

Heliodorus within and beyond the Canon

Introduction:

Heliodorus of Emesa consistently displays an awareness of coming at the end of the tradition of the novel and Greek literature more broadly. His *Aethiopica*, the last extant Greek novel, demonstrates the author's self-consciousness regarding his role in the novelistic tradition, and draws heavily from a range of other genres (Morgan 2008). He cultivates a dense network of intertextual relationships with what we today conceive of as "the canon."

The *Aethiopica* is deeply indebted to the *Odyssey* (Telò 2011), while the novel's narrative voice and setting evoke Herodotus (Morgan 1982). Tragedy, especially the *Hippolytus*, is repeatedly invoked (Feuillâtre 1966; Morgan 1989), and major characters demonstrate Platonic ideals (Jones, 2006). Our panel will pursue further connections between Heliodorus and the Greek canon through the Homeric Hymns, Euripides' melodramatic tragedies, and the figure of Pythagoras.

Writers of the early modern period considered Heliodorus' novel one of the great works of Greek literature, but it is now unfamiliar to both professional and lay audiences alike. Our final two papers interrogate Heliodorus' place in the modern canon, discussing his prominence in the early modern era and his neglect in the modern classroom.

Proposed Program of Papers:

"Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* and the Homeric Hymns to Demeter": This paper will suggest a literary allusion in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*'s hymn to Thetis (*Aeth.* 3.2.4.) to the two *Homeric Hymns to Demeter*. Heliodorus' response to the two *Homeric Hymns* should be interpreted within the context of a generic prominence of maidenhood/virginity,

common to the hymns and the novels. The difficulty of reconciling motherhood with a deep attachment to maidenhood is a shared concern, to which the novel and the hymns offer different solutions.

“Catastrophe Survived in the Final Book of Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica*”: This paper argues that Heliodorus based the final book of the *Aethiopica* on the ‘melodramatic’ Euripidean tragedies. The book contains a number of theatrical metaphors, vocabulary, plot functions, and comedic elements that recall these plays. Specific plot elements are shared with the Iphigenia plays (Feuillatre 1966). The mostly lost *Andromeda* likely provided thematic and mythical inspiration for Heliodorus’ Ethiopia. Finally, Heliodorus further uses these plays to contrast ‘barbaric’ and Greek customs. The novel’s connections to canonical literature allow Greek values to take root outside of Greece itself.

“Pythagoras and Heliodorus:” Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica* reveals significant Pythagorean influences: Charicleia’s and Theagenes’ journey parallels Pythagoras’ own. Heliodorus’ priests observe Pythagorean dietary and material restrictions and scientific studies. Hydaspes’ chamberlain, Harmonias, named for the musical scale of the planetary spheres and the perfect magical number three, guides the protagonists to their own perfection. The novel concludes on Meroe, described as a Pythagorean triangle, under the auspices of the Pythagorean gods, the Sun and the Moon. Pythagorean initiates join the stars, just as Perseus and Andromeda (the heroic models of Theagenes and Charicleia) transformed into constellations.

“Heliodorus and the Pleasures of Divination”: Heliodorus’ use of oracles and other techniques of divination provided a convenient staging ground for the testing of

divine providence during the Renaissance. Divination's contribution to Heliodorus' early modern popularity has been understudied; by reexamining the intersection of classical foreknowledge and Renaissance providentialism, we can better appreciate why the *Aethiopica* was so popular in the 16th century, and perhaps why, with a loss of faith in providence and the rejection of divination as a mere plot device, it has largely failed to find an appreciative audience more recently.

“Teaching Heliodorus in the Greek Civilization Course”: The novel in general, and Heliodorus specifically, is largely absent from Greek Civilization courses. This paper will present the results of one Greek Civilization course (taught by the author) which used the *Aethiopica* as a frame through which to approach the Greeks, and some of the strengths and drawbacks of that approach. Of particular value are the ways Heliodorus reinforces the long-term cultural trends seen elsewhere, including religion, magic, just and unjust rule, and family structures, as well as a more direct interaction with several more canonical texts. Ironically, Heliodorus' marginal status allows students to better understand the Greek canon.

