

The Silence of Semiramis: Shame and Desire in the Ninus Romance and Other Greek Novels

MICHAEL J. ANDERSON
Trinity College, Hartford

Introduction

In fragment A of the Ninus Romance, a richly rewarding text for both the literary critic and the cultural historian, Ninus and his beloved cousin Semiramis each in turn seek parental consent for their marriage.¹ Although they are formally betrothed to one another, Assyrian custom, we are informed, prohibits marriage until Semiramis reaches age fifteen. So the lovers, their impatience perhaps exacerbated by an impending military campaign, agree to petition their elders for permission to marry early.² Ninus delivers an eloquent plea to his aunt Dercia, Semiramis' mother, who quickly agrees to further his cause. But as Semiramis attempts a similar exposition before her aunt Thambe, inexperience and shame overwhelm her, and she can do little more than blush and weep.³ She opens her mouth but cannot utter a word.

¹ P. Berol. 6926. I quote the fragments from the edition of Stephens and Winkler 1995. Kussl 1991, 13–101 provides a text and German translation, with detailed notes and an informative discussion of scholarly issues. Sandy 1989 is a widely available English translation. Morgan 1998, 3330–37 is a valuable survey of scholarship on the Ninus fragments. See these authors also for further details on the generally accepted date of the papyrus, roughly 100 BCE to 100 CE. On the identification of the heroine as Semiramis despite the absence of her name from the fragments, see Stephens and Winkler 1995, 24–25. On the legendary Ninus and Semiramis and on the divergence between the chaste and demure heroine of the romance and the ruthless queen of the historiographic tradition, see Perry 1967, 153–66 and Stephens and Winkler 1995, 24–26.

² It is unclear whether the campaign described in fragment B occurs before or after the events in fragment A (see Stephens and Winkler, 27–28 on the controversy). In either case, Ninus himself cites the 'wars upon wars' that await him as a reason for haste (A,III,21–22).

³ The interviews are perhaps imagined to be taking place simultaneously.

Moved by the girl's distress, Thambe offers words of comfort and a kind-hearted embrace. And while the extant remains of the novel do not tell us whether the petitions were successful, the favorable reactions of the aunts suggest that marriage will follow shortly.

While placing the hero and the heroine in parallel situations—a common device in the Greek novels—the author of our fragment assigns them sharply contrasting responses to these situations. The hero fulfills his intentions, but the heroine falters. She shares his desires (ἐν ὁμοίοις πάθεσιν—A,IV,20–21) but lacks his verbal license (οὐχ ὁμοία παρρησία τῶν λόγων—A,IV,21–22). In the following pages I will observe how artfully the author has constructed hero and heroine as models of distinctly masculine and distinctly feminine behavior. And through close analysis of Ninus' and Semiramis' divergent experiences of shame in their common pursuit of marriage, I will illuminate the underlying erotic ethics governing their behavior in this scene. By observing comparable examples of shame-induced silence in the novels of Chariton and Heliodorus, I will also argue that this same ethics shapes and regulates ideal male and female behavior in these works as well.⁴ In brief, we find these novels celebrating the desire of both hero and heroine for one another while, not surprisingly, imposing much tighter restrictions on the heroine's pursuit of desire.⁵ Though granted the experience of desire, the heroine is rigorously constrained from acting on that desire in any way, even

⁴ Johne 1996, 179–180 (cf. 205) posits a categorical differentiation between Semiramis and the heroines of the canonical novels: in contrast to Callirhoe, who assumes center stage and who 'determines the actions in the novel', Semiramis 'is still described according to the old regime of the role of a woman: shy, blushing with shame and full of tears, subordinated, in the background as it was expected of a woman in the polis and as it is performed in comedy.' Haynes 2003, 74 more cautiously detects in Semiramis a degree of passivity not characteristic of the heroines of the canonical novels: 'Given that, from the admittedly scarce fragments we possess, the male protagonist appears to conform more closely to the epic model of warrior-hero, the heroine's extreme passivity may point to a more complete polarization of gender roles than is the case in the fully extant novels.' In this paper, by contrast, I identify some striking parallels between the behavior of Semiramis, Callirhoe, and Chariclea. The extent of Semiramis' participation in the plot and the extent to which the plot was constructed around her cannot be determined, but were more of the text to become available, I think it not unlikely that a closer kinship between Semiramis and the other heroines would emerge.

⁵ While not denying that the hero and heroine of the novels enjoy a remarkable degree of sexual reciprocity, as has been illuminated by Konstan 1994, this article draws attention to some of the asymmetrical aspects of their relationship. In particular, I suggest that the reciprocity enjoyed by hero and heroine is largely confined to their interaction with one another, while external constraints still impose distinctions on their behavior.

from expressing her desire openly.⁶ But while enforcing this strict patriarchal prohibition, the novel simultaneously exploits the heroine's consequent suffering for emotional effect, making her at once the object of the reader's admiration and the object of our compassion. We admire her modesty and pity her inhibition. And while maintaining the heroine's decorous silence, the novel casts itself as a legitimate voice for the heroine's desire, proclaiming her desire where she herself cannot.

Sex and Gender in the Ninus Romance

The behaviors exhibited by Ninus and Semiramis as they confront their aunts adhere to traditional gender roles. Ninus' verbal eloquence may in and of itself be understood as a mark of his masculinity insofar as it reflects his rhetorical training and preparation for public life. Eros can sometimes inspire eloquence even in the unschooled, but Ninus' oratorical performance, replete with well-crafted phrases and logical reasoning, looks less like the spontaneous poetic outburst of a love-smitten suitor than the thoughtful argumentation of a well-educated young man, one for whom the term *pepaideumenos* would not be inappropriate. In his insistence, for example, on regard for nature over blind obedience to foolish convention, Ninus exercises a familiar rhetorical topos, and he cleverly collapses the *phusis-nomos* polarity in claiming that 'nature is the finest convention' (ἡ φύσις ... κάλλιστός ἐστι νόμος—A,3,4–5). This dexterity reflects the confidence of a young man trained to pursue his ambitions through debate. And since we elsewhere hear him speaking publicly before his army as they prepare for battle (B,III,27–38), I suspect that the author may have showcased Ninus' rhetorical skills repeatedly to display the masculine competitiveness and assertiveness of his hero.⁷

⁶ Occasional comments on the liberties granted to women's voices in the novels, as well as on verbal restrictions, can be found scattered throughout recent scholarship. See, for example, Haynes 2003, 14, 71, and 72. Sustained attention to this issue is rare, but Crismani 2006 surveys the occasions on which the heroines of the canonical novels speak or remain notably silent, with attention to tragic antecedents.

⁷ The little that remains of Ninus' speech at the end of fragment B, a rousing address to his assembled troops, emphasizes his drive for success. He considers the significance of the coming battle for his own career, viewing it as a 'foundation' for his 'ambitions' (B,III,32–33). We find also evidence of rhetorical training in the balanced constructions (ἢ ἄρξομαι ... ἢ πεπαύσομαι—B,III,35–36).

The contents of Ninus' speech, particularly the arguments stemming from his role as king, also highlight masculine preoccupations. Urging his aunt to hasten the marriage before the uncertainty of fortune can intervene, Ninus reminds her of the 'wars upon wars' that await him, dangers which his courage will not allow him to dodge (A,III,20–26). And the familiar paradox that underlies his speech—the mighty conqueror himself conquered by love—similarly advertises his role as commander-in-chief. Granted, in portraying himself as Semiramis' 'prisoner of war' ([αἰ]χμάλωτος—A,II,29–30), he allows a playful inversion of gender roles, relinquishing his customary position of dominance. And his weakness in the face of love contrasts with his customary 'firmness' (στερρότης—A,II,27). This cliché nevertheless places Ninus in the company of hypermasculine divinities like Zeus and Apollo, who despite physical prowess and cosmic authority still bow to the dictates of desire.⁸ It is applicable to Ninus only because his military and political supremacy are unquestioned. And while depicting him as love's victim, the cliché simultaneously allows him to remind his aunt how many peoples he rules (τοσούτων δεσπόσας ἔθνῶν—A,II,10), an authority partially earned through active military conquest (A,II,11) and partially inherited from his ancestors (A,II,11–13). He carries forward the masculine ruling traditions of his paternal bloodline.

