Part V: **Fable and Ancient Novel**

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Crossings between Fable and Novel: Some Examples from Phaedrus and Apuleius

Abstract: Among all the ancient novels, the animal fable has a privileged relationship with the story of Lucius, whose metamorphosis into an ass subjects him to a fate of hunger, beatings, and unbearable labours, just as often happens to the donkeys of fable. This paper focuses on Phaedrus' version of the Aesopic fable and on Apuleius' version of Lucius' story: thanks to their poetics and thematic *uarietas*, they lend themselves to interesting intertextual parallels. First of all, the two Latin authors share the decision to rewrite a Greek original for a public of Roman language and culture, and both engage in a meaningful metaliterary dialogue with the reader. For this reason, we start from the analogies between the programmatic discourses with which, in a self-ironizing manner, both Phaedrus and Apuleius present to the reader humble and entertaining *fabulae* (which, however, conceal a deeper meaning); then we examine a series of thematic and linguistic convergences between their works (see esp. Phaed. 5.1 Z. [= 4.1 G.] / Apul. *Met*. 8.24–26; Phaed. *app*. 8 Z. [= *app*. 10 G.] / Apul. *Met*. 9.9–10; Phaed. *app*. 14 Z. [= *app*. 16 G.] / Apul. *Met*. 6.28; 7.13; 9.39). The elements we point out are not meant to demonstrate Apuleius' direct dependence on Phaedrus; rather, they constitute a significant testimony, in the Latin context, of osmosis between fable and novel, both of which are traditionally low and popular genres.

1 Programmatic convergences

The fable and the novel share a status as low genres, unworthy of serious readers and severe critics. In authors such as Phaedrus and Apuleius, who carry on an intense dialogue with the reader, this aspect is clearly indicated at the programmatic level. Indeed, these two authors display a shared attitude that aimed to belittle their own work, using terms that suggest the frivolous, half-serious nature typical of games and children's tales: Phaedrus, for example, refers to his fables with the words *ioci* (or *iocari*, *ludere*), *neniae*, and *argutiae*.[1] *Neniae*,[2] in particular,

1 Cf. Phaed. 1 *prol*. 7 Z. [= G.]; 2 *prol*. 5 Z. (but with *logus* instead of *iocus*) [= G.]; 3 *prol*. 10, 37 Z. [= G.]; 4 *epil*. 3 Z. [= G.]; 5.2.3 Z. [= 4.2.3 G.]; 5.7.2 Z. [= 4.7.2 G.]; *app*. 2.1 Z. [= G.]. On the poetics of *lusus* in Phaedrus, see esp. Lamberti 1980; Hamm 2000; Mattiacci 2008; Gärtner 2007; 2015, 43–47.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111181936-014

calls to mind the atmosphere of the simple stories told to children, whose narrator par excellence is the nurse. This is made clear in Quintilian's[3] comparison of Aesop's fables to *fabulae nutricularum*, a comparison later picked up by Ausonius, who underscores their function as lullabies (*nutricis inter lemmata | lallique somniferos modos* ["amid nurse's tale and soporific strains of lullaby"], *Ep*. 9b.90 Green).[4] To these definitions should be added that of *aniles fabellae*, used by Horace to introduce the most famous fable of Antiquity, that of the country mouse and the city mouse.[5] Similarly, Apuleius refers to the various stories woven together in his novel as *fabulae lepidae* and *aniles.* In particular, in the *incipit* of the problematic prologue, an ambiguous *ego* promises the reader that it will weave *uarias fabulas* together and caress his ears *lepido susurro* (*Met*. 1.1.1),[6] where *susurrus* — not unlike *nenia* (vd. n. 2) — seems to allude both to the pleasing 'singsong' of a tale narrated in a soft voice and also to its magical, soporific enchantment. And it is just to console Charite, the maiden carried off by Lucius-the-Ass's first owners, and to lull her back to sleep when she was woken up by nightmares,

2 On this term, which Phaedrus uses twice, both times in reference to his own works (3 *prol.* 10 Z. [= G.] *uiles nenias*; 5.2.3 Z. [= 4.2.3 G.] cit. below n. 8), cf. Gärtner 2021, 92–93. Alongside the funereal and magical sphere (cf. OLD s.v. 1, 3), *nenia* refers specifically to a children's jingle in Hor. *Epist*. 1.1.62–63.

3 *Inst*. 1.9.2: *Aesopi fabellas, quae fabulis nutricularum proxime succedunt* ("Aesop's fables, which follow on directly from nurses' stories"). Similarly, about the novel, cf. Macrob. *In Somn*. 1.2.8, where Petronius' and Apuleius' tales, full of fictitious adventures of lovers, are relegated to the cradles of nurses (*in nutricum cunas*).

4 In a verse epistle, Ausonius is presenting the *Apologi* of Iulius Titianus, a prose paraphrase of Aesopic fables in iambs intended for reading in early childhood to the son of the dedicatee, his friend Probus. On the problems posed by this passage and the identification of the author of the verse fables (Babrius or Phaedrus?), I refer to Mattiacci 2021, 111–115, with bibliography. The term *lemma* (here in the sense of "tale") seems chosen for its onomatopoeic assonance with *lallum* (or *lallus*), a *hapax* to be connected to the infantile sound *lallare* (cf. *nutrices infantibus, ut dormiant, solent dicere saepe: lalla, lalla, lalla: aut dormi, aut lacte* ["nurses usually say to infants to make them sleep: lalla, lalla, lalla: either sleep or suck milk"], *schol. Pers*. 3.18).

5 Hor. *Sat*. 2.6.77–81: *Ceruius haec inter uicinus garrit anilis | ex re fabellas* […] *sic incipit: "olim | rusticus urbanum murem mus paupere fertur | accepisse cauo* […]" ("Now and then our neighbour Cervius rattles off old wives' tales that fit the case... he thus begins: 'Once upon a time a country mouse welcomed a city mouse in his poor hole [...]'"). Cf. also Philostr. *VA* 5.14, where asses and frogs are emblems of Aesopic wisdom suitable for old women and children (Finkelpearl 2018, 250).

6 On the prologue of the novel and the identification of the ambiguous *ego*, I limit myself to a reference to recent commentaries (with discussion of the enormous previous bibliography): GCA 2007, 8–26, 62–91; Graverini 2019, 138–149. On the definitions of *neniae* and *fabulae anilis*, which go back to a traditional self-mocking attitude that makes use of the image of a childish pastime as a cryptic clue to lead the reader to a serious philosophical and moral exploration, cf. Graverini/Keulen 2009, 198–204; Graverini 2012, 95–113.

that the robbers' old servant woman promises to distract her *narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis* ("with pretty stories and old wives' tales", *Met*. 4.27.8). And this is how, with Apuleius' typical authorial modesty, the *bella fabella* of Cupid and Psyche is introduced.

As I have noted elsewhere, the self-ironizing in these definitions is obvious, as their intention is to prevent and at the same time guard against the criticisms of *nasuti*[7] readers. Phaedrus' *neniae* may seem to be a game, but in fact they hide a deeper truth useful to the reader who knows how to examine them carefully, as the author himself makes clear in 5.2 Z. [= 4.2 G.], in accordance with the twofold intention to *delectare* and *docere*, which is shown to be his programme from the very first prologue.[8] Then again, if we consider the philosophical-religious implications that critics have always found in the plot of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and in the fable of Psyche in particular, we clearly see the seriocomic nature of these *fabulae*, which the untrustworthy narrators of the novel (Lucius or the robbers' old servant) present as mere *lepidae* and *aniles*, whereas in reality they, like the Aesopic fable, occupy the ambiguous space of the *spoudogeloion* of satiric ancestry, whose aim is to amuse and entertain (*delectare*) for a serious purpose (*docere*).

Another point of contact in the statements of the narrators of the fable and the novel is their claim to truthfulness, which is linked to the presumed realism demanded by the two genres: the more unbelievable the stories, the more marked is the reference to facts that actually occurred in their own time, to which they sometimes claim to have been eye-witnesses. It is significant that in one of Phaedrus' novelistic fables, in which he wants to show the dangers involved in *credere et non credere*, after two mythical examples (those of Hippolytus and Cassandra) he introduces a contemporary fact, as follows:

> Ergo exploranda est ueritas multum, prius
> quam stulta praue iudicet sententia.

