

Susanna and Callirhoe: Female Bodies, Law, and Novels

Abstract

Susanna, der griechische Zusatz zum Danielbuch und *Callirhoe* von Chariton aus Aphrodisias sind frühe Beispiele für Novellen. Diese Werke reflektieren über Rechtsgrundsätze und die Position von Frauen in Bezug auf Gesetz und Haushalt, wobei sie deutlich die weiblichen Körper in den Fokus und damit ausstellen. Der vorliegende Artikel verbindet diese verschiedenen Aspekte mit dem Einsatz weiblicher Körper durch antike Autoren.¹

Warnung zum Inhalt: Dieser Artikel diskutiert sexuelle Gewalt, Vergewaltigung und Tod.

1. Introduction

In 2014, Isabel Gómez-Acebo identified Greek novels as an influence on *Susanna*, briefly exploring *Callirhoe* as the first example of such literary influence.² She writes that “Callirhoe, a woman of great beauty, is unjustly accused of adultery (*Chaereas* 1.2.6), and before her punishment she is unclothed (*Chaereas* 1.13.14) before many people, who admire her beauty. Her rejected lovers plot that she be punished by death.”³ These motifs or elements are shared with *Susanna*, yet there is a difficulty in ascribing any interdependence or textual relationship between these works, especially as *Susanna* was composed perhaps a century or more prior to *Callirhoe*.⁴ Only by the end of the 1st century CE would these works have occupied the same literary world. By this time, these texts occupied proximate or even the same literary environment, being read and circulated within a network of elite and literate readers.⁵ Regarding such literate circles, Robyn Faith Walsh writes that, Greek and Roman authors routinely describe themselves writing within (and for) literary networks of fellow writers – a competitive field of educated peers and associated literate specialists who engaged in discussion, interpretation, and the circulation of their works. These networks could include learned individuals from a variety of social backgrounds, but each member possessed the necessary training and the technical means for producing or publishing various forms of writing. Each was also bound by certain expectations and conventions of training, reading, composition, and literary exchange; while capable of innovation, they were

still beholden to the dictates of genre, citation, and allusion in order to demonstrate knowledge of and engagement with other works within their literary field.⁶

While *Callirhoe* is identified as a “romance”, *Susanna* has been classified in many ways, variously suggested as belonging to the categories of “criminal novellas, fables, legal legends, folktales, and wisdom instructional narratives,”⁷ with most revolving around the notions that the text was written to serve as didactic instruction, theological interpretation and entertainment.⁸ Recently, Michael Fontaine has suggested that *Susanna* may be a “Jewish Comedy,” akin to Greek New Comedy.⁹ Clearly *Susanna* may be variously understood, and I am particularly interested in how it might be viewed as either midrashic or didactic regarding the law, especially law around adultery.

This article offers a comparative reading of *Susanna* and *Callirhoe*. This reading draws from feminist approaches within biblical scholarship that examine how the female body is a space of patriarchal control, and how ancient authors manipulated women’s bodily expression towards their own ends. In the following, I will adopt Cheryl Exum’s questions: “what androcentric interests do these texts serve? What encoded messages do these texts give women about gender roles and expectations?”¹⁰ In the following and in brief, my argument is that we should reflect on the intentions that underpin the use of women’s bodies in *Susanna* and *Callirhoe*, and the ways in which they present a view of justice through such utilisation. The following analysis suggests that the similarities between these texts shared approaches to composition and storytelling amongst literate circles in the ancient Mediterranean, writing in Greek.¹¹ *Susanna* and *Callirhoe* are both participants in this network, each offering readers various levels of engagement, depending on their ability to recognise elements interwoven in each narrative.¹² A key element shared between these texts is their engagement with aspects of law and legal proceedings, and particularly how female bodies are exposed and controlled. I will first discuss these features in *Callirhoe*, establishing a pattern for the utilisation of a woman’s body in a later and longer novel, both to engage with then contemporary legal theory, and also to establish a key element of the emerging novel. I will then turn to *Susanna*, which prefigures many of these same features, demonstrating an elite interest in such utilisation of women’s bodies across ancient Mediterranean literary networks. The following is intended as a starting point for further analysis around these questions for various ancient works across cultural boundaries.

2. The Exposure of the Female Body, Courtrooms and Law in *Callirhoe*

Chariton's *Callirhoe* is the earliest known of the Greek romance novels.¹³ The work was likely composed around the mid-to late-1st century CE, its storyline principally concerning two prominent and exceedingly attractive protagonists, the eponymous Callirhoe, and her soon-to-be husband Chaereas. They are children of rival families, but, after becoming smitten with one another, their respective fathers become persuaded that such a marriage is fated. They are swiftly married, much to the annoyance of Callirhoe's many suitors. These suitors get together and plot to convince Chaereas that Callirhoe is being unfaithful in order to dissolve their marriage. Among the identified are "the prince of Rhegium" (υἱὸς τοῦ Ῥηγίων τυράννου, *Chaereas* 1.2.2) who calls upon his fellow "kings" (βασιλέων, *Chaereas* 1.2.3) to somehow exact revenge upon Chaereas.¹⁴ He is followed by "the ruler of Acragas" (ὁ Ἀκραγαντίνων τύραννος, *Chaereas* 1.2.4) who suggests that they should use cunning to achieve their ends. Callirhoe's suitors attempt to arouse Chaereas' suspicions by leaving garlands, half-burned torches and traces of wine and perfume (*Chaereas* 1.3.2). This subterfuge works initially. Chaereas, arriving back to his home after a time away, thinks that Callirhoe has been partying with other men. This suspicion does not survive contact with Callirhoe, and the conspirators' first plot is soon undone. Following this failure, the conspirators then resort to employing two others, the first to get close to Callirhoe via one of her slaves (θεραπαινίδων, *Chaereas* 1.4.1), the second to waylay Chaereas and feed him a story about Callirhoe's infidelity (1.4.6). Rather than publicly charge Callirhoe, Chaereas aims to catch her in the act. In some confusion, Chaereas assaults Callirhoe, kicking her violently. She collapses and Chaereas believes that he has killed her. After learning the truth of the whole evening by torturing Callirhoe's slaves, Chaereas is put on trial for the murder of Callirhoe.

