

Playing with Elegy:
Tales of Lovers in Books
1 and 2 of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

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In the brief prologue to his *Metamorphoses*, the narrator makes it clear to his reader that his novel will be a literary game, involving changes of both language and style in a manner best described as that of a 'circus rider' (*iam haec equidem ipsa vocis immutatio desultoriae scientiae stilo quem accessimus respondet*, 'Now, in fact, this very change of language corresponds to the style which we have undertaken—that of the skill of a circus rider,' *Met.* 1,1,6). Immediately after this programmatic statement, he makes a bid for his reader's attention—*lector intende* (*Met.* 1,1,6)—and the imperative is undoubtedly meant to alert the reader to the highly allusive nature of the text. In order to 'be delighted' (*laetaberis*, *Met.* 1,1,6), Apuleius hints, one must pay attention to the complicated interweavings of language, style, and, allusion within the narrative.¹

It is only appropriate that this narrative—the story of Lucius, a man who falls prey to the interconnected worlds of sex and magic—should encompass

¹ On Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* as a highly allusive text, cf. e.g., Sarafov 1976, 537: 'On connaît bien la variété du style d'Apulée, ainsi que la virtuosité de sa langue. Si dans l'Apologie on retrouve le style de Cicéron, les *Métamorphoses* portent l'empreinte de diverses influences. Dans l'*Asinus aureus* coexistent des mots et des tournures empruntés aux poètes archaïques, ainsi qu'aux auteurs de l'époque d'Auguste, au latin familier, à la langue contemporaine d'Apulée qui regorge de néologismes... La plupart des mots empruntés par Apulée aux auteurs de l'âge d'Auguste se retrouvent aussi bien chez Ovide que chez d'autres poètes de la même période: Tibulle, Properce, Horace, Virgile... Lucrèce et Catulle.' On epic allusions in Apuleius, cf. esp. Harrison 1997, 53–73 and Frangoulidis 1990, who focuses primarily on Vergilian influences on Apuleius' novel. Studies of elegy in Apuleius tend to center upon the central embedded narrative of Cupid and Psyche, such as Parker – Murgatroyd 2002, 400–404, and Mattiacci 1998, 127–149.

within its allusive scope the genre of elegy. With its emphasis on the suffering of the lover reduced to almost nothing by the whims of a cruel mistress and, often, the magic practices of a grasping witch, elegy provides many of the paradigms for Lucius' misadventures in the novel.² The central elegiac figures of the lover (*amator*), the mistress (*domina*), and the witch (*saga*) appear numerous times in the *Metamorphoses*, and in various guises. Often, however, Apuleius combines and conflates the traditional roles of the elegiac characters, in keeping with his promise of utilizing a 'circus performer's style,' with the result that elegy is assimilated into the complex literary game that Apuleius offers his readers throughout the novel.

In order to explore the many facets of Apuleius' game with elegy, it is necessary to look first at the general scheme of characters encountered most frequently in elegiac poetry, since an understanding of these figures will facilitate discussion of the many reversals described by Apuleius. The following table provides a brief, and necessarily simplified, description of each of the character types whose roles come to serve as elegiac 'watchwords' in Apuleius' narrative:³

<i>puella</i>	the poet's girlfriend (e.g., Ovid's Corinna, Propertius' Cynthia, Tibullus' Delia and Nemesis)
<i>domina</i> ⁴	the poet's girlfriend at her worst, characterized as a cruel mistress who enslaves her miserable poet-lover

² Apuleius was certainly familiar with the work of the Augustan elegists, as he provides in his Apology a brief discussion of the true identity of each poet's pseudonymous mistress: 'So they accuse Gaius Catullus of these things because he said "Lesbia" for "Clodia," ... and Propertius, who speaks of "Cynthia" to conceal "Hostia," and Tibullus, because "Plania" was in his mind but "Delia" in his verse' (*eadem igitur opera accusent C. Catullum, quod Lesbiam pro Clodia nominarit, ... et Propertium, qui Cynthia dicat, Hostiam dissimulet, et Tibullum, quod ei sit Plania in animo, Delia in versu*, Apul. Apol. 10,3). On Apuleius' discussion of the poets' mistresses and its relation to a similar passage in Ovid's *Tristia*, cf. Bright 1981, 356–366.

³ The cast of characters contained within this table reflects the standard assessment of the stock characters of Roman elegy, succinctly summarized by Sharrock 2002, who expands the list of conventional elegiac roles to include traditional themes as well: according to Sharrock, Ovid inherits from the poetry of his predecessors, Tibullus and Propertius, 'the topoi of love elegy: the locked-out lover, the slave go-between, the traditional symptoms of love, the rich rival, the witch-bawd, infidelity, the military, political, and poetic alternatives, and even the occasional successful erotic encounter' with the *puella* or *domina* (150).

⁴ For a fuller discussion of the role of the elegiac *puella* and/or *domina*, cf. e.g., Hallett 1973, 103–124; Wyke 1987, 153–178; and Keith 1994, 27–40.

<i>lena</i> ⁵	the ‘procuress,’ who acts as a go-between for the poet’s unfaithful girlfriend and her myriad lovers (e.g., Ovid’s Dipsas at <i>Am.</i> 1,8; Phryne in Tib. 2,6); the <i>lena</i> often exhibits magical powers (such as Ovid’s Dipsas or Propertius’ Acanthis at Prop. 4,5)
<i>anus</i>	the ‘old hag’ invested with magical powers who tries to ruin the poet’s relationship with his mistress; on very rare occasions the <i>anus</i> can be a good figure, such as Delia’s mother, who seeks to join, rather than separate, the lovers (Tib. 1,6)
<i>saga</i>	the professional “witch,” who uses her magic powers to ruin the poet’s relationship with his mistress; often, she is also an <i>anus</i>
<i>exclusus amator</i>	the lover ‘locked out’ of his mistress’s house who typically laments his exclusion at (or even to) his mistress’s door

The frequent appearance of these elegiac figures, as well as the kinds of scenes that traditionally accompany them, creates within the narrative of the *Metamorphoses* a sort of elegiac framework over which Apuleius consistently refashions the roles of *puella*, *domina*, *lena*, *saga/anus*, and *amator* in order to create a highly complicated network of character roles that branches out around the central figure of Lucius, the text’s primary internal *lector*. His ability to read (or, most often, *misread*) the conflation of elegiac roles depends upon the presence of elegiac discourse and imagery, which creates a richly allusive theme of eroticism in the narrative.

