TIM WHITMARSH

An I for an I: Reading Fictional Autobiography

> ... *sicut Apuleius in libris, quos asini aurei titulo inscripsit, sibi ipsi accidisse, ut accepto ueneno humano animo permanente asinus fieret, aut indicauit aut finxit.*

> ... just as Apuleius, in the books he wrote with the title of *The Golden Ass*, has told, or feigned, that it happened to his own self that, on taking a potion, he became an ass, while retaining his human mind. (Augustine, *ciu.* XVIII 18).

Augustine was much troubled by Apuleius, whom he saw as a demonologist and apologist for magic[1]. Like his predecessor Lactantius and other early patristic writers[2], he saw him as an embodiment of all that was false in pagan thaumaturgy, a diabolic opposite number to Christ the miracle-worker. Perhaps there was also a personally competitive edge in his denigration of another north-African composer of conversion narratives in sparkling Latin prose; perhaps too a guilty disavowal of the literary pleasures of his pre-Christian youth. At any rate, when, in the passage from which the quotation above is drawn, he comes to decry the «wicked arts» of living metempsychosis, he does not waste the opportunity to berate the author of the *Metamorphoses* (or *Golden ass*, as he titles the work) for his claims to have transformed himself into a donkey.

This is, however, one of those moments when literary critics cringe. We so deeply want the ancients to be sophisticated, sensitive readers of literature, but Augustine, one of antiquity's shrewdest minds, seems to have fallen into the most elementary of elephant-traps: he has confused author and narrator[3]. The story was written by Apuleius, but the protagonist is, of course, Lucius of Corinth, a relative of Plutarch's. Nor, to make matters worse, was Augustine alone in assuming «without question that Apuleius is claiming to relate his own experience – that he is the Lucius of his novel»; according to a recent account of the reception of the novel, the «assumption continued to be unquestioned for at least a thousand years, and the identity of Apuleius and Lucius was to play a major role in the interpretation of the *Golden ass*»[4].

Similar problems arise when we look to the Greek *Ass* tradition. Bishop Photius of Constantinople was no fool, and noone could accuse him of not being widely read; but he too seems to ascribe the authorship of the longer version of the Greek *Ass* (now lost), which he takes to be the original, to «Lucius of Patrae» (*Bibl.* cod. 129 = 96b). Lucius of Patrae is the central figure and narrator of the novel, and presumably not the real author. It is far from impossible, of course, that the ascription predated Photius, and even that it went back to an

---

[1] Generally on the Christian reception of Apuleius see Carver 2007, 17-30, with 26-29 on our passage; and Gaisser 2008, 20-39, with 33-34 on our passage. Augustine's view of Apuleius is discussed by Hunink 2003.

[2] Lact. *inst.* V 3,19, discussed at Carver 2007, 18-19 and Gaisser 2008, 22-23.

[3] It is worth emphasising at this point that the author/narrator distinction that I am discussing has nothing to do with Winkler's *auctor/actor*, which actually has nothing to do with the Apuleian author: *auctor* for Winkler means the narrator Lucius (e.g. pp.135-40).

[4] Gaisser 2008, 33.

original pseudonymy in the text. The fact remains, however, that the redoubtable bishop shows no sign of scepticism, or even suspicion.

Are these really cases of naïveté? At one level, surely not. Augustine shows no sign of believing that Apuleius' first-person narrative is, or indeed is intended to be, a factual account of the author's experience (nor does Photius)[5]. The phrase *aut indicauit aut finxit* («has told, or feigned»), with its implicit weighting towards the second option, suggests that he knows full well that he is dealing with a *fictio* in the guise of a factual utterance, an *indicatio* (which can mean a «statement» in a forensic context)[6]. Augustine's formulation, indeed, does capture the distinctiveness of Apuleius' narrative technique. As Andrew Laird has demonstrated, the chatty, discursive style and use of free indirect discourse in the *Metamorphoses*, coupled with the first-person form, is unprecedented in narrative literature; such features were more typically employed in veridical genres of literature[7]. In other words, the text is precisely a *fictio* (Apuleius impersonating another person) in the guise of an *indicatio* (a testimony about one's own life). Augustine's conflation of author and narrator is, moreover, already seeded in Lucius' notorious self-identification as a «man from Madaura», i.e. Apuleius' own home town (XI 27)[8].

