

Disjoining Meaning and Truth:  
History, Representation, Apuleius'  
*Metamorphoses* and Neoplatonist Aesthetics

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1. *Ethics and Aesthetics*: Discussions of Neoplatonism, both on their own and in relation to literary works such as Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, at times pay greater direct attention, understandably, to matters of ethics and religion than to aesthetics. Nevertheless, we should not forget that the principles implicated in Neoplatonism – broadly defined – require us to establish a relationship between the sensory world and the realm of unchanging qualities. If such principles distinguish levels of meaning, above all in terms of truth-value, then it would seem almost inevitable that a philosophy of representation and perception – in other words an aesthetics – should also be treated as inseparable from, and in some ways even as the essence of, ontology, epistemology, and thus also ethics, religion, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

If we were to figure such a philosophy of representation rhetorically, especially in the context of Neoplatonism, we would probably call it by the name of *allegory*. And indeed, in this paper I want to offer, in the first instance, simply a reading of such tropic material in one fairly short passage of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. However, an *allegorical* reading of the text should here be understood not as a form (in opposition to the content) of discourse, nor simply as the exposition of an instrumental trope by means of which we reach a deeper understanding, nor even as the figure of a dualist ontology or epistemology.<sup>2</sup> An *allegory*, at least in the Apuleian context,

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<sup>1</sup> Plato himself is, of course, among the first to allow for this, for example in the *Republic*. Perhaps the most important recent argument for the relation between ethics and aesthetics is Ranci re 2004.

<sup>2</sup> For some studies of allegory in the context of antiquity, Apuleius, and Neoplatonism see, e.g., Boys-Stones 2003; Struck 1995; Laks 1997; Rollinson 1981; Heine 1978.

can, as I shall try to demonstrate in this essay, also be thought of as a speech event, as an act of language, an involved disjunction of what is said and its meaning, one that cannot be adequately described in terms of a static opposition between, say, word on the one hand, and world on the other, between representation and reality, between objective and subjective, or for that matter, between text (such as the *Metamorphoses*) and underlying philosophical essence (such as ‘Neoplatonism’).<sup>3</sup> It should be clear, then, that my purpose here is not to try to prove that this or that Apuleian passage is ‘Neoplatonic’ in any positive sense. I also submit that, as a matter of principle, it is neither possible nor desirable to produce a straightforward philosophical (or any other) reading of a work as elusive and as roundabout as the *Metamorphoses*. Be that as it may, in this paper I hope to do more than rehearse yet again arguments about irreducible Apuleian paradoxes.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, what I hope to develop here is something of a ‘regime’ of representation and truth for reading Apuleius, and, in a wider sense, aspects of the ancient world in general.<sup>5</sup>

2.1 *Anachronism and History*: We shall presently take a brief look – without making any claims to either coverage or summary – at the work of three important exponents of Neoplatonism: Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus. Sub-

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<sup>3</sup> We would have to speak of a process in which (axiomatically, as in geometry and certain aspects of mathematics) the distance between point A and point B cannot be explained simply by reference to another point C or to any other point (since that explanation leaves open the question of what lies between point A and point C, and so on, for any intermediary). It should therefore be clear that by ‘speech event’ I do not here mean an Austinian ‘speech act’, or a logical conflation of word and action that follows Gricean ‘conditions of felicity’, or illocutionary logic of the type discussed, e.g., by Searle & Vanderveken 1985: speech-act theory posits a world free of mediation, in which things exist, or come into being merely by virtue of verbal utterance. Peter Hallward (in the introduction to Hallward 2004) describes this conflation as the ultimate philosophical fantasy. The fantastic element becomes clear if, for example, we consider the analogous conflation of word and action in ‘magic’.

<sup>4</sup> As, for example, in Winkler’s seminal *Auctor and Actor* 1991, and subsequent important work in this vein (to which I myself have also tried to contribute: see, e.g., Kahane 2001 on Apuleius, representation, and modernity).

<sup>5</sup> For general background see recent responses to questions of the deferral of knowledge and truth, for example, by Alain Badiou (his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, reaching back to his *Being and Event* and the second volume of that work, the recent *Logiques des mondes*); Giorgio Agamben (especially *State of Exception*, but also, *Remains of Auschwitz*, *Homo Sacer*, and other works); Georges Didi-Huberman (for example in *Images malgré tout*); Slavoj Žižek (for example in *The Parallax Effect*), and Jacques Rancière (especially in *The Names of History* [Rancière 1994], for which see the extensive discussion below). Badiou’s widely influential aesthetics and philosophy of being are important underpinnings of this study, but cannot, of course, be discussed here.

sequently, we shall consider their views in the context of Apuleius and of some modern critical discussions of the general historico-philosophical problems that are raised within Apuleius' and similar texts. We must, however, first comment on a matter of chronology that has important practical and theoretical implications for our reading.

The dates for Plotinus and Porphyry in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and for Proclus in the 5<sup>th</sup> century are, of course, well past those of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and its immediately contingent cultural contexts.<sup>6</sup> This anachronism is in fact useful to us. We must, to begin with, allow the well established general point, expressed with increasing prominence since the last century (within philosophy, for example, in the context of hermeneutics; within studies of literature and history in the context of reception studies, reader-response theory, and so on), which asserts that meaning is ultimately enacted in the reading of a text, and is not inherent in the text or dependent on authorial intention. We cannot read outside our own reading (since such a reading would itself be a reading). Thus, if history is an act of reading and of representing the past in the present (any text from the past we read in the present, and in the present only), history must be understood as the process of writing/reading history.<sup>7</sup> We must not, needless to say, read an ancient work as if it was composed at a later time, or in our time. But to eject ourselves from the condition of our own contingency would be to elide our existence as historical beings, or indeed as minds. And in the most practical sense, without the assumption that later thought can and must inform earlier thought, the whole purpose of scholarship would, in some simple sense, be void.<sup>8</sup>

Yet – and this we must stress, as it is where we diverge from certain hermeneutic turns, as well as from facile historical relativism – it is precisely out of the breach of past and present that history and the need for history, or the fundamental problem, and, as we shall see, the very possibility of history and representation can emerge.

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<sup>6</sup> For Porphyry and Plotinus, see Edwards 2000, 117–119. For Proclus, see Saffrey & Westerink 1968, ix–lxxxix.

<sup>7</sup> This, in essence, is Hayden White's basic point about the relation between narrative and history, and more specifically for us, one of Jacques Rancière's arguments – for which see in greater detail further below.

<sup>8</sup> For example, we see no anomaly, but rather an important advantage, in reading Homer through the lens of 20<sup>th</sup>-century oral-formulaic theory which (with the exception of brief mentions in Josephus and perhaps in Julius Africanus' *Kestoi* [4<sup>th</sup> cent.; see Kahane 1997 on *P.Oxy.* 412]) is unattested in antiquity. For the historicity of oral-formulaic theory and its claims to veracity as objective scientific discourse, see Kahane 2005, Ch. 3.

