

# Theatricality and self-fashioning: Reading Apollonius' dramatic performance in *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* chapter 16

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Theatrical performances integrated into the main narrative are commonplace in the ancient novels, and among the Latin texts Petronius and Apuleius have been studied under this aspect;<sup>1</sup> the dramatic features in the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, however, have received very little investigation. Konstan 2013 briefly looks at the father-daughter relationship in the novel as inspired by Greek comedy, especially Diphilus, but hardly touches upon the theatricality of an early scene in the text (*Hist. Apoll.* 16), in which Apollonius performs an extraordinary theatrical display. However, I shall argue that this episode deserves to be the focus of a more detailed study for its theatrical and performative aspects, because as the first of many performances, it sets the scene for how they are viewed for the rest of the novel. At the same time, I will discuss aspects of Apollonius' dress and how it can be appropriated for his performance. Finally, differences between Greek and Roman views on performances and actors touch on the important question of whether the text as we have it is based on a lost Greek novel or is an originally Latin text.<sup>2</sup>

So far, the scene has drawn scholarly attention mainly for its possible reception of the emperor Nero on the one hand, and its own probable reception in the middle ages on the other: Pittaluga analyses the performance as a *spectaculum*

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<sup>1</sup> Petronius: Panayotakis 1995; Apuleius: May 2006. Overview: Morgan & Harrison 2008.

<sup>2</sup> For a Greek origin: Kortekaas 2007 based on his earlier work; for an originally Latin text: Panayotakis 2012 and to some extent Vannini 2018, who describes the *Hist. Apoll.* as a 'living', changeable text following an open tradition (2018, xlvi) and dates its archetype to the early-mid 5<sup>th</sup> century to mid 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, which is however based on earlier texts it has adapted and integrated. Schmeling 1988 in his Teubner edition states that he believes that the *Historia* was written in Latin in the early third century as a pagan work. Mastrocinque 2019 goes further than Schmeling and argues that it was written under Caracalla as a kind of parody of the emperor.

and Apollonius as an exemplar of a perfect medieval prince, expert in music and all arts, but does not look at the classical context;<sup>3</sup> Panayotakis shows the similarities between Apollonius' performance, especially the first and last parts involving lyre playing and tragic pantomime, and Nero, but does not discuss the important differences in their respective repertoires.<sup>4</sup>

The socio-cultural circumstances of the characters must be comprehensible to the novel's readers. An originally Greek production context for the story allows for a more lenient view of members of the nobility performing the lyre or citizens performing onstage, whereas Romans associated aristocrats performing on stage with *infamia*, the loss of one's reputation.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Cornelius Nepos used the different attitude to performers as one of his key differences between Greeks and Romans in the 'Preface' to his *Lives of Eminent Commanders*, as he explains that in Greece, appearing on stage (*in scaenam vero prodire ac populo esse spectaculo*) was considered by no one to be a source of shame, whereas in Rome it led to disgrace and loss of respect (*apud nos partim infamia, partim humilia atque ab honestate remota*). It would however be facile to conclude that the *Historia Apollonii* with its performing king therefore offers a Greek context, and therefore has to be based on a Greek novel. Nepos continues to explain the differences between Greece and Rome with another pertinent example: respectable Greek women are absent from symposia, whereas Romans take their wives to their dinner parties: in this novel, the king's daughter not only participates in a symposium, she even performs the lyre to entertain its guests. Other novels, too, display this mix of cultural expectations. Symposia in the Greek novels feature noble female participants; for example, Parthenope is present at her father's symposium for Metiochos, which indicates a certain Romanisation of ethics in the novels even if their events are ostentatiously set in classical Athens.<sup>6</sup>

As the hero's and heroine's actions in the novel need to be acceptable to its readers, it is important to understand in which kind of environment Apollonius' performance is set; as a text written in Latin, it should make sense to its Latin readers. I shall argue that just like the other Latin novels, the *Historia Apollonii* uses theatrical display as an exposition of its hero's social status and aspirations, and that Apollonius promotes his equal social standing among his peers with its help, by building on their knowledge of the rules of theatrical performance,

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<sup>3</sup> Pittaluga 2005, 149-153.

<sup>4</sup> Panayotakis 2012 ad loc. See Champlin 2003, 53-83, and especially 77-79 on the nature and context of Nero's performances, which include lyre playing and pantomime acting of tragic, but no comic themes.

<sup>5</sup> See Edwards 1993 and 1997, and especially 1997, 85-90 on aristocrats and infamy.

<sup>6</sup> Pap. Mich. 3402v.

reception and production in a scenario that owes much to the Greek perspective of acting, but that can be viewed sympathetically, too, by a Roman audience.

To set the scene in its context: in *Hist. Apoll.* 16, after his shipwreck on the Cyrenean coast, Apollonius of Tyre has been invited by King Archistrates of Cyrene to attend a formal dinner with him, his daughter, and various noble guests. Apollonius had drawn Archistrates' attention to himself on that day by performing skilfully at ball games in the gymnasium, and by subsequently giving the aged king an expert massage. Archistrates' enquiries as to Apollonius' identity reveal that Apollonius is a shipwrecked man, who arrived on the shores of Cyrene penniless and in rags. The reader knows that Apollonius has had to flee his kingdom of Tyre to escape the wrath of King Antiochus after solving the riddle that revealed Antiochus' incest with his own daughter. Archistrates is unaware of Apollonius' background, but has ordered good dining clothes for him in gratitude so that he can attend the dinner as an honoured guest. During that dinner, the king's daughter asks curiously about Apollonius' identity, and her father orders her to fetch her lyre to soothe their guest's sadness. The princess performs and sings well: *cum nimia dulcedine vocis chordarum sonos, melos cum voce miscebat* / 'with the exceedingly sweetness of her voice she began to mingle the sounds of the strings, the tune with the melody'<sup>7</sup>, to the praise of all present: *Omnes convivae coeperunt mirari dicentes: 'Non potest esse melius, non<pot>est dulcius plus isto, quod audivimus!'* / 'All the diners began to marvel and said: "Nothing could be better, nothing could be sweeter than that what we have heard!"'

