

M. J. EDWARDS

THE TALE OF CUPID AND PSYCHE

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## THE TALE OF CUPID AND PSYCHE

The romance of Cupid and Psyche, while embedded in a fine novel by Apuleius, has been thought too great for its context - not only by translators and imitators, who are enamoured of its beauty,<sup>1</sup> but by scholars, who have inquired here for the origins of the European folktale,<sup>2</sup> and by poets and philosophers, who detect in it the vestiges of something more profound.<sup>3</sup> Exegetes, encomiasts and students of the sources have produced discrete hypotheses, which rarely have much in common; this article attempts to bring to light a number of sources that have hitherto been neglected, but with the aim of showing that philosophy in this period did not disdain the folktale, and that allegorists are often most successful when they are not the sole contrivers of their myths.

### I. The Text and Some Interpreters

First we must rehearse the tale again, and note the differing approaches which are exemplified by two distinguished authors of our time. The following abridgement of the tale accords most prominence to those details that will be taken up again in the present study.

Psyche is a princess, so illustrious for her beauty that the people worship her as an earthly Venus (*Metamorphoses* IV.28). The heavenly Venus, here an imperial figure moved to wrath (IV.29), persuades the infant Cupid to ruin Psyche (IV.30-1), and the consequence is that, though she is revered like the simulacrum of a goddess (IV.32), she is never sought in love. In obedience to an oracle, she is exposed upon a mountain, where a monster is expected to devour her (IV.33-5); but instead she is conveyed to a gorgeous palace (V.1), and is served by unseen ministers in the daytime (V.2), while her unseen bridegroom sleeps with her at nights (V.3-4). Against her lover's wishes (V.5), she invites her plainer sisters to the palace (V.6-8); their envy is excited (V.9.11), and, on learning that her husband is resolved to remain invisible, they maintain that he is a serpent, whom she must kill before she is herself devoured (V.12-20).

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<sup>1</sup> Readers of English literature will think of William Adlington's translation of the *Metamorphoses* (1566), and that of Cupid and Psyche in Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*. A poetic rendering under the title *Eros and Psyche* was made by Robert Bridges, and William Morris retold the story in his *The Earthly Paradise*. C.S.Lewis's novel "Till we Have Faces" recounts it through the eyes of one of the sisters.

<sup>2</sup> See F.Liebrecht, *Amor und Psyche* (1879) in G.Binder and R.Merkelbach (eds) *Amor und Psyche* (Darmstadt 1968) pp. 44-55; R.Reitzenstein, *Das Märchen von Amor und Psyche* (Leipzig 1912), of which pp. 1-89 are reproduced as Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 87-158. L.Friedlander, *Das Märchen von Amor und Psyche* (1964), *ibid.* pp. 16-43.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. K.Raine, *Blake and Antiquity* (Princeton 1963) pp. 23-33. See S.Lancel, *Curiositas et préoccupations spirituelles chez Apulée, Revue de l'histoire des religions* 160 (1961) pp. 25-46 = Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 408-32.

Psyche is persuaded (V.21), and that evening, dagger in hand, she lights her lamp, but only to discover that the object of her plot is the most beautiful of deities, the author and delight of every creature, Love himself (V.22). Wakened by a drop of oil from the lamp (V.23), he flies away, though not withdrawing an earlier pledge that she is to bear his child (V.14). Psyche, after fruitless attempts at suicide (V.25) and a more effectual vengeance on her sisters (V.26-7), now falls under the dominion of Venus, who plays the part of a jealous and vindictive mother-in-law, enjoining one impossible labour after another (V.28-9 ff). The first two are accomplished with the aid of other creatures (V.30-VI.15); the third is to descend to the lower world and ask Proserpina for a portion of her beauty (VI.16). Once again the task is achieved with the help of other agents (VI.17-19), but Psyche, on returning with a chest reserved for Venus, is overcome for a second time by a fatal curiosity, and looks into the contents of the chest (VI.20). Forthwith she falls unconscious, but is roused by Love, who rebukes her (VI.21) but introduces her as his bride among the immortals (VI.22). Venus is won over (VI.23), and the birth of the infant "Pleasure" or *Voluptas* seals the bond (VI.24).

The fable recapitulates in miniature the experiences of Lucius, the protagonist of the whole novel, who, in consequence of a foolish curiosity, is transformed into an ass.<sup>4</sup> He regains his human form by initiation into the mysteries of Isis, undergoing ordeals that resemble Psyche's final task.<sup>5</sup> A simulated journey to the underworld and the opening of a casket being episodes in the Eleusinian ritual,<sup>6</sup> it is natural to conjecture that the tale has a sacred origin, and Reinhold Merkelbach has argued cogently that Isis holds the key.<sup>7</sup> Noting that the goddess has two aspects - one as the personified hand of fortune,<sup>8</sup> and one as the roving heroine who retrieves the dismembered body of Osiris<sup>9</sup> he proposes to equate Psyche with the second and her celestial tormentor with the first.

E.J.Kenney has dwelt instead on the hints of philosophical allegory.<sup>10</sup> Reasoning from the fact that Apuleius was a Platonist,<sup>11</sup> he finds in the *Symposium* a precedent for the ascription of a dual nature to Venus and her son.<sup>12</sup> He makes no use, however, of the

<sup>4</sup> See S.Lancel, *Curiositas et préoccupations spirituelles chez Apulée*, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 160 (1961) pp. 25-46 = Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 408-32.

<sup>5</sup> See the remarks made later in this essay, above n.45.

<sup>6</sup> See W.Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (London/Cambridge, Mass. 1987) pp. 89-114.

<sup>7</sup> R.Merkelbach, *Eros und Psyche*, *Philologus* 102 (1953) pp. 103-116 = Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 392-407.

<sup>8</sup> See Merkelbach (1953) p. 105 (395), and, for a longer study of the importance of the Isis-cult, the same author's *Roman und Mysterium* (Berlin 1962) pp. esp. 53-72.

<sup>9</sup> Isis was identified with Io, the abandoned paramour of Zeus; for analogies between her woes and those of Lucius see Merkelbach (1953) p. 105 (394/5).

<sup>10</sup> E.J.Kenney, *Psyche and her Mysterious Husband*, in D.A.Russell (ed.) *Antonine Literature* (Oxford 1990) pp. 175-98.

<sup>11</sup> See for a comprehensive recent study B.L.Hijmans, *Apuleius, Philosophus Platonicus*, *ANRW* 36.1 (1987) pp. 395-475.

