Believable Lies and Implausible Truths: Negotiating Late Antique Concepts of Fiction in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*[*]

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<sc>summary<sc>: Despite the long debate over whether it was composed in the third or fourth century <sc>c.e.<sc>, Heliodorus' *Aithiopika* has usually been understood through the imperial literary contexts which characterize earlier novels. This article inverts this perspective to explore instead how the novel fits into contemporary late antique considerations about fiction. By reading the *Aithiopika* against late-fourth and early-fifth century discussions of plausibility, and falsehood found in Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, this article argues that the *Aithiopika* both reworks classical models for reading fiction and also illuminates late antique concerns about fiction, falsehood, and belief.

<sc>keywords<sc>:

<sc>Heliodorus' *Aithiopika* is characterized by its liminality. Whether the novel should be dated to the third or fourth century <sc>c.e.<sc> has long been debated,[1] but what this

dispute makes clear is that the novel stands on the cusp between the imperial era and late antiquity. The earliest testimonium to the novel dates from the fifth century, in Socrates Scholasticus' *Ecclesiastical History*, and declares that Heliodorus became bishop of Tricca after writing the novel (5.22).[2] Few, if any, would accept this as the literal truth of the biography of the *Aithiopika*'s author.[3] Nonetheless, this statement demonstrates that regardless of when the novel was composed, the *Aithiopika* was being read in late antiquity.[4] The contested evidence for the novel's date of composition and the proof of its presence in the fifth-century places the *Aithiopika* squarely across the divide between the imperial literary contexts which characterize the novel genre and the late antique contexts of its reception.

Despite this, the novel has usually been read solely against the literary, cultural, and political contexts which characterize the earlier novels, rather than in dialogue with the trends and literary culture of late antiquity. This stands in contrast to recent scholarship on the fourth century <sc>c.e.<sc> in particular, which has increasingly collapsed the distinction between imperial and late antique, with greater attention paid to the continuities and cultural interactions between the two.[5] Some recent scholarship on the *Aithiopika* has already suggested more points of contact between Heliodorus and fourth-century culture than previously assumed, in particular how Heliodorus may have been influenced by late antique Christian imagery.[6] What has not been considered, however, are the wider consequences of contextualizing the *Aithiopika* within the intellectual frameworks of late antiquity as opposed to imperial literary culture. This article attempts to grapple with these implications. Rather than illustrating the late antique trends and themes which may have influenced the *Aithiopika*, considering how the novel may have been read and interpreted in its earliest reception makes visible the impact of contextualizing Heliodorus within a late antique framework. Reading the novel against late fourth and early fifth century literary culture, therefore, helps to break

down this artificial binary of imperial and late antique and instead offers a new perspective on the hitherto underexplored contexts in which the novel was first read.[7]

In this article, I argue that placing the *Aithiopika* in dialogue with late antique texts not only provides fresh insight into the novel's key themes and preoccupations, but also offers new and innovative ways of understanding how the novel was read in late antiquity. Given how little we know of how ancient novels were read in antiquity generally,[8] this article cannot make a definitive claim for the exact time, place, and contexts in which the *Aithiopika* was read. As such, I do not make any arguments about direct textual influence, either for how the *Aithiopika* influenced late antique texts or for how late antique texts influenced the *Aithiopika*. Instead, my aim here is to demonstrate how Heliodorus' engagement with classical fictional practices takes on new relevance when put in dialogue with late antique texts, topics, and themes. Fiction is uniquely receptive to literary and cultural change as, despite being a constant feature of narrative,[9] attitudes towards fiction shift over time and inflect the contexts in which texts are composed and received.[10] Consequently, tracking how the *Aithiopika* reworks classical practices of fiction offers a way to situate the novel within late antique contexts without resorting to crude periodization or simplistic thematic parallels.

Ancient considerations of fiction coalesce around two key themes, lies and plausibility, and concern for these concepts persists throughout imperial culture into late antiquity. On the one hand, the language of truth and falsehood is used to define fiction in ontological terms, while on the other, issues of plausibility and likelihood attempt to grapple with the thorny issue of fictional belief.[11] This article is structured around these two strands of thought because the *Aithiopika* repeatedly shows awareness of the classical heritage of these ideas and also raises relevant questions for specifically late antique concerns about them. The *Aithiopika* persistently explores the question of whether falsehood can be ethical, especially in relation to questions of sexual violence and morality. The novel repeatedly

tackles this issue through the rhetoric of classical traditions of fiction, but this takes on fresh relevance when positioned next to Augustine's late fourth and early fifth century treatises on the morality of falsehood, the *de Mendacio* and *contra Mendacium*. Similarly, the *Aithiopika* repeatedly explores the tensions inherent in classical traditions of likelihood, or τὸ εἰκός, but this becomes particularly potent when set against Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*, a late fourth century hagiography which explores questions of plausibility, belief, and miracles. Augustine's treatises are the first to explicitly question the moral value of lying in opposition to classical treatments of this topic, and Gregory's hagiography is a paradigmatic example of the relationship between classical views of plausibility and Christian miracles which becomes especially fraught in late antiquity. Rather than arguing for the *Aithiopika*'s direct dependence on these texts, I show here that both works epitomize wider cultural debates and key themes of late antiquity against which Heliodorus' novel takes on new relevance.

This article argues that exploring the *Aithiopika*'s engagement with such models for fiction not only illuminates the dynamics of fiction within the novel itself, but also demonstrates how it foreshadows or even taps into late antique concerns about fiction. As such, reading the *Aithiopika*'s engagement with classical and imperial practices of fiction exposes both the novel's literary sophistication and also how it may have been read and received within the dynamic and porous cultural frameworks of late antiquity. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of the novel's fictionality on its own terms, but also argues that this fictional self-presentation had particular resonance for its earliest audiences in late antiquity. Contextualizing Heliodorus within late antique contexts of theorizing, debating, and challenging fiction, therefore, not only challenges the artificiality of this binary periodization between imperial and late antique, but also offers new ways of understanding the hitherto underexplored field of the novel's earliest reception.

<a> Lies<a>

The *Aithiopika* repeatedly explores the ethical value of falsehood through questions of sexual

morality in a way which positions it on the cusp of classical and late antique conceptions of

fiction. The earliest expressions of fictional consciousness in Greek literature are framed

through the medium of falsehood. For example, the Homeric and Hesiodic descriptions of

lies which seem like the truth (ἴσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, *Odyssey*

19.203; ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, *Theogony* 25–27) have often been

interpreted as indicative of some kind of awareness of fiction, even though they are far from

unambiguous or homogenous.[12] Nevertheless, these examples stand at the head of a longer

tradition where the language of lying is used to grapple with the thorny question of how to

classify fiction between truth and falsehood.[13] This can be seen in the technical vocabulary

used to describe the truth-value of different categories of narrative found in rhetorical

treatises and imperial *progymnasmata*. Here, the language of ψεῦδος remains prominent, but

the distinction shifts to not just true and false narratives, but false narratives which seem

untrue (μῦθος/*fabula*) and those which seem true (πλάσμα/*argumentum*).[14] The rhetorical

context of these sources suggests that these concerns were not exclusive to concerns about

fiction, but it nonetheless foregrounds the importance of truth-status in categorizing narrative.

By late antiquity, therefore, even if fiction is naturalised as part of the novelistic reading

experience, lies and falsehood remain potent models for thinking about fiction.

But the *Aithiopika* takes these earlier models further to consider not just the

ontological status of fiction between truth and falsehood, but also its ethical value. From the

very outset of the novel, the *Aithiopika*'s thematization of the morality of falsehood shows

awareness of these classical traditions surrounding falsehood and fiction, but also of the

limitations of these models. The hermeneutic riddles and delayed revelations of the novel's

opening have been well discussed elsewhere, notably by Jack Winkler,[15] but one key effect of

these deferrals is to highlight the expectations this opening invites and then rebuffs. For example, Charikleia's story to the bandit Thyamis that she and Theagenes are siblings on a religious mission plays with novelistic motifs to the extent that Winkler describes it as 'nearly a parody of the Greek romance as a genre.'[16] The insincerity of this story and Charikleia's promise to marry Thyamis are not exposed until the couple are in private and Theagenes laments Charikleia's willingness to marry someone else. At this point Charikleia delivers a lengthy justification for her lie as necessary for the couple's protection (1.26.2–6).[17]

> ὁρμὴν γάρ, ὡς οἶσθα, κρατούσης ἐπιθυμίας μάχη μὲν ἀντίτυπος ἐπιτείνει, λόγος δὲ εἴκων καὶ πρὸς τὸ βούλημα συντρέχων τὴν πρώτην καὶ ζέουσαν φορὰν ἔστειλε καὶ τὸ κάτοξυ τῆς ὀρέξεως τῷ ἡδεῖ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας κατεύνασε…πολλὰ μία ἡμέρα καὶ δύο πολλάκις ἔδοσαν τῶν εἰς σωτηρίαν, καὶ τύχαι παρέσχον ἃ βουλαῖς ἄνθρωποι μυρίαις οὐκ ἐξεῦρον. τοῦτό τοι καὶ αὐτὴ τὸ παρὸν ἐπινοίαις ὑπερεθέμην τὰ πρόδηλα τοῖς ἀδήλοις διακρουσαμένη. φυλακτέον οὖν, ὦ γλυκύτατε, καθάπερ πάλαισμα τὸ πλάσμα…καλὸν γάρ ποτε καὶ τὸ ψεῦδος, ὅταν ὠφελοῦν τοὺς λέγοντας μηδὲν καταβλάπτῃ τοὺς ἀκούοντας.

