Love’s Calling
How Eroticism Encourages Religious Intentions in *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika*

Mémoire
Maîtrise en études anciennes

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Sous la direction de :
Anne-France Morand, directrice de recherche
Résumé

Ce mémoire s’intéresse à l’emploi de l’érotisme et de l’amour comme outils littéraires dans deux romans de l’Antiquité. Le texte principal est un écrit dérivé de la Torah intitulé Joseph et Aséneth. Le second est le roman grec d’Héliodore d’Émèse, Les Éthiopiquest. Puisque tout auteur, peu importe sa foi, avait une éducation hellénique semblable, on retrouve des motifs similaires dont les détails se distinguent et les buts sont aux antipodes dans ces textes. Dans le cas de cette recherche, il s’agit de deux œuvres du genre romanesque écrites en grec qui emploient chacune une histoire romantique à des fins édifiantes.

Les buts de cette analyse sont triples. Ce travail cherche à montrer que Joseph et Aseneth a droit au titre de « roman grec, » de qualifier les expériences religieuses présentées dans ces œuvres et de participer au débat sur la datation de Joseph et Aseneth par une étude comparée. Cette recherche se divise en trois sections. D’abord, le topos bien connu des romans a été analysé : la maladie d’amour. Dans les deux cas, le coup de foudre et la maladie émotionnelle qui s’en suit ont été dévoilés comme moteur important de la trame narrative, ainsi qu’une manière d’introduire des thèmes religieux ou philosophiques. En second lieu, les paroles des personnages au sujet de l’amour et le mariage ont été considérées. Puisque les protagonistes refusent le mariage initialement, les raisons données pour ce refus ont été révélatrices encore une fois de soucis sociaux, soit religieux, soit politiques. En dernier lieu, la relation entre le couple romantique et les dieux présents dans ces récits a été analysée. Les deux romans témoignent de la croyance contemporaine du grand rôle des dieux dans la vie des humains. Cette implication divine dans la vie mortelle s’est manifestée de manières différentes, car elle relève des buts divergents des deux romans. Le parallèle qui se présente est un lien individuel avec les dieux qui est évident dans les romans d’amour.
Summary

This thesis examines the use of eroticism and love as literary devices in two ancient novels. The primary text analysed is a work derived from the Torah entitled Joseph and Aseneth. The second piece is the Æthiopika, the romance written by Heliodorus of Emesa. Despite their divergent backgrounds, all authors received a similar Hellenic education, and motifs bearing striking similarities are thus found in these narratives of antithetical purposes. Moreover, both of these texts are novels, were written in Greek, and exploit romance in order to edify their public.

This thesis has three purposes. It aims to show that Joseph and Aseneth is deserving of classification as a Greek romance, to qualify the religious experiences had by the characters, and to contribute to the discussion of dating of Joseph and Aseneth by this comparative study. A tripartite analysis is used in this research. To begin with, the well known romantic trope of lovesickness is analysed. In both cases, the use of love at first sight and the emotional illness that follows are shown to be not merely genre requirements, but motors of the plot, as well as a means by which an author can introduce either religious or philosophical elements. The second section takes up speech pertaining to love and romance. As protagonists from both novels initially refuse matrimony, the language regarding these refusals is highly informative of social anxieties, particularly political or religious concerns, regarding marriage. Lastly, the relationship between the romantic couple and the gods present in their narrative is considered. The two novels display the historically appropriate understanding that the gods intervene in the private lives of mortals. The fashions and reasons for which they do so is different in each story, a convergence stemming from the purposes of these two works. Parallels can be drawn, however, for both narratives display a shift from institutional to personal religion, through the individual relationships of characters with divinities.
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For my loved ones
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INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to catch and keep a reader’s attention. The following thesis analyses one such technique in two pieces of ancient Greek literature. This thesis takes a comparative approach to Joseph and Aseneth and the Æthiopika to comprehend the uses of eroticism made within the narratives as a means of supporting specific ideals.

Not all modern scholars support the comparison of Joseph and Aseneth, a Jewish novel, and the Æthiopika, an ideal Greek romance. However, the Greek origin of Joseph and Aseneth permits, even encourages, this comparison, because while their subjects are different, their cultural origin and stylistic emphasis of identity and purpose are similar. Both of these subjects will be further explored in subsequent chapters. Putting Joseph and Aseneth into context with other Hellenistic and early Roman Jewish writings further strengthens the argument for such a comparison with pagan works. Jewish writings in Greek from the Hellenistic period have been studied extensively by Erich Gruen and John Collins have extensively studied Greek language Jewish writings. They both place these texts into context with Hebrew Jewish writings and pagan Greek texts. Lawrence Wills’ work on fictions, such as Esther, Judith, and Daniel, has shown the importance of the novel genre in the construction of identity, both in Judea and in the diaspora. Outside the novel genre, history, philosophy, and theatre are but a few examples of other instances wherein Jews chose to write in Greek, yielding the works of Flavius Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, and Ezekiel the Tragedian, respectively. The complexity of the choice to write in Greek is not to be underestimated. While it has been suggested that Philo, in fact, knew no Hebrew, and Josephus was clearly writing for a non-Jewish public (or at least a public that was not exclusively Jewish), the language of their works undoubtedly facilitated their circulation, reception, and transmission. The influence of pagan literature on Jewish authors, particularly Josephus and Philo, is well recognised. Joseph and Aseneth must be read in the same light as these other Jewish texts circulating in Greek. It is important to remember that Jewish authors were not writing in a cultural void, beyond the grasp of Hellenism, and that the dialogue between Jewish and pagan literature was indeed vibrant.

Joseph and Aseneth is the main text to be examined here; however, as the aim of this thesis is to provide an in-depth analysis of the eroticism found in Aseneth’s transformative experience, it will be necessary to borrow from other Greek literature of the period that explores romance and eroticism. Five extant narratives make up the canon of the ideal Greek novel, with other fragments intermingling in the genre. Of the five novels fitting this description, theÆthiopika by Heliodorus of Emesa is serves as a most useful companion. The methodological reasons for this choice will be detailed shortly but, briefly, this decision was based on the religious nature of Chariklea and Theagenes’ whole adventure. Heliodorus’ work will therefore be the main point of reference within the body of Greek romances. Should it become necessary to use specific examples from others texts, however, it may be pertinent to pull from different examples of the genre. This comparison will show that Joseph and Aseneth merits the title of Greek romance, despite its Jewish origins.

Methodology

Comparative work is by no means a simple task. This section will outline they ways in which this will be done, while also highlighting certain pitfalls to be avoided. Both Joseph and Aseneth and theÆthiopika will be discussed, but this section opens a brief presentation of the prior, for it is the primary text under consideration. This will be followed by defence of the comparative method, the pertinence of Heliodorus’ novel, and the possibilities of intertextuality.

Biblical Fiction

Joseph and Aseneth draws its inspiration from Genesis 41:45:

καὶ ἐκάλεσεν Φαραω τὸ ὄνομα Ιωσηφ Ψονθομфанῆξ· καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ τὴν Ασεννεθ θυγατέρα Πετεφρη ῾Ηλίου πόλεως αὐτῷ γυναῖκα.

And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphenath-Paneah [Psonthomphanèx]; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potiphera [Petephrê] priest of On [Helios]. And Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

5 Chalirhoe and Chariton by Chariton of Aphrodias, Daphnis and Chloe by Longus, Anthia and Habrocomes by Xenophon of Ephesus, Leucippe and Clitophon by Achilles Tatius, and theÆthiopika by Heliodorus of Emesa.
6 All translations in this thesis were done by R. G. Glass, unless it is otherwise specified.
And with that, Joseph was married; and to a *shiksa*, no less! What a *shanda*! The marriage of Joseph to an Egyptian woman troubled ancient Jews. He was (and is) one of the founding figures of Judaism, a potent symbol of the weak and downtrodden rising above their tormentors, of how the Jew could be accepted, influential, and respected in a Gentile world. So why did he marry a Gentile? Who was this Aseneth whom Pharaoh gave unto Joseph in marriage? Other than when Pharaoh gives her to Joseph as his wife, the Torah only mentions her in connection to the births of Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph and Aseneth’s sons (Gen. 45:50-52). The oldest explanation of this union to have been preserved is a novel-like narrative, retold in sixteen Greek manuscripts. This version explains that when Aseneth saw Joseph, she was so overwhelmed by his beauty, wisdom, and spirit, that she subsequently repented her idolatrous ways and became a perfect, pious wife for him, thus solving the problem of her non-Jewish origin.

The anonymous tale of the transformation of Aseneth from a headstrong, young Egyptian girl, into the image of religious and matrimonial perfection has piqued scholarly interest in the past three decades. As an analysis of any substantial bibliography shows, this text has never been truly forgotten or abandoned, yet the past thirty years has seen a remarkable expansion of attention given to this anonymous text, now known as *Joseph and Aseneth*.

Of all the narratives described as “Jewish novels” by Lawrence Wills in his anthology *Ancient Jewish Novels*, *Joseph and Aseneth* presents something altogether unique: it is decidedly the most romantic. This thesis does not use “romantic” in the sense of a twentieth or twenty-first century romance or harlequin style story. Rather, it is a romance of the type known in Antiquity, also called a novel. The centrality of the love story between the pagan girl and the Jewish man, which results in a happy ending specifically calls to mind the erotic novels of Greek culture, a genre to which *Joseph and Aseneth* might actually belong, a connection made more obvious given that this narrative was originally written in Greek. The Greek romances thus offer a cultural backdrop

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7 The terms *shiksa* and *shanda* are Yiddish. The prior is a (derogatory) word for a non-Jewish girl or woman and the latter a scandal.
8 A note on the spelling of the heroine’s name: the transliteration of the Hebrew name is “Asnath” or “Asenath”; the Greek texts spell the name “Asenneth”; modern scholarship on the Hellenic novel uses a version of the Greek transliteration, “Aseneth.” This last spelling is what will be used in this thesis. It refers to the character from the novel, a character obviously based on the woman from Genesis, but with its own literary history.
10 Titles such as *Joseph and Aseneth, The Marriage and Conversion of Aseneth, or La prière d’Aseneth* are all quite recent, for none of the manuscripts includes a title from Antiquity.
against which the romance and eroticism of the Jewish novel can and should be examined, despite the obvious and significant differences between them and *Joseph and Aseneth*.

Written five to eight hundred years after the Biblical stories, this novel is “too late for biblical scholars, too crude for most literary critics, and too esoteric for classicists,”13 which resulted in *Joseph and Aseneth* being somewhat ignored, though never entirely.14 As previously mentioned, as interest for para-biblical and intertestamental literature has deepened, scholars have only deepened their study of *Joseph and Aseneth*. Since the renewed interest for this novel in the latter half of the twentieth century, specialists, mostly working in religious studies and theology, have explored questions of transmission and manuscript tradition, theology, historical context, and literary genre; work that has shed much light on the complexity of this multi-chaptered elaboration of a single sentence in Genesis.

The story of Aseneth’s transformation is one of those curious texts that is without author, “without text,”15 and even without title. Undoubtedly important narratives in their respective communities (as their manuscript traditions show), it is virtually impossible to pin such tales down to one location. The lack of clear authorship and the wonderfully varied collection of manuscripts leave the modern reader with a host of questions. The following section is thus dedicated to the discussion of which edition best suited for the questions this thesis seeks to answer, as well as the interlacing subjects of chronologic and geographic origin, and the religious self-understanding of the author.16

One reason for the great interest in the story is the sheer number of versions found, both attesting to its contemporary cultural significance and offering scholars a number of choices. This

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16 The term “self-understanding” comes from Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered*. New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 245-274. As it is a term used elsewhere in this thesis, a brief definition of the concept is required. Throughout her monograph, Kraemer refers to “authorial self-understanding” as a means of explaining that, due to the ambiguous religious origins of *Joseph and Aseneth*, it is unclear how the author and first tellers of this tale would have defined themselves. In other words, we cannot know for sure whether the author considered himself Jewish, Christian or something else entirely. The concept of “self-understanding” is thus a means to allude to the classifications of the author’s religious practices as he would have defined them, not as modern scholars understand them to be.
narrative has been preserved in no fewer than ninety-one manuscripts written in seven languages.\textsuperscript{17} The Hellenic version of \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} exists in a short and a long version, which belong to four families of manuscripts (a, b, c, and d).\textsuperscript{18} Though once disputed, the idea that \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} was originally written in Greek is now widely accepted.\textsuperscript{19} The critical edition published in 1968 by Marc Philonenko deals uniquely with the shorter recension.\textsuperscript{20} Other editions of the text tend to combine both the long and short versions in one publication wherein the parts belonging to the longer version are clearly marked. Such is the case for Christoph Burchard’s critical edition;\textsuperscript{21} however, the most recently published editions are those of Uta Fink\textsuperscript{22} and Pius-Ramon Tragan,\textsuperscript{23} both of whom were improving upon Burchard’s edition.\textsuperscript{24} Translations of the text abound in all the modern languages of academic research: French,\textsuperscript{25} English,\textsuperscript{26} Italian,\textsuperscript{27} and German.\textsuperscript{28} Circular discussions about which text came first, the shorter or longer, continue unabated. Philonenko argued

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Standhartinger. \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 354.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} The oldest manuscripts of \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} are in Syriac. It has, however, been established that they would have been translated from a Greek original. This means that they occasionally provide insight into readings from versions predating surviving manuscripts, which makes them a precious point of contact with the no-longer existent Greek texts from which they were translated. Cf. R. D. Chesnutt, \textit{From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth}. Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1995. p. 69-71 and p. 76-80.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} V. Aptowitzer, for example, considered the original to have been in Hebrew (or possibly even Aramaic). “Aseneth, the Wife of Joseph: A Haggadic Literary-Historical Study,” \textit{Hebrew Union College Annual}, vol 1, 1924. p. 239-306. However, the obvious connection with the koine used to translate the Torah (the Septuagint) makes it unlikely that any other language would have been used initially. Most recently, the Greek origin of this text has been contested by N. Elder, “On Transcription and Oral Transmission in Aseneth: A Study of the Narratives’ Conception,” \textit{Journal for the Study of Judaism}, vol. 47, 2016. p. 119-142. He argues for, if not a Hebrew origin, at least a bilingual existence early on in the story’s telling.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} M. Philonenko, \textit{Joseph et Aséneth: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes}. Leiden, Brill, 1968.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} P.-R. Tragan, \textit{Josep i Àsenet: Introducció, text grec revisat i notes}. Barcelona, Fecha, 2005.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Standhartinger, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 354.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} S. Inowlocki, \textit{Des idoles mortes et muettes au dieu vivant: Joseph, Aséneth et le fils de Pharaon dans un roman du Judaïsme hellénisé}. Turnhout, Brepols, 2002. p. 159-80; Philonenko, \textit{op. cit.}
\end{itemize}}
for the shorter version, whereas Burchard still supports the longer. The recent consensus upholds the latter’s opinion. The most recent contributions to the discussion are those of Kraemer, and John Collins. Kraemer prefers the shorter version, believing the longer to have been written in order to elaborate on specific ideas or themes. In response, Collins published “Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?” in which he sought not only to answer the query voiced in the title once and for all, but to refute Kraemer’s preference for the shorter text. Neither text comes out on top in his analysis, although he does poke holes in much of what Kraemer argues, and not uniquely pertaining to the date of redaction. In parallel to this agonistic debate sits Angela Standhartinger’s opinion. She sees the two traditions as distinct versions of the same story, each with their own philosophical and religious intents, and thus each worthy of analysis in its own right. The qualifier “circular” is by no means an implication that it is neither interesting nor pertinent to discuss such things; but no matter how many times the long chicken and the short egg are discussed, no one can say categorically which came first, nor can an Urtext be reconstructed at this time; the manuscripts on hand simply do not permit it. The importance of these texts is clearly found in their constant transmissions, and their importance to the communities that found it useful and meaningful to keep rewriting and retelling them.

This debate has significant consequences for research. The date, location, and length of the first version of Joseph and Aseneth all have an influence on the subject at hand. For the purpose of this thesis, an entirely different criterion must be considered as well: the novelistic and romantic qualities of the respective versions. Standhartinger’s assertion that both texts ought to be studied as individual pieces is the best approach for an internal study of Joseph and Aseneth. As this is a

29 Philonenko, op. cit.; he restated his arguments for the last time in his article “Un mystère juif?” in F. Dunand (ed.), Mystères et syncrétismes. Études d’histoire des religions 2. Paris, Guethner, 1975. p. 65-70. He has not taken up the argument anew since then.
30 Burchard, op. cit.; he defended his opinion most recently in 1983-1985 in “Joseph and Aseneth,” loc. cit.
32 Kraemer, op. cit., p. 6-9.
34 Kraemer, op. cit., p. 22.
35 Collins, loc. cit., p. 112.
36 Ibid., p. 101.
comparative analysis, a different criterion must be considered: the romantic and erotic elements of the narration. Both the short and long versions of this novel involve Aseneth’s conversion due to a love-like motif. The shorter version, though it does rely on Aseneth falling in love with Joseph, does not detail her reactions as extensively, nor does it include a rather lengthy hymn that provides key information after the fact. This extended description of her reactions, as well as her keenly felt emotions as detailed by the heroine provide more points of comparison between *Joseph and Aseneth* and Helidorus’ novel. The analysis of this thesis is thus based on the longer version, relying on the edition established by Burchard in his 2003 publication *Joseph und Aseneth kritisch herausgegeben*.39

In his review of Wills’ anthology, Gideon Bohak is right that Aseneth’s story is clearly one of religious devotion, but not exclusively.40 Yet most of the research concerning this tale is of a theological, philosophical or historical bent. Aseneth’s repentance and transformation have been analysed in major works by Bohak,41 Randall Chesnutt,42 Kraemer,43 Standhartinger,44 and Christian Wetz,45 to name but some of the larger studies that have been published; many other attempts to illuminate the meaning of this enigmatic novel have been made. The conclusions drawn by (most) authors rest on certain fundamental assumptions: this is a Jewish text, written in Greek, in Egypt, between 70 BC and 117 AD.46 Each one of those four statements must be briefly explored. It must be immediately stated, however, that unless a hitherto unknown or lost manuscript with a clear date or recognised hand is unearthed, it is unlikely that scholars will ever be able to answer these questions convincingly.

In her monograph dedicated to re-examining *Joseph and Aseneth*, Kraemer points out a curious aspect of discussions regarding date, geographical provenance, and religious orientation of this text: the arguments are often interconnected and rooted in other aspects of the argument. The

42 Chesnutt, *op. cit*.
43 Kraemer, *op. cit*.
44 Standhartinger, *op. cit*.
46 The interpretation made by Bohak, *op. cit.*, is here at odds with the consensus. Although he is convinced that the text is Jewish and composed in Egypt, he is inclined to date it to the second century BC, for he reads it as a justification for the construction of a Jewish temple at Leontopolis. This is, however, unlikely, as his interpretation relies on analysis of the “Bees Scene,” which is by far the most mysterious and complex of the entire story. That particular scene also exists in the longer recension only, and thus cannot be the reason for which the entire tale was written; otherwise, it would be found in both versions. Cf. Collins, *loc. cit.*, p. 107-108.
text is older because it is Jewish, and because it is Jewish (and in Greek) it is from Egypt.\(^47\) As she prefers a date in the fourth century AD,\(^48\) redaction in the Middle East (most likely Syria),\(^49\) and an unknown religious self-understanding for the author (though she leans towards Christian, given the time and place for which she argues),\(^50\) her criticism of the consensus is of considerable note. It would be all too convenient to simply take this alternate conclusion and run with it, as this research is to be comparative, using Heliodorus of Emesa’s novel from Late Antiquity as the Hellenic counter point to *Joseph and Aseneth*. The consensus is, however, more likely than Kraemer’s analysis.\(^51\)

The most compelling argument for Hellenized, Jewish authorship stems from a *Sitz im Leben* argument. The book’s conflicts occur among Jews, between Jews and gentiles, and, most importantly, between Gentiles themselves. There is no dichotomy exclusively pitting Jews and non-Jews against each other. Traditionally, this indicator has been read as a hint to an actual historical and political situation.\(^52\) Specialists have therefore sought out a time and place in which a Jewish population was living peacefully with their Gentile neighbours. Due to its *koine* and Septuagint Greek, Aseneth can have been composed no earlier than 70 BC, the traditional *terminus ante quem* date given for the writing of Septuagint.\(^53\) Because of the amicable relations between Joseph (and his brothers) and Pharaoh, it has been suggested that this narrative corresponds to a time before the revolt of the Jews under Trajan in 117 AD.\(^54\) Above and beyond specific historical incidents, this particular element of Aseneth places it squarely within a considerable body of Hellenic Jewish literature that depicts not only good relations between Jews and Gentiles, and more specifically a privileged relationship between a Jew and a monarch.\(^55\) In this text, the relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh fits with the other writings of the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Not only is

\(^{47}\) Kraemer, *op. cit.*, p. 247

\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 239.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 260 and p. 263.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 253-254.

\(^{51}\) Kraemer’s arguments are not without their own circularity, however. “In fact, Kraemer’s arguments for dating the composition of JA between the 4th and 6th centuries C.E. serve as the foundation for her discussion of JA’s significance, which she then uses to defend her proposed date for JA. In this way, Kraemer’s discussion is not impervious to her own critique of the consensus view that JA was composed no later than 115 C.E. This ‘circular manner’ of reasoning (as Kraemer identifies it) is inevitable when trying to reconstruct the original context of JA’s composition.” P. Ahearne-Krolle “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity in Greco-Roman Egypt,” PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005. p. 153.


\(^{53}\) Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

\(^{54}\) Chesnutt, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

this the case, but it is also a distinctly Jewish characteristic — Christians quite simply did not write stories in which loyalty to the system was an important feature.\textsuperscript{56} If Jewish, and written in Greek, it is unlikely that this text was written much later than the early or mid-second century AD. Arguing that no Jews were writing in Greek after that time is, of course, an argument out of silence, and thus fallacious. However, Daniel Boyarin emphasised just how complete a job of absorbing Hellenized Jews and their writings early Christianity did.\textsuperscript{57} This means that Hellenic Jewish writings that do not issue from Rabbinic sources are probably much earlier than any date proposed by Kraemer. It is thus most likely that \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} is a text of Jewish origins, dating to the late Hellenistic or early Roman period. A more precise date than that is impossible to establish comfortably.

Where the novel was written is an equally difficult question. Once again, a certain amount of educated guesswork is required. Naturally, both the figure of Joseph and tales about the relationship between Jews and Egyptians were extremely popular in the Jewish communities of Egypt, notably Alexandrian.\textsuperscript{58} It is also more likely that the text was written outside of Judea due to its complex linguistic origin. The first written version of \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} may well have been Greek, but Nicholas Elder recently suggested that the story’s beginning was an oral one, and may initially have circulated in a bilingual milieu, existing in either Hebrew or Aramaic, and Greek.\textsuperscript{59} This would explain the “Semitic flavour” of the Greek text.\textsuperscript{60} This suggests, yet again, that the text (though perhaps not the story itself) originates from outside of Judea, possibly in Egypt, as the Alexandrian Jewish community was large and important during the Hellenistic period. The need for Jewish texts in Greek is clearly shown by the translation of the Torah into Greek, and it is therefore possible that \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} had a similar experience. Although this does not actually pin down an exact location of origin for the story, the Greek text may very well come from Egypt, possibly Alexandria, where a thriving Jewish community has been well documented. This is, of course, conjecture, and ultimately less important than the chronological and religious questions, as stories can and do travel.

The balance of research thus supports the stance that \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} is indeed a Hellenic Jewish text, most likely a text dating back to the very end of the Hellenistic period or the beginning of the Roman Empire. The very fluid transmission of the Greek document does mean that certain elements more common in Late Antiquity can be found in the text, particularly in the longer

\begin{itemize}
\item[56] Collins, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 108.
\item[58] E. Gruen, “The Hellenistic Images of Joseph” in Gruen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 73-108.
\item[59] Elder, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 140.
\item[60] Chesnutt, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 70.
\end{itemize}
recension. As Collins so nicely summarised: “one could grant that there are late antique elements in this story without thereby being forced to suppose that the whole story was composed in the third or fourth century CE.” Most interestingly (and importantly), the later elements simply mean that the text was floating around at the same time as Heliodorus was writing the Æthiopika. Though still contested, the novels are considered to be a product of the Second Sophistic, thus placing them squarely within the Roman Empire. In 2002, Ewen Bowie reconsidered the dates for the earlier novels, bumping Chariton up from the I century BC to a date between 41 and 61 AD, Xenophon to shortly after 65 AD, and Achilles Tatius to no later than 160 AD. The dating of Heliodorus is still uncertain. While the majority of scholars still prefers a third century date, there have been strong arguments for a late fourth century date of composition (see below). All of this is to say that the romance was popular during the centuries in which Joseph and Aseneth is presumed to have been written. Because of the fluidity of its transmission, and the popularity of the ideal novels during the early years of its circulation, it is unsurprising that Joseph and Aseneth contains novelistic and erotic tendencies. The evolution and circulation of this story was happening simultaneously to the redaction of the Greek erotic novels. However, it is important to note that there is no direct link between Joseph and Aseneth and the Æthiopica. Instead they show similar interests. They are a fossilised thoughts from their time period. Although it is most likely much older, Joseph and Aseneth was a popular text during Late Antiquity, as the numerous translations and manuscripts show. That it should appear as a novel at a time during which the Greek romances were circulating shows the importance of fiction as a means of social questioning at the time. The comparison of these two novels will raise the question of dates time and again, thus enriching the conclusions drawn from a contrastive approach.

Because of the blatantly theological and mystical aspects of this novel, the first comparisons made of Joseph and Aseneth were with known religious and philosophical writings. Comparison with other works of fiction really only began in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and can be divided into three sections. These different articles and periods of research all share one common element, with one exception that will be seen bellow: they all advocate the comparison of Aseneth’s
narrative with the Greek romance novels. The groundwork was therefore laid to permit in depth comparative work, but very little has been done. The initial section of fictional comparison began in the 1970’s. Stephanie West started the ball rolling with her article “Joseph and Aseneth: A Neglected Greek Romance.” West explored the similarities of some novelistic motifs, which could be said to be nothing but superficial comparisons, but she specifically draws out the fact that, just like in Greek romance, love is what determines the action. Shortly after, Richard Pervo published an article entitled “Joseph and Aseneth and the Greek Novel,” wherein he stated that “Jos. and As. belongs to the history of the Sapiential Novel in its Jewish manifestation at a stage when influence from contemporary Greek novels was quite appropriate...” Furthermore, he was of the opinion that there “can be no doubt that Jo. and As. took up the structure of its plot and many individual features from the erotic novel of the contemporary Greco-Roman world.”

The second period of comparative study began some fifteen years later when Pervo advocated once again for a comparative understanding of this text. By creating pairings between female characters in Jewish narratives and Greek novels, he showed a series of thematic similarities used by both cultures. Catherine Hezser and Lawrence Wills followed the trend with their separate and unaffiliated publications. The purpose of Hezser’s article was to show that “[both] the pagan and the Jewish romances are primarily concerned with the definition and maintenance of social, political, and religious boundaries and the establishment of social unity and harmony.” Her research was thus not simply a list of comparable motifs, but the expression of deeper questioning found in these narratives. Wills’ research was not confined uniquely to Joseph and Aseneth, but took into consideration fiction of Jewish origin written at approximately the same time. In discussing several works, including the Books of Daniel, Tobit, Esther, and Judith, and Joseph and Aseneth, he demonstrated that the manipulation of emotions was a key element in both Jewish and Greek novels.

68 Ibid., p. 75.
70 Ibid., p. 171.
71 Ibid., p. 176.
74 Wills, “The Jewish Novellas,” loc. cit.
75 Hezser, op. cit., p. 2.
76 Wills, op. cit., p. 235-236.
The third large period of scholarly work suggesting that *Joseph and Aseneth* ought to be studied alongside the Greek romances arose in the early 2010’s and continues today. The period started with another publications by Wills.\(^{77}\) Continuing his research on Jewish works of fiction, Wills described the parallel, yet earlier, evolution of Jewish fiction in comparison to Greek and Roman works of similar genres,\(^{78}\) highlighting their uses in the exploration of cultural identity.\(^{79}\) In opposition to this trend, Nina Braginskaya underlined several issues inherent in the comparison with the Greek novels, most notably chronological difficulties.\(^{80}\) She actually suggested that *Joseph and Aseneth* is not only anterior to the Greek novels, but that it actually served as fodder for their creation.\(^{81}\) There are several issues with Braginskaya’s argumentation. Particularly, her reliance on Bohak’s explanation of the origin of the tale made the subsequent argument tenuous, for his is now a mostly discredited theory. Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to say how widely read *Joseph and Aseneth* was outside of Jewish, and later Christian, communities; despite its obvious popularity in both circles, one simply cannot know if it was read widely by polytheists. Despite these points of contention, Braginskaya was undoubtedly right that *Joseph and Aseneth* predates the Greek novels, at least in some early form, as was discussed above.

Some detailed comparative work has been undertaken in the last five years as part of the most recent wave of studies. The similarities with the Greek novels are intriguing, and Françoise Mirguet explores them with her interest in body language and emotion.\(^{82}\) Her analysis is based on the research of Massimo Fusillo into conflicting emotions in the novel.\(^{83}\) Adapting Fusillo’s work to a study of 6.1 in *Joseph and Aseneth*, Mirguet shows the complexity, ambiguity, and eroticism of the passage. Silvia Montiglio also includes Aseneth’s experiences in her research on scenes of recognition in the Greek novels.\(^{84}\) Despite the similarities in other *topoi* used in the Jewish novel, this one shows itself to be quite different, for Aseneth and Joseph cannot recognise each other as proper partners until after Aseneth’s transformation, and thus the recognition of the beloved

\(^{77}\) Wills, “Jewish Novella,” *loc. cit.*
\(^{78}\) Ibid., p. 142.
\(^{79}\) Ibid., p. 145.
\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 103.
competes with recognition of God.\textsuperscript{85} A known expert on the novel, when Tim Whitmarsh briefly explores the combination of eroticism and religion in this particular Jewish novel.\textsuperscript{86} Although he does not overtly compare \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} with any specific Greek novel, he does explore the intertwining roles of sexuality and identity creation within the novel, paying particular attention to the ambiguous construction of the Other within the text. Continuing in this comparative line of thought, Meredith Warren pushes the comparative reading of \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} with the Greek romances even further as she used Aseneth’s luminous garments, compared with those of Callirhoe in Chariton of Aphrodisias’ \textit{Chaireas and Callirhoe}, as a way of understanding religious experience and divine transformation.\textsuperscript{87} One must, of course, proceed with caution when comparing texts of varying ages and purposes, yet all four of these authors have shown that the study of \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} does belong in the field of narrative and fiction in Antiquity.

In her monograph \textit{Desiring Conversion}, Barbara Lipsett broaches the importance of eroticism in narrative.\textsuperscript{88} This excellent book looked at the roll of desire in the conversion stories of Thecla, Hermas, and Aseneth. Drawing on philosophical sources such as Philo, Plutarch, and Plato, Lipsett places Aseneth squarely within the world of Greco-Roman thought. She choses, however, to compare Joseph and Aseneth with Longinus’ \textit{On the Sublime},\textsuperscript{89} and not the novels. With reference to the aforementioned literary treaty, Lipsett explores the malleability of Aseneth’s personal and cultural identity and the way in which \textit{eros} first breaks these down,\textsuperscript{90} and then allows for their reconstruction. Lipsett’s research provides an excellent base on which to found further research into \textit{eros} and its roll in transformation, for it places this novel in context with pagan works, but does not look specifically at the parallels to be found in the \textit{Æthiopiaka}.

The field of study is quite open, and much work is to be done. This thesis aims to fill the lacunae of using romantic tropes for other purposes and the interaction between mortal and divine. While most studies have been singular, enough comparative work has been done to lay a foundation for deeper analysis. This research will therefore be the first in depth analysis of the eroticism found in \textit{Joseph and Aseneth}, with the \textit{Æthiopiaka}, providing in the comparison through which to

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p. 88.
understand the role of romance in this Jewish novel.

Before leaping into such a comparison, there is some groundwork to be laid out first, namely questions of genre, comparison with the Æthiopika, and terminology.

What is a novel?

Using pagan literature, specifically the Greek novel, as a lens through which to view Judeo-Christian literature has drawn academic attention. It is uncontested that narrative is a powerful vehicle for ideas, but scholars have only just begun to be explore this in the ancient world. Most notably in the analysis of hagiographic works, the understanding that the prose literature of monotheistic religion(s) borrowed from and leaned on a variety of sources is not new. Although a detailed analysis of Joseph and Aseneth in the context of other prose literature from the first centuries AD has not yet been done, the methodology itself has been proven effective.

One of the main arguments against comparing Joseph and Aseneth with the Greek romances is based on a question of genre. It is true that if one adheres to a definition like that proposed by Bowie that the comparison is not ideal. The unity of the plot permits Bowie to define the ideal novels as follows:

Boy and girl of aristocratic background fall in love, are separated before or shortly after marriage and subjected to melodramatic adventures which threaten their life and chastity and carry them around much of the eastern Mediterranean. Eventually love and fortune prove stronger than storms, pirates and tyrants and the couple is reunited in marital bliss.

This definition limits the genre to encompass the five canonical Greek romances. Quickly leafing through Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments, however, paints a very different picture. The genre shows itself to be exceptionally heterogeneous. Defining something so variegated is no small task and thankfully Wills presented an excellent definition in his anthology. According to him, the genre is defined as “written popular narrative fiction, expanded significantly beyond a single episode,

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91 In particular, see G. Bowersock, Fiction as History: Nero to Julian. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994. Bowersock does not, however, take into consideration any of the Jewish fiction from the late Hellenistic or early Roman periods, Cf. Gruen, op. cit., p. 189., n. 1.
which focuses on character and virtue.” 95 This definition, which is subsequently elaborated upon in the introduction to his book, includes two very important elements. Firstly, it emphasises the written aspect of the genre. Though ancient stories may well have been rooted in an oral tradition, some of these texts were eventually written down. The obvious influence of Septuagint Greek on the writing of Joseph and Aseneth shows this quite clearly. Despite its significant theological bent, the story of Aseneth is just as much a written text as the Greek novels. In this respect, it is similar to the Gospels. It shares linguistic traits, as well as the same interest in fiction. Secondly, Wills highlights the importance, of character and virtue over adventure in the narratives. This echoes the opinion of Bryan Reardon, one of the specialists responsible for the salvation of the Greek romances’ reputation as sub-par literature. 96 In an article in 2001, Reardon specified that the most important element of the Greek novels is not the far-fetched adventuring of the protagonists, but the authors’ interest in scrutinising what Reardon calls “la situation humaine.” This idea is directly connected to the importance of female protagonists in the novels, for if the authors scrutinise the “situation humaine” of the heroines in particular, it is due to the vulnerability of women, particularly in Antiquity. 97 Reardon clearly showed that the most important aspect of the novels is the interest in the emotional, the pathetic, something on which Wills elaborated. This element is all too present in Joseph and Aseneth.

Where Wills’ definition does not do justice to the novels is in its use of the descriptor “popular.” He defines this as being “literature [...] that was written for entrainment and not for official use.” 98 The definition then goes on to recall that even “popular literature” was aimed at the wealthier classes, 99 and to mark a distinction between what he calls high and popular art. 100 In this definition, “popular” is by no means a way of saying “unrefined,” or “trivial.” It does call into question the public for whom these texts were written, a complex inquiry which many have attempted to answer. 101 “Popular” thus functions in Wills’ definition in the same manner as Bowie.

96 This opinion was, of course, wrapped up in the less than enthusiastic appreciation for much of the literature produced during the period of Late Antiquity.
98 Wills, op. cit., p. 6.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., p. 7.
defined it: “likely to attract a readership among the educated bourgeoisie.”

The two novels that will be studied below are by no means “popular” in a vulgar sense. One can open Heliodorus’ work at random, and find a myriad of references in varying degrees of subtlety. *Joseph and Aseneth* is just as full of references and subtle irony. It is true that neither this Jewish novel, nor the *Æthiopika* had liturgical functions, they are by no means mere divertissement for the reader. The definition offered by Wills is highly inclusive, and is thus the definition retained in this thesis.

As is the case for many ancient works, *Joseph and Aseneth* resists all attempts at shoehorning it into one specific genre. The alert reader recognizes and appreciates an eclectic mixture of genre influences on this text: biblical, areteological, sapiential, historical, theatrical, and possibly even biographical texts all had their effect on this narrative. This has ultimately become one of its defining features. However, for all its stylistic diversity, *Joseph and Aseneth* most greatly resembles the ancient novel. The narrative’s focus on a heterosexual couple, their romantic experiences and sufferings, and its historicising, all bring it into parallel with the Greek novels. As modern theorists have shown, the novel is an inherently multifarious, and nigh impossibly defined genre. Moreover, the story reflects a remarkable amount of fluidity. The freedom with which this particular writing was altered shows that it was far from canonical, and yet held importance in a number of communities. The Greek novels also show more fluidity than other ancient authors. It is thus highly likely that a reader of either of these texts would have had a similar “relationship” with the two stories. They were written to both “entertain and to edify.”

If it is to serve as the primary comparison for *Joseph and Aseneth*, brief introduction of the *Æthiopika* is required. Within the broader category of the novel, the parameters of which are still under debate, the *Æthiopika* fits into the subcategory of the ideal romances. If the past thirty years of philological research have been kind to *Joseph and Aseneth*, they have been no less so to the *Æthiopika*. Heliodorus’ brilliance has been shown time and again by scholars such as

102 Bowie, loc. cit., p. 440.
103 To historicise means to ground in the past, to make something historical that is not otherwise be so. *Joseph and Aseneth* is set in the past, as are the Greek novels, albeit a biblical past and not exactly what a modern reader would consider to be historically accurate.
105 Thomas, loc. cit., p. 287.
106 It is not here implied that the reader of either one would be the reader of both.
107 Collins, loc. cit., p. 100; he is referring to *Joseph and Aseneth* only, yet the *Æthiopika* also fits this description.
Shadi Bartsch, Pierre Chuvin, Koen de Temmerman, Nicholas Holzberg, John Morgan, Bryan Reardon, and many others. Without their work, this research would not be possible. The *Æthiopika* was written by one Heliodorus of Emesa. As with *Joseph and Aseneth* questions as to the exact date and the religious self-understanding of Heliodorus may never be answered definitively. His text has a decided henotheism, and is infused with both Christian and pagan elements, both in theme and representation (this will be discussed in the chapters to follow).

The understanding of Heliodorus’s work has undergone a big temporal shift. Initially said to be the first of the novelists, yet written at a late date, Heliodorus has now been shown to be one of (if not the) last novelists of Antiquity, whose work has arrived intact and whole into modernity. The exact date, however, remains elusive and Reardon’s comment, “Héliodore oscille entre les IIIᵉ et IVᵉ siècles,” is still as pertinent now as it was in 1971. In the introduction to the first edition of *Les Éthiopiques* by Les Belles Lettres, published in 1960, Jean Maillon stated that the novel was written in the third century AD, possibly between 220 and 240. It is indicative of contemporary scholarship that this was not amended or updated in the 2011 republication of Heliodorus’ novel. Ewen Bowie, a scholar known for his extensive work on the novels, also advocated for a third century date of redaction, possibly the 230’s and stated that “the author of the *Aethiopica* is Heliodorus the Arab of Philostratus’ *Lives of the Sophists*,” adding that “this *lis* is still *sub judice*, and a late-fourth-century date for Heliodorus could yet be proved.” The French scholar, Pierre Chuvin, however, preferred a fourth century date for Heliodorus’ work. Basing this date on historic

109 Bowersock, *op. cit.*
116 Reardon, *op. cit.*, p. 334.
sources regarding the siege of Nisibis, the Æthiopika also fits in nicely with other solar imagery from Late Antiquity. In fact, this would put it in the second half of the fourth century. Although Bowersock does not site Chuvin in his article, after a detailed comparison of the Æthiopika and the Historiae Augustae, he wrote that “[we] should [...] be able to rest in the calm and documented assurance that the novel of Heliodorus was indeed written at some date after 350 A.D.” In his book, Fiction as History, Bowersock does take up Chuvin’s arguments to support a late fourth century date. Both Chuvin and Bowersock published their opinions in the 1990’s. The assurance is not quite so calm, though. Most scholars still prefer a date in the third century. Bowersock’s arguments rest on historical events as they may be represented in Heliodorus’ novel, notably the siege of Nisibis, and the treatment of the kingdom of Aksum in Ethiopia by Heliodorus. One of the most recent arguments for a later date stems from a religious lexical analysis. Ken Dowden has suggested that a fourth century date, possibly in the 330’s, is likely because of language used by the priest Kalasiris. It thus seems more and more likely that the Æthiopika was indeed penned during the fourth century, although in which half remains to be determined.

The most complex of the ideal romances, the Æthiopika tells the love story of Chariklea and Theagenes as they journey from Greece to Ethiopia, via Egypt. The narrative is packed with excitement, not only because of the usual topos of brigands, pirates, threats of physical and sexual violence, but because of the enigmatic unraveling of the narrative. Heliodorus plays brilliantly on the different between histoire and récit. In every way worthy of its own research, the Æthiopika serves in this thesis as a frame of reference for the eroticism found in Joseph and Aseneth.

The Choice of Heliodorus

The comparison with Heliodorus’ novel thus establishes itself clearly. At first glance, the

120 Ibid., p. 200.
121 Ibid., p. 324.
124 Bowersock, op. cit., p. 152.
125 Ibid., p. 50.
127 In this specific instance, and conforming with the literary critics of the twentieth century, histoire means the chronological order in which the narrative events actually happened, whereas récit is the order in which those events are revealed to the reader. Morgan, loc. cit., p. 314.
Æthiopika and Joseph and Aseneth are overtly religious, an inviting aspect for comparison. Joseph and Aseneth abounds in solar references, and thus the Æthiopika offers extremely inviting grounds for analogous study. There are, however, more profound reasons to compare these two works. Firstly, the female protagonists experience something similar over the course of their respective story. Both girls are daughters of priests, and both stories present initiatic experiences aided and abetted by eros. Chariklea undergoes an initiation during which she is passed from one priestly father figure to the next, leading her from girlhood to womanhood, resulting in her marriage to Theagenes, their ascension to priestly functions, and her being reunited with her birth parents. Aseneth’s transformation displays something remarkably similar, with her father the priest being subsequently replaced by a divine visitor, and then God, as she becomes a suitable wife for Joseph and a pillar of religious perfection. The clearly initiatory experiences call to mind Reinhold Merkelbach and his controversial and disputed readings of the novels as Mysterientext. The reading of Heliodorus’ work as religious propaganda for a cult to Helios, and the flagrantly pro-God of the Hebrews moral of Joseph and Aseneth make these books interesting bedfellows. These girls’ correspondent experiences thus invite a comparison of the topoi involved. Secondly, both texts were clearly written in Judeo-Christian settings, despite the religious self-understanding of the authors being blurry at best in both cases. This thesis will defend the idea that, just as in the Greek romances, love and eroticism play vital roles in Aseneth’s transformation. When the reader first meets Chariklea on the beach, she has already undergone a transformation as powerful as that experienced by Aseneth, although due to the enigmatic story-telling of Heliodorus, this is not understood until later. Brought down from her disdainful opinion of love and marriage by eros, Chariklea is a very different woman. So too is Aseneth once eros is done with her.

In these two novels, love and erotic experience are not portrayed as ends in and of themselves, but as means to something greater. The possibility that the authors were transmitting similar social or literary ideas can therefore not be ignored. Both of these books use “leitmotifs like apparent death, recognition, wandering, loss, trials, reassurance... and achievement,” resulting from an initial erotic experience to explore more profound social anxieties. When discussing religion, initiation, and the novel, it is impossible to ignore the works of Reinhold Merkelbach.

130 Ibid., p. 235.
131 Burrus, loc. cit., p. 73.
Emanating from his theory that the novels were religious texts from mystery cults, only truly understood by initiates, Heliodorus is thought to have been a member of a cult to Helios, and his novel thus promoted this faith. Hotly contested, though “strangely influential,” the “widespread rejection of the work [of Merkelbach] has inhibited recognition of the importance of religion in at least some of the erotic novels.” This is the case for Heliodorus, despite the impossibility of denying the centrality of religion in the Æthiopika. It has recently been asserted that “much of the observations Merkelbach makes could be preserved within a sort of minor thesis that would bring some of Merkelbach’s theory within general scholarly discourse.” Consequently, a reintegration of Merkelbach’s ideas is slowly being made. One cannot simply divorce religion and literature in Antiquity. Ken Dowden in particular rejects the purely literary approaches of novel study, especially concerning Heliodorus. In an attempt to harmonise the concepts of novel, mystery cults, and regular life, he provocatively stated, “Thus the novel is a metaphor of life and the novel is a metaphor of the mysteries.” Religion is accordingly granted its literary, narrative, and possibly theological or philosophical role in the analysis of the Æthiopika that is to follow. The same goes for Joseph and Aseneth, a text in which theological intent cannot be refuted. The focus on religious experience in both of these novels, which draws them into parallel, will therefore be taken into account in the following analyses. The types of religious experiences had by the protagonists will be contrasted, and these can be qualified as result.

Adding to the interest of this study is the linguistic nature of Joseph and Aseneth. As a text most likely written in Greek, the author(s) show a remarkable familiarity with certain literary conventions, rhetorical styles of Hellenic literature, and even philosophical ideas of the Greek world. It is therefore not unlikely that the cultural milieu in which the novel was written allowed for contact between cultures, and that the demographic reading the texts may have had some overlap.