But if we can accept that Augustine was a sophisticated and attentive reader[9], the question still stands: why has he managed to make such an elementary confusion? My hypothesis in this discussion will be that the problem lies not with Augustine but with a particular configuration of modern critical practice. The narrator/author divide has become so central to literary criticism[10] that to disturb it seems transgressive, in a way that it clearly was not in pre-modern times. Narratology has become for us a dominant and all-pervasive intellectual idiom that it is easy to forget that antiquity had no dedicated vocabulary to describe the 'narrator' (narratology's central category)[11] in the strict, critical sense of a narrating persona within the textual fiction (as distinct from the 'poet', 'singer' or 'writer' who created it)[12]. Hence, for example, the well-known tendency of ancient biographers to take statements of narratorial self-identification more or less literally, rather than (as modern critics would prefer) as circumscribed by the demands

---

[5] Photius emphasises the level of quasi-Lucianic τερατεία in the text, and indeed entertains (if he finally rejects) the notion that «Lucius» may have derived the story from Lucian.

[6] *OLD* s.u. *indicatio* 2, citing Ulp. *dig.* XIX 1,13,3.

[7] Laird 1990.

[8] Laird 1990, 156-157 aptly compares *Onos* 55, where the fictional Lucius reveals that he is a ἱστορίων ... συγγραφεύς. See further Whitmarsh 2010, 140.

[9] Augustine's developed, proto-phenomenological ideas about reading are the subject of Stock 1996.

[10] «That it is essential not to confuse author and narrator has become a commonplace of literary theory» (Chatman 1978, 147).

[11] Bal 1997, 19: «The narrator is the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts. The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character».

[12] Plato's Socrates influentially distinguished 'narrator-text', in the voice of the Homeric narrator, from 'mimetic text', containing characters' words (*Rep.* 393d-4d; for a recent discussion of the influence see Nünlist 2009, 94-115); but crucially it is always 'Homer' who is said to be doing the narration (see e.g. *Rep.* 393d for the distinction between Homer speaking 'as Chryses' (e.g.) or 'as Homer'). Arist. *Poet.* 1460a 5-11 makes the same distinction, even if it is not quite clear why he apparently limits «Homer-speak» to proems. See Rabel 1999 for a recent discussion of this problem. I am not, however, convinced that Aristotle necessarily saw the narratorial passages after the proems in terms of impersonation of the voice of the Muses, as Rabel suggests; that even if he did, he was necessarily right to do so (how would this account for the second invocation of *Iliad* 2?); or that even if he did and was right, that this is an ancient version of the author / narrator distinction (as Rabel 1999, 169-170 seems to imply).

of genre and literary context[13].

I have described the ancient configuration in terms of the *absence* of a critical term, and from one perspective this is clearly right. The more concepts and tools we have at our disposal, the subtler and sharper we are as critics. But it is always awkward when moderns start lording it over their benighted pre-enlightenment predecessors: partly because it smacks of 'presentist' arrogance, but more seriously because too heavy a dependence on modern critical schemes risks inattention to the reading instincts and habits of the ancients themselves. Apuleius, «Lucius of Patrae» and their peers, of course, were writing for readers who were closer to Augustine and Photius than to Genette and Bal: they were surely *anticipating* the kind of confusion that they generated. And, conversely, it is likely that Augustine and Photius entered this fictional contract willingly and with their eyes open, attuned as they were to the conventions.

