

Yourcenar, Apuleius, Petronius: Slender Threads

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In a review-essay of the English translation of Marguerite Yourcenar's *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, published in the *Anglican Theological Review* of 1956, the specialist in early Christian history Frederick C. Grant suggested that a passage in Yourcenar's novel on the cult of Antinous showed not only 'fine writing'—due in this case as much to Yourcenar's translator, Grace Frick, as to Yourcenar herself—but also the influence of Apuleius. Hadrian speaks:

The cult of Antinous seemed like the wildest of my enterprises, the overflow of a grief which concerned me alone. But our epoch is avid for gods; it prefers the most ardent deities, and the most sorrowful, those who mingle with the wine of life a bitter honey from beyond the grave. At Delphi the youth has become the Hermes who guards the threshold, master of the dark passages leading to the shades. Eleusis, where his age and status as a stranger formerly prevented him from being initiated with me, now makes of him the young Bacchus of the Mysteries, prince of those border regions which lie between the senses and the soul. His ancestral Arcadia associated him with Pan and Diana, woodland divinities; the peasants of Tibur identify him with the gentle Aristaeus, king of the bees. In Asia his worshipers liken him to their tender gods devoured by summer heat or broken by autumn storms. Far away, on the edge of barbarian lands, the companion of my hunts and travels has assumed the aspect of the Thracian horseman, that mysterious figure seen riding through the copses by moonlight and carrying away the souls of the dead in the folds of his cloak.¹

¹ Grant 1956: 286-287. The essay reviewed the American edition of Frick's English translation of Yourcenar's book, *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, first published in Paris in 1951 by Librairie Plon, which as *Memoirs of Hadrian* was published in New York by Farrar, Straus

‘Anyone familiar with Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*,’ Grant concluded, ‘will recognize the echoes of the “hymn” to Isis, her aretalogy, the goddess with many names, one nature.’² He was evidently thinking of, but did not cite, *Metamorphoses* 11.5, especially this famously crucial section:

Inde primigenii Phryges Pessinuntiam deum matrem, hinc autocthones Attici Cecropiam Minervam, illinc fluctuantes Cyprii Paphiam Venerem, Cretes sagittiferi Dictynnam Dianam, Siculi trilingues Stygiam Proserpinam, Eleusinii vetusti Actaeam Cererem, Iunonem alii, Bellonam alii, Hecatam isti, Rhamnusiam illi, et qui nascentis dei Solis inchoantibus inlustrantur radiis Aethiopes utrique priscaque doctrina pollentes Aegyptii, caerimoniis me propriis percolentes, appellant vero nomine reginam Isidem.³

There is much in the *Metamorphoses* that a modern novelist might exploit in order to recover and convey the texture of cultural life in the high imperial age.⁴ It is a natural question, therefore, whether Yourcenar’s novel—a life-story told by Hadrian in the form of a letter to the young Marcus Aurelius—shows any significant Apuleian influence, particularly in view of the reputation Yourcenar enjoyed throughout her career as a figure of immense erudition.⁵ The question is the subject of this short study. The answer offered will be minimal, but in reaching it several items of interest to students of the Latin novel emerge.

Yourcenar identified the sources, both primary and secondary, on which she had drawn in writing *Mémoires* in a *Note* that accompanied her text. Although revised and expanded between 1951, the date of the book’s first appearance in France, and 1982, the date of the definitive Pléiade edition, the *Note* does not cite

and Young in 1954, and by Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd. in London in 1955. In what follows quotations from *Mémoires* and Yourcenar’s other novels are from the final Pléiade edition of 1982 (Marguerite Yourcenar, *Œuvres romanesques*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris 1982, abbreviated as *OR*), and quotations from her essays are from the final Pléiade edition of 1991 (Marguerite Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris 1991, abbreviated as *EM*). I extend thanks to Ellen Finkelppearl for her encouraging remarks on a draft of this essay, and to Marc-Etienne Vlamincq of the Centre International de Documentation Marguerite Yourcenar in Brussels for his assistance during my visit to that institution in September 2015. The eagle eye of Nicholas Bradley is also appreciated.

² Grant 1956: 299.

³ The text of Zimmerman 2012.

⁴ Or even for comic effect, as in Cremutius Cordus’ story of killing three robbers who ambushed him in Robert Graves’ *I, Claudius* (1934), which evidently draws on *Metamorphoses* 2.32-3.11.

⁵ Poignault 1995, a remarkable study, provides the best illustration of Yourcenar’s astonishing knowledge of classical antiquity.

