

“Necessary Roughness”:
Plato’s *Phaedrus* and Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*¹

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Introduction

Readers of Apuleius have long recognized the influence of Plato’s *Phaedrus* (along with other Platonic works) on his *Metamorphoses*, especially in the allegorical elements of the “Cupid and Psyche” centerpiece.² Outside of “Cupid and Psyche” a handful of other allusions to the *Phaedrus* in the novel have been widely noted³ but it is the contention of this essay that elements of Plato’s *Phaedrus* are more deeply embedded in the themes and overall narrative(s) of the Apuleian novel than previously recognized. Reading the whole of the novel closely against the *Phaedrus* reveals that just as this particular dialogue provides a useful interpretive touchstone for the “Cupid and Psyche” tale, it functions in a similar and deliberate way for the novel’s principal narrative concerning Lucius, acting as backdrop to and underlining what we might call his fall and redemption. What follows is not an argument that the *Phaedrus*

¹ I am very grateful to my colleagues Ken Bratt, U.S. Dhuga, and David Noe for their helpful comments on an early draft of the essay as well as to Luca Graverini and the journal referees especially for bringing me up to speed on recent scholarship and talking me down from particular interpretive ledges.

² For Phaedrean (and other Platonic) influence on Cupid and Psyche see: Hooker 1955; Walsh 1970, 55ff, 195, 206ff; Penwill 1975; Anderson 1982, 75-85; Kenney 1990, 17-22; Schlam 1992, 82-98; Shumate 1996, 259ff; Dowden 1998; O’Brien 1998; Zimmerman 2004; Graverini 2012a, 112-113. For broader treatment of “Platonica” in the *Metamorphoses* see: Portogalli 1963, Moreschini 1965, Thibau 1965, Schlam 1970, Pottle 1978, Heller 1983, DeFillipo 1992, Sandy 1997, Harrison 2000 (esp. 252-259), O’Brien 2002, Graverini 2012a. As Shumate notes (1996, 260 n.7), while broader in scope, many such studies still tend largely to focus upon the Cupid and Psyche episode in their analysis. For an overview of Apuleius as Platonic philosopher and his own Platonic writings see Hijmans 1987.

³ See below.

functions as some sort of “master key” for understanding the ultimate “meaning” of the novel; as we will see, looking for a precise, one-to-one correspondence between figures in the *Phaedrus* and the *Metamorphoses* can quickly lead one into the weeds. Interpreting one mythic narrative in the light of another mythic narrative is bound to lead to paradoxes of some sort. My goal here is not to argue for a close, slavishly detailed Apuleian use of the *Phaedrus*. But rather I am suggesting that the novel employs broad and sustained use of the allegorical elements of that text as inspiration and template which certainly have bearing on larger interpretive issues regarding the *Metamorphoses*.

Because the Phaedrean links to “Cupid and Psyche” have been widely noted and accepted, I will not rehash such arguments here but rather will be content to take such acceptance (and also the attendant and widely accepted link between the narrative arcs of Lucius and Psyche⁴) as an invitation to look for Phaedrean allusions outside the folktale. Instead, in the following pages I will seek to build upon and flesh out previously recognized Phaedrean tags,⁵ focusing on two particular scenes in the novel:

- The opening scene (1.2-20) involving Lucius’ travels on the way to Hypata during which he hears Aristomenes’ gruesome tale concerning his friend Socrates. Many readers have noted a kind of scattered parody of the *Phaedrus* in a handful of details in this tale.
- The return of Lucius’ white horse, Candidus, at the end of the novel (11.20). Here many readers have seen in this reunion a clear allusion to the noble white horse of reason from the *Phaedrus*’ well-known allegory of the tripartite soul-chariot (symbolically underlining Lucius’ own Isiac redemption), but have been puzzled by the seeming incompleteness of the allusion. Where, for instance, is the allegorical black horse? Who is the charioteer?

Using these scenes as starting-points I hope to demonstrate that the Phaedrean influence on the whole of the *Metamorphoses* is not, on the whole, scattered or incomplete, but rather is deeply woven into the narrative fabric of the novel from beginning to end. Once this is established I will conclude with some

⁴ See Walsh 1970, 190-223; Smith 1998; Graverini 2012a, 115ff.

⁵ Throughout this essay I will also note allusions to other Platonic dialogues but only when they underline or expand a particular allusion to the *Phaedrus*. My goal here is to narrow the focus as much as possible and not attempt a comprehensive “Platonic” reading of the novel. For broader treatments see n. 2.

thoughts on how such an analysis might provide partial answers to long-standing puzzles in the novel as well as with comments on how such a reading might affect the debate concerning the unity of the *Metamorphoses* and Apuleius' overall "seriousness" as a novelist, philosopher, and initiate.

Platonic Allusion:

Lucius, Aristomenes, and the "Un-Socrates" (Met. 1.2-20)

Phaedrean elements in Book 1 of the Metamorphoses

A number of readers have noted a Phaedrean allusion near the end of Aristomenes' nightmarish tale involving his beleaguered friend, Socrates. We hear of a bizarre, dream-like encounter with the two witches, Panthia and Meroë, in which Aristomenes believes he witnesses the witches draining blood from his friend's throat and inserting a sponge into the wound, but not before Panthia eerily admonishes the sponge, "Listen, o sponge born in the sea, take care to travel back through a river."⁶ The next morning Aristomenes dismisses the night's events as a food and wine-induced nightmare when Socrates wakes up the next morning with no apparent signs of a wound to his throat. But the truth of the encounter is tragically revealed in the next chapter when Socrates leans over a river to drink and collapses in death, the sponge obeying Panthia's surreal command and rolling out of his throat. It is in the setting of this death scene that we see a nod to the *Phaedrus*. Compare the following passages—first from the *Phaedrus* where Socrates waxes effusively about the *locus amoenus* along the Ilissos he and Phaedrus have chosen for their discussion and then the corresponding Apuleian passage:

Νῆ τὴν Ἑραν, καλὴ γε ἡ καταγωγὴ. ἢ τε γὰρ πλάτανος αὐτὴ μάλ' ἀμφιλαφὴς τε καὶ ὑψηλὴ, τοῦ τε ἄγνου τὸ ὕψος καὶ τὸ σύσκιον πάγκαλον, καὶ ὡς ἀκμὴν ἔχει τῆς ἄνθης, ὡς ἂν εὐωδέστατον παρέχοι τὸν τόπον: ἢ τε αὖ πηγὴ χαριστάτη ὑπὸ τῆς πλατάνου ῥεῖ μάλα ψυχροῦ ὕδατος, ὥστε γε τῷ ποδὶ τεκμήρασθαι (*Phdr.* 230b).

By Hera, a fine stopping-place! This plane-tree is very spreading and tall, and the tallness and shadiness of the agnus are quite lovely; and being in full flower it seems to make the place smell as sweetly as it could. The

⁶ Met. 1.13.7: 'Heus tu,' inquit, 'spongia, cave in mari nata per fluvium transeas.' Text and translation of the *Metamorphoses* in this essay are taken from Hanson 1989.

stream, too, flows very attractively under the plane, with the coolest water, to judge by my foot.⁷

'En' inquam 'paratum tibi adest ientaculum.' Et cum dicto manticam meam umero exuo, caseum cum pane propere ei porrigo, et 'Iuxta platani istam residamus' aio... Verum ille, ut satis detruncaverat cibum, sitire impatienter coeperat. Nam et optimi casei bonam partem avidè devoraverat, et haud ita longe radices platani lenis fluvius in speciem placidae paludis ignavus ibat, argento vel vitro aemulus in colorem' (Met.1.18.8—1.19.7).

'Here,' I said, 'breakfast is all ready for you,' and at once I took my sack off my shoulder and quickly handed him some bread and cheese. 'Let's sit down next to that plane tree,' I said... Socrates, however when he had polished off enough food, began to feel unbearably thirsty, since he had greedily bolted down a good share of a fine cheese. Not far from the plane-tree's roots a gentle stream lazily flowed along in the likeness of a quiet pool, rivaling the color of silver or glass.⁸

⁷ Text and translation of the *Phaedrus* throughout this essay are taken from Rowe 1986.

⁸ Scholars who have noted and commented on the Phaedrean 'plane tree' allusion include: Thibau 1965, 114; Drake 1968, 108 n. 29; van der Paardt 1978, 83; Münstermann 1995, 12; Sandy 1997, 253; O'Brien 2002, 77-78; Smith-Woods 2002, 191; Keulen 2007, 338-339; Graverini 2012a, 18 and 135. In addition, Pottle (1978, 120), Smith-Woods (2002, 190), Keulen (2007, 172-173) and Graverini (2012a, 135) have noted another possible Phaedrean echo in the condition in which Aristomenes finds Socrates earlier in the tale. *Met.* 1.6.4 seems to recall the pose Socrates takes before his opening speech concerning Eros at *Phaedrus* 237b. Socrates, devastated by what he calls the 'slippery windings and shifting attacks and alternating reversals of Fortune' (*fortunarum lubricas ambages et instabiles incursiones et reciprocas vicissitudines*) covers his blushing head with a tattered cloak leaving the rest of his body naked (*et cum dicto sutili centunculo faciem suam iam dudum punicantem prae pudore obtexit ita ut ab umbilico pube tenus cetera corporis renudaret*). In the *Phaedrus* we find Socrates saying that he will rush through his first speech on Eros—which he will soon recant and correct—with his head covered out of shame (Ἐγκαλυψάμενος ἔρω, ἵν' ὅτι τάχιστα διαδράμω τὸν λόγον καὶ μὴ βλέπων πρὸς σὲ ὑπ' αἰσχύνῃς διαπορῶμαι). See Rowe 1986, 153 for further comment. Also compare Socrates' pose before his second speech at *Phdr.* 243b. Keulen (2007, 354) sees a possible humorous Phaedrean echo at *Met.* 1.19.8 where the Apuleian Socrates prefers to kneel down where the river bank does not slope too much in contrast to the enthusiasm of Plato's Socrates for the grassy slope at *Phaedrus* 230b.

What is going on here? Drake sees in Aristomenes' tale a "faint caricature of a Platonic episode" which sets up a loose, comic inversion which in turn presents the Apuleian Socrates as a kind of antithesis to the Socrates of Athens.⁹ Instead of lofty self-examination, the Apuleian Socrates indulges in the sordid, sensual delights of food, wine, sex, and magic.¹⁰ The narrative concerning the Apuleian Socrates also certainly foreshadows many of the poor choices Lucius himself will soon make and also the dire potential dangers he will soon face. Walsh comments, "The story of Aristomenes posts the first warning [to Lucius]. Socrates is the exemplar of the man who, forgetful of his family, binds himself by sexual ties to a witch...The sexual association is the prelude to subjection by magic, just as Lucius too is to seek his experience of magic by way of Photis' bed."¹¹ Even before Lucius reaches Photis' bed in Hypata, both he and Socrates are linked by a penchant for gluttony. Lucius, before Aristomenes begins his tale describes a dinner-party at which he nearly choked to death on a too large bite of "cheese pudding" (*polentae caseatae*) while trying to compete with his companions;¹² just before his bizarre death over the river we twice see Socrates "greedily devouring" the cheese Aristomenes brings him (*avide essitantem...avide devoraverat*).¹³ The indulgences of the Apuleian Socrates prefigure his own ostracism from society and pathetic death within the narrative, but also, on a Platonic level, Lucius' admitted gluttony and future "Socratic" dabbling may also foreshadow his imminent asinine transformation, recalling a

⁹ Drake 1968, 108 n. 29. See also Tatum 1979, 34. More recent commentary has argued that the scene is not strictly a parody which presents the Apuleian Socrates as an "anti-Platonic Socrates". Both Smith-Woods (2002, 189) and Graverini (2012a, 139) have noted parodic elements in the scene but also have drawn attention to the various overlaps between the Apuleian Socrates and traditional depictions of the Platonic Socrates.

