Eighteenth-Century Fiction

Volume 12 Issue 2 *Reconsidering the Rise of the Novel*

Article 17

1-1-2000

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Recommended Citation

Doody, Margaret Anne (2000) "Shandyism, Or, the Novel in Its Assy Shape: African Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, and Prose Fiction," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*: Vol. 12: Iss. 2, Article 17.

Available at: http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol12/iss2/17

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Abstract

So says Tristram Shandy, taking us into his confidence as usual, after describing the ass he encountered in Lyons, at the gate of the Basse Cour of his inn. Sterne has just engaged in a riff that gives his game away, telling the curious and enlightened reader that his story is related to the tradition of the Ass-Novel, or Esel-Roman (as German scholars say). It is my contention that Sterne's novel is clearly related to the greater of the surviving Ass-Novels of antiquity, Apuleius's Asinus aureus, or Metamorphoses. My own views as to the long and complex history of the novel have been spelled out in The True Story of the Novel (1996), and there is of course no need to rehearse that argument here. Suffice it to say at present that I do not think that we best study eighteenth-century English fiction by remaining only within the geographical confines of England, or the temporal confines of the eighteenth century--even "the long eighteenth century." (Unless, perhaps, one feels as I do, that "the long eighteenth century" extends from Aristotle to Bridget Jones's Diary.) Each novel has deep and complex relations to a variety of other works, especially other works of fiction, and the relation to other novels is no mere matter of superficial allusion to be covered by a succinct footnote. Connections may create the new novel and its meaning, at least in part. I do not contend that the past is greater than the present, or that the later author is merely daunted by "anxiety of influence." Rather, the author is glad of the various other novelists, separate in time and space, who may be as it were taken into partnership in the new enterprise. Some of our ways of describing such connections and relationships in the past have become less than fully helpful over time. To refer to the "tradition of learned wit" has been helpful because it makes us aware of the play of reference in a novelist like Lucian or Petronius or Sterne; such a determining phrase may become negative because the very term, although daunting to the new young reader (who may shy away), can also be taken as an endorsement of the assumption that nothing very serious is happening in this fiction that 'tis but a dry jest. At the same time, it can limit our view of the text's range of relationships, and their deeper significance.

Shandyism, Or, the Novel in Its Assy Shape: African Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, and Prose Fiction

Margaret Anne Doody

-But with an ass I can commune for ever.1

So says Tristram Shandy, taking us into his confidence as usual, after describing the ass he encountered in Lyons, at the gate of the Basse Cour of his inn. Sterne has just engaged in a riff that gives his game away, telling the curious and enlightened reader that his story is related to the tradition of the Ass-Novel, or Esel-Roman (as German scholars say). It is my contention that Sterne's novel is clearly related to the greater of the surviving Ass-Novels of antiquity, Apuleius's Asinus aureus, or Metamorphoses. My own views as to the long and complex history of the novel have been spelled out in The True Story of the Novel (1996), and there is of course no need to rehearse that argument here. Suffice it to say at present that I do not think that we best study eighteenth-century English fiction by remaining only within the geographical confines of England, or the temporal confines of the eighteenth century—even "the

¹ Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ed. Ian Watt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), vol. 7, chap. 32, p. 399. References are to the original volume and chapter numbers, followed by the page number in this edition.

long eighteenth century." (Unless, perhaps, one feels as I do, that "the long eighteenth century" extends from Aristotle to *Bridget Jones's Diary*.) Each novel has deep and complex relations to a variety of other works. especially other works of fiction, and the relation to other novels is no mere matter of superficial allusion to be covered by a succinct footnote. Connections may create the new novel and its meaning, at least in part. I do not contend that the past is greater than the present, or that the later author is merely daunted by "anxiety of influence." Rather, the author is glad of the various other novelists, separate in time and space, who may be as it were taken into partnership in the new enterprise. Some of our ways of describing such connections and relationships in the past have become less than fully helpful over time. To refer to the "tradition of learned wit" has been helpful because it makes us aware of the play of reference in a novelist like Lucian or Petronius or Sterne; such a determining phrase may become negative because the very term, although daunting to the new young reader (who may shy away), can also be taken as an endorsement of the assumption that nothing very serious is happening in this fiction that 'tis but a dry jest. At the same time, it can limit our view of the text's range of relationships, and their deeper significance.

The Ass-Novel, the story of negative metamorphosis, provides a means of dealing with some of the most painful experiences of mortal nature, and eases us into a world not only of thought but of feeling—and of feeling in which pain is dominant. In all versions of the Ass-Novel, masculinity is in question, and the torments and dubieties of masculinity not only form a central subject but also put pressure upon and shape the form.

Of course, Sterne's Tristram, unlike Apuleius's hero, appears clearly differentiated from the ass. The animal he encounters proves a source of diversion, even of conversation, though at first it is experienced as a blockage, creating an aporia, when Tristram is "stopped at the gate" by this uncertain animal who stands in the throughway:

'Twas by a poor ass who had just turned in with a couple of large panniers upon his back, to collect eleemosunary turnip tops and cabbage leaves; and stood dubious, with bis two forefeet on the inside of the threshold, and with his two hinder feet towards the street, as not knowing very well whether he was to go in, or no.

Now, 'tis an animal ... I cannot bear to strike—there is a patient endurance of sufferings, wrote so unaffectedly in his looks and carriage, which pleads so mightily for him, that it always disarms me; and to that degree, that I do not like to speak unkindly to him: on the contrary, meet him where I will—whether in town or country ... whether in liberty or bondage----I have ever something civil to say to him on my part; and as one word begets another (if he has as little to do as I)—

so busy as in framing his responses from the etchings of his countenance—and where these carry me not deep enough—in flying from my own heart into his, and seeing what is natural for an ass to think—as well as a man. (7:32, 398–99)

Tristram's own tender sensibility towards the ass and its thoughts is surely a literary sensibility framed by a reading of Apuleius in the past. Reading about Lucius, the man-who-turned-into-an-ass, has given Tristram a finer sense of the trials of the life of an ass, a capacity for pity and fellow-feeling. Like Lucius, the ass may be (or think of himself as being) "in liberty or bondage." Apuleius's novel certainly associates its poor hero with vegetables and beatings, with hunger and with fear of the blows that the benevolent Tristram will forbear to give. More than that, as we go through this passage we note that a metamorphosis is quietly taking place. Encountering each other, Tristram and the ass are at first distinct; Tristram the man looks condescendingly at the ass as object. But Tristram's psychological enthusiasm, his rage of benevolence, leads to communication, to sympathy, and then even to identification. Part of the joke must be that Tristram is "an ass" in the colloquial if metaphorical sense. Of course Tristram knows by nature, and his own heart is fitted to tell him "what it is natural for an ass to think." From observing the ass as an object at a distance, an inferior, external, Tristram begins to think naturally like an ass. In the course of this passage by a process of subtle and comic metamorphosis Tristram is transformed into an ass. Tristram Shandy thus announces, in its own cryptic way, that it is another Ass-Novel. At its deepest levels it has learned from and is informed by the extraordinary fiction that precedes it. Not least is this so in the kind of centrality the novel gives to masculinity and sexuality—in a manner that denies triumph, success, phallic conquest as the happy norm.



