Allegory, Rhetoric, and Imagination in Apuleius' *Cupid and Psyche*

Apuleius was a philosopher and an orator, and the myth of Cupid and Psyche in his *Metamorphoses* showcases both of these facets of his literary personality. It is a philosophical allegory married to exuberant rhetoric and is persuasively constructed to make a point. He wants his audience to behold the divine, and he coopts both allegory from philosophers and the particular rhetorical tools of ekphrasis to convince his audience of his message that a Soul's search for Divine Love is a difficult but rewarding experience.

Originally, allegory belonged in philosophy, but due to the effects of Hellenistic scholars in both Alexandria and Pergamum, Roman poets were using allegorical interpretations in their composition of poetry. This opened the door for teachers of rhetoric to include allegorical methods in their instruction (Most 2010). While it is chronologically true that allegory arrived in rhetoric late in life, but Apuleius' myth of Cupid and Psyche proves that allegory loses none of its potency when married to masterful rhetoric.

The importance of the ekphrastic technique to rhetoric has been thoroughly discussed by Ruth Webb in *Ekphrasis, Imagination, and Persuasion* (2009). This paper follows her lead by producing a case study of ekphrastic technique of a rhetorician. Furthermore, the power of ekphrastic description lies in its capacity to enslave the audience through vivid descriptions (Goldhill 2009). The principles of *enargeia* (the ability to make visible) and *phantasiai* (vivid impression), which are hallmarks of rhetorical training, are abundantly clear in the language of the central scene of the myth, when Psyche lights her lamp and sees Cupid for the first time (*Metamorphoses* 5.21.3-5.23.6). Apuleius persuades his audience by engaging their imagination through these techniques.

This paper explores the relationship between allegory and rhetoric used in the episode where Psyche first sees Cupid. I consider the elaborate style of the passage including its use of alliteration, diction, asyndeton, word order, etc. Further, I analyze how these stylistic choices work persuasively through the rhetorical tools of *phantasiai* (vivid impressions) and *enargeia* (the ability to make visible) which are typically found in ekphrasis. Apuleius strives for *enargeia* because it has the power to persuade through captivating imaginations.

This paper analyzes the language of the entire scene, and the effectiveness of Apuleius' use of ekphrasis is particularly clear in the climax of the scene when he describes Psyche's view of Cupid. Apuleius signals this crescendo of ekphrastic technique with the simple *videt*, proceeding to lead the audience's imagination over the vision of the god. Apuleius begins with Cupid's head and golden hair, and the liquid letters drip off the tongue, matching the image of his hair (*aurei, genialem, temulentam*). Apuleius then describes Cupid's face, slowing down the pace by using a high percentage of multi-syllabic words. This invites the eyes of the imagination of the audience to wander over Cupid's sleeping form just as Psyche's do, prompting them to contemplate pure Love.

This masterful performance reveals more than Apuleius's rhetorical ability. By inviting the imagination to engage, Apuleius pulls his audience into his allegory, forcing them to identify with Psyche, and strengthening the message of his allegory. As a self-styled philosopher-orator, Apuleius provides a case study for the exploration of the interaction between philosophical allegory and rhetoric during the Second Sophistic.

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