

Awe and Opposition: the Ambivalent Presence of Lucretius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

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I thank the editors for giving me the honorable opportunity to contribute to this volume. This essay is dedicated to Gareth Schmeling, in gratitude for his loyalty and friendship. Our shared fascination with the ancient fictional texts has resulted in so many fruitful cooperative undertakings, the last (but not least) being the establishment of *Ancient Narrative*. Gareth's unstinting enthusiasm for that new journal and his many initiatives in making it work are invaluable.

In the first chapter of his *De deo Socratis*, Apuleius is speaking about the light of the moon, and introduces a quotation from Lucretius: after mentioning the different opinions on the source of the moon's light, he continues: 'or whether she...either stands like a mirror in the way of the sun's rays...or takes them over when the sun is opposite and (to use the words of Lucretius), "throws out from its body a light not her own"' (*ceu quodam speculo radios solis obstipi uel aduersi usurpat, et, ut uerbis utar Lucreti, notham iactat de corpore lucem*).¹ The lines of Lucretius to which Apuleius here, apparently quoting by heart, alludes, are:

*lunaque siue notho fertur loca lumine lustrans
siue suam proprio iactat de corpore lucem*
(Lucr. *DRN* 5,575 f.)

At first sight Apuleius' expression *ut uerbis utar Lucreti* could be considered against the background of the general, renewed appreciation of Lucretius

¹ *Apul. Soc.* 1,118. For the translations from Apuleius' *De deo Socratis* I have followed Harrison in Harrison, Hilton, Hunink 2001, 195 f.

which arose in the middle of the second century A.D. In the first century A.D. Lucretius had been neglected; he was considered a difficult writer, and his utility in rhetorical instruction was doubted by Quintilian.² Tacitus, in his *Dialogus*, has Aper mock those who prefer to imitate Lucretius instead of Vergil.³

But admirers of Lucretius like the ones Aper mentions became more numerous, and in the time of the archaists, especially Fronto and Gellius, Lucretius was studied with enthusiasm. Many passages in Fronto's correspondence testify to the warm appreciation for Lucretius, and also Gellius speaks high about him.⁴ The marked interest of these archaizers, who perhaps even made him a school author, was restricted to appreciation of *De Rerum Natura* as a poem where one could delve for surprising word-choice and remarkable diction in order to embellish one's own writings.

In any case, despite the objections of Quintilian, Lucretius apparently was, in the time of Fronto and Gellius, at least being read and appreciated for whatever reasons. Small wonder, then, that their younger contemporary Apuleius has also read Lucretius well and thoroughly. However, in this essay I will argue that Apuleius' reading of Lucretius goes deeper than 'delving' for original and surprising expressions, the way Fronto and Gellius advised their pupils to use Lucretius. I hope to show that in many places of Apuleius' works one is entitled to speak of a real intertextual relationship of Apuleius with the *De Rerum Natura*. That is to say, a considerable number of Lucretian allusions acquire new meaning in the context of Apuleius' work, and thus go beyond a pure 'ornamenting' function. Indeed, I expect to be able to prove that in discussions on 'influence' or *Nachleben* of Lucretius, Apuleius deserves a chapter of his own. Such a chapter is still missing in scholarly discussions of the influence of Lucretius. In these discussions Apuleius most often is not mentioned at all, or mentioned summarily and negatively, as by

² Quint. *Inst.* 10,1,87: *Nam Macer et Lucretius legendi quidem, sed non ut phrasin, id est corpus eloquentiae faciant, elegantes in sua quisque materia, sed alter humilis, alter difficilis.*

³ Tac. *Dial.* 23,2: *isti qui...Lucretium pro Vergilio legunt.*

⁴ E.g. Fronto *Ep. Ad M. Antoninum imp. De eloquentia* 1,2, speaks of *sublimis Lucretius* (133,11 van den Hout); in his letter 3,1 *De feriis Alsinensibus* (227,8 van den Hout), Fronto suggests to M. Antoninus: *mox, ubi studium legendi incessisset, aut te Plauto explorares aut Accio expleres aut Lucretio delenires*; in his *Noctes Atticae* Gellius often quotes Lucretius with admiration (e.g. 1,21,5–7, three times; 5,15,4; 10,26,9, twice; 12,10,8; 13,21,21; 16,5,7). See also Graverini 1996, 172 f., with bibliography in notes.

Alfonsi: ‘e ben poco ci dice qualche discutibile ricordo di Lucrezio in Apuleio.’⁵ I take up Alfonsi’s expression *discutibile*: I would like to debate, indeed, and now in a positive sense, the Lucretian reminiscences in Apuleius, first in some of his other works, especially those in his philosophical speech *De deo Socratis*, and then those in his novel, the *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass*.⁶

In his self-portrait in the *Apology*, Apuleius expressly presents himself as a *philosophus platonicus*, a member of the ‘family of Plato.’ In all his philosophical writings he manifests himself as a representative of the so-called Middle Platonist philosophical school. In this period the Academy had considerably evolved away from its Platonic roots and had adopted elements from the Stoa, from Neopythagoreanism as well as from mystery religions. Much of the characteristic blending of philosophy and religion discernable in Apuleius can already be found in Plutarch, who in many ways prepared Middle Platonism. It is probably meaningful that the protagonist in Apuleius’ fictional work, the *Metamorphoses*, is presented more than once as being a member of the family of Plutarch.⁷ Already in the works of Plutarch one detects that specific trait of Middle Platonism which pervades all of Apuleius’ works: a consciousness of the enormous distance between the divine and the human, and a search for the means to bridge this gap. It is no coincidence that Apuleius, in one of his earlier writings, chose to translate a Greek work called Περὶ κόσμου. This pseudo-Aristotelian treatise connects the idea of an essentially transcendent god with a conviction of that god’s power emanating throughout the whole universe. In his Latin translation, or better adaptation of Περὶ κόσμου, *De Mundo*, Apuleius accentuates in every way the idea of a power which mediates between the divine and the human world, and he also expands on the notion of Providence.⁸

