

# Apuleius and Homer: Some Traces of the *Iliad* in the *Metamorphoses*

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## *1. Introduction*

The fundamental importance of Homeric allusion and intertextuality for the literary works of the Greek Second Sophistic is well established in modern scholarship;<sup>2</sup> equally firm is the agreement of scholars that the *Odyssey* is a key intertext for the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius,<sup>3</sup> who can plausibly be regarded as a participant in the sophistic literary revival working in the Latin-speaking West.<sup>4</sup> This paper, continuing a series of studies on the interrelation of ancient epic and novel,<sup>5</sup> looks at the neglected topic of the use of the *Iliad* in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. It will be seen that the *Iliad*, though it cannot rival the *Odyssey* in its overall significance for Apuleius' novel, makes its own contribution to the common pattern of treatment of epic in the *Metamorphoses*, by which elevated epic material is parodied and lowered for the less august parameters of prose fiction. It also provides further confirmation of the high learning demanded from the novel's implied reader, particularly when Iliadic allusion is skillfully combined with the use of later source texts.<sup>6</sup>

The most prominent Homeric citation in the *Metamorphoses* is the narrator Lucius' comparison of his own time as an ass to the voyages of Odysseus (9,13,4), which comes very close to verbatim quotation:

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<sup>1</sup> I should like to thank Michael Paschalis and Stavros Frangoulidis for their splendid organisation of the conference in Rethymnon.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Kindstrand 1973, Zeitlin 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. Harrison 1990, Frangoulidis 1992a, 1992b, 1992c.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Sandy 1997, Harrison 2000.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Harrison 1997, 1998, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> For the 'implied reader' and its complexities see Iser 1974.

*Nec inmerito priscae poeticae divinus auctor apud Graios summae prudentiae virum monstrare cupiens multarum civitatum obitu et variorum populorum cognitu (cf. *Iliad* 1,3 πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν) summas adeptum virtutes cecinit.*

Very rightly did the divine originator of ancient Greek poetry, when he wished to define a consummately wise man, sing of one who attained supreme virtue by visiting many cities and acquainting himself with many virtues.<sup>7</sup>

This is relatively unusual: most of the other examples of Odyssean imitation in the *Metamorphoses* discussed by scholars take the form of intertextual allusions of a traditional literary type, echoing themes, motifs and situations. It is my purpose here to collect and analyse similar Iliadic references in the novel, a task which scholarship seems not yet to have undertaken.<sup>8</sup> They fall into three categories: allusion to the Olympian apparatus of the Homeric gods, parody of Homeric battle-narrative and allusion in an Apuleian ekphrasis to its Homeric ancestor. All are subtle reworkings, which sometimes incorporate evident citation or paraphrase as a means of rapidly evoking the relevant Iliadic passage.

## 2. *Iliadic divine colour in 'Cupid and Psyche'*

In the *Metamorphoses* the Olympian gods appear only in the inserted tale of Cupid and Psyche, often seen as the part of the novel which engages most closely with epic texts.<sup>9</sup> At *Met.* 6,6,1-4 we find a typical Homeric scene in which Venus' chariot is prepared for use in Olympus:

*At Venus terrenis remediis inquisitionis abnuens caelum petit. Iubet instrui currum quem ei Vulcanus aurifex subtili fabrica studiose poliverat et ante thalami rudimentum nuptiale munus obtulerat limae tenuantis detrimento conspicuum et ipsius auri damno pretiosum. De multis quae circa cubiculum dominae stabulant procedunt quattuor candidae colum-*

<sup>7</sup> Tr. Kenney 1998.

<sup>8</sup> No items on Iliadic allusion are listed in the full bibliographical surveys of Schlam and Finkelpearl 2000 or in the account of Apuleian allusion in Finkelpearl 1998; commentaries note parallels but have no space for in-depth analysis.

