

# Metaphor and the Ancient Novel

Luca Graverini

*Sweet and Dangerous? A Literary Metaphor (aures permulcere) in Apuleius' Prologue*

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## Sweet and Dangerous? A Literary Metaphor (*ares permulcere*) in Apuleius' Prologue

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In recent years, there has certainly been no dearth of studies about the prologue to Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.<sup>1</sup> However, the single six-word phrase I am going to deal with, *Met.* 1.1.1 *aresque tuas benivolas lepido susurro permulceam* ('I would like... to caress your ears into approval with a pretty whisper'),<sup>2</sup> does not seem to have excited the curiosity of many other researchers. Some critics have already pointed out the relevance of the image of *permulcere aures*, 'stroking the ears', in the novel; Paula James, in particular, states that the prologue speaker's promise to stroke the ears of his readers with a whisper 'implies an asinine but attentive audience'.<sup>3</sup> I think that the comparison between the listener and the main character of the novel is important, and I will come back to it at the end of this paper. But grasping the links between the prologue and the following narration is a task that only a second reader can perform; my intention here is rather to figure out how a first reader might react to the prologue speaker's promise to soothe the ears of his listener, and to show that this metaphor conveys some general information about the literary genre and the style of the work it introduces. More consistent with my purposes is a study by Michael B. Trapp,<sup>4</sup> who reads the promise of soothing the ears of the reader as a statement of pleasure-giving, inferior and irresponsible communication, the kind of speaking that was frequently stigmatized by Plato and other philosophers. This is, in my opin-

<sup>1</sup> The obvious reference is Kahane–Laird 2001; for some comments on this book and a few bibliographical supplements, see Graverini 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Here and elsewhere, translations from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* are by Hanson 1989.

<sup>3</sup> James 2001, 260. Cf. also Krabbe 1989, 13–14; James 1991, 170; Münstermann 1995, 70, who follows Schlam 1970, 179 s.

<sup>4</sup> Trapp 2001.

ion, a very good point, and I will try to push even further the analogies suggested by Trapp between our prologue and Plato's *Phaedrus*. I will also try to demonstrate, however, that his reconstruction is part of a larger picture, and that not only philosophy, but (and maybe mainly) rhetoric<sup>5</sup> and poetry should also be taken into consideration.

The speaker promises to soothe our ears with his whisper: in plain terms, the metaphor implies that his speech is going to have some sort of deep and pleasing effect on the mind or heart of the reader. This is what any good and convincing speaker should be able to do; but Apuleius' choice of words is worth considering.

My starting point will be an analysis of the prologue speaker's statement in the light of ancient rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> *Aures permulcere*, 'to caress' or 'to soothe the ears', seems to be a technical expression in Quintilian, that defines the devices adopted by an inferior and corrupted branch of the rhetorical art.<sup>7</sup> Uneducated speakers (*indocti*), Quintilian says, resort to any rhetorical device that could *permulcere aures* of their audience, and do not even refrain from offering them *pravae voluptates*, perverted pleasures (*Inst.* 2.12.6); and it is indeed the ears that provide the easiest way to appreciate the most immediate and simple pleasures offered by rhetoric (9.4.116: 'the ear, which appreciates the fullness of rhythm or feels the lack of it, is offended by

<sup>5</sup> A connection with rhetoric is rapidly suggested by Trapp himself: see esp. pp. 44 f. (Maximus of Tyre); Nicolai 1999, 145 briefly points out that '*lepido susurro permulceam ci porta in quell'ambito lessicale intermedio tra la critica letteraria (cioè la terminologia retorica) e la psicagogia musicale*'.

<sup>6</sup> This implies that I will try to read the prologue from the point of view of an ancient reader provided with a full and thorough rhetoric and literary education. I am not assuming that such a reader is the only reader to whom Apuleius addresses himself, but only that the *Metamorphoses* were written also for a learned public. I will also make the obvious assumption that Apuleius (who indeed belonged to this category of people provided with full learning) has carefully constructed his prologue, leaving no space to chance in his choice of words and images. For this first part of my paper I am heavily indebted to Wytse Keulen, whose doctoral thesis (Keulen 2003, an excellent commentary on *Met.* 1,1–20 that will be soon available as the next "Groningen Commentary on Apuleius"; see esp. his *Introduction*, pp. 14–19) has anticipated many of the points I am going to make about ear-soothing rhetoric.

<sup>7</sup> The expression *aures (per)mulcere* is most frequently adopted in contexts related to some sort of literary criticism: so Quint. *Inst.* 2,12,6; 11,3,60; 12,10,52; 9,4,116; Cic. *de Orat.* 2,315; *Orat.* 163; Fro. *Aur.* 1,9,3 pp. 17–18 Van den Hout; Gel. 20,9,1. Otherwise, its usage seems to be mainly poetic: Hor. *Ep.* 1,16,26; Ov. *Met.* 5,561; *Tr.* 2,1,358; Sil. 11,288 ss.

harshness, soothed by smooth and excited by impetuous movement... it is for this reason that those who have received a thorough training understand the theory of artistic structure, while even the untrained derive pleasure from it').<sup>8</sup> If the orator was speaking only to wise judges, he could give up most of his rhetorical devices and could be even more concise than Cicero and Demosthenes, since he would only need to persuade his listeners, and would not be compelled to soothe their ears (12.10.52). In short, in Quintilian – as well as in other authors, as we will see later – *aures permulcere* defines the lower pleasures of rhetoric.

What are these pleasures like? At 11.3.58–60 Quintilian is a bit more explicit. His contemporaries' worst habit, he says, was the so-called 'singing style' adopted by those rhetors who declaimed in a melodious, almost sing-song like way.<sup>9</sup> This ear-soothing style, although reprimanded by old-fashioned teachers, was widely accepted, and according to Quintilian it reflects the moral flaws of those who practise it (11.3.60). Acting in this case as the defender of the traditional austerity of Rome against the laxity of the East,<sup>10</sup> he considers this style as foreign, since it originated in Lycia<sup>11</sup> and Caria, and unworthy of the Forum and of the Roman courthouses (11.3.58). This 'singing style', as Maud Gleason<sup>12</sup> has well pointed out, was widely perceived as a threat to the Romanity and even to the masculinity of orators. Quintilian clearly states that he does not wish 'the boy... to talk with the shrillness of a woman or in the tremulous accents of old age' (1.11.1; cf. 11.3.91); Seneca adopted the same criticism against 'a degenerate style of speech... modulated in the music of a concert piece'<sup>13</sup> (*Ep.* 114.1: *corrupti generis oratio... in morem cantici ducta*); and Fronto offers a good testimony to the persistence of this view in the II<sup>nd</sup> century in a letter to Marcus

<sup>8</sup> Trans. Butler 1943<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> 11,3,57; cf. Gleason 1995, 117–118 and *passim*. A useful list of relevant passages on this topic is also in Norden 1898, 294 f.; 372 ff.