Callirhoe is buried in an elaborate funeral, but a pirate discovers she is alive while robbing her tomb and takes her aboard his vessel, only to sell her off as a slave to Dionysius. These events are covered in the first of eight books. The rest of the narrative involves Dionysius' love for Callirhoe and his marriage to her after it is discovered that she is pregnant. Dionysius believes that this is his child but really it is Chaereas. The pirate is captured and reveals what has happened, at which point Chaereas goes to find Callirhoe. Further intrigue happens, the protagonists make their way to Babylon, more charges of adultery are brought about by Dionysius, as every man, even the king of Babylon, is infatuated with Callirhoe. Chaereas and Callirhoe are reunited, Callirhoe abandons her son to Dionysius' care, allowing him to

continue to believe that the child is his. For the sake of this article, most of the relevant points of discussion take place in Book One.

Exposure of the Female Body in Callirhoe

As already stated, Callirhoe is described as a very attractive woman (e.g., *Chaereas* 1.1.2).¹⁵ Katharine Haynes writes that “the force of Kallirhoe’s beauty is such that all men wish to possess her, yet this attraction is something she neither wishes for nor is able to control.”¹⁶ Callirhoe simply exudes attractiveness. Not only do other characters find Callirhoe an object of desire, but she is also framed to readers like this.¹⁷ Like Susanna, Callirhoe is objectified via a bathing scene (*Chaereas* 2.2.2). Callirhoe is bathed by the countrywomen and described like a deity; Chariton writes that “her skin gleamed white, shinning just like a shimmering surface,” and later, a woman says to Callirhoe that “when you see Aphrodite you will think you are looking at a picture of yourself” (*Chaereas* 2.2.2, 6).¹⁸ Indeed, Callirhoe even advances her honour via her sexuality. She consistently steps outside of gender norms and utilises her desirability to defend her own interests.¹⁹

Not only is Callirhoe’s appearance particularly important for the novel, but it is also essential to note that she is put on display for the audience by Chariton, and at times, various characters throughout the work. According to Sandra Schwartz, *Callirhoe* follows a stereotypical “bedroom showdown” wherein the adulterers are discovered by the spurned husband, entrapped and exposed.²⁰ This element of public exposure is usually focussed on the woman and seeks to reassert social norms by revealing private affairs. To achieve this reassertion, women are frequently portrayed as naked. Callirhoe’s exposure is frequent throughout the novel and is often connected to her association with the goddess Aphrodite, but it may also be connected to a trope where attractive women are described in detail for the benefit of the audience.²¹ Once she is captured by the pirate Theron, she is paraded before Leonas, steward of the aforementioned Dionysius. Theron unveils Callirhoe and loosens her hair before a gathered household (*Chaereas* 1.14.1). Here again, Callirhoe is identified with Aphrodite, and quickly bought by Leonas.

Callirhoe’s exposure is often related to the magnification of her divine beauty. Her character is often at the mercy of others, and her personal space and inner life is open to a rotating cast of usually male figures. While her exposure appears to be less sexually explicit than Susanna’s, there is nevertheless a consistent element in her portrayal. Callirhoe is often able to gain the upper hand, as Chariton provides Callirhoe with an insight into the motivations of those around her, yet she is still often at the mercy of powerful men’s desires and actions. The

conspirators attempted to expose Callirhoe, although the bedroom showdown was only ever a sham. That Callirhoe remains faithful to Chaereas subverts an attempted exposure of her body, yet she is met with punishment anyway. Her body is thus made to present a legal argument; Chaereas is entitled to full control over her, and his violence toward her body becomes a set piece for a courtroom scene. As we shall see, Callirhoe's body becomes the vehicle for a discussion of justice.

Courtrooms and Law in Callirhoe

While there are many aspects throughout *Callirhoe* which engage in legal theory, I will discuss four core elements related to courtrooms and law.²² Chariton introduces the text itself by identifying himself as a “clerk of the lawyer Athenagoras” (Ἀθηναγόρου τοῦ ῥήτορος ὑπογραφεύς, *Chaereas* 1.1.1), and throughout demonstrates his familiarity and interest in legal proceedings, particularly around questions of intentionality.²³ Schwartz suggests that *Callirhoe* probably responds to the Augustan *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis*, a set of laws which attempted to impose legal penalties on those who transgressed what Augustus perceived as proper conduct in marriage.²⁴ Furthermore, Chaereas' actions when he expects to find Callirhoe in the midst of adultery draw from Lysias' speeches on law. Not only are there plentiful allusions to these legal speeches, but in *Callirhoe*, Chariton offers his own rejoinder.²⁵ Element one is thus the advancement of a legal perspective.

The first trial only results from Chaereas' reaction to this false claim of adultery, rather than a trial over adultery itself. Yet, adultery and legal proceedings are a key feature of Greek romance. Schwartz notes that “the first trial of Chariton's novel clearly establishes that adultery is a fundamental concern of the ideal romance.”²⁶ The later trial held by Artaxerxes between Dionysius and Mithridates is also a result of suspicions around adultery (*Chaereas* 4.6.8). According to Schwartz, trials depicted in such novels are intended to “restore social order” and to show “how the villains will be punished, and the heroes vindicated.”²⁷ Schwartz elsewhere states that “the inclusion of at least one trial in each of the extant Greek novels... attests to the appeal of this type of scene, and indeed its centrality to the genre.”²⁸ These legal cases are imaginative where a public mass is entertained, oratory often overrides close legal argument. This provides both entertainment for the reader and demonstrates the rhetorical skill of the author.²⁹ The trial is obviously arranged against Chaereas; the group of conspirators apparently have some influence over the initial trial proceedings (*Chaereas* 1.5.3).³⁰ While the audience may expect to be presented with a clever defence, Chaereas opts for something more surprising and emotive, condemning himself to death for the murder of

Callirhoe. This bold strategy and the clear expression of remorse leads to his acquittal.

