

*LECTORES IN FABULA:*  
*APULEIUS' METAMORPHOSES*  
BETWEEN PLEASURE AND INSTRUCTION.

The two sections of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* that cause the greatest puzzlement in modern readers are its beginning and its end, both of which seem to many to be somehow at odds with the rest of the novel. The recent publication of *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' Metamorphoses*<sup>1</sup> documents a great number of uncertainties that characterize modern interpretations of the prologue. Even such a basic question as 'Who is the speaker of the prologue?' remains a matter of debate: is it the author<sup>2</sup>, the main character<sup>3</sup>, a bizarre combination of both<sup>4</sup>, a *prologus* as in some of Plautus' plays<sup>5</sup>, or, ultimately, the book itself<sup>6</sup>?

Book XI is notoriously also one of the major stumbling blocks for modern readers. The overwhelming majority of modern interpretations of Apuleius' novel are, in one way or another, predicated upon the meaning attributed to its final book. The fact that the novel's protagonist at the end of his comic adventures is assisted by the goddess Isis in regaining his human shape and, as a result, becomes an ardent adept of her religion has been a matter of wide-ranging disagreement among classical scholars. Some regard the inconsistency that ensues from the radical change of tenor as aesthetically unsatisfactory and see in it the most blatant manifestation of Apuleius' supposed habitual carelessness<sup>7</sup>. Many others, however, share a common tendency to harmonize what at first glance appears to be completely irreconcilable. This harmonization can obviously proceed in two directions: either

<sup>1</sup> A. Kahane – A. Laird (eds), *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, Oxford, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> H. Riefstahl, *Der Roman des Apuleius*, Frankfurt 1938, 22; M.J. Edwards, *The Proem to Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, "Hermes" 121, 1993, 375-377.

<sup>3</sup> K. Bürger, *Zu Apuleius*, "Hermes" 23, 1888, 489-498.

<sup>4</sup> C. Harrauer – F. Römer, *Beobachtungen zum Metamorphosenprolog des Apuleius*, "Mnemosyne" 38, 1985, 353-372; M. Korenjak, *Eine Bemerkung zum Metamorphosenprolog des Apuleius*, "RhM" 140, 1997, 328-332.

<sup>5</sup> W.S. Smith, *The Narrative Voice in Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, "TAPhA" 103, 1972, 513-534; see also J.J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' Golden Ass*, Berkeley 1985, 200-203.

<sup>6</sup> S.J. Harrison, *The Speaking Book: The Prologue to Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, "CQ" 40, 1990, 507-13.

<sup>7</sup> B.E. Perry, *The Literary Art of Apuleius in the Metamorphoses*, "TAPhA" 54, 1923, 196-227; cf. R. Heine, *Picaresque novel versus allegory*, in: B.L. Hijmans Jr. – R.Th. van der Paardt (eds), *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass*, Groningen 1978, 25-42.

backwards, extending the postulated religious message of the final book to the preceding sections, which, in some extreme cases, transforms the *Metamorphoses* into a “Mysterienroman” or “roman initiatique”<sup>8</sup>, or forwards, pointing to the fact that Book XI contains comic elements analogous to those in the first ten books<sup>9</sup>.

Both of these extreme solutions strive to demonstrate the essential unity of the work; however, they both seem to achieve this unity at too high a price by sacrificing some of the novel's exuberant polyphony. A way out of this interpretive impasse has been attempted by J.J. Winkler in his narratological study of the *Metamorphoses*. According to Winkler's reading, the novel emerges as “a philosophical comedy about religious knowledge”<sup>10</sup>, whose recurrent feature, from the prologue through Book XI, he sees in ambiguity and ‘non-authorization of meaning’. Winkler ingeniously elucidates the narrative complexity of the Apuleian novel and thus saves it from the oversimplification that many other readings inadvertently succumb to. One of the most serious drawbacks of his interpretation, however, is the fact that he does not adduce any parallels to the narratological tricks that he detects in Apuleius, which creates the impression that we are dealing with a completely unprecedented aesthetic phenomenon.

While on the whole subscribing to Winkler's view that the *Metamorphoses* is a self-consciously ambiguous text, I would like to show how attention to intertextual links can enrich our understanding of the text. I am going to use the term ‘intertextuality’ in a broader sense than is usually done in Latin studies, where attention is always focused on verbal correspondences that can trigger in the reader a recollection of a particular passage that the text consciously or unconsciously alludes to<sup>11</sup>. I would claim that larger conceptual or structural patterns can be also used in a similar way to create an allusion<sup>12</sup>. These – more abstract – intertextual links refer not to a particular

<sup>8</sup> R. Merkelbach, *Roman und Mysterium in der Antike*, Munich 1962; N. Fick-Michel, *Art et Mystique dans les Métamorphoses d'Apulée*, Paris 1991.

<sup>9</sup> S.J. Harrison, *Apuleius the Latin Sophist*, Oxford 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Winkler (see note 5) 124.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. L. Edmunds, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Roman Poetry*, Baltimore-London 2001, 134: “The study of intertextuality is the study of a certain kind of relation between texts: One text quotes another or others. [...] Quotation, of whatever length, can be either exact or inexact. [...] But none of these means of quotation is possible without the repetition of words”.

<sup>12</sup> G. Tissol (*The Face of Nature: Wit, Narrative, and Cosmic Origins in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Princeton 1997 at 131) makes a similar claim concerning style: “Though the term ‘allusion’ is usually used in discussion of specific expressions and collocations of words that link a later to an earlier work in the reader's awareness, more general stylistic features are at least as likely to establish such a link”.

turn of phrase but rather to a set of ideas or a mode of composition exemplified by another text or set of texts, and a recognition of this kind of correspondences can often contribute more to the reader's understanding of the intention of the text than a similarity of wording.

In discussing the beginning and the end of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, I would like to single out two links of this kind. I will start by concentrating on the prologue. Then I will show how one of the conceptual allusions that I claim to see in it functions in the context of the novel's closure. Finally, I will look at Book XI as alluding to yet another text at the structural level. What I hope will emerge from my analysis is not the, or a, meaning of the novel but rather a somewhat clearer understanding of how the novel functions and why it elicits such a variety of conflicting responses from its readers.

2. At the moment when the reader picks up a papyrus roll containing Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, there is only a bare minimum of information available to him about the author: 1) that he is a Latin writer (Greeks notoriously did not write in Latin at that time<sup>13</sup>); 2) if we are to assume that the author's name was mentioned in the title as *Apuleius Madaurensis*, that he is a native of Madaurus in North Africa. This sparse information is, however, quite sufficient to distinguish the author from the prologue speaker, who describes himself as a Greek who came to Rome as an adult, where he learnt Latin with great difficulty; thus, the prologue speaker betrays himself as a fictional character. The overly ornate Latin style and the exceptional linguistic self-consciousness of the few preceding sentences clearly contradict the speaker's modest statement concerning his imperfect command of Latin and seem to further underscore his fictionality.

The prologue speaker is aware of the fact that he is writing a book. He does not mention that he is going to tell his own life story. Instead, he draws attention to the overt fictionality of the account to follow. In the first sentence he says that he is going to intertwine various stories (*varias fabulas*) in the Milesian fashion. At the end of the prologue he announces a *fabulam Graecanicam*. In the Latin rhetorical vocabulary *fabula* is a technical term that, in contrast to *historia* and *argumentum*, means a purely fictional account<sup>14</sup>. Milesian tales – a form of sensational popular literature dealing primarily with

<sup>13</sup> G. Sandy, *The Greek World of Apuleius: Apuleius and the Second Sophistic*, Leiden 1997, 48-49.