Apuleius as a source of information in the way that many other authors are cited. Nonetheless any reader of *Mémoires* might be reminded at certain points of passages in the *Metamorphoses*, the difference of character and tone between the two works notwithstanding, as when for instance Hadrian at one stage tells of a mistress from long ago:

Et pourtant, parmi ces maîtresses, il en est une au moins que j'ai délicieusement aimée. Elle était à la fois plus fine et plus ferme, plus tendre et plus dure que les autres: ce mince torse rond faisait penser à un roseau. J'ai toujours goûté la beauté des chevelures, cette partie soyeuse et ondoyante d'un corps, mais les chevelures de la plupart de nos femmes sont des tours, des labyrinthes, des barques, ou des nœuds de vipères. La sienne consentait à être ce que j'aime qu'elles soient: la grappe de raisin des vendages, ou l'aile. Couchée sur le dos, appuyant sur moi sa petite tête fière, elle me parlait de ses amours avec une impudeur admirable.⁶

The passage immediately recalls Lucius' rhapsody on women's hair in *Metamorphoses* 2.8-9, with its culmination in the description of the hair of the maidservant Photis:

Sed in mea Photide non operosus sed inordinatus ornatus addebat gratiam. Uberes enim crines leniter remissos et cervice dependulos ac dein per colla dispositos sensimque sinuato patagio residentes paulisper ad finem conglobatos in summum verticem nodus adstrinxerat.⁷

Elsewhere Hadrian tells of an occasion, shortly after his accession, when his enemy Lusius Quietus, an authentic figure, seems to have made a treacherous attempt on his life during a hunting expedition:

Il m'invita à une chasse en Mysie, en pleine forêt, et machina savamment un accident dans lequel, avec un peu moins de chance ou d'agilité physique, j'eusse à coup sûr laissé ma vie.⁸

The hunting episode contrived by Apuleius at *Metamorphoses* 8.4-5 supplies a parallel: the jealous Thrasyllus, with comparable treachery, assists a raging wild

⁶ OR 336; cf. Poignault 2005: 311-312, without reference to Apuleius.

⁷ *Metamorphoses* 2.9.

⁸ OR 362.

boar which attacks and eventually kills Charite's husband Tlepolemus, the obstacle to his discreditable desire, by deliberately wounding Tlepolemus' horse and exposing him to the boar's onslaught. It begins with a dire warning: *Spectate denique, sed oro sollicitis animis intendite, quorsum furiosae libidinis proruperint impetus.*⁹ Later still, Hadrian tells of his initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries, emphasising the intense emotion experienced in the company of his fellow devotees:

J'avais entendu les dissonances se resoudre en accord; j'avais pour un instant pris appui sur une autre sphère, contemplé de loin, mais aussi de tout près, cette procession humaine et divine où j'avais ma place, ce monde où la douleur existe encore, mais non plus l'erreur. Le sort humain, ce vague tracé dans lequel l'œil le moins exercé reconnaît tant de fautes, scintillait comme les dessins du ciel.¹⁰

Lucius' climactic experience at *Metamorphoses* 11.23 is an obvious comparandum:

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 proxumo.

Such correspondences, if that is the right term to use, are not close and could be no more than fortuitous.¹¹ But equally they could imply a general knowledge of the *Metamorphoses* on Yourcenar's part that two passing references in her essays seem to confirm. In *Borges ou le Voyant*, from 1987, Yourcenar includes a quotation from Borges' story *Les Théologiens* that contains Apuleius' name: 'Qui est Apulée devant les multiplicateurs du Grand Véhicule;' while in *Ton et langage dans le roman historique*, from 1972, in a discussion of the difficulty of understanding and recovering conversational language in Roman antiquity from high literary texts, acknowledgement is made of the two authors of what Yourcenar

⁹ *Metamorphoses* 8.3.

¹⁰ OR 400.

¹¹ On the principle laid down with regard to Shakespeare's plays by Bate 2009: 134: 'Since the eighteenth century there has been a busy scholarly industry in the tracking of Shakespeare's borrowings and the tracking of his sources. But verbal parallels can be coincidental and shared ideas can be derived at secondhand, especially in a culture that encouraged the recycling and amplification of sententiae and commonplaces.' On the complexities of understanding allusion see Hinds 1998: ch. 2, and in the case of Apuleius himself Finkelparl 1998.

termed ‘le roman picaresque,’ namely Petronius and Apuleius.¹² The notion of influence is therefore plausible.