Element two concerns the dramatic role of legal settings and conflicts.

Callirhoe consistently exhibits what Romain Brethes terms “tragic (or dramatic) irony,”

wherein the audience is consistently more aware of the situation than the principal characters.³¹ This detail is related somewhat to the motif of the trial scene already discussed.

Integral to effective trial scenes is the knowledge of the audience, who can judge the effectiveness of such scenes, and courtrooms more generally.³² The audience is able to determine and critique a courtroom scene; their awareness of the events that have transpired provides them with a means to evaluate legal proceedings and question legal principles.³³

Much of the narrative drama is contained in the readers’ expectations. The reader has to make a decision about the justice of the case at hand. Of course, one already knows that Chaereas had been tricked into thinking Callirhoe was committing adultery,³⁴ but we might judge whether the assembly has made a just decision. Is their verdict in accordance with proper legal practice? According to G. Goold, Chaereas’ attempt to kill his wife’s supposed lover would have been “perfectly legal.”³⁵ Chaereas could have, in theory, attempted to justify his actions and seek the court’s mercy. His actions while in private, and there are no witnesses to verify or challenge his account of what happened.³⁶ Yet it is Callirhoe who has paid the price. Element three therefore includes the audience as jury, providing them with the tools to think about justice, while element four is the question of how a woman’s body has been used to create this thought experiment.

Chariton’s interest in law is evident and is put to good use, for he frequently seeks to use his audience’s knowledge of such environments and precedents to undermine or play with expectations. His use of a courtroom setting is therefore playful but with an openness that can lead to questions around the process and outcomes of legal proceedings for his audience. To arrive at this point, Chariton has exposed Callirhoe’s body (something he will return to on occasion) and has had her harmed to provide both entertainment and a thought experiment.

This utilisation demonstrates how a male author has discussed a law which gives men control over women’s bodies. Each interaction with a man demonstrates Callirhoe’s submission into this system. First her father marries her off without so much as telling her to whom she is to be married, then the conspirators decide that if they cannot win her then they should destroy her marriage, and then Chaereas, who upon becoming convinced that Callirhoe has been unfaithful, kicks her violently enough to make her appear dead. Presiding over this is Chariton, who while presenting Callirhoe often much more favourably than Chaereas, still subordinates the character of Callirhoe to his own ends. If he is to entertain and provide legal

thought experiments, then it is Callirhoe who must be exposed. These four elements are also present in *Susanna*, but I will first introduce the work and how Susanna's body is treated throughout, before turning again to these four elements.

3. The Exposure of the Female Body, Courtrooms and Law in *Susanna*

There are two key versions of *Susanna* in Greek and attached to the Book of Daniel which follow the same broad storyline. While the provenance of *Susanna* is open to question, the forms of the text known from the Old Greek and Theodotion were not written in its setting, 6th century BCE Babylon. *Susanna* is typically dated to around the 1st century BCE, which would place the temporal setting of the narrative perhaps as much as 500 years in the past from its composition.³⁷ The likelihood is that for at least some readers, 6th century Babylon functioned as a distant setting, removed from their own experience, yet about characters and situations that were familiar.³⁸ Susanna herself is introduced to the reader as a prominent woman, the wife of a wealthy and powerful man. Even in a position of privilege, Susanna is still at the mercy of patriarchy. That is an “androcentric” household (and by extension communal) hierarchy which places a man at the top, whose needs and reputation are to be preserved by all of his household.³⁹ Susanna is reported in the Theodotion text as being “very beautiful” (καλή σφόδρα, *Susanna* 2 cf. *Susanna* 31) and “refined” (τροφερὰ σφόδρα, *Susanna* 31). Two elders, also judges in the local community, become infatuated with her, and concoct a way to corner her (while she is bathing in the Theodotion version) in her private garden and coercively rape her. In the Theodotion version, they threaten that they will falsely claim that they saw her committing adultery with a young man if she refuses them. Susanna denies them anyway. In the Old Greek, their threat is implicit, and they simply depart, while in the Theodotion, the scene ends in a commotion. The following day, a trial is held where Susanna is subjected to public humiliation and the elders claim that they caught her committing adultery. Susanna only speaks to herself at the outset in the Old Greek (*Susanna* 35a), and after her sentence in the Theodotion (*Susanna* 42–42); she does not speak in her own defence. Indeed, even in her “retrial,” Daniel only further questions the elders.⁴⁰ Daniel's outburst launches immediately into his separation and questioning of the elders in the Old Greek, while the crowd and other elders have lines of their own in the Theodotion. Daniel's cross-examination consists of a rebuke of each elder, followed by a single question, then a further rebuke. The elders' failure to provide a consistent answer demonstrates to the assembled

crowd that they have provided a false witness, and as a result, they are given the sentence that would have applied to Susanna. The Old Greek notes that they were thrown into a ravine that was set on fire by an angel (*Susanna* 60–62), while the Theodotion simply states that they were put to death (*Susanna* 62). The Theodotion perhaps smooths over the difference between the elders' method of execution in the Old Greek and Daniel's words that they will be "split" (σχίσει, *Susanna* 55) and "saw[ed]" (καταπίρησι, *Susanna* 59).⁴¹ Intrinsic to this story are the elements of exposure and law.⁴² Individual and communal responses to adultery, attempted rape, and false witness all revolve around these key features.