<sup>12</sup> *Symposium* 180d; cf. Apuleius, *Apologia* 12.

speculations of any later Platonist, not even of those contemporary with the African polymath. It is true that he would not find much support in the *De Platone* of Apuleius,<sup>13</sup> but there are other works that might have been consulted with advantage, as the following article sets out to prove. At the same time, while Kenney has taken little note of Merkelbach or Merkelbach of Plato, the evidence suggests that a philosopher of the period would not have thought it difficult to reconcile the content of the dialogues with the teaching of the mysteries - indeed, he might have been surprised to hear that they admitted of divorce.

## II. The Evolution of Platonic Myth

The myth that most possessed the imaginations of the Platonists is attributed in the *Symposium* to the prophetess Diotima. At the feast for the birthday of Aphrodite, she tells Socrates, the god of Plenty, drunk with nectar, fell asleep in a garden, where Poverty discovered him and prudently resolved to make him the father of her child (*Symposium* 203b-c). Poverty, though the counterpart of Plenty, is no goddess, and the fruit of this stealthy intercourse, the daemon Love, is therefore neither mortal nor immortal, neither beautiful nor ugly, never wealthy but always drawn to riches by desire (203c-204a).<sup>14</sup>

All love, as this allegory implies, is the aspiration of the lower for the higher, the thirst of the deficient for its good.<sup>15</sup> The good of every soul is its immortality (207d), which the foolish seek through worldly reputation (208c-d), the common man through fatherhood (208e), the artist through the fashioning of a poem or an image (209d-e). The last-named act, transforming the potential into the actual, unites the quest of being with that of value, but only in an external medium; as we hear in the *Republic*, the artist merely imitates what the wise man will endeavour to become.<sup>16</sup>

Aristotle, both in stating his own views and in commentary on Plato, takes the action of the artist as a paradigm for the kinetic laws of nature, opining as he did that every physical change or motion will convert potential being into actual and subjugate some matter to some end.<sup>17</sup> The end of every substance is the transition from the potential to the actual, in other words the attainment of its form, which may be said to work upon it like an artist on his

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<sup>13</sup> *De Platone* II.239 distinguishes three species of love - philosophical, carnal and connubial. On the authenticity of this treatise see Hijmans (1987) p. 408 and n.38.

<sup>14</sup> On the treatments of this passage in later Platonism see L.Robin, *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'Amour* (Paris 1932) pp. 103-108

<sup>15</sup> See G.Santas, *Freud and Plato* (Oxford 1988) p. 32ff on the notion of a "generic Eros" in the *Symposium* of Plato.

<sup>16</sup> See esp. *Republic* 599b, where it is said that the good man would rather be the subject than the author of encomia.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. *Metaphysics* 1071a-b and *De Generatione et Corruptione* passim; but the theme is universal. The relation of Aristotle to Plato has been the theme of numerous studies, e.g. H.Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticisms of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore 1944); G.E.L.Owen, *The Platonism of Aristotle*, *Proc. of the British Academy* 50 (1965) pp. 125-50.

matter,<sup>18</sup> though only as final, not as efficient cause. The aspiration is kindled by the very imperfection of the aspirant: in a word, the formless is enamoured of the form.<sup>19</sup> Plutarch surely divines a true community of thought between Aristotle and his master when he writes that in Diotima's myth the aspiring matter is Poverty, while Plenty is the object of desire:<sup>20</sup>

ὁ γὰρ Πόρος οὐχ ἕτερός ἐστι τοῦ πρώτου ἐρατοῦ<sup>2</sup> καὶ ἐφετοῦ τελείου καὶ αὐτάρκους· Πενίαν δὲ τὴν ὕλην προσεῖπεν, ἐνδεᾶ μὲν οὐσαν αὐτὴν καθ' ἑαυτὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, πληρουμένην δ' ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ποθοῦσαν ἄει καὶ μεταλαμβάνουσαν.

*Plenty is none other than the first object of desire and aspiration, the perfect and self-sufficient ; and by Poverty he meant matter, which in itself is deficient in the good, but is being filled by it, for ever yearning and partaking (De Iside 374d).*

The same thesis holds for Plotinus, except that each hypostasis in his system acts as matter as for its immediate superior,<sup>21</sup> and that at times the upward tendency from the lower plane can be seen as an encroachment and the complicity of the higher as a fall. If Poverty is matter and Plenty is Soul, the myth implies that the latter must be prepared to fight temptation:<sup>22</sup>

ὕλη δὲ παρούσα προκαιτεῖ καὶ οἶον καὶ ἐνοχλεῖ καὶ εἰς τὸ εἶω παρελθεῖν θέλει· πᾶς δὲ ὁ χῶρος ἱερός καὶ οὐδέν ἐστιν ὃ ἄμοιρόν ἐστι ψυχῆς.

*Matter appears, importunes, raises disorders, seeks to force its way within; but all the ground is holy, nothing there without part in Soul (Enneads I.8.14 trans. Mackenna).*

If, however, Plenty is Mind and Poverty is Soul, a neglected detail in the Platonic myth implies that the mind has broken with its source:

Τὸ δ' ἐκεῖ πληρούμενον<sup>1</sup> τοῦ νέκταρος τί ἂν εἴη ἢ λόγος ἀπὸ κρείττονος ἀρχῆς πεσὼν εἰς ἐλάττονα; Ἐν οὖν τῇ ψυχῇ ἀπὸ νοῦ ὁ λόγος οὗτος, ὅτε ἡ Ἀφροδίτη λέγεται γεγονέναι

*"Poros intoxicated" is some power deriving satisfaction outside itself; what then can we understand by this member of the Supreme filled with Nectar but a Reason-Principle falling from a loftier essence to a lower? This means that the Reason-Principle, upon the "birth of Aphrodite", left the Intellectual for the Soul (Enneads III.5.9 trans. Mackenna).*

<sup>18</sup> The hints of Physics 199b and Metaphysics 1033b are taken up more explicitly by Themistius on De Anima 430a 12-13, and by Plotinus e.g. at Enneads V.1.8.

<sup>19</sup> See L.Elders, Aristotle's Theology (Assen 1972) pp. 35-44.

<sup>20</sup> For commentary on Plutarch and the Isis-cult see J.G.Griffiths, Plutarch: De Iside et Osiride (Cardiff 1970). The thought of Plutarch is compared with that of Apuleius by P.G.Walsh, Apuleius and Plutarch, in H.J.Blumenthal and R.A.Markus (eds) Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought (Aldershot 1981) pp. 20-31.

<sup>21</sup> Hence there must be an "intelligible matter" even in the realm of Nous, in so far it suffers a privation of the one: Enneads II.4.16. This is the principle of Otherness that is posited by Plato in the Sophist and the Timaeus.

