

Marcus Tullius Cicero, Author of the *Metamorphoses*

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Menard (perhaps without wanting to) has enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading: this new technique is that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution. This technique, whose applications are infinite, prompts us to go through the *Odyssey* as if it were posterior to the *Aeneid* and the book *Le jardin du Centaure* of Madame Henri Bachelier as if it were by Madame Henri Bachelier. This technique fills the most placid works with adventure.

Jorge Luis Borges

It was a close call, that faraway day in 1985. The normally sunny voice on the other end of the line suddenly darkened. Had an unseen cloud skirted across the blue California sky? An inaudible silence emanated from the wire, so palpable that I felt compelled to check the phone to see whether or not we were still connected. The spirit of Edgar Allan Poe was in the air.

I had just mentioned to John J. (“Jack”) Winkler, author of the famous narratological study of Apuleius, *Auctor & Actor*, how happy I was to see references to earlier classical literature throughout his work, as well as throughout the *Metamorphoses*. At that time this greatest of ancient novels was still regarded by many as anything but classical. A little outreach to the mainstream wouldn’t hurt, especially for those who wanted to get ahead in their careers. “So that’s the key to the *Metamorphoses*!” I exclaimed.

Another tick-tock of silence, then finally Winkler asked, guardedly, “Do you mean Vollgraff’s emendation?”

“What?” I said. Without knowing it, I was only one clue away from learning the truth about the author of *The Golden Ass*! But it was not to be. I was thinking of Plautus and how much the chatty opening of the *Metamorphoses* sounded like a prologue from that far-from-subtle *auctor* from Sarsi-

na who was nothing if not an *actor*. So I merely replied, “I mean Plautus, it all sounds like Plautus: your book, the novel, everything.”

If only I had read Elaine Fantham’s paper published in 2002, “Orator and/et Actor.” My failure to do so cannot be excused by the superficial objection that her work did not appear until seventeen years later. The reader might assume that its title is an allusion to Winkler’s *Auctor & Actor*, or even to Roland Barthes, who reinvented the ancient art of bifocal titles in *S/Z*. Nothing could be wider from the mark. Fantham’s essay instead begins with a shrewd observation: the words “orator” and “actor” occur in both Latin and English; not only that, they are spelled the same way in both languages. This is not narratology, but what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz would term Thick Description. Not surprisingly, Cicero plays a big role in this account of orators and actors.

Nearly twenty years of misguided readings could have been avoided if only I had known as much, but I didn’t. For his part, Winkler mused silently a moment. And then I heard, “*Ha!...Aaaahhh...*”

The sudden explosion and long sigh of relief on the other end of the line were inaudible, yet unmistakable. At the time I thought he was dismissing the whole exchange, but now I know better. It was a snapping shut of the mousetrap, to be sure, but in front of the mouse, a total relaxation of critical vigilance. A knowing palindromic expletive, the opposite of “*Aha!*”, the narratologist’s *Aha-Erlebnis* or “*Aha-Experience*,” “*Ha!...Aaaahhh...*” signals to the second-time thinker that the mystery at the heart of this Roman *Roman* would stay mysterious. The secret was safe for the time being, and no one would discover it until the time came for a complete reassessment of who or what wrote *The Golden Ass*. With the prospect of Maaike Zimmerman’s new edition of the *Metamorphoses* as an Oxford Classical Text, that time has at last arrived. The true authorship of this novel can now be revealed. Let the irreligious see, as the TV Evangelist says in Book 11 of the novel: Let them see and know the error of their ways.

As all know who think about such things, the title for Winkler’s book is an ingenious word play on the words *auctor* and *actor*, which are related by the addition and/or subtraction of the vowel *u* in the first syllable of both words. I have always found it helpful to understand this difficult theoretical proposition by expressing it mathematically.

auctor = actor + u

actor = auctor – u

Fewer still will know or care that it is not a word-play Winkler himself invented—as he himself acknowledged—but derives from a phrase an anonymous magistrate of the Thessalian city Hypata utters in book 3 of the *Metamorphoses*, as he tries to console the narrator and character Lucius for being made a fool of at a local festival dedicated to the god Laughter (*Risus*). As this town father explains, Laughter himself will see to it that no harm comes to the man who has been producer (*auctor*) and performer (*actor*) of the farce that the ludicrous Lucius has just lived through.