7 Cf. Phaed. 5.7 Z. [= 4.7 G.] for the disparaging designation of a follower of high genres like *nasutus* (1) and *lector Cato* (21), on which see Mattiacci 2022a, 71–72.

8 Cf. Phaed. 5.2.1–7 Z. [= 4.2.1–7 G.]: *Ioculare tibi uidemur* [...] *sed diligenter intuere has nenias*; | *quantam sub illis utilitatem reperies!* [...] *rara mens intellegit* | *quod interiore condidit cura angulo* ("I seem to you to be fooling [...] but take a careful look into these trifles; what a lot of practical instruction you will find in tiny affairs! [...] it is the unusual mind that perceives what the artist took pains to tuck away in some inner nook"); 1 *prol.* 3–4 Z. [= G.]: *Duplex libelli dos est: quod risum mouet* | *et quod prudentis uitam consilio monet* ("A double dowry comes with this, my little book: it moves to laughter and, if you are careful, by counsels guides the conduct of life").

> **Sed, fabulosam ne uetustatem eleues**,[9]
> **narrabo tibi memoria quod factum est mea**.
>
> (Phaed. 3.10.5–8 Z. [= G.])

> Therefore, the truth ought be searched out thoroughly in advance before a foolish opinion leads to a wrong decision. But, lest you make light of my ancient examples, as being mythical, I will tell you of something that happened within my own memory.
>
> (Transl. Perry, with some adaptations)

This statement has significant echoes in the novel of Petronius when, to show women's constantly flighty and shameless nature, Eumolpus introduces the 'incredible' story of the matron of Ephesus:

> Ceterum Eumolpos [...] multa in muliebrem leuitatem coepit iactare [...] nullamque esse feminam tam pudicam, quae non peregrina libidine usque ad furorem auerteretur. **Nec se tragoedias ueteres curare aut nomina saeculis nota, sed rem sua memoria factam, quam expositurum** se esse, si uellemus audire.
>
> (Petron. *Sat*. 110.6–8)

> Then Eumolpus [...] began to hurl many taunts at the fickleness of women [...] how no woman is so chaste that she cannot be driven to mad distraction by lust for a foreigner. He was not thinking about those old ancient tragedies or names notorious in earlier ages, but an affair that happened in his own lifetime, which he would set out for us, if we wished to hear it.
>
> (Transl. Schmeling)

Similarly, some stories of magic in the *Satyrica* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* are narrated by eye-witnesses, who are protagonists in the incredible events whose truthfulness they stress over and over again. Niceros and Trimalchio, for instance, make comments on the horror stories with which they entertain their guests at the dinner party, using phrases such as: *nolite me iocari putare; ut mentiar, nullius patrimonium tanti facio* ("don't think I am joking; I value no one's fortune so high that I'd lie about this", *Sat*. 62.6), or else *rogo vos, oportet credatis* ("I beg you to believe", *Sat*. 63.9). Similarly, the first tale in Apuleius' novel, in which the narrator Aristomenes and his friend Socrates are victims of the witch Meroe, is introduced by these eloquent words:

> Sed tibi prius deierabo Solem istum omniuidentem deum **me uera comperta memorare**, nec uos ulterius dubitabitis si Thessaliae proximam ciuitatem peruenieritis, quod ibidem passim per ora populi sermo iactetur quae palam gesta sunt.
>
> (Apul. *Met*. 1.5.1–2)

9 On the textual problems of this line, which I quote following the edition of Zago 2020, see Zago 2015, 91, and Gärtner 2021, 172 n. 19.

> But first I shall swear to you by the Sun, this all-seeing god, that I am narrating events which I know at first hand to be true; and you will have no further doubts when you arrive at the next town in Thessaly, for the story is circulating there on everyone's lips about what occurred in plain daylight.
>
> (Transl. Hanson)

The reference to personal experience and contemporary events is an artifice serving to guarantee the fictitious truthfulness of the fictional narrative. The fable, and Phaedrus in particular, does not refuse a priori the *fabulosa uetustas* (i.e. remote and mythical examples); indeed, in *app*. 6 Z. [= *app.* 7 G.], where the several mythical examples of the punishments of the Underworld are interpreted allegorically, it is stated at the end that *antiquitas* had deliberately concealed the truth so that only the wise man could fathom it.[10] Yet it is significant that the negative remark about the *fabulosa uetustas* refers in particular to tragedy, the main repository of the myths of Hippolytus and Cassandra, in contrast to which a novelistic theme linked to contemporary reality, in which the *diuus Augustus* appears, is introduced. It seems, therefore, that the clarification can also count as a programmatic declaration characterizing the low genre as linked to the modes of everyday reality.[11]

2 Apuleius, the Aesopic tradition, and Phaedrus' *res nouae*

These points of contact between fable and novel at the metaliterary level are reflected also in their content, with themes exchanged and interwoven between the two genres. Indeed, since the ancient fable long remained at the margins of literature and, given its markedly popular character, it gained entry only via the lower genres (iambic poetry, comedy, and in Rome above all satire, whose informal character was open to incorporating heterogeneous elements, including popular

10 Cf. 17–18: *Consulto inuoluit ueritatem antiquitas,* | *ut sapiens intellegeret, erraret rudis* ("It was by design that antiquity wrapped up truth in symbols, that the wise might understand, the ignorant go astray").

11 On the rhetorical expedient of referring to the present (cf. e.g. Sen. *Ep*. 24.11), and on the relation between the passage of Phaedrus and that of Petronius, cf. Vannini 2010, 28, 233; Gärtner 2021, 172 n. 22. On the hypothesis of "eine spielerische Distanzierung" ("a playful distancing") from tragedy in this passage of Phaedrus, cf. Gärtner 2021, 172–173; more generally on the relationship of Phaedrus to the tragic genre, cf. Gärtner 2017; Mattiacci 2022a (also with reference to the novel of Apuleius).

and everyday ones), the presence of Aesopic elements in the later but equally mixed and popular genre of the fictional narrative appears to be a continuation of this process of osmosis. At any rate, it is a decidedly interactive phenomenon: the fable, in the more literary and mature guise provided by Phaedrus, enriches Aesopic material, which was closely tied to animal guise, with novelistic motifs, while the Greek and Latin novel, in the complexity of its various plots, gives a home to prompts and motifs from fable, allusions to the Aesopic tradition, and complete apologues. In particular, the story narrated by Apuleius and his Greek source has as protagonist of a large part of the narrative an ass or, better, a man 'disguised' as an ass, just like the animals of the Aesopic tradition, though with the essential difference that he is deprived of their fundamental characteristic — the ability to speak. But to this we shall return.

On the presence and functions of the fable in the Greek and Latin novel overall, we refer to the detailed study of van Dijk.[12] On the *Metamorphoses* in particular, van Dijk lists a series of motifs deriving from the fabulist tradition (defined as 'non-fables'), which Apuleius borrows in a variety of ways, recasting them and adapting them to the plot and characters of his story.[13] A few examples will allow us to understand this method. A widespread popular belief about the beaver's instinctive ability to save its life by biting off its testicles, which contain the precious *castoreum* it is hunted for, is rewritten by Phaedrus (*app*. 28 Z. [= *app.* 30 G.]) in the form of an apologue with a final exhortation to free oneself from riches, which are always dangerous.[14] The same motif appears in *Met*. 1.9.2, where, however, it is not tied to a moral teaching, but rather to two of the novel's major themes, metamorphosis and castration: the witch Meroe, protagonist of the first embedded story, transforms an unfaithful lover into a beaver *quod ea bestia captiuitati metuens ab insequentibus se praecisione genitalium liberat, ut illi quoque simile proueniret* ("because when that animal is afraid of being captured it es-

12 van Dijk 1996.

13 van Dijk 1996, 514, 517–519; cf. also the *Index Locorum* in Adrados 2003, s.v. "Apuleius". Previous references to the Aesopic fable in Apuleius are found (starting from Crusius 1889) in van Thiel 1971, 184–186; Mason 1978, 10; Scobie 1975, 30–33. The parallels singled out concern essentially the Greek fable and are not always convincing, as has been well demonstrated by Finkelpearl 2018 in a contribution that offers new perspectives on Apuleius' use of the fable (mainly Greek, whereas the present study aims to focus above all on the relationship with Phaedrus, see below § 4).

