On the Road in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

MAAIKE ZIMMERMAN
Groningen

> "The most characteristic thing about this novel is the way it fuses the course of an individual's life (at its major turning points) with his actual spatial course or road – that is, with his wanderings. Thus is realized the metaphor of "the path of life". The path itself extends through familiar, native territory, in which there is nothing exotic, alien or strange. Thus a unique novelistic chronotope is created, one that has played an enormous role in the history of the genre."

Thus Bakhtin in his essay *Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel*.[1] Indeed, the importance of travel as a theme in this novel is highlighted from the Prologue onward. The first sentence of the story proper meaningfully starts with an expression of movement to a place: *Thessaliam …petebam* ("To Thessaly …I was heading").[2]

Any reader of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* will remember the complaints of the protagonist about the hardships suffered during his existence as an ass, and specifically the complaints about the often laborious journeys which he is forced to make at the hands of various masters. In this essay I will examine more closely the roads as an important element in the space of this novel, and the ways in which the narrator describes them to his audience. I will examine how the protagonist's remarks on the road and on the conditions of the road, made at several stages of his journey, become increasingly meaningful and appear to fully justify Bakhtin's observation that the metaphor of the "path of life" is realized in this novel.

---

[1] Bakhtin 1981, 120.
[2] See Clarke 2001, 101 f.

In general, landscape descriptions in Apuleius' novel quite often are in some ways 'symbolic' of the narrative itself; in this respect, Apuleius employs procedures which may be found in Latin epic and other Latin lyric genres as well. One may, for instance, think of the harbour description in Verg. *Aen.* 1,159 ff., or Propertius' elegies 1,17 and 1,18. Many passages in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* reveal a "… strong *figurative* collusion … between landscape and action".[3] In an interesting article, De Biasi has, with several examples, shown that often the elaborate landscape descriptions in Apuleius' novel testify to such a figurative collusion; moreover, these sometimes reflect, or are in contrast with, the emotional state of the protagonist.[4] In this essay I will single out for discussion precisely those passages on travelling and those road-descriptions which De Biasi has mentioned only in a cursory way, because he does not consider the descriptions of the landscape in such passages to be functional. Indeed, they are not conceived as literary showpieces, as are some of the landscape descriptions studied by De Biasi, and he is probably right in leaving them out of his investigations. However, they are often meaningful on more than one level, and increasingly so as the novel proceeds.

Entering the world of the novel

Our first meeting with the protagonist of Apuleius' novel is a meeting on the road – the road to Thessaly. The description of his journey to Thessaly, immediately after the prologue, is elaborate and highly stylized:

> *Postquam ardua montium et lubrica vallium et roscida cespitum et glebosa camporum emersi, equo indigena peralbo vehens iam eo quoque admodum fesso,* … I had emerged from steep mountain tracks and slippery valley roads, damp places in the meadows and cloddy paths through the fields. I was riding a native-bred pure white horse; as he too was now quite tired, … (Apul. *Met.* 1,2.2)[5]

---

[3] Hinds 2001, 132 ff. offers an intriguing discussion of this aspect of Ovid's landscapes, with references to other literature; the quotation in my text is from Hinds 2001,132, with his emphasis.

[4] De Biasi 2000, 199–264 (repr. of De Biasi 1990); see esp. pp. 219 ff., on "il collegamento psicologico tra paesaggio e personaggio".

[5] Translations of passages from Apuleius' Metamorphoses are, unless expressly stated otherwise, from Hanson 1989.

This is a journey over land, and the description especially concerns the conditions of the soil trodden by the traveller, or rather by his mount. The length of the journey is suggested by the elaborateness of the sentence with its four kola of equal length. Lucius' host Milo is quite right when he later refers to this journey by his guest as 'quite a difficult and extensive journey'. (Apul. *Met.* 1,23.8: *satis arduo itinere atque prolixo*).

This description, at the very beginning of the story proper, marks the entrance of the protagonist, and at the same time our own entrance as readers, into the world of the novel. Within this world we will move along with the ass continuously until his flight – at the end of the tenth book – from the interior to the coast, to the beach of Cenchreae, and then further on into the world of Isis.

> *… iam cursu memet celerrimo proripio, sexque totis passuum milibus perniciter confectis Cenchreas pervado, quod oppidum audit quidem nobilissimae coloniae Corinthiensium, alluitur autem Aegeo et Saronico mari*. I … hurled myself forward with the utmost rapidity. I covered six whole miles at full speed and arrived at the town of Cenchreae, which is well-known as part of the illustrious territory of the Corinthians, and is washed by the Aegean Sea and the Saronic Gulf. (Apul. *Met.* 10,35.3)

In my view, both the passages just quoted clearly indicate transitional phases, suggesting liminal experiences, as discussed by Margaret Anne Doody in the section 'Tropes of the Novel' of her book *The True Story of the Novel*.[6]

Book Eleven evolves in a different world: After his flight from Corinth, Lucius the ass enters the sacred places of Isis, the beach of Cenchreae, and the temple precinct there. In the eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses*, Lucius, who has regained his human shape, and has become an initiate of Isis' cult, no longer mentions journeys along roads. He stays for some time in Cenchreae, then pays a short visit to his home town, after which he travels to Rome; his journey is swift and also profitable – probably because he has undertaken it 'at the powerful goddess's urging' (*deae potentis instinctu*):

> *… digredior et recta patrium larem revisurus meum … contendo paucisque post diebus deae potentis instinctu … nave conscensa Romam*

[6] Doody 1998, 319 ff., Ch. 14, 'Marshes, Shores, and Muddy Margins'.