Apuleius’ *De deo Socratis* is a philosophical treatise, apparently conceived as a public speech. He here popularizes for his audience the doctrine of the demons as mediators between gods and people. It is in this work that Apuleius repeatedly reacts to Lucretius: in his thorough study of this poet he

⁵ Alfonsi 1978, 296.

⁶ For discussions of references to Lucretius in Apuleius’ other works, see e.g. Bajoni 1994 (on Apuleius’ *De Mundo*); Lucarini 1999 (meaningful Lucretius imitations in some passages of the *Florida*); Harrison 2000, 143; 154 f. (*De deo Socratis*); 185 (*De Mundo*); 205 (*De Platone*); Marangoni 2000, 55 (on *Florida* 22).

⁷ *Apul. Met.* 1,2,1; 2,3,2. See Walsh 1981.

⁸ See Beaujeu 1983, 389 f.

had no doubt recognized the overwhelming poetic power with which Lucretius had expressed the idea that the gods are completely unapproachable for and inaccessibly remote from human beings. Throughout the work we find several allusions to Lucretius, by which Apuleius subtly appears to use the powerful words of this poet to underline the distance between god and mankind. In this way he is able to amplify the great relief of his counter-message: the message that, after all, mediation between god and mankind is possible, through the demons. I will only select a few of the many examples of Lucretian allusions in Apuleius' *De deo Socratis*.

A central idea in Middle Platonism, based on Plato's *Parmenides* 142a and *Timaeus* 28c, is the impossibility of speaking about or even having knowledge of the supreme god. Apuleius underlines this idea by varying upon a motif repeatedly applied by Lucretius, the motif of the poverty of language: 'that this god alone, such is the amazing and ineffable excess of his majesty, cannot be comprehended, even to a limited extent, in any discourse, owing to the poverty of human speech' (*hunc solum maiestatis incredibili quadam nimietate et ineffabili non posse penuria sermonis humani quavis oratione uel modice comprehendi* [Apul. Soc. 3,124]). Compare Lucretius:

*nec me animi fallit Graiorum obscura reperta
difficile inlustrare Latinis uersibus esse,
multa nouis uerbis praesertim cum sit agendum
propter egestatem linguae et rerum nouitatem.*
(Lucr. DRN 1,136–139)

*nec nostra dicere lingua
concedit nobis patrii sermonis egestas.*
(Lucr. DRN 1,831 f.)

*nunc ea quo pacto inter sese mixta quibusque
compta modi uigeant rationem reddere auentem
abstrahit inuitum patrii sermonis egestas;
sed tamen, ut potero summatim attingere, tangam.*
(Lucr. DRN 3,258–261)

One notices that Apuleius, with his characteristic allusive technique, surpasses his model: Lucretius is speaking of the poverty of the Latin language to convey Greek wisdom; Apuleius speaks of the poverty of human language. Instead of *egestas* in Lucretius, he chooses the stronger word *penuria*.

In this same chapter Apuleius tells his audience that the wise man in rare moments may achieve a momentary revelation of the supreme god. Here he applies the metaphor of a sudden light in darkness. Lucretius repeatedly has used such metaphors for the effect of Epicurus' teaching, with which Epicurus frees mankind from darkness.⁹ Gale 1994 has shown that Lucretius in these metaphors borrows expressions from mystery cults, expressions which all originate from Diotima's famous speech in Plato's *Symposium* 209e–212a. Apuleius, however, himself initiated in more than one mystery cult, uses this metaphor for a revelation which is quite the opposite of the wisdom of Epicurus! Wise men, he explains, sometimes may receive an idea of the supreme god: 'like a bright light fitfully flashing with the swiftest flicker in the deepest darkness, and that only from time to time' (*uelut in artissimis tenebris rapidissimo coruscamine lumen candidum intermicare* [Apul. *Soc.* 3,124]). Compare Lucr. *DRN* 3,1 f.:

*E tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen
qui primus potuisti*

and Lucr. *DRN* 5,10 f.:

*quique per artem
fluctibus e tantis uitam tantisque tenebris
in tam tranquillo et tam clara luce locauit.*

In his description of the remoteness of the gods from the world of human beings, of their dwelling in serene calm, not disturbed by any passion, Apuleius on the one hand alludes to passages in Lucretius, and seemingly adheres to the poet who presents similar ideas about the gods.¹⁰ But in this self-same passage Apuleius also makes clear that the demons, the mediators between god and men, are less remote, and, indeed, can be subjected to passions. And after having described in Lucretian language the Lucretian view

⁹ See Schrijvers 1970, 276 f.

