

An Ethiopian Paradox: Heliodorus, *Aithiopika* 4.8¹

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The opening scenes of the *Aithiopika* have deservedly attracted much critical attention, both in terms of narrative technique and also from the point of view of their dramatic and enigmatic construction.² The architecture of the story has similarly drawn comment, although opinion on this has not been unanimous; according to some, the story follows the model of the *Odyssey* in that it is a *nostos* that begins and ends in Ethiopia,³ while others argue for a linear structure and regard events preceding Charikleia's arrival in Delphi as 'prehistory'.⁴ In terms of the conventions of romance, Delphi is indeed a starting-point of sorts, since traditional elements that are normally found at the beginning of these works, such as descriptions of the setting, the hero and heroine, and the love encounter between them during a religious ceremony, take place here.⁵ The conventional meeting of lovers at a festival in their home town to which they return after experiencing various ordeals and adventures has therefore been replaced by a structure of far greater originality.⁶ Nevertheless, linear readings of the plot underplay the importance of the narrative of Charikleia's birth, which is introduced during the complex course of events at the oracle by means of a 'flashback' in the form of Persinna's letter. The story of Charikleia is central to the narrative – the destinies of all the other characters depend on hers as she herself says (10.12.4);⁷ chronologically

1. This paper was presented as a 'close reading' of *Aithiopika* 4.8 to the Laurence Seminar on Heliodorus in May 1996. My thanks are due to Richard Hunter, who convened the seminar, the delegates and an anonymous reader for their comments.
2. Bühler (1976) 177–85 (dramatic); Morgan (1994) 97–116, (1992) 86–90 (enigmatic); Keyes (1922) 44 (*in medias res* technique, cf. Hor. *AP* 148).
3. Cf. Morgan (1989b) 320 'The dynamic and deviant event which brought the whole story to life was the birth of Charikleia, white in Ethiopia. At the end of the story Charikleia has returned, to her family and her nation'; Bartsch (1989) 48; Keyes (1922) 44.
4. Hägg (1983) 70, 'prehistory'; Reardon (1971) 385 talks of the 'structure linéaire, et non pas circulaire, de ce roman' and notes that Charikleia is white and that she is travelling to the culturally alien land of blacks, Ethiopia.
5. The conventional opening of the romances and the reasons for Heliodorus' choice of Delphi as the location for the love encounter are discussed in Hilton (1996b) 187–95.
6. Morgan (1996) 440 writes '... the story itself is not the familiar circular one. The characters do not simply end up where they started ...'; Létoublon (1993) 108–9, 127 emphasizes the originality of Heliodorus in replacing the conventional circular plot with a linear one (compare her map xxv–vi with that of Alvares in Schmeling (1996) 807).
7. In the Byzantine period, the romance was known as the *Charikleia*, see Morgan (1996) 421–2; Colonna (1938) *test.* II (Maximus Confessor).

and geographically her story begins and ends in Meroe and in religious terms she is a descendant of the Sun, born in the land of the Sun (4.8.3), to which she returns to become a priestess (10.41.1–2). Straight readings of the plot therefore also exaggerate the degree to which it can with any justification be said to constitute the opening of a *Greek* romance, in the sense of a romance whose cultural sympathies unquestionably belong to the Hellenistic world.⁸

The letter of Persinna, the Queen of Ethiopia, to the daughter she exposed at birth (*Aith.* 4.8) is thus crucially important for any interpretation of Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*;⁹ in addition to opening the main line of the plot, it exposes the central paradox of the birth of its white heroine to the black king and queen of Ethiopia. The letter, embroidered on a swaddling band (ταβνία) in which the infant Charikleia had been bound, is read by an Egyptian priest, Kalasiris, to Knemon, a young Athenian whom he had encountered on the banks of the Nile. The circumstances under which the band is obtained and the strange story that it tells are wrapped in enigma that challenges the hermeneutic powers of the reader. Michael Psellos, the eleventh-century Byzantine polymath, famously compared the beginning of the *Aithiopika* of Heliodorus to a mass of intertwined snakes with their heads buried in their coils (ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ συγγράμματος ἔοικε τοῖς ἔλικτοῖς ὄφεσσι, *De Chariclea et Leucippe iudicium* 19–23).¹⁰ The aptness of this comparison is amply borne out by the intricate and convoluted events that take place at Delphi, during which the mysterious letter of the Ethiopian queen first comes to light. But Psellos' analogy also suggests that the 'heads' (the literary 'openings' of the various narratives which constitute the work) are hidden within their 'coils' (the tales that follow). In effect, Heliodorus has hidden an enigma – the story of Charikleia's birth in Ethiopia – in the complex narrative of the encounter between Theagenes and Charikleia, their elopement from Delphi, and their capture by pirates in Egypt.¹¹ This article therefore has a double purpose: to demonstrate the degree of narrative compression in *Aithiopika* 4.8 and its immediate context, and to argue that the script it presents (that of the birth of a prodigy) is what provides the story with its imaginative power and originality.

8. For the ambivalent cultural attitudes of Heliodorus cf. Kuch (1996) 218; (1989) 81, 85. There is no space here to discuss this difficult question adequately: some characters state their preference for Greeks (e.g. 2.10.4 Thisbe) but most of the action of the romance takes place outside Greece and the majority of the characters are not Greek. Furthermore, attention is repeatedly called to objective 'Greekness' in birth (2.34.2 Theagenes), dress (2.21.2–5 Kalasiris), language (e.g. 2.33.3 Charikleia), learning (2.28.5) and culture (7.14.2). The perspective appears to be that of an outsider; Heliodorus portrays Athens as a city of sexual debauchery and Delphi as a place of ignorance, superstition and military bravado as well as a haven of philosophical and religious enlightenment (2.26.1). I assume here that Heliodorus was a Syrian from Emesa (cf. 10.41.4).