14 On the same theme, see Aesop. 118 P. [= 120 Hsr.; 154 Ch.], but Phaedrus romanizes the fable, using for "beaver" the term *fiber* and criticizing the Greeks and the Graecism *castor* (on this fable, see Schmalzgruber in this volume, 172–177). The *castoreum*, taken from an inguinal gland, was valued for its therapeutic properties. The belief in the beaver's self-castration is also accepted in writings on natural history (Plin. *HN* 8.109; Ael. *NA* 6.34; see also Juv. 12.34).

capes from its pursuers by cutting off its own genitals, and she wanted the same thing to happen to him").[15] Another example of a probable adaptation of a fable motif to the ass-protagonist of the *Metamorphoses* is the one, known in several versions (Babr. 11; Aphth. 38 [= Aesop. 283 P.]), of the incendiary fox, a metaphor for an attempt to harm others that rebounds on the practitioner: a man captures a fox and sets it loose with burning tow tied to its tail, to punish it for the damage it had caused to his vineyard (or to destroy his neighbours' abundant harvest), but instead the animal in its flight sets fire to the crops of the person who had acted so foolishly in the grip of anger (or of envy).[16] In Apuleius' version (*Met*. 7.19.4–20.3), the wicked owner is a *puer deterrimus*, to whom Lucius-the-Ass has been entrusted, and who torments him in every possible way, to the point of making him carry a load of tow with a burning ember inside; the animal manages to save itself by jumping into a deep pool, and the outcome of the story is therefore different. Yet, the punishment of the sadistic *puer* is merely postponed, while for the time being he mocks his victim, blaming the ass for the fire because he came too close to the neighbours' bonfires, and calling him *inigninus*[17] (something like an 'incendiary ass' instead of the well-known fox).

Thus, Apuleius' handling of fable materials does not seem to be very different from how he deals with proverbs, which he uses for narrative purposes. We need only think of the episode of the *tres utres inflati* ("three inflated goatskins") and the mock trial (*Met*. 2.32–3.18), in which proverbial expressions about wineskins — most famously the one about the haughty, vacuous nature of men, who are compared to "swollen wineskins" (also present in Petron. *Sat*. 42.4: *utres inflati ambulamus*) — are combined with and adapted to the story of the magically animated wineskins pierced by the sword of Lucius, the *utricida.* Or we need only think of the behaviour of the curious ass who, when he is being sought by some soldiers together with his current owner (the gardener), reveals his presence by peeking out of a little window of his hiding-place, an episode that is said to have

15 On the theme of castration as punishment and revenge in the *Metamorphoses*, cf. GCA 2007, 214.

16 On the myth of the incendiary fox, also taken up in an aetiological key in Ov. *Fast*. 4.691–712, see Mincione 1981. On Babr. 11 and this motif, see Spielhofer 2023, 218–231.

17 *Met*. 7.20.3: *"Quo usque ergo frustra pascemus inigninum istum?"* ("How long, then, shall we profitlessly feed this firebug?"). *Inigninum* is the reading of F, also transmitted by φ (with *igninum* in the margin) and accepted, though with much doubt, by several editors (cf. GCA 1981, 213–214): it may conceal a play on words (cf. Nicolini 2011, 135–136); Kenney 1998, 244, translates "incendiary ass" and Fo 2002, 327, "piroasino". The episode is also found in *Onos* 31, though without the reference to the neighbours and the ironic definition.

given rise to the proverb *de prospectu et umbra asini* ("about the peeping ass and his shadow", *Met*. 9.42).[18]

What is lacking, however, in the *Metamorphoses* are actual fables narrated *in extenso*, like those in Achilles Tatius' novel (2.21–22), where we find a sort of "fable fight", that is, a playful duel between two servants (Conops, Leucippe's untrustworthy servant, and Satyrus, Clitophon's cunning servant), who narrate two Aesopic fables in which the characters of the lion and the mosquito are clearly relevant to the narrators themselves. It is interesting to note here that the first fable, narrated by Conops, is closely related to the version found in anonymous collections of Aesop's tales (Aesop. 259 P. [= 292 Hsr.; 211 Ch.]), while that told by Satyrus, who will be victorious in the contest, is more rhetorically elaborate, longer, and richly adorned with musical and military metaphors, in comparison with the original version (Aesop. 255 P. [= 267 Hsr.; 189 Ch.]).[19]

At any rate, Apuleius shows specific interest in the Aesopic tradition, as is well illustrated by a passage in the *Florida*,[20] where, in answer to the request for an improvised speech, he declares his fear of winding up like Aesop's crow, introducing the fable as follows:

> At est hercule formido ne id mihi euenerit, quod coruo suo euenisse Aesopus fabulatur, id erit ne, dum hanc nouam laudem capto, paruam illam, quam ante peperi, cogar amittere. Sed de apologo quaeritis: non pigebit aliquid fabulari.
>
> (*Flor*. *fr*. 4.108 Beaujeu)

> But, by Hercules, I am worried that what Aesop says happened to his crow may happen to me; that is, that while I strive for this new prize, I may be compelled to forfeit what little glory I have already won. But you ask about the fable and I will not be sorry to tell you the story.
>
> (Transl. Hilton)

The brilliant lecturer follows this with two successive versions of the famous fable of the crow and the fox: one takes full advantage of the opportunity to amplify

18 On Apuleius' tendency to give a narrative dimension to proverbial expressions, cf. Brancaleone/Stramaglia 1993 (to whom I refer also for the documentation on the sources of the proverbs mentioned above); Finkelpearl 2018, 260–262; Graverini 2019, 338. On the connections between the cited passages by Petronius and Apuleius, cf. Ciaffi 1960, 106–108.

19 Cf. van Dijk 1996, 525–528. A typical example of continuous interweaving between fable and novel is the *Vita Aesopi*, where the numerous fables narrated by Aesop are embedded within the novelistic plot of his life (cf. van Dijk 1996, 530–541).

20 *Flor*. *fr*. 4.108–111 Beaujeu. The passage is part of the so-called "false prologue" of the *De deo Socratis*, generally considered to be a series of *excerpta* linked to the *Florida*; on this complicated and still-debated question, cf. Beaujeu 1973, 5–7, 161–162; Harrison/Hilton/Hunink 2001, 177–180; Martos 2015, xxxv–xxxvi.

and embellish the episode, while the other is characterized by the most concise *breuitas*. This approach recalls in certain ways that of Achilles Tatius, but it is used for the same fable. Thus, it seems to be an example of a concrete application, perhaps not without irony, of the scholastic practice of *progymnasmata*, in which the *Aesopi fabellae*, useful for the first exercises of the students of the *grammaticus*, were given a paraphrase *qua et breuiare quaedam et exornare saluo modo poetae sensu permittitur* ("in which it is allowed to abbreviate and embellish some parts, so long as the poet's meaning is preserved", Quint. *Inst*. 1.9.2).[21] Even if — as is the norm — the fable is generically presented along with the label of *Aesopus*, it is not impossible to discern in Apuleius' 'baroque' reworking some lexical traces of Phaedrus, such as those concerning the position of the crow (far vaguer in the Greek versions): *sublime euectus, in quadam proxima quercu in summo eius cacumine tutus sedit* ("he flew up and perched safely on the top of a nearby oak", *Flor*. *fr*. 4.109: cf. Phaed. 1.13.4 Z. [= G.]: *celsa residens arbore* ["perched on a high tree"], perhaps mixed with 2.4.1 Z. [= G.]: *aquila in sublimi quercu nidum fecerat* ["an eagle had made her nest high up in a lofty oak"]).[22] Apuleius, on the other hand, when speaking of *offula* concerning the food stolen by the crow[23] — where the Aesopic versions mention a morsel of cheese (Phaedrus and Babrius), or of meat (Aesop) —, seems to have relied on more than one source, and to have tried in this way to get around their differences. What is more, he introduces details lacking in the Aesopic tradition (for instance, the initial competition between the two ani-

21 On Apuleius' rewriting as an expression of implementation of the progymnasmatic model, cf. Harrison 2000, 131–132; Pugliarello 2014, 78–79, who underscores its ironic purpose; Scappaticcio 2017, 20–22.