¹⁰ See Apul. *Soc.* 12,145–147, and compare Lucr. *DRN* 5,176–173.

of complete remoteness of the gods, and their serenity, he introduces an imaginary interlocutor, who objects:

What then, speaker,...am I to do following this heavenly but almost inhuman view you have stated? What, if humans are (as you say) absolutely driven to a far distance from the immortal gods and are thus exiled to this hell on earth, with the consequence that all communion with celestial divinities is denied them, and that none of the heavenly ones pays them visits, as one who tends sheep or horses or oxen visits his bleating or whinnying or lowing herds (130) to restrain the fierce, heal the sick and aid the needy among them? No god, you say, intervenes in human affairs: to whom, then, shall I direct my prayers? Whom shall I name in my vows? To whom shall I sacrifice my victims? Whom shall I call upon throughout my life as helper of the distressed, as supporter of the virtuous, as opposer of the vicious? Whom, finally, to take the most frequent case, shall I invoke to witness my oaths? (Apul. *Soc.* 5,129–130)

Lucretius has stressed in many verses, that, indeed, the gods do not mingle with the affairs of humans, and are not moved by prayers or oaths.¹¹ But here Apuleius opens his explanation of the doctrine of the demons. And in this explanation he continues to use Lucretian allusions, but applies them to contradict the message of Lucretius.

For instance, when Apuleius illustrates the substance of the demons' bodies by comparing it to the substance of clouds, we find, again, numerous borrowings from Lucretius:

Quod ne uobis uidear poëtico ritu incredibilia confingere, dabo primum exemplum huius libratae medietatis: neque enim procul ab hac corporis subtilitate nubes concretas uidemus; quae si usque adeo leues forent ut ea quae omnino carent pondere, numquam infra iuga, ut saepenumero animaduertimus, grauatae caput editi montis ceu quibusdam curuis torquibus coronarent. porro si suapte natura spissae tam graues forent ut nulla illas uegetioris leuitatis admixtio subleuaret, profecto non secus quam plumbi rodus et lapis suoapte nisu caducae terris inliderentur. nunc enim uero pendulae et mobiles huc atque illuc uice nauium in aëris pelago uentis gubernantur, paululum immutantes proximitate et longin-

¹¹ Cf., e.g., Lucr. *DRN* 2,646–651; 5,156 f.; 1194 f.; 6,67–78.

quitate. Quippe si aliquo umore fecundae sunt, ueluti ad fetum edendum deorsus degrassantur. Atque ideo umectiores humiliter meant aquilo agmine, tractu segniore; sudis uero sublimior cursus est, cum lanarum uel-leribus similes aguntur, cano agmine, uolatu perniciose. nonne audis, quid super tonitru Lucretius facundissime disserat?

*principio tonitru quatiuntur caerulea caeli
propterea quia concurrunt sublime uolantes
aetheriae nubes contra pugnantibus uentis*

In case you think I am inventing the incredible, as the poets do, let me give you a prime example of this balanced intermediate state. We can see thick gatherings of clouds, which are not far removed from this kind of subtle material texture. If they were as light as the elements which wholly lack mass, they would never become so weighed down as to descend below the mountain-line and garland the head of a lofty peak as though with a winding necklace, as we often observe that they do. Moreover, if they were naturally dense and consequently so heavy as to prevent any admixture of livelier lightness from lifting them up, they would surely fall with their own momentum and be dashed against the earth just like a lump of lead or a stone. Now indeed they hang in the sky and are mobile, steered here and there by the winds like ships in the ocean of the *aer*, changing gradually in their distance and proximity. However, if they become fertile with some moisture, they sink down as if to give birth to young. And it is for this reason that the more moist clouds move at a lower level in a dark formation, with a more sluggish transit; but the drier ones have a loftier course, and, when they are driven along like woollen fleeces, move in a white formation and with a swifter flight. Can you not hear what Lucretius most eloquently says about thunder?

In the first place, the blue reaches of the sky are shaken by thunder,
For the reason that the heavenly clouds, flying up on high,
Clash together, with the winds fighting against them.

(Apul. *Soc.* 10,141–143)

In the sequel of the lines from Lucretius *DRN* 6 (a) quoted here by Apuleius, I have underlined the verbal parallels. Two more passages (b and c) from Lucretius' sixth book reveal more verbal parallels with Apul. *Soc.* 3,142–143:

a. Lucr. *DRN* 6,96–107:

*Principio tonitru quatiuntur caerulea caeli
propterea quia concurrunt sublime uolantes
aetheriae nubes contra pugnantibu' uentis.
nec fit enim sonitus caeli de parte serena,
uerum ubicumque magis denso sunt agmine nubes, 100
tam magis hinc magno fremitus fit murmure saepe.
praeterea neque tam condense corpore nubes
esse queunt quam sunt lapides ac ligna, neque autem
tam tenues quam sunt nebulae fumique uolantes;
nam cadere aut bruto deberent pondere pressae 105
ut lapides, aut ut fumus constare nequirent
nec cohibere niues gelidas et grandinis imbris.*

b. Lucr., *DRN* 6,189–193:

*contemplator enim, cum montibus assimilata
nubila portabunt uenti transuersa per auras,
aut ubi per magnos montis cumulata uidebis
insuper esse aliis alia atque urgere superne
in statione locata sepultis undique uentis.*

c. Lucr., *DRN* 6,503 ff.

*concupiunt etiam multum quoque saepe marinum
umorem, ueluti pendentia uellera lanae,
cum supera magnum mare uenti nubila portant.
consimili ratione ex omnibus amnibus umor
tollitur in nubis. quo cum bene semina aquarum
multa modis multis conuenere undique adaucta,
confertae nubes umorem mittere certant
dupliciter; nam uis uenti contrudit et ipsa
copia nimborum turba maiore coacta
urget et e supero premit ac facit effluere imbris.*

In passage c, Lucretius speaks of *semina aquarum*, ‘seeds of water,’ which collect in clouds. Apuleius, as we saw, elaborates this imagery by speaking of ‘fertile clouds, which sink down as if to give birth to young.’