Immediately after this distinctly masculine portrayal of the hero we are treated to a decidedly meek characterization of the heroine, one that emphasizes her relatively sheltered life and her youth. Whereas Ninus stresses that he has entered the ranks of manhood (A,II,22–23), the narrator now introduces Semiramis as a 'girl' (κόρη—A,IV,20) and a 'maiden' (παρθέν[ος]—A,IV,23). And unlike Ninus, who has already seen war, we are told that Semiramis spends her life in the 'women's quarters' (A,IV,23–24). After Ninus' powerful rhetorical display, Semiramis' silence projects an image of impotence. Eloquence links Ninus with the public world, while silence now associates Semiramis with the domestic space. And deprived of eloquence parallel to his, Semiramis becomes an object of visual fascination rather than an agent of verbal persuasion. Whereas Ninus' speech invites us to listen to him and reflect upon his arguments, Semiramis' embarrassment invites us instead to look at her, to observe her suffering with compassion. We appre-

⁸ The dichotomy between the god's power and his subjection to love is frequently the subject of humor. See, for example, the mischievous juxtaposition of Zeus the storm god and Zeus the lover subject to Eros in Asclepiades 11 (*Palatine Anthology* 5.64), and Ovid's treatment of Apollo and Cupid at *Metamorphoses* 1,456–65. Closer in spirit to Ninus' confession is Isocrates' observation that Theseus, though accustomed to conquer others, was himself subdued by Helen's beauty (*Encomium of Helen* 18).

ciate the skillful crafting of Ninus' appeal, but when Semiramis' turn to speak arrives we hear instead the artistry of the narrator, who describes for us the outward signs of her inner turmoil, the changing colors of her face, her lips opening and her eyes glancing upward as she attempts to speak (A,IV,31–32). To be sure, we cannot simply assume that the narrator is here directing an overtly masculine, erotic gaze toward a female object of desire. On the contrary, the immediate audience is Semiramis' aunt. And yet, insofar as this scene reflects a widespread novelistic convention of displaying the beautiful heroine in distress, the author here casts Semiramis in a traditionally feminine pose.⁹ And just as Ninus' eloquence may have figured repeatedly in the narrative, so too I suspect that the author repeatedly attracted the reader's gaze with charming descriptions of the beautiful Semiramis. It may be more than coincidental that the Antioch Ninus mosaic, which shows the hero gazing upon a painted image of a woman, suggests a similar attention to the visual appeal of the beloved.¹⁰

What does the author hope to tell us about these characters by distinguishing the reticent heroine so sharply from the articulate hero? We might infer that her rhetorical training is not equal to that of Ninus, although one wonders how much rhetorical training is needed to address a beloved aunt. If we attribute her awkwardness to the inexperience of youth—and by modern standards she is young indeed—we might conclude that she is not yet old enough for marriage after all.¹¹ The fundamental reason for her silence, however, is simply that the subject she attempts to address is taboo for a girl, for a *kore* or *parthenos*. The well-mannered heroine of a Greek novel should not voice erotic desire openly. She experiences erotic desire, of course, and the novel will satisfy this erotic desire, eventually granting her the husband of her dreams. But the heroine of the Ninus Romance may not actively pursue her beloved, not even her fiancé. While allowing her to experience passionate desire, the novel simultaneously subjects her to a severely strict patriarchal code of conduct, according to which an unwed girl has no legal prerogative to select her own marriage partner and very little say in the mat-

⁹ Chariton displays his heroine both publicly before crowds of admirers and privately in moments of distress. Egger 1994a discusses many of these scenes, observing that Chariton displays his heroine before both male and female audiences.

¹⁰ On the mosaic see Levi 1944, 420–41; Hägg 1983, 19 (illustration); and Stephens and Winkler 1995, 24.

¹¹ Semiramis looks very much like the type of young bride featured in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, married when not yet fifteen years old (7,5), although Ninus is much younger than Xenophon's Ischomachus. On the typical age of girls at marriage, a complicated historical question, see Shaw 1987.

ter altogether.¹² In attempting to verbalize her desire to marry Ninus, Semiramis attempts to address a subject forbidden to her, and the narration tells us as much. Transitioning from Ninus' speech to Semiramis' silent performance, the narrator suggests that our heroine lacks authorization to speak as her male counterpart had: 'though suffering the same, the girl had not the same verbal license with Thambe' (τῆι κόρηι δ' ἐν ὁμοίοις πάθεσιν οὐχ ὁμοία παρρησία τῶν λόγων ἦν πρὸς τὴν Θάμβην—A,IV,20–22). The word *parrhesia* here denotes less the ability than the permission to speak.¹³ Likewise, in telling us that, 'living in the women's quarters, she was unable to make her own words *appropriate*' (εὐπρεπεῖς—A,IV,24–25), the narrator implies that, from the lips of an unmarried girl, a plea to hasten marriage would be deemed unseemly.¹⁴

Semiramis' silence is therefore a measure less of rhetorical skill than of ethical character, and at the heart of the distinction between Ninus' and Semiramis' appeals lie their differing ethical responses to erotic desire. The operative force here is moral shame, *aidos*, which may be defined briefly as the emotional pain experienced when an impulse, an intention, or an action violates an ethical norm and thus threatens to incur the disapproval of a revered individual or group.¹⁵ In a social setting where the desires of her guardian, and not her own desires, ideally determine the arrangements for her marriage, the truly chaste and modest heroine will respectfully defer to her guardian. And in the case of the exceptionally modest and chaste heroine of a Greek novel, any words she might speak in the interest of love, any actions she might undertake, are inhibited by her anxiety over the potentially transgressive nature of her desires. Thus the narrator informs us that, when at-

¹² On marital legal constraints the novelists place on their heroines, see Egger 1994b, esp. 271-272.

¹³ Sandy's translation of παρρησία τῶν λόγων as 'openness' is preferable to Stephens and Winkler' 'eloquence', but I think 'license' is preferable to both. Kussl 1991, 21 preserves the idea of constraint: 'Dem Mädchen indes war es nicht möglich, ebenso frei zu Thambe zu sprechen.'

¹⁴ Neither Sandy's translation nor Stephens and Winkler's nor Kussl's explores the potential ethical implications of εὐπρεπεῖς. Sandy 1989, 807 writes that she 'could not advance persuasive arguments on her own behalf.' Stephens and Winkler 1995, 43 write, 'she was unable to fashion her arguments with such finesse.' And Kussl 1991, 21 writes, 'als Jungfrau ... konnte sie ihre Worte nicht so geschickt fügen.' While the word εὐπρεπεῖς itself, however, need not connote moral appropriateness, the context, I think, invites this interpretation.

¹⁵ Although much attention has been devoted to the general subject of shame in antiquity since Dodds 1951, relatively little attention has been devoted to the shame experienced by the heroines of the novel. On the closely related concept of *sophrosyne* in Heliodorus, see Anderson 1997.

tempting to share her desire with her aunt, Semiramis blushes at the ‘shame’ of her intended words (πρὸ[ς τὴν] αἰδοῦ τῶν λόγων—A,IV,36–37). She is caught, the narrator explains, ‘between [fear] and longing, between [hope] and shame’ (μεταξὺ [γὰρ ἦν φόβου] καὶ ἐπιθυμίας καὶ [ἐλπίδος καὶ] αἰδοῦς—A,V,1–3).¹⁶ The hero, in contrast, though not invulnerable to this obstruction, not shameless, nevertheless exercises a greater license to pursue his desire. Law and custom allow an adult male—and Ninus claims to be an adult male—to negotiate a marriage contract with the guardian of his prospective bride, while his bride cannot negotiate any such contract for herself. Social convention accordingly allows the hero to profess and pursue his love publicly, while denying that license to the heroine. It is this factor—the differing cultural constraints imposed upon male and female and the divergent experience of *aidos* that results—it is this factor that most decisively distinguishes the behavior of Ninus and Semiramis, allowing his eloquent appeal for marriage while silencing her desires.