> As you know, immoveable resistance only aggravates the force of irresistible passion, whereas a compliant answer and swift submission can curb the first eruption of desire and soothe away the pangs of lust with the sweet taste of a promise given…A day or two can often do much to deliver us from peril, and chance can bring to pass what all the plans of men have failed to achieve. So in this affair my intention was to fend off the certain dangers of the present with the uncertainties of the future. My deception is our protection, my love…Sometimes even a lie can be good, if it helps those who speak it without harming those to whom it is spoken.

Charikleia's statement here is, as Laurent Pernot puts it, "une leçon sur le ψεῦδος."[18] The rhetorical skill of her speech is demonstrated by the wordplay of καθάπερ πάλαισμα τὸ

πλάσμα (1.26.5), but more importantly, it directly challenges a variety of classical traditions about the morality of falsehood.[19] Thyamis' initial reaction to Charikleia's false story is to compare her to a Siren (ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν λόγων ὥσπερ τινὸς σειρῆνος κεκηλημένος, 1.23.2), but her seemingly-impromptu creation of a persuasive and emotionally affecting narrative also assimilates Charikleia to Odysseus.[20] This parallel is particularly potent here because of Odysseus' paradigmatic role for later writers as a catalyst for questions about the ethics of falsehood. In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, for example, Odysseus explicitly articulates the value of lies told for salvific purposes despite Neoptolemus' objections (Νε. οὐκ αἰσχρὸν ἡγῇ δῆτα τὸ ψευδῆ λέγειν; / Οδ. οὔκ, εἰ τὸ σωθῆναί γε τὸ ψεῦδος φέρει, 108–9),[21] and in Plato's *Hippias Minor* Odysseus' skill at deception reflects his "deep knowledge of both truth and untruth."[22] Charikleia's false story, therefore, not only aligns her with Odysseus but invokes a long tradition of debate over the morality of deception and falsehood. Moreover, Charikleia's assertion that a lie can be good (καλὸν γάρ ποτε καὶ τὸ ψεῦδος, 1.26.6) perhaps invokes an echo of the noble lie (γενναῖον...ψεῦδος) of Plato's *Republic* (414b–c).[23] These Odyssean and Platonic resonances position Charikleia's speech within a traditional framework of concerns about the ethical value of lies and justifications for falsehood.

Significantly, Charikleia explicitly states that her lie is worthwhile because her feigned compliance with Thyamis' marriage proposal protects her chastity. This establishes a pattern which recurs throughout the novel, where questions about the ethics of falsehood are raised in relation to threats of sexual assault and loss of bodily autonomy.[24] In an extended analepsis which explains the famously enigmatic *in medias res* opening of the novel,[25] Kalasiris proposes a plan for to help the protagonists elope that involves Charikleia pretending (πλάττεσθαι, 4.13.3) to agree to marry her father's preferred suitor. In contrast to her prior confidence in protective falsehood, here Charikleia is uncomfortable with the whole idea of the pretense, despite its beneficial purpose. She describes it as shameful and difficult

(βαρὺ…καὶ ἄλλως αἰσχρὸν, 4.13.4), explicitly questions its purpose (τίνα σκοπὸν ἔχει τὸ πλάσμα; 4.13.4), and is anxious to ensure that it will not come true (4.13.4). These anxieties more closely parallel Theagenes' earlier discomfort with Charikleia's agreement to marry Thyamis (1.25–6) than her earlier belief in its salvific value. This chronological discrepancy in Charikleia's attitude has been interpreted as a narrative of educational development, with Kalasiris instructing a younger and more naïve Charikleia in how falsehood can be used defensively,[26] although the novel's convoluted structure complicates this progression of cause and effect.[27] Moreover, Kalasiris never actually responds to Charikleia's concerns, but refuses to answer with a dismissive statement that obscures any educational precepts (4.13.5). If Charikleia does learn how to use falsehood benevolently from Kalasiris, the *Aithiopika* refuses to state exactly what the principles of this lesson might be. Instead, this scene again dramatises anxieties about the morality of falsehood and challenges its ethical value.

These questions about the value of mendacity come to a head later in the novel. After Arsake, wife of the Persian satrap Oroondates, propositions Theagenes, Charikleia suggests that he should pretend to comply with her demands as a way of temporarily placating her (7.21.1–5).[28] This parallels Charikleia's justification in the opening book of the novel, where she also stresses the value of deception as a way to buy time to avoid a dangerous situation.[29] Unlike her previous speech, however, Charikleia describes this not as a ψεῦδος, but instead as a form of πλάσμα (πλάττου, 7.21.4) and a μελέτη (ἀλλ᾽ ὦ Θεάγενες, ὅπως μὴ ἐκ τῆς μελέτης εἰς τὸ αἰσχρὸν τοῦ ἔργου κατολισθήσῃς, 7.21.4), which frames this as a rhetorical pretense rather than simply a deceptive one. Yet Theagenes entirely rejects Charikleia's suggestions, stating that saying shameful things is no different to doing them (ἐμὲ δὲ ἴσθι μηδὲ πλάσασθαι τὰ τοιαῦτα δύνασθαι· ποιεῖν γὰρ τὰ αἰσχρὰ καὶ λέγειν ὁμοίως ἀπρεπές, 7.21.5) and emphasizing the immortality of deception. If Charikleia represents the Odysseus of Plato's *Hippias Minor* who understands the intricacies of truth, falsehood, and

the grey areas between them, Theagenes here recalls his ancestor Achilles, who criticizes those who say one thing while concealing another (*Il.* 9.312–13).[30] These contrasting intertextual and rhetorical positions model different approaches to deceit, and bring this question of the ethics of falsehood into explicit dispute.

Beyond these Homeric and Platonic undertones, however, this debate gains additional potency from the specifically novelistic intertextuality in this scene. In order to placate Cybele, Arsake's go-between, Charikleia justifies Arsake's lust by describing her as suffering something human (τι πάσχειν ἀνθρώπινον, 7.21.1). This phrase recalls Achilles Tatius' second century novel *Leucippe and Clitophon*, in particular[31] Clitophon's justification of his decision to sleep with Melite despite his desire to be reunited with Leucippe (5.27.1–3).[32]

> ταῦτα φιλοσοφήσασα (διδάσκει γὰρ ὁ Ἔρως καὶ λόγους) ἔλυε τὰ δεσμὰ…ὡς οὖν με ἔλυσε καὶ περιέβαλε κλάουσα, ἔπαθόν τι ἀνθρώπινον, καὶ ἀληθῶς ἐφοβήθην τὸν Ἔρωτα μή μοι γένηται μήνιμα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἄλλως ὅτι Λευκίππην ἀπειλήφειν, καὶ ὅτι μετὰ ταῦτα τῆς Μελίτης ἀπαλλάττεσθαι ἔμελλον, καὶ ὅτι οὐδὲ γάμος ἔτι τὸ πραττόμενον ἦν, ἀλλὰ φάρμακον ὥσπερ ψυχῆς νοσούσης. περιβαλούσης οὖν ἠνειχόμην καὶ περιπλεκομένης πρὸς τὰς περιπλοκὰς οὐκ ἀντέλεγον.

> With this philosophical exposition done (Eros even teaches eloquence) she started loosening my bonds…when she had untied me, embraced me, and wept, I felt a natural human reaction. I was genuinely scared of Eros, that he might visit his wrath upon me; and, what was more, I considered how I had regained Leucippe, how I was about to get rid of Melite, how the act to be performed was a matter not of marriage, but the remedy for a kind of illness of the soul. So I did not resist when she threw her arms around me, nor did I object to her embraces when she embraced me.

Clitophon explains his decision with a variety of justifications, ranging from the philosophical (ταῦτα φιλοσοφήσασα[33]) to the religious (ἀληθῶς ἐφοβήθην τὸν Ἔρωτα) to the rhetorical (αὐτουργὸς γὰρ ὁ Ἔρως καὶ αὐτοσχέδιος σοφιστὴς) to the medicinal (γάμος ἔτι τὸ πραττόμενον ἦν, ἀλλὰ φάρμακον ὥσπερ ψυχῆς νοσούσης). This car crash of excuses imbues Clitophon's words with insincerity,[34] and epitomizes the novel's recurrent interest in questions of sexual ethics. *Leucippe and Clitophon* is characterized throughout by questions over erotic morality, from Clitophon's self-contradictory assertions of his virginity (2.37.5, 5.20.5, 8.57) to the chastity tests which close the novel.[35] Against this backdrop, Clitophon's decision to sleep with Melite becomes a focal point of such concerns. While Clitophon at no point tells an outright lie about his infidelity, his rhetorically slippery insistence that he remains a virgin as far as Leucippe is concerned (εἴ τις ἄρα ἔστιν ἀνδρὸς παρθενία, ταύτην κἀγὼ μέχρι τοῦ παρόντος πρὸς Λευκίππην ἔχω, 8.5.7) and his emphasizing of his chastity in relation to Melite (8.5.2–3) highlight the rhetorical possibilities of speech beyond a simple opposition of truth and falsehood. This neatly parallels the situation in Heliodorus' novel, where Charikleia's rhetorical skill at manipulating falsehood stands in contrast to Theagenes' binary viewpoint. These correspondences between Achilles Tatius' and Heliodorus' use of this phrase suggest a direct relationship between the two,[36] but the use of τι πάσχειν ἀνθρώπινον in imperial authors as diverse as Herodian and Lucian also appears in similar contexts of sexual ethics and thinly veiled falsehoods.[37] As such, Heliodorus' use of this phrase not only suggests an intertextual reference to Achilles Tatius, but invokes a wider set of associations with falsehood, sexuality, and infidelity which sharpen Charikleia and Theagenes' discussion through these specifically novelistic anxieties.

