Complexes of Emotions in
Joseph and Aseneth

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Abstract
The ancient Greek novel introduced to the history of literature a new topos: the “complex of emotions.” This became a staple of storytelling and remains widely in use across a variety of genres to the present day. The Hellenistic Jewish text Joseph and Aseneth employs this topos in at least three passages, where it draws attention to the cognitive-emotional aspect of the heroine’s conversion. This is interesting for what it contributes to our understanding of the genre of Aseneth, but it also has social-historical implications. In particular, it supports the idea that Aseneth reflects concerns about Gentile partners in Jewish-Gentile marriages, that Gentile partners might convert out of expedience or that they might be less than fully committed to abandoning “idolatrous” attachments. The representations of deep, grievous, and complex emotions in Aseneth’s transformational turn from idolatry to monolatry, then, might play a psychagogic role for the Gentile reader interested in marrying a Jewish person.

Keywords
ancient novel—literary conventions, conversion, emotion, Joseph and Aseneth

“Extremely intense emotions, streams of tears, swooning are all characteristic of the Greek novel from its very beginnings,” writes Tomas Hägg in his classic introduction to ancient novels.¹ Although emotions figure into the longer history of ancient Greek literature in manifold ways, they take on an increased prominence and are represented with new literary formulae in the novels of the late Hellenistic and early Roman worlds. The prominence of emotions in the Hellenistic Jewish text Joseph and Aseneth (hereafter Aseneth) is among the factors that have led scholars to describe it as an ancient Greek novel.

¹. Tomas Hägg, The Novel in Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 6.

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novel. The prominence of emotion language in _Aseneth_ is most apparent when we read it alongside the Joseph stories of Genesis 37–50 that constitute this text’s literary background, stories which are relatively thin on emotional representations. The link between _Aseneth_ and the ancient Greek novel is not straightforward, however, and merits further study. This paper, a study of emotions in _Aseneth_ and their function in connection to the narrative’s conversion theme, takes a step in that direction.

**Emotions and the ancient Greek novel**

The five “canonical” ancient Greek novels are Chariton’s _Callirhoe_, Xenophon’s _Ephesiaca_, Longus’s _Daphnis and Chloe_, Achilles Leucippe and Clitophon, and Heliodorus’s _Aethiopica_. The earliest (_Callir._ and _Ephes._) are generally assigned to the first or second century C.E.; the latest (_Leuc. Clit._ and _Aeth._) to the fourth or fifth century C.E. These five, however, are a mere taste of an older and thematically expansive corpus, which, unfortunately, is now mostly visible only in fragments. The _Ninus Romance_ (first century B.C.E.), for example, was composed half a millennium before Heliodorus’s grand, fourth-century _Aethiopica_. _Aseneth_ was most likely composed in the second or first century B.C.E., although it seems to have undergone adaptations and revisions over subsequent centuries, some perhaps as late as the conventional dates assigned to the _Aethiopica_ (fourth or fifth century C.E.) or _Leucippe and Clitophon_ (third or fourth century C.E.).

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2. Although some scholars have sought a different genre label for _Aseneth_, most maintain that its genre affiliation is closest to the ancient novel (sometimes preferring the label “ancient romance” or “erotic novel”). For a survey of recent scholarship, with particular attention to genre, see Angela Standhartinger, “Recent Scholarship on _Joseph and Aseneth_ (1988–2013),” _CBR_ 12 (2014): 353–406. On the title, see Christoph Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” in _Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Vol. 2_, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 181–82.

3. The relative absence of emotional detail in another Genesis story, that of Abraham and Isaac, is discussed in Erich Auerbach’s classic essay, “Odysseus’ Scar,” in _Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature_, trans. Willard R. Trask, new and expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 3–23.

4. Unless otherwise noted, this paper uses Fink’s Greek text for _Aseneth_; the Loeb Classical Library for text and translation of Chariton, Xenophon, Longus, and Achilles Tatius; Rattenbury’s Greek text for Heliodorus; Morgan’s English translation for Heliodorus; Stephens and Winkler’s Greek text for the _Ninus Romance_; and Sandy’s translation for _Ninus_. Translations of _Aseneth_ are my own, hewing closely to Burchard’s and with consultation of Ahearne-Kroll’s.

5. Gerald Sandy, “Ninus: Introduction,” in _Collected Ancient Greek Novels_, ed. B. P. Reardon, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 803.

6. The textual history of _Aseneth_ is complex and uncertain. Long and short versions survive; some scholars argue for the relative priority of the long version (Burchard; Burfeind; Fink), others for the short version (Philonenko; Standhartinger; Kraemer). Angela Standhartinger (who prefers the case for the antiquity of a shorter version) has found flaws in the cases for both positions. Patricia Ahearne-Kroll, in a bid to sidestep the probably-insoluble debate, prioritizes themes and motifs common to both versions. Cf. Christoph Burchard, Carsten
Ancient Greek novelists frequently represent emotions *singly* and attach them to specific characters or groups with predicate constructions (she was angry), verbal constructions (such-and-such brought grief to him), or participial constructions (rejoicing, they took action). Sometimes *pairs* of emotions are attributed to a character, where both may be negative (e.g., frightened and angry), both positive (e.g., amazed and rejoicing), or the two seemingly in tension with each other (e.g., laughing and crying). These are “complex” emotions, useful in narrative situations where a simple emotion (e.g., she rejoiced) would not do justice to the experience the implied author wishes to invoke: a character may be between shame and fear, for example, or between grief and anger, or between joy and longing. Duplex constructions have a long pedigree in ancient Greek literature, notably in the lyric poetry of Sappho and Anacreon. The ancient novelists use such constructions extensively but push the concept further by beginning to describe emotional states in triplex, quadruplex, and so on. Discovering that one’s thought-to-be-dead beloved is alive and remarried, for example, might cause a character to feel surprised, overjoyed, grateful, and distressed, all in one flurry of feeling. Such “complex of emotions” constructions are vanishingly rare in ancient Greek literature outside of the ancient novel. They are found with some frequency, however, in the five extant Greek novels noted above, as well as in a fragment of the *Ninus Romance* and, interestingly, in the Hellenistic Jewish text that is the primary focus of this paper. *Aseneth* features complexes of emotions in at least three passages, which we will discuss below.

In 1990, Massimo Fusillo published a seminal article identifying the Greek erotic novel (by which he meant chiefly those by Chariton, Xenophon, Achilles Tatius, and

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Burfeind, and Uta Barbara Fink, *Joseph und Aseneth: Kritisch herausgegeben* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Uta Barbara Fink, *Joseph und Aseneth: Revision des griechischen Textes und Edition der zweiten lateinischen Übersetzung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008); Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Leiden: Brill, 1968); Angela Standhartinger, *Das Frauenbild im Judentum der hellenistischen Zeit* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Edith M. Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 17–27; Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife. Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 50–89; Patricia Ahearn-Kroll, “‘Joseph and Aseneth’ and Jewish Identity in Greco-Roman Egypt” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2005), 60–87.

The present paper follows Ahearn-Kroll’s recommendation, recognizing that the fluidity of the early tradition is itself telling of early audience expectations and experience of the narrative.

7. We cannot assume that any given emotion was consistently construed positively or negatively. E.g., tears spring from joy in some contexts and from grief in others. In thinking about positive and negative emotions, it may also be important to distinguish a moral lens (where, for example, suffering or experiencing anger in the right circumstances can be a “positive” emotion) from an “experiential” lens (where any emotion that produces distress is construed as negative and vice versa). This distinction is complicated further by the fact that for many ancient thinkers, the moral and experiential lenses were supposed to line up neatly with each other.