22 The well-known fable of the crow and the fox, also mentioned in Hor. *Sat*. 2.5.55–57, existed in several versions: Aesop. 124 P. [= 126 Hsr.; 166 Ch.]; Phaed. 1.13 Z. [= G.]; Babr. 77. The fable is also known from the bilingual scholastic tradition of the *Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana* (Flammini 2004, 85, 2151–2164), on which see Scappaticcio, 2017, 20–22. On the fortunes of this fable theme from antiquity to modern times, see Bertini 2009; cf. also Adrados 2003, 160–165. For the lexical analogies with Phaedrus, whose text "sembrerebbe in qualche modo riemergere pur nel profluvio inventivo apuleiano" ("would seem to re-emerge somehow in the riot of Apuleius' inventiveness"), cf. Pugliarello 2014, 79–80; on the silence concerning the name of Phaedrus and the generic reference to *Aesopus* as *auctor* indicating a genre rather than the man himself, cf. Mattiacci 2021, 109–111.

23 *Flor*. *fr*. 4.108: *Coruus et uulpes unam offulam simul uiderant eamque raptum festinabant* ("A crow and a fox had caught sight of a scrap of food simultaneously, and were hurrying to snatch it up"). On *offula*, cf. Apul. *Met*. 1.4.1: *polentae caseatae* […] *offulam* ("bite of cheese pudding") with GCA 2007, 131.

mals and the mythological reference to the crow as a bird sacred to Apollo),[24] and multiplies the linguistic and stylistic ornaments (see e.g. *Flor*. *fr*. 4.110: *iam ipse alis persequax, oculis perspicax, unguibus pertinax* ["a bird that is impetuous in flight, perspicacious in sight, and tenacious in bite"]). But beyond this, what strikes us is the substitution of the moral[25] with reference to the occasion of speaking *ex tempore* (see above): and so in this case, too, and in a fable told *in extenso*, we can speak of a kind of updating.[26]

We find a connection more specifically to Phaedrus, and not only generically to the Aesopic tradition, in Apul. *Met*. 8.24–26, where Lucius-the-Ass is sold in the market to a disgusting *senex cinaedus*, one of those people from the dregs of society who carry the Syrian Goddess around to the sound of cymbals, forcing her to beg for alms.[27] All the bargaining between the auctioneer and the priest is interwoven with tongue-in-cheek insinuations alluding to asses' proverbial prowess in the erotic sphere[28] and to the buyer's passivity. This anticipates the following scene in which the priest, returning to his companions he apostrophizes as *puellae*, presents the *seruus pulchellus* he has purchased at the market, who will become their husband.[29] In the bargaining scene it may already be possible to recognize

24 But see also the fox's speech about the colours black vs. white in relation to the crow and the swan, whose song contrasts with the crow's supposed lack of voice (*Flor*. *fr*. 4.110).

25 Cf. Phaedrus' promythium (1.13.1–2 Z. [= G.]): *Qui se laudari gaudet uerbis subdolis* | *fere dat poenas turpi poenitentia* ("He who takes delight in treacherous flattery usually pays the penalty by repentance and disgrace"); instead, the epimythium should be considered spurious (13–14, on which see Zago 2020, 20).

26 On the use of the fable as *exemplum* in a rhetorical context, to which Apuleius refers here while dropping its symbolic meaning, see Finkelpearl 2018, 255–257.

27 *Met*. 8.24.2: *cinaedum et senem cinaedum, caluum quidem sed cincinnis semicanis et pendulis capillatum, unum de triuiali popularium faece, qui per plateas et oppida cymbalis et crotalis personantes deamque Syriam circumferentes mendicare compellunt* ("a pervert, and an old one at that; bald on top but with grey ringlets of hair hanging round his head; one of those common people from the dregs of society who walk through the city streets and towns banging their cymbals and rattles, carrying the Syrian goddess round with them and forcing her to beg").

28 The allusions are favoured by the presentation of the ass as a servant: *Met*. 8.24.4–25.1: *quin emis bonum et frugi mancipium?* […] *non asinum uides* […] *sed prorsus ut in asini corio modestum hominem inhabitare credas* ("why not buy yourself a good and useful slave? […] you see before you not an ass […] but you would really think that inside this ass's hide dwelt a mild-mannered human being"); there is clear irony in the claim of the auctioneer, who is unaware that he is in fact right. On the figurative sources relating to sexual activities between *cinaedi* and asses, cf. GCA 1985, 214; on the other hand, the phallic nature of the ass is well-known (cf. Scobie 1975, 31 n. 18), and Lucius himself is presented as an *amator* lusting after both sexes (7.21.2).

29 *Met*. 8.26.1–4: "*Puellae, seruum uobis pulchellum en ecce mercata perduxi.*" […] *non enim seruum, sed maritum illum scilicet sibi perduxisse. Et "Heus," aiunt "caue ne solus exedas tam bellum*

the inspiration of fable when the priest tries to make sure of the ass's docility, reacting to the sarcastic allusions of the *praeco* in these terms: *an me putas, inepte, iumento fero posse deam committere, ut turbatum repente diuinum deiciat simulacrum?* ("You fool, do you suppose I could entrust the goddess to an animal who was wild? He might suddenly upset her divine image and throw it off his back", *Met*. 8.25.4). Indeed, in a variant of the fable of the ass with the statue of a divinity on its back (Aesop. 267b Ch.), the animal thinks that passers-by are bowing down to him and, feeling proud, starts jumping about, at the risk of making the statue fall, which earns him a thorough beating from his owner.[30] Naturally, when the moral — that the ass's behaviour shows the folly of those who boast of others' merits — is removed, and the fable is adapted to the narrative context, the nature of the discourse is completely different.[31] But still more interesting is a comparison with another fable, particularly with Phaedrus' version:

Qui natus est infelix non uitam modo
tristem decurrit, uerum post obitum quoque
persequitur illum dura fati miseria.
Galli Cybebes circum <in> questus ducere
asinum solebant baiulantem sarcinas.
Is cum labore et plagis esset mortuus,
detracta pelle sibi fecerunt tympana.
Rogati mox a quodam, delicio suo
quidnam fecissent, hoc locuti sunt modo:
"Putabat se post mortem securum fore:
ecce aliae plagae congeruntur mortuo!"
(Phaed. 5.1 Z. [= 4.1 G.])

Whoso is born to ill luck not only runs out the course of life in sorrow but is also dogged after death by the hard misery of his fate.
The Galli, priests of Cybele, on their begging circuits used to take an ass around with them as porter for their luggage. When this ass was dead from overwork and beating they stripped

scilicet pullulum, sed nobis quoque tuis palumbulis nonnumquam inpertias." ("'Girls! Look what a pretty little slave-boy I've bought you' [...] 'You haven't brought us a slave,' they teased, 'but a husband for yourself. Hey! Don't eat up this pretty little chick all by yourself, but give your little dovies a piece sometimes.'"). Whereas the scene of bargaining in the purchase of the ass is absent in the *Onos*, that of the return of Philebus (this is the name of the priest who buys Lucius in both versions) to his companions is similar to that of Apuleius, though it is shorter (*Onos* 35–36).

30 In the best-known variant (182 P. [= 193 Hsr.; 267a Ch.]), the ass, made proud by the bows he thinks are meant for him, starts to bray and refuses to go forward.

31 Cf. Finkelpearl 2018, 257–259, who illustrates this procedure with the example mentioned above and with the episode of the soothsayer Diophanes (*Met*. 2.12–14, compare Aesop. 161 P. [= 170 Hsr.; 234 Ch.]).

> off his hide and made themselves tambourines of it. Afterwards, when they were asked by someone what they had done with their pet, this is how they put it: "He thought that after death he would rest in peace, but, behold, new blows are heaped upon him, dead though he is".
>
> (Transl. Perry)

The same fable is found in the Aesopic corpus (Aesop. 164 P. [= 173 Hsr.; 237 Ch.]) without any substantial differences,[32] except that the mendicant priests are called *Menagyrtai* and it is another group of them that asks where the ass has got to, whereas Phaedrus attributes this question to an unspecified outsider (*rogati* […] *a quodam*, 8), who mischievously alludes to the ambiguous relationship of the castrated *Galli* with the ass (*delicio suo*).[33] Apart from the common theme of the blows inflicted on the ass (an example of the cruelty of the Aesopic world, where beatings go on even *post mortem*, and a recurrent motif in Lucius' adventurous story), it is this mischievous wink in Phaedrus' fable that suggests a situation similar to that narrated by Apuleius in the episode of the Syrian goddess, where her priests are described using the obscene stereotype of the *cinaedus* (often represented by the *Gallus*, a eunuch priest of Cybele), and where the ass's bondage also suggests active participation in their dissolute practices of passive homosexuality.[34]

Besides describing Lucius' new owners as revoltingly effeminate, Apuleius also shows them to be fake beggars who exhibit themselves in frenetic dances pretending to be possessed (*Met*. 8.27–28) and who sell false prophecies (*Met*. 9.8). In the end, as they are leaving a village, they are approached by a group of armed men on horseback and accused of stealing a gold goblet from the local temple; the goblet is found in the lap of the statue of the goddess carried by the ass, and the priests are accused of sacrilege and led in chains to the local jail (*Met*. 9.9–10). The theft by characters who are *cinaedi*, and the blasphemous lie with which they mockingly try to exonerate themselves — claiming that the goblet is a *hospitale munus* that the temple goddess, the Phrygian Mother of the Gods, offered to the Syrian Goddess, her sister —, are motifs found in another of Phaedrus' fables (*app*. 8 Z. [= *app.* 10 G.]), based on a historical anecdote whose protagonists are an anonymous soldier and Pompey. The *miles* is universally considered to be a *cinaedus* and is described in terms similar to those Apuleius uses for his priests (*Pompeii miles* […] | ***fracte loquendo*** *et ambulando molliter* | *famam cinaedi*

32 Only partially conserved is the version of Babr. 141, which is interrupted after a more detailed description of the ass's duties and of the begging of the priests (*Galli*, as in Phaedrus).

