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A Tale of Two Countrysides: Impositions of Culture and Nature in *Daphnis and Chloe*  
and *Pride and Prejudice*

In the beginning of Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, the protagonists exist in a pastoral world marked by their oneness with nature and hyperbolic innocence. In the absence of a structured society, Daphnis and Chloe face the task of distinguishing their love as separate from and superior to the animal world. By adopting a civilized sense of restraint and social rituals, they learn to prolong pleasure in romance and, ultimately, marriage. Jane Austen sets *Pride and Prejudice* in a converse countryside whose well-established culture stifles the independence and very humanity of its inhabitants. The world in which Elizabeth, the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, endeavors to find love is governed by a rigid class structure and a restricting sense of propriety. Love is easily lost in this culture as the sense of restraint it requires renders the true feelings and characters of others difficult to discern. The societies into which both Daphnis and Chloe and Elizabeth and Darcy are born threaten their humanity. In order to find the love they desire, Daphnis and Chloe must impose aspects of Austen's world onto their natural states, and Elizabeth must free herself from the impositions of her culture, in effect, growing closer to the world of *Daphnis and Chloe*.

Though both novels illustrate the necessity of rising above the worlds in which they take place, *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Pride and Prejudice* do present the possibility of growing too distant from their respective worlds. When Daphnis is kidnapped by pirates,

he is saved by the simplicity of his attire, “as he was dressed for grazing on a plain,” (Longus 39) while his kidnappers, weighed down by the trappings of their culture, quickly drown. Similarly, when Lydia of *Pride and Prejudice* foolishly disregards societal expectations in pursuing an extramarital relationship with Wickham, she brings immense suffering on her family. Elizabeth claims their relationship is doomed to “bring little of permanent happiness,” because “their passions were stronger than their virtue” (Austen 209). In other words, Lydia chooses her natural desire over her culture. The choice in itself inoffensive, Lydia strays too far from the laws of society in senselessly disregarding the effect of her actions on her family. Mr. Bennett, another example of the dangers of removing oneself too completely from society, often uses his sardonic wit to withdraw from the society he despises, a habit which Elizabeth deems an “ill-judged direction of talents” (Austen 160). Mr. Bennett later realizes that his efforts would be better spent on active participation in society: “Mr. Bennett had often wished...that instead of spending his whole income, he had lain an annual sum, for the better provision of his children...the satisfaction of prevailing on one of the most worthless young men in Great Britain to be [Lydia’s] husband, might then have rested in its proper place” (Austen 206). Though the society of *Pride and Prejudice* is ultimately criticized, its laws, such as the law that prohibits women from inheriting property, nonetheless determine the livelihood of the characters and, therefore, cannot be discarded completely.

Daphnis and Chloe’s love ignites at a time in which they have more experience among goats and sheep than they do in human society. Most significantly, Daphnis and Chloe have “no experience in the methods employed by lovers” (Longus 29). The absence of any need for social propriety, at first, appears liberating as it allows them to

express their feelings openly and to welcome physical affection. As the novel progresses, however, their lack of social sophistication becomes increasingly restricting, leaving Daphnis and Chloe's relationship stagnant and vulnerable. The honesty with which Daphnis and Chloe address their feelings for one another, though endearing, cannot go far because despite their talk of, "kissing and embracing and lying naked on the ground...they had no idea what to do next and thought that love could go no further [so] nothing came of it" (Longus 49-51). Without examples of human relationships to follow, the lovers remain frustrated and unsatisfied. As long as Daphnis and Chloe remain untouched by human culture, their love cannot progress.

Daphnis and Chloe's ignorance also makes them susceptible to traps and manipulation. Daphnis' naivety so blinds him to potential dangers in his idyllic world that he literally falls into a wolf trap in the beginning of the novel. Later, Daphnis is easily deceived by Lycaenion, an older woman, whose name ironically translates to "little wolf," when she tricks Daphnis into sleeping with her. Although the experience is a didactic one, "teaching [Daphnis] how to do what he wanted to do to Chloe," (Longus 80) this breach of fidelity corrupts Daphnis and Chloe's love.