<sup>14</sup> *Rhet. Her.* 1.13; *Cic. inv.* 1.27; *Quint. inst.* 2.4.2; *Sext. Emp. adv. Math.* 1.252 and 1.263-4.

erotic topics – could be regarded as fictional stories ‘par excellence’<sup>15</sup>. The emphasis on ‘metamorphoses’ both in the title and in the prologue further intensifies the impression of the purely fictional nature of the subsequent account since the theme of transformation was generally regarded as one of the most characteristic examples of self-evident fiction<sup>16</sup>. Besides, the speaker explicitly states that the only goal of his tales is to entertain the reader (*aurēs benivolās permulceam; lector, intende: laetaberis*).

So, the situation seems in a way to be quite similar to the prologue of Lucian’s *Verae Historiae*, which announces that the book will contain a series of entertaining lies (=fictions)<sup>17</sup>. The major difference is, however, that Apuleius does not state this directly and still, in a significantly more subtle roundabout way, achieves the same effect. Furthermore, unlike in Lucian, where the prologue speaker is indistinguishable from the author (in 2.28 the narrator is even referred to as Lucian), the prologue speaker in Apuleius is a fictional character. Thus, the narrative of the *Metamorphoses* consists of entertaining lies told by a person who is himself invented by the author. What we seem to be dealing with is a peculiar combination of overt fictionality (as in Lucian) and a first-person narrative related by a fictional protagonist (as, for instance, in Petronius) – a combination that appears to be *per se* conducive to playful indeterminacy and a high degree of narrative irony in that it allows jokes not only at the expense of the protagonist but also at the expense of the narrator and his style.

What do we learn about the narrator from the prologue before he starts telling his fictions? The information that he provides about himself seems to be highly ambiguous, to say the least: *Hymettos Attica et Isthmos Ephyrea et Taenaros Spartiaca, glebae felices aeternum libris felicioribus conditae, mea vetus prosapia est*. It has often been observed that it is hardly conceivable that one and the same person could have come from three different cities. Besides, the word *prosapia*, which normally means ancestry or lineage (see entries in *OLD* and *ThLL*), cannot properly refer to a list of cities. Of course, one can understand this sentence simply as an elaborate way of saying “I come from Greece” or, somewhat more specifically, “My ancestors of old (*vetus prosapia*) come from Athens, Corinth, and Sparta”. However, a distinctly literary flavor of this description and an overt emphasis on these cities’

<sup>15</sup> E. Lefèvre, *Studien zur Struktur der ‘Milesischen’ Novelle bei Petron und Apuleius*, Stuttgart 1997.

<sup>16</sup> A. Bitel, *Fiction and History in Apuleius’ Milesian Prologue*, in: Kahane–Laird (see note 1) 137–151.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Laird, *Fiction, Bewitchment, and Story Worlds: The Implications of Claims to Truth in Apuleius*, in: Ch. Gill – T.P. Wiseman (eds), *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, Austin 1993, 157.

connections with literature creates the impression that the speaker points to his literary pedigree rather than to his genealogy<sup>18</sup>: Hymettus evokes associations with the Attic honey and thus with sweetness or pleasantness as a characteristic of a literary work<sup>19</sup>, the Isthmus, qualified by the rare and exclusively poetic adjective *Ephyrea*, may trigger a great profusion of literary associations from Homer to Statius<sup>20</sup>, and *Taenarus* conjures up innumerable poetic references to the underworld<sup>21</sup>. Besides, the emphasis on the fact that all these locations are forever enclosed in books and that these books are even more fertile than the locations themselves makes it very tempting to surmise that Athens, Corinth, and Sparta can be regarded as the speaker's origin, or rather as his intellectual ancestry, *only* insofar as they serve as a subject matter of literary works. Thus, what at first glance appears to be just a convoluted reference to the geography of Greece may be also regarded as a description of a purely literary landscape, whereas the prologue speaker emerges not only as a fictional character but also as a pure narrating voice inhabiting a world of books. It is there (*ibi*) – in these Greek books – that he learned the Attic tongue in his childhood – or rather earned it as pay (or deserved as a prize?) as if for military service (*linguam Attidem primis pueritiae stipendiis merui*). For the image of the narrator as a fictional human being this may imply a proudly accomplished formal school training in Greek letters, whereas the narrator as a literary voice becomes closely connected with Greek poetry or poetry on Greek themes, which the three Greek cities emblematically represent.

References to certain locations used metonymically to signify intellectual activities are not unheard-of in Latin literature. It is, however, the mythological abodes of the Muses (Helicon, Parnassus, Castalia, etc.) that are typically used this way with regard to poetry<sup>22</sup>. Sometimes Helicon is juxtaposed with the Roman forum to denote the opposition between the (noble but materially unrewarding) pursuit of poetry and the (hectic but lucrative) career of a forensic orator<sup>23</sup>. The fact that in the next sentence of the prologue the speaker explicitly refers to the Roman forum makes one feel that he deliberately transforms the familiar topos by replacing Mount Helicon with three other local-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. K. Clarke, *Prologue and Provenance: Quis ille? or Unde ille?*, in: Kahane–Laird (see note 1) 101–110.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Mart. 11.42.3.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. D. Innes, *Why Isthmos Ephyrea?*, in: Kahane–Laird (see note 1) 111–119.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Verg. *G.* 4.467; Hor. *c.* 1.34.10; Ov. *Met.* 10.13; Sen. *Her. F.* 587; Stat. *Theb.* 1.96.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Hor. *epist.* 2.1.218; Pers. *prol.* 1–4.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Petron. 118; Mart. 1.76.9 and 7.63.12.

ities no less rich in poetic associations<sup>24</sup>.

The speaker describes himself as coming to Rome as a stranger to the (literary) pursuits of the Roman citizens (*mox in urbe Latia advena studiorum Quiritium*) where he started learning Latin and polished it (*indigenam sermonem aggressus excolui*). A reference to the literary pursuits of the Roman citizens seems to imply that what he learnt was not simply the Latin language but rather the language of Roman literature. The mention of *Quirites* – the word used “especially in solemn addresses and appeals” (*OLD*) – evokes political and forensic oratory, which pursues exclusively practical and utilitarian goals opposed to the prologue-speaker’s intention to devote himself to giving pleasure. So, it is not at all surprising that it is precisely this part of the Roman literary culture from which the narrator continues to dissociate himself: we may detect a certain amount of pride in his assertion that he familiarized himself with the Latin language and literature all by himself (*nullo magistro praeunte*); that is to say, he did not go through the Roman rhetorical school system, whose aim was to train practically oriented forensic orators; therefore he is still an inexperienced speaker of the language of the forum (*exotici ac forensis sermonis rudis locutor*), which involved a complex set of rules and restrictions pertaining to all levels of literary composition. Thus, in his capacity as a storyteller, as a narrating voice, the narrator can afford a license (*en ecce praefamur veniam*), unthinkable for a properly educated Roman, to commit offence (*siquid... offendero*) against literary propriety taught at school. This is, in part, illustrated in his comparison of his style and compositional technique to the switch-back technique of a circus rider (*desultoriae scientiae stilus*), which he links with his change of language but which may also refer to the haphazard progression of both the prologue and the subsequent narrative<sup>25</sup>.

