ALEXANDER KIRICHENKO

A Comedy of Storytelling

Theatricality and Narrative in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*

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В те дни, когда в садах Лицея
Я безмятежно расцветал,
Читал охотно Апулея,
А Цицерона не читал...

In those days when in the Lyceum's gardens
I bloomed serenely,
would eagerly read Apuleius,
while Cicero I did not read…

Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*
(trans. Vladimir Nabokov)

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Part III. Narrative

Preface

This study has its origin in my 2006 Harvard dissertation (*Apuleius'* Golden Ass*: A Comedy of Storytelling*). The title is, however, one of the very few things that the two versions – at least partly – share. Among the main objectives of my dissertation was to point to comic incongruities inherent in the notoriously multidimensional voice of Apuleius' narrator(s). It was only later that I realized that Apuleius' comedy of storytelling was not only funny, but also, and quite literally, theatrical in nature, i.e. that many of Apuleius' characters, first and foremost the novel's protagonist, notionally engaged in role-playing games, mimicking, as it were, other characters and reenacting other narrative scenarios – both intra- and extra-textual. Moreover, I realized that these role-playing activities found numerous tangible parallels in imperial performance culture. So, despite its 'theatrical' subtitle, this book is not so much about Apuleius' allusions to drama – the topic magisterially dealt with in a recent monograph by Regine May (2006) – as about the intricate dialectics of mimesis and reenactment that in my view determines the tenor of Apuleius' narrative on a variety of levels.

As for many other scholars writing on Apuleius in the past two and a half decades, John J. Winkler's *Auctor & Actor* has been both the main inspiration and the starting point for my own thoughts. In his truly revolutionary study, Winkler reads the *Golden Ass* as "a set of games that may be played in myriad ways and in which all players may win – but to which there is no right answer" (p. 200). I see my book as an attempt to modify – however slightly – this understanding of Apuleius' narrative by placing it more firmly within the cultural context from which it originated. Unlike Winkler, I see Apuleius' ideal (implied) reader not necessarily as someone engaging in 'hermeneutic entertainment' – as someone obsessively (and futilely) looking for the correct answer to the alleged mystery – but rather as someone who derives particular pleasure from the fact that the text is radically, and non-negotiably, polyphonous. It is probably too obvious to need emphasis that the voices that this kind of reader would have been expected to hear in this polyphony (or ways in which s/he would have played Apuleius' games) are anything but arbitrary: in order to remain comprehensible, such a complex structure must be based on narrative patterns familiar to its intended readership. In the middle section of the book, I analyze in detail five of such – potentially much more numerous – patterns. These five readings – some mutually complementary, others jarringly contradicting each other – constitute interpretative paths, which, if pursued too rigorously, would in fact result in radically different books – something that has notoriously happened time and again in Apuleian scholarship (cf. pp. 1-7 below).

My objective is to demonstrate that the intention of the text is not to frustrate the expectations of any reader who chooses one of these 'books', but, on the contrary, to harness the reader's ability to appreciate the rather discordant ambiguity produced by their overlap. I further discuss possible contexts in which this kind of readerly competence could have been trained. These I see, first and foremost, in popular theater and sophistic oratory.

When I finished my manuscript, I realized that it, too, could be read as a combination of – I hope somewhat less mutually exclusive – overlapping books. Needless to say, it would please me beyond measure if my study found as many readers as possible who would be willing to read it from beginning to end. But there are other options as well, which I imagine some may prefer. Here are several that have occurred to me:

Chapters 1 and 8 could be read as a study of the generic commonality between the two surviving Roman novels, Petronius' *Satyricon* and Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. The parallels that I uncover between these two texts comprise a wide range of aspects – from their subject matter to the essentially theatrical stance of their first-person narrators.

Chapters 1, 2, 8.1, and 9 deal with Apuleius' deep indebtedness to the contemporary performance culture: Chapters 1 and 9.1 contain an investigation of the parallels between the subject matter of the *Golden Ass* and narrative scenarios used in mime and in sophistic declamations, whereas Chapters 2, 8.1, and 9.2-3 focus on the pervasive emphasis on ambiguity both in imperial theatrical productions and in epideictic rhetoric. I also argue that there are three different ways in which Apuleius' protagonist Lucius could be regarded as a kind of mime actor: as a laughable clown-like character, he resembles a buffoon of the Greco-Roman mime; many of his actions can be categorized as improvised mimicking of other characters' actions – something that, as I show, mime actors also tended to do; finally, he adopts the same kind of improvisatory stance in his capacity as a narrator. In this connection, it is of course particularly important that this pervasive emphasis on improvisation is compatible not only with the mime, but also with sophistic epideictic rhetoric – and thus with the narrator's status as an orator, particularly stressed in the epilogue of the novel.

Read as a self-contained unit, Chapters 2 through 7 represent a detailed study of the novel's structure and meaning. My main contention here is that the notoriously disturbing effect produced by the novel's conclusion, which at first glance seems to be borrowed from a completely different story, is repeatedly anticipated earlier on in the text – whenever a new tale is inserted into the primary narrative.