8. For brief remarks on the antithesis of emotions in early Greek literature, see Massimo Fusillo, “The Conflict of Emotions: A Topos in the Greek Erotic Novel,” in *Oxford Readings in the Greek Novel*, ed. Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 65, 67, 74.
Heliodorus) as the birthplace of a literary topos he termed “le conflit des émotions.”

He observed that the topos usually took the form of “an asyndetic accumulation of abstract nouns or more elaborate forms based on verbs.”

It is significant that Fusillo’s attention was drawn to those complexes of emotions in which conflict characterized the relationships among the constituent parts. He finds this topos especially notable as an early attempt to grasp the psychological complexity inherent in the human condition. While it would be a mistake, he says, to “expect to find in ancient texts the kind of analytical introspection which the European novel was only to attain in the 19th century and then in the Freudian period,” the prevalence and texture of this topos nevertheless illustrate a pre-Freudian awareness “of the human psyche as a field of tensions and contradictory forces.”

We shall see shortly, however, that conflict need not be the guiding metaphor when complexes of emotions appear in the ancient novel, that conflict is better characterized, rather, as one of several ways in which emotional intensity is conveyed.

Work on emotions in antiquity generally, and in the novels specifically, has multiplied in the three decades since the appearance of Fusillo’s article. Some of the most interesting developments are playing out in cognitive literary studies, an emerging field concerned with the cognitive mechanisms involved in composing and reading literature, on the one hand, and narrative representations of cognitive processes, on the other. This paper deals with emotions of the latter sort, that is, with the emotional language assigned

9. Massimo Fusillo, “Le conflit des émotions: un topos du roman grec érotique,” MH 47 (1990): 201–21; Fusillo, “The Conflict of Emotions.” Specifically, Fusillo writes that “[t]he frequency with which this topos occurs and its novelty (to my knowledge there are no direct models or parallels in other ancient novels [i.e., other than Callir., Ephes., Leuc. Clit., and Aeth.]) clearly demonstrate that even without a theoretical codification the novelists were aware that they were dealing with a literary genre which had rules, conventions, and themes of its own, in other words that they were using a code” (64).

10. Fusillo, “The Conflict of Emotions,” 67.

11. Fusillo, “The Conflict of Emotions,” 63–64.

12. Fusillo’s work has been followed by a number of important studies, some of which have nuanced his work in helpful ways: Bernhard Kytzler, “Der Regenbogen der Gefühle : zum Kontrast der Empfindungen im antiken Roman,” SCA 12 (2003): 69–81; Ian Repath, “Emotional Conflict and Platonic Psychology in the Greek Novel” in Philosophical Presences in the Ancient Novel, ed. J. R. Morgan and Meriel Jones (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2007), 53–84; Loveday C. A. Alexander, “The Passions in Galen and the Novels of Chariton and Xenophon,” in Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought, ed. John T. Fitzgerald (London: Routledge, 2008), 289–325; Cécile Daude, “Aspects physiques et psychiques des passions chez Achille Tatius,” CMO-SIP 42 (2009): 185–208; Silvia Montiglio, “‘My Soul, Consider What You Should Do,’” AN 8 (2010): 25–58; Koen De Temmerman, Crafting Characters: Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek Novel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Michael Cummings, “The Interaction of Emotions in the Greek Novels,” in Cultural Crossroads in the Ancient Novel, ed. Marília P. Futre Pinheiro, David Konstan, and Bruce Duncan MacQueen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 315–26. On ancient emotions generally, see David Konstan, The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). In Biblical Studies, see most recently F. Scott Spencer, ed., Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).
to characters in the narrative rather than the emotional processes of, for example, “surprise” or “suspense” felt by the reader.\textsuperscript{13}

While the ancient novelists were not the first to attribute emotions to literary characters, they do seem to be the first writers to develop the \textit{topos} that Fusillo described as “emotions in conflict” or that I designate more generally “complexes of emotions.”\textsuperscript{14} The novelists themselves provide helpful language for describing individual instances of the \textit{topos}. Chariton refers to the experience of \textit{πάθη ποικίλα}, “many-colored passions” (cf. \textit{Callir}. 3.4.1; 4.5.10) and of being filled with \textit{μυρίων παθῶν}, “myriad emotions” (\textit{Callir}. 6.6.1; cf. 5.8.2, 8.5.8). Xenophon speaks of a character who \textit{ἀναμιξασα πάντα}, “mixes up altogether” a set of emotions (\textit{Eph}. 2.5.5) and at another point speaks of \textit{πάθη συμμιγῆ}, “emotions mixed together” (\textit{Eph}. 3.7.1). He can also speak of many emotions coming together (\textit{πολλὰ ἃμα πάθη}) to “seize” (\textit{κατέχειν}) a person (\textit{Eph}. 5.13.3). Achilles Tatius also speaks of characters being seized by emotions (\textit{Leuc. Clit}. 1.4.5) or of having their souls pulled in every which way (\textit{Leuc. Clit}. 5.24.3; cf. 2.29.1, 7.1.1). The poetic aim of the \textit{topos}, as Fusillo understood it, was to have the narrator cast a character as “stupified” with the “paradoxical simultaneity” of the emotions, and this is often (though by no means always) the explicit outcome.\textsuperscript{15} Scholars following Fusillo’s line of thinking have noted that this \textit{topos} adds depth to characterization and contributes to character individuation over and against a tendency to typify characters in stock terms.\textsuperscript{16} More recent work on the novels’ emotions has emphasized that even where the complexes are characterized by “conflict,” the nature of the conflict varies according to the themes and interests of the novels where the \textit{topos} appears.\textsuperscript{17} A few words on the nature of the complexes of emotions in the individual novels may help clarify the issue.

In Chariton’s \textit{Callirhoe}, complexes of emotions frequently reflect the author’s interest in adapting the Greek dramatic tradition to prose. The narrator even compares observation of characters’ myriad emotions with the experience of taking in a performance on the stage:

\begin{quote}
An observer would have thought himself in a theater filled with every conceivable emotion (\textit{μυρίων παθῶν}). All were there at once—tears, joy, astonishment, pity, disbelief, prayers (\textit{πάντα ἣν ἤμοι, δάκρυα, χαρά, θάμβος, ἔλεος, ἀπιστία, εὐχαί}). They blessed Chaereas and rejoiced with Mithridates; they grieved with Dionysius; about Callirhoe they were baffled. She herself was totally confused and stood there speechless, gazing with eyes wide open only at Chaereas. (\textit{Callir}. 5.8.2)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} This kind of cognitive literary study is sometimes helpfully labeled “cognitive narratology,” in reference to its genealogical ties to early- and mid-twentieth century structuralist narratology. For a broad introduction to cognitive literary studies, see Lisa Zunshine, \textit{The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). On cognitive narratology, see Monika Fludernik, \textit{Towards a “Natural” Narratology} (London: Routledge, 1996); David Herman, \textit{Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis} (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999).
\textsuperscript{14} Cummings, “The Interaction of Emotions in the Greek Novels.”
\textsuperscript{15} Fusillo, “The Conflict of Emotions,” 65.
\textsuperscript{16} Depth: Kytzler, “Der Regenbogen der Gefühle.” Individuation: De Temmerman, \textit{Crafting Characters}.
\textsuperscript{17} E.g., Repath, “Emotional Conflict and Platonic Psychology in the Greek Novel”; Montiglio, “My Soul, Consider What You Should Do.”
Chariton skillfully exploits the kinds of plot-building techniques described in Aristotle’s *Poetics* to provoke intense emotional responses in his characters and, by extension, in his audience (cf. *Callir.* 3.4.1; 3.5.3; 3.7.6; 4.5.10).