Questions about *aidos*, in fact, surround the entire episode, contributing to its ethical and emotional appeal from beginning to end. The author first signals the importance of shame when Ninus and Semiramis make plans to address their aunts. Although little of this portion of the text can be restored with certainty, it appears that Semiramis here displays trepidation when Ninus urges her to join him in hastening the marriage. His love is ardent (ὁ σφόδρα ἐρῶν—A,I,3) as he encourages her to act, but she falters, her ‘courage’ restrained by ‘the shame customary to women’ (ἡ συνῆ[θη] ταῖς γυναι]ξίν αἰδῶς ... θάρσος—A,1,9–11). Here *aidos* is neatly opposed to *tharsos*, moral inhibition pitted against a willingness to risk rejection and condemnation. And the qualification of *aidos* as ‘customary to women’ suggests by extension that *tharsos* in pursuing desire is a characteristic more properly belonging to men. We might applaud Ninus for his progressive views; in encouraging his beloved to voice and pursue her desire rather than condemning her as shameless, he treats her with sexual equality, with the same license he grants himself.¹⁷ On the other hand, he may not fully appreciate the emotional distress that his request provokes. Although he is not technically seducing Semiramis, not inviting her to join him in illicit sexual activity, he is nevertheless inducing or pressuring her to overstep the boun-

¹⁶ I translate the supplements printed by Stephens and Winkler, and although ‘fear’ and ‘hope’ have been restored without certainty, ‘longing’ and ‘shame’ are not in doubt.

¹⁷ Ninus’ encouragement of Semiramis to speak with the frankness he himself assumes is consistent with Konstan’s general model of sexual symmetry in the novels, although, as I shall observe, Ninus’ treatment of his beloved is not equivalent to the author’s treatment of his heroine.

daries of convention within which she has so far existed—both the customary prohibition on marriage before age fifteen and also the customary restraint on a maiden’s expression of desire. Ninus is actively stirring the conflict between desire and shame within Semiramis. Moreover, their intention to address their aunts instead of their mothers—a relative likely to be less critical, less authoritarian, and more sympathetic, if not more permissive—would suggest that even Ninus recognizes the difficulty, if not the impropriety, of his request (A,I,32–36). These preliminary preparations of the hero and heroine anticipate a scene that may stretch the boundaries of appropriate behavior and loosen the constraints of shame. Is it inappropriate for Ninus and Semiramis to contest marriage customs and request permission to marry before reaching the required age? Does Ninus lack an appropriate sense of shame?

Shame remains a central issue as Ninus addresses Dercia, asking permission to marry her daughter immediately. So bold is Ninus’ appeal that he must end with an apology for his seemingly shameful behavior: ‘perhaps you will call me shameless in discussing these things’ (ἀναιδῆ τάχα με ἐρεῖς περὶ τούτων διαλεγόμενον—A,III,36–37). His audacity lies not simply in his willingness to oppose the convention prohibiting marriage for women before age fifteen. This opposition is hardly surprising, as he himself is already seventeen, not subject to the prohibition directly, and since the law, as he describes it, is ‘unwritten’ and sanctioned only by ‘foolish convention’ (A,II,36–38). The reasoning he advances in opposition to this unwritten convention, however, involves some potentially disrespectful attention to sexual activity. Ninus does not, of course, deliberately debase his speech with explicit references to the mechanics of intercourse; obscenity will not win his case. But in arguing that the artificial prohibition on early marriage opposes the natural patterns of human sexual behavior, and in insisting that both he and Semiramis are now sexually mature, he broaches a very delicate topic. First, to establish that he himself is sexually mature or ready for sex, he reminds Dercia that as ruler over so many he could have taken his fill of every pleasure (A,II,13–15), and he asks her to consider how many other men of his age have preserved themselves uncorrupted (ἀδιάφθοροι—A,II,35), as he himself has. While this question distinguishes him as ethically superior for having remained a virgin, with it he also acknowledges the anomaly of his virginal status, hinting that it is now time for him to become a man, a sexually active male.¹⁸ After thus announcing his own state of sexual readiness, he next turns his attention to the maturity of Semiramis. Arguing that marriage

¹⁸ Compare Theagenes’ profession of ‘virginity’ at Heliodorus 3,17.

should follow the dictates of nature rather than arbitrary custom, Ninus observes that pregnancy and even childbirth are in some cases possible for women of fourteen (A,III,7–9).¹⁹ Implicit in this observation is the suggestion that Semiramis, like Ninus himself, is biologically equipped for reproductive activity. Finally, as he approaches the end of his speech, Ninus anticipates the product of his sexual union with Semiramis, suggesting that, should an untimely death separate them, he and Semiramis at least be allowed to leave behind tokens of their love (ἐνέχυρα—A,III,35–36), i.e. children. Sex, or the biology of reproduction, is in the forefront of his mind, and his candor in discussing sexual matters with the mother of his future wife is remarkable. His speech acknowledges that, in asking Dercia's permission to marry, he is asking her permission to reproduce with, i.e., have sex with, her daughter.

The author has thus devised an impediment that foregrounds the sexual implications of marriage and consequently compels Ninus to speak with remarkable candor about his and Semiramis' sexuality. At the same time, this impediment gives Ninus the opportunity to display a well developed and appropriate sense of shame. For his speech is a carefully controlled and balanced expression of desire. He may stretch the limits of propriety, but he never violates them completely. He acknowledges the irregularity of his appeal, but he refuses to recognize indecency, and lest his boldness be misconstrued as impudence, he concludes his speech with an explicit disavowal of shamelessness (A,III,36–A,IV,13):

ἀναιδῆ τάχα με ἔρεις περὶ τούτων διαλεγόμενον· ἐγὼ δὲ ἀναιδῆς ἂν ἦμην λάθραι πειρῶν καὶ κλεπτομένην ἀπόλαυσιν ἀρπάζων καὶ νυκτὶ καὶ μέθῃ καὶ θεράποντι καὶ τιθηνῶι κοινούμενος τὸ πάθος. οὐκ ἀναιδῆς δὲ μητρὶ περὶ γάμων θυγατρὸς εὐκταίων διαλεγόμενος καὶ ἀπαιτῶν ἃ ἔδωκας καὶ δεόμενος τὰς κοινὰς τῆς [ο]ικίας καὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἀπάσης εὐχὰς μὴ εἰς τοῦτον ἀναβάλλεσθαι τὸν καιρὸν, ὃς ἐφ' ὑμῖν οὐκ ἔσ[τ]αι.
Perhaps you will say I am shameless in discussing these things. I would be shameless if I were making my attempt in secret and seizing enjoyment like a thief, entrusting my passion to the aid of night and drink and servant and nurse. But I am not shameless in discussing a daughter's wished-for marriage with her mother and in demanding what you

¹⁹ Note that Ninus here uses the term *gunaikes*, 'women', rather than the various terms used elsewhere in the passage for girl: *pais*, *kore*, or *parthenos*. Although Ninus does not apply the term to Semiramis explicitly, his use of it here anticipates her advancement to the role of woman and wife.

granted and asking that the common wishes of the household and the entire kingdom not be postponed to a time when it will be beyond your control.

In this passionate apology Ninus opposes his own honorable words to the shameful deeds of the adulterer. His advertisement of his own and Semiramis' sexual maturity might shock, but his virtuous candor is preferable to the adulterer's stealth (κλεπτομένην) and secrecy (νοκτῖ). And while he does urge Dercia to abandon social convention, he asks that his appeal be understood as a legitimate marriage petition rather than an act of adulterous seduction. He rouses his auditor's pity by characterizing himself as Semiramis' prisoner, a potentially seductive maneuver, but he quickly qualifies his captivity as not dishonorable (οὐκ [α.]ἰσχρῶ <ς>—A,II,28) and sanctioned by Dercia herself (ὕμῶν ἐθελήσαντω[v]—A,II,29). He rouses his auditor's good will not by praising her beauty, as would an adulterer, but by flattering her desire for grandchildren. It is noteworthy that Ninus applies the words *apolausis* and *pathos*, pleasure and passion, to the activity of the adulterer. Earlier in his speech, as well, Ninus employed the term *apolausis* with similar disparagement when pointing out that, as conqueror of so many, he could have sated himself with 'pleasure'—an implicit denial, dissociating him from the pursuit of physical gratification. While Ninus does not utterly condemn sexual pleasure, his appeal foregrounds instead the idea of childbirth (the tokens), focusing on the desired product rather than the act itself. By pointing out that both he and Semiramis are only children (A,III,32–33), he emphasizes that the continuity of the royal line depends on their producing a successor, thereby portraying his anticipated union with Semiramis not as satisfying private desires, but as fulfilling the common wishes of household and kingdom.

