

‘Waves of Emotion’: An Epic Metaphor in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*¹

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1 Introduction

It is a commonplace of modern scholarship on the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius that the deployment of elements from Greek and Roman epic, easily recognisable by the cultured bilingual elite reader of the high Roman Empire, plays a crucial role in the literary self-definition and reception of Apuleius’ novel.² On the one hand, the appearance of such features suggests that the novel shows a significant similarity to epic in literary ambition; on the other hand, the comic or parodic manner in which such features are often treated serves to maintain a suitable generic distance between lofty epic poetry and prose fiction, a form considerably lower than epic in the perceived hierarchy of ancient literary kinds. In this paper I want to continue my own researches on the interrelation of ancient epic and novel³ by focussing on a single metaphorical field which the *Metamorphoses* derives primarily from epic sources and which might have been felt by a contemporary reader as an epic image – that of the ‘waves of passion’, a metaphorical idea usually expressed by *fluctus*, *aestus* and their cognate verbs *fluctuare*, *(ex)aestuare* in Latin.⁴

¹ I am most grateful to Michael Paschalis and Stavros Frangoulidis for their kind invitation to and organisation of the conference in Rethymnon, and to my fellow-participants for helpful discussion.

² Walsh 1970 was perhaps the crucial work here; since then see the material collected in Schlam and Finkelppearl 2001, 202–13.

³ See e.g. Harrison 1997, 1998, 2003.

⁴ I here exclude *aestus* and its cognates in their sense of ‘heat’, which it is sometimes difficult to disentangle from their watery meanings.

As for much Latin imagery, the concept of ‘waves of passion’ has some precedent in Greek poetry. Two passages in Homer, one a metaphor, one a simile, already suggest this imagistic field: at *Iliad* 1.342 Achilles is said to seethe with rage (ἦ γὰρ ὅ γ’ ὀλοῖησι φρεσὶ θύει), while at *Iliad* 9.1–8 the panic and indecision of the Greeks is compared in an extended simile to the waves of the sea stirred up by storm-winds:

ᾠς οἱ μὲν Τρῶες φυλακὰς ἔχον· αὐτὰρ Ἀχαιοὺς
 θεσπεσίη ἔχε φύζα φόβου κρυόεντος ἑταίρη,
 πένθει δ’ ἀτλήτῳ βεβολήατο πάντες ἄριστοι.
 ὡς δ’ ἄνεμοι δύο πόντον ὀρίνετον ἰχθυόεντα
 βορέης καὶ Ζέφυρος, τῷ τε Θρήκηθεν ἄητον
 ἐλθόντ’ ἐξαπίνης· ἄμυδις δέ τε κῦμα κελαινὸν
 κορθύεται, πολλὸν δὲ παρὲξ ἄλα φῦκος ἔχευεν·
 ὧς ἐδαΐζετο θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν Ἀχαιῶν.

‘So did the Trojans set out their guards; but the Achaeans were gripped by a wondrous panic, the companion of chill fear, and all the chiefs were struck by unendurable grief. Just as two winds from the north and west stir up the fishy sea, and blow from Thrace, suddenly arising, and the dark ocean is raised aloft all at once, and piles much seaweed beside the salt sea, just so was the spirit confused in the breast of the Achaeans’.

Here already we have the image of waves used for high passion (Achilles) and for passionate indecision (the Greeks); as we shall see, these are the two main fields in which the image is metaphorically deployed in Apuleius. Homer’s image was picked up by Pindar, who talks of ‘waves of desire’ (fr. 123.4 Snell πόθῳ κυμαίνεται) and by Greek tragedy. The two references to ‘waves of passion’ in Aeschylus seem both to refer to ‘waves’ of bile inside the body (*Cho.* 183–4 κάμοι προσέστη καρδία κλυδώνιον / χολῆς, *Eum.* 832 κελαινοῦ κύματος πικρὸν μένος), pointing to a physiological analogy with storms on the sea,⁵ while Sophocles’ Oedipus talks of his past passion as the time when his soul seethed (*OC* 434 ὀπηνίκ’ ἔξει θυμὸς). At Euripides *HF* 1091–2 the recovering Herakles describes his madness in terms of a terrible