Apuleius was a provincial, an outsider, an African who rose by his capacity to speak and write, but who was not a member of the nation which supplied the ruling power. In his most important legal speech, the *Apologia*, defending himself before a Roman court, he makes no claim to Roman blood. He is a Numidian—he says defiantly moreover that he terms himself, as he has said before in public, Semi-Numidian and Semi-Gaetulian ["Seminumidam et Semigaetulum"], that is, he is a Berber of the Berbers, not only a Numidian but partly a member of the wilder tribes—the

And I don't see any reason why I should be ashamed of it ["non video quid mihi sit in ea re pudendum"], any more than Cyrus the Great, who was a mixture, Semi-Mede and Semi-Persian ["quod genere mixto fuit Semimedus ac Semipersa"].²

Apuleius cannot have forgotten, however, that Herodotus, disapproving of such mixture, calls Cyrus *hemionos*—half-ass, or mule—on that account.³

Apuleius the Berber, the half-ass of mixed kind ["genere mixto"] was born in Numidia (in an area of present-day Algeria) after it had come under Roman rule; he was a man of North Africa of the Age of the Antonines. He was born in Madauros or Madaura, where St Augustine later went to school. Apuleius was highly educated; he went to school in Carthage and studied in Athens. He seems to have made a career out of public speaking, largely performative and entertaining. He was a student of comparative religions who, according to his own account of himself in the *Apologia*, spent most of his patrimony travelling to various important religious sites. He married in Tripoli; his wife probably did not live very long, and Apuleius in later life seems to have lived for a long while in Carthage as a priest of Asclepius.

Renaissance editions of his *Opera* are almost always preceded by some account of his life; most of our information is derived from these works themselves. These chiefly include his *Apologia*, his version of his speech in his own defence when he was tried for witchcraft in Oea near Tripoli, sections of famous speeches by him (the *Florida*), and several philosophic-scientific treatises. Apuleius emerges as a character both religious and secular, a figure sacerdotal and profane, suffering from delicate health (as in several references in *Apologia* and *Florida*) but enjoying ebullient spirits, and perpetually witty. It is easy to imagine why such a personality in its own self-presentation would appeal to Sterne, who is also a character sacerdotal and profane. Like Apuleius the provincial, Sterne the provincial, the man of wit, the priest with the delicate health, also ranged far and wide in different sorts of lore. It is easy to see why Sterne might have found in Apuleius a sympathetic character, perhaps a model.

² Apuleius, Apologia, in Apologie et Florides, ed. Paul Vallette (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971), section 24, p. 29. All quotations by section and page number are based on the Latin text as presented in this edition, though "u" is changed to "v" in such words as divum for the convenience of the reader. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

³ Herodotus says Crocsus did not understand when the Pythia at Delphi told the Lydians that they would be endangered by the Medians when "a mule becomes king of the Medes" ["hotan hemionos basileus Medoisi genetai"]. That sounds like a way of saying never, but Crocsus discovers too late that mighty Cyrus is the hemionos. See Herodotus, Historiai, 1, c. 55, Herodotus, ed. and trans. A.D. Godley, Locb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1:1, 60–61. http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol12/iss2/17

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Not *The Golden Ass* alone but most of the extant works of Apuleius were readily available—at least to readers of Latin—from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Of late, we read only *The Golden Ass*, but earlier readers tended to know more of Apuleius. He provides a celebrated locus for discussion of sacred and profane love. After Plato, a passage in the *Apologia* seems a source for Walter Shandy's great riff on the subject. Apuleius in a digressive *occupatio* seems devoutly Platonic:

I pass over all that great and divine Platonic doctrine, rarely unknown by the pious but unknown to the profane: the goddess Venus is really twins [or two-form, "geminam esse Venerem deam"], each ruling one kind of love, and different sorts of lovers. Of these the vulgar Venus, pierced by popular love, has power over not only human souls but even tame and savage animals and calls them to libidinous activity ... the other, the celestial Venus ["alteram vero caelitem Venerem"], presides over those who are best able to love, humans alone, and of those but a few; she moves those of her sect by no improper stimuli or allurements. (c.12, p. 15.)

Apuleius's statement referring to Plato's Symposium seems straightforward, but it is not so in its context. This pious passage comes in the Apologia just after the speaker has had to admit that he has written erotic poems—and addressed to boys at that! And the pious and beautiful digression is introduced within the central context of a trial in which he is accused of entangling a woman (now his wife) by unlawful arts. Masculinity here, as in *Metamorphoses*, is under attack and under definition. Nothing is ever really simple. Walter Shandy, speaking earnestly to Yorick, echoes Plato and Apuleius and Ficino in his distinction between the two loves and his praise of the heavenly love: "The first which is the golden chain let down from heaven, excites to love heroic, which comprehends in it, and excites to the desire of philosophy and truth—the second, excites to desire, simply" (8:33, 452). Yorick wants to cut the discussion off by denying the difference, but Walter comes out with his statement of his own allegiance to the celestial Venus (whom he will not allow even to be called Venus) in the presence of his wife and of the man who we may suspect is really the father of his child. Mrs Shandy disagrees with her husband, holding that "love keeps peace in the world. ... It replenishes the earth" (8:33, 452-53). Profane Venus has kept peace in the Shandy household (by relieving Mrs Shandy's loneliness and anomie) and the same profane love has replenished the earth (by bringing Tristram into the world). Walter's philosophical statement veils his unacknowledged outrage against the vulgar Venus who has overtaken these others; it also acts as a kind of apology for his own inability to engage successfully in sexuality.

