

Space and Displacement in Apuleius

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Space. For Americans of a certain generation, among whom I number myself, it is almost impossible to hear that word without hearing a continuation: “Space – the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise....”

I begin with this cliché of contemporary popular culture, not just for an easy laugh, but more importantly as a reminder of how fundamentally anachronistic so much of our depiction of the category of space is for the literature of the ancient world. Not just the three-dimensional (or more!) universe we have learned to see through NASA television images from space and science fiction film and television, but even the two-dimensional projections of space we call maps are in many ways profoundly modern imaginings.

In recent years there has been an efflorescence of interest in *ecphrasis* in ancient fiction, both in the modern sense of literary depictions of works of art and more generally as the language of visual description.¹ Apuleius is a master of the full range of *ecphrasis* in his invocation and manipulation of the reader’s “visual repertoire,”² for want of a better term, in the process of reading. Reader response theory has examined in some detail the reader’s literary repertoire, that is, the texts and literary concepts already present in the reader’s mind which a given text quotes, paraphrases, alludes to, parodies, or otherwise employs. Ancient readers possessed a similar, non-literary, and largely visual repertoire of images and experiences which a text can also invoke. At one end of the spectrum, these are recognizable and specific masterpieces of art and architecture, the Venus Anadyomene or the Stoa Poikile. At the other end, they are equally recognizable but generic elements of the

¹ See Bartsch 1989, followed by many others.

² On this concept, see Slater 2001.

visual environment: an amphitheatre, a warship, a flock of sheep on a hillside.

Conceptions and visualizations of space are a fascinating and underexplored category within visual repertoire. The present study seeks simply to raise a few points about Roman imagination of space as implicated in, and applied to, the world of the *Golden Ass*. The pattern I seek to discern in Apuleius, one of persistent displacement, is relatively simple and perhaps not revolutionary, but its persistence is still under-appreciated and, in combination with other arguments, does contribute substantially to the debate over the ending and the meaning of this remarkable novel.

What tools did a Roman have to imagine space? As a first reader of this novel which begins somewhere in Thessaly, I had at least the outlines of a map in my head on which I could place Thessaly to the north of, and at some distance from, the more familiar places of central Greece, such as Athens, and more generally in the eastern Mediterranean world. Did a Roman reader imagine things this way?

The general notion of a map, even a world map, is quite plausible for the second century AD reader, though it would have been far less detailed than the maps we imagine. Six or seven centuries earlier Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (200ff.) already possesses a map with Athens, Sparta, and Euboea on it. Plutarch, in his *Life of Nicias*, gives us a vignette of men and boys on the eve of the Sicilian expedition drawing their own maps of Sicily and its harbors:

ὥστε καὶ νέους ἐν παλαίστραις καὶ γέροντας ἐν ἐργαστηρίοις καὶ ἡμικυκλίοις συγκαθεζομένους ὑπογράφειν τὸ σχῆμα τῆς Σικελίας, καὶ τὴν φύσιν τῆς περὶ αὐτὴν θαλάσσης, καὶ λιμένας καὶ τόπους οἷς τέτραπται πρὸς Λιβύην ἢ νῆσος. οὐ γὰρ ἄθλον ἐποιοῦντο τοῦ πολέμου Σικελίαν, ἀλλ' ὀρμητήριον, ὡς ἀπ' αὐτῆς διαγωνισόμενοι πρὸς Καρχηδονίους καὶ σήσοντες ἅμα Λιβύην καὶ τὴν ἐντὸς Ἡρακλείων στηλῶν θαλασσαν. (Plutarch, *Nic.* 12,1-2)

so that the youth in their training-schools and the old men in their workshops and lounging-places would sit in clusters drawing maps of Sicily, charts of the sea about it, and plans of the harbors and districts of the island which look towards Libya. For they did not regard Sicily itself as the prize of the war, but rather as a mere base of operations, purposing

therefrom to wage a contest with the Carthaginians and get possession of both Libya and of all the sea this side of the Pillars of Heracles. (trans. Perrin 1916)³