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Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* and the *Homeric Hymns to Demeter*

A rather unexplored literary model for Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* is the corpus of the *Homeric Hymns*, in particular the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Similarly to the *Odyssey*, this hymn is interested in the liminal space between virginity and marriage, which is also the core theme of the Greek novels; moreover, starting with Hellenistic literature *Hy. 2* was recognized as an important literary model for varied literary responses such as Callimachus' *Hymn 6* or Claudian's *De raptu*.

While keeping an eye on these larger considerations, this paper will focus on the hymn to Thetis mentioned by Calasiris in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* 3.2.4 and discuss a possible relation to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Previous scholarship (especially Bowie 1989: 227-229; also Rattenbury 1935: 99) has highlighted similarities between Heliodorus' pentameter hymn and both Philostratus' hymn to Thetis in *Heroicus* 53.10 and Philip's five-pentameter poem in *A.P.* 13.1. My paper will argue for a stronger, if subtler, connection to the *Hy. 2* and to the three-line *Hy.13*, also addressed to Demeter, first by looking at semantic and structural similarities, and secondly by explaining the significance of this intertext within a generic dialogue between the *Homeric Hymns* and the Greek novels.

To mention some of the lexical similarities, Heliodorus' hymn begins with a common opening formula for the *Hymns* (Calame 2000 and 2011, Clay 2011), τὰν Θέτιν ἀείδω; *Hy. 2* and *Hy.13* have ἄρχομ' ἀείδειν in their first line. Thetis is presented as *daughter* in the second line, parallel to Persephone in the two *Homeric Hymns* (Νηρέος... κόραν in *Hld.*, θύγατρα in the *Hy. 2* and κούρη in *Hy. 13*). Zeus' assent to a sexual liaison is mentioned in the third line (Διὸς ἐννεσίη, in *Hld.*, versus δῶκεν...Ζεὺς in the

Hy. 2). In Heliodorus' hymn's fourth line Thetis is invoked as τὰν ἀλὸς ἀγλαίαν, while Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn*'s fourth line is called ἀγλαοκάρπου (and ἀγλαόδωρος is an epithet for Demeter in *Hy.* 2.54, 192, 492). The subsequent invocation to Neoptolemus to protect the city (line 9 ῥυσίπολιν Δαναῶν, line 13 πᾶν δ' ἀπέρυκε δέος ἀμετέρας πόλιος) might look back to *Hy.* 13.3 τήνδε σάου πόλιν. Finally, Heliodorus' hymn's unusual closing which merely repeats its first line (τὰν Θέτιν αἰίδω, χρυσοέθειρα Θέτιν), seems to *read* the last line of the *Hy* 13 (ἄρχε δ' αἰοιδῆς), not as the announcement of an ensuing narrative (Calame 2011: 335), but as a circular, ritual return to the beginning of singing.

Heliodorus' response to the two *Homeric Hymns* should be interpreted within the context of a generic prominence of maidenhood/virginity, common to the hymns and the novels (Calame 2001, Faulkner 2008, Ormand forthcoming) and particularly of the theme of a mother's investment in her daughter's virginity, present both in Heliodorus' novel and the two *Homeric Hymns to Demeter*. Heliodorus' invocation of Neoptolemus in the hymn to Thetis explicitly alludes to Theagenes, the male protagonist, called θεᾶς γενέτην at 2.35.5. But what is Heliodorus' purpose in associating Thetis with both Demeter and Persephone?

This paper will argue that by constructing Thetis as a condensation of the two separated figures of Demeter and Persephone, Heliodorus subscribes to the portrayal of an idealized non-violent loss of virginity, specific to the *Aethiopica* and more generally to the Greek novels. If in the *Homeric Hymn* Demeter searches literally for her long-lost daughter and figuratively for her lost virginity, in *Aethiopica* the daughter Charicleia, while holding firmly to her virginity until the end of the story, searches for her long-lost

mother and for her not-yet-achieved motherhood. Virginity and motherhood can be reconciled, says Heliodorus.

