

Chronotope and *locus amoenus* in *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Pleasantville*

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Longus' novel *Daphnis and Chloe* may be characterized as a "song of innocence and of experience," to appropriate a famous title by William Blake. In the novel, innocence and experience work on two levels. One is within the story, which describes the protagonists' journey of erotic self-discovery from a state of naiveté to sexual knowledge, a journey that culminates in their marriage and parenthood. The other and more fascinating level of innocence and experience is the basis of Longus' narrative strategy: an experienced author writes about inexperienced characters for experienced readers. While the novel's setting is the idyllic countryside, the author and his readers are urban sophisticates. Longus' narrative works mainly through the dramatic tension which arises from the difference between the story's protagonists and its readers and the simultaneous presence of innocence and experience on the two levels mentioned.¹

This tension in turn is the basis for the novel's lasting appeal and for its earlier reputation as a naughty or dirty book. It is also the one aspect that elevates it above the level of a predictable adventure romance, just as Heliodorus' non-linear plot is the chief glory of the *Aithiopika*. Nevertheless, the characters in these two as in the other surviving Greek novels firmly remain one-dimensional or, in E. M. Forster's well-known term, "flat."²

¹ Bowie 1996 surveys the audiences of the Greek novels in general; Morgan 2002 discusses Longus' readership and narrative strategy.

² Forster 1985, 67–78, on "flat" and "round" characters, and especially 68–72 on the narrative advantages of flat characters. See also Robert Louis Stevenson's 1882 essay "A Gossip on Romance," in Stevenson 1897, 327–343, a defense of formula fiction as eloquent as it is convincing.

In “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel,” Mikhail Bakhtin devotes a long first section to “The Greek Romance.”³ In this paper, I will focus first on the aspect of *chronos* in Bakhtin’s chronotope and then turn to that of *topos*, closely related as the two of course are in what we today call the “space-time continuum.” My main purpose in doing so is to juxtapose Longus’ novel, a work of ancient popular art, with a work of modern popular art which works in comparable ways, although in a new medium. The latter, too, shows the journey from innocence to experience in matters of love and sexuality and, moreover, touches directly on classical themes. This is the 1998 film *Pleasantville*, written and directed by Gary Ross. Although Longus’ novel has been filmed three times, I have chosen *Pleasantville* as a more interesting cinematic reworking of several aspects of the ancient text.⁴ Thematic connections between works where one would not expect them can be more revealing than more or less straightforward adaptations.

³ Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel,” in Bakhtin 1981, 84–258, especially 86–110 on Greek romances. Subsequent quotations from and references to the text are according to this translation. I have also consulted “Formen der Zeit und des Chronotopos im Roman,” in Bakhtin 1986, 7–209. Bakhtin wrote his long study in 1937–1938 (with “Concluding Remarks” added in 1973); it was first published in Russian in 1975. For a classical perspective on the text see Branham 1995. Branham 2002 examines the temporal aspects in the ancient novels.

⁴ *Daphnis and Chloe* was twice filmed in Greece, first by Orestis Laskos under its original title in 1931, then, more loosely (and indebted to the *Idylls* of Theocritus as well), as *Young Aphrodites* (*Mikres Afrodites*) by Nikos Koundouros in 1963. On the latter see Faulx 1969. A third version appeared in Spain in 1976 as *La iniciación en el amor*, directed by Javier Aguirre. On these films see de España 1998, 414–418 and 427, 428, and 430 (filmography). De España, 417, in his caption to an illustration, calls twelve-year old Cleopatra Rota of *Young Aphrodites* “una *Lolita* helénica.” His picture explains why. An example of a modern analogy to Longus’ Chloe is Marcel Pagnol’s Manon in *Manon des Sources* (*Manon of the Spring*), filmed first by Pagnol himself in 1953 and again by Claude Berri in 1986. In the later version, more readily accessible, Emmanuelle Béart plays Manon. Here are some similarities to her classical predecessor: Manon is a goat-herd; she dances and plays the harmonica, a modern equivalent to the rustic instruments played by Longus’ country folk; she innocently bathes naked in a spring by a grotto. The evil character who watches her doing so and immediately falls in love with her but is eventually rejected partly redeems himself in death (overtones of Longus’ Dorcon). When she marries, Manon in her bridal gown combines the purity of her natural beauty with the cultural refinement of society, a point which Longus emphasizes about Chloe (and to which I will turn below).

