; 4,4,5; 4,13,1; 7,5,5.

¹⁹ Θεοί: 3,17,2; 4,12,2.

²⁰ Θεοί: 5,13,2; 5,20,4; 5,22,5.

ishing them, guiding them, and shaping their lives. Yet the novel remains unclear about the nature of the gods: what gods do is often just a part of what they are. Of course, practical deities whose names denote their activity, such as ἔρως, τύχη, εἰμαρμένη or ἀνάγκη ('love', 'chance', 'fate', 'necessity'), usually *are* what they *do*. These entities, however, do not dominate the novel.

8. The question of the gods' nature is complicated by the lack of text focalized through a divine perspective. In the other novels, the gods are treated like characters: they express feelings and invest themselves emotionally in their novels' action. In *Callirhoe* Aphrodite (2,2,8; 8,1,3) and Eros (1,1,4; 6,4,5) repeatedly lead attacks against the lovers, motivated by anger at the initial resistance of the pair and ingratitude on the part of Chaireas. Tyche as well is a recognizable character, delighting in causing discord (2,8,4; 4,5,3; 8,1,2). Likewise in Xenophon's novel, Eros plays a capricious, scheming sprite (1,1), and in Longus' novel, Eros (1,11,1), the nymphs (2,23; 3,27) and Pan (2,26–27) become personally involved in the characters' lives. Despite the barrage of deities that speckle the pages of the *Aithiopika*, there is no personal sense of divine providence anywhere in the novel. Gods are interchangeable not only because of similar behavior but because they are essentially bland, without character, color or motivation. In the other novels, the gods display human personalities, and their emotional involvement in the story supports the reader's engagement with the characters' lives. In the *Aithiopika* the gods do not mirror or guide the reader's reactions to the story. As their participation in the action is uncertain, so too is their nature.

9. This depersonalization of the divine is reflected in the character of the deities that receive mention. The *Aithiopika* strongly favors the use of indefinite deities to certain ones, by a factor of two.²¹ There does not appear to be an immediate narrative benefit in any instance indicating why an indefinite god (e.g. δαίμων, 'spirit') is used in any particular instance in preference to an equivalent definite god (e.g. τύχη, 'chance'). For instance, at 2,17,2 Knemon refers to the suffering that the δαίμων has given him, which could just as easily have been attributed to τύχη. Or, at 8,3,7 the trials that Thyamis

²¹ Definite gods include ἀνάγκη, βασκανία, δίκη, εἰμαρμένη, ἔρως, Olympian gods, μοῖρα, τύχη, 150 occurrences; indefinite gods include δαιμόνιον, δαίμων, θεῖον, θεός, κρείττων, others, 328 occurrences.

says τύχη has inflicted upon Charikleia and Theagenes could also have been perpetrated by a δαίμων. Not only does the novel contain a plethora of deities, but the frequency of references to the divine is much higher in the *Aithiopika* than in the other Greek novels.²² The result of having such a variety of gods crowded into one novel is to diffuse the overall sense of divine identity. That is, the idea of divine providence is emphasized, while the role of any particular god is de-emphasized. Thus gods are effectively defined by their function and *not* by their nature – for the reader, at least.²³

10. Among the characters, however, there is no uncertainty about the nature or role of the gods. That is, the characters behave as if they live in the worlds of Chariton or Longus, where the divine is easily identified. This divergence from the narrator's point of view is worth exploring. For the reader's benefit a contest of sorts is played out, contrasting the characters' impressions with the narrator's pronouncements. The characters express their beliefs about the divine through speech, whether direct or indirect, while the narrator narrates the story with its occasional written references to the divine. This establishes an interesting opposition between the spoken and the written in the novel, an opposition that is not characteristic of other ancient novels.²⁴ This highlights the key way in which the *Aithiopika* differs from its peers: in the other novels there is a faithful correspondence between the oral and the written. This means that what characters say and believe in other novels is generally reflective of what the narrative itself declares in writing. The *Aithiopika* varies on this point because it calls into question something that the other novels take for granted: the reliability of information, both spoken and written. This

²² More than 700 references, spread over ten books works out at 70 references per book, or at least two per chapter. See also paragraph 12 below.

²³ That is, while each character may have a personal sense of the nature of the divine, the reader's sense of the divine in the novel is necessarily influenced by the sum of the characters' impressions, not to mention the narrator's perspective. A collective impression of the nature of the gods in the *Aithiopika* is nearly impossible to ascertain.