A crucial component of Ninus' closing apology is his assertion that, notwithstanding his arguments for the primacy of nature over social convention, he does not reject the authority of cultural institutions altogether. Rather than directing an adulterous appeal for sex to the beloved, to the girl who lacks the social authority to give herself, Ninus is directing his appeal instead to an authority figure empowered to grant her daughter's sexual activity.²⁰

²⁰ The fragments do not explain the absence of Semiramis' father or of Ninus' father. The reference in fragment B to a military decision made by Ninus' father (B,II,2–3) might suggest that he is still living. But Ninus' boast of his own authority over multiple nations in fragment A (A,II,10–12) suggests that his father has died. It is possible that, if alive, the fathers are away on campaign, although their exclusion from decisions concerning their children's marriage would be surprising. Unless Dercia's promise to advocate for

He opposes social conventions that foolishly contradict nature, but he remains deferential to parental authority. An adulterer might gain access to the house by means of a disloyal nurse or servant, but Ninus himself would never seek to undermine the authority structure of the household in this way. In approaching Dercia openly rather than gaining access to Semiramis deceitfully, by employing legitimate persuasion rather than illegitimate seduction, he displays himself as a model of shame-free behavior and an authority on what constitutes shame and what does not. Sex, we are to understand, is not inherently shameful, only sex under inappropriate circumstances and without social or familial sanction, sex enjoyed solely as a means of gratification, without the sanction of the institution of marriage—a familiar refrain within the Greek romantic novels. And as for speaking about sex, that too is permissible as long as the discourse ultimately advocates lawful marriage. Thus an apparent flirtation with social transgression ends with a resounding reaffirmation of family values. And while we readers may at first experience unsettling excitement at Ninus' daring self-assertion, his obedience to inviolable norms offers comfort and reassurance at the scene's close.

It is with Ninus' triumphant denial of shame fresh in our ears that we arrive at Semiramis' distraught submission to this overpowering force, and his success in addressing marriage renders her failure all the more poignant. While his speech emphatically disavows shamelessness, her silent blushes expose an inescapable feeling of guilt. His candor in discussing sexual matters highlights her inhibition, and his freedom in pursuing desire highlights her restrictions. He may have encouraged her to address her aunt freely, as he himself does, but he has little conception of the narrow compass within which a virgin may legitimately exercise erotic desire. Ninus understands shame as the pursuit of desire by any means possible, in the manner of an adulterer, whereas Semiramis is conditioned to understand shame simply as the pursuit of desire. For Ninus, desire and shame can rest comfortably side by side: a sense of shame prevents him from stealing his bride, but it does not prevent him from delivering a marriage proposal to his prospective mother-in-law. Semiramis, on the other hand, experiences love and shame as hopelessly irreconcilable opposites. One propels, the other restrains, and she lies incapacitated in the middle.

The key to resolving this dilemma is the kindhearted matriarch, Thambe. For Semiramis, Thambe represents the authority of the family, the very au-

Ninus (συνηγορήσειν—A,IV,19) points to a future meeting with Semiramis' father rather than to her subsequent meeting with Thambe, the authority assumed by both Thambe and Dercia in their responses suggests that both fathers have died.

thority that prohibits her pursuit of desire and renders her appeal impossible, the authority before which Semiramis feels shame most acutely. And while the intended appeal might look at first glance like an intimate conversation between aunt and niece, in Semiramis' mind it would function as a petition for marriage, with Semiramis awkwardly and inappropriately playing the masculine role of a prospective suitor. Despite Semiramis' inhibitions, however, Thambe is much more than a figure of patriarchal authority. Instead of intimidating Semiramis with an uncompromising male guardian, the author provides in Thambe a maternal heart, a woman highly sensitive to the tender emotions of youth, who quickly recognizes the nature of Semiramis' emotional turmoil and discreetly promises fulfillment of desire. When she realizes that Semiramis cannot simply 'take courage' and 'say what she wants' (A,V,8–10), that she cannot assume masculine courage and unveil her desire as Ninus could, Thambe adopts a less direct, more delicate means of communication, and she tactfully implies recognition of her niece's dilemma: 'Your silence speaks better than any speech' (ἄπαν[τος] ... μοι λόγου κάλλιον ἢ [σιωπῆ] διαλέγεται—A,V,12–14). Semiramis' awkward silence, her failed attempts at speaking accompanied by blushes and tears, have communicated to Thambe that her niece suffers from lovesickness. While Semiramis continues to guard her painful secret, Thambe nevertheless knows it; and by hinting of this knowledge very gently, Thambe offers Semiramis comfort, some hope that her wishes will soon be fulfilled. At the same time, by not naming Semiramis' affliction openly, by not confronting her with her desires directly, Thambe spares her niece unnecessary pain. She allows Semiramis to achieve her erotic objective without sacrificing her modesty. In fact, the very same words that Thambe uses to indulge Semiramis' desire simultaneously applaud her verbal restraint. Semiramis' silence speaks *kallion* than any speech, not simply 'better', but 'in a more beautiful way'. In other words, it is ethically more appropriate that Semiramis communicate her desire silently than through speech. Thambe thus acknowledges Semiramis' desire while simultaneously praising her reticence. She assuages both desire and shame with a single discreet statement.

Indirect communication, taken to extremes, poses the danger of misinterpretation for the reader. And as we proceed through the scene and find among Thambe's words no mention of lovesickness, we might wonder whether Thambe has, after all, misunderstood the cause of Semiramis' silence. For instead of reassuring Semiramis that she may marry Ninus if she wishes, Thambe seems instead to suspect that Ninus is responsible for Semiramis' present tears (A,V,14–25):

μή τι μέ[μφοι τὸν] ἐμὸν υ[ι]όν; οὐδὲν μὲ[ν οὖν]²¹ τετόλμηκεν οὐδὲ
 θ[ρασύς ἢ] μῖν ἀπὸ τῶν κατορθω[μάτων] καὶ τροπαίων ἐπανε[λθῶν]
 οἷ [α πο]λεμιστῆς πεπ[αρώινη]κεν εἰς σέ. τάχα δὲ κ[οῦκ ἂν ἐσι]ώπας
 τοιοῦτου γενομ[ένου]. ἀλλὰ βραδύς ὁ νόμος τ[οῖς ἐφω]ρίοις γάμων.
 σπεύδει δ[ὲ γαμείν] ὁ ἐμὸς υἴος. οὐδέ, διὰ τ[οῦτ' εἰ] κλαίεις, βιασθῆναί
 σε δεῖ.]

Perhaps you have some complaint against my son? But surely he has dared nothing, nor bold in his return from successes and victories has he assaulted you like a drunken warrior. I suppose you would not have kept silent about such a thing. Yet the custom is slow for those of an age for marriage, and my son is eager to marry. But if you are crying on this account, you must not be forced.

Acknowledging her son's impatience for marriage, Thambe ostensibly attributes Semiramis' present distress to Ninus' haste, apparently unaware that Semiramis' shame stems from feelings of desire. Thambe's misdiagnosis, however, is calculated, and rather than truly misunderstand her niece's distress, I believe, she deliberately avoids identifying it out of consideration for the girl's sense of shame.²² Instead of confronting Semiramis with her desire, she cautiously constructs a scenario that is more comforting to the girl, one in which Ninus, the returning conqueror, plays the active role, and Semiramis is merely the object of his advances. Thambe is, of course, correct to suspect Ninus' eagerness as a factor in Semiramis' dilemma; he did in fact encourage her to undertake this impossible task. But Thambe's decision to focus exclusively on Ninus' haste while ignoring any corresponding eagerness on Semiramis' part politely removes Semiramis' desire from the picture and thus eliminates the cause of her shame. At the same time, Thambe's reformed picture of the relationship does not deprive the girl of agency altogether. Semiramis no longer acts as a male petitioner, but she reserves the power to reject his proposal: 'if you are crying on this account, you must not be forced,' Thambe informs her.²³ Unlike the powerless victim

²¹ Stephens and Winkler as well as Kussl print μὲ[ν γὰρ], but I agree with Gronewald 1993, 3 and adopt μὲ[ν οὖν], which indicates the speaker's correction of her preceding suggestion. I thank Victor Bers for his judgment on this issue.

