

PLATONIC INFLUENCE ON THE GREEK NOVEL

Titian's painting *Sacred and Profane Love* (1514 CE) depicts twin Aphrodites, one nude and one clothed. From a Platonic perspective, the nude Aphrodite represents spiritual *eros* (ὁ ἔρωϑ), and the clothed Aphrodite, carnal *eros*. The former extends high toward heaven, and the latter sits close to the earth. The nude's *eros* is light and lifts her soul upward, whereas her sister's *eros* is heavy and drags her soul downward. Together, the two Aphrodites depict the philosophy of Diotima's Ladder in the *Symposium* and the Chariot Allegory in the *Phaedrus*. Comparable depictions of this philosophy appear in the Greek novel, the purpose of which is the exploration of *eros*. Two novels, *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus and *Aethiopica* by Heliodorus, serve as a case study for Platonism in the Greek novel. As texts that analyze different stages of Plato's philosophy on *eros*, *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Aethiopica* complement one another for this purpose. At first, Longus appears to subvert the Platonic model by concluding Daphnis and Chloe's story with the consummation of carnal *eros*. However, the garden scene between Philetas and Eros (Longus, *D&C*. 2.3–7), and the final marriage-bed scene (Longus, *D&C*. 4.38), indicate that Platonic philosophy remains active within Daphnis and Chloe's world and that they may yet recognize spiritual *eros*. Heliodorus, by contrast, more openly adopts Platonic philosophy, mirroring the journey of Theagenes and Charikleia with that of the soul in Diotima's Ladder, the Chariot Allegory, and the Allegory of the Cave (Pl. *Rep.* 514a–520a), while also incorporating imagery reminiscent of Aristophanes

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myth of spheres. (Pl. *Symp.* 189c–193e). Although different in approach, these interpretations demonstrate the enduring influence of the Platonic conception of *eros* on ancient Greek authors.

As Trapp explains, Longus' and Heliodorus' responses to Plato's philosophy constitute acts of "classicizing *mimesis*."¹ During the second to fourth centuries CE, when both novels were written, there was a "widespread literary exploitation" of Plato.² Authors repeated, adapted, and drew inspiration from his works. For their own philosophical pursuits, they employed Platonic settings, rhetorical styles, and literary structures. In comparison with authors such as Plutarch, Dio of Prusa, and Maximus of Tyre, who wrote in other literary genres, the Greek novelists' use of the Socratic dialogues is "relatively sparse."³ This scarcity cannot be attributed to the constraints of subject matter, for both the genres of the aforementioned authors and the novel explore *eros*.⁴ Nevertheless, the Platonic influence that is present in the Greek novels is all the more marked because of its rarity.

The Platonic conception of *eros* is most fully articulated in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* and, of the Socratic dialogues, these two are the most influential on *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Aethiopica*. In the *Symposium*, Socrates recounts the explanation of *eros* given by his teacher, Diotima (Pl. *Symp.* 210a–212c). He explains that when a person falls in love, he

¹ M.B. Trapp, "Plato's *Phaedrus* in Second-Century Greek Literature," in *Antonine Literature*, ed. D.A. Russell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 141, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198140573.003.0006>.

² Trapp, "Plato's *Phaedrus*," 154.

³ Trapp, "Plato's *Phaedrus*," 156.

⁴ They are *λόγοι έρωτικοί*, or amatory words.

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perceives beauty in his beloved and initially believes that beauty and his beloved are one. This constitutes the first rung of the Ladder. As the lover comes to distinguish the two, he perceives beauty in all bodies. He then abstracts beauty from the physical and perceives it in souls. The lover continues to ascend past the beauty of institutions and knowledge until he reaches the highest rung of the Ladder. Here, he perceives the Form of Beauty in its totality, recognizing his previous encounters as expressions of this Reality. While the lowest rung is characterized by carnal *eros* and the highest by spiritual *eros*, it is essential to note, as does Yunis, that the former still “points upward towards transcendence” and the latter “retains its innate affinity with sexual *eros*.”⁵

A related articulation of *eros* appears in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates describes the soul as a winged charioteer driving two horses (Pl. *Phdr.* 246a–257a). The black horse represents the soul’s physical desires, and the white horse its spiritual desires. The black horse is heavy and drags the soul down toward the earth; the white horse is light and lifts the soul up toward the Forms. The charioteer must train both horses through *sophrosyne* (ῥή σωφροσύνη), or self-control. Once, the gods and the souls of men saw the Forms beyond the edge of heaven. The gods saw the Forms perfectly. The souls that followed the gods most closely had the clearest view. Others, whose chariots rose and fell as their two horses struggled against each other, caught some real things and missed others. The souls that lagged behind because they were unable to

⁵ Harvey Yunis, “Eros in Plato’s ‘Phaedrus’ and the Shape of Greek Rhetoric,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 13, no. 1 (2005), 113, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29737247>.