<sup>10</sup> According to Norden 1898, 362 'die Einwirkung des Griechischen auf das Lateinische ist nie stärker gewesen als in jener Zeit'. On the 'Roman resentment at the growing preeminence of Greek literary culture' cf. Walker 2000, 94; Anderson 1990, 99. Russell 1990b, 17 states that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD '*Graecia victa* was establishing her victory more and more securely'. In Tim Whitmarsh's words, 'Hellenism is both a resource and a threat' (Whitmarsh 2001, 10).

<sup>11</sup> Phrygia and Caria according to Cicero, *Orat.* 57. He also states that Caria, Phrygia and Mysia 'have adopted a rich and unctuous diction which appeals to their ears' (*Orat.* 25).

<sup>12</sup> Gleason 1995, xxviii; 112 f.; 117 f.; 124 f.

<sup>13</sup> Transl. Gummere 1925.

Aurelius.<sup>14</sup> An ancient reader would also probably connect the ‘singing style’ and the *immutatio vocis* the prologue speaker proclaims to practice to an on-stage performance,<sup>15</sup> but this is another story and I am not going to elaborate on it in this paper.

This dispute, concerning the ‘singing style’ and more generally a kind of *pronuntiatio* that ‘soothes the ears’ of the audience, was in no way limited to the Roman world, even though it was enhanced by the anti-Greek cultural nationalism in most Roman authors. Aelius Aristides was harshly critical of the Asianists. They, he affirmed, only tried to γαργαλίσαι τὰ ὄτα (*Or.* 34.16), to titillate the ears of their audience, and are similar to ‘androgynes or eunuchs’ (34.18).<sup>16</sup> The same terminology recurs in the Christian rhetor Clemens of Alexandria and in several other Greek authors:<sup>17</sup> in Greek as well as in Latin, it seems, ‘to stroke’ or ‘to soothe the ears’ was adopted as a technical expression in rhetorical polemic. The target of Aristides was probably Favorinus of Arles,<sup>18</sup> who had the best example of a Greek, effeminate, chanting and enchanting voice. According to Philostratus (*VS* 491), when Favorinus ‘delivered discourses in Rome... even those who did not understand the Greek language shared in the pleasure that he gave’,<sup>19</sup> since ‘he fascinated (ἔθελε) even them by the tones of his voice’.<sup>20</sup> The connection between his singsong style and his effeminacy is rudely pointed out in Lucianus’ *Demonax* (12). Demonax ridiculed the ‘singing style’ exhibited by

<sup>14</sup> *Aur.* 1,9,3 pp. 17–18 Van den Hout. In Apuleius, the music of the lewd and effeminate priests of the Dea Syria is ‘soothing’ (8,30,5 *cantusque Phrygii mulcentibus modulis*), just like the whisper of the prologue speaker.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. e. g. Quint. *Inst.* 11,3,182–183; 11,3,57; Aristid. *Or.* 34, 55–57; cf. Keulen 2003, 83. On the affinities of Apuleius’ prologue with the prologues of Plautus see Dowden 2001, 134–136 and Winkler 1985, 200–203, with further references.

<sup>16</sup> On this invective see Norden 1898, pp. 374 f.

<sup>17</sup> *Strom.* 1,3,22,5. Cf. also Epiphanius *Haer.* 3,333; Joannes Chrysostomos, *de sancta Thecla martyre* 50,748; Theodoretus, *Interpretatio in Ezechielem* 81, 917. Cf also Suidas, delta 1603, where γαργαλίσειν is explained as ‘to make laugh and to persuade’; and Anon. In *Aristotelis artem rhetoricam commentarium* 161, about the rhetors’ temptation to titillate the listeners’ hearing with a flowery diction. Remarkably, Photius states (*Bibliotheca*, cod. 94 p. 73 b) that the style of Iamblichus (a novelist roughly contemporary to Apuleius) inclined ἐπὶ τὸ γαργαλίσειν. See also below, n. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Or maybe Polemo of Thasus, according to Behr 1981, 399 n. 34. On the contraposition between Aristides and Favorinus see Gleason 1995, 125 (122 ff. on Aristides’ oration).

<sup>19</sup> Something similar in Apul. *Apol.* 9,7: Sappho’s poems are so sweet, that even her unfamiliar dialect becomes agreeable.

<sup>20</sup> Transl. Cave Wright 1921.

Favorinus, since it sounded effeminate and shameful for a philosopher; Favorinus asked Demonax who he was to make fun of him, and he answered ‘a man whose ears are not easily deceived’. The eunuch rhetor was not yet satisfied, and asked Demonax what it was that was necessary to become a philosopher; maybe appropriately, but not politely, Demonax answered ‘to have balls’.

As it seems, Apuleius’ choice of words concretely suggests a rhetorical programme for the novel, and this was clearly understandable to any reader who was trained in rhetorical studies. *Aures tuas permulceam* suggests that he is taking a stand in a rhetorical dispute concerning *pronuntiatio* and, more generally, style. His style will be somehow Greekish, similar to that of the ‘singing rhetors’ like Favorinus, and a few lines later the prologue stresses the same point: *fabulam Graecanicam incipimus*.<sup>21</sup> We do not know how Apuleius pronounced his acclaimed orations, but we do know how much his prose adopts figures of sound: Eduard Norden, who did not exactly appreciate Apuleius’ style, deplores the fact that ‘alle die Mätzchen, die dem weichlichsten Wohlklang dienen, werden in der verschwenderischsten Weise angebracht’ (p. 601), and censures ‘den maßlosen Gebrauch der auffälligsten und pikantesten, auf das Ohr wie Schellengeläute wirkenden Redefiguren’ (p. 603). All of this was also looked at with some suspicion in other circles and ages inclined towards a more severe rhetoric: Giuseppina Magnaldi, in a study on the Apuleian edition *in usum Delphini*, reminds us that there was a general prejudice against the *horror affectatae compositionis qui aures laedere poterat*.<sup>22</sup> Again an ‘acoustic’ stylistic assessment (*aures laedere*), like a refrain: the terminology and imagery adopted by rhetorical polemic shows a surprising stability across the centuries.

