

To Reason and to Marvel: Images of the Reader in the *Life of Apollonius*

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The subject of this study is the experience of reading the *Life of Apollonius* (henceforth *LA*). Due to the uncertain fictional status of Philostratus' book, it can be acknowledged that this experience is quite uncomfortable: when we read the *LA*, we find it difficult to decide what kind of belief – factual or fictional – is expected of us. This book is, in other words, an exemplary case of the challenges posed by 'interpretive cooperation'¹ between the text and the reader. What do we need to do, in order for the text to work? What role are we supposed to play?

The answer depends largely on the credit we give to the 'memoirs of Damis', which the Narrator claims to have used to write the *LA*: authentic document, or fictional device?² Different reading contracts will follow from our assessment. This issue, however, does not provide all the answers. Even if we assume that the Memoirs do not exist, which is generally the case today, is this enough to define the *LA* as fiction? The book's logic is so complex, that most scholars view it as a *sui generis* work,³ which cannot be neatly slotted into any generic pigeonholes. Hence the tendency to move away from the truth / fiction dilemma, and to describe the *LA* with categories such as 'myth', 'allegory' or 'truthful fiction'.⁴

¹ Both here and further on in the study, we refer to Eco 1985, esp. 61-83.

² To give only the main stages of a discussion that goes back a very long way: Meyer 1917, Bowie 1978, 1653-1671 and Dzielska 1986, 19-49 challenged the existence of the Memoirs; Grosso 1954, Anderson 1986, 155-173, Flinterman 1995, 79-88 on the contrary acknowledged it.

³ To quote Bowie 1994, 194. Cf. the similar statements of Anderson 1986, 235; Anderson 1996, 613; Whitmarsh 2001, 227-230.

⁴ Respectively Cox 1983, XII ff., Elsner 1997 and Francis 1998; see also Cox 1983, 145 ('biography functioned (...) by mythologizing a man's life, that is, by using fiction to convey truth').

While acknowledging these categories as relevant, I think we need to describe the reading attitude they involve. What kind of engagement with the reader does a 'truthful fiction' suppose? In what way is it different from a purely fictional engagement? Fictional belief is already quite a complex process, requiring a combination of different cognitive attitudes;⁵ all the more so in a 'truthful' fiction. To be sure, it can be supposed that Philostratus wanted perhaps to address several different audiences simultaneously.⁶ Nevertheless, we cannot avoid putting these audiences in hierarchical order, assuming that some will have better, or more fully actualized the meaning of the text⁷. From U. Eco's 'interpretive cooperation' perspective, I would therefore like to understand what the approach of a Model Reader would be: a reader who knows exactly how to make a 'truthful fiction' work.

In order to do this, I intend to look within the text itself for figures of embedded readers, with the hypothesis that characters in a 'reception' situation have a specular function, as possible models for the real reader.⁸ Actually, Philostratus' text, as we shall see, represents two broad types of reading: an active, intellectual reading on the one hand, and a passive, emotional reading on the other. These two types of attitude are essentially contradictory; however, I shall argue, it is through simultaneously using both as a model, whilst avoiding the excesses of each one, that we collaborate properly with the text.

To Reason

The first reader of the book is the narrator himself. Far from being abstract or disincarnate, the narrator's voice belongs to a real character with a num-

⁵ On the paradoxes of fictional belief, and their apprehension by the Ancients, see the papers in Gill and Wiseman 1993, especially Morgan 1993 and Feeney 1993. See also more recently Webb 2006, on the complex attitude both described in, and implied by Philostratus' *Imagines*.

⁶ 'The sober and sceptical reader who wants a good but credible story will welcome the apparently reliable source that Philostratus claims Damis to be; the more sophisticated connoisseur of literary technique will interpret the 'notebooks' of Damis as a covert admission of fictionality' (Bowie 1994, 196).

⁷ In the statement that has just been quoted, for example, the 'fictional' reading is clearly presented as more perceptive and relevant.