⁵ Cf. Garvie 1986, 91, Sommerstein 1989, 247. A similar confluence of physiological and emotional seething seems to be found at Apollonius *Arg.* 1.1262–3: ᾠς φάτο· τῷ δ’ αἰόντι κατὰ κροτάφων ἄλις ἰδρώς / κήκειν, ἂν δὲ κελαινὸν ὑπὸ σπλάγχνοις ζέεν αἷμα.

wave (ὥς <δ’> ἐν κλύδωνι καὶ φρενῶν ταραγάματι / πέπτωκα δεινῶι). This is a small harvest in an imagistically rich tradition, and Greek tragedy is fonder of the metaphor of ‘sea of troubles’, referring to overwhelming misfortune, than of that of ‘waves of passion’.⁶ But this last is clearly a recognisable image in Greek culture: the etymologising play of Plato’s *Cratylus* (419e) clearly relies on this metaphorical field in its folk-derivation of θυμός in the sense of anger or passion from ‘the seething and boiling of the soul’ (ἀπὸ τῆς θύσεως καὶ ζέσεως τῆς ψυχῆς).

But the metaphor of the waves of the sea for high passion appears to be more prominent in Roman literature, and especially in Roman epic. I now propose to give a brief account of its pre-Apuleian history in Latin epic and then turn to its uses by Apuleius in the *Metamorphoses*.⁷

2 Waves and Passion in pre-Apuleian Latin epic

Lucretius’ philosophical and didactic epic *De Rerum Natura* employs the image of the waves of passion several times. For Lucretius’ poem this image is evidently primarily conceived as a contrast with the prominent Epicurean metaphor of γαληνισμός, calm on the sea, for the mental calmness of the wise man,⁸ the same philosophical idea is presented by Cicero in the *Tusculans* a few years later, perhaps with Epicurean influence (*Tusc.*5.16):

ut maris igitur tranquillitas intellegitur nulla ne minima quidem aura fluctus commovente, sic animi quietus et placatus status cernitur, cum perturbatio nulla est, qua moveri queat.

In every Lucretian case we find psychological wave-imagery used of mental confusion or disorder caused by irrational passion or uncertainty, the two being closely connected in Lucretian thought (lack of certainty about the truth leads to irrational emotions). In particular, Lucretius, arguing for the

⁶ For the frequency of this image in Greek tragedy see the material collected by Bond 1981, 340–1.

⁷ The frequency of wave-imagery in Apuleius is noted briefly by Koziol 1872, 247 and in more detail by Neuschwander 1913, 89–93, but neither says anything about epic models, and the section on recurring imagery in Schlam and Finkelppearl 2001, 191–4 does not mention our image. There is some good but limited material in Hijmans et al.1977, 28.

⁸ See the rich material gathered by Fowler 2002, 28–33.

key Epicurean idea that the gods feel no emotions, is strongly concerned to deny that gods suffer from anthropomorphic ‘waves of passion’, claiming that any such ideas must be owed purely to the wrong ideas of the unregenerate reader (*DRN* 6.74–5):

*et quia tute tibi placida cum pace quietos
constitues magnos irarum volvere fluctus*

Here *fluctus irarum* seems to refer specifically to anger, as the same phrase clearly does at 3.296–8 in the description of the lion:

*quo genere in primis vis est violenta leonum,
pectora qui fremitu rumpunt plerumque gementes
nec capere irarum fluctus in pectore possunt.*

At 3.1051–2 the image is extended to describe the anxiety of the man who is confused about the truth, with the first use of *fluitare* in this metaphorical sense:⁹

*urgeris multis miser undique curis
atque animi incerto fluitans errore vagaris.*

At 4.1077 *fluctuat incertis erroribus ardor amantum* we find the first use of *fluctuare* in this metaphorical sense of a psychological state, in this case the stormy and violent passion of love.¹⁰ The noun *aestus* is also found in a metaphorical sense in Lucretius, at 3.173 *suavis et in terra mentis qui gignitur aestus*, of the mental confusion and lack of tranquillity caused by fainting, where the maritime image of *aestus* makes a nice contrast with *terra*; but the verb *aestuo*, used many times in its literal senses in the *DRN*, is not Lucretian in its metaphorical sense, but is first found in that usage in Catullus, to whom I now turn.