But Charikleia's use of this phrase in Heliodorus' novel also rejects its relevance to her present situation. Whereas Clitophon uses the phrase τι πάσχειν ἀνθρώπινον to justify his actions, Charikleia uses it superficially to validate Arsake's feelings while her sardonic

smile (σεσηρός τι, translated as "la lèvre ironique" by Rattenbury and Lumb, 7.21.1) and

barbed phrasing in the assonance of τὴν πάντα ἀρίστην Ἀρσάκην (7.21.1) suggest a deeper

condemnation.[38] Charikleia's description of Arsake as conquered by her passion (ἐπειδή τι

πέπονθεν ἀνθρώπινον καὶ νενίκηται, ὡς φής, καὶ ἥττων ἐστὶ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, 7.21.1) create

a disparity between Arsake's inability to withstand her lust and Charikleia's own

determination not to give into her desire after falling in love with Theagenes (4.10.6).[39]

Cybele's response, in which she praises Charikleia for taking pity on a woman like herself

(γυναῖκα ὁμοίαν σοι τὴν φύσιν ἠλέησας, 7.21.2), sharpens this contrast between chaste love

and uncontrolled passion, just as Charikleia's manipulation of Clitophon's rhetoric marks the

Aithiopika's tonal variation from *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Indeed, Charikleia's parting

comments to Theagenes that he should not let any fictional pretense (μελέτη, 7.21.4) become

reality perhaps implicitly recall Melite (Μελίτη) and evoke the memory of another novelistic

scene where rhetoric did in fact become reality. Consequently, the memory of Clitophon's

actions not only invokes a novelistic predecessor for the *Aithiopika*, but an unfaithful hero

who brings questions about sexual morality, falsehood, and fiction to the forefront.

 Theagenes' response to Charikleia's speech also uses novelistic intertextuality to

bring these same issues of truth, falsehood, and sexual ethics to the forefront. Despite

Charikleia's anxieties over the consequences of Theagenes' refusal to feign compliance with

Arsake's wishes, Theagenes does not engage with her arguments and instead reduces her

concerns to the innately female disease of jealousy (τὴν γυναικῶν ἔμφυτον νόσον

ζηλοτυπίαν, 7.21.5). This phrase ἔμφυτος ζηλοτυπία is attested in only one text preceding

the *Aithiopika*, Chariton's likely first-century novel *Callirhoe*. While there is little explicit

reference to Chariton's novel in antiquity, Heliodorus is clearly aware of another early novel,

Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesiaka*, and recent arguments that Achilles Tatius alluded to

Chariton strengthen the possibility that Heliodorus knew Chariton as well.[40] The catalyst of

Chariton's narrative is ζηλοτυπία, as Chaereas' attack on his wife Callirhoe which prompts all subsequent events in the novel is prompted by his jealousy at the slanderous rumor she has been unfaithful.[41] This theme recurs twice in the final book of the novel, when Callirhoe omits mention of her life with her second husband Dionysius (8.1.15) and conceals her farewell letter to him (8.4.4) out of concern for Chaereas' innate jealousy (ἔμφυτος ζηλοτυπία).[42] Callirhoe's bigamous second marriage is a significant issue throughout the novel which invokes a host of rhetorical, legal, and ethical issues,[43] and, just as in Achilles Tatius, brings together both a lie of omission and issues of chastity. Both scenes in Chariton and Achilles Tatius, therefore, are characterized by questions over sexual morality, truth, and falsehood, and offer concrete examples of infidelity in novelistic predecessors against which the *Aithiopika*'s exploration of the ethics of mendacity is thrown into sharp relief.

While the presentation of ethical falsehood in the *Aithiopika* draws on classical and novelistic traditions, Theagenes' position, that lies are never acceptable, stands in contrast to the majority of discussions of falsehood in antiquity. As discussed earlier, Plato's noble lie and Odysseus' salvific falsehoods in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* both focus on the possible justifications for falsehood, suggesting that lies always have at least the potential to be used ethically.[44] This, however, changes in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, when two treatises by Augustine began circulating, the *de Mendacio* (395 c.e.) and *contra Mendacium* (420 c.e.). These treatises represent the first texts of antiquity dedicated solely to the ethics of falsehood,[45] but stand in stark contrast to previous considerations of the topic, as both argue that there is never any moral justification for falsehood in any circumstance. Although Augustine's seemingly limited knowledge of Greek makes it highly unlikely he read the *Aithiopika*, Augustine's works offer a frame of reception for the novel due to Augustine's wider influence on fifth-century culture. Augustine's treatises are indicative of a broader contemporary debate about the utility of falsehood,[46] and the temporal

gap between the two works implies that the topic remained a significant one for Augustine and his audiences.[47] As such, Augustine's polemical argument testifies to a wider late antique anxiety about the morality of falsehood and illuminates a framework within which the *Aithiopika*'s repeated thematization of ethical lying might have gained additional potency.

Augustine's arguments about the ethical validity of falsehood do not exist in a vacuum, as both treatises were prompted by specific cultural and historical circumstances. The earlier treatise, *de Mendacio*, was written in around 395 following a contentious exchange of letters between Jerome and Augustine regarding Jerome's defense of biblical falsehood as pedagogically useful.[48] The *contra Mendacium*, written around twenty-five years later, argues against Consentius' proposal to join a rival Christian sect, the Priscillians, in order to expose their controversial teachings that lies were not only acceptable but even laudable.[49] Despite the chronological gap between the two treatises, Augustine's argument remains broadly stable in that he consistently asserts that lies are never permissible under any circumstances.[50] At its root, the key feature of falsehood in Augustine's terminology is the speaker's intention to deceive.[51] This intentionality is so important for Augustine that it supersedes whether or not the statement is itself true or false, since in Augustine's description a false statement may not be a lie if the speaker believes it to be true (*potest itaque ille qui falsum pro vero enuntiat, quod tamen verum esse opinatur, errans dici et temerarius: mentiens autem non recte dicitur*, DM 3.3).[52] As Griffiths puts it, for Augustine "the characteristic mark of the lie is duplicity, a fissure between thought and utterance that is clearly evident to the speaker as she speaks…Lying words are spoken precisely with the intent to make such a fissure: the liar takes control of her speech."[53]

Although Augustine does not include exceptions for poetic fictions, despite engaging with issues of fictional belief elsewhere in his corpus,[54] a particular area of contention in both treatises is whether falsehood is permissible to defend against sexual assault.[55] At the end of

the *de Mendacio*, Augustine concedes that lies for the purpose of preserving the chastity of body and soul (*pudicitia corporis et castitas animae*, 19.40) could be permissible if it did not violate piety, innocence, or kindness (*conficitur ergo ex his omnibus haec sententia, ut mendacium quod non violat doctrinam pietatis, neque ipsam pietatem, neque innocentiam, neque benevolentiam, pro pudicitia corporis admittendum sit*, 20.41). After this, however, he asserts that since bodily chastity is inferior to the integrity of the soul,[56] someone committed to truth as an expression of religious devotion would have to value the latter above the former (20.41).[57] This stands in complete opposition to the *Aithiopika*, where Charikleia repeatedly uses falsehood protectively to ward off sexual violence. Combined with Theagenes' refusal to contemplate any kind of deception, the *Aithiopika*'s presentation of falsehood serves to engage ongoing debates about the value of mendacity, as opposed to simply reflecting earlier traditions, and gives the novel a unique relevance within a late antique context.

Between the composition of these two treatises, however, another event comes to bear on Augustine's arguments. The Sack of Rome in 410 brought with it a wave of sexual violence, and the first book of Augustine's *City of God*, composed between the *de Mendacio* and *contra Mendacium* in 413, includes a consolation (*consolatio*) for these rape survivors. Augustine's work tackles some difficult ethical questions about the aftermath of assault, most notably when he invokes the example of Lucretia to argue, in opposition to earlier writers who praise her actions, that her suicide is not a model for rape survivors to emulate.[58] Augustine's difficulty in reconciling the perceived sin of suicide with his sympathy for Lucretia's situation is palpable. He argues that rape survivors are not to blame for the actions of rapists, and yet, he also states that they may feel shame because of the belief that assault cannot happen without the victim's mental consent (1.16). This contradictory attitude has been much debated,[59] but Augustine's continued attempts to grapple with the ethical and theological questions surrounding the trauma of rape brings the theoretical concerns of both

treatises on lying into stark cultural relevance. Helen Morales has argued that Augustine's *consolatio* is an important part of the cultural background to Colluthus' sixth century epyllion *The Abduction of Helen*, which raises similar questions about the legal and ethical issues of sexual violence.[60] As such, these questions about sexual assault and its consequences have a long afterlife which casts the clash between Augustine's and Heliodorus' presentations of falsehood into relief. Against this backdrop, the *Aithiopika*'s exploration of ethical falsehood and its relationship with sexual morality situates it within a culturally potent framework, and add a specific late antique twist to its transformations of classical models for fiction. Reading Charikleia's lies through Augustine's concept of falsehood, therefore, plugs the *Aithiopika* into a wider framework of concerns about ethical falsehood, sexual violence, and morality which give the novel cultural relevance in the early fifth century and beyond.