In 1813, the date of *Pride and Prejudice's* first publication, the countryside no longer represents the absence of cultural rituals that defines Longus' rural setting in the year 185 A.D., the year *Daphnis and Chloe* is guessed to have been written. Rather, country life in *Pride and Prejudice* embodies the height of cultural restrictions because "in a country neighborhood you move in a very confined and unvarying society" (Austen 29). The dominance of social tradition in *Pride and Prejudice* is perhaps even more crippling than its absence in *Daphnis and Chloe*. The necessity to marry into a family that

will ensure economic stability not only forbids the freedom to love beyond the constraints of social standing but creates in some a seeming inability to feel at all. Mr. Collins, the lawful inheritor of the Bennett's estate and one of Elizabeth's suitors, exemplifies a worst-case scenario victim of Austen's society. When proposing marriage, Mr. Collins states the danger of his being "run away with by [his] feelings on the subject," (Austen 73) yet he proceeds to list mechanically social pressures as his primary reasons for proposing. While Mr. Collins understands the proper behavior of a man in love, he cannot see love as anything more than a social convention.

Social conventions in *Pride and Prejudice* also provide the perfect hiding place for untrustworthy characters to disguise themselves and for genuine characters to be misjudged. Elizabeth, for example, is easily blinded by Wickham's charm, praising his ability to render "the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic...interesting," (Austen 52) while all of Hertfordshire, Elizabeth's town, proclaims Darcy "unpleasant" because he is socially aloof. The significance placed on characters' ability to navigate society dehumanizes them by diminishing the importance of the true worth of the characters; who a person is in reality seems unimportant when compared with the way he is viewed by society.

The social ideal in Austen's rural world is also the cause of the most frustration: the commitment to restraint and discretion. The restraint required in every social encounter prevents communication of honest feeling. After encountering Darcy at Pemberly, his estate, Elizabeth, "longs to know what Mrs. Gardiner thought of [Darcy], and Mrs. Gardiner would have been highly gratified by her niece's beginning the subject" (Austen 182). Unable to speak their feelings openly, Elizabeth and Mrs. Gardiner are

both left frustrated. Elizabeth's sister, Jane, also suffers from her excessive restraint, believing she is complying the social ideal. Because society calls on her not to betray too much affection for Bingley, the object of her desire, he "believes her to be indifferent," (Austen 134) and gives up on winning her. The restraint that society requires in *Pride and Prejudice* leads to ambiguity of intention and prevents the characters from satisfying their desires.

Though restraint inhibits the happiness of characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, it is, ironically, by embracing this same quality that Daphnis and Chloe come to know lasting fulfillment. In checking their instincts, Daphnis and Chloe's acquired sense of restraint allows them to extend the pleasure of their romance and be fully assimilated into society: Restraint, essentially, distinguishes Daphnis and Chloe from the animal world. When Chloe, for example, offers Daphnis a drink upon arriving at her house, Daphnis drinks "slowly, although he was very thirsty, and thus by his slowness prolonged his enjoyment" (Longus 74). Ignoring his instinct to appease his thirst instantly, Daphnis applies a sense of restraint that enhances his pleasure. Daphnis later receives a formal lesson about restraint in sex, despite the instinct to imitate his heard of goats. Daphnis learns "a form of intercourse quite different from [that of the rams and he-goats] and far sweeter—for the pleasure lasts longer" (Longus, 80). In addition, though Daphnis does learn that human intercourse is pleasurable, he restrains himself again in deciding to postpone sex with Chloe in an effort to avoid hurting her. Through distinguishing themselves as independent from the animal desires that affect them, Daphnis and Chloe find pleasure that lasts. In the end, Daphnis' restraint allows him and Chloe to be fully integrated in society through marriage: "Dionysophanes drew Daphnis aside and asked him if Chloe