²⁴ Achilles Tatius' novel, discussed in this collection by Marinčič, is an exception to this rubric because its ego-narrator(s) behave(s) inconsistently, sometimes restricting the point of view to the narrator Clitophon, sometimes offering an omniscient perspective. Also because the novel is an ego-narrative it by definition addresses the perspective of the narrator alone; the perspectives of other characters are adduced through their communication with the narrator and not independently.

hermeneutic game the novel plays is well documented.²⁵ Various characters speak deceptively in order to further their own purposes; the narrator also writes deceptively, shifting focalizations in order to surprise the reader, who is continually forced to reinterpret and reevaluate information. The *Aithiopika* plays this contest of speech versus writing in many arenas, especially in categories that other novels would consider unquestionable, such as the alignment of characters, the motivation of characters, and especially the nature and domain of the gods.

11. The conventional position on divine power is expressed in speech (direct or indirect) by the characters, who believe that gods are intimately involved in their everyday lives. Furthermore, there is a marked tendency among the characters to prefer divine explanations even when terrestrial ones are readily available. For instance, Charikles eagerly attributes Charikleia's malady to *βασκανία* ('evil eye'), instead of to love (3,9–11). At 3,15,1 Knemon accepts Kalasiris' explanation that Homer's greatness must be imputed to a divine origin. At 5,32,4 Kalasiris comments that the victims of Charikleia's archery assumed that their wounds were divinely inflicted. Knemon at 2,9,5 posits that they will never know how Thisbe came to be killed in Egypt unless some god reveals it (when moments later he recognizes Thyamis' sword in the corpse, 2,11,4). There is also some self-conscious play by certain characters on this topic in the novel. At 5,18,9 Kalasiris comments that Tyrrhenos' success at fishing, due to his skill, was ascribed by others to the gods. Kalasiris also tells Charikleia that the voice of a god told him that she was in love with Theagenes (4,10,5). Here the priest is toying with the notion that a divine explanation is more convincing to people than a secular one. It does not take long for Charikleia to understand this. For, though the spectators are willing to believe that her deliverance from the pyre was divinely engineered (8,9,15), Charikleia herself has doubts (8,10,2), and at last remembers a dream she had which forecast the fire-retarding properties of her pantarbe ring (8,11,2). Later she admonishes Charikles not to ascribe her personal misdeeds to the will of the gods (10,38,1). Kalasiris and Charikleia are the only characters who overcome the general mortal inclination to trust blindly in the power of the gods. This gives them a remarkable advantage over other characters, in that they can manipulate other characters, secure in

²⁵ As discussed by Winkler 1982, 93–158; by Morgan 1982–1983, 221–226; by Morgan 1991, 86–90; and by Morgan 1994, 107–109.

the knowledge that those characters will readily attribute what happens to them to the gods.

12. The narrative, the written authoritative voice in the novel, contradicts the characters' perspective and calls into question the very nature, role and domain of the gods. The ratio of references to divine intervention in speech (both types) to narratorial references is nearly 27 to one; or, 96.4% (489) of all explanations appealing to the divine (507) are spoken by characters, either in direct speech, indirect speech, or in narrative focalized through a character. Thus the written narrative does not support the characters' orally expressed notion of constant divine intervention in human life. This contest between speech and text in the novel takes on interesting dimensions in light of the relative prestige of each method of communication in this novel and among all the novels. I would argue that, as a more privileged technology, literacy is generally accorded higher status in the novels than orality, in that orality appears to be a more open (and unreliable) form and literacy a more fixed (and therefore reliable) one. The privilege of literacy versus orality in the novel extends to expressions of literacy within the novel, namely, personal correspondence. For instance, Persinna's letter to her infant daughter (4,8) is the authoritative voice of reason in the novel because it explains everything, ties up many loose threads, and guides the rest of the action in the novel.²⁶ In the *Aithiopika* the more privileged form of communication,

