

*PRESSULE: The Egyptian Ass; Or the Incest Motif
in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass**

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PRESSULE

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Vobis, My Mom and Britney Spears:

“...[A]ll I’m praying is that
Someday I will understand in [*sic*] God’s whole plan
And what he’s done to me.
Oh, but maybe someday I will breathe
And finally see,
I’ll see it all in my *baby*.”

—A once pregnant Britney Spears – “Someday (I Will Understand)”



“Oh, *baby, baby*, have you seen Amy tonight?...”

All of the boys and all of the girls are begging to if you seek Amy.”

—Britney Spears – “If You Seek Amy”

Preliminary Remarks (PR)

PR.1 From Text to Work: The Material *Golden Ass*

PR.1a. Introduction

“Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins *effectively* (as opposed to the mere expression of a pious wish) when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down—perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion—in the interests of a new object a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that were to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation.”

—Roland Barthes – “From Work to Text”¹

Quid illud? Most introductions to a particular interpretation of *The Golden Ass* (also known as *The Metamorphoses*) begin with a plot synopsis, as though what the text says in summary is what it *is*. Mine will consider *The Golden Ass* as an object, closer to an object of art-historical analysis than literary analysis. While the discipline of art history has only recently moved toward considering the interaction between image and text (image-text),² literary theory with Roland Barthes once at the helm has unfortunately dematerialized *work*—the text with its bulky, confining materiality—into *text*—a neo-Platonic abstraction, a conglomeration of immaterial words, unbounded by the confines of the book—to such an extent that the study of literature has devolved into simply studying the contours of the text without considering the inherent material process of

¹ “From Work to Text,” *Image—Music—Text* trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 155.

² W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

applying text to paper—or, in Apuleius’ case, to Egyptian papyrus (*papyrus* 1.1). For us, descendants of the formalist and structuralist schools (not to mention, of the printing press), the material nature of the words have lost their charm.³ Yet *The Golden Ass*’ prologue states right from the beginning that our process in decoding *The Golden Ass* necessitates the use of our visual faculties: *inspicere*—“to look.” When reading the work, we not only inspect the three-dimensional container of the words, in our *ideal* case the papyrus scroll, but also the materiality of the Latin words, even if they are not pictographic in nature—as with hieroglyphs, whose Apuleian representation are discussed below (PR.1c). Therefore, the words of the text are truly material and must be treated as such. Like sculpture, the *Asinus Aureus* is *in toto* a striking example of second-century C.E. *aegyptiaca*, a three-dimensional form, whose paint is the ink of Apuleius’ words.

PR.1b. *The Golden Ass* as (Art-)Historical Object

The original material papyrus, even if only idealized as physically present by the text’s prologue, stretched—to use an historical tense (PR.3b)—from beginning to end; it provided the medium upon which words might be inscribed. In the second century the materiality of *The Golden Ass*, although unable to be reconstructed for a wide-audience today in both medium (papyrus) and patterning of words (script, columns, spacing, etc.), would have been obvious to a contemporaneous reader, an ability which has disappeared with today’s mechanical reproduction of texts (not works) into countless languages. We sometimes forget that the printing press is an early modern phenomenon,⁴ and in Britain,

³ “From Work to Text,” 155-64.

⁴ See William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 12, 14-5 for a discussion on how the lack of a printing press during the Greco-Roman period prevented widespread literacy.

for example, prior to 1770 “the ‘extensive’ reading so typical of the novel—reading many texts once and superficially, rather than a few texts often and intensely—would easily outgrow the yearly output of titles, forcing readers to turn to the past for (much of) their entertainment.”⁵ Because of mechanical reproduction the materiality of the book is no longer special, *and so we have read that belief into our ancient texts*. We must no longer presuppose modern reading practices. Otherwise, we stand to lose the material referentiality of *The Golden Ass*, while the words hover above and outside but never within the container, the papyrus scroll.

Gains for this approach have been made, but contradictory elements have crept into scholarly work. For example, John J. Winkler’s decision in his magisterial *Auctor and Actor* to examine the differences in interpretation between a first-time read-through of *The Golden Ass* and a rereading conform well to Franco Moretti’s assumption that ancient readers—without much *material* to pore over—had to turn back to dog-eared papyri *identidem*. Winkler’s pioneering research showed that *The Golden Ass* functions as hermeneutic entertainment, able to press the interpreter into repeat visits—nonetheless, always foiling him.⁶

However, Winkler was a disciple of Barthes, whose transgressions against materiality have been noted above. Therefore, the context of Winkler’s own work must also be taken into account in order to understand the setbacks he faced against a materialist approach to understanding *The Golden Ass*: he was writing during

⁵ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (New York: Verso, 2005), 7.

⁶ Since Winkler wrote his *Auctor and Actor* in the 1980s he clearly also drew from Umberto Eco’s 1979 work on the Ideal Reader, a reader always duped by the pitfalls of the pesky text. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979).

narratology's rise to fame—1985. Roland Barthes had, roughly twenty years earlier, detailed the importance of rereading in his *S/Z*. We can, therefore, thank Roland Barthes for this refocusing but not for everything else he, *theoeides*, hath wrought.

Barthes' theoretical approach, like Winkler's, may also be explained as a testament to his time. Because Roland Barthes—whether as a structuralist or a post-structuralist—relied upon Ferdinand de Saussure's system of signs, his analyses were bound to mention only the immaterial nature of language. Barthes' failure to assign materiality to the text follows from Saussure's own failure to take into account the referent, which exists in the material world, even if the referent is only created through the materiality of discourse.⁷ Because Saussure's system excludes the referent, the materiality behind the sign, from entering into discussion of the relationship between the immaterial signifier and the signified, Saussure's system is self-referential and has allowed the term—"social construction"—to enter into modern parlance.⁸ To discuss "social construction" of, say, race involves tracing how certain signifiers (blackness) become attached to certain signifieds (socio-economic background, supposed violent behavior), even though the connections are arbitrary. While blackness—an abstract concept—can

⁷ The materiality of discourse includes the disciplines and institutions, which establish the same reproduction of discourse *ad infinitum*, unless there is a reproduction of an error in the system. The potentiality for error is what over time enables a breakdown of the system, the road toward revolution. To speak less about politics and more about the materiality of discourse's role for literature, a good example is the unicorn. Discourses, whether oral or written, create the referentiality of the unicorn, even though it is a mystical beast. There is always materiality behind the creation of an immaterial being. See Rosemary Hennessy, "The Materiality of Discourse: Feminism and Post-Marxism," *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 37-66. For a counterargument against her claims, see Dana L. Cloud, "The Materiality of Discourse as Oxymoron: A Challenge to Critical Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Communication* 58 (Summer 1994): 141-63.

⁸ For a fuller discussion, see Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 5-6.

be discussed, the referent, the material humans (black people) are bracketed out from the purely structuralist approach of uncovering the relations between signifiers and signifieds. Barthes' treatment of the material work is no different: "the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field...[T]he work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse."⁹ While the text—an abstract concept—is discussed, the material referent, the work, cannot be, so long as Barthes' Saussurian framework is in place. While a return to the recognition of *The Golden Ass's* material referentiality is in order, we must not fail to underestimate the implications of this critical move.

With the acceptance of the work's material referentiality comes the task of understanding other aspects of its material presence, its nature as an *aegyptiacum*. Perhaps attuned to the popularity (and therefore marketability) of Egyptian objects, Apuleius fashioned *The Golden Ass* as something more than a novel: like the frescoes in Pompeii, it is able to conjure the atmosphere of Egypt, both as a potential Egyptianizing religious text because of its incorporation of Isis and her cult and as a social marker to be shown to guests.

However, two assumptions have deterred any Apuleian scholar from making this connection: 1) the inability to reconstruct the text's original format (spacing, columns, etc.) and 2) the pernicious assumption that only authentically Egyptian objects can be considered *aegyptiaca* (*The Golden Ass* was written by a North African, not an Egyptian), a classification hitherto applied exclusively to art-historical objects. While the former problem has obviously been ignored because of the impossibility in 'getting it right,' the

⁹ "From Work to Text," 156-7.

latter problem follows from our assumptions about the mechanical reproduction of texts. Following Walter Benjamin, many cultural theorists have decried our postmodern age as lacking aura, a thing's "uniqueness" and therefore authenticity, because of mechanical reproduction's dominance over almost anything and everything material.¹⁰

The Romans do not appear, though, to have had this problem. Recent scholarship on Roman interactions with Egyptian objects have shown that it is a misconception to assume that Egyptianizing objects, those not made in Egypt, were considered inferior to Egyptian objects, those actually imported from Egypt.¹¹ Because art historians have treated Egyptianizing objects as inferior to Egyptian objects, literary scholars have had no reason to consider *The Golden Ass*, whose author's origins are North African, as an Egyptian object, one of many *aegyptiaca*. Yet its materiality is ever present.

PR.1c. The Materiality of Writing

PR.1c.i. ←Plutarch and the Ending of the Golden Ass→

Both Plutarch in his discussion of Egyptian sacred writings and Apuleius in his presentation of hieroglyphs in the last book of *The Golden Ass*, the Isis Book, consider the materiality of writing. First, Plutarch claims that the name of the Egyptian goddess, Isis, is actually a Greek word (Plutarch not so incidentally wrote in Greek),¹² which attaches her divinity to a language other than hieroglyphs, just as Apuleius fashions his

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* trans. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 223.

¹¹ Molly Swetnam-Burland, "Egyptian Objects, Roman Contexts: A Taste for Aegyptiaca in Italy," *Nile into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World: Proceedings of the IIIrd International Conference of Isis studies, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, May 11-14 2005* eds. Laurent Bricault, Miguel John Versluys, and Paul G.P. Meyboom (Boston: Brill, 2007), 113-36.

¹² Plutarch, *Moralia* 351 F.

own representation of Isis in Latin, thereby creating a Latin version of her. Plutarch then goes on to claim that the true devotees of Isis

are they who within their own soul, as though within a casket, bear the sacred writings about the gods clear of all superstition and pedantry; and they cloak them with secrecy, thus giving intimations, some dark and shadowy, some clear and bright, of their concepts about the gods, intimations of the same sort as are clearly evidenced in the wearing of the sacred garb. For this reason, too, the fact that the deceased votaries of Isis are decked with these garments is a sign that these sacred writings accompany them, and that they pass to the other world possessed of these and of naught else.¹³

Plutarch's statements are based upon his assumption that the sacred writings signify the material splendor, cloaks and jewelry included, of the Isiac cult.

Similarly, the end of Apuleius' work presents a procession to the Egyptian goddess. The hieroglyphs function as a material manifestation of the Egyptian mysteries:

Yet another priest bore in exultant arms the venerable image of the supreme deity... [I]t expressed in a manner beyond description the higher religious faith which has to be cloaked in boundless silence. Fashioned from gleaming gold, this was a small vase skillfully hollowed out on a perfectly rounded base, with remarkable Egyptian figures fashioned on its outer surface.¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid.* 353B-C.

¹⁴ *Gerebat alius felici suo gremio summi numinis venerandam effigiem... sed sollerti repertu etiam ipsa novitate reverendam, altioris utcumque et magno silentio tegendae religionis argumentum ineffabile, sed ad*

Again, the material writing expresses beliefs, which are ineffable, which in a Platonic fashion point to something transcendent: the supreme deity. The writing is sacred but also always Egyptian, always hinting at the material splendor of the cult. As one scholar has noted, “[t]he consciousness of Egypt as the privileged and mysterious site of writing and its cultures is signaled in the final book [of *The Golden Ass*], in which Lucius is inducted into the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis by the reading of indecipherable symbols on a sacred book.”¹⁵ Egypt is central to *The Golden Ass*’ self-reflexive focus on its own materiality.

PR.1c.ii. ←The Beginning of the Golden Ass→

The Egyptian ending is almost a repeat of the prologue (1.1). Apuleius again considers the materiality of writing in his prologue and attaches an Egyptian quality to it: “[t]he speaker promises that in his Milesian tale, described as an oral performance...but immediately followed by a reminded, *papyrus...inscriptam* (‘written on papyrus’), that it is actually *in writing* that he will stroke the receptive ears of his readers.”¹⁶ Apuleius acknowledges the power of material writing to transport the reader, but he goes further by attaching this writing to a physical medium: Egyptian papyrus (*papyrus Aegyptiam*). In the same way that multiple strands of papyrus are woven together to form just one sheet and seemingly countless sheets may join together to form a scroll, Apuleius represents his text as woven together (*conseram*), a text that is marked up with Egyptianness to the extreme (*argutia Nilotici calami*).

istum plane modum fulgente auro figuratum; urnula faberrime cavata, fundo quam rutundo, miris extrinsecus simulacris Aegyptiorum effigiata...11.1.

¹⁵ Yun Lee Too, “Losing the Author’s Voice: Cultural and Personal Identities in the *Metamorphoses* Prologue,” in *Companion...*, 178.

¹⁶ Warren S. Smith, “Apuleius and Luke: Prologue and Epilogue in Conversion Contexts,” in *Companion...*, 88.

To be Egyptian is to be written within—both for devotees, who wear the sacred writings inside themselves, and for Apuleius’ work, whose referentiality is tied to its materiality. Apuleius makes a self-reflexive move in making his own text something like the aforementioned Egyptian scriptures. The difference is that Apuleius’ text, *The Golden Ass*, contains a particular narrative about Lucius’ spiritual refocusing toward Isis. Just as Lucius reads the indecipherable signs in order to gain knowledge, Apuleius suggests that his own text has the same power.

PR.1c.iii. The Roll of the Scroll: Beginning→Ending→Beginning→...