Though this metaphorical use of *aestuo* first appears in two non-epic poems of Catullus (25.12, 63.47), the metaphorical use of *aestus* not at all in

⁹ The image is taken up by Horace *Sat.*2.3.268–70 (on the unstable behaviour induced by love) *haec siquis tempestatis prope ritu / mobilia et caeca fluitantia sorte labore / reddere certa sibi.*

¹⁰ This assumes that Lucretius’ instance predates that at Catullus 65.4 (below).

Catullus, and *fluctuare* of emotional turmoil amid troubles at 65.4, it is in his epyllion poem 64, which I regard as part of the epic tradition, that the image of waves of passion achieves particular prominence, in his description of the abandoned Ariadne. There the sea-shore setting no doubt influences the watery imagery, but Ariadne’s passions are memorably referred to in terms of waves – cf. 64.61–2, describing her despair at Theseus’ departure:

*saxea ut effigies bacchantis, prospicit, eheu,
prospicit et magnis curarum fluctuat undis,*

Here Lucretian models might influence both the expression *magnis curarum undis* (cf. *DRN* 6.75 *magnos irarum volvere fluctus*, above) and the metaphorical use of *fluctuat* (cf. *DRN* 4.1077).¹¹ Ariadne’s despair is closely connected with her love for Theseus, described a little later with the same image in an address to Venus and Cupid which paradoxically combines the fires of love and the waves of passion (64.97–8):

*qualibus incensam iactastis mente puellam
fluctibus, in flavo saepe hospite suspirantem.*

Thus Catullus and Lucretius have already established this field of imagery in the Latin hexameter poetry of the 50s B.C.

But the most important source of this type of imagery for Apuleius is undoubtedly Vergil’s *Aeneid*, and I shall here number the relevant Vergilian passages for convenient future reference. In the *Aeneid* the imagery of waves of passion is found in the two different functions already identified in the earliest Homeric occurrences, no doubt as a matter of Homeric imitation. The first of these functions also has recognisable links with Lucretian practice, the use of such water-imagery for the single passion of seething anger:

1. 9.798 (Turnus) *mens exaestuat ira*.
2. 10.813–4 (Aeneas) *saevae iamque altius irae / Dardanio surgunt ductori*
3. 12.526–7 (Aeneas) *nunc, nunc / fluctuat ira intus* (cf. Lucretius 4.1077, Catullus 64.62)

¹¹ See Brown 1987, 222, with further material on this image in Epicureanism.

4. 12.831 (Juno's anger) *irarum tantos volvis sub pectore fluctus* (cf. Lucretius 3.298, above).

But even more common is the use of such water-imagery in contexts where one extreme emotion conflicts with another, for which the co-existence of love and despair in the abandoned Ariadne provides some model, especially for her literary descendant Dido:

5. 4.532 (Dido) *saevit amor magnoque irarum fluctuat aestu* (cf. Catullus 64.62 *magnis curarum fluctuat undis*)
 6. 4.564 (Dido) *variosque irarum concitat aestus*
 7. 8.19–20 (Aeneas) *magno curarum fluctuat aestu* (cf. Catullus 64.62)
 8. 10.680 (Turnus) *animo nunc huc, nunc fluctuat illuc*
 9. 10.870–1 (Mezentius) *aestuatur ingens / uno in corde pudor mixtoque insania luctu*
 10. 12.486–7 (Aeneas) *vario nequiquam fluctuat aestu / diversaeque vocant animum in contraria curae*.
 11. 12.666–7 (Turnus) *aestuatur ingens / uno in corde pudor mixtoque insania luctu*.

In all these Vergilian examples we find this imagery used of heroic passions of important characters, dignifying with a powerful image from the elemental world of nature the psychological surges and dilemmas of heroic action. We shall see that Apuleius specifically takes up this element.