<a> Plausibility <a>

But this is only half the story. While ancient critics theorize fiction primarily through the language of mendacity, they also consider how to distinguish fiction as a category distinct from falsehood. In the Homeric and Hesiodic examples discussed above, both Odysseus and the Muses' respective speeches are not just untrue, but resemble the truth. The contrast between their false status and their truthful appearance brings into focus the question of plausibility, or how fiction can seem truthful despite not being strictly factual. This is most visible in Aristotle's *Poetics*, which defines the distinction between poetry and history through plausibility, as the latter is based on actual events (τὰ γενόμενα) and the former probable ones (οἷα ἂν γένοιτο καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, *Poetics* 1451a36–8).[61] As examined previously, this tension between truth-status and plausibility becomes a key part of the tripartite categorization of narrative found in imperial rhetorical

handbooks. While a range of different terms are used across ancient texts to discuss

plausibility, probability, and likelihood,[62] a key term is τὸ εἰκός, a concept with a long history

and a broad range of applications in forensic oratory, rhetoric, historiography, philosophy,

and literature.[63] As Victoria Wohl has described it, 'at once a logical operation, a rhetorical

trope, and a literary device, *eikos* is a way of thinking about the probable and the improbable,

the factual and the counterfactual, the hypothetical and the real.'[64]

Against this background, the *Aithiopika*'s manipulations of plausibility both recognize

the centrality of this concept in classical rhetoric and also transform it. The novel centers on a

fundamental implausibility, namely how the white Charikleia can be born to black parents.[65]

This is explicitly articulated by the Ethiopian king Hydaspes, who incredulously questions

how he and his wife Persinna could have produced a white child against all probability

(παρὰ τὸ εἰκὸς, 10.14.5). But manipulations of plausibility are part of the novel from the

outset. After Charikleia's *Scheintod* and the revelation that the corpse in the cave belongs to

Thisbe, a minor character from Cnemon's inset narrative last seen in Athens, not Egypt,

Cnemon and Theagenes attempt to resolve their confusion by interpreting the situation

according to τὸ εἰκός.[66] Indeed, Cnemon's assertion that it is reasonable (εἰκὸς τι πλέον

ἐντεῦθεν ἡμᾶς ἐκμαθεῖν, 2.10.1) that the writing tablets found with Thisbe's body will

explain this enigmatic situation both naturalizes the situation by appealing to the familiar

tragic model of Phaedra, but also exposes the artificiality of this dramatic model.[67] As

Richard Hunter has put it, Charikleia's implausible identity and the dramatic reappearance of

Thisbe in the opening books of the novel "call into question…the appropriateness of τὸ εἰκός

as a reading criterion for any kind of 'fiction', or perhaps prompt us to revise our notions of

just what τὸ εἰκός might be."[68]

Hunter goes on to suggest that the most common use of τὸ εἰκός in the *Aithiopika* is

to naturalize the fictional nature of the narrative by implying that "what is being told accords

with our experience of the way the world works."[69] But who is included in that "our"? Ideas about plausibility or τὸ εἰκός appeal to shared standards of narrative logic and communal acceptance of what seems natural, whether this is rooted on external criteria or subjective prejudices and expectations.[70] Reasoning from τὸ εἰκός both relies upon these shared standards and establishes them by doing so, creating a circular relationship in which reader and text are mutually implicated. But Heliodorus' novel exposes the artificiality of this connection, and who is assumed to be included or excluded in these appeals. The overtness of the Hippolytus allusions in this scene, building on Cnemon's earlier inset narrative, implies a communal awareness of this parallel while simultaneously questioning whether this myth is appropriate here and how this novelistic narrative differs from the dramatic parallel. This representation of reasoning from τὸ εἰκός, in other words, brings into view the question of *why* this is plausible and to whom. By doing so, the *Aithiopika* exposes the subjectivity and limitations of plausibility as a mode of reading the unbelievable fiction of the novel.

The inadequacies of classical conceptions of plausibility become clearer as the protagonists undergo increasingly unbelievable experiences on their journey to Ethiopia. For example, after being framed for murder in retaliation for not playing along with Arsake's erotic demands, Charikleia is publicly burned at the stake but miraculously survives. This paradoxical sight convinces the spectators of her innocence, but the narrative offers no explicit explanation for Charikleia's unexpected survival (8.9.13).[71] Before learning the real source of Charikleia's vulnerability – a *pantarbe* stone she inherited from her mother (8.11.5–10) – Charikleia and Theagenes debate different possible explanations for the miracle, all of which rely on τὸ εἰκός. Theagenes recalls a recent dream of Kalasiris, in which he stated that Theagenes will soon go to Ethiopia with a girl, a statement which functions as a basic if banal summary of the remaining plot of the novel.[72] Theagenes, however, interprets this as a portent of their death because on his reading the girl (κούρη, 8.11.3–4) alludes to

Persephone and Ethiopia connotes the underworld.[73] This is something of an overreach given what has already been revealed about Charikleia's Ethiopian heritage, as Charikleia herself notes (8.11.5), and Theagenes' mistake is to treat a remarkably literal statement as if it required prophetic interpretation.[74] By contrast, Charikleia discovers the correct conclusion based on the inscription on the *pantarbe* stone, which she reasons must have protective powers (γράμμασι δὲ ἱεροῖς τισιν ἀνάγραπτος καὶ τελετῆς, ὡς ἔοικε, θειοτέρας ἀνάμεστος, 8.11.8).[75] Charikleia's use of ὡς ἔοικε here slyly highlights the conjectures built into her reasoning, as she admits at the end of her speech that her reading is based on Kalasiris' earlier decipherment of her mother's inscribed *tainia*, which Charikleia herself was – and presumably still is – unable to read.[76] Both Theagenes and Charikleia structure their interpretations around the language of τὸ εἰκός (ἔοικε, 8.11.4; παρ' ἧς εἰκάζω, 8.11.8 ταῦτα μὲν εἰκότα καὶ ὄντα, 8.11.10), but these appeals to plausibility but their contrast with the unbelievability of the event undercut the value of τὸ εἰκός as a mode of reasoning.

The close of the novel brings these tensions to a head. Charikleia's reunion with her biological parents involves a number of false closures which not only delay the ending of the narrative, but also throw greater emphasis onto the methods by which Charikleia's recognition is achieved.[77] The crowning proof which overcomes Hydaspes and the Ethiopian crowd's disbelief is the portrait of Andromeda which affected Charikleia's conception, as the similarity between the two creates a public acceptance of the truth of Charikleia's birth and superficially demonstrates the triumph of τὸ εἰκός. On the other hand, however, this recognition is not achieved as a result of these appeals to τὸ εἰκός, but in spite of them. The final proof which convinces Hydaspes that he is in fact Charikleia's father (10.16.2) is the revelation of her birthmark, which the priest Sisimithres remembers from the baby he exposed (10.15.2). This band of black skin around her otherwise white arm literalizes Charikleia's hybridized heritage, but also disrupts her perfect resemblance to the Andromeda

painting.[78] This juxtaposition of Charikleia's similarity to and divergence from the Andromeda painting undercuts any straightforward appeal to plausibility and demonstrates the impossibility of naturalizing such an unbelievable paradox. If indeed Charikleia's hybrid body can be seen as a parallel for the hybrid literary, nature of the *Aithiopika*,[79] these closing games with the implausibility of Charikleia's identity highlights the impossibility of entirely squaring the classical trope of τὸ εἰκός with the miraculous paradox of Charikleia's birth.

Heliodorus' manipulations of plausibility throughout the *Aithiopika*, therefore, explore the friction inherent in classical conceptions of τὸ εἰκός and expose the limitations of this line of criticism. This tension between the plausible and the miraculous becomes especially acute in late antiquity, where anxieties about the relationship between Christian faith, pagan mythology, and miracles combine to bring these issues to the forefront.[80] Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*, a hagiographic biography from the late fourth century, epitomizes these concerns. Despite their likely chronological proximity, Gregory's text makes no mention to Heliodorus or any other novelist, despite the long-recognized affinities between hagiography and the novel.[81] Both texts, however explore the tensions between the plausible and the miraculous, and how they relates to questions of fiction and belief. Given the wider resonance of these questions about plausibility and faith throughout early Christian hagiography, therefore, the *Life of Macrina* can be read as an exemplar for the tensions between classical and late antique conceptions of the unbelievable against which the *Aithiopika*'s challenging approach to τὸ εἰκός is thrown into stark relief.