<sup>21</sup> I wonder if the mention of *sermo Milesius* should also be connected with the effeminate and singsong *pronuntiatio* that, as we have seen, was practised in Rome, but had very bad press and was perceived as foreign. Quintilian and Cicero (above, n. 10) say that it originated in Asia Minor, and the polemic against it is part of the anti-Asianist polemic. Apuleius clearly associates *aures permulcere* with his ‘Milesian style’: this is normally, and correctly, interpreted as referring to *fabulae Milesiae* and Aristides/Sisenna, but it also suggests that the style of the novel has a geographical origin in Asia Minor, the land of chanting rhetors. The prologue speaker also declares that he is a *forensis sermonis rudis locutor*: an expression that is open to further interpretation, but that at face value simply seems to state that the speaker’s language is not well suited to the *Forum* – and Quintilian, as we have seen, lamented that the singing style was a sin against the sanctity of the Roman Forum (*Inst.* 11,3,58).

<sup>22</sup> Magnaldi 2001, 97.

To sum up, we have in the *Metamorphoses* a Hellenizing and melodious style, one that many critics, be they Greek like Aristides, Roman like Seneca, or modern like Norden, would definitely consider effeminate. I would also briefly point out that the text suggests a striking parallelism between the prologue speaker and the old woman who narrates the tale of *Cupid and Psyche*:<sup>23</sup> cf. *Met.* 1.1.1 *at ego tibi... varias fabulas conseram auresque tuas... lepidus susurro permulceam* ('but I would like to tie together different sorts of tales for you... and to caress your ears into approval with a pretty whisper') with 4.27.8 *sed ego te narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis protinus avocabo* ('but right now I shall divert you with a pretty story and an old wife's tale'). We might wonder whether the prologue speaker is supposed to have the same trembling and feminine voice that we expect the old woman to speak with (the same kind of voice, in fact, that Quintilian *Inst.* 1.11.1 recommended that the pupils should not imitate, as we have seen above), but the analogies go well beyond this point. I have suggested elsewhere that this mad and drunken old woman (6.25.1 *delira et temulenta... anicula*) is characterized as a degraded epic storyteller;<sup>24</sup> in the next part of this paper I will try to demonstrate that the same statement can be made about our prologue speaker.

<sup>23</sup> See Winkler 1985, 53; Kenney 1990, 13 and 22 f. It is not by chance, I think, that both the prologue and the introduction to *Cupid and Psyche* are alluded to in the preface to Fulgentius' *Mitologiae* (1, p. 3,13 Helm): cf. Mattiacci 2003, 232–234.

<sup>24</sup> Graverini 2003b, 214. Here I would like to add a quotation from Fowler 2002, 145 on ebriety and poetic inspiration: 'the poetry of *ars* is the poetry of sane, water-drinking, Apollonian, Aristotelian types who write their books without the need of any external stimulus: the poetry of *ingenium* belongs to mad, drunken, Dionysian Platonists who need the incursion of Socrates' "divine power"... to be able to sing their songs'. A 'Bacchic' style was in no way limited to poetry, but was also typical of some (Asianist) orators. Philostratus, *VS* 1,19,1 says of Nicetes of Smyrna (on whom see also Tac. *Dial.* 15,3) that 'his type of eloquence forsook the antique political convention and is almost bacchic and like a dithyramb (ὑπόβακχος ... καὶ διθυραμβώδης)'; cf. also Socrates' inspired and dithyrambic speech in Plato, *Phdr.* 238 D. As regards Apuleius, Norden 1898, 600f. describes his style by saying that 'bei ihm feiert der in bacchantischem Taumel dahinrasende... Stil seine Orgien'. The topos is still working in contemporary narrative; see e. g. this passage by Ray Bradbury: 'none of us had the euphoric muse which once walked with Willis Hornbeck... Willis Hornbeck drunk was almost everything the critics claimed, a wildman who blind-wrestled creativity in a snake pit, who fought an inspired alligator in a crystal tank for all to see, and sublimely won' (from *The Dragon Danced at Midnight*, in *One More for the Road*).

The rhetorical background proved to be important, but there are some good reasons to go beyond it. First of all, the fact that the prologue speaker describes his voice as a *lepidus susurris* is worth some attention. The standard voice a Roman rhetor was normally supposed to speak with was quite different, loud and clear enough to be heard and understood by a large audience.<sup>25</sup> A low whisper was in no way fit for a public speech,<sup>26</sup> or a *recitatio*; here, like at 4.27.8, we have an intimate one-to-one relationship, something like a tête-à-tête between speaker and listener. Such a relationship is also alluded to by the initial *ego tibi*: quite different from *ego vobis*, a standard addressing formula adopted by ancient rhetors.<sup>27</sup> So, we also need to consider other texts and other literary genres if we want to understand this expression correctly.

A *susurris* can convey the idea of magic, and the term is used in this sense at 1.3.1 ('as if someone should assert that by magic mutterings rivers can be reversed'). It can also imply some sort of deception and danger: for example, with sweet and charming, but deceptive whispers, Psyche and Thrasyllus try to persuade Cupid and Charite to do something they should or will regret (5.6.10; 8.10.1). An almost magical and deceptive meaning can also be highlighted in our prologue speaker's *susurris* by some intertexts I have discussed at length elsewhere,<sup>28</sup> and that I will briefly mention here.

In Virgil's first *Eclogue*, Meliboeus says that Tityrus, who is not forced to abandon his pastures, will be free to enjoy the bucolic peace of his pasture land, and the drone of the bees will induce him to sleep: 51–53 *hinc tibi, quae semper, vicino ab limite saepes / Hyblaeis apibus florem depasta salicti / saepe levi somnum suadebit inire susurro*. So, the bees' *levis susurris* has a bewitching effect, namely to induce sleep in those who listen to it; and it should be noted that (*per*)*mulcere*, the verb that in Apuleius describes the fascination induced by the prologue speaker's *lepidus susurris*, is frequently

<sup>25</sup> At *Met.* 3,29,3 the ass tries in vain to speak as a rhetor in the Forum, and his braying is *disertum ac validum*.

<sup>26</sup> A Sallustian fragment preserved by Fronto (*Ant.* 4,3 p. 143,15 f. VdH; the fragment has not yet found its way into Sallustian editions) seems to be a polemic against orators speaking with a low and/or modulated voice (see La Penna 1978). Cf. also Fronto, *Ant.* 2,16 p. 140,4 VdH 'you prefer... a whisper and a mumble to a trumpet-note' (*murmurare et frigitare potius quam clangere*; transl. Haines 1929<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. e. g. Cic. *Agr.* 2,102; *Caec.* 9; *Mur.* 90.

