

Leering for the Plot: Visual Curiosity in Apuleius and Others

KIRK FREUDENBURG
Yale University

Winkler's *Auctor and Actor* taught us to pay close attention to how listeners listen in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, and how readers (featured as characters) go about the act of interpreting, often badly, inside the novel's many inset tales. Scenes of hermeneutical activity, he shows, have implications for readers on the outside looking in. My approach in this paper is largely in the same vein, but with a different emphasis. I want to watch the book's inset watchers, not 'rather than' but 'in addition to' reading its readers. Expanding upon two recent articles by Niall Slater, I will focus on how their watching is figured, and what it does to them, by transfixing and transforming them in various regular (as we shall see) and suggestively 'readable' ways.¹ My main point will concern the pleasures of the text that are produced and set out for critical inspection by the novel's scenes of scopophilia, scenes that invite us to feast our eyes on characters happily abandoned to their desires. They draw us in to watch, and secretly enjoy the show. And in doing that they have the potential to tell us something not just about the bewitching powers of the book as a lush meadow of enticements, but about ourselves as stubborn mules who are easily enticed by its many pleasurable *divertissements*. Curiosity is a problem in the book, something we load on Lucius' back as his famous problem. That is clear enough. But the point of this paper is that the problem of curiosity does not stay safely inside the book. It becomes ours as we read and engage sympathetically with a protagonist who is abandoned to some pretty outlandish and wonderful and disgusting desires, the most notorious of which is his desire to watch, and to see, and to hear and touch things he should not. This makes him the perfect stand-in for the reader, a mirror-image that reflects back on us as we, with widened-eyes, consume the erotic,

¹ Slater 1998 and 2003.

visual pleasures of the book, and lunge our way forward from one Milesian tale to the next. For Milesian Tales are notoriously hair-raising ('salvo' inquit 'tuo sermone' Trimalchio 'si qua fides est, ut mihi pili inhorruerunt', Petron. 63.1). They prick up the ears and sexually excite,² effects powerfully reminiscent of Lucius' moment of transformation: *pili mei crassantur in setas...et aures inmodicis horripilant auctibus...natura crescebat* (*Met.* 3.24). The magic of these tales is not merely in their contents, but in their effects.

Helen Morales, in her recent study of Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*, has underscored that novel's obsessions with vision, putting special emphasis on the lines that connect desire to knowledge and sight. The *Leucippe and Clitophon* is, in her words, a 'profoundly ocularcentric' work, 'a scopophilic's paradise.'³ The recent firmer dating of the novel to the second century C.E. on the evidence of the Robinson-Cologne papyrus makes it possible for us to consider one novel's obsessions with vision and desire as relevant to the other's, either as a case of direct influence, or, as the evidence of much second century literature suggests, as part of a much larger 'Second Sophistical' interest in the description and theorizing of vision. The evidence for this larger trend is amply laid out by Morales. Rather than repeat it here, and rather than attempt to trace any direct lines of influence between Achilles Tatius and Apuleius (or *vice versa*), I propose simply to add Apuleius into the conversation by showing that he, too, is well versed in the optical obsessions of the Greek novelists generally. He knows how novels exploit scenes of gazing to thematize the lover's obsession with his/her beloved, and how these scenes, by his day, had become increasingly baroque and, in many cases, visually explicit. And here again much excellent work has already been done by Luca Graverini in his recent study of Lucius' ogling of Photis at *Met.* 2.6–7.⁴ Graverini's work shows that Apuleius is not only well versed in the habits of description practiced by the Greek novelists, but that layered into certain scenes of arrested gazing in the *Metamorphoses* are specific references to Homer, and to numerous Roman writers, especially to Virgil, Propertius and Ovid. Thus in the close readings that follow I hope to expand on the works of Morales and Graverini to show that, despite an

² Macrobius *Somn.* 1.2.8: *auditum mulcent vel comoediae...vel argumenta fictis casibus amatorum referta, quibus vel multum se Arbiter exercuit vel Apuleium non numquam luisse miramur. Hoc totum fabularum genus, quod solas aurium delicias profitetur*; cf. Pseudo-Lucian *Amores* 1: 'this morning I have been quite gladdened by the sweet winning seductiveness of your wanton stories, so that I almost thought I was Aristides being enchanted beyond measure by these Milesian tales.'

³ Morales 2004, ix.

⁴ Graverini 2001.

obvious obsession with Second Sophistical optic theorizing and a clear attention paid to novelistic precedents, Apuleius does something unprecedented in his particular deployment of scenes of gazing as pleasure-taking. By connecting the desire to see not only to his central moral theme of *curiositas*, but to the ‘spectacular’ pleasures of reading itself (via ekphrasis, reading as watching/leering), Apuleius puts a special tension upon the (full knowing male) reader’s ability to self-regulate and keep to the story’s high road. For as Simon Goldhill has shown in his study of Longus, watching for pleasure in the novel always has the potential to catch us in the act of pleasuring ourselves. And that’s a very nasty thing to be caught doing.⁵

The first scene of the arrested gaze that I wish to consider is Lucius’ description of a statue group that he sees as he enters Byrrhaena’s house in Hypata, at *Met.* 2.4–5:

‘Look, a Parian stone turned into Diana holds the mid-point balanced at the center of the whole spot, a representation/presage perfectly lustrous. With her tunic blown back she rushed forward to meet you on your way in, inspiring awe by her divine majesty. Dogs flank the goddess on both sides, and they too were of stone. Their eyes menace. They prick up their ears, flare their nostrils and snarl. If barking were to break out from someplace nearby, you would think it came from throats of stone...Just off the farthest border of rock apples hung down, and grape-clusters expertly polished. Art, not to be outdone by nature, laid them out as if they were real...Amid the leaves a stone likeness of Actaeon peeped out, his curious gaze leering down towards the goddess. He was already wild, becoming a stag, and you could see him both in the rock and reflected in the spring, waiting for Diana to take her bath.

As I pored over these details again and again in utter delight, squinting my eyes, ‘Yours,’ says Byrrhaena. ‘All that you see is yours’. That said, she ordered the rest to leave to make way for a private conversation.’

Though he does not know it yet, this is Lucius’ first faint sighting of his beloved, for the depiction of his arrested gaze bears a strong resemblance in many of its details to the epiphany of Isis, with whom Diana will later be

⁵ Goldhill 1995, 43: ‘Longus...manipulates the (patrolling of) relations between a subject and text, the delights and self-regulations of reading and writing about desire. In Longus’ sweet writing, sensual and narrative pleasure—to *terpnon*—overlap.’

conflated in book 11.⁶ And it gestures towards precedents in Greek romance, where the ‘divine epiphany’ is one of the most common figures of the lover’s first sighting of his/her beloved, as at *Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.4.2–4 or, more elaborately, in the reader’s first encounter with Anthia in the first book of Xenophon of Ephesus’ *Ephesiaca*. In the typical rendering of the motif, the viewer is thunderstruck, standing fixed to his/her spot and unable to speak, overcome by wonder, as if in the presence of some super-human beauty. Often the object of admiration is scanned in detail from head to foot, and compared to a famous artistic rendering of a heroine or goddess, usually Venus or Diana.⁷ ‘The desired woman is frequently likened to famous works of art as the male viewer paints or moulds her in his imagination. Woman is reified as statue, statue lusted after as woman.’⁸ But here, in a reversal of the common trope, we have a work of art come to life. And the work in question is not a painting, as it commonly is elsewhere in the Greek novels, but a statue, perhaps to remind us of another stone lover come to life, and thus to put one Ovidian transformation (Pygmalion’s) inside another (Actaeon’s).⁹ So realistically carved is the stone Diana, says Lucius, that she seems actually to move. Her dogs sniff the air and howl. Meanwhile Lucius, the flesh and blood viewer, is frozen in place, like a statue.

