

## An Unequal Couple (late 17th century)

### Abstract

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This painting depicts age and class inequalities in gender relations and courtship. A well-dressed older man, whose clothing identifies him as a member of the bourgeoisie or landed gentry, chats and flirts with a peasant girl in front of a farmhouse. The girl appears to reciprocate, laughing and wagging her finger. But the man's general countenance – not to mention the way that he holds the girl's chin – makes clear that the balance of power is on his side. The pair is observed by an old woman who peers from the farmhouse window, and by a younger woman who is tending to an infant. Their expressions suggest a mixture of surprise and disapproval. This painting's lively narrative style and muted colors are characteristic of its maker, the Hamburg-born painter and etcher, Matthias Scheits (c. 1625/30-c.1700), who worked in the Dutch tradition, painting subjects from peasant life.

### Source

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Source: Oil painting on oak panel by Matthias Scheits, late 17th century.  
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