# Heliodorus in the Harlem Renaissance

Sujata Iyengar writes in *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) that "scholars and critics" in the "English Renaissance, the Harlem Renaissance, and our own era" (19) have obsessed over the *Aithiopika*, Heliodorus' ancient novel. In an earlier scholarly work, "*Aithiopika* and Ethiopianism" (in *Studies in Heliodorus*, ed. Richard Hunter [Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1998] 182-217), Daniel Selden had written that towards "the end of the nineteenth century African-American intellectuals began reading" Heliodorus (200). While it is true that classical learning and scholarship of the English Renaissance and modern day studies were and are quite taken by the ancient novels, both Greek and Roman, it is rather difficult to make such a definitive statement about the ancient novel in the Harlem Renaissance. Indeed, of particular interest are Selden's statement that African-Americans read this ancient novel, along with Iyengar's inclusion of the "Harlem Renaissance" in her listing since the ancient novel was relegated to the lowest stratum in the hierarchy of classical Graeco-Roman texts and generally neglected as a genre that deserved study until the 1967 publication of Ben Edwin Perry's *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-Historical Account of Their Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

My paper will determine the status and reception of the ancient novel and the accuracy of statements such as those of Iyengar and Selden through an examination of data gathered from scholarship published on the ancient novel during and immediately before the Harlem Renaissance, in addition to contemporary translations of the novels from Greek or Latin into English, curricula from historically black colleges, and the Harlem Renaissance "passing novels" that include or reflect the unusual story surrounding the birth and skin color of Charicleia, the heroine of the ancient Greek novel.

Gallego Durán, María del Mar. 1993. *Passing Novels in the Harlem Renaissance: Identity Politics and Textual Strategies*. Münster: Lit Verlag.

Perkins, Judith. 1999. "An Ancient 'Passing' Novel: Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*." *Arethusa.* 32.2: 197-214.