> *versus profectionem dirigo tutusque prosperitate ventorum ferentium Augusti portum celerrime pervenio ac dehinc carpento perviolavi … sacrosanctam istam civitatem accedo.* I … departed and hurried straight to visit my ancestral hearth … After a few days there, at the powerful goddess's urging I … boarded a ship, and set out towards Rome, Safely driven by favourable winds, I arrived very quickly at the Port of Augustus, and hurried from there by carriage … I reached the holy, inviolate city. (Apul. *Met.* 11,26,1–2)

From this passage it becomes clear that the world of the eleventh book evolves in a different space, whithout difficult roads to travel. It will therefore be the first ten books on which I will concentrate in this essay 'on the road'. Equally, I will reserve for brief mention at the end the space of the Tale of Cupid and Psyche (4,28 – 6,24), since that tale does not concern journeys by the protagonist of the novel.

On the road with Lucius, the ass

In the first ten books of the novel we encounter numerous passages where roads are being travelled under various circumstances. I will now turn to these. First I will give an overview, while discussing interesting intertextual references and possible connections. Then I will try to answer the question of whether we are entitled to ascribe a meaningful function to the way in which road conditions are described in the first ten books of the *Metamorphoses*.

As soon as Lucius – transformed by error into an ass – has been stolen by the robbers to carry the booty from Milo's house, he is led through a mountainous region, where there seem to be no roads at all:

> … *nos … per avia montium ducunt concitos.* [They] … took us through the trackless mountains at full speed. (Apul. *Met.* 3,28.6)

As Gianotti 1995 remarks,[7] many elements of this first journey of Lucius in the shape of an ass, *per avia montium* (through the trackless mountains) to

[7] Gianotti 1995, 117.

the robbers' cave, suggest his progressive estrangement from the civilized world and from his existence as a human being.
The poor ass suffers badly:

> *Iamque rerum tantarum pondere et montis ardui vertice et prolixo satis itinere nihil a mortuo differebam.* With the weight of all those goods and the height of the steep mountain and the extreme length of the march, I was as good as dead. (Apul. *Met.* 3,29.1)

At this point, it is useful to remember that in this novel Apuleius is working from the model of a Greek ass tale. This Greek example has not been passed down to us, but is described by the ninth-century Byzantine bishop Photius,[8] who mentions the title of this work: Μεταμορφώσεις, and designates its author as being Loukios of Patras. What we do have, however, is the shortened version of the Greek Μεταμορφώσεις, an epitome, handed down to us in the corpus of Lucian's works, and entitled Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος.[9] I will refer to this epitome as 'the *Onos*'. Now, also in the *Onos* Loukios, the ass complains about the hard journey with the robbers, as follows:

> καὶ οὕτως μέγα ἄχθος φέροντας ἡμᾶς ξύλοις παίοντες ἤλαυνον εἰς τὸ ὄρος ἀτρίπτῳ ὁδῷ φεύγειν πειρώμενοι. τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄλλα κτήνη οὐκ ἔχω εἰπεῖν ὅ τι ἔπασχεν, ἐγὼ δὲ ἀνυπόδητος ἀσυνήθης ἀπιὼν πέτραις ὀξείαις ἐπιβαίνων, τοσαῦτα σκεύη φέρων ἀπωλλύμην. Despite such a heavy load, they drove us, beating us with sticks, towards the mountain, attempting to escape by an unused path. I can't say what the other animals felt, but I myself, feet unshod and unused to such travel, moving over sharp rocks and carrying such heavy stuff, I was practically dead. (*Onos* 16,3 f.)[10]

It can be seen immediately that at this point the Latin *Metamorphoses* runs parallel to the text of the *Onos*.

---

[8] Photius Bibl. 129.
[9] For a recent discussion of the Greek sources of Apuleius' Metamorphoses, with literary references, see Mason 1999.
[10] Translations of passages from the Onos are from Sullivan 1989.

Only a short while later, remarkably enough, just after the ass has heard the robbers mention that the day's journey is almost over, the narrator descibes the last part of the road as follows:

> *Nam et secum eos animadverteram colloquentes, quod in proximo nobis esset habenda mansio et totius viae finis quieta eorumque esset sedes illa et habitatio. Clementi denique transmisso clivulo pervenimus ad locum destinatum.* I had also gathered from their conversation that we would shortly be making a halt and taking a rest after the end of the journey, and that their headquarters and residence were there. We then climbed a gentle slope and arrived at our destination. (Apul. *Met.* 4,5.6–7)

It is instructive to compare the corresponding passage in the *Onos*:

> καὶ τῶν λῃστῶν δὲ ἤκουον ὡς οὐκ εἴη ἔτι πολὺ τῆς ὁδοῦ λοιπόν, καὶ ὅτι καταμενοῦσιν ἔνθα καταλύσουσιν· ὥστε ταῦτα πάντα δρόμῳ ἐκομίζομεν, καὶ πρὸ τῆς ἑσπέρας ἤλθομεν εἰς τὰ οἰκεῖα. And I heard the bandits saying that there wasn't much of the journey still left and that they would be staying where they unpacked. So we carried all this stuff at a trot, and we arrived at their home base before dusk. (*Onos* 20,2 f.)