Finally, the five middle chapters (3 to 7) deal with two purely thematic concerns that have been at the center of most discussions of Apuleius' narrative for decades: Chapter 3 deals with religion, Chapters 4 and 5 with philosophy, and Chapters 6 and 7 with both. Each of these chapters tells a different – seem-

ingly coherent – story. Each of these stories, however, is to various extents destabilized by other similarly coherent stories told in other chapters. Lucius' life is alternately presented here as an aretalogical account of miraculous healing, a philosophical biography, a kind of moralistic fable teaching how to draw philosophical benefit from frivolous fictions, a satire on a religious charlatan with philosophical pretensions, and a comic narrative – as self-ironic as it is self-congratulatory – about an up-and-coming sophistic orator for whom both philosophy and religion are nothing but a means to an end.

This book would not have been possible without the unstinting support that I have received over the years from my mentors, colleagues, and friends. My greatest gratitude belongs to my teachers at St. Petersburg and Harvard. My first exposure to Apuleian Latin dates back to 1995 and 1996 when I was lucky enough to attend two reading courses on the *Golden Ass* in a row – one on *Cupid and Psyche* offered by the late Natalia Botvinnik, the other taught by Alexander Verlinsky on Book 11. A few years later, and on a different continent, I read the entire Apuleian corpus under the vigilant guidance of Kathleen Coleman, to whom I also owe my interest in Roman popular culture in general. From Albert Henrichs I learnt more about Greek literature and religion than I ever have from anyone else before or since; his most palpable contribution to the genesis of this book was that he introduced me to Isis. And last but not least, I am particularly grateful to my dissertation advisor, Richard Thomas, for fostering my burgeoning enthusiasm for poetics, literary theory, and the novel from the earliest stages of my research.

It was a great piece of luck that one of the first courses that I was asked to teach at the University of Trier was an undergraduate seminar on Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. Having to discuss Apuleius with an audience that literally consisted of 'first-time readers' proved in retrospect to be truly crucial in helping me streamline my thoughts. For this privilege I would like to thank both the participants of this seminar, who accompanied me on this rather labyrinthine journey through Apuleius' text, and Stephan Busch, the Chair of the Classics Department at Trier, who has always generously granted me all the freedom in teaching and research that a humble *wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter* can possibly hope for.

Some of the thoughts that lie at the foundation of this book were presented in talks I gave in Heidelberg (June 2004), Lisbon (*International Conference on the Ancient Novel,* IV, July 2008), and Vienna (*False Closure in Greek and Roman Literature and Art*, March 2009). Discussions that took place afterwards were each time tremendously helpful.

Alfred Breitenbach, Kathleen Coleman, Costas Panayotakis, Andreas Schwab, and Georg Wöhrle each read and commented on a few chapters, whereas Audrey Pitts read the entire manuscript and meticulously eradicated some of its most glaring stylistic infelicities. I also had the exceptional privilege

of having among my pre-publication readers the well-disposed members of the *Heidelberger Förderpreis für klassisch-philologische Theoriebildung* Committee (Reinhard Brandt, Martin von Koppenfels, and Jürgen Paul Schwindt) as well as Andreas Barth of the Universitätsverlag Winter.

And finally, my special thanks go to Farouk Grewing, who is not only partly responsible for my metamorphosis from a Russian/American aspiring Hellenist into a Russian/German Latinist, but who – for quite a number of years now – has also been (among other things) the first to hear, to read, and to discuss with me whatever I had to say about things Greek and Roman.

Needless to say, all remaining errors are solely mine, as are, unless otherwise indicated, all translations of ancient texts.

March/April 2010 Trier and Vienna

Introduction

It is a truism to say that every literary text can be interpreted in a virtually unlimited number of ways. In most cases, however, readers of the same text who belong to the same interpretive community tend to agree at least about a few essential matters. Most readers, for instance, would probably find the story of *Oedipus Rex* profoundly tragic and that of the *Frogs* hilarious; they would consider the *Aeneid* to be a serious poem and most of Martial's epigrams to be frivolous in tone. In principle, there would be nothing wrong with questioning such common assumptions, except that by doing so any reader with academic ambitions would automatically run the risk of no longer being taken seriously by the rest of his or her fellow readers. Apuleius' *Golden Ass* is quite idiosyncratic in this respect, as there is no universal agreement among its readers even about such basics. Readings proposed by classical scholars cover the entire spectrum from a symbolic religious autobiography to an incongruous collection of titillating stories. It is indeed quite striking that such a variety of incompatible interpretations can be supported by the same text and that the vast majority of them can still remain firmly within the boundaries of accepted academic discourse (which most likely would not be the case with a reading of *Oedipus Rex* as a droll farce).

