

Sex and Status in *Daphnis and Chloe*

In *Daphnis and Chloe* the title characters spend most of the novel attempting to figure out how to have sex and failing. Even when their elders encourage sex and try to explain it, they cannot understand. What prevents them is their inherent aristocratic nature, which binds them to the conventions of chastity followed by the protagonists of all Greek ideal novels. All ideal novels star chaste and aristocratic lovers; it is *Daphnis and Chloe's* unique combination of the ideal novel with another genre, pastoral poetry, that makes the connection between chastity and social class clear. The rustic, lower class characters in this novel are derived from pastoral, which is filled with eroticism and reproduction, and they take a free approach to sexuality, largely unconcerned with social strictures around it. The aristocratic characters come from the Greek ideal novel, in which chastity and marriage are highly prized, and they maintain these priorities. Daphnis and Chloe's inability to break these conventions of chastity show that they are inherently aristocratic.

Daphnis and Chloe is frequently analyzed in terms of gender differences, especially concerning sexual behavior, most famously in Winkler 1990 but also Morgan 2004 and Alvarez 2014. However, the characters are also divided by class and genre. The two genres that Longus is combining are preoccupied with different classes. Pastoral is populated by simple rustics living an idealized life herding animals in the countryside, but with shepherding comes low social class. Their lives are happy, but these characters are herders and subsistence farmers, a circumstance to which Longus brings attention by having Daphnis raised as a slave. In the Greek ideal novel the protagonists are always aristocrats, who fall into slavery but overcome it to reacquire their original status, as Daphnis does when recognized by his birth parents. Longus is thus able to

maintain the conventions of both genres even as he blends them, and to compare them to each other.

In the countryside the lower-class characters try to help Daphnis and Chloe understand love and sex. A major character is an old man named Philetas, who is strongly identified with rusticity and named for Philetas of Cos, the teacher of Theocritus who is the earliest known pastoral poet. He attempts to teach the lovers how to have sex, and shows no concern for their marital or social status. On the other hand, when the upper-class characters visit from town they are strongly concerned about marriage. When Daphnis' birth father, the landlord Dionysophanes, learns that Daphnis and Chloe are in love, his first concern is whether she is also born to a high-status family, and his next is whether she is still a virgin. He is as invested in the lovers' happy union as Philetas is, but his primary concern is that their sexual behavior occurs within proper social norms. Notably, Philetas fails to explain to the lovers how sex works, and Dionysophanes successfully marries them. Daphnis and Chloe cannot figure out how to break the sexual rules of the upper class, despite their upbringing. Their social class is inherent; nature rather than nurture.

While the rustic world of pastoral is filled with eroticism and reproduction, Daphnis and Chloe only have access to sexuality when it is associated with enough social status and propriety. Free sexuality is available to the lower-class pastoral characters, but the ideal novel protagonists cannot have sex that breaks too many social rules. In Longus' interpretation, at least, all the positives of the ideal novel heroes flow from their status.

Bibliography

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