So, what can we say about the prologue speaker now? To sum up: He is a fictional character created by the author and by no means identical with the

<sup>24</sup> Hymettos is also sometimes used metonymically in opposition to Rome (Cic. *Q. fr.* 2.9.3) and is at least once explicitly associated with Helicon (Val. Max. 1.6.3).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Harrauer-Römer (see note 4) 360-361: “Apuleius gibt mit *ures tuas benivolas lepido susurro permulceam* den Hörer-(Leser-)Kreis an, den er mit seinem Werk ansprechen will; es ist eben jener, den Quintilian im Kapitel über den Vortrag ablehnt: *sunt quidam, qui secundum alia vitae vitia etiam hac audiendi, quod aures mulceat, voluptate ducantur* (11.3.60). Er stellt schon hier sein Werk dem *sermo forensis* – wie gegen Ende des Prologs im Bescheidenheitstopos (er nennt sich dort selbst *locutor*) und der folgenden Genos-Aussage deutlich formuliert wird – gegenüber, der nach Quintilian im Gegensatz zur Bühne so geartet sein muß: *aliud oratio sapit nec vult nimium esse condita... quare non immerito reprehenditur pronuntiatio vultuosa et gesticulationibus molesta et vocis mutationibus resultans* (11.3.183). Mit Anspielung darauf durch *vocis immutatio desultoriae scientiae stilo... respondet* setzt Apuleius die Metamorphosen klar vom Rhetorikideal eines Quintilian ab”.

author. His only function is to be a storyteller, a narrator of what he himself presents as fiction and what, thus becomes, from the author's viewpoint, or from ours, a fiction of second degree. The way he characterizes himself, on the one hand, would perfectly suit a human being: we can easily imagine a rather comic character – an educated, somewhat decadent *Graeculus*, whose hedonistic values are radically opposed to the traditional Roman ideal of *decorum*, who, surprisingly enough, sets out to write a rather unusual book in Latin. At the same time, it is quite curious that his only human quality he deems worthy of mentioning is speech: he describes himself exclusively as a voice acquiring language and literary culture and producing a certain kind of literature. Outside of his relation to different kinds of literary discourse, he simply does not exist. Thus, the narrator's function is not only to increase the degree of fictionality of the subsequent narrative but also to embody a particular set of aesthetic principles. This realization, however, should *by no means* cancel the speaker's identity as a fictional human being and turn him, for instance, into a speaking book, as Harrison has suggested<sup>26</sup>.

What kind of a narrator is he? Or, in other words, how are we to define the aesthetics ensuing from the prologue? To begin with, the notion of unity in this aesthetics is definitely not at the top of the priority list. The speaker's overt emphasis on limitless variety (*varias fabulas*) and on the lack of any sense of direction (*desultoria scientia*) evokes the ancient literary-critical and rhetorical notion of *varietas-ποικιλία*. On the one hand, it was regarded as a positive quality indispensable in any literary work but, on the other, its excess, unbalanced by any inclination to unity, was generally not approved of in classical poetics. This indeed seems to suggest a poetics radically opposed to the Aristotelian and Horatian notion of *decorum* conceiving of a properly executed literary work as *simplex et unum*<sup>27</sup>.

The second important point, closely related to the first one, is that this aesthetics is uncompromisingly hedonistic: the prologue does not promise the reader anything but pleasure. Such a strong programmatic emphasis suggests that the text may be asserting itself against a more 'serious' attitude to literature. A persistent stress on amusement as the sole goal of a piece of literature appears to contrast not only with the practical forensic oratory explicitly alluded to in the text but also with the discussion about the function of literature essential to much of – philosophically inspired – ancient literary theory. With the notable exception of a few marginal cases (e.g. Gorgias, Δίσσοι

<sup>26</sup> Harrison, *The Speaking Book* (see note 6).

<sup>27</sup> C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: The 'Ars Poetica'*, Cambridge 1971, 95; A.N. Cizek, *Imitatio et Tractatio: Die literarisch-rhetorischen Grundlagen der Nachahmung in Antike und Mittelalter*, Tübingen 1994, 94-107.

λόγοι, and Philodemus), the prevailing classical views on literature (e.g. Plato, the Stoics, Horace) in various ways put a strong accent either on usefulness – however broadly conceived – or on didacticism<sup>28</sup>. In a way, the fact that the prologue does not contain any perceptible hint at either didactic qualities or usefulness of the text makes its speaker sound almost like a convinced anti-philosopher<sup>29</sup>.

Thus one could assume that the prologue represents a fairly consistent aesthetic stance implicitly defined in opposition to the utilitarian notion of literature advanced by some philosophical schools. However, the first sentence that follows the prologue proper calls even this assumption into question.

3. By the time we reach the first sentence of the announced *fabula Graecanica* and see that it is a first-person statement (*Thessaliam ex negotio petebam*) we have already learnt enough from the prologue to realize that the narrator, who has so far been speaking in his own voice, is now pretending to be a character in a fictional story. At the same time, the fact that there is no perceptible change of identity of the speaking 'I' explicitly marked in the text makes the transition from the prologue to the narrative very smooth and blurs the boundary between the two levels of fiction. The curious parenthesis that interrupts the flow of the sentence greatly intensifies this impression. *Thessaliam – nam et illic originis maternae nostrae fundamenta a Plutarcho illo inclito ac mox Sexto philosopho nepote prodita gloriam nobis faciunt – eam Thessaliam ex negotio petebam*. Whom does this genealogical aside refer to, the character in the narrator's fiction or the narrator himself<sup>30</sup>?

My answer to this question would be: to both, but in different ways. On the one hand, we are reminded later that the character Lucius is literally related to Plutarch on the maternal side (2.3); on the other, the parenthesis clearly refers back to the prologue and, strictly speaking, belongs to it conceptually. I would like to put particular emphasis on the fact that the *et* linking the speaker's origin to Thessaly and introducing the mention of Plutarch and Sextus undoubtedly connects this sentence to the description of the prologue speaker's *prosapia*. Since both Plutarch and Sextus are prominent literary figures and since their names are inserted into the literary landscape of the

<sup>28</sup> K. Adam, *Docere–delectare–movere. Zur poetischen und rhetorischen Theorie über Aufgaben der Literatur*, Kiel 1971; D. Russell, *Criticism in Antiquity*, London 1981.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Michael B. Trapp, *On Tickling the Ears: Apuleius' Prologue and the Anxieties of Philosophers*, in: Kahane–Laird (see note 1) 39–46.

<sup>30</sup> For other attempts to deal with Plutarch and Sextus, see H. van Thiel, *Der Eselsroman*, vol. 1 (*Untersuchungen*), Munich 1971, 32–35; A. Scobie, *Apuleius. Metamorphoses I: A Commentary*, Meisenheim am Glan 1975, *ad loc.*; Laird (see note 17) 159.



prologue, it is very tempting to investigate what impact their mention has on the meaning of the prologue as a whole.

To begin with, from this perspective Thessaly should obviously also be regarded as an element in the literary geography of the prologue, on a par with Athens, Corinth, Sparta, and Rome. Thus, the reference here is to Thessaly not only as a particular geographical space but also – and much more importantly – as an imaginary locale of myth, legend, and literature. As such, Thessaly is the first Greek land where Medea practiced her magical arts and, by extension, the land of witches ‘par excellence’<sup>31</sup>. It is almost invariably true that whenever Thessaly is mentioned in a context that is neither historical nor mythological, it is in conjunction with witchcraft<sup>32</sup>. Besides, stories about Thessalian sorcery notoriously belonged to superstitious beliefs unworthy of a philosophical-minded person<sup>33</sup>.

But why are Plutarch and his nephew philosopher Sextus placed in Thessaly, with which they, as historical figures, have no clear connections? Both of them are known to stem from Boeotia, with which they are invariably associated by all known literary sources. Thus, one can see the juxtaposition of Plutarch and Sextus with Thessaly as a way of economically compressing two unrelated literary references into one sentence, which at the same time indirectly characterizes the narrator as a blatantly unreliable source of information and once again underlines the self-evident fictionality of his account. At the same time, it would be hard to overlook a potentially humorous overtone in the fact that the moralist Plutarch and his nephew Sextus, whom Marcus Aurelius described almost as a paragon of Stoic wisdom<sup>34</sup>,

<sup>31</sup> Cf. G. Bowersock, *Zur Geschichte des römischen Thessaliens*, “RhM” 108, 1965, 277–289 at 278: “Die meisten Römer des Prinzipats kannten Thessalien hauptsächlich als einen Ort von Magie und dämonischen Frauen. Von dem tatsächlichen Thessalien hatten sie nur geringe Ahnung”.

