Between Fiction and Reality:
Robbers in Apuleius' Golden Ass

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Introduction

Up to the present day the relationship between fictionality and reality is controversial above all in the context of antiquity, where there is still a lack of clarity concerning the ancient understanding of fiction as such in relation to the obvious use of genuinely fictional narrative structures by ancient authors. The relevance of this question for historical purposes is particularly important, since the main object of historical and philological criticism of texts is the judging of literary sources with respect to their historical authenticity.

Especially in the case of the ancient novel this question has not yet been studied in any depth at all. So far historians, who are above all interested in "historians", have perceived and evaluated them all too infrequently as sources of social history.[1] Philologists shy away even nowadays from the difficulty of approaching a literary work of art from a historical perspective.[2] New research developments have made it highly desirable that one combines historical and philological approaches. An example of this is the history of crime, which has established itself in the last 20 years as a fruitful extension of standard social history especially in the realm of studies in early modern

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[1] There are exceptions such as Grosso 1954; Veyne 1961; Gérard 1976; Warren 1976; Fröhlke 1977; Scarcella 1977; Millar 1981; Morgan 1982; Pouilloux 1983; Futre Pinheiro 1988; Galsterer 1989; Jones 1991; Cauderlier 1992; Hahn 1992; Hopkins 1993; Pouilloux 1993 and Scarcella 1996.

[2] Described thus for example by Colin 1965, 96: *Déroutés par la grammaire, étonnés par le style et la fantaisie, choqués par la lubricité, trompés par la bouffonnerie, l'invraisemblance et le surnaturel, les pauvres latinistes n'ont guère su dégager les observations précises de l'étudiant à Athènes, du voyageur en Phrygie et des sources milésiennes – dans les réalités de la vie.*

history, and cries out to be applied to studies in the ancient world. Since the state of our sources for this historical period is so desolate – we are lacking the inquisitional records and the reports of torture proceedings which we possess from early modern times – we must draw upon and give serious consideration to every piece of information no matter how small it is.

In Latin literature the most vivid and detailed descriptions of robbers' lives are found in the novel The Golden Ass, written by the North African Latin author Apuleius of Madauros around 150 A.D. In order to carry out a study on the robber scenes in the ancient novel from this point of view, a number of methodological considerations have to be taken into account. Our knowledge of the relation between fictionality and reality in the ancient world has to be confronted and combined with the results of modern fictionality studies. On the basis of a concrete example – we choose here the question concerning the use of violence – we attempt to reconstruct a broad range of proven background information, which can provide us with the foil required in order to compare the data Apuleius himself delivers with our understanding of historical authenticity. Whereas the data Apuleius provides can be attained with the help of text analysis, the historical background information can, however, only be attained by methods of cultural cross-comparison and of the sociology of deviant behaviour.

The careful use of the historical study of crime in early modern Europe and the sociology of deviant behaviour[3] delivers some structural knowledge of how human society works. This will shed some illuminating light on the obscure conditions of antiquity. Exactly like antiquity early modern times represent a pre-modern, agricultural epoch; therefore the basic structures are comparable. But in contrast to antiquity, we are much better informed about early modern Europe, because we have immeasurably more sources at our disposition. Transferring the findings of these two neighbouring disciplines to antiquity is the cultural cross-comparison we need in order to compare history and the novel.

The result of this paper, which is a better insight into how Apuleius deals with reality and fictionality in his novel, should offer us a view about the meaning of and reason for the robber scenes in the Metamorphoses and thus provide us with a stepping stone to a better understanding of the difficult Book 11 of the Metamorphoses.

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[3] Lamnek [6]1996 offers a detailed introduction.

History in Fiction

Since the 70s of the 20th century the literary, linguistic, and philosophical discussion concerning the nature of fictional writing is for the most part no longer in a state of flux, so that a review of it is possible. Theories involving the search for semantic indicators for fictional use of language[4] joined forces with pragmatic theories in linguistics, which are derived from Searle's studies. His assumption was that *fictional discourse* consists of *pretended assertions*[5] and this became a landmark for subsequent studies. Reference to the as-if-structure of the so-called *inszenierter Diskurs*[6] is to be found in German literature on the subject since Warning's work. In a contract of fictionality it is made clear to the reader that what is said in the following makes no claim to truth. The reader, who knows how to understand the relevant signals, can allow himself to take part in a game with the greatest of enjoyment. Thus fictionality is not an ontological category, but a special mode of communication.[7]

The relationship between a literary work of art and non-literary reality has likewise been the object of markedly differing theories, which are heavily indebted to contemporary fashions. It was only in the 18th and 19th centuries that a conception of art, in which art was perceived as being isolated from any kind of reality at all, became dominant. In the wake of the late enlightenment literary studies in the 19th century were pervaded by a positivism, which was often bound to partly misunderstood ideals of research in the field of the natural sciences. If this theoretical approach laid so much weight upon the study of the biographies of the authors and their times, in which the works were created, then one can note the development of a counter-movement at the beginning of the 20th century, in which Formalism[8] and

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[4] Gabriel 1979, 247ff.; Hamburger [4]1994, 56ff.