²⁶ Likewise in the other Greek novels, the literary, I would argue, is honoured above the spoken. As Rosenmeyer 2001, 42–43, points out, a familiar trope in literature is for letters to be used for treacherous purposes, but in the novels all the letters are written with honest intentions and eventually all miscommunications are cleared up. In *Callirhoe* the letter from Chaireas to the heroine sparks an intense court battle because some people read it as a forgery (4,5–6). Its genuineness is proven in the end (5,8,1), and the letter's purpose is finally fulfilled. In Xenophon's novel, the foreign femme fatale Manto is convicted by her own letter to Habrocomes (2,10,1), whom she has harmed through perjury. In Achilles Tatius' novel, Clitophon receives a letter purportedly from his dead girlfriend (5,18), which turns out to be as genuine as reports of her demise are false. Longus' novel is composed on the pretext of an offering to the gods (a claim to prestige), and is supposed to be a superior version of the story that had been explained orally to him by an exegete (praef, 3). That Longus identifies himself as a city dweller, and thus a sophisticated man, also lends prestige to the fact that he writes (although it is also possible to derive an opposing interpretation for Longus' novel, that the interplay and conflation of art and nature, or the fabricated and the natural, playfully undermine the narrator's claim to reliability.) In the *Aithiopika* Thisbe's letter found with her corpse clears up part of the reason for her presence in Egypt (2,10).

writing, is associated with the more privileged point of view in the novel, the narrator's. The less privileged communication type, speaking, is also paired with the less privileged perspective, that of the characters. This pairing (speech and characters; writing and narrator) becomes significant in Heliodorus' novel because only the *Aithiopika* creates a dichotomy between the characters' and narrator's point of view and, consequently, between speech and writing. That is, in the other novels, in which the characters' beliefs about the operation of the world is supported by the narrative, the characters' point of view is a subset of the narrator's perspective – the characters have a limited scope, but what they do think and know parallels the gods' viewpoint. In the same way, speaking is a subset of writing in the other novels, in that what is represented through speech corresponds with what is reported in the narrative, given that the perspective of speech (associated with the characters) is inherently narrower than that of the narrative (associated with the narrator). By calling into question the mirroring of the characters' and narrator's points of view, the *Aithiopika* backhandedly contests what is a basic tenet in the other novels: that the gods are concerned with and intimately involved in human affairs.

13. The conventional belief that the gods care about mortals' lives is fundamental not only to the other novels besides the *Aithiopika* but also to most of the rest of Greek literature. In the *Aithiopika* the less privileged pair, characters/speech, represents this conventional belief while the more privileged pair, narrator/writing, represents something close to agnosticism. What this does is set in opposition two valued principles among the ancient novels: the gods' concern with human affairs and the pre-eminent reliability of writing over speech.²⁷ Heliodorus does not attempt to resolve this conflict (characters/speech/divine intervention versus narrator/writing/agnosticism) so much as to undermine it and confound it, as we shall see below. The heart of this conflict lies in its structure, in its binary oppositions. Binary opposition is a favorite device of Plato who, for instance, in the *Phaedrus* pairs speech with truth and writing with deception. Plato conveniently assumes that writing is the opposite of speaking and uses this as a pretext for associating one with falsehood and the other with truth. Plato is concerned foremost with the idea

²⁷ See the contribution of Marinčič in this collection for an examination of the unreliability of writing in Achilles Tatius' novel. In terms of point of view, this novel is an exception to the pattern in novels addressed above; see n. 24.

of truth, that there exists some fixed, independent *trueness* against which all other things can be compared. Unlike Plato, Heliodorus does not care about absolute truth, at least not in the binary terms in which Plato casts it, but he is more concerned with *how* knowledge comes to be. Speech and writing are not opposing but graduated modes of representation in the novel. It is important here to distinguish between what information these modes provide and what their natures are. That is, though speech and writing provide contradictory information about the operation of the divine, they nevertheless are not by nature antitheses of each other. In fact they are related functions. Therefore the opposing factors that are implied by the *Aithiopika* – the gods' concern with mortals and the primacy of writing – do not have to be mutually exclusive. If these factors are seen on a progressive gradient, they could mean that the wider the perspective (from character to narrator) the less likely one is to attribute events to deities and the more likely to seek a terrestrial explanation.²⁸ Is Heliodorus then guilty of constructing faulty lines of conflict? Heliodorus is always guilty, not of lying to the reader (again, no interest in *the* truth here) but of letting the reader trap himself in his own preconceived and perhaps unexamined assumptions. So, instead of getting entwined in the inextricable puzzle of the simultaneous emphasizing and undermining of the sense of divine presence in the novel, the reader should ask how knowledge – of the divine or of anything else – is attained.