In Xenophon’s *Ephesiaca*, complexes of emotions are all experienced in connection to the protagonists’ physicality: either when Habrocomes and Anthia embrace each other (*Eph.* 1.9.1; 1.11.1; 5.13.3) or when a third party reacts to a protagonist’s body (*Eph.* 2.5.5; 3.7.1). The *Ephesiaca* is not a highly sophisticated literary text, but if it has one well-developed and constantly sounded motif, it is that Habrocomes and Anthia are ridiculously good-looking. These good looks in turn provoke emotional reactions in spades.

Three passages in Longus’s *Daphnis and Chloe* perhaps qualify as instances of the complex of emotions *topos*. The first plays out in the context of Chloe’s sexual awakening, a transition of paramount thematic interest to Longus:

She neglected food, she was sleepless at night, she neglected her flock. Now she would be laughing, now she would be crying (νῦν ἐγέλα, νῦν ἔκλαεν). One moment she would sit quietly, the next she would leap into action (ἐἶτα ἐκάθητο, ἐἶτα ἀνεπήθα). Her face would turn pale and then blush red (ἀχρία τὸ πρόσωπον, ἐρυθήματι αὖθις ἐφλέγετο). Not even a cow stung by a gadfly acts this way. (*Daph.* Chl. 1.13.6)

Longus delights in representing intense emotions, but these come mainly in single and duplex constructions; this is one of only a few scenes in which Longus presents a character reeling from a complex of emotions or, more accurately, a complex of duplexes of emotion. The comparison to pastoral livestock is no accident; this reflects Longus’s interest in sketching human adolescence through the lens of animal fecundity. Longus also stresses Chloe’s naïve failure to understand the changes affecting her. This failure-to-understand theme is underscored also in connection to her male counterpart, Daphnis:

Daphnis, as though he had been stung, not kissed, immediately looked distressed; he shivered repeatedly (πολλάκις ἐψύχετο); he tried without success to control his pounding heart (τὴν καρδίαν παλλομένην κατεῖχε); he wanted to look at Chloe, but when he looked, he blushed deeply (βλέπειν μὲν ἤθελε τὴν Χλόην, βλέπων δ’ ἐρυθήματι ἐπίμπλατο). (*Daph.* Chl. 1.17.2)

This scene describes the effects of an innocent kiss Chloe shared with Daphnis. Overwhelmed by the flood of emotions, he is reduced to silence and immobility: “He was silent, although before he had chattered more than the grasshoppers; he did nothing, although before he had been more energetic than the goats” (*Daph.* Chl. 1.17.4). A third example of the *topos* comes in a passage where the old man Philetas reflects on his long-ago first experience of Eros (*Daph.* Chl. 2.4–6). The terms with which he describes that experience mirror those of Daphnis and Chloe. The emotions are not “in conflict” with each other in any of these instances, but the cumulative effect of the rush of emotions in each case is to drive the experiencing character into a state of animal madness or

18. On the relationship of Chariton to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, see C. Ruiz Montero, “The Rise of the Greek Novel,” in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth L. Schmeling (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 51.
stupefaction. These complexes of emotions, then, can be imagined as collectively overwhelming the protagonists in ways that the characters themselves cannot (yet) comprehend, while the implied reader—older, more experienced—appreciates the characters’ naïveté with benevolent condescension.

Achilles Tatius’s uses of the topoi illustrate well the conflict and competition theme, both where the emotions are at war among themselves (e.g., Leuc. Clit. 1.4.5; 5.24.3) and where the emotions gang up on the experiencer (e.g., Leuc. Clit. 2.29.1; 5.19.1). Emotions battle each other for supremacy in a pair of scenes in which Achilles Tatius explicitly sets love and anger in conflict: in one case, anger prevails; in the other, love (Leuc. Clit. 5.24.3; 6.19–20). These texts must be read in light of Achilles Tatius’s idiosyncratic theorizing about the physiological sources of emotions, discussed in excurses throughout the novel, and the competition motif woven into the entire work. This competition motif includes, but is not confined to, the emotional domain. Take, for example, a scene immediately following the episode where anger bests love. The heroine Leucippe is threatened with torture and welcomes it, urging her oppressor to “[w]atch a new contest (ἀγῶνα θεάσασθε καινόν): a single woman competes (ἀγωνίζεται) with all the engines of torture and wins every round” (Leuc. Clit. 6.21.2). Elsewhere, instead of simply comparing Leucippe’s glance to the radiant beauty of the peacock, or her beauty to that of flowers, Achilles Tatius casts the comparison agonistically: “The beauty of her body,” he writes, “challenged (ήριζεν) the flowers of the field” (Leuc. Clit. 1.19.1). Or when he describes Calligone’s necklace in his ekphrasis on her wedding attire, the gemstones are described as “competing (ήριζον) for attention” among themselves (Leuc. Clit. 2.11.3). Of the five canonical novels, that of Achilles Tatius offers the best illustrations for Fusillo’s thesis, discussed above. Pace Fusillo, however, we note that the emotions are represented in conflict here because conflict as such is a major theme in Leucippe and Clitophon in a way that it is not in the other novels.

Heliodorus uses the topoi especially in connection with the themes of recognition (anagnorisis) and transformation or reversal (peripeteia). As with Chariton, these emphases evoke the Greek dramatic tradition: one might compare the recognition scenes in plays by Sophocles or Euripides with Heliodorus’s scene in which Thymis and Petosiris recognize their father (Aeth. 7.7.3), or the scene in which Charicleia’s birth parents recognize their daughter (Aeth. 10.13.1). Groups experience recognition too, as when the Ethiopian populace, despite understanding “very little of what was said, [was] able to surmise the facts of the matter” and so

the most hideous horror transformed to celebration; those who wept also laughed; those who grieved also rejoiced (χαρᾶς καὶ λύπης συμπεπλεγμένων, γέλωτι δακρύων κεραννυμένων); they found those whom they had not sought and lost those whom they thought to have found; and finally the offering of human blood, which all had expected to see, was transformed into a sacrifice free of all stain. (Aeth. 10.38.4)

Anagnorisis and peripeteia are attended, in this dramatic novel, by complexes of emotions. Where the emotional accompaniment to recognition scenes in classical dramas would typically have had to be inferred by performers and an audience, Heliodorus draws those inferences for his readers, capturing in words the emotional complement to recognitions and reversals.
We would be hard-pressed to say with confidence which dominant motifs were developed in the *Ninus Romance*, since the novel survives only in fragments. From the fragments that do survive, including this instance of emotional disturbance, we can tentatively suppose that its author was interested in questions of propriety, shame, anxiety, and wordless communication:

Her tears rolled down and her cheeks were suffused with red in embarrassment at the prospect of speaking. When she made another (sudden attempt) to speak, her cheeks grew pale through anxiety. (She was) between . . . and desire and . . . shame. Her emotion increased, but her resolve failed as she (seethed) in great (turmoil). Thambe wiped away her (tears) with her (hands) and told her to (take courage) and say whatever she wanted. But when the girl (uttered) nothing and remained (overcome) in the same state of distress, (she said:) “For me (your silence) speaks more eloquently than any speech.”

These themes are also reminiscent of the dramatic tradition, suggesting perhaps the difficult silences endured by Phaedrus and Hippolytus in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, or the several characters in Chariton’s *Callirhoe* who want desperately to say something but are compelled to keep silent because of social norms (Callirhoe at 1.1.8; Dionysius at 2.4.1; Mithridates and Polycharmus at 4.2.13).