This last passage of Apuleius' text and its counterpart in the *Onos* reveal that only in the Latin text is the emotional situation of the protagonist – whose hopes are raised since he has heard that the journey will soon end – reflected in his perception of the road conditions:[11] suddenly the last part of the mountain road, which only a short moment ago was steep and unbearable, becomes a *clemens clivulus*; the use of the diminutive heightens the affective value of this 'gentle slope'. I do not agree with the Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius,[12] which, in line with Junghanns (1932, 62), consider this phrase ironic. We see repeatedly that the narrator's descriptions of the condition of the roads along which he – being the 'I' and the protagonist of this story – travels either reflect his own emotional state at the time, or are in some other way suggestive of the particular situation in which he finds himself. In this

[11] One may wonder whether in the lost, larger Greek version more extensive remarks on the road conditions were present (see for one possible case below, note 16). However, since we only have the epitome, the Onos must remain our point of comparison.

[12] Hijmans et alii, eds. 1977, 54.

connection, it may sometimes be worthwile to note that even the narrator's silence about the hardships of the road can be meaningful, as will be illustrated by the discussion of the following cluster of passages:

The robbers lead their newly acquired beasts of burden, loaded with booty, to their hiding place. The road leading there is, as we might expect, steep and full of sharp rocks and thorny bushes:

> *Mons … in primis altus fuit. Huius per obliqua devexa, quae saxis asperrimis et ob id inaccessis cingitur, convalles lacunosae cavaeque nimium spinetis aggeratae et quaqua versus repositae naturalem tutelam praebentes ambiebant.* The mountain was … pre-eminently high. Its precipitous slopes, where it was ringed with jagged and hence inaccessible rocks, were encircled by pitted, hollow gullies, well fortified by thick thorn-bushes and isolated on every side, furnishing a natural defence. (Apul. *Met.* 4,6.2–3)

Later, the robbers take the ass to another hide-out to fetch some loot, and the path to that place is described as very difficult:

> … *multisque clivis et anfractibus fatigatos prope ipsam vesperam perducunt ad quempiam speluncam.*…toward evening, when we were exhausted from many a hill and winding dale, they brought (us) to a cave … (Apul. *Met.* 6,25.4)

and they follow the same difficult path back again:

> … *unde multis onustos rebus rursum ne breviculo quidem tempore refectos ociter reducunt. Tantaque trepidatione festinabant, ut me plagis multis obtundentes propellentesque super lapidem propter viam positum deicerent, unde crebris aeque ingestis ictibus crure dextero et ungula sinistra me debilitatum aegre ad exurgendum compellunt* …, loaded us with quantities of loot, and, not even allowing us a brief moment to regain our strength, started us back again with all speed. They were so agitated and in such a hurry that with their frequent battering and shoving they made me fall over a rock at the side of the road. They continued none the less to rain blows on me, eventually forcing me to get

> up, though I found it difficult, for I had gone lame in my right leg and left hoof. (Apul. *Met.* 6,25.4 (rest) + 5)

And yet, when the ass attempts to escape from the robbers' den with a beautiful young woman on his back, we hear no complaints about the extremely difficult conditions of the road, which must be the same as when the ass arrived there. He runs with the speed of a racehorse:

> *Ego simul voluntariae fugae voto et liberandae virginis studio, sed et plagarum suasu quae me saepicule commonebant, equestri celeritate quadripedi cursu solum replaudens* … I was moved not only by the desire to effect my own self-chosen escape and eagerness to rescue the maiden, but also by the persuasion of the blows which admonished me from time to time; and so I smote the earth in a four-footed gallop with the speed of a racehorse. (Apul. *Met.* 6,28.1)

From the second half of the eighth book of the *Metamorphoses* and onward Lucius, the ass, travels more regularly. Schlam,[13] who structures the novel in terms of travel, has with reason entitled section 8.15 – 10.31 'On the road'. I will now turn to some striking passages from that section.

After the destruction of the household of Charite and Haemus, the *familia* of the household, slaves with their family, cattle and possessions, travel as a group to find a new settlement. The narrator has already informed us that he, the ass, is delighted to leave the place where he had been threatened by castration. He does not complain about his burden:

> *Nec me pondus sarcinae, quanquam enormis urguebat, quippe gaudiali fuga detestabilem illum exectorem virilitatis meae relinquentem.* But the weight of my load, though enormous, was no burden to me: it was a joyous escape, after all, to leave behind that detestable amputator of my manhood. (Apul. *Met.* 8,15.4)

The road described immediately hereafter, leading from mountainous terrain to more level roads, again reflects the emotional state of the protagonist, who escapes from an imminent danger, and hopes to remain intact. It is

[13] Schlam 1992, 30; 36 f.

remarkable that in this description the length of the journey is merely reported, but not, as so often before, complained about. The ass is happy to move very far away from the place where they had planned to castrate him:

> *Silvosi montis asperum permensi iugum rursusque reposita camporum spatia pervecti, iam vespera semitam tenebrante pervenimus ad quoddam castellum frequens et opulens.* We crossed the rough ridge of a wooded mountain and traversed the length of the low-lying plain beyond. Just as dusk was darkening the road, we came to a well-populated and prosperous hamlet.[14] (Apul. *Met.* 8,15.5)

Although the travelling group encounters several dangerous adventures and loses some companions, they finally find a place to settle:

> *… rursum pergimus dieque tota campestres emensi vias civitatem quandam populosam et nobilem iam fessi pervenimus.* Having walked all day across the plain, we now arrived exhausted at a large and famous city. (Apul. *Met.* 8,23.1)

Note the qualification *campestres* (‘level’) for the roads. This adjective as a qualification of roads is used three times in the *Metamorphoses*; I will discuss it below, in the section on `Difficult and easy roads’.