Let the Games Begin: Elegy at Work in Aristomenes’ Tale

The chain of erotic events begins early in Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses*, with the first of the novel’s many embedded narratives—the tale of Aristomenes. As Lucius, the primary narrator, is making his way to Thessaly on business (*Thessaliam ex negotio petebam*, *Met.* 1,2,1), he joins company with two other travelers, Aristomenes and an unnamed companion. After Lucius hears the unnamed man dismiss Aristomenes as a liar (*parce... in verba ista haec tam absurda tamque immania mentiendo*, ‘Stop telling those

⁵ For more on the *lena* figure, cf. especially Gutzwiller 1985, 153–178 and Myers 1996, 1–21. Myers identifies the *lena* as ‘the opposite of the amatory mistress, as old and ugly as [the *domina*] is young and beautiful’ (1) and connects the *lena* very closely with the figure of the *saga*: the *lena* ‘is bibulous, mercenary, and dangerously magical, a witch’ (6), who is the natural enemy of the poet-lover (18–19). Wyke 1987 also identifies the *lena* as the ‘polar opposite’ of the elegiac mistress (167) and discusses Propertius’ Acanthis at length (165–170).

such ridiculous and monstrous lies of yours,' *Met.* 1,2,5), his curious nature (*curiosus*) prompts him to ask Aristomenes to share his story (*impertite sermones*, *Met.* 1,2,6). Before Aristomenes can reply, however, his companion interrupts with a second warning about the lying nature of the tale (*Met.* 1,3,1):

'ne,' inquit, 'istud mendacium tam verum est quam siqui velit dicere magico susurramine amnes agiles reverti, mare pigrum conligari, ventos inanimes exspirare, solem inhiberi, lunam despumari, stellas evelli, diem tolli, noctem teneri.'

He said, 'This lie of yours is only as true as if someone were to say that, through magical whispering, swift rivers are turned back, the sea is bound back, the winds die down lifeless, the sun is held back, the moon runs dry, the stars are plucked from the sky, the day is held in check, the night is prolonged.'⁶

The list of *adynata* which Aristomenes' companion includes is, of course, intended to dissuade Lucius from listening credulously, but many of the impossible elements mentioned recur within Aristomenes' tale as proof that 'things which seem very difficult at first hearing may prove easily done after all.'⁷ More importantly, the speech of Aristomenes' companion introduces the theme of magic, which becomes a key feature of the novel, and is intimately linked with the role of elegy in the *Metamorphoses*.

When Aristomenes at last begins his tale, he explains that he first came to Thessaly on business (much like Lucius), but that, when his business venture failed, he sought the city baths, 'worn out by the pointless speed' of his journey (*inefficaci celeritate fatigatus*, *Met.* 1,5,5). Along the way, he encountered his old friend Socrates, who presented a very sorry image indeed (*Met.* 1,6,1):

humi sedebat scissili palliastro semiamictus, paene alius lurore, ad miseram maciem deformatus, qualia solent fortunae decermina stipes in triviis erogare.

⁶ All translations of Apuleius, as well as the elegists, are mine. The text of the *Metamorphoses* is that of the Teubner edition.

⁷ Tatum 1969, 497. For this theme, cf. also Lucius' rebuke of the man's skepticism at *Met.* 1,3, in which he states that there are many things that seem impossible, 'which, if you examine them a little more closely, you will find not only clear to see but also easy to do' (*quae si paulo accuratius exploraris, non modo compertu evidētia, verum etiam factu facilia senties*, *Met.* 1,3,3).

He was sitting on the ground, half-clothed in a ragged cloak, nearly someone else because of his sallow complexion, and disfigured into a wretched state of leanness, like the beggars who usually ask for alms at crossroads.

Moved by Socrates' 'ghostly image' (*larvale simulacrum*, *Met.* 1,6,3), Aristomenes says, he treated him to a bath and conducted him to his own room at a local inn, where he tried to revive him with food, wine, and conversation. After a considerable amount of time, Socrates began to tell his tale (*Met.* 1,7,4–10):

... ille imo de pectore cruciabilem suspirium ducens dextra saeviente frontem replaudens: 'me miserum,' inquit, 'qui dum voluptatem gladiatorii spectaculi satis famigerabilis consector, in has aerumnas incidi... spectaculum obiturus in quadam avia et lacunosa convalli a vastissimis latronibus obsessus atque omnibus privatus tandem evado et utpote ultime adfectus ad quandam cauponem Meroen, anum, sed admodum scitulam, devorto... quae me nimis quam humane tractare adorta cenae gratae atque gratuita ac mox urigine percita cubili suo adplicat. et statim miser, ut cum illa adquevi, ab unico congressu annosam ac pestilentem cladem contraho et ipsas etiam lacinias, quas boni latrones contegendo mihi concesserant, in eam contuli, operulas etiam, quas adhuc vegetus sacchariam faciens merebam, quoad me ad istam faciem, quam paulo ante vidisti, bona uxor et mala fortuna perduxit.'

... he drew out a tortured breath from deep within his chest and struck his forehead savagely with his right hand. 'Poor me!' he said. 'I fell into these troubles as I was pursuing the delight of a rather celebrated gladiatorial show. ... I was about to go to the show when I was attacked by huge robbers on a trackless and roughened path and robbed of everything. I went to stay with a certain innkeeper, Meroe, an old woman but still an attractive one... She began to treat me ever so kindly, and directed me to a welcome and free dinner and then, after she had been incited by lust for me, to her own bed. I was miserable as soon as I slept with her. From that one embrace I've gotten a long and painful destruction. I've even given her the very rags that the good robbers left for me to cover myself and the small wages I earned as a porter when I was still strong. So a good wife and bad luck have reduced me to that state which you witnessed a little while ago.'