Far from being a simple text, the text of *The Gold* imagines itself in the Prologue as a physical work (PR.1 “From Text to Work”). The text—which has been inscribed upon codices and recopied upon today’s mass-produced paper—reproduces its mythological origins, its *work*, as a vibrantly painted-upon, multi-fibered papyrus within its evocation in *The Golden Ass*’ prologue. Recent research into the text’s prologue has examined the Egyptian connection between the prologue and the Isis Book, i.e. some of the Egyptian-ness of the text. One scholar has importantly proven that the prologue is really the epilogue, that the text doubles in upon itself, as though the Egyptian-influenced beginning and Isis-dominated ending are sown together (*conseram* 1.1).¹⁷ The Egyptian nature of the text, which is another Apuleian addition to the Greek version, binds the beginning and the ending together. The scroll of *The Golden Ass*’s text can literally curl up around itself, a reminder that the original work was able to do this, as well. The text of *The Golden Ass*’s ability to shift into its material aspects as work indicates the power of the text.

¹⁷ Andrew Laird, “Paradox and Transcendence: The Prologue as the End,” *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius’ Metamorphoses* eds. Ahuvia Kahane and Andrew Laird (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 267-81.

PR.2 The Power of the Text: Indeterminacy of Identities

Apuleius' text has more power than the ability to reconstruct itself as work, but its additional power is wound up with its vision of itself as a work. John J. Winkler was onto something when he claimed that the text functions as hermeneutic entertainment, that it compels the reader to make sense of the contradictions she faces.¹⁸ Contradiction exists between the two voice of the text: text *qua* work and the text *qua* text. Because the text recreates its historic origins as papyrus, the text *qua* work subjugates the text *qua* text to its will. Judith K. Krabbe has shown that immaterial motifs are never included in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* for mere decoration, as sometimes in Ovid's own *Metamorphoses*.¹⁹ Rather, "structur[ing] *The Golden Ass* "on the basis of recurring themes and motifs,"²⁰ they line the text and give it some formal stability.

Contradiction is not so far from paradox, a favorite of any intellectual. As a sophist, Apuleius followed his colleagues in carefully constructing his own identity.²¹ During the Second Sophistic the techniques of the sophists, including 'figuring,' allowed them to show off their wit (*argutia* 1.1). According to Tim Whitmarsh's reading of Polemo's speeches, "[f]iguring'...allows Polemo to say one thing and mean another," i.e. to spin double entendres.²² Whitmarsh, citing Dio of Prusa's *Kingship Orations* before the emperor Trajan, notes that "contrary to the theoretical precepts of Menander Rhetor, 'figured' speech was widely associated with addresses even to emperors who were

¹⁸ Winkler, 11-14.

¹⁹ Krabbe (2003), 547.

²⁰ Warren S. Smith, "Summary," *Lucius of Corinth and Apuleius of Madaura: A Study of the Narrative* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1972), unnumbered introductory page.

²¹ S.J Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²² Tim Whitmarsh. *The Second Sophistic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 58.

broadly friendly.”²³ ‘Figuring’ was a way to show off one’s ability to produce double-coded meanings, whether Polemo’s for the sake of entertainment or Dio’s for the expression of political unrest. Apuleius the sophist, true to his identity, fashions a text with so many contradictory meanings that a reader can never take a firm stance on anything about the text, especially when it comes to the confused identities found in *The Golden Ass*.

Unlike the reader of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, a reader sometimes has the choice between one out of two potential identities for its primary actant—as for Paul in his epistles: Paul as both anti-Semitic and not or Paul as the impersonator. John G. Gager has shown that Paul uses *prosopopoiia*, impersonation, during the sections of *Romans*, in which he supposedly condemns the Jews.²⁴ Rather than Paul, who makes these statements, a second impersonated personality, “the pretentious teacher,” makes them in order to challenge Paul’s claims; for Paul, the best offense is a good defense.²⁵ Other interpreters believe Paul to be making heartfelt, anti-Semitic statements, yet they are forced to forget his kind words for the Jews. Here, the choice is between two options: one that erases contradictions—Paul as rhetorician—or one that maintains them—Paul as both despiser and lauder of the Jews. Clearly, the former is the better option.

But what happens when there is no clear-cut choice, when there are too many possibilities? The identity of Apuleius and the identity of the prologue speaker are wrapped in so many contradictions that no loose fiber appears for one to find her way into the knot of the text, into the identity of each. According to Winkler, Apuleius plays with our sense of the connection between the narrator, Lucius, and the author, Apuleius

²³ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁴ John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71-3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

himself.²⁶ For example, Lucius, whose origins are elsewhere identified as Corinth,²⁷ becomes by the end of the tale *Lucius Maudarensis*, Lucius of Maudara.²⁸ Maudara was Apuleius' homeland. S.J. Harrison has found other commonalities between the two:

Lucius and Apuleius seem to have a good deal in common: both belong to a provincial elite, both have connections with Platonic philosophy, both have a first-class education including study at Athens and visits to Rome, both have Greek intellectual credentials as well as seeking a literary or rhetorical career in Latin, both are subject to jealous rivalries in that career, both have been initiated into several Greek mystery-cults, both receive honorific statues, and both are trained orators and emerge successfully from defending themselves in a trial in which the charges can be seen as fabricated. These resemblances do not require that the *Metamorphoses* should be read as a fictionalized autobiography, though there were apparently ancient readers who thought Apuleius himself might really have been turned into an ass.²⁹

How connected then are Lucius and Apuleius? Earlier, the prologue contains the question, *Quis ille?* ("Who is that man?") about Lucius. Different locations are named, as though they represent the origin of Lucius: Attic Hymettus, the Ephyrean Isthmus, and Spartan Taenarus. What? Is Lucius from these three locations, Corinth, or Maudara? Indeterminacy exists. The text compels the reader to search as much as he can but always fall short of a tenable answer. New meanings come and go because

²⁶ Winkler, 153-79.

²⁷ *Litteras ei a Corinthio Demea scriptas ad eum reddo*. 1.22. *Nam et Corinthi nunc apud nos...* 2.12.

²⁸ 11.27.

²⁹ Harrison, 218.

contradictions exist throughout the text, even though many scholars have tried to find unity in its contours, often by erasing one half of a contradictory pair.

Lucius' identity, which is never fixed, derives its contradictory multiplicity from another problematic voice: the prologue speaker, who relates information about Lucius' identity. The prologue's speaker's identity is even more confused than Lucius'. Ken Dowden provides a snippet history of this debate:

Rohde (1885) [claimed] that the prologue presents a mixture of Apuleius and Lucius, especially because of the reference to translation from Greek into Latin (the activity of Apuleius) and the acknowledgment of the fictionality of the story. To Bürger (1888), Rohde's position seemed incredible: there must, he thought, be a single speaker in the first paragraph in the novel; consequently, he explained away the reference to translation and fictionality and maintained that the subject was Lucius throughout...Leo (1906), in an important note, formally assented to Bürger's position, but brought Rohde's distinction back from under the carpet: the whole prologue is spoken by Lucius, but there *was* a mixture of writer and narrator...Leo's major achievement is to dissociate the fictional author from Apuleius: Apuleius is not himself actually competing for the reader's attention, but presenting an author...as so doing.³⁰

While Dowden agrees with Rohde's argument, the answer to the conundrum appears indeterminate. With *The Golden Ass* there are not two choices; there are too many. The

³⁰ Ken Dowden, "Apuleius and the Art of Narration," *The Classical Quarterly* 32.2 (1982): 427.

prologue speaker could be any of these identities, potentiality not even Lucius or Apuleius. The final choice depends upon the whims of the reader. No objective truth is possible.

Because the voices of the prologue speaker and Lucius determine the interconnections between, respectively, the beginning and the end of the text, they are the main characters of the tale. The prologue's Egyptian-inspired words and Lucius', following his conversion to Isis, unify the text, even though (acknowledging Macherey) loose fibers may be found—fibers which are not subordinated to the Egyptianness of *The Golden Ass* but exist for their own sake. These voices determine the meaning of the text because they, forcing indeterminacy upon it, control the interconnections through the text. The prologue speaker and Lucius are the bearers of meaning, and they must be foiled in order to gaze at the work, self-fashioned by the text.

PR.3 The Golden Ass's Palette and Fibers

A way into a text with so many contradictions and one that evades the cacophony of Lucius and the prologue speaker is needed. What did all archaeologists claim to do before (post-)processualism took over? Archaeologists during the Cultural-Historical phase catalogued and described objects and ascertained the date of each. Just as these Cultural-Historical archaeologists' data may be used as a starting point for a more theoretical analysis, data about *The Golden Ass* could illuminate multiple meanings within the text. Its descriptive details must, therefore, be taken into account. Since *The Golden Ass* self-consciously idealizes its text as within a referent, the papyrus scroll, which is material in nature, the text propels the reader to catalogue it in regards to two of its traits, more often applied to art-historical (*PR.1b*) and archaeological objects than literary texts: color and medium (papyral fibers). First, Apuleius' use of distinct colors for

specific sections of the text creates a pattern, which is internal to the text, as is all data. Second, he weaves together the fibers of the text, which because of the prologue are also idealized as material.

One of the most important fibers, the incest motif (also known as the mother-son motif), runs the course of the entire narrative, from the Egyptian-inspired opening of the prologue to the interaction between Byrrhena and Lucius (*SU.4b*) to the Cupid—Venus—& Psyche threesome (*ES; SU.4a*) to the Lucius and Isis relationship at the novel's ending (*SU.1*). As we shall see throughout the rest of this essay, color and especially the fibers of *The Golden Ass* are both formal (internal to the patterning of the text) and thematic (constitutive of the text's ultimate meaning). The formal data, linguistic and narrative (*ES.1b*), help us make sense of the complexity of the thematic data. Any respectable formalist analysis claims to find truth in the patterns of the text formed by each datum point, which may be used to develop the meaning of the work as a whole. Because a formalist critique can never escape any ideology, he must select. I have selected the ideology of *The Golden Ass*, its attempt to materialize its immaterial text as a material work. Because this ideology appears consistent with Apuleius the sophist's contradictory designs, this analysis takes *The Golden Ass*'s status as the work of a sophist into account rather than substituting a Marxist, psychoanalytic, or other interpretive framework in its place. Only then can we access the themes of *The Golden Ass*, not the themes of an external metanarrative like psychoanalysis, which would force the text to accept the Oedipal complex, even where it has no applicability. A formalist approach, which bases itself upon the ideology of the internal text, therefore, reveals the inner themes of the text.

A formalist approach also lays visible how Apuleius formally constructed his work. Because descriptive data, such as color, allows us the most objective look at *The Golden Ass* as far as is possible, it may go towards bridging the gap between the inferring reader and the intending author, especially an ancient writer, whose thoughts are much different from our own. The influential narratologist, Peter J. Rabinowitz, has stated that authorial intention helps us understand the nature of the text better in its context, a claim which will be of use to us for the socio-historical of *The Golden Ass* in the final chapter, *LE*.

Because fibering involves a motif, which extends throughout the entire novel, it may often connect with other motifs at various points, including the curiosity motif,³¹ the animal-man motif,³² a *candidus* theme connected to a Pegasus and Bellerophon motif,³³ etc. While fibering represents a much more challenging feat for thematic analysis (*PR.3b*), which will comprise the rest of this essay (*ES-LE*), the significance of Apuleius' use of different colors is easily explained thematically (*PR.3a*). Whether simple or complex, these formal characteristics of the text function teleologically to present Isis as both the culmination of *The Golden Ass*' color and the culmination of its fibering (*PR.3b.iii*).

PR.3a. Graphice: Color in the Text of The Golden Ass

³¹ Carl. C. Shlam, "The Curiosity of the Golden Ass," *The Classical Journal* 64.3 (December 1968), 120-5.

³² Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 99-112.

³³ Gertrude C. Drake, "Candidus: A Unifying Theme in Apuleius' "Metamorphoses," *The Classical Journal* 64.3 (December 1968), 102-9.

The text of *The Golden Ass* reproduces itself for its viewer as an art object with its own distinct colors for specific sections. Judith K. Krabbe's research,³⁴ which provides the data for the table below, makes a distinction between *colores floridi* and *colores austeri*, a distinction that reflects ancient color theory. Whereas the *colores austeri* only comprise four colors—white, yellow, red, and black—the *colores floridi* (in addition to others outside of the *colores austeri*) include purple and indigo, colors that are employed by Apuleius to describe the gowns of the effeminate and corrupt Dea Syria cult members (see table below for more data).

Just as Apuleius treats the *colores floridi* pejoratively, so do Pliny the Elder and Cicero. Pliny states that all colors fall either into one category or the other (no color is safe from classification), and at the same time he deplores the current state of affairs when painters delight in employing the *colores floridi*: “[now] there is no such thing as a high-class painting.”³⁵ With Pliny at the helm of ancient color theory, no color is safe from a connotatively coded classification into the noble *colores austeri* or the ignoble *colores floridi*. Further, Pliny the Elder and Cicero make it “very clear that ancient critics considered the tradition of the four-color palette to be one of the most significant aspects of the history of Greek painting,” and later artists attempted to “recall the grandeur of a golden age of artistic achievement.”³⁶

Therefore, these colors are marked—as connotatively good or bad—whereby they mark out what they depict as good or bad. For example, because the *colores floridi* construct the image of the Dea Syria cult, while the *colores austeri* Isis, these usages

³⁴ “*Colore vario: Apuleius’ Palette*,” *Lusus Iste: Apuleius’ Metamorphoses* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), 521-66.

³⁵ *Natural History* 35.32.