14. The game becomes complicated beyond this point. These distinctions (narrator, writing, reliable; characters, speaking, unreliable) break down when both communicative orientations in the course of the novel prove themselves to be either unreliable, non-committal, or incomplete sources of information, and when boundaries between narrator and character dissolve. For instance, oral reports are only as trustworthy as the characters who de-

²⁸ Feeney 1998, 127-131, points out that while Greek exegeses of rituals tend to be monolithic, in that for any given ritual there is only one explanation, Roman exegeses regularly entertain multiple explanations without diminishing in the least the religious validity of the practice. These explanations range from the natural, to the philosophical to custom, to accident, or to history; e.g. Ovid's *Fasti*. Plutarch presents a fascinating example, as his *Roman Questions* supply multiple αἴτια but his Greek questions rarely do. It might be possible to argue that Heliodorus is adding some Roman flavour to his Greek novel by including multiple αἴτια for terrestrial events. Heliodorus, however, does not give equal weight to his alternative explanations (see paragraph 14 above). In fact, the divine explanation is always the less privileged one. This suggests that Heliodorus does not intend for the alternative explanations to be read as equally valid pairings.

liver them,²⁹ and narratorial pronouncements are compromised either by the focalization of the passage or by a marked tendency to qualify declarative statements concerning the divine with expressions of doubt ('perhaps', 'as if') or humorous alternative explanations. That is, both scientific and divine explanations are given at 9,8,2 for the collapse of a dike,³⁰ at 1,18,3 for a cock's crow,³¹ at 10,28,4 for Theagenes' bravery,³² at 5,4,1 for Knemon's suffering,³³ at 7,11,4 for Kalasiris' death,³⁴ at 8,9,2 for a slave girl's defense of Charikleia,³⁵ and at 10,38,3 for the Ethiopians' comprehension of the

²⁹ As discussed by Winkler 1982, 93–158.

³⁰ The force of the divine explanation is diminished by the use of the optative mood, the number of alternative terrestrial explanations, and the responsive use of *καί* (Denniston 1991, 293): *εἴτε καὶ δαμονίας ἐπικουρίας θεῆι τις τὸ ἔργον παρὰ δόξαν ἐκρήγνυται* ('or one might even attribute this paradoxical event to divine intervention'). Denniston remarks that *καί* is translated as 'also' when it 'marks an addition to the content of the preceding context' but as 'even' when 'the addition is surprising or difficult of acceptance, and when a sense of climax is present'. Clearly in this case *καί* means 'even' and carries the narrator's doubts as to the validity of the assertion.

³¹ The authority of the divine explanation is weakened by the parenthetical *ὡς λόγος* ('so the story goes'), which casts doubt upon the validity of the belief.

³² The divine explanation is undermined both by the responsive use of *καί* (*v. supra* n. 30) and by its vagueness: *εἴτε καὶ ἕκ του θεῶν ὀρμῆι χρησάμενος* ('or he might even have been driven by an impulse of one of the gods').

³³ The divine explanation is weakened not only by the sarcastic tinge of melodrama, as Knemon has a fit each time he runs into Thisbe's corpse (earlier at 2,5-6), but also by its equivocation with human nature: *Ἐπαιξε δὲ ἄρα τι τὸν Κνήμωνα δαιμόνιον, δ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα χλευῆν ὡς ἐπίπαν τὰ ἀνθρώπεια καὶ παιδιὰν πεποιήται, καὶ οὐδὲ τῶν ἡδίστων ἀλύπως μετέχειν ἐπέτρεπεν ἄλλ' ὅτι μετ' ὀλίγον ἡσθήσεσθαι ἔμελλεν ἦδη τὸ ἀλγεινὸν ἐπέπλεκε, τάχα μὲν οὕτως ἔθος ὄν αὐτῷ καὶ νῦν ἐπιδεικνύμενον, τάχα δέ που καὶ τῆς ἀνθρώπων φύσεως ἀμιγῆς καὶ καθαρὸν τὸ χαῖρον οὐκ ἐπιδεχομένης* ('for some divine entity, which in general makes everything a joke and human affairs its plaything, was playing with Knemon and was not allowing him to taste of pleasures without pain, but because in a little while he was going to experience pleasure it was now weaving in suffering, perhaps in this way showing off its habitual nature, or perhaps even somehow human nature does not accept unmixed and pure delight'). Denniston 1991, 35, remarks that *ἄρα* expresses 'the surprise attendant upon disillusionment'; I read the use of *ἄρα* in the first clause as ironic. I would then argue that the responsive use of *καί* (*v. supra* n. 30) in the concluding clause upholds the sarcasm with which the passage began, and thus implies that human nature is operating here rather than a god.