Exposure of the Female Body in Susanna

Susanna is repeatedly exposed in the book.⁴³ In the first instance, the elders have been watching Susanna for a while prior to their attack (*Susanna* 12). Susanna, unaware of their presence, enjoys her garden. She is objectified by the elders and the narrative. Following this, Susanna bathes in private, but this private experience has been rendered public by the elders and the text.⁴⁴ The motif of women bathing and/or anointing themselves with cosmetics is relatively commonplace in biblical and ancient Jewish literature. Women such as Bathsheba, Jezebel, Judith, Bilhah, Esther, and unnamed women in Proverbs and Song of Songs are portrayed as bathing, usually with the implication that they are eliciting male attention.⁴⁵ I would stress to note here that this exists on a narrative level; the text sexualises and objectifies such women.⁴⁶ Jennifer Glancy notes that in the story of *Susanna*, "readers are invited to share" the elders' view of Susanna herself.⁴⁷ In the Theodotion version, Susanna's garden is then exposed. When the elders attack her, she cries out. In response, the elders rush to the garden's outer doors and throw them open, while Susanna's own slaves open a side door from the house to the garden. Susanna's body and her household are exposed to the world. Again, during her trial, she is brought before the community. Susanna is then "uncovered" (Theodotion: ἀποκαλυφθῆναι; OG: ἀποκαλύψαι *Susanna* 32).⁴⁸ While the Theodotion clarifies that Susanna was unveiled, the Old Greek has her simply stripped.⁴⁹ The elders then lay their hands upon her head (*Susanna* 34). While the Old Greek seems to suggest that they may have touched Susanna before when trying to "force her" (ἐξεβιάζοντο, *Susanna* 19), this may be the first instance where the elders have physically touched her, although Susanna's words to them repeatedly references their hands (*Susanna* 22–23). Repeatedly, Susanna's body has been exposed, and not solely for the benefit of the elders.

It has been often noted that the narrative of *Susanna* is voyeuristic; readers are invited by the text to participate in the elders' spying on the naked Susanna.⁵⁰ During her trial, Susanna's

description and unveiling suggest to the crowd and the reader that Susanna is perhaps a seductress; conversely Daniel does not look at her.⁵¹ According to Laura Quick, Susanna's bathing and particularly her use of oil (Theodotion) signals to readers that Susanna is sexually desirable.⁵² Suffice it to say that the narrative offers a view of Susanna as desirable, implicating its intended readers among the voyeuristic elders. Susanna's private garden is turned into a viewing gallery, and her household is the scene for her own trial.⁵³ Glancy suggests that Joakim's garden operates as an open and closed space; depending on this status, his honour can be threatened.⁵⁴ In the Theodotion text, doorways operate in the garden to limit access, but also to expose. Here it is important to center Susanna's social prominence. For instance, Glancy argues that *Susanna* overlooks Susanna's slaves, wherein these characters merely serve to reinforce Susanna's status. They "are a human veil that buffers Susanna against the outside world."⁵⁵ Part of Susanna's exposure is limited by her social position, yet this would not prevent her death. Susanna has her slaves shut the doors to the garden (*Susanna* 17), while the slaves themselves exit via "side doors" (*Susanna* 18). Once the elders have accosted Susanna, both doors are opened, revealing Susanna to the world outside of her garden (*Susanna* 25–26). Private and public spaces are repeatedly mixed.⁵⁶ Amy-Jill Levine characterises this as part of a diasporic experience where the boundaries between such spaces are "unstable."⁵⁷

Susanna's exposure is a result of patriarchy. Elders are generally thought to be local leaders who exercised some kind of power over communal decision making.⁵⁸ The text of *Susanna* portrays these two elders as highly respected. Even were it not for the rule of two witnesses, these two men are not only elders, but are also judges who regularly hold court at Joakim's house (*Susanna* 5–6). The Old Greek notes that even people from other localities came to them for their legal verdicts. Thus, these two figures are structurally and socially influential. The elders further appear to have created a situation which has undermined Susanna's efforts to guard her husband's honour and have placed her entirely within their power.⁵⁹ Susanna is then, to reuse Levine's title, "hemmed in on every side" (*Susanna* 22 [Theodotion]).⁶⁰ Her husband's honour is at stake and must be preserved through a public trial. Susanna's supposed infidelity results in a public reckoning of this threat to patriarchal control.

Courtrooms and Law in Susanna

Susanna as a work engages in ancient Jewish legal theory, and arguably functions as a midrash on adultery legislation. Whether texts such as Deuteronomy and Numbers should be understood as "legal works," antecedents for actual practice or something else entirely is up

for discussion, but for the sake of this article I wish to highlight that *Susanna* is related to these texts that establish some kind of authoritative precedent for public behaviour.⁶¹ *Susanna* begins and ends with allusions to “the law.” The first verse of the Old Greek (Theodotion v. 5) establishes a key theme around questions of lawlessness and judges, likely derived from Isaiah or Jeremiah.⁶² Towards the end of the work, the text directly quotes Exodus 23:7 (Old Greek v. 53).⁶³ Finally, *Susanna* notes that the elders were executed according to the “law of Moses” (Theodotion v. 62). This clearly demonstrates *Susanna*’s interest in judicial regulations and the exercise of proper law, critiquing legal authorities in Babylonia from Palestine.⁶⁴ *Susanna* covers some of the same material as these texts and acts as a kind of commentary on how such cases may arise. *Susanna* further augments some of the positions stated in these texts, whether this becomes a full critique of such laws is a further point of discussion. For example, Richard Hidary argues that *Susanna* presents the failure or problems of an “inquisitional legal system” as such a system relies on a competent defence lawyer to provide justice; judges themselves are ill-equipped to properly examine the case fully.⁶⁵ The differences between the Old Greek and Theodotion texts illustrate the compounding of legal elements. The Theodotion version itself establishes “knowledge of the law” as a theme for the ongoing narrative; *Susanna* herself is noted to have been taught “according to the law of Moses” (*Susanna* 3).⁶⁶ J. McKay suggests that the invocation of the Decalogue as an oath could be “normal procedure in a Hebrew law-court.”⁶⁷ Thus in this context, Daniel’s accusation of wrong-doing before his cross-examination forms part of a standard court admonition for an elder to remember the proper conduct in such settings. Certain actions are described in such a way which led the reader through a chain of legal reasoning. *Susanna* presents the reader with a kind of thought experiment with which to consider how legal principles might be approached.