<sup>22</sup> On Plotinus and the exegesis of Plato see J.-M.Charrue, Plotin, Lecteur de Platon (Paris 1978), though less is said of the Symposium here than the frequent use of it in the Enneads would warrant; see n.14 above.



The tribulation and rescue of the soul may be compared to the fate of Psyche in Apuleius. Plotinus holds that the Intellect must sever part of itself as a "Reason-Principle" (or Logos) to redeem the truant soul from its destitution; in Apuleius Love will make no visible approaches to his paramour before he has been estranged from her by an inadvertent wound. If Plenty (Πόρος) is the nectareous exudation of the Intellect, he cannot be unrelated to the Cupid of Apuleius, whose blood is said to fleck his skin like delicate beads of dew.<sup>28</sup> We must not attempt to substitute the Eros of Plotinus for the Cupid of Apuleius; if there is any allusion in the Enneads to a tale of Eros and Psyche, it is to another version, far more common, in which Love, and not the soul, displays the lamp. The scene is known from amulets and also from the magical papyri:<sup>29</sup>

γλύφον Ἀφροδίτην ἰππιετὶ καθήμενην ἐπὶ Ψυχῆς τῆ ἀριστερῇ χειρὶ κρατοῦσαν ... ὑποκάτω δὲ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς Ἔρωτα ἐπὶ πόλου ἐστῶτα, λαμπάδα κρατοῦντα καομένην, φλέγοντα τὴν Ψυχὴν.

*Engrave Aphrodite seated, as on a horse, astride the soul, holding her with the left hand ... And underneath Aphrodite and the soul Love standing on the vertex, holding a lighted lamp and setting the soul aflame (PGM IV.1725-1733 Preisendanz).*

Yet even this brief icon, which can hardly be the creation of philosophers, apprises us that the bondage of the soul to Aphrodite is a commonplace, a parable of its servitude to passion, while her "left hand" makes an equally conventional allusion to the weakness and sterility which the soul incurs by yielding to the machinery of fate.<sup>30</sup>

The scheme of folly, loss and restitution, which constitutes the history of the soul on earth, is juxtaposed with a reference to Eros and Psyche in Enneads VI.9. Here the initial error is a striving for the Good, the ill success of which results in wandering and captivity:

ὅσῳ δ' ἂν εἰς ἀνειδέον ἢ ψυχὴ ἦ, ἐξαδυνατοῦσα περιλαβεῖν τῷ μὴ ὀρίζεσθαι καὶ οἶον τυποῦσθαι ὑπὸ ποικίλου τοῦ τυποῦντος ἐξολιθάνει καὶ φοβεῖται, μὴ οὐδὲν ἔχη. διὸ κάμνει ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις καὶ ἀκμήνη καταβαίνει πολλάκις ἀποπίπτουσα ἀπὸ πάντων, μέχρις ἂν εἰς αἰσθητὸν ἦκη ἐν στερεῷ ὥσπερ ἀναπαυομένη.

*The soul or mind reaching towards the formless finds itself incompetent to grasp where nothing bounds or to take impression where the impinging reality is diffuse; in sheer dread of holding to nothingness it slips away. The state is painful; often it seeks relief by retreating*

<sup>28</sup> Metamorphoses IV.23: "ut per summam cutem roraverint parvulae sanguinis rosei guttae".

<sup>29</sup> See for commentary R.Mouterde, *Le Glaive de Dardanos*, in *Mélanges de l'université de St.-Joseph* 15 (1930) pp. 53-64; R.Reitzenstein, *Noch Einmal Eros und Psyche* (1983) in Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 235-92. In this translation I have thought it too tendentious to treat Psyche as a proper name, though this practice is suggested by the use of capital letters in Preisendanz, and endorsed by H.D.Betz, *The Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago 1986) pp. 69-70.

<sup>30</sup> See Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses* I.5.4 and I.11.1 for this symbol in Christian heresy. On the "bastard generation" of matter see Republic 587b and Timaeus 52b. On the symbolic relation between the left-hand and bastardy, even before the invention of the "bar sinister" in European heraldry, see J.-P.Vernant, *From Oedipus to Periander*, *Arethusa* 15 (1932) pp. 19-38.

*from all this vagueness to the region of sense, there to rest as on solid ground (Enneads VI.9.3 trans. Mackenna).*

After this the soul may come into its own again through Eros, bearing out (Plotinus says) the enigmatic doctrine of two myths:

καὶ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐκεῖ Ἀφροδίτη οὐρανία, ἐνταῦθα δὲ γίγνεται πάνδημος οἶον ἑταιρικθεΐα. καὶ ἔστι πάσα ψυχὴ Ἀφροδίτη· καὶ τοῦτο αἰνίττεται καὶ τὰ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης γενέθλια καὶ ὁ Ἔρως ὁ μετ' αὐτῆς γενόμενος.

*There the soul is Aphrodite of the heavens; here, turned harlot, Aphrodite of the public ways; yet the soul is always an Aphrodite. This is the intention of the myth which tells of Aphrodite's birth and Eros born with her (Enneads VI.9.9 trans. Mackenna).*

We shall soon have cause to return to the Symposium, with its distinction between the Uranian and the Pandemic Aphrodite.<sup>31</sup> For the moment it can be said that, while a tale of Eros and Psyche was familiar to the Greek Platonists, it was not the one that Apuleius tells. We should look instead to the intercourse of Poverty and Plenty, or rather to the Platonic commentators who conflate this allegory with the myth of the fallen soul.

If Diotima's fable can be cited by the Platonists as the vehicle of a doctrine about the soul, it is legitimate to adduce Platonic doctrine about the soul as a gloss on the tale of Cupid and Psyche. The history of the soul in Neoplatonism consists, like that of Psyche in Apuleius of the sequence: union, separation, wandering and return. The first attempt to rise to a superior plane entails the soul's expulsion in the Phaedrus, and in the exegesis of the Symposium could be construed as an assault on a great prerogative. In the same way, Psyche loses Cupid when she seeks to know too much of him and is driven back to the world.

Having noted a propensity to combine the two erotic myths of Plato, we should not fail to observe that in the Phaedrus it is the charioteer's two horses that betray him into a second fall, just as Psyche in Apuleius yields to the importunity of two sisters. The sisters are not so beautiful or so virtuous as Psyche, and reason is the appointed master of both desire and spirit in the Phaedrus; each myth represents the capitulation, in the human soul, of the better to the worse.

### III. Isis and the Philosophers

The part assigned to Venus in the fable of Cupid and Psyche is the silhouette of that which Fortune plays throughout the novel, until Isis, who describes herself as Lucius' "better fortune", intervenes.<sup>32</sup> Psyche puts herself without delay in the power of Venus, who becomes her persecutor; Lucius comes to Isis as a suppliant after a long estrangement

<sup>31</sup> Symposium 180d; see n.12 above.