33 Cf. Solimano 2005, 236. The ironic joke on the ambiguity of the term *delicium* (or *delicia*) is clear: it can mean both "dear" (in reference to persons or animals), but also "catamite".

34 Cf. what is said above and what is found in *Met*. 8.26.5–6 and 8.29.3–4, passages that have no counterpart in the *Onos*.

traxerat ["a soldier of Pompey [...], because he spoke in a high-pitched voice and walked with a lady-like gait, had acquired the reputation of being an effeminate creature"], 1–3: cf. ***fracta*** *et rauca et effeminata* ***uoce*** ["with their cracked, shrill, effeminate voices"], *Met*. 8.26.2); during the night he steals the mules carrying his general's garments, gold, and silver. When accused of the theft, he vigorously denies it, resorting to a *turpe ius iurandum*:[35] *ille continuo exscreat* | *sibi in sinistram et sputum digitis dissipat*: | *"Sic, imperator, oculi exstillescant mei,* | *si uidi aut tetigi."* ["he immediately spits into his left hand and scatters the spittle with his fingers: 'So may my eyes ooze away, general, just like this, if I have either seen or touched your property.'"], 9–12). Since Phaedrus had proudly claimed that his work was emulative and innovative in its content too (and not only in its poetic form: see 1 *prol*. 1–2 Z. [= G.]), calling his fables *Aesopias, non Aesopi* [...] *quia paucas ille ostendit, ego plures sero,* | *usus uetusto genere sed rebus nouis* ("Aesopic rather than Aesop's, since he brought out only a few, and I compose a larger number, using the old form but treating new themes", 4 *prol*. 11–13 Z. [= G.]), it is clear that the *res nouae* also include the fable of the soldier and Pompey, and more generally the tendency to amplify the Aesopic zoomorphic material with anecdotal and novelistic motifs, a tendency that makes the interaction with the novel more pointed.[36] In the case just mentioned, what is striking is the common presence of low-class tricksters who are described as *cinaedi*, of beasts of burden carrying precious goods, and of thefts denied with snide, sacrilegious excuses, or false, vulgar oaths: all this contrasts to the established order represented by the armed villagers or by the *dux* Pompey the Great.[37] Phaedrus' *cinaedus* soldier then manages to redeem himself thanks to an incredible proof of courage; in fact, the purpose of Phaedrus' story differs from that of Apuleius, who reproduces in full the negative stereotype of the *cinaedus* found chiefly in the satiric and epigrammatic tradition.[38]

35 This is how the oath is described at the end of the fable (33).

36 The best-known example is certainly the story of the widow and the soldier (*app*. 13 Z. [= *app*. 15 G.]), on which see n. 48. In the case of the goblet stolen and then hidden, the cross-over between novel and Aesopic tradition is further strengthened by the presence of the same motif in the *Vita Aesopi* (127–128 G, where the theft is the fruit of a deceit at Aesop's expense): see Zimmerman 2007 for a comparison between this version, that of the *Onos* (41), and of Apuleius.

37 Cf. Grottanelli 1983, 127–128, who offers an anthropological reading of this tale and its protagonist, with reference to the mythical and religious background (see esp. 121–139). On this fable in general, see Luzzatto 1976, 151–160; Oberg 2000, 236–238; Henderson 2001, 137–148; on the technique of the "paradoxical portrait", see La Penna 1978, 206–208.

38 The moral of Phaedrus' tale is found in Perotti's title *Quam difficile sit hominem nosse*, which leads us back to the theme of the opposition between appearance and truth. On the different

Returning to the most evident feature that connects the story of the man changed into an ass with the Aesopic tradition of animals as allegories of human types, we have seen that Lucius maintains both human sensibility and intelligence though in the guise of an ass, but not the faculty of speech that is the distinctive feature of animals in the fable genre, as the prologues of the poetic collections of Phaedrus (1 *prol.* 6 Z. [= G.]) and Babrius (1 *prol.* 5–11) underscore.[39] The aphasia of the novel's protagonist, who tries more than once to speak in a desperate attempt to express his dissent or indignation but to his great frustration succeeds only in braying,[40] is an interesting divergence from the recurring figure of the ass in Aesop's fables, who has — as is the rule — a double voice, both animal and human.[41] In particular, the unpleasant sound of the ass's braying, which above all the Apuleian Lucius dwells on disconsolately,[42] turns into a reason for presumption on the part of the ass that hunts with the lion. In Phaedrus' version (1.11 Z. [= G.]) the ass is proud of his unusual, powerful voice (*insueta uoce* […] *clamorem subito totis tollit uiribus* ["with his unfamiliar voice […] he immediately begins to bray with all his might"], 5–7), which terrifies and puts to flight the animals that are then captured by the lion. The ass reacts as follows and is heaped with ridicule: *Tunc ille insolens:* | *"Qualis uidetur opera tibi uocis meae?"* | *"Insignis" inquit "sic ut, nisi nossem tuum* | *animum genusque, simili fugissem metu."* ("Then the insolent creature said: 'What do you think of my vocal performance?' 'It was superb,' said

characterization of the *cinaedus* in Phaedrus compared to the widespread negative stereotype, see Mattiacci 2022b.

39 See also the epistle *ad Tiberinum filium* which opens the collection of the *Romulus*: *Aesopus* […] *ut uitam hominum et mores ostenderet, inducit aues, arbores, bestias et pecora loquentes* ("Aesop […], to show the life and manners of men, introduces talking birds, trees, beasts, and cattle"; Th.). On speaking animals, see the recent volume edited by Schmalzgruber 2020, with interesting contributions also on the ancient fable.

40 The loss of speech is certainly one of the most serious impairments for the protagonist become beast with a human intelligence. The aphasia of Lucius-the-Ass is immediately highlighted after his metamorphosis (*Met*. 3.25.1; *Onos* 13), and more than once repeated in the course of his life as an ass (*Met*. 3.29.2–3; 7.3.3–4; 7.25.8; 7.26.2; 8.29.5; *Onos* 16; 38): cf. Finkelpearl 2006, 213–218; Slater 2020. On the problems posed by Lucius' prayer to the moon goddess (in *Met*. 11.2 the interior monologue of the ass is presented as an act of praying aloud), cf. GCA 2015, 105; Slater 2020, 306–307. In the fairytale world of Cupid and Psyche, to the contrary, animals speak human language (cf. the analysis of Slater 2020, 293–299).

41 Cf. the *Index* of Perry 1965, s.v. "Ass" and "Donkey". For the ass who converses not only with other animal characters, but also with humans, cf. e.g. Phaed. 1.15 Z. [= G.] (on which see below § 4); 4.5 Z. [= 5.4 G.].

42 Cf. n. 40, where we see the special insistence on Lucius' aphasia and braying in the Apuleian reworking of the *Eselsroman*.

the lion, 'so much so that, if I hadn't known your nature and your race, I should have fled in terror like the others.'", 12–15).[43] On the other hand, his long donkey ears represent Lucius' only consolation for his grievous deformity, precisely because, *auribus grandissimis praeditus*, he is able to hear everything easily even at a distance (and so to collect stories).[44] But in the Aesopic world these ears are the object of derision and harm: in the fable cited above, Phaedrus coins for the *insolens asellus* the diminutive *auritulus* (1.11.6 Z. [= G.]), an absolute *hapax*, evidently with parodic effect;[45] and in Avianus' version of the fable of the donkey in the lion's skin[46] a farmer recognizes, thanks to *magna* […] *ab aure* (13), the *asellus* who pretends to be a wild beast and imitates a roar (*imitato murmure*, 17), terrifying only those who fail to recognize him.