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As we all know, Tristram was not meant to have that sad name but a grander one:

He shall be christened *Trismegistus*, brother. I wish it may answer—replied my uncle *Toby*, rising up. (4:8, 209)

Trismegistus (another name for the Egyptian Thoth) is the name given to the chief interlocutor of the corpus of mystic writings (dating from early in the Christian era) generally called the *Hermetica*. The works combine Egyptian, Greek, and other religious thought and speculation, and, with one notable exception, most of these works are written in Greek. The notable exception is a Latin treatise in the *Hermetica*, a work called the *Asclepius*, sometimes attributed to Apuleius himself. The general view of Renaissance critics and editors is that he was the work's translator from Greek into Latin. The *Asclepius* thus appears in many early Renaissance printings of Apuleius's works; although the work has been customarily repudiated as non-Apuleian since the early seventeenth century, there is some cautious movement in its favour at present.⁴

The Hermetic *Asclepius* is one of the pieces of quaint and curious lore such as Walter Shandy and Sterne himself love to peruse. Hermes Trismegistus (in Greek, Trismegistos), a personification of knowledge in the

4. I tend to agree with the editor of the printed edition of 1488, who discusses Apuleius as a translator of the Asclepius, "a work of most ancient and divine philosophy" ["antiquissimum & divinum philsophum"). Oddities in Apuleius's text are to be explained by the probable nature of the source: "The doctrines are in exotic diction, and it is altogether terrifying stuff to translate" ["quae a forensi magis sunt dictione remota: nequaquam horribile interpractari"], Apuleius Opera, Lucii Apuleii Platonici madaurensis philosophi metamorphoseos liber: ac nunnulla alia opuscula eiusdem, ed. Vicenza Henricus de Santo Urso (1488), A 5 v. That is, Apuleius has been struggling with foreign ideas, and a certain lack of smoothness in the work can be accounted for on that basis. I think that is true, and that the foreignness really comes not from Greekness but from the presence of Egyptian in the original; Apuleius may have been translating directly from Egyptian, or may have translated from a Greek version based on some Egyptian writings. Parts of the Asclepius, however, seem very familiar in tone, diction, and stylistic devices to the Apuleius whom we know elsewhere. Apuleius frequently translates from Greek sources; Jean Beaujeu also points out in his cdition of the Opuscules Philosophiques (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1973) that Apuleius sometimes errs in the interpretation of the Greek, in instances where we do have the Greek text of which Apuleius gives his readers a version. He also customarily interpolates his own material with a good deal of freedom. Some of the arguments against accepting Asclepius as pertaining in any respect to Apulcius have been based on a very late dating of what might be called "the Hermetic movement," but suppositions about such absolute datings (of Hermeticism and of Gnosticism) are undergoing revision at present. There are recent signs of a tendency to rehabilitate Asclepius among Apuleius's works. See Vincent Hunink's edition of and commentary on the Apologia, in Apuleius of Madauros Pro Se de Magia, 2 vols (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1997), 2:150; Hunink refers there to his own article "Apuleius and the 'Asclepius," Vigiliae Christianae 50 (1996), 288-30, in which he argues that "there are indications ... that may well point to Apuleius" (299). The Asclepius creeps into footnotes discussing diction and style, on equal terms with the other canonical works, in Warren S. Smith, "Narrative Voice in Apulcius' Metamorphoses," Oxford Readings in the Roman Novel, ed. S.J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 195–216; see pp. 197, 207.

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works of these Greek-speaking mystic philosophers centred largely in Egypt, represents, like the writings themselves, an attempt to syncretize Western thought—especially but not only the Platonic—with Egyptian traditions. The Hermetic thinkers were liberated from orthodoxies and could provide their own theological beliefs, secret doctrines about the higher spiritual works and the way in which all things connect—all of which Tristram-almost-Trismegistus represents too in his own overtly inadequate way. Walter's choice of such a first name is humorous and perverse. Even without Susannah's error, no curate would have been legally allowed to impose this preposterous un-Christian "Christian name" on a baby. We are certainly meant to laugh at Walter. But his desire for a Trismegistus reminds us of the mystic enlightenment that underlies the Enlightenment, and hints at the genuine unorthodoxies within the novel.

In the Latin treatise long associated with Apuleius, man is declared by Hermes Trismegistus to be an eternal soul clad in a mortal envelope through the will of God, and given the power over things of earth, not only the bare elements of earth and water alone, "but also those things that are either done or made by men from them, as cultivation of the earth, pasture, buildings, harbours, navigation, communications and the mutual service to one another which is the firmest bond uniting human beings" ["sed ea quae ab hominibus aut in his aut de his fiunt, aut ipsius terrae cultus, pascuae, aedificatio, portus, navigationes, communicationes, commodationes alternae, quae est humanitatis inter se firmissimus nexus"].⁵ Apuleius's love of catalogues and of mutuality seems to indicate his style at work in this passage.

God-given power exists within us, even in this mortal envelope. Hermetic writings tend on the whole to be rather pessimistic, emphasizing the corruption and low estate of this world. The Latin Asclepius is actually more positive about this world than are most Hermetic works, and its positive affirmations are consonant with Sterne's ideas, especially in the value placed on human communication.

Within this particular Hermetic dialogue we also find a certain acceptance of changing and shape-changing (coming from the Egyptian side of the tradition as well as from thinkers such as Heraclitus or poets such as Ovid). Although the writer of *Asclepius* believes that transformation into bestial form will be a punishment for inferior souls, he believes that in the

⁵ Asclepius 1, ed. and trans. Walter Scott in Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus (Boston: Shambhala, 1985), 8681168 8, pp. 300-2. References are to this edition by book, section, and page number. Translations are mine

main all is made well, and the eternal deity reveals himself in everything: "For everything is from him and in him and exists through him, all the various and multiform qualities and the great quantities and all things immeasurable in magnitude, and every kind of thing in every form" ["Omnia enim ab eo et in ipso et per ipsum, et variae et multiformes qualitates, et magnae quantitates et omnes mensuras excedentes magnitudinis, et omniformes species"] (3:c.34, 326). The use of the word "multiform," like the presence of the catalogues, sounds typically Apuleian. A novelist reading the Latin Asclepius could take from it the idea that some respect or affection is due to all kinds of life—a belief that Uncle Toby carries to a Jainite extreme in his care of the fly. The appeal of multitudinous forms and the value of communication are notes struck in this Hermetic dialogue that seem proleptically Sternean.

Throughout this dialogue, as in other Hermetic texts, wisdom is imparted to an interlocutor (in this case Asclepius) by the divine Logos who is Hermes Trismegistus. Pieces of "secret wisdom" include the idea that neither the full name of God nor his true nature can be known by us. Perhaps most interesting to the modern reader is the statement that God is both male and female. Most startling is the defiant proposition (as against Neoplatonists and many later Gnostics) that sexuality has been given to us as a high gift by this Deity: "the eternal faculty of procreation, a mysterious offering, in which by nature is the height of charity, joy, hilarity, desire and divine love" ["in aeternum procreandi inventum tributumque mysterium. cui summa caritas, laetitia, hilaritas, cupiditas, amorque divinus innatus est"] (3:c.21,334). Walter Shandy is certainly not on the side of Hermes the thrice-powerful when Hermes Trismegistus speaks in this vein. Walter prefers to cling to the abstractions of celestial Venus—as Apuleius had also done in a most self-interested way in the Apologia. Steme, I think, knows that he is setting aspects of Apuleius against each other.