Slippery roads

The ass is then sold to a travelling band of *Galloi*, priests of the *Dea Syria*, described by the narrator with considerable disgust. They are not only sexually perverse, but also devious, greedy, and cruel in their behaviour towards the ass. After having piled up huge amounts of money by deceiving

[14] It is instructive to note that the Onos in the parallel passage (Onos 34,4–5) mentions an ‘uncomfortable road’, covered overnight: ἐγὼ δὲ ἠχθόμην μὲν φέρων φορτίον ὄνου ἀληθινοῦ, ἀλλ’ οὖν ἄσμενος τὸ ἐμπόδιον τοῦτο τῆς ἐμῆς ἐδεξάμην ἐκτομῆς. καὶ τὴν νύκτα ὅλην ἐλθόντες ὁδὸν ἀργαλέαν καὶ τριῶν ἄλλων ἡμερῶν τὴν ὁδὸν ἀνύσαντες ἐρχόμεθα ἐς πόλιν τῆς Μακεδονίας Βέροιαν μεγάλην καὶ πολυάνθρωπον. I was angry at carrying a real ass’s load, but on the other hand I was happy to get this reprieve from castration. Traveling the whole night on an uncomfortable road, we came to the end of it after three more days and arrived in Beroea, a large and well-populated city of Macedonia.

gullible villagers, they take to their heels. The road along which they take the ass is described at length:

> *… rursum ad viam prodeunt, viam totam, quam nocte confeceramus, longe peiorem, quidni? Lacunosis incilibus voraginosam, partim stagnanti palude fluidam et alibi subluvie caenosa lubricam. Crebris denique offensaculis et assiduis lapsibus iam contusis cruribus meis vix tandem ad campestres semitas fessus evadere potui.* … they took to the road again, a road from beginning to end far worse than the one we had covered by night. For it was muddy, with the drains full of puddles, in some parts waterlogged by stagnant pools, in other places slippery with slush and mud. As a consequence my legs were by now bruised by the numerous obstacles and constant falls, and only with great difficulty could I finally escape, tired out, on to level paths.[15] (Apul. *Met.* 9,9.1–2)

In the *Onos,* too, the *Galloi* leave stealthily, and the passage in the Latin novel runs fairly parallel to *Onos* 41,4; it is, however, only Apuleius' text that has this elaborate description of the road. Our attention is enlisted all the more by the address to the reader: '*quidni?*'. The emphatic quality of this particle is lost in the translations, which render it by 'for', or 'since': indeed, it introduces a more detailed explication of the previous statement; the translation by Annaratone 1977 acknowledges its discursive force: *Non ci credete?*

We find here, again, as in the previously quoted passage from Book 8, the combination of a notion of escape (*evadere potui*) with the qualification of `level-ness' of the road (*campestres semitas*). The qualification 'level' (*campester*) will be discussed more extensively below, in the section on `Difficult and easy roads'.

The phrase *viam … lubricam* deserves closer scrutiny. The adjective *lubricus,* used to denote slippery ground, occurs in the *Metamorphoses* already earlier, when the young tormentor of the ass refuses to help him after he stumbles heavily laden with wood at a slippery riverbank. The other occurrence is in 1,2.2, quoted above (*lubrica vallium,* 'slippery valley

[15] Here I have followed the more literal translation of Hijmans, B.L. et alii, eds., 1995, 92–94, with one change: they have at the end of this sentence: `country roads'; I prefer 'level paths' (Hanson: 'a level path').

roads'). At other places in the *Metamorphoses*, the adjective is sometimes used in a positive sense, meaning 'sinuous', but it is also often used in reference to persons, meaning 'shifty, deceitful', or, as in the famous speech of the priest of Isis in 11,15.1, in a moral sense, referring to the tendency of youth to take false steps: '… *lubrico virentis aetatulae ad serviles delapsus voluptates…*' ('on the slippery path of headstrong youth you plunged into slavish pleasures').

It seems obvious that in this road description the slippery road is a direct allusion to the deceitfulness of the priests in whose company the ass is travelling, and whose theft of a temple utensil is about to be exposed. There are other instances in Latin literature of a metaphorical use of the combination *lubrica via*. For instance in Cicero:

> *Si L. Flacco tantus amor in bonos omnes, tantum in rem publicam studium calamitati fuerit, quem posthac tam amentem fore putatis qui non illam viam vitae quam ante praecipitem et lubricam esse ducebat, huic planae et stabili praeponendam esse arbitretur?* If Flaccus' affection for loyal citizens, his devotion to the Republic have been so great as to bring disaster upon him, who, do you think, will be so demented now as not to think that way of life which he previously considered steep and slippery preferable to the firm and level path that is ours? (Cic. *Flac.* 105; transl. MacDonald 1977).