Specific elements which parallel material in the Hebrew Bible include the regulations around punishment of adultery (*Susanna* 22, 45 cf. death penalty in Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22),⁶⁸ but also in the Theodotion text, there appears to be a kind of layering of legal principles. Initially the elders threaten *Susanna*, that they will publicly accuse her of adultery with a young man (*Susanna* 21). At this point, *Susanna* refuses them, but also cries out (*Susanna* 24). This recalls the condition in Deuteronomy 22:24 that if a woman cries out upon being assaulted in a town, then she is spared from execution.⁶⁹ The elders then counter *Susanna*’s subversion of their plot by shouting themselves and opening the door to the garden to provide further evidence in favour of their concocted story.⁷⁰ This chain of reactions works through clauses from which a woman may be implicated or exonerated from charge of

adultery. Even the fact that the two elders conspire to go to Susanna together also pre-empts their need to concoct a story about Susanna; their reputation as elders and judges, combined with their joint testimony fulfil a requirement for two-witnesses in cases that result in capital punishment (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).⁷¹ Herein lies a further problem; in this case, the elders who are the “witnesses” to Susanna’s “adultery” are the same judges who are appointed and according to Deuteronomy 19:16–19, are the ones who must establish whether someone is bearing a false witness. In *Susanna*, the “assembly/synagogue” (συναγωγῆ, *Susanna* 41) appears to be responsible for determining the outcome of the trial (cf. *Susanna* 60).⁷² Beyond references in Deuteronomy to judges, officials (שֹׁפְטִים וְשָׂרִים, Deuteronomy 16:18) and Levitical priests (הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם, Deuteronomy 17:9), it is difficult to ascertain exactly who would be responsible for ruling in such a trial. Documents known from Qumran reveal a specific kind of court arrangement, although to what degree this was actually practised and the extent to which such arrangements were widespread is unclear.⁷³ Furthermore, *Susanna* likely draws from actual courtroom language and proceedings. The fact that the elders lay their hands upon Susanna’s head (*Susanna* 34) may draw from texts like Leviticus 24:14 prior to the execution of a blasphemer, while her unveiling in the Theodotion may relate to the unveiling of a suspected adulteress in Numbers 5:18.⁷⁴ After they have presented their story, the elders attest that they have spoken the truth; “these things we testify” (ταῦτα μαρτυροῦμεν, *Susanna* 41).⁷⁵ On the whole, *Susanna* does not disrupt these legal requirements; it is either the application of a legal principle known elsewhere (although not explicitly in the Hebrew Bible), or the intervention of the divine which ultimately secures her acquittal. Mitzi Smith writes that *Susanna* essentially conforms to “the Deuteronomic law [which] is systematically biased against women conferring upon men the right to control female sexuality.”⁷⁶ The extent to which *Susanna* engages in legal theory may be surmised as a comment on perhaps the risks of corrupt judges, yet it is the giver of the law who rescues Susanna. The law is just, but there is a danger insofar as it can be applied unjustly. The systematic bias against Susanna and her testimony is not undone, or even really challenged. Her husband and his reputation are kept intact through such a proceeding; the men who threatened his “hegemonic masculinity” are destroyed.⁷⁷ Joakim is ultimately the beneficiary of this legal apparatus in this narrative, not Susanna.⁷⁸

Regarding the identified elements above [0], *Susanna* engages with and advances a legal perspective. It identifies various valid elements of law also known from other Jewish texts, and augments this by introducing the “two-witness” rule. The second element, concerning the

drama of the scene is achieved in multiple ways, including Daniel's last-minute intervention. Element three, which asks that the reading audience act as jury is also present, although perhaps such an audience is also asked to act as advocates on behalf of Susanna. Finally, element four, the whole case rests on the desirability of Susanna's body, enhanced in the Theodotion version. Her body is stripped willingly and unwillingly, while the "real" matter behind the case is the question of Joakim's honour. So that the author may advance their own legal perspective, and reinforce the centrality of the patriarchal household, Susanna's body is utilised as a tool.

4. Women's Death at the Expense of Men's Expectations

In both texts, a false accusation of adultery is thus a primary narrative driver; the accusations push the stories forward. Initially, the woman is automatically suspected as having committed adultery. Adultery threatens a framework behind each text that elevates ultimately men's control over women's sexual activity.⁷⁹ This framework is concerned with the protection of one man's reputation, honour, even masculinity, against the actions of other men.⁸⁰ Other than the protagonists, only the audience and conspirators are aware that these claims are false, and the initial action taken either by their husbands or communities is to seek some kind of legal recourse. In this recourse to the law, courtrooms or punishment, women's bodies and personal lives are exposed to the community.⁸¹ This is a continuation of the protagonist's exposure to other characters and the audience. Their beauty makes them objects to view, and this objectification is continued in their experience before men who seek to reassert patriarchal social order. Neither woman escapes this. Susanna's positioning as Torah-literate, the daughter of a priest, and the wife of a prominent man, all pre-empt her decision to leave her fate in the hands of her god, the final patriarchal arbiter.⁸² Callirhoe finds her own end in her romance with Chaereas, yet her happiness in such a marriage is due in some way to her good fortune. Her father, acquiescing to the pleas of the people of Syracuse, agrees for Callirhoe to marry Chaereas (*Chaereas* 1.1.11–12). Hermocrates only tells her that she is to be married, and only once she sees Chaereas, does Callirhoe know whom her father has selected as a bridegroom (*Chaereas* 1.1.15). It is also Hermocrates who chooses to exonerate Chaereas from murdering his daughter, expressing his, and a presumed dead Callirhoe's, expectations of submission inside a male household.⁸³ Both women are portrayed as willing to become subordinate in such ways.⁸⁴

As Glancy points out, Susanna (both narrative and character) present the idea that death is better than the dishonour brought about by rape.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Glancy writes that “Susanna is effective as a story largely because it codes for gender accord with wider societal expectations about femininity in the ancient Mediterranean world and among readers today.”⁸⁶ Susanna articulates that if she does allow the elders to have sex with her, then she will die (*Susanna* 22). This indicates that her assumption is firstly that death awaits her if she gives in to the elders, but, particularly in the Theodotion, she is likely to have to face a public accusation of adultery. Thus, Susanna does not challenge the framework by which death awaits adulterers. Beyond this, Susanna is rather passive, particularly in the Old Greek version where she does not even cry out to lament her fate.⁸⁷ Even while it acknowledges the risk of false witness, the text does not overturn the framework where an adulteress may be judged; Susanna is not liberated from a regulation which would have her put to death at the word of two men.