2.2 *Plotinus and the Silent Vision of the Self*: It would be both unnecessary and foolhardy to try to lay out in detail here the complex and sometimes disputed positions expressed by Plotinus towards art and imitation.<sup>9</sup> For our purposes, suffice it to say that already in the *Enneads* there exists the possibility of representation as something other than a flawed *eidōlon eidōlou* (looking back to readings of Plato's *Republic*), and, instead, as something that can reach to the idea itself:

For, indeed, even in pictures those who look at the works of art with their eyes do not see the same things in the same way, but when they recognize an imitation (*mimēma*) on the level of sense of someone who has a place in their thought they feel a kind of disturbance and come to a recollection of the truth.<sup>10</sup>

Plotinus is not suggesting that the painting is produced by the worldly image, of course:

If someone were to say that it is not necessary for the image to be dependent on anything in the original – *for it is possible for a likeness to exist when the original is not there from which the likeness is taken*, and when the fire has gone away, for the heat to exist in what has been heated – first of all, as regards the original and the likeness, if one is talking about the likeness made by the painter, we shall affirm that it is not the original which made the likeness but the painter, since even if some painter makes a self-portrait it is not a likeness of himself, for what made the painting was not the body of the painter or the bodily form which was represented: and it is not the painter, but this particular disposition of the colours which should be said to make this particular likeness. *This is not in the strict and proper sense the making of likeness and image as it occurs in pools and mirrors, or in shadows – here the image has its existence in the strict and proper sense from the prior original, and comes to be from it, and it is not possible for what has come to be to exist cut off from it.*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ‘...the Platonism of Plotinus is very different from a number of other Platonisms, including quite probably the Platonism of Plato himself (if Plato was a Platonist)’ (Armstrong 1986, 170).

<sup>10</sup> Plot. *Enn.* 2,9,16,43–47 (trans. Armstrong).

<sup>11</sup> Plot. *Enn.* 6,4,10,1–15; my emphases.

In this difficult passage what is sufficiently clear for our present purposes is that Plotinus upholds a disjunction between the veracity of a representation and its direct relation to a sensible material origin, even as he allows for the possibility of a representation of truth:<sup>12</sup>

Nature [he says] is at rest in contemplation of the vision of itself, a vision which comes to it from its abiding in and with itself and being itself a vision; and its contemplation is silent (*apsophos*), but somewhat obscure (*amydrotera*).<sup>13</sup>

2.3 *Porphyry and Ainigmos*: It would be unwise to try to summarise the relations between Plotinus and Porphyry here. But we can, it seems to me, safely assume that Porphyry would have held to a tiered view of representation, in which we move, perhaps, from a low, *mimetic* representation, to a higher *symbolic* one.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in the *Life of Pythagoras*, he says that:

In Egypt he [Pythagoras] kept company with the priests and acquired their wisdom and the Egyptian language, and three modalities of notation (γραμμάτων ... τριστὰς διαφοράς), ‘epistolographic’ [i.e., probably of the secular, bureaucratic letter-writing kind], ‘hieroglyphic’, and ‘symbolic’, the first being ordinary speech according to *mimēsis*, and the others allegorising by way of riddles (κατά τινας αἰνιγμοῦς).<sup>15</sup>

Something of these principles becomes clearer in *The Cave of the Nymphs*, Porphyry’s paradigmatic exposition of his symbolic reading:

[The ancients] used caves to represent the Cosmos, which was generated from matter; caves, for the most part, are natural and are made of the same substance as the earth is; they are surrounded by a single mass of stone, hollow on the inside while their boundary is lost in the limitless mass of the earth. The Cosmos, on the other hand, is a natural reality and is by its very nature joined to matter; matter they signified by stone and

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Enn.* 5,8,31,7 (*On the Intelligible Beauty*) and Armstrong 1986, 155. Plotinus objects, for example, to the ‘crude anthropomorphism of the literal interpreters of the *Timaeus*’ (Armstrong 1986, 159).

<sup>13</sup> *Enn.* 3,8,4,25–28: Armstrong translates *amydrotera* as ‘blurred’ (1986, 161). For readings of Plotinus on art, representation, and imitation, see also, for example, Rich 1960; Hadot 1976; Pepin 1970; Keyser 1955; Close 1971.

<sup>14</sup> See Struck 1995, 230.

<sup>15</sup> *Porph. VP.* 11,9–12,4.

rock because it is inert and resists form (διὰ τὸ ἀργὸν καὶ ἀντίτυπον πρὸς τὸ εἶδος εἶναι)... Matter is in a state of flux and of itself lacks the form by which it can be shaped and recognised. For this reason, they appropriately took the moistness and humidity and dimness and, as Homer called it, the mistiness<sup>16</sup> of caves to symbolise qualities which the Cosmos owes to matter (εἰς σύμβολον τῶν προσόντων τῷ κόσμῳ διὰ τὴν ὕλην). Because of matter, then, the Cosmos is misty and dim; but because of the power of form for connecting and ordering (which gives Cosmos its name) it is beautiful and pleasing. For this reason, then, it may be properly described as a cave that is pleasant when one first comes upon it because it participates in form, but obscure when one examines its foundations and penetrates with the mind to the depths of it – so that its exterior surface is pleasing and its interior and depths are dark.<sup>17</sup>

What is important, for our purposes, to extract from this passage are the following basic points: the possibility of truth in representation, coupled with the notion of vagueness in the interior; the inverse hierarchical relations between the surface quality of being pleasant and the deep, but dark, interior truth; the misleading quality of pleasing beauty which is in reality obscure.<sup>18</sup>

*2.4 Proclus, Timaeus, and Recapitulation:* Last but not least, let us consider, in slightly greater detail, Proclus, who, whether or not he is representative of Neoplatonism as a whole, is one of its most distinctive exponents. In particular, let us consider his commentary on the *Timaeus* and his views on the relation of that dialogue to the *Republic*. After all, the *Timaeus* and the *Republic* both contain canonical expositions of the Platonic theory of the conditions of immutable truth and its relation to transient sensory objects. This relation is precisely what we have here called *aesthetic*.

In his commentary on the *Timaeus*, Proclus speaks of Socrates' two narratives in the dialogue: first, his 'sober sketch' of the *Republic*'s argument about the city and the order of the world, and then the mythical rendering of the story of Atlantis (17b–25d). What, asks Proclus, are the functions of these two overlapping narratives? He seems to side with those who suggest

<sup>16</sup> ἠεροειδές; cf. Hom. *Od.* 13, 103 etc.