³⁶ Krabbe (2003), 534.

indicate the Dea Syria cult as bad and Isis as good.³⁷ For this reason, we have a chance to see Apuleius literally color his characters' personalities, a chance to see a glimmer of authorial intention, since the appearance of the *colores austeri* provides an objective truth: “[Apuleius] prepares his palette in advance” during the earlier books but “reserves for Isis the more intensely concentrated use of the same four colors (11.3),” whereby “[t]he four-color palette...serves as a means of [formally and thematically] binding Book 11 to the earlier books of the *Metamorphoses*, specifically to Book 3, in which Lucius undergoes his *deformatio* into an ass.”³⁸ The table below presents both the formal (pattern-oriented) aspects of colors under the heading, “Colors Employed,” while Krabbe’s notes (with page numbers in parentheses) connect their use to the thematic level, the teleological movement of the text toward Isis under the heading, “Thematic Notes”:

Books	Colors Employed	Thematic Notes
I	Mainly white, including “pale as boxwood”	“The dominant color...is deathly pallor” (532).
II	Red, yellow, blue, black, white	In contrast with Book 1, Book 2 contains a number of colors” (532).
III	Four-color palette (white, yellow, red, black) only	“In using these colors in Book 3...Apuleius appears to be setting up a parallel for the greater metamorphosis which lies ahead, Lucius’ transformation into an initiate

³⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin found that “[i]t is the *axiological* horizon that assumes the most important function in the organization of the literary work, and especially in that of its formal aspects.” By axiological horizon, he means the interpretive biases, which organizes the text—often through connotation. Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle* trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 46.

³⁸ Krabbe (2003), 534.

		of Isis in Book 11” (534).
IV-VI	Green, red, blue, white and, black (IV) White, yellow, purple, red, and terms <i>color</i> and <i>concolor</i> (V) White, blue, green, yellow, black, and purple (VI)	“[C]olor terms are again more varied” in these books (534).
VII-IX	Black, white, gray Dea Syria exception (8.27): Saffron, white, purple, yellow, various colors	The colors of these books “have a negative, even ‘dirty white’ and sordid cast to them” (538), whose pejorative usage also relate to “the vivid colors [found] in the Dea Syria passage” (537). “[T]he specific color words” used to depict them “are: <i>crocotis...albas...purpura...luteis</i> ” (537-8), while their garments are described as “multicolored” (<i>variis coloribus indusiati</i>). The cult is “described in contempt and in gaudy color” (525), which reflects their actions: they engage in anal penetration, especially with gargantuan penises, and steal money from others.
X	Red, white, gray, gold, purple, Term: <i>floridus</i> (as in the <i>colores floridi</i>)	While red, white, and gray appear in the earlier section of the book, “color does not come into play again in Book 10 until Thiasus enters the picture” (539). Thiasus paves the way for Lucius to be nearly eaten by wild beasts in a ring, which

		suggests the negative connotation of a gaudy overuse of color: it can kill a man...or an ass.
XI	Four-color palette	“[C]olor finds its culmination in Book 11” (539). Apuleius uses the four-color palette thrice in his description of Isis, “reserving for her its fullest use” (540-1).

These colors show Apuleius as a paper of papyrus, but there is more. Just as the appearance of *Maudarensis* alerted Winkler to the linkage between Apuleius, *auctor*, and Lucius, *actor* (PR.2), the appearance of *graphice* within the description of the Dea Syria cult does two things: it presents us with a passage that shows how connotation and color are interwoven, and it serves referentially to link the colors of the Dea Syria cult to the colors of *The Golden Ass* itself. Describing them, Lucius relates that the members, who were “shamefully [*deformiter*] done-up, whose faces were smeared with foul [*caenoso*] pigment and whose eyes were lined with greasepaint, appeared like a painting [*graphice*].”³⁹ Throughout the passage, the description of the cult members’ visages is filtered through Lucius’ judgmental voice. The adverb, *deformiter* (hideously), connects their garish delight in color with a pejorative connotation, while the other adverb, *graphice*, compares the scene to a painting. Like a painting [*graphice*] created with the *colores floridi*, the outlandish description shows that Apuleius follows Pliny the Elder and Cicero in at least acknowledging the distinction between a foul overuse of color and a dignified use of

³⁹ *Die sequenti variis coloribus indusiati deformiter quisque formati facie caenoso pigmento delita et oculis obunctis graphice prodeunt.* 8.27.

only four colors. A formal property of the text reveals Apuleius' knowledge and the closest we can come to his intentions. Isis represents all that is good, Apuleius' colors reveal.

PR.3b. Going for the Innerworkings of the Fibers: The Words of the Text

Papyrus is the medium of *The Golden Ass*, according to its prologue. The fibers of the text, hammered together to form the length of the scroll, also require analysis. Because Apuleius was drawing upon what was likely a longer version of the Greek *Onos*, Apuleius' alterations are his art.⁴⁰ Viktor Shklovsky, the leading Russian Formalist, praised *The Golden Ass* for its form: it is a threaded, frame narrative.⁴¹ When it comes to defining "threading," Shklovsky considers it to be the technique by which the author strings his entire tale together in order to unify its parts.⁴² Incidentally, I shall refer to the threads of the narrative as 'fibers' and threading as 'fiber-ing' to conform with the text's self-representation of itself as papyrus. Whereas the *Onos* lacked fiber-ing, Apuleius' inclusion of fibers that bind the end to the beginning, beginning to end (PR.1c.iii), is Apuleius' technique other than the inclusion of connotative color toward materializing the text as work.

Fiber-ing in *The Golden Ass* functions (provisionally) on two levels: material (physically part of the original papyrus seen by the ancient reader) and immaterial (recreated by the prologue speaker). The immaterial fiber-ing of the text, since it transcends the material origins of the text by folding in upon itself (PR.1c.iii), enables

⁴⁰ For a thorough but concise discussion of shifting, scholarly beliefs about Apuleius' relation to his source(s), see Schlam (1992), 18-28.

⁴¹ Framing refers to the embedding of stories within stories, such as "Cupid and Psyche" within the main narrative of Lucius.

⁴² *Theory of Prose* trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), 69.

interesting patterns of motifs to form. Whereas the material papyrus was historical, the immaterial text is ahistorical and has, therefore, inspired numerous anachronistic readings; however, the immaterial aspect of the work must never be internally divided from its materiality. They function dialectically, rather than contradictorily. The immaterial motifs are never what Barthes calls “semic,” never there for mere decoration as sometimes in Ovid.⁴³ Rather, they constitute the text since Apuleius “structure[s]” *The Golden Ass* “on the basis of recurring themes and motifs.”⁴⁴ In Apuleius’ work these twin types of fibers—material and immaterial—are woven together, and together they form the nature of *The Golden Ass* itself, composed of ink and papyrus (material) and the text’s representation of itself (immaterial), which interact dialectically. By paying attention to these threads, both their textual and work-based dimensions are revealed, but they are also revealing, especially in determining whether or not there is a teleological progression toward Isis also found in the threads, not just the color of *The Golden Ass*.

PR.3b.i. Incest and Egypt

One fiber, the incest motif, not only spans the length of the text but also links itself to Egypt. Egypt was the land of incest. In Roman Egypt brother-sister incest was common.⁴⁵ Distortions, which extended brother-sister incest to a more generalized incest, likely accrued post-Actium because Egypt was off-limits to most Roman citizens.⁴⁶ Therefore, in both Propertius and Apuleius we find the same schematized

⁴³ Krabbe (2003), 547.

⁴⁴ Warren S. Smith, “Summary,” *Lucius of Corinth and Apuleius of Madaura: A Study of the Narrative* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1972), unnumbered introductory page.

⁴⁵ Hopkins, Keith. “Brother-Sister Marriage in Roman Egypt.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22.3 (July 1980), 303-354.

⁴⁶ During the Augustan Age a senatorial visa was required in order to visit. For further information see M.J. Versluys, *Aegyptiaca Romana: Nilotic Scenes and Roman Views of Egypt* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 9.

description of Egypt with Egyptian(izing) places or objects standing in for the whole of Egypt itself. Within Apuleius' section about the Egyptian magician, Zatchlas, Apuleius presents what is supposedly an Egyptian perspective of Egypt, since it is during Zatchlas' prayer, not Lucius' narration, that the schematized description emerges: Coptus, Memphis, the Nile, and the Egyptian *sistrum*. While Propertius enumerates almost the same things—Memphis, the Nile, and the *sistrum*—Canopus appears instead of its alliterative partner, Coptus, but, more importantly, an adjective is attached to the noun: *incestus*, which the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* lists under the definition “incestuous,” not the more generalized, “unholy.” By removing this adjective in his own text, Apuleius (or Zatchlas) occludes the association between Egypt and incest, just as the relationship between Isis and Osiris at the end of *The Golden Ass* is never marked as incestuous in nature (*SU.1*).

PR.3b.ii. Methods for Uncovering the Incest Motif

A complete discussion of the work's Egyptian nature *forces* us to discuss the physical fibers of the material papyrus, but also Shklovsky's fibers, motifs that run along the course of the text and unify it, that are recreated as physically present by the speaker of the prologue, who is thus just as important a character as Lucius. To unweave the woven, both a stylistic and a character analysis provide the best means to thoroughly expose the incestuous moments of the text. Before we look at any potentially incestuous relationships, we shall show that even at the novel's source of communication to the reader, Apuleius' language itself, the raw material of his words, is infected with connotatively incestuous phrases.⁴⁷ Literary stylistics, which employs the tools of

⁴⁷ Such a search mirrors Donald Lateiner's own discovery: “The pattern of discovering rot in the center of the essential social unit, the family, warns against sensual, especially

linguistic to analyze the text's linguistic data, will serve to uncover these moments. As a preview, I shall enumerate them, even though comprehension for you, my reader, will likely have to wait until you reach the subsections of my next chapter, *ES*. With that said, they are as follows: 1) whenever Venus' name appears in the same sentence as Cupid's, they function as a pressed together syntagm [*pressule*], which syntactically hints at incest and 2) when Cupid and Psyche spar with their weapons of love, Venus appears as the third member of a *ménage à trois*. Since, Cupid—Venus—& Psyche are the only characters involved in these linguistic manifestations of incest, the incest motif focuses upon the Venus and Cupid, mother and son, relationship.

The following chapter, *SU*, will show that Apuleius does not quarantine incest to the Venus and Cupid, mother and son relationship, but extends it outward to Lucius and Fotis' relationship, to Lucius and Byrrhaena's relationship, to Cupid and Psyche's relationship, and to Lucius and Isis' relationship. In a sense, every relationship in the novel is infected with incest because these are all characters central to the novel as a whole. We can only begin to understand Lucius' own relationship with Isis in Book XI so long as incest forms an important factor. Therefore, an analysis of the characters within Apuleius' narrative world is necessary.

After 'treating' these moments with various therapies, the last chapter, *LE*, will provide literary-theoretical and socio-historical analyses to reveal the larger implications of this motif outside Apuleius' text. On a larger scale, this analysis seeks to understand how a text's own materialization of itself can alter our consumption of it. On a moderate scale, this analysis seeks to reconceptualize how we interpret the Egyptian

sexual, pleasures and even against normal family life." Donald Lateiner, "Marriage and the Return of Spouses in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*," *The Classical Journal* 95.4 (2000): 323. Incest must be included as an indication of such "rot."

nature of *The Golden Ass*, which affects our social-historical notions of a North African (versus a Roman) conception of Egypt's; on a smaller scale, it provides an analysis of one important, Egypt-related fiber: incest.

PR.3b.iii. Venus → Isis as *The Unifying Theme*

If nothing else, the incest motif functions as one strand of a larger theme, the text's movement toward Isis. Because the Venus and Cupid, mother and son, relationship, is of such importance to the incest motif, as can be gleaned from my preview, the movement towards Isis may be better conceptualized as movement away from Venus toward Isis, who will be seen to function as the mother figure to her spiritual son, Lucius (*SU.1*). Without Isis Lucius would be unable to make the final transformation back to a human, according to the logic of *The Golden Ass*'s narrative world. Before my analysis runs further apace, the Venus → Isis theme must be mentioned in the context of how unified *The Golden Ass* is in general.

Because *The Golden Ass* is essentially a short story collection, woven together by Apuleius, critics have differed on how unified the text actually is. B.E. Perry believed that Apuleius started from an outline of the main storyline of Lucius and filled it in with elaborated short stories, which Perry considers to be a “mechanical method” to prolong the narrative.⁴⁸ He believed that the text was more of a story than a plot: it is an assemblage of stories, which reflects Apuleius' “neglect of logical sequence.”⁴⁹ William

⁴⁸ B.E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-Historical Account of Their Origins* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 254.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

R. Nethercut and Warren S. Smith, responding to Perry, claim that the tale is, in fact, plot-driven, i.e. more casually than temporally connected, whereby the text is unified.⁵⁰

These debates reflect modern debate about the nature of the text itself. Pierre Macherey, similar to B.E. Perry, believes that there are ruptures and holes in the text and that the interpreter does wrong in attempting to perfect the text by unifying it,⁵¹ while structuralists, like Claude Lévi-Strauss, assume that the text is a “closed system”; thus, there is unity to the text.⁵² In order not to take sides, we must account for the unifying disunity of the text. We must find material in the text that allows this paradox. Because numerous fibers may be interwoven to form a theme, not all of the fibers of the text necessarily take part in forming this theme. *The Golden Ass* is most (not completely) unified by its fibers, which coalesce to form a theme.

The one theme, which (mostly but not completely) unifies *The Golden Ass*, is the Venus→Isis theme. Scholars agree that *The Golden Ass* moves (seemingly teleologically) from Venus to Isis.⁵³ Aside from the use of the word, “Venereal” (*ES*.3), Venus appears twice: 1) as the goddess within the “Cupid and Psyche” embedded story and 2) as represented by a girl in the Judgment of Paris performance, which coming at the end of the tenth book marks the transition to Isis’ manifestation in Book XI. Both Venus’ and

⁵⁰ Nethercut, “Apuleius’ Metamorphoses: The Journey,” *Agon* 3 (1969): 97-134. Smith, *Lucius of Corinth and Apuleius of Madaura: A Study of the Narrative* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1972), 56). He repeats this claim in a later article: “Apuleius offers something based on predecessors but new, a delightful unity made up from many parts.” Warren S. Smith, “Apuleius and Luke: Prologue and Epilogue in Conversion Contexts,” in *A Companion...*, 89.

⁵¹ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* trans. Geoffrey Wall (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁵² Claude Lévi-Strauss, “At the Scene of the Crime,” *The Origin of Table Manners* trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 36.