This discussion will focus on the phenomenon of first-person fictional narratives, which attract this kind of problematic more than any other type of literary text. In this category I include alongside Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and the Greek *Ass* texts[14], Petronius' *Satyrica*, Lucian's *True Stories*, Lollianus' now-fragmentary *Phoenician affairs* and the framing narrative of Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*. Not all of these will be discussed here in any kind of detail. For example, Petronius' *Satyrica* seems to me a relatively straightforward case of fictivity: the figure of Encolpius is so obviously not Petronius (especially if Petronius is Nero's *arbiter elegantiae*) that the issue becomes not so much how to distinguish the two as how to locate the 'hidden' authorial slant that ironises Encolpius' narration (a process that seems more complex than Conte's and similar readings admit)[15]. In *Leucippe and Clitophon*, by contrast, an ancient audience would (I imagine) immediately have identified the figure we tend to call the 'unnamed narrator' of the prologue with Achilles himself; but the narrator plays such a small role that little depends directly on that identification[16]. Lollianus is too fragmentary to admit much discussion. My emphasis, then, will be primarily on the various Greek and Roman *Ass* stories and on Lucian (even if most of the discussion will be at the theoretical level).

I am going to call this kind of narrative a 'fictional autobiography' rather than (for example) a 'first-person', 'homodiegetic' or 'ego-narrative', because these latter terms imply too much investment in the narratological category of the narrator as discrete from the author, which assumes automatically precisely what I claim to be *sous rature*. The idea of 'fictional autobiography' is a deliberate paradox, since (as Philippe Lejeune has argued) the 'autobiographical contract' (whereby author and narrator are assumed to be identical) categorically excludes the 'fictional contract' (the prerequisites of which are non-identity between the two and overt fictivity)[17]. The narratives that we are dealing with, or rather the reading conventions that they imagine, precisely blur (I argue) the boundaries between these categories.

There is a serious philosophical and psychological complexity involved in both composing

---

[13] Lefkowitz 1991, 113: «When ancient poets start to write about themselves in the first person, it has been natural to want to think of them as speaking directly about their feelings and their lives. But it is a mistake to take these 'I'-statements as naïve, direct expressions about some particular development in time, rather than as the formal utterance of some professional person».

[14] Excluding *P.Oxy.* 4762, which is apparently narrated in the third person (or heterodiegetically).

[15] Rimell 2007, 114: 'we cannot, as Auerbach, Sullivan and Conte propose, ally ourselves securely with a sophisticate Author (Petronius) and condescend to a buffoonish Narrator (Encolpius) from a position of objectivity and superiority "outside" the text: it is ultimately impossible to disentangle narrator from author, or even narrator from protagonist».

[16] I explore some of the possible consequences in Whitmarsh 2011.

[17] Lejeune 1982, 203.

and reading a story in which the narrating 'I' is a performance, an ego that is not one's own. The pronoun 'I' marks not a concrete reference – like all pronouns, it is exclusively deictic, and can hence be used to denote a potentially infinite number of human beings – but a social and linguistic function: it indicates (a) that the allusion is to the person currently speaking (or, by extension, who has written); (b) that that person speaking or writing is the subject of the utterance[18]. Fictional autobiography breaks the rules of that particular contract. Now it might be argued that the very fact of fictivity suspends the normal rules: after all, we can comfortably read *The Lovely Bones* without assuming that Alice Sebold, the real author, is dead like the narrator. But this easy acceptance of fictional conventions is, I think, a peculiarly modern effect of the omnipresence of fiction in our world, which has dulled our sense of the transgressiveness of this kind of speech act.

It is that transgressiveness, the discomforting jolt, that I want to recapture here. Fictional autobiography generalises the paradox that critics have identified in relation to Apuleius' famous *quis ille?* («who is that man?») in the prologue to the *Metamorphoses* (I 1): a question, spoken by the narrator but ventriloquised by the addressee, that shifts the narrator away from the first into the third person[19]. In first-person fiction, the narrator is an uneasy blend between *ego* and *ille*, between authorial identification and distantiation. In particular, I want to pursue the implications of taking Augustine's approach to Apuleius as a paradigmatic ancient strategy for dealing with first-person fictions, rather than as failed attempt at a modern one. My hypothesis will be that the modern instinct to divide author from narrator actually does violence to the fictional conventions of the ancient world, foreclosing the complex and unresolved play between the autobiographical and the fictional modes.

