

# ‘Food for Thought’ for Readers of Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*

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## 1. ‘Chain of Receptions’

‘Homer has been changed for us by Virgil and Milton, who have left their traces in his text and thereby enabled new possibilities of meaning’.

Thus Charles Martindale.<sup>1</sup> Martindale writes on Latin poetry, but his book offers insights that are helpful for understanding the reception of Apuleius’ prose text as well. His concept of the Chain of Receptions is particularly enlightening:

‘...our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected.’<sup>2</sup>

In the chain of receptions of Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* from Late Antiquity through the sixteenth century, allegorical interpretations of both the Lucius story and the tale of Cupid and Psyche have played a major role.<sup>3</sup> It is a plausible guess that the Sallustius who under supervision of his teacher En-delechiu in the last decade of the fifth century A.D. was preparing a codex of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (together with the *Apology* and possibly also the *Florida*), was especially attracted to the *Metamorphoses* because he and his teacher were aware of that novel’s possibilities of an allegorical interpre-

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<sup>1</sup> Martindale 1993, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Martindale 1993, 7.

<sup>3</sup> This chain of interpretations has been discussed in full by Julia Gaisser, who likewise applies Martindale’s concept of the ‘chain of receptions’: Gaisser 2003, 23–24; 36–37.

tation.<sup>4</sup> The main links in that first chain of receptions are represented by Fulgentius, Boccaccio and Beroaldo.

## 2. Beroaldo and his commentary

Beroaldo had been the first who presented an allegorical reading of the whole of the *Metamorphoses*. Both Fulgentius and Boccaccio had only offered allegorical readings of the Cupid and Psyche tale. Filippo Beroaldo’s commentary was printed in Bologna in 1500. It had an immediate, but also long-lasting influence. The first edition was printed in twelve hundred copies, and in the sixteenth century it was already reprinted ten times; this can be seen quickly from the list in Krautter’s bibliography.<sup>5</sup>

To Beroaldo himself, Apuleius’ greatly admired novel indeed offered plenty of food for thought, and he certainly conceived his own commentary as a work that should present his addressees, mostly his numerous students from all over Europe, with even more food for thought. Beroaldo considered the commentator as an indispensable mediator between the original text and the reader.<sup>6</sup> In his commentary on Propertius, he says, in the letter of dedication to his friend Mino de’Rossi:

*Maxima est vel potius divina virtus poetarum ... magna etiam vis est ipsorum explanatorum, qui a Cicerone grammatici (Cic. Div. 1,34), a Platone rhapsodi appellantur: Illi afflatu divino concitati poemata praeclara conficiunt, hi poetico furore correpti praeclare interpretantur; illi deo pleni deo dignissima eloquuntur, hi poetica inflammatione calentes divinas interpretationes excudunt. Et ut apud Platonem (Ion 533D 1 ff.) disserit Socrates prope divinitus, poetae a Musa divino instinctu agitantur, interpretes a poetis furore extimulantur. Et quemadmodum lapis magnes non solum anulos ferreos trahit, sed vim etiam anulis ipsis infundit, qua hoc idem efficere possint, anulorum catena pendente, ita deus poetas, poetae interpretes furore corripiunt.*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gaisser 2008, 51–52.

<sup>5</sup> Krautter 1971, 188–190.

<sup>6</sup> This is illustrated in nr. 1 of the woodcuts that were included in Beroaldo’s commentary. See the Appendix below.

<sup>7</sup> Quotation from: *Ad magnificum Minum Roscium Bononiensem Philippi Beroaldi Bononiensis epistola*, in: *Commentarii in Propertium a Philippo Beroaldo editi*, Bologna 1486.

‘Great, yes, rather divine, is the art of the poets ... But great too is the power of the interpreters, who by Cicero are called grammarians, by Plato rhapsodes: the first ones, incited by divine inspiration, create splendid poems, the latter, affected by poetic fervor, give out splendid explanations. Those (the poets) full of the divinity, pronounce utterances worthy of the god, these (the interpreters) enflamed with poetic fire, produce divine interpretations. And, as in Plato Socrates speaks divinely inspired words, the poets are being driven by a divine impulse, and the interpreters in their turn are stimulated by the poetic fervor. And just like a magnet not only attracts iron rings, but also endowes these rings with its power, through which they can have the same effect, when a whole chain of rings hangs together, thus the god gets hold of the poets, and the poets again by their fervor seize the interpreters.’

And indeed, for many readers in the subsequent centuries, Beroaldo’s commentary was the guide for their interpretation of Apuleius’ novel. Many long-lasting interpretations of the novel are to be traced back to Beroaldo’s commentary.