Complexes of emotions, as this survey demonstrates, take a variety of literary and syntactical forms in the novels, where they often interface with specific interests of the particular texts in which they appear. They involve “state of mind” and “state of body” language, where the “state of body” language often functions metonymically in relation to some “state of mind” emotion (trembling for fear, weeping for grief, etc.). They can involve strings of paired emotions, both complementary and antithetical (e.g., *Callir. 6.4.4; Daph. Chl. 1.13.6; Aeth. 10.38.3–4*); asyndetic arrangements (e.g., *Callir. 1.9.3; 3.4.1; 4.5.10; 5.8.2–3; Ephes. 2.5.5; 5.13.3; Leuc. Clit. 1.4.5*); and paratactically arranged medleys (e.g., *Callir. 3.7.6; 6.6.1; Ephes. 1.9.1; 1.11.1; Leuc. Clit. 1.6.4; Aeth. 1.30.7; 4.11.1; 7.7.3–4; 7.29.1; 10.13.1*). They involve strings of positive emotions, negative emotions, or mixed sets of positive and negative emotions. Sets of this latter sort often yield “emotions in conflict” complexes. Where emotions are in conflict, the conflict may be directed against the experiencing character, as a collective force stupefying the character with “paradoxical simultaneity” (as at *Aeth. 10.38.3–4*) or the conflict may be cast as an internecine battle, with different emotions competing to define the subject’s emotional status (as at *Leuc. Clit. 5.24.3*). In their diverse forms, these complexes of emotions bear out Hägg’s observation with which we began in this essay: “Extremely intense emotions, streams of tears, swooning are all characteristic of the Greek novel from its very beginnings.”

We have seen, moreover, that the “complex of emotions” topos in the novels is often produced by, illustrative of, supporting, bearing out, or otherwise intersecting with themes and motifs that are specifically developed in the individual novels (reactions to beauty; sexual awakening, psychic and physical conflict, dramatic anagnorisis, etc.). When we turn to look at the topos in *Aseneth*, we would do well to attend to the relationship between it and the text’s key motifs.

19. For the Greek text and alternate translation, see Susan A. Stephens and John J. Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 42, 44.
**Aseneth and the ancient novel**

The narrative of *Aseneth* comes in two distinct parts. The first and better-studied part concerns the conversion of an Egyptian priest’s daughter from idolatry to the worship of Joseph’s God and her subsequent marriage to Joseph. The second part plays out in the years of famine following the migration of Joseph’s family to Egypt and is organized around the infatuation Pharaoh’s son, a bandit character, conceives for Aseneth and the prince’s enlistment of Joseph’s half-brothers Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher (i.e., the sons of Bilhah and Zilphah) in an ill-fated plot to take Aseneth for himself and intrigue against Pharaoh and Joseph. The narrative abounds in emotion—especially fear, grief, surprise, anger, and rejoicing.

Prior to the twentieth century, scholars took little notice of *Aseneth*, with the occasional exception of surveys and sweeping discussions of Hellenistic Judaism, Pseudepigrapha, and “rewritten Bible.” Scholars of Hellenistic Judaism have not always given it much attention, since there is some question about whether the text is Christian, either in composition or in redaction. Scholars of the Pseudepigrapha have rightly recognized that,

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20. Kraemer is reluctant to use the term “conversion,” since “the texts themselves do not use such language” and instead prefers the language of “transformation.” Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 20. Her laudable goal, presumably, is to prevent readers from transposing later Christian models of “conversion” onto this novel. The language of “transformation,” however, is just as absent from the texts of *Aseneth*. In this paper, then, I speak of “conversion” and “transformation” interchangeably to describe the ideological and practical shift attributed to this character.

21. As noted by Ahearne-Kroll, “Joseph and Aseneth’ and Jewish Identity in Greco-Roman Egypt,” 107. The bandit as a character type is discussed by Alain Billault, “Characterization in the Ancient Novel,” in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth L. Schmeling (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 120.

22. Lawrence Wills argues that the novel “should not be divided into a first half and a second half, as it is by many scholars, but into an early and late layer. The love-and-adventure story associated with the second half actually begins in chapter 1 but is then overwhelmed in most of the intervening chapters by the introduction of a symbolic conversion story.” Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 184.

23. Batiffol, in the *editio princeps* (1889–90), treated the work as a product of the fourth or fifth century CE, although he conceded an ancient Jewish provenance after reviewers pointed to connections between the text’s missionary theme and a missionary outlook understood to be characteristic of Judaism in the Hellenistic and early Roman Imperial period. See Stephanie West, “Joseph and Asenath: A Neglected Greek Romance,” *ClO* 24 (1974): 70. Cf. Pierre Batiffol, “Le livre de la Prière d’Aseneth,” in *Studia Patristica: Études d’ancienne littérature chrétienne, I-II*, ed. Pierre Batiffol, (Paris: Leroux, 1889), 1–115. In an argument based largely on the absence of references to the book in texts predating the fifth century, Kraemer has suggested that *Aseneth* might have been written by a Christian (or Jewish God-fearing) author from Syria or Asia Minor at some point between the fourth and sixth centuries CE. Kraemer leaves open the possibility of non-Christian Jewish authorship by a writer perhaps from the land of Israel. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 286–92. Most scholars who have published on the issue since Kraemer’s book remain convinced of the earlier provenance of *Aseneth* in Hellenistic Judaism. See, e.g., John J. Collins, “Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?” *JSP* 14 (2005): 97–112.
strictly speaking, it is anonymous, not pseudonymous.24 “Rewritten Bible” has been rightly criticized as unstable and anachronistic both as a unified exegetical strategy and as a literary genre.25 It is obvious, for example, that Aseneth does much more than “rewrite” the three brief references to Joseph’s wife in Genesis 41 and 46:

Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt. (Gen 41:45 NRSV)

Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” The second he named Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.” (Gen 41:50–52)

To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. (Gen 46:20)26

Aseneth works these few details into its narrative, sometimes in ways the biblical version of events would not lead one to expect (e.g., Pharaoh “gives” Aseneth to Joseph in Aseneth not by fiat, as the biblical account suggests at Gen 41:45, but by officiating at their wedding after they independently decide to marry; Asen. 21.8). Aseneth’s narrative does much more than elaborate these details, however, particularly in providing an account of Aseneth’s conversion, an account which dominates the first part of the book, and in developing a drama with Pharaoh’s son, which dominates the second part. Neither the conversion story nor the drama with the Egyptian prince has a basis in Genesis. Some have even suggested that the primary reason for composing Aseneth was to “correct” the impression given by Genesis that the patriarch Joseph took a non-Jewish wife by supplying an account of her conversion.27 This view has to commend it the

24. Note that although it is not included in earlier collections of pseudepigrapha, such as those of R. H. Charles or Emil Kautzsch, it is found in more recent collections. E.g., James H. Charlesworth, Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Vol. 2 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983). This may have something to do with evolving sensibilities about what such categorizations entail. On the label Pseudepigrapha, its historical contingency, and its limited heuristic value, see Annette Yoshiko Reed, “The Modern Invention of ‘Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,’” JTS 60 (2009): 403–36.

