

## Fixity and Fluidity in *Apollonius of Tyre*

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To sing a song that old was sung  
From ashes ancient Gower is come,  
Assuming man's infirmities,  
To glad your ears and please your eyes.  
It hath been sung at festivals,  
On ember-eves and holy-ales;  
And lords and ladies in their lives  
Have read it for restoratives.  
The purchase is to make men glorious;  
*Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius.*  
(Shakesp. *Pericl.* I.Prol.1–10)

Anonymous authorship, textual fluidity, and an episodic narrative structure are distinctive features that the Latin *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri* (*The Story of Apollonius, king of Tyre*; hereafter, *Apollonius of Tyre*) shares with works of ancient Greek 'popular' literature such as *The Alexander Romance*. As Hansen explains, 'literature of this sort stands midway between conventional literature, in which texts ideally possess a single, unvarying form, and oral narrative such as myth, legend, and folktale, in which certain kinds of variation, including the development of ecotypes, or local recensions, are the norm'.<sup>1</sup> The fascinating adventures of Apollonius survive in diverging versions, the earliest of which are known as Recensions A and B; the examination of both the relationship between these families of manuscripts and the interrelationships between manuscripts within each recension, shows that copyists, who do not mechanically reproduce the text, take the liberty to

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<sup>1</sup> Hansen 1998, xxi.

modify it, often altering the wording and expanding upon or shortening the content.<sup>2</sup> Recent scholarship has convincingly demonstrated that in texts which are characterised by the fluidity of the narrative structure in the manuscript tradition, the copyists' relationship to the original creator is not that of an editor to author, but of author to author; the original text functions as a basis for further retellings. Each version of the story seems to be a fresh, original performance of the work, and the copyist approaches the autonomy and individuality that we generally associate with a performer.<sup>3</sup> In Konstan's words, *Apollonius of Tyre* would be an 'open' text, that is, 'a particular kind of artistic entity, distinct from the works that typically constitute the modern literary canon; open texts admit a degree of variation or indeterminacy that is incompatible with single authorial control.'<sup>4</sup> At the same time, however, *Apollonius of Tyre* is both fluid and rigid: while the inessential parts of the story and the wording may vary,<sup>5</sup> the essential ones are fixed in all its versions (Antiochus rapes his own daughter, Apollonius loses his wife and daughter and is then reunited with them). Thus, each retelling of the story presents us with a new variation on the same theme,<sup>6</sup> whether it is orally performed or transmitted as a literary text, as Gower declares in the prologue of Shakespeare's adaptation of this narrative cited above ('It hath been sung at festivals ... And lords and ladies ... Have read it for restoratives.').<sup>7</sup>

The changeability of *Apollonius of Tyre* should be understood not only in terms of its transmission and reception, but also of its composition. For the enigmas surrounding the origins of this late Latin narrative are multiplied when we consider the as yet unresolved issue of the relation between the earliest extant Latin versions (dated to the late fifth or the early sixth cent. AD) and an alleged lost original, which may have been both lengthier and written in Greek as early as the third century AD.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the coexistence of epic vocabulary, Ciceronian and Apuleian prose, 'vulgar' forms and Biblical language, which is particularly felt in Recension A, suggests to the

<sup>2</sup> See Kortekaas 1984, 59–96; Janka 1997; Garbugino 2004, 23–47.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas 1998, 280–281, 289 and 2003, 72–86.

<sup>4</sup> Konstan 1998, 123. See also Kortekaas 1984, 8 and 160 n.31 ('texte vivant').

<sup>5</sup> The author of Recension B introduces e.g. Apollonius' discussion with his helmsman in 8 RB 2–10, and the 'necromancy' episode in 50 RB 13–18.

<sup>6</sup> For this concept ('multiformity') in oral tradition see Finkelberg 2000, 2–6.

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion of this Prologue in Archibald 1991, 100–101.

<sup>8</sup> However, it is a matter of debate whether or not the search for the alleged lost original is of any value for our improved understanding of this type of narrative; see Thomas 1998.

majority of critics that this pagan story survives only in a non-authentic, Christianized version.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, critics have made strong claims for the oral-formulaic character of this allegedly unsophisticated narrative. In particular, Ruiz-Montero, Puche Lopez, and Fernández-Savater Martín refer in their readings to stylistic features, including the predominance of a straightforward and paratactic mode, the dry narration with its sequence of *ait* and *dixit*, the repetitive syntax and the almost formulaic use of words and phrases, and the use of recapitulation.<sup>10</sup> Similar conclusions have been reached through motif-analysis, and by the listing of careless motivations, poor and simplistic characterization, inconsistencies in the plot and other loose narrative connections.<sup>11</sup> The stylistic and narratological features mentioned above are intrinsic to this narrative, and can be justified according to what Hansen, using Bourdieu's formulation, defines as the aesthetics of popular literature, namely, principles in texts that privilege content over form and aim to quickly engage and entertain readers.<sup>12</sup> However, it should also be taken into account that recent development in oral-formulaic theory strongly questions the traditional notion of orality and literacy as mutually exclusive categories, whereas terms such as 'transitional' are employed with reference to written texts that exhibit the techniques of both oral and written types of composition.<sup>13</sup>