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control their black horses failed to glimpse the Forms at all. After, any soul that saw any true thing was given another circuit where it saw more. Eventually, all souls lost their wings and fell to the earth. Those that had seen the Forms more clearly retain stronger recollections of them during their mortal lives and develop divine madness. When such souls fall in love, they are reminded of the Form of Beauty in their beloveds, and their wings begin to grow back; when they are separated from their beloveds, they are afflicted, and their wings shrink. The black horse will urge the individual soul toward sexual relations with its beloved. If it overcomes these physical desires and attains a purely spiritual recognition of beauty, it will fully regain its wings and ascend to heaven after death. The soul that yields to physical desires but restricts them through *sophrosyne*, will likewise ascend, though after a longer time. Non-lovers will continue to wander the earth for thousands of years.

The *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* can be read together as suggesting a complementary, although not strictly doctrinal, conception of *eros*. This reading is supported by structural parallels between Diotima's account of ascent toward the Form of Beauty and the journey of the soul, where *eros* is first experienced as physical desire but serves as a metaphysical force for the soul to recollect Reality. The ascent up Diotima's Ladder may, therefore, be interpreted as the soul's earthly journey to regrow its wings. To climb past the lowest rung, it must reign back its black horse. The soul that once glimpsed the Forms can ascend the Ladder, but the soul that lagged behind, unable to control its black horse, cannot. Both souls begin their earthly journeys with physical desire, but only the soul that had a clearer sight of the Forms can be reminded of the Form of Beauty through its beloved and thus aspire towards it. The other

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soul cannot be reminded of that which it has forgotten. Experiencing divine madness, the *sophrosynic* soul refrains from the sexual relations tempted by the beauty of its beloved and abstracts that beauty to a purely spiritual *eros*. In doing so, it climbs to the top of Diotima's Ladder and regrows its wings. Such a reading of the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* is consistent with that of later Neoplatonists, including Plotinus and Proclus.⁶ These philosophers interpret the two texts as expressing a singular model of *eros*, synthesizing the *Symposium's* ascent toward the Form of Beauty through *eros* with the *Phaedrus's* recollection of the Form through divine madness.

Longus' reception of the two texts begins with a seeming subversion of the Platonic model. When Daphnis and Chloe fall in love, they perceive beauty in each other. As Chloe bathes Daphnis, she realizes that "Daphnis is beautiful" (καλὸς ὁ Δάφνις) (Longus, *D&C*. 1.13).⁷ Later, when she kisses him, Daphnis:

"realize[s] with admiration that her hair was golden, that her eyes were as big as a cow's, and that her face was really even whiter than the goats' milk."⁸

The couple now stands on the first rung of Diotima's Ladder, as "Chloe attributes aesthetic value to Daphnis himself."⁹ If

⁶ See Plotinus, *Enn.* I.6.8–9; III.5.1. See Proclus, *Theol.* I.24 and in *Alc.* 327–30.

⁷ Translations of *Daphnis and Chloe* are by Gill in Longus, "Daphnis and Chloe," Tr. Christopher Gill, in *The Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, edited by B.P. Reardon, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 332–406

⁸ Longus, *D&C* 1.17: τότε πρῶτον καὶ τὴν κόμην αὐτῆς ἐθαύμασεν ὅτι ξανθὴ <ὥσπερ πῦρ>, καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὅτι μεγάλοι καθάπερ βοῶς, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον ὅτι λευκότερον ἀληθῶς καὶ τοῦ τῶν αἰγῶν γάλακτος.

⁹ Caitlin C. Gillespie, "Creating Chloe: Education in Eros Through Aesthetics in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*," in *Aesthetic Value in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ineke Sluiter and Ralph M. Rosen, v. 350 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 429, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004232822_018.

