

CHARACTERIZATION IN APULEIUS' CUPID AND PSYCHE EPISODE

CHARACTERIZATION IN APULEIUS' CUPID AND PSYCHE EPISODE

BY JUANITA C.K. ELFORD, M.A., B.A. (HONS)

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University © Copyright by Juanita C.K. Elford, June 2011

McMaster University DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2011) Hamilton, Ontario (Classics)

TITLE: Characterization in Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche Episode

AUTHOR: Juanita C.K. Elford, M.A., B.A. (Hons)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Paul Murgatroyd

NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 302

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a careful study of characterization in the Cupid and Psyche episode (IV.28 - VI.24) in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. In general, although the *Metamorphoses* has been the subject of a good deal of scholarly interest as of late, there has previously been minimal focused examination of characterization in the Cupid and Psyche section. This dissertation therefore represents an important contribution to current scholarship and uses a multi-faceted approach which includes investigation of the characters' relationships to one another, roles, function, speech, intertextual connections, and questions of genre and authorial technique.

After a brief discussion of preliminaries such as the scope of the study, methodology, and the isolation of the Cupid and Psyche narrative from the rest of the novel, Chapter One examines the minor characters of the episode. The minor characters are defined and then placed into five groups for analysis: the invisible servants, the personifications of the abstract concepts, the floral and faunal characters, the animate object, and the deities. Chapter Two addresses the role of Psyche's family in the narrative, covering her parents' small but important contribution and her sisters in their larger role as Psyche's secondary adversaries. Chapters Three, Four, and Five investigate the characterization of Venus, Cupid, and Psyche respectively. The Conclusion summarizes the larger picture of Apuleius and his approach to characterization and reviews some of his favorite techniques of characterization, as well as his approach to the characterization of females.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*in Assumptione B. Mariae Virg. MMXI  
Novum Eboracum*

It is my happy duty to acknowledge first the guidance of my supervisor, Professor Dr. Paul Murgatroyd whose corrections and scholarly example have improved this dissertation immeasurably. The errors and omissions which may remain are, of course, all my own. The members of my supervisory committee, Professor Dr. Daniel McLean and Professor Dr. Howard Jones, have made valuable contributions to the present work as well. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Ontario Government and the Department of Classics of McMaster University. I am no less indebted to those dear hearts who have offered moral support such as Ms. October Ivey, Mr. Anthony Falcone, and my parents, Mr. Stewart Elford and Mrs. Loretta Elford, *sine quibus non*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Figures.....	viii
PREFACE	
Preliminaries.....	1
Scope of Study.....	2
Methodology.....	3
Isolation of the Cupid and Psyche Episode.....	4
CHAPTER ONE: MINOR CHARACTERS	
Definition of Terms.....	8
The Invisible Servants.....	9
The Personification of Abstract Concepts.....	12
The Floral and Faunal Characters	
The Tattletale Bird.....	19
The Ant.....	21
The Reed.....	24
The Eagle.....	27
The Talking Tower.....	31
Deities	
Pan.....	35
Ceres and Juno at 5.31.....	40
Ceres at 6.1.....	45
Juno at 6.3.....	48
Mercury.....	52
Jupiter.....	54
Conclusions.....	58
CHAPTER TWO: PSYCHE’S FAMILY	
Psyche’s Mother and Father.....	63
Psyche’s Sisters.....	65
Conclusions.....	88
CHAPTER THREE: VENUS	
Introduction.....	91
Sources and Models for Venus	
<i>Venus Caelestis</i> and <i>Venus Vulgaris</i> .....	93
Venus and Love Poetry.....	97
Lucretius.....	99
Apuleius and the stock characters of Ancient Drama.....	100
Myth.....	104
Apuleius’ Venus and Virgil’s <i>Aeneid</i> .....	106

Apuleius' Venus and Virgil's Juno.....	108
Apuleius' Venus and Virgil's Venus.....	118
Character Analysis.....	121
First Appearance.....	122
Venus' Speech.....	133
Comparison with other Characters.....	137
Venus' Status.....	142
Venus Inverted.....	146
Humor and Wit.....	147
Venus' Function.....	151
Conclusions.....	152
 CHAPTER FOUR: CUPID	
Introduction.....	154
Previous Scholarship on Cupid in Apuleius.....	156
Cupid's General Literary Tradition.....	164
Apuleius' Cupid and Virgil's <i>Aeneid</i> .....	171
Cupid as the <i>adulescens amans</i> of Ancient Comedy.....	175
Importance and Function.....	182
First Appearance.....	184
Cupid's First Appearance and his Relationship to Psyche and Venus.....	185
Cupid's First Appearance and the Narrator's Description.....	188
Venus' Speech and Cupid's First Appearance.....	191
Cupid's Speech and Silence.....	194
Physical Description.....	201
Cupid's Status.....	205
Cupid's Actions.....	207
Cupid and the Oracle.....	210
Humor and Wit.....	212
Conclusions.....	215
 CHAPTER FIVE: PSYCHE	
Introduction.....	217
Previous Scholarship on Psyche in the Cupid and Psyche Narrative.....	219
Virgil and the Construction of Apuleius' Psyche.....	224
Psyche and Dido.....	225
Psyche and the Venus of Virgil's <i>Aeneid</i> .....	230
Psyche and Virgil's Aeneas.....	233
The General Situation.....	234
Psyche's Sisters.....	236
Psyche's Labors.....	238
Psyche and Ancient Comedy.....	244
The Unusual Application of Psyche's Comic Elements.....	245
Psyche and Lucius.....	250

Psyche’s First Appearance.....	252
Psyche’s Speech.....	257
Psyche’s Appearance and Description.....	262
Psyche’s Status.....	266
Psyche’s Importance and Function.....	269
Conclusions.....	273
FINAL CONCLUSIONS: APULEIUS AND CHARACTERIZATION	
Introduction.....	275
Direct Characterization.....	275
Indirect Characterization.....	278
First Appearances and Dynamism.....	280
Character as Narrative Device.....	281
Intertextual Characterization.....	283
Characterization of Female.....	284
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	289

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Sisters' Traits.....	87
Figure 2: Distribution of Direct Speech among Characters by Word Count and Percentage.....	136

## PREFACE

### Preliminaries:

There has been confusion over the correct name for Apuleius' novel since antiquity. St. Augustine states clearly that the author himself approved the title *Asinus Aureus*.<sup>1</sup> Sallustius' subscriptions in the earliest manuscript make it equally clear that the title should be *Metamorphoseis* (nominative plural) or *Metamorphoseon* (genitive plural).<sup>2</sup> Following Winkler's ingenious compromise (that the actual title is *Asinus Aureus, περι μεταμορφώσεων*)<sup>3</sup> and for the sake of pleasing variety, I use the two titles interchangeably. Like others, for the sake of convenience, I refer to the specific portion of the novel in question as the 'Cupid and Psyche' episode, narrative or tale, notwithstanding the reasonable objections raised by Winkler.<sup>4</sup> All references are to the slightly amended version of Helm's 1955 Teubner text found in the *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius*, unless otherwise stated. In footnotes whole works are referred to by author's name alone; partial ones by author's name and page number.

---

<sup>1</sup> *De Civitate Dei* 18.18.

<sup>2</sup> Laurentianus 68.2. See Robertson on the manuscripts of Apuleius' novel.

<sup>3</sup> Winkler, 292f.

<sup>4</sup> Winkler, 89f., reminds us that the title, though popular, is unofficial and was not sanctioned by Apuleius. Moreover, it totally spoils the suspenseful effect of the narrative to reveal (by its very title!) the identity of the tale's initially unidentified mystery characters. It would be, Winkler points out, like entitling a detective novel "The Butler Did It".

Where the bibliography contains more than one work by a given author, works are specified by author's name and date.

Scope of Study:

This study is focused on Apuleius' use of characterization in the Cupid and Psyche episode (*Apulei Metamorphoseon Libri IV.28 – VI.24*). I am concentrating on aspects of Apuleius' art which have not been carefully examined previously and I do not wish to repeat the studies which others have done. While it is clear that the Cupid and Psyche episode is deeply influenced by the author's Platonic philosophy and by religious considerations, for example, these aspects of the narrative have been well covered by others.<sup>5</sup> The same applies to exclusively psychological, allegorical, literary-historical, narratological, feminist, and autobiographical readings, aspects of which will, no doubt, arise periodically in my own interpretation, though no single one of these will be my focus.<sup>6</sup> In a post- *Auctor & Actor* era of Apuleian literary criticism, to assert that the *Metamorphoses* admits a multi-faceted approach seems a statement of the obvious.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> For the philosophical elements of the tale see especially Moreschini, Schlam (1970), Thibau. For its religious significance see N.L. Hoffer, Merkelbach, Scazzoso, Shumate.

<sup>6</sup> See especially: Gollnick, Makowski, Neumann for psychological readings; Fulgentius' *Mythologiarum* 3.6, Gély-Ghedira for allegory; Junghanns, Lesky, van Thiel for its literary-historical significance. For narrative technique see especially van der Paardt (1978), Smith, Svendsen. For autobiographical influences see Hicter. St. Augustine also acknowledges at least the possibility of reading the *Asinus Aureus* as autobiographical at *De Civitate Dei* 18.18.

<sup>7</sup> I refer the reader to Winkler's seminal work which has substantially influenced the discourse on the *Metamorphoses* for the past twenty years. In particular, see pp.2-22 and

Methodology:

Characterization can be tricky to tackle methodologically, in part because it has been under-theorized. The study of narrative has been systematized in narratology, the use of sources has been theorized by intertextuality, but a coherent and standardized method for the study of character has not yet been established.<sup>8</sup> Various tools and techniques for analysis, however, have been produced and it is useful to come at these characters in as many ways as possible. I wish to be sensitive to the ancient explorations of character, such as those found in Theophrastus' collections of ethical types or Aristotle's evaluative analyses of character, although ancient theories of characterization are not my focus.<sup>9</sup> Some modern techniques of characterization like Greimas' actant model, Fowler's componential analysis, and Hochman's comparative taxonomy offer helpful and practical approaches. Frow, Rimón-Kenan, and Harvey have also provided interesting theoretical discussions and pragmatic suggestions for investigation of character. Although it seems natural to think about a character as we do a person, Weinsheimer's semiotic approach to Austin's Emma Woodhouse (who is widely considered one of the most fully human characters in English literature) as an 'it', is to be emulated.

---

187 on the "revisionary interplay of shifting meanings that the original text contains in great abundance on every level." (187)

<sup>8</sup> On narratology see: Bal, Barthes, Chatman, Genette, for example. On intertextuality see: Barchiesi, Conte, Hinds, Thomas, etc.

<sup>9</sup> For examples of ancient views of characterization see Aristotle *Ethica Eudemia* 2-3, *Ethica Nicomachea* 2-4, *Rhetoric* 2.12-17; Cicero *De Officiis* 1; Plato *Respublica* 4.8-9; Theophrastus *Characters*.

Other techniques of character analysis which I use include looking at the function of the characters, their nature, their models, and their relation to earlier versions. I consider Apuleius' use of direct and indirect characterization, both major and minor characters, simple and complex characterization, the characters' physical, intellectual, and psychological attributes, their role, speech, emotions, motivations, interaction with other characters, their development throughout the narrative, the verbs and adjectives applied to each character by the author, the narrator, and other characters. I shall identify any favourite techniques of characterization which Apuleius consistently uses, as well as any other discernable patterns, such as the presence or absence of particular types. It will also be important to consider the effect of Apuleius' use of characterization on the tone, plot development, and meaning of the narrative as a whole.

The Isolation of the Cupid and Psyche episode:

I am hardly the first person to single out the Cupid and Psyche episode for study or translation.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the bibliography for Apuleius has expanded significantly in recent years and the Cupid and Psyche episode has been especially compelling for scholars. It is one of the most popular sections of Apuleius' most popular work, as even a quick bibliographic search will attest. The mere fact that this part of the novel is singled out for study and widely recognized by the unofficial title 'Cupid and Psyche' suggests that scholars see it, at least to some extent, as a separable part of the whole. Some, in fact,

---

<sup>10</sup> von Binder, Fehling (1977), Grimal (1963), Hijmans, Kenney, and many others have offered valuable studies of the Cupid and Psyche episode.

have said explicitly that *Apulei Metamorphoseon Libri IV.28 – VI.24* is a discrete unit, cleanly detachable from the rest of the novel. Shumate explains her decision to discuss the tale individually, saying that it seems to be “qualitatively different in tone and type from the rest of *Metamorphoses* Books 1-10. It is distinguished both from the other tales and from the main action by its remote fairy-tale atmosphere, its divine characters, and its happy-ending.”<sup>11</sup> James too points out that the tale has been treated (by others, not by James) as a “temporary transportation of the reader, as well as Lucius and Charite, away from a dark and menacing world to the realms of ‘happy ever after’. The myth has been retold on the understanding that it can stand alone, a story in and for itself.”<sup>12</sup> These ideas, I think, warrant a brief general rebuttal.

Although I am isolating the characters of the Cupid and Psyche tale for close study, I certainly do not wish to advance a reading of the narrative which separates the episode itself from the contextual whole in which the author himself set it. One can only imagine that Apuleius would have made it an independent creation had he not envisaged it as an important part of his novel. Certainly, the narrative’s considerable length makes this an obvious option for an author of Apuleius’ significant talent and range of repertoire. In addition, I am struck by the strangeness of viewing the Cupid and Psyche tale as divergent from the rest of the novel because of its unreal, fairy-tale feel, given that the ‘real’ narratives from which the Cupid and Psyche episode are to be distinguished include

---

<sup>11</sup> Shumate, 36. Elsewhere (252f.) the author does, however, argue that the Cupid and Psyche tale offers a parallel “expression-in-miniature” for Lucius’ personal transformation.

<sup>12</sup> James (1987), 120.

stories of a man turned into an ass, a woman into a bird, animated wineskins, and a stuffed re-animated victim of witchcraft. Surely the unreality of the Cupid and Psyche episode is an argument for its close connection with (not separation from!) the rest of the novel. Similarly, the primacy of the novel's thematic interest in metamorphosis, as evidenced most obviously by its title and by the plot points I have just mentioned, is also well represented in the Cupid and Psyche narrative where Cupid becomes a husband and a mortal becomes an immortal. As for the notion that Cupid and Psyche offer the audience (either internal or external to the novel) a break from the dark and threatening world of the rest of the novel – Psyche's story, that of a rather helpless girl driven mercilessly to the point of suicide by hostile heavenly forces who punish her for a 'crime' which is quite beyond her control, is hardly a comforting view of one's place in the universe. Even if she is miraculously restored for that 'happy ending', it is at the mere whim of the gods. The uncontrollable, unpredictable vicissitudes of Psyche's life seem to me rather like those which Lucius and Charite and others undergo.<sup>13</sup>

I will, as the following chapters unfold, have occasion to discuss many specific connections between the characters of the Cupid and Psyche episode and the characters of other narratives of the novel such as Lucius, Isis, etc. It is sufficient, at this juncture, to point out that as Gestalt theory shows, the whole is something different from the sum of parts and a novel is something different from an assortment of unrelated narratives. There are intratextual connections between the diverse elements of the *Metamorphoses*

---

<sup>13</sup> I am not alone in seeing such links. See, for example, Accardo, 51f.; Gianotti, 36-7; Kenney, 12-16; MacKay, 477; Sandy (1972), 180; Tatum (1969), 508-14.

which make the novel differ fundamentally from a simple sum total of narrative, plot points and characters: “summing up is a meaningless procedure, whereas the whole-part relationship is meaningful.”<sup>14</sup> My paradoxical goal, then, is to integrate the Cupid and Psyche episode by isolating it.

---

<sup>14</sup> Koffka, 176.

## CHAPTER ONE: MINOR CHARACTERS

### Definition of Terms:

Subsequent chapters are dedicated to the individual analysis of major characters. This chapter examines the minor characters of the Cupid and Psyche narrative. Most obviously, the minor characters are those which do not play the major roles which Cupid, Psyche, Venus, and Psyche's sisters do. I have identified the minor characters generally as those which fall into one or more of the following categories :

- (a) those who are assigned a small number of words in the text (either speech or description);
- (b) those whose group of functions and qualities is not stressed by repetition, accumulation, transformation, modulation of tone, analogy, doubling, paralleling, or oppositional relation to other characters;<sup>15</sup>
- (c) characters who are unnamed or have indistinct personalities;<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Frow, 231f. outlines these as some of the elements of characterization as does Rimón-Kenan, 36f. who also points out that characterization is sometimes reinforced by analogy (to landscapes, to other characters, to their physical and social environment, etc) at 67f. Harvey, especially 74f., focused my attention on the importance of different kinds of narration such as doubling, paralleling, contrasting, modulation of tone.

- (d) who are given little background, few actions or minimally significant purposes;<sup>17</sup>
- (e) characters who may be called one-dimensional, simple (rather than complex), flat (rather than round);
- (f) who are not particularly vividly drawn or appear to have few choices (and therefore a diminished appearance of personal agency).<sup>18</sup>

The fact that the characters are minor does not, as I shall demonstrate, mean that their individual or corporate effect on the narrative is negligible. I have organized the minor characters into groups and will address them in the following order: the invisible servants, personifications of abstract concepts, floral and faunal characters, the animate object, and deities.

The Invisible Servants (5.2):

When Psyche awakens refreshed at 5.1 she finds herself beside a grove which contains a royal palace. She wanders in and marvels at its opulence and at the fact that it is unlocked (5.2). She is then greeted by a disembodied voice who cordially addresses her and invites her to rest, bathe, and eat. The voices she hears, the greeter says, are her servants who will wait on her attentively. Later these invisible servants prepare and serve her dinner, entertain her with music (a soloist, a vocal ensemble, and an invisible-lyre

---

<sup>16</sup> Fowler, 33f. stresses the importance of distinctive features and of a proper name.

<sup>17</sup> Murgatroyd, 151f. explains simply the value of the Greimas actant model and these features.

<sup>18</sup> Bal, 15f. stresses choice and confrontation as components of character.

player), and care for her after her first sexual encounter with her as yet unidentified husband. The servants certainly add to the supernatural marvelous feel of the palace and its owner. In addition to the palace's fine appearance, the prompting of the narrator,<sup>19</sup> and Psyche's own assessment that she is subject to divine providence,<sup>20</sup> they help to show the audience that Psyche is indeed in the home of a god. At 5.7 her sisters cite her control over invisible servants as evidence that Psyche *deam spirat*, a conclusion that obviously foreshadows her deification, as does the description of the wine which the invisibles serve (*vini nectarei*, 5.3).

The voices are likeable characters who do exactly what they initially promise (*sedulo tibi praeministrabimus*). The first voice who greets Psyche establishes the mistress-slave roles immediately by addressing her as *domina* and identifying the voices as *tuae famulae*. This entrance and greeting will be strongly contrasted at 6.8 when Psyche enters the palace of Venus and is immediately greeted by a different slave (*Consuetudo*) who calls her not *domina* but *ancilla*. There, as here, the behaviour of the servants reflects the feelings of their owner. They are a thoughtful touch (especially since they are largely female, care for Psyche so attentively, and solace her loneliness) and thus they are relevant to the characterization of Cupid too. In a witty twist, the invisibility of the servants parallels that of their unseen master Cupid, although Psyche's experience of the latter is decidedly corporeal! Other details of the servants are similarly clever and

---

<sup>19</sup> *...ut equidem illud recte videatur ad conversationem humanam magno Iovi fabricatum caeleste palatium.* (5.1)

<sup>20</sup> *Sensit Psyche divinae providentiae beatitudinem...*(5.3)

amusing. The servant who tells Psyche that *tua sunt haec omnia* is doing several things at once - offering a conventional formula of hospitality, echoing the earlier words of Byrrhaena to Lucius (who also finds himself in a beautiful home and is also victim to his own curiosity),<sup>21</sup> and, in a kind of pun, telling the literal truth.<sup>22</sup> These things really are hers. She isn't just visiting; She's the mistress of the house now. The image of food and drink floating through the air is amusing, as is Psyche's dazed under-reaction to such amazing servants. The servants' invisibility makes them novel and intriguing characters.<sup>23</sup>

We learn relatively little about the slaves who remain nameless and shapeless and largely without individual personality. The single most striking feature of the servants is that they are only voices, a fact which is stressed early, often, and clearly. This too gives rise to amusement. Being only a voice is appropriate to the task of singing solo or in a choir, but it must be tricky to play the lyre (even a mysteriously invisible one) without fingers! The very idea of a bodiless slave is arresting when the usual servile identity and function is so exclusively, so cruelly and insistently physical. A slave is little more than a body but these slaves don't have one. Finally, the formlessness of the servants presents a kind of reversal of roles. The slaves (who are very sensitive to the needs of Psyche's physical

---

<sup>21</sup> Kenney, 142.

<sup>22</sup> *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius (GCA)*, 125.

<sup>23</sup> *GCA*, 125 cites Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3.299 (Echo) and Lucian *Ver. Hist.* 12f. (the bodiless inhabitants of the Islands of the Blessed) as parallel.

body for rest and food, although they do not themselves have bodies) are, after all, serving a woman named Psyche who paradoxically does have a body.<sup>24</sup>

The Personification of Abstract Concepts:

Apuleius incorporates in this narrative several minor characters which are personified abstractions, namely Venus' enemy *Sobrietas* (5.30), the members of Venus' domestic staff *Consuetudo* (6.8), *Sollicitudo* (6.9), and *Tristities* (6.9) as well as *Voluptas* (6.24), the daughter of Cupid and Psyche, who are themselves personifications. Apuleius is certainly not unique among Latin authors in his use of the technique.<sup>25</sup> Still, his use of personification adds to the humour of the narrative and contributes to the characterization of other characters.

*Sobrietas* appears in the Cupid and Psyche episode in name alone. Having been informed of Cupid's dalliance with Psyche (5.28), an indignant Venus storms to her palace and angrily berates Cupid. She reminds her son, amid a hail of insults, of his parentage, his past transgressions, and especially, the fact that his station is inferior to her own. She then threatens to replace him with another son or a slave and considers turning to

---

<sup>24</sup> *GCA*, 125 and 129.

<sup>25</sup> Virgil, for example, populates the entrance court to the realm of Pluto with *Luctus*, *Curae*, *Senectus*, *Metus*, *Fames*, *Egestas*, and the like at *Aeneid* 6.274ff. There are, of course, many other such examples. See the *GCA* (1977), 110f. for a list of the other personified abstractions throughout the *Metamorphoses*. Walsh, 212 points to the use of abstractions in Greek romance; May, 188f. to Plautus' invention of abstract gods for comic effect.

*Sobrietas* for help in exacting her revenge. Here *Sobrietas* is described first (by Venus) as an enemy (*inimica mea*). Kenney rightly cites Ovid’s *Amores* 1.2.31f., the triumph of Cupid, as parallel.<sup>26</sup> It is, however, the differences between the passages which constitute the more salient point. In Ovid’s passage *Mens Bona* and *Pudor* are led in a general’s triumph. The image is specifically military. Here, however, *Sobrietas* is clearly pictured as a personal enemy (*mea inimica*) of Venus, with her own reasons for hating the goddess (*offendi saepius*, 5.30). The change from military imagery to a more personal enmity is fitting in the context of the domestic squabble pictured in Apuleius (between a son and his mother). Moreover, it is notable that *Amores* 1.2 speaks of Cupid as the captor of *Mens Bona* and *Pudor*. One can hardly imagine a more distinctly Roman and gloriously triumphant picture than that of a Roman general processing to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol. In Apuleius, Venus is proposing exactly the opposite situation, one in which Cupid is the victim (not the conqueror) of an enemy who will disarm him and who is no more than a crude and ugly woman (*rusticae squalentisque feminae*). If Apuleius’ use of *Sobrietas* is analogous to Ovid’s *Amores* 1.2, the analogy is witty, creative, subtle, and learned.

More to the point is Kenney’s observation that “the idea of an alliance between Venus and Sobriety, mutually exclusive forces, recalls Ceres’ appeal to *Fames* in Ovid’s story of Erysichthon.”<sup>27</sup> This connection is worth pursuing more fully. The two passages share

---

<sup>26</sup> *Mens Bona ducetur manibus post terga retortis / et Pudor er castris quidquid Amoris obest.* See Kenney, 186.

<sup>27</sup> Kenney, 186. Ovid *Metamorphoses* 8.814f.

numerous features and it seems that Apuleius has put his own spin on the situation. Both passages feature two goddesses, one affronted (*Ceres/Venus*), the other an unlikely ally (*Fames/Sobrietas*), against a single male offender (*Erysichthon/Cupido*). Yet, Ceres' injury is substantially more deserving of vengeance. Ceres acts to punish a violent, unrepentant murderer. Venus, on the other hand, is set to punish harshly, not a stranger, but her own son for the 'crime' of falling in love with a woman she considers her rival. Cupid's culpability here falls noticeably short of Erysichthon's.<sup>28</sup>

Both authors show the reluctance of the offended goddess to make contact with her intended ally. Venus bristles at the thought of talking to *Sobrietas* and *Ceres* actually resorts to using an intermediary oread since *...neque enim Cereremque Famemque / fata coire sinunt...*<sup>29</sup> Venus, despite her assertions to the contrary, does not employ *Sobrietas* while Ceres follows through on her plan with a careful strategy, taking care to provide transport and explicit instructions to her helpers. Finally, both authors depict the avenger's assistant as unsophisticated and unattractive.<sup>30</sup> Only Ovid's account, however, does so fairly. Who could question the undesirability of hunger but what, exactly, is so negative about sobriety? Lucius benefits from a voluntary abstinence before being joyfully added to the priesthood<sup>31</sup> and Venus' sobriety need only be suspicious for its

---

<sup>28</sup> Ceres and Juno will shortly question whether Cupid's behaviour constitutes a crime at all and will cite the boy's age and gender as mitigating factors. *Quid tale...deliquit tuus filius....Quod autem, oramus, isti crimen...*5.31.

<sup>29</sup> 8.785-6.

<sup>30</sup> Apuleius' Venus says so of Sobriety expressly, while Ovid's account contains a lengthy and comically repulsive description of Hunger's appearance and daily life.

<sup>31</sup> *spontali sobrietate*, 11.30.

suddenness.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Venus (in her irrational anger) imagines that Sobriety would be the perfect person to inflict her unrestrained punishments.<sup>33</sup> Hunger can reasonably be expected to cause hunger but one could not expect *sobrietas* to, for example, *immo et ipsum corpus eius acrioribus remediis coerceat*. The word's basic meaning implies freedom from the physical and mental effects of such substances! Moreover, the punishments Venus demands of Sobriety add to Venus' comically unreasonable appearance – Cupid will undergo a merciless *haircutting*? Apuleius uses the connection between this passage and Ovid's and the personification of *Sobrietas* in a more than accidental way. Here the characterization of a very minor personified abstract contributes meaningfully to the unflattering characterization of Venus and adds considerable comic and literary interest.

Three personified abstractions are attributed to Venus as domestic servants: *Consuetudo*, *Sollicitudo*, and *Tristities*. The first of her handmaids, *Consuetudo*, is given primacy in that she appears first (as Psyche approaches the door, 6.8), occupies more lines, gives a short speech, and her actions and manner (*audaciter*, 6.9) are described. Her response to Psyche is swift and loud, and includes name-calling (*ancilla nequissima*), unfair accusation (*morum tuorum temeritate* - what does she know about Psyche's usual behaviour anyway?), sensitivity to her own relatively minor inconvenience (*quantos labores...sustinuerimus*), and violence (*in capillos eius immissa manu trahebat*). Her own

---

<sup>32</sup> *Cupido...matris suae repentinam sobrietatem pertimescens*, 6.22.

<sup>33</sup> *castiget asperrime*.

reference to Orcus highlights the horror of Psyche's predicament and foreshadows her actual descent to the underworld.<sup>34</sup>

The other two of the three, *Sollicitudo* and *Tristities* (6.9), are given little attention, with no dialogue and little description devoted to them. They are called by names which emphasize their negative characters<sup>35</sup> and described as *ancillae*, a title which should emphasize their connection to Psyche (who is an *ancilla* of the same *domina*) but instead serves to highlight the inferior and wretched position of the girl.<sup>36</sup> They receive Psyche and obediently torture her and return her to Venus. Their entire presence in the novel amounts to only three sentences which, nevertheless, underscore Psyche's unenviable lot (*misellam...afflictam*) and Venus' harsh and unreasonable treatment of her. Their only actions, after all, consist of obedience (in contrast to Psyche's insubordination) and of armed, violent, torture of an outnumbered and pregnant woman.<sup>37</sup> The actions of *Sollicitudo* and *Tristities* (aptly) leave Psyche feeling *sollicitudo* and *tristities*. Each of

---

<sup>34</sup> Parker, 138 also notes the use of foreshadowing.

<sup>35</sup> Like *Consuetudo*, the personifications *Sollicitudo* and *Tristities* are unparalleled so Apuleius seems to use an imaginative invention here, though as *GCA*, 426 points out, it is not hard to see *Terror* and *Metus* as comparable. May, 190f. offers as corollary the numerous personified emotions found in comedy. The negative connotations of anxiety and sadness are obvious enough but habit is not necessarily so (5.4.5). See Parker, 137n.32 for the idea that the negative personification of *Consuetudo* at 6.8 is a play on the earlier appearance of the word at 5.4.

<sup>36</sup> *Tandem, ancilla nequissima, dominam habere te scire coepisti.* 6.8.

<sup>37</sup> *Sollicitudo* and *Tristities* are armed: *flagellis...et ceteris tormentis* (6.9); Psyche is outnumbered: it is three (or four if you count Venus) against one; the servants are obedient: *At illae sequentes erile praeceptum* (6.9); while Psyche is insubordinate: *contumaciae* (6.8); and great with child: *turgidi ventris* (6.9). The ancients were certainly aware of the need for special care (and the avoidance of excessive mental and physical distress) during pregnancy, see Hippocrates *Mul.* 25, *Nat. puer.* 13; Aristotle *Poetics* 7.16.

these details arouses pity for Psyche and adds to the perception that Venus is violent and cruel. That she laughs maniacally at the sight of Psyche and in the presence of Trouble and Sadness (of all things) shows just how unreasonable she is. The choice of two such negative forces as attendants for Venus here (as opposed to her earlier retinue at 4.31) further emphasizes that the goddess is a dark and threatening force.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Apuleius mentions the daughter of Cupid and Psyche, *Voluptas*, in the last lines of the narrative (6.24). Like the previous personifications of abstract principles, the inclusion of this one, especially in its emphatic position at the close of the tale, underlines the (rather obvious) openness of the narrative to symbolic or allegorical readings and reflects Apuleius' fondness (seen throughout the novel) for names which are related to common nouns or draw on other important connections.<sup>39</sup> Unlike the other personifications, *Voluptas* as a figure is not an Apuleian invention.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the character's appearance here has some distinctly Apuleian features. The narrator's choice to delay revealing Pleasure's identity is typical of the *Metamorphoses*<sup>41</sup> and that the child is a girl (instead of the boy the audience has been led to expect) adds to the surprise.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> At 4.31 her happy attendants include a choir of Nereus' daughters, Portunus, Salacia, Palaemon, and a troop of Tritons who variously play her music, hold her mirror, shade her, etc. This is a considerably rosier picture.

<sup>39</sup> See Gely-Ghedira, Kenney, 27f. on allegory and Hijmans (1978), 107ff. on names in the *Met*.

<sup>40</sup> See Kenney, 224ff. and *GCA*, 553.

<sup>41</sup> On Apuleius' tendency to delay identification of characters see Bernhard, 93n.45 and Brotherton, 36f.

<sup>42</sup> *GCA*, 185, points out that the child is repeatedly referred to in the masculine (*infans aureus*, 5.14; *spurius*, 6.9, for example).

In fact, *Voluptas* contradicts several of the reader's expectations. She is (as the daughter of two gods) a goddess,<sup>43</sup> although Cupid had threatened that their child would be a mortal if she revealed his mystery.<sup>44</sup> Psyche prematurely rejoiced *divinae subolis solacio* (5.12) but by the end of the narrative the audience knows that she ignored Cupid's numerous warnings and so could rightly wonder about the outcome of the pregnancy. Psyche's sisters (5.14), who ironically intend to lie (and are therefore not credible), most accurately describe the coming child as good (*Quantum...boni*), a source of joy (*Quantis gaudiis...hilarabis*), golden (an epithet applied commonly to gods and goddesses),<sup>45</sup> a little Cupid, and (at 5.18) an *opimioire fructu*.<sup>46</sup> In a witty twist their lies are true; *Voluptas* is all these things. At 5.16 they rightly ascertain (and jealously dread) the probability that the child will be divine (*deum...divini puelli*), although here too they get the gender wrong. Venus, who clearly intends to be cruelly sarcastic, also unknowingly (and in retrospect amusingly) predicts the child's important status (*praeclara subole*, 6.9). Her speech (mis)leads us to expect, instead of *Voluptas*, a son (*filius*) and a *spurius* one at that. It is, perhaps, in answer to this very expectation that the procedural and legal validity of the marriage between Psyche and Cupid is stressed in the narrator's

---

<sup>43</sup> Kenney, 224ff. notes that *Voluptas* had a cult at Rome and that she was elsewhere (as here) associated with Venus.

<sup>44</sup> 5.11.

<sup>45</sup> Applied to Venus at Virgil *Aeneid* 10.16; to Amor at Ovid *Amores* 2.18.36, for example.

<sup>46</sup> The sisters threateningly (and wrongly) imply that the child will be a literal fruit – a human crop to be devoured. Their estimation turns out (by a pun) to be correct in another sense of the word. *Voluptas* is pleasure, gratification, satisfaction, a reward, an advantage, enjoyment (all other meanings of *fructus*). See *OLD s.v. fructus* 1, 4, 5, 6.

announcement of the birth of *Voluptas*.<sup>47</sup> With so many opposing predictions of the outcome of the pregnancy (Venus even threatens to prevent the birth altogether at 6.9), Apuleius builds suspense (delaying the crucial information until the very end) and cannot fail to surprise his readers with the true gender, status, and identity of the child. *Voluptas*, then, is not only part of the final line of the narrative and the happy resolution of previous worries, but the tale's last opportunity for a delicious surprise revelation. It is also worth noting (as have others)<sup>48</sup> that *voluptas* represents a thematic link with the purpose of the *Metamorphoses* as a whole and with the experiences of its intended and unintended audience (Charite and Lucius who both need cheering). Of course, if Lucius had been a little less concerned with his own pleasure in the first place he would not be in this mess. For the ass, at least, the story was attractive (*tam bellam fabulam*, 6.25) even if its immediate effect was pain (*dolebam*, 6.25), not pleasure.

Floral and Faunal Characters:

The Tattletale Bird (5.28):

While Psyche continues her pursuit of Cupid, who is by now in his mother's home, a bird<sup>49</sup> dives down<sup>50</sup> to Venus in *Oceani profundum gremium* and tattles on Cupid to his

---

<sup>47</sup> *Sic rite Psyche convenit in manum Cupidinis; et nascitur...filia...* (6.24). *GCA*, 552f.

<sup>48</sup> Kenney, 224f.; Walsh, 192n.5; *GCA*, 552f. The novel begins and ends with the notion: *lector intende: laetaberis* (1.1); *gaudens obibam* (11.30).

<sup>49</sup> A *gavia* is likely a seagull according to Arnott, 261f.

mother. The bird is given little physical description (we know only that it is white<sup>51</sup> and that its flight to Venus is hurried). If the bird has some personal motivation for speeding to be the first to tattle (besides a sycophantic desire to ingratiate herself with Venus or a sadistic desire to stir up trouble, both of which she successfully does),<sup>52</sup> it is difficult to see. Once she has arrived the verbs which describe her actions uniformly stress her big mouth (*indicat, ganniebat, non conticuit*) and the violence of her verbal assault on Cupid (*lacerans*). The adjectives applied to the bird by the narrator are similarly unflattering and consistent (*verbosa, satis curiosa, loquax*). The bird's personification as a gossip is humorously accurate. Her speech contains: some truth,<sup>53</sup> much which is false, exaggeration,<sup>54</sup> salacious subject matter, a target of interest to the listener,<sup>55</sup> provocative language,<sup>56</sup> and careful timing (designed to increase the impact of her revelation).<sup>57</sup> Her

---

<sup>50</sup> As sea birds are wont to do for fish. Parker 134n.28 notes the appropriateness of the choice of a sea bird since Venus was born in the sea and is often pictured there.

<sup>51</sup> The bird's whiteness is a detail which Kenney, 180 sees as a possible connection to Ovid *Metamorphoses* 2.531f., the story of Apollo and Coronis.

<sup>52</sup> Venus addresses the bird as *quae sola mihi servis amanter*. That upon arrival the bird stations herself right next to Venus (*ibi commodum Venerem lavantem natantemque propter assistens*) and talks right *in auribus Veneris* may also suggest this desire for favour.

<sup>53</sup> Parker, 134 argues that she reports only two true statements: first, that Cupid is hurt, and second that the girl is Psyche. This is not the case. The bird accurately mentions that Venus is swimming and that Cupid is very much in love, for example.

<sup>54</sup> Is it really what *everyone* is saying? Is Cupid's recovery really in doubt? *No one* is in love anymore? Pan and Echo seem to be doing fine.

<sup>55</sup> The bird is sure to interest Venus with talk about Venus herself and her own son.

<sup>56</sup> Surely a more diplomatic phrase than *montano scortatu* could have been found! *scortatu* draws additional attention since it is a *hapax*.

<sup>57</sup> As Parker, 135 points out, she saves the "juiciest information", Psyche's identity, for last. The bird's opening speech begins with Cupid's wound and builds to the total breakdown of social order. Her words are carefully enough chosen to include rhetorical features such as anaphora (*non...non...non...*), a *hapax*, and sound effects (such as the o-sounds in *cunctorum ora populorum* or the cacophonous s/f/t-sounds in *squalentium*

report is unnecessary, untrue, and unkind. There is nothing here which would endear the bird to the reader. She does not show a single redeeming quality and the behaviour she inspires in an irate Venus is equally deplorable. That Venus immediately accepts all of this (when some of it is manifestly untrue) shows again that she is an unpleasantly reactionary and volatile character.

Apuleius' choice to use a bird is an interesting one since birds are often associated with the sounds they produce (a normally silent animal would not have made as apt a choice), since it is a fitting contrast to other more helpful members of the animal world (such as the ant or the eagle) and since both Romans and Greeks were accustomed to the idea of birds bringing messages (by means of portents and omens).<sup>58</sup>

The Ant (6.10):

After subjecting Psyche to a beating at the hands of her servants and an angry tongue-lashing, Venus orders the girl to complete a seemingly impossible task (6.10). Psyche is to separate a jumbled heap of various seeds according to kind before the goddess' return that night. Overwhelmed by the enormity of the task, Psyche does nothing. Her first labour is completed (and thus she is saved at least for the night) by a kind and able ant

---

*foederum insuave fastidium* both of which *GCA*, 327f. notes). The bird's speech is calculated, not spontaneous.

<sup>58</sup> Bird augury, divination based on the movements of either wild or domesticated birds, was very common. See Homer *Iliad* 12.200f. and Aeschylus *Prometheus Victus* 488-492, for example.

who summons other ants to help. Apuleius' choice of an ant is a fitting one since the creatures are so often seen carrying small bits of food (as they must here). It also constitutes the addition of yet another female character in a narrative already rich in female roles<sup>59</sup> and permits the author to show another human-like animal (not unlike the *gavia* and the eagle). This is particularly appropriate in a novel where the main character is Lucius, a human in an animal's body and especially so in a narrative whose internal audience is, like Psyche, a helpless girl (Charite) who will presently be aided by an animal (Lucius the ass) to escape her female captor (although they too succeed only briefly). Apuleius is also able to make use of the features typically associated with ants such as their size, number, speedy movement, and industry so there is realism in with the unreal, fantastic aspects of these ants.<sup>60</sup> It is also possible that he draws on a folk motif and/or on a ritual or initiatory one.<sup>61</sup>

At any rate, the ant's compassion for the girl is stressed in both the description of the ant (*miserta...socrusque saevitiam exsecrata*) and in her description of Psyche (*Amoris uxori, puellae lepidae, periclitanti*). In fact, the only verbs used in the ant's short speech are *miseremini* (twice) and *succurrite*. The ant's directives secure the action of her fellow ants and similarly encourage the audience to sympathize with Psyche. This short

---

<sup>59</sup> The gender is especially noticeable since the ant will be characterized as a military leader – an unusual role for a female, to say the least.

<sup>60</sup> *GCA*, 438f. lists these as proverbial characteristics of ants (with the relevant ancient citations).

<sup>61</sup> For the folktale and mythical motif of the animal helper and sorting seeds see Hoevels, 185f. For representations of a girl, an ant, and an eagle on gems as a ritual scene see Schlam (1976), 33.

interlude of compassion provides respite from Venus' cruelty to Psyche (both immediately before and after this passage) and points up, yet again, the unreasonable savageness of her hatred for the girl. Even an ant can see that she is wrong. There is also something especially satisfying and witty about the fact that, although Venus intended to use the natural world (grain) against Psyche, it is the natural world (the *Terrae...alumnae*) who comes to the girl's aid.

Additionally, the ant's appearance provides an opportunity for wit and humour. Certainly there must be something amusing about a helper who is so absurdly small! The minuscule size of the ant is emphasized specifically in *parvula* and by the use of two diminutives in such close proximity (*formicula...parvula*) with the added emphasis which the homoioteleuton naturally brings.<sup>62</sup> Given the ant's small stature it is amusingly appropriate that she refers to Cupid as *magni dei*. He certainly must seem *magnus* to an ant! The ant's own epithet for her fellow ants (*alumnae*) also underlines their small size. This is set in contrast to the enormity of the task (which is repeatedly mentioned),<sup>63</sup> and the efficiency with which the ants carry out their purpose. Their behaviour is invariably described in active, positive terms: *discurrens, ruunt, summoque studio, perniciter*. To add to the witty incongruity, the ant is clearly pictured as a teeny military general (*convocat corrogatque cunctam...classem*) of an insect army who like any good military leader calls the troops together, addresses them respectfully (even conferring on them an

---

<sup>62</sup> Abate, 44 points out the effect of the diminutives. *GCA*, 439 notes the homoioteleuton.

<sup>63</sup> *immanitate praecepti; difficultatis tantae laborisque*, (6.10), for example.

august epithet),<sup>64</sup> gives them clear instructions (the ant's verbs are all orders) of what to do and how to do it (*prompta velocitate*). The little leader's words are well chosen to win cooperation.<sup>65</sup> She, in her aptly short speech, manages to play up Psyche's important position (*Amoris uxori*),<sup>66</sup> her attractiveness (*puellae lepidae*), and her dire need (*periclitanti*). The ant, then, is compassionate, helpful, successful, perceptive, and even susceptible to human charms and this too has humorous effect. That it takes a country ant (and not Psyche herself) to assess the situation, make an effective appeal for aid, and get the job done is a further reminder of the girl's comically total powerlessness in her situation. It is not just that she can't complete the task; she cannot even ask for help on her own.

The Reed (6.12):

The morning after Venus returns from her party and finds Psyche's impossible sorting task complete, she summons the girl and orders her to collect wool from a nearby flock of

---

<sup>64</sup> Similarly the narrator refers to them as the 'six-footed peoples' – a title which points up the absurdity of their literal personification here.

<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Finkelpearl, 341 and others have pointed out the Apuleian humour in the fact that the ant's speech draws on Vergil *Aeneid* 6.595 where the description is of the giant Tityos (not of tiny insects). This is also mock-solemnity and is strengthened by the use of rare words like *sepedum*.

<sup>66</sup> This foreshadows the end of the narrative when any anxiety about the status of the marriage will be laid to rest. This is also one of only two places in the narrative (the other is 5.23) where *Amor* is used instead of *Cupido*. As *GCA*, 441 rightly concludes the choice is "clealy motivated by the sound-play with *uxori*." This decorative rhetorical effect adds to the perception that the ant's speech is cleverly and carefully constructed.

golden sheep (6.11).<sup>67</sup> Psyche sets off willingly (not to accomplish her goal, but as is by now usual, to kill herself). She is saved by a green reed who dissuades her from suicide, explains the extreme danger of approaching the sheep, and advises her to wait until the animals are calm and then harvest the wool hanging from foliage in the woods. Psyche follows the reed's advice and does manage to complete her task.

The reed performs several important functions. It, like so many others in the tale, prevents the heroine's death by suicide. Its kindness contrasts unflatteringly with Venus' cruelty. As a talking plant it reinforces the element of marvel in the narrative. It also reveals the hidden danger of the situation and thereby prevents Psyche's death by attack. After all, Venus has seriously downplayed the difficulty of the task by saying that the sheep are unguarded (the guardian of the sheep being the expected threat) and by stressing Psyche's freedom to choose the way in which she will harvest the wool. She has also (no doubt intentionally) failed to mention that the flock itself is ferocious. Thus, the reed provides invaluable information to Psyche and allows the plot to move forward to subsequent labours. The result of Psyche's success in this endeavor is, of course, more anger and threats from Venus and this too contributes to the reader's view of Venus as an enemy and Psyche as a victim. The reed is the least active of Psyche's helpers since it does not actually *do* anything at all. Even its advice is pretty passive. Psyche is first to

---

<sup>67</sup> The task itself seems to be a complex and clever conflation of Jason's quest for the golden fleece, Aeneas' search for the golden bough, Menelaus' capture of Proteus in the *Odyssey* (4.363), Virgil's story of Aristaeus in the *Georgics* (4.387) and others, as Kenney, 205ff. and *GCA*, 450ff. explore more fully. Psyche's labour here and her interaction with the reed then add to the mock-epic aspect of the narrative.

wait under a tree's shade. Do nothing – at last an instruction which Psyche is capable of following!

While the reed is a sympathetic character, there are certainly other signs that an entirely serious reading of the character is not advisable. The initial description of the plant sets the reader up to expect that the reed will be kind and compassionate. Apuleius' use of positive words like *suavis*, *nutricula*, *leni*, *dulcis*, and *inspirata* suggests this,<sup>68</sup> as does the fact that the reed is under the influence of a god (perhaps Cupid?), that the plant advises her against suicide, and addresses her kindly and by name. It is particularly fitting that someone who is also described as *simplex et humana* should be willing to help a kindred Psyche. Nevertheless, when the reed's speech begins it seems the plant's real concern is for preserving its own waters rather than Psyche's life! There must be some comedic value too in the ridiculously full and novel personification of a plant who can be described as *nutricula* or *humana*, can speak directly to a human, show awareness of the situation of Psyche as well as self-interest, can see and prophesy.<sup>69</sup> That I should, I suppose, be referring to this blade of grass as a 'she', rather than an 'it' illustrates the absurdity of the situation. Moreover, the plant's speech is not without nuance (you know, for a plant) and includes elevated stylistic and rhetorical features.<sup>70</sup> In fact, the reed does

---

<sup>68</sup> Parker, 141.

<sup>69</sup> The personification of a reed may also be a nod to the story of Syrinx, see Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.689f.

<sup>70</sup> Parker, 142 notes the balance of *Psyche tantis aerumnis erercita*, the use of *non numquam*, and the careful accumulation of details about the sheep.

not merely speak it *vaticinatur* and *docebat* and considers its own waters to be *sanctas*.<sup>71</sup> Apuleius' decision to delay the subject of *vaticinatur* adds to the effect. Still, the plant's advice, while helpful, is less a prophetic utterance than a statement of what should be obvious to anyone who (like the reed) has observed the surrounding area for even a day. The reed seems concerned with its own status (a concern which is unattractive in a person and laughable in a plant). It puts itself on par with the giant plane tree<sup>72</sup> and artfully builds up the importance of its own advice by stressing the extreme danger of the sheep.<sup>73</sup> Finally, its description of the sheep cannot fail to amuse. They are incongruously located by both Venus and the reed in the woods (these are forest sheep?) and the details of their ferocity are similarly ludicrous. Sheep are normally very docile, responding submissively to herders and falling prey to attacks by other substantially more fierce animals. Certainly they do not inflict poisonous bites! The joke here in the arrival of solar-powered killer sheep works in much the same way as Monty Python's "killer rabbit of Caerbannog."<sup>74</sup> The animals' innocuous appearance renders its violent action absurdly funny.

The Eagle (6.15):

At 6.15 an eagle comes to aid Psyche. Venus has demanded (at 6.13) that Psyche fill a crystal vial with water from the Styx, a deadly task that quickly pushes Psyche to despair.

---

<sup>71</sup> *GCA*, 454 points out the connection here between the reed, the pipe, and Pan.

<sup>72</sup> *GCA*, 458 points out the humour of this comparison.

<sup>73</sup> Parker, 142f.

<sup>74</sup> *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1974).

As she stands senselessly, unable even to cry, the eagle swoops down to face her. The majesty of the bird is initially emphasized. It is described as *regalis*, associated with supreme Jove, and with Cupid's service. Moreover, the eagle's physical appearance is impressive. The bird comes into sight in its most imposing posture (with both wings outstretched) and descends from an equally grand location (*alti culminis diales vias*). When finally the eagle hurriedly snatches the *arreptam* vessel (an appropriate enough action for a bird who is *rapax*)<sup>75</sup> and hastens to fill it, the size and balance of his wings and his skill in flight are showcased especially amid such dangerous terrain. That he is resisted, threatened, and still successful adds to his appearance as capable and powerful. That he manipulates the truth to gain access to the water (it is not quite a lie - he is fulfilling Venus' orders *in a way*) shows that he is shrewd, if somewhat deceitful.<sup>76</sup> He may also be displaying a snide sense of humour since it is pretty clear that Venus would not want him getting the water for Psyche. Even part of the eagle's personal history is detailed. Unlike the other natural characters (such as the country ant or the tattletale bird) he is a famous animal. He is the very one who had carried Ganymede to Jupiter at Cupid's behest.<sup>77</sup>

Apuleius takes care to build up the eagle's status and focuses on the bird's fine physical qualities. This places him in sharp contrast to Psyche's pathetic uselessness and silliness.

---

<sup>75</sup> The eagle's association with snatching is emphasized elsewhere too. See Strabo *Geography* 13.1.11. He also snatched up Ganymede.

<sup>76</sup> Parker, 145 says that his comment "adds an ironical touch since Psyche herself is worshipped as Venus at the tale's outset."

<sup>77</sup> This is a very famous eagle indeed. So familiar is the story that Apuleius need not even name the young man. See Kenney, 210.

She has just resolved (again) to kill herself, is in the perfect place to do so, and yet cannot accomplish a thing. She can't even cry! Her comparative weakness elicits the audience's sympathy or perhaps by now some impatience and it is amusing that she seems so totally unfazed by a talking eagle, and one that talks down to her at that. The eagle is an interesting choice for other reasons too. The bird is appropriate to the rugged mountainous landscape which the ecphrasis at 6.14 describes so vividly. The eagle is routinely associated with great heights and its appearance is considered an omen of success (its entrance here is certainly good news for Psyche).<sup>78</sup> It is very strongly associated with Jupiter, whose decision to deify Psyche will be pivotal in the tale's happy ending.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the mention of having previously been in Cupid's service, has special point here.<sup>80</sup> Venus has repeatedly assumed Cupid's intervention in Psyche's successes and this detail suggests that she may be right and foreshadows the god's role in Psyche's ultimate success.<sup>81</sup> It is also a witty twist that the bird that carried off Jupiter's cupbearer himself becomes a kind of cupbearer here. Finally, and strikingly, the eagle is an apt choice to help Psyche since the bird himself has experienced something of Psyche's predicament. Antoninus Liberalis records the story of Periphas, a successful

---

<sup>78</sup> Virtually all references to the bird mention his soaring aloft or the like which is predictable enough in the description of a bird. The *aquila*, however, is especially associated with height and the heavens. See Hyginus *Astronomica* 2.16. For the eagle as an omen of success see Greek lyric II Anacreon, frag. 505d (Fulgentius *Mythologies*), Campbell.

<sup>79</sup> See Aelian *On Animals* 9.10; Apollodorus *Library* 3.141; Ovid *Fasti* 5.732 and *Metamorphoses* 10.152; Virgil *Aeneid* 5.252.

<sup>80</sup> Kenney, 210 notes that this detail makes Cupid's offstage role in the narrative explicit, although Apuleius has not specifically said anything about Cupid's influence or intervention. See *GCA*, 479.

<sup>81</sup> 6.11, 6.13.

ruler whom people then worshiped in place of Zeus.<sup>82</sup> Affronted, Zeus determined to punish the man. By the intervention of another god (Apollo in this case), Zeus is persuaded not to kill his innocent victim and instead transforms him into an eagle. The parallels to Psyche's experience with Venus are quite conspicuous.

The eagle is not, however, an entirely sympathetic character. His manner is comically discourteous and superior. He is, after all, just a bird! He lectures Psyche on the danger and power of the Styx (something he knows she already appreciates given that she is standing next to it paralyzed with fear!). He calls her *simplex* and *expers*. While this may be an accurate assessment, it is also an amusingly obvious one. Who would be experienced in retrieving water from the Styx? The apparent impossibility of the task is surely Venus' reason for assigning it. Additionally, Psyche is hardly in need of further discouragement at this point and his approach seems unkind. It is equally obnoxious that he, having explained that even the gods fear the river, assumes his own success.<sup>83</sup> His agreement to help (*Sed cedo istam urnulam*) coming after all this is impatiently short and curt, nor do we learn anything of his manner in handing off the water to Psyche. These somewhat more negative aspects of the eagle's characterization add colour and interest to the character without changing the overall positive appearance of the bird as a help to our heroine. He does, after all, succeed in retrieving the water and sparing Psyche from imminent death by either suicide or accident and is, therefore, vital to the plot.

---

<sup>82</sup> *Metamorphoses* 6.

<sup>83</sup> Parker, 144 points out the arrogance of this.

The Talking Tower (6.17):

At 6.17 Venus assigns Psyche her final task. She is to travel to the underworld, pass a jar to Persephone, request a bit of Persephone's beauty for Venus, and travel back up to Venus to deliver the jar of beauty in time for Venus to apply it before the *theatrum deorum*. This seemingly impossible task convinces Psyche that Venus is driving her to her death and leads (predictably by now) to thoughts of suicide. As she approaches the tower, intending to kill herself by jumping off it, the tower spontaneously speaks. The tower asks her why she wants to jump to her death, informs her that this is her final task, and over the next sections (6.18-20) gives Psyche detailed instructions on how to perform the task successfully. The tower thus plays an important role for a minor character and so is quite developed.

The tower's appearance here is remarkable in several ways. Firstly, even in a story with invisible servants and talking animals, it is surely noteworthy to find a tower capable of speech. This animate object adds to the fantastic and marvelous tone of the narrative and is a witty parallel to the talking architecture involved in love affairs in Catullus 67, Propertius 1.16, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 4.73.<sup>84</sup> Apuleius' use of a tower as the intended means for Psyche *ad inferos recte atque pulcherrime...descendere* recalls the sarcastic advice given to Dionysus for his *katabasis* in Aristophanes' *Frogs* and thus sets

---

<sup>84</sup> Purser, 212; *GCA*, 494.

a comic tone which undercuts the potential pathos of the situation significantly.<sup>85</sup> It is not at all clear that Psyche understands the irony of wishing to kill herself in order to avoid (!) a trip to the underworld, but the audience can surely see the humour in the situation and this also adds to the perception that Psyche is simple and a figure of fun. Lamarque has suggested that Apuleius' choice of a tower is a veiled reference to the burial rites of the Zoroastrians with which Apuleius would have been familiar but this theory seems less useful than the more obvious literary parallels and, even if there is here some allusion to the Zoroastrian *tours du silence* (*dakhmas*), there is surely some irony in using these as a model for a talking tower.<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, the tower's lengthy speech is remarkably detailed in its instructions. It directs Psyche geographically, anticipates numerous dangers both hidden (the lame driver, the floating corpse, the weavers, etc.) and obvious (the three-headed guard dog), offers effective strategies to avoid or overcome these snares, and identifies the equipment which Psyche will need to succeed (such as cakes and coins). The speech tells Psyche what to think, what to do, what not to do, and its meticulous accuracy is highlighted by the brief synopsis of Psyche's actions at 6.20 since those actions reflect the tower's directions so exactly. In addition to specific instructions for the completion of Psyche's task, the tower's advice shows general knowledge (about people on their death beds, for example),

---

<sup>85</sup> *Frogs* 117-33; Kenney, 212; *GCA*, 493f.; Dietze, 141.

<sup>86</sup> As Parker, 146n.47 points out.

moralizing,<sup>87</sup> and an ability to anticipate the probable reaction of her listener. It (she?) rightly warns against underestimating the importance of keeping both cakes (a mistake which would be easy to make) and clearly lays out for Psyche the dire consequences of disregarding her advice (*lux haec tibi prorsus denegabitur*) in a manner that is likely to catch the attention of her listener. It also takes special care (*praecipue tibi censeo*) in cautioning Psyche not to indulge her curiosity and look in the jar. The concern is well placed since Psyche's *curiositas* led her into this mess in the first place and since this last directive is the very one which Psyche ultimately fails to follow. It is an ironic twist that the tower's well-intentioned warning may have contributed to the girl's curiosity.<sup>88</sup> The tower is not only able to speak but shows real intelligence and insight. It is even directly called *prospicua* by the narrator. Apuleius' tower repeatedly shows novelty and humour in its description, by painting Charon as a harbour-master (as opposed to the *portitor* described by Virgil and Ovid) and by using very rare words like *teriugo*, for example.<sup>89</sup>

The tower appears to have supernatural knowledge of Psyche's personality, her present condition and thoughts (that she plans to kill herself, for example), knows her past (such as that she has endured other tasks from Venus), and is able to anticipate her future behavior. It is a witty twist that a stationary object should be an expert on otherworldly travel and it is never made clear why the tower should have such detailed knowledge.

The mysteriousness of the situation is emphasized by the sudden and unexpected way the

---

<sup>87</sup> Parker, 147 sees moral rectitude in the tower's aside at 6.18: *ergo et inter mortuos avaritia vivit nec Charon ille Ditis exactor tantus deus quicquam gratuito facit.*

<sup>88</sup> Parker, 147.

<sup>89</sup> Kenney, 214.

tower first addresses the girl (*prorumpit in vocem subitam*), by the otherworldly content of its speech, by the numerous echoes of Virgil's *Aeneid*<sup>90</sup> (in which Aeneas undertakes a *katabasis* with the Sibyl as his advisor), and most obviously by the narrator's characterization of the tower's performance as *vaticinationis munus*. It is an amusing twist that "the role of cicerone taken previously by Circe, Heracles and the Sibyl" is now being played by "communicative masonry".<sup>91</sup> The tower plays a sort of Sybil to this foolish female Aeneas. Psyche will certainly need prophetic help to succeed at this task and that fact underlines the cruelty and near impossibility of Venus' assignment.

The tower further points up Venus' brutality by its comparative kindness. The tower voluntarily and with no obvious motive or incentive speaks to Psyche. It immediately dissuades Psyche from her plan to kill herself, sympathetically addresses her as *misella*, and provides her with helpful and encouraging information, explaining clearly the irreversible spiritual consequences of killing herself.<sup>92</sup> The tower's appearance and behavior here allow Psyche to complete most of her task and thus move the plot forward towards Cupid's intervention.

---

<sup>90</sup> Harrison, 68 suggests that Apuleius also draws on Orpheus' *katabasis* in Virgil *Georgics* 4.467. On the many Virgilian phrases in the tower's description see Walsh, 57 and Wright, 280f.

<sup>91</sup> Kenney, 212.

<sup>92</sup> Parker, 147 argues that it is amusing that the tower feels so compassionately for Psyche since stone is customarily employed to convey an absence of feeling. This assumes (for reasons that are not apparent to me) that the tower is necessarily made of stone.

The extent to which the tower is developed is striking. This really is quite an impressive character and an amusing one. Ludicrously, the tower is knowledgeable, literate and well read (she certainly reads Virgil),<sup>93</sup> articulate and persuasive (she uses elevated diction and embellishes her speech with stylistic flourishes),<sup>94</sup> moralizing, solemnly admonitory, and prophetic. This is such a superior tower that there may well be a word play on several of the senses of *altus* in its description as *praealtam* (6.17). In addition to the primary meaning of *altus* (high), the word can also mean exalted, noble, haughty, proud, above the common, and can be used in the context of high style, deep thinking, and wisdom – all of which would apply to this unusual tower.<sup>95</sup>

Deities:

Pan (5.25-26):

Pan's appearance at 5.25 accomplishes several things. For a start, Pan's words highlight Psyche's connection to *labor* (*amore nimio laboras*). This is a significant verbal and thematic connection in that the recurrence of *labor* (ten times in book six alone) underlines Psyche's characterization as a pseudo-Hercules figure.<sup>96</sup> Like Hercules, she will have labours but unlike him she will be laughably helpless and unable to succeed on

---

<sup>93</sup> See above, n.90 on the tower's use of Virgil.

<sup>94</sup> See *GCA*, 494, 498 on elevated diction and stylish features such as *atra atria* in 6.19, for example.

<sup>95</sup> See *OLD* *sv. altus* 1, 11, 12, 13, 13 (b), 14.

<sup>96</sup> Krabbe, 226-7.

her own. She requires the aid of others (like Pan himself) and Apuleius uses Pan’s own assessment of Psyche (*amore nimio laboras*) to point to this ironic role and thus to contribute to the characterization of Psyche. Simultaneously, Pan’s advice to Psyche may foreshadow, albeit very generally, the advice Isis will give to Lucius.<sup>97</sup> Pan tells the girl: “*Luctum desine et pone maerorem precibusque potius Cupidinem deorum maximum percole*”, a recommendation which Isis also gives her initiate: “*mitte iam fletus et lamentationes omitte, depelle maerorem*” (11.5). This would also loosely link Psyche with the novel’s main character and with the concept of obedient and prayerful submission to the gods. Nevertheless, it must be said that exhorting a mourning or heartsick person to dry her tears is both an obvious and common thing to do. If a connection is to be made between Isis and Pan here, it is a faint one indeed.

More importantly, his noticeably sympathetic treatment of Psyche encourages the audience (by example) to feel the same compassion for her. From the very opening of their interaction Pan is sensitive and responsive to Psyche’s condition. He calls her over kindly and talks to her with soothing gentle words. His speech begins with a warm apostrophe (*puella scitula*) and reveals that he has assessed the girl’s condition carefully. He notes her faltering gait, her pallor, her laboured breathing, and her sad eyes, all of which are, no doubt, symptomatic of her physical and emotional weakness. That Pan observes her so attentively and conveys this to her is certainly evidence of his sympathy for her. His encouraging and kind attitude puts him in sharp contrast with Psyche’s

---

<sup>97</sup> Griffiths, 149.

sisters, Cupid (who has just left her), and Venus whose cruel treatment of Psyche is made even more obvious by comparison with a fellow god.

His kindness is especially noticeable because it is so unexpected. After all, Pan is elsewhere depicted as enraged by unexpected interruptions of his leisure time and an inadvertent Pan-sighting is placed in the same dangerous and undesirable category as glimpsing Diana's bath.<sup>98</sup> In fact, far from having the soothing effect which we see in his interaction with Psyche, Pan is quite often identified as a source of startling terror and panic.<sup>99</sup> His unusually gentle behaviour here may (in a witty touch) reflect the fact that he has repeatedly been in Psyche's very same position. He identifies with Psyche since the objects of his affection (such as Syrinx, Pity's, and Pholoe) always seem to reject and flee him (as Cupid has just fled a desperately pursuing Psyche).<sup>100</sup> He has, in fact, been familiar with this kind of rejection from infancy. At birth his own nurse, startled by his ugly bearded face, jumped up and ran away.<sup>101</sup> To say that he is 'not unfamiliar' with her situation (*non inscius...*) is something of a comic understatement in this light. His

---

<sup>98</sup> Theocritus 7.107; Ovid's *Fasti* 4.751.