A skeptical reader might wonder if such knowledge and spatial thinking was in fact so common in the fifth century BC – but it surely must be quite imaginable for Plutarch’s own audience in the second century AD. Maps of some kind were certainly available in public spaces of the Hellenistic world. The philosopher Theophrastus in his will (c. 286 BC) requested that panels showing maps of the world (*periodoi ges*) be set up in his school.⁴ The Roman general Agrippa assembled information to prepare a world map, which was completed by Augustus after Agrippa’s death in 12 BC and set up in the Porticus Vipsania in Rome.⁵

Yet this kind of map would offer only a general visual orientation: they were not survey or road maps in a modern sense, tools to follow in moving through space. For actual travel, a Roman might well be more familiar with an itinerary, a sequenced list of places, often enumerating distances between, by which one moved from one place to another. First century examples of these survive in the form of the Vicarello goblets, now in the Palazzo Massimo in Rome: four silver goblets listing an overland sequence of staging points between Cadiz and Rome itself.⁶

Such maps and itineraries then are two means for the Roman reader to imagine space and movement through space – and yet even by these standards, it is clear that Apuleius prefers to disorient – rather than orient – his readers. The pattern is set at once by the Prologue to the *Golden Ass*:

At ego tibi sermone isto *Milesio* varias fabulas conseram, auresque tuas benivolam lepido susurro permulceam, modo si papyrus *Aegyptiam* ar-

³ Virtually the same anecdote recurs in Plutarch, *Alc.* 17, 3: “Many were they who sat in the palaestras and lounging-places mapping out in the sand the shape of Sicily and the position of Libya and Carthage” (καὶ τοὺς μὲν νέους αὐτόθεν εἶχεν ἤδη ταῖς ἐλπίσιν ἐπηρμένους, τῶν δὲ πρεσβυτέρων ἠκροῶντο πολλὰ θαυμάσια περὶ τῆς στρατείας περαιόντων, ὥστε πολλοὺς ἐν ταῖς παλαίστραις καὶ τοῖς ἡμικυκλίοις καθέζεσθαι τῆς τε νήσου τὸ σχῆμα καὶ θέσιν Λιβύης καὶ Καρχηδόνας ὑπογράφοντας). Cf. Dilke 1985, 25-26.

⁴ Quoted in Dilke 1985, 30-31.

⁵ Dilke 1985, 41-53.

⁶ Dilke 1985, 122-124.

gutia *Nilotici* calami inscriptam non spreveris inspicere. figuras fortunisque hominum in alias imagines conversas et in se rursus mutuo nexu refectas, ut mireris, exordior. quis ille? paucis accipe. *Hymettos Attica* et *Isthmos Ephyrea* et *Taenaros Spartiatica*, glebae felices aeternum libris felicioribus conditae, mea vetus prosapia est. ibi linguam *Atthidem* primis pueritiae stipendiis merui; mox in urbe *Latia* advena studiorum *Quiritium* indigenam sermonem aerumnabili labore, nullo magistro praeunte, aggressus excolui. en ecce praefamur veniam, si quid exotici ac forensis sermonis rudis locutor offendero. iam haec equidem ipsa vocis immutatio desultoriae scientiae stilo quem accessimus respondet: fabulam *Graecanicam* incipimus. lector intende: laetaberis.

But let me join together different stories in that Milesian style, and let me soothe your kindly ears with an agreeable whispering, if only you do not scorn to glance at an Egyptian papyrus inscribed with the sharpness of a reed from the Nile. I begin a tale of men's shapes and fortunes transformed into different appearances and back again into themselves by mutual connection, that you may wonder at it. 'Who is this?' Hear in brief. Attic Hymettus and the Corinthian Isthmus and Spartan Taenarus are my origins of old, ever fertile regions recorded in even more fertile books. There it was that I acquired the Attic tongue in the first campaigns of boyhood; thereafter in the Latin city as a foreigner to the studies of Rome I took on and developed the local language with laborious effort and without the lead of a master. Look then, I ask your pardon at the beginning if I commit any offence, being an inexperienced speaker of the language of the forum which is foreign to me. Indeed, this very change of language corresponds to the style of switchback lore which I have approached. I begin a story of Greek origin. Reader, pay attention: you will be pleased.⁷

Note that some ten percent of the prologue's 118 words are place names or geographical adjectives, depending on how one counts. I have highlighted thirteen here, and a dizzying assortment they are: Milesian, Egyptian, Nilotic, Athenian, and Latian, along with Attic Hymettus, the Ephyrean (Co-

⁷ For the text and translation of the prologue only, I give that of Harrison and Winterbottom 2001. Elsewhere both text and translations of the *Golden Ass* are those of J. A. Hanson 1989 in the Loeb.

rinthian) Isthmus, and Spartan Taenarus – not to mention a Greek(ish) story told by one who has studied with the Quirites. These place names do as much as anything else in this opening to embody the narrator's "switchback lore," his acrobatic abilities for leaping from one language and culture to another and back again.

