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***Apuleius' Judgement of Paris: A Philosophical Critique of Didactic
Storytelling and its Implication for Social and Legal Morality,
Metamorphoses 10.29-33***

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Abstract

The focus of this article is to explore the meaning of the pantomime of the judgement of Paris in Book X of the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.*10.29-33), arguing that its location and embedded authorial commentary make it both a thematic climax and vital in understanding Apuleius' authorial values. Central to this meaning is a philosophical apostrophe inset in the passage which contextualises a tone shift from the poor behaviours of the preceding books to the sober religious conversion present in Book XI. Leading up to this conversion, as Apuleius' theatrical displays of crime and punishment presented in his narratives accurately reflect the type of performative punishments practised under Roman law, it calls into question the values of such punishment, especially considering their conflict with Platonic attitudes towards education. Since many of the inset narratives are parodies of myths set, ostensibly, in the real world, Apuleius' attitude towards such stories is likely that they teach misaligned values, trapping their consumers in animal desires and leading to legal consequences. If so, then it might explain why Apuleius depicts the gods within this pantomime as highly eroticised human actors, why he says that such myths create 'forum cattle' (*forensia pecora*) and 'vultures in togas' (*togati vulturii*) who pervert the legal system (*Met.*10.33), and why it is only after Lucius abandons this scene that his humanity is restored.

Introduction

Near the end of Book X of the *Metamorphoses* (henceforth, *Met.*), Apuleius breaks off in an extended philosophical apostrophe, which he describes as an *impetus indignationis* ('an attack of indignation', *Met.* 10.33). This philosophical apostrophe introduces a noteworthy tone shift in the narrative from the bawdy humour and bad behaviours of the preceding books to the sober depiction of religious conversion in Book XI.¹² 'What is the relevance of this tirade?', Ellen Finkelpearl asks, further observing that 'critics' reactions have been various'.³ James Tatum notes that this striking shift has 'caused many to wonder how we can reconcile the incontestably serious ending of Book 11 with the tales and their oft-stated purpose of "entertaining."'⁴ Yet if one assumes that these 'sweet whispers' which Lucius promises will 'charm' his readers (*lepido susurro permulceam*, *Met.* 1.1)⁵ are meant only to charm, they risk ignoring, what Anton Bierl observes, that Apuleius, as '*philosophus Platonicus*, enriches this bio-ritual plot with all sorts of allegorizing material' in which 'he applies such a polyvalent perspective in order to appropriate a higher meaning which he simultaneously deconstructs'.⁶ Many of these perspectives have already been excellently analysed individually; consequently, this examination of the text will be a work of scholarly syncretism, aiming to connect the many superficially disparate themes, and arguing that the seemingly irrelevant 'moral judgments and literary echoes'⁷ scattered throughout the work are not merely poetic ornaments for amusement, but, when properly recognised, sources of genuine outrage about society, its education, and its legal system.

¹ A shortened version of this paper was presented at the January 2024 meeting of the *Society for Classical Studies*. I would like to thank Professor Tim Parkin and Professor Ellen Finkelpearl for their helpful comments and suggestions.

² Zimmerman 2000: 183.

³ Finkelpearl 1991: 233; Finkelpearl's summary includes perspectives from scholars such as those of Gerald Sandy, Carl Schlam, and H.J. Mason, which are relevant for any researcher interested in the broader scholarship on this scene. This article does not outline them here for the sake of brevity.

⁴ Tatum 1969: 487.

⁵ Translations of Apuleius are either my own or adapted from the Loeb editions. Quotations from all other ancient authors are taken from their respective Loeb's unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Bierl 2013: 96.

⁷ Finkelpearl 1991: 222.

A Didactic Deconstruction

Apuleius' work defies simple explanation largely because his work functions on different interpretational levels and reflects an educated and accurate understanding of many topics – from literature and philosophy to law, medicine, and religion.⁸ While these topics have been examined in broader Apuleian scholarship, as this scene depicts a pantomime, most scholarship has viewed it through the lens of literary metanarrative and Lucius' character development. In this regard, the scholarship of Regine May, Nicole Fick, Ellen Finkelpearl, Anna Maria Wasyl, and Maaïke Zimmerman proves particularly useful. There are two additional themes, however, which can help explain why Apuleius might have inserted – or perhaps self-inserted – such a fit of moral outrage: Apuleius' Platonism and his history of legal prosecution. For, despite facetiously referring to himself as a 'philosophising ass' (*philosophantem asinum*, Met 10.33), Apuleius perceived a serious link between his own history of prosecution and that of Socrates – a discussion of which is featured prominently in *Met.*10.33. Consequently, building on the discussions of whether the *Metamorphoses* is itself charming but meaningless literary mimesis which contributes nothing morally to either Lucius nor the reader, we must view the progression to the end of Book X through the lens of Apuleius' authorial Platonism. Considering this view, then perhaps he, like Plato, saw the purpose of literature as didactic and, stemming from proper education, justice as a harmonious ordering of the body politic.⁹ If so, then the *Metamorphoses* might be arguing that poor educational models nurture immorality and that the Roman legal system not only failed to remedy these social ills but actively contributed to them. Therefore, the judgement of Paris scene might be Apuleius placing corrupt myth and law on trial, and this *impetus* itself a judgement – yet not one which proves punitive but rather an educational model for how, like Lucius, to break free from the base *curiositas* which feeds these two corrupt systems.

In the scene in question, the protagonist, Lucius, who, through his *curiositas* about magic, has found himself trapped in asinine form for most of the work's first ten books. During

⁸ See May 2013'. For a more in-depth discussion of this topic on page 7 of this article.

⁹ For a general overview of this, see Tate 1933.

this time, he listens to and experiences a number of inset stories which are told in the subversive imitation of other literary genres. By Book X, Lucius finds himself no closer to restoring his humanity and yet seems increasingly accepted by Roman society. He gains a seat at the Roman table and has an affair with an elite woman. These acts render him a bizarre spectacle for the delight of the wealthy rather than a genuine member of human society. Near the conclusion of the book, Lucius finds himself set to participate in a *munus* in which he will re-enact the myth of Pasiphaë with a woman condemned for murder (*Met.* 10.23). Just prior to this, however, he watches the performance of a pantomime of the judgement of Paris (*Met.* 10.29-32) – an event that triggers his *impetus indignationis*.

Keeping in mind the many equally grotesque incidents which occur in preceding books, particular consideration must be given to why these events trigger such a reaction in Lucius and whether his diatribe serves as an epexegetical bridge into Book XI. If Book XI presents a moral remedy to the many problems presented in the narrative as a whole, then the philosophical indictment that this *impetus* presents would suggest that Apuleius held the core of these problems to be the failure of proper didacticism in both literature and the law. But why argue that these two ideas hold particular meaning when the work itself might be largely meaningless? While at face value, Lucius' tales may seem like 'a hodgepodge of uncoordinated material', as Jack Winkler describes them,¹⁰ on closer examination, they prove to be a complex network of literary allusions and social commentary. While Lucius claims at its outset that these stories are merely meant to delight, on a metanarrative level, Reinhold Merkelbach concludes that Apuleius presents charming frivolity only 'on the surface level', while still preserving 'deeper meaning'.¹¹

At this stage, an important point established by Winkler must be referenced; there is a narratological difference between 'auctor and actor' in this work. Apuleius, the auctor, remains elusive throughout the work and his intent is ambiguous, while Lucius, the actor, exists as a separate entity into which both Apuleius and the audience can, at times, project their own self-identification. Therefore, behind Lucius' performatively naïve incipit

¹⁰ Winkler 1985: 20.

¹¹ Merkelbach 1962: 90; Translation rendered by Bierl 2013: 83.

claim that he only intends to delight (*laetaberis*, *Met.* 1.1), there lies hidden a broader authorial understanding that all narratives are didactic and that very little of the work is even remotely charming. For, from the outset, despite ostensibly knowing that he is within a story being told to his 'reader' (*lector*, *Met.* 1.1), Apuleius, 'by a change of voice' (*vocis immutatio*, *Met.* 1.1) into a 'crude performer' (*rudis locutor*, *Met.* 1.1), presents the separation of auctor from actor. In this, Lucius, the actor, continually seems to be ignorant of the artificiality of his condition as a character inset within Apuleius' larger narrative. Why this matters is because Lucius' suspension of disbelief seems to develop throughout the narrative to the point, in Book X, where Lucius entirely loses himself in the illusion of playing, as Regine May calls it, 'an ass on stage'.¹² It is at this moment when it becomes evident that the line between the fictive and ostensibly real has dissolved and that Lucius' reality is merely a cheap performance.