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Catastrophe survived in the final book of Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*

This paper demonstrates that the tenth book of Heliodorus' *Aethiopika* modeled on the 'melodramatic' tragedies of Euripides. The final book of the novel marks a departure from all that has come before. Generically, it represents a shift from the models of disastrous tragedy, Homeric epic, and Herodotean historiography, which have been traced by Elmer 2008. Elmer reads book ten as a transcendent hybrid that escapes a single model. I propose, however, that Heliodorus based the ending of his novel on the 'melodramatic' Euripidean tragedies (*Ion, Helen, Iphigenia at Aulis Iphigenia in Tauris*), using both general and specific allusions. These tragedies are considered as part of the tragic cannon, but exist on its fringes as problematic plays that challenge the modern concept of the tragic plot (Wright 2005). As such, they are a fitting inspiration to the marginally canonical novel of Heliodorus.

General suggestions of Heliodorus' return to tragedy in the final book can be found in the theatrical metaphors and vocabulary, in particular in 10.36 (Walden 1894). Plot functions common in the melodramatic tragedies also take the forefront. We see a recognition scene, as Charikleia is finally accepted by her family through a series of negotiations between daughter, parents, and priest. Even the seemingly discordant comic elements from the Euripidean plays, such as Menelaus' entry dressed in rags, are echoed in *Aethiopika* ten, especially in the unexpected reappearance of Charikles as a disheveled *pater ex machina*. Finally, the threatened tragedy of human sacrifice is averted, and the family reestablished on solid ground at the end of the novel, as in the plays of 'catastrophe survived', to use the term of Burnett 1971.

Specific plot elements concerning human sacrifice and salvation are shared with

the Iphigenia plays, as has been long recognized (Feuillatre 1966). While Charikleia is almost sacrificed by her father like the heroine of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, also comes close to sacrificing the one closest to her as Iphigenia does at Tauris by offering to sacrifice Theagenes herself. *Ion* a model for familial recognition scenes and the sudden provision of heirs. The gods involved further link these plays with Heliodorus' narrative, since the Iphigenia plays center on Artemis, while the *Ion* place at the temple of Apollo at Delphi. The Iphigenia plays and the *Helen* particularly pertinent because they contrast Greek and barbaric behaviors. As the *Iphigenia* us, both Greeks and barbarians are capable of human sacrifice. These specific links show that Heliodorus was engaging with this group of plays for more than superficial plot structure and metaphors.

Had Euripides' mostly lost *Andromeda*, it is likely that we would have another play for our 'melodramatic' corpus, one with obvious relevance to Heliodorus. The play is even connected with the *Helen* the *Iphigenia in Tauris* Wright 2005. Heliodorus claims Andromeda as an ancestor of the Ethiopians, and a painting of her is the cause of Charikleia's unusual pigmentation. Even the plot of the play would have been fruitful for Heliodorus, as it described Perseus falling instantly in love with Andromeda as Theagenes did with Charikleia. Charikleia's similarity to Andromeda does not extend to her fate, however. The novelistic heroine is chained and almost sacrificed to the gods but her mother is not to blame. In the end, instead of the couple fleeing to Greece, they remain to rule over Ethiopia, with Theagenes accepted by his bride's parents, unlike the banished Perseus.

I have charted a number of affiliations in the final book of Heliodorus, to the Euripidean melodramas as a group as well as to specific incidents in a number of them.

The concluding return to tragic allusions reprises the earlier connections to pessimistic tragedy seen in Knemon's Athenian tale, illustrated by Morgan 1989. The major difference in Heliodorus' melodrama is geographical: the Euripidean characters in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Helen*, and *Andromeda* find their happy ending by escaping crude and dangerous barbarians. Yet Heliodorus' heroine, hero, and even foster-father find their happy endings in a foreign land. The novel's connections to canonical literature allow Greek value to take root outside of Greece itself. Here, at the end of antiquity, the Greek cannon and Hellenic values are reborn at the edge of the world.