25. This is not the place to attempt to articulate the exact relationship between Aseneth and the Joseph stories of Genesis 41–45, particularly the thorny question of whether Aseneth constitutes an instance of what used commonly to be called “rewritten Bible.” There are, however, at least two good reasons to be skeptical: rewritten Bible was not a genre recognized in antiquity, and the entire scholarly paradigm in which rewritten Bible scholarship unfolds is predicated on a set of modern text-first and biblio-centric assumptions about the relationship of various narratives to each other. For discussion, see Eva Mroczek, The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

26. Except for variations in the spelling of names, there are no major departures in the corresponding Septuagint passages, which would have constituted the text of the Joseph legend we presume would have been most familiar to the composer(s) and editor(s) of Aseneth.

27. For a general statement of this position, see Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph, 20. For a different solution, see the rabbinic material asserting that Aseneth was the daughter of Dinah
observation that some details in *Aseneth* take on added significance for readers familiar with Genesis 37–50. At certain points, the narrative seems to assume extra-narratival knowledge about Joseph, directly or indirectly related to the Genesis account. Perhaps the best solution is to allow that *Aseneth* was written for a dual audience. Some readers, already familiar with the Joseph saga, would have enjoyed a fuller appreciation of the text, but the central plot and characterizing strategies nevertheless remain comprehensible to readers or hearers not primed by prior exposure that biblical saga.

As noted above, *Aseneth* presents a number of literary and historical difficulties. It is anonymous, its provenance is a mystery, and its date of composition is uncertain. It survives in multiple versions, and scholars remain divided on whether an originally “long” version was subsequently abbreviated or an originally “short” version was later expanded. It may, like the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs or the Sibylline Oracles and other originally Jewish texts, have been subjected to Christian interpolations in its history of transmission. It certainly contains language and ideas—including the conversion motif—amenable to Christians. And it was Christians, not Jews, who read, translated, and copied it in later antiquity and in the Middle Ages. While I lean toward the view that a version of the text more akin to the long version than the short was composed by an Alexandrian Jewish author at some point between the second century B.C.E. and 117 C.E. and subsequently abbreviated in the chain of transmission, the approach in the present paper is to focus on material attested in both the long and short versions, signaling where necessary if a reading under discussion appears only in one or the other.

The genre of *Aseneth* has been identified more or less closely with that of the ancient novel since the beginning of modern academic study. Already in his 1889–90 *editio princeps*, Batiffol called it “romanesque.” Motifs shared between *Aseneth* and the...
ancient novel received more focused attention beginning with Marc Philonenko and especially Christoph Burchard in the 1970s and 1980s. An important 1974 essay by Stephanie West brought Aseneth to the attention of classicists and strengthened the connection with the romance genre. While a few scholars have tried to distance Aseneth from the ancient novel or assign it to a specialized subgenre (e.g., “sapiential novel” or “Jewish novel”), recent scholarship by Angela Standhartinger, Catherine Hezser, Françoise Mriguet, and Patricia Ahearne-Kroll bear out its genre affiliation with the ancient Greek novel. While all of these scholars have noted the presence of emotions in Aseneth and even used the emotions as a basis for connecting the Jewish text to the Greek novels, the complexes of emotions in Aseneth have not yet received sustained attention, either by these scholars or by others in studies of emotions in the novels generally.

Emotions in Aseneth

Emotions are ubiquitous in Aseneth and have been recognized as an important window onto the book’s social and cultural significance. Virtually every scene includes represented emotions. The majority of these involve “simple” constructions, as at 3:7, where Aseneth “rejoiced” (ἐχάρη) at learning her parents had come in from the field. Simple emotions are frequently intensified in Aseneth by modifiers like σφόδρα or μεγάς, as when Aseneth was “extremely grieved” (ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα) at the words of Joseph (8:8). There is “great joy” (χαρὰ μεγάλη), for example, more often than there is simple χαρά (cf. χαρὰ μεγάλη at 3:4, 4:2, 7:10, 9:1, 14:11, 15:12, 24:5). The intensifiers can pile up. We find, for example, “exceedingly great rejoicing” (χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα) when Pentephres hears of Joseph’s visit (3:4). The intensity of these simple emotions adds a novelistic touch to Aseneth. We should also note, however, that the language for describing intensified emotions in Aseneth frequently reflects Semitic/Hebrew.
Septuagintal constructions like “so-and-so feared a great fear” (ἐφοβήθη φόβον μέγαν) or “rejoiced a great joy” (ἐχάρη χαρὰν μεγάλην). While the Septuagint on any definition cannot be considered “novelistic,” one can easily imagine readers or hearers of certain books (Greek translations of Daniel, Esther, or Ruth, for example) interpreting those texts in light of a pre-existing familiarity with the tradition of Greek fiction found in the novels.

Many of the emotions in *Aseneth* also appear in duplex constructions. These almost always involve complementary emotions (either both negative or both positive), as when Pharaoh’s son “grieves and suffers horribly” (24:1; cf. 24:12) or when Aseneth’s parents see her and “were amazed at her beauty and rejoiced” (20:7). Relatedly, what we might call “state-of-mind” emotions are frequently paired in *Aseneth* with complementary metonymic “state-of-body” emotions. The dominant pairings are fear with trembling/collapsing (9:1; 14:10; 23:15; 26:8), on the one hand, and grief with weeping/groaning (8:8; 10:1), on the other. The bodily expressions of emotion may stand in for the “state-of-mind” emotion to which they are attached or they may serve to specify the “kind” of state-of-mind emotion in question: the kind of fear that manifests in trembling, the kind of grief that manifests in weeping, and so on. This strategy for describing emotions, paralleled abundantly in both the Greek novels and the Hebrew Bible, lends these representations of emotions a poignant physicality.

Representations of emotion comparable to those already discussed (simple, simple intensified, duplex) may be found in a wide array of classical and postclassical genres, Jewish and non-Jewish, including even occasionally in the Joseph narratives in Genesis 37–50 (simple emotions in, e.g., Gen 37:3–4; 40:2; 42:35; simple intensified in 39:19; 46:29; a possible instance of duplex emotions in 37:35). Three passages in *Aseneth*, however, invite a closer look. All three contain complexes of at least five emotions or physical proxies for emotions. Such constructions are difficult to find paralleled in ancient Greek literature apart from the ancient novel.

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39. See Ahearne-Kroll, “Joseph and Aseneth,” in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*. Vol. 1, ed. Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 2533. For examples, see 3:3; 4:1; 6:1; 7:8; 10:1, 3; 14:10; 15:11; 24:1, 5. For the same construction (a transitive verb with cognate accusative) but not applied to an emotional signifier, see 27:2.

40. On this tendency, see Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World*.

41. “And rejoiced” is found only in manuscripts of groups a and d; it is missing from those of groups c and d. Miniscule 661 reads “and they rejoiced a great joy.” See Fink, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 70.

42. For body language and emotion in *Aseneth*, see Mirguet, “And Aseneth Saw Joseph . . . Body Language and Emotions in *Joseph and Aseneth* 6,1.” On blushing in Chariton, see Koen De Temmerman, “Blushing Beauty: Characterizing Blushes in Chariton’s *Callirhoe*,” *Mn* 60 (2007): 235–52.

43. As noted above, this paper follows Ahearne-Kroll’s proposal that scholars of *Aseneth* begin with what the longer and shorter versions have in common. In the longer version, however, there are two further passages that might also qualify as instances of the “complexes of emotions” topos, both in the second part of the novel and characterizing Pharaoh’s son (cf. 23:1; 24:1).
We begin with a passage in which Aseneth catches sight of Joseph from her bedroom window. The result is that she was

κατενύγη ἰσχυρῶς· καὶ παρεκλάσθη ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτῆς καὶ παρελύθησαν τὰ γόνατα αὐτῆς καὶ ἐτρόμαξεν ὅλον τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς· καὶ ἐφοβήθη φόβον μέγαν καὶ ἀνεστέναξε καὶ εἶπεν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς . . .

strongly cut (to the heart), and her soul was crushed, and her knees were paralyzed, and her entire body trembled, and she was filled with great fear, and she sighed, and she said in her heart . . .