This Hermetic "Apuleius" is more on Mrs Shandy's side than Walter's; the superiority of sacred love is not as certain, and the blessings of this world are insisted upon in a manner not usual to the more platonized and ethereal of Hermetic writers. The connection between healing and appreciation of the world, the sense of the pains of the physical life and the value of it, which can be found in all of Apuleius's extant works, are very similar to what we find in the works of the author of *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne is giving a definite if comic signal of unorthodoxy in teasingly placing a shadowy Trismegistus at his centre. Tristram is not knowledgeable, not a Thoth (though a disciple of Thoth, being addicted to writing and reading). He is sad like every animal after coition—his name like that of the medieval hero means "I was sad." Flesh and the life of the flesh weigh upon him.

But he will not repudiate nor claim transcendence of them. Being born is an ordeal, the life of the body is a complex affair, and it cannot be separated from ideas about mind and soul. To be born, and to be suddenly reminded of life in the body in the middle of a thought, is already to undergo metamorphosis.



Metamorphoses is the alternative title of The Golden Ass. The relation between Apuleius's great novel and that of his Yorkshire successor at fifteen centuries' remove deserves a more lengthy study than I can promise here, but I shall attempt a sketch. Apuleius's novel is a foundation work—though even so, the fable is apparently not original with himself, but taken from a circulating story, or Ass-Novel, of which the other extant version (the Greek Onos) used to be attributed to Lucian. But the Numidian writer takes the story of the man-who-turned-into-an-ass and makes it his own. Lucius—young, eager, gullible—is a well-marked and well-developed character before the transformation that unmakes him. The whole fabula is a complex first-person narration, an "I" story, self-centred and self-communing, in which the agent or active consciousness is also the sufferer, the man repeatedly ridiculed. Asinus aureus, like Tristram Shandy, is a story in which ordinary things are highlighted-and in which ordinary things are always going wrong. Early in the story, Lucius arrives as a guest at the house of a miser, who will not feed him dinner. He goes out into the marketplace to get his own dinner, buys some fish, and then has the misfortune to encounter an old acquaintance, now turned public official. This "friend," Pythias, declares that the fish Lucius has bought cost too much—it is rubbish, unfit for consumption—and, scolding the fishmonger in harsh tones, he throws it on the roadway and orders his attendant official to trample upon it and grind it with his feet. Satisfied with this official act, Pythias walks away; Lucius has now lost his dinner.6

Lucius is a young man who intensely desires relationship and connection—that is an aspect of his sociable *curiositas*. As narrator, he creates a conversation with his reader. So he does in the very opening of the story, when the reader breaks in with a question, "Quis ille?" ["Who's that?" Or "Who's that speaking?"]. As John J. Winkler notes, Apuleius's narrator appeals to the *scrupulosus lector*, who will ask "But how could you have

 ⁶ Apuleius, Asinus aureus, ed. and trans. J. Arthur Hanson, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1:1, c.24-25. References by volume, book number, section, and page are to this edition. Translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.
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known, you sly ass, confined within the boundaries of the mill, what those women did (as you claim) in secret?" The appeal to a defined reader reminds Winkler of Sterne, and Warren S. Smith elaborates the comparison with Sterne:

Calling attention to normally accepted conventions: cheating the reader's logical expectations at every turn—these elements are essential to Apuleius' narrative method, as well as to Sterne's. Both authors, for example, borrow the comic dramatists' trick (of which ancient dramatists are so fond) of temporarily shattering the dramatic mood by claiming to anticipate some interest or objection on the part of the audience.⁸

In both novelists' work, the narrative fussiness is related to a certain uneasy self-consciousness on the part of the narrator. Lucius and Tristram are both eager to associate with others, and uncertain about the causes and results of any and all connections, or their own appearance in the social scene.

Social interactions may be desired in *The Golden Ass*, but they are usually dangerous. Lucius is always running into trouble; his little social ventures turn into humiliations. At a great dinner party given by the formidable hostess Byrrhena he is apparently taken in by tall tales told by others. After the party, when Lucius thinks he is killing three gigantic robbers what he actually slaughters are three great wineskins (*Don Quixote*, part 1, chap. 35). This episode was adapted by Cervantes in Don Quixote's battle with the wineskins. At the Festival of Laughter, the mistaken Lucius is therefore the unwitting butt of a joke carried out by a whole populace.

Affectionate, uneasy, trusting, and curious, young Lucius though handsome is a poor sap—but we sympathize with him in his ridiculous adventures. The initial series of social blunders culminates in his major
misadventure when he insists to the maid Photis, with whom he has become sexually intimate, that he must have access to her mistress's magic
creams and potions. Envying the power of witchcraft and curious about
what it would be like to be something else, Lucius wants to be a bird for a
while. But he and Photis use the wrong unguent, and he suddenly experiences his metamorphosis into a most despised animal. His transformation
is perfect Shandyism. Nothing works right. Lucius wants so earnestly to
become a bird—but look what happens:

⁷ John J. Winkler, Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's "The Golden Ass" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 60. The translation, by Winkler, is of Asinus aureus, book 9, c.30.

throwing off my clothes, with avid hand I dipped deep into the jar and, pulling out a great gob, rubbed it all over my body and all its members. Then I alternately extended my arms and waved them in a bird-like gesture. But no little feathers appeared, not even one plume, but my hairs were growing thick and gross into bristles and my soft skin was hardening into hide ["et cutis tenella duratur in corium", and at the ends of my hands I lost the number of my digits which were conjoined together into single hoofs, and from the end of my spine there proceeded a great tail. Already my face was enormous and my mouth too wide with flaring wide nostrils and pendulous lips; thus too my ears became immoderately large and hairy. I could see no consolation for this miserable re-formation save that, although I could no longer hold Photis, my organ was growing ["mihi ... natura crescebat"]. (1:3, c.24, 168-70)

Lucius can blame the maidservant, Photis, who erred and brought the wrong magic unguent from her mistress's room. One Shandyesque misstep has plunged Lucius into a world of woe, in which his body is a perpetual problem.