It would take too long to treat more of such allusions in the *De deo Socratis*. In the polyphony of this text, verses of Lucretius ring through like a kind of *ostinato*. One sometimes hears them faintly, sometimes they come to the surface with an unmistakable verbal signal. In the opening chapter Apuleius said: 'to use the words of Lucretius.' In view of the position of these words in the first chapter, one could consider this remark as almost a programmatic and slightly elliptic declaration: 'I will use *the words* of Lucretius, – *not his philosophy*.'

In Apuleius' *De deo Socratis* we thus observe the attitude of adhesion and admiration for the poet Lucretius combined with great reserve, sometimes even condemnation of the Epicurean philosopher Lucretius ('awe as well as opposition'). Comparable is Cicero's treatment of Lucretius in his *Somnum Scipionis*, as discussed by Ronconi 1958.¹² Traina 1965 has signaled a similar attitude in Vergil's use of Lucretian allusions in his *Eclogae* and *Georgica*. Barra 1960 has investigated Apuleius' Lucretian allusions in the *De deo Socratis* in this way. His ideas have gone almost unnoticed because he published them in a period when scholars had a low opinion of the *De deo Socratis*. It was considered a public glitter-speech, in which the author had no other ambition than to impress his audience with rhetorical fireworks and learned literary allusions, and thus was not to be taken seriously.¹³ This was, as a matter of fact, not the opinion of readers of the *De deo Socratis* in Late Antiquity: a great thinker like Augustine took this work of Apuleius very seriously. And, indeed, Apuleius here presents some of his deep religious convictions. In presenting an important part of Platonic philosophy he manifests himself simultaneously as a philosopher and an orator. The fact

¹² Cf. Ronconi 1958, 62: 'l'emulazione stilistica (of Lucretius in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*) è un atteggiamento allusivo che, mentre si innalza sullo stesso piano di cosmicità del modello, acquista vivacità dal contenuto scopertamente polemico: al tempo stesso riafferma l'ammirazione per l'artista e la perennità della poesia al di là delle costruzioni dottrinali.' See also Traina 1959, 73f. nn. 18 and 19.

¹³ Thus, in a reaction to Barra 1960, Di Giovine 1980, 123, after a very interesting discussion of several Lucretian allusions in the *De deo Socratis*, still concludes: 'mi pare tuttavia che la presenza di Lucrezio nell'operetta apuleiana debba essere considerata alla luce delle tendenze letterarie prevalenti intorno alla metà del II secolo d.C. e messa in rapporto con l'utilizzazione in senso retorico dei *veteres scriptores*, in particolare dei poeti: citazioni e riecheggiamenti del *De rerum natura* rappresentano un espediente significativo, insieme a molti altri, di cui Apuleio si serve per rendere più brillante, più alla moda una conferenza tenuta davanti a un pubblico competente, sicuramente sensibile a richiami e allusioni a poeti arcaici e arcaizzanti.'

that he wraps his ideas in virtuous diction and literary show is not in itself a sign of superficiality. It only proves that he knows very well how to make a complicated matter understandable to a lay audience.

Apuleius' fictional work, the *Metamorphoses*, is a novel, not a public speech on a philosophical-religious subject. In the novel, too, we find numerous allusions to Lucretius in various levels of seriousness. Of course, there are a great deal of instances where Apuleius just takes over a beautiful phrase or combination from the much admired poet. I will give only one instance of this kind of 'ornamental' use of a Lucretian expression.¹⁴ In his impressive description of the pest in Athens Lucretius writes:

*illud in his rebus miserandum magnopere unum
aerumnabile erat, quod ubi se quisque uidebat
implicitum morbo, morti damnatus ut esset,
deficiens animo maesto cum corde iacebat,
funera respectans animam amittebat ibidem.*

What was the most pathetic thing of all, worst wretchedness: when someone saw himself snared by the sickness and so sentenced to die, he lay undone, dispirited, sad at heart, and gazing upon death he lost all life.¹⁵ (Lucr. *DRN* 6,1230–1234)

For the excessively pathetic situation which he describes here, Lucretius may have invented the adjective *aerumnabilis*. After Lucretius the adjective occurs again, for the first time, in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.¹⁶ Apuleius applies this Lucretian adjective three times: first in a funny, exaggerating way qualifying the painful efforts of the 'I' of the novel when he had to master

¹⁴ For other such 'ornamental' use of Lucretian words or phrases, cf. e.g. Apuleius' use of *luror* (before him only found in Lucr. *DRN* 4,333), 4 times in the *Met.* (1,6,1; 8,7,6; 9,12,4; 9,30,3); also cf. Apul. *Met.* 6,10,6 *terrae omniparentis*, with *GCA* 2004, 441 ad loc.). Often in the immediate surrounding of a more meaningful or extensive Lucretian allusion one also finds other Lucretian words or phrases: e.g., in the famous passage in Apul. *Met.* 4,30,1, where Lucretius' Venus Hymn is extensively and meaningfully alluded to (see Finkelpearl 1998, 201 f.), Venus opens with the words '*En rerum naturae prisca parens.*'

¹⁵ For translations of passages from Lucretius I have used Esolen 1995.