I

In *Pleasantville*, two modern teenagers, brother and sister, are supernaturally transported into a 1950s black-and-white television series called “Pleasantville,” which is set entirely within this eponymous town. This Pleasantville might as well be named Perfectville, because it represents the American dream at its suburban ideal: perfect weather, perfect town- and countryside, perfect people, and no family, social, urban, or natural problems. Crime does not exist. The worst kind of crisis we see in the film involves a treed cat. What Bakhtin said about the Greek romance in the following two quotations is applicable wholesale to Pleasantville:

In this kind of time, nothing changes: the world remains as it was, the biographical life of the heroes does not change, their feelings do not change, people do not even age. This empty time leaves no traces anywhere, no indications of its passing.

It goes without saying that in this type of time, an individual can be nothing other than completely *passive*, completely *unchanging*....to such an individual things can merely *happen*. He himself is deprived of any initiative. He is merely the physical subject of the action. And it follows that his actions will be by and large of an elementary-spatial sort....he *keeps on being the same person* and emerges...with his *identity* absolutely unchanged.⁵

Since in the black-and-white world of Pleasantville we are in the wholesome 1950s, there is, of course, no eroticism or sex. Teenagers go on a date to the soda fountain, hold hands, sit side by side in a car in Lovers’ Lane looking at the natural surroundings – this is all that happens. But their idyllic existence is radically altered when David and Jennifer, our modern teenagers, arrive from the late 1990s. They, of course, are sexually experienced, Jennifer more so than David. (In an early scene set in the present, we learn that she had bought herself new underwear before an important date.) Longus’ description of Lycaenion partly fits Jennifer: both are “imported...from town” and

⁵ Bakhtin 1981, 91 and 105.

“young, pretty, and rather sophisticated.”⁶ In Pleasantville, Jennifer introduces first her 1950s date and then, indirectly, several other youngsters to their erotic nature. The irresistible spread of sexual knowledge among Pleasantville’s teenagers and adults, despite the futile attempts on the part of the town’s mayor and several other good citizens – in this patriarchal society, all of the latter are middle-aged males – appears on screen in a way as charming as it is clever. Director Ross takes full advantage both of the visual nature of his medium and of modern computer technology to present his characters’ gradual journey toward love and sexuality and, resulting from this, greater self-knowledge, a deeper emotional and intellectual life, and an awareness of the world around them. More and more, Ross infuses individual objects and people with color until, at the completion of this process, the originally black-and-white world of Pleasantville has become entirely polychrome. To his characters in the story as well as to his audiences in the theater, Ross shows the radical changes which knowledge of any sort demands from all who embark on a quest for it.

In the biblical story of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God forbids Adam to eat the fruit of this tree; otherwise, he has to die the same day.⁷ But when Eve and Adam eat the forbidden fruit, they do not die at all but acquire consciousness. Their first realization is not knowledge of good and evil but awareness of their nakedness. Nudity here symbolizes their sexual awakening, from which all additional and deeper knowledge may derive. A parallel perspective occurs in Plato’s *Symposium*, in which Socrates explains the true nature of Eros. Real love transcends the physical and ascends to the ultimate knowledge that “beauty is truth; truth, beauty,” as John Keats put it in the best-known phrase of his “Ode on a Grecian Urn.”⁸ Knowledge of good and evil and the Platonic ideal are two sides of the same coin. In *Daphnis and Chloe*, Longus is not quite this philosophical, but the concept that carnal knowledge leads to self-awareness and to a meaningful and happy life is the culmination point of his story. Only when Chloe’s natural beauty

⁶ *Daphnis and Chloe* 3.15.1. I quote Longus in the translation by Christopher Gill in Reardon 1989, 285–348; quotations at 324.