Callirhoe self-conceptualises in relation to men; her construction as a woman is dependent on her relationship toward such figures.⁸⁸ While Chaereas says that if Callirhoe is being unfaithful, then “I may have more reason for killing myself; for I shall spare Callirhoe, even if she is doing me wrong.” (*Chaereas* 1.4.7), his later actions speak against this. In anger he kicks at her when she rushes towards him, to welcome him back home (*Chaereas* 1.4.12). She collapses to the floor and appears to have died. Her death is anticipated; Chaereas, while mourning her death and blaming himself, still contrived a situation where an adulterous Callirhoe may receive violence and even death.

Both Susanna and Callirhoe are women who are elite, prominent in their social settings, and famed for their beauty. They will both be falsely accused of adultery and suffer at the hands of men for this charge. Whether or not they ever committed such an offense is immaterial to one degree. They should not be executed. However, the expectation with each of these works is clearly that, if guilty, then both Callirhoe and Susanna deserve violent retribution on behalf of scorned husbands and the society at large. Indeed, it is male jealousy that spurs the false accusations against each woman. Male jealousy quickly becomes male rage, and the elders and conspirators solicit fellow men into their plots, making them willing participants in the punishment which such groups have deemed Susanna and Callirhoe to be deserve. These texts are representative of what Cheryl Anderson identifies as the construction of gender in texts like Exodus and Deuteronomy, wherein “men can use force against women, and women (and men) are conditioned to condone that use of force.”⁸⁹ This expression exists before the administration of justice; the texts create a social world where violence is done to women by

men. The expression is continued in the ways in which such violence is readdressed. Women, like Susanna and Callirhoe, are subjected to further violence in the name of justice. As readers, we can choose to reject this framing, where such women are idealised and justified because they participate in patriarchal oppression and perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity.⁹⁰ As put by Exum, “patriarchy relies upon women’s cooperation, and one of its rewards for cooperation is status.”⁹¹

5. Conclusion

Susanna and *Callirhoe* participate within a literary culture where the themes of law, legal proceedings, and the exposure and control of female bodies were used for entertainment, edification and reflection. *Susanna* is comparatively short, while *Callirhoe* moves from episode to episode, setting to setting. The themes between these two works also differ. *Susanna* largely dwells on injustice, and aspects of legal theory, while these elements form a backdrop to *Callirhoe*’s theme of love. For *Callirhoe*, the first trial scene only prolongs the narrative; it does not restore social order but adds twists and turns to the development of the story. Susanna’s trial proceeds essentially until an unjust verdict is delivered. At Daniel’s injunction, Susanna is retried, but this is not so much a separate scene as a continuation of the prior events. Yet despite these differences, between *Susanna* and *Callirhoe*, we see how early Greek novels (using Greek in an expansive sense) utilised women’s bodies. A common feature of many ancient novels is the presentation of women’s bodies as “a microcosm of the community,” these women’s husbands are inept, weak and stupid, and social and bodily borders are muddled.⁹² Both of these texts provide their own take on these tropes, featuring many of the same elements for their own purposes. Even as the texts subvert certain forms of male and female social activity, they both reinforce the combinations of exposure, law and death.

These observations should be taken forward to think about how other ancient Jewish authors writing novels or novellas utilised women’s bodies for (proto-)Midrashic purposes, and how non-Jewish authors drew from this mode of narrative to expand upon and develop the emerging notion of “novel.” These observations also have implications for our understanding of the authorship and readership of such texts, whether we reimagine who could have initially read and spread such works in the ancient world.

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² For the sake of clarity, *Susanna* refers to the text while “Susanna” refers to the character. Similarly, *Callirhoe* signals the work, and “Callirhoe” the character. I accept that *Susanna* was likely composed in Greek. For language and text-critical notes, see Lahey, “Additions to

Daniel,” 557, 560–561, 563. For the major differences between the two versions not covered below, see Clanton, “Story of Susanna,” 122; Collins, *Book of Daniel*, 427–428; Moore, *Daniel*, 78–80; Neef, “Susanna,” 600–602. I use “Old Greek” and “Theodotion” for the two main Greek text versions. Neither of these titles are necessarily accurate descriptions of the content or translators, but they have been retained for clarity. *Callirhoe* has been compared to Jewish literature before. For Esther and *Callirhoe*, see Moyer, “Beautiful Outsider.” For Josephus (particularly his version of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife) and *Callirhoe*, see Whitmarsh, *Dirty Love*, 25–30, 87–92, and 105–121, for *Joseph and Asenath*.

³ Gómez-Acebo, “Susanna,” 279.

⁴ Lawrence Wills (*Introduction*, 24–25) articulates some of this somewhat reversed matrix of understanding: that Jewish novels/novellas are understood via their later Greek and Roman counterparts. For an overview of the dating of *Susanna*, see Clanton, “Story of Susanna;” Moore, *Daniel*, 91–92. For the dating of *Callirhoe*, see Smith, *Greek Identity*, 2. For Chariton’s background and the date of composition for *Callirhoe*, see Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity*, 26–27.

⁵ See Walsh, *Early Christian Literature*, 15–16, for subsequent comments on the use of “elite” to describe a literate class of ancient authors who may have had low social status. And further Walsh, *Early Christian Literature*, 112. Cf. Owens, “*Callirhoe*,” 37–40; Wiersma, “Ancient Greek Novel,” 111–112.

⁶ Walsh, *Early Christian Literature*, 6.

⁷ Neef, “Sousanna,” 602. On the genre of *Callirhoe*, see Connors, “Chariton’s Syracuse,” 13; Whitmarsh, *Dirty Love*, 12–13; Wiersma, “Ancient Greek Novel,” 110.

⁸ For *Susanna* as a novella, see Adams, *Greek Genres*, 195–198; Collins, *Book of Daniel*, 437. For Midrash, see Hobyane, “Forensic Dialogue in *Susanna*,” 1 (although against this, see Collins, *Book of Daniel*, 436). For the Old Greek version as a hortatory sermon, see Wills, “Form of the Sermon,” 293–294, 298. As a moral tale, see Collins, *Daniel, First Maccabees*, 122.