He will never let your mind feel grief, but will constantly make your face smile in cloudless loveliness. And the city has unanimously offered you special honors in gratitude for what you have done. It has inscribed you as its patron and decreed that your likeness be preserved in bronze.

At this point no one but Maaïke Zimmerman will want to remind us that the phrase *auctor & actor* does not actually occur in the Laurentian Library's manuscript of Apuleius' novel, but only the truncated phrase *auctorem et torem*. This is why the clue in the 1904 emendation of Vollgraff that Winkler mentioned was so exciting. Vollgraff was duly credited by Rudolf Helm, Rudi van der Paardt and other editors of Apuleius with the authorship of *auctor & actor*.

But was the Latin-writing Batavian really the author of the phrase *auctor et actor*? Context, the historicist's truest friend and constant companion, suggests otherwise. The huge first volume of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* had been published in 1900, some four years before Vollgraff's emendation appeared. There the industrious Batavian saw, brilliantly, a citation from Cicero's Oration for Publius Sestius (61) in which the words *auctor* and *actor* occur. Recall the circumstances: as part of his defense of Sestius Cicero is bravely praising the intrepid Marcus Cato. This famous humorist supported Cicero in his finest hour and would later provide much-needed comic relief in Lucan's hysterical epic on Rome's civil wars. Cicero's finest hour was, of course, the year 63 B. C. E., when he exposed and attacked the conspiracy of Catiline in such a way that Roman history and intermediate Latin were forever altered.

Cato was the leader (*dux*), adviser (*auctor*), the main advocate (*actor*) of those measures—not that he did not see his own danger, but in such a storm as that which was threatening to overwhelm the Republic, he thought that he ought not to think of anything but the dangers of his country.

Brilliantly, paying no attention to surface matters like literary style or history, Vollgraff saw the three words *dux*, *auctor*, and *actor* in the *Thesaurus* entry and pressed on as if he could read Apuleius reading Cicero's mind. Casting aside unneeded words and asyndeton, Vollgraff reasoned that

$dux\ auctor\ actor - dux + et = auctor\ et\ actor.$

Or, if you like,

Apuleius and Winkler's *auctor et actor* = Cicero – Cicero + Apuleius.

The bias in favor of Apuleius is evident, but Vollgraff was not yet done. He also read further in the *Thesaurus* and noted that the words *auctor* and *actor* often occur elsewhere, and that they were easily confused by scribes because they look so much alike when viewed under Medieval indoor lighting of 60 Watts or less. And then Vollgraff hit *Zahltag* (North American “pay dirt”) in the *Thesaurus*' citation to the third chapter of the *Life of Atticus* by Cornelius Nepos. For there he saw Apuleius and Winkler's phrase, as it were, in palindrome: *actor auctorque*: “in all the management of the state's business, they treated him as both agent (*actorem*) and counsel” (*et auctorem*). Expressed mathematically, this discovery could be stated as

$auctor\ et\ actor = auctor - u + actor + u - et + -que$

Or, if you like,

Apuleius and Winkler's words = Cicero – Cornelius Nepos – Cicero + Apuleius.

This is more complicated than Vollgraff's philo-syndetic response to Cicero, and the bias in favor of Apuleius as author of the *Metamorphoses* is clearer

than ever. It is at this point that we can finally part company with the ingenious Batavian to spell out the implications of Nepos' literary nepotism.

Cornelius Nepos' erudition and literary flair have been familiar themes ever since Catullus immortalized them in his dedicatory poem, "Who Am I Going to Give This To?" (*Cui dono...*, etc.). The Roman historian Jack Dawe, no ordinarily mean judge of others' writings, has praised his *Life of Atticus* as the best thing to have fallen to us out of Cornelius Nepos' grasping hands. By Nepos' account, Titus Pomponius Atticus managed to be good friends with everybody on every side of every question. He was close to both Cicero and Nepos, for example, who otherwise seemed to have little use for one another. Atticus also managed to keep his own head during the dynastic rampages of Sulla, Caesar, and Antony, at a time when many others, including Cicero, were losing theirs. And, like so many Romans who had enough slaves—not least, like Apuleius himself—he spent his formative years in Athens and would dine out for many years on his memories of them at banquets back home in Rome. Atticus lived up to his name; he was All-Athenian to all the Athenians.