<sup>9</sup> See Harrison 1998; some of the parallels which follow in this section are to be found in Kenney 1990 and Zimmerman *et al.* 2004, but only in summary form and without extensive comment.

*bae et hilaris incessibus picta colla torquentes iugum gemmeum subeunt susceptaque domina laetae subvolant. Currum deae prosequentes gannitu constrepenti lasciviunt passeret et ceterae quae dulce cantitant aves melleis modulis suave resonantes adventum deae pronuntiant. Cedunt nubes et Caelum filiae panditur et summus aether cum gaudio suscipit deam, nec obvias aquilas vel accipitres rapaces pertimescit magnae Veneris canora familia.*

Venus, however, had given up earthbound expedients in her search, and set off for heaven. She ordered to be prepared the car that Vulcan the goldsmith god had lovingly perfected with cunning workmanship and given her as a betrothal present – a work of art that made its impression by what his refining tools had pared away, valuable through the very loss of gold. Of the many doves quartered round their mistress's chamber there came forth four all white; stepping joyfully and twisting their coloured necks around they submitted to the jeweled yoke, then with their mistress on board they gaily took the air. The car was attended by a retinue of sportive sparrows frolicking around with their noisy chatter, and of other sweet-voiced birds who, singing in honey-toned strains, harmoniously proclaimed the advent of the goddess. The clouds parted, heaven opened for his daughter, and highest Aether joyfully welcomed the goddess; great Venus' tuneful entourage has no fear of ambushes from eagles or rapacious hawks.

This scene is plainly derived from *Iliad* 5,719-732, where Hera prepares a chariot in Olympus for herself and Athene:

ᾠς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἀπίθησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη.  
 ἦ μὲν ἐποιχομένη χρυσάμπυκας ἔντυεν ἵππους  
 Ἥρη πρέσβα θεὰ θυγάτηρ μέγαλοιο Κρόνοιο·  
 Ἥβη δ' ἄμφ' ὀχέεσσι θεῶς βάλε καμπύλα κύκλα  
 χάλκεα ὀκτάκνημα σιδηρέῳ ἄξονι ἄμφις.  
 τῶν ἦτοι χρυσέη ἴτυς ἄφθιτος, αὐτὰρ ὕπερθε  
 χάλκε' ἐπίσσωτρα προσαρηρότα, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι·  
 πλῆμναι δ' ἀργύρου εἰσὶ περίδρομοι ἀμφοτέρωθεν·  
 δίφρος δὲ χρυσεῖοσι καὶ ἀργυρέοισιν ἱμάσιν  
 ἐντέταται, δοιαὶ δὲ περίδρομοι ἄντυγές εἰσι.  
 τοῦ δ' ἐξ ἀργύρεος ῥυμὸς πέλεν· αὐτὰρ ἐπ' ἄκρῳ  
 δῆσε χρύσειον καλὸν ζυγόν, ἐν δὲ λέπαδνα  
 κάλ' ἔβαλε χρύσει'· ὑπὸ δὲ ζυγὸν ἤγαγεν Ἥρη

ἵππους ὠκύποδας, μεμαυῖ ἔριδος καὶ ἀυτῆς.

So she spoke, and the bright-eyed goddess Athene did not fail to obey. Hera then, queenly goddess, daughter of great Kronos, busied about the harnessing of the horses with their golden head-pieces. And Hebe quickly fitted the curved wheels to the chariot-frame, bronze wheels with eight spokes, at each end of the axle made of iron. Their felloes are of imperishable gold, and all around them are fixed tyres of bronze, a wonderful sight. The naves that revolve on either side are of silver: and the platform is made of gold and silver straps stretched tight, and twin rails run round it. From it there extends a pole of silver: at the end of this Hebe lashed a beautiful yoke of gold, and fitted it with lovely golden yoke-straps. And Hera brought the swift-footed horses under the yoke, eager for the clash and shout of battle'.<sup>10</sup>