My aim in this article is not to define *Apollonius of Tyre* as either an oral, or a literary, or a 'transitional' text; nevertheless, the shifting relationships between orality and writtenness will be a central concern to this paper. I am particularly interested in the way in which oral and written modes of communication or genres such as riddles, letters and epitaphs (all crucial for the advancement of the plot in *Apollonius of Tyre*) illustrate the tension and the balance between form and content in this romance and reflect its 'fluid' state; my analysis is focused on the earliest Latin version, R(ecension) A, although references to RB will occasionally be made. It will also become clear that the written word in *Apollonius of Tyre* changes as easily as this (quasi-oral) narrative, whereas monumentality and fixity, traditionally asso-

<sup>9</sup> See the introductory essays by e.g. Schmeling 1996; Kortekaas 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Ruiz-Montero 1983–84, 324–327; Puche López 1997, 38–45; Fernández-Savater Martín 1997, 52–53.

<sup>11</sup> See, conveniently, Archibald 1991, 27–44, 63–80; also, Panayotakis 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Hansen 1998, xi–xvii.

<sup>13</sup> On the concept of 'transitionality' and related terms in oral-formulaic theory see e.g. Bäuml 1984, 37–38. See also König in this volume on Xenophon of Ephesus.

ciated with writtenness (see Rimell's Introduction to this volume), may in this text additionally characterize oral speech. The last section of my article focuses on orality vs. writtenness and the representation of closure as continuity in the two principal versions of this narrative, which enjoyed a great popularity during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

### Riddles, Spoken and Written

It may be argued that the conventional, 'folktale-like' opening in *Apollonius of Tyre*, in which the narrator announces the characters of a king and his beautiful only daughter,<sup>14</sup> provides the reader or listener of the tale with a comfortable feeling: similar openings in Chariton's *Callirhoe*, Xenophon's *The Ephesian Story*, or Apuleius' Tale of Cupid and Psyche, suggest not only generic but also thematic relations with *Apollonius of Tyre*, which may well be taken as yet another love story of a young couple's separation and reunion with the beautiful princess as the heroine, customarily presented at the very beginning of the story. However, the turn of events in the very first chapter subverts any feeling of the customary: the king falls in love with his own daughter and eventually rapes her.<sup>15</sup> The opening episode is significant for our appreciation of both the text's (violent) relation with the novelistic agenda and its self-representation as a transgressive narrative: traditional themes such as troublesome female beauty are exploited to unprecedented extremes, and this type of transgression provides the story with a tension and an oppressive atmosphere that is difficult to resolve.

If the opening of *Apollonius of Tyre* functions, as I argue, as an 'informal prologue',<sup>16</sup> the narrative as a whole stresses the relations between father and daughter (with prominent the theme of incest that is either committed or presented as a threat) over those between husband and wife. The figure of the mother is characteristically absent in the story, while all male authority figures have only daughters; their attitudes to their daughters reflect their political personas.<sup>17</sup> This essentially patriarchal structure of society significantly accommodates oral and written modes of communication that are marked by the prevalence of riddles, and by obscure and suggestive lan-

<sup>14</sup> See Mazza 1985, 597–599 with more references.

<sup>15</sup> See also Schmeling 1999, 141.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Morgan 2001, 152.

<sup>17</sup> See Archibald 1989; Panayotakis 2002.

guage. Once the father-daughter incest is consummated and its continuation is assured, the king secures its prolongation too, by means of a riddle-test put to all suitors. For this idea our author apparently combines elements from folktales or myth, yet his decision to introduce riddles as the means of securing incest is revealing, while it is all the more significant that Antiochus' riddle is itself about incest.<sup>18</sup> Riddles, like incest, join elements that would otherwise be kept apart, as is shown by the work of both Lévi-Strauss and Aristotle.<sup>19</sup>

Ancient theorizing about riddles and riddle-solving praises the original position of these predominantly oral forms of communication within a system of philosophical thought, where intellectuals contest with each other in order to exhibit their *paideia* and confirm the dignity of their status; esoteric philosophers, poets, prophets, and the Sphinx are key figures associated with riddles or symbolic language in the Classical Greek period.<sup>20</sup> *Apollonius of Tyre*, on the other hand, features enigmatic discourse, employed by kings and princesses, as a special form of communication. Riddles in the form of enigmatic utterances that require interpretation and often receive no proper or satisfactory answer, are numerous in our story.<sup>21</sup> Since the language of a riddle has the capacity to hide and reveal at the same time, all major characters, as it will be demonstrated below, employ implicit language as a means of expressing the unspeakable and the hidden, and sometimes also the ordinary, in both the oral and written communication with each other. The avoidance of straightforward speech by characters in a narrative that predominantly favours straightforward language and style creates an atmosphere of paradox and artificiality, yet indicates the limitations of all forms of communication within the world of the characters themselves. Let us briefly consider two examples of ordinary conversation within the story, starting with the dialogue between the princess and her nurse right after the girl's rape by her father.

<sup>18</sup> See Chiarini 1983; Garbugino 2004, 126–140.

<sup>19</sup> For the supporting evidence see Arist. *Poet.* 1458 a 22 αἰνίγματός τε γὰρ ἰδέα αὐτῆ ἐστὶ, τὸ λέγοντα ὑπάρχοντα ἀδύνατα συνάψαι; Lévi-Strauss 1973, 32–35.