133 Merkelbach, op. cit., p. 235.
134 Dowden, loc. cit., p. 25.
137 Ibid., p. 32.
138 It is quite likely that Platonic philosophy influenced the translation of the Old Testament. Collins states that, at least for Jews in the Diaspora, “Greek was their native language. They were heirs to Greek literature and philosophy just as much as were their Gentile neighbours.” Jewish Cult and Hellenistic Culture, op. cit., p. 5. For a discussion of the influences possibly had by the Timaeus on Genesis, see W. R. G. Loader, “Sexuality and Ptolemy’s Greek Bible. ‘...Things Which They Altered for King Ptolemy’ (Genesis Rabbah 8.11),” in F. McKechnie, P. Guillaume (ed.), Ptolemy II Philadelphus and his World. Leiden, Brill, 2008. p. 207-232.
139 Questions of readership are always sticky. If there were overlap, it would have been down a one way street. There is almost no evidence that Hellenized Jews were writing for people outside of the Jewish community. It has been argued that Joseph and Aseneth was used as a proselyting text (cf. Aptowitz, “Aseneth, the Wife of Joseph: A Haggadic
This thesis consequently takes on an analysis of the role of eroticism in Aseneth’s cultural and religious transformation. The ancient Greek novels leave the reader with a clear image of the romantic and erotic experience. Love is felt, discussed, and tested. This thesis deals first with the physical aspects of the erotic experience will be treated. The purpose of this section is to analyse how love is felt and its effects on the characters. Secondly, the verbal aspects will be discussed, notably how the lover talks to and about the beloved. Thirdly, the romantic trials of both novels will be analysed. Just what, how much, and in what way the lover is able to suffer will be compared and contrasted in the two novels. Many of these themes – the anatomy of love, women and gender, religion, and violence in ancient literature, for example – were first broached in the fall semester of 2011 in the course “Roman grec et latin,” taught by Prof. Anne-France Morand. The following research is very much a continuation of discussions had both inside and outside of that classroom.

It is important to note that, for chronological reasons as well as geographical ones, this thesis does not suggest that Joseph and Aseneth is directly related to, borrowed from, or (inversely) influenced Heliodorus’ novel, or any other Greek romance for that matter. As Warren stated in her analysis of the Book of John, the novels preserved a way of thinking common to the time and place of their conception, and distinct from modern ideas. It is this way of thinking which is so important for this research, not necessarily direct or indirect influences of one piece of literature on another. Whitmarsh stated something similar when analysing Joseph and Aseneth for its literary merits rather than its religious significance: “Joseph and Aseneth fonctionne, comme tout roman grec, en attirant les espoirs et les désirs de ses lecteurs, et en les insérant dans une matrice narrative à peu près ouverte.” The weaving together of religion and narrative, though complex, can therefore be analysed in comparison with non religious pieces; this Hellenic Jewish text can also be placed into the larger context of Greek literature at the time as it uses similar methods, albeit to arrive at different ends. This is in some ways the crux of this research, and thus will be revisited in the conclusion.

In summary, the subsequent chapters endeavour to answer two questions, and possibly a third. Firstly, does Joseph and Aseneth use eroticism like another Greek novel, thus earning itself a place among the Hellenic romances? Secondly, can the religious experiences portrayed in these two

Literary-Historical Study,” Hebrew Union College Annual, vol 1, 1924. p. 239-306.), but this is unlikely. For further discussion, see Gruen, Heritage and Hellenism. op. cit., where this subject is discussed frequently; and Collins, loc. cit., p. 238, where Gentile readership of Joseph and Aseneth specifically is mentioned.

For the opposite opinion, that the Greek novels are in fact (or at least could be) indebted to Joseph and Aseneth, see Braginskaya, loc. cit.

141 Whitmarsh, loc. cit., p. 239.
disparate texts be qualified, and if so, how? Thirdly, can this specific comparison contribute to the debates around the time of redaction of *Joseph and Aseneth*?

A Charged Word

Before commencing, there is one last methodological point to be discussed. “Eroticism” is an extremely loaded term. From Plato’s philosophical understanding of the word to modern smut, it does not carry the same weight in different scenarios. Curiously, none of the authors who evoke it in connection to *Joseph and Aseneth* (or any of the other novels, for that matter) take the time to give it specific meaning. The ancient novel generally has been recognised as being “elusive and erotically playful,” and *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika* have been recognised for their displays of “virginal eroticism;” and yet, no one, not even Burrus, Mirguet or Whitmarsh, all of whom discuss eroticism explicitly, actually says what is meant by the designation in any of their respective, aforementioned articles.

If the truth be told, it is a difficult task to define a word that is simultaneously frequent, comprehensive, and ambiguous. Even the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* had a hard time of it. It is far simpler to detail what elements constitute eroticism for this research than to offer an absolute definition. In the context of *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika*, two elements must be brought to the foreground, although the aspects mentioned will be explored in detail further on. Firstly, the place of sexuality in both of the tales. This includes both physical contact between the lovers, as well as descriptions of the body, emotion, or spirit (mind), which evoke sexual tensions, imagery, or metaphor. Secondly, the possibility of Neoplatonic underpinnings in the texts brings a more philosophical bent to the eroticism therein. Through their “shared themes of virginity and ‘mixed marriages,’ closely interwoven with tropes of ‘transformation’ and ‘conversion’” these stories use eroticism, or at the very least portray the power of *eros*, as a means to a higher end. “Eroticism” must therefore be understood to be a multi-faceted experience in these novels, involving not only physical, but mental (and even philosophical or religious) dimensions.

This discussion is immediately pertinent to the first chapter of this research. The ideal romances use eroticism in its multifarious representations to explore a variety of topics. A first means of establishing whether or not *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Greek romance is thus presented. This thesis

therefore opens with an analysis of eroticism in this Biblical romance, bearing in mind what “eroticism” is in this context. Taking this into account, it is time to turn to the texts.
CHAPTER ONE: Seeing is Believing

Love is an illness, a sufferance, a passion to which we are subjected without consent or deliberation. Or at least, so the age-old medical metaphor for this experience tells us. Plato himself described *eros* as a type of madness caused by seeing great beauty (*Phaedrus*, 250). The image of love as an illness became a literary trope. The symptoms of love — loss of appetite, insomnia, and faintness, to name but a few — are well known, tying the body and mind together in one tangled web. The erotic novels of Antiquity exploited this trope in poignant and humorous ways. As a literary motif, a reader knows specifically what to look for in order to identify a case of love gone array. The opening chapter of this thesis therefore begins with an inquiry into the anatomy and symptoms of love in *Joseph and Aseneth*, followed by the *Æthiopika*. Special attention will be paid to descriptions of body parts and passions. Whether or not the emotions of the various scenes are explicit or implicit will be discussed, as well as the impact that this has on both the plot and the reader. The concept of “love at first sight,” as well as the disease which ensues will be shown to be far more vague than they appear. The uncertainty of eroticism is something to be exploited by a cunning storyteller, as shall be seen throughout this chapter.

This chapter will be devoted to the descriptions of falling in love as detailed in *Joseph and Aseneth* first, followed by that of the *Æthiopika*. In the ideal romances, this process entails a first meeting of the characters, followed by a period of separation in which the protagonists appear to be ill. In order to establish *Joseph and Aseneth* as a romance, it must first be shown that it too follows this narratological path. These two sections will each be subdivided, *Joseph and Aseneth* into three parts, the *Æthiopika* into two. The first section, Aseneth’s experience, will be analysed through her first sighting of and reaction to Joseph, followed by the couple’s initial encounter, and finally by Aseneth’s reaction afterwards. Once Aseneth’s response to love has been explored, similar moments in Chariklea and Theagenes’ courtship will be analysed, notably the scenes in which they first meet and fall in love, and their physical and emotional reactions afterwards. To conclude, the different elements which are shown to be key to each novel will be briefly compared and contrasted. This first comparison will illuminate what roll falling in love plays in each of these pieces of fiction, and how the story exploits the ambiguities inherent in love and eroticism within the text.
Aseneth Falls for Joseph

In almost any piece of scholarship dedicated to *Joseph and Aseneth*, the concept of “romance” is inevitably brought up. This novel is frequently referred to as a “religious romance.” It is thus only logical to begin a thesis on eroticism and religion with an investigation of tropes from novelistic literature in Antiquity. This section is divided into three subsections. Firstly, “love at first sight” will be analysed. Afterwards, a deviation from the ancient novels will be considered. Lastly, the famous “lovesickness” trope will be explored.

Coup de foudre

The opening lines of *Joseph and Aseneth* set up the important aspects of the narrative to come, both in regards to its form and its subject matter. These elements must be examined in order to understand Aseneth and Joseph’s first meeting. The opening words are καὶ ἐγένετο, a classic turn of phrase in Biblical narrative. The reader is thus prepared for a story involving characters from the Torah. Three lines later, Aseneth first appears. She is said to be ὀκτωκαίδεκα μεγάλη καὶ ὡραία καὶ καλὴ τῷ ἐξελθείν μετὰ πάσας τὰς παρθένους ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, “eighteen years of age, tall, comely, and exceedingly beautiful to behold, more so than all the virgins in the land.” (1.4). Hers is, however, a special beauty, for these attributes are not merely given to her, but are further defined: μεγάλη ὡς Σάρρα καὶ ὡραία ὡς Ῥεβέκκα καὶ καλὴ ὡς Ῥαχήλ, “as tall as Sarah, as comely as Rebecca, and as beautiful as Rachel” (1.5). The narrator even goes so far as to explicate that καὶ αὕτη οὐδὲν εἶχεν ὅμοιον τῶν παρθένων τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἀλλὰ ἦν κατὰ πᾶντα ὁμοία ταῖς θυγατράσι τῶν Ἑβραίων, “she was not akin to the Egyptian virgins, but was in every way akin to the daughters of the Hebrews” (1.5). This introduction to the character of Aseneth does two things. From the very outset, Aseneth is compared, not to her own pagan goddesses or country-women, but to three of the four matriarchs of the Torah. If this were a Greek novel, she might be compared to any number of goddesses or other divine beings, but as this text condemns idolatry, it opts instead to draw parallels between the protagonists and important female figures of the Jewish tradition. Moreover, it prepares the reader for a discussion of identity and of cultural belonging. Whereas the Egyptian women are virgins, παρθένοι, and thus uniquely desirable, the Hebrew women are designated

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148 Leah’s absence is interesting. Alone of the four, she was not known for her beauty.
149 Burchard, *loc. cit.*, p. 203, n. K.
daughters, θυγατέρες; not only do they have all the physical virtues of the Egyptian virgins, but they are members of a distinct group, a family. This is one of the rare moments in which *Joseph and Aseneth* uses ethnic rather than religious terms when drawing social boundaries,\(^\text{151}\) setting up a discussion of “us vs. them” in which Aseneth is caught in the middle, for now.

In case the reader had missed the comments on Aseneth’s beauty, the narrator goes even further. Aseneth’s beauty is known throughout the land (1.5) and is, in fact, so renown, that the sons of satraps and kings wish to marry her (1.6). Even the son of Pharaoh would like to have Aseneth as his wife (1.7). So desperate for her hand are these men that καὶ ἦν ἔρις πολλὴ ἐν αὐτοῖς περὶ Ἀσενέθ καὶ ἐπειρῶντο πολεμεῖν πρὸς ἄλληλους δι᾽ αὐτήν, “there was much strife among them concerning Aseneth, and they endeavoured to war amongst themselves for her” (1.6). One cannot help but think of the face that launched a thousand ships. The intertextuality between the Greek novels and Homeric epic is vast and rich,\(^\text{152}\) but the image of Helen is perhaps one of the most striking parallels. Indeed, Chariton’s *Callirhoe* can be read as a second Helen.\(^\text{153}\) Although Helen is not explicitly mentioned here, she does spring to mind. The character of Penelope is also conjured, for, just like the wife of Odysseus, Aseneth refuses her suitors. Readers of *Joseph and Aseneth*, educated in the “Homerocentric” παιδεία of the ancient world would have known the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* only too well. As John Collins has pointed out, Greek speaking Jews were just as much heir to the literary and philosophical education of the Hellenistic and Roman periods as were the pagans, and later the Christians.\(^\text{154}\) This, then, is the first characterisation of Aseneth: direct and efficient, it paints the picture of an incredibly beautiful, desirous young woman. This characterisation, relying on both the tropes of exceptional beauty and Homeric hints, combined with the καὶ ἐγένετο of the opening line, prepares the reader for a romance set against a Biblical backdrop.

Aseneth is introduced as a cross between a novel heroine, a fairy-tale princess, and a Biblical matriarch. Naturally, a good number of readers, knowing the story and characters from Genesis, would be impatient for Joseph, “the prince charming,” to arrive, and for the protagonists to meet. A second characterisation of the heroine must be done first, though. To begin with, the reader


is told why Aseneth is still unwed at the age of eighteen: Καὶ ἦν Ἀσενεθ ἐξουθενοῦσα καὶ καταπτύουσα πάντα ἄνδρα καὶ ἦν ἄλαζών καὶ ὑπερήφανος πρὸς πάντα ἄνθρωπον, “Aseneth was scornful and contemptuous of all men, and she was boastful and pretentious towards all of humanity” (2.1). Maybe she is not such a fairy-tale princess after all. Despite her initially positive introduction, Aseneth’s character shows itself to be less than ideal.

These negative aspects are brought to the fore in chapter four. Pentephres, priest of Heliopolis and father of Aseneth, arrives in his house and announces his wish that she be married to Joseph, who shall visit later that day. The exact wording of their exchange will be analysed in Chapter two of this thesis; the focus here is how this reaction underlines Aseneth’s negative traits. When her father suggests that she be married to Joseph, Aseneth refuses, practically spitting on the idea. Even here, her reactions are strikingly physical: περιεχύθη αὐτῇ ἱδρὼς ἐρυθρὸς πολὺς ἐπὶ τοῦ προσώπου αὐτῆς καὶ ἐθυμώθη ἐν ὀργῇ μεγάλῃ, “much sweat poured over her red face, and she became wroth with anger,” (4.9). She then shames her father, because μετὰ ἀλαζονείας καὶ ὀργῆς ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ, “she answered him with boastfulness and anger” (4.12). Richard Pervo has described Aseneth as being both “the archetypal protected maiden” and a quintessential “adolescent girl.” Through historically anachronistic, the teenage description is amusingly accurate. This scene, which most definitely shows a volatile young woman, provides another point of comparison with the Greek novels: refusal of matrimony and fighting between parents and children. The case of Chariklea will be treated shortly, but it is not only in the Æthiopika that the theme of unwanted or refused marriage exists. Anthia and Habrocomes refuse marriage before they meet each other, and Clitophon is engaged to marry his half sister when he meets Leucippe, who will quarrel with her mother over the truthfulness of her virginity. Tempers flair and emotions are high at the beginnings of the Greek novels as well. Due to her fit, Aseneth falls in with the other protagonists of romance quite well.

No sooner has Aseneth spoken, than Joseph’s arrival is announced (5.1). Aseneth leaves the room, and goes up to her chamber. She does not hide, however: ἔστη ἐπὶ τὴν θυρίδα τὴν μεγάλην τὴν βλέπουσαν κατὰ ἀνατολὰς τοῦ ἰδεῖν τὸν Ἰωσὴφ εἰσερχόμενον εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῆς, “she stood next to the big window which looked to the east in order to see the arrival of Joseph into her father’s house” (5.2). Curiosity is a dangerous thing, as Aseneth is about to find out. As the


156 The protagonists from An Ephesian Tale by Xenophon of Ephesus, and Leucippe and Clitophon by Achilles Tatius, respectively.
“sharpest” of the senses, looking can bring pleasures, but it can also cause pain.\textsuperscript{157}

After five chapters of characterisation and anticipation, the reader finally arrives at the highly anticipated moment. Physically out the way, it is from this “place of viewing”\textsuperscript{158} that Aseneth will see Joseph for the first time:

Καὶ ἑδὲν Ἀσενὲθ τὸν Ἰωσήφ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἄρματος καὶ κατενύγη ἰσχυρῶς καὶ παρεκλάσθη ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτῆς καὶ παρείθη τὰ γόνατα αὐτῆς καὶ ἕτρομαξεν ὅλον τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς καὶ ἑροβήθη φόβον μέγαν. καὶ ἁνεστέναξε...

“And Aseneth saw Joseph upon his chariot, and she was greatly struck, her soul was broken, her knees gave way, her whole body trembled, and she was fearful in her great fear. She sighed deeply...” (6.1)

An astute reader immediately recognises what is going on. Aseneth has fallen prey to passion. As Barbara Lipsett has remarked, this passage reads like a highly condensed version of the scenes in the ideal romances wherein the protagonists meet and fall in love.\textsuperscript{159} Despite its brevity, the intensity of Aseneth’s experience is remarkable and shall be thoroughly explored. First, the means by which Aseneth falls in love, then the reactions described.

No one is surprised that Aseneth falls in love at first sight. What is surprising is that “[the] optics of infatuation receive no emphasis.”\textsuperscript{160} Unlike the Greek novels, there is no elaborate explanation of love at first sight, no digression on how visual stimuli can effect a person. This is due to the fact that narrator is making two assumptions about the reader’s literary knowledge: love is caused by a visual experience, and desire comes not from within, but from without.\textsuperscript{161} In discussing lovesickness, a theme to which we shall return, and medical authors, Tim Whitmarsh wrote, “The poros of the illness that is desire... is particularly the eyes, which represent a threshold between the self’s subjective interior and the world outside.”\textsuperscript{162} Even outside the fictional world of romance, the eyes were recognised as a weakness, a point of entry into the body. \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} therefore needs no further description than ἑδὲν Ἀσενὲθ τὸν Ἰωσήφ to show that this is an erotic experience. The roll played by sight in love is known particularly through what remains to us of Sappho’s poetry. Indeed, Lipsett says that \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} “presupposes the literary conventions of lovesickness represented by Sappho,… or lovers from the Greek romances,”\textsuperscript{163} which is to say that it

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{T. Whitmarsh, \textit{Ancient Greek Literature}. Cambridge, Polity, 2004. p. 199.}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 101.}
\footnote{Ibid., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 198.}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 199.}
\footnote{Lipsett, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 101.}
\end{footnotes}
relies heavily on Hellenic, not Hebraic, literature. Having seen Joseph, Aseneth goes through a physical and emotional reaction. What follows this first glimpse of Joseph is simultaneously anticipated and surprising, when one stops to contemplate the words chosen.

The first thing said to happen to Aseneth is κατενύγη ἰσχυρῶς, she is “greatly struck,” or “pierced.” This verb is usually translated “to stab,” “to be sorely pricked,” or “to be stunned.” When κατανύσσω is broken down, the emphasis of the violence is revealed. The core of the verb, νύσσω, means “to touch with a sharp point,” “stab,” or “pierce.”\(^{164}\) An overtly military word,\(^ {165}\) it is here augmented by κατά, which denotes a downwards motion from above.\(^ {166}\) The imagery is striking. Moreover, κατανύσσω is highly indicative of the period of composition of \textit{Joseph and Aseneth}. From the literature still available, this verb sees little use before the I century BC. Prior to the writing of the Septuagint, where it is used nineteen times,\(^ {167}\) the verb was used only once in the existent texts, by the scholar and philosopher Dicaearchus.\(^ {168}\) Used only once in the New Testament,\(^ {169}\) it is used seventeen times in the corpus of Origen. Its use in the Septuagint is quite confusing. It is used to translate Hebrew verbs with meanings as far ranging as “to feel pain,” “to be silent,” “to humble oneself,” and “to fall asleep.”\(^ {170}\) None of this is particularly helpful in the case of Aseneth. \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} is not the only text to use this verb in the context of a person gazing upon a member of the opposite sex, however. A similar use is found in the Greek Book of Daniel, when two lecherous old men spy on Susanna in her bath. After an analysis of both \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} and the Susanna episode, Françoise Mirguet concluded that “sexual attraction seems therefore to constitute a metaphorical use of the verb κατανύσσω, along with the other meanings mentioned above.”\(^ {171}\) As obvious as this may seem, it is important to draw out this hidden sexual metaphor. Violence and sexuality are frequently connected in Greek literature. The personification of Eros is of an archer, and the violence of his attacks is well known. Indeed, “the Greek word \textit{eros} [...] denotes a violent, disruptive possession.”\(^ {172}\) There may be no obvious implication of bows or arrows, but the idea of being pierced from above highlights the fact that Aseneth is besieged by an external force highly evocative of Eros’ assaults. The use of κατανύσσω, amplified by ἰσχυρῶς,


\(^{166}\) LSJ, κατά.


\(^{171}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 409.

\(^{172}\) Whitmarsh, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 198.
most assuredly qualifies as violent and disruptive. The metaphoric use of κατανύσσω is also the first play on the ambiguity of sexuality in this text. It relies on the topos of love at first sight, and would otherwise connote only pain, not sentimental suffering.

κατενύγη ἰσχυρῶς acts as an overall description of what Aseneth is feeling. It is an all encompassing, global image — she is greatly struck. After this first physical reaction, two specifics are given: παρεκλάσθη ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτῆς καὶ παρείθη τὰ γόνατα αὐτῆς, “her soul was twisted [and broken off] and her knees were paralysed.” This representation of love’s assault is in some ways characteristic of the tropes about falling in love in ancient literature, and in other ways it is entirely innovative. These two descriptions blend what modern readers would think of as physical and emotional experience into one. Highly reminiscent of Sappho’s fragmentary poem preserved in Longinus,173 Aseneth’ body and mind dissolve into each other; these precisions also continue the theme of violent assault. Firstly, the verb παρακλάομαι, which means literally “to break off,” has a long history of use in military context. It is used primarily in martial contexts, by authors such as Aeschines, Xenophon, Demosthenes and Diodorus Siculus. Later, the early Church Fathers made considerable use of the verb; but by the time Eusebius and Gregory of Nazianzus started writing, παρακλάομαι had taken on metaphorical as well as physical connotations. A particularly interesting example is found in a text part way through this linguistic shift, in the Vita Antoni of Plutarch. At 76.7.2, Anthony seeks death at the hand of his slave Eros, who has been purchased for the purpose of “breaking him off,” should it become necessary. This use by the first century philosopher seems to mark a changing point in the use of this verb. In this context, it is plain that Eros has the responsibility of killing Anthony. Despite the clear violence in this scene, παρακλάομαι is used metaphorically to describe this terrible act. It can be posited that something similar is happening in Joseph and Aseneth, which was written down at approximately the same time as Plutarch was alive. Obviously, her soul is not being torn from Aseneth literally. The death imagery that is so prevalent in the following scenes does, however, allow a reader to imply a “death” of her soul. Motifs of death and love are, after all, not mutually exclusive in Greek literature. One has but to think of Psyche who travels to the land of the dead for her lover Eros.174 The Soul literally dies for Love.

174 Cf. Philonenko, Joseph et Aséneth : introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes. Leiden, Brill, 1968. p. 148: “Description du ‘coup de foudre’. Comparer, dans Apulée, Méamorphoses, 5, 22, 3, la description du trouble de Psyché à la vue de Cupidon: At uero Psyche tanto aspectu deterrita et impos animi marcido pallore defecta tremensque desedit in imos poplites. Also, ‘Quant au conte d’Amour et Psyché, il a le mérite non seulement de pouvoir être rapproché de notre roman en vertu de son caractère amoureux, mais aussi de présenter une structure semblable à celle de la première partie de notre texte dans ce qu’il a d’initiatique. En effet, Psyché, tout comme Aséne, doit être mariée à un époux qu’elle n’a pas choisi; comme Asénéth, elle s’en fait une idée négative, qui fera place à l’émerveillement lors de sa rencontre; comme elle, elle devra passer par une épreuve initiatique pour se racheter de sa conduite devant une.
Themes of death, violence and love can easily be mixed together. Although the verb is unusual, the part of Aseneth attacked is not. Love attacks the soul, not the heart in ancient literature. In Achilles Tatius, beauty wounds the soul through the eyes, καὶ διὰ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν καταρρέι, “and through the eyes, flows down into the soul,” (1.4.4). Clitophon, Achilles Tatius narrator, employs a verb that also implies a top down action, καταρρέω. The downwards motion of the sentiment from eyes to soul confirms the idea that Aseneth is suffering from love at first sight. *Joseph and Aseneth* plays on a reader’s expectations in this first specification. An unanticipated verb comes into contact with an anticipated aspect of her person. In other words, the description fits the trope, despite the language’s departure from tradition.

The second specification of Aseneth’s physical suffering is just as surprising. Neither knees, nor paralysis are mentioned in traditional erotic literature. As they are not usually included in the theme of love’s anatomy, they stand out. The bending of the knee can be read as a sign of reverence or of submission. In this light, one could thus read this passage as the forceful submission of the heroine. Another possibility makes recourse to hoplite imagery. To stand firm is necessary when in the ranks, and the trembling knee is thus problematic. Both of these options recall the use of military imagery in love poems, and so are not mutually exclusive. To further complicate the matter, the verb describing what happens in the knees is not consistent. Several texts also use the verb παράλωσις, which has distinctly anatomical, even medical connotations. Whereas παρίημι can mean “to relax,” “to give up,” παράλωσις can mean “to take off,” “to undo,” or even “to paralyse.” This last meaning of παράλωσις would give the knees an altogether different kind of reaction; and yet, whether they give out or seize up, one thing is certain: Aseneth has lost control of her body. Emotionally, her soul has been rent from her, and she cannot control her physical being. Very much the image of a novel heroine, Aseneth has no sophrosyne, no self control, at this moment. This word is not to be found in *Joseph and Aseneth*, but the negative representation of Aseneth’s loss of control reveals a similar appreciation for composure found in the ideal romances. She is entirely at the mercy of this new emotion.

Aseneth is at the mercy of this new, unnamed emotion. Nowhere in this chapter, nor anywhere else in the text for that matter, is this new emotion of Aseneth’s named. The sexual tension read in the text is pure conjecture made by the reader. It is, however, conjecture to be
desired. In her discussion of body language, Mirguet highlighted the importance of what comes immediately after the sentence describing Aseneth’s near collapse: καὶ ἀνεστέναξε, “she sighed deeply.” Whereas κατανύσσω hints at arousal, Mirguet was of the opinion that it is in fact ἀνεστέναξε which gives away Aseneth’s feelings. Sighing is symbolic of longing, particularly in situations of sexual desire where the object of one’s lust is unattainable.\footnote{Mirguet, loc. cit., p. 412.} ἀναστενάζω, meaning “to groan” “to bemoan,” or “to sigh,” is equated to ἀναστένω in the Liddell and Scott dictionary.\footnote{LSJ, ἀναστενάζω.} It is also closely linked to the verbs στενάζω and στενάω, both of which mean “to sigh deeply,” “to moan,” “to bewail.”\footnote{LSJ, στενάζω and στενάω.} A host of these verbs are themselves to be found in other Greek romance, frequently, though not exclusively, in moments of erotic longing (This will be discussed in the following section). Moreover, the trope of lustful sighing is found in Jewish literature as well. Mirguet pointed explicitly to Sirach, particularly to the discussion of “the eunuch, ‘embracing a virgin and sighing [στενάξων]’ (30.20)” and to the wifeless man who sighs (36.25).\footnote{Mirguet, loc. cit.} To come back to Joseph and Aseneth, the sigh, which comes so closely on the heels of a violent, physical and emotional reaction to the first sight of a divinely beautiful man most certainly leads readers to believe that Aseneth is sighing out of (sexual) longing.

Joseph and Aseneth 6.1 plays on literary tropes of passion. The picture framed by Aseneth’s eastward facing window is of a young woman swooning at the sight of the gorgeous Joseph. All assumptions are thus that she has fallen in love. As it has been previously said, however, eros is not mentioned. Neither the verb nor the substantive is used anywhere in the entire novel. This diametrically opposes it to Heliodorus, where is explicitly discussed. A variety of forms of ἐράω are used 47 times throughout his novel, for example. It is not coincidental that what is described here so closely resembles falling in love in erotic literature, and yet remains unnamed. The ambiguity of Aseneth’s passion has a specific narratological and theological purpose, which shall be discussed in the following two sub-sections. This coup de foudre creates a similitude with the Greek romances. It is necessary to now pass to a part of this narrative quite antithetical to the ideal novels.

**Rejection**

A key element of the ideal romances is the symmetry between the hero and the heroine.\footnote{This is the premise of D. Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994. He uses it to show how the novel is interested in the individual. This has since been}
The protagonists are presented as destined to be together because of their many virtues. They are shown to be equals, and fall in love with each other simultaneously, which strengthens their union. Initially, it is suggested that Joseph and Aseneth are equals as well. Their garb (Aseneth: 3.6, Joseph: 5.4-5) is very similar, for they both wear white robes decorated with purple and gold, and are adorned with precious stones. They are both pious as well, as Pentephres points out to each of them in turn, saying παρθένος ὡς σύ of Joseph to Aseneth (4.7), and describing Aseneth as παρθένος to Joseph (8.1). The parallel between them becomes very apparent when Pentephres says μισεῖ πᾶσαν γυναῖκα ἀλλοτρίαν ὡς σύ πᾶντα ἄνδρα ἀλλότριον, “he hates all foreign women just as you hate all foreign men” (8.1) while in the presence of them both. They are, at face value, perfect for each other. The constant reminders of their pious virginity and the exaggeration of their hatred of all strange members of the opposite sex even brings a touch of humour to the scene, mocking their identical stubbornness and putting the “xenophobic virgins” on the edge of parody.

Despite the many similarities between Joseph and Aseneth, and the symmetry between lovers in the ideal romances, the initial reactions of Aseneth to Joseph and of Joseph to Aseneth could not be more different from the first encounter of the heroes and heroines in the Greek novels. There is no instant, mutual affection between the two. In his monograph Sexual Symmetry, David Konstan asserts that the narrative structure of the Greek romantic novels goes as follows: “The primary couple, invariably heterosexual, [...] fall in love mutually and simultaneously at the beginning of the story [...] The couple are wracked by suffering until friends and fortune intervene to unite them, while the larger part of the narrative [relates] their subsequent adventures and tribulations [...]” For the most part, this is true of the Big Five. In Joseph and Aseneth, however, this could not be further from the experiences had by the protagonists. In an ironic twist, both countered, notably by Perkins, who shows that the novels are more interested in the collective. The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era. London, Routledge, 1995. p. 66. The symmetry between the youths in the romantic pair is, however, widely recognised in modern research and is understood to be a key trope in romantic, novel literature.

183 Konstan, op. cit., 1994, p. 7
185 Burrus, loc. cit., p. 71.
186 Konstan, op. cit., p. 33.
187 The first person narrative of Achilles Tatius’ work makes it impossible to know whether the primary couple is indeed mutually passionate for each other at the story’s outset. As Koen de Temmerman points out, the reader has no idea whatsoever of Leucippe’s sentiments for Clitophon; her motivation to invite Clitophon into her bed is unknown, and her running away appears to be a means to be free of her mother, not a desire to be united with Clitophon against all odds. K. de Temmerman, Crafting Characters: Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek Novel. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014. p. 188.
characters initially reject each other as representative of the “Other” based on misinformation. 

This next sub-section will explore Joseph’s rejection of Aseneth and the sexual tension that it creates in the narrative. This scene is a continuation of 6.1, and can be read as a deepening of the “falling in love” motif.

Invited into the home of Pentephres, Joseph will actually reject Aseneth twice, once before meeting her, and then once again after the introductions have been made. Joseph initially wishes to have Aseneth removed from Pentephres’ house altogether. In an amusing parallel, ἄναβλέψας τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ εἶδε παρακύπτουσαν τὴν Ἀσενέθ, “sees with his eyes the hiding Aseneth” (7.2). Much like Aseneth herself, Joseph’s reaction is fear (ἐφοβεῖτο, 7.2). Unlike Aseneth, his fear is for his safety, not due to an emotional crisis, and he tells Pentephres that she is to be sent away (7.6). This is pompous, even arrogant, on the part of Joseph. The beautiful man fears molestation, as he himself says: “μήποτε καὶ αὕτη ἐνοχλήσῃ με,” “this one must not trouble me, too” (7.2). Joseph’s fear is not unjustified, as the narrator explains ὅτι ἠνόχλουν αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες καὶ αἱ θυγατέρες τῶν μεγιστάνων καὶ τῶν σατραπῶν πάσης γῆς Αἰγύπτου τοῦ κοιμηθῆναι μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ, “for all the wives and daughters of the great men and satraps in all the land of Egypt troubled him in order to sleep with him” (7.3). Joseph fears that Aseneth will be just like all the other women of Egypt. Joseph is to be forgiven, though, unlike the reader, he does not know that Aseneth is more like the daughters of the Hebrews than like the virgins of the Egyptians (1.5). To come back to Konstan’s idea of symmetry, the unequal act of spying which permits Aseneth to see Joseph before he sees her creates an erotic tension in the text, but introduces imbalance into their relationship. According to Pervo, Aseneth can more easily be compared to the “bad women” of the Greek novels than the protagonists at the story’s outset. Although he hits upon an interesting idea, the reason for his suggestion is not quite accurate. Because of her emotional meltdowns, notably her outburst against her father, Pervo associates Aseneth with women like Arsake in Heliodorus’s novel. As was seen above, however, Aseneth’s tantrum is not unlike what other novel heroines or heroes do. While it is true that Arsake does throw extraordinary fits, hers are far more like the reaction of the prince of Egypt than they are like Aseneth’s. Arsake is “bad,” not because of her strong emotions,

191 Pervo. loc. cit., p. 150.
but because she turns her frustration outwards, punishing those around her. Aseneth, once bitten by the love bug, will turn her frustrations inwards, upon no one but herself. Where Arsake and Aseneth are alike is in their gazing upon the main male character. For neither of these women is the first sight mutual. Aseneth is up in her tower, Arsake upon the ramparts of Memphis (7.6.1). The parallel drawn by Pervo is therefore not wrong, it simply needs some tweaking. Aseneth’s staring casts her in the role, not of the heroine, but of the anti-heroine, a sexually dominant, female predator, even though this will be shown to be far from the truth. Misconstrued as this type of character, it is natural that she inspires fear. First mentioned in passing in chapter 4, Joseph’s fear of Aseneth recalls the episode in Genesis with the wife of Potiphar. As Tim Whitmarsh pointed out, Genesis 39 can be read as a titillating palimpsest in Joseph and Aseneth; it is just underneath the surface, reminding the readers of the sexual tensions in Joseph’s past. It has been said that Joseph refuses Aseneth initially based on misinformation. To be fair to Joseph, he may react strongly (even hysterically), but he did not misread the situation. Aseneth, hiding up in her room, is staring wantonly at him. From where Joseph is sitting, Aseneth is a real threat to his chastity. The narration shows that this is his point of view, and thus subject to a certain amount of relativity. As the erotic ambiguity created by Aseneth’s reaction to the sight of Joseph mingles with Joseph’s initial reaction to the sight of Aseneth, one cannot help but be amused at the juxtaposition of reactions had by the main characters.

Pentephres is, fortunately, able to calm Joseph. He explains that Aseneth is no foreigner, but his daughter, saying that she is παρθένος μισοῦσα πάντα ἄνδρα, “a virgin who hates all men,” and that διότι ἡ θυγάτηρ ἡμῶν ὡς ἀδελφή σοῦ ἐστιν, “because she is our daughter, she is like a sister to you” (7.7). This makes Joseph quite happy, and Aseneth’s mother goes up to her chamber to bring her down to the hall. There, Pentephres gives official introductions, and tells Aseneth to καταφίλησον τὸν ἀδελφόν σου, “kiss [her] brother” (8.4). Then everything goes wrong. Joseph refuses: ἐξέτεινεν Ἰωσὴφ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ τὴν δεξιὰν καὶ ἔθηκε πρὸς τὸ στῆθος αὐτῆς ἄνω τῶν δύο μασθῶν αὐτῆς καὶ ἦσαν οἱ μασθοὶ αὐτῆς ἤδη ἑστῶτες ὡσπερ μῆλα ὡραῖα, “Joseph stretched out his right hand and placed it between her two breasts upon her chest, and her breasts were now perky like ripe apples” (8.5). Joseph is about to refuse mouth to mouth contact with

193 Egger, op. cit., p. 83.
194 Whitmarsh, loc. cit., p. 244-245.
195 Ibid., p. 247; Pervo calls it “a dreadful mistake,” loc. cit., p. 150.
196 Burrus, loc. cit., p. 70.
197 Whitmarsh, loc. cit., p. 247.
Aseneth due to her idolatrous ways, but before he does so, the narration includes this juicy titbit. The text has already narrated the minutia of Aseneth’s erotic reaction to Joseph. This titillating passage is then followed by a touch that makes the sexual tension of the narrative yet more taught. Despite the overtly religious tones of Joseph’s words, the excitement is palpable in this detail that is not strictly necessary to the narration. Due to its seemingly frivolous nature, the inclusion of this contact between Aseneth and Joseph must be assumed to be an erotic element added as a means of drawing in the reader. In defiance of one possibly sexual contact, Joseph instead initiates another, encouraging the reader to continue in order to find out if this tension will be released carnally later on in the story.

Joseph and Pentephres do not share the same opinion on the boundaries of familial relations. Aseneth may not be other, ἀλλοτρία (7.7), but neither is she of the same tribe as Joseph. Kissing in Antiquity was not necessarily an amorous act, just as it is not exclusively sexual in modern society. Embraces bore great importance as markers of who was in and who was out in family circles. At this point in the story, kissing is an action which would “overcome markers of difference and establish a familial connection between Aseneth and Joseph.” A motif also found in Greco-Roman texts, the “legitimate kisses of family members” are here contrasted “with the illegitimate kisses of strangers.” Joseph’s refusal of all further contact with Aseneth is couched in religious, rather than ethnic, terminology, and, naturally, focuses on their mouths, τὸ στόμα. Theirs cannot meet in greeting for she worships dead idols, and he the living God. The symbolism of this orifice is best explained by Whitmarsh: “La bouche est un espace surdéterminé: l’organe non seulement du plaisir amical ou sexuel (le baiser), mais aussi du parler, du manger et du boire, des activités qui doivent être vouées à Dieu et à la loi juive.” The mouth and what one does with it has become a highly charged symbol of belonging and exclusivity, of righteousness or impiety. Joseph’s mouth would thus be contaminated by Aseneth’s. The erotic tension which has underscored the entire story since Aseneth clapped eyes on Joseph cannot be forgotten when hearing Joseph’s words. This is the first moment in which sexual passion becomes synonymous with religious devotion. This fusion of sexual and religious passion is crucial to the narrative, and is what gives Joseph and Aseneth such subtle strength.

202 Whitmarsh, loc. cit., p. 248.
Aseneth is, of course, devastated by Joseph’s refusal:

καὶ ὡς ἤκουσεν Ἀσενὲθ τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα τοῦ Ἰωσήφ κατενύγη ἰσχυρῶς καὶ ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα καὶ ἀνεστέναξε καὶ ἦν ἀτενίζουσα εἰς τὸν Ἰωσήφ ἀνεῳγμένων τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν δακρύων οἱ ὀφθαλμοί αὐτῆς

And when Aseneth heard these words of Joseph, she was greatly struck, and was sorely vexed; she sighed deeply and, opening her eyes wide, she gazed upon Joseph, and her eyes filled with tears. (8.8)

This time, it is not Joseph’s appearance that wounds Aseneth, but his words. The reiteration of κατενύγη ἰσχυρῶς and ἀνεστέναξε recalls the initial violence and sexual desire of Aseneth’s passion. Moreover, one cannot help but imagine the poor girl, sighing and crying, so close to the object of her desire that he is actually touching her, yet refusing to have anything more to do with her. It is no wonder that her suffering is amplified by ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα! This is not just any verb that is used to augment the previously used κατανύσσω; λυπέω, meaning “to vex,” “to grieve,” or “to cause pain,” has a long history of use in erotic situations. A favourite of the tragedians, it is frequently used to describe a pain induced by the object of one’s desires, either directly or indirectly. The exact phrase, ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα, is very Biblical, and its earlier attestation is in the Septuagint. Specifically, this turn of phrase is applied in situations where a person is reacting to news that has been transmitted orally. Several examples of this are: the Book of Tobit, another novel-like narrative, we find ταῦτα ἀκούσασα ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα, “hearing these things, she was sorely vexed” (3.10.1); or Nero, in the Acts of Paul, who is said to be ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα upon hearing of the death of Patroklos (2.2); God in the apocryphal Life of Adam and Eve is also sorely vexed, although, exceptionally, God is ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα upon seeing Adam, not due to acoustic information. There are yet more examples, many of which bring out the auditive nature of this reaction. This is thus a typical reaction to bad news in Biblical narratives of the time. This is another aspect of this language to be noted: it not found in the Pentateuch. The Judeo-Christian texts that make use of it are all inter-testamentary or early Christian. Once again, Joseph and Aseneth employs language that is specific to both a type and time of literature. This phrase is not found after the Life of Pachomius, who died in the first half of the fourth century. The language of Joseph and Aseneth has once again taken conventions, and played with them. Following in the Biblical uses of ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα, this reaction is had by Aseneth after hearing Joseph’s negative decision. By mixing this expressing in with κατενύγη ἰσχυρῶς, the eroticism of her reaction to Joseph’s arrival is

203 LSJ, λυπέω.
204 Longus uses the verb λυπέω in a sense of “to be pained” in describing sentiments had by both Daphnis of Chloe and Chloe of Daphnis while the other is being flirted with by strangers in Daphnis and Chloe (2.2.2).
205 Rahlfs, op. cit.
recalled, and what is otherwise simply a response to bad news becomes a response to romantic rejection. In this scene, Biblical language paints a highly erotic picture.

Aseneth’s emotional reaction to Joseph’s words is just as physical as when she saw him. This time, she starts to cry. What man is unmoved by the sight of a beautiful women in tears? It is now Joseph’s turn to be struck. Upon seeing her, he ἠλέησεν αὐτὴν σφόδρα καὶ κατενύγη, “he pitied her greatly, and was pained” (8.8). His pain is not erotic, though, for the narrator specifies that he is φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν, “a god-fearing man,” (8.8). It is due to his religious devotion that he will place his hand on Aseneth’s head, and offer her a blessing.

The εὐλογία said by Joseph will cause Aseneth great joy, and she will leave the room. This passage will be analysed in the next sub-section. This sub-section has shown that while Joseph’s twofold rejection of Aseneth distinguishes it from the ideal romances, they also continue the ambiguous play on sexuality which was begun in 6.1. By using unexpected vocabulary to conjure images of traditional romance, Joseph and Aseneth uses the motif of falling in love as a tool put to its own devices. It is now possible to turn to the exhibition of lovesickness in Joseph and Aseneth.

Lovesickness

When a novel hero or heroine falls in love, not only is it instantaneous, it is confused and confusing. The juxtaposition of the different emotions felt by novel heroes was commented on by Massimo Fusillo in his article “The Conflict of Emotions in the Greek Erotic Novel.” This publication explores the ways in which emotions which are superficially contradictory become paradoxical, yet plausible representations of love. These emotions are so cataclysmic that they propel the plot forward. Conflicting emotions and the illness they cause are an important part of the ideal romances. Though something similar does happen, this sort of experience is not had immediately by our Jewish heroine. For Aseneth, it is only once Joseph finishes speaking that the emotional roller coaster starts:

Καὶ ἐχάρη Ἀσενὲθ ἐπὶ τῇ εὐλογίᾳ τοῦ Ἰωσὴφ χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα καὶ ἔσπευσε καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ὑπερῷον πρὸς ἑαυτὴν καὶ πέπτωκεν ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης αὐτῆς ἀσθενοῦσα διότι ἦν ἐν αὐτῇ χαρὰ καὶ λύπη καὶ φόβος πολὺς καὶ τρόμος καὶ ἱδρὼς συνεχῆς...

And Aseneth rejoiced much great pleasure at the blessing of Joseph, she hastened and went up to her upper chamber and, being weak, fell onto her bed, for in her was joy and sadness, great fear and trembling and continuous sweat... (9.1)

Aseneth’s experience bears the trademark juxtaposition of conflicting emotions. Moreover, they are described in a quintessentially novelistic way, as “an asyndetic accumulations of abstract nouns”. This passage, much like 6.1, is not overly elaborate. The reader is given a list of feelings and sensations, which are mixed pell-mell, and is expected to know what they represent in the given context. The mind and body are again thrown casually together as Aseneth’s passion washes over her. The sentence’s brevity is as dizzying as the emotions. Though they are more elaborate, other novels preserve for modern readers similar emotions employed in parallel circumstances, and thus lovesickness is recognised. Even without the aide of the other novels, the sweating and trembling alone are enough to evoke connotations of illness, as well as desire.

The combination of diverse feelings and the physical sensations of emotion predate the novels, though. Integrated into Longinus’ On the Sublime, the fragmentary poem by Sappho preserves something remarkably similar: ἀ δέ μ᾽ ἴδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ/ παϊσαν ἄγρη, “the sweat runs down me and a trembling takes me altogether...” (13-14). In this poem, Sappho presents a “keen articulation of her body’s disarticulation”. Remarkably, the narrator in Sappho’s poem is also covered in ἱδρώς and suffers from τρόμος. These words are inverted in Joseph and Aseneth, and yet their proximity recalls the Lesbian lyrics. It is not completely improbable that a well educated Jew or Jewish sympathiser, familiar with Sappho, would have included these two words in proximity to one another based on the archaic poetess. Both papyri and graffiti have testified to the widespread circulation of Sappho’s works in a large number of milieux, however. This may well be an implicit reference to Sappho: one clearly recognises the trembling and sweating indicative of a physiological response to erotic stimulation. It can thus be said that Aseneth is experiencing a deep passion.

This third passage is like 6.1 and 8.8: succinct. Fusillo’s idea that eros “is the principal theme to which the entire narrative is subordinated” in the ideal novels seems to hold true for Joseph and Aseneth as well, albeit with a twist. In a game of literary dominos, the erotic motif is ambiguously set up, only to be knocked down syllables later by religious meaning. In the case of Aseneth’s lovesickness, it is the explanation for her passion: ὡς ἤκουσε πάντα τὰ ῥήματα Ἰωσὴφ ὅσα ἐλάλησεν αὐτῇ ἐν τῷ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου, “because she had heard all of Joseph’s words, which he had spoken to her in the name of the highest God” (9.1). Joseph’s elocution may

207 Ibid. p. 62
208 For example, Leucippe and Clitophon, 1.4.
210 Lipsett, op. cit., p. 87.
211 Fusillo. loc. cit.
hint at the fusion of erotic and religious passion, but this line says it loud and clear. “Desire [...] becomes indistinguishable from spiritual remorse; the same physical symptoms bear both significations.” Indeed, in the very next line, Aseneth begins to repent her idolatrous ways: καὶ ἔκλαυσε κλαυθμῷ μεγάλῳ καὶ πικρῷ καὶ μετενόει ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν αὐτῆς ὧν ἐσέβετο καὶ προσώχθισε τοῖς εἰδώλοις πάσι καὶ περιέμενε τοῦ γενέσθαι ἐσπέραν, “she wept a great and bitter lamentation, repented upon her gods, which she had venerated, and she was angry at all her idols; and she waited for night to come” (9.2) Erotic literature is no stranger to tears. Achilles Tatius wrote that tears enhance the beauty of pretty women (6.7). Even without the sophistic digressions of this author, sobbing over one’s lover is a common motif in romance, particularly at night, which is when a lover’s pains are at their worst. Nor is it a purely female response. What would be pure erotic passion in any other novel is here infused with religious fervour, for Aseneth is no longer pining for Joseph alone, but for his God as well.