A relevant parallel to our passage is Propertius 4,4,49, where *lubrica via* denotes the road along a muddy river which the Vestal Tarpeia convinces herself to travel on, in order to be the bride of the enemy Tatius. In that context, the expression is unmistakably a metaphor for Tarpeia's perfidious undertaking:

> *cras, ut rumor ait, tota pigrabitur urbe:*
> *tu cape spinosi rorida terga iugi!*
> *lubrica tota via est et perfida: quippe tacentis*
> *fallaci celat limite semper aquas.*
>
> Tomorrow, says rumour, the whole city will be off its guard: it is then you must climb the dewy ridge of the thorn-covered hill. The whole

> route is slippery and treacherous, for a deceptive track of grass covers up the waters hidden beneath. (Prop. 4,4,47 f.; transl. Goold 1990)

This metaphorical use of *lubrica via* becomes a favourite expression for the 'road of sin' in the language of the Church Fathers. I quote only two instances:

> *Quod si primus ille homo, qui cum deo loquebatur in paradiso positus, labi tam facile potuit, … quanto facilius postea lubrica ad peccandum via maius advexit humano generi praecipitium, cum deterior tolerabiliori per vices generationis successerit!* But if the first man, who was placed in paradise, and talked with God, could fall so easily, … how much more easily later on has the slippery road to sin brought the human race to a greater precipice, since one generation in turn succeeds another, a generation more base succeeding one less wicked? (Ambr. *Epist.* 6,34,13)

> *quantum etenim discors agno lupus et tenebris lux,*
> *tantum dispescunt via divitis et via Christi.*
> *nam via lata patet, quae prono lubrica clivo*
> *vergit in infernum, quae dites urget avaros,*
> *molibus impulsos propriis in tartara ferri.*
> *at via, quae Christi est, quae confessoribus almis*
> *martyribusque patet, paucis iter ardua pandit.*
>
> As much, in fact, as the wolf differs from the lamb, and light from darkness, the road of the rich and the road of Christ are separate. For wide open is the large road, which, slippery, sloping downward, descends to hell; this road pushes the greedy rich with the weight of their own possessions to be hurled into Tartarus. But the road which is of Christ, and which is open to beneficent confessors and martyrs, opens for few a difficult path. (P.- Nol. *Carm.* 21,538 f.)

Difficult and easy roads

After the priests have been exposed as thieves, and thrown in prison, the ass is sold at a public auction. The mention of a difficult road along which the

new owner of the ass, a miller, takes him to his mill, appears to be the announcement of hard times to come:[16]

> *me … quidam pistor… praestinavit, protinusque frumento etiam coemto adfatim onustum per iter arduum scrupis et cuiusce modi stirpibus infestum ad pistrinum … perducit.* A miller … bought me …. Immediately he loaded me to capacity with grain that he purchased as well, and took me, by way of a steep path dangerously full of sharp stones and all sorts of underbrush, to the mill …(Apul. *Met.* 9,10.5)

At the end of Book 9 a soldier confiscates the ass, and in the first chapter of Book 10 he takes the ass with him. Quite unexpectedly, the narrator here tells us that the road was easy and passed through level country:

> *Confecta campestri nec adeo difficili via ad quandam civitatulam pervenimus nec in stabulo, sed in domo cuiusdam decurionis devertimus.* At the end of a level and not very difficult journey we came to a small town, where we put up not in an inn, but at the home of one of the town-councillors. (Apul. *Met.* 10,1.3)

There is no equivalent of this in the *Onos*. It appears that the seemingly gratuitous mention of an easy and level road is an anticipation of the life of ease and luxury lying ahead of the ass. As we have seen before, the mention of a level road often reflects an uplifting in the emotional state of the protagonist. This reminds one of the remarks of Artemidorus about the meaning of dreaming about roads:

> ὄρη δὲ καὶ νάπαι καὶ ἄγκη καὶ φάραγγες καὶ ὕλαι πᾶσι δυσθυμίας καὶ φόβους καὶ ταραχὰς καὶ ἀνεργασίας σημαίνουσι … ἀεὶ δὲ ἄμεινον ταῦτα διεκπερᾶν καὶ τὰς ἐν αὐτοῖς ὁδοὺς εὑρίσκειν καὶ ἀπὸ τούτων εἰς πεδία κατιέναι …αἱ (ὁδοὶ) μὲν γὰρ πλατεῖαι καὶ ὁμαλαὶ καὶ ἐν πεδίῳ οὖσαι πολλὴν εὐμάρειαν ἐν τοῖς πραττομένοις προαγορεύουσιν, αἱ δὲ λεῖαι μὲν ἀνάντεις δὲ μετὰ παρολκῆς καὶ δυσθυμίας σημαίνουσιν ἀνύσειν τὰ προκείμενα … στεναὶ δὲ παντελῶς δυσθυμίας σημαίνουσι. Mountains,

[16] In the comparable passage of the Onos (42,2) this road is summarily called a ‘difficult road’ (ὁδὸν ἀργαλέαν). This may point to a more extensive road description in the lost, larger Greek Μεταμορφώσεις.