Socrates' description of his wretched state corresponds closely to the state of the poet-lover in Augustan elegy. His exclamation *me miserum*, in particular, places him in the position of the 'wretched' elegiac lover who becomes a veritable slave to his typically cruel or neglectful mistress—so, for example, Propertius writes *misero ... mihi* when his speaker complains that his mistress is 'harsh' to him at Prop. 2,9a,42, and the Ovidian narrator exclaims *me miserum* at *Am.* 2,17,8 because he 'serves' a mistress who is beautiful but cruel (*servire puellae*, Ov. *Am.* 2,17,1). In much the same way, Socrates is made *miser* when his relationship with Meroe deprives him of all that he has, even his clothing and wages. That he surrenders everything to her seems to place her in the position of the grasping elegiac mistress, who is always on the lookout for extravagant gifts, such as Tibullus' Nemesis, whom the poet characterizes as a *rapax domina* (Tib. 2,4,25) who surrenders herself to any man who gives her expensive gifts but spurns those unable to afford her 'price' (*pretio victos excludis amantes*, Tib. 2,4,39).

It would appear, then, that Meroe has rejected Socrates in much the same way as the elegiac mistress traditionally dismisses her poet-lover: she leaves him 'sitting on the ground half-clothed' like a beggar (Apul. *Met.* 1,6) after depriving him of all his possessions, and he has become like a slave to her, just as the typical elegiac lover often laments his status as a 'slave to love' (*servus amoris erat*, Prop. 2,13b,35) and the fact that he is forced to 'serve' his mistress like one of her slaves (*servire puellae*, Ov. *Am.* 2,17,1; *hic mihi servitium video dominamque paratam*, Tib. 2,4,1).⁸ Indeed, even Socrates' physical appearance is symptomatic of the experience of the elegiac *servus amoris* mistreated by his mistress: he is 'sallow' almost beyond recognition (*paene alius lurore*, *Met.* 1,6,1) and 'disfigured to a wretched state of leanness' (*ad miseram maciem deformatus*, *Met.* 1,6,1), just as, in Propertian elegy, the lover often suffers from the 'pallor' (*pallorem nostrum*, Prop. 1,5,21–22; *pallescere*, Prop. 1,13,7; *pallidus esse*, Prop. 3,8,28) and 'thinness' (*per tenuem ossa mihi sunt numerata cutem*, Prop. 4,5,64) caused by his mistress's cruelty. According to Ovid, 'every lover' pales because 'this is a fitting color for the lover' (*palleat omnis amans: hic est color aptus amanti*, Ov. *Ars* 1,729), and 'sleepless nights thin out young men's bodies' (*attenuant iuvenum vigilatae corpora noctes*, Ov. *Ars* 1,735). By this measure, Socrates has indeed become the victim of a demanding *domina*, a concept that is underscored in the ensuing exchange with Aristomenes.

When Aristomenes rebukes his friend for preferring 'sexual pleasure and a leather-skinned whore' to his home and family (*qui voluptatem Veneriam*

⁸ On elegiac *servitium amoris*, cf. e.g., Lyne 2002, 359–362 and Sharrock 2002, 150–162.

et scortum scorteum Lari et liberis praetulisti, Met. 1,8,1), Socrates quickly silences him, for fear that his ‘intemperate tongue’ will bring him harm (*ne quam tibi lingua intemperante noxam contrahas, Met. 1,8,2*). When the astonished Aristomenes asks what sort of woman Meroe could be, Socrates replies (*Met. 1,8,4*):

Saga... et divini potens caelum deponere, terram suspendere, fontes durare, montes diluere, manes sublimare, deos infimare, sidera extinguere, Tartarum ipsum inluminare.

She’s a witch... and she has the supernatural ability to bring down the sky, to raise up the earth, to freeze running streams, to crumble mountains, to draw up the *manes*, to cast down the gods, to put out the stars, to illuminate Tartarus itself.

The catalogue of Meroe’s skills not only recalls the list of *adynata* described by Aristomenes’ companion at *Met. 1,3*, but it also serves to locate the relationship of Socrates and Meroe more firmly within the elegiac tradition. Indeed, the powers of the ‘witch’ Meroe (*saga*) resemble those typically attributed to the ‘witch’ figures of elegy (*sagae*), who often use their magic to bring ruin upon the elegiac lover. So Ovid’s ‘old hag Dipsas’ (*Dipsas anus, Ov. Am. 1,8,2*)—who has the power to control running waters (*liquidas aquas, Ov. Am. 1,8,6*), the clouds and sun (*Ov. Am. 1,8,9–10*), stars and moon (*Ov. Am. 1,8,11–12*), earth (*findit humum, Ov. Am. 1,8,18*), and the spirits of the dead (*Ov. Am. 1,8,17*)—tries to convince the poet’s mistress to reject him in favor of wealthier men (*Ov. Am. 1,8,57–62*). Likewise, Tibullus complains that Delia listens to ‘the teachings of a grasping witch’ (*sagae praecepta rapacis, Tib. 1,5,59*) who is ‘bent on [his] death’ (*venit in exitium... meum, Tib. 1,5,48*). Only in one case does a *saga* actually aid the elegist, the witch of Tibullus 1,2, who supposedly furnishes the poet with spells to attract his mistress. The Tibullan witch’s magic skills, however, are attested as proof of her power—just as Socrates catalogues Meroe’s supernatural abilities to explain the extent of his own ruination—and are quite similar to the powers attributed to Dipsas and Meroe (*Tib. 1,2,43–50*):

*hanc ego de caelo ducentem sidera vidi,
fluminis haec rapidi carmine vertit iter,
haec cantu finditque solum Manesque sepulcris
elicit et tepido devocat ossa rogo:*

...

*cum libet, haec tristi depellit nubila caelo,
cum libet aestivo convocat orbe nives.*

I saw (the witch) drawing the stars down from the sky. She changes the course of rapid rivers with her song, she splits open the earth with her chanting, and calls the *manes* forth from their tombs and calls down bones from warm pyres. When she wants, she drives the clouds away from a sad sky; when she wants, she conjures up snow in a summer sky.