9. See, e.g., Bartsch (1989) 48; Winkler (1982) 127, who regarded the chapter as 'a mini-novel'; Dilke (1980) 264.

10. Given as *test.* XII in Colonna (1938) 363–5.

11. For a discussion of literary openings, particularly the opening scene of the *Iliad*, see Nuttall (1992) 214–16.

Narrative Compression in Aithiopia 4

Consideration of the narrative context of Persinna's letter shows that Heliodorus has left much unexplained. The first puzzle concerns the readiness of Charikles to believe Kalasiris when he told him (4.7.13)¹² that he was afraid that some enemy had written spells on the band and that it is these that are responsible for Charikleia's hysterical reaction to her father's proposal that she marry his nephew, Alkamenes (4.7.11). Charikles accepts this explanation unquestioningly (4.8.1, ἐπήνει ταῦτα) despite the fact that earlier (2.31.2) he had told Kalasiris that the Ethiopian ambassador, who had entrusted the infant Charikleia to him in Katadoupoi, had told him explicitly that the band was embroidered in native (ἑγχωροίς) characters which told the story of her birth (διηγῆματι τῶν κατὰ τὴν παῖδα κατάστικτος), and despite the fact that Kalasiris had not yet seen the band. The reader must therefore assume that Charikles' credulity here is part of his characterization as an unobservant, uncritical and superstitious pedant who fails to observe the behaviour of his daughter and Theagenes at their first meeting (3.5.7), readily accepts Kalasiris' explanation of the evil eye (3.9.1), and believes that the Egyptian priest is capable of curing Charikleia of its effects (3.9.1; 4.5.3) as easily as he thought he could make her fall in love (2.33.6; 4.7.1). Charikles' acceptance of Kalasiris' suggestion is more understandable when viewed in the light of contemporary attitudes to exotic scripts. Apuleius, for example, describes the sacred books that the priest of Isis revealed to him as 'books marked with strange letters' (*Met.* 11.22 *libros litteris ignorabilibus praenotatos*); according to the priest, the writing was intended to be illegible by the profane (*a curiosa profanorum lectione munita*).¹³ Moreover the claim was frequently made in late antiquity that holy men composed allegories and enigmas in strange characters.¹⁴ 'Mystery writings' in this sense were plentiful in the third and fourth centuries A.D. when the Christian codex was establishing itself as a medium for individual reference and when the Bible was used as a guide to individual salvation. Gnostic, Manichaean and other religious texts were also committed to writing and editions of the pagan authors proliferated.¹⁵ In this context, Kalasiris' suggestion that the band contained magic writing would have been plausible and adds to the importance and quasi-sacred status of its contents.

12. δέδοικα μή τινος ἐμπέπλησται γοητείας καὶ μαγγανείας τυγχάνει τραχυνούσας τὴν ψυχὴν ἀνάγραπτος.

13. The emphasis placed on enigmatic writing in the romances is reflected in the occurrence of riddles on statues and in inscriptions in the *Alexander Romance* (1.32), the *Life of Aesop* (78–80) and *Apollonius, Prince of Tyre* (e.g., 4.42–3).

14. Cf. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.23.153, Moses used an Egyptian 'symbolic script', hieroglyphics and Assyrian writing), Porphyry (*VP* 12.1, Pythagoras used epistolary, hieroglyphic and symbolic scripts), Diogenes Laertius (9.49.3, Democritus wrote works on the sacred scripts of Babylonia and Meroe), and Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.15.69, Democritus translated the stele of Ahikar).

15. Cf. Altheim (1957) 47–66.

A second puzzle concerns the fact that, although the sudden expulsion of the Ethiopian ambassador from Egypt had frustrated Charikles' hopes of finding out who the parents of the girl were and why she had been exposed (2.32.3), he nevertheless neither sought help in translating the band while he was in Egypt nor does he now ask Kalasiris to decipher the writing in Delphi, although it was well known (Diod. Sic. 3.3.5) that Egyptian priests (such as Kalasiris) were able to read the Ethiopian script, which resembled Egyptian hieroglyphics. At any rate, Heliodorus takes it for granted that Kalasiris is able to read the script whereas Charikles is not and evidently assumes that his readers would not have found this inexplicable (4.8.1).¹⁶ However, Heliodorus states that the band is written in 'native' (ἐγγωροίς) letters (2.31.2) so that Charikles' failure to read the text himself or to ask for it to be interpreted for him is made more believable. In the present passage (4.8.1) Kalasiris states that the band was in 'royal' (βασιλικούς) rather than 'demotic' characters and that the royal script resembles the Egyptian hieratic,¹⁷ and in 10.14.1 they are described as 'regal' (βασιλείους). The author's use of the term 'royal', which is unprecedented in the received account of Ethiopian or Egyptian writing, distracts attention from the problem of who was able to read the band and reinforces the reader's interest in the mysterious significance of its contents.¹⁸

However, writing plays a much more significant part in *Aithiopia* 4.8 than this; the contents of the band are described metadiegetically as a γράμμα διηγούμενον (4.8.1) and Heliodorus is clearly aware that the story of Charikleia stands for the romance itself, since the heroine later refers to the band as 'the story of my destiny and the narrative of all your lives' (10.12.4 γράμματα δὲ τάδε τύχης τῆς ἐμῆς τε καὶ ὑμῶν διηγήματα).¹⁹ In the passage under discussion Persinna also uses the word χαράττω (4.8.1, 6) where ὑφαίνω, 'weave', or possibly γράφω, 'trace', would have more accurately conveyed the required sense. χαράττω conveys the impression that the letter is carved on a monument like an epitaph,²⁰ an idea that is later picked up by Persinna's promise to defend her actions before the whole human race (4.8.2 πρὸς τε αὐτὸν ὅλον τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίον) and her statement that the words on the band would serve as 'a mother's funereal tears at your grave' in the event of Charikleia's death (4.8.8 ἐπιτύμβια καὶ μητρὸς ἐπικήδεια δάκρυα). Corpses were commonly buried with

16. Winkler (1982) 119 and n. 33 regards this as an instance of the theme of 'failed communication' in the romance, but had Charikles learned the story of the exposure of Charikleia by Persinna he would have told Kalasiris, thus rendering much of the ensuing plot entirely pointless.

17. οὐ δημοτικοῖς ἀλλὰ βασιλικοῖς ἐστιγμένην, ἃ δὴ τοῖς Αἰγυπτίων ἱερατικοῖς καλουμένοις ὁμοίωται. Cf. Hdt. 2.36.