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Daphnis and Chloe were to follow the Platonic model, they would then renounce their physical desires in pursuit of spiritual *eros*. Yet, although the couple does not know what carnal *eros* is, Philetas teaches them that such *eros*, “a kiss and an embrace and lying down together with naked bodies” (*φίλημα καὶ περιβολή καὶ συγκατακλιθῆναι γυμνοῖς σώμασι*) (Longus, *D&C*. 2.7), is the proper fulfillment of their physical desires, in direct opposition to Plato.¹⁰ This is the only lesson Philetas can teach, for he himself has not ascended beyond the lowest rung of the Ladder. His soul belongs among those unable to control their black horses and therefore attained the most limited view of the Forms in heaven. As a result, on the earth he does not truly “see” (*έώρας*) Eros, as the god tells him in the garden (Longus, *D&C*. 2.5). Like Philetas, Lycaenion is framed a teacher of *eros*. She stands to Daphnis as Socrates does to Alcibiades and Diotima to Socrates in the *Symposium*. However, unlike Socrates and Diotima, she teaches her student carnal rather than spiritual *eros*, and like Philetas, fails to rein back her black horse and overcome her physical desires.

Rather than discrediting Plato’s philosophy, Longus uses these subversive elements to reinforce the Platonic conception of *eros*. He establishes the Platonic model as the standard within Daphnis and Chloe’s world. Philetas himself, somewhat unexpectedly, knows that love “makes souls take wing” (*τὰς ψυχὰς ἀναπτεροῖ*) (Longus, *D&C*. 2.7). Here, Longus’ language recalls that of the *Phaedrus*. In the *Phaedrus*, the “soul’s wings”

¹⁰ Ian Repath, “Platonic Love and Erotic Education in Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*,” in *Echoing Narratives: Studies of Intertextuality in Greek and Roman Prose Fiction*, ed. Konstantin Doulamis, v. 13 (Barkhuis, 2011), 112. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13wwxfk.8>.

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are described as being nourished by and growing best in the presence of “beauty, wisdom, goodness, and everything of that sort.”¹¹ Additionally, Socrates states that “thanks to their love,” lovers “will grow wings together when the time comes” (*καὶ ὁμοπτέρους ἔρωτος χάριν, ὅταν γένωνται, γενέσθαι*, Pl. *Phdr.* 256e). It is only against this Platonic standard that Eros’ criticism of Philetas holds weight. Both Philetas and Lycaenion fail to imitate the Platonic model: they do not learn that carnal *eros* must be “resisted by philosophical restraint.”¹² According to Wellman, Lycaenion, in particular, neglects the “educative process” of “seeking the beautiful youth” as a means “to become *sophrosynic*,” which the Platonic model requires.¹³ Controlled by their black horses, they teach Daphnis and Chloe accordingly. The couple, therefore, succumb to their physical desire, for it is all that they know.

However, the failure of Philetas and Lycaenion to realize spiritual *eros* does not necessitate that it is nonexistent in their world. Daphnis and Chloe are already *sophrosynic* in that their sexual relations are confined to the marriage-bed. On the night of their marriage’s consummation, Chloe “found out that what they had done in the woods had been nothing but shepherds’ games” (*ἔμαθεν ὅτι τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς ὕλης γενόμενα ἦν παιδίων παίγνια*) (Longus, *D&C.* 4.40). This suggests that they may come to

¹¹ Plato, *Phdr.* 246d–e: τὸ δὲ θεῖον καλόν, σοφόν, ἀγαθόν, καὶ πᾶν ὅτι τοιοῦτον· τοῦτοις δὴ τρέφεται τε καὶ αὔξεται μάλιστα γε τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς πτέρωμα. Translation of Plato’s *Phaedrus* by Nehamas and Woodruff in *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*, edited by C. D. C. Reeve, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company), 209–66.

¹² Repath, “Platonic Love and Erotic Education,” 113.

¹³ Robert R. Wellman, “Eros and Education in Plato’s «Symposium»,” *Paedagogica Historica* 9, no. 1–2 (1969), 147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0030923690090107>.

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recognize something higher than what Philetas and Lycaenion taught them. If such recognition occurs, they will be able to ascend further up Diotima's Ladder and regrow their souls' wings. Chloe already begins to separate the beauty she sees in Daphnis from Daphnis himself, noting that although he is beautiful, "so are the flowers" (*kai gàρ τὰ ἄνθη*) and the sounds of the "nightingales" (*αἱ ἀηδόνες*) (Longus, *D&C*. 1.14). Eventually, she may understand that the beauty of Daphnis and of the natural world share a common basis and abstract further from there. By the story's conclusion, Daphnis and Chloe have learned carnal *eros* and are beginning to ascend the second and third rungs of the Ladder. Given the progression of their journey thus far, Longus leaves open the question of whether the couple will achieve a complete understanding of spiritual *eros*. His purpose for such ambiguity is to reflect a central feature of Platonic thought on the soul: that the ascent toward the Form of Beauty is an uncertain process available to all souls but rarely fully completed. Longus translates this philosophy into his narrative by leaving Daphnis and Chloe suspended on the Ladder. In doing so, he also focuses his novel on the climb itself rather than the Ladder's completion, mirroring the ongoing nature of the soul's journey.