To make sense of this complex of six negative emotions and emotional proxies, it will help to take a closer look at the narrative circumstances that produce it. The narrative emphasizes that Aseneth had spurned Joseph earlier, sight unseen (4:9–11). Something about seeing Joseph directly, however, abruptly changes her perspective. What does Aseneth see when she looks at Joseph? The narrative does not give a direct answer. One possibility is that Joseph appears in her eyes as an otherworldly, heavenly figure. This is supported by her description of Joseph on his arrival: “the sun from heaven (ὁ ἥλιος ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) has come to us on his chariot and entered our house today, and shines upon it like a light upon the earth” (6:2). This picks up on the narrative fact that Aseneth lives in Heliopolis (Ἡλιούπολις), the “city of the sun,” where her father is a priest (1:3).44 For the reader with an eye to divine providence, it is perhaps significant that the sun (or, more precisely, the heat of the sun) is what brings Joseph to Pentephres’s house (3:2). Joseph’s dazzling wardrobe includes “an exquisite white tunic” and a purple robe interwoven with gold thread “and a golden crown (was) on his head, and around the crown were twelve chosen stones, and on top of the twelve stones were twelve golden rays” (5:5). Burchard, following F. J. Dölger, notes that the crown with its twelve stones and rays is characteristic of Helios’s crown; such crowns are also described in connection to other heavenly figures.45 When she begins to pray, Aseneth faces east, the direction of the rising sun (11:1).46 Later, when Aseneth has finished her confession and reached an emotional nadir, the morning star rises in the east (14:1) and an angelic visitor comes to her. This visitor appears to her as “a man in every respect similar to Joseph” in his attire,

except that his face was like lightning, and his eyes like sunshine (ὡς φέγγος ἡλίου), and the hairs of his head like a flame of fire of a burning torch, and hands and feet like iron shining forth from a fire, and sparks shot forth from his hands and feet. (14:9)47

Aseneth’s reaction to the solar angelophany involves extreme emotion: she “fell on her face at his feet on the ground” and “was filled with great fear, and all of her limbs trembled” (14:10). Although not a complex of emotions, this certainly qualifies as an instance of the “extremely intense emotions” that Hägg identifies as characteristic of the Greek novel.48 Aseneth’s reaction to the angel is reminiscent of responses to visions and angelophanies in biblical texts, but the emotion is here is more pronounced than anything

44. So, too, the LXX; the Masoretic Text makes “On” (יה) her hometown.
45. Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” 208n.
46. As noted by several commentators, including Burchard, 217n.
47. On the solar imagery, see Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph, 156–67.
48. Hägg, The Novel in Antiquity, 6.
found in comparable biblical scenes (cf. Judg 6:22–23; 13:21–22; Isa 6:5; Dan 8:17; 10:8–9; Rev 1:17; 4 Ezra 6:33). In view of the parallels between Joseph and the angel, we may reasonably understand Aseneth’s reaction to Joseph in 6:1 as a novelistic take on an angelophany. Here we would do well to remember that the idealized and erotically charged heroes of the novels are also frequently mistaken for gods and goddesses (e.g., Callir. 1.14.1; 2.3.6; 3.2.15; 6.3.5).

A second possibility, however, is that Joseph is so good-looking that just the sight of him ignites Aseneth’s erotic passion. This second reading is supported by several factors. The verb κατανύσσομαι, Aseneth’s first emotional response here, can describe sexual attraction, as demonstrated by Françoise Mirguet. A notable parallel is found in the additions to Greek Daniel, in the story of Susanna, where the verb describes the effect on a pair of lecherous elders of seeing the beautiful heroine (v. 10). A second consideration recalls that “love at first sight” is among the most regular and predictable motifs of the Greek novels, characterizing the meeting of the protagonists in the novels by Chariton, Xenophon, and Heliodorus. We might therefore expect to find “love at first sight” here as well. The third and most important consideration, however, recalls that a major factor in Joseph’s characterization in Aseneth is that

all the wives and the daughters of the noblemen and the satraps of the whole land of Egypt used to molest him (wanting) to sleep with him, and all the wives and the daughters of the Egyptians, when they saw Joseph, suffered badly because of his beauty. (Asen. 7:3)

For the reader familiar with the biblical Joseph story, this clearly alludes to the episode with Potiphar’s wife described in Genesis 39. Again, however, a reader unfamiliar with the biblical Joseph story could easily digest the characterization detail without losing the thread of the story. After all, “wives and the daughters of the noblemen and the satraps” is a category to which Aseneth obviously belongs as daughter to Pentephres, “chief of all the satraps and the noblemen of Pharaoh” (1:3–4). The generalization about women of that larger category appears to square with Aseneth’s initial reaction to the sight of

49. Mirguet, “And Aseneth Saw Joseph . . . Body Language and Emotions in Joseph and Aseneth 6,1,” 409.
50. Two versions of the story of Susanna are extant in Greek: those of the Old Greek (OG) and Theodotian (TH). The basic outline of the story is the same in both, although OG is considerably shorter. TH begins with four verses not paralleled in OG, and the two have somewhat different endings. The figure of Daniel is more prominent in TH. OG and TH contain substantial agreements in verse 10, although in TH the effect is not instant; it is the result of watching Susannah day after day. OG, therefore, contains the closer parallel, where one could read καὶ ἀμφότεροι ἦσαν κατανενυγμένοι as immediately effective, as seems to be what is happening to Aseneth in our passage. For the text and discussion, see Joseph Ziegler and Olivier Munnich, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum: Susanna Daniel Bel et Draco (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).
51. Achilles Tatius has Clitophon fall instantly for Leucippe (1.4), but Leucippe takes some time to reciprocate (2.9). Longus has Daphnis and Chloe first come to know each other as pre-adolescents and then again, in a new season of life, as vulnerable to Eros. For discussion and analysis, see Stephen Epstein, “The Education of Daphnis: Goats, Gods, the Birds and the Bees,” Phoenix 56 (2002), 28–30.
Joseph. Aseneth’s erotic desire for Joseph, however, if present, is part of a general condition characterized by intense negative emotions. These negative feelings are magnified and elaborated in subsequent scenes.

When Aseneth eventually meets Joseph, Pentephres encourages her to kiss Joseph as she would a brother. Joseph prevents her, however, explaining that it is not fitting for him, a man who blesses the living God with his mouth, to kiss “a strange woman who will bless with her mouth dead and dumb idols and eat from their table bread of strangulation and drink from their libation a cup of insidiousness and anoint herself with ointment of destruction” (8:5). He can only kiss women—mothers, sisters, and the wife who shares his bed—who “bless with their mouths the living God” (8:6). The same would be true were the genders reversed: a woman who worships the living God should not “kiss a strange man, because this is an abomination before the Lord God” (8:7). The rebuff, as one might expect, crushes Aseneth’s already deflated spirit, and directly produces a second complex of emotions. Before turning to that passage, however, we must revisit the question posed above: What did Aseneth see when she looked at Joseph? What provoked the devastating complex of feelings in 6:1? An awesome and terrifying messenger from heaven, radiating glorious light? Or a devastatingly handsome bachelor, the sight of whom filled her with a kind of painful lovesickness? Or both? Perhaps the best clue lies in the complex of emotions itself, which supports both readings: she is inwardly pained and/or aroused (κατενύγη ἰσχυρώς) and at the same time she is afraid (ἐφοβήθη φόβον μέγαν). The physical emotional proxies—paralyzed knees, trembling body, the deep sigh—also support a complex response. Such a “both-and” solution squares well with the tendency in the ancient novel for beautiful protagonists to generate intense erotic attraction and be routinely mistaken for dangerous, frightening divine beings.