<sup>28</sup> Graverini forthcoming.

connected with sleep.<sup>29</sup> Tityrus' sleep has in my opinion a metapoetical meaning. Pastoral sleep, like Ennius' sleep at the beginning of the *Annales* and that of Callimachus at the beginning of the *Aitia*,<sup>30</sup> is a place and a metaphor for poetic creation. The sleep that the bees induce is not without connection to poetic activity (the *Musa silvestris* that appears in the first *Eclogue* as early as at v. 2): while Moelibeus, forced to abandon his land, will lose his source of inspiration and will stop singing (65 *carmina nulla canam*), Tityrus will be allowed to live forever in a nature reverberating with sounds (65–70: the drone of the bees,<sup>31</sup> the singing of the *frondator*, the cries of *palumbae* and *turtures*) that accompany his own music; the sacred springs and the sleep-inducing bees of vv. 52–55 are part of this *locus amoenus* that inspires music and poetry. After all, the bees are traditionally connected with the Muses: Varro (*R.* 3.16.7) defines them *Musarum volucres*, while Plato (*Ion* 534a–b) compares them to the poets, and their honey to the poets' songs.

Virgil's is not the only *locus amoenus* containing enchanting and sleep-inducing insects connected with the Muses. The same topical and highly stylised elements recur, for example, in the *Vita Aesopi*: at ch. 6 (rec. G) Aesop is enchanted (*ψυχαγωγούμενος*) by the many different sounds of a grove, among which the chirp of the cicadas, that Echo blends into a melodious whisper (*ψιθυρίσμα*). He falls into a deep sleep during which he receives the gift of speech and the ability to tie together tales (*μύθων πλοκήν*) from Isis and the Muses. It would be easy to connect *ψυχαγωγείν* with *permulcere*, *ψιθυρίσμα* with *susurrus* and *μύθων πλοκή* with *fabulas conserere*, but I do not want to go so far as to suppose a direct link between the *Vita Aesopi* and Apuleius' prologue:<sup>32</sup> as well as in Virgil, here we have to do with standard descriptive elements, and for most of them the obvious common source could be Theocritus' *Idylls* 1, 5, and 7.<sup>33</sup> However, I would suggest that the

<sup>29</sup> Cf. e. g. Verg. *Aen.* 7,754 f.; Ov. *Her.* 18,27; *Met.* 8,824; 11,625; Plin. *Nat.* 10,136; Sil. 7,293; Stat. *Theb.* 2,30 f.; V. Fl. 1,299 f.; 2,140. In Apuleius, the case of Thelyphron at 2,25,1 (on which see Graverini 1998, 134) is exemplary.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. also Prop. 3,3; Pers. *prol.* 2–3.

<sup>31</sup> The same sound at *Ecl.* 7,13.

<sup>32</sup> On the *Vita Aesopi* and Apuleius' novel in general, see esp. Finkelppearl 2003, with further references.

<sup>33</sup> Gibson 2001, 71 f. has suggested that Apuleius' *lepidus susurrus* evokes the beginning of Theocritus' first *Idyll*, ἦδὺ... ψιθυρίσμα. See Graverini forthcoming for further discussion on the subject.

'Musical' enchantment and sleep induced by bees and cicadas in Virgil and in the *Vita Aesopi* can find a closer parallel in Plato's *Phaedrus* (258e–259d),<sup>34</sup> where the enchanting power of the cicadas is described: in the noon-tide heat, with their mesmerizing voice, they can avert the philosopher's mind from his philosophical thoughts, and put him to sleep under the influence of their enchantment (*κηλουμένους ὕπ' αὐτῶν*) just like the slaves who sit nodding under a shady tree or the sheep that rest near a cool spring at noon. Plato's cicadas are a sort of hypostasis of the Muses themselves, and in the *Phaedrus* they seem to symbolize the enchantment induced by song and poetry; but this time it is clearly a bad kind of enchantment. The slaves and sheep who abandon themselves to the drone of the cicadas and fall asleep symbolize a listener that appreciates music, poetry, and rhetoric for their exterior (musical) qualities, and neglects the difference between truth and falsehood, good and evil.<sup>35</sup> Socrates and Phaedrus have to resist the cicadas, just like Odysseus had to resist the Sirens.<sup>36</sup>

So, Virgil's bees with their *levis susurrus*, and Plato's cicadas through them, help us to appreciate the meaning of the enchantment induced by the prologue speaker's *lepidus susurrus*: it can also be the enchantment connected with music and poetry and, more generally, with literary creation.<sup>37</sup> But a question is left open: should the reader of the *Metamorphoses* confidently abandon himself to this enchantment, like Tityrus, or rather resist it, like Plato and Phaedrus?

<sup>34</sup> The *locus amoenus* where the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus takes place is and was extremely famous, and has had an archetypal function towards bucolic poetry: see e. g. Hunter 1999, 145 f. on Plato's *Phaedrus* and Theocritus' *Idyll* 7; and p. 14 on 'the special place in the history of the literary presentation of landscape' occupied by Plato's dialogue. On the description of Aesop's initiation see Mignogna 1992.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. e. g. Ferrari 1987, 29. It is a nice and striking coincidence that Socrates, in order to elucidate the difference between truth and false opinions, adopts an example concerning an ass (*Phdr.* 260b); the same proverb *de umbra asini* quoted by Plato at 260c is alluded to by Apuleius at 9,42,4.

<sup>36</sup> Scarcia 1964, 19 ff. produces many ancient texts in evidence of the relationship between bees, Muses, and Sirens, and of their symbolic value related to poetry. Cf. also Waszink 1974, and A. S. Pease's commentary at Cic. *Div.* 1,78. The bees are explicitly connected to Plato's cicadas by Aelianus, *NA* 5,13; I would also mention Callimachus, *Aet.* 2,2 Μουσῶν ἔσμός, 'the swarm of the Muses'.

<sup>37</sup> This statement could also be reinforced by a possible connection of Apuleius' prologue with the prologue of Callimachus' *Aitia*, discussed also in Graverini forthcoming.

θέλγειν, ‘to fascinate’, or κηλεῖν, as Plato puts it (*Phdr.* 259A),<sup>38</sup> was the task of poetry and of the Muses; I will now try to offer a better understanding of the meaning of the verb θέλγειν, applied to rhetoric and poetry, and to demonstrate that the Latin *permulcere* is to be connected with, and translates, the Greek θέλγειν.