Both the similarities and the contrasts between the two passages are significant. Both divine chariots are appropriately made of precious materials surpassing mere mortal manufacture: the allusion to Vulcan as *aurifex* (goldsmith) suggests the material of gold explicitly mentioned in Homer, typical for the possessions of gods in general, but the jewelled yoke in Apuleius (*iugum gemmeum*) adds a detail from Ovid, who presents the jewelled yoke as a feature of the chariot of the Sun (*Fasti* 2,74; *Met.* 2,109). There may be a suggestion here that Vulcan had copied that famous vehicle for his wife's wedding present, though the jewelled decoration also fits Venus' characterization in Apuleius as ostentatious and luxurious. Note too that the Homeric chariot is prepared by the goddesses themselves with the help of Hebe, but Venus does not lift a finger: like a grand Roman *matrona* she simply gives orders that the chariot be made ready. The warlike horses are replaced by the gentle and decorative doves traditional for Venus, and an escort of sparrows, also traditionally associated with Venus, adds to the fantastic and whimsical qualities which distinguish the erotic narrative of Apuleius from Homer's more austere war narrative; but these doves may also have an Iliadic origin in the same scene, in the brief simile for the two goddesses just after they have descended to earth – *Iliad* 5,778-779:

Αἱ δὲ βάτην τρήρωσι πελειάσιν ἴμαθ' ὁμοῖαι  
ἀνδράσιν Ἀργείοισιν ἀλεξέμεναι μεμαυῖαι·

The goddesses walked out stepping like trembling doves, eager to bring aid to the Argive soldiers.

<sup>10</sup> Tr. Hammond 1987. This translation is henceforward cited for all Iliadic passages.

Overall, there is a telling contrast between the two divine missions to earth: Hera and Athene are making an important intervention to aid the Greeks on the battlefield, while Venus is pursuing her personal campaign to prevent Psyche's marriage to her son. The relative pettiness of the Apuleian mission again indicates a less intense and serious literary work. The Iliadic colour continues in the scene which follows immediately at *Met.* 6,7-8, as Venus approaches her brother Mercury to aid in her search for Psyche:

*Tunc se protinus ad Iovis regias arces dirigit et petitu superbo Mercuri dei vocalis operae necessariam usuram postulat. **Nec rennuuit Iovis caeruleum supercilium.** Tunc ovans ilico, comitante etiam Mercurio, Venus caelo demeat eique sollicitate serit verba: "**Frater Arcadi,** scis nempe sororem tuam Venerem sine Mercuri praesentia nil unquam fecisse nec te praeterit utique quanto iam tempore delitescentem ancillam nequiverim reperire. Nil ergo superest quam tuo praeconio praemium investigationis publicitus edicere. Fac ergo mandatum matures meum et indicia qui possit agnosci manifeste designes, ne si quis occultationis illicitae crimen subierit, ignorantiae se possit excusatione defendere"; et simul dicens libellum ei porrigit ubi Psyche's nomen continebatur et cetera. Quo facto protinus domum secessit. [8] **Nec Mercurius omisit obsequium.***

She immediately headed for Jove's royal citadel and haughtily demanded an essential loan – the services of Mercury, the loud-voiced god. Jove nodded his dark brow, and she in triumph left heaven then and there with Mercury, to whom she earnestly spoke: 'Arcadian brother, you know well that your sister Venus has never done anything without Mercury's assistance, and you must be aware of how long it is that I have been trying in vain to find my skulking handmaid. All we can do now is for you as herald to make public proclamation of a reward for her discovery. Do my bidding then at once, and describe clearly the signs by which she can be recognized, so that if anyone is charged with illegally concealing her, he cannot defend himself with a plea of ignorance'; and with these words she gave him a paper with Psyche's name and the other details. This done, she returned straight home. Mercury duly obeyed her.