Nor is the lovesickness trope laid aside once the religious and erotic are mixed; indeed, it is heightened later, as Aseneth lies wakeful in the night, unable to sleep despite the lateness of the hour:

καὶ ἐβαρυθύμει καὶ ἔκλαιεν ἕως ἔδυ ὁ ἥλιος. καὶ ἄρτον οὐκ ἔφαγε καὶ ὕδωρ οὐκ ἔπιεν. καὶ ἐπῆλεν ἡ νύξ καὶ ἐπάτασσε τῇ χειρὶ τὸ στῆθος αὐτῆς πυκνῶς καὶ ἔφοβειτο φόβον μέγαν καὶ ἔτρεμε τρόμον βαρύν.

“And [Aseneth] was melancholic and cried until the setting of the sun. She ate no bread and drank no water. And [when] night had arrived and all others in the house slept, she alone was wholly awake; she thought and cried, she beat her breast frequently with her hand and she was afraid in her great fear and shook with fearful tremors.” (10.1-2)

As the house hold slumbers, there is nothing and no one to distract Aseneth from her passion. The lover pining away in the night is another recognisable element of romantic texts. When a servant comes to check on her, Aseneth, not wishing to be consoled, responds that τῆς κεφαλῆς μού ἐστι πόνος βαρύς, literally “the pain of [her] head is heavy” (10.6). Although she is lying so as to not be disturbed, she does say that she is unwell, which she is, though from her passion, not a migraine.

213 It is again Achilles Tatus, through Clitophon, who supplies this information: οὐδὲ ὑπὸν τυχεῖν ἠδυνάμην. ἔστι μὲν γὰρ φώσει καὶ τάλλα νοσήματα καὶ τά τοῦ σώματος τραύματα ἐν νυκτὶ χαλεπέτερα, καὶ ἐπανίσταται μᾶλλον ἡμῖν ἡσυχάζουσι καὶ ἐρεθίζει τὰς ἀλγηδόνας... ὄταν γὰρ ἀναπάυηται τὸ σῶμα, τότε σχολάχει τὸ ἥλκος νοσεῖν... τὰ δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς τραύματα, μὴ κινουμένου τοῦ σώματος... πάντα γὰρ ἐξεγείρεται τότε τὰ τέως κοιμώμενα... τοῖς ἐρῶσι τὸ πῦρ, “... I was unable to get to sleep. For Nature will have it that diseases and bodily wounds are worse at night: while we are at rest they obtain more power to attack us and aggravate the pain that they cause; for when the body is still, the wound has the more leisure to hurt. In like manner the wounds of the soul are far more painful when the body is at rest... all the sensations which were lately at rest are then aroused... lovers [feel] their consuming flame.” This is G. Gaselee’s translation. Achilles Tatus, Leucippe and Clitophon. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1947. 1.6.
Aseneth here plays into the lovesickness image herself by saying that she is ill, despite not mentioning what this illness is. The secondary and tertiary characters are baffled by an undiagnosed malady, not an emotional sufferance, just as those of the Greek romances are intrigued by enigmatic symptoms. The reader does, of course, recognise in Aseneth’s behaviour a classic mourning gesture: the beating of her breast. Common in both Hellenic and Jewish texts and rituals, this gesture is unclear — what or whom Aseneth bewails is unknown. Is it the loss of Joseph? The breaking (death) of her soul? Some authors suggest that it is more the latter than the prior; Aseneth has seen her idolatrous ways through Joseph’s eyes and she now “mourns the death of her own earlier self”. This is undeniable. The (con)fusion of erotic and religious passion makes it impossible not to read these scenes as the beginning of Aseneth’s transformation; however, if it were not for the arrival of Joseph in her father’s home, Aseneth would never have been exposed to these passions. If she is unable to please the Highest God of Joseph, she will never be united with either of them. The human aspect of this religious experience cannot be forgotten. The stakes are thus incredibly high: either she transforms, and gains both God and Joseph, or she loses everything, herself included. The narrator of Joseph and Aseneth is building on key themes, such as situational and character tropes, as well as religious motifs to further confuse erotic and religious passion and bring about Aseneth’s ultimate transformation.

At this point in the narrative, there is a clear rift between Joseph and Aseneth and the ideal romances. Whereas in the ideal romances, the love-struck protagonists pine for each other, languishing in their passions and driven to despair by desire, Aseneth acts upon her feelings. The next few scenes will see her dawn a sackcloth robe (10.8), destroy her beautiful clothes and worldly possessions (most importantly she will smash her idols; 10.10-12), and cover herself with ashes (10.14). She then proceeds to fast and pray for seven days (10-17). After her seven days of humiliation, Aseneth rises to see ὁ ἑωσφόρος ἀστήρ, the morning star, rising to greet her (14.1). She correctly interprets this sign as one of her deliverance and the acceptance of her transformation.

214 One thinks of Chaireas’ illness while pining for Callirhoe in Chariton of Aphrodisias’ Chaireas and Callirhoe or of Chariklea’s mysterious sickness in the Ἐθεοπικά by Heliodorus of Emesa (to be discussed in the second section of this chapter).
215 This combination of passion and mourning is deserving of its own research. Moreover, that is should be present in literature of different religious cultures makes it an interesting comparative study between Joseph and Aseneth and literature of different genres. It has not received its just due in the present thesis, but provide fertile grounds for further exploration.
Concluding Remarks: *Joseph and Aseneth*

The above subsections have scrutinised the place of certain tropes common to the Greek romances in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Sometimes congruous, sometimes incongruous with the ideal romances, these literary building blocks are an essential part of Aseneth’s conversion. The ideas of initiation and transformation are only too obvious in Aseneth’s story. They are announced in one version of the tale’s title, after all: *The Marriage and Conversion of Aseneth*. Aseneth’s emotional responses can be seen as playing a key role in her growing up, and in her preparation for initiation to both the divine and adulthood. This is symbolised by what happens after her melt downs, her humiliation, and the rising of Venus.

In the longer version, the morning star heralds more than “just” her completed transformation. In the longer version, the morning star heralds more than “just” her completed transformation. She is visited by a divine being, who announces her redemption. Regarded as the most mysterious passage of *Joseph and Aseneth*, this scene is in some ways the climax of the story. Having renounced idolatry, Aseneth has been transformed, and is now rewarded with the gift of divine wisdom. When discussing *Joseph and Aseneth*, most authors comment on the influences of eschatological writings on this scene. Of greater pertinence to this research is how this divine messenger is described:

κατὰ πάντα ὅμοιος τῷ Ἰωσὴφ... πλὴν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἦν ὡς ἀστραπή καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φέγγος ἡλίου καὶ οἱ τρίχες τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλὸξ πυρὸς ὑπολαμπάδος καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν χειρῶν καὶ τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ ἐκ πυρὸς ἀπολάμπωσιν καὶ αἱ χεῖρες καὶ οἱ πόδες ὅσπερ σίδηρος ἐκ πυρὸς ἀπολάμπουσιν...καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν χειρῶν καὶ τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ in every way identical to Joseph... except his face was like lightening, his eyes like the light of the sun, and the hair of his head like the flames of fire from a burning torch, and his hands and feet were like iron out of beaming fire, and sparks leapt from his hands and feet. (14.9)

Throughout the Mediterranean, the divine was linked to light and flame. It is therefore of little surprise that the ἄνθρωπος in *Joseph and Aseneth* should be portrayed in such terms. Passing frequently unnoticed, Aseneth’s reaction to the divine being’s arrival is familiar: ἐφοβήθη Ἀσενὲθ φόβον μέγαν καὶ ἐτρόμαξε πάντα τὰ μέλη αὐτῆς, “Aseneth feared a great feat and all of her limbs trembled” (14.10). Such a reaction is not uncommon in epiphanic experiences. This is not the first time that Aseneth experiences fear and trembling. The first time was at 6.1, when Joseph arrived in her house, the second at 8.8, when she and Joseph met properly, and thirdly at 9.1, when her sexual

217 The passage to be discussed does not appear in the shorter versions of *Joseph and Aseneth*.
passion is turning into religious fervour. This man from heaven is also a carbon copy of Joseph. Wills understands this divine visitor to be “a symbolic substitute for the sexual union one expects between Aseneth and Joseph;”220 Whitmarsh sees him in a similar, yet different light, saying that he is “le symbole de son éveil sexuel.” There is no way to divorce the sexual from the spiritual in this scene.221 Furthermore, 14.10 retroactively makes Aseneth’s reaction to Joseph in 6.1 an epiphany-like experience. Gods do not visit mortals aimlessly,222 and thus his arrival announced the beginnings of something. In Joseph and Aseneth, experiencing the divine clearly entails an erotic component.

The love and eroticism of this novel is not, however, openly stated. The ancient Jews, just like the Greeks, understood sexuality to be complicated and paradoxical — dangerous, yet seductive, frightening, yet funny, shocking, yet natural.223 Whitmarsh commented that “[cette] ambiguïté soutend notre texte”.224 This statement can be pushed further. Ambiguity does not simply underscore this piece, but is its main melody. One word is particularly remarkable by its absence: eros. As has already been stated, nowhere is Cupid to be found in this text. In scene upon scene, word upon word, image upon image, readers are convinced that they can see him, flitting between the ancient letters, and yet he is not to be found on a single page. This cannot be accidental. Were the sexuality, the eroticism of this text overt, it might slide into a celebration of the flesh, of the material, instead of being an exhalation of the divine, the eternal. The physical descriptions of Aseneth’s reactions draw on erotic Greek literature, and her emotional responses recall the falling in love of other novel protagonists; but for whom she longs is not stated outright. It is up to the reader to decide. The ambiguity of the eroticism is the key to understanding Joseph and Aseneth, for it allows one passion to melt into another, ultimately justifying not only the social order represented by love and marriage, as do the ideal romances,225 but also monotheistic religion.

**Carrying a Torch: the Meeting of Chariklea and Theagenes**

The ambiguity and complexity of Joseph and Aseneth is nothing in comparison with

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Heliodorus’ sophisticated novel of love and adventure. Commencing famously in medias res, the _Æthiopika_ is an enigmatic adventure that explores Hellenism and identity. Despite being unable to pinpoint the exact date of redaction of this piece of literature, it is now accepted as the latest of the ideal novels, which means that readers would have been fully aware of the conventions of romance. The elaborate scenes describing how Chariklea and Theagenes meet and fall in love come as no surprise, neither in the manner in which they fall in love, nor in the fact that they are seen as predestined to be together. Furthermore, a reader of Heliodorus, unlike in the other romances, is doubly aware that the protagonists must meet and fall in love. Not only is it a criterion of this type of literature, but the very beginning of the story requires it. Because the tale starts part way through the young couple’s travels, the reader already knows that they are madly in love. Unlike the other romances, where the _coup de foudre_ happens in the beginning, and the adventures follow, Heliodorus makes his audience wait (and positively beg) to hear how the couple met.

There is no objective narration of Chariklea and Theagenes’ meeting, however. Built on an Odyssean model, the story of the couple’s first encounter is in fact told by the wandering, Egyptian priest Kalasiris. His audience for this tale of love and woe is the Athenian Knemon. Throughout Kalasiris’ telling, Knemon becomes a symbol of the reader, reacting within the narrative as the reader does without. In this way, Kalasiris becomes an avatar of the narrator/Heliodorus, speaking to his public. This is of note, for Kalasiris, who is himself a character in the narrative he weaves, is not impartial. Heliodorus may be using Kalasiris as his mouthpiece. Of course, he is telling the story of the protagonists’ love affair, but he is also telling the story of his involvement in their adventures. The role of the author in relation to his story is

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227 The genre did not formally exist in Antiquity, of course, it was created for modern convenience. “Since generic classification was principally the work of Alexandrian scholarship in the Hellenistic period... it is not at all surprising that a later genre went without a label.” Bowie, “The Readership of the Greek Novels in the Ancient World,” in J. Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel*. Baltimore/London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1994. p. 435-453. Save for Julian’s reference to πλάσματα, there is no proof that literature like the _Alexander Romance_ and Heliodorus’ novel were read as an ensemble. The five ideal romances can, however, be read so easily alongside each other that it is difficult to image people not enjoying them as a collection.


230 Whether or not the author and narrator are one and same is difficult to determine in the case of the _Æthiopika_. For the sake of this research, they will be treated as such, although this is not necessarily a given in any work of fiction.
quite similar, for without him no narrative would be written, although the author may not himself inspire the story being told. This must not be forgotten during this next section, dedicated to the analysis of falling in love and lovesickness in the \textit{Æthiopika}, for the tongue in cheek aspect of Heliodorus’ novel is important to its narration, as well as its representation of religion.\textsuperscript{231} Because this is an ideal romance, the protagonists do not reject each other. It is therefore unnecessary to use a tripartite analysis. This section will be divided into two brief discussions: firstly of the character’s initial glimpse of each other, the love at first sight motif, and then of their reactions to \textit{eros}, the lovesickness theme.

First Flames

By the time one gets to hear of how Chariklea and Theagenes met, the desire to know the whole story boarders on desperation. Not only does this part of the story come in book 3, but throughout Kalasiris’ tale there are numerous digressions and interruptions that prevent him from cutting to the chase. In many ways, the reader’s longing for the story imitates a lover’s desperation for the beloved, building parallels between physical lust and love of literature. Excitement of all kinds abounds in the romantic literature, figured here as the first meeting of the protagonists.

True to novelistic convention, Chariklea and Theagenes are not only predestined to be together, they are exquisitely beautiful. Even as a child, Chariklea is said to be a κόρην ἀμήχανόν τι καὶ δαμόνιον κάλλος, “a girl of unimaginable and miraculous beauty” (2.30.6).\textsuperscript{232} Equally striking, there is something of Achilles in Theagenes’ appearance, Ἀχίλλειόν τι τῷ ὄντι πνέων (2.35.1). When the hero arrives at Delphi, where he will meet the heroine, the Oracle pronounces a prophecy, punning on the names Xαρικλέα and Θεαγένης (2.35.5). The couple is indeed so awesome, that τὴν γὰρ πρὸς θάτερον συζυγίαν ἴσα καὶ ἀθανασίαν ἦγον, “their joined union was taken as something divine” (3.4.8). Though only Kalasiris and the reader truly understand the oracular words, the prophecy has the effect of lending a further divine character to the union of the two. Heliodorus has included all the tropes, but gives the whole affaire a religious air as well through the geographical use of Delphi, and the Pythia’s portents.\textsuperscript{233}


\textsuperscript{232} The Greek text of the \textit{Æthiopika} was taken from \textit{Les Éthiopiques. Théagène et Chariclée}. Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2011 [2]. All translations of the novel were done by R. G. Glass.

They are, like Aseneth and Joseph, however, flawed characters. Both refuse love and marriage. Charikles, Chariklea’s adoptive father says that she ἐπανατείνεται ἐκθειάζουσα μὲν παρθενίαν καὶ ἐγγὺς ἀθανάτων ἀποφογαίνουσα, ἄχραντον καὶ ἀκήρατον καὶ ἀδιάφθορον ὄνομαζουσα, “she holds up virginity, deifying [it], proclaiming it nigh divine, and calling it immaculate, pure, and incorruptible, damning Eros, Aphrodite and everything belonging to marriage” (2.33.5). He is desperate for her to change her mind. Theagenes is no better.

The reader knows that the two characters will fall for each other in the next few lines. Kalasiris builds the tension and foreshadows this by telling Knemon that τότε ὅτι καὶ Θεαγένη ἦττηθῆναί ποτε δυνατὸν ἔγνωμεν, ἀλλ’ ἦττηθῆναι τοσοῦτον ὅσον ἀκραιφνὲς γυναικείον, “then we knew that the powerful Theagenes was to be defeated, he would yield to but one inviolate woman” (3.4.1). The language of love is not gentle. Theagenes’ is to be bested, defeated, using a verb dripping in military connotations, ἡσσάομαι. The power displayed by Theagenes is shown to be of a physical nature. Considering the emphasis placed on wiles wills? in this text, this is important, for it plays into the characterisation of the hero. Indeed, Virginia Burrus calls him “a blandly Greek everyman”234 adding that he “frequently comes off as a caricature of a Greek hero — all brawn and beauty and little enough wit.”235 Considering his connection to Achilles, this is perhaps a tad unfair, although, truthfully, Theagenes is not the ideal hero in many situations.236 But this is leaping ahead. This passage shows that the “fighting talk” of love literature is clearly still in use.237 The reader thus anticipates the violence so usually brought on by Eros.

True to yet another convention of the romances, the protagonists meet during a religious ceremony. Although the novels do explore divinely sanctioned marital love,238 which acts as a sanctioning of societal norms, the encounters happen during festivals for reasons more practical than theological: heroines, who are usually confined to the home, are out and about in the city during festivals, thus providing the boy and girl with an opportunity to meet.239 The description of falling in love in the Ἀθιοπικα is couched in explicitly philosophical imagery. Kalasiris says:


235 Ibid., p. 81.

236 S. Lalanne points out that Theagenes is craven (p. 155; p. 175), thus resulting in Chariklea having to do the quick thinking and saving, both of herself and him on numerous occasions. Une éducation grecque: rites de passage et construction des genres dans le roman grec ancien. Paris, Édition la Découverte, 2006. p. 175-176.


238 Zeitlin, loc. cit., p. 96.

239 Whitmarsh, op. cit., p. 191; Egger, op. cit., p. 97.
He [Theagenes] said these things, then made an offering, and took the fire; at that moment, dear Knemon, we were confident that the soul is something divine, akin to the deeds of above. Indeed each of them seeing the other, the youths loved, as if the soul from the very first meeting recognised its counterpart, and hurried towards that which it naturally deserved. At first, they stood silent and fearful... next, they smiled a quick and stolen [smile], proven only by the cheerfulness of the glance. Thereupon they became red with shame, because I saw that the heart was overrun by their emotion, and they became pallid again, and their figure plainly filling countlessly in little time on each of their countenances, and turning quickly all sorts of complexions, an accusation of the tossing of their souls at a glance. (3.5.4-6)

While it could be said that the couple falling in love as a torch is passed between them is somewhat heavy handed imagery, it fits brilliantly with the Platonic ideals that seem to peak through this passage. Plato’s treaties the Symposium and the Phaedrus were very popular during the period in which the novels were written. Moreover, they influenced other genres, generating “a larger body of literature... that drew upon Plato’s spiritual elevation of Eros and its role in the education and enlightenment of lovers...” Instead of discussing pederasty, these new discussions of love were used as “platforms for current ideas about the sexes and their reciprocal relations that were oriented now towards marriage and its emotional pleasures...” This recycling of Plato can be seen in the above passage of Heliodorus. In his well argued article “Heliodorstudien II: Die Liebe in den ‘Aithiopika’,” Meike Keul-Deustcher draws a number of parallels between the motif of love at first sight in Heliodorus, and the evil eye in Plutarch (Table Talk, 680-683), both of which share similarities with the passage in the Phaedrus (255c-d) which discusses beauty as a source of love, that τὴν τοῦ ἐρωμένου αὖ ψυχὴν ἐρωτος ἐνέπλησεν, “again filled the soul of the lover with love.” What is a classic example of two people falling in love in Heliodorus is thus deepened through Platonic and possibly Plutarchian influence. The vocative insertion of φίλε Κνήμων is a direct call to the reader, represented by the young Athenian. Through Kalasiris, the second narrator who is
speaking to a character representative of the reader or public, Heliodorus speaks to his audience. The imagery of souls rising to meet each other is enchanting, and openly evocative of Platonic erotics. The flame is reminiscent of the fire in the cave allegory found in the Republic; through double entendre, the phrase ἐκ πρώτης ἐντεύξεως, “from the first meeting” or “from the first intercourse” brings these souls into instantly carnal contact; and furthermore, the recognition of the identical natures of the souls recalls Aristophanes speech in the Symposium. Yet despite all of this philosophical imagery, the language is not necessarily Platonic. There is only one use of ἐντεύξις in Plato (Politicus, 298d), and it is not set in an erotic context. This noun for “encounter” (sexual or otherwise) was used frequently by Polybius, and notably by early Christian writers. Moreover, these souls ἐπιγνοόμενος; a verb found only once in Plato (Euthydemus, 301e), it is far more common in the Septuagint, where it is used 149 times.246 The verb ἐπιγιγνώσκω is to be found in almost all early Christian works, from the Acts, to Origen, to the New Testament. The language employed by Kalasiris to discuss the meeting of souls is as surprising as that used to describe Aseneth’s passion. While clearly based on Platonic philosophy, the vocabulary sounds proto-Christian to a modern reader. This is not necessarily to say that Heliodorus was a Christian, simply that he is using a vocabulary circulating widely at the time. Coming into first contact before the altar of Apollo, this couple appears to be sanctioned by the god, using a vocabulary familiar to other, contemporary religious texts.247

The wording is very different, but one cannot help but notice that Chariklea and Theagenes are initially immobile upon first meeting each other. Although more than one verb is possible, this does help explain Aseneth’s possible paralysis. Fear, which Aseneth experiences, seems to cause the protagonists to freeze upon the initial sighting of their beloved. The physical response described in 6.1 of Joseph and Aseneth is not quite so peculiar after all.

The protagonists cannot hide their sentiments — their faces give it all away. This passage focuses on both physical and emotional reactions, much as 6.1 in Joseph and Aseneth does. Overwhelmed by their emotions, the protagonists first stand still, then change colours and emotion in rapid succession. Again, the vocabulary is far from light. The heart has been ἐπιδραμόντος, from ἐπιτρέχω, “to overrun”. Not only is this a militaristic metaphor, it creates the idea that the heart is like a city, walled, yet obviously breechable. The comments made by Whitmarsh on the body as being sealed, yet vulnerable due to certain openings is displayed here in the image of the captured

Although much more could be said about this passage, what is important in the context of a comparison with *Joseph and Aseneth* is the following. First of all, this text shows the continuation of the violent, warlike language so frequently employed when discussing “falling in love.” This fall is decidedly more like that of a city into the hands of an enemy than into a lover’s waiting arms. Furthermore, this language, which conjures a certain image of Platonic erotics, is in fact linguistically more like theological texts circulating at the time of Heliodorus’ writing. This is more a way of underlining the philosophically religious aspect to what Heliodorus was writing than it is to say that Heliodorus was himself a Christian, although this idea will be revisited in the conclusion. Now that the moment of encounter has been introduced and examined, it is possible to consider the consequences of this brush with *eros*.

**Sobbing and Sighing**

In the sections 6.1, 8.8, and 9.1 of *Joseph and Aseneth*, the use of tropes related to lovesickness were shown as a means of introducing theological motivation. As the text centres on Aseneth’s transformation, very little space is devoted to Joseph. Despite being struck by the sight of the crying Aseneth, he does not succumb to anything resembling lovesickness. In this way, the *Æthiopika* is similar, yet different, for Chariklea and Theagenes are both stricken. This is obvious from the instant their eyes meet during the ceremony at Delphi. What Kalasiris describes pertains to them both. Afterwards, in the throws of their passions, the descriptions of Chariklea and Theagenes differ greatly. This next section is therefore dedicated to an analysis of their respective symptoms, focusing on two key moments.

In the case of both Theagenes and Chariklea, passion becomes a hindrance and they cease to tend to their duties. Theagenes, who is not shown moping around nearly as much as Chariklea, is observed during a banquet. Despite his attempting to save face, Kalasiris notices that Theagenes sighs deeply (ἐπιστένων — 3.10.4) when he thinks that no one is looking. He is thus not participating as he ought to. As previously discussed, sighing over the absent object of one’s longing is a classic motif in erotic literature. In the case of Theagenes, it permits Kalasiris to confirm his suspicions, and subsequently set in motion a plan to sneak the lovers out of Delphi. Throughout this part of the book, Theagenes shows himself to be brash and energetic, easily

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manipulated by Kalasiris into helping set his plans in motion.250

Considerably more time is dedicated to Chariklea’s “illness.” She ceases in her religious duties, and her symptoms appear worse than those of Theagenes, requiring the intervention of local doctors. The reader gets the distinct impression that Heliodorus finds it more shameful for a woman to be enslaved to love.251 This disease is first noticed shortly after the ceremony. Charikles and Kalasiris visit Chariklea in her room, where they find her εἰσελθόντες ἐπὶ τῆς εὐνῆς ἀλύουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῷ ἔρωτι διαβροχοὺς, “distraught upon her bed, her eyes moist with desire” (3.7.1). This is, of course, Kalasiris’ description. Charikles is oblivious to the cause of his adoptive daughter’s tears. When he seeks to find out, she simply tells him that τῆς κεφαλῆς ἄλγημα διοχλεῖν, “pain is bothering her head” (3.7.1). Like Aseneth, Chariklea buys peace with the explanation of a headache. The men then leave. Taking advantage of the situation, Kalasiris introduces the idea of the evil eye as source of Chariklea’s sufferings. This pseudo-scientific digression deepens the understanding that it is through vision that a person falls in love. When Kalasiris visits her again, Chariklea is said to be ὅλοσχερῶς τῷ πάθει, “completely in her passion” (3.19.1). In her study of the other romances (she omits the Αἰθιοπικα), Judith Perkins’ states that “individual love, passion outside of social structures, functioned as a malady.”252 Chariklea’s illness supports this analysis. Only now that she has sunk so low as to be unable to leave her bed is she willing to accept Kalasiris’ aide. To be discussed in the following chapter, he will convince her that marriage is the most viable option, and then to sneak out of town with her would-be lover.

Heliodorus’ moral stance on Chariklea’s lovesickness can only be properly understood later in the story. It has been pointed out that this master of narrative works through doublets.253 Although John Morgan did not include Arsake and Chariklea as such in his article “Narrative Doublets,” Koen de Temmerman is convinced, and rightly so, that the prior character acts as a foil to the latter.254 Both women fall in love with Theagenes, and both women suffer from lovesickness, which is described in similar ways. It is not, however, the lovesickness that is in and of itself problematic. Arsake, unlike Chariklea, is not Theagenes’ equal. The imbalance of power in their relationship makes them ill suited to one another, and ultimately dooms their coupling.255 Moreover, Arsake does not have Chariklea’s moral fibre. Whereas Chariklea’s passionate behaviour is justified by her

250 de Temmerman, op. cit., p. 289.
251 Keul-Deutscher, loc. cit., p. 347.
252 Perkins, op. cit., p. 52.
254 de Temmerman, op. cit., p. 272, n. 87.
255 Konstan, op. cit., p. 9.
staunch upholding of chastity, which saves her from base sensuality.\textsuperscript{256} Arsake, an already married woman, seeks a degrading and undignified tryst with the beautiful Theagenes. She is the embodiment of Plotinus’ “ugly soul.”\textsuperscript{257} She lashes out, making those around her suffer, whereas Chariklea turned her pain inwards, causing only herself to wither away.\textsuperscript{258} By using her own suffering as an excuse to make others suffer, Arsake highlights Chariklea’s admirable behaviour. Passion is to be a source of inner suffering, not outer.

In the aftermath of their first meeting, both Theagenes and Chariklea suffer, which is a key element to the sub-genre of ideal romances.\textsuperscript{259} Theagenes, as a boy, must be in the public eye, and thus his emotions are plainly visible for all who can interpret the signs. Chariklea’s is a privatised sentiment, made visible to the reader (thus public) only when Charikles and Kalasiris visit her. It is thus possible to speak of voyeurism in her case, of sneaking a peak at what is normally hidden away. In both of these situations, it is Kalasiris who is able to correctly interpret the symptoms. Not only does he correctly divine the causes of their sighs and sobs, he is even able to deduce for whom they are pining, that is to say, each other. This allows him to instruct both of them on what is to be done next. The reader is left in little doubt that, were it not for the machinations of Kalasiris, the protagonists would never have been able to leave Delphi together. Both Theagenes and Chariklea are indeed so overrun by their passion that they are not even able to keep up with their usual activities, let alone plan an elopement. Kalasiris’ telling of this tale is his way of showing his importance in the engineering of the novel’s plot. The multifaceted character of Kalasiris has been discussed by many scholars,\textsuperscript{260} and a proper presentation of his character is beyond the scope of this research. It must be noted before moving on, however, that he is vital to the erotic experience of Chariklea and Theagenes. Although he does not orchestrate their first meeting, and so is not responsible for them falling in love, he alone understood the Oracle’s prophecy, and sets the couple on their adventurous path. In a meta-literary parallel, the reader would not be hearing this tale were it not for the work of Heliodorus. He may not start things initially, be he places them in

\textsuperscript{256} Keul-Deutscher, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 349-350.
\textsuperscript{257} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 355.
\textsuperscript{258} Her concerned father might say otherwise.
\textsuperscript{259} Zeitlin, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 96.
advantageous cohesion so that the reader may enjoy them.

**Concluding Remarks: the Æthiopika**

By the time his protagonists fall in love, Heliodorus has a weighty history of literary tradition behind him from which to borrow. His story uses motifs familiar to the educated reader. Innovations are to be found, however, as he uses a (possibly Christian) contemporary vocabulary to call to mind Platonic philosophy, subverting a reader’s expectations in the process. Before concluding with a comparison, it should be highlighted that Heliodorus uses violence and eroticism together, and that the lovesickness of his characters is not simply a fun detail for his reader’s pleasure, but a veritable plot device designed to show off Kalasiris’ wisdom and conniving, as well as the relationship between author, narrative, and public.

**Comparative Conclusion**

The individual contemplations of *Joseph and Aseneth* and the Æthiopika are highly interesting. When brought into comparison, they bring out different aspects of each other, both in the ways in which the protagonists fall in love, and in their reactions. The two women in particular invite this comparison. Both in their late teens at the beginning of their respective stories, they are past the early years of marriage eligibility. Evidently, they have been fending off wedlock for some time. Similarly, it is the sight of their predestined betrothed that causes their change. It is through seeing that these women come to believe that marriage is a viable option for them.

Falling in love is, in ancient narrative, a violent, visual experience. The sense of sight is privileged in comparison to the others. Hearsay can thus never lead to true love. Aseneth, and Chariklea and Theagenes have no choice but to fall in love through their first vision of their future partners. In the Æthiopika, the sole cause of this love is beauty. What makes this a love beyond compare is that the soul is engaged simultaneously. One might say that beauty is the soul cause of love. This is not carnal lust, and thus the two souls recognise each other as being their predestined partner, as was seen in the analysis of 3.5 of the Æthiopika. Through his philosophical description of falling in love, Heliodorus shows himself to be more interested in the spiritual than the corporeal.

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261 Chariklea is 17 and Aseneth 18.
262 One thinks of the accidental kidnapping of Calligone, Clitophon’s half sister. After she has been snatched away, the villain will fall in love with her, but this is because he can see her. *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 2.18.
benefits of this emotion. In Joseph and Aseneth, something very similar happens. Struck to the soul by the solar beauty of Joseph, Aseneth is enamoured with the son of Jacob. Joseph, however, will not recognise Aseneth as an ideal wife until later in the story, after her transformation. Both narratives use the classic imagery of love at first sight, but deepen its importance through soulful language. This is not simply lust, but something much more profound. Moreover, as seen in the Æthiopika, both Chariklea and Theagenes initially react in the same way — their souls reach out to each other. By making this experience religious or philosophical, questions of manliness or femininity can be left aside. Anyone with a soul can be touched by love. This is important in Joseph and Aseneth. Despite only having a female character fall in love at the beginning, the fact that it is her soul that is struck removes the gendered implications of falling in love. Neither does the text focus on any particularly female anatomy. Having a soul is again the only requirement for being struck with this passion. Any reader of either of these texts could recognise the possibility of having a similar experience of their own.

As has been previously mentioned, sexuality was seen as something highly ambiguous in Antiquity. The beauty of ambiguity is that it can be moulded into any shape. Sexuality can thus be used to introduce almost any number of ideas to a text; it is simply a question of finding the right angle of attack. Heliodorus’ description of love only uses the verb ἐράω once, and neither lust nor Eros is actually present. Falling in love becomes a Platonic discussion of souls. It is only after, when describing the different symptoms of the lovesick youths that eros becomes more prevalent. Even more enigmatic than this, Aseneth’s emotion is never explicitly named at all; her vision of Joseph and her reactions are simply described, and it is left up to the reader to make further implications. These texts are therefore “erotic” because they describe love, but this is not done to laud the flesh. What is physically anchored in “love” is very quickly shown to move beyond that. The physical eroticism is replaced by a spiritual awakening in both narratives. This manipulation of romantic cliches to serve a different purpose shows that Joseph and Aseneth is indeed a novel.

This ambiguity is further used in Joseph and Aseneth in the reactions had by Aseneth. These responses are best understood in comparison with Chariklea and Theagenes. The Æthiopika uses familiar understandings of male/female in the reactions of its protagonists to love. Representative of the home and private life, female is interior, whereas male, representative of public life, is exterior. Chariklea, a young woman, hides in her room, languishing on her bed and crying. She is

265 Whitmarsh, op. cit., p 179.
out of the public eye. The reader only sees that she is suffering when Charikles and Kalasiris step out of the public space of Delphi and into her intimate quarters. Antithetically, Theagenes, a young man, is out in public. Kalasiris sees him sighing during a banquet, that most important social moment in Greek culture. While both characters are pining for each other, they do so in gendered ways. Aseneth’s reaction is described as an interesting mixture of these two. Alone when she first sees Joseph, she too sighs. This active longing is more masculine than it is feminine. Of course, she does proceed to lie in bed crying once she has been rejected by Joseph. This privatisation, internalisation of her sentiments is both female, and a part of the initiatory motif in *Joseph and Aseneth*. The characterisation of gender can therefore be seen as more ambiguous than either Chariklea or Theagenes. This may be linked to the individual aspect of *Joseph and Aseneth*. Whereas the *Æthiopika* has both a male and a female protagonist with whom a reader can identify, *Joseph and Aseneth* only has the one, female character. As a way of inviting any reader to identify with her, the descriptions of Aseneth must therefore be more neutral. Furthermore, despite the ability to argue that Aseneth is hyper feminine, it can also be said that she is going through the stages of initiation, 266 which are far more neutral. The cloistering in her room can thus be read as preparation for her liminal state, and not uniquely an aspect of her assigned gender role. Readers of antiquity, familiar with rituals and mystery rites, would have recognised the ambiguity of Aseneth’s ordeal, which takes an individual’s experience, and through the universal interest in eroticism and sexuality, 267 makes it an event with which anyone can identify.

CHAPTER TWO: “How do I love thee?”

Both of these novels, despite one being Jewish and the other Greek, conform to the novelistic tendency of using discussions of chastity and marriage as a guise for socio-cultural commentary.\(^{268}\) When “counting the ways”\(^{269}\) in which *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika* are similar, the refusal of marriage made by both the eponymous heroine and Chariklea is perhaps the first semblance to come to mind. Indeed, in a fascinating article from 2005, Virginia Burrus, a specialist of women in early Christianity, refers to both young women as “converted virgins” based on their initial rejection and then acceptance of matrimony.\(^{270}\) The importance of virginity is, of course, wrapped up in questions of legitimacy of heirs and (always problematic) female sexuality, and thus the locus of social anxiety and reflexion. The virginal body, as the scene of social theatre, displays the depths to which morays penetrate the individual, thus blending the latter with society at large.\(^{271}\) In the words of Judith Perkins, “chastity is the manifestation of society’s power inserted into the very body of its subjects; it acts as the actual embodiment of social control.”\(^{272}\) The marriage and preservation of chastity are subsequently two of the main concerns of the Greek novels, and are tied into the eroticism of these stories.

This second chapter will analyse the refusal and then acceptance of marriage made by the heroines. The purpose of the following pages is to discuss the “language of love” in *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika*. As it is now abundantly clear, these two texts differ from each other, and yet both narratives display concepts of pre-ordained union between the protagonists that are not wholly dissimilar. These phenomena demonstrate perceptions of love, marriage, and sexuality underscoring the stories, as well as the more than simply ludic purposes of these pieces of literature. These concerns are placed in the mouths of different characters whose responsibility it then becomes to represent a certain point of view, or moral stance. This chapter therefore focuses primarily on the words and speeches, either in soliloquy, or in dialogue between different characters. The narration, when it is necessary, will also be considered. The first section of this second chapter, dedicated to *Joseph and Aseneth*, will be divided into three subsections. The first

\(^{268}\) On the Greek novels, see *ibid.*, and p. 63-64; on the application of this to *Joseph and Aseneth*, C. Hezser, “*Joseph and Aseneth* in the Context of Ancient Greek Erotic Novels,” *Frankfurter judaistische Beiträge*, vol. 19, 1997, p. 1-40.

\(^{269}\) The title of this chapter and the first sentence reference to the sonnet “How do I love thee?” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861).


will consider her argument with her father, wherein she refuses to marry Joseph. Secondarily, her verbal reaction to Joseph’s arrival, as well as parts of her prayers while alone in her room will be analysed for the continue and adaptation of motifs from the first section. This second sub-section will also look at Joseph’s refusal of Aseneth, as it uses contrasting themes to those put forth by Aseneth. The final sub-section explores certain parts of the hymn sung by Aseneth after her marriage and the birth of her sons, because grants closure to most of the themes presented. The second section, which will be the occasion to understand the refusals of marriage made by Chariklea and Theagenes, is also divided into three subsections. These three subsections look at Theagenes’ and Chariklea’s refusals respectively. The reasons for their respective rejections and capitulations are insightful for both characterisation and narrative purpose. After, the third subsection considers their subsequent descriptions of and references to each other. These references function as support for the novel’s message. This tripartite division will permit a proper analysis of the reasons for which the heroines and heroes initially refuse to be wed, as well as their “conversions” to marriage. The previous chapter introduced the divine, or philosophical aspect of marriage and eroticism. It’s presence is just as clear, if not more so, in the words of the primary and secondary characters as it was in the protagonists physical reactions. The interplay between eroticism, philosophy and religion will permeate this second chapter as well.

**Loving the Stranger**

Virginity, sexual relationships, and marriage carry weighty significance in *Joseph and Aseneth*. In many ways, the importance of these elements brings this Jewish romance into parallel with not only the ideal Greek romances, but with the martyr accounts as well. As Tim Whitmarsh quipped, “Sexuality is a problem of power. Partly the alluring power that others can exercise over the besotted subject; but also, and more urgently, the maddeningly unpredictable power that your own desires can exercise over you.”

Connected to sexuality, marriage in particular becomes a discussion of power, be it this or other-worldly, over others or over oneself in this narrative. Of course, the symbolism of virginity and marriage in the novels and martyr acts is very different, even opposite. Eroticism in the ideal romances serves as an exploration of the importance of chastity and marriage, which is ultimately a reaffirmation of society cohesion, the couple’s fidelity reinforcing...

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and protecting social values, whereas the passages in the accounts of female martyrs, the torturing of whom can be highly sexualised, show the rejection of such an institution, while emphasising the value of virginity, resulting in a subversion of societal expectations. As it shall be shown, the discussion of marriage in Joseph and Aseneth is deeply rooted in social and political ideas, as well as theological ones, both in its rejection and acceptance. This section will therefore pay close attention to the vocabulary of social hierarchy used in the passages to be analysed, as well as the different aspects of eroticism found either in the words said or the contexts in which they are pronounced. This will shed light on whether Joseph and Aseneth narrates subversion or reaffirmation of social values.

Enslaving Marriage: Aseneth’s Refusal

Before accepting marriage, Aseneth first refuses it. This refusal is an important insight into both the characterisation of the heroine and certain ideas that the narrative seeks to explore. This first sub-section will illuminate the aspects of her rejection of matrimony so as to fully understand her later acquiescence. Before analysing the speech made by Aseneth on the subject of Joseph and marriage to him, it is necessary to first explore two other aspects of the story’s overture.

The narrator announces Aseneth’s aversion to marriage early on in the narrative. It is understood to be a key element of her characterisation. In no uncertain terms, the narrator states: καὶ ἦν Ἀσενὲθ ἐξουθενοῦσα καὶ καταπτύουσα πάντα ἄνδρα, “Aseneth was scornful and contemptuous of all men,” going so far as to add that καὶ ἦν ἀλαζὼν καὶ ὑπερήφανος πρὸς πάντα ἄνθρωπον “she was boastful and pretentious towards all of humanity” (2.1). Direct and to the point, these sentences are far more profound than they initially appear.

Interestingly, Aseneth’s age of eighteen is mentioned as a throw away comment in 1.4. By specifying Aseneth’s age, the narration causes one to pause and consider its implications for the story. Initially, it would appear that Aseneth has been fending off suitors for several years, if one accepts Keith Hopkin’s proposal of the modal marriage age as between twelve and fifteen in the

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275 Ibid., p. 63.
Roman Empire as correct. More recent research has, however, shown that the average age of marriage in the western Roman Empire was probably in the late teens for most women. The east presents a different marital situation for women. Most evidence comes out of Egypt. Conveniently, this is the preferred location of redaction for *Joseph and Aseneth*. Evidence suggests that “a considerable proportion of Egyptian families were postponing the marriage of their daughters by up to ten years,” for the documentation shows that “barely half of all women were married by the age of 20-24 years.” The narrator of *Joseph and Aseneth* would appear to be stating that the heroine is of ideal age for marriage, without it being of further use to the story itself. Within the novel genre, however, an attention to age-related details is part and parcel. The ages of the characters are so important that they ought to be included as a trope of the genre, just like their aristocratic status or physical beauty. Although she is older than all the novel heroines, Aseneth is not exaggeratedly older. Chariklea is herself seventeen. *Joseph and Aseneth* shows itself to be interested in a young woman of the same category of youth as the ideal romances and their authors through the addition of one simple word: ὀκτωκαιδεκα (1.4). Because her age is conform to the novel genre, Aseneth’s refusal of marriage clearly runs deeper than a simple wish to remain unwed; unlike some heroines of ancient literature for whom chastity is of value in and of itself, Aseneth appears as a greatly conflicted, even contradicting, character. Aseneth lives in a tower (2.1), surrounded by seven other virgins of the same age (2.6), and has never been seen by a man (2.1). One wonders if this secluded life style is imposed on the heroine or chosen by her. The text gives no real clues to this puzzle. An incredibly pious young woman, she therefore appears initially as Chariklea does, wishing to remain a virgin, as this is a virtuous state in and of itself. This appears as an ideal akin to “chastity as autonomy” as studied in the female martyr accounts by Virginia Burrus in her monograph of the same title. As shall be discussed shortly, this is not exactly the case for Aseneth. The reasons for her continued maidenhood become clear in chapter 4, when her father suggests that she marry Joseph.

Aseneth refuses marriage when her father proposes it. Her reasoning is therefore a response

280 Ibid., p. 39.
282 Ibid., p. 333.
284 Ibid., p. 73.
285 Burrus, *op. cit*. 

58
to her father’s logic. This is the second element to explore before looking specifically at Aseneth’s refusal. Like all heroines of novelistic literature, Aseneth is not the daughter of an average man. Her father, Pentephres, is the priest of Heliopolis and the most important of Pharaoh’s satraps who are the priest of Heliopolis (Πεντεφρῆς ἱερεὺς Ἡλιουπόλεως, 1.3). Daughter of a priest and noble, Aseneth is as close as it comes to being royalty, without being born of the house of Pharaoh. Considering his dual importance in the court and in religious practice, it comes as little surprise that Pentephres’ reasons for wishing for the union of Aseneth and Joseph are philosophical or theological, on top of being socio-political. Speaking to Aseneth, Pentephres says:

Ἰωσὴφ ὁ δυνατὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἔρχεται πρὸς ἡμᾶς σήμερον. καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἄρχων πάσης τῆς γῆς Ἀιγύπτου καὶ οὐδὲν τῆς γῆς... καὶ ἔστιν Ἰωσὴφ ἀνὴρ θεοσεβὴς καὶ σώφρων καὶ παρθένος ὡς σύ σήμερον καὶ ἔστιν Ἰωσὴφ ἀνὴρ δυνατὸς ἐν σοφίᾳ καὶ ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐστιν εἰς αὐτοῦ καὶ χάρις κυρίου μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ. δεῦρο δὴ τέκνον μου καὶ παραδώσω σε αὐτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα καὶ ἔσῃ αὐτῷ νύμφη καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται σου νυμφίος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον.

Joseph, the powerful one of God, is coming to us today. He is the leader of all the land of Egypt, and Pharaoh the king has appointed him king over all the land... Joseph is a God-worshiping man, self-controlled, and a virgin, like you are today, and Joseph is a man powerful in wisdom and knowledge, and the spirit of God is upon him and the Lord’s grace is with him. Here, now, my child, I will give you to him as his wife, and you shall be a bride to him, and he shall be your bridegroom for all time. (4.7-8)

In this introduction to Joseph’s character, Pentephres goes to great pains to show that he is Aseneth’s equal, both socially and religiously. First of all, Joseph is shown to be politically important. Pharaoh has chosen him to rule over the land. Readers familiar with Genesis know that this is in order to ensure proper grain storage and distribution during the seven years of plenty and then famine foretold in Pharaoh’s dreams of cows and corn (Gen. 41.1-8). Joseph has risen to a rank of social prominence as the man chosen by Pharaoh to act as king over the land. This political importance seems to be less interesting in the eyes of Pentephres, however. Joseph is truly δυνατός, “powerful,” because of his moral qualities, and these are described in more detail than his political importance. Right out of the gate, he is said to be ὁ δυνατός τοῦ θεοῦ, “the powerful one of God,” and then that he is ἀνήρ δυνατός ἐν σοφίᾳ, “a man powerful in his wisdom.” This differentiates him from the heroes of the ideal novels, particularly Theagenes, who is also said to be δυνατός.