[5] Searle 1975, 324f. Searle 1969 and Austin [2]1989 grounded the fundamental principles of Pragmatics. There have been many attempts to explain the phenomenon of fictionality in terms of Pragmatics: Gale 1971; Coleman 1973; Gabriel 1975; Searle 1975. Wildekamp – van Montfoort – van Ruiswijk 1980; Fricke 1982; Gabriel 1983, 546 operate as mediators between the semantic and pragmatic approaches.

[6] Warning 1983.

[7] Anderegg [2]1977; Iser [2]1979, 277; Riess 2001, 349f.

[8] According to the definition of Döhl [2]1990, 159 Formalism is a Russian school of literary science, c. 1915–1930, which regards the use of extra-textual factors as unsuitable for the interpretation of literary texts and thus postulates a radical distinction between literature and life.

American New Criticism[9] found their place. They regard art as existing in its own sphere with its very own laws. This isolation of a work of art from social reality was popular above all in times, in which a sociopolitical reflection upon literary works of art would have been disconcerting. Even Adorno demanded the autonomy of works of art, albeit, to make it, for example, all the more difficult for future totalitarian regimes to instrumentalise them ideologically. Thus it became the *communis opinio* that a fictional text should not be seen as referring to reality. According to these theories the basic semantic rules of reference and denotation were not applicable,[10] the text presented only a pseudo-referential use of language, that is it refers not to things outside itself, but simply to itself (autoreferentiality). Yet even the most radical exponents of the autonomy theory cannot avoid allowing any text reference to reality. A text is not simply true or false, but possibly exists in some vague sphere. Searle realised the existence of this problem and makes the penetrating distinction between *fictional discourse* and a *work of fiction*,[11] which does not need as a whole to consist of fictional discourse, but can by all means contain well known and empirically verifiable aspects. Genette aligns himself with Searle and emphasises that there can be not only real details in a fictional text, but indeed extensive "islands of non-fictionality".[12] These statements are of inestimable value for historians, because they make the old search for "Realia" in all genres of genuinely literary texts methodologically allowable. Iser, who is critical of the autonomy theory, has demonstrated in a terminology which is current to this very day, that the act of fabrication always calls up reality beyond the text.

The process of *selection* takes elements of reality out of their original context and sets them in different surroundings, thus it contextualises them in a different manner. Taken by themselves these elements are not fictional, but in as much as they lose their specific purpose in the system from which they originate, and are put in a different context, they no longer make reference directly to an object, they do this rather in an indirect manner.

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[9] According to the definition given by Schweikle [2]1990, 326 New Criticism sees its method of interpretation in close reading while neglecting historical and biographical facts. This method is regarded by this school of thought as the best way of handling works of art, which are considered as autonomous entities.

[10] Bußmann 1983, 86; 428 offers definitions of both terms.

[11] Searle 1975, 332.

[12] Genette 1992, 59f.

It is crucial that the creative author makes use not only of various elements taken from reality, but that he also draws from other texts. Empirical and literary elements are moulded together into a new system, that is they are combined to produce a literary work of art, a process which Iser calls *combination*. Selection and combination contribute to the vagueness of the fictional text, which is something different from reality and is in a position to call up varied associations. These can hardly be put into words and cannot be referred directly to reality and yet make continuous reference to the outside world and play with it and with the experiences of the reader, who for his part gains new experiences by reading the text. If Iser's theory leaves us with the impression that an author is bound to reality as well as to other texts, then Aleida Assmann expands the act of fabrication by adding a crucial third component, that of *addition*. Naturally every artist is free to add anything fictitious just as he pleases and as far as his fantasy carries him.

However one desires to approach the complex phenomenon terminologically, there appear to be at least three ways for fictional texts to make reference to reality. The text refers as a whole to reality or there are "islands of non-fictionality" according to Searle and Genette or empirical and textual elements are combined in a new way and enriched with differing grades of fantasy. For a historian it might simply be a matter of finding the "islands of non-fictionality" with the help of the above described method of cultural cross-comparison and the application of sociology, or rather to study the selection and combination of elements of reality with elements from other texts. Philological findings with respect to the intertextuality of the Metamorphoses have allowed us in the meantime to gain insight into the selection of textual passages from other works of literature. Whatever cannot be made out, may be ascribed to the fantasy of the sophist, that is his "addition".

It is at this stage, however, that the next problem arises. What understanding, or more cautiously formulated, what awareness did antiquity have of fictionality? We are undoubtedly confronted with this phenomenon and not only in the context of the so-called ancient novel. How did Apuleius deal with it in the particular case of the Metamorphoses and to what end did he use fictional patterns of writing? To what extent is the portrayal of his robbers affected? These questions are of particular relevance, because they are also crucial for our assessment of genuinely historiographical sources. It is surely the case that the distinction between fictional and historical storytel-

ling was unclear, although there was apparently a differentiation between fiction and history. The following observations point in this direction:

1. With the help of the term *sermo Milesius* Apuleius indicates clearly to the reader the existence of a contract of fictionality, which he is about to enter into with him. The story teller is not concerned with historically verifiable claims, but with the sheer desire to fabulate:

> *At ego tibi sermone isto Milesio varias fabulas conseram, auresque tuas benivolas lepido susurro permulceam, modo si papyrum Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami inscriptam non spreveris inspicere, figuras fortunasque hominum in alias imagines conversas et in se rursum mutuo nexu refectas ut mireris.*[13]

> 'But I would like to tie together different sorts of tales for you in that Milesian style of yours, and to caress your ears into approval with a pretty whisper, if only you will not begrudge looking at Egyptian papyrus inscribed with the sharpness of a reed from the Nile, so that you may be amazed at men's forms and fortunes transformed into other shapes and then restored again in an interwoven knot'.

