

IT HAS BEEN EVIDENT TO MOST CRITICS that, when Lucius visits his wealthy relative named Byrrhaena, the description of her statue-group of Actaeon spying on Diana is more than just a sophistic display of artistic writing about art objects.¹ It is to be seen as a "fair warning"² to Lucius about the dangers of curiosity: Actaeon appears as an active spy rather than an involuntary chance observer (thus Wlosok 73–74), and his consequent punishment by metamorphosis into a deer is also prominent. Lucius has already displayed his eager curiosity to spy on witches and their rites; and the motif of "man turned into animal" has occurred before in connection with the power of witches to punish those who offend them.³ The scene thus lines up with the previous cautionary tale told by Aristomenes and the subsequent cautionary tale of Thelyphron—both concerning the disasters that follow indulgence in curiosity about and dealings with witches. So much is fairly widely agreed upon.⁴

It is also common for recent critics to treat the incident as if Actaeon and Diana were the only occupants of Byrrhaena's hall. The episode begins, however, with some other statues:

Atria longe pulcherrima columnis quadrifariam per singulos angulos stantibus attolerabant statuas, palmaris deae facies, quae pinnis explicatis sine gressu, pilae volubilis instabile vestigium plantis roscidis delibantes, nec ut maneant inhaerent, et iam volare creduntur.

Who is the *palmaris dea* set thus before the reader? The connection of palms with victory, taken together with the common appearance of statues of Victory with wings and upon a globe (Weinstock 50–51), suggests immediately that she is Victoria (or, since we are in Thessaly, Nike).

¹As the critics cited by A. Wlosok, "Zur Einheit der Metamorphosen des Apuleius," *Philologus* 113 (1969) 68–84 (henceforth "Wlosok") had viewed it (74, n. 3). The following will also be referred to by author's surname only: E. J. Dwyer, *Pompeian Domestic Sculpture* (Rome 1982); V. Tran Tam Tinh, *Essai sur le culte d'Isis à Pompei* (Paris 1964); V. F. Vanderlip, *The Four Greek Hymns of Isidorus and the Cult of Isis* (Toronto 1972); S. Weinstock, *Divus Iulius* (Oxford 1971).

²J. Tatum, *Apuleius and the Golden Ass* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1979) 38.

³Meroe at 1.9 and in a lighter vein at 1.12 (*de Aristomene testudo factus*—by a bed falling on top of him).

⁴The paradigmatic function was recognized by H. Riefstahl, *Der Roman des Apuleius* (Frankfurt 1938) 67–68. J. L. Penwill, "Slavish Pleasures and Profitless Curiosity: Fall and Redemption in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*," *Ramus* 4 (1975) 49–82 can accept it merely in passing (69).

The significance of this has not hitherto been pointed out. Byrrhaena's words of hospitality, "*Tua sunt . . . cuncta quae vides*," have been recognized as truer than she knows; we should now detect a second layer of hidden meaning through an emphasis on *cuncta*. Victory has a part in the scene presented to Lucius—indeed, it has the most important part, surrounding and defining the tableau of Actaeon and Diana. Even while the scene predicts disaster for Lucius because of his curiosity, as a whole it holds out the assurance of his final success in escaping from that fate.

There may, however, be a further significance to these statues. Three rather curious features may be noticed about them. First of all, what is a private citizen doing with a hall of statues of Nike? The evidence of a cult or dedications to Nike in the Greek world is extremely scanty for anywhere at any time.⁵ Even if we suppose that Apuleius is extending the common Roman cult of Victoria into the Greek world, still the problem remains that although the army and the Arval Brethren naturally sacrificed to Victoria, and emperors liked to be associated with her (*OCD*² s.v.), one would not have thought a rich and distinguished private citizen (even away from the emperor's gaze in the provinces) would have dared to—or had much reason to want to. However, positive evidence of this is lacking; Pompeii does supply a rather tame parallel in atrium statues to Fortuna (Dwyer 70); and perhaps not every feature of a novel should be pressed for realistic detail; so we might conclude that Apuleius has been content to give his character rather strange taste in decor in order to make the thematic point of final success.

A second feature is less easily explained away: the iconography of the statues has some strange aspects. Victoria is frequently depicted on a globe to denote conquest, but Fortuna-Tyche is frequently depicted on a ball to denote instability;⁶ and *instabile vestigium* is a strong pointer towards her rather than Victoria. The very emphasis given to the positioning on the globe is also surprising: in most representations of Victoria the globe is subordinate visually as well as conceptually,⁷ and its importance for the positioning of the goddess here creates an impression of the contact between the celestial and the mundane, rather than of conquest over the world (which Victoria usually signifies). Apuleius seems, then, to have created at the very least a composite Victoria-Fortuna, or a Victoria with a

⁵S. Weinstock, "Victor and Invictus," *HThR* 50 (1957) 211–247, at 218; L. Daly, "Nike and Athena Nike," *Studies Presented to D. M. Robinson* 2 (St Louis 1953) 1124–1128, at 1124, 1128.