¹⁶ See Graverini 1996, 178 f. for a fine discussion of a more far-reaching influence from Lucretius' description of the pest in Apuleius' description of the devastating disease that strikes Demochares' animals in Apul. *Met.* 4,14.

the Latin language: ‘Soon afterwards, in the city of the Latins, as a newcomer to Roman studies I attacked and cultivated their native speech with laborious difficulty and no teacher to guide me’ (*mox in urbe Latia aduena studiorum Quiritum indigenam sermonem aerumnabili labore nullo magistro praeunte aggressus excolui* [Apul. *Met.* 1,1,4]).¹⁷ Apuleius uses the adjective a second time to underline how sorrowful life has become for Charite after her murdered bridegroom has revealed to her in a dream how he was murdered by his rival: ‘Yet she shared that night’s vision with no one, and completely concealed the disclosure of the crime. In secret she determined both to punish the vile assassin and to remove herself from a life of suffering’ (*nec tamen cum quoquam participatis nocturnis imaginibus, sed indicio facinoris prorsus dissimulato et nequissimum percussorem punire et aerumnabili uitae se subtrahere tacita decernit* [Apul. *Met.* 8,9,3]). Finally the adjective occurs in a passage where the narrator in all misery of his ass-shape yet sees one positive side of it: ‘nevertheless I was at least heartened by this one consolation in my painful deformity: namely, with my enormous ears I could hear everything very easily, even at a considerable distance’ (*isto tamen uel unico solacio aerumnabilis deformitatis meae recreabar, quod auribus grandissimis praeditus cuncta longule etiam dissita facillime sentiebam* [Apul. *Met.* 9,15,6]).

More properly ‘intertextual’ are those places where readers are encouraged to take into consideration both the Lucretian context and the new Apuleian context in their interpretation. The Lucretian reminiscence sometimes is playful, but at other times can acquire a more serious meaning. I will give just one example of both.

Before his metamorphosis, Lucius makes love with the slave-girl Photis. In the first love-scene Photis clearly shows to be attracted to Lucius:

et cum dicto artius eam complexus coepi sauiari. iamque aemula libidine in amoris parilitatem congermanescenti mecum, iam patentis oris inhalatu cinnameo et occurrentis linguae inlisu nectareo prona cupidine adlibescenti: ‘pereo’, inquam, ‘immo iam dudum perii, nisi tu propitiaris’. ad haec illa rursus me deosculato: ‘bono animo esto’, inquit, ‘nam ego tibi mutua uoluntate mancipata sum nec uoluptas nostra differetur ulterius...

¹⁷ Translations from passages in the *Met.* follow Hanson 1989.

and with that I held her tight and began to kiss her. Her ardour now began to rival my own, and she grew with me to an equal intensity of passion. Her mouth was open now, her breath like cinnamon and her tongue darting against mine with a touch like nectar, her passion unrestrained in her desire for me. ‘I am dying’, I said. ‘No, I am already dead unless you have mercy.’ After another long kiss she answered: ‘Cheer up! because I want what you want. I have become your slave, and our pleasure will not be postponed much longer...’ (Apul. *Met.* 2,10,3–6)

Here resound the following Lucretian lines:

*quod petiere, premunt arte faciuntque dolorem
corporis et dentis inlidunt saepe labellis
osculaque adfligunt, quia non est pura uoluptas*
(Lucr. *DRN* 4,1079–1081)

*nec mulier semper ficto suspirat amore
quae complexa uiri corpus cum corpore iungit
et tenet assuctis umectans oscula labris.
nam facit ex animo saepe et communia quaerens
gaudia sollicitat spatium decurrere amoris.*

...

... *quos mutua saepe uoluptas
uinxit, ...*

...

quod facerent numquam nisi mutua gaudia nossent

...

quare etiam atque etiam, ut dico, est communi’ uoluptas.

(Lucr. *DRN* 4,1192 ff.)

The very unusual expression *occursantis linguae inlisu* in the Apuleian passage points back to the equally unusual expression *dentes inlidunt labellis* in Lucretius; there it occurs in the context of what Lucretius describes as the wrong kind of *uoluptas*. Observe also *artius* in Apuleius, and *arte* in Lucretius. Whoever has read the complete *Metamorphoses* knows that, seen from later perspectives, the sensual love between Lucius and Photis can be considered as the wrong, *non pura uoluptas*. Moreover, the many indications

of Photis' avidly responding to the desires of Lucius (*aemula libidine in amoris parilitate congermanescenti mecum...occursantis linguae...mutua uoluntate...uoluptas nostra*) refer to the other passage in the diatribe against passionate love in Lucretius (4,1192 ff.), where he comments negatively on the reciprocal passion of the woman in love-making.

An instance of a meaningful Lucretian allusion with a more serious tone can be found in Book 10. The ass has become the servant of two cooks, and their professions are described. One of them is a pastry cook, the other one, as the narrator tells us, makes exquisite meat dishes: 'the other was a chef who cooked tender meat-dishes, flavouring them with the tastiest seasoned sauces' (*alter cocus, qui sapidissimis intrimentis succuum pulmenta condita uapore mollibat*: [Apul. *Met.* 10,13,3]). The expression *mollire uapore* occurs, before this Apuleian passage, only once, in Lucretius:

cibum coquere ac flammae mollire uapore.
and how to use fire to soften and cook food.
(Lucr. *DRN* 5,1102)

In Lucretius this line is found in the context of the development of civilization, and is immediately followed by a description of the demoralizing effects of increasing luxury. In the passage just quoted from Apuleius' tenth book the phrase is found in the opening of an episode where Lucius, the ass, shortly before his becoming a man again, has been adopted into a decadent and immoral environment; in this episode it is suggested in many ways that in the refined and luxurious society whose darling the ass has become, real human civilized behavior is completely absent.