<sup>32</sup> On the reading of the novel in the light of the eleventh book see J.J.Winkler, *Auctor and Actor* (California 1988) pp. 8-11 and 209-15. On Apuleius as a witness to the nature of the cult see J.G.Griffiths, *Apuleius: The Isis-Book* (Leiden 1975).

from his human form. Calling upon the goddess by whatever name she elects to bear,<sup>33</sup> he begs to have his previous shape restored to him, and she answers in like terms:

En adsum tuis commota, Luci, precibus, rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina.

*Behold, I come hither Lucius, in answer to your prayers, I the parent of the natural order, the sovereign of all the elements (Metamorphoses XI.5).*

The Venus of the fable cannot wield the infernal titles, but she exerts the same dominion over nature:

en rerum naturae prisca parens, en elementorum origo initialis, en orbis totius alma Venus ...

*Lo I the ancient parent of the natural order, I the primordial origin of the elements, the kind Venus of the whole world ...*

Little though she deserves them, this vindictive mistress appropriates the honours that Lucretius had conferred upon a deity of the same name. The poet's "Alma Venus" (De Rerum Natura I.2) is the Roman form of a goddess known to Empedocles and the Greek tragedians, who occupies the whole of the natural world as the law of harmony, the pleasure of attraction and the principle of birth;<sup>34</sup> no less is she the Isis of philosophers, whom Plutarch would equate with the World-Soul:

ἔχει δὲ κύμφοτον ἔρωτα τοῦ πρώτου καὶ κυριωτάτου πάντων, ὃ ταγαθῶ ταυτόν ἐστι, κακείνο ποθεί καὶ διόκει· τὴν δ' ἐκ τοῦ κακοῦ φεύγει καὶ διωθεῖται μοῖραν, ἀμφοῖν μὲν οὐσα χώρα καὶ ὕλη, ῥέπουσα δ' ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον καὶ παρέχουσα γεννᾶν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς ἐκείνω.

*... she has a love of the first and most sovereign principle of all, and this she longs for and pursues. The lot which lies with evil she shuns and rejects, she is indeed a sphere of activity and subject-matter for both of them; but she inclines always of herself to what is better, offering herself to it for reproduction (De Iside 3726 trans. Dillon).*

The World-Soul, as the intermediary between form and matter, is subordinate to the higher nature, signified in Plutarch by Osiris.<sup>35</sup> In Apuleius Lucius learns that, even after becoming an initiate of Isis, he must be inducted into a higher mystery:<sup>36</sup>

novum mirumque plane comperior: deae quidem tantum me sacris imbutum, at magni dei deumque summi parentis invicti Osiris nedum sacris illustratum ...

<sup>33</sup> Metamorphoses XI.2: "Regina caeli - sive tu ... caelestis Venus ... seu nocturnis ullulatus horrenda Proserpina" etc.

<sup>34</sup>Empedocles Fr. 17; Sophocles, Fr. 855 Nauck = 678 Radt; Euripides, Hippolytus 447ff.

<sup>35</sup> On Love and Osiris cf. R.Reitzenstein, Eros als Osiris (1930) in Binder and Merkelbach (1968) pp. 301-12.

<sup>36</sup> Lucius' guide is a priest called Mithras (XI.25-6), though syncretism of the Mithraic cult with that of Isis is not demonstrable elsewhere. Perhaps the common equation of Mithras and Hermes had led Apuleius to introduce him here; for this Hermes as a mystagogue see the Hermetica passim and especially the Kore Kosmou for his friendship with Egyptian deities.

*I was plainly informed of a new and marvellous thing: I had only been steeped in the sanctities of the goddess, but was not yet illuminated by the sanctities of the invincible Osiris, a great god and the supreme parent of all the gods (Metamorphoses XI.27).*

The distinction between the Greater and the Lesser Mysteries was observed from the earliest times in Greek religion;<sup>37</sup> but a Platonist might have recalled the words of Socrates in the Phaedrus, that initiation into the highest teletai was prepared by Love for the retinue of Zeus.<sup>38</sup> Poets who sing to Venus or Aphrodite as the monarch of the natural order speak of sexual passion as a malady to be shunned or prayed away.<sup>39</sup> Plutarch, who believes that such attraction is unfruitful, calls it Aphrodite, and the higher feeling Love.<sup>40</sup> He then goes on to give qualified assent to an ancient simile:

εοικέναι μὲν οὖν Ἀφροδίτῃ κελήνην ἥλιον δ' Ἐρωτι τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν μᾶλλον εἰκός ἐστιν, οὐ μὴν εἶναι γε παντάπασι τοὺς αὐτούς·

*It is more reasonable to liken the moon to Aphrodite and the sun to Love than to speak thus of any other gods, though certainly the relation is not one of complete identity (Amatorius 464d).*

In making solar and lunar deities of Love and Venus, Plutarch matches the former with Osiris, the latter with Isis, since he also allots these gods, in order of dignity, to the sun and moon.<sup>41</sup> In Apuleius' fable Venus fails because there are creatures who love Psyche enough to execute her tasks for her,<sup>42</sup> and Love himself supplies the remedy in her last distress. If Isis lacks the darker side of Venus, in the novel as in mythology, a Platonist might conclude that one is the evil, and the other the good World-Soul.<sup>43</sup> This duplication of souls we find in Plutarch's captious reading of the Laws:<sup>44</sup>

ὁ γὰρ Πλάτων μητέρα μὲν καὶ τιθήνην καλεῖ τὴν ὕλην αἰτίαν δὲ κακοῦ τὴν κινητικὴν τῆς ὕλης καὶ περὶ τὰ σώματα γιγνομένην μερικτὴν ἄτακτον καὶ ἄλογον οὐκ ἄψυχον δὲ κίνησιν, ἣν ἐν Νόμοις ὡς περ εἴρηται ψυχὴν ἐναντίαν καὶ ἀντίπαλον τῇ ἀγαθουργῶ προσεῖπε.

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. H.W.Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London 1977) p. 56 f.

<sup>38</sup> Phaedrus 250b; cf. Plutarch, *Amatorius* 761f etc.

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. Euripides, *Hippolytus* 523-32, 555-64; and cf. the change in the character of Venus in Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* IV.

<sup>40</sup> At *Amatorius* 764c the association of Aphrodite is denied in favour of the lunar one. In the speech of Aristophanes at *Symposium* 190b, the moon is the planet of the androgynous beings, who after being cut in half by Zeus become the ancestors of that class of human beings who engage in heterosexual (but illicit) intercourse.