To reverse the trope in these several ways is more than a clever turn upon an old theme. It is a way of reminding us that the work being described is not a neutral thing simply ‘there’ to be scanned in its every minute detail as if by a camera’s unlying lens. Rather, as a fiction and not a thing ‘there’ at all, it is something we view from inside the psychology of the viewer (another fiction), as a set of images filtered through the values and curious desires of a young man who is obsessed with magic and convinced that everything he sees in the world is full of hidden powers. Just moments before this

⁶ Peden 1985 suggests that the four winged goddesses that frame the Diana and Actaeon group represent Isis in her role as goddess of Victory and Fortune. See also Slater 2003, 28.

⁷ Van Mal-Maeder 2001, 91 points out that paintings, not statues, are the common point of comparison in the novels. Petronius does an elaborate send-up of the motif at 126.13ff.

⁸ Morales 2004, 33.

⁹ Ovid, *Met.* 10, 247–253:

*interea niveum mira feliciter arte
sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci
nulla potest, operisque sui concepit amorem.
virginis est verae facies, quam vivere credas.
et, si non obstet reverentia, velle moveri:
ars adeo latet arte sua. miratur et haurit
pectore Pygmalion simulati corporis ignes.*

elaborate description we are told that upon making his way into town on his first day in Hypata, his curiosity having been piqued by Aristomenes' tall tale, Lucius walks wide-eyed and bedazzled, absolutely convinced that everything he sees is not what it seems: 'thunderstruck' with desire (*attonitus immo vero cruciabili desiderio stupidus*, *Met.* 2.2), he is sure that the stones lying about him are humans magically petrified, and that the statues can come to life (*curiose singula considerabam...et lapides quos offenderem de homine duratos...iam statuas et imagines incessuras, parietes locuturos*, *Met.* 2.1). If he is taken with the statues in Byrrhaena's atrium for being so realistically crafted that they can almost breathe and move, it is not because that is the simple truth of what they are and the way they have to be seen, but because that is his thunderstruck way of experiencing them, fired by curiosity, gullibility and desire. We see these artifacts not as they are, but through Lucius's way of seeing the world, as a magical neverland where stones turn into things (*Ecce lapis Parius in Dianam factus*). To take in this sight in this way is to momentarily feel his enchantment. Though the scholarship on this, the most studied ekphrasis in Apuleius, is vast, this particular point has, to my knowledge, never been duly noted.

Lucius spies Actaeon watching Diana from behind a screen of leaves. Actaeon watches something he should not, leering curiously (*curioso optutu*) and virtually lunging towards the goddess (*in deam...proiectus*) with his lustful gaze. He gives in to curiosity, looks at what he should not, and turns into an animal. As a hermeneutical puzzle or 'omen', this ekphrasis is awfully easy to read.¹⁰ We have in this scene what Van Mal-Maeder in her commentary calls a *mise en abyme proleptique*, a mirror-image, that is, in a set of hardened symbols that reflect, almost too obviously in this case, on Lucius' own story.¹¹ And in case we missed the obvious, Apuleius includes a handy reflecting device, the spring that acts as a mirror, right inside the scene. One of the clearest gestures prompting us to connect one story (Lucius') to the other (Actaeon's) is to be seen in the precise nature of the metamorphosis undergone by Actaeon, by which I mean not his turning into a stag (as Lucius turns into an ass), but his being reconfigured right before our eyes from an Ovidian version where he was an innocent victim of a ruth-

¹⁰ For the statue as 'prophetic' or 'ominous', see Van der Paardt 1978, 81 and 90 n.45, and Bartsch 1989, *passim*, but esp. 65ff. Ancient readers were highly attuned to the potentials of ekphrasis as symbolic/ominous; cf. Servius *ad Aeneid* 1.653, commenting on Aeneas' gifts to Dido: *quamuis apta nupturae reginae sint munera, tamen futurorum malorum continere omen videntur*.

¹¹ Van Mal-Maeder 2001, 91.

less divinity (this is in book 3 of that other, earlier *Metamorphoses*).¹² Seen through the eyes of Lucius, Actaeon is no innocent victim, but a wide-eyed pervert, so he clearly gets what he deserves. His story has a clear moral end. And that is the principal irony we sense in watching Lucius watch: he stands in awe of what he sees. He studies its every detail, the grape clusters, the leaves on the trees, and so on. And yet he does not see the obvious: himself. And thus as we scan the bigger scene that includes Lucius lost in gazing at his own reflection but failing to recognize himself, we see him transformed before our eyes into yet a third Ovidian hero, Narcissus. From where we stand, he is reflected in the stream too.¹³

The irony of Lucius' failure to comprehend what he sees is underscored by the exotic adjective *rimabundus*. The word is likely to be Apuleius' own invention, built on analogy with adjectives of the *mirabundus* type. And that is roughly what the word means: Lucius is standing there staring in stunned amazement. In fact I think what Apuleius has done here is simply switch the *r* and *m* from the familiar *mirabundus* to invent *rimabundus* so that you still hear one word inside the other enhancing its meaning.¹⁴ At any rate, the new word means 'examining closely (with the eyes or mind)' as if focusing right down into the *rimae*, ('fissures', 'cracks'). That is how the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* connects the idea of intently staring to 'fissures' or 'cracks'.¹⁵ But I think it much more likely that the fissures in question are those not of

¹² Cf. Ovid *Met.* 3, 141–2 (perhaps commenting on Ovid's own famous *error*): *Fortunae crimen in illo, / non scelus invenies; quod enim scelus error habebat?*

¹³ Slater 2003, 41ff. argues that the inclusion of Actaeon's reflection in the pool may refer to the representation of Narcissus in Roman wall painting. For inset misreadings of works of art in the novel, cf. Morales 2004, 48 on the visual appearance of the Europa/Selene painting in Achilles Tatius as a 'site of error': 'Neither Clitophon nor the narrator sees the painting fully.' Much of what I have said regarding the Diana/Actaeon ephrasis of *Metamorphoses* book 2 has been said, here and there, by others: Winkler 1985 noted the irony of Byrrhaena's 'it's all yours,' and Zimmerman-de Graaf 1993 pointed out that Lucius sees everything but himself in the scene because he is too given over to the sheer pleasure of viewing (*eximie delector*) and thus dazzled into ignorance. Cf. Van Mal-Maeder 2001, 113: 'noter l'ironie avec laquelle s'achève le spectacle de cette description. C'est le voyeur qui, avant même d'assouvir son désir, est vu: par Diane, par Lucius et par le lecteur/spectateur auquel ce groupe sculptural est décrit.'