From the outset, the *Life of Macrina* signals that it will play with questions of plausibility and likelihood in ways which exemplify wider questions in late antique hagiography. The biography presents itself as a letter following an unplanned meeting with the addressee, as the limits of polite conversation necessitated writing out the life in full (1).[82] This conceit that a written text originates from a chance encounter has a long literary

history,[83] and here it draws attention to the generic fluidity and literary allusivity of Gregory's text within the still-evolving traditions of Christian biography.[84] Within this framework, Gregory's statement that it was not likely (εἰκὸς) that such a meeting would be silent due to his interlocutor's garrulousness (οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰκὸς ἦν ἐν σιωπῇ τὴν συντυχίαν εἶναι, 1) teases the fictionality of this construct and points to the work's self-consciousness about its own literary sophistication. From the outset, therefore, the *Life of Macrina* adopts the language of τὸ εἰκός, but the knowing nature of the work's pretense of orality suggests a high degree of self-consciousness about the inherent subjectivity of claims to plausibility.

Macrina's unbelievable identity as both holy saint and mortal woman becomes a key point of contention for classical ideas about plausibility and later anxieties. Macrina's theological acumen and didactic role frames her as a Socratic figure from a Platonic dialogue, both in the *Life* and elsewhere in Gregory's corpus,[85] but Gregory also expresses concern that her deviance from gender roles means she can hardly be called a woman (1).[86] Similarly, while Macrina's saintly devotion to virginity is prefigured from virtually the moment of her birth,[87] due to parental and class pressures she is betrothed to a man who dies before their wedding (4–5). When compelled to marry another suitor, however, Macrina refuses on the grounds that she is already married in the eyes of God and death does not change that.[88] These paradoxical tensions over gender, sexuality, and sanctity are exemplified by Macrina's scar, a mark which both testifies to her identity as a saint and questions whether such intensity of faith can in fact be proved. Described as the greatest miracle she ever performed (31), Macrina's body is marked by a scar from a cancerous tumor on her breast which was cured by Macrina's religious faith. As such, this scar becomes a site of "locational memory" which confirms Macrina's holiness,[89] and also literary memory, as Macrina's scar allusively evokes Odysseus',[90] just as Charikleia's birthmark recalls Menelaus' thigh wound in the *Iliad*.[91] And yet, although Gregory strains to see it, this identifying sign is hardly visible (31).

While this mark testifies to Macrina's sainthood and demonstrates the extent of her powers, its invisibility highlights the gap between faith and proof that this scene exposes. While Heliodorus' novel uses Charikleia's birthmark to emphasize the impossibility of ever fully naturalizing such unbelievable fictions, Macrina's scar epitomizes the tensions between belief and evidence, miraculous sainthood and mortal likelihood which are central to hagiography.

These frictions come to a head at the end of the *Life of Macrina*, which concludes with a playful twist on τὸ εἰκός. In a mirror of the chance encounter which inspired the text, Gregory ends with the story of a soldier he met unexpectedly when leaving Macrina's funeral (36).[92] After his family visited the saint, Macrina kissed his child, as was natural (φιλοῦσα δὲ οἷα εἰκὸς τὸ παιδίον, 37), and offered them a cure for their daughter's disfiguring eye condition. Upon returning home, however, they realized that they had forgotten the cure and panicked before seeing that their daughter's affliction had already disappeared, an outcome they attribute to Macrina's faith (38). This story is described by Gregory as a paradigmatic example of the miracles performed by Macrina, a θαῦμα comparable even to those performed by God (39),[93] but the miracle hinges on the seemingly throwaway phrase οἷα εἰκὸς. At first glance the attribution of her kiss to εἰκός ascribes her actions to a natural affection for children, but on a second reading invites audiences to recognize this action as the mechanism by which the miracle is achieved.[94] This tension between the naturalisation of Macrina's kiss and the revelation of its significance dramatizes the appeal to shared expectations which underpins τὸ εἰκός and converts them into proof of the miraculous power of Macrina's faith.

This redefinition of τὸ εἰκός, however, goes further. After narrating the story of the soldier's child, Gregory claims to have omitted even stranger stories than this, including exorcism and prophecy, in order not to strain the credibility of his audience and incite them to question the truth of the whole account (39).[95]

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ὅσα δὲ καὶ ἄλλα τοιαῦτα παρὰ τῶν συνεζηκότων αὐτῇ καὶ δι᾽ ἀκριβείας τὰ κατ᾽ αὐτὴν ἐπισταμένων ἠκούσαμεν, οὐκ ἀσφαλὲς οἶμαι προσθεῖναι τῷ διηγήματι. οἱ γὰρ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τὰ ἑαυτῶν μέτρα τὸ πιστὸν ἐν τοῖς λεγομένοις κρίνουσι, τὸ δὲ ὑπερβαῖνον τὴν τοῦ ἀκούοντος δύναμιν ὡς ἔξω τῆς ἀληθείας ταῖς τοῦ ψεύδους ὑπονοίαις ὑβρίζουσι. διὸ παρίημι τὴν ἄπιστον ἐκείνην ἐν τῷ λιμῷ γεωργίαν…καὶ ἄλλα τούτων παραδοξότερα…ἃ πάντα τοῖς μὲν δι᾽ ἀκριβείας ἐγνωκόσιν ἀληθῆ εἶναι πιστεύεται, κἂν ὑπὲρ πίστιν ᾖ, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν σαρκωδεστέρων ἔξω τοῦ ἐνδεχομένου νομίζεται…ὡς ἂν οὖν μὴ βλαβεῖεν οἱ ἀπιστότεροι ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ δωρεαῖς ἀπιστοῦντες, τούτου ἕνεκεν καθεξῆς ἱστορεῖν περὶ τῶν ὑψηλοτέρων θαυμάτων παρῃτησάμην, ἀρκεῖν ἡγούμενος τοῖς εἰρημένοις περιγράψαι τὴν περὶ αὐτῆς ἱστορίαν.

We heard many similar stories from those who lived with Macrina and who knew her well, but I do not think it is a good idea to add them to this account. Most people judge the credibility of what they are told from their own experiences, and anything that goes beyond what they can grasp they disparage as unbelievable, suspecting it of being a lie. For this reason I will not say anything about that incredible harvest during the famine…nor will I mention other things even stranger than this… All these things, incredible though they may seem, are believed to be true by those who know all the details. But such stories are regarded as unacceptable by people who have a less spiritual view…So that those who do not believe will not be harmed by being given an opportunity to deny faith in God's gifts, I have decided to omit Macrina's more remarkable miracles, thinking it sufficient to outline her story as I have done here.

While the anecdote about the soldier's daughter exposed the standards of plausibility invoked by οἷα εἰκὸς and redefined them to make the miraculous believable, here Gregory describes the marvel as one of the more plausible miracles Macrina ever performed. Gregory distinguishes between two classes of audience, one who believe these events to be true,

despite their being beyond belief (κἂν ὑπὲρ πίστιν ᾖ), and the other for whom these events

must be rejected due to their implausibility. Gregory's justification for omitting Macrina's

more unbelievable miracles is to prevent harm to this latter group of unbelievers (οἱ

ἀπιστότεροι ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ δωρεαῖς ἀπιστοῦντες) but this omission reinforces the tension

between plausible and unbelievable which runs throughout the text. While the text throughout

has toyed with the miraculous nature of Macrina's sanctity, this coda entirely disregards

concern for plausibility and frames belief in the unbelievable as key to theological acumen. In

other words, rather than naturalizing the incredible nature of Macrina's miracles, Gregory

converts their implausibility into a test of his audience's Christian faith.

The framing of incredible events as a test of faith challenges classical conceptions of

τὸ εἰκός by asserting the theological value of believing the unbelievable. This contested

relationship between faith and plausibility resonates throughout early Christianity, as Celsus'

attacks on the improbability of Christian miracles in the second century <sc>c.e.<sc> and

Origen's lengthy, vicious rebuttal a hundred years later shows.[96] For Origen, the

unbelievability of Jesus' miracles is precisely what proves them to be true, as no-one would

make up such an implausible story if they wanted it to be believed (*C. Cels.* 2.48).[97] These

arguments, however, achieve particular resonance in late antiquity due to the increasing

prominence of hagiography, which combines the miraculous and the mundane in ways which

highlight these issues of belief and believability.[98] Gregory's biography exemplifies these

tensions. Just as the *Aithiopika* is framed around the central paradox of Charikleia's

unbelievable identity, the *Life of Macrina* is structured around the tensions between Macrina

as a saint and mortal, credible holy woman and yet capable of the unbelievable. Set in

dialogue with the *Life of Macrina* and early Christian hagiography, the *Aithiopika*'s repeated

thematization of plausibility, paradox, and the limits of credibility acquires new significance

and opens up parallels with late antique concerns about faith and the miraculous.