All join in the praise, with the exception of Apollonius, who first remains silent and then asks for the lyre himself to show how it should be played properly, and then gives a magnificent performance which incorporates lyre playing, comedy, and tragic pantomime:

*Et induit statum et corona [eum] caput coronavit, et accipiens lyram introivit triclinium. Et ita stetit, ut discumbentes non Apollonium, sed Apollinem existimarent. Atque ita facto silentio 'arripuit plectrum animumque accomodat arti.' Miscetur vox cantu modulata chordis. Discumbentes una cum rege in laude clamare coeperunt et dicere: "Non potest melius, non potest dulcius!" Post haec deponens lyram ingreditur in comico habitu et mirabili manu et saltu inauditas actiones expressit. Post haec induit tragicum et nihilominus admirabiliter complacuit ita ut omnes amici regis et hoc se numquam audisse testa<re>ntur nec vidisse.*

<sup>7</sup> *Hist. Apoll.* 16; the text here and elsewhere follows recension A of Panayotakis 2012.

‘And he took up his posture, and crowned his head with a garland; he accepted the lyre and entered the triclinium. And he bore himself in such a way that the banqueters thought he was not Apollonius but Apollo. And when thus silence had fallen, ‘he took up the plectrum and adjusted his mind to his art.’ In his song his voice was blended in harmony with the strings. The banqueters, together with the king, began to exclaim in praise and to say: “It could not be better, it could not be sweeter!”. After this Apollonius put down the lyre and stepped inside dressed in comic costume, and with miraculous hand movements and dancing he performed an unheard-of<sup>8</sup> performance. After this he put on a tragic costume, and he entertained them no less admirably so that all of the king's friends announced that they had never heard or seen anything like this.’

Apollonius is not only praised in the same way the princess was earlier (*Non potest melius, non potest dulcius*), but he also wins the girl's admiration and heart; a little while later they marry.

Apollonius is a king, though running for his life, destitute and in need of support, who gains both help from another king and in due course the hand of that king's daughter through an extraordinary theatrical display, despite his apparent snootiness about the princess' musical skills. Crucially, Apollonius is received positively by his audience.

Commentators draw attention to the similarities of part of Apollonius' performance with Nero's histrionic ambitions, and tend to note that the Cyrene scenes of the *Historia Apollonii*, with their ball games and a symposium, contain obvious echoes of Odysseus' stay with the Phaeacians (*Od.* 5-9),<sup>9</sup> with the hero playing the lyre as his own Demodokos, the princess as a musical and a little more forward Nausicaa, as well as echoing the role of Aeneas at Dido's court.<sup>10</sup> The epic intertext with its similarly sympathetic audience reaction helps Apollonius to overcome his loss of status from king to shipwrecked man and to reinstate his heroic

<sup>8</sup> Here I follow Panayotakis 2012, 245 (who suggests *inauditas* to indicate the performance's 'outstanding quality' as well as a possible 'word-play on the mute aspect of the pantomime performance', and possibly also its 'novelty') rather than Vannini 2018, 199, who merely sees it as an expression of novelty.

<sup>9</sup> *Od.* 8,86;8,92; 8,531; 9,1ff. See Panayotakis 2012, 205 and 208, with bibliography. He also adds that ball games are a display of 'elite ideology'. Contrast Trimalchio's ball game in Petr. 27, where Trimalchio spectacularly fails at displaying his upwardly rising credentials by being unable to play the game in a noble way.

<sup>10</sup> Verg. *A.* 2,3 *infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem* / 'unspeakable, oh Queen, is the pain you order me to renew' is echoed in *Hist. Apoll.* 's *veteres ei renovasti dolores* / 'You have renewed his old sorrows'; see Panayotakis 2012, 233 and Vannini 2018, 194-195 ad loc for further allusions, and most recently Mastrocinque 2019, 202.

nature, both in his own eyes and those of his audience; but whereas the epics focus on Odysseus' and Aeneas' past heroism when they narrate their own adventures, Apollonius silently performs theatrical feats to reflect his past and future, while trumping Odysseus by performing to the lyre himself as well as telling his story.

We are not told of Apollonius' reasons for his performance and choice of material apart from proving his superiority over the king's daughter's lyre skills, but the selection of lyre playing, comedy and tragic pantomime gives us important clues why Apollonius chose them and why the audience reacts so enthusiastically.

An obvious point of comparison to an aristocrat on stage is Nero. Most of our sources on him are hostile, but show Nero's preferred material and performance modus: although emperor, he played the lyre, and wanted to be a *tragoedus*, or possibly a pantomime dancer:<sup>11</sup> Eutropius 7,14 [sc. Nero] *ad postremum se tanto dedecore prostituit ut et saltaret et cantaret in scaena citharoedico habitu vel tragico* / 'at last he prostituted himself with such indecency that he would dance and sing on stage in the clothes of a lyre-player or tragic actor'. Suetonius lists Nero's preferred subjects as *tragoedus* (Nero 21,3): 'Canace in labour, Orestes the matricide, Oedipus blinded, Hercules insane' – Nero performed tragic themes and pantomime, but not comedy.

Nero's audience did not share his enthusiasm, and did not fall in love with the performer, according to Suet. *Nero* 23.2,<sup>12</sup> but was somewhat forced to show their appreciation for the acting emperor. Acting on stage, especially as pantomime, carried negative connotations, which Nero's somewhat shocking performance did nothing to mitigate. Apollonius' performance is therefore highly problematic as a nobleman performing pantomime. As Panayotakis argues, it is 'revealing for the author's (and the intended audience's) concept of "high" and "low" culture in this story'<sup>13</sup> that the *Historia Apollonii* allows its high-status protagonist to assume a low-status role.