The physical and auditory features of the ass are, thus, treated differently in the *Eselsroman* than in the Aesopic tradition. Yet, where Phaedrus draws upon *res nouae* to enlarge the *uetustum genus* of the fable, and the figure of the ass is presented in a novelistic context alongside human characters, many elements are close to Apuleius, not least the motif of braying. And this is the case for an interesting fable in the *Appendix* that we examine in the following section.

3 The ass and the girl

The main characters of this story are two youths, one rich and one poor, and a beautiful maiden promised by her family to the rich suitor, but who marries the poor one thanks to the unexpected help of Venus and of a donkey, who is an unconscious instrument of the goddess. Here below I give the text, whose moral can be understood from Perrotti's title *Fortunam interdum praeter spem atque expectationem hominibus fauere* ("Fortune sometimes favours men beyond their hope"):

43 On this fable and the Romanization effected by Phaedrus compared to Aesop's version (Aesop. 151 P. [= 156 Hsr.; 209 Ch.]), cf. Gärtner 2015, 149–154; cf. also Pisi 1977, 33–38; Solimano 2005, 154–155; Renda 2012, 110–111.

44 Cf. *Met*. 9.15.6. For the role the large ears play in the status of Lucius-the-Ass as a witness and to reinforce the motif of his *curiositas*, cf. GCA 1995, 150.

45 The diminutives *asellus* and *auritulus* (perhaps an echo of Hor. *Sat*. 1.9.20: *demitto auriculas, ut iniquae mentis asellus* ["I down drop my poor ears like a sulky donkey"], but cf. also Ov. *Am*. 2.7.15: *auritus* […] *asellus*) are obviously ironic, alluding to the real nature of the ass beyond its voice and its terrifying effects: see Gärtner 2015, 151.

46 Avian. 5, which extensively reworks the Greek version present in Aesop. 188 P. [= 199 Hsr.; 268 Ch.] and 358 P. [= 280 Ch.]; Babr. 139.

Vnam expetebant uirginem iuuenes duo.
Vicit locuples genus et formam pauperis.
Vt nuptiarum dictus aduenit dies,
amans, dolorem quia non poterat perpeti,
maerens propinquos contulit se in hortulos,
quos ultra paulo uilla splendens diuitis
erat acceptura uirginem e matris sinu,
parum ampla in urbe uisa quod fuerat domus.
Pompa explicatur, turba concurrit frequens,
et coniugalem praebet Hymenaeus facem.
Asellus autem, qui solebat pauperi
quaestum <re>ferre, stabat portae in limine.
Illum puellae casu conducunt sui,
uiae labores teneros ne laedant pedes.
Repente caelum, Veneris misericordia,
uentis mouetur, intonat mundi fragor
noctemque densis horridam nimbis parat.
Lux rapitur oculis, et simul uis grandinis
effusa trepidos passim comites dissipat,
sibi quemque cogens petere praesidium fuga.
Asellus notum proximum tectum subit
et uoce magna sese uenisse indicat.
Procurrunt pueri, pulchram aspiciunt uirginem
et admirantur; deinde domino nuntiant.
Inter sodales ille paucos accubans
amorem crebris auocabat poculis.
Vbi nuntiatum est, reciperatus gaudiis,
hortante Baccho et Venere, dulces perficit
aequalitatis inter plausus nuptias.
Quaerunt parentes per praeconem filiam;
nouus maritus coniuge amissa dolet.
Quid esset actum postquam populo innotuit,
omnes fauorem comprobarunt caelitum.
(Phaed. *app*. 14 Z. [= *app*. 16 G.])

Two young men were courting the same girl; the rich suitor carried the day against the birth and good looks of the poor one. When the day appointed for the wedding came, the sorrowing lover, because he could not endure his grief, betook himself to his nearby gardens, beyond which at a short distance the gorgeous villa of the rich suitor stood ready to receive the maiden from her mother's bosom; for the house in the city had not seemed spacious enough for the occasion. The wedding procession gets under way, a large crowd gathers, and Hymen provides the marriage torch. Now an ass which used to bring in some profit for the poor man was standing at the threshold of the city gate. By chance the girl's kinsmen hire it for her use, to save her tender feet from wear and tear on the way. Suddenly, by the compassion of Venus, the sky is stirred by winds, the crash of thunder resounds throughout the heavens and brings on a night made rough by heavy rains. The light of the day is snatched from their sight, and at the same time a storm of hail bursts forth, throwing the wedding guests into

> confusion everywhere, scattering them, and compelling each one to take refuge for himself in flight. The ass enters the familiar shelter close at hand and announces his arrival with a loud bray. The servants run out; the sight of a beautiful girl meets their startled eyes, and presently they report to their master. He, reclining at a table with a few friends, was consoling his disappointed love with cup after cup of wine. When the news was brought to him he made a joyful recovery; and, prompted by Bacchus as well as by Venus, he proceeded to consummate his own sweet nuptials amid the applause of his comrades. The bride's parents advertised for their daughter by the town crier, and the new husband grieved for the loss of the wife that was to be his. When people came to know what had happened everybody hailed with approval the favour shown by the celestial gods.
>
> (Transl. Perry, with some adaptations)

Both the fable's length and its topic already give an idea of its distinctiveness. With its 33 lines, this composition is the third longest in Phaedrus' corpus;[47] in modern editions it follows the equally long tale (31 lines) of the widow and the soldier (*app*. 13 Z. [= *app.* 15 G.]), which shares its novelistic character and which, given the presence of the same story in Petronius' *Satyrica* (111–112), is undoubtedly the most famous example of the intersection between fable and novel.[48] In these two singular fables we find the theme of eros, rare in Phaedrus,[49] first treated according to the misogynistic cliché of female lustfulness and inconstancy, and then from the romantic perspective of the triumph of love blessed by Fortune, which represents a rare positive note in Phaedrus' pessimistic universe.[50]

In this lively tale of two suitors, whose source is unknown, a complicated web of literary and poetic echoes has been found, as well as the influence of declamations, in which the motif of the contrast between the rich and the poor was frequent.[51] Clearly what is interesting for us, more than the general relationship with

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47 After 3.10 Z. [= G.] of 60 lines and *app.* 8 Z. [= *app.* 10 G.] of 34 lines, compositions already mentioned for their analogies with the novel genre. To be kept in mind also is that, according to the hypothesis of Zago 2015, 85–89, the unitary poem restored to us by the new manuscript M (*app*. 32 G. + *app*. 8 G. + four new senarii [= *app.* 30 Z.]) must have had more than 33 lines.

48 See Weinreich 1931, 53–73. On the vast reception of this theme and the relations among the various ancient versions, of which the most famous is that of Petronius, I limit myself to a reference to only the most recent contributions: Huber 1990; Vannini 2013 (with previous bibliography).

49 The few other examples are 2.2 Z. [= G.] and *app*. 27 Z. [= *app.* 29 G.].

50 For an interpretation of Phaedrus as "la voce amara della favola esopica" ("the bitter voice of the Aesopic fable"), cf. La Penna 2021 (1968).

51 More precisely, we could say that upon a declamatory scheme inspired by the *controuersiae* (for other examples cf. Phaed. 3.10 Z. [= G.]; 5.5 Z. [= 4.5 G.]) is grafted a theme taken from Catullus (Catull. 61 for the scene of the wedding procession), from Latin elegy, and from Virgil (in partic. *Aen*. 4.160–165 for the motif of the storm). See esp. the commentary of Luzzatto 1976, 231–237, and the analysis of Craca 2014, who also suggests a 'theatrical' subdivision of the tale into scenes; cf. also Pepe 1991, 69–75; Oberg 2000, 247–250; Solimano 2005, 318–319; for an analysis of the

the novel based on the fundamental role played by Fortune (here identified with Venus), is the specific relationship with the *Metamorphoses*, given the central role of the *asellus* as the instrument of a Fortune not *caeca* but *uidens*, who resolves the contest between the two suitors, as she does the metamorphic plight of Apuleius' Lucius.[52] Already Otto Weinreich had pointed out the analogies between *app*. 14 Z. [= *app.* 16 G.] with the tale of Charite,[53] especially with the first part, which ends with a 'happy ending' and is intertwined with the story of the ass stolen by robbers.[54] However, Weinreich did not believe that Apuleius depended directly on Phaedrus' fable; instead, he used the comparison between the two texts to reconstruct a common source which, given the miraculous salvific intervention of the divinity, could be identified as an aretological Hellenistic tale. Leaving aside such complicated issues of *Quellenforschung*, I would like to investigate some points of contact (and of divergence) that seem relevant to our discussion, concerning how both Phaedrus' verse fable and Apuleius' prose narrative are happy to include certain common motifs, for a similar purpose of entertaining a varied public with a plot that weaves together realistic and learned elements.