18. Similar care is exercised in describing the characters engraved on Hydaspes' ring. In the present passage Persinna says that it is inscribed with a 'regal symbol' (4.8.7 βασιλείου ... συμβόλοι) but later Charikleia labels the characters 'sacred' (8.11 ἱεροῖς). Each use is appropriate to its context.

19. See Stephens (1994) 71–2.

20. See Létoublon (1995) 14.

phylactic scrolls to protect them in the afterlife,²¹ so that the band functions both as a birth-token and as a death-amulet. But, as is often the case in Heliodorus, there is also a play on the words *χαράττω* and *χαρακτηρίζει* (4.8.7), suggesting that the writing of the band and the moral life of Charikleia are analogous, an impression confirmed by the words *ἦν ἀπὸ δακρῶν τῶν ἐπὶ σοὶ καὶ αἵματος ἐχάραττον* (4.8.6), in which the physical pain of the birth stands metaphorically for the grief felt by the queen in writing the story of her daughter's conception and subsequent exposure. Finally, Persinna refers to the message as an *ἔγγραφον θρηῖνον* (4.8.1), a phrase which calls to mind the tapestry woven by Philomela to tell Prokne of her rape by Tereus (cf., e.g., Ovid *Met.* 6.424-674). Like Philomela, Persinna weaves her story into a cloth to overcome a seemingly insurmountable difficulty in communication: whereas Philomela has her tongue cut out by Tereus, Persinna is separated from her daughter in time and place. In both cases a traumatic event is communicated between women (sisters in the Philomela myth; mother and daughter in the *Aithiopia*) by means of an embroidery. The deed the queen perpetrates, like that of Tereus, is unspeakable (4.8.6 *ἀπορορήτως* – a word that is both paradoxical in the present context and also suggestive of religious taboo). Persinna's description of herself as *πολύθρηγος* (4.8.6) reinforces the parallel, since the word is used by Euripides of Itys, the son of Tereus murdered by Prokne (fr. 773 l. 26), and in the *Aithiopia* by Charikleia (alias Thisbe), who sings a lament for her loss of Theagenes like a nightingale in the darkness, as Philomela did after her transformation (5.2.9). Persinna also likens her band to a messenger (4.8.8). The myth is suited to the metadiegetic consciousness of the passage, since weaving was an established metaphor for narrative fiction (cf. Apuleius, *Met. Prol. varias fabulas conseram*) and belonged to a tradition of narrative that went back to the rhapsodes. This kind of self-referentiality further deepens the import of the story the band has to tell, but it also suggests that, just as a tapestry requires interpretation, the story is an enigma encoded in such a way as to be incomprehensible to the profane.

The time scheme of the romance at this point is compressed in much the same way as the narrative is elliptical. For example, Kalasiris supposedly quotes the whole letter of Persinna from memory verbatim to Knemon, since he does not have it with him at the time.²² This is clearly a case of a shift in focalization. Although Heliodorus describes Kalasiris as reading the letter after he had received it from Charikles (4.8.2, *ἐπελεγόμεν ὄντα τοιάδε*), the voice of the narrative is not his own so much as that of the Ethiopian queen. The ancient reader, familiar with the prosopopoeic letters of Aelian, Alciphron and Philostratus, would have expected to hear the voice of the writer of such letters. In narratological terms, the role of focalizer shifts imperceptibly from

21. See Drucker (1995) 67.

22. Compare the criticism of Hefti (1950) 70, who argues that Heliodorus uses the technique of a historian in allowing Kalasiris to recreate the gist of Persinna's letter. Hefti notes a 'ganz streng realistische Selbstbeschränkung' here. Neimke (1889) 39 points out that Kalasiris would have needed to have a good memory to recall the contents of the letter verbatim.

Kalasisir to Persinna for the time it takes to read the letter (a technique quite familiar to the modern reader from the use of ‘flashbacks’ in cinematography) so that in effect the narrative is doubly embedded. Any mention of the narrative frame during the reading of Persinna’s letter would have destroyed the dramatic shift of focus from the dialogue between the two priests to the highly personal and emotional utterance of Persinna. In any case such reports occur frequently in Heliodorus’ model Homer. There is, moreover, an almost mythic timelessness about the letter that universalizes the story. Heliodorus has clearly conflated and interwoven a number of narrative time frames: (1) the time at which Kalasisir received the band from Charikles (4.8.1 οὐδὲ ὅσον ἐλάχιστον ὑπερθέμενος ἐπελεγόμην τὴν ταινίαν), (2) a future moment when her daughter will be rescued and named (4.8.1 τῆι ὃ τι δὴ κληθησομένη), (3) the time of composition of the band by Persinna, who describes the circumstances under which the letter was written (4.8.1 χαράττω τόνδε τὸν ἔγγραφον θρηῖνον), (4) the time of narration to Knemon (4.8.2 ἐπάγην, ὃ Κνήμων), and (5) the imaginary time of Charikleia’s death (4.8.8 εἰ δ’ ὅπερ καὶ ἀκοὴν λάθοι τὴν ἐμήν). The effect of this compression of the time frame of this passage is to make the story more universal in its application and to lend the story of Charikleia’s birth a mythical quality.

