

“*Simplificissima Psyche*”: Apuleius’ *Cupid and Psyche* as Hellenistic Epyllion

Previous scholarship on the inserted tale of Cupid and Psyche within Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* has interpreted the tale through the lenses of various genres including elegy (Mattiacci 1998), comedy (Keulen 1998), epic (Harrison 1998), and Platonic allegory (Hooker 1955). Particularly influential has been P.G. Walsh’s (1970) suggestion of a five act structure which Kenney (1990) has adopted in his Cambridge commentary on the episode. In this paper I propose that Apuleius plays with one particular genre that inverts the topoi of a range of genres, namely the epyllion. I argue that Apuleius structures the story in such a way which encourages the reader to treat Cupid and Psyche as one continuous narrative, employs a highly wrought style which allows Apuleius to apply a poetic veneer to a story set in Latin prose, and characterizes Psyche as the heroine of her own small, ironic epic within a larger Latin novel to exemplify the *desultoria scientia* promised to the reader in the opening of the *Metamorphoses*.

Instead of the proposed five act structure by P.G. Walsh which encourages the reader to place the inset tale of Cupid and Psyche against a dramatic backdrop, my reexamination of the divisions between books suggests a structure reminiscent of epic. Apuleius’ close to book 4 and opening of book 5 encourages a linear reading due to an unorthodox cliffhanger which transitions into a scene of awakening which parallels Odysseus’ arrival into the land of the Phaeacians (*Od.* 6.1-126) and places Psyche in the realm of epic, yet also uses language which characterizes the *locus amoenus* and the Hellenistic pastoral. The transition from book 5 to 6 inverts a different scene from epic - namely the opening of book 3 of Apollonios’ *Argonautica*. Walsh, Harrison and Zimmerman draw attention to the strong comedic characterization of Venus in *Met.* 5.29 and Harrison draws parallels to the characterization of Juno in the Aeneid. Rather than treating both the comedic and epic elements separately, I argue that we should

combine these. Apuleius' intentional parallel of the *opening* of book 3 of the *Argonautica* at the *closing* of book 5 of the *Metamorphoses* employs the epic topos of a counsel of the gods made *levis* by the characterization of Venus.

Stylistically Apuleius not only occupies a place in the highly ornate style of the Second Sophistic, but points to a Hellenistic aesthetic that colors the narrative across the three books. The majority of the *Metamorphoses* is told by Lucius the ass, the protagonist of the novel. However the focalization changes for the story of Cupid and Psyche. Just as Callimachus' epyllion the *Hecale* is narrated to Theseus by an old woman, the tale of Cupid and Psyche is also narrated by an *anicula*. The old woman promises to distract Charite with *lepidis anilibusque fabulis*, "charming and old-womanly tales (4.27)" just as the speaker of the introduction of the *Metamorphoses* promises *conseram auresque tuas beniuolas lepido susurro permulceam*, "(to) weave various tales and delight your willing ears with a charming murmur." The frequent use of *novella elocutio* and diminutives in Latin prose mirrors the use of obscure vocabulary and dialect-play in Hellenistic poetry and contributes to the sweetness the reader has been promised.

Through close reading, my paper examines the playful references to epic throughout the inset tale of Cupid and Psyche, demonstrates a linear reading which challenges that of the dramatic, and demonstrates the effect of Apuleius' ornate language which causes Latin prose to read as poetry. Thus the inset tale of Cupid and Psyche within the larger Latin novel unites two elements from the opening of Callimachus' prologue to his *Aetia*: the clear murmur of Hellenistic cicada and the literal braying of the ass.

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