<sup>99</sup> Euripides *Rhesus* 36; Pausanias 10.23.7; Statius *Thebaid* 11.32; *Suidas s.v. Panikoi deimati*; Valerius Flaccus 3.46;

<sup>100</sup> Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.689; Nonnus *Dionysiaca* 16.289 and 42.363 on Syrinx; Propertius *Elegies* 1.18; Nonnus *Dionysiaca* 2.85, 42.196, and 42.257 on Pity's; Statius *Silvae* 2.3.1 on Pholoe.

<sup>101</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Pan* 19. His shabby appearance is also emphasized here. He is *hircuosus, rusticanus, and upilio* (even by his own estimation).

appearance here with Echo, who is also frequently depicted as spurning him, subtly underlines this point.<sup>102</sup>

Other aspects of their exchange also point toward seeing Pan as a figure of fun. While Pan is elsewhere associated with teaching (especially music) to nymphs<sup>103</sup> and while he takes care to mention that he is *instructus*, note that he is teaching Echo to repeat various songs back to him (...*eamque voculas omnimodas edocens recinere*). ‘Teaching’ an echo to repeat must be an achievement roughly equivalent to teaching water to be wet. In a similar way, Pan’s usual connection to prophesy and divination is exploited here.<sup>104</sup> Pan himself reminds Psyche that his appraisal of her situation is not guess-work *quod profecto prudentes viri divinationem autumant*. Still, his divine insight leads him to conclude only what is painfully obvious to all – Psyche has been dumped and she is heartbroken about it. His advice to her is equally pedestrian. Couldn’t anyone with even the commonest of sense have come up with the idea that she should *not* kill herself? Appealing to Cupid for help with one’s love life is a similarly unoriginal plan, although it is given piquancy here since she would be asking Cupid for help in her love affair with Cupid!<sup>105</sup> It is especially ridiculous that Pan spends time describing Cupid to (of all

---

<sup>102</sup> Kenney, 175 lists examples: Moschus *fr.* 2; Longus 3.23; Anon. *A.P.* 9.825.

<sup>103</sup> Pan as teacher: Apollodorus, *Library* 1.22; *LIMC* s.v. Daphnis 8b.

<sup>104</sup> Pan and prophesy: Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 54; Apollodorus, *Library* 1.22; Pausanias 8.37.11.

<sup>105</sup> Many have noted the absurdity of his advice. See Herrmann, 19; James, 153; *GCA*, 307, for example. Contra these see Parker, 152f.

people!) Psyche.<sup>106</sup> As his wife she is certainly already aware of his tastes. These more amusing aspects of Pan's appearance and behaviour help to tie the Cupid and Psyche episode to the larger novel in which it is set (a decidedly comic novel whose main character also endures hardship). Pan's amusing description also fits in with the irreverently humorous depictions of other deities in the narrative (such as Jupiter and Mercury, for example) and modulates the tone of the narrative which might otherwise be rather insistently depressing.<sup>107</sup>

Moreover, as a helper (even if he is somewhat ridiculous) he shows that Psyche is not entirely alone in her suffering. His advice to her is intended to secure her life (*nec te rursus praecipitio vel ullo mortis accersitae genere perimas*), her emotional stability (*luctum desine et pone maerorem*) and even her marriage. Pan's suggestion to focus on winning over Cupid is not entirely without merit since it is, in the end, only by Cupid's own intervention (6.22) that the two are reunited for eternity. Despite the aspects of Pan's appearance which may strike the audience as laughable, his deity is emphasized (*deus* appears twice, *deo* once, and *numine* once in reference to Pan in this short section). He advises prayer and worship, speaks of divination, shows previous knowledge of her situation (*non inscius...*), and is treated deferentially by Psyche. Even as a rustic deity (a

---

<sup>106</sup> ...*Cupidinem deorum maximum...adulescentem delicatum luxuriosumque...*

<sup>107</sup> Parker, 154: "His introduction to the narrative alleviates the tension created by Cupid's departure at 5.24; he keeps Psyche alive, and adds much humour to the narrative."

point he and the narrator repeatedly make), he is in a position to help. How clearly this separates him from helpless Psyche!

His surroundings reinforce the point. Pan, a bucolic god (*Pan deus rusticus* 5.25), appears in a typical pastoral setting complete with river, riverbank, grass, goats, music, and a mountain goddess in his embrace. The ecphrasis helps to underline the difference between the glorious ease of life for deities and the difficulties of mortal life. While poor pathetic Psyche has lost her husband and her will to live and has been dropped alone on a bank, Pan just happens (*forte*) to be seated comfortably in a *locus amoenus*, snuggled up to his favourite Oread. The disparity in their situations is pointed, and this too encourages sympathy for Psyche.

Ceres and Juno (5.31):

Initially Ceres and Juno appear together at 5.31. Venus (having just learned of Cupid's affair with Psyche) has an angry confrontation with him at 5.29-30. She then stomps off and runs into the two goddesses who notice and inquire about her sullen expression, although *non ignarae quae gesta sunt*.<sup>108</sup> They try, very unsuccessfully, to soothe her rage by offering Venus a series of rhetorical questions, platitudes, and back-handed

---

<sup>108</sup> See *GCA* 353f. for a discussion of whether the text should read *ignarae* or *gnarae*. Either way, the bird at 5.28 has said that everyone knows the situation and if so the goddesses' questions are comically disingenuous.

compliments. At the end of the encounter the narrator reveals their true motivation for defending Cupid: fear of his arrows. Naturally, Venus is only further offended by the exchange and brushes past them toward the sea at the close of Book Five.

There is much here which makes the initial characterization of Ceres and Juno interesting, if not downright amusing. Firstly, the goddesses are not treated individually. It is not possible, for example, to discern which of them is speaking at any point in the rather long speech attributed to them both at 5.31. This leaves the impression of a united front against a hostile Venus, and therefore plays up the danger and unreasonableness of her character since even goddesses prefer safety in numbers when they tangle, however subtly, with her! The observant audience must also see some irony in Apuleius' choice of goddesses here. Aeneas, a hero with whom Psyche is indirectly associated in this narrative,<sup>109</sup> was, after all, sent through all manner of hardship *saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram*.<sup>110</sup> Juno then is a comically unlikely person to counsel Venus against angry overreaction and vendettas, especially those which concern *spretaeque iniuria formae*<sup>111</sup> or honours paid to the secretly snatched lover of a family member.<sup>112</sup> Ceres is a similarly unsuitable character to advise Venus. After all, Ceres famously conducted her own mad

---

<sup>109</sup> See Chapter Five for a discussion of the characterization of Psyche and her association with the Aeneas of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

<sup>110</sup> *Aeneid* 1.4.

<sup>111</sup> *Aeneid* 1.27 refers, of course, to the Judgement of Paris. Venus is angered on similar grounds. Psyche's beauty has eclipsed her own.

<sup>112</sup> *Aeneid* 1.28 mentions *rapti Ganymedis honores* as one of the reasons for Juno's implacable anger. Similarly, Venus' relative (her son instead of her husband) has surreptitiously taken Psyche (not Ganymede) as a lover and many even before this have paid Psyche the honours due to Venus' cult.

global search for a girl (Proserpina), though she was seeking the return of a daughter, not a slave.<sup>113</sup> Still, the question she asks of Venus here (*Quod autem, oramus, isti crimen, si puellae lepidae libenter arrisit?*) could have as easily been asked of her. She certainly saw the crime when it was Hades liking her pretty girl! Where was this ‘boys will be boys’ *laissez faire* attitude then? These witty inversions and twists add interest to the characters’ appearance at 5.31. Similarly, it is possible that Apuleius has an eye to the general relationship of Venus and Juno in Virgil’s *Aeneid* and perhaps to their collaboration there on a matter of love (Dido). The start of Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica* 3, where Hera and Athena approach Aphrodite who complains about Cupid’s disobedience, also seems a probable intertextual source.<sup>114</sup>

Moreover, the attempts of the two goddesses *palpare Veneris iram saevientem* are patently and entertainingly ill-conceived. As we all know, nothing is more infuriating to someone already enraged than to be urged to calm down and accused of overreacting (especially when it’s true). The two goddesses give Venus back-handed compliments. Their very first words to her are to ask *cur truci supercilio tantam venustatem micantium oculorum coaceret*, a question which stresses her sullen frown as much as it does her dazzling eyes. Similarly, their seemingly complimentary affirmation that she is a mother *et praeterea cordata mulier* is, in fact, a sign that she is behaving in a manner that is not

---

<sup>113</sup> The rape of Proserpina and Ceres’ search is well known. See Apollodorus *Library* 1.29f.; *Homeric Hymn (2) to Demeter*; Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 5.2.3f.; *Orphic Hymn (41) to Demeter*, for example.

<sup>114</sup> Kenney, 188 identifies the connection between this scene and Apollonius 3.106-10. *GCA*, 354ff. elaborates slightly.

befitting a sensible woman.<sup>115</sup> They insult her capacity for clear thinking by asking whether she fails to see Cupid's age simply because he is aging well and the verbs which they use to describe Venus' activities are almost uniformly negative.<sup>116</sup> The initially polite tone of *domina* and *oramus* stand out against the rude things which the goddesses imply and actually say.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, it is possible that there is word play on several meanings of *domina*. Venus may see herself as the *domina* of Psyche but she is certainly not in control of Cupid here.<sup>118</sup> As a mistress herself to Anchises and others, the erotic title *domina* also applies to Venus, a title that points up her hypocrisy in objecting to the love affairs of others.<sup>119</sup>

In contrast to offering very faint praise right to Venus' face, the two goddesses are quite clearly flattering to her opponents, Psyche (whom they call a *puella lepida*) and Cupid (whom they call her *formosus filius* and defend obligingly). Moreover, the goddesses minimize Cupid's offenses against Venus. He has certainly done more than their

---

<sup>115</sup> The application of *mulier* and *mater* to Venus may have a special sting since she is a goddess (not a mortal *mulier*) and her behaviour here is hardly maternal. See *GCA*, 357 on this and the Ennian echo in *cordata*.

<sup>116</sup> Verbs such as *impugnes*, *perdere gestias*, *ignoras*, *oblita es*, *explorabis*, *culpabis*, *revinces*, *reprehendes*, *coerceas*, *praecludas* are not complimentary. Additionally, Parker, 158n.66 points out that Ceres and Juno humorously pick up on Venus' own words. She does call him *puer* and his embraces *licentiosis et immaturis ... amplexibus* at 5.29. Similarly, *tuae domus* recalls Venus' words *domus meae* (*GCA*, 358). *GCA*, 355 and Panayotakis, 33f. see the mention of Cupid's age as a way to mockingly play on Venus' anxiety about her own advancing age.

<sup>117</sup> *GCA*, 355 identifies the polite tone of *domina* and *oramus*. *GCA*, 359 says, for example, that the goddess' phrase *vitiorum muliebrium publicam...officinam* implies that Venus is the madam of a brothel.

<sup>118</sup> *OLD sv. domina* 1,2; *TLL sv. domina* I(a).

<sup>119</sup> *OLD sv. domina* 3(b); *TLL* III(a).

description, *libenter arrisit*,<sup>120</sup> would suggest and Ceres and Juno question whether he has committed a crime at all. They point out (irritatingly) that his conduct is perfectly natural and reasonable. They bring attention to factors which they feel should mitigate his culpability, such as his age and gender. They openly call attention to Venus' hypocrisy, call it intolerable, and address her with an uninterrupted barrage of questions to which she cannot respond until they've finally finished. Flippant word play (such as the early use of the word *venustatem* and the phrase *amores amare*) reveals that they are not taking this seriously. Their trite advice might be conventional in the mouths of women of the world but it is certainly an unexpected and amusingly common conversation for three Olympian goddesses.<sup>121</sup> They come off as tolerant and sophisticated, all very understanding about an erotic escapade while Venus (the goddess of such things, no less!) looks like a prig. Of course, Venus recognizes that she is being treated with ridicule.<sup>122</sup> If this is a strategy for calming her, it is laughably poor one! The twist is made more explicit when, after being initially misled, the audience learns that Ceres and Juno are actually acting out of fear of retribution from Cupid.

---

<sup>120</sup> Kenney, 188. *GCA*, 356 notes, however, that *adridere* and *libenter* can have erotic associations.

<sup>121</sup> Kenney, 188 points out that the goddesses “dispense conventional wisdom as women of the world.” He also notes (189) that the goddess’ “plea for forbearance is reminiscent of Micio’s relaxed attitude to the goings-on of his nephew and adopted son Aeschinus in Terence’s *Apdelphi* 50-76.” The connection to Roman comedy is instructive. See also *GCA*, 355.

<sup>122</sup> She is *indignata ridicule tractari*. It is noteworthy (and a metaliterary caution against too serious a reading of the passage) that *ridicule tractari* means both ‘to ridicule’ and ‘to make a comedy’, as *GCA*, 360 explains.

Thus, the appearance of Ceres and Juno at the close of Book Five performs several important functions. It adds to the perception that Venus is an unreasonable hothead and provides some subtle amusement and literary interest. The tempered reaction of Ceres and Juno makes Venus seem more unreasonable and encourages the audience to see Psyche as a sympathetic victim. Since the goddesses seem to support Cupid and Psyche here, the audience is encouraged to hope for some later help for Psyche. This allows Apuleius to surprise the reader when Psyche is later rejected by them both and Venus' angry departure also allows Psyche to meet with the goddesses alone.<sup>123</sup> I treat Psyche's individual meetings with Ceres and Juno below.

Ceres (6.1):

At the start of Book Six Psyche is desperately wandering around in search of Cupid. She spots a temple perched on a mountaintop and, although tired, quickly makes her way to it, hoping that it could be where Cupid lives. She enters and soon finds agricultural objects (which points to the temple's association with Ceres, not Cupid) and sets them in order out of a feeling of religious obligation and to appeal to the gods' goodness and mercy. Seeing this, Ceres appears at a distance and questions Psyche who falls at the goddess' feet and begs her for at least a few days of rest in the safety of her temple. Ceres says that she is moved and would like to help Psyche but because of her relationship with Venus she refuses Psyche's request and abruptly expels her from the temple at 6.3.

---

<sup>123</sup> Parker, 158.

Initially Ceres seems to be a kind and sympathetic character. She has just defended Psyche's love affair with Cupid at the close of Book Five. At the outset of her appearance here she is described as *Ceres alma* and she chooses to appear personally to Psyche when she needn't have, although she does so from a distance at first. She addresses Psyche as *miseranda* and shows that she understands the seriousness of her situation in her vivid description of Venus' all out effort to track and punish the girl. This is useful information for Psyche to have as is the warning Ceres gives her to see to her own safety. Ceres' emphasis on the impressive immortal powers (*totis numinis sui viribus*) which Venus is using against Psyche and her recognition of the service which Psyche is rendering her (despite her personal peril) make it seem probable that the goddess sees Psyche as a victim of Venus and one who is deserving of her assistance. The girl's devout care for the temple and her very humble posture of supplication make her a likely recipient of the god's benevolence.<sup>124</sup> Psyche's tearful, emotional, and multiple entreaties (which thoughtfully recount many of the objects, religious rituals, and people sacred to Ceres) add to this effect, as does the meagerness of the girl's request. Psyche is not, after all, asking Ceres to face off against Venus on her behalf or even to approach Cupid for her. She asks only to hide out among the grain stores until Venus cools down or until she can get a little rest.<sup>125</sup> Ceres even admits to being moved by her weepy prayers and to wishing to help Psyche. Additionally, Ceres is elsewhere

---

<sup>124</sup> See *GCA*, 373f. on falling at the feet in supplication and sweeping the floor with loosened hair.

<sup>125</sup> *GCA*, 378 comments on the simple way in which the actual request is stated (after the highly stylized and elevated prayer formula which precedes it).

associated with marriage and especially with newly married couples (like Psyche and Cupid).<sup>126</sup> All this encourages the expectation that Ceres will grant Psyche's request.

It comes as quite a surprise then, when Ceres abruptly ends their exchange by refusing to help Psyche, citing her kinship and friendship ties with Venus, calling Venus a good woman, and admitting that she cannot risk having bad blood between them. Ceres not only orders Psyche to leave immediately, she menacingly tells her to consider herself lucky not to be detained there in custody. It is suddenly clear to the audience that Ceres is not so friendly to Psyche. The surprise ending is typical of Apuleius' playful style (consider the ending of the novel) and this abrupt change in Ceres' behaviour invites the reader to reconsider the words and actions which previously seemed so positive. That Ceres calls Psyche *miseranda* now seems an ironic epithet since Ceres herself does not see fit to take pity on her and help her. Similarly, *alma* is an ironic appellation for the Ceres we see here.<sup>127</sup> Ceres' wonder at Psyche's ability to care for someone else despite the risk to her personal safety also has special point. Ceres is certainly not willing to put her own selfish interests aside to help Psyche! Psyche's groveling appeals to Ceres focus on her power over agriculture, her rituals, and potent mysteries. Yet, it is now clear that Ceres has little power.<sup>128</sup> She is cowed by Venus and cannot help Psyche even though she wants to. This shows that Venus' influence is widespread and powerful and inspires

---

<sup>126</sup> Servius *ad Aen.* 4.58; Plut. *de Off. conj.* 1.

<sup>127</sup> *GCA*, 371 cites other examples of *alma* being applied ironically to Ceres such as Lucil. 200 and Ovid *Fasti* 4.547. *alma* was also notably applied to Venus at Lucretius 1.2. If one thinks of that (and this is certainly possible since Venus is under discussion here) the epithet links Ceres to Venus and shows that they are on the same side.

<sup>128</sup> Parker, 158.

sympathy for Psyche. Moreover, Psyche's prayers to her were incongruously (even comically) elaborate, learned, and sophisticated for so helpless and simple a character as Psyche.<sup>129</sup> Ceres' description of Venus' rage-fuelled global man-hunt for Psyche does not fit with her description of the goddess as a 'nice woman' here and if she was so concerned about *malam gratiam* she should have approached Venus very differently at the end of Book Five. Her feelings are fickle and her actions self-serving.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, it is humorous that she describes her relationship with Venus as a *foedus antiquum amicitiae*. This parodies the important Roman concept of kinship and friendship ties<sup>131</sup> (a cultural convention which normally applies to Romans, not their gods!)<sup>132</sup> and simultaneously is comically lofty language for the kind of childish cat fight we saw at 5.31. Ceres' about-face adds interest to the narrative and inspires greater sympathy for Psyche whose destiny seems to rest on the passing fancy of very capricious immortals.

Juno (6.3):

Having been tossed out by Ceres and feeling doubly dejected (*afflicta duplici maestitia*), Psyche makes her way down from the height of Ceres' temple and spots a well

---

<sup>129</sup> Kenney, 191. See also *GCA*, 374f. on the ways in which Psyche's prayer follows the formal structure of rhetorical prose hymns and exhibits the sonority, alliteration, rhyme etc. associated with Roman liturgical language. See Pasetti for a detailed discussion of prayer in the *Metamorphoses*.

<sup>130</sup> Parker, 158.

<sup>131</sup> Grimal, 98.

<sup>132</sup> See also *GCA*, 381f. and Kenney, 192 on the numerous colloquial and legal touches in Ceres' response which add to the humorous lowering of this goddess to the level of an everyday Roman.

constructed shrine in the dimly lit valley below. She approaches the consecrated doors, notes the expensive offerings, the gold-lettered ribbons bearing the goddess' name, as well as thank offerings before dropping to her knees, embracing the altar which is still warm, and offering up a prayer.

As with Ceres, there is much in this exchange which could give the audience (and Psyche too) cause to be hopeful. After Juno defended Cupid in the face of an irate Venus at the close of Book Five one might expect the goddess to help Psyche here, although Ceres' recent refusal calls that into question. Still, in the initial moments of Psyche's arrival at the temple, before she even hears from Juno, we may notice encouraging signs. The temple is well constructed, has received costly offerings, gilded ribbons, and the altar has recently been used for sacrifice (it is still warm) – all evidence that the goddess is both popular and powerful. The level of recent and ongoing care implied by this contrasts nicely with the state of neglect which Psyche encountered at Ceres' temple. That the ribbons attached to the doorposts and trees are thank offerings for the goddess' help (*cum gratia facti*) means that this is a goddess who does answer the prayers of her suppliants. Furthermore, expensive offerings suggest that the goddess has rendered significant help. Psyche's willingness to assume an appropriate posture of supplication (on her knees embracing the altar)<sup>133</sup> and to describe the humbleness and desperation of her situation (*meis extremis casibus...in tantis exanclatis laboribus defessam imminentis periculi metu*) makes her a sympathetic character and one likely to inspire Juno's help. Psyche's prayer

---

<sup>133</sup> See May, 183f. on the parallel to Plautus *Rud.* 694 here.

with its emphasis on Juno's impressive and powerful position and its elevated epic touches (*Magni Iovis germana et coniuga; nuptam Tonantis et reginam dearum*) add to the effect. If any goddess is in a position to help Psyche, it ought to be the queen of the goddesses. The narrator similarly emphasizes the supremacy of Juno in noting that the goddess' sudden personal appearance is made *cum totius sui numinis augusta dignitate*. Although Ceres was cowed by Venus, it seems possible that Juno should be able to help Psyche whether Venus likes it or not. Moreover, Juno has special reason to help a pregnant Psyche recover her husband given her own station as a wife (*nuptam*) and her function as a protector and savior of women (*Juno Sospita*) in marriage (*Zygam*) and childbirth (*Lucinam*), details which Psyche wisely highlights in her prayer.<sup>134</sup>

Nevertheless, Juno too refuses to come to Psyche's aid. This, like Ceres' refusal, is something of a surprise. In this case, however, it is the obvious weakness and banality of the goddess' excuses which are the main cause for amusement. Juno's language immediately deflates her as it is noticeably lower in register than Psyche's elevated and elevating prayer.<sup>135</sup> Juno first asserts that she cannot accommodate Psyche's petitions since *pudor* prevents her from opposing Venus who is her daughter-in-law and whom she has always loved as her own daughter. This is a ridiculous defense. Juno's opposition to Venus at the close of Book Five was apparent enough to everyone (including Venus) and

---

<sup>134</sup> Clearly, this prayer with its epic touches and careful, artful, learned construction are too sophisticated to fit with the previous presentation of Psyche. See Kenney, 193f. and *GCA*, 387f.

<sup>135</sup> On Juno's colloquial tone see *GCA*, 392f.

the two goddesses were famously in bitter opposition in Virgil's *Aeneid*.<sup>136</sup> The mention of Venus' close personal and familial connection to Juno (through marriage to Vulcan who is Juno's son) is ironic since Venus cuckolded Vulcan in favour of Mars.<sup>137</sup> Venus' unfaithful relationship with Juno's son hardly obligates the goddess to be faithful to Venus in this business. Finally, it is obvious that the Roman laws which prevent the harbouring of runaway slaves apply to humans, not gods!<sup>138</sup> Juno's excuses then are comically transparent and lame. Juno is lying (so it is especially amusing that she begins her speech with *per fidem*) and she is lying to a human. It is clear even to Psyche at 6.5 that both Ceres and Juno were willing but felt unable to help her. Juno, like Ceres, seems to be afraid of Venus and embarrassed in front of Psyche. This is a very different and comically diminished figure from the Juno of the *Aeneid* who is fearless, active, and impressive and who even tries to manipulate Venus at 4.90f.

Juno's appearance here and her refusal to help Psyche are amusing and add to the build-up of Psyche's desperation. It is following this second rejection that Psyche determines to hand herself over to Venus. Thus Juno plays a key role in moving the plot forward

---

<sup>136</sup> The richness of Juno's temple here may also point to the rich temple of Juno built by Dido in Virgil *Aeneid* 1.446f. as *GCA*, 384 points out. This calls to mind the *Aeneid* so that one contrasts Apuleius' Juno with Virgil's Juno readily enough.

<sup>137</sup> Parker, 160. Venus had plenty of other affairs as well.

<sup>138</sup> *Codex Iustinianus* 6.1.4, for example. See Walsh (1970), 250 on the implications of this line for the dating of the novel. *GCA*, 392 notes that Juno's response is prosaic and that the "impressive description of the 'epiphany' of Juno to Psyche contrasts playfully with the answer which follows *protinus*, in which she does not display any *augusta dignitas*, and speaks like a Roman matron..."

while simultaneously increasing the impression that Venus is a dangerous and powerful adversary.

Mercury (6.7 and 6.23):

At 6.7 Venus and her train rise to Jupiter where she announces her need of Mercury's services. Mercury joins her retinue and descends to earth. Venus addresses the messenger god and instructs him to proclaim a reward for the whereabouts or capture of Psyche. This he promptly does and specifies that interested parties should meet him behind the Murcian turning post and that the reward will be in the form of kisses from Venus. Mercury's appearance in the narrative here is brief, as is his reappearance at 6.23 where he is Jupiter's announcer and Psyche's escort to heaven.<sup>139</sup>

His arrival on the scene at 6.7 has the functional purpose of persuading people to drive Psyche to Venus' door in desperation and at 6.23 he clears the way for Psyche's deification and the final resolution of the narrative. In both cases Mercury obediently follows instructions and effectively conveys information from a god, an expected traditional role for the heraldic Mercury. Apuleius emphasizes this (rather stately)

---

<sup>139</sup> Mercury escorting Psyche to heaven (instead of to the Underworld) is a witty reversal of his traditional role of Psychopompos (as Kenney, 223 notes). In becoming an escort for Psyche Mercury is *really* a Psychopompos!

position by affording him a noticeably and aptly stylish and carefully-wrought speech<sup>140</sup> as well as the title *dei vocalis* and *frater Arcadi*<sup>141</sup> of Venus. This elevation, however, is comically at odds with other aspects of the god’s characterization. He joins Venus’ retinue (which has only just been described at 6.6 as consisting of gay songbirds who proclaim the goddess’ approach with their delightfully sweet melodies) and he must have made an amusingly odd-looking addition.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, the description of the god as *per omnium ora populorum passim discurrens* like a common messenger,<sup>143</sup> his offer to meet any takers personally (imagine him, a god, standing around waiting in the Circus Maximus!)<sup>144</sup> and his own description of himself as a mere town crier (*praedicatorem*) all add to his comically incongruous characterization here. The Homeric echoes help make it clear that his deflated appearance is, in part, a parody of the traditional role of the epic messenger.<sup>145</sup> Finally, the content of his speech (an announcement of a reward for a runaway slave) with its humorously specific sexual content of exactly seven regular

---

<sup>140</sup> Parker, 162 points out the alliteration and rhyme of *septem savia suavia* and the tetracolon, alliteration, and juxtaposition in *metas Murtias Mercurium praedicatorem*, for example. *GCA* 415ff. detail many more such devices in Mercury’s speech.

<sup>141</sup> See Herrmann, 18f. for links with Arcadia in the narrative.

<sup>142</sup> Could this association with birds also be a witty play on the traditional depiction of the herald of the gods as winged? The two gods are elsewhere associated. Kenney, 199 notes the connection between love (Venus) and speech (Mercury) and cites Horace *Carmen* 1.30.8 and Nisbet and Hubbard *ad loc.* *GCA*, 411 adds Cornut. *nat. deor.* 24 and Plut. *coniug. praec.* *GCA*, 410 also says that the conversation here takes place during their flight to earth “in the spirit of Lucianic satire. cf. *Bis accus.* 8.9.”

<sup>143</sup> Kenney, 199 also sees a play on the Stoic identification “of Mercury (Hermes) with the divine logos and on etymological speculation.”

<sup>144</sup> Kenney, 200 adds that the shrine was a “well-known haunt of prostitutes”, a detail that surely emphasizes the lack of decorum in Mercury’s appearance here.

<sup>145</sup> See *GCA* 409 and 415 on Homeric verbal echoes.

kisses and one tongue kiss is comically unexpected.<sup>146</sup> The usual reward for a runaway slave is of course monetary, not amatory, and none of this is in keeping with the dignified office of anyone who could be called a *dei vocalis*. Mercury embroiders significantly on the *praemium* (compared to Venus' instructions to him) and there may be wit in putting such a pronouncement in the mouth of Mercury, given his personal history with Venus as the father of Hermaphroditus. Mercury seems to focus on the salacious stuff that interests him and even omits some of what Venus asked him to pass on. He does not, for example, provide a clear description of Psyche. In summoning the divine assembly together for Jupiter at 6.23 Mercury appears in a significantly more stately and distinguished role but even there his status is undercut via reference to mortal institutions such as the senate meeting.

Jupiter (6.7 and 6.22):

Jupiter first appears at 6.7 in his royal citadel with all the epic dignity of the king of the gods. Supplication of Zeus is a standard epic feature seen in both Homer and Virgil and

---

<sup>146</sup> Parker, 163 calls the sexually explicit message “comically vulgar and demeaning.” Kenney, 200 supposes that the number seven may be significant in that Lucius undergoes seven ritual immersions before his invocation of Isis (11.1.4). This, I think, is quite unlikely. It is improbable that a reader (even a very alert one) will remember this detail five books later or see any particular connection between kisses and immersions (and by extension between Venus and Isis). This also does not take into account that the total number of kisses is eight, not seven. *GCA*, 418 also sees the number seven here as a possible parody of sacral number theory. Surely it is more likely that the inclusion of a particular number of kisses plays off the expectation that a particular number of coins should constitute the reward for a slave. As *GCA*, 416 notes, the notion of an amatory reward from the Cyprian for someone's return is paralleled in Moschus *Eros drapetes* 1-5.

Jupiter's assent here (*nec rennuit Iovis caerulum supercilium*) is a verbal echo of *Iliad* 1.528.<sup>147</sup> The fact that Jupiter has power over the actions of even other gods underlines his tremendous authority, as do his dignified appearance and his surroundings (*regias arces*). Similarly, at 6.22 Jupiter is given a lofty location (*caeli...vertice*) and title (*magno Iovi*) and is treated with deference by Cupid. Jupiter himself is not ashamed to call attention to his primary position in the universe as the god *quo leges elementorum et vices siderum disponuntur*. He observes that he is deserving of special honour by decree of the gods (even if he doesn't get it from Cupid) and is seen at 6.22-24 performing such dignified stately actions as decision- and speech-making, ordering of the divine assembly, threatening other gods with fines, commanding immediate unquestioned obedience, sitting on his throne on high, and is described as *cerus*. *Sic fatus* at 6.23 is an epic convention and adds to the high style of the god's appearance.<sup>148</sup> His unilateral decision and effortless performance of Psyche's deification is perhaps the ultimate example of his unparalleled power. He is able too, with a few words, to appease Venus' anger (which has raged throughout the narrative) and to persuade her not only to tolerate the lavish wedding he mysteriously calls into being at 6.24 but even to dance at it. Jupiter's prominent placement with Juno at the banquet as well as his private cup-bearer also suggest his importance and status as the narrative reaches its conclusion, thanks to Jupiter's own intervention.

---

<sup>147</sup> Kenney, 198. He also cites Virgil *Aeneid* 1.229f. and 10.17f. as previous epic examples of Venus' emotional outbursts to Jupiter.

<sup>148</sup> Kenney, 221.

Nevertheless, like the other gods in the narrative, Jupiter's character should not be read too seriously. There is also much in his characterization throughout the narrative that undercuts his dignity subtly or that plainly exposes him as a figure of fun. The divine assembly which Jupiter summons at 6.23 is a burlesque of the epic council of the gods and of Roman senatorial meetings.<sup>149</sup> His kingly assent at 6.7 is less impressive if you consider that Venus' supplication is closer to demanding than petitioning and that the favour he grants (to borrow Mercury when he wasn't otherwise engaged) is quite small. Similarly at 6.22 Jove seems grandfatherly, not stately, when he pinches Cupid's cheeks, kisses the hand of a rather disobedient Cupid and repeatedly fondly remembers him as a child growing up in his own arms.<sup>150</sup> His own mention (at length) of Cupid's failure to afford him the respect he deserves<sup>151</sup> (he's not exactly modest, is he?) and of his tarnished reputation, scandalous adulteries, and degrading bestial transformations diminish his dignity significantly. He amusingly seems to inadvertently brag and belittle himself simultaneously. That he controls the gods with his nods and commands is undercut comically by his inability to control his own (sexual) behaviour and that of his son. He represents himself as the victim of Cupid (*istud pectus meum...convulneraris assiduis ictibus*), who has himself just recovered from a wound, a role which hardly suits a god of

---

<sup>149</sup> See *GCA*, 537.

<sup>150</sup> See James, 158 on the use of *domine fili* here to capture both the idea of respect for a powerful god and affection for a grandson. As with English 'son', *fili* can refer to any younger addressee, Dickey, 326. Jupiter's role here resembles the indulgent father of New Comedy (which brings in light-hearted undercutting associations), May, 189. Note too that there are various traditions about the identity of Cupid's father, see Barrett on Euripides *Hipp.* 530.

<sup>151</sup> Kenney, 221 calls Jupiter the heavy father here. See Parker, 165 for Jupiter as a comically lenient push-over parent.

his immense power. It is similarly quite ridiculous that Jupiter, the god who ordains the laws of the elements and the orbits of the constellations, should be subject to the *Lex Julia*! Finally, it is absurd that it should be Jupiter of all people who gives such a passionate speech about the virtues of marriage and of curbing sexual impulses and immorality.<sup>152</sup> His pronouncement (*Teneat, possideat, amplexus Psychem semper suis amoribus perfruatur*) and talk of *perpetuas nuptias* and the obligation to marry a girl once one has taken her virginity would be a lovely romantic ideal if he himself were not scandalously involved in every sort of sexual depravity and a serial adulterer! He has, after complaining of Cupid making him fall in love earlier, just finished negotiating that Cupid give him a girl of outstanding beauty as payment for his decision. This, in fact, would seem to be his major motivation, left to the end for stress and undercutting the lengthy and rather pompous speech that precedes it. If a bargain to keep his hands off Psyche is implied,<sup>153</sup> he is careful to keep this quiet as he hypocritically puts a good face on things in this speech. Even when seated at the wedding banquet with Juno (the pair does not have a model marriage by almost any account), Apuleius specifies that Jupiter is served by *ille rusticus puer*, Ganymede, one of his most famous lovers and the special source of Juno's jealous rage.<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup> Parker, 166 points out that Cupid's youthful passions do not need curbing at all as he has been faithful to Psyche alone. It is (ironically) Jupiter who most needs to take Jupiter's advice.

<sup>153</sup> See *GCA*, 535f. on Jupiter as a rival for Psyche's affections.

<sup>154</sup> *GCA*, 548 calls Ganymede's presence "unconducive to domestic harmony" and says that it ironically picks up *cum sua Iunone* above.

Conclusions :

As we have seen, the Cupid and Psyche episode contains a relatively large number of minor characters in addition to Cupid, Psyche, Venus, and Psyche's family who will be examined in subsequent chapters. This in itself is surprising for a narrative whose core concern is a personal matter – a secret love affair between two people. The inclusion of so many other characters rounds out the narrative, fills in the void left by Cupid's rather lengthy absence from the tale, adds interest and variety, and provides the opportunity to contrast the identity and behavior of these minor characters with the major characters and with one another. This naturally helps bring the important features of the major characters into sharper focus and thus contributes significantly to their characterization.

The numerous minor characters obviously also add to the development of the plot and, given their supernatural identities (deities, invisible servants, talking plants and animals, and animate objects), they do much to enhance the fantastic, otherworldly tone of the narrative. It is noteworthy then that among these many minor characters Psyche does not encounter a single regular human being like herself. This subtly adds to the audience's perception that Psyche is isolated and overmatched by her adversary, her interlocutors, and her environment. That Psyche so desperately needs to receive aid from the likes of an ant, reed or tower shows her incredible vulnerability and encourages the audience to sympathize with her plight. That she seems unfazed when she finds herself talking to invisible servants or an eagle increases her appearance as an unthinking, unquestioning

simpleton. In this regard, the minor characters point up the fact that although Psyche's relationship with Cupid is disrupted because of her overwhelming *curiositas*, she displays a strange lack of *curiositas* in the situations where such inquisitiveness would seem most natural. The supernatural quality of the minor characters also links the Cupid and Psyche narrative intratextually to its wider context, a novel about a human being trapped magically in the body of an ass.

In the main, the minor characters appear in the narrative individually and interact with only a single other main character (such as the bird with Venus, the reed with Psyche or Jupiter with Cupid).<sup>155</sup> There are a few exceptions to this generalization but even these are carefully handled. Juno and Ceres initially appear together with Venus at 5.31 but this dramatic triangle is undercut by Apuleius' portrayal of Juno and Ceres as a single inseparable unit whose voices cannot be distinguished from one another. In other instances where third parties are present (such as Echo at 5.25, other ants at 6.10, and *Sollicitudo* and *Tristities* at 6.9) the impact of their presence is certainly diminished by their silence. This tendency towards the appearance of a single minor character with a single major character minimizes distractions and allows even these less significant characters to enjoy a certain individual prominence in their own episodes. In fact, this tendency seems largely responsible for the impression that the narrative is episodic. It is also the case that the minor characters generally appear just once. The exceptions

---

<sup>155</sup> Parker, 168.

(Mercury, Ceres, and Juno) allow Apuleius to play the character's second appearance off the first.

Many of the minor characters perform important functions, despite their comparatively small role in the narrative. Fully four of the characters are placed in a position to prevent Psyche's death by suicide (Pan, the eagle, the reed, and the tower) and this alone is a significant contribution to the development of the plot. To avoid monotony in this repetitive scenario the characters do not all save Psyche in the same manner. Pan does so by talking with her immediately after her first failed suicide attempt and by advising her not to continue in this course of action. The eagle performs an impossibly hard task for the girl, while the reed and the tower encourage and enable her to undertake one herself by offering her key information. These characters render a service to Psyche and are thus connected to other helper characters in the tale such as the invisible servants and even to Ceres and Juno who, while they refuse to help the girl directly, are nevertheless sympathetic to her plight. This is an important point too. There are, even among the helping characters, significant variations. Some of the minor characters are more active participants in Psyche's redemption (the ant, for example, performs the task for her), while others appear in a less active or an advisory capacity (like the tower). Some of the characters are more emotionally supportive (like the ant) others are helpful but seem less emotionally responsive to the girl (like the eagle). These changes keep the story interesting and show Apuleius' impressive creativity. The cluster of helpful characters who come to Psyche's aid in her trials build upon one another and through repetition

stress Psyche's need for help. The successive interventions encourage the audience to hope for a positive resolution to the conflict.

The sympathetic and helping characters model for the audience a compassionate reaction to Psyche and reinforce the impression that Psyche is a hapless victim and Venus a cruel antagonist. Conversely, there are other of the minor characters who actively hinder Psyche. The handmaids of Venus physically and verbally abuse Psyche, while the tattletale bird and Mercury aid Venus (and therefore impede Psyche's efforts to re-unite with Cupid). These characters also have a significant function in that they reinforce the widespread power of Venus and help bring out many of her most unattractive qualities. The mere fact that the minor characters can be grouped in terms of their allegiance to Venus or their sympathy to Psyche demonstrates their polarizing effect on the narrative and adds to the perception that Venus is pitted against her target Psyche.

There are, nevertheless, certain connections between characters which add some continuity to the narrative. The kindly invisible servants of Cupid contrast neatly with the cruel handmaids of Venus, just as the two very different birds are obvious objects for comparison. Many of the characters are united by their status as gods or as part of the natural (plant and animal) world. All possess the power of human speech and at least human (if not supernatural) understanding. In general, the minor characters are not drawn in a detailed way. They are given little physical description and are not generally directly characterized by the narrator. Instead, the audience is usually given a few key

pieces of information and is left to infer a good deal about the character by his/her/its speech and actions. This works perfectly since the characters are sufficiently developed to be interesting and to play their role in the narrative.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, the opportunity to form opinions about the characters keeps the reader actively involved. In the case of the gods the audience can also be expected to draw on its previous knowledge of the characters and is frequently encouraged to do so.<sup>157</sup> In particular, Apuleius has unified the minor characters and made them more appealing by his use of wit, humour, and parody in their characterization. Literary *doctrina* is an important part of this entertainment and appeal. His humorously irreverent treatment of the gods is in line with the irreverence for traditional religion he shows elsewhere but generally the minor characters show significantly more elements of humour than others have noticed.<sup>158</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> Parker, 168.

<sup>157</sup> Pan is placed in a bucolic setting, Mercury is a messenger of sorts, etc.

<sup>158</sup> See Grimal, 23f. on Apuleius' irreverent treatment of religion.

## CHAPTER TWO: PSYCHE'S FAMILY

### Psyche's Mother and Father:

The Cupid and Psyche narrative begins at 4.28 with the introduction of Psyche's parents, who are first described simply as a *rex et regina*. Their royal status and initially enviable family situation (with three attractive marriageable daughters) belie the ruin that will follow. This allows Apuleius to bring about a surprising reversal of fortune, a technique which is familiar in the novel,<sup>159</sup> and it is not too many lines before the couple's problem becomes clear. The parents' role is relatively minor and the pair is confined to the early part of the lengthy narrative and given little description and speech. They are not, for example, given personal names or direct speech. Nevertheless, they do have an important effect on the narrative and the audience does learn some particulars about them, as I will show. The inclusion of Psyche's parents in the narrative and their emphatic placement at the start of the tale (they are the first characters) foreshadow and reflect the important role which marriage and family will play in the story. The Cupid and Psyche narrative is, after all, primarily concerned with the relationship of its two main characters and culminates in their marriage and the birth of their child. The narrative begins and ends then with Psyche's family (her family of origin at the start and her own nuclear family at the close) and this ring structure helps give a sense of order and completion to the tale.

---

<sup>159</sup> The fortune of Lucius is an obvious example.

The father is given more attention in the story than the mother. The family's particular involvement in securing the marriage of the daughters (and the father must put in special effort in the case of Psyche) imitates Roman practice and echoes the family norms seen elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*.<sup>160</sup> Several aspects of the father's personality can be seen. He is called a *miserrimus pater* at 4.32.5, a description which shows that his concern for his daughter affects him deeply and that his own emotional state is closely tied to that of his daughter. This is particularly emphasized by the juxtaposition of *infortunatissimae filiae* and *miserrimus pater* and by the use of the superlatives, both of which elicit pity. The father shows initiative in his willingness to consult the oracle of Apollo and appropriate piety in approaching the ancient oracle *precibus et victimis* and in his acceptance (albeit sorrowful) of the oracle's pronouncement. That both the oracle and the narrator refer to him as *rex* in 4.33 and that that he is appositionally described as *olim beatus* emphasize his previous happiness and the total reversal of his fortune. The parents' identity as royals also gives Psyche her royal status, a detail which raises the audience's positive impression of her too. The father's trip to the oracle is, in fact, critical to the advancement of the plot since it leads to Psyche going to Cupid's palace. The father reacts to the bad news of the oracle with understandable grief which he shares with his wife. The two are closely tied by their appearance together, the father's care in explaining the whole matter to his wife, and their common feelings and behaviour. When the time comes to leave Psyche to her fate they reasonably delay and are *maesti* and *perciti*. From Psyche's speech to them we learn additional pitiful details. They are old,

---

<sup>160</sup> See Bradley, 286f.

gray headed, constantly crying and wailing, tearing at their eyes and hair, and beating their breasts in mourning. Leaving their daughter behind, their devastation is total and they cloister themselves in their dark home for good. These details (and Psyche's choice to address them specifically and with such care) make the parents likeable characters and increase the pathos of Psyche's situation considerably. They too become innocent victims of Venus' hatred and jealousy. By contrast with Psyche's loving parents, Venus' actions appear cold and mean and her parental relationship with Cupid seems strange and strained indeed. The parents receive mention again at 5.4 where the narrator reiterates their advancing age and tireless mourning and they come up in connection with Psyche's wicked sisters at 5.9, 5.14, and 5.11, where they are also taken in by the sisters' selfish deception and are thus a device for making the sisters look bad. Conversely, their appearances make Psyche look good via their feelings for her and her treatment of them. The parents' display of genuine love for Psyche highlights the cruelty and insincerity of her sisters. Their great grief at 4.33 – 35 also heightens the joy of Psyche's escape on the mountaintop. The parents then play a useful role as their characterization sharpens the audience's perceptions of Venus, Psyche, and her sisters.

Psyche's Sisters:

Psyche's sisters, like her parents, are among the earliest characters introduced in the narrative. They are described briefly at 4.28 as the elder sisters and physically attractive but are distinguishable from their younger sister in that they can be adequately acclaimed

with mortal praises. In short order (by 4.32.3) the reader learns that the older sisters' more modest beauty had not been the subject of the wide attention which their sister was receiving, that they had been engaged to royal suitors, and had been well married for some time. Soon absent, the two initially seem to be unimportant characters, perhaps mere foils to their younger more attractive sibling. Their importance later is consequently an interesting surprise.

Similarly, their wickedness is concealed from the reader at some length. As daughters of a *rex* and *regina* they are princesses, and this together with their good looks helps to form the initially favorable impression they give. Their personalities are not directly described at the start but the reader is told that they secured good marriages, another positive sign. When they learn of Psyche's apparent death (5.4.6) they show what seems to be genuine sadness (they are called both *maestae* and *lugubres*) and filial devotion. They willingly leave their own homes and rush to comfort their grieving parents. Cupid himself says the women are *turbatae* (5.5.3) at the thought of Psyche's death and that they are searching for some trace of her.<sup>161</sup> At 5.7 the sisters, having discovered the location where Psyche was abandoned, hurry there and mourn her sincerely and in traditional ways.<sup>162</sup> Their haste, their show of emotion, and the effort they make in ascertaining information about

---

<sup>161</sup> As Kenney, 145 points out, Venus' angry manhunt for Psyche will later (6.2.2) be described in words which echo Cupid's words here. The sisters and Venus are thus verbally connected as enemies of Psyche who is the target of their respective search missions.

<sup>162</sup> The sisters weep profusely, beat their breasts, and call on the dead by name. This is typical mourning behavior. See Kenney, 149.

their sister and in physically going to grieve for her show their best side.<sup>163</sup> Psyche's concern for her sisters' pain, her request that they be safely transported to her by Zephyr, her genuine desire to see them, to talk with them, and to offer them gifts, which all show Psyche's sincere devotion to her sisters, strengthen the reader's positive impression of the sisters, and build up the expectation that a warm family reunion is imminent. Psyche, in fact, is so desperate to see her sisters in person that she threatens to kill herself unless Cupid relents and allows them to visit.<sup>164</sup>

Since the reader has not had specific cause to dislike the sisters or to suspect that they are a threat to Psyche, Cupid's repeated admonitions concerning them are puzzling and surprisingly stern.<sup>165</sup> At 5.5.2 he rather cryptically advises Psyche of an *exitabile periculum* in connection with the sisters and his warning that listening to the sisters or even looking at them (!) would cause Psyche's *summum exitium* is especially harsh.<sup>166</sup> In this regard the sisters may recall the Sirens and the Gorgons as monstrous females whose voices pose a threat or whose very gaze is deadly and must be avoided.<sup>167</sup> Even a subtle

---

<sup>163</sup> Kenney, 148 sees the use of *illae* at 5.7.1 as pejorative. I see no reason that it must, or even should, be so taken, especially on first reading of the narrative. *Contra* Kenney see Parker, 115.

<sup>164</sup> 5.6. This is an early sign of the willingness to end her own life which will show itself repeatedly in the narrative.

<sup>165</sup> Parker, 116 questions the audience's ability to consider Cupid's warnings credible at this point since his identity and appearance are still unknown.

<sup>166</sup> Psyche is (perhaps amusingly?) unable to look at most everyone by now! She is not allowed to see her sisters. She is not allowed to see her husband and even her servants are invisible.

<sup>167</sup> Kenney, 145 says that this "solemn injunction to harden the heart against appeals foreshadows the instructions given to Psyche about her journey to Hades" in 6.18 and

comparison of this kind is more than a little unflattering. The seriousness of the danger posed by the sisters (according to Cupid) together with the fact that the reader has seen little reason to distrust them and ample reason to like them adds considerable mystery and tension to the narrative. When all three sisters are reunited it seems at first, amid hugs and kisses and tears of joy, that Cupid's earlier warnings about the sisters are unfounded. This hope allows Apuleius to add interest by a reversal of expectations, lets the audience witness a metamorphosis of sorts in the sisters' characterization, and invites the audience to feel sympathy for Psyche when the sisters turn on her in response to (of all things!) the royal treatment they have received at her home. A corresponding metamorphosis in connection with the sisters occurs later (5.27) when the two women, thinking that they have effected an exchange of fortunes with Psyche, plunge to their deaths instead of into the royal treatment they expected. Obviously, Psyche's attitude to them also undergoes a complete change.

Psyche's typically unwitting role in inflaming her sisters' jealousy is amusing and seems entirely innocent. She needlessly draws attention to the opulence of her own home and her invisible servants, incredibly obvious features which should hardly require pointing out, and she showers them with extravagant gifts. Psyche gives no indication that she understands that this behavior will inspire envy, much less that she intends it to do so (5.8). In fact, Psyche's genuine joy at seeing her sisters at 5.7 and her generous and loving treatment of them ironically show us how a decent sister should react. The sisters'

---

6.19. The association of the sisters with the terrible dangers of the underworld is similarly quite unflattering.

envy and meanness then stand out all the more. Their envy manifests itself first in a meddlesome series of questions about her husband's identity. The interrogation is carried out *curiose*,<sup>168</sup> a detail which subtly links the sisters to one of Psyche's major faults, and more broadly to Lucius' transformational peccadillo. This dangerous flaw in the sisters, as in Psyche's and Lucius' cases, leads to their own suffering, although the sisters' characters are sufficiently villainous to minimize the audience's sympathy for them by the time of their ruin. The narrator's sarcastic description of the sisters as *sorores egregiae* who are swollen with envy and complaining bitterly adds to this effect (5.9.1).

It is an ironic touch that the sisters' complaints in 5.9 about Fortune's blindness reveal their own inability to perceive accurately their situations and that of their sister Psyche. Their complaints about Fortune (that she is cruel and unjust) are true enough but it is they (not Psyche) who have reaped unmerited advantage in life. They are also, ironically, the very instruments which Fortune will use to inflict cruelty and injustice on Psyche.<sup>169</sup> The inverse is true of their initial protestations about their lives and marriages. It is Psyche, not they, who will be an *ancilla* (to Venus) and a wife to a foreign husband. It is Psyche, not they, who will be subject to a wandering exile far from her home and unable to see her parents and country. They do, however, correctly determine early on that Psyche's husband is a god and predict her eventual deification, although they wrongly assume that Psyche is acting with the kind of scheming foresight and malice that they employ. Later

---

<sup>168</sup> 5.8.3 *scrupulose curioseque*.

<sup>169</sup> Kenney, 151.

(5.14.5) the two gush that Psyche's child will be a real Cupid if he resembles his parents. Ironically, they don't know how right they are since Cupid is the parent!

In fact, many of the sisters' comments have amusing and unintended meanings. It really is unfair that sisters *utroque parente prognatae* (5.9.2) should suffer such a different lot in life but not for the reasons they suppose. At this point Psyche is far from the luckiest girl in the world and her growing familiarity with her husband will lead to her downfall, not her deification. Similarly, it is hard to see how the first sister's complaint that Psyche does not know how to use the clothes and jewelry could be correct. We can presume that she knows how to dress herself and put on jewels and any reluctance to don ostentatious garb and ornaments in the presence of two women so prone to envy ought to be a credit to Psyche rather than a fault. The divergence between the narrator's story and the words of the sisters make it clear that the sisters are not being truthful. Far from suffering in their respective marriages to a puny pumpkin-headed geezer and a bent, arthritic, stinky-salved geriatric patient (and the images the sisters paint are in themselves comically realistic), we have already been told at 4.32.3 that they *procis regibus desponsae iam beatas nuptias adeptae*. We know too (by their very presence at Psyche's home!) that they are free to come and go from their homes and are not being treated as *ancillae* or locked up in the house by their husbands as they claim.<sup>170</sup> If the one sister is acting as constant nurse to her ailing husband, her absence from him makes her a poor one. Similarly, it is not quite true that Psyche is already putting on airs like a goddess (*deam*

---

<sup>170</sup> *Cunctam domum seris et catenis obditam custodientem* (5.9.8).

*spirat*) with orders even for the winds (5.9.7). Her ‘order’, in fact, was Cupid’s order, not her own, and she reminded Zephyr of that specifically at 5.7.4. Similarly at 5.13.2 she addresses her request for Zephyr’s aid to Cupid and does not presume to give instructions on her own authority. Her handing over of her sisters who are loaded down with gifts to Zephyr for safe transport back at 5.8.5 is hardly presented as a show of superiority or self-importance. We are specifically told that her hastiness to get her sisters on their way is motivated by fear in this case.

The sisters give a very negative impression of themselves from 5.9 onwards and this is significantly heightened by the suddenness of their change in disposition. At 5.7.5 they were crying with joy at finding Psyche alive. By 5.10 they are plotting to destroy her. Their feelings are evidently quite changeable and self-interested. They want to see Psyche alive but jealously do not want to see her better off than they are. They are liars and lie not only to their parents (which is cruel) but even to each other (which is ridiculous). The internal audience for their falsehoods about their husbands at 5.9-10 is each other, after all! They are envious, as the reader is explicitly told at 5.8.2 (*praecordiis penitus nutrent invidiam*) and 5.9.1 (*iamque gliscentis invidiae felle flagrantes*) where the close repetition of *invidia* gives the point special emphasis.<sup>171</sup> These are important instances of direct characterization which really stand out since most of the characterization of the sisters is indirect. As the first negative authorial intrusions

---

<sup>171</sup> Parker, 118.

they are also very noticeable, especially given the striking phrasing of these unequivocal condemnations.

Their avarice is made perfectly obvious by indirect characterization. They show immediate interest in Psyche's material possessions as is evident in their first question to Psyche (*quis illarum caelestium rerum dominus*, 5.8.3), their frequent bitter references to her wealth (*tantis opibus*, 5.9.4; *beatam fortunam*, 5.10.3; *tantis divitiis*, 5.10.5; *tantis opibus*, 5.10.6; *divitias*, 5.10.8), their specific mention of the quality and quantity of jewelry, gems, and fancy clothing (5.9.5), and their unwillingness to content themselves with the goods they themselves have received. They call Psyche's gifts to them *exigua* (5.10.5), although the narrator has said that the sisters were *auro facto gemmosisque monilibus onustas* (5.8.5) and calls their gifts *pretiosis muneribus* (5.11.1). Similarly, they characterize their hearths as *pauperes* (5.10.9), although we know they are well married. This selfish greed makes Psyche's generosity with her sisters conspicuous by comparison and thus increases the reader's good will toward Psyche. It naturally diminishes the good impression which the sisters originally gave.

In addition to dishonesty, envy, and avarice, the sisters also show a tendency towards a vain concern for appearances and even lust. One sister says that she could consider Psyche the luckiest woman in the whole world solely on the basis that she has a handsome husband (5.9.6). Surely this represents an exaggerated view of the importance of physical attractiveness in a mate. Concomitantly, each sister complains about the

appearance of her own husband who is, apparently, old, bald, and scrawny or crippled, deformed, and covered in odiferous poultices. Even if these were accurate descriptions (and there is reason to believe they are not) these are superficial grievances and ones their husbands could not likely help. It is also telling that one of the sisters considers it worth mentioning that her husband's medications are detrimental to her delicate fingers (5.10.2). Her concern (and her prideful characterization of her hands as *delicatas*) demonstrates her vanity and also her selfish insensitivity.<sup>172</sup> She thinks much of her appearance and nothing of the discomfort these concoctions (or the underlying ailment they treat) must cause her husband. Her complaint that she has to put up with a bent husband *per hoc rarissimo Venerem meam recolentem* (5.10.1) reveals a lustful appetite and verbally connects her to Venus, who has already shown herself an enemy of Psyche, and who is proverbially lustful.<sup>173</sup> The sisters' concern to keep Psyche's good fortune from others *nec sunt enim beati quorum divitias nemo novit* (5.10.8) is both wrong (a secret windfall is as good as a public one and maybe better since it cannot arouse envy) and revealing. The sisters are inordinately interested in how things appear to others.

By 5.11 it is quite evident that the sisters are united in their opposition to Psyche's success but it has been clear from the start that the two eldest sisters are more like each other than they are like Psyche. Psyche is separated from her sisters at the beginning of the narrative by the uniqueness of her experience just as the two sisters are grouped together by the commonality of their experience. They are both married, away from their

---

<sup>172</sup> Parker, 121 also identifies this complaint as self-centred and lacking compassion.

<sup>173</sup> On the connection between Venus and Psyche's sisters see Frangoulidis (1994).

family of origin, older, and mortally beautiful while she alone is at home, unmarried, and uniquely, indescribably gorgeous. Although the significance of this quite subtle alienation of Psyche from her sisters is not apparent at the start, it makes sense in the context of the sisters' later hostile rivalry, as does their separation from their parents. The three sisters are straight away (even in their introduction to the narrative) compared to one another in beauty, age, ability to attract suitors, and ability to contract a timely advantageous marriage. As the narrative progresses the two sisters continue to be strongly associated with one another. They are never given their own names,<sup>174</sup> constantly appear together, and even when speaking individually are referred to as 'this one' and 'the other one' (*altera...alia* 5.9.1, 5.10.1). They address one another rather flatly (*et tu quidem soror*, 5.10.3), behave identically, and even in explaining their individual circumstances at 5.9-10 present the same basic complaint – that their husbands are unattractive and mistreat them.<sup>175</sup> They will even die in precisely the same way. Their united front against Psyche encourages the audience to see her as the victim of an unfair, undeserved attack. They are picking on her and have her outnumbered. Apuleius' choice to use two mean sisters (when a single plotting sister would certainly have done) doubles their negative impact and allows the reader to observe not only their behavior but also their speech. It is, after all, primarily by observing the sisters in conversation with

---

<sup>174</sup> Apuleius names less than 33% of his characters according to Billaut, 123 so this in itself is not remarkable. Psyche's parents, for example, are also not named in the narrative. Nevertheless, the sisters are very textually prominent characters to remain so anonymous and interchangeable.

<sup>175</sup> Parker, 118 says that only the "exaggerated accounts of their dire circumstances...provide the reader with distinguishing information." Even this, however, does little to distinguish the two women.

one another that readers learn for themselves the sisters' true nature and their wicked plans. It is the words and actions of the sisters, even more than those of Cupid and the narrator, which initially convince one of their villainy. The two sisters set each other off, exacerbating the negative impact.

Apuleius also puts considerable emphasis on the sisters' coldly calculated thinking. They do not act in the heat of the moment, overcome by a sudden, passionate anger which might seem more forgivable, but take the time to go home and give their treacherous plot serious thought (*diuque cogitationibus pressioribus*, 5.10.9). The narrator removes all ambiguity by confirming verbally that the wickedness of their plan is a reflection of their wicked character (*duabus malis malum consilium*, 5.11.1) and by calling their intentions a *dolum scelestum, immo vero parricidium* (5.11.2). Note the forcefulness of the language and the emphatic expression which stress the criminality of their scheming, especially in contrast to Psyche, their *sororem insontem*. Cupid too will pick up on the notion that they are murderous in calling the sisters' hatred for Psyche *internecium* (5.12.6). Later the sisters will be described as *iugum sororium consponsae factionis* (5.14.1) and their manipulation of their conversation with Psyche *ad destinatam fraudium pedicam sermonem conferentes* (5.15.3).

Cupid too stresses the sisters' thinking in his speech. He calls their plans *nefarias insidias* (5.11.4) and says they are *noxiiis animis armatae* (5.11.5). All this focus on the sisters' plotting to destroy Psyche is fitting since, as Parker points out, Psyche's downfall

is the “critical event upon which the plot of the story turns.”<sup>176</sup> While they are not main characters, the sisters and their scheme are pivotal to the narrative and do much to advance the plot and develop the audience’s opinion of Psyche. It is also interesting to note that despite the frequent mention of the sisters’ wicked scheming from 5.10 onwards we do not learn what their plan actually is until 5.20. The audience, in fact, hears the details of their deceptive machinations (they want to persuade Psyche to kill her husband and take his wealth) at the same time Psyche hears them. Delaying the full unveiling of their scheme, despite frequent references to it, builds the suspense considerably. Moreover, allowing the audience to hear their destructive advice to Psyche at the same time she hears it builds our connection with the girl and underlines her total naiveté. Like her we are learning the details of their plot; unlike her we know it’s a plot! The women even take care to include the oracle in their lie (5.17.4) and the terrifying opinions of numerous (unnamed and non-existent) locals whose testimony she finds credible (5.19.1). Thus the characterization of the sisters as devious schemers who put time and effort into premeditation is, by way of contrast, a useful tool in characterizing Psyche as innocent, uncritical, and unsophisticated in her thinking, a perception that is strengthened by her actions and by Cupid and the narrator’s evaluations of her. As Parker points out, it is especially ridiculous that the sisters are so successful at tricking Psyche (and she is so highly suggestible) that they are able to convince her that she has been sleeping with a snake.<sup>177</sup> If anyone is in a position to know that is false, it is surely Psyche herself!

---

<sup>176</sup> Parker, 118.

<sup>177</sup> Parker, 127.

At 5.10.7 the sisters callously decide not to tell their parents that Psyche is alive and at 5.11 they return home and turn their cruelty on their own parents more directly. They frighten and upset them with renewed grief, a decision which both highlights their absolute wickedness and abruptly reverses our earlier positive impression of them as dutiful children who rushed to their mourning parents' side to comfort them. This point is emphasized by repetition. As the narrative unfolds the sisters prove to be terrible daughters as well as sisters. They do not stop to visit their parents even when they are in the area at 5.14.1, and when they do spend a fitful, sleepless night at their parents' home they greet them *fastidienter* and rush off early the next morning (5.17.1). They are also prepared to use their parents to further their insidious plot against Psyche. They appeal to her on the basis of their common origin (*quoniam nos originis nexus*, 5.20.1) which, is of course, their shared parentage. One of them even pretends that their parents are dead as an excuse to leave her husband and make a deadly, selfish, and jealous play for her sister's husband (5.27.1), an efficient plot point since it shows simultaneously that she is a bad daughter, a bad sister, and a bad wife.

Section 5.11, in fact, is very revealing. In addition to demonstrating the sisters' incredible lack of feeling for their own parents (and what could be more shocking to Greco-Roman sensibilities than disregard for one's parents?),<sup>178</sup> 5.11.1 also suggests that

---

<sup>178</sup> Cupid also stresses the sisters' contempt for blood ties and their unworthiness to be considered Psyche's family. The sisters' *impietas* is certainly in contrast to the regard Psyche shows for her parents at 4.34 and for her own impending motherhood at 5.12.1. Also, Cupid refers specifically to Psyche with her *religiosaque continentia* (5.12.5) and

the sisters' grief at Psyche's apparent death had never been genuine (*simulatos redintegrant fletus*). Apuleius highlights the deception involved by specifying their method for producing false tears at 5.17.1 – they press their eyelids to force watering. Not only capable of crocodile tears, the sisters also show themselves able pretenders of joy and affection too (*affectione simulata*, 5.15.1, where the repetition of *simulata* underlines the parallel). They use emotion to hide their true intentions (*thesaurumque penitus abditae fraudis vultu laeto tegente*, 5.14.3), they flatter Psyche in person (5.14) but insult her in private (5.16), and their falseness is noticeably placed in sharp contrast to the sincerity they owe as sisters (*sorores nomine mentientes*, 5.14.3). The manipulative deception revealed at 5.11, together with the bad conduct and malevolent speech which the audience has just seen from the sisters in 5.9 - 10, shows the total unreliability of the sisters and confirms the suspicion that Cupid's warnings were justified.

At 5.11.1 the narrator fully reveals her low opinion of the women in a sharp aside (saying that the sisters tore at their hair and scratched their faces *ut merebantur*). The very same narratorial assessment (*ut merebatur*, 5.27.3) will be applied to one of the sisters' gruesome death and disembowelment. The narrator's direct criticism of the sisters is bound to be an influence on the reader's ever more disapproving perception of the sisters and this is amplified by the frequency and vividness of her criticisms. She refers to the wickedness of these *scelestarum feminarum* (5.15.3). She insultingly calls them *anhelantes vipereum virus* (5.12.3) *inflammatae* (5.17.1) *perditae* (5.17.1), *facinerosae*

---

later Psyche will show her *pietas* in her dealings with the goddesses Juno and Ceres (6.2 - 6.4).