⁵³ See, for example, Warren S. Smith, “Venus and Isis,” *Lucius of Corinth and Apuleius of Madaura: A Study of the Narrative* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1972), 48-76.

Isis' physical descriptions are supplied with barely a physical separation in the material text between 10.30-1 and 11.3-6. The closeness of the passages indicates their metonymic relationship, i.e. that Apuleius is presenting the reader with a comparison.⁵⁴ While others may read this juxtaposition in a subversive manner, similarities (like physical description) in the doubles, Venus and Isis, may actually heighten the spiritual contrast between the two. We have two possibilities on our hand: either read Isis as a Jekyll and Venus as a Hyde (which implicates both in a shared evil-doing) or read Venus as the evil Angra Mainyu of Zoroastrianism and Isis as the good Ahura Mazda. A certain level of indeterminacy exists concerning this textual conundrum (PR.2). We must at least allow one possibility, however: Venus and the witches are contrasted with Isis.

The witches and Venus share traits, which Isis lacks. Venus and the witches, both powerful creatures, are able to bring chaos to the narrative world of *The Golden Ass*, the witches by their harnessing of the moon and their other assorted powers,⁵⁵ Venus by her removal of love from the earth.⁵⁶ In fact, Psyche assumes the same about Venus' son, when she calls him, "he who was born for the destruction of the world,"⁵⁷ because the oracle had stated that she would wed a dragon for a husband (who is really Cupid).⁵⁸ He proves close to doing such since he, like his mother, absents himself from the task of

⁵⁴ P. Murgatroyd, "The Ending of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*," *The Classical Quarterly* 52 (2004): 319.

⁵⁵ [*Pamphile*] *in vetustum chaos submergere novit*. 2.5.

⁵⁶ *Ibi commodum Venerem lavantem natantemque propter assistens indicat adustum filium eius gravi vulneris dolore maerentem dubium salutis iacere, iamque per cunctorum ora populorum rumoribus conviciisque variis omnem Veneris familiam male audire, quod ille quidem montano scortatu tu vero marino natatu secesseritis, ac per hoc non voluptas ulla non gratia non lepos, sed incompta et agrestia et horrida cuncta sint, non nuptiae coniugales non amicitiae sociales non liberum caritates, sed enormis colluvies et squalentium foederum insuave fastidium*. 5.28

⁵⁷ *qui totius orbis exitio natus est*. 4.34.

⁵⁸ *Nec speres generum mortali stirpe creatum, sed saevum atque ferum vipereumque malum*. 4.33.

caring about the earth's inhabitants.⁵⁹ Venus, like the witches who fly through the night in search of virile youths (*SU.4b*), is also highly sexual. She offers not only open-mouthed kisses to her son but also to any mortal able to locate Psyche: "seven sweet kisses and one long-lasting honey-sweet kiss, which includes the movement of an urging tongue."⁶⁰ Venus and the witches' representations merge to a degree; they implicate each other in their respective evil doings.

Because Apuleius combines them, the witches (like Psyche *SU.4a*) look similar to Venus. In his socio-historical account of the metamorphosis of the witch from an earth mother to an old hag, Jacob Rabinowitz encounters a strange data point.⁶¹ Up until Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* all contemporary representations of the witch present her as old and ugly, not sexually attractive. While Rabinowitz does not know how to make heads and tails of this phenomenon, one folklorist believes that the sexy witches in *The Golden Ass* are an amalgamation of different traditions: "Apuleius blend[s]...the Lamia theme with more popularised conceptions of witchcraft."⁶² A better answer exists. If both the witches and Venus are represented as highly sexual, they are better lumped together as the Angra Mainyu against the good Isis. Venus bends the witches to her lovely but evil will.

In contrast, the good version of the feminine, Isis, does not partake of any of Venus and the witches' traits, although her physical appearance does mirror Venus'. She is never represented as a sexual being. Instead, Isis is fashioned as a maternal figure to both Lucius and the world: she finishes what Lucius' dead mother began, and, as the

⁵⁹ 5.28.

⁶⁰ *septem savia suavia et unum blandientis adpulsu linguae longe mellitum.* 6.8.

⁶¹ *The Rotting Goddess* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1998).

⁶² David Walter Leinweber, "Witchcraft and Lamiae in "The Golden Ass," *Folklore* 105 (1994): 77-82

governess of the elements,⁶³ she prevents the world from entering into chaos. Based upon these fundamental differences, a dichotomy exists between the witches-Venus and Isis.

However, while Isis does not act like the witches, they do partake of Isis' traits. Carl C. Schlam, the late Apuleian scholar, once noted how the witches almost syncretise themselves with Isis:

the names of Meroë and her “sister” Panthia both have Isiac associations and reinforce the characterization of the witch as antithetical to the goddess. Meroë is an island in the Nile famous for its shrine of Isis, and Panthia may be taken as a form of Panthea, “All-goddess,” attested as an Isiac epithet. Within the thematic structure of the *Metamorphoses* witchcraft is marked as a debased form of what is wondrous and Lucius' pursuit of it as an unholy assault on the divine.⁶⁴

Through these interconnections, Apuleius better interweaves the witches, who appear in the first three books of the text, in the Venus→Isis theme, whereby he connects the first three books to the “Cupid and Psyche” section (4.28-6.24) to the Isis Book (11). The incest motif, an important strand of this larger theme, forms the fiber that better binds the beginning to the end.

Through the incest motif, more elements of *The Golden Ass*' discourse, including its Egyptians ones, are consigned to the Venus→Isis theme, the bad mother→the good mother. As John Henderson has so entertainingly written, Lucius is

⁶³ *elementorum omnium domina* 11.5.

⁶⁴ Carl C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1992), 68. For more information, see Gilbert Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist: A Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 242-3.

like Cupid all along, owing all his powers to his mother (*Met.* 5. 23). This is a priest who worships his ‘sweet Mama love’ (11.25 *dulcem matris adfectionem*). He sets out on a boy’s quest to find his roots, in Greek philosophy, Plutarch and Sextus his ‘matrix’ (1. 2 *originis maternae nostrae*), through his second mother, Byrrhena (2. 3). Another Alcibiades, this mother’s boy faces an unorthodox journey into unorthodoxy, and so to Rome.⁶⁵

We must follow the fiber of incest in order to find the meaning to Lucius’ journey toward Isis and the Egyptian nature of the work, since “meaning,” like a fiber, “is not ‘at the end’ of the narrative, it runs across it.”⁶⁶ We cannot simply read the end for our answer.

⁶⁵ John Henderson, “In Ya (Pre)face,” *Companion...*, 196.

⁶⁶ “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives, *Image—Music—Text* ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 87.

Elementary Suggestions (*ES*), Incest 1: Linguistic Manifestations of Incest

ES.1. An Introduction to an Incestuous Relationship

ES.1a. The Venus and Cupid Relationship

“If I were trying to write an adequate account of the *AA* [*The Golden Ass*], sensationalism is one of the many lines that would have to be developed...”

—John J. Winkler – *Auctor & Actor*⁶⁷

The initial interaction between Venus and Cupid in the embedded story, “Cupid and Psyche,” is jaw-droppingly shocking. At one moment, Venus begs her son “by the compact of maternal love [*maternae caritatis*]” to ruin Psyche’s love-life; at the next, Venus all but slips her son some tongue: “after Venus spoke these things, for a long time as she was pressed up to him, she was kissing her *son* [*filium*] with her mouth wide-open; she sought the nearest area of the receding shore.”⁶⁸ This moment is sensational, and it happens suddenly since Venus rushes away at once. Venus has breached a taboo: incest. Bruno Bettelheim revealed the scene’s sensationalism when he wrote that “Aphrodite does not just order her son to do her dirty work for her, she seduces him sexually to do

⁶⁷ John J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius’ The Golden Ass* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 96.

⁶⁸ *per ego te inquit ‘maternae caritatis foedera deprecor’... sic effata et osculis hiantibus filium diu ac pressule saviata proximas oras reflui litoris petit...* (4.31) Emphasis mine.

so,”⁶⁹ while E.J. Kennedy noted the ratiocinative complexity of the scene when he wrote that “Venus’ kiss here is not exactly maternal—but how could the embrace of this mother and this son...be anything but ‘erotic?’”⁷⁰ Both are present. The sensationalist nature of the incest taboo piques the reader’s attention and prompts him to consider the scene’s implications for the larger narrative world. John J. Winkler asserts within his *Auctor & Actor* that “the sheerly sensational [is] the co-present opposite of the ratiocinative. It is the combination that is provocative.”⁷¹ Therefore, while the incest taboo lends sensationalism to the scene, the ratiocinative elements of this moment will occupy the rest of this section and serve to uncover the diverse fibers of the incest motif.

ES.1b. The Linguistic and Narrative Levels

They are diverse because they course through both the linguistic level and the narrative level.⁷² The linguistic level may be accessed through stylistics, a form of literary analysis that uses the tools of linguistics. However, linguistics can only analyze up to the

⁶⁹ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Use of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 293.

⁷⁰ E.J. Kenney, *Apuleius: Cupid & Psyche*, (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics. Cambridge University Press, 1990), 126. Joanne McNamara also notes that “Venus kisses Cupid like a goddess of love, rather than a mother” but does not explore the implications any further other than to state that the “power and seductiveness of Venus and Cupid are repeatedly emphasized—the reader is not allowed to forget which emotions they represent.” Joanne McNamara, “The only wife worth having? Marriage and Storytelling in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*,” *Ancient Narrative* 3 (2003): n. 30 and 112. William R. Nethercut claims that the moment when “Lucius asks Fotis to anoint him that he may stand winged, like Cupid, beside his Venus” sets up Lucius’ later “rejection” of Venus in 10.30-3, but he leaves the incestuous element of Lucius’ claim unexplored. William R. Nethercut, “Apuleius’ Literary Art: Resonance and Depth in the ‘Metamorphoses,’” *Classical Journal* 64.3 (December 1968): 112.

⁷¹ Winkler 96.

⁷² Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan provides a clear summary of further divisions of these levels into surface linguistic, deep linguistic, surface narrative, and deep narrative levels. See *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (New York: Methuen, 1983), 10, originally discussed in A.J. Greimas, “Narrative Grammar: Units and Level,” *Modern Language Notes* 86 (1971): 797.

sentence and breaks down when it tries to tackle the complexity of multi-sentenced discourse, which forms the narrative level.⁷³ Of course, individual sentences form the discourse, and for this reason the linguistic level may implicate the narrative, just as the narrative world may suggest more about the individual sentence.

The Cupid and Venus relationship will serve as something of a case study because it can reveal how manifestations of incest occur at each level. It is my contention that the incestuous relationship between Cupid and Venus, because it partakes of both the narrative level and the linguistic level, is the most conspicuous one. The Venus and Cupid relationship functions as one of the sturdiest fibers of the incest motif.

ES.1c. The Kiss (and Frottage)

ES.1c.i. The Narrative Level

In the case of the incestuous kiss and associated frottage, the main indication of incest is primarily the kiss itself on the narrative level. While the linguistic level can only appeal to one sentence at a time, the narrative level may take into account the kiss' occurrence in the discourse alongside terminology related to familial relationships: Venus at first calls upon her son's duty to his mother by invoking *materna caritas*; then Venus treats him as a lover, while the narrator calls attention to his familial role as a son, *filius*. When Cupid was first introduced, the narrator only referred to him as "her boy"

⁷³ Dan Shen, "What Narratology and Stylistics Can Do for Each Other," *A Companion to Narrative Theory* eds. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 136-49. Roland Barthes writes that "there can be no question of linguistics setting itself an object superior to the sentence, since beyond the sentence are only more sentences—having described the flower, the botanist is not to get involved in describing the discourse." "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," *Image—Music—Text* trans and eds. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 82-3.

[*suum puerum*].⁷⁴ The possessive adjective, *suus*, does makes her relationship to her son quite clear in this latter sentence, but the narrator goes further toward hinting at incest by shifting Cupid's designation from *puer* to *filius* for this naughty episode. The narrator emphasizes Cupid's familial role to confirm that this encounter was incestuously driven.

In moving from the immediate discourse of the scene to the discourse of genre, the kiss takes on a new light. It concludes a meeting between Venus and Cupid; the kiss signifies a parting between the two. Mikhail Bakhtin has shown that the motif of meeting "is probably the most important [element]" of the ancient Greek novel.⁷⁵ Meeting always requires a concurrence of "the temporal marker ('at one and the same time)" and "the spatial marker ('in one and the same place')." ⁷⁶ While time and space are aligned to enable Venus and Cupid's conversation, the incestuous kiss occurs on a liminal zone between meeting and parting, which in film is called a 'bridging shot.' This bridging shot is fast because very little reading time, a matter of seconds, is required to pass over what in story time is quite a lengthy kiss (*din*). The great length of the kiss in story time contrasts with Venus' immediate getaway from Cupid and from our abilities to detect incest in her entire interaction with Cupid.

ES.1c.ii. The Linguistic Level

⁷⁴ 4.30.

⁷⁵ M.M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination* ed. Michael Holquist trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 97.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

In order to see on the linguistic level the syntactic relationship of the Latin sentence, which details the kiss between Venus and Cupid, the sentence's discourse may be divided into something like Barthes' *lexia*⁷⁷:

sic (thus) *effata* (having spoken) *et* (and) *osculis biantibus* (with wide-open kisses) *filium* ([her] son) *diu ac pressule* (for a long time and pressed together) *saviata* (having kissed) *proximas oras* (the nearest coasts) *reflui litoris* (of the receding seashore) *petit* ([she] sought)...

A metamorphosis of this discourse into a narrative grammar allows us to see what the original sentence highlights and, especially, what it occludes. A summary of this sentence provides a systematic way to take into account the arguments and predicates in the form, Predicate (Argument₁, Argument₂,...),⁷⁸ where the predicate—to simplify—stands for the deed and the arguments for the doers:

1. Speech Act (Person₁, Person₂): Venus has spoken (*effata*) to Cupid.
2. PhysInteract (Person₁, Person₂): Venus kisses Cupid.
3. PhysInteract (Person₁, Person₂): Venus presses against (*pressule*) Cupid.
4. PhysAct (Person): Venus leaves.