Support on the flank comes from another passage of *Mémoires* in which familiarity with Apuleius’ *Apology* is evident. Early in his reign Hadrian discharges a personal obligation:

Le camarade des plaisirs et des travaux littéraires d’autrefois, Victor Voconius, était mort; je me chargeai de fabriquer son oraison funèbre; on sourit de me voir mentionner parmi les vertus du défunt une chasteté que réfutaient ses propres poèmes, et la présence aux funérailles de Thestylis aux boucles de miel, que Victor appelait jadis son beau tourment. Mon hypocrisie était moins grossière qu’il ne semble: tout plaisir pris avec goût me paraissait chaste.¹³

The passage has two sources. The funeral oration is based on a section of the *Apology* in which Apuleius defends his composition of erotic verses:

Dius Adrianus cum Voconi amici sui poetae tumulum uorsibus muneraretur, ita scripsit:

Lasciuus uersu, mente pudicus eras,
quod numquam ita dixisset, si forent lepidiora carmina argumentum
impudicitiae habenda.¹⁴

This follows quotation of lines from Catullus, and through *lepidiora carmina* is clearly reminiscent of the neoteric tradition.¹⁵ Hadrian had earlier confessed to his addressee, ‘j’ai quelque part, sous clef, un ou deux volumes de vers d’amour, le plus souvent imités de Catulle,’¹⁶ which also draws on the *Apology*: *Ipsius etiam diui Adriani multa id genus legere me memini*.¹⁷ Thestylus (*sic*) meantime is known from Martial 7.29: *Thestyle, Victoris tormentum dulce Voconi*.¹⁸ Yourcenar conflated the two sources and took Hadrian’s friend and Martial’s Victor

¹² *EM* 589; 291. *Ton et langage* perhaps underestimates what might be deduced about conversational Latin from the *Metamorphoses*, as also from Roman comedy.

¹³ *OR* 368-369.

¹⁴ *Apology* 11.3-4 (the text of Vallette 1971).

¹⁵ Catullus 16.5-6; see Butler and Owen 1914: 30.

¹⁶ *OR* 311.

¹⁷ *Apology* 11.4.

¹⁸ See Galán Vioque 2002: 208-209 (cf. Kay 1985: 233), noting that Thestylis is the name of Corydon’s female slave at Virgil, *Eclogues* 2.10, 43. Thestylis (*sic*) appears also in the English translation of *Mémoires*.

Voconius to be one and the same.¹⁹ Whether they were is an unanswerable question: identification is sometimes made with the younger Pliny's friend and coeval, Voconius Romanus, from Saguntum by the sea, but this is unlikely.²⁰

For a historical novelist certainty of identification was unnecessary, even for an author famously (if controversially) committed to historical authenticity.²¹ As already remarked Apuleius is not mentioned by name in Yourcenar's *Note*. The relevant wording when authorities on Hadrian's friends are disclosed is essentially the same in both the original and the expanded Pléiade editions: 'Pline le Jeune et Martial ajoutent quelques traits à l'image un peu effacée d'un Voconius ou d'un Licinius Sura,'²² which suggests that Yourcenar felt free to draw on Pliny and Martial for her Voconius as she thought fit. Nevertheless her text shows that Yourcenar knew something of the *Apology*, and given her classical knowledge at large, and of the sources for the history of Hadrian in particular, the gloss of the *Apology* is no surprise. Confirmation comes from the English version of the *Note*, which differs significantly at the point of concern from that of the French editions: 'both the Younger Pliny and Martial add a few touches to the somewhat sketchy information *left to us by Apuleius* and by Trajan's historians for two of Hadrian's friends, Voconius and Licinius Sura.'²³ An entry in an unpublished collection of 'Notes' on *Mémoires* now housed among Yourcenar's papers in the Houghton Library at Harvard University—a kind of commentary by Yourcenar on her own text—is self-explanatory and comprehensible:

Voconius est un personnage historique, Thestylis (*sic*) aussi; et H. fit en effet l'éloge du premier dans les termes indiqués ici; seule, la présence de Thestylis aux funérailles est imaginée.²⁴

Grant's essay was first delivered as a lecture at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Before publication he sent a copy to Yourcenar at Petite Plaisance, her home in Northeast Harbor, Maine; but when it arrived Yourcenar was about to

¹⁹ Poignault 1975: 591-592.

²⁰ Syme 1991: 108 n. 22 (unanswerable); Courtney 1993: 382 (identification); Butler and Owen 1914: 30 (unlikely; cf. Hunink 1997 II: 53); *PIR*² L 210 with Syme 1979: 480-482; 1998: 471, 488; Birley 2000: 101. Martial 11.78 adds a further aspect: Victor on the point of marriage in need of urgent heterosexual instruction.

²¹ The accuracy of *Mémoires* was seriously, and strangely, challenged by Syme in the Bryce lecture of 1984 (Syme 1991: 157-181), in which, however, full consideration of Yourcenar's aims and of revisions to her original text of 1951 was omitted.