*mulieres* (5.19.5), *vesania turgidae* (5.11.2), *infestis Furiis* (5.21.3), and *pestes illae taeterrimaeque Furiae* (5.12.3). The latter is an ironic appellation to be sure since the Furies are generally associated with avenging familial crime, not perpetrating it! It does, however, strongly convey the idea of the sisters' physical unattractiveness (which mirrors the ugliness of their personalities) as well as their power, potential to do harm, and inhumanness. These princesses, once considered *forma conspicuas* (4.28.1) are now monstrous with their viperous breath and impious speed (5.12.3).<sup>179</sup> The transfer of the epithet from the women to their alacrity is striking and together with *festinantes* puts real emphasis on their swift pace. This trait appears again at 5.14.1 where they travel *praecipiti cum velocitate*, do not take time to visit their parents or wait for a carrying wind, and storm in to Psyche's house *incunctatae statim* (5.14.3). Similarly, they beat a rapid retreat after tricking Psyche at 5.21 and each sister hastens to her own death at 5.27. Their speed corroborates their impatience and immoderacy.<sup>180</sup> The narrator also highlights the sisters' negative attributes in contrast to more affable characters and pleasant surroundings. For example, even after being feasted, bathed, and serenaded with instruments and choirs (5.15) the sisters will not be softened by the gentle music and turn their attention to destroying Psyche *illa simplicitate nimia* (5.15.4). The great number of words in this passage which denote the pleasantness and comfort of the women's experience in Psyche's home (such as the restfulness of the palace, the warmth of the bath, the richness of the food, the sweetness of the music) contrast sharply with their

---

<sup>179</sup> Parker, 124 points out that *vipereum* forms a thematic link with serpents (as in the oracle at 4.33.1, Psyche's task at 6.14.4, and the sisters' lie about Cupid at 5.17.2ff.).

<sup>180</sup> At 5.14.1 they refuse to wait for Zephyr and rush off the cliff *licentiosa cum temeritate*, just as at 5.27.1 the sister hurries *invidiae noxiae stimulis agitata*.

nasty attempts to trick a woman so entirely unable to discern their intentions. Similarly, on the way home the sisters' angry discussion (*altercantes*) and ugly accusations are the very opposite of the narrator's description of Zephyr with his gentle carrying breath (5.16).

Nor is the narrator alone in her distaste for the sisters. Everyone, except Psyche, it seems, finds them odious. Were it not for Cupid's royal edict, Zephyr would willingly let the sisters plunge to their death at 5.14.2, a suggestion which foreshadows their eventual death in this manner. Moreover, Cupid's warnings to Psyche, once forceful but vague, become increasingly censorious and harsh as the narrative progresses. At 5.11 he stresses again to Psyche that she is in real danger, a show of concern which contrasts starkly with her sisters' eagerness to see her suffer. His warning includes very strong language. After noting that fortune is threatening Psyche, he speaks of her sisters without naming them or even identifying them as *sorores*. He explains this choice explicitly in his next warning to Psyche – their murderous hatred and disregard for blood ties make it impossible to call them sisters (5.12.6), correcting the earlier appellation *nefariae tuae sorores* (5.12.4) which he now deems too generous! The idea that Psyche's sisters are not worthy of the title 'sisters' is reinforced by the narrator (5.14.3). The repetition of this point and the fact that the same opinion comes from more than one character give it real stress. In their most outrageous lies to Psyche about her husband (5.18) the sisters shrewdly make a point of emphasizing that they are sisters to increase their credibility by calling themselves *sororibus* (5.18.2) and even *piae sorores* (5.18.3). Psyche, totally taken in by

this tactic, echoes their sentiments by addressing them as *carissimae sorores* (5.19.1) in return and referring to herself as *sorori vestrae* (5.19.4), a sign of her sensitivity to family loyalty even in the face of her sisters' willingness to use family connections to their own selfish advantage.

Cupid, however, refers to the women by a variety of insults. He calls them *perfidae lupulae*, a decidedly uncomplimentary term (5.11.4). The diminutive *lupulae* which seems to be an Apuleian invention (or at least is attested for the first time in the *Metamorphoses*) calls attention to itself by its novelty.<sup>181</sup> As a diminutive it has the effect of diminishing the sisters, (although certainly diminutives can be used affectionately this is clearly not the case here!) and strikes a colloquial tone appropriate to a realistic dialogue between spouses. The word itself has the connotations of prostitution which *lupa* carries,<sup>182</sup> a point which efficiently reinforces the audience's earlier impression that the women are inordinately interested in both sex and money. Furthermore, *lupus* is also routinely applied to people who are greedy and the animal itself is proverbially associated with preying mercilessly on the weak and helpless, both are appropriate and unflattering associations for the sisters.<sup>183</sup> *Perfidae* stresses their dishonesty and untrustworthiness while *magnis conatibus* and *nefarias insidias* highlight their great willingness to work towards her destruction and their wicked treachery. The collocation of these negative attributes in Cupid's characterization of the women has real

---

<sup>181</sup> *GCA*, 183. *Lupulae* also appears at 3.22.

<sup>182</sup> Kenney, 154.

<sup>183</sup> *GCA*, 183 and *TLL*.

impact. He calls them *pessimae illae lamiae* and the implication that they are horrible female monsters who devour children<sup>184</sup> picks up on the idea that they are savage, inhuman, formidable, dangerous, hurtful, destructive, and likely to attack a helpless victim (all of which are already evident in *lupae* and much of which was also suggested by the narrator calling them Furies). Additionally, *lamiae* ironically foreshadows the sisters' false accusations about Cupid himself (5.18). He says they eat babies and they say he does! Cupid further reinforces the notion that the sisters are inhuman, monstrous, and deadly by directly calling them Sirens (5.12.6), something his earlier admonishment (5.5.3) to avoid seeing or hearing the sisters indirectly suggested. Apuleius' great efficiency in drawing together the sisters' negative attributes is in evidence here too. Sirens are a specifically female threat, like the sisters he so pointedly calls *illas scelestas feminas* (and like the Furies), and attract their victims with their *funestis vocibus* before killing them.<sup>185</sup> The sisters are also dangerous because of their ability to convince Psyche, although unlike the Sirens they plan to bring about her ruin without touching her themselves. The direct violence suggested by Cupid's comparisons of the women to *lamiae*, wolves, and Sirens reflects the sisters' murderous objectives and contrasts with the indirect nature of their attack. Their goal after all (as Cupid has just revealed for the first time) is to persuade the girl (*ut te suadeant*) and to destroy her with their *noxiiis animis*. These are indirect assaults, made by mental, not physical, force.

---

<sup>184</sup> OLD s.v. *lamia*. GCA, 184 argues that Cupid's use of *lamia* (since *lamiae* often appear in stories meant to frighten children) is consistent with his condescending tone in the speech.

<sup>185</sup> Parker, 125 notes that Cupid's description of the women leaning out from a cliff foreshadows their deaths in this manner.

Cupid, nevertheless, plays up the violence of their intentions by his frequent use of military language in his discussion of the sisters.<sup>186</sup> During his next warning to Psyche about her sisters (5.12) his martial vocabulary grows even more obvious with talk of them ‘striking camp’, ‘drawing up ranks’ and ‘sounding the battle horn’. The consistent application of military terms to their behavior also highlights the massive scale of their endeavors against their sister, their organized and unified front against her, and the mortal danger in which Psyche finds herself. That such language is used to describe two women is also interesting. They, apparently, are dangerous and violent enough to warrant diction (some of it epic, such as *mucrone dextricto* 5.12.4) appropriate to male soldiers.<sup>187</sup> This point is further reinforced by the narrator’s use of martial language in connection with the sisters at 5.19.

As the narrative unfolds the sisters’ own behaviour and words are a very strong indication of their bad characters. When the sisters learn that Psyche is pregnant (5.14) they pretend to be happy for her and for the whole family. This fraudulent joy is emphasized by the numerous words related to happiness in their initial comments (*boni, gaudiis, hilarabis, beatas, aurei, laetabunt*). Of course this would be a natural reaction to a new baby in the family if it were genuine. We know by now, however, that the sisters are insincere and

---

<sup>186</sup> There is a good deal of martial vocabulary associated with the sisters such as *magnis conatibus, explorare, armatae*. See *GCA*, 184 and Panayotakis (1998), 154 on military language in the passage.

<sup>187</sup> On Cupid’s use of epicisms and other noticeable techniques (such as alliteration, anaphora, etc.) see *GCA*, 192f. and Bernhard, 34f.; 82f.

by 5.16.4 it is clear just how much the prospect galls the sisters – at least one of them is prepared to hang herself if Psyche receives the honour of a divine child. Her jealous desire to kill herself if Psyche prospers certainly contrasts with Psyche's threat of suicide if she cannot see that her sisters are doing well (5.6.4). While the sisters feel free to lie to Psyche in this way and also to their parents and each other, amusingly they are hypocritically outraged by what they call Psyche's *monstruoso mendacio* (5.16.1) about her husband's identity. They sarcastically point out the implausibility of Psyche's recent explanation (5.16), little caring that unlike themselves Psyche has good reason to be untruthful and that their own dangerous and meddlesome prying is what is forcing Psyche to lie to them in the first place! The sisters are very nosy. Their string of questions to Psyche about her husband's identity and background (5.8; 5.15) seem like an interrogation and (absurdly!) the answers are of no consequence to them anyway. Whatever her husband's identity the two are interested only in dislodging Psyche as soon as possible from her riches (5.16.3) and thus their questions serve only to satisfy their snoopiness and perhaps to increase Psyche's anxiety about her husband.

In addition to the sisters' cruelty which is evident in their desire to undo their own sister and in their name-calling (*istam pessimam feminam*, 5.16.3) directed at such a likable character as Psyche, the sisters come across most strongly as deceptive and manipulative. Their approach to Psyche, their tactics for deceiving her, and the lies themselves are shocking. They begin by contrasting the blissfulness of Psyche's ignorance with the pain of their own knowledge about her husband. None of this is true. They have no

knowledge about her husband, are tortured by her happiness, and actually in themselves present a danger to Psyche as they pretend to warn her against an imaginary threat. The description of the monster which they offer is detailed, inflammatory, gruesome, and intended to frighten. They prey on her understandable fear for her own safety and for her unborn child, her isolation in the palace, and her susceptibility to trusting her sisters. They strengthen the credibility of their lies by referring to the oracle about her and by emphasizing the large number of people who (they say) have knowledge of this monster (*multi coloni...accolae plurimi...omnes affirmant*, 5.17-18). They manipulate her intellectually by setting up false ultimata : either she listens to them or she prefers to die, either she prefers to live with them or she prefers loneliness and perverse bestiality. She is not sophisticated enough to recognize their ploy (*simplex*, 5.18.4) and is overcome by fear (*rapitur...formidine*, 5.18.4) just as they intended.

The plan they lay out for Psyche to follow mirrors their own plan of attack on Psyche. It is detailed, deceptive, and relies on attacking a helpless, unsuspecting victim (in this case a sleeping one). It thus supports the negative impression of the women. It is also notable that their plan promises their support only after Psyche has done the dirty work (craven, they actually flee the scene before the crime, 5.21.2) and shows their greedy desire to share in the booty (5.20.6)! When Psyche explains the disastrous results of their advice she also highlights the sisters' jealous desire for her husband by pretending that Cupid wanted to marry each of them. That they fall for this so readily and rush off so madly confirms the lustfulness and impatience they have exhibited earlier. The violence of their

deaths and the grotesque description which the narrator offers are welcome since the sisters receive exactly the kind of deceptive and destructive treatment they have been dishing out.

In general, it is remarkable how consistently and effectively Apuleius builds these memorable and provocative characters, despite the very limited direct characterization they receive. Figure 1 (below) demonstrates the efficiency of characterization since several concepts about the sisters can be conveyed by a single word, as in the case of *lupulae*. You may also readily see that many of the sisters' primary traits are emphasized through repetition by a single character and/or through repetition by multiple sources.

Figure 1

<b>Sisters' TRAITS</b>	<b>According to CUPID</b>	<b>According to NARRATOR</b>	<b>According to ZEPHYR</b>	<b>As shown by the SISTERS' OWN WORDS/ACTIONS</b>
<b>Deceptive</b>	√ (especially 5.11.4 - <i>perfidae</i> , 5.12.6- <i>Sirenum</i> )	√ (especially 5.14, 5.15, 5.17, 5.27.1)	X	√
<b>Dangerous/deadly</b>	√ (especially 5.11-5.12 - Military diction, <i>lamiae</i> , <i>Sirenum</i> , 5.24)	√ (especially 5.12.3- <i>Furiae</i> , 5.19- Military diction)	X	√
<b>Malevolent/ Criminal</b>	√ (especially 5.12.6- <i>Sirenum</i> , 5.24)	√ (especially 5.11, 5.12, 5.15, 5.17, 5.21, 5.27)	√ 5.14.2	√
<b>Envious</b>	X	√ 5.8, 5.9, 5.27	X	√ (especially 5.9, 5.10, 5.16)
<b>Greedy</b>	√ 5.11.4- <i>lupulae</i>	X	X	√ (especially 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 5.16, 5.20)
<b>Lustful</b>	√ 5.11.4- <i>lupulae</i> , 5.12.6- <i>Sirenum</i>	√ 5.27	X	√ (especially 5.9, 5.10)
<b>Non-human</b>	√ 5.11- <i>lupulae</i> , <i>lamiae</i> , 5.12.6- <i>Sirenum</i>	√ 5.12.3- <i>Furiae</i>	X	X
<b>Bad as sisters/ not filial</b>	√ 5.12.6	√ 5.14.3	X	√
<b>Hurried/Reckless</b>	X	√ 5.4, 5.7, 5.11, 5.14, 5.21, 5.27	X	√

Conclusions:

Although Psyche's parents are not given a great deal of description, personal names or even direct speech, they are important to the narrative. Their noticeable placement at the start of the narrative (even before Psyche) reflects the critical importance of questions of marriage and family in the Cupid and Psyche tale. The father receives more attention than the mother and is more involved in Psyche's fate, as is typical of Roman practice. He also furthers the plot by having recourse to the oracle. Several aspects of his character are highlighted including his emotional connection to Psyche, his initiative, his piety, his royal status, and the reversal of fortune which he too suffers. He is closely tied to Psyche's mother and their pitiful, grief-stricken, and aged appearance, together with their loving behavior, increase sympathy for Psyche and make Venus and Psyche's sisters seem even more cold by comparison. This kind of oppositional characterization is an important feature of the Cupid and Psyche episode.

Psyche's sisters initially appear to be rather unimportant characters and thus their later importance is an interesting surprise for the reader. Similarly, their wickedness is concealed at first and, in fact, several details about them, including their own behavior and apparent filial devotion, suggest that they are good. Psyche's own very sincere and at times even hysterical devotion to them strengthens the expectation that they are lovable. This makes Cupid's constant but vague warnings about them seem all the more puzzling and harsh. The seriousness of the threat they pose (according to Cupid) adds tension and mystery to the narrative. The joyful reunion of the three sisters gives the

reader hope that these warnings are unfounded and sets up a great reversal of the reader's opinion when the sisters turn on Psyche and reveal their maliciousness. Here, as elsewhere, Psyche plays a role in her own suffering by unwittingly arousing her sisters' envy and greed. The sisters are complainers and also display an unwholesome curiosity, a trait they share with Psyche and Lucius. They display a combination of ironic perspicacity (in saying that her child will be a real Cupid if he resembles his parents, for example) and total blindness to reality (in their negative assessments of their own supposedly servile lives and of Psyche's character, for example). Many of their comments are amusing and ironic.

From 5.9 onwards they are uniformly wicked and their change in disposition is sudden and total. Their propensity for lies and avarice is made obvious by indirect characterization, as are their vanity, superficiality, and lustful tendencies. Their cruelty is in evidence in their treatment of their husbands, parents, and Psyche and by direct characterization. Apuleius puts considerable emphasis on their cold and calculating thinking, their unworthiness to be Psyche's sisters, and their speed, which is an apt reflection of their impatience and immoderacy. They are closely connected to one another throughout and this heightens their villainy, as do the negative assessments of their character which are made by Cupid, the narrator, and Zephyr. Cupid's words about the sisters are particularly damning, efficient, and allusive. The sisters' own speech and behavior demonstrate their poor character and corroborate Cupid's assessment that they have manipulative and violent intentions. The sisters are an excellent example of

Apuleius' ability to draw memorable and provocative characters efficiently, with very limited direct characterization. They also serve to highlight Psyche's innocence and gullibility before heartbreak drives her to return their deceptive attacks with one of her own.

### CHAPTER THREE: VENUS

I shall first provide a quick synopsis of Venus' appearances before moving on to an exploration of the primary sources and models Apuleius draws on for her characterization. Given the long and widespread tradition of Aphrodite/Venus in both Greek and Roman literature and art, Apuleius had an ample choice of sources to draw on in constructing Venus' character.<sup>188</sup> His Venus not only recalls the Juno and Venus of Virgil's *Aeneid*, she also shares several important characteristics with the Venus figures found in other sources such as Lucretius, ancient comedy, mythology, etc. In the final portion of the chapter I shall undertake a detailed analysis of Venus' character.

Venus arrives early in the narrative but certainly not before Psyche is referred to (4.28.2), a sign that the goddess' principal role in the narrative will nevertheless be secondary to Psyche's. Her importance is further emphasized by the length and frequency of her appearances. She is initially mentioned at 4.28.3, 4.28.4 and at 4.29 when the narrator describes the state of neglect into which her cult has fallen and her consequent wrath. At 4.30 she personally appears, gives a monologue expressing her outrage, and calls for Cupid whom she instructs to punish Psyche. By the end of 4.31 she has kissed Cupid and made her dignified marine departure. Although absent from the tale until 5.28, Venus remains a character of some interest since others make frequent reference to her. Psyche herself mentions Venus at 4.34.5 as the source of her misery and at 5.26.4 in her lies to

---

<sup>188</sup> On Venus/Aphrodite in literature see Bittrich; Boedeker; Breitenberger; Elm von der Osten.

her sisters. Additionally, Psyche's sister, the narrator, and Cupid all make passing references to the goddess (at 5.10.1, 5.22.7, and 5.24.3 respectively). From 5.28 until the close of book five, however, Venus is the center of attention. She is reported to by the bird in the depths of the Ocean, gives voice to her fury (5.28), and storms up to her bedroom where she berates a heartbroken Cupid (5.29-31). At 5.31 she complains to Juno and Ceres about Cupid and receives their less than sympathetic replies. While she does not assume the primary focus of the action again until 6.6, her crucial role as the narrative's antagonist is continually emphasized by the specific mention of her which other characters make (such as at 6.2.2, 6.3.1, 6.4.5, and 6.5.3). From 6.6 - 6.16 Venus is almost constantly a central focus, visiting Olympus by chariot (6.6), obtaining Mercury's help (6.7 - 6.8), raging at Psyche (6.9), assigning her labors at 6.10, 6.11, 6.13, 6.16, and fuming when she completes them, although Psyche's successful completion of the tasks is given textual prominence over Venus' assignment of them.<sup>189</sup> After the goddess demands the katabasis at 6.16 she fades from view, reappearing only to receive Jupiter's orders 6.22.4 and to dance at Psyche and Cupid's wedding at 6.23.3. Her absences and diminished status (as at 6.23.3 where her mute presence receives no more emphasis than any of the other gods)<sup>190</sup> make room for the development of Psyche's personal story and that of her relationship with Cupid. Her opposition to Psyche's happiness (and thus to her relationship with Cupid) nevertheless remains the primary tension of the narrative and it is only through Jupiter's intervention to quell Venus' wrath that the story can reach a satisfying ending for the reader. The fact that Cupid's restored willingness to be with

---

<sup>189</sup> Parker, 195 n.42.

<sup>190</sup> Parker, 195.

Psyche does not end the narrative (which it certainly could, if the story were principally about the re-establishment of their relationship) and that a ban must be placed on Venus' anger is a clear sign that Venus remains a major problem and an important character in the narrative.

### Sources and Models for Venus

#### *Venus Caelestis and Venus Vulgaris:*

Kenney advanced a theory about Venus' characterization which has had some sway among scholars.<sup>191</sup> I shall address briefly at this point the concept of 'the two Venuses' which Kenney asserts is central to understanding Apuleius' Venus since its impact, especially given the authoritative influence of its originator, merits specific, individual refutation.<sup>192</sup> In Plato's *Symposium* Pausanias describes two characters for Venus viz. a heavenly Venus (*Urania / Venus Caelestis*) and a Venus of the people (*Pandemos / Venus Vulgaris*).<sup>193</sup> Each of these two Venuses, whom Kenney dubs 'Venus I' and 'Venus II' respectively, has a son, Cupid, who reflects the nature of his mother. Kenney calls these gods 'Amor I' and 'Amor II'. According to Pausanias, *Venus Caelestis* (the older Venus and the motherless daughter of Uranus) and her corresponding Eros are noble, have noble purposes, and are praiseworthy. Their love does not concern women but is directed at

---

<sup>191</sup> Kenney, 19f. Others such as Schlam, 97; and Walsh, 183f. also hold this view.

<sup>192</sup> Parker, 175ff. provides a good rebuttal from which my following remarks have benefited.

<sup>193</sup> Plato, *Symp.* 180d2ff.

young men who are brave, intelligent, and old enough to develop reason and a beard. This love is not wanton or exploitative and aims at lifelong monogamy. In contrast, *Venus Pandemos* (the younger Venus and the child of Zeus and Dione) and her co-worker Amor II are common, not noble. Their love is indiscriminate, felt by baser men, and may be directed toward women or boys. It is concerned with the body, rather than the soul and considers its own ends, while ignoring the question of whether the means to those ends are good or evil.

Kenney maintains that this duality is operational in the Cupid and Psyche episode. He asserts that a competition between the two sides (Venus I and Cupid I vs. Venus II and Cupid II) for the human soul, represented by Psyche, drives the plot and is the central meaning of the narrative. In his view the main players are Venus II and Amor I, the loser and winner of the competition respectively, whose antithetical counterparts (ie. Venus I and Amor II) remain “largely decorative and (in Cupid’s case especially) passive foils”.<sup>194</sup>

Apuleius is obviously aware of the concept; He repeats the idea of the two Venuses in his *Apology*.<sup>195</sup> This does not, however, mean that Apuleius’ treatment of the Cupid and Psyche episode in the *Metamorphoses* draws on this Platonic dichotomy in its construction of Venus. In fact, there are a number of good reasons to argue against this. First, although Kenney indicates several points at which he believes Venus is depicted

---

<sup>194</sup> Kenney, 20.

<sup>195</sup> Apuleius, *Apol.* 12.1ff.

clearly as *Caelestis* or *Vulgaris*,<sup>196</sup> he provides no clear criteria by which we may distinguish for ourselves when Apuleius' Venus is being presented as 'Venus I' and when as 'Venus II'. The criteria provided by Plato (such as that *Urania* is concerned with homosexual love, while *Pandemos* may concern herself with heterosexual couplings or that one Venus is older than the other) do not clarify the matter and would not seem relevant to the Cupid and Psyche episode in the least. Kenney does not advance any particular argument as to why we need to see two Venuses in the Cupid and Psyche narrative at all and it is hard to imagine that anyone could find much of a dichotomy, Platonic or otherwise, in Venus' character which is so obviously and uniformly presented as unpleasantly mean, jealous, and angry.

Furthermore, even when Kenney does identify for us that Venus is acting as Venus I (by which he seems to mean essentially that she is being nice or respectable) there is reason to doubt her niceness and respectability.<sup>197</sup> Venus' return to the sea and 4.31.4-7 and her chariot drawn flight to Olympus at 6.6 are both listed as examples of Venus acting as *Caelestis*, yet her motives in these instances could hardly be less spiritual, noble, or heavenly. At 4.31.4-7 she is taking her leave, having instructed Cupid to inspire Psyche to passionately love the basest possible man (a love appropriate, at least by Platonic standards, to Venus II, not Venus I, since it involves a base person and is heterosexual). In any case she is not being noble or nice at this point. Similarly, her ascent to heaven at

---

<sup>196</sup> According to his index Kenney sees Venus I at 4.31.4-7; 6.6; 6.6.4; 6.7.2 and Venus II at 4.30.4-31.3; 5.28.7; 6.7.2; 6.8.3.

<sup>197</sup> See Parker, 178ff. on this and other internal inconsistencies in Kenney's logic.

6.6, while stately, is aimed at demanding Mercury's help to track down a runaway slave, a distinctly material and worldly concern which is not consistent with the spiritual realm of Venus I. This would seem to obviate the need to posit, as Kenney does,<sup>198</sup> that Venus' character makes a dramatic 180° change mid-sentence from *Caelestis* back to *Vulgaris* at the words *caelo demeat*.<sup>199</sup> It is likewise hard to understand why Kenney associates the Venus depicted at 6.8.3 with the rather degraded or *vulgaris* level of Photius *and* with Isis whom he says is "also Venus Caelestis."<sup>200</sup> Neither do we receive any suitable explanation of the miniscule role which Venus I and especially Cupid II play in the narrative. Finally, the fact that even Kenney is forced to identify Venus' character at 4.30 as a "blend" of these two identities reveals the procrustean effort required to fit the Platonic concept of two Venuses into Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche narrative.<sup>201</sup> In short, the two Venus theory does not make sense, does not fit the facts, does not advance our understanding of the narrative, and should have been dropped from Kenney's otherwise exemplary and very helpful commentary.

---

<sup>198</sup> Kenney, 198 on 6.7.2.

<sup>199</sup> Parker, 177 points out the unnecessary and unprecedented strangeness of such a rapid and dramatic change in personality and in strategy for characterization.

<sup>200</sup> Kenney, 200.

<sup>201</sup> Kenney, 243 says 4.30 shows Venus' "identities blended".

Venus and Love Poetry:

Apuleius will certainly have had an eye to the work of love poets.<sup>202</sup> The goddess of love is a natural subject for authors of love poetry and many of the negative characteristics which Apuleius attributes to Venus are found in earlier poems. Conversely, he inverts some positive ones, although there is little evidence of specific or sustained imitation of the love poets.<sup>203</sup> Propertius, for example, portrays her as jealous of the beauty of other women and cruel enough to punish a mortal with personal harm for her good looks.<sup>204</sup> She causes pain for lovers, is very powerful, is capable of inflicting misery, and is worryingly capricious.<sup>205</sup> Like the Venus of the Cupid and Psyche episode, Tibullus' Venus is dangerous and violent when angered (1.2.41f.; 1.8.5f.), her influence and punishments are frightful (1.2.79f.; 1.2.98f.; 1.9.21f.), and she is associated with suffering (1.2.90; 1.9.19f.). The speaker in Tibullus' poems identifies her as the source of the problems in his love life (2.4.23ff.).<sup>206</sup> Sappho acknowledges Aphrodite's ability

---

<sup>202</sup> See Parker and Murgatroyd, n.56.

<sup>203</sup> Cupid is similarly a character of obvious interest to love poets. Parker and Murgatroyd, 400ff., identified a number of features of the Cupid and Psyche episode (especially with reference to Cupid) which have been influenced by Latin elegy.

<sup>204</sup> Propertius 2.28.9f. where he calls the goddess *invidiosa* and suggests that the goddess' anger may be the cause of Cynthia's illness.

<sup>205</sup> Propertius 1.1.33; 1.14.6; 1.14.17ff.; 2.16.13f.; 2.21.1f.; 3.17.3; 3.24.13ff. See Merriam, 47ff. for a good summary of Propertius' negative portrayal of Venus which I have used here.

<sup>206</sup> Merriam, 101ff. for a summary of these negative characteristics of Venus' portrayal in Tibullus. She also points out (99f.) that Tibullus sometimes depicts Venus positively as a helper of lovers (especially women), although the emphasis even then is on Venus' role in deception such as at 1.2.18ff. Interestingly Apuleius' Venus does not use much deception or trickery (she does attempt to use some, *de Veneris insidiis*; 6.19.1), although this is a common trait for Aphrodite/Venus in earlier authors. See Parker, 182n.16.

to crush the spirit and inflict anguish, as do others.<sup>207</sup> Venus' depiction as a slave owner offering a payment in kisses for her runaway slave (*Met.* 6.7f.) must certainly owe something to Moschus 1 (Gow) and several elements of her marine cortege at 4.31 recall Moschus *Eur.* 118ff.<sup>208</sup>

Equally, there are a number of attractive traits attributed to Venus/Aphrodite in love poetry which Apuleius ignores or inverts in his characterization of Venus. Sappho, for example, treats Aphrodite as an approachable goddess to whom one addresses personal prayers for success in a romantic affair, associates her with delight, nectar, and happiness in love, gives her pleasant epithets, seeks her permission, and mentions her favorable intervention.<sup>209</sup> Other poets show Aphrodite as a help to mortals in love or at sea.<sup>210</sup> Far from working cooperatively with Eros to trap a lover in her nets, as Aphrodite does at Ibycus 287 (Campbell), Apuleius' Venus is instead the enemy of Cupid.<sup>211</sup> She is not pictured in the Cupid and Psyche narrative doing anything so delicate and caring as nursing a lover among rose-blossoms (as at Ibycus 288), nor does she overwhelm the lover with passion (Ibycus 286), or indeed play any positive role at all in inspiring love.

---

<sup>207</sup> Sappho 1 (Voigt); *A.P.* 5.87; 5.98; 12.50; 12.89; 12.100, Horace 1.19.1; 4.1, for example.

<sup>208</sup> Kenney, 127f.

<sup>209</sup> She calls on the goddess to be her personal ally in love and receives her encouraging promises at Sappho 1. For delight, nectar, and happiness see 2; 96; 112 (Voigt). For pleasant epithets see 33; 102 (Voigt). For permission or favor see 33; 5 (Voigt). These ideas are found elsewhere in both Greek and Latin poetry. See also Catullus 36; Horace 1.13.15f.; 1.15.13; 1.18.6; 1.30.

<sup>210</sup> *A.P.* 5.11; 5.17; 5.75; 5.121, for example.

<sup>211</sup> She is also seen working cooperatively in service of love at Catullus 61 and 13. See Stephens, 286ff. for a discussion of the relationship between Venus and Cupid in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

She does not exist exclusively or even primarily in the fresh, green *locus amoenus* of Theocritus, *Idyll* 28 (Edmonds), Horace 1.4.5, Anacreon 346 (Campbell) or 357. She does not show even the slightest compassion for Psyche and Cupid's grief, despite the real pain she suffers at the end of her own love affair in Bion 1. In general, Apuleius emphasizes the negative traits associated with Venus/Aphrodite in love poetry and ignores or contradicts many of the positive ones, a choice which supports her role as the narrative's villain.

Lucretius:

At the start of Venus' opening speech (4.30.1) there are verbal echoes of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* which have been identified by scholars but which have received little analysis of their content and effect.<sup>212</sup> Each of these allusions to Lucretius' didactic poem reinforces the elevated tone and high style of Venus' monologue, the importance of the generative role which she claims for herself in the universe, and her keen sense of her own entitlement to be worshiped. Yet, the high minded cosmogonical Venus which she paints here is comically incongruous with the petty, jealous, tempestuous, and bathetic Venus which emerges shortly. There is irony in the Lucretian allusion. There she appears as a positive, favorable, and attractive life-force (unlike in Apuleius). She is also

---

<sup>212</sup> Kenney, 121; *GCA*, 57f. identifies the following associations: between *rerum naturae* (4.30.1) and Lucretius' title *De Rerum Natura* and Lucretius 1.21; between *prisca parens* (4.30.1) and especially the proem of Lucretius' poem with its description of Venus as a generative force and *alma Venus* (Lucretius 1.2); between *origo initialis* (4.30.1) and *rerum...genitalis origo* (Lucretius 5.176), although here it does not refer to Venus.

depicted as responsible for all births and thus even for the birth of her rival Psyche! It is similarly amusing that Apuleius' Venus should be familiar enough with Lucretius' poem to allude to its opening lines in the opening of her own speech, but not familiar enough to have noticed the main points of the poem. Lucretius argues, after all, that the gods do not directly interfere in the affairs of mortals (which Venus is about to do here) and that their cult (which she is so concerned to maintain) is not only unhelpful but sometimes harmful to mortals! This very early allusion to Lucretius is reinforced by verbal echoes of the Lucretian prologue later in Venus' marine cortege and in the final lines of the ecphrasis of her trip to Jupiter's citadel.<sup>213</sup> The references to Lucretius are an occasion for Apuleius to include literary and philosophical allusions (so common to Latin literature), to give the narrative Roman color, to contribute to Venus' characterization by showing her high opinion of herself, and to provide some sly undercutting humor at Venus' expense.

Apuleius' Venus and the stock characters of Ancient Drama:

The Venus character in the Cupid and Psyche episode also shares some features found in ancient drama. The frequent appearance of choruses in the narrative, for example, including the depiction of Venus with a 'chorus' of sea nymphs at 4.31.6 and references to the Muses as a chorus (5.28.7 and 6.23.3) may point to "a certain metatheatricality" at

---

<sup>213</sup> See *GCA*, 76 on *persultantes* as a conscious echo of *Lucr.*1.14 and *GCA*, 405 on 6.6.4 as an evocation of *Lucr.*1.6f.

work.<sup>214</sup> In particular, scholars have examined the connection between the Cupid and Psyche tale and comedy, identifying a number of comic features in the narrative such as the fact that it ends with a wedding, at which a formerly disapproving parent celebrates, concerns the pairing of a higher class man with a lower class woman against the wishes of the man's parent, includes a child being conceived without the benefit of marriage, schemes to deceive, and stock comic characters.<sup>215</sup> Apuleius' Venus may well play on two stock characters familiar from comedy, namely the angry disapproving parent and the *lena*.

The *senex iratus* and *durus pater* are recognized as a comedic archetype by both ancient authors and modern critics.<sup>216</sup> May, in particular, has pointed out that Apuleius' Venus fulfills the function and has many of the traits associated with the *senex* such as age, anger, and a blocking function in the narrative.<sup>217</sup> Apuleius exploits this conventional comic characterization by stressing Venus' advancing age more than once<sup>218</sup> and giving her anger significant emphasis (calling her, most notably, *irata* at 5.28.7). As in the case of the *durus pater*, she feels she has sole authority over her son whose relationship with

---

<sup>214</sup> May, 209. Depictions of a chorus also appear in connection with Psyche (4.33.4, 5.3.5, 5.15.2). It is the frequency of these references to the chorus in the narrative that is striking since it is not unusual to find, for example, mosaic representations of Venus with a marine cortege in Roman North Africa. See Dunbabin, 154f.; Slater, 21; and *GCA*, 74.

<sup>215</sup> Frangoulidis, 145ff.; Konstan, 135, 137f.; May, 208ff.

<sup>216</sup> Naturally, the two frequently overlap since the parent of an adult is likely *senex*. See Ovid, *Amores* 1.15.17f.; Frye, 171ff.; Hough, 86f.; MacCary, 303f.

<sup>217</sup> May, 235ff.

<sup>218</sup> Venus' own anxiety about her advancing age is on show at 5.29.4. The descriptor *parens* (applied to Venus at 4.30.1) is usually applied to old ladies in Apuleius' *Met.*, see Panayotakis, 32f. The notion of her aging is especially arresting since the gods are typically depicted as ageless.

an unsuitable girl she desires to ruin and ultimately her opposition to the marriage gives way to a wedding at the close of the narrative. May also points to Apuleius' use of the comic convention of just stepping outside (*foras*) to encounter neighbors and to comic, especially Plautine, language in the narrative.<sup>219</sup> Juno and Ceres' advice to 'let youth have its way' in reaction to Venus' rage at 5.31.3 is similarly familiar from comedy.<sup>220</sup> To these similarities I would add that Apuleius' Venus, like the *durus pater* or *senex iratus*, issues threats, is violent toward slaves, and is the unsuspecting victim of her son's trickery. That Venus is thus assuming, at least in part, the role of a man is also an interesting addition to the gender play already at work in the narrative. The questor figure, with which Psyche is associated (as we shall see in Chapter 5), is also typically male.

Ancient Comedy's *lena*, like the *durus pater*, is mentioned by Ovid as one of the typically Menandrian stock characters.<sup>221</sup> As May points out, Venus herself brings up the idea of her characterization as a *lena* for Cupid in her explicit denial of it at 5.28.9. The seagull initiates the line of thought by saying that Cupid had been cavorting *montano scortatu*. Venus' indirect association (through Mercury at 6.8) with an exchange of kisses for information and with the *metae Murtiae*, a location closely connected to prostitution (and a Plautus-like Roman break in the illusion of a Greek tale) are also cited

---

<sup>219</sup> May, 237. See also *GCA*, 359 on the Plautine topos of Love's bitterness recalled by *amores amare* at 5.31.6; *GCA*, 337 on Apuleius' use of archaisms from comedy. See Callebat, 502f. on the forms of imperative in *-to* (which Venus commonly uses) as recalling the atmosphere of Old Comedy.

<sup>220</sup> *GCA*, 355. See e.g. Plaut. *Bacch.* 410.

<sup>221</sup> Ovid, *Amores* 1.15.17f. (cited by May, 238).

by May as evidence of Venus' depiction as a *lena*.<sup>222</sup> Ceres and Juno's response to Venus' anger at 5.31.6 (*vitiorum muliebrium publicam...officinam*) may also obliquely suggest that Venus is like the madam of a public brothel.<sup>223</sup> While the situation of a son carrying on a secret affair with a prostitute arranged by a *lena* certainly seems comic, it is less clear that a depiction of Venus as a comic *lena* (beyond the immediate context of the conversation between the seagull and Venus) is intended. Unlike the case of Venus as *durus pater*, the allusion to the comic *lena* is fairly localized and limited. Venus does not, for example, show many of the traits most typical of a *lena*. She is not depicted in the narrative as bibulous, motivated by money, of a low social class, and does not employ black magic.<sup>224</sup> She has no other clients and her slaves, *Consuetudo*, *Sollicitudo*, *Tristities*, are not appropriate to a *lena*. Moreover, the *lena* figure is hardly unique to ancient comedy. A similar character may be found in epigram (*A.P.* 7.455f.; 11.67; Mart. 9.29), Hellenistic mime, (Herodas, *Mim.* 1), elegy (Tibullus 1.5.47f.; Propertius 4.5; Ovid *Amores* 1.8) and perhaps Roman mime.<sup>225</sup>

---

<sup>222</sup> May, 239.

<sup>223</sup> *GCA*, 359.

<sup>224</sup> See Myers, 6 on these typical behaviors for the *lena*.

<sup>225</sup> Myers, 3 provides most of this list. See McKeown, 79; Fantham, 159 on elegy and Roman mime.

Myth:

Additionally, the Venus character in the Cupid and Psyche episode demonstrates a number of traits which are familiar from depictions of Venus in myth.<sup>226</sup> The image of the goddess dancing at a feast of gods in the company of the Muses and Graces (as at 6.24), her attendance at wedding parties (6.10f.) and the *theatrum deorum* (6.16), her golden chariot pulled by birds (6.6), her attractive appearance (5.31) and interest in her own beauty (6.16), her association with grace, charm, joy, love and marriage (5.28), and her own love affairs with gods and men (5.31) are not novel.<sup>227</sup> Yet, these quite positive qualities, while present in the narrative in some small way, are not given significant attention. She spends most of the narrative raging and hounding Psyche, not socializing. When she does attend a wedding party at 6.10 she uses it as an occasion to torment Psyche. She employs her lovely chariot at 6.6 to storm up to Jupiter and demand

---

<sup>226</sup> By ‘myth’ I refer to narrative traditions, examples of which are to be found in the extant corpus of ancient literature. I do not mean folktale traditions (such as the malevolent step-mother who persecutes her attractive, innocent step-daughter) as they may or may not be preserved in modern fairy/folktales around the world. For a discussion of the numerous folktale elements in the Cupid and Psyche episode see Swahn; Walsh, 193f.; Wright, 273ff. As Kenney, 18 points out, we cannot be certain whether Apuleius’ story reflects and draws on these folktales or whether his story has itself been a source for the development of these fairy or folktales. Fehling, in fact, argues exactly the latter. The focus of this study is literary and thus I also do not attempt to cover the vast topic of Venus/Aphrodite in art.

<sup>227</sup> At festive occasions: *Hom. Hymn* 3.186ff.; Plato, *Symp.* 178; Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 165; Apuleius, *Met.* 10.30ff.; On Venus’ chariot with birds: Ovid, *Met.* 9.708; Ovid, *Met.* 14.597; Statius, *Silv.* 1.2.51; On her appearance: Apuleius, *Met.* 2.8ff.; *Orphic Hymn* 57; *Hom. Hymn* 6.6ff.; *Hom. Hymn* 5.78ff.; Homer, *Il.* 3.396ff.; Her associations with grace, love, pleasure, joy etc.: Hesiod, *Theog.* 176; Homer, *Il.* 14.187; *Hom. Hymn* 5; Ovid, *Her.* 3.116ff.; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 1.28f.; Seneca, *Med.* 62; Apuleius, *Met.* 10.30; Aeschylus, *Supp.* 1038; Venus’ own love affairs are numerous: with Ares, Hephestus, Dionysus, Adonis, Anchises, etc.

Mercury's help in tracking down Psyche. Her interest in getting some of Proserpina's beauty for herself (6.16) is intended to result in Psyche's death. She is at pains to destroy Cupid and Psyche's love affair and is not seen pursuing her own love interests in the narrative. In fact, her fondness for affairs is only mentioned by Ceres and Juno at 5.31 in order to point out her hypocrisy. Other of her traditional traits have been ironically inverted. Her common epithet "laughter-loving"<sup>228</sup> is played upon (*laetissimum cachinum extollit*, 6.9.1; *subridens amarum*, 6.13.2) to stress her cruelty, and her usual association with procreation is undermined by her clear distaste for Psyche's pregnancy and the prospect of becoming a grandmother (6.9.4).<sup>229</sup> Venus' demand for the waters of the Styx, traditionally used by gods to prevent lying,<sup>230</sup> is amusingly at odds with her own propensity to bend the truth in this narrative.<sup>231</sup> Certainly Venus' tendency to be competitive or to see others as rivals (as she does Psyche) is a familiar one, both for Venus<sup>232</sup> and for other gods.<sup>233</sup> Venus' anxiety and anger at the prospect of her cult being neglected is seen in the myths of Hippolytus, Hippomenes, the Lemnian women,

---

<sup>228</sup> Hesiod, *Theog.* 986; Homer, *Od.* 8.362; *Hom. Hymn* 5; *Suidas* s.v. *Philomedes*, for example.

<sup>229</sup> Parker, 182. Parker, 181 erroneously asserts that Venus' "aggression towards Cupid...is not paralleled in earlier works and appears to be novel to Apuleius' Venus." In fact, this is seen in *A.P.* 5.178; Apollonius' *Argonautica* 3.90ff.; Moschus 1.

<sup>230</sup> Hesiod, *Theog.* 782ff.

<sup>231</sup> Cupid is hardly a *puerum ingenuum et investem* (5.28.7), for example.

<sup>232</sup> Venus competes with Athena (Nonnus, *Dion.* 24.261ff.), with Achilles (Photius, *Myriobiblon* 190), at the Pythian games (Photius, *Myriobiblon* 190) and in the judgment of Paris.

<sup>233</sup> Other gods compete and treat rivals harshly too. Consider Athena's treatment of Arachne (Ovid, *Met.* 6.1ff.), for example.

Menelaos, Pasiphae, Polyphonte, Propoetides, and Tyndareus,<sup>234</sup> although this worry too is not unique to Venus among the gods.<sup>235</sup> Venus' decision to punish Psyche with an unsuitable lover has ample precedent in the penalties she meted out to Poseidon's sons, the daughters of Eos, Hippolytus, Kinyras, Kleio, Narcissus, Pan, Pasiphae, Polyphonte, and Myrrha.<sup>236</sup> In general then, Apuleius' use of myth in his construction of Venus does not seem haphazard. He downplays or subverts certain of her traditional characteristics and associations, while he plays up others with noticeable effect. The Venus of the Cupid and Psyche episode exhibits many of the most negative and destructive traits associated with her tradition and few of the best and loving ones.

#### Apuleius' Venus and Virgil's *Aeneid* :

Numerous allusions or possible allusions to Virgil's *Aeneid* have already been identified in Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche narrative. Book six of the *Metamorphoses*, Psyche's katabasis, in which Apuleius clearly draws repeatedly on book six of the *Aeneid* and

---

<sup>234</sup> On Hippolytus: Euripides, *Hipp.*; Hippomenes: Ovid, *Met.* 10.681 and Hyginus, *Fabulae* 185; On the Lemnian women: Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.114 and Hyginus, *Fabulae* 15; On Menelaos: Photius, *Myriobiblon* 190; On Pasiphae: Hyginus, *Fabulae* 40; On Polyphonte: Antoninus Liberalis, *Met.* 21; On Propoetides: Ovid, *Met.* 10.220; On Myrrha: Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 3.184; On Tyndareus: Hesiod, *Cat. Frag.* 67 (from Scholiast on Euripides, *Or.* 249).

<sup>235</sup> Juno, for example, expresses the same anxiety (Virgil, *Aen.* 1.48).

<sup>236</sup> On Poseidon's sons: Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 5.55.4; On the daughters of Eos: Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.27; On Hippolytus: Euripides, *Hipp.*; On Kinyras: Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 3.183; On Kleio: Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.16; On Narcissus: Ovid, *Met.* 3.350; On Pan: Photius, *Myriobiblon* 190; On Pasiphae: Hyginus, *Fabulae* 40 and Seneca, *Phaedra* 112; On Polyphonte: Antoninus Liberalis, *Met.* 21; On Myrrha: Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 3.184.

Aeneas' own journey to the underworld has, for example, been a productive source of references to Virgil.<sup>237</sup> As Finkelppearl points out, it is practically inevitable that Apuleius' second century Latin-language narrative of a protagonist's descent to the underworld would recall Virgil's influential epic version, especially given the deliberately imitative tradition of Latin literature.<sup>238</sup> As we shall see in Chapter Five, Apuleius uses Virgil's example of a katabasis imaginatively. He variously conforms to, diverges from, twists, and inverts his source's material to create a narrative which is enriched by the *Aeneid* and which is entertaining and worthy of analysis in its own right. Apuleius' debt to Virgil, however, is not confined solely to the katabasis portion of the narrative and it will be a valuable exercise to examine at this point the relationship which Apuleius' Venus character may have to the Juno and the Venus of Virgil's *Aeneid*. This will help to outline more clearly the broad, bold, and inventive intertextual engagement which the Cupid and Psyche episode is making with Virgil's authoritative epic. Apuleius use of Virgil includes humour, twists, wit, inversion, and complexity for a truly sparkling performance which constitutes a neglected but very important aspect of his characterization of Venus.<sup>239</sup>

---

<sup>237</sup> See below, Chapter Five, on Psyche's characterization as an Aeneas figure.

<sup>238</sup> Finkelppearl, 333.

<sup>239</sup> Surprisingly little work has been done on the connection between Virgilian and Apuleian characters. Major commentaries on Apuleius (such as Kenney's and *GCA*) cite verbal echoes or allusions, usually in the form of line numbers alone. Occasionally connections between Juno and Venus are given some slight elaboration in the commentaries and a paragraph or two on the subject can also be found in Finkelppearl, 345; Schlam, 89; Singleton, 73; and Tatum, 49. The most thorough treatment to date is Parker, 183ff. What follows here thus constitutes a significant contribution to existing scholarship on Venus' characterization.

Apuleius' Venus and Virgil's Juno:

At a basic level the two stories have much in common. A lone sympathetic hero figure (Aeneas / Psyche) is mercilessly persecuted by an unreasonably bitter goddess (Juno / Venus) who is angry about a perceived slight. The hero is forced to endure a series of tests and to encounter monsters (e.g. Harpies / killer sheep). Cerberus is common to both tales. S/he successfully undertakes a dangerous round trip to the underworld (book six in both works) following the advice of a knowledgeable advisor. In both cases things work out favorably for the protagonist at the end of the narrative. Since the presentation of Psyche as an Aeneas figure seems to be a major component of her characterization, the characterization of Venus as a Virgilian Juno would serve to reinforce further Psyche's mock-epic and heroic features.<sup>240</sup> It is also an opportunity to show efficiently that Venus is a dangerous and savagely angry enemy.

The likeness of Apuleius' Venus to Virgil's Juno is striking early in the narrative in the manner and timing of her introduction, her identity as an important goddess, her disposition, the cause and target of her anger, and her opening speech.<sup>241</sup> Both Venus and Juno are introduced in their respective stories by the narrator, after the first appearance of the main protagonist but, nevertheless, very early in the narrative (*Aeneid* 1.4; *Met.*

---

<sup>240</sup> Finkelpearl, 345.

<sup>241</sup> Tatum, 49 introduced the idea that Venus' opening speech is a thematic reworking of Juno's opening speech in the *Aeneid*.

4.29).<sup>242</sup> Each gives the first direct speech of her story in the form of a soliloquy.<sup>243</sup> Both deities are female and their considerable authority is acknowledged by the narrator.<sup>244</sup> Further, each of them is immodest and outraged enough to point out her own (recently disregarded) fundamental importance in the order of the universe.<sup>245</sup> The first characteristics ascribed to each are violent anger and jealous indignation and each of the goddesses will continue to be associated throughout her narrative with *ira* and *saevitia*.<sup>246</sup> The goddesses jealously resent the narrative's protagonist (Aeneas / Psyche) and express particular anger at playing second fiddle to mortal adversaries.<sup>247</sup> Each is affronted and feels that her beauty has been slighted since a rival is preferred.<sup>248</sup> Both goddesses complain of human neglect of their cult and are worried that they will not receive worship and sacrifice.<sup>249</sup> Both goddesses, in fact, have a history of angrily pursuing their

---

<sup>242</sup> Poetic elements in Venus' introduction such as the poetic use of plurals e.g. *numina* and *populi* (4.29.4) and the sonorous alliteration of 'in' and repetition of 's' sounds (4.29.5) identified by *GCA*, 55 add to the perception of a poetic connection here.

<sup>243</sup> Kenney, 121.

<sup>244</sup> Juno: *regina deum* (1.9); Venus: *deae tantae* (4.29.4).

<sup>245</sup> Virgil's Juno: *ast ego, quae divum incedo regina, Iovisque / et soror et coniunx...* (1.46f.); Apuleius' Venus: *En rerum naturae prisca parens, en elementorum origo initialis, en orbis totius alma Venus...*(4.30.1).

<sup>246</sup> Juno: *saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram* (1.4); Venus: *vehementer incendit animos, et impatiens indignationis..*(4.29.5). Additionally, *GCA*, 354 compares Venus at 5.31.3 (*Veneris iram saevientem*) with Juno at *Aen.* 1.25 (*causae irarum saevique*). See also *GCA*, 485 on Apuleian Venus at 6.16.1 (*nutum deae saevientis*) and Virgilian Juno at 7.592 (*saevae nutu Iunonis*).

<sup>247</sup> Juno: 1.47; Venus: 4.30.1.

<sup>248</sup> Venus resents Psyche being the preferred focus of attention and Juno has been overlooked by both Paris (who chooses Venus in his famous judgement) and Jupiter who prefers Ganymede.

<sup>249</sup> Juno: 1.48; Venus: 4.29.5, 4.30.2. As Parker, 186 notes, Apuleius picks up on Juno's unfounded fear that her cult will be abandoned and elaborates on it by having Venus' cult actually suffer such neglect.

adversaries and so their wrathful behavior here does not seem out of character.<sup>250</sup> Apuleius' Venus, like Virgil's Juno, is bitter about the Judgment of Paris, although (in an amusing twist) her complaint is not about the shepherd's verdict but about the small good it did her (*Aeneid* 1.27; *Met.* 4.30.3).<sup>251</sup> These specific associations between Venus and Juno are further reinforced by an association between Venus' diction and tone in her opening speech and the *Aeneid*.<sup>252</sup> Immediately after their respective opening speeches the goddesses, already intent on destroying their enemies, turn to a minor god (Aeolus / Cupid) for help in bringing about their targets' ruin.<sup>253</sup> Each goddess addresses her assistant with some formality and makes a direct appeal for help.<sup>254</sup> Each outlines a specific plan she wishes her helper to carry out and each attempts to make a personal connection with these less prominent male gods. Juno flatters Aeolus, while Venus plays up the maternal bonds which link Cupid to her. In an interesting twist, Juno's offer of a reward for Aeolus' service (marriage) is Venus' plan for the punishment of Psyche.<sup>255</sup>

---

<sup>250</sup> In various myths Venus/Aphrodite has a grudge and seeks revenge on Eos, Helios, Nerites, Diomedes, Narcissus, and others. Juno/Hera similarly persecutes Leto, Semele, Alceme, Heracles, etc.

<sup>251</sup> Tatum, 50. Tatum also notes that the two goddesses both undertake a relentless pursuit because their beauty was slighted.

<sup>252</sup> For example, as Kenney 121 points out, Venus' speech begins with *en*, the first word of both speeches of Allecto, the Fury which Juno sends, (*Aen.* 7.452; 7.545). Apuleius' Venus prefaces her speech with the angry mannerism of head shaking (*capite quassanti*, 4.29.5) as does Virgil's Juno at 7.292 (*quassans caput*), Parker, 186.

<sup>253</sup> Finkelpearl, 345.

<sup>254</sup> Austin *s.v.* 1.65 points out the formal ceremony and the diction appropriate to prayer in *Aeneid* 1.65f. Parker, 185 compares this with *Met.* 4.31.1, *Per ego te...deprecor*.

<sup>255</sup> Parker, 185 thinks that both Juno and Venus offer bribes here. This is not strictly the case. Juno's offer to marry Aeolus to the fairest of her 14 nymphs is very clearly a bribe and is connected to and contingent upon her request for help being met. Venus' uncomfortably familiar French kiss is not exchanged for Cupid's assistance (and thus is

The goddess' desire to bring suffering to their foes (who are unaware and undeserving of these grudges) drives the plot of the narratives.<sup>256</sup> Both Apuleius' Venus and Virgil's Juno cruelly work to keep lovers apart – Venus keeps Psyche miserable and apart from Cupid and Juno sees to it (through Allecto) that the wedding of Aeneas and Lavinia does not come easily.<sup>257</sup>

In fact, Juno's incitement of Allecto at 7.330ff. is particularly recalled by Venus' incitement of Cupid. In each case an angry goddess is described by the narrator as verbally provoking a lesser deity for her own advantage (*quam Iuno his acuit verbis, Aen.7.330; verbis quoque insuper stimulat, Met.4.30.5*). There is then both a situational correspondence and a verbal one (with *verbis* appearing in both sentences, as Kenney, 121 and *GCA*, 64 note respectively). It has not, however, been previously noticed that a description of the deity who is being approached (Allecto/Cupid) accompanies these and provides numerous other parallels. Within these short descriptive passages, which appear immediately before the incitement in Apuleius and immediately before and afterward in Virgil, both Allecto and Cupid are depicted in wholly negative terms and are associated specifically with weaponry and nighttime.<sup>258</sup> They are each described in relation to a

---

not a bribe), although it must certainly be a part of her manipulative attempt to foster a sense of obligation on Cupid's part.

<sup>256</sup> Kenney, 121.

<sup>257</sup> Parker, 185.

<sup>258</sup> Weaponry and martial language: *flammis et sagittis armatus, Met. 4.30.4; sagittae...flammae, Met. 4.31.1; bella, Aen. 7.325; armare in proelia, Aen. 7.335; belli, Aen. 7.339; arma velit, Aen. 7.340*. Note that the passages even contain the related words *armatus, armare, and arma*. Nighttime: *nocte, Met. 4.30.4; Nocte, Aen. 7.331*, where the correspondence includes case but refers to a personification in Virgil.

parent, each is pictured interfering in the homes of others and in marriages, and they are more generally implicated in malfeasance.<sup>259</sup> Both angry requesting goddesses (Juno and Venus) specify that they are concerned with retaining their honours.<sup>260</sup> Moreover, Allecto's funereal association and her portrayal as a snaky and savage monster will soon be applied to Cupid.<sup>261</sup> The epic formula *sic effata*, which appears in the *Met.* only here and 5.31.1 where it also refers to Venus, forms the transition from Venus' speech back to the narrator.<sup>262</sup> This formula, so commonly used in Virgil's *Aeneid*, adds to the epic flavor of the passage, as may the marine cortege which follows it.<sup>263</sup> These thematic and

---

<sup>259</sup> In relation to a parent: *puerum suum*, *Met.* 4.30.4; *pater Pluton*, *Aen.* 7.327; *sata Nocte*, *Aen.* 7.331. Interference in homes: *alienas domos*, *Met.* 4.30.4; *versare domos*, *Aen.* 7.336. Note that *domos* appears in both. Marriages: *matrimonia corrumpens*, *Met.* 4.30.4.; *conubiis*, *Aen.* 7.333. Malfeasance: *committit tanta flagitia et nihil prorsus boni facit*, *Met.* 4.30.4.; *iraeque insidiaeque et crimina noxia*, *Aen.* 7.326; *mille nocendi artes*, *Aen.* 7.338.

<sup>260</sup> *meos honores*, *Met.* 4.30.3; *noster honos*, *Aen.* 7.332.

<sup>261</sup> Funereal: *funerei thalami*, *Met.* 4.33.1; *funereasque...faces*, *Aen.* 7.337. Snakey: *vipereum*, *Met.* 4.33.1; *colubris*, *Aen.* 7.329. Savage: *saeuum*, *Met.* 4.33.1; *saeuae*, *Aen.* 7.329. Monstrous: *ferum...malum*, *Met.* 4.33.1; *monstrum*, *Aen.* 7.328.

<sup>262</sup> *GCA*, 70 identifies the two places the formula appears in the *Met.* and notes its use at Virgil's *Aen.* 4.30; 6.197; 7.456. This is not the only epic formula in the narrative. Harrison, 244n.19 points to a concise version of the epic dawn formula (at 6.11.4) which is familiar from Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* as contributing to the epic tone of parts of the narrative. See also *GCA*, 528 on *his dictis*.

<sup>263</sup> Marine cortegees are traditionally an element of epic (eg. Vergil *Aen.* 5.822f. where the cortege is even referred to as an *exercitus*, as here at 4.31.7), *GCA*, 74; 77. I do not suggest, of course, that the marine cortege is exclusive to epic. Similar to the marine cortege, the ecphrasis (such as the one of Venus' chariot which appears later at 6.6.1f.) is familiar from epic and helps to evoke a generic intertextual connection between Apuleius' *Met.* and other epics. *GCA*, 401 notes in particular the similarity of this passage to Hom. *Il.* 5.722ff. and Ov. *Met.* 2.105f. One might also consider a connection to the arms which Venus gets from Vulcan for Aeneas in *Aen.* 8.370f. since the two situations share the following elements: Vulcan making something, using gold, an ecphrasis on the item, the fact that it is Venus who receives the item in each case, as a gift, mention of Venus' golden bedroom, and mention of her marital relationship to Vulcan as the reason for the favor. The difference in the goddess' plans for the item is

verbal correspondences between Allecto and Cupid's description, the similarity of the situations generally, and the presence of an epic formula draw further attention to Apuleius' use of Virgil and strengthen the connection which Apuleius is building between Virgil's Juno and his own Venus.

Despite the noticeable connection between Apuleius' Venus and Virgil's Juno in their opening appearances and elsewhere, the two characters also have important differences. While both goddesses persecute an undeserving mortal, Juno's target is no less than an accomplished, capable, military figure and, importantly, a man. Venus' victim (and she does seem to be a victim) is instead a helpless, despairing, young woman. Unable to complete her tasks, she must rely on numerous others to avoid Venus' punishments. This difference highlights the comic absurdity of using Psyche as a heroic figure and emphasizes Venus' special cruelty in picking on a girl who is so totally outmatched. Furthermore, Venus' anger is less forgivable than Juno's since it is motivated solely by self-interest for the preservation of her own status and cult. Juno, while hardly entirely altruistic, is at least also concerned with the future of Carthage. Her anger about the private affairs which she cites is also quite understandable. Anyone can understand a woman being bothered by her husband's latest extra-marital infidelity (with Ganymede). By appealing to the precedent of Athena and Ajax, Juno adds to the sense that her anger is more considered than Venus', even though her grudge against Aeneas is not

---

pointed. Virgil's Venus uses the gifts to help Aeneas, Apuleius' Venus uses hers to secure help in hunting down her son's pregnant wife! The end of the ecphrasis also evokes Lucretius, see above, n.213.

necessarily justified. Moreover, it is unsurprising that losing the beauty contest bothered Juno but it is surely unreasonable that Venus complains even when she wins! The appeals which the goddesses make to a lesser male god (Aeolus / Cupid) are also noticeably different in their nature, tone, and outcome. Juno requests a terrible and deadly storm at sea (Venus' plan to punish Psyche with an unhappy marriage seems comically lame by comparison). Juno's tone is very serious, and Aeolus immediately complies with dramatic and dire consequences for a number of Aeneas' ships and men. Far from obeying his mother in delivering even the comparatively minor penalty of love for the lowest of mankind, Cupid actually falls in love with Psyche himself! The ironic result of Venus sending Cupid to arrange the worst possible marriage for Psyche is that Psyche will end up with the best possible marriage (to a god and a god of love, no less!). It is also worth noting that in her appeal to Cupid Apuleius' Venus is not entirely truthful about Psyche's culpability (or lack thereof) in their rivalry, characterizing the girl's beauty as *pulchritudinem contumacem* (4.31.2). Even earlier than this (at 4.30.3) she vows to make sure that Psyche gets no pleasure out of her extraordinary beauty. Of course, by 4.32 the narrator tells us specifically that Psyche is not profiting in any way from her beauty, that she hates her own good looks, and that she spends her time at home alone, weeping, heartsick, and forlorn. This is hardly a *pulchritudinem contumacem*, and one sees none of the insolence which Venus' description suggests. This is an early sign, and one that will be reinforced throughout the narrative, that Venus is not only mean but also dishonest, even with herself! Venus seems, at least at the start, a weaker, pettier, even more strident and unlikable character than Virgil's formidable Juno.

At 5.29 Apuleius' Venus makes a return trip from the sea and back into the story, is outraged to discover that her enemy is still prospering, and makes another indignant speech. Virgil's Juno returns via air (instead of sea), sees that Aeneas, far from destroyed, is doing well, and makes a similarly bitter and angry speech at *Aen.* 7.286ff. The manner in which the goddesses learn that their enemies are doing well contrasts unflatteringly for Apuleius' Venus. While Juno, who is given the dignified title *saeva Iovis coniunx* (7.287) spies Aeneas and his fleet for herself on her way back from Argos and thus seems alert and watchful, a clueless Venus, who is passing her time idly swimming and bathing, has to get her information from an obnoxious tattle-tale bird. Her reaction to the news is also comically unimposing when compared to Virgil's Juno. Venus throws a temper-tantrum, screaming at the top of her lungs (5.28.9) and storming home to berate the insubordinate son whom she threatens, somewhat lamely, to replace (5.29.5) or have his hair cut off (5.30.6). She also vows to make his already unhappy marriage unhappy (5.30.2). Juno's anger is considerably more terrifying and effectual. She calls upon the dreaded goddess Allecto who promptly ruins an engagement and starts a war. Juno's reaction diminishes Venus comically by contrast.

Venus does, however, continually cause Psyche hardships and, in particular, for the fourth task she sends Psyche on a long and dangerous journey where she needs help to survive. Juno ensures hardships and a similarly protracted and dangerous journey for Aeneas. Like Psyche, Aeneas receives assistance from others to succeed. Unlike most of

Psyche's helpers (amusingly unimposing characters such as a talking reed, an ant, an eagle, a tower), many of Aeneas' helpers have significant status and *gravitas*. From immortal aids like Venus and Neptune to human helpers like Sibyl, Anchises, Achates, and Evander, the comparatively elevated status of those who come to aid Aeneas against Juno highlights Virgilian Juno's impressive dignity relative to Apuleian Venus.