When Meroe's powers are viewed in tandem with those of the *sagae* described by Ovid and Tibullus, it becomes clear that she fits into the tradition of the elegiac witch. The fact that Socrates describes her as an *anus* only strengthens the association since, in the poetry of the elegists, the *saga* is always an old woman, like Ovid's *Dipsas anus* or the *anus* who 'sings with her magic song' at Tib. 1,5,12 (*carmine cum magico praecinuisset anus*).⁹

Although Meroe looks much like the elegiac *saga*, there is nevertheless a single, key difference that prevents a one-to-one correspondence between Meroe and the witch of elegy: the elegists' *sagae* always act on behalf of someone else and use their magic to affect that person's lover; Meroe acts in her own interest and afflicts her own lover with destitution. Thus Meroe, in Socrates' description at least, takes on the characteristics of both *domina* and *saga*. She robs Socrates of all his possessions to make him *miser*, as Nemesis does Tibullus and Cynthia does Propertius, but at the same time she works her *own* love magic, either to make men fall in love with her (*Met.* 1,8) or to punish former lovers who have been unfaithful (*Met.* 1,9).

When Meroe at last makes her entrance into Aristomenes' tale, however, she resists identification with both of these roles. Instead of the harmful *saga/anus* or the *domina* who has wronged her lover, Meroe herself looks much like the elegiac *amator*. Even when she uses her magic powers to break down the locked doors of the room shared by Aristomenes and Socrates, she closely resembles the *exclusus amator*, or 'locked-out lover,' of elegy, as a comparison of her break-in with Propertius' description of his inability to enter Cynthia's house elucidates (*Met.* 1,11,7):

⁹ For other aged witches in elegy, cf. e.g., Prop. 2,4,16: *quae mea non decies somnia versat anus?* ('What old hag [has] not reflect[ed] on my dreams ten times?') and Tib. 1,8,17–18: *num te... devovit tacito tempore noctis anus?* ('Has an old hag cursed you in the night's silent hour?').

*Commodum quieveram, et repente impulsu maiore quam ut latrones crederes **ianuae reserantur**, immo vero fractis et evolsis funditus **cardinibus** prosternuntur.*

I had just lain down when, all of a sudden, with a greater force than you would think robbers could make, the doors were unbarred—rather, they were thrown down, their hinges broken and utterly torn off.

Prop. 1,16,17–26:

***Ianua** vel domina penitus crudelior ipsa,
quid mihi tam duris clausa taces foribus?
cur numquam **reserata** meos admittis amores,
nescia furtivas reddere mota preces?*

...

*tu sola humanos numquam miserata dolores
respondes tacitis mutua **cardinibus**.*

Door crueler than my mistress within, why are you so silent, your harsh gates cruel to me? Why don't you ever open up and let in my love? Don't you know how to answer furtive entreaties when moved? ... You alone never pity human misery, and you respond silently, with mute hinges.

The linguistic similarities between Propertius' and Aristomenes' descriptions unmistakably link the two scenes.¹⁰ As a consequence, Meroe is placed in a position parallel to that of the Propertian lover. She is locked out by the bolted door, but, unlike the lover in Propertius' poem, her exclusion is only momentary; a sudden, and rather comic, reversal of the situation occurs when she uses her magic to break down the very doors that keep her outside. She overcomes the physical limitations of the typical *exclusus amator*, yet still envisions herself as the grieving, abandoned lover, as the address to her sister Panthia reveals (*Met.* 1,12,4–6):

'hic est, soror Panthia, carus Endymion, hic Catamitus meus, qui diebus ac noctibus inlusit aetatulam meam, hic qui meis amoribus subterhabitis

¹⁰ The scene of Meroe's break-in may also have some resonance with Cynthia's sudden intrusion on the poet's tryst with Phyllis and Teia in Prop. 4,8, where the poet describes how 'the doors creaked noisily on their hinges' (*cum subito rauci sonuerunt cardine postes*, Prop. 4,8,49) as Cynthia flung them back (... *totas resupinat Cynthia valvas*, Prop. 4,8,51), and how a table 'fell over' (*reccidit*, Prop. 4,8,44), its feet in the air like those of Aristomenes' bed (*grabattulus... recidens in inversum*, Apul. *Met.* 1,11,8).

non solum me diffamat probris, verum etiam fugam instruit. at ego scilicet Ulixi astu deserta vice Calypsonis aeternam solitudinem flebo.'

'Here, my sister Panthia, is my dear Endymion. Here is my Ganymede, who trifled with my tender little age day and night. Here is the one who not only defamed me with slanderous remarks but also added his flight to them when he thought my love beneath him. But of course I'll weep for my eternal loneliness like Calypso, abandoned by the cunning of my Ulysses.'

Here, in direct contrast to Socrates' description of his mistreatment, Meroe shows 'her superior treatment of Socrates, as she compares her love for him with those of the Moon and Jupiter in their respective affairs with the young mortals Endymion and Ganymedes.'¹¹ Her words are clearly 'intended as a "correction" of Socrates' negative portrayal of her,'¹² and she, in effect, reverses their roles as earlier defined by Socrates: instead of the wretched elegiac lover (*Met.* 1,7), he now occupies a position like that of the *domina*, since he has 'deserted' Meroe (*deserta*, *Met.* 1,12,6) and left her locked out of his room; Meroe, by contrast, has become, instead of a cruel mistress, an attentive yet abandoned lover, as her self-comparison to Calypso illustrates.

In elegy, the nymph Calypso epitomizes the rejected and abandoned lover. Propertius mentions her three times in his elegies, each time in conjunction with her abandonment by Ulysses: she is, together with Medea, a *deserta femina* at Prop. 2,21,16, while at Prop. 3,12,31 she is 'the weeping Aeaeian girl' who laments that Ulysses 'has left her bedchamber' (*et thalamum Aeaeae flentis fugisse puellae*). Finally, at Prop. 1,15,9–10, the poet states that 'Calypso, moved by the departure of the Ithacan, once wept for deserted seas' (... *Ithaci digressu mota Calypso/ desertis olim flevemat aequoribus*). In each case, Calypso laments her status as an abandoned woman (*deserta*), and it is with this aspect of Calypso that Meroe aligns herself by calling herself *deserta*. Significantly, however, Meroe's remark is rather sarcastically stated (*at ... scilicet*, *Met.* 1,12,6), as if she rejects the comparison even as she makes it. As a result, a degree of tension develops within Meroe's rather positive self-representation, which seems to indicate that she may not be the innocent victim she claims to be. Instead, her 'clear disapproval of the behavior of Calypso... prefigures her assumption of the role of a vindictive witch, familiar to the tale's audience... from Socrates' earlier

¹¹ Frangoulidis 1999, 380.