³⁴ The divine explanation is weakened because of its vagueness, its responsive use of *καί*, (*v. supra* n. 30) and its pairing with a detailed somatic explanation: *εἴτε καὶ θεῶν αἰτήσαντι τοῦτο παρασχομένων* ('or he even asked for [death] and the gods provided it').

³⁵ The divine explanation is compromised by a responsive *καί* (*v. supra* n. 30), its vagueness about the particular divine agency, and by its juxtaposition with a plausible psychological explanation: *εἴτε τι παθὸν εὐνοίᾳ τῇ περὶ τὴν Χαρίκλειαν ὑπὸ συνηθείας τε καὶ*

drama between Charikleia and Hydapses.³⁶ Equivocal divine explanations are given at 2,20,2 for Thermouthis' death by snakebite,³⁷ and at 9,11,6 for the Syenians' supplication of the Ethiopians.³⁸ Then at 1,1,6, the carnage of the opening tableau is attributed to a δαίμων ('spirit'), but when it is revealed at 5,32 that Charikleia is responsible for the slaughter, the reader realizes that the opening scene was focalized through the brigands, not the narrator. A few more instances, not surprisingly having to do with Kalasiris, are somewhat more challenging to untangle. At 7,2,2 the narrative remarks in passing that the prophecy Kalasiris received about his sons was from the gods. A few books earlier, however, Kalasiris tells Knemon that his wisdom had given him advance notice of the coming conflict between his sons (2,25,5). Then, at 3,16,4, Kalasiris tells Knemon that his wisdom comes from the gods. This trio of passages creates an interesting progression: Kalasiris says that his wisdom comes from the gods; Kalasiris says that his wisdom tells him about his sons' future conflict; later, the narrator says that the gods have told Kalasiris about his sons. There is a curious ellipsis here, where Kalasiris' thought is subsumed into the narrator's perspective. This is a striking example, to look ahead in my argument, of how the narrative obscures and even confuses the boundaries between mortal and divine, between character and narrator, and between the oral and the literary. The above passages must be kept in mind, then, when the narrative states at 7,6,4 that either τι δαιμόνιον or τύχη brought Kalasiris onto the scene with his sons, and at 7,6,5 that this event was constrained by fate and had been foretold by the gods. At this point it is difficult to distinguish Kalasiris' perspective from that of the narrator. At some level this makes sense, because at this point in the story, Kalasiris has orchestrated many of the events, as he is about to orchestrate the reconciliation of his sons. Even though the overlap of Kalasiris and narrator

συνδιατήσεως, εἴτε καὶ δαιμονία βουλήσει χρησάμενον ('either she was somehow affected by good-will towards Charikleia due to sharing their daily lives, or perhaps she was driven by divine will').

³⁶ The divine explanation is weakened by the conditional τάχα and a responsive καί (v. *supra* n. 30): ἢ τάχα καὶ ἐξ ὀρμῆς θείας ('or perhaps even [they were brought to this understanding] by divine impulse').

³⁷ Again, the conditional use of τάχα diminishes the authority of the divine explanation: μοιρῶν τάχα βουλήσει πρὸς οὐκ ἀνάρμοστον τοῦ τρόπου τὸ τέλος καταστρέψας ('perhaps he came to this quite befitting end of his life by the will of the fates').

³⁸ The divine explanation is weakened by the qualifying use of καθάπερ: καθάπερ σχεδιαζούσης ἐν αὐτοῖς τὴν ἰκεσίαν τῆς τύχης ('just as if chance was extemporizing a supplication scene with them').

fits within this context, it reiterates the sense of uncertainty that this plasticity of perspective brings to the story.