Joseph’s cerebral qualities are more important than his physical attributes, which go unmentioned by Pentephres, and his political power. He is θεοσεβής, “God-worshiping,” σώφρων,

286 Lalanne, op. cit., p. 66.
“self-controlled,” and παρθένος, “virginal.” These three adjectives all have distinct, moral values, and each must be considered in turn. The term θεοσεβής dates back to Euripides, (Alcestis, 605; Iphigenia Taurica, 268) and is used regularly, though sparingly, by those authors left to us. In the context of apocryphal literature, θεοσεβής presents some difficulties. While it has been suggested that the theosebic worshippers of literary sources were those Jewish sympathisers who followed monotheistic cult without converting, this cannot be proven. Conversely, Whitmarsh actually calls it an “empty” word, vocabulary that can be adapted to the purposes of any monotheistic liturgy or literature. In regards to Joseph in the above passage, it is a means of distinguishing his spotless devotion to his God, thus showing him to be morally superior to someone of lesser faith.

To be σώφρων is, of course, a very well known concept of ancient Greece. Meaning “having control over the sensual desires,” “temperate,” “self-controlled,” or “chaste,” it dates back to Homer (Iliad, 21.462; Odyssey, 4.158), and is loaded with philosophical significance. It is clearly linked to the last descriptor of Joseph.

The most peculiar of the adjectives is the third, παρθένος. Although this word also dates back to Homeric epic, seldom it is applied to men. Male virginity was not of particular importance, nor concern in Antiquity, as it in no way threatened a man’s social or political power, or the legitimacy of any claims, legal or otherwise, made by a man. It was even doubted that men had a virginity comparable to that of women. The appropriation of this female virtue is seen in fictions from the early centuries after Christ, in the novels as well as in the martyr acts, where men are feminised and women masculinised in order to obtain martyrdom. This concern for male chastity is yet another example of these texts’ discursive attention to society anxieties and morality. This aspect of Joseph’s characterisation is, however, of great significance in this story, for it is, above all others, the attribute used to show Aseneth that she and he are alike, and vice versa, to show Joseph


290 μαθήσῃ τὴν σήμερον με παρθένειαν μεμιμημένον, εξ τῆς ἑστι καὶ ἐν ἀνδράς παρθενία, “... you will find that I have imitated your virginity, if there be any virginity in men,” (5.20) This is G. Gaselee’s translation. Achilles Tatius, Leucippe and Clitophon. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1947.


292 Perkins, op. cit., p. 47.
that she is like him. The adjective is in fact used 35 times in *Joseph and Aseneth*, and is applied to both Aseneth and Joseph regularly. Considering the fact that this narrative is, in the longer recension, 13,136 words in length, and that παρθένος is the 26th most common word in the text, this amounts to a nearly compulsive use. The constant use of this word also heightens the text’s eroticism, particularly in regards to Aseneth. Instead of describing the heroine as a κορή, a word which does not necessarily connote either virginity or non-virginity, Aseneth is described using a word which is linked explicitly with virginity in the novels. Necessarily, it does the same for Joseph. That Joseph is described as both ἀνήρ and παρθένος in a novelistic context is incredibly peculiar, however. The heroes of the ideal novels are not “men” at the outset — they become them through their adventures, but they do not start out as such. Joseph, by contrast, is already a man. The description of him as παρθένος is therefore doubly important. Firstly, the heroes of the novels become men partially through their ability to dominate women, particularly their wife. This does not appear to be the case for Joseph. His sapiential qualities are what make him a man and not a boy. This is in line with the highly favourable Hebrew representations of Joseph written in texts from Judea during the Hellenistic period, as well as some from Egypt. As alluring as this is to Aseneth, it highlights the lack of symmetry between the characters, what social historian Sophie Lalanne calls “la règle d’homèlikiè,” the idea that the couple are in part destined to be together because they are of the same age group. In this light, the shared descriptor as παρθένος is a means to rebalance the scale, drawing out the similarities between Aseneth and Joseph, instead of highlighting their asymmetry. Pentephres seems to consider that this is not only a marker of these two characters’ spiritual similarity, but is also of more importance than religious, ethnic, or social background. Pentephres does not seem to care a whit for the traditional distrust and hatred of the perceived other. Chastity alone is enough to unite these two in matrimony; Joseph’s political rank is simply the cherry on top. This is, in a small way, reminiscent of the symmetry seen between the hero and the heroine in the ideal novels: Aseneth and Joseph’s virtues bring them into parallel, and they are obviously both from the nobility. It would therefore appear that this novel participates in

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295 Ibid., p. 72.
296 Ibid., p. 178.
299 Cf. Whitmarsh, *loc. cit.*, for a discussion of the Other in *Joseph and Aseneth*.
the underlying message of the Greek novels, that “among the upper classes, noble souls were made for each other.”

Moreover, Joseph’s chastity plays into the eroticism of the narrative. Firstly, readers know that if Joseph is still a virgin, it is because he had to fight off the advances of Potiphar’s wife, his previous mistress while enslaved. The famous sex scandal of Genesis 39 is ever present. Furthermore, by emphasising the lack of sex, the reader naturally starts to think about it. The question of carnal consummation raises the tension in the text. The reader anticipates the meeting, marriage, and consummation of love by the hero and heroine.

To come back to the topic at hand, which is to say, Pentephres’ suggestion that his daughter be wed to Joseph, Aseneth does not share her father’s enthusiasm. She answers him rudely:

Why does my lord and father speak such things through these words, to deliver me like a captive to a man [who is] a foreigner, a fugitive and a slave? Is he not the son of a shepherd from Canaan? And was he not caught in the act of sleeping with his mistress, and his master threw him into the darkness of prison? And did Pharaoh not bring him forth from prison because he could interpret [Pharaoh’s] dreams, in the manner in which old women of Egypt interpret [dreams]? No, but I shall be married to the firstborn son of the king, for he is the king of all the land of Egypt. (4.9-12)

This is indeed an angry outburst. One notes that it is also a perfect inversion of her father’s speech. The form is fitted to a rejection of the substance. Whereas Pentephres concludes by saying that he will give Aseneth to Joseph, she starts with this idea, reusing the same verb, παραδίδωμι. Pentephres uses the verb (παραδώσω) simply with the idea of giving; Aseneth interprets it as “to give a city or person into another’s hands... [especially] as hostage, or to an enemy.” Her interpretation is shown through the compliment ως αἰχμάλωτον, “like a captive.” Aseneth views this marriage, though not necessarily all marriages, as enslavement. She then brings up Joseph’s questionable background, calling him “a foreigner, a fugitive and a slave”. As the daughter of a high ranking official, these are indeed undesirable attributes in a husband. Instead of focusing on any moral virtues, Aseneth couches her thoughts in political and social ideas. This is accentuated by her

302 LSJ, παραδίδωμι.
statement that she will marry no one but the son of the king, ὅτι αὐτός ἐστι βασιλεὺς πάσης τῆς γῆς Αἰγύπτου, “because he is the king of all the land of Egypt.” These words are almost identical to her father’s αὐτός ἐστιν ἄρχων πάσης τῆς γῆς Αἰγύπτου. Whereas Joseph is but a leader, Aseneth wishes to be wed to the king, moreover to the king who is τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ βασιλέως τῷ πρωτοτόκῳ, “the first born son of the king,” and therefore born royal, not picked up out of a prison thanks to supposedly dubious abilities, and handed a new title.

Aseneth speaks in political terms, whereas her father speaks in moral ideals. When reading this story, and particularly when comparing it to other novels, most authors point out Aseneth’s refusal of marriage as a point of comparison, be it with Chariklea, Habrocomes, or another.  

This is not, however, a Chariklean exaltation of virginity. Aseneth does not wish to remain a pious virgin; she wants to be wed to the most powerful man in the land. As Richard Pervo pointed out, Aseneth is no “simpering virgin,” she is a woman standing up for what (she thinks) she wants. She will, of course, change her mind. This is yet another way in which Aseneth is initially more like the “bad women” of the novels: she is too attached to the material world. Melite and Arsake as wealthy and fairly independent women, are interested in the carnal, something that Aseneth does not mention, but the idea is not antithetical. Wanting material or physical gain from a partner is not what is most important in a marriage. The vocabulary of Aseneth’s refusal is important for the subsequent subsections. As shall be seen, the ideas of social hierarchy, of mastery and slavery, will be used again, only next time, they shall be said of Aseneth, and shall be shown to be a covetable position.

The story of Joseph and Aseneth presents its main characters as mirror images of each other, and thus as a perfect match. As was mentioned in Chapter one, their garb is similar, as is their initial rejection of one another prior to being introduced. Where Joseph differs greatly from Aseneth, beyond the simple fact that he is a man and she a woman, is that he will reject her yet again after their first encounter, whereas she will wish to become better acquainted. Although he is not the narrative’s central character, Joseph does have an important part to play as the catalyst for Aseneth’s conversion.


304 Ibid., p. 150.

305 From Leucippe and Clitophon, and the Æthiopika, respectively.

In his rejection of her, Joseph continues this play of social, political, and religious reasoning. For this reason, this sub-section looks at his speech as well before moving on. Joseph is initially afraid of Aseneth (ἔφοβεῖτο, 7.2). Aseneth’s fear features in her emotional and physical reaction to seeing Joseph and appears to be a part of the tropes surrounding love at first sight (ἔφοβήθη φόβον μέγαν, 6.1). Joseph, by contrast, does not wish to be approached by Aseneth, but to have her sent away (7.2). Pentephres manages to calm his guest by assuring him that this woman is not a threat, but indeed his own daughter. Joseph, delighted, responds: εἰ θυγάτηρ ὑμῶν ἐστι καὶ παρθένος ἥπαρχει ἣκέτω ὅτι ἀδελφὴ μού ἐστι καὶ ἁγαπῶ αὐτήν ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον ὡς ἀδελφήν μου, “if [she] is your daughter, and she really is a virgin, she must come, for she is my sister, and I care for her on this day as my sister” (7.8). Joseph picks up on Pentephres’ use of the term ἀδελφή (7.7) to describe the relationship he has with Aseneth. The family barriers between the two seem to be dissolving, as each male character speaks in relative terms about who is and who is not a foreigner (ἄλλοτριος).

Tim Whitmarsh points out that there is, despite this reconciliation, an apparently obvious, but unspecified difference between “being a sister,” and “being like a sister” in this text. Although she may be ὡς ἀδελφή, Aseneth is not an ἀδελφή, as is seen in the words pronounced pompously by Joseph when she attempts to embrace him:

οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον ἀνδρὶ θεοσεβεῖ ὃς εὐλογεῖ τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ τὸν θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα καὶ ἐσθίει ἄρτον εὐλογημένον ξωῆς καὶ πίνει ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ζωῆς καὶ χρίεται χρίσματι εὐλογημένῳ ἀφθαρσίας φιλῆσαι γυναῖκα ἄλλοτριαν ἥτις εὐλογεῖ τῷ στόματι αὐτῆς εἴδοσα νεκρὰ καὶ κωφὰ καὶ ἐσθίει ἅρμα τῆς τραπέζης αὐτῶν ἄρτον ἄγχονης καὶ πίνει ἅρμα τῆς σπονδῆς αὐτῶν ποτήριον ἄρχονης καὶ χρίεται ὄλυμμα ἁπάθου. ἀλλ᾽ ἀνὴρ θεοσεβὴς φιλήσει τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐκ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς καὶ τῆς συγγενείας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα τὴν σύγκοιτον αὐτοῦ αἵτινες εὐλογοῦσι τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν τὸν θεὸν τὸν ζῶντα. ὁμοίως καὶ γυναικὶ θεοσεβεῖ οὐκ ἔστι προσῆκον φιλῆσαι ἄνδρα ἄλλοτριον διότι βδέλυγμα ἐστὶ τούτο ἐνώπιον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ.

It is not appropriate for a God-worshipping man, who blesses the living God with his mouth, eats the blessed bread of life, drinks from the blessed cup of immortality, and is anointed by the blessed oil of incorruptibility to feel affection for a foreign woman who blesses dead and dumb idols with her mouth, eats the bread of anguish from their offerings, drinks from the cup of treachery of their libations, and is anointed with oil of destruction. But a God-worshipping man may feel affection for his mother and the sister who is of his mother, and the sister who is of his tribe and his kin, and the wife [who is] his bedfellow, and those [women] who bless the living God with their mouth. Just as it is not appropriate for a God-worshipping woman to feel affection for a foreign man, for these things are abominations in the presence of the Lord God. (8.5-7)

This speech explains why Aseneth is but a simile-sister, and not the real thing. Fraternity is not based upon biology, as this text shows, but on religious practice and the veneration of the right

308 Ibid.
divinity. In other words, Joseph uses distinctly religious ideas to create social groups, not ethnic definitions. This erasure of ethnic importance by comparison to religious practice recalls the introduction of Aseneth in 1.5, where it is stated that Aseneth is more like the daughters of the Hebrews than the virgins of Egypt. The heroine is therefore not exactly like the Hebrew women, but really a woman upon whom Joseph can lavish affection either, and he makes it perfectly clear why this is the case. In her analysis of Aseneth’s three prayers, Ross Kraemer reminds readers that “many ancient writers also connect women’s speech with women’s sexuality, drawing a clear analogy between the mouth and the vagina.” Although this may be pushing one interpretation a little too far, it potentially makes Joseph’s words highly sexual, lending a further understanding to the physical impurities of the idolatrous woman. As a worshiper of idols, Aseneth’s mouth, and all the rest of her, is contaminated. The trilogy of cult objects mentioned by Joseph (bread, cup and oil), has been the subject of numerous discussions. While some see in them a means of identifying the origins of Joseph and Aseneth, being convinced that they are elements required in Jewish rituals, or symbolic of the Eucharist, what is most important in the context of this research is the logic behind Joseph’s refusal. Like Aseneth, he is not rejecting all females wholesale — he sees nothing disgusting in sharing his bed with a woman — but he is reaffirming his religious beliefs, which do not permit him to consummate a relationship with a woman who does not recognise his God. In this way, he is like Aseneth, who does not reject marriage qua marriage, but makes it quite clear that she is looking for a specific partner.

Two other aspects of Joseph’s speech mark his opinion as very different from Aseneth’s. Firstly, Joseph speaks of feeling affection for, of loving, or of caring for a woman, using the verb φιλέω to describe the feelings appropriately had for a mother, a sister (of blood or social relation), and/or a wife. Aseneth made no mention of feelings, speaking of matrimony, and matrimony alone. Despite his overtly religious speech, Joseph seems to perceive his union as one of affect and piety, not of social or political importance. Inversely, Aseneth appears to have created a divide between love and marriage. Secondly, unlike Aseneth, Joseph makes no mention of the social rank of the

310 Kraemer, op. cit., p. 207.
woman sharing his bed. Whereas Aseneth spoke of Joseph’s poor social standing and her desire to be wed to the prince of Egypt, Joseph speaks of religious customs and family ties, thus preferring religious signifiers to social or political ones. In other words, when looking for their ideal partner, Aseneth cares about political rank and power, whereas Joseph cares about affection and religious compatibility. Despite the similarities of their appearances, and the initial stubbornness and arrogance, Joseph and Aseneth are shown to be as different as can be through the reasons they voice while rejecting each other. Only Pentephres comes off as a moderate party, accepting good morals and socio-political rankings as being adequate in both characters, and thus as sufficient grounds for their union. As a polytheist, Pentephres is more likely to be open to the idea of such a union, for Joseph’s veneration of τὸ θεὸς ὕψιστος poses no problems within the pagan system. This makes Joseph’s speech incredibly important to one of the story’s underlying moral questions. His words redraw social boundaries, but not based on ethnic ties. This means that, while Aseneth cannot be married to him now, he does not exclude her from possible, future inclusion into his religious group, making her an eligible partner.

The reasons for which both protagonists refuse to marry each other are fraught with narratological intent. The reader already knows, or suspects, which one of them is upholding the right morals. Political and religious literary motifs are introduced in these speeches. These themes figure heavily in Aseneth’s change of heart, to which we now turn.

**To be his Slave and his Maidservant**

As was seen in chapter one, Aseneth’s experience of love, whether love is defined as erotic, religious, or both, is sudden and violent. Her physical experiences are both accompanied by elocutions, which further elaborate her narrated reactions. This sub-section scrutinises Aseneth’s words upon seeing Joseph, and then the sections of her prayers and monologues pertaining to Joseph, for they convey a deeper reason behind the narrative than pure entertainment.

The arrival of Joseph in chapter 5 is set up to show his magnificence. His clothing, and


καὶ ἠνοίχθησαν αἱ πύλαι τῆς αὐλῆς αἱ βλέπουσαι κατὰ ἀνατολάς καὶ εἰσῆλθεν Ἰωσὴφ ἑστὼς ἐπὶ τῷ ἅρματι τοῦ Φαραώ καὶ ἦσαν ἐζευγμένοι ὡσεὶ χιὼν χρυσοχάλινοι καὶ τὸ ἅρμα κατεσκεύαστο ὅλον ἐκ χρυσίου καθαροῦ. Καὶ ἦν Ἰωσὴφ ἐνδεδυμένος χιτῶνα λευκὸν καὶ ἔξαλλον καὶ ἡ στολὴ τῆς περιβολῆς αὐτοῦ ἦν προφυρᾶ ἐκ βύσσου χρυσοῦ καὶ στέφανος χρυσοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ στεφάνου ἦσαν δώδεκα λίθοι ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ ἐπάνω τῶν δώδεκα ἀκτῖνες χρυσαῖ. “And the gates of the courtyard that looked to the east were opened, and Joseph, standing upon the second chariot of Pharaoh, entered. The four horses hitched [to it] were white as if [of] snow and bridled with gold, and the chariot was entirely fitted out in pure gold.
accessories, all show his power, both political and spiritual. Aseneth’s startled reaction takes into
consideration all of these aspects of him:

What now shall I do, miserable [that I am]?
Did I not speak, saying that Joseph was the son of a shepherd from the land of Canaan?
And now, behold, the sun from the sky is near us upon his chariot,
and he has entered into our house today
and he shines in himself, like the light upon the world.
I, [being] senseless and rash, I scorned him,
and I said wicked words about him
and I did not see that Joseph is the son of God.
For from what man on this earth could such beauty come,
and such light be born of what kind of belly of woman?
I am miserable and senseless, for I spoke wicked words to my father about him.
And now, where shall I go and [where] shall I hide from his countenance,
in order that Joseph, the son of God, will not see me,

Joseph was displaying a special white tunic, and the robe put around him was purple, of silk embroidered with gold, and
a golden crown [was] upon his brow and in the ring of the crown were twelve precious stones, and above the twelve
stones were twelve golden rays of light.” (5.4-5) This posture, though lacking the right hand raised while on the chariot,
is highly reminiscent of Roman iconography of the Sun Emperor, which was unused prior to the third century CE. This
is used by Kraemer as an argument for a later date of redaction. Kraemer, op. cit., p. 159. Collins counters that this
could simply be an addition to the previously redacted narrative during its circulation. Collins, loc. cit., p. 111. It is
doubtful that this passage can be used as a clue to solving the dating puzzle, but it is quite clear that this text shows the
importance of solar motifs in Late Antique literature, religious and secular, as well as across religious boundaries.
Furthermore, Joseph and Aseneth was undoubtedly circulating at approximately the same time as Heliodorus was
composing the Æthiopika.
because I spoke wicked [words] about him?
And where shall I go and [where] shall I hide?
For he sees all that is hidden,
and nothing hidden escapes him on account of the great light that is in him.
And now, be gracious to me, Lord, God of Joseph,
because me, I spoke wicked words regarding him in my ignorance.
And now, my father, give me to Joseph as his slave and as his maidservant
and I shall serve him for all time. (6.2-8)

These are not exactly the words one expects of a love struck women, but they are important to both
the plot and the understanding of the different themes and motifs in the narrative. Three aspects of
this speech require specific attention: the sun and light motifs, the emphasis placed upon Aseneth’s
ῥήματα πονηρά, and her request to her father.

Catching a first glimpse of her future husband, Aseneth describes him to the reader. He bears
the divine beauty that is stock and trade of the novels. Her description is not, however, of his
physical nature per se, but of something much more intangible. What is initially most striking in
Aseneth’s speech is the declaration that Joseph is the sun from the sky, ὁ ἥλιος ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ;
what was implicit in the description of Joseph standing upon his quadriga with golden rays
sprouting from his head in 5.5 is rendered explicit in Aseneth’s startled words: Joseph, the image of
Helios, enters Heliopolis, from the east, causing an awakening in Aseneth. The imagery here is as
blunt as when Chariklea and Theagenes’ love is kindled in the presence of a torch during the
Pythian games (3.5.4). It is also far more profound than if Aseneth were to gush over Joseph’s good
looks. Of all the polytheist divinities, Helios was involved in a complex relationship with ancient
Judaism. Belief that solar and astral bodies were divine was ubiquitous throughout the ancient
Mediterranean,\(^\text{315}\) and the Jews were hardly exempt. An example of this is found in Philo of
Alexandria’s writings. In his typically allegorical way, Philo used Helios to designate the human
mind, “sense perception,” “divine Word,” and even “the Ruler of the world.”\(^\text{316}\) Helios thus
represented everything from higher cognitive function to God, which fits perfectly with the
presentation of Joseph as a wise man, chosen by the Highest God. Philo is not an author on whom
assumptions about solar worship within all of ancient Judaism can be made, but he is written proof
that the sun was recognised as important symbolically within Jewish communities, notably in
Alexandria, the consensus’ preferred location of composition for \textit{Joseph and Aseneth}. In addition to
Philo’s written commentary, a number of ancient synagogues with mosaics displaying solar
iconography which date back to the third through sixth centuries C.E. have been uncovered in

\(^{315}\) Kraemer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 157.
\(^{316}\) \textit{Ibid.}, discussing Philo’s treaty \textit{On Dreams}. But he also uses a similar analogy in \textit{On Joseph} (43).
Israel, thus providing further material proofs of solar importance in Jewish cult, this time in the East. Furthermore, Joseph is associated, not with Jahweh, the God obviously connected to the Hebrews, but to ὁ θεός ὁ ὕψιστος, the Highest God, whose “essence was associated with light, fire, and the sun.” Aseneth’s use of figurative, prayer-like language does not make Joseph divine, but his description in terms of light and the sun does align him with concepts of goodness, knowledge, beauty, and divinity. Aseneth’s inability to hide from his inner light, and thus from his sight, shows Joseph’s omnipotence. Despite the similarities, Joseph’s beauty is not that of a traditional romance hero. He appears far superior to the young men of the ideal romances. As a sapiential hero, he is not explicitly compared to mythic warriors, but neither is he compared overtly to any important figures of wisdom. He is presented as a holy and celestial man.

Aseneth’s first monologue introduces the idea of shame of oneself, which shall be continued in her later prayers. Here, Aseneth describes herself as ταλαίπωρος, “miserable,” and ἄφρων, “senseless.” Her misery is presented as a result of her senselessness, and, being senseless, she spoke ῥήματα πονηρά. The result is that she is now miserable. The characterisation of her outburst as saying “wicked words” about Joseph is curious. Despite recounting the events of Genesis in a condescending way, Aseneth did not say anything that is narratively fictitious. She does not invent gossip, but retells different bits of the Joseph story with surprising accuracy. What was wrong was her inability to recognise that Joseph is in fact more than simply the son of a shepherd, her refusal of his divine connection. There is no embarrassment about her current feelings, however, only a sense of shame at her previously poor conduct. Aseneth has recognised her undesirable behaviour, but this is only the introduction of this motif in her monologues, and so is unelaborated in this first speech.

Finally, Aseneth makes a request of her (absent) father: to be given to Joseph. This differs from the words she threw in his face just moments before. Whereas in her initial speech, she wished to be wed (γαμηθήσομαι) to the prince of Egypt, thus becoming a queen, she now wishes to be

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317 Ibid., p. 158.
319 Warren, loc. cit., p. 150.
320 This image of Joseph is among the reasons for which Joseph and Aseneth is frequently referred to as sapiential literature. Although it was not pertinent to this research, a comparison of Joseph’s representation to those of other wisdom figures, such as Apollonios of Tyana or Enoch, may be revealing of yet more Greco-Roman influences on this text, or inversely of a reinforced Jewish sapiential model.
321 The only exception is when she states that Joseph was caught “sleeping with his mistress,” which was, in fact, a set up to make him appear guilty. The alteration is therefore in conformity with gossip, although the rest remains true, though condescending.
given (δότω) to Joseph εἰς παιδίσκην καὶ εἰς δούλην, “as his slave and maidservant.” There are numerous ways of interpreting this request, none of which requires the others to be mutually exclusive. This language continues the social and political discourse of Aseneth’s words in 4.9-12. She does not speak in strictly philosophical or religious terminology. The imagery and language of slavery is common in erotic texts, where the idea of being rendered subservient to one’s passions is usual, and lovers who suddenly find themselves wishing to complete the every whim of their beloved are common. Questions of power frequently arise in erotic motifs. Although Aseneth does not express anything overtly sexual through her words, she does use the word παιδίσκη. This word can be used to refer to a young prostitute, but it does not necessarily carry such a connotation.

Later in Joseph and Aseneth, however, παιδίσκη is the word used to describe Bilhah and Zilpah, the handmaidens of Leah and Rachel (παιδισκῶν Λιὰς καὶ Ῥαχὴλ γυναικῶν, 24.2), and the mothers of four of Jacob’s children. Genesis states that these women were given to Jacob “to wife” (Bilhah: Genesis 30.3-5; Zilpah: 30.9). If the meaning of παιδίσκη is to be understood throughout the entire novel as being similar, it can be inferred here that Aseneth understands that her role as slave and maidservant to Joseph would involve sexual activity, just as was the case for Bilhah and Zilpah. Slavery is often found in the Greek novels, not only in its metaphoric state, but literally as well. Callirhoe, Leukippe, and Theagenes, for example, find themselves reduced to slavery. This abasement and humiliation exposes them to sexual dangers, but is also a part of the initiatory element in the narratives. The representation of slavery and eroticism in Joseph and Aseneth is unlike that seen in the ideal novels, however. Slave to her passions, Aseneth would not be separated from Joseph through this imaginary bondage, she would be bound to him. In the Greek novels, slavery separates lovers, it does not unite them. Aseneth does not conceive of herself as being Joseph’s equal despite her emotions, but as being socially, religiously, and morally inferior. She actively wishes for enslavement, something that no Greek heroine ever does. To be reduced to servitude, which is the lowest level of the social totem pole, is the ultimate humiliation from a social standpoint. This request therefore shows just how ashamed of her behaviour Aseneth must be, if she is willing to go from the very top to the very bottom of the social hierarchy. Furthermore, the slavery motif is common in religious texts as well, and this should not be over looked. The image of the mighty falling to serve the meek is common. Aseneth, as the daughter of a courtier and  

323 Whitmarsh, op. cit., p. 197.  
324 LSJ, παιδισκάριον, II.2.  
priest, who clung to social rank as a means of choosing a husband, releases her false pride and material desires, only to wish to serve someone overwhelmingly symbolic of goodness and divine power. Servitude is not portrayed here as being truly dreadful. Indeed, Aseneth wants it so badly that it almost appears that the service to one’s masters is a desirable situation. To serve a god (or as is the case here, the quasi-divine Joseph), is to be initiated into his cult. Aseneth’s servitude is thus a part of her initiation, stemming from her passion, the impetus of the conversion. Her words regarding slavery thus contribute to the fusion of the religion and romance that was seen in her physical reactions in Chapter one, this time through the image of subjugation.

Aseneth’s speech from 6.2-8 is said shortly before meeting Joseph. As was discussed above, her suit for him does not get very far. She therefore hides in her room, where she spends a week wearing sackcloth, refusing to eat and drink, covered in ashes, crying and praying. After this week of humiliation (ἡ ταπείνωσις), the text gives voice yet again to Aseneth’s inner thoughts. Being too afraid to address herself to God, Aseneth has two monologues which have been described as “secret prayers,” for they are said “in her heart,” (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς τὸ στόμα μὴ ἄνοιξασα (11.3) and ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς οὐκ ἄνοιξασα τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς (11.5)). Both of these prayers discuss her poor behaviour. Their content shall be discussed fully in the next chapter of this thesis. The parallel phrasing which describes the silence of her words, clearly links what is said twice in chapter 11 with what she thinks in 6.2-8, which is also described by the narrator as being said ἐν καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς, “in her heart” (6.1). One cannot help but make the connection between these two passions. What appears to be falling in love in 6.1 and leads to her first silent prayer, finds an echo in her passionate thoughts about her suffering and humiliation. It is these words, held back by silent lips, that Kraemer associates with illicit intercourse.

"Thus Aseneth might be understood to utter her first two prayers silently to counter the possible implication that the seemingly chaste Aseneth was engaged in unchaste, inappropriate speech.” Aseneth is most certainly ashamed of her behaviour, making Kraemer’s suggestion a distinct possibility. After these silent words, she finally gets up on her knees and opens her mouth to God. Throughout the book’s chapters, the mouth has retained its symbolism in these scenes, and she finally deems it cleansed enough to say her prayers aloud.

The voiced prayer is predominantly a summary of what Aseneth has said and done. It also

327 R. Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph. A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 207; The coincidence that “intercourse” should mean both sexual encounter and conversation in both the Greek and English heightens the humour to be found in these passages.
328 Ibid.
includes apocalyptic stylings and describes Aseneth’s fear of being dragged back into idolatry by ὁ λέων ὁ ἄγριος ὁ παλαιός, “the old savage lion” (12.9). The image of God found in Aseneth’s words is contradictory; he can be both violent and caring, dangerous and forgiving. He is clearly the God of the Torah, not the compassionate Christian God. All three of these prayers, be they said internally or audibly, are said after the seven day period during which Aseneth performed rites of repentance. She is at her lowest, her most vulnerable at this moment. The initiatory aspect of Aseneth’s mourning has been explored by several authors. Her isolation prior to commencing her prayers “accords with the stage of separation or preliminality in van Gennep’s analysis of rites of transition.” Her prayers are thus said in a state of true liminality. Moreover, the expression of “loss and desperation which Aseneth’s soliloquies and prayer express are intrinsic with the experience of liminality.”

Having divested herself of all symbols of her worldly attachments, Aseneth’s prayers show her attempts to recreate a new social identity, that of the community to which Joseph belongs. Her prayers, which describe exile from her worldly family, ask God to take the place of her father Pentephres, using imagery of God as a loving father who protects his children. The repetition of orphanhood imagery deepens the familial motif (ὁρφανῆ, 11.3, 12.5, 12.13, 12.14; and τὴν ὀρφανίαν μου, my orphanhood, 11.13, 13.1). God is said to be the father of orphans (ὁ πατὴρ τῶν ὀρφανῶν). Aseneth’s prayer culminates in the following lines:

καὶ σύγγνωθί μοι
diótì ἦμαρτόν σοι ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ
παρθένος οὖσα
καὶ ὀδαμ ἐμαθέν
cαι λελάληκα βλάσφημα εἰς τὸν κύριον μου Ἰωσήφ
diótì οὐκ ἤδειν εἰδι ἡ ἄθλικα τι ὑπὸς σοῦ ἔστιν
ἐπείδη εἰμέν μοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὅτι Ἰωσήφ υἱὸς τοῦ ποιμένος ἐστιν ὡς γῆς Χαναάν.
καὶ ἄθλια πεπίστευκα αὐτοῖς
καὶ πεπλάνημαι.
cαι ἐξοδεύσα αὐτόν
και λελάληκα περι αὐτοῦ πονηρά
και οὐκ ἤδειν ὅτι ὑπὸς σοῦ ἔστιν.
τὶς γὰρ ἀνθρώπων τέξεται τοιοῦτον κάλλος καὶ τοσαύτην σοφίαν καὶ ἀρετήν καὶ δύναμιν ὡς ὁ πάγκαλος Ἰωσήφ;

329 The lion will be discussed in Chapter three.
332 Douglas, loc. cit., p. 36.
333 Lipsett, op. cit., p. 105
334 Ibid., p. 107.
κύριε παρατίθημι σοι αὐτὸν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τὴν ψυχήν μου.
διατήρησον αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τῆς χάριτός σου.
καὶ τὸ κύριον παράθου με αὐτῷ εἰς παιδίσκην καὶ δούλην.
κἀγὼ στρώσω τὴν κλίνην αὐτοῦ καὶ νίψω τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ διακονήσω αὐτῷ
καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ δούλη καὶ δουλεύσω αὐτῷ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον.

Think of me
since I wronged You
being a virgin,
and ignorant, I was deceived
and I spoke slanders on my lord Joseph
for I, a wretch, I did not see that he is Your son
since people had told me that Joseph is the son of a shepherd from the land of Canaan.
And I, a wretch, believed them
and was deceived.
I scorned him
and I spoke wicked [words] about him
and I did not see that he is Your son.
For what man can birth such beauty, such wisdom, such virtue, and such strength as like the all-beautiful Joseph.
Lord, I place him before you, because I care for him above my own soul.
Watch over him in the wisdom of your grace.
You, Lord, place me before him as slave and maidservant.
And I shall make his bed, and wash his feet, and I shall minister to him
and I shall be his maidservant, and serve him for all time. (13.13-15)

Despite some important differences, this wishful conclusion to Aseneth’s prayer bears many similarities to her thoughts in 6.2-8. This linguistic connection, which shall be specifically discussed below, makes it impossible to escape the erotic context of the previous scenario. Aseneth’s passion is just as much a part of this scene as it was in 6.1. Two parts of this prayer must be emphasised: her description of Joseph’s beauty and her request to God.

When Aseneth first lays eyes on Joseph, she describes him as a solar entity, saying of him, τίς γὰρ ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ γῆς γεννήσει τοιοῦτον κάλλος; “for from what man on this earth could such beauty come?” (6.4) This idea is repeated and elongated here. Not only is Joseph beautiful, he is wise, excellent, and strong. Aseneth has picked up on some of the words her father used to describe Joseph, specifically his strength (δύναμις) and wisdom (σοφία), but she has added his virtue (ἀρετή), and “all-beauty” or “all-goodness” (πάγκαλος). Joseph’s superhuman attributes are more than a synopsis of novelistic qualities. He is the perfect novel hero, for he is beautiful and strong, but his wisdom and virtue go beyond the necessary qualities of the Greek heroes like Theagenes. His superlative attributes ultimately lend him a divine air. Aseneth sets up Joseph’s goodness in a direct contrast to her negative qualities. She even appears to include virginity as one of her negative
qualities here.335 In this prayer, her virginity is associated with her ignorance (ἀδαής). The Torah frequently uses the verb “to know [someone]” as a euphemism for sexual relations. It is not unlikely that virginity is here being shown as a lack of knowledge, for as a virgin, Aseneth cannot “know.” This may appear contradictory at first. Joseph is also a virgin, and yet said to be wise. How can one virgin be knowledgable and the other ignorant? This is where the fusion of eroticism and religiosity becomes crucial. Knowledge, though it may here be inspired by sexual euphemism, is not only carnal. Joseph knows God. In seeking to “know” Joseph, Aseneth seeks to know God, desiring not sexual experience, but religious knowledge. Moreover, the statement “being a virgin,” instead of connecting her ignorance to her state as παρθένος, could instead connect it to her gender.336 Indeed, this is quite possible, “[since] all versions of the text repeatedly [emphasise] Joseph’s virginity as well,”337 as Kraemer pointed out.

At the end of her inner thoughts in 6.2-8, Aseneth asks that her father give her to Joseph to be his slave and maidservant (6.8). There, the verb δότω, “give” (δίδωμι) was used. Here, she makes the same request of God, yet Aseneth uses the verb παράθου, “commend” or “place before” (παρατίθημι) instead. Two lines before, she places Joseph before God, using the same verb (παρατίθημι). This is most likely not a coincidental, but deliberate repetition of the verb. Aseneth’s prayers completely deconstruct her social and familial identities,338 only to rebuilt them so that she may become a member of Joseph’s family. Whereas her biological father could not give her to Joseph, despite both his and her wishes, her heavenly father, as head of the religious society to which she is seeking to adhere, can do so. This is thus divine sanctification of the couple’s marriage, just as that seen in the Greek novels.339 The repetition also imposes a clear hierarchy: Joseph is bellow before God, whereas Aseneth is bellow Joseph. The lack of symmetry becomes even more obvious.

Both of Aseneth’s requests to be given to Joseph lack the symmetry so crucial to the Greek novels, however.340 In both prayers, Aseneth asks not to be given as a bride to Joseph, but as εἰς παιδίσκην καὶ δούλην, “as his slave and maidservant.” Initially, that is all that Aseneth asks of her

335 Ibid., p. 106-107.
336 Kraemer, op. cit., p. 208.
337 Ibid.
338 Lipsett, op. cit., p. 105.
340 The importance of symmetry is, of course, most well known as David Konstan’s argument, Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994. However, most authors do note the parallels of age, physical beauty, and social status of the protagonists in the ancient novels.
father Pentephres. When she requests of God to be given to Joseph, she adds two important elements: κἀγὼ στρώσω τὴν κλίνην αὐτοῦ καὶ νίψω τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ, “and I shall make his bed, and wash his feet”. These two gestures, an addition unremarked upon by any other commentator, are not random. While discussing a wife’s duties towards her husband, Tractate Ketuboth of the Mishnah states that she must prepare his bed and drink, and wash his feet.341 These are not duties that can be handed off to another woman or servant. This is a chronologically sensitive piece of information, for the Mishnah, the first rabbinic text written, was composed in the early third century. As it was previously oral law, this does not help pinpoint an exact date for the redaction of Joseph and Aseneth, but it does suggest that this tale does indeed have Jewish origins. The theological and social ideas of the Mishnah were circulating before its composition, and Aseneth is praying to perform duties that the rabbinic texts obligates only a wife to do. This part of the prayer anchors Joseph and Aseneth in the real world of its creation. It discusses the roles of a wife, despite the references to servitude. Naturally, it is possible to imagine that this spousal imagery might evoke sexual connotations as well. This imagery does more, however, for it introduces a well-known dichotomy of antiquity, the “construction of feminine gender as subordinate and submissive” to the male gender.342 What is even more interesting in the use of this imagery is that it is not necessarily referring uniquely to historical women. Latter in the text, Aseneth refers to herself as the Lord’s slave and maidservant (ἵλεως ἔσο κύριε τῇ δούλῃ σου καὶ φεῖσαι τῆς παιδίσκης σου, 17.10). The fusion of her two passions, the slip from the erotic to the religious, means that Aseneth serves God, as well as Joseph, the figures of whom have become confused. This gives interesting grounds to a statement made by Ross Kraemer in regards to the purpose of this narrative. Aseneth’s subordination and submission to Joseph, the catalyst for her desire to be subservient, is not solely the representation of a woman and a man, but possibly of human to divine as well.343 “Before the masculine God... petitioners are as women and as slaves, whose status itself incorporates an element of gender differentiation, for in their relation to their owners, slaves, too, assumed the role of women in relation to men.”344

Aseneth’s admiration of Joseph brings about a radical change. She realises the error of her ways, and seeks to redeem herself through prayer. An important part of this is the shame of her previous behaviour, and the idea that she deserves nothing more than subservience. These parts of

341 Specifically, this tractate states that a wife may do so while niddah, impure, during her menstrual cycle, when contact with her husband would otherwise be forbidden.
342 Kraemer, op. cit., p. 196.
343 Ibid.
344 Ibid.
the text utilise imagery and language common to the novels to include an erotic element; but no amount of eroticism can mask the religious message found in this text: true love leads to God, and to Him is owed servitude. This penitence does, however, have its rewards.

In Praise of Marriage

As a result of her successful conversion, Aseneth receives the prize that all novel heroines ultimately obtain: marriage.\(^{345}\) Unlike her Greek “sisters,”\(^{346}\) however, Aseneth’s marriage is not a reward for having successfully defended her chastity through thick and thin, nor is this an ordinary marriage. Tinged with religious colours from the beginning, the mystic nature of the protagonists’ union is in the spotlight. Indeed, Aseneth’s marriage can be seen as secondary to her divine transformation.\(^{347}\) Not only is she accepted by God, but the ἄνθρωπος announces her transformation from “Aseneth” to πόλις καταφυγῆς, “City of Refuge” (15.7). She did not achieve this transformation on her own, though, and were it not for Joseph, her desire would not have been evoked, neither that of the erotic, nor of the religious persuasion. Aseneth is keenly aware of Joseph’s roll as catalyst in her transformation. Given all the luminous imagery, it is not out of place to describe him as the spark that lights her fire. This last sub-section will therefore analyse a section of Aseneth’s hymn, said after her marriage and the birth of her sons. This part of the hymn bring an end to certain motifs found in the passages studied above. It thus grants closure to the first part of Joseph and Aseneth, cementing some of the novel’s main messages.

Like many hymns, Aseneth’s is designed to give thanks. The narration says specifically that she is thankful for ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ἠξίωται ἀγαθοῖς παρὰ κυρίου, “all the good [things] of which she was thought worthy from the Lord” (21.10). This prayer has a classic structure. Using the refrain ἥμαρτον κύριε ἥμαρτον/ ἐνώπιόν σου πολλὰ ἥμαρτον, “I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned/ I have sinned many [sins] before you,” it recounts her story, summarising the known plot. Ten of the hymn’s eleven verses recount her previous arrogance, vanity, and ignorance; she emphasises her

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345 Cf. B. Egger’s article on the subject, “Women and Marriage in the Greek Novels: The Boundaries of Romance,” in J. Tatum (ed.), The Search for the Ancient Novel. Baltimore/London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. p. 260-280; S. Wiersma also discusses the rewarding of marriage and recognition of traditional female virtues in her 1990 article, “The Ancient Greek Novel and its Heroines: A Female Paradox,” Mnemosyne, vol. 43, 1, 1990, p. 109-123. In this context, “marriage” is more a way of designating that the hero and heroine are united definitively with their partner, for some of the novels have the marriage at the beginning, with the trials and separation coming after, whereas others have the marriage at the end.


347 Warren, loc. cit., p. 142-143.
virginity, which takes on a polyvalent symbolism, encoding “not just restraint, but excess, including excessive and misplaced piety.” Virginity is thus shown to be a transitory and not permanent state. Though laudable, it is not meant to be perpetually maintained. Only the final stanza discusses her transformation, simultaneously singing the praise of Joseph:

<ἥμαρτον κύριε ἥμαρτον
ἐνώπιόν σου πολλὰ ἥμαρτον>
ἐως οὗ ἦλθεν Ἰωσήφ ὁ δυνατός τοῦ θεοῦ.
αὐτὸς με καθεῖλεν ἀπὸ τῆς δυναστείας μου
καὶ ἐπέπνευσε με ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπερηφανίας μου
καὶ <τῷ> κάλλει <τῇ> σοφίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἐκράτησέ με
καὶ <τῷ> θεῷ τῶν αἰώνων και τῷ ἄρχοντι τοῦ <οἴκου> τοῦ ὑψίστου
καὶ ἐγένετο με τὴν θυσίαν καὶ τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ ἐδελέασέ με
καὶ τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ ἐστήριξέ με
καὶ ἔδωκέ μοι φαγεῖν ἄρτον ζωῆς καὶ πιεῖν ποτήριον σοφίας.
I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned,
Before you I have sinned many [sins],
until the moment Joseph, the powerful one of God, came.
He pulled me down from my position of power,
He brought me down from my arrogance,
with his beauty he caught me,
by his wisdom he conquered me, like a fish upon a hook,
with his spirit, like the bait of life, he enticed me,
by his strength he held me,
and I went to the God of eternity and to the Leader of the most high house,
and He gave to me to eat the bread of life, and to drink the cup of wisdom,
and I became his wife for time out of time. (21.21)

By now, the reader is familiar with the language used to describe Joseph in this prayer, as well as the violent imagery mixed in with it. Given their new context, however, it is possible to make further comments.

This passage presents the first violent image of Joseph. He is here shown to be a hunter, or warrior. The verbs ἀγρεύω (ἤγρευσε), κρατέω (ἐκράτησε), and δελεάζω (ἐδελέασε) mean “to take by hunting,” “to conquer,” and “to catch by bait,” respectively. Christoph Burchard comments that hunting metaphors are common in missionary language. Undoubtedly true, this language goes further, as it continues to play on the ambiguity of sexuality. This way of describing Aseneth’s attraction to Joseph, particularly in light of the eroticism discussed previously, makes a reader think not only of classic proselytism, but also of the romantic aspect of this story. The image of being

348 Lipsett, op. cit., p. 120.
taken by beauty recalls the tropes of falling in love violently upon first sight, and the hunter could very well be a tip of the hat to Eros and his methods. Where this text deviates from erotic norms is the two aspects of Joseph other than his beauty that are so enticing to Aseneth, his σοφία and πνεῦμα. This is a reminder that the purpose of *Joseph and Aseneth* is not to glorify a carnal union, but a meeting of souls.³⁵⁰ Yet another surprising deviation is that it is Joseph himself who does the hunting. There is no third party, no Eros to hunt down the lovers. The active hunting of Aseneth is another way in which Joseph becomes god-like, fulfilling the role otherwise occupied by Aphrodite’s son.

The translation of this passage into modern English has been done in order to distinguish between Aseneth’s “going to the God of Eternity,” (ἤγαγέ με τῷ θεῷ τῶν αἰώνων) and her marrying Joseph (ἐγενόμην αὐτοῦ νύμφη) by use of the conventional majuscule H for God, and the minuscule for Joseph. Alas, this translation lacks the magnificent subtlety of the Greek, a language in which such a distinction did not exist. This hymn, because it starts by recounting Aseneth’s experience chronologically, naturally makes a reader see the αὐτοῦ in the eleventh line of the last verse as a pronoun for Joseph. After the acceptance of her prayers by God, and visitation by the ἄνθρωπος, Aseneth is married to Joseph, the mortal man. Be it in her request to be his slave (6.8, 13,15), or in the words of her father (4.8) or the ἄνθρωπος (15.6), Aseneth is said to be bound to Joseph εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον, “for time out of time,” in one way or another. That she should be someone’s bride for time out of time is a clear reminder of Aseneth’s bond with Joseph. As has been reiterated many times, however, Aseneth’s longing for Joseph is carefully blended with religious passion through the ambiguities of eroticism. Particularly evident because of this hymn, Joseph awakens in her a longing for something she previously did not know; it is thanks to him that she rises above what she previously was. The solar imagery and this elevation make this text nearly Platonic in the drawing up of the soul. After stating the role played by Joseph in all of this, Aseneth does not say his name again. This hymn, by not repeating Joseph’s name, renders it unclear to whom Aseneth is actually wed “for all time.” The first implication is that it is Joseph, because of the reiteration of the eternity motif, but αὐτοῦ could here mean God. Moreover, He is designated as God of Eternity in the tenth line of the ultimate verse, linking him to Aseneth’s eternal marriage. Furthermore, upon first seeing their daughter in chapter 4.1, Pentephres and his wife rejoice for she looks ὡς νύμφην θεοῦ “like a bride of God”. This is very possibly a foreshadowing of the hymn itself and the ultimate purpose of

³⁵⁰ The emphasis on the spiritual aspect of this union puts the use of a hunting metaphor into parallel with texts discussing education in Antiquity. The pedagogic purposes of *Joseph and Aseneth* is discussed below, but this is yet another comparative approach that deserves attention in the future.
Aseneth’s conversion and transformation. This lends further credence to Kraemer’s suggestion that this story is not only about the marriage of a woman to a man, but of that to the soul to divine as well.  