Following from the tropes of ancient literature, this critical element of ignorance which stands in the way of Lucius' *catharsis* is cleared away in a pivotal moment of *anagnorisis*, recognition; a moment which, arguably, occurs during this scene. In order to unpack why Lucius' recognition of this *catharsis* occurs at this point and why this matters, it is necessary to outline what literature Apuleius was imitating. Beyond the fact that the *Metamorphoses* is told in imitation of Lucian's earlier *Onos* story, the many narratives themselves inset within this copy are evidently told as imitations of other famous works of literature. Alex Scobie notes the presence of mimetic inversion within the *Metamorphoses*, observing that many of the narratives presented throughout the work are staged by Apuleius as parodies of common myth though with the stories not acted out by heroes and gods, but rather by common people.¹³ Regine May traces the degree of these literary influences from Euripides and Menander, to Seneca and Plautus, claiming that 'Apuleius constantly builds up a certain generic expectation, just to thwart this expectation and create his own specific meaning out of the unexpected and the deviation.'¹⁴ While not inherently arguing for 'a single formula – whether simple or

¹² See May 2006.

¹³ Scobie 1975: 76.

¹⁴ May 2006: 9.

complex' which 'would make this book seem more of a unity,'¹⁵ Ellen Finkelpearl, nonetheless, suggests that Apuleius presents not only an 'experimentation with genres' but a systematic pattern of 'narrative inversions' which are 'resolved' in Book XI.¹⁶

Despite being increasingly drawn into the narratives leading up to this point, the trigger for Lucius' metatheatrical recognition occurs with the performance of pantomime and his own inclusion in a twisted reenactment on stage of the Pasiphaë myth. Despite Anna Maria Wasyl noting how the genre of pantomime had 'extraordinary didactic potential' and an 'excellent way of lecturing the most important cultural texts to uneducated masses',¹⁷ which was both praised by the likes of Libianus and had become increasingly common during the imperial period, there was also widespread criticism of the genre. Finkelpearl extensively documented how early Christians and moralising pagans alike condemned such performances for contributing to the collective breakdown of society's morals,¹⁸ while May argues that such performances 'had a sustained influence on the audience's character',¹⁹ a view which perhaps, unsurprisingly, authors, such as Augustine, held towards the *Metamorphoses* itself. Considering how indulgently Apuleius describes elements which are seemingly meant to titillate the audience, it is small wonder that the view held by critics both in the ancient world and which, as Finkelpearl observes, is 'even more popular today' fails to find a unified moral meaning in Apuleius' stories.²⁰ But, in so doing, such critics 'are implicitly denying Lucius any spiritual or moral development that would render his religious conversion expected or deserved.'²¹

While it is possible to argue that Lucius' allusions are merely a literary exercise whose purpose extends somewhere between meaninglessness, excess, and a complex narratological 'set of games for readers to play', which are entirely 'shown to depend on

¹⁵ Finkelpearl 1998: 35.

¹⁶ Finkelpearl 1998: 35.

¹⁷ Wasyl 2020: 101; Please note, as the original paper was written in Polish and I have not studied this language, this translation came from Google.

¹⁸ Finkelpearl 1991: 227.

¹⁹ May 2008: 355.

²⁰ Finkelpearl 1991: 221.

²¹ Finkelpearl 1991: 222.

the perspective of the interpreter',²² there is no inherent reason to project such a postmodern reading when it is equally possible that Apuleius meant to reflect and comment on the life of his times. In this vein, Elizabeth Greene notes that Apuleius' imitation of literature was no less equally inspired by fiction as the satires of the Second Sophistic (c. AD 60 – AD 230), and therefore argues that his work functions as 'social commentary' staged in a 'fictional premise in order to safely project criticism of the contemporary world.'²³ Consequently, she observes how this criticism explores how, 'themes such as the notion that nobility is gained by virtue rather than birth, condemnation of the greedy and debauched, and the role of fortune in one's life are shown to aid Apuleius in criticising common vices.'²⁴

Where this argument becomes increasingly useful is when it is paired with the tropes of mimic performance and Apuleius' many staged legal scenes. R. W. Reynolds notes how the themes of adultery and court trials were likely a common element within mime,²⁵ and Finkelpearl concludes that Apuleius presents 'a reasonable facsimile of popular mime.'²⁶ May argued that Apuleius embedded accurate knowledge of technical practices into his work 'as a philosopher's credentials' and 'as a bonding mechanism' for his readers whom he expected to be well-educated rather than the kind of audience one might expect to watch a pantomime.²⁷ Among the many arts over which Apuleius demonstrates his familiarity, May shows his knowledge of medicine, Leonardo Constantini discusses his understanding of the 'real tools of magic',²⁸ and Robert Summers observes that Apuleius' many legal scenes represent an accurate knowledge of the Roman legal system.

Considering Apuleius' criticisms within the novel of unethical practices in each of these fields, together they form an overarching pattern which supports the argument that Apuleius used his work to critique society and its real practices. In isolation, however, the

²² Winkler 1985: 319, 321.

²³ Greene 2008: <https://ancientnarrative.com/article/view/24539>.

²⁴ Greene 2008: <https://ancientnarrative.com/article/view/24539>.

²⁵ Reynolds 1946: 77-84.

²⁶ Finkelpearl 1991: 222.

²⁷ May 2014: 110, 122.

²⁸ Costantini 2019: 75-76.

topic of the law and Apuleius' view on its ethics might prove the most useful for unpacking this meaning behind why it predicates his 'famous tirade against the venality of judges'²⁹ and his pursuit of the law in the final passages of the work.

Fictive Imitation and its Legal Consequences

Ben E. Perry first appears to have noticed that there is a 'repeated occurrence of fear of the law in the novel', and that this 'was a connecting link between many of the tales discussed.'³⁰ This role of law within the work has only been systematically addressed by Richard Summers, where he concludes that 'Apuleius intended these incidents to serve as a subtle indictment of the system of justice in the provinces of the Roman Empire.'³¹ While Summers' unpublished dissertation presents a commentary on the whole of the *Metamorphoses*, his analysis largely concludes with his examination of the Hippolytus tale at the beginning of Book X (*Met.* 10.1-12). This conclusion perhaps comes from Summers' analysis, which focuses on reading the text as a direct representation of real Roman legal systems rather than as a sometimes-allegorical element in a larger philosophical argument. Unintentionally in line with the themes of metatheatre and narrative inversion, Summers, nevertheless, acknowledges that Apuleius presents legal process as connected to the theatre, and that its 'failure to have true guilt punished while false charges cause untold pain doubtless is a method by which the novelist is emphasising the absolute capriciousness of the system.'³²

Rather than restating what Summers already demonstrates, i.e., that across his many tales Apuleius displays an intimate knowledge of the Roman laws which 'form the matrix of Rome's underdeveloped system of criminal law'³³: it is best to begin an analysis at the end of Apuleius' long string of tales. Unlike the stories prior to this, this last inset tale – that of a jealous and murderous wife (*Met.* 10.23-28) – has no dramatic scene described

²⁹ Finkelpearl 1991: 232.

³⁰ Summers 1970: 531; See Perry 1967.

³¹ Summers 1970: 511.

³² Summers 1970: 524.

³³ Summers 1970: 517.

in court. It is, nonetheless, the legal consequences of this story which appears to bring about Lucius' stunning shift in character. The story begins with the case of a girl, unwanted by her father, who is saved from infanticide 'by her mother's inherent sense of duty' (*insita matribus pietate*, *Met.* 10.23) and raised in secret by a neighbour. Upon reaching marriageable age, the mother entrusts her son with this secret and asks him to provide for her. Real legal precedent existed for a Roman father having the 'option not to constitute the relation of father and child'³⁴ and, consequently, rejecting legal responsibility for the offspring. The mother in this tale, however, is asking her son, who is not yet clearly endowed with the rights of *patria potestas*, to provide for her with the rights of a legal daughter, e.g. 'to provide a dowry matching the girl's birth' (*dotare filiam pro natalibus*, *Met.* 10.23) – a 'duty' (*officium*) which he embraces with 'spectacular dutifulness' (*pietatis spectatae*) and 'manages with religious dedication' (*religiose dispensat*). In other words, the inciting complication of this story comes from the legality of infanticide being counteracted by these higher personal senses of duty and religious responsibility.