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Pythagoras and Heliodorus

The role of Middle Platonism and other philosophical systems in the ancient novels has proven to be a fertile area of analysis, contributing a deeper appreciation of their content and structure. Scholars have noted the complex philosophies woven throughout Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* (Jones, 2005), but the centrality of Pythagoreanism deserves further examination. The philosophy of Pythagoras experienced a significant resurgence during the Second Sophistic and influenced both Greek and Latin writers more broadly than has been appreciated. The presence of important Pythagorean elements in the *Aethiopica* reveals much about Heliodorus' world and increases the readers' appreciation of the novel's complexity.

Pythagoras was believed to have learned divine mysteries in Egypt, studied with the Magi of Babylon, and then framed his moral philosophy with the Pythia at Delphi. He taught through analogy and parables, requiring his followers to analyze their hidden meanings. His students underwent a form of initiation, in which knowledge was imparted gradually. Pythagoras taught a doctrine of cosmic harmony formed by the balancing of opposite forces, expressed through numbers and music. The initiate learned to live a righteous life in order to align his soul with the divine and to avoid much of the suffering brought by Fate. Pythagoreans abstained from certain foods and behaviors that corrupted the body and soul; the sect's rules covered aspects of religious purity and ritual, restricting sacrifice, ownership of property, and imposing chastity or even celibacy. In the Pythagoreanism popular in the Roman Empire, after death the initiate's soul shed its body and joined the gods and heroes. Laymen could begin their study of Pythagorean wisdom with the *Golden Verses* and popular biographies by Diogenes Laertius, Iamblichus and

others. Plutarch, Pseudo-Plutarch, Lucian, Apuleius, Philostratus and other intellectuals of the Roman elite incorporated, manipulated and sometimes parodied Pythagorean precepts. The sect was well known to the imperial court: Julia Domna expressed interest in the life and teachings of Pythagoras and important Pythagoreans worked for the imperial household.

Heliodorus incorporates many Pythagorean elements in the *Aethiopica* and weaves a startling number of parallels from the life of Pythagoras into his protagonists' adventures. For example, not only does Charicleia receive divine instruction from the Pythia of Delphi, but she learns further truths as she travels to Egypt. Kalasiris, Sisimithres and the Ethiopian gymnosophists follow Pythagorean food laws and rules of personal behavior. In the last book, Harmonias, Hydaspes' chamberlain who guides the novel's resolution, is named for the term used by Pythagoreans to indicate the musical scale of the planetary spheres and to indicate the perfect magical number three. Harmonias guides the protagonists to their own perfection: Charicleia is perfected in three ways at the end of the story, recovering her family and birthright, marrying her beloved soul mate, and being crowned chief priestess of the divine Moon at Meroe. For Pythagoreans, the Sun and Moon are particularly important deities, central to the harmony and balance of the world. Heliodorus describes the island of Meroe as a perfect Pythagorean triangle. Thus, the climax of the novel occurs in a world both physically and metaphorically embodying the Pythagorean divine triadic harmony.

The Pythagoreans taught that Homer knew the divine mysteries and read his poetry as allegory that illuminated the soul's route to immortality (Diodorus Siculus 18.1-5). The Pythagorean view of Homer is reflected by Heliodorus and explains his

story that Homer had a birthmark on his thigh: Pythagoras had the same, so the two are closely linked. The Homeric sign appears again: Charicleia carries the royal birthmark of the priestly rulers of Aithiopia, which she conceals until it is time for her identity to be revealed to the initiated. Like Odysseus, the suffering traveler who appears in a vision in the *Aethiopica*, Charicleia suffers on her journey to her true home. Heliodorus invokes a Homeric model of heroism for his protagonists in his allusions to Achilles and Perseus; these also reflect a Pythagorean bias. For example, in the *Golden Verses*, Pythagoras urges his followers to emulate the gods and heroes. He is said to have believed that Achilles lived on as an immortal hero of extraordinary beauty; Heliodorus crafts Theagenes as the descendent of Achilles, of heroic beauty and accomplishment, who proves his worth in a series of Homeric contests in Meroe. Heliodorus extends the heroic model when he represents Theagenes as Perseus, rescuing the Ethiopian princess Charicleia (the descendent and image of Andromeda). Perseus and Andromeda received apotheosis and live eternally as constellations, the fate Pythagoras promised to pure souls.