<sup>17</sup> Porph. *Antr.* 5,4 – 6,8.

<sup>18</sup> See Struck 1995 on Porphyry and 'anti-mimesis'. The term resonates with contemporary critical thinking about (non-mimetic) representation (in the context of Apuleius, see Kahane 2001), but risks conflating several distinct and at times incompatible views.

that we have here a twofold representation of what is to follow later in the *Timaeus*. We get first, he suggests, an ‘explicit rendering’ (*dēlōsis*) conveyed ‘through likeness and images (*eikones*) of the matters under investigation’, and then a presentation through ‘secret hinting’ (*endeixis aporrhētos*) of these same matters, communicated by *symbola*.<sup>19</sup>

And so, the recapitulation of the *Republic* which appears before the section on physics addresses itself to a consideration of the structure of the universe by means of likeness (*eikonikōs*); the story of Atlantis does the same, but by means of symbols (*symbolikōs*). Indeed, it is by means of symbols that myths customarily hint at higher realities (*ta pragmata*). Consequently, although physics is the subject of the whole dialogue, it is presented one way in one place and another way in another.<sup>20</sup>

This passage relates very significantly to views we have seen in Plotinus and Porphyry, and to the possibility of truth. It postulates two basic modalities of representation, with the more abstract one, which Proclus terms *symbolikē*, hinting at ‘higher realities’. Arguably, this passage radicalises an important component of Neoplatonist ‘citational’ discourse – namely how to make present (or ‘re-present’) a thing which is not directly there, a thing which is too difficult or intense to be shown *an sich*, as it were.<sup>21</sup> One might only add that, whether these arguments are ‘Platonic’ depends largely on our view of Plato’s position in the quarrel between philosophy and poetry.<sup>22</sup>

**3.1 *Paradigms of Judgement:*** Let us now move on to a passage from the *Metamorphoses*. At 10,30 Lucius is describing the preparations for an enactment of the myth of the Judgement of Paris, in a scene which precedes his planned ‘climactic’ rendezvous with the convicted woman. The Judgement of Paris is, of course, emblematic of aesthetic judgement. Furthermore, the judgement scene takes place in the theatre, which is itself a key site of representation, especially in antiquity, and thus a particularly suitable context for discussions of aesthetic theory. We should not, however, forget that ethics

<sup>19</sup> I follow Coulter 1976, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Procl. *in Ti.* 1,130,11–18.

<sup>21</sup> I use the term ‘radicalise’ so as to avoid the idea that Proclus’ views sum up, represent, or are identical to the views of earlier Neoplatonists. For Proclus on representation see Coulter 1976.

<sup>22</sup> Plato, despite the arguments in *Republic* 10, allows for at least some types of poetry (and, in the *Symposium*, for the value of beauty, of course). See, generally, Sheppard 1994. See also Rancière’s comments further below.

and aesthetics are not separate. The Judgement is, of course, the ‘originary’ moment of the Trojan conflict and thus has strong ethical overtones.<sup>23</sup>

The myth of the Judgement is cited in a ‘twofold’ manner in this passage. In the first instance it is enacted onstage, as an action. This action and its visuality are, of course, *not* directly accessible to readers. Rather, the scene is narrated, by the Ass, by means of the words we read in the book. We could, perhaps, describe this act in Platonic terms as twice removed from ‘reality’, from the myth itself.

3.2 *Apuleius and Mons Ida*: Let us look at our text a little more closely. ‘The curtain was raised,’ says Lucius, ‘the screens folded back, and the stage was set.’ Now what do we see?:

*Erat mons ligneus, ad instar incliti montis illius, quem uates Homerus Idaeum cecinit, sublimi instructus fabrica, consitus uirectis et uiuis arboribus, summo cacumine, de manibus fabri fonte manante, fluuiialis aquas eliquans.*

There stood a wooden mountain, constructed with lofty craftsmanship to resemble<sup>24</sup> the famous mountain of which the bard Homer sang, Mount Ida. It was planted with bushes and live trees, and, at its very peak, from a flowing fountain made by the designer’s hand, it poured river water.<sup>25</sup>

This passage is the only place in the *Metamorphoses* where the poet Homer is actually mentioned by name, although he is a prominent presence in the work. Homer, of course, is the paradigmatic point of reference for all ancient imitation. It seems, then, that this passage, which is emblematic of aesthetic judgement by virtue of its theme (the Judgement) and context (a theatrical performance), also deals explicitly and in practice with the fundamental subject matter of citation and reference (Homer), and is thus almost unmatched as the point *par excellence* at which to consider aspects of Apuleius’ representation.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Mount Ida is generally the site of a basic conflation of visual/ethical perspectives. Cf. Hom. *Il.* 2,824; 3,276, 320; 7,202 etc.; “Zeus looks down from Mount Ida and is the prime enforcer of Justice” (Kirk 1990, 260). For the Judgement of Paris in the history of representation in the West, see Damisch 1996.

<sup>24</sup> *Ad instar*: ‘according to the standard or pattern of’ (*OLD sv. instar* 4).

<sup>25</sup> Ap. *Met.* 10,30,2.

<sup>26</sup> The Judgement of Paris is, in fact, never mentioned in Homer, except obliquely at *Il.* 23,23–30. This important omission was well known to early critics, and discussed at length (Aristarchus in Schol. *ad loc.*; Eustathius 1337,29–30). See Kirk 1993, 276–277.



The passage and the description of the scene as a whole begin with the Latin *mons ligneus*. These words are, of course, a pun. In Greek *Ida* (*idē*, Doric *ida*) means ‘timber-tree’, ‘forest’, and Mount Ida is the ‘timber mountain’ (both ‘mountain covered in timber’ and perhaps, spurred by our Latin here, ‘mountain made of timber’; note also the curious later reference to the mountain as *Idaeus*). Apuleius’ words *mons ligneus* no doubt refer to the man-made prop onstage, the visual signifier, the material pile of wooden planks, that material object out of which or by means of which a more real ‘Mount Ida’ is made or represented.<sup>27</sup> But I wonder if it could also be read the other way around. Could we perhaps think of these words as referring to the signified Mount Ida, that mountain ‘out there’, one made *ad instar*, ‘according to the manner or standard’ of the famous mountain described by Homer (which is how most audiences and readers of Homer might know it), the mountain bearing the trees that will yield the *wood* that will be used to build the mountain-prop onstage, which, after all, is itself, despite being described as *ligneus*, planted with *living trees* (*vivis arboribus*)?<sup>28</sup> In fact, we could take this process of semantic expansion much further. The first sentence here seems to set up a bewilderingly complex interplay between at least four ontologically discrete ‘mountain objects’ – wooded Mount Ida ‘out there’ in the Troad, the wooden prop onstage, Homer’s verbal mount Ida (*quem uates Homerus Idaeum cecinit*), and that Mount Ida of the myth of which Lucius tells us, all enmeshed in this verbal expression *mons ligneus...Idaeu(s)* in the text of the *Metamorphoses*. What distinguishes each of these objects, of course, is the specific relation between signified and signifier that each of them embodies, yet it is precisely this relation that is most difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish in the words (even as, in a practical sense, they are easily understood). Furthermore, each of these distinct objects would be meaningless on its own, that is without the crucial relationship to the others. Without that intimate link no representation, no

<sup>27</sup> Notwithstanding *materia* (above all ‘wood as building material, timber’ [*OLD sub voc.* 1], used only once in *Metamorphoses*, 10,27,6), can we link *ligneus* to Greek *hylē*, which is the philosophical term for ‘substance/matter’ (as opposed to form) generally and in Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, etc. For the importance of *hylē* in Neoplatonic thought see Simonini 1986, 97–101.