> valleys, mountain glens and clefts, and woods mean for all people sorrow, terror and disturbances and periods of idleness … it is always better to traverse those entirely, to find the roads there and to descend from them into plains … level, even roads which are in a plain, predict many good opportunities in business, and smooth but steep roads mean that, amidst delay and trouble, one's undertakings will be completed … but narrow roads altogether mean trouble. (Artem. *Onirocriticon* 2,28)

Another interpretation might be possible for this conspicuous mention of the flat and easy road. As the 'second reader'[17] of the *Metamorphoses* knows, this road will eventually lead to the depraved society of Corinth as described in the later chapters of Book 10.[18] In this respect, it is remarkable that in this episode – namely, during the journey to Corinth – we find the one and only passage where, contrary to what we have seen thus far, it is the *Onos* that mentions a difficult road, without any equivalent for this in the parallel passage in the Latin *Metamorphoses*.[19]

> ἐξελαύνομεν ἕωθεν, κἀγὼ τὸν δεσπότην ἔφερον εἴ ποτε χωρίον εἴη τῆς ὁδοῦ τραχὺ καὶ τοῖς ὀχήμασιν ἐπιβαίνειν χαλεπόν. So we moved off at dawn, and I carried my master wherever there was a rough stretch of the road that made it difficult for the carriages to proceed. (*Onos* 49,3)

In Apuleius (*Met.* 10,18) the procession of the journey to Corinth is described lavishly, but without any mention of a difficult stretch of road.

The two roads in life

We may well wonder whether in the strikingly easy roads in Book 10 there is an allusion to the widespread image of the two roads in life, found for the first time in a famous passage of Hesiod:

---

[17] For the importance of the concept of the 'second reader' for the interpretation of Apuleius' Metamorphoses see Winkler 1985, 10 f. (and passim); see also Hofmann 1997, 167, and n. 86, for this concept in ancient rhetorical theory.

[18] For other associations which Corinth might evoke in the reader of the Met. see Graverini in this volume.

[19] It must be added that in the Onos the journey is to Thessaloniki, not to Corinth.

τὴν μέν τοι κακότητα καὶ ἰλαδόν ἐστιν ἑλέσθαι
ῥηδίως· λείη μὲν ὁδός, μάλα δ' ἐγγύθι ναίει·
τῆς δ' ἀρετῆς ἱδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἔθηκαν
ἀθάνατοι· μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἶμος ἐς αὐτήν
καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον·

… Badness can be got easily and in shoals; the road to her is smooth, and she lives very near us. But between us and Goodness the gods have placed the sweat of our brows; long and steep is the path that leads to her, and it is rough at the first …(Hesiod. *Op.* 287 ff.)

Hesiod's formula had a rich afterlife, and was picked up by Prodicus in his fable of Heracles at the crossroads; Prodicus' allegory has been preserved for us in the version presented by Xenophon in his *Memorabilia*, 2,1,20 f.

The allegory of Heracles at the crossroads is at the root of expressions like the Latin proverb *per aspera ad astra*. The history and background of this proverb in Latin literature have been carefully studied by Hommel 1976. The fable of Heracles at the crossroads as a parable for a choice between a life of virtue and a life of vice, as suggested by the image of a steep, narrow and difficult road opposed to a flat and wide-open road, has found numerous expressions in Greek and Roman philosophy and literature. A famous and elaborate re-working of this fable is the Dream of Scipio in Silius Italicus' *Punica*, 15,18–130. It was still very much alive in Apuleius' day, and may be recognised, among other places, in Lucian's *The Dream*, 5 ff. A passage in Philostratus' "Life of Apollonius of Tyana" attests to the existence of ancient art works depicting this fable:

Εἶδες ἐν ζωγραφίας λόγοις καὶ τὸν τοῦ Προδίκου Ἡρακλέα, ὡς ἔφηβος μὲν ὁ Ἡρακλῆς, οὔπω δὲ ἐν αἱρέσει τοῦ βίου, κακία δ' αὐτὸν καὶ ἀρετὴ διαλαβοῦσαι παρὰ σφᾶς ἄγουσιν, ἡ μὲν χρυσῷ τε κατασκευασμένη καὶ ὄρμοις, ἐσθῆτί τε ἁλιπορφύρῳ καὶ παρειᾶς ἄνθει καὶ χαίτης ἀναπλοκαῖς καὶ γραφαῖς ὀμμάτων, ἔστι δ' αὐτῇ καὶ χρυσοῦν πέδιλον, γέγραπται γὰρ καὶ τούτῳ ἐνσοβοῦσα. ἡ δ' αὖ πεπονηκυίᾳ μὲν προσφερής, τραχὺ δὲ ὁρῶσα, τὸν δὲ αὐχμὸν πεποιημένη κόσμημα καὶ ἀνυπόδετος ἡ ἀρετὴ καὶ λιτὴ τὴν ἐσθῆτα, καὶ γυμνὴ δ' ἂν ἐφαίνετο, εἰ μὴ ἐγίγνωσκε τὸ ἐν θηλείαις εὔσχημον. "You have seen in picture-books the representation of Hercules by Prodicus; in it Hercules is represented as a youth, who

> has not yet chosen the life he will lead; and vice and virtue stand on each side of him, plucking his garments and trying to draw him to themselves. Vice is adorned with gold and necklaces and with purple raiment, and her cheeks are painted and her hair delicately plaited and her eyes underlined with henna; and she also wears gold slippers, for she is pictured strutting about in these; but virtue in the picture resembles a woman worn out with toil, with a pinched look; and she has chosen for her adornment rough squalor, and she goes without shoes and in the plainest of raiment, and she would have appeared naked if she had not too much regard for feminine decency."[20]

This later became a widely used image in Christian moralising literature and art, as these two examples illustrate:

Fig. 1. Girolamo di Benvenuto, *The choice of Hercules* (Panofsky 1930, fig. 53)

[20] Philostratus, VA 6,10; ed. and transl. Conybeare.