<sup>20</sup> See Wolff 1999, 283–286; Struck 2004, 179, 39–50. This is, however, not to deny the pejorative or 'low' associations of riddle-solving found in authors of the Imperial period; on this see Horsfall 2003, 65, 81; Laird 2005, 229.

<sup>21</sup> See Schmeling 1998, 3288–3291; Müller 1991, 273; Wolff 1999, 281–282.

*Puella ait: 'Cara nutrix, modo hoc in cubiculo duo nobilia perierunt nomina.' Nutrix ignorans ait: 'Domina, quare hoc dicis?' Puella ait: 'Ante legitimam mearum nuptiarum diem saevo scelere violatam vides.' Nutrix ut haec audivit atque vidisset, exhorruit atque ait: 'Quis tanta fre-tus audacia virginis reginae maculavit torum?' Puella ait: 'Impietas fecit scelus.' Nutrix ait: 'Cur ergo non indicas patri?' Puella ait: 'Et ubi est pater?' Et ait: 'Cara nutrix, si intellegis quod factum est: periit in me nomen patris.'* (2 RA 3–10)

The girl said: 'Dear nurse, just now in this bedroom two noble reputations have perished.' Not understanding, the nurse said: 'Lady, why do you say this?' The girl said: 'You see a girl who has been brutally and wickedly raped before her lawful wedding day.' The nurse was horrified by what she heard and saw, and she said: 'Who was so bold as to violate the bed of the virgin princess?' The girl said: 'Disregard for morality caused this crime.' The nurse said: 'Then why do you not tell your father?' The girl said: 'And where is my father? Dear nurse', she went on, 'if you understand what has happened: for me the name of father has ceased to exist.'<sup>22</sup>

The collapse of standard moral values is expressed in a highly rhetorical style, which includes the princess' striking predilection for abstract instead of concrete nouns. The nurse at first does not perceive the meaning of her nursling's enigmatic words (which are still puzzling for some scholars), mainly because of the overwhelming nature of the double crime committed in the princess' bedroom.<sup>23</sup> She is *ignorans*, both 'unaware' of the dreadful events that took place earlier between the king and his daughter, and 'unable to understand' immediately the deeper meaning of what she sees and hears.<sup>24</sup> This situation is familiar in the story (more examples will follow), as more than once a character, like the nurse, finds herself at an interpretative loss. I would like to suggest that this phenomenon is a conscious technique on the part of the author, who thereby aims not only at creating special narrative

<sup>22</sup> The text cited here and throughout this article follows Kortekaas' second edition (2004); references include recension, and chapter and line numbers. Translations of passages, unless otherwise indicated, are by Archibald 1991.

<sup>23</sup> See also Laird 2005, 226–227, 238.

<sup>24</sup> For the secondary notion of *ignorare*, attested from Cicero onwards, see the examples in the *Thesaurus linguae Latinae* VII,1 313,62 f.

effects in particular episodes, but also at telling ultimately a story that invites its audience to consider carefully its meaning and character. The following passage, taken from a different context and related to different characters, illustrates the same point.

*Conversus ait ad gubernatorem: 'Dic mihi, si valeas, unde venisti?' Gubernator ait: 'De Tyro.' Apollonius ait: 'Patriam meam nominasti.' Ad quem gubernator ait: 'Ergo tu Tyrius es?' Apollonius ait: 'Vt dicis; sic sum.' Gubernator ait: 'Vere mihi dignare dicere: noveras aliquem patriae illius principem, Apollonium nomine?' Apollonius ait: 'Vt me ipsum, sic illum novi.' Gubernator non intellexit dictum et ait: 'Sic ego rogo, ut, ubicumque eum videris, dic illi...' (24 RA 5–12)*

He turned to the helmsman and said: 'Tell me, please, where do you come from?' The helmsman said: 'From Tyre.' Apollonius said: 'You have named my own country.' The helmsman said: 'So you are a Tyrian?' Apollonius said: 'As you say, so I am.' The helmsman said: 'Be kind enough to tell me the truth: did you know a prince of that country called Apollonius?' Apollonius said: 'I know him as well as I know myself.' The helmsman did not understand this remark and said: 'Then I have a request: if you see him anywhere, tell him...'

The use of enigmatic language on Apollonius' part is justified here, since the hero, in fear of Antiochus' persecution, wishes to conceal his identity. The ambiguity in the hero's words ('I know him as well as I know myself') additionally produces a comic effect, but it is intriguing that the witty remark concerns the hero himself; the Self is thus presented as The Other, or as a present absence;<sup>25</sup> the hero's identity is the key to the solution of more enigmas, since both Apollonius and other characters employ indirect descriptions or implicit language to refer to this topic (see below). Like the nurse in the previous passage, the helmsman simply does not grasp the meaning of this remark and proceeds with his message to Apollonius as if the addressee is absent. The play on Apollonius' concealed identity occurs again with regard

<sup>25</sup> Compare the princess' outburst when her father is mentioned (2 RA 8–10): 'The nurse said: 'Then why do you not tell your father?' The girl said: 'And where is my father? Dear nurse', she went on, 'if you understand what has happened: for me the name of father has ceased to exist.' See also Laird 2005, 231–232.

to a princess, who, unlike Antiochus' daughter, is destined to become the hero's spouse; consumed with erotic passion for Apollonius, king Archistrates' daughter is privileged to choose her husband among noble and educated suitors, and as a reply she sends a letter to her father.