<sup>28</sup> Thus, *ad instar*, ‘in the manner/pattern of’ would refer not to an ontologically antecedent model but to the ‘pattern’ of the mountain in the poetry of Homer. We, audiences and readers, who have no access to the ‘original myth’ or to the visual ‘reality’ of the Troad, would only know this mountain through the mediation of (for example) Homer’s words. Mount Ida is often mentioned in the *Iliad* (not named in the *Odyssey*), and its many trees are prominent, too, for example in 14,286ff. (see also above, note 23).

narrative, no signification, no meaning, indeed no language would be possible.

Notice also the emphasis in the passage on the craftsmanship involved in the making of representations. The mountain is made by sublime craftsmanship (*sublimi instructus fabrica*). Is it the theatrical prop-maker's human craftsmanship which is described in such lofty terms? Or a higher 'craftsman's work (...a *demiourgos*...)? Or even, self referentially, the cunning verbal craftsmanship of Apuleius? We are not told. Yet its highest manifestation is, it would seem, precisely its ineluctable quality. This quality is sufficiently evolved to coax the readers into radical suspension of the distinction between art and life, between what is represented and its beautiful representation. Under 'normal' circumstances such a suspension may be a source of anxiety – the conceptual equivalent of, say, intoxicated disorientation. And yet here at least it is clear that the opposite is true. The suspension of the hierarchy between signified and signifier is precisely what brings language into being and allows it to have an effect, let us say, as a *symbolic* medium, as a medium that 'throws together' a signified and a signifier. If each one of these mountains were truly 'discrete' there would be no contact between them. Words would represent nothing. We would be faced with a radical 'Platonist' opposition to representation and with the idea of non-representable truth.

3.3 *Ida and the Ethics of Representation*: Semantic slippage in this passage may be both prominent and pleasing (perhaps not unlike the surface representation of the cave in Porphyry). Yet clearly the pleasantness and the eloquence of this text's likeness of Mount Ida, the *eikonic* representation (to use Proclus' term) are problematic. Even as we view Ida's beautiful scenery in our mind's eye and succumb to Lucius' vigorous ear-stroking, no reader of the words can forget the terrible quality of the events which are to take place next to this Ida, this 'wood mountain', this *mons ligneus*, and which involve the perverted union of love and death between Lucius and the convicted woman. No reader could fail to appreciate understand that, to adopt a hybrid 'Porphyrean-Proclean' perspective, the beauty of the visual scene onstage and the verbal description in the book are seriously misleading.<sup>29</sup> The essence of the problem, indeed its perversity, lies, both aesthetically and ethically, precisely in the identity of the representation and the thing represented!

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<sup>29</sup> As indeed Apuleius himself eventually declares; see §3.4 below.

If we are to read the scene properly, both it and its words must be taken not simply as (to invoke Proclus' term again) *dēlōsis*, 'an explicit rendering' through likeness (i.e. as an *eikōn*), but also as a sign (*symbolon*) of something more complex and sinister, as some kind of 'secret hinting' (*endeixis aporrētos*) at deeper and hidden truths.

3.4 *The Judgement of Philosophy*: Notwithstanding external references, and if for a moment we were to forget Apuleius' Neoplatonist leanings, any doubts about the paradigmatic function of the Judgement of Paris, or about the need to read this passage with an awareness of Platonist philosophy, would be resolved by the end of this extended description:

*Quid ergo miramini, uilissima capita, immo forensia pecora, immo uero togati uulturii, si toti nunc iudices sententias suas pretio nundinantur, cum rerum exordio inter deos et homines agitatum iudicium corruperit gratia, et originalem sententiam magni Iouis consilii electus iudex rusticanus et opilio lucro libidinis uendiderit cum totius etiam suae stirpis exitio?*

Why are you surprised, you cheap ciphers – or should I say sheep of the courts, or better still vultures in togas – if nowadays all jurors hawk their verdicts for a price, since at the world's beginning an adjudication between gods and men was corrupted by beauty's influence, and a country shepherd, chosen judge on the advice of great Jupiter, sold the first verdict for a profit of pleasure, resulting in the destruction of himself and his entire race.<sup>30</sup>

The Ass, insulting us, the readers, as 'cheap ciphers' (so undoing the misleading effects of beauty and flattery?) launches into an invective against the corrupting influence of beauty on the process of adjudication. Then he moves on to a verbal assault on the disgraceful condemnation of Palamedes ('a man of superior learning and wisdom', *eruditione doctrinaque praepollens Palamedes*, 33,10–11), and Ajax and, indeed, to the killing of Socrates himself.<sup>31</sup>

*Quale autem et illud iudicium apud legiferos Athenienses catos illos et omnis scientiae magistros? Nonne diuinae prudentiae senex, quem sapientia praetulit cunctis mortalibus deus Delphicus, fraude et inuidia*

<sup>30</sup> 10,33,1–8.

<sup>31</sup> Ajax: alluding to Plat.*Ap.*41b. For Socrates see *Ap.*21a ff.

*nequissimae factionis circumuentus uelut corruptor adolescentiae, quam frenis coercebat, herbae pestilentis suco noxio peremptus est, relinquens ciuibus ignominiae perpetuae maculam, cum nunc etiam egregii philosophi sectam eius sanctissimam praeoptent et summo beatitudinis studio iurent in ipsius nomen?*

And what kind of trial was that one held by the Athenians, those skilful legislators and teachers of all knowledge? Is it not true that that divinely wise old man, whom the Delphic god pronounced superior to all other mortals in intelligence, was attacked by the lies and malice of an utterly worthless faction, accused of being a corruptor of the young – whom he was in fact keeping in rein – and murdered with the poisonous juice of a baleful herb? He bequeathed to his fellow-citizens the stain of eternal disgrace, because even to this day the best philosophers choose his holy school and in their zealous pursuit of happiness swear by his very name.<sup>32</sup>

The name of Socrates, openly mentioned and so beautifully misapplied in the opening parts of the *Metamorphoses*, is here elided (a somewhat literal, and perhaps comic example of a ‘secret hinting’?). Yet it is perfectly clear that the whole Paris scene can, and perhaps must be read, if not philosophically, then at least alongside philosophy, as an ethico-aesthetic comment outlining the risks and corrupting power of beauty and sensory perception on judgement.