The best way to appreciate the complexity of Apuleius' novel would be to compare it with the extant epitome of its lost Greek original – the Ps.-Lucianic *Onos*.[1] Λούκιος ἢ ὄνος is a fictional autobiographical account, whose narrator Lucius of Patrae sets out on a journey to uncover the occult knowledge of Thessalian witches. We learn quite a few things about Lucius' background from his narrative. He comes from a well-connected family of Greek-speaking Roman citizens (*Onos* 55). He enjoys the advantages of the cutting-edge education of his day by attending a sophist's school (*Onos* 2). Finally, he is "a writer of histories and other things" himself (*Onos* 55). One of the narrator's defining character traits is his unbridled curiosity (*Onos* 4, 15, 45, 56).

The tale has a clear tripartite structure, which quite closely corresponds to the Aristotelian notion of the ideal ('classical') plot[2] consisting of: 1) the begin-

[1] On the three versions of the ass-story (the Greek *Metamorphoses*, the Ps.-Lucianic *Onos*, and Apuleius' *Golden Ass*) and on the history of scholarship on how they are related to each other, see Mason 1994.

[2] On the concept of classical plot, see Lowe 2000, who essentially provides a heavily modernized reformulation of Aristotle's understanding of plot in *Poetics* 7-12 (1450b-1452b). On the notion of plot in general in modern literary theory, see Brooks 1984.

ning, which introduces the initial tension culminating in Lucius' transformation into an ass (*Onos* 1-14); 2) the middle, where Lucius' existence as an ass is presented as a series of misfortunes that keep him from regaining his human shape and thus postpone the final resolution (*Onos* 15-45); and 3) the end, which contains the events immediately preceding and following Lucius' transformation back into a human (*Onos* 46-56).

Lucius' aim is clearly stated almost at the very beginning (*Onos* 4), and his interactions with other characters rarely cross the line of what is absolutely indispensable for the development of the plot. For instance, the travelers whom at the very beginning of the tale Lucius meets on his way to Thessaly happen to come from Hypata and, by virtue of their familiarity with that city, are able to help Lucius to reach his intermediate goal – his host Hipparchus (*Onos* 1). Hipparchus, in turn, happens to be married to a typical Thessalian sorceress, and Abroia, as a close friend of his mother's (Lucius runs into her at the marketplace on his first day in Hypata), is most suitable to impart this horrible secret to Lucius (*Onos* 4). Palaestra, the maid of Hipparchus' wife, is the final link in the chain, and although to some extent Lucius seems to be emotionally involved with her, we are explicitly reminded that she is just a means to an end.[3]

Of course, the narrative fully satisfies Lucius' (and, by extension, the reader's) unrestrained curiosity for the miraculous. His desire to gain personal experience with magic, however, proves to be a fatal error (*Onos* 13), and with Lucius' transformation into an ass we find ourselves in a totally different narrative environment (*Onos* 14-45). The entire action of the middle section of the tale is dominated by the fact that Lucius has to regain his human shape, but, in order to maintain the suspense created in the first part, the narrative has to keep him from achieving this goal. Waiting for a suitable opportunity to eat roses, which he knows will transform him back into a human, Lucius passes from one owner to another and undergoes a series of excruciating sufferings. Most of the episodes in this part of the tale unfold according to a very similar pattern: Lucius is exploited, tortured, and abused to the point where his life is threatened. Then, at the moment of highest suspense, a sudden deliverance comes, which transfers him to his next owner.

There is a gradual transition from the narrative's tightly plotted beginning to its more picaresque middle. The fact that Lucius' first owners are brigands is anything but incidental. After his transformation, the narrative runs the risk of a 'short-circuit'[4] (of a too easy, too quick resolution): all that Lucius has to do to secure his successful retransformation on the following morning is simply to stay at home and wait for Palaestra to bring him roses (*Onos* 14). In order for

[3] E.g., *Onos* 11 καί ποτε ἐπὶ νοῦν μοι ἦλθε τὸ μαθεῖν ὧν ἕνεκα ἤθλουν, καὶ φημὶ πρὸς αὐτήν, Ὦ φιλτάτη, δεῖξόν μοι μαγγανεύουσαν ἢ μεταμορφουμένην τὴν δέσποιναν· πάλαι γὰρ τῆς παραδόξου ταύτης θέας ἐπιθυμῶ.

[4] Brooks 1984, 104.

Lucius to embark upon his adventures, the narrative has to force him out of the house, and brigands are obviously the best candidates to fulfill this function. The identity of his second owner – a noble girl kidnapped by the brigands – is rooted in the brigands-episode (*Onos* 22-27): her function consists in bringing about, by her unfortunate death, suitable conditions for Lucius to be brought to the marketplace and thus to the realm of unbridled chance (*Onos* 34-35). The situation where Lucius the ass constantly changes hands is ideally suited to de-laying the final resolution in a variety of ways. The succession of the captive girl's slaves (*Onos* 28-34), who after her death are the first to sell the ass, the effeminate priests of Dea Syria (*Onos* 36-41), the miller (*Onos* 42), the gardener (*Onos* 43-45), and the soldier (*Onos* 46), creates a truly kaleidoscopic vision of a journey through various aspects of low life, which enables the author to portray Lucius' sufferings in constantly changing settings.