I have presented only a few of many such reminiscences of Lucretius in the *Metamorphoses*,¹⁸ and conclude with a couple of more far-reaching examples.

The long embedded tale of *Cupid and Psyche* is told by the robbers' housekeeper to distract Charite, a bride who has been kidnapped by the robbers on the day of her wedding. In the opening of her tale the old lady tells how the supernaturally beautiful Psyche is being honored and adored on

¹⁸ See, e.g. James 2001 (esp. 159 f.) on *consuetudo* and personified *Consuetudo* in Apuleius' *Met.*, and the resonance with Lucr. *DRN* 4,1278 f.; see also GCA 2000, 409 f. on Apul. *Met.* 10,34,5 *in amplexu Venerio nobis cohaerentibus*; GCA 2004, 242 on Apul. *Met.* 5,18,2 *bestiae sepeliri uisceribus*.

earth as a second Venus. This provokes the anger of Venus, the real goddess. In an angry monologue she utters her indignation, and in this speech Apuleius has effectuated a nice blend of the Hymn to Venus, which opens Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* 1, and Juno of Vergil's *Aeneid*:

Haec honorum caelestium ad puellae mortalis cultum immodica translatio uerae Veneris uehementer incendit animos et inpatiens indignationis capite quassanti fremens altius sic secum disserit: 'en rerum naturae prisca parens, en elementorum origo initialis, en orbis totius alma Venus, quae cum mortali puella partiaro maiestatis honore tractor et nomen meum caelo conditum terrenis sordibus profanatur!'

This extravagant transfer of heavenly honours to the cult of a mortal girl inflamed the real Venus to violent wrath. In uncontrolled indignation she shook her head, gave forth a deep groan, and thus she spoke to herself: 'Look at me, the primal mother of all that exists, the original source of the elements, the bountiful mother of the whole world, driven to divide my majesty's honours with a mortal girl! My name, which is founded in heaven, is being profaned with earthly pollution.

(Apul. *Met.* 4,29,5–30,1)

Compare Lucr. *DRN* 1,1–23:

*Aeneadam genetrix, hominum diuumque uoluptas,
alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
quae mare nauigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantium
concipitur uisitque exortum lumina solis: 5
te, dea, te fugiunt uenti, te nubila caeli
aduentumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum.
nam simul ac species patefactast uerna diei 10
et reserata uiget genitabilis aura fauoni,
aeriae primum uolucres te, diua, tuumque
significant initum percussae corde tua ui.
inde ferae pecudes persultant pabula laeta*

et rapidos tranant amnis: ita capta lepore 15
te sequitur cupide quo quamque inducere pergis.
denique per maria ac montis fluuiosque rapaces
frondiferasque domos auium camposque uirentis
omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora amorem
efficis ut cupide generatim saecla propagent. 20
quae quoniam rerum naturam sola gubernas
nec sine te quicquam dias in luminis oras
exoritur neque fit laetum neque amabile quicquam,
te sociam studeo...

Mother of Romans, delight of gods and men,
 sweet Venus, who under the wheeling signs of heaven
 rouse the ship-shouldering sea and the fruitful earth
 and make them teem – for through you all that breathe
 are begotten, and rise to see the light of the sun;
 from you, goddess, the winds flee, from you and your coming
 flee the storms of heaven; for you the artful earth
 sends up sweet flowers, for you the ocean laughs
 and the calm skies shimmer in a bath of light.
 And now, when the gates are wide for spring and its splendor,
 and the west wind, fostering life, blows strong and free,
 pricked in their hearts by your power, the birds of the air
 give the first sign, goddess, of you and your entering;
 then through the fertile fields the love-wild beasts
 frolic, and swim the rapids (so seized with your charm
 they eagerly follow wherever you may lead);
 yes, across seas and mountains and hungering rivers
 and the leaf-springing homes of the birds and the greening fields,
 into all hearts you strike your lure of love
 that by desire they propagate their kinds.
 And since it is you alone who govern the birth
 and growth of things, since nothing without you
 can be glad or lovely or rise to the shores of light,
 I ask you to befriend me...

Parts of this hymn are to be heard also further on in the tale of *Cupid and Psyche*, for instance when Venus travels to the Olympus in her coach: ‘the birds...proclaim the goddess’s approach. The clouds make way and Heaven opens up to its daughter’ (*aves...aduentum deae pronuntiant. cedunt nubes et caelum filiae panditur* [Apul. *Met.* 6,6,3–4]) (compare hymn 6–7). Lucretius’ hymn recurs again when the effects of Venus’ retirement from the world of human affairs are described: ‘and so there is no joy any more, no grace, no charm. Everything is unkempt and boorish and harsh. Weddings and social intercourse and the love of children are gone’ (*ac per hoc non uoluptas ulla, non gratia, non lepos, sed incompta et agrestia et horrida cuncta sint, non nuptiae coniugales, non amicitiae sociales, non liberum caritates* [Apul. *Met.* 5,28,5]) (compare hymn 22–23). Lucretius’ Hymn to Venus returns once more in the eleventh book, when Isis by her grace responds to the desperate prayers of the protagonist:

En adsum tuis commota, Luci, precibus, rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina, saeculorum progenies initialis, summa numinum, regina manium, prima caelitem, deorum dearumque facies uniformis, quae caeli luminosa culmina, maris salubria flamina, inferum deplorata silentia nutibus meis dispenso...adsum tuos miserata casus, adsum fauens et propitia.