The outcome of both the narratives is positive for the protagonists – Psyche is reunited with Cupid and Aeneas vanquishes Turnus - yet the tone of the closing moments could hardly be more different. Psyche's deification is the total opposite of Venus' plans to destroy her (since she is now impervious to death) and Psyche's happiness is made complete by her marriage to Cupid and the birth of their child. The picture of merriment in the rich wedding banquet attended by the gods (*Met.* 6.24) underlines the unmitigated defeat which Venus suffers and shows everyone else's enjoyment of it. In each case it is Jupiter who gets the goddess (Venus / Juno) to give up her hostility, addressing the goddess via her relationship to himself (*filia*, *Met.* 6.22.4; *coniunx*, *Aen.* 12.793) and smoothing the way for a wedding. Juno's defeat in the violent death of Turnus, however, is substantially less glorious and she does, at least, succeed in convincing Jupiter to give Aeneas' descendants the name and language of the Latins, rather than that of the Trojans.<sup>264</sup> Jupiter reinforces Juno's important status by listening to her feelings on the matter at some length (12.808-828), by talking to her directly about the situation (12.793-

---

<sup>264</sup> So violent and ambiguous is the final scene of the *Aeneid* that many scholars have questioned the basic morality of Aeneas' actions. See Burnell, 186ff. for a discussion of the pertinent issues.

806; 12.830-840), responding to her requests with diplomacy, and by conceding clearly on some points (*do quod vis, et me victusque volensque remitto*, 12.833). Conversely, Apuleius' Jupiter makes his decision to restore Psyche to Cupid without consultation with Venus, makes his pronouncement in two short sentences, and orders her to cheer up. He concedes to Venus (and it is an imposition more than a concession!) that the relationship which she so violently opposes will be legitimized by matrimony. Venus is given no opportunity to respond, her anger having been sufficiently neutralized by Jupiter's command that she is even pictured dancing at the wedding (6.23.3). This is hardly to be compared with the rather more stately negotiated end to hostilities with the formidable Juno of the *Aeneid*. The connection between the two goddesses points up Venus' comparative weakness and comic pettiness quite nicely.<sup>265</sup>

---

<sup>265</sup> Venus' connection to Juno is further reinforced by her similarity to Juno in certain other myths. Venus treats Psyche here like Juno treats her rivals Semele, Callisto, and Io. Her persecution of pregnant Psyche recalls Juno's persecution of pregnant Semele, Callisto, and Io, as Kenney, 202; Walsh, 52f. (who also adds that Hera is informed about Io by a bird); and Fehling, 22 have noted. In addition to the fact that both women are pregnant, the Cupid and Psyche episode also shares with the Semele narrative the following elements: a mortal woman's affair with a god, an eagle character, the birth of a deity, and a god begging his mortal lover not to look at him for her own safety (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.308ff.; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 179; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 8.178ff.). Callisto, like Psyche, is remarkable for her beauty, as the Greek root of her name suggests, and she similarly receives the uninvited sexual attention of a god (Ovid, *Fasti* 2.155f.; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 410), while the Io story (Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 561ff.; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 145; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.583) includes the idea of a woman, pregnant with a god's offspring and jealously hated by the goddess, undergoing extensive wanderings and meeting with strange adversaries.

Apuleius' Venus and Virgil's Venus:

With the connection between Virgil's Juno and Apuleius' Venus thus established emphatically and early (via similarities and contrasts), the reader may be expected to pick up on even subtle associations between the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* as the narrative progresses. There would also seem to be an intertextual connection between the Venus of the *Aeneid* and that of the *Metamorphoses*. It is typical of Apuleius' complexity and wit that he has managed to align his Venus simultaneously with Virgilian Juno and with Virgilian Juno's opponent, Venus. In both stories Venus approaches Cupid<sup>266</sup> and asks him to inflame passion (fire imagery appears in both passages)<sup>267</sup> between the protagonist and another. Virgil's Venus does so for Aeneas' protection, Apuleius' Venus for Psyche's punishment. The contrast effectively highlights how far Apuleius' vindictive Venus is from a loving motherly protector. In both cases, however, the tactic does not work as it is intended since Aeneas' wish to remain with Dido proves a threat to his destiny and Cupid disobediently falls in love with Psyche himself.<sup>268</sup> In fact, it is Virgil's Juno (like Apuleius' Venus) who hopes to ruin the protagonist by a marriage

---

<sup>266</sup> Parker, 189 and Kenney, 123 also note that both Virgilian and Apuleian Venus approach Cupid for help. Parker, 189 further remarks that in both cases the Venuses, "as the goddesses of love, assume the paradoxical roles of employing love to harm." This paradox (if it is a paradox, for unhappy or star-crossed love is still love) is hardly unique to the *Aeneid* or the *Met*. In other myths Venus employs her talents as she wishes, for good or for ill. She punishes Smyrna, for example with incestuous love (Hyginus *Fab.* 58. 164, 251, 271).

<sup>267</sup> Love's 'fire' appears at *Aeneid* 1.673; 1.688 and elsewhere; and *Metamorphoses* 4.31.1. References to the 'fire' of passion are not uncommon, of course. See, for example, Cicero's *in Verrem* 5.92; Catullus 61.171, Valerius Maximus 4.6.2.

<sup>268</sup> Parker, 190 sees a further connection between Dido's death as a result of this disastrous love affair and Psyche's near deaths by suicide as a result of her love affair.

(or pseudo-marriage between Aeneas and Dido). In this instance, Apuleius would seem to be conflating Virgil's Juno and Venus into one angry goddess who seeks to punish the hero (like Juno) and acts via Cupid (like Venus) to establish an unsuitable marriage. In both cases the lover's (i.e. Dido's and Cupid's) palatial home is described at some length. Dido's home is literally a royal palace (*Aen.* 1.631-2), Cupid's a proverbial one (*Met.* 5.1.2). Each is complete with gold, silver, precious stones and gems, graven images, carved wood, ivory, high ceilings, splendid interiors, atmospheric lighting, regal banqueting, reclining, good food and wine, lyre music, numerous servants and their voices. The connection between Aeneas' striking experience of stumbling into Juno's elaborate bronze temple with its artistic reliefs (*Aen.* 1.447) and Psyche's discovery of Cupid's golden palace with its own wondrous engravings (5.1) is obvious.

At 6.7 Apuleius' Venus approaches Jupiter with a haughty appeal, he consents and gives her the use of Mercury. Virgil's Venus also approaches Jupiter at 1.228ff. and asks for help. She too receives assurances from the god and the help of Mercury (1.297). Here again, the contrast is effective, makes for humor, and belittles Apuleius' Venus and her helper, Mercury. At the request of Virgil's Venus Mercury is sent on an important mission to ensure that Aeneas and the Trojans are well received by Dido and the Carthaginians. The Apuleian Venus flatters Mercury and sends him out to announce a merely personal (not diplomatic) matter that Venus is looking for a run-away slave. He, now more in the role of a town crier than a dignified messenger of the gods, even offers the tawdry award of a tongue kiss. While Virgil's Venus tearfully and humbly requests

Jupiter's intervention for the sake of her son's safety, Apuleius' Venus storms up to heaven and arrogantly presses her case. She does this, not out of motherly affection, but rather to satisfy her own obsessive grudge against an innocent victim. In fact, the maternal care of Virgil's Venus is seen frequently in the *Aeneid*. She intercedes for him, sees that he gets armor, and even heals him when he is wounded. By way of contrast, one finds none of this from Apuleius' Venus who at 4.31.1 tries to exploit her parental relationship to manipulate her son (*'Per ego te,' inquit, 'maternae caritatis foedera deprecor...*) and at 5.29ff. upbraids, insults, and threatens him. Her one show of affection (and it's a calculated gesture) is a disturbing open-mouthed kiss (4.31.4). Apuleius' Venus is not very likeable and especially so when compared to Virgil's Venus. Whereas the Virgilian Venus is careful to appear submissive to Juno (even if it is a false appearance such as at *Aen.* 4.107f.), the Apuleian Juno, *magni Iovis germana et coniuga* (6.4.1)...*nuptam Tonantis et reginam dearum* (6.4.2), is cowed by the Apuleian Venus' raging and must make lame excuses to Psyche.<sup>269</sup>

Naturally, such confluences between the two works add to the perception that Apuleius is making multiple and complex intertextual play with the *Aeneid*. His Venus is now like Virgil's Venus, now like Virgil's Juno. Apuleius' Cupid is sometimes like Virgil's Cupid, and at others is linked to Virgil's Dido. This adds considerably to the literary appeal of the narrative. While it seems clear that Apuleius is drawing on Virgil's *Aeneid* (and especially on his Juno and Venus characters), he does so while simultaneously using

---

<sup>269</sup> Parker, 192.

not only his own creativity, but also other important source material, as we have seen in the earlier sections.

#### Character Analysis:

In addition to his use of previous sources and models for Venus, Apuleius has used various other methods to produce a vividly drawn Venus character which has real and lasting impact. Nevertheless, Apuleius' Venus has not been the subject of much discrete or detailed analysis. Scholars have rightly noted her bad temper and jealousy,<sup>270</sup> tried to associate her with the Isis of book eleven of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*,<sup>271</sup> or explored her possible connection to folktale.<sup>272</sup> Several have pointed out incidentally that some of her behavior is amusing or unexpected for a goddess but this feature of her character has not previously received sufficient attention to demonstrate its extent or effect in the narrative.<sup>273</sup> The remainder of this chapter provides, by a multifaceted approach, a thorough examination of the Venus character which offers new insights into Apuleius' characterization and places a special emphasis on his employment of humor and wit, an area which has been underestimated by scholars to date.

---

<sup>270</sup> Frangoulidis, 67; Singleton, 73; Tatum, 49, for example.

<sup>271</sup> Singleton, 62ff.

<sup>272</sup> Fehling, Swahn; Walsh, 193f.; Wright, 273ff.

<sup>273</sup> Grimal, 24; Parker, 198; Schlam, 97; Walsh, 200ff.

First Appearance:

A character's first appearance is always important since it shapes the audience's initial opinion of the character. This will be the audience's only direct encounter with the character at first and it is thus very powerful. Even when subsequent appearances arise they will be viewed in light of the impression left by this first encounter. Venus' first appearance in the narrative is given special emphasis by its length (it extends from 4.29.5 – 4.31.7), its variety (using third person description, monologue, and dialogue), its speeches, its impact on plot development (setting up both the motivation for Venus' hatred of Psyche and the conditions for Cupid and Psyche's love affair), its allusions (to Lucretius and Vergil),<sup>274</sup> and its novelty (since the introduction of a major new character naturally draws the reader's interest). Venus' initial appearance here sets the tone for her subsequent appearances in the narrative and deftly introduces many of the primary traits and negative behaviors which will shape Venus' character throughout. The points of character which are introduced at this first appearance have real impact and leave the reader with a reliable and negative first impression of Venus on which Apuleius consistently builds as the story unfolds. Apuleius presents Venus here as an angry, menacing, hasty, jealous, vain, vengeful, dishonest, powerful, but inept goddess. Although these traits mostly bode ill for Psyche, as does her connection to the *Aeneid's* Juno, Venus is also the target of some diminishing humor and appears comically over the top in her reactions.

---

<sup>274</sup> See above, 99f. and 106f.

Venus' anger is, of course, a primary component of her personality and is the first trait to appear in the narrative (4.29.5). Furthermore, this trait receives stress at Venus' first appearance since it is conveyed by multiple methods. Her rage is communicated via direct characterization (in the voice of the narrator, *incendit animos, indignationis*), by disturbing and comical alliteration (4.29.5), and emphatic descriptors (*vehementer, inpatiens*). She is also represented via indirect characterization here as angry by means of her own outraged and threatening words, her intertextual connection to the implacable Juno of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the immediate action she takes to secure Psyche's unhappiness. The goddess' bad temper will be continually emphasized in the narrative by her own angry, explosive behavior and by direct characterization.<sup>275</sup> Venus' irate mannerisms also add realistic, natural detail and indirectly characterize her negatively. This first appearance of Venus shows her shaking her head in uncontrolled indignation and groaning (4.29.5). Such angry, unattractive mannerisms will continue to accompany the descriptions of Venus throughout the narrative.

In fact, it is worth noting that absolutely all the physical mannerisms which Apuleius attributes to the goddess are negative and convey bad temper or rage.<sup>276</sup> Even Venus' ear

---

<sup>275</sup> See especially *irata*, 5.28.6; *indignata*, 5.28.9 and 5.31.7; *infesta*, 5.31.1; *stomachata biles Venerias*, 5.31.1; *Veneris iram saeuientem*, 5.31.3; *furens animi*, 6.2.2; *saeviens ira*, 6.2.6; *saeuientis*, 6.16.1. Parker, 202 notes that 16 of the 45 adjectives and participles which describe Venus indicate that she is angry and threatening.

<sup>276</sup> Venus' mannerisms include: shaking head angrily and groaning 4.29.5; moaning and groaning in indignation 4.30.5; angry outbursts 5.28.5 and elsewhere; shouting in indignation 5.28.9; yelling 5.29.1; storming out on Cupid 5.31.1; storming out again

scratching is associated with anger and histrionics.<sup>277</sup> Her sardonic smiles and hysterical, irate laughter are a clever inversion of her usual epithet as smiling Aphrodite and convey her fury emphatically.<sup>278</sup> She is even angry when she's smiling! These details about the goddess' gestures not only support the clear characterization of Venus as constantly infuriated but are individualizing touches which result in a more distinct, vivid, and realistic portrayal of personality. Her excessive anger, which stands out among her numerous negative characteristics, is given real emphasis. This anger helps to tie her intertextually to Juno of Virgil's *Aeneid*, adds dramatic tension to the narrative, elicits sympathy for the story's main protagonist Psyche, and humorously undermines Venus. Her extreme rage together with her status as a powerful goddess initially suggest that Psyche will not escape retribution.

The final line of Venus' monologue (4.30.3), in particular, stresses Venus' menacing personality and propensity for hastiness. Most obviously, she is issuing a threat (*paeniteat*) against Psyche, something she will do several more times throughout the narrative.<sup>279</sup> She also utters numerous threats against Cupid later which demonstrate that Cupid is also a victim of Venus' behavior.<sup>280</sup> All of this intimidation shows Venus as an unpleasant and menacing character whose threats are sometimes vague (like this one), sometimes absurd (like making a new Cupid out of a slave, 5.29.5), and always, always

---

5.31.7; wildly laughing in a fit of rage 6.9.1; shaking head 6.9.1; mocking/bitter smile 6.9.4, 6.13.2, 6.16.2; scratching right ear 6.9.1; frowning 5.31.1, 6.13.2.

<sup>277</sup> *GCA*, 425.

<sup>278</sup> See above, 105n.228.

<sup>279</sup> Venus' threats against Psyche occur at 4.30.3; 6.9.6; 6.13.5; 6.16.2.

<sup>280</sup> Threats against Cupid occur at 5.29.5; 5.30.2; 5.30.5f.

empty. Although she does succeed in imposing suffering on Psyche and Cupid for a time, none of her threats are fulfilled ultimately. Here her threat to make Psyche regret her beauty is not only empty but unnecessary since Psyche resents her unusual good looks well before Venus' intervention (4.32.4). Later, Psyche and Cupid do end up happily married, the baby is safely delivered, Venus does not have a new baby to replace Cupid, etc. These empty threats, all made in the heat of the moment, show that Venus is angry but is not particularly calculating or deceptive, a quality traditionally associated with the goddess.<sup>281</sup> This failure to develop sophisticated secret plans and her tendency to react (or overreact) immediately, without spending time plotting, is also demonstrated by Venus' interest in speed. It is apparent here in her first threat against Psyche (*iam*, 4.30.3) and is given considerable stress by repetition elsewhere. There are no fewer than seventeen textual references (adverbs, verbs, and adjectives) to Venus' preoccupation with haste.<sup>282</sup> Venus is not only hasty in her own actions, but demands an immediate response from others (like Psyche and Mercury) and is volatile emotionally, reacting quickly with rage. Venus' haste supports the other negative characteristics she has shown since it implies impatience, is connected to her anger, and may be related to her inability to impose her will on Cupid. Her wheedling request for Cupid's help at 4.31 was

---

<sup>281</sup> See above, 97n.206.

<sup>282</sup> *iam* 4.30.3; *confestim* 4.30.4; *statim* 4.31.5; *repente* 5.28.6; *properiter*, *protinus* 5.29.1; *iam* 5.30.2; *sese proripit* 5.31.1; *concito* 5.31.7; *protinus* 6.7.1; *ilico* 6.7.2; *matures* 6.7.4; *protinus* 6.7.5; *ubi primum* 6.9.1; *involat* 6.10.1; *proiecto* (since throwing food conveys haste as well as contempt) 6.11.2; *confestim* 6.11.6; *haud immaturius redito* 6.16.5. *GCA*, 334 rightly notes that sometimes Apuleius' succinct phrasing emphasizes Venus' speed, as at 5.29.1.

unsuccessful. Perhaps she should not have hurried off before securing an answer from him! Her volatility also adds to the dramatic tension of the narrative.

The emptiness (and in some cases laughable improbability) of Venus' threats diminishes Venus in the eyes of the reader. Similarly, her first appearance contains some rather unflattering humor and irony, an important feature of her characterization which will emerge strongly as the narrative progresses. It is worth noting at this point, however, the significant role which humor at Venus' expense plays in the reader's introduction to this important character. Venus' first speech, which as a monologue has no intended audience but herself, is (ridiculously!) not completely truthful and is absurd at points. Her divine honors are not being divided (*partiaro*, 4.30.1) with a mortal girl, as she suggests. They have been handed over wholesale to Psyche (4.29.1-2; 4.29.4) or have been neglected entirely (4.29.3). Psyche's beauty was not usurped, *illicitae*, or a source of joy to her (4.30.3) as Venus implied but was unsolicited, unwelcome, and the cause of her lonely suffering (4.32.1-4). Far from being a *puella moritura* (4.30.3), Psyche will make a successful return trip to the underworld and will be made a deathless immortal by the end of the narrative! Paris cannot seriously be praised for his sense of justice and trustworthiness (*iustitiam fidemque*, 4.30.3) since he betrayed and deceived Menelaus in order to run away with his wife.<sup>283</sup> Moreover, he was hardly an impartial judge since he was induced to rule in Venus' favor by the promise of Helen. In addition to the humor of Venus' lack of self-awareness or her outright self-deception, it is also preposterous to

---

<sup>283</sup> Kenney, 122.

complain about the outcome of a competition when one is the winner! Venus thus is shown to be ridiculous, petty, and an exaggerator, if not a liar, a trait which will appear several times in the narrative.<sup>284</sup>

Venus is vain and jealous of Psyche's beauty, facts which she stresses by angrily mentioning the issue of physical appearance three times in her short opening monologue and by gazing at herself in a mirror while traveling.<sup>285</sup> Given Venus' own evident preoccupation with appearance and her traditional association with beauty, there is noticeably little direct description of her physical appearance at all here or in the narrative generally.<sup>286</sup> Instead, Apuleius will detract from Venus somewhat by emphasizing Psyche's relative beauty, virginity, and youth throughout and by stressing Venus' unattractive personality traits here.

---

<sup>284</sup> Venus falsely represents Cupid as a mere boy (5.29.3), sanitizes the nature of her relationship with Mars (5.30.1), and overstates her role in caring for Cupid in his infirmity (6.16.5), for example.

<sup>285</sup> *imaginem meam* 4.30.2; *eximiam speciem* 4.30.3 where she takes care to mention that she was chosen over other goddesses, a sign of her jealous eagerness, not simply to be considered beautiful, but to be more beautiful than others; *formonsitatis* 4.30.3; a Triton holds a mirror before her eyes 4.31.7.

<sup>286</sup> The relatively few references to Venus' physical appearance in the narrative follow: she refers to her own surpassing beauty 4.30.3 and 5.28.9; rosy feet 4.31.4; Cupid thinks she's old 5.29.4; angry face, the charm of her flashing eyes ruined by frowning 5.31.1; has delicious kisses and a caressing tongue 6.8.3; refers to self as being in the flower of her youth 6.9.5; smelling of balsam with her entire body wreathed in roses 6.11.1; knitted eyebrows 6.13.2; used up all her beauty, needs some of Proserpina's 6.16.4f.; dances gorgeously in time to music 6.23.3. Note that her beauty is only rarely mentioned (except by Venus herself). This allows Psyche's beauty to be a stronger focus.

Furthermore, the immediate introduction to Venus' first speech (4.29.5) with its comically vehement alliteration (*uerae Veneris uehementer; incendit...inpatiens indignationis*) and clever sound effects (such as the angry hissing 's' sounds in *quassanti fremens altius sic secum disserit*)<sup>287</sup> has a lightness which is humorously incongruous with its serious content. Additionally, the level of Venus' anger (which drives her to shake her head furiously and groan ridiculously), the cause of it (petty jealousy over her ritual turf),<sup>288</sup> and its target (a mere mortal) suggest a rage that is comically over the top. Similarly, the opening words of Venus' monologue, tinged as they are with Lucretian color and elevated in tone,<sup>289</sup> present a high-minded goddess whose language suggests that she not only possesses "old-fashioned morality"<sup>290</sup> but is the "universal creative principle"<sup>291</sup> and a "beneficent mother goddess"<sup>292</sup> type. These expectations are almost immediately undercut with comic effect by the reality of Venus' character. While her description of herself is flatteringly decorous, her own monologue reveals that far from high-mindedness, she is obsessively concerned about the attention a mere mortal is receiving and is driven to rage and rash action by petty jealousy and snobbery. Venus' declaration at 4.30.3 (*sed non adeo gaudens...*) is threatening and wrongly assumes that Psyche has willfully usurped Venus' honors. Venus' (again incorrect) assumption that such a power grab would bring joy to Psyche betrays her own lust for honor and position.

---

<sup>287</sup> *GCA*, 56.

<sup>288</sup> *GCA*, 56 on the association of *translatio* with the transfer of rights or possessions in judicial language. This is thus also an example of Venus humorously applying mortal (and especially Roman) legal concepts to her own situation.

<sup>289</sup> See above, p.99f.

<sup>290</sup> Kenney, 121 on *prisca*.

<sup>291</sup> Kenney, 121.

<sup>292</sup> Parker, 196.

Her inflated opinion of herself throughout her speech and of her own (universal, no less!) importance is amusing. Her character's familiarity with Lucretius' poem and her own description there are also entertaining. Any reference to her role in the creation of the universe must also ironically point to the fact that she played a part in her rival's creation. Likewise, beneficence and motherliness (*alma*) are promptly ruled out by her mean-spirited plans for Psyche and her disturbing interactions with her son.

In general, the fact that Venus is a mother is given a surprising amount of emphasis throughout the tale. Not only does she begin her monologue by identifying herself as the original mother of the world, this is quickly reinforced by her appeal to the maternal bond between herself and Cupid and by her reference to herself as Cupid's parent at 4.31.1. Then as the story progresses she is referred to in terms which recall her motherhood fully ten more times and by five different speakers.<sup>293</sup> There are, in fact, few aspects of Venus' identity which receive more direct mention than this one. The constant references to Venus' motherhood, together with frequent references to Venus as a member of an extended family,<sup>294</sup> could humanize Venus and make her a more sympathetic character but do not since she shows so little regard for others, especially her own son. The discrepancy between Venus' angry and aggressive conduct and the expectations one might have of a mother in her treatment of her family make Venus' bad behavior stand

---

<sup>293</sup> See comments by the narrator at 5.22.7; 5.28.1; 6.22.1; by Cupid at 5.24.3; 6.21.4; by Venus at 5.29.2; 5.29.4; 5.29.5; 5.29.5; 5.30.1; by Ceres and Juno at 5.31.5; by Psyche at 6.5.4.

<sup>294</sup> As in *cognatae meae*, 6.3.1; *nurus meae*, 6.4.5; *filiae*, 6.6.4; *sororem tuam Venerem*, 6.7.3; *socrum tuam*, 6.9.2; *aviam beatam*, 6.9.4; *avia*, 6.9.5; *filia*, 6.22.4.

out all the more. Apuleius' repetitive application of *mater* and similar titles to Venus thus has the amusingly paradoxical effect of pointing up her lack of motherliness.<sup>295</sup>

Venus' first interaction with Cupid (4.30.4-4.31.4) reveals the goddess' manipulative side right from the start. She assumes control by calling Cupid to herself (*uocat*; 4.30.4) and leading him (*perducit*, 4.30.5). She plays on one of his pre-existing vices, making him still more *procax* (*uerbis quoque insuper stimulat*, 4.30.5), and attempts to manipulate him in her manner of relating the story (*gemens ac fremens*, 4.30.5) and in the presentation of her actual request. Her appeal for help (4.31.1-4) begins, not with her specific demand which is actually explained last in her speech at 4.31.3, but with a calculated build-up. She relies on her personal connection to her listener (emphasized by the juxtaposition of *ego te* and the hyperbaton which results from separating *per foedera*),<sup>296</sup> their familial association (*maternae...tuae parenti*, 4.31.1), subtle flattery (*dulcia...mellitus*, 4.31.1), and exaggeration of Psyche's culpability (*pulchritudinem contumacem*, 4.31.2). When finally she reveals the substance of her request, she follows it with a kiss (which we can also assume she uses for effect since she certainly shows no affection anywhere else in the narrative). The kiss, with its disturbing incestuous

---

<sup>295</sup> The equally frequent use of *domina* in reference to Venus throughout the narrative has a similar effect since she is unable to control Cupid or Psyche's many helpers and is ultimately unable to exert her dominance over even an opponent as weak as Psyche. Venus is called a *domina* at 4.31.7; 5.28.8; 5.29.2; 5.31.3; 6.4.5; 6.5.3; 6.6.2; 6.6.2; 6.8.5; 6.8.6; 6.13.2; and *erile* at 6.9.3. Venus specifically uses the term of herself at 5.29.2 in an unsuccessful effort to assert her authority over Cupid. As *domina* can also have an erotic context, the word reminds the reader that Venus who is usually the embodiment of erotic love is instead ironically its adversary in this story.

<sup>296</sup> Kenney, 124 notes that the hyperbaton "throws the pronouns into high emotional relief".

overtone, is described in terms of duration (*diu*), pressure (*pressule*), and kind (*osculis hiantibus*) and is thus more noticeable and repellent.<sup>297</sup> This kiss (which would seem to be an attempt to seduce her own son into obeying her) is a sign of Venus' desperation and laughable ineptitude. This isn't an effective tactic, as we soon see, and neither is it sensible for Venus to rest all her plans for vengeance on the cooperation and obedience of a son who is so widely known for his bad morals, contempt for law and order, and impudence (4.30.4-5). The placement of this unflattering description of Cupid immediately before Venus' request underlines the point. Moreover, introducing her son (a young man and a god of love, no less) to the company of a young virgin of extraordinary beauty is not entirely unlikely to result in the very problem which arises. Finally, Venus' appeal to Cupid to help based on *maternae caritatis foedera* (4.31.1) is quite misplaced if the lack of affection (or even civility) which we see in Venus' other interactions with her son is at all representative of their relationship.

Venus' exit from the scene before Cupid (and without his explicit consent to her request or even a response) emphasizes her importance in the narrative and her power relative to him, at least in her own mind. His ensuing disobedience thus comes as something of a surprise to the audience and certainly to Venus. The miraculous mode, destination, and companions of her travel similarly underline her identity as an important deity. Venus'

---

<sup>297</sup> Kenney, 126 cites *A.R.* 3.149 for a kiss between Venus and Cupid when parting but notes that here the kiss is "not exactly maternal" and that the erotic nature of the kiss reflects the erotic associations of both deities involved. True, but this does nothing to remove the repulsiveness of a mother french-kissing her son! See *GCA*, 70 on the emendation of *oculis* in (found in F) to *osculis*, a reading which is widely accepted.

status as a deity, and a major one at that, is emphasized from the start. Early on the narrator specifically mentions the sites of her most famous shrines (Paphos, Cnidos, and Cythera) as well as her rites, statues, garlands, and the interior elements of her shrines such as altars and cushions.<sup>298</sup> The list of these heavenly honors (*honorum caelestium*, 4.29.5) is closely followed by Venus' own speech which stresses her deity by its elevated style and by its content (she refers repeatedly to her own godly attributes).<sup>299</sup> Similarly, many of her actions and movements point to her divinity. Here and elsewhere she can summon minor gods at her will (such as Cupid, 4.30; Nereids and Tritons, 4.31), travel with instantaneous ease (4.30.5, 5.29.1, 6.7.1) or even miraculous splendor (4.31, 6.6). She can walk on water (a common sign of divinity),<sup>300</sup> her unspoken wishes are carried out (4.31.5), later her servants are abstract concepts (6.8, 6.9), minor gods, goddesses, and wondrous birds (6.6). The sea (4.31.5), clouds, Heaven, and the topmost ether (6.6.4) will accommodate her, as will Jupiter and Mercury at 6.7. The reference to her companions as an *exercitus* at 4.31.7 hints at Venus' potential for violence and contrasts amusingly with "the luxurious portrait" which immediately precedes it.<sup>301</sup> All this

---

<sup>298</sup> 4.29. *GCA*, 51 points out that the sentence (4.29.3) which marks the shift in attention towards Venus is sonorous. This naturally gives extra emphasis to the shift. Moreover, the narrator underscores Venus' divinity by adding a redundant *deae* in the phrase *deae Veneris* (4.29.3), redundant since any reader certainly knows that Venus is a goddess, see *GCA*, 52 which also notes the comic effect of stating the obvious like this and several similar examples from the Cupid and Psyche narrative.

<sup>299</sup> Her short initial speech is positively full of references to her own godhead: *rerum naturae prisca parens; elementorum origo initialis; orbis totius alma Venus; maiestatis honore; nomen meum caelo conditum; numinis; piamento; venerationis; meos honores*; her immortality is suggested in contrast to Psyche's mortality (*puella moritura*); her association with other gods (*magnus Iupiter; tantis...deabus*) also highlights her deity.

<sup>300</sup> Kenney, 126. See Homer *Iliad* 13.29-30; 20.228-9; Moschus *Eur.* 114.

<sup>301</sup> *GCA*, 77.

emphasis on Venus' important standing and miraculous abilities reflects Venus' vanity and is ominous for Psyche, a mere mortal whom we cannot expect to outdo a goddess so determined to destroy her. Venus' vanity, which Apuleius neatly demonstrates by picturing her gazing at herself in a mirror while *en route* at 4.31.7, is also a troubling sign for Psyche since a goddess so obsessed with appearances is not likely to tolerate being outshined in this regard. The ephrasis may also contain a metatheatrical reference in *chorum canentes* (4.31.5) and continues the wit and humor seen elsewhere in the narrative via the exploitation of multiple meanings of words and punning.<sup>302</sup> Simultaneously, this traditional ephrasis of a marine cortege benefits from Apuleius' creative combination of sources such as Lucretius, Virgil, and Moschus.<sup>303</sup>

#### Venus' Speech:

Venus' own oral communication is a key component of her characterization and will receive individual assessment in this section. A great deal of direct speech is attributed to Venus. She is given a high word count (920 words of direct speech), a high number of interlocutors (8), and a lengthy monologue. As figure 2 (below) demonstrates, the direct speech attributed to Venus constitutes more than 10% of the total narrative and more than 20% of all the direct speech made by characters other than the narrator. Thus, Venus is directly quoted by the narrator more than any other character. There are also numerous textual references to her oral communication, including but not limited to those which

---

<sup>302</sup> See above, 101n.214 on metatheatricality and below, 147f. on humor.

<sup>303</sup> See above, 98n.208; 99f.; 106.

immediately introduce her direct speech.<sup>304</sup> This points to the importance of speech versus action in revealing Venus' character. Since she does not actually do much in the narrative besides verbally assaulting Cupid and Psyche, her most frequent action in the narrative is, in fact, talking. Her relative inaction is underlined especially by her return to the narrative at 5.28.3 (after a lengthy absence in which Psyche, Cupid, and the sisters have all been quite busy) in the same company, idleness, and location she was in at the close of 4.31! By contrast, she is silent at the close of the narrative only, when she has submitted to Jupiter and assumed a diminished role relative to Cupid and Psyche. Venus' inactivity and loquaciousness show that she mistakenly assumes that her directives will be followed (and thus she need not act herself). Even when it becomes clear that Cupid has disobeyed her previous instructions, she nevertheless lectures him at length, assuming anew that her speech will be effective. Venus' excessive reliance on speech over personal action and her ineptitude at handling her interlocutors make her amusingly ridiculous.

The majority of her words throughout the story are directed at Psyche and Cupid (each hears more than one third of her total word count) which is reflective of their primary

---

<sup>304</sup> There are 32 instances : *fremens* 4.29.5; *secum disserit* 4.29.5; *vocat* 4.30.4; *uerbis...stimulat* 4.30.5; *tota illa perlata...fibula* 4.30.5; *gemens* 4.30.5; *fremens* 4.30.5; *inquit* 4.31.1; *sic effata* 4.31.4; *exclamat* 5.28.6; *exclamavit* 5.28.9; *quiritans* 5.29.1; *maxime boans* 5.29.1; *inquit* 5.29.2; *conloquium* 5.30.4; *effata* 5.31.1; *inquit* 5.31.2; *iubet* 6.6.1; *petitu superbo...postulat* 6.7.1; *serit verba* 6.7.2; *inquit* 6.9.2; *inquit* 6.9.2; *erile praeceptum* 6.9.3; *inquit* 6.9.4; *dicam* 6.9.6; *his editis* 6.10.1; *inquit* 6.11.2; *uocatae...infit* 6.11.4; *censeo* 6.11.6; *inquit* 6.13.2; *aiens* 6.13.5; *comminans appellat* 6.16.2.

place in the narrative.<sup>305</sup> While she speaks to Psyche repeatedly in smaller amounts, she talks to Cupid at only two critical points (when she tells him to punish Psyche and when she berates him for not doing so, the latter getting the most emphasis by far). This helps to define these two points as pivotal to the progression of the narrative and showcases Venus' unattractive callousness, even in connection with her own son. She is totally enraged when speaking with every interlocutor except Mercury who receives cordial treatment (likely because she wants something from him, a sign of her manipulative selfishness). Venus makes frequent use of direct questions, (eleven in total) asking five each of Psyche and Cupid, which adds to the impression that she is an aggressive interrogator, especially at 5.30 and 6.9.2 where she does not give her listeners an opportunity to respond to the rather accusatory questions she poses.<sup>306</sup>

---

<sup>305</sup> Venus' direct speech is allocated as follows: to Cupid 340 words; to Psyche 310 words; in monologue 78 words; to the bird 63 words; to Mercury 58 words; to Juno and Ceres 36 words; to *Sollicitudo/Tristities* 35 words.

<sup>306</sup> Venus' direct questions appear at 5.28.7 of the bird; at 5.30.2f. of Cupid; 6.9.2 of Psyche; at 6.11.5 of Psyche; at 6.13.4 of Psyche. See *GCA*, 344 for the idea that Venus' questions at 5.30 are part of a *διαλογισμός*.

**Figure 2:**

**Distribution of Direct Speech among Characters by Word Count and Percentage**

<b>Character</b>	<b>Word Count of Direct Speech</b>	<b>% of Direct Speech Excluding Narrator</b>	<b>% of Narrative</b>
Venus	920	21.9	10.3
Sisters	824	19.6	9.2
Psyche	805	19.1	9.0
Tower	416	9.9	4.7
Cupid	394	9.4	4.4
Ceres and Juno	227	5.4	2.5
Jupiter	196	4.7	2.2
Reed	90	2.1	1.0
Pan	80	1.9	0.9
Eagle	49	1.2	0.5
Apollo	47	1.1	0.5
Consuetudo	45	1.1	0.5
Invisible Servant	38	0.9	0.4
Mercury	38	0.9	0.4
Ant	15	0.4	0.2
Tattletale Bird	12	0.3	0.1
Water	9	0.2	0.1
Narrator	4705	N/A	52.8

Comparison with Other Characters:

The reader's perception of Venus' character is sharpened by the comparisons one naturally makes between her and other characters. In each case Venus' negative traits are highlighted. Venus' character is related to Psyche's sisters, although the three females never interact directly, via their shared adversarial opposition to Psyche's happiness. Of course, since we hate the sisters linking Venus with them negatively affects our perception of her.<sup>307</sup> Furthermore, as Psyche's only other independent antagonists in the narrative (the talkative bird, *Consuetudo*, *Sollicitudo*, and *Tristities* also act against Psyche but do so merely in service of Venus), they share Venus' propensity for anger, haste, selfishness, and cruelty.<sup>308</sup> Just as one of the sisters shows callous indifference by complaining about the minor inconvenience which her husband's physical pain and suffering causes to *her* (5.10), Venus is also unmoved by the pain of someone she is supposed to love.<sup>309</sup> She is totally unconcerned about anything but her own rage when the bird reports to her that Cupid is suffering grievously from a wound (5.28) and makes no allowances for her ailing son at 5.29, even threatening to inflict further injury (5.30.5). She does not so much as mention his condition until 6.9.2 when she uses it to upset Psyche.<sup>310</sup> At 6.16.5 she mentions it a second time, this time (as with the sister) to complain about its effect on her. Furthermore, both the sisters and Venus question the

---

<sup>307</sup> See above p.65 on the characterization of the sisters.

<sup>308</sup> See Frangoulidis, 67ff. on the connection of Venus and the sisters.

<sup>309</sup> The comparison is made more obvious by the sister actually mentioning a version of Venus' name in connection with her complaints, *uenerem meam*, 5.10.1.

<sup>310</sup> *GCA*, 426.

legitimacy of the marriage of Cupid and Psyche, using these doubts to scare the girl (5.18; 6.9.6). Their selfish opposition to Psyche's good fortune and relationship ties them together and their connection underlines the seriousness of the obstacles which Psyche faces. Simultaneously, the death of the sisters suggests that there may be hope for Psyche in overcoming Venus' cruelty too.

In addition to this example of parallelism in the characterization of Venus and Psyche's sisters, there are many instances of contrast between Venus and other characters in the narrative. In fact, the contrasting characterization of Venus is extensive and affects our perception of the goddess quite significantly. The number of characters who are sympathetic to Psyche and next to whom Venus looks bad is large, fifteen in total.<sup>311</sup> Moreover, these characters are varied in kind, including male and female deities, male and female mortals, plants, animals, and animate objects. They are variously connected to Venus and Psyche, and are peppered throughout the narrative as a constantly recurring contrast to Venus' unreasonable villainy.

Venus' fellow goddesses in the narrative, Ceres and Juno, are obvious candidates for comparison. Not only are they similar in their gender and divine status, they appear together at 5.31 and their opinion of Venus' situation contrasts sharply with her own assessment. They are gentle and understanding about the affair, unlike Venus. Ceres and

---

<sup>311</sup> These include Psyche, Psyche's parents, Zephyr, the invisible servants, Cupid, Pan, Ceres, Juno, Jupiter, the ant, the reed, the eagle, the tower, and even Voluptas who is also the target of Venus' threats.

Juno easily see Cupid's real age; Venus, blinded by rage or deliberately exaggerating, does not. They react coolly, making her seem petty and call her a *cordata mulier* (5.31.5) and a good woman (6.3.1) which only underlines that she isn't these things at all. Theirs are the only three altars in the narrative which are described. While Venus' altars are cold and abandoned and her temples fall into disrepair from neglect (4.29.3), Juno and Ceres' shrines receive diligent care, loving embraces, and pious prayers from (of all people!) Psyche (6.1-6.3) the very cause of the abandonment of Venus' cult. Juno's altar, by way of contrast, is still warm from sacrifices (6.3.4). Apuleius underlines Psyche's innocence in the neglect of Venus' shrines (and thus the irrationality of Venus' hatred) with the ironic affirmation that Psyche cared for Ceres' temple because she felt that no god's ritual should be neglected (6.1.5). The behavior of Ceres and Juno and the comparative condition of their shrines diminish Venus. Juno's explicit desire to help Psyche at 6.4.4 and Ceres' warning for Psyche at 6.2.2, motivated apparently by pity for the girl, distinguish them from Venus' ruthlessness and callousness towards Psyche. Moreover, the reluctance of these powerful goddesses to anger Venus themselves demonstrates Venus' terrifying potential.

Other divinities in the narrative also compare favorably with Venus. Cupid, as a target of Venus' threats and anger, a victim of the sisters' plotting, and as Psyche's love interest, is a sympathetic character whose treatment at the hands of his own mother emphasizes Venus' cruelty. Ultimately, it is Cupid's intercession which secures Psyche's safety. Pan too offers Psyche advice and compassion. Zephyr sees to her safe transport. Jupiter

orders an end to Venus' rage and elevates Psyche to immortality. Even Mercury, who initially acted so quickly to aid Venus in tracking down Psyche, readily obeys Jupiter and carries Psyche to heaven for her deification. In fact, every divinity in the narrative acts or wishes to act against Venus in support of Psyche.<sup>312</sup> This isolation of Venus underlines her singularly irrational and obsessive persecution of Psyche and shows the extent of the contrasting characterization in the construction of Venus' character.

Similarly, many others (who are not divinities) help Psyche or are positively disposed to her and their kindness also points up Venus' cruelty. She is kindly treated by the invisible servants and is helped to complete her labors successfully by the ant, the reed, the eagle, and the tower. Here again, the willingness of so many diverse characters (who have no particular connection to either Psyche or Venus) to side with Psyche, to offer her physical help or sound advice to defeat Venus, and to show sympathy where Venus shows none is striking. Next to these small sincere helpers Venus looks even more mean and petty. Psyche's parents, in particular, are a useful contrast to Venus. As parents they are caring, attempt to help their child as best they can (even consulting an oracle for advice), and show deep and genuine pain at the misfortune of their daughter. Venus, taking quite the opposite approach, is not only entirely unsympathetic towards Psyche,

---

<sup>312</sup> For a fuller discussion of the roles of Pan, Juno, Ceres, Jupiter, and Mercury see above, the 'Minor Characters' chapter.

she is the cause of the girl's trials and is an uncaring, unfeeling parent to her own suffering child Cupid.<sup>313</sup>

Finally, Psyche herself is a foil for Venus' wickedness.<sup>314</sup> Psyche's despair and helplessness underline how dogged and relentless is Venus' pursuit. Psyche's vulnerability and pathetic manner throughout most of the narrative earns her the unsolicited aid of others and brings into relief Venus' acerbic personality and her manipulative attempt to gain assistance for herself from Mercury. The girl's righteous anger at her sisters, who tried to trick her into killing her own husband, and her understandable desire for vengeance point up the pettiness of Venus' grievance against Psyche (ie. that people think she's pretty) and the lack of proportionality in her response (she drives Psyche to the point of suicide repeatedly for this). Venus' beauty is deemphasized by the stress on Psyche's striking beauty, youth, and virginity. Psyche's naïve trust in her sisters, despite Cupid's dire warnings, contrasts starkly with Venus' paranoid suspicion of Psyche and her eagerness to condemn others even when such condemnation is unwarranted. Psyche's curiosity, while dangerous, is an innocent desire to see and know things, especially when compared to Venus' demands for information on Psyche and her complete unwillingness to learn anything from, for example, the advice of Ceres and Juno. The characterization of Psyche as a (mock) heroic questor figure

---

<sup>313</sup> The role of these minor characters is discussed above and a fuller analysis of Psyche's parents may be found in the 'Psyche's Family' chapter.

<sup>314</sup> For a comprehensive examination of Psyche's characterization and her position relative to Venus and others, see below, the 'Characterization of Psyche' chapter. This précis of the effect of Psyche's characterization on Venus is not intended to be an exhaustive look at the connection between Venus and Psyche.

(similar in some ways to Aeneas or Hercules) also places Venus in the unflattering role of an angry, obsessive persecutor. Finally, the contrast between their conditions and lifestyles is a striking reminder of Psyche's victimization. Psyche, with her hair disheveled, badly beaten, wearing a ripped dress (6.10.1), and eating a piece of bread which Venus threw at her (6.11.2), contrasts sharply with Venus' radiant condition at 6.11.1. She returns from a wedding banquet (where we may be sure she was not scrounging for discarded scraps of bread), wreathed in roses, smelling of balsam, and drunk (a detail which may also reflect the story's bibulous narratrix).<sup>315</sup>

Venus' Status:

Apuleius' careful construction of Venus results in a character which is consistently drawn but which contains certain interesting contrasts, as well as features such as Romanizing touches, bathos, and humour. Obviously, Apuleius' Venus is a goddess and her deity is emphasized from the start. She summons divine helpers, travels with miraculous ease and splendor, and is concerned about maintaining her cult. She can intimidate even major deities like Juno and Ceres, attend the theater of the gods (6.22.1), live beneath the Ocean or in a golden bedroom (5.29.1), and impose her will on Psyche and Cupid, at least for a time.<sup>316</sup> Furthermore, in her very first speech Venus claims for herself a special role as the primary deity responsible for the creation of the universe.

---

<sup>315</sup> *GCA*, 444.

<sup>316</sup> Venus' power and status as a goddess is given significant emphasis by the repetition of the noun *dea* in reference to her throughout the narrative at 4.29.3; 6.2.6; 6.6.3; 6.6.3;

Despite this, Apuleius' Venus also appears in situations where she humorously seems more like a mundane Roman mortal. Of course, anthropomorphic gods are hardly unique, having appeared much earlier, in Homer for example. Nevertheless, the marked disparity between the Venus who is the extraordinary, powerful, generative force of the universe with the elements at her command and the decidedly ordinary Venus who gripes about unexceptional human problems (such as in-laws) and obsesses about specifically Roman matters (so much has her once universal authority been reduced!) is striking enough to produce amusement. For a goddess (!) she is unusually preoccupied with Roman-style laws which apply to mortal families, she refers to Psyche as a daughter-in-law (5.29.3), then questions the validity of the marriage between Cupid and Psyche on the grounds of its informal location, the disparate social status of the spouses, and the lack of parental consent (6.9.6; 6.22.4).<sup>317</sup> Jupiter's remark at 6.23.4 is obviously directed at Venus' legalistic turn of mind too. She uses Roman technical language (*puerum ingenuum et inuestem*, 5.28.7) to refer to Cupid as a freeborn minor and concerns herself with legal concepts such as mounting a defense against charges (6.7.4).<sup>318</sup> Venus is depicted as a *domina* to mortal slaves. She has *cognatae* (6.3.1), is

---

6.6.4; 6.16.1. She is called *magnae Veneris* twice at 6.5.3 and 6.6.4 and the power of her name is suggested by 4.34.5 and 5.28.9.

<sup>317</sup> Kenney and *GCA*, 431 suggest that these lines contain an authorial reference to the objections made about Apuleius' own marriage to Pudentilla. See *apol.* 67.2-4; 87-88. If this is so, Apuleius is setting Venus up to be the representation of his personal adversaries. This really underlines the negative spin he is putting on her character.

<sup>318</sup> Kenney, 182. He also points out a pun in the phrase *puerum ingenuum et investem* since Cupid is elsewhere pictured as naked, youthful, or innocent. See also Kenney, 199. On Apuleius' use of legal terminology see Keulen, especially 217n.66.

herself a *nurus* (6.4.5), and is bound to others by *amicitia*, in Roman fashion (6.3.1). Her concerns about lineage and social standing are also typical of Rome's highly stratified, class-obsessed society. She represents herself as divorced from Cupid's father (Vulcan) and married to Mars whom she calls Cupid's step-father (5.29.6; 5.30.1). She points out that no financial allowance has been made for Cupid from his father's property (5.29.6). All this comically suggests (1) that gods have legal estates and are subject to the inheritance, marriage, and property rights laws applicable to mortals, (2) that Cupid's parentage is clear,<sup>319</sup> and (3) that her relationship with Mars, usually represented as an embarrassing affair, is instead a legitimate marriage.<sup>320</sup> The moral high ground which Venus is so keen to take on this point is also amusingly out of character for a goddess with her venereal associations. In short, these Romanizing touches in Venus' characterization, especially noticeable in a purportedly Milesian tale (4.32.6), bring Venus down to the level of a Roman woman and are comically incongruous with the impressive deified status she claims for herself.

This diminution of Venus is strengthened by Venus' frequent appearances as a goddess who is not only like a Roman *hausfrau* but like a petty and undignified one! She sees herself as the mother of a boy (4.30.4; 5.22.7; 5.24.3; 5.28.7, etc.) whom she manipulates with guilt (4.31.1), whom she does not want to have a girlfriend (5.28.7), and whom she berates for disobedience (5.29). Yet the reader can easily see that Cupid, with his own sparkling mansion, is plenty old enough to have a marital relationship with Psyche and to

---

<sup>319</sup> See Kenney, 185 on the genealogies of Cupid / Eros.

<sup>320</sup> Kenney, 185.

offer her mature and cautious advice. He will be a father himself by the end of the narrative! That Venus' concerns on this point are embarrassingly unsophisticated is reinforced by the comparatively worldly response which Juno and Ceres have to Cupid's love affair (5.31). The care she takes to represent her liaison with Mars as a legitimate marriage is similarly amusingly mundane for a goddess!

In general, Venus' own behavior consistently undercuts her dignity as a goddess. She routinely loses control of her temper and is pictured screaming, throwing food, and storming in and out on people. She overreacts at every possible opportunity and comes off as an over the top and rather desperate villain. Her inability to fully bring her punishments to bear on Psyche compounds the issue. She, the supposed powerful generative force of the universe, has her plans repeatedly foiled by a very simple-minded mortal girl. Venus cannot even manage to bring an end to the life of a girl who is herself suicidal! The intertextual relationship which Apuleius particularly develops between his Venus and the Juno and Venus of the *Aeneid*, as discussed above, adds considerably to the negative impression of the goddess.

Venus Inverted:

At times Apuleius' Venus is strikingly and comically enough unlike the positive aspects of the traditional Venus to constitute a parody.<sup>321</sup> She is then a sort of anti-Venus, whose traits and interests are contrary to or inversions of those customarily attributed to the goddess. Here is a goddess of love who obsessively quashes love and is full of hate (for Psyche), a procreative force who threatens to prevent life emerging from the womb, a "smiling Aphrodite" whose smiles are sardonic, threatening, and maniacal. Her well-known beauty is here eclipsed by Psyche's virginal appeal and she appears as a borrower of beauty balm (from Proserpina) rather than, as previously, a lender.<sup>322</sup> She is concerned with her age (5.29.4), appearance (6.16.4), and reputation (5.29.2; 5.31.2; 6.22.4), which is humorously incongruous with the usual conventions of immortality such as agelessness, irresistible power over mortals, and personal sovereignty. The goddess of love's usual propensity for having her own love affairs is given hardly any emphasis. She is not seen with a lover or even expressing interest in any lover. Instead her dalliances are mentioned directly only by Juno and Ceres who bring up the matter to point out her hypocrisy (5.31) and obliquely by Venus (5.30). Her usual association with weddings, marriage, grace, and joy is similarly inverted. She attempts to destroy Cupid and Psyche's marriage and uses her attendance at a wedding party (6.10) as an occasion to torture Psyche. She brings happiness to no one and is herself bitterly unhappy.

---

<sup>321</sup> See above, p. 97ff, on the ways in which Apuleius' Venus confirms many of the negative aspects of her tradition.

<sup>322</sup> Kenney, 212.

In particular, the description which the *verbosa avis* (5.28) gives of a world without Venus paradoxically describes many of the effects of Venus' presence (!) in this narrative.<sup>323</sup> According to the bird, in Venus' absence there is *non voluptas ulla*, a pointed phrase since she threatens to eliminate Voluptas and her ill temper sure eliminates *voluptas*. Although the bird mentions a dearth of grace and charm (*non gratia, non lepos*), Venus can hardly be described as graceful and charming anywhere in the narrative except perhaps at the very end when, having been disarmed by Jupiter, she makes a silent, dancing appearance. The other conditions which the bird describes are similarly reversed in Apuleius' Venus. She shows total disregard for others like Juno and Ceres (*non amicitiae sociales*). Certainly Venus is hostile to the marriage of Cupid and Psyche (*et squalentium foederum insuave fastidium*) and shows no love for children (*non liberum caritates*), neither her own nor Psyche's. These inversions and adaptations of the Venus tradition add humor and interest, diminish Venus, and further showcase Apuleius' creative use of source material.

#### Humor and Wit:

As with the characters we have previously examined, the importance of humor and wit in Venus' characterization has been greatly underestimated. Apuleius builds on the humor and wit seen in the characterization of the other major and minor characters and Venus' character adds considerably to the overall humor of the narrative. This is a welcome

---

<sup>323</sup> Kenney, 181.

counterpoint to the tension which her rages prompt and encourages sympathy for Psyche and Cupid who are the victims of her ridiculous and violent outbursts. Apuleius' use of humor in the narrative is creative, diverse, and complex. He uses multiple methods to lighten the tone of the Cupid and Psyche tale.

Literary humor is particularly prevalent. The author draws on Lucretius not simply as a source of verbal echoes but to inform his construction of Venus.<sup>324</sup> His Venus, while speaking in terms that recall Lucretius' Venus and identifying herself as a cosmic generative force (thus imitating Lucretius), simultaneously challenges Lucretius' main argument (against the existence of the gods and the importance of their cult). Moreover, the petty behavior of Apuleius' Venus is comically incongruous with the high language which she borrows from Lucretius. The notion that Venus whose own words allude to Lucretius (or the narratrix who quotes Venus or Lucius who quotes the narratrix) has read *De Rerum Natura* is itself an amusing one. In a similar way, Apuleius uses multiple allusions to Virgil's Juno to characterize his Venus as a cruel and vengeful goddess while simultaneously showing that she is comically petty and powerless in comparison to the Juno of the *Aeneid*. Moreover, the connections between Apuleius' Venus and Virgil's Venus point up her outlandishly (even humorously) poor treatment of her own son in comparison to Virgil's Venus who is so keen to protect and prosper her Aeneas.<sup>325</sup>

---

<sup>324</sup> See above, p.99f.

<sup>325</sup> See above, p.106ff., for a fuller discussion of the Virgil connection.

At other times Venus' dignity is seriously undercut by humorous bathos. Her rather hysterical response to Cupid's affair with Psyche at 5.31 is especially obvious next to the more worldly rational response of Juno and Ceres. Here Venus exaggerates Cupid's transgression and seems consumed with rather petty social concerns such as the reputation of her *domus* and the propriety of her son's love affair. She needs reminding about what is obvious - that her son is now a young man, that young men have love interests, and that she herself has been involved in such affairs. All this results in a Venus who is "mocked as a huffy matron, unwilling to let her son grow up".<sup>326</sup> This depiction alone is amusing (and Venus herself recognizes that she is being ridiculed, *indignata ridicule* 5.31.7) but especially so in comparison to the epic (Juno type) avenging goddess or the cosmic generative force she styles herself elsewhere in the tale. Her constant direct characterization as a *mater* to Cupid and a *domina* to runaway slave Psyche and her inordinate concern with Roman law have the same ludicrous effect of reducing a sublime goddess to the level of a very commonplace woman.

Apuleius also incorporates humor in the narrative by sometimes characterizing Venus as a comically over the top burlesqued villain. She chooses as her enemy a girl who is not only entirely innocent of the charge Venus levels against her but ridiculously unequal to the pseudo-heroic tasks she assigns and to her obsessive pursuit in general. This innocence and vulnerability helps to highlight Venus' exaggerated villainy as does the global span and intensity of her manhunt, her uncontrolled rage, screaming, threatening,

---

<sup>326</sup> Schlam, 97.

groaning, and head shaking. She is recognizable as a sort of avenging goddess but a distorted caricatured one whose provocation is petty and whose reaction is an absurd overreaction. Her remarks are caustic and her empty threats are preposterously unlikely. The fact that nearly every other character in the narrative shows compassion for Psyche also isolates Venus and underlines the excessiveness of her behavior.

Naturally, Apuleius' wit is on display in his ironic depiction of the goddess of love as the primary opponent of love. Oblique mention of her own past love affairs and her usual role in facilitating such interactions also brings out her laughable hypocrisy. Ironic too is his presentation of Venus as an anti-Venus whose traditional associations with beauty, grace, charm, laughter, marriage, and children are not simply absent but inverted.<sup>327</sup> Moreover, there are instances of *figurae etymologicae* associated with Venus' name,<sup>328</sup> witty verbal ambiguity,<sup>329</sup> exploitation of multiple meanings of a word in the ecphrasis of Venus' marine cortege,<sup>330</sup> and punning references to Venus' past.<sup>331</sup> More complex

---

<sup>327</sup> See above, p. 146f. on Apuleius' inversion of several aspects of Venus' tradition in her characterization.

<sup>328</sup> e.g. *Venerem uenerabantur*, 4.28.3 See *GCA*, 45 on this *figura etymologica* in Plautus; See Kenney, 118 on *ros spumantium fluctuum*, 4.28.4 as an allusion to the etymology of the name Aphrodite and Kenney, 153 for the play on Venus' name in *uenerem meam recolentem*, 5.10.1.

<sup>329</sup> For example, the phrase *nomine Veneris* at 4.34.5 can mean either 'because of being called by Venus' name' or 'because of Venus' orders' both of which are true in some sense, Kenney, 135. *Auctor adulterinus*, 6.13.3 is similarly ironically ambiguous, Kenney, 208.

<sup>330</sup> Such as *sinu* at 4.31.6 which may refer to the fold of Salacia's garment, her embrace, or the gulf of the sea as Kenney, 128 points out. *GCA*, 75 objects to this being termed "verbal ambiguity" since the meaning of 'gulf' is clearly not the primary one here. Nevertheless, the expression is wittily enriched by the other possible, albeit secondary, meanings of *sinus*.

dramatic irony is also in evidence in statements like the description of Cupid as attractive enough that Venus would not regret having him (5.22.7) or Psyche's uncanny analysis of the source of her misfortune at 4.34.5.

#### Venus' Function:

The importance of the function of Venus' character as a narrative device can hardly be overstated. It provides the motivation for much of the progression of the plot. It is Venus who is responsible for Cupid and Psyche meeting one another and thus, indirectly, she is behind their love affair, the secrecy upon which Cupid insists and which Psyche violates, and the separation of the lovers which ensues. The Venus character affects most of the main protagonist's activities via the labors she assigns and via her influence over other characters such as Cupid, Juno, Ceres, and Mercury who could help Psyche or bring an end to her suffering. Venus' lengthy monologue ensures early on that the reader is privy to her private thoughts in addition to her observable speech and behavior, all of which point repeatedly to her oppositional role in the narrative.

In fact, although the narrative is widely referred to as "Cupid and Psyche", it could certainly as well be informally called "Venus vs. Psyche" since the primary relational problem of the narrative is the rivalry between Venus and Psyche, rather than the love

---

<sup>331</sup> The punning reference to the sun as the enemy of Venus (*inimici*, 4.31.7) suggests the sun's ill effects on her complexion and the Sun's role in revealing Venus' affair with Mars, Kenney, 128. Similarly, *natalibus nostris*, 5.29.2 may also refer to Venus' own birth, an ironic ambiguity "in view of the gory details...", Kenney, 184.

affair between Cupid and Psyche. It is Venus, not Cupid, who plays the primary role after Psyche, as is shown by Venus' numerous appearances, larger word count and number of interlocutors, and greater impact on other characters and on the plot development. After Psyche's encounter with Pan, the remainder of her trials and wanderings seem aimed at managing or avoiding Venus' wrath, rather than at regaining Cupid's love. The narrative thus cannot end simply with the re-establishment of Cupid and Psyche's relationship but requires the definitive end of Venus' hostility towards Psyche which Apuleius economically provides through Jupiter's edict and Venus' silent final appearance at the wedding.

#### Conclusions:

Venus is certainly one of the principal characters of the narrative, as evidenced by her early introduction, the frequency and length of her appearances and speeches, and her role as the narrative's main antagonist. Apuleius' construction of Venus does not, as Kenney posits, reflect the Platonic idea of the two Venuses (*Venus Caelestis* and *Venus Vulgaris*). It does, however, reflect many of the negative traits associated with Venus in love poetry, while deemphasizing or contradicting the positive aspects of Venus which are found in the work of earlier love poets. Apuleius also draws on the work of Lucretius and, in especially interesting ways, on stock characters of ancient drama (such as the *senex iratus*, *durus pater*, and *lena*) for his Venus. Aspects of Apuleius' Venus recall many of the most negative traits associated with her mythological tradition. Virgil's

*Aeneid* is a particularly rich source for Apuleius' Venus. She is closely associated with Virgil's Juno and his Venus and this demonstrates the complex intertextual interplay of his narrative.

Venus' first appearance is especially important in building her character and presents her as an angry, menacing, hasty, jealous, vain, vengeful, powerful, but inept goddess. Her motherhood is also stressed in a way that paradoxically highlights her lack of motherliness. Venus' direct speech, accounting for 10% of the narrative in itself, reflects her importance in the narrative and reveals much about her personality. The reader is invited to compare Venus' character with other characters in the narrative and both parallels (such as with Psyche's sisters) and contrasts (such as with Psyche, Psyche's helpers, and fellow deities in the narratives) are in evidence. Venus' status as an immortal is an important feature and provides an opportunity for a good deal of humor and bathos in her depiction. In fact, Apuleius' Venus is sometimes comically enough unlike the positive aspects of the traditional Venus that she appears to be an inversion, a parody, or an anti-Venus. Humor is a much more important part of Venus' characterization than has been previously acknowledged and is one of her many vital functions in the narrative.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: CUPID

Like Psyche and Venus, Cupid arrives early in the narrative, although he does so only after the two other main characters have been introduced. This is fitting since he plays an important role but one that is secondary in prominence to Psyche and Venus. His role depends principally upon his connection to the major female characters (via birth to Venus and via marriage to Psyche). Cupid is first mentioned by the narrator who does not give his name but describes him sufficiently for recognition (4.30.4). He is then shown Psyche and asked by Venus to make her fall in love with a wretch. He is silent throughout this exchange and receives a kiss before Venus departs the scene (4.31.4). He later makes a silent and brief appearance as Psyche's unknown husband at 5.4.3, and then in a fuller appearance speaks for the first time at 5.5.2 in order to warn Psyche about the danger which her sisters pose. He slips away in the morning and returns at night to find Psyche weeping (5.6.1). Threatening and chastising at first, he renews his warnings about her sisters and reminds her not to investigate his identity. Nevertheless, he is quickly won over by his wife and agrees to allow a visit from her sisters, gifts for them, and to arrange their transport. Psyche's unintentionally humorous assertion that Cupid himself could not compare to him (5.6.7) is the first mention of his name in the narrative. This delay in identifying Cupid by name subtly ties him to Psyche whose name Apuleius similarly withholds. Additionally, Apuleius is able to intrigue, trick, and tease the reader for some time by withholding the fact that Cupid is the unknown husband.

Cupid leaves as day is breaking and does not return until 5.11.3 when he repeats his warnings about Psyche's sisters at greater length and with more forceful language, revealing that Psyche is pregnant and adding the compelling caveat that if she does not keep their secret the child will be mortal. He issues another lengthy warning against the sisters at 5.12.3 but is again persuaded by his wife to allow a visit. He departs again ahead of daybreak (5.13.6). The sisters, like Psyche at 5.6.7, make a humorously inadvertent reference to Cupid's true identity at 5.14.5 before terrifying Psyche into trying to kill him. When he returns at night (5.21.5) Psyche plans to kill him but catches sight of him and a long and sensuous description of Cupid's appealing physical appearance follows. Once awakened, Cupid gives a short speech vowing to have revenge on her sisters and punishes Psyche by his immediate winged departure (5.24.5). At 5.28.1 we are told that Cupid is ailing at his mother's and by 5.29.2 he is silently enduring her irate tirade. He does not appear again until 6.21.2, although he is mentioned in favorable terms by Juno and Ceres (5.31), the narrator (6.10.5; 6.15.2), and the ant (6.10.6) and his presence in Venus' house is revealed at 6.11.3. This very lengthy absence allows Psyche to take centre stage with her clumsy performance of the labors which Venus assigns. Only when Psyche has been reduced to a *dormiens cadaver* (6.21.2) does Cupid reappear to revive the girl with a short speech, ascend to Jupiter to win his support (6.22.1), and instantaneously and mutely recline at his miraculous wedding to Psyche (6.23.1).