Complementing the earlier stage depicted in *Daphnis and Chloe*, Theagenes and Charikleia in *Aethiopica* are further along in their spiritual journeys. They understand carnal *eros* and can distinguish between carnal and spiritual *eros*. Thus, they stand higher on Diotima's Ladder. Their attachment, however, is marked not only by *sophrosyne* but also by an intensity that recalls the attachment between the lover and the beloved in the *Phaedrus*. This intensity also invites comparison with earlier accounts of *eros* in Plato's dialogues. In particular,

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Theagenes and Charikleia's relationship can be read as evoking Aristophanes' myth of spheres in the *Symposium* (Pl. *Symp.* 189c–193e). Aristophanes explains that in early times, human beings were spherical creatures possessing two heads, four arms, and four legs. These spherical creatures were of three kinds: male–male, female–female, and male–female, the first descending from the Sun, the second from the Earth, and the third from the Moon. When these spherical creatures attempted to climb Mount Olympus and overpower the gods, Zeus considered striking them with his thunderbolts. Realizing, however, that he would lose their offerings if he smote them, he instead split each sphere in half, creating two separate bodies. Since then, each body has sought the half from which he was split in order to regain wholeness. This lost half is the beloved, and when the two are reunited, they never wish to be separated again.

Instead of treating Aristophanes' speech as philosophically equivalent to Socrates', it is better understood as a mythic illustration of the "yearning for wholeness"¹⁴ that anticipates, but does not fully explain, the "yearning for immortality" in the Platonic conception of *eros*. For this reason, Socrates counters Aristophanes and reframes *eros* from a force in a search for wholeness to a force in an ascent toward immortality and understanding of the Form of Beauty. Nevertheless, Aristophanes' myth captures vividly the intensity, immediacy, and feeling of *eros* between lover and beloved and is therefore useful for interpreting the relationship between Theagenes and Charikleia.

¹⁴ Wellman, "Eros and Education," 136.

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When Theagenes and Charikleia meet for the first time, it is “as if the soul recognized its kin” (*ὥσπερ τῆς ψυχῆς ... τὸ ὁμοιον ἐπιγνούσης*) and “as if [they are] calling to mind a previous acquaintance or meeting” (*που γνωρίζοντες ἢ ἰδόντες πρότερον, ταῖς μνήμαις ἀναπεμπάζοντες*) (Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.5).¹⁵ While this encounter resembles the reunion of two halves described by Aristophanes in his myth — the sense “of belonging to one another” (*οἰκειότητι*) (Pl. *Symp.* 192c) — its language more closely aligns with Socrates’ discussion of recollection in the *Phaedrus*. Socrates explains that when the lover beholds the beloved, he “sees the beauty we have down here and is reminded of true beauty” (*ἦν ὅταν τὸ τῆδὲ τις ὁρῶν κάλλος, τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀναμνησκόμενος*) (Pl. *Phdr.* 249d). By doing so, the lover achieves *anamnesis* (*ἀνάμνησις*), the recollection of innate knowledge: the beloved seems familiar because his beauty reminds the lover of his previous encounter with the Form “when [his soul] was traveling with god” (*συμπορευθεῖσα θεῷ*) (Pl. *Phdr.* 249c). This sense of familiarity, however, is limited. Socrates elaborates that

“only a few remain whose memory is good enough; and they are startled when they see an image of what they saw up there. Then they are beside themselves, and their experience is beyond their comprehension because they cannot fully grasp what it is that they are seeing.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Translations of Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica* are by J.R. Morgan in *The Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 407-686.

¹⁶ Plato, *Phdr.* 250a: *ὀλίγοι δὲ λείπονται αἷς τὸ τῆς μνήμης ἱκανῶς πάρεσπιν· αὐταὶ δέ, ὅταν τι τῶν ἐκεῖ ὁμοίωμα ἴδωσιν, ἐκπλήττονται καὶ οὐκέτ’ ἐν αὐτῶν γίγνονται, ὃ δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ πάθος ἀγνοοῦσι διὰ τὸ μὴ ἱκανῶς διαισθάνεσθαι.*

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Theagenes and Charikleia's meeting mirrors this situation, and the "as if" language by which their familiarity is qualified signals how their understanding of the experience is uncertain. At the same time, the emotional intensity of their encounter is palpable. Despite philosophical inconsistencies between Socrates and Aristophanes, the feeling of *eros* shared by Theagenes and Charikleia evokes the reunion of two halves after long separation.

