

A MISUNDERSTANDING OF APULEIUS, MET. 9.6.3 ADEST?

In the story of the 'Lover in the Tub', Apul. Met. 9.5–7, we encounter an apparent inconsistency. When the husband arrives unexpectedly, he says that he has sold the tub in which the lover is hiding: *Istud ego sex denariis cuidam venditavi, et adest ut dato pretio secum rem suam ferat*¹). Are we to suppose that the purchaser was present through the whole scene when the *mulier callida* plays the virtuous woman and blames her husband for selling the tub too cheaply? His presence seems unnecessary, even disturbing.

The problem can easily be resolved, if we understand *adest* as 'present tense referring to future time'²; see OLD I, 1968, p. 53 *adsum* 2b³). The references there given are Cic. Att. 12.11 and Cic. Att. 16.15.6; in both places the usage is rare enough to require the attention of commentators. In the first letter the sender announces his imminent arrival in the following terms: *Sed adsum. Coram igitur*. Tyrell & Purser comment 'A nice use of the present for the future'⁴). The second example – *Adsum igitur* – must be taken in the same sense. Shackleton Bailey remarks 'This must mean that he is coming soon'; as well as the passage mentioned above he cites Cic. Att. 13.34 *quid plura? ipse enim adsum* and Fam. 16.10.2 *nos adsumus*⁵).

This somewhat rare use of *adesse* in reference to the future has obviously led a later revisor of Apuleius' story to a misunderstanding: The novella 7.2 of Boccaccio's *Decameron* leans heavily on Met. 9.5–7, and is in many parts an almost literal translation of the Latin model⁶). In the Italian text the husband refers to the presence of the purchaser as unexpectedly as in the *Golden Ass*, and soon after sends him off with the words: 'Buon uomo, vatti con Dio; ché tu odi che mia

1) I quote from D. S. Robertson/P. Vallette, Apulée, Les Métamorphoses, t. III (Paris, ²1956).

2) As, for example, A. Rode (Apulejus, Der goldene Esel, Dessau 1783; repr. e.g. in: A. Rode-É. Burck, Metamorphosen oder Der goldene Esel, Reinbek/Hamburg 1961), R. Helm (Apuleius. Metamorphosen oder der goldene Esel, Berlin ³1957) and W. Ehlers (E. Brandt/W. Ehlers, Apuleius, Der goldene Esel, München ³1980) have done in their translations.

3) Th.l.L. II, p. 916, 46 f. cites this passage under category I 'praesens sum, ... 1 de animantibus: ... additur *qualis vel quo consilio quis adsit*' without considering this temporal aspect. – For such presents see further R. Kühner/C. Stegmann, Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache II, 1 (Hannover ⁴1962; repr. Darmstadt 1966), pp. 119–20 and J. B. Hofmann/A. Szantyr, Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik (München 1965), pp. 307–8; the usage is much more common with verbs of coming and going, with adverbs indicating the future (*cras, iam, post*, etc.) or in spoken language (comedy).

4) The Correspondence of M. Tullius Cicero, vol. IV (Dublin/London 1894), p. 379.

5) Cicero's Letters to Atticus, vol. VI (Cambridge 1967), p. 308.

6) Cf. M. Landau, Die Quellen des Decameron (Stuttgart ²1884), esp. pp. 311–3. – L. Di Franca, 'Alcune novelle del „Decameron“ illustrate nelle fonti', Giorn. Stor. Lett. It. 44 (1904) 679 and 783.

mogliere l'ha venduto sette, dove tu non me ne davi altro che cinque⁷⁾. ('Good man, I wish thee Godspeed; for, as thou hearest, my wife has sold the tun for seven gigliats, whereas thou gavest me only five.')

One can hardly imagine that the purchaser – even as 'buono uom' – would have been put off without some protest at the breach of contract. Inconsistencies of this kind are uncharacteristic of Boccaccio's narrative art, and the excuses made for him here are quite unconvincing⁸⁾. It seems that he was induced by a misinterpretation of the Latin *adest* to introduce a superfluous character⁹⁾.

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7) I quote from V. Branca, Giovanni Boccaccio. Il Decameron (Florence 1965), p. 787.

8) L. Di Franca who compares the two stories (op. cit. pp. 3–12) takes a different view of Boccaccio's version: 'Anche qui vediamo dei miglioramenti e maggiore sviluppo nell'azione. Di nuovo, abbiamo il licenziamento del compratore del doglio, che in Apuleio doveva ancor venire.' (p. 11). He equates too uncritically a higher quantity with a better quality of the text.

9) Surprisingly enough, we encounter a similar lapsus in Vallette's translation: he renders *adest* in the present tense without considering the incongruity (op. cit. pp. 67–8 'Je l'ai vendue six deniers, et voici le client qui vient en payer le prix et emporter son acquisition.').