Behold, Lucius, moved by your prayers I have come, I, the mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, and first offspring of the ages; mightiest of deities, queen of the dead, and foremost of heavenly beings, my one person manifests the aspect of all gods and goddesses. With my nod I rule the starry heights of heaven, the health-giving breezes of the sea, and the plaintive silences of the underworld...I have come in pity at your misfortunes; I have come in sympathy and good will.

(Apul. *Met.* 11,5,1 and 11,5,4)

The main message here is that Isis (contrary to the gods of Lucretius) is a divinity who does respond to prayers and assists human beings in their sorrows. Observe the thrice repeated ‘*adsum*’ in the passages from 11,5 quoted just above. In the first chapters of *Metamorphoses* Book 6, Psyche beseeches first Ceres, then Juno, with prayers for help. Both goddesses, despite granting Psyche their presence, are not moved by her prayers; they bluntly refuse

to come to her rescue, and send her away.¹⁹ There is an implicit contrast between the refusals of the Olympian goddesses Ceres and Juno there, and Isis' epiphany here, in Book 11, and her professing of pity (*tuis commota precibus...tuos miserata casus*) and promise to support and favour Lucius (*En adsum...adsum fauens et propitia*).²⁰

The coming of Isis in Book 11 is in chapter seven highlighted by a brilliant description of Spring:

nec mora, cum noctis atrae fugato nubilo sol exurgit aureus, ...tantaque hilaritudine...gestire mihi cuncta uidebantur, ut pecua etiam cuiusce modi et totas domos et ipsum diem serena facie gaudere sentirem. Nam et pruinam pridianam dies apricus ac placidus repente fuerat insecutus, ut canorae etiam auiculae prolectatae uerno uapore concentus suaues adsonarent, matrem siderum, parentem temporum orbisque totius domnam blando mulcentes adfamine. Quid quod arbores etiam, quae pomifera subole fecundae quaeque earum tantum umbra contentae steriles, austrinis laxatae flatibus, germine foliorum renidentes, clementi motu brachiorum dulces strepitus obsibilabant, magnoque procellarum sedato fragore ac turbido fluctuum tumore posito mare quietas adluuies temperabat, caelum autem nubilosa caligine disiecta nudo sudoque luminis proprii splendore candebat. (Apul. *Met.* 11,7,2–5)

At once the cloud of dark night was banished and the Sun arose all gold...everything seemed to be so filled with happiness that I could feel every sort of animal, and all the houses, and even the day itself rejoicing with bright faces. For a sunny and calm day had come close on the heels of yesterday's frost, so that even the songbirds were enticed by the spring warmth to sing lovely harmonies, soothing with their charming greetings the mother of the stars, parent of the seasons, and mistress of the whole world. Why, even the trees – both the fertile ones with their offspring of fruit and the fruitless ones content to produce only shade –

¹⁹ See *GCA* 2004, 380 and 387 on 6,3,1 and 6,4,1 respectively.

²⁰ We signal here some inconsistency in the author's theology: Isis is being here characterized simultaneously as the supreme divinity and as a higher demon, just as Plutarch characterizes her in his *De Iside et Osiride*. However, the *Metamorphoses* is a novel, not a theological treatise, and, as argued above, here the main aim is to evoke a contrast between Isis' responding to prayers and the Olympian Ceres and Juno's refusal to do so.

loosened by the southerly breezes and glistening with leaf-buds, rustled sweet whispers with the gentle motion of their arms. The mighty roar of the tempests was stilled and the boisterous swelling of waves subdued; the sea, now calm, lapped quietly against the shore. The sky too, its cloudy darkness dispersed, shone bare and clear with the brilliance of its own true light.

The passage abounds with echoes from Lucr. *DRN* 1,1–23 (the Hymn to Venus), and reminds us of the connection that Lucretius brings about between Venus as a cosmic creative power and Spring. In Book 11 it is clearly Isis who is the cosmic creative power. Moreover, another Lucretian theme is evoked in this passage: Lucretius often expresses the contrast between life not enlightened by the Epicurean wisdom and the Epicurean life in exactly the same terms that he employs for his physical presentations of storm vs. calm weather.²¹ Thus, for instance in *DRN* 3,14–22 Lucretius thus depicts the Epicurean life at the *sedes quietae*:

nam simul ac ratio tua coepit uociferari
naturam rerum, diuina mente coorta, 15
diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi
discedunt, totum uideo per inane geri res.
apparet diuum numen sedesque quietae,
quas neque concutiunt uenti nec nubila numbis
aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina 20
cana cadens uiolat, semperque innubilis aether
integit et large diffuso lumine ridet.

for once your teachings, sprung from a godlike mind,
 begin to trumpet the nature of things, the soul's
 terrors flee, and the battlements of the world
 sunder; I see vast space and all its works.
 The quiet dwellings of the gods appear,
 which winds can never lash nor storms defile
 nor the fall of biting snow and its hard sleet
 mar with their gray; one still and cloudless sky
 is canopy, and laughs in a bath of light.

²¹ See Schrijvers 1970, 276 f.