The central paradox

The story of the miraculous and fantastic conception of the heroine (4.8.4) is therefore set in a highly compressed, allusive and mythical narrative context. As a result, the strange story of Charikleia’s conception that occurred in a far-off palace, among unfamiliar people in the remote, other-worldly land of Ethiopia, takes on an air of unreality. The story itself is bizarre; according to Persinna, Charikleia was conceived by ‘maternal impression’ when she caught sight of a painting of Andromeda (naked) while making love with her husband, Hydaspes, in fulfilment of a dream (4.8). Consequently, although her parents were black she was born white, and her mother was forced to expose her to avoid a scandal. The ancient belief in the ‘Andromeda Effect’ has been very ably dealt with elsewhere,²³ but the manner in which Heliodorus presents this material deserves careful consideration. The tale is told with a grave solemnity quite different from the ironic and sceptical attitude shown towards superstition and popular magic elsewhere in the romance (cf., e.g., 3.7.2-5; 3.16.2-3),²⁴ and is even repeated in the final book (10.14.7) by the Gymnosophist Sisimithres, by way

23. See Reeve (1989), Dilke (1980) and Morgan (1979).

24. The queen is aware that her daughter’s chances of survival are very slim (4.8.2; 4.8.7; 4.8.8), subject to the inscrutable will of chance (4.8.6; 4.8.8) and actively opposed by hostile forces (4.8.8). The pathos of her words is accentuated by the queen’s barrenness before this conception (4.8.4), although the king needed a successor (4.8.5), and by the complications in the birth which left her unable to have other children (4.12.3). The emotional reunion of mother and daughter in the final book (10.16.1) emphasizes the intensity of the queen’s feelings for her daughter.

of proof of Charikleia's identity. The reader infers that the mysterious circumstances of the heroine's birth provide the hermeneutic key for an explanation of her supernatural character.

By comparison with other ancient accounts of this phenomenon, such as Galen's medical discussion of the ugly man who fathered a handsome son by this method (*De theriaca* 11.14.253 Kühn), Soranus, gynaecological description of women who gave birth to monkeys (Soranus' *Gyn.* 1.39), and the Old Testament story of piebald sheep born to white ewes (Genesis 30.37-41; Aug. *De trin.* 11.2), Persinna's exposition is severely understated. What is missing is the kind of rational explanation of the phenomenon that is provided by Kalasiris, for example, in the case of the 'evil eye' that afflicts Charikleia (3.7-8). For the modern reader, the scientific explanation is obvious: the 'Andromeda Effect' was an attempt to explain the mysteries of heredity in the absence of any theory of genetics. When viewed in this light, the birth of a white daughter to the black king and queen of Ethiopia as a result of maternal impression is most naturally taken to be a case of albinism.²⁵ To an ancient reader on the other hand, for whom genetics was a mystery, such occurrences were only explicable in terms of divine intervention and would have been thought of as sacred: that is, both holy and cursed, divine and prodigious – in short, demonic (δαμόνιος).²⁶ An example of this attitude can be found in Lucian's description of how Ptolemy I (366-282 B.C.), the son of Lagos, introduced a human prodigy into the theatre in Alexandria (after displaying a Bactrian camel) – a δίχρωμον ἄνθρωπον, ὡς τὸ μὲν ἡμίτομον αὐτοῦ ἀκριβῶς μέλαν εἶναι, τὸ δὲ ἕτερον ἐς ὑπερβολὴν λευκόν, ἐπ' ἴσης δὲ μεμερισμένον (*Prom. es* 4)²⁷ – and describes the mixed reaction of the audience: some laughed, others abominated him as a prodigy (οἱ μὲν πολλοὶ ἐγέλων, οἱ δὲ τινες ὡς ἐπὶ τέρατι ἐμυσάπτοντο). On the other

25. Pearson et al. (1911–13) 21–2, who cite Heliodorus as 'highly probable' evidence for this genetic condition. This exhaustive study by members of the Department of Applied Statistics of the University of London, was published in two sections, text and atlas, both in four parts (except that part 3 of both sections never appeared). All references in this article are to part 1 of the text. The authors cite earlier authorities for their view of Charikleia's condition. Since a foetus must inherit two recessive genes for this condition to manifest itself, it occurs rarely in all life forms but particularly strikingly in an African or Asian context. The phenomenon was poorly understood even in Western scientific discussion before the twentieth century. Stannus (1913) 333–65 is an early discussion of the medical aspects of albinism, but it was only after the discovery of DNA by Crick and Watson in the 1950s that the genetic character of the condition was properly understood.

26. Garland (1995) 2–3 states that albinism, among others conditions, was considered sacred in antiquity and notes similar beliefs about albinos in New Guinea and Senegal.

27. See Rommel (1923) 30. In a more neutral context, Pliny refers to Isogonos of Nicaea's report that *in Albania gigni quosdam glauca oculorum acie, e pueritia statim canos, qui noctu plusquam interdiu cernant* (*Nat.* 7.12; cf. *Gel.* 9.4.3–6). The evidence of Pliny suggests that the source for both Latin writers was Isogonos. Pomponius Mela (1.23), Ptolemy (*Geog.* 4.16), and Pliny (*Nat.* 5.43) describe a race of 'white Ethiopians' (*Leucoaethiopes*) but do not give enough information for us to judge whether albinos are meant or not. Note also the Λευκόσσοροι near the Taurus mountains (Strabo 12.3.9; 16.1.2).

hand, partial albinism is attested as a sacred condition in Philostratus, who gives an account of how Apollonius met a woman in India black from the top of her head to her breasts and white from her breasts to her feet (VA 3.3). Philostratus adds that such women are devoted to Aphrodite in India and are bred to serve the goddess, as Apis was in Egypt (VA 3.3 *ἱεροῦται δὲ ἄρα τῆι Ἀφροδίτῃ Ἰνδῇ τοιαύτη, καὶ τίκεται τῆι θεωῖ γυνὴ ποικίλη, καθάπερ ὁ Ἴσις Αἴγυπτίως*).²⁸ In what follows, I propose to consider the extent to which Heliodorus was making use of such accounts in his description of Charikleia in the romance and how his portrayal of his unusual heroine and the paradoxical circumstances of her birth create a subliminal impression in his readers of her sacred or daimonic nature.