¹⁴ Cf. the *mira-/rima-* play at Apuleius *Met.* 5.23 (Psyche ogling and fondling Cupid's equipment):

Quae dum insatiabili animo Psyche, satis et curiosa, rimatur atque pertrectat et mariti sui miratur arma, depromit unam de pharetra sagittam et puncto pollicis extremam aciem periclitabunda tremantis etiam nunc articuli nisu fortiore pupugit altius.

¹⁵ See *OLD* s.v. *rimor* 1a.

the object studied, but of the viewer's eyes as he narrows them into 'slits'.¹⁶ This is not wide-eyed viewing (though I prefer to translate it that way for concomitant reminders of stupefaction), but a narrow-eyed straining to focus on the details. In either case, the word's first known usages occur here and in one other passage of Apuleius, *de Deo Socratis* 2.121, where it refers to contemplating the gods for their spiritual essence, not with the eyes but with the mind.¹⁷ That reference is likely the earlier of the two, constituting both the word's first known use and perhaps even its invention. By being so highly marked, that first usage provides a nice ironic point to the description of Lucius' sexualized (Actaeonic) viewing of Diana at *Met.* 2.4–5. For what is he doing here but contemplating divinity? But his viewing has nothing to do with seeing Diana with the mind, as a spiritual essence transcending human vision. His viewing is completely physical, all ocular and none-too-spiritual. It has everything to do with seeing Diana exactly as Actaeon sees her, as an object to ogle and take pleasure from, a gorgeous young female about to strip for her bath. Such is the measure of Lucius' 'spiritual' contemplation.

As if to remind us of the 'bookishness' of what we have just seen Lucius describes Actaeon standing 'off the farthest margin of the rock' (*sub extrema saxi margine*) where the artist's skill 'spreads out' hanging fruits the way a Roman reader 'unrolls' a book (*quas ars...veritati similes explicuit*). Thus we have a hint at the idea that Lucius is not seeing, he is reading, intently (*identidem rimabundus*) and with relish. But he scores very low marks for putting together the whole of what he sees. For besides failing to see his own reflection, he demonstrates an ass-like fascination with colorful details that distract him from understanding the scene's mythological import. Only at the last moment before Byrrhaena arrives, as an accidental consequence of marveling at the highly wrought foliage, does he manage to catch sight of Actaeon hiding in the leaves. And only then does it strike him that this statue group is not just a pretty picture, remarkable for its juicy apples and disrobing goddess. It is, in fact, a story, a moral tale about a young man misled by his desires, and about the goddess' power to transform him. He should have seen this, the meaning of the whole, sooner than he did. The dogs have spotted Actaeon. So has Diana. Why can't he? But once he stumbles his way to the furthest 'margin' of the scene, the penny drops, and all that Lucius has

¹⁶ I owe this idea entirely to Niall Slater *per sermones*.

¹⁷ *Est aliud deorum genus, quod natura visibus nostris denegavit, nec non tamen intellectu eos rimabundi contemplantur, acie mentis acrius contemplantes.*

seen to this point changes its meaning. The entire book/scene is transformed by an unexpected encounter at the end.

And there's the rub. We can find ourselves inside this story, as readers of the *Metamorphoses*, if we look deeply enough. Actaeon peers intently. An eagle-eyed pervert, he sees all he wants to see. And yet he does not see the most important thing: himself, by way of his reflection. He does not realize that he has been spotted (*uisitur*). Diana does not have eyes in the back of her head (Actaeon ogles her from behind), but she can see his image reflected in the pool as she looks down into it. Stepping back, we see that Lucius thoroughly enjoys looking in on this scene. The intensity of his gaze, coupled with the delight he takes from peering at the scene's every detail (*eximie delector*) is perfectly matched to the sculptured story he is reading. And yet, like Actaeon, he does not see that his image is being reflected back from it for others, like us, to see: he will turn into an animal soon enough. But the question I want to pose in what follows concerns that third set of eyes that peers in upon Lucius, peering in on Actaeon, peering in on Diana: namely, ours. Could there be yet another frame that brackets this entire scene? One that includes a spellbound *lector* watching the pleasurable watching of Lucius (*eximie delector*), utterly enjoying the act of peering in on his watching, but not seeing anything of himself, and utterly unaware that these pleasures, and the meaning of the whole, might change drastically as we reach the tale's end?¹⁸

To answer this question I want to go with Lucius where he goes next, to another famous scene of transformative gazing. When he learns from Byrrhaena that his hostess, Pamphile, is a notorious witch, Lucius cannot wait to get home to see her in action. On the way he decides that sleeping with a witch could be disastrous (he remembers Aristomenes' sad tale in book 1), so he decides to get himself involved with the slave-girl, Photis, as a way of getting close to Pamphile. He had noticed that Photis was cute, and that she was giving off ample positive signs of interest.¹⁹ But only now, at the prospect of using her to get to the witch, does he seem to develop an ardent desire for her. When he reaches home he finds her all alone, cooking in the kitchen (*Met.* 2.7):

¹⁸ Winkler has taken the elaborate structuring of the sculpture group as emblematic of the unified design of the novel itself; see Winkler 1985, 165.

¹⁹ This is a rather famous problem for the cohesion of the narrative as we have it. Prior to this point in the story Lucius shows no interest in Photis, nor she in him.

‘She was cutely dressed in a linen tunic, with a bright red sash cinched up high under her sweet breasts. With hands pretty as flowers, she was swirling her cooking pot in circles, and repeatedly she tossed it up and around in winding arcs. And as she did that she glided her own body into it. Gently jiggling her ass, she sent calm and inviting waves up along her nimble spine. I was dumbfounded, riveted by this sight, and fixed in wonder as I stood there. And my member, too, which had been snoozing previously, bolted straight up (*isto aspectu defixus obstupui et mirabundus steti, steterunt et membra quae iacebant ante*). Finally I said to her “My dear Photis, how gorgeous and fun, the way you twist that cute little jug of yours with your ass. That’s one sweet dip you’re cooking up! Happy is he and, more certainly than certain, is he “blessed”, the man who gets to dip his finger in for a taste.”’

Graverini has fully described the intertextual layering of this scene, paying special attention to the comic figuration of Lucius’ stupefaction and ‘hardening’ as an irreverent take (‘una sorta di *aprosdoketon* irreverente’) on Dido’s first sighting of Aeneas, and on Aeneas’ encounter with Creusa’s ghost where, in imitation of Homer *Il.* 24.358, it is Aeneas’ hair, not his member, that stands straight up.²⁰ But in addition to these parodic references to epic and romance a whole set of more local allusions can be found layering this passage with memories of the Diana/Actaeon ecphrasis just encountered above. Just like Actaeon in that earlier scene, Lucius lurks off the scene’s margin where he gets a good look at Photis, mostly from behind (the emphasis here is on her ‘Callipygian’ qualities), but enough to one side to enjoy a view of her breasts. She is looking away from him, down into her pot, as Diana looked into her stream, but she does not notice that she is being watched from behind. Meanwhile, as Lucius ogles her to his heart’s delight, he undergoes a clear bodily transformation, sprouting his own version of Actaeon’s horn. Frozen in place, it is as if he has hardened into stone to become an object for us to behold in statue-form: no marble-white Apollo, in this case, but a garden-variety Priapus.