¹⁰ The very kind of *serviles voluptates* which the priest announces that Lucius has been freed from by Isis at *Met.* 11.15. See Sandy 1974 and particularly Graverini 2012a, 115-117 for Platonic connections.

¹¹ Walsh 1970, 177. For further comparison between Lucius and Socrates see Nethercut 1968, 115 and Graverini 2012a, 135.

¹² *Met.* 1.4.1. The full passage: *Ego denique vespera, dum polentae caseatae modico secus offulam grandiore in convivas aemulus contruncare gestio, mollitie cibi glutinosi faucibus inhaerentis et meacula spiritus distinentis minimo minus interii*. Smith-Woods: "As is frequently the case in Apuleius' allusive style of narration, a small and seemingly trivial or even absurd detail can have wide symbolic implications and in this case, the choking prepares us for the tone of the story which lies immediately ahead. Lucius chokes on the food of the philosophers in the context of a symposium, when moreover the choking is caused by his greediness in trying to keep up with his companions (thus implying a moral flaw incompatible with philosophical serenity)" (2002, 186). Smith-Woods also see a link with this passage and *Met.* 1.19 where Aristomenes, out of fear, chokes on a piece of bread (2002, 187).

¹³ *Met.* 1.19.1, 7.

passage from the *Phaedo* where the Athenian Socrates predicts that those souls steeped in such sensual pursuits may be reincarnated as asses.¹⁴ I affirm all these observations and take issue only with the classification of the Platonic allusions and caricatures at play here as being “faint”, especially with regard to Apuleius’ use of the *Phaedrus*. In the next section I hope to show that Apuleius makes much more specific use of the *Phaedrus* with regard to both the smaller details of Aristomenes’ tale and also in setting up the larger themes of the novel and questions posed by it.

Additional elements: the agnus and the river

First let us return to the setting at the river under the plane-tree. We might, I suggest, see at *Met.* 1.19 a deliberate incompleteness of the Phaedrean allusion on the part of Apuleius in order to underline the un-Socratean nature of his Socrates. As we saw above both the Apuleian Socrates and the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* take their rest near a river under a plane-tree. However, at *Met.* 1.19 Apuleius fails to mention the presence of the ἄγνος bush which Plato’s Socrates showers with praise just as he does the plane tree (*Phdr.* 230b). Is this a telling omission? Several readers of the *Phaedrus* have noted the possible symbolic import of the tall, shady, and fragrant ἄγνος plant (*vitex agnus castus*) on the banks of the Ilissus.¹⁵ Helmbold and Holther comment, “The *agnus castus* is a peculiarly apt symbol of the true love which Socrates will praise in his second speech.”¹⁶ Rowe points out that the “chaste” plant was held to have anti-aphrodisiac qualities in antiquity.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Phaedo* 81d-82a. Pottle 1978, 86: [commenting on Lucius after his initial metamorphosis at *Met.* 3,24] “Lucius has fulfilled the Platonic prediction that those who have been addicted to gluttony, violence, and drunkenness and have taken no steps to correct their condition, may enter the bodies of asses and various other beasts in their next round of existence. His ass body reflects his true nature.” Graverini also notes that asses often appear in the speeches of Socrates, notably at *Phaedrus* 260b-c (2012a, 137 n. 247).

¹⁵ Both the agnus and the plane-tree were common in Attica. See Rowe 1986, 141-142 and DeVries 1969, 53. For text and translation see p. 3 above.

¹⁶ Helmbold and Holther 1952, 389. Scholars are divided on understanding the plants and the river mentioned at *Phaedrus* 230b as having any kind of symbolic significance. DeVries dismisses symbolic readings, “There is no need to seek profundities in its mention” (1969, 54). Rowe comments, “Given the obvious care and attention to detail with which the *Phaedrus* is written, it is difficult to avoid looking for significance, if not profundity, in every aspect of it” though he allows that the significance of the agnus in the passage “may simply lie in the denseness of its shade, and its flowers” (1986, 141-142).

¹⁷ Rowe 1986, 141. See *Dsc. de Materia Medica* I.183 and Pliny, *NH* XXIV.38.

Could, then, the *absence* of the *agnus* bush in the Apuleian allusion be another way in which this Socrates' perverse sensuality and imminent downfall are symbolized and telegraphed? One might object that such a reading necessarily expects too much from Apuleius and his attention to detail as a novelist¹⁸ as well as from the erudition of his original audience. However, as Trapp has argued, “few works were more firmly entrenched in the ‘cultural syllabus’ of Hellenic *paideia* by the 2nd century than Plato’s *Phaedrus*” to the point where allusions to the *Phaedrus*—particularly the plane-tree/*agnus* bush/river setting—or using it as an “object of classicizing mimesis” became so commonplace so as to be considered a kind of stock device.¹⁹

Socrates' death at the river may also be read as a kind of Phaedrean inversion. In the Apuleian text, Socrates' already undead-like existence comes to end when he (or rather, the sponge) obeys Panthia's command and attempts to “cross” the river.²⁰ In the *Phaedrus* there is a crucial moment following Socrates' first speech on Eros where he is about to escape from Phaedrus by crossing the Ilissos and back into the city,²¹ but his “divine sign” (*daimonion*) stops him from doing so:

Ἦνίκ' ἔμελλον, ὠγαθέ, τὸν ποταμὸν διαβαίνειν, τὸ δαιμόνιον τε καὶ τὸ εἰωθὸς σημεῖόν μοι γίνεσθαι ἐγένετο —ἀεὶ δέ με ἐπίσχει ὃ ἂν μέλλω πράττειν—καὶ τινα φωνὴν ἔδοξα αὐτόθεν ἀκοῦσαι, ἧ με οὐκ ἔᾶ ἀπιέναι πρὶν ἂν ἀφοσιώσωμαι, ὡς τι ἡμαρτηκότα εἰς τὸ θεῖον (*Phdr.* 242b-c).

When I was about to cross the river, my good man, I had that supernatural experience, the sign which I am accustomed to having—on each occasion, you understand, it holds me back from whatever I am about to do—and I

¹⁸ One's judgment, I imagine, would be affected by the degree to which one considers the *Metamorphoses* to be a coherent, “unified” text. I would, for the most part, apply Rowe's comment concerning the “care and attention” regarding the composition of the *Phaedrus* to the Apuleian text as well.

¹⁹ Trapp 1990, 141. In the appendix of his article (170-173) Trapp details dozens of allusions, references, and uses of the *Phaedrus* in 2nd century Greek literature. For the plane-tree/*agnus*/river setting alone he records uses by 14 different authors in 20 different works. e.g. Plutarch, *Amatorius* 749a. See below for more details and further discussion.

²⁰ Hanson's translation of this passage (which I have quoted above) renders the command to the sponge in a positive sense (“take care to travel back through a river”). Others have taken it negatively. See Keulen (2007, 275) for further discussion of the grammar here and the possible connection to *Phaedrus* 242b.

²¹ Nicholson argues that the conversation between Phaedrus and Socrates must take place on the eastern bank of the Ilissos as Socrates would not logically be proposing to escape Phaedrus by traveling deeper into the Attic countryside (1999, 128).

seemed to hear a voice from the very spot, which forbids me to leave until I have made expiation, because I have committed an offence against what belongs to the gods.

Socrates' "divine sign" demands that he stop and do recompense for his first speech on Eros which he had just broken off in personal disgust.²² We might say that the Socrates of both the *Metamorphoses* and *Phaedrus* have, to some degree, "not gotten Eros right"—Apuleius' Socrates has reveled in the low bodily pleasures of food, wine, and sex²³ while Plato's Socrates has, apparently, offended the gods by (in his first speech) attacking Eros, reducing it to a kind of vice or self-indulgence, rather than as something truly lofty and divine.²⁴ The difference is that Apuleius' Socrates never truly repents of his offenses and "crosses the river" to his demise while the *daimonion* of Plato's Socrates stops him at the river's edge and forces him to deliver a second, greater speech which focuses upon the divine majesty of Eros and atones for his earlier misstep. Again, the dark semi-parody in book 1 of the *Metamorphoses* gives us an "un-Socrates" whose life lessons go unheeded by Lucius for most of the novel.²⁵

The truth of myth and the Typhonic choice

These details suggest that Apuleius makes more pointed use of the *Phaedrus* in the Socrates episode than previously recognized, but I also submit that the very set-up of the Socrates/Aristomenes episode (and thus also, I shall argue, the set-up for the principal narrative of the novel) takes its cue from the *Phaedrus* as well. Before any of the speeches begin in the dialogue, we find Phaedrus and Socrates looking for a place along the Ilissos to stop and have their discussion.²⁶ As they walk along Phaedrus notes that he thinks they may be near the spot where, according to the myth, Boreas (the North Wind) is said

²² *Phaedrus* 241b.

²³ The very kinds of things Socrates at least partly associates with love and desire in his first speech on Eros. See *Phaedrus* 238a-c.

²⁴ See Nicholson 1999, 118-124.

²⁵ For a similar argument see Thibau 1965, 112 and Münstermann 1995, 12ff. Van der Paardt (1978, 83) also notes the connection between this passage and *Phaedrus* 242b. Like other readers I find Thibau's Platonic reading of the novel much too diffuse and tending to see Platonic influence and shadings behind every rock and tree. Schlam notes: "Thibau's work is often illuminating but...in striving for an excessive consistency of symbolic significance, it loses touch with the character and force of the narrative" (1970, n.2). Smith-Woods also agree with this assessment of Thibau (2002, 187).

²⁶ *Phaedrus* 229a

to have carried off the maiden Oreithyia.²⁷ When Socrates states that the actual location of the abduction was about two or three stades down the river (where the altar of Boreas is), Phaedrus, flabbergasted, is prompted to ask Socrates if he actually believes in the veracity of the story:

ἀλλ' εἰπὲ πρὸς Διός, ὦ Σώκρατες, σὺ τοῦτο τὸ μυθολόγημα πεῖθῃ ἀληθὲς εἶναι; (229c)

But please tell me, Socrates, for goodness' sake, do you believe this fairy-tale to be true?

What follows is a curious mini-speech by Socrates on the nature of myths and belief or disbelief in them. Socrates states that he could, like the experts (οἱ σοφοί), explain the myth away by speculating that perhaps once a young girl fell to her death after having been blown off the riverbank by a blast of wind and that over time this developed into the familiar story. In this view, Socrates says, he would not be “extraordinary” (ἄτοπος). He also notes another tradition which claims the story began with a girl falling to her death from the Areopagus. Socrates then goes on to say that while he finds such explanations attractive, he also finds them overly-clever and reductive and that they present more problems than solutions for the *sophos* who takes this approach:

...κατ' ἄλλο μὲν οὐδέν, ὅτι δ' αὐτῷ ἀνάγκη μετὰ τοῦτο τὸ τῶν Ἴπποκενταύρων εἶδος ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, καὶ αὐθις τὸ τῆς Χιμαίρας, καὶ ἐπιρρεῖ δὲ ὄχλος τοιοῦτων Γοργόνων καὶ Πηγάσων καὶ ἄλλων ἀμηχάνων πλήθη τε καὶ ἀτοπίαι τερατολόγων τινῶν φύσεων: αἷς εἴ τις ἀπιστῶν προσβιβᾷ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἕκαστον, ἅτε ἀγροίκῳ τινὶ σοφία χρώμενος, πολλῆς αὐτῷ σχολῆς δεήσει (229d-e)

...just because after that [the expert] must set the shape of the Centaurs to rights, and again that of the Chimera, and a mob of such things—Gorgons and Pegasus—and strange hordes of other intractable and portentous kinds of creatures flock in on him; if someone is skeptical about these, and tries to reduce each to what is likely, with his boorish kind of expertise, he'll need a good deal of leisure.