This scene combines several episodes of Iliadic divine interplay which have a thematic resemblance; the individual episodes are pinpointed by close verbal allusion in the words marked in bold above. First, we find echoes of the scene in the first book of the *Iliad* (1,493-530) where Thetis goes to Olympus and succeeds in asking Zeus to bring defeat on the Greeks until they

have compensated her son Achilles, matching Venus' request to Jupiter for Mercury's services concerning her son Cupid: the link is marked by the virtual translation in *Nec rennuit Iovis caeruleum supercilium* of *Iliad* 1,528 Ἡ καὶ κυανέησιν ἐπ' ὀφρύσι νεύσε Κρονίων. Second, Venus's approach to her divine brother echoes that at *Iliad* 5,357-362, where Aphrodite asks Ares to rescue her from the battlefield: once again this is marked by verbal allusion in the pleading address to her brother (cf. *Iliad* 5,359 φύλε κασίγητε). Finally, Mercury's acceptance of Venus' request recalls Hermes' acceptance of Zeus' request to go to Priam in the final book of the *Iliad* and guide him to Achilles to ransom Hector (24,332-339), indicated once more by a close linguistic link (cf. 24,339 Ὠς ἔφατ', οὐδ' ἀπίθησε διάκτορος Ἀργειφόντης.). Yet again, these are all intense and serious scenes echoed in a rather less elevated context: Venus is soft-soaping her brother to collaborate in a dubious advertisement (Psyche is a princess, not the slave of Venus as she implies), a long way from the requests for battlefield defeat and rescue and the moving return of Hector's corpse.

A final scene of Iliadic divine interaction in the tale of Cupid and Psyche is the celebration on Olympus of the final marriage of the pair which ends the story at 6,24:<sup>11</sup>

*Nec mora, cum cena nuptialis affluens exhibetur. Accumbebat summum torum maritus Psychen gremio suo complexus. Sic et cum sua Iunone Iuppiter ac deinde per ordinem toti dei. Tunc poculum nectaris, quod vinum deorum est, Iovi quidem suus pocillator ille rusticus puer, ceteris vero Liber ministrabat, Vulcanus cenam coquebat; Horae rosis et ceteris floribus purpurabant omnia, Gratiae spargebant balsama, Musae quoque canora personabant. Tunc Apollo cantavit ad citharam, Venus suavi musicae superingressa formonsa saltavit, scaena sibi sic concinnata, ut Musae quidem chorum canerent, tibias inflaret Saturus, et Paniscus ad fistulam diceret. Sic rite Psyche convenit in manum Cupidinis et nascitur illis maturo partu filia, quam Voluptatem nominamus.*

No sooner said than done: a lavish wedding-feast appeared. In the place of honour reclined Psyche's husband, with his wife in his arms, and likewise Jupiter with his Juno, and then the other gods in order of precedence. Cups of nectar (the wine of the gods) were served to Jove by his own cupbearer, the shepherd lad, and to the others by Liber. Vulcan cooked the dinner; the Seasons made everything colourful with roses and

<sup>11</sup> I have examined the passage more extensively in Harrison 2006, but the links here made with the *Iliad* are additional to what is said there.

other flowers; the Graces sprinkled perfumes; the Muses discoursed tuneful music. Then Apollo sang to the lyre, and Venus, fitting her steps to the sweet music, danced in all her beauty, having arranged a production in which the Muses were chorus, while a Satyr played the tibiae, while a Satyr and a little Pan sang to the shepherd's pipe. Thus was Psyche married to Cupid with all proper ceremony, and when her time came there was born to them a daughter, whom we call Pleasure.