2. Ancient rhetoric distinguishes three *genera narrationum* according to their truth content, the *fabula*, which is neither true nor probable (myth, tragedy), the *historia*, which relates real events, *res gestae/verae*, and in the midst of these two is the sphere of *argumentum* (*res fictae*) – in Greek *to diegema plasmatikon* – consisting of tales, which are not true, but at least probable. According to standard research opinion the ancient novel, for which antiquity developed no consistent terminology, is included in this category.[14]

There are however, border zones, in which justifiable doubt can arise as to whether these divisions were always regarded so precisely. In the border

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[13] Apul. *Met*. 1,1. All quotations of Apuleius are taken from Apuleius, Metamorphoses, edited and translated by J. Arthur Hanson in two volumes, Cambridge/MA 1989.

[14] Cic. *Inv*. 1,27; *Rhet. Her*. 1,13; Isid. *Orig*. 1,44,5; Macr. *Somn*. 1,2,7–8. This categorisation is of course only typical in an ideal way. Categories were not standardised in literary theories of antiquity and the Middle Ages. Hose 1996 was able to state that the tripartite categorisation first appeared about 90 BC in Rome, at a time when the Greek dichotomy of truth – lie (*aletheia – pseudos*) was extended by the addition of the category of *plasma*.

zone between novel and historiography, that is in fictional biography (the Alexander romance), in fictional autobiography (pseudo-Clemens), in the so-called epistolary novels and in the eye-witness accounts of Troy[15] an understanding of the purpose of literature can be observed, which is diametrically opposed to ours. Whereas the modern historian would like to distinguish between fictionality and reality, the ancient reader showed a marked lack of interest in such categorisation. Indeed rhetoric, which has handed down the basic concepts mentioned above, makes it very difficult for the ancient audience to distinguish between *res fictae* and *res factae*. It demanded the same compositional patterns for all texts, which an author had to use, if he wanted to present his product in an attractive form. The realism of depiction, that is the obligation to the principles of mimesis,[16] was the basic requirement in order that a text might be perceived as successful. For this very reason it is likely that the novels strive to present realistic depictions. Sociohistorical details are without doubt present and may give the social historian more information about the world of the authors than historiography, which, while making claims to historicity, confined itself only to great political persons and events.

The Historical Background

In the domain of crime and robbery, possible aspects in the Metamorphoses, which are worth being compared from a social historian's and a philologist's point of view, are the causes of robbery, the gang structures, the criminal methods, violent behaviour and the reaction of society confronted with these phenomena of crime (measures of prosecution and integration).[17] Here, I would like to concentrate on violent behaviour to demonstrate the way in

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[15] Holzberg 1995 pays particular attention to the fringe novels.

[16] One must differentiate between two types of mimesis in the times of Apuleius: Plat. *Pol.* 595a–606d understands one sort as an imitation of nature (cf. Koller 1954; Kardaun 1993). While Plato from the starting point of orality comes to a negative judgement, Aristotle discerns the cathartic powers of mimesis on the psyche of the reader or the audience and thus forms not only a more positive picture of literary writing, but also offers at the same time the first theory and legitimation of fictionality (cf. Rösler 1980, 308ff.). In the Hellenistic period mimesis refers more and more to the *imitatio* of literary models (cf. Flashar 1978; Fuhrmann [2]1992; Cizek 1994, 11ff.). Auerbach [8]1988 uses the term in the book with precisely this title in the sense of the interpretation of reality in literary texts.

[17] For a comprehensive treatment see now Riess 2001, 45–236.

which we can use neighbouring disciplines and the method of cultural cross-comparison to compare fiction to facts.

The use of violence was amazingly similar in ancient and in early modern times. We have two types of sources at our disposal: literary sources and the papyri, which are the only ancient sources, which have come down to us in a relatively continuous form.