But there are authors which intervene chronologically between Vergil and Apuleius which deserve brief attention here. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* follow the Vergilian model in the use of our image. At 6.623 the anger of the vengeful Procne recalls that of Turnus (passage 1 above) *triste parat facinus tacitaque exaestuatur ira*, likewise the vengeful Hecuba at 13.559 *tumidaque exaestuatur ira*, but in the *Metamorphoses* *aestuare* tends to be used in its sense of fire rather than water in metaphorical contexts referring to love (cf. e.g. 4.64, 9.465, 13.867, 14.700). The full simile at 8.470–4 (used by Apuleius in the *Metamorphoses*, see below on *Met.5.21*) clearly invokes the Homeric idea of the competing waves of emotional indecision and confusion, as Althaea debates whether to kill her son Meleager:

*utque carina,
quam ventus ventoque rapit contrarius aestus,
vim geminam sentit paretque incerta duobus,
Thestias haud aliter dubiis affectibus errat
inque vices ponit positamque resuscitat iram.*

Seneca’s tragedies are likewise Vergilian in the use of this imagistic field. The madness of Hercules is described by the chorus with an epicising simile which fully explores the image of waves as irrational passion, enlarging and developing the metaphor of its Euripidean original (Seneca *HF* 1088–93, cf. Euripides *HF* 1091–2, cited above):

*nec adhuc omnis expulit aestus,
sed ut ingenti uexata noto
seruat longos unda tumultus
et iam uento cessante tumet,
pelle insanos fluctus animi,
redeat pietas uirtusque uiro.*

Seneca, like Ovid, also invokes the Homeric picture of competing waves of passion, e.g. at *Ag.* 138–40 (Clytemnestra, torn about whether to kill Agamemnon):

*fluctibus uariis agor,
ut, cum hinc profundum uentus, hinc aestus rapit,
incerta dubitat unda cui cedat malo.*

The stormy dilemma of Ovid’s Althaea about infanticide is also replayed by Seneca’s Medea, as she debates whether to kill her children (*Med.* 939–944):

*anceps aestus incertam rapit;
ut saeva rapidi bella cum venti gerunt,
utrimque fluctus maria discordes agunt
dubiumque fervet pelagus, haut aliter meum
cor fluctuatur: ira pietatem fugat
iramque pietas – cede pietati, dolor.*

The appearance in all three cases of this image in extended similes strongly suggests that it has an epic origin, though it is interesting to note that its simpler metaphorical use seems to be avoided.

Lucan's *De Bellum Civile*, though much interested in irrational emotion, has only a few examples of the image of waves of passion. At 5.118–20, describing the prophetic madness of Delphic Pythia, the image is clearly that of madness as shipwreck through waves of passion:

*quippe stimulo fluctuque furoris
conpages humana labat, pulsusque deorum
concutiunt fragiles animas.*

Poetic point can be added to the image in a typically Lucanian way: at 6.63 *aestuat angusta rabies civilis harenae*, the Vergilian water-image of *aestuat* is paradoxically countered by the dry *harenae*, while at 8.164 *incerti pectoris aestus* the water-image of *aestus* seems to interact with the narrative context (Pompey's eastward sea-voyage). But little is added in Lucan to the Vergilian tradition.

3 Waves and Passion in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

The examples from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* which follow seem to derive largely from the Latin epic tradition we have just considered. That Apuleius can use this field of imagery in a serious philosophical context is indicated by a passage of *De Deo Socratis* which clearly shows the influence of Lucretius, and which matches several of the metaphorical terms to be found in the *Metamorphoses*. In this passage Apuleius refers to the wrong account given by the poets about whether the gods feel emotions, and is naturally using poetic language (*DDS XII*[20]):

igitur et misereri et indignari et angi et laetari omnemque humani animi faciem pati, simili motu cordis et salo mentis¹² ad omnes cogitationum aestus fluctuare, quae omnes turbulae tempestatesque procul a deorum caelestium tranquillitate exulant.

¹² Apuleius seems to be the first writer to use *salum* in this metaphorical sense (again at *Met.*4.2, 9.19).

In the *Metamorphoses*, however, this poetic image tends to be used with some irony or humour, and we find this metaphor of heroic psychology often (though not always) parodied and comiced by its relocation in a different literary context.

The first group of uses of this image describe the passions of Lucius, who just as he is a sub-epic hero in a less dignified context, also experiences sub-epic passions. At 3.1 Lucius wakes feeling anxious about his escapade of the previous night, the supposed slaying of three men which turn out later to be three wine-skins:

3.1 *aestus invadit animum vespertini recordatione facinoris.*

That this is watery *aestus* is perhaps suggested by example 8 from Vergil (above), where Aeneas is in a similarly difficult position at the beginning of a book and *magno curarum fluctuat aestu*, and Apuleius’ book-beginning of day-break may invert Vergil’s where Aeneas is about to go to sleep (cf. 8.29–30).¹³ The generic differential between the two is clear: Aeneas feels genuine anxiety about an immediately forthcoming major war, while Lucius feels false anxiety about an immediately past battle which turns out to be a comic and magic hoax.