The roles of God and Joseph notwithstanding, Aseneth does fail to mention one rather important character in her hymn: the ἄνθρωπος. The importance of this being is widely contested in the analysis of Joseph and Aseneth. In her defence of a third or fourth century date of redaction, Ross Kraemer has argued that Aseneth’ prayer focuses on calling down this angel, based on information concerning the adjuration of angelic beings across numerous religious texts from roughly the same time period as the redaction and circulation of Joseph and Aseneth, notably Jewish, Christian, and Judeo-Christian. If one follows this argumentation, Aseneth’s transformation therefore passes necessarily through this divine being. This has been debated and impugned, notably by John Collins, and Patricia Ahearne-Kroll, mainly because Aseneth never makes the summoning of the ἄνθρωπος her explicit, singular purpose — he comes unbidden though not unannounced (the morning star predicts his arrival). What is more, the text states that he is a herald, not a priestly figure: he announces her acceptance by the Most High God, he does not help her in her transformative process, which is completed by the time he arrives. While it is true that the arrival of the ἄνθρωπος follows certain literary descriptions of epiphany in the hellenic tradition, and he does impart divine knowledge to Aseneth, an action that has been read as a part of an initiation. The texts presents this apocalyptic-like transferal of τὰ ἀπόρρητα μυστήρια τοῦ ὑψίστου, “secret mysteries of the Highest” (16.14) as being the gift to the adept, not to the uninitiated or the person in the process of initiation. The hymn confessed by Aseneth appears to follow the conclusions reached separately by Collins and Ahearne-Kroll. The heavenly man is not there to initiate Aseneth. Her desire to transform and the completion of this act are entirely her own doing. Although the divine being visits Aseneth in both the long and the short version, the hymn only appears in the longer text. It would have been easy to include the angelic figure in this final prayer; yet he is not to be found. The hymn recounts how the desire of Aseneth was awakened in her upon seeing Joseph, a desire that lead her to the Lord God, to whom she sings the hymn (κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ,

351 Kraemer, op. cit., p. 22.
352 Ibid., p. 110-127.
353 Collins, loc. cit., p. 110.
The ἄνθρωπος resembles the figures of teachers which are so prevalent in the novel genre, not all of whom are so openly manipulative as Kalasiris has been seen to be.

The elaboration of Joseph’s importance and the omission of the ἄνθρωπος is important in other ways as well. As was discussed in Chapter one, the divine being plays an important role in the combining of eroticism and religious fervour. As was just stated, his heralding of Aseneth’s transformation also marks her acceptance into God’s family. He announces God’s intention to give her to Joseph as his bride (ἰδοὺ δὲδώκα σέ σήμερον νύμφην τῷ Ἰωσήφ καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται σου νυμφίος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον, 15.6). Most importantly, it marks her transformation, which she accomplished by herself, for which she is recognised and graced with the new name πόλις καταφυγῆς, “City of Refuge”. As protector of all other proselytes, Aseneth has her own part to play in this religious society. “Making Joseph the agent of her transformation belies Aseneth’s considerable autonomy, manifested throughout the story.”

The effacing of her own divine role lends some credence to a feminist reading of the two Greek versions, which states that the longer text is more androcentric than the shorter. By the same token, it lends Joseph more heavenly importance. He looks exactly like the ἄνθρωπος, with a few exceptions, and he is here shown to be vital to Aseneth’s transformation. No matter the interpretation of this hymn, this addition to the text does make one thing quite clear: the purpose of the first section of Joseph and Aseneth is to show the erotic transformation of a pagan girl, culminating in her union with the Highest God.

This union is described by Aseneth as being a marriage. The statement ἐγενόμην αὐτοῦ νύμφη, “I became his bride,” is her first positive reference to matrimony. Previously, marriage to Joseph was seen as a form of slavery, which she scorned at first (4.9), and openly wished for afterwards, either in language of matrimony (as in 13.13), or without it (as in 6.8). At no other moment is this relationship described as being a marriage by her. Now that divine sanction has been given, and the worldly ceremony is over, Aseneth appears to have embraced the idea of marriage.

Concluding Remarks: Joseph and Aseneth

Aseneth’s words regarding her feelings and Joseph are made up of a criss-crossing web of images and motifs present in both erotic and religious literature. The effect of such combinations is
to further confuse the boundaries between religious and erotic feelings. Mixing these two elements makes it impossible to say definitively whether Aseneth’s marriage is to Joseph or to God. In either case, the narrative shows an unrequited, self-destructive love that is transformed into an eternal, blessed union between Aseneth and her beloved. This does sound vaguely like the ideal romances, wherein unbridled love, outside the reassuring bonds of marriage, is seen as dangerous, functioning as a malady, but this is not the same.

Language in *Joseph and Aseneth* borrows from religious as well as social vocabulary. Due to its overt religiosity, yet appreciation of the pre-existing social order, *Joseph and Aseneth* appears as something of a hybrid between the ideal novels and the martyr accounts. Aseneth marries and has children, going from a wild young thing to a calm matron, and thus this text reaffirms certain societal values, such as marriage and childbearing; yet these historically important elements of a woman’s life appear secondary in comparison with the religious message espoused by this narrative.

In the case of both protagonists, their virginity is an exaggeratedly large part of their characterisation. The description of Joseph as παρθένος, and Aseneth’s allusion to Genesis 39, depict a virginal state chosen by the hero. Like the chastity in some martyr accounts, Joseph has clearly chosen to remain a virgin, although not to the grave, unlike the Christian heroes. This brings into question Aseneth’s virginity. As previously mentioned, whether the heroine chose chastity is unclear, although it is historically true that women were expected to arrive in their marriage beds unsoiled. These virginal lovers, although they do wed, like novel characters, also introduce a curious questioning of virginity, considering the prevalence of martyr accounts during this story’s heyday. As the text does not indicate whether the virginity of the heroine is voluntary or enforced, it is difficult to draw further conclusions.

A Meeting of Souls

Chariklea and Theagenes, like many heroes and heroines before them, believed themselves to be immune to love’s dart. Their illness once they succumb, shatters this idea. As was seen in the previous chapter, both protagonists suffer from lovesickness in the *Æthiopika*, although differently. Their acceptance of their “affliction” is equally divergent. This section will briefly explore these two characters’ verbal reactions to their own passion. These scenes are key moments of

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characterisation, as well as introductions to certain ideas explored over the course of the novel. After this, key examples of how they speak to or of each other once they have accepted their “affliction” will be analysed. Studying these parts of the *Æthiopika* permits a continuation of the themes brought up in Chapter one of this thesis. This subsection will analyse Theagenes first, then Chariklea. After discussing their individual acquiesces to a union, it will be necessary to consider how they reference each other afterwards. Kalasiris is (yet again) a central figure, as he seeks to unite the two lovers, and fulfil the Pythia’s prophecy.

**On the Wings of Love**

Theagenes is a quick character to study. Just as Heliodorus is brief in describing his symptoms, he is also quick in showing that Theagenes accepts his newfound feelings. Like Joseph, Theagenes is described as δυνάτος, although his power is clearly of a physical, not a sapiential, nature. This is shown by the use of “powerful” as a descriptor in 3.4.1: τότε ὅτι καὶ Θεαγένην ἠττηθῆναι ποτε δυνατὸν ἔγνωμεν, ἀλλ᾽ ἠττηθῆναι τοσοῦτον ὅσον ἀκραιφνὲς γυναικεῖον, “then we knew that the powerful Theagenes was to be defeated, he would yield to but one inviolate woman”. The purpose of highlighting Theagenes’ strength is to show that beauty, and thus love, is stronger even than physical ability. Initially shy about declaring his love of Chariklea to Kalasiris, Theagenes opens up when Kalasiris tells him that he, Kalasiris, already knows what ails the young hero (3.17.2). Swearing that he has never had sexual relations with a woman, Theagenes then admits ἀεὶ γὰρ διαπτύσαι πάσας καὶ γάμον αὐτὸν καὶ ἔρωτας εἴ τινος ἀκούσειεν, ἕως τὸ Χαρικλείας αὐτὸν διήλεξε κάλλος ὅτι μὴ φύσει καρτερίκος ἦν ἀλλ᾽ ἀξιεράστου γυναικὸς εἰς τὴν παρελθοῦσα ἀθέατος, “for he always spat on all [women], marriage, and love, if he heard of one, until Chariklea’s beauty refuted him, wherefore he was not steadfast in his soul, but blind to a woman worthy of love until that moment” (3.17.4). In his excellent book *Crafting Characters*, Koen de Temmerman comments: “Theagenes changes his view because, as he confesses himself, Chariclea’s beauty (τὸ Χαρικλείας... κάλλος) makes him [realise] that he is not naturally proof against temptation.”360 The conversation is framed in a philosophical discussion of one’s nature (φύσις). In this, he seems to have a similar experience to Aseneth’s, whose soul was simply waiting to lay eyes on the right beauty. Furthermore, when Theagenes discusses his love, he very quickly passes from shame to longing. As a young man, this passion is not as problematic, virginity not being at stake in his case. That he should be a virgin is remarkable, but not as awe inspiring as Chariklea’s virginal

state, as is shown by the virginity test they undergo in Ethiopia, and the reaction of the crowd (10.9). He is a man mimicking virginity, to which he does not cleave absolutely.

The conclusion reached by de Temmerman is thus that Theagenes “may be read as an instantiation of the stereotype informing novelistic heroism: one is devoted to chastity until one falls into the hands of Eros. His physis is presented as a stable entity but his own perception of it changes as a result of a specific circumstance (meeting Chariclea).” It is this change which permits Theagenes to say that Eros grants wings (4.2.3), whilst Chariklea wallows in self pity. The fact that Theagenes is a clichéd character will permit Chariklea to go beyond the conventions of romance, as shall be seen.

**Turning Malady into Matrimony**

Chariklea’s understanding of her passion is far more complex than Theagenes, although it too is discussed in terms of φύσις. Her acceptance of it is thus more difficult. As it turns out, this is why her illness is so much more serious than Theagenes: she is struggling against this new impulse. Chariklea holds sophrosyne above all others virtues. She therefore sees her feelings and her ideal as being irreconcilably opposed. This permits Heliodorus not only to characterise Chariklea, but to draw out moral and religious questions in his novel. It is here that Kalasiris’ cunning becomes so important.

As the reader knows, Kalasiris has been asked by her adoptive father to aide Chariklea. Charikles initially asked Kalasiris to make Chariklea fall in love (2.33.6), but now that she is ill, he asks that Kalasiris help cure her (3.9.4). Kalasiris uses this as an opportunity to become Chariklea’s mentor, specifically, a teacher of rhetorical artistry and guile. Just like Theagenes, Chariklea does not want to name the passion that plagues her, and Kalasiris will gain her trust by showing that he already knows what ails her (4.10.4), just as he did with Theagenes. The entire conversation is couched in both medical and moral language. This section analyses Chariklea’s feelings and Kalasiris’ arguments in the order of their presentation, which is logically how they are most easily understood.

363 de Temmerman, op. cit., p. 253.
364 Ibid., p. 254.
365 Ibid.
When confiding in Kalasiris, Chariklea speaks almost uniquely in negative terms, describing the shame of her situation: δυστυχεῖν, “to be unlucky” (4.10.2), νόσος, “illness” (4.10.2, 3 and 6), and τὸ... ἐπιθυμίας αἰσχὸν ὄνομα, “the shameful name of desire” (4.10.6). She says that it is shameful even to speak of such a subject, and that hers is a pain shameful to bear, and worse of which to hear speak (4.10.2). This plays into the shameful representation of succumbing to passion in women that Meike Keul-Deutscher reads in Heliodorus. While her passion may be more exaggerated than that of Theagenes, what is particularly interesting in Chariklea’s illness is not the shame described, but against whom the shame is levelled, and why. As she holds chastity to the highest order, Chariklea is distressed that she should give in to this passion. Eros is, of course, viewed as being an external force, one which has succeeding in breaching Chariklea’s defences, and it is this very breach that is so problematic for her. She does not understand this sentiment as an external phenomenon that has penetrated her boundaries, but as an internal one. “Chariclea’s adamancy is [also thematised] in terms of *physis*” She sees herself as supposedly immune, and thus sees herself as uniquely responsible for her “outbreak” of and succumbing to this passion. This crisis is therefore all the more unsettling for her. Whereas Aseneth was ashamed of her actions prior to her erotic encounter, Chariklea is ashamed of the experience in and of itself. This clashing of *eros* and *sophrosyne* makes Chariklea ill.

It is upon this understanding of her *physis* that Kalasiris will play in order to convince her to skip out of town with Theagenes. “Kalasiris imagines Chariclea’s *physis* itself to be unchangeably devoted to chastity but at the same time suggests that its impact upon her behaviour can and will be changed through his machinations.” He therefore informs her that she is hardly the first woman “to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous [Eros]” (4.10.5). He continues by explaining that the only acceptable means of controlling such urges is by “transforming ‘malady’ into ‘matrimony’” (4.10.6). It is again Koen de Temmerman, in his brilliant study of characterisation, who best explains the scene between Chariklea and Kalasiris: “Chariclea is shown to change her view of *sophrosynê* itself.” Marriage will permit Chariklea to maintain her chastity (if not her virginity),

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367 Ibid., p. 347.
368 Whitmarsh, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
372 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 1, lines 1750-1751. The imagery, along with Chariklea’s somewhat hysterical and indecisive reaction, made the quote seem appropriate.
373 This translation is taken from Burrus, *loc. cit.*, p. 75.
and this in turn explains her devout defence of the same throughout the entire book. Of course, she does not arrive at this rhetorical and moral conclusion all by herself; Kalasiris narrates his instrumental role in all of this. He is therefore the familiar pedagogical figure of the genre, and more besides, as he pulls strings like a master puppeteer in order to manipulate characters and plot.

Speaking of Souls

Refusals of matrimony are symbol laden affairs in the Æthiopika. Assenting to marriage is therefore just as significant. Once the hero and heroine agree to a union, their subsequent communications support the ideas introduced by rejection and acceptance of matrimony. The first section of this chapter discussed the ways in which Aseneth speaks of and to Joseph. The presence of God and the importance of His role were analysed. In the simple narrative of Joseph and Aseneth, this sort of discussion is fairly straightforward. The length and complexity of the Æthiopika make such a discussion more difficult. It is by no means impossible, of course, but is deserving of its own study, as is the case for all aspects of this remarkable novel considered in this thesis. For this reason, a few, select examples will be shown in the following subsections. Previously, Chariklea and Theagenes have been analysed, either for their word or action, in individual sub-sections. Here, they shall be analysed together, but according to a different criterion: whether they are speaking privately, or to others. The prior shall be discussed before the latter.

Heliodorus’ novel is constructed as a riddle, and so much of the information given early on in the book is not truly understood until later. As it is Kalasiris who recounts the when and how of the protagonists love affair, the reader does not truly understand the depth of their passion during the first few books. An example of this is when, captured by brigands, Theagenes comforts the wailing Chariklea by calling her ὃ φιλτάτη καὶ ψυχὴ ἐμή, “my beloved and my soul” (1.8.4). Later on in the story, when Chariklea and Theagenes have been separated, Chariklea (pretending to be the deceased Thisbe) is overheard lamenting the loss of her lover, and calls him ὃ ψυχὴ ἐμή, “my soul” (5.2.10). These tender scenes show more than affection and concern, however. The words bind the hero and heroine together, dissolving their individual identities. Novel heroes and heroines are so often shown lamenting the loss of the other, and wishing for death if separated, that it is something of a trope. In the case of Chariklea and Theagenes, it actually makes a good deal of sense. As

375 Ibid.
Kalasiris emphasises in his description of their first contact, Theagenes and Chariklea, as a couple, are of one soul: their individual spirits recognised their equal, that which is of the same substance (τὸ ὅμοιον ἐπιγιγνώσκης), upon seeing each other (3.5.4). What might otherwise be seen as a cute convention of romance (calling a sweetheart “my heart,” “my soul”, etc.), takes on a more profound connotation, once put into the context of Kalasiris’ philosophical explanation of falling in love. In his discussion of epiphany in the Greek novels, Robert Cioffi notes that they almost always follow the tripartite construction of divine apparitions: “the moment of divine self-revelation (usually expressed by φαίνω in the middle voice), mortal perception (most typically expressed by the aorist of ὁράω and/or the noun ὄψις), and, finally, recognition (often expressed by γιγνώσκω).”

He also states that fear replaces recognition in some cases. The meeting of Chariklea and Theagenes does not follow this formula perfectly, but does include some interesting elements. The youths see each other ἑώρων (ὁράω, 3.5.4), and their souls recognise ἐπιγιγνώσκης (ἐπιγιγνώσκω, 3.5.4) each other. One of their initial reactions is also fear (ἐπτοημένον, from the verb πτοέω, 3.5.4). The modes and tenses are not what is called for, nor does the verb φαίνω appear in the scene, but the similarities to epiphanic moments is remarkable. Love at first sight can be compared to divine revelation. The mystic readings of the novels made by Reinhold Merkelbach, although they were not originally based on the Æthiopika, and although they have been refuted many times, are relevant in this context. Moreover, Merkelbach has since studied the possibility of aretological influences in the novels, particularly in Heliodorus’ text. The overtly philosophical and subtly religious aspects of falling in love, which correspond to a moment in a religious ceremony, make the theories that this is a mystery text enticing. This cannot be stated outright, however. This possibility will be revisited again below. Whether or not Heliodorus was writing a religious text to the followers of a solar divinity is uncertain, but there is an undeniably philosophical and moral side to the Æthiopika. These protagonists are not simply carnally interested in each other, for their souls are destined to be together. They are connected at the soul, rather than at the hip.

The use of ὤ ψυχὴ ἐμή is only to be found in private moment in the Æthiopika, although the reader may witness these words either through the narrator or thanks to an eves dropping character.
Both Chariklea and Theagenes dialogue with other characters, though. Oration is fundamental in the Æthiopika, just as it was in the educative system of Antiquity. The importance of rhetoric, which has a pedagogic (and initiatory) aspect in this text, has been commented upon by many authors.\(^{382}\) The analysis of what Chariklea and Theagenes say about each other to others is a delicate subject, firstly because of the ways in which their rhetoric shows characterisation, and secondly because of its exploration of profound moral questioning about truth, lies, and speech. The adventures of the young couple lead them into many dangerous situations, as is typical of the romances. In order to keep themselves safe, Chariklea and Theagenes use a ruse on multiple occasions: they present themselves as brother and sister, instead of as betrothed lovers. They actually employ it so often that it becomes a “véritable stratégie du mensonge”.\(^{383}\) As Theagenes notes, this allows them to stay together, without arousing suspicion (1.25.6). And yet, their presentations of this idea are not identical, and reveal the author’s deeper reflections. The unraveling of the récit in Heliodorus means that, to the reader’s knowledge, the first use of this lie is made by Chariklea (1.21.3).\(^{384}\) Through her posture, her use of ruse, and her words, as well as her public’s reaction, Heliodorus associates Chariklea simultaneously with Odysseus and Penelope, and with the sirens.\(^{385}\) She promises to marry Thyamis, the brigand king, while intending to find a way out of the situation. The reader does not know at this early stage in the story that this scene shows, not Chariklea’s first, hesitant use of a lie, but her full acceptance of the power of speech as a tool to be employed as she sees fit.\(^{386}\) As the Homeric comparisons make clear, Chariklea is believed, establishing the notion that “rhetorical performance implies the construction of a split between words and intentions.”\(^{387}\) This very idea is contested by Theagenes when it is his turn to present Chariklea as his sister in order to protect her from Arsake, the Persian noblewoman. Unlike Chariklea, Theagenes is unable to use the ruse to its fullest, being of the opinion that doing and saying ill amount to one and the same (7.21.5). He will ultimately accept that it is unavoidable, however, although far more grudgingly that Chariklea.\(^{388}\) Koen de Temmerman concludes his study of the Thyamis/Chariklea and Arsake/Theagenes scenes by writing that “[the] protagonists’ changing attitudes to rhetoric

\(^{382}\) More recent commentary on both protagonists has been done by R. Brethes, “*Poiein aischra kai legein aischra, est ce vraiment la même chose? Ou la bouche souillée de Chariclée?*” in V. Rimell (ed.), *Seeing Tongues, Hearing Scripts: Orality and Representation in the Ancient Novel, Ancient Narrative, Supplementum 7.* Eelde/Groningen, Barkhuis and Groningen University Library, 2007. p. 223-256; and K. de Temmerman, *op. cit.*; but the article published by L. Pernot in 1992 is an excellent exploration of the development of rhetoric in Chariklea’s character, *loc. cit.*

\(^{383}\) *Ibid.*, p. 44.

\(^{384}\) Cf. p. 18, n. 126.

\(^{385}\) de Temmerman, *op. cit.*, p. 262-263.

\(^{386}\) Pernot refers to her as “experte dans l’art sophistique du mensonge et de la casuistique,” *loc. cit.*, p. 44.


attest to the fact that their awareness of its importance is depicted not statically but as an amalgam of skills which involve moral considerations and have to be passed on by teaching and imitation.”

For Chariklea, this teacher is Kalasiris, yet for Theagenes, it is Chariklea, who gives him “une lesson sur le ψεῦδος.”

Lying about being brother and sister allows Heliodorus to engage in a discussion of chastity and purity with subtlety and wit in a context removed from the religious framework within which it was presented. The protagonists end up being opposed to each other: Chariklea, who is willing to say anything to preserve her physical chastity, is contrasted to Theagenes, who believes that physical and verbal integrity must be mutually inclusive. Heliodorus thus engages in the moral question of purity, and what it means to stay in such a state.

More pertinent to this research is the fact that this lie, perpetrated by Chariklea and Theagenes to protect their chastity and each other from unwanted lovers, goes beyond rhetoric. It is connected to an erotic motif found in other, sometimes monotheistic, religious literature. The brother/sister motif was, by the third and fourth century, well known in the Roman Empire. At least as old as Abraham and Sarah’s sojourn in Egypt in the book of Genesis (20:2), and the Song of Songs (8:1), different accounts of martyrs and saints written by Christian authors regularly employed the motif. Indeed, the concept of “virginalised eroticism” was quite common. Although the concept of brother/husband and sister/wife is quite common in early Christian literature, the Life of Malchus in particular bears a striking similarity. The same ruse is employed by Malchus and a woman to whom he is to be married. As this is a Christian narrative, both members of the couple wish to maintain their celibacy. Once again, this idea is presented as being that of the woman’s, just as it is Chariklea who appears to come up with the lie in the Æthiopika. Be it in Heliodorus’ work or in the Christian stories, the use of this lie is to permit the couple to stay together, and thus bolster each other’s morale, but also to preserve their chastity, ultimately showing that these texts are not simply about sex, but about something greater. Lying about being related in Heliodorus is therefore not a way to tone down the eroticism between the hero and heroine, but to postpone it to a later

389 Ibid.
390 Ibid., p. 269.
391 Pernot, loc. cit., p. 44.
392 Brethes, loc. cit., p. 246.
393 Ibid., p. 247.
394 Term borrowed from Burrus, loc. cit., p. 56.

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moment, once the act is sanctified by marriage.

That Chariklea and Theagenes are presented on numerous occasions as siblings also draws them closer together than if they were simply lovers. In this way, they are a part of the same “family,” stemming from one source, just like their souls. The family to which they belong is not necessarily mortal, however. This fraternal fib, which brings to mind monotheistic literature circulating widely at the time, is also a way of recalling the polytheism of the Æthiopika itself. Was it not a dream of Apollo and Artemis that convinced Kalasiris to spirit the youths out of Delphi? This lie alines the hero and heroine with the Olympian twins. Furthermore, Chariklea is regularly likened to the goddess of hunt during her adventures. The sororal subterfuge also acts as a reminder of the solar deities centrality to the story-telling.

**Concluding Remarks: the Æthiopika**

Speaking of passion in the Æthiopika is complex. It is wrapped up in moral judgements made by the characters and the narrator. The result is that this couple is united by something more than desires of the flesh. Their souls met, and through Kalasiris’ ministrations, the two constituted a unit. Through his discussions with both protagonists, but particularly in his relationship with Chariklea, Kalasiris shows himself to be not only a wily charlatan, but also a teacher, that classic novelistic character. His constant presence brings out the motifs of the pedagogic figure who helps pave the road to adulthood, underscoring the idea of initiation present in these romances. Chariklea and Theagenes’ initiation is not purely a transition from adolescence, to adulthood, however. The religiosity of this text, infused with philosophical ideals, makes their initiation something far greater than a change in social status due to their age and marriage. This first encounter is wrapped up in solar and philosophical imagery. Although they do not discuss gods in any of the scenes analysed in the above subsections, deities, and Apollo in particular, are vital to the Æthiopika. Chapter three will explore this in greater detail.

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396 de Temmerman, *op. cit.*, p. 256.
397 The Greek novels have a thorough series of categories related to age. The idea of adolescence as it is now understood is, of course, highly anachronistic for discussions of Antiquity, but Chariklea and Theagenes correspond to the categories of κόρη “young girl,” or παρθένος, “maiden,” and νεανίς “young man,” respectively. This terminology means that both characters have entered puberty, and are no longer παιδες, “children,” but neither are they adults (γυνη and ἄνηρ, woman and man). Lalanne, *op. cit.*, p. 70-72.

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Comparative Conclusion

The second chapter of this thesis undertook the analysis of the refusals and acceptances of marriage made by the protagonists of *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika*. The comparison of all four characters will prove to be most useful in the understanding of values eschewed and espoused in both works of fiction.

If Chariklea and Theagenes were set up as two poles of a spectrum, they would appear as opposites, with Theagenes on one end as the quintessential novel hero, a character who refuses love until it whacks him upside the head, but who accepts it readily enough after the fact;398 and with Chariklea on the other, as a character so consumed by her principles that she prefers to emotionally martyr herself rather than to give in to love.399 These are, of course, exaggerated extremes, but they serve remarkably well as ways of highlighting the characters of *Joseph and Aseneth*. Both *Joseph and Aseneth* fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum of romantic suffering. More specifically, Aseneth falls squarely onto the spectrum, while Joseph falls slightly under the line. Aseneth, although she has a certain set of values, does no hesitate to discard them upon falling in love. The fact that she had these values, as erroneous as they are shown to be, makes her like Chariklea; the speed and ease with which she changes her ideas, however, makes her like Theagenes.

The one character who does not fit this spectrum is Joseph. Even though he openly declares a set of values, and despite being so very like the novel heros of the Greek world, when he is κατενύγη, struck, in chapter 8.8, it is by Aseneth’s tears. He does not “fall in love” with the heroine until much later. In the *Æthiopika*, Heliodorus presents his readers with a plethora of possible solutions, conclusions, and interpretations to the morales embodied by his characters. *Joseph and Aseneth* is not so ambiguous. By not having Joseph succumb to any violent passions, he and his values are clearly shown to be superior to those of his future bride.

Because both protagonists in *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika* initially refuse either marriage or romance, they do appear similar on the surface. Upon closer inspect, however, they are revealed to be very different. Whereas Chariklea and Theagenes were refusing love, romance, sex and marriage, Aseneth and Joseph were refusing marriage, but not necessarily carnal relations or love — they simply had preconceived notions about with whom these different relationships ought to be consummated. Yet another stark contrast is the way in which these characters arrive at the conclusion of their conversions or transformations. It is quite clear to any reader of Chariklea and

399 Ibid., p. 254.
Theagenes’ adventures that, were it not for Kalasiris, nothing would be possible. The couple would have withered away, unable to do anything but mope for each other, if the Egyptian charlatan did not meddle in their affaires. Both the hero and heroine are in many ways at the mercy of that man. Unlike her Greek novel counterparts, Aseneth is incredibly independent. Deciding to act of her own volition, she undertakes her own conversion, resulting in a visit from the ἄνθρωπος. This divine creature’s arrival heralds her mystic transformation from Aseneth to πολίς καταφυγῆς, and he imparts unto her spiritual wisdom, but he does not actually help her convert. Indeed, had he done so, the transformation would have been less significant because readers of this religious text, though able to undertake Aseneth’s portion of the conversion, would not necessarily have been graced by an angelic visitor. The comparison of Kalasiris and the ἄνθρωπος throw into sharp contrast the initial helplessness of Chariklea and Theagenes and the spiritual resourcefulness displayed by Aseneth.

Lastly, this chapter has shed considerable light on the ways in which these couples, or at least these characters, conceive of their relationship. Theagenes and Chariklea are a team, two halves of one soul. This is evident from the moment they clap eyes on each other. Joseph and Aseneth is a text that, although it rings of ideal romance, rings hollow. This is not a reference to the religiosity of the story and its purpose, but to the inequality of its relationships. The ἐμὴ ψυχή said by Chariklea and Theagenes is by no means the same as κύριε παρατίθημί σοι αὐτὸν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἀὑτὸν ὑπὲρ τὴν ψυχήν μου (13.15). Aseneth most assuredly borrows from the conventions of romance and other Greek literature when speaking of Joseph, but, as this comparison has shown, hers is not the story of equal partners facing hell and high waters in order to be together. Aseneth is all on her own.
CHAPTER THREE: Proving One’s Affections

More so than has been properly emphasised in either of the previous chapters, the overt religiosity of *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika* draws these two novels together. Both narratives describe the creation of the couple, the testing of individual characters, and the triumph and union of both the individuals and their relationship with language, imagery and motifs that links them to the divine. Furthermore, two elements common to the novel genre have been mentioned continuously, yet without further comment: violence, which Kathryn Chew showed to be “a staple part of the entertainment value of the Greek novels,” 400 and secondly, the characters’ relation to the god(s) of their stories, which closely resembles Froma Zeitlin’s comments on “an increased level of religious engagement, one that promoted a desire for closer personal contact with the gods”. 401 The time has come to meet both of these ideas head on, taking up the motifs of trial and suffering in this third and final chapter. The analysis of ordeals seen through a theological prism will grant insight into the type of religious experiences presented in these novels.

This chapter will therefore not analyse the individual moments of conflict within these narratives, but the overall relationship between the couple and the god(s) in question, as the different types of animosity and conflict reveal the dialogue between human and immortal. This approach is a departure from the ways in which the trials of the novel protagonists, particularly the heroines, have been previously studied. Analyses done by authors such as Kathryn Chew, 402 Brigitte Egger, 403 Kathrine Haynes, 404 Sophie Lalanne, 405 and Judith Perkins 406 show how the assaults on the heroines are representative of transformation and social education, 407 as well as attacks on society and its values, 408 as symbolised by the bodies of these young women. 409 This research will be

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407 Cf. Lalanne, *op. cit.*
included in this section, but will not be the focus of the following discussion. This chapter, which recognises the social significance of the novel characters, will go beyond any individual attacks to put both the characters and their relationship back into the context of their stories, as well as the societies that generated them. In other words, the way the couple is conceived of, constituted and tested as a unit by the divine is here more important that the sufferings of the individual characters. The exploration of the role of the divine is done in this final chapter, although it could have been analysed elsewhere, because it is most easily ascertained in both cases in relation to the sufferings endured by Aseneth, and Chariklea and Theagenes in these different texts than at other points in the narratives. Whereas the first chapter of this thesis was mostly interested in body language, and thus corporeal descriptions, and the second in statements made by the lovers, and thus on words, this final chapter, in its analysis of suffering, love, and the gods, will look at both verbal and bodily clues taken from the texts. Although most of the chapter will be interested in things said either by characters or narrators, the place of the body within the narrative will continue to be important throughout the following discussion.

This last chapter is divided much as the first two were, discussing *Joseph and Aseneth* in a first section, and Heliodorus’ work in a second. Divided into three parts, the subsections dedicated to *Joseph and Aseneth* will begin by looking at the words surrounding the relationship between Aseneth and Joseph (or God), because the vocabulary surrounding the romantic couple is a key component to the establishment of a divine union. Then, moving from the big picture to the small, the ordeals involved in her conversion as Aseneth describes them herself will be considered for the ways in which conflict permits Aseneth to commune with God. Finally, the attempt made on the heroine’s chastity in the last third of the story will be studied, as it reveals a continued interest in the relationship between mortals and their God. Likewise, the section concerned with the *Æthiopika* will be divided into three sections. The first will look at the divine ordinances involved in the creation the romantic couple, for this sets up the reader’s nascent understanding of religion in the plot. The second two will look at moments in which Chariklea and Theagenes discuss the implications of being the centre of divine attention, either for good or ill because it displays the relationship between the individual characters and their gods. Thirdly, the treatment of religious motifs in the novel’s conclusion will show the prolonged concerns of the novel regarding relationships between humans, and between mortals and immortals.
A Religious Romance: *Joseph and Aseneth*

Alterations to what was just said must be made immediately in the case of *Joseph and Aseneth*. As it should be luminously clear by now, there is none of the parallel sufferings of protagonists of the ideal novels\(^{410}\) to be found in this Jewish story. Whereas the couple in the novel is removed from the world they know, traveling through a liminal space together,\(^{411}\) and are then reintegrated back into society as a unit,\(^{412}\) Aseneth undergoes the experience of liminality alone.\(^{413}\) Joseph is, however, present throughout, either through direct evocation, or through textual reminders. The narrative, either through the omniscient narrator, or through different characters, works very hard to construct an image of a divinely constituted couple. More specifically, the texts goes to great lengths to show that Aseneth is an appropriate wife for the patriarch.\(^ {414}\) This first section of Chapter three will explore this through three subsections dedicated to the divine and suffering for the divine. A chronologic structure is inadequate for the following analysis, and thus the sections are mostly thematic. It is first necessary to show how Aseneth and Joseph are described or shown to be meant for each other. Secondly, the struggles and rewards of Aseneth’s conversion will be analysed. These first two sections deal with individual ordeals undergone by the heroine. The final subsection explores a trial faced by the couple. The last third of the novel depicts a conflict that concerns both Aseneth and Joseph. This last section will analyse this mutual conflict. However, the scene hinges on Aseneth, despite its significance for the character of Joseph as well. The asymmetry between *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika* is felt immediately.

**Divine Words**

The location in which *Joseph and Aseneth* meet for the first time is unlike any of the encounters of the heroes and heroines of the ideal romances. In the canonical romances, a youth and a maiden, alike in beauty, virtuosity, and age,\(^ {415}\) lock eyes under the watchful surveillance of a god.

\[^{412}\] Egger, *op. cit.*, p. 328, comments “The fantasy of leaving behind the world of parents on a voyage to remote lands also involves the theme of the initiation of teenagers into a life without parental restrictions: into self-reliance, sexuality and adulthood.”
\[^{415}\] Lalanne, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
The construction of the couple as divinely joined is thus quite simple. Despite the practical nature of these public encounters, the location of the first sightings lends itself to religious readings of the novels well. Conversely, the eponymous protagonists of *Joseph and Aseneth* meet in the private home of Pentephres, Aseneth’s father. While he is priest of Heliopolis, and therefore lends a certain gravitas to the encounter, this is not synonymous to the holiday meetings of Chariklea and Theagenes. It heralds a more intimate experience than that had by the Greek protagonists. Moreover, Aseneth and Joseph are not well suited, save for their beauty, for Joseph is considerably older than Aseneth, as he is already an adult, whilst she is still a maiden. While this is standard in the Greek world, it is not in the novels, where the couple are youths of proximate age. Because of the obvious dissimilarities between the two characters, this first sub-section will explore the ways in which the narrative shows that Joseph and Aseneth are destined for each other, both before and after Aseneth’s conversion. Three motifs are used to convey this sense of unity between the protagonists: the characters clothes, the repetition of τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον, and the contact between Aseneth and Joseph.

Prior to Aseneth’s voluntary seclusion and conversion, certain visual hints are made regarding the heroine and her beau. These images are continued through to the post-conversion moments. They shall be addressed in that order. The most flagrant aspect of the two characters’ similarities is in the presentation of their clothes. When Aseneth’ hears of her parents’ arrival, she hurries to dress herself:

καὶ ἔσπευσεν Ἀσενὲθ εἰς τὸν θάλαμον αὐτῆς ὅπου ἔκειντο αἱ στολαὶ αὐτῆς καὶ ἐνεδύσατο στολὴν βυσσίνην ἐξ ὑακίνθου χρυσούφη καὶ ἐζώσατο ζώνην χρυσῆν καὶ ψέλια εἰς τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τοὺς πόδας αὐτῆς ἔθετο καὶ ἀναξυρίδας χρυσᾶς περιέθηκε τοῖς ποσί πόδις αὐτῆς καὶ περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτῆς περιέθετο κόσμον πολύτιμον καὶ λίθους πολυτελεῖς ὁπίνες ἦσαν <περιηρτημένοι> πάντοθεν καὶ ἦσαν τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν θεῶν τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἐγκεκολαμμένα πανταχοῦ ἐπί τε τῶν ψελίων καὶ τοῖς πρόσωπα τῶν εἰδώλων πάντων ἦσαν ἐκτετυπωμένα ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔθηκε <τιάραν> ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς καὶ διάδημα ἔσφιγξε περὶ τοὺς κροτάφους αὐτῆς καὶ θερίστρῳ κατεκάλυψε τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς.

And Aseneth hastened to her room where lay her robes, and she put on a linen robe of hyacinth and embroidered with gold, and she girded herself with a golden sash. She put bracelets upon her arms and feet, and she put golden trousers around her feet. Around her neck she placed a golden ornament and costly stones that were hung from all sides, and the anklets and stones were carved everywhere with the names of the gods of Egypt and the faces of all the idols were worked in relief on them. And she placed a tiara upon her head and fastened a diadem upon her temples, and she covered her head with a veil. (3.6)

417 For discussion of this, cf. Chapter two, p. 60-61.
The lavishness of Aseneth’s attire is to be expected from a novel heroine, a young woman associated with both the upper echelons of society, as well as one so clearly devout. Aseneth wears not only markers of her social rank (purple, gold, and precious stones), but also of her piety (the names and images of the Egyptian gods). Beyond their various social and religious functions, Aseneth’s clothing have a proleptic function within the narrative, as shall be seen.

Later, Joseph’s attire is just as explicitly detailed:

Joseph was displaying a special white tunic, and the robe put around him was purple, of linen embroidered with gold, and a golden crown [was] upon his brow and in the ring of the crown were twelve precious stones, and above the twelve stones were twelve golden rays of light. In his left hand was a royal staff and in the right hand was an olive branch, and it was full of fruit, and in the fruits there was much oil. (5.5)

When set beside Aseneth’s clothes, certain aspects of Joseph’s garb stand out immediately. Both Joseph and Aseneth wear στολαί, “robes,” of linen (βυσσίνην, 3.6; ἐκ βύσσου, 5.5) which are χρυσουφές, “woven with gold.” The robes diverge in that Joseph’s is πορφυρᾶ, “purple,” and Aseneth’s is ὑάκινθος, “hyacinth” or “blue;” yet in both descriptions, the colour is described before the gold, thus drawing a parallel between the descriptions. And while they both wear precious stones and headdresses, these similarities also highlight differences. Joseph’s crown (στέφανος) and twelve rays show his affinities with a solar deity,419 later to be identified with ὁ θεός ὁ ὕψιστος, “the Highest God,” of a henotheistic or possibility monotheistic cult Aseneth’s diadem (διάδημα) connects her to the polytheistic religion of Egypt. Joseph’s crown is decorated with twelve precious stones, possibly symbolic of the Tribes of Israel, whereas Aseneth’s numerous costly stones are engraved with the names and faces of pagan gods. The image created of the two during their first encounter is thus of a parallelism, not an overlapping of each other, but of persons who are more similar than they are dissimilar nonetheless. The text is clearly inviting a comparison of the protagonists, though. Moreover, if such details concerning clothing are given, it stands to reason that it is important. In this first comparison, their similar, yet not identical garb is a glimpse of a possible union to come.

It is only after Aseneth’s transformation that their apparel will truly match:

καὶ ἐξήνεγκε τὴν στολὴν αὐτῆς τὴν πρώτην τοῦ γάμου ὡς ἀστραπὴν τῷ εἴδει καὶ ἐνεδύσατο αὐτήν. καὶ περιεζώσατο ζώνην χρυσῆν καὶ βασιλικὴν ἥτις ἦν διὰ λίθων τιμίων. καὶ περιέθηκεν ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῆς ψέλια χρυσὰ καὶ εἰς τοὺς πόδας ἀναξυρίδας χρυσὰς καὶ κόσμον τίμιον περιέθηκε περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτῆς <ἐν ᾧ> ἦσαν λίθοι πολυτελεῖς τίμιοι ἠρτημένοι ἀναρίθμητοι καὶ στέφανον χρυσοῦν περιέθηκαν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐν τῷ στεφάνῳ ἦν λίθος υάκινθος μέγας καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ λίθου τοῦ μεγάλου ἦσαν ἔξι λίθοι πολυτελεῖς, καὶ θερίστρῳ κατεκάλυπτε τὴν κεφαλήν αὐτῆς ὡς νύμφη καὶ ἔλαβεν σκῆπτρον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς.

And she brought for her robe, the first [one] of marriage, like lightening to behold. And she donned [it]. She girded herself with a royal, golden girdle, that had valuable stones along it. She put golden bracelets around her arms and golden trousers around her feet and she placed around her neck a valuable ornament, in it countless costly and valuable stones were hung, and she put upon her head a golden crown, and in the front of the crown upon her brow was a large hyacinth stone, and circling the large stone were precious stones. She veiled her head with a veil like a bride, and took a sceptre in her hand. (18.5-6)

As Meredith Warren points out, this second scene of Aseneth dressing is remarkably similar to the first. In the narrative’s context, the purpose of both of her changes of clothes is to go and meet someone. Warren calls them “the two passages where Aseneth clothes herself to prepare for Joseph.” The first time is actually to meet her parents, however, as she does not know that Joseph will be visiting. This appears to be a minor point, but it does show that Aseneth’s motivation in dressing up is social and religious in both instances: initially due to her false piety, and subsequently because of her newfound and correct faith. This correction takes nothing away from either the parallels in the descriptions, or Warren’s excellent analysis of them. The descriptions of Joseph in 5.5 and of Aseneth in 18.5-6 border on ascriptions of angelic beauty. This new description of Aseneth contains a crown (στέφανος) and a sceptre (σκῆπτρον), which are ocular reminders of Joseph’s crown and his royal staff (στέφανος and ῥάβδος βασιλική, 5.6). The vocabulary used for Aseneth’s sceptre and Joseph’s royal staff are different, but this is symbolic of the characters’ different functions. As Joseph bears a ῥάβδος βασιλική, a royal staff, it is indicative of his political functions; Aseneth carries a σκῆπτρον, a sceptre, which is not necessary a token of influence or authority, but is a visual analogy to Joseph figuration. Although the protagonists have different purposes, “Aseneth’s sceptre and her elaborate crown associate her with Joseph,” and what was foreshadowed by the first description comes to pass in the second.

421 Ibid., p. 149.
422 Chesnutt, loc. cit., p. 31.
A hitherto uncommented aspect of Aseneth’s dress is the bridal simile. This is far more obvious in the second description of her vestments, for her robe is described as τὴν στολήν αὐτῆς τὴν πρώτην τοῦ γάμου “her robe, the first [one] of marriage,” and she is said to be like a bride in that she veils her head (καὶ θερίστρῳ κατεκάλυψε τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς ὡς νύμφη). Because the angelic visitor has already declared to Aseneth that she and Joseph are to be wed, this language comes as little surprise. The first comparison of Aseneth to a bride is in chapter 4, though, when her parents see her κεκοσμημένην ὡς νύμφην θεοῦ, “adorned like a bride of god.” (4.1) In a novel that takes great pains to describe clothing, this is not a throw away comment. When Aseneth first dons her apparel, the slide from carnal to holy passion has not yet been displayed in the narrative. The overly divine comparison of “like a bride of god,” is (a not so subtle) foreshadowing of the union to come. The more refined shift in meaning between eroticism and religiosity, between Joseph and God, which has been repeatedly evoked in this thesis, is complete by the time Aseneth’s wedding clothes are described. Aseneth’s physical clothing is yet another way in which the ambiguity of this mixture is played out through the text, for although her garments bring her into parallel with Joseph, her countenance actually causes her character to approach the άνθρωπος and divinity, although this will be explored in depth in the next subsection. Clothing is therefore shown to be one of the key ways in which the couple is placed on equal footing, but it also links the protagonists to the divine.

