

## The Ass and the Bull: The Myth of Europa in Apuleius

This paper contributes to studies on sexual violence in the ancient novel by analyzing the Europa myth in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. According to Morales (2008, 53), "one striking aspect of the Greek novels is the sheer relentlessness with which women are threatened with rape," and Pinheiro (2013, 31) proposes that this tendency is influenced by the pervasiveness of sexual violence in Greco-Roman mythology, a connection that is borne out by the frequent association of the novels' heroines with mythological victims like Europa, Syrinx, Philomela, and Daphne. Apuleius' treatment of the Europa myth, in contrast, more consistently associates the hero Lucius instead of the novel's heroine with their mythological counterpart, in this case Jove disguised as a bull. This apparent shift in the deployment of mythological rape narratives merits contextualization within Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and the Latin novel more broadly.

Lucius is first compared to Jove disguised as a bull quite explicitly by Charite when the two escape from the bandits who have abducted her (*Met.* 6.29.4). Lateiner observes (2003, 232) that their escape parallels Jove's abduction of Europa and "is sexualized by both parties and likened to another bestial union." Graverini (2004, 237 n38) points out, moreover, that the donkey's erotic behavior toward Charite at *Met.* 6.28.2 alludes to that of Jove's towards Europa in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2.863). Lucius' association with the divine rapist Jove is subtly amplified later in the novel when a farm boy accuses the ass of attempting to rape women, girls and boys (7.21), an accusation that is, strangely enough, believed by the crowd of shepherds. Lucius' sexual exploits are again linked to the world of myth in what is perhaps the most infamous episode of the *Metamorphoses*: Lucius has sex with a Corinthian matron whom he likens to Pasiphae lusting after an ass (*asinariae Pasiphaae*, 10.19.3) rather than a bull. Lucius'

successful copulation with the matron inspires his owner to devise a cruel punishment for a condemned female criminal: the ass will have sex with the woman in the amphitheater before she is killed by beasts. In sharp contrast to the matron, however, the condemned woman is not a willing sexual partner, a point that is noted by only a few scholars (Haskins 2014, 41 and Lateiner 2001, 246). This substitution of Lucius' female partner associates him once more with Jove and the god's rape of Europa in bestial form.

After analyzing these episodes in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, this paper will conclude by comparing Apuleius' treatment of the Europa myth to episodes involving mythological rape in Petronius' *Satyrical* (Freas 2021), contributing to our understanding of gender-based sexual violence in the ancient novel.

#### Works Cited

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