Joseph’s words to Aseneth lay out the complication at the crux of the novel’s marriage plot.52 The Greek novels, it has been argued, each in their own ways seek to support “values of heterosexual bourgeois romance.”53 Aseneth has a parenetic aim in connection to marriage too: the author is apparently interested in promoting endogamy, allowing Jewish-Gentile marriage only when the prospective Gentile partner first renounces idolatry and acknowledges the God of Israel as the one, true God. In a word, conversion must precede marriage. We should not fail to notice, however, that Joseph does not urge Aseneth to convert; that initiative seems to come entirely from her side, perhaps nudged along by divine providence. There is nothing in either the long or the short version of Aseneth that suggests endorsement of generalized missionary program to the Gentiles. Neither the author of this novel nor his leading Jewish character sets out to make Egyptians into Jews, and we cannot fail to notice that a number of characters

52. For the view that “this passage sets up the conflict to be resolved by Aseneth’s conversion,” see also Chesnutt, “The Social Setting and Purpose of Joseph and Aseneth,” 23.

53. The quotation is from Morgan and Harrison’s essay on “Intertextuality” in The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel, ed. Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and in specific connection to Chariton, contrasting the Chaereas-Callirhoe relationship with the Achilles-Patroclus relationship in the Iliad of which the former is a kind of rewriting, but similar statements have been made about each of the other “canonical” novels, sometimes with Achilles Tatius being kept to one side as an ironic send-up of that kind of writing. Morgan and Harrison, “Intertextuality,” 220.
(including Pharaoh, Aseneth’s parents, and Aseneth’s virgin companions) are presented in a relatively positive light, despite their “failure” to convert. It would be wrong, then, to conceive of *Aseneth* as a missionary document, but defensible to view it as a text upholding the biblical prohibition on intermarriage (cf. Gen 24:3–4, 37–38; 27:46–28:1), and working out an innovative strategy to square that prohibition with the cultural memory of a Jewish patriarch marrying an Egyptian bride.\(^5\) This reading also suggests—not to say proves—that questions about Jewish-Gentile intermarriage—whether and under what circumstances such marriages could take place—were topics of live discussion in the author’s diaspora community.\(^5\)

Despite Joseph’s joy that Aseneth is not like other Egyptian women (7:8, “And Joseph rejoiced exceedingly with great joy . . . and Joseph said by himself, ‘If she is a virgin hating every man, this (girl) will certainly not molest me’”), he does not reciprocate her affection. His only worry, apparently, is the potential impropriety of *her* feelings toward him. Again, a reader familiar with Genesis 39 could well read Joseph’s interactions with Aseneth through the lens suggested by the biblical Joseph’s interactions with Potiphar’s wife. There it is clear that a “bourgeois” Egyptian woman desired Joseph and unclear whether Joseph felt anything for her. The question seems to have been a nonissue for the biblical narrator who, like the narrator in *Aseneth*, does not comment on Joseph’s private thoughts. All the reader knows is that Joseph rebuffs the woman’s advances.\(^5\) If anything—and this is clearer in *Aseneth* than in Genesis 39—the flat characterization of Joseph in the presence of a beautiful woman telegraphs self-control, widely recognized as a masculine virtue in the Hellenistic world.\(^5\)

While the picture painted at 6:1 involves a complex of intense emotions, Aseneth’s emotions here are not represented metaphorically as “in conflict,” either each with a fellow emotion, or collectively against Aseneth as the experiencing subject. There is only a piling on of negative emotions reminiscent of characters like Sophocles’s Oedipus (in *Oedipus tyrannus*, at his self-recognition) or Euripides’s Agave (in *Bacchae*, at her recognition of Pentheus as her son) who experience dysphoric (self-)-recognition. Each of the emotions has a rationale that is elaborated in Aseneth’s subsequent soliloquy. Her experiences of being “cut (to the heart)” and having her soul crushed are explained by the sudden reversal of her feelings about Joseph, whom she now describes as “the sun from heaven” and a “son of God” and surpassing all men on earth in beauty and light (6:2–4). The paralysis of her knees, her trembling, and her great fear are explained by her felt inability to hide herself, the speaker of “wicked words” against Joseph, from

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\(^5\) Note also the elaboration of these prohibitions in Jub. 20:4; 22:20; 30:7–16. Cf. Tob 4:12–13.

\(^5\) As argued by Chesnutt, “The Social Setting and Purpose of Joseph and Aseneth,” 37–39.

\(^5\) The account of Potiphar’s wife and Joseph was greatly elaborated by Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*; there too we find Joseph offering a lengthy moralizing speech on the value of chastity at the moment where his biblical counterpart is beating a hasty and cloak-less escape (Ant. Jud. 2.51–52; cf. Gen 39:12).

\(^5\) In *Asen.*, Pentephres describes Joseph as “a god-fearing man, self-controlled (πόρφρον), and chaste (παρθένος).” A related virtue is also suggested for Joseph’s brother Levi, who is in many ways the hero of the second part of the novel. He addresses Pharaoh’s son with “a disciplined calmness of heart (ἐν πραότητι καρδίας).” Pharaoh’s son provides a contrasting case study when it comes to self-control.
whom “nothing hidden escapes . . . because of the great light that is inside him” (6:6). In her fear, she implores the Lord God of Joseph to be gracious and give her to Joseph as a maidservant and slave (6:7–8).

A second complex of emotions follows Joseph’s refusal to be kissed by Aseneth’s idolatrous lips. Following Joseph’s speech (8:5–7), we read that

when Aseneth heard these words of Joseph, she was cut (to the heart) strongly and was distressed exceedingly and sighed, and she kept gazing at Joseph with her eyes open and her eyes were filled with tears. (8:8)

Five emotions and emotion signifiers make up this particular complex. The first is of special interest. Again, we read that Aseneth was “cut strongly to her heart” (κατενύγη ἰσχθρῶς). Here, the possibility of reading this emotion with an erotic valance is mitigated by the facts, first, that the feeling is provoked by Joseph’s rejection of her kiss and, second, that Joseph himself will be κατενύγη in the next sentence in response to seeing her in this state. The feeling here, then, seems to be the pain that comes from grief, first for Aseneth and second for Joseph. For Joseph, the experience of being κατενύγη is paired with his quality of mercifulness. The second emotion, grief (ἐλυπήθη), in Aseneth’s complex is intensified by σφόδρα. The third element, groaning or sighing (ἀνεστέναξε), elaborates and characterizes her grief. The fourth and fifth elements in the complex are likewise related, with the fifth (her eyes filling with tears) building on and elaborating the fourth (gazing wide-eyed at Joseph). Nothing suggests that her desire for Joseph has abated; the emphasis in this complex of emotions, however, is on the intensity of her grief. The author is ambiguous about whether she is grieved primarily because Joseph will not receive her kiss or because she is already beginning to regret her idolatry. While it is of course possible for both to be true at once, in view of the theologically inflected monologue that followed her first complex of emotions, the second potential cause should be given more weight.