Although the *Historia Apollonii* indeed exemplifies this curious mixture of 'high' and 'low' literature, the reader still needs to be won over and see Apollonius' performance as non-humiliating. Nero tried to normalise performance of drama not only by performing himself, but also by making aristocrats act on stage

<sup>11</sup> On parallels with Nero see Panayotakis 2012 ad loc.; see Bartsch 1994, 36ff. for Nero's aspirations. Bradley 1978, 134: Tac. *Ann.* 14,14-15. Cassius Dio 51,17; Suet. *Nero* 11,1, Cassius Dio 3,134 etc. On the gaze's important place in Republican Roman ethics and its decline in importance in the Imperial period, see Bartsch (2006) 115-182.

<sup>12</sup> See Bartsch 1994, 4-9 and Champlin 2003, 59-60 on Nero's *claque*s. Barton (2002) 222-223 shows that "Roman honor...was a way of self-regarding as well as other-regarding. Honor required self-splitting; one needed to be, at all times, both the watched and the watcher."

<sup>13</sup> Panayotakis 2012, 245.

for the *Ludi Maximi*, without masks (Suet. *Nero* 11,2), to facilitate their recognition by the audience (Tac. *Ann.* 15,65). When he himself wore masks, they echoed his own facial features or, for female roles, Poppaea Sabina's.<sup>14</sup>

His performance style ensured that he was always recognisable as the emperor Nero, even when wearing a mask. When he made others take part in performances, he ensured they were recognisable to the spectators, too. The Roman audience was fully aware of this and provided Nero with the praise he so desired. At the same time, they realised that Nero's theatrical display was not only intended to be an artistic act, but also required them to recognise the identity of the artist behind the performance and read the story he told in his performance as an interpretation of his own identity. It is never only an actor playing a role they see, but a Roman nobleman or emperor performing his own identity while taking on a role. Nero is always visible to them as the emperor. Apollonius, likewise, does not wear a mask, and even if there were any doubt, is quite recognisable. The audience sees both him and his role at the same time and identifies him with what they see. Unlike Nero's, Apollonius' audience is not forced to show admiration, but genuinely reacts impressed. This indicates that Apollonius is better than Nero in important ways.

Despite echoing Nero's performance in content, in other ways, Apollonius's self-reflectiveness resembles more that of the unlucky Britannicus, who used a song at a party to reflect on his own exiled and powerless condition (Tac. *Ann.* 13,15,2-5). There are reasons to suspect Tacitus' anti-Neronian version of not entirely fairly reflecting the realities of Britannicus' death. Still, Tacitus' audience would need to be able to put the story into its cultural context and believe it possible that Britannicus' audience, and, unfortunately for him, Nero, read his performance correctly, which contributed to his murder by Nero. Apollonius, too, uses the theatrical performance to comment on his current helpless situation.

As I will show, Apollonius' three performances are primarily about Apollonius himself, his own identity, and the audience's reaction to it. It is therefore important to analyse how and why Apollonius chose these specific genres to perform, and how the internal and external audience is likely to read it.

The display starts with the princess showing off her lyre skills. Lyre playing was part of a female education, although it is not at all clear whether these women performed to the lyre in public.<sup>15</sup> The elegiac *puellae* in Propertius and Ovid may

<sup>14</sup> On Roman dislike of performing among upper classes: Griffin 1987, 42-44.

<sup>15</sup> See Panayotakis 2012, 236 who references Sal. *Cat.* 25 (Sempronia); Plu. *Pomp.* 55,1-2 (Cornelia); Stat. *Silv.* 3,5,63-67 (daughter) – but none of these women is explicitly said to perform to the lyre in public. Kortekaas 2007, 223 claims 'The following scene of recital, music and dance is conceivable both in a Hellenistic environment and in Roman high society', but does not give specific examples.

be trained dancers and performers, but they are not princesses and of rather dubious morality; Kortekaas' examples of female lyre players in the Greek novels are of slave girls.<sup>16</sup> Archistrates' daughter is an anomaly, and Apollonius' similarly daring performance fits neatly into the extraordinary nature of the evening entertainment.

When novel heroes perform to the lyre, they do so in the Greek cultural context, where this skill is not beyond their dignity, and which associates them with Achilles playing his lyre and singing *klea andron* (*Iliad* 9,189). Even so, their lyre-playing is not followed by any dramatic performances. Apollonius' show is therefore unprecedented and audacious, just as that of the princess. The first part of his performance places him alongside Metiochos, another novel hero, who shows off his lyre skills during an important banquet, making Apollonius' performance, though not unique, still unusual and possibly transgressive and indicative of his uncertain social status.<sup>17</sup>

The princess and the shipwrecked king are evenly matched, as also the audience twice uses the same words for their performances, once for her, and again for him: "*Non potest (esse) melius, non potest dulcius!*": Just like the spoiled princess moves beyond what is expected of feminine behaviour in the novels, so Apollonius oversteps the typical behaviour of a dinner guest, by being rather undiplomatic and not praising her efforts. Before they even talk to each other, Apollonius and the princess are a match for each other – not in musical skill, but in their audacity and their audience's adulation.

Apollonius enters his stage to show off his exquisite skills and appearance,<sup>18</sup> recalling his position as an outsider and guest at the banquet, who still needs to establish his social credentials to his peers. He is so successful in his lyre playing that the audience believes him to be not Apollonius, but Apollo. This has precedent, too, since Nero attempted to emulate Apollo (Suet. *Nero* 25,2 *statuas suas citharoedico habitu* / 'statues of himself in the posture of a lyre player'; and 53.3 *quia Apollinem cantu ... aequiperare existimaretur* / 'for he was believed to be the equal of Apollo in singing'). This is evidence for Nero's religious affinity to Apollo, and his claims to be the 'new Apollo', the *neos Apollon*,<sup>19</sup> but even Caligula during 39/40 AD trained choirs to sing paeans to himself impersonating

<sup>16</sup> Kortekaas 2007, 224.

<sup>17</sup> Panayotakis 2012, 243 with further lit: points out that in *Metiochos and Parthenope*, the hero's singing and lyre playing performance during a banquet shows him to be a suitable suitor for the heroine, but the text is too fragmentary to establish whether Metiochos adds any other dramatic performance.