was a virgin. Daphnis swore that nothing had taken place between them but kisses and vows of fidelity; and Dionysophanes, who was delighted to hear of the compact, made them sit down to feast” (Longus, 116). Had Daphnis followed his natural instinct, his marriage to Chloe would have been disdained by society. In using the uniquely human capacity to defer natural desire, Daphnis and Chloe assert their humanity and are fully introduced to culture. At the same time, Daphnis and Chloe still “could not bear living in town,” (Longus, 120) and thus retain their characteristic oneness with nature. Daphnis and Chloe do not, therefore, risk becoming like the pirates who are destroyed by the excessively material aspect of society.

Like Daphnis and Chloe, Elizabeth and Darcy find happiness in asserting their freedom as human individuals. Instead of rising above animal urges as Daphnis and Chloe do, it is their ability to act independently from a web of culture that distinguishes their characters and their love. While her friend, Charlotte, accepts her situation in society, claiming she is “not a romantic” (Austen 87), Elizabeth perpetually challenges the society that withholds her. Unwilling to be constrained by her place in the social hierarchy, she frequently questions Mr. Darcy and overtly defies Lady Catherine, Mr. Darcy’s aunt who embodies the height of society. The final sign that Elizabeth and Darcy succeed in distinguishing themselves from society is in their unrestrained conversation in which they profess love in spite of the prejudices which society would have them feel against each other. Still, Elizabeth’s devotion to her family and established rationality ensures that she will not deviate so far from society, as Lydia does, as to place passion above virtue.

In both the absence of culture and the excess of it, the characters who find happiness are the ones who assert their humanity in breaking free from the constraints of their worlds, Daphnis and Chloe by accepting aspects of culture and Elizabeth and Darcy by accepting their natural inclinations. After all, it is only when Elizabeth admires “a stream of some natural importance,” and, “without any artificial appearance,” in the woods of Darcy’s mansion that she finally admits, “that to be mistress of Pemberly might be something” (Austen 163). In a similar description in *Daphnis and Chloe*, Philetas, an old cow-herd, points out the merits of his garden, saying, “if you took away the fence, my garden would look exactly like a small wood” (Longus 45). In both novels, the height of beauty is described as a hybrid between nature and culture, a state of being that is more structured than the primitive innocence in *Daphnis and Chloe*, but more natural than the artificial society in *Pride and Prejudice*.

*Daphnis and Chloe* and *Pride and Prejudice* present the countryside at opposite ends of centuries of social evolution. At each end, the characters’ humanity is at stake; Daphnis and Chloe’s excessively natural state is, at first, hardly different from that of the animals, while Austen’s society is embedded in so many layers of cultural ritual that the humanity of her characters is obscured. Though both Longus and Austen admit that this ideal balance between nature and culture is difficult to achieve, they also present a means of transcending the struggle altogether. *Daphnis and Chloe* begins with a description of a painting, “even more delightful,” (Longus 17) than the wood it depicts. Longus implies that art can perfect nature and represent it without its inherent flaws. Austen also seems to uphold art as a means of revealing the truth that social boundaries and misjudgments often obscure. When Elizabeth visits Pemberly, she is struck by a painting of Darcy that

arouses “a more gentle sensation toward the original than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance” (Austen 167). The painting reveals the essence of Darcy’s character in a way that even he, himself, cannot. In art, Darcy is unencumbered by his social unease and the realities that separate him from Elizabeth. The parallel ekphrases in *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Pride and Prejudice* illustrate the ability of art to idealize nature and represent people in their truest form. Daphnis and Chloe and Elizabeth and Darcy were lucky enough to find a way of rejecting the oppressive aspects of their worlds without sacrificing dignity. In presenting this alternative to the delicate struggle between nature and culture, Longus and Austen invite us to achieve the sense of humanity that their protagonists find through the power of art, and perhaps through their own novels.

Charlotte claims she is “not a romantic” (Austen, 87) and therefore accepts a life ajdoined to Mr. Collins as a marriage of conveniance.