Pythagorean philosophy was enormously popular in the Byzantine east and in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe; the Pythagorean *Golden Verses* circulated in many translations, commentaries and responses. The Pythagorean subtext of Heliodorus' novel, and its continued intelligibility to post-antique readers, may help explain the popularity of the *Aethiopica* across time.

Heliiodorus and the Pleasures of Divination

By providing a safe place for the questioning of Providence, and by dramatizing different responses to and ethical stances toward futurity, Greek romance functioned as a fictional laboratory for airing cultural anxieties that were specific to the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Oracles, prophecies, and other techniques of divination, as represented in Greek romance and debated in theology, provided a convenient staging ground for exploring the ethical philosophical, and technological ramifications of foreknowledge. Crucially, this ostensibly forward-looking project depended on using ancient narrative models; more specifically, the Heliiodoran romance, with its suspenseful and largely unified in medias res plot structure, was a player in the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns in early modern Europe. While suspense structures the events of Heliiodorus' narrative, the very use of Heliiodorus as a model in the first place represents a fraught suspension between past and present texts in the early modern period.

I propose that we consider Heliiodorus' romance as an anatomy of divination; a large number of the major classical techniques of divination make an appearance in the novel, and I argue that this technical diversity provides a narrative armature for a romance ethics of futurity. The panoply of divinatory strategies offers a spectrum of stances toward the future, from impious necromancy, to unconsidered superstition, to prudent endurance. The testing of knowledge demands an interpretative stance from both readers and characters (Bartsch 1989.) The need for interpretation, in fact, accompanies all foreknowledge, no matter what the source: whether we initiate the bid for knowledge, as in oracle consultation or entrail-reading, or the deity initiates, as in prophecies or

revelations, interpretation is a constant threat and opportunity. But divination in Heliodorus is also a source of narrative pleasure, a pleasure that complements the pleasure of the novel's famous in-medias-res plot structure.

Heliodorus crafts suspense on at least three levels: Stylistically, he cultivates doubt by his frequent recourse to amphibolies, i.e., either/or statements (Winkler 1999); structurally, by beginning the novel in medias res and by punctuating the plot with frequent and sudden turns or peripeteia; and emotionally, by mirroring the reader's emotional experience of suspense in the characters, withholding information from both.

Early modern translators and literary theorists praised Heliodorus for his generation of narrative suspense. His French translator, Jacques Amyot, interpreted the in medias res structure as the engine for creating a desire in the reader to learn the origins of the story; Scaliger, too, analyzed this desire for learning the backstory; and the Spanish literary theorist El Pinciano extolled Heliodorus for his skill in "tying and untying" tension in the development of his plot (Forcione 1970). But in addition to plot structure, Heliodorus also generates desire and tension by his frequent recourse to divination; if the in medias res opening elicits a thirst to know the beginning, then oracles and divinatory dreams help to drive the reader forward to discover the ending.

The conclusion of the romance, in which the operation of providence is ostensibly confirmed by the happy ending, renders the text in a sense itself divinatory; the reader encounters narrative promises, most obviously in the form of oracles, dream visions, and the like, but these promises can only be fully recognized after they are already fulfilled. This paradox of the retroactive confirmation of foreknowledge is shared both by classical divination and early modern understandings of providence (Keith 1971; Walsingham

1999).

The contribution of divination to Heliodorus's early modern popularity has been understudied, and by bringing the intersection of classical foreknowledge and Renaissance providentialism back to critical light, we can better appreciate why the *Aithiopica* was so popular in the 16th century, and perhaps why, with the loss of faith in providence and the rejection of divination as a mere plot device, it has largely failed to find an appreciative audience until fairly recently.