⁷ *Genesis* 2.16–17. Sir James G. Frazer’s reconstruction of the myth of the Fall of Man and his analysis of its likely original form is still worth reading (Frazer 1918, vol. 1, 45–77); it is readily accessible, if in the abridged version from a 1923 one-volume edition but with original notes restored, in Dundes 1984, 72–97.

⁸ Socrates’ exchange with Agathon and his subsequent speech are in Plato, *Symposium* 198a–212c.

is supplemented by her elegant bridal dress – when, in other words, nature and culture, *physis* and *technê*, are combined – can she embody true perfection, the ideal of both beauty and knowledge. As the narrator puts it toward the conclusion of his story:

Then you could learn what beauty is like, when it is properly presented. For when Chloe was dressed and had put her hair up and washed her face, she seemed so much more beautiful to everyone that even Daphnis scarcely recognized her.⁹

Knowledge of one's own nature leads to the development of other areas of knowledge: of one's surroundings and society, of arts and sciences, of civilization.

This latter aspect of knowledge is brought to the fore even more in Ross's film than in Longus' novel. The ignorant inhabitants of Pleasantville discover in their municipal library a great repository of culture. (This is a plot turn that appears quaint today and is more in keeping with the society of the 1950s.) In the film, culture is represented by two areas, painting and literature. Three novels receive prominence of place: Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. All three at some time have been banned or censored somewhere. Not only in the case of teenage readers, identification with the protagonists of Twain's and Salinger's novels has often been an initiation into literature and, by extension, into the arts – that is to say, into knowledge and civilization at large. This, along with their heroes' irreverence toward "good society," may be one of the reasons why the books are banned in some American middle and high schools even today. Lawrence's novel in particular was as dangerous and notorious in the twentieth century as *Daphnis and Chloe* had been in the nineteenth. Here again, Bakhtin on the chronotope helps us see both similarity and difference between *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Pleasantville*. After stating that "the homogenization of all that is heterogeneous in a Greek romance...is achieved only at the cost of the most extreme abstraction [and] schematization," Bakhtin goes on to observe:

⁹ *Daphnis and Chloe* 4.32.1; quotation from Gill, 345.

This most abstract of all chronotopes [the one in the Greek romance] is also the most static. In such a chronotope the world and the individual are finished items, absolutely immobile. In it there is no potential for evolution, for growth, for change. As a result of the action described in the novel, nothing in its world is destroyed, remade, changed or created anew. What we get is a mere affirmation of the identity between what had been at the beginning and what is at the end. Adventure-time [the time necessary for the development of the novel's plot] leaves no trace.¹⁰

The latter part of this quotation does not apply to the final state of things in Pleasantville, which has completely changed from its earlier idyllic existence. But even this difference is analogous to the Greek novel, since the affirmation of the country life at the conclusion of *Daphnis and Chloe* occurs only because the dangers of the external world could be resisted successfully. In *Pleasantville*, the people from the outside world, the two who have arrived from today's society, effect a radical change in the idyllic world, which turns out not to have been all that idyllic in the first place. The outside world, we may say, has conquered the idyllic one. But this conquest could take place only with the willing cooperation of most of the inhabitants of the idyllic world. For better or worse, any incursion of knowledge – exemplified by sexuality, as it was in Longus – destroys the paradisaic state of innocence and ignorant perfection (or perfect ignorance). This is the price necessary to be paid for evolution, growth, and change.

II

After these general connections between *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Pleasantville* I now turn to a specific scene in either work which best illustrates the simultaneous presence of innocence and experience from whose inherent tension the narrative development of a love story may derive its most irresistible force and greatest appeal. Both scenes are highly erotic, if in different ways. That in *Pleasantville* is indeed the most erotically charged one in the entire film. Neither scene is in any way pornographic. Both are presented with great delicacy, with sympathy for and understanding of the character or characters involved, and with a touch of humor. In terms of plot or situation

¹⁰ Bakhtin 1981, 110.

described, the two scenes have nothing at all in common, nor do I wish to imply that writer-director Ross in any way imitated, or was conscious of, Longus. But both very effectively illustrate a specific moment of sexual awakening and do so in analogous ways regarding the narrative moment at which they occur.