This feeling can drive them either to "seek and enjoy sex" or "'recollect' the form of Beauty."¹⁷ According to Aristophanes, the former action is how two halves attempt to mold their bodies back into a single sphere. Yet even though this pursuit aims at wholeness, it requires that the souls' black horses take control, thereby keeping them weighed down to the earth. In contrast, Theagenes and Charikleia, being *sophrosynic*, repeatedly resist their physical desires, even going so far as to have Theagenes swear an oath that he "will have no carnal knowledge" (*οὔτε ὁμιλήσει τὰ Ἀφροδίτης*) of Charikleia until their marriage (Heliod. *Aeth.* 4.18). Instead, they lead their white horses along the path of the latter action, knowing that "the soul is something divine and partakes in the nature of heaven" (*θεῖον ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ συγγενὲς ἄνωθεν*, Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.5). Socrates makes a similar declaration in the *Phaedrus*, that a soul can become a "companion to a god" (*θεῶ συνοπαδός*, Pl. *Phdr.* 248c) and that "all soul looks after all that lacks a soul, and patrols all of heaven" (*ψυχὴ πᾶσα παντὸς ἐπιμελεῖται τοῦ ἀψύχου, πάντα δὲ οὐρανὸν περιπολεῖ*, Pl. *Phdr.* 246b). In doing so, Theagenes and Charikleia follow the models set forth by

¹⁷ Andrea Nightingale, "Sight and the Philosophy of Vision in Classical Greece: Democritus, Plato and Aristotle," in *Sight and the Ancient Senses*, ed. Michael Squire, 1st ed (Oxford: Routledge, 2016.), 60.

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Plato in both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, where *eros* begins in the perception of beauty but must ascend past the carnal in order to approach the Forms.

It is through vision, not sexual relations, that the soul may regain its former state. The soul first sees the Forms beyond the edge of heaven, then on the earth sees the beloved, and in the beloved sees beauty — beauty that “enters through his eyes, which are its natural route to the soul” (*διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων ἰόν, ἣ πέφυκεν ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἰέναι*, Pl. *Phdr.* 255c). Beauty itself is “radiant among the other objects” and alone has the privilege “to be the most clearly visible ... through the clearest of [the] senses” — vision.¹⁸ Accordingly, when Theagenes and Charikleia first meet, they perceive the Form of Beauty “at the moment when they set eyes on one another” (*ὁμοῦ τε γὰρ ἀλλήλους ἑώρων*) and fall in love (Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.5). The soul is tempted by what it sees and loves most and must resist this temptation for its ascent to continue. In doing so, spiritual *eros* “drives [it] upwards, away from the physical realm.”¹⁹ Because the soul has once seen the Forms, which constitute Reality, it expects that what it sees on the earth is likewise real. Charikleia’s soul, having previously glimpsed the Forms, perceives in Theagenes a manifestation of the Form of Beauty. For this reason, she believes Theagenes to be dead when she does not see him walking with Kalasiris and Knemon, for she “trusts no evidence but that of [her] own eyes” (*μόνοις ὀφθαλμοῖς μάρτυσι καταπιστεύουσιν*, Heliod. *Aeth.* 6.5). So,

¹⁸ Plato, *Phdr.* 250d: *περὶ δὲ κάλλους, ὥσπερ εἶπομεν, μετ’ ἐκείνων τε ἔλαμπεν ὃν, δεῦρὸ τ’ ἐλθόντες κατειλήφαμεν αὐτὸ διὰ τῆς ἐναργεστάτης αἰσθήσεως τῶν ἡμετέρων στίλβον ἐναργέστατα. ὅψις γὰρ ἡμῖν ὀξυτάτη τῶν διὰ τοῦ σώματος ἔρχεται αἰσθήσεων ... νῦν δὲ κάλλος μόνον ταύτην ἔσχε μοῖραν, ὥστ’ ἐκφανέστατον εἶναι καὶ ἐρασιμώτατον.*

¹⁹ Nightingale, “Sight and the Philosophy of Vision,” 61.