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<a> Conclusions <a>

How were ancient novels read in antiquity? In light of the relatively few, though not insignificant, papyrus fragments and the paucity of critical responses to the novels from late antique sources, any answer to this question is likely to involve a certain amount of speculation. But for Heliodorus' *Aithiopika* in particular this question is unavoidable. The novel's ambiguous dating and the evidence that it was being read in late antiquity automatically challenges any easy assumptions about exactly where to place the novel in a literary and cultural landscape and forces us to confront the silence surrounding the novel's earliest reception. This article has offered one way of approaching this silence by demonstrating how the novel's engagement with classical practices of fiction opens up points of connection with late antique cultural concerns rather than exclusively classical or imperial ones. While without further evidence we will likely never know exactly how the *Aithiopika* was read in late antiquity, this approach shows how the novel prefigures and fits into late antique contexts. Although this article has only looked at Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa as exemplars of late antique literary culture, both writers tackle issues with wider resonance and suggest themes, if not exact texts, against which the *Aithiopika* may have been read. My approach does not rely on textual dependence between the *Aithiopika* and later works, but argues instead that the common ground between these texts illuminates key themes in the novel and their potential resonance for a late antique audience. In other words, what this article suggests is a new way of contextualizing the novel within late antique frameworks without reductionist approaches to dating or textual influence. Instead, adopting a more fluid and forward-looking approach to chronology opens up new perspectives which demonstrate how the novel's transformative approach to classical fiction gives it specific and significant resonance within a late antique context.

This is especially meaningful for how we understand the novel as a fictional text. Regardless of which context in which the *Aithiopika* is read, it is clear that Heliodorus is conscious of the literary traditions in which the novel is working. While the *Aithiopika*'s literary sophistication has long been recognized, the depth of its engagement with and transformations of ancient ideas about fiction have rarely been explored holistically. The novel's engagement with themes of falsehood and plausibility, themes which run throughout classical conceptualizations of fiction, consistently demonstrates its understanding of both this literary background and its own place within it. Reading the *Aithiopika* as a text engaged with the question of its own fictionality exposes how receptive the novel is to these later concerns instead of consistently harkening back to the classical past. This transformative engagement with classical practices of fiction both anticipates later developments and positions the novel alongside these concerns. This approach demonstrates not only the hitherto unrecognized late antique resonance of the *Aithiopika*, but more importantly, how the novel's own presentation of its fictionality brings this to the forefront.

Moreover, this approach complicates, as Helen Morales describes it, some of our "rather neat stories about the ancient novel."[99] If the *Aithiopika* is seen solely as the culmination of the imperial development of the ancient novel, this text, as the latest example of the genre from classical antiquity, becomes the pinnacle of this evolution and is left nowhere to go afterwards. Placing the novel in the contexts of its late antique reception, however, inverts this approach and positions the *Aithiopika* not simply as the endpoint of an imperial genre, but as a text open to reinterpretation across its reception history. The verbal echoes of Achilles Tatius and Chariton identified here suggest that Heliodorus recognized these authors as having particular relevance for the *Aithiopika*, and might suggest implicit recognition of the novel as a genre. But the thematic connections with Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa explored here demonstrate that the *Aithiopika* cannot be contextualized

only in terms of novelistic literature and imperial culture. Instead, the *Aithiopika*'s self-presentation of itself as specifically a fictional text not only shows awareness of classical fictional practice, but also makes visible the continuities and ruptures between classical and late antique considerations about truth and falsehood, the believable and the implausible. Instead of being constrained by sitting at the limits of a restrictive imperial framework, placing the *Aithiopika* in dialogue with late antiquity opens up new contexts in which the novel's transformations of classical models acquire new potency. In other words, this approach not only demonstrates the wider significance of the *Aithiopika* as a text on the cusp of scholarly divides between imperial and late antique cultures, but exposes the limitations of this binary periodization, and invites us to think harder about how seeing the novel as solely an imperial genre limits its broader resonance.

Returning to the fifth-century Socrates Scholasticus, our earliest secure reference to the *Aithiopika*, reinforces the value of this approach. Regardless of the literal truth of Socrates' description of Heliodorus as bishop of Tricca, what has often been overlooked is that this statement contextualizes Heliodorus within a Christian environment. This placement of Heliodorus in a Christian context suggests that early readers of Heliodorus could have considered the novel through or against other Christian texts of the period. At the very least, it implies that the two were not opposed and could be viewed within the same frameworks. As such, placing the novel in dialogue with late antique Christian texts perhaps parallels the kinds of literary contexts in which the novel was being read in the fifth-century <sc>c.e.<sc>. Looking at the *Aithiopika* through these models and in these contexts, therefore, sheds light not only on the dynamics of fiction within the novel itself, but also on its earliest reception.

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[1] Whether Heliodorus should be dated to the 3rd or 4th century <sc>c.e.<sc> is long-debated: see the overviews in Bowersock 1994: 149–60; Swain 1996: 423–24; Morgan 2003[2]: 417–21.

[2] Socrates Scholasticus *Church History* 5.22 (= Heliodorus, T 1, Colonna 1938).

[3] Although Morgan (2003[2]) 420–21 offers a measured reading of how testimonium and novel might relate to one another. The ninth-century patriarch Photius also claims Heliodorus became a bishop (*Bibliotheca* codex 73, 51b40–41 Bekker): see Futre Pinheiro 2014: 76–77.

[4] Evidence for the novel's circulation in late antiquity is also provided by a parchment codex, albeit likely from the sixth century (P. Amh. 160 = Pack[2] 2797). See Gronewald 1979 on this.

[5] See in particular Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen 2015: 1–4, with further references. See also the survey of scholarship on late antiquity and periodization in Shorrock 2011: 1–12.

[6] Morgan 2005; Krauss 2017. See also Morgan 1998: 75–76.

[7] Scholarship on the reception of the *Aithiopika* has generally focused on its popularity following Jacques Amyot's 1547 translation, as in Doody 1996; Plazenet 2008; Reeve 2008.

[8] On ancient readership, see Bowie 1994 and 2003[2]; Stephens 1994; Hunter 2008. Stephens and Winkler 1995: 480–81 briefly summarizes the papyrological evidence. Potential references, such as Persius *Sat.* 1.134 and Philostratus *Ep.* 66, have been much-debated but are essentially inconclusive: see Bowie 2002 for a survey of this evidence.

[9] Much recent scholarship has argued for a particular author or genre as the 'inventor' of fiction, but this ignores the universality of fiction as a feature of narrative. See Halliwell 2011: 10–25; Whitmarsh 2013: 11–34, especially 12–13, for critiques and bibliography.

[10] Cullhed and Rydholm 2017 offer a geographically wide-ranging and diachronic exploration of fiction. The essays in Gill and Wiseman 1993 offer an overview of fiction

from the archaic period to imperial literature, with Morgan 1993 specifically on the Greek novel, and the essays in Bréchet, Videau, and Webb 2013 look at the imperial period.

[11] The titles of Pratt 1993, Gill and Wiseman 1993, and Bowersock 1994 (Chapter 1: "Truth in Lying"), Scodel 1999, and Wohl 2014a testify to the relevance of these themes for ancient fiction. Ancient examinations of these themes are discussed in more detail below.

[12] Halliwell 2011: 12–19 offers a useful overview of these issues with further bibliography.

[13] See Rispoli 1988; Levet 1976, 2008 for vocabularies of fiction in archaic and classical Greek texts, Barwick 1928 and Hose 1996 for Hellenistic and imperial periods. Halliwell 2011: 10–11 and 2015 offer succinct overviews of this material.

[14] This tripartite theory of narrative derives from a variety of sources including Sex. Emp. *Adv. Math*. 1.252-53, 263–68, Cic. *de Inv*. 1.27, *Rhet. Her*. 1.13, Quint. 2.4.2, as well as the *progymnasmata* of Theon, Aphthonius, Hermogenes, and Nicolaus. Discussed by Barwick 1928; Hose 1996; Meijering 1987, especially 72–82; Webb 2001, especially 306–7.

[15] Winkler 1982, which has inspired various responses, notably Hunter 1998.

[16] Winkler 1982: 111, with particular emphasis on the parallels with Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesiaka*. On Xenophon and Heliodorus, see also Whitmarsh 2011: 117–19; 2013: 45–48.

[17] All text of Heliodorus from Rattenbury and Lumb 2011[5], translations adapted from Morgan 1989a.

[18] Pernot 1992: 44.

[19] See De Temmerman 2014 258–69 on Charikleia's rhetorical prowess and sexual morality.

[20] Discussed by De Temmerman 2014: 262–63; Brethes 2007: 233–39; Fusillo 1989: 31–32; Pernot 1992. On the *Aithiopika*'s use of Homer, see Whitmarsh 1998; Telò 1999; Lowe 2000: 236–41; Tagliabue 2015; Garson 1975; Hefti 1950: 98–103; Feuillâtre 1966: 105–114.

[21] Noted by De Temmerman 2014: 265.

[22] ní Mheallaigh 2014: 78. On the *Hippias Minor* and its relevance for ancient fiction, see ní Mheallaigh 2014: 78–79 and Hunter 2016.

[23] Schofield 2007 offers an overview of this slippery concept. On wider issues of falsehood and ethics in Plato, see Belfiore 1985; Page 1991; Woolf 2009; Baima 2017.

[24] Ormand 2010: 170 and De Temmerman 2014: 264–66 note the programmatic nature of Charikleia's opening falsehood.

[25] On the effect of this inset narration, see in particular Hardie 1998.