Like Venus, Cupid has a vast history as a literary, religious, and mythological character which Apuleius could draw on in the construction of his own Cupid. As with Venus, Apuleius uses multiple literary sources with complexity, subtlety, and great creativity in his characterization of Cupid. I shall begin with a critical survey of the work done on Apuleius' Cupid and then, in the same manner as previous chapters, an examination of Apuleius' use of literary sources in his construction of Cupid, and a detailed analysis of Cupid's characterization in the narrative.

Previously Scholarship on Cupid in Apuleius:

There has been some scholarly work done previously on the characterization of Cupid in Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche episode, although it has for the most part been limited in terms of both quality and quantity. Generally, the analyses of Cupid's role have been superficial (comprising a page or two in a work which has some other topic as its focus) or fragmentary (examining only some very limited aspect of Cupid) and occasionally they have been demonstrably misguided. I shall provide a brief critical survey of the scholarly literature on the subject to date, noting where these investigations fall short, in which areas the present study can make substantive additions to scholarship, and where (rarely) previous scholars have adequately covered some aspect of Cupid's depiction.

In the first place, I have already pointed to Kenney's assertion that Apuleius picks up on the Platonic idea of the two Venus' and that he applies this to his characterization of both

Venus and Cupid.<sup>332</sup> I have, I hope, sufficiently refuted this claim and will not renew my objections to this theory here.

Rambaux, addressing the same fundamental problem (the seeming existence of a duality or even multiplicity in the characterization of Cupid), proposes that Apuleius' Cupid undergoes a dramatic process of maturation appearing first as a child and later as an adolescent and ultimately an adult.<sup>333</sup> This is an interesting idea and is an attempt to account for the variety in Cupid's behavior and presentation, but it does not hold up to close scrutiny. While Cupid is first introduced in terms which stress his youth and immaturity and does remain submissively mute in this first exchange with his more dominant mother (4.30.4), he shows this same childish silent surrender to her violent anger at 5.29 (perhaps even more so later since at that point he obeys his mother and is separated from Psyche, as at 6.11.3). This occurs well after he has assumed the unmistakably adult role of settled husband and father-to-be in the early part of book five. Moreover, Venus is clearly at odds with others in her understanding of Cupid's maturity (5.31). Unless Rambaux means to propose a complicated series of progressions and regressions in age (and he doesn't), his theory does not fit the movement of the narrative and does nothing to explain how different characters can simultaneously hold opposing opinions of Cupid's supposedly advancing maturity. Additionally, Rambaux's rather negative assessment of Cupid as a husband (such as that Cupid does not truly love Psyche, that he is weak, and that he only seeks his own pleasure) is genuinely puzzling

---

<sup>332</sup> See above, 93ff. See also, Kenney, 19f.; Schlam, 97; and Walsh, 183f.

<sup>333</sup> Rambaux, 188.

and does not account for Cupid's careful attention to Psyche's needs early in their relationship, his loving words and assurances to her, and his sincere desire to warn her against the destructive intentions of her sisters.<sup>334</sup>

The psychological approaches to the narrative advanced by von Franz, Neumann, and others are quite dated and complicated, involving Jungian or Freudian theories, feminine/masculine psychology, "thresholds of consciousness", etc.<sup>335</sup> Nor do such approaches offer any usable analysis of Cupid's characterization, beyond asserting that it conforms to certain archetypal figures. Lewis' Christianizing allegorical reworking is unhelpful for similar reasons<sup>336</sup> and primarily philosophical interpretations of the narrative, such as those in Wright and Shumate, simply do not address how Apuleius forms Cupid's character or the result he achieves.<sup>337</sup> Studies whose interests are primarily religious in nature are also generally unconcerned with Cupid's characterization.<sup>338</sup>

---

<sup>334</sup> See Rambaux, 188-92 especially and Parker, 209.

<sup>335</sup> Von Franz, 61ff. for example. There are other Jungian readings such as those proposed by Ulanov, Hillman, Johnson, Houston and also Freudian interpretations such as those proposed by Riklin, Barchilon, and Bettelheim. See Gollnick, 81ff. for a concise summary. Gollnick also adds his own fanciful and unsupported assertions such as that Apuleius knows that Cupid "symbolizes how closely the divine is related to love" (115) or that he could "represent the lust which seems to rule Lucius' experience in the first books of the novel" (119).

<sup>336</sup> Shumate, 256n.4 also sees an "uncannily Calvinistic" strain to the narrative.

<sup>337</sup> See Shumate, 259ff. on Cupid and Psyche as a "fictional representation of Platonic concepts of conversion."

<sup>338</sup> Kerényi, Merkelbach, and Griffiths, 145ff., for example.

Purser, Krabbe (1989), and Tatum offer extremely superficial analyses of Cupid, being mostly unconcerned with the question of characterization.<sup>339</sup> James notes that Apuleius' Cupid can be examined from a great variety of angles (suggesting mythological and philosophical aspects and claiming that the episode is a narrative representation of the development of Cupid's cult in Rome) and rightly calls his Cupid a "masterpiece of comprehensiveness."<sup>340</sup> She does, however, place more emphasis on Venus' power over Cupid (whom she considers essentially passive) than is warranted.<sup>341</sup> Additionally, her argument is inconsistent and occasionally she contradicts herself obviously.<sup>342</sup> Schlam's primary contribution has been his examination of the depictions of Cupid and Psyche in art and monument, studies which have shown no precedent for the narrative of the pair which appears in Apuleius. This, while not principally focused on characterization, is important since it allows us to see Apuleius' creative contribution more clearly. Puccini-Delbey offers a few pages of analysis on the sensual description of Cupid at 5.22 but this hardly exhausts the subject.<sup>343</sup>

More specifically, Krabbe (2003) points to a connection between Apuleius' Cupid and

---

<sup>339</sup> See Krabbe (1989), 59 and 137. Krabbe (2003), 309 notes Cupid's association with the term *temerarius*. See also passing comments on Cupid's significance at Krabbe (2003), 356. Tatum, 54 sees Cupid in the intermediary role of *daimon*.

<sup>340</sup> James, 182. See James, 180ff. for her brief examination of several aspects of Cupid's character.

<sup>341</sup> James, 146ff. See also Parker, 208 on this.

<sup>342</sup> Consider the following, "...Cupid re-establishes himself as a power equal to Venus and even subordinates a surrogate Venus to his will. Nevertheless Venus continues to dominate and control Cupid..." (James, 147). It is difficult to see how Cupid can be simultaneously equal to Venus and dominated by her.

<sup>343</sup> Puccini-Delbey, 187ff.

Ovid's Hermaphroditus (*Ov. Met.* 4.285-388), which is interesting and which is worth exploring here briefly.<sup>344</sup> Krabbe lays out a compelling number of connections between the narratives. Both Cupid and Hermaphroditus are sons of Venus. In each case a young woman who is uncertain of her lover's identity addresses a male who is compared to Cupid. The girls' passion is not reciprocated and each 'Cupid' speaks of flight. The females cling to their beloved as the males attempt to leave and ultimately both relationships become permanent because of the assent of the gods. Both stories are recounted by a female narrator and Krabbe also identifies some striking verbal echoes.<sup>345</sup> In addition to shared narrative elements and diction, Krabbe identifies imagery which is common to the narratives. For example, the struggle between Salmacis and Hermaphroditus occurs in water but is compared to a mid-air struggle between an eagle and a serpent. Apuleius uses an analogous inversion of these same elements by describing Cupid's in-air flight from Psyche as rowing (5.25.1).<sup>346</sup> Moreover, imagery of serpents and wings is earlier applied to Psyche's husband by the oracle (4.33). Krabbe also points to dramatic differences between the endings of the two stories. Salmacis is aggressive to the end and the resulting metamorphosis produces a "monstrosity".<sup>347</sup> In Apuleius, on the other hand, it is Cupid's tenacity which brings about their permanent union, a detail which emphasizes Cupid's agency at the close of the narrative. The happy result is the

---

<sup>344</sup> Krabbe, 417ff.

<sup>345</sup> See especially Krabbe, 419-423.

<sup>346</sup> Krabbe does, however, note that the comparison of flight and rowing is found elsewhere. See, for example, Virgil *Aen.* 1.301 and Ovid, *Met.* 8.228.

<sup>347</sup> Krabbe, 423.

apotheosis of Psyche, the appeasement of Venus, and the birth of *Voluptas*. Although not all of Krabbe's observations are compelling, a sufficient number of them do point to a connection between the two narratives. Like so many others, Krabbe is mostly concerned with the effect of such connections on our view and understanding of Psyche rather than Cupid. She does, however, recognize that Apuleius' use of allusion is often a source of humor and wit as well as a way to "insert himself into an existing tradition and use his predecessors as points of reference."<sup>348</sup>

Winkler who is interested in developing a hermeneutic for reading the *Asinus Aureus* as a whole novel briefly discusses the effect of delaying the revelation of Cupid's true identity. Winkler argues that this delay creates in the reader's mind a mystery (over who Psyche's lover will be) and that the narrative presents to the reader multiple possible solutions to the mystery before Cupid is ultimately revealed.<sup>349</sup> This process is, no doubt, part of the enjoyment of the narrative and a certain amount of suspense and, critically, authorial misdirection is central to the construction of Cupid's character.<sup>350</sup> Still,

---

<sup>348</sup> See Krabbe, 432 and Galinsky, 185 for the quotation.

<sup>349</sup> Winkler, 89ff. See especially p.91 where he lists the sequence of possibilities as he proposes they occur in the narrative. Psyche's husband will be "Every Man, No Man, Ideal Husband, Worst Husband, Terrifying Demon Serpent, Loving God." Psyche also suggests two other identities for him which she and we know to be false: Handsome Young Hunter and Middle-Aged Business Man (p.92). Winkler does not properly address the fact that Psyche proposes three other possible identities for the owner of the mansion (5.1.4) namely, miraculous man, demi-god, or god.

<sup>350</sup> Yun Lee Too, 184f. also mentions the misidentification and misdirection regarding the identity of Cupid and other characters in the episode. Krabbe (2003), 76 identifies *quis ille?* as a question which is pertinent to both Lucius and Cupid who are also both associated with animals (Lucius, the ass and Cupid, the snake).

Winkler's broader focus on the novel does not permit him sufficient depth of investigation into Cupid to explain much about his characterization in the episode. His discussion of Cupid spans only a few pages and Winkler is not even sufficiently clear about how he has arrived at his own list of possible solutions to the husband identity mystery – a list which the reader is supposed to have consciously or unconsciously formed while reading.<sup>351</sup>

Regine May, whose work I've discussed previously in relation to Venus, suggests that there is a connection between Apuleius' Cupid and the *adulescens amans* of Ancient Comedy.<sup>352</sup> This is an attractive assertion which she does not fully explore and which I shall develop significantly in my discussion of Apuleius' use of sources in his characterization of Cupid.<sup>353</sup> Finkelpearl identifies some verbal and descriptive connections between Apuleius' Cupid (5.22.5) and Virgil's Ascanius (10.131-40). While

---

<sup>351</sup> I must conjecture (since Winkler does not spell it out) that his categories are meant to correspond to the following points in the narrative: Psyche's husband will be Every Man because everyone marvels at her beauty and the reader imagines that everyone will want to marry her (4.28.3); No Man because no one individual is actually stepping forward to marry her (4.32.1); Worst Husband because that is what Venus requests (4.31.3); Terrifying Demon Serpent is deliberately ambiguous in that it may refer to either the monster of the oracle (4.33.1) or the one proposed by Psyche's sisters (5.17.3) as Winkler does specify at p.92.; Loving God since it turns out to be Cupid and he loves her (5.23.3); But to what suggestion in Apuleius' text, I wonder, must Winkler's Ideal Husband correspond? If it is the husband proposed by her sisters (5.20.6) it is badly out of sequential order. If it is the one sought by Psyche's father via prayers and sacrifice (4.32.6) it is slightly out of order and, moreover, it is inaccurate since he merely seeks *a* husband for Psyche; There is no suggestion of an ideal one. Winkler's No Man and Worst Husband also seem to be listed in reverse order. Winkler's proposal very much needs further explanation, as should be clear by now.

<sup>352</sup> See above, p.100f. on Venus and May, 221f. on Cupid.

<sup>353</sup> See below, 175ff.

I clearly see the basic commonalities, I do not believe, as Finkelppearl does, that these establish “a specific connection that goes deeper than the obvious correspondence[s].”<sup>354</sup> Additionally, I shall examine a number of other connections between Apuleius’ Cupid and Virgil’s *Aeneid* which are not discussed by Finkelppearl.

Parker’s dissertation on techniques of description in the Cupid and Psyche episode discusses Cupid’s appearances directly more than any other source but her wider focus (including the description of settings, ephrases, as well as characters) does not permit her to examine Cupid’s characterization as closely as this study will.<sup>355</sup> There is almost no area of Cupid’s characterization which is completely covered and to which I cannot make substantial additions. The recent publication of the commentary on the Cupid and Psyche episode (one of the series of *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius*) is extremely helpful. In particular, the notes of the commentary identify a number of the relevant literary models and predecessors upon which Apuleius draws. Still, they devote little space to analysis of these references and their impact on characterization. Furthermore they are often not particularly sensitive to the presence of humor and wit in the narrative. As with other chapters, this will continue to be an area in which I can make important contributions.

Most helpfully, Murgatroyd and Parker, building on the scant work done by others regarding the influence of neoteric and elegiac literature on the Cupid and Psyche

---

<sup>354</sup> Finkelppearl, 70.

<sup>355</sup> See Parker, 206ff.

narrative, have outlined Apuleius' use of (especially Latin) love poetry in this tale.<sup>356</sup> With respect to Cupid's characterization they identify not only the straightforward use of common amatory terms and images (such as Cupid's torch and arrows, wounding and burning, *militia amoris*, etc.) but also more complex manipulations of erotic *topoi*, characters, and details. In particular, they are able to show clear connections between Apuleius' Cupid and the lover of Classical Latin love poetry which (together with Apuleius' use of the sources examined below) reveal an extremely varied, complex, and witty intertextuality.<sup>357</sup> As this area is now well covered I will not address it directly in what follows.

#### Cupid's General Literary Tradition:

Cupid / Eros is a major figure of Graeco-Roman literature and appears in myths too numerous to recount here.<sup>358</sup> It will, however, be useful to identify which of the strands, characteristics, and associations which have previously been applied to Cupid are followed especially by Apuleius and which he noticeably departs from, suppresses, or builds upon. Many scholars have noted that Apuleius' Cupid is not consistently described, being at times depicted as a disobedient boy, at others a solicitous husband, at still another point a god powerful enough to successfully bargain with Jupiter for

---

<sup>356</sup> Murgatroyd and Parker, 400n.2 for the previous scholarship on this.

<sup>357</sup> See especially Murgatroyd and Parker, 403.

<sup>358</sup> Cupid is, of course, also very well represented in ancient art, an insuperably large aspect of his tradition which this dissertation, in the main, shall not attempt to handle.

Psyche's deification.<sup>359</sup> Reaching for an explanation of this has prompted proposals like Kenney's two Cupids theory or Rambaux's supposition that Cupid's character is depicted as advancing from childhood to youth to adulthood in the narrative.<sup>360</sup>

There is, thankfully, a much simpler answer to be found. This phenomenon of multiple types of Cupids has an obvious precedent in Cupid's own tradition. His origins, birth, and nature are variously represented by authors.<sup>361</sup> He is a chubby baby, a disobedient boy, and a handsome adult interested in his own love affairs.<sup>362</sup> Cupid may be depicted as a singular entity, one of a pair of brothers or twins, or as a multitude of Cupides.<sup>363</sup> He is conceived of as a powerful cosmogonic force who emerges at the beginning of the world as a unitive impulse which brings some order and cohesion to the universe, as a very early or perhaps the first parentless god, and is associated with the foundations of

---

<sup>359</sup> See above, 156ff. for a critical survey of current scholarship on Cupid's characterization in Apuleius' *Met.*

<sup>360</sup> Rambaux, 188 discussed above, p.157. See above, p.93 on Kenney and the two Cupids theory.

<sup>361</sup> While alternate traditions in mythology are not unusual, Cupid's depictions are noticeably wide-ranging and diverse.

<sup>362</sup> For Cupid as a crawling baby see Statius, *Thebaid* 4.786 ff. Depictions of Cupid as a *putto*-type baby are particularly common in art. See, for example, the Pompeiian fresco of Cupid Riding a Crab (House of the Vettii) or the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD mosaic of Cupid Picking Grapes (Roman Carthage) which is housed at the National Museum of Carthage in Tunisia. He is a delightful child at *A.P.* 9.325. He is a *puer* at Sen. *Phaed.* 193; himself in love at Nonn. *Dion.* 32.46.

<sup>363</sup> For example, he is a single entity at Ov. *Met.* 10.311f.; twins (or two brothers) at Ov. *Fast.* 4.1; there are multiple *Cupides* (a crowd of little Cupids who form Venus' entourage) at Catull. 3.1; *A.P.* 9.585; 16.214; 16.215.

the world.<sup>364</sup> Elsewhere one finds a younger Eros/Cupid who is instead a descendent of the gods and whose varied genealogies present him as fathered by Mars, Zephyr, Jupiter, Ouranos, or Poros, and mothered by Venus, Iris, Eileithyia, or Penia.<sup>365</sup> Pausanias shows that the ancients were certainly aware of this variety in Cupid's depictions and Apuleius whose characterization has been so creatively and wittily allusive thus far could easily be playing on this varied tradition with his own conspicuously varied Cupid.<sup>366</sup> Moreover, the genealogy for Cupid which Apuleius himself offers within the *Metamorphoses* seems to be something of a blend of Cupid's identities. He is evidently the son of Venus and Mars is his step-father (5.30.1) and he thus resembles the tradition of the more recent Cupid who is a descendant of the gods. He is also, however, associated with the cosmogonic Cupid tradition via his mother's grand claim to be the origin of the universe (4.30) and the later statement that he was born of her at the beginning of the world (11.2.1). Consequently, it is reasonable to suppose that Cupid's diverse characterization in the Cupid and Psyche narrative is a witty reflection of the diversity of his mythological tradition, incorporating something of Cupid's varying ages and genealogies into a single complex and entertainingly unpredictable figure. This

---

<sup>364</sup> This is the Eros familiar from Hes. *Theog.* 120; Ar. *Av.* 695f.; Orph. *Hymn* 5; Arist. *Metaph.* 1.4; Pl. *Symp.* 178b; Ibycus (Campbell), frag. 324; Sappho (Campbell), frag. 198 where he is son of Ouranos and Gaia.

<sup>365</sup> On Cupid as son of Jupiter and Aphrodite: Virg. *Cir.* 134; son of Ares and Aphrodite: Simonides (Campbell), frag. 575; son of Ouranos and Aphrodite: Sappho (Voigt), frag. 198; son of Aphrodite at the moment of her own birth: Nonn. *Dion.* 41.128f; son of Zephyr and Iris: Alcaeus (Voigt), frag. 327; of Poros and Penia: Pl., *Symp.* 178; son of Eileithyia: Pausanias, 9.27.1; son of a nymph: *A.P.* 16.202; not the child of either Cypris or Earth: *A.P.* 16.201; born from the sea: *A.P.* 9.420. A scholiast on Apollonius of Rhodes (Sappho [Campbell], frag. 198) notes that Sappho herself made many inconsistent references to Eros in her poems. His tradition is evidently widely varied.

<sup>366</sup> Pausanias 9.27.1f.

mélange of usually mutually exclusive features, such as seemingly different ages in a single depiction of Cupid, is in fact not only very interesting (as the scholarly attention to this point shows), it is creative and entirely unprecedented. Apuleius has thus managed to present a Cupid who is at once familiar and novel.<sup>367</sup>

There are numerous other traits familiar from Cupid's tradition which are similarly used by Apuleius in his construction of his Cupid. His association with inspiring erotic love is proverbial and his connection to Venus is exceedingly common. The idea of Venus using him to inspire love is established,<sup>368</sup> as is his mischief or disobedience,<sup>369</sup> his quickening of love in gods and humans,<sup>370</sup> and his causing the transformation of gods, especially Jupiter, into beasts in order to pursue affairs.<sup>371</sup> The pain associated with love, his own falling in love, and aspects of his physical appearance in the Cupid and Psyche episode such as his breathtaking good looks, winged flight, association with gold, torches, bow, and arrows are also a continuation of his tradition.<sup>372</sup> As in the case of his genealogy, there are divergent portrayals of Cupid's character in mythology. In many sources his negative characteristics (such as cruelty and ferocity) are emphasized, while in others he is associated with peace and love and given quite a positive treatment.<sup>373</sup> Here too,

---

<sup>367</sup> See below, 168f. for other examples of Apuleius diverging from the familiar mythological tradition in his characterization of Cupid.

<sup>368</sup> Ap.Rhod., *Argo*. 3.25ff; Virg; *Aen.* 1.664ff.

<sup>369</sup> Ap.Rhod., *Argo*. 3.82ff.

<sup>370</sup> Ap.Rhod., *Argo*. 3.25ff; Ov. *Met.* 1.452ff, 5.363ff, 10.525ff; Sen., *Phaed.* 186ff, 290ff.

<sup>371</sup> Ovid, *Amores* 1.10. This is mentioned by Jupiter at Apul. *Met.* 6.22.4.

<sup>372</sup> See Kenney, 123f. and Parker, 213 (especially n.69 and n.72) for references.

<sup>373</sup> See Parker, 213n.70 and n.71. On Love's cruelty see especially *A.P.* 9.157; 9.221.

Apuleius has managed to incorporate in one portrayal both contrary elements of Cupid's tradition by showing the marriage-wrecking, unruly, malevolent Cupid (as at 4.30.4) and the tender, beneficent Cupid (as in his caring treatment of Psyche at 5.5.2). Apuleius thus uses Cupid's sizeable and diverse mythological tradition to his advantage. Again, it is his creative blending of the contradictory previous portrayals of Cupid which produces Apuleius' entertaining Cupid and shows the author's witty and allusive style.

There are, however, certain aspects of Cupid's characterization which seem to be entirely novel and others which are traditional but noticeably absent from Apuleius' treatment. Given his extensive use of previous sources and traditions, the absent and new elements stand out especially. These include small points such as the fact that Apuleius' Cupid does not have the same types of arrows which are elsewhere ascribed to him.<sup>374</sup> The lead-tipped (love-dampening arrows) of Ovid's Cupid seem to be uniquely Ovidian and must be excluded for the obvious reason that they would have put a speedy end to the heartache Cupid suffers for most of the narrative, a heartache which is quite necessary for the plot to advance and to resolve. More significantly, Apuleius adds several very striking and innovative elements to his Cupid. His depiction in this narrative as a settled husband to Psyche and as a father are novel. Cupid in a relationship (genuinely in love and in a long-term relationship) seems to be new since his erotic entanglements in Hellenistic epigrams are light in tone and his affairs are not highly developed and do not

---

<sup>374</sup> This is not entirely surprising since Cupid's arrows are variously described by authors. Ov. *Met.* 1.468ff. has him with two different kinds of arrows (lead-tipped to dampen love, golden to inflame it) while Eurip. *Iphig. Aul.* 548 shows Eros with two types of arrows which inspire happy and unhappy love. See Bömer, 150 for a summary.

exhibit much in the way of psychological or emotional dimension.<sup>375</sup> The picture of a wounded and bound Cupid is not unprecedented but his being locked up by his mother in this ailing condition is.<sup>376</sup>

Previous depictions of Cupid have shown him with a psyche but these are much more clearly allegorical in nature and explore the mostly negative and even torturously painful effects of erotic love (Eros) on the human soul (psyche).<sup>377</sup> Cupid is not in love with Psyche in these epigrams (in fact he is elsewhere erotically linked to a male). The psyche found in the epigrams is not depicted as a believable character, an actual non-allegorical figure with personal agency, (a Psyche) in any real way.<sup>378</sup> These poems do not advance any particular narrative, much less the rather complicated series of plot points which Apuleius proposes, for a relationship between the two figures.<sup>379</sup> Certainly, Cupid is not the settled, solicitous husband, *dominus* of a large household with slaves and a wife, nor the impending *paterfamilias* of a growing family which one sees in Apuleius. This depiction is quite unprecedented and is emphasized repeatedly by the lengthy description of his glittering mansion, copious references to the marital or pseudo-marital relationship

---

<sup>375</sup> See Schlam, 18; Parker, 214;

<sup>376</sup> For Cupid bound and suffering the effects of love see *A.P.* 16.195-99; 16.251. He is burned at *A.P.* 16.251, for example.

<sup>377</sup> *A.P.* 5.57; 12.80; 12.132; 12.132(a).

<sup>378</sup> Parker, 213ff. discusses these points and notes that when the object of Eros' affection is specified (at *AP.* 5.179; 12.112-3; 12.144; 16.251) it is a male.

<sup>379</sup> In a similar way, Schlam's close study of depictions of Cupid and Psyche in art and monument (especially 89ff and Schlam [1978]) reveal no evidence of a discernable continuous narrative between the two figures such as is found in Apuleius. There are, however, numerous depictions of the pair together, some of which show Cupid torturing Psyche, as in the epigrams.

of the pair, Cupid's assumption of authority over Psyche and their forthcoming child, his administration of the household, and the closing of the narrative with a detailed wedding scene and the birth of their child.<sup>380</sup> Moreover, Cupid is not merely a husband and a father, he is quite a serious and attentive one. His numerous warnings to Psyche show forethought, that he accurately understands his wife's flaws, and that he wishes to avoid (rather than cause!) pain for her. He cares about her enough to try to protect her from her sisters' disastrous influence and ultimately he allows the visits only because she so earnestly desires them. Even after he discovers Psyche's betrayal he is restrained in his punishment of her and dignified in his departure. None of this is paralleled elsewhere in Cupid's tradition and these factors are thus novel and enlivening. In addition, the focus on Cupid as an adult who is a husband and father helps to show the unreasonableness of Venus' objections to the love affair. The more mature Cupid seems, the less Venus' hostility to her son having a relationship and her supposed concern over his age make any

---

<sup>380</sup> On his mansion see: 5.1.2; on their marital relationship: *maritus*, 5.4.3, *uxorem*, 5.4.3, *nuptam*, 5.4.4, *maritus*, 5.5.1, *uxor*, 5.5.2, *mariti*, 5.5.4, *maritus*, 5.6.1, *maritus*, 5.6.2, *marito*, 5.6.4, *nuptae*, 5.6.5, *mariti*, 5.6.6, *marito*, 5.6.7, *marite*, 5.6.9, *maritus*, 5.6.10, *maritalis*, 5.7.4, *maritus*, 5.8.3, *coniugale*, 5.8.4, *marito*, 5.9.4, *maritum*, 5.9.6, *maritus*, 5.9.6, *maritus*, 5.11.3, *marito*, 5.11.5, *maritus*, 5.12.3, *maritum*, 5.12.5, *maritus*, 5.13.6; *maritus*, 5.15.3, *maritum*, 5.15.4; *mariti*, 5.16.3, *vir*, 5.16.4, *denupsit*, 5.16.4, *nuptiis*, 5.17.4, *mariti*, 5.18.4, *vir*, 5.19.2, *maritum*, 5.19.2, *maritum*, 5.21.4, *maritus*, 5.21.5, *mariti*, 5.23.1, *coniugis*, 5.23.6; *coniugem*, 5.24.4, *mariti*, 5.25.1, *maritum*, 2.25.1, *mariti*, 5.26.3, *nuptias*, 5.27.5, *nurum*, 5.29.3, *nuptias*, 5.30.2, *mariti*, 6.1.1, *uxoriis*, 6.1.1, *maritum*, 6.5.1, *socrum*, 6.9.2, *maritum*, 6.9.2, *nurum*, 6.9.2, *nuptiae*, 6.9.6, *contubernalis*, 6.10.5, *socrusque*, 6.10.5; *uxori*, 6.10.6, *uxoris*, 6.15.2, *nuptialibus*, 6.23.3, *matrimonio*, 6.23.4, *nuptias*, 6.23.4, *nuptiae*, 6.23.5, *nuptialis*, 6.24.1. On his authority over Psyche: she repeatedly receives instructions from Cupid and complies, as at 5.5.4. Even when he is persuaded by Psyche to allow visits the very fact that he must be persuaded shows his authority; On his authority over their child (even over the child's divinity or mortality) see: 5.11.6; On his authority over the household: he decides ultimately who can or cannot visit (5.6.4, 5.13.6), what they will be given (5.6.5), and how they will arrive (5.6.8, 5.13.2).

sense at all. Naturally, these positive traits are also useful in building sympathy for Cupid who will receive such harsh treatment from his own mother and regain his wife at the end of the narrative. The result of this is that Apuleius produces a Cupid who a marvelously varied character and the dynamic consequence of blending elements of his existing mythological tradition and adding completely new traits. It must be said that coming up with a fresh and novel Cupid at this stage of his vast tradition is really quite something! Apuleius' creativity in his characterization of Cupid has not been sufficiently acknowledged.

Apuleius' Cupid and Virgil's *Aeneid*:

Since we have already seen the significance of Virgil's *Aeneid* in Apuleius' construction of Venus and since Cupid appears in both narratives we may reasonably wonder if Apuleius' Cupid might have a relationship to the Cupid of the *Aeneid*. Cupid's first appearance in the *Aeneid*, as in the Cupid and Psyche narrative, comes relatively near the beginning (*Aen.* 1.657ff.) and at his mother Venus' request. In both cases Venus is looking to manipulate a mortal woman (Psyche/Dido), hatches a plan, and initiates a conference with Cupid. She delivers a speech to Cupid which is quoted by the narrator (*Aen.* 1.664-688 / *Met.* 4.31.1-4) and which requests Cupid's intervention in a plan that relies on his ability to quicken erotic love in the woman. The tone in these speeches is noticeably different. Her speech in Apuleius is clearly motivated by her own angry thirst for revenge, a self-centered pursuit which she expects Cupid to take up after a little false

flattery and a few short directives. Virgil's Cupid is not treated this way and is instead drawn by Venus into her plans via a careful explanation of her motives and strategy, arousal of sympathy for Aeneas, and genuine compliments. He is thus afforded a certain personal dignity which Apuleius' Cupid does not enjoy in his first interaction with Venus. Nevertheless, in each case Cupid is pictured as winged (*pinnatum*, *Met.* 4.30.4; *aligerum*, *Aen.* 1.663, *alas*, *Aen.* 1.689), is called a boy (*puerum*, *Met.* 4.30.4; *puer*, *Aen.* 1.684), and is associated with fire (*flammis*, *Met.* 4.30.4, *flammae*, *Met.* 4.31.1; *ignem*, *Aen.* 1.660, *ignem*, *Aen.* 1.688). These last characteristics are hardly unique to Virgil and Apuleius' depictions of the god, nevertheless they are common to them.

In each case the oblivious mortal woman falls in love. Virgil's Cupid causes this in happy obedience (*Aen.* 1.695f.) to his mother's request. Apuleius' Cupid, by way of contrast, defies Venus' instructions and is only incidentally the cause of Psyche's infatuation (5.23.2), distinctions which clearly show that Apuleius' Cupid will not be characterized here as Venus' little helper nor as the opposite, an entirely self-directed, independent Cupid who has total control over erotic love. Although Virgil's Cupid kindles love for Aeneas (instead of himself), the women are both pictured repeatedly embracing Cupid without knowing who he is (*Aen.* 1.718f.) and both are eventually driven by the immense power of love to become suicidal (*Aen.* 4.412-15). Psyche's wish to know Cupid's face by the face of their child (*Met.* 5.13.3) is perhaps an echo of Dido's similar wish (*Aen.* 4.327).<sup>381</sup> Virgil's Cupid is closely associated with his mother

---

<sup>381</sup> *GCA*, 202.

(*Aen.*10.188). His obedience, good temper, and ability to excite love are the key features of his comparatively small role in the *Aeneid*. Naturally, the first of these contrasts sharply with his appearance in the *Metamorphoses*. In addition to Cupid's reaction to his mother's request, one may also contrast his attitude toward his human victim (which in Apuleius involves genuine love and concern) and the effect of the love affairs which each Cupid inspires. Apuleius' Cupid inspires a genuine love affair which ends in a marriage and a new life (*Voluptas*), while Virgil's ends in the denial of a marriage, the taking of life (*Dido's*), and disaster.

In a broader look at Apuleius' use of Virgil's *Aeneid* in his construction of Cupid, we may see several factors. I have already asserted that the passage in which Juno incites Allecto (7.330ff.) contains certain notable verbal and situational correspondences to Apuleius' incitement of Cupid by Venus.<sup>382</sup> Here Cupid shares a number of the characteristics ascribed to Allecto including appearance, behavior, and associations. These connections to the monstrous figure of Allecto help to form a startlingly negative first impression of Cupid (perhaps ridiculously so, given his later positive depiction). Additionally, Cupid himself uses epic language at certain points in the narrative.<sup>383</sup> There are also instances of Virgilian language being applied to Cupid in description.<sup>384</sup>

---

<sup>382</sup> See above, p.111.

<sup>383</sup> For example, *GCA*, 193 notes that his words *mucrone dextrico* (*Met.*5.12.4) are found in Virgil's *Aeneid* 2.449; 12.663 and elsewhere. Similarly, Grimal compares *deuinctam cupidine* (*Met.*5.24.3) with *deuinctus amore* from Virgil's *Aeneid* 8.394.

<sup>384</sup> *GCA*, 205 notes the verbal echo of *complexibus mollibus* (*Met.*5.13.6 and Virgil's *Aen.*8.388). See also *GCA*, 301 on *remigio plumae* (*Met.*5.25.1); *GCA*, 528 on *his dictis*; and *GCA*, 277 on *capitis aurei...caesariem...,cervices lacteas* (*Met.*5.22.5) and

More general than these are the situational links between Apuleius' Cupid and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Cupid's winged departure from Psyche after promising impending vengeance and punishment (5.24.5-25.2) is not unlike that of Celaeno (Virg.*Aen.*3.258).<sup>385</sup> Celaeno's dark prophecy and monstrous nature are given a twist by Apuleius. Cupid's threat is laughably light by comparison (his mere absence from Psyche rather than the mass starvation which Celaeno foresees) and far from being a horrible Harpy, Cupid is both male and, as Psyche has just seen, gloriously attractive. His entreaty to Jupiter for help (6.22) may also recall *Aeneid* 1.223f. in which Venus pleads to Jupiter on Aeneas' behalf. The two scenes are domestic, place Jupiter in the identical position, unfold in the same location, and are connected by a verbal echo.<sup>386</sup> Here again the difference of proportions between the scenes is an amusing twist. In the *Aeneid* the entire future of the Roman race hangs in the balance. Apuleius' Cupid, on the other hand, wants his girlfriend back and his mommy to calm down.

In general, Apuleius' use of Virgil's *Aeneid* in his characterization of Cupid is part of a wider tapestry of allusions to the *Aeneid* found in the narrative. Certainly, in Cupid's case the *Aeneid* is used in a much more limited way than we have seen in, for example,

---

Virg.*Aen.*8.659. Finkelppearl, 70 argues for a connection between Apuleius' Cupid and Virgil's Ascanius based on the description at *Met.*5.22.5 (especially *cervices lacteas*) and Virg.*Aen.*10.134ff. The passages both contain references to heads, hair, gold, and the verbal echo in their descriptions is clear enough but I do not follow Finkelppearl's assertion that some deeper "specific connection" to Ascanius is at work. See also Parker, 210.

<sup>385</sup> See *GCA*, 300 on this early comparison made by Pricaeus.

<sup>386</sup> *GCA*, 529 also identifies a more complex literary twist in Apuleius' use of the *Aeneid* scene: Apuleian Cupid imitates his Virgilian parent's behavior, just as the Apuleian scene imitates its 'parent' text, the *Aeneid*.

the characterization of Venus. Nonetheless, such intertextuality adds literary interest and keeps the reader in mind of the *Aeneid* but without using it as the primary model for Cupid. This may, in part, reflect Cupid's limited role in the *Aeneid* but it also allows other sources to come to the fore and ensures some allusive variety.

Cupid as the *adulescens amans* of Ancient Comedy:

Recently Regine May has suggested that Apuleius' Cupid shares a number of features with the *adulescens amans*, the young man in love, of ancient comedy.<sup>387</sup> She has shown real insight and made an important contribution, but there is still more that can and should be added. She points out that he is young, especially in the eyes of his mother who calls him a *puer* (notably in a variation on a comic phrase)<sup>388</sup> and considers him too young for a love affair. Additionally, he begins a love affair with a woman of lower social status, which he attempts to keep secret from a parent, and which when discovered is opposed by his parent. A pseudo-marriage or concubinage and then legitimate marriage between equals ensues, as does a pregnancy. May correctly points out that examples of such concubinage are found between lovers in comedy (such as Philematium and Philolaches in the *Mostellaria* or Selenium and Alcesimarchus in the *Cistellaria*) and that like the girl in the *Cistellaria* Psyche ultimately has her social status elevated (to

---

<sup>387</sup> May, 221ff.

<sup>388</sup> Venus calls him *hoc aetatis puer* at 5.29.3 recalling *hoc aetatis senex* (Plautus, *Bacch.* 343) as May, 221; Grimal and *GCA*, 336 all note. On imitation of comic language in Apuleius, see Callebat, especially 501ff. On comic language associated with Cupid, see *GCA*, 144; 145; 300; 355; 534.

immortality not citizenship) which facilitates a legitimate marriage. These are reasonable observations which are supported by some of the characterization of Venus and Psyche and by certain other plot points, such as the wedding at the close of the narrative.<sup>389</sup>

May also notes that the secrecy surrounding a relationship in comedy may be because of a citizen girl's pregnancy (as in Terence's *Adelphoe*) or a girl's sharply inferior social status (as in the case of Pasicompsa in *Mercator*) and that secrecy, pregnancy, and disparate social status are all factors in the Cupid and Psyche narrative. This is true, but May does not go far enough. Apuleius, in a comic twist, exaggerates the disparity in their status by making the beloved mortal and the lover, not merely her social better in human terms, but immortal! Similarly, the elevation of Psyche's status to immortality instead of simple citizenship is an entertaining twist. Moreover, while Cupid is Psyche's social better and the girl does become pregnant, these factors are not the reasons for the couple's initial secrecy. Instead, their secrecy is a result of Venus' villainous demand that Cupid punish Psyche and is also a response to the threat posed by Psyche's envious sisters. Psyche's pregnancy and mortality are merely an added source of irritation for Venus whose real motivation is petty jealousy and outrage at being disobeyed once the secret relationship is revealed. These issues, which in comedy are enough to necessitate a clandestine affair, are for Cupid and Psyche dwarfed by the problem of Venus' ill temper. This distinction (which May does not notice) between the comic situations which she

---

<sup>389</sup> See p.100ff. on Venus' possible connections to the ancient comedy's *lena*, *senex iratus*, *pater durus* and below p.268 on Psyche's characterization as a slave (to Venus), a common role for the beloved of the *adulescens amans*. Many comedies close with a wedding.

cites and the case of Cupid and Psyche points to Psyche's victimization by Venus and underlines the unreasonableness of Venus' objections.

In addition, there are some other aspects of comedy in evidence, which have escaped May's attention. Comedy frequently makes use of concealed or mistaken identity and trickery, a device which is recalled in Psyche's ignorance about who her lover is, the sisters' plot to deceive Psyche about her husband's identity, and Psyche's own attempt to conceal Cupid's identity from her sisters.<sup>390</sup> In particular, the specific circumstances of Cupid's deception of his mother reflect one of the types most commonly seen in comedy (*viz.* the duped character believes the duper is actually working on his/her behalf).<sup>391</sup> There is also a tension which is quite familiar from Plautus between the stated Greek context of the Apuleian narrative (4.32.6) and the frequent Roman references.<sup>392</sup> Perhaps there are even traces of comedy's avaricious *parasitus* character in the sisters' flattering, fake, mercenary, and selfish behavior. Additionally there are a few comic conventions which Apuleius inverts or which are conspicuously absent in Cupid's characterization.

Since Cupid and Psyche's general situation does include a number of factors present in ancient comedy, we should expect Cupid's own characterization to incorporate the most

---

<sup>390</sup> *Amphitruo*, *Casina*, and *Miles Gloriosus*, for example, all involve mistaken/concealed identity.

<sup>391</sup> See Duckworth, 169 on the three categories of dupes in comedy.

<sup>392</sup> On the supposed Greek context of Plautus' plays and their constant Roman allusions see Moore, 50ff. For Roman references in Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche see above p.51; 57; 100; 102; 143; 144; 149. On this tension in the *Metamorphoses* see Clarke, 106; May, 173f.

axiomatic traits of the *adulescens amans*. As we shall see, however, interestingly several of these qualities are actually applied to Psyche, instead of or in addition to Cupid. Firstly, the young lover of comedy is, obviously, young and expected (at least by his parent) to be subject to his parent's authority in securing a partner. This does not exactly fit the picture of Cupid which we find in the narrative. Although Cupid is treated by Venus as a *puer* and described notably by Pan as an *adulescentem*,<sup>393</sup> other characters such as Juno and Ceres clearly recognize that he is not a boy and explicitly reject the idea that he is too young for a relationship (5.31.4). In fact, he is at times characterized, particularly by his own words and behavior, not only as a grown man but as a responsible and solicitous husband. For example, it is he who repeatedly warns Psyche against her sisters, arranges her care and transport, and appears as *dominus* of his own glittering mansion. He is hardly the impulsive minor of ancient comedy in this regard and the novelty of his depiction as a settled husband draws attention to this independent adulthood especially. Apuleius thus teases the reader. He has it both ways, now hinting at the idea of Cupid as the *adulescens* and now showing him clearly as an adult.

Rather, it is Psyche, young (in fact the youngest sister, 4.28.2; 5.9.4) and unmarried, who more properly falls under her parents', most especially her father's, authority. She, unlike Cupid, is still subject to her parents' approval, as her father's active role in seeking a match and her own willingness to obey him show. She is repeatedly referred to in

---

<sup>393</sup> See 5.25.6. It is odd that May, 221 cites Venus' remark that Cupid is a *puer* but does not mention his being called an *adulescens* in her argument that he is characterized as a comic *adulescens*!

terms that emphasize her youth, her subjection to her parents, and her virginity such as a *puella*, *infantilis*, *filia*, and *virgo*.<sup>394</sup> Additionally, Psyche's characteristic *simplicitas* makes her seem childlike, especially in comparison to Cupid's mature foresight and measured cautiousness.<sup>395</sup>

The other obvious trait of the *adulescens amans* of comedy (in addition to his youthfulness) is, of course that he is hopelessly in love. His love is generally desperate, excessive, and melodramatic. When the relationship is threatened the infatuation is painful to the *adulescens* who becomes love-sick and may even express suicidal tendencies.<sup>396</sup> Certainly Cupid has great love for Psyche (5.6.10; 6.22.1). He does experience pain from his injury and eventually finds Psyche's absence impossible to bear (6.9.2; 6.16.5; 6.21.2). Yet, the image of the despairing and passionate heart-sick *adulescens* still does not fit with Cupid's character in the narrative nearly so well as it does Psyche's. Cupid, while injured by Psyche's betrayal, speaks rationally to Psyche (even in the moment) and voluntarily withdraws himself from the relationship to punish her. Although we hear secondhand through Venus that Cupid is ailing (6.9.2; 6.16.5), it is Psyche's condition (including weakness, paleness, constant sighing, and sad eyes) which is witnessed more clearly and recognized immediately by Pan as love-sickness. It

---

<sup>394</sup> She is called *puella* at 4.28.2; 4.29.4; 4.29.5; 4.30.1; 4.30.2; 4.30.5; 4.33.1; 4.33.4; 4.35.2; 5.17.1; 5.19.5; 5.25.5; 5.28.8; 5.28.9; 5.31.4; 6.10.6; 6.15.2; 6.23.3; *infantilis* at 5.11.6; *filia* at 4.28.1; 4.32.5; 4.34.2; virginal at 4.28.4; 4.29.4; 4.31.3; 4.32.4; 4.32.6; 4.33.4; 4.35.1, 5.4.2; 5.4.4.

<sup>395</sup> For a full discussion of Psyche's characterization see the 'Psyche' chapter below.

<sup>396</sup> See, for example, Pl. *As.* 606f., 621, 629f.; *Cist.* 284-304, 639-50; *Mer.* 482f., 830-63, 931-51; *Ps.* 74-98.

is Psyche's devotion which is given the considerable stress normally afforded to the *adulescens amans*. Like the young lover of comedy, her passion and desperation are frequently emphasized and (unlike Cupid) she deteriorates repeatedly to talk of suicide.<sup>397</sup> Yes, Psyche too is deeply in love and in a playful twisting of the stock character of the young lover she even seems to outdo the great love of Cupid.

In a similar way, the young lover of comedy often appears *amans egens*.<sup>398</sup> Penniless and passionate he must find funds. This hardly describes Cupid who (perhaps in a deliberate inversion) has his own fabulously resplendent mansion which is ornately decorated and constructed of precious metals, stones, and ivory (5.1-2). His storerooms are heaped with treasure, his table with sumptuous food and wine, and he is master of a large number of slaves (5.2-3). Psyche, however, is quite destitute and is pictured scrounging for bread (6.11.2), begging for a place to stay (6.2-4), poorly dressed (6.10.1), and seeking a way to be together with her beloved. She, not Cupid, is in a desperate situation akin to the smitten but insolvent young man of comedy. Furthermore, the *adulescens amans* in his need turns to a clever slave for help. This character typically offers him assurance and devises a clever and deceptive plan to address his problem.<sup>399</sup> Regine May does mention the clever slave and suggests that he is recalled in Cupid's use of his invisible servants to attend to Psyche. I simply do not see how. It seems clear that the servants are only following their master's orders, as slaves do, and do not act on their own initiative. They

---

<sup>397</sup> See 5.25.1; 6.12.1; 6.14.1; 6.17.2, for example.

<sup>398</sup> Plautus, *Pers.* 1; *Pseud.* 299f.; Terence, *Phorm.* 509ff.

<sup>399</sup> Plautus, *Pseud.* 117ff., for example.

do not devise any particular plan, much less a clever one, and fulfill quite ordinary servile functions such as providing food and entertainment. They are an unnamed plurality and no individual slave emerges as a character, addresses Cupid with anything like the verbal virtuosity of the clever slave, or solves a problem for his master. Rather, it is again Psyche to whom this aspect of the *adulescens amans* has been transferred. Psyche is assured and encouraged by the reed, an individual helper, who confidently speaks up when she is desperate and does not know what to do. Like the clever slave of comedy, the reed proposes a plan which is cunning and which allows Psyche to fulfill the letter of Venus' instructions while disobeying the spirit of them. The tower similarly acts as a wily helper, offering Psyche several ingenious tricks to evade harm.

Apuleius' decision to employ connections to Roman comedy (in plot, circumstance, setting, language, and characterization) is a fitting one. It brings a lighter tone in keeping with many other parts of his humorous novel and eases the dramatic tensions which Venus' vendetta against Psyche imposes. That comedic elements in Cupid's characterization are mixed with elements from numerous other sources (epic, mythology, elegy, tragedy, etc.) is in line with his kaleidoscopic characterization of other figures in the tale and adds considerable literary interest and variety. The application of several of the most axiomatic traits of the young lover to Psyche (rather than Cupid or in addition to Cupid) is a fascinatingly subversive engagement with the pattern of characterization of the *adulescens amans*. In addition to highlighting his very creative use of source material, this phenomenon fits nicely with the gender play and generic play at work

throughout the narrative and, in particular, with the gender play which figures prominently in Psyche's characterization.<sup>400</sup>

Importance and Function:

The frequency of Cupid's appearances, their length (the pivotal scene in which Psyche attempts to behead Cupid lasts from 5.21.5-5.24.5, for example), and the distribution of these appearances across all three books of the narrative attest to his importance as a character. He is involved in the tale near its beginning and at its very end, both emphatic positions which give his character prominence. Cupid, Venus, and Psyche are the only characters who appear at both of these points, a fact which ties them together as the narrative's main players. Cupid's role is certainly a significant one. His decision to defy Venus and to love Psyche is a crucial plot point. If he had condemned Psyche to a low and miserable marriage, as Venus requested, Psyche's sisters would not have been moved by envy to plot against her and Venus would not have needed to subject Psyche to the various labors which form the largest part of the narrative. It is thus Cupid's action, *viz.* his disobedience, rather than Psyche's (as one might expect) which causes the continuing rivalry between Venus and Psyche. He sets in train the whole subsequent narrative. Similarly, it is through Cupid's action (in approaching Jupiter) that Venus' enmity towards Psyche is moderated and that the narrative reaches its conclusion. Even when Cupid himself is not on stage, his great power influences the behavior and speech of

---

<sup>400</sup> Psyche is, for example, also a pseudo-heroic questor figure, a typically male role. This type of gender play will be discussed in the 'Psyche' chapter below.

some of the other characters. For example, Zephyr acts on his orders, the stream saves Psyche's life in part to honour Cupid (5.25.2), as does the eagle (6.15.2), and even in Cupid's absence Juno and Ceres flatter him out of fear (5.31.7).

While these are clearly pivotal contributions to the episode, it is also clear that Cupid's role is one which depends upon his relation to Venus and Psyche and which facilitates and influences their relationship to one another (for good or ill). In fact, he appears exclusively in situations which influence the interactions between Venus and Psyche. His scenes with Venus concern her desire to punish Psyche and her rage when he fails to do so while those with Psyche will be the source of Venus' furious search for the girl. Even his conversation with Jupiter (the only character other than Psyche to whom Cupid speaks in the narrative) concerns his relationship to Psyche and results in the end of Venus' hostility to Psyche. A significant part of his importance to the narrative is thus vicarious and relational. Venus' angry tirades against Cupid and his depiction as silently enduring them connects him to Psyche as a victim of Venus and underlines the goddess' excessive anger, antagonism, and threatening power. If her own son, an important god, is unable to confront Venus directly, Psyche's fear and weakness are quite understandable for the reader. Moreover, his warnings to Psyche, which account for most of his direct speech in the narrative, also underline the girl's frailty and lack of sophistication (this time relative to her sisters). The secrecy about Cupid's true identity builds tension and drama and simultaneously allows for some humor. His numerous appearances to Psyche prior to the identification of him as Cupid function as a way of intriguing and teasing the

reader (another aspect of him as a narrative device). The gradual development of his relationship with Psyche adds a dynamic, humanizing, and even realistic touch to an otherwise fanciful narrative. Naturally, the evident sincerity of the couple's feelings encourages the reader to feel sympathy for the pair when they are separated. Cupid's unexpected departure also adds a dramatic twist. His absence then allows Psyche and her completion of Venus' labors to take precedence. In a similar way, his sudden re-appearance to resolve Venus' opposition to Psyche and to reunite the two lovers provides a dramatic and memorable closing to the narrative.

Apuleius' depiction of Cupid is varied and interesting. He is at times described and treated as a naughty child. At other times he seems to be a mature and prudent husband. In this way Apuleius showcases his creativity in giving Cupid that new and unprecedented role as a husband and father, while also drawing in many of the aspects familiar from traditional depictions of Cupid. Even the features of Cupid's character which are identifiably traditional are sometimes given an ingenious spin. The result is a witty and unexpected blend of originality, intertextuality, and humor.

#### First Appearance:

As with other characters, Cupid's first appearance is an especially important part of his characterization. Here, the reader's initial expectations of Cupid are formed. His later appearances will seem to conform to or depart from this foundational characterization.

Moreover, since Cupid's first appearance includes both a description of him by the narrator and an interaction with his mother the reader is given an especially good opportunity to form a first impression of Cupid. Cupid's appearance and behavior here offer valuable insight into Apuleius' method of characterization. Several aspects of his first appearance, addressed in the following three sections, are striking.

#### Cupid's First Appearance and his Relation to Psyche and Venus:

It is instructive that Cupid is introduced to the reader at this point in the story (4.30.4). It is early enough to signal his basic importance in the narrative but, significantly, it follows the introduction of Psyche (first at 4.28.2) and Venus (second at 4.29). The primary conflict of the narrative is, after all, the conflict between Venus and Psyche, a conflict which precedes Cupid's introduction to the story and endures even after Cupid and Psyche are reconciled. Cupid then is an important character but not one of the most primary ones. This is a basic observation, I suppose, but one that has not really been made by other scholars. Indeed, the narrative is routinely treated as if it were principally about the love story of the couple, an attitude which is reflected most obviously in the narrative's widespread nickname "Cupid and Psyche".<sup>401</sup>

---

<sup>401</sup> I have observed above, p.151 that the narrative might be better called "Venus vs. Psyche". On Venus' importance and the primacy of the conflict between Venus and Psyche see above, p.152. See also, below, p.195ff. on Cupid's comparatively small amount of dialogue and his absence from much of the narrative.

In addition to the timing of his first appearance, the manner and wording of his introduction affirm that his significance depends significantly upon his relationship to Venus (*vocat...puerum suum*, 4.30.4). Cupid is not called by name, nor even as the god of love, although it is in this capacity that Venus will prompt him to act in causing Psyche to fall in love with a wretch. He is instead first identified by his relationship to Venus. He is Venus' boy (*puerum suum*, 4.30.4). His interactions, speech, and behavior throughout the narrative will continue to show that he is important to the narrative primarily in relation to Venus or Psyche.<sup>402</sup>

Moreover, Cupid does not make his first appearance in the narrative independently. He does not arrive on to the scene without invitation, as do, for example, Psyche and Venus. Rather, Cupid is called into the story (*vocat*, 4.30.4). His first appearance is a response to Venus and, notably, an obedient one. Thus the initial impression is subtly formed in the very first words of Cupid's introduction that she is active, he reactive. As his first appearance unfolds, the impression that Cupid is passive (relative to Venus) is bolstered by numerous factors. The narrator's description of Cupid as a *puer* (4.30.4), rather than, for example, a *filium*, does not only identify him as Venus' son it also suggests his relative youth (a characteristic which adds to Venus' perceived authority) and

---

<sup>402</sup> For example, Cupid actually speaks relatively little throughout the narrative and only those words which he speaks to Venus or to Psyche are directly quoted by the narrator. See below, 195ff. on Cupid's speech. Similarly, he never appears alone in the narrative and is portrayed only once with a character other than Psyche or Venus. Notably, this appearance is the scene in which he receives Jupiter's assent to resolve the problem of Psyche and Venus' conflict (6.22) so that the two females are still importantly involved, although they are not yet present.

inferiority.<sup>403</sup> Throughout their exchange Venus takes the lead. She speaks while he remains silent. This fact is highlighted by no fewer than 9 words<sup>404</sup> from the narrator which concern speech or sound made by Venus and by the presentation of her uninterrupted monologue (comprising 66 words at 4.31.1-3). Cupid's silence, in particular following the speech in which Venus makes her request, is noticeable by comparison.<sup>405</sup> Perhaps Cupid already fancies Psyche and, not wanting to carry out Venus' command, remains submissively silent.

Additionally, Cupid is the object of Venus' actions in his first appearance with her and does not himself initiate any action relative to Venus. She calls, she goads, she shows, she relates, moans, groans, speaks, beseeches, kisses, and leaves. Venus is here the subject of a series of active verbs (active in both meaning and voice) while Cupid is the passive recipient of these actions.<sup>406</sup> Having called him into her presence and made her will known, Venus leaves the exchange on her own terms (4.31.4). She thus initiates, controls, and ends Cupid's first appearance. Relative to Venus, Cupid would initially seem to be entirely passive. This fact will make his later disobedience to Venus interesting and somewhat surprising for the reader when Cupid suddenly becomes very active in his own interests. This passivity to Venus is also something of a contrast to the

---

<sup>403</sup> *TLL*, sv. *puer* I, II B (a) and (b). The point of the ambiguous use of *puer* here is noted by Parker, 215f. but missed by *GCA*, 62. Cupid's age later becomes a point of contention, see 5.31.4.

<sup>404</sup> These are at 4.30.4-5: *vocat, verbis, tota, perlata, fabula, gemens, fremens, inquit, and effata* at 4.31.4.

<sup>405</sup> See below, 195ff. on Cupid's speech and silence in the narrative as a whole.

<sup>406</sup> At 4.30.4 – 4.31.4: *vocat, stimulat, perducit, ostendit, perlata, gemens, fremens, inquit, deprecor, effata, petit*, for example.

narrator's description of Cupid in his first appearance. Moreover, unlike the introductions of Psyche and Venus which give the reader every indication that these personages will be crucially important to the narrative, Cupid's introduction, while effective, is deliberately understated. It is not only his disobedience and his novel role as a husband which will surprise the reader. His introduction here as silent errand-boy son to Venus certainly belies his later significance to the narrative as Psyche's lover. This reader-deception is an important part of Cupid's characterization.

Cupid's First Appearance and the Narrator's Description (4.30.4-5):

The narrator's description of Cupid, although it is short and does not include his name, has enough detail for him to be accurately identified. That he is Venus' son is immediately made clear, as we have seen. Only a few of his physical attributes are mentioned: he is winged, a *puer*, and armed with flames and arrows. These are all points which are typical of Cupid's presentation elsewhere as the childish and naughty inspirer of erotic love and thus confirm for the reader quite efficiently that the unnamed character is Cupid. His age is not specified but the ambiguity of *puer* adds to the impression that his character will follow closely the tradition of the boy Cupid which cannot fail to be familiar to the reader from his very large mythological tradition.<sup>407</sup> This is partly a clever

---

<sup>407</sup> On Cupid's tradition see above, p.164ff. For examples of similar depictions of Cupid as a winged, associated with fire and arrows, see: Kenney, 123f. and McKeown (on Ovid *Amores* 1.2.45f.). Parker, 216 suggests that Venus' attempt to bribe Cupid here connects him to the Eros of A.R. 3.129-44 who is portrayed as a disobedient child. See Schiesaro, 142 on the differences between the two scenes.

misdirection on Apuleius' part. Cupid's wings and his association with fire and arrows will appear in the narrator's later descriptions but Apuleius' Cupid as a whole is far from a typical rendering of Cupid.<sup>408</sup> An important part of Cupid's character will be novel and a marked departure from his previous depictions in myth: his identity as a settled husband and father. The narrator's delicately misleading initial description here will help to delay the reader's identification of the palace owner at the start of Book Five since the boy Cupid would hardly spring to mind as the mansion's *dominus*. This short introduction thus heightens the suspense and tension of that later portion of the narrative. Moreover, having set up the expectation that Cupid will be depicted as the little helper of Venus, Apuleius' subsequent presentation of him as a responsible husband will stand out all the more.

In addition to Cupid's physical appearance, this efficient description also depicts Cupid's activities. The relative passivity which he shows in his interaction with Venus is not, apparently, typical of him. In only one sentence (4.30.4) four very active verbs are applied to him (*discurrens, corrumpens, committit, facit*). His activities are vigorous (he doesn't just appear in homes but runs through them), bold (occurring in homes which are *alienas* to him), widespread (*omnium matrimonia*), and conducted with impunity (*impune*). The actions which the narrator attributes to him are also uniformly negative (*tanta flagitia...nihil prorsus boni*) and suggest his association with wantonness and

---

<sup>408</sup> All of these characteristics appear in the much longer description of Cupid at 5.22-23. See 5.22.6 (wings); 5.22.7 (arrows); 5.23.5 (flames).

wickedness.<sup>409</sup> Similarly, the narrator has no kind word for his personality. For such a short description there are numerous unflattering assessments of his personal character.<sup>410</sup> The strongly negative slant of this description is certainly highlighted by Cupid's subtle connection to Allecto via correspondences of situation, appearance, associations, and activities, as I have discussed above.<sup>411</sup> In this regard too Apuleius subtly misdirects the reader. Cupid will hardly be villainous in this narrative, appearing instead as something of a victim of Venus' rage and Psyche's artlessness. He is, in fact, a very likeable figure elsewhere in the narrative.

The narrator's short description, like Cupid's depiction elsewhere in the narrative, is not without wit and twists. Although Cupid is strongly associated by the narrator here with the ruin of marriages, he will soon establish his own and be very diligent in trying to avoid its destruction. In fact, in the end it is Cupid's own intervention in approaching Jupiter which reunites the couple. It is similarly ironic that a god so closely associated with the corruption of marriage will momentarily be asked to procure a marriage.<sup>412</sup> Nowhere else in the narrative does Cupid appear running through others' homes (*alienas domos*, 4.30.4). It is, paradoxically, the influence of outside forces (Psyche's sisters) in *his* home which proves troublesome. The narrator's emphasis on Cupid's tendency to be

---

<sup>409</sup> The diction of the passage also associates Cupid with adultery. The word *temerarium*, for example, in addition to denoting reckless foolishness, is characteristic of adulterers in Apuleius' *Met.*, see McCreight, 40f.

<sup>410</sup> Such as *malis suis moribus; contempta disciplina publica; genuina licentia; and procacem.*

<sup>411</sup> See above p.111 and 173 on the connection between Allecto at Virg. *Aen.*7.330ff. and Cupid here.

<sup>412</sup> *GCA*, 63.

licentious and his contempt for rules makes him an amusingly poor candidate for Venus' request. This is highlighted later by Venus' angry complaints about Cupid at 5.29-30 which reflect his description here as unruly, undisciplined, and insolent.<sup>413</sup> It is perhaps a sign of Venus' blinding rage that she calls upon someone so likely to be disobedient and interested in an unusually beautiful woman. That she delivers her angry appeal and blithely sweeps away, assuming that her undisciplined wanton son will now be obedient and circumspect is also an amusing display of poor judgment. Parker rightly notes that the image of Cupid lurking in the homes of others at night (rather like a thief) has special piquancy in the mouth of this narrator, associated as she is with robbers.<sup>414</sup>

Venus' Speech and Cupid's First appearance (4.31.1-4):

Venus's speech confirms a number of the elements of Cupid's characterization which are discussed above. She too emphasizes Cupid's relationship to herself, appealing to him to act on the basis of bonds of maternal love (*maternae caritatis foedera*) and referring to herself, not as previously as the primal mother of all and origin of the elements (4.30.1), but as specifically his mother (*tuae parenti*). All of these parent-child references also support the idea that Cupid is a young boy. Her long, passionate, open-mouthed kiss at the end of her request suggests that at least Venus believes that Cupid's behavior can be

---

<sup>413</sup> See Parker, 215 on the narrator's description as foreshadowing Venus' diatribe.

<sup>414</sup> *GCA*, 63; Moreschini *ad loc.*; Parker, 215n.76. *GCA*, 64 points out that *impune* (4.30.4) has the same effect since it expresses the notion of criminal activity without punishment.

controlled by her interactions with him. It may reflect his characterization as lascivious as well.<sup>415</sup> Additionally, Venus's speech to Cupid picks up on several of Cupid's traditional associations such as with arrows, wounds, fire, burns, and of course the ability to inspire erotic love, a love which is represented as not only passionate but painful.<sup>416</sup>

The quality of the love with which Cupid is associated, an oxymoronic mixture of pleasurable and painful feelings, is aptly expressed in Venus' references to sweet wounds (*dulcia vulnera*) and honeyed burns (*mellitas uredines*).<sup>417</sup> Amid such a uniformly negative description of Cupid, the suggestion of any hint of sweetness, even if it is in Cupid's wounds, is remarkable as the only positive trait attributed to him here and is indicative of Venus' attempt to manipulate via flattery.<sup>418</sup> The impact of this rather back-handed compliment is minimized by the obvious fact that Venus considers Cupid's effects a suitable punishment for her worst enemy. There is surely some irony then in Venus talking of sweetness in connection with him and his wounding! That Cupid is her

---

<sup>415</sup> Parker, 217.

<sup>416</sup> For examples of literary and artistic depictions of Cupid and these traditional associations, see Kenney, 123-4; *GCA*, 63.

<sup>417</sup> Such contradictions are, as Kenney 124 notes, exceedingly common in Hellenistic epigrammatists and Sappho and are found elsewhere including Catull. 68.18; Longus 1.18.1. The pairing of *dulcia vulnera*, however, is unprecedented before Apuleius, see *GCA*, 67. Also, *uredines* is a rare word (appearing only here in Apuleius) and is thus noticeable, *GCA*, 68. The use of these paradoxical descriptions (which Apuleius manages to make at once familiar and novel) also supports the developing impression that Cupid will be depicted as the typically cruel inspirer of love and suggests that Cupid might happily punish Psyche as requested. This is the same kind of subtle misdirection which I have discussed above. See also Parker, 216.