<sup>32</sup> O. Phillips, *The witches’ Thessaly*, in: P. Mirecki – M. Meyer (eds), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, Leiden 2002, 378–385, esp. 382: “On occasion the Roman poets simply use ‘Thessalian’ as a synonym for ‘magical’”.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., Hor. *epist.* 2.2.205–209

*non es avarus: abi. quid? cetera iam simul isto  
cum vitio fugere? caret tibi pectus inani  
ambitione? caret mortis formidine et ira?  
somnia, terrores magicos, miracula, sagas,  
nocturnos lemures portentaque Thessala rides?*

<sup>34</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 1.9. Both *RE* and *OCD* refer to Sextus as a Platonist, apparently based on the fact that he was Plutarch’s nephew. Most of the sources, however, which point to his philosophical affiliation at all, describe him rather as a Stoic. See A.S.L. Farquharson, *The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus: Edited with Translation and Commentary*, Oxford 1968, *ad loc.*

are implicitly linked here to what from their own philosophical viewpoint would probably be severely reprehended as a pure superstitious fantasy.

Whatever Plutarch's and Sextus' connection to Thessaly may be, a reference to them clearly presupposes some knowledge of their literary personalities on the part of the implied reader. Since they both could be viewed, as I suggested, within the literary landscape of the prologue, one can quite plausibly assume that it is a part of the text's intention to evoke their views on literature. Since Sextus' writings do not survive, very little can be securely inferred about his attitude to literature. All we know about his career is that Marcus Aurelius attended his lectures in Rome, that he was a Stoic philosopher, and that among his writings there were some books of ἠθικά<sup>35</sup>. It is quite possible that ethical treatises by this I/II cent. AD Stoic did not significantly differ in spirit from the Stoicism of Seneca, Epictetus, and his own student Marcus Aurelius, who were all much more concerned with the application of moral philosophy to the solution of real-life problems than with abstract reasoning. As far as literature is concerned, all three of them displayed a distinctly moralistic attitude to it, using examples from narrative poetry as moral paradigms of virtues and vices<sup>36</sup>; a similar attitude is displayed by the unknown Stoic, against whom Philodemus argues in *On Poems*<sup>37</sup>. So, it is not unlikely that Sextus' attitude to fictional poetry was akin to that of other Stoics. Whereas for Sextus it is just a plausible assumption, Plutarch, both in the *Vitae* and in the *Moralia*, manifestly uses quotations from fictional poetry for moralistic purposes in a manner not dissimilar from that of the Stoics<sup>38</sup>. Thus, I would like to venture a preliminary hypothesis that the mention of Plutarch and Sextus is primarily meant to trigger in the reader an association with a moralistic use of literary texts.

Accidentally, Plutarch happens to be not only a moralist but also the author of a treatise dedicated exclusively to moralistic interpretation of literature, namely *De audiendis poetis* (Πῶς δεῖ τὸν νέον ποιημάτων ἀκούειν), a work in which he succinctly spells out the principles that he and other moralists tacitly rely on elsewhere<sup>39</sup>. Since this treatise is the only surviving text

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Suidas, s.v. Σέξτος; *Hist. Aug., M. Ant. Phil.* 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ph. de Lacy, *Stoic Views of Poetry*, "AJPh" 69, 1948, 241-271; R.B. Rutherford, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. A Study*, Oxford 1989, 95.

<sup>37</sup> E. Asmis, *Epicurean Poetics*, in: D. Obbink (ed.), *Philodemus and Poetry: Poetic Theory and Practice in Lucretius, Philodemus, and Horace*, Oxford 1995, 15-34; ead., *Philodemus on Censorship, Moral Utility, and Formalism in Poetry*, *ibid.* 148-177.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. de Lacy (see note 36); D. Babut, *Plutarque et le Stoïcisme*, Paris 1969, 88-93; cf. D.A. Russell, *Plutarch*, London 1973, 42-62 and 84-99.

<sup>39</sup> E. Valgiglio, *Plutarco: De audiendis poetis*, Introduzione, testo, commento, traduzione, Turin 1973; R. Flacelière – J. Irigoin (eds), *Plutarque. Oeuvres Morales*, vol. I.1., Paris

providing a theoretical background for the ancient practice of moralistic reading of poetry in general<sup>40</sup>, a brief analysis of it seems to me to be the most economic and convenient way to approach this topic.

*De audiendis poetis* is an attempt to salvage narrative poetry (which we can equate with fiction in general) from a total ban imposed on it by Plato in the *Republic*. Plutarch would not contest Plato's view that reading fiction entails a great danger for the young reader. However he was writing not for the ideal state but for real life, and in real life various forms of narrative poetry were an integral part of the standard school curriculum. It would obviously have been utterly unrealistic to prohibit students from reading fiction. Instead, one could try to put this inevitable evil to some proper use.

Since Plutarch's main concern is with education in accordance with philosophical ethics, he has to develop a program of how to make poetry innocuous to the young people preparing to study philosophy. Plutarch admits that poetry's chief purpose is pleasure, not edification: as a matter of fact, poetry is full of falsehoods blatantly contradicting philosophical doctrines (*aud. poet.* 17A). He is also aware of the fact that readers' attitude to poetry can significantly vary: there are those who are fascinated by the story (φιλόμυθοι), those who admire the style (φιλόλογοι) – in other words, those who are receptive to different kinds of pleasure offered by narrative fiction – and, finally, those who read not for the sake of entertainment but in order to acquire a correct understanding of the morals (μὴ παιγνίας ἀλλὰ παιδείας ἔνεκα – the φιλότιμοι, or the φιλόκαλοι), and it is the last group that Plutarch addresses in his treatise<sup>41</sup>. Overindulgence in pleasure is

1987, 67-81.

<sup>40</sup> Babut (see note 38): 94 cites a few titles of early Stoic works that are curiously similar to that of Plutarch's treatise and, thus, could have served him as models: e.g., Chrysippus, *Περὶ τοῦ πῶς δεῖ τῶν ποιημάτων ἀκούειν*, and Zeno, *Περὶ ποιητικῆς ἀκροάσεως*. See also K. Ziegler, *Plutarchos von Chaironeia*, Stuttgart 1949, 170, who also mentions Chrysippus, "auf dessen Schrift *Περὶ τοῦ πῶς δεῖ τῶν ποιημάτων ἀκούειν* Plutarch mit der Betitelung seiner Schrift für jeden kundigen Leser unverkennbar Bezug nimmt".

<sup>41</sup> Plut. *De audiendis poetis* 30C-D: ἐπεὶ δ' ὥσπερ ἐν ταῖς νομαῖς ἡ μὲν μέλιττα διώκει τὸ ἄνθος, ἡ δ' αἶψ τὸν θαλλόν, ἡ δ' ὕς τὴν ρίζαν, ἅλλα δὲ ζῶα τὸ σπέρμα καὶ τὸν καρπὸν, οὕτως ἐν ταῖς ἀναγνώσεσι τῶν ποιημάτων ὁ μὲν ἀπανθίζεται τὴν ἱστορίαν, ὁ δ' ἐμφύεται τῷ κάλλει καὶ τῇ κατασκευῇ τῶν ὀνομάτων [...]. οἱ δὲ τῶν πρὸς τὸ ἥθος εἰρημένων ὠφελίμως ἔχονται, πρὸς οὓς δὴ νῦν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος ἐστίν, ὑπομνήσκωμεν αὐτοὺς ὅτι δεινόν ἐστι τὸν μὲν φιλόμυθον μὴ λανθάνειν τὰ καινῶς ἱστορούμενα καὶ περιττῶς, μηδὲ τὸν φιλόλογον ἐκφεύγειν τὰ καθαρῶς πεφρασμένα καὶ ῥητορικῶς, τὸν δὲ φιλότιμον καὶ φιλόκαλον καὶ μὴ παιγνίας ἀλλὰ παιδείας ἔνεκα ποιημάτων ἀπτόμενον ἀργῶς καὶ ἀμελῶς ἀκούειν τῶν πρὸς ἀνδρείαν ἢ σωφροσύνην ἢ δικαιοσύνην ἀναπεφωνημένων...

obviously one of the first things that serious-minded future students of philosophy should learn how to avoid. The solution that Plutarch offers to such students is that they should read poetry only under careful supervision by a teacher sufficiently versed in philosophy, who can use fictional stories as a series of instructive examples of commendable or reprehensible behavior (*aud. poet.* 15F-16A).

