

pagan mysteries, and also with some of Shakespeare's plots. Of particular significance is that on her husband's grave Charitë erects an image of the god Dionysus, endowed with her husband's features. Tlepolemus, a savior like Dionysus, is torn by a wild beast as Dionysus was by the Bacchanals. This death of the savior is occasioned by a rival whose name means "rashness," or the impiety that comes from presumption and envy. This gives the opportunity for a noble, martyr's death, in a love that transcends the grave, for Charitë, whose name signifies hope and love. This episode shows the close parallels that lie between certain pagan Mystery cults and the Christian interpretation of the significance of Jesus, who is an historical embodiment of pagan spiritual insights as much as a fulfillment of the Old Testament Jewish prophetic tradition.

The Trials of the Ass

In parallel to these events, the ass's stay at the stud farm is not a happy one. First he is shunned and persecuted by the horses, who look down upon him as inferior to themselves. And in defiance of express orders for his honorable treatment, the steward's evil wife sets him to work slaving at a mill. He is also cruelly overworked and tortured by a sadistic boy. The theme of evil wife and mill turning appear more than once in the narrative. The evil wife is the adverse side of womanhood, and a distorted aspect of Isis, invoked by Lucius' underhand means and motives in his approach to her Mysteries.

The mill is an interesting symbol in that it represents harnessed power. It can be beneficent in its technological results or a form of slavery. The symbol of the swastika derives from it, being the plan view of a mill spindle driven by four beasts via transverse poles.

Just as the evil wife, the nagging shrew, is the adverse side of the goddess, so the sadistic boy is the adverse side of the divine miraculous child. Poor Lucius certainly reaps as he has sown in his impious approach to the Mysteries.

This is the nadir of his treatment. Having been well punished by the circumstances evoked by his own attitude (the true operation of karma) his sufferings are brought to an end by a she-bear killing the sadistic boy. The she-bear is another emblem of the goddess Isis, and signifies her intervention. This is in the nick of time for, as a result of the boy's falsely accusing him of trying to molest little girls, plans were afoot to castrate the ass. Even so, he suffers a cruel beating from the boy's avenging mother, who blames him for her son's death.