This storyline, like those of the inset tales preceding it, is heavily predicated on literary antecedents. For example, Maaïke Zimmerman identifies close comparisons with Terence's *Heauton Timorumenos* (*Hau.* 626f), though comments more broadly that the estranged sibling element is 'an ingredient in the plots of several comedies by Plautus and Terence', further observing that 'the reader who recognizes the comic situation, and bases certain generic expectations on it, will find it more remarkable that from ch. 24 onwards the story moves rapidly farther and farther away from its "comic" start.'³⁵ In doing so, the move away from comedy results in violence, for, in a rapid shift towards tragedy, the girl, who secures a good marriage, ends up becoming the target of her brother's wife's jealous violence. This wife proves to be manifestation of all the vices of the work, for having wrongly concluded that the girl is her husband's lover, violently murders her and then poisons her husband. To remove her potential accusers and to avoid paying the doctor from whom she had bought the poisonous drug, she then also poisons the doctor,

³⁴ Radin 1925: 338.

³⁵ Zimmerman 2000: 303.

the doctor's wife, and as a capstone to her 'exceedingly manifold wickedness' (*tam multiforme facinus*, *Met.* 10.28) even murders her own daughter who, in accordance with the law, was set to inherit her dead father's estate (*huic infantulae quod leges necessariam patris successionem deferrent*, *Met.*10.28).³⁶ This shift both parallels the attempted poisonings of the so-called Hippolytus-tale at the beginning of Book X (*Met.* 10.1-12) and follows the tropes of wicked women and tragic poisonings, but within Apuleius' narrative this murderess bears more similarities to Deianeira or Medea than Phaedra. Rather than escaping in a draconic chariot, the comparison to literary fiction ends, the reality of legal prosecution sets in, and she is sentenced to a *damnatio ad bestias*,³⁷ a standard punishment set for poisonings associated with the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis*.³⁸

In this tale, Lucius finds himself as the unfortunate co-star of the murderess in the next planned reenactment of literature – the myth of Pasiphaë. There are a number of troubling implications to this scene tied, more confusingly, to several interpretational issues associated with the morality leading up to it. Lucius expresses his disgust at the woman, claiming the punishment to be 'indeed no less than she deserved' (*minus quidem quam merebatur*, *Met.* 10.28), yet he equally states unwillingness to participate lest he be 'polluted by the contagion of the woman's wickedness' (*scelerosae mulieris contagio macularer*, *Met.* 10.29). Even so, this idea does not align fully with the rest of the work, for, as Winkler confirms, this 'runs counter to Lucius the actor's detailed enjoyment of the rich matron' especially since Lucius described himself as a willing actor in this equally unnatural act (*Met.* 10.19-22).³⁹ Apuleius refers to this affair in theatrical terms, describing it as a scene (*scaenam*, *Met.*10.23) and twice describing it as an enactment of the Pasiphaë myth (*Met.* 10.19 and 23). Furthermore, Zimmerman notes that Apuleius described this elite Roman woman using the exact same language as the murderess

³⁶ Zimmerman 2000: 342.

³⁷ '...because no other punishment could be devised that was appropriate, he sentenced her at least to be thrown to the beasts' (*quod dignus cruciatus alius excogitari non poterat, certe bestiis obiciendam pronuntiavit*, *Met.* 10.28).

³⁸ Berger 1953: 760.

³⁹ Winkler 1985: 146.

(*egregia illa uxor*, *Met.* 23 and 24).⁴⁰ The issue, instead, seems to be that it is public and therefore shameful;⁴¹ for, despite the willing adoption of metatheatrical language to describe his own performances of acting like a human for much of Book X, it seems that Lucius has been genuinely unaware that he has been an ‘ass on stage’ the entire time and that the performances within his tales, including his own, presented publicly for his ‘reader’ (*lector*, *Met.* 1.1) are filled with equally shameful acts.

Metaleptic Transgression

At this point, the distinction between auctor and actor becomes particularly important, and it can be argued that Lucius, despite knowing that he is narrating what Julia Bolton Holloway calls his ‘tales within tales’,⁴² has become progressively under a growing suspension of disbelief. For, while the action of the first inset narrative in Book I is quite far removed from Lucius, he becomes gradually more involved in the tales moving forward and seems to become less and less aware of his own story’s artificiality. What begins with Lucius first hearing other people’s narratives, moves then to watching, and finally to participating in them. Consequently, by Book IX, the boundary between fictive inset and ostensibly real framing narratives seem to dissolve and become indistinguishable. Rather than the accepted ‘ancient notion that an imitator (actor) was identifiable with the imitated figure, just as great art mirrored life’,⁴³ espoused by Aristotle and Ovid, in Apuleius’ most extreme example of ‘an inversion of an aesthetic of mimesis’, the life within the narrative reality of the work increasingly becomes an imitation of art. Zimmerman observes that Apuleius oversees the ‘real’ peoples within his framing narrative undergoing a ‘successful

⁴⁰ Zimmerman 2000: 292.

⁴¹ Roman morality is what anthropologists would label a ‘shame culture’ meaning that right and wrong were dictated not by an internal sense of good and bad but rather the public consequences of their actions. As Frederik Vervaeke 2017: 88 explains, ‘the ancient sources amply attest to the paramount importance of honour and shame, or loss of face, as pervasive drivers of social interaction, expectation and self-regulation. As Cicero implicitly attests in *De Republica* 5.4, the quest for an honourable reputation and fear of shame significantly compounded the dread of penalties ordained by law’. No doubt one of the purposes of Plato’s story of the ring of Gyges (*Rep.* 2:359a-360d) is to demonstrate that when one removes public consequences, most people are left unguided by a sense of internal moral guilt and therefore behave poorly.

⁴² Wright and Holloway 2000: 18.

⁴³ May 2008: 349.

transformation into *objets d'art*.⁴⁴ This metaleptic transgression begins to permeate all aspects of the work rendering most characters who are supposedly real (within the narrative reality) as cheap imitations of literary antecedents. This transgression is both juxtaposed to and highlighted by the strikingly accurate real details which Apuleius uses to flesh out his story, from his genuine depiction of law to his in-depth understanding of medicine.

This metalepsis, therefore, calls into question just what the reality of the humanity which Lucius has been pursuing is and presents a key problem of reading the text. As Finkelpearl notes, much of Book X depicts Lucius' 'reintegration into human society' as a process of acting – specifically acting like a human by 'eating human food, communicating in a crude sign language, (and) having a touching love affair with a beautiful *matrona*.'⁴⁵ Yet, Zimmerman equally recognises that his behaviour during this book also represents 'the culmination of moral degradation before the religious enlightenment of Book 11.'⁴⁶ Therefore, Book X has been a source of contention over whether it represents moral growth or regression in Lucius' character. From a metatheatrical lens, though, it seems clear that Lucius' imitative performance of Roman social practices does not equate to a genuine restoration of humanity, simply because this society is itself imitative of morally poor literary examples. This is why, despite acting like a human, his humanity is not restored until he rejects this same inferior reality in Book XI and remains an animal prior to this because the humans he emulates are themselves compared to animals. Lucius himself even says that he tries not to 'act in too human a way' lest the people 'condemn me as a monster, slaughter me, and offer me as a sumptuous meal to the vultures' (*sed verebar ne si forte sine magistro humano ritu ederem pleraque, rati scaevum praesagium portendere, velut monstrum ostentumque me obtruncatum vulturiiis opimum pabulum redderent, Met. 10.17*). While it is unclear whether Lucius is referring to actual vultures or the people in society as vultures, the fact that his *impetus* refers to Roman jurors as 'vultures in togas' (*togati vulturii, Met. 10.33*) suggests the latter interpretation. From this,

⁴⁴ Zimmerman 2000: 386.

⁴⁵ Finkelpearl 1991: 221.

⁴⁶ Hijmans Jr. *et al.* 1995: 3-4; Bechtle 1995: 109; Also see Shumate 1999: 113-125, which argues that the tales are 'a culmination of moral degradation before the religious enlightenment of Book 11'.

it is equally unsurprising the murderous woman with whom he is set to perform on stage is described both in zoomorphic terms as 'a venomous serpent' (*excetrae venenatae*, *Met.*10.28) and using metatheatrical language as 'concealing the face of honesty' and 'wearing its mask' (*fidei suppressens faciem, praetendens imaginem*, *Met.*10.27).

Therefore, by this intended Pasiphaë performance, Lucius has become so engrossed in the story that the line between narrative fiction and perceived reality has dissolved and one has metamorphosed into the other. Lucius has become an actor in reality playing out the tropes of human society as set by myths and literature and, in this, has become merely the unwitting player of the artificial rather than the author of his own genuine human experience.