### 3. *The autobiographical approach to Apuleius’ Metamorphoses and counter-reactions*

Beroaldo was acquainted with pseudo-Lucian’s Ass-tale, the Λούκιος ἢ ὄνος (henceforth: the *Onos*), both through Poggio’s translation of it and through the Greek text itself; and in his commentary he often quotes from the Greek *Onos*, and compares the jejune (in his eyes) narration of the *Onos* with the much admired narrative diversity and flowery style of Apuleius. And yet, in his preface in which he presents biographical information about Apuleius, he draws extensively from, besides *Apology* and *Florida*, the *Metamorphoses* and not only from its eleventh book for autobiographical testimonies for Apuleius’ biographical data. Apuleius’s father thus is called Theus and his mother Salvia, the latter being of Greek origin and standing in a family relation to Plutarch and Sextus. Apuleius himself is described according to Byrrhena’s description of Lucius in *Metamorphoses* 2,2, as tall and muscular, blonde, with blue eyes. And throughout the commentary the ‘I’-form of the narration is taken to the word, and in this way we often meet remarks referring to the protagonist as *Apuleius noster* (‘our Apuleius’). This

autobiographical approach to Apuleius’ novel had a very long life.<sup>8</sup> Soon after 1500, philologists like, for instance, Becichemo and Maffei, and many Apuleius-editors for three hundred years onward, did not hesitate to use the first three books of the *Metamorphoses* for the biography of the author. One of the first scholars who abandoned that tradition was August Rode, who in the proem of his translation from 1783 remarked:

*‘Alles was Apuleius hier und in der Folge des Romans von seinem Helden Lucius erzählt, das haben die bisherigen Biographen dieses platonischen Philosophen als Nachrichten von ihm selbst angenommen und es in sein Leben eingerückt. Unmöglich kann ich ihnen darin meinen Beifall geben ...’*

‘All that Apuleius here and in the rest of the novel narrates about his hero Lucius, has by biographers of the platonic philosopher until now been interpreted as information about himself, and they have included it in his *Life*. I cannot possibly agree with them on this matter ...’

Soon others, like Oudendorp, followed in this vein. But, as Krautter shows, even in the past century, the tendency to look for the ‘Apuleianic’ in Apuleius’ novel still had its champions, the most extreme case being Cocchia 1915.<sup>9</sup>

Much has changed in literary criticism since Beroaldo. I leave aside many narratological tools and refinements that today can be applied to this text, and that have deepened our understanding about what is going on in this narrative. However, there is one clearcut narratological concept that has now generally been accepted, and that Beroaldo and his contemporaries did not have at their disposal. That is the concept of narrative perspective, and the distinctions between ‘narrated I’, ‘narrating I’ and author. This has enabled readers to move away from any search for a moralistic message in the novel. The numerous moralistic asides of the narrated/actorial ‘I’ do not tell us anything about what Beroaldo entitled ‘*Scriptoris Intentio atque Consilium*’ (for this phrase see next section).

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Krautter 1971, 57–60.

<sup>9</sup> Krautter 1971, 59. A quite different, somewhat ‘autobiographical’ approach that still stands, and rightly so, in my opinion, will be discussed later; see below, section 7.

#### 4. Allegorical explanations of the *Metamorphoses* from Beroaldo onward

Although primarily interested in offering a philological and historical commentary on Apuleius' text, and notwithstanding all his delight in the narrative qualities of the novel, Beroaldo's interest in this text did not stop short at its aesthetical aspects.<sup>10</sup> As he emphasizes in his praefatio, Beroaldo sees Apuleius not only as an elegant '*fabulator*', but foremost as an '*auctor eruditus*'. Beroaldo considers it his task in his commentary to elucidate the hidden '*eruditio*' and '*doctrina*' in the work of the much admired author. The important image of Apuleius as a '*philosophus platonicus*' is brought into prominence when Beroaldo undertakes his philosophical-allegorical interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*. While dismissing the rigid allegorical interpretation of the Cupid and Psyche tale by Fulgentius, Beroaldo himself explains the whole of the *Metamorphoses* as an allegory of the human condition, as already discussed in his preface, under the heading '*Scriptoris Intentio atque Consilium*' ('the author's intention and policy'), and, again, many times in the course of his commentary and in the afterword. With a final quotation from this afterword we will leave Beroaldo's commentary:

*'Lectio Asini Apuleiani nimirum speculum est rerum humanarum istoque involucro efficti nostri mores expressaque imago vitae quotidianae conspicitur, cuius finis et summa beatitas est religio cultusque divinae maiestatis una cum eruditione copulata connexaque.'*

'Reading Apuleius' Ass is like looking at a mirror-image of the human condition. And one observes expressed in this guise our characters, and the picture of our daily lives, the goal and greatest blessing of which are religion and the cultivation of divine majesty coupled and conjoined with erudition.'

Beroaldo and others before him found a justification for their ethical-allegorical interpretation in the practice of the Middle Platonists themselves. From Beroaldo's commentary onward this allegorical interpretation held the field for centuries to come.<sup>11</sup> It was not before the end of the nineteenth cen-

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<sup>10</sup> For a succinct overview of the various points of interest in Beroaldo's commentary see also Sandy 2006, 240–251.