²⁷ It is worth noting the striking similarities—a personified wind spiriting a maiden down from a rock—between this myth and elements of the Cupid and Psyche tale. See Thibau 1965, 112.

Despite Socrates' stated general sympathy with such an approach he dismisses it as far too exhausting and reductive. As Nicholson writes, "Socrates simply has not got the time, or the heart, to take on this huge labor of reinterpretation."²⁸ Socrates seems to value myth primarily not for what they can tell us about what did or did not happen in the past; this is to miss the point. For Socrates myth is useful, "believable", primarily as medium for self-examination, for acting in accordance with the Delphic maxim. This "acceptance" of myth in the face of the skepticism of both Phaedrus and the *sophoi* sets up Socrates' own use of myth to explore the nature of soul later in the dialogue, most notably in the allegory of the soul-chariot in his second speech on Eros (241d-257d).²⁹ In fact, immediately after this dismissal Socrates makes an appeal to myth to express the dangers at play in such an examination:

ὄθεν δὴ χαίρειν ἔασας ταῦτα, πειθόμενος δὲ τῷ νομιζομένῳ περὶ αὐτῶν, ὃ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον, σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ' ἐμαυτόν, εἴτε τι θηρίον ὄν τυγχάνω Τυφῶνος πολυπλοκώτερον καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπιτεθυμμένον, εἴτε ἡμερώτερόν τε καὶ ἀπλούστερον ζῶον, θείας τινὸς καὶ ἀτύφου μοίρας φύσει μετέχον (230a).

So then saying goodbye to these things, and believing what is commonly thought about them, I inquire—as I said just now—not into these but into myself, to see whether I am actually a beast more complex and more violent than Typhon, or both a tamer and simpler creature, sharing some divine and un-Typhonic portion by nature.³⁰

Socrates chooses the language of myth to describe a kind of duality within himself, an approach which certainly foreshadows his use of myth and allegory later in the dialogue. We will return to this below, but first let us turn to Apuleian *comparanda*.

²⁸ Nicholson 1999, 21.

²⁹ Socrates' views on myth within and without the *Phaedrus* are complex and too layered to adequately cover in this space. For my purposes here I believe the above summary and broad interpretation will suffice and that they do not do disservice to general agreement on the topic among scholars. For further discussion see Griswold 1986, 36ff.; Rowe 1986, 139; Ferrari 1987, 9-12; White 1993, 21-22; Nicholson 1999, 14-34. Nicholson's argument is particularly lucid.

³⁰ More on the figure of Typhon below.

The principal narrative of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* also begins with a debate over the believability of tall tales and what we might call a "Typhonic choice". We first see Lucius traveling on his way to Hypata along with Aristomenes and another unnamed companion. After Aristomenes finishes his tragic tale concerning his friend Socrates, Lucius and the unnamed traveler have an exchange markedly similar to the one we saw between Phaedrus and Socrates concerning Boreas and Oreithyia:

Haec Aristomenes. At ille comes eius, qui statim initio obstinata incredulitate sermonem eius respuebat: 'Nihil' inquit 'hac fabula fabulosius, nihil isto mendacio absurdus', et ad me conversus: 'Tu autem' inquit 'vir ut habitus et habitudo demonstrat ornatus accedis huic fabulae?' 'Ego vero' inquam 'nihil impossibile arbitror, sed utcumque fata decreverint ita cuncta mortalibus provenire: nam et mihi et tibi et cunctis hominibus multa usu venire mira et paene infecta, quae tamen ignaro relata fidem perdant. Sed ego huic et credo hercules et gratas gratias meminere, quod lepidae fabulae festiuitate nos avocavit, asperam denique ac prolixam viam sine labore ac taedio evasi' (1.20.1-5).

So ended Aristomenes' story. But his companion, who in stubborn disbelief had rejected his tale from the very start, remarked, 'That is the most fabulous fable, the most ridiculous lie that I have ever heard. Then he turned to me. 'Now you are a cultured fellow,' he said, 'as your clothes and manners show. Do you go along with that story?' 'Well,' I said, 'I consider nothing to be impossible. However the fates decide, that is the way everything turns out for mortal men. I and you and all human beings actually experience many strange and almost unparalleled events which are disbelieved when reported to someone who is ignorant of them. But as for Aristomenes, not only do I believe him, by Hercules, but I am also extremely grateful to him for diverting us with a charming and delightful story. I have come out of this rough and long stretch of road without either toil or boredom.'³¹

³¹ This is the second time in the novel that Lucius rebukes Aristomenes' companion for his disbelief. He upbraids him before Aristomenes begins his tale at *Met.* 1.3-4. Scobie (1975, 120) comments, "[Lucius'] viewpoint and attitude are intended to influence or invite the reader to adopt a similar outlook in preparation for the acceptance of still more fantastic things to come." Elsewhere Scobie argues that this slant toward belief in such fantastic things reflects a credulity and craving for novelty present amongst the educated classes of the 2nd century (1975, 84). For further comment on the credibility of Aristomenes tale see James 2001, 263; Keulen 2007, 114; Graverini 2012a, 136 n. 9.

In his epistemological openness and acceptance of the tale Lucius would initially seem to follow the side taken by the Phaedrean Socrates. Unlike Plato's Socrates, however, Lucius does not regard the tale as a call to introspection; quite the opposite—he seems to take the truth of the tale as evidence of a world filled with inexplicable oddities in which the events of a man's life are ascribed not to personal choice, but to an impersonal fate (or, we might say, the Blind Fortune he decries at several places in subsequent books).³² Thus, disregarding the power of the tale as an invitation to serious self-examination, Lucius follows his appetites down the same path as the Apuleian Socrates. He arrives in Hypata mad for magic in its native land (Thessaly) and thus revealing his inner Typhon. When Lucius at last transforms into an ass at *Met.* 3.24 he reveals his “outer Typhon”, becoming a reification of the reckless, violent creature about which Socrates muses at *Phaedrus* 230a.

Readers of Apuleius have long recognized the association of the ass with the Egyptian Seth (the enemy and antithesis of Osiris and Isis), the identification of Seth with the Greek Typhon (Seth-Typhon, the principle of disorder and chaos in the universe), and the possibilities these associations have as a unifying device for the novel.³³ The very asinine form of Lucius may foreshadow his eventual Isiac salvation: at *Met.* 11.6 Isis notably tells the asinine Lucius to eat the roses offered to him in order that he “cast off at once the hide of that wretched beast which I have long detested.”³⁴ It is possible that in using this imagery Apuleius is taking a page from Plutarch who in his *De Iside et Osiride* equates Seth with Typhon and the form of Typhon with the ass, all the while filtering his observations through a Platonizing, syncretizing lens. Consider:³⁵

³² Graverini (2012a, 133-140) also connects these opening scenes with elements of the *Phaedrus*, particularly the notion that an entertaining tale can relieve the toil of a long journey as well as the discussion concerning truth and falsehood in storytelling. I follow Graverini's observation here that at Lucius resembles the Platonic Socrates but ultimately demonstrates that he is completely enamored of precisely the same sort of μύθοι that Socrates considers fundamentally pointless. Lucius conflates λόγοι with *fabulae*.

³³ e.g. Schlam 1992, 110-112.

³⁴ ...*pessimae mihique iam dudum detestabilis beluae istius corio te protinus exue* (11.6.2).

³⁵ Lucius' familial ties to Plutarch are noted at *Met.* 1.2 and 2.3. For more on Apuleius and Plutarch see Walsh 1981; DeFillipo 1992; Kenney 1998, xxiv, xxvi; Finkelpearl 2012; and van der Stockt 2012.

Τυφὼν δὲ τῆς· ψυχῆς τὸ παθητικὸν καὶ τιτανικὸν καὶ ἄλογον καὶ ἔμπληκτον τοῦ δὲ σωματικοῦ τὸ ἐπικηρον καὶ νοσῶδες καὶ ταρακτικὸν ἀωρίαις καὶ δυσκρασίαις, καὶ κρύψεσιν ἡλίου καὶ ἀφανισμοῖς σελήνης, οἷον ἐκδρομαὶ καὶ ἀφανισμοὶ [καὶ] Τυφῶνος· καὶ τοῦνομα κατηγορεῖ τὸ Σήθ, ᾧ τὸν Τυφῶνα καλοῦσι· φράζει μὲν γὰρ τὸ καταδυναστεῦον καὶ καταβιαζόμενον, φράζει δὲ τὴν πολλακίς ἀναστροφήν καὶ πάλιν ὑπερπήδησιν (371b).

Typhon is the element of the soul which is passionate, akin to the Titans, without reason, and brutish, and the element of the corporeal which is subject to death, disease and confusion through bad seasons, imperfect coalescence of air, eclipses of the sun, and disappearances of the moon, which are in the manner of sallies and rebellions by Typhon; and this is implied by the name Seth, by which they call Typhon; for it denotes the overpowering and violent, it denotes frequent return and overleaping.

ὁ μὲν γὰρ Ὅσιρις καὶ ἡ Ἴσις ἐκ δαιμόνων ἀγαθῶν εἰς θεοὺς μετέλλαξαν· τὴν δὲ τοῦ Τυφῶνος ἡμαυρωμένην καὶ συντετρυμμένην δύναμιν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ψυχορραγοῦσαν καὶ σφαδάζουσαν, ἔστιν αἷς παρηγοροῦσι θυσίαις καὶ πραῦνουσιν, ἔστι δ' ὅτε πάλιν ἐκταπεινοῦσι καὶ καθυβρίζουσιν ἔν τισιν ἑορταῖς, τῶν μὲν ἀνθρώπων τοὺς πυρρὸς καὶ προπηλακίζοντες, ὄνον δὲ κατακρημνίζοντες, ὡς Κοπτίται, διὰ τὸ πυρρὸν γεγενῆσθαι τὸν Τυφῶνα καὶ ὀνώδη τὴν χροάν (362e).

Osiris and Isis thus changed from good daemons into gods. The weakened and shattered power of Typhon, which still gasps and struggles, is appeased and mollified by them partly by sacrifices, while at other times again they humiliate and insult it in certain festivals, jeering at men of ruddy complexion and throwing an ass down a precipice,³⁶ as the people of Coptos do, because Typhon had a ruddy complexion³⁷ and was in asinine form.³⁸

³⁶ Compare the fate of another ass at *Met.* 4.5 and the brigands' plan to execute the asinine Lucius at 6.31-32.

³⁷ Some have viewed the title *Asinus Aureus* as an allusion to the Seth animal, with "golden" referring to the 'ruddy', 'tawny', or 'flame-red' color (τὸ πυρρὸν) of Plutarch's Typhonic ass. See Griffiths 1970, 407-409; Martin 1970; Scobie 1975, 48-49; Schlam 1992, 111.