The analysis of 155 papyri containing records of criminal offences reported to the authorities by victims can be structured according to a matrix which defines categories for various characteristics of the crimes such as size of the group or gang, violence or not, murder, the job of the victim and of the delinquent and so on.[18] This matrix can be evaluated according to the methods established by the history of crime. Numerous phenomena can be investigated, depending on which parameters are combined. The results fully correspond to the situation in early modern times: Whereas the number of thefts was 104, there were only 33 cases of robbery, in only three cases was murder committed as well. The papyri investigated included only six cases of street robbery, but these were carried out very brutally. The victims were beaten up, but most of them survived. Interestingly enough, most victims knew the delinquents because they came from the same social group – either from their village, neighborhood or even from their relatives. According to the proverb "opportunity makes the thief" people stole whenever there was a chance to do so. This is typical of societies characterized by poverty. Only 12 out of 94 group-related crimes can be classified as gang crimes, which were committed by unknown criminals using a high degree of brutality. The 82 other group-related cases were obviously committed by temporary robber groups who had spontaneously joined forces for a single coup, while still being socially integrated villagers. This supports the thesis that criminal gangs consisting of highly aggressive social outcasts played only a minor role in the criminal cases of antiquity, although they existed of course. The probability of being beaten up by one's neighbor or of property being stolen by a close acquaintance was much higher than becoming the victim of a gang or even being killed by a robber.

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[18] The so-called robbery and theft petitions have been presented a number of times in tabulated form: Lukaszewicz 1983; most recently and with the most parameters Riess 2001, 377–395.

Less than 1/3 of the 155 property offenses involved the use of violence. Although in the culture of pre-modern times violence was more readily used than today,[19] criminals tried to avoid violence for fear of prosecution, exactly like the delinquents of early modern times.

Besides these reflections on proportions, it is also important to consider in which contexts apart from property offences violence and force were used. Anthropological research shows that the use of violence in pre-modern times is only irregular at first glance. In reality, pre-modern societies had unwritten rules which made the use of force acceptable in certain situtions, or even called for it. The social code of behaviour worked according to a fixed escalation scheme and people had to follow these rules, otherwise they would not only have to confront the sanctions of the authorities, but would also lose their acceptance within their own village community. For instance, it was a must to defend material goods or symbolic values, such as honour (lat. *honos*, gr. *time*). Honour was of vital importance; if a person's honour was offended, i.e. when somebody lost his face, normal modes of communication were put aside, and the immediate reaction of the offended person was often to beat the insulter in order to defend his honour. If the person who had been insulted, did not react, it was felt that this was a tacit admission of his wrongdoing. This fixed behaviour is not only true for the early modern times,[20] but is also very well documented in the papyri, where insults (*hybris*, *logopoioumenos pros autous*) were often followed by fights.[21] Both in antiquity and in early modern times conflicts between villages, between competing families, during festivities and in inns often led to escalation and violence. Some inns even had a bad reputation and are characterized in the Digests as *loci inhonesti*.[22]

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[19] Elias ⁵1978, vol. II 312f.; 317ff.; 326ff.; 336; 353ff.; 369ff.; 444f.

[20] Rummel 1993, 87f.; 92; 95; 110; 113; Frank 1995, 193; 333–348.

[21] P. Lille II 24 = P. Enteux 79 (219/218 B.C.); P. Oxy. XIX 2234 (31 A.D.); P. Ryl. II 141 (37 A.D.); P. Ryl. II 150 (40 A.D.); P. Mich. V 228 (47 A.D.); P. Mich. V 229 (48 A.D.); P. Mich. V 230 (48 A.D.); P. Oxy. II 324 (50 A.D.); BGU I 36 = BGU II 436 (98–117 A.D.); P. Tebt. II 331 (126–132 A.D.); SB VI 9458 (2. Hälfte 2. Jh.); P. Oxy Hels. 23 (212 A.D.); P. Oxy. XXXIII 2672 (218 A.D.). Cf. Preisigke 1927, Sp. 631; Dahlmann 1968; Rupprecht 1991, 143f.; Rupprecht 1993; Hobson 1993, 201.

[22] Dig. 4,8,21,11 (Ulpian).

The Use of Violence in the Metamorphoses

Even on first acquaintance with Apuleius' novel "The Golden Ass", it is noticeable that a wide range of information about crime is to be found. Tlepolemus wants to rescue his fiancé Charite who has been kidnapped by the robbers. To this end, he dresses as a robber, adopts the name of Haemus and tries to infiltrate the robber gang – today we would call him an under-cover agent. In the famous speech Haemus delivers to the robbers, he praises himself in stilted diction, explaining that he fulfils what he considers to be the ideal profile of a robber. We should analyze this part as a classic example of a situation chosen for a rhetorical exercise and therefore be very careful: The robbers are so impressed that they at once make him their gang leader right after this panegyric, which shows us that Haemus' bombastic exaggerations not only fulfil the robbers' expectations, but even exceed them. Obviously he embodies the robbers' values better than they do themselves:

> Apul. *Met.* 7,5,4-6:
> *"Havete", inquit "fortissimi deo Marti clientes mihique iam fidi commilitones, et virum magnanimae vivacitatis volentem volentes accipite, libentius vulnera corpore excipientem quam aurum manu suscipientem, ipsaque morte, quam formidant alii, meliorem. Nec me putetis egenum vel abiectum, neve de pannulis istis virtutes meas aestimetis. Nam praefui validissimae manui totamque prorsus devastavi Macedoniam. Ego sum praedo famosus Haemus ille Thracius, cuius totae provinciae nomen horrescunt, patre Therone aeque latrone incluto prognatus, humano sanguine nutritus interque ipsos manipulos factionis educatus heres et aemulus virtutis paternae.*

> "'Hail, brave servants of Mars and now my trusty fellow-soldiers! Receive a willing recruit willingly. You see before you a man of heroic vigour, who more gladly accepts wounds on his body than gold in his hand, and who is superior to death itself, which others fear. And do not think me destitute or an outcast; do not judge my virtues from these rags. I was in command of a strong and mighty band and laid waste the whole of Macedonia. I am the famous brigand, Haemus the Thracian, at whose name every province trembles. My father was Theron, also a renowned

robber; I was nursed on human blood and raised among the squadrons of our troop as heir and rival to my father's valour'.