True, Lucius has had trouble before. And his body is always playing him false. Near the very beginning of the narrative, when he is addressing a fellow traveller. Lucius comments with chatty and self-involved wonderment on the fact that some entertainers can swallow a sword, while he can hardly swallow polenta:

For yesterday evening, when I was trying, in emulation of my dinner companions, to bite off and swallow a larger bit than normal of cheesy polenta, the soft glutinous food stuck in my gills and because my throat was distended and I couldn't breathe, I was next thing to death. (1:1, c.4, 8)

Transformed into an ass. Lucius experiences his entire body as a mistake. He still enjoys or is tormented by desire, he still feels pleasure and pain, and is goaded by hunger. But there are few rewards for living in this body. He tries at once to find the roses which he must eat to cure this malady, as Photis tells him, but he first stuffs himself with vegetables from a garden plot. "Et quamvis crudis holeribus affatim tamen ventrem sagino" ["and I crammed my belly with vegetables enough, although they were raw"] (1:4, c.1, 182). Thinking he sees roses, he is misled by oleander, and beaten furiously by a gardener with a large stick. He kicks the gardener who beats him; the villagers call on their dogs; he is caught and tied and beaten again. The villagers would probably have done for the ass if he had not had an attack of diarrhoea, letting go of the vegetables in a liquid stream that keeps others out of his way (1:4, c.3, 186-88)

The ass has nothing to expect but shame and danger, pain and blows and humiliation. He is at the very bottom of the pyramid of power of which Published by Digital Commons @McMaster, 2000 the Romans are the apex—as we see clearly in the incident in which the wretched ass is taken by force from the poor gardener ["hortulanus"] by a Roman soldier. After addressing the peasant in Latin, then in Greekneither of which the poor man understands—the soldier in unrestrained "accustomed insolence" ["familiarem ... insolentiam"] knocks the peasant off the ass with his staff (2:9, c.39, 200.) As the peasant resists, however, and knocks the soldier down, the gardener's village has to be punished. A gang of soldiers take revenge, and the soldier-assailant is free to take the ass after all, making it carry his baggage and arms. He does this in a manner calculated to show off his helmet, shield, and spear on top of an imposing load. "It was not because of military regulation but in order to terrorize poor travellers ["sed propter terrendos miseros viatores"] that he composed his dunnage in a pile with these things in top like an army in action" (2:10, c.1, 212). This vivid and analytical description of colonial power's use of casual terror is a sharp political commentary; Asinus aureus certainly has its political anti-imperial aspects, and the novel here shows its hand. At the apex of power is the Roman emperor (to whose bureaucracy in Rome this miles is sent, forcing him to sell the ass for a clear profit). At the bottom of the structure of power is the poor ass, which bears all the economic and social burdens in the most literal manner.

The ass is a despised animal. Thought by many, including some North African tribes, to be unclean, a beast in which the divine spirit does not enter, it is also in Egyptian lore a beast of Seth, representing the enemy of Isis and Osiris. Its mundane experience is of perpetual servitude. Politically the ass represents the extreme of marginalization. It is an exaggerated figure for the despised, the forgotten, those whose labour supports a mighty empire in which they have literally no voice. The ass in *Onos* tries to appeal to Caesar, to shriek "O Kaisar" ["O Caesar!"], but it can say only "O" and cannot get the word "Kaisar" out; its appeal is only a ridiculous bray. Lucius is similarly unvoiced. At least, Lucius in the time of his transformation has no effective human voice, but the narrator is abustle with talk, talking to us all the time, in a wonderful stream of egoistical and pathetic and funny personal discourse.

The metamorphosed Lucius has become an extreme case of the male body—the figure of the penis, a presentation the reverse of the usual phallus—the phallus as despised, laughable, troublesome. "Ass" almost always has sexual connotations as well as connotations of ridicule, and its meaning is clarified by incidents within the story. People complain that

⁹ Onos in Lucian, 8 vols, ed. and trans. M.D. Macleod, Loeb Classic Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 8:76.

the beast is too unruly but will be tamed if it is castrated (a suggestion picked up by Swift, whose Gulliver makes the same suggestion regarding Yahoos in the fourth book of Gulliver's Travels.) Even transformed into his monstrous state, the Ass is not without his attractions, as a gigantic penis on legs. A woman wants to make love to this ass, who spends a wild night of passion with her. Towards the end of the story of transformation, the phallic powers of the Ass are to be used for public entertainment and torture a murderess is to be killed by being rogered by the ass in a highly decorated nuptial bed for the entertainment of the populace. Lucius the ass is both oversexed-regarded as nothing but his sexuality-and a quivering and punished male member. If his nature, his natura, was steadily increasing during the transformation scene, it is a base nature, now embarrassingly enlarged. His whole body is a ridiculed penis, always suffering and ever vulnerable. His soreness and bleeding prove that he is penetrable. He represents a low point, the abject of masculinity.

In the context of Apuleius's own era and culture, the Roman Empire in the second century CE, Lucius's transformation is even more acutely distressing than it would seem to us. Lucius the narrator, the hero of his own tale, presents himself at the outset as a free male of the higher if not the very highest-class. Born in or near Athens, he has studied in Rome, and is travelling in Thessaly on business. Thessaly, he remarks, is the home of Plutarch, who is a relative of his mother. Apuleius thus gives his hero a very respectable lineage and cultivated background—factors doubtless partly inherited from the original ass-story which he is adapting. (The insertion of Plutarch, however, seems definitely Apuleius's own idea.) Lucius first appears riding on a horse—an indigenous all-white horse in itself a sign of money and status. (Roles will be reversed when he who now rides gets ridden.) The metamorphosis into an ass turns Lucius into a parodic image of the slave class. In undergoing his transformation, he is paradoxically both more of a "male" (with giant organ) and less masculine. His conscious and articulated experience holds the stuff of nightmare, what every true Roman vir would dread. As Jonathan Walters points out in his essay "Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought":

the Roman sexual protocol that defined men as impenetrable penetrators can most usefully be seen in the context of a wider conceptual pattern that characterized those of high social status as being able to defend the boundaries of their body from invasive assaults of all kinds. 10

¹⁰ Jonathan Walters, "Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought," Roman Sexualities, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 29–43; quotation, p. 30
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As Walters explains, the word vir does not apply to all men, only to "those adult males who are freeborn Roman citizens in good standing." As vir, the dominant male can penetrate others without being penetrated. Penetration and beating are associated; in the time of the Republic "[it was one of the formal marks of Roman citizen status that one could not be beaten. The liability to be beaten or the exemption from it, still served as aperhaps the—major marker of the distinction between high and low." To hear the voice of Lucius the male recounting all the distressing experiences he has as an ass is disconcerting, for the "real male" Lucius born in Attica, inhabitant of Corinth, has irretrievably lost caste and status now that he is the object of others' desire—primarily their desire to hit and penetrate. It is not just his being made into an animal that humiliates him; his liability to be beaten has detached him—and forever—from truly and perfectly virile experience. He will never be a vir again; he has undergone too deep a degradation. He can be perhaps restored to humanity, as homo, but he will not be vir.