<sup>18</sup> Panayotakis 2012, 240-1; see further Kortekaas 2007, 229 and 232 on this passage.

<sup>19</sup> Imitating Apollo: Panayotakis 2012, 242; Bradley 1978, 151-2; *neos Apollon*: Bradley 1978, 288-89.

Apollo by wearing a garland and carrying a bow.<sup>20</sup> The statue type of Apollo Musagetes<sup>21</sup> is a good indication of how Apollonius, Caligula and Nero may have looked, and corresponds with Apuleius' description in *Fl.* 15,6 of a *citharoedus*-statue wearing a long embroidered tunic and cloak covering his legs down to his feet and his arms down to his fingers (*tunicam picturis variegatam deorsus ad pedes deiectus ipsos [...] chlamyde velat utrumque brachium ad usque articulos palmarum*), with luxurious long hair streaming over his shoulders. Whereas other novels go into detail about their hero's and heroine's looks at the moment of their first encounter and love at first sight,<sup>22</sup> the *Historia Apollonii* does so only indirectly; Apollonius is an equal to the gods just as his predecessors Theagenes or Habrocomes, but it is his audience who makes this link in their mind, not the story's narrator who elsewhere compares the heroes to gods. This indirectness lies at the bottom of the often-noted argument that there is no obvious erotic attraction between Apollonius and Archistrates' daughter, whereas other authors linger over the genre-establishing love at first sight between the novel protagonists.<sup>23</sup>

To skip to the third part of his performance for a moment, let us look at the 'tragic' display with which Apollonius finishes his performance. Vannini proposes that this may be a monody,<sup>24</sup> but the text does not imply that Apollonius sings or speaks a monologue. I would rather suggest that the genre in question is pantomime, which is the second genre that Nero excelled in and used to dominate the narrative of his own self-representation. If not for the comedy section of the performance, Apollonius could have easily moved from resembling Apollo to performing Apollo in a pantomime without any change in appearance and stance.<sup>25</sup> Pantomimes are usually the means for the promotion of the people who pay for their performance, while their performers are subject to *infamia*, lack of public honour.<sup>26</sup> While, to the likes of Suetonius, Nero and Caligula's pantomimic performances act as proof to their inability to be proper rulers of Rome, Apollonius' expertise is intended to show him to be a nobleman. Apollonius seems to emulate Nero in important ways, but also transcends him.

Lyre playing and pantomime are linked aesthetically, since lyres can be used as props during pantomime performance, suggested in Lucian's *On Dance*, a

<sup>20</sup> Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 95-96.

<sup>21</sup> See for example the statue of Apollo Musagetes displayed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century statue discovered near Tivoli in 1774, now in the Vatican; its sleeves however only reach down to the elbows. Vannini 2018, 198 compares his stance to that of Arion in Gell. 16,19,14.

<sup>22</sup> Chariton 1,1; X. Eph. 1,3; Ach. Tat. 1,4; Hld. 3,5 etc.

<sup>23</sup> Arguing for Apollonius feeling a lack of attraction to the princess: Konstan 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Vannini 2018, 199.

<sup>25</sup> For Apollo in pantomime see e.g. Libanius *Or.* 64,67 on Apollo and Daphne.

<sup>26</sup> See Edwards 1993, 98-136 and 1997 on the low status of actors in Rome.



treatise on pantomime,<sup>27</sup> and seen on the 4<sup>th</sup> century Trier pantomime performer ivory. Another important pantomime prop is however missing from Apollonius' performance, the mask. Mask changes in pantomime took place in view of the audience, not by leaving the stage.<sup>28</sup> Because of the impromptu nature of the performance Apollonius does not wear a mask, and he uses his robe as the relevant prop as pantomime dancers do.<sup>29</sup> This facilitates the continued identification of the performer Apollonius with the role he takes up, and ensures that his audience associates his own fate with that of the characters of the genre he dances. The pantomime dancer always remains himself and, just like Nero during his performances, does not quite become the character, unlike tragic or comic performers.<sup>30</sup> This is important here because Apollonius is performing his own story and welcomes the identification that the absence of masks facilitates.

Pantomime, furthermore, eroticises the dancer, with pantomime performers becoming objects of desire for their audience.<sup>31</sup> Apollonius' show therefore ends on the most eroticised genre of all three, which is important for his developing relationship with the princess. Ladies falling in love with actors is not entirely unknown, and generally disapproved of.<sup>32</sup> Here it is a noble woman, a princess and sympathetic protagonist of what follows, who does so, because she, like the rest of the audience, continues to see Apollonius performing his own story, not as an actor of a story written long ago.<sup>33</sup> The apparently unemotional first meeting of Apollonius and the princess is therefore eroticised at a second glance, which fits this scene more neatly into the set pieces of love at first sight encounters in the other novels.

Lyre-playing and pantomime can be associated with performances by nobles and emperors. But the middle performance, comedy, is unique in its associations, and the text rightly calls it *inauditas*.<sup>34</sup> Its placement in the middle problematises

<sup>27</sup> Lyres as props: Luc. *salt.* 63, 68-69, 72, 83. Amphion and his lyre are also among the list of pantomime subjects in Luc. *salt.* 31. On props in pantomime see also Wyles 2008, 73, with Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 79: 'Then, as in the theatre, [the emperor] assumed different costumes at different times, sometimes the lion skin and club, both overlaid with gold, to adorn himself as Heracles, sometimes caps in his head when he made himself up as the Dioscuri, or again as Dionysus with ivy, thyrsus and fawn's skin.' (trans. Colson 1962).

<sup>28</sup> Wyles 2008, 70.

<sup>29</sup> Another performance of pantomime without masks in the Latin novel: Apul. *Met.* 10.30-34, with May 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Wyles 2008, 83.

<sup>31</sup> See Lada-Richards 2007, 59-60 for the politicisation of this eroticism by Roman emperors, and Edwards 1993, 129 on the sexual allure of actors.

<sup>32</sup> See Keane 2003, 260.

<sup>33</sup> On life echoing art and vice versa: Bartsch 1994, 39-44 on Nero.