Since the two different types of analysis, discourse and summary, are here juxtaposed, an occlusion in the discourse emerges.

The third predicate, PhysInteract (Venus, Cupid): Venus presses against (*pressule*) Cupid, does not have a clause unto itself in the discourse but relies upon one adverb for

⁷⁷ In his divisions of *Sarrasine* into “units of reading” known as *lexias*, Roland Barthes acknowledges that “[t]his cutting up, admittedly, will be arbitrary in the extreme.” *S/Z* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 13. Although I could have included other clauses, my division is not completely arbitrary. *Sic* marks off this clause from the prior clause, although it does not prevent it from bleeding into the ekphrasis, which appears after this clause.

⁷⁸ Doležel *Heterocosmica* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 34.

the expression of its action: *pressule*. It has the possibility to contribute an additional action to the discourse, but Apuleius reduces the importance of this adverb for the full sentence through the conjunction, *et*, which orders *diu* and *pressule* as though they are equals, as though they have the same function. The Venus and Cupid frottage is, therefore, partially hidden. Had it been its own sentence unto itself, the representation of its action in discourse would have been much expanded to include a subject (Venus), a verb (*pressi*), and a direct object (Cupid). Whereas another author may have expressed a logical order of events—Venus presses herself against Cupid and then she kisses—Apuleius assigns a subordinate relationship to the frottage: it is dependant upon the act of kissing. In a sense, *pressule* symbolically represents the incestuous element of the Venus and Cupid scene.

ES.2 Linguistic Manifestations of Incest

It may seem that elsewhere in the *AA* the incest motif seemingly rises at random.⁷⁹ Of course, seeming and being are not the same. These moments are not random because if we can pluck out various strands from the fiber of incest, we soon realize that they overlap with one another. To look at the various levels, linguistic and narrative, is to uncover how Apuleius wove together the strands of one fiber with the fiber of another to form a pattern, which is constitutive of the various motifs within the *Golden Ass*.

The rest of this chapter will look at the linguistic manifestations of the incest motif, i.e. we shall show that even within the novel's material language, the raw material of Apuleius' words, which reside on the surface linguistic level, is infected with

⁷⁹ An entire study has been written about Apuleius' elusively allusive text. See Ellen D. Finkelpearl, *Metamorphosis of Language in Apuleius: A Study of Allusion in the Novel*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

connotatively incestuous phrases, particularly in relation to Venus and Cupid's relations.⁸⁰ When Cupid and Psyche 'know' each other in "Cupid and Psyche," Venus appears as the third member of a love triangle (ES.3). Whenever Venus' name appears in the same sentence as Cupid's throughout the entire text, the words, *Venus Cupidoque*, always appear pressed together (*pressule*) (ES.2), whose form is linked to the incestuous scene in which their bodies were represented in the discourse as *pressule* (ES.1c.ii). The following chapter, *SU*, will present a similar analysis for the narrative manifestations.

ES.2a. *Pressule*: Venus&Cupid

dixeris egregie, notum si callida verbum

reddiderit iunctura novum.

—Horace *Ars Poetica* – 47-8

While Cupid and Venus are emphatically pressed together in their act of kissing on the narrative level, their respective names press against one another on the surface linguistic level: *Venus Cupido(que)*, no signifiers in-between. This adjacency of the signifiers—*Venus* next to *Cupido*—has a long history in Latin literature, which will be examined first. Because “[n]o member of a verbal community can ever find words in the language that are neutral, exempt from the aspirations and evaluations of the other, uninhabited by the other’s voice,” we will show how Apuleius “intervenes in his own context from another context, already penetrated by the other’s intentions.”⁸¹ Only then can we see how Apuleius is playing off of past Latin writers in a process known in

⁸⁰ Such a search mirrors Donald Lateiner’s own discovery: “The pattern of discovering rot in the center of the essential social unit, the family, warns against sensual, especially sexual, pleasures and even against normal family life.” Donald Lateiner, “Marriage and the Return of Spouses in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*,” *The Classical Journal* 95.4 (2000): 323. Incest must be included as an indication of such “rot.”

⁸¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics,” in Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 48.

African American literary analysis as “signifyin’,” which “dislodges ostensibly fixed signifiers and opens up new ‘meanings of a word [or trope], the meanings that lie in wait.”⁸² Through an incestuous-inspired juxtaposition of the words, signifyin’ Apuleius subverts earlier connotations of the word by associating *Venus Cupidoque* with the Venereal *pressule* of incest.

ES.2a.i. A History of the Collocation, *Venus Cupidoque*

In Plautus’ *Asinaria*, a product of the late third/early second century B.C.E, the names of both divinities appear in the same sentence yet not as a ready-made collocation. In this section the Parasite revises Diabolus’ letter to a procuress about his exclusive claims to Philenium. According to the Parasite’s revisions, if Philenium decides to present wreaths, garlands, and unguents to Venus or Cupid (*Veneri aut Cupidini* ll. 804), the procuress must inform Diabolus whether Philenium gave them “to Venus or to a man” (*Venerine eas det an viro* ll. 805). Of course, the conceit hinges on Cupid’s status as a man. Cupid can both literally represent the god and metaphorically stand-in for the *vir* in the next line. In the first case *Veneri* and *Cupidini* are separated by an *aut*, while in the second *Venerine* and *viro* are separated by three words. This one-word division between Venus and Cupid widens-out in the next line in order to show the dichotomous nature of the possibilities—either Venus (a female) or a male. Venus and Cupid here represent cult figures, to which Philenium could show equal reverence. While their worship appears joined together, Philenium has the choice between worshipping one or [*aut*] the other, not both.

⁸²Ed Pavlic, “‘I just don’t know how to move on your word’: From Signifyin(g) to Syndetic Homage in James Baldwin’s Responses to William Faulkner,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 53 (Fall 2000): 515-31. The quotation (and the term, *signifyin’*, itself) is from Henry Louis Gate Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Expression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 58.

After Plautus' *Veneri aut Cupidini*, the *aut*, "or," between *Venus* and *Cupid* disappears in Catullus' poetry. *Venus aut Cupido* becomes *Venus Cupidoque*, in which the enclitic, *-que*, means "and." *-Que*'s standard placement after the second noun enables *Venus* and *Cupido* to be pressed smack next to another (*pressule*), not separated by an *aut*. Catullus either repeats *Venus Cupidoque* as a common collocation or he himself creates it as an easy means to complete a hendecasyllabic line.

According to the first argument, joint Venus and Cupid worship may have led the poet to use the words, *Venus Cupidoque*, in his poetry:

[c]ontrary to Eros in Greece, in Rome there is no evidence that Cupid had an independent cult...[H]e was together with Venus whose temple he shared, as for example outside the Colline Gate. Hence the formula *Venus Cupidoque*, which makes him appear frequently associated with Venus in inscriptions and literary texts which allude to cult.⁸³

In 36.3-4 Lesbia "vows to sacred Venus and Cupid [*Veneri Cupidinique*]," which does allude to cult. The Parasite in the *Asinaria* speaks as though the cults of Venus and Cupid, if not the same, are certainly equivalent because Philenium can send gifts to either. If as Wlosok asserts, Venus always shared her temple with her son, the collocation would have seemed natural to Catullus' audience—and later, to Apuleius'.

Whether Catullus created a new collocation or simply copied a familiar collocation into his work, it appears three times in his poetry (3.1, 13.12, 36.4) and always in the same metrical position on the line.⁸⁴ Following the first three syllables of a

⁸³ Antonie Wlosok, "Amor and Cupid," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79 (1975), 177. Wlosok cites Ovid *Rem.* 549-555.

⁸⁴ While Jeffrey Wills authoritatively discusses "expanded pairs," in which two elements repeatedly appear together (such as the names, Nisus and Euryalus), he considers their

hendecasyllabic line (x x –), the *Veneres Cupidinesque* (or *Veneri Cupidinique*) completes the line (˘˘ – ˘˘ – –). In order to quickly finish a line, Catullus could have easily added these eight syllables onto three initial ones. The metrical power of the collocation and its reoccurrence not once, not twice, but thrice, fortify its chance of survival into later authors, such as Apuleius, so that he would have been more likely to recall and thus appropriate it. Proof for Apuleius’ appropriation of the *Venus Cupidoque* collocation from Catullus or cult is found in Apuleius’ word order; the name, *Venus*, always appears to the left of the name, *Cupido*.

ES.2a.ii. A History of Sexually-Explicit, Mimetic Syntax

While Catullus provided the collocation, Propertius, Ovid, and Virgil enabled what the collocation comes to signify in Apuleius: incest. These poets provided syntactic models for Apuleius: “all Augustan poets...arrange[] syntax and words for calculated effect.”⁸⁵ Donald Lateiner comes closer than anyone else at identifying the usage of suggestive syntax in Apuleius’ precursors. Lateiner notes that “[t]wo forms of one word written consecutively underline closeness.”⁸⁶ In order to prove this claim, we shall show in Propertius’ poetry how polyptoton, repetition of a word in a different grammatical case, may indicate sexual innuendo when the words are close enough to rub against one another. We shall show in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Vergil’s cave scene from the *Aeneid* that verbal frottage is suggested, even though polyptoton does not occur.

recurrence throughout the same poem, not the same pair throughout different works. *Repetition in Latin Poetry: Figures of Allusion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 182-6.

⁸⁵ Donald Lateiner, “Mimetix Syntax: Metaphor from Word Order, Especially in Ovid,” *The American Journal of Philology* 111.2 (Summer 1990): 208.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

Alongside the text's other aspects of materiality—its fibers and colors—mimetic syntax functions as another adornment. Lateiner states that “[m]imetic syntax is more commonly visual than aural...”⁸⁷ Because the text's prologue encourages the reader to be an actual reader (*lector*), not a listener, the assumption is that the reader will be able to see the visual patterns of the language. The written novel, which expects visual consumption, lends itself to mimetic syntax better than any other medium. That Apuleius would appropriate a device particularly suited to the written, rather than aural, work should not surprise, since his prologue imagines the materiality of *The Golden Ass*.

As seen in his *Apology*,⁸⁸ Apuleius himself took a stab or two at elegy, as seen in the *Apology*. elegy engages in mimetic syntax. In two of his elegies Propertius employs mimetic syntax when he links bones together in different configurations through syntax. Bones are interspersed at random in 2.8: Haemon “thoroughly mixed his own bones with [the bones] of the wretched girl[Antigone] [et *sua* cum **miseræ** PERMISCUIT *ossa puellæ*].”⁸⁹ The elision of *ossibus* and the hyperbatons of *sua* (with *ossa*) and *miseræ* (with *puellæ*) reflect the content: the girl's bones are strewn about with her lover's. The word order is just as interspersed. In 4.7.94 Cynthia promises sensual friction between her bones and Propertius: “I will rub bones with mixed bones [et *mixtis ossibus ossa teram*].” *Ossibus*' and *ossa*'s placement next to one another emphasize that frottage is the topic of the line. Propertius displays a piqued sensitivity to the innuendo of *ossa ossibus*, which engage in a suggestive juxtaposition.

⁸⁷ Lateiner, 208.

⁸⁸ See *Apology* 9 and Harrison, 18-9.

⁸⁹ I have adopted formatting similar to Lateiner's—in regards to *italicization*, **bolding**, and CAPS.

While Propertius only takes us so far, Ovid makes greater syntactic leaps.⁹⁰ In two incestuous episodes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* the syntactic formation, known as the enclosure,⁹¹ and juxtaposition in general syntax insinuate incest. In the Venus and Adonis episode Cupid engages his mother in kisses:

namque pharetratus dum dat *puer oscula* MATRI,
inscius exstanti destrinxit harundine pectus;
 laesa manu natum dea reppulit...⁹²

What needs to be discussed here is the syntax. As Cupid enfolds his mother in kisses, syntax repeats the content on the linguistic level. *Puer*, his kisses (*oscula*), and an adjective, which modifies *puer* (*inscius*), surround the only word, which represents Venus: *matri*. Cupid's nouns and adjective dominate his mother. The juxtaposition of *natum* and *dea* fits the prior image of them close together kissing, even though this is not an example of polyptoton,⁹³ before we learn the action of the sentence (*reppulit*), which separates them. Lateiner provides a similar sentence and similar analysis in 221:

“accipit *obsceno genitor* SUA VISCERA *lecto*...”

He comments that “Myrrha lies next to her father, both *snugly* ensconced in their incestuous bed-frame.” By using the adverb “snugly,” Lateiner draws our attention to the juxtaposition of *genitor* and *sua viscera*. While we will see nearly the same word order in the Dido and Aeneas sex scene in the cave, here we should note that *obsceno* and the *lecto* press *genitor* and *sua viscera* together, which result in verbal frottage. Notably, this

⁹⁰ 204.

⁹¹ See Lateiner's section 3.1, “Enclosure,” 217-21.

⁹² “For while the quivered boy gives kisses to his mother, unknowingly he grazed her chest with an arrow coming out [of the quiver].” 10.525-7.

⁹³ See Lateiner's section 2.1, “Juxtaposition,” 214-5.

friction is achieved without polyptoton, which Lateiner had included as a requirement. As the father and his daughter have incestuous sex, so do the words.

L.P. Wilkinson showed over forty years ago that Virgil himself also utilizes this device,⁹⁴ although he missed one example. Conspicuous syntax appears in Virgil's *Aeneid* IV.125-6 and in the line's repetition in 165-6:

Speluncam Dido DUX et TROIANUS *eandem*
deveniunt...

While critical debate concerning IV.125 and 165 has largely centered on the ambiguity of whether *dux* fleetingly modifies *Dido* (based upon a narratological reading),⁹⁵ the syntactical peculiarity of pressing these two alliterative nouns next to one another has *not* received critical attention. However, before we explicate the significance of this mimetic syntax, we must place the line and a half in context.