We have already mentioned the story of Charite that frames the *bella fabella* of Cupid and Psyche: the beauty of the maiden kidnapped by robbers on the day of her wedding strikes the ass protagonist as soon as she enters the novel: *uirginem filo liberalem* […] *puellam mehercules et asino tali concupiscenda* […] *aduehebant* (sc. *latrones*) ("they brought with them a maiden of refined qualities […] a very desirable girl, by Hercules, even to an ass like me", *Met*. 4.23.3). And just as good-looking, as is suitable in a love novel in miniature, is her betrothed: *speciosus adulescens*, as the maiden herself calls him in telling her sad story to the robbers' old servant (*Met*. 4.26.3). In Phaedrus, too, beauty marks the couple destined to a final union (cf. *formam pauperis*, 2; *pulchram* […] *uirginem*, 23); and in his fable we also find the motif of the interrupted wedding, with a description of the house all aglow for the celebration and of the mother alongside the bride (*uilla*

female figure, cf. De Maria 1987, 120–128. For the reconstruction of the source of *app*. 14 Z. [= *app.* 16 G.] and the reception of similar motifs in Medieval and Humanist literature, cf. Thiele 1908, 369–372; Weinreich 1931, 9–33; Henderson 1977, who is, however, sceptical about the dependence on Phaedrus of modern versions identified by the previous scholars.

52 Thus, rightly, Solimano 2005, 318; cf. *Met*. 11.15.2–3, where the priest of Isis announces to Lucius that, after the torments of *Fortuna caeca* and *nefaria*, he has finally passed under the protection of *Fortuna uidens*.

53 Weinreich 1931 (cit. n. 51), esp. 15–30.

54 On the structure of the tale in two parts with differing endings (the first happy, in the manner of the Greek love novel, the second tragic, due to the presence of a jealous rival who kills the husband), cf. Nicolini 2000, 11–73.

splendens [...] *uirginem e matris sinu*, 6–7: cf. *domus* [...] *taedis lucida constrepebat hymenaeum; tunc me gremio suo mater* [...] *mundo nuptiali decenter ornabat* ["our whole house [...] alight with torches was blaring out the wedding hymn; at that time my mother was holding me in her lap and prettily decorating me with wedding finery"], *Met*. 4.26.5–6).[55] In the novel the interruption of the wedding dramatically separates the lovers, Charite and Tlepolemus, who will, however, be joined in the end thanks to the courageous enterprise of the betrothed, who frees the maiden from the robbers. By contrast, in the fable Venus-Fortune providentially steals the maiden from the aspirations of the rich suitor and delivers her to the *dulces nuptiae* with the *pauper amans*. In both cases, however, the wedding scene is repeated (cf. 6–10, 28–29; *Met*. 4.26; 7.14) and ends with the striking image of the *uirgo asino triumphans* amidst a jubilant crowd, whose joy the ass shares by his potent braying. Let us compare Phaedrus' lines 21–24 with the scene of Charite's return home on the back of the ass:

> **Procurrunt** parentes, affines, clientes, alumni, famuli laeti faciem, gaudio delibuti. Pompam cerneres omnis sexus et omnis aetatis nouumque et hercules memorandum spectamen, uirginem asino triumphantem. Denique ipse etiam hilarior pro uirili parte, ne praesenti negotio ut alienus discreparem, porrectis auribus proflatisque naribus **rudiui fortiter, immo tonanti clamore personui**.
>
> (Apul. *Met*. 7.13.1–3)[56]

> Their parents, relatives, clients, wards, and servants came running to meet us, their happy faces suffused with joy. You could see a parade of each sex and age, and, by Hercules, a novel and memorable spectacle: a virgin riding in triumph on an ass. Even I was as happy as a man could be, and had no desire to be out of tune with the present proceedings like an outsider; and so I stretched out my ears, flared my nostrils and brayed my best — I should say trumpeted with thunderous din.
>
> (Transl. Hanson)

The image of the crowd rushing also recalls *pompa explicatur, turba concurrit frequens* (9); but it is above all the ass's braying (*uoce magna*, 22), dwelt on by Apuleius in realistic detail, which shows the complex interaction between the two authors. Distinguishing himself from the Aesopic tradition of humanized animals to develop a novelistic motif in which the ass is merely a beast endowed only with

55 All the details mentioned up to now (the maiden's beauty and that of her fiancé, the interrupted wedding) are absent in the *Onos*.

56 The description of the maiden's return home on the back of the ass is much more concise in the Greek version, and the detail of the braying, though present, is reduced to an announcement of the "good news" at a distance (*Onos* 26). Not relevant here is the relationship of Apuleius' text to the tradition of the apocryphal gospels, on which see Shanzer 1990.

its natural voice (and not one both human and animal, as we saw above), Phaedrus makes this figure converge with that of the *Eselsroman's* ass-man who cannot speak and whose braying, for once, is not a cause of frustration but is willingly given as sign of jubilation. On the other hand, Phaedrus' donkey, which obeys pure instinct, contrasts with that of Apuleius, who does not fail to emphasize his human essence, ironically revealing his heartfelt happiness (*hilarior pro* ***uirili*** *parte*)[57] and his wish to manifest it, in order not to seem out of place (*ut alienus*) amidst the general joy. Also profoundly different is the figure of the *uirgo*: while she is a silent, passive character in Phaedrus, who develops the narration exclusively from the male point of view, Apuleius' Charite is far more active; indeed, even if we only consider the first part of the tale, we see her showing presence of mind and courage in her attempt to escape with the ass from the robbers' lair (*Met*. 6.27–29).[58]

There are two additional elements, not observed up to now, which might link Phaedrus' *asellus* to Apuleius' text. The animal had been leased by the family to carry the bride during the *deductio* from the town to the country villa of the wealthy man, so that the rough road does not hurt the girl's tender feet (14). Concern that the beloved should not wound her tender feet is an elegiac motif,[59] here brought into the nuptial context and set in relation to the humble, prosaic figure of the ass. Lucius, too, will be involved with the lovely little feet of the maid he carries on his back: during the attempt at flight mentioned above, between the two there seems to develop an almost erotic bond: the ass, not insensible — as we have seen — to Charite's beauty, often turned his neck, pretending to scratch his back, and sweetly kissed *pedes decoros puellae* (*Met*. 6.28.2).[60]

Finally, Phaedrus' *asellus*, an animal symbolic par excellence of poverty,[61] is presented as a natural ally of the poor man who could gain some profit from his

57 On the irony of this expression (= "for my individual part"), taken from law and become current usage, but referred here to an ass and not to a *uir*, cf. Vallette 1945, 17 n. 2; GCA 1981, 166.

58 As has been said, it is chiefly this part of the tale that interests us for the comparison with Phaedrus, while in the second, tragic part (cf. n. 54) Charite will be changed into a true virago, killing herself on a sword after blinding the perfidious rival guilty of Tlepolemus' death (*Met*. 8.8–14).

59 Cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 10.48–49: *a, te ne frigora* ***laedant****!* | *a, tibi ne* ***teneras*** *glacies secet aspera plantas!* ("ah, may the frost not harm you! ah, may the jagged ice not cut your tender feet!": verses that Virgil — according to Servius — had probably taken from Cornelius Gallus, cf. Cucchiarelli 2012, 501–502); Prop. 1.8.7–8: *tu* ***pedibus teneris*** *positas fulcire pruinas,* | *tu potes insolitas, Cynthia, ferre niues?* ("can you tread with your dainty feet the hoar-frost on the ground? can you endure, Cynthia, the unfamiliar snows?").