This festive finale to the tale, enacted on Olympus, looks back to the similar party at the end of *Iliad* 1 (595-611):

Ὡς φάτο, μείδησεν δὲ θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,  
 μειδήσασα δὲ παιδὸς ἐδέξατο χειρὶ κύπελλον·  
 αὐτὰρ ὃ τοῖς ἄλλοισι θεοῖς ἐνδέξια πᾶσιν  
 οἰνοχόει γλυκὺ νέκταρ ἀπὸ κρητῆρος ἀφύσσω·  
 ἄσβεστος δ' ἄρ' ἐνῶρτο γέλωσ μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν  
 ὡς ἴδον Ἥφαιστον διὰ δώματα ποιπνύοντα.  
 Ὡς τότε μὲν πρόπαν ἦμαρ ἐς ἥλιον καταδύντα  
 δαίνυντ', οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς εἴσης,  
 οὐ μὲν φόρμιγγος περικαλλέος ἦν ἔχ' Ἀπόλλων,  
 Μουσάων θ' αἰ ἄειδον ἀμειβόμεναι ὀπι καλῆ.  
 Αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κατέδου λαμπρὸν φάος ἡλίοιο,  
 οἱ μὲν κακκείοντες ἔβαν οἶκον δὲ ἕκαστος,  
 ἦχι ἐκάστῳ δῶμα περικλυτὸς ἀμφιγυήεις  
 Ἥφαιστος ποίησεν ἰδυίησι πραπίδεσσι·  
 Ζεὺς δὲ πρὸς ὃν λέχος ἦν Ὀλύμπιος ἀστεροπητῆς,  
 ἔνθα πάρος κοιμᾶθ' ὅτε μιν γλυκὺς ὕπνος ἰκάνοι·  
 ἔνθα καθεῦδ' ἀναβάς, παρὰ δὲ χρυσόθρονος Ἥρη.

So he spoke, and the white-armed goddess Hera smiled, and smiling took the cup from her son. Then beginning from the left he poured for all the other gods, drawing sweet nectar from the bowl. And uncontrollable laughter rose among the blessed gods, as they watched Hephaistos bustling to and fro in the palace. So they feasted all day long till the setting of the sun, and no-one's desire went without an equal share in the feast, nor did they lack the beautiful music of the lyre in Apollo's hands, and the lovely singing of the Muses, voice answering voice. Then when the brightness of the sun had set, they each went home to sleep, in the houses made for them in the cunning of his craft by the famous lame god Hephaistos. And Zeus the Olympian lord of the lightning went to his own

bed, where he always lay down when sweet sleep came over him. He climbed to his bed and slept there, and beside him slept Hera of the golden throne.

The two scenes share several thematic similarities apart from their divine characters and location. Both present the resolution of a dispute or difficulty for the gods arising from their involvement with mortals, a resolution effected by the intervention of the supreme authority of Jupiter: in the *Iliad* the difficulty is between Zeus and Hera about Achilles and the Trojans, in the *Metamorphoses* it is between Jupiter and Venus about the Cupid/Psyche marriage. Of course, the stakes are much higher in the epic, which is concerned with war and the mass death of mortals, than in the novel, which centres round the issue of whether Venus's son can marry his mortal girlfriend. In both texts the gods then turn to cheerful feasting to mark the moment of reconciliation.

The details of the Apuleian feast clearly recall and vary those of its Homeric model. In both a senior god is served with nectar, followed by other gods: in Homer Hephaistos serves Hera first, then all the others, while in Apuleius Jupiter gets personal service from Ganymede, the rest are served by Liber. Apollo plays the lyre, the Muses sing and Hephaestus serves in both celebrations; on the other hand, Liber (Dionysus), included in Apuleius' party, does not belong to the Iliadic Olympus, while the Hours and Graces do though not in the poem's first book. Finally, both passages close with a reassertion of conjugal unity previously endangered: the disputed marriage of Cupid and Psyche is successfully accomplished, matching and varying the conjugal reconciliation of Zeus and Hera as they go to bed together.