Even though there were some non conventional views about this issue, rhetoric had traditionally no specific Muse to protect it;<sup>39</sup> it was not a ‘Musical’ activity, and its task – especially in a traditional, ‘classical’ perspective – was to persuade, not to enchant. Hence Quintilian’s and Aristides’ disapproval of fascinating, singing rhetoric. But this theoretical separation between ‘Musical’ and fascinating poetry on one side, and ‘technical’ and convincing rhetoric on the other, was never an absolute truth in ancient culture, even much before the ‘singing rhetors’ like Favorinus.<sup>40</sup> In Homer (*Od.* 8.169 ff.), Odysseus describes eloquence as a gift of the Gods and not as a *techne*; it has to do not so much with truth and intellectual persuasion, as with emotions and auditive pleasures: the listeners are *τερπόμενοι*, and the speaker’s words are honey-sweet.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, in Odysseus theory and practice

<sup>38</sup> Both verbs are connected with magic: for example, at *Od.* 10.329 Circe says that Odysseus, who proved to be refractory to her enchantment, has an ἀκήλητος νόος. Expressions similar to γαργαλίσει τὰ ὄτα (on which see above, n. 17) are created with κηλεῖν; see e.g. the very first words of Eusebius’ *De laudibus Constantini*, surprisingly similar to Apuleius’ prologue: Ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐγὼ μύθους, οὐκ ἀκοῆς θήρατρα, λόγων εὐγλωττίαν πλασάμενος πάρεμι κηλήσων ὄτα φωνῇ Σειρήνων.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Murray 2002, 42 (‘rhetoric is always regarded as a *techne*... designed to be teachable, and *technai* do not need Muses... the art of speech, in contrast to music and poetry, is thus seen as an entirely human activity’); Plut. *Quest. conv.* 9,14 (743 E ff.). *Techne* is insufficient to create poetry: cf. Plato, *Phdr.* 245 A.

<sup>40</sup> In Hesiod, *Th.* 79–80 Calliope is the Muse both of bards and of kings, that is both of poetry and of rhetoric (cf. Walker 2000, 6). Eduard Norden was a fierce opponent of the marriage between Rhetoric and Poetry; grumbling over and over again, he nevertheless offers a useful collection of passages on this subject (Norden 1898, 883 ff.). Aristoteles (*Rh.* 1405a) and Isocrates (*Evag.* 9 ff.), it seems, were the first to differentiate rhetoric and poetry on a theoretical level; in Cicero, *Orat.* 65 ff. the distinction is too soft for Norden’s tastes, but it nevertheless exists, and sophists, historians and poets are all set against *eloquentia*. The inextricable connection between poetry and rhetoric is the main subject of Walker 2000 (who seems to ignore Norden’s work); but in my opinion he probably goes too far in silencing some rhetors’ complaints about this marriage. Poetry was perhaps more receptive with rhetoric, also on a theoretical level, than the opposite.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. also Hesiod, *Th.* 92. Kennedy 1963, 36 says that ‘speech in the epic is generally treated as an irrational power, seen in the ability to move an audience and in its effects on a speaker himself, and is thus inspiration, a gift of the gods’.

do agree. He is a fascinating orator; he lies, but his words hold the audience spellbound (θέλγει) like the songs of an epic poet (so says Eumaeus at *Od.* 17.514 and 521; cf. also 14.387); actually, in the *Odyssey* a speaker who θέλγει his audience is often associated with lies, deception, and danger (cf. e.g. *Od.* 3.264; 16.195; 18.282).<sup>42</sup> A sweet and charming voice seems to be a standard for all good epic orators. The most representative of them is Nestor, who is a (*Il.* 1.248) ἡδυεπής, λιγύς ἀγορητής, ‘sweet of speech, ... clear-voiced orator’.<sup>43</sup> In Virgil, it seems, there are no fascinating speakers provided with honey-sweet voices.<sup>44</sup> This is a telling absence: in Rome, during the Augustan age, rhetoric was supposed to be quite different from the psychagogic, poetic and ‘Musical’ art practiced by Homeric heroes. And it is also telling that in Petronius’ *Satyricon* (1.3) Encolpius, while deploring the decadence of rhetoric, says that in schools young learners are accustomed to *mellitotus verborum globulos*, ‘honey-balls of phrases’;<sup>45</sup> Agamemnon quickly adds that a good rhetoric (*ars severa*, ‘stern art’) should be *Graio exonerata*<sup>46</sup> *sono*, ‘unburdened from the music of Greece’ (5.1). Honey and Greece are for Petronius’ characters the symbols of the decadence of rhetoric. In Apuleius, the origins of the prologue speaker are clearly set in Greece; and mount Hymettos is mentioned, that was particularly famous for bees and honey.

In some cases, magic and supernatural powers can also be included in the semantic range of the verb θέλγειν, so that the match with the meaning of Latin (*per*)*mulcere* is perfect.<sup>47</sup> At *Od.* 1.57 Calypso enchants (θέλγει) Odysseus with her sweet words, so as to make him forgetful of his homeland. At 12.40 and 44 the Sirens λιγυρή θέλγουσιν ἀοιδῆ, ‘beguile... with their clear-toned song’ the passing sailors, and their songs have an even more drastic

<sup>42</sup> On the meaning of θέλγειν in Homer see Marsh 1979; Ritook 1989, 335; Goldhill 1991, 60–66.

<sup>43</sup> Transl. Murray 1928<sup>2</sup>. On the sweetness of Nestor’s oratory see also Cic. *Brut.* 40; *Sen.* 31; *Laus Pis.* 64; Quint. *Inst.* 12,10,64; Valg. *poet.* 2,4. Together with Odysseus, Nestor is a paragon of eloquence also in Tac. *Dial.* 16,5.

<sup>44</sup> There are a few orators who *mulcent* their audience; but in these cases the meaning of *mulcere* is not ‘to enchant’, but ‘to appease anger or grief’: see *Aen.* 1,153; 5,464; 7,754.