In the first place, Heliodorus' account of Charikleia's birth is not consonant with the evidence we have from antiquity for black children born to white parents and vice versa. Stories in Aristotle (*HA* 586a2-4; *GA* 722a9-11), Pliny (*Nat.* 7.51.7-10) and Plutarch (*Mor.* 563a6-8) about the birth of a black child to a white parent or parents cannot be compared with Charikleia's conception and birth, because these accounts concern children of mixed descent, whereas Charikleia's parents are both black (and there is no suggestion of adultery or earlier intermarriage with Greeks – indeed adultery and illegitimacy are viewed with abhorrence in the romance).²⁹ The change in the colour of the child in the *Aithiopika* from black to white is in itself therefore a striking departure from the tradition that serves to awaken the reader's curiosity about the heroine. Goethals' argument (1959, 260) that Andromeda and Charikleia were described as white 'to reduce improbability' because the Greeks thought that the heroines of romance had to have skins of this colour is not borne out by the evidence; in fact the white skin colour of Charikleia greatly increases, rather than reduces, the implausibility of the plot. Besides, the cultural outlook of the romance is not unambiguously Hellenocentric: the Ethiopian Gymnosophist Sisimithres, who articulates the 'higher morality' of the *Aithiopika*, says that the wise man does not judge people by the colour of their skins (10.10.4).³⁰

Second, Heliodorus provides a mythical parallel for Charikleia's birth in the story of Andromeda (4.8.3; 4.8.5) which also concerns the exposure of the white daughter of an Ethiopian king. The myth may well have originated among the eastern Ethiopians,

28. Quoted by Kerényi (1927) 257 n. 138. Kerényi argues (256–9) that Hydaspes' later doubts concerning the legitimacy of his daughter (10.13), and the striking parallel between the black mark on Charikleia's arm (10.15) and the hair on Homer's thigh (indicating his illegitimate birth) show that she was of divine birth and resembled Isis in being two-coloured.

29. For the condemnation of adultery the stories of Demainete and Arsake are sufficient evidence; for illegitimacy see below. There is very little evidence elsewhere for a white child born to black parents, mainly because the Greeks had relatively little knowledge of Blacks. The only remotely probable case, to my knowledge, concerns Delphos (Schol. in Eur. *Or.* 1094; Paus. 10.6.3–4), who was the son of Poseidon by Melantho, Melaena, Melanis, or Thyia (the name varies but clearly means 'black').

30. 'οὐ τοῖς προσώποις μόνον' ἔφη 'τὰ δίκαια γίνεται ἰσχυρὰ παρὰ τοῖς σφρασοῖσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς τρόποις.' This sentiment is shared by Queen Kandake in the *Alexander Romance* (3.18.3).

only to be transferred to the African context at a later stage.³¹ Nevertheless, at least one representation of the heroine on Attic vases, which is dated to about 450 B.C., shows the princess accompanied by Ethiopic attendants (cf. *LIMC* s.v. 'Andromeda' 2, 3). These were probably inspired by Sophocles and Euripides who both composed plays of this name (Soph. fr. 122-32; Eur. fr. 114-56 Nauck²). Most visual and literary representations of the mythical princess, however, clearly describe her as white. Heliodorus' use of the myth here reinforces the paradox of Charikleia's colour: the puzzle is underlined but no attempt is made to explain it. By comparison with the erotic tableau of Achilles Tatius (3.7) or the extravagant set pieces of Philostratus (*Imag.* 1.29) and Lucian (*On the Hall* 22),³² the references to Andromeda in Heliodorus are severely compressed.

Third, Heliodorus' description of Charikleia is out of keeping with the conventions of romance: for example, the brilliance of Charikleia's eyes are all that enable Theagenes to penetrate her disguise at their reunion at Memphis (ἐνατενίσας τε καὶ ταῖς βολαῖς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τῆς Χαρικλείας ὥσπερ ὑπ' ἀκτῖνος ἐκ νεφῶν διαιπτούσης κατανασθεῖς, 7.7.7; cf. also 3.4.7). Such eyes are not a conventional feature of female beauty in the romances since they are said to shine with a radiance like the beams of the sun *from the time of her infancy* (2.16.3 τὰς ἡλιακὰς ἀκτῖνας ἀποσοῶζεις; 2.31.1 καὶ ἄλλως καὶ τὸ παιδίον αὐτόθεν μέγα τι καὶ θεῖον τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἐξέλαμπεν).³³ It is this feature of her appearance that caused Sisimithres to regard her as exceptional (ἐμοὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ βλέμμα τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν παρίσταται, καὶ τὸν ὄλον τῆς ὄψεως χαρακτηριστῆρα καὶ τὸ ὑπερφυῆς τῆς ὥρας, ὁμολογοῦντα τοῖς τότε τὰ νυνὶ φαινόμενα, γνωρίζω, 10.14.4). In fact, her gaze appears to be intended to mark her quasi-divine status – Kalasiris later tells Knemon that intense gaze is a distinguishing feature of divinity (3.13.2-3), and, although Kalasiris' statement is probably facetious in this context, there is independent evidence to suggest that piercing gaze was a common attribute of deities and people with divine qualities in antiquity.³⁴ The reader may be reminded of how Circe recognizes Medea as a member of the race

31. The term 'Ethiopia' is very broad, at least in the early authors. Originally, Ethiopia was associated with the inhabitants of the remotest regions of the earth, particularly in the East. As Greek knowledge of the world grew, however, the name was applied also to the area south of Egypt. Cf. Romm (1992) 45–60; Morgan (1989c 433 n. 114; Lesky (1959) 27–38. For discussion of the origins of the Andromeda myth see *LIMC* s.v. 'Andromeda'.

32. Cf. Bartsch (1989, 54).

33. Jax (1933) 167 shows that conventionally it was the round shape of the heroine's eyes that were considered attractive, not their intense, unearthly quality, as in the case of Charikleia. There are numerous instances in which eyes are described as the 'windows of the soul' in the *Aithiopia*. A few examples will suffice: 2.25.2 (Kalasiris), 2.25.1 (Rhodopis), 4.18.3 (Kalasiris), 10.16.2 (Hydaspes), 7.6.1 (Arsake). The best illustration of this, however, are the discussions of the 'evil eye' (3.7, 4.5.4), although Kalasiris is not being entirely serious here.

