Longus and the Construction of the *Kolax*

Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe* is perhaps the most indebted of the ancient Greek novels to the New Comedic plays. From the exposure-and-recognition plot to the use of comedic stock characters, Longus alludes liberally to the earlier genre (Rutherford 2024). Among the stock characters in *Daphnis and Chloe* is the parasite Gnathon, who has attached himself to Daphnis's secret brother, Astylus. When Gnathon arrives in the country along with Astylus, he attempts to have sex with Daphnis, variably threatening Daphnis and begging Astylus, while ultimately proving to be Chloe's unlikely salvation. I argue that Gnathon's portrayal in *Daphnis and Chloe* blends elements of characterization from various New Comedic parasites, resulting in a character worth more than the sum of his stock parts.

Antonis Petrides, in *Menander, New Comedy, and the Visual* argues that there are two distinct types of parasite in New Comedy, each represented by a distinct theatrical mask (Petrides 2018). He associates the mask called "*kolax*" with aggression and manipulation and the mask called "*parasitos*" with passivity and neediness. Building upon this framework, I consider the diverse array of parasites present in New Comedy in analyzing Longus's construction of Gnathon's character. The most obvious *comparanda* from New Comedy is Gnathon's namesake from Menander's mostly-lost *Kolax* and the parasite of the same name imported by Terence into *Eunuchus*. However, neither of these characters nor any singular parasite in Greek or Roman New Comedy accounts for Longus's surprisingly nuanced Gnathon.

Gnathon, per his archetype's theatrical origin, occasionally slips into melodrama, indicated by a shift to more poetic language. R.L. Hunter notes that the New Comedic playwrights employ a similar method, the use of a tragic register, to imply melodrama and

(perhaps) parody (Hunter 1999). The parasite's impassioned speech to Astylus begging to have Daphnis for his sexual gratification (*Daphnis and Chloe*, 4.16) calls to mind not only Polemon's suicidal speech in Menander's *Perikeiromene* (977) and Acelsimachus's similar speech in Plautus's *Cistellaria* (640) but also Menelaus's speech at Proteus's tomb in Euripedes' *Helen* (842). Plautus's parasite Gelasimus threatens to end his own life only after having one last hot meal in *Stichus* (637), a sentiment which Gnathon echoes in his own desperate speech to his benefactor. Longus skillfully harnesses the trappings of various genres in the composition of *Daphnis and Chloe*, the tropes of New Comedy among them. Longus' Gnathon runs the gamut of his new comedic predecessors, from a gluttonous threat to a needy, melodramatic beggar, to a savior in his own right, showing the author's careful construction of a rich character built from New Comedy's various representations of the parasite.

Selected Bibliography

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