⁸ This method has often been applied to canonical novels: see e. g. Morgan 1991 on Heliodorus; Egger 1994 on Chariton; Morales 2004, 36-95 on Achilles Tatius; Puccini-Delbey 2006 on Petronius and Apuleius.

ber of recognizable features.⁹ In his description of this character, T. Whitmarsh has shown that his persona is generally that of a serious historian.¹⁰ This position stands out most clearly in the Preface (I, 1-3), where he assigns himself the goal of being useful and remedying ignorance through a precise and rigorous method, thus using key Thucydidean words or notions (ἀκρίβεια, ἀλήθεια, ὠφέλεια). Accordingly, during the course of the book, he tends to adopt a rationalist stance, particularly in the geographical sections. In those, we usually see him distancing himself from poets, dismissing mythological accounts of phenomena, full of μυθῶδες,¹¹ and substantiating his narrative with his own experience — thus promoting autopsy, a typically historical procedure.¹²

This disciple of Thucydides constantly presents his narrative as the result of his readings, and lists the most important ones at the end of the Preface.¹³ Now, as a reader, he likes to emphasize his independence and the autonomy of his judgement. He tends to criticize other authors and opinions: he attacks Moiragenes' book on Apollonius (I, 3, 2), for instance, or disapproves of the elephant tusks with Juba (II, 13). Regarding Damis' book, by judging, from the outset, that it is written σαφῶς μὲν, οὐ μὴν δεξιῶς γε (I, 3, 2), he intends to show that he considers it in a distanced and objective fashion. Throughout the book, he projects the same attitude towards the Memoirs. At the end of the Indian episode, for instance (III, 53), he substantiates what Damis says about how the sky looks in the Red Sea, by saying that his testimony corresponds to that of another author, Orthagoras: therefore, he writes, 'we must believe that this account is accurate' (χρῆ πιστεύειν ὑγιῶς εἰρησθαι ταῦτα). The effect of this sentence is twofold: on the one hand, it shows that Damis's narrative can be trusted, but on the other hand, it also stresses that he does not trust it on principle. In other words, the Narrator depicts himself as someone who has to decide, at every point, whether or not to believe what he is reading.

⁹ It is of course important to distinguish this narrator from the author (Billault 1993a precisely reads 'I' as referring to the actual Philostratus). The subtle way this distinction is exploited in the *LA* is analysed in Gyselink & Demoen forthcoming.

¹⁰ Whitmarsh 2004 — a very helpful study.

¹¹ See especially II, 3 (the Caucasus) and V, 1-2 (the tides of the Ocean). I quote the *LA* from C. Jones' edition (Loeb Classical Library, 2005); translations slightly modified.

¹² See Hartog 2001, 395-411, about the function of autopsy in ancient historical discourse.

¹³ Archives, the correspondence of Apollonius, books by previous authors, and, of course, the memoirs of Damis (I, 2-3).

This kind of approach, it should be pointed out, although mostly shown by the Narrator, is also echoed by Apollonius himself.¹⁴ When faced with incredible phenomena, he is often shown adopting a rationalist stance; in India, for instance, he expresses doubts about the supposed powers of the wild asses' horn (III, 2). On the subject of volcanoes, he praises 'scientific explanations' (φυσικώτεροι λόγοι), rather than mythical ones (V, 16). When told about the birth of a baby with three heads, he sends Damis to witness the marvel with his own eyes (V, 12, 2), thus significantly relying on autopsy to establish the truth of what he has heard.

In this aspect of their behaviour, the Narrator and Apollonius create the image of a coherent intellectual approach which stands as a possible model for us real readers. If we conform to this model, we consider that we are not requested to grant our belief once and for all; rather, we should apply our judgement to each individual episode or problem, and refuse to believe what we are told categorically.

To Marvel

There is another obvious 'reception situation' in the book, that of Apollonius' audiences. Throughout the narrative, Apollonius is demonstrating his wisdom, power and clairvoyance, and each episode shows the effect of his words and actions upon the various characters he encounters.¹⁵ One word, more than any other, describes this effect: the verb θαυμάζειν, to be amazed. The capacity to amaze is essential to Apollonius' character. It is related to his status as a 'miracle-worker', a maker of θαύματα, which seems to be a constant of the character throughout the tradition,¹⁶ and is at the core of the controversies surrounding his status as a magician, before and after the *LA*.¹⁷ Regarding his hero's γοητεία, Philostratus' position is evidently an uneasy

¹⁴ On the 'convergence' between the two characters, Apollonius and the Narrator, see again Whitmarsh 2004, 424, 431.