¹² *Ibid.*

narrative of her exploits' at *Met.* 1,9–10.¹³ It is this role that Meroe now assumes, as she and Panthia extract the sleeping Socrates' heart and urinate over Aristomenes' face while he lies trapped under his bed (*Met.* 1,13). Immediately afterward, the vindictive women depart, and the broken doors are magically restored to their former, tightly locked state (*commodum limen evaserat, et fores ad pristinum statum integrae resurgunt*, *Met.* 1,14,1). Thinking Socrates dead, Aristomenes vainly attempts suicide to escape a charge of murder (*Met.* 1,16),¹⁴ but finds his friend miraculously alive, even after the removal of his heart. The next day, however, the severely weakened Socrates—looking perhaps even more like an elegiac lover who has suffered a bout with his *domina* (... *aliquanto intentiore macie atque pallore buxco deficientem video*, 'I saw him weakening with a considerably more drawn leanness and a pallor like that of boxwood,' *Met.* 1,19,1)—actually does die as Aristomenes tries to help him leave town (*Met.* 1,19). Aristomenes, still afraid of being charged with murder (*quasi conscius mihi caedis humanae*, *Met.* 1,19,12), leaves his home and family and resettles in Aetolia, where he begins life anew (*Met.* 1,20).

The constant shifting of the elegiac roles of the lover, *domina*, and *anus/saga* within Aristomenes' tale keeps Apuleius' reader playing at a "who's who" game. The ever-changing identity of the suffering lover and the ever-shifting balance of power within the story invite the reader to ponder over the narrative, which is itself consciously allusive, rife with elegiac vocabulary, themes, and motifs. At the very heart of the tale lies Aristomenes' reproach of Socrates for putting home and family second to sexual pleasure, a remark that ultimately serves to condemn the immorality of Socrates' relationship with Meroe. An attentive reader—as Apuleius calls for in the prologue to the *Metamorphoses* (*lector intende*, *Met.* 1,1,6)—will, of course, perceive the moral *exemplum* at the heart of the story, and use its

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Aristomenes' actions immediately after Socrates' presumed death also have affinities with the behavior of the elegiac lover. As Mattiacci 1998, 129 has shown, his 'pressing but vain request for the *ianitor* to open the door of the inn... can also be seen as an adaptation distorting a motif in the erotic poetry as well, that of the *paraclausithyron* [= *exclusus amator*].' For a fuller treatment of the scene as elegy, cf. Mattiacci 1993, 257–267, who examines Aristomenes' invocation of his bed as an elegiac topos. Frangoulidis 1999, 383 has also stated that Aristomenes' inability to leave his room, 'followed by his failed attempt to commit suicide, reveals his limited abilities in comparison with the witches.' Aristomenes' 'limited abilities' would make his situation typical of that of the locked out (or, in this case, locked in) elegiac lover, as opposed to the situation of Meroe, whose magic powers allow her to transcend the typical impotence of the *exclusus amator*.

values to evaluate the other tales of sex and magic in the novel. But what about the *inattentive* reader? What will he or she take away from Aristomenes' tale? Apuleius provides us with a perfect example of this *lector inattentus* in the figure of Lucius himself, who clearly misunderstands the importance of Aristomenes' words, and becomes quite *miser* himself as a direct result of his indulgence in sex and magic.¹⁵

Lucius' Erotic Adventures: A Replay of Socrates and Meroe?

Despite the fact that he should probably understand Aristomenes' tale as a warning against the insidious effects of sex and magic, Lucius pronounces it a mere 'charming story' (*lepidae fabulae*, *Met.* 1,20,5) that serves to lighten the strain of a long and difficult journey (*asperam denique ac prolixam viam sine labore ac taedio evasi*, *Met.* 1,20,5). Later, when he arrives at the house of his host, Milo, it becomes abundantly clear that the story has had exactly the wrong effect on him (*Met.* 2,1,1–2):

Ut primum nocte discussa sol novus diem fecit et somno simul emersus et lectulo, anxius alioquin et nimis cupidus cognoscendi quae rara miraque sunt, reputansque me media Thessaliae loca tenere, qua artis magicae nativa cantamina totius orbis consono ore celebrentur, fabulamque illam optimi comitis Aristomenis de situ civitatis huius exortam, suspensus alioquin et voto simul et studio curiose singula considerabam.

As soon as the night had been shaken off, a new sun brought forth the day, and I emerged from my bed and from sleep at the same time, somewhat anxious and quite eager to see what strange and miraculous things there were. Remembering that I was in the heart of Thessaly, where the native incantations of the magic arts are celebrated with one voice throughout the entire world, and that my excellent friend Aristomenes' story arose from the site of this city, I was quite in suspense with both hope and eagerness, and I was curiously examining everything in detail.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g., Lucius' description of himself as *miserum me* at *Apul. Met.* 3,27,7 where he is beaten by his own slave shortly after being turned into an ass. Lucius' treatment at the hands of the slave is actually mild compared to the treatment that he receives later in the novel at the hands of the robbers (Books 4–6) and the wicked miller's wife (described as *saeva scaeva virosa ebriosa pervicax pertinax*, 'a cruel, perverse, man-crazy, drunken, obstinate, stubborn woman,' at *Apul. Met.* 9,14,4), so that his experiences as an ass gradually become more 'wretched' as the novel progresses.