*'Bone rex et pater optime, quoniam clementiae tuae indulgentia permittis mihi, dicam: illum volo coniugem naufragio patrimonio deceptum. Et si miraris, pater, quod tam pudica virgo tam impudenter scripserim: per ceram mandavi, quae pudorem non habet.'* (20 RA 15–18)

'Good king and best of fathers, since you graciously and indulgently give me permission, I will speak out: I want to marry the man who was cheated of his inheritance through shipwreck. And if you are surprised, father, that such a modest girl has written so immodestly, I have sent my message by wax, which has no sense of shame.'

This passage primarily illustrates that the choice to express oneself in riddles in our story is not *per se* related to an oral mode of communication.<sup>26</sup> Although the princess' wish is perfectly clear for the reader or the listener of the tale who cannot but recall the tribulations of Apollonius before his arrival in Pentapolis, and his narration of these events at the court of king Archistrates (16 RA 1), the mere fact that the beloved is not named explicitly in the young woman's letter suffices to confuse Archistrates (*rex ignorans quem naufragum diceret* 'the king did not know whom she meant by the shipwrecked man' 21 RA 1) and to induce a comic scene among the suitors. Apollonius' assistance is then deemed necessary, and the hero unravelling the riddle finds the solution in himself: *Apollonius accepto codicillo legit et ut sensit se a regina amari, erubuit. ... Et his dictis videns rex faciem eius roseo colore perfusam, intellexit dictum.* 'Apollonius took the tablet and read it, and when he realized that the princess loved him, he blushed. ... When he said this, the king saw his face blushing scarlet, and understood the remark' (21 RA 10–15). Again, problematic communication among characters is the

<sup>26</sup> However, it should also be said that the girl's desperate oral confession to her father in private follows closely the content of the sealed letter: *Pater carissime, quia cupis audire natae tuae desiderium: illum volo coniugem et amo: patrimonio deceptum et naufragum, magistrum meum Apollonium* 'Dearest father, since you want to hear your child's desire: the man I want for my husband, the man I love, is the man who was cheated of his inheritance and shipwrecked, my teacher Apollonius' (22 RA 4–6).



issue, and the whole episode may function as a comic set-piece, featuring the types of the naïve king Archistrates and the three suitors, and the shrewd teacher Apollonius. However, this time the king's failure to understand the wish of his own beloved daughter goes hand in hand with enigmas that require decoding and explaining, perhaps because the reality these characters live in, is characterized by social norms and restrictions, such as a woman's limited freedom of choice in her marriage.

Rosenmeyer includes our passage in her discussion of letters as intermediaries of love affairs in the ancient novel, and as 'a way for a woman to avoid public embarrassment or shame'. She finds an intriguing parallel in Antonius Diogenes' novel, in which a female servant is urged to reveal an amorous passion by means of a letter.<sup>27</sup> It is more fruitful (I think) to compare, with Klebs, the letter episode from *Apollonius of Tyre* with an extract from the Ovidian story of Byblis, who, after a long deliberation, opts to confess her (incestuous) passion for her brother by means of a letter, not orally, as pre-Ovidian versions of the myth would have it.<sup>28</sup>

*Si tamen ipse mei captus prior esset amore,  
 Forsitan illius possem indulgere furori.  
 Ergo ego, quae fueram non reiectura petentem,  
 Ipsa petam! Poterisne loqui? Poterisne fateri?  
 Coget amor, potero; vel, si pudor ora tenebit,  
 Littera celatos arcana fatebitur ignes. (Met. 9,511–516)*

And yet if he himself had first been smitten with love for me, I might perchance smile upon his passion. Let me myself, then, woo him, since I should not have rejected his wooing! And can you speak? Can you confess? Love will compell me: I can! Or if shame holds my lips, a private letter shall confess my secret love.<sup>29</sup>

Female sexual desire and the letter as a substitute for oral communication are common denominators between the two passages, but their connection is enhanced, paradoxically, by means of a contrast: unlike the situation in Ovid's tale, there is no issue of incest in the extract from *Apollonius of Tyre*. Not ex-

<sup>27</sup> Rosenmeyer 2001, 155–156, 167; see also Hodkinson in this volume.

<sup>28</sup> Klebs 1899, 285–286; Jenkins 2000, 440–442.

<sup>29</sup> Transl. F.J. Miller, *Ovid, Metamorphoses*, vol. II, LCL, 1976.

plicitly, at least; for, I would like to argue, the incest theme lurks between the lines not as a plot element, but in the form of a literary borrowing. Notice the subversive use of the oral and the written medium in the romance: the relevant lines from Ovid, adduced by Klebs and others, derive from the conclusion of Byblis' monologue, *before* the actual letter is written; their imitation features *within* the written letter of the lovesick princess in *Apollonius of Tyre*. Moreover, it is fascinating how the notions of the spoken and the written can be identified as ephemeral by means of the written medium, the wax tablets, wax being a material known for its plasticity and potential for reuse.

It may now come as a surprise that the generally acknowledged literary model for the final lines of the princess' letter is the beginning of an epistle written by Cicero in 56 BC, and addressed to L. Luceius, who at the time was writing a history of Rome. Cicero himself elsewhere calls it 'an exceedingly pretty letter' (*valde bella, Att. 4,6*).