¹⁵ Hägg and Rousseau 2001, 8 observe that to provide such a model of reception is precisely the advantage, in late Antiquity, of encomiastic biography over panegyric, since only the former can show both the hero speaking, and his audience listening.

¹⁶ Cf. Bowie 1978, 1686; Dzielska 1986, 85-127; Robiano 1989.

¹⁷ Of which the Origen/Celsus and the Eusebius/Hierocles controversies, surrounding Apollonius' symbolic rivalry with Jesus, are the clearest examples. Eusebius' *Reply to Hierocles*, in particular, is entirely centered on Philostratus' report of Apollonius' θαύματα.

one, and he usually refrains from clearly stating his opinion.¹⁸ He nevertheless bestows upon Apollonius the power to continuously amaze his audience: not only when he performs miracles (*e. g.* IV, 10; IV, 20; IV, 25), or when he foresees the future (V, 30), but even when he just says or does something wise or unexpected (I, 19; I, 27; III, 58; IV, 39...). Overall, people's θαυμάζειν is directed at every aspect of Apollonius, from the most superficial to the most profound, just as the Narrator says at the beginning of book IV:

When they saw the Master as he entered Ephesus in Ionia, not even workmen stayed at their crafts, but followed him, amazed (θαυμασταὶ ὄντες) at his wisdom, his appearance, his diet, his dress, or all of these at once.

What lies beneath this θαυμάζειν, and in what sense is it relevant to the real reader?

First of all, the term generally conveys a very strong desire to hear Apollonius. Here we see the Ephesians running to hear him, and even workmen leaving their workshops. In book 5 it is said that the Egyptians 'were all ears for him' (V, 24). When he visits the Naked Ones, Nilos, a young boy, is said to be '*passionately eager* (ἐρῶν) *to hear the Master*' (VI, 14).¹⁹ After his triumph over Domitian, the whole Greek world assembles at Olympia to see its hero (VIII, 15, 2). By repeatedly showing this desire for Apollonius, the Narrator makes the book itself an object of desire. Mimetically, it is the real reader's curiosity or interest that is described and incited at the same time. Moreover, the θαυμάζειν obviously points to the profoundly asymmetrical relationship between Apollonius and those he speaks to. As a teaching figure, Apollonius is mostly surrounded with younger disciples,²⁰ and the episodes confronting him with νεανία and μεράκια are especially numerous.²¹ In addition, what characterises Apollonius' lessons is their non-negotiable nature: they come across as a set of truths imposed on the audiences. For that matter, the Narrator contrasts his hero's style with that of Socrates or Aristotle (I, 17):

¹⁸ Flinterman 1995, 60-66.

¹⁹ See also I, 2, 3; VI, 17, 1 for Apollonius as an object of ἔρωσ.

²⁰ See for instance the ten νεανίσκοι joining him in Athens (IV, 17), or the νεότης ἐξ ἀπάσης τῆς γῆς coming to see him after his symbolic victory over Domitian (VIII, 15, 2).

²¹ *E. g.* IV, 12, 20, 25, 32; V, 22, 23; VI, 3, 36.

He was not given to logic-chopping or to long discourses, and he was never heard being ironic or argumentative (περιπατοῦντος) with his listeners. In answering he spoke as if from the tripod (ὥσπερ ἐκ τρίποδος) (...) and his sayings had the ring of commandments issued from the throne. (...) and when [some quibbler] asked him (...): ‘how will a wise man converse?’, he replied: ‘like a lawgiver; for a lawgiver must make his own convictions into ordinances for the many’.