Lucius is, in fact, raptly investigating his surroundings (*attonitus... cuncta circumibam*, *Met.* 2,2,1), when he suddenly finds himself in the town market (*repente me nescius forum cupidinis intuli*, *Met.* 2,2,3). Here he encounters, but does not recognize, his aunt Byrrhena, and we, as Apuleius' readers, receive confirmation of the fact that Lucius is a bad reader, as Niall Slater has shown: 'Lucius can read the signs of status,' such as Byrrhena's elegant dress and bearing and the train of servants accompanying her, 'but he cannot remember far back enough in his childhood to recognize Byrrhena ... We thus begin to realize that Lucius, for all his eagerness to see beyond the surface, is not as adept at visual reading as he thinks he is.'¹⁶

Apart from visual reading, Lucius is also somewhat limited in his ability to 'read' what he hears, for, when he accompanies Byrrhena to her home at *Met.* 2,3,6 (*ad domum Byrrhenae pervenimus*), he ignores a second warning about the dangers of magic. While he is busy marveling at the statues in the *atrium* of Byrrhena's house, she sends her servants away in order to have a private word with him (*Met.* 2,5):

quibus dispulsis omnibus: 'per hanc,' inquit, 'deam, o Luci carissime... cave tibi, sed cave fortiter a malis artibus et facinorosis illecebris Pamphiles illius, quae cum Milone isto, quem dicis hospitem, nupta est. maga primi nominis et omnis carminis sepulchralis magistra creditur, quae... omnem istam lucem mundi sideralis imis Tartari et in vetustum chaos submergere novit. nam simul quemque conspexerit speciosae formae iuvenem, venustate eius sumitur et ilico in eum et oculum et animum detorquet. serit blanditias, invadit spiritum, amoris profundi pedicis aeternis alligat... haec tibi trepido et cavenda censeo. nam et illa uritur perpetuum et tu per aetatem et pulchritudinem capax eius es.'

When all the slaves had been dismissed, she said, 'By this goddess, my dearest Lucius... look out for yourself and take strong precautions against the evil arts and wicked allurements of that Pamphile, who is married to the Milo whom you say is your host. She's a witch of the first rank and is believed to be a master of every kind of sepulchral spell. She knows how to plunge all the light of the starry world into the depths of Tartarus and how to plunge the world into ancient chaos. As soon as she has spotted a young man of handsome appearance, she is consumed by desire for him, and right then and there she turns her eye and her mind

¹⁶ Slater 1998, 29.

toward him. She sows the seeds of flattery,¹⁷ invades his spirit, binds him with the eternal shackles of deep love... I fear these things for your sake, and I think you must take care, because she is always on fire and you are susceptible to this because of your age and beauty.'

According to Byrrhena, Pamphile is endowed with many of the same abilities as Meroe; she can control the very workings of the earth, but uses her magic to lure young lovers to her bed. If he were a good reader, Lucius should recognize the similarities between the two *sagae* and be able to read Aristomenes' warnings about Meroe into Byrrhena's admonition to 'take strong precautions' against Pamphile. Quite to the contrary, however, he becomes more anxious to see magic performed, and even debates whether he should surrender himself willingly to Pamphile's powers (*tantum a cautela Pamphiles afui, ut etiam ultro gestirem tali magisterio me volens ampla cum mercede tradere*, 'I was so far from being wary of Pamphile that I even longed to surrender myself, willingly and voluntarily, at high cost, to such instruction,' *Met.* 2,6,1–2) for the sake of witnessing the magic acts he has always hoped to see (*artis magicae semper optatum nomen*, *Met.* 2,6,1). He immediately bids Byrrhena farewell and hurries back to Milo's house 'like an insane man' (*amenti similis*, *Met.* 2,6,4).

Along the way, he begins to devise a way in which he can gain access to Pamphile's magic, and his desire to see magic performed is quickly transformed into a sexual desire as he decides to seduce Pamphile's maid, Photis. Although she was merely 'some young woman' to him when he first arrived at Milo's house (*adulescentula quaedam*, *Met.* 1,22,2), he now imagines her as his lover (*Met.* 2,6,5–7):

'age,' inquam, 'o Luci, evigila et tecum esto. habes exoptatam occasionem: ex voto diutino poteris fabulis miris explere pectus... Photis formula petatur enixe. nam et forma scitula et moribus ludicra et prorsus argutula est. vesperi quoque cum somno concederes, et in cubiculum te deduxit... quam invita discederet, vultu prodidit, denique saepe retrorsa respiciens substitit.'

¹⁷ *Blanditia* is a particularly elegiac word, traditionally used to describe the 'flattery' through which the elegist attempts to gain access to his mistress. It occurs only here in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, but its usage in elegy is quite frequent. Cf., e.g., Prop. 1,9,30; 1,6,16; 4,6,72; Tib. 1,1,72; 1,2,93; 1,9,77; Ov. *Am.* 1,2,35; 1,4,66; 2,1,21; 2,9b,45; 2,19,17; 3,7,11; 3,11a,31; Ov. *Ars* 1,439; 1,480; 1,571; 2,159; 2,466; Ov. *Rem.* 35 and 507.

‘Come on now, Lucius,’ I said, ‘be vigilant and keep your wits about you. You have the opportunity you’ve hoped for. After long hoping you will be able to fill your heart with wondrous tales... Let the servant Photis be strenuously sought. She has an attractive appearance and playful ways and is quite witty. Yesterday evening when you yielded to sleep and she led you to your bedroom... she betrayed how unwillingly she left you with her expression, and then she stopped and turned around often, looking back at you.’

Photis’ departure from Lucius’ room, as he imagines it, looks much like the scene of lovers parting at Tib. 1,3, where the poet recalls how unwillingly he left his mistress, Delia, when he embarked on a military campaign. Tibullus describes how Delia ‘looked back on [their] paths’ (*nostras respiceretque vias*, Tib. 1,3,14) as he delayed their parting (*quaedam tardas anxius usque moras*, Tib. 1,3,16), and their anxiety over separating prompts him to proclaim, ‘Let no one dare to depart when Love is unwilling’ (*audeat invito ne quis discedere Amore*, Tib. 1,3,21). Apuleius’ use of *discederet* and *respi-ciens* in Lucius’ description of Photis recalls Tibullus’ *discedere* and *respi-ceret*, with the result that Photis’ actions come to resemble those of Delia in Tibullus’ elegy. She becomes, by extension, the elegiac mistress who cannot bear to part from her lover.

