

What's Your Type? Stereotypical Lovers in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*

Within his novel, Heliodorus casts lovers into stereotypes *par excellence*. He provides the reader with two types of lovers, good and bad. Good lovers keep their oath of chastity towards each other; they suffer from lovesickness but are not tempted to form schemes in order to pursue their beloved; they are ready to take their own lives rather than to kill others if the integrity of their oaths will be damaged; and in the face of adversity they care about their beloved's wellbeing more than their own. Charikleia and Theagenes, the protagonists, fall under this category. Bad lovers, on the other hand, fall in love with someone who is forbidden to desire; they hatch plots to achieve their desire; they lie to conceal their schemes; and they attempt to murder their beloved either to conceal their crimes or to prevent someone else from having what they were unable to obtain. Most importantly, they represent the behavior the good lovers should avoid. The bad lovers discussed in this paper are Demainete and Thyamis.

The model of bad lovers is set early in the novel while the protagonists hear a story from a fellow Greek named Cnemon. The author of his troubles was his step-mother, Demainete. She made advances on Cnemon, building from an unusual step-mother's interest in her new son into something more, giving him unchaste looks, and sometimes calling him her son and heir, at other times her darling and beloved. Once she realized she could never have Cnemon she sought to punish him. She lied to his father that she was secretly pregnant and, having discovered this, Cnemon intentionally kicked her in the stomach. She then tricked Cnemon into charging into his father's room ready to slay him as an adulterer while having relations with Demainete. Demainete previously warned his father that Cnemon might try to harm him. She then tried to

manipulate her husband to have Cnemon killed for crimes he was tricked into committing, all because he rejected this unlawful love.

Demainete's character presents a model that is so undeniably depraved that it provides a quick reference to spot other bad lovers. Her amoral actions remain fresh in the audience's memory when a new character, Thyamis, takes the scene. Although he initially seems to be a respectable and noble man, he slowly devolves into a stereotypical bad lover. Thyamis was the leader of the band of robbers that had control of Charikleia, Theagenes, and Cnemon. The same night Cnemon told his story about Demainete, Thyamis dreamed he was in the temple of Isis in his hometown and the altar and hearth were drenched with sacrificial blood of many animals. Isis handed him Charikleia and said he will have her and not have her, and that he will kill her but she will not be killed. He understood this to mean that he would have her as a wife, not as a slave, and that he would kill her maidenhood without threatening her life (1.18).

Thyamis presented a speech before his men and the protagonists explaining why he deserved to marry Charikleia. He cited fine qualities of his leadership such as doing more than his share of work but only taking an equal share of rewards, never abusing captive women, and even letting some go without ransom because he pitied them. He added that despite his piratical way of life, he was born to be the high priest at Memphis. Charikleia looks highborn and her behavior befits a priestess, therefore it is fitting that a priest marries a priestess. During a raid on his camp he had Charikleia hidden in a cave, but when he feared that his own troops were going to be overpowered by the invaders, he asked Cnemon where the girl was hidden, lying to "seem more concerned for her safety than his own" (Reardon 374). He reinterpreted the dream to mean that he would not have Charikleia because this war would deprive him of her, and that he would

end her life instead of her maidenhood (1.30). So he fled to the cave and killed whom he thought was Charikleia, but was in reality another girl whom he did not know was also hiding in the cave.

Demainete and Thyamis demonstrate the fallacies of pursuing love: they both abuse power they wield through authority or manipulation, they keep their promises only so long as the promise adheres to their plans; they lie to conceal their schemes, and they attempt to kill their beloved when they believe he or she is unobtainable. These bad lovers provide a model for how love can end badly as well as an antithesis for how the protagonists pursue their love.

Bibliography

Reardon, B.P. ed. 1989. *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*. UC Press.