Its first and therefore less salient appearance occurs when Juno and Venus are discussing the upcoming sexual encounter of Aeneas and Dido. Juno defines the circumstances under which the lovers will have sex: "The companions will flee and be covered by black night." Lo and behold, the cave, as the hot spot for the affair, appears in order to provide darkness. This inclusion of faux-night likely has to do with the Roman taboo against having sex during the daytime.⁹⁶ However, the effect is also that both Aeneas and Dido are covered by darkness in the first physical layer and by the cave in the second. We then learn that the cave will provide the hot spot for the affair—and

⁹⁴ L.P. Wilkinson, *Golden Latin Artistry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

⁹⁵ See, for example, Kenneth Quinn, *A Critical Discussion of The Aeneid* (London: Routledge, 1968) and the counter-claim in M.L. Clarke's review in *The Classical Review* Vol. 18.3 (Dec. 1968), 306-8. The repetition of the dentals, *d* in *Dido* and *dux* and *t* in *et* and *Troianus* are the throbs and pulses of the encounter.

⁹⁶ See Gregory S. Aldrete, *Daily Life in the Roman City* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 113.

in ll.165 the same syntax provides the environs. On a physical level the cave and its darkness quite literally surround them. On a syntactic level, *speluncam* and *eandam* surround them, and just as in the Myrrha, in which her father and her are syntactically pressed together, the placement of *Dido* and *dux* suggests the same sort of encounter. As the nuptials occur in the cave, the syntax suggests the action—quite a bit of friction.

ES.2a.iii. Venus Cupidoque in *The Golden Ass*

Therefore, this phenomenon, linguistic incest between *Venus* and *Cupido*, did not arise at once. *Venus Cupidoque* had to become a readily recognizable collocation, notably in Catullus (*ES.2b.i*), and Ovid had to fit his syntactic acrobatics to his themes, what Donald Lateiner has called “mimetic syntax” (*ES.2b.ii*).⁹⁷ Only then could Apuleius engage in signifyin’ off of these two poets to combine *Venus Cupidoque* and mimetic syntax. Although “Cupid” and “Venus/-ereal” only appear twice throughout the *Golden Ass*, both instances lay these two words side-by-side in the same order as Catullus and never separated.

ES.2a.iii.1. Lucius and Photis

Before Venus and Cupid swap tongues (or even appear in the text), Lucius invokes their names to describe his relationship with Photis. After clandestinely witnessing Pamphile fly away as a *strix*, Lucius’ curiosity impels him to beg Photis for the magic ointment, which Pamphile had applied to her skin for her metamorphosis. The language of Lucius’ declaration of love to Photis hints at incest: “I would stand as winged Cupid to you, my Venus [*ut meae Veneri Cupido pinnatus adsistam tibi*].”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ See Donald Lateiner, “Mimetic Syntax: Metaphor from Word Order, Especially in Ovid,” *The American Journal of Philology* 111.2 (Summer 1990), 204-37.

⁹⁸ 3.22.

Unlike the Venus and Cupid kiss scene, which indicates incest on both levels, this scene provides ambiguous data for incest on the narrative level but does hint at incest on the linguistic level.

The incestuous innuendo functioning on the immediate narrative level can be explained as something other than incest: a half-baked mythological reference. S.J. Harrison has shown that although “Lucius has many traits of the elite intellectual in the *Metamorphoses*, his education does not prevent him from making many foolish decisions and choices, and his intellectual capacity is usually shown in the novel as ineffectual and comically ambiguous.”⁹⁹ More specifically, whenever Lucius attempts to show off his *paideia*, he always botches the job with “self-important mythological and textual references.”¹⁰⁰ To Harrison’s list of Lucius’ mythological and textual gaffes should be added this notable example. In this passage Lucius conflates Mars’ role as lover of Venus and Cupid’s role as a winged figure because he hopes to seduce Photis but also to metamorphose into an owl.

However, within the wider narrative arc of the story, Lucius’ statement foreshadows the Venus and Cupid kiss. Up to this point, neither Venus nor Cupid have appeared, and because Lucius compares himself and Photis to an incestuous couple, Apuleius hints at the wicked nature of their relationship, based upon sex, as it is. Because Photis serves her mistress, Pamphile, a witch, the similarities between witches and Venus are again brought forth. A similarity in language also exists between the two passages. Like the adverb, *pressule*, which bespeaks nearness of contact between Venus and Cupid, Lucius’ verb, *adsistam* (literally, “I will stand toward), hints at Lucius’ yearning

⁹⁹ Harrison, 219.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

to remove any distance between their bodies. The parallels between this passage and Venus and Cupid' indicate that the incest motif lines this section.

The proximity of these bodies—Lucius and Photis; Venus and Cupid—on the narrative level feeds into the adjacency of the words—*Veneri* and *Cupido*—on the linguistic level. In Apuleius' sentence the word order—*Veneri*, followed *Cupidinis*—is exactly the same as Catullus' *Venus Cupidoque*. The only differences are the change in case and the subtraction of the linking *-que*. These changes, nonetheless, do not prevent the word order from remaining the same. Theme—incest within Lucius' simile—relates to syntax.

ES.2a.iii.2. Stepmother and Stepson

Apuleius again sets Venus alongside Cupid for a similarly incestuous moment. During this scene, the narrator describes a stepmother, slighted by her stepson. As during the Venus-Cupid make-out session, the narrator focuses upon the familial relationship between the stepmother and her stepmother. Here he is suggestively referred to as *filius*, not *privignus* ("stepson"): "she ordered her son [*filium*] to be called to her."¹⁰¹ To use the word *filius*, as Apuleius had for the Venus-Cupid open-mouth kiss, again draws attention to the dangerously incestuous possibility of their relationship. Immediately before, the narrator jokingly refers to the "learned understanding of Venereal desire [*docto Veneriae Cupidinis comprehensione*]..."¹⁰² Again Venereal and Cupid, when appearing in the same sentence, are juxtaposed, a relationship which hints at intended incest. Again the same word order of *Venus Cupidoque* is maintained, although again as before the cases of these words' case differs—now in the genitive.

¹⁰¹ 10.3.

¹⁰² *docto Veneriae cupidinis comprehensione* (10.2)

The ablatives, *docto* and *comprehensione*, bind the two words together by surrounding them. As incestuous relations are related, Venus and Cupid are similarly rammed together, *pressule*, by their respective words.

ES.2b. A *Ménage à Trois*: Cupid—Venus--& Psyche

Wording enables the theme of incest to be further developed. The appearance of Venus's adjectival form within the context of Cupid and Psyche's nightly festivities avowedly bespeaks the genius of Apuleius's hermeneutical entertainment. Although the narrator does not go so far as to allow Cupid to scream out Venus's name during the sexual encounter, the narrator ingeniously insinuates the incest-tinged relationship between Venus and Cupid by designating their movements under the adjectival form of Venus's name. Venus, essentially, joins in on the *mêlée*.

Interestingly, these moments never occur within dialogue but are related to the reader by the narrator. Because "[m]otifs introduced in the speech act of the anonymous narrator are *eo ipso* authentic while those introduced in the speech acts of the narrative agents are non-authentic,"¹⁰³ the incest motif achieves especial significance as having the stamp of the narrator's authority.¹⁰⁴ Since "[t]he authentic motifs and only these motifs represent *narrative facts* [of the narrative world]," the inclusion of Venus's name in a *ménage à trois* with her son's and daughter's becomes a narrative fact of its own. It's as though the narrator has a direct hand in introducing Venus' name into Cupid and Psyche's sex life; his hand is sleight.

¹⁰³ Lubomír Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity in Narrative," *Poetics Today* 1.3, *Special Issue: Narratology I: Poetics of Fiction* (Spring 1980): 12.

¹⁰⁴ Doležel presents *Don Quixote* as an example: "If the motif had been expressed only in the speech of Don Quixote and/or Sancho Panza, its authenticity value would change: in that case, the motif would be non-authentic and the existence of the windmills would not be established as a fictional fact." *Ibid.* 14

Venus' adjectival form appears in the first love encounter. Similar to his treatment of the kiss, the narrator brushes quickly through the details of the encounter: "night was present and her husband arrived, and after first skirmishing with Venereal battles, he fell into a deep sleep"¹⁰⁵—but with a key word: "Venereal." The first reader may not realize by this moment in the narrative that Psyche's lover is Cupid, and in a superficial reading he may consider this word as just part of the description. If we consider that Cupid skirmishes with Psyche *by means* of Venereal battles, Venus shockingly becomes even more of an integral part within Cupid and Psyche's sex-life than she later avows: "Undoubtedly, that sprig [Cupid] thought that I was a pimpess, by whose introduction he 'knew' that girl."¹⁰⁶ While Venus here believes that she, as a go-between, has indirectly enmeshed herself within their sexual affairs in this latter moment, the narrator has already informed us that Venus's sex-force enables Cupid and Psyche to sport with each other, if we should consider Venereal quite literally. A breakdown, therefore, occurs between a metaphorical reading of Venereal and a quite literal reading. Both are correct readings, especially taken together.

A similarly shocking moment occurred earlier, but similarly, it is only shocking with the realization that Psyche's lover is Cupid. Again, Apuleius appears to play tricks with the reader, but he does so by a craftier means: he stops the reader in his tracks before he even approaches "Venereal." Within this scene, Psyche appeals to her husband with honeyed words and some petting in order to see her sisters: "Pressing

¹⁰⁵ *nox aderat et maritus aduenerat priusque Veneriis proeliis velitatus altum in soporem descenderat.* 5.21.

¹⁰⁶ *nimirum illud incrementum lenam me putavit cuius monstratu puellam illam cognosceret* (5.28). Citing the same passage, Paula James also claims that "Venus influences Cupid through Psyche," although she does not note the resulting incestuous suggestion. Paula James, "Cupid at Work and at Play," *Gronigen Colloquia on the Novel I* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1988), 118.

down persuasive kisses, she adds to these things with blandishments: ‘My honey-sweet, my husband, sweet soul of your Psyche [*tuae Psychae...anima*].’¹⁰⁷ The unfocused reader may smile over the meaning—sweet soul of your soul (a merging of Greek *psyche* and Latin *anima*). Because of this sudden stop in his reading, he may plow ahead without truly exploring the pastures.

Again, the adjectival form of Venus’ name, “Venereal,” pops-up while Cupid and Psyche are engaged in the bedroom, this time during pillow talk. Venus plays the role of agent: by “the strength and power of the Venereal whispering Psyche’s husband, although reluctant, succumbed and promised that he would do everything.”¹⁰⁸ Venus’ force, working through Psyche, reverses her son’s original decision to not let Psyche see her wicked sisters. By these means, Venus remains the third-member in their love-life, a love-life that even more queerly is between Cupid and a copy of Venus (#1) (see *SU.4a*).

ES.3 Conclusion

While the manifestations of incest at the linguistic level may seem less certain as actual markers of incest than those at the narrative level (*SU*), this quality derives from the type of data. The data is more quantitative in nature because often its occurrence is just as important as how it interlocks with the themes of the narrative. The quantity that emerges is the number of times Venus and Cupid are implicated in incest on the linguistic level. The next chapter will extend the primarily linguistic aspects of the incest motif, analyzed within this chapter, to the primarily narrative aspects of the incest motif.

¹⁰⁷ *et imprimens oscula suasoria haec etiam blanditiis astruit: ‘mi mellite, mi marite, tuae Psychae dulcis anima...’* 5.6.

¹⁰⁸ *et imprimens oscula suasoria haec etiam blanditiis astruit: ‘mi mellite, mi marite, tuae Psychae dulcis anima.’ ui ac potestate **Venerii** susurrus invitus succubuit maritus et cuncta se facturum sponondit.* 5.8. Emphasis mine.

Signifying Unions (SU), Incest 2: Narrative Manifestations of Incest

The linguistic manifestations of incest discussed in the last chapter indicate that Venus and Cupid's relationship is central to understanding this motif, which extends to the most Egyptian of books, the Isis Book. Because Isis acts as both wife and mother to Lucius, as we shall see, the relationship between motherly figures and their only counterparts deserves attention. The incest motif becomes an indicator of the shift for Lucius from Venus → Isis. As a kourotrophic ("son-nourishing") goddess, Isis better nourishes Lucius than does Venus, whose own garden lacks roses, by which Lucius may be cured of his asinine state.¹⁰⁹ Venus, not a good example of a kourotrophic goddess, treats Cupid as a lover, not a son. The shift from Venus to Isis is the shift from an imperfect kourotrophic goddess to the mother of all. Lucius, bereft of his mother, Salvia, seeks the maternal affections of Isis as the culmination of his journeys as an ass, of his search for an immortal mother.

SU.1 The Golden Ass' Final Incestuous Relationship: Goddess and Devotee

Isis is not only "the mother goddess" of the Phrygians and "the mother of the constellations,"¹¹⁰ but also the final mother to Lucius, who proclaims at the opening of

¹⁰⁹ 4.2.

¹¹⁰ *Inde primigenii Phryges Pessinuntiam deum matrem...*11.5.

his address to Isis that she “bestows the sweet affection of a mother upon men, wretched because of their misfortunes.”¹¹¹ Lucius, whose mother is no longer alive, and whose aunt, Byrrhaena, is unable to successfully take up this role (*SU.4b*), finally finds his mother figure in Isis. Lucius acknowledges in his speech that Isis provides this maternal presence for him. By doing so, an implicit comparison exists between Venus, always lusty in her ways, as a mother to Cupid and Isis as a mother to Lucius.

But Isis also acts as a wife to Lucius, and Isis is one of the few wives ‘worth having.’¹¹² The ceremony in the Isis Book functions as a marriage ceremony between Isis and Lucius. The relationship between Isis and Osiris, however, is never presented as a marriage and certainly never as an incestuous one. Many scholars view the jump from Isis to Osiris within the narrative as sudden, either indicative as a failing in Apuleius’ art or as a failing in Lucius’ conversion. Apuleius almost occludes this relationship altogether. The narrator within “Cupid and Psyche” refers to Juno as “as wife and sister of great Jove,”¹¹³ while Isis’ familial relationship (only marital relationship) is never highlighted. By doing so, Apuleius lets the reader locate the stains of incest within the Venus-Cupid mother-son relationship, not the Isis-Osiris brother-sister relationship.