<sup>45</sup> He also has something to say about sounds and voices: ‘Your tripping, empty tones stimulate certain absurd effects into being, with the result that the substance of your speech languishes and dies’ (transl. Heseltine 1930<sup>2</sup>). On Encolpius’ tirade see VanMal-Maeder 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Petronius’ text is uncertain here. See the discussion by Pellegrino 1986, 161–162.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. e. g. Hor. *Epist.* 2,1,212; *Sen. Her. f.* 575; *Ov. Met.* 1,716.

outcome than the words of Calypso. The Sirens present themselves as epic singers at 12.189–90, ‘we know all the toils that in wide Troy the Argives and Trojans endured through the will of the Gods’.<sup>48</sup> It would seem that Calypso and the Sirens, whose voices are honey-sweet (μελίγηρυς: 12.187), are the best practitioners of the epic art of speech. For example, there is not so much difference between the Sirens and Nestor: his speech is an αἰοιδή (‘word’, but also ‘song’)<sup>49</sup> and his voice is λιγύς ‘clear-toned’. Nestor himself, like the Sirens, is a kind of substitute for an epic singer: in *Od.* 3.103 ff. he recapitulates the events of the Trojan war and of some *nostoi*. In Hesiod, *Th.* 98–103 the αἰοιδός is able to enchant his listeners and to make them forgetful of their sorrows (ἐπλήθεται, just like Calypso). In the epic tradition, both speech and song are the gifts of the Muses, they are honey-sweet and enchant the listeners; in this sense there is not that much difference between them.<sup>50</sup>

At this point, it is really time to come back to Apuleius. I strongly suggest that it is mainly a kind of epic and poetic diction that Apuleius is alluding to when he uses *permulcere aures* to describe his narrative.<sup>51</sup> Ovid offers a very good testimony to confirm the strong connection between the Greek θέλγειν, the verb that best seems to describe the primaeval epic art of speech, and the Latin *permulcere*, that describes Apuleius’ art of narration. As we have seen, in Homer *Od.* 12.44 the Sirens λιγυρή θέλγουσιν αἰοιδῆ, ‘be-guile... with their clear-toned song’;<sup>52</sup> the expression is taken up again by Apollonius 4.893–4, where the Sirens ἠδέτησι / θέλγουσαι μολπησιν, ‘be-guile with their sweet’<sup>53</sup> songs’. The act of θέλγειν was so strictly connected

<sup>48</sup> According to Segal 1983,39 ‘to remain and listen to their song would be to yield to the seduction of a heroic tradition rendered in its most elegant, attractive, and deadly form’.

<sup>49</sup> By the way, in Hesiod the term recurs to identify the voices of the Muses and of the cicadas: *Th.* 39 and *Sc.* 396.

<sup>50</sup> Walker 2000, 4: ‘Hesiod considers both the *aoidos* and the good *basileus* to be engaged in essentially the same activity. Both acquire their gift of eloquence from the Muses, and both are gifted with the power of persuasion, here figured as the ability to deflect or “turn aside” the listener’s mind from its current state or path’.

<sup>51</sup> On the debt of Apuleius’ style towards epic and poetry see Norden 1898, 603.

<sup>52</sup> Transl. Murray 1924<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> I have so far accepted Murray’s translations, according to which the voices of (e. g.) Nestor and the Sirens are ‘clear-toned’. But, as we can see, in Apollonius’ description of the Sirens ἠδύς corresponds to Homer’s λιγύς; and Nestor’s voice, in the Latin authors quoted above at n. 43, is always sweet (*suavis* or *dulcis*; ἠδύς also in Philostratus, *Heroikos* 26,1–2). In my opinion, when referred to epic speakers, the Muses, the Sirens, the cicadas or the like, λιγύς has mainly the meaning of ‘sweet’ and/or ‘tuneful’ (cf. also

with the Sirens that one of them was called Θελξίεπεια, ‘Enchanting words’.<sup>54</sup> Ovid, who certainly did not ignore his poetic precedents, described the voice of the Sirens (*Met.* 5.561) as a *canor mulcendas natus ad aures*, ‘tuneful voice, so soothing to the ear’. (*Per*)*mulcere aures* translates θέλγειν, and conveys the same ideas of enchantment and possible deception;<sup>55</sup> the connection of the verb with the Sirens is confirmed by Petronius’ *Satyricon*, where Circe’s voice *mulcet aera* like the Sirens’ songs (127.5). It would seem that we have come to the same idea of morally reproachable pleasures that Quintilian connected with *aures permulcere*. This expression, in Apuleius’ prologue, defines the novel’s genre and style as something participating of both prose and poetry, and hovering dangerously between persuasion and enchantment, teaching and deception, truth and lie.

So, we can say that the humming of the bees, the chirp of the cicadas, and the Greek and Latin expressions meaning ‘to titillate or soothe the ears’, alluding to auditive seduction, are all part of the same picture, representing the fascination of music and poetry: a fascination that many ancient rhetors claimed as being at odds with rhetorical art, and that Plato considered as not less dangerous than the songs of the Sirens. This picture is evoked by the terminology adopted by Apuleius in his prologue. Now, I am going to suggest that, in this scenario, the Sirens could stay in the foreground, and that Apuleius could be more specifically alluding to the Homeric (and Ovidian) description of the Sirens. Admittedly, I can only offer some weak hints to prove my statement, but the story that they suggest is worth telling; after all, intertextuality is often just like surrendering to the Sirens’ songs, and then leaving more learned, as they promise – or lying dead under the sea.

The rhetor Themistius is useful in demonstrating that a seductive and melodious style was easily comparable to the songs of the Sirens. He contrasts his style to that of the sophists, and says (*Or.* 28.341C) that their style

Stephanus s. v.: ‘Stridulus, Argutus, s. Argutum stridens: interdum et Canorus, Iucundus... Suaviter loquens’; in Longus 4,15,2 Daphnis’ goats lay down when the sound of the shepherd’s pipes is λιγυρόν, they stand and run when it is οξύ).

<sup>54</sup> On the names of the Sirens see De Sanctis 2003; Scarcia 1964, 41 n. 30.

<sup>55</sup> See also the verbal coincidence in Philostratus and Gellius, when they describe Favorinus’ charming rhetorical style. The former, as we have seen, said that Favorinus ἔθελγε τῆ τε ἡχῆ τοῦ φθέγγματος (*VS* 491); the latter, that he *sermonibus... amoenissimis demulcebat* (16,3,1). On Gellius and Favorinus see Gleason 1995, 138 ff.

is seducing (οἱ λόγοι αἴμυλοι εἰσί), and they utter every word with a sensual melody, like the Sirens (πάσας ἱεντες φωνάς καὶ ἄσματα ὄσπερ Σειρήνες). Themistius was much later than Apuleius, but this topos can be traced back many centuries. Demosthenes, for example, said the same thing about Aeschines, suggesting that he was like a Siren and that his speeches and his very nature 'have proved the ruin of those who have listened to him' (Aeschines, *in Ctes.* 228). Dionysius of Halicarnassus tell that Aeschines in turn adopted the same image referring to Demosthenes;<sup>56</sup> and Plutarch and Philostratus relate that the image of a Siren stood on the grave of Isocrates.<sup>57</sup> It is also to be noted that in Plato's *Phaedrus* 259A the cicadas, that threaten the philosophers with their sleep-inducing song, are explicitly compared to the Sirens. As it seems, also the Sirens, as well as the image of 'titillating the ears', were among the stock images adopted by literary and rhetorical po-lemic.<sup>58</sup>