Despite his protestation of 'contagious contamination' (*contagio macularer*, *Met.*10.29) from this woman's poisonous character, Apuleius makes it clear that Lucius is equally 'worried not only from a sense of decency but also for my very safety' (*ergo igitur non de pudore iam sed de salute ipsa sollicitus*, *Met.* 10.33). Since the punitive nature of Roman justice was such that if someone transgressed the boundaries of legal society, according to K.M. Coleman, retribution would be meted out by 'the principle of *talio*, according to which the means of punishment evokes the misdeed.'⁴⁷ In other words, the punishment would fit the crime. Because this woman acted like an animal, her legal punishment was to be thrown *ad bestias*. These so-called 'fatal charades' were both public and often took the form of performative 'executions staged as mythological enactments.'⁴⁸ The purpose of these, although theoretically 'correction, deterrence, and the restoration of security by removing the criminal from society',⁴⁹ more realistically 'reflect the taste for observing spectacular suffering on the part of persons who were of no account while they were alive and could provide enjoyment by their death.'⁵⁰ On this topic, Coleman presents a wealth of source evidence for just how immensely ancient audiences relished the gory excesses

⁴⁷ Coleman 1990: 46.

⁴⁸ Coleman 1990: 44.

⁴⁹ Coleman 1990: 48.

⁵⁰ Coleman 1990: 54.

of these performances, but also notes their 'criticism by pagan philosophers and early church fathers.'⁵¹

While previously willing to enjoy perverse stories of crime, Lucius' inclusion in their punishment provides a catalyst for his *anagnorisis* of the system's flaws, and, consequently, he forms a strikingly different view on the role of punishment. For, despite being legally innocent, Lucius recognises that these beasts 'could not possibly turn out to be so intelligently clever or so skilfully educated or so temperately moderate as to mangle the woman lying attached to my loins while sparing me on the grounds that I was unconvicted and innocent' (*non adeo vel prudentia sollers vel artificio docta vel abstinentia frugi posset provenire, ut adiacentem lateri meo laceraret mulierem, mihi vero quasi indemnato et innoxio parceret; Met. 10.34*). Despite his own moral lapses in Book X, what separated Lucius from actual animals is his human reason. Yet, ironically, in his curious pursuit of this humanity Lucius was more than willing to engage in bestial acts which only degraded him further; be it his liaison with Photis (*Met. 2.15-18*), which resulted in his initial metamorphosis, or his intercourse with the *matrona* which led to his intended role in this Pasiphaë myth. Although he willingly indulged in these behaviours privately, when forced to perform an act of 'public shame' (*incoram publicam, Met. 10.23*) in front of a 'massive audience' (*populi caveam, Met. 10.23*) on an actual stage with real physical consequences, his own investment within his artificial narrative seems to shatter.

This change is metatheatrically amusing considering that he has been narrating this story the entire time, and by the nature of that performance, like having sex in the arena in front of an audience, Lucius has been no less putting his own private actions on public display for his 'reader' (*lector, Met. 1.1*). Similarly, while more than willing to decry the actions of others, when potentially sharing in the public punishment which this woman will endure, Lucius becomes immensely aware that he no longer stands silently and aloofly removed from the action as a detached narrator but rather has become 'part of the entertainment' (*destinat me spectaculo publico, Met. 10.23*). Therefore, by the moment that Lucius is set

⁵¹ Coleman 1990: 58.

to step on an actual stage, he recognises for the first time the artificiality of his reality and it prompts him to reflect on the didactic potential of literature.

So, by the time we reach the pantomime, Lucius and the reader alike are primed to think about stories as an artificial construct and as a vehicle for conveying the values of moral justice. It cannot be a coincidence, therefore, that Apuleius chose to tell the story of the Judgement of Paris. Having just become aware of the 'fictive' reality of his world,⁵² the boundaries between inset and framing narrative, which had, up to this point, largely dissolved, snap back into sharp focus. This effect is made strikingly evident by the fact that this is Apuleius' first time directly staging a known myth.⁵³ Unlike all previous stories which, even at their most 'dreamlike',⁵⁴ aim at depicting reality, Apuleius explicitly places the simulacral nature of this narrative centre stage. Apuleius' metatheatrical language is subtle yet pointed as he uses Lucius' perspective to draw the audience's attention to this artificiality; for, just as Lucius serves, at times, as Apuleius' own self-insertion, so Lucius acts as an everyman with which the reader can identify and into which project themselves.⁵⁵ Therefore, when Lucius says, in the present tense that 'I am led forth towards the boundary enclosing the theatre with processional applause following from the crowd' (*ad consaepum caveae prosequente populo pompatico favore deducor*, *Met.* 10.29), he draws attention to the fact that his story is being observed. At the same time, the reader, who has been projecting into this Lucian perspective, has their own

⁵² Bradley 2000: 303-304; In Bradley 2000: 283, he argues that 'the *Metamorphoses*, although a fictional source, contains a great deal of information about family life under the high Roman Empire that captures Roman historical experience.' While Bradley acknowledges the potential influence of 'literary topoi' inspiring Apuleius' stories, he prefers to read them as Summers does with the depiction of law within the work, as an accurate reflection of life. The fact that scholars sit on both sides of the aisle as to whether Apuleius wrote a realistic story that imitates art or a work of art that imitates reality is one of the main reasons for ongoing debate over this work.

⁵³ The closest Apuleius comes to myth is in his Cupid and Psyche story, which has no known mythological precedent and bears more similarity to Platonic allegory than myth. Plato himself had a habit of rationalising old myths, for example, that of Oreithyia or Gyges, for philosophical purposes or entirely creating his own allegories, such as that of the cave of the Myth of Er.

⁵⁴ Gollnick 1999: 2.

⁵⁵ Krabbe 2003:308 has argued that the *Metamorphoses* demonstrates its educational value through Apuleius placing Lucius, who is as *scholasticus* (*Met.* 2.10), into the role of a student throughout the work. She argues, however, that this trend shifts for 'Lucius who, by virtue of his initiation, assumes the role of teacher, (is) casting this *studiosus lector* into the role of student', Krabbe 2003: 308. My argument however is that Lucius is a vessel for both Apuleius and reader alike, and, consequently, that his learning is also ours.

suspension of disbelief shattered as they realise that, up to this point, they have had more in common with the crowd standing outside the stage and voyeuristically looking in on the narrative produced.

As a result, just as the reader looks in on the main narrative with new awareness of its artificiality, so too does Lucius observe the staging of the pantomime conscious of his own viewshed, witnessing how it was 'from that point restoring my curious eyes in the open gate from the very pleasurable sight of the performance' (*subinde curiosos oculos patente porta spectaculi prospectu gratissimo reficiens*, *Met.* 10.29). Special consideration is due to the language used in translation of this passage. While it is possible, as several translators have, to construe the word *reficiens* as meaning that Lucius is 'satiating' or 'feasting' on the pleasure of this scene, when used in conjunction with the adverb *subinde*, which can be read here as meaning 'from that moment moving forward', Apuleius could be indicating the moment of shift in Lucius' perspective away from the voyeuristic appetite for pleasure, his sight and therefore his mindset has been literally *reficiens*, that is to say 'reformed' and 'restored'. The word, which carries a medical connotation of healing an object in the accusative from a malady in the ablative,⁵⁶ suggests that his eyes, plagued with the *curiositas* which has been the source of so much trouble, are being freed from his attachment to gratification of the physical senses, *prospectu gratissimo*. As a result, no longer does he see the illusion of the superficial performance which plays to his animal desires, but to the form of ideas underlying this spectacle.

May notes how much of this scene is constructed to draw attention to the cheapness of its mimesis, stating that 'it is the first-person narrator who, despite some brave attempts on the part of the actors to merge with their roles, consistently refuses to permit them completely to blur the distinction between fiction and reality, by pointing out repeatedly the artificiality of the situation.'⁵⁷ The stage scenery of Mount Ida is described by Lucius as 'constructed by sublime craftsmanship' (*sublimi instructa fabrica*, *Met.* 10.30), the prop

⁵⁶ Lewis and Short 1879: 1546.

⁵⁷ May 2008: 353.

golden apple is merely gilded (*maleum... inauratum*, *Met.*10.30), and the actors can only 'pretend', 'seem like', or 'represent' (*simulabat, videbatur, designans*, *Met.* 10.30) the characters they are playing. While this facsimile of the myth 'is enough to charm the Corinthians', observes May, 'not the narrator, who is at pains to illustrate the distance between himself and the story told, repudiating the identification.'⁵⁸ Therefore, by the start of the play, 'when the horn's concluding note had unravelled the knotted complexities of their alternating movements, the curtain was raised, the screens folded back, and the stage was set,' (*ubi discursus reciproci multinodas ambages tubae terminalis cantus explicuit, aulaeo subducto et complicitis siparis scaena disponitur*, *Met.* 10.29), Lucius and reader alike are primed to consider this story not as a passive member of the audience taken in by its superficial charms, but rather to critically consider its narrative intent and didactic function. By extension, Lucius now alerts the readers to the fact that they too are consuming a literary construct, and, in so doing, have been caught up in the suspension of disbelief rather than rationally engaged in thought about its purpose.