<sup>418</sup> *GCA*, 62 asserts that Cupid is introduced in “exclusively negative terms”.

first choice as an agent for retribution and vengeance highlights his dangerous and violent powers, as does Venus' mention of injurious articles such as arrows, flames, and their results (wounds and burns).<sup>419</sup>

The request which Venus makes of Cupid rests on his ability to inspire erotic love among mortals but neither the reader nor Venus (apparently!) could predict the amusing paradox that Cupid himself will be vulnerable to the effects of such passion in this narrative.<sup>420</sup> Cupid's hearing of Venus' request is critical to the advancement of the plot since it is here in his first appearance that he is made aware of Psyche, shown the girl in person, and asked to intervene. It is this interaction which sets in motion one of the narrative's primary plot points (Cupid falling for Psyche). His silence allows Venus' aggressive posturing to be especially noticeable and thus his first appearance at her speech also effects her characterization. Cupid's subsequent disobedience suggests that his silence here (rather than a sign of submission or obedience, as one might presume initially) may characterize him as the kind of son who lets his mother lay down the law and then quietly goes off to do what *he* wants to do.<sup>421</sup>

---

<sup>419</sup> Parker, 217.

<sup>420</sup> James, 119 notes the “probably intentional paradox” of a Cupid who is vulnerable to his own effects. No doubt it is intentional but the paradox is not unique to Apuleius. Eros is similarly pictured at *AP* 5.179; 9.449; 12.112; 12.113; 12.144; 16.195ff.; 16.251, for example.

<sup>421</sup> Cupid is, in fact, described as one who doesn't say what is really on his mind at *A.P.* 9.440.

Cupid's first appearance here includes authorial misdirection. Although he is at first described in very negative terms, we later learn that Cupid is very caring and is capable of a mature spousal relationship, for example. Because of the misdirection in this passage the reader may also assume that Cupid is actually going to carry out Venus' instructions, especially when Psyche's father receives the cryptic oracle and later when her mysterious husband (suspiciously) will not let her see him. Nevertheless, Venus' final words of instruction to Cupid (4.31.3) contain an ironically truthful description of Psyche's husband! When Venus condemns Psyche to a marriage with a man who has forfeited rank, wealth, and health she surely does not realize that this is a pretty accurate sketch of the husband which Cupid himself becomes. Cupid soon gives up his usual autonomy and his glittering mansion and lies sick in his mother's house. The reader cannot appreciate the irony until later but it is nevertheless present and is quite obvious to the second reader.<sup>422</sup>

#### Cupid's Speech and Silence:

A character's speech (its content and quality, its tone and diction, even its length) is a valuable way to learn about a character. Speech from a character, especially direct speech, often provides the reader with an insight into the character's mind and helps him/her to form an opinion of the character. In narratives, as in life, we make judgments

---

<sup>422</sup> *GCA*, 69. James, 167 also suggests a reference to Plato *Symp.* 203c5-d3.

based in part on observable behavior, of which speech acts constitute a major part. Despite Cupid's relatively important role in the narrative, he is remarkably silent. In fact, his first appearance in the narrative (at 4.30.4) is silent, his presence being announced by the narrator and then by Venus' address, throughout which he remains a mute listener. Likewise, no speech, direct or indirect, is attributed to him during his first encounter with Psyche at 5.4.3 (his second appearance in the narrative, although the reader cannot yet be certain of the identity of the *ignobilis maritus*). The narrator notes that he makes multiple such visits to the girl (5.4.5) before he first speaks at 5.5.2. He is also perfectly silent during Venus' lengthy tirade against him (5.29-31). In fact, Cupid is not pictured speaking directly or indirectly from 5.24 when he promises to punish Psyche by his absence until almost the close of the narrative when he again addresses Psyche. This extended silence allows Psyche's story to develop, highlights Venus' overwhelming rage, and makes Cupid's speech and intervention more noticeable when they do come at 6.21.4.

Cupid's relative silence in the narrative is not only apparent because of his silence at critical times (such as his first appearances with Venus and Psyche and at 5.29-31) and his silence throughout most of Book 6. It is clear in other ways as well. In total, he has only 394 words of direct speech.<sup>423</sup> This constitutes a mere 9.4% of the direct speech quoted by the narrator and only 4.4% of the entire narrative, a miniscule percentage for a major character. Venus and Psyche are each given more than twice this amount of direct

---

<sup>423</sup> See above, p.136, figure 2 for this and the following statistics.

speech, as are Psyche's sisters. Cupid does not even do as much direct speaking as the tower, which has 416 words! Similarly, there are also few references to Cupid speaking where his speech is not quoted. For example, his unknown voice was a solace for Psyche's loneliness at 5.4.5, where the content of his speeches is not specified. It is implied at 5.7.4 that he spoke to Zephyr to give a specific order and at 6.15.2 that he had previously given an order to the eagle. Even Cupid's pivotal appeal to Jupiter at 6.22.1 is indirect and is summed up by the narrator extremely briefly and vaguely (*supplicat suamque causam probat*). It is instead Cupid's interlocutor, Jupiter, whose speech is given priority while Cupid appears primarily in the role of silent listener (as previously in his exchanges with Venus).

It is, in fact, only in conversation with Psyche that Cupid's speech is directly quoted by the narrator. This exclusivity emphasizes the importance of Cupid's connection to Psyche for his characterization. He is pictured speaking to her alone and, in fact, there are a number of occasions on which his speech is given priority and she (instead of he) assumes the role of silent listener.<sup>424</sup> This reversal of the role Cupid has previously played relative to Venus highlights his unusual characterization as the solicitous husband of Psyche. In these situations it is Cupid who takes the lead, offering advice, admonishment, or exhortation. The content of Cupid's speech similarly emphasizes his relationship to Psyche, his extraordinary spousal role in the narrative, and his loving demeanor, as the following statistics demonstrate. Of the 394 words of direct speech

---

<sup>424</sup> As at 5.11; 5.24; 6.21.

which are attributed to Cupid all 394 are directed at Psyche. He uses her name on 4 occasions,<sup>425</sup> addresses her with a term of endearment 5 times,<sup>426</sup> refers to their spousal relationship unambiguously 6 times,<sup>427</sup> and to himself as her lover twice.<sup>428</sup> Psyche is not only the listener, she is also the subject of much of Cupid's speech. 73 of Cupid's 394 words directly refer to Psyche.<sup>429</sup> This includes verbs of which Psyche is the subject, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives which refer specifically to Psyche's person. 44 other of his words refer more generally to Psyche, her attributes, activities, or circumstances.<sup>430</sup> Cupid's speech is directed at and revolves around Psyche, as is demonstrated by a quick

---

<sup>425</sup> 5.5.2; 5.6.2; 5.12.5; 5.24.3.

<sup>426</sup> 5.5.2: *dulcissima, cara*; 5.6.2: *mea*; 5.12.5: *dulcissima*; 6.21.4: *misella*. These tender terms of address also demonstrate Cupid's genuine devotion to the girl.

<sup>427</sup> 5.5.2: *uxor*; 5.6.2: *maritus*; 5.6.2: *coniugales*; 5.11.5: *marito*; 5.12.5: *maritum*; 5.24.4: *coniugem*.

<sup>428</sup> 5.24.3: *amator*; 5.24.4: *amatores*. Parker, 228 sees some particular distinction between references to Cupid as Psyche's husband and those to Cupid as her lover: "...no nouns or adjectives are employed to indicate that the relationship between Cupid and Psyche is sexual. Cupid is always called Psyche's *vir* or *maritus*, and it is only after their separation that the narrator called the god Psyche's *amator* at 5.24.2, as does Cupid himself at 5.24.3." This distinction is strained since the marital embrace is certainly closely connected to and indeed implied by the marital relationship, as Apuleius' own wording at 5.4.3 demonstrates: *...et torum inscenderat et uxorem sibi fecerat...*

<sup>429</sup> 5.5.2: *Psyche, dulcissima, cara, uxor, tibi*; 5.5.3: *tuae, tuumque, acceperis, respondeas, prospicias, tibi, creabis*; 5.6.2: *Psyche, mea, te, tuus, desinis*; 5.6.3: *age, voles, tuo, pareto, memineris, coeperis*; 5.11.3: *videsne, tibi, praecaves*; 5.11.4: *tibi, te, tibi, videbis, videris*; 5.11.5: *conferas, tui, potueris, audias, respondeas*; 5.11.6: *nostram, propagabimus, nobis, texeris, nostra, profanaueris*; 5.12.4: *tuum, tuae*; 5.12.5: *urguemur, Psyche, dulcissima, tui, nostrique, teque, nostrum, libera*; 5.12.6: *tibi, uideas, audias*; 5.24.3: *simplicissima, Psyche, te, deuinctam, tibi*; 5.24.4: *teque, coniugem, meam, tibi, tuos*; 5.24.5: *tibi, tuae, te*; 6.21.4: *perieras, misella, tu, tibi, exsequere*.

<sup>430</sup> 5.5.3: *mortis, uestigium, summum, exitium*; 5.6.2: *amplexus, coniugales, cruciatum*; 5.6.3: *animo, damnosa, poscenti, sero, paenitere*; 5.11.3: *quantum, periculum*; 5.11.4: *nefarias, insidias, explorare, uultus*; 5.11.5: *sermonem, genuina, simplicitate, animi, teneritudine*; 5.11.6: *familiam, infantilis, uterus, secreta, silentio*; 5.12.4: *iugulum*; 5.12.5: *quantis, cladibus, religiosaque, continentia, imminens, ruinae, infortunio*; 5.24.3: *miseri, extremique, hominis, cupidine, infimo, matrimonia*; 6.21.4: *simili, curiositate*.

look at the subjects of Cupid's verbs. Since Cupid is pictured delivering monologues to a silent listening Psyche, he might be expected to speak in the first person most frequently. Rather, Psyche is the sole subject of 28 of his verbs, while Cupid is the subject of 16. Together Cupid and Psyche are the subject of 11 of his verbs. Moreover, her sisters are the subject of 12 verbs and these remarks too are aimed at protecting Psyche. Psyche, her connection to himself, and her situation are thus essentially Cupid's only topic of conversation.<sup>431</sup> The admonitory tone of his speeches (which is emphasized repeatedly)<sup>432</sup> and the frequency of these warnings (5.5.1; 5.6.1; 5.6.6; 5.11.3; 5.11.4; 5.12.3; 5.24.5) attest to Cupid's commitment to Psyche's well-being and especially to his unprecedented role as a responsible husband. His warnings against Psyche's sisters (which may initially arouse some suspicion in the reader) are quickly borne out by the sisters' own bad behavior. The frequency of these warnings, their strong wording, even their placement (back to back at 5.11.3-6 and 5.12.4-6) all convey a sense of urgency, build tension, and contribute significantly to the negative characterization of the sisters.<sup>433</sup>

One of the features of Venus' speech, as we have seen, is her dishonesty.<sup>434</sup> Cupid withholds his identity from Psyche and fails to inform her of Venus' sinister plan for her.

---

<sup>431</sup> The remaining verbs are as follows: fortune is the subject of 3 verbs, 2 verbs are impersonal, and Venus is the subject of a single verb.

<sup>432</sup> See *pressiore cautela censeo*, 5.5.2; *expostulat*, 5.6.1; *seriae monitionis*, 5.6.3; *monuit*, *terrui*, 5.6.6; *commonet*, 5.11.3; *admonet*, 5.12.3; *cauenda censebam*, *remonebam*, 5.24.5.

<sup>433</sup> Parker, 212.

<sup>434</sup> See above, p. 127.

These are deceptive omissions. He also makes a couple of threats which, like his mother's, turn out to be empty. He claims that if she sees his face she'll never see it again (5.11.4) and that if she does not keep their secret their child will be mortal rather than divine (5.11.6). These promises prove false, but not until the close of the narrative, and thus do not give the impression that Cupid is a liar. On the contrary, his warnings are generally well founded. He certainly does accurately warn Psyche of the immediate threat which her sisters pose and his assessment of their character is corroborated by their own mean words and hateful behavior and by the negative opinion of the sisters which the narrator and Zephyr also form. His speech reveals that he understands the danger which the sisters' thoughts and words pose (5.11.5; 5.24.5), that their intentions are malevolent and even violent (5.11.4; 5.11.5; 5.12.4; 5.12.6), and that Psyche's interactions with them could cause regrettable harm to her and painful suffering to himself (5.5.3; 5.12.5).<sup>435</sup> Not satisfied simply to warn Psyche of the dangers, Cupid is also practical. He gives her specific and simple instructions which, if followed, would have been effective.<sup>436</sup> His persistence in repeatedly advising Psyche shows his concern for her, disposes the reader to like him, and emphasizes the perniciousness of the sisters. It also raises the tension and drama as the reader awaits the disaster which Cupid reliably predicts.

---

<sup>435</sup> Cupid's use of military language (*arma, castra, aciem, classicum*, at 5.12.4, for example) reflects the violent danger which the sisters pose. It is also an appropriate reference for a god who is himself famous for his *arma*.

<sup>436</sup> He tries several tacks, variously instructing her not to listen or look at the sisters (5.5.3; 5.11.5; 5.12.6), not to talk to them about her husband (5.11.5), or telling her to go ahead but to remember that she'd been warned (5.6.3).

He is similarly astute and forthright in his evaluation of Psyche's character, correctly identifying Psyche's weaknesses of simplemindedness, tender-heartedness (5.11.5), naiveté (5.24.3), and dangerous curiosity (6.21.4). All this adds up to a remarkably complex and layered depiction of Cupid. He sees her faults and is very firm at times in his discussions with her. Nevertheless, he is clearly smitten, calling her pet names and reluctantly giving in to her requests to see her sisters (5.6.4), to give them gifts (5.6.5), and to have them transported by Zephyr (5.6.10). Apuleius thus uses Cupid's speeches to characterize him psychologically. One sees in his speeches a glimpse of his intimate thoughts and of the internal conflict which he experiences in his dealings with Psyche.<sup>437</sup> He loves Psyche, sees that her course of action is dangerous, tries to put his foot down, but can't seem to resist her appeals. This dynamic, so apparent in his speeches, is remarkably humanizing.

It most certainly makes Cupid a more sympathetic and natural character, especially in contrast to Venus' single-minded obsession with vengeance. Despite the urgency of the situation, which is apparent in Cupid's firm warnings, he remains likable. He is restrained in his emotions and speech, not yelling, nor descending, as Venus so frequently does, to hysterical emotionalism, irate tirades or violence.<sup>438</sup> At times Cupid is depicted as a weak and silent victim of Venus, at others he is a silent and mysterious lover, a bold and authoritative advisor to Psyche, or a love-struck husband, susceptible to Psyche's

---

<sup>437</sup> Parker, 221.

<sup>438</sup> Parker, 218.

entreaties. More than any other character in the narrative, Cupid's characterization is varied and surprising, a fact that is emphasized, in particular, by his speech and silence.

#### Physical Description:

Cupid's physical appearance is conveyed in noticeable detail. His appearance, especially his beauty, is the subject of more description than that of any other character. Venus, as we have seen,<sup>439</sup> is hardly described at all. Certainly her traditional association with beauty and appeal is downplayed in the narrative, a fact which well reflects her ugly personality and allows Psyche's more stunning physical beauty to be emphasized. Even so, it is Cupid's beauty, not Psyche's which is elaborately treated. The dearth of description of Psyche's beauty is an apt reflection of an appearance that is *tam praeclara pulchritudo nec exprimi ac ne sufficienter quidem laudari sermonis humani penuria poterat* (4.28.2). The focus on Cupid's appearance is quite useful. His impressive beauty is a reflection of his overall attractiveness as a character and an important aspect of his characterization since his speech is limited and his name and identity are concealed from the reader and from Psyche at length. It also makes him a suitable mate for the divinely beautiful Psyche. The extended ecphrasis of Cupid at 5.22 also has the effect of allowing the reader to see Cupid as Psyche sees him, thus confirming the god's role as not only lover but beloved. He is both the inspirer of love and an object of it. The idealized view of Cupid which Psyche enjoys makes a compelling case for her attachment and powerful

---

<sup>439</sup> See above, 127n.286.

attraction to him and makes more understandable the desperate depression into which she falls at their separation. Cupid's physical beauty is so potent that the sight of him has a restorative effect (as well as an erotic and a startling effect)<sup>440</sup> on Psyche at 5.22.4 and even provokes a reaction from objects.<sup>441</sup> Psyche's reaction to the full revelation of Cupid's beauty is given a good deal of attention and includes wonder, desire, panting, desperation, eagerness, passion, impetuosity, excitement, kisses, and embraces (5.23).<sup>442</sup> This focus on her reaction stresses the impact of Cupid's great beauty, as does the fact that Ceres and Juno also notice and mention his good looks (at 5.31.4 and 5.31.5).

Apuleius' depiction of Cupid's appearance includes elements which could stress his rather more dangerous side such as his flames and arrows which are mentioned numerous times. They are themselves given some description and it is interesting to note the extent to which these items are given a positive treatment by the narrator, Psyche, Venus, and Cupid himself. His bow, arrow, and quiver are called *magni dei propitia tela* (5.22.7) by

---

<sup>440</sup> The sight of Cupid at first leaves Psyche *deterrita et impos animi* (5.22.3). Repeated gazing at his beauty, however, restores her (5.22.4). Cupid's physical appearance is thus depicted paradoxically as both the cause and the cure of Psyche's distress.

<sup>441</sup> The light of the lamp quickens with joy at the sight of him and the razor feels regret at its own sharpness (5.22.2). The narrator also suggests that an erotic desire to touch Cupid or give him a kind of kiss is the cause of the lamp sputtering hot oil onto the god at 5.23.4.

<sup>442</sup> The impression that Psyche's discovery of Cupid's full beauty is a kind of religious mystical revelation is certainly deliberate. See *GCA*, 276 on the verbal allusions to discourses of mystery, especially to Plato. See also, Wright, 61f.; Burkert, 77f. and 91; and Harrison, 252-59.

the narrator.<sup>443</sup> The designation of weapons as *propitia* is as striking as Venus' earlier mention of his arrow's sweet wounds and his flames' honeyed burns (4.31.1). The arms' exact location at the foot of Cupid's bed is specified (5.22.7) and Psyche shows noticeable interest in these items, especially since Cupid himself is meanwhile present and available to be examined. She even removes an arrow from the quiver and tests its point (5.23.1-3).<sup>444</sup> Cupid associates himself with his weapons by sardonically calling himself *praeclarus ille sagittarius* (5.24.4). He identifies his arrow as the source of his feelings for Psyche (a very important role for this object) and while his tone here is not positive, it is nevertheless Psyche's apparent betrayal and not the arrows which he should resent (5.24.4). His willingness to use these weapons on himself in the first place underlines that Cupid's bow and arrows are at least ambiguously presented. Even more favorable is the fact that Cupid uses a "harmless prick of his arrow" to rouse Psyche from her slumber for their reunion.<sup>445</sup> This reflects the very positive overall characterization which Cupid receives. Even his weapons are given a positive spin.

His wings, which are mentioned numerous times, efficiently convey his grace, beauty, and divinity.<sup>446</sup> They are even the subject of a delicate sensual description (5.22.6) where

---

<sup>443</sup> His arrows and flames are also mentioned by the narrator at 4.30.4; 5.31.7 (where they inspire fear in Ceres and Juno) and by Venus at 5.29.5; 5.30.5.

<sup>444</sup> Touching Love's weapons is specifically warned against at *A.P.* 9.440.28-9, a warning which implies that someone might be expected to want to touch them, so that Psyche's action here is not altogether surprising, even if it is pretty obviously ill-advised.

<sup>445</sup> 6.21.3 *innoxio punctulo sagittae suae*.

<sup>446</sup> Cupid's wings are mentioned at 4.30.4; 5.22.6; 5.24.5; 5.25.1; 5.29.5; 5.30.6; 6.21.3; 6.21.4 ; 6.22.1; His flight is mentioned at 5.23.6; 5.24.1; 5.24.2; 5.24.5; 5.25.1; 6.21.3; 6.21.4.

they are depicted precisely and alluringly, by their placement on his body, color, sheen, movement, size, texture, and by association with the natural beauty of a flower. Their erotic appeal is unmistakable in the verb *lasciuiunt* (5.22.6). Psyche appreciatively mentions Cupid's *sacrosancta imago*, his cinnamon-scented curls, soft round cheeks which resemble her own, and his warm breast (5.13.3). The narrator describes his glorious ambrosia-soaked hair, milky neck, rosy cheeks, ringlets of hair hanging in the front and back of his head, and his hairless and resplendent body (5.22). This is a more detailed physical description than any other character receives and is uniformly positive and attractive. In addition to helping the reader understand Psyche's overwhelming attraction to Cupid, this also sets up a contrast between the healthy attractive Cupid here and the ailing, pallid Cupid who so suffers without Psyche.<sup>447</sup> This comparison will help to show Cupid's overwhelming feelings for Psyche.<sup>448</sup> It is not only the great and flattering detail about Cupid's physical attributes and the reaction of others to his appearance which convey to the reader a sense of his incredible beauty. His loveliness is also a widespread feature of his tradition and is the subject of repeated direct characterization about Cupid in the narrative.<sup>449</sup> Cupid does not, however, receive such a detailed and sensual description elsewhere in surviving Classical literature and so this is

---

<sup>447</sup> How much greater is the contrast between the glorious appearance of Cupid at 5.22 and the horrid snaky man-eater which the sisters described to Psyche! As Parker, 219 points out the sisters' lies serve to reinforce the magnificence of Cupid's beauty.

<sup>448</sup> He is, for example, *amore nimio peresus et aegra facie*, 6.22.1.

<sup>449</sup> Psyche's sister's comment that if the child resembles his parents he "will be a real Cupid" (5.14.5) demonstrates the proverbial connection between Cupid and good looks. He is directly characterized as attractive at 5.9.6; 5.22.2; 5.22.2; 5.22.4; 5.22.5; 5.22.7; 5.31.4; 6.20.6. Moreover, his voice is positively described at 5.4.1 and 5.4.5, as is his touch at 5.6.7.

not only a lively innovation which builds upon his previous tradition but also a way of highlighting him.<sup>450</sup>

#### Cupid's Status:

Cupid's divine status is given some attention. Notably Cupid himself does not overly stress the point. This is in contrast to Venus who brags about her important divine role in the universe and violently resents being opposed. Obviously, Venus looks the worse for the contrast. Instead, Cupid's divinity is pointed up by the narrator and others in direct characterization numerous times.<sup>451</sup> His divinity is also stressed via indirect characterization. He is the master of Zephyr, intimidating to powerful goddesses such as Ceres and Juno, and has exercised unwelcome influence over even Jupiter.<sup>452</sup> Pan

---

<sup>450</sup> Schlam (1976), 29f. discusses artistic representations of Cupid sleeping (including some from the second century A.D.) but does not conclude that they are likely to be illustrations of Apuleius' narrative or similar versions of it. Conversely, this ephrasis has some of the typical traits of literary descriptions of works of art (such as starting at the head and moving downwards), see *GCA*, 276; Aphthonius 1885.2, p.46 Spengel; Nicolaus 1886.3, p.492 Spengel.

<sup>451</sup> 5.9.4; 5.13.2; 5.16.4; 5.22.2; 5.22.4; 5.23.5; 5.23.6; 5.24.2; 5.25.6 (where Pan calls him the greatest of the gods); 6.15.2.

<sup>452</sup> Cupid's power over Zephyr: 5.7.4; 5.13.2; Ceres and Juno: 5.31.7; Jupiter: 6.22.3-5. Despite reports of Cupid's past menacing or lascivious behavior from Venus and Jupiter and to a lesser extent Ceres, Juno, and Pan, the reader does not witness this malfeasance and instead sees Cupid as a caring husband to Psyche and as a suffering, silent victim to Venus. Parker, 227 suggests that the gods' misreading of Cupid shows "their comic ignorance and detracts from their inherently potent image" and is "in keeping with Apuleius' expressions of distaste for conventional religion throughout the narrative." Of course, Cupid (who is a sympathetic character) is also divine and a religious figure. More important is her observation that the constant references to Cupid's traditional association with *luxuria* and cruelty emphasize for the reader that these characteristics are not typical of Cupid's observable behavior in this narrative.

recommends supplicating him (5.25.6), the ant and eagle help Psyche at least partly in deference to him (6.10.6; 6.15.2), and he is associated with a sparkling mansion so beautiful that it had to have been made by divine, not human, skill (5.1.2) and inhabited by a miraculous man, demi-god, or god (5.1.4) or used by Jupiter himself (5.1.7).<sup>453</sup> Cupid's invisible servants also reflect their master in that they are solicitous of Psyche, mysterious, and miraculous. All this focus on Cupid's divine status makes the discrepancy between the powerful god portrayed in these examples and the pale-faced, silent victim of Venus' tirades all the more obvious. Such a dramatic deflation of Cupid's status makes him appear amusingly weak at these times. This emphasizes the scale of Venus' villainy in the narrative and makes Psyche's desperation and victimization believable. If Venus can cow Cupid, a potent deity, into silence, she can certainly drive a mere mortal woman to desperation. This dynamic is part of the complexity of Cupid's character, which is alternately presented as childish or adult, weak or dominating, resolved and independent or vulnerable to persuasion. This variation, moreover, is lively and entertaining. The close of the narrative is especially emblematic of this. Cupid does pluck up the strength to fly to Psyche's rescue but is, nevertheless, afraid of his mommy (6.22.1). He silently supplicates Jupiter for his intervention while Jupiter reveals that he himself has been subject to Cupid's influence!

---

<sup>453</sup> We cannot be sure that the owner of the mansion is Cupid until later in the narrative. Parker, 222 has noted that the description of the mansion provides several clues that this could be the case: The columns and walls are golden (5.1.3; 5.1.6), an epithet commonly applied to Cupid. The floor is bejeweled, as are the wings of Cupid in Ovid. The palace as a whole is resplendent, a common characteristic of Cupid's glowing appearances elsewhere. Finally, the rare use of the verb *effero* (5.1.4) may be a veiled reference to Cupid's common epithet *ferus*. This is not, however, the only possible identity for the palace owner which is suggested by the narrative.

Cupid's Actions:

An examination of the adjectives, nouns, and verbs (in particular) applied to Cupid reveals three main activities in which Cupid engages. These account for most of the verbs which describe Cupid's movements and activities and reveal something about his character. His main spheres of activity relate to (1) coming and going, (2) amorous activities, and (3) his admonitory role. Cupid is absent from the narrative for most of Book 6 and is only sporadically present throughout the rest of the narrative. This fact is reflected in the many words which ascribe motion to Cupid or concern arrival and departure. This focus on movement is certainly apt for a winged god. These activities account for some 26 references to Cupid in the narrative.<sup>454</sup> Cupid's frequent departures stress the constant upheaval which Psyche undergoes and her desperate abandonment for much of the narrative. More positively, the frequency of Cupid's initial visits to the girl (visits which slowly increase in duration and which eventually involve more lengthy verbal exchanges) allows the reader a glimpse at the gradual development of their relationship. Only after multiple visits does Psyche go from trembling fear (5.4) at

---

<sup>454</sup> See *discurrens*, 4.30.4; *calcant*, 5.1.5; *aderat, ante lucis exortum propere discesserat*, 5.4.3; *propere*, we learn too that this pattern of arrival and departure happened repeatedly at 5.4.4; *eo simul cum nocte dilapso*, 5.5.4; *luce proxumante...euanuit*, 5.6.10; *momentarius*, 5.12.3; *praeuertit statim lumen nascentis diei*, 5.13.6; *aderat*, 5.21.5; *auolauit*, 5.23.6; *inuolauit*, 5.24.2; *aduolauit*, 5.24.3; *fuga mea puniuero, pinnis in altum se proripuit*, 5.24.5; *uolatus, remigio plumae raptum maritum proceritas spatii fecerat alienum*, 5.25.1; *distentis...separatis*, 6.11.3; *nec diutinam...absentiam tolerans, elapsus fenestram*, 6.21.2; *prouolans, accurit*, 6.21.3; *in pinnas se dedit*, 6.21.4; *alisque pernicibus caeli penetrato uertice*, 6.22.1; *nec umquam digredietur*, 6.23.5.

Cupid's arrival to addressing him adoringly with pet names (5.13.5). The husband's good will towards Psyche is also not immediately apparent to the reader whose good opinion of him likewise develops gradually.<sup>455</sup> These visits are also vital to the development of the plot since they establish the erotic connection between Psyche and Cupid and result in her pregnancy. Cupid's separation from Psyche, which is initially voluntary, must later be enforced by guard (6.11.3), a detail which suggests the intensity of his feelings for her.<sup>456</sup> His surprise reappearance at the close of the narrative is a dramatic turn of events and leaves the reader with a final impression of the force of Cupid's love for Psyche.

The second of Cupid's main activities, which concerns his amatory nature, accounts for 32 references.<sup>457</sup> This is in keeping with his traditional association with erotic love and

---

<sup>455</sup> Parker, 224 is apparently unique in placing emphasis on the fact that Psyche is initially afraid of her lover and is alarmed by his warnings. Cupid's unprecedented role as a doting husband is not immediately apparent and must develop over the course of his visits. Several factors in the husband's early visits may cause alarm initially such as (1) his anonymity, (2) his silence, (3) his seemingly sole interest in sex, (4) his arrival at night only and departure before morning, (5) his forceful warnings against looking at him and (6) against seeing her sisters before the sisters demonstrate that they are a genuine threat. That Cupid approaches his wife sexually for the first time in darkness is not unusual (Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 279F); that she is never allowed to see him and that he only comes at night surely is!

<sup>456</sup> Parker, 221.

<sup>457</sup> These include very direct and more indirect references (adjectives, verbs, nouns, adverbs) to his role as a lover, his amatory activities and feelings, and his inspiration of the same. See *matrimonia corrumpens; committit tanta flagitia* 4.30.4; *torum inscenderat et uxorem sibi fecerat* 5.4.3; 5.4.5; *lectum maritus accubans...complexus* 5.6.1; *amplexus coniugales* 5.6.2; *amplexum* 5.6.6; *tuo isto dulcissimo conubio* 5.6.7; *teneo te* 5.13.5; *amplexibus mollibus* 5.13.6; *Veneris proeliis uelitatus* 5.21.5; *amator* 5.24.2; *amator* 5.24.3; *coniugem meam feci, amatores* 5.24.4; *montano scortatu* 5.28.4; *iungeres amplexibus* 5.29.3; *corruptor* 5.29.4; *uoluptates, quam ille diligit* 5.31.3; *amores* 5.31.5;

underlines that his primary importance in the narrative is his relationship to Psyche and its consequences. It also gives extra emphasis to Cupid's unusual depiction in the narrative as a husband and soon-to-be father. Cupid's drying of Psyche's tears with his hair (5.13.6) is a light touch. It conveys something of the tenderness of his feelings for the girl. The third main activity in which Cupid engages is his delivery of frequent and emphatic warnings to Psyche. This feature of his character, which is also indicative of his love for Psyche, is already addressed above.<sup>458</sup>

In general, we may discern an important difference between Cupid's actions as we actually see them and the way in which he is described by certain other characters. Cupid's observable behaviors (especially his warnings and erotic encounters with Psyche) are sympathetic and give a positive impression of the god. By way of contrast, the description of him initially offered by the narrator and the report of his abuses given by both Venus and Jupiter are not well supported by his actions in the narrative. This discrepancy is a reflection of his varied tradition, demonstrates the complexity of his characterization in the narrative, and also ties him to Psyche whose negative description by Venus is similarly incongruous with her actual behavior in the narrative. Moreover, it makes for an entertaining and lively surprise when Cupid, who has been depicted in a bad light, instead appears as a good and loving character.

---

6.11.3; 6.21.2; *amator* 6.21.4; *amore nimio perseus et aegra* 6.22.1; *libidinis foedaueris* 6.22.3; *turpibus adulteries* 6.22.4; 6.23.2; 6.23.3; *nexu Cupido* 6.23.5; *gremio suo complexus* 6.24.1.

<sup>458</sup> See above, p.198ff.

Cupid and The Oracle:

Winkler has described the Cupid and Psyche narrative as a “quest for identity” and a “genuine and exciting mystery” which “follows two trails of detection (the sisters’ and Psyche’s)”.<sup>459</sup> He provides a useful catalogue of all the possible identities for Psyche’s husband which are suggested by the narrative. This is certainly a demonstration of the extent to which Apuleius builds interest and narrative suspense via his uncertain characterization of Psyche’s husband. I do not wish to rehearse Winkler’s arguments here but will comment on the interaction between the alternate identity for Psyche’s husband which is proposed by the oracle and Cupid’s characterization.

The oracle of the Milesian god (4.33) which Psyche’s father consults provides some indirect characterization of Cupid who is, after all, the creature who eventually marries Psyche. The prophesy includes several features which are familiar from Cupid’s first appearance at 4.30-1 only a few short chapters before. The unnamed creature, like Cupid, is cruel, winged, menacing, associated with flames and weapons, and is not human. Cupid’s power over Jupiter and the other gods is traditional and is confirmed later in the narrative itself, as is the characterization of him as a wild beast (*ferum*, 4.33.1; *ferarum*, 5.22.2) and as a god whom rivers fear (4.33.2; 5.25.2). All of these are mentioned by the oracle.

---

<sup>459</sup> Winkler, 89-90.

The description of Psyche’s future husband which is presented in the oracle strongly suggests that the husband could be Cupid and corresponds with key points of the negative description of him from his first appearance.<sup>460</sup> Nevertheless, this negative portrayal is at odds with the kindness which the unknown husband and his servants show Psyche, nor does the serpentine nature of the predicted husband fit in any obvious way.<sup>461</sup> The oracle’s description of a snaky monster anticipates the terrifying identity which Psyche’s sisters suggest for her unknown husband (5.17-18). In fact, they will cite the oracle as evidence for their lies (5.17.4). The husband’s constant warnings against looking at him intimidate Psyche (5.19.3) and suggest that he could, in fact, be monstrous.

Schlam notes that the oracle “serves the ends of Cupid, with no allowance for his Olympian mother”.<sup>462</sup> Parker suggests that Cupid’s own intervention is discernible in the oracle since blackmail may be implied by the last two lines of the oracle and since the substance of the oracle (such as the directive to place Psyche on a mountain crag) proves useful to Cupid.<sup>463</sup> None of these observations is necessarily true. The abandonment of Psyche to a wicked snaky beast is not exactly what Venus requested but one can imagine it giving some pleasure to Cupid’s Olympian mother! The final two lines of the narrative

---

<sup>460</sup> See Kenney, 131f. and Parker, 223.

<sup>461</sup> See Parker, 223n.94 on the depiction of Cupid as the hissing (like a snake) child of Night and Wind in certain Orphic fragments. Parker, 229n.108 lists multiple examples of Psyche’s husband being referred to as a beast: *colubrum* (5.17.3), *serpentis* (5.18.3), *bestia* (5.18.3; 5.19.2; 5.21.4; 5.24.4; 5.26.3), *ferarum* (5.21.4). These together with several other threatening and derogatory terms enhance the tension and mystery surrounding his character and set Cupid’s actual behavior, appearance, and gentleness in high relief.

<sup>462</sup> Schlam, 84.

<sup>463</sup> Parker, 224.

affirm that Cupid is capable of intimidating even powerful gods but do not imply that Apollo was influenced here, especially since the text specifically notes that he tailored the wording of the oracle to suit the author (4.32.6), not Cupid. Finally, I do not see exactly how the content of the oracle is uniquely suited to Cupid's ends. Since Zephyr picks up the girl he could, one imagines, retrieve her from most anywhere.

#### Humor and Wit:

As with the other characters in the narrative, Apuleius' portrayal of Cupid includes more wit and humor than has been previously supposed. The literature survey above demonstrates how little scholarly work has been focused on Cupid and less still has considered his humorous features.<sup>464</sup> In particular, Apuleius' Cupid exploits inversions of Cupid's previous or expected motifs, features, and behavior. This tactic was especially noticeable in Apuleius' characterization of Venus and its use in Cupid's characterization reinforces Apuleius' interest in producing figures which are not only novel and entertaining but which interact with previous depictions in interesting ways.<sup>465</sup> Rather than destroying marriages, he arranges one (for himself!). Rather than being an unwelcome interloper in the relationships and homes of strangers, he tries hard to defend his own home and family against the malevolent interference of others. Of course, the greatest threat to his wife is Venus who is usually associated with inspiring (not

---

<sup>464</sup> See above, 156ff. Parker has given this some attention. See in particular Parker, 218 and 229f. which have contributed to my discussion here.

<sup>465</sup> See above, 146ff. on Venus inverted.

quashing) such erotic entanglements. Not a cruel god of love, Cupid instead defends Psyche against the cruelty of another god and is himself kind, gentle, and caring to the girl. In Apuleius Cupid is not the charmer but is charmed, does not inflict wounds but is wounded, does not burn but is burned, and following the lovers' separation he becomes sickly and weak rather than beautiful and imposing.<sup>466</sup>

In addition to these inversions, Cupid's characterization includes other amusing features. His insistence on anonymity allows for humorous and ironic word play on his identity such as the sisters' comment that if the baby resembles his parents he'll be "a real Cupid".<sup>467</sup> There is also broader dramatic irony such as in Pan's suggestion that Psyche supplicate Cupid for help with her love life.<sup>468</sup> Amusing too is the complete misreading of Cupid which Venus makes in the narrative. She presumes upon his obedience, an absurd choice given his initial portrayal as a disobedient upstart, and is spectacularly disobeyed by him. Venus' unintentionally humorous characterization of Amor himself as *inamabilis* (5.29.4) is illustrative of her amusing blindness. Not only does Venus become a figure of fun, her original intention of Cupid arranging a monstrous marriage at the start of the narrative is turned on its head in the closing image of a perfect wedding, arranged by Cupid.<sup>469</sup> Cupid himself at times appears foolish. He is sometimes depicted as a childish, submissive victim of Venus. He silently accepts her abuse, fears her, and may

---

<sup>466</sup> See Parker, 229f.

<sup>467</sup> See 5.14.5.

<sup>468</sup> See 5.25.6.

<sup>469</sup> For Venus as a figure of fun see 5.31.7.

even be so insistent about his anonymity in order to hide his disobedience from her. This is especially amusing given his usual reputation for power among other gods.

Finally, as elsewhere in the narrative, literary humor is present in Cupid's characterization. Apuleius' Cupid is cleverly drawn with an eye to the many traits and identities in his tradition. Just as Cupid is sometimes depicted as a child, sometimes as a disobedient youth, sometimes an adult, Apuleius variously picks up on or hints at all these portrayals in his Cupid who is treated as a petulant child, called a *puer* and an *adulescens*, and depicted as a sensible adult. Of course, any reference to his depictions elsewhere also draws attention to the novel aspects of his characterization, such as his unprecedented role in the narrative as a husband and father. Literary humor can also be seen in Apuleius' development of the more abstract idea of the interaction of Love and Psyche found in Meleager, for example, to show a literal love affair between two actual figures who are more than allegorical.<sup>470</sup> Simultaneously Apuleius has made numerous witty twists and plays on love poetry, on Virgil's *Aeneid* and on the *adulescens amans* of ancient comedy in his characterization of Cupid.<sup>471</sup> Delightful word play on Cupid's name and interesting sound effects (such as in *Sic ignara Psyche sponte in Amoris incidit amorem. Tunc magis magisque cupidine fragrans Cupidinis*, 5.23.3) also lighten the tone.

---

<sup>470</sup> See above, 169.

<sup>471</sup> On Apuleius' intertextual engagement with love poetry in his characterization of Cupid see Parker, 231 and Murgatroyd and Parker, 400ff. They point, for example, to his depiction as an *amator* and to elements such as his *custodia*, *lusus*, *dolor*, and the amatory *preces* addressed to him. See above, p.171ff. on Apuleius' use of Virgil's *Aeneid*. On Cupid as the *adulescens amans* of ancient comedy see above, 175ff.

Conclusions:

Cupid arrives fairly early in the narrative and has some textual prominence but is absent for a significant part of the narrative while Psyche and her labors take centre stage. He has an important role but one that is secondary to that of Psyche and Venus. Previous scholarship on Cupid's characterization has been limited in terms of both quality and quantity, with the exception of the influence of love poetry on Apuleius' Cupid, which has been well covered. Some characteristics and associations which have been part of Cupid's mythological tradition are followed especially by Apuleius and there are some others which he noticeably departs from, suppresses, or builds upon. Several parts of Cupid's character in the Cupid and Psyche episode are totally novel. The variability or inconsistency of Cupid's depiction in the Cupid and Psyche episode is an apt reflection of the variety to be found in his tradition. It produces an unpredictable and entertaining character who is simultaneously novel and familiar. As with Apuleius' Venus, his Cupid is intertextually related to Virgil's *Aeneid* in complex and interesting ways. He is also related to the *adulescens amans* of ancient comedy in a manner which adds literary interest and humor to the narrative.

As with other characters, Cupid's first appearance is important. He initially appears passive, especially relative to Venus and the description of Cupid given by the narrator is misleading, witty, and ironic. Venus' speech to Cupid at his first appearance supports this authorial misdirection and prepares the reader to be surprised by many of Cupid's

later traits. Cupid's silences are as noticeable as his speeches which emphasize in various ways his relationship to Psyche. His physical beauty, described in flattering detail, and the reaction of others to his appearance make him an attractive and sensual character. Cupid's divine status is emphasized by direct and indirect characterization. His actions, in the main, relate to (1) coming and going, (2) amorous activities, and (3) his admonitory role. The description of the oracle is at turns applicable to Cupid and at turns puzzling, as oracles are wont to be. Finally, humor and wit are an important part of Cupid's characterization and add considerably to the enjoyment of the narrative.

## CHAPTER FIVE: PSYCHE

Psyche is the final character which I shall explore and is the central figure of the tale. As in previous chapters, I shall begin with a brief summary of her appearances in the narrative and then provide a critical survey of the previous scholarly work relevant to her characterization, highlighting in particular those areas where studies have been misguided or insufficient and where I expect to make significant contributions. A discussion of the previous models upon which Apuleius draws in his construction of Psyche will precede a detailed analysis of her characterization in the Cupid and Psyche tale. This will include meticulous investigation of the major aspects of her character, such as her appearance, behavior, and speech. Apuleius' creativity in combining and adapting source material, his imaginative construction of a new character with unique traits, and his use of wit and humor will all figure prominently in the chapter.

Psyche's importance to the narrative is signaled from the beginning. She is introduced by the narrator in only the second sentence of the tale (4.28.2) and is distinguished from her sisters by her younger age and especially by her indescribable beauty, although (like Cupid) her name is withheld for some time.<sup>472</sup> Crowds flock to see her and, ominously, venerate her as if she were Venus. Psyche remains textually prominent for the rest of the narrative right up to its closing with her apotheosis and marriage to Cupid. When personally present she is an important focus of attention (if not the central figure) and

---

<sup>472</sup> The girl is not named until 4.30.5.

when absent she is nevertheless the primary subject of the narrator or the other characters' speech and interest. She is spoken of by the narrator at 4.28, by the narrator and Venus at 4.29 and 4.30, and by Venus at 4.31. At 4.32 the narrator discusses her, as does the oracle at 4.33, after which her parents and whole city begin publicly mourning her impending fate. At 4.34 Psyche is personally present and makes her first speech of the narrative. At the close of book four (4.35) the narrator again takes up her story. Sections 5.1 – 4 concern her arrival at the mansion and her initial interactions with the slaves and their *dominus*. Sections 5.5 – 20 cover her interactions with her sisters and the related concerns of her husband. Her attempt on Cupid's life and discovery of his identity with its consequences for her span 5.21 – 25, followed by Psyche's interaction with Pan (5.25 - 26), and her sisters' undoing (5.26 – 28). The bird and Venus discuss Psyche at 5.28, Venus and Cupid discuss her from 5.29 - 31, and Juno and Ceres bring her up to Venus at 5.31. In sections 6.1 – 6 Psyche herself presents her case before Ceres and Juno and is driven out without aid. Venus goes to heaven and elicits Mercury's help in tracking down Psyche (6.6 - 8) and thus drives Psyche to turn herself in at Venus' own door (6.8 – 10). This begins Psyche's series of trials and her interactions with her helpers: the sorting of the grain with the ant (6.10), the collection of the fleece with the reed (6.11-13), the retrieval of water from the font of the Styx with the eagle (6.13 - 16), and the journey to the underworld for Proserpina's beauty with the tower's help (6.16 - 21). Next come her deathlike sleep and awakening (6.21), Cupid's appeal to Jupiter for Psyche (6.22), Psyche's apotheosis (6.23) and finally her wedding to Cupid (6.24). There is, then, not a single chapter of the narrative which does not feature either Psyche herself

or her interests. She is represented at the emphatic opening and closing positions of the narrative and at every major turning point in between. She interacts with more characters than any other single character (nearly every character in the narrative, in fact) and is the subject of a significant amount of description by the narrator and by other characters.<sup>473</sup> She speaks 805 words of direct speech which constitutes 9.0% of the overall word-count of the narrative.<sup>474</sup> Psyche's characterization then is an important component of the narrative, and one that deserves more and closer attention than it has received to date.

#### Previous Scholarship on Psyche in the Cupid and Psyche Narrative:

Some scholarly work has been done on Psyche but as with the other characters which I have examined above, this work has tended to be limited in scope (focusing only on some single aspect of her character), in depth (devoting a small amount of attention to Psyche's characterization in favor of a broader hermeneutic of the narrative or novel) or in quality (addressing her character and its formation superficially or inaccurately). I shall provide a brief critical survey of the work done to date, with particular emphasis on those areas in which I can expect to make important contributions.

---

<sup>473</sup> Psyche personally interacts with her two parents, two sisters, Venus, Cupid, Pan, Zephyr, numerous invisible slaves, Ceres, Juno, Habit, Trouble, Sadness, the ants, reed, eagle, waters, tower, the various creatures and people of the Underworld, Mercury, Jupiter, and the numerous wedding guests. She does not, for example, have any direct interaction with the tattle-tale bird, although the bird has clearly gathered information about her. The assessments of her character made by the narrator and the other characters will be the subject of some discussion below.

<sup>474</sup> See above, figure 2, p.136.

The literal Greek meaning of Psyche's name (*ψυχή*), together with the frequent word-play on its meaning in the narrative, have, predictably, prompted allegorical and psychological analyses of the narrative.<sup>475</sup> The exclusively psychological interpretations presented by, for example, von Franz and Neumann are now dated (relying heavily on Jungian and Freudian principles) and do not address the question of Psyche's characterization in any useful way.<sup>476</sup> Allegorical interpretations of Psyche and the narrative, while not convincing in their entirety, deserve a brief response at this point.

As Kenney suggests, it is impossible to imagine that Apuleius did not expect the obviously allegorical names of the characters in his narrative (Psyche, Cupid, Venus, Pleasure, Sobriety, Habit, Sadness, Trouble) to have their full meaning.<sup>477</sup> Apuleius himself was, after all, a philosopher, and moreover a neo-Platonist for whom such allegorizing about the human soul and love (in particular) will have been familiar.<sup>478</sup> Early readers with even half an education would surely have recognized this and attempted to read the myth accordingly, as Fulgentius did in the fifth century.<sup>479</sup> Still, it is not necessary to suppose that such allegorical interpretations are the sole or even primary meaning of the text, that every aspect of the narrative is subordinated to the

---

<sup>475</sup> For word-play (with *anima*, *spiritus*, etc.) on the meaning of Psyche's name see, for example, 5.6.7; 5.6.9; 5.13.4.

<sup>476</sup> On these and similar psychological approaches to the narrative, see above 158n335.

<sup>477</sup> Kenney, 16.

<sup>478</sup> Plato's *Symposium* being an obvious example. Philosophical approaches have been taken by Walsh (1970), 220ff.; De Filippo; Dowden. Penwill, 53ff. argues against a Platonic reading of the narrative.

<sup>479</sup> See Walsh (1970), 218f. for a précis. On the history of allegorical interpretations of the narrative, see Heine, 32f.

service of an elaborate and extended allegorical meaning, the interpretive key to which is that Psyche stands for psyche and Love for love. A more facile and obvious reading there could hardly be and it is not particularly useful to our understanding of Psyche's character to search the Cupid and Psyche narrative for its deep hidden meaning in this manner, as such allegorical interpretations themselves show. Kenney's observation that the ancient understanding of allegory was much more limited than our own is also instructive.<sup>480</sup> The Cupid and Psyche narrative and Psyche's character specifically must certainly have some degree of allegorical meaning. The narrative is (not on a profound level but rather on an obvious and superficial level!) an exploration of the condition and fate of the human soul and its sometimes painful interaction with love. This is barely a beginning of understanding Psyche's characterization and Apuleius' own light treatment of the matter (his witty word-play on her name and other humor at Psyche's expense) should prevent too serious a treatment of her character in this regard.

Equally unsatisfying, or perhaps more so, are the discussions of the supposed folk-tale elements of Psyche's character and of the narrative. It should be obvious to all that the tale bears many resemblances to modern folk-tales: the "once upon a time"

---

<sup>480</sup> Kenney, 27 points out that ancient commentators and grammarians use the term allegory to refer to two different literary phenomena, neither of which exactly accord with the modern understanding of allegory. It is clear that they consider simple cases in which one says one thing but another is understood to be *allegoria*. See Isid. *Etym.* 1.37.22; Quint. *I.O.* 9.2.5; Cic. *Att.* 2.20.3. There is also a broader sense of the word in which they consider that *allegoria* is continuous or extended metaphor (see Cic. *Orat.* 94; Quint. *I.O.* 9.2.46). This seems to approach the modern understanding but, as Kenney points out, the ancient examples of continuous metaphors (at Cic. *De or.* 3.166f., for example) are closer to a "small-scale trope of the kind employed by Horace (after Alcaeus) in the Ship of State Ode (*C.1.14*; cf. Quint. *I.O.* 8.6.44)."

geographically and temporally ambiguous setting, the royal family, with two older and evil sisters, the mysterious man, the suggestion of a monster, the wicked and jealous female antagonist, the love-affair established, then lost, then found again, and of course Psyche, the vulnerable and attractive folk-tale type princess around whom the narrative revolves. Despite a number of scholarly discussions on these points,<sup>481</sup> a fundamental problem remains. Since we do not have preserved any ancient Greco-Roman folk-tales (folk-tales in this case taken to be distinct entities from the extant corpus of Greek and Latin literature), it is impossible to determine what is and is not an ancient folk-tale element which is picked up by Apuleius. The fact that such elements appear in modern folk-tales or in numerous folk-tales which are preserved diachronically or synchronically from other cultures, does not prove that they predate Apuleius and were known to him or used by him.<sup>482</sup> In fact, Fehling has argued the reverse. He contends (and this supposition is similarly unable to be proven) that Apuleius is actually the source of these elements found in later folk-tales! Either way, it is a simple matter and not exactly a basis for great insight to acknowledge that in some obvious ways Psyche is a Cinderella figure.<sup>483</sup>

---

<sup>481</sup> See Walsh, 203; Bettelheim, 291; Binder-Merkelbach; Mantero; Hoevels; Mette, 231f.; Thompson and Wright, for example.

<sup>482</sup> For example, Swahn considers the Cupid and Psyche narrative an instance of Aarne-Thompson Type 425 (sub-type A), “The Search for the Lost Husband” in which the heroine searches for her husband and finds her way to the home of witch figure (Venus) who gives the heroine a series of impossible tasks. He examines around eleven hundred versions of this narrative!

<sup>483</sup> Purser’s (p. lxi) assessment of Psyche is representative of the results of this line of inquiry: Psyche is “simply the usual princess of fairy-tales, only perhaps more graceful and simple – of surpassing beauty, of no little royal courage (cp.4.34, 35), but at the same time endowed naturally with the charming and affectionate trustfulness and clinginess of

More fruitfully, a number of scholars have noted the connection between Apuleius' Psyche and Virgil's *Aeneid*, although little in depth analysis has been offered to date. Finkelpearl (333-347) gives an outline of many connections between the two works, and the major commentaries (such as Kenney and the *Gröningen Commentaries*) cite verbal echoes or allusions, although usually by line number alone with little additional investigation into the impact of this intertextuality. A relationship between the katabasis of Aeneas and Psyche, and between their characters is noted by some, as is an association between Dido and Psyche.<sup>484</sup> Nevertheless, I shall be able to contribute some meaningful analysis of these associations and point out some other connections between Apuleius' narrative and Virgil's poem which have not been noticed previously.

Apuleius' debt to Greek epigram and to Ancient Comedy in his construction of Psyche's character has previously been suggested and will be more fully fleshed out in the pages which follow.<sup>485</sup> Murgatroyd and Parker have well covered the influence of Latin love poetry on Psyche's construction, but her relationship to masculine heroes such as Hercules and to female victims such as Io will bear more scrutiny, especially in relation

---

youth, though too prone to curiosity (6.21 *russum perieras, misella, simili curiositate*), and easily led astray by her sisters..."

<sup>484</sup> See, for example, Schiesaro, 144f. and Parker, 238f. on Dido and Psyche; Finkelpearl and Harrison, 67 discuss the connection between Aeneas and Psyche.

<sup>485</sup> On Psyche and Greek epigram, see Kenney, 133, 188. On Psyche and Ancient Comedy, see May, 222ff. and Konstan, 138.

to Apuleius' construction of the female.<sup>486</sup> Several scholars have already handled the similarities between Psyche and the heroines of Greek romances.<sup>487</sup> Psyche's intratextual associations, with Lucius for example, will need to be re-examined, although briefly, since a number of others have considered this angle.<sup>488</sup> Finally, as with other characters, far too little emphasis has been placed by scholars on Apuleius' use of humor and wit in his construction of Psyche and this will be a fruitful area of investigation.

#### Virgil and the Construction of Apuleius' Psyche:

We have previously discussed the significant influence of Virgil's *Aeneid* on Apuleius' Venus and Cupid characters.<sup>489</sup> It is not entirely surprising then that Virgil's poem plays an interesting role in shaping Psyche's characterization as well. I shall examine

---

<sup>486</sup> Murgatroyd and Parker, 400ff. have noted many, many connections between Psyche's character and Latin love poetry including, for example: (1) the application of love poetry terms such as *amica*, *blanditiae*, *fides*, *obsequium*, *pallor*, *tener* to Psyche (2) Psyche's depiction as a mistress figure who is called a *domina* (3) Psyche's use of amatory *preces* (4) Psyche's conformity with numerous standard features of the mistress including beauty, fame, admiration, having a furtive and devoted lover, by night, whom she kisses and has sex with, and whom she manipulates by tears and entreaties. She takes a wealthy lover and is locked up by him, she lies and is lied to, she forgets her promises to him, she is under the negative influence of other women. (5) Several other standard features of the mistress are given an interesting twist in Psyche. For example, she entertains in her lover's absence but her guests are her sisters, not other men and she is not only compared to a goddess but is actually mistaken for one and worshiped. On Psyche and Hercules, see *GCA*, 312, 437, 499, 547. On Psyche and Io, see Walsh, 52; *GCA*, 306, 324, 364, 390, 416.

<sup>487</sup> See Walsh, 218; James, 141; Rohde, 162n1; Parker, 235f.; and *GCA*, 412, 427.

<sup>488</sup> On Psyche and Lucius, see *GCA*, 114, 125, 138, 148, 184, 233, 245, 250, 284, 294, 352, 368, 391, 412, 476, 495, 519, 520, 544; Walsh (n. 1), 142, 190ff.; Kenney, 10ff.; Harrison (ed., 1999), xxxvii-xxxviii, 142ff., 157ff.

<sup>489</sup> See above, 171ff. on Cupid and 106ff. on Venus and Virgil's *Aeneid*.

separately her connection to Dido and to Aeneas, in addition to other connections between Apuleius' *Psyche* and Virgil's *Aeneid*.

### Psyche and Dido

Psyche and Dido have many common traits. They are the primary female love interests in their respective narratives. They suffer because of their love and because of the interference of a deity, who in each case is Venus.<sup>490</sup> Juno and Cupid are involved with their situations. They both have royal lineage, as the daughter of a king. Neither Dido nor Psyche have children (*Aen.* 4.33; *Met.* 4.32.1) or a husband (although Dido had one previously) and the women are lonely and sad (*Aen.* 4.32; *Met.* 4.32.4). Each woman lives with her new lover for a period of time, in a beautiful mansion which is described at some length (*Aen.* 1.631ff.; *Met.* 5.1-3),<sup>491</sup> and enters into a pseudo-marriage, the validity of which is explicitly questioned by another character (*Aen.* 4.338f.; *Met.* 6.9.6). Each discusses her lover with her sister(s) and receives assurances of her sister's/sisters' affection (*Aen.* 4.31; *Met.* 5.18.3) as well as very bad advice. (Anna advises Dido to pursue the ill-fated relationship at *Aen.* 4.50ff., while Psyche's sisters talk her into making an attempt on Cupid's life at *Met.* 5.20.) Schiesaro has pointed to the similarity between Psyche's speech to her parents (*Met.* 4.34.3-6) and Dido's monologue (*Aen.* 4.596f) and Parker to similarity of the emotional post-break-up monologues in which the

---

<sup>490</sup> See Schiesaro, 144f. and Parker, 238.

<sup>491</sup> See above, p.119 on the numerous correspondences between the mansions of Cupid and Dido in these descriptions.

women consider their next course of action (*Aen.* 4.534ff.; *Met.* 6.5.2ff.).<sup>492</sup> Ultimately, Aeneas abandons Dido (*Aen.* 4.333ff.), as Cupid does Psyche (*Met.* 5.24.5). Both women are left by their lovers before a child is born to the couple and both women express a desire to see their husband's face in the face of their child (*Aen.* 4.328ff; *Met.* 5.13.3).<sup>493</sup> Being deserted, each woman pitifully attempts to prevent her lover's departure (*Aen.* 429-38; *Met.* 5.24.1) and when these attempts prove unsuccessful Dido commits suicide (*Aen.* 4.663ff.) while Psyche attempts it (*Met.* 5.25.1). The anxiety and loneliness that the women experienced before their love affairs are intensified after their break-ups and expressed in similar terms (*relicta sola*, *Met.* 5.21.3; *semperque relinqui / sola sibi*, *Aen.* 4.466f.).<sup>494</sup> Dido and Psyche are pictured, in their misery, before religious altars performing pious acts (*Aen.* 4.453ff; *Met.* 6.1; 6.3.3ff.) and Parker points out that Psyche's prayers to Ceres and Juno for assistance (6.2-4) recall Dido's sacrifices to the same goddesses for help in her affair with Aeneas (4.58f.).<sup>495</sup> An appeal to Juno for help in a love affair is sensible enough (on the basis that Psyche herself uses, *viz.* her patronage of marriage and pregnancy) but Ceres is a less obvious choice and this strengthens the association between the passages. The description of Dido with its similes at *Aen.* 4.466-473 (lonely, driven searching through foreign lands, and hounded by an avenging enemy into desperate flight) could as well describe Psyche's experience fleeing Venus and searching for the departed Cupid. In particular, the comparison of Dido to Orestes (who was hounded by Furies) parallels the depiction of Psyche *infestis*

---

<sup>492</sup> Schiesaro, 144f. and Parker, 239.

<sup>493</sup> See Kenney, 157.

<sup>494</sup> Harrison, 62f.

<sup>495</sup> Parker, 239.

*Furiis agitata* (*Met.* 5.21.3).<sup>496</sup> Harrison points out that both women are driven to an irrational state of mind by their doubts about (and the imminent collapse of) their relationship with a son of Venus and he suggests that Apuleius' use of *fluctuat* (*Met.* 5.21.3) to describe Psyche's emotional instability "clearly" recalls Virgil's similar use of the verb at *Aen.* 4.532.<sup>497</sup> Both are maltreated by Venus.

Furthermore, Mercury's intervention as a messenger is instrumental in leading to the despair and suicide/attempted suicide of both Dido and Psyche.<sup>498</sup> In Dido's case, it is Mercury who hurries Aeneas on from Carthage and away from Dido (*Aen.* 4.223), a message which quickly leads to Dido's misery and death; in Psyche's case, Mercury's announcement of a reward for her capture (*Met.* 6.8) leads to her desperate surrender to Venus and subsequent suicide attempts. Even general connections between the Cupid and Psyche narrative and *Aeneid* 4, such as the possible influence of the ant simile from *Aen.* 4.402ff. on the portrayal of the ant army at *Met.* 6.10, help lead Apuleius' reader to see *Aeneid* 4 (and thus Dido) as a *locus* of interest.<sup>499</sup> For a similarly understated but quite relevant connection between Psyche's desire to die and Dido's death in *Aeneid* 4,

---

<sup>496</sup> Harrison, 62.

<sup>497</sup> Harrison, 62f. This point is less clear to me than to Harrison. Given the pattern of frequent references to the *Aeneid* and the force of the wider case we are building for a relationship between the two passages, I certainly think it is likely that Apuleius is echoing Virgil in his use of *fluctuat*. It is only fair to note, however, that (1) Apuleius uses the same image elsewhere at 4.2 to describe emotions, (2) Virgil uses the same verb similarly of Aeneas at 8.19, and (3) a number of other poets compare the rise and fall of emotions to the sea (Catullus, 64.62, for example). See *GCA*, 265 and Kenney, 166 who concludes instead that Apuleius' prime inspiration is "clearly Ovid"!

<sup>498</sup> Parker, 239n.129.

<sup>499</sup> On the ant simile see Kenney, 204.

we may consider also *Met.* 6.14.1 (*illa studiose gradum celerans*) where Psyche eagerly hastens her step to end her life. This unmistakably echoes Virgil's *Aeneid* 4.641 (*illa gradum studio celerabat anili*) where Barce, with the eagerness of an old woman, hastens her step towards the end of Dido's life.<sup>500</sup>

Such connections as we have here identified between Apuleius' Psyche and Virgil's Dido can hardly be accidental and are not without a definite effect on Psyche's characterization. Naturally, Psyche's association with Dido prepares the reader to see her as a tragic figure, and an important one, and it misleadingly suggests that there will be no happy ending for Cupid and Psyche, especially when Psyche 'dies' at 6.21. As we have seen, misdirection of this kind is typical of Apuleius and allows for greater dramatic effect when Psyche's unexpected salvation arrives. In so far as Dido is a figure which elicits reader sympathy, Psyche's likeness to her may also evoke pathos. Nevertheless, against the background of the numerous similarities between the two women, the glaring differences between them stand out all the more. Psyche's bumbling ineptitude with her sisters and husband is set in relief by Dido's competent reign over Carthage. Her rather weak and girlish desire to die contrasts with Dido's prompt and manly death by her own hand, her naiveté is pointed up by Dido's watchfulness and perspicuity (*quis fallere possit amantem*), and her simplicity and dependence upon others (such as her father, her sisters, the invisible servants, and Cupid) differ sharply from Dido's self-possession and independence. Whatever pity one may feel for Dido in her heartbreak, she is not, like

---

<sup>500</sup> See *GCA*, 478.

Psyche, a figure of fun or a helpless fool. As Parker has pointed out, Dido makes a single error of judgment in misunderstanding the nature of her relationship with Aeneas and is, moreover, the object of forces quite beyond her control (by the involvement of Juno and Venus, for example).<sup>501</sup> Psyche, on the other hand, is the bumbling but active agent of her own misery. She is a pretty face but hardly has Dido's insight and nobility. Her behavior and Apuleius' (mock-epic rather than epic) presentation of it, have nothing of the elevated tone and tragedy of Virgil's Dido. Connecting Psyche with Dido highlights her foolishness in a witty and humorous way. We are thus invited to see Psyche in part as a second Dido, but a comic (rather than tragic) Dido. Virgilian allusion facilitates mock-solemnity. Apuleius may well be gently poking fun at Virgil and his tragic queen by this association with his own foolish little Psyche character.