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Teaching Heliodorus in the Greek Civilization Course

Heliodorus is largely absent from Greek Civilization courses. This is hardly a surprise given the pressure to provide majors with a sense for the texts, and historical context which will be most helpful for their future studies and to provide the general education student with some familiarity with the canonical works which help comprise our society's shared knowledge. The greatest hits usually take precedence over an author obscure even to many classicists. But Heliodorus' separation from the canon, a separation of genre as well as time, makes him an intriguing tool for the classroom. The novel is a more familiar form than epic, or tragedy, and the characters more approachable. Furthermore, in his *Aethiopica*, Heliodorus constructs an imagined past at the height of Greek civilization, rife with both studied literary allusions and details about everyday particulars of ancient Greek life.

In an intensive, 6-week Greek Civilization course, I experimented with a syllabus largely structured around Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*. I assigned a consecutive section of Heliodorus for each class, paired with readings which both helped illuminate that portion of the *Aethiopica* introduced the students to more canonical texts. This paper will lay out the (mostly positive) results of that pedagogical experiment, which have helped continue to shape my own thinking about these courses.

Every course has its narrative arcs, and many Civilization courses allow historical chronology to shape that arc. While this approach is in many ways helpful and natural, it can also, as Robert Zaretsky (2012) has recently noted, give the students the impression that the syllabus is merely “a train schedule for students who, click-clacking along the tracks from stop to stop, assume that what happened had to happen for the simple reason

that it did happen.” By allowing the explication of the *Aethiopicato* dictate my students' itineraries, I discovered that it was generally easy to hit the mandatory stops, and that there was now a clear reason why we were exploring a particular text on a particular day.

Nor was I forced to abandon chronology. The course's historical thread moved chronologically, as the heroes' encounters with Egyptians and Persians pulled them further and further from Delphi. But the text also presented interesting diversions, allowing us to focus on longer-term trends in the Greek world: family, religion, athletics, and magic. The pairings of Heliodorus with canonical authors helped the students construct both enduring trends and diachronic changes in patterns of thought and practice. Students were compelled to read strategically and gained an appreciation for how Classicists make use of the evidence available to us.

In addition to these elements of syllabus design, I was also pleased to discover that the inclusion of a non-canonical text opened up new paper topics. The internet is full of essays or analyses on the *Medea*. Writing about the *Aethiopica* is rarer, freeing students from the temptation of plagiarism, and just as importantly, from the sense that their essay cannot be original. The most successful assignment asked students to use their understanding of Plato's *Crito* explain what Socrates might advise Charikleia and Theagenes to do when they find themselves imprisoned, wrongly sentenced to death, and presented with an escape. I do not know whether Heliodorus was thinking of the *Crito* he wrote his prison scene, but the novel creates a powerful vehicle to think about ethical arguments of Platonic philosophy.

This approach did have drawbacks. A few elements were somewhat clumsily shoehorned in, with little in the way of an organic connection. I was forced to stretch the

connection to the Pelponnesian war because I could not let my students leave without reading some Thucydides. At times too, it was difficult to decide whether precious lecture time was better spent on Heliodorus or on the canonical texts ostensibly included to help explicate Heliodorus. Finally, while many students enjoyed and were even held in suspense by the *Aethiopica*, some students felt it to be a distraction from the “real” readings.

This last drawback reinvites the question of why these courses exist. If students take these courses to learn about another culture, Heliodorus helps provide a compelling narrative structure to a topic-based approach to the material. If they exist purely to expose students to the canon, Heliodorus' place can still be defended. Not only has Heliodorus' own work had tremendous influence, it also engages powerfully with the canon and reinforces the notion that the syllabus is truly a guide to the most important works of that canon. Finally, Heliodorus provides students with a model for understanding the project they are involved in: re-making the canon, constructing the past and applying it to their own life and times.

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