²² *OR* 547; the edition of 1951 omits 'le Jeune,' which appears in editions of 1956 and 1962.

²³ *Memoirs of Hadrian* (Secker & Warburg edn. [n.1]): 309, my emphasis.

²⁴ Marguerite Yourcenar Additional Papers (MS Fr 372.2.266). Houghton Library, Harvard University. (In a list of modified or imagined historical events).

travel abroad and delayed a response. Several months later, however, she reacted with indignation when she discovered that the lecture had been published, because despite its apparently enthusiastic tone she found much of it offensive and accordingly prepared a detailed letter to Grant addressing the issues he had raised—concerning ancient mystery cults in the main—and said that she would have replied much earlier had she known he intended to make his lecture public. She also planned to submit a formal reply to the *Anglican Theological Review*.²⁵

In the event her protest came to nothing, and her letter remains only as a draft, offering, regrettably, no comment on ‘the echoes’ of Apuleius Grant detected. But in its remarks on the Eleusinian mysteries and the cults of the Cabiri, Trophonios, and Mithras, it illustrates the extent of Yourcenar’s academic knowledge and allows its reader to appreciate how and why she had written of the mysteries in *Mémoires* as she did.²⁶ The letter, an essay in effect of some four thousand words, is far too long to quote in full. The following, on Hadrian and Eleusis, is a sample:

Toute allusion à Éleusis faite par Hadrien lui-même se heurtait à une difficulté grave: la consigne du silence qu’il était censé d’observer. C’est ce qui m’a décidée à lui faire présenter l’expérience éleusienne en quelque sorte de biais, en l’assimilant à d’autres méditations à demi mystiques inspirées par la contemplation mathématique des sphères, sur un ton somme toute pas trop éloigné de celui du *Songe* de Scipion, ou de certaines allusions cosmologiques de Virgile (bien que la pensée d’Hadrien soit orientée vers une philosophie différente), ou encore de l’épigramme de Ptolémée que nous a conservée l’*Anthologie Palatine*. Le secret symbolique d’Éleusis est ainsi évoqué par Hadrien par analogie, en partie pour ne pas manquer à une promesse formelle de silence, en partie parce qu’un homme élevé à l’école des philosophes eût sans doute cherché à donner à ces vieux rites une motivation philosophique qu’il eût pu faire sienne, à peu près comme un catholique des années 1920 eût pu chercher des arguments dans la philosophie de Bergson. Vous reprochez à ces vues d’Hadrien d’antidater sur le néo-Platonisme, mais Nouménios, ce philosophe qui fut assez lié avec Hadrien pour lui adresser une *Consolatio* après la

²⁵ The events are known from the draft of the letter, dated February 6, 1957, which can be read in a volume of Yourcenar’s published correspondence: Marguerite Yourcenar, *‘Une Volonté sans fléchissement’: Correspondance 1957-1960. (D’Hadrien à Zénon II)*. Paris 2007: 56-69. A second undated draft invited Grant, shortly to attend a conference in Bangor, to her home for discussion: *‘Une Volonté sans fléchissement’: 202-204*. Neither letter was apparently completed or mailed. Yourcenar was notoriously sensitive to adverse criticism of her work.

²⁶ Many details might now, more than a half century later, be disputed, but that is not the point. Blanckeman 2014: 263-264 comments on the draft but obscures its status.

mort d'Antinoüs, fut déjà sur bien des points un précurseur de Plotin (Croiset, *Hist. Littér. Grecque*, V.694, Aimé Puech, «Nouménios d'Apamée»). Vous reprochez aussi à ces vues d'être «influencées par la théosophie». Ayant fort peu lu les théosophes, j'ignore à quel ouvrage vous faites allusion, mais, toute théorie plus ou moins fumeuse mis à part, il n'en reste pas moins vrai que c'est seulement à l'aide de l'expérience mystique universelle que nous pouvons essayer de deviner ce que fut l'initiation éleusienne pour les esprits supérieurs du monde gréco-romain qu'une simple pantomime religieuse n'eût pas suffi à toucher.²⁷

Evidence of this kind suggests that if any Isiac material were in mind when the passage on Antinous was composed, it may have come from knowledge of the aretalogical tradition at large as well as, or rather than, from Apuleius.²⁸ At the same time Yourcenar was well informed about the iconography of Antinous, as the pertinent section of the *Note* indicates, and knew the various divine forms in which Antinous was represented in sculpture and on coins.²⁹ At Petite Plaisance she maintained a dossier of images of Antinous as she collected photographs to illustrate successive editions of her novel—it is still *in situ*—which contains some fifty items and predictably enough includes the most well known representations of the new god. Various passages in *Mémoires* may have been inspired by them, as a valuable study by Michèle Goslar suggests, the effect being to enhance the novel's overall authenticity.³⁰ Also, and perhaps more pertinent still, there are references to representations of Antinous in *Les Carnets de notes de «Mémoires d'Hadrien»*, Yourcenar's reflections on the composition of her novel which have accompanied editions of the work since 1953. They reveal the rootedness of this material in Yourcenar's consciousness, from an early age, through the novel's long gestation and far beyond.³¹

²⁷ *Une Volonté sans fléchissement*: 58-59.