<sup>11</sup> Before offering his own, extensive and in parts idiosyncratic allegorical explanation of the *Metamorphoses*, Hildebrand 1842, xxviii–xxxviii, presents influential allegorical interpretations of earlier scholars.

tury that philologists, first mainly in Germany, began to deny Apuleius’ novel any serious intent, at the same time criticising the novel for a lack of unity. Morelli, early in the twentieth century, renewed as it were the line of interpretation in the manner of Beroaldo.<sup>12</sup> Although he provoked firm criticism, his controversial ideas had the effect of a complete revision of the problem of the unity of the *Metamorphoses*.<sup>13</sup>

Allegorical techniques had consistently been used in the Greek and Roman world in the elucidation of texts by interpreters of all kinds of religious and philosophical persuasions, and until the nineteenth century allegorical criticism remained a central and persistent element of literary thought, as Coulter explains; she adds: ‘These interpreters were often men of considerable intellectual eminence, and there seems little point, and not much fairness either, in blinding oneself to the fact that they were asking serious and important questions about the meaning of the texts to which they and others since have devoted so much study.’<sup>14</sup>

But, as Coulter remarks, much of the critical thought of the nineteenth and early twentieth century has been marked by an anti-allegorical bias.<sup>15</sup> This bias may, I think, have been even more persistent in the case of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* because it was fueled by some very strained and rigid forms of allegorical interpretations of this novel. In these interpretations, the *Metamorphoses* was explained as a protreptic or moralizing allegorical text, a trend that indeed could also be seen in some of Beroaldo’s comments.<sup>16</sup> And there was on the other hand, Merkelbach’s explanation of the *Metamorphoses* as a mystery text whose hidden Isiac keys throughout the book could be understood rightly by the initiated only; his reading put the finger on many hitherto unnoticed elements in the text, but his rigid one-to-one allegorisation of the whole of the *Metamorphoses* probably made readers allergic to any allegorical interpretation. It is not necessary here to rehearse the history

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<sup>12</sup> Morelli 1913.

<sup>13</sup> See Krautter 1971, 64–71, with full references, on the philosophical-moralistic interpretations of the *Metamorphoses*, and the reactions from the early 20th century onward. See also Wlosok 1969; Harrison in Harrison (ed.) 1999, xxxii–xxxiv.

<sup>14</sup> Coulter 1976, 22–23.

<sup>15</sup> Coulter 1976, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Although Beroaldo himself did not agree with Fulgentius’ allegorizing of the tale of Cupid and Psyche, he had quoted Fulgentius extensively, and in this way Fulgentius’ allegorical interpretations influenced the readers of Beroaldo’s influential commentary, where they also found an allegorical, moralizing interpretation of the whole of the *Golden Ass*.

of this question; all relevant information may be found in the excellent bibliographical reviews we possess.<sup>17</sup>

### 5. *New approaches and other 'chains of receptions'*

The burgeoning scholarly interest in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* since the second half of the twentieth century has led to various new appreciations of this novel.<sup>18</sup> The *Golden Ass* is now generally admired and avidly read as a literary masterpiece, as a rich and intriguing text encouraging the reader to discover ever new intricate intertextual and interdiscursive patterns. It is also read against the social and cultural background of Apuleius' time, adumbrating the position of a literary artist living and working in, and publishing from, a province of the Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup> It is also shown that in this work the author emerges as a Latin representative of the Second Sophistic, and as an Antonine orator, thoroughly engaged in the rhetorical and cultural questions with which his contemporaries like Gellius and Favorinus and others were concerned.<sup>20</sup> Although disagreeing about the extent to which Platonic elements may be detected in the *Metamorphoses*, no one nowadays will deny that this novel by Apuleius '*philosophus platonicus*' might be fruitfully read while paying attention to its Platonic undercurrents, whether they be interpreted as a serious undertone, or as largely comic, or as a display by the author of his erudition.<sup>21</sup>

Although the tale of Cupid and Psyche has by many been interpreted in an allegorical way mirroring the overarching Lucius tale,<sup>22</sup> an allegorical explanation of the whole novel was largely avoided in any case by those who were of the opinion that the sole aim of Apuleius with his *Metamorphoses* was to offer pure entertainment and to show off. This opinion was often combined with the reproach that the earnestness and religious fervor of Book

<sup>17</sup> Schlam 1971; Harrison in Harrison (ed.) 1999, xxvi–xxxix; Schlam and Finkelpearl 2001.

<sup>18</sup> This becomes immediately apparent from the reviews mentioned in the previous note.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Finkelpearl 1998, 132–144; Edwards 2001; Swain 2001; Alvares 2007; Finkelpearl 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Sandy 1997; Harrison 2000; Keulen 2007; Riess (ed.) 2008.

<sup>21</sup> For bibliography on the subject see Finkelpearl in Schlam and Finkelpearl 2001, 99–117 (Ch. VI. Philosophic Readings); references to philosophy largely comic, or as sophistic display of erudition: Harrison 2000, 252–259; Trapp 2001; Kirichenko 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Mirroring as a foreshadowing of the culmination of Lucius' own adventures in the Isis book (see bibliography in Schlam and Finkelpearl 2001, 140–144), or mirroring as counterpoint to the Lucius story (Penwill 1975; 1990; 1998).