The absence of true virility is expressed everywhere in the form of the novel, which is an extensive first-person narration not acting as formal or argumentative discourse. It is wandering, digressive, chatty, anecdotal, and irrelevant—deformatus. As Lucius says, he found consolation in his deformity, in that with his gigantic ears he could easily hear everything said, even at a distance (see 2:9, c.15,152). Deformity has its advantages, which the style explores. The narrative is greedy and rich in lists, catalogues of marvellous completeness and irrelevance. Lucius the ass is tempted by the baked goods prepared by the pastry cook: "cuiusce modi pulmentorum largissimas reliquias, hic panes, crustula, lucunculos, hamos, laterculos, et plura scitamenta mellita" ["the other brought all sorts of great leftovers of pastries—here were breads, cookies, little shaped cakes like lizards and anchors, biscuits and more dainty things made with honey"] (2:10, c.13, 240). Apuleius enjoys the enumeration of richness, the rhyme of lucunculos and latercolos, the sense of great variety just enumerable, held loosely together within some overarching but not exactly enclosed unity. The multiform is his favourite mode, and words such as "multiform" among his favourite terms. The goddess Isis is multiform: "cuius numen unicum multiformi specie" ["one divinity under manifold forms"] (2:11, c.5, 298). This definition would seem to swallow up the simple twin Venuses of the Symposium and the Apologia.

Lucius the ass is just as greedy in eating the pastries as the author is in describing them. Lucius devouring pastry is doubtless the inspiration to Tristram when pitying the poor ass he met at the gate of his inn.

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He was eating the stem of an artichoke as this discourse went on, and in the little peevish contentions of nature betwixt hunger and unsavouriness, had dropt it out of his mouth half a dozen times, and pick'd it up again—God help thee, Jack! said I, thou hast a bitter breakfast on't—and many a bitter day's labour ... And now thy mouth, if one knew the truth of it, is as bitter, I dare say, as soot—(for he had cast aside the stem) and thou hast not a friend perhaps in all this world, that will give thee a macaroon.—In saying this, I pull'd out a paper of 'em, which I had just purchased, and gave him one—and at this moment that I am telling it, my heart smites me, that there was more of pleasantry in the conceit, of seeing how an ass would eat a macaroon—than of benevolence in giving him one, which presided in the act. (7:22, 399)

The game here may partly refer us to Erasmus, who says in *The Praise of Folly* that one must not pity a horse because he does not know Latin grammar and does not eat pastries.¹² The boundaries between kinds are blurred. But Tristram would have known very well from *Asinus aureus* how well an ass can eat sweet pastries—indeed, the lucky ass for his greed is allowed to cease from work and go on exhibition, even showing off as a diner (2:10, c.16-17, 244-48).

Lucius as narrator, like Lucius the ass, errs and strays from all sorts of pathways, lighting upon what pleases him. Apuleius has heightened and changed what we may think of as the "original tale" as we may discern it in *Onos* by adding in various digressions and inset stories, taking a model of narration from the Egyptian tradition which, so far as modern scholarship is able to ascertain, seems to be the first literary tradition to discover the value of the tale-within-a-tale.¹³ Lucius the narrator has egotism without

12 "It's utter misery, they say, to be in the clutches of folly, to be bewildered, to blunder, never to know anything for sure. On the contrary, I say, that's what it is to be a man. I don't see why they should call that condition miserable into which we were born, in which we were bred, in which we have grown up—which is the common fate of every one of us. There's nothing miserable about what conforms to one's basic nature—unless someone wants to argue that a man should be considered wretched because he can't fly like the birds, gallop around like the quadrupeds, or threaten his foes with horns like a bull. Such a fellow might equally well deplore the fate of a thoroughbred horse because he has never learned grammar and doesn't eat pasty pies [quod neque grammaticam didicerit neque placentis vescatur], or think a bull must be wretched because he cuts such an ill figure as a gymnast." The Praise of Folly, ed. and trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: W.W. Norten, 1989), p. 32; Stultitiae Laus, ed. John F. Collins (Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr Latin Commeniams." 1991); c 32; 23: Wa may note that Cucius did feel inisemble because he condition to his fix as the ass.

For Egyptian fiction, see Ancient Egyptian Literature, ed. and trans. Miriam Lichtheim, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), and The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940–1640 BC, trans. R.B. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). The most remarkable tale-within-a-tale structure is to be found in what in modern times is called "The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor." Egyptian literature also has very well developed first-person narration. An author such as Apuleius working within the African as well as the European tradition might well have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by Egyptian literary forms and devices.

accomplishment and without power; he is curious, unfixed, and garrulousall most un-Roman characteristics. The novel, the work that is his (Lucius's) story, is overtly and in all elements of its form an anti-Roman tale. The ass has logorrhoea rather than phallogocentric certainty. Both the masculine role here presented and the form in which it is presented are illegitimate. Within the story, the playful, extravagant, excessive style is in keeping with the illegitimately soft and disconcerting form. Apuleius engages in repetition, plays of sequences of clauses, rhyme, puns—the illegitimate formulations of a style that rejects empire, masculinity, and solidity. It is at the opposite remove from Caesar's Gallic Wars. As James Tatum says. after a detailed commentary on a sentence on De deo Socratis, describing mortality and its attendant frustrations, "These figures of speech both complement and shape the thought; the uncertain ever changing state of affairs in our daily lives is perfectly represented by the ever changing forms of the words."14 The same could be said of many sentences in Asinus aureus. and the features of the style—its puns, antitheses, rhythmic phrases, and rhyme offer constant pleasures for a listener or a reader. Tatum illustrates common devices by setting clauses in a sequential order on the page, a poetic arrangement of prose for which the cue lies in Rabelais, another great reader of Apuleius.

An evil wife is described by a series of rhymed adjectives:

Nec enim vel unum vitium nequissimae illi feminae deerat, sed omnia prorsus ut in quandam caenosam latrinam in eius animum flagitia confluxerant:

saeva

scaeva

virosa

ebriosa

pervicax

pertinax

in rapinis turpibus avara

in sumptibus foedis profusa

inimica fidei

hostis pudicitiae.

[There was not a single vice lacking in this vilest of women; all kinds of sin had flowed into her spirit as though into some filthy cesspool. She was savage and crude, poisonous and drunken, overbearing and indomitable; grasping in base thefts, extravagant in debased living, an enemy of fidelity, a foe of chastity.]¹⁵

¹⁴ James Tatum, Apuleius and "The Golden Ass" (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 133.

¹⁵ Tatum, p. 151

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The only change Tatum makes here is the setting out on the page, so that in the list of adjectives and adjectival phrases we can see clearly what is going on. Apuleius loves lists and sequences, an excess of description, a play of repetition with variation that exhausts the capacity of language to supply meaning. The play runs ahead of, or runs rings around, the normative meaning.