Platonic Re-education

Why did Apuleius choose the judgement of Paris though? While not told directly by Homer himself, despite Apuleius saying otherwise (*Met.* 10.30), the story of the judgement of Paris is found in the Homeric cycle of texts often attributed to Homer, and the myth itself was considered by the ancients as the inciting action for all the events of this cycle. By extension, one might argue, it is at the base of the aetiology for their entire literary tradition. As Xenophanes claimed: 'from the beginning all have learned according to Homer' (ἐξ ἀρχῆς καθ' Ὅμηρον ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασι πάντες, *D10 (B10)*), and, consequently, his works 'came to form the core of the Greek educational system', which was largely adopted by the Romans.⁵⁹ Despite being the revered father of this tradition, Homer himself was the subject of much philosophical scrutiny, because, in setting the model for literature, philosophers questioned whether this model was the correct educational foundation upon which a society could construct its moral values. While some criticisms

⁵⁸ May 2008: 353.

⁵⁹ Pache 2020: 417.

of Homer seemed to be based on differences in cultural values between those of the Bronze Age Greeks and those of the later societies (these differences seem to be a particularly poignant aspect of Virgil's own homerically inspired epic), the school of thought in the classical world that was most openly critical of Homer was Platonism.⁶⁰

Although it is not usually mentioned in the context of this pantomime scene, Apuleius' Platonism provides important background which allows his authorial intent to come into better focus. From his Platonic works and his own court defence, the *Apologia*, Apuleius clearly considered himself primarily a *philosophus Platonicus* (*Apol.* 10.6 and 39.1), and, as Werner Riess argues, even a second Socrates.⁶¹ A major component to Apuleius' own defence against the accusations of magic and poisoning (*magus et veneficus*, *Apol.* 78.2) was that his jurors had confused Platonism with magic, an error which would not have occurred had they been properly educated in the technical arts. As James Rives explains, 'Apuleius' displays of learning in the *Apology*, far from being gratuitous, are central to his strategy' of 'shaping people's perceptions and convinc(ing) the judge that he was not a *magus* but a maligned philosopher.'⁶² In this manner, Apuleius seems to have exaggerated the scale of this case beyond that of a petty personal matter to that of a conceptual attack on philosophy, analogous to the prosecution of Socrates, for he says, 'it falls to me to clear the name of Philosophy, and to justify myself in the eyes of ignorant people' (*optigit purgandae apud imperitos philosophiae et probandi mei*, *Apol.* 1.3).

Apuleius' fear that his philosophical ideas might be misunderstood and that he might again be wrongly convicted appears to have been rooted in Plato's writings. For Plato argued that Socrates was prosecuted not for being a genuinely corrupting influence on Athens but that his misrepresentation by authors such as Aristophanes, whose *Clouds* was used as evidence in the prosecution, misled the lay jurors into convicting and executing Socrates. Consequently, this event seems to have led to Plato's own anxieties

⁶⁰ This criticism, however, was not limited to Platonists, the same Xenophanes quoted previously also said, 'Homer and Hesiod sang of many lawless deeds committed by the gods: thieving, committing adultery, and deceiving each other' ('Ὅμηρος δὲ καὶ Ἡσίοδος ... ὡς πλεῖστ' ἐφθέγγαντο θεῶν ἀθεμίστια ἔργα, κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν, *D.* 9 (B12)).

⁶¹ Riess 2008: 51.

⁶² Rives 2008: abstract, 6.

about mimetic literature and the dangers of the technical arts, such as philosophy, medicine, and law, being practised by lay, and improperly educated, people rather than those professionally trained.

This criticism is most famously laid out in Book II of Plato's *Republic* in which Plato criticises Homer's depiction of the divine as a false misrepresentation, claiming that the poets imbued the gods with all sorts of human traits, and in so doing debased the divine with all sorts of imperfection, which by no means could be part of an ideal higher nature (*Rep.* 2.379-380). Longinus, a first century AD Platonist, famously expressed this inversion by saying: 'I feel indeed that in recording as he does the wounding of the gods, their quarrels, vengeance, tears, imprisonment, and all their manifold passions Homer has done his best to make the men in the *Iliad* gods and the gods men' ('Ὀμηρος γάρ μοι δοκεῖ παραδιδούς τραύματα θεῶν στάσεις τιμωρίας δάκρυα δεσμὰ πάθη πάμφυρτα τοὺς μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν Ἰλιακῶν ἀνθρώπους ὅσον ἐπὶ τῇ δυνάμει θεοὺς πεπιοηκέναι, τοὺς θεοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους, *Longin.* 9.7).⁶³ The argument that Plato and his followers, accordingly, made, was that telling stories in which gods commit base behaviours misleads humans and justifies their imitation of these actions. Unsurprisingly, the very behaviours which are liberally depicted throughout the tales of the *Metamorphoses* and the inspiration of which is entirely based in literary precedents. It is thus the *curiositas* that Lucius (the actor) shows towards these stories which misleads him into becoming an unknowing actor in his own mimesis. Joseph DeFilippo argues that in this *curiositas* 'there is undisputed scholarly agreement that *curiositas* is a coinage that attempts to capture in Latin the meaning of the Greek terms *periergia* and *polupragmosunē*' and which can be translated as 'attachments to material desires.'⁶⁴ It is these attachments, therefore, which keeps Lucius trapped in a debased animal form, a concept which seems to be conceptually

⁶³ Xenophanes, despite living the sixth century BC, seems to align with Apuleius' sentiments, for just as Apuleius criticises a depiction of the gods played by humans in the pantomime, and therefore the projection of human desires onto the divine, so Xenophanes stated that 'if oxen, horses or lions had hands or could draw with their hands and create works like men, then horses would draw the shapes of gods like horses, and oxen like oxen, and they would make the same kinds of bodies as each one possessed its own bodily frame' (εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες ἵπποι τ' ἢ ἐλέοντες, ἢ γράψαι χεῖρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἄπερ ἄνδρες, ἵπποι μὲν θ' ἵπποισι, βόες δὲ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας καὶ <κε> θεῶν ἰδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν τοιαῦθ' οἷόν περ καῦτοι δέμας εἶχον ἕκαστοι, *D14* (B15)).

⁶⁴ DeFilippo 1990: 479, 486.

borrowed from Plato's Myth of Er in Book X of the *Republic*, where the quality of a person's soul determines their physical manifestation (*Rep.* 10.614–10.621).

Since, for Plato, poetry such as that of Homer and the dramatists taught impiety, his ideal solution in the *Republic* was not to punish those who had learned to behave impiously from this incorrect teaching, for he observed that instilling justice is like training animals and, in this, neither man nor beast is made better by punishment, but rather by correct education:

“But is it part of being a just man,” I asked, “to harm any human being at all?” Yes, indeed,” he replied, “he ought to harm those who are both bad and his enemies.” “When horses are harmed, do they become better or worse?” “Worse.” “Judging by the standards of excellence of dogs or of horses?” “Of horses.” “And dogs, too, if harmed, become worse by the standards of dogs and not of horses?” “That follows.” “But as for human beings, my friend, mustn't we say that when harmed they become worse by human standards?” “Certainly.” “And is not justice a human excellence?” “That also follows.” “So, my friend, those men who are harmed necessarily become more unjust.” “So it seems.” “Well, are musicians able to make people unmusical through their musicianship?” “Impossible.” “Or horsemen able to make people bad riders through their horsemanship?” “No.” “Well, is it by justice, then, that the just make people unjust, or, in short, is it by their standards of excellence as humans that the good make people bad?” “No, that cannot be.”