<sup>34</sup> See footnote 8 on the possible meaning of this word here.

the smooth and seamless transition from lyre player to pantomime and the slippage in Nero's and Apollonius' performances between actor and role. Comedy complicates any simple identification of Apollonius with a Neronian type of performer, and must therefore be looked at in close detail in its placement between the other two. Unfortunately, our text does not give us much to go on. It is clear that there is a complete shift between the noble lyre performance and comedy: Panayotakis knows of no comic or tragicomic pantomime topics; Vannini suspects that Apollonius recites a play, but the text does not suggest this.<sup>35</sup> This part seems to be an invention using the method of pantomime, dancing without speech at all,<sup>36</sup> making the transition to the third part easier to sustain.

In Lucian *salt. 2*, listening to lyre performances, comedy and tragedy are listed as more worthwhile alternatives to watching pantomimes, and the Greek or Latin performance context is important here. There is no stigma attached at all to performing either tragedy or comedy in a Greek context: initially the authors of tragedies performed themselves, e.g. Aeschylus acted and danced in his own plays (Athenaeus 21d-22a), and Sophocles played both the lyre and ball games in his (Athenaeus 20e); the comic playwright Crates also performed in Cratinus' plays before writing plays himself (Scholion to Aristophanes, *Knights* 537). Even after acting became professionalised, actors were well regarded in 4<sup>th</sup> century Greece, for example the second hypothesis to Demosthenes' *On the False Embassy* reports on the tragic actors Neoptolemus and Aristodemus, who were involved in high level political negotiations on Athens' behalf.

Furthermore, Apollonius' performance is private, and takes place during a symposium, where excerpts from tragic and comic plays were commonplace, as Plutarch *Quaest. Conv.* 7,8,3 (712a-c) suggests.<sup>37</sup> His performance would be socially unremarkable, especially since it is in part based on the self-portrait of Homeric heroes.

In a Roman context, however, Apollonius' performance is more problematic, although Nero's forays into performing to the lyre and as pantomime allowed Apollonius to do so, too, without falling victim to *infamia* and condemning himself to banishment from Archistrates' court. It should be added, too, that the ideas of aristocrats composing and performing drama in Rome was remarkably resilient. Although Martial 2.7 pours scorn over Attalus who composes mimes well and performs well (*belle*) to the lyre, and Juvenal 8.183-94 does the same for

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<sup>35</sup> Panayotakis 2012, 244. On the language of the scene, which echoes phrases from Roman comedy, see Panayotakis 2012 and Kortekaas 2007 *ad* ch. 16, especially 2007, 220 and 227; Vannini 2018, 199.

<sup>36</sup> See May 2008.

<sup>37</sup> May 2006, 10-12.

Damasippus for acting in Catullus' mime *Phasma*, and on Lentulus for acting in the mime *Laureolus*<sup>38</sup>, it appears that time and again elite performers had to be stopped from appearing on stage by the law. Both Augustus and Tiberius attempted to prevent the appearance of nobility on stage,<sup>39</sup> and even performances in a private context seem to be in the hand of professional performers, not of the elite: for example, Pliny *Ep.* 5,19 discusses his freedman Zosimus who acts comedy and plays the lyre; 7,17 mentions tragedies, 9,36,4 suggests comedy and lyre-playing as after-dinner entertainment. Nero, as noted, introduced elite actors, including himself, for at least lyre playing and pantomime performance. Still, the cultural attitude to performing on stage, especially of comedy, was entirely negative and criticised in Roman sources, which makes Apollonius' performance set extraordinary, especially since he discards a possibly more permissible performance modus, recitation, and instead favours its entire opposite, a performance without words.

In Rome, comedy performance by a king is problematic: for a nobleman to perform in the Roman comic theatre, social demotion may be the outcome. Whether it happened or not, the story of Laberius the equestrian author of mimes (ca. 105-43 BC) is emblematic. Caesar is said to have forced him to perform in one of his own mimes, which forfeited his equestrian rank, and then restored him to his rank again on the same day, which indicates the fear of the elite of being shown to be acting like an actor in a non-serious lesser genre.<sup>40</sup> Apollonius takes considerable risk with a comic performance, which is without precedent.

Again, it is clear from historical parallels that comedy performance is used to discuss social and political status: Cicero's *Pro Sestio* shows that a performance of a play by Afranius was used to discredit Clodius, a play by Menander was used with contemporary references to Claudius, and even the most innocuous comic verses could be applied by audiences to current political situations (Cassius Dio 60,29,3).<sup>41</sup> Apollonius' comedy, too, offers a comment on his own status.

In addition to analysing the character and actions of its protagonist, comedy is important for our understanding of this novel as a whole. Konstan 2013 has shown that there is a considerable intertextuality between New Comedy and the *Historia Apollonii* as far as the averting of father-daughter incest is concerned. He looks at the love story between Apollonius and the princess briefly, but only under the aspect of a curious lack of passion between the future couple, since, he argues, Apollonius never displays any open attraction to the princess, though as I have

<sup>38</sup> See Edwards 1993, 121 and 1997, 86.

<sup>39</sup> Dio 56,25,7-8; Tac. *Hist.* 2,62; Suet. *Tib.* 35,2, with Edwards 1997, 88.

<sup>40</sup> On Laberius see e.g. Edwards 1993, 131 and Panayotakis 2010.

<sup>41</sup> See further Edwards 1993, 115-119; Bartsch 1994, 72-76.

argued above, there may actually be some understated eroticism in their performances. As Kortekaas before him, Konstan notes the setting similar to Plautus' *Rudens*, based on a play by Diphilus: both novel and comedy are set on the shore of North African Cyrene, where in Plautus the incest between Daemones and his long lost daughter must be avoided. This he compares with the second part of the novel, the fate of Apollonius' and the princess's daughter Tarsia.<sup>42</sup> Tarsia, too, performs to the lyre like both her parents, and provides a *spectaculum* by retelling her woes in a compromised position<sup>43</sup> (*Hist. Apoll.* 36) in a repetition of her father's plight, loss of status and performances, but unlike him, her primary medium is words: she talks so much that Athenagoras, her future husband, falls in love with her. Her deceptively low social status as an ostensible prostitute echoes the low opinion Romans have for women performing to the lyre (Cynthia in Propertius 1.3, Sallust's Sempronia in *Cat.* 25), but her saving from the fate of prostitutes by a young man who loves and marries her again echoes the plots of comedies, including that of Diphilus' Plautine adaptation *Rudens*.