SU.2 Venus→*Isis* Theme (see *PR.3b.iii*)

SU.3 Characterizing Incest in *The Golden Ass*

Because the Venus→*Isis* theme is central to the movement of the narrative and to the Egyptian nature of the text, all of the mother-son relationships in the text point to the Venus and Cupid relationship and the Lucius and Isis relationship; any insinuations

matrem siderum 11.7

¹¹¹ *dulcem matris adfectionem miserorum casibus tribuis.* 11.25

¹¹² Joanne McNamara (2003): 106-28.

¹¹³ *magni Jovis germana et coniuga* (6.4)

of incest within secondary relationships, such as Lucius and Byrrhena, become symbolic of the thematic shift from Venus to Isis. However, such discussions take us to the realm of characterization.

Especially within the past forty years, literary theorists have struggled over the legitimacy of characterization. Aristotle considered action more essential than character for drama. Roland Barthes, while calling for the death of the author,¹¹⁴ also called for the death of the character.¹¹⁵ In Barthes' view a character is simply a passive conduit of action, and it is a fallacy to assume that a character has any specific psychology.

However, Perry has shown that *The Golden Ass* is special: Apuleius “bring[s] vividly before us the inner thoughts and feelings of his characters.”¹¹⁶ While Barthes' critique of characterization is appropriate for understanding the *nouveau roman*, Apuleius' *AA* is a different monster than the *nouveau roman*: Apuleius reworked the original Greek novel with the result that the character went from a two-dimensional stick figure to a fully-fleshed, three-dimensional figure. Whether or not Apuleius' changes reflect his “studious[...] interest[...] in human nature,”¹¹⁷ as Perry claims, Apuleius would likely have shocked the reader not only with the Egyptian nature of the text but also with the level of depth bestowed upon the characters.

SU.4 The Relationships

SU.4a. Cupid—Venus—& Psyche

¹¹⁴ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image—Music—Text* trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 155-64.

¹¹⁵ *S/Z* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 95.

¹¹⁶ B.E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1967), 250-1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Incest between Venus and Cupid, first explicated in the kiss (*ES.1*), gives rise to incestuous insinuations between Psyche and Cupid: Psyche's physical appearance, from the reader's perspective, slowly transforms into Venus'. As "Cupid and Psyche" unfolds, the narrator gives more and more clues that Psyche is the spitting image of Venus. Unnamed for fifty-four lines of text,¹¹⁸ the youngest of three daughters causes quite a stir throughout her lands and elsewhere. Because of her widely-reported beauty there gathered together a multitude of seekers, "stupefied with admiration for her unequalled beauty...[T]hey would venerate her as utterly the goddess Venus herself."¹¹⁹ Because the narrator does not divulge the information that Venus and Psyche look the same, Winkler's 'first reader'¹²⁰ would assume that this unnamed girl does not actually look like Venus, that this sentence is merely employed as hyperbole to emphasize the singular winsomeness of this unnamed beauty. Paula James makes this assumption when she comments that Psyche "robs Venus of her *status* of beauty"—just the status.¹²¹

But something striking happens. This unnamed girl is presented with her first named identity: Venus. Uri Margolin has shown that in narrative "[a]n individual is introduced into our, or a character's, mental representations of a domain as soon as a PN [proper name] occurs in the corresponding discourse."¹²² Venus is Psyche's first identity

¹¹⁸ For the count, see Blanche Brotherton, "The Introduction of Characters by Name in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius," *Classical Philology* 29.1 (1934): 36.

¹¹⁹ *Inaccessae formonsitatis admiratione stupidi...ipsam prorsus deam Venerem venerabantur...*(4.28)

¹²⁰ For Winkler's discussion of a first reader, who is only beginning his first course through the novel, and the second reader, who may have trekked through the novel numerous times but has at least gone through it once, see Winkler, 10-11.

¹²¹ "Cupid at Work and at Play," *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel* 1 (1988): 114.

¹²² Uri Margolin, "Naming and Believing: Practices of the Proper Name in Narrative Fiction," *Narrative* 10.2 (May 2002): 109. "A character in a novel, *supposing that it is introduced by the attribution of a name conferred on it*, is progressively created by consecutive figurative notations extending throughout the length of the text, and it does not exist as a complete figure until the last page, thanks to the cumulative memorizing of the

for the reader, and this identity is reaffirmed almost immediately. She is considered “another Venus”¹²³—Venus #2. Because of the repetition, the first reader may suspect Venus’s eventual entrance, and once we learn that worship for Venus #1 has ceased to continue, it must be expected. Shortly thereafter, Venus #2 receives the “name of the not-present Venus”¹²⁴ because she, the narrator reveals, is being propitiated under its *nomen*. Now, the “real Venus” becomes enraged by “the immodest transference of these celestial honors to the worship of a mortal girl.”¹²⁵ The idea of an “immodest transference” of something—just anything—from Venus (#1) to Venus #2 is suspect since the unnamed Cupid’s affections are likewise transferred from Venus #1 to Venus #2. It is quite fitting; they *are* nearly the same person. Using a computer analogy, Margolin makes a relevant statement: “The occurrence later in the discourse of a somewhat different PN [for the same character] would initially lead to the opening of a new file. If however, we decide the new name is a mere variant or equivalent of the one we already have, the files will be merged.”¹²⁶ The question now becomes whether the signs, Venus #1 and Venus #2, should be merged in the reader’s mind since both Venus and Psyche gratify themselves sexually upon Cupid. Just as Venus offers ten kisses to humans, she gives one of the same sort to her son. While she considers Psyche an inferior to Cupid, Venus’ offering kisses to mortals is structurally parallel. Venus signifies both the goddess and her sexual successor, Psyche.

reader.” A.J. Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* trans. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 119.

¹²³ *aliam Venerem* 4.28.

¹²⁴ *Veneris absentis nomen propitatur* 4.29

¹²⁵ *haec honorum caelestium ad puellae mortalis cultum immodica translatio* 4.29

¹²⁶ Margolin 109.

In-between Venus' summoning of her son and her speech, we learn that Venus #2 has a name: Psyche.¹²⁷ Based upon Margolin's rationale, with the introduction of her name, the Psyche identity takes over the Venus #2 identity, even though her former identity as Venus #2 is still present. In an important article on Apuleius' narration Ken Dowden states that "[n]ames of character cause problems in anything other than an omniscient narration...In a first-person narrative, a name, like anything else, is a fact to be discovered; and this leads to a certain hesitance in presenting the name."¹²⁸ While "Cupid and Psyche" is told through the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator, problems do still exist. The second reader may wonder why an omniscient narrator would introduce the girl's name not only somewhat late into the narrative but also in quite a round-about way. If the narrator had introduced Psyche/Venus #2 as Psyche earlier in the proceedings, the reader would not have conceived of her quite as much as Venus #2—for then she would have a name all to her own, Psyche, and would not require a secondary identity. Perhaps the searching second-reader may also recognize that the narrator introduces her name in a sly manner to draw our attention to the Venus and Cupid kiss. Venus #1 resumes her role as *the* Venus, and Venus #2 becomes Psyche immediately before Venus slips her son some tongue. By transforming Venus #2 into Psyche, the narrator nearly occludes the aforementioned transference: Venus #2 will replace Venus #1 as the seducer of Cupid, notably with her "Venereal whispering" (ES.3).

¹²⁷ *perducit ad illam civitatem et Psychen—hoc enim nomine puella nuncupabatur...*(4.30-1)

¹²⁸ Dowden, 421. Dowden also notes that "[o]mniscience allows the narrator [of *Apollonius of Tyre*] to state at the beginning, for instance, 'In civitate Antiochia rex fuit quidam nomine Antiochus.' Cupid and Psyche's opening clearly mirrors such an opening—minus the names: *Erant in quadam civitate rex et regina.*

Psyche's physical transformation picks up speed after this seductive kiss. Jammed within this section, which resignifies Venus #2 as Psyche, there exists a further indicator of the physical resemblance between Venus and Psyche. The narrator tells us that Venus informs her son "about [Psyche's] emulation of beauty"¹²⁹—to be quite literal. The first reader may assume that the word, *aemulatio*, simply signifies "unfriendly rivalry."¹³⁰ However, the second reader may entertain the possibility that this word could indicate Psyche's impeccable "imitation"¹³¹ of Venus's physical appearance. Likely, the first-reader considers Psyche no longer as Venus #2 during the interim when Psyche lives within Cupid's palace, even though she still retains that identity. The insinuation of incest is again salient when, after being burned by a spurting, phallic lamp, Cupid flees to his mother's bed, as back to a once-scorned lover. He is, in fact, in *her* bed. Once Venus from outside her room berates her son, only a door's distance away, she refers to Psyche as not only "the rival of my name" but also "the usurper of my appearance [*formae*]."¹³² Now, all our assumptions are confirmed. Psyche is an exact replica of Venus. Since Psyche and Venus are identical in appearance, Cupid was, by all appearances, having sex with his mother.

On Cupid and Psyche's final night of love Apuleius further reveals the incest motif by an allusion to an infamous myth of incest, the affair between Myrrha and her

¹²⁹ *de formositatis aemulatione* (4.31)

¹³⁰ *Oxford Latin Dictionary* 64, 2nd definition of *aemulatio*.

¹³¹ *Oxford Latin Dictionary* 64, 3rd definition of *aemulatio*.

¹³² *tunc indignata Venus exclamavit vel maxime: Psychen ille meae formae succubam, mei nominis aemulam uere diligit?* (5.28).

father in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹³³ Apuleius does this by making Psyche's betrayal parallel the moment when Cinyras discovered that he was sleeping with his daughter:

"The following night doubles the crime, and it was not over for her.

When nonetheless Cinyras, eager to know [*cognoscere*] his lover

After so much sex, with his light held out saw [*inlato lumine vidit*]

Both the crime and his daughter and with his words held back by his grief

He ripped his shining sword out of his scabbard."¹³⁴

Apuleius imitates Ovid's phraseology for "with his light held out," an ablative absolute (*inlato lumine*) with his own ablative absolute: "with the lantern held out" [*prolata lucerna*].¹³⁵ Apuleius maintains similarity between the two by ordering his ablative absolute with the participle, followed by the noun. *Prolata* and *inlato* are both forms of *fero* ("to bring, bear"), and *lumine* alliterates with *lucerna*. For the *AA*'s opening Apuleius was able to allude to Ovid's opening with "both sound and sense, but without repeating any of the same word":

Ovid	Apuleius
<u>f</u> ert... <u>f</u> ormas	<u>f</u> iguras <u>f</u> ortunasque
<u>c</u> orpora... <u>c</u> oeptis	<u>c</u> onversas... <u>r</u> efectas
<u>m</u> utates... <u>m</u> utastis	<u>m</u> utuo... <u>m</u> ireris

¹³³ Kenney 168. For an early discussion of Ovid's influence on Apuleius, see James Tatum, "Apuleius and Metamorphosis," *The American Journal of Philology* 93.2 (April 1972): 306-13, esp 310-3. Hugh J. Mason also connects Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Apuleius' also in the prologue for "the fact that each is the site of a major myth recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*." Hugh J. Mason, "The Distinction of Lucius in Apuleius' 'Metamorphoses,'" *Phoenix* 37.2 (Summer 1983): 137.

¹³⁴ Ovid *Met.* 10.472-4.

¹³⁵ Apuleius *AA* 5.22.

Instead, Apuleius utilizes “patterns of alliteration and assonance.”¹³⁶ Once the reader realizes the allusion to the incestuous scene, the reader is reminded that, by all appearances, Cupid and Psyche are engaging in an incestuous affair. But, of course, the difference is that Psyche violates the “sight taboo” formulated by Cupid when she gazes at his erotic flesh and wings,¹³⁷ while Cinyras the taboo of incest. Therefore, incest is hinted upon, not flatly stated.

Yet Apuleius could have differentiated Venus #1 and #2. Past representations distinguished them by appearance: “Psyche was rendered much younger and more girl-like than Aphrodite.”¹³⁸ However qualitatively ambiguous this statement may be, scholars have not puzzled over whether Aphrodite or Psyche is depicted in any given object, as they have with Psyche and Nike. Any way to differentiate between Psyche and Nike has confounded them because “slowly the Eros and Nike became Eros and his own girl friend Psyche...”¹³⁹ Apuleius, on the other hand, does all that he can to bridge any gaps between Venus and Psyche. E.J. Kenney has shown, based upon similarities in wording among passages, that Psyche’s kisses upon Cupid’s body resemble Venus’ kiss with her son and Venus’ promised honeyed kisses. After breaking the sight taboo, Psyche smothers him with open-mouthed and unruly kisses [*patulis ac petulantibus sauiis*].¹⁴⁰ By kissing Cupid as Venus had, Psyche revives her role as Venus #2.

¹³⁶ Judith K. Krabbe, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 44.

¹³⁷ Carl C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1992), 83-4.

¹³⁸ Marianne Maaskant-Kleibrink, “Psyche’s Birth,” *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel 3* (1990): 22.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21. Maaskant-Kleibrink also notes that K. Schauenburg considered all of the winged young female figures on South Italian vases to be Nike. See K. Schauenburg, “Flügelgestalten auf unteritalischen Grabvasen,” *JdI* 102 (1987), 199-232.

¹⁴⁰ 5.23.3. “Psyche and her Mysterious Husband,” *Antonine Literature* ed. D.A. Russell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990b), 184. Also see 192.