Due to its mimetic nature, poetry imitates both good and bad people and deeds. However it is of utmost importance to bear in mind that poets do not necessarily commend the immorality they portray (*aud. poet.* 25B). More importantly, instead of being bewitched by fictions and falling under the spell of the great heroes of the past, the reader should always be ready not only to approve of their deeds but also to cry out 'wrong!' or 'shameless!' whenever he encounters a morally suspect statement or episode (*aud. poet.* 26B: ἐπιφωνεῖν μηδὲν ἦττον τοῦ "ὀρθῶς" καὶ "πρεπόντως" τὸ "οὐκ ὀρθῶς" καὶ "οὐ προσηκόντως").

Although it is not concerned with wisdom, poetry contains kernels of truth hidden under the veil of the fictitious actions it represents (*aud. poet.* 28D-E). It is the teacher's task to purify the truth from the fictional or theatrical element and to make it conspicuous to the student by paying close attention to nuances of wording conveying the poet's attitude. If this method does not succeed in reducing a fictional representation to an acceptable moral statement, one should not hesitate to reject the poet's pronouncements by citing counter-examples from his own works or from other sources (*aud. poet.* 21D). One should also by no means refrain from correcting the most pernicious assertions that one encounters in narrative poetry by rewriting them in accordance with what is useful from the viewpoint of moral philosophy. Besides, if one finds in poetry an aphoristic statement agreeing with a certain philosophical truth, one is taught to extract it from its original context and to apply it to a wide range of similar situations. By learning these reading skills, the student is expected to sharpen his moral sense and to turn the potentially harmful experience into an exercise in applied ethics. Thus, for a φιλόκαλος, fictional literature as such loses its significance and becomes a preliminary stage to the study of philosophy. The knowledge of moral values acquired through literature gently inures the student to numerous counter-intuitive philosophical statements he is to encounter in his subsequent studies, which otherwise could scare him away from the noble pursuit of truth (*aud. poet.* 36D-E).

One of the most important points that Plutarch makes in this treatise (and it seems to be shared by other practitioners of moralistic literary criticism in

antiquity<sup>42</sup>) is that the ultimate outcome of the reading experience – the two opposite poles being pleasure and instruction – is dependent upon the initial predisposition of the reader: the reader has to be either prone to seeking pleasure (φιλόμυθος, φιλόλογος) or keen on obtaining moral instruction (φιλότιμος, φιλόκαλος) prior to the act of reading. Fiction, whose primary aim is always to entertain, can be morally instructive only insofar as it is read by a reader willing to be instructed.

What consequences does it have for the reader if we allow for this view on narrative fiction to be heard in the mention of Plutarch and Sextus in Apuleius? To begin with, serious doubt is cast on the unequivocally hedonistic aesthetics that has crystallized out of the reading of the prologue proper. A deep split becomes apparent in the narrator's image. Introduction of two moral philosophers into his otherwise purely hedonistic and patently anti-philosophical literary pedigree inevitably adds almost a schizophrenic touch to the image of the narrator, who, on top of everything else, appears to be blissfully unaware of his implicit self-contradiction, which, as a result, remains unresolved in the text. In other words, the gap that the author leaves here for the reader to fill is unusually spacious and, in a way, prefigures other similar interpretive gaps in the novel. At this point, the implied reader is, I think, encouraged by the text just to recognize the contradiction and eventually to come to terms with the image of the unreliable narrator. At the same time, the possibility of some form of a moral lesson should be included into the horizon of the reader's expectations.

Every single element adumbrated in the prologue is, in one way or another, actualized in the novel<sup>43</sup>. What about Plutarch and Sextus? What consequences does the hint at the moralistic attitude to fiction inherent in their mention in the prologue have for the rest of the novel<sup>44</sup>?

<sup>42</sup> Seneca expresses a similar idea in his *Moral Epistles*; compare Plut. *aud. poet.* 30C-D (note 41 above) with Sen. *epist.* 108.29-30: *non est quod mireris ex eadem materia suis quemque studiis apta colligere: in eodem prato bos herbam quaerit, canis leporem, ciconia lacertam. cum Ciceronis librum de re publica prendit hinc philologus, hinc grammaticus, hinc philosophiae deditus, alius alio curam suam mittit.*

<sup>43</sup> Winkler (see note 5) 180-203; cf. also P. James, *From Prologue to Story: Metaphor and Narrative Construction in the Opening of the Metamorphoses*, in: Kahane-Laird (see note 1) 256-266.

<sup>44</sup> Another question that may arise in this connection is, why Apuleius used Plutarch and Sextus to refer to moralistic interpretation of literature, instead of, say, Seneca or Chrysippus? The main reasons for that, I think, are that Plutarch and Sextus were relatives, Greeks, and near-contemporaries of the protagonist, which allowed Apuleius to use them not only as literary markers but also, by connecting them with Lucius' family, as a part of the fictional world that he creates. This kind of ambivalence is quite typical of Apuleius' narrative in general. See Winkler (see note 5), esp. 135-179.

4. I think one can discern a reverberation of the moralistic view on literature behind some of the reactions, both from the protagonist and from other characters, to the fictional tales within the novel. Although one can arguably find quite a number of instances in the novel indirectly reflecting a moralistic attitude to fiction, I would like to concentrate on the two instances of moralistic interpretation of fiction – both of them located towards the end of the novel – that are explicitly spelled out in the text.

The first one occurs at the very end of Book X. Lucius gives a long lascivious description of the pantomime of the judgment of Paris (10.30-32), which gives the impression that he is fully under the spell of its dramatic illusion and that he would not hesitate to follow Paris in awarding the first prize to Venus. However he suddenly interrupts his description with an outburst of righteous anger against the venality of judges (10.33): Why wonder that modern judges are corrupt if corruption is inherent in the primordial judgment initiated by Zeus? He then cites further classic cases of unjust judgment from Greek mythology – Palamedes and Ajax – and his diatribe culminates in a lengthy expostulation on the death of Socrates and praise of Socratic philosophy. The narrator here seems, on the whole, to follow Plutarch's precept to cry out "wrong!" and "shameless!" in response to morally suspect fictions and to draw from them a positive moral lesson applicable to a variety of different situations. What is peculiar about this digression is that both the luscious wantonness of fiction and the stern morality of response originate from the same source – the narrator Lucius, who as usual does not care to reconcile the obvious contradiction.