Finally, the position of the Homeric scene at the end of its book is surely reflected by its position in Apuleius at the end of a major embedded narrative, especially as the location of the close of Cupid and Psyche before the end of Book 6 (like the location of its opening before the end of Book 4) is a deliberate manipulation of the reader's expectation that an embedded narrative of two books' length will be contained exactly in two books, as in Vergil's *Aeneid*.<sup>12</sup> The *Metamorphoses* shows clear awareness of epic book endings in the endings of its own books, and here echoes an Iliadic book-ending in one of its other major closures.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See further Harrison 1997.

<sup>13</sup> See further Harrison 2003.

### 3. *Iliadic battle-narrative parodied in the Metamorphoses*

The events of the main narrative of the *Metamorphoses* with their picaresque character and low-life setting create a framework in which parody of the elevated and tragic battle-narrative of the *Iliad* finds a natural place: heroic warfare is evoked to comic effect in several unlikely contexts.

#### *A : Throat-wounds*

In the tale narrated by Aristomenes in the first book of the novel, the character Socrates is killed by the witch Panthia (*Met.* 1,13,4):

*capite Socratis in alterum dimoto latus per iugulum sinistrum capulo  
tenus gladium totum ei demergit et sanguinis eruptionem utriculo ad-  
moto excipit diligenter, ut nulla stilla compareret usquam*

twisting Socrates' head to one side she buried her sword up to the hilt in the left-hand side of his throat, catching the blood that spurted out in a leather bottle so neatly that not a drop was spilled.

Commentators have noted both a reference to sacrificial practice and an allusion to Iliadic throat-wounds.<sup>14</sup> The total immersion of the sword is the detail that marks the Homeric allusion: we may compare *Iliad* 16,340 (one minor warrior slays another via a mouth-wound) πᾶν δ' εἴσω ἔδυσ ξίφος, 'the whole blade sank in' and *Iliad* 21,117-118 (Achilles kills Lycaon, also a neck-wound) πᾶν δέ οἱ εἴσω / δδυσ ξίφος ἄμφορες: 'the whole length of the two-edged sword sank inside him'. The evocation of the second Homeric scene, one of the great tragic moments of the poem, again shows the difference between epic and novel: Lycaon's battlefield slaying by Achilles is recalled in the hotel-room stabbing of a travelling businessman by his vengeful ex-lover in a macabre witches' ritual.

#### *B : Dogs and Birds*

In Book 6 one of the gang of robbers threatens a cruel death for Lucius-ass and the girl later named as Charite by sewing the girl into the ass's belly (*Met.* 6,32,1):

<sup>14</sup> See Keulen 2007, 269.

*sic enim cuncta quae recte statuistis ambo sustinebunt, et mortem asinus quam pridem meruit, et illa morsus ferarum, cum vermes membra laniabunt, et ignis flagrantiam, cum sol nimiis caloribus inflammavit uterum, et patibuli cruciatum, cum canes et vultures intima protrahent viscera.*

In that way both of them will undergo the punishments to which you have so justly sentenced them. The ass will die as he richly deserves; the girl will be torn by beasts when the worms gnaw her, she will be roasted when the blazing sun scorches the ass's belly, and she will be gibbeted when the dogs and vultures drag out her entrails.

This charming idea has been rightly compared by commentators to the prospective Iliadic fate of corpses killed in battle (cf. *Iliad* 1,4-5 αὐτοῦς δὲ ἐλώρια τεύχε κύνεσσιν / οἰωνοῖσί τε πᾶσι ‘making their bodies the prey to dogs and the bird's feasting’, 18,271); to this can be added the equally Iliadic idea of the potential consumption by scavengers of a corpse's softer parts (*Iliad* 4,237 τῶν ἦτοι αὐτῶν τέρενα χροῖα γῦπες ἔδονται, ‘and vultures will feed on their soft flesh’). The supposed fate of heroic corpses in battle is thus evoked for the planned criminal murder of an ass and girl, a telling contrast and perhaps an appeal to Roman taste for bizarre and elaborate executions.<sup>15</sup> Of course, Charite and Lucius-ass escape this fate in the novel: this may recall the fact that exposure to scavengers is a fate always threatened for rather than suffered by Iliadic casualties — even Hector's corpse is inviolate (through Apollo's intervention) as Achilles exposes it and drags it around Troy (*Iliad* 24,18-21).