At Athens he so behaved as to seem at one with the humblest and on a level with the mighty. The result was that they bestowed on him all the public honors possible and sought to make him a citizen. Of this kind offer he was unwilling to take advantage. As long as he lived there, he took a stand against the erection of any statue to him, but when absent he could not stop them. So they put up several statues to him in their most hallowed places, for in all the management of the state's business, they treated him as both agent (*actor*) and counsel (*auctor*).

There is no need to add emphasis by italicizing these last words. Their implication leaps off the page. But what implication? And once it's leapt, where does it land?

Not, I am thrilled to inform you, in Apuleius' lap. It is true that he tells us in an oration published separately from the *Metamorphoses* that several cities had honored him by erecting statues bearing his image (*Florida* 16). If *The Golden Ass* were a *roman à clef* it would be tempting to speculate that its author was having a little joke at the expense of its actor. He really had had statues dedicated to him, and now here these Greeks are proposing to do the same for Lucius. But as Winkler demonstrates, while the *Metamorphoses*

may be a *roman à clef*, it is at the same time a *roman à thèse*, a *roman fleuve*, a *roman de geste*, a *roman d'aventure*, a *roman noir*, and last but not least, a *roman policier*. This very multiplicity of *romans* should have tipped off readers of *Auctor & Actor* that the *Metamorphoses* was anything but novel. It has, more accurately, the flavor of a rhetorical treatise of Cicero gone mad.

To pick up the thread of the *Metamorphoses*' story once again, in Hypata, notice that Lucius politely refuses the honor of a statue, just like Atticus in Athens.

Yours is the most brilliant city in Thessaly; it is unparalleled. I thank you greatly for these great honors. But I urge you to reserve statues and portraits for worthier and greater men than I.

This is obviously an allusion to Cornelius Nepos' *Life of Atticus* calculated to make Atticus himself squirm and wish he had never heard of Cornelius Nepos. That Nepos himself was incapable of such a reaction says volumes about him; as Catullus observed, volumes are about the only things Cornelius knew (*tribus cartis doctis et laboriosis*, etc.). Lucius' words are at once an allusion to Nepos' presumptuous portrait of the noble and modest Atticus' conduct in Athens, and a sharp rebuke to Nepos for daring to attempt to write about Cicero's best friend in such a familiar way.

What is even more offensive is this Greek Lucius' feeble attempt to imitate Cicero's style. He begins his defense with a puerile confession of the difficulty of his case and a clumsy appeal for good will.

I am not unaware how difficult it is, in the full display of the corpses of three citizens, for him who is accused of their murder, even though he speaks the truth and voluntarily admits to the facts themselves, to persuade so large an audience that he is innocent.

This would have been laughed out of Cicero's schoolroom if he had bothered to have one. Periodic sentences jingle and jangle with rhythms and rhymes that exaggerate every flaw an orator could have. The most obvious clue of all that Cicero's hand is behind this parody of his own work comes when Lucius addresses his audience as *Quirites*, "Worthy Roman Citizens." How could a Greek in some backwater in Thessaly possibly have said this and expect to

be understood? The whole performance justly deserves the uproarious reception the audience gives it. It also prompts a reconsideration of the magistrate's little speech as well.

What the nameless magistrate of the *Metamorphoses* actually does is *correct* Cornelius Nepos' Latinity. Nepos had read the above passage in Cicero's oration for Sestius and noticed both the words and the word order in "the leader" (*dux*), "adviser" (*auctor*), and "the main advocate" (*actor*). He resolved to appropriate Cicero's unmistakable style for his own purposes. He thought he would be able to hide his theft by simply omitting one word, throwing in a conjunction where none had been before, and reversing the order of the words. But by doing so, Nepos destroyed the style and substance of Cicero's original speech. When the magistrate says that Lucius will be both the producer and the performer (*auctor et actor*) of Risus the god of Laughter, he at once corrects Nepos' perversion of Ciceronian style and puts an unmistakable stamp of Ciceronian authorship on both the magistrate's speech and, indeed, the entire novel. He restores the original order of *auctor* and *actor* and firmly corrects Nepos' feeble *actor auctorque*. Vollgraff did not restore Apuleius' text by referring to Cicero. Without realizing it, he restored Cicero's text by referring to Cicero.