At first glance, Apuleius seems to exaggerate this aspect of the robbers' way of life, compared to the reality we can deduce from the historical sources. Nonetheless, Apuleius follows a certain pattern of writing from which we can indeed draw conclusions about the conditions in his time. We just have to understand his literary practice. His robbers are ready to use violence and they do so on many occasions.[23] But since Apuleius was not a member of the underworld, he omitted many facets of the subject and its conditions. So it is our task to put his textual patterns into the context of Roman society: As in all pre-modern societies, violence was the order of the day. Tax collectors often used force.[24] Fights and brawls in inns and during village festivities were common.[25] There were, however, as we have shown, important limits: Only few people were killed and normally you had to obey to the general rules which regulated every-day life in the little villages.

At least at first glance the situation in Apuleius is totally different. Social reality is certainly distorted to a remarkable extent, because the novel abounds in murder and bloodshed. Sex and crime, we can deduce, were also very popular in ancient times. But it is precisely the most brutal scenes in his novel, which are also the most fictitious ones. The bloody scenes, for instance when Alkimus is thrown out of the window[26] or when Thrasyleon is killed while disguised as a bear,[27] are deliberate and above all recognizable exaggerations formed according to literary models with the purpose of bringing action and slapstick scenes into the novel and thus making it more excit-

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[23] Apul. *Met*. 1,15,2–3; 2,14,3; 2,18,3; 2,32,2–6; 3,5–6; 4,7,2–3 (verbal violence); 4,9,4–4,12,1; 4,18,3–7; 4,26,7–8; 6,25,2; 6,30,6–7; 6,31,1–2; 7,4,3–6; 7,5–7,6,1; 7,7–7,9,1.

[24] Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3,159f.; Fl. Jos. *BJ* 2,8,1; *AJ* 18,1,1; further instances in MacMullen 1987, 748f.; Isaac 1990, 282ff.; Krause 1996, 189–202. The connection between tax collection and village crime is examined by Riess 2001, 55; 82; 124f.; 132f.; 199; 266; 300; 380; 388.

[25] Attested for example in PSI III 172 (2. Jh. A.D.); P. Cair. Isidor 75 (316 A.D.); P. Alex. Giss. 3 (201/202 A.D.); P. Oxy. XVI 1853 (6./7. Jh. A.D.); further source material in Kleberg 1963; McMullen 1966, 167f.; Sperber 1970, 262; Davies 1973, 212; pertinent descriptions from the early modern period in Castan 1980, 202–212; Frank 1995, 246ff.; on the use of violence in taverns or at festivals cf. in summarised form Riess 2001, 136–138.

[26] Apul. *Met*. 4,12,2–9.

[27] Ibid. 4,18–21.

ing to read. These scenes are so exaggerated that the readers will certainly have noticed the contrast to reality which was much less violent. Apuleius, therefore, does not really overestimate the actual violence potential among robbers. So for the attentive reader reality – less spectacular as it was – remained visible in the background in spite of the action-effects.

The Function of Fiction in Apuleius and the Robbers' Role in the Novel

Before we can make enquiries about the purpose of the robbers in the Metamorphoses, we must remind ourselves of the functions, which the phenomenon of fictionality fulfils in this novel. Fictionality is, however, a systematic as well as a historical phenomenon, which can always be understood as something slightly different dependent upon culture and era. There are nevertheless certain timeless aspects of fictionality, such as the fact that the suspended claim to truth allows alternative forms of perception and thought, which are not only affirmative acting as a guarantee of political stability,[28] but can be relevant in terms of critique of the times and of society, too. The robbers in the Metamorphoses are assuredly fictional to a large extent, as we have seen. What is their role within the novel? Let us first recall the traditional function of bandits in Greek novels. The authors used them as structural elements. Their only function in the novel was to increase suspense, bring about peripeties, changes in fortune, and serve as a transition to the next chain of actions. They fulfil these functions in the Golden Ass as well, of course.

But as a result of adding the Isis book the whole novel develops a completely different purpose from that of the Greek epitome of the Onos. This is all the more true for the second reader, as he is in a position to recognise anticipations at a very early stage while reading the text for a second time.[29] Thus new functions are attributed to the robbers, so that they become completely different from those of the Greek model. With his manner of fictional story telling in book 11 the narrator Lucius offers not only an alternative to the picaresque action of the Greek model but also an unconventional reinter-

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[28] One need only consider the Latin panegyrics or Molières *Le Tartuffe*, in which Louis XIV intervenes at the end as a *deus ex machina* , in order to give the plot a positive turn at its end.