[26] De Temmerman 2014: 264–69; Chew 2007. On Kalasiris' rhetoric, see Winkler 1982; Hefti 1950; Baumbach 1997; Dowden 1996.

[27] This is not to say that such connections cannot be made, rather that the novel's *in medias res* structure adds a note of doubt to any such connections. This structure affects later readers' responses to the *Aithiopika*: Photius' linear reordering of the plot suggests that he found it confusing, whereas Psellos praises it. See Danek 2000 on Photius, McLaren 2006 on Psellos.

[28] This conflict between Charikleia, Theagenes, and Arsake is framed through a number of ethnic and gender stereotypes which act as a foil to these issues. On this see Lye 2016.

[29] Compare 7.21.4 (εἰκός τινα καὶ λύσιν θεῶν βουλήσει τὸν μεταξὺ χρόνον ἀποτεκεῖν, "with the god's help it is not impossible that the time you buy might bring about our deliverance") with 1.26.3–4, quoted more fully above (λόγος δὲ εἴκων καὶ πρὸς τὸ βούλημα συντρέχων τὴν πρώτην καὶ ζέουσαν φορὰν ἔστειλε καὶ τὸ κάτοξυ τῆς ὀρέξεως τῷ ἡδεῖ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας κατεύνασε…, "…a compliant answer and swift submission can curb the first eruption of desire and soothe away the pangs of lust with the sweet taste of a promise given…"). Noted by Rattenbury and Lumb 2011[5]: *ad loc*.

[30] On Theagenes' association with Achilles, see Whitmarsh 1998: 101–4; De Temmerman 2014: 282–88; Jones 2012: 119–24. For Montiglio 2013: 126, Charikleia and Theagenes' different attitudes here model different ways of engaging with fiction.

[31] The same phrase also occurs later in the novel to describe Melite's husband Thersander's eroticized reaction to Leucippe (6.7.7), a repetition which draws an implicit parallel between Thersander and Clitophon. On this see De Temmerman 2014: 168; Morales 2004: 136–40.

[32] Text is taken from Garnaud 1991, translation adapted from Whitmarsh 2001.

[33] On the ironic language of philosophy in Achilles Tatius, see Goldhill 1995: 94–97.

[34] See Morales 2004: 207-8 on the disingenuous nature of Clitophon's claims.

[35] On Clitophon's narration see Goldhill 1995; Whitmarsh 2003, 2011: 89–93; Marinčič 2007. Leucippe's virginity test is subtly questioned by Melite's parallel ordeal, which she passes due to a technicality: she is asked if she slept with Clitophon before she knew her husband was alive, and they did so after Thersander's return (8.11.2–3). See Segal 1984 on these virginity tests and Ormand 2010 on virginity in Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus.

[36] An intertextual relationship between Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus has long been posited, and the parallels listed in Durham 1938 remain suggestive, even if he inverts the likely direction of influence. Other allusions to second-century <sc>c.e.<sc> texts have been spotted in Heliodorus: see Bowie 1995 on Longus and Tagliabue 2016 on Lucian's *Toxaris*.

[37] Herodian 5.6.2: here, the emperor Elagabalus justifies having sex with a Vestal Virgin as a human experience (φήσας ἀνθρώπινόν τι πεπονθέναι πάθος); Lucian *de Domo* 21, where an audience's reaction to a beautiful room is described similarly (συγγνώμη γάρ, εἴ τι ἀνθρώπινον πεπόνθατε, ἄλλως τε καὶ πρὸς οὕτω καλὰς καὶ ποικίλας τὰς ὑποθέσεις). In both, the eroticized context and disingenuous tone invite parallels with Achilles Tatius. On Herodian's characterization of Elagabalus, see Kemezis 2014: 246–50; on the erotic and knowing tone of *de Domo*, Newby 2002. Rattenbury and Lumb 2011[5]: *ad loc.* note these parallels, along with those to Achilles Tatius, but do not explore their wider significance.

[38] This parallels Charikleia's similar smile as she sees through Kalasiris' show of magic (ἡ δὲ πυκνὰ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐπέσειε καὶ σεσηρὸς ὑπεμειδία, 4.5.4). Brethes 2007: 229 also compares this with Calasiris' smile (σεσηρός τι μειδήσας, 5.22.2).

[39] On this see Morgan 1998: 65–66. See also Charikleia's description of Arsake's love-sickness as a tumour (7.21.4), which recalls Clitophon's use of medical terminology to justify his actions (5.27.2). De Temmerman 2014: 272–73 argues that this aligns Charikleia with Kalasiris, who also adopts a medical pose when Charikleia first suffers from love-sickness.

[40] Jones 2012: 80–82 cites this phrase in Chariton and Heliodorus as evidence for stereotypes of female jealousy, but does not consider an intertextual relationship. If Achilles Tatius alludes to Chariton, as Bird 2019 argues, Heliodorus may reference *Callirhoe* through his knowledge of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, an idea supported by the proximity of the allusions. See n. 16 on Heliodorus' knowledge of Xenophon of Ephesus.

[41] See Borgogno 1971 on the New Comic traditions which shape Chaereas' jealousy.

[42] 8.1.15: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἧκεν εἰς Μίλητον τῷ λόγῳ, Καλλιρόη μὲν ἐσιώπησεν αἰδουμένη, Χαιρέας δὲ τῆς ἐμφύτου ζηλοτυπίας ἀνεμνήσθη… ("when she came to the part of her story about Miletus, Callirhoe fell silent from shame, and Chaereas remembered his innate jealousy…"); 8.4.4: τοῦτο μόνον ἐποίησε δίχα Χαιρέου· εἰδυῖα γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὴν ἔμφυτον ζηλοτυπίαν ἐσπούδαζε λαθεῖν ("Callirhoe did this thing alone separately from Chaereas and made an effort to keep it secret from him, because she was aware of his innate jealousy"). Text from Reardon 2004, translations my own.

[43] Schwartz 1999, De Temmerman 2014: 61–65.

[44] This is of course only a brief survey of a wider topic: for overviews see Hesk 2000 on deception in fifth-century Athens, Ahl 1984 on veiled speech and criticism in imperial politics, and Bartsch 1994 on the importance of doublespeak in imperial Roman contexts.

[45] Griffiths 2004: 14–15. See Birchall 1996: 149 for a brief diachronic survey of this topic.

[46] Ehrman 2013: 537–46 surveys the alternative views of John Chrysostom, Athanasius, and John Cassian, all of who find justifications for falsehood, and argues for Augustine's treatises as vehement interventions in a wider debate. See also Griffiths 2004: 14–15. Fleming 1998 and Griffiths 2004: 133-43 compares Augustine's view of falsehood with Cassian and John Chrysostom respectively. Feehan 1991: 165 n.3 argues that the counter-examples cited throughout both works suggest Augustine was aware that his arguments were controversial.

[47] On the later influence of the *de Mendacio* and *contra Mendacium*, see Hermanowicz 2018. Augustine's views on falsehood can also be found in his other writings, such as *Enchiridion* 6.18, but these treatises can be taken as paradigmatic of at least the core of his views.

[48] Although not all of the letters made it there (mentioned in *Ep.* 40): see Hermanowicz 2018: 699–700. *Ep.* 28 contains Augustine's central criticisms. Lamberigts 2018: 231–33 summarizes Augustine and Jerome's correspondence.

[49] *Contra Mendacium* 2.1–3. Burrus 1995 surveys the Priscillians' wider contexts and impact, and reviews the reliability of Augustine and Consentius' correspondence: 115–16.

[50] Augustine claims in the *Retractiones* (likely written in 426/427 <sc>c.e.<sc>) that he wanted the *de Mendacio* destroyed, but ordered it to be preserved because it complemented the superior *contra Mendacium* (*Retract.* 1.26). As both texts make essentially identical arguments, Augustine seems here to recant the earlier work's style rather than its content.

[51] On the philosophical and theological arguments here, see Feehan 1988, 1990, 1991.

[52] Text for the *De Mendacio* and *Contra Mendacium* taken from Zycha 1900, translations often adapted from Muldowney 2002 and Jaffee 2002 respectively.

[53] Griffiths 2004: 25.

[54] Augustine repeatedly displays his knowledge of fictional texts (especially Vergil and Apuleius), although he often downplays this (for example *Conf.* 1.13.20). On Augustine and Vergil, see MacCormack 1998; on Apuleius, Hunink 2003, Burrus 2004: 78-82.

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[55] This is summarized well by Feehan 1991.

[56] This recalls his arguments in an earlier section of the treatise (*DM* 7.10): *pudicitia quippe corporis, quia multum honorabili persona videtur occurrere, et pro se flagitare mendacium, ut si stuprator irruat qui possit mendacio devitari, sine dubitatione mentiendum sit: facile responderi potest, nullam esse pudicitiam corporis, nisi ab integritate animi pendeat*. "To some persons, bodily chastity seems of such honorable character that it may demand the telling of a lie and that the lie be told without hesitation if, by means of it, someone attacking for the purpose of sexual assault may be thwarted. The answer to this problem may be given readily: there can be no chastity of the body unless it derives from the integrity of the soul."

[57] On the problems of this argument, see Feehan 1991: especially 173–74.