3.5 *Illegitimate Speakers*: As usual in Apuleius, this is not the end of the reading process. After all, the speaker, whatever he says, is, during these parts of the narrative, an ass, a mute and stupid beast. And as the Ass himself says in a self-annulling statement:

*Sed nequis indignationis meae reprehendat impetum secum sic reputans: ‘Ecce nunc patiemur philosophantem nobis asinum?’, rursus, unde decessi, reuertar ad fabulam.*

I’m afraid one of you may reproach me for this attack of indignation and think to himself, ‘So now we are going to have to stand an ass lecturing us on philosophy?’ So I shall return to the story at the point where I left it.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> 10,33,13–23.

<sup>33</sup> 10,33,23–26.

Lucius' earlier philosophical excursus, and perhaps also Apuleian representation and citational discourse in general, here seem to negate themselves by the very principles of reflective thought on which they are based and which delegitimise the philosophy of an ass. In the last few decades scholars have, of course, repeatedly discussed the paradoxical 'muteness' that the *Metamorphoses* imposes on its own discourse: the book seems to negate its ability to speak seriously about philosophy, or for that matter about anything else. Are we, then, back to that good old chestnut of radical slippage between language and signification?

4.1 *Legitimacy, Historical Consciousness, and Mimesis*: I must stress again that I do not wish to dwell on familiar arguments about Apuleius' playfulness. Indeed, I suggest that the fundamental premises of Lucius' 'muteness' are not playful at all. They are, on the contrary, quite conventional in the context of antiquity. As I will try to show, it is only out of these conventional assumptions that Apuleius' endless apparent paradoxes emerge. Towards the end of this essay we shall, with the aid of some contemporary thinking about history and representation, attempt to overturn these conventions. And it is from this overturning that a new and strangely stable reading of Apuleius will, I hope, emerge.

The muteness of the Ass in the *Metamorphoses*, for all its comic ambiguities, is ultimately anchored in a sharp hierarchy of legitimacy and authority which de-legitimises certain well-defined types of speakers and modes of discourse, demarcating those who have the right to speak and those who do not. If an ass speaks, he speaks only as a comic and questionable character or after he has been turned back into human form and has become a legitimate speaker again, a 'serious' person and a devotee of Isis.

Viewed in the context of asses and men, such bias hardly seems surprising. Yet, abstracted, it is arguably an instance of the kind of hierarchy between legitimate and illegitimate speakers that has been regarded by many influential modern readers as one of the defining features of ancient representation, and, by extension, of ancient ethics and its world view or historical consciousness as a whole. The most forceful overt presentations of such views are to be found in, for example, Hegel, Lukács, Bakhtin, Auerbach, and many other authors who have explicitly taken it upon themselves to study the history of historical progress.<sup>34</sup> But the idea is even more perva-

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<sup>34</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*; G. Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel: a Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*; M.M.

sive, at times even taken for granted, in subject histories and historically situated critique.<sup>35</sup>

4.2 *Representing the Other*: By way of an example, let us consider Erich Auerbach's most famous and influential work, *Mimesis*. In this book Auerbach looks closely at canonical moments in the history of ancient literature and literary genre, and traces key modalities of the representation of reality. As part of this analysis he considers basic stances towards the legitimacy of speakers and discourse. The question at hand is the ability, or indeed the willingness of an author, a genre, and an era to represent the 'other', the one who is *not* like ourselves. Mapped on to the question of social stratification, this becomes a matter of ethics, of course (we have already seen how ethics and aesthetics overlap); mapped on to the question of time, this becomes a matter of the philosophy of history (our ability to represent the past, which is *not* in our present).<sup>36</sup>

In the second chapter of *Mimesis*, Auerbach famously discusses Tacitus' narrative in the *Annales* of the revolt of the Roman legions in Pannonia. Tacitus describes the breakdown of discipline and the tumult following the death of Augustus, and how the legions 'wax wanton and quarrelsome'. In this state of idleness and confusion the soldiers 'lend their ears to the discourse of every profligate'. 'At last,' says Tacitus, 'they longed for a life of dissipation and idleness and spurned all discipline and military labour'. At this point the army is incited to revolt:

In the camp there was a man by the name of Percennius, in his early days the leader of a clique at the theatres, then a private soldier with an abusive tongue, whose experience of stage rivalries had taught him the art of

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Bakhtin's, 'Epic and Novel,' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*; E. Auerbach's *Mimesis*, etc.

<sup>35</sup> For example Emmanuel Levinas, who, paradoxically, sees in Homer's Odysseus a man who always wants to go home and thus never really travels beyond the boundaries of his own self (Levinas 1986, 48); or Alasdair MacIntyre, who, in his *A Short History of Ethics* asserts that in Homer goodness and virtue belong only within the narrow band of aristocratic behaviour (1974, 5–8).

<sup>36</sup> Auerbach is a remarkably precise and insightful critic, but his views are firmly anchored in a 'monumental' narrative of the history of mind, in which antiquity is ever the differential. See, e.g., 1957, 29: 'If the literature of antiquity was unable to represent everyday life seriously, that is, in full appreciation of its problems and with an eye for its historical background; if it could represent it only in the low style, comically or at best idyllically, statically and ahistorically, the implication is that these things mark the limits not only of the realism of antiquity but of its historical consciousness (*Geist*) as well'.

inflaming an audience. Step by step, by conversations at night or in the gathering twilight, he began to play on those simple minds, now troubled by doubt how the passing of Augustus would affect the conditions of service, and to collect about him the off-scourings of the army when the better elements had dispersed.<sup>37</sup>

As Auerbach points out, Tacitus presents the soldiers' position vividly, but only in the form of their leader Percennius' speech. The speech, Auerbach argues,

... is by no means based upon an understanding of those [i.e. the soldiers'] demands. This fact might naturally be explained as the result of Tacitus' characteristic attitude of aristocratic conservatism; to his mind, a rebellious legion is nothing but a lawless mob; *a common soldier in the role of a mutinous leader defies classification in terms of constitutional law*... For Tacitus not only lacks understanding, he actually has no interest whatever in the facts underlying the soldiers' demands.<sup>38</sup>

But why, asks Auerbach, if Tacitus is not interested in the soldiers' demands, does he express their positions so graphically in Percennius' speech? 'The reasons,' Auerbach says, 'are purely aesthetic. The grand style of historiography requires grandiloquent speeches which as a rule are fictitious'.<sup>39</sup> This is where Auerbach's acuity as a critic is at its greatest<sup>40</sup>:

*Percennius does not speak his own language; he speaks Tacitean, that is, he speaks with extreme terseness, as a master of disposition, and highly rhetorically.* Undoubtedly his words – though given as indirect discourse – vibrate with the actual excitement of mutinous soldiers and their leader. Yet even if we assume Percennius was a gifted demagogue, such brevity, incisiveness, and order are not possible in a rebellious propaganda speech and of soldiers' slang there is not the slightest trace.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1,16,9–15.