[29] Winkler 1985 introduced the category of the second reader.

pretation of the tribulations of the times. This alternative mode of contemplation regards misery as an unavoidable evil, which must be suffered first, in order to attain redemption, in which at least the narrator of the tale of the ass apparently believes, even though the redemption is treated in an ironical way and as such is seen as a problem, a point to which we shall have to return. The robbers embody aspects of this path of suffering, one might indeed call them *chiffres*, in a similar way to the witches and wolves we meet along the wayside.

Consequently, Apuleius had much more in mind than the Greek author when he integrated robbers in his Metamorphoses. And for this reason Apuleius wanted to make the robbers appear as authentic as possible. This thesis may be corroborated for three reasons. Discussing them we have to keep in mind that there is a decisive difference between Apuleius' and his audience's claim to truth and our interests and conceptions of truth. The three reasons are: the function of the ass's mask, i.e. the *play with satire*, secondly the *pseudo-religious* and philosophical message of the novel, and thirdly the *game* with the *pseudo-autobiographical perspective*.

It is first of all the main theme, the story of the Ass, which makes it more than likely that Apuleius wanted his robbers to be perceived as realistic. For the first time in ancient literature, an outside perspective is so consequently used to cast a critical view on contemporary society. In this respect, Apuleius is a precursor of Montesquieu's "Lettres Persanes", written in 1721, where a fictitious Persian visiting France writes letters to his friend back home in Persia expressing his bewilderment about the brutal conditions prevailing in the absolutistic French state. This approach of a fictitious outside observer unmasking morally questionable social standards by looking at society with detachment is often resorted to under suppressive regimes. In this case the author wants to make his readers think critically about their own society by using the means of satire. As in a caricature, this literary approach, however, only works, if the readers recognize the real world behind the satire. Since Apuleius uses a similar effect, his novel must contain a sufficient degree of reality. The sufferings Lucius encounters along his way had to be plausible, otherwise the redeeming power of Isis at the actor-level in the 11th book would have appeared incredible, which would have been contrary to Apuleius' objectives.

A carnevalesque reading could of course simply deny the pedagogic intentions of the satire and insist that one can indeed laugh at all the inaccu-

racies in the text. A counter argument is that at least at the actor-level one cannot laugh at all times. At the Risus festival, the most striking carnevalesque scene, Lucius is not at all in the mood for laughing. On top of this the world in the text is not always topsy turvy as in the carnevalesque world. Members of the lower classes are often helplessly at the mercy of the privileged.[30] It is of course possible that upper class readers could still be amused, but the picaresque nature of the first ten books is so strongly affected by the Isis book, that their content can be understood as being quite blasphemous in relation to Isis. It is a particularly masterly stroke of the author that even the "decarnevalisation" in book 11 is itself treated in an ironic manner. Thus if one does not believe in a serious dimension, one cannot, however, deny the possibility that at least at the narrator's level, as in the case of the pseudo-autobiographical level, satirical elements are played with. A satirical reading can therefore be treated on equal terms as a carnevalesque one.

The seriousness of the *religious* and *philosophical message* of the novel is highly controversial. The re-metamorphosis of the donkey into the human being Lucius and finally into the alleged author, the poor man from Madauros, is so problematic that it does not allow a thoroughly consistent interpretation. Far beyond the commonplace that author and narrator are never one and the same, the interplay with various masks is typical of display oratory of the Second Sophistic: At the actor-level Lucius remains naive and trusting, beneath the surface, however, the irony of the author figure is clearly recognisable. In order to be able to gauge the religious seriousness of the Metamorphoses, the controversial unity of the work is of prime importance. The few scholars, who even today see a deep rift between books 1–10 and the eleventh book, deny to a large extent that there is a deeper meaning to the novel.[31] The proponents of unity are not unanimous. While some believe in a genuine religious message,[32] the majority of these scholars regard it as impossible to come to a coherent result concerning this point. Winkler was the first to come out strongly against there being a religious slant in the Isis book, which he saw as full of adventures as the 10 preceding books. In

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[30] Apul. *Met*. 8,22,5–7 (a member of the lower classes is devoured by ants); 9,35,2–9,38,10 (a poor farmer and his family are wiped out by the neighbouring large landowner); 9,42,4 (an innocent gardener who does not have Roman citizenship is crucified by the Romans).

[31] Bernhard 1927; Lesky 1941; Helm [2]1956; Perry 1967; in toned down form Sandy 1994.