As regards Apuleius and Homer, I would point out in our prologue the particular association between the enchanting voice (*lepido susurro permulceam*), the promise of a marvellous narration (*figuras fortunasque hominum in alias imagines conversas... ut mireris*), the promise of joy, and the invitation, or better, the order to listen (*lector intende* [obviously, *i. aures*]: *laetaberis*). In Homer the Sirens, as we have seen, really have an enchanting voice, that θέλγει (that is, *permulcet*) the passing sailors (*Od.* 12.40 and 44); they invite, or better they order Odysseus to stop and listen (νήα κατάστησον, ἵνα νοῦτέρην ὄπ' ἀκούσης, 12.185), and promise that he will be made joyful (τερψάμενος); like the prologue speaker in Apuleius, they also offer a short sketch of what their song will be like: ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ', ὅσ'

<sup>56</sup> *Dem.* 35. In Dionysius' words the comparison was laudatory; but if we consider the precedent quoted in the text, the hostility between the two rhetors, and the fact that Dionysius is a passionate upholder of Demosthenes, I think that we are allowed to doubt about his interpretation.

<sup>57</sup> *Plut. Vitae X orat.* 838 c; *Philostr. VS* 1,17,1. According to De Romilly 1975, 83 Philostratus is adapting to Isocrates the connection between magic and rhetoric that was typical of the Second Sophistic. Cf. also Eunapius, *VS* 6,5,1–2 on the rhetor Eustathius: he was κάλλιστος, the fascinating power of his speech seemed to be almost magical, his voice was so honey-sweet that the listener completely surrendered, like the Lotus-eaters, and hung on his lips, and he was not that different from the Sirens. In Philostratus, *Heroikos* 43,1 the Phoenician listens to the vine-dresser's speech with such rapt attention that he is dependent on his tales like the Lotus-eaters on their drugs.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. also Eusebius' passage quoted above, n. 38. The same imagery is adopted by Heliodorus when he describes Charicleias' and Calasiris' rhetorical skills (1,23,2 and 5,1,4; cf. Pernot 1992, 45 and n. 25).

ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ Ἀργεῖοι Τρωῆς τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν (12, 189–90). In Homer the insistence on the listeners' ears is, of course, twofold: on one side the Sirens invite Odysseus to listen, on the other he is warned by Circe that listening to them could be very dangerous, so he decides to stop his comrades' ears with wax.

Of course, I do not expect everybody to be convinced by this parallel. I find it particularly seductive (!), coherent with what I have been suggesting about the stylistic and rhetorical connotation of *aves permulcere* and with the epic and Odyssean colour our novel so often shows.<sup>59</sup> But this parallel could also be useful to introduce a better understanding of a famous and much discussed passage of the novel. At 9.13.4 f. Lucius the ass compares himself to Odysseus,<sup>60</sup> explicitly recalling the beginning of the *Odyssey*; but he also adds a few, sibylline words. He is grateful, he says, to his ass, since his metamorphosis allowed him to live many adventures, and made him *etsi minus prudentem, multiscium*, 'more knowledgeable, if less astute'. Odysseus is defined *summae prudentiae virum*, and these words are usually connected to the very first verse of the *Odyssey*, Ἄνδρα ... πολύτροπον.<sup>61</sup> But Lucius the ass makes clear that he is *almost* like Odysseus: the difference is that he is not *prudens* / πολύτροπος, but *multiscium*. What does this mean? The Groningen commentators<sup>62</sup> state, I think correctly, that 'Lucius... simply admits that he does not quite dare aspire to Odysseus' virtue of *prudentia* which would make him *sapiens* in the philosophical sense of the word'. In short: if Lucius were really *prudens*, like Odysseus, he would not have been metamorphosed into an ass.

It was traditionally acknowledged that Odysseus was able to avoid the dangers represented by Circe (metamorphosis into an animal) and the Sirens (death) thanks to his *prudentia* or *sapientia*; in our case, the best testimony is

<sup>59</sup> Going even further with such abstract speculations, I would also point out that a veiled allusion to the Sirens is well suited to a prologue, a place so often occupied by the Muses. Sirens and Muses traditionally have much in common, and Doherty 1995, 85 even defined the daughters of Achelous and Calliope as 'unauthorized Muses'. On the (sometimes competitive) relationship between Muses and Sirens see also Scarcia 1964, 17 and *passim*; Pucci 1979, 126–129; Murray 2002, 33–37. It is noteworthy that Ovid, *Met.* 5,555 applies to the Sirens the epithet *doctae*, that was standard for the Muses.

<sup>60</sup> On this passage see Winkler 1985, 165–168 and 289 n. 24; Harrison 1990, 193 f. The first verses of the *Odyssey* are adopted to describe a character's ethos also in Heliodorus 2,22,3.

<sup>61</sup> On the epithet πολύτροπος, probably echoed in Verg. *Aen.* 1,8–11, see Cavarzere 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Hijmans *et al.* 1995 *ad loc.*

Apuleius himself, who in his *de deo Socratis* (24) states that Odysseus ‘thanks to his *sapientia*... drank Circe’s potion and was not transformed... listened to the Siren’s songs and did not get close to them’.<sup>63</sup> Other authors went so far as to imagine what would have happened if Odysseus had been *stultus* and not *sapiens*. Horace writes to Lollius Maximus: ‘You know the Sirens’ songs and Circe’s cups; if, along with his comrades, he had drunk of these in folly and greed (*stultus cupidusque*), he would have become the shapeless and witless vassal of a harlot mistress – would have lived as an unclean dog or a sow that loves the mire’.<sup>64</sup> Like this hypothetical Odysseus, Lucius was *curiosus* and not *prudens*, and ended up under the skin of an ass.<sup>65</sup> But, he says, at least he became *multiscius*. I think that we should connect this strange statement<sup>66</sup> to the promise the Sirens make to Odysseus, that they will render him *πλείονα εἰδώς*, ‘more knowledgeable’, *multiscius*.<sup>67</sup> Lucius is *curiosus* and aspires to knowledge like Odysseus, but while the wise (*prudens*, *πολύτροπος*) Odysseus could resist the songs of the Sirens (and while Plato and Phaedrus could resist the drone of the cicadas without falling asleep), Lucius totally surrenders to his lust for listening and for seeing incredible things,<sup>68</sup> and makes an ass of himself. Thus, Lucius appears to

<sup>63</sup> On Odysseus’ *prudentia* see also e. g. Cic. *Tusc.* 1,98 and Serv. *Aen.* 3,636.