Lucius’ being transfixed by the vision of his beloved has many counterparts in Greek novels generally, and in much love poetry going back to Sappho. But this particular rendition of the theme is heavily weighted towards the Milesian side of the scale. For whereas gazing in the novel is often figured as pleasurable ‘feeding’, and the lover’s astonishment (*ekplexis*) com-

²⁰ Graverini 2001, esp. 436–438.

pared to petrification, this is no typical scene of love at first sight.²¹ For as Morales points out, the delights consumed by the lover's arrested eye are usually set much higher on the beloved's frame, especially on the eyes and face as windows into the beloved's soul, as at *Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.4.2 where the lover is first ensnared by Leucippe's eyes, then by the contrasting colors of her golden hair, her jet-black eyebrows, ivory cheeks, and lips red as a rose. Lovers often find pretty flowers on their beloved, especially roses spotted on their lips or cheeks. Clitophon, responding to what he sees, is thunderstruck by Leucippe's beauty, but the physical expression of his burgeoning desire is a fluttering heart (*etremon kardian*, 1.4.5), not an unseemly protuberance.²² In the novelists generally, detailed descriptions of the lover's first view of his beloved proceed gracefully from head to foot, stealthily gliding past, or only politely hinting at, what lies in the middle. One sees a comically baroque textbook rendition of the lover's scanning of his beloved at Petronius 126.13–18, where Polyaeus/Encolpius gets his first look at Circe. After claiming that the sight of her was more perfect than any painting or statue (*simulacrum*), Encolpius proceeds to describe her from top to bottom: *crines, frons, supercilia, oculi, nares, mentum, cervix, manus, pedes*, exactly in that order, with nothing between the chin and feet but the hands.²³ The scene will turn lurid soon enough, and the middle will be filled in. But the lead-in to the sex scene that follows is colored in the polite hues of high romance.

From these comparanda it is easy to see how radically Apuleius has changed the motif of the lover's gaze at *Met.* 2.7, even while keeping some of its basic trappings. Most notably, while Lucius certainly works from higher to lower in scanning Photis, he does not work from top to bottom. His gaze is set squarely on the unsafe middle zone, detailing everything he sees from 'nipples' (*papillae*) to 'ass' (*nates*). Such is the range of his optic fixation. Clearly, his is a delighted looking (*eximie delector*), taking in the girl's most unmentionable details. That is what Milesian Tales do, after all: they draw us in to watch closely (*intende lector*); they titillate and turn on (*laetaberis*).²⁴ And it is hard not to be drawn into the scene as a fellow voyeur and

²¹ On the 'consumptive gaze' and the viewer's petrification, see Morales 2004, 165–172. Usually it is the woman lusted after who is reified as a work of art; see Morales 2004, 32–34.

²² For the eyes and face as mirrors of the soul, see Morales 2004, 138–139.

²³ Such head-to-foot procedures were prescribed by the rhetorical progymnasmata; see Courtney 2001, 191.

²⁴ Both *intende* and *laetaberis* have erotic connotations that are underscored later in the book; cf. Hor. *Sermones* 2,7, 47–8 *acris ubi me / natura intendit*. Trapp 2001, 39: 'What-

aroused by it. For this scene, like its several luridly ‘innocent’ counterparts in Longus, especially the scene of *al fresco* sexual instruction where Lykainion teaches dullard Daphnis what erections are good for, fails to bar the door to our viewing. In being so highly eroticized and suggestive of a transgressed liminality, such scenes inevitably remind us of our own complicity, posing a question of what narrative desire itself is good for, ‘a question of the reader’s fiction of mastery, of control and self-control.’²⁵

If we somehow managed to maintain our composure early in the book, we have a much harder time doing so later in sections 16–17 of book 2, where Lucius and Photis, after an agonizing delay, make their way to his bedroom. Lucius gets there first and he notices that the room has been made up for a night of fun. Among other things, he notices that the slaves have been banished far from the door ‘to keep them from listening in on our nocturnal yelping’. The yelping word, *gannitus*, is commonly used of dogs. It jumps out to remind us of the metamorphosis that will occur when Lucius and Photis give themselves over to their desires. But sending the slaves away, in this case, is not just a matter of wanting no interruptions. Rather it is to keep them from watching and listening (*arbitrium*) and thus to deprive them of the opportunity to get an eyeful of, and take pleasure from, what they see as they watch through the keyhole. And just how real and sympathetically ‘involved’ in all of this the peeping slaves might be is clearly demonstrated from Martial *Epigrams* 11.104.14–17 where Martial pictures Hector’s slaves masturbating in secret as they watch him make love to Andromache from behind a closed door.²⁶

This little detail of the slaves’ banishment has raised problems of narrative consistency for commentary writers.²⁷ But it raises a rather large problem for the reader’s self-mastery as well: the slaves may have been banished from peering through the door’s cracks, but we have not. For as much care as Lucius and Photis take to make sure that no one will see them or hear them

ever other functions it may perform, the Prologue to Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* strikes a thoroughly hedonistic note, from its fifth word, *Milesio*... to its last, *laetaberis*.’

²⁵ Goldhill 1995, 30.

²⁶ *masturbabantur Phrygii post ostia servi,*
Hectoreo quotiens sederat uxor equo,
et quamvis Ithaco stertente pudica solebat
illic Penelope semper habere manum.

²⁷ The slaves should not be there in the first place. Elsewhere we are told explicitly that Milo has only one slave, Photis. And nowhere else does Lucius seem to indicate that he has brought personal slaves with him.

yelp, all of their fun is being observed in secret, by us, as through a crack in the door. And we see everything in full frontal detail. As the love-battle begins, Lucius, ‘busting with an erection’ (*vehementer intentus*) and visibly manifesting an ‘impatience for Venus’ (*impatientiam veneris*), says a little prayer to Photis, as to a goddess: ‘pity me...and come speeding to my rescue’ (*Miserere...et subveni maturius*).²⁸ After a fair bit of erotically charged ‘combat’ banter, modeled after the scene’s Pseudo-Lucianic counterpart at *Onos* 8.2, Venus rises up from the sea to save the day:

‘No more delay. After she had cleared the dishes and stripped off all of her clothes, she let her hair flow down to provoke some naughty fun, and she was gorgeously transformed into a vision of Venus rising from a wavy sea. For an instant she even ‘shaded over’ her feminine tuft with a rosy palm—it was more that, a clever ruse, than it was a desire to ‘cover’ herself from embarrassment. “Now fight,” she said. “And fight like a man!”’