²² Stephens and Winkler 1995, 28–29 dispell the mistaken notion that Ninus has actually attempted rape, noting its inconsistency with Ninus' earlier claims to virtue. I am not aware, however, of discussions of this passage that credit Thambe with deliberately diverting attention from Semiramis' desire.

²³ Gronewald 1993, 3–4 restores A,V,24–25 differently: οὐδέ διὰ τ[οῦτο] κλαίεις; βιασθῆναί σε δεῖ.—'Is this not the reason you are crying either? Then you must be

of rape—a possibility Thambe has raised only to discount—Semiramis may indeed say no. Moreover, in granting Semiramis the power to reject Ninus’ advances, Thambe implicitly grants her also the power not to reject Ninus’ advances. She may choose to say no, or she may choose not to say no. She may indicate consent without actually saying yes; and without acknowledging her desire, she can have this desire fulfilled nonetheless. Thambe thus accommodates her niece’s desire once more with only the mildest injury to modesty.

The author maintains this delicate balance of shame and desire to the very close of the scene, allowing Semiramis’ desires to be heard without utterance (A,V,27–36):

δ[ι' αἰδῶ δὲ]²⁴ φθέγγασθαι μὲν τι οὐδ[ὲ τό]τε ἐτόλμησεν ἡ κόρη,
[παλ]λομένην δὲ τὴν καρδί[αν τοῖς] στέρνοις αὐτῆς προσθε[ῖσα] καὶ
λιπαρέστερον κατα[φιλοῦ]σα τοῖς τε πρότερον δάκ[ρυσσι] καὶ τῇ τότε
χαρᾷ μόνο[ν οὐχ]ὶ καὶ λάλος ἔδοξεν εἶνα[ι ὄν] ἐβούλετο.

In her shame not even then did the girl dare to utter a word, but resting her beating heart against her aunt’s breast and embracing her more earnestly, with her earlier tears and her present joy she seemed to be practically effusive about what she wanted.

Semiramis remains subject to the dictates of decorum. Even after her aunt’s indulgent invitation, she cannot assume a verbal daring unbecoming a girl. Shame muzzles not only expressions of desire, but even expressions of consent to marriage; and although she has not said no to Ninus’ proposal, she is still unable to utter an affirmation. Nor can she exploit the oblique manner of speaking demonstrated by her aunt. Her desire remains a highly private experience, to be shared verbally with none but her husband. Despite this silence, however, Semiramis paradoxically speaks volumes (*λάλος ἔδοξεν εἶνα[ι]*—A,V,35). No doubt she recognizes within her aunt’s words implicit permission for the marriage, and though her voice is still, her body proclaims the strength of her desire. Previously visible in her tears, it can now be felt in her beating heart and her eager embrace of her aunt. Though unwilling to

forced.’ Thambe, he explains, playfully feigns impatience in an attempt to compel Semiramis to acknowledge her desire. While this suggestion is consistent with Thambe’s shrewdness, I think it at odds with her kindness and her sensitivity. And none of the transcripts of the papyrus indicates any punctuation or space after *κλαίεις*, which further complicates this proposal.

²⁴ Stephens and Winkler 1995 print *χ* [αῤᾗ δὲ], but I adopt here Garin’s supplement, which maintains the balance between shame and desire.

verbalize her desire in any way, she simply cannot contain the joy she experiences in knowing that her desire will be fulfilled.

In the end both hero and heroine achieve their initial goal despite the decidedly divergent ethical constraints confronting them and despite the strikingly different degrees of composure they achieve. Having so vividly staged the contrast between male license and female inhibition, the novelist ultimately grants satisfaction to both protagonists. It would be inconsistent with the sexual decorum of this fragment and of the Greek novels generally to label the work culturally subversive. The emphasis on chastity and restraint characteristic of the genre would hardly permit that. And it is far from likely that the novelist's goal is to promote social equality by raising consciousness of the disparity in power and authority between the sexes. By aestheticizing the heroine's shame, in fact, the passage would appear to glorify and validate the heroine's endurance of this emotional suffering, if not the suffering itself. The novelist does not, however, simply accept the constraints imposed upon Semiramis' desire without question. The heroine may not be able to express desire openly without loss of respectability, but this novel, like all the Greek novels, reveals to its readers the heroine's experience of desire and grants it respect and legitimacy. Yes, Semiramis' desire remains subject to strict controls: it can be directed only toward the worthiest of suitors, and even then it must be ratified by parental authority. But her desire nevertheless exists, and the author invites us to witness it in action. We know that Ninus and Semiramis have shared at least one intimate conversation, during which Semiramis has presumably communicated her feelings to her fiancé. The loving Ninus welcomes Semiramis' love, and while holding himself to the same standards of chastity customarily imposed on women, he accords Semiramis a verbal license equal to his own. And although Semiramis cannot bring herself to expose her desire before her aunt, this interview ultimately gives expression to her desire in a strikingly spectacular way. In dramatizing the conflict between shame and desire within Semiramis, the novel testifies to the heroine's passion, demonstrating that, just as desire inspires Ninus' eloquent speech, an equally powerful desire motivates Semiramis' emotional crisis. And while she herself cannot actively voice that desire before her aunt, the novel succeeds in conveying that desire indirectly to its audience.

In the final analysis Semiramis' performance paradoxically outshines Ninus', exposing a passion even greater than his. Ninus may have succeeded in delivering an eloquent plea where Semiramis failed. He may have exercised his liberty where Semiramis remained subject to constraints. When we

consider the sentimental appeal of this episode, however, we find the balance of power inverted. Ninus, for all the charm and eloquence of his rhetoric, cannot match the poignancy of Semiramis' emotional turmoil. His deft verbal handling of desire and shame is but a prelude to Semiramis' gripping visual display of shame and desire in conflict. Read as a self-reflective authorial evaluation, Thambe's response to Semiramis—'Your silence speaks better than any speech'—highlights the distinction between the two performances and judges Semiramis' the more effective. The sentimental vision of a girl in emotional turmoil, we learn, employs an emotional rhetoric more powerful than any logic or eloquence. And Dercia's response to Ninus, though unquestionably favorable, similarly diminishes the value of his rhetorical skill: 'His words to Dercia fell on willing ears; in fact, if he had delayed any longer in all probability he would have forced her to bring the subject up first herself. As it was she pretended briefly to be scandalized and then promised to speak for him.' Dercia's pretended shock flatters Ninus' daring while her quick capitulation exaggerates the effectiveness of his rhetoric.²⁵ But in truth it is neither his daring nor his eloquence that wins her favor, since she was willing to consent before he began. The true appeal of his speech for Dercia lies not in the substance or shape of his arguments, but in the emotion that inspires them, his desire. And though we can detect this emotion behind the stylish clothing of rhetoric, we witness it much more vividly in Semiramis' blushes and tears. The evidence for her desire is more sincere, more genuine. Such terms may sound incongruous with the conventional contrivance and artificiality of the Greek novel. Nevertheless, through the spectacle of the heroine's suffering the author invites us to experience a deeper emotion than that roused by the hero's easy success. And the juxtaposition of the two performances highlights this emotional hierarchy.

The Semiramis Paradigm in the Works of Chariton and Heliodorus

Despite several cosmetic features distinguishing Ninus and Semiramis from their counterparts in the canonical Greek novels—their ethnicity, their royal status, and Ninus' extraordinary military prowess—the treatment of desire in fragment A, particularly the treatment of Semiramis' desire, reveals a fun-

²⁵ Dercia's shock reflects the expected response of a woman to whom a man has addressed words about sex. The word ἀκκίζομαι, 'pretend to be scandalized', is a particularly clever touch here, as it is elsewhere used specifically to express a real or a pretended rejection of sexual advances or aversion to sexual displays.

damental ethical and emotional kinship between this work and the surviving novels.²⁶ The reticent, shame-stricken maiden emerges as a convention of the genre, regularly encountered when the need for parental consent arises, its emotional impact sometimes enhanced by attention to the verbal freedom of the hero. Chariton, for example, exploits this convention in his opening chapters, where he subjects both Chaereas and Callirhoe to the flames of love at first sight (τὸ γὰρ πῦρ ἐξεκαίετο—1,1,8) but carefully distinguishes their reactions to desire. Like Ninus, Chaereas is capable of sharing his desire openly, and despite the political rivalry separating his family from Callirhoe's, he 'dared to tell his parents that he was in love' (ἀπετόλμησεν—1,1,8). Callirhoe, meanwhile, suffers more because she must keep silent (διὰ τὴν σιωπὴν) 'for shame of being exposed' (αἰδομένη κατάφωρος γενέσθαι—1,1,8). Like Semiramis, she is constrained by shame from voicing her desire.