While much more can be said about this prologue,⁸ at the moment I simply want to point to two aspects of its geographical language: the narrator's starting point is much less clear than it may seem on first hearing or reading, yet the overall language does indicate movement through space as well as time, a movement leading generally from a Greek to a Roman sphere. The narrator claims three different Greek city states as his singular *vetus prosapia* ("my origins of old"): Athens, Corinth, and Sparta. A Roman reader surely had enough experience with mapping to imagine these three – and realize they are not the same. Stephen Harrison solves this problem of geographic confusion with the notion of the speaking book: unlike a person, a book can indeed be from three different places at the same time.⁹ This is an intriguing notion, but it remains a question whether all or most first-time readers will grasp such a conceit at once. Instead, Apuleius seems to be deliberately fogging our geographical imagination here, inviting us as readers first to think spatially and then realize that this will not quite work. At the same time, he clearly indicates that his growth and education took him from this Greek-speaking area to the single Latian city of the Quirites, where he cultivated the language in which he writes his "Greekish" tale. In this the prologue accurately anticipates the movement of the whole narrative, from our discovery of Lucius in an indeterminate space, on the road into Thessaly, to his final appearance as a priest of Isis in Rome.

Let us focus on the relation between the geographical movement of the overall narrative and the first two of the inset tales. My suggestion is that these show similarities in their patterns of movement, similarities which may have significance for our understanding once again of the novel's ending. Other characters in this novel beside our narrator end up as "displaced persons." Their fates may suggest something about our narrator's own.

The first inset tale in the novel is the familiar and oft studied one told by Aristomenes, to beguile his companion and the newly met Lucius on their way. The narrative proper begins thus:

⁸ See Kahane and Laird 2001 for a range of approaches.

⁹ Harrison 1990.

Thessaliam – nam et illic originis maternae nostrae fundamenta a Plutarcho illo inclito ac mox Sexto philosopho nepote eius prodita gloriam nobis faciunt – eam Thessaliam ex negotio petebam. postquam ardua montium et lubrica vallium et roscida cespitum et glebosa camporum emerisimus.... (1, 2, 1-2)

I was travelling to Thessaly, where the ancestry of my mother's family brings us fame in the persons of the renowned Plutarch and later his nephew, the philosopher Sextus. Thessaly, I say, is where I was heading on business. I had emerged from steep mountain tracks and slippery valley roads, damp places in the meadows and cloddy paths through the fields.

Its first word is *Thessaliam*, Thessaly, and yet in a typical Apuleian move, we discover only with the last word of that first sentence, *petebam* ("I was travelling to..."), that we do not know quite where we are, only that we are travelling in that direction. The next sentence begins with a montage of mountains, valleys, and plains, which could be anywhere.¹⁰ Only after he encounters and begins to converse with Aristomenes and the other traveller does Lucius volunteer that he is on his way from Athens, indeed from the very heart of Athens, the Agora,¹¹ into Thessaly.

The narrative that Lucius hears contains two itineraries, one for the narrator Aristomenes, the other for his unfortunate friend Socrates. Aristomenes tells his tale because they are all headed to Hypata. He identifies himself as a merchant, travelling through Thessaly, Aetolia, and Boeotia:

At ille: 'istud quidem quod polliceris aequi bonique facio, verum quod inchoaveram porro exordiar. sed tibi prius deierabo Solem istum videntem deum me vera comperta memorare; nec vos ulterius dubitabitis, si Thessaliam proximam civitatem perveneritis, quod ibidem passim per ora populi sermo iactetur quae palam gesta sunt. *sed ut prius* noritis, cuiatis sim, [qui sim,] Aegiensis. audite et quo quaestu me teneam: melle

¹⁰ De Biasi 2000, 238-240 identifies a series of passages exhibiting "*error geographico*" in the novel, beginning with this sentence (1, 2, 2) and ending with the remarkable sentence at 11, 26, 1, in the course of which Lucius returns home to Corinth and then sails off to Rome (see further below). De Biasi finds "*l'error geographico come τόπος letterario non è più pertinente*" (240), but I shall argue otherwise.