Near the beginning of Book 4 we again find Lucius in this Aeneas-like situation of doubt about how to proceed in a difficult situation (4.2): describing Lucius-ass’s plans to eat roses and escape from his asinine shape, our metaphor occurs again:

4.2 *cum in isto cogitationis salo fluctuarem ...*

Once again the dignifying of his asinine plans for plant-eating with this heroic range of imagery has an evidently comic effect. Much the same is found in Book 7, where Lucius-ass laments his inability to defend himself as a human from suspicions of carrying out the robbery at Milo’s in which he (Lucius-ass) was himself stolen:

7.4 *talibus cogitationibus fluctuantem subit me illa cura potior*

¹³ On Apuleian awareness of the openings and closures of Vergilian books see Harrison 2003.

Again the dignified language is undermined by the comic and sensational situation: Lucius' thoughts about how to defend himself though in asinine form are interrupted by the more immediate concern about the robbers' professed intention to kill him and sew Charite up to die in his belly, as threatened at the end of the previous book (6.31–2). Finally, in the last book Lucius, returned to human form, begins to have doubts about the good faith of his cult-officials in demanding a third initiation:

11.29 *quo me cogitationis aestu fluctuantem ad instar insaniae percitum ...*

Here our dignified metaphor presents Lucius as an epic hero, but the subject of his anxiety is whether or not he is being taken for a ride and exploited, a far from epic concern.

But perhaps the most elaborate contexts in which our metaphor is deployed are those of emotional dilemma. In her important article on Vergilian language in the *Metamorphoses*, Caterina Lazzarini points out that the Vergilian image of fluctuation for conflicting emotions is a favourite of Apuleius' novel, and cites several of these passages, but forgoes a close analysis.¹⁴ I finish with three examples which can be shown to rework Vergilian and other epic originals in some detail.

In Book 9, in one of the adultery-tales, the servant Myrmex, left in charge of his mistress' chastity but offered a bribe by a lover, hesitates between the threat of punishment from his absent master and the present inducement of the money:

9.19 *miroque mentis salo et cogitationum dissensione misellus in diversas sententias carpebatur ac distrahebatur: illic fides, hic lucrum, illic cruciatus, hic voluptas.*

Myrmex's dilemma is palpably a parody of the epic hero's hard choice: the use of the metaphor of the stormy sea of emotional hesitation, though it uses terms not found in epic sources, plainly derives from the kind of epic scene considered above. The detail of *diversas sententias* recalls the *diversae..curae* of Aeneas at *Aeneid* 12.487 (passage 10 above), while the alternation of *illic ... hic ... illic ... hic* looks back to and comically exaggerates

¹⁴ Lazzarini 1985.

Turnus’ dilemma at *Aeneid* 10.680 (passage 8 above) *animo nunc huc, nunc fluctuat illuc*. The epic trope is doubly undermined, since Myrmex’s choice (unlike that of the epic hero in such situations) is in fact an easy one (certain present reward against uncertain future punishment), and the dilemma he faces of whether to accept a bribe for conniving at adultery is a low-life novelistic context which is far from heroic.

In Book 10, in the lurid story of the Phaedra-type wicked woman, a father thinks he has lost both his sons, one through apparent death by poison, another through apparent guilt for the death of his brother and incest with his stepmother:

10.5 *Tunc infelix duplici filiorum morte percussus magnis aerumnarum procellis aestuat. Nam et iuniorem in coram sui funerari videbat et alterum ob incestum parricidiumque capitis scilicet nimium mentitis lamentationibus ad extremum subolis impellebatur odium.*

The competing emotions are presumably grief for his dead younger son and hatred for his elder son, but their clash is described in the terms of Catullus and Vergil: as commentators point out, this looks back to Ariadne at Catullus 64.62 *magnis curarum fluctuat undis*, but mixes the idea of waves of passion with that of the sudden storm of ill-fortune, another common Apuleian image which is also found in Vergil.¹⁵

In context, this image suggests a serious and weighty set of emotions which owe much to tragedy as well as to epic, but in the lighter literary world of the novel the outcome of this version of the Phaedra story is a happy one: the ‘poisoned’ son returns to life and the apparently guilty son is shown to be innocent.