<sup>41</sup> See *De Iside* 372a-e. Griffiths (1970) pp. 496-502 finds Plutarch tendentious on the functions of Isis.

<sup>42</sup> Note the words of Venus at *Metamorphoses* VI.11.2: "non tuum ... sed illius cui tuo immo et ipsius malo placuisti".

<sup>43</sup> J.Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London 1977) pp. 283-4 attempts to find this evil World Soul in the *Didascalicus* of Alcinous/Albinus chapter 10.

<sup>44</sup> The passage under interpretation is *Laws* 896d-897c, which posits the evil World-Soul as a hypothesis to be rejected.

*For Plato calls matter a mother and a nurse; but the source of evil he calls the motive principle in matter, which is divisible with respect to the body, disorderly and irrational; yet this is not a motion devoid of soul, and in the Laws he has styled it the soul that is contrary and antagonistic to the benevolent one (De Animae Procreatione in Tamaeo 1015f).*

We may appeal to Plutarch with some confidence, not only because Apuleius was himself a Platonist of the second century, but also because, at the outset of the novel, his hero Lucius names the Chaeronean as his kinsman (Metamorphoses I.2),. Plutarch's help enables us to interpret both the affinity and the difference between the two goddesses, each of whom is an aspect of the double face of Fortune. Isis is the sister of Osiris, and Aphrodite shares her birthday with Love in the Symposium; in Plutarch's thought both Isis and Aphrodite are inferior manifestations of the power that sways the world.

#### IV. Mesopotamian Goddesses and the Magical Papyri

We have noted that the functions of Proserpina are not ascribed to Venus in the fable of Cupid and Psyche; had it been otherwise she would hardly have made an application to Proserpina for a portion of her beauty. As Merkelbach and others have observed, the trials which Psyche undergoes in her embassy to the lower realm are recapitulated in the experience of Lucius when he enters the cult of Isis:

accessi confinium mortis et calcato Proserpinae limine, per omnia vectus elementa remeavi ... does inferos et deos superos accessi coram et adoravi de proxumo.

*I came to death's frontier and trod the threshold of Proserpina; I was borne through all the elements and returned .... I came into the presence of the infernal and supernal gods, and adored them close at hand (Met. XI.23).*

Isis is the triple power in heaven, earth and Hades - not only caelestis Venus, but Proserpina, Diana and the moon (Metamorphoses XI.5). In classical mythology the goddess who embraces the last three figures is more commonly known as Hecate,<sup>45</sup> though when it occurs in the magical papyri her name is often joined with that of deities who belong to the lower world. One of these is Persephone, the Greek Proserpina, who sometimes shares an appellation of still more ancient provenance:

καὶ Κούρη Περσεφόνη Ἐρεσχιγὰλ καὶ Ἀδώνιδι (PGM IV.337-8).

This Ereshkigal rules the nether kingdom in Sumerian texts, and then in Babylonian ones; the most famous of her deeds is her confinement of Inanna, a lunar goddess who was also her sister and the queen of love.<sup>46</sup> Descending to her sister's realm by seven gates, at each of

<sup>45</sup> On Hecate in philosophy see S.I.Johnston, Hecate Soteira (Atlanta 1990).

<sup>46</sup> See J.B.Pritchard (ed.) Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Princeton 1969) pp. 52-59 for this tale, and pp. 637-44 for other stories of Dimuzi and Inanna. S.Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia (Oxford 1989) pp. 154-62 translates the Babylonian version, noting on p. 161 n.9 the theory that both the Sumerian and the Babylonian texts allude to the journey of the goddess' statue at a yearly festival.

which she sheds a piece of clothing, Inanna steps unclad into the presence of Ereshkigal, and, failing to make good whatever challenge she came to issue, is humiliated and taken prisoner. Only the provision of a substitute, her consort Dimuzi, effects her release, and even this condition is granted only after the womb of her oppressor (who is a virgin) has been swollen by the other gods with intolerable pangs.<sup>47</sup>

Some students of the Mesopotamian story have concluded that Ereshkigal is the other self of Inanna;<sup>48</sup> in the Classical world, where the queens of heaven and of Hades were two aspects of the same deity, it could hardly have been doubted that, if Isis were to descend into the underworld, the shadow that would greet her was her own.

We might even say that the devotees of Hecate enacted the fall of Inanna whenever, as legend told, they drew the moon down from the sky.<sup>49</sup> *Eidolon*, the Greek word for a shadow, also denotes a reflection or any image of the original; it is rendered almost perfectly into Latin when Apuleius writes of Psyche that "mirantur quidem divinam speciem, sed ut simulacrum fabre politum mirantur omnes" (Met. IV.32). Psyche is the simulacrum of Venus, for whom she is here mistaken. That the worship is said to be erroneous would imply that she is unequivocally the lesser being, and so of course it seems to Venus; nevertheless the human fugitive proves herself the moral superior of her persecutor, who acts throughout like a jealous mother fearful that her son will bring a new mistress into the home. As neither is consistently superior or subordinate to the other, we cannot denominate either of them the Pandemic or the Uranian Aphrodite, as these terms are defined in the *Symposia* of Xenophon and Plato<sup>50</sup> - or rather, we may use both terms of each at different times. We must reckon with both the Uranian and the Pandemic Aphrodite when considering the evidence in the next section of this paper; we should also note that, if Venus and Proserpina can be aspects of the same goddess, the enslavement of the wandering girl to Venus and her descent into the underworld are tales on a common theme.

#### V. Gnostic and Valentinian Parallels

Myths are the characteristic form of speech for a deviant Platonism that flourished in the second and third centuries A.D.<sup>51</sup> It is seldom that any remains of it can be dated more precisely, but we know that one of its earliest treasures, the Book of Zoroaster, was

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<sup>47</sup> The passage of Inanna through seven gates may be compared with the ascent of the soul through the planetary houses in *Hermetica* I.25 and the Ophite Diagram described in *Origin, Contra Celsum* VI.24-33.

<sup>48</sup> See D.Wolkstein and S.N.Kramer, *Inanna* (New York 1983) pp. 155-63; though it should be said that this interpretation is attributed only to Wolkstein, and is thus not that of an expert in Akkadian literature.

<sup>49</sup> See e.g. Virgil, *Eclogues* VIII.70; Horace, *Epodes* V.46; Propertius I.19-20; Ovid, *Heroides* VI.85.

<sup>50</sup> Plato, *Symposium* 180d; Xenophon, *Symposium* VIII.9.