15. In this way, the validity of all forms of communication in the novel is called into question. The aforementioned hybridity of the divine complicates this discussion. The narrative does not explicitly deny the existence of supernatural powers. The oracle of Delphi speaks truly, which is itself a hybrid source, both literary (in that its prophecies were delivered in writing, and are fixed in verse in the novel) and oral (in that its prophecies were orally generated, and appear in the novel within direct speech). Dreams, as well, purport to have divine origin (1,18,3; 8,11) but enter the world through mortal vectors and depend upon human interpretation. The novel calls into question the reliability of interpretation by pointing out how human desires compromise rational thought – Thyamis believes that his dream was sent by the gods (θεῖον, ‘divine’ 1,18,3), then he interprets it according to his personal desires (τῆς ἐπιθυμίας ἐξηγουμένης – ‘as his desire led him’, 1,19,1). Moreover, there are a couple of unqualified and disputable affirmations of divine agency in the narrative. The first is at 7,12,2, where τύχη (‘chance’) is said to give Charikleia and Theagenes a few hours’ respite, and the second is at 9,5,2, where ἀνάγκη (‘necessity’) suggests to Oroondates a way of communicating with the Ethiopians. Both of these occurrences could be poetic expressions of metaphor. What is interesting is that these completely insignificant instances are the only unqualified ones in the entire novel – all other mentions of divine action by the narrator contain some ambiguity as to their legitimacy or certainty. The novel wants to focalize the action almost entirely through its human characters but stubbornly reserves the right to appeal to higher powers as circumstance, or perhaps narratorial whim, demands.

16. Let us examine further the notion that the boundaries between human and divine are fuzzy and mutable in the *Aithiopika*. There are thirty-nine instances in the novel where the human is mistaken for the divine (but never *vice versa*). This, I would propose, is a remarkably high number, a significant figure. For example, Charikleia is mistaken for a god many times, both Kalasiris and Hydaspes are addressed as ‘god and savior’, and Kalasiris says that Charikleia and Theagenes count as gods in his estimation.³⁹ Of particu-

³⁹ For example, Charikleia is so beautiful that she could be mistaken for a god (1,2,1); the brigands on the beach think that Charikleia is divinely possessed, or a goddess, perhaps

lar interest here is the wide range of uses for the verb ἐκθειάζειν ('to make a god out of' something): people deify the Nile river (9,9,4; 9,22,5), Kalasiris deifies Egyptian wisdom by supplementing it with Ethiopian wisdom (4,12,1), Charikleia deifies virginity (2,33,5), Achaimenes deifies Charikleia's beauty to Oroonates (8,2,1), and the Ethiopians deify Theagenes (10,29,1). Is Heliodorus implying that the Nile was not a god before people worshipped it, or that Egyptian wisdom was not sublime until Kalasiris touched it? Human agency seems to play a powerful role in creating divinity in this novel. This development not only complicates the notion of what a god is by further diffusing the powers of the divine but it also bastardizes the concept of the divine, making it vulgar through overuse. Clearly some characters do not actually believe that other characters are divine, but they use the word so freely that it loses some of its resonance and some of its transcendent power. The novel sends contradictory messages: on the surface (orally from the characters) it says that the divine is frantically active in the mortal realm, but on closer inspection (the literary statements of the narrator)

Artemis or Isis (1,2,6); the brigands then compare Charikleia to a δαίμων (2,2,7); Theagenes also compares her to a δαίμων (2,7,3); Kalasiris announces that he counts Charikleia and Theagenes as gods and libates them (2,23,1); Kalasiris promises Knemon that he will consider him on the level of the gods if he tells him what he knows about Charikleia and Theagenes (2,23,3); Charikles (2,30,6) and Kalasiris (2,31,1) remark that Charikleia's beauty is divine; Charikles says that Charikleia has made virginity a god (2,33,5); Kalasiris says that the Delphians imagine that Charikleia and Theagenes' love is immortality itself (3,4,8); Kalasiris says the soul was revealed to be divine when Charikleia and Theagenes fell in love (3,5,4); Kalasiris tells Knemon that when θεοί or δαίμονες come to earth, they occasionally take on human form (3,13,1); Knemon accepts Kalasiris' assertion that Homer had divine origins (3,15,1); Kalasiris equates his wisdom to divine knowledge (3,17,2); Kalasiris says that Charikleia looked to him as to a god (4,6,4); Kalasiris says that Charikles called him his saviour and god (4,7,8); Kalasiris says that Charikles thought that Charikleia was possessed (4,7,10); Kalasiris confirms that he brought this possession upon Charikleia (4,7,12); Kalasiris says he was honoured for deifying the wisdom of Egypt by supplementing it with Ethiopian wisdom (4,12, 1); Kalasiris says that Charikles told the Delphians that the priest was heaven-sent (4,19,6); Nausicles equates Mitraneas with the gods (5,8,3); Nausicles compares Charikleia to a god (5,10,2); Nausicles calls Thisbe a δαίμων (6,1,3); the sacristan says that Kalasiris has joined the elect of the κρείττονας (7,11,9); Kybele calls Arsake a goddess of fortune (7,17,3); Achaimenes calls Charikleia's beauty divine (8,2,1); Kybele addresses Charikleia as divine (8,7,4); Theagenes compares Kalasiris to a god (8,11,3); Oroonates equates Hydaspes to a god (9,6,4); the Egyptians deify the Nile (9,9,4; 9,22,5); the Syenian priests call Hydaspes their god and saviour (9,22,7); Charikleia seems more divine than mortal (10,9,3); Hydaspes supposes that Charikleia is possessed (10,22,4); the Ethiopians deify Theagenes (10,29,1).