As Apollonius' performance is intended to echo Achilles, but most importantly Odysseus' and Aeneas' retelling of their travels, its comedy section must echo his previous experience. I argue that the idea of Apollonius' silent comic performance here may indeed derive from intertextuality with *Rudens*, but would like to add another level of comparison: shipwreck, the reason why Apollonius has ended up at Archistrates' court. Shipwreck is a convenient comedy plot device not only in *Rudens*, where it ensures that all protagonists end up on the Cyrenean shore after years of searching for each other, but also in Terence's *Andria* or Menander's *Perikeiromene*. Furthermore, in comedy it has erotic connotations in addition to the more obvious loss of fortune. The part of the shipwrecked man is a comic theme,<sup>44</sup> and the comic idea that the lover is like a shipwrecked man might be useful here, too: in Ter. *Eu.* 1037ff., Amor shipwrecks the lover; the lovesick lover in Plautus *Cistellaria* compares his fate to a battering at sea.<sup>45</sup> The association between bad fortune and shipwreck is commonplace in the novels, too, and not entirely unheard of in tragedy, either.<sup>46</sup> Euripides' rather happy tragedy *Helen*,

<sup>42</sup> Konstan 2013, 451-53; Kortekaas 2007, 156.

<sup>43</sup> Although a virgin, she is forced to live in a brothel and perform to the lyre for its clients. On the *infamia* of prostitutes and actors see Edwards 1993, 123-126.

<sup>44</sup> A shipwrecked man (*nauagos*) features in comedy titles, among others, by Aristophanes, Ephippus, Epicharmus and Paramonus. For Fortuna as a female playwright (*poietria*) who designs characters such as the shipwrecked man, the exile or the beggar see also Teles *On Circumstances* fr. 6 (p. 52 Hense).

<sup>45</sup> Pl. *Cist.* 221f., see also *Mer.* 197 etc.

<sup>46</sup> For example in novels: Apul. *Met.* 6,5 Psyche is shipwrecked by Fortuna; see also Hilton 2012.

for example, relies on Menelaos' shipwreck in Egypt, though there are stronger and more varied associations with New Comedy. Luc. *salt.* 31 also includes several myths that might involve shipwreck, e.g. the return of the Greeks from Troy or the story of Odysseus' wanderings.

Apollonius' shipwreck has certainly made an impression on the princess, as months later, in her modesty she asks for the hand of the 'shipwrecked man' – *naufragum* (*Hist. Apoll.* 20-21) when she rather discreetly describes Apollonius to her father, first in a letter and then in person as the person she wishes to marry. Only afterwards does she describe Apollonius as her music teacher. It is obvious that the shipwreck in which he has lost his birth right made such a lasting impression on her, because not only had her father identified Apollonius to her as a shipwrecked man, but also Apollonius described himself to her in the silent performance of comedy at the feast when she first cast eyes on him. Comedy is instrumental in defining Apollonius' situation to his audience as a noble man, equal to the gods, who has lost his fortune in a shipwreck. The tragic performance which follows also describes his life story, but is much less daring, given the universality of tragedy in pantomime performance, and may well continue the theme of shipwreck. It is however the central comedy that makes Apollonius' performance unique, and luckily he has a learned audience who not only admires him but also reads his performance of his status as noble but impoverished by Fortune correctly, first and foremost the princess, who is able to read the erotic undertone of the performance of the shipwrecked man and falls in love with him.

Already previously in the novel Apollonius had compared his life story with drama: He tells of his past tragic life to a character found in comedy, a fisherman, in a situation which Konstan has pointed out to be parallel to Plautus' *Rudens*<sup>47</sup> and its Greek Diphilian original. Just as he is shipwrecked and encounters a man on the shore who might be willing and able to help him, Apollonius refers to his fate as a tragedy: *Hist. Apoll.* 12,6: *audi nunc tragoediam calamitatis meae* / 'listen now to the tragedy of my misfortune', while prostrating himself before the old fisherman. This is melodrama to ensure the fisherman's sympathy,<sup>48</sup> but also indicates how Apollonius himself sees his fall from royal status to a shipwrecked destitute as a drama, a notion and generic association he will revisit at Archistrates' banquet. But in addition to a melodramatic effect there is also a metatheatrical use of the phrase here: Apollonius' life story has indeed dramatic overtones, just as in Apul. *Met.* 4,26 the captive girl Charite's melodramatic *specta denique*

<sup>47</sup> See also the notes in Panayotakis 2012, 199 on the scene and *Rudens*, both of which are set in the Cyrenaika.

<sup>48</sup> Panayotakis 2012, 193 sees 'tragedy' here as a melodramatic way to describe Apollonius' traumatic experiences.

*scaenam meae calamitatis* / ‘watch, finally, the drama of my misfortune’ is intended by her as a melodramatic outcry, while it is also a metatheatrical marker for the readers to see her story in terms of drama, both comedy and tragedy.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, Apollonius gains King Archistrates’ interest first with some aristocratic ball-playing in the gymnasium, but then, surprisingly, by his skilful massaging skills (*Hist. Apoll.* 13) which belie his royal status though again pay tribute to his versatility. The latter task is usually given to slaves or freemen,<sup>50</sup> but Apollonius makes himself useful to Archistrates in terms here that a comedy parasite, who carries gym massaging equipment as part of his costume, would recognise.<sup>51</sup> Because of his shipwreck, Apollonius had moved into the realm of the lower orders, from a tragic king to a king’s parasite.<sup>52</sup> This reflects a move, in generic terms, from tragedy to comedy. His performance for Archistrates, his noblemen and his daughter therefore enacts his fall and current low state, but also his confidence of rising again to his former heights. It shows his aspirations and innate nobility, and the generic move from the divine-lyre playing status of Apollo/Apollonius to the lower aspects of comedy emulates his own transformation from highest rank to that of a performer. Comedy performed in hitherto unheard-of pantomimic fashion then would become a symbol of the hitherto unheard-of downfall of a king to a performer at a banquet. Apollonius’ art imitates his life. His performance establishes his nobility and kingliness; he is worthy of the princess not only in art, but also in birth and nobility, and it is his performance that makes her fall in love with him, and the scene has a suppressed eroticism that is easily missed.

