

Losing Hope as a Cure for Love: The Role of Self-Enslavement in the Ancient Novel

In both the ancient Greek and Latin novels, slavery is an important theme for the hero and the heroine. Much research has been done on the role of slavery in the Ancient Novel, especially with its connection to the elegiac theme of being a slave to love or Eros, but the importance of self-enslavement is often omitted. In two instances in the ancient Greek novel, the hero enslaves himself voluntarily – in *Chaereas and Callirhoe* by Chariton, where Chaereas joins the army, and in *An Ephesian Tale* by Xenophon of Ephesus, where Habrocomes works in the mines. These two instances are in stark contrast to the other methods of slavery since the hero *chooses* to enslave himself and thus, in at least one of them, seems to cure himself of his love. By looking at these exceptions to the role of slavery, I will show how this voluntarily enslavement has the potential to provide the hero with another cure, besides his lover, to his suffering from love. The central theme to this cure is hope. Chaereas gives up hope of finding Callirhoe, but Habrocomes never does and therefore does not cure himself of his love.

In *An Ephesian Tale*, Habrocomes, consigns himself to slavery in the mines after a prolonged search for Anthia (5.8). This action does not help his plight. Self-enslavement should have had a different effect on Habrocomes in contrast to being forced into slavery. Chaereas gives up hope of regaining Callirhoe, accepts his fate, and enslaves himself in the King of Egypt's army where he flourishes (7.1). He seems to forget Callirhoe, accepting her fate apart from him and his own fate as a soldier.

Chaereas is able to move on in his new status unlike Habrocomes who is still enslaved to his beloved, Anthia. Chaereas overthrows his subjected state that he intended to have in the army and gains command of a group of selected soldiers for a raid on the Persians (7.3). He is able to

overcome his self-enslavement without his beloved. He leaves his old life behind and to become someone new. However, he still had to start at the bottom – as a slave.

Although Chaereas and Callirhoe are reunited at the end of the novel, just as Habrocomes and Anthia were reunited, their journey still stands out. Habrocomes and Anthia never lost hope of finding each other despite frequent laments and suicidal tendencies. Chaereas, however, does give up hope. He shows he has the potential to live a successful life apart from Callirhoe while in the army. He flourishes when he is free from his love and from his enslavement and suffers a momentary identity crisis when he initially goes off to die in military service. Since slavery is a frequent theme in the ancient novels, it has a pattern for the protagonists in which they always hold on to the idea that their beloved is alive somewhere. When Chaereas gives up this hope, he separates himself from the other characters in the Ancient Novel.

Bibliography.

Chariton. “Chaereas and Callirhoe.” Translated by B.P. Reardon, in *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, edited by B.P. Reardon. University of California Press, 2008.

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