Here as before, the object of Lucius’ gaze is ‘transformed’ (*pulchre reformata* = Greek *metamorphoumene*). In stripping and letting her hair down, Photis turns into something else: from a nobody slave girl who just cleared the dinner dishes (*vasculis raptim remotis*) into a goddess, as if seen in a divine vision, rising from the sea (*Venus Anadyomene*). Obviously we will want to log this for future consideration when we come to book 11. Lucius sees her hair pouring down like waves of the sea (*capillo fluente undanter*), and he wants desperately to go for a sail in the waves. Here we recall that in the cooking scene earlier in the book Lucius was similarly mesmerized by Photis’ swaying back, taking a lusty sailor’s eye-view of an inviting sea, calmly waving (*quatiens placide decenter undabat*).²⁹ And again as before his eyes are drawn downwards, scanning from high to low, stopping when he spots her ‘rosy palm’. This is the same ‘flowery palm’ that Lucius caught sight of stirring the cooking pot.³⁰ Ever since Homer, flowers and verdant

²⁸ Van Mal-Maeder 2001, 257 compares the prayer of Propertius 2.16.13–14: *at tunc nostro, Venus, o! succurre dolori, / rumpat ut assiduis membra libidinibus*.

²⁹ For the long Greco-Roman literary tradition that connects sailing with sex, seas with ‘storming’ or ‘placid’ women, and so on, see Murgatroyd 1995.

³⁰ Van Mal-Maeder 2001, 150 points out that already in the earlier cooking scene the *vasculum* stirred by Photis is obscenely figured as a double entendre.

foliage were common metaphorical screens for sex (see below).³¹ The hand gesture adopted by Photis to ‘shadow’ her genitals is familiar from several of the ancient world’s most famous sculptural renditions of Venus. Perhaps the most resonant of these for Apuleius’ readers is that of the so-called *Venus Pudica* type, portraying ‘a Venus caught off guard as, having removed all her clothes to take a bath, she glimpses an unseen looker. She tries to cover herself with her hands, with a result that’s more provocative than protective.’³²

In being so metaphorically rich and allusive, the lovemaking scene of *Met.* 2.16–17 leaves much to the imagination, but that does not mean that it leaves our vision impaired. On the contrary, our imaginations are good at seeing through the metaphorical banter that, like Photis’ rosy palm, does more to stoke interest and expose than it manages to hide.³³ When Lucius says to Photis ‘as you see’ (*ut vides*) that applies to us too, for when he lifts his cloak to show that he is now ready for battle, we see exactly how *vehementer intentus* he has become. And despite all the florid linguistic cover of spears and swords and bowstrings strung so tight they are ready to pop, we are not visualizing military hardware when he draws up his cloak. The question one is left to ask from watching this striptease is: what condition does it leave us in? We had our marching orders right up front, straight from the writer: pay strict attention, reader (*intende lector*), and you might just enjoy yourself (*laetaberis*). Watching sex in secret, which is the basic definition of scopophilia and a common scenario for pornographic viewing, we undergo a transformation to become the *intentus lector* we set out to become. The trouble is, like Lucius, intending to grow wings, we have only managed to grow a very long set of pricked up ears—or worse.³⁴

³¹ Some botanical figures were used euphemistically to screen the view (as fig leaves), others to make the display more vivid and obscene. For botanical metaphors generally, see Adams 1982, 26–9.

³² Associated Press wire report of June 14, 2006, by Giovanna Dell’Orto, announcing the acquisition by the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University of a Roman marble sculpture of the *Venus Pudica* type. For a detailed study of the iconography through which Lucius figures his descriptions of lovely females, see Slater 2003.

³³ Not all sexual metaphors are euphemisms. For when it comes to hiding the unmentionable there is a huge difference between a fig leaf and a gourd. See n.31 above and Adams 1982, 1–8.

³⁴ The ancient Roman configuration of the *asellus* defined him as a preternaturally curious beast (like the modern cat) distinguished by two comically oversized physical features, both of which were remarkably excitable and expressive, and thus easily taken as an index of his curiosity.

The most famous watching scene in the entire work is at *Met.* 3.21–22, where, with Photis' help, Lucius finally gets his chance to see some real magic. When the lights go down, in the dead of night, Lucius takes a front-row seat outside Pamphile's door (*perque rimam ostiorum quampiam iubet arbitrari*). Once again, and this time quite literally, Lucius is *rimabundus* 'intently peering into cracks', with the slit of his eyes matching the crack in the door. The verb *arbitrari* reminds us of the slave-boys banished in book 2, *ut arbitrio nocturni gannitus ablegarentur*. The fact that Lucius takes the spot of Martial's masturbating slave-boys is certainly not flattering. But a more telling referent than Martial in this case is certainly Petronius 26.4–5, where the sexual encounter between Giton and Quartilla's slave girl (who is all of 10–12 years old) is set up as a spectacle, complete with an applauding crowd and a pornographic tapestry for a stage curtain. Once the stage is set, Encolpius and Quartilla station themselves outside the bedroom door to watch: 'Quartilla was the first to put a curious eye to a crack in the door that she had naughtily drawn open, and with horny concentration she gazed upon the kiddies at play' (*Quartilla per rimam improbe diductam applicuerat oculum curiosum lusumque puerilem libidinosa speculabatur diligentia*). It is with a curious eye that matches Actaeon's that Quartilla looks through the crack.³⁵ And, like him, she is sexually aroused by what she sees.

Here and in many other places in the *Satyrica*, Petronius is deliberate in the way he sets up his most lurid sex scenes to mark them as private, 'closed off' affairs into which uninvited watchers illicitly intrude, and from which they take pleasure.³⁶ As again at 127.7 where Circe invites Encolpius to make love to her under an open sky, claiming that 'you don't have to fear any curious onlooker' (*neque est quod curiosum aliquem extimescas*). And yet she seems to be wrong about that. For we are right there, taking it all in. Circe's assurances to Encolpius recall the Ur-scene of *al fresco* love-making between Zeus and Hera at *Hom. Il.* 14.331ff. where 'Hera fears an observer (*curiosus* in Petronius) and Zeus assures her that there will be none.'³⁷ And yet, unlike Petronius, Homer holds Zeus to his word by drawing a rain cloud

³⁵ As in Apuleius, the term *curiosus* is regularly eroticized in Petronius; cf. *Petron.* 92.4 *non delectavit me tam curiosum principium, timuique ne in contubernium recepissem Ascyli parem*. Cf. also *Catullus* 7.8–12.

³⁶ Schmeling 1971 argues that Quartilla's vigil *ante limen thalami* parodically recasts the *exclusus amator* motif of elegy. Whereas in elegy the doors that separate lovers from their beloved tend to be those of noble mansions, sturdy as oak and impregnable, the doors in the *Satyrica* tend to be of the fleabag hotel variety, flimsy and full of holes. For more on doors in Petronius, see Sullivan 1968, 238ff.