Eleven fitted uneasily with the first ten books full of ribald episodes. Helm and Perry were among the most prominent early representatives of this view,<sup>23</sup> and they may rightly be regarded as having originated another quite influential chain of receptions (see for this concept above, section 1), to which new links are added up to the present day.<sup>24</sup>

The learned and influential monograph by Winkler may be considered a strong new link in this chain of receptions.<sup>25</sup> Winkler, as others before him did, assumes a complete narrative break between the first ten books and the eleventh book. In his narratological analysis of the novel, Winkler makes a virtue of this narrative break, which invites the first reader to re-read and thus to become an interpreting 'second-time reader'. Central to Apuleius' novel are precisely the act of interpreting and the process of narrating. Winkler's narratological reading of the *Golden Ass*, and his statement that the *Golden Ass* lacks key elements of authorization and that it resembles a set of games for readers to play, has inspired many readers and interpreters since to play their ever more sophisticated games with this text.<sup>26</sup>

Besides the chain of receptions that as it were was invigorated and re-directed through the impact of Winkler's monograph, another chain of receptions in which for instance Wlosok and Tatum are important links,<sup>27</sup> has remained vital up to the present day. Scholars who may be considered as links in this latter chain advocate the unity of the eleven books of the *Metamorphoses* by tracing binding elements like themes, recurrent patterns, and other 'hermeneutic signs'. Although other names could be mentioned, I think that it is justified to mention Carl Schlam as a very important link in this chain of receptions. It has been, as one may expect, in this chain of receptions, that allegorical interpretations naturally could gain a fresh foothold. Thus, for instance Schlam wrote: 'In classical scholarship allegory is still something of a dirty word, although it has been rehabilitated in other areas of literary scholarship.'<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cf. e.g. Helm 1914, 175 (= Helm 1968, 182), calling the eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses*: 'ein ganz unpassender dunkler Flecken auf einen heiteren, hellen Gewande' ('an unbecoming dark spot on a cheerful and bright cloth'); cf. Perry 1967, 234; 242–248.

<sup>24</sup> For more recent 'links' in this chain, see Schlam and Finkelpearl 2001, 50–54; 63–74.

<sup>25</sup> Winkler 1985.

<sup>26</sup> Besides many adherents and much positive response, Winkler's book of course also encountered more negative and often well-founded criticism. Important representatives of such reactions are e.g. Van der Paardt 1988; Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000 (in her introductory chapters).

<sup>27</sup> Wlosok 1969; Tatum 1969 and 1979; Alpers 1980.

<sup>28</sup> Schlam 1992, 14.

There remain, along the way, those who unequivocally dismiss any allegorical explanation of Apuleius' novel, a dismissal expressed for instance by Harrison: 'Many modern readers still feel the urge to interpret Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* as an allegorical text, feeling that the surface story is too insubstantial and frivolous for so apparently ambitious a literary work.' Harrison then mentions Merkelbach, and the view of Apuleius' novel as a Platonising allegory (adding references from Beroaldo onward), and continues: 'In my view these attempts to make Apuleius intellectually respectable in terms of uplifting content are misconceived ... What we have in the *Metamorphoses* ... is a type of literature where the prime intellectual element derives not from a didactic message but from a complex and allusive literary text.'<sup>29</sup>

This discomfort with allegorical interpretations is based on the idea that such interpretations always look for didactic or moralizing, protreptic or propagandistic messages, as indeed had been the case with the late antique and religious-philosophical allegories discussed above (section 4). Schlam, however, in my opinion, has paved the way for another approach to allegorical interpretations, arguing that the *Metamorphoses* is in no sense a pure or continuous allegory (as Beroaldo and others would have it); however, since allegorical interpretation, especially of Homer, was a well-established part of the horizon of ideas in the second century, '... its prominence gives validity to our understanding some of the motifs and events of the *Metamorphoses* as expressions of religious and philosophic conceptions.'<sup>30</sup>

Thus, allegory not applied as a kind of code, concealing a systematic analogy with some external discourse, but as a function of reading, might very well regain a place among various approaches to Apuleius' novel, each of them with its own set of modes enriching our understanding of this text. There is no use in denying this second-century text its 'allegorical moments', and in this way enriching our understanding of it.

#### 6. 'Allegorical moments' in the *Metamorphoses*

In several instances, allegorical explanation, especially of Homer, is alluded to and re-activated in Apuleius' novel. One example is the theme of 'for-

<sup>29</sup> Harrison 2002, 163.

<sup>30</sup> Schlam 1992, 14. Cf. Münstermann 1995, 60–61.

getting the home-journey’.<sup>31</sup> The Circe episode in Homer’s *Odyssey*, as well as the episode of the Lotos-eaters, both tell us that those who accepted food and drinks from Circe, respectively those who ate from the lotosfruits, completely forgot about their homeland. These Homeric passages, especially the Circe episode, were cherished loci for allegorical interpretations of Homer. As is well known, in Apuleius’ novel the theme of forgetting about the home-journey plays an important role. In *Metamorphoses* 1,7,5-1,8.2 Socrates tells Aristomenes about his sexual relationship with the witch Meroe, who had entertained him with food and drinks when he was miserably robbed, and then had lured him into her bed. Socrates then had forgotten all about returning home. In *Metamorphoses* Book Two, Lucius shares food, drink and sex with Fotis, and in *Met.* 3,19,5-6 he sincerely declares that he is completely addicted to her, and does not think of ever returning home:

*Iam denique nec larem requiro nec domuitionem paro et nocte ista nihil antepono.*

‘In fact I do not miss my home any more and I am not preparing to return there, and nothing is more important to me than the night with you.’  
(Apul. *Met.* 3,19,6. Transl. Hanson)

When, in the tenth book, Lucius, the ass, is taken to Corinth, the town that in the first two books has several times been mentioned as his hometown, the narrator, Lucius, appears not even to realize that he has returned to his native town.<sup>32</sup> Although Lucius often compares himself with Odysseus, he has not resisted his ‘Circe’, and through his relationship with Fotis, he has forgotten about his *nostos*. That Apuleius was aware of the allegorical potentialities of Homer’s Circe episode and other Homeric passages is apparent from a passage in the *De deo Socratis* where he praises Odysseus with these words:

*Circae poculum non bibit nec mutatus est, ad Lotophagos accessit nec remansit : Sirenas audiit nec accessit.* (*Soc.* 24,178)

(Guided by Minerva = wisdom, Odysseus) drank Circe’s potion and was not metamorphosed, he went to the Lotos-eaters and did not stay there, he heard the Sirens and did not come to them.