ἔστιν ἄρα, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, δικαίου ἀνδρὸς βλάπτειν καὶ ὄντινοῦν ἀνθρώπων; καὶ πάνυ γε, ἔφη· τοὺς γε πονηροὺς τε καὶ ἐχθροὺς δεῖ βλάπτειν. βλαπτόμενοι δ' ἵπποι βελτίους ἢ χεῖρους γίνονται; χεῖρους. ἄρα εἰς τὴν τῶν κυνῶν ἀρετὴν, ἢ εἰς τὴν τῶν ἵππων; εἰς τὴν τῶν ἵππων. ἄρ' οὖν καὶ κύνες βλαπτόμενοι χεῖρους γίνονται εἰς τὴν τῶν κυνῶν ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰς τὴν τῶν ἵππων ἀρετὴν; ἀνάγκη. ἀνθρώπους δέ, ὧς ἐταῖρε, μὴ οὕτω φῶμεν, βλαπτομένους εἰς τὴν ἀνθρωπεῖαν ἀρετὴν χεῖρους γίνεσθαι; πάνυ μὲν οὖν. ἀλλ' ἢ δικαιοσύνη οὐκ ἀνθρωπεῖα ἀρετὴ; καὶ τοῦτ' ἀνάγκη. καὶ τοὺς βλαπτομένους ἄρα, ὧς φίλε, τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀνάγκη ἀδικωτέρους γίνεσθαι. ἔοικεν. ἄρ' οὖν τῇ μουσικῇ οἱ μουσικοὶ ἀμούσους δύνανται ποιεῖν; ἀδύνατον. ἀλλὰ τῇ ἵππικῇ οἱ ἵππικοὶ ἀφίππους; οὐκ ἔστιν. ἀλλὰ τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ δὴ οἱ δίκαιοι ἀδίκους; ἢ καὶ συλλήβδην ἀρετῇ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ κακοὺς; ἀλλὰ ἀδύνατον.

—*Rep.* 1.335b-d

Plato does not prescribe punishment to people who, either according to their base nature or improper education, behave unjustly, viewing this as treatment of the symptoms of a social ill, rather than the cause. Instead, Plato argued for throwing the poets out of the city and installing his own set of allegorical stories engineered by technical experts to properly educate humans on how to behave piously. But what under this Platonic model is piety? In his *Euthyphro* – a dialogue staged nearly on the eve of Socrates’ trial – he argues that piety is a type of justice (*Euthyph. 11-15*).⁶⁵ To Plato, since the gods are above any attachment to materiality, they have no needs or desires through which piety can be demonstrated in their service. Instead, since Plato viewed the divine as the ideological manifestation of order, he viewed piety as the process by which humans hold a shared ‘conviction based on a state of “order” (*kosmos*), “consonance” (*sumphônia*), and “harmony” (*harmonia*)’, as well as the collective ‘role they play in the maintenance of the social order.’⁶⁶

Form over Substance

Consequently, Apuleius’ choice to stage a myth which is at the root of the mythic tradition, and which so clearly intertwines the ideas of justice with humanity’s relationship to the gods is of narratological importance. Not only does it set up an ideal example of anthropomorphic deities at their most superficial, but also shows how the influence of

⁶⁵ Rosen 1968: 110 argues that a key element to Plato’s argument in the *Euthyphro* is orthodoxy, saying ‘between these two concepts of justice stands another concept which Socrates connects with both justice and piety. The Greek word *orthos* means “correct”, and it “seems to be attuned to the world of human affairs...to the right way of conducting them...to the right way of acting”. When it is combined with *doxa* (opinion), *orthē doxa* is “primarily an opinion which is responsible for a right action, that is to say, for an action beneficial to us, to others, or to the community as a whole”. The Greek *orthē doxa* differs somewhat from the English derivative “orthodoxy”. The English word emphasises traditional acceptability as the main criterion of orthodoxy, while the Greek emphasises usefulness to the community.’ Apuleius announces the importance of not having wrong opinions (*pravissimis opinionibus*) when forming judgements in his prologue to the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 1.3):

You are not being very clever, by Hercules, if your wrongheaded opinions make you judge as false what seems new to the ear or unfamiliar to the eye or even too difficult for the intellect to grasp, but which upon a little more careful investigation you will perceive to be not only easy to ascertain, but even simple to perform.

Minus Hercule calles pravissimis opinionibus ea putari mendacia, quae vel auditu nova vel visu rudia vel certe supra captum cogitationis ardua videantur; quae si paulo accuratius exploraris, non modo compertu evidentia, verum etiam factu facilia.

⁶⁶ Frede and Lee 2023: Section 3.2.

such beings encourages humans to pervert justice. Since such a story, like all other myths, held a didactic function, it is clear to see how Apuleius might connect the poor behaviour of his characters to the many myths he wrote in imitation of and how he might have seen this as influencing the many failures of the legal system within not only his story, but also his actual experience of unjust prosecution. Therefore, the story of the judgement of Paris is, in many ways, an ideal myth upon which to predicate his own philosophical attack. Furthermore, by ending his string of tales by going back to the beginning of the corrupt mimetic literary tradition, it positions this scene as a clear turning point in his conversion towards a life of real pious religious experience, philosophy, and legal pursuits.

Plato himself was almost entirely silent on the topic of the judgement of Paris, a silence which Shaun Gamboa reads as a critique, where he refused to acknowledge or judge such a misaligned example of judgement.⁶⁷ Yet Plato had much to say about judgement. In his description of judgement in the *Gorgias*, for example, Plato states that all souls must be judged naked (*Gorg.* 523). This, in Gamboa's interpretation, is metaphoric of how the inner quality of a soul, not its outward physical appearance or material possessions, decided their future condition.⁶⁸ Accordingly, only once a soul has been stripped of these lesser material coverings that its true nature can be revealed and, following the Myth of Er, reincarnated in a form fitting its nature. Apollodorus, likewise, recounts that Paris required the goddesses to be nude for him to make his judgement (*Epitome* 3.2-3), for the exact opposite reason to Plato, because Paris judged solely on physical attraction – traits which the gods should be entirely above in Plato's model. Thus, in his depiction of the pantomime of this myth, when Apuleius depicts humans as nude and costumed as gods, this is no doubt an intentional act of inversion of natural order, for he clothes the higher divine nature in inferior materiality and thereby misrepresents it for the pleasure of

⁶⁷ Gamboa n.d.

⁶⁸ Plato's philosophy is highly binary, with the split running between physical (associated with the body) and immaterial (associated with the mind), a doctrine laid out in his *Phaedo* (*Phaedo* 79). Within this system, material and, therefore, material wealth and beauty only seemed good because they appeal to lower animal desires, true good, to Plato, is defined by being good in an immaterial moral way, a distinction he makes in Book V of the *Republic* (*Rep.* 5.479). For a full examination of this idea, see Jessica Moss's 2021 book *Plato's Epistemology: Being and Seeming*.

humans rather than the service of the gods and their true immaterial nature. This point is driven home when Apuleius describes in-detail the nudity and near nudity of the actors in the play, fixating on the 'desirous body' of Venus (*membrorum voluptatem*, *Met.*10.31), which was 'showing her perfect form by her naked and uncovered body' (*nudo et intecto corpore perfectam formositatem professa*, *Met.* 10.31) details which Zimmerman notes 'titillates the curiosity of the Corinthian audience in the theatre.'⁶⁹ Lucius, now cured of his own curious eyes, describes with metatheatrical clarity the fixed attention of the audience. Much like Lucius, and by extension the reader, for much of the work, this audience's *curiositas* – attachment to base pleasures – allows them to get drawn in and deceived by the illusion of this corrupt mimesis. Their gaze, in particular, is referenced (*in specimen*, *Met.*10.31) as well as their salacious excitement as they observe her taking centre stage 'with the great favour of the theatre' (*cum magno favore caveae*, *Met.* 10.32) and beginning a provocative musical dance, 'which sweetly charms the hearts of the spectators' (*quibus spectatorum pectora suave mulcentibus*, *Met.*10.32).

While Finkelpearl notes that Lucius stages this pantomime in Corinth because the city was 'known for its depravity',⁷⁰ functionally this criticism of society extends more broadly to Rome,⁷¹ for Apuleius' description of the dancer's diaphanous garment matches a description which Juvenal himself makes in criticism of how immodestly Roman women dressed in sheer clothes:

her body was naked and uncovered except for a piece of sheer silk with which she veiled her comely charms. An inquisitive little breeze would at one moment blow this veil aside in wanton

⁶⁹ Zimmerman 2000: 377.

⁷⁰ Finkelpearl 1991: 222; See also H.J. Mason's 1971 article, in which he states: 'Corinth's fame rested, in large part, on its lack of sexual restraints, what Landi called its "depraved and dissolute customs." The old, Greek, city enjoyed this reputation not least because of the temple prostitution associated with the cult of Aphrodite'; Mason 1971: 161.