<sup>51</sup> Many of the statements in this paragraph require a long bibliography, which I or other students have supplied in recent articles. I shall therefore confine myself in most cases with a reference to one or two items of secondary literature.

composed before 150 A.D.,<sup>52</sup> and that in the second century the name "Gnostic" was assumed by a number of related groups.<sup>53</sup> Gnostic thought perhaps originated with the Jews of Alexandria,<sup>54</sup> and, though it was always a blend of the Hebraic and the Greek, was not at first especially redolent of Plato. As I have maintained elsewhere, however,<sup>55</sup> it entered into relations with the Platonist Numenius of Apamea; and at the same time or earlier a Christian theologian of Alexandria married Plato with some tenets of the Gnostics - though Valentinus took his vocabulary, and professed to take his doctrines, from the Epistles of St Paul.<sup>56</sup>

Closely associated with the system of Valentinus, and of similar date, is a scion of the Book of Zoroaster, the Apocryphon of John.<sup>57</sup> The lost Zoroaster, together with other documents that survive in late and adulterated versions, was used in the late third century by a group who were known to Porphyry as Gnostics,<sup>58</sup> though Plotinus treats them rather as the ungrateful heirs of Plato, once his friends. The doctrine of the Gnostics can be reconciled with the contents of the Apocryphon of John, although not quite so well with the creed of Valentinus; which is the earliest and which the latest of the three we cannot say. We need not doubt, however, that all their elements lay to hand in the second century, and two of their common elements have a bearing on the tale of Cupid and Psyche. The fathering of the intelligible kingdom by the luminous Anthropos, and the transgression of Sophia, which engenders the material realm, may be called the heart and veins of Gnostic thought.

1. The Naassenes, says Hippolytus, were the first Gnostics, acknowledging as supreme divinities Man and the Son of Man (Refutatio V.6.4 etc.).<sup>59</sup> Uniting both the sexes, the Primal Man or Anthropos had an extended genital member for the dispersion of his seed in the domain of physical being (V.7.29); here the scattered particles were rejoined to form the image of another Primal Man (V.7.6). The phallus of this mundane god pointed heavenward, that of the higher Anthropos downward (V.7.27, 29), and both could be

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<sup>52</sup> See M.J.Edwards, *How Many Zoroasters?*, *Vigiliae Christianae* 42 (1988) pp. 282-9.

<sup>53</sup> As often, the best study of the term is one of the oldest: R.P.Casey, *The Study of Gnosticism*, *JTS* 36 (1935) pp. 45-60.

<sup>54</sup> As recently argued by M.J.Edwards, *Gnostic Eros and Orphic Themes*, *ZPE* 88 (1991) pp. 25-40. See also Fallon in n.60 below.

<sup>55</sup> M.J.Edwards, *Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews*, *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990) pp. 64ff.

<sup>56</sup> On the Platonism of Valentinus see C.Stead, *In Search of Valentinus* in B.Layton (ed.) *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol I (Leiden 1980) pp. 75-95. On this theologian as an interpreter of Paul, see S.Petrement, *A Separate God* (London 1991) pp. 127-213. My "Gnostics and Valentinians in the Church Fathers", *JTS* 40 (1989), which maintains that Platonism furnished the means of a systematic return to orthodoxy, should have distinguished Valentinus more carefully from his successors, Ptolemaeus, Secundus and Heracleon.

<sup>57</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses* I.29 and a number ofoptic versions: see S.Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis* (Copenhagen 1963).

<sup>58</sup> On *Vita Plotini* 16 see H.M.Jackson, *The Seer Nicotheus and his Lost Apocalypse*, *Novum Testamentum* 32 (1990) pp. 250-77.

<sup>59</sup> See further J.M.Creed, *The Heavenly Man*, *JTS* 26 (1924-5); M.Marcovich, *The Naassene Psalm in Hippolytus*, in B.Layton (ed.) *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, Vol II (Leiden 1981) pp. 770-779.

identified with Hermes (V.7.29, 30, 34, 37); but Osiris was among his other titles, while the seven veils of Isis were deemed to symbolize the planetary spheres (V.7.23). These planets must be the offspring of the Anthropos, who is said to be the demiurge of everything in the upper and lower kingdoms (V.7.29). The reason for the creation of the lower world, which is treated as a "Chaos" and a prison (V.7.9, 30; V.10.2), is not explained. Nevertheless, a text from Nag Hammadi, a great repository of eccentric religious literature, confirms what would in any case be suggested by a comparison of the Naassenes with the Orphics - that the Anthropos was the cosmic god of Love.

In this text, *The Origin of the World*, we are told that, just as one lamp kindles many, so Eros, who combines delight and forethought in his androgynous nature, scattered light into every part of Chaos without depletion of his own.<sup>60</sup> All creatures are enamoured of this luminous progenitor, among them Soul or Psyche, who sheds blood to cement their union:

*But the first Psyche (Soul) loved Eros who was with her, and poured her blood upon him and upon the earth ... After this the beautiful fragrant flowers sprouted up in the earth according to their kind from the blood of each of the virgins of the daughters of Pronoia (NHC II.5.111.9-20).*

Here - though not without a reminiscence of the *Iliad*<sup>61</sup> - we meet again the Eros and Psyche of the amulets and the magical papyri, where Pronoia is an epithet of the soul.<sup>62</sup> In this treatise the greater being is once again the lamp by which the weaker, female party is excited; the Apuleian plot remains unparalleled, but this treatise must belong, as Tardieu thinks,<sup>63</sup> to the same allegorical domain.

2. As Gnostic thought develops,<sup>64</sup> Primal Man must take his seat amid a multitude of lights. Above him are the incomprehensible powers who supply the ground of being, below him that exfoliation of properties which makes up the "pleroma" of the intelligible realm. Each of these lesser "aeons" is androgynous, but distance from the Anthropos makes the collusion of the masculine and feminine unstable. The trespass of Sophia, the female moiety in the last and weakest aeon, is a desertion of her consort, and entails the generation of a new but imperfect world. Plotinus knew the story in two versions:

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<sup>60</sup> On this treatise see F.T.Fallon, *The Enthronement of Sabaoth* (Leiden 1978); M.Tardieu; *Trois Mythes Gnostiques* (Paris 1974) pp. 140-214. The text has been edited and translated anew by B.Layton (Leiden 1989). The translation here is that of H.-G.Bethge, taken from J.M.Robinson (ed.) *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden 1977) p. 169.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Iliad* XIV. 347-9 on the fertility which results from the union of Zeus and Hera.

<sup>62</sup> See PGM IV.475: ἴλαθί μοι, Πρόνοια καὶ Ψυχή.

<sup>63</sup> Tardieu (1974) pp. 146-8.