Repetition of certain themes and motifs, though common in many types of literature, is flagrant in Joseph and Aseneth. It is very possible that this is a result of an orally based beginning of what is now a piece of written literature. The repetition of one aspect in particular in this story also creates a sense of divine purpose i.e. time. The phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον has already been discussed in passing. Here, the places in the narrative where it is found, as well as who is speaking will be analysed. This expression reveals a mystic bond between Aseneth and Joseph, thus aiding in the establishment of this couple as being selected by the divine. The exact phrase is repeated thirteen times in Joseph and Aseneth. It is most frequently used to describe the duration of Aseneth and Joseph’s union. The first use comes at the end of Pentephes’ speech to his daughter, discussed in Chapter two. The earliest attestation of this expression is the Septuagint, and it can be

424 Ibid.
425 Ibid., p. 150, and p. 152.
427 At 4.8; 6.8; 8.9; 12.11; 13.5; 15.6; 15.7; 15.9; 15.12x; 16.14; 17.6; 19.5; and 21.3.
428 Cf. p. 58-61

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found in texts as far ranging as Exodus, the Book of Judith, and psalms. It is not necessarily employed in a context implying mysticism. What makes this phrase more profound in Joseph and Aseneth is its repetition and context. In the case of Pentephres, it comes at the end of a speech regarding the virtues of the heavenly Joseph, and after his daughter has been described ὡς νύμφην θεοῦ, “like a bride of God”. Nor is Pentephres the only paternal figure to say such things. After her conversion, Joseph announces to Pharaoh, who is like a father to him, that he wishes to be wed to Aseneth (20.9). The king’s response is: οὐκ ἰδοὺ αὕτη κατεγγύηταί σοι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος; καὶ ἔσται σοι γυνή ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον, “Behold, was she not declared to you from eternity? And she shall be your wife from now until time out of time” (21.3). Pharaoh’s refusal of matrimony with Aseneth to his son now makes sense — he knew all along that she was intended for Joseph (1.9). But how? The text gives no hints, but the reader understands that something spiritual is at work. Just as their clothing announced their future compatibility, Pentephres’ introduction of the time motif also heralded their divine union. Furthermore, the God of Joseph and Aseneth is described as ὁ θεὸς τῶν αἰώνων twice (12.1 and 21.21), and Aseneth describes herself as a bride — εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας <τῶν αἰώνων> — in her hymn (21.21). As stated above, the repetition of ὁ αἰών in chapter 21 shows the ultimate fusion of Joseph and God, as well as erotic and religious passion. Taken altogether, though, the eternity motif makes Aseneth’s union to Joseph appear as not only an inevitability of the story, but as a predetermined event in the history of the world. Despite being a clearly literary motif in this narrative, the eternal union of Aseneth and Joseph is a part of the “long run” planned by God.429

Lastly, the interactions between Aseneth and Joseph before and after her conversion are designed to make the reader believe that this couple has been preordained by the Heavens. In the first chapter, Aseneth’s reaction to a blessing said over her by Joseph was analysed. This prayer is an important part of Aseneth’s conversion, but also to the notion of a divine relationship between the protagonists. The benediction unfolds follows:

Κύριε ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς μου Ἰσραήλ
ὁ ψιστὸς ὁ δυνατὸς τοῦ Ἰακώβ
ὁ ζωοποιήσας τὰ πάντα
καὶ καλέσας ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸ φῶς
καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς πλάνης εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν
καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωήν

Lord, God of my father Israel,  
Highest, powerful [God] of Jacob,  
Life-maker of all [living creatures],  
You who calls from the darkness to light,  
and from deception to truth,  
and from death to life,  
You, Lord, bless this virgin,  
and renew her in Your spirit,  
and mould her by Your secret hand  
and bring her back to life in Your life,  
and she will eat Your bread of life,  
and she will drink of your cup of blessings,  
and include her among your people, who You chose before all [things] came into being,  
and she shall be brought into Your place of rest that you prepared for Your chosen [people],  
and she shall live in Your eternal life until time eternal. (8.9)

Joseph’s blessing over Aseneth is often brushed aside in scholarly research, having been deemed “largely irrelevant.” This passage has also been interpreted as characterisation of Joseph. By rejecting his host’s daughter, he appears aloof, snobby, even condescending. For the most part, the imagery is standard to concepts of conversion, moving from the wrong faith, represented by darkness, deception and death, to true belief, through the metonymy of light, truth, and life. This is true insofar as the rites and rituals of conversion are represented by this text. Aseneth is “motivated by awe at Joseph’s numinous beauty,” as is seen in her love-struck reaction to his arrival, but his words are important to understanding certain themes within the novel, if not the plot. As discussed in Chapter one, Aseneth is just as struck (κατενύγη) by his words as by his appearance. What is most intriguing in the context of this study is what Joseph requests of the Highest God in the final three lines of his blessing. Joseph prays that Aseneth be counted among the chosen people. This people was not only singled out, but ὃν ἐξελέξω πρὶν γενέσθαι τὰ πάντα,

430 Douglas, loc. cit., p. 36.  
433 Douglas, loc. cit., p. 36.  
“[chosen] before all [things] came into being.” It stands to reason that, if the Highest God chose the collective of His people before creation, then the individuals of that mass would also have been chosen. The reader, who already suspects that Aseneth will convert in order to be with Joseph, is lead to believe that Aseneth, who will join the elect of God, was already elect, although her “choseness” has more to do with having been singled out to convert at this moment in the narrative. Thanks to Genesis 41, the marriage of Aseneth and Joseph is already known, thus the narrative is playing on how, and not if, they will be united. To be a part of the chosen people is to have been singled out from before time began. Aseneth is thus destined to be with Joseph, just as she was destined to convert.

When Joseph first lays eyes on Aseneth, his instinct is to drive her away. He does not recognise that she is his intended. Based on scenes of a similar style in other genres, such as tragedy and comedy, recognition is important in the ancient novels.\textsuperscript{435} \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} does include a scene of recognition between the lovers, but, like so many others tropes, this one is also bent to the purpose of the religious writing.\textsuperscript{436} The second meeting of Aseneth and Joseph is diametrically opposite to the first. Instead of fearing the woman before him, καὶ ἐξέτεινε τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκάλεσε τὴν Ἀσενὲθ <ἐν> νεύματι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ, “Joseph saw her and was astonished by her beauty.” (19.4). After a brief exchange, ἐξέτεινε τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκάλεσε τὴν Ἀσενὲθ <ἐν> νεύματι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ, “he extended his hands, and Joseph called Aseneth with a wink of his eye” (19.10). This is yet another novelistic trope, for lovers are often able to communicate without vocalising.\textsuperscript{437} Now that Aseneth has undergone her divine transformation and conversion, Joseph recognises her as a wife perfectly suited to him.\textsuperscript{438} Whereas Aseneth initially trembled at the sight of Joseph, an action which now shows itself to be one of an inferior before a superior, or of a mortal before the divine,\textsuperscript{439} Joseph is astonished by her beauty, reacting to it as to the divine.\textsuperscript{440} After the transformation for which he prayed, Aseneth has become Joseph’s equal.

As a result of Aseneth’s successful conversion, she will be permitted to marry Joseph. The narrative does not make the marriage a climactic scene in the story, though. Far more interesting is what happens right after Joseph calls to Aseneth with his eyes:

\begin{verbatim}
καὶ <ἐξέτεινε> καὶ Ασενὲθ τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῆς καὶ ἔδραμε πρὸς Ἰωσήφ καὶ <ἐπεσεν> ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{436} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 208.
\textsuperscript{437} One thinks of \textit{Clitophon and Leucippe}, for example: 7.16.4.
\textsuperscript{438} Montiglio, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 206.
\textsuperscript{439} Kraemer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{440} Montiglio, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 208.
And Aseneth extended her hands and ran to Joseph and fell upon his chest and he took her in his arms, and Aseneth [took] him [in hers], and they embraced a long time, and clung [to each other]. And they both came to life by means of their breath. And Joseph kissed Aseneth, and gave to her the breath of life, and he kissed her a second time and gave to her the soul breath of wisdom, and he kissed her a third time and gave to her the soul of truth. And they embraced a long time, and bound a bond around their hands. (19.10-11, 20.1)

All of the erotic tension built up in the narrative is released in these few sentences. Given the profound nature of the embraces shared, the reasons for which the mouth is such a key element in the speech of Joseph and Aseneth’s prayers become obvious. This climax also shows that “marriage is celebrated as a sacrament in which the mystery of a virginal eroticism eclipses interest in a merely sexual consummation.”

This story is not about canoodling for the sake of it. In his blessing, Joseph asks that God ἀναζωοποίησον, “make live again” or “bring back to life.” Given its use in 8.9, but also 15.5 and 27.10, the verb ἀναζωοποιέω can only be used in reference to God’s actions. As the spirits of the hero and heroine are here (re)acting of their own accord, the verb is ἀναζάω. Curiously, it is not just Aseneth’s πνεῦμα which is awakened by the kiss; the text makes it perfectly clear that both Joseph and Aseneth’s souls are reanimated: ἀνέζησαν ἰμφότεροι τῷ πνεῦματι αὐτῶν. Despite already being a distinguished member of the chosen people, Joseph’s spirit is also capable of more, but only when his body comes into a physical, possibly carnal, contact with his betrothed. Froma Zeitlin asked, “Is there, for example, any intrinsic relationship between the erotic and the sacred, the sexual and the spiritual, the carnal and the transcendent, whereby literal and metaphorical levels may change places or interfuse with one another?” Joseph and Aseneth affirms its response in the embraces of its protagonists.

The spiritual aspect of Aseneth and Joseph’s union is obvious from the sharing of the spirits of life, wisdom, and truth. The narrative underlines this shortly afterwards. The couple has moved from the courtyard to the hall, and Joseph tells Aseneth to let one of the servants wash his feet. Aseneth responds: οὐχὶ κύριέ μου ὅτι σύ μου εἶ κύριος ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν καὶ ἐγὼ παιδίσκη σου. καὶ ἵνα τί σὺ τοῦτο λαλεῖς ἄλλην παρθένον νίψαι τοὺς πόδας σου. διότι οἱ πόδες σου πόδες μού εἰσι καὶ οἱ χεῖρες σου χεῖρες μού εἰσι καὶ ἡ ψυχή σου ψυχή μου, “no my lord, for you are my lord from now...
[on], and I am your slave. Why do you say this, ‘another virgin shall wash your feet’? For your feet are my feet, your hands are my hands, your soul is my soul.” (20.4). Despite her conversion and divine transformation, and there is reason to believe that she is more divine than he, Aseneth still refers to herself as Joseph’s slave. Paradoxically, despite being his inferior, she and he share feet, hands, and soul. The washing of Joseph’s feet is a reminder of her request to make his bed and wash his feet in her prayer at 13.15. She has gotten exactly what she wanted. The equation of their body parts makes the hero and heroine symmetrical. It also deeps their connection, for they are bound not only physically, as is shown through their embraces and clasped hands at 20.1, but also spiritually, for they share one soul. Their religious connection strikes similar cords to the recognition of souls in the Æthiopika (3.5.4), although it has a distinctly religious and not philosophical connotation in Joseph and Aseneth.

The Highest God is conspicuously absent from the romantic climax of Joseph and Aseneth. The union of the lovers, both physically and spiritually, is couched in religious language, but does not itself mention the deity. This implies that the mystic union is just as important within the couple, if not more so, than between the characters and God. The narrative goes to great lengths to show that Joseph and Aseneth are meant to be together, calling them ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ πρωτότοκος καὶ... θυγάτηρ ὑψίστου, the firstborn son of God and the daughter of the Highest (21.4). As the children of God, this reminds the reader that Joseph and Aseneth are brother and sister, as previously discussed. It makes them equals. In a narratological parallel, the divine messenger also announces the upcoming nuptials to both protagonists. Yet despite the ways in which the text shows them to have been destined for one another, they do not necessarily perceive the divine hand’s machinations themselves in the establishment and fulfilment of their couple.

The Proselyte’s Plight: the Difficulties of Conversion

Conversion is a difficult process, and Joseph and Aseneth presents it as such. Aseneth’s choice to leave one group, and to adhere to another, is painful and dangerous. While it has been shown that this narrative is very much a Greek romance, it also has a distinct and undisguised theological purpose. It is indispensable to bear in mind Froma Zeitlin’s comment that “these motifs and conventions are deployed expressly in the service of religious ideology with none of the irony, ambiguity, authorial sleight of hand and opportunism that may be read in a typical specimen of

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444 Warren, loc. cit., p. 151. This will be explored more in the following subsection, see below.
445 Chesnutt, loc. cit., p. 32.
prose fiction”446 in this next subsection in particular. Hopefully, the importance of ambiguity in *Joseph and Aseneth* is now obvious, but the twisting of these motifs to suit a theological purpose is plain. Where this Jewish narrative deviates greatly from the novels is in its focalisation on only one character, instead of both. While all the ideal romances appear more interested in their female than their male characters (one thinks of the intensification of Chariklea’s experiences, for example), *Joseph and Aseneth* seems almost solely preoccupied with Aseneth. Joseph is a static character, being portrayed in much the same way at the end of the story as he is at the beginning. In order to fully understand the relationship between the characters and the divine, it is therefore necessary to use this sub-section to explore certain aspects of Aseneth’s transformation. This will include the analysis of certain motifs within her prayers, as well as the results of her visitation by the ἄνθρωπος.

As the epiphanic experience only happens once Aseneth’s week of mourning and praying is complete, it is only logical to commence with the study of her words. Aseneth’s prayers have already been mentioned. For the most part, these monologues either describe different conflicts in which Aseneth finds herself, or act as internal summaries of the plot. Although interesting in their own right, these synopses are not the subject of the following analysis. These private speeches display the conflicts between Aseneth and three groups: family/society, herself, and the divine. This is the order in which they will be presented, which is thematic, and not chronological.

That the Greek novels are concerned with societal values is no secret.447 The concern of Aseneth’s family is thus of little surprise. It features heavily in the first, silent soliloquy of the heroine:

τί ποιήσω ἡ ταπεινή
ἡ ποῦ ἀπέλθω
πρὸς τίνα καταφύγω
ἡ <τί> λαλήσω
ἐγὼ ἡ παρθένος καὶ ὀρφανὴ καὶ ἔρημος καὶ ἐγκαταλελειμμένη καὶ μεμισημένη;
pάντες γὰρ μεμισήκασί με
καὶ σὺν τούτοις ὁ πατήρ μου καὶ ἡ μήτηρ μου
διότι κάγω μεμίσησα τοὺς θεοὺς αὐτῶν καὶ ἀπώλεσα αὐτοὺς
καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτοὺς καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.
καὶ διὰ <τοῦτο> μεμισήκασί με ὁ πατήρ μου καὶ ἡ μήτηρ μου καὶ πᾶσα ἡ συγγένεια μου καὶ “οὐκ ἔστι θυγάτηρ ἡμῶν Ἀσενέθ διότι τοὺς θεοὺς ἠμῶν ἀπώλεσεν.”
καὶ πάντες ἄνθρωποι μισοῦσί με
διότι κάγω μεμίσησα πάντα ἄνδρα καὶ πάντας τοὺς μνηστευομένους με.

καὶ νῦν ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει μου τὰ πάντα μεμισήκας ἔστη καὶ φοβερός ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς σεβομένους θεοὺς ἄλλοτροὺς.
διὰ τούτο κάμε μεμίσηκε
ὅτι οἶκος εἰδώλων νεκρὰ καὶ κοφὰ καὶ εὐλόγησα αὐτὰ καὶ ἔφαγον ἐκ τῆς θυσίας αὐτῶν καὶ τό στόμα μου μεμίσθην ἐκ τῆς τραπέζης αὐτῶν καὶ οὐκ ἔστη μι αὐτὸ τῇ εἰδώλου πάντας τοὺς σεβομένους θεοὺς ἄλλοτροὺς.
διὸ ἔστη μι αὐτὸ τῷ θεῷ τῷ δυνατῷ Ἰωσὴφ ὁ ὕψιστος ἐστὶ θεὸς θεοὺς ἀλλοτρίους.
διὸ τὸ στόμα μου ἀπὸ τῶν θυσιῶν τῶν εἰδώλων.
ἀλλ' ἀκήκοα πολλῶν λεγόντων ὁ θεὸς τῶν Ἑβραίων ἔστι θεὸς θεοὺς ἄλλοτροὺς αὐτοῖς ἐστὶ θεὸς ζῶν καὶ θεὸς ἔλεος καὶ οἰκτίρμων καὶ πολυελεούς καὶ μὴ λογιζόμενος ἁμαρτίαν ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἐπιεικὴς καὶ μὴ ἐλέγξα τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἄρρητων ἀνθρώπων εἰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν καιρῷ θλίψεως αὐτοῖς.
τίς οἶδεν ἄν ἐλεήσει με; ὁ θεὸς τῶν ἄρρητων ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν ἐρήμωσιν με ἐν καιρῷ θλίψεως αὐτοῖς.
τῆς οὖν ἐστιν ἡ πατέρας τῶν ὀρφανῶν καὶ τῶν τεθλιμμένων.
I am not daring [enough] to call upon the Highest God of heaven, the mighty [God] of the powerful Joseph,
for I sullied my mouth with the offerings of idols.
Yet I have heard many saying
that the God of the Hebrews is a true god, a living god
and a pitying, compassionate, patient, very merciful and fair God
and He does not count the [sins] of a humble person
and He does not refute the lawlessness of a distressed person in a time of his affliction.
For which reason I will turn towards Him
and I will seek refuge with Him
and I will confess all my sins to Him
and utter my entreaty in front of Him.
Perceiving me, if He sees my humiliation will He have mercy on me?
perhaps He may happen to see this desolation of mine and will be compassionate with me.
Or He sees my orphanhood and will defend me
for He is the father of orphans, defender of the hunted, and helper of the distressed.
I will take courage and cry aloud before Him. (11.3-14)

This prayer is quite clearly concerned with more than just social mores, but those other issues will
be discussed below. Moving away from eroticism, this first soundless speech introduces the motif of
orphanhood, which is central to Aseneth’s conversion. In the scenes prior to these prayers, Aseneth
repudiates the “markers of her social identity,” that is to say her rich clothing and idols. Thus, in a
state of liminality, the heroine is bereft of the physical markers of her identity, but also the
emotional and social bonds of family life. The language used by Aseneth continues the religious, as
opposed to ethnic, discourse used by Joseph in his speech to her earlier. She clearly recognises
herself as the source of her misery, for she caused her family to reject her through her destructive
actions. The orphan theme returns at 12.5, 12.13, and 12.14, and orphanhood is again mentioned at
13.1. Outside of her family ties, the building block of society, Aseneth is in danger. The reader’s
empathy mounts with the repetition of the orphanhood motif. Furthermore, this motif places
Aseneth among the socially disadvantaged, and is thus a means of further underlining the liminal
position of the heroine. While it evacuates sexuality, this prayer explicitly introduces the paternal
image of God.

The social connections that the family offers a youth are an equally important aspect of the
larger social dilemma posed by Aseneth’s religious volte-face. Not only does her family hate her,
but πάντες ἄνθρωποι μισοῦσί με διότι κἀγὼ μεμίσηκα πάντα ἄνδρα καὶ πάντας τούς

449 Ibid., p. 105; Douglas, loc. cit., p. 36.
451 While it is true that Aseneth asked God to give her to Joseph when it became clear that Pentephres could not do so, it is not explicit that she wishes to have God replace her mortal father.
μηστευομένους με, “all of humanity hates me for I hated all men and all those who courted me.”

Unlike the religious reasons for which her parents are shown to be scornful of her, it is for social reasons that humanity hates the heroine. By refusing marriage, Aseneth is rejecting the fabrication of social links through marriage and the creation of her own family, thus making her a social pariah. This stance shows the danger felt by any female character who steps outside the bounds of her socially accepted role. In her comparison of the martyr acts and the ideal romances, Kathryn Chew remarked that the female body, through its chastity, is almost solely responsible for the continuation of society by the producing of legitimate heirs. In the context of the martyr acts, the spurning of marriage and procreation by the female characters becomes symbolic of eschewment of societal values as a whole. This refusal results in the torturing and deaths of the women. Aseneth’s story falls somewhere between these two models. She suffers no physical violence due to her rejection of social obligations, but the presentation of herself as being “positioned between familial identities” is a means of amplifying the liminal state of transformation or conversion. What is particularly noteworthy is that Aseneth shows no sense of destiny, despite the narrative hints that she was predetermined to convert. There is no divine purpose understood in her words, indeed she may even fail to convert, as shall be discussed below, and it is entirely due to her own actions that she has been cast out by her family.

Aseneth’s first two prayers, those said ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ, in her heart, both reveal a second conflict, this time, one had by the heroine within herself. These first two soliloquies are intended to bolster her courage, for τὸ στόμα μου μεμίαται, “I sullied my mouth,” and thus cannot open it to the Highest God (ἀνοίξω... πρὸς τὸν ὤψιστον). Introduced in the first prayer, the inability to speak to God is continued in the second:

Ταλαίπωρος ἐγώ καὶ ὀρφανὴ καὶ ἔρημος
to στόμα μου μεμίαται ἀπὸ τῶν θυσιῶν τῶν εἰδώλων
καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν εὐλογιῶν τῶν Θεῶν τῶν Αἰγυπτίων.
καὶ νῦν ἐν τοῖς δάκρυσι μου τούτοις καὶ τῇ τέφρᾳ ταύτῃ κατεσποδὲν
πῶς ἐγὼ ἀνοίξω τὸ στόμα μου πρὸς τὸν ὤψιστον
καὶ πῶς ὀνομάζω τὸ ἅγιον αὐτοῦ ὄνομα τὸ φοβερὸν
μήποτε ὀργισθῇ μοι κύριος
διότι ἐν ταῖς ἀνομίαις μου ἐγὼ ἐπεκάλεσάμην τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ἅγιον αὐτοῦ;
tί <νῦν> ποιήσω ἢ ταλαίπωρος ἐγώ;

453 Ibid., p. 139.
καὶ ἀνοίξω τὸ στόμα μου πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ ἐπικαλέσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ. καὶ εἰ θυμῷ κύριος πατάξει με αὐτὸς πάλιν ἰάσεται με καὶ ἐὰν παιδεύσῃ με ἐν ταῖς μάστιξιν αὐτοῦ αὐτὸς ἐπιβλέψει ἐπ’ ἐμοὶ πάλιν ἐν τῷ ἐλέει αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐὰν θυμωθῇ ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις μου πάλιν διαλλαγήσεται μοι καὶ ἀφήσει μοι πᾶσαν ἁμαρτίαν. τολμήσω οὖν ἀνοίξαι τὸ στόμα μου πρὸς αὐτόν.

I am miserable, an orphan and deserted
I sullied my mouth with the offerings of the idols
and with prayers of the Egyptian gods.
And now in these tears of mine, [in] these ashes thrown about and [in] the petty goods of my humiliation
How will I open my mouth before the Highest
And how can I invoke His terrible and holy name?
What shall I do, [being] miserable?
But rather, I shall take courage
and open my mouth before Him
and invoke His name.
And if the Lord strikes me in his anger, He will heal me once more
and if he chastises me with his whips, He will look well upon me again in his mercy
and if he is angered in my sins, He will be reconciled with me and dissolve from me all sins.
I therefore take courage to open my mouth before Him. (11.16-18)

These first two prayers show that Aseneth is seeing her previous idolatry through Joseph’s eyes. The difference is that, in the first, Aseneth’s focus was not purely on her relationship to the divine; she was equally concerned by her familial and social ties. This second soliloquy fixates uniquely on her internal experience, thus revealing her awareness of her current situation. Joseph stated that he could not kiss her due to the uses to which she put her mouth. In the first prayer, Aseneth reuses the labial imagery and states that εὐλόγησα αὐτὰ καὶ ἔφαγον ἐκ τῆς θυσίας αὐτῶν, “[she] prayed to them and ate of their offerings,” (11.8) they being the gods. The obsessional importance of the mouth carries over into this prayer and lies at the heart of Aseneth’s inner conflict. How can she open her sullied mouth to the Highest God? Kraemer’s sexualised reading of the passage render the scene all the more poignant, not to mention misogynist.455 The only option is to take a chance, a chance that introduces the third and final conflict from Aseneth’s transformation: divinities.

The God of Joseph and Aseneth is clearly identifiable as the God of the Torah, as he oscillates between anger and kindness. Although Aseneth does describe God in 11.7, saying what she has heard about him, she does not describe any personal contact with Him until 11.18 (see above). Whereas the first monologue presented an erratic God, the second details all that he could do to Aseneth at this pivotal moment. The possibilities are highly ambivalent: though he may punish her harshly, he will inevitably see to it that she is taken care of. While the strikes and whips are

455 Kraemer, op. cit., p. 207.
reminiscent of martyrdom, this divine intervention is entirely unique, for the source of both pain and healing are to be found in the Highest God; unlike the martyr accounts of women, wherein a pagan punishes a woman for refusing marriage or intercourse with him, allowing the woman to model the sufferings of Christ.\footnote{Chew, loc. cit., p. 131.} Two particular elements of God’s actions require further comment, His chastisement and His anger.

In the ancient world, a pupil’s main incentive to learn was given through corporal punishment.\footnote{Cf. A. Booth, “Punishment, discipline, and riot in the schools of antiquity,” Échos du monde classique, vol 27, 1973, p. 107-114.} Thus, when a reader sees ἐὰν παιδεύσῃ με ἐν ταῖς μάστιξιν, the reader understand Aseneth’s suffering to be instructive. This begs the question of a modern reader, for whom education is not necessarily punitive, of how punishment and education are related. Sophie Lalanne, in her analysis of the ideal romances, discussed the social education of the protagonists;\footnote{Lalanne, Une éducation grecque: rites de passage et construction des genres dans le roman grec ancien. Paris, Édition la Découverte, 2006} how they went from girls to women, and from boys to men through their ordeals.\footnote{Ibid.} She also deliberately excluded Jewish and Christian novels on the grounds that they do not show a similar interest in the education of their characters.\footnote{Ibid., p. 13.} This is mostly true: the Jewish novels are not interested in an anthropological education, which permits the youth to pass to adulthood. \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} is, however, interested in religious education. As there are other verbs for “to punish” in Greek, ζημιοῦν for example, the use of παιδεύω is important. Moreover, it appears in all of the Greek manuscripts and is not a unique reconstruction of Burchard’s 2003 edition.\footnote{C. Burchard, \textit{Joseph und Aseneth}. Kritisch Herausgegeben (mit Unterstützung von Carsten Burfeind und Uta Barbara Fink). Leiden, Brill, 2003. p. 152-153.} In his blessing, Joseph requested that God mould Aseneth with His hand (8.9). This is not exactly what was asked for, but does involve divine, personal attention. God would appear to both educate and punish the heroine in this instance. It should be added that Aseneth uses her prayers as a means of recounting her experience, and divine violence is represented as enlightening in her words. One can therefore understand this educative violence as a mirror for other violences in the text. All of her sufferances, erotic or otherwise, lead to a spiritual education. \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} does not part from an ancient understanding of pain as pedagogical.

Divine wrath is by no means a new motif. Here it is the motor that drives Aseneth’s punishments, and thus becomes crucial to her reflections. Whereas God’s hatred is due to idolatry,
διότι θεὸς ζηλωτής ἐστι καὶ φοβερὸς ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς σεβομένους θεοὺς ἀλλοτρίους. / διὰ τούτω κάμε μεμίσηκε (11.7-8), His anger is the source of His retribution, εἰ θυμῷ κύριος πατάξει με (11.18). The God of this text has nearly human reactions. Anger, θυμός, is a passion, revealing the emotional energy required to cause great change. Human passion thus becomes a mirror of the divine in its ability to cause change. In parallel, Aseneth was wrong in her idolatry, but changes due to a great passion. While human passion pushes the mortal towards God, divine passion compels the divinity to intercede. Though these passions are painful, as was seen in the use of the love-sickness _topos_, and now in the anger of God, it is these grand emotions that cause transformation.

Yet another danger presents itself to Aseneth during her conversion. During her vocalised prayer, Aseneth says:

> ἱδοὺ γὰρ ὁ λέων ὁ ἄγριος ὁ παλαιὸς καταδιώκει με διότι αὐτὸς ἐστὶ πατήρ τῶν θεῶν τῶν Αἰγυπτίων καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ εἰσίν οἱ θεοὶ τῶν εἰδωλομανῶν κἀγὼ μεμίσηκα αὐτοὺς ὅτι τέκνα τοῦ λέωντος εἰσίν. καὶ ἔρριψα πάντας ἀπ' ἐμοῦ καὶ ἀπώλεσα αὐτούς. καὶ ὁ λέων ὁ πατὴρ αὐτῶν θυμωθεὶς καταδιώκει με ἀλλὰ σὺ κύριε ῥῦσαί με ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐξελοῦ μέ μήποτε ἁρπάσῃ με ὡς λέων καὶ διασπαράξῃ μέ καὶ βάλῃ με εἰς τὴν φλόγα τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ τὸ πῦρ ἐμβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν φλόγα τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσεται με ἐν σκότει καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ με εἰς τὴν καταιγίδα καὶ ἡ καταιγίς περιελίσσε...
if set upon by the wild old lion. Burchard has remarked upon the use of the four elements, and Aseneth’s fear of a punishment related to each one. What these elements may have represented concretely is unknown, and so the modern reader understands this as a spiritual dilemma, though a physical one is not incredible. The reality of one’s previous cult attempting to retain its worshippers is not unknown in Antiquity, and proselyte literature usually portrays the old God attempting to take back its follower, frequently in the shape of a lion. The importance of the lion is twofold in this prayer. First of all, he represents the dire straits in which Aseneth finds herself. If she converts successfully, she will be accepted into the Lord’s community; should she fail, she will not be accepted back into her previous social group, and the lion will destroy her. It’s all or nothing. Secondly, this persecution highlights the idea that only the Highest God can save Aseneth. As she begged him, ῥῦσαί με πρὶν καταληφθῆναι με ὑπὸ τῶν καταδιωκόντων με, “rescue me before I am seized by those who pursue me” (12.7). As a father protects his frightened child (12.8), so Aseneth hopes that the Lord will shield her, too, for what father is as sweet as He? (τίς πατήρ οὕτω γλυκύς ὡς σὺ κύριε, 12.15). Not only does God take the place of Joseph through a fusion of the erotic and religious, but He takes on the role of her father Pentephres as well. The new religious community into which Aseneth seeks to go is presented in overtly social terminology, emphasising the paternal role of God, and yet drawing its boundaries based on religious behaviour, not on ethnic criteria.

Aseneth succeeds in converting. Not only does she succeed, she is granted a key role in the religious community. Upon his arrival, the ἄνθρωπος announces that, not only has her name been written ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῶν ζώντων, “in the book of the living” (15.5), but that she will be married to Joseph (15.6). Furthermore, he announces:

καὶ τὸ ὄνομά σου οὐκετι κληθήσεται Ἀσενὲθ ἀλλ᾽ ἔσται τὸ ὄνομά σου πόλις καταφυγῆς διότι ἐν σοὶ καταφεύξονται ἔθνη πολλὰ ἐπὶ κύριον τὸν θεόν τὸν ὕψιστον

and your name shall no longer be said Aseneth, but your name shall be City of Refuge, for in you many nations shall seek refuge with the Lord, the Highest God. (15.7)

Once Aseneth asked πρὸς τίνα καταφύγω, “before whom shall I seek refuge?” (11.3). Now, as the

463 Ibid., n. C2, p. 221 “In the [Old Testament] ‘lion’ is a metaphor for a persecutor; in later times it also signifies the devil... That the devil will attempt to avenge himself upon those who escaped his dominion takes the plot of TJob, and apparently there was a paraenetic tradition warning new converts against his machination...”; For other examples of this, cf. M.-A. Calvet-Sebasti, “Colère et compassion dans les récits apocryphes chrétiens,” in B. Pouderon, C. Bost-Pouderon (ed.), Passions, vertus et vices dans l’'ancien roman. Colloque de Tours. Lyon, Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée Jean Pouilloux, 2009. p. 271-282.
πόλις καταφυγῆς she will answer that question when it is posed by others. The divine man’s words reinforce the religious aspects of this texts. All people may take refuge in the Highest God — there is no ethnic criteria.465

The arrival of the heavenly man announces many changes. In novel literature, an epiphanic experience can be used to let the reader know that the plot’s end is near.466 Such is the case here: the end of Aseneth’s isolation and her “happy ending” are at hand, although these are not the end of the story itself. The visit of the ἄνθρωπος will also be the catalyst for Aseneth’s “angelic transmorphism.”467 After changing her clothes, she eats of a divine honey-comb and learns τὰ ἀπόρρητα μυστήρια τοῦ ὑψίστου, “the ineffable mysteries of the Highest” (16.14). After the divine being leaves, Aseneth’s foster father is shocked at her beauty, now described with solar similes, like Joseph and the divine messenger: she has a face like the sun (τὸ πρόσωπον... ὃς ὁ ἥλιος) and eyes like the morning star (οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ... ὃς ἑωσφόρος) (18.9). Whereas Joseph simply appear divine, Aseneth seems to have become godlike.468 Furthermore, unlike the novel heroines whose beauty remains flawless through their narratives, Aseneth’s is now enhanced.469 Her “angelic transmorphism” make it unsurprising that her foster father should react to her as to a god: καὶ ἦλθεν ὁ τροφεὺς αὐτῆς... καὶ ὡς εἶδεν αὐτὴν ἐπτοήθη καὶ ἔστη ἄφωνος ἐπιπολὺ <καὶ> ἐφοβήθη <φόβον μέγαν>, “and her foster father came... and when he saw her, he threw himself [to the ground] and was generally speechless and feared a great fear” (18.11). This naturally recalls Aseneth’s reactions to Joseph and the ἄνθρωπος, simultaneously confirming her angelic status,470 as well as the fusion of eroticism and religious experience.

In many ways, the visitor from Heaven and the resulting transformation is the climax of the coalescence of religion and eroticism. The scene with Joseph and the hymn after the marriage are far less thrilling, though still narratologically satisfying. It is precisely because the zenith of sexual excitement has passed that the last third of the narrative may introduce new ideas and themes. These ideas are nonetheless presented within the stock scenes of romance, as shall be demonstrated

469 Montiglio, op. cit., p. 208.
shortly.

A Rival Lover: Pharaoh’s Son Attacks

When *Joseph and Aseneth* is analysed purely as romance, one of the criticisms made is that the only attempt on Aseneth’s chastity (and life) is made after the marriage and in the last third of the novel. This reproach usually ignores the fact that not all of the Greek novels finish in marriage, some commence with it.\(^{471}\) Even so, it is true that in all of the novels it is either the woman’s defended virginity or maintained marital fidelity that is the ticket to the reintegration of the couple into society.\(^{472}\) In the case of Aseneth, the attack made by the Pharaoh’s son in the last third of the plot is not a means of proving that she is worthy of marrying Joseph, or of returning to the civilised world, for this has already been done through her conversion and the sufferings that were involved. What then is “the purpose” of this assault? *Joseph and Aseneth* is a two stranded novel, explaining, on the one hand, how Aseneth converted for Joseph, and, on the other, how Joseph came to rule over the land of Egypt. The prince’s plot involves both the spiritual and the political aspects of the story.

The narrator shows quite clearly that Pharaoh’s son has a double motive. *Joseph and Aseneth* is just as interested in social order as any of the ideal romances. Like many a novel antagonist, the prince is motivated by his desire for the heroine: καί ἐξεδόξη τὴν Ἀσενὲθ καὶ κατενύγη καὶ ἐδυσφόρει βαρέως καὶ κακῶς ἐγξε διὰ τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς, “and he [the prince] saw Aseneth and was painfully struck, and he was unwell and ill because of her beauty” (23.1). Like Aseneth in 6.1, the prince has caught a case of love. This is not surprising, for love is the motivator of most characters in the novels, be their intentions pure or licentious.\(^{473}\) As the son of Pharaoh is unsuited to Aseneth, he will not win her. But this is jumping ahead. This first motive is openly erotic: he wishes to “marry” Aseneth. This is conform to the novel genre, wherein “marriage” is the language for all sexual relations, be they consensual or rape.\(^{474}\) The second is political. While it is true that the prince lies to enlist the aide of Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher, it is true that Pharaoh treats Joseph as a son (said by the prince at 24.14; said by Joseph himself at 20.9). The political intrigue is clearly secondary, but it is nonetheless important. By murdering the Pharaoh and Joseph (as well as his two sons), the prince will take the throne and Aseneth as wife and queen. The plan all seems quite dastardly. It turns out to be a Wile E. Coyote kind of ploy, however.

\(^{471}\) *Chaireas and Callirhoe*, for example, or *Anthia and Habrocomes*.


The prince is barred from his father’s chambers (25), foiling the first part of his plan. The second part is ruined by Benjamin, Joseph’s younger brother, who defends Aseneth from the soldiers and the prince, who is himself fatally wounded by a stone strike to his temple. The brothers in cahoots with the prince, deviate from the plan, and decide to kill Aseneth. Greatly afraid, Aseneth prays:

κύριε ὁ θεός μου
ὁ ἀναζωοποιήσας με
καὶ ρυσάμενός με ἐκ τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς φθορᾶς τοῦ θανάτου
ὁ εἰπών μοι ὅτι “εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ζήσεται ἡ ψυχή σου”
ῥύσαι με ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἀνδρῶν τῶν πονηρῶν τούτων.

Lord, my God,
who brought me back to life,
who saved me from the idols and the ruin of death,
who said to me, “your soul shall live forever,”
save me from the hands of these knavish men. (27.10)

Instantly, God intercedes on behalf of Aseneth:

καὶ ἤκουσε κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῆς φωνῆς Ἀσενὲθ καὶ εὐθέως ἔπεσον αἱ ῥομφαῖαι αὐτῶν ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ ἐτεφρώθησαν.

And the Lord, God of light, heard Aseneth, and directly their swords fell from their hands upon the ground, and burned to ash. (27.11)

Although *Joseph and Aseneth* clearly never attempted to hide its religious message, the miraculous intervention of God in defence of Aseneth takes the text’s religiosity to a new level. His presence was previously felt through his followers’ piety or His messenger. The main narratorial motivation of this attack is thus to show that the Highest God is a mighty defender of the faithful. If this passage is considered in parallel with the novels, it takes on a deeper meaning, for Aseneth is not just any follower of the Lord. The novelistic female body is a symbol of society. To attack it is therefore to assault the very stability of the novel world. Aseneth, as the City of Refuge, is representative of spiritual stability and religious order, the creation of a divine world order on Earth.

It is only natural that the Highest God steps in to defend her. This Jewish novel has, yet again, taken a familiar aspect of the Greek novel and turned it to its own devices; that is to say, it privileges the spiritual or religious over the materially social, but still engages in a social debate through the language of marriage, violence, and chastity. The erotic motif which lead Aseneth to God also caused the Prince to attempt to create chaos. Which one is right, and which one is wrong is blatantly shown by the narrative’s happy ending.

476 Ibid.
Concluding Remarks: *Joseph and Aseneth*

The role of God in relation to Aseneth is profoundly complex, using something akin to situational irony. The narrative shows through the use of imagery and a chronological motif that the characters were intended to be together, that they were hand chosen for each other by the Highest God. The protagonists, however, seem supremely unaware of this fact. This appears to be due to Joseph’s pompousness or arrogance, and Aseneth’s idolatry-related naiveté.

The conflicts of *Joseph and Aseneth* distinguish it from the ideal romances. Despite showing a clear concern for morays and social values, Aseneth’s distressed soliloquies are more concerned with her relationship to the Highest God than they are with the material world and its mortal hierarchies. Being “on the threshold between gods,” Aseneth perceives her danger as being extreme. Oddly, the struggles described by Aseneth are not what a reader would consider “real.” This is to say that within the narrative reality, the Egypt of *Joseph and Aseneth* wherein the heroine falls in love with the hero and converts, none of the described actions happen. Her family’s distain, the divine assaults, they can all be considered to be figments of Aseneth’s imagination. They do, however, lend the story an urgency that does not otherwise exist in the plot. In any case, suffering for one’s god does not necessarily have to be physical. These struggles firmly fix Aseneth’s conversion in a world of stark reality wherein violence is “part of a cultural scene.” The protagonist, as a wealthy young woman, far removed from the mundane world of the average reader, is not a character with whom the masses may easily identify. The elaborate details of her sufferings, from abandonment, to physical ills and assault, are all part of the realities of conversion in Antiquity. The wide popularity of this story, attested to by its translations and numerous manuscripts, shows that the story held significance for the communities where it was retold. The ability to overcome the difficulties of conversion, no matter the odds, must play a role in its

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479 This having been said, the passage to which most scholars refer to in discussing the torture of women in the Greek novels, that is to say when Leucippe defends herself against Thyamis, does not actually result in any physical violence (5.21). Leucippe enumerates all the ways in which one could torture her, but she is not, as a point of fact, subjected to any of the punishments that she suggests. Indeed, her Scheintod are revealed to be theatrics or cases of mistaken identity.
importance.

The divine does have an explicit presence in *Joseph and Aseneth*, however. The Highest God makes an appearance in chapter 27, and the ἄνθρωπος is an important character. It is here pertinent and interesting to make a few remarks on the god who is invoked in this novel. Although He is referred to in many other ways, the god of Joseph is most frequently called ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὕψιστος. This is the Greek translation of one of the Hebrew names of God in the Septuagint. Although this title was given to many deities, it is quite possible that a divinity was worshiped by this name by both Jews and Jewish sympathisers in Late Antiquity.\(^{483}\) This means that, although Christian authorship is highly unlikely, it is true that a sympathiser may be at the roots of this narrative. As John Collins wrote:

*Joseph and Aseneth* can scarcely be described as missionary literature. Its main readership was most probably Jewish. Only Jews would have fully appreciated the biblical allusions that run throughout. But the story is surely also meant to encourage proselytes, both those who have not yet converted and those who have. It is addressed to all interested parties, both Jewish and Gentile. It affirms the superiority of Judaism as a monotheistic religion, but not necessarily that of all ethnic Jews.\(^{484}\) By invoking ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὕψιστος, this text broadens its horizons, as it would appeal to many different groups. This story could very well have originated in one of the communities where Jews and sympathisers worshiped side by side, although this aides in fixing neither a date, nor location of redaction.\(^{485}\) The importance of the ἄνθρωπος would thus be explained, for angels and lesser gods act as messengers to the Highest God.\(^{486}\) This cultic idea thus supports a henotheism which is inherent in *Joseph and Aseneth*, where both the angelic man and Jacob, Joseph’s father, are referred

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483 S. Mitchell, “The Cult of Theos Hyspistos between Pagans, Jews, and Christians,” in P. Athanassiadi, M. Frede (ed.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999. p. 81-148; “Further Thoughts on the Cult of Theos Hyspistos,” in S. Mitchell, P. Van Nuffelen (ed.), *One God. Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010. p. 167-208. Mitchell’s work has been heavily criticized by N. Belayche, “Hyspistos. Une voie de l’exaltation des dieux,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, vol. 7, 2005, p. 34-55. Although she does admit that it is not impossible that Jewish practices could have influenced the cult of ὁ θεὸς ὕψιστος in some circumstances, she rejects Mitchell’s idea that this is indicative of a widespread monotheism. She supports the view that this is, in fact, highly representative of polytheistic practices. Another rebuttal to Mitchell’s work is A. Chaniotis, “Megatheism: the Search for the Almighty God and the Competition of Cults,” in S. Mitchell, P. van Nuffelen (ed.), *One God. Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010. p. 112-140, although he does not dismiss Mitchell’s arguments entirely, he does allow for some of Belayche’s arguments as well, stating that the real problem is one of questioning done by modern scholars. Whereas current research is interested in a question of quantity, the ancients were interested in questions of quality, of which god to worship, and how; it is this that resulted in the abundant uses of ὕψιστος.


485 Inscriptions dedicated to ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὕψιστος range from the second century BC to the second or third century AD., and are found all around the Mediterranean basin: “The geographical range which they cover is huge, extending from Achaea and Macedonia to the eastern parts of Asia Minor and to the edge of the Syrian desert, from Rostov on the Don to the Nile Delta... Hyspistos was one of the most worshipped gods in the eastern Mediterranean world” Mitchell, “The Cult of Theos Hyspistos,” *loc. cit.*, p. 109; cf. p. 99 also.

to as θεὸς. The solar imagery of this novel, another crucial aspect of worship of ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὕψιστος, makes what might otherwise be a story interesting to only a handful of people, and universalises it.

**More Than Just Romance: the Æthiopika**

Of all the ideal novels, Heliodorus’ Æthiopika has been declared the most religious. The obsession with chastity displayed by Chariklea, the abundance of oracles, visions and dreams, and the roles of priests, gods, and their temples do not go unnoticed. In this second section of the chapter, the role of religion will come to the fore as the role of the gods in the sufferings of Chariklea and Theagenes is unraveled. That a god should play matchmaker is not unique to this novel. Indeed, the gods associated with love stories are to be found in all of the Greek novels, drawing on mythic and tragic sources. What is unique to this novel is not the creation of the couple by a god, nor even the trials inflicted on the couple by the gods, but the interaction of the couple within this relationship with the divine, the presentation of the entire narrative as having religious significance. In other words, what is interesting is the way in which Chariklea and Theagenes live their experience as pawns on an immortal’s chessboard.

Two points must be made before beginning the subsections, one regarding narrative, and another humour. First of all, in order to understand the give and take between Apollo, the god who declares himself responsible for this couple, and Chariklea and Theagenes, this analysis requires a chronological analysis of the events in the Æthiopika. This means that the scenes in the following section do not follow the order of the récit, but that of the histoire. Secondly, the place of irony within Heliodorus’ work is a sensitive subject. The changing of narrators, the continuous interrogation of rhetoric, falsehood and fiction within the text, and the subversion of conventional novelistic tropes, while showing Heliodorus’ mastery of literary technique, have also brought about accusations of authorial opportunism. There are scholars who read the religious aspects of the Æthiopika as just another literary technique. One must concede, however, that no matter the level of humour, the divinities are not ridiculed in the novels, not even in Achilles Tatius’ famously mocking Leucippe and Cleitophon. Furthermore, smiles, laughing, and merriment are integral

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488 “Given the novel’s general focus on erotic life and all-consuming passion, it should come as no surprise that the most active divinities are Aphrodite, Artemis, Eros, Pan and the Nymphs, and Dionysus, with the participation at times of Apollo...” Zeitlin, loc. cit., p. 92.
490 R. Brethes, “Hommes sacrés, sacrés hommes. Le fonction du prêtre dans le roman grec,” in C. Bost-Pouderon,
parts of polytheistic religion. One has but to think of the importance of Demeter’s laughter in the Homeric hymn to her. Although Heliodorus does make a good show of how humans may use the gods to their own ends, the relationship maintained between Apollo and his romantic couple remains consistent throughout the work. It can therefore be tentatively stated that the influence of the god on the protagonists and their experience of said influence is being addressed in a semi-serious way, at least.