Chariton does not showcase his heroine's silence here with the same elaborate staging found in the Ninus romance; he does not depict Callirhoe attempting speech and failing. But as the episode continues, we can observe him experimenting with the topos just as the Ninus author has done, momentarily foregrounding Callirhoe's desire, but always maintaining a delicate balance between desire and shame, between verbal silence and visual expression. In his efforts to preserve his heroine's modesty, Chariton playfully disguises her desire as shame when, believing that she is to be married to someone other than Chaereas, she faints (1,1.14). We readers, of course, know that her swoon, its monumentality underscored by a quotation from Homer, stems from being thwarted in her desire for Chaereas, whereas the witnesses quite wrongly attribute her faint to maidenly shame. While allowing us to savor Callirhoe's desires, Chariton politely and humorously masks these potentially shameful emotions from those around her. Privately she can be shown beseeching Aphrodite to fulfill her desire—'give me as husband this man you have shown me' (1.1.7)—but in the company of others there can be no mention of desire whatsoever.

Even as the lovesick couple is officially united, the constraints of modesty remain strong. In what looks like a ceremonial introduction of groom to bride, Chaereas rushes forward and kisses Callirhoe, and she is reanimated by his appearance, obviously relieved and delighted to learn that the intended groom is her beloved Chaereas: 'like a lamp-flame on the point of

²⁶ Even these cosmetic distinctions are not comprehensive. Chaereas eventually enjoys military success comparable to that of Ninus; and Chariclea, like Semiramis, is a princess from a barbarian nation.

expiring just when new oil is added, she lit up and grew larger and stronger upon recognizing her beloved' (1,1,15). It is clear to the reader that Callirhoe feels desire for Chaereas. He is identified as her 'beloved' (*eromenos*), a label that implicitly assigns her the role of desiring agent. And the simile of the lamp vividly conveys the emotional transformation, from fear of desire thwarted to joy at desire fulfilled. Nevertheless, Chariton vigilantly distinguishes his submissive heroine from her assertive male counterpart. Chaereas approaches and Callirhoe awaits his approach. He kisses while she is kissed. And even the beautiful simile of the replenished lamp envisions Callirhoe as the passive recipient of Chaereas' love. Her marriage has been arranged by others, and the physical reanimation captured by the simile is as far as Chariton will go in allowing his heroine to indicate consent. As in the case of Semiramis, Callirhoe's gestures render her 'practically effusive about what she wanted' (*Ninus* fr.A,V,34–36). But throughout the episode Chariton observes the dictates of a traditionally patriarchal family structure, avoiding the shame of direct expressions of desire despite multiple indirect manifestations.

Chariton exercises the *topos* again in his Babylonian episode, even though Callirhoe is no longer the same naïve girl, but a woman already twice married. The visually engaging heroine and the verbally persuasive hero of the *Ninus* fragment find close analogs when Callirhoe stands on display in the Babylonian high court and her suitors argue over her. Once again, a marriage is to be arranged for her, and propriety allows her no voice in the decision; formerly subject to her father's authority, she is now subject instead to the authority of the court. The standard conflict between desire and shame, moreover, assumes novel dimensions at the trial, as Callirhoe's love for one husband opposes the shameful reverence she feels toward the other: 'Callirhoe stood downcast and crying, loving Chaereas, feeling shame before Dionysius' (Καλλιρόη μὲν εἰστήκει κάτω βλέπουσα καὶ κλαίουσα, Χαίρειαν φιλοῦσα, Διονύσιον αἰδομένη—5,8,6). The trial thus projects the inner emotional turmoil of the heroine onto a grand stage, casting Chaereas and Dionysius as embodiments of love and shame respectively, each vying for possession of the heroine while she can do little more than wait for them to resolve the dispute, crying tears over one, averting her gaze from the other. Chariton does, however, allow Callirhoe a momentary ethical lapse: overcome by the vision of a husband she had believed dead, she calls out, 'Chaereas, you live?' and begins to run toward him (5,8,1). Modesty abandons the emotionally weakened and confused Callirhoe, and she acts upon her desire,

oblivious to the crowd of spectators in the courtroom.²⁷ But this very public expression of love is soon cut short: Dionysius intercepts her as she rushes toward Chaereas, and shame symbolically reasserts control, hindering her course toward love. From this point on, she looks toward Chaereas, but she remains silent (5,8,3). And as if to cloak her erotic indiscretion, Chariton diverts our attention to the verbal wrangling of the two suitors, their rivalry intensified by the sight of the beloved (5,8,4). They speak, and she is viewed. They desire, she is desired, and order is thereby restored.²⁸ Shortly after the trial, Chariton counterbalances his heroine's public display of desire with a private display of shame. When the Persian queen assures her that she will have 'whichever man she prefers'—perhaps an implicit invitation to reveal the object of her desire—Callirhoe responds only with tears (5,9,7). Like Semiramis, who cannot confess her desire even before her indulgent aunt, Callirhoe is paralyzed by shame even before a potential compassionate confidante.²⁹

Heliodorus, too, cleverly exploits the convention of the shame-stricken, silent heroine. By subjecting his heroine to a debilitating conflict between love and desire at the very beginning and again at the very end of her travels with Theagenes, he frames her entire adventure as a discourse on the emotions and actions appropriate for a maiden. So earnest is Chariclea's devotion to chastity and so deep her aversion to carnal pleasure, that her first encounter with the hero sparks a clash of shame and desire even more debilitating than those suffered by Semiramis and Callirhoe. Reluctant to ac-

²⁷ Chariton soon afterwards lets us know that the spectators recognize her affection for Chaereas, telling us, 'even the king would have wanted to be Chaereas' (5,8,3).

²⁸ In two other passages Callirhoe may be thought to violate the prohibition on public expressions of desire. First, at 4,1,11, when mourning her supposedly dead husband publicly, she embraces and kisses his image, clear signs of affection. The context of funeral lamentation, however, licenses this erotic display as an expression of devotion and grief. Second, when Artaxates threatens torture if she does not yield to the king, Callirhoe scorns his threats as trivial in comparison with her past suffering, and she offers a priamel-like list of her misfortunes, culminating in her present separation from Chaereas (6,7,9). Although Callirhoe reveals her love here, it is an unintentional breach of decorum, prompted by indignation rather than erotic intemperance. In response to Artaxates' shameful attempt to purchase her services for the king's pleasure, her expression of love for Chaereas may be read as an emphatic assertion of fidelity. The love she shares with him puts to shame the economically profitable relationship Artaxates proposes.

²⁹ We might be tempted to interpret Callirhoe's refusal to answer the queen as a reflection of her distrust—she expresses fear of the queen's jealousy at 6,6,5—but in 5,9 Statira offers only comfort. Chariton later points out that Callirhoe could not openly show her sadness in the palace (6,2,5); in other words, modesty prohibited her from showing sadness at being thwarted in her desire for Chaereas.

knowledge desire even to herself, let alone to expose her desire to another, this most chaste of heroines lies ill in bed as passion and principles wrestle within her. Calasiris assumes Thambe's role as the insightful, indulgent elder, and the brief exchange between aunt and niece in the *Ninus Romance* swells here into several days of tactful and often humorous diplomacy, culminating in a discreet confession of desire from Chariclea (4,10) and a promise from Calasiris that her desire will be honorably fulfilled (4,11). Like Semiramis and Callirhoe, Chariclea strenuously resists naming her desire: 'Diagnose my sickness how you will, but do not force me to speak of my distress; allow me at least to spare myself dishonor by concealing that which it is shameful to suffer but even more shameful to divulge' (4,10,2, tr. Morgan 1989). Theagenes, on the other hand, inherits from Ninus a combination of masculine audacity and bodily chastity. He actively approaches Calasiris for assistance in furthering his desire while simultaneously professing never before to have indulged in sexual pleasures (3,17). Although we cannot be sure that Heliodorus in fact read Semiramis' interview with her aunt, more than coincidence lies behind these parallels of character and plot.