To offer some psychological contextualisation for the phenomenon I am describing, we need to move well beyond literary narrative, into the world of performance. Let us consider first the singing of poetry in early Greece. Rhapsodic performance of Homer seems to have been more than simply the tactical adoption of a Homeric persona; the rhapsode in a sense inhabits the role of Homer for the duration of the performance, albeit without sacrificing his own identity. This is what the rhapsodic rapture described in Plato's *Ion* suggests: Ion is magnetically enthused with Homer's spirit, even as he maintains his own independent status as Greece's top performer of Homeric poetry (541b2). Similarly, the situational vagueness of Sapphic poetry has been taken as a device to allow reperformance in contexts where the singer was male, allowing him to 'be' Sappho more plausibly – although here, of course, gender difference would provide a strong marker of the residual non-identification[20].

Greg Nagy has expanded this model of performative identification into a more radical theory of poetic composition in early Greece, claiming that in many cases authorial identifications are no more than the corollary of all composition in a particular genre: thus, for example, to write blame poetry is to become Archilochus, to write rustic or theogonic epic is to become Hesiod, and so forth[21]. Although these particular examples are speculative, we can see an indisputable instance in sympotic love poetry, where up until Byzantine times poets adopted the identity of Anacreon[22].

---

[18] I borrow here from Lejeune's (1982, 197-199) reformulation of Benveniste.

[19] Among many discussions, see especially Winkler 1985, 180-203 (esp. 194-196); Laird 1990, 155-156; Too 2001.

[20] Most 1985, 33-34.

[21] See i.a. Nagy 1979, 243-252; 1990, 47-50.

[22] Rosenmeyer 1992.

The assumption underlying all of these models is that to say 'I' is, in a complex but serious way, to lay claim to the selfhood that one performs. To unpack some of the complexity, let us look sideways to dramatic acting. Actors in performance are not usually[23] confused with *authors* in the way that we have been describing – which is why I have described this as a sideways look – but they do occupy a similarly double role in relation to their characters. An actor onstage is at once the flesh-and-blood actor *and* the character[24]. This is the point of the famous anecdote about Polus the actor, who played the role of Sophocles' Electra using an urn containing the ashes of his own son. Thus the grief of the acted Electra merged with that of the actor: «he filled everywhere not with the appearance and imitation, but with real grief and living laments»[25]. Ismene Lada-Richards aptly cites in this connection Dicaeopolis' words in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, which can clearly be taken as a metatheatrical allusion to theatrical acting: «for I must this day seem to be a beggar; be who I am and yet not seem to be»[26]. The two sides of the acting self, the actor and the role, co-exist in the same person, their simultaneity indicated by the balancing μέν ... δέ construction. Both passages create a clear ontological hierarchy, between the true, real actor and the fictitious representations that his acting depicts; but both, in their different ways, acknowledge a convergence between the two identities.

Acting is thus conceived of as a form of *illusion*, a central concept in Greek aesthetics. Gorgias famously commented on tragedy that it is a «deception in which the deceiver is more just than the non-deceiver, and the deceived is wiser than the undeceived»[27]. The paradoxical nature of the illusion – it fools you that it is real, when you know all along it is a fiction – is a running theme of much ancient rhetorical and literary criticism, particularly that in the orbit of literary vividness (*enargeia*)[28]. What illusion does, primarily, is elide textuality, while simultaneously insisting on it[29]. When ps-Longinus describes the impact of Orestes' vision of the Furies in Euripides' *Orestes* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, he claims that the «poet himself saw Erinyes, and has made his audience all but see what he imagined»[30]. Audience and poet alike are transported into a imaginative fantasy in which they can see what Orestes himself can see ... or, rather, they can *all but* see it, the characteristic ecphrastic 'qualification'[31] marking the residual awareness of textuality, of fictionality.

Fictional autobiography is a form of illusionism. In Augustine's response to Apuleius, the authorial 'I' slides fictitiously into the (narratorial) *alter ego*, even as the reader retains an awareness of the irreducible fictionality of the process. Viewed from the perspective of ancient

---

[23] The widespread 'Euripides says that' phenomenon (when discussing lines attributed to a character) is only a limited exception, since is not keyed to the challenging ontology of the fictional 'I' (and it is a function of textuality rather than performance). A more pungent case is that of the Aristophanic parabasis, alluded to below.

[24] Amply discussed at Lada-Richards 2002, 395-401, and further Easterling 1990.