²⁸ See conveniently Witt 1971: 100-110, with especially P. Oxy. 1380 and the great inscription from Cyme (Merkelbach 1995: 115-118). It is true that *Metamorphoses* 11.5 itself is influenced by the aretalogical tradition (*GCA* XI 61, 148-166), but the issue is that of Yourcenar's direct knowledge of the text.

²⁹ The material on Antinous in *OR* 550-552 is much more extensive than in earlier editions, but already in the original edition of 1951 it occupied a twenty-seven line paragraph. In the Librairie Plon Nouvelle Bibliothèque Française edition of 1962 (text from 1958) it occupied some three pages.

³⁰ Goslar 2007; cf. Poignault 1995: 651-657, emphasising a synthetic impact. Vout 2007: 54 urges of Antinous that 'his is a story that demands that historians use the visual,' a point Yourcenar understood long ago.

³¹ *OR* 520, 522, 531-533.

The range of divinities with whom Antinous historically came to be associated was extensive: Osiris, Horus, Dionysus (especially), Hermes, Apollo—these are the most prominent among others. For immediate purposes it is significant that statues of Antinous-Hermes and Antinous-Dionysus Zagreus are known specifically from Delphi and Eleusis, and that Arcadia was an important region in which coins were minted with his image, Pan being one divinity with whom he was identified at Mantinea. He is portrayed moreover as Aristaeus, the god of the bees, in a familiar statue originally from Rome (now in the Louvre), while at Lanuvium, where a temple was built to him, he was commemorated with Diana by the members of a funerary college. A portrait representing him as Silvanus was found nearby. One relief in Yourcenar's dossier shows Antinous leading a horse, which is perhaps the source of her reference to him as the Thracian Horseman, the chthonic hunting and healing god of the Balkans. (Its genuineness is much disputed.) But in any case the impact of the visual material as a whole hardly seems in doubt.³²

It would have been impossible on chronological grounds for Yourcenar to attribute to Hadrian direct knowledge of the *Metamorphoses* in the way that he describes Petronius as the author of a book that lightens life and makes of it 'une balle bondissante et creuse, facile à recevoir et à lancer dans un univers sans poids.'³³ (Trimalchio is playing with a ball when first seen in the *Satyricon*.)³⁴ But the reference is just one in Yourcenar's writings that hints at a preference for the earlier over the later author. Hadrian's view of the ancient novelists is rather low: 'Les conteurs, les auteurs de fables milésiennes, ne font guère, comme des bouchers, que d'apprendre à l'étal de petits morceaux de viande appréciés des mouches.'³⁵ In *Mémoires* nonetheless the *Satyricon* is the model for a putative work, abandoned in the end, that had a very serious purpose, and that might be taken to indicate high regard on the part of Yourcenar herself:

³² Meyer 1991 is the standard collection of images of Antinous, but note the refinements of Vout 2007: 126 n. 76. Lambert 1984: 224-237, 238-243 provides a check-list of statues and a digest of what is known from coinage and gems; see also usefully Turcan 2008: 168-172. Vout 2007: 74-113 disturbingly discusses issues of identification and authenticity. For the pertinent items here see Goslar 2007: nos. 7 (contentious), 8, 17, 22 (omitted by Meyer), 23. Lambert 1984: 184-197 on the cult of Antinous is very important. Blum 1914, known to Yourcenar, remains an impressive collection of numismatic evidence. Obviously no account can be taken here of iconographic discoveries made since Yourcenar's death in 1987, for which see Oppen 2008: 188-190; Evers 2013.

³³ OR 302. The *Metamorphoses* cannot have been composed before 138, the year of Hadrian's death.

³⁴ *Satyricon* 28.

³⁵ OR 303.