At this point even the sceptical reader is likely to come into some sort of agreement with me, for we can see that Sterne's own love of lists of parallel phrases and rhymes and word play rivals Apuleius's affection for the same stylistic elements. That Steme's novel must own Apuleius as an ancestor is not startling. What is more startling is to suggest, as I am doing, that both novels are as they are because they (or their authors-I am not a supporter of vaticide) share a common interest in questioning masculinity, dominance, and empire. Within Sterne's novel—a story about a family, largely males, living in the provinces—the large-scale structures and activities that make the British empire are questioned: imperial trade (Walter was a Turkey merchant); the British army (Toby); the Church (Yorick). We see these institutions only through the imperfections and idiosyncrasies of the male protagonists, all of whom are failures in part or whole. Sterne's allegiance to Whiggism has been greatly exaggerated, for if we look into his novel we see a sophisticated implicit critique of the cruelty and wrong wrought by empire, and by allegiance to an impossible Roman ideal. The soldiers of the conquering colonial power are envisaged as suffering and enduring, not conquering and rejoicing. The pride of King William and of Marlborough is bought with the pain and effort of Toby, Trim, and Le Fever.

Masculinity, idealized as the capacity to govern the world through action and discourse, is steadily under question and under threat. If in Apuleius the hero in his transformation represents the penis in distress, so in Tristram Shandy the penis is a leading character—but a character oft in danger, oft in woe. The window falls on Tristram's penis, administering an unplanned circumcision. A hot chestnut leaps into the male groin. Toby is wounded—but the question is where? To what extent has he been unmanned? His wound in his private parts must always be occluded through the map that tells us of more triumphal horn works. But Toby is primarily interested in defensive warfare. Masculinity is lost, is a has-been or a not-yet, is something recollected or imagined but not ever able to manifest itself.

The most impressive manifestation of masculinity is its power of begetting, which makes Tristram's birth a central event not only for him—and Published by DigitalCommons@McMaster, 2000 17

his mother—but for the males on the premises. But the biological theory that gives power to masculinity and authority to the father alone as creator is undermined by its very inclusion. If Tristram is his Homunculus grown older, the Homunculus was always in distress. Insistent physicality does not allow the abstraction of the Law of Begetting, the story of filiation. Genealogy is steadily undermined in Tristram Shandy. And on the fiction of genealogy depends the whole structure of kingship, patriarchy, patrimony, property. There is a lot that Tristram does not say—is not able to say—despite his outpouring of narrative. Indeed, his whole narrative, like Toby's bowling green, is a defence mechanism. Tristram is not able to confront directly the most important fact of his birth—that he is not Walter Shandy's son. His position under the law becomes (technically) peculiarly dreadful and singularly guilty at the point of his elder brother Bobby's death. At Bobby's death Tristram becomes the heir. (That is why Bobby has to be in the book at all—he is not a character.) Tristram becomes the heir. That is, the cuckoo will inherit the nest, the nightmare of British law and society. The rightful authority and meaning of paternity and patriarchy are broken. What the Roman empire is to Apuleius, the British system of patriarchy and primogeniture is to Sterne. The institution is everywhere attacked, though not fully named, an atmosphere rather than an entity. Masculinity and all good order are supposed to depend on that unnameable entity which is being constantly subverted by the garrulous chat of the impostors who should be marginalized and forgotten—ass and illicit claimant. They have no claim to status as vir, they are an embarrassment, but—there they are in full voice, central, not peripheral.

The triumph of the overturn of order is expressed in both texts, in which the command of narrative is given to the lowly outsider, the male entity who does not measure up, and this male entity gallops away with the form, delighting in story, in digression and deliquescence, in illicit borrowings of other stories, in frustration of rules of order. Both stories circulate about themselves, play with repetition in large and small. The texts play with themselves: they are masturbatory, they never succeed in being serious and orderly. They are not sober. They do not live up to the Roman ideals of which both texts are fully conscious. Sterne alludes over and over again to Roman ways and histories and habits, reminding us how much of Romanness (including Roman errors) modern life still holds. Walter Shandy believes, like the Stoic Roman, that the private man and the public should be exactly the same. A man should go to bed with his wife with the same dignity with which he would address the Senate. He gives credence to the parish bull because the bull seems so virile, in the sense of being like http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol12/iss2/17 18 454 EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION Doody: Shandyism, Or, the Novel in Its Assy Shape: African Apuleius, <em

a proper Roman male, full of gravitas and self-importance, an imaginary self-sufficiency:

my father's Bull, to speak the truth of him, was no way equal to the department; he had, however, got himself, somehow or other, thrust into employment—and as he went through the business with a grave face, my father had a high opinion of him. (9:33, 496)

In both texts, with their play of incessant presence of the non-ruling penis, the non-phallic entity that is incarnate in flesh and blood and mortality, it is impossible to insist on the gravitas of the masculine. The rules of proper masculine discourse, as a Cato, a Caesar, or a Cicero would understand them, are discounted. Master narratives of the culture are alluded to, but are not followed. It should be added that Tom Jones is a major master narrative of novelistic order immediately behind Tristram Shandy, a work from which Sterne has taken many hints and yet which he in a sense parodies. Tom, son of Summer, born in May, is the warm, good phallic presence in The History of Tom Jones—Tristram, born in November on Guy Fawkes' Day, is the cold, weak, inadequate penis never able to rise to phallic power.

Both Apuleius's novel and Sterne's go in for eggs-of-Leda narration. Straight lines, says Tristram, are for cabbages. In both works, a textuality is insisted on, yet that textuality refuses to be perfectly understood or to make itself accountable. We have long streams of thought by the narrator, whose adventures are ridiculous, grotesque, meaningful only when meaninglessness has been admitted. In creating Tristram—and other characters, especially Toby—Sterne has transformed his males (writers, lawgivers, preachers) into a version of the ass—the insistent and too forward flesh that brings claims to rule and glory into disrepute. The whole story is a tale of "a cock and a bull"—a cock making a blunder, a penis that turned in to the wrong hole. The joke is at the same time deadly serious—for Tristram to admit that he knows that Yorick must be his father would be commensurate with accepting a death sentence against which he still wills himself to fight. He is not suffering from a cold caught in Flanders, but from an inherited consumption that took off his father, whose tombstone we gazed on near the beginning of the book. Mortality is all around, and can be staved off only by an effort of the defensive will, by creative denials.