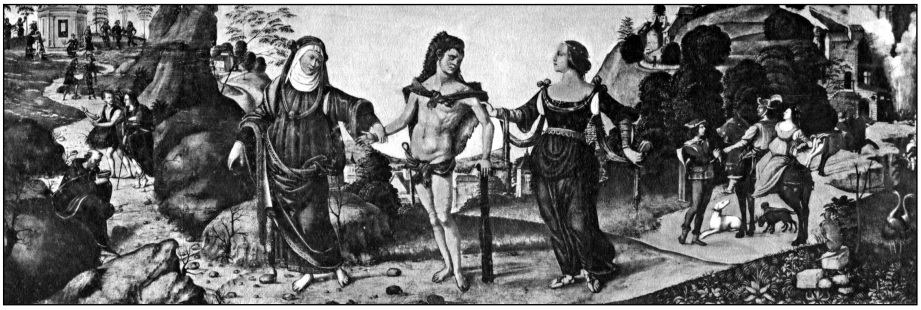

Fig. 2. Niccolò Soggi (?), *The choice of Hercules* (Panofsky 1930, fig. 52)

In allegorical interpretations of the poets another mythical tale was apparently often interpreted as a choice between pleasure and virtue: the tale of the Judgement of Paris; this tale was sometimes explicitly compared to the parable of the choice of Heracles, as for instance by Athenaeus:

> ἐγὼ δέ φημι καὶ τὴν τοῦ Πάριδος κρίσιν ὑπὸ τῶν παλαιοτέρων πεποιῆσθαι ἡδονῆς πρὸς ἀρετὴν οὖσαν σύγκρισιν· προκριθείσης γοῦν τῆς Ἀφροδίτης, αὕτη δ' ἐστὶν ἡ ἡδονή, πάντα συνεταράχθη. καί μοι δοκεῖ καὶ ὁ καλὸς ἡμῶν Χενοφῶν τὸν περὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα καὶ τὴν Ἀρετὴν μῦθον ἐντεῦθεν πεπλακέναι.: And I for one affirm also that the Judgement of Paris, as told in poetry by the writers of an older time, is really a trial of pleasure against virtue. Aphrodite, for example – and she represents pleasure – was given the preference, and so everything was thrown into turmoil. (Athen. *Deipnosophistai* 12, 510c; transl. C. Burton Gulick)

Remarkably, the pageant of the tenth book of Apuleius' novel ends with a pantomime representing just that mythical tale of a choice: 'The Judgement of Paris'. In the description of that spectacle, Apuleius has at least once clearly and unmistakably inserted an allusion to the famous tale of Heracles at the crossroads, as it is found in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 2,1,22:

> (First the appearance before Hercules of the woman personifying 'Virtue' is described, then 'Vice':) … τὴν δ' ἑτέραν τεθραμμένην μὲν εἰς … ἁπαλότητα, κεκαλλωπισμένην δὲ τὸ μὲν χρῶμα, … ἐσθῆτα δέ, ἐξ ἧς ἂν μάλιστα ὥρα διαλάμποι ...the other was well-developed to the point

> of … sensuality, her complexion made up …, and robed in a way that revealed as much as possible of the blossom of her youth. (Xen. *Mem.* 2,1,22)

Compare the passage in Apuleius' description:

> *… introgressit alia, visendo decore praepollens, gratia coloris ambrosei … nudo et intecto corpore perfectam formonsitatem professa, nisi quod tenui pallio bombycino inumbrabat spectabilem pubem. …ut … pateret flos aetatulae* … another girl made her entrance, surpassingly beautiful to look at, with a charming ambrosial complexion … She displayed a perfect figure, her body naked and uncovered except for a piece of sheer silk with which she veiled her comely charms. … to reveal the flower of her youth. (Apul. *Met.* 10,31.1–2)

Conclusion

It is not my intention to claim that the many harsh, steep and difficult roads which the protagonist and narrator of Apuleius' novel so often and loudly bewails could in any respect be suggestive of the difficult road to virtue. Certainly, no uniform message can be identified in the various ways in which the image of the road is applied throughout the story of the journey of Lucius, the ass. Rather, the different ways in which the protagonist experiences and describes the conditions of the roads along which he must travel have often been shown to be projections of his emotional situation at the time. And yet, as the Latin novel draws to its end – and especially from the ninth book of the *Metamorphoses* onward – I have, I hope, shown that the moral connotations attached to the road descriptions increase, and this development goes hand in hand with the Latin text deviating ever more strongly from the Greek *Onos*.[21] For instance, I have discussed the possible metaphorical use of the 'slipperiness' of the road in connection with the devious priests of the Syrian Goddess, a use which is entirely missing in the parallel episode in the *Onos*. Moreover, in the tenth book the seemingly gratuitous mention of an easy and flat road along which the soldier takes the ass towards a new life, on a journey which will eventually lead to the Vanity

[21] See also Zimmerman 2000, Introd. 2.3 (pp. 17 f.) on this phenomenon

Fair of Corinth, is suggestive of the flat and easy road which becomes – in Christian thought – the road of sin, but which already in the parable of Prodicus is presented as the road of Vice, opposed to the steep and arduous road of Virtue. It is probably a universal phenomenon that people express their multiform relation to the world and to life in that world by using the image of the road. Becker 1937 has traced the development of this phenomenon from early Greek literature onward.