J'ébauchai pourtant à cette époque un ouvrage assez ambitieux, mi-partie prose, mi-partie vers, où j'entendais faire entrer à la fois le sérieux et l'ironie, les faits curieux observés au cours de ma vie, des méditations, quelques songes; le plus mince des fils eût relié tout cela; c'eût été une sorte de *Satyricon* plus âpre. J'y aurais exposé une philosophie qui était devenue la mienne, l'idée héraclitienne du changement et du retour. Mais j'ai mis de côté ce projet trop vaste.³⁶

Elsewhere Naples is the city of Petronius in the opening sentence of the sketch, *Wilde rue des Beaux-Arts*,³⁷ and Petronius, like Martial, is one of the many Latin authors encountered by Nathanaël, the protagonist of the late novella, *Un homme obscur*, when working as a proof-reader in his uncle's printing house in late Renaissance Amsterdam:

Il lut Martial; un Pétrone lui tomba entre les mains. Certaines pages le divertirent. Mais ces trois coquins de Pétrone, courant leurs aventures comme certains gars de sa connaissance dans les rues mal famées d'Amsterdam, ces gaudrioles de Martial couvertes de la patine des siècles, ces descriptions de postures ou d'assemblages bizarres, tout ce qui émoustillait les hypocrites commentateurs, c'était ce qu'il avait fait ou vu faire, dit ou entendu dire à l'occasion au cours de sa vie.³⁸

More substantively still, remarks in Yourcenar's critical essay on Constantin Cavafy, originally composed as the introduction to the translations of Cavafy's poetry Yourcenar made in the 1930s with Constantin Dimaras, draw for illustration of the poet's depiction of Alexandria directly on the world of the *Satyricon*:

Mais une lumière toute grecque continue subtilement à baigner les choses: légèreté de l'air, netteté du jour, hâle sur la peau humaine, sel incorruptible qui préserve aussi d'une totale dissolution les personnages du *Satyricon*, ce chef-d'œuvre grec en langue latine. Et, en effet, la pègre alexandrine de Cavafy rappelle souvent Pétrone; le réalisme nonchalant de tel poème intitulé: *Deux jeunes hommes, entre vingt-trois et vingt-quatre ans*, évoque irrésistiblement le souvenir des bons coups d'Ascylte et d'Encolpe.³⁹

³⁶ OR 455.

³⁷ EM 499 (the sketch belongs to *En pèlerin et en étranger*, first published posthumously in 1989).

³⁸ OR 969. The work first appeared in *Comme l'eau qui coule* (1982).

³⁹ EM 136. The essay and translations were published as a volume in 1958 and later supplemented. The essay was included in the collection *Sous bénéfice d'inventaire* (1962) and is

The remarks, in an essay admired notably by E.M. Forster, fall between quotations of ‘One Night’ and lines from ‘Two Young Men 23 To 24.’⁴⁰ Yourcenar, it happens, could imagine Hadrian in conversation with Cavafy.⁴¹

Also to take into account is an extract from the *Satyricon* that appears in Yourcenar’s second masterpiece, the novel *L’Œuvre au Noir* of 1968, which is set in northern Europe of the early Renaissance. The passage concerned serves as the credo of the figure Henri-Maximilien Ligre, who quotes and translates it for the benefit of his cousin, the alchemist and doctor Zénon (Zeno) who is the novel’s chief character as their crucial encounter at Innsbruck, midway through the work, comes to an end:

«Stultissimi, inquit Eumolpus, tum Encolpii, tum Gitonis aerumnæ, et precipue blanditiarum Gitonis non immemor, certe estis vos qui felices esse potestis, vitam tamen aerumnosam degitis et singulis diebus vos ultro novis torquetis cruciatibus. Ego sic semper et ubique vixi, ut ultimam quamque lucem tanquam non redituram consumarem, id est in summa tranquillitate...

“Sots que vous êtes, dit Eumolpe, se souvenant des maux d’Encolpe, de ceux de Giton, et surtout des gentillesse de ce dernier. Vous pourriez être heureux et menez pourtant une vie misérable, soumis chaque jour à une gêne pire que la veille. Pour moi, j’ai vécu chaque journée comme si ce jour que je vivais devait être le dernier, c’est-à-dire, *en toute tranquillité.*”⁴²

‘Pétrone,’ Henri-Maximilien concludes, ‘est l’un de mes saints intercesseurs.’⁴³ Much later, Zeno recalls the exchange as he anticipates his fateful demise:

«Ma mort semblait sûre, et je n’avais plus qu’à couler quelques heures *in summa serenitate*... À m’en supposer capable», poursuivit-il avec un hochement amical qui sembla fou au chanoine, mais qui s’adressait à un promeneur lisant Pétrone dans une rue d’Innsbruck.⁴⁴

now in *EM* 130-164. For Dimaras’ recollections of his collaboration with Yourcenar see Savigneau 1993: 106-109, and for the progress of the volume see Savigneau 1993: 139, 230, 232, 255-256; cf. Yourcenar’s comments in *Les yeux ouverts: Entretiens avec Matthieu Galey* (Paris 1980): 205-207.