At first glance, both voices sound equally convincing and the reader is not provided with any unambiguous guidance as to whether one of them possesses a greater validity within the framework of the novel. Thus, the reader is free to identify with either Lucius the hedonist (φιλόμυθος), or Lucius the moralist (φιλόκαλος), or neither (or possibly even both). If the reader happens to find the moralistic voice more congenial, s/he may interpret it as a sign of Lucius' incipient moral progress and will find a justification for this view in Lucius' similar moralistic outbursts earlier in the novel and in his subsequent conversion to Isis in Book XI<sup>45</sup>. However, the reader who is more sensitive to the narratological intricacies and stylistic niceties of the text (φιλόμυθος or φιλόλογος) will probably find that the moral force of the narrator's outburst is significantly weakened by the blatant inconsistency

<sup>45</sup> Cf. M. Zimmerman-de Graaf, *Narrative Judgment and Reader Response in Apuleius' Metamorphoses 10,29-34: The pantomime of the Judgment of Paris*, in: "Groningen Colloquia on the Novel" 5 (1993), 143-161.

both of his perspective and of his tone. This reader will pay closer attention to the narrator's comic fear that his fictional addressee may find his moral austerity out of place and get angry with a 'philosophizing ass' (*sed nequis indignationis meae reprehendat impetum secum sic reputans: 'ecce nunc patiemur philosophantem nobis asinum', rursus, unde decessi, revertar ad fabulam*, 10.33). To this reader, the undeniable comic effect created by the sheer irrelevance of the moralistic interpretation will be greatly enhanced by the fact that the narrator forgets about the double-time perspective essential to any first-person fictional account and presents himself as still an ass at the moment of writing. From this perspective, the paradoxical humor of this confusion will greatly contribute to the impression that the narrator is a "philosophizing ass" not only because he is an ass talking about Socrates but also because the way he philosophizes would rather befit an ass, and, thus, the narrator's attempt to play a φιλόκαλος will turn out to be nothing but a silly, albeit quite amusing, joke. If the reader at this point remembers that, in the narrator's literary pedigree, the moral philosophers Plutarch and Sextus were, quite incongruously, placed within the highly unphilosophical, and for that reason quite subversive, landscape of Thessaly, it may also suggest to him that jokes at the expense of moralistic readers (both intra- and extra-textual) may be a part of the text's intention.

The peculiar quality of this passage is that it participates in two sets of overlapping patterns and thus contains enough clues to sustain both of these mutually exclusive interpretations depending on which clues the reader chooses to regard as more significant: since the narrator does not provide any commentary that would create a link between these two patterns, the text does not seem to privilege directly either one of the two positions it presents. In this episode, the fact that the narrator traces his literary ancestry both to Greek fictional poetry and to a moralistic view on fiction comes to the fore in a most conspicuous way. However, just as in the prologue, the two halves of his lineage do not seem to fuse harmoniously and it is left to the reader either to take sides or to enjoy the paradox.

I think the reader is particularly encouraged to reactivate the Plutarchean background while reading the final book of the novel. In a way, the whole book can be perceived as a kind of appendix to the rest of the novel, which by no means grows out of its complex fictional world but is rather superimposed on it. Just as the narrator in the judgment-of-Paris episode steps outside the fictional illusion of the described performance to deliver a moralistic diatribe, the unexpected solemnity of tone in Book XI clearly sets it apart from the rest of the novel and creates, as it were, an external perspective on the frivolous fictions of the preceding ten books, ideally suited for expressing moralistic views.

The narrator's persistent inconsistency reaches in Book XI a truly monumental scale. Shortly after his ardent anti-religious tirade on the fundamental injustice inherent in the initial compact between men and gods in the judgment of Paris and his comment on the absurdity of the philosophizing ass, the narrator reports that he *suddenly* decided to address the Moon goddess, who turns out to be Isis, and to perform ritual ablutions in accordance with Pythagorean precepts (11.1). Isis appears to Lucius in a dream and promises to help him regain his human shape in return for his becoming a devotee of her religion. Everything happens as she says. On the next day, during the celebration of an Isiac festival, Lucius receives a rose crown from a priest of Isis, eats the roses, and becomes human again. Subsequently, he turns into an ardent worshipper of Isis, undergoes initiations both into her cult and into the cult of Osiris, and eventually becomes an Isiac priest in Rome.

The mention of both Isis and Pythagoras at the very beginning of Book XI creates an atmosphere unmistakably reminiscent of Plutarch's treatise *De Iside et Osiride*, where he allegorically interprets myths and rituals of the Isiac religion from the standpoint of Platonic and Pythagorean philosophy<sup>46</sup>, and I find it hardly coincidental that it is in this context that we encounter the most characteristic specimen of a moralistic interpretation of fiction along the lines of Plutarch's *De audiendis poetis*. It comes from an Isiac priest quite curiously called Mithras<sup>47</sup>. What Mithras interprets from a moralistic viewpoint is not the second-level fiction of an inserted tale but the self-consciously fictional life of the protagonist constituting the primary narrative of the novel. Right after Lucius' retransformation, Mithras delivers a speech congratulating him on his return to humanity and urging him to devote his life to worshiping Isis (11.15).

Mithras presents Lucius' life story as a moralistic fable about an imprudent young man, whose unrestrained curiosity and susceptibility to passion and pleasure led him into the trap of the uncontrollable blind chance (*Fortunae caecitas*), from which only the divine providence of Isis (*Fortuna videns, providentia*) could save him. Now that he has reached the secure haven of the Isiac rites, chance has no power over him anymore. The only way

<sup>46</sup> For connections between Plutarch's *De Iside* and Apuleius, see J.G. Griffiths (ed.), *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, Univ. of Wales Pr. 1970, 49ff; cf. also P.G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel*, Cambridge 1970, 182f.

<sup>47</sup> The name of the Persian god Mithras is by no means a common Greek personal name, and it seems hardly suitable for an Egyptian priest. This incongruity is undoubtedly supposed to produce an ironic effect. There seems to be more to it, however: Plutarch dedicates an entire section of *De Iside* to a discussion of the Persian dualism and the significance of the name Mithras (Plutarch, *De Iside* 369D-E). Thus, in Apuleius it may serve as another indirect reference to Plutarch.



he can remain immune to the enslaving power of Fortune and thus attain freedom is by willingly accepting the yoke of slavery imposed on him by Isis (*quo tamen tutior sis atque munitior, da nomen sanctae huic militiae, cuius non olim sacramento etiam rogabaris, teque iam nunc obsequio religionis nostrae dedica et ministerii iugum subi voluntarium. nam cum coeperis deae servire, tunc magis senties fructum tuae libertatis*, 11.15).

In addition to the inevitable praises of Isis' providential power and a strong emphasis on Lucius' personal salvation through her intervention, the speech contains a few elements that curiously resemble some commonplaces of popular moral philosophy. Mithras interprets the outcome of Lucius' story as a victory of providence over chance, which clearly recalls the Stoic doctrine of *πρόνοια*<sup>48</sup>. The cause of Lucius' downfall is his curiosity, a quality condemned by many moral philosophers, quite notably by Plutarch, among others<sup>49</sup>. His curiosity led him to succumb to *serviles voluptates*, which evokes not only pleasures unworthy of a free man but also slavery to pleasure, universally condemned by all ancient moralists, among them Seneca and Plutarch<sup>50</sup>. His fatal slip could be prevented neither by his high birth nor by his superb education, both of which belong to the Stoic *ἀδιάφορα*<sup>51</sup>. The paradoxical statement that only enslavement to Isis can guarantee Lucius true freedom is reminiscent of the Stoic musings on the relativity of freedom and slavery, and particularly, of Epicurus' assertion, quoted with approval by Seneca, that true freedom is attainable only through enslavement to philosophy<sup>52</sup>.

Thus, Mithras reacts to the fiction of Lucius' life like a Plutarchean φιλόκαλος reprehending or lauding its different episodes depending on whether or not they comply with his preconceived notion of morality and using his story to formulate a convincing moral lesson, which makes sense not only in the context of his proselytizing speech but also in the larger context of

<sup>48</sup> M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa*, Göttingen 1970<sup>4</sup>, 98-101.

<sup>49</sup> Plutarch, *De curiositate*; on curiosity as a pervasive motif in the *Metamorphoses*, see A. Wlosok, *Zur Einheit der Metamorphosen des Apuleius*, "Philologus" 113, 1969, 68-84.