¹¹ Since he there saw a performance in front of the Stoa Poikile (1, 4).

vel caseo et huiusce modi cauponarum mercibus per Thessaliam Aetoliam Boeotiam ultro citro discurrens. (1, 5)

I focus here especially on the second part of this (after the italics):

“I consider that a fair promise,” he replied, “and I shall forthwith continue the story I had started. But first I shall swear to you by the Sun, this seeing god, that I am narrating events which I know at first hand to be true; and you will have no further doubts when you arrive at the next town in Thessaly, for the story is circulating there on everyone’s lips about what occurred in plain daylight. *But first*, so that you may know where I am from, I am from Aegium. Hear too how I make my living. I deal in honey and cheese and that sort of innkeepers’ merchandise, travelling back and forth through Thessaly, Aetolia, and Boeotia.

The text here is not without problems. Many editors, including Helm, follow Castiglioni and add *Aristomenes sum* (“I am Aristomenes”) after *qui sim*, though Hanson is right to note that characters in Apuleius often delay in giving their names. The more immediate concern is the geographical adjective *Aegiensis*, which Hanson and most others translate as “from Aegium,” an Achaean city on the gulf of Corinth.¹² Wytse Keulen has now made an intriguing case that Apuleius means his reader to understand the adjective as “from Aegae.”¹³ There were several towns named Aegae in Greece; if this is Apuleius’s intention, then, he is once again deliberately confusing the reader about geographical origins. Moreover, instead of an itinerary of one stop after another on his journey, we get a field of operations, through which Aristomenes moves “back and forth,” (*ultro citro discurrens*). Keulen finds a pun on the Greek word for goat (αἴξ) implicit in the town name (whether Aegium or Aegae) and notes the ancient etymologies which connected that noun with the verb αἴσσω, to dart, move rapidly, as goats did.¹⁴ Aristomenes’ business travels gambol over three regions, so how precisely he came to Hypata on the trip in question is left uncertain.

¹² This is certainly the meaning of the adjective in Livy 38, 30, 1 and 5 and Tacitus *Annals* 4, 13, 1. I have not been able to determine what text Lindsay 1960 is reading; his translation says Aristomenes is “from Aegina.”

¹³ Keulen 2000.

¹⁴ Keulen 2000, 313-314.

In Hypata Aristomenes finds his old friend Socrates, given up at home for dead, living here in desperate circumstances. Although the narrative does not specifically say so, the reader's likeliest assumption is that they know each other from their home city; therefore Socrates too comes from Aegium. He has arrived in Hypata by a different route, however, as he tells Aristomenes:

“me miserum”, inquit, “qui dum voluptatem gladiatorii spectaculi satis famigerabilis consector, in has aerumnas incidi. nam, ut scis optime, secundum quaestum Macedoniam profectus, dum mense decimo ibidem attentus nummator revortor, modico prius quam Larissam accederem, per transitum spectaculum obiturus in quadam avia et lacunosa convalli a vastissimis latronibus obsessus atque omnibus privatus tandem evado et utpote ultime adfectus ad quandam cauponam Meroen, anum, sed admodum scitulam, devorto, eique causas et peregrinationis diuturnae et domuitionis anxiae et spoliationis miserae refero. (1, 7)

“Woe is me,” he began. “I was pursuing the pleasure of a famous gladiatorial show when I fell into these tribulations. As you very well know, I had gone to Macedonia on a commercial venture, and after nine months of work there I was on my way home a more moneyed man. A little before reaching Larissa – where I was going to stop for the show on my way – as I was walking through a desolate and pitted valley, I was set upon by monstrous bandits and stripped of everything I had. I finally escaped and, in my desperate state, stopped at the house of an innkeeper named Meroë, an old but rather attractive woman. I explained to her about my long travels and my anxiety to return home and the miserable robbery.