Lucius' last buyers (two slaves – a cook and a confectionary baker) form a providential transition to the denouement of the tale, which is as tightly plotted as its beginning (*Onos* 46). Because of the nature of his new owners' profession, Lucius' super-asinine propensity for human food is discovered and rouses the interest of their master Menecles, the producer of public shows from Thessalonica (*Onos* 47). Lucius' rendezvous with a rich matron (*Onos* 50-52) makes his new master come up with the idea of giving a public show involving Lucius the ass copulating with a convict woman (*Onos* 52). The moment when Lucius is on stage with his prospective lover is reminiscent of other points of high suspense familiar to the reader from earlier episodes: Lucius feels ashamed of performing a sexual act *coram publico* and scared of the wild animals that are supposed to tear his partner apart right after its consummation (*Onos* 53), and the reader instinctively knows from his earlier experience with the text that a sudden deliverance must come, as indeed it does when Lucius notices roses among the flowers decorating the bed on which he is reclining, eats them, and becomes human again (*Onos* 54).

The section that follows Lucius' retransformation is quite short. Lucius has regained not only his place in humanity, but also, through his recognition by the proconsul, his status in society. His brother comes to pick him up, and now they are both set to go back home (*Onos* 55). The action is complete; its main conflict is resolved without leaving any loose ends or unanswered questions.

This nearly impeccable completeness is disturbed only by a short scene, which at first seems to be a mere digression but which on closer inspection turns out to constitute the real punch line of the entire narrative (*Onos* 56). Before Lucius departs, he decides to visit the rich matron who was so fond of his sexual prowess when he was still an ass. Contrary to his expectations, she rejects his advances as she discovers that, along with his asinine appearance, he has lost what she used to treasure most about him – his oversized male member. The situation, quite funny in itself, is depicted with a further beautiful touch of humor: Lucius completely misconstrues the nature of the woman's affection for

him and at first assumes a rather condescending attitude towards her. He accepts her invitation to dinner, because he thinks it unduly contemptuous to reject a woman who loved him *even* as he was an ass. When he finally decides to undress, he assumes he is doing her a great favor. The woman, however, is not at all impressed and, quite fittingly, brings in the metamorphosis motif again by remarking that from a beautiful and useful animal Lucius has been metamorphosed into a pitiful monkey.[5] The humor here is so poignant and unparalleled in the rest of the tale that this episode can be perceived as the true culmination of the protagonist's comic adventures.

To sum up, the Greek ass-tale is based on a tightly plotted series of events that are all closely interrelated. Moreover, the story events can be easily reduced to a straightforward moral lesson. Throughout the tale, the narrator constantly emphasizes the disastrous consequences of Lucius' uncontrollable curiosity: curiosity is the primary cause of his initial interest in magic that leads to his metamorphosis, and it is responsible for some of the self-inflicted calamities during his existence as an ass (e.g., *Onos* 15, 45). The easy morality of this comedy of curiosity is perfectly self-evident and does not even have to be explicitly formulated in order for the reader to get the message.[6] However, the narrator prefers to make sure that the reader will not miss the point, and in the last sentence proudly announces that, upon his retransformation back into a human, he was delivered from the consequences of his misplaced asinine curiosity.[7] Thus, thematically, too, the narrative has made a full circle, at the end of which the protagonist learns an obvious moral lesson.

The moment we turn from the Greek ass-tale to the *Golden Ass* we note a striking contrast. The most conspicuous difference between the two is that Apuleius transforms the linear story of the original into a frame for numerous inserted narratives.[8] The very fact that, in contrast to the relatively unassuming Greek story, we deal with multiple fictions intricately interwoven with each other loosens the coherent cause-and-effect sequence of the story events of the original narrative and makes it more difficult for the reader to perceive them in their totality. The most radical deviation from the classical model of plotting in Apuleius is of course the novel's *deus ex machina* ending. As Marsilio Fusillo notes, "in terms of narrative structure, the ending [of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*] is not circular or parallel but tangential, introducing a new topic, unconnected to

[5] *Onos* 56 σὺ δέ μοι ἐλήλυθας ἐξ ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ χρησίμου ζῴου ἐξ πίθηκον μεταμορφωθείς.

[6] On the curiosity motif in the *Onos*, see Kirichenko 2008 (b), 345-350.

[7] *Onos* 56 ἐνταῦθα θεοῖς σωτῆρσιν ἔθυον καὶ ἀναθήματα ἀνέθηκα, μὰ Δί' οὐκ ἐκ κυνὸς πρωκτοῦ, τὸ δὴ τοῦ λόγου, ἀλλ' ἐξ ὄνου περιεργίας διὰ μακροῦ πάνυ καὶ οὕτω δὲ μόλις οἴκαδε ἀνασωθείς.