<sup>50</sup> E. g. Sen., *De vita beata* 4: *Quo die infra voluptatem fuerit, et infra dolorem erit; vides autem quam malam et noxiosam servitutem serviturus sit quem voluptates doloresque, incertissima dominia inpotentissimaque, alternis possidebunt: ergo exeundum ad libertatem est*; 7: *Altum quidem est virtus, excelsum et regale, invictum infatigabile: voluptas humile servile, imbecillum caducum, cuius statio et domicilium fornices et popinae sunt*; Plut. fr. 117 Sandbach (Stob. 3.6.50): Πλουτάρχου ἐκ τοῦ Κατὰ ἡδονῆς... Θηρίον ἐστὶ δουλαγωγὸν <ἢ> ἡδονή, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἄγριον.

<sup>51</sup> Pohlenz (see note 48) 121-123; J.G. Griffiths, *Apuleius of Madauros. The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)*, Leiden 1975, *ad loc.*

<sup>52</sup> Sen. *epist.* 8.7: *philosophiae servias oportet, ut tibi contingat vera libertas*.

ancient ethics and moralistic interpretation of fiction.

The moral lesson drawn by Mithras from Lucius' life story can undoubtedly be taken at face value by a φιλόκαλος reader as the ultimate answer to the *desultoria scientia* of the multiple fictions of the preceding ten books. However, the text contains numerous elements that may seriously undermine the force of Mithras' moralistic reading. To begin with, the protagonist's self-denying religious zeal, in the form that we observe in Book XI, is not anticipated by Books I-X. Moreover, the first ten books invariably present religion and interactions between humans and the divine in terms of material gain<sup>53</sup>. The fact that in Book XI there is a pervasive emphasis on the exorbitant payments for religious initiations, which completely exhaust Lucius' financial resources (11.27ff.), acquires an extra significance in juxtaposition with other descriptions of religious activities in the novel and may make the protagonist's conversion look somewhat ludicrous<sup>54</sup>. Besides, in juxtaposition with the judgment of Paris, where Venus wins Paris' favor by bribing him, Isis' act of salvation may appear simply to be a clever way of recruiting another soldier for her *sacra militia*<sup>55</sup>. The parallel is clearly there but the narrator of course fails to comment on it, as is his wont. It is, thus, up to the reader to decide whether to accept it as meaningful or to disregard it completely in favor of a useful moral lesson.

The situation seems, on the whole, to be quite similar to that in the judgment-of-Paris episode: Book XI also seems to be an intersection of two mutually exclusive patterns, between which the narrator does not establish any compelling connection. Since the text does not force the reader to fill the gap in a particular way, the reader is free to rely on his or her own initial predisposition – looking for either pleasure, or instruction, or both.

The peculiar structure of the novel thus emerges more clearly: the unstable multi-dimensional fictional world of the first ten books, devoid of any clear teleological sense and stubbornly resisting any conceivable attempt at generalization, receives a moralistic ideological foundation in the last book; this foundation, however, turns out to be quite as unstable as the rest of the novel's fictions, and the decision to accept or to reject it rests entirely with the reader. I think the best way to appreciate the suggestiveness of this structure is to regard it not in isolation but in a larger context of the history of ancient narrative.

<sup>53</sup> For instance, the Diophanes tale (2.13-14), or the priests of Dea Syria (8.25-9.10).

<sup>54</sup> Winkler (see note 5) 219-227.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. P. Murgatroyd, *The Ending of Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, "CQ" 54, 2004, 319-321.

5. Individual features of Apuleius' narrative technique have often been compared to other ancient prose fiction<sup>56</sup>. These comparisons, however, do not quite seem to elucidate the elusive nature of Apuleian narration. I, therefore, propose to view Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* in a different narratological context, which, in my opinion, can much better clarify the logic behind the indeterminacy that its reader is bound to experience. I suggest that the structure of Apuleius' novel, as I have presented it, is intertextually linked to a famous Latin poem, which also progresses from Greece to Rome, consists of multiple intermingled fictions, and, on top of everything else, is related to it thematically and shares its title – namely Ovid's *Metamorphoses*<sup>57</sup>.

It is quite a curious fact that, outside Apuleius, the word *metamorphoses* in extant Latin literature is used exclusively in references to Ovid's poem<sup>58</sup>. Even though it is well known that the *Metamorphoses* component of the title of Apuleius' novel (the full title was most likely *Asinus Aureus Περὶ μεταμορφώσεων*<sup>59</sup>) is borrowed from his Greek source<sup>60</sup>, it would not be too far-fetched to surmise that an educated 2<sup>nd</sup> century Latin-speaking reader could have discerned in this title a hint at Ovid. The title, however, is not the only thing that the two *Metamorphoses* have in common. Much recent research on Ovid has focused on his laying bare of the self-conscious fictionality of his account, his use of the unreliable narrator, various patterns of integration of individual fictions into the framework of the entire poem<sup>61</sup>, and numerous other features highly compatible with the poetics of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. What I would like to concentrate on here is just one peculiar feature of Ovid's poem, namely the tension, similar to the one we have seen in Apuleius, between the chaotic and variegated fictional world characteristic

<sup>56</sup> E.g., G.N. Sandy, *Apuleius' Metamorphoses and the Ancient Novel*, ANRW II.34.2 (1994), 1511-1574.

<sup>57</sup> Attempts to establish connections between Ovid and Apuleius have been generally discouraged by most experts on Apuleius; see, for instance, B.E. Perry, *The Significance of the Title in Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, "CPh" 18, 1923, 230-238; J. Tatum, *Apuleius and Metamorphosis*, "AJPh" 93, 1972, 306-313. Among the few exceptions are J. Krabbe, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, New York 1989, 37-82, and H. Müller, *Liebesbeziehungen in Ovids Metamorphosen und ihr Einfluß auf den Roman des Apuleius*, Göttingen 1998.

<sup>58</sup> E. g. Mart. 14.192; Quint. inst. 4.1.77; Sen. Apoc. 9.6.

<sup>59</sup> Winkler (see note 5) 294-296.

<sup>60</sup> H.J. Mason, *Greek and Latin Versions of the Ass-Story*, ANRW II.34.2 (1994), 1665-1707.

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-Conscious Muse*, Cambridge 1987; D. Feeney *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition*, Oxford 1991, ch. 4; A. Keith, *The Play of Fictions: Studies in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Book 2, Ann Arbor 1992; Tissol (see note 12).

of most of the narrative and an attempt to impose on it an ideological unifying principle, introduced, just as in Apuleius, in the last book of the work.

The speech of Pythagoras in Book XV (lines 75-478) is one of the longest episodes in the *Metamorphoses*, and its prominent position almost at the very end of the poem inevitably encourages the reader to attribute to it a particular significance. The speech is a combination of an impassioned sermon pleading for vegetarianism based on the doctrine of metempsychosis and a relatively 'sober' discussion of transformation as a fundamental principle underlying a vast variety of processes in the universe, which range from banal (change of seasons, aging) through paradoxographical (springs and rivers affecting those who come in contact with them) and mythological (Symplegades, Phoenix) to historical (great cities of old dwindling into insignificance and Rome now promising to surpass all others in splendor). Since everything in the world is governed by mutability and since we are a part of this world and consist not only of the body but also of the eternal soul, which tends to change its corporeal dwellings and, thus, may easily migrate into an animal, we have to stop killing animals and consuming meat in order to avoid eating by mistake bodies inhabited by the souls of our parents or other humans.