One of the most charming erotic vignettes in *Daphnis and Chloe* is the episode with the grasshopper or cicada which flies into Chloe's dress. This is a particularly significant moment in Daphnis' and Chloe's journey toward their discovery of love. The narrator tells us that Daphnis "put his hands between her breasts and took out" the cicada.¹¹ He says nothing else about Daphnis' act, but experienced readers – that is to say, all readers – know that in order to do so Daphnis must touch her chest. Mentally, readers automatically add this missing detail, the acme of eroticism in the little episode. That the very moment omitted from verbal description is indeed significant, perhaps even a turning point for Daphnis' awakening to love, becomes evident from two authorial comments which prompt us to fill in the blank, as it were. Before reading that Daphnis put his hand into Chloe's dress we have been informed that he did so taking advantage of the situation – *prophaseôs labomenos*. This is by no means an indication of lechery on his part because he is still far too innocent. Instead, his act shows his tender desire to be closer to Chloe than he can usually be and to come to her rescue. (The grasshopper has made her scream twice in surprise and fear.) More importantly, however, this comment is a nudge to the reader. The disarming charm of the moment and the equally disarming naiveté of Daphnis are expressed in the experienced author's gently ironic phrase "that obliging grasshopper" (*ton beltiston tettiga*). The moment is one of great intimacy and erotic vulnerability on the part of the two young lovers.

The corresponding moment in *Pleasantville*, also one of intimacy and vulnerability, occurs when Betty, the mother in the film's central television family, discovers her sexuality. Our two time-travelers have replaced her children, who were of necessity conceived asexually. After she has obtained, to her initial disbelief and surprise, the requisite information about sex from her experienced "daughter" Jennifer, Betty takes a bath and discovers the true nature of her body – its erogenous zones – and of herself. But more importantly, Betty now becomes aware of her mind as well, for after her experience she is no longer willing to play the submissive housewife, her tradi-

¹¹ *Daphnis and Chloe* 1.26.3; this and the following quotation are from Gill, 300.

tional and stereotypical 1950s role, and determinedly emancipates herself from husband and kitchen. (She even acknowledges and acts on her sexual feelings for a man not her husband.) While she is in the process of discovering her erotic self in the bathtub, she begins to see her surroundings in color. Soon after, she leaves behind her black-and-white existence for good and turns into color herself. In an informal audio commentary on his film, director Ross has observed about this scene:

The sexual awakening is the first thing that occurs because it's the most primal, it's the most basic....If you look at this as kind of a growing up of the world that way, sort of that edenic allegory, this *is* the first impulse, and it's a primal thing and it's one that you can't deny....But there's higher levels of evolution than that; it's only the first....There are so many other things that are on a higher level of evolution and complexity than just that sexual impulse, yet I think if you're closed off to something that fundamental, it's very hard to be open to other things....it gives rise to a whole new world of nuance and beauty that's non-sexual....

Although Ross does not name Plato here, he might as well have done so, because his words are clearly in the tradition of Platonic philosophy.

A later scene in the film, in which David takes Margaret, a Pleasantville girl who embodies a Chloe-like perfection of beauty and innocence, on a first date to Lovers' Lane, equally harks back to the classical tradition, as Ross himself makes clear. The description, in his commentary, of the *locus amoenus* which we see on screen again sounds rather Platonic:

We took to calling the sequence the Athenian sequence because it did have a certain mind-body ideal, and that's the reason that the design of that gazebo in the background has certain Greek Revival elements in it, because I wanted that tableau across the lake to have almost an Elysian kind of quality to it in the same way that a lot of Greek Revival paintings of England in the eighteenth century would use a piece of Greek Revival architecture across a pond because they were all kind of in a romantic era drunk on that Athenian ideal.