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while vision is the clearest of senses, it “may [also] be confused” (γίνονται ἐπιτάρᾳξεις, Pl. *Rep.* 518a).²⁰ Separation from her beloved thus interrupts her soul’s engagement with what reminds it of the Form of Beauty. It is only through the continued sight of Theagenes and denial of physical desires that her soul is lightened and begin to regrow its wings.

Theagenes and Charikleia are already lovesick, but as they regrow their wings, they are “possessed by god” (ἐνθουσιάζων) and experience divine madness (Pl. *Phdr.* 249d). In the *Aethiopica*, divine madness is characterized by the “classic symptoms of love” (τὰ ἐρώτων πάθη, Heliod. *Aeth.* 6.5), including dark rings under restless eyes, paleness, wandering concentration, insomnia, and loss of self-confidence (Heliod. *Aeth.* 4.7). Socrates presents a similar description of these physical and emotional disturbances in the *Phaedrus*: the possessed “shudders and a fear comes over him ... his chill gives way to sweating and a high fever ... [his] whole soul is stung all around ... [he] cannot sleep at night or stay put by day.”²¹ Additionally, divine madness causes Theagenes and Charikleia to feel “instant dread and anguish” (δειλία ... ἥδη καὶ ἀγωνία, Heliod. *Aeth.* 6.5) when they are separated. Reminiscent of the two halves in Aristophanes’ myth, they “don’t want to be separated from one another, not even for a moment” (οὐκ ἐθέλοντες ὥς ἔπος εἶπεῖν χωρίζεσθαι ἀλλήλων οὐδὲ σμικρὸν χρόνον, Pl. *Symp.* 192c) because separation dries shut the

²⁰ Translations of Plato’s Republic are by C.D.C. Reeve in *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues*, ed. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2012), 267–573.

²¹ Plato, *Phdr.* 251a–e: ἐφριξε καὶ τι τῶν τότε ὑπῆλθεν αὐτὸν δειμάτων ... τῆς φρίκης μεταβολή τε καὶ ἰδρῶς καὶ θερμότης ἀήθης λαμβάνει ... πᾶσα κεντουμένη κύκλω ἡ ψυχὴ οἰστρᾷ ... οὔτε νυκτὸς δύναται καθεύδειν οὔτε μεθ’ ἡμέραν οὐδ’ ἂν ἡ μένειν.

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openings from which the feathers grow and “keep[s] the[ir] wings from sprouting” (ἀποκλήει τὴν βλάστην τοῦ πτεροῦ, Pl. *Phdr.* 251d). Shared presence is thus necessary both to relieve this pain and to “[set] free the parts that were blocked up before” (ἔλυσε μὲν τὰ τότε συμπεφραγμένα, Pl. *Phdr.* 251e). Without divine madness, the lovesick soul’s black horse gains control, and the soul surrenders to physical desire. With divine madness, lovesickness propels the soul from initial carnal *eros* toward spiritual *eros*. Accordingly, divine madness is a blessing driving the soul toward transcendence and understanding of the Forms.

Lovesickness also causes “instant dread and anguish” for unworthy lovers. Yet their pain differs from that of Theagenes and Charikleia because they lack divine madness. Their suffering arises from an understanding of only carnal *eros* and the subsequent frustration of their unfulfilled physical desires. Unworthy lovers direct carnal *eros* toward beloveds who are neither their “kin” (τὸ ὅμοιον), nor “worthily” [their] own”²² (τὸ κατ’ ἀξίαν οἰκεῖον, Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.5). As Papadimitropoulos states, they lack shame and “hesitation to express their feelings directly” and are indifferent “to the consent of their object of desire.”²³ Theagenes and Charikleia are pursued by many such lovers, including Trachinus, Pelorus, and Achaemenes, but especially Theagenes by Arsake, and Knemon by Demaenete. The love of Arsake and Demaenete for Theagenes and Knemon, respectively, is purely physical: “they simply aim at sexual

²² That is, toward those who previously saw the Forms more clearly than they did.

²³ Loukas Papadimitropoulos, “Love and the Reinstatement of the Self in Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica*,” *Greece and Rome* 60, no. 1 (2013), 103. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383512000289>.

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gratification through a display of power or through manipulation.”²⁴ Both fail to develop *sophrosyne* when tempted by their physical desires and thus remain on the lowest rung of Diotima’s Ladder. As a result, they do not achieve an understanding of spiritual *eros*, and their desires remain confined to the physical.

