

Apuleius and Intellectualism in Raphael's Loggia of Psyche

The story of Cupid and Psyche as recounted in Apuleius' *Metamorphosis* was a popular subject for Renaissance painters and patrons (Gaisser 2008; Vertova 1979). Its themes of love and lust made the tale particularly appropriate for a decorative motif in the Villa Farnesina, built in Rome by Sienese banker Agostino Chigi for his mistress Imperia in the early sixteenth century (Frommel 2003; Rowland 1986). The small but lavishly decorated villa was packed with references to classical antiquity painted by some of the most notable artists working in the city at the time. The centerpiece of this pleasure villa is the Loggia of Psyche, a room featuring an open arcade facing the garden; its trompe-l'oeil vault, designed by Raphael, was meant to give the impression of an open-air setting adorned with vegetal festoons. These garlands surround scenes from the story of Cupid and Psyche as told in the *Metamorphosis*.

In this paper I examine the narrative structure of the Loggia of Psyche to show the complexity of Raphael's storytelling and the artist's knowledge of the classical source which influenced the decorative program. Though the ceiling of the Loggia of Psyche clearly depicts Apuleius' story in its ten spandrel scenes, Raphael included subtle details and relationships among the figures to make the story more compelling and to reward the careful observer. The dialogue among Raphael's human and animal figures creates new narratives with meanings that range from human concepts of love, jealousy, and triumph to obscure references to classical literature. Like the Villa Farnesina as a whole, the room serves not only as a tribute to antiquity, but a testament to Renaissance intellectualism.

Bibliography

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