Writing itself is a strategy that offers consolation. So it is for Tristram and for Lucius—even for the poor ass, who in the cave hearing the old woman's story of Cupid and Psyche wishes he had writing materials: "I was sad, by Hercules, that I didn't have my tablets and stilus" ["dolebam

mehercules quod pugillares et stilum non habebam"] (1:6, c.25, 354). What would an ass do with writing tablets? Lucius-as-ass consoles himself that he is like Odysseus, seeing many men and many cities. He wants his story to be epic—which it never can be. He, like Tristram, is highly text-conscious, and envies the wordy instantiation, the immortal permanence, that literature provides. Before his transformation, he tells his companions at a dinner party that a Chaldean soothsayer has prophesied regarding him:

Mihi denique proventum huius peregrinationis inquirenti multa respondit et oppido mira et satis varia: nunc enim gloriam satis floridam, nunc historiam magnam et incredundam fabulam et libros me futurum. (1:2, c.12, 82-84)

[When I asked him about the success of this journey of mine he responded saying many things and wonderfully contradictory and various: now that I should flourish in sufficient glory, now that I should be in the future a great history, an incredible fable in several books.]

But what kind of books should Lucius figure in? To think of oneself as booked is to foresee one's end. He dreams of being a hero of epic, of finding meaning in his painful transformation:

Not unworthily has the divine author of the first poetry amongst the Greeks, desirous to demonstrate the highest manly prudence, sung the man who attained the highest virtues through visiting many cities and knowing many peoples. Therefore I have remembered and am thankfully grateful to my ass ["nam et ipse gratias asino meo memini"], because concealed under his covering, I was exercised in various fortunes, and so the ass repaid me—though I was not so prudent—with a good deal of knowledge. (2:9, c.I3, 148-50)

Deciding to be like Odysseus, the ass imitates his hero only in fabrication and narration. He was never prudent, and within his story, before, during, and after his transformation, he is intimately associated with what he oddly calls "my ass" ["asino meo"]. The novel itself is his ass, it bears the mark of his assy shape—superabundant, misshapen, distended, and disproportionate, comic, endearing, and physically based.

Lucius cannot be a hero—that role is illegitimate, as it is to be very deeply for Sterne also. Tristram is the narrator of a story in which he did not do anything—but was acted upon, chiefly in the matter of his birth. Both of these novels have puzzling endings that have left readers thinking that there surely must be more, that the ending we have cannot be the "real" ending. There is no winding up, no wrapping up the tale. Asinus aureus ends with an imperfect verb: "I was happily going about" ["gaudens obibam"] (2:11, c.30, 358). A continuous action is not resolved. The meaning of Tristram Shandy's last-word joke of the cock and the bull is not resolved. Finding meaning in the world is an inevitable effort, but the

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search for finality is doomed for different reasons to disappointment. The offering of assured meanings, of definite wrappings up (like the ending of *Tom Jones*), is the function of the empire. Empire is a debased fiction, an invented masculinity which has assumed its dominating shape as a truth, behind which the reality of the physicality of the penis, the mortality of man, and the struggle of consciousness remain, if not dormant, hidden—or at least encrypted.



Between Sterne and Apuleius are several important writers who also serve to transmit to Sterne what he could get directly too from reading Apuleius's Opera. Boccaccio, Rabelais, and Cervantes took Apuleius into partnership and got different things out of the association. Beyond Sterne the play of the Ass-Novel continues. Salman Rushdie is the finest living exponent today of the kind of novel of "assy shape" created by Cervantes and developed in his own way by Sterne. In Rushdie's Midnight's Children the game being played with Sterne is very evident. Here too we have the story of a birth and its background, a context long drawn out—only to realize that the story of filiation is a fiction, that all sorts of dominant-group realities and fixities are questioned, subverted, or reversed. No entity is certain—nation states fission and split, identities are claimed and discarded. The political content of Midnight's Children gives it a closer relationship to Apuleius than to Sterne. Sterne also has political content, but his questioning of empire is done at a remove. Rushdie's questioning of empire (not just of the British empire but of all sorts of manifestations of dominance and subordination) is urgent and of primary importance in Midnight's Children. It is in The Satanic Verses, however, he takes care to point out his debt to Apuleius:

"Once I'm an owl, what is the spell or antidote for turning me back into myself?" Mr Mohammed Sufyan, prop. Shaandar Café and landlord of the rooming-house above, mentor to the variegated, transient and particoloured inhabitants ... responded ... with the above impromptu quip, stolen, with commendable mental alacrity for one aroused from his slumbers, from Lucius Apuleius of Madaura, Moroccan priest, A.D. 120–180 approx., colonial of an earlier Empire. 16

Rushdie here offers us the valuable insight that Apuleius is a colonial writer who engages in some devices we associate with postcolonial writing; Apuleius's realismo magico, like Rushdie's in Satanic Verses, becomes

more comprehensible in terms of literary history. Sterne just skirts realismo magico—save in Slawkenburgius's Tale, where he lets go with Renaissance extravagance, playing at once with sexuality, the body, Latinity, and translation. All three writers—Apuleius, Sterne, Rushdie—are creators of the novel in its assy shape. It is illegitimate to have asses tell stories, to have bastards inherit. But are not conquests, empires, and borders illegitimate fictions? We depend on boundaries and straight lines; blood-lines and clear borders. In the novels by these three authors the boundaries by which we live—even the boundary between human and animal—become subject to question and dubiety. Logic is blown by the heap of words, the great mingling of things, the urgent inclusion of trivial objects within a rhetoric that shows off its own pleasure in itself—a pleasure that proponents of rightful rule, or order and measure, would label self-indulgence.

These novels—Asinus aureus, Tristram Shandy, Midnight's Children tell a story that is not the discourse of power. All three have leading characters who are narrators, telling their embarrassing non-plotted tales. These are first-person stories told in the abject person. Yet the narrators (including Rushdie's Saleem) are also young men who remain always young, who always have a certain juvenility in their composition, and their youth imparts a certain optimism. The three works all insist on the physicality of existence, the life within the flesh. The flesh life means that the outer assy covering of the body conceals a quivering consciousness. "A man's body and his mind, with the utmost reverence to both, I speak it, are exactly like a jerkin, and a jerkin's lining;—rumple the one—you rumple the other" (Tristram Shandy, 3:4, 120). The hard hide, the corium that Lucius grows in place of his soft skin, proves not to be hard enough, a cortex that is easily broken through. The inescapable fact of body and pain is matched by the inescapable fact of the penis—deromanticized as flesh and blood, like nose and knees, it is equally vulnerable. We realize, if we brood on Tristram Shandy for very long, that Tristram encountering the ass at the gate of his inn at Lyons is once again encountering the penis that recurrent element in Tristram Shandy. As the three novelists exhibit the novel in its assy shape, the novel becomes meum asinum.

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