Their lovemaking, we can see again, is tinged with incest, but, more importantly, we see that Psyche's roles and Venus' roles are easily redistributed among one another. Just as Apuleius' work presents Venus in Psyche's role as seducer of Cupid, various objects bear witness to Psyche as the mother of Cupid, Venus' typical role. Carl C. Schlam's analysis of a sculpture and certain gems merits reproduction:

“Eros and Psyche express another aspect of love both as a human experience and as a religious theme, that of a mother and child. A marble sculpture, recovered from the harbor at Baiae and identified as a Greek original of the second century B.C., presents the seated figure of Psyche, as a young woman with butterfly wings, holding an infant Eros in her arms (Plate VII-2 [in Schlam]). Two gems present similar designs....The form, however, of the works in question seems closest to that of Isis as mother holding the infant Horus.”¹⁴¹

Schlam also points out that the same image exists in Meleager's *Palatine Anthology* 12.132a and Plotinus' *Enn.* III.5.iv.¹⁴² Therefore, just as Psyche attempts to act as kourotropic goddess in various media, in *The Golden Ass* Venus attempts to act as Psyche, the lover of Cupid.

SU.4b. Byrrhena and Lucius

He holds him with his glittering eye—

The Wedding-Guess stood still,

And listens like a three years' child:

The Mariner hath his will.

¹⁴¹ Carl C. Schlam, *Cupid and Psyche: Apuleius and the Monuments* (University Park, PA: The American Philological Association, 1976), 24.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 52.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge – *The Ancient Mariner* ll.13-15.

In Thessaly Lucius “meet[s] accidentally with his kinswoman, Byrrhena.”¹⁴³ But in Thessaly nothing is accidental; everything is coincidental. Before the incident, Lucius wanders throughout the streets of the “forum of Cupid” and reflects upon Aristomenes’ story and universal gossip about the permeation of witchcraft in Thessaly. Because Lucius betrays his assumption that “there was nothing in that city that I could believe *is* as it is when I am looking upon it,”¹⁴⁴ this admission of circumspection prepares the reader to believe nothing will *be* as it seems in Thessaly. Almost immediately after Lucius voices this concern, the meeting takes place and Byrrhena makes the claim that she used to act as a mother to him. By juxtaposing what Lucius thinks about seeing and then what he sees, the narrator calls Byrrhena’s assertion into question. Byrrhena relies upon Lucius’ remembrance of anecdotes from his nursery staff as proof for her claim, since Lucius was very young when she supposedly nourished him. By making her assertion involve Byrrhena’s identity itself as caretaker, Apuleius calls Byrrhena’s role as a selfless, maternal figure into question.

While most commentators have described Byrrhena as “well-meaning,”¹⁴⁵ “an old family friend,”¹⁴⁶ others have noticed a more sinister side. R. Heine, for example, has claimed that Lucius refuses Byrrhena’s dinner party invitation and even “shivers at the mere thought of her house” because “she is accessory to his disgrace at the Festival,”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ B.E. Perry, “On Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* II, 31-II, 20,” *The American Journal of Philology* 46.3 (1925): 254.

¹⁴⁴ *Nec fuit in illa civitate quod aspiciens id esse crederem quod esset...*2.1

¹⁴⁵ Warren S. Smith, Jr., “Apuleius *Metamorphoses*,” *TAPA* 103 (1972): 528.

¹⁴⁶ Harrison, 211.

¹⁴⁷ R. Heine, “Picaresque Novel Versus Allegory,” *Aspects of Apuleius’ Golden Ass* eds. B.L. Hijmans Jr. and R. Th. Van der Paardt (Groningen: Bouma’s Boekhuis B.V. (1989), 26.

Lateiner includes Byrrhena in his list of Lucius abusers because she appears “calmly aware of his terrifying abasement at the festival of Laughter.”¹⁴⁸ Byrrhena, therefore, is not “the very opposite of the witches.”¹⁴⁹ Rather, Apuleius constructs Byrrhena as a witch by embedding witchlike traits within her through her characterization: she acts in concert with the witches and like Pamphile penetrates a youth, Lucius, with her gaze. After constructing her as a sexually wanton woman, Apuleius turns her machinations upon Lucius in order to implicate attempted incest.

Because no one has yet to connect Byrrhena with the witches, past scholarship has consigned blame to either Photis and Pamphile or Byrrhena, always *either...or*. D.S. Robertson in 1919 claimed that “the fight with the wineskins had nothing to do with Pamphile’s witchcraft but was a trap deliberately laid for Lucius by the young bloods of Hypata...aided and abetted by Byrrhena.”¹⁵⁰ Perry responded that “there is nothing here to indicate that the *vesana factio*...had anything to do...with Byrrhena” and instead “Pamphile’s witchcraft and the goat-skins-episode are *inseparably connected*” (emphasis his).¹⁵¹ However, Perry does later admit that “it seems quite probably that here and in III, 12 Apuleius is actually hinting, though very vaguely, that the fight with the wineskins was a put-up job in which Byrrhena was implicated.”¹⁵² Because no scholar’s opinion is

See also D.S. Robertson, “A Greek Carnival,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 39 (1919): 112.

¹⁴⁸ Lateiner (2000): 324.

¹⁴⁹ Hijmans (1978), 110. Hijmans conjectures that Byrrhena’s name may derive from a Greek word for “a tough piece of leather.” Because Hijmans admits that “such reasoning is not satisfactory,” i.e. that he is making a conjecture, his desire to interpret Byrrhena favorably appears as a personal bias, a personal bias repeated *ad nauseam* by other scholars. Hijmans could have claimed that “a tough piece of leather” may rather indicate that she is similar to physically worn-out, wrinkled witches.

¹⁵⁰ Robertson (1919): 112.

¹⁵¹ Perry, 257.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 259.

clearly preferable in assigning blame, it is more likely that the witches and Byrrhena work in concert, and considering Byrrhena is remarkably witchlike, it is not surprising. Just as Lucius views everything accidental in Thessaly as coincidental, Byrrhena's statement, as Heine has shown, is clearly prophetic for Lucius. She hopes that Lucius will devise some entertainment for her,¹⁵³ and Photis brings Byrrhena's desire to fruition with the necromancy of the wineskins. Byrrhena, the text reveals over time, is in-league with the witches.

The witches and Byrrhena share another trait—a penetrating gaze. As Lucius dines with the witch, Pamphile, he fears her gaze. Byrrhena had forewarned Lucius that “as soon as Pamphile will have espied any youth with a beautiful form, she is taken by his charm and thereupon she turns both her eye [*oculum*] and her mind upon him.”¹⁵⁴ After he stares into Pamphile's eyes, he believes that he just has seen Lake Avernus, a volcanic hell pit.¹⁵⁵ The obsession of gazing upon youths implicates Lucius' aunt as a witch. Even before Byrrhena weaves her physiognomic description of Lucius, she has already, to take a quote by Homi Bhabha out of context, turned “the gaze of discriminated back upon the eye of power,”¹⁵⁶ Lucius' own—tied to ours through the first person perspective, since it is actually Lucius, who had first gazed upon Byrrhena: “behold! [*ecce*] a woman with a bustling retinue walking with a quick step.” But Lucius' gaze, which enables him to describe her glittering couture in the next sentence, becomes impotent

¹⁵³ *Hunc tua praesentia nobis efficies gratiorem. Atque utinam aliquid de proprio lepore laetificum honorando deo comminiscaris, quo magis pleniusque tanto numini litemus.* 2.31.

¹⁵⁴ *Nam simul quemque conspexerit speciosae formae iuvenem, venustate eius sumitur et ilico in eum et oculum et animum detorquet.* 2.5.

¹⁵⁵ *Nam Milonis boni concinnaticiam mensulam rogatus ad cubueram, quam pote tutus ab uxoris eius aspectu, Byrrhenae monitorum memor, et perinde in eius faciem oculos meos ac si in Avernum lacum formidans deieceram.* 2.11.

¹⁵⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 37.

when Byrrhena inflicts her own eyes upon him. Like Byrrhena's exploitative act, "Cynthia's bold return of the lover's gaze [in Propertian elegy, especially in 1.3] constitutes her assumption of the male role of gazer," and it is apt to note for both Byrrhena and Cynthia that "a woman's assumption of traditionally masculine roles typically earns her the title of witch or monster."¹⁵⁷

As if these details are not damning enough, Byrrhena's physiognomic portrait itself also hints at her incestuous desire for her nephew. According to F. David Martin, "portrait features by accenting distinctive characteristics focus our attention upon the individual."¹⁵⁸ While all other viewers of Lucius do not comment not about his physique but about his social status, Byrrhena presents a block characterization of Lucius' appealing body: "his appearance is perfect. He is tall, but not lofty; a succulent [*suculenta*] leanness; his skin is rather ruddy, his hair blonde but not overdone; his blue eyes are watchful, quick to focus, as keen as an eagle's, and his walk is beautiful [*speciosus*] and natural."¹⁵⁹ While numerous scholars have shown this portrait to be physiognomic in nature, i.e. it shows that Lucius' physique compliments his brave character, scholars seem to forget that this description subjects Lucius to the female gaze, as do the witches. The adjectives, *suculenta* ("succulent" or more literally, "juicy"), and *speciosus* (literally "full of looking" → "beautiful (in appearance)") suggest that Byrrhena derives sexual pleasure from looking, just as much as the witches do. While Byrrhena praises Lucius' noble

¹⁵⁷ O'Neill, Kerill. "The Lover's Gaze and Cynthia's Glance." *Gendered Dynamics in Latin Love Poetry* eds. Ronnie Ancona and Ellen Greene. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 2005, 248.

¹⁵⁸ F. David Martin, "On Portraiture: Some Distinctions," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20.1 (Autumn 1961): 62.

¹⁵⁹ *inenormis proceritas, suculenta gracilitas, rubor temperatus, flavum et inadfectatum capillitium, oculi caesii quidem, sed vigiles et in aspectu micantes, prorsus aquilini, os quoquoversum floridum, speciosus et immeditatus incessus.* 2.2. R. Heine states that Lucius' "attractive appearance is depicted by Byrrhena" (emphasis mine). R. Heine, 31.

uprightness with only six words, she uses thirty-six in order to introduce and finally provide a physiognomic portrait of Lucius.¹⁶⁰ According to the truth-of-consensus methodology for determining physical beauty, “[i]f a significant number of ‘judges’ designate a person as physically attractive, then that person is defined as physically attractive.”¹⁶¹ Because Byrrhena alone reveals this information, she appears as a powerful revealer to (if not “over”) the reader for information about the physical characteristics of Lucius.

SU.4d. The Stepmother and Stepson (see ES.2b.i)

SU.5 Conclusion

The linguistic manifestations of incest discussed in the last chapter indicate that Venus and Cupid’s relationship is central to understanding the incest motif. This chapter has shown that through various character relationships, the incest motif extends to the most Egyptian of books, the Isis Book. The incest motif aids in structuring the text, but little is revealed about Apuleius’ views about incest.

¹⁶⁰ Hugh J. Mason, “Physiognomy in Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 2.2,” *Classical Philology* 79.4 (1984): 307-9. Mason only considers Lucius’ blue eyes to be indicative of a flaw in his character. Lucius’ eyes indicate that he is overbold. Elizabeth C. Evans also identifies Byrrhena’s description as a physiognomic portrait, although she considers Lucius’ portrait to be completely complimentary of his good nature. *Physiognomics in the Ancient World, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series* 59.5 (1969): 72-3.

¹⁶¹ E. Berscheid and E. Walster, “Physical Attractiveness,” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* ed. L. Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 181.

The Last Episode (LE): Tying the Fibers Together

The Golden Ass' Power

While its text recreates itself as an Egyptian artifact, the incest motif of *The Golden Ass* may not be used to generate a socio-historical analysis of the second century C.E. In the same way that “[t]he female is employed in the [elegiac] text only as a means to defining the male,”¹⁶² incest does not exist within *The Golden Ass* for its own sake. Instead, incest structures the transition from Venus→Isis. Narrative deforms any topic, which it depicts, including the incest motif, and therefore we cannot speak learn anything about contemporary thoughts on incest.

But the author, Apuleius the sophist, is the one who truly deforms. New Historicists and other theorists still repeat *ad nauseam* that the individual was a myth of the Renaissance and that the individual merely reflect the state of society at that time. But while constraints always exist, so do freedoms. In any narrative, whether literary or

¹⁶² Maria Wyke, *The Roman Mistress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30.

historical, the author may subordinate some elements for the sake of others. Such is the case with *The Golden Ass*. Apuleius subordinates the incest motif for the sake of the Venus→Isis theme, a theme which, like the materiality of the text, spans its beginning and its ending: Lucius' journey away from the witches and Byrrhaena to his mother, Isis.

In modern practices of Isiac worship the relationship between mother and son, not father and son or mother and daughter, is most sacred. M. Isidora Forrest, a native of Oregon, not Egypt, provides a prayer, "The Naming," in which the parent/child relationship is represented as the one between Isis and Horus, mother and son:

Priestess-Mother holds the child in her arms while Priest-Father stands beside them.

PRIESTESS: [*Addressing child*] I welcome you into this family and into this world, my child, in your name of [*state child's legal name*].

PRIEST: [*Addressing child*] I welcome you into this family and into this world, my child, in your name of [*state child's legal name*].

Priestess-Mother turns child toward group. Each person now has the opportunity to welcome the child.

PRIESTESS: We invite you all, our beloved friends and family, to welcome this child in her/his name of [*state child's name*].

EACH PERSON: Welcome, [*state child's legal name*]!

This is completed.

PRIESTESS: As you are also a Child of Isis, we also give to you a Horus name which shall be a secret symbol of the love between you and us.

Parent/s lean toward the child and whisper the Horus name in the child's ears.

PRIESTESS & PRIEST: We love you and welcome you in your name
of [*whisper Horus [sic] name into the child's ears*].

*Parent/s trace the invoking Star of Isis upon the child to seal the name.*¹⁶³

Isis *kourotrophos*, may you always bless all mother and son relationships!

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¹⁶³ M. Isidora Forrest, *Isis Magic: Cultivating a Relationship with the Goddess of 10,000 Names* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2001), 395.

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