34. *Il.* 1.200 (Athena), cf. 3.13.2–3; *Virg. Aen.* 5.648 (*ardentisque notate oculos*); Porphyry (*Life of Pythagoras* 10) describes the intense gaze of the infant Pythagoras and, according to Plutarch, the souls of the dead do not blink their eyes (*Q. Gr.* 300c).

of Helios by her extraordinary gaze (Ap. Rhod. 4.725-29).³⁵ It is also notable that Sisimithres brings Charikleia to Egypt because he feared that her extraordinary appearance would lead to the revelation of the secret of her birth and therefore to her death, and punishment for himself (2.31.3 ἢ τῆς κόρης ἀκμή μείζονος ὥρας ἐφαντάζετο τοῦ εἰωθότος τὸ κάλλος). If there had not been something divine about her appearance (Sisimithres describes her beauty as ἀμήχανόν τι καὶ δαίμωνιον κάλλος, 2.30.6: cf. ἀμήχανόν τι κάλλος καὶ θεὸς εἶναι ἀναπειθουσα, 1.2.1) – so unusual that it would shine out even if buried underground – Sisimithres' fears would have been singularly unfounded.³⁶ Charikleia was seven at this point (2.30.6) and so the reader must infer that Sisimithres was not describing the conventional nubile beauty of the romance heroine; in fact, Heliodorus avoids giving a detailed description of his heroine's appearance – instead he simply states that she was 'beautiful and wise' (ἡ καλὴ καὶ σοφὴ Χαρίκλεια, 3.4.1). By concentrating on the unusual features of his heroine, Heliodorus emphasizes her daimonic stature, which is made particularly apparent in her epiphany scenes: e.g. 1.2.5-6 (Charikleia resembles Artemis or Isis); 7.7.7 (Theagenes recognizes Charikleia); 10.9.3 (Charikleia on the gridiron at Meroe).

Furthermore, Heliodorus uses the extremely rare word ἀπρόσφυλον (4.8.5 'not belonging to the tribe', 'exotic') to describe the skin colour of Charikleia;³⁸ this adjective serves as an adverb to the equally unusual participle ἀπανγάζουσιν (4.8.5 'gleaming'). In the same way, when Persinna finally recovers her long-lost daughter in Meroe, she is profoundly affected by her appearance (10.7.3 ὥστε κάκεινην παθεῖν τι πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν) and finds her strangely difficult to categorize, since she is neither clearly Greek nor Ethiopian (10.7.5 ἴσως δέ που καὶ Ἑλληνίς ἐστὶν ἢ ἄθλια: τὸ γὰρ πρόσωπον οὐκ Αἰγυπτίας). Similarly, Hydaspes comments on the peculiarity of the stranger's skin, which is again described in negative rather than positive terms (10.14.3

35. Two themes pervade the mythology of the House of the Sun: magic (Circe and Medea are examples) and miscegenation (cf. the suggestively-named Pasiphaë 'all-shining', the daughter of Helios). Medea was able to cast spells with her eyes (Ap. Rhod. 4.1669–72), while Pasiphaë's lust for Poseidon's bull (Apollod. 3.7) may be a mythological aetiology for the connection between albinism in man and in nature. Charikleia possesses magic powers through the ring of Hydaspes but avoids the fate of other members of her house through her chastity.

36. The adjective ἀμήχανος is used to describe the inexpressible beauty that Er saw during his journey in the underworld (Plat. *R.* 615a). For the importance of the term δαίμων in Heliodorus cf. John Birchall's PhD dissertation (1995) 10–22, although he does not discuss the heroine's daimonic character.

37. Jax (1933, 170) notes the fact that Heliodorus avoids describing his heroine's appearance fully.

38. It is therefore surprising that LSJ⁹ cite ἀπρόσφυλον as a *dubia lectio* on the grounds that the manuscripts are equally divided between this reading (VMCZ) and ἀπρόσφιλον 'hostile' (BPAT). Rattenbury and Lumb (1960) lxxii discuss this textual problem in Appendix II 2 of their edition, but make no mention of the conclusive testimony of 10.14.3. Their argument that Heliodorus would have only coined one rare word with such an unusual structure is not entirely convincing; ἀπρόσφιλον is more appropriate at 5.7.3. The manuscript confusion over the word shows that later copyists were unsure of Heliodorus' meaning and tried to normalize the passage by changing ἀπρόσφυλον to the quite prejudicial ἀπρόσφιλον.

πρὸς γὰρ τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ χροαῖι ξένηι τῆς Αἰθιοπίδος λαμπρύνη). Later in this same passage Sisimithres refers to the colour of her skin as an ἀπορία (10.14.7 τῆς γε μὴν κατὰ τὴν χροαῖαν ἀπορίας φράζει μὲν σοι καὶ ἡ ταινία τὴν λύσιν). The words Sisimithres uses to describe the mark or ‘sign’ (σύνθημα) on the heroine’s arm (10.15.2 τὸ τῶν φνύτων καὶ γένους μαρτύριον) are highly unusual, especially the reference to ‘race’ (γένος), and suggest (at least to the modern reader) mottled skin or a melanoma – characteristic features of albinism.⁴⁰ To the educated ancient reader the blemish resembles the scar of Odysseus with whom the heroine is closely associated.⁴¹ But the mark on Charikleia’s arm suggests something more than this, especially when it is linked with the obscure oracle Kalasiris receives at Delphi (τῆι περ ἄριστοβίων μέγ’ ἀέθλιον ἐξάψονται | λευκὸν ἐπὶ κροτάφων στέμμα μελαιομένων, 2.35.5; repeated with added resonance at the conclusion of the romance, 10.41.2). The present participle μελαιομένων suggests at the very least the recognition of the indeterminacy of race.⁴²

It seems clear that by the standards of ancient romance Heliodorus’ heroine is portrayed in highly unusual terms both in respect of appearance and character.⁴³ Her sexuality is likewise atypical; for her, marriage is intensely and inordinately problematic (cf., e.g., *Aith.* 2.33.4; 4.18.4–6) despite her passionate and indeed sensual nature (cf. 3.4.2, the ζωνή; 6.8.3–9.5, the wedding of Knemon), but her erotic constraint is not portrayed in terms of convention, or systematic moral or religious dogma so much as from her own