*Coram te tecum eadem haec agere saepe conantem deterruit pudor quidam paene subrusticus; quae nunc expromam absens audacius; epistula enim non erubescit. Ardeo cupiditate incredibili, neque, ut ego arbitrator, reprehendenda, nomen ut nostrum scriptis illustretur et celebretur tuis. Quod etsi mihi saepe ostendis te esse facturum, tamen ignoscas velim huic festinationi meae. (Fam. 5,12,1)*

Often, when I have attempted to discuss this topic with you face to face, I have been deterred by a sort of almost boorish bashfulness; but now that I am away from you I shall bring it all out with greater boldness; for a letter does not blush. I am fired by an extraordinary, but not – as I think – reprehensible eagerness to have my name rendered illustrious and renowned by no other pen than yours. And though you often assure me that such is your intention, you will still, I hope, pardon my being so impatient.<sup>30</sup>

If both Ovid's incest story and Cicero's letter were in the mind of the author of *Apollonius of Tyre* when he was composing the letter episode (as I think they were), male desire for literary glory and female sexual desire intertwine as two aspects of an ardent passion. The character's anxiety and wish for a

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<sup>30</sup> Transl. W. Glynn Williams, *Cicero, The Letters to his Friends*, vol. I, LCL, 1965.

happy marriage, seen from another, intertextual, perspective, is the author's agony and ambition for literary glory.

It has so far been suggested that enigmatic language as a special form of communication is in *Apollonius of Tyre* associated with female speech (the princesses), whereas the exchange of proper riddles occurs among men (who are also kings or political leaders). The fact that Apollonius, a generally passive character, employs enigmatic language when speaking of himself, may support this hypothesis. It is his first encounter with the daughter of king Archistrates that interests me here. Invited to the royal court in Cyrene just after his survival from shipwreck, the young stranger whose identity remains secret arouses the curiosity of the princess:

*Et accedens ad eum ait: 'Licet taciturnitas tua sit tristior, generositas autem tuam nobilitatem ostendit. Sed si tibi molestum non est, indica mihi nomen et casus tuos.' Apollonius ait: 'Si nomen quaeris, Apollonius sum vocatus; si de thesauro quaeris, in mari perdidit.' Puella ait: 'Aperitius indica mihi, ut intellegam.'* (15 RA 11–16)

She approached him and said: 'Although your silence is rather melancholy, yet your manners reveal your noble birth. If it is not too painful, tell me your name and your misfortunes.' Apollonius replied: 'If you want to know my name, I am called Apollonius; if you ask about my fortune, I lost it in the sea.' The girl said: 'Explain to me more clearly, so that I can understand'.

At first sight Apollonius' double answer to the young princess is hardly obscure enough to justify the girl's persistence to hear more about the young man. Recension B, unsurprisingly, alters the hero's reply considerably and appropriately to fit the girl's confusion: *Si necessitatis nomen quaeris, in mare perdidit: si nobilitatis, Tarsum reliqui* (15 RB 13–14) 'If you want to know about the notion of necessity, I lost it in the sea; if you ask about that of nobility, I left it behind in Tarsus'; here, Kortekaas argues, we should understand both 'necessity' and 'nobility' in astrological terms, namely as an astral constraint and a harsh destiny that were cancelled by the tempest.<sup>31</sup>

However, the early version (RA), as is often the case, preserves a text whose apparent simplicity belies a deeper meaning. For when the hero says:

<sup>31</sup> Kortekaas 1998, 188–189.

‘If you want to know my name’ (*Si nomen quaeris*), he is actually using a formula attested in Imperial sepulchral inscriptions, both pagan and Christian, with which the monument initiates a dialogue with the passer-by, asking him to stay awhile and find more about the identity and social standing of the deceased. Because of this widespread practice in the Greco-Roman world, this type of formula in verse epitaphs was already from an early period used to introduce puzzles and other mind-games, in which the reader is invited to guess the name of the deceased by means of e.g. an acrostich (an example from Rome would be *Carmina Epigraphica* 109 (*CIL* VI 10627) 9 *n]omen si queris, iunge u[ersuum exordia* ‘if you want to know my name, join the beginnings of the verses’).<sup>32</sup>

Apollonius, much like a personified tombstone, speaks in a fixed, formulaic language that can also be reduced to abstraction and meaninglessness. At the same time, his address to the princess ‘If you want to know my name’ (*si nomen quaeris*) is a marker of an intellectual challenge, a set-up of a riddling situation, and the same may be argued of the clause *Apollonius sum uocatus*, which can be rendered not only as: ‘I am called Apollonius’ but also as ‘I am the lost, or the shipwrecked one’; etymological word-play with the name of Apollo and the verbs *apoluein*, *apollunai*, or *perdere* was observed by Greek and Roman authors alike, and it is not a mere coincidence that in his very next sentence the hero employs this crucial verb: ‘if you ask about my fortune, I lost it in the sea’ (*si de thesauro quaeris, in mare perdidit*). Moreover, the etymological play involving a proper name and a verb denoting loss, misery, and grief connects the main character with the epic and tragic tradition of heroes with ‘suffering names’, exploited in etymological plays: for example, Ajax-*aiai-aiazo* in Sophocles, *Ajax* 430–434, Achilles-*achos* in *Il.* 2,724, Odysseus-*odyssoimai* in *Od.* 19,407.<sup>33</sup>

My argument that a form of riddling exchange takes place between the *sapientissima* princess and Apollonius, is also supported by the phraseology the young woman employs in her reaction: ‘*Apertius indica mihi, ut intellegam.*’ ‘Explain to me more clearly, so that I can understand’. The princess’ interest has a double epic model: Alcinous’ and Arete’s interest for the name and origin of the stranger Odysseus (*Od.* 7,237–239; 8,550–556),<sup>34</sup> and Dido’s

<sup>32</sup> More examples can be found in my forthcoming commentary *ad loc.*

<sup>33</sup> See Barchiesi 1994, 109 (=1999, 324); Paschalis 1997, 67–68, and Panayotakis forthcoming.