³⁸ Text and translation from Griffiths 1970. Plutarch equates Typhon with the ass again at *De Iside* 371c.

The first passage quoted above also contains a number of details which directly recall talk of magic early in the *Metamorphoses* and the dark experiences of the Apuleian Socrates at the hands of Meroë and Panthia, including the disappearance of the moon and eclipses of the sun.³⁹

Seeing a larger Phaedrean frame or set-up for the novel, then, is tempting. Lucius' own transformation can be read as a playing out or extension of the "Typhonic choice" put forth by Socrates at *Phdr.* 230a. I would also argue that Socrates' use of the Typhon myth sets up his later appeals to myth and in particular his use of the white horse/black horse allegory of the soul in his second speech on Eros. The duality of his Typhonic example would seem to telegraph the striking duality of the rational/irrational halves of the soul which these horses represent. Ferrari comments [in a discussion of Socrates' belief in myth and his use of the Typhonic example], "When Socrates...offers his most sustained account of the human and especially the philosophical soul...he finds himself incapable of describing it 'as it is', and compelled to resort to the simile of a chariot with winged horses and charioteer (246a3-7)—a simile which grows into a full mythical allegory as the chariot plies its way among the Olympian gods (246e4-249d3). In turning eventually to the study here recommended, Socrates seems to return willy-nilly to considering the sort of composite mythical monster [Typhon] here rejected [by the *sophoi*] as unworthy of attention."⁴⁰

If we accept this connection between these two allegories in the *Phaedrus*, we might also see a greater connection between the *Phaedrus* and the *Metamorphoses*. That is, if Plato's Socrates invites us (at least in part) to view the black/lower/irrational horse of his soul allegory as "Typhonic" and we accept the larger Phaedrean frame for the novel suggested above, I submit that the Apuleian text might invite us to read Lucius' "Typhonic" ass against that same horse. Is Lucius-as-the-ass himself the Phaedrean black horse of the soul? The

³⁹ At *Met.* 1.8 Socrates claims that Meroë can, through her witchery, lower the sky, suspend the earth, solidify fountains, dissolve mountains, raise up ghosts, bring down gods, darken the stars, and light up Tartarus itself. At *Met.* 1.3 Aristomenes' unnamed companion scoffs at the notion that magical incantations can reverse rivers, shackle the sea, stop the winds, halt the sun, cause dew to drop from the moon, make the stars to fall, and banish daylight.

⁴⁰ Ferrari 1987, 11-12. Rowe (1986, 140) also notes that the Typhonic musings look forward to the later chariot/horse allegory pointing out that the Typhonic image is a "development of one found in the *Republic* (588bff), where the three 'parts' of the soul are represented respectively by a man, a lion, and a many-headed beast—hence, probably, the reference in the present passage to Typhon: Typhon (or Typhoeus) was a hundred-headed dragon, with arms and legs to match, who was the last obstacle between Zeus and the kingship of the gods (Hesiod, *Theogony* 820ff.)" Thus in both the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* Typhonic imagery is used to denote the 'lower' aspects of human nature or soul.

seeming absence of this element of the Phaedrean soul allegory has long puzzled commentators keen to find Platonic influences and allusions within the novel. It is to this problem we now turn.

*The Black Horse:
Lucius and Plato's Allegory of the Soul (Phaedrus 244a-257b)*

Summary of the problem

Near the end of the novel following Lucius' retransformation back into human form but before his Isiac initiation, Lucius has a dream in which the chief Isiac priest appears telling him that he has some gifts for him including the return of a slave of his named Candidus. Upon awaking Lucius is puzzled because he has never owned a slave of that name. Soon, however, the meaning of the dream is revealed when his "shining white" horse (which he had lost upon his asinine metamorphosis early in the novel) is returned to him:

Quare sollertiam somni tum mirabar vel maxime, quod praeter congruentiam lucrosae pollicitationis argumento servi Candidi equum reddidisset colore candidum (11.20.7).

Then it was that I particularly marvelled at the prophetic nature of the dream, for, besides having its promise of gain confirmed, it foretold under the symbol of a slave Candidus (which means white) the recovery of my white horse.

Many readers have seen here what is perhaps the most overt allusion to the *Phaedrus* in the novel—Lucius' salvation/initiation at the hands of Isis is underscored and given a Platonic sheen by the symbol of the white horse, the higher, rational element of the soul in Plato's allegory.⁴¹ Dowden comments, "The white horse is one's means of transport to heaven; it symbolises moral control. And it is restored to Lucius after he is reborn into human shape and has devoted himself to God, but before his initiation. That is to say, what in Plato symbolises moral control that is one's passport to heaven occurs in Apuleius at the moment of adoption of the religious will."⁴² This is, of course,

⁴¹ Thibau 1965, 102; Drake 1968; Dowden 1977; Griffiths 1978, 160-161; Tatum 1979, 34; James 2001, 263; Keulen 2007, 100.

⁴² in Griffiths 1978, 161. See also Dowden 1977.

the same horse which we see Lucius dismounting at *Met.* 1.2, a move which some readers have seen—rightly, I think—as a symbolic gesture and as the first of a pair of bookends in the novel; Lucius abandons the Platonic ideal in the first narrative scene and is reunited with it at the end.⁴³

But if Candidus is a clear reference to the Platonic white horse, where then is the black horse? Even while accepting the Phaedrean allusion this absence has troubled commentators. James notes that “the absence of the black horse...skews the philosophical equation from *Phaedrus*, for Candidus needs a counterpart in order to play his role effectively.”⁴⁴ Dowden has made the suggestion that Lucius could be read as the black horse but ultimately concludes that “all this is in the realm of the unverifiable: there is no sign that Apuleius took any more than the theme of the white horse from this part of the *Phaedrus* myth.”⁴⁵ I submit, however, that a close reading of the *Me-tamorphoses* reveals that Lucius-as-the-ass does indeed resemble the Phaedrean black horse at several points. In the pages below I hope to show that in a number of scenes we find clear allusions which act as the very counterpart James mentions and provide a kind of consistent narrative thread that, to a degree, holds the whole of the novel together. Before we approach these scenes, however, we need to reconsider the black horse of the *Phaedrus*.

Reevaluating the black horse

In Socrates’ second speech on Eros he likens the human soul to a chariot drawn by two horses—a “good” white horse, and a “bad” black horse which are at cross purposes (unlike the horses and charioteers of the gods). As the chariot of the soul attempts to soar aloft and approach the sublime beauty of the divine, the charioteer has great difficulty in trying to manage these opposing forces:

⁴³ See James 2001, 262ff.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 263

⁴⁵ in Griffiths 1978, 161. Griffiths himself here summarizes a number of arguments regarding the Candidus scene but ultimately rejects the Platonic reading noting that Lucius “possessed the white horse even when his lust and curiosity were most excessive” (161). The importance of the scene, he argues, lies in the dream-fulfillment, not in any kind of philosophical allusion.

ἐοικέτω δὴ συμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνίοχου. θεῶν μὲν οὖν ἵπποι τε καὶ ἡνίοχοι πάντες αὐτοὶ τε ἀγαθοὶ καὶ ἐξ ἀγαθῶν, τὸ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων μέμεικται. καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἡμῶν ὁ ἄρχων συνωρίδος ἡνιοχεῖ, εἶτα τῶν ἵππων ὁ μὲν αὐτῷ καλὸς τε καὶ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἐκ τοιούτων, ὁ δ' ἐξ ἐναντίων τε καὶ ἐναντίος; χαλεπὴ δὴ καὶ δύσκολος ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ περὶ ἡμᾶς ἡνιόχησις (246a-b).

Let [the soul] then resemble the combined power of a winged team of horses and their charioteer. Now in the case of the gods, horses and charioteers are all both good and of good stock; whereas in the case of the rest there is a mixture. In the first place our driver has charge of a pair; secondly one of them he finds noble and good, and of similar stock, while the other is of the opposite stock, and opposite in nature; so that the driving in our case is necessarily difficult and troublesome.

Part of the problem in seeing an allusion to the black horse in the character of Lucius has been, I believe, the tendency to see the Phaedrean black and white horses in purely “black and white” terms. For example, how could Lucius ultimately be the “evil”⁴⁶ Platonic black horse when he properly submits to Isis and is redeemed at the end of the novel? Certainly the language of the above passage seems to suggest a polar opposition between the two equines, but an evaluation of the whole of the allegory reveals that the nature of these symbols is far more complex. As Belfiore has argued,⁴⁷ the black horse is not simply an “evil” force that needs to be overcome in order to approach the divine. In fact, she notes, it is the black horse that always initiates movement toward the divine, often in the face of excessive restraint on the part of the white horse. The movement of the black horse may be shameful, excessive, disorderly, and lustful but without this movement there would be no approach at all. The task of the charioteer is not to “repress or eradicate the desires represented by the black horse but to learn from them and to integrate the whole soul by allowing these desires to find their proper place within it.”⁴⁸

Belfiore also notes that the allegory is largely the story of a kind of “redemption” of the black horse—after much trial and many missteps the black

⁴⁶ A kind of polarizing bias appears in translations such as Rowe’s where he renders πονηρός (describing the black horse at 254e) as “evil”. The word has a broad range of meanings—“toilsome”, “base”, “knaveish”, “roguish”—most of which do not carry the moral gravity implied by “evil”.

⁴⁷ Belfiore 2006, esp. 186-191

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 186. Here Belfiore closely follows Ferrari’s argument. See Ferrari 1987, 185-203, esp. 194. Also, see Griswold 1986, 135 on “integration”.

horse learns to work with the charioteer and the white horse to approach the beloved/divine with reverence and fear (αἰδομένην τε καὶ δεδιῶσαν, 254e).⁴⁹ Viewed in this way the black horse—not evil, but misguided; lustful, yes, but whose desires need reordering not eradication; stumbling shamefully toward the divine, but ultimately arriving at the divine nonetheless—becomes an attractive touchstone for the asinine Lucius and his narrative arc in the novel.⁵⁰

Lunging toward the divine; fighting the charioteer

Before we attend to specific scenes in the *Metamorphoses*, it is worth noting that Socrates' physical description of the black horse conjures an asinine mental image:

ὁ δ' αὖ σκολιός, πολὺς, εἰκῆ συμπεφορημένος, κρατεραύχην, βραχυτράχηλος, σιμοπρόσωπος, μελάγχρωτος, γλαυκόμματος, ὕφαιμος, ὕβρεως καὶ ἀλαζονείας ἑταῖρος, περὶ ὧτα λάσιος, κωφός, μάλιστα μετὰ κέντρων μόγις ὑπεϊκῶν (253e).

The [black horse] is crooked in shape, gross, a random collection of parts, with a short, powerful neck, flat-nosed, black-skinned, grey-eyed, blood-shot, companion of excess and boastfulness, shaggy around the ears, deaf, hardly yielding to whip and goad together.

Compare description of the ass in the *Metamorphoses*—first at Lucius' initial transformation, *Met.* 3.24.4-6:

...sed plane pili mei crassantur in setas et cutis tenella duratur in corium et in extimis palmulis perdito numero toti digiti coguntur in singulas ungulas et de spinae meae termino grandis cauda procedit. Iam facies enormis et os prolixum et nares hiantes et labiae pendulae; sic et aures inmodicis horripilant auctibus. Nec ullum miserae reformationis video solacium, nisi quod mihi iam nequeunt tenere Photidem natura crescebat.