<sup>64</sup> *Ep.* 1,2,23 ff.; transl. Fairclough 1929<sup>2</sup>. A somewhat desecrating view on Odysseus is in Philostratus, *Heroikos* 13–15.

<sup>65</sup> Of course, he was also *stultus* (cf. 10,13,7 *neque tam stultus eram tamque vere asinus*...) and *cupidus* (cf. e.g. 2,1,1 *nimis cupidus cognoscendi*), like Odysseus’ comrades. Horace’s opinion on Odysseus is somewhat different in *Ep.* 1,6,63 *Ithacensis Ulixi / cui potior patria fuit interdicta voluptas*. As regards the literary tradition about Odysseus’ wisdom, thirst for knowledge, and curiosity, see Stanford 1954, 124 and 156 ff. I only quote Dante, *Inferno* 26,94 ff. ‘né dolcezza di figlio, né la pieta / del vecchio padre, né ‘l debito amore / lo qual dovea Penelopé far lieta, / vincer potero dentro a me l’ardore / ch’i’ ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto, / e de li vizi umani e del valore’.

<sup>66</sup> The adjective *multiscius* is attested 5 times in Apuleius, and never before him. It seems to be a translation from the Greek, one of those new coinages Apuleius was proud of: see *Apol.* 38,3 and Stramaglia 1996, 138. Useful remarks in Hijmans et al. 1995 *ad loc.*

<sup>67</sup> Cicero, at *Fin.* 5,49, translates *πλείονα εἰδώς* more plainly with *doctior*.

<sup>68</sup> Lucius even arrives to walking on his ears: *Met.* 1,20,6 ‘I have ridden all the way to this city gate here not on his back, but on my own ears’ (cf. also 1,2,6; for the topos of a good story relieving the tiredness of a journey see also Plato, *Phdr.* 227D; Verg. *Ecl.* 9,64; Heliodorus 6,2,2). At 3,19,6 he confesses that, out of his curiosity about magic, he does not think any more of returning home: ‘I do not miss my home any more and I am not preparing to return there (*nec domuitionem paro*)’. Clearly, Lucius is implicitly comparing himself to Odysseus, and Photis to Calypso, Circe, and the Sirens. The word *domuitio* itself (rare and poetical, though not infrequent in Apuleius) seems to be connected, in the

be a fictional and curious version of the epic and wise Odysseus; and the novel, a similarly degraded version of an epic poem.

If the prologue speaker speaks with a dangerously sweet, Siren-like voice, should we, the readers, listen to him, or hadn’t we better seal up our ears with wax?<sup>69</sup> Already Homer seems to be playing with this idea: as we have seen, the dangerous song of the Sirens is about the Trojan war – like the *Iliad*! So the *Iliad*, or at least a version of it, is a dangerous song; and the Sirens are the first example of degraded epic storytellers, a character that recurs so often in our novel. Listening to a story is certainly fascinating, but it can also have dangerous effects: for example, Dido’s love madness is also stimulated by Aeneas’ account of his own sufferings (*Aen.* 4.14 *quae bella exhausta canebat!*). Lucius is *curiosus* by nature, but his curiosity about magic is particularly stirred up by the fact that he has been listening to the story told by Aristomenes, his fellow-traveller on the road to Hypata: *Met.* 2.1.2 ‘considering... that the story told by my excellent comrade Aristomenes had originated at the site of this very city, I was on tenterhooks of desire and impatience alike, and I began to examine each and every object with curiosity’.

A reader of the *Metamorphoses* is much in the same position as Lucius, and takes the same chances. Reading Apuleius could be dangerous for one’s reputation. On the one hand, he has always fascinated those readers who are able to find a moral and philosophical lesson in his novel; but we know that others, like Macrobius (*Somn.* 1.2.8), were sincerely astonished that a serious *philosophus Platonicus* could waste his (and our) time with an erotic novel, only written to soothe the ears of the reader; and we know what Septimius Severus said (*HA* 12.12) about the *neniae aniles* of Apuleius.<sup>70</sup>

literary tradition, with the return of Greek heroes from Troy: cf. Pac. *trag.* 173; Acc. apud Non. p. 357M.; *Rhet. Her.* 3,21,34; Hyg. *Fab.* 125,2; maybe also Non. p. 96M.

<sup>69</sup> This is exactly the response to incredible and deceitful stories that Protesilaus recommends in Philostratus, *Heroikos* 34,4.

<sup>70</sup> By the way, both Macrobius (*Somn.* 1,2,8: *auditum mulcent vel comoediae... vel argumenta fictis casibus amatorum referta*) and Septimius Severus (*HA* 12,12 *neniis quibusdam anilibus occupatus*) adopt an ‘acoustic’ terminology in their literary criticism. Both of them, also, consider story-telling a thing for old wives and nurses (cf. the references to *neniae aniles* in the *Historia Augusta*, and to *nutricum cunae* in Macrobius; and of course Apul. *Met.* 4,27,8): a topos that we can trace back to Plato (*Leg.* 10, 887c–e; *Resp.* 2,377a; *Tim.* 26b–c; cf. also Philostr. *Heroikos* 7,10; *Eikones* 1,15).

Of course, this is not the place to discuss whether Apuleius' novel is a work of mere entertainment, or if it also contains a moral/philosophical/religious lesson. What is certain is that we should be wise like Odysseus, and pay attention in responding to the prologue speaker's invitation to *intendere aures*. Lucius, *sitor novitatis* (1.2.6), has done this too literally and without care, and has ended up like king Midas in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 11.179: a curious and incompetent listener, who prefers the barbarian, seductive song by Pan, playing the flute, to the solemn, classical song by Apollo, who plays the lyre, Midas *induitur... aures lente gradientis aselli*, 'wore the ears of a slow-moving ass'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Transl. Miller 1916. Midas' ears were proverbial already in Aristophanes, *Pl.* 287; the image was adopted to indicate an incompetent listener by Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 28,144 and Dio Chrysostomus, *Or.* 32.101 (cf. also Hor. *Ep.* 2,1,199–200, comparing an incompetent audience to a deaf ass).

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