39. Morgan (1979) ad loc. notes the imprecise formulation here: ‘Heliodorus has not conceived a very clear picture of the contrast between her (sc. Charikleia’s) white skin and the black skin of the Ethiopians.’ However, the description may have been intentionally enigmatic.
40. See Pearson et al. (1911–13) 21–2. Morgan (1979) ad loc. notes that συνθήματι is an unusual word for ‘birthmark’. LSJ⁹ read σπιδώματι with little justification from usage or the manuscripts (Z appears to be an isolated scribal gloss). Clearly συνθήματι is the *lectio difficilior* and should be retained. The word is used elsewhere by Heliodorus of the ‘signs’ the two lovers choose by which they may recognize each other should they be separated.
41. Charikleia behaves like Odysseus on a number of occasions: she gives Thyamis a false account of her identity (1.22.2) as Odysseus did to Eumaios (*Od.* 14.192–359); she bears a mark on her arm (10.15.2) as Odysseus had on his thigh (*Od.* 19.386–475); she disguises herself as a beggar (6.11.4) as Odysseus did (*Od.* 13.429–438); and hears the prophecies of the dead (7.1.1, cf. *Od.* 11). More generally, her return to Ethiopia resembles the *nostos* of Odysseus. Charikleia is not alone in resembling the Greek hero, however: Kalasiris also resembles Odysseus in his disguise (6.11.4), his ten years’ wandering (7.8.2), and in hearing the prophecies of the dead (7.1.1).
42. Morgan’s translation ‘a crown of white on brows of black’, taking the brows to belong to the Ethiopians (cf. Morgan 1979 ad loc.), is at variance with the others: cf., e.g., ‘una candida corona sulle tempie abbronzate’ (Colonna); ‘une blanche couronne ceindra leurs tempes noircies’ (Maillon). The following words (στεφθέντες οὖν οἱ νέοι λευκαῖς ταῖς μίτρας) fulfil the prophecy and show that Theagenes and Charikleia alone are meant. The inclusion of Theagenes makes this evidence less valuable as evidence of albinism, but he appears to be assimilated with Charikleia here. The majority of MSS read λευκῶν here for λευκόν (V), the reading adopted by RL.
43. For a recent discussion see Johne (1996) 194–98, who notes that Charikleia ‘is similar to a Valkyrie of the Nordic–Germanic sagas’ (197) and ‘a spiritual Amazon’ (197–8). Such clichés do not really get to grips with the uniqueness of her character.

inhibitions (2.33.4) reinforced by the personal injunction of her mother after the miraculous birth (4.8.7); after eloping with Theagenes she swears him to chastity (4.18.5) – an oath unique in the Greek romances – following the solemn adjuration in her mother’s letter that Kalasiris had translated for her word for word (4.11.4).⁴⁴ The importance of chastity in the romance is therefore linked to the paradoxical conception and birth of the heroine.

The concern for chastity is the structural inverse of the fear of illegitimacy which pervades the romance.⁴⁵ The *Aithiopika* has indeed recently been described as a *roman du métissage* written in the context of a broad cosmopolitanism, as shown by the discussion between Kalasiris and Knemon on the birth of Homer (3.14).⁴⁶ As in the case of Charikleia, Homer was of divine birth; his father was Hermes and his mother the wife of the high priest in Egyptian Thebes. Both bore marks of their miraculous origins on their bodies, Charikleia a black ring on her arm (10.15.2) and Homer a patch of shaggy hair (3.14.3). According to Kalasiris, Homer concealed the circumstances of his place of birth because he wanted to be the citizen of the world rather than a citizen of one nation. This cosmopolitan outlook, which is implied in Persinna’s desire to defend her actions before the entire world (4.8.2), is also discernible in the centrifugal progression of events from Delphi, the navel of Greece, to Meroe in Ethiopia; in the catalogue of the numerous tribes that fought on the side of Ethiopia in the war with the Persians; and in the account of the embassies of the Chinese, Arabs, Troglodytes, Blemmyes and Auxomites to the court of Hydaspes that show it to be a microcosm of the known world.⁴⁷ Related to this universal world view is the broad cultural perspective of the romance: Heliodorus recounts, for example, the ironic death of the Egyptian bandit Thermouthis (2.20.2); gives short

44. For the theme of chastity in the romance, see Goldhill (1995) 35–6, 118–21, who describes the hero and heroine as ‘religiously committed’ to chastity and emphasizes that ‘the very mainsprings of the plot, desire and elopement, are turned – with notable rhetorical care – to show this awe for chastity’ (120). Morgan (1989b) 320 characterizes marriage as ‘sacramental’ in the romance. Neither author, however, explains the source of this religious concern for chastity, nor do they mention the injunction of Persinna to her daughter.

45. Death is to preferred to illegitimacy (4.8.6); Charikleia’s royal parentage emphasizes her loss of status (4.9.2); Hydaspes is concerned to protect the royal line of succession against spurious claims (10.13.5); and Homer is said to have been born of a divine (but illegitimate) union (3.14.4). The concepts of chastity and illegitimacy are brought together at 10.22.3 (παρθενεύειν νόθως χαρίζεται) which also works in a play on Charikleia’s name. The elaborate doctrine of ‘maternal impression’ is constructed to counter the charge of illegitimacy. A fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which has been identified as a Genesis apocryphon (Avigad and Yadin (1956) 40), provides a notable example of how albinism was explained by illegitimacy. The papyrus records the dialogue between Lamech and his wife concerning the strange birth of their son, Noah, who is described as an albino in the apocryphal Book of Enoch (12.5, see n.50 below; see also Enoch 7.11, 105.120, quoted by Sorsby (1974) 17–18.). Lamech states that he thought his wife had conceived from the ‘watchers’ or the ‘holy ones’ or the ‘fallen angels’, but was ultimately convinced by her that the child was his.

46. Létoublon (1993) 126–36.

47. Létoublon (1993) 131 rightly points out the exoticism of the romance.

vignettes of the Phoenician athlete (4.16.6-8) and Nausikles' friend, the lover of Isias (6.3.1-4.1); and informs his readers that one of the guards of the two lovers is a $\mu\lambda\acute{\xi}\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\lambda\eta\eta$ (9.24.2).⁴⁸ At the same time, there is a constant tension in the *Aithiopia* between the insecurity of human existence and the inscrutable power of the supernatural (e.g. 4.9.1: cf. 7.8.1). Heliodorus' account of the strange birth of his heroine and the parallel anecdote of Homer's birth add a sense of alienation to the paradoxical and prodigious nature of his heroine that is entirely in keeping with this cosmopolitan perspective.