60 This and the other details connected to the erotic sphere (*placidis gannitibus*, *Met*. 6.27.6; *delicatas uoculas*, 6.28.1: cf. Nicolini 2000, 187–188) are totally absent in the *Onos*.

61 Cf. Keller 1909, 265–266.

services (*quaestum referre*, 12), perhaps by using him to carry home or to market the products of his modest *hortuli* (5). The couple of an ass and a poor man who lives off the meagre proceeds of his vegetable plot is also found in Apuleius, in the episode in which Lucius' owner is a *pauperculus hortolanus*. The gardener himself says of the poor animal, his only helpmate, to an arrogant soldier who wants to commandeer him: *hic ipse* […] ***asellus*** […] *paucos holerum maniculos de proximo* ***hortulo*** *solet anhelitu languido fatigatus subuehere* ("this poor ass […] can scarcely even carry a few handfuls of vegetables from my garden nearby without getting tired and out of breath", *Met*. 9.39.7). The diminutives *asellus* and *hortulus* appear elsewhere in the two authors, but only in *app*. 14 Z. [= *app.* 16 G.] and in this passage of the *Metamorphoses* are they associated with each other, with the clear aim of emphasizing the lowly condition of both man and animal.[62]

4 Conclusions

A fable in the Aesopic corpus (179 P. [= 190 Hsr.; 274 Ch.]) presents an ass that eats very little and works very hard in the service of a gardener; the situation, which is only touched on, is similar to that of Lucius-the-Ass, who suffers cold and hunger in the episode we referred to above (cf. esp. *Met*. 9.32; *Onos* 43). But this fable is of interest chiefly for its development: the dissatisfied ass obtains from Zeus the opportunity to change owner (gardener, potter, tanner) several times, with the result that its situation worsens each time. According to Alexander Scobie, what we see here is a sort of *Eselsroman* in miniature, which may have suggested to its author the idea of tying together various stories about the ass.[63] This hypothesis is not altogether convincing: after all, Lucius' life with his owners after the gardener (two brother cooks and ultimately their wealthy owner) does not get worse; on the contrary, it gets notably better from a material point of view, allowing him to regain human habits. Still, Scobie's observation leads us to the reflection that, at the intertextual level, the animal fable has a privileged relationship, among literary genres and ancient novels in general, with the story of Lucius, whose metamorphosis into an ass for most of the story subjects him to a fate of hunger, beatings, and unbearable labours, just as often happens to the donkeys of fable.[64]

62 The gardener's poverty is also made clear in the corresponding passage of the *Onos* (43–45); for the pair Ass-Gardener in an Aesopic fable, see below.

63 Scobie 1975, 30.

64 Along with the examples already cited, see e.g. also Babr. 7 and Aesop. 181 P. [= 192 Hsr.; 142f Ch.] (the donkey who dies of fatigue because the horse/mule does not want to share its burden); 263 P.

Recently, Ellen Finkelpearl has opportunely illustrated how, besides offering narrative suggestions for the plot of the *Metamorphoses*, animal fables interact with the ambiguous hybridity of Lucius in his animal state: "Lucius is complicatedly both human and animal and not simply a man in animal skin; bodies matter and are not divisible from the mind." Apuleius therefore activates the complex nature of Aesopic animals by setting them alongside Lucius' ambiguous identity, and profoundly changing the fables into a longer narrative in which the moral or allegorical element has been removed.[65]

In light of these results, which were chiefly based on the comparison of Apuleius' novel with the Greek animal fable, the present study has tried to conduct a more limited comparison with Phaedrus, whose literary project was undoubtedly ambitious: not only to endow the low genre of the fable with artistic dignity through a learned verse rewriting of the rough Aesopic material, but also to broaden its boundaries and renew its contents (*res nouae*) through the introduction of anecdotal and novelistic material.[66]

It is precisely thanks to this literary awareness and thematic *uarietas* that Phaedrus' version of the Aesopic genre lends itself to interesting intertextual parallels with the *Metamorphoses* and the great variety of its interwoven *fabulae*. First of all, the two Latin authors share a commitment to rewrite a Greek original for a public of Roman language and culture, and both engage in a meaningful metaliterary dialogue with the reader. For this reason, we began from the similarities between the programmatic discourses with which, in a self-ironizing manner, both Phaedrus and Apuleius present to the reader their humble and entertaining *fabulae* (which, however, conceal a deeper meaning), and we then examined a series of thematic and linguistic convergences between their works. The elements we have pointed out are not meant to demonstrate Apuleius' direct dependence on Phaedrus — a hypothesis not impossible but certainly weak, both due to the presence of some of these elements in the *Onos*, thus making them attributable to the lost Greek model of the *Metamorphoses*, and due to the scarce reception of Phaedrus, whose work was disseminated mainly through anonymous prose paraphrases.[67] Rather, the elements of convergence between these two au-

[= 204 Hsr.; 273 Ch.] (the donkey who carries the same weight as the mule, but receives half the ration of food); Babr. 111 and Aesop. 180 P. [= 191 Hsr.; 266 Ch.] (the donkey with the burden of salt).

65 Finkelpearl 2018, esp. 269, source of the quotation referring to the comparison between *Met*. 4.4 and Babr. 7 (264–267); see also Slater 2020, 292–293.

66 For an example of Greek narrative fable with echoes in Apuleius, cf. Babr. 116, which tells of a 'menage à trois' to compare to the story of the miller, the adulterous wife, and her young lover (*Met*. 9.27); on this, see van Djik 1996, 518; Finkelpearl 2018, 273–276 (with bibliography).

67 Cf. Mattiacci 2021.

thors constitute a significant testimony, in the Latin context, of osmosis between fable and novel, both traditionally low and popular genres that are here learnedly re-interpreted for a varied audience, and both with the common intent of offering quality entertainment under the emblem of the *spoudogeloion*. Obviously, certain motifs present in the Aesopic tradition and particularly in Phaedrus, once introduced into the narrative structure of the novel, are amplified and modified to suit the new context, and lack — we repeat — the moral meaning that constitutes the distinctive element of the fable.

Another important difference on which our analysis has dwelt is between the talking animals of the Aesopic world and the ass of the novel, who cannot speak though he retains his human intelligence. On this, I would add one last thought, which leads us to consider the relationship between Phaedrus and Apuleius once again. In the *Metamorphoses* the association of the ass-protagonist with the figure of the slave is especially evident, and his inability to speak is also put into high relief. According to Keith Bradley, the state in which Lucius finds himself after the metamorphosis reveals an identity crisis and offers "a perfect metaphor for the situation of captive slaves, who, while not losing their voices in quite the same manner as Lucius, certainly lost the ability to speak openly and freely"; further on he adds, "He is not the ass of Phaedrus's fable who can voice the wisdom of the suffering servant."[68] The reference is to a fable with no parallel in the Aesopic corpus, where an *asellus* responds as follows to his old master, who has urged him to flee because enemies are arriving:

> At ille lentus: "Quaeso, num binas mihi
> clitellas impositurum uictorem putas?"
> Senex negauit. "Ergo quid refert mea
> cui seruiam, clitellas dum portem unicas?"
> (Phaed. 1.15.7–10 Z. [= G.])

> But the stubborn beast replied: "I ask you, are you assuming that the conqueror will load me with two packs at a time?" "No," said the old man. "Then," said the ass, "what difference does it make to me whose slave I am, so long as I carry only one pack at time?"
> (Transl. Perry)

The philosophy of the donkey, who accepts but also denounces the impossibility of any social change for the poor, reveals the bitter moral drawn by the slave subjected to power (*seruitus obnoxia*) who, according to Phaedrus, created the fable

68 Bradley 2012, 64, 66.

using a coded language to express what he wished to but dared not say outright.[69] Thus, animals and slaves are central to both Phaedrus' fable and Apuleius' novel: if the speechlessness of Lucius-the-Ass becomes a metaphor for the slave who loses his capacity to speak openly, according to Phaedrus it is precisely this incapacity that the fable is responding to by exploiting the mask of talking animals to give voice to slaves.

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69 Phaed. 3 *prol.* 33–37 Z. [= G.] *Nunc, fabularum cur sit inuentum genus,* | *breui docebo. Seruitus obnoxia,* | *quia quae uolebat non audebat dicere,* | *affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit* | *calumniamque fictis elusit logis* ("Now I will explain briefly why the type of thing called fable was invented. The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence, since he dared not say outright what he wished to say, projected his personal sentiments into fables and eluded censure with made up stories").

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