[8] I join Hugh Mason (1994) in assuming that the original Greek *Metamorphoses*, which served as Apuleius' main source for the ass-tale, did not contain any of the inserted tales.

the rest of the work."[9] Unlike the conclusion of the *Onos*, Isis' epiphany at the end of the novel does not function as a legitimate answer to the problems that have been raised in the rest of the novel but, on the contrary, seems to be artificially added on to the coherently constructed plot structure of the original. As a result, it transforms much of the original plot into a series of non-functional loose ends. We are dealing here with a rather paradoxical situation: whereas traditionally, in Euripidean tragedy for instance, *deus ex machina* endings were used to resolve conflicts that otherwise could not be resolved from within the plot,[10] Apuleius brings his protagonist to the very threshold of a perfectly logical resolution only in order to abandon it and replace it with a highly counter-intuitive ending. Moreover, the plot structure of the ass-tale is not the only thing that Apuleius subjects to this kind of fragmentation. The manner in which he constructs the figure of his protagonist can hardly be reconciled with the conventional notion of personal identity. Unlike the self-coherent, mimetically credible Lucius of Patrae, Apuleius' Lucius is a chameleonic character who is pre-sented now as an astronomically wealthy aristocrat from Corinth, now as a poor man from Apuleius' own North African hometown of Madaurus.[11] As a result of these transformations, the obvious moral message that the narrator of the *Onos* communicates to the reader becomes blurred too, as it gives way to an incongruous mixture of lofty sermon and comic burlesque.

Given all these blatant inconsistencies, it strikes one as rather surprising that modern readers of Apuleius continue, against all odds, to perceive his novel through the lens of the classical plot paradigm. Modern interpretations of Apuleius' novel can be broadly divided into three groups: 'unitarian', 'pluralist', and 'postmodern'.[12] 'Unitarian' readings declare a certain portion of the text (as a rule, the tale of *Cupid and Psyche* or the Isis book) to be the key to its overall meaning and then force the rest of the narrative into a classical plot based on that portion. As a consequence, the *Golden Ass* becomes either a fictionalized philosophical treatise[13] or a coded Isiac aretalogy (alias *roman initiatique*).[14] 'Pluralist' readers, on the contrary, disappointedly admit that the *Golden Ass* does not comply with the classical principles of plotting and declare it to be a work by a skillful but careless rhetorician, who sacrificed consistency for the sake of frivolous amusement.[15] Finally, 'postmodern' readings, initiated by John J. Winkler's *Auctor & Actor*, see the chief goal of the novel in 'hermeneutic entertainment' – "a set of games that may be played in myriad ways and in

[9] Fusillo 1997, 223.
[10] Dunn 1996, 26-44.
[11] Apul. *Met.* 2.12 *nam et Corinthi nunc apud nos,* etc. 11.27 *audisse mitti sibi Madaurensem, sed admodum pauperem.* On this peculiar change, see van der Paardt 1981.
[12] Cf. Schlam – Finkelpearl 2000.
[13] E.g., Gianotti 1986.
[14] E.g., Merkelbach 1962; Martin 1970; Hani 1973; Frangoulidis 2008.
[15] E.g., Perry 1967, 236-282; Anderson 1982, 75-86.

which all players may win – but to which there is no right answer,"[16] – and where the decision as to how to integrate disparate clues provided by the text is predicated upon whether or not the reader knows how the novel ends. On closer look, however, it turns out that, Winkler's two-readings theory, too, despite its radically non-committal sophistication, aims to justify a typical *classical plot* assumption, that "Lucius' life-story had to lead up to a conclusion that would seem surprising beforehand but detectable in retrospect."[17]

The main objective of my book is to demonstrate that deliberate non-compliance with the classical plot paradigm is the cornerstone of Apuleius' narrative aesthetics and to interpret this aesthetics as a product of the cultural context from which his novel originated. Here is how Apuleius himself – a Second Sophistic *philosophus Platonicus*, who thrilled huge audiences with his rhetorical performances in theaters throughout his native North Africa – described this context (Apul. *Fl.* 18):