[25] Aul. Gell. VI 5,1-8, at 7. This anecdote is the opening hook for a metatheatrical discussion at Ringer 1998, 1-5; on its reception see Holford-Strevens 2005.

[26] δεῖ γὰρ με δόξαι πτωχὸν εἶναι τήμερον / εἶναι μὲν ὅσπερ εἰμί, φαίνεσθαι δὲ μή, 440-441; Lada-Richards 2002, 396.

[27] [Γοργίας δὲ τὴν τραγῳδίαν εἶπεν] ἀπάτην, ἣν ὅ τ' ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατήσαντος καὶ ὁ ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατηθέντος, DK 82 B23 = Plut. *Quomodo adulescens* 15D. Other examples, more narrowly focused on acting, cited by Lada-Richards 2002 (above, n. 24).

[28] On pictorialism, *enargeia* and *ecphrasis* in ancient literature see in general Webb 2009, esp. 87-130.

[29] In Ruth Webb's words, the «audience combines a state of imaginative involvement in the worlds represented with an awareness that these worlds are not real» (Webb 2009, 168-169).

[30] ὁ ποιητὴς αὐτὸς εἶδεν Ἐρινύας· ὁ δ' ἐφαντάσθη, μικροῦ δεῖν θεάσασθαι καὶ τοὺς ἀκούοντας ἠνάγκασεν, *De subl.* 15,2. The Euripidean passages are *Or.* 255-257 and *Iph. Taur.* 291.

[31] Webb 2009, 168.

aesthetics, it is not a case of mistaken narratological identity, but a conventional instance of illusionistic *impersonation*, a textual mimicking of the performative conventions that cluster around rhapsodes and actors[32]. The idea of impersonation, it seems to me, better captures the fundamentally non-narratological approach to the fictional 'I' that prevailed in the ancient world: like an actor playing a role, the fictional autobiographer *created an illusion* of identity with the role he played – an illusion that was ever predicated on universal awareness of its unreality. A model of impersonation highlights two particular features of fictional autobiography that a narratological model represses, or at least deproblematises:

> (i) that impersonation is a variety of illusion, whereby the author imitates another figure;
> (ii) that this illusion oscillates between success (readers are led to believe in the impersonation) and self-exposure (our attention is drawn to the very artificiality of the illusion).

Narratology, by contrast, would see fictional biography in terms as nothing more than a particular instance of the author/narrator divide that is universal to narrative, and hence as both non-transgressive and entirely stable.

The transgressiveness and instability of impersonation manifest themselves in a variety of what Gérard Genette names «metalepsis». Metalepsis, on his account, is the elision of two different narrative levels, the traversal of a «shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds»[33]. An excellent example comes in the 2006 Hollywood film *Stranger than fiction*, where the protagonist, Harold Crick, begins to hear a voice inside his head; in time he realises this is the voice of the author who is writing his lifestory, and plans to kill him off. Of course, a fictional character should not usually meet his or her author; the film is predicated on an elaborate, postmodern flouting of conventional narrative realism. But despite the avantgardiste flavour of instances like this, more recent discussions have detected instances of metalepsis in older literature, including classical antiquity (for example, Homeric apostrophe)[34].

Impersonation of the kind we have described is a subspecies of metalepsis, which (as Genette notes) attaches itself particularly to the figure of the author, and particularly to fictional writing[35]. Strikingly metaleptic are those moments where the text's impersonated 'I' seems to morph transgressively into the identity of the real author, like Lucius' description of himself in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* as «from Madaura» (XI 27; see above). A subtler case is Theocritus 7, where the first line's ἐγών might be thought to be the poet himself (a city-dweller walking into the countryside: a suitable image for pastoral composition), until his interlocutor Lycidas identifies him as one «Simichidas» in line 21. But the possibilities that Simichidas might be a cover for Theocritus are continually toyed with, as he and Lycidas compete in bucolic song (36), and possible future competitions with the real poets Asclepiades (himself referred to under a pseudonym) and Philitas are alluded to (40). Simichidas thus «both is and is not Theocritus»[36].