Let us notice the words ἐκ τρίποδος here. Elsewhere, the verb χρησιμωδεῖν applies to his philosophical language (I, 9, 2) or to that of Pythagoras (VI, 11, 3). What is implied, is that Apollonius’ prophecies are in fact just an instance of his overall style: every word he utters is oracular.²² A clear example is the final episode of the narrative (VIII, 31), when a μειράκιον described as ‘eager for disputes’ (θρασὸν περὶ τὰς ἔριδας), arrives in Tyana after Apollonius’ death, and questions the immortality of the soul, asking for proof. Like an oracle (τρίπους), Apollonius appears to him in a dream, and thus literally *imposes* belief on him (πείθομαί σοι, the boy exclaims waking up, ‘as if he were mad’: ὥσπερ ἐμμανές). It is tempting to interpret this conclusive scene as an encrypted message to the reader; all the more so, considering the young students are shown to be ‘concentrated on their books’ (πρὸς βιβλίοις ἦσαν). The text here seems to dissuade us from rationally putting it to the test; rather, its truth is to be experienced, and accepted, like a revelation. From this point of view, the *LA* is not so much a document exposed to the intelligence of a reader, as a performative discourse itself trying to manipulate him.

Reading between two extremes

Philostratus’ book therefore depicts two types of reception: one is scientific, adult and active; the other emotional, juvenile and passive. Between these two antithetical models, how are we to choose? One particular passage provides a clue; in reference to a conversation about the marvels of India, that is, in the section which raises most clearly the issue of the book’s ‘credibility’, the narrator declares (III, 45): ‘*I shall not leave it out, since one might do well neither to believe nor to disbelieve all the details*’ (κέρδος εἴη μήτε πιστεύειν, μήτ’ ἀπιστεῖν πᾶσιν). ‘Believing all the details’ is what a young

²² Cf. Billault 1993b on Apollonius’ ‘rhetoric of authority’, and the more general points of Anderson 1994, 73-85 on the Holy Men’s ‘rhetoric of revelation’.

and overly impressionable audience might do; ‘disbelieving all the details’, on the contrary, looks like the attitude of a fanatically Thucydidean reader. Specifically, it seems that the text defines here the right attitude as simultaneously believing *and* disbelieving (πιστεύειν καὶ ἀπιστεῖν), provided that the extremes (πᾶσιν) of both are avoided. Two types of ‘bad readers’ are thus hinted at, between which the hypothetical Model reader can be supposed to stand.

The ‘over-amazed’ reader

The first bad reader is the naive reader. While showing Apollonius as ‘amazing’, θαυμαστός, the text is very careful to explain that there are two ways to be amazed, one good and one bad, and that being amazed only by what *really is* amazing, is a distinctive feature of a strong and cultivated mind. In this respect, of course, Apollonius is a Master. In Persia, for instance, he is said to be indifferent to all the wonders, the θαυμαζόμενα, in the King’s palace (I, 30). Similarly, he refuses to consider the tunnel dug under the Euphrates as a miracle, a θαῦμα (I, 39). Not *all* θαύματα, then, should be admired by the wise.

The question of what really is a θαῦμα is particularly acute when the narrative comes down to the traditional ‘land of wonders’ that is India.²³ An atmosphere of wonder indeed surrounds this part of the book, but in a somehow unexpected way. A good example is when Phraotes, the philosopher and philhellenic king, welcomes Apollonius and Damis with a show involving incredible feats of archery (II, 29). Both companions react differently at this point: on the one hand, we see Damis marvelling at the performance (θαυμάζειν); on the other, Apollonius doesn’t pay the slightest attention, and asks the king about his relationship with Greek culture. Consequently, not the *show*, which is only superficially wonderful, but *the king’s Greekness*,²⁴ becomes the object of philosophical amazement, and, as such, the only true ‘wonder’.

Such is the strategy of Philostratus in the Indian episode: he describes a universe literally filled with wonders, but plays them down in favour of truer, or more philosophical wonders, so that the reader’s attention is shifted

²³ See Romm 1992, 82-120 for a survey of this tradition.