Since Arsake’s and Demaenete’s souls did not see the Forms as clearly as Theagenes’ and Knemon’s, they do not respond to the beauty they see in their beloveds in a way that recollects its true essence. Their desire is directed not toward the understanding of beauty, but toward its possession. This mismatch between their physical desires and the spiritual desires of their beloveds prevents the formation of relationships that elevate the soul and aid in the regrowth of wings. Instead, it produces frustration. Because Arsake and Demaenete’s lovesickness lacks the possibility of spiritual development in its current state, they do not develop divine madness and are instead driven to literal insanity. The only resolution to their futile lovesickness, which disrupts the journey of Theagenes’ and Charikleia’s souls, is death.²⁵ Indeed, in *Aethiopica*, not only they but “all those who either display illicit desire or assist in its fulfilment ultimately fail in their erotic objectives and invariably end up losing their lives.”²⁶ The only unworthy lovers who survive are Thyamis and the Tyrian merchant; they show some recognition of a spiritual form of *eros*, but their love for Charikleia remains one-sided and does not produce a mutually elevating relationship.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ For example, Arsake commits suicide at *Aeth.* 8.15, Demaenete throws herself into a well at *Aeth.* 1.17.

²⁶ Papadimitropoulos, “Love and the Reinstatement of the Self,” 102.

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As Theagenes and Charikleia reunite, Charikleia undertakes a physical journey that mirrors the soul's journey on the earth as described in the *Phaedrus*.²⁷ Charikleia is removed from her homeland, Aethiopia, to Greece, just as the soul is removed from its homeland, heaven, to the earth when it loses its wings. To return to her homeland, Charikleia faces various trials that test her will; her success in these trials bring her closer to Aethiopia. Similarly, the soul's will is tested when it experiences love and confronts temptations of carnal *eros*, which it must resist in order to begin regrowing its wings and ascend to the highest rung of the Ladder. Eventually, Charikleia returns to Aethiopia and is reinstated to her rightful place on the throne, while the soul, having fully regrown its wings, ascends once more to heaven.

During her physical journey, Charikleia also undertakes the same journey of the soul. She falls in love with Theagenes and perceives beauty in him, a beauty that reminds her of the Form of Beauty she once glimpsed when her soul was in heaven. She resists the temptation to engage in physical relations with Theagenes through *sophrosyne*. Both Theagenes and Charikleia go to extreme measures to preserve their chastity with each other and with others. In doing so, they gain an understanding of spiritual *eros*. The spiritual significance of Charikleia's effort is manifest when Arsake condemns her to be executed on the pyre:

ἐπέβη προλαβοῦσα τῆς πυρᾶς, καὶ εἰς τὸ μεσαίτατον
ἐνίδρυθεισα αὐτὴ μὲν ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἀπαθῆς εἰσπήκει,
περιρρέοντος αὐτὴν μᾶλλον τοῦ πυρὸς ἢ
προσπελάζοντος, καὶ λυμαιομένου μὲν οὐδέν,
ὑποχωροῦντος δὲ καθ' ὃ μέρος ὁρμήσειεν ἡ Χαρίκλεια,
καὶ περιαιγάζεσθαι μόνον καὶ διοπτεύεσθαι

²⁷ Papadimitropoulos, "Love and the Reinstatement of the Self," 111.

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παρέχοντος ἐπιφαιδρυνομένην ἐκ τοῦ περιαιγίσματος
τὸ κάλλος καὶ οἶον ἐν πυρίνῳ θαλάμῳ νυμφευομένην.²⁸

The very element intended to kill Charikleia, fire, accentuates her chastity and presents an image of the Form instead. Her elevated soul protects her from being harmed by the flames. Unlike Arsake and Demaenete, Charikleia does not have to die. Her love has the possibility of fulfillment because it is both restrained by *sophrosyne*, and thus spiritually *erotic*, and channeled through divine madness toward an elevating relationship. Although Theagenes and Charikleia will still engage in physical relations, these are confined to the bonds of marriage, as with Daphnis and Chloe. According to the Platonic model, they will eventually ascend to heaven.

Charikleia's return to Aethiopia reveals her true identity as the daughter of Hydaspes and Persinna, and thus a member of the royal family (Heliod. *Aeth.* 10.12). This identity constitutes reality. When her soul ascends to the highest rung of Diotima's Ladder, she likewise recollects Reality—the Form of Beauty. The two journeys she undergoes, that of her physical return to Aethiopia and her soul's ascent to heaven, coalesce to unveil Reality in its totality. In doing so, Charikleia discovers the "true essence of [her]self,"²⁹ both physically and spiritually. Her love for Theagenes serves as the driving force behind these revelations. The love that Arsake has for Theagenes and Demaenete for Knemon, however, produces no such revelation.

