The study of so-called “ring composition” has been around for about a century, but there is still considerable skepticism about its existence as an aesthetic strategy as well as disagreement about its meaning and purpose. Aside from the more general observation that authors often return at the end of a discourse to something mentioned at the beginning, or that they begin with an anticipation of their conclusion, more complex examples of ring-like patterns have been argued to be a mnemonic device peculiar to oral poetry as well as a touchstone of the influence of literacy. Characteristic of those approaches that see ring patterns as an organizational structure is the notion that a series of thematic or narrative elements presented in hysteron proteron order focuses attention around a central point of paradigmatic significance, so that it is a pattern that must be grasped as a spatial disposition of elements whose impact can be felt only when the design is visualized as such. Elsewhere I have argued that the disposition of elements into ring-like patterns in the Iliad is not the result of a conscious attempt to produce meaning by the use of symmetrical designs, but is the result of the activity of performance and composition itself. I would like to extend that argument to a work that is firmly in the world of literacy, Longus’ Daphnis and Chloe, which is usually dated to the second century C.E. I will argue here that, despite this novel’s status as a text composed in the second sophistic by an author who clearly had high literary pretensions and made frequent allusion to numerous antecedent literary traditions, it is best understood as an articulatory process that unfolds...

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linearly, rather than an object that can be properly understood only when grasped as a whole: that patterns and repetitions of thematic elements are clues to what the author is doing rather than symmetrical designs that reflect some model of meaning that exists prior to the composition of the novel. I will take as my starting point Bruce MacQueen’s analysis of ring-composition in *Daphnis and Chloe*, since it is the most elaborate of a series of attempts to identify patterns as a key to the meaning of the work. The analyses of MacQueen and others identify a range of phenomena that I will account for in another way that focuses on process.

Taking his cue from other critics who have noted various formal principles in the story—the cycle of seasons, the framing function of ecphrastic scenes, patterns of repetition, and especially the aetiological stories in the first three books of the novel—MacQueen sets out to identify a structure that will give a spatial wholeness to the story’s linear unfolding. In particular, he identifies a pattern of two rings or cycles in each of the first three books, each of which focuses our attention on a central unit, one having to do with rhetoric, the other an aetiological story. I have reproduced his schema for book 1 below:

A. Spring and its occupations (1.9–10)
  B. A wolf, a trap, a rescue (1.11–12)
  C. Chloe’s soliloquy (1.14)
  D. Dorkon’s machinations (1.15)

**THE SPEECH CONTEST** (1.16)

D’. Dorkon’s further machinations (1.17)

C’. Daphnis’ soliloquy (1.18)

B’. A wolf, a trap, a rescue (1.20)

A’. Summer and its occupations (1.23)
  a. A bath with sexual overtones (1.24)
  b. Wolves out of character, and noisy animals (1.25)
  c. The grasshopper (1.26)

**THE STORY OF PHATTA** (1.27)
  c’. The pirates (1.28–30)
  b’. Wolves out of character, and noisy animals (1.29–30)
  a’. A bath with sexual overtones (1.32)

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