<sup>31</sup> An extraordinary meaningful motif, found from Homer to Boethius: see Alpers 2006, 19–22. See also about this theme in the *Metamorphoses* and on Apuleius’ Lucius as an ‘anti-Odysseus’ Montiglio 2007.

<sup>32</sup> See Zimmerman 2000, 259 on Apul. *Met.* 10,19,1, with references. Cf. also Montiglio 2007, 105–106.

All these examples, referred to here by Apuleius, belonged to the standard repertoire of Homer-allegoresis.<sup>33</sup>

No one will deny the many ‘allegorical moments’ or potentialities for allegorical explanation in Apuleius’ tale of Cupid and Psyche. Kenney, in the Introduction to his *Cupid and Psyche* quotes Walter Pater’s comment on this tale: ‘... so that you might take it, if you chose, for an allegory ...’, and adds: ‘In the phrase “if you chose”, Pater puts his finger on the point. Apuleius has furnished the opportunity; it is for the reader to take it if he cares to’.<sup>34</sup> Other such ‘allegorical moments’ are definitely to be found for instance in the representations of the goddesses in the pantomime of the Judgement of Paris in the tenth book of the novel, with its obvious allusions to the allegory of Heracles at the Crossroads.<sup>35</sup> Again, various elements in the description of the *anteludia*, the preludes to the Isis procession in *Metamorphoses* 11,8 furnish an opportunity for the reader to look for ‘allegorical moments’.<sup>36</sup>

From these and other examples it is, in my opinion, justified to argue that our reading of the *Metamorphoses* may be enriched when one does not shrink from recognizing the ‘allegorical moments’ in this text. Or, as Dowden has recently proposed more generally for the ancient novel,<sup>37</sup> when we replace the rigid allegorization of late antique and early modern as well as some twentieth-century readers with a ‘softer’, more flexible formulation that sees these novels, like myths and initiation rites, as allegories for life. In the case of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, we could, as I have argued elsewhere, see this novel as being – among so many other things – also about a human being’s search for spiritual renewal, a search which in the eleventh book may, or very well may not yet have reached its goal in Isis.

### 7. The new ‘autobiographical’ approach

Yet another important, and in the wider sense allegorical approach to the *Metamorphoses* is represented in the tendency to consider this work no longer as a ‘*Fremdkörper*’ within the whole corpus of Apuleius’ works, but to

<sup>33</sup> See Baltes 2004, 119 ad loc., with references.

<sup>34</sup> See, for the full quotation from Pater, Kenney 1990, 26; see also Kenney *ibid.* 27–28 ‘A note on allegory’.

<sup>35</sup> See Zimmerman 2002, 91–95.

<sup>36</sup> Griffiths 1975, 173–180, although himself not convinced about a deeper level to be present, discusses the allegorical levels detected by others in individual lemmas.

<sup>37</sup> Dowden 2005.

observe a deeper unity of most of his texts, through the *Florida* and the *De deo Socratis* down to the *Metamorphoses*. In all these works, one meets, in various guises, the same themes, similar questions, similar preoccupations. This is what I would call a ‘new’ and changed ‘autobiographical’ approach that embeds the *Metamorphoses* in the cultural and spiritual background of Apuleius’ times.<sup>38</sup> To conclude, I would like to quote a very sensitive reader of the *Metamorphoses*, one of the characters from Umberto Eco’s *Foucaults Pendulum*, who in Chapter 28 remarks:

‘Do you realize how great the second and third centuries after Christ were? Not because of the pomp of the empire in its sunset, but because of what was burgeoning in the Mediterranean basin then. In Rome, the Praetorians were slaughtering their emperors, but in the Mediterranean area, there flourished the epoch of Apuleius, the mysteries of Isis, and that great return to spirituality: Neoplatonism, Gnosis. Blissful times, before the Christians seized power and began to put heretics to death. A splendid epoch, in which dwelled the nous, a time dazzled by ecstasies and peopled with presences, emanations, demons and angelic hosts ...’

A new and more open-minded view of ‘allegorical moments’ in the *Metamorphoses* will, I expect, besides all other fascinating approaches, continue feeding the thoughts of readers, commentators, and interpreters. Thus, Apuleius’ novel will continue to amuse (*laetaberis*) and amaze (*ut mireris*) us.