His performance therefore symbolises a move from high to low and high again, all in terms of twists of fortune never experienced before. Apollonius is enacting his past and his future, as well as his social aspirations, in order to display his own nobility to the king who is able to help him. King Archistrates, too, sees Apollonius’ clever performance as a display and proof of his nobility, which consequently is an inversion of Nero’s, who in the mind of his audience degraded his kingship by becoming a tragic actor. Apollonius inverts Nero’s degradation to his advantage.

The smooth change between genres is also important, as Apollonius never leaves his ‘stage’. At first, Apollonius’ performance moves seamlessly from a

<sup>49</sup> See May 2006, 251.

<sup>50</sup> See Panayotakis 2012, 212 *ad loc.* for literature and evidence; Mastrocinque 2019, 208-209.

<sup>51</sup> See the parasite masks in Pollux numbers 17 and 18, both of which carry bathing and gym equipment, with Webster-Green-Seeberg 1995, I, 22.

<sup>52</sup> It is interesting in this context, perhaps, that a comic parasite tends to refer to his patron as ‘king’, which makes *rex* a technical term. On the term see Damon 1997, 17, with examples.

participant at a symposium to a lyre player looking like Apollo, then to a comic performer and finally a tragic pantomime dancer. This is possible because of the versatility of his clothes, which double as a stage costume, as I will show.<sup>53</sup> In Cyrene, Apollonius' status is constantly recognised as and identified with his garments (*Hist. Apoll.* 14). His soiled and torn rags initially identify him several times as a shipwrecked man (*illo tacente habitus indicat* / 'though he was silent, his clothes gave the answer', and *sordido tribunario coopertum* / 'covered in a dirty old cloak'). King Archistrates himself commands Apollonius to be given decent clothes (*dignis vestibus*) for his dinner, and therefore allows Apollonius a shift in status display and self-representation that makes the rest of the story possible even before Apollonius launches himself into the theatrical performance.

This easy transition from party participant to performer is interesting, and possible, since, given the official nature of the king's generosity, Apollonius' symposiastic garment carries some unspoken symbolism and versatility. Garments worn by men for dining have to be decent, and not show any flesh, especially in a Roman environment.<sup>54</sup> This is the opposite of the shipwrecked man's rags, and useful as a prop in the performance that establishes Apollonius again as a nobleman and king. Though not compulsory, garlands (often made from ivy) would be worn at symposia. Apollonius' decent clothes for the banquet, especially one where the king's daughter attends, are likely therefore to have been long, and with long sleeves, and possibly ornately embroidered. This fortuitous incident allows for his exploitation of his clothes to show his shifts in his own fortune through interpretative dance, while maintaining his identity.

The passage's first words are crucial here. *Induit statum* could either indicate the stance/posture, or dress/equipment, in which case Apollonius dresses himself in the appropriate costume of the lyre player.<sup>55</sup> Most usually, and also in *Hist. Apoll.* 32 (*induit se et filiam suam vestes lugubres* / 'she dressed herself and her daughter in mourning clothes'), *induere* indicates putting on a garment (*OLD* 1 and 2), but it can also mean to assume, adopt or put on an appearance (*OLD* 3b), e.g. Cic. *Tusc.* 5,73 *qui tantum modo induit personam philosophii* / 'who merely assumed the role of a philosopher'. Apollonius does not need to change his dress to take up all three different roles, which has wide ranging meaning for his performance style and his display of his own identity throughout: it is the stance of

<sup>53</sup> Vannini 2018, 199 *ad loc.* notes that it is impossible for Apollonius to have the appropriate costumes at hand.

<sup>54</sup> Roller 2006, 34-35, with note 46.

<sup>55</sup> See Panayotakis 2012 240f.; Kortekaas 2007, 229-232 argues that *habitus* here is the dress or habit of the cithara player; see Vannini 2018, 197 for a discussion of the passage's transmission.

the performer which makes him recognisable as such, but the nature of his garment helps him to prove his point.

Apul. *Fl.* 15,6, as we have seen, identifies the costume of a lyre player as long-sleeved and embroidered. This style is also a suitable costume for a pantomime dancer: it is generally long, ankle-length with a fringe, and can have golden embroidery, as sported by the Trier ivory pantomime performer, who also uses a lyre, like Apollonius.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, lyres can function as pantomime signatures prop. The Trier ivory shows the performer's hair is long and flowing, and crowned with an ivy garland, suggesting emulation of Apollo Musagetes.<sup>57</sup> All this indicates that Apollonius can move easily from symposiast to Apollo the lyre player and pantomime dancer by merely changing his stance, and the fluidity of his dress makes this transition from a lyre player looking like Apollo to Apollonius performing drama on stage possible.

This fluid nature and adaptability of his costume also extends to the comedy performance in the middle. The costume of a young man in comedy involves a long garment, often in scarlet or purple.<sup>58</sup> Since comedy *iuvenes* are the focus of the plays' erotic plot lines, this is another understated association of Apollonius with the role of a lover. Once again, the fluid nature of the symposium robe facilitates the identification of Apollonius with his role, while still maintaining his own identity. Through the subtle use of his symposiastic dress as a performance prop, Apollonius manages to identify with Apollo, a young lover from comedy (who may have suffered a shipwreck metaphorically or for real), and a tragic king, and his audience seems to be able to read all these cues.