the notion of the divine becomes fragmented and fuzzy, and the consistent participation of the divine in human life questionable. The characters believe that the gods are in control of their lives. If the gods are removed from action, then who is in control in the novel?

17. If we return to the idea that gods are designated by their function and not by their nature, the providence of the novel becomes clear. Certain characters rule the action in the novel: Kalasiris and Charikleia. Not surprisingly, these characters also frequently verbalize their beliefs that the gods are controlling their lives: guiding their steps, sending them troubles, bringing their own purposes to fulfillment. Furthermore, these two are the principal people who are referred to as divine in the novel.⁴⁰ It is no coincidence that the same characters that are called divine are also the ones who are best able to control other characters and manipulate them to do their bidding. In the absence of interactive gods in the novel, these characters fulfill the function of the divine. In fact, they even cover the three aforementioned areas of divine providence: mischief, protection and punishment, and guidance. Charikleia creates much mischief and confusion when she slays the crew of Trachinos with a volley of arrows (5,32,3–4). Kalasiris misdirects Charikles' attention (4,14–15) and engineers a distracting ploy when he and Theagenes escape Delphi with Charikleia (4,17). Charikleia protects both herself and Theagenes by a clever ruse when they are captured by pirates (1,21,3) and later by Persians (7,12,7), she dissuades the pirates from killing Theagenes and Kalasiris (5,26,2–3), and she saves Theagenes' life again in the court of Hydaspes (10,33,4; 10,38,2). Kalasiris protects Charikleia from the pirates (5,21) and saves his sons from killing each other (7,7,1–4). Charikleia as well punishes the pirates, as she puts it, for their outrage against chastity, with death (1,3,1). Kalasiris and Charikleia do what they do purposefully, guiding the action in accordance with their will, Kalasiris to escort Charikleia from Delphi and embark her upon her journey home to Ethiopia, and Charikleia to arrive in Ethiopia in worthy estate and reclaim her birthright. All of their actions dovetail to these ends. Aside from these specific activities, Kalasiris and Charikleia exert influence over other characters. Kalasiris manipulates Charikles, Nausicles, Trachinos, and Knemon, while Charikleia uses her wiles on Thyamis, Trachinos, and Hydaspes. Other minor characters tempo-

⁴⁰ Charikleia at 1,2,1; 1,2,6 (four instances), 2,2,7; 2,7,3; 2,23,1; 2,30,6; 2,31,1; 3,5,4; 5,10,2; 8,2,1; 8,7,4; 10,9,3; Kalasiris at 4,6,4; 4,7,8; 4,19,6; 7,11,9.

rarily control the action (such as Arsake or Thyamis) but they are usually motivated by some immediate emotional need and have no long-range plans or goals. Like Whitmarsh's insight on the plasticity of cultural identity, so is divine nature a function of divine behavior. As Kalasiris and Charikleia display the most godlike behavior of all the characters in the novel, in that they exercise the most control over other mortals, they are accorded divine status in the minds of their fellow mortals. Perhaps the divine is not extensively developed as a concept in the novel because the human characters are much more interesting.

18. In the end, however, mortals are not gods, and all divine signs (such as oracles and dreams) must be filtered through mortal agents. Literacy (authoritative knowledge) is imbedded in orality (popular belief), which itself is unstable soil. The blurring of mortal-divine boundaries creates opportunities for mortals to achieve things beyond human expectation, but it also weakens the esteem of the gods. How is the reader to interpret the operation of the divine in Heliodorus' world? The novel does not have an 'answer' as to what to believe but seems to say that, if there are gods, they are probably neither as powerful nor as concerned with human affairs as people would like to believe. Belief is a powerful tool for control, and not surprisingly it is the characters who understand how to manipulate the beliefs of others to their own advantage that enjoy the greatest success and accomplishment in the novel. The plurality of belief systems in the Roman Empire can be seen as a fragmentation of divine authority in the world. Heliodorus' novel replicates this sense of fragmentation and reflects the ambivalence in faith of its age. If the gods are unreliable at best, the wisest counsel is to count instead upon one's own ability to interpret. But reading is always a multi-layered game in the *Aithiopika*, and there comes a point where the processes of reading all signs – the oral, the written, the acted (oracles, behaviors) overlap, where human rationality and divine 'omniscience' eventually fuse and become indistinguishable from one another. Heliodorus gives us a world, in terms of the divine, much like our own. Though we may yearn for the comfort and reassurance that Longus provides with his providential deities, the *Aithiopika*'s lesson on self-reliance is a perennial one.