---

[32] Hence no doubt the markers of oral performance that percolate Apuleius' text, on which see most recently Gorman 2008.

[33] Genette 1983, 234-237, at 236, and more generally 2004.

[34] Fludernik 2003 emphasises the pre-modern ancestry, as indeed does Genette 2004; see de Jong 2009 on classical literature (93-97 on apostrophe), and Whitmarsh 2011 on the later Greek novels.

[35] See Genette 2004, 10 for «métalepse de l'auteur», and *passim* on fictionality.

[36] Bowie 1985, 67-68 at 68.

Or, in other terms, the text alternately interposes and cancels distance between the two.

In Genette's model, metalepsis consists in isolated, discrete moments where the text can be seen to conflate the narrative levels of the author and the fiction; these are figural precisely because they disturb the narrative homeostasis. The process that I have described as impersonation, by contrast, is dynamic and ongoing. In fictional autobiography, the narrative 'I' continually serves as a wormhole connecting the real author and the fictional; and even at those moments were distance is enforced, where the fictional contract reasserts itself, readers can feel the absence of identification tensed against the contrary force.

Let me take, as a particularly complex and entertaining example of this phenomenon, Lucian's *True stories*. Lucian is one of antiquity's most metaleptic authors anyhow, often manifesting himself in his own works, within their fictional texture, but under pseudonyms that simultaneously mark non-identity (Momus, Parrhesiades, Tychiades and so forth)[37]. In the dialogue *Fisherman*, Parrhesiades is arraigned by revenant philosophers from the past, for having «written certain slanders in a thick book»[38] – the book in question being Lucian's own *Sale of lives*. The scenario being described is an impossible fantasy of the dead coming to life, obviously fictional; but into that imaginary world the real Lucian has levered an authorial alter-ego to defend his own writing of a different work. (This technique, I think, owes more than has been recognised to the *parabaseis* of Aristophanes' comedies, which similarly slide between identification with and distantiation from the authorial voice; a topic for another occasion)[39].

Lucian is persistently metaleptic across his works; but nowhere more so, I want to argue, than in his *True stories*. This is a different kind of fictional autobiography to Apuleius' or Petronius': it involves not the impersonation of another human being, but the projection into the author's own life of «things which I have neither seen nor experienced nor heard from anyone else – things that do not exist at all, and could not exist in the first place»[40]. The narrator and protagonist of the story clearly is (a version of) the author, because – unusually in the Lucianic corpus – he is directly named as «Lucian' in the inscription set up on the Isles of the Blessed (II 28). As Karen ní Mheallaigh has recently argued, this very act of naming reestablishes the link between author and narrator that the prologue denied: it is precisely the name that is normally expected to underwrite the autobiographical guarantee («I, the undersigned, testify that this happened to me ... »)[41].

We can see this kind of metaleptic play throughout the *True Stories*. Let us briefly consider another example. At one point in book one, we read of the distinctive eyes of the inhabitants of the moon: «I am reluctant to tell you what sort of eyes they have, for fear that you may think me lying, because of the unbelievability of the story»[42]. This is of course a «humorous

---

[37] A phenomenon discussed at Whitmarsh 2001, 248-253 and Goldhill 2002, 63-67. I discuss Lucianic metalepsis in more detail in an article forthcoming in *Greece and Rome* 2012; for now see Whitmarsh 2009, which covers other examples of Lucianic metalepsis.

[38] βλασφημίας τινὰς εἰς παχὺ βιβλίον ἐγγράψας, Pisc. 26.

[39] «The parabases of Aristophanic comedy develop and play with the tensions and disjunctions between the roles of the chorus as a character in the drama, as a medium for the words of the *sophos*, as a celebrant of the festival of Dionysus, as the performer of lyric poetry» (Goldhill 1991, 188-205, at 199); see further Hubbard 1991.

[40] [γράφω τοίνυν περὶ] ὧν μήτε εἶδον μήτε ἔπαθον μήτε παρ' ἄλλων ἐπυθόμην, ἔτι δὲ μήτε ὅλως ὄντων μήτε τὴν ἀρχὴν γενέσθαι δυναμένων, I 4.