Instead [of changing into a bird] my body hair was thickening into bristles and my soft skin hardening into hide. At the ends of my palm my fingers were losing their number and being all compressed together into single

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 191

⁵⁰ Sandy observes that throughout his wanderings and missteps in the *Metamorphoses* Lucius is still consistently portrayed as a proper young man (1974, 235-236).

hoofs, and from the end of my spine came forth a great tail. My face was immense now, mouth spread, nostrils gaping, lips sagging. My ears too grew immoderately long and bristly. I saw no consolation in my wretched metamorphosis except for the fact that, although I could not now embrace Photis, my generative organ was growing.

And also at Lucius' retransformation back into human form at 11.13.3-5:

Ac primo quidem squalens pilus defluit, ac dehinc cutis crassa tenuatur, venter obesus residet, pedum plantae per ungulas in digitos exeunt, manus non iam pedes sunt, sed in erecta porriguntur officia, cervix procera cohibetur, os et caput rutundatur, aures enormes repetunt pristinam parvitatem, dentes saxei redeunt ad humanam minutiem, et, quae me potissimum cruciabat ante, cauda nusquam!

First my coarse bristles disappeared, then my thick hide thinned, my fat belly contracted, and the soles of my feet grew out through their hoofs into toes; my hands were no longer feet, but were extended for their upright functions; my long neck shrank, my face and head rounded, and my enormous ears returned to their original smallness; my rock-like teeth went back to their minute human scale; and the thing which had tortured me most of all before, my tail,⁵¹ no longer existed.

While the Platonic and Apuleian descriptions certainly do not match up exactly,⁵² the animals in both works appear as an odd assemblage of parts, recalling, perhaps, the comic observation, “a donkey is a horse designed by committee”.⁵³ Certainly the legendary hyper-sexuality⁵⁴ and stubbornness associated with the ass apply both to the black horse and notions of the ass in

⁵¹ *cauda*/tail—sometimes used as a euphemism for the phallus. See below.

⁵² The description of the black horse as being “deaf” (κωφός) is particularly at odds with the eagerly eavesdropping ass of the latter books of the *Metamorphoses*. Still, the usage here may be figurative and meant to emphasize the black horse's unwillingness to obey or its overall dullness of character, especially considering that the black horse is portrayed as being able to speak later in the dialogue (254c).

⁵³ This line is also often applied to the camel as well.

⁵⁴ Ferrari argues that Plato's vocabulary describing the actions and intent of the black horse is sexual, lustful (1985, 3). Moritz notes that a Sanskrit name for an ass—*gardabha*—probably means something like “the lascivious beast” (1958, 16, n. 6). The priapic and lustful nature of the ass was a well-known theme in the Classical world; see van Mal-Maeder 1997, 108-109 (and esp. n. 74).

the *Metamorphoses*.⁵⁵ The description and behavior of the black horse dove-tail with the potentially Typhonic persona Socrates mentions at *Phdr.* 230a and with the later Seth-Typhon ass we see later in Plutarch. It is also worth recalling here that at *Phaed.* 81e Socrates posits that souls given to drunkenness, violence, and gluttony would pass into the bodies of asses or other animals of that sort.⁵⁶ There is not enough here, perhaps, to definitively state that Plato means for his audience to imagine an ass at *Phdr.*253e, but at the least here we have a very unorthodox equine which invites further comparison with the Apuleian ass.

At several places in the novel Lucius-as-the-ass' behavior mirrors that of the Platonic black horse. As we noted above, in the Platonic allegory it is the black horse which initiates movement toward the divine, but his approach is impetuous, impassioned, and improper. As the chariot team draws near to the sublime vision of beauty, the charioteer and the white horse resist but are forced, temporarily, to follow the lead of the black horse:

ὅταν δ' οὖν ὁ ἡνίοχος ἰδὼν τὸ ἐρωτικὸν ὄμμα, πᾶσαν αἰσθήσει διαθερμήνας τὴν ψυχὴν, γαργαλισμοῦ τε καὶ πόθου κέντρων ὑποπλησθῆ, ὁ μὲν εὐπειθὴς τῷ ἡνιόχῳ τῶν ἵππων, αἰεὶ τε καὶ τότε αἰδοῖ βιαζόμενος, ἑαυτὸν κατέχει μὴ ἐπιπηδᾶν τῷ ἐρωμένῳ: ὁ δὲ οὔτε κέντρων ἡνιοχικῶν οὔτε μᾶστιγος ἔτι ἐντρέπεται, σκιρτῶν δὲ βίᾳ φέρεται, καὶ πάντα πράγματα παρέχων τῷ σύζυγί τε καὶ ἡνιόχῳ ἀναγκάζει ἰέναι τε πρὸς τὰ παιδικὰ καὶ μνειῖαν ποιεῖσθαι τῆς τῶν ἀφροδισίων χάριτος (253e-254a).

So when the charioteer first catches sight of the light of his love, warming the whole soul through the medium of perception, and begins to be filled with tickling and pricks of longing, the horse which is obedient to the charioteer, constrained then as always by shame, holds itself back from leaping on the loved one; while the other no longer takes notice of goading or the whip from the charioteer, but springs powerfully forward, and causing all kinds of trouble to the beloved and mention to him the delights of sex.

⁵⁵ Belfiore sees satyr-like qualities in the description of the black horse (2006, 187). The distance between the satyr and the ass is, in some ways, small, particularly with regard to physical appearance (Silenus was often depicted with a snub-nose, fat belly, and the ears and tail of an ass) and sexuality. See Padgett 2000. Graverini (2012a 127, 134) notes the resemblance in various descriptions between the Platonic Socrates and asses and satyrs (particularly Silenus).

⁵⁶ οἷον τοὺς μὲν γαστριμαργίας τε καὶ ὕβρεις καὶ φιλοποσίας μεμελητηκότας καὶ μὴ διηυλαβημένους εἰς τὰ τῶν ὄνων γένη.

As they draw closer the charioteer is frightened by the sight and pulls violently back on the reins. This maddens the black horse which proceeds to lash out at the charioteer and the white horse for their cowardice before redoubling its efforts:

...βιαζόμενος, χρεμετίζων, ἔλκων ἠνάγκασεν αὐτὸν προσελθεῖν τοῖς παιδικοῖς ἐπὶ τοὺς αὐτοὺς λόγους, καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἐγγὺς ἦσαν, ἐγκύψας καὶ ἐκτείνας τὴν κέρκον, ἐνδακὼν τὸν χαλινόν, μετ' ἀναιδεΐας ἔλκει· ὁ δ' ἠνίοχος ἔτι μᾶλλον ταῦτόν πάθος παθὼν, ὥσπερ ἀπὸ ὕσπληγος ἀναπесῶν, ἔτι μᾶλλον τοῦ ὕβριστοῦ ἵππου ἐκ τῶν ὀδόντων βία ὀπίσω σπᾶσας τὸν χαλινόν, τὴν τε κακηγόρον γλῶτταν καὶ τὰς γνάθους καθήμαξεν καὶ τὰ σκέλη τε καὶ τὰ ἰσχία πρὸς τὴν γῆν ἐρείσας ὀδύνας ἔδωκεν (254d-e).

...struggling, neighing, pulling, [the black horse] forces them to approach the beloved again to make the same proposition, and when they are nearby, head down and tail outstretched, teeth clamped on its bit, it pulls shamelessly; but the same happens to the charioteer as before, only still more violently, as he falls back as if from a *husplex*;⁵⁷ still more violently he wrenches the bit back, and forces it from the teeth of the unruly horse, spattering its evil-speaking tongue and its jaws with blood, and thrusting its legs and haunches to the ground delivers it over to pains.

Compare the following episode from *Met.* 3.27.3—Lucius has just transformed into an ass when he spies an antidotal garland of roses decorating a shrine of the horse goddess Epona within the stable:

Denique adgnito salutari praesidio pronus spei, quantum extensis prioribus pedibus adniti poteram, insurgo valide et cervice proluxa nimiumque porrectis labiis, quanto maxime nisu poteram, corollas appetebam.

I recognized this as an instrument of salvation, and with eager anticipation, straining as hard as I could, I stretched out my front feet and stood powerfully upright; with my neck extended and my lips thrust forward, I summoned all the effort I could and tried to reach the garlands.

⁵⁷ Some sort of “mechanical contrivance”, perhaps here referring to the starting-barrier one might see in a horse race. See Rowe 1986, 188.

I would argue that here too we have an impetuous, improper approach to the divine. Lucius, now fully “Typhonic” on the heels of his dabbling in illicit sex and magic, strains forward to desecrate the shrine of a goddess. I also suggest we see a glimmer of Lucius’ Isiac salvation and retransformation here—the very presence of the roses here telegraph the properly offered (and approached) roses Lucius at last devours in book 11.⁵⁸ But the Lucius here is the black horse in need of taming and reordered desires. Also like the black horse Lucius suffers immediate pains for his efforts; his own slave (who suddenly appears as a stable groom) plays the unwitting role of the Phaedrean chariotteer⁵⁹ and angrily decries the actions of the ass as a kind of religious crime⁶⁰ as he proceeds to beat him mercilessly with a tree branch.

There is a kind of doublet of this scene at *Met.* 4.2-3 where we see Lucius slipping away from his captors to graze in a nearby meadow. Here from a distance he spots some roses and imagining that this must be a “grove of Venus and the Graces” he lunges forward:

*Tunc invocato hilaro atque prospero Eventu, cursu me concito proripio,
ut hercule ipse sentirem non asinum me verum etiam equum currulem
nimio velocitatis effectum* (4.2.3).

Then, with a prayer to joyous and prosperous Success, I hurled myself forward at such an accelerated pace that, by Hercules, I felt I was no longer an ass, but had been transformed by my extreme speed into a racehorse.

Then upon recognizing that the blossoms are not the fragrant, red roses he needs for his retransformation but rather a poisonous flower which “uneducated folk call... by the rural name ‘laurel-roses’” he cautiously steps forward

⁵⁸ 11.13. There seem to be linguistic links as well—the language used to describe the shrine of Epona at 3.27 (*in ipso fere meditullio Eponae deae simulacrum residens aediculae, quod accurate corollis roseis equidem recentibus fuerat ornatum*) and that characterizing the shrine of Isis before which the newly initiated Lucius stands (*Namque in ipso aedis sacrae meditullio ante deae simulacrum constitutum tribunal ligneum iussus superstiti byssina quidem sed floride depicta veste conspicuus*) is strikingly similar. Also, the goddess Epona may have had, for a 2nd c. audience, direct associations with the goddess Isis. See Sandy 1978, 127. I am currently pursuing this connection in a separate study.

⁵⁹ Drake (1968, 108) notes this possible connection between the groom and the Phaedrean chariotteer as well, pointing out that while this scene does appear in the Pseudo-Lucianic *Onos*, the detail of the groom is Apuleian. I would add as well, that the specific mention of the goddess Epona is also uniquely Apuleian and does not appear in the *Onos* version. See n. 58 above.

⁶⁰ He refers to Lucius as a *sacrilegus*, a “temple-robber” in Hanson’s rendering.

to eat them anyway.⁶¹ Another would-be “charioteer” steps forward in the form of a young man (whom Lucius supposes to be the gardener) who begins beating Lucius savagely. Lucius compounds his problems by kicking the young man with his hooves which raises the ire of the man’s wife who incites the villagers to set their dogs upon him.