²⁴ On the ideological significance of the *LA*, as an apology of Hellenism, see S. Swain 1999.

from the wonder itself, to what the wonder suggests or signifies.²⁵ Another key episode concerns the Brahmins' ability to levitate (III, 15): they do not accomplish this wonder, the Narrator reports, for its own sake, οὐ θαυματοποιίας ἕνεκα. This phrase could apply to the whole episode, and even to the whole book: it means that its θαύματα have only been included as a way of portraying, metaphorically, the divine man, of conveying his uncommon nature. To appreciate this portrait, however, you have to be able to see the metaphor; that is, you should be mature enough, Thucydides enough, to avoid being enthralled by the mere surface of wonders.²⁶

The 'over-critical' reader

Opposite the naive reader is the reader who 'disbelieves everything'; instead of being too easily impressionable, this other 'bad reader' is not enough so. To embody such a reader is precisely the function of the Naked Ones of Egypt whom Apollonius encounters in book 6.²⁷

The Naked Ones are first remarkable in that they are ill-disposed towards Apollonius, and therefore represent a kind of 'anti-audience' for him. Apollonius typically addresses young, enthusiastic disciples; here, he faces an old man, Thespesion (VI, 10, 1: πρεσβύτατος ἦν τῶν Γυμνῶν), whose chilly reception is highlighted by the young (*ib.*: νεώτατος τῶν Γυμνῶν) and almost loving (see *sup.*) Nilos. In contrast with the usual amazement, Thespesion resists Apollonius' authority and charisma, and will not accept his wisdom without putting him to the test (VI, 12, 2): '*suppose you were a merchant or a captain importing some cargo to us from there. Would you expect to dispose of it unexamined (ἀδοκίμαστον), just because it was from India, and not give out a taste or a sample?*'. The commercial image chosen here is quite reminiscent of the typical history-readers described by Lucian, who '*test (ἐξετάζοντες) each expression like a money-changer, rejecting at once what is false but accepting current coin that is legal tender and cor-*

²⁵ Romm 1992, 116-120 highlights the metaphorical value of Apollonius' travels. Elsner 1997 is more specific still (the range of Apollonius' travels is an image of his all-encompassing wisdom). See also Billault 2000, 105 ff. on the 'anti-novelistic' treatment of travel, wonders and exoticism by Philostratus.

²⁶ See II, 11; III, 12; IV, 3; VI, 3, 4 for other instances of 'naive' amazement.

²⁷ The setting of the Gymnosophists in Ethiopia, whereas they usually appear as Indians, is specific to Philostratus and Heliodorus; cf. Robiano 1992, on this change in the tradition. The Naked ones have been interpreted by Reitzenstein 1906, 42-45 as embodying the Cynic philosophy, defeated, through Apollonius, by Pythagorism. This opinion, contested by Robiano 1992, is supported by - 1995, 87-88.

rectly minted'.²⁸ The old figure of Thespesion looks like a caricature of the serious reader, the history-inclined reader, who will put 'all the details' under scrutiny and severely reject everything that seems tainted with 'fabulous', with *μυθῶδες*. 'Nudity' appears as a symbolic motif encapsulating this serious and severe rationalism.

The irrelevance of such an attitude is twofold, as becomes clear when the discussion which follows broaches the subject of visual arts. This discussion contains the famous affirmation in which Apollonius celebrates the visionary power of the painter (VI, 19, 2). Even though gods are not perceptible by the senses, he explains, they can indeed be represented, because *phantasia* can accomplish what *mimesis* cannot, as with the anthropomorphic Greek gods (φαντασία ταῦτα εἰργάσατο, σοφωτέρα μιμήσεως δημιουργός).²⁹

First of all, if we read this statement as referring, in a specular way, to the book itself,³⁰ we will conclude that the present portrait of Apollonius is the result of *phantasia*, not *mimesis*. This indirect relationship between the depicted object and its image rules out any idea of putting it 'to the test'. Rather than critical sharpness, what a work of art demands from the spectator is a kind of creative imagination, as shown in the other discussion of visual arts, in Taxila. '*Line-drawing and monochrome (...) deserve to be called portraiture too (...); being composed in one color, they convey a fair-haired man and a white-haired one. And if we draw one of these Indians with a white line, he will surely seem black; the snub nose, fuzzy hair, prominent jaws, and something astounding, as it were, in the eyes, lend blackness to the picture, and convey an Indian at least to those who look without foolishness (τοῖς γε μὴ ἀνοήτως ὀρώσιν)*'.³¹ Like Thespesion, the over-critical reader will 'foolishly' quibble over the factual inaccuracy of the image, instead of responding to the author's *phantasia* with his own capacity to bring images to life.