*C : Warlike Steed and Skin-Saving Donkey*

At the beginning of the novel's ninth book, after the ‘cliff-hanger’ ending of Book 8<sup>16</sup> in which Lucius-ass again faces the prospect of a bloody death as a cook prepares to butcher him to replace a stolen joint of venison, he manages to effect an escape (*Met.* 9,1,1-2):

*At ego praecipitante consilium periculi tanti praesentia nec exspectata diutina cogitatione lanienam imminentem fuga vitare statui, protinusque vinculo, quo fueram deligatus, abrupto cursu me proripio totis pedibus.*

<sup>15</sup> See esp. Coleman 1990.

<sup>16</sup> For such endings see Harrison 2003.

I resolved to escape from the butchery that threatened me by flight. Without more ado I wrenched myself free of my tether and took off at full gallop.

As observed by commentators, this passage seems to recall the famous simile used of both Paris (*Iliad* 6,506-511) and Hector (*Iliad* 15,263-268) as they return to battle:

ὥς δ' ὅτε τις στατὸς ἵππος ἀκοστήσας ἐπὶ φάτῃ  
 δεσμὸν ἀπορρήξας θεῖη πεδίῳ κροαίνων  
 εἰωθὸς λούεσθαι ἐϋρρεῖος ποταμοῖο  
 κυδιῶν· ὕψοῦ δὲ κάρη ἔχει, ἀμφὶ δὲ χαίται  
 ὅμοις αἴσسونται· ὃ δ' ἀγλαΐῃφι πεποιθὸς  
 ῥίμφα ἔ γοῦνα φέρει μετὰ τ' ἤθεα καὶ νομὸν ἵππων·

As when some stalled horse who has fed full at the manger breaks his halter and gallops thudding across the plain, eager for his usual bathe in the lovely flow of a river, and glorying as he runs. He holds his head high, and the mane streams back along his shoulders: sure of his own magnificence, his legs carry him lightly to the haunts where the mares are at pasture.

It has been suggested that ‘the narrator implicitly puts the ass on a par with (epic) horses’,<sup>17</sup> but one might equally argue that the point here is not similarity but contrast: not only is the comparison between the noble charger and the comic ass ironic and parodic, but the point of the simile is wholly different. In the *Iliad* the desire of stallions for mares is paralleled with the desire of warriors to return to battle (as both Paris and Hector are), while Lucius is doing the opposite – escaping from the sword of the cook’s butchery rather than rushing into the swordplay of battle. The contrast of epic and low-life situations needs no emphasis.

Here once more we have Homeric material combined with allusion to later texts. The Apuleian simile also picks up Vergil *Aeneid* 11,492-495 (Turnus goes into battle):

*qualis ubi abruptis fugit praesepia uinclis  
 tandem liber equus, campoque potitus aperto  
 aut ille in pastus armentaque tendit equarum  
 aut adsuetus aquae perfundi flumine noto*

<sup>17</sup> Hijmans *et al.* 1995, 34.

*emicat ...*

Just as when a stallion, free at last, flees his manger, breaking his tethers, and gaining the open plain either makes for the pastures and the herds of mares or flashes away, accustomed to be soaked with the familiar stream of water.

It would be possible to argue that only the Vergilian simile is being referenced here. But one detail suggests that the Homeric comparison is also engaged here: the singular *vinculo*, though it uses the Vergilian word (*vinculis*), uses the Homeric number (δεσμόν).