[41] ní Mheallaigh 2010, 128-130. My formulation here (following ní Mheallaigh's) leans on Lejeune 1982.

[42] περὶ μέντοι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, οἵους ἔχουσιν, ὀκνῶ μὲν εἰπεῖν, μή τίς με νομίσῃ ψεύδεσθαι διὰ τὸ ἄπιστον τοῦ λόγου, I 25.

twist»[43] on a historiographical convention, but it is more than just a joke. The historiographical topos aims to establish the plausibility of the account, guaranteeing that the author (the real, flesh-and-blood author) will personally testify to this truth. Yet at the same time, the reference to «unbelievability' reminds us of the prologue's claim that «my readers must not believe» in any of the events described[44]. In fact, we know that the real, flesh-and-blood Lucian has disavowed the entire tale; the metaleptic reappearance of Lucian-the-(prologic)-author here does not guarantee truth, but double-dares us to disbelieve.

I have argued not that the critical category of the narrator should not exist or does not make sense, but that narratology's automatic compartmentalisation of the narrator as discrete from the author discounts much of the metaleptic play on which pre-narratological fiction depends. The issue arises, primarily, because narratology is a theory with pretensions to the objective description of literary form, and in no sense a theory of composition or reading; but at the same time, like any critical system, it contains an implicit normativity. 'Better' authors or readers, we are encouraged to think, will show awareness of narratological categories. But the cases of Augustine and Photius show the limitations of this assumption: both were expert readers in ancient terms, and both formulate their responses in markedly non-narratological ways.

It is almost certainly true that any narrative in world history could be described in narratological terms. Narratology is, to this extent, a universal. But the same could be said of any formal classificatory system, however arbitrary. Imagine, for example, a science of literature that reordered the sentences of a given text in order of the number of phonemes in each: universal, yes, but it would tell us nothing about how real readers in a given culture made sense of their texts. Narratology is certainly not useless in that way, but it does name, reify and concretise certain categories – prime among them being, I have argued, 'the narrator' – and in so doing lend them a false impression of objective value.

Like many readers, I suspect, I have long found the antiseptic formulae of narratologists incompatible with my experience of reading. We read for identifications with characters, whether emotional, psychological, intellectual or otherwise, not to pinpoint the CF-p or EN[1]. And it is the bloodless anonymity of 'the narrator' that is particularly intolerable. In his theoretical attack on the narrator, Robert Walsh argues that narratology absconds from the implications of speech-act theory, which demands an originating agent who can be held accountable for the truth or fictionality of an utterance.[45] In his view, all 'narrators' are in fact characters within the text or the author. This, I think, is true enough: communication, context-specific as it is, requires that someone should own and be responsible for every utterance (even if this normative expectation may be often flouted). Fictional autobiography, however, is a special case, where the character/author divide becomes perpetually unstable, ever susceptible to metaleptic play.

---

[43] Georgiadou-Larmour 1998, 141.
[44] δεῖ τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας μηδαμῶς πιστεύειν [αὐτοῖς], I 4.
[45] Walsh 1997.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bal 1997
   M.Bal, *Narratology*, Toronto 1997².
Bowie 1985
   E.L.Bowie, *Theocritus' Seventh Idyll, Philetas, and Longus*, «CQ» XXXV (1985), 67-91.
Carver 2007
   R.Carver, *The Protean Ass: The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Oxford 2007.
Chatman 1978
   S.Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca 1978.
de Jong 2009
   I.J.F.de Jong, *Metalepsis in Ancient Greek Literature*, in J.Grethlein- A.Rengakos (eds.), *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature*, Berlin-New York 2009.
Easterling 1990
   P.Easterling, *Constructing Character in Greek Tragedy*, in C.Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, Oxford 1990.
Fludernik 2003
   M.Fludernik, *Scene Shift, Metalepsis, and the Metaleptic Mode*, «Style» XXXVII (2003), 382-402.
Gaisser 2008
   J.H.Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass: A Study in Transmission and Reception*, Princeton 2008.
Genette 1983
   G.Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Ithaca 1983.
Genette 2004
   G.Genette, *Métalepse: de la figure à la fiction*, Paris 2004.
Georgiadou-Larmour 1998
   A.Georgiadou-D.Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel True Histories: Interpretation and Commentary*, Leiden 1998.
Goldhill 1991
   S.Goldhill *The Poet's Voice: Essays in Greek Literature and Poetics*, Cambridge 1991.
Goldhill 2002
   S.Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek? Conflicts in the Cultural History of Hellenism*, Cambridge 2002.
Gorman 2008
   S.Gorman, *When the Text Becomes the Teller: Apuleius and the Metamorphoses*, «Oral Tradition» XXIII (2008), 71-86.
Holford-Strevens 2005
   L.Holford-Strevens, *Polus and His Urn: A Case-Study in the Theory of Acting, ca. 300 BC-2000 AD*, «IJCT» XI (2005), 499-523.
   Hubbard 1991
   T.Hubbard, *The Mask of Comedy: Aristophanes and the Intertextual Parabasis*, Ithaca.
Hunink 2003
   J.V.C.Hunink, «*Apuleius, qui nobis Afris Afer est notior*» *: Augustine's Polemic Against*