Returning home from a trip to Macedonia, Socrates diverted to Larissa in order to see some gladiatorial games. Plundered and beaten by robbers, he takes refuge with Meroë, an innkeeper soon to be revealed as a witch, and then becomes sexually ensnared by her.¹⁵ This sounds a bit more like an itinerary: out from Aegium (by implication) to Macedonia, then back via

¹⁵ One might here expand on the suggestion of Keulen 2000 about *Aegiensis*. If Socrates too is a man “from Goat-Town,” this might further explain his goat-like nature in yielding to Meroë’s sexual temptations.

Larissa. The first-time reader, however, might guess that Meroë's inn is in Larissa. We are not yet told that her inn is at Hypata, although that later becomes clear in the narrative.

Socrates enumerates her powers to a skeptical Aristomenes; these include powers over space: the ability to pull down the sky and lift up the earth (*divini potens caelum deponere, terram suspendere*, 1, 8) and to cast love spells on the most distant inhabitants of the earth (*ut se ament efflictim non modo incolae, verum etiam Indi vel Aethiopes utrique vel ipsi Anticthones*).¹⁶ Indeed, the name of the witch herself, Meroë, is that of the supposed capital of Aethiopia.¹⁷ After learning of her neighbors' plan to eliminate her by stoning, she uses her magic to reverse inside and outside, conjuring demons to trap them all inside their houses until they agree to leave her alone. Not satisfied with this, however, she punishes the instigator of the plot against her by magically picking up his house, walls, foundations, and ground underneath (*cum tota domo, id est parietibus et ipso solo et omni fundamento*, 1, 10)¹⁸ and dropping it outside the walls of a city a hundred miles away on a mountain top, thus exiling him both from his home city and the protection of what is perforce his new home.

Aristomenes receives lurid demonstration of Meroë's powers over space that night when he attempts to shelter Socrates. Meroë and another witch named Panthia burst into their room at the inn, overturn everything, remove Socrates' heart and replace it with a sponge – then withdraw, magically replacing the door and mending the broken hinges. The spatial categories of inside and outside here are desperately confused – and then seemingly restored, enough at least for Aristomenes to think that it all might have been a nightmare. Only when he attempts to take Socrates away to safety is the real and permanent disruption revealed: when Socrates leans over a stream to drink, the sponge pops out, and he drops down dead.

¹⁶ A telling demonstration of her power. Rabinowitz 1998, 79: "Meroe ... is a creature whose lust is so great it cannot be described in physiological terms alone - its range is geographical ..." (a reference for which I thank Wytse Keulen).

¹⁷ So named by both Herodotus (2, 29) and Pausanias (1, 33, 4; 5, 7, 4).

¹⁸ Scobie 1975, 130, 134, Pl. III, reproduces from the 1538 German translation of Apuleius by Johan Sieder, *Lucii Apuleii von ainem gulden Esel* a woodcut showing the naked witch Meroë flying through the air and carrying her opponent's house. There are six figures below her on the ground, two of which are certainly Socrates and Aristomenes.

Socrates never returns home – but then neither does Aristomenes. His guilt over his friend’s death causes him to abandon his home and wife for exile and a new marriage in Aetolia:

relicta patria et lare ultroneum exilium amplexus. nunc Aetoliam novo contracto matrimonio colo. (1, 19)

I abandoned my country and my home and embraced voluntary exile. I now live in Aetolia and have remarried.

Even though he survives, therefore, Aristomenes’ adventures permanently displace him.

Aristomenes’ travelling companion doubts the veracity of this story at its end just as much as he did at its beginning, but Lucius is more credulous. With Hypata in sight, the travellers part, and Lucius goes looking for Milo, his prospective host. He asks an innkeeper:

‘estne’, inquam, ‘Hypata haec civitas?’ adnuit. ‘nostine Milonem quendam e primoribus?’ arrisit, et: ‘vere’, inquit, ‘primus istic perhibetur Milo, qui extra pomerium et urbem totam colit.’ (1, 21)

“Is this town Hypata?” I asked. She nodded. “Do you know someone named Milo, one of the foremost citizens?” “Foremost is the right word for your Milo,” she replied, “since he lives outside the city-limits and the whole town.”

Let us not allow the bad pun here to distract us from an interesting point: Milo lives on the edge of the city. We are not told much about walls and gates, but it looks as though his house, like that of Meroë’s opponent, is outside their protection.