Like Chariton and the author of the *Ninus Romance*, Heliodorus also addresses the patriarchal standards that typically limit the heroine's actions. In a shocking departure from convention, Heliodorus allows his heroine to defy her guardian, to reject the suitor chosen by Charicles and to elope with a man of her own choice. While mischievously testing the limits of shame, however, Heliodorus does not wantonly violate the patriarchal hierarchy. The well-timed revelation of Chariclea's true parentage in Persinna's letter (4,8)—she is the daughter of the king and queen of Ethiopia—diminishes Charicles' claim to paternal authority. And Calasiris' greater attentiveness to Chariclea's emotional well-being, together with his general sagacity, entitles him to supplant Charicles as guardian. Moreover, Heliodorus limits the role of desire as a motive for Chariclea's actions: he characterizes her elopement not as a honeymoon voyage with her lover, but as a search for her true parents, the parents entitled to authorize her marriage.³⁰ After eventually reuniting his heroine with these birth parents in the novel's closing episode, Heliodorus restages the conflict between the heroine's desire and the father's authority, placing his heroine once again in the midst of a battle between love and shame. Having quickly assumed authority over his daughter, Hydaspes already intends to marry her to Meroebus (10,24), while her beloved

³⁰ Compare Anderson 1997, 312–13.

Theagenes faces imminent death as a sacrificial victim.³¹ And yet Chariclea, although she several times attempts obliquely to communicate her marriage plans to her father, repeatedly refrains from explaining her desires openly (10,22; 10,29; 10,33). Her mortification grows ever more audible as Theagenes' peril pushes her closer toward voicing her love: 'Now I am compelled to resort to an explicit and undisguised denunciation of myself,' she laments (10,29,5). Her harsh self-condemnation exposes more than mere modesty or shyness. Having fallen in love and pledged fidelity without true parental consent, Chariclea is now ashamed to confess to her father that her passions defy his authority. And so it is time for the wise Thambe to intercede once again, her role this time divided between Persinna and Sisimithres, between the compassionate mother and the authoritative priest.

The other three surviving romances offer no precise parallels to Semiramis' painful silence, although they do at times acknowledge the conventional expectation of masculine verbal assertion and female verbal passivity. Daphnis displays eloquence analogous to that of Ninus on at least five occasions, each time on an erotic subject.³² Chloe displays none. This distinction is consistent with the greater freedom accorded to Daphnis generally in the pursuit of desire—it is Daphnis, for example, who overcomes their distressing winter separation (3,3–11, esp. 3,4).³³ While keeping Chloe habitually silent, however, Longus has not emphasized shame as a motive for her silence. In Longus' pastoral Eden, conscious knowledge of right and wrong is scarce, and ignorance largely replaces shame as the principal force of restraint against desire. Although Chloe's foster-parents for a time plan to marry her to someone other than Daphnis, the idea of countering their plans by confessing her own desires never occurs to her, and she never suffers from a debilitating conflict between desire and shame.³⁴ Achilles Tatius val-

³¹ Persinna, too, apparently looks forward to choosing a suitable husband for Chariclea (10,21,3).

³² Daphnis demonstrates his eloquence when vying with Dorkon for Chloe's affections (1,16), when relating to Chloe the myths of the wood-dove (1,27) and Echo (3,22–23), when petitioning Dryas for marriage to his daughter (3,29), and when bestowing upon Chloe the marital apple (3,34).

³³ Longus' use of typical novelistic conventions is especially complex, both because he is fusing these with pastoral elements, and because his protagonists grow gradually into conventional gender roles over the course of the novel, rather than simply assuming these roles from the start. On the gradual enculturation of Chloe, see Winkler 1990 and Morgan 2004, 11–12.

³⁴ This is not to say that shame plays no role in the pastoral curriculum. Morgan 2004 perceptively detects its influence in several passages, including the following: at 1,13,2 Chloe tests the softness of her flesh only when Daphnis is not looking; at 1,17,2 Daphnis

ues the Ninus and Semiramis paradigms more as targets for parody than as models of virtuous behavior. Instead of emulating Ninus, Clitophon emulates the kind of adulterer Ninus condemns, the man who attempts to steal pleasure without paternal authorization (2,19–24). And Clinias satirizes the verbal modesty of heroines like Semiramis and Callirhoe with his claim that maidens resent the word ‘sex’ more than the act itself (1,10). Despite the relaxed ethical standards of his protagonists, however, Achilles prevents them from consummating their relationship before securing parental consent (8,19). And while his garrulous hero-narrator frequently indulges in erotic rhetorical displays, Achilles allows Leucippe to maintain a respectable silence on sexual matters throughout.³⁵ Xenophon of Ephesus shows a brief

blushes when looking at Chloe; at 1,25,1 Daphnis can look at the sleeping Chloe without shame (οἶα μὴδὲν αἰδοῦμενος); at 1,31,2 Chloe’s shame (αἰδεσθεῖσα) prompts her to withhold from Daphnis any mention of the kiss she has shared with Dorcon, an action paralleled by Daphnis’ failure to share with Chloe news of his experience with Lycaenion (3,20,2); and at 2,9,1 Daphnis and Chloe consider lying together naked too bold (θρασύτερον) for maidens and for young goatherds. Although Longus does not adopt the pattern of painful opposition between desire and shame observed in Semiramis, he is clearly interested in the parallel development of these two forces. I thank the anonymous referee who brought this issue to my attention.

I should also note that shame does inhibit Chloe’s speech on one occasion, but here she feels shame before Daphnis rather than before an older, parental authority figure. At 3, 24, equipped with new knowledge after Lycaenion’s lesson, Daphnis no longer permits Chloe to be naked with him so frequently; and though surprised by his prohibition, Chloe is ashamed (ἠδέϊτο) to ask the reason. Commenting on Chloe’s ‘modesty’ here, Morgan 2004, 216 writes, ‘it is depicted as a natural female instinct, not grounded in knowledge, and mirrors D’s male acquisition of knowledge.’ I would suggest, however, that Longus has cleverly blended the natural and the conventional in this passage. The shame Chloe feels here stems from a reverence for Daphnis and a fear of being judged unfavorably by this developing authority figure. And by imposing a prohibition (οὐκ ἐπέτρεπεν), Daphnis is in fact *teaching* Chloe to feel shame at being naked before him. So while Chloe’s capacity for shame is innate, her exercise of shame is influenced by culturally determined constraints.

³⁵ Achilles Tatius introduces shame on several occasions, sometimes in conjunction with parental judgment, and often in a humorous and mildly subversive tone. At 2,29,3, for example, after Leucippe’s mother reprimands her sternly for nearly losing her virginity, the narrator identifies shame as the wound the soul suffers when reproached for errors. At 8,5,3 the narrator mischievously characterizes his gratification of Melite as an act of αἰδώς; and compare her complaint at 5,25,6 that Clitophon did not reverence (ἠδέεσθης) the fire of Eros. Achilles occasionally understands shame as a restraint on speech. At 1,5,6 shame gives way to verbal license (παρρησία). And at 8,15,3 the narrator points out that Leucippe can relate her adventures to her father without shame, her virginity now having been confirmed. Compare also 8,4,1–3, where Sostratus invites Clitophon to relate his adventures without shame. Despite the many appearances of shame in the novel,

interest in the Semiramis pattern: shame prevents Anthia from voicing her desire in the opening chapters, and she recognizes the restraint imposed by family authority, although she longs to share her secret desire with another (1,4,7). Habrocomes, on the other hand, bears little resemblance to the daring Ninus. Shame is as much an obstacle for him as for Anthia; and after he overcomes his initial narcissism, few if any significant ethical distinctions can be observed between hero and heroine.³⁶

Conclusions

In juxtaposing Ninus' eloquence and Semiramis' silence, the author of the Ninus Romance invites an ethical debate over the proper limits of erotic speech among adolescents. How much verbal license should be granted to maidens in love? Depending on our views on family structures and domestic hierarchies of authority, we may find conflicting answers in the novels. On the one hand, the hero's treatment of his fiancée as a sexual equal, empowered to speak as he does, suggests that the conventional shame compelling maidens to hide their desires is just that, conventional. And while the heroine herself does not dare to expose her desire as Ninus has suggested, the novel acknowledges her desire and legitimizes it, removing the veil of shame and exhibiting her love triumphantly before an admiring audience. The novel thus casts itself as a legitimate artistic expression of feminine desire, supplementing the limited agency of its heroine with its own less constrained powers of narration. On the other hand, we should not overlook the fact that the Ninus fragment does not permit the heroine herself to violate the patriarchal prohibition on her expression of desire. While speaking for her, it maintains her silence. The novelist might characterize his (assuming the novelist is a he) adherence to the prohibition less as suppression than as defense; he must preserve her reputation and shelter her from the mental trauma any

however, Achilles devises no sustained conflict between shame and desire like that experienced by Semiramis, Callirhoe, and Chariclea.