#### *Appendix: Renaissance illustrations of Apuleius’ Asinus Aureus*

In two different sets of Renaissance illustrations of the *Golden Ass* it is possible to observe two different ways of reading the *Golden Ass*:<sup>39</sup>

In 1510, an edition of Apuleius’ text, with the commentary by Beroaldo, was printed in Venice, by Filippo Pinzi; in this edition thirty-three woodcuts appeared for the first time. In 1516, the same woodcuts were printed in

<sup>38</sup> Important publications that testify to such an approach are articles by Heller 1983; Beaujeu 1983; Alpers 2006. See also above, section 5 and the literature mentioned in n. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Already more than a century before Beroaldo a serious, allegorical reading of Apuleius’ novel had its illustrators. Cf. for instance the illuminated initials (by the Bolognese ‘Maestro del 1346’) in Vat. Lat. 2194, a manuscript transcribed and interpreted by Bartolomeo de’ Bartoli for his patron Bruzio Visconti. See for a detailed description and on Bartolomeo’s reading of the novel in moral and religious terms, Gaisser 2008, 82-93, with further references.

another Venetian edition of the text and the commentary by Beroaldo, the one printed by Giovanni Tacuino. The woodcuts in the Beroaldo commentary are completely different in theme and presentation from the ones that were produced for the *editio princeps* in 1518 of the vernacular Italian translation of the *Golden Ass* by Boiardo, and which were used many times, not only for reprints of Boiardo's *Apulegio* but also for Firenzuola's *Asino d'oro* (posthumously edited for the first time in 1550) and Vizzani's translation (1585 or later). A selection of these more than sixty woodcuts is printed below in Figure 2. These woodcuts from Boiardo's translations served also as inspiration for painted cycles from the tale of the *Golden Ass*.<sup>40</sup> The woodcuts that accompanied Beroaldo's commentary have never been used as a source for paintings or engravings. However, an Italian translation of 1927 by Felice Martini contains the whole series of these woodcuts. In figure 1 below, all thirty-three are printed in their order of appearance in the book, although I will only refer to some of them.

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<sup>40</sup> I found much of the information presented here in Acocella 2001.



Fig. 1 (1-15)

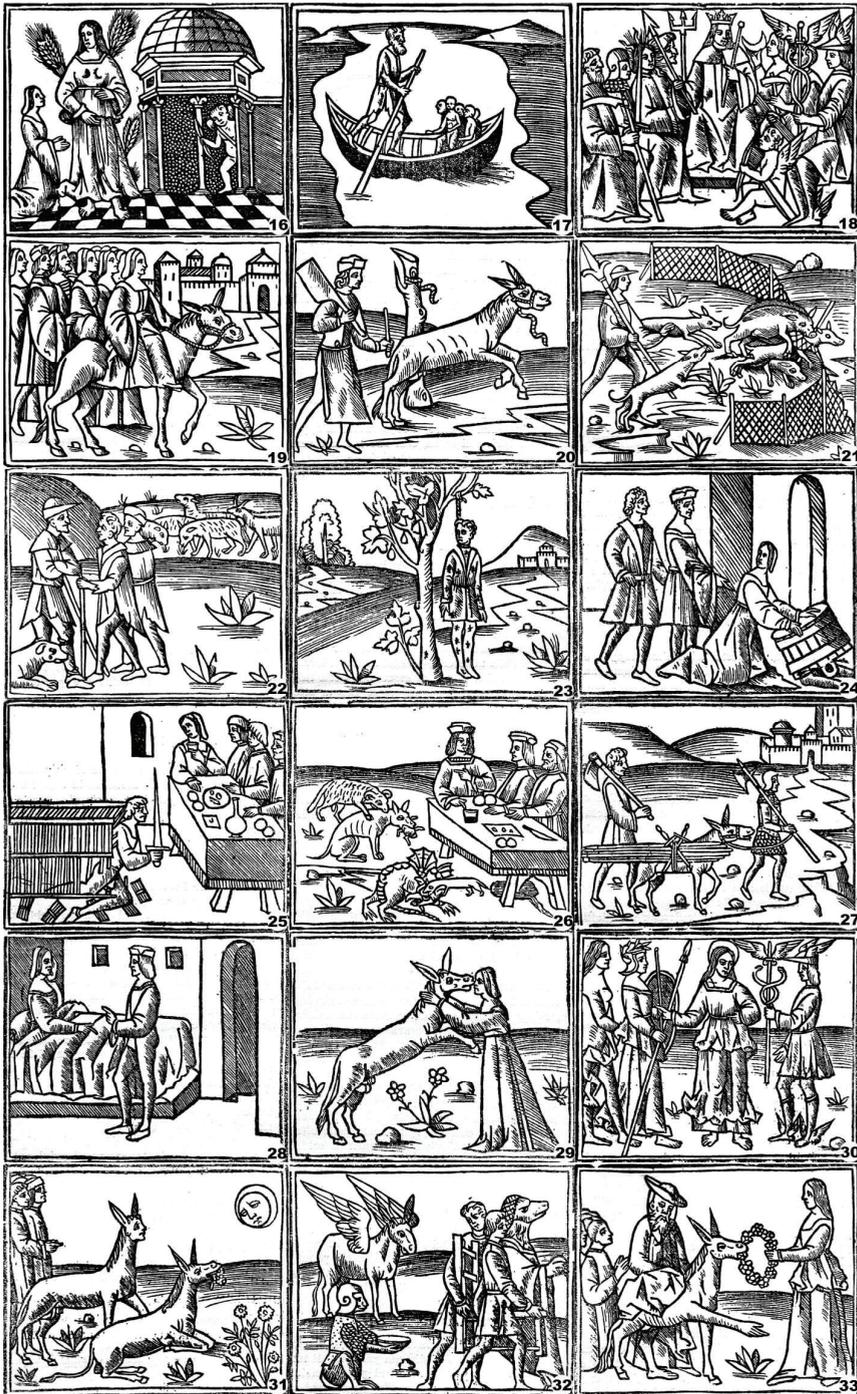


Fig. 1 (16-33)