Without suggesting a unified, moralizing message in the treatment of road images in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, I hope to have shown that into the final books of his version of the ass tale Apuleius, playfully, teasingly, or even unconsciously, has woven some suggestions of the image of different roads leading to different goals in life.[22]

In this essay I have concentrated on the main narrative of the *Metamorphoses*, and I have therefore deliberately left out the journeys described in the embedded tales, as for instance in the Tale of Cupid and Psyche. Psyche in that tale travels from her home country to a mysterious landscape inhabited by divine beings, but still (with help of Zephyrus) within the reach of mortal beings like herself and her sisters. The heroine thereafter walks on her own feet in search of her lost husband; she even travels as deep down as the Underworld, and ends up (borne by Mercury) as high as Olympus. From this survey it becomes immediately clear that the world of the Tale of Cupid and Psyche is far outside the dimensions of the world of the main narrative through which Lucius travels (see also section 5 of Harrison in this volume: "A Fantasy World?…", p. 48 f.).

Bibliography

Annaratone, C. 1977 (14th ed. 1996). *Apuleio. Le Metamorfosi o L'Asino d'oro* (Latin-Italian; with an introduction by R. Merkelbach, and a *premessa al testo latino* by S. Rizzo). Milano.

Bakhtin, M.M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination. Edited by M. Holquist. Translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist*, Austin.

[22] This essay issues from a paper presented at a colloquium held at the University of Crete, Rethymno, in May 2001; I want to thank Michael Paschalis and Stavros Frangoulidis for their warm hospitality and flawless organization. I also thank the audience on that occasion for their reactions; a special word of thanks goes to Stephen Harrison, Stelios Panayotakis, Victor Schmidt, and Ben Hijmans for their careful reading of, and helpful remarks on a previous version of this essay.

Becker, O. 1937. *Das Bild des Weges und verwandte Vorstellungen im frühgriechischen Denken*, Berlin.

Clarke, K. 2001. 'Prologue and Provenance: *Quis ille?* or *Unde ille?*', in: A. Kahane and A, Laird, eds., *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, Oxford, 101–110.

Conybeare, F.C. 1912. *Philostratus. The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. 2 Vols, Cambridge, Massachusetts. – London (Loeb Classical Library).

De Biasi, L. 1990. 'Le descrizioni del paesaggio naturale nelle opere di Apuleio. Aspetti Letterari', *Memorie dell' Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, Classe di Scienze Morali*, serie V, vol. 14. Reprinted in: Magnaldi, G. and Gianotti, G. F., eds. 2000. *Apuleio. Storia del testo e interpretazioni*, Torino, 199–264.

Doody, M.A. 1998. *The True Story of the Novel*, (orig. New Brunswick 1996), Paperback (Fontana Press).

Gianotti, G.F. 1995. 'In viaggio con l' asino', In: Rosa, F. and Zambon, F., eds. *Pothos. Il viaggio, la nostalgia*. Trenta, 107–132.

Hanson, J.A. 1989. *Apuleius. Metamorphoses*, Cambridge Massachusetts – London: Loeb, 2 Volumes.

Hijmans, B.L. et alii, eds. 1977. *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius. Apuleius Madaurensis, Metamorphoses Book IV. 1–27. Text, Introduction, Commentary*, Groningen.

Hijmans, B.L. et alii, eds. 1995. *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius. Apuleius Madaurensis, Metamorphoses Book IX. Text, Introduction, Commentary*, Groningen.

Hinds, S. 2002. 'Landscape with figures: aesthetics of place in the *Metamorphoses* and its tradition', in: P. Hardie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, Cambridge, 122–149.

Hofmann, H. 1997. 'Sprachhandlung und Kommunikationspotential: Diskursstrategien im *Goldenen Esel*', in: Picone, M. – Zimmermann, B., eds. *Der antike Roman und seine mittelalterliche Rezeption*, Basel – Boston – Berlin, 137–169.

Hommel, H. 1976. 'Der Weg nach Oben. Untersuchungen zu lateinischem Spruchgut', *Symbola I*, Hildesheim – New York, 274–289.

Junghanns, P. 1932. *Die Erzählungstechnik von Apuleius' Metamorphosen und ihrere Vorlage*, *Philologus* Suppl. 24, Leipzig.

Mason, H.J. 1999. 'The *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius and its Greek Sources', in: Hofmann, H., ed., *Latin Fiction. The Latin Novel in Context*, London – New York, 103–112.

Panofsky, E. 1930. *Hercules am Scheidewege*, Leipzig.

Schlam, C. 1992. *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius. On Making an Ass of One Self*, London.

Sullivan, J.P. 1989. *Pseudo-Lucian. The Ass*, in: Reardon, B.P., ed., *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, 589–618.

Winkler, J. 1985. *Auctor & Actor. A Narratological reading of Apuleius' "The Golden Ass"*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London.

Zimmerman, M. 2000. *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius. Apuleius Madaurensis, Metamorphoses Book X. Text, Introduction, Commentary*, Groningen.