⁷¹ Roman comedies were often set in Greece ostensibly to criticise Hellenic culture for its moral failings, yet functionally 'Romans had been absorbing Greek cultural practices for centuries', Germany 2019: 77. Therefore, Roman comedy is itself an act of projecting and externalising criticisms of its own culture, for as Robert Germany 2019: 77 concluded, Roman comedies 'concern the behaviour of the rich and the public construction of Romanness vis-à-vis a cultural other...(and) also engages with the politics of everyday life, as encountered by all social levels'.

nudo et intecto corpore perfectam formositatem professa, nisi quod tenui pallio bombycino inumbrabat spectabilem pubem. quam quidem laciniam curiosulus ventus satis amanter nunc lasciviens reflabat, ut dimota pateret

–Met. 10.30

But what will others not do, when you wear gauze, Creticus, and, while the people are staring in amazement at this garment, you deliver an impassioned finale against women like Procula and Pollitta? Fabulla is an adulteress. Imagine even Carfinia found guilty, if you like. But if she is found guilty, she won't put on a toga like that. "But July's blazing—I'm sweltering." Then plead stark naked. Insanity is less disgusting. Just look at the outfit you're wearing for citing laws and statutes, in front of an audience consisting of the populace fresh from victory with their wounds still raw and those famous mountain folk who have just put down their ploughs! Just think how you would protest if you saw those clothes on the person of a judge. I question whether gauze is right even for a witness. You fierce, indomitable champion of liberty, Creticus—you are transparent! This stain is caused by infection and it will spread further, just as the entire herd in the fields dies because of the scab and mange of a single pig, just as a bunch of grapes takes on discoloration from the sight of another bunch.

sed quid

*non facient alii, cum tu multicia sumas,
Cretice, et hanc vestem populo mirante perores
in Proculas et Pollittas? est moecha Fabulla;
damnetur, si vis, etiam Carfinia: talem
non sumet damnata togam. "sed Iulius ardet,
aestuo." nudus agas: minus est insania turpis.
en habitum quo te leges ac iura ferentem
vulneribus crudis populus modo victor et illud
montanum positus audiret vulgus aratris.
quid non proclames, in corpore iudicis ista
si videas? quaero an deceant multicia testem.
acer et indomitus libertatisque magister,
Cretice, perluces. dedit hanc contagio labem
et dabit in plures, sicut grex totus in agris
unius scabie cadit et porrigine porci
uvaque conspecta livorem ducit ab uva.*

–Sat. 2.65-81

This passage in Juvenal's *Satires*, though written at least a century prior to Apuleius, demonstrates many of the same perennial invectives against moral degradation found in earlier Roman literature. Nevertheless, the complaints of his day 'produced no immediate

reaction' and were not appreciated until 'much later'.⁷² Despite the apparent 'gap before Fronto, Aulus Gellius, and Apuleius',⁷³ Frederick Jones suggests that there is a continuity between these works and the didacticism of Juvenal. The 'close verbal similarities and thematic resonances between the *Metamorphoses* and the *Satires* of Juvenal' demonstrate that Apuleius' presentation of this performance is in-line with criticisms of genuinely perceived problems within Roman society of that period.⁷⁴ Consequently, that both authors echoed themes of disgust towards a sexually provocative moral 'contagion',⁷⁵ place their targets of moral approbation in front of a legal audience, and, more broadly, stage 'grotesque parody' of epic mythological scenes,⁷⁶ suggests that Apuleius' depictions reflect a shared language of moral outrage rather than idiosyncratic frivolity.⁷⁷ The irony which perhaps exists here, is that one could argue that the woman condemned is not, per se, a deviant from society, but rather a reflection of this society, which, like the beasts, will voyeuristically consume her forced shameful act with their own curious eyes. Her acts, which society publicly condemns, itself privately pursues and personifies through the corrupt literary models which Apuleius, who like Plato seems to criticise.

A Curious Remedy

Since Lucius and the reader are now liberated from this literary illusion, they can observe the same external projection of suppressed personal desires in the crowd who claim disgust at the woman's actions and yet also visually hunger to watch even more degraded

⁷² Rudd and Barr 1992: x.

⁷³ Jones 2007: 147.

⁷⁴ Greene 2008: 175.

⁷⁵ Sapsford 2022: 169.

⁷⁶ Jones 2007: 143; Though Jones 2007: 130 wrote this in connection to Juvenal's twelfth satire, he explores Juvenal's subversion of epic in the second satire elsewhere in his work.

⁷⁷ Keane 2003 argued that Juvenal uses the didactic metanarrative of staged theatre scenes in much the same way as I argue here that Apuleius presents them; in particular both seem to treat pantomime synonymous with sexual excess and indicative of cultural moral decay, Keane 2003: 259. Juvenal himself makes mention of a famous Egyptian pantomime actor named Paris in two separate satires (*Sat.* 6.87 and *Sat.* 7.87) and potentially was banished from Rome for writing about Paris' affairs with noble Roman women (Pseudo-Suet. *Juv.* 7.86-91). The idea of a foreigner seducing an elite woman resonates thematically with both the story of Paris and Helen in the Homeric Cycle as well as that of Lucius and the *matrona* in Book X of the *Metamorphoses*.

levels of sex and violence.⁷⁸ Rather than accept these repressed desires, it becomes obvious that the function of this staged myth is not to educate on the nature of justice but rather to titillate the audience before the even more degrading *munus* itself. In this, it becomes equally obvious that the practical function of this *munus* is not to provide just consequences for the murderess's wrongdoings, but rather to serve as a cheap scapegoat by which the populus voyeuristically indulges. For her public degradation does not functionally repay any debt, but rather reflects tastes of an immoral society out of which her behaviour was nurtured.⁷⁹ Therefore, in her punishment, society can project public disapproval of the same immoralities which they would potentially themselves commit, if given the opportunity. Much of the morally degraded choices that Lucius makes in Book X prove this point, but 'Lucius, unlike the Corinthian audience, becomes increasingly aware of the fictionality of the situation and its applicability to his own life.'⁸⁰ Consequently, while Lucius, seeing this farce for what it is, is disgusted by its hypocrisy and exploitation, the audience feels an ersatz catharsis at seeing someone else punished who they perceive as worse than themselves. This makes them, as Coleman observes, 'united in a feeling of moral superiority',⁸¹ not because of their right action but rather their lack of acting upon their own evil desires.⁸²

⁷⁸ Von Franz 2001: 62 argued that there is a great deal of projection of repressed desires depicted within this work saying that 'these amplifications illustrate the psychological projections on the ass at these times, namely the strange, complex mixture with which we are now so familiar in the treatment of neurosis', in which 'the person is convinced that a desire, or a power drive, or sexual drive, or any other strong instinctual drive, cannot be carried out, so that it is repressed through resignation and so constitutes the nucleus of a deep depression in the unconscious. That is why when you get people out of such a state they first turn into a hungry lion which wants to eat up everything.' Within this framework, the audience of this pantomime and by extension Roman society during this period regularly repressed acting upon their animal urges, but lived out their repressed fantasies through myths, dramatic performances and public games. Therefore, rather than literally letting out lionly appetites, they project these into the lions who will devour the murderess.

⁷⁹ As Tatum 1969: 488 has observed regarding the content of the tales with the *Metamorphoses*, 'if they are told only for our delectation, one marvels at the tastes they would appeal to, for they usually end in the humiliation and death of the characters involved'.

⁸⁰ May 2008: 360.

⁸¹ Coleman 1990: 47

⁸² Von Franz's 2001: 2, 21, psychological reconstruction of Apuleius is as a bookish man who had not lived an exciting life and so had to create 'a chain of creative fantasies whose meaning goes much deeper than even he himself knew', for 'usually introverts put the extraverted part into such fantasies ... Apuleius has been parked in his mother's lap and stayed there, and his wish for adventure has not been lived, and probably that is what he has put into Lucius.'. If this is to be believed, then Lucius' *curiositas* towards pleasure which is constantly pursued but regularly denied by the fortune is reflective of Apuleius' own perceived inability to live out his fantasies in reality.

As Apuleius depicts it, the social function of this judgement of Paris myth cannot be about justice, as Plato would define it, but instead appears deeply tied to the concept of scapegoating. As Coleman describes this point:

there is one category of punishment recognized by anthropologists that involves the delinquent in role-play or, at the least, requires that he be temporarily accorded the trappings and treatment associated with a person of superior status: so-called 'scapegoat' rituals. The purpose of these rituals is to inflict suffering, banishment, and even (sometimes) death upon persons deemed worthless (but innocent), in order to redeem the remaining members of the community.⁸³

Tying into Plato and Apuleius' interest in the application of the technical arts, the term in Greek for a scapegoat, *pharmakos* (φαρμακός),⁸⁴ seems borrowed from medical terminology. The term, related to the word *pharmakon* (φάρμακον), conceptually is linked to both remedies and poisons. The Platonic conclusion here being that such injustice is a failed remedy for societal ills which reveals itself to be not a societal cure but rather a poison. In a Platonic interpretation of this myth, Gamboa notes how Paris' fatal judgement was the result of his father's attempted sacrifice of Paris as a baby,⁸⁵ an act of attempted infanticide akin to that of the murderous woman's story. Upon receiving the prophecy that Paris would lead to the destruction of the city, Priam had Paris led out of Troy as a *pharmakos*, a sacrificial scapegoat by which a society could purge itself of a source of detriment. Having been exposed and discovered by a shepherd, Paris was placed in the exact position to make his judgement at Mount Ida and thus become the source of

⁸³ Coleman 1990: 69.