A third complex of emotions follows the blessing Aseneth receives from Joseph. After the blessing, Aseneth

rejoiced exceedingly with great joy over his blessing and went into the upper floor by herself, and fell on her bed exhausted, because in her there was joy and distress and much fear and trembling and continuous sweating as she heard all these words of Joseph, which he had spoken to her in the name of the Most High God. And she wept with great and bitter weeping and repented of her (infatuation with the) gods whom she used to worship, and spurned all the idols, and waited for evening to come. (9:1)

Here, we find several features already discussed: the Septuagintalism “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy,” the modification of a simple emotion with an intensifier,
and body language functioning metonymically for emotions. What makes this passage especially noteworthy, however, is the complex of clearly conflicting emotions at the center: the joy and distress and much fear and trembling and continuous sweating, which combine to exhaust their experiencer. This is not the “asyndetic accumulation of abstract nouns” that Fusillo described as most typical of the “conflict of emotions” topos, but it does qualify as a “complex of emotions” in the more general terms introduced above and it certainly involves emotions in conflict. The pairing of joy and distress is reminiscent of the topos as it figures into the novels (cf. Callir. 3.4.15; 7.6.5; Leuc. Clit. 2.18.6; 5.19.1; 5.21.1; Aeth. 4.11.1; 7.7.3; 10.38.3–4), and the pairing of fear and trembling recalls both biblical language (cf. Gen 9:2; Exod 15:16; Deut 2:15; Judg 7:3; Pss 2:7; 55:5; Mark 5:33; Acts 16:29; 1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 7:15) and other passages in Aseneth (e.g., 6.; 10:1; 14:10; 23:15; 25:8). Especially interesting, however, particularly in comparison to earlier and contemporary Jewish writing, is the passage’s apparent participation in the novelistic impulse to produce an elaborate complex of emotions. The five emotion signifiers add up to more than the sum of their parts. Positive and negative emotions are experienced simultaneously and combine to paralyze Aseneth. Fusillo noted that the usual effect of the topos on characters in the novels was stupefaction from the “paradoxical simultaneity” of their emotions. The author of Aseneth elaborates the effect of these emotions on Aseneth at great length: “She wept with great and bitter weeping and began to repent (and turn away from) her gods that she was accustomed to worshiping, and she became angry at all of her idols. And she waited for evening to come” (9:2). The narrative shifts briefly to Joseph, who takes his leave, refusing Pentephres’s offer of lodging for the night and promising to return after a week. We then return to Aseneth, who continued to (feel) melancholy and to weep until the sun set. And she ate no bread and drank no water. And nighttime came, and all who were in the house were sleeping, but she alone was wide awake, and she continued to contemplate and weep, and she recurrently beat her chest with (her) hand, and she continued to be very much afraid and to tremble severely. (10:1)

This emotional state is related to the stupefaction experienced by the novels’ characters in the fallout from many of their complexes of emotions. At last, when everyone else is asleep, Aseneth takes action, beginning by fetching ashes from the hearth in a leather napkin and setting them on the floor in her room. Barring the door, she resumes mourning. When one of Aseneth’s companions hears the groaning, wakes the other companions, and calls to their mistress through the locked door, Aseneth speaks for the first time since Joseph’s devastating blessing. She tells her anxious companions that she has a headache and is unable to open the door (10:6), a stratagem that allows her to remain in solitude and mourning. She then rises quietly and changes her “royal robe of < fine linen > interwoven with gold” for a dark mourning tunic (10:8–10), throwing her fine clothes out the north window for the poor. She then smashes “all her gods that were in her room, the gold and silver ones that were without number” and jettisons them out the window, again for the benefit of “beggars and those in need.” Those are followed out the window by the “royal meal” that was set out in her chamber and included “all of the sacrificial offerings of her gods and their vessels of wine libation” (10:11–14). Now she spreads the previously

58. Fusillo, “The Conflict of Emotions: A Topos in the Greek Erotic Novel,” 65.
collected ashes about the room and on her own head. These external actions signify her turning from her past life as an idolater toward her new life in service of Joseph’s God. The through line, however, is the repeated emphasis on grief, weeping, and melancholia. Her environment and person are humbled to reflect her inner condition, and to give evidence for it. Her surroundings thus transformed, she resumes beating her chest and weeping “with great and bitter weeping the entire night with groaning and bellowing until morning” (10:15). She remains in this state, eating and drinking nothing, for the next seven days (10:17). The rest of her transformation, the overriding focus of this first part of the novel, plays out on the field shaped by her deep and complex emotions.

**Conclusion**

The three complexes of emotion in *Aseneth* discussed here intersect with the novel’s conversion motif. They intensify the grief experienced by the heroine as she reckons with the error of her idolatrous past and is refashioned into a suitable mate for a Jewish patriarch. It may well be that this tale indirectly addressed a concern in the author’s social context, either an exegetical concern about Joseph, a practical concern about the propriety of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage, or both. The intense realism conjured by the novelistic *topos* of complexes of emotions offered *Aseneth’s* author a potent instrument to show how true conversion looked and felt. We might even go so far as to posit a polemic here against “sham conversions” or “conversions of expedience” claimed by Gentiles prior to marrying a member of the author’s Jewish community. To truly move from “from darkness to light, from error to truth, and from death to life,” as Joseph describes the necessary shift (*Asen.* 8:9), one needed to feel a deep sense of grief mixed with the joy that comes from moving into the embrace of the true and living God.

Although emotions are attached to most characters who figure in *Aseneth*, the major complexes of emotions examined here are all attached to the titular heroine. If the attribution of complexes of emotions is a way of individuating characters, as De Temmerman and others argue in connection to the other novels, then this observation corroborates and explains the observation that Aseneth is the most developed and individuated character in the novel, even (or perhaps especially) when compared with Joseph. Such a reading works alongside one in which *Aseneth* illustrates

59. De Temmerman, *Crafting Characters*, 14. Cf. Repath, “Emotional Conflict and Platonic Psychology in the Greek Novel”; Alexander, “The Passions in Galen and the Novels of Chariton and Xenophon”; Daude, “Aspects physiques et psychiques des passions chez Achille Tatius.”

60. Burchard, e.g., in his introduction to “Joseph and Aseneth,” describes the Joseph of *Aseneth* as “a passive figure who has his marriage more or less wished upon him. During his bride’s cumbersome conversion he is absent collecting grain” (182). For a different view, see Docherty, “Joseph and Aseneth,” 36–41. Note that the relative prominence of a character in a given narrative is not necessarily the same as the relative complexity of a character, although the two scales typically overlap to a great extent, in both ancient and modern narratives. The prominence of a character could be measured, for example, by the number of verbs of which a given character is the subject, or by the relative number of scenes in which a given character is present.
the emotional dimension of conversion a proselyte ideally experiences before taking a Jewish spouse. Aseneth’s intense emotions, particularly when represented as complexes of emotions, are psychagogic; they are the signs, the vivid proofs of the turn away from polytheism which must be in evidence before a Gentile may embrace the Jews’ compassionate God and marry a spouse from among the Jews’ beautiful sons and daughters.61

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61. Recent work on the social context of Aseneth in Hellenistic Judaism includes Collins, “Joseph and Aseneth”; Mermelstein, “Emotion, Gender, and Greco-Roman Virtue in Joseph and Aseneth”; Jill Hicks-Keeton, Arguing with Aseneth: Gentile Access to Israel’s Living God in Jewish Antiquity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For a different view, advocating informed agnosticism about the social origins of the text and outlining the plausibility of composition in late antique Syriac Christianity, see Kraemer, When Aseneth Met Joseph. Although the late antique hypothesis has not generated widespread agreement, the case for informed agnosticism is a healthy corrective to overconfident pronouncements on the origins of this enigmatic text.
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