Only when he arrives here do we as readers learn where Lucius is really from. Athens proves not to be his true starting point, for he announces that he has a letter of introduction from his friend Demeas at Corinth (*‘litteras ei a Corinthio Demea scriptas ad eum reddo,’* 1, 22). This information is repeated and made most explicit the next night at dinner, when Lucius tells his host Milo about a Chaldean prophet now working at Corinth (*Corinthi nunc*

apud nos), whom he consulted about his journey. His response was the famous prophecy:

nunc enim gloriam satis floridam, nunc historiam magnam et incredendam fabulam et libros me futurum. (2, 12)

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.

Milo immediately undercuts this prophecy by telling a story of the same Chaldean prophet, Diophanes, when he was in Hypata. A merchant named Cerdo consults him about a propitious day to travel, receives his prophecy, and is in the process of paying when Diophanes is accosted by another friend and in his joy blurts out his own disastrous tale of travel to Hypata, having been shipwrecked and robbed and his brother murdered on the trip thither from Euboea. Having heard this tale, Cerdo grabs back his money and runs off before Diophanes realizes what is happening, to the great amusement of the spectators. Milo means the story as a disproof of the prophecy about Lucius, and the first-time reader certainly will take it so. A re-reader, however, knows that the prophecy is quite true: Lucius does become a book. Moreover, a sensitive reader may note that Diophanes himself survives his adventures and in doing so anticipates some of the movement of Lucius's own experiences, from the wilds of Thessaly back to Corinth.

The second major inset story, that of Thelyphron, exhibits motivations and patterns of displacement which are intriguingly parallel to those in the first tale, that of Aristomenes. When the talk at Byrrhena's dinner turns to witches and their mutilations of both dead and living, a joke at his expense turns the spectators' attention and laughter to Thelyphron. His story and, let us be frank, his mutilated state exert a horrified fascination upon most readers, so much so that we may miss some of those parallels. Here is the first part of his narrative, for example:

Pupillus ego Mileto profectus ad spectaculum Olympicum cum haec etiam loca provinciae famigerabilis adire cuperem, peragrata cuncta Thessalia fuscis avibus Larissam accessi. (2, 21)

When I was still a minor I set out from Miletus to see the Olympic games. Since I also wanted to visit this area of the celebrated province, I travelled through the whole of Thessaly and, under dark omens, arrived at Larissa.

Like both Aristomenes and Socrates, Thelyphron set out from his home in order to see a spectacle and ends up diverted to Thessaly – in particular, to Larissa, Socrates' goal. I omit all the details of his very familiar story which leaves him, again like Socrates, unknowingly missing a few body parts – though in his case they turn out not to be essential to life. As the final laughter inside his narrative merges with the renewed laughter of the banquet audience for his narrative, we learn that he too ended up displaced by his experiences:

nec postea debilis ac sic ridiculus Lari me patrio reddere potui... (2, 30)

I could never afterwards return to my ancestral home so maimed and so ludicrous...

Too ashamed to return home, Thelyphron has ended up a spectacle at Byrrhena's dinner party.

The first two inset tales of the *Golden Ass*, then, give us more spatial and geographical details than most of the stories which follow, but in doing so they do not so much fix events spatially in our minds as give us a sense of arbitrary motion, the vulnerability of space itself to magical manipulation, and the subjection of the characters to displacement by the forces surrounding them.

Let us turn now to the overall patterns of movement through space in the novel. Through his curiosity Lucius succeeds in transforming himself into the ass and on that very night is stolen away by robbers to their cave in the mountains. We leave aside here any discussion of spatial patterns and themes of displacement in the tale of Cupid and Psyche, though a number beckon. Rather, let us simply note that Charite and Lucius are rescued by Charite's bridegroom and brought back to town – but not the town of Hypata. We never learn the name of Charite's native city, though it must be somewhere near Hypata. Charite sends Lucius into the country, intending to reward him but in fact condemning him to dire abuse. Eventually news of the drama of

lust and revenge which takes the lives of Charite and her husband reaches Charite's dependents in the country, and they seize the opportunity to escape.

As Maaike Zimmerman notes in her commentary,¹⁹ from the tale of Cupid and Psyche until the end of Book Ten, when the action finally moves to Corinth, place names are entirely absent from our narrative: we wander in a geography without markers, without fixed points to attach events to, and in a similarly foggy chronology. Our introduction to that landscape is perhaps the most surreal part, for the fugitives from Charite's country estate wander into the world of monsters, where an old man, weeping for his grandson, turns out to be a giant serpent who eats the travellers he tricks.