Again, through a Phaedrean lens, we might see this as another improper, misguided approach to the divine in need of immediate correction. Lucius’ association of the roses with a grove of Venus may suggest that they remain for him a symbol of or reminder of a lower kind of Eros;⁶² this is perhaps underlined when he discovers that the roses are poisonous, a counterfeit of the Isiac ideal. The passage also foreshadows the Isiac finale in that we later learn that the true Venus has her identity in Isis herself (11.2.1 and 11.5.2) and that Lucius notes the blessings that Success (*Eventus*) has—finally—showered upon him in his legal career at the end of the novel (11.28).⁶³

When Lucius attempts an escape from the robbers’ lair at 6.27 we may see another “charioteer” in the person of the kidnapped Charite who mounts Lucius’ back and urges him on his way. Here, the actions of the “charioteer” are not necessarily violent or inducing of physical pain, but they are corrective and result, again, in tragedy for Lucius. At *Met.* 6.28-29 the escape seems to be going well with Charite urging Lucius on with the whip (*plagarum suasu*) as well as with endearments, but soon Lucius’ stubbornness puts him at odds with the girl:

Dum haec identidem puella replicat votisque crebros intermiscet suspiratus, ad quoddam pervenimus trivium, unde me adrepto capistro dirigere dextrorsum magnopere gestiebat, quod ad parentes eius ea scilicet iretur via. Sed ego gnarus latrones illac ad reliquas commeasse praedas renitebar firmiter atque sic in animo meo tacitus expostulabam: "Quid facis, infelix puella? Quid agis? Cur festinas ad Orcum? Quid meis pedibus facere contendis? Non enim te tantum verum etiam me perditum ibis." Sic nos diversa tendentes et in causa finali de proprietate soli immo viae herciscundae contendentes rapinis suis onusti coram deprehendunt ipsi latrones et ad lunae splendorem iam inde longius cognitos risu maligno salutant (6.29.6-8).

⁶¹ *Met.* 4.2.8 This is the oleander or “rose-laurel” plant, *rhododaphne* in Greek (Hanson 1989, 186, n. 1).

⁶² Achilles Tatius (2.1.3) refers to the rose as the “go-between of Aphrodite”. See Kenney 1998, 230.

⁶³ On the connection between *Eventus* and *Fortuna* see Schlam 1992, 34-35 and Drews 2009, 558 n. 519.

While the girl was repeating these sentiments again and again, mingling frequent sighs with her prayers, we arrived at a fork in the road. She seized my halter and tried hard to turn me to the right, because that was evidently the way to her parents'. But I knew that the robbers had gone along that road to fetch the rest of their loot, and so I stubbornly resisted, while objecting silently in my mind. "What are you doing, unhappy girl? Why are you hurrying so to the next world? Why do you insist on doing it on my feet? You are going to destroy not just yourself, but me too." And so there we were, straining in different directions, arguing a boundary dispute over possession of property—or rather about a right of way—when we were caught in the open by the robbers loaded with their plunder. By the light of the moon⁶⁴ they had recognized us from a long way off, and they greeted us with a malicious laugh.

The whole scene is reminiscent of *Phaedrus* 254b-d where not only do we see the black horse pulling against the bit which the charioteer has wrenched back in a kind of holy fear, but also that same horse angrily upbraiding the charioteer (and the white horse) for what it sees as a cowardly dereliction of duty:

...ἰδοῦσα δὲ ἔδεισέ τε καὶ σεφθεῖσα ἀνέπεσεν ὑπτία, καὶ ἅμα ἠναγκάσθη εἰς τοῦπίσω ἐλκύσαι τὰς ἠνίας οὕτω σφόδρα, ὥστ' ἐπὶ τὰ ἰσχία ἄμφω καθίσει τῷ ἵπῳ, τὸν μὲν ἐκόντα διὰ τὸ μὴ ἀντιτείνειν, τὸν δὲ ὕβριστὴν μάλ' ἄκοντα. ἀπελθόντε δὲ ἀπωτέρω, ὁ μὲν ὑπ' αἰσχύνης τε καὶ θάμβους ἰδρῶτι πᾶσαν ἔβρεξε τὴν ψυχὴν, ὁ δὲ λήξας τῆς ὀδύνης, ἦν ὑπὸ τοῦ χαλινοῦ τε ἔσχεν καὶ τοῦ πτόματος, μόγις ἐξαναπνεύσας ἐλοιδόρησεν ὀργῇ, πολλὰ κακίζων τὸν τε ἠνίοχον καὶ τὸν ὁμόζυγα ὡς δειλία τε καὶ ἀνανδρία λιπόντε τὴν τάξιν καὶ ὁμολογίαν: καὶ πάλιν οὐκ ἐθέλοντας προσιέναι ἀναγκάζων μόγις συνεχώρησεν δεομένων εἰς αὐθις ὑπερβαλέσθαι.

...at the sight [of the beloved the charioteer] becomes frightened, and in sudden reverence falls on his back, and is forced at the same time to pull back on the reins so violently as to bring both horses down on their haunches, the one willingly, because of its lack of resistance to him, but the unruly horse much against its will. When they are a little way off, the first horse drenches the whole soul with sweat from shame and alarm, while the other, when it has recovered from the pain caused to it by the bit

⁶⁴ It is tempting to see here, in the moonlight, a foreshadowing of the opening of Book 11.

and its fall, scarcely gets its breath back before it breaks into angry abuse, repeatedly reviling the charioteer and its companion for cowardly and unmanly desertion of their agreed position; and again it tries to compel them to approach, unwilling as they are, and barely concedes when they beg him to postpone it until a later time.

In both texts both the black horse and Lucius are “correct” in their goal—the black horse strains toward the vision of the beloved, and Lucius strains toward the road away from the bandits and on (presumably) to freedom.⁶⁵ But also for both, the attempt, the desire is ill-omened; for Socrates’ black horse, at least, the period of trial, taming, and humbling must go on until it learns to obey and follow the lead of the charioteer.

Through all these episodes do we see Lucius learning or being “tamed” in any way? Is he being humbled in preparation for his encounter with Isis? Readers looking for a unified narrative in the novel have often been troubled by the seeming lack of development in Lucius’ character throughout especially the latter books.⁶⁶ It is true that after Lucius’ transformation the novel becomes very episodic without much in the way of “moral development” on the part of the central hero. Still, if we put the “charioteer” episodes side-by-side we may see Lucius-as-the-black-horse progressively beginning to come around. In the stable before the shrine of Epona Lucius lunges at the roses with abandon and is quickly beaten away. In the so-called “grove of Venus” Lucius again races toward the flowers but this time he couples his attempt with a prayer and then approaches the blossoms “hesitantly” (*cunctanter*) before being beaten once again. In the Charite episode we have a more distinct, and more charitable “charioteer” figure pulling on the reins and whose words presage a happier life for Lucius. Even if the struggle here places Lucius back in the bandits’ hands, his wrestling with the “charioteer” is intellectual as well as physical and he escapes the immediate punishment he receives in the previous episodes. We will return to this question in the closing section of this essay.

⁶⁵ Lucius seems to be correct in his assessment that the road to the right is where, indeed, the bandits are, having been out with them at 6.25 to collect more of their loot, although Apuleius does not exactly make it clear where the bandits are coming from when they come upon the ass and the girl. The parallels with the Platonic text are not exact—Charite pulls on the halter out of conviction, not fear—but at the very least the narrative recalls the *Phaedrus* in the lack of coordination between “horse” and “charioteer”.

⁶⁶ See Sandy 1974, 235.

Of lameness and winglessness

The “lameness” of Lucius-as-the-ass (actual or threatened) as well as that of other characters appears enough times in the novel so as to be a recurring theme.⁶⁷ At *Phdr.* 248b Socrates describes souls whose charioteers and horses are not in sync and are dragged down and trample upon each other as they attempt, but fail, to rise up and gaze upon the upper, heavenly regions. In the chaos they become lame and lose their wings:

θόρυβος οὖν καὶ ἄμιλλα καὶ ἰδρῶς ἔσχατος γίγνεται, οὐ δὴ κακία ἠνιόχων
πολλαὶ μὲν χωλεύονται, πολλαὶ δὲ πολλὰ πτερὰ θραύονται: πᾶσαι δὲ
πολὸν ἔχουσαι πόνον ἀτελεῖς τῆς τοῦ ὄντος θεᾶς ἀπέρχονται, καὶ
ἀπελθοῦσαι τροφῇ δοξαστῆ χρῶνται.

So there ensues the greatest confusion, competition and sweated exertion, in which through incompetent driving many souls *become lame*,⁶⁸ and many have their wings all broken; and all of them having had much trouble depart without achieving a sight of what is, and afterwards feed on what only appears to nourish them.

It seems that Apuleius taps into this symbolism in order to underline Lucius’ association with the unruly horse and lower elements of the soul at several points. In each of the “charioteer” episodes outlined above the “lameness” of the ass is highlighted or threatened immediately preceding or following the failure of the lurch toward freedom or retransformation. At 3.27 after Lucius tries to gobble the roses of Epona the groom threatens to render Lucius maimed and crippled (*debilem claudumque reddam*). At 4.4 after Lucius escapes from the blows of the gardener and villagers in the “grove of Venus” only by spraying them with an effusion of diarrhea, he is retaken by the robbers and forced to stagger lamely on worn-down hooves (*ungulis extrititis iam claudus et titubans*). At 6.26 just before Lucius’ failed escape with Charite the bandits complain about having to waste food on a lame, little donkey (*Quo usque...ruptum istum asellum, nunc etiam claudum, frustra pascemus?*).

Nethercut sees a progression towards Lucius’ salvation in four other instances of “lameness” in the novel:⁶⁹ 1) at 6.18 the tower tells Psyche that she

⁶⁷ *Met.* 3.27, 4.4, 6.26, 6.30, 9.30, 11.27

⁶⁸ χωλεύονται: Rowe translates this as “become maimed”. I have replaced this with “become lame” because I believe this is a better, more literal translation given the equine context.

⁶⁹ Nethercut 1968, 117-119

will encounter in the depths of Hades a lame donkey with a lame driver (*claudum asinum...cum agasone simili*). 2) at 9.27 we find Lucius led by a lame old man (*senex claudus*) to a watering hole; on the way Lucius seizes the opportunity to stomp on the fingers of the miller's wife's lover which protrude from under the trough where he hides. 3) at 11.8 at the *anteludia* of the Isiac festival we see in the parade an ass decorated with wings led by a decrepit old man (*seni debili*). 4) at 11.27 Lucius dreams of priest with a deformed foot (*sinistri pedis talo paululum reflexo*) and meets him the next day in the person of the aptly-named Asinius Marcellus.

In each instance Nethercut sees the old man as a kind of “charioteer”⁷⁰ or spiritual guide progressively and more pointedly directing Lucius to true divinity. In the Psyche episode we follow the girl past the lame ass and driver on her attempt to secure the beauty of Proserpina, which recalls the Phaedrean soul's attempt to gaze upon the true beauty of the beloved and points to Lucius' encounter with Isis. With the miller we perhaps see some moral development on Lucius' part as he expresses disgust at the miller's wife's adultery and takes justice into his own hands (or hooves). In the Isiac parade Nethercut notes that unlike before where the ass walked in darkness, laden and prodded by the old man, here the ass “moves in harmony beside the older human, even as the names of steed and master [Pegasus and Bellerophon] imply a unity of purpose”.⁷¹ This same harmony is highlighted again at the dream-fulfillment involving the priest. The aspects of lameness, asininity, and spiritual guide are brought together in this one figure who will shepherd Lucius into the rites of the highest deity, Osiris, the scene which closes the novel.