Apuleius in «De civitate dei», «Scholia» XII (2003), 82-95.

Lada-Richards 2002

I.Lada-Richards, *The Subjectivity of Greek Performance*, in P.Easterling- E.Hall (eds.), *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of a Profession*, Cambridge 2002.

Laird 1990

A.Laird, *Person, «Persona» and Representation in Apuleius' Metamorphoses, «MD»* XXV (1990), 129-164.

Lefkowitz 1991

M.Lefkowitz, *First-person fictions: Pindar's poetic 'I'*, Oxford 1991.

Lejeune 1982

P.Lejeune, *The Autobiographical Contract*, in T.Todorov (ed.), *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, trans. R.Carter, Cambridge 1982.

Most 1995

G.W.Most, *Reflecting Sappho*, «BICS» XL (1995), 15-38; revised and reprinted in (and cited from) E.Greene (ed.), *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, Berkeley, Los Angeles-London 1995.

Nagy 1979

G.Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans. Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*, Baltimore 1979.

Nagy 1990

G.Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, Ithaca 1990.

ní Mheallaigh 2010

K.ní Mheallaigh, *The Name of the Game: Anonymity and the Contract of Reading in Lucian*, in F.Mestre-P.Gómez (eds.), *Lucian of Samosata: Greek Writer and Roman Citizen*, Barcelona 2010.

Rabel 1999

R.Rabel, *Impersonation and Representation in the Odyssey*, «CW» XCIII (1999), 169-183.

Rimell 2007

V.Rimell, *Petronius' Lessons in Learning – The Hard Way*, in J.König-T.Whitmarsh (eds.), *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*, Cambridge 2007.

Ringer 1998

M.Ringer, *Electra and the Empty Urn: Metatheater and Role-Playing in Sophocles*, Chapel Hill 1998.

Rosenmeyer 1992

P.Rosenmeyer, *Anacreon and the Anacreontic Tradition*, Cambridge 1992.

Stock 1990

B.Stock *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge and the Ethics of Interpretation*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996.

Too 2001

Y.L.Too, *Losing the Author's Voice: Cultural and Personal Identities in the Metamorphoses Prologue*, in A.Kahane-A.Laird (eds.), *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, Oxford 2001.

Walsh 1997

R.Walsh, *Who is the Narrator?*, «Poetics Today» XVIII (1997), 495-513

Webb 2009

R.Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, Farnham 2009.

Whitmarsh 2001

    T.Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation*, Oxford 2001.

Whitmarsh 2009

    T.Whitmarsh, *Reframing Satire: Lucianic Metalepsis*, in M.Çevik (ed.), *Uluslararasi Samsatli Lucianus Sempozyumu*, Adıyaman 2009.

Whitmarsh 2010

    T.Whitmarsh, *Metamorphoses of the Ass*, in F.Mestre-P.Gómez (eds.), *Lucian of Samosata: Greek Writer and Roman Citizen*, Barcelona 2010.

Whitmarsh 2011

    T.Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel: Returning Romance*, Cambridge.

Winkler 1985

    J.J.Winkler, *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' The Golden Ass*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.