> *tanta multitudo ad audiendum convenistis, ut potius gratulari Karthagini debeam, quod tam multos eruditionis amicos habet, quam excusare, quod philosophus non recusaverim dissertare. nam et pro amplitudine civitatis frequentia collecta et pro magnitudine frequentiae locus delectus est. praeterea in auditorio hoc genus spectari debet non pavimenti marmoratio nec proscaenii contabulatio nec scaenae columnatio, sed nec culminum eminentia nec lacunarium refulgentia nec sedilium circumferentia, nec quod hic alias mimus halucinatur, comoedus sermocinatur, tragoedus vociferatur, funerepus periclitatur, praestigiator furatur, histrio gesticulatur ceterique omnes ludiones ostentant populo quod cuiusque artis est, sed istis omnibus supersessis nihil amplius spectari debet quam convenientium ratio et dicentis oratio*.
>
> You have come to listen to me in such great numbers that I should rather congratulate Carthage for having so many friends of learning than excuse myself for not refusing to deliver a speech here despite being a philosopher. For the great multitude of those gathered here corresponds to the size of the city, and the venue has been selected to accommodate such a great multitude. Besides, what one should heed in a hall of this kind is not the marble paving of the floors, the boards of the *proscaenium*, the pillars of the stage, the height of the roof, the resplendence of the paneled ceiling, or the circumference of the seats. Nor should one heed what takes place here at other times: the nonsense that a mime actor talks, the conversation in which a comic actor partakes, the loud cry a tragic actor enunciates, the risks a ropedancer takes, the thefts a juggler perpetrates, the gestures a pantomime imitates, or whatever else belongs to the art that the rest of all these stage performers demonstrate to their audience. No, one should disregard all these things and pay no further attention to anything but to the listeners' judiciousness and to the speaker's articulateness.

[16] Winkler 1985, 200.
[17] Winkler 1985, 98.

This is a context in which elite culture (philosophy and sophistic oratory) and low culture (the mime and other kinds of popular entertainment) not only share the same venues and appeal to the same audiences but also, as we shall see, engage in active exchange of subject matter and histrionic techniques.[18] I read the *Golden Ass* as a product of this theatrical atmosphere in which vulgar farce peacefully coexisted with philosophy and exquisite rhetoric.

In recent years, there has been a significant amount of research on both sophistic and theatrical elements in the *Golden Ass*. Most of these studies, however, have been limited to a search for allusions to either drama[19] or the literature of the Second Sophistic.[20] Although I will also pay close attention to Apuleius' intertextual echoes, my overall aim is different. What I would like to do is, first and foremost, to read the *Golden Ass* as an aesthetic phenomenon with a distinctive profile of its own – as a narrative deeply indebted to popular theatricality, and yet compatible with the elite culture of the period.

The procedure that I adopt in my investigation is, broadly speaking, archaeological. The surface from which I begin my discussion in Chapter 1 consists of the most conspicuous elements of popular theater that can be found in the novel's subject matter. Then, in Chapter 2, I delve a little deeper and point to what I see as theatrical patterns in the narrative's structure; my main claim here is that Apuleius' primary narrative does not cohere along the lines of a single 'classical plot' but is a result of a deliberate intertwining of multiple plots. In Chapters 3 to 7, I discuss five of such possible plot patterns in detail. Finally, in Chapters 8 and 9, I turn to what Apuleius himself would have probably called *dicentis oratio,* namely to the text's status not as a theatrical play but as a first-person narrative.

[18] On the second century AD theatrical culture, see Zucchelli 1995. On connections between theater and oratory in the Second Sophistic, see my Chapter 9.1.

[19] The most comprehensible recent study of Apuleius' allusions to drama is May 2006.

[20] E.g., Sandy 1997; Harrison 2000.

Part 1

Theatricality

1. The Nonsense of the Mime: The *Golden Ass* and Popular Theater

1.1. The Mime's *centunculus*

In his long discussion of riddles in Book 10 of the *Deipnosophistae* (448b-459b), Athenaeus mentions Cleon, Nymphodorus, and Ischomachus, famous actors of Italian mimes, and gives two examples of 'riddles' that they used in their performances (Ath. *Deipn.* 453a):

> τοιοῦτοι δ' ἦσαν οὓς ἐποίουν γρίφους, οἷον ἀγροίκου τινὸς ὑπερπλησθέντος καὶ κακῶς ἔχοντος, ὡς ἠρώτα αὐτὸν ὁ ἰατρὸς μὴ εἰς ἔμετον ἐδείπνησεν, "οὐκ ἔγωγε," εἰπεῖν, "ἀλλ' εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν." καὶ πτωχῆς τινος τὴν γαστέρα πονούσης, ἐπεὶ ὁ ἰατρὸς ἐπυνθάνετο μὴ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχει, "πῶς γάρ," εἶπε, "τριταία μὴ βεβρωκυῖα;"
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> The riddles that they made were of the following kind: for instance, some countryman ate too much and became sick; when a doctor asked him whether he had stuffed himself with food to the puking point, he replied: "No way! I have stuffed it into my belly." Or: some beggar woman had a pain in her stomach; so when the doctor asked her whether she was heavy [with child], she said: "How could I be? I haven't eaten for three days!"

These silly, barely translatable puns find parallels in the *Philogelos* – a late antique collection of jokes, which doubtless goes back to a much earlier period and which was connected to the mime as early as in the *Suda*.[1] For instance (*Philog.* 4 and 120),

> σχολαστικοῦ ἵππον πιπράσκοντος ἠρώτησέ τις εἰ πρωτοβόλος ἐστίν. τοῦ δὲ εἰπόντος δευτεροβόλον εἶναι, εἶπε· Πῶς οἶδας; ὁ δὲ ἀπεκρίνατο· Ὅτι ἅπαξ ἐμὲ ἔβαλε κάτω καὶ ἅπαξ τὸν πατέρα μου.
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> A *scholasticus* wanted to sell a horse. Someone asked him whether it had already dropped [its] first [teeth]. The *scholasticus* said that it had already dropped its second. "How do you know?" said the other one. He replied: "Because it has once dropped me and once my father."