<sup>34</sup> Holzberg 1990, 96–97.

passion to hear the epic story par excellence from the hero Aeneas himself (*Aen.* 1,753–755). However, the great epic poets are not the only model-texts in this phrase. There is close verbal and thematic correspondence between the princess' reply to Apollonius and some words of the chorus from Pacuvius' *Antiope* as preserved in Cicero; the following verses describe the reaction of the perplexed chorus of the Athenians when they fail to grasp the riddle of the tortoise-shell posed by Amphion (frg. IV, 5–7 Ribbeck<sup>2</sup> = Cic. *div.* 2,133):

*Hoc saeptuosa dictione abs te datur,  
Quod coniectura sapiens aegre contuit:  
Non intellegimus, nisi si aperte dixeris.*

Enclosed in such a barricade of words  
Is this your riddle made; and even a sage  
Wise in his guessing scarcely can perceive it.  
We do not understand, unless you speak  
Your meaning openly.<sup>35</sup>

By means of her reply, the princess, like the nurse and the helmsman mentioned earlier, acknowledges her inability to understand the meaning of Apollonius' reply. Nevertheless, she manages to persuade the hero to continue with his narration, and this develops the story further.

#### The Missing Letter and the Changed Inscription

In *Apollonius of Tyre*, as Sironen reminds us in a recent article, letters and inscriptions give credence to the plot, but the latter are favoured over the former: the romance includes only two letters, whereas there are no fewer than six or seven inscriptions or references to them. Inscriptions belong to public honorific monuments raised in honor of Apollonius and his daughter Tarsia by the citizens of Tarsus (10 RA) and Mytilene (47 RA), whereas two 'posthumous' inscriptions are also recorded for Tarsia (32 and 38 RA), although she is still alive.<sup>36</sup> Of the letters the first is the enigmatic confession of love by Archistrates' daughter for Apollonius (20–21 RA), which I men-

<sup>35</sup> Transl. by E.H. Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin*, vol. II, *LCL*, 1977. On the fragment see the extensive comment by Pease 1977, 561–562 on Cic. *div.* 2, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Sironen 2003, 292–294.

tioned earlier; the second contains Apollonius' instructions for the proper burial of his wife (26 RA). All this, including a brief yet striking description of Apollonius' private library (6 RA 11–13 / RB 11–12), certainly gives the impression that the characters in this story live in, and communicate via, a culture that is predominantly written.<sup>37</sup> This section intends to argue that the issue of writtenness in this narrative is a highly controversial one.

On the ship to Antioch Apollonius' pregnant wife gives birth to a girl and falls into a coma; since the princess is believed to be dead and is a potential bringer of doom and pollution for the ship, she is put into a specially made coffin and thrown into the sea. Apollonius is devastated during these moments of grief.

*... et facere loculum amplissimum. Et charta plumbea obturari iubet eum inter iuncturas tabularum. Quo perfecto loculo regalibus ornamentis ornatam puellam, in loculo composuit et XX sestertia auri ad caput eius posuit. Dedit postremo osculum funeri, effudit super eam lacrimas ... Et iussit loculum mitti in mare cum amarissimo fletu. (25 RA 26–33)*

He told them to make a very spacious coffin, and to seal the joints with lead leaf. When the coffin was ready he adorned the girl in royal finery, laid her in it, and put twenty thousand gold sesterces at her head. He kissed the corpse for the last time, and showered it with tears. [...] Weeping very bitterly, he ordered the coffin to be thrown into the sea.

The coffin floats for two days and then arrives on the coast of Ephesus, in the very next chapter in the story. A physician finds the coffin lying on the shore and having taken it to his house, eagerly opens it.

*... et vidit puellam regalibus ornamentis ornatam, speciosam valde et in falsa morte iacentem ... Et videns subito ad caput eius pecuniam positam et subtus codicillos scriptos et ait: 'Perquiramus, quid desiderat aut mandat dolor.' Qui cum resignasset, invenit sic scriptum. (26 RA 5–11)*

He saw a very beautiful girl lying there adorned with royal jewels, apparently dead. [...] Suddenly he saw the money which had been put at her head, and the tablet underneath it; he said: 'Let us find out the desires

<sup>37</sup> See also Robins 1995, 210.

or instructions of Grief<sup>37</sup>. When he broke the seal, he found the following message.