Epilogue

Before we let the topic of the gods in the *Aithiopika* rest, it might be illuminating to gather all the strings of information connected to the divine to see if that gives us a more coherent grasp of its identity. Heliodorus' gods are not like other gods. Perhaps the difficulty with the divine in the *Aithiopika* stems from the fact that Heliodorus is once again challenging the reader to re-examine his assumptions, this time concerning the nature of gods. Consider these factors: among Heliodorus' gods there is no hierarchy and no conflict (paragraph 6); furthermore, these gods are more likely to be indefinite or abstract than specific (paragraph 9). Greek gods traditionally reflect Greek human society. A society without hierarchy and conflict is *not* human. Heliodorus' gods then are clearly *not* anthropomorphic. They lack definite personae; they are not possessed of emotions, another tellingly human trait. If it seems, then, that the gods of the *Aithiopika* are less concerned with mortal events than their novelistic peers, it could be because Heliodorus does not conceive of his gods in human terms. There is little in this construction of the divine for the reader to identify with personally, little of human interest in the divine to engage the reader. What I have argued above, that the novel's peculiar representation of the divine clears the way for outstanding human characters themselves to become identified with the divine, is based upon traditional expectations of literary gods. That is, the reader assumes that the divine has anthropomorphic characteristics, similarities to humans emotionally, psychologically, and physically, in addition to broader powers of understanding and control. When the representation of the gods does not meet these expectations, but there are extraordinary humans who do, a reasonable interpretation is the one that I presented above.

Equally tenable, however, is the position that Heliodorus arbitrarily follows a different blueprint for the gods, one that is non-anthropomorphic, and leaves the reader to wander in confusion, should he not realign his thinking. Heliodorus may allude to a possible motivation for this twist in storytelling by the connection between the first and last sentences of the novel, a connection that is obvious only to a second reader. The novel begins with a curious reference to the sun 'smiling' and ends with the self-pronounced revelation that Heliodorus himself is a member of a priestly clan of the Sun god.⁴¹ In

⁴¹ Whitmarsh 2005 teases out the metaphorical implications of the opening sentence.

Greek mythology, the all-seeing Sun god, Helios, is one of the deities least likely to interfere in either mortal or divine affairs, and is thus more aloof and impersonal.⁴² Furthermore, if Heliodorus was truly involved with the cultic practices associated with the Sun god, then he would have had a different experience of divinity from the type of divine interactions represented in literature: as Vernant comments, 'the Greek gods are powers, not persons', distinguishing the impersonal gods of Greek cult from the anthropomorphic deities of literature.⁴³ Perhaps the allusion to the Sun god at the beginning of the novel is Heliodorus' declaration that he is pursuing a different representational course. Unfortunately, this new interpretation sheds no further light on the relationship between speech and writing in the novel but in fact complicates it. The written narrative (i.e., the narrator's perspective) most closely approaches this non-anthropomorphic depiction of the gods, and by comparison speech (i.e., the characters' perspective) respectively provides an inaccurate portrayal of the gods. Nevertheless the reliability of these two modes of representation in the novel is still undermined (paragraph 14). So once again, the final interpretation of information is incumbent upon the reader. I began this article by noting that Heliodorus' novel accommodates conflicting interpretations. I shall leave off here with that same thought and note that there is one clear message the novel seems to be imparting: the assumption that the world is configured in terms of human forms and human concerns is short-sighted and misguided.

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⁴² For instance, in the *HH Dem.* 62-87, Demeter and Hecate must cajole Helios to reveal the identity of Persephone's abductor. Aphrodite's punishment of Helios for betraying her tryst with Ares to Hephaestus (Ovid, *Met.* 4, 192-240) perhaps taught Helios not to intervene in others' affairs.

⁴³ Vernant 1983, 328.

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