Fig. 2

Description of the selected woodcuts from the vernacular *Apulegio* by Boiardo (fig. 2):

- 1: Lucius on his way to Hypata, together with two travellers.
- 2: The witches are cutting out Socrates' heart, while Aristomenes hides under his bed.
- 3: The witches empty their bladders over Aristomenes.
- 4: Socrates has dropped dead after he tried to drink water from the river.
- 12: Lucius spies on Meroe who changes herself into an owl.
- 15: Lucius the ass is beaten but drives his assaulters away by spraying them with diarrhoea.
- 18: The robbers' housekeeper tells the tale of Cupid and Psyche to Charite, while the ass is listening.
- 19: Psyche asleep in the garden of the palace of Cupid.
- 21: By the light of a lamp Psyche discovers that her husband is the god Cupid.
- 22: Cupid flies away while Psyche tries to accompany him.
- 23: Venus scolds Cupid who is suffering from his wound.
- 45: right: Philesitherus bribes Myrmex and Arete; left: Arete and Philesitherus making love.
- 46: The 'trio in bed' (the miller, his wife, and her adulterer). To the left: the miller has hung himself.
- 47: The ass is sold to a market gardener.
- 49: After having beaten the soldier knock-out, the market gardener rides away to go into hiding.
- 53: The cooks and other slaves are spying on the ass who is stealing from human food.
- 54: The ass as a guest in the dining room of Thiasus.
- 55: The ass and the Corinthian *matrona*.

The famous woodcuts that accompanied the vernacular translations like Boiardo's practically all breathe a novellistic atmosphere, as one can easily conclude from the selected examples in figure 2: only one of the whole series presents a scene of magic, representing Pamphile changing herself into a bird. But in the woodcuts of Beroaldo's commentary there are five that deal with magic or metamorphosis: fig. 1, nrs. 3, 10, 26 – the bad omens – and nrs. 31 and 33; nr. 32 represents the masquerade of book eleven chapter eight; six of the series represent pagan gods. These woodcuts clearly mirror Beroaldo's own concerns. The first one is connected to Apuleius' prologue. On the left we see two persons clad in togas and with garlanded heads, prob-

ably representing Apuleius himself and Beroaldo: the first person apparently addresses the other one, just as the author of the *Golden Ass* in the prologue addresses the reader: here, as Acocella points out, a very special kind of reader is shown: the commentator.<sup>41</sup> Portraits of the author on the title page or first page of a classical text, either in manuscripts or in the first printed editions, were quite frequent, but, as Acocella acutely observes, here the commentator assumes the same status as the author, as an indispensable guide for the interpretation of the text.<sup>42</sup> From the right, three female persons move towards them, these are probably allegorical figures, the first one a bit older, standing in a circle that is drawn on the ground; she has an inscribed leaf of paper in her hand: this paper might represent the *papyrus Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami inscriptam* (‘Egyptian papyrus inscribed with the sharpness of a reed from the Nile’: Apul. *Met.* 1,1,1, transl. Hanson), and this woman might stand for the *fabula graecanica* (‘a Greekish story’: Apul. *Met.* 1,1,6); the two younger women, standing at the edge of the circle, carry a book in the shape of a codex; they may represent personifications of the *desultoria scientia* (‘the skill of a rider jumping from one horse to the other’: Apul. *Met.* 1,1,6) and the ‘Milesian’ tales (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,1 *sermone* .. *Milesio* : ‘that Milesian style’), on both of which the first page of Beroaldo’s commentary has explanatory notes. The codex may represent the text itself, published with the commentary.<sup>43</sup>

A remarkable and rather enigmatic picture is presented in nr. 33 of the woodcuts (fig. 1, 33). It is clearly meant to illustrate the moment that Lucius, the ass, finally reaches the garland of roses that will free him from his ass shape. But here again, as Acocella has pointed out, the image is an illustration of Beroaldo’s commentary rather than of the text of the novel.<sup>44</sup> We see the ass eating from the garland, while one of his front legs is already changing into a human arm with a human hand; behind him we see a crowd of believers, in pious prayer acknowledging the miracle. However, the figure that presents the garland is not a priest as we are told in the text of *Metamorphoses* 11,13,1, but a female figure with loose hair, represented similarly as the goddesses are represented in for instance nrs. 14 (Venus) and 16 (Ceres). Beside the ass we see an old, bearded man, probably representing the Isis priest, but clad more like a Christian priest. Acocella has argued that a solu-

<sup>41</sup> Acocella 2001, 154, n. 302.

<sup>42</sup> Acocella 2001, 154. See for Beroaldo’s ideas on the important role of the commentator above, section 2.

<sup>43</sup> I have here adopted Acocella’s interpretation of the illustrations: Acocella 2001, 154.