Who else but Cicero would have had the genius as well as the confidence to correct the squalid Latin of Cornelius Nepos? Who else would even have noticed or cared? Finally, we must not neglect to ask that most Ciceronian of questions, *Cui bono?* Who stood to gain the most by this rigorous yet subtle correction, but Cicero himself? Certainly not Apuleius, who constantly reminds us that he is a Platonic philosopher and a loyal citizen of Rome from Africa and a literary star in Carthage and Sabratha. He never says a word about the *Metamorphoses*.

The conclusion is inescapable: *Marcus Tullius Cicero is the author of the 'Metamorphoses'*. Somehow, in a way we have yet to understand, he anticipated the future course of Latin literature and was able to project himself two hundred years into the future, to the happier and more prosperous Empire of the Antonine emperors. To give but one example of the way Cicero wrote for the future, consider that moment when Lucius, now transformed into an ass, thinks of escaping some bandits who have abducted him in book 3:

I tried amidst those crowds of Greeks to invoke the august name of Caesar in my native tongue. And indeed I shouted the "O" by itself elo-

quently and vigorously, but I could not pronounce the rest of Caesar's name.

There is nothing exceptional in this, and most readers have been content to be amused at the notion of an ass trying to bray Caesar's name. Anyone who lived in the second century would know that this was what a Roman citizen should do. When in trouble, call for help in the current Caesar's name.

But consider what meaning this same passage takes on when we realize that it was written some two centuries *before* the time of Apuleius and the most prosperous years of the Roman Empire. These same words are, suddenly, astounding.

I tried amidst those crowds of Greeks to invoke the august name of Caesar in my native tongue. And indeed I shouted the "O" by itself eloquently and vigorously, but I could not pronounce the rest of Caesar's name.

Written in the waning years of the Roman Republic, these words acquire a totally different meaning. Cicero (obit. 43 B. C. E.) could not possibly have known of Apuleius' contemporary Caesars Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius; still less could he imagine that anyone in his right mind would call for help by naming Caesar. Imagine what the consequences would have been if Cicero had shouted out "O Caesar!" to a gaggle of Pompeians! What a name to conjure with if he had dropped it at a dinner party hosted by Brutus or Cassius! Yet here is Lucius the ass trying to pronounce Julius Caesar's name in order to be *saved*. Surely the only Caesar Cicero could have known was the same Caesar Catullus knew, the conqueror of Gaul and the lover of Cleopatra. Nonetheless Cicero anticipates the entire sweep of Roman history, from Caesar and Augustus, down through the Julio-Claudians and Flavians, to the adoptive emperors of the second century.

Adding the *Metamorphoses* to the Ciceronian canon will obviously have important consequences. Perhaps none is more important than what Ciceronian authorship can tell us about the hero of the *Metamorphoses*. The author of the four orations against Catiline may well have known of certain Greek traditions about a man named Loukios and his transformation into an ass. It seems less likely that he knew Lucian's *Lucius or the Ass*, since both that author and his pseudonymous other self (helpfully known as Pseudo-Lucian)

were not born until well after Cicero had gone to his cosmological Never Never Land with Scipio and his dreams. Nonetheless, Cicero sends us the clearest possible signal of exactly who Lucius is, shortly after his transformation into an ass. *Lucius of the 'Metamorphoses' is an incarnation of Lucius Sergius Catilina, the arch conspirator of Republican Rome.*

Shortly after the man Lucius has been accidentally turned into an ass by taking a wrong prescription in Fotis and Pamphile's magical pharmacy, he struggles to free himself from his asinine destiny by eating some roses decorating a little shrine to Epona, the patron goddess of quadrupeds. At that moment he is done in by the very man who had been his own slave, who jumps up, loyally, and exclaims, "How long, pray, shall we put up with (*Quo usque tandem patiemur*) this old gelding who attacks first the animals' food and now even the gods' statues?" This is a transparent reference to the famous opening of Cicero's first oration against Catiline, "How long, pray, will you abuse our patience, Catiline?" (*Quo usque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra?*). It is the surest possible sign that the hero of the *Metamorphoses* is to be identified with the satanic hero of Cicero's orations and Sallust's monograph *The Catilinarian Conspiracy*. The similarities between Catiline and Lucius are too many to be accidental, above all their curious mixture of respectable lineage, intellect, and the basest kind of appetites. As Sallust sums him up:

Lucius Catiline was a man of noble birth and of eminent mental and personal endowments, but of a vicious and depraved disposition. His delight, from his youth, had been in civil commotions, bloodshed, robbery, and sedition; and in such scenes he had spent his early years. His constitution could endure hunger, want of sleep, and cold, to a degree surpassing belief. His mind was daring, subtle, and versatile, capable of pretending or dissembling whatever he wished. He was covetous of other men's property, and prodigal of his own. He had abundance of eloquence, though but little wisdom. His insatiable ambition was always pursuing objects extravagant, romantic, and unattainable.