<sup>38</sup> 1957, 32; my emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> 1957, 34.

<sup>40</sup> His arguments are important, if problematic, forerunners of the arguments about the 'silence' and 'ventriloquism' of the subaltern, advanced in the field of gender and post-colonial studies by Mulvey, Spivak, and others.

<sup>41</sup> 1957, 34; my emphasis.

According to Auerbach, then, Percennius speaks ‘Tacitean’. No citational mode is evoked in the *Annales*. The voice of the ‘other’, of the non-aristocratic common man, the plain soldier, is never heard.

These claims are summed up by Jacques Rancière, one of the most important living philosophers of history, in his book *The Names of History*. Reading Auerbach reading Tacitus, Rancière suggests that the essential effect is one of disjunction:

For Auerbach, this disjunction of the narrative is equivalent to a double dispossession: Tacitus strips Percennius of his reasons [Percennius speaks in a non-place, in a vacancy, in a time of suspension of order and authority, and he is a common soldier and a mutinous leader, a figure who, categorically ‘defies classification in terms of constitutional law’] and his voice [Percennius speaks ‘Tacitean’], of his belonging to a common history and his own speech.<sup>42</sup>

As Auerbach himself points out, and as Rancière stresses, the whole purpose here is to define the quintessential characteristics of certain historical eras as manifest in their texts. Rancière goes on:

Auerbach opposes, to this rhetorical invalidation, the realism of the scene of Peter’s denial in the Gospel of Mark: the presence of the ‘little’ people, the character of the servant, the mention of Peter’s Galilean accent—all of these dramatise the mixture of grandeur and weakness that characterises the man of the common people...<sup>43</sup>

This presence of the ‘little people’ allows the Evangelist ‘to represent something that ancient literature could not depict’, namely the language of the real, the language of someone other than authoritative, authorised speakers.<sup>44</sup> Here, for Auerbach, is a crucial characterisation of contingent historical consciousness and a conception of the self (*Geist*) that distinguish ancient from modern.

4.3 *Paradigmatic Disposessions*: One could argue (in line with Auerbach’s views) that precisely the same ‘double dispossession’ is prominently attested elsewhere in Graeco-Roman antiquity. In Homer, for instance, we find the

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<sup>42</sup> Rancière 1994, 27, with my comments.

<sup>43</sup> 1994, 27.

<sup>44</sup> For Auerbach on the New Testament see further below, note 52.



example of the illegitimate and borrowed words of Thersites.<sup>45</sup> Homer, of course, is in many ways the paradigmatic representation of the ancient mind-set, and his Thersites is, arguably, one of the quintessential ancient ‘muted others’. Thersites is described as:

... the ugliest man who went to Troy. He was bandy-legged and lame in one foot, and his shoulders were rounded, hunching together over his chest, and above them his head was pointed, and a scant stubble grew on it. Hateful above all was he to Achilles, and to Odysseus.<sup>46</sup>

He is introduced by Homer as one ‘full of disorderly (*akosma*) words with which to challenge kings idly, and without order (*ou kata kosmon*)’.<sup>47</sup> And, just as Percennius speaks ‘Tacitean’, so Thersites speaks in ‘pure Homeric’. His words are perfectly well-formed, formulaic, Homeric hexameters. Thersites’ words are thus not his own. And it should be clear that Lucius too, is doubly dispossessed. The braying of an ass – an otherwise harsh, incoherent sound – is conveyed in the *Metamorphoses* as eloquent and polished Apuleian prose.<sup>48</sup>

My point is simple. Lucius, Percennius, Thersites: they are all, from this perspective, varieties of ‘braying ass’ – instances, if we follow Auerbach, of the refusal or the inability of antiquity to understand, represent, or acknowledge the ‘other’ within its historical consciousness. When they speak, these characters are essentially mute. This is where epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical positions overlap in what is ultimately a key point in the narrative of the progress of history. It is a narrative that, in the service of modernity, lays a serious charge against antiquity. And, of course, if we accept these arguments, the paradoxes of the Apuleian ‘talking beast’ come to the fore. We face a serious practical as well as a theoretical problem requiring ever more ingenious solutions that mediate between silence and the possibility of speech.<sup>49</sup> In earlier times this paradox consigned Apuleius to the periphery of the canon as a subversive and/or comical work. Late Modernity has, of course, reinstated Apuleius, mostly within the frame of its own deferral of the question of truth. It thus seems that the history of Apuleian criticism in the last two centuries or so has implicitly taken on board some of the diffi-

<sup>45</sup> In fact, Rancière himself also briefly notes Thersites: 1994, 26.

<sup>46</sup> Hom. *Il.* 2,216–220 (trans. Hammond).

<sup>47</sup> Hom. *Il.* 2.213–214; note the emphatic repetition; see further in Kahane 2008.

<sup>48</sup> On the uniformity of language in Apuleius see Heine 1978.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Harrison 1990: widely cited, precisely because it offers such an original response to the problem.

culties, not only of (Hegelian) progressionist readings and grand historical narratives,<sup>50</sup> but also of postmodernism. We enter the morass of how to read the *Metamorphoses*.

5.1 *The Place of Inclusion*: Do we have to read Apuleius in these terms? Perhaps not, if we appeal to recent arguments about representation and – to stay with the example of Auerbach – to Jacques Rancière’s critique of precisely the question of the representation or exclusion of the ‘other’ in *Mimesis*. In opposition to Auerbach, Rancière suggests that in fact Tacitus’ narrative enables not only a substantive discourse of alterity, but also, more significantly, a historical regime of truth. It goes without saying that Rancière’s argument is not an attempt to absolve antiquity of the responsibility for its ethical dysfunctions. Indeed, as we shall see, it is precisely through arguments about the potential for representation that the text can expose both ethical differentials and our responsibilities in the dialogue between self and other. Rancière argues that in Percennius’ speech we should find

... not its effect of exclusion [of illegitimate speakers]... but, on the contrary, its power of inclusion: the place it gives, through its own agency, to what it declares to have no place.<sup>51</sup>

If Rancière is right, if we can show that antiquity *is* capable of ‘inclusive’ speech, this would clearly also have important implications for our understanding of the ‘illegitimate’ speech of the Ass in Apuleius, and for our attempt to read serious philosophy into the *Metamorphoses*.