⁴⁰ For the views of Forster, Cavafy’s friend and supporter quoted by Yourcenar in her essay, see his letter of July 25, 1958 to G. Savidis in Jeffreys 2009: 119-120 (Letter no. 86).

⁴¹ See Weitzman 1998.

⁴² *OR* 657-658. For a valuable introduction to *L’Œuvre au Noir* (*The Abyss*) see Shurr 1987.

⁴³ *OR* 658.

⁴⁴ *OR* 821.

Attentive readers will immediately realise that the Latin text quoted is not truly Petronian, but is based on two of the so-called Nodotian fragments of the late seventeenth century:

Eumolpus, tum Encolpii tum Gitonis commotus aerumnis et praecipue blanditiarum Gitonis non immemor: “Stultissimi, inquit, certe estis vos, qui virtute praediti, felices esse potestis, vitam tamen aerumnosam degitis et singulis diebus vos ultro novis torquetis cruciatibus.”⁴⁵

Id est in tranquillitate: si me vultis imitari, sollicitudines animis mittite... [etc.]”⁴⁶

Only the section from *Ego sic semper* to *consumerem (sic)* is genuine Petronius.⁴⁷ Yourcenar’s essential interest in the *Satyricon*, however, is not undermined; knowledge of the false fragments is simply indicated, as remarks in the *Note de l’auteur* that Yourcenar appended to *L’Œuvre au Noir* confirm:

Le fragment 99 de Pétrone, tel que le cite Henri-Maximilien, s’augmente de quelques lignes inauthentiques qu’on suppose ici, pour les besoins de la cause, composées, non par l’inventif Nodot au XVII^e siècle, mais par quelque ardent humaniste de la Renaissance, peut-être par Henri-Maximilien lui-même. *In summa serenitate* est un noble apocryphe.⁴⁸

All is not lost, however, for Apuleius and the *Metamorphoses*. As *L’Œuvre au Noir* concludes, Zeno, a prisoner condemned to execution on trumped up charges—the Inquisition is in full force—takes steps to end his life on his own terms and awaits the arrival of death in agony and hallucination:

La nuit aussi bougeait: les ténèbres s’écartaient pour faire place à d’autres, abîme sur abîme, épaisseur sombre sur épaisseur sombre. Mais ce noir différent de celui qu’on voit par les yeux frémissait de couleurs issues pour ainsi dire de ce qui était leur absence: le noir tournait au vert livide, puis au blanc pur; le blanc pâle se transmutait en or rouge sans que cessât pourtant l’originelle noirceur, tout comme les feux des astres et l’aurore boréale tressaillent

⁴⁵ Laes 1998: fragment 19, following *Satyricon* 98.9.

⁴⁶ Laes 1998: fragment 20, following *Satyricon* 99.1.

⁴⁷ *Satyricon* 99.1.

⁴⁸ OR 845. The following edition is included in Yourcenar’s library at Petite Plaisance: ‘Pétrone. *Le Satyricon. Préface d’Henry de Montherlant*. Paris, Gallimard, collection ‘Folio’, no. 70, 1978, 253 p.’ (Bernier 2004: no. 3069).

dans ce qui est quand même la nuit noire. Un instant qui lui sembla éternel, un globe écarlate palpita en lui ou en dehors de lui, saigna sur la mer. Comme le soleil d'été dans les régions polaires, la sphère éclatante parut hésiter, prête à descendre d'un degré vers le nadir, puis, d'un sursaut imperceptible, remonta vers le zénith, se résorba enfin dans un jour aveuglant qui était en même temps la nuit.⁴⁹

Between 1965 and 1968 Yourcenar prepared material for what was to become in the event the *Carnets de notes de «L'Œuvre au Noir»*, her reflections on the composition of the work; but the material was not fully redacted or published at the time of her death in 1987. It is now included in the Pléiade edition of her novels due to the editorial initiative of Yvon Bernier, with whom Yourcenar collaborated on the *Carnets* in her late years.⁵⁰ She wrote in one of its passages:

N'ayant jusqu'ici lu que les quelque cinq ou six premiers chapitres d'Apulée, et connaissant le reste de l'œuvre surtout par des résumés ou des commentaires, je tombe avec surprise et admiration sur les paroles du prêtre décrivant ce qui est évidemment le passage par la mort, ch. XI, que je trouve dans une traduction anglaise: «I approached the confines of death, and having trod the threshold of Proserpine, I returned from it, being carried through all the elements. *At midnight I saw the sun shining with a splendid light*, and I manifestly drew near to the gods above and beneath...» Ainsi, Zénon mourant, dans ce qui est précisément sa dernière *vision*, avant que l'ouïe seule demeure quelques moments en plus, voit resplendir le soleil de minuit dans le ciel de l'été polaire. Et certes, l'image a été rationnellement introduite dans mon livre du fait que le voyage de Zénon aux confins de la Laponie suédoise est à ses yeux le plus *dépaysant* qu'il ait accompli, et incidemment lié au souvenir des «nuits blanches» d'un bref amour. La rencontre avec Apulée ne m'intéresse pas moins et peut-être d'autant plus qu'Apulée n'avait jamais *vu* le soleil de minuit. Espèce de symbole archétypal de la mort et d'une sorte de triomphe sur la mort.⁵¹

The reference is clearly to *Metamorphoses* 11.23 and is evidence enough of Yourcenar's familiarity with the Isis-book. Just as clearly the reference is garbled, since it is not the priest who speaks but Lucius, a slip perhaps attributable to simple inadvertence or lack of opportunity to check details. The passage may mean that

⁴⁹ OR 832-833.

⁵⁰ See Bernier 1990; cf. OR 851.

⁵¹ OR 870-871 (Yourcenar's emphases).

Yourcenar read the *Metamorphoses*, in part at least, in the mid to late sixties or even later, although not necessarily then for the first time: the possibility that she had read the work before writing *Mémoires* cannot be entirely excluded, and reminiscences of the sort itemised above, while meagre, may conceivably stand. Notably a minor work from 1930, *Le Catalogue des idoles*, contains, as its longest entry, this remarkable passage:

PSYCHÉ. Psyché a épousé l'inconnu. Elle le caresse, mais elle n'a pas vu son visage. Le corps de celui qui repose à côté d'elle, chaque nuit, dans l'obscurité, prend la forme de son plus beau songe. L'amour, ce miel des ténèbres.

Une femme heureuse se fût assoupie à son tour, mais le sommeil ne peut effleurer Psyché. Ce corps couché dans l'ombre l'effraie comme un cadavre. Elle décide d'allumer sa lampe.

Avoir cru s'unir à l'infini, et ne trouver rien qu'un être. Le palais de Psyché est moins vaste qu'elle ne pensait; il suffit d'un soupir pour que tout s'écroule. Murs et plafonds, que ne soutient plus la pression d'une ferveur.

On a dit que Psyché avait les ailes d'un papillon, mais son âme est celle d'une abeille. Cette ouvrière rebâtira son palais, alvéole par alvéole. Elle s'habituerà même à aimer l'Amour.⁵²

Whether directly from the *Metamorphoses* or indirectly through some intermediate source, this extract is proof of Apuleian influence, given that no other extant work from antiquity tells the story of Cupid and Psyche. There is nothing in Apuleius' narrative of the girl with butterfly wings or of Psyche as a bee, aspects of Yourcenar's text that must be attributed to knowledge of Greco-Roman symbolic associations of the soul with the butterfly, moth, and bee,⁵³ for which iconographical as well as literary sources are relevant.⁵⁴ The remainder, however, can only be derived from the *Metamorphoses*, in which connection it is notable that on March 17, 1958, during a visit to Rome, Yourcenar visited the Villa Farnesina in order to see the frescoes painted by Raphael and his followers in the Loggia di Psiche, and that while no copy of the *Metamorphoses* is on record in her library at Petite Plaisance, an edition of the story of Cupid and Psyche was certainly in her possession.⁵⁵

⁵² EM 524.

⁵³ Bettini 1991: 197-219. The butterfly image appears at EM 804 (*Souvenirs pieux*).

⁵⁴ Schlam 1976. The reference elicits no comment from Delcroix 1995.

⁵⁵ *Les Voyages de Marguerite Yourcenar*. Centre International de Documentation Marguerite Yourcenar. Bulletin no. 8 (December 1996, Brussels): 51 (visit); Bernier 2004: no. 6815: 'Apulée. Histoire de Psyché. Paris, Payot et Cie, collection 'Bibliothèque miniature', [s.d.], 120p.' (edition).

Ultimately, however, it is a better suggestion that the passage from the *Carnets de notes de «L'Œuvre au Noir»* makes use of the *Metamorphoses* in the composition of *Mémoires d'Hadrien* unlikely; and altogether the influence of Apuleius on Yourcenar cannot be said to have been anything but slight. As a positive gain, however, Zeno's vision of the midnight sun may be added to examples of the phenomenon from antiquity known to modern scholars from Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and Jewish-Christian sources on mystery cults,⁵⁶ and Yourcenar's inference that such an event is an "archetypal symbol" of triumph over death be appropriately observed.

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⁵⁶ GCA XI: 400.

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