Readers of Plato will remember a comparable – indeed, a highly Longian – *locus amoenus* as the setting of the *Phaedrus*, whose subject, related to that of the *Symposium*, is the nature of love and beauty.¹² The work culminates in the discussion of the true nature of knowledge. Socrates and Phaedrus converse under a high plane tree with a spring at its roots. A nearby grotto is sacred to Pan, the river god Achelous, and the nymphs. Pan and the nymphs will later play major parts in *Daphnis and Chloe*. (As they are in the novel, cicadas are present in Plato’s dialogue, too.) Obviously, Ross cannot include any gods in his modern story, although his narrative as a whole would not have worked without a supernatural figure. (This is the strange television repairman who makes it possible for David and Jennifer to appear in Pleasantville and who functions as a *deus ex machina* – indeed, at certain points, as a *deus in machina*.) But even so, Ross manages to infuse his Lovers’ Lane setting with a high degree of supernatural beauty. When David and Margaret approach in their car, a gentle rain of pink petals descends on them and swirls around their still partly black-and-white environment. On the soundtrack, the old standard “At Last,” a well-known love song from an earlier time of innocence, provides an aural complement to the scene’s visual magic.

An observation by the narrator at the beginning of *Daphnis and Chloe* is applicable to this scene in the film. In the novel’s prologue, the narrator tells us that he saw “a painting that told a story of love” and that this painting inspired in him “a yearning to depict the picture in words.” His verbal account of the painting contains, in part, the following *ecphrasis* of nature and an evaluation of its artistic quality:

The grove itself was beautiful – thickly wooded, flowery, well watered; a single spring nourished everything, flowers and trees alike. But the picture was lovelier still, combining great artistic skill with an exciting, romantic subject.¹³

These words apply, virtually without a change, to the *locus amoenus* in Ross’s film.¹⁴

¹² Plato, *Phaedrus* 229a–230c.

¹³ *Daphnis and Chloe*, prol. 1–2; quotations from Gill, 288–289.

¹⁴ The tradition of the *locus amoenus* in ancient and later literature is far too extensive to be addressed here. In classical antiquity, the *locus amoenus* originally took the form of an

III

In *Daphnis and Chloe* and in *Pleasantville*, knowledge causes uncertainties, difficulties, even dangers, and it has unpleasant consequences. Dealing with these consequences brings increased knowledge to those whose lives had previously been simple and easy. But greater knowledge may come to the outsiders, too. In the novel, Chloe's kidnapper Lampis, for instance, is eventually forgiven and allowed to be present at her wedding, and a full-scale war between the Methymneans and the Mytileneans is avoided with surprising effortlessness. The conciliatory ending of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is an apposite example from the later pastoral tradition. In the film, David and Jennifer also react to the changes they have brought to Pleasantville, but in different ways. Jennifer decides to stay in this world, simple and still backwards as it is despite its changes, whereas David returns to today. In an earlier scene he had comforted Betty by applying make-up to her face to allow her to appear in black and white after she has turned into color so that she might save face in front of her husband and the town's mayor, both black-and-white reactionaries. In a moving reversal of this moment, David now comforts his real mother, who is stuck in a hopeless love affair after the breakup of her family, by wiping off her make-up to allow her face to regain

enclosed garden (*paradeisos*), beginning with the garden of the Phaeacian king Alcinous in Homer (*Odyssey* 7.114–131). Xenophon's park (*Anabasis* 5.3.7–11) was modeled on Persian gardens; cf. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 4.13–14. For the wider context see Moynihan 1979. Cf. further the Greek and Roman tradition of idyllic, bucolic, and erotic poetry and, in Rome, that of the *laudes Italiae*. For some examples of *loci amoeni* see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 35.116–117, with which cf. Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 7.5.2, and Pliny the Younger, *Epistles* 5.6.7–13, 8.8, and 9.39. The walled garden at Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.15, is an example of such a garden in the Greek adventure-romances. Cf. also Bruno Snell, "Arkadien: Die Entdeckung einer geistigen Landschaft," most recently in Snell 1984, 257–274 and 320–321 (notes). On the influence of classical literature on medieval culture see especially Curtius 1993, 191–209 (a chapter on ideal landscape), with discussions of Homer, Plato, Theocritus, and Virgil, among others, and with a section on the *locus amoenus* at 202–206. Curtius, 202–203, quotes and translates Petronius, *Satyricon* 131.8, and a fourth-century poem by Tiberianus (*Anthologia Latina* 1.2.809) as prime examples from Roman literature. Snell's and Curtius' books are easily accessible in English, albeit in earlier editions: Snell 1953; Curtius 1952. For the Renaissance see the classic overview by Burckhardt 1995, 190–197 ("Discovery of the Beauty of Landscape"), and more recently Jäger 1990, 87–99 and the textual excerpts at 272 (Lorenzo de' Medici on the paradise garden), 275–276 (Leonardo), 280 (Isabella d'Este), 282–283 (Ariosto), and 303–304 (Armina's garden in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*).