5.2 *The Infinitive*: There is no disputing the ‘facts’. In Tacitus, Percennius’ rabble-rousing, disorderly speech does actually take the paradoxical form of perfectly ordered, rhetorical, Tacitean Latin. However, there is a small but crucial philological point, whose importance escapes neither Auerbach nor Rancière: Percennius’ words are not presented as a verbatim citation in direct discourse, but rather are given in indirect discourse with the main verbs in the infinitive mode.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Criticism of progressionist views and, in the context of classics, of the work of Adkins, Snell, Jaeger, Dodds, and others has been persuasively put forward, e.g., by B. Williams (*Shame and Necessity*) and C. Gill (*Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue*).

<sup>51</sup> 1994, 28.

<sup>52</sup> 1957, 34. Auerbach goes on to show that it is only with the New Testament and the radical shift in perspective that it brings, that direct discourse begins to be significantly

*Postremo ... velut contionabundus interrogabat cur paucis centurionibus paucioribus tribunis in modum servorum oboedirent. quando ausuros exposcere remedia...*

At last ... he asked, in the tone of a demagogue, why, like slaves, they submitted to a few centurions and still fewer tribunes, and when would they dare to demand relief ...<sup>53</sup>

This is a key issue. On the face of it, the use of indirect speech is a pointed, technical aspect of Percennius' dispossession. It means that he can speak only 'cited' words, never words as they are literally uttered. Yet, as Rancièrè points out, it is precisely the

... 'indirect style', which is the specific modality according to which he [Tacitus] effects the equilibrium of narrative and discourse, and holds together the powers of neutrality and those of suspicion [towards a speaker like Percennius].<sup>54</sup>

Rancièrè further explains this compact and somewhat difficult claim:

Percennius speaks without speaking, in the infinitive mode, which is the zero-degree of the verb, expressing the value of information without deciding on the value of this information, without situating it on the scale of the present and the past, of the objective and the subjective. The indirect style, in practice disjoining meaning and truth, in effect cancels the opposition between legitimate and illegitimate speakers. The latter are

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used in the presentation of the speech of ordinary characters in the scene of Peter's denial (1957, 40):

A scene like Peter's denial fits into no antique genre. It is too serious for comedy, too contemporary for history – and the form which was given it is one of such immediacy that its like does not exist in the literature of antiquity. This can be judged by a symptom which at first glance may seem insignificant: the use of direct discourse. The maid says: And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. He answers: I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest.... ...I do not believe that there is a single passage in an antique [*sic*] historian where direct discourse is employed in this fashion in a brief direct dialogue. Dialogues with few participants are rare in their writing; at best they appear in anecdotal biography and there the function they serve is almost always to lead up to famous pregnant retorts, whose importance lies not in their realistically concrete content but in their rhetorical and ethical impact.

<sup>53</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1,17,1–4.

<sup>54</sup> 1994, 28.

just as much validated as suspected. The homogeneity of the narrative-discourse thereby constituted comes to contradict the heterogeneity of the subjects it represents, the unequal quality of the speakers, to guarantee, by their status, the reference of their speech. Although Percennius may well be the radical other, the one excluded from legitimate speech, his discourse is included, in a specific suspension of the relations between meaning and truth.<sup>55</sup>

We could emphasise this point by noting that the infinitive is a form of the verb that has an ‘aspect’ but no ‘tense’. In other words, the infinitive marks the ontological quality of action (‘an ongoing action’, ‘a finished action’, ‘a repeated action’), but avoids an ‘indexical’ marking of time.<sup>56</sup>

Rancière agrees with Auerbach as far as the basic characterisation of citational discourse in Tacitus is concerned. But he turns Auerbach’s reading on its head by arguing that Tacitus’ ‘indirect style’, for example the use of the infinitive, blurs the boundary between the present speaking historian and his past ‘mute’ objects. This blurring, Rancière suggests, works both ways, effectively cancelling the opposition between legitimate and illegitimate speakers. Percennius, a truly ‘radical other,’ is thus a character whose voice is not marked as either ‘true’ or ‘false’ in relation to that of the historian Tacitus. But for exactly this reason, Percennius’ voice is also as meaningful as that of the historian Tacitus himself.

*5.3 The Possibility of History:* As Rancière carefully notes, the practice of suspension outlined above transfers the forms of *discours* into the forms of *histoire*.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, it is precisely out of that suspension that history, according to Rancière, emerges:

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<sup>55</sup> 1994, 28.

<sup>56</sup> For a discussion of the phenomenology of historical time and issues related to this example, see Kahane 2008. For an overall discussion of time in history, see, most recently, Corfield 2007.

<sup>57</sup> These terms are drawn from E. Benveniste’s technical analysis of presence and absence in language (1971, 195–215). The use of personal pronouns (1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>) and tenses of the verb (primary/historical) is crucial to Benveniste’s analysis. Both Auerbach and Rancière (1994, 13–14, 48) work within Benveniste’s framework. The terms *histoire* and *discours* are significantly related (though not identical) to ancient, particularly Platonic modalities, of *mimēsis* and *diēgēsis*. See further below.

This equality of the speakers reflects... ..the homogeneity between the *stating* of history and the *stating* of what it recounts.<sup>58</sup> To write history is to render equivalent a certain number of situations of discourse. Relating the action of Pericles or Agricola is an act of discourse that has the same status as the harangues of Pericles or Agricola.<sup>59</sup>

It is crucial to stress that this practice of suspension, this homogeneity, is not a deferral of truth, but rather a return to truth. To understand this we must consider some of Rancière's more general observations. Significantly, as we attempt to draw our argument to a close, this move will also take us back to Plato and Platonism, to the *Republic*, and to the division between *mimēsis* and *diēgēsis*.<sup>60</sup> Rancière writes:

To understand what the linguistic exchange of the forms of discourse for those of narrative effectively means, we must recognise the settlement of an old account between philosophy and poetry. In the third book of the *Republic*, Plato classed the diverse poetic forms according to their degree of falsity. This falsity increased for him the more the poet hid his own intervention behind the imitation of his characters. The least deceptive poetry was that in which the poet kept his distance from the characters, allowed himself to be seen as the speaking subject of his poem. It was that in which the mode of narrative, of *diegesis*, dominated. The most deceptive, on the other hand, was that in which the *I* of the poet and the agency of the narrative were absent. What then triumphed, exemplarily on the tragic stage, was the illusion of *mimesis*. The poet acted as though the

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<sup>58</sup> This idea is not far from Neoplatonist thinking, although we must be very careful not to trivialise the contingent specificity of historical moments by assuming their identity. See, for example, Plotinus *Enneades* V,3,3,44–4,14, quoted in Armstrong 1986, 166–67:

“Sense-perception is our messenger but Intellect is our king.