Only on the road to the amphitheatre at Corinth does Lucius finally re-join the recognizable geography of the world. He then escapes from the amphitheatre to the arms of Isis. And yet, having returned home to Corinth, he is not at home. Like Aristomenes, like Thelyphron, like Psyche for that matter, he cannot remain at home. Although after much hesitation and preparation he is initiated into the cult of Isis at Corinth, his monitory dreams continue and he eventually travels to Rome for further initiations and a new career as a legal advocate.

A typical if not universal spatial pattern of the Greek novels sends hero and heroine away from their homes through a series of disasters and adventures but ultimately brings them back home. Even if there are variations on this pattern,²⁰ the five major novels do suggest a cyclic pattern through space, and one quite consistent with the novels' affiliation with the cycles of New Comedy: after tribulation, the young couple settles down to marriage and the production of the next generation, which may undertake the cycle again.

Apuleius and, to the extent that we can guess, Petronius embody a different pattern, one of displacement, where we cannot join end to beginning and simply start over again. Apuleius's novel momentarily offers a "false closure," suggesting the narrator *can* go home again, but as Stephen Harrison so succinctly puts it, "even before the very sentence describing his journey

¹⁹ Zimmerman 2000, 11 and n. 18.

²⁰ The title figures of *Daphnis and Chloe* return to a home in the city they do not remember, as does the heroine of Heliodorus's *Aethiopian Story*. The cyclic pattern is also a bit confused in Achilles Tatius's *Leucippe and Clitophon*, where they may or may not end up back in Tyre.

home has had time to conclude, Lucius is called by a vision of the goddess to travel to Rome".²¹

tandem digredior et recta patrium larem revisurus meum post aliquam multum temporis contendo paucisque post diebus deae potentis instinctu raptim constrictis sarcinulis, nave conscensa, Romam versus profec-tionem dirigo ...²² (11, 26, 1)

I finally departed and hurried straight to visit my ancestral hearth again after a long time away. After a few days there, at the powerful goddess's urging I hastily gathered my luggage together, boarded a ship, and set out toward Rome.

Unlike the hero of the Greek tale of *The Ass*, Apuleius's Lucius apparently can't go home again. But is this a good or a bad thing? Traditional interpretations which take the final book as a serious, even proselytizing account of the salvific power of Isis certainly see it as a good thing. The ancient mystery religions promised that one would not end up where one began, but in a different and profoundly better place.

But is our narrator in a better place at the end of the *Golden Ass*? Most Roman readers would quickly answer yes: he is in the imperial capital, at the end of a journey from provincial obscurity to professional success. For a great many of the imperial elite, displacement was a necessary pre-condition of advancement. Yet the examples of Aristomenes, Socrates, and Thelyphron might suggest that we be a bit more cautious as to whether displacement is always a good thing.

Biographical criticism tempts me here. It would be very useful to know if the *Golden Ass* is indeed, as Stephen Harrison and others have argued, a product of Apuleius's later career.²³ If so, the novel's author had gone home again, if not to Madauros, at least to Carthage and the province from which he had set out on his distinguished career. This would reinforce for me the

²¹ Harrison 2000, 246.

²² Note, however, that Hanson punctuates this as two sentences, with a full stop after *contendo*.

²³ Harrison 2000, 9-10; cf. also 249-252 and the suggestion that Book 11 in part satirizes or parodies the *Sacred Tales* of Aelius Aristides.

sense that our youthful narrator's sudden displacement in the last book from home to Rome is not so much a promotion as an exile.

Finally, where do we end? Nowhere in particular, I submit, but in motion which is not rest. The tense of the novel's last word has been the subject of some discussion, but let us consider also the sense of the final two phrases of the novel (11, 30): *sed quoquo versus obvio, gaudens obibam*. "Wherever I went, I encountered joyfully...." The imperfect tense of the last word makes for an endless loop, a process continually in motion, never reaching a goal.

The spatial pattern of displacement here noted in the *Golden Ass* does not alone determine its meaning – but nothing in that pattern itself suggests that the story should or even does end where our text does. The undiscovered country, where Lucius's story reaches its final goal, as yet eludes our grasp.²⁴

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