Secondly, when praising *phantasia*, Philostratus situates himself within the long rhetorical tradition where speech is given the task of reaching *enargeia*, that visual quality which gives audiences the impression that the

²⁸ *Hist. conscr.* VI, 10 transl. K. Kilburn, Loeb 1959.

²⁹ On the significance of this statement in the history of ancient art, see Rouveret 1989, 381-460; Elsner 1995, 21-48 ff. For an overall assessment of Philostratus' art theory, Birmelin 1933 is still valuable.

³⁰ Such a reading has been recently supported by Schirren 2005, 272 ff. and Miles forthcoming.

³¹ It seems that Apollonius alludes here to the archaic technique of *skiagraphia*: see Dubel 2006, 178-181 with the reference to Rouveret 1989, 17-24.

object of speech, though absent, is set before their eyes.³² Now, *enargeia* is based above all on an emotional process: it is through the emotions that the orator manages to bring about images in the mind of the audience, and even to impose them with the power and evidence of real images.³³ This ‘pathetic’ quality of the *enargeia* makes quite significant the portrait of Thespesion as a hostile old man: one should know, we seem to be told, how to watch Apollonius with a juvenile enthusiasm. By reading the book in a purely intellectual fashion, Philostratus warns, we prevent it from conjuring up the very presence of the Sage, and therefore from completely achieving its effect.

Conclusion

Two reading approaches are depicted in the *LA*: the narrative simultaneously values a learned, intellectual reading attitude, and a naive, emotional one. The Model Reader of the *LA*, as a consequence, might look like a living oxymoron, if the condemnation of extremes did not hint at a possible synthesis. It all comes down, in a way, to a matter of age: the reader should be old and young at the same time, that is, neither too old, nor too young. To be sure, between believing and disbelieving, between the passion of Nilos (νεώτατος) and the austere caution of Thespesion (πρεσβύτατος), the text seems to resolutely favour the former. However, we should notice that immediately after having symbolically defeated the over-critical reader, Apollonius expresses some reserve as to Nilos’ enthusiasm to join him (VI, 16): is he not too young to make this choice? Has he sufficiently put to the test (ἐλέγχον) the Master he is preparing to follow? Is he not excessive in his enthusiasm?

The openness of youth, then, or in other words the agreement to undergo the text’s power, is only valuable if it comes with a certain wisdom, and with some reflection about what one is being exposed to. This unexpected conclusion to the episode confirms, then, that the book, rather than a ‘naive’ reader, demands the superior naivety of a reader intelligent enough to ‘switch off’

³² Rhetors commonly define *phantasia* as the quality required to obtain the *enargeia*. See esp. DH *Lys.* 7; *Rhet. Her.* IV, 68; Ps-Long. *Subl.* XV; Quint. *IO* VI, 2, 29-32. Among an abundant literature on these two key-notions, see Calame 1991 and the articles in Lévy and Pernot 1997 and Lories and Rizzerio 2003.

³³ The orator who masters παντασία, *is erit in adfectibus potentissimus*, writes Quintilian (*IO* VI, 2, 29). On the central role of emotions in ancient rhetoric, see Webb 1997a.

his own intelligence.³⁴ Besides, as shown by R. Webb, an orator can only produce the necessary emotion for *enargeia*, by building on images already etched in the mind of the audience, that is, by assuming they possess a certain ‘cultural memory’, a certain *παιδεία*.³⁵ In this sense, juvenile emotion and adult intelligence are not contradictory, but necessary for one another. The specificity of the *Life of Apollonius* might then lie in the particular schizophrenia it demands from its reader; for here these two cognitive attitudes are not only mutually dependent (as when you momentarily stop being adult, out of adulthood), but simultaneously demanded of the reader in an almost impossible contiguity.

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³⁴ Thus following the famous statement of Gorgias about tragedy, that ‘he who is deceived is more clever than he who is not deceived’ (B 23 DK). On the relevance of this phrase to fictional belief, see Cassin 1995, 409-512, esp. 477 sq.

³⁵ Webb 1997b, 1997a.

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