Latin literature is highly allusive in nature and Virgil's most famous work is a classic source text for such references, one which the author can expect will be immediately recognizable to his audience. The prominence of the *Aeneid* in the corpus of Latin literature also makes it an attractive source text for an author who wishes his own work to be unmistakably linked (by thematic and verbal echoes) to one of such distinction.<sup>502</sup> The fact that the source text here is epic allows for an interesting variation of tone between, for example, the elevated style of Dido's tragic end which is recalled here and the bathetic Venus which we see elsewhere in Apuleius' narrative. Moreover, a connection between Dido and Psyche fits in with the wider interplay we have seen

---

<sup>501</sup> Parker, 240.

<sup>502</sup> Schiesaro, 145.

between Apuleius' narrative and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Apuleius' use of the text is especially piquant here since his Psyche is also closely connected to Virgil's Aeneas and other characters, as we shall see below. Apuleius' use of Virgil's *Aeneid* is an additional occasion for creativity and for interesting and witty twists. There is cerebral entertainment in seeing how Apuleius rings the changes on Virgil and Apuleius may be playing around with the epic genre, rather like Ovid did in his *Metamorphoses*, experimenting with producing a humorous prosaic version of an epic.

#### Psyche and the Venus of Virgil's *Aeneid*:

From the very beginning of the Cupid and Psyche narrative Psyche is connected with Venus since she is venerated as if she were Venus herself (4.28.3). She is the subject of two rumors related to Venus, namely that she is Venus or that she is a second and virginal Venus (4.28.4), and she is invoked by the absent Venus' name and worshiped in Venus' stead with feasts, sacrifices, garlands, and flowers (4.29.4). This erroneous association and Venus' resulting anger and jealousy are the initial cause of her problems with Venus in the narrative. One quickly discovers that Psyche, far from being a second Venus, is a mere mortal and a rather foolish and fragile one at that. It is therefore especially interesting to note that as part of the tapestry of allusions to Virgil's *Aeneid* which Apuleius weaves in this narrative, he actually draws a subtle connection between his own Psyche and (of all characters!) Virgil's Venus. Psyche's physical tempting of her husband at 5.6.9 recalls Venus' similar shameless temptation of her husband Vulcan at

*Aen.* 8.387ff.<sup>503</sup> In each case a divinely beautiful female uses her considerable charm to persuade a male deity, her husband, to acquiesce to her will. Each female uses both words and physical affection to sway her husband successfully. The wives address their husbands by endearments which stress their marital connection such as *carissime coniunx* (*Aen.*8.377) and *mi marite* (*Met.* 5.6.9). They are pictured throwing their arms (*Aen.*8.387f.;*Met.*5.6.9) around their husband, embracing him irresistibly, and in each case the encounter begins at night and ends when the husband departs the marital bed and his wife’s embrace at dawn (*Aen.*8.407f.; *Met.* 5.6.10). The connection between the two passages and between Apuleius’ Psyche and Virgil’s Venus is wittily highlighted by Apuleius’ word play: Psyche succeeds *vi ac potestate veneri* (5.6.10).<sup>504</sup> This relationship is strengthened and recalled at 5.13.6 when Psyche persuades Cupid in a similar fashion to allow her sisters to visit. Here again, she uses both physical and verbal inducements, makes her successful request at night, and her husband departs before dawn. Apuleius’ use of the phrase *amplexibus mollibus* (5.13.6) particularly recalls Virgil’s use of the same words together (*amplexu molli*, 8.388) to describe Venus embracing Vulcan. This is especially noticeable since the two words seem to have been paired for the first time in all of Latin literature by Virgil in this passage.<sup>505</sup> It is interesting to note that sons of Venus figure in both cases (Aeneas and Cupid), another sign of Venus’ importance as a reference point for Psyche’s characterization here. Moreover, the connection of these two scenes allows the reader to enjoy the amusing

---

<sup>503</sup> Price, 256f.; Kenney, 148.

<sup>504</sup> The word *veneri* is especially noticeable here since it incongruously follows *vi ac potestate*, a phrase familiar from rhetorical writings and legal texts. See *GCA*, 152.

<sup>505</sup> *GCA*, 205. *ThLL s.v. amplexus* 1998.2.

deflation of a divine mother's pivotal request for armor to protect both her son and the future of Rome into a wheedling histrionic girl's dangerous desire to chat with her sisters. The importance of Psyche's request is comically small next to Venus' and its result is reversed. Venus' request will offer protection, if granted; Psyche's will do harm.

Apuleius' association of his own Psyche with her archenemy Venus (even if it is Virgil's Venus) is an interesting twist. Finkelpearl argues that this is part of a larger pattern of "irreverent destabilization of divine identities and the interpenetration of divine and human realms".<sup>506</sup> This observation certainly has merit. Psyche acts like Virgil's Venus and Venus like Virgil's Juno, while Cupid is associated with Virgil's Ascanius, for example.

Finkelpearl does not seem, however, to appreciate the literary wit and humor at play here. This "destabilization of divine identities" is the result of a very creative use of Apuleius' source texts and is at least intellectually entertaining for the reader who pays attention. It is surely ironic and amusing that Venus (even if it is Virgil's Venus) is used by Apuleius to characterize her own archenemy. While Venus is railing against Psyche and pointing out how different and superior she is to the girl, Psyche is being characterized as a second Venus (in appearance, word, and behavior) and is manipulating Venus' son by Venus' own tactics! Furthermore, the aspect of divine and human realms being intermingled is especially piquant in the case of Psyche, a mortal who is directly and indirectly

---

<sup>506</sup> Finkelpearl, 67.

characterized in relation to a deity and who eventually undergoes apotheosis. There could hardly be a greater intermingling of mortal and divine than in apotheosis! Moreover, this connection between Psyche and Venus helps to highlight the unreasonableness of Venus' hatred for Psyche, who bears more than a passing resemblance to herself in these numerous ways.

Psyche and Virgil's Aeneas:

Having already examined a number of connections between Apuleius' characters (such as Cupid and Venus) and the *Aeneid*, we come now to the largest part of Apuleius' use of Virgil's *Aeneid* in the Cupid and Psyche episode: his use of Virgil's Aeneas as a model for Psyche. There are numerous links between the two, some of which are situational, involving characters, settings and specific plot points, some are verbal echoes, some are more thematic in nature. A number of scholars have pointed to similarities between Aeneas and Psyche,<sup>507</sup> although these have not been exhaustively examined, particularly with regard to their effect on characterization, nor has the significance of glaring differences been given much attention.

---

<sup>507</sup> See, for example, Finkelpearl; Harrison, 67ff.; Kenney. Parker, 238n.128 lists several parallels between Aeneas and Psyche but argues against the idea that Apuleius intended readers to compare the characters, stressing instead the bearing of the parallels on setting.

The General Situation:

Most obviously, both Psyche and Aeneas are the main characters in their respective narratives. Psyche is the focus of only a relatively small inset episode within a larger oeuvre, while Aeneas is the focus of the whole of the *Aeneid*, a fact which might point subtly to the idea that Psyche is also a kind of Lucius-figure (since he, like Aeneas, is the wider focus of the whole of the *Metamorphoses*). Additionally, the *Aeneid* and the Cupid and Psyche episode mostly concern the suffering and eventual triumph of these main characters (Aeneas and Psyche), despite numerous setbacks. Each of the narratives ends with the victory of the protagonist and a marriage is in prospect (Lavinia to Aeneas / Psyche to Cupid). Aeneas achieves a violent military success at the close of the *Aeneid*; Psyche a romantic one: putting on immortality, she is wed to Cupid for eternity.<sup>508</sup> It is worth noting the humorously wide disparity in the scale of their afflictions before triumph. Aeneas' sufferings include wars, violent storms, shipwreck, and the deaths of comrades, friends, and family. Upon his shoulders rests the future destiny of Rome and of all Romans. Meanwhile, Psyche's main problem is that she broke up with her boy friend. Psyche's personal heartbreak is for her painful enough to lead to suicidal ideations but it remains a *personal* heartbreak and one, moreover, that she helped to cause. There is surely some irony and humor in Apuleius recalling Aeneas' epic adventures in his characterization of Psyche, especially given this obvious difference in the kind and scale of their afflictions.

---

<sup>508</sup> In other versions of Aeneas' story, notably in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 14.607 Aeneas (like Psyche) undergoes an apotheosis.

Still, each protagonist is vigorously persecuted by an angry and vengeful goddess for things over which s/he has little or no control.<sup>509</sup> We have already seen the numerous ways in which Apuleius' Venus mirrors Virgil's Juno in her relentless and resentful pursuit of her enemy, including her speech, her behavior, her interactions with other characters, and her temperament.<sup>510</sup> Naturally, this places Aeneas and Psyche in a comparable position and suggests that they too might share some features, as victims. Both are the mortal and innocent targets of their divine persecutors and are chased by them as the subjects of a global scale manhunt. Aeneas is *multum ille et terris iactatus et alto / vi superum* (*Aen.* 1.3f.), while Psyche (*variis iactabatur discursibus*, *Met.* 6.1.1) is informed by Ceres that Venus is making an intense investigation of her whereabouts *totum per orbem* (*Met.* 6.2.2).

Psyche and Aeneas are forced from their homes and experience a painful loss of contact with family (Psyche is separated from her parents and sisters, Aeneas from his wife and eventually his father) and wander far and wide. Each becomes involved in an ill-fated love affair with someone of the opposite sex who is the owner of a fabulous edifice (described in some detail) and each is the guest at a lavish feast at this mansion, complete with multiple servers, food, drink, gold and jewel encrusted décor, and musical entertainment (*Aen.*1.695ff.; *Met.*5.1-3). Psyche's wonderment at Cupid's glittering

---

<sup>509</sup> Juno's rage over Ganymede is no more Aeneas' fault than Psyche's beauty is a personal crime against Venus, for example. Several other reasons for Juno's anger are also given at *Aen.*1.23ff.

<sup>510</sup> See above, p.108 on the connections between Virgil's Juno and Apuleius' Venus.

mansion with its precious metals and its relief carvings and mosaic scenes is an echo of Aeneas' similarly innocent exploration of Juno's temple at Carthage. Each lives with the paramour host (Dido/Cupid) for a time in a pseudo-marriage. The relationship and its eventual breakup cause not only terrible emotional suffering for the protagonist but also result in a serious physical wound for the owner of the mansion. Cupid suffers from his injury (*gravi uulneris dolore maerentem*, *Met.*5.28.3), while Dido's self-inflicted damage is excruciating and eventually fatal (*longum miserata dolorem / difficilisque obitus*, *Aen.*4.694). Nevertheless, Cupid's wound is not as serious as Dido's and not tragic in its outcome. Here too there seems to be a deflation of the serious tragedy of the situation in the *Aeneid* and mock-heroic humor in the disparate outcomes for Aeneas who suffers loss and misery and Psyche who ends up a happy wife and mother.

Psyche's Sisters:

Some of Psyche's interactions with her wicked and dangerous sisters verbally recall Aeneas' experiences in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Psyche's words during her unexpected appearance to her sisters at 5.7.2 (*quam lugetis, adsum*) echo Aeneas' own first words when he unexpectedly arrives before Dido (*coram, quem quaeritis, adsum*, *Virg. Aen.* 1.595).<sup>511</sup> The fall of Troy, in particular, is a recurring metaphor in Psyche's dealings with her sisters and is the subject of numerous Virgilian allusions in the narrative.<sup>512</sup> Cupid's warning about Psyche's sisters at 5.12.4 (*Dies ultima...*) is an adaptation of

---

<sup>511</sup> Helm.

<sup>512</sup> On the fall of Troy allusions in the Cupid and Psyche episode, see Panayotakis, 156.

Virgil's *Aeneid* 2.324 (*uenit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus*) and picks up much of the vocabulary found in the Virgilian passage, for example.<sup>513</sup> The martial language which is liberally applied to the sisters throughout the narrative reinforces the connection between Psyche and her sisters and Aeneas' military experiences in Virgil's *Aeneid*.<sup>514</sup> Epic language used in connection with the sisters, their behavior, and surroundings has a similar effect of strengthening the connection between Virgil's Aeneas and Apuleius' Psyche, as each is buffeted and battles his/her own fall of Troy experience.<sup>515</sup> As we have seen, this connection reinforces the idea that the sisters are not only unpleasant characters but also a mortal danger to Psyche.<sup>516</sup> It similarly puts Psyche in the position of a mock epic hero and invites comparison between her and Aeneas. Here too the domestic and private nature of her struggles makes them seem laughably trivial in comparison to Aeneas' epic, nation-making labors. That Psyche is herself a woman and

---

<sup>513</sup> Lazzarini, 152.

<sup>514</sup> Military terms appear frequently in relation to the sisters. For example, *consilium* at 5.6.6; 5.11.1; 5.24.5 (Panayotakis in *AAGA* 2, 1998, 153f.); *penetrabili* at 5.7.2 ; 5.14.3 (*McCreight*, 333 and *GCA*, 156); *cogitationibus...instructae* at 5.10.9 (*GCA*, 178); *magnis conatibus* and *explorare* at 5.11.4 (*GCA*, 183); *armatae* at 5.11.5 (*GCA*, 184); *casus extremus* and *castra commouit* at 5.12.4 (*GCA*, 192).

<sup>515</sup> For example, the juxtaposition of *saxa cautesque* (5.7.1) is common in epic landscapes such as at Virg. *Aen.* 3.699 (*GCA*, 155) and *scopulo prominentes* (5.12.6) probably recalls Virg. *Aen.* 5.864 (Kenney, 156). The sisters call Psyche's name at 5.7.2 in a form of ritual mourning seen at Virg. *Aen.* 3.68f.; 6.505 and elsewhere (Toynbee, 54). They are referred to as *sanguis inimicus* (5.12.4) which has a clear parallel in Virg. *Aen.* 11.720 where, like the sisters, a female attacker (Camilla) is brought down by her material greed (*GCA*, 192). The description of the sisters as *mucrone dextricto* (5.12.4) is epic in flavor and is familiar from Virgil *Aen.* 2.449; 12.663, as is *Heu quantis urguemur cladibus, Psyche dulcissima* (5.12.5) which recalls Virg. *Aen.* 8.537. See Lazzarini, 148f. and 152n59.

<sup>516</sup> See above, p.65 on the characterization of Psyche's sisters.

that her rivals are her sisters and Venus also underlines the decidedly female spin which Apuleius places on the *Aeneid*.

Psyche's Labors:

Like Aeneas, Psyche is made to undergo various trials, some of which bear remarkable resemblance to Aeneas' experience. The preamble to Psyche's trials also recalls several experiences of Aeneas. Both receive a divine epiphany which gives them specific instructions regarding their love affairs. Psyche comes upon Pan (*Met.* 5.25), while Mercury visits Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.259). In each case the deity describes to his listener the listener's own situation (*Met.* 5.25.5; *Aen.* 4.265ff.), refers to the higher authority of another divinity whom he characterizes as the greatest of the gods (Pan re: Cupid at *Met.* 5.25.6; Mercury re: Jupiter at *Aen.* 4.268f.), and then the divine speaker spurs his listener on to specific action. Later, Mercury's work as a messenger in the *Metamorphoses* (like his work in Virgil's *Aeneid*) will also be instrumental. In the midst of her sufferings, Psyche, like Aeneas (*Aen.* 1.446), comes to a temple (*Met.* 6.1) which at last inspires hope in an otherwise hopeless situation (*quem defectum prorsus assiduis laboribus spes incitabat, Met.* 6.1.2; *hic primum Aeneas sperare salutem/ausus et adflictis melius confidere rebus, Aen.* 1.451f.). Its location is described in a Virgilian phrase (*in ardui*

*montis vertice*, 6.1.2)<sup>517</sup> and her actions there in the service of the gods are indicative of the kind of *pietas* so closely associated with Virgil's Aeneas.<sup>518</sup>

Upon Psyche's arrival at Venus' home at 6.8 she is greeted by the eerie personifications *Sollicitudo* and *Tristities*, a reminder of the similarly forbidding symbolic figures on the doorstep of Virgil's underworld at *Aen.* 6.273f.<sup>519</sup> Venus' sarcastic remark to Psyche a few lines later about the girl's illustrious progeny making Venus a happy grandparent is reminiscent of a similar but genuine promise at *Aen.* 1.75.<sup>520</sup> Following this Virgilian build-up, Venus imposes the first of Psyche's labors, the separation of seeds (6.10). While Aeneas is not compelled to attempt an analogous task, Psyche's stunned silence at the prospect is expressed in a Virgilian phrase<sup>521</sup> and the intervention of the ant has Virgilian overtones as well.<sup>522</sup> The second labor assigned to Psyche, the gathering of the golden fleece, is not primarily associated with Aeneas (being more obviously connected to the story of Jason and the golden fleece). Nevertheless, certain of its features are

---

<sup>517</sup> *GCA*, 365 points to *Virg.Aen.* 8.221 and 11.513. The latter is especially interesting since it describes an ascent by Aeneas.

<sup>518</sup> She tidies the shrine of Ceres (6.1) and offers pious prayers at the shrine of Juno (6.4). The narrator describes her pious motives at 6.1.5.

<sup>519</sup> Kenney, 202.

<sup>520</sup> Kenney, 202 identifies the echo. Juno promises Aeolus that beautiful progeny will make him a happy parent in similar wording.

<sup>521</sup> See *GNC*, 438 on *silens obstupescit* (*Met.* 6.10.4) and *obstipere silentes* (*Aen.* 11.120) in response to a speech by Aeneas.

<sup>522</sup> The *agmen* that ants form in *Virg.Aen.* 4.404 is here made a bit more explicitly military by Apuleius and *terrae omniparentis...alumnae* (*Met.* 6.10.6) is certainly an ironic reminiscence of *Aen.* 6.596. See *GNC*, 441ff.; Finkelpearl, 341; Lazzarini, 133n6.

compatible with Virgil's *Aeneid* such as the epic dawn formula (6.11.4),<sup>523</sup> the wooded setting, the search for a golden item (in this case a fleece rather than a bough),<sup>524</sup> and the reception of specific instructions from a prophetic advisor on how to gather the important item. In each case the protagonist approaches a tree which glistens with gold and removes the desired golden object.<sup>525</sup> They do not retrieve their items from the tree without some physical effort either, as *obhaerescit* (Apul.*Met.*6.12.5) and *avidusque refringit cunctantem* (Virg.*Aen.*6.210ff.) suggest. The reed also uses language in speaking to Psyche which recalls a speech by Anchises to Aeneas.<sup>526</sup> The mock heroic twist is noteworthy here as the golden bough is deflated to wool.

Psyche's next assignment from Venus (*Met.*6.13), to fetch water from a stream that feeds the Styx and Cocytus, is also reminiscent of Aeneas' experience in Virgil's *Aeneid*. The language which Venus uses to describe the nearby *locus inamoenus* and certain elements of the landscape itself suggest a connection to the underworld described in the *Aeneid* and a connection to Aeneas' katabasis.<sup>527</sup> Naturally, this foreshadows Psyche's own upcoming katabasis. The description of Psyche's land travel towards attaining the water

---

<sup>523</sup> See *GCA*, 448. The dawn formula is not unique to the *Aeneid* of course but is typical of epic.

<sup>524</sup> The golden bough motif is based on Virg. *Aen.*6.187f. See *GCA*, 458.

<sup>525</sup> Virg.*Aen.*6.208f.; Apul.*Met.*6.12.5.

<sup>526</sup> See *GCA*, 456 on *tantis aerumnis exercita* (*Met.*6.12.2) and Virg. *Aen.*3.182.

<sup>527</sup> The waters are ominously black (*fontis atrī fuscae...undae*, *Met.*6.13.4) and *ater* is used of the Cocytus at Virg.*Aen.*6.132, (*GCA*, 464). The Styx and Cocytus are mentioned together here (*Met.*6.13.3), as at Virg.*Aen.*6.323, *GCA*, 465. There is clearly an echo of Virg.*Aen.*6.327 (*rauca fluenta* of the Styx) in *Met.*6.13.4 (*rauca...fluenta* of the Cocytus) which is strengthened by the fact that *fluentum* is used by Apuleius only in Book 6 (Finkelpearl, 298).

includes the use of a verb which is much more commonly used of travel by sea (*appulit*, *Met.6.14.1*).<sup>528</sup> This conflation of wandering by land and sea is suggestive of Aeneas' experience, as is the rocky landscape and the dangerous presence of monsters (*dracones*, *Met.6.14.4*).<sup>529</sup> The image of a rapacious eagle, closely associated with Jupiter by name, with its wings spread swooping down to the water to retrieve (and ultimately release) a desired object while others look on is also dimly reminiscent of the eagle omen at *Aen.12.245ff.* which shares these elements (eagle, Jupiter, wings, swooping down to water, snatching, releasing). Upon the successful completion of this task too Psyche's persecutor Venus is described in terms which reinforce her connection to Aeneas' oppressor Juno.<sup>530</sup> This connection suggests an implicit connection between their victims as well. In this task, in particular, the comparison of Psyche to Aeneas highlights her relative passivity and weakness. She does not actually do a single thing to complete this labor, failing even to kill herself as she wishes (*Met.6.14.1*). Entirely unlike her heroic counterpart, Psyche is the frightened, dejected, passive observer of this event and completes her assignment only because the eagle takes control. She is hardly the picture of an epic hero here. The disparity between her observable behavior and her characterization as an Aeneas figure is ironic and highlights her non-heroic characteristics. The domesticating of the Aeneas story, from the epic scale of Aeneas' role in the birth of a nation down to the mundane level of marriage and children in

---

<sup>528</sup> On the nautical connotations of *appulit* and its rare use with a direct object, see *GCA*, 469; *OLD* s.v. 2,3,4b, 5.

<sup>529</sup> Aeneas is threatened by the Harpies, the Cyclopes, Scylla and Charybdis, for example.

<sup>530</sup> *Met.6.16.1 nutum deae saeuientis* picks up on Virg. *Aen.7.592 saeuae nutu Iononis eunt res*, Harrison, 65.

Psyche's case, is a clever and amusing twist and is similarly seen in Psyche's labors. Psyche's labors are largely domestic in nature. Golden wool – wool is within a woman's purview to be sure - replaces Aeneas' golden bough and Psyche's other tasks, like fetching water and working with grain, are also variations on daily chores, albeit with an interesting twist.

The most striking link between Psyche and Aeneas is that in the sixth book of their respective oeuvres,<sup>531</sup> each undergoes a katabasis.<sup>532</sup> The journey is described in some detail, first in advance by a knowledgeable advisor. This character (the tower for Psyche and the Sibyl for Aeneas)<sup>533</sup> reveals the secrets of a successful katabasis and describes the topography and characters of the underworld. The tower's speech and the narrator's précis of Psyche's actions contain numerous verbal echoes of Virgil's *Aeneid* 6 and many identical or similar elements of setting, characters, and plot.<sup>534</sup> A number of other

---

<sup>531</sup> That Psyche's journey to the underworld also occurs in Book Six is a 'reference by position' to Virgil's *Aeneid*. The technique is a conventional one used by Lucan, Virgil, Propertius, and Statius, for example. See Finkelparl, 335; von Albrecht, 282; and Thomas, 181.

<sup>532</sup> The katabasis is not, of course, unique to Virgil's *Aeneid*, being familiar from Ovid (*Met.*4.432ff.), Homer (*Od.*11.568ff.), and Aristophanes (*Frogs*), for example. Nevertheless, Apuleius is drawing especially on Virgil's *Aeneid* for Psyche's katabasis, as should become clear.

<sup>533</sup> That the role of the Sibyl should be instead handled by "communicative masonry" is a piece of "gratuitous pleasantry", as Kenney, 212 puts it. On the characterization of the tower see above, p.31.

<sup>534</sup> For example: *inuium* (*Met.*6.18.2) cf. *sic demum lucos Stygis et regna inuia uiuis / aspicias* (*Aen.*6.154f.); *canale derecto* (*Met.* 6.18.2) cf. *facilis descensus Auerno* (Virg. *Aen.*6.126); *offas polentae mulso concretas* (*Met.* 6.18.3) cf. *melle soporatum et medicatis frugibus offam* (Virg.*Aen.*6.420f.); *ad ripam ulteriorem* (*Met.*6.18.5) cf. *ripae ulterioris amore* (Virg.*Aen.*314); *squalido* (*Met.*6.18.7) cf. *squalore* (Virg.*Aen.*6.299); Cerberus appears at Apul.*Met.*6.19.3 and Virg.*Aen.*6.417ff.; *oblatrans...territando*

features familiar from Aeneas' descent to the underworld appear in Psyche's descent but with an interesting or witty twist.<sup>535</sup> These reinforce the connection between Psyche and Aeneas, but also allow Apuleius to demonstrate creative originality and to add humor and

---

(*Met.*6.19.3) cf. *Virg.Aen.*6.400f.; *uacuum Ditis domum* (*Met.*6.19.3) cf. *Virg.Aen.*6.269; The danger of Psyche sitting at Proserpina's invitation (*molliter assidere*, *Met.*6.19.4) may pick up on the situation of Theseus at *Virg.Aen.*6.617f.; *vectori* (*Met.*6.20.2) cf. *vectare* *Virg.Aen.*6.391; *sopita* (*Met.*6.20.2) recalls the *soporata offa* at *Virg.Aen.*6.419; *latratibus* (*Met.*6.20.4) cf. *latratu* (*Virg.Aen.*6.417); both Psyche and Aeneas must appear before Proserpina with an object (*Aen.*6.142), although we do not see Aeneas offer his object, and both undergo labors). Such verbal echoes of Virgil's work have been previously identified by other scholars such as *GCA*, Kenney, Grimal, Walsh, and Parker. I am indebted to them for identifying most of this list.

<sup>535</sup> Charon appears, as he does at *Virg.Aen.*6.298, but is styled as a bathetic toll-collecting functionary at Apuleius *Met.*6.18.5 and he does not delay Psyche's speedy progress as he did Aeneas' (*Virg.Aen.*6.384ff.); *sutili cumba* (*Met.*6.18.5) cf. *cumba / sutilis* (*Virg.Aen.*6.413 and also cf. 6.314) where the boat, by contrast, is not made to labour under Psyche's weight. This highlights the disparity between the big and strong Aeneas and Apuleius' hapless little heroine and may well be a witty play on her name. Not a heavy corporeal presence, she is instead a weightless ψυχή (contra Finkelpearl, 336 who considers that Apuleius is not doing "anything much more complex than simply recalling *Aeneid* 6" by this allusion); The old man at *Met.* 6.18.8 who begs to be pulled into the boat is a variation on Palinurus begging Aeneas for a ride across the Styx. Apuleius' use of *pietate* in the sentence especially recalls *pius Aeneas* in this context and strengthens the connection between Aeneas and Psyche (*Virg.Aen.*6.337ff.); That Psyche is a female harrower of hell is itself an interesting twist on the tradition of katabaseis which are usually carried out by heroic men like Hercules, Aeneas, or Orpheus, as is her comparatively trivial womanly goal (to obtain a pot of beauty). An extension of this gender play is the fact that the underworld is (for the first time in extant Latin literature) called *domum Proserpinae* (*Met.*6.20.2) rather than its usual appellation 'the house of Dis', as at *Virg.Aen.*5.732 and elsewhere. This is a female's descent to a female's realm at the order of a female. The noticeable narrative acceleration at 6.20.2 in which Psyche's descent to the underworld is unexpectedly easily and briskly accomplished is an inversion of Aeneas' katabasis in which the hero's ascent from the underworld is accomplished and narrated surprisingly swiftly. The dangerous sleep into which Psyche falls after her ascent from the underworld (a sleep which mimics death and thus threatens to send her back to the underworld at *Met.*6.21.2) is something of an inversion of Aeneas' safe passage back to the land of the living via a Gate of Sleep (*Virg.Aen.*6.893ff.). Again, other scholars such as *GCA*, Kenney, Grimal, Walsh, and Parker have noted many of these similarities but do not generally note the witty twists which Apuleius' has put on these allusions, nor do they usually consider the effect of Apuleius' use of Virgil.

wit to the narrative. While any narrative of a katabasis after Virgil's authoritative version will necessarily be measured against it and will seem to draw on or depart from Aeneas' well-known descent, the preponderance of references to him in Psyche's katabasis is noticeable, especially given how very ludicrous it is to place girly, helpless, hapless Psyche in anything like the position of an heroic Aeneas.

#### Psyche and Ancient Comedy: Comic Elements

We have already seen that Apuleius engages ancient comedy in his characterization of both Venus and Cupid.<sup>536</sup> It is interesting to consider the manner in which Psyche is also connected to drama. Cupid and Psyche's general situation does include a number of factors present in ancient tragedy and especially comedy.<sup>537</sup> The Cupid and Psyche narrative concerns a love affair between a male and a female of lower social status, a love affair which the male attempts to conceal from a parent, and which is opposed by his parent upon discovery. A pseudo-marriage or concubinage and then legitimate marriage between equals follows, as does a pregnancy. The narrative ends with a wedding. All this is the stuff of comedy.<sup>538</sup> Comedy also frequently makes use of concealed or

---

<sup>536</sup> On comedy and Apuleius' Venus, see above, p.100; on comedy and Apuleius' Cupid, see above, p.175.

<sup>537</sup> On the tragic elements in the narrative including, for example, Psyche's royal pedigree, her tragic farewell speech and her stately, resigned march toward death, see May, 209ff.

<sup>538</sup> May, 221f. correctly points out that examples of comparable concubinage are found between lovers in comedy (such as Philematium and Philolaches in the *Mostellaria* or Selenium and Alcesimarchus in the *Cistellaria*) and that like the girl in the *Cistellaria* Psyche ultimately has her social status elevated (to immortality not citizenship) which

mistaken identity and trickery, a device which is recalled in Psyche's ignorance about who her lover is, the sisters' plot to deceive Psyche about her husband's identity, and Psyche's own attempt to conceal Cupid's identity from her sisters.<sup>539</sup> Additionally, Psyche is identified by the comic expression *puella scitula* (*Met.*5.25.5) and associated with slavery (another common element in comedy) and with enslavement to a *lena*-figure, Venus.<sup>540</sup> May has identified a number of convincing links between Psyche's character and Palaestra of Plautus' *Rudens* in particular.<sup>541</sup>

#### The Unusual Application of Psyche's Comic Elements:

Although these elements are familiar from ancient comedy, they are used very imaginatively by Apuleius. May notes that the secrecy surrounding a relationship in comedy may be because of a citizen girl's pregnancy (as in Terence's *Adelphoe*) or a girl's sharply inferior social status (as in the case of Pasicompsa in *Mercator*) and that secrecy, pregnancy, and disparate status are all factors in the Cupid and Psyche narrative.<sup>542</sup> Apuleius, in a comic twist, exaggerates the disparity in their status by

---

facilitates a legitimate marriage. Many comedies close with a wedding. May does not note that the ending also includes a sudden escape from great difficulty which is threatening the lovers' happiness. This too is a common feature of comedies.

<sup>539</sup> *Amphitruo*, *Casina*, and *Miles Gloriosus*, for example, all involve mistaken/concealed identity.

<sup>540</sup> The term *puella scitula* is comic, being found only in Plautus and Apuleius, as May 223 notes. Psyche is referred to in terms which suggest her servility at *Met.* 5.31.2; 6.1.1; 6.4.5; 6.8.2; 6.8.5; 6.8.6; 6.10.2. See above, p.100ff. on Venus' possible connections to the ancient comedy's *lena*.

<sup>541</sup> See May, 223f.

<sup>542</sup> May, 221ff.

making the beloved mortal and the lover, not merely her social better in human terms but immortal! Similarly, the elevation of Psyche's status to immortality instead of simple citizenship, as in comedy, is an entertaining twist.<sup>543</sup> Moreover, while Cupid is Psyche's social better and the girl does become pregnant, these factors are not the reasons for the couple's initial secrecy. Instead, their secrecy is a result of Venus' villainous demand that Cupid punish Psyche and is also a response to the threat posed by Psyche's envious sisters. Psyche's pregnancy and mortality are merely an added aggravation for Venus whose real motivation is petty jealousy and outrage at being disobeyed once the secret relationship is revealed. These issues, which in comedy are enough to necessitate a clandestine affair, are for Cupid and Psyche dwarfed by the problem of Venus' ill temper. This distinction between the comic situations which May cites and the case of Cupid and Psyche emphasizes Psyche's role as a victim of Venus. Moreover, it is worth noting, that as part of the ongoing gender play in the narrative, Venus usurps the role of the disapproving male parent.

Similarly, while it is not unusual for the young lover's beloved to be a slave girl (and Psyche is treated as both Cupid's beloved and Venus' slave), it is not a small point that Psyche is not actually a slave. Far from slavery, she is a princess! In fact, Venus' supposition that Psyche is her personal slave and the apparent acceptance of this supposition as fact by other characters (such as Mercury and Juno)<sup>544</sup> make little sense outside this comic paradigm in which Venus is a *leno*-figure and Psyche her slave-figure

---

<sup>543</sup> See above, 244n.538.

<sup>544</sup> Mercury: 6.8; Juno: 6.4.5.

or some other intertextual engagement.<sup>545</sup> Here again, Apuleius' use of the element of slavery in his characterization of Psyche may reflect a comedic source but is used wittily. His incongruous application of servile status to a woman who is not only free but royal and worshipped is piquant and highlights the injustice of Venus' claim over Psyche and ill-treatment of her. It consequently builds sympathy for Psyche's character too.

A still more complicated relationship between Psyche's characterization and comedy is demonstrated by the fact that several of the most axiomatic traits of the *adulescens amans* are also applied to Psyche, instead of or in addition to Cupid. The young lover of comedy is, of course, young and is expected to be subject to his parent's authority in the matter of a romantic partner. He is often naive and rather silly too. Psyche, young (in fact, the youngest sister, 4.28.2; 5.9.4) and unmarried, properly falls under her parents', particularly her father's, authority, as his active role in finding a husband for her shows. Repeatedly referred to in terms that emphasize her youth, her subjection to her parents, and her virginity (such as a *puella*, *infantilis*, *filia*, and *virgo*),<sup>546</sup> Psyche's characteristic

---

<sup>545</sup> This internal inconsistency in the narrative is noticed by Walsh, 210 and its legal implausibility in a text which elsewhere demonstrates the author's familiarity with legalities is noted by Norden, 76 and May, 224. See above, p.100ff. on Venus' possible connections to the ancient comedy's *lena*, *senex iratus*, *pater durus* and p.266ff. on Psyche's characterization as a slave (to Venus), a common role for the beloved of the *adulescens amans*. This run-away slave motif may also be attributable to the influence of folktale on the narrative or to an intertextual engagement with *A.P.* 12.80, for example, in which Meleager's speaker fears Eros will capture and torture him like a run-away slave, as May, 224 notes. The *seruitium amoris* figure may also be relevant.

<sup>546</sup> She is called *puella* at 4.28.2; 4.29.4; 4.29.5; 4.30.1; 4.30.2; 4.30.5; 4.33.1; 4.33.4; 4.35.2; 5.17.1; 5.19.5; 5.25.5; 5.28.8; 5.28.9; 5.31.4; 6.10.6; 6.15.2; 6.23.3; *infantilis* at 5.11.6; *filia* at 4.28.1; 4.32.5; 4.34.2; *virginal* at 4.28.4; 4.29.4; 4.31.3; 4.32.4; 4.32.6; 4.33.4; 4.35.1, 5.4.2; 5.4.4.

*simplicitas*, silliness and naiveté also make her seem childlike, especially in comparison to Cupid's relative maturity and caution.

The other obvious trait of the *adulescens amans* of comedy is that he is hopelessly in love. His love is generally desperate, excessive, and melodramatic. When the relationship is threatened the infatuation is painful to the *adulescens* who becomes love-sick and may even express suicidal tendencies.<sup>547</sup> Psyche's condition (including weakness, paleness, constant sighing, and sad eyes) is clearly recognizable to Pan as love-sickness. Like the young lover of comedy, her passion and desperation are frequently emphasized and she repeatedly considers suicide.<sup>548</sup> In a similar way, the young lover of comedy often appears *amans egens*.<sup>549</sup> Penniless and passionate he must find funds. Psyche too is quite destitute and is pictured scrounging for bread (6.11.2), begging for a place to stay (6.2-4), poorly dressed (6.10.1), and seeking a way to be together with her beloved.

Furthermore, the *adulescens amans* in his need turns to a clever slave for help. This character typically offers him assurance and devises a clever and deceptive plan to address his problem. Psyche is assured and encouraged by the reed, a helper who confidently speaks up when she is desperate and does not know what to do. Like the clever slave of comedy, the reed proposes a plan which is cunning and which allows

---

<sup>547</sup> See, for example, Pl. *As.* 606f., 621, 629f.; *Cist.* 284-304, 639-50; *Mer.* 482f., 830-63, 931-51; *Ps.* 74-98.

<sup>548</sup> See 5.25.1; 6.12.1; 6.14.1; 6.17.2, for example.

<sup>549</sup> Plautus, *Pers.* 1; *Pseud.* 299f.; Terence, *Phorm.* 509ff.

Psyche to fulfill the letter of Venus' instructions while disobeying the spirit of them. The tower similarly acts as a wily helper, offering Psyche tricks to evade harm. The use of normally inanimate objects (such as the reed and the tower) and animals (such as the ants and eagle) in the place of the comedy's usual human helper of inferior status is a lively twist. Psyche is herself simultaneously characterized as a slave to Venus. She is so low in status she must have recourse to plants and animals! Moreover, the multiplication of such helpers (she needs four instead of the usual one clever slave, plus Cupid's intervention at the end) highlights her great need and incredible helplessness.

The application of several of the most axiomatic traits of the young lover to Psyche (rather than Cupid or in addition to Cupid) is a fascinatingly subversive engagement with the pattern of characterization of the *adulescens amans*. In addition to highlighting his very creative use of source material, this phenomenon fits nicely with the gender play and generic play at work throughout the narrative and, in particular, with the gender play which figures prominently in Psyche's characterization.<sup>550</sup> It is part of Apuleius' typically complex kaleidoscopic approach as well.

---

<sup>550</sup> Psyche is, for example, also a pseudo-heroic questor figure, a typically male role.

Psyche and Lucius:

Many scholars have pointed to some relationship between Lucius and Psyche.<sup>551</sup> The familiar Alexandrian technique of using an inset story to reflect on the larger work in which it is placed alone suggests that the idea of an important connection between Lucius and Psyche bears investigation.<sup>552</sup> There are numerous connections between the two figures, who are the central figures of their respective narratives, including their high birth,<sup>553</sup> their *improspera curiositas*,<sup>554</sup> their active role in their own downfalls despite numerous warnings,<sup>555</sup> and their experience of hostile fortune and surroundings.<sup>556</sup> Both characters must submit to a goddess who requires that they undergo various trials,<sup>557</sup> each experiences a katabasis of sorts,<sup>558</sup> ultimately achieves a special union with a god which produces *uoluptas*,<sup>559</sup> and near the close of their respective narratives each character (now totally helpless) is saved by the intervention of a divine agent.<sup>560</sup> The narratives are also

---

<sup>551</sup> See below n.556; n.558; n.560, for example.

<sup>552</sup> See Walsh, 190; Kenney, 12. On the connection between the Lucius frame narrative and Psyche's inset narrative see Walsh, 190f; Tatum, 51; James, 125.

<sup>553</sup> Lucius is Roman provincial nobility, Psyche a princess.

<sup>554</sup> Wlosok, 75f.; Sandy, 180; Krabbe, 16; Schlam, 97.

<sup>555</sup> Kenney, 15; MacKay, 477; *GCA*, 138.

<sup>556</sup> Kenney, 14. See Schlam, 61n19 on *providentia* as an element which connects Psyche and Lucius. Fitzgerald, 97 points out that the motif of Psyche as a *deformis ancilla* (6.10.2) provides a connection between the story of the beautiful Psyche and the deformed Lucius. Despite their high births, they are both brought to slavery by curiosity.

<sup>557</sup> Kenney, 15.

<sup>558</sup> Psyche's is a physical descent and Lucius' a symbolic one (11.21.6ff.), Kenney, 15.

<sup>559</sup> Psyche: Apul. *Met.*6.24.4 and Lucius: 11.24.5. See Kenney, 15n.68; Tatum, 513f.; Walsh 192n.5.

<sup>560</sup> Psyche is saved by Cupid at her weakest at 6.21 and Lucius too is saved by the undeserved intervention of Isis, see Kenney, 14.

purportedly told for similar reasons.<sup>561</sup> The narrative's length (it is by far the longest inserted narrative in the novel) and its spatial and temporal setting outside the novel's main narrative (it is the only inserted narrative which does not occur within the main narrative's own world) both draw attention to it and suggest that it may have a more significant relationship to the main narrative of the novel than the numerous other inset narratives. The position of the narrative, at roughly the centre of the novel, also suggests that it has a central importance to the larger tale and its content (Psyche's experiences and especially her katabasis) has been seen as a mythical projection of Lucius' experiences.<sup>562</sup>

Certain of Psyche's experiences suggest a connection between herself and Lucius. The initial emphasis on Psyche as a spectacle, for example, (which people come to see and admire) later gives way to a depiction of Psyche as a spectator.<sup>563</sup> This is perhaps an inversion of Lucius' experience of being an over-eager spectator and thus becoming a spectacle.<sup>564</sup> Similarly, certain phrases verbally recall Lucius' experiences.<sup>565</sup> If the

---

<sup>561</sup> Winkler, 53 points out the similarity between the prologue of the novel and the introduction to the Psyche narrative (4.27.8).

<sup>562</sup> Harrison, 51f. and *GCA*, 9.

<sup>563</sup> See Murgatroyd, 364 on the prevalence of words relating to vision in 5.1, for example.

<sup>564</sup> *GCA*, 114. See also James, 129f. on the comparison of Psyche's warning against looking at her husband and her viewing of the forbidden with Lucius' illicit viewing.

<sup>565</sup> For example, the servant's words to Psyche at 5.2.3 *tua sunt haec omnia* recall Byrrhena's words to Lucius at 2.5 *tua sunt...cuncta quae uides*, see *GCA*, 125. The description of Psyche at 5.18.4 *extra terminum mentis* recalls Lucius' psychological state at 3.22 *exterminatus animi*, see *GNC*, 244. Psyche's prayer to Juno at 6.4 has remarkably similar diction to Lucius' prayer to *regina caeli* at 11.2, see Pasetti, 248. The phrasing at 6.17.3 *te...praecipitio..quaeris extinguere* (regarding Psyche) is picked up (regarding Lucius) at 7.24 *praecipiti ruina memet ipse quaerebam extinguere*, see *GCA*, 495. Psyche's actions at 6.20.5 *adorata candida ista luce* parallel with Lucius' Isaac initiation

connection between Lucius and Psyche is apparent to the reader, it is a witty touch that Lucius himself found her story attractive (perhaps because he related to it?) and worthy of being recorded in writing.<sup>566</sup>

#### Psyche's First Appearance:

As with other characters, Psyche's first appearance is important. As a first appearance, its impact is not yet diminished or nuanced by previous or subsequent views of the character. It immediately becomes the standard against which later views of Psyche will be compared. Nevertheless, few scholars have carefully examined Psyche's first appearance in isolation and most are instead interested in her later appearances or in an overall impression of the girl, if they are interested in Psyche's characterization at all.<sup>567</sup> These approaches result in a diminished appreciation for the important development and change in Psyche's characterization over the course of the narrative. The Psyche which appears at the end of Book Four differs substantially from the one who surrenders herself to Venus, desperate and broken, as we shall see.

The emphatic position of Psyche's introduction at the start of the narrative (4.28.1) signals her character's importance at the earliest possible opportunity. She is introduced in relation to her parents and sisters, a detail which sets up the importance of her family

---

at 11.23 *uidi solem candido coruscantem lumine...deos..adorauit de proximo*, see Smith, 81.

<sup>566</sup> *Met.* 6.25.

<sup>567</sup> Parker, 241 points out this dearth and does offer some analysis.

in later chapters. It is only because of Psyche's trusting and familial love for her sisters that she is exposed to their dangerous influence and prompted to attempt to kill her own husband. The initial picture of a royal family with three beautiful daughters is the happy background against which the sisters' machinations and Psyche's very bad fortune will soon stand out.<sup>568</sup> Like Cupid, Psyche is not mentioned by name at first but is quickly distinguished from her sisters by her younger age and indescribable beauty.<sup>569</sup> Although her appearance attracts eager throngs, they find her inaccessible, relating to her as if she were not herself (and were instead Venus or a new Venus) or from an emotional or physical distance with gestures, prayers, garlands of flowers, and rumors (4.28.3f.). This social isolation, even in the midst of a crowd, is an important feature of Psyche's experience and one which will be repeatedly stressed throughout the narrative.<sup>570</sup> It certainly increases sympathy for her character and for the helpers who later come to her aid.

---

<sup>568</sup> See *GCA*, 39 on the traditional use of the number three and Bernhard, 116f. on its special importance in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.

<sup>569</sup> *GCA*, 40 points out that Psyche's beauty is presented in suitably beautiful phrasing: *puellae iunioris tam praecipua, tam praeclara pulchritudo* (4.28.2) where the alliteration and assonance (*pu-prae-prae-pu*) is in an a-b-b-a arrangement, with *pulchritudo* prosodically equivalent to *iunioris*.

<sup>570</sup> Psyche suffers loneliness throughout the narrative. She is the only one of her sisters who remains unmarried, she is left alone on the cliff, her servants in Cupid's palace are invisible to her, she is lonely without her sisters and parents, is left alone and desperate by Cupid, found forlorn by Pan who has company, turned away by Juno and Ceres, and then sent off alone by Venus to perform her various tasks. It is not until the close of the narrative when she is wed to Cupid in the company of the Olympians that this is finally relieved.

Once this introduction to Psyche has been quickly made and her incredible beauty and its effects established, Apuleius turns the reader's attention to Venus' perspective before we learn anything of Psyche's interior thoughts and her true personality at 4.32.4.<sup>571</sup> Counter-intuitively and contrary to Venus' accusation, Psyche is lonely, sick, and hurting emotionally. She detests her own beauty and its alienating effects. Naturally, this vulnerability disposes the reader to see Psyche favorably, especially in light of what now seems to be Venus' unreasonable hatred of the girl. Venus heightens the sympathy. She is an enraged and unfair goddess and seems at first to have her son in league with her against Psyche, a lone and undeserving human victim.

Psyche herself first truly appears at 4.33 where she reacts with tears to the oracle's ominous pronouncement. The city's willingness to share in her grief, the citizens' extended display of mourning over several days (4.33.3), and her own pathetic appearance as a funereal bride also suggest that Psyche ought to be an object of pity rather than hatred. Small, pathetic and realistic touches such as the image of Psyche wiping away tears with her wedding veil make her initial grief immediate for the reader.<sup>572</sup> The genuine anguish of her parents, which is given considerable emphasis, further excites the reader's compassion and their hesitation at the prospect of the impending *nefarium facinus* (4.34.2) is both a realistic and a sympathetic touch.

---

<sup>571</sup> See Kenney, 116 for a comparison to the description of the heroine's beauty and its effects in Chariton's description of Callirhoe. The topos of the heroine's superhuman beauty is common in Greek novels. See *GCA*, 40 for numerous references.

<sup>572</sup> *GCA*, 94 remarks on this detail: "a doubly pathetic gesture: wiping away tears of grief is uncommon enough for a young bride, but doing so with her wedding veil is an even stronger expression of her sorrow".

It is, however, Psyche's own words (the first ones she utters in the narrative) at 4.34.3 which have the greatest dramatic impact. Her monologue resembles that of a tragic heroine who is doomed to be sacrificed and establishes Psyche as a selfless, learned, brave, and perceptive daughter.<sup>573</sup> She addresses her remarks to her parents and selflessly speaks (at such a point!), not of her own pain, but of theirs, employing several clever adaptations of familiar literary motifs.<sup>574</sup> Her speech is remarkably literate and carefully constructed for a girl who is later depicted as so entirely *simplex* and gullible. In addition to the literary substance of her speech, its style and presentation are not lacking sophistication.<sup>575</sup> She employs rhetorical questions, dramatic irony,<sup>576</sup>

---

<sup>573</sup> See Kenney, 134 who compares Psyche to Iphigenia, Macaria or Polyxena.

<sup>574</sup> For example, Psyche picks up on the literary idea of people who love one another sharing one soul/life (Eur. *Alc.* 882; Sen. *Ep.* 104.2; Plut. *Amat.* 759d; Callim. *A.P.* 12.73) with *quis magis meus est*, Kenney 134. This idea not only conveys the especially close relationship between the girl and her parents but has special piquancy here since she actually is, by name, their ψυχή. Psyche's close identification with her parents is continued by *quid laceratis in uestris oculis mea lumina*, a variant on the 'two souls in one' conceit as Kenney, 134 notes. It also draws strength from the proverbial dearness of one's eyes (Cat. 3.5). Psyche's reference to the *ubera sancta* of her mother is a tragic motif, reminiscent of Clytemnestra's appeal to Orestes (Aesch. *Cho.* 896) cf. Hom. *Il.* 22.82, Kenney 135. There is also in her words an echo of the philosophical commonplace on excess mourning (cf. Lucian *de luctu* 40.16), Kenney, 134 futility of tears (*lacrimis inefficacibus*, 4.34.3) is a topos of consolation literature, see *GCA*, 99 for citations. The motif of the bride who dies on her wedding day (familiar from Hellenistic epigram, *A.P.* 7.711; 7.712; 7.182. 7.186, for example) is made even more immediate in this paradoxical combination of Psyche's wedding and funeral wherein Psyche becomes "a live participant in her own funeral", Kenney, 133. The contrast of marriage and burial is already visible as early as Hom. *Od.* 20.307, Schiesaro, 145f. and is seen in Greek novels too (*GCA*, 92 for citations). Moreover, fatal beauty in a heroine is a leitmotiv of Greek novels, see Kenney, 135 for numerous citations.

<sup>575</sup> For a rhetorical analysis of the speech as *ethopoia* see Schissel, for its resemblance to a declamation see Moreschini.

anaphora,<sup>577</sup> homoeoteleuton,<sup>578</sup> alliteration,<sup>579</sup> unusual and striking combinations of words,<sup>580</sup> forceful language,<sup>581</sup> and a pleasing variety of constructions. She uses indicatives, imperatives, and interrogatives, direct and indirect speech, as well as first, second and third person in a short but dramatic and heartfelt speech. The epicizing tag *sic profata* (4.35.1) is not only an efficient transition but a fitting ending to Psyche's rather elevated speech and a signal that the epic genre will continue to play an important role in Psyche's characterization.<sup>582</sup>

In short, Psyche's first appearance leads the reader to expect that she will be clever, courageous, and likeable. This expectation is, of course, repeatedly disappointed. Apuleius sets up a reader expectation in order to very obviously thwart it, later presenting instead a Psyche who is easily duped, too intellectually feeble to keep track of her own

---

<sup>576</sup> When Psyche says that she was doomed *nomine Veneris* (4.34.5) she must mean "through being called Venus" but the reader is aware of another possible meaning: that she is doomed "by Venus' orders" (*OLD* s.v. *nomen* 14a; Kenney, 135). Note too the paradox which Psyche points out to her parents: that the real grief would have been due at the time of her greatest popularity, *GCA*, 101. Psyche's apparently sarcastic reference to her impending nuptials (*felices istas nuptias*, 4.34.6) also contains dramatic irony. She has yet no idea that her husband will actually be a happy match, she will wed, after all, Love himself!

<sup>577</sup> Consider, for example, *quid....quid....quid* (4.34.3); *cum...cum; tunc...tunc..tunc* (4.34.5); *iam..iam* (4.34.5).

<sup>578</sup> *GCA*, 99 points out the homoeoteleuton at 4.34.3 in *cruciatus, fatigatis, foedatis*. On the sound effect see Bernhard, 224.

<sup>579</sup> Such as the p and s sounds at 4.34.3: *praeclara praemia...plaga percussi* and *sero sentitis*, *GCA*, 101.

<sup>580</sup> The combination of *ubera sancta* (4.34.3), for example, is unparalleled, *GCA*, 100 and *ore consono* (4.34.5) is not attested before Apuleius, *GCA*, 102.

<sup>581</sup> Psyche's verbs are especially forceful and visceral: *cruciatis, fatigatis, foedatis, laceratis, scinditis*.

<sup>582</sup> Psyche's *ora...foedatis* (4.34.3) is also a Virgilian phrase (*Virg.Aen.4.673*), as numerous commentators point out.

lies much less identify those of her sisters, extremely weak in the face of adversity, wholly dependent upon others' help, predictable, and not altogether likable at times. Her initial positive appearance is thus an important backdrop against which her later negative characteristics will stand out especially. Here too Apuleius is typically playing with his readers. He has done much to build sympathy for her here. Later, however, as she persists in her silliness, the reader's total unalloyed sympathy for her is challenged. There is also irony and humor in people likening Psyche, a feeble mortal, to a powerful divinity who is her great enemy. On the other hand, it is an amusingly appropriate comparison in light of what later follows with Psyche. Apuleius is tricky, and part of the entertainment of his writing is that you never quite know where you are with him.

Psyche's Speech:

In literature, as in life, we become acquainted with people and learn about their character at least in part by their words. We shall, therefore, briefly examine Psyche's use of speech and language in the narrative. Although she is a central figure of the narrative, Psyche actually speaks less than both Venus and her own sisters. She utters 805 words of direct speech, not even one-fifth of the total amount of direct speech attributed to characters besides the narrator, and a mere 9% of the narrative as a whole.<sup>583</sup> Of these, the largest number (275 words) is directed at her sisters. This is a sign of the extent to which observation of Psyche's interactions with her sisters allows the reader an important

---

<sup>583</sup> See above, figure 2, p.136.

opportunity to get to know her character. Psyche also speaks directly to Cupid and only slightly less to her parents. Ceres and Juno are her interlocutors as well, although she speaks little more than 80 words to each of them. Psyche even speaks to herself at 6.20.6, rationalizing another bad decision and correctly characterizing herself as a fool, but for the wrong reason.<sup>584</sup> These characters (her family, Cupid, and the two goddesses) are the only other characters to whom Psyche speaks and has her words quoted directly in the narrative.<sup>585</sup> It is interesting to note that despite Venus' central importance in the narrative and her own numerous speeches to and about Psyche, Psyche is not quoted as directing a single word to Venus. This is an apt reflection of their relative status. In Venus' presence, Psyche's already inferior status (as a mortal) is reduced to the level of a silent slave girl, subject not only to Venus' rants, but even to verbal and physical abuse at the hands of Venus' slaves. Venus' unreasonable hatred of the girl means that Psyche must mutely bear her tirades, unable to supplicate her with tearful, if unsuccessful, prayers, as she did Ceres and Juno, or with wheedling entreaties, as she did in Cupid's case.

In fact, much of Psyche's quoted speech is persuasive or manipulative in nature. Although her behavior and inaction in the narrative suggest helplessness and gullibility, her speech, particularly as the story progresses, reveals a Psyche who is capable of

---

<sup>584</sup> Psyche ironically says that she would be *inepta* (6.20.6) to complete her task without deviating from the careful instructions she has been given. Of course, the very opposite is true. Even at this late stage in the narrative when she has been given so much help and advice, she is clueless.

<sup>585</sup> We know, for example, that Psyche must speak to Zephyr but her words are not quoted in the text.

dissembling, plotting, manipulating, inveigling, threatening, and controlling others, even a god, at least for a time. Psyche's speech is described in terms which suggest persuasion or manipulation, rather than simply iteration (such as *inquit* would imply) some 34 times<sup>586</sup> and she makes requests and uses imperatives frequently.<sup>587</sup> Her speech has a noticeable emotional effect on her listeners, winning an unwilling Cupid (a god no less) to her side, convincing Juno and Ceres that she is deserving of their help even if they feel unable to provide it, and duping her scheming sisters into effecting their own bloody demise.<sup>588</sup> She is capable of giving forethought to her words and planning her approach,<sup>589</sup> and tells numerous lies, some of which are hastily contrived and

---

<sup>586</sup> She exhorts, uses begging, threats, and wrenches consent. She uses repetition and/or tears, physical touch, sweet nothings, and flattery: *adhortatur vocibus* 4.34.2; 5.5; *precibus, se morituram comminatur, extorquet* 5.6.4; *precibus* 5.6.5. *precibus, oro* 5.6.8; *oscula suasoria, uerba mulcentia, membra cogentia, blanditiis, Mi mellite, mi marite, tuae Psychae dulcis anima* 5.6.9 *uocatum Zephyrum, admonet, imperio* 5.7.4; *Psyche uestra* 5.7.6; *confingit* 5.8.4; *uocato Zephyro* 5.8.5; *ut affirmat* 5.9.6; *imperitat* 5.9.7; *iusserit* 5.10.5; *singultu lacrimoso sermonem incertans* 5.13.1; *per..per...per* 5.13.3; *supplicis anxiae piis precibus* 5.13.4; *iubet* 5.15.2; *instruit* 5.15.4; *monstruoso...mendacio* 5.16.1; *confingere* 5.16.3; *nuntiari...desiderat* 5.26.2; *fallacie germanitatis* 5.27.5; *uxoriis blanditiis...seruilibus precibus* 6.1.1; *pedes eius aduoluta et uberi fletu rigans...multiugis precibus editis ueniam postulabat* 6.2.3; *per... deprecor...per...per...* and flattery at 6.2.4; *lacrimosis precibus* 6.3.1; *adprecat* 6.3.4; flattery at 6.4; *supplici* and *precibus tuis* 6.4.4.

<sup>587</sup> She makes requests at 4.34; 5.6.8; 5.7.3; 5.7.6; 5.13; 5.15.2; 5.19.4; 5.26.2; 6.2.5; 6.4.3 and uses the following imperatives: *ducite, sistite*, 4.34.6; *desinite* 5.7.3; *succedite, recreate*, 5.7.6; *praecipe, redde*, 5.13.2; *indulge, recrea* 5.13.4; *subsistite* 5.19.4; *subsiste* 6.2.5; *libera* 6.4.3.

<sup>588</sup> Psyche wrenches consent from Cupid (*extorquet*, 5.6.4 is particularly strong language). He gives in to her prayers (and his own feelings of love) at 5.6.5 (*precibus ueniam tribuit*), and concedes still more than she asks, similarly at 5.6.10 (*inuitus succubuit...se facturum spondit*) and 5.13.6 (*uerbis...decantatus...spondit*). Ceres is moved by Psyche's tearful words at 6.3.1 and longs to come to her defense. Juno wishes to accommodate Psyche's petitions at 6.4.4. Psyche manipulates her sisters into killing themselves at 5.26f.

<sup>589</sup> As at 6.5.4: *principium futurae secum meditabatur obsecrationis*.

implausible,<sup>590</sup> and some of which, far from the work of a *simplex* Psyche, show evidence of being very carefully crafted.<sup>591</sup>

Moreover, some of Psyche's speech is decidedly learned and elegantly composed. As we have seen,<sup>592</sup> her first speech to her parents at 4.34 is a sophisticated offering and her prayer to Juno (6.4) is also particularly stylish and erudite. Psyche's elaborate prayer to Juno weaves together Greek and Roman traditions of Juno, draws on traditional prayer formulae<sup>593</sup> and resembles certain archaic juridical formulae,<sup>594</sup> benefiting stylistically from assonance, alliteration, rhyming, and parallel pairs and triads of words.<sup>595</sup> The threefold *siue* sequence (each part of which mentions an important site of Juno's cult and has an attached relative sentence) increases in number of syllables and shows not only parallelism but pleasing structural variety.<sup>596</sup> Hoevens, 169f. has also noted many connections between Psyche's speech to Juno here and Juno's speech in *Ov. Fast.* 6.45f.

Such complexity is comically at odds with the depiction of a simple-minded and helpless Psyche which we see elsewhere in the narrative. Has little Psyche read the *Fasti*? It is

---

<sup>590</sup> Her conflicting lies to her sisters about the identity of her husband at 5.8 and 5.15 are examples.

<sup>591</sup> Her vengeful lies to her sisters at 5.26f. cleverly play upon the faults which they have already exhibited such as lust, greed, pride, and envy and successfully effect their deaths without Psyche having to take any direct action herself. Moreover, when she sees that her lies are successful with the first sister, she does not change tactics in the slightest.

<sup>592</sup> See above, p. 255.

<sup>593</sup> See Pasetti, 1999.

<sup>594</sup> De Meo, 113f.

<sup>595</sup> *GCA*, 387f.

<sup>596</sup> *GCA*, 387f. and Norden, 144.

amusing to consider that the woman who effortlessly delivered this elaborate speech to Juno is unable to string two words together before Venus, the ant, the reed, or others when it might benefit her to do so. It is similarly strange, for example, that the same woman who cannot remember a simple lie about the identity of her own husband from moment to moment could devise and assert an intricate lie which manipulates her sisters into effecting their own deaths. These contrasts in Psyche's speech contribute to the comic and dramatic interest of the narrative. Apuleius makes Psyche's character less predictable by building and then thwarting reader expectations for comic and dramatic effect. This also allows Apuleius to highlight certain negative aspects of Psyche's character. She is, for example, clearly more motivated by anger and revenge (once she has reason to be) than her child-like portrayal as *simplex* and *innocens* elsewhere in the narrative might suggest. The sisters whom she plots to kill were precious to her a few chapters before and this reveals a changeableness, an emotionalism, and a desire to exert control over others (which is similarly evident in her use of persuasion and manipulation with other characters such as Cupid and Juno).

Nevertheless, her ability to speak does seem to be noticeably inconsistent. Parker credibly posits that this reflects her functional role in the narrative rather than any important permanent change in her character.<sup>597</sup> Psyche ably eliminates her sisters since Apuleius needs to remove them from the narrative in order to clear the way for Psyche's wanderings. She fulfills each of Venus' tasks since this is functionally essential in order

---

<sup>597</sup> Parker, 246.

to allow Venus to assign another task. Such functional use of a major character, as a mere narrative device, is unusual, as Parker herself notes.<sup>598</sup> While I think this is part of what is going on, it cannot be the whole and does not explain, for example, Psyche's fruitless but eloquent speech to Juno. This is better accounted for by the comic and dramatic effect of such dynamism in Psyche's character, a dynamism which is itself a witty nod to the great overarching theme of the novel, metamorphosis. Moreover, with the sisters, it is possible to see why Psyche finally stops being the nice goody-goody. She must have realized (even Psyche!) how her sisters have ruined her life, and this can certainly account for a harder, more vengeful, and focused (even Psyche!) approach. In this case especially, the abrupt change in her speech, while surprising and darkly humorous, is not an altogether implausible development in her character.

#### Psyche's Appearance and Description:

Psyche is the subject of both direct and indirect characterization. Overall, she receives little in the way of direct characterization. It is her remarkable appearance which garners the most direct characterization, although even this is not described in great detail.<sup>599</sup> We learn early and unequivocally that her beauty is dazzling and this point receives repeated

---

<sup>598</sup> Parker, 246.

<sup>599</sup> We do not, for example, learn anything about her skin or eye colour, hair colour or length, height, her features, her exact age, and her clothing and movements are little described. At first this lack of explanation is attributed to the poverty of human speech (*tam praeclara pulchritudo nec exprimi ac ne sufficienter quidem laudari sermonis humani penuria poterat*, 4.28.2) but later Venus expects Mercury to describe clearly the features by which she can be recognized (6.7.3) to the public. Apuleius' vagueness in this regard preserves an air of otherworldly mystery about her beauty.

emphasis from different speakers.<sup>600</sup> Her exceptional beauty is indirectly reinforced by the worshipful reaction of crowds of both strangers and neighbors (4.28.3), by her ability to seduce the god of love himself, and by a few flattering indirect references.<sup>601</sup> Naturally, beauty is a positive trait which engenders sympathy from the audience, as from other characters.