[32] Kerényi 1927; Nock 1933; Festugière 1954; Merkelbach 1962; Wlosok 1969; Münstermann 1995, who continues in the Merkelbach tradition; more subtle and differentiated Scobie 1973; Tatum 1979; Hooper 1985; James 1987; Shumate 1996.

his opinion these uninterrupted adventures are the basis of unity.[33] Doubts about the level of truth in the religious scenes arise above all because of the avaricious priests, who insist upon one expensive initiation after another for Lucius.[34] Likewise suspicious is the bald head, which Lucius has to take upon himself, in order to be initiated into the various cults. Baldness was not only a sign of servitude in antiquity, but also of lecherousness. The self-characterisation in *Apol.* 4.6, in which Apuleius makes reference to his shaggy and unkempt hair, makes it clear that lack of hair should not be understood autobiographically.[35] According to Harrison Platonism simply serves Apuleius as a means of parodying the serious religious texts of the Greeks and making an ostentatious show of his knowledge of the cults and mysteries as is typical of the showy manner of the Second Sophistic.[36] If, however, ambivalence is a characteristic of the first 10 books, then it is all the more a defining feature of book 11. Lucius promotes Isis and her cult, however ironically it is portrayed, and the author-figure introduces himself into the action, even if only in a playful manner. One could of course be a lawyer and a priest at the same time, just as inaccuracies concerning the rites of the Isis cult are not in any way surprising in view of our poor knowledge. The high costs can be taken as motif-repetition,[37] baldness may be understood as a particular expression of asceticism.[38] The thrice initiated Lucius is to be contrasted with the fooled and ill-starred Lukios of the Greek version, who fares in no way better than his Latin counterpart.[39] The path which leads from misery is at least for the narrator the changing of one's ways and conversion to Isis. Lucius apparently had to complete the journey along his path of suffering, before he could gain a dubious glimpse of the divine.

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[33] Winkler 1985.

[34] Cf. Fredouille 1975, 12f.; Winkler 1985, 217f.; Fick-Michel 1991, 101f.; Shumate 1996, 325f.; van Mal-Maeder 1997, 100ff.

[35] Further serious reservations concerning a genuinely serious religious message are the otherwise unattested equation of Isis with Fortuna, who is furthermore qualified by the epithet *videns*, which is not attested in this combination, as well as the fact that Lucius is priest and lawyer at one and the same time, and that there is a lack of clarity in the masquerade, which precedes the Isis procession. Cf. Riess 2001, 332.

[36] Harrison, 1996, 514f.; 1999, xxxviii; 2000 (in this volume of *AN* 1, 2000-2001), 250-264.

[37] Van der Paardt 1996, 72.

[38] Ibid. 74–76.

[39] Ibid. 77.

As the mixture of frivolity and seriousness in the Latin version can not be explained logically, it must have a special sense. There is nothing comparable in the Greek "Onos" which was written as pure entertainment and which Apuleius had used as the basis of his novel. This tells us that Apuleius' own intentions can be detected in the very passages which deviate so strikingly from the Greek text and which make seem his novel so incongruous. The contrasts stand for a very special view of the world. As a *philosophus platonicus*, Apuleius believed that the world is characterized by a fundamental dualism comprising both good and evil forces. And as a faithful follower of Plato, he wants to show this dualistic world in all its facets and contrasts as a whole, as an entity which he depicts in a condensed form. Apuleius portrays the world in all its vicissitudes in just the way that life produces its ups and downs. The duplex sensus of Platonic philosophy, in other words, ambiguity as one of the most characteristic features of Apuleius' style, can also be applied to the presentation of robbers as bearers of meaning. On the one hand, they fulfil the traditional narrative functions as pointed out above, on the other hand, they have also been attributed a semantic function as symbols of the dangers, vicissitudes and dark sides of the world, showing how much it needs redemption. This additional and deeper, allegorical meaning distinguishes Apuleius' robbers sharply from the robbers in the Greek novels.

A purely burlesque or edifying way of writing which would maybe meet our aesthetic expectations much better, would for Apuleius probably have been a crude distortion of the truth, to which he felt so devoted as a *philosophus Platonicus*.[40]

It is remarkable that it is precisely this truth which Apuleius perceives and presents in a very selective manner. In the novel the robbers commit almost only serious crimes, although in reality less serious crimes were more frequent. Furthermore the robbers are not integrated into the fringes of society as the criminals were in reality, but are shunted off to a *locus horridus*, which is made up out of citations from other texts.[41]

Even if the picaresque interludes only have a serious function on the surface, it is obvious that the description of robbers also serves this superior, serious aim to which the action is heading for at the actor-level. In its religious character the narrator recommends this transcendent goal of seeking redemption as a viable alternative to remaining stuck in the banality and

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[40] Riess 2001, 334f.
[41] Ibid. 299; 303; 336.

trouble of everyday life. So we can deduce that the evil forces in his novel, represented by witches, wolves and robbers, are meant to be authentic and make sense.

In order to make the various metamorphoses into a donkey and the initiation more believable, they are anchored by the *play with the autobiographical level*, which remains controversial to this very day. The famous naming of the Madaurensis at the end of the novel[42] is in no way the only autobiographical clue in the text. Alongside the highly complex introduction, where Lucius points to his intellectual affiliation with Plutarch,[43] there are above all two allusions to literary fame at the beginning and at the end of the novel,[44] which can only refer to the author himself. Of course the playful nature of these two allusions should at no stage be misunderstood. From the point of view of the author's use of fictionality the autograph at the end of the novel cannot be overestimated. The novel appears to metamorphose itself into a fictional autobiography with a high claim to truth, which puts the fictionality contract at the beginning of the novel into stark perspective. This claim to truth and credibility at the actor-level can only be conveyed in a believable fashion, if a sufficient extent of empiricism is to be found in the text. The masterful play with fictionality and reality along with the apparatus of authentication of the pseudo-autobiographical references, which for their part point the versed reader to the path of fictionality, lends a relatively historical authenticity to the reports.