It should be noted that this narrative oddity (a letter whose contents are crucial appearing out of nowhere) is found not only in RA, but also in RB, which is supposed to be an improved retelling of the story and a stylistically and narratologically corrected version of RA. Schmeling acknowledges the problem of the missing letter in ch. 25 and supplements the text right after the mention of the gold sesterces.<sup>38</sup> But does this absence indicate carelessness on the part of the author (or the narrator), or is it a sign of an epitomization of the text? Although I cannot exclude either of those explanations, it is a third interpretation I consider as the most likely; namely, that the author mentions the existence of the letter only when a character is there to read its content; in other words, the written word becomes ‘real’ once it serves a narrative function.

Let me illustrate the same point further with another example. The gravestone erected in honour of Apollonius’ daughter Tarsia, whom the citizens of Tarsus, misled by the evil Dionysia, believed to be dead, bears the following inscription (32 RA 54–57):

*DII MANES  
CIVES THARSI THARSIAE VIRGINI  
BENEFICIIS TYRII APOLLONII  
EX AERE COLLATO FECERVNT*

TO THE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD:  
THE CITIZENS OF TARSUS ERECTED THIS MONUMENT  
BY SUBSCRIPTION TO THE MAIDEN TARSIA  
BECAUSE OF THE BENEFACIONS OF APOLLONIUS OF TYRE

Dionysia adduces the existence of this very monument as proof of Tarsia’s death, when Apollonius shows his disbelief on this matter. He is then directed to the cenotaph, where the inscription cited a few chapters earlier is found, and reads (38 RA 9–12):

<sup>38</sup> Schmeling 1988, ch. 25, p.19, 2 f. *et viginti sestertia auri ad caput eius posuit <et codicillos scriptos>*. Compare Tsitsikli 1981, 76 app.cr. *ad loc*: ‘*possis auri <et codicillos scriptos>*’.

*DII MANES*  
*CIVES THARSI THARSIAE VIRGINI, APOLLONII REGIS FILIAE*  
*OB BENEFICIVM EIVS, PIETATIS CAUSA*  
*EX AERE COLLATO FECERVNT*

TO THE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD:  
 THE CITIZENS OF TARSUS ERECTED THIS MONUMENT  
 BY SUBSCRIPTION TO THE MAIDEN TARSIA,  
 DAUGHTER OF KING APOLLONIUS,  
 OUT OF RESPECT FOR HIS BENEFACTIONS

Only few scholars observe the discrepancy and some actually speak of two separate inscriptions.<sup>39</sup> Once again the discrepancy is not peculiar to RA, but is found also in RB (albeit with different wording). Since there is no reason to assume that the citizens of Tarsus erected two memorials, in which the inscriptions have similar but not identical phrasing, the attentive reader is confronted again with a question regarding the author's competence. However, the repetition of the written message is on its own highly significant,<sup>40</sup> especially for a text that values economy, and perhaps we need to approach the matter from a different point of view: indeed, the phrasing of one and the same inscription has 'miraculously' changed, yet in both cases the inscription is sepulchral and emphasizes the viewer's perspective. The former inscription focuses on the everlasting gratitude of the citizens of Tarsus for the benefactions of Apollonius; the latter retains the message with the addition of the family bond between the benefactor Apollonius and the allegedly deceased Tarsia; it is essential to acknowledge that in the latter passage the reader of the inscription is the father himself who is thus led to believe that his daughter is dead.

This 'free' use of the written medium (cf. above my remarks on the wax tablets) is not altogether surprising in a narrative characterized by adaptability and fluidity. The phenomenon then appropriately adopts a self-reflexive perspective and emphasizes the performative aspects of the text. The episodes in which these apparent contradictions occur tend to have an autonomy, they can be seen in isolation from each other; the individual episodes

<sup>39</sup> See Kytzler 1997, 481; Sironen 2003, 293.

<sup>40</sup> For another example, regarding an oral message, of a significant repetition with variation in *Apollonius of Tyre* see Panayotakis 2002, 101 n. 5.



highlight different aspects of the hero's character. Moreover, manifestations of writing such as letters and inscriptions become illusionary and immaterial, but the non-fixity of the written text can be observed when the corresponding 'reality' is itself fluid and false, such as the *Scheintod* of Apollonius' wife and the empty grave fabricated for Tarsia.

### Closure as Continuity

Thus far, I have attempted to show that fixity and fluidity in *Apollonius of Tyre* are categories that may invariably apply to both oral and written modes of communication; the text encourages its readers, ancient and modern alike, to engage in an intellectual game where the deciphering of enigmas is crucial. Where does that all end? In the final section of this article I will argue that narrative closure is established in RA and RB via different channels, oral and written, respectively, which, nevertheless, represent two sides of the same notion, the propagation and continuity of the text.

Let me begin with the ending of the story as given in RB, which is the version most often cited in treatments of this topic.

*Ipse quoque cum coniuge sua benigne vixit annis septuaginta IIII. Tenuit regnum Antiochiae, Tyri et Cyrenensium. Quietam vitam per omne tempus suum vixit. Casus suos suorumque ipse descripsit et duo volumina fecit: unum Dianae in templo Ephesiorum, aliud in bibliotheca sua exposuit.* (51 RB 24–28)

Apollonius himself lived with his wife in a friendly manner for seventy-four years. He ruled Antioch and Tyre and Cyrene, and had a peaceful time for all his life. He himself wrote an account of all his own and his family's misfortunes, and made two copies: he displayed one in the temple of Diana of the Ephesians, and the other in his own library.

