

Exclusus Lector: Narrative Boundaries in Apuleius' Metamorphoses

Narratives in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* tend to bleed into one another. Characters, plot elements, essential objects, and even narrative voices from one story resemble those of another, such that the reader has great difficulty telling them apart. The effect of this narrative similitude, I argue, is to induce the reader to experience, and therefore repeat, the flaw that our focalizers share. Just as Aristomenes, Socrates, Lucius, and Thelyphron share a common inability to maintain the integrity of boundaries, so too a reader of the *Metamorphoses* must have difficulty maintaining narrative borders—the distinction between one story from another and one character from the next.

I will focus in this paper on scenes in which characters confront locked or enclosed spaces, because it is precisely these scenes that articulate the difficulty in interpreting the action, both inside and outside the novel. I demonstrate that a character's way of dealing with boundaries is programmatic for the way he experiences the world, and is indicative also of the way in which Apuleius compels us to experience the novel. While our focalizers can hardly even keep their own intestines inside themselves, characters like Meroe, Pamphile, and the *ianitor* are uncannily knowing precisely because they control boundaries. The *ianitor*, like the witches, can penetrate locked spaces and restore the integrity of access points once opened. So too, the *studiosus lector* of the *Metamorphoses* must fight against the grain to impose proper borders on the narrative – and to see through boundaries, like book divisions, that are less clear-cut than they may at first appear. By detailed attention to a handful of scenes from the first three books of the *Metamorphoses*, I demonstrate how the text outlines a model of reading whereby the task of the successful reader is to penetrate the interior of the text – wherein lies the story and its *auctor* – while preserving the integrity of its boundaries.

Works Cited

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