This section will be divided into three subsections. Before analysing the relationship between the protagonists and the gods, it is necessary to understand how they constitute a perfectly matched pair. Just as Aseneth and Joseph were shown to be destined to be together, the *Æthiopika* lets readers know that Chariklea and Theagenes were predetermined, as were their adventures. It then becomes possible to analyse different characters’ awareness of this divine sanction in a second subsection. Lastly, the merger of social and religious values will be considered in the mystic marriage of the hero and heroine.

**Memphis comes to Delphi, or Oracular Beginnings**

The holiday, or holy-day, has its expected place in the *Æthiopika*. As seen in Chapter one, it is as a torch passes between them that the eyes of Theagenes and Chariklea meet. The rest is, as they say, history. The propensity to fall in love during festivals of the novelistic hero and heroine is a recognised trope. This permits the narrator to introduce the god or goddess responsible for the couple and their story, but it is also a simple practicality of the genre and of Classical Greece, a time when young, nubile women of good breeding were not permitted to wander the street aimlessly. The holiday of the ancient novels is, in some ways, similar to the balls and soirées of Jane Austen’s 19th century books, without which the fictional young ladies would not meet their “single [men] in possession of a good fortune... [and] in want of a wife.” That Chariklea and Theagenes should fall in love during Delphic festivities is therefore a hallmark of the ideal genre. It is, however, an auspicious hallmark, for, as the place of love’s first blooming, it gives the scene, and

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thus the novel, an occult or spiritual ambiance, as well as establishing a dialogue between Heliodorus and the classical, Greek world. Unlike the other novel couples, though, Theagenes and Chariklea are destined to be together before laying eyes on each other. Their couple, as well as their trials and triumphs, were foretold by the Pythia.

We turn once more to the figure of Kalasiris. Not only does he relay the words of the oracle to Knemon (and therefore the reader) as secondary narrator, he positions himself as the only person present at its pronouncement who was able to comprehend its significance. His role in both narration and narrative shows itself to be crucial once more.

After the arrival of Theagenes, but before the fateful festival’s rites, the Pythia pronounces the following oracle:

Τὴν χάριν ἐν πρώτοις αὐτὰρ κλέος ὕστατ’ ἔχουσαν φράζεσ’, οἱ Δελφοί, τὸν τε θεᾶς γενέτην· οἱ νηὸν προλιπόντες ἐμὸν καὶ κῦμα τεμόντες ἠελίου πρὸς χθόνα κυανέην, τῇ περ ἀριστοβίων μέγ’ ἀεθλιον ἐξάψων λευκόν ἐπὶ κροτάφων στέμμα μελαιομένων.

Hear, O Delphians, she who is in first things grace, but lastly fame, he who the goddess bore, forsaking my shrine and ploughing the waves, they shall reach the dark earth of the sun; there, for all of their virtues a great prize shall be given, a white wreath upon their blackened temples [set]. (2.35.5)

This is, as a matter of fact, the second statement made by the Pythia, the first being a welcoming of Kalasiris to Delphi (2.26.5). These two declamations receive opposing reactions from the listeners, that is to say comprehension and enthusiastic reception in the case of the latter, and incomprehension and disinterest in the case of the former; this second reaction is what makes this divine riddle all the more fascinating, and is the motor of the plot itself. This is not the place to discuss the dichotomy between orality and literacy, truth and fiction (to avoid saying lies) that are so integral to both plot and interpretation.

This is of vital importance to the hybrid form of communication, is a truthful voice in the novel. This is not the place to discuss the dichotomy between orality and literacy, truth and fiction (to avoid saying lies) that are so integral to both plot and interpretation. What is important to note is that the oracle, itself a hybrid form of communication, is a truthful voice in the novel. This is of vital importance to the

495 Ibid., p. 113.
496 Ibid.
498 Ibid., p. 292.
story, as well as to the interpretation of Chariklea and Theagenes’ relationship and ordeals.

Of course, Kalasiris uses this moment to show his own powers of observation, for he is, according to himself, the only one who attempts to uncover the riddle’s answer, much as he is the only one to observe the coup de foudre in 3.5.4-6. Furthermore, the Pythia’s recognition of Kalasiris quite nearly expunges from the reader’s mind the original cult of the Egyptian priest. Originally from the folds of Isis, Kalasiris shows himself to be cut from a universal cloth.

To come back to the subject immediately relevant, the oracle reveals the adventures of the protagonists. In many ways, this is the “beginning” of the plot line, for the Æthiopika tells the story of the adventures that take “she of charm and fame” and “the one goddess born” from Delphi to Ethiopia, with many a digression along the way, to be sure. The narrative, simply put, answers the who, when, where, and why of the oracle’s enigma. Moreover, that this tale of love and adventure should be put in the mouth of the Pythia, the exclusive mouth piece of Apollo, makes not only the union, but also the voyage appear as a mystic journey, as indeed it has been read to be.

Merkelbach suggested that the Chaldean oracles may have been the source of the mystery cults. The importance of the oracle in this text, although it does not necessarily support this hypothesis, does instantly place this narrative within a religious frame.

As if the divine orders were not clear enough for both Kalasiris and the reader, an apparition appears in 3.11:

'Ήδη δὲ μεσούσης τῆς νυκτὸς ὁρῶ τὸν Ἀπόλλω καὶ τὴν Ἀρτεμιν ώς ὤμην, εἰ γε ὤμην ἄλλα μὴ ἀληθῶς ἑώρων· καὶ ὁ μὲν τὸν Θεαγένην ἢ δὲ τὴν Χαρίκλειαν ἔνεχειρίζεν· ὄνομασί τε μὲ προσκαλούντες "ὁρα σοι" ἔλεγον "εἰς τὴν ἐνεγκοῦσαν ἐπανήκειν, οὕτω γὰρ ὁ μοιρῶν ὑπαγορεύει θεσμός. Αὐτὸς τε οὖν ἔξυπνος καὶ τούσδε ὑποδεξάμενος ἐγένομεν, συνεμπόρους ἴσα τε παισὶ ποιοῦμενος, καὶ παράπεμπε ἀπὸ τῆς Αἰγυπτίων ὅποι τε καὶ ὅπως τοῖς θεοῖς φίλον."

Ταῦτα εἰπόντες οἱ μὲν ἀπεχώρησαν ὡς μὴ ὄναρ ἦν ἡ ὄψις ἀλλ' ὕπαρ ἐνδειξάμενοι· Already then, in the middle of the night, I saw Apollo and Artemis, so I believed; if at any rate, I believed, but did not truly see. And the one had in hand Theagenes, and the other Chariklea; they called me by my name, they said “It is time for you to return to [the land] that bore [you], for thus the divine law of Destiny dictates. You must go out and, welcoming these two, bring [them], making them your equal travel companions and children, and you will escort them out of Egypt when and how it pleases the gods.”

502 Merkelbach, op. cit., p. 235.
After saying these things, they left, making it plain that this was neither a dream nor an impression, but a true appearance. (3.11.5-3.12.1)

As a priest and wise-man, Kalasiris takes the time to explain that this is a ὅπαρ, “a true appearance,” and no sham. Despite his dubious presentation, Kalasiris is shown here to be a true priest, as when he understood the Pythia’s prophecy — the gods speak to him, he is able to interpret their wishes correctly, and through him the gods act upon the world. This classic means of divine communication to mortals is actually an interesting array of gods. Obviously central to the dream are the Olympians, Apollo and Artemis. The presence of Apollo in a dream had at Delphi during a night while the Pythian Games are underway comes as no surprise. Artemis has no narrative function in the story, that is to say that she does not act to either hinder or help the protagonists. As a devout virgin, she does have symbolic importance as a divine double for the heroine. Artemis is also the double of Apollo, his sister and close friend, which allows Chariklea to have a sacerdotal role, there being no women other than the Pythia in the Delphic cult to Phœbus. Her presence in the dream therefore recalls Chariklea’s chastity and priesthood. The other divine element is ὁ μοίρῶν θεσμός, “the divine law of Destiny.” All of the Greek novels reflect the religious plurality of the world in which they were created. While the division of Olympian and non-Olympian gods can be critiqued, Kathryn Chew showed how different divinities serve different functions within Heliodorus’ narrative. Her tripartite division of gods who are vague beings or forces showed that, non Olympian gods, such as Eros, Tyche, and δαίμονες, “spirits,” were capable of rivalling the Olympian gods as narratives forces. Of the three categories of “secondary deities” found in the Ἐθιοπικά, Destiny is an indefinite, infrequently mentioned, yet powerful guiding force. Apollo and Artemis, by saying that it is because of μοῖρα that Kalasiris must act now,commencing the travels and trials of the couple, clearly show that this is their will, but that they do

503 Kalasiris explains to Knemon how to recognise a god during an epiphany at 3.13.
506 Cf. Chew, loc. cit., for a discussion of how this is used in the plot.
507 Ibid., loc. cit., p. 63.
508 Ibid.
509 Chew, loc. cit., p. 280; Zeitlin, loc. cit., p. 98-100.
510 Ibid., loc. cit., p. 282.
511 Ibid.: “These powers fall into three functional categories: the mischief makers, including δαίμονες, τὸ δαιμόνιον, τύχη and ἔχθρος τῆς (‘spirits’, ‘the divine’, ‘chance’, ‘some enemy’); the providential yet punitive gods, including τὸ θεῖον, θεοὶ, οἱ κρείττονες and οἱ μείζονες (‘the divine, ‘gods’, ‘the mightier ones’, ‘the greater ones’); and the guiding forces, such as ἐχθρός μοῖρα, and πεπρωμένον (‘fate’, ‘destiny’, ‘fate’), and sometimes δαίμονες and τύχη (‘spirits’, ‘chance’). There is over- lap between these categories, notably with δαίμονες and τύχη.”
512 Ibid., p. 284. (particularly n. 21)
not act alone. The twins have chosen the couple, have decided upon the road ahead, but it is μοῖρα who decides the time of action. This leads Kalasiris, and thus the reader, to understand that this couple is important: Apollo and Artemis stand as the gods who have chosen these two specific individuals, while μοῖρα is the force that launches their adventure. The combination of the prophecy and the dream, paired with the protagonists’ meeting during the Delphic celebrations most certainly paints Apollo as the source of this couple’s love.513

The reader, thanks to the insight of Kalasiris, is “in the know.” On the one hand, it is perfectly clear within the narrative that Chariklea and Theagenes are a divinely chosen couple whose adventures are under the aegis of Apollo, for his oracle foretold of their travels, and he and his sister showed themselves and their will to Kalasiris. The heroine and hero, on the other hand, have not been privy to such a bevy of knowledge. This will, in turn, influence the ways in which they understand their own voyage. The entire plot of the Æthiopika is presented as resulting from religious experiences. Moreover, the prophecy and the dream are of deeply personal natures, which is representative of the religious leanings in later antiquity. This resonates with what Angelos Chaniotis wrote discussing religion in the Imperial period: “One of the most obvious objectives of religious texts in the imperial period was to insinuate the tangible, continuous and effective presence of the gods in the world of the mortals.”514 It becomes tempting to say that Reinhold Merkelbach was correct, that Heliodorus was writing to promote a cult to the solar titan.515 These elements are, however, representative of the religious practices of its time, and not exclusive to cults of Apollo or Helios. This possibility will be revisited below.

Speaking of gods

While Chariklea and Theagenes may not initially be cognisant of the heavenly hand at play in their affaires, they do believe that the gods participate in their lives. These youths understand their world to be ordered and controlled by the gods, as do all the other characters of the Æthiopika.516 What they lack is the understanding that their steps are guided by Apollo. This second subsection will analyse two instances in which Chariklea and Theagenes speak either to or of the

515 Merkelbach, op. cit., p. 235.
516 Chew, loc. cit., p. 281.
gods as they pertain specifically to their experiences. The first is Chariklea’s outburst against Apollo when they are the captives of Thyamis and his band of brigands, and the second their interpretations of dreams had while held captive in Arsake’s prison. After these two scenes are analysed, it will be most illuminating to draw attention to how Chariklea and Theagenes hold up under torture. While it fits in well with the theme of suffering for love, and showing oneself to be worthy of the rewards offered at the end of the narrative, this scene is also a fascinating study of the portrayal of sufferance, tying this work all the more tightly to Christian narratives.

Chariklea’s angry outburst happens after she and Theagenes have been locked up for the night in the brigands’ camp. Once they are alone, she says:

Ἀπόλλων... ὡς λίαν ἡμᾶς καὶ πικρότερον ἁμώνη τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων, οὐδὲ ἱκανά σοι πρὸς τιμωρίαν τὰ παρελθόντα, στέρησις τῶν οἰκείων καὶ καταποντιστῶν ἁλωσις καὶ θαλασσῶν μυρίος κίνδυνος καὶ ληστῶν ἐπὶ γῆς ἤδη δευτέρα σύλληψις καὶ πικρότερα τῶν ἐν πείρᾳ τὰ προσδοκώμενα. Καὶ ποῖ ταῦτα στήσεις; ... σοῦ δὲ οὐδεὶς ἔσται δικαστὴς πικρότερος.

Apollo... thus do you avenge our faults exceedingly and most keenly upon us, but those past [experiences] were not sufficient retribution to you, deprivation of our homes, capture by pirates and countless dangers of the sea, and taken twice already by robbers on land; those [experiences] to be expected are worse than those already experienced. How long will you stir these things up? ... None can be a judge more severe than you. (1.8.2-3)

Theagenes is shocked at what he sees as an accusation of the god (1.8.4). Chariklea, once calmed, does ultimately agree, but her tell-tale words give away her analysis of the situation. In her study of divine epistemology, Kathryn Chew shows that ordeals can be met out by any of the “the providential yet punitive gods,” which is her second category of deities; these ordeals may be either a punishment for the wicked, or a test for the righteous. In accusing Apollo, an Olympian, Chariklea deviates from the standard idea that it is the secondary divinities which place obstacles in the hero’s path, but she also inadvertently places herself, along with Theagenes, on the wrong side of the scale. Apollo is their judge (δικαστής), but not to send them to the gallows, as is the fate of the bad characters, but to see that they are indeed worthy of the μέγ᾽ ἀέθλιος, “the great prize,” foretold by the oracle (2.35.5). Moreover, Chariklea perceives there to be no purpose to these punishments. The retribution (τιμωρία) is clear, yet insufficient, and the ἁμάρτημα, the “sins” or “faults,” are not. This first scene shows a burgeoning understanding of the place of the gods in the story of the protagonists’ lives by the hero and heroine themselves. This knowledge is only permitted to deepen through their ensuing ordeals.

517 Chew, loc. cit., p. 282.
518 Ibid.
519 Ronnet, loc. cit., p. 63.
A part of the thrill of the novels is the violence in them. A particularly fascinating moment of this in Heliodorus’ novel is when both Chariklea and Theagenes find themselves locked away in Arsake’s dungeon. At this point in the story, Theagenes has refused all physical relations with Arsake, much to her fury, and Chariklea, who has been accused poisoning and killing the lady’s servant Cybele, has escaped death by fire. In discussing all of the novels save for the Æthiopika, Judith Perkins stated, “the romances constructed a subject for whom, in the end, pain did not matter.”

520 She explains that the romances have a very Stoic outlook. What happens in Arsake’s dungeon would appear to undermine this:

Τοῖς δὲ ἦν παραψυχὴ μᾶλλον τὸ γινόμενον καὶ τὸ ἐν ὁμοίοις τοῖς πάθεσιν εξετάζεσθαι κέρδος ἐνόμιζον, εἰ ἔλαττον αὐτῶν τις κολασθήσεται νενικῆσθαι ὑπὸ θατέρου καὶ μειονεκτεῖν τῶν ἐρωτικῶν οἴμων. Προσῆν δὲ καὶ τὸ προσομιλεῖν ἀλλήλοις καὶ τὸ παρηγορεῖν τε καὶ ἐπιθαρσύνειν εὐγενῶς τε καὶ γενναίως τὰς προσπιπτούσας τύχας καὶ τοὺς υπὲρ σωφροσύνης τε καὶ πίστεως τῆς εἰς ἀλλήλους φέρειν.

This then became a great consolation for them, and they believed [to have] gain in their identical afflictions in being tested; if one of them was tortured less, they prevailed less than the other and fell short in proving their love. And so they approached each other to console and comfort, and to encourage [each other] to bravely and nobly embrace providence and to bear these trials for their chastity and faith to each other. (8.9.22)

Chariklea and Theagenes embrace their torture with a vim and vigour more akin to that of the martyr accounts than the other novels. As this is an ideal romance, both hero and heroine must, and do, suffer, but their competition recalls the way in which “[suffering] becomes a way for Christians to participate in their religion and opportunity to prove devotion to God.” Of course, the female martyrs are imitating and proving their love for Christ through these tortures, and not a mortal lover, something similar is clearly at play in the Æthiopika. Chariklea and Theagenes are using these physical assaults as a way of entering fully into their bond, as a means of proving their commitment to each other. The language of sport and competition, so common in martyr accounts, is found here as well with the words νενικῆσθαι and ἀγῶνας. Furthermore, this is a competition for their σωφροσύνη and πίστις, just as the struggles of the martyrs are. These trials are not, however, endured for any gods, but for the lovers alone. It is not improbable that a

521 Ibid.
522 With perhaps the exception of Leucippe, who invites torture, but who is not actually tortured. (5.21).
523 Zeitlin, loc. cit., p. 96.
525 Ibid., p. 131.
526 Perkins, op. cit., p. 32 and p. 111.
contemporary reader would recognise this scene as a blend of martyr-like suffering and romance. While this scene in Arsake’s dungeon does not strengthen the characters’ comprehension of the gods in their sufferings, it does show that the hero and heroine now accord adversity and anguish an improving, or even purifying, use in their person and romantic lives. This usefulness of misery will become central to their quest, as shall be clear from the next passage to be analysed.

Like all novel protagonists, Chariklea and Theagenes keep to the idea that the gods are directly involved in their affairs throughout the novel. This becomes particularly clear in Book 8, when they are the prisoners of the Persian princess, Arsake. Immediately following this ordeal, Chariklea shows herself to be still sceptical of the gods, wondering if she was not saved simply for the amusing of a god who enjoys throwing them from the frying pan into the fire (8.10.2). Theagenes is, again, shocked at her blaspheming. It is then that Chariklea remembers her pantarb stone and a dream that she had. Indeed, night visions appeared to both Chariklea and Theagenes, during which the figure of Kalasiris, who has passed away by this point in the story, gives them cajoling words. The problem with dreams is not what is said in them, though, it is that the characters must rely on human interpretation of them. As it should so happen, neither of them shared their vision prior to the would-be execution of Chariklea, who realises afterwards that she had misinterpreted her dream. Hearing Chariklea’s story, Theagenes realises that he too may not have understood what was said to him:

\[ \text{Αἰθιόπων εἰς γαῖαν ἄφιξαν ἄμμιγα κούρη} \]
\[ \text{δεσμῶν Άρσακέων ἀφαίρεσα} \]
\[ \text{καὶ εἰκασμένων ἐκπροφυγών.} \]

You will arrive in the land of the Ethiopians with the young girl, Fleeing shortly the chains of Arsake. (8.11.3)

Chariklea, who also initially misunderstood her own dream as a death omen, offers him a new, happier understanding of his reverie. Whereas their previous experiences had caused him to see this as a portent of his death, Chariklea, who takes it at the first degree, accepts it for what it is: a promise that they will arrive in Ethiopia, and obviously will be freed from their bonds. As Kalasiris’ star pupil, and as a double for the wily priest, it is only natural that it be Chariklea who correctly interprets these visions. Armed with this new, more cheerful outlook, Chariklea changes her mind about the obstacles put in their way:

“Θάρσει” ἔφη· “παντάρβην ἑτέραν ἐχομεν τὰ μεμαντεμένα καὶ θεοῖς ἐπανέχοντες σωζόιμεθα τε ἃν ἢδιον καὶ, εἰ δέοι, πάσχοιμεν ὁσιότερον.”

528 Schubert, loc. cit., p. 263.
“Take courage,” she said, “we have another pantarb: [these] divinations. In returning to the gods, we shall be preserved, and, if fated, we shall suffer the most hallowed affair with pleasure. (8.11.11) This time, Chariklea points not to Apollo, but to the θεοί as instrumental in their experience. These gods fall into Chew’s category of “providential yet punitive gods,” thus those frequently associated with providence in the Αἰθιοπικά.  

Whereas earlier, she had not considered the possibility that they had survived up until this point because of divine purpose inherent in their journey, she now embraces it whole heartedly.

Her encouraging words deserve further comment. She tells Theagenes θάρσει, “take courage.” An imperative attested to in early Greek literature, it is a Homeric call to bolster one’s sentiments. It later takes on a religious tone in the Septuagint. In Joseph and Aseneth, for example, the ἄνθρωπος exhorts Aseneth seven times to take courage. By Heliodorus’ lifetime, this simple enunciation could be either a clin d’œil to Homer, or have theological overtones. Considering the pedestal upon which Homer finds himself in this novel, as well as the function of religion in the text, it may well be both.

The Pythia comes to Meroe, or Oracular Closure

Superficially, the Αἰθιοπικά concludes with the classic “and they lived happily ever after” that is anticipated at the end of the ideal Greek novels. In paying close attention to the role of the gods and the divine in the evolution of the romantic couple, however, one is lead to believe that more is going on under the surface than “merely romance.” This hypothesis is upheld by three points.

First of all, the conclusion is not uniquely centred around marriage. Indeed, when Hydaspes mentions the marriage of Chariklea and Theagenes, it is almost as if it were of secondary importance. While it is common for the sexual consummation of the marriage to happen discretely “off-stage,” this ending conspicuously lacks an emphasis of the social union of the lovers, or, as a matter of fact, any overtly erotic overtones at all. Of more central importance is the priesthood bestowed upon the heroine and hero. Whereas Theagenes appears to be granted a role as priest

529 Chew, loc cit., p. 282.
530 Hymni Homericici (8-6BC), “In Mercurium” 301 and “In Bacchum” 55, also Isyllus Lyr.(3BC) “Fragmenta” (IG 4.950), 73.
532 Ronnet, loc. cit., p. 62.
533 Ibid.
which is his by rights as a man, Chariklea has undoubtedly earned her new status through the successive sufferings she has endured. In her study of rites of passage in the novels, Sophie Lalanne points out: “Il faut voir là une promotion dans la hiérarchie sacerdotale, du fait que la jeune fille n’est plus une zacore de la déesse (ἡ ζάκορος τῆς Αρτέμιδος)... mais une prêtresse attitrée (ἡ ιερεία τῆς Σελήνας)...” While it is true that Heliodorus transforms his heroine, up until that moment a παρθένος, into a priestess, a bride or wife, and a (future) queen in one quick line, this initiation into the solar cult would appear to be more important than the roles of wife (and mother) or queen, for this is what happens “on-stage.”

The overtly religious tones in which the marriage is presented is the second point leading to the conclusion that this union is not uniquely about marriage and children. Although the marriage appears to be less symbolically important than the priesthood, even the terminology designating this union is religious. Hydaspe employs the verb ἀναδείκνυμι, which here means “to consecrate,” and authorises the marriage of Chariklea and Theagenes in accordance with θεσμῷ παιδογονίας, “the divine laws of procreation.” That this novel’s ending in marriage should appear as a revelation is a distinct part of the presentation of marriage as a sacrament that surpasses purely sexual pleasures. Heliodorus shows himself to be of like minds with Plutarch, who dismissed the sensual, but respected the true love between a man and wife. In his Dialogue on Love (Ερώτικες), Plutarch wrote Ἀλλὰ γυναιξί γε γαμεταῖς ἀρχαὶ ταῦτα φιλίας, ὥσπερ ἱερῶν μεγάλων κοινωνήματα, “On the other hand, in the case of lawful wives, physical union is the beginning of friendship, a sharing, as it were, in great mysteries.” In this apparently classic novel, what starts as romance ends in religion.

The last aspect of this theological, or possibly philosophical, ending is the presence of Chariklea’s adoptive father, Charikles. The tripartite division of paternal authority in this novel has been commented on often. All three men, Charikles, Kalasiris, and Hydaspes, are priests “affiliated

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534 Lalanne, op. cit., p. 178.
535 Ibid., p. 151.
536 Ibid.
537 Ibid.
538 Ronnet, loc. cit., p. 62.
539 Ibid.
542 Ronnet, loc. cit., p. 65. Interestingly, Ronnet uses this as an argument for a second century date of redaction for the Αἰθιοπικα.
with important cult centres that span a broad geographical sweep: Greece, Egypt and Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{544} The three priests can be read as representing different markers on a gradient scale of perfection,\textsuperscript{545} corresponding to the ideals represented by each country, which “unfolds a hierarchy of religious enlightenment from Greek (good) to Egyptian (better) to Ethiopia (best).”\textsuperscript{546} This is not incongruous with beliefs at the time. Egyptians and Ethiopians had been represented as devout peoples since classical literature,\textsuperscript{547} and could be read in parallel with the metaphorical interpretation of the \textit{Æthiopika} as representative of a spiritual journey, with the flight to Ethiopia through Egypt as a parallel to Plotinus’ escape from the world.\textsuperscript{548} As the Greek representative, Charikles is shown to be a less than apt priest, for he is “uneducated, unqualified, and unsuited.”\textsuperscript{549} This allows Kalasiris to dupe him regularly with regards to Chariklea. His importance is, however, undeniable in the last chapter of the book. Unlike Kalasiris, Charikles is not killed off during the narrative, and Heliodorus brings him back deliberately at the end. Charikles is the only character in the final scene who is able to recall the words of the Oracle. Though the reader may well have a vague memory of them, the presence of the Delphic priest at Meroe permits an easy bookending of the plot’s motor through the Sibylline words.\textsuperscript{550} This repetition of the second half of the prophecy

\[ \textit{τῇ περ ἄριστοβίων μέγ' ἀέθλιον ἐξάψονται λευκὸν ἐπὶ κροτάψων στέμμα μελαινομένων,} \]

“there, for all of their virtues a great prize shall be given, a white wreath upon their blackened temples [set].” (2.35.5)

loops the plot back upon itself, creating narratological circularity.\textsuperscript{551} By reintroducing the Pythia’s words, Chariklea’s priestly origins are recalled. More importantly, the repetition of the oracle highlights the fact that this entire adventure was the will of Apollo, who, as Charikles states, is none other than Helios (10.36) is displayed openly to the reader.

\textbf{Concluding Remarks: The \textit{Æthiopika}}

This section has been dedicated to understanding the interplay between the romantic couple

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Baumbach} Baumbach, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 181.
\bibitem{Merkelbach} Merkelbach, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 294.
\bibitem{Baumbach2} Baumbach, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 178.
\bibitem{Marein} Marein, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 113.
\bibitem{Schubert} Schubert, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 264.
\end{thebibliography}
and the divine in Heliodorus’ highly ambiguous and deeply intriguing novel. Conclusively, it can be said that both the characters themselves and the narrator want the reader to believe that Chariklea and Theagenes constitute a divinely sanctioned couple, which wanders and suffers, only to be (re)integrated into (a new) society once their trials are completed. This narrative is decidedly one of initiation. The work of Sophie Lalanne successfully demonstrated the social dynamics imbedded in the novels, and the successful shift from youth to adulthood to be read in their pages. 552 This is one aspect of the tale’s initiatory message. Reinhold Merkelbach, 553 Gilbert Ronnet, 554 and Ken Dowden 555 have all shown that the religious component of the *Æthiopika* is not merely rhetorical. It displays real values. In a complex finale, the religious initiation culminates simultaneously with the social one: the hero and heroine are sanctified as priests of Helios and Selene respectively, and led off to their marriage. The degree to which this initiation is to be interpreted and how is an entirely different beast. One might hesitantly go so far as to call this a mock-conversion, for Chariklea and Theagenes leave their initial social and religious community in Greece, and are then integrated into a new hierarchy of society and religion in Ethiopia. This departure from one group and adherence to another is a basic part of conversion, one that separates it from initiation, wherein the individual returns to the initial group. 556

Their’s is not a true conversion, though. The entirety of the *Æthiopika* points to a theologically or philosophically influenced megatheism, consistent with the later periods of Antiquity. 557 The story opens with a supernatural ambiance 558 and oracular foreshadowing, closes with a revelatory finale, 559 and the narrative is entirely saturated with gods. Apollo/Helios comes out on top, however, thus showing that he is the great among the deities.

A key component of this religiosity is the use of Apollo and/or Heliodorus as the central deity. At first glance, this is something of an odd choice, for the sun is the least likely of all divinities to meddle in the affairs of mortals. 560 And despite this, Ronnet calls him the only effective agent in the narrative. 561 Much of her analysis is brilliant, but this particular statement

552 Lalanne, *op. cit.*
553 Merkelbach, *op. cit.; loc. cit.*
554 Ronnet, *loc. cit.*
558 Marein, *loc. cit.*, p. 112.
ought be amended. Apollo/Helios is most definitely the root cause of the adventures, the consequences of which are his will, but he is not the only deity perceived of as being effective by the characters themselves, as Kathryn Chew has shown.\textsuperscript{562} Crucial in this novel is the slow slide from Apollo at Delphi to Helios at Meroe, which is itself an adherence to and mixture of popular beliefs.\textsuperscript{563} The importance of solar cults in Late Antiquity and in this novel permit Heliodorus to show the great power of the god in his novel. It has been said that this creates a “syncretistic kosmos” which umbrellas the entire ancient world.\textsuperscript{564} This appears to fit in perfectly with what Ronnet calls “la tendance à un monothéisme qui n’ose pas s’affirmer,” which is shown “par le biais de l’aventure romanesque autour de la figure d’Apollon délibérément confondu avec Hélios,”\textsuperscript{565} as well as Merkelbach’s affirmation that the final stage of ancient paganism was the syncretistic Helios cult.\textsuperscript{566} The \textit{Æthiopika}, is not a monotheistic novel, however. While Apollo/Helios is undeniably important, the plethora of other divinities is undeniably present. To label Heliodorus a monotheist is to ignore the powers of all the gods in his novel. While, Chariklea and Theagenes may leave Greece and Apollo, but by a trick of narration, they arrive not in a foreign land where they are to be eschewed as strangers, but in the homeland of Chariklea, where they are greeted by family and familiar gods. What may be presented as a mock-conversion is therefore most definitely an initiation in a megatheistic piece of literature.\textsuperscript{567} In other words, the \textit{Æthiopika} shows the widespread nature of Hellenism over the whole known world through a text that appears at first glance to be a conversion narrative, but that is revealed to be an initiation story.

No aspect of Heliodorus’ novel is quite so neatly wrapped up, however. Kathryn Chew said it best: “Heliodorus is always guilty, not of lying to the reader... but of letting the reader trap himself in his own preconceived and perhaps unexamined assumptions.”\textsuperscript{568} The human agency with which the divine is created is a key part of the \textit{Æthiopika}.\textsuperscript{569} The fact that the story’s motor is to be found between the two uses of the Pythia’s words is proof enough that Heliodorus is bending the divine to

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\textsuperscript{562} Chew, \textit{loc. cit.} p. 282.  \\
\textsuperscript{563} Ronnet, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 64-65; she briefly summaries the distinction and confusion of these two gods by ancient authors.  \\
\textsuperscript{564} Marein, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 113.  \\
\textsuperscript{565} Ronnet, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 64.  \\
\textsuperscript{566} Merkelbach, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 234.  \\
\textsuperscript{567} “Megatheism” is a term coined by A. Chaniotis, “Megatheism: the Search for the Almighty God and the Competition of Cults,” in S. Mitchell, P. van Nuffelen (ed.), \textit{One God. Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire}. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010. p. 112-140. It refers to “an expression of piety which was based on a personal experience of the presence of god,” and which often enters into an agonistic relationship with other cults and practices.  \\
\textsuperscript{568} Chew, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 289.  \\
\textsuperscript{569} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 293. For an interesting discussion of the use of gods by men, cf. Frangoulis, \textit{loc. cit.}
\end{flushright}
his authorial will. This is by no means a nasty thing, it simply sows doubt in the conclusions at which one arrives while reading this novel. Merkelbach’s initial analysis may go too far in one direction, but the current tendency to ignore religious aspect of this text, or to consider it merely another literary tool most certainly goes too far in the other. Religious writings were not the sole source of inspiration for this narrative, though they clearly have a place therein. One thing is clear: the oracle speaks the truth. What the Pythia says came to pass. Whether or not the secondary deities had anything to do with the near death experiences, escapes and mad cap adventures is unknown, but Chariklea and Theagenes were most definitely chosen by Apollo, and rewarded with sacerdotal roles in the cult of his proxy, Helios. The fate of the romantic couple must therefore be seen as divinely laid out.

**Comparative Conclusion**

This final chapter has been an exploration of the relationship between divinities and the heroic couple in *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika*. Once more, this investigation is most revealing of similarities and differences in both works of fiction. The differences are found in the awareness of the characters, as well as the divine representation of the protagonists. The similarities are found in the representations of the central deity or godly force within the narrative.

It is simpler to start with the antithetical aspects of these two narratives. The above sections and subsections have show that, in both cases, these novels wish for the reader to see the hero and heroine as forming a heavenly sanctioned couple. In some ways, this is not surprising: the ancient world was awash with gods perceived of as meddling in and controlling the lives of mortals. The novels are thus a product of their time, reflecting the religious plurality of the real world, working within a set of pre-established values. In others ways, the couple being formed by a god is a trope of the genre itself, and not wholly dependant on reality. Where these tales diverge is in the awareness of the characters themselves of this line between the religious opportunism of the author and the pious representation of religion. It comes as little surprise that it is Chariklea and Theagenes

570 Marein *loc. cit.*, p. 113.
571 Merkelbach, *op. cit.*
572 Chew, *loc. cit.*, p. 28, n. 5.
who are ultimately “in on the joke.” Although they do not realise it until chapter 8, the reader has been aware all along that the gods are interceding on their behalf or interfering in their existence for a unique purpose. Like all novel characters, they are convinced throughout the novel that the gods are involved in their lives, they simply do not understand that there is a divine plan in place and a utility to their errancies and trials prior to their dreams in Arsake’s dungeon. This shows once more the ways in which Heliodorus plays with both his characters and his readers, blending the lines of fiction and reality. This speaks to the very probable interpretation that “if there are gods, they are probably neither as powerful nor as concerned with human affairs as people would like to believe.”

Inversely, *Joseph and Aseneth* wants the reader to know that its god is just as powerful and very much as concerned with human affairs as mortals are wont to believe. Neither of the protagonists of this Jewish novel develops the awareness that Chariklea and Theagenes do. Ironically, characters around them (like Pentephres and the Pharaoh) seem to know that they had been chosen for each other prior to their encounter, but Aseneth and Joseph never realise that they were destined to be together. Considering the amount of repenting she does, and the descriptions of her suffering, it is thus noteworthy that Aseneth does not see herself as fulfilling a divine plan. She even makes it clear that she could fail in her quest, something that Chariklea realises is impossible when the gods have plans for you. So while both narratives depict a couple created, tested, and proved worthy by a god or gods, within the stories, not everyone has the same understanding of their experience.

Yet another difference between these two novels is shown in the religious representation of the characters. Both novels compare their heroes and heroines to important characters of literature and myth. On the one hand, Theagenes is likened to Achilles, and Chariklea is regularly mistaken for Artemis, and on the other Aseneth is compared to the Hebrew matriarchs, and Joseph to a solar deity. The divergence in these tropes is once again tied into the stories purposes. Chariklea is frequently described as a goddess, and is ultimately a more concrete character than any of the rather underdeveloped divinities of the novel. Although quite possibly inspired by aretologies and mystery cults, Heliodorus’ novel does not have a singularly religious purpose. Both *Joseph and Aseneth* are described in terms reminiscent of a god, particularly a helical deity. This is partially to

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show the similarities between the two of them,\textsuperscript{583} but is also a way in which the text shows the importance of Aseneth’s experience. Whereas Joseph is simply god-like, Aseneth becomes angelic or divine through her transformative experience.\textsuperscript{584} This speaks to the radically different purpose of Joseph and Aseneth in comparison with the \textit{Æthiopika}. The very point of this Jewish novel is to show the ways in which the divine works in the lives of mortals, and how even an individual can be important in the eyes of the Lord.

One of the remarkable similarities between Joseph and Aseneth and the \textit{Æthiopika} is the importance of a solar god and imagery. In Heliodorus’ work, it is obviously Apollo/Helios who takes centre stage, although Artemis/Selene is also present. As was stated in the second section of this chapter, the use of heliocentric cult renders Heliodorus’ message far more universal that had he written about the cult of any other divinity. He created a “syncretistic kosmos”\textsuperscript{585} in which he could explore certain philosophical, religious, and cultural ideas. In Joseph and Aseneth, the God is clearly the monotheistic divinity of the Torah, but the different metaphors and similes of light, fire, and lightning bring this text out of a private, exclusive world and into the syncretism of the age, not to mention the Diaspora. Although it is very difficult to place the redaction of this text in any set time or place, the use of ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὕψιστος and the solar imagery, as well as the term θεοσεβής, instead of designating his followers as “Jews,” or “Hebrews,” goes a long way to making this text accessible, if not actually universal. It is easy to see how this second narrative would fit into the “monothéisme qui n’ose pas s’affirmer” of the time.\textsuperscript{586}

There may not be an inherent connection between any of these novels and the mystery cults of later Antiquity. However, both stories are strong witnesses of a changing religious landscape, wherein the individual seeks a closer, more intimate contact with the divine.\textsuperscript{587} The use of love and erotics in this religious endeavour is also clearly palpable in this literature. In both cases, Eros seems to be a tool, rather than the purpose of the narrative. Whereas both tales commence with falling in love, ultimately the interest in pure erotics is replaced with something higher.\textsuperscript{588}

\textsuperscript{586} Ronnet, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{587} Zeitlin, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{588} Burrus, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 81.
Apollo/Helios is the driving force in the Æthiopika, and the Highest God is the main force behind Joseph and Aseneth, but without eroticism, neither would accomplish what they set out to do. Both narratives show a “bold originality that welds romance and religion together into a new and symbiotic relationship.”

This interdependence of literary motifs and purposes contributes greatly to the enjoyment of these tales.

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589 Zeitlin, loc. cit., p. 105. Discussing the Æthiopika.
CONCLUSION

Parallel lines are, perhaps, the perfect metaphor for the analyses that have taken place in the previous three chapters: two lines, going in the same direction, but which never actually touch. Although, as it has been seen, these lines draw divergent conclusions from their explorations of similar ideas, through their themes and motifs, both Joseph and Aseneth, and the Æthiopika show that they are dealing with the same subjects, despite their differences of opinion. Romance for romance’s sake is not the raison d’être of these novels. This is all well and good, but what conclusions can be drawn from the above chapters, concerning these texts either individually or as a pair? Unlike the protagonists of their adventures, these books are not a predestined couple, despite the similarities of genre. Before concluding with remarks not already made, it is necessary to revisit certain key components to the individual conclusions of each chapter.

The purpose of this research was to explore the manipulation of eroticism for ulterior motives in Joseph and Aseneth. The Æthiopika served as a counterpoint, for it is a well recognised member of the romantic sub-genre of ancient novels. This thesis opened with an analysis of falling in love, and how this motif was employed in both of these novels. Chapter one therefore focused on physical reactions, be they to visual or auditory stimuli. In “Seeing is Believing,” lovesickness, as well as falling in love were shown to be motifs susceptible to reinterpretation through the ambiguity of the language used. Although these motifs are assuredly expected tropes of the romantic genre, in neither of these two novels are they included simply because they are supposed to be there. In Joseph and Aseneth, the inclusion of erotic motifs permits an ingenious slide from sexual longing to religious fervour, whilst the lovesickness imagery furthers this fusion. Similarly, falling in love in Heliodorus’ novel is awash with philosophical imagery, although lovesickness is employed as a means of displaying Kalasiris’ role more than anything else. Love is thus the means to an end. These two stories, although they present different characters and concerns, both insert deeper questionings into the romantic genre, showing that this style of literature is far from frivolous. This comparison elucidates Joseph and Aseneth’s purpose and genre: it is an edifying romance, just as the Æthiopika has been shown to be.

Chapter two, “How do I love thee?,” looked at the different reasons for rejecting and accepting marriage. For this reason, it was predominantly an analysis of speeches and rhetoric, as opposed to body language. Once again, both of these novels explore social, moral, and religious ideals through their discussions of sexuality and marriage, and yet arrive at different conclusions.
On the one hand, *Joseph and Aseneth* has a very clear set of values: this is a theological romance, wherein marriage and procreation, though present, are decidedly less important than the religious lessons; on the other hand, the *Æthiopika*, while it clearly shows an eschewment of purely carnal relations between a man and a woman, is far less straightforward in its moral opinion, leaving it up to the readers to draw their own conclusions. This second chapter also highlighted the independence of Aseneth, contrasting it to the rather helpless reactions of Chariklea and Theagenes to their passions. This necessarily put Kalasiris front and centre in the discussion of Heliodorus’ work. This knowledge cements *Joseph and Aseneth*’s place among the Greek novels, specifically the romances. Just as the ideal novels explore similar themes through different means, this Jewish narrative is deeply concerned with communal bonds and moral propriety. The combination of religion and romance, which is somewhat akin to the martyr accounts, is revealed to be more alike to Heliodorus’ work than contemporary Christian writings.

Lastly, Chapter three considered the divine constitution of the romantic couple, analysing the place of trials and suffering in the religiosity of these two narratives. While both *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika* follow the novel trope of having a divinely sanctioned couple, “Proving One’s Affections” showed this was done in different ways. While Kalasiris and the reader are aware of the gods role in the narrative from the word “go,” Chariklea and Theagenes are not, although they do eventually become aware of the fact that their destiny is organised by the gods over the course of the novel. In contrast, Aseneth and Joseph are supremely unaware that they are predestined to be together, God’s hand goes unnoticed by them in the stories of their lives. In both works of fiction, the fusion of love (which necessarily includes an erotic element) and religion is a key component, and the importance of a solar divinity makes the messages of both novels universal instead of punctual. Despite vast differences, *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika* revealed rather interesting similarities. Most striking in this chapter was the highly personal experiences of divine implication. Although the *Æthiopika* does include scenes of communal religious practice, the protagonists are most aware of the gods’ interest in their lives while in private. Their understanding of religion, while connected to a larger society, is quite intimate. So it is for Aseneth, too. By passing through emotions instead of ritual, *Joseph and Aseneth* takes conversion out of the wider world of communal religion, and places it squarely in the domain of the individual. It is not wholly separate, of course, for the purpose of Aseneth’s conversion is to join a society that rejects her initially. This conversion is presented as private, not public. The main religious experiences in both of these texts can thus be qualified as intimate and personal. The irony of these intimate experiences
is that the reader is witness to every detail. The private moments of these characters are thrust back into the public domaine through the very nature of narrative. This play between public and private, personal and communal is deserving of its own analysis.

To conclude, the religiosity of both narratives must be revisited. One of the fascinating similarities in both of these fictions is the solar henotheism at their cores. These texts are not only examples of henotheism, but also of what Angelos Chaniotis calls “megatheism.” This shows a move towards personal religion, using the stories of individuals to make their point, for this form of worship “represented one particular god as somehow superior to others.” And yet, despite this similarity, the religions present in their pages are radically different, with one text espousing a megatheism tinged with monotheism, and the other maintaining a decidedly polytheist outlook. As Chaniotis affirms, megatheism is neither polytheistic, nor is it monotheistic, nor an alternative to these religious affiliations, but a tendency of the Imperial period to agonistically show one’s divinity to be superior, either within a pantheon or generally.

The main purpose of this thesis has been to analyse Joseph and Aseneth. Although the religious affiliation of its original author is hotly debated, this text is always described as either Jewish or Christian. It may therefore seem peculiar to refer to this text as an example of a henotheistic cult or culture. Three elements of the narrative do, however, support this. First and foremost is the description of the god in the story as ὕψιστος, “highest.” Although the 1999 and 2010 publications of Stephen Mitchell are concerned with epigraphy, and not literature, they have shown the widespread popularity of the divinity known as ὁ θεὸς ὕψιστος throughout the Mediterranean over several centuries. Conveniently, this cult can be found in every single location proposed for the redaction of Joseph and Aseneth, as well as the locations which are linguistically represented by the existent manuscripts of this tale. While it is not possible to affirm that all

591 Ibid. p. 113.
592 Ibid.
593 Ibid., p. 115.
594 This question becomes even more complex if one considers N. Elder’s arguments for an oral tradition, which are very persuasive, thus negating the single author origin, which could have been attributed to a single religious community. “On Transcription and Oral Transmission in Aseneth: A Study of the Narratives’ Conception,” Journal for the Study of Judaism, vol. 47, 2016, p. 119-142.
epigraphic (or literary) uses of ὑψιστὸς exalt the same divinity, it does place Joseph and Aseneth in a linguistic convergence with other contemporary forms of worship. This does not help pinpoint any given location or period in history for the composition of Joseph and Aseneth, but it most definitely helps explain the popularity of this story, for ὁ θεὸς ὑψιστὸς was a popular designation for local gods. The veneration of the God of Jacob by the same title makes Him familiar. A term found in communities of Jews and Jewish sympathisers, those who worshipped this god were not necessarily monotheists of a Mosaic variety. They did recognise the existence of other divinities and celestial beings, and incorporated them into their cult, although these were seen as being subordinate to ὁ θεὸς ὑψιστὸς.