[58] See Trout 1994, who compares Augustine's treatment of the Lucretia myth with Livy's.

[59] On which see Miles 2012 and Webb 2013, with further bibliography.

[60] Morales 2016. Heliodorus' engagement with the legal complexities around late-antique sexual morality has also been considered by Lateiner 1997 and Hilton 2019.

[61] On this and other discussions of probability in Aristotle, see Eden 1989: 32–54.

[62] Nünlist 2009: 174–84; Meijering 1987, especially 72–82; Futre Pinheiro 2018: 24-30.

[63] On this see Kraus 2006; Schmitz 2000; Eden 1989; Hoffman 2008; Wohl 2014b; and the essays in Wohl 2014a. On probability and novelistic practice, see Morgan 1993: 181–83.

[64] Wohl 2014b: 1.

[65] On this key theme see Reeve 1989; Whitmarsh 2013: 123–34; Lehoux 2014.

[66] For example, 2.8.3; 2.10.1.

[67] Paulsen 1992: 82–110: see also Brethes 2007: 115–24. Hunter 1998: 43–47 rightly shows how readings of this scene shift according to which models and characters are prioritized.

[68] Hunter 1998: 56.

[69] *Ibid* n.60.

[70] Schmitz 2000: 47–48. Eden 1989 argues that these models are not opposed in Aristotle's works, where reasoning from probability underpins his views on poetry, ethics, and rhetoric.

[71] Morgan 1998: 70–71 notes the visual parallels with Charikleia's virginity test at the close of the novel. Andújar 2012 see this scene as evidence of intertextuality with the Thekla narrative, which reinforces the dialogue between Christian and pagan texts explored here.

[72] 8.11.3–4: Αἰθιόπων εἰς γαῖαν ἀφίξεαι ἄμμιγα κούρῃ

δεσμῶν Ἀρσακέων αὔριον ἐκπροφυγών.

ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν ὅποι τείνει τὸ χρήσιμον ἔχω συμβάλλειν γῆν μὲν γὰρ Αἰθιόπων τὴν τῶν καταχθονίων ἔοικε λέγειν ἄμμιγα δὲ κούρῃ τῇ Περσεφόνῃ με συνέσεσθαι καὶ λύσιν δεσμῶν τὴν ἐνθένδε ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγήν. ("'Ethiopia's land with a maiden shalt thou see: Tomorrow from Arsake's bonds shalt thou be set free.' Now, I can guess the meaning of the prophecy as it affects me: by 'Ethiopia's land' it signifies, I think, the netherworld, 'with a maiden' perhaps means I shall be with Persephone, and the release from bonds is the departure of my soul from my earthly body.") Winkler 1982: 149 situates this dream within the novel's hermeneutic games.

[73] Hilton 1998: 249 and Morgan 2005: 312–15, with further references. See also the novel's opening, where Charikleia sees the bandits' dark skin and addresses them as ghosts (1.3.1).

[74] As Rattenbury and Lumb 2011[5] note *ad loc.* n.3: "Théagène commet la faute de traiter un rêve dont le contenu se réalise dans la suite comme s'il s'agissait d'un symbole nécessitant une explication."

[75] This wording recalls Persinna's description of the stone on the *tainia* (4.8.7): βασιλείῳ μὲν συμβόλῳ τὸν κύκλον ἀνάγραπτον λίθῳ δὲ παντάρβῃ καὶ ἀπορρήτῳ δυνάμει τὴν σφενδόνην καθιερωμένον, "engraved all around with the royal crest and set with a *pantarbe* jewel that endows it with holy, mystic powers."

[76] The invocation of Kalasiris also undercuts Charikleia's reasoning, as he has been characterized throughout by questions about his credibility. Winkler 1982 is seminal on this

issue: see also Hefti 1950, Fuchs 1993: 174–88, Dowden 1996, esp. 283–84, Baumbach 1997, Hunter 1998: 51–59. On language and translation in the *Aithiopika* see Winkler 1982.

[77] On the ending of the novel see Morgan 1989b; Montiglio 2013: 125–58.

[78] On the relationship between art and nature in this scene, see Whitmarsh 1998: 109–13.

[79] Whitmarsh 1998, especially 107–13. See also Elmer 2008: 431 n.30.

[80] Gerolemou 2018b offers an overview of the vast bibliography on miracles: see also Nicklas and Spittler 2014 and Gerolemou 2018a. See Hardie 2009 and Garland 2011 for miracles and wonder in classical antiquity. Carleton Paget 2011 and De Nie 2011 look at miracles in early Christianity, with Daston and Park 1998 on later wonders. See Kaldellis 2014 and Roilos 2014 on fiction and miracles in Byzantium, with Cullhed 2015: 60–73 on early Christian views of truth and pagan mythology and Turner 2012: 55–74 on truth in hagiography.

[81] Messis 2014 and Staat 2018 are useful overviews of Byzantine Greek and late antique Latin hagiography respectively and their relationship with novelistic fiction.

[82] The addressee of this letter is unclear: the manuscripts suggest a monk named Olympiodorus, a bishop called Hieros, or a certain Eutropios. See Maraval 1971: *ad loc.* n. 1.

[83] For example, in Achilles Tatius and Philostratus' *Heroicus*, on which see Martin 2002.

[84] Krueger 2000: esp. 492–93. See also Burrus 2004: 53–90, who compares the *Life of Macrina* with other early Christian biographies of women, and Maraval 1997 on its genre.

[85] Smith 2004: 59 suggests that Gregory's *de Anima et Resurrectione* is built on the *Phaedo*, with Macrina as Socrates. By contrast, Burrus 2000: 112–22 argues for Macrina as a second Diotima. Ludlow 2015: 94–96 gives a balanced overview of these intertextual dynamics.

[86] 1: γυνὴ δὲ ἦν ἡ τοῦ διηγήματος ἀφορμή, εἴπερ γυνή· οὐκ οἶδα γὰρ εἰ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἐκ τῆς φύσεως αὐτὴν ὀνομάζειν τὴν ἄνω γενομένην τῆς φύσεως. On this see Burrus 2004: 69–70; key on gender in early Christian biography is Clark 1998.

[87] She is secretly named for the saint Thekla, whose parallel chastity influences her life (2).

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[88] Macrina's fidelity to an absent husband (ἄτοπον δὲ εἶναι τῷ ἐκδημοῦντι νυμφίῳ μὴ φυλάσσειν τὴν πίστιν, 5) aligns her with Homer's Penelope, although Penelope is unsure whether her husband is alive and Macrina knows hers is dead, but hopes for divine resurrection. See Burrus 2004: 69–70. This paradox of married chastity recalls the *Aithiopika*, where Charikleia's insistence that Theagenes is her husband, despite the proof of her virginity, leads Hydaspes to declare that she is mad (10.22.1–3). This is only resolved by an off-stage conversation between Charikleia and her mother, after which Persinna publicly vouches for Charikleia's chastity (10.38.2), although she has already said that she would conceal any indiscretion if needed (10.29.4–30.1). See Ormand 2010; Olsen 2012: 303–10.

[89] Frank 2000: 528.

[90] Frank 2000. See also Burrus 2005.

[91] Whitmarsh 1998: 111–13. This simile seems to have been popular amongst imperial authors, as it also occurs in Achilles Tatius *L&C* 1.4.4, Lucian *Imagines* 8, and others. Frank 2000: 517 suggests that that Gregory's description of Macrina's marked part (μέρος) puns on Odysseus' scarred thigh (μηρός), a linguistic joke which recalls Kalasiris' claims that Homer's name derives from his hairy thigh (ὁ μηρός), proof of his divine parentage (*Aeth.* 3.15). On this see Whitmarsh 1998: 104–7; Pitcher 2016. This is not to say that Heliodorus and Gregory are interacting directly with each other (Frank *ibid* n. 25 cites Eur. *Bacch.* 286–97 as a parallel pun), but rather shows their similar reworking of classical models.

[92] This epilogal placement adds weight to its framing as a paradigmatic example of Macrina's miracle-working powers: on which see Krueger 2000, 2004: 110–32.

[93] Gregory's statements here led me to disagree with the conclusions of Giannarelli 1993, who claims that women in early Christian biographies are rarely miracle-workers.

[94] Krueger 2004: 240 n.47 argues that the cure takes place while the mother narrates her encounter with Macrina, but, given that Macrina looks at the child while kissing her

(προσάγουσα τὸ στόμα τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς, ἐπειδη εἶδε τὸ περὶ τὴν κόρην πάθος, 37),

Gregory's prose places emphasis on the *act* of the kiss rather than the *narration* of it.

[95] Text is taken from Maraval 1971, translation adapted from White 2010.

[96] On this see Bowersock 1994: 2–9, 74–75, 95–98, 114–19. Junni 2013 analyses Celsus'

arguments. Greenwood 2016 surveys Celsus and Origen's respective views on miracles.

[97] Bowersock 1994: 113–14 notes "this is perhaps not one of Origen's strongest arguments."

[98] Turner 2012, especially 25–74, offers a thought-provoking survey of these questions.

Greenwood 2016 compares Celsus and Origen's views to Julian's in order to demonstrate the

continued relevance of these issues into the fourth century <sc>c.e.<sc>.

[99] Morales 2009: 4.