its natural beauty. David and Jennifer, Ross makes evident, have been both teachers and learners.

A question which may arise, both for *Daphnis and Chloe* and for *Pleasantville*, is whether these works are instances of the *Bildungsroman*. Bakhtin's argument about the Greek romances leads to an answer in the negative for Longus' novel – rightly so, because the psychological realism of the modern novel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be expected from its ancient precursors. The same answer is appropriate for *Pleasantville*: despite the process of learning and insight and the larger issues of knowledge and recent American history on which the film touches, such as McCarthyism and race relations, the characters even in the film's modern frame story are intentionally left too schematic to be “round” in Forster's sense of the word. But nevertheless, one particular aspect of the *Bildungsroman* to which Bakhtin refers applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the film. Bakhtin observes that in the novels of Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert

the issue is primarily one of overturning and demolishing the world view and psychology of the idyll, which proved increasingly inadequate to the new capitalist world....the capitalist world is...not idealized, its inhumanity is laid bare, the destruction within it of all ethical systems..., the disintegration of all previous human relationships..., love, the family, friendship... – all of these are emphasized.¹⁵

In its frame story, *Pleasantville* shows us a capitalist world whose social fabric is fraying. But we might update Bakhtin's observations and take them a stage further by replacing the term “capitalist world” with “technological world” to describe the life and society of today. In regard to *Pleasantville*, supernatural power (the quasi-divine TV repairman) linked to technology makes it possible for David and Jennifer to return to the past – which, being on television, is itself a creation of modern technology. In today's visual media, such technology creates a new variant on the idyllic chronotope which Bakhtin had found in the ancient novels. More importantly for the art of storytelling today, advanced computer technology has made it possible for writer-director Ross to tell his story the most effectively. All the black-and-white images that we see on the screen are really color images – that is to say, they were originally filmed in color and then digitally turned into black

¹⁵ Bakhtin, 1981, 234–235.

and white. Only in this way was it possible for him to show both colors and black-and-white side by side in individual frames and entire scenes in a way which appears convincing and realistic to sophisticated and technologically savvy modern viewers. From this perspective, we might be justified to call *Pleasantville* a kind of visual *Bildungsroman*: a highly technological world becomes both the *subject* and the *means* of telling a story about the journey from innocence to experience and knowledge. That this kind of story has numerous points of comparison with literary works almost two millennia old makes the phenomenon only the more remarkable and attractive.

Despite the differences of time and space – of *chronos* and *topos* – between *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Pleasantville* and those of their respective chronotopes, and despite the even more obvious differences between an ancient literary medium and a modern medium of moving images, the similarities of story and, more importantly, of narrative stance in both works are too noticeable to be overlooked. (*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*) So those familiar with novel and film may readily think of *Pleasantville* when they remember what the narrator of *Daphnis and Chloe* has to say about the purpose he pursues with his attempt to transpose the painting he describes at the beginning into a story. His work is meant to be

something for mankind to possess and enjoy. It will cure the sick, comfort the distressed, stir the memory of those who have loved, and educate those who haven't. For certainly no one has ever avoided Love, and no one will, as long as beauty exists, and eyes can see.¹⁶

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¹⁶ *Daphnis and Chloe*, prol. 3–4; quotation from Gill, 289.

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