This leads to the second aspect of this text that points to henotheism: angel worship. Veneration of celestial beings is a symptom of monotheistic belief, and a remarkable element of Joseph and Aseneth. Aseneth wishes to know the name of her celestial visitor so that she may pray to him. He refuses knowledge of his nomenclature, and departs. The term θεός is then ascribed to describe him, as he ascends to heaven upon his chariot (17.9). As a messenger of ὁ θεὸς ὑψιστὸς, the ἄνθρωπος is fulfilling the role of an adjunct deity found in many systems of belief at the time, although hypsistarian inscriptions do give a special place to this kind of practice. This term θεός is used again to describe Joseph’s father, Jacob, who is depicted as being angelomorphic (22.3). Israel (both the man and the people) is considered quasi-divine in other traditions as well, for he wrestled with an angel (Gen. 33.22-31). These gods have no place in a modern conception of monotheism, yet are a welcomed part of Joseph and Aseneth. This narrative is quite clear that idolatry, the veneration of “dead and dumb idols” (12.5) is absolutely reprehensible, but this story makes no attempt to deny the veracity of other gods’ existence. This is equally shown in the description of the old lion, father of the Egyptian gods, persecuting Aseneth. He and his children are real deities. The purpose of this text is thus not to refute the existence of other gods, but to show

597 Ibid., p. 102.
598 Ibid., p. 103.
599 R. Kraemer showed the biblical intertextuality of this passage with Gen. 33.22-31, wherein Jacob is refused knowledge of the nomenclature of his divine attacker, When Aseneth Met Joseph. A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998. While this is most likely a real allusion, P. Ahearne-Kroll showed that the arrival of the angel shares many similarities to Gabriel’s visit to Daniel as well. “Joseph and Aseneth and Jewish Identity in Greco-Roman Egypt,” PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005. p. 226-238.
600 Chaniotis, loc. cit., p. 139-140.
that ὁ θεὸς ὕψιστος is the only divinity worthy of true veneration. Despite the fact that this piece of literature is classified as either Jewish or Christian, this aspect of Joseph and Aseneth receives very little attention. Future study ought to delve further into the balance struck between the undeniable place of importance of God and the roles of divine, yet lesser beings in Joseph and Aseneth. This representation of God, which relies on the personal experience of an individual, and in which one deity is shown to be greater than all the others through miracles, epiphanies, and protection, is highly indicative of the megatheism of Imperial Rome.\[603\] This narrative, which was popular well past the installation of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, may yet shed further light on the nature of religious experience in Late Antiquity.

The third and final henotheistic note in Joseph and Aseneth has to do with the highly prominent place of solar imagery throughout the story. Joseph is a mortal likeness of Helios when he arrives in the home of Pentephres, riding a quadriga with golden rays extending from his crown (5.5). Aseneth is also described in luminous terminology after her encounter with the ἄνθρωπος, having a face like the sun, and eyes like stars (18.9). As Chapter three showed, Aseneth has essentially become divine, whereas Joseph merely appears celestial.\[604\] The most obviously solar being is the angelic man, however. In a study of Jewish beliefs regarding angels, Michael Mach called the chapter analysing the ἄνθρωπος from this story “Die Verschmelzung biblischer Angelologie und griechischer Mythologie auf ihren vorläufigen Höhepunkt,” “the height of the merger of biblical angelology and Greek mythology”.\[605\] This really says it all. Many scholars have pointed out resemblances between Helios and the angel in Joseph and Aseneth.\[606\] The importance of solar imagery ties in perfectly with the cult of ὁ θεὸς ὕψιστος. In certain instances, light, flames and the sun were important elements of worship and associated with his essence.\[607\] Furthermore, in some specific situations ὁ θεὸς ὕψιστος is virtually conflated with Helios.\[608\] It is highly unlikely that Joseph and Aseneth was used as conversion literature,\[609\] or that it depicts specific rites and rituals.\[610\]

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603 Chaniotis, loc. cit., p. 133-134.
610 R. Chesnutt, “The Social Settings and Purpose of Joseph and Aseneth,” Journal for the Study of the
The solar motif does render this text more accessible, both for Jews and Jewish sympathisers though, for heavenly bodies were venerated in all cultures of the period.\textsuperscript{611} The solar imagery therefore connects \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} to other Hellenic literature of the novel genre,\textsuperscript{612} but also to religious texts and practices. The solar motif thus offers another area for future scholars to explore, as is its implication on the readership of this biblical romance.

This leads to a final hypothesis regarding \textit{Joseph and Aseneth}. In the introduction, the comparison of this Jewish text and the \textit{Æthiopika} was presented as a possible means of contributing to the discussion of dating of \textit{Joseph and Aseneth}. Over the course of this thesis, specific elements and small conclusions have leapt out that are, together, stronger than the mere sum of their parts. The analysis of lovesickness in Chapter one clearly showed that Aseneth’s erotic experience is a call to action. She chose to convert in order to gain her heart’s desire. This idea became even clearer in Chapter two, where she was seen actively praying. Furthermore, Joseph’s benediction and the eternity motif present this conversion as Aseneth’s destiny. No one has to proselytise this young woman: she does it all herself, as God intended her to. Lastly, this text is suffused with a megatheism that Chaniotis described as an agonistic tendency of the Imperial period.\textsuperscript{613} All of this leads to the conclusion that \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} is not a Hellenistic text, but an Imperial one, with the intent of justifying a cessation of active proselytising by members of the Jewish community. The twofold message of \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} is thus that Jews need not convert the Gentiles, for this is God’s work, not that of mortals, but also that proselytes have a divinely sanctioned place among and role to fulfil within the chosen people. This implies that the redaction of this narrative would have been after the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. What’s more, this further suggests a Jewish origin for this narrative. The comparative method of this study has brought out the elements leading to this conclusion, thus validating this approach.

This conclusion permits a remark on the subject of readership, an area of research that has not been considered in this thesis. On the one hand, the \textit{Æthiopika} may have sparked curiosity in readers of varying backgrounds with its highly educated style, and plumbing of social questions. On the other hand, it is unlikely the \textit{Joseph and Aseneth} circulated widely in polytheistic communities. The conclusions drawn regarding its ant-proselytising message leads one to believe that it was a text that remained within Jewish, and later Christian, circles.

612 Warren, \textit{loc. cit.}
613 Chaniotis, \textit{loc. cit.}, p. 115.
Naturally, it was impossible to broach all subjects of interest in these narratives. A component of *Joseph and Aseneth* that has not been discussed in this research is the possibility of Egyptian influences on the narrative, either in plot, motifs, or religious practice. Of the well known scholarship to be publish on the subject of *Joseph and Aseneth*, both Christoph Burchard and Marc Philonenko have put forward hypotheses regarding Egyptian influences on this narrative. Burchard reads *Joseph and Aseneth* in light of the Osiris and Isis myth. Once again, Philonenko is of a different mind. He is of the opinion that this novel was in dialogue with specific aspects of Egyptian theology, however, calling it “le plus égyptien des romans grecs.” If this narrative was produced in Greco-Roman Egypt, which does seem likely, further study into the possible influences had by Egyptian cult and culture would most certainly be worthwhile. In a similar, yet different line of research, much of what is currently undertaken in scholarship on *Joseph and Aseneth* centres around the Greek manuscripts of the text. Although editions of other languages exist, not enough comparative work is being done between the different version of this text. Detailed analysis of these versions would be highly illuminating as to the translation and adaptation of this story into the communities that so clearly cherished it.

Considering the vast complexity of the *Æthiopika*, it comes as little surprise that the research done in order to complete this thesis resulted in more questions than it did answers. Most significantly, the question of Heliodorus’ religious affiliation crops up in a comparison between his novel and an overtly theological, and undeniably Judeo-Christian, narrative. In Chapter one, it was shown that, despite the openly Platonic imagery, the language of the *Æthiopika* is quite clearly of its era, if not directly drawn from Christian literature. The use of a motif found in monotheistic literature was seen in Chapter two. Not only does the fraternal lie told by Chariklea and Theagenes remind a reader of a possible connection to the Torah, but the position of Theagenes to Arsake is reminiscent of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar, for the Greek hero is a slave in the Egyptian house of a noble, just as Joseph is in Gen. 39. If one looks further, the attempted execution and miraculous salvation of Chariklea can even be compared to the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22). If one moves away from similarities of motif, the ways in which the body is represented as suffering recalls Judith Perkins’ analysis of martyr accounts quite dramatically. This begs the question, why did Perkins

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not include the *Æthiopika* in her study? It is quite possible that this is because it is too similar. This novel clearly shows a hybridization of pagan and Christian representations where she draws a line: the novels condone life and marriage, show stoicism and the rightful place of the socially powerful to be there; the martyrologies show suffering as the way to salvation and tip social hierarchies on their heads. Perkins actually shows that this sense of the self and suffering as a means of worship or communication with the divine is not a uniquely Christian phenomenon, but is found in pagan literature as well. 617 The representation of the body, and the blending of traditional Greek literature with late Antique beliefs in Heliodorus would thus be a fascinating study. To come back to the question of Heliodorus’ religious self-understanding, the author’s name is of course central. Literally “the present of the Sun,” it is perhaps unsurprising that his text is overflowing with solar imagery. The *Æthiopika* and its creator warrant much further exploring.

In light of this mention of Joseph and Theagenes in the same motif, this is the moment to state once more that this thesis is not suggesting that one of these two narratives is influenced by the other. There is no proof that Heliodorus read *Joseph and Aseneth*, nor that the *Æthiopika* is the source of inspiration for Aseneth’s conversion story. What this comparison has shown is that the novel, which is perhaps the most ambiguous genre of literature, encompassing hugely variant pieces, and drawing on sources of all kinds, is the ideal place to explore different and difficult questions. Superficially, *Joseph and Aseneth* appears to support Reinhold Merkelbach’s theories regarding mystery religions. However, Richard Pervo quite clearly showed that this is not the case: This novel is so clearly a derivative product, in which the love story obviously serves as a scant frame for a religious message, that it provides no support whatsoever for the contention that the original motive force behind the composition of Greek erotic novels was religious propaganda. The Greek and Latin novels with a religious theme as a major purpose appear to be secondary. Without naming names, Pervo has thus lumped *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika* in together once again. Neither text has love as the ultimate goal. Both use the frame of a love story to paint a different picture. While the ultimate purposes of these narratives are unrelated, they make use of the same motifs.

Solar religion was popular throughout ancient history, and well into the Christian era. Both *Joseph and Aseneth* and the *Æthiopika* are examples of this. Although the dates of composition for both works are uncertain, these narratives evidently spoke to the minds of those reading them. The universalising nature of the religion in these novels is indeed a part of this popularity. It is not,

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however, the unique element to their success. The purpose of these two tales is quite clearly more than to simply spin a good yarn. Although Heliodorus’ vague messages are woven into a veritable tapestry, and the anti-idolatrous ideals of *Joseph and Aseneth* are spelled out, both of these narratives use the classic love story to communicate with their public. These tales capitalise on the popularity of a genre, and then remould it to their own ends.

This brings to mind the famous lines from Kohelet, or Ecclesiastes, 1.9:

What has been, shall be
And what has been done, shall be done
There is nothing new under the sun.

These famous lines could not be more appropriate for the novels studied in this thesis. Not only do they portray love stories, possibly one of the old kinds of narrative, they even display their tales under the watchful eye of solar deities. Indeed, there is nothing new under the sun, but that doesn’t mean that what is already there cannot be reused, refashioned, reworked, so as to no longer be identical to what was previously read, thus allowing the reader to discover new ideas through old concepts.
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Synthèse en français

Le mémoire qui sera ici résumé traite de l'érotisme dans deux œuvres de l'Antiquité à travers une étude comparée. La première, Joseph et Aséneth, est le récit principal qui fait l'objet de cette analyse, et le roman d'Héliodore d'Émèse, Les Éthiopiques, en est le second. Tous deux étant des écrits romanesques helléniques, cette approche comparative a pour but de comprendre les usages qui sont faits de l'érotisme au sein de ces histoires comme moyens d'introduire et de soutenir d'autres idées. Comme cela ne représente qu'une synthèse des démonstrations et des analyses présentées dans le mémoire, ce document se bornera à évoquer les grandes lignes de la démarche et de l'argumentation.

Introduction

Cette introduction a pour objectif d'offrir au lecteur un survol de l'état de la question des textes, ainsi qu'une justification de la méthode comparée, car cette dernière n'est pas acceptée par l'ensemble de la communauté scientifique. L'étude de Joseph et Aséneth et de ses contextes historique et littéraire est complexe. Le récit de l'amour qu’éprouve Aséneth pour Joseph figure parmi les œuvres juives rédigées en grec entre la période hellénistique et le début de l'Empire romain. Il fait donc partie des écrits rejetés par la tradition rabbinique naissante et préservés seulement grâce aux chrétiens, tels que le corpus de Philon d'Alexandrie, les fragments d'Ézéchiel le Tragique et un certain nombre de documents pseudépigraphiques et apocryphes. L'intérêt d'évoquer ces autres textes, qui ne seront guère analysés plus loin, est de montrer les échanges qui se font entre les écrits juifs et païens. La tendance qu'on a à placer des bornes intellectuelles entre les penseurs juifs et les traditions philosophiques helléniques est de moins en moins acceptée. On reconnaît maintenant qu'il existait des contacts entre les juifs et leurs voisins païens dans les communautés de la Diaspora, ainsi qu'au sein de la communauté palestinienne. C’est par des études comparées que s’améliore notre compréhension de ces textes juifs, et cela se révèle tout aussi vrai pour Joseph et Aséneth.

Les juifs de cette époque étaient toujours aussi fortement attachés à la Torah qu'au paravant. Joseph et Aséneth est inspiré par le verset problématique de Genèse 41,45: « Et Pharaon donna à Joseph le nom de Psonthomphanêx ; et il lui donna comme femme Aséneth, la fille de Pentéphès, le prêtre de la ville d'Hélios ». Le roman de Joseph et Aséneth explique comment il est possible que
Joseph, symbole du juif qui conserve son identité culturelle dans un monde païen, ait pu se marier avec une non juive. Étudier ce texte aujourd’hui suscite cinq questions : celles de la date, de la langue, de la provenance, de la religion et de sa version définitive. On admet généralement que ce texte fut écrit au premier siècle avant ou après Jésus-Christ, en grec, en Égypte, par un juif et que la version longue - car il en existe une courte - serait plus proche de l'original. Ce consensus reste l’hypothèse la plus convaincante sur ces sujets ; cependant quelques-unes de ces questions seront reprises dans la conclusion.

La littérature scientifique concernant Joseph et Aséneth a beaucoup évolué depuis trente ans. Ce texte, qui fut longtemps étudié pour ses intérêts théologiques et sociaux, est maintenant lu comme une œuvre de divertissement et pour son intertextualité. Cette nouvelle lecture qu’on en fait a inspiré plusieurs études comparées avec les romans idéaux grecs. La diversification et l’enrichissement de la recherche contemporaine sur Joseph et Aséneth ont été encouragés par les récentes études du genre romanesque de l’Antiquité. Depuis que ce genre a cessé de se limiter aux cinq romans d’amour grecs les plus connus et aux quelques romans latins traditionnels, est apparu un réel intérêt universitaire pour les écrits romanesques en prose et les emprunts entre ces textes. C’est dans cette perspective que se situe cette étude comparée de Joseph et Aséneth.

Dans le cadre de cette recherche, parmi les cinq romans d’amour de l'Antiquité, c’est avec Les Éthiopiques qu’une comparaison s’impose de la façon la plus logique. En effet, le texte d’Héliodore présente lui aussi un questionnement méthodologique. La date de rédaction n'en est pas certaine. Certains chercheurs penchent pour une datation au IIIe siècle apr. J.-C., d'autres pour le IVe. De nos jours, c’est cette seconde datation qui est plus couramment admise que la première. La distance chronologique entre ces deux œuvres rend crucial un point de ce mémoire : ce travail ne plaide pas en faveur d’une filiation directe entre Joseph et Aséneth et Les Éthiopiques ; il étudie plutôt comment deux auteurs différents, pour transmettre des idées religieuses ou philosophiques, ont recouru au même genre littéraire, celui du roman d’amour, et à ses topoi.

On dit que Les Éthiopiques est le plus religieux des romans idéaux, car il propose en abondance au lecteur dieux, oracles, rêves et symbolisme solaire. La place centrale qu’y occupent les dieux célestes invite à une comparaison avec Joseph et Aséneth. De plus, les deux textes ont été écrits en grec, ce qui rend possibles l’intertextualité et la recherche de sources communes. Mais on peut évoquer des raisons plus profondes pour les comparer. En premier lieu, les héroïnes des deux romans vivent des expériences initiatiques dont l'amour est le moteur de la trame narrative.
D'ailleurs, cet amour n'est jamais le but des textes, mais un moyen d'atteindre une autre conclusion. En second lieu, ces deux romans furent écrits dans des milieux où circulaient des écrits à la fois judéo-chrétiens et païens. Qu'ils aient un vocabulaire commun et des sources communes est donc tout à fait vraisemblable, et ces similitudes permettent la comparaison entre ces deux romans. Le but de cette comparaison est triple. D'abord, cette étude revendique le titre de « roman grec » pour *Joseph et Aséneth* en se fondant sur l'analyse et la comparaison de l'usage qui est fait de l'érotisme dans *Les Éthiopiques*. Cette revendication permettra une contribution au débat sur la date de rédaction de l'œuvre juive. En fin de compte, cette recherche vise à une qualification de l'expérience religieuse des personnages.

Avant de passer à l'analyse des deux textes, il doit être précisé ce qui est entendu par l'emploi du terme « érotisme ». Ce terme est ici conçu comme ayant de multiples facettes. D'abord, il concerne la sexualité proprement dite des personnages, ce qui inclut la description des corps ou des émotions, ainsi que les métaphores qui évoquent des tensions sexuelles dans ces récits. Ensuite, il faut tenir compte des courants néoplatoniciens qui ont pu influencer les auteurs et qui créent un érotisme purement philosophique. C'est de cette manière complexe et éclectique que cet érotisme est étudié dans ce mémoire. Cette définition permet de passer maintenant à la première partie, où cet érotisme révèle son importance dans les deux œuvres.

1ère partie

Les romans idéaux sont connus pour évoquer le coup de foudre que vivent les protagonistes, ainsi que pour se livrer à des descriptions de l'anatomie de l'amour et des émotions confuses, partie intégrante du genre. Puisque un des buts de cette recherche est de justifier l'appartenance de *Joseph et Aséneth* aux romans d'amour grecs, il est logique de commencer cette étude comparée par celle du moment où les personnages tombent amoureux l’un de l’autre et des conséquences d’ordre physique et affectif de cette expérience. Cette partie commence par une analyse de *Joseph et Aséneth*, qui est suivie d’une étude des *Éthiopiques* et se termine par une conclusion comparative entre les deux.

L'amour érotique et spirituel d'Aséneth

Ce récit est souvent qualifié de romanesque et religieux. Afin de bien le définir comme étant
un roman d’amour, il faut en analyser trois aspects : le coup de foudre, le rejet de l’héroïne par le héros et les moments où Aséneth languit d’amour.

L’histoire d’Aséneth est présentée, dès ses premières lignes, comme un mélange de récit biblique et de roman d’amour. L’œuvre commence par une tournure typique des récits bibliques grecs : Καὶ ἐγένετο (1.1). L’héroïne est ensuite présentée d’une manière qui rappelle les héroïnes romanesques grecques : on la compare aux figures féminines de la tradition juive Sarah, Rebecca et Rachel ; elle est dite la plus belle fille du monde et les hommes sont prêts à guerroyer pour l’épouser, ce qui rappelle le personnage d’Hélène. D’ailleurs, la figure de Pénélope est également sous-entendue dans le refus qu’oppose Aséneth aux prétendants, puisqu’elle est dite dédaigneuse de tout homme.

Alors qu’elle a refusé le mariage avec Joseph proposé par son père, Aséneth souffre terriblement lorsqu'elle voit cet homme pour la première fois (6.1). Le lecteur comprend sa réaction comme un condensé du *topos* du coup de foudre, tradition littéraire qui remonte à Sappho. Le coup de foudre d’Aséneth témoigne de la violence de l’amour, qui est une émotion qui passe par la vue, ainsi que de la combinaison des effets physiques et sentimentaux de cette passion. Pourtant, l'amour n'est pas explicitement mentionné. Si le lecteur est bon connaisseur des canons littéraires grecs, il reconnaît aisément dans cette description la profonde passion charnelle que ressent la protagoniste. Cette passion est renforcée dans le passage 8.8, lorsque Joseph refuse d’embrasser Aséneth à cause de son idolâtrie. Cette scène éloigne *Joseph et Aséneth* des romans grecs, car elle ne présente pas la symétrie entre le héros et l’héroïne typique des amours idéales : en effet, Joseph pose sa main sur la poitrine d’Aséneth, entre les seins, mais refuse de l’embrasser sur la bouche. La réaction d’Aséneth souligne tous les aspects érotiques, tant physiques qu’émotifs, du passage 6.1.

Par contre, Joseph consent à bénir Aséneth. Cette bénéédiction crée chez l’héroïne des émotions fortes, présentées comme une accumulation asyndétique de substantifs abstraits, manière typiquement romanesque de décrire les passions. Loin de n’être qu’un éloge de la passion charnelle, les souffrances d’Aséneth en 9.1 permettent un premier glissement explicite entre le désir érotique et le désir religieux. Ce dernier va lui inspirer ses prochains gestes rituels, car elle va détruire ses idoles, renoncer à ses beaux vêtements, se revêtir d'un tissu grossier et se lamenter dans une mare de larmes mêlées de cendres. L’enchaînement des passions de l’héroïne la mène d'une expérience érotique à ce moment de crise religieuse. Cette fusion de l'érotique et du religieux devient l'élément clef de *Joseph et Aséneth*.
L'amour philosophique dans *Les Éthiopiques*

Le roman d'Héliodore présente au lecteur une histoire alambiquée. Commençant *in medias res*, il ne parvient à la scène du coup de foudre entre les protagonistes qu'au livre 3. Donc, il n'est pas surprenant que le héros et l'héroïne tombent amoureux l'un de l'autre, car le récit et le genre les y obligent. Cependant, la narration de cette scène n’est pas objective. Ce moment de l'histoire se trouve dans le récit odyssee de Kalasiris. Cette subjectivité est importante dans une analyse de l'amour de Chariklée et de Théagène.

Le couple des amoureux de ce roman est typique du genre : ils sont jeunes, beaux et d’un milieu aisé. Néanmoins, Chariklée et Théagène refusent de se marier : Chariklée vénère la chasteté et la virginité comme étant quasi divines (2.33.5) et Théagène n'a jamais trouvé la femme qui méritait ses attentions. Ces refus obstinés rendent leur premier contact encore plus dramatique. Le moment du récit où les yeux des protagonistes se croisent puise dans les conventions du genre : on reconnaît les réactions physiques et psychologiques des personnages, car Kalasiris décrit la fusion instantanée des âmes, mais on retrouve également la violence de l'amour, car on nous dit que leur cœur est envahi par cette émotion. Pourtant, Héliodore ne recourt pas aux *topoi* du coup de foudre comme à une simple ornementation littéraire, mais les approfondit par l'ajout de références philosophiques, en particulier platoniciennes. Une étude minutieuse de ce passage dévoile une chose tout à fait étonnante : malgré des images de toute évidence platoniciennes, qui rappellent les traités, à l'époque populaires, du *Phèdre* et du *Banquet*, le vocabulaire est nettement plus tardif, incluant nombre de mots renvoyant bien plus souvent à des écrits chrétiens qu'à des traités de Platon. Cela ne constitue pas la preuve qu'Héliodore ait été chrétien, mais n’en témoigne pas moins de la religiosité philosophique de ce passage.

Dans les *Éthiopiques*, ce coup de foudre entraîne de lourdes conséquences : chez l’un et l’autre des deux protagonistes, il engendre leur indifférence à tout et l’arrêt de leurs activités quotidiennes. D'un côté, ce que vit Théagène est un amour typique des romans : il désire ardemment Chariklée. Kalasiris lui offre son aide pour sortir de Delphes avec la fille de ses rêves. De l'autre côté, l'héroïne souffre d'une véritable maladie, dont aucun médecin ne discerne la cause. Ce qu'elle éprouve semble un grave malaise, qui crée une grande souffrance intérieure. Kalasiris est finalement le seul qui comprenne les symptômes du mal de la jeune femme et lui seul sera en mesure de l'aider. Au vu de l'ampleur des symptômes et de la description qui en est faite en ce qui concerne Chariklée, on peut conclure qu'Héliodore porte sur ce désir érotique qu’éprouvent les femmes un jugement
négatif, voire honteux. Malgré la passivité des protagonistes, c'est le dynamisme du prêtre égyptien qui fait avancer la trame narrative. Ces moments de souffrance, ainsi que le coup de foudre, relaté uniquement par Kalasiris, donnent à ces écrits une morale, mais constituent surtout des moments où Kalasiris se révèle le vrai héros de son récit odysséen.

Conclusion comparée

Les deux études de cas soulignent non seulement la violence, mais aussi le mélange d'émotions et de réactions physiques et affectives qu'attendent un lecteur des scènes de passions naissantes dans les romans de l'Antiquité. Tous deux fournissent des exemples du recours qui est fait aux topoï génériques à des fins édifiantes, et donnent le moyen d'introduire des idées morales, religieuses ou philosophiques. Ces œuvres n'offrent pas de l'érotisme pour le simple plaisir du lecteur, mais un érotisme rhétorique à visée spirituelle. Bien que son intention soit différente, Joseph et Aséneth mérite tout autant que Les Éthiopiques le statut de roman.

2ème partie

Le point commun le plus évident entre Joseph et Aséneth et Les Éthiopiques est le rejet du mariage par les protagonistes. Cette deuxième partie analyse les arguments pour lesquels les héros et les héroïnes refusent le mariage, et ensuite y consentent. Cette partie de l'étude met aussi en relief les intérêts sociaux, politiques ou religieux, qui apparaissent dans ces deux romans à travers le discours des personnages principaux. Si ces idées, dans ces romans, sont occultées par l'érotisme et l'amour, leurs messages n'en sont pas moins clairement exprimés. Cette analyse montre encore qu'il existe des liens entre Joseph et Aséneth et les romans grecs, puisqu’ils abordent les mêmes sujets et les traitent sur le même mode divertissant.

L'amour pour l'étranger dans Joseph et Aséneth

Cette première section relève des thèmes importants du roman juif dans trois passages voisés de l'héroïne, ainsi que dans certains discours de Pentephrès, son père, et de Joseph. L'étude des opinions proférées par les personnages et des valeurs soutenues par la fin de l'histoire montre que nous avons affaire à un récit hybride, qui partage avec les romans et les martyrologies certaines idées concernant les relations sexuelles et le mariage.
Aséneth refuse de se marier avec Joseph après que son père lui a suggéré leur union. Pentéphres, prêtre et noble, se place dans une perspective politique, sociale et morale ou religieuse pour expliquer à son enfant pourquoi ce mariage est souhaitable. Lorsqu'elle lui répond, Aséneth ne parle qu'en termes politiques et sociaux. Elle se montre pragmatique par son désir de n'épouser que le premier prince d'Égypte. A l'inverse, lorsque Joseph refuse un contact trop intime avec l'héroïne, il use d'un vocabulaire qui gravite autour d'idées d'ordre spirituel et affectif, associant l'amour au mariage d'une manière tout à fait typique des romans idéaux. Au-delà des bornes religieuses qu'il impose, Joseph offre une nouvelle définition du groupe socio-religieux auquel il appartient, car il ne recourt jamais à une terminologie ethnique. Il crée l'image d'une fraternité spirituelle, à laquelle tous et toutes peuvent adhérer. Joseph et Aséneth présente donc des protagonistes qui sont aux deux extrêmes opposés du spectre du rejet du mariage.

Le refus d'Aséneth introduit un langage social qui parle en termes de hiérarchie. Ces concepts sont repris, ensuite, lorsqu'elle passe au stade liminal qui précède de peu sa conversion. Alors qu'elle a refusé de s'unir à un esclave de Canaan, elle souhaite maintenant être « sa servante et son esclave ». Ses discours expriment aussi le sentiment de honte que lui inspirent ses paroles et ses gestes inconvenants et irrespectueux. L'esclavage est un thème récurrent des romans idéaux, mais cette image dans Joseph et Aséneth est inversée, puisque l’esclave de Joseph que voudrait devenir Aséneth, loin de la détourner du héros, ne peut que la rapprocher de lui. Ainsi voit-on un topos amoureux radicalement détourné par la visée religieuse du texte, détournement permis par le glissement entre désir érotique et désir religieux qui a été analysé dans la première partie.

Les paroles d'Aséneth éclairent un autre point fondamental de ce roman, qui le distingue des romans grecs. Comme elle se convertit, Aséneth éprouve le besoin de déconstruire, puis de reconstruire son identité sociale et religieuse ; et ce processus de transformation la place dans une relation extrêmement asymétrique avec Joseph. Malgré les motifs qui les mettent en parallèle et présagent leur union, ces personnages ne sont pas immédiatement égaux, comme le sont les personnages du couple amoureux dans les romans idéaux. Cet aspect de Joseph et Aséneth relève de ses visées théologiques. On a donc affaire à des images et à un langage fortement liés aux romans, mais intégrés à un cadre religieux.

Une notion fondamentale du discours d'Aséneth est qu'elle n'est pas l'égale de Joseph. En souhaitant devenir sa servante et son esclave, elle se place dans un statut social nettement inférieur à lui. Elle parle de son mariage dans un seul passage : un hymne prononcé au chapitre 21. Le dernier
verset de ce poème présente la séduction violente et la violence séductrice que l'on considère comme caractéristiques du genre romanesque. Par contre, ce n'est pas uniquement la beauté du héros qui attire l'héroïne, mais aussi ses capacités sapientiales, car ce texte ne fait pas l'éloge que de l'amour charnel. Ce qui est unique dans le récit de ce mariage spirituel est l'ambiguïté du pronom αὐτοῦ à la onzième ligne 21.21. En grec, cet emploi de la troisième personne du singulier peut faire référence aussi bien à Joseph qu'à Dieu. Le glissement entre érotisme et spiritualité est parachevé, car le lecteur ne pourrait dire avec certitude avec qui l'héroïne s'est mariée. Le roman d’amour fusionne avec un mariage mystique entre l'âme et le divin par le biais de l'hymne élogieux d'Aséneth. L'hybride de Joseph et Aséneth devient alors claire : tout comme dans les romans d’amour, où ni la grossesse ni les enfants ne sont centraux, la trame narrative devient un moyen d’évoquer des questions d’ordre social au-delà d’une apparence sentimentale superficielle ; mais, comme dans les martyrologies, ce discours sur le mariage relève d'une angoisse concernant la relation entre les hommes et leur Dieu.

Lorsque les âmes se rencontrent chez Héliodore

Le rejet et l'acceptation du mariage par les protagonistes des Éthiopiques sont tout aussi révélateurs qu'ils le sont dans Joseph et Aséneth. Ces discours sont encadrés par l'idée de la nature (φύσις) du héros et de l'héroïne, et constituent alors un prolongement des thèmes et des motifs évoqués par l'étude des passages vus dans la première partie.

Les personnages sont caractérisés par leur raisonnement concernant le mariage. Théagène est un personnage amoureux typique, car il modifie tout simplement la perception qu’il a de sa propre nature, afin de se réconcilier avec ses émotions. Pour ce qui est de Chariklée, son désir est en opposition avec son idéal. En effet, comme elle se croyait à l'abri de cette passion, elle s'estime responsable de ses sentiments. Elle a donc honte de ce qu'elle éprouve, contrairement à d'Aséneth. Kalasiris doit l'aider à changer sa conception de la morale, pour la convaincre de se marier. Le personnage de Kalasiris est tout aussi primordial dans ces scènes qu'il l’est dans l'analyse faite auparavant.

Lorsque le héros et l'héroïne sont sûrs de s'unir et de quitter Delphes, le discours qu'ils tiennent l'un sur l'autre est significatif pour la compréhension du texte. D'abord, comme Kalasiris, qui narrait le coup de foudre, a évoqué des images platoniciennes en parlant des âmes des jeunes gens, il n'est peut-être pas étonnant de lire que Théagène parle à Chariklée en l'appelant : ὦ ψυχῇ ἐμῇ, « mon âme ». Chariklée en fait de même. Ensuite, en plus d'être une manière traditionnelle de
parler à son amant, la répétition du motif spirituel souligne le lien plus que charnel qu'entretiennent ces personnages. Leur amour n'est pas uniquement sensual, mais aussi philosophique.

Un motif récurrent dans les Éthiopi ques est le mensonge sur la fraternité des protagonistes. Cette supercherie leur permet non seulement de se protéger mutuellement contre la jalousie des amants indésirables, mais aussi de souligner d'autres aspects de l'histoire. Ce mensonge lie les personnages les uns aux autres, créant entre eux une unité sociale intime. En outre, cela construit un parallèle imagé entre, d'une part, le héros et l'héroïne et, d'autre part, Apollon, dieu central du récit, et sa sœur Artémis. Ce mensonge fait dépasser le caractère passionnel de leur relation, en reléguant au second rang l'importance de sa dimension érotique et en accentuant la spécificité de leur union, qui va bien au-delà de la seule sensualité.

Conclusion comparée

La comparaison entre les refus du mariage et les consentements qu'on y donne relève des différences à la fois superficielles et profondes entre ces deux œuvres. En apparence, ce qui est refusé s'avère très différent d'un roman à l'autre. Chariklée et Théagène refusent toute relation sexuelle, le mariage et l'amor ; Joseph et Aséneth, quant à eux, ne refusent que le mariage avec une personne particulière, et non l'institution en soi. Quoique cela puisse ne sembler qu'anodin, ce n'en est pas moins révélateur de moteurs différents de la trame et d'une caractérisation distincte. Alors que Chariklée cherche à quitter le système social en refusant le mariage, Aséneth sort de celui dans lequel elle est née afin de pouvoir se marier.

Le dynamisme et la passivité des personnages sont au cœur de l'intrigue. Aséneth se montre extraordinairement active dans tout le roman, portée à se convertir par ses passions. À l'inverse, Chariklée et Théagène ne sont pas capables de satisfaire leurs souhaits, si ce n'est avec l'aide de Kalasiris. Les Éthiopi ques montre encore une fois le rôle fondamental de ce prêtre enseignant, là où Joseph et Aséneth met en valeur l'autonomie de son protagoniste.

En dernier lieu, il a été soulevé dans cette partie une question de symétrie, car le parallélisme entre le héros et l'héroïne est primordial dans la construction des romans idéaux. L'égalité entre leur âge, leur statut social et leur beauté constitue un élément appartenant, parmi d'autres, aux topoi du genre. On trouve bien cette symétrie chez Héliodore, puisque ses protagonistes sont égaux entre eux dès le début - leur âme étant faite de la même substance (3.5) -, mais guère dans Joseph et Aséneth. Certains motifs, mis en place pour créer un parallèle entre les personnages, s'avèrent cependant
superficiels, et Aséneth est cantonnée dans un rôle qu'elle décrit elle-même comme étant inférieur à celui de Joseph.

Partie 3

Le dernier partie du mémoire examine la religiosité dont sont empreints ces romans, thème souvent avancé comme motif de parallélisme entre eux deux. Les sections subséquentes abordent la manière dont on illustre l'union prédéterminée et quasi divine du couple amoureux. De plus, sont aussi étudiées les souffrances vécues, car elles témoignent du soin constant porté au dialogue entre les hommes et les dieux.

Un amour religieux : Joseph et Aséneth

Le roman de Joseph et Aséneth présente une asymétrie totalement absente des romans idéaux. Dès lors, il n'est pas possible d'analyser les souffrances du couple, car Aséneth passe par des stades liminaux dans la solitude. Pourtant, le narrateur montre que les deux personnages du couple étaient destinés l'un à l'autre. De plus, les luttes d'Aséneth incarnent une relation intime avec les dieux, et le dernier conflit du roman relève d'angoisses très semblables à celles présentes dans les romans d'amour grecs.

Dans le couple qu'ils forment, Aséneth et Joseph sont inégaux. Malgré la proximité de leur statut social, leur religion, leur âge et leurs mœurs les mettent aux antipodes l'un de l'autre. Cependant, le texte offre au lecteur des motifs symétriques susceptibles de le convaincre qu'ils sont prédéfinis l'un à l'autre: la similitude de leurs habits, la répétition de l'expression « depuis » ou « pour tous les temps » (τὸν αἰῶνα κρόνον) et une scène de reconnaissance qui a lieu après la conversion de l'héroïne – conversion qui suscite la faveur des trois baisers qui raniment l'esprit des deux protagonistes (ἀνέζησαν ἀμφότεροι τῷ πνεύματι αὐτῶν [19.11]), et pas seulement celui d'Aséneth. Ces baisers sont peut-être le moment où les personnages sont le plus équilibrés, car Joseph a besoin d'Aséneth autant qu'elle a besoin de lui pour ranimer son esprit. Malgré l'inégalité intrinsèque qui règne dans le couple, la narration cherche à créer en son sein un effet de symétrie qui rappelle les romans idéaux, mais comme l'ultime message du roman juif s’en éloigne, cette apparente égalité est loin d’être parfaite.

Le roman de Joseph et Aséneth évoque autant de souffrances vécues par l'héroïne que les
romans idéaux. De plus, les conflits relèvent de difficultés familiales et sociales, comme dans les romans grecs, mais aussi comme on peut en lire dans les martyrologies. Ce roman juif s'intéresse donc aux mêmes questionnements que ces deux autres genres littéraires, mais en opérant des parallèles plus clairs avec les romans, car Aséneth se marie et donne naissance à des enfants, au lieu de mourir pour Dieu. *Joseph et Aséneth* narre un certain nombre de conflits entre Aséneth et les dieux, outre les conflits purement humains. Les anciens dieux de l'idolâtrie, représentés par un vieux lion sauvage, poursuivent la prosélyte afin de la faire mourir. Ce conflit, de façon métaphorique, montre le péril réel qu'encourent les convertis. Le danger que représente le Dieu de Joseph, celui vers lequel se tourne Aséneth, est moins prévisible que celui que représentaient les dieux précédents : violent et colérique, Dieu punit Aséneth lorsqu'elle essaie de s'intégrer dans la communauté qui le vénère. Ces châtiments témoignent, dans l’œuvre, d'une intention pédagogique, et à la suite de la lecture des passages qui évoquent ces conflits spirituels, le lecteur comprend que toutes les souffrances d'Aséneth, tant physiques qu’affectives, constituaient ni plus ni moins que son éducation religieuse.

En fin de compte, l'unique mise en péril de la chasteté d'Aséneth suggère les mêmes préoccupations pour la stabilité politique et sociale que celles qu’on retrouve dans les romans idéaux, et qui sont également identiques aux violences perpétrées contre les héroïnes grecques. De même, les raisons pour lesquelles le prince d'Égypte essaie de porter la main sur Joseph et de déshonorer Aséneth sont, elles aussi, politiques et sociales. Joseph représente la stabilité politique et Aséneth la stabilité sociale, mais d’un point de vue religieux et les menacer porte atteinte à tous les aspects de la hiérarchie et de l'équilibre des mondes humain et divin.

Ce roman apparaît encore une fois comme un hybride du roman d’amour et d'une martyrologie. Par contre, les protagonistes ne voient pas la main divine dans la trame de leur vie. Les souffrances proviennent des conventions romanesques, mais s’avèrent spirituelles, comme dans les martyrologies.

**Au-delà d’un roman d’amour : Les Éthiopiques**

L'étude de la religion chez Héliodore repose sur un spectre large et varié. Son roman peut être lu comme une œuvre relevant de traditions mystiques, ou comme un détournement de thèmes religieux, comme on le ferait de n'importe quel autre outil littéraire. Mais chacune de ces lectures nous semble assez réductrice, et cette recherche veut adopter un point de vue intermédiaire : la
société était imprégnée par la religion et, comme les *Éthiopiques*, n'invente pas un monde fantaisiste, la religion fait partie intégrante de l’arrière-plan littéraire. Afin d'analyser son rôle dans la vie des protagonistes, il faut se livrer à une étude chronologique des événements représentés dans ce roman, c'est-à-dire qu'il faut conduire une étude selon « l'histoire » et non pas selon le « récit ».

Un des éléments religieux dont Héliodore use dans son roman sont les oracles, et tout particulièrement la Pythie de Delphes. La Pythie annonce le départ, les errances et le prix offert pour la réussite aux épreuves dont sortiront vainqueurs le héros et l'héroïne. Cette prophétie instaure autour de la narration un cadre religieux, développant le *topos* du genre, selon lequel le couple se rencontre au cours d'une fête religieuse. De plus, Chariklée et Théagène jouent des rôles actifs pendant les jeux pythiens, ce qui souligne dans le roman la place de la religion. Et comme si cela ne suffisait pas, un rêve au cours duquel Apollon et Artémis amènent Théagène et Chariklée auprès de Kalasiris accentue l'importance divine de ces jeunes gens. Héliodore, qui donne astucieusement une nouvelle fonction à tous les *topoi* du roman, leur adjoint des éléments religieux, qui placent au centre de la trame romanesque les dieux et la relation qu'entretiennent ces dieux et les protagonistes.

Il ressort du texte une juxtaposition de connaissances : le lecteur sait que le couple a été choisi par les dieux et il est au courant de la prophétie et du rêve de Kalasiris. Les héros, au contraire, ne sont nullement informés de ces choses : pour eux, en effet, leurs errances semblent arbitraires et injustes, car ils croient à l'implication des dieux dans leur vie, malgré leur manque d'informations. Leur souffrance n'est donc pas perçue par eux comme « utile », mais leur opinion à cet égard change lors de leur séjour dans le donjon d'Arsake. D'abord, les tortures qu’ils subissent prennent une signification personnelle et intime, comme si elles étaient pour eux une manière de se donner l’un à l’autre la preuve de leur amour et de leur fidélité ; ensuite, après certains rêves qu’elle a faits, Chariklée comprend que les tourments qu’ils endurent ne sont pas inutiles, mais font partie d'un plan divin. À la suite de cette illumination, les jeunes gens acceptent volontiers leur sort.

C’est aussi l’illumination qui est au cœur de la conclusion des *Éthiopiques*. En effet, la fin du roman est présentée comme une révélation. Le mariage et les relations sexuelles sont nettement de moindre importance que la prêtrise accordée à Chariklée et à Théagène, car c'est elle qui est décrite en détail. Lorsqu'on parle de mariage, il est employé des tournures qui évoquent la religion et qui soulignent l'aspect plutôt mystique de l'union. Le mariage du héros et de l'héroïne, toute comme leur première rencontre, se déroule dans un cadre de fête religieuse. Mais on rappelle encore
au lecteur la prophétie pythienne, et ainsi l'oracle vient boucler le récit et l'histoire, dotant de ce fait l’œuvre d’un début et d’une fin encadrés par la religion solaire.

Qu’Apollon devienne progressivement Hélio est capital dans ce récit. La fusion des divinités solaires crée dans le roman un excellent exemple d’un hénôthéisme fréquent à l'Époque impériale, appelé « mégathéïsme » par A. Chaniotis. Par la voie de l’expérience intime et personnelle, Héliodore montre que son dieu est le plus puissant, sans pour autant nier l'existence des autres.

Conclusion comparée

Les conclusions de ces sections montrent à la fois des ressemblances et des divergences intéressantes. Les dieux de ces œuvres ne sont pas semblables sur tous les points. Les Éthiopiques est clairement le produit d'un système religieux polythéiste, malgré son hénôthéisme, alors que Joseph et Aséneth est tout aussi clairement issu d'un milieu monothéiste. En fin de compte, les protagonistes d'Héliodore deviennent, au bout de quelque temps, conscients des machinations divines et du sens de leurs souffrances, pendant qu'Aséneth et Joseph ne sont jamais mis au clair de leur destin. Pour le dire brièvement, ces deux œuvres sont donc nettement différentes.

D'ailleurs, toutes deux témoignent d'un phénomène historique fascinant, car chacune d’elles prend pour exemples des expériences intimes de certains personnages afin de promouvoir le culte d'une divinité définie. Ce mégathéisme n'est l'apanage exclusif ni des polythéistes ni des monothéistes et il est caractéristique de l'Époque impériale romaine. Malgré leurs visées divergentes, ces deux romans recourent à des techniques tout à fait comparables.

Conclusion

Ce mémoire s'était fixé trois buts. Les analyses faites dans les trois parties ont porté leurs fruits, car il est possible de proposer quelques conclusions. D'abord, il est maintenant clair que Joseph et Aséneth mérite bien le titre de roman grec, et pas seulement parce que la version originelle est en grec. Héliodore est un brillant exemple de la manière dont on peut se servir du genre amoureux à des fins philosophiques ou religieuses. Les motifs érotiques et romanesques ne s’y trouvent pas seulement parce qu'ils y sont attendus ; ils sont réadaptés, modifiés ou introduits d'une façon nouvelle afin de rendre plus claires certaines idées. Le même phénomène se produit
dans le roman juif. Chaque motif et chaque image qui participent du récit de la conversion
d'Aséneth, qu'il s'agisse de l'anatomie de l'amour, de la violence et de la souffrance comme support
à visée pédagogique, de la beauté mythique des personnages ou de quelque autre élément, sont liés
à la tradition romanesque amoureuse, mais sont traités de telle manière qu'ils puissent servir à la
visée théologique de l'œuvre. Même si le style nous laisse parfois sur notre faim, nous n'en sommes
pas moins en présence d'un roman d'amour grec.

La deuxième question posée en introduction porte sur la qualification des expériences
religieuses vécues par les protagonistes. La réponse est complexe et mérite d'être bien nuancée. Ces
deux romans, malgré leurs visées divergentes, présentent au lecteur un cheminement religieux
personnel et intime. Les textes incluent des prières, des épiphanies privées, des oracles et des rêves,
enfin des éléments religieux dont une bonne partie relève du cadre privé et personnel. Pourtant, le
lecteur « voit » tout ce qui a lieu. Il convient donc de se demander s'il s'agit de véritables
expériences intimes. Il existe dans ces récits un voyeurisme qui réduit à néant cet aspect privé. Mais
le but de ces expériences est d’ordre nettement social, puisqu’elles aboutissent à l’intégration dans
une communauté, lorsque les personnages sortent vainqueurs de leurs épreuves. Selon nous, cette
religiosité relève des présentations agonistiques des arguments théologiques propres à la période
impériale, où on cherchait à déterminer lequel des dieux méritait le plus de vénération. Ce jeu sur le
privé et le public dans le vécu religieux permet alors au lecteur de vivre à travers l’œuvre une
expérience qui dépasse le quotidien.

De cette deuxième conclusion en découle une troisième. Cet exemple de conversion à un
dieu unique et le message agonistique du roman semblent appartenir à l'époque impériale. Et un
aspect primordial de ce récit, qui soutient cette hypothèse, est l'importance du dynamisme
d'Aséneth. Dans son histoire à elle, aucun Kalasiris n’intervient pour qu'elle se convertisse ; Aséneth
gère la totalité de sa évolution. Ce texte semble justifier l’abandon du prosélytisme juif, après la
destruction du Second Temple. Cette histoire aurait alors été écrite à la fin du premier siècle de
notre ère, si ce n'est pas au début du deuxième.
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