When Lucius casts Photis as his elegiac lady love before initiating a relationship with her, he places himself in the role of the intrepid *amator*, confident in his ability to win the maid.¹⁸ Significantly, his calculated intent to use a slave to gain access to her mistress (albeit only to her magic) is a tactic endorsed by Ovid in his *Ars Amatoria* 1,351–386:¹⁹

*Sed prius ancillam captandae nosse puellae
cura sit: accessus molliet illa tuos.*

*Proxima consiliis dominae sit ut illa, videto,
neve parum tacitis conscia fida iocis.*

...

*Quaeris, an hanc ipsam prosit violare ministram?
Talibus admissis alea grandis inest.*

¹⁸ For the confident lover, cf. esp. Ovid’s advice to the would-be seducer at *Ars* 1,343: *ergo age, ne dubita cunctas sperare puellas* (‘Therefore, go! Don’t hesitate to hope for all girls’).

¹⁹ Cf. *Ov. Am.* 2,7 and 2,8, in which the poet describes his affair with Corinna’s hairdresser, Cypassis: he seduces Cypassis only after he has already won Corinna, but the vengeful Corinna punishes them both nonetheless.

...
*Si tamen illa tibi, dum dat recipitque tabellas,
 corpore, non tantum sedulitate placet,
 fac domina potiare prius, comes illa sequatur:
 non tibi ab ancilla est incipienda venus.*

But first take care to get to know the slave of the woman to be caught; she will make your approach easy. Make sure that she is very close to her mistress's plans and that she can be trusted to know of your secret game... You ask: does it help to seduce the servant herself? There is great risk in such actions... If, however, you find her body, not just her services, pleasing while she delivers and receives your love letters, see to it that you possess her mistress first. Let the maid come second; you must not begin your wooing with the slave girl.

Unlike the Ovidian seducer, however, Lucius will make *Photis ancilla* his lover (*Met.* 1,26,1), and so presumably incur any 'risks' involved. Once again he proves a bad reader, and falls short of elegiac expectations: although he envisions himself as a bold *amator*, he goes about obtaining his goal (to observe Pamphile's magic) in exactly the wrong way, by seducing Pamphile's slave before gaining access to Pamphile herself.

Despite the fact that Lucius fails to follow the precepts of elegiac seduction, his sexual encounters with Photis look much like elegiac scenes of love. When Photis first comes to his bed at *Met.* 2,16, for example, she comes bearing wine and rose garlands (*corollae*), objects that help to characterize the scene as an encounter between an elegiac lover and his mistress. In elegy, garlands frequently serve as love gifts (cf. e.g., Prop. 1,3,21–22; 1,16,6–7; 3,5,21–22; Ov. *Ars* 2,528), and Propertius mentions wine (*meri*, Prop. 4,8,38) and roses (... *spargi munda sine arte rosa*, Prop. 4,8,40) when he describes a tryst with Phyllis and Teia in Book 4 of his elegies. Perhaps most important for the elegiac setting of the scene with Lucius and Photis, however, is the use of military metaphor to describe the sexual act, a common theme in the poetry of the elegists.²⁰

²⁰ The *locus classicus* for love as a type of warfare is Ov. *Am.* 1,9, which begins *militat omnis amans, et habet sua castra Cupido* ('every lover's a soldier, and Cupid has his own camp'). Ovid extends the metaphor to include 'commanders' (*duces*, Ov. *Am.* 1,9,5), 'hostile enemies' (*infestos hostes*, Ov. *Am.* 1,9,17), 'nighttime battles' (*nocturnaue bella*, Ov. *Am.* 1,9,45), and a description of how 'lovers move their own arms' (*amantes... sua... arma movent*, Ov. *Am.* 1,9,25–26). For more on *militia amoris* as an elegiac topos, cf. e.g., Lyne 2002, 350–359 and Sharrock 2002, 150–162.

After Photis removes her clothing, she calls for Lucius to ‘engage... and engage bravely’ (*proeliare... et fortiter proeliare*, *Met.* 2,17,3), and her use of the imperative *proeliare* recalls, for example, Propertius’ use of the noun *proelia* to refer to his sexual ‘battles’ with Cynthia (*nos contra angusto versamus proelia lecto*, *Prop.* 2,1,45). Photis then declares that ‘the day’s battle will not have a truce’ (*hodierna pugna non habet missionem*, *Met.* 2,17,3), and she and Lucius indulge in ‘grappling’ (*conluctantibus*, *Met.* 2,17,5) until daybreak, much as the Propertian lover and Cynthia ‘grapple’ (*luctuatur*) at *Prop.* 2,1,13. Later, when Lucius must dine with Byrrhaena, Photis grants him ‘a brief furlough from [his] amatory campaign’ (*amatoriae militiae brevem commeatum indulisit*, *Met.* 2,18,2), which much resembles the ‘campaign’ described by Ovid at *Ars* 2,233 (*militiae species amor est*). Thus the sexual relationship in which Lucius indulges with Photis is unmistakably set in elegiac terms; nonetheless, he never intends to make her his *domina*, as the elegists do their lovers. Although Photis is the object of his seduction, she remains only an *ancilla* and *puella*, whom Lucius exploits in order to gain access to the *domina* Pamphile. Because Photis never truly gains mastery over him, as the elegiac *domina* does over her lover, Lucius’ claim that he is ‘addicted, in the manner of a slave’ to Photis’ beauty (*in servilem modum addictum*, *Met.* 3,19,5) can be seen as an empty excuse to gain access to Pamphile’s magic. He appeals to the elegiac concept of *servitium amoris* to ingratiate himself with Photis so that she will allow him to watch Pamphile perform her magic,²¹ but his true desire remains to gain firsthand experience of magical practices. Thus he can swear to Photis at 3,22,5 that he will be her ‘slave forever’ (*sic tibi perpetuo pignera*) if she performs the ‘unrepayable favor’ of obtaining some of Pamphile’s magic ointment (*inremunerabili beneficio*), but can forget her entirely after his transformation into an ass.²²

²¹ For this idea, cf. also de Smet 1987, 616–617: ‘In the relationship between Photis and Lucius, the elements magic and eros cannot be seen [as] separated... Although Photis is not a witch herself and hardly actively involved in magic, she remains, via Pamphile, an instrument of the black art... In III,19, the link between eros and magic is complete. Lucius gives his indistinguishable urge to magic away to Photis... but immediately adds that hi[s] loving her has a magic cause because he thinks she is not *rerum <istarum> rudis vel experta* herself.’