In the passage from the *Phaedrus* above we also saw that another mark of the lower aspect of the soul (and by association also of the black horse) was the brokenness of its wings. Later in the allegory (251b) Socrates describes how the vision of the beloved, of true divinity warms the soul and causes it to sprout wings (and thus return to its original state):

δεξάμενος γὰρ τοῦ κάλλους τὴν ἀπορροὴν διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων ἐθερμάνθη ἢ ἢ τοῦ πτεροῦ φύσις ἄρδεται, θερμανθέντος δὲ ἐτάκη τὰ περὶ τὴν ἔκφυσιν, ἃ πάλαι ὑπὸ σκληρότητος συμμεμυκότα εἶργε μὴ βλαστάνειν, ἐπιρρυείσης δὲ τῆς τροφῆς ὤδησέ τε καὶ ὥρμησε φύεσθαι ἀπὸ τῆς ρίζης ὁ τοῦ πτεροῦ καυλὸς ὑπὸ πᾶν τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς εἶδος: πᾶσα γὰρ ἦν τὸ πάλαι πτερωτή.

⁷⁰ Nethercut does not describe him specifically as such; I'm taking Nethercut's observations and framing them in Phaedrean language.

⁷¹ Nethercut 1968, 119. See below for more on the allusion to Pegasus and Bellerophon.

...for [the soul of the lover] is warmed by the reception of the effluence of beauty through his eyes, which is the natural nourishment of his plumage, and with that warmth there is a melting of the parts around its base, which have long since become hard and closed up, so preventing it from sprouting, and with the incoming stream of nourishment the quills of the feathers swell and set to growing from their roots under the whole form of the soul; for formerly the whole of it was winged.

At *Phdr.* 251d Socrates goes on to describe how the opposite happens when the lover is away from the presence of the beloved—the feathers shrivel and dry up

In the *Metamorphoses* the state of being “winged” or “wingless” is also a recurring theme and from a Phaedrean viewpoint underlines Lucius’ many failed attempts to approach the divine or achieve salvation in books 1-10 and also his success in finally doing so under the direction of Isis. Lucius’ very descent into his lower, Typhonic form results from a failed attempt to become literally winged. We see him ridiculously flapping his arms as Pamphile’s ointment turns him not into a bird but rather bends him down into his asinine shape.⁷² Even before this when Photis worries that once Lucius becomes a bird that he will fly away and never come back to her, Lucius quickly swears that he would readily trade his new-found wings for the (slavish) pleasures of her bed.⁷³ His winglessness is synonymous with his subsequent “fall”.

This notion is also notably mirrored in the Cupid and Psyche tale at *Met.* 5.24 where Psyche grabs onto the winged Cupid’s leg as he flies away but loses her grip and falls down to earth.⁷⁴ Drake has argued that the return of Lucius’ white horse, Candidus, is prefigured by four specific allusions to the Pegasus myth.⁷⁵ In the first three Lucius himself is likened to the winged horse and each case involves a failed escape attempt from his captors. After the attempt with Charite (6.30) the bandits mock Lucius claiming that before his recapture he was “surpassing the winged velocity of Pegasus” (*at paulo ante pinnatam Pegasi vincebas celeritatem*). At 7.24-26 the sadistic boy in charge of Lucius is killed by a bear after which Lucius is mounted and driven off by a passerby. Again, Lucius nearly escapes but they are captured by herdsmen

⁷² *Met.* 3.24

⁷³ *Met.* 3.22-23

⁷⁴ Many have seen in this scene a clear allusion to the *Phaedrus*. See Kenney 1990, Smith 1998, O’Brien 2002, and especially the commentary and further bibliography in Zimmerman 2004.

⁷⁵ Drake 1968, 106-109

who accuse the passerby of theft and of murdering the boy. Lucius refers to this would-be savior as his “Bellerophon” (*meum Bellerophontem*). In the next book at 8.16 Lucius sets out with the fugitive slaves of Tlepolemus and Charite. Here Lucius protects himself from potential wolf attacks by embedding himself in a crowd of horses and amazes all around him by outrunning the herd. In remarking on his own speed, Lucius reflects on the speed of Pegasus and what it was that made him fly so fast.

Reading these scenes against the *Phaedrus* we might see in Lucius’ failures an allegorical attempt by the black horse to grow wings and elevate itself but only to fall again. There is failure in each case because the attempt at “flight” is not properly motivated or the “charioteer” is not obeyed (or is even absent). Drake notes how in the first two scenes Lucius is motivated in his new-found swiftness by fear and sudden impulse which is the opposite of the gentle approach and surrender needed to encounter the divine in the Phaedrean allegory. On the escape attempt following the death of the sadistic boy Drake comments, “[The passerby] has almost succeeded in spurring the ass on to escape the vengeful shepherds; that is, Lucius has had a short-lived impulse, motivated by fear, to save himself; but idealism cannot ride high on an ass if it is to surmount the horrors of debasement.”⁷⁶ After surpassing even the horses at 8.16.3 Lucius himself recognizes that his velocity is born not of eagerness but dread (*formidinis*) and goes on to imagine a rider-less Pegasus motivated by the same:

...denique meum ipse reputabam Pegasus inclutum illum metu magis volaticum ac per hoc merito pinnatum proditum, dum in altum at adusque caelum sussilit ac resultat, formidans scilicet igniferae morsum Chimaerae.

Then it was that the thought occurred to me that the famed Pegasus had taken flight more because of fear, and that this was the reason why he was traditionally described as winged when he jumped up and leaped into the air and right up to heaven—no doubt he was terrified of being bitten by the fire-breathing Chimaera.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 106-107

⁷⁷ Drake comments: “In Lucius’ version there is no Bellerophon forcing the horse to hover above the monster in order to slay the chimaerical terrors of distorted imagination. The ass refuses to face up to them” (*ibid.*, 107).

The fourth allusion we have already attended to above in our discussion of “lameness”, the comic pair of Pegasus and Bellerophon in the in Isiac *anteludia* at 11.8.4:

Vidi...asinum pinnis adglutinatis adambulans cuidam seni debili, ut illum quidem Bellerophontem, hunc autem diceret Pegasus, tamen rideres utrumque.

I saw...an ass with wings glued on his back, walking beside a decrepit old man, so that you would call the one Bellerophon and the other Pegasus, but laugh⁷⁸ at both.

Just as this scene answers and “corrects” the other instances of lameness in the novel, so this same scene may redeem the earlier allusions to Pegasus and point to Lucius’ imminent retransformation and the return of his white horse. The ass/the black horse/the soul finally has its wings moving in harmony with its driver in a proper religious context. This is underscored at 11.12.2 by Lucius’ behavior at the end of the procession when he is at last offered the salvific roses by a priest:

Nec tamen gaudio subitario commotus inclementi me cursu proripui, verens scilicet ne repentino quadripedis impetu religionis quietus turbaretur ordo, sed placido ac prorsus humano gradu cunctabundus paulatim obliquato corpore, sane divinitus decedente populo, sensim inrepo.

I did not, however, dash forward in an unrestrained rush under the influence of my sudden joy, because, obviously, I was afraid lest the peaceful progression of the rites be upset by the sudden rush of a four-footed beast. Instead, with calm and almost human steps, I slowly edged my body little by little through the crowd, which doubtless by divine guidance made way, and crept gently inward.

⁷⁸ A serious religious or philosophical reading of the passage would seem to be undercut by the laughter here and cannot be fully explained away. Nethercut (1968, 119), however, suggests that the laughter here need not be derisive and that *rideres* could simply mean “smile” here. He also offers that we might even see here redemption of the many instances of mocking laughter in the previous ten books, an observation that fits well with my argument here. I suppose one could also argue that the Lucius we see at 11.8 does not himself fully understand the import of what he is witnessing. Graverini has recently argued that the “comedy” in the novel does not necessarily undercut its “seriousness” or its “philosophy”. See 2010 and 2012a (ch. 2), and also below.

Gone are the fear and the impulse that led Lucius to lunge at the roses or toward a supposed freedom earlier in the novel; present are the humility and reverence needed to approach true divinity and redemption.

The initiation of the black horse

We see the same transformation in the Phaedrean black horse—when it at last gives in it is now able to heed the command of the charioteer and work in tandem with its yokemate:

...τῆς ὕβρεως λήξει, ταπεινωθεὶς ἔπεται ἤδη τῆ τοῦ ἠνιόχου προνοία, καὶ ὅταν ἴδῃ τὸν καλόν, φόβῳ διόλλυται: ὥστε συμβαίνει τότε ἤδη τὴν τοῦ ἔραστοῦ ψυχὴν τοῖς παιδικοῖς αἰδουμένην τε καὶ δεδιῦσαν ἔπεσθαι (254e-255a).

[the black horse] ceases from its excesses, now humbled it allows the charioteer with his foresight to lead, and when it sees the boy in his beauty, it nearly dies with fright; and the result is that now the soul of the lover follows the beloved in reverence and awe.

The language here recalls Lucius' epiphany on the shores of Cenchreae at 11.1.1, having escaped Corinth and the vile public display of bestiality and execution planned for the following day:

Circa primam ferme noctis vigiliam experrectus pavore subito, video praemicantis lunae candore nimio completum orbem commodum marinis emergentem fluctibus. Nantusque opacae noctis silentiosa secreta, certus etiam summam deam praecipua maiestate pollere resque prorsus humanas ipsius regi providentia...

About the first watch of the night I awoke in sudden fright and saw, just emerging from the waves of the sea, the full circle of the moon glistening with extraordinary brilliance. Surrounded by the silent mysteries of dark night, I realized that the supreme goddess now exercised the fullness of her power; that human affairs were wholly governed by her providence...

With the vision of the moon Lucius begins to gaze upon a form of true beauty and divinity and, just as with the black horse, that vision produces fear (φόβῳ/*pavore*) and a sudden transformation of behavior and bearing. Working

together, the Phaedrean team of charioteer and horses are properly able to approach the divine apparition and ultimately become privy to the most sacred level of ἐποπτεία. Submission to Isis returns Lucius to his human form and gains for him access to mystic, metaphysical experience. Note the striking corollary between Socrates' description of the "journey" and experience of the highest, immortal souls and the language Apuleius uses to describe Lucius' own "soul-journey" during his Isiac initiation:

αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀθάνατοι καλούμεναι, ἥνικ' ἂν πρὸς ἄκρῳ γένωνται, ἔξω πορευθεῖσαι ἔστησαν ἐπὶ τῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ νότῳ, στάσας δὲ αὐτὰς περιάγει ἡ περιφορά, αἱ δὲ θεωροῦσι τὰ ἔξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (247b-c).

When those souls that are called immortal are at the top, they travel outside and take their stand upon the outer part of the heavens, and positioned like this they are carried round by its revolution, and gaze on the things outside the heavens.⁷⁹

Accessi confinium mortis et calcato Proserpinae limine per omnia vectus elementa remeavi; nocte media vidi solem candido coruscantem lumine; deos inferos et deos superos accessi coram et adoravi de proximo (11.23.7).

I came to the boundary of death and, having trodden the threshold of Proserpina, I travelled through all the elements and returned. In the middle of the night I saw the sun flashing with bright light. I came face to face with the gods below and the gods above and paid reverence to them from close at hand.