But we too are kings when we are in accord with it; we can be in accord with it in two ways, either by having something like its writing written in us like laws, or by being as if filled with it and able to see it and aware of it as present. And we know ourselves by learning all other things by such a vision, either learning a vision of this kind according to the knowing power, by that very power itself, *or ourselves becoming it*, so that the man who knows himself is double, one knowing the nature of the reasoning which belongs to soul, and one up above this man, *who knows himself according to Intellect because he has become that Intellect; and by that Intellect he thinks himself again, not any longer as man, but having become altogether other and snatching himself up into that higher world*, drawing up only that better part of soul, which alone is able to be winged for intellection, with which someone there keeps by him what he sees” [my emphases].

<sup>59</sup> 1994, 28–29.

<sup>60</sup> See above, n.57.

words of his own invention were those of Orestes or Agamemnon, those of characters expressing their proper names. This condemnation of tragic *mimesis* went along, in Plato, with that of democracy. The tragic illusion belonged to the democratic reign of appearance and flattery, in which the arbitrariness of the orator and that of the *demos* reflected each other interminably.<sup>61</sup>

This is precisely where the act of suspension provides us with the necessary answer: ‘In affirming itself in its absoluteness, in unbinding itself from *mimesis* and the division of genres, literature makes history possible as a discourse of truth’.<sup>62</sup> This is also where Rancière parts company with Plato. For it is by destroying the primacy of *mimēsis* that democracy can manage to ‘tear itself away from the reign of excessive speech [i.e. the kind of mimetic and controlling falsity used by the orators]’.<sup>63</sup> Antiquity and history, it seems, against themselves and against the bias of such progressionist thinkers as Auerbach, can give a voice to others.

6.1 Here then, is the practical point of our argument. I would suggest that, as in the *Annales*, so in the text of Homer, and, finally, in Apuleius too, we find a cancellation of the opposition between legitimate and illegitimate speakers. It is this cancellation that will allow a common soldier to arouse the rabble, an ugly non-aristocratic renegade to oppose the Trojan expedition, and an Ass, a ‘truly radical other’, we might say, to speak philosophy.

We must hasten to add that these three different works achieve their shared ends by very different means. For, of course, neither Homer nor Apuleius employs indirect speech in the same way as Tacitus. Indeed, in Homer the rule is precisely the opposite. Characters, heroic or otherwise, invariably speak in direct speech (about half of all the lines in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*). In Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* the narrator *is* the character, of course (he is what narratologists call an internal narrator). When the narrator-ass himself speaks, and certainly in the description of the Judgement of Paris scene, Apuleius does not use the infinitive mode or the indirect style.

How then, is the effect of ‘zero-degree of the infinitive’, that embodies a tenseless, timeless, equalising temporal/ethical modality in Tacitus, achieved

<sup>61</sup> 1994, 50.

<sup>62</sup> 1994, 51.

<sup>63</sup> 1994, 50. Rancière is discussing, above all, the French *Annales* school and Jules Michelet’s contribution to our understanding of the French Revolution. But his arguments reflect back, inevitably, to our understanding of ancient history.

in these works? Homer does it by means of a much more powerful linguistic device: the homogenous, artificial, formulaic hexameter style. Quite simply: the Homeric metrical form, the hexameter, forces all and any Homeric words into one identical formal, artificial, formulaic verbal mould. The words of the poet who sings in the present, and words, in direct speech, uttered by the heroic characters of the distant epic past are, in metrical/formulaic form and in modality, identical. Thus, the ugly, seditious, and disorderly Thersites, since he too speaks perfect Homeric hexameter, is, for all his shortcomings, as much a meaningful speaker as the greatest of heroes, or indeed, as meaningful as the very song of Homer himself!<sup>64</sup>

And in Apuleius? In the *Metamorphoses*, as we have just noted, the most fundamental modality of narration is that which co-aligns Lucius, curious youth, Ass, and devotee of Isis in the single voice of the narrator (all narration is posterior to event, of course). All narrative is the Ass's *Ich-Erzählung*). But the suspension of meaning and truth, of past and present, of narrated object and narrating subject, is perhaps most prominently and significantly marked, not surprisingly, in the prologue to the work, that is to say, in its programmatic 'prologic' declaration. Here the opposition between a legitimate and illegitimate speaker is cancelled, above all by abdicating identity. This can be seen, for example, in the unanswerable question *Quis ille?*<sup>65</sup> It is likewise achieved in the prologue by the narrator claiming his provenance everywhere, by both threatening and cajoling, by abjuring his own eloquence in exceptionally eloquent style, and so on. Likewise, in the passage dealing with the Judgement of Paris, the suspension is achieved, as we can now clearly see, by the Ass's self-annulling comments: 'So now we are going to have to stand an ass lecturing us on philosophy?'

6.2 It is, it seems to me, precisely at this point that we can return to the Neoplatonist stance, to the relation between *eikōn* and *symbolon*, between *mimē-*

<sup>64</sup> Heroes, lowly soldiers, and great poets thus have identical ontological status *in the immediate performative now, even as the bias and repression associated with their asymmetrical relationships are exposed*. Indeed, this union of past and present embraces *any and every now* of the performance in the ever-changing enunciative present of the very words spoken.

<sup>65</sup> Indeed, as I and others have pointed out, this question is phrased, not in the expected first person *Quis ego?* or *Quis sum?*, but in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, *Quis ille?* We should understand the problem in terms of Benveniste's distinction between *histoire* and *discours* (see above, note 57): since the speaker is referring to himself, we would expect the 1<sup>st</sup> person modality that characterises *discours*, but find the 3<sup>rd</sup> person usage, which characterises *histoire*. For a wide range of comments on *Quis ille?* by various authors, see the index entry in Kahane & Laird 2001, 300–301.

sis and hidden hintings, which relies, as we have seen, perhaps unexpectedly, from Rancière's brief discussion, on a 'Platonic' argument against the illusion of *mimēsis*, and in this sense, on the suspension of the relation between meaning and truth, not in order to defer it, but precisely in order to establish a regime of truth. This regime, I must stress again, does not absolve antiquity of its biases or of the ethical responsibility that is inseparable from such biases. Quite the contrary, it prevents their elision, and, lest we think that we have progressed to better things today, it places upon us the responsibility of recognition. It gives a hearing not merely to (otherwise muted) radical others, but perhaps also to the past in general and, indeed, to the practice of history.

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