The history of interpretation of the Pythagoras episode in Ovid in modern scholarship is quite similar to that of the Isiac book in Apuleius. Pythagoras' speech has been interpreted both as an ultimate philosophical answer to the irrational unstable world of transformation myths in the preceding fourteen books and as an ironic and self-consciously fictional episode subverting the enthusiastically pro-Augustan message of the finale. Some scholars claim that the entire poem reflects tenets of Pythagorean philosophy, adumbrating a serious theoretical exposition of the doctrine in Book XV<sup>62</sup>, whereas some others regard the Ovidian Pythagoras as a comic figure and see in his speech a parody of Pythagoreanism<sup>63</sup>, and yet others point to subversive elements within the speech, which, as they stress, is significantly less philosophical than it appears at first glance but is rather based on conventions of either aetiological elegy<sup>64</sup> or popular paradoxography<sup>65</sup>. There are also some who

<sup>62</sup> L. Alfonsi, *L'inquadramento filosofico delle Metamorfosi Ovidiane*, in: N.I. Herescu (ed.), *Ovidiana: Recherches sur Ovide*, Paris 1958, 265-272; R. Crahay – J. Hubaux, *Sous le masque de Pythagore*, ibid. 283-300.

<sup>63</sup> Ch. Segal, *Myth and Philosophy in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, "AJPh" 90, 1969, 257-292; R. McKim, *Ovid's Account of Creation*, "CJ" 80, 1984, 97-108.

<sup>64</sup> P. E. Knox, *Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry*, Cambridge 1986, 72-74.

<sup>65</sup> K. S. Myers, *Ovid's Causes. Cosmogony and Aetiology in the Metamorphoses*, Ann Arbor 1994, 133-166.

declare the Pythagoras episode to be an artistic failure reflecting Ovid's general lack of concern for unity<sup>66</sup>. Thus, the tension between the hedonistic multifaceted fictional world of the narrative and the ideological justification of it offered at the end elicits from many modern readers of Ovid's and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* a similar spectrum of reactions – from a condescending rejection of the disjunction as esthetically inferior to various attempts to harmonize the incompatible elements.

Another common feature of Ovid's and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* that I would like to emphasize is that the ideological foundation introduces a moralistic attitude to the multiple fictions that constitute the main body of both narratives. Just as the speech of Mithras in Apuleius draws a moral lesson from the protagonist's life, the Pythagoras episode in Ovid can be read as conveying a moralistic message implicitly based on the fact that many of the transformation stories in the poem deal with metamorphoses into animals. However, just as in Apuleius, the moralistic message in Ovid is not integrated into, but rather superimposed upon, the fictional universe of the first fourteen books, creating logically incompatible overlapping patterns that can be accounted for by the reader in a variety of ways. Just as in Apuleius' final book, there are enough clues in Ovid's Pythagoras episode for the philosophically-minded φιλόκαλος reader to take it at face value as a conceptually well-grounded moral unifying the medley of the transformation tales and explaining the mechanism of mythological metamorphoses. On the other hand, the reader who simply enjoys the fictions of the poem without necessarily looking for moral instruction will probably notice that the effect of the messianic vegetarianism that Pythagoras so passionately preaches in his speech and of his indignant hostility to any form of animal sacrifice is significantly weakened, among other things, by an extraordinary piling-up of scenes involving matter-of-fact descriptions of animal sacrifice in the remaining approximately 400 verses of the poem (lines 575, 695, 735, 795). The irony such a reader will detect in this contrast is, I believe, functionally parallel to the subversive effect of the pervasive emphasis on exorbitant payments for religious services, which a similarly-minded reader will probably see in Apuleius' Book XI.

What also links the endings of Ovid's and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* is the fact that the ideological message in both of them originates from two systems that seem to occupy similar niches in ancient culture. Both the Isiac religion and Pythagoreanism represent a mysterious esoteric lore located on

<sup>66</sup> K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1975, 104; D. Little, *The Speech of Pythagoras in Met. 15 and the Structure of the Metamorphoses*, "Hermes" 98, 1970, 340-360.

the border between religion and philosophy, which both lures and alienates. Similarities between Egyptian rites and certain Pythagorean practices were pointed out as early as in Herodotus (2.81). The Pythagoreans' unconventional way of life, particularly their abstinence from meat, was a target of sarcastic humor in Greek literature from Old Comedy onwards and in Roman literature as well<sup>67</sup>. Egyptian animal worship and other idiosyncratic religious practices, as well as Egyptian priests' dubious moral standards, are often treated with a similar sarcasm in both Greek and Roman literature<sup>68</sup>. Thus, the picture of both the Pythagoreans and the followers of Isis that one gets from much of ancient literature seems to be quite similar to the opinion most modern passers-by have of the adepts of Krishnaism dancing on the streets of major cities all over the world.

This sarcastic attitude, however, coexisted with the idealizing tradition of portraying Pythagoras and his followers as well as Egyptian deities and priests in the Hellenistic and Roman philosophical literature. The myth of Pythagoras reflected later in idealizing biographies by Diogenes Laertius, Porphyry and Iamblichus is a product of the Hellenistic period, and the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC witnessed a significant revival of Pythagoreanism, especially in Rome<sup>69</sup>. On the Egyptian side, the idealizing tradition started by Herodotus became particularly popular in the Hellenistic period, when, for instance, an Egyptian named Manetho composed a work explaining to the Greeks the significance of Egyptian rituals<sup>70</sup>. Later on, the Stoic philosopher Chaeremon wrote a treatise where he represented Egyptian priests as archetypal philosophers<sup>71</sup>. The best-known representative of this trend is, of course, Plutarch, who in *De Iside et Osiride* once again drew an explicit parallel between Pythagorean philosophy and Isiac rites basing, as I have mentioned above, some of his allegorical interpretations on Pythagorean doctrines.

Both Ovid and Apuleius plant in their accounts elements that can be interpreted as alluding to both the sarcastic and the idealizing traditions. In Apuleius we see both Isis represented as a great universal goddess, like in

<sup>67</sup> A. Weiher, *Philosophen und Philosophenspott in der attischen Komödie*, Diss. Munich 1913; Segal (see note 63) 281.

<sup>68</sup> M. Malaise, *Les conditions de pénétration et de diffusion des cultes égyptiens en Italie*, Leiden 1972, 274ff.; K.A.D. Smelik – E.A. Hemelrijk, 'Who knows not what monsters demented Egypt worships?' *Opinions on Egyptian Animal Worship in Antiquity as Part of the Ancient Conception of Egypt*, ANRW II.17.4 (1984), 1852-2000.

<sup>69</sup> J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A study of Platonism 80 BC to AD 220*, London 1977, 117-121.

<sup>70</sup> P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, vol. 1, Oxford 1972, 505f.

<sup>71</sup> H. Frede, *Chaeremon der Stoiker*, ANRW II.36.3 (1989), 2067-2103; P.W. van der Horst, *Chaeremon, Egyptian Priest and Stoic Philosopher*, Leiden 1984.

Plutarch, and greed and rapaciousness lurking behind religious rhetoric, which is a commonplace in the polemics against Oriental cults<sup>72</sup>. In Ovid, Pythagoras is both a prophet revealing a new philosophical truth and a pompous philosopher of comedy whom no one takes seriously. Neither Ovid nor Apuleius, however, privilege one of these extratextual backgrounds, leaving it, thus, up to the readers to establish connections with one of them (or both) depending on their initial predispositions.

Thus, the textual strategy of Apuleius' novel seems to me to presuppose an implied reader familiar both with Plutarch's moralistic views on literature and with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or at least one could say that this familiarity would definitely make reading Apuleius a much richer and more profound experience. The reference to Plutarch and Sextus explicitly draws attention to one of the possible ways of reading fiction, which the novel at times entices the reader to adopt, whereas Ovid provides a structural model of incorporating a similar response to literature into the subversive indeterminacy of a polyphonic fictional universe.

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<sup>72</sup> E.g., R. Turcan. *Sénèque et les religions orientales*, Brussels 1967; see also M.S. Salem, *Ennius and the Isiaki coniectores*, "JRS" 28, 1938, 56-59.