⁸⁴ For more on Lucius as a scapegoat, see Habinek 1990. In a paper presented at the 2024 meeting of the *Society of Classical Studies*, McCoy put forward the argument that Thelyphron (*Met.* 2.21-30) functions as a scapegoat by which the people of Thessaly protect themselves from witches. In line with the concept that Lucius, by the end of the work, finally recognises the cautionary messages of the tales, I would argue that Lucius also recognises the connection between Thelyphron's scapegoat status and his own, and, in so doing, is able to escape a scapegoat's fate.

⁸⁵ Gamboa n.d.: 11; This paper, despite containing compelling analysis, has not been published but instead can be accessed through the author's academia.edu profile.

poisonous destruction to his city, a *pharmakon*. Gamboa argues that Plato made this parallel between purgation (*pharmakos*) and poison (*pharmakon*) with respect to the poets such as Homer who taught didactically misaligned *mythoi*, and that Plato's consequent desire to expel such poets functions as a type of societal purgation. In the same vein, this renders society's failed judgement of Socrates equivalent to a failure to recognise their philosophical cure; again, encompassed by the word *pharmakon*.⁸⁶ Instead, their failed judgement, stemming from their improper education, resulted in scapegoating and executing Socrates by a poison (*pharmakon*).

This idea of poisoning is important to Apuleius as part of his own court case involved accusations of *veneficium*. Likely as a result, poisons are prominently displayed within the *Metamorphoses*' narrative. Besides the fact that it is a drug which changes Lucius into donkey form, it plays a key role in many of his tales, including both the rescue and the ruin of Charite (*Met.* 7.12 and *Met.* 8.11) and in the Hippolytus-tale at the opening of Book X (*Met.* 10.1-12). This Hippolytus-tale, in particular, acts as a foil to that of the murderess later in the book as the court case, along with the life of a drugged boy, is saved by the testimony of an ethical doctor who had refused to sell poison under the suspicion it would be misused.⁸⁷ By contrast, within the story of the murderess, the unethical doctor who supplied poison himself is poisoned, and the murderess is sentenced to be thrown *ad bestias*, in accordance with the *lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* for poisoning.

Therefore, between the break of narrative illusion underpinned by his underlying Platonic distrust of mimetic anti-didacticism, the understanding that Apuleius had been satirically criticising society throughout the work, and Apuleius' own personal history of prosecution, it is not surprising that Apuleius chooses this moment to break from the otherwise comedic

⁸⁶ While the discussion of *pharmaka* begins with Derrida 1981, for a full examination of this topic, see Rinella 2010.

⁸⁷ Though a psychoanalytic reading of the text, von Franz 2001: 168 confirms Lucius' distrust of law and confirms his need of a remedy to societal neurosis: 'again, we have a similarity with Roman civilization, in as much as at that time people began to think that civilization was a question of paragraphs of the law. But the psychological health of the individual matters much more. Therefore, with Apuleius, it is a medical doctor who settles the problem and not the lawyers, who would have given the wrong verdict'.

tone of the work, and become a self-aware 'philosophising ass' (*philosophantem asinum*, *Met* 10.33) with his moralistic assault of indignation.

In an apostrophe that bears reading in its entirety, Apuleius sums up his condemnation of society, its immoral storytelling, and its debased legal system. In so doing, he gives perfect context for why he decides to flee from this society which he has been spending the majority of the narrative attempting to rejoin and which he has functionally achieved during Book X:

Why, therefore, are you surprised, you utterly cheap fodder, or perhaps I should say legal cattle, or better yet vultures in togas, if now all jurors trade their verdicts for a price, since at the world's beginning an adjudication between gods and men was corrupted by beauty's influence, and a country shepherd, chosen judge on the advice of great Jupiter, sold the first verdict for a profit of pleasure, resulting in the destruction of himself and his entire race? And it was the same, by Hercules, with a second and yet another celebrated case among the far-famed princes of the Achaeans, when Palamedes, a man of superior learning and wisdom, was condemned for treason because of false accusations, or mediocre Ulysses was preferred to great Ajax, who was supreme in martial valour. And what kind of a trial was that one held by the Athenians, those skilful legislators and teachers of all knowledge? Is it not true that that divinely wise old man (Socrates), whom the Delphic god pronounced superior to all other mortals in intelligence, was attacked by the lies and malice of an utterly worthless faction, accused of being a corruptor of the youths, whom he was in fact keeping in check with his guidance, and murdered with the poisonous juice of a baleful herb? He bequeathed to his fellow-citizens the stain of eternal disgrace, because even to this day the best philosophers choose his holy school and in their zealous pursuit of happiness swear by his very name.

quid ergo miramini, vilissima capita, immo forensia pecora, immo vero togati vulturii, si toti nunc iudices sententias suas pretio nundinantur, cum rerum exordio inter deos et homines agitatum iudicium corruerit gratia, et originalem sententiam magni Iovis consiliis electus iudex rusticanus et opilio lucro libidinis vendiderit, cum totius etiam suae stirpis exitio? sic hercules et aliud sequensque iudicium inter inclutos Achivorum duces celebratum, vel cum falsis insimulationibus eruditione doctrinaque praepollens Palamedes prodicionis damnatur, vel virtute Martia praepotenti praefertur Ulixes modicus Aiaci maximo. quale autem et illud iudicium apud legiferos Athenienses catos illos et omnis scientiae magistros? Nonne divinae prudentiae senex, quem sapientia praetulit cunctis mortalibus deus

Delphicus, fraude et invidia nequissimae factionis circumventus velut corruptor adolescentiae, quam frenis coercebat, herbae pestilentis suco noxio peremptus est, relinquens civibus ignominiae perpetuae maculam, cum nunc etiam egregii philosophi sectam eius sanctissimam praeoptent et summo beatitudinis studio iurent in ipsius nomen?

–Met. 10.33

It is even Apuleius' beloved Greeks, from whom he claims intellectual heritage in his prologue to the *Metamorphoses* (Met. 1.1): 'those skilful legislators and teachers of all knowledge' (*legiferos ... catos illos et omnis scientiae magistros, Met. 10.33*),⁸⁸ who failed because of their improperly aligned myths to provide justice to the wisest of men. In reference to Socrates' conviction, he asks, 'what kind of a trial was that one held' (*Quale autem et illud iudicium apud, Met.10.33*), for if even the Athenians corrupted justice, the average Roman might have even less hope of justice, as Apuleius' own prosecution stands as evidence. Because poor myths teach poor morals, and poor morals lead to poor judgement, even a great culture improperly educated cannot differentiate between a cure and a poison. Therefore, while Socrates' philosophy was a cure against such bad education, he was, according to Apuleius, confused with being a poisonous 'corruptor of the youths, whom he was in fact keeping in check with his guidance' (*corruptor adolescentiae, quam frenis coercebat, Met. 10.33*). In their attempt to cure their city, they purged the moral cure and, ironically did so with poison, as Lucius observes that Socrates was 'murdered with the poisonous juice of a baleful herb' (*herbae pestilentis suco noxio peremptus est, Met. 10.33*).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems likely that Lucius's entire journey is an educational process which stands in the face of the Roman models of education and punitive justice. Throughout this narrative, he watches those around him imitate the same poor models of behaviour resulting in moral degradation and legal consequences, but, like the rest of society, learns

⁸⁸ 'Who am I? I will tell you briefly. Attic Hymettos and Ephyrean Isthmos and Spartan Taenaros, fruitful lands preserved for ever in even more fruitful books, form my ancient stock' (*quis ille? paucis accipe. Hymettos Attica et Isthmos Ephyrea et Taenaros Spartiaca, glebae felices aeternum libris felicioribus conditae, mea vetus prosapia est, Met. 1.1*).

nothing to prevent him from nearly suffering a similar fate. Instead, it is only the real threat of these consequences that teach him that both systems have failed in their intended didactic function within society. Rather than becoming the passive victim of these systems, Lucius breaks free of his narratological prison and places literature, society and even the law itself on trial. His verdict, however, is one which is strikingly anti-punitive, concluding that it is only false judgement created by false stories which call for poisonous penalties, instead he provides a remedy for this by turning away from mimesis and pursuing a genuine and ethical life guided by philosophy. Therefore, in putting all literature on trial, and choosing not to punish it, he instead redeems it by teaching its readers how to be just and moral.

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