From an ironical distance the initiation experience in all the facets of its problematic nature is thus portrayed in a highly reflected manner. In order to give to the play with redemption its fascinating and contradictory as well as realistic effect on the reader, Apuleius had to stamp not only an autobiographical claim on the plot, but also had to portray the world in the text in a reasonably realistic way. Had Apuleius deviated too far from reality, he would have failed in his prime intention of convincing his readers of the real,

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[42] Apul. *Met*. 11,27,9.

[43] Münstermann 1995, 57–93 offers the most detailed interpretation of the introductory allusion to Plutarch.

[44] Apul *Met*. 2,12,5: *nunc enim gloriam satis floridam, nunc historiam magnam et incredundam fabulam et libros me futurum* ('on the one hand my reputation will really flourish, but on the other I will become a long story, an unbelievable tale, a book in several volumes'); ibid. 11,27,9: *nam et illi studiorum gloriam* [...] ('the man would acquire fame for his studies').

redeeming power of Isis at the actor-level. The robbers are amongst the elements, which have to convey realistic features.

When they do not do this in the text as far as we can see, the reason for this may be the author's lack of knowledge or different intentions on his part. In all probability both he as well as his audience regarded the robber stories with the exception of a few exaggerations as quite credible.

The thesis that Apuleius wanted to create his robbers as realistically as possible, enables us now to analyze in a more detailed way the literary practice of an author of the Second Sophistic. He selects facts which can be observed in everyday life (selection), and combines them with elements represented in other works (combination), then he adds imagination and exaggeration (addition) and with them assembles a literary work of art, in which the robbers fulfil the functions as described above. This artful picture of life is only similar to reality and as far as crime is concerned condenses reality to a certain extent.[45] Apuleius' ingeniousness is to let reality shine through fiction, to refine reality by adding fiction, and to assign additional semantic meanings to the characters of his novel including the robbers.

In the particular case of the Metamorphoses the systematic phenomenon of fictionality serves the purpose of portraying the problematic retreat from this world into one of religious intimacy, one of inner security.

Further Perspectives

Is Apuleius a typical representative of the elites of Roman society? Before we can answer this question, we need to consider briefly his social background. His father was a duumvir, approximately the equivalent of a mayor in our times. In Roman society, this function was not very prestigious. Sociology has found out that social ascent makes most people particularly fervent supporters and conservative defenders of the basic values represented by the class to which they have gained access – a typical example is Cicero. It is

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[45] By the accumulation of raids, which were relatively rare in sociohistorical reality, the phenomenon of robbers is dramatised. This is in accordance with the general tendency of embellishment in the Metamorphoses. The exaggerations did not necessarily contribute to a loss of authenticity – in marked contrast to the aesthetic perceptions of modern times – but could apparently be perceived by a contemporary audience as legitimate emphasis.

therefore safe to assume that Apuleius, who gained access to the Roman literary elite by means of his talent, fully identifies himself with the ideological values, views and moral codes of the Roman upper classes. Therefore, it would have been unthinkable for him to express sympathy or even pity with the robbers in his novel, which he wrote for Rome, the centre of power.[46] So *his* picture of the robbers as elements outside society, representing the evil side of life, deserving defeat and ridicule, is symptomatic of the view which the upper classes of ancient Rome had about the robbers. Thanks to the Metamorphoses we are now able to grasp not only the mentality of one single author, but due to his representative position of the major part of Roman elites.

We come full circle hermeneutically. The findings resulting from the text are in astonishing accordance with the historic data. This makes the novel ''The Golden Ass'' a source worth evaluating for the purposes of historical criminology. Literary science has already given up the former distinction between purely historical and purely fictional works, having proven that both modes of literary speaking contain elements from one another.[47] Small wonder then that the Metamorphoses can indeed be used as a historical source for analyzing aspects of robbery in antiquity.

It would be a worthwhile endeavor to transfer this methodology to the works of other authors of antiquity. We could thus establish a matrix and scientifically establish, how far ancient fiction in general confirms, or contradicts, historical findings and how far these findings from the Metamorphoses are in line with the picture of reality painted by other ancient authors, historians and novelists alike.[48]

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[46] Dowden 1994, 422 emphasizes that the Metamorphoses were written for Rome.

[47] White 1978; Ricœur 1983; 1984; 1985. A survey of research pertaining to Apuleius is available in Riess 2001, 366–374.

[48] This is the longer version of the lecture held at ICAN 2000 under the title: ''The Robbers in Apuleius between fiction and reality''. It is based upon the main theses of my PhD thesis, which portrays the relationship between fictionality and reality in general and in particular with respect to the robber scenes in Apuleius. I would like to thank Maaike Zimmerman for permission to speak at the Congress and the Advisory Board of AN for the invitation to publish my contribution in the first fascicle of this journal. I owe many thanks to Dr. James M.S. Cowey for his help in translating this article.

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