Conclusion

The secret of Charikleia's birth may be taken to be the hermeneutic key to the religiosity of the romance. Heliodorus' account of his heroine's conception is compressed and elliptical, but not entirely outside the reach of his readers; belief in the sacred character of albinism appears to be almost universal,⁴⁹ and is frequently associated specifically with the cult of the sun, moon or stars.⁵⁰ There is even evidence for this

48. For this rare word, which usually denotes outcasts from society, cf. Diod. Sic. 25.2.2; Pib. 1.67.7.

49. Kromberg & Jenkins (1984) 103-4 report that in South African black society a significant majority of the population believe that albinos are a 'gift from God'. Woolf & Grant (1962) 391-3 report rumours that Hopi Indians attach religious significance to albinism and that the gene for this condition was 'culturally selected'. The authors refer to literary accounts of albino Hopi Indians who were leaders of totemic dances and responsible for magic, though present-day members of the tribe do not hold these beliefs. The earlier study of Pearson et al. (1911-13) 61, 108, 137, 138 cites evidence for the religious role played by albinos in Africa and among the Maoris, who called them Korako, mythical white-skinned devils. The authors also note (141) that albinos in Africa were members of a religious cult known as the Nolembu.

50. The uncanonical Book of Enoch (12.5), written in the second and first centuries B.C., describes Noah in terms that clearly denote albinism: his flesh is 'white as snow and red as a rose', his hair 'white as wool', and when he opened his eyes 'he illuminated all the house, like the sun; the whole house abounded with light.' Noah's father, Lamech, goes on to comment on his son's appearance thus: 'His eyes are bright as the rays of the sun; his countenance glorious and he looks not as if he belonged to me, but to the angels.' As a consequence of his albinism, Noah was considered to be spiritually pure and a mediator between divine wrath and human corruption; it was owing to his unusual genes that his family was picked out for salvation during the Flood (Genesis 5.28-9). According to de Heusch (1985) 125-60, the complex Dogon creation myth shows how the death of an albino child expiates the transgressions of its parents. The birth of the albino child is explained by the fact that he had been 'burnt on contact with the sun during his descent to earth' at the time of creation. In South Africa, Kromberg & Jenkins (1984) 105-6 observe that albinos are commonly considered to be exceptionally virtuous and pure. Lionel Wafer's early description of American Indian tribes (1699) 134 describes an encounter with 'White Indians' which suggests that albinos associated themselves with the moon. Wafer says that such people came to be white 'through the force of the Mother's Imagination, looking on the Moon at the time of Conception'. Stout (1946) 489 records that albinos among the San Blas Indians were thought to be sacred and able 'to scare away with a small bow and arrow, the demon devouring the sun or moon at times of eclipses'. He adds that they are referred to as *ibe*, an honorific term meaning 'sun'. Pearson et al. (1911-13) 102 state that on the island of Amboina albinos were considered to be the offspring of the morning star and that among the Malays they were thought to be the children of the sun.

link in the Graeco-Roman context: the astrologer Vettius Valens specifically attributes white skin-blemishes to the agency of the Sun and Moon (5.26-7 Kroll, <K>ριός ἐστιν ... ζώιδιον ... δίχρωμον, ἐπεὶ ὁ Ἥλιος καὶ ἡ Σελήνη ποιούσιν ἀλφούς λιχῆνας) – interesting testimony, in view of Heliodorus' interest in astrology (3.16.4). Moreover, the cult of Helios is central to the *Aithiopia*; the god is the racial ancestor of the heroine (10.11.3 Ἥλιε, γενεάρχᾳ προγόνων ἐμῶν), queen (4.8.2 – ὁ γενεάρχης ἡμῶν Ἥλιος; 4.8.3.1-2 ἡμῖν πρόγονοι θεῶν μὲν Ἥλιός τε καὶ Διόνυσος) and author (10.41.4 τῶν ἀφ' Ἥλίου γένος).⁵¹ All this suggests that Heliodorus was employing the paradoxical phenomenon of albinism in a typically reticent and allusive manner for literary effect – to sustain his daemonic characterization of his heroine and to deepen the enigmatic texture of his narrative. The letter of Persinna reveals the paradox of Charikleia's birth as a mystery that constitutes its imaginative epicentre. Lucian (*Prom. es* 4) used the anecdote of the δίχρωμος ἄνθρωπος to explain why his interlocutor in this dialogue described him as a literary Prometheus; his art, like the piebald man, has the quality of originality (τὸ καινουργόν) not appreciated by his readers. Similarly, Knemon characterizes the poetry of Homer as 'mystery combined with sheer pleasure' (τὸ ἡνιγμένον τε καὶ ἡδονῆι πάσῃ σύγκρατον, 3.15.1). The complex and compressed context of the letter of Persinna and its paradoxical contents suggest that Heliodorus was aiming at a similar quality in his own work.

51. These phrases have been used to argue (in my view mistakenly) that Heliodorus was Ethiopian, or at least that he was strongly sympathetic to Ethiopians. Dilke (1980) 271 notes the ending of the romance in which 'blacks and whites live happily together' and Goethals (1959) 262 emphasizes the relative absence of prejudice in the work as evidence of the author's sympathy with Ethiopians. The connection between 4.8.2 and 10.41.4 was originally made by Glava (1937) 9, who argues against Naber (1873) 146-7 that the errors Heliodorus makes in describing Egyptian geography are insignificant and that Heliodorus was himself Ethiopian. Her view has been summarily rejected by Rattenbury (1938) 145. The debate goes back to Thorlacius (1825) 6-8, 12 who suggests a connection between the cult of Helios and Egyptian and Ethiopian beliefs. See also Hägg (1983) 61. There is less evidence in the text for such a connection than there is for the speculation that Heliodorus' link with the cult of the sun may indicate a personal knowledge of albinism.

52. Reading ἡνιγμένον for ἀνηγμένον with Rattenbury and Lumb.