How fitting that this experience comes on the heels of the return of Candidus, Lucius' white horse (11.20). Might a Phaedrean reading of the episode suggest that we see Isis as a kind of charioteer leading the retransformed, reintegrated, re-yoked Lucius to a variety of sublime, Platonic *ekstasis*?

The connection between Phaedrean black horse and Lucius-as-ass may also be underlined at a more linguistic and visceral level too. Ferrari has argued that the excesses of the Phaedrean black horse are largely meant to be understood as lustful and sexual; a "low" desire in need of replacement with

⁷⁹ Socrates elsewhere explicitly uses the language of the mysteries and initiation to describe the winged-ness, purification, and elevation of the soul. See 249c-250c.

a “higher” one.⁸⁰ He sees this, in part, in a likely pun where the black horse while struggling violently against the reins is described as “thrusting out its tail” (ἐκτείνας τὴν κέρκον).⁸¹ Here Socrates may be using “tail” (κέρκος) as a euphemism for the phallus as we see it used in other texts as well.⁸² Apuleius perhaps makes use of the same euphemism in Latin—*cauda* (“tail”)—when describing Lucius’ retransformation at 11.13.5:⁸³

...aures enormes repetunt pristinam parvitatem, dentes saxei redeunt ad humanam minutiem, et, quae me potissimum cruciabat ante, cauda nusquam.

...my enormous ears returned to their original smallness; my rock-like teeth went back to their minute human scale; and the thing which had tortured me most of all before, *my tail*, no longer existed.

If, indeed, Apuleius uses *cauda* here as a phallic euphemism it is striking that this reference ends Lucius’ description of his own retransformation. It would seem to correct the sentiment we see at 3.24.6 where after his transformation into an ass Lucius notes—also at the very end of the description—that his only consolation was that his “generative organ was growing” here too using a circumlocution—*natura*—for the phallus.⁸⁴ The detail would also serve to emphasize the *serviles voluptates*—the pleasures of the body and a prurient interest in a magic inextricable from a low eroticism—which plagued Lucius especially in the first three books of the novel and lay at the heart of his previous disordered-ness. The reordering and retransformation, then, is extreme, the Latin here even suggesting a kind of *castration* having taken place.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ “[The black horse] presses the others to approach the boy and ‘give him a reminder (μνείαν) of the favours of Aphrodite’ (254a6-7). A similar circumspection marks his second approach, which is made ‘in order to renew the proposal (λόγους)’ (254d5-6). Plato muffles with the vocabulary of verbal exchange a transaction that the lewd beast intends, if he gets his way, to conduct primarily in the language of the pelvis (Ferrari 1985, 3).”

⁸¹ *ibid.* 3 and n.15.

⁸² Aristophanes, *Thes.* 239; Herodas 3.68, 5.45.

⁸³ As in Greek, the “tail” in Latin literature also appears a prurient reference to the male member. See Horace, *Sat.* 1.2.45, 2.7.49.

⁸⁴ *Nec ullum miserae reformationis video solacium, nisi quod mihi...natura crescebat.*

⁸⁵ The issues of the euphemism and the “castration” are, I concede, highly debatable. Could not the reference to the tail simply refer to the actual donkey’s tail? If *cauda* is indeed a reference to the phallus, how literally ought we to understand its disappearance? If this is a “castration” how do we reconcile this with the scene at 11.14 where Lucius hides his nudity from the festival onlookers? I rest my pro-euphemism argument on the parallelism

*Conclusion:
Suggestions and Final Thoughts*

My principal goal in this essay has been to show that Apuleius made a more detailed, deliberate use of Plato's *Phaedrus* than has previously been noted. What acceptance of the arguments made above means for broader interpretive issues regarding the novel deserves, I think, more attention but lies beyond the scope of this essay. In conclusion, however, I will make some general suggestions. Certainly the presence of a Phaedrean thread through much of the novel would seem to favor unified readings of the novel as well as readings which take the novel more seriously as a work with a philosophical or religious message.⁸⁶ For example, the touchstone of the Phaedrean black horse may help explain, in part, the loose, episodic, undeveloped nature of books 7-10 which have always been troublesome for proponents of unified readings.⁸⁷

Sandy argues against the novel as a kind of *Entwicklungsroman* noting that as an ass we do not see Lucius truly "develop" in any distinct kind of way, particularly in the latter books. In fact, Sandy notes, even throughout his existence as an ass Lucius is usually depicted as a proper young man often rendering moral judgments.⁸⁸ This lack of moral development could be taken as argument against unity, but this in fact lines up well with details regarding the

between the transformation and retransformation scenes and also the strong language Lucius uses—*quae me potissimum cruciabat ante*—to describe his *cauda* at 11.13.5 which seems to me to fit better with the moral reversal described above than as literal reference to the donkey's tail. Throughout the novel Lucius does not describe his tail as a particularly troublesome appendage in and of itself, although the sadistic boy does attach thorns to his tail as a torture device at 7.18. The *nusquam* is more difficult to explain along these lines; at most, I suppose, I'm arguing here for some hyperbole on Lucius' part and read this as a figurative rather than literal castration. For further discussion see van Mal-Maeder 1997, 108-109. I am indebted to Luca Graverini for his comments and observations on this difficult passage (personal correspondence).

⁸⁶ For an excellent (and recent) summary of interpretive approaches to the novel see Frangoulidis 2008, 1-8. See also Sandy 1974, 234-235 and van Mal-Maeder 1997, 87-91 for overviews of "unified" vs. "separatist" views and also n. 91 below.

⁸⁷ e.g. see Sandy 1978. Here he takes what has come to be a widely accepted approach, namely that books 1-3 and the Cupid and Psyche centerpiece much more readily relate to the reversal in Book 11 than the latter wanderings of the ass.

⁸⁸ Sandy 1974, 235-236. On the whole, I agree with Sandy here but I would point out that when Lucius escapes from Corinth and from his perverted role in the execution of the condemned woman, the very degraded nature of the spectacle itself and Lucius' own shame and disgust with it do reach a fevered pitch. See also Sandy 1994, 1529 and 1562; Shumate 1996, 121.

Phaedrean black horse. Certainly there is moral reversal in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Phaedrus*—Lucius’ redemption is framed in his setting aside of *serviles voluptates* and the black horse must refrain from his lustful excesses to properly approach the divine.⁸⁹ Still, Lucius’ fairly consistent propriety or even lack of development in one direction or the other in the latter books is not wholly inconsistent with the nature of the black horse. As we noted above, the desires and “roughness” of the black horse can be read as being in need of redirection and even as necessary. The horse’s problem is as much one of misreading and misunderstanding as it is a moral one. Thus, we might read the jumble of episodes in the latter books as involving a character whose heart, deep down, is in the right place but who stumbles haphazardly toward the divine. We might read Lucius’ various handlers as would-be charioteers, his various escapes and attempts to devour roses as misguided lurches toward salvation, and the recurring Pegasus motif as foreshadowing of his re-ordered, re-yoked self in book 11. I would add that in the *Phaedrus* the black horse’s submission to the charioteer is not described in terms of “learning” or gradual moral development, but rather a sudden surrender after a series of misguided attempts to fight the charioteer and approach the beloved:

ὅταν δὲ ταὐτὸν πολλακίς πάσχων ὁ πονηρὸς τῆς ὕβρεως λήξει, ταπεινωθεὶς ἔπεται ἤδη τῇ τοῦ ἡνιόχου προνοίᾳ (254e).

When the same thing happens to the rogue⁹⁰ horse many times, and it ceases from its excesses, now humbled it allows the charioteer with his foresight to lead...

The—admittedly jarring—reversal we see at *Met.* 11.1 when Lucius collapses at Cenchreae and offers his prayer to the goddess would seem to follow suit.

A Phaedrean reading may also shed light on the problem of Lucius’ multiple initiations at the end of the novel, a puzzle at the center of many “comic” or “serious” readings (and “seriocomic” readings) of the text.⁹¹ Do these initiations reinforce the solemnity of the last book or reveal Lucius to be a dupe in the hands of charlatan priests? At *Phdr.* 249c-d Socrates uses the language

⁸⁹ See Graverini 2012a, 115-117 on the Platonic connections to *serviles voluptates*.

⁹⁰ See n. 46 above

⁹¹ On this problem see van Mal-Maeder 1997, especially 104, n. 59 for further bibliography. For “seriocomic” readings see Anderson 1982, Schlam 1992 and Graverini both 2010 and 2012a (esp. ch. 2).

of the mysteries to describe the elevation of the philosopher's soul and speaks of the need for "continual initiation":

διὸ δὴ δικαίως μόνη περουῖται ἢ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια: πρὸς γὰρ ἐκείνοις αἰεὶ ἔστιν μνήμη κατὰ δύναμιν, πρὸς οἷσπερ θεὸς ὢν θεῖός ἐστιν. τοῖς δὲ δὴ τοιούτοις ἀνὴρ ὑπομνήμασιν ὀρθῶς χρώμενος, τελέους αἰεὶ τελετὰς τελούμενος, τέλεος ὄντως μόνος γίγνεται: ἐξιστάμενος δὲ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων σπουδασμάτων καὶ πρὸς τῷ θεῷ γιγνόμενος, νουθετεῖται μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ὡς παρακινῶν, ἐνθουσιάζων δὲ λέληθεν τοὺς πολλοὺς.

Hence it is with justice that only the mind of the philosopher becomes winged: for so far as it can it is close, through memory, to those things his closeness to which gives a god his divinity. Thus if a man uses such reminders rightly, being continually initiated in perfect mysteries, he alone through that initiation achieves real perfection; and standing aside from human concerns, and coming close to the divine, he is admonished by the many for being disturbed, when his real state is one of possession, which goes unrecognized by the many.

The end of the novel certainly seems to have the same flavor as this passage—Lucius' spiritual path is one of continual and progressive initiation; in the end the goddess Isis and the priests of her cult act like charioteers for the re-yoked Lucius and guide him to the sublime mysteries of Osiris where he experiences the god not through the filter of a vision or dream but meets him at last face-to-face (*coram*).⁹²

To conclude: my purpose in this essay was not to offer a grand unified theory to the overall meaning or structure of the *Metamorphoses* but rather to show a more deliberate use of (particularly) Plato's *Phaedrus* as a touchstone in the construction of the novel. Acceptance of my arguments would seem to have immediate bearing on especially philosophical, religious, and "unified" readings of the text and my hope is that this essay is useful for further explo-

⁹² *Met.* 11.30.3. As I have argued elsewhere, it is likely that Apuleius also takes his cue from Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride* in his syncretizing, Platonizing presentation of Isis and Osiris. For Plutarch, Isis' association with the moon marks her as an intermediary deity whose more ready contact with the hylic world allows her ultimately to point the worshipper to the highest level of deity which for her is represented by her brother/consort Osiris, who is associated with the sun. Thus, I would argue that from both a Plutarchian and Phaedrean point of view the novel ends on a fitting (and serious) philosophical-religious high note. See Winkle 2002.

rations along those lines. Certainly my analysis above leaves untouched a myriad of scenes, characters, and oddities in the text. It is perhaps fitting, then, to end with a paraphrase of Socrates' own views on the "truth of myth" we examined above: it is, perhaps, pointless and exhausting to try to go through every detail of the narrative and attempt to explain it all away or thread it all together, but given the number of Phaedrean echoes in the text, might not many passages (if not the text as a whole) call the attentive reader to self-examination?

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