Several of Psyche's other traits also receive repeated emphasis, such as her mortality.<sup>602</sup> This too increases reader sympathy for the girl, since she is so outclassed by her opponent and her lover, both powerful deities. It also adds to the impact of her eventual deification. In a similar way, Psyche's youth is highlighted by direct characterization, as is her inexperience with men, and these qualities encourage the reader to sympathize with her and to see her as the unwitting, naive victim of a more powerful, vengeful, and unreasonable enemy.<sup>603</sup> The addition of related descriptors such as *simplex*, *innocens*,

---

<sup>600</sup> Psyche's beauty is directly referenced at 4.28.1; 4.28.2; 4.28.3; 4.28.4; 4.30.3; 4.30.5; 4.31.2; 4.32.1; 4.32.2; 4.32.4; 5.25.5; 5.28.9; 5.31.4 by the narrator, Venus, Pan, Ceres and Juno.

<sup>601</sup> For example, she is the most famous sight of the age (4.29.2), resembles Venus (4.30.2), Cupid (5.13.3) and a statue (4.32.2), she is decked out in wedding finery with a flame red veil (4.33.1; 4.33.4), her garments billow in the soft breeze (4.35.4), she is pictured pleasantly reclining (5.1.1), has irresistible limbs (5.6.9), and soft stroking palm (5.20.2). Her access to fine jewelry, gems, and gold is mentioned several times (5.6.5; 5.8.5; 5.9.5), although we are not told specifically that she wears them.

<sup>602</sup> Her mortality is referenced directly or indirectly at: 4.29.4 (*puellae*); 4.29.4 (*humanis*); 4.29.5 (*puellae mortalis*); 4.30.1 (*mortali puella*); 4.30.1 (*terrenis sordibus*); 4.30.2 (*puella moritura*); 5.28.7 (her mortality is indirectly stressed by Venus' expectation that Cupid is in love with a deity); 6.1–6.4 (Psyche's pious invocation of the gods emphasizes her humanity); 6.15.4 (the eagle's explanation of the power of the Styx relative to gods and men); 6.20.6 (her desire for divine beauty).

<sup>603</sup> Psyche's relative youth is suggested by introducing her as a *filia* (4.28.1), as the youngest sister (4.28.2; 5.9.4), and by calling her *nouissima* (5.9.4) and *puella* (4.28.2;

*insons*, *teneritudo*, *tenella*, and *expers rerum talium* reinforces this impression, as do diminutives and adjectives that clearly identify Psyche as worthy of pity.<sup>604</sup> Moreover, her personality is favorably described more than once and her pregnancy and swelling belly are also repeatedly mentioned.<sup>605</sup> This kind of direct characterization contributes to the impression that Psyche is vulnerable, victimized, and helpless, although not consistently so, as her brave march towards her destiny at 4.34 and her expert revenge on her sisters (5.26) prove.

It is perhaps these glimpses of a competent and self-possessed Psyche that allow the reader to feel some slight annoyance at her emotional lability, her numerous suicide attempts, her relentless physical and emotional vulnerability and defeatism, and her silliness, especially as the narrative wears on.<sup>606</sup> She is a comically dumb blonde (who

---

4.29.4; 4.29.5; 4.30.1; 4.30.2; 4.30.5; 4.33.1; 4.33.4; 4.35.2; 5.17.1; 5.19.5; 5.25.5; 5.28.8; 5.28.9; 5.31.4; 6.10.6; 6.15.2; 6.23.3). Her maidenhood is suggested at 4.28.4; 4.29.4; 4.31.3; 4.32.4; 4.32.6; 4.33.4; 4.35.1; 5.4.2; 5.4.4; 6.23.3.

<sup>604</sup> She is called *simplex* at 5.11.5; 5.15.4; 5.18.4; 5.19.5; 5.24.3; 6.15.3; *innocens* at 6.15.1; *insons* at 5.11.2; *teneritudo* at 5.11.5; *tenella* at 5.18.4; *expers rerum talium* at 6.15.3. The diminutive *misella* is applied to Psyche at 4.34.1; 5.5.4; 5.18.4; 5.26.3; 6.9.3; 6.17.3; 6.21.4, as is *tenella* (see above). The appellations *miseranda* (6.2.1), *miserrima* (4.33.4; 6.12.2), *infelicissima* (5.23.6) and *infortunatissima* (4.32.5) clearly identify Psyche as an object of pity.

<sup>605</sup> For example, she is called both *dulcissima* (5.5.2; 5.12.5) and *cara* (5.5.2). Her pregnancy is mentioned at 5.11.6; 5.12.1; 5.12.2; 5.12.5; 5.14.4; 5.14.5; 5.16.4; 5.18.1; 6.4.3; 6.9.4; 6.9.5; 6.9.6; 6.24.4.

<sup>606</sup> Psyche is highly emotional, alternately crying with joy and sorrow, elated, despondent, afraid, angry, depressed, and suicidal. References to her emotionality, loneliness, impulsiveness, self-hatred, and physical vulnerability abound: 4.32.4; 4.33.4; 4.34.1; 4.35.4; 5.1.1; 5.2.3; 5.4.2; 5.4.5; 5.5.4; 5.5.5; 5.5.6; 5.6.1; 5.6.2; 5.6.4; 5.6.7; 5.7.2; 5.7.5; 5.12.1; 5.12.2; 5.13.1; 5.13.4; 5.13.6; 5.18.4; 5.18.5; 5.21.1; 5.21.3; 5.21.4; 5.22.1; 5.22.3; 5.22.4; 5.23.3; 5.23.4; 5.23.6; 5.24.1; 5.25.1; 5.25.4; 5.25.5; 5.25.6; 6.1.1; 6.1.2; 6.2.3; 6.2.6; 6.3.1; 6.3.3; 6.3.4; 6.4.3; 6.5.1; 6.5.2; 6.5.3; 6.9.3; 6.9.4; 6.10.1;

thinks that the way to get to Hades on Venus' mission is to kill herself!) and this affects plot development too (eg. allowing herself to be taken in by her sisters, despite Cupid's warnings). She has an active role, a very active role, in her own misfortune, but insists upon remaining almost perfectly inactive in bringing about her salvation.<sup>607</sup> The verbs applied to her reveal an inordinate amount of emotional behavior such as crying, begging, and despairing but little else. Besides speaking, and this too is usually emotionally driven, Psyche does not actually do much in the narrative. This reflects her role as a helpless victim and wittily reflects her identity in the narrative. She feels; She does not act. She is a Psyche, after all, and not a Soma.

One final trait of Psyche which receives special attention is her curiosity.<sup>608</sup> This characteristic, as much as naiveté, plays a role in her willingness to follow her sisters' instructions and to indulge her desire to see Cupid. It is similarly pivotal in her decision to open the jar of divine beauty which causes her death-like sleep and inspires Cupid's decision to rescue her. The functionality of the trait in the plot is obvious. It prompts the major crisis of the narrative (Cupid's departure) as well as the crucial part of its

---

6.10.4; 6.11.3; 6.12.1; 6.12.2; 6.13.1; 6.14.1; 6.14.6; 6.15.1; 6.16.1; 6.17.1; 6.17.2; 6.17.3; 6.20.5; 6.21.2.

<sup>607</sup> She does, for example, manage to obey the reed's instructions at 6.13.1 and Cupid's at 6.21.4.

<sup>608</sup> 5.6.6; 5.19.3; 5.23.1; 6.20.5; 6.21.4; Her sisters encourage the trait by suggesting that she is dangerously lacking in curiosity at 5.17.2 and she is warned against the trait at 6.19.7 by the tower. Other characters too have the word applied to them unflatteringly such as the sisters (5.8.3), the tattle-tale bird (5.28.6), and Venus herself (5.31.5). The word can, of course, be used flatteringly as well, as at 6.21.3 of Cupid. Psyche's *studium uisionis* (5.2.1) is *curiositas* by another name and ties Psyche especially clearly to Lucius whose desire to see magic was the beginning of his own problems (see Krabbe, 16 and Shumate, 243f.).

resolution (his return). Additionally, it highlights the role the Psyche herself plays in her own suffering, despite her unfair targeting by Venus and her envious sisters. It too suggests that a certain exasperation with Psyche by the reader is not unreasonable. Not only does she not help her situation, she actually makes it significantly worse by this characteristic! Yet this trait too, like her simplicity, is inconsistently displayed. If Psyche had shown a little more curiosity at her sisters' implausible story that her husband is a snake, she would have avoided her disaster. While she could not see Cupid, *et manibus et auribus... sentiebatur* (5.5.1), and an inquisitive girl should surely have wondered why her husband did not feel or sound like a snake. Her incredible lack of curiosity in this regard is ridiculous and amusing. Such variations in Psyche's characterization do not seem to reflect a pattern of growth or change in her personality but rather allow the author to build a character which is largely functional (it is vital to the narrative that she believes her sisters, after all), amusing, and able to surprise the reader.

Psyche's Status:

Psyche's status is given special attention in the narrative. As we have already seen, her mortality is stressed initially.<sup>609</sup> This highlights the power disparity between herself and the immortal players in her personal drama (thus increasing sympathy for Psyche), and when her sisters' worst nightmare at last comes true (5.9.6; 5.9.7; 5.16.4), her sudden

---

<sup>609</sup> See above, 263.

apotheosis is especially dramatic. The placement of Psyche's deification at the close of the narrative and the fact that it provides the ultimate resolution to the narrative (uniting Psyche and Cupid permanently and putting Psyche safely on the same level as Venus) place particular emphasis on her change in status. Moreover, Psyche's change in status from mortal to deity plays into one of the main overarching themes of the novel, *viz.* metamorphosis, and fulfills the foreshadowing present in the early part of the narrative when Psyche was proleptically worshipped and adored as a goddess (4.28; 4.29). In this way her actual deification at the end of the narrative forms a ring which recalls the start.

In a similar way, Psyche's socio-economic status undergoes important changes. Our first information about her at 4.28.1 includes the fact that she is the daughter of a king and queen. Her royal lineage is obliquely mentioned twice more at 4.33.1 and 4.33.3 (*rex*) and reinforced by the public interest in the fate of her *domus* (4.33.5). Her pseudo-marriage to Cupid makes her the *domina* of a sparkling mansion with control over riches and a band of invisible servants who see to her every need. It is therefore especially noticeable that Psyche is repeatedly called a slave after Cupid's departure.<sup>610</sup> Like the emphasis on Psyche's mortality, the numerous references to her as a slave girl highlight the disparity between herself and Venus. This label also calls attention to the gulf between Venus' twisted and angry perception of Psyche and objective reality. Psyche is not and never was Venus' slave, much less her runaway slave with the attendant legal

---

<sup>610</sup> 5.31.2; 6.4.5; 6.7.3; 6.8.2; 6.8.6; 6.9.5; 6.10.2.

consequences.<sup>611</sup> The fact that Venus soon has other gods speaking and acting as if she were,<sup>612</sup> is another confirmation of her dangerous influence and power (and provides an opportunity for parodic reference to Roman law). It also promotes reader sympathy for Psyche who is so badly outclassed by her opponent.

Although Psyche is not actually a slave, it is nevertheless the case that a number of the features of her situation resemble those of a slave. She comes under the control of a powerful mistress (Venus) and has little control or rights over her own life and activities. At times she is confined, kept under lock and key, required to do menial domestic labor (such as dealing with grain, wool, and water), and required to do labors which are dangerous by an ‘owner’ who is indifferent to her safety or outright hostile. This mistress assumes the right to control her choice of mate, the power of life or death over any offspring, and is at liberty to beat and abuse her with impunity. Her mistress controls her food, her shabby attire, and leaves her exhausted and disenfranchised. This encourages the reader to feel pity for Psyche, since the lot of a slave is so unenviable, especially for a woman who is not actually a slave.

On a larger intratextual level, the characterization of Psyche as a slave is a link to the story of Lucius who is reduced to slavery for his *curiositas*,<sup>613</sup> while intertextually the image of a pregnant girl sold as a slave links Psyche to Chariton’s Callirhoe and other

---

<sup>611</sup> 6.4.5; 6.7.5.

<sup>612</sup> 6.4.5; 6.7.5.

<sup>613</sup> See Gianotti, 36f. and Fitzgerald, 97f.

Greek novels.<sup>614</sup> As we have seen above, Psyche's status also provides a link to ancient comedy which Apuleius exploits in complex and interesting ways.<sup>615</sup> The reference to Psyche at 5.31. (*Psychem illam fugitivam uoliticam*) wittily picks up on the Hellenistic motif of the flight of the soul and may also obliquely reference artistic representations of the soul as winged.<sup>616</sup>

#### Psyche's Importance and Function:

In a narrative which is commonly referred to as the "Cupid and Psyche" episode, it is obvious that Psyche plays an important role. Her problems with Venus, her sisters, and Cupid are the central problems of the story. Nevertheless, Psyche's character is strikingly functional. She has only a few discernible character traits and even these are rather shallowly and inconsistently drawn.<sup>617</sup> Perhaps one *likes* Psyche better than her sisters or Venus by the end of the narrative but one seems to *know* the other characters better.<sup>618</sup> She is often a kind of foil against which the traits of other characters can stand out. Venus is never more unreasonable and wrathful than when she is raging at an innocent underdog, Psyche. Psyche's sisters are especially envious, greedy, and hateful

---

<sup>614</sup> See Kerényi, 197f. and Mantero, 89.

<sup>615</sup> See p.244.

<sup>616</sup> *GCA*, 351 notes the connection to the flight of the soul and references Callimachus *A.P.* 12.73, as well as the philosophical topos of men as slaves to passion and the literary motif of the *seruitium amoris*, also mentioned by Kenney *ad loc.* See also Gianotti, 36n.13. On the depictions of Psyche as winged see Maaskant-Kleibrink, 23f. and Luck-Huyse, 157.

<sup>617</sup> See above on Psyche's main characteristics. Her usual naiveté and helplessness, for example, are inconsistent with ability she shows to deceive and to plot her sisters' deaths.

<sup>618</sup> See above on Psyche's sympathetic and unsympathetic characteristics.

next to Psyche's willingness to share and her filial piety. Psyche's use as a mere narrative tool for the development of other characters and for plot advancement contributes to her overall colorlessness in the narrative. Such a high level of superficial functionality is certainly very unusual in a protagonist.

Other aspects of her characterization are also notable for their rarity or novelty. Apuleius has created in Psyche a special sort of heroic figure, one which subverts reader expectations of a hero by her gender, personality, and behavior. In some ways, Psyche is clearly cast in the role of a traditional hero. Her birth is special (given that she is both a princess and miraculously beautiful), she completes labors, the most important of which she faces alone, she undergoes a katabasis, and is threatened by dangerous foes both human and animal, and by hostile deities before ultimate victory or apotheosis.<sup>619</sup> Nevertheless, her gender sets her apart from the traditional heroes with which she shares these traits, like Aeneas, Achilles, Hercules or Odysseus, for example. Similarly, her own personality and behavior are often decidedly un-heroic. Far from overflowing with heroic excellence, Psyche is helpless, repeatedly victimized, and quite inactive. The images of her standing uselessly by while tiny ants (of all things!) cover themselves in pseudo-military glory or of her resting motionless like a dead body until Cupid saves her point up her real lack of even ordinary human initiative and capability, much less heroic action. The only weapons she handles in the narrative are the knife she fails to use on Cupid (5.22) and Cupid's arrow. Note that she manages to hurt, not him, but herself with

---

<sup>619</sup> On the features of the epic hero generally, see Finkelberg, 1ff.; Toohey, 9ff.; Foley, 71ff.

it at 5.23! She is hardly a military hero and her labors too are feminized by their domestic slant. She must fetch water and wool, deal with foodstuffs like grain, and even her harrowing of hell is for cosmetics!

Thus, we see that simultaneously Psyche is a victim character. She is unfairly and vindictively preyed upon by Venus, Venus' servants and Mercury. She is abandoned by Cupid and is denied aid by Juno and Ceres. Throughout this, she is frequently hysterical or despondent, socially isolated, utterly helpless, and passive. In this regard, she bears a resemblance to many female victim characters such as Io, Iphigenia, and Andromeda, whose similarities to Psyche in terms of character and situation have been pointed out by others.<sup>620</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Apuleius' blending of these two opposite identities (male hero and helpless female victim) is both bold and unique. It is also part of making Psyche a figure of fun by setting up reader expectations which she fails to meet in comically spectacular ways.

Additionally, Psyche is a new kind of character in that Apuleius has created a Psyche which retains its obvious allegorical and neo-platonic associations but is, as never before, a real literary character. Apuleius' Psyche is not a mere metaphor or psyche but a discrete character with a sense of personal agency and its own individual feelings,

---

<sup>620</sup> See Parker, 237f.; Grimal, 14ff.; Schiesaro, 146ff.; Walsh; 53. Io, in particular, as the pregnant daughter of a king who is driven by a jealous goddess to wander far and wide shares a number of characteristics with Psyche. Her experience of being a mortal trapped by a supernatural force in the body of a farm animal and her later association with Isis are especially relevant since they also links her to the experience of Apuleius' Lucius.

thoughts, and actions. Although Psyche's character is less consistently or fully developed than other characters in the narrative such as Venus, Apuleius' Psyche is nevertheless the first appearance of a Psyche character which is fully a character. This makes her an interesting match for his Cupid who is himself a never before seen version of a familiar figure and adds literary interest to the narrative. Moreover, Psyche's allegorical associations, rather than representing the only real significance of her character, can instead become a source for wit and humor. Psyche's name is repeatedly used for a pun on the basis of its literal meaning.<sup>621</sup>

In general, as with other characters, the humor and wit associated with Psyche's character has been largely ignored. The amusing diminishing and feminizing of her typically male and heroic role together with her character's incredible silliness and helplessness (which can be amusing and exasperating in their own right) suggest that she is not just a female version of an epic hero but a mock hero. Her intertextual associations with Virgil's *Aeneid* add literary interest as well as irony and wit. She is variously and ironically connected to the Venus, Aeneas, and Dido of Virgil's *Aeneid* by her words, her general situation, her behavior, and her interaction with other characters. As we have seen, Apuleius uses these connections in interesting and creative ways which highlight not only Psyche's similarities to these well-known characters but also her noticeable differences. Additionally, the numerous innovative links between Psyche and ancient comedy make it

---

<sup>621</sup> See 4.34.3 (*quid spiritum uestrum, qui magis meus est...*); 5.6.7 (*meum spiritum*); 5.6.9 (*tuae Psychae dulcis anima*); 5.7.6 (*animas cum Psyche uestra recreate*); 5.13.4 (*Psychae animam gaudio recrea*); 5.31.2 (*Psyche illam fugitiuam uolaticam*); 6.2.5 (*Psyches animae*); 6.15.1 (*innocentis animae*).

clear that her role and character need not be read as soberly as it has been previously. The inconsistencies in Psyche's character and behavior also provide an opportunity for Apuleius to add dramatic and comic interest to the narrative by building up and then subverting or reversing the reader's expectations.

#### Conclusions:

Previous studies of Psyche have focused little or no attention on her characterization, usually preferring to concentrate instead on a broader hermeneutic of the narrative or the novel in which it is placed. Nevertheless, Psyche's central role in the narrative, her important appearances at the start and close of the story (emphatic positions), her textual prominence throughout, her interactions with most of the other characters, and her own words warrant a closer look. As with Apuleius' Cupid and Venus, her characterization reveals that Apuleius is engaging with other texts and authors in complex and creative ways. Psyche is simultaneously connected to the Dido, Venus, and Aeneas of Virgil's *Aeneid*, for example, via situational correspondences but also by verbal echoes, themes, common characters and experiences. The wit and humor in this intertextuality is an important component of the narrative. In similarly entertaining and unexpected ways, Psyche's characterization is also closely tied to ancient comedy, drawing upon and twisting with great ingenuity many familiar comic elements and characters. Intratextual associations between Psyche and Lucius are also at play.

Careful examination of Psyche's appearances, especially in relation to her early characterization, reveals noticeable contrasts (between her appearance and her feelings and between the Psyche who nobly accepts her tragic fate and the helpless, hopeless Psyche who appears after Cupid's departure, for example). Psyche's speech, physical appearance and description further emphasize change and highlight her beauty, mortality, vulnerability, emotional lability, and curiosity. In keeping with other contrasting elements of her characterization, Psyche's variable status (mortal/immortal and princess/slave) adds interest and drama to the narrative. In addition to the somewhat shallow functionality of Psyche's character, numerous other aspects of her characterization are also remarkable for their novelty, including her presentation as a feminized mock hero and simultaneously as a helpless victim and the blending of her allegorical associations with her identity as a distinct character with its own thoughts, feelings, and agency. Humor and wit also play an important role in Psyche's characterization. Like the comic novel in which it is placed and the Lucius character to which Psyche is linked, the Cupid and Psyche episode and the construction of the Psyche character itself invite readers to an experience which is amusing, witty and designed to entertain.

## FINAL CONCLUSIONS: ON APULEIUS AND CHARACTERIZATION

Characterization is a crucial part of the narrative process and one which is difficult to theorize about and assess in a structured way. Nevertheless, Apuleius' approach to characterization is an important part of his craft as an author. His method of building characters is varied and interesting and reflective of his entertaining, creative, and unpredictable style of writing. A close study of Apuleius' characters and of the methods and processes involved in building and conveying information about these characters has revealed significant insights about his approach to narrative. Certainly, this study has identified a number of trends which occur in his process of characterization in the Cupid and Psyche episode. I shall review these features briefly in the following pages.

### Direct Characterization:

Apuleius uses both direct and indirect characterization. His minor characters, in particular, are directly described by the narrator. The bird is *uerbosa et satis curiosa*, the ant *paruula atque ruricola*, the reed *simplex et humana*, the eagle *rapax*, and the tower *prospicua*. Such direct characterization allows the reader to grasp clearly and quickly the most important qualities of the character and is especially useful in the case of minor characters who do not have a sufficient amount of time or importance in the narrative to develop more than one or two relatively stable traits. In this way, these minor characters remain relevant to the plot but are not intrusive. It is also easy to see that in each case the

nature of the directly characterized minor figure is closely related to its function. The *talkative* bird has the function of verbally passing on vital information to Venus; the *tiny country* ant shows up Psyche's relative weakness and ineptitude; the *kind* reed points up Venus' cruelty, etc. Each does so entertainingly while clearing the way for the plot to unfold. These minor characters do not recur and there is little opportunity for repetition, accumulation of points, or the cumulative impact of the character's actions. Thus clarity about their important trait(s) is necessary, despite the lack of need or opportunity for a fuller exposition of their character. As we shall see, minor characters are also subject to a small amount of indirect characterization as well.

Neither are minor characters the only ones which receive direct characterization. More prominent characters such as Psyche's sisters also receive direct characterization, having been accurately described as *perfidae lupulae* and *pessimae illae lamiae* by Cupid, for example. Even the narrative's major characters, Psyche, Venus, and Cupid, the most important, active, developed, textually prominent characters with ample opportunity to speak for themselves, are directly characterized. Psyche is *simplex* and Cupid *formosus*, for example. In fact, Cupid's physical attributes receive a great deal of direct characterization, while his mental and intellectual qualities are less likely to be drawn in this way. This emphasis on the simple direct exposition of his appearance allows the reader to share in the visual, sensual experience which Psyche has at the revelation of his outward appearance and helps us to relate to her stunned awe. Conversely, we learn little directly about Psyche's physical appearance, especially given the important role her

beauty plays in the narrative. It is instead her mental and emotional features which Apuleius shares by such exposition. Emotions, deeply felt and utterly human, are particularly important for depicting Psyche's great mortal and feminine fragility and for engaging the reader in her predicament. We can see then that Apuleius' use of direct characterization has purpose beyond its ease and economy.

Obviously major characters have multiple traits which are stressed and developed in other ways, as well as minor background traits which are not as heavily stressed. Generally, Apuleius does fill out his major characters by covering, at least briefly, most or all of the typical aspects of a character such as physical, mental, and intellectual attributes, background, environment, thoughts, emotions, and others' reactions to them. He does not give equal emphasis to each aspect in all his major characters, of course, and some of these aspects are very roughly sketched. Still, his variety results in major characters which are memorable and sufficiently coherent for his purposes, even if they are not highly developed and natural figures such as Emma Woodhouse. They clearly belong to certain identifiable, rather stereotypical character types (Psyche is a waif, Venus a threatening and jealous goddess, Cupid a lover) but nevertheless they remain convincing as individuals. What Apuleius' major characters may lack in consistency (Cupid is variously a mischievous boy, a dangerous god, and a settled husband, for example), they more than make up for with entertainment value. His emphasis on amusement and the relative shortness of the narrative shape and limit characterization to some extent and allow plot and action to be an important focus as well.

Indirect Characterization:

Apuleius does not rely solely on direct characterization of relevant traits for even his minor characters, much less his major characters. This is quite natural. Readers are very much conditioned by ‘real life’ to observe behavior, appearance, and speech and to draw conclusions from these about a person’s character. Apuleius avoids impairing his readers’ emotional or intellectual involvement in the narrative by not heavy-handedly telling them what they could ably conclude on their own. Thus we see for ourselves, indirectly, that the talkative bird is also an exaggerator, that Ceres and Juno are more rational than Venus, and that the eagle is pretty pompous for a bird.

In this regard, a character’s speech is very revealing. Apuleius exploits the actual words which various characters speak and also the manner in which they are spoken to give insight into their nature. In Cupid’s case, his silence is itself very revealing. Via speech many of Apuleius’ characters demonstrate their thoughts, priorities, personal preferences, emotions, and approach to life. This often gives the reader insights into not only the speaker’s nature but the traits of others, especially when the speaker seems reliable. The narrator’s poor opinion of Psyche’s sisters is very much confirmed by their own bad speech and by Cupid’s speech about them, for example.

A character’s gestures, mannerisms, and expressions while in action are also very revealing. Even small individualizing touches or a few suggestive details can give

characters distinct personalities and make them come alive for readers. Venus' sullen frown at 5.31 and her maniacal laughter at 6.9 really allow the readers to picture her and so draw them in. Similarly, actions and reactions to other characters are instructive. This includes acts of commission or omission (Ceres and Juno's refusal to help Psyche say a good deal about their own and Venus' character, for example).

Apuleius is especially fond of placing characters in situations in which they are likely to be compared to one another. Contrast in traits between different characters throws the contrasting trait into relief, heightens its impact, and makes for an interesting variety. The horribleness of Psyche's sisters *as sisters* is directly mentioned by Cupid and the narrator but it is the contrast of their jealousy and hatred with Psyche's familial love and generosity which really brings home the point. Similarly, some characters are linked, parallel or simply share important traits or functions and thus reinforce each other and increase impact, such as Psyche's helpers. Their common pity for Psyche and their shared desire to help her avoid harm (a trait they share even with Juno and Ceres who desire to help but feel they should not) strongly reinforce that Psyche is, in fact, pitiable and Venus, unreasonable. Here one also sees that repetition is an important technique. Characteristics which are most strongly conveyed are often repeatedly conveyed and conveyed by a variety of nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

### First Appearances and Dynamism:

First appearances are especially important in Apuleius. The points of character which are first brought to the reader's attention have great impact since they do not compete with any previous appearances. They form, at least initially, the sole personal impression of the character. Even as the narrative progresses and the character makes subsequent appearances these will be colored by and compared to his/her first impression. The first appearance of a character is therefore privileged. Venus is clearly cruel, unreasonable, and angry from the start. Her later appearances support and enhance this view by repetition and accumulation of points (so too with other characters). Her haughty and menacing approach to Psyche when she assigns her the final labor has added impact because of the cumulative effect of her having behaved similarly to Psyche before, during, and after her previous labors and because she has been haughty and menacing with Cupid, Juno, and Ceres besides.

Nevertheless, Apuleius adds interest and entertainment to the narrative by sometimes making a character's first appearance deliberately misleading, as with Psyche who originally appears brave, competent, and clever. It is only later that this impression is inverted and the full extent of her weakness and naiveté comes to light. Cupid too, who is first introduced as an impudent and dangerous home-wrecker, later appears as a mature, cautious, settled husband and father. Misdirection is an important feature of Apuleius' craft, and an especially important part of his use of first appearances. We do

not, by way of contrast, see much slow rehabilitation of characters in the Cupid and Psyche episode. Characters do not begin one way and over a measured and deliberate process of maturation and development end up another way. In general, besides the reversal of misleading first appearances, the characters do not change significantly over the course of the story but rather remain relatively static, despite significant changes in circumstance and reversals of fortune. Even in cases where a character acts contrary to expectations (such as Psyche killing off her sisters or Venus dancing beautifully at Psyche's wedding) the behavior does appear sudden and out of step with the character's usual pattern. Venus does not, for example, slowly get to know Psyche and learn to love her over a period of time and via multiple, successively more amicable interactions. Rather, she hates Psyche and rages at her until suddenly Jupiter insists that Venus does otherwise. By the next paragraph, she is, very abruptly, doing otherwise. Perhaps this lack rehabilitation is in part due to the limited length of the narrative. It is probably also a result of the emphasis which Apuleius places on the function of characters.

Characters as narrative devices:

Characters can be considered according to their roles in the plot, as hero, heroine, villain, helper, etc. Apuleius pays close attention to not only the traits but the function of his characters in order to move the action of the plot forward with sufficient speed, interest, and variety. In fact, as we have seen in many examples, function does seem to be closely related to the character's nature and may actually determine it. This is made especially

clear by the minimal importance of motivation in the narrative, particularly in the case of the helper characters. Apuleius does not need to explore deeply a character's personal reasons for helping Psyche, although he may mention a plausible motivation, since it is only important that he does so to allow the plot to progress and Psyche to get on to her next labor. A character may, like the invisible servants, slow down the action or provide some vicarious information about the main characters. In such situations the character functions mainly in this practical and mechanical way and is not built up significantly by means of traits or background motivation. They may, like the loquacious bird, act as blocking characters to undermine the heroine and bring conflict to the fore. In fact, most of the minor characters can be grouped easily according to function as helpers to Psyche (Pan, reed, tower, eagle) or to her enemy Venus (the loquacious bird, Mercury, Trouble, Sadness). The second group hinder Psyche's progress and create tension but these are not as textually prominent on the whole as her many helpers. Certainly the hinderers are not as likeable but, as with the helpers, they are memorable characters, usually with a single simple trait which supports their function. By way of contrast, we do understand a good deal about Psyche's sisters and even their unsavory motivations. Although they act as auxiliary villains to Venus, they are not merely functional characters and are much more fully developed than necessary for their mechanical function. Although function is a major component of Apuleius' approach to characterization, it is hardly the only one. It is also worth noting that even leading characters sometimes have a variety of roles. Cupid, for example acts variously as husband, adviser, deserter, and helper to Psyche as well as disobedient son (to Venus) etc.

Intertextual Characterization:

Although Latin literature is generally very allusive, Apuleius makes especially frequent use of intertextuality in his characterization. In fact, erudition (particularly witty or humorous use of erudition) is a very important aspect of his characterization. It is natural that our perception of a figure be affected by the fact that he or she closely resembles a character from another work and thus acquires the effect and quality of that figure or invites comparison and contrast. In fact, distinct differences from the analogue will stand out especially and are likely significant. Additionally, one may see how the character fails to measure up to the analogue, surpasses the analogue, or how the character represents a new twist on the analogue. Psyche's relationship to Virgil's Aeneas and, interestingly, to Dido functions in this way and is an important part of her characterization. The intertextual engagement of both Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche with the *adulescens amans* of ancient comedy shows that the dynamic works even when the analogue is a more generalized stock character than a specific one. Moreover, a character can be a variant on a previous version. This is especially convenient for a character like Cupid for whom there is a rich tradition against which to play. Apuleius' creative use of that tradition and his consequent ability to produce a Cupid who is both novel and familiar are a testament to his skill in characterization.

Characterization of Females:

The examination of gender roles and the representation of women in literature has been a major scholarly interest of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, Apuleius has created a narrative in which the main protagonist, Psyche, and her major and minor antagonists (Venus and her own sisters) are all females. Some of the minor characters are female, the narrative concerns a marriage, and the female lead character is suggestively placed in the typically male roles of Harrower of Hell, persecuted epic hero, and *adulescens amans*. This scenario cries out for a discussion of the characterization of females! The scope of the present study prevents as full a discussion as the topic might warrant. A comprehensive feminist critique of Apuleius' work could easily warrant its own dissertation but I will provide here a brief examination of the most significant features of Apuleius' approach to gender roles and his depiction of women in order to show that like other aspects of his work, he is creative in his approach.

It is a commonplace by now that women in ancient myth are presented in a way which somehow references marriage and that this is a reflection of the central importance of marriage in the life of an ancient Greek or Roman woman, whose two most significant life events are supposed to be the day she's wed and the day she's dead.<sup>622</sup> Certainly Psyche's search for a husband (at first) and for her husband (later) are primary concerns for her and for her parents. Her sisters' marriages are also a focus of attention and

---

<sup>622</sup> See Cantarella on the importance of marriage in the presentation of women in myth.

Venus' marital history is addressed. Psyche's marriage and motherhood at the close of the narrative conclude Apuleius' interest in her story and this, of course, implies that her fulfillment of these roles is her primary purpose. This is, however, only part of the picture. It is equally true that the male Cupid is presented in a way which highlights the importance of marriage and family to his character. The novelty of Cupid's role as a husband and father emphasizes this especially. Moreover, *his* primary concern is also the establishment and re-establishment of the marriage relationship, without which he is very miserable.

It is similarly a well-accepted scholarly maxim that women in ancient Greek and Roman literature are often threatening figures, whose trustworthiness and sexual fidelity is to be considered suspect and whose open hostility towards their husbands ought to be unsurprising.<sup>623</sup> It is true, of course, that Psyche does make an attempt on her sleeping husband's life and that the other important female characters in Apuleius' narrative (Venus and Psyche's sisters) are dangerously wicked, vain, selfish, and lustful. Psyche, however, has to be pressured and tricked into her violent intentions, intentions which she certainly views as a necessary pre-emptive defense of her own and her baby's life against a gobbling monster. She is, in fact, the victim, not the perpetrator, of most of the narrative's suffering and while Venus and her sisters very certainly fit the stereotype of the dangerous woman, there are other female characters who are at least harmless (Ceres, Juno), if not actually helpful (the invisible servants, the ant, the reed, the waters, the

---

<sup>623</sup> See, for example, Felson-Rubin, who demonstrates that even Penelope (that paragon of wifely virtue) is depicted as a potential Clytemnestra in Homer's *Odyssey*.

tower). It is nevertheless true that his four most important female characters are demonstrably dangerous. The composite image of Apuleius' females, despite the lack of absolute uniformity among them, is noticeably negative in this regard.

Apuleius' characters seem to reveal something of a world view and thoughts on human/divine nature. The world which the characters build here together is, in general, a dangerous one, especially for humans. They are subject to the rather arbitrary and often unfair whims of divine agents and fate. Females are dangerous but, especially when human like Psyche, they are also potential victims of danger. Even those traits which might otherwise be expected to shield a woman from great suffering (such as a good and attentive father, noble birth, a powerful husband, and exceptional beauty), are useless, if not actually harmful to Psyche. Neither the innocence of Psyche nor the jaded, calculating wickedness of her mortal sisters protect the women from coming to harm, deserved and undeserved. The witness of Lucius in the rest of the *Golden Ass* makes it clear that mortal males too live in a perilous world, subject to capricious deities. Certainly it may be a deity (such as Cupid or Isis) who ultimately rescues the helpless mortal but he/she does so at his/her pleasure and on his/her timeline.

More complex is Apuleius' interesting play with expected gender roles. Pomeroy's groundbreaking look at women's roles in antiquity, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, is aptly named. Psyche is associated with all these roles at some point in the narrative. She is worshipped as a goddess, compared to a

whore (with Venus as her *lena*), made a wife to Cupid, and called a slave of Venus. These are all quite traditional roles for female characters. Venus and Psyche's sisters fit some, not all of these as well. Still, Psyche is very clearly associated with some roles traditionally assigned to male characters such as the typically male heroic quest figure and the *adulescens amans*. Venus and Cupid also transgress gender role expectations. Venus is a *senex iratus* and a *leno/lena* figure and Cupid does not always enjoy the usual subjective male role in his characterization. While Cupid does initiate both the establishment and re-establishment of his relationship with Psyche, he is nevertheless obviously in the usually feminine role of the beloved (object), rather than the lover (subject), when his appearance is discovered and explored at 5.22 and when he is sought here and there by Psyche, a period which constitutes a large portion of the narrative. Apuleius' characterization thus deemphasizes the idea of polarity in gender and presents a challenging and entertaining blending of expectations in his presentation of both male and female characters.

Apuleius' characterization does not presuppose that the interests of females are necessarily or permanently opposed to those of males. Both Cupid and Psyche benefit from their relationship and suffer at its loss. They display some level of interdependence and each is submissive to someone of the opposite sex at times (Psyche to Cupid, and Cupid to Venus) and is dominant on other occasions. This kind of variation contributes to the credibility of Apuleius' female characters who do not appear to be entirely stereotypical and flat. While typical and negative feminine traits such as emotionality (in

Psyche) and jealousy (in Venus and her sisters) are assigned to female characters, these are also in evidence in male characters. Cupid shows emotional lability when he storms off, sulks, and then suddenly relents and Jupiter agrees to help Cupid only on the jealous condition that he too gets a girl. Both genders are represented as interested in love affairs and Ceres and Juno explicitly argue that Venus' behavior is comparable to Cupid's in this regard. Both genders also show rationality and irrationality at various times, although Venus and Psyche do come off as especially prone to desperate senselessness.

The potential power difference between men and women is certainly evident in Psyche and Cupid's initial encounter. He is the owner of a glittering mansion with slaves and treasures; She is alone, far from home, and vulnerable. Her consent to sexual intercourse is neither sought nor required, and he cannot even be compelled to reveal his identity to her, despite her efforts. The loss of her virginity in this manner is, at least, acknowledged by the care she receives from the invisible servants (5.4), although the detail that she must be won over to her new condition by constant habituation might suggest Stockholm Syndrome rather than the start of a happy marriage to a modern reader! Cupid seems to come and go as he pleases, while Psyche remains in the domestic sphere, waiting upon his nighttime arrival and the visits of her sisters (which also happen only with Cupid's permission). Psyche's reasons for loving Cupid, beyond the pleasant surroundings he affords her and his own physical appeal, are not really explored by Apuleius who for once quite ignores Psyche's emotional side. It is only fair to point out that Apuleius seems equally uninterested in exploring the development of Cupid's emotional

attachment to Psyche, beyond her physical appeal. Apuleius thus treats his major female character in much the same way as her male counterpart and, in fact, in placing her in the typically male role of (mock) epic hero, he actually treats her in some ways *as a male*. Moreover, to the extent that the narrative operates on the allegorical level, she is not ‘woman’ but ‘soul’ and thus steps beyond gender to embody the human experience as the representative (hu) man, who is acted upon by gods and fate.<sup>624</sup> Apuleius is remarkably modern in seeming to suppose that male and female characters do not have fundamentally different needs and outlooks.<sup>625</sup> Still, her quest is what feminist scholar Lloyd Brown in another context termed a quest “of limited ambitions”, that is a search, not for ‘masculine’ ideals such as power, independence, fame, money, etc, but for the ideal marriage and the happiness that she seems to believe can only be found in marriage.<sup>626</sup> Brown’s perspective is not atypical and presupposes that Psyche’s ‘feminine’ priorities, family and domestic stability, are *a priori* inferior. I am not sure this is true (nor is the mutually exclusive relationship many suppose exists between individuality and dependence) and it is Psyche’s priorities, not Brown’s, which must strike a chord with the story’s narratrix.

---

<sup>624</sup> Compare Carlin, 7 on Cather’s heroine as ‘American’ rather than ‘woman’, despite her gender.

<sup>625</sup> Woolf argued that while women’s lives give them a different perspective, they do not differ in the most important ways from men.

<sup>626</sup> Brown, 42.

Bibliography

- Abate, F.R. *Diminutives in Apuleian Latinity*, Diss. Columbus, 1978.
- Accardo, P. *The Metamorphosis of Apuleius. Cupid and Psyche, Beauty and the Beast, King Kong*. Madison. 2002.
- Ackermann, H.C. et alii (eds). *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. Zurich. 1981-1999.
- Anderson, G. *Eros Sophistes: Ancient Novelists at Play*. Chico, CA. 1982.
- Arnott, W.G. 'Notes on *gavia* and *mergus* in Latin authors', *CQ* 14 (1964) 249-262.
- Austin, R.G.P. *Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Sextus*. Oxford. 1977.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Trans. Christine van Boheemen. Toronto. 1985.
- Bal, Mieke. 'The Narrating and the Focalizing: A Theory of the Agents in Narrative', *Style* 17 (1983) 234-69.
- Barchiesi, Alessandro. *Speaking Volumes: Narrative and intertext in Ovid and other Latin poets*. Ed. and trans. by Matt Fox and Simone Marchesi. London. 2001.
- Barchilon, J. "Beauty and the Beast: From Myth to Fairy Tale". *Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalytic Review* 46.4 (1959) 19-29.
- Barrett, Conrad. 'The Marriages of Charite and Psyche in the context of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', *CB* 70 (1994) 73-88.
- Barthes, R. 'Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives', In S. Onega, & J. A. G. Landa (Eds.), *Narratology*. New York (1996) 45-60.
- Bartsch, S. *Decoding the Ancient Novel*. Princeton. 1989.
- Beck, J. W. *Fabula de Psyche et Cupidine*. Groningen. 1902.
- Bell, R. E. *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary*. Oxford. 1993.

- Bernhard, M. *Der Stil des Apuleius von Madaura. Ein Beitrag zur Stilistik des Spätlateins*. Stuttgart. 1927.
- Bettelheim, B. *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. London. 1976
- Billaut, Alain. 'Characterization in the Ancient Novel' in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth Schmeling. Leiden. 1996. 115-129.
- Binder, G. Merkelbach, R. (eds). *Amor und Psyche*. Darmstadt. 1968.
- Bittrich, Ursula. *Aphrodite Und Eros in Der Antiken Tragodie: Mit Ausblicken Auf Motivgeschichtlich Verwandte Dichtungen (Untersuchungen Zur Antiken Literatur Und Geschichte)*. Berlin. 2005.
- Blundell, Sue. *Women in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995
- Boedeker, Deborah Dickmann. *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic*. Mnemosyne, bibliotheca classica Batava: Supplementum, Volume 32. 1974.
- Bomer, Franz. *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen*, 7 vols. Heidelberg. 1969-86.
- Bonheim, Helmut W. *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story*. Cambridge. 1982.
- Bourneuf, Roland and Real, Oulet. *L'Univer du roman*. Paris. 1975.
- Bradley, Keith. 'Fictive Families: Family and Household in the "Metamorphoses" of Apuleius', *Phoenix* 54.3/4 (2000) 282-308.
- Breitenberger, Barbara M. *Aphrodite and Eros: the development of erotic mythology in early Greek Poetry and Cult*. New York. 2007.
- Brossard, Michele. 'Conte ou mythe? Apulée: Métamorphoses (IV.XXVIII – VI.XXIV)', *Les Cahiers de Fontenay* 9-10 (1978). 79-134.
- Brotherton, Blanche. 'Introduction of Characters in Apuleius', *CP* 29 (1934) 36-52.
- Brown, Lloyd W. "Zora Neale Hurston and the Nature of Female Perception." *Obsidian* 4.3 (1978) 39-45.

- Burkert, W. *Ancient Mystery Cults*. Cambridge, MA. 1987.
- Burkert, W. *Antike Mysterien. Funktionen und Gehalt*. Munchen. 1991.
- Burnell, Peter. 'The Death of Turnus and Roman Morality', *Greece & Rome* 2<sup>nd</sup> series 34.2 (1987) 186-200.
- Cahill, Jane. *Her Kind: Stories of Women from Greek Mythology*. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1995.
- Callebat, L. *Sermo cotidianus dans les Métamorphoses d'Apulée*. Caen. 1968.
- Callebat, L. 'L'Expression dans les oeuvres d'Apulée', *ANRW* 34.2 (1994) 1600-1664.
- Cantarella, Eva. *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987
- Carlin, Deborah. *Cather, Canon and the Politics of Reading*. Massachusetts. 1992.
- Carver, Robert H. F. *The Protean Ass: The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Oxford University Press. 2007.
- Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse*. Ithaca. 1978.
- Clarke, K. 'Prologue and Provenance: *Quis ille?* or *Unde ille?*' in Kahane, Laird (eds) (2001) 101-110.
- Cohen, Beth (ed.). *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer's Odyssey*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1995.
- Conte, G.B. *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario*. Einaudi Torino 2nd ed. 1985 (engl. *The Rhetoric of Imitation*, tr. Glenn W. Most, Ithaca and London 1987).
- Coolidge, A. C. *A Theory of Story*. Iowa City. 1988.
- D'Alton, J. F. *Roman Literary Theory and Criticism*. London. 1931.
- De Filippo, J. 'Curiositas and the Platonism of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*', *AJPh* 111 (1990) 471-92.
- De Meo, C. *Lingue tecniche del latino*. Bologna. 1983.

- Dietze, J. 'Zum Marchen von Amor und Psyche', *Phil.* 59 (1900) 136-47.
- Doherty, Lillian. *Siren's Songs: Gender, Audiences, and Narrators in the Odyssey*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1995.
- Dowden, K. 'Cupid and Psyche: A Question of the Vision of Apuleius', *AAGA* 2 (1998) 1-22.
- Duckworth, G.E. *The Nature of Roman Comedy: a study in popular entertainment*. Princeton. 1952.
- Dunbabin, K.M.D. *The mosaics of Roman North Africa, Studies in iconography and patronage*. Oxford. 1978.
- Elm von der Osten, Dorothee. *Liebe als Wahnsinn. Die Konzeption der Göttin Venus in den Argonautica des Valerius Flaccus*. Stuttgart. 2007.
- Fantham, E. 'Mime: the missing link in Roman literary history', *CW* 82 (1989) 153-63.
- Fantham, E., H.P. Foley, N.B. Kampen, S. B. Pomeroy, and H. A. Shapiro. *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1995.
- Fehling, Detlev. *Amor und Psyche: Die Schpfung des Apuleius und ihre Einwirkung auf das Marchen, eine Kritik der romantischen Marchen Theorie*. Mainz. 1977.
- Felson-Rubin, N. *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poetics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 1993.
- Fick, N. 'Du palais d'Eros a la robe olympienne de Lucius', *REL* 47 (1969) 378-96.
- Finkelberg, Margalit. 'Odysseus and the Genus 'Hero'', *Greece & Rome* 42.1 (April, 1995) 1-14.
- Finkelpearl, Ellen. 'Psyche, Aeneas and an ass: Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 6.10-6.21', *TAPhA* 120 (1990) 333-346.
- Finkelpearl, Ellen. *Metamorphosis of Language in Apuleius: A Study of Allusion in the Novel*. Ann Arbor MI. 1998.
- Fitzgerald, W. *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination*. Cambridge. 2000.

- Fliedner, H. *Amor und Cupido. Untersuchungen über den römischen Liebesgott*. Meisenheim am Glan. 1974.
- Foley, J.M. *A Companion to Ancient Epic*. Maiden, MA and Oxford. 2005.
- Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York. 1927.
- Fowler, D. 'On the Shoulders of Giants: Intertextuality and Classical Studies', *MD* 39 (1998) 13-34.
- Frangoulidis, Stavros. 'Venus and Psyche's Sisters in Apuleius' Tale of Cupid and Psyche', *CB* 70 (1994) 67-72.
- Frangoulidis, Stavros. 'Contextuality in the Sisters' Death in Apuleius' Tale of Cupid and Psyche', *La Parola del passato* Fasc. 281 (1995) 140-44.
- Frangoulidis, Stavros. 'Intratextuality in the Sisters' Death in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', *Antiquité Classique* 66 (1997) 293-9.
- Frangoulidis, Stavros. *Roles and Performances in Apuleius' Metamorphoses*. Verlag J. B. Metzler. 2001.
- Frangoulidis, Stavros. 'Venus and Psyche's Sisters in Apuleius' Tale of *Cupid and Psyche*', *Classical Bulletin* 70 (1994) 67-72.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton. 1957.
- Gaisser, Julia Haig. *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass: A Study in Transmission and Reception*. Princeton University Press. 2008.
- Galinsky, Karl. *Ovid's Metamorphoses: an Introduction to the Basic Aspects*. Los Angeles. 1975.
- Gély-Gherida, M. 'Psyche, de *Métamorphoses* en *Métamorphoses*: lectures croisées d'Ovide et d'Apulée, de la renaissance italienne aux *Amours de Psyché* de la Fontaine', in E. Bury, M. Néraudau, J.P. Néraudau (eds), *Lectures d'Ovide: études publiées à la mémoire de Jean-Pierre Néraudau*. Paris. 2003. 479-497.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse*. Trans. by Jane Lewin. New York. 1980.
- Giannotti, G.F. *Romanzo e ideologia. Studi sulle Metamorfosi di Apuleio*. Napoli. 1986.

- Gollnick, James. *Love and the Soul. Psychological Interpretations of the Eros and Psyche Myth*. Waterloo. 1992.
- Gollnick, James. *The Religious Dreamworld of Apuleius' Metamorphoses: Recovering a Forgotten Hermeneutic*. Waterloo. 1998.
- Griffiths, J. Gwyn. *The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)*. Leiden. 1975.
- Griffiths, J. "Isis in Metamorphoses of Apuleius", in B.L. Hijmans Jr. and R. Th. van der Paardt (eds.), *Aspects of Apuleius* Golden Ass. Groningen (1978) 141-166.
- Grimal, P. 'Le conte d'amour de Psyché', *Vita Latina* 71 (1978) 2-9.
- Grimal, P. *Metamorphoseis 4.28-6.24: Le conte d'Amour et Psyché*. Paris. 1963.
- Hagg, T. *The Novel in Antiquity*. Berkeley. 1983.
- Haight, Elizabeth Hazelton. *Apuleius and His Influence*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co. 1927.
- Harrison, S. J. 'A Note on Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 4.31', *CQ* 41 (1991) 562-3.
- Harrison, S.J. 'Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*' in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, Ed. Gareth Schmeling. (Leiden, 1996). 491-516.
- Harrison, S. J. *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist*. Oxford University Press. 2004.
- Harrison, S.J. 'From Epic to Novel: Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and Vergil's *Aeneid*', *MD* 39 (1998) 53-73.
- Heine, R. *Untersuchungen zur Romanform des Apuleius von Madaura*. Diss. Gottingen. 1962.
- Helm, R, Von Jachmann, R. & Schmidt, E.G. *Amor und Psyche*. Leipzig. 1975.
- Herrmann, L 'Légendes locales et thèmes littéraires dans le conte de Psyché', *Ant. Class.* 21 (1952) 13-27.
- Herrmann, L. 'Styx et auctor adulterinus dans le Conte de Psyché', *AC* 39 (1970) 78-87.
- Hicter, M. 'L'Autobiographie dans l'ane d'ore d'Apulée', *L'Antiquite Classique* 13

(1944/45) 61-68.

Hijmans, B.L. and van der Paardt, R.Th. eds. *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass*. Groningen. 1978.

Hijmans, B.L., van der Paardt, R.Th. and Smits, E.R. *Metamorphoses Book IV. 1-27*. Groningen, 1977.

Hillman, James. *The Myth of Analysis: three essays in archetypal psychology*. Northwestern. 1998.

Hinds, Stephen. *Allusion and Intertext*. Cambridge. 1998.

Hoevels, F. E. *Marchen und Magie in den Metamorphosen des Apuleius von Madaura*. Amsterdam. 1979.

Hoffer, N.L. *Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche and the Egyptian Cult*. Washington. 2001.

Hooper, R.W. 'Structural unity in the Golden Ass', *Latomus* 44 (1985) 398-401.

Hough, John N. 'Description of Physical Characteristics in Comedy' *The Classical Weekly* 37.8 (1943) 86-87.

Houston, Jean. *The Search for the Beloved*. Los Angeles. 1987.

James, Paula. *Unity in Diversity. A Study of Apuleius' Metamorphoses*. Hildesheim. 1987.

James, Paula. 'Cupid at Work and at Play', *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel Vol. I*, ed. H. Hofmann (Groningen, 1988) 112-121.

Johnson, Robert A. *She: Understanding Feminine Psychology*. New York. 1989.

Junghanns, P. *Die Erzählungstechnik von Apuleius' Metamorphosen und ihrer Vorlage*, *Philologus*, Suppl. 24. 1932.

Kenney, E.J. 'Psyche and her mysterious husband', in D.A. Russell ed., *Antonine literature* (Oxford, 1990) 175-98.

Kenney, E.J. ed. *Apuleius: Cupid and Psyche*. Cambridge. 1990.

Kerenyi, K. *Die griechisch-orientalische Romanliteratur in Religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung*. Darmstadt. 1962.

Keulen, Wytse. 'Some Legal Themes in Apuleian Context', in M. Picone and B. Zimmermann eds., *Der antike Roman und seine mittelalterliche Rezeption* (Basel, Boston, Berlin, 1997) 203-229.

Koffka, K. *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*. New York. 1935.

Konstan, D. 'Narrative Spaces', in Paschalis, Frangoulidas (eds.), (2002) 1-11.

Krabbe, Judith K. *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*. New York. 1989.

Kurman, G. 'Ecphrasis in Epic Poetry', *Comparative Literature* 26 (1974) 1-13.

Labhardt, A. 'Curiositas. Notes sur l'histoire d'un mot et d'une notion', *MH* 17 (1960) 206-24.

Lamarque, H. 'Une tour douée de parole dans le conte d'Amour et de Psyché d'Apulée', *Pallas* 35 (1989) 65-8.

Lazzarini, C. 'Il modello virgiliano nel lessico delle *Metamorfosi* di Apuleio', *SCO* 35 (1985) 131-160.

Lee, Benjamin Todd. *Apuleius' Florida: A Commentary*. Berlin. 2005.

Lefkowitz, M. R. *Women in Greek Myth, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. 1990.

Lesky, A. 'Apuleius von Madaura und Lukios von Patrai', *Hermes* 76 (1941) 43-74.

Luck-Huyse, K. *Der Traum vom Fliegen in der Antike*. Stuttgart. 1997.

Maaskant-Kleibrink, M. 'Psyche's Birth', *GNC* 3 (1990) 13-33.

MacCary, W. Thomas. 'Menander's Old Men', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 102 (1971) 303-325.

MacKay, L.A. 'The Sin of the Golden Ass', *Arion* 4 (1965) 474-80.

Makowski, John F. 'Persephone, Psyche, and the Mother-Maiden Archetype'. *Classical*

*Outlook* 62 (1985) 73–78.

Mantero, Teresa. ‘L’isola di Psiche’, *AA Lig* 29 (1972) 289-303.

Mantero, Teresa. ‘La Psiche apuleiano ed i giuramenti d’amore’, *Maia* 26 (1974) 127-39.

Mantero, Teresa. *Amore e Psiche: Struttura di una “Fabia di Magia”*. Bergamo. 1973.

Martin, W. *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca and London. 1986.

May, Regine. *Apuleius and Drama: The Ass on Stage*. Oxford University Press. 2006.

McCreight, T.D. *Rhetorical Strategies and Word Choice in Apuleius’ Apology*, Diss. Duke Univ. Durham. 1991.

McKeown, J.C. *Ovid’s Amores II: A Commentary on Book I*. Leeds. 1989.

McLeod, Gillian. *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1991.

Mellet, Sylvie. ‘Présent de narration et parfait dans le conte de Psyché’, *REL* 63 (1987) 148-60.

Merkelbach, R. *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike*. Berlin and Munich. 1962.

Mette, H. ‘Curiositas’ in *Festschrift Bruno Snell* (1956) 227-35.

Myers, Sara K. ‘The Poet and the Procuress: The Lena in Latin Love Elegy’, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 86, (1996) 1-21.

Moore, T. *The Theater of Plautus*. Austin. 1998.

Moreschini, C. ‘Amore e Psiche. Novella, filosofia, allegoria’, *Fontes* 3 (2000) 21-44.

Murgatroyd, P. ‘Apuleian Ecphrasis: Cupid’s Palace at Met. 5.1.2-5.2.2’, *Hermes* 125 (1997) 357-366.

Nethercut, W. R. ‘Apuleius’ literary art. Resonance and depth in the *Metamorphoses*’, *CJ* 64 (1968) 110-119.

Neumann, Erich. *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine*.

Princeton, NJ. 1956.

Norden, F. *Apuleius von Madaura und das romische Privatrecht*. Leipzig. 1912.

O'Brien, Maeve C. *Apuleius' Debt to Plato in the Metamorphoses*. E. Mellen Press. 2002.

Panayotakis, S. 'Insidiae Veneris: Lameness, Old Age and Deception in the Underworld (Apul. *Met.* 6,18-19)', *GCN* 8 (1997) 23-40.

Panayotakis, S. 'Slander and War Imagery in Apuleius' Tale of Cupid and Psyche (Apul. *Met.* 5,5-5,21)', *AAGA* 2 (1998) 151-164.

Paratore, E. ed. *Apulei Metamorphoseon Libri IV-VI (La favola di Amore e Psyche)*. Florence. 1948.

Paratore, E. *La novella in Apuleio*. Palermo. 1942.

Parker, Sarah. *Techniques of Description in Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche*. Diss. McMaster University. 1999.

Parker, S. and P. Murgatroyd. 'Love Poetry and Apuleius' "Cupid and Psyche"' *The Classical Quarterly* New Series, 52.1 (2002) 400-404.

Pasetti, L. 'La morfologia della preghiera nelle *Metamorfosi* di Apuleio', *Eikasmos* 10 (1999) 247-271.

Penwill, J.L. 'Slavish pleasures and thoughtless curiosity: fall and redemption in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', *Ramus* 4 (1975) 49-82.

Pomeroy, S. B. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Schocken Book. 1995.

Price, J. (ed.). *L. Apuleii Madaurensis Metamorphoseos Libri XI*. Paris. 1650.

Prince, Gerald. *Narratology. The Form and Function of Narrative*. The Hague. 1982.

Prince, Gerald. *A Dictionary of Narratology*. Lincoln. 1987.

Puccini-Delbey, Géraldine. *Amour et désir dans les Métamorphoses d'Apulée*. Bruxelles. 2003.

- Purser, L.C. ed. *The story of Cupid and Psyche as related by Apuleius*. New Rochelle. 1983.
- Rabinowitz, N. S. and A. Richlin (eds.). *Feminist Theory and the Classics*. New York: Routledge. 1993.
- Rambaux, C. *Trois analyses de l'amour. Catulle, Poésies. Ovide, Les Amours. Apulée, Le conte de Psyché*. Paris. 1985.
- Riklin, F. *Wish-fulfillment and Symbolism in Fairy Tales*. Trans. by W. White. New York. 1915.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London. 1983.
- Roncali, R. 'La favola di Psiche', *Sileno* 7 (1981) 71-86.
- Rohde, E. *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*. Darmstadt. 1974.
- Ruch, M. 'Psyché et les quatre vertus cardinales', *IL* 23 (1971) 171-6.
- Sandy, G.N. 'Apuleius' Metamorphoses and the Ancient Novel', *ANRW* II 34.2 (1994) 1511-1574.
- Sandy, G.N. 'Knowledge and Curiosity in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', *Latomus* 31 (1972) 179-183.
- Sandy, G.N. *The Greek World of Apuleius. Apuleius and the Second Sophistic*. Leiden, NY, Köln. 1997.
- Scazzoso, P. *Le Metamorfosi di Apuleio*. Milan. 1951.
- Scheid, John and Jasper Svenbro. *The Craft of Zeus: Myths of Weaving and Fabric* (tr. Carol Volk). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1996.
- Schiesaro, A. 'Il "locus horridus" nelle "Metamorfosi" di Apuleio', *Maia* 37 (1985) 211-23.
- Schiesaro, A. 'La tragedia di Psiche: Note ad Apuleio *Met.* IV.28-35', *Maia* 40 (1988) 141-50.
- Schissel, Otmar. 'Die Ethopoiie der Psyche bei Apuleius *Met.* IV 34', *Hermes* 76.1

(1941) 106-111.

Schlam, C.C. 'Platonica in the *Metamorphoses*', *TAPA* 101 (1970) 477-487.

Schlam, C.C. *Cupid and Psyche. Apuleius and the monuments*. University Park, Pa. 1976.

Schlam, C.C. *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself*. Chapel Hill and London. 1992.

Shumate, Nancy. *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius' Metamorphoses*. Ann Arbor. 1996.

Shumate, Nancy. "Darkness Visible": Apuleius Reads Vergil' in *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel Volume VII* (Groningen, 1996) 103-116.

Singleton, N.E. *Venus in the Met. of Apuleius*. Diss. Ohio State University. 1977.

Slater, N.W. 'Passion and Petrification: The Gaze in Apuleius', *CP* 93 (1998) 18-48.

Slater, N.W. 'Vision, Perception, and Phantasia in the Roman Novel', in Picone, Zimmerman (eds.) 89-105.

Smith, W.S. *Lucius of Corinth and Apuleius of Madaura: A Study of the Narrative Technique of the Metamorphoses of Apuleius*. Diss. Yale University, 1968.

Smith, W.S. 'The narrative voice in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', *TAPh* 103 (1972) 513-34.

Stabryla, L.S. 'The functions of the tale of Cupid and Psyche in the structure of the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius', *Eos* 61 (1973) 261-72.

Stanzel, Franz. *Narrative Situations in the Novel*. Bloomington. 1971.

Stephens, Wade C. 'Cupid and Venus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 89 (1958) 286-300.

Svendsen, J. 'Narrative Techniques in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*', *Pacific Coast Philology* 13 (1978) 101-107.

Swahn, J.O. *The tale of Cupid and Psyche*. Lund. 1955.

Tatum, James. 'The Tales in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', *TAPhA* 100 (1969) 487-527.

- Tatum, James. 'Apuleius and Metamorphosis', *AJP* 93 (1972) 306-313.
- Tatum, James. *Apuleius and The Golden Ass*. Ithaca and London. 1979.
- Thibau, R. 'Les Métamorphoses d'Apulée et la théorie platonicienne de l'Eros', *Studia Philosophica Gandensia* 3 (1965) 89-144.
- Thomas, R.F. *Virgil, Georgics*, 2 vols. Cambridge. 1988.
- Thomas, R.F. 'Virgil's *Georgics* and the art of reference', *HSCP* 90 (1986) 171-198.
- Thompson, Stith. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* [Revised and Enlarged Edition].  
Bloomington. 1958.
- Too, Yun Lee. 'Losing the Author's Voice: Cultural and Personal Identities in the *Metamorphoses*' in *A Companion to the Prologue to Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, Andrew Laird (ed.). Oxford. 2002.
- Toohey, P. *Reading Epic. An introduction to the ancient narratives*. London and New York. 1992.
- Toolan, M. *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. London and New York. 1988.
- Ulanov, Ann Belford. *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche*. New York. 1977.
- Van Mal-Maeder, D. 'Descriptions et descripteurs: mais qui décrit dans les *Metamorphoses* d'Apulée?' in edd. M. Picone and B. Zimmermann, *Der Antike Roman und seine mittelalterliche Rezeption* (Basel, 1997) 171-201.
- Van Thiel, H. *Der Eselsroman*. 2 vols. Munich. 1971.
- Van Wageningen, J. 'Psyche ancilla', *Mnemosyne* 44 (1916) 177-180.
- Von Albrecht, M. *Meister romischer Prosa von Cato bis Apuleius*. Heidelberg. 1971.
- Von Binder, Gerhard and Merkelbach, Reinhold. *Amor und Psyche*. Darmstadt. 1968.
- Von Franz, Marie-Louise. *A Psychological Interpretation of The Golden Ass of Apuleius*.  
Irving, TX. 1980.
- Walsh, P.G. *The Roman Novel*. Cambridge. 1970.

Winkler, J.J. *Auctor & Actor. A narratological reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London. 1985.

Wlosok, Antonie. 'Amor and Cupido', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79 (1975) 165-79.

Woolf, Virginia. 'Professions for Women', *The Death of the Moth and other Essays*. Boston. 1974.

Wright, Constance S; Holloway, Julia Bolton (ed). *Tales Within Tales: Apuleius Through Time*. AMS Press. 2000.

Wright, J.R.G. 'Folk-tale and literary technique in *Cupid and Psyche*', *CQ* 21 (1971) 273-84.