Nothing could better describe the voice of the narrator of the *Metamorphoses* than these quintessential Catilinarian characteristics: *satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum*, "an abundance of eloquence, but little wisdom." As Lucius himself puts it later in the tale:

That divine inventor of ancient poetry among the Greeks, desiring to portray a hero of the highest intelligence, was quite right to sing of a man who acquired the highest excellence by visiting many cities and learning to know various peoples. In fact, I now remember the ass that I was with thankful gratitude because, while I was concealed under his cover and schooled in a variety of fortunes, he made me better informed, if less intelligent (*etsi minus prudentem, multiscium reddidit*).

Faced with exile and other reprisals after Catiline and his followers had been exterminated, Cicero could naturally be expected to expand the range of writing to less inflammatory themes. His *Catilinarians* assured him of a special place in the heart of future Latin teachers, but he must have wanted more—more even than his rhetorical treatises and philosophical dialogues would provide.

How better achieve that goal than to create under a pseudonym what *looked* like a novel, but was not; what *seemed* to be written by a provincial from Africa two hundred years in the future, but was not; and what *sounded* like an outlandish Egyptian mystery religion as a solution to all of life's problems, but was not, than to tell the adventures of Catiline as an ass in such a way that his identity would be as invisible to ordinary readers as Lucius' human form was to everyone he met? In fashioning all this Cicero became the most successfully hidden author of all time.

Since Niall Slater published his 1990 book on Petronius, *Reading Petronius*, few others have ventured to cross the narratological *pons asinorum* that Winkler built for them. Given the momentous discovery that his work enabled me to make, this is a cause for personal regret. But scholarly tastes—as opposed to truth—are a fact of life. So perhaps we should not linger any longer at the bottom of Winkler's bridge, dithering as Lucius and Charite do at the end of book 6, where their dilatory ways cause them to be recaptured by the bandits they thought they had escaped. As Gian Biagio Conte explained in his Sather lectures at Berkeley, published as *The Hidden Author: An Interpretation of Petronius' 'Satyricon'* (1996), narratology as a critical concept is passé.

Narratology has been valuable, and it is essential to assimilate its most important contributions (Genette, and not just Genette; Greimas and his followers, on the other hand, have from the start done more harm than

good). It has helped us, or rather taught us, to read a narrative text in a more rational way. Now we are facing a single text, and this is just what we want to do: read it rationally, and do this in a manner that is clear and direct. Narratological studies have been valuable to us: let us thank them and move on.

Christian Dior himself could not have better expressed the new directions that the *haute couture* of literary studies should follow.

Writing in a slathering or should I say sathering review in *Eris und Odium: Zeitschrift für zerrissene Philologie*, Professor Hermann Ferkel of Konstanz declared himself totally persuaded by Conte's views. He was moved most of all by the main argument of *The Hidden Author: The character Encolpius and the author Petronius are not the same person, nor do they speak in the same voice*. This discovery could not possibly be achieved unless we had indeed moved on, casting aside the once-valuable narratology as so much litter on the academic roadside, not unlike Napoleon abandoning his men to race back from Moscow in time for the next issue of *Paris Match*. Vibrant concepts like "the hidden author" and other landmarks of theoretical progress will have profound consequences for the reading of the fiction of the future, as well as of the past. Once we realize that Isabel Archer is not the same as Henry James, or that Emma Bovary is not Gustave Flaubert, there will be no end to the revisionist readings we can expect in the ever-spreading puddle of modern literary scholarship devoted to the novel. It is an exciting prospect. For the moment, though, may we not conclude with a modest suspicion that the hidden author of the *Satyricon* was not Petronius at all, but another author altogether, as yet undetected?