[1] According to the *Suda*, the author of the *Philogelos* was the 1 century BC mimographer Philistion (Φ 364 Adler ὁ γράψας τὸν Φιλόγελων). On the date and authorship of the *Philogelos*, see Andreassi 2004, 27-37. See also Reich 1903, 454-475; Nicoll 1931, 114-115.

Ἀβδηρίτης ἀκούσας ὅτι κρόμμυα καὶ βολβοὶ φυσῶσιν, ἐν τῷ πλέειν αὐτὸν γαλήνης οὔσης πολλλῆς, σάκκον πλήσας ἀπὸ τῆς πρύμνης ἐκρέμασεν.

An Abderite had heard that onions and other bulbous plants made [people make] wind. Once, when he was traveling by sea, there was absolutely no wind. So he hung a full sack at the stern.

Although no one seems to share anymore Reich's unquestioning trust in the *Suda's* attribution of the *Philogelos* collection to the mimographer Philistion,[2] it is impossible to deny that the buffoonish absurdity of these jokes is perfectly congenial with the mime.[3] For this reason, it seems to be justified to use the *Philogelos* as indirect evidence for mime humor.

The stock figures ridiculed in the *Philogelos* fall into three distinct categories. Some jokes rehearse age-old stereotypes about ethnic groups (Abderites, Sidonians, and Cumaeans).[4] Others feature character types reminiscent of Theophrastus' *Characters* (εὐτράπελοι, ἄγροικοι, etc.) or such comic figures as ὀζόστομοι familiar to us from Greek epigram.[5] But by far the largest number of jokes focuses on the character of σχολαστικός – variously rendered by translators as 'pedant', 'professor', or 'schoolmaster'.[6] Apuleius' Lucius, too, is once directly referred to as *scholasticus*,[7] and, as J. J. Winkler has argued, the overall combination of helpless naïveté and highbrow education indeed makes his character highly compatible with the inept intellectual of the *Philogelos*.[8]

When Lucius approaches Hypata in Book 1 of the *Golden Ass*, he seems to enter the world of mime jokes. The first thing he does is to stop at an inn to ask for directions. The brief conversation that he has with an old female inn-keeper sounds almost like one of Athenaeus' 'riddles' too (Apul. *Met.* 1.21):

'nostine Milonem quendam e primoribus?' adrisit et: 'vere', inquit, 'primus istic perhibetur Milo, qui extra pomerium et urbem totam colit'.

"Do you know Milo, one of the outstanding citizens?" She smiled and said: "Milo is indeed regarded as outstanding here, for his house stands outside the city limits."

2 Reich 1903, 454-475 on "Philistions Philogelos." Cf. Wüst 1932, 1750.

3 Winkler 1985, 163 n.54: "The evident mime-content of the *Philogelos* might simply have been the basis for the *Suda*'s conjecture that Philistion, the archetypal mimographer, was its author." See also Andreassi 2004, 38-39.

4 Andreassi 2004, 51-54.

5 Andreassi 2004, 54-58.

6 For the overview of translations of the term into modern languages, see Andreassi 2004, 43-44.

7 Apul. *Met.* 2.10 *heus tu, scolastice*.

8 Winkler 1985, 160-165.

There is one episode in Book 1 of the *Golden Ass* that displays particularly strong connections with *scholasticus* jokes. On his first day in Hypata, Lucius goes to the marketplace to buy food for supper. After some bargaining, he ends up buying fish at a price that he finds somewhat too high (Apul. *Met.* 1.24). When he is about to leave the market, he runs into his former fellow student Pythias, a local official in charge of the food-supply. Once he finds out how much Lucius has paid for the fish, he becomes angry with the merchant. But, instead of helping Lucius to get his money back, he "punishes" the malicious vendor by ordering his attendant to trample on the fish (Apul. *Met.* 1.25).