<sup>64</sup> Petrement (1990) maintains that Valentinian thought precedes the Gnostic systems, but does not give sufficient attention to the fifth book of Hippolytus' *Refutatio*, where the creeds described are too diverse to be derived from Valentinus, and rely more heavily on Jewish and pagan than on Christian sources. On the evidence for the Valentinians see F.Sagnard, *La Gnose Valentinienne et le témoignage de St.Irenée* (Paris 1947).

Ψυχὴν γὰρ εἰπόντες νεῦσσι κάτω καὶ σοφίαν τινά, εἴτε τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρξάκης, εἴτε τῆς τοιαύτης αἰτίας γενομένης σοφίας, εἴτε ἄμφω ταῦτὸν θέλουσιν εἶναι, τὰς μὲν ἄλλας ψυχὰς συγκατεληλυθέναι λέγοντες καὶ μέλη τῆς σοφίας ταύτας μὲν ἐνδύνασι λέγουσι σώματα, οἷον τὰ ἀνθρώπων· ἥς δὲ χάριν καὶ αὐταὶ κατῆλθον, ἐκείνην λέγουσι πάλιν αὐτὴ μὴ κατελθεῖν.

*They first maintained that the Soul and certain "Wisdom" (Sophia) declined and entered this lower sphere - though they leave us in doubt of whether the movement originated in soul or in this Sophia of theirs, or whether the two are the same to them - then they tell us that the other souls came down in the descent and that these members of Sophia took to themselves bodies, human bodies for example. Yet in the very same breath, that very Soul which was the occasion of descent to the others is declared not to have descended (Enneads II.9.10 trans. Mackenna).*

The account in which Sophia avoids a fall can still be read in a descendant of the Gnostic Zostrianus;<sup>65</sup> but the one describing a fatal inclination had perhaps a better pedigree, at least in Jewish sources, since a variant occurs in the First Hermeticum and in Philo.<sup>66</sup> It is only in later sources that Sophia is equated with the moon,<sup>67</sup> but the story of a goddess who falls captive to her own image or eidolon is one for which we have already shown the most ancient precedent. As we have observed, it is also Apuleius' prototype when he tells how Venus abused her simulacrum, the errant Psyche, and dispatched her on an embassy to Proserpina. Sophia too was banished from the pleroma, and in certain narratives turns into a prostitute, or conceives a lower self, Sophia Prunicus, who mates with the cosmic powers.<sup>68</sup> Behind this figure lies Eve, the "foolish woman" of the Book of Proverbs, and prophetic denunciations of the harlotries of Israel;<sup>69</sup> but Platonists would not forget the Pandemic Aphrodite, who partakes of male and female, or the custom in Greek of giving the neuter gender to the names of prostitutes.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Zostrianus (Nag Hammadi Codices VIII.1) 9.18-10.12. The same title belongs to one of the texts employed by the Gnostics of Porphyry, Vita Plotini 16.

<sup>66</sup> Hermetica I.14 on the fall of the Anthropos; Philo, De Opificio Mundi 151-2 (on the fall of Adam), where an allusion to the speech of Aristophanes in the Symposium must also be suspected. On the Jewish provenance of the First Hermetic treatise see C.H.Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (Cambridge 1935).

<sup>67</sup> Clementine Homilies II.8-9, where the name Helena, given by Simon to his paramour, appears to have been confounded with that of Selene.

<sup>68</sup> See Irenaeus, Adv. Haereses I.29.4, drawing upon a version of the Apocryphon of John; Origen, Contra Celsum VI.34, where the source is the Ophite diagram. On the relation of the Apocryphon of John to Valentinian theology see G.Quispel, *Gnosis and the Apocryphon of John in Layton*, Vol I (1980) pp. 118-32.

<sup>69</sup> See G.Macrae, *The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth*, *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970) pp. 86-101; Proverbs 9.13-18. Ezekiel 16 is perhaps the most extended of the prophetic denunciations.

<sup>70</sup> At Plato, Symposium 180d-181d Pausanias slights the Pandemic Aphrodite, which, unlike the Uranian, is drawn to women no less than to boys. The epithet Pandemos, unlike Urania, has only one termination for the masculine and the feminine genders.

But if any myth of this kind is to be aligned with the Apuleian fable, it is that of Valentinus. Platonist as well as Christian, he took for granted the love of the inferior for the superior, which entails a disposition to ascend. Yet this may have excessive manifestations, like the impulse of Sophia to know her Father in his veiled identity:

ἤθελε γάρ, ὡς λέγουσι, τὸ μέγεθος αὐτοῦ καταλαβεῖν. Ἔπειτα μὴ δυνηθῆναι διὰ τὸ ἀδυνάτω ἐπιβαλεῖν πράγματι, καὶ ἐν πολλῷ πάνυ † ἀγῶνι γενόμενον διὰ τε τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ βάθους καὶ τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον τὸν Πατρός καὶ τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν στοργήν, ἐκτεινόμενον ἀεὶ ἐπὶ τὸ πρόθεον, ὑπὸ τῆς γλυκύτητος αὐτοῦ τελευταῖον ἂν καταπεπόσθαι, καὶ ἀναλελύσθαι εἰς τὴν ὅλην οὐσίαν, εἰ μὴ τῇ κτηριζούσῃ καὶ ἐκτὸς τοῦ ἀρρήτου μεγέθους φυλακτούσῃ τὰ ὅλα συνέτηθε δυνάμει.

*This passion, they say, consisted in a desire to search into the nature of the Father; for she wished, according to them, to comprehend his greatness. When she could not attain her end, inasmuch as she aimed at an impossibility and this became involved in an extreme agony, of mind, while both on account of the vast profundity as well as the unsearchable nature of the Father, and on account of the love she bore him, she was ever stretching herself forward, there was danger lest she should at last have been absorbed by his sweetness, and resolved into his absolute essence, unless she had met with that power which supports all things, and preserves them outside of the unspeakable greatness (Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses II.2, trans. Roberts and Donaldson).*

The limiting form, or Horos, has the same function in the narrative, though not in the philosophy of the author, as the sensible world that supports the soul in Enneads VI.9.3. Poverty conceives a child by Plenty in the Symposium, and Sophia also has offspring by this wanton overture. Ejected as she wanders, weak and crying, in the void outside the pleroma, this abortion is nothing but a poor image of herself.<sup>71</sup> Sophia, like the chastened soul in the Enneads of Plotinus, is redeemed by the creation of a new boundary; the abortion is not so lucky, but gives birth to a viler son, who becomes the architect and tyrant of the material creation.<sup>72</sup> This Demiurge and his immediate progenitors are all degraded copies of the Gnostic Primal Man, and hence of Love.<sup>73</sup>

Sophia's misfortune represents, if nothing else, the poverty of human understanding, which falls short of God, breeds heresy and does penance in the hope of restoration by

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<sup>71</sup> See E.A.Fischer-Mueller, Yaldabaoth: The Gnostic Female Principle in its Fallenness, *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1990) pp. 79-95.