⁹ Fontaine, “*Susanna*,” 471, cf. Grillo, “Showing Seeing.”

¹⁰ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, xix.

¹¹ Coetzer (“Performing *Susanna*,” 352), has argued that the themes presented in *Susanna* “must have found an eager ear in almost every Diasporic Jew” because it addressed concerns about exploitation and being subject to fickle rulers.

¹² See Doulamis, “Rhetoric and Irony,” 69–70.

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- ¹³ Goold (*Callirhoe*, 14–15) goes as far as to say that “Chariton is a pioneer in a new genre that has yet to acquire a definite shape.”
- ¹⁴ Unless otherwise indicated all translated quotations of *Callirhoe* are from Goold, LCL 481.
- ¹⁵ Schmeling, “Callirhoe,” 37.
- ¹⁶ Haynes, *Fashioning the Feminine*, 46.
- ¹⁷ Haynes, *Fashioning the Feminine*, 47. See also Schmeling, “Callirhoe,” 37; Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity*, 33.
- ¹⁸ Schmeling, “Callirhoe,” 37 n. 9.
- ¹⁹ Haynes, “Power of the Prude,” 88.
- ²⁰ Schwartz, *Bedroom to Courtroom*, 42–43. Cf. Lateiner, “Gendered Places,” 59.
- ²¹ Schmeling, “Callirhoe,” 39 n. 10.
- ²² For a discussion of legal theory more generally in *Callirhoe*, see Smith, *Greek Identity*, 127–140.
- ²³ Doulamis, “Rhetoric and Irony,” 55; Schwartz, “Clitophon the *Moichos*,” 101.
- ²⁴ Schwartz, *Bedroom to Courtroom*, 35–37. See also the bibliography in Schwartz, “Clitophon the *Moichos*,” 94 n. 5.
- ²⁵ For a treatment of Chariton’s engagement with and subversion of legal settings, see Smith, *Greek Identity*, 120–127.
- ²⁶ Schwartz, *Bedroom to Courtroom*, 49. Cf. Schwartz, “Clitophon the *Moichos*,” 98.
- ²⁷ Schwartz, “Clitophon the *Moichos*,” 96.
- ²⁸ Schwartz, “Clitophon the *Moichos*,” 94. On Greek genre and Jewish texts, see further Adams, *Greek Genres*, 8–16.
- ²⁹ Schwartz, *Bedroom to Courtroom*, 230–231.
- ³⁰ Schwartz, *Bedroom to Courtroom*, 42.
- ³¹ Brethes, “Who Knows What?” 173. See also Doulamis, “Rhetoric and Irony,” 58.
- ³² Schwartz, *Bedroom to Courtroom*, 231–232.
- ³³ Schwartz, “Clitophon the *Moichos*,” 98.
- ³⁴ This is not to justify Chaereas’ actions.
- ³⁵ Goold, *Chariton*, 47 n. a, citing Lysias 1.30.
- ³⁶ Schwartz, *Bedroom to Courtroom*, 46.
- ³⁷ See Clanton, “Story of Susanna,” 124.
- ³⁸ Regarding reader’s identification with the themes and situations in *Susanna*, see Levine, “Jews and Women,” 311. See further Collins, *Daniel, First Maccabees, Second Maccabees*, 123; Junior, “Susanna,” 1049–1050. The composition of the earliest version of *Susanna*

known to us significantly predates Chariton's composition of *Callirhoe*, yet *Susanna* was read, copied and even reworked. We should not pretend that works sat unused and unread until modern scholars picked them up again, but rather they were circulated and discussed over long periods (an example is the 3rd century CE Syriac translation).

³⁹ Adopting here some of the language used in Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 63; Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 97. On the household as an organising concept, and sexuality as the means by which boundaries were managed in biblical texts, see Berquist, *Controlling Corporeality*, 80–106, particularly 103–106 on the effects and regulations around adultery.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 105.

⁴¹ Although Moore (*Daniel*, 111) notes that the elders would likely have been stoned.

⁴² Moore, *Daniel*, 90.

⁴³ Regarding the exposure of spaces, see Jordaan and Chang, "Private Places."

⁴⁴ Quick, "Cosmetics," 228–229.

⁴⁵ Gera, *Judith*, 331–332; Quick, "Cosmetics," 218–221, 228; Tamber-Rosenau, "Biblical Bathing Beauties," 59–65.

⁴⁶ Even within the narrative, Bathsheba was not intending to draw male attention. See Andruska, "Rape;" Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 137–140.

⁴⁷ Glancy, "Accused," 289. Cf. Moore, *Daniel*, 97.

⁴⁸ Glancy, "Accused," 295; Wills, *Introduction*, 68.

⁴⁹ Levine, "Jews and Women," 318–319. Moore (*Daniel*, 102–103) suggests that this is in accordance with Ezekiel 16:37–39; Hosea 2:3–10, and while crediting Zimmermann, notes that this also appears in Mishnah Sotah 1.5. Cf. Collins, *Book of Daniel*, 432; Quick, "Cosmetics," 230. Laura Quick has drawn my attention to Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones' (*Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece* [Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2003], 241–247) argument that even an unveiling would have been understood as incredibly humiliating for Susanna.

⁵⁰ A point made expertly in Bal, "Elders and Susanna"; Glancy, "Accused." Tamber-Rosenau, "Biblical Bathing Beauties," 63, helpfully distinguishes between how the text itself is voyeuristic, yet at the same time, absolves Susanna of any potential blame. On this point, see also Grillo, "Showing Seeing," who further distinguishes between representations in the Old Greek and Theodotion.

⁵¹ Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 101.

⁵² Quick, "Cosmetics," 228, 231.