My final example of our epic metaphor in Apuleius shows a triply epic intertextual history. At 5.21 Psyche, left alone by her sisters, hesitates as to whether to follow their horrific advice to kill her husband:

5.21 *At Psyche relictā sola, nisi quod infestis Furiis agitata sola non est, aestu pelagi simile maerendo fluctuat, et quamvis statuto consilio et obstinato animo iam tamen facinori manus admovens adhuc incerta consilii titubat multisque calamitatis suae distrahitur affectibus.*

¹⁵ See Zimmerman 2000, 122 and 100, comparing *Aeneid* 7.594 (Latinus laments the Italians’ misfortune) ‘*frangimur heu fatis*’ inquit ‘*ferimurque procella*’.

Our imagery will resurface again briefly of Psyche at 5.23 (*saucia mente fluctuat*). Scholars rightly trace this Apuleian use of the metaphor of fluctuation to Dido's anguish of indecision in the *Aeneid*, *Aeneid* 4.532 *saevit amor magnoque irarum fluctuat aestu*. But as the Groningen commentary notes,¹⁶ the Vergilian metaphor for the despair of the deserted Psyche at 5.21 is itself already derived from a famous epic source, the despair of the abandoned Ariadne in Catullus 64.62, *magnis curarum fluctuat undis*, another anxious heroine (see above). That this particular poem in the epic tradition is also operative in the Apuleian passage is strongly suggested by its use of the combination *aestu pelagi*, otherwise found only twice in classical Latin, once in another passage of the same Catullan poem (64.127 *unde aciem in pelagi vastos protenderet aestus*), and once in Ovid's *Heroides* (16.25 *perstet et ut pelagi, sic pectoris adiuvet aestum*). The parallels naturally extend to situation as well as language: Ariadne like Dido has already suffered abandonment by her male partner when this image is used of her, and this literary reminiscence perhaps looks forward to Psyche's impending suffering of the same kind of abandonment at the hands of Cupid. Psyche replays the epic roles of both Ariadne and Dido.

A third level of epic allusion in this image has been suggested (though not followed up in detail) by Kenney in his commentary, who points to several Ovidian passages underlying this one, including the simile describing Althaea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, already cited above:¹⁷

Ovid *Met.* 8. 470–4:

*utque carina,
quam ventus ventoque rapit contrarius aestus,
vim geminam sentit paretque incerta duobus,
Thestias haud aliter dubiis affectibus errat
inque vices ponit positamque resuscitat iram.*

The Vergilian elements *aestus* and *iram* are here combined with two new Ovidian elements, *incerta* and *affectibus*, not found in the Vergilian model but appearing (in the same cases) in the Apuleian passage. The epic metaphor of fluctuation from Catullus and Vergil is overlaid with further Ovidian

¹⁶ Zimmerman et al. 2004 ad loc. This point is not made by Kenney 1990 or Moreschini 1994.

¹⁷ Kenney 1990, 166–7.

detail, in a way which evokes all three models for the alert and elite reader and exhibits Apuleian literary learning. Once again the parallels are thematic as well as linguistic: Althaea is debating whether to burn the log which represents the external soul of her son Meleager, about to make the tragic decision to kill her son, while Psyche is debating whether to make the tragic decision to kill her mysterious husband. There are some other interesting parallels, too: Psyche has been urged to her tragic act by the persuasion of her sisters, while Althaea is motivated by revenge for her dead brothers, and in both cases fire plays a fatal role, the burning of Meleager's external soul, and the burning of the lamp which wakes up Cupid. This last element is a witty inversion of the Ovidian passage, since in Psyche's case the element of burning saves Cupid from death, reversing the pattern of Meleager's destruction in the form of burning the log.

4 Conclusion

I hope to have shown that the notable epic metaphor of the waves of passion is exploited in a number of ways in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. As I suggested at the outset, the use of this recognisably elevated image in a number of non-elevated contexts underlines the literary ambition of the *Metamorphoses* in alluding to epic texts, its self-definition as a work of self-consciously lower genre than epic, and its reliance on an elite educated readership to spot and enjoy such entertaining incongruities.

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