³⁷ Courtney 2001, 193.

over the entire scene. Thus we see only the most visually vague and proper of sights, in a figurative fog of showers and flowers and verdant foliage. In contrast, the only fadeout that happens in Petronius is the one imposed by the book's late antique and medieval editors, strict anti-Milesianists who made sure that we would leave Encolpius lying in the verdant grass, 'seeking pleasure stiff as oak' (*quaerentes voluptatem robustam*, Petr. 127.10). References to epic in this scene only enhance the sense of an expected fadeout that does not come, and of our spying on secretive 'mysteries' (a favorite way of configuring sex in both Apuleius and Petronius) that we should not allow ourselves to see.³⁸ Both Petronius and Apuleius put leering watchers, or potential watchers, into some of their book's most lurid scenes, and both figure their/our watching as a problem of the watcher's *curiositas*. And although both Petronius and Apuleius frequently refer to the softer habits of epic, elegiac and romance, they ultimately cast their scenes of love-making in very different ways, as spectacles to be turned on by, with a strong sense of a transgressed (or naughtily straddled) liminality, of 'stage' versus 'audience', 'in' versus 'out'. Their particular emphasis on inset audiences watching unseen from the margins, as through a keyhole or a screen of leaves, is apparently a Milesian tic.³⁹ Such scene-setting maneuvers have the special 'diagnostic' effect of causing readers to take note of their/our own complicity in watching, making us painfully aware of our own illicit desire to see.

Once the stage is set and Lucius has taken his seat, Pamphile does her part to oblige Lucius in his leering by putting on a good show. Her magical rite is a strip-tease familiar from other scenes that precede and follow. Elsewhere in the book to loosen one's hair, take off one's clothes, and anoint oneself (or one's partner) with oil is always a prelude to sex. And that is what it is in Pamphile's case as well: she turns herself into a bird not just for the fun of flying, but so that she can fly off to her lover. Magic and sex are carefully figured as coterminous throughout the entire work: both are naughty secrets that titillate and transform. Lucius, seeing Pamphile transformed, is desperate to enter the scene and follow her in her eroticized flight. But Photis gives him the wrong ointment, so he turns not into a bird, but an ass. And in that form he sees a lot of things, and hears a lot of stories, helped

³⁸ Cf. Petronius 20, 2–3, mid-way through the Quartilla episode: *sollicitavit inguina mea mille iam mortibus frigida ** operuerat Ascyrtos Pallio caput, admonitus scilicet periculosum esse alienis intervenire secretis*.

³⁹ The keyhole device will become a preferred method of staging soft pornographic viewing in Boccaccio, and exceptionally hard pornographic viewing in Aretino. Although many of their descriptions pander to the marveling eye, neither Longus or Achilles Tatius uses the keyhole device.

along by his wonderfully long ass's ears. And he treats us to all that he experiences as he goes. Near the end of his trials Lucius becomes a kind of popular animal act, making love to a local matron night after night. But little does she know that the slaves, and eventually also the master, are watching (by now this is to be expected) through a crack in the door. They even start selling tickets. This ass is a pornographic legend.

But why limit your audience to a crack in the door? Lucius' owner decides that he needs a bigger venue. It is his turn to give games in his native city of Corinth, so he plans to feature as the grand finale of his games (and, as in the Pseudo-Lucianic *Onos*, this is led up to as if it is the grand finale of the book itself) an ass screwing a condemned woman to death. That is where this narrative seems to be heading; it is the pornographic *telos* that our curiosity/narrative-desire pulls us forward to watch. But before the finale comes the warm-up act, a pantomime rendition of the Judgment of Paris. It is described to us by Lucius as he waits in the wings, cropping the lush spring grass that has sprouted outside the arena's gate: From that vantage point, he says, 'with the gate wide-open, I was able to feed my curious eyes on the most inviting spectacle inside' (*curiosos oculos patente porta spectacula prospectu gratis-simo reficiens*, *Met.*10.29⁴⁰). With *reficiens* ('feeding/refreshing') Lucius' viewing is figured as a kind of eating (= Morales' 'consumptive gaze'), and what he treats us to is fittingly a feast for the eyes.⁴¹ So again we have the basic setup of someone watching from the margins, this time not through a crack, but through a wide-open gate. That tells us that we are in for a real feast for the eyes, and the closest view we have had so far.

The entrance of the three goddesses is packaged as an ascending tricolon, two duds followed by a spectacular winner.⁴² Juno enters first. She has a crown and a scepter, and little else to show for herself. Minerva wears a helmet (again we start at the top and move down), a wreath of olives, a

⁴⁰ For *patere/patente porta* referring to sexual exposure, cf. Catullus 15.18–19 *quem attractis pedibus patente porta / percurrent raphanique mugilesque*, and the windy culmination of Lucius' leering at *Met.* 10.31 *ut...pateret flos aetatulae*.

⁴¹ But not just any eyes. By being transformed into so much sweet and verdant foliage (*puelli puellaeque uirenti florentes aetatula*) the young dancers become a feast attractive to the eyes of an ass. Again we find ourselves viewing the world through Lucius' peculiarly asinine desires.

⁴² Zimmerman 2000, 375 points out that the imbalance between the descriptions of the first two contestants and that of the third is both pronounced and meaningful: "For Juno's introduction scarcely three Teubner lines sufficed, for Minerva's scarcely four. Venus, on the other hand, is introduced in ten lines. Moreover, the dances of Juno and Minerva and their attendants...are described more briefly than the dance of Venus (ch. 32: 263, 1–24). It is clear that the narrator regards Venus as the main character of the Pantomime."

shield and a spear. Her description too is very short, all about the usual hardware, and for that reason not terribly interesting to Lucius. But then comes Venus. Here things open up considerably, and we get the real feast for the eyes that we were promised (*Met.* 10.31):

‘And after the others another girl made her entrance. Outshining the rest, her loveliness was something to see. Judging from the beauty of her ambrosial complexion she was Venus, Venus as she was when still a virgin, stripped completely bare to show off her flawless beauty, except that she shaded over her eye-catching tuft with a snatch of thin silk. To provoke some naughty fun, a leering breeze would sometimes blow this cloth aside to expose the flower of the girl’s tender youth unobstructed. At other times the wind blew lustily, so that the silk, by clinging tightly, would draw the lines of her voluptuous figure in graphic detail.’

As cinematography, this is exceptional stuff. First we have a general sense of the girl’s entire ambrosial figure (*intecto corpore*), but we quickly lower our sights and zoom in to that flapping piece of transparent silk that ‘shadows’ but does not cover her *spectabilem pubem*. Our eyes have done some general scanning and then quickly found their mark. Now the real leering begins. A little puff of wind (*curiosulus ventus*) blows the silk aside, and what does Lucius see there but a *flos aetatulae*. We remember that in the striptease of book 2 Photis ‘shadows’ her *glabellum* with a ‘rosy’ hand. Lucius tends to find flowers here, hiding in the shade. That is the same as before. But by now things are very different for Lucius in seeing that flower in that spot and making it the center of his/our attention. For if there is one thing that he has been desperately looking to find since his transformation in book 3 it is that, a flower. A rose. Here it seems he has it spotted. The object of his quest is fleetingly seen. Then that leering wind comes again and blows the cloth tight against the girl’s body. It then becomes an artist and draws a line, a *linea*, as with a pencil or brush (*graphice liniaret*), and there is no getting around what that line is. Here again we see an object of desire transformed into a piece of art, and the last stroke of the brush happens right in front of our eyes as the wind draws one last vertical line down the center of the cloth. That is what we are staring at right now. Right down the *rima*. There is no getting around the fact that Lucius is here, once again, *rimabundus*, staring into a crack.⁴³

⁴³ For *rima* in its obscene sense, see Adams 1982, 95–96, and Juvenal 3, 97: *uacua et plana omnia dicas / infra uentriculum et tenui distantia rima*.