³⁶ On the extreme symmetry between Anthia and Habrocomes in Xenophon's work, see Konstan 1991. Xenophon actually draws attention to his hero's unusual passivity by having Anthia chastise him for his unmanly failure to pursue her (Ἄνανδρε καὶ δειλέ, πόσον ἐβράδυνας ἐρῶν χρόνον; πόσον ἠμέλησας; 1.9.4). For a bolder masculinity in the *Ephesiaca* we must look to the bandit Hippothous, a notable foil to the meek Habrocomes; for discussion of Hippothous' masculinity see Watanabe 2003 and Konstan 1991, 27–28. Xenophon also provides us with the shameless Manto as an extreme foil for the chaste Anthia.

shameful words might induce. Yet, the novel repeatedly exposes her to danger and repeatedly arouses emotional distress. Semiramis' non-interview with her aunt looks very much like a test of her self-restraint, and by subjecting her to this test and allowing her to pass, the novel makes the girl complicit in her own subjugation. By sentimentalizing her emotional turmoil, moreover, by casting desire and shame as sweetness and bitterness rather than as liberty and repression, the novel makes its audience complicit in that subjugation as well.

The ethical debate surrounding Semiramis' silence as well as the silence of her cousins Callirhoe and Chariclea has a rich history in Greek literature; and while not all of this history can be retraced here, it is worth noting the relevance of Homer's Nausicaa and Euripides' Phaedra, two familiar icons of female desire and female speech. Like the novelists, Homer does not hide the intensity of Nausicaa's desire; he allows her openly to share with her companions the desire to have Odysseus as a husband (6.244–45)—not unlike Callirhoe's prayer to Aphrodite to give her Chaereas (1,1,7).³⁷ While her praise for the hero might merit our approval, however, not all of her language is ethically unassailable. Though acquainted with shame and the customary restrictions governing a maiden's tongue, she cleverly circumnavigates these restrictions, offering them only lip-service. She gains her father's permission to leave the palace through prevarication and then, with some not-so-subtle double-entendres, she invites Odysseus to pursue her as a suitor. Rather than subordinating her language to shame, she uses language as a tool for bypassing shame. She feels desire and she pursues it; and while superficially deferential to the dictates of decorum, she refuses to let a sense of shame get in her way. We may delight in her vivacity and verbal facility, but this transgression of erotic boundaries ultimately sets Nausicaa apart from the obedient heroines of the novels.³⁸

³⁷ Nausicaa's wish did not escape the attention of ancient moralists. A scholiast judges it 'unbefitting a maiden' and 'licentious' (ἀπρεπεῖς παρθένῳ ... καὶ ἀκόλαστοι), and Aristarchus (2nd c.) is reported to have athetized the lines (schol. on *Od.* 6,244). A debate may already have been underway in the 4th c., for Ephorus is said to have praised these words as 'coming from a soul naturally disposed toward virtue' (schol. on *Od.* 6,244). Plutarch offers a diplomatic assessment in his essay *On how the young man should listen to poetry*: if Nausicaa's wish is motivated merely by the sight of Odysseus, then 'one must rebuke her boldness and her lack of restraint,' but if her words reflect her recognition of Odysseus' sound character, then 'she is worthy of admiration' (27a–b). The novelists have prudently avoided giving their heroines confidantes of their own age.

³⁸ Homer's account gives us no strong cause to criticize Nausicaa's behavior, although we may suspect that standards of behavior and gender hierarchies on Phaeacia differ from

Phaedra, paradoxically, is much closer in erotic temperament to these heroines. I am not suggesting that the novelists actively cultivated a strong resemblance between their blameless maidens and this would-be incestuous adulteress.³⁹ Yet Euripides' Phaedra is one of the few characters of the literary tradition to suffer a shame as oppressive as that suffered by the romantic heroines, a shame that dreads verbal exposure and generates mental and bodily disorder. And while the illegitimacy of Phaedra's desire distinguishes it from the desire of Semiramis, Callirhoe, and Chariclea, these heroines treat their own desire as though it were indeed illegitimate. They feel guilt as Phaedra feels guilt, and they dread the condemnation that uttering their desires would incur. And like Phaedra, they ultimately rely on others to diagnose their illness and accommodate their desire. With shame preventing them from adopting Nausicaa's erotic initiative, they require a facilitator, a Thambe or a Calasiris, to act on their behalf as the nurse acts for Phaedra. To be sure, the pity that Phaedra's erotic distress can arouse in an audience is dulled and confused by the horror of her illegitimate desires. But by harnessing the kind of debilitating shame suffered by Phaedra and yoking it with a noble desire, the novelists invite us to experience an intense pity for the erotic suffering of their heroines as well as a deep admiration for their erotic restraint.

Accordingly, the *pharmakon* for the illness of the heroines is not just sex, as Euripides' nurse and Longus' Philetas recommend, but rather marriage, the physical satisfaction of desire sanctioned by paternal consent. By miraculously arranging the heroine's legitimate marriage with the man she loves, the novels finally overcome the conflict between desire and shame, nature and culture, autonomous female will and patriarchal authority.⁴⁰ Once she is released from parental subordination and partnered with the man who regards her as a sexual equal, once she is transformed from girl into woman, the heroine's shame and desire cooperate, as both are now centered upon her

those on Ithaca. Alcinous, of course, knowingly indulges his daughter; see *Odyssey* 6.68 and de Jong 2001, 155.

³⁹ Heliodorus adapts the Phaedra model to produce Cnemon's wicked step-mother and the villainous Persian Arsake.

⁴⁰ Compare Perkins 1995, 71: 'Romance celebrated not so much the achievement of personal attachments as the bonds of social relations. One mark of the romance's idealizing nature was its fiction that these coincided.' I agree that the novels accommodated both, but I do not read them as subordinating the pursuit of personal desire to public or social interest. See also Swain 1996, 118–31, for a survey of attitudes toward marriage observed in the novels and contemporary texts, with particular attention to the general disapproval of extra-marital sexual activity, including pederasty.

husband: her desire propels her toward this beloved husband while her shame repels her away from all others.⁴¹ Her husband, moreover, regards his own marital role as analogous to hers: he is not her guardian, but a companion who will maintain affection and fidelity toward her just as she maintains affection and fidelity toward him.⁴² In contrast to their previous, divergent experiences of emotion, their exercise of desire and shame as husband and wife is truly symmetrical. Whether this new father, in the end, will hear or value the desires of his unmarried daughter as he once heard and valued the desires of his beloved is a question the novels leave unanswered and unasked.⁴³

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⁴¹ Clinias recognizes this cooperative relationship between desire and shame when encouraging Clitophon to marry Melite at Ach. Tat. 5.12.1: ὁ δὲ ἔρωσ ἀιδῶ προζευεῖ. Since Anthia marries at the start of Xenophon's work and remains married, the conventional conflict between shame and desire can no longer be employed after the novel's beginning. In the novels of Chariton and Heliodorus, on the other hand, the conflict can remain active throughout, since Callirhoe's marital status remains technically undetermined until the novel's close, and Chariclea does not officially wed until the close of the *Aethiopica*.

⁴² Chaereas' physical abuse of his wife at 1,4,12 suggests an improper assumption of authority or at least an imprudent exercise of authority over a wife who, by virtue of her fidelity, deserves better.

⁴³ Insofar as the relationship between Hydaspes and Persinna differs in its lack of trust (4,8) from that between Theagenes and Chariclea, one might hypothesize that Theagenes' attitudes toward his own daughter will differ as well.

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