What turns Lucius and Pythias into *scholastici* here is on the surface simply the fact that, like some of the *scholastici* of the *Philogelos* (e.g., *Philog*. 54), they both studied in Athens – the preferred destination for Hellenistic and Roman intellectuals.[9] More importantly, however, this comic sketch is based on the same kind of absurd humor as most of the *scholasticus* jokes. As a rule, these jokes involve a ridiculous intellectual pedantically engaging in a *per se* normal routine in a context in which this routine becomes absolutely counter-productive. For instance, a *scholasticus* hides when he sees a doctor because he is ashamed of being healthy (*Philog*. 6); wants to teach his ass to abstain from food and is distressed by the fact that the ass dies just at the moment when he has learnt not to eat (*Philog*. 9); offers to sell a friend one thirty-year old slave instead of two fifteen-year old ones (*Philog*. 12); wears a bandage on his foot after stepping on a nail in his dream and is accused by his friend of stupidity for sleeping barefoot (*Philog*. 15); does not trust his eyes when he sees his friend alive, because the person who has told him that the friend is dead is more trust-worthy (*Philog*. 22); does not dismount from his horse while crossing a river in a ferry because he is in a hurry (*Philog*. 31); sees nothing wrong in sleeping with his grandmother (his father's mother) because his father has been sleeping with his mother for years (*Philog*. 45); wishes that his father would be sentenced to death so that he might demonstrate to him his skills in forensic oratory (*Philog*. 54), etc. Juxtaposed with this selection of *scholasticus* jokes, the Pythias episode of the *Golden Ass* indeed reads as if it came directly from the *Philogelos*.

Lucius and Pythias are not the only characters that behave like *Philogelos* figures. It has been observed that Lucius' miserly host Milo evokes a stock character of new comedy.[10] At the same time, the φιλάργυρος character looms large in the *Philogelos* too. In one joke (*Philog.* 104), for instance, the miser makes himself his own sole heir in his will; in another, he eats only olives because he can satisfy his hunger with what's outside, use the pit as wood, and, to top it all off, doesn't need to take a bath because he can simply wipe his

[9] Apul. *Met.* 1.24 *Pythias condiscipulus meus apud Athenas Atticas*. See Sandy 1993.
[10] May 2006, 161-166.

hands in his hair after a meal.[11] Quite significantly, Milo's Greek prototype Hipparchus is explicitly called φιλάργυρος (*Onos* 1), whereas Milo's own stinginess is characterized by an exaggerated absurdity reminiscent of the φιλάργυρος jokes from the *Philogelos*: despite being one of the richest men in town, Milo has only one servant and, for fear of thieves, owns no chairs and too few kitchen utensils;[12] what is more, his dinner consists of an empty table, at which he urges Lucius to join him by saying *en hospitium* (Apul. *Met.* 1.22).[13]

This combination of mime gags with which Apuleius' novel begins, seems to be consciously designed to conjure up the atmosphere of mime buffoonery. Despite the consistency of these generic references, however, it would be hard to deny that *Philogelos*-like passages are integrated into Apuleius' narrative in a rather gratuitous manner. The introduction of the Pythias episode, for instance, proves to be so unmotivated as to garble the coherence of the original ass-tale's plot almost beyond repair. At first, when Pythias asks Lucius about the goal of his journey and Lucius promises to give him an answer on the next day,[14] it seems that Apuleius does go through the motions of fitting this new character into the cause-and-effect sequence of Lucius' adventures. This, however, turns out not to be the case: Pythias forever disappears from the narrative after this short interlude, Lucius never gives the promised answer, and, as a consequence, we are given to understand that this scene has no other purpose than to provide a specimen of the typical *scholasticus* routine.

Milo's stinginess is treated in a similar manner too. Despite his previously described pathologic parsimony, Milo is quickly transformed into a generous host eager to satisfy any of his guest's wishes (Apul. *Met.* 1.23). Lucius, nevertheless, continues to act like a typical *scholasticus*, clinging to the premise that Milo *is* stingy, despite all evidence to the contrary. This unswervingly counterintuitive behavior leaves him both moneyless and hungry for the rest of the day: not only does he fail to claim back the money that he has lost at the marketplace due to Pythias' untimely intervention, but he refuses to partake of the food that Milo so insistently offers him at home (Apul. *Met.* 1.26). Consequently, the last scene of Book 1, at the end of which Lucius goes to bed

[11] *Philog.* 105 Φιλάργυρος ἐρωτώμενος διὰ τὶ ἄλλο οὐθὲν ἢ μόνον ἐλαίας ἐσθίει, ἔφη· Ἵνα τὸ μὲν ἔξωθεν ἀντὶ ὄψου ἔχω, τὸ δὲ ὀστοῦν ἀντὶ ξύλου· φαγὼν δὲ εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ κεφαλὴν σφογγισάμενος λουτροῦ οὐκ ἐπιδέομαι.

[12] Apul. *Met.* 1.22 *et cum dicto iubet uxorem decedere utque in eius locum adsidam iubet meque etiam nunc verecundia cunctantem adrepta lacinia detrahens: 'adside', inquit, 'istic. nam prae metu latronum nulla sessibula ac ne sufficientem supellectilem parare nobis licet'.*

[13] Apul. *Met.* 1.22 *intuli me eumque accubantem exiguo admodum grabatulo et commodum cenare incipientem invenio. assidebat pedes uxor et mensa vacua posita, cuius monstratu 'en' inquit 'hospitium'.*

[14] Apul. *Met.* 1.24: *'quae autem tibi causa peregrinationis huius?' 'crastino die scies.'*