<sup>44</sup> Acocella 2001, 155.

tion for this divergence from the Latin text may be found in the commentary of Beroaldo on *coronam devoravi*:

*Lucianus sine ullo mysterio religioso simpliciter narrat se vidisse inter flores alios rosas promicantes, ad quas procurrens ea devoraverit: hoc enim utitur verbo ῥόδα κατέπινον, rosas devoravi. Noster vero Lucius mistycoteta quaedam decentissime sapientissimeque profatus ait se ex manu sacerdotis coronam roseam devorasse, eaque devorata in pristinum hominem fuisse e vestigio reformatum, ut mystice intellegas coronam rosaceam esse sapientiam. Ad quam gustandam quam diu mortales non aspirant, tam diu bruti et asinino corio coniecti torpescunt. Mox ubi rosas carpserunt ex manu porrigentis sacerdotis, hoc est sapientis, qui antistes est doctrinarum, qui esurientes ultro invitat ad gustulum sapientiae dulcissimum, illico exuunt brutale tegumentum, fiuntque humana ratione pollentes et vere homines; ipsi quoque sacerdotalibus sacris initiantur. Terreni corporis labe purgati, vitiis exutis, nulla deinceps scelerum contagione polluti, Deo serviunt, cui conciliante virtute coniunguntur. Qua vita nihil beatius esse potest, ad quam utinam nos quoque pervenire possumus, sicut Apuleius noster post exudatos labores multiugos, post exutas terrenas sordes aliquando felicissime pervenit.*<sup>45</sup>

‘Lucian without any religious mystery relates that inbetween other flowers he saw roses glimmering, and that he ran towards them, and swallowed them. For he indeed uses this word ῥόδα κατέπινον: I swallowed the roses. Lucius, however, very becomingly and wisely pronouncing certain matters pertaining to the mysteries, says that he swallowed roses out of the hand of a priest, and after he had swallowed them, he was immediately changed back into his human shape, in order for you to understand in the way of the mysteries, that the rose garland is wisdom. For as long as human beings do not aspire to taste it, so long they are ugly beasts, covered by the hide of an ass. Later, when they have tasted the roses offered them by a priest, that means: by a wise person, who is a high priest of learning, and who spontaneously invites the hungry to taste the sweetest food of wisdom, then they immediately shed their beastly cover, and they become capable of human reasoning, and are real humans, and they themselves too are initiated in the sacred knowledge of priests. Purged from the blemish of their earthly body, freed from vices, no longer disgraced by any stain of crime, they serve God, with whom they communicate now that virtue connects them to Him. There can be

<sup>45</sup> Beroaldo on Apul. *Met.* 11,13,2 *coronam ... devoravi*.

nothing more blessed than such a life, and I hope that we too may attain it, just like our Apuleius after all kinds of toils and labouring, after he had freed himself from earthly dirt, once attained it in great happiness.’

The only possible explanation of the female figure in this woodcut is that she must be an allegorical figure of Wisdom, *Sapientia*, as Acocella also suggests. In order to visualize Beroaldus’ allegorical concept of this passage, the artist has a personification of *Sapientia* herself offer the garland of roses to the ass, instead of the Isis priest, whom the artist, not having at his disposal iconographical models of Isis priests, has represented as a Christian priest in unofficial garment.<sup>46</sup>

Seen in this light, one may also suppose that woodcut nr. 2 functions as a kind of counterpart to nr. 33. Here in nr. 2, Fortune is represented with a quiff on her forehead. She has a wheel in her left hand and is fiercely hitting Socrates. This picture presents words spoken and a gesture made by Socrates, in *Metamorphoses* 1,6,4:

“*Aristomene*”, inquit “*ne tu fortunarum lubricas ambages et instabiles incursiones et reciprocas vicissitudines ignoras*”, et cum dicto *sutili centunculo faciem suam iam dudum punicantem prae pudore obtexit ita ut ab umbilico pube tenus cetera corporis renudaret.*

“Aristomenes”, he answered, “you apparently do not know the treacherous twists and turns, and the shifting assaults and alternating reversals of Fortune.” And with this he drew his patched cloak over his face, which had already been blushing from shame all the time, with the result that he bared the rest of his body from his navel to his private parts.

We can see that, different from the text, the artist has decently given Socrates some underwear! The contrast between the illustrations nr. 2 and 33 makes clear that at least one of the topics in the modern thematic interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* had been realized already in Beroaldus’ time: the theme of the goddess Fortuna, who plays a far from amusing game (despite the promise of *laetaberis* in the Prologue) with Lucius and with other figures in the narrative, but who is in the end overcome by the providence of

<sup>46</sup> There is no counterpart for this scene in any of the woodcuts from Boiardo’s *Apulegio*. As is well known, Boiardo has changed the conclusion of Apuleius’ novel: he has omitted the Isis dénouement, and has Lucius receive roses from the hand of the magistrate in the theatre (and there is a woodcut illustrating that moment, but it is not included in my selection). Boiardo’s *Apulegio* then ends with an adaptation of the burlesque ending of the *Onos*.

the benign goddess Isis, who frees Lucius not only from his ass hide but also from the reign of blind Fortuna.

Much more could be said about these intriguing woodcuts that are so completely different from the ones that accompanied Boiardo's *Apulegio*. Accocella's book is a wonderful guide.

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