The passage has often been highlighted by critics, and not only because of its (at first sight) strong affinity with the ending in Xenophon's *Ephesian Tale*.<sup>41</sup> In the words of Robins, 'the end of the text of the story becomes the beginning of the history of the text, or rather the beginning of two possible histo-

<sup>41</sup> Nimis 2004, 186–187 subtly illustrates the different nature of the closure in Xenophon.

ries.<sup>42</sup> In his analysis of the relationships between the original spoken word and its technological transformations, Ong observes an inherent paradox in writing and its close association with death. ‘The paradox lies in the fact that the deadness of the text, its removal from the living human lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity, assures its endurance and its potential for being resurrected into limitless living contexts by a potentially infinite number of living readers.’<sup>43</sup> Indeed the expiring text offers a picture of its own creation and propagation, just as the birth of Apollonius’ son is the last significant event we hear of in the hero’s life (51 RA 29 / RB 23). In an intriguing analysis, Robins views the double status which *Apollonius of Tyre* imagines for itself as a two-sided invocation, to the world represented in Greek romances on the one hand, and to the context of late antique literary practice on the other. This device of authentication (in Hansen’s formulation, a case of ‘light pseudo-documentarism’)<sup>44</sup> has in my view a complementary function, as it stands for the text’s own multiplicity and polyphony. At the same time it underlines the existence of different written traditions of this text, one of the basis for the writing of the novel, and the other of a performative character, for the reading of the novel (as a votive offering in the temple of Diana).

By comparison the ending as transmitted in RA is, as seen by Janka,<sup>45</sup> apparently of the simple ‘oral’ or ‘folktale’ type:

*Ipsē autem cum sua coniuge vixit annis LXXIII. Regnavit et tenuit regnum Antiochiaē et Tyri et Cyrenensium; et quietam atque felicem vitam vixit cum coniuge sua. Peractis annis, quod superius diximus, in pace atque senectute bona defuncti sunt. (51 RA 30–34)*

Apollonius himself lived with his wife for seventy four-years. He ruled Antioch and Tyre and Cyrene as his kingdom, and led a peaceful and happy life with his wife. At the end of the time we have mentioned, they died in peace and virtuous old age.

In Fusillo’s formulation, this is a ‘proleptic’ ending, in the sense that it alludes to a wonderful future for the leading couple outside the story.<sup>46</sup> Yet the

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<sup>42</sup> Robins 1995, 208.

<sup>43</sup> Ong 1982, 81.

<sup>44</sup> Hansen 2003, 308–309.

<sup>45</sup> Janka 1997, 186.

impact of closure here feels stronger since death and finality are explicit (observe the silence about the hero's death in RB). In particular, the text's last words (*in pace atque senectute bona defuncti sunt* 'they died in peace and virtuous old age'), which carry an undeniably Christian colour (*bona senectus* occurs several times in sepulchral inscriptions and in the Vulgate version of the Bible),<sup>47</sup> place an irrevocable line between life and afterlife. I should like to suggest that this sentence offers a different perspective on the continuity of the text, and propose to read it against the background of *Genesis* 15, in which Abraham receives God's promise of a son and of a 'starry' future,<sup>48</sup> while a covenant is made between God and Abraham, which pledges the Israelites their land (*Gen.* 15:12–15):

*Cumque sol occumberet sopor inruit super Abram et horror magnus et tenebrosus invasit eum dictumque est ad eum: 'scito praenosceus quod peregrinum futurum sit semen tuum in terra non sua et subicient eos servituti et adfligent quadringentis annis; verumtamen gentem cui servituri sunt ego iudicabo et post haec egredientur cum magna substantia; tu autem ibis ad patres tuos in pace sepultus in senectute bona'.*

As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a trance and great and fearful darkness came over him. The Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain: your descendants will be aliens living in a land that is not their own; they will be enslaved and held in oppression for four hundred years. But I shall punish the nation whose slaves they are, and afterwards they will depart with great possessions. You yourself will join your forefathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.'<sup>49</sup>

Abraham is portrayed in Greco-Roman paganism, Siker tells us, as a model of wisdom and righteousness, as a significant political ruler, and as an expert in astrology and philosophy.<sup>50</sup> All three aspects can be detected in Apollonius' personality throughout the narrative (e.g. chs. 6 RA 10–16, 7 RA 1–5). His *Story* in RA ends and simultaneously begins as the story of an individual

<sup>46</sup> Fusillo 1997, 218.

<sup>47</sup> Kortekaas 2004, 80–82.

<sup>48</sup> Lane Fox 1991, 60–61.

<sup>49</sup> Transl. *The Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha*, Oxford and Cambridge 1989, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Siker 1987, 193.

with a lasting historical-political significance, carrying the sphragis of the orally transmitted Divine Word.

To conclude, orality in *Apollonius of Tyre* should not be examined only in terms of the text's style and language. Rather it relates to the 'fluidity' of a narrative that has the ability and the freedom to transform itself during its transmission. The limits of communication in the text's world apply to both oral and written modes; speech is cryptic and requires analysis and decoding, while writing is often an illusionary phenomenon. Nevertheless, orality and writtenness stand against each other as opposing categories for the continuity of the narrative at the endings of the principal versions of *Apollonius of Tyre*; the text seeks its perpetuation by means of different worldviews.<sup>51</sup>

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