Note the parallelism between *diffugiunt animi terrores* (here, l. 16), and *te fugiunt uenti* (in the Hymn to Venus, *DRN* 1,6). In the first chapters of Book 11 of the *Metamorphoses* similar imagery is connected with the contrast between a life without Isis and a life with Isis, not only in the description of spring in 11,7, quoted above, but also in *Met.* 11,15,1, in the address to Lucius of the Isis priest: ‘You have endured many different toils and been driven by Fortune’s great tempests and mighty storm winds; but finally, Lucius, you have reached the harbour of Peace and the altar of Mercy’ (*Multis et uariis exanclatis laboribus magnisque Fortunae tempestatibus et maximis actus procellis ad portum Quietis et aram Misericordiae tandem, Luci, uenisti*). The final book of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, the Isis book, a surprising conclusion of the novel, has recently by several scholars been shown to be full of irony, and, indeed, the exalted devotion of Lucius to his new protector and savior, Isis, often raises doubts concerning the seriousness of this conversion. But this conclusion of the novel in any case attests to the never-ending search for bridging the gap between man and god, a search which in the devotion to Isis probably not has found its definite destination, but a possible stage in that search. This search, as I argued before, is in itself a serious thread pervading all of Apuleius’ works. This earnest quest for a possible communion with the supreme divinity is no doubt motivated by the belief that, after all, such a communion must be possible. This belief runs counter to the message of Lucretius’ poem, where it is time and again stressed that human beings cannot communicate with the divine. This is an unacceptable message for the religiously inclined philosopher Apuleius. However much he admires the poetic power of Lucretius, he at the same time applies allusions to the poet for subtle polemic ends. One more example of Apuleius’ contrastive allusions to the much-admired poet of *De Rerum Natura* may round off this discussion: in the first chapter of *Met.* Book 11, Lucius awakes on the beach of Cenchreae, and looks up into the sky. The sight of the moon inspires in him a belief in the presence of a propitious divinity:

*Circa primam ferme noctis uigiliam experrectus pauore subito, uideo
praemicantis lunae candore nimio completum orbem commodum marinis
emergentem fluctibus. Nanctusque opacae noctis silentiosa secreta, cer-
tus etiam summatem deam praecipua maiestate pollere resque prorsus
humanas ipsius regi prouidentia, nec tantum pecuina et ferina, uerum*

inanima etiam diuino eius luminis numinisque nutu uegetari, ipsa etiam corpora terra caelo marique nunc incrementis consequenter augeri, nunc detrimentis obsequenter imminui, ...augustum specimen deae prae-sentis statui deprecari.

About the first watch of the night I awoke in sudden fright and saw, just emerging from the waves of the sea, the full circle of the moon glistening with extraordinary brilliance. Surrounded by the silent mysteries of dark night, I realised that the supreme goddess now exercised the fullness of her power; that human affairs were wholly governed by her providence; that not only flocks and wild beasts but even lifeless things were quickened by the divine favour of her light and might; and that individual bodies on land, in the sky, and in the sea grew at one period in consequence of her waxing and diminished at another in obedience to her waning...I decided to pray to the august image of the goddess present before me.

(Apul. *Met.* 11,1,1–3)

This passage seems to me an oblique reference to Lucr. *DRN* 5,1161 ff.:²² Lucius' belief in a divine providence, inspired by his looking up into the sky, is exactly the error from which Lucretius wants to save the '*genus infelix humanum*' (*DRN* 5,1194). In those lines, the poet convinces his audience that it is an error to assign to the gods all things, and to believe that the gods would be moved by prayers, and then he offers some explanations as to how human beings come to believe in avenging and propitious gods, for instance when they look up into the sky:

praeterea caeli rationes ordine certo 1183
et uaria annorum cernebant tempora uerti
nec poterant quibus id fieret cognoscere causis.
ergo perfugium sibi habebant omnia diuis
tradere et illorum nutu facere omnia flecti.
in caeloque deum sedis et templa locarunt,

²² The reference is, as it were, 'announced' by the Lucretian echo *marinis fluctibus* (see on this allusive technique also note 14 above): this combination is first found in Lucr. *DRN* 5,1079–1080; Apuleius has it three times in the *Met.*: in 2,17,1, where the narrator compares the naked Photis to Venus emerging from the sea; in 5,28,2, where a sea-gull flies above the waves to bring a message to Venus who has retired into the sea, and here, where the moon(-goddess) rises from the sea.

per caelum uolui quia nox et luna uidetur

...

nam cum suspicimus magni caelestia mundi 1204
templa super stellisque micantibus aethera fixum,
et uenit in mentem solis lunaeque uiarum,
tunc aliis oppressa malis in pectora cura
illa quoque expergefactum caput erigere inquit,
nequae forte deum nobis immensa potestas
sit, uario motu quae candida sidera uerset,

...

then too they saw the systems of the sky
 turn in sure order, and the changing seasons,
 but could not understand why this occurred,
 their refuge, then: assign to the gods all things,
 have them steer all things with a single nod.
 in the heavens they placed the holy haunts of the gods
 for through the heavens wheeled the night and the moon

...

for when we look up to the heavenly
 shrines of this great world, the stars that glitter, the sky
 studded, when we think of the journeying sun and moon,
 then in hearts heavy-laden with other cares,
 that trouble is roused to boot, and rears its head –
 that the limitless power of gods, the power that wheels
 the stars and planets, may be aimed at us...

The dialogue with Lucretius in late antiquity begins only with the Fathers of the Church, as we have always been told by scholars, for instance Hadszitz 1935 and Leeman 1968. In my opinion Apuleius here, as in many other respects, is a forerunner, and the dialogue with Lucretius is already very much present in his writings. When we encounter specific Lucretian allusions in the *Metamorphoses*, it is always worthwhile to take into consideration the Lucretian context of the allusion and to decide in each case whether we have to do either with a purely ornamental reference to the admired poet, or with a real and functional intertextuality.

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