#### 4. From one ekphrasis to another

At *Met.* 10,29 we find a description of a dance routine in the theatre at Corinth:

*Nam puelli puellaeque virenti florentes aetatula, forma conspicui veste nitidi, incessu gestuosi, Graecanicam saltaturi pyrricam dispositis ordinationibus decoros ambitus inerrabant nunc in orbem rotatum flexuosi, nunc in obliquam seriem conexi et in quadratum patorem cuneati et in catervae discidium separati. At ubi discursus reciproci multinodas ambages tubae terminalis cantus explicuit, aulaeo subducto et complicitis siparis scaena disponitur.*

First I saw boys and girls in the very flower of their youth, handsome and beautifully dressed, expressive in their movements, who were grouping themselves to perform a pyrrhic dance in Greek style. In the graceful mazes of their ballet they now danced in a circle, now joined hands in a straight line, now formed a hollow square, now divided into semi-choruses. Then a trumpet-call signaled an end to their complicated manoeuvres and symmetrical interweavings, the curtain was raised and the screens folded back to reveal the stage.

This routine forms an introduction to the famous depiction of the Judgement of Paris, a performance closely allied to pantomime. This link with the event that led to the Trojan War is surely not coincidental, as Apuleius' description is clearly related to a well-known description of a dance performance in the *Iliad*, on the Shield of Achilles (*Iliad* 18,593-602):<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Noted by Zimmerman 2000, 363-364.

ἔνθα μὲν ἠΐθεοι καὶ παρθένοι ἀλφεσίβοιαι  
 ὀρχεῦντ' ἀλλήλων ἐπὶ καρπῷ χεῖρας ἔχοντες.  
 τῶν δ' αἱ μὲν λεπτὰς ὀθόνας ἔχον, οἱ δὲ χιτῶνας  
 εἶατ' ἐϋννήτους, ἦκα στίλβοντας ἐλαίῳ·  
 καὶ ῥ' αἱ μὲν καλὰς στεφάνας ἔχον, οἱ δὲ μαχαίρας  
 εἶχον χρυσεῖας ἐξ ἄργυρέων τελαμώνων.  
 οἱ δ' ὅτε μὲν θρέξασκον ἐπισταμένοισι πόδεσσι  
 ῥεῖα μάλ', ὡς ὅτε τις τροχὸν ἄρμενον ἐν παλάμησιν  
 ἐζόμενος κεραμεὺς πειρήσεται, αἶ κε θέησιν·  
 ἄλλοτε δ' αὖ θρέξασκον ἐπὶ στίχας ἀλλήλοισι.

On it there were dancing young men and girls whose marriage would win many oxen, holding each others' hands at the wrist. The girls wore dresses of fine linen, and the men closely-woven tunics with a light sheen of olive oil: and the girls had beautiful garlands on their heads, and the men wore golden daggers hanging from belts of silver. At times they would run round on their skilful feet very lightly, as when a potter sits to a wheel that fits comfortably in his hands and tries it, to see if it will spin smoothly: and then they would form lines and run to meet each other.

Once again the marked details guarantee the allusion: in both descriptions we find dancers of both sexes, descriptions of their dress, and anaphora of an adverb indicating separate and parallel times of movement. Here one description of a dance performance picks up another, and for once the novelistic treatment seems to make no fundamental modification of its epic original, perhaps with one witty allusion to its use of a well-known model: the term *Graecanicam* ('in Greek style') might hint at the scene's Homeric origin, especially as *Graecanicus* often refers to material translated from Greek to Latin.

### 5. Conclusion

This consideration of allusions to the *Iliad* in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* leads to several conclusions. First, the novel plainly picks on prominent epic features which are typical of the genre – Olympian divine machinery, battle-narrative and extended ekphrasis. Secondly, it treats these features in a parodic and comic way, thus transforming elevated and intense material from the highest of poetic genres into elements more suitable for the lower form

of comic prose fiction. Finally, the sophisticated nature of the intertextuality involved, encompassing thematic and verbal resemblance, witty reversal and variation, and the use of combined allusion to other post-Homeric texts shows yet again the rich and complex nature of the literary texture of Apuleius' novel.

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