But notice how Lucius displaces his curiosity problem on the wind with the transferred epithet, *curiosulus*. You will recall that Botticelli's Venus actually does have winds in human form (puffed out cheeks and all) blowing on her, but I do not think that there is any question of the leering wind being personified here and actually walking onto the stage. This is just a breezy spring day. So it is a very cute touch for Lucius to blame his desire on the wind.⁴⁴ But I wonder whether it really is his desire that is being displaced by the transference (*hypallage*) of *curiosulus*. He blames it on the wind. But we know better and blame it on him. He is the curious one, after all, the one who has been caught painting pinup girls with a fine-tipped brush all along. But here I want to jump into the role of the *scrupulosus lector*, the part that Apuleius scripted for us early on, as (in Winkler's summary) 'one who closely observes details and will object to inconsistencies.'⁴⁵ We have just seen how our eyes zoom in on this object: first the girl herself, then straight down to her *spectabilem pubem*. There are two basic senses of *spectabilis* in Latin, *OLD* entries 1 and 2: something that can be seen because it has a pronounced visual impact, and something that is worth looking at because it is stunning or lovely. Both senses work here, but the former puts more than a little strain on our suspension of disbelief. Were we not just told that this ass is munching on grass outside the stadium? Just how *spectabilis* can this girl's pubic region be? Or anyone's for that matter? Except perhaps that of a spectacularly oversized ass. With vision that can zoom us in that close, is this an ass we are talking about or is it an eagle? For even a front row seat does not get you in close enough to see what we are made to see by the drawing of that last thin line. That visual activity puts us not outside the arena—how can it?—but center stage, staring right between this young girl's legs. So without knowing it, just by being drawn ineluctably along by this story's pleasures and enticements, we have worked our way to the arena's center to become ourselves *spectabilis* and part of the scene. Like Actaeon, we made the mistake of thinking that no one could see us watch. And we might still be tempted to load the whole blame for our leering so indiscreetly on the poor ass's back. But was it really Lucius' curiosity that brought us here? In the end it was not the wind that pulled back that wisp of cloth or drew the line. That is what we did when we gave in to the pleasure of looking just that

⁴⁴ The idea of the wind's taking an active role in stripping the girl is well represented in Ovid, e.g. *Met.* 1.527–28 (the transformation of Daphne): *tum quoque visa decens; nudabant corpora venti*. / *obviaque adversas vibrabant flamina vestes*; For Ovidian parallels, see Graverini 1999. For the larger history of the idea extending into Hellenistic literature, see Zimmerman 2000, 377.

⁴⁵ Winkler 1985, 61.

intently with the mind's eye. The point of the reader's complicity has been beautifully made by Zimmerman: "One might also say that the narrator disappoints those readers who, like the audience in the theatre, are eagerly awaiting (the description of) the promised Pasiphae pantomime. Did not the readers, along with the audience, share the inquisitiveness of the *curiosulus uentus*, which...lifted the gown of the seductive dancer?"⁴⁶

Two things happen at this point that space limitations prevent me from detailing. Glancingly: Paris gives Venus the apple (and by now we fully understand why) and this sends the writer of the book, quite without warning, into an uncharacteristic, Juvenalian rage. How stupid, he says at *Met.* 10.33, that judges should allow themselves to be seduced in this way. And of course, now that we have snapped back to our respectable selves, we agree completely. Surely we would have given the apple to Minerva. No doubt about it. He rants for an entire page. He apologizes for ranting, then returns to the scene. In the company of her provocative attendants, the Graces and the Seasons, Venus does an exuberant victory dance. And at this point the fake Mount Ida in the background can take no more. Through a hidden opening it blows its top, shooting up a jet of perfumed wine: I think we have a winner. The symbolism is pretty transparent, especially when one remembers that Venus' husband is Vulcan, associated with volcanoes.⁴⁷ Lucius, only now fearing that he would be next on stage, runs away. Reaching the water's edge at Cenchreae, late at night, he prays to the full moon 'just rising from the waves of the sea'. Then he falls into a deep sleep.

Then comes the famous vision of Isis, his savior, at *Met.* 11.3–4. No peeking through a hole this time: Lucius is having a dream. And the Latin emphasizes the irony of his being able to see so vividly with his eyes shut: *necdum satis conixeram, et ecce...visum est mirandam speciem*. Just as at *Met.* 2.16–17, the answer to his prayer for help arrives in the form of a goddess rising from the sea: *attollens emergit divina facies ac dehinc paulatim toto corpore perlucidum simulacrum excusso pelago ante me constitisse visum est*. And many of his habits of leering are the same as they have been all along. Once again he is transfixed, and he tells us that the sight of her was 'inexpressibly wonderful.' He begins at the top with her hair, lush and 'daintily curled' (*crines uberrimi prolixique et sensim intorti*), and he moves his way slowly down. But this time there is no getting stuck half-way. He makes it all the way from her floral, moon-mirrored diadem to her palm-leaf san-

⁴⁶ Zimmerman 2000, 21. For further indications of the reader's complicity, see Zimmerman's notes *ad loc.*, pp. 377ff.

⁴⁷ Cf. Trimalchio's squirting Priapuses at Petr. 60.6 *contacta coeperunt effundere crocum*.

dals, and he takes his time getting there by describing her clothing in great detail, and all her traditional insignia: a crown of flowers (again he finds them, but this time much higher up), the disc, the viper, the embroidered stars, and so on. All those hardware items, the symbolic accoutrements that made Juno and Minerva so uninteresting and easy to skip over just moments before, have suddenly become points of ultimate fascination and full of meaning. Here we have, in one sense, the same Lucius we have come to know from the start, standing in awe of a woman, and taking in her every detail, from top to bottom. And scholars have been quick to point out that this divine vision is rather an odd place to feature so many of the same leering habits from earlier books. The scene simply sends off too many weird signals, some have claimed, to be taken as anything but comic. This, along with memories of those venal, sex-crazed monks from books 8–9, have been the bedrock of recent claims that Lucius' transformation is not to be taken seriously even inside the book, let alone in the life of its author.⁴⁸

But there are other ways one can go with this. For example, one can point out that, yes, Lucius is in his same old role as he feasts on the vision of Isis, transfixed by what he sees. It is a quasi-sexual experience for him. And yet it has nothing specifically sexual about it. No skin is exposed. No virgin is lusted after. Everything is familiar (even finding flowers, as before), but nothing is the same. Those earlier scenes of strip-tease are a complicating presence, certainly. But they can be taken to indicate that Lucius is now completely transformed in his desires; that, in the end, he can only see clearly with his eyes tightly shut. Filled with inexpressible joy, he sees in this goddess some higher kind of feminine beauty that he could not see before. And it is a higher kind of beauty that we cannot see either because, as he says, it cannot be put into words. Hence comes the emphasis on symbols, things that we have to look into to find some deeper, inherent meaning. What would it be like to see things that deeply, past the physical form, in this 'transformed' way, and to feel that kind of joy? That is the question that this vision, put as it is, puts to us. An obvious problem raised by this new manner of viewing is that we could actually relate to those earlier visions because, rightly or wrongly, we could feel Lucius' desires right along with him. But here, in the vision of Isis, he takes us to a place where we cannot go. With it, we behold a man transformed, desiring all the 'right' things, and showing no interest in all the dirty Milesian details that fascinated him, and us, before. Our failure to go with him, and to feel what he feels, may be the point: we have to wonder what that would be like. For this is a place where he can talk

⁴⁸ See most recently Murgatroyd 2004.

all he likes about the joy he feels, but since the language is not universal but theological/symbolic, we have a hard time feeling it with him in anything like the way we felt it before.