⁵³ Bruyn (“Susanna,” 224) suggests that there are “private spaces” and “god-spaces” in *Susanna*, the synagogue in the Old Greek functioning as the later. Bruyn notes that the Theodotion text situates the narrative in Joakim’s household, which undermines his argument somewhat. Moore (*Daniel*, 102) and Collins (*Book of Daniel*, 431) notes that the setting of the trial in the household provides an easy test of the elders’ story as the crowd can view the garden and see clearly that the elders’ description of the setting does not match.

⁵⁴ Glancy, “Accused,” 292.

⁵⁵ Glancy, “Mistress–Slave Dialectic,” 80.

⁵⁶ Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 95.

⁵⁷ Levine, “Jews and Women,” 322.

⁵⁸ McKenzie, “Elders,” 522.

⁵⁹ Glancy, “Accused,” 294–295.

⁶⁰ Cf. the constraints upon the women around Samson as explicated by Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 62–64.

⁶¹ Regarding various understandings of ancient law and its relation to lived practice, see Anderson, *Women, Ideology*, 3–20. While there are numerous allusions to other Jewish figures and works in *Susanna*, I will not devote much space to them in this article. For instance, Eve, Joseph, and the woman in the Song of Songs, among others; Leisering, “Susanna”; Levine, “Jews and Women,” 315–318; for allusions to texts in prophetic literature, see Grillo, “Innocence of Susanna”; Segal, “Biblical Paraphrase,” 34–37; Segal, “Rethinking Jewish Life,” 184–189, 194–198.

⁶² See Segal, “Biblical Paraphrase;” Segal, “Rethinking Jewish Life,” 185–198.

⁶³ Segal, “Biblical Paraphrase,” 34.

⁶⁴ Segal, “Biblical Paraphrase,” 39.

⁶⁵ Hidary, *Rabbis and Classical Rhetoric*, 218–219. Cf. Jackson, *Halakhah*, 91.

⁶⁶ Collins, *Book of Daniel*, 429. This is absent in the Old Greek. Evidence for Jewish women being instructed in or instructing the law can be found in 4 Maccabees 15:29, 32 (although see 4 Maccabees 18:10). Cf. 2 Maccabees 7:30. A papyrus document (*CPJ* 19) dated to 226 BCE and found in the Egyptian Fayum details a woman named Herakleia, accused of assaulting a man during an initially verbal confrontation. When the trial is brought before the Greek court, only the Herakleia appears before the court. She has with her a guardian, and has prepared documents for the court, and is also willing to defend herself. We might assume that this shows her familiarity with the legal system.

⁶⁷ McKay, “Administration of Justice,” 325.

⁶⁸ Junior, “Susanna,” 1049.

⁶⁹ For a detailed analysis of Deuteronomy 22:23–24, see Milstein, “Independent Logic,” 627–631. Susanna crying out agrees with Glancy’s assessment that this is not an act of adultery, see Glancy, “Accused,” 299.

⁷⁰ Moore, *Daniel*, 98.

⁷¹ Siegfried Kreuzer’s comments in Neef, “Sousanna,” 603. See further Junior, “Susanna,” 1049; Segal, “Biblical Paraphrase,” 37. *Susanna* can be read alongside Mishnah Sanhedrin which also included a separation of witnesses and questioning around the location where the event they are supposed to have witnessed took place (Mishnah Sanhedrin 3:6; 5:4); Jackson, *Halakhah*, 92–93. Jackson further suggests that the result, the execution of the elders, appears to fall short of the expected requirements for the execution of false witnesses in many later rabbinic texts, and as such, *Susanna* did not become part of the Hebrew Bible. Elsewhere, Jan Willem van Henten suggested that Susanna was the daughter of the high priest Hilkalah, and as such her punishment may be burning according to m. Sanh. See Henten, “Story of Susanna.” Moore (*Daniel*, 109) suggests that Daniel’s statement “I am innocent of this woman’s blood” (Theodotion v. 46) may reflect Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:1.

⁷² Ryan, “Socio-Political Context,” 138.

⁷³ See Schiffman, *Sectarian Law*, 23–28, specifically on the Damascus Document.

⁷⁴ See Collins, *Book of Daniel*, 432; Moore, *Daniel*, 103. Collins also notes that this practice most often appears to accompany sacrifices in Leviticus (e.g., Leviticus 8:14, 18, 22; 16:21–22; cf. Exodus 29:10, 15, 19).

⁷⁵ Similar language around “witnesses” can be found in many legal documents preserved in papyri, e.g., *CPJ* 1, 18, 19, 22, 24, 25, 37, 46, 126. Often these witnesses sign such documents to testify to their veracity.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 98. Cf. Anderson, *Women, Ideology*, 68.

⁷⁷ For further reading on “hegemonic masculinity,” see Connell, *Gender and Power*, 295–303; Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity.”

⁷⁸ I thank Charlotte Thomas for this observation.

⁷⁹ Scholars have wrestled with this and other unsavoury aspects of *Susanna*. Glancy (“Accused,” 298) recognises Susanna’s bravery, but does not “agree with her moral judgment.” Levine (“Jews and Women,” 306–307) points out that Susanna’s construction of a moral and pure woman who resists a “repressive” setting contains an anti-Jewish sentiment.

⁸⁰ Once again, I thank Charlotte Thomas for this framing.

⁸¹ Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 97, in this case, Joakim and Daniel, but the same could be said for the elders.

⁸² Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 103.

⁸³ Redondo Moyano, "Space and Gender," 43.

⁸⁴ Anderson, *Women, Ideology*, 69–70.

⁸⁵ Glancy, "Accused," 290, 295.

⁸⁶ Glancy, "Accused," 291–292. Glancy's point about present readers is important to retain even if it is not the focus of this article.

⁸⁷ This perception of passivity has been noted, but her own cries against this injustice have also been recognised, see Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 106–107.

⁸⁸ Haynes, "Power of the Prude," 77.

⁸⁹ Anderson, *Women, Ideology*, 91.

⁹⁰ In discussion, Charlotte Thomas has also highlighted the tension between complicity and coercion here. A question I am unable to answer but think worth posing is the extent to which a literary woman can be complicit in her own coercion.

⁹¹ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 93.

⁹² Smith, *Womanist Sass*, 96. Cf. Whitmarsh, *Dirty Love*, 100–101.

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