<sup>72</sup> See Sagnard (1947) pp. 148-71 for a review of the testimonies in Irenaeus, and G.C.Stead, *The Valentinian Myth of Sophia*, *JTS* 20 (1969) pp. 75-104.

<sup>73</sup> See Edwards ZPE 88 (1991) for this thesis.

God's love.<sup>74</sup> In the Gospel of Truth, a Valentinian work,<sup>75</sup> the Error is personified as Plane, and her fruitless exploration of the void has been compared to the quest of Isis for Osiris.<sup>76</sup> Osiris, as we have noted, was among the appellations of the Gnostic Primal Man, and Sophia retains enough of him to scatter brilliant particles of wisdom in the lower world, then work for their redemption and return.<sup>77</sup> Though there was no reflection to ensnare her in the Valentinian story, she here submits voluntarily to a world that is a shadow of the higher one, governed by a nature which can be nothing but a base replica of hers.

Like Psyche, then, Sophia, having erred by curiosity, is sentenced to a double expiation: first she is expelled from the place of joy, and secondly some part of her must go down to the lower world. In texts which are not Valentinian, though related, she comes to resemble Psyche in her felicity as a mother, since the instrument of salvation is a child produced through the Demiurge, who is destined to enter heaven, with great rejoicing, as the captain of the redeemed.<sup>78</sup>

#### VI. Conclusions and Reservations

This article may claim to have contributed a least five points to the study of the Apuleian fable and its sources:

1. An ancient myth related the descent of a female power to the nether world, in which she was taken captive by her shadow. Philosophers, who would call this her eidolon, read the myth as an allegory of the soul's capitulation to inferior desires. The relics of this tradition in Apuleius are that his heroine is named Psyche, that he makes her a simulacrum of the goddess who becomes her persecutor, and that Psyche's final task is to solicit from Proserpina, the Venus of the underworld, a gift which it is envious to covet and (for Psyche) almost fatal to discern.

2. Platonism, even when it exhorted the soul to strive for union with the highest principles, maintained that where the postulant is greedy or importunate a calamity will follow, which cannot be redeemed except by arduous discipline. Sometimes the encroachment of the lower on the higher could be conceived as an assault; Psyche when she exposes the face of Love with the aim of murdering him, is guilty of this temerity, and incurs the due reward.

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<sup>74</sup> F.C.Burkitt, *Church and Gnosis* (Cambridge 1932) maintained that the fall of Sophia was an allegory for the ineptitude of human wisdom, and, in the light of Petrement (1990) one should certainly take notice of 1 Cor 1.17ff and Romans 1.22. In the latter text the futility of Wisdom is revealed in the making of idols, the most lucrative profession of the pagan demiurge.

<sup>75</sup> See H.Jonas, *The Evangelium Veritatis and Valentinian Speculation*, *Studia Patristica* (1962) pp. 96-111.

<sup>76</sup> J.Helderman, *Isis as Plane in the Gospel of Truth?*, in M.Krause (ed.) *Gnosis and Gnosticism* (Leiden 1981) pp. 26-46.

<sup>77</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses* I.7; Sagnard (1947) pp. 384-415.

<sup>78</sup> See Fallon (1978) *passim*.

3. Both in the astrology of Plutarch and in the synthesis performed by Christian heresy, Love can be equated with Osiris, and the wandering soul with Isis; the evidence assembled here sides firmly with those readers of Apuleius who see a parallel between the Love and Venus of his fable and the Egyptian deities of his final book.

4. While he has put the lamp in the hand of Psyche and not of Cupid, Apuleius may have intended the dripping of the oil to take the place of the emission of Psyche's blood in another version of the story. The severance of the Intellect from its Logos in Plotinus might be cited by a pertinacious exegete as a gloss on Cupid's wound.

5. The pangs of Ereshkigal, the birth of Eros in the Symposium and the repeated parturition of Sophia in the Valentinian myth all offer precedents or parallels to the birth of Psyche's child.

We must not leap too rapidly from parallels to sources, from inherited materials to generic affiliation. We might conclude, since the strongest and most numerous affinities are supplied by Valentinus, that Apuleius moved in circles close to Gnostic thought; or, seeing that some features of his tale are prone to allegory, we might suppose the whole to be nothing more than an elegant draping for the common furniture of Platonism. Apuleius, however, was not a Gnostic and only an occasional philosopher. Such rigid schemes deny to Apuleius his facility in invention, combination and the avoidance of expected commonplaces. We should not forget how often he sets out to surprise his readers - by transferring the lamp from Cupid to his spouse, by robbing Venus of her initial majesty, by making Psyche fall a second time.

We have barely taken notice of certain elements in the narrative - the portrayal of Venus as a wicked stepmother, for example, or the rumour that Psyche's lover is a beast - which belong to a common fund of storytelling;<sup>79</sup> we have not asked whether theories of historical contagion will account for the recurrence of a theme so well as those of Jung or Propp; we have not asked whether Northrop Frye is right to see all romance as a "secular scripture", which turns upon the heroine's descent to and return from a state of peril and distress.<sup>80</sup> We have not appraised the debt of Apuleius to such celebrated and obvious precursors as the Fourth Georgic,<sup>81</sup> nor observed how often it is that the greatest Latin poems (and the last-named one among them) seem to be pregnant with the germ of an allegory that miscarries in the hands of scholarship.<sup>82</sup>

Discussion of such topics can be neither brief nor certain, and the object of this essay was more modest. It was to show that we find convergent tendencies in the disparate speculations of the Empire, that the systematic interpreters of Plato could both feed and feed upon the

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. in particular the stories of Cinderella and of "Beauty and the Beast".

<sup>80</sup> N.Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (London 1976).

<sup>81</sup> See *Georgics* IV. 316-558 for the descents of Aristaeus and of Orpheus.

<sup>82</sup> On the Fourth Georgic see e.g. L.P.Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil* (Cambridge 1969) pp. 117-8. Other candidates for an allegorical reading, perhaps based on the mysteries, would be *Aeneid* VI and *Catullus* LXIII.

interpretation of the mysteries, that philosophers were not debarred from reading other books, nor other books from citing them. Apuleius - sophist, Platonist, novelist and humorist - has devised an entertainment that does not preclude all serious constructions, an arbitrary fiction that does not shun all affinities with myth.<sup>83</sup>

New College, Oxford

M.J.Edwards

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<sup>83</sup> I am grateful to Isabel Henton for her comments on an early draft of this study.