That is another way to go with the vision of Isis, and the problems it poses. I offer this 'serious' reading not to trump its 'ironic' alternative, but to show the kind of work that the sudden, but suggestively reminiscent, appearance of Isis in book 11 puts us to. That, I think, is the more important point. Somehow we managed in the first 10 books of this work to not demand to know whether Apuleius, the man himself, was 'really' a Peeping Tom with tousled hair, and family connections that go back to Plutarch, and so on. But here, with the epiphany of Isis, we always want to know, is he serious? Is this conversion in some way about the author's own most deeply held beliefs? And, if so, does he really intend to convert us to those beliefs with this work (as, say, the writer of the book of Acts)? Book 11 has a habit of making scholars declare themselves. And it does this by arising, just like Isis herself, straight out of the blue, and positing Lucius' conversion experience as the *telos* towards which all the action drives, and that we (as Lucius must do when he spots Actaeon hiding at the edge of the sculpture group) read back into the beginning and middle to settle the meaning of the whole. That is the problem it puts to us. Thus I want to end this essay not by trying to make the question of 'serious' versus 'ironic' go away by insisting that it must be one or the other. Rather, I want to examine why this book routinely finds us casting the question in these terms. I will get at this by keeping things where I have had them all along, squarely on myself as a reader caught performing for you. And from that vantage-point I will suggest that the main problem that the conversion story poses is one of relationships. And here I am taking very seriously the idea of reading as self-work, with narrative not just bearing upon, but producing, and provoking, identity.⁴⁹ There are three basic relationship problems I will consider: that of reader-to-narrator; that of reader-to-text; and, most crucial of all, that of reader-to-reader, me to you.

First, reader-to-narrator. One of the main problems we face in casting the novel as 'in the end', which is to say 'all along', a serious religious protreptic, is that this decision forces us to reconsider our relationship with Lucius.

⁴⁹ For a survey of recent theoretical studies on the manufacture of identity via narrative means, see Currie 1998, 17–32. Two classic studies of the subjectivity of the viewer in voyeuristic film narratives are Mulvey 1975 and 1981. An indispensable work connecting narrative desire in the novel to voyeurism and the phallic gaze is Brooks 1993. For a basic study of relationship negotiations in criticism, see Freudenburg 2005.

The bulk of the story seems to have nothing to do with saving one's soul. When Lucius took us into his confidence in the first pages of Book 1 he invited us to join in on some rollicking good Milesian fun as one of the boys, like him: rich, handsome, noble, in the prime of life and enjoying all the fruits and flowers to be picked along the way. When we loaned him our sympathies and agreed to see things through his eyes, we did so to keep company with him, because his was company we might prefer to keep, even if that relationship slowly eroded into a dirty little secret we wanted to keep to ourselves. How embarrassing, then, after ten full books to have to reconsider our relationship to the narrator, to find ourselves suddenly in his company. Or did we really think on setting out that we were in the company of a clean-living, shaved-headed deacon in the Church of Isis? Writers of confessional biographies are supposed to remind us as they tell of their past that they deeply regret their old and sinful ways. But Lucius never did that for us. He started us down the Milesian road on different terms. He never told us that we would need to repent of it all and be born again.

Dovetailed into the question of our relation to the narrator, and inseparable from it, is the question of our relationship to the text itself. By hitting the bump at the end of the road we have to ask ourselves, what has our relationship to this text been so far, and how must that change now that we have reached the door of Isis' temple? Did we use the text, as the narrator nudges us to do in his prologue, as a means of 'tickling the ears' by taking full advantage of its hedonistic pleasures, as a scandal-sheet, an erotic plaything, a boy-toy? Was our relationship to the text purely physical? Or did we, like Socrates in relating to one of his attractive male students, manage to move past physical attractions to find a higher kind of beauty in the book?⁵⁰ Winkler points out that all known approaches to the *Metamorphoses* (he finds five basic types) make the same assumption about the incompleteness of this narrative. This story somehow fails to 'mean' on its own, so scholars look for authority outside the text (whether in conversion literature, in philosophical literature, whatever) that would authorize a certain kind of decoding operation and thereby help the novel mean one thing rather than another. I myself do not think that this is merely a vain search for transcendental signification. Though I think it is that. Just not merely that. I

⁵⁰ The reason I pose the question this way is that I have my own pet theory about some of the bigger implications of the work's 'calisthenics of desire', wherein I take *eros* not as a mere theme for study, easily separable from the act of reading, but as an effect actually produced by narrative means, there to be felt for its beauties and animalizing effects. And this theory has mainly to do with modern notions of 'narrative desire' and with Plato's *Phaedrus*. But constraints of space allow me only to hint at what I have in mind.

think the search itself is precisely the kind of work that this novel sets us up to perform, and that this self-diagnostic activity may be more important than any specific result we find in concluding that search. The trend of much recent scholarship has been to establish a strictly ‘Platonic’ relationship between the reader/performer and the text.⁵¹ And that is something that scholars always need to find some way to do (whether by Plato, or by some other means) in reading this text in front of others. The scholarship on Apuleius is unanimous: we have not, not a single one of us, been sleeping with this book or using it, as Rousseau once said of certain sexually explicit novels of his day, as a ‘book that can only be read with one hand.’ That is the teacher/interpreter’s first Platonic rule for helping the book achieve its proper, ‘meaningful’ end: don’t sleep with the student. A more strictly Middle Platonic version of the rule might be, don’t sleep with the student much. And, above all, don’t make physical gratification the goal of the relationship.

That brings me to one last relationship affected by the transformation of book 11. If the question is, who really is saved at the end of this work, my one best answer is, above all, we are. For in the act of changing our relationship to the text into an elevated, philosophical one, this story starts to grow wings, as if turned on by us. And in producing that effect of critical sublimation we ourselves become the ideal reader for other readers, a model to be watched, perhaps even leered at, by them in a suitably de-eroticized relationship that takes place between ourselves and the text.⁵² And thus as others look at us looking at Apuleius, they see themselves not in the low, horn-sprouting company of Actaeon, or of Martial’s slave-boys leering through a crack, but in the good company that they desire to keep.

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⁵¹ Similar Platonic (rescue) operations have been performed on Achilles Tatius by way of his many marked allusions to Plato’s *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Symposium*. See Morales 2004, 50–60.

⁵² Fundamental to my thinking on the sublimating self-work of critical (male-to-male) performance in antiquity are Gunderson 2000 and 2003.

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