²⁸ Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 8.9: Charikleia climbed onto the pyre and positioned herself at the very heart of the fire. There she stood for some time without taking any hurt. The flames flowed around her rather than licking against her; they caused her no harm but drew back wherever she moved towards them, serving merely to encircle her in splendor and present a vision of her standing in radiant beauty in a frame of light, like a bride in a chamber of flame.

²⁹ Papadimitropoulos, "Love and the Reinstatement of the Self," 111.

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Because the discovery of self and the remembrance of the Forms are inseparable, Arsake and Demaenete, who remain bound to carnal *eros*, cannot ascend the Ladder and therefore cannot discover their true essence. Instead, they lose themselves entirely, namely in death.³⁰ Charikleia, by contrast, experiences a “reinstatement of the self through the supreme power of love”³¹ both on the earth and in heaven.

As a particularly Platonic moment in *Aethiopica*, Charikleia’s revelations also recall those of the freed prisoner in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, which offers a complementary model of the soul’s ascent toward knowing and understanding the Forms. Her arduous travel to Aethiopia mirrors the freed prisoner’s trek up the rough path (Pl. *Rep.* 515e), as both physical journeys depict their souls’ unfolding spiritual journeys toward truth. In Charikleia’s case, this specific journey is directed toward the Form of Beauty, while for the freed prisoner it culminates in the Form of the Good. Vision is crucial for both souls in their journeys. When the freed prisoner comes into the light and his eyes adjust, he is able “to look at [the sun] and see what it is like” (*κατιδεῖν καὶ θεάσασθαι οἷός ἐστιν*, Pl. *Rep.* 516b), understanding it to be the Form of the Good. Similarly, Charikleia comes to know the Form of Beauty through her sight of Theagenes; together, they are “seeing what is real and watching what is true” (*ἰδοῦσα ... τε καὶ θεωροῦσα τάληθῆ*, Pl. *Phdr.* 247d). By the end of their stories, Charikleia has achieved knowledge (*διάνοια*) of the Form of Beauty and the freed prisoner, understanding (*νόησις*) of the Form of the Good. Both figures also undergo transformations during their souls’ ascents.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Papadimitropoulos, “Love and the Reinstatement of the Self,” 112.

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The freed prisoner becomes a philosopher (Pl. *Rep.* 517c), while Charikleia relinquishes her acquired identity for her true self as Aethiopian royalty. Like the freed prisoner, Charikleia's journey from the sensible to the intelligible realm reveals two truths: her real identity and the essence of that which she sees. Through this revelation, she recollects both her origins and her sight of the Form in heaven.

The Platonic conception of *eros* underlies the worlds of *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Aethiopica*. Although Longus and Heliodorus employ the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* less extensively compared to other second to fourth century authors, the Platonic elements they incorporate are central to both stories' narratives and philosophical frameworks. The ideas expressed in Diotima's Ladder and the Chariot Allegory serve as the standard by which each character is measured, whether he leads with his black horse or white horse, whether he recognizes spiritual *eros* or remains bound to carnal *eros*, and whether he can restrain the latter through philosophical discipline. A character's ability to fulfill these conditions determines whether he will regrow his wings and climb Diotima's Ladder to return to heaven.

By the end of their story, Daphnis and Chloe have climbed at least the first rung, if not the second: they recognize carnal *eros* and begin to separate beauty from each other's bodies. The story of Theagenes and Charikleia begins partway along the same ascent, and when Charikleia's true identity is revealed, she approaches the highest rung of the Ladder as she comes to see Reality itself. Though the couples demonstrate different forms of *sophrosyne*, both confine their physical relations to marriage. If they continue to lead with their white horses, like the nude Aphrodite of Titian's *Sacred and Profane*

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Love, their *eros* will carry their souls upward toward their homeland.

Building on the journeys of the two couples, these Greek novels explore the human condition in ways that resonate with Platonic thought. Whereas Titian's painting conveys the Platonic conception of *eros* with visual force, Longus and Heliodorus develop it through narrative, presenting complex characters with whom readers can relate and from whom they can learn, whether by imitation or rejection. Because Plato's philosophy contains fundamental truths, both ancient and modern readers can reflect on the implications of embodying either carnal *eros* or spiritual *eros* and begin, in turn, the journey of their own souls toward the Forms.

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