

Julia GAISSER

Boccaccio and Apuleius: Three Ways to Read an Ancient Novel in the Renaissance

Within a few short years around 1350 Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) transcribed a manuscript of Apuleius' works, used two stories from the *Golden Ass* in the *Decameron*, and wrote an allegorical interpretation of the story of Psyche in the *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*. I will discuss these uses of Apuleius by Boccaccio, arguing: that they constitute three distinct ways of reading (or receiving) the *Golden Ass*, that each reading is bound inseparably to its time and place, and that reading Boccaccio reading Apuleius has much to teach us not only about both authors but also about our own ways of receiving and appropriating classical texts.

Boccaccio's manuscript (Florence. Laur. 54.32) provides important insights into his conception of Apuleius and his novel. Like other fourteenth-century scribes, including the copyist of Petrarch's manuscript but unlike those of our oldest manuscripts, F and _, Boccaccio awards Apuleius the praenomen Lucius. His annotations make it clear that like Petrarch a few years earlier, he regards Apuleius himself as the hero of the novel.

Boccaccio transplants two of Apuleius' adultery stories (*Met.* 9.5-7 and 9.1-31) into the early Renaissance world of the *Decameron* (*Dec.* 7.2 and 5.10). I will focus on the "miller's tale" (*Met.* 9.1-31) in *Dec.* 5.10, arguing not only that the sexual mores of Boccaccio's time require significant alterations to Apuleius' story, but that Boccaccio exploits these alterations to turn Apuleius' melodramatic episode into a self-contained comedy with a witty surprise ending.

Boccaccio's allegory of Psyche in the *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods* (5.22) is a complex intertextual production, which alludes not only to Apuleius, but also to the late antique allegories of Martianus Capella (1.7) and Fulgentius (*Myth.* 3.6). Boccaccio revises Fulgentius to make his discussion of the soul conform to contemporary theological views and later corrects himself in order to present a still more theologically "correct" interpretation. Boccaccio's allegory was revised again in the fifteenth century by painters of Florentine wedding chests (*cassoni*) in order to present an exalted image of marriage.

Boccaccio's treatments present three ways of reading Apuleius. We have: first, a manuscript, a physical manifestation of reading that transmits the author as literally as possible, but in a form shaped and interpreted by the scribe; second, two stories in Italian brought into a new setting, the *Decameron*, and into a new moral and social world; and third, an allegorical interpretation in a Latin encyclopedia that mixes elements of previous allegories and has been changed twice to suit contemporary theological views and a third time to foster a social ideal. From the standpoint of reception this last case is the most interesting, since in it we can see a continuing reuse and reinterpretation of the ancient material over time in what Charles Martindale has called a "chain of receptions."