Symposiastic audiences are tuned into reading this kind of clothes-symbolism as part of the symposium experience. Plato's *Symposium* is exemplary here: not only does its ending play on the problem of the interchangeability of comedy and tragedy as genres (*Smp.* 223d), but Socrates' clothes, especially his shoes, are discussed in the *Symposium* as a way to understand his personality (173b; 174; 220b). Apollonius stresses his identity and changing fortune from king to shipwrecked man to participants in the symposium here by using his versatile garment during his performances, without changing it or donning any masks. This facilitates the recognition that he is all these things he puts on display: a noble lyre player resembling a god, a young man who lost everything in a shipwreck like characters in comedy, and a king again involved in tragic events. During these performances, he is however always recognisable as Apollonius himself by his unmasked face, and the sophisticated audience understands his allusions, and rewards him with

<sup>56</sup> Wyles 2008, 64f. discusses pantomime costume in detail.

<sup>57</sup> See Libanius *Or.* 64, 50-1 for long hair as attribute of pantomime dancers.

<sup>58</sup> See Donatus 1,29-30 and Pollux 4,118f. and 120; Webster-Green-Seeberg 1995, I, 45.



the recognition that he is equal to the princess in his performance and noble status. Apollonius has re-established his identity to himself and to his audience in a way that is typical in this novel: with the help of a riddle which the audience has to solve. The *Historia Apollonii* contains several riddles (*Hist. Apoll.* 4 = Antiochus' riddle which Apollonius solves; 42-43 – Tarsia's riddles), which scholars have recently used to show how they reflect and comment on the story;<sup>59</sup> this performance should be added to these.

In the context of symposia, which function as self-display and performance, Nero's audience could not help seeing similarities between e.g. Nero's murder of Agrippina and his dancing of Orestes the matricide. Apollonius exploits this slip-page between character and performer in reverse. He naturally turns to performance strategies permissible by associations with Roman emperors to declare his own nobility. In important ways, therefore, Apollonius outperforms Nero here, not only in the versatility of the genres he performs, but also in their mastery.

There is one further association of Apollonius' dress. Wyles notes that a pantomime dancer's costumes 'emphasize his erotic appeal, while simultaneously also bewitching – and potentially corrupting – the spectators.'<sup>60</sup> The princess falls in love with him during the performance, just as Dido falls in love with Aeneas during his retelling of his escape from Troy. Like Odysseus and Aeneas before him, Apollonius treats his performance at the court of Archistrates as a way to remind himself of his nobility and reinstate his status in society. Apollonius' behaviour is circumspect, like that of the epic heroes, though he is neither as diplomatic as Aeneas or Odysseus, but the erotic nature of the display (his godlike appearance, his role as a comic lover, and erotic pantomime performer) may contribute to the princess' inevitable reaction, and, to the reader, suggest an eroticism that is all but unpronounced in the *Historia Apollonii*. The novel is a genre where love at first sight is the norm, and I suggest that Apollonius' drama is a substitute for the explicit mention of the mutual attraction between Apollonius and the princess.

I hope to have shown that in *Historia Apollonii* 16 Apollonius' performance is not merely a display of his stagecraft and lyre skills, but that both the internal and external audiences are invited to see something metafictional in it, contemplate the fluctuations of Apollonius' social status reflected in his dress and its skilled use in his performance, and understand with its help that he is an aristocrat fallen on hard times worthy of their respect and support, and eventually the hand

<sup>59</sup> See Panayotakis 2007, 302-311 (especially p. 306-7 on the princess' riddle letter about marrying the shipwrecked man); Panayotakis 2012, 81f. and *ad locc.* for the riddles in the *Historia Apollonii*.

<sup>60</sup> Wyles 2008, 61.

of the princess. Apollonius reasserts his identity as a king, no longer merely a shipwrecked man, by means of his display and performance. His change in clothes from the rags of his misfortune to the decent robes of a king's dinner guest allows him to manipulate his performance through various generic displays, from lyre to comedy and tragic pantomime, to tell his own story so far and re-establish his royal credentials. Doing so, ostensibly in silence and without masks, focuses his audience's attention on the manipulation of his clothes, his aristocratic lyre playing and continued recognition as Apollonius the dinner guest, which allows him to identify himself with the characters he performs while ensuring these characters are seen as aspects of his own identity. He becomes royal again, and a silent and possible suitor for the princess' hand. *Hist. Apoll.* 16's spectacle is therefore not merely a strange rebuke to the princess to practice her music more frequently, but also, in its riddle-like nature, a challenge for the audience watching Apollonius to read him correctly. The symposium audience, trained in reading between the lines, especially when the performers' faces are still identifiable throughout, realises this, just as Nero's audience recognised their emperor and the nobility performing at the *Ludi*. Nero wanted to be seen as an emperor who is also a tragedian and lyre player, whereas Apollonius' aim is to be seen as a consummate performer who is also a king, changing the semantics of his robes as a prop as best as he can.

Although the novel as we have it is a Latin text, chapter 16 seems to reflect both Greek as well as Roman contexts in the sense that there is no opprobrium attached to Apollonius' performance during the symposium, a performance that outshines other Greek novel heroes such as Metiochos in its diversification of skills, and even Nero in its command of different performance genres. The scene is therefore part of the riddling structure of the novel, where riddles about the characters' identities (Antiochus and his daughter, Apollonius, his daughter Tarsia) abound. The ability of Archistrates and his daughter to read Apollonius' performance correctly is tested, and results in her love for Apollonius, whom she begins to see as a social equal and artistic superior, and therefore worthy of her hand.<sup>61</sup> We may therefore perhaps be able to see the *Historia Apollonii* as a text portraying events set in a Greek context adapted for Roman consumption, showing elements of both cultures intermixed through constant exposure of both their values to each other.

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<sup>61</sup> I would like to thank my daughter, whose violin practice for her grade 2 exam inspired me to look at the lyre performances in this novel, Stephen Harrison and Malcolm Heath for their comments on earlier drafts, and Liz Pender for discussing clothing in Plato's *Symposium* with me.

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