²² Interestingly, Photis completely disappears from the narrative after Lucius has obtained his goal of experiencing magic. She last appears at *Apul. Met.* 3,26,2 where Lucius-turned-ass debates whether or not he should kill her as punishment for bringing him the wrong magic ointment: *diu denique ac multum mecum ipse deliberavi, an nequissimam ac facinorosissimamque illam feminam spissis calcibus feriens et mordicis adpetens necare deberem* (‘and so I deliberated with myself much and for a long time, whether I should kill that entirely worthless and criminal woman by striking her again and again

Because Lucius is motivated to seduce Photis only by his *curiositas* and not by any feelings of love for her, she cannot occupy the position of a true *domina*, and he cannot, by extension, be a true elegiac lover.

Because he treats Photis as a sort of go-between for himself and Pamphile, Lucius places the girl in the position of the *lena*, the ‘procuress’ who controls access to the elegiac *domina*, such as Ovid’s Dipsas, Propertius’ Acanthis, or Tibullus’ Phryne.²³ Photis, however, is not a true *lena*, just as she is not a true elegiac mistress. She does not hinder Lucius in his attempts to witness Pamphile’s magic, whereas the *lena* traditionally hinders the elegiac lover in his efforts to see his mistress. Nor does Photis possess any of the magic powers typically associated with *lenae*. Indeed, Photis acts as Pamphile’s agent on occasion—when she procures a young Boeotian’s hair clippings for use in one of Meroe’s love charms, for example (*Met.* 3,16)—but she does not, by herself, practice magic or procure lovers for her mistress as the *lenae* of elegy do. Rather, Pamphile performs her own magic and obtains her own lovers, as Meroe does in Aristomenes’ tale, and thus outstrips Photis in the role of the *lena* as well as that of the *saga* and the *domina*. Lucius’ exploitation of Photis as a *lena* figure thus serves to characterize her as a failed procuress, who does not exactly resemble the wicked go-between represented in elegy: although she introduces Lucius to Pamphile’s magic arts, she makes a grave mistake when she tries to co-opt Pamphile’s magic for herself. She fails to provide Lucius with the experience he desires by accidentally fetching the wrong magic ointment for him, and their pseudo-elegiac relationship ends when he does not achieve the results he wants.

Conclusion

Through the many reversals of elegiac roles in Apuleius’ description of Lucius’ erotic adventure with Photis, it becomes clear that Lucius, though not enslaved by an elegiac *domina*, is indeed enslaved by his passions. His

with my hooves and attacking her with my teeth’). The only reason he decides to spare her is that she could not help him change back into a human if she were dead: *melior me sententia revocavit, ne morte multata Photide salutare mihi suppetias rursus extinguerem* (‘better thinking called me to my senses, that if Photis were punished with death I would, in turn, destroy the help that would heal me,’ *Met.* 3,26,3).

²³ Dipsas tries to convince the poet’s mistress to repudiate him at *Ov. Am.* 1,8; Acanthis tries to persuade Cynthia to refuse Propertius’ advances in *Prop.* 4,5; an unnamed *lena* prevents Tibullus from seeing Delia at *Tib.* 1,5,39–48; and Phryne thwarts the poet’s advances by carrying Delia’s love letters to men other than him in *Tib.* 2,6.

strong desire to see magic performed and his eagerness to indulge in sex to achieve this goal make him forget about the business that he originally came to Thessaly to conduct (*ex negotio*, *Met.* 1,2,1), and he actually ‘renounces his home and former life to gain his desires.’²⁴ In this way, he becomes much like the figure of Socrates in Aristomenes’ tale, who is accused of giving up his home and family for ‘sexual pleasure and a leather-skinned whore’ (*Met.* 1,8,1). Both Socrates and Lucius are ultimately brought to ruin by a witch’s magic, but Lucius, unlike Socrates, has fair warning (from Aristomenes, then Byrrhaena) not to indulge in magic or sex while he is in Thessaly. His transformation into an ass results from his inability to ‘read’ the warnings he receives, both visual and aural, and he continues to pursue his *serviles* ... *voluptates* (*Met.* 11,15,1)—as exemplified by his gluttony and performance of hired sex for the *matrona* in Book 10—until he is threatened with the exhibition of his vices on the public stage. It is only when Lucius is scheduled to copulate with a condemned woman poisoner as the central attraction of a public show that he realizes the extent to which his passions have enslaved him and seeks quite literally to regain his humanity through the goddess Isis.

Throughout Books 1 and 2 of his *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius consistently deploys character types familiar from Roman elegy in a complex literary game that results in near-constant role changing among his characters. Meroe, we have seen, is alternately portrayed as a *domina*, a *saga*, and even an *exclusus amator* early in Book 1, while Lucius later manipulates the roles of *amator*, *puella*, and *domina* to gain access to Pamphile’s magic. The complex interplay of elegiac roles in *Metamorphoses* 1 and 2 keeps Apuleius’ reader playing at a literary “who’s who” game, which, importantly, connects with the *quis ille?* notion introduced in the prologue to the work (*Met.* 1,1,1). A *lector attentus*, as Apuleius calls for at the end of *Met.* 1,1, is needed to read and decipher who and what each of the characters is in Apuleius’ ever-changing and highly allusive game with Roman elegy. The intricate yet playful interconnection of elegiac roles and themes within the *Metamorphoses* both exemplifies a high level of literary self-consciousness and gives us, as readers, a glimpse of the author himself “at play” with the inherited literary tradition. The multi-faceted identities with which he endows his characters not only reflect the Second Sophistic interest in identity but also ‘solicit the pleasure, admiration and respect of the audience’²⁵ through a virtuoso performance that resembles that of a ‘circus rider.’ Only through participating

²⁴ Tatum 1969, 497, citing Apul. *Met.* 3,19.

²⁵ Whitmarsh 2005, 3.

in this literary game and watching closely the author's acrobatic manipulation of the literary tradition can Apuleius' reader realize the goal of the work: the pleasure of reading. As Apuleius himself writes, *lector, intende: laetaberis*.