⁶Dio Chrysostom 63.7; cf. Artemidorus 2.37. In his edition of Apuleius (London 1825) *ad loc.*, Oudendorp does not draw this distinction.

⁷Weinstock 51; the Isis-Fortuna of Tran Tam Tinh 148 and Plate XVII has her right foot proudly on the globe, and the Isis-Fortuna of 149 and Plate VII.3 has only a tiny world at her feet.

strong hint of Fortuna about her; and there is also a strange insistence on the worldly immanence of the goddess which one does not usually associate with Victoria.

Finally, the passage shows a striking anomaly when compared to Apuleius' usual set-piece descriptions. If we compare his other reports of representations of goddesses—here by human actresses (Photis as Venus, 2.17; or the women impersonating Juno, Minerva, and Venus in the pageant at Corinth, 10.31–32)—we can find most of the features of this passage repeated. Thus the love of paradox (*sine gressu/instable vestigium*), the play with words (*volubilis/instable, singulos/angulos, stantibus/statuas*), the love of an unexpected continuation (*nec ut maneant inhaerent et iam volare creduntur*) can all be closely paralleled inside these other scenes.⁸ The feature I wish to concentrate upon is the way Apuleius introduces his “goddesses:” in all these other scenes, where there cannot even be doubt as to whom he means, he uses an apparently pointless expansion of the name (*in speciem Veneris; in deae Iunonis speciem similis; quam putares Minervam; designans Venerem*; cf. also *in modum Paridis* 10.30 and *in Dianam factus* in 2.4 itself) which turns out to be literally exact and also important in the information and slant it gives us on the character. (With Photis, for example, it tells us that she is good at deceptive appearances and beauty which is merely skin-deep—as Lucius will learn later to his cost.) Here we have only *palmaris deae facies*, which is a curiously bland way of noting that they are merely statues of Victoria, if that is all he meant. Elsewhere Apuleius carefully withholds names which are important, and in his only description of the one goddess who is crucially important, at 11.3, he never names Isis at all.

My answer to these three difficulties is that the statues are not Victoria, nor even Victoria-Fortuna, but a concealed epiphany of Isis in her role as Isis-Victoria-Fortuna. First, a private citizen could well have a hall full of Isis, and Pompeii provides exact parallels for garden “shrines” thus.⁹ (The evidence from Pompeii, even if from another century and another country, is not irrelevant: “Diana’s grove” was a popular theme, and the Isis cult there used Actaeon in just the programmatic way that Apuleius does).¹⁰ Apuleius may not have intended us to think through to the logical conclusion that Byrrhaena is a devotee of Isis, but the strong suggestion of Isis’ presence is enough for his purposes.

Secondly, Isis-Victoria-Fortuna is by far the commonest and most

⁸Which is not to say that this by itself explains these phrases, much less explains them away.

⁹Tran Tam Tinh 44–45 (cf. 51, 53 for the *lararia*); Wilhelmina E. Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii* (New York 1979) 134–135.

¹⁰Dwyer 125, 126, 137; Tran Tam Tinh 82–83; R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1971) 150.

visually obvious cult figure at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and this assimilation is represented strikingly in cult prayer also.¹¹ Isis as a universal power permeating this world is another common theme of cult prayer—and of Apuleius.¹²

Finally, as noted already, Isis is too important to be named at 11.3; and the apparent periphrasis in *palmaris deae facies* turns out to be literally exact and important. Palm and victory¹³ are specifically associated with Isis by Apuleius as the culminating detail in her visible epiphany at 11.4; and Book 11 as a whole bristles with the terminology of victory and triumph in Isis.¹⁴ The success predicted for Lucius is thus of a specifically Isiac nature.¹⁵

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¹¹Tran Tam Tinh 78; V. Tran Tam Tinh, *Le culte des divinités orientales à Herculaneum* (Leiden 1971, Études préliminaires . . . 17) 13; Vanderlip 32–33 (with references), 95, and Plate XV for the “M” text line 55 ἐγὼ τὸ ἱμαρμένον νικῶ. P. Bruneau (“Isis Pélagia à Délos,” *BCH* 85 [1961] 435–446, at 442) notes how the figures of Isis Pelagia have been contaminated by motifs from *Nike*.

¹²Vanderlip 25–27, 55–58; *Metamorphoses* 11.5.

¹³*Palmae victricis* is Apuleius’ phrase in 11.4. We could compare the impressive appearance of Zatchlas, the Egyptian priest wearing palm sandals, to save the day—for some—in Thelyphron’s story (2.28). The palm sandals worn by Isis and her priests were probably due to considerations of ritual cleanliness (Herodotus 2.37), but that is not how Apuleius chose to present the matter.

¹⁴*Invictum numen* 11.7; *Lucius de sua fortuna triumphat* 11.15; *e cohorte religionis* 11.14; *sanctae huic militiae* 11.15.

¹⁵I would like to thank the referees for their comments and suggestions.