

Introduction: Uncovering the Unseen in Apuleius

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, a Roman novel from the second century AD and a masterpiece of world literature, has long fascinated readers for its jarring combination of the asinine and the sublime.¹ In this novel of eleven books, which is also known as *The Golden Ass*, a young man named Lucius tells how he turns into a donkey after a magical accident in Thessaly and then describes in Book 11 how he regains human form with the help of the Egyptian goddess Isis and becomes a devoted member of her cult.² Flaubert once wrote the *Metamorphoses* “reeks of incense and urine” (*Ça sent l'encens et l'urine*), a phrase that brilliantly captures not only the tension between the solemnity and the dark levity of the novel but also the visceral impact it has on its readers.³ Apuleius is a vivid, ekphrastic writer: the *Metamorphoses* is full of careful descriptions of the sights, sounds, and smells his characters sense – for example, the marble statue group representing Diana and Actaeon in the atrium of Byrrhaena's house that Lucius gazes upon with little understanding (*Met.* 2.4). As Walter Pater emphasized in his novel, *Marius the Epicurean*, when you read the longest inserted story in the *Metamorphoses*, the tale of *Cupid and Psyche* (*Met.* 4.28–6.24), you seem “to

¹ It is difficult to date the *Metamorphoses* with precision. Dowden (1994) argues Apuleius wrote the novel when he was a young man for an audience in Rome, while Harrison (2000) 9–10 suggests the novel's sophistication is a sign that Apuleius wrote it later in his career. The evidence, as scanty as it is, seems to be on the side of the later date, see Lee (2005) 8, but we need to be cautious, as Graverini (2012a) 182–193 stresses after pointing out the flimsy foundations of both positions. The key point favoring the later date is that Apuleius' accusers do not appear to have brought up the novel when they prosecuted Apuleius for witchcraft in AD 158/159: there is no reference to the novel in the *Apology*. Furthermore, there is no mention of the novel at *Florida* 9.27–28, an excerpt from a speech dated to AD 162/163 and in which Apuleius boasts of his proficiency in a wide range of literary genres.

² Both titles were used for the novel in Late Antiquity: Sallustius calls it the *Metamorphoses* in his subscriptions to the text, which date to the end of the fourth century AD; Augustine refers to the novel as *Asinus aureus* or *Golden Ass* in *City of God* 18.18. Bitel (2000–2001) examines what the original title of Apuleius' text may have been, including the theory it had a double title, as Winkler (1985) 292–321 suggested, and what the respective titles may mean.

³ This phrase appears in a letter from Gustave Flaubert to Louise Colet (June 27–28, 1852); the translation is Carver (2007) 1 n. 1.

see and handle the golden hair, the fresh flowers, the precious works of art in it!”⁴ This quality of Apuleius’ writing – his ability “to bring his subject matter vividly before the eyes,” as ekphrastic speech is described in one of the Greek rhetorical handbooks of the Roman Empire – has rightly garnered a great deal of critical admiration.⁵ Imperial Rome, as Jaś Elsner argues, was “a civilization which theorized the visual more intensely than at any other time in antiquity.”⁶ Vision and, to a lesser degree, the other senses have become focal points in scholarship concerned with the Latin and Greek literature of this period.⁷ This is the case with Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*. The novel’s interest in the power of vision has been explored extensively – in particular Lucius’ voyeuristic gaze and the narrative’s many descriptions of visual art and spectacles – and the depiction of the other senses in the novel is beginning to attract more attention.⁸

However, while criticism of the *Metamorphoses* along these lines continues to reveal at a blistering pace the sensuous richness of this narrative, it has overshadowed and obscured a dimension of Lucius’ world that is just as important as the material and sensual one. Accordingly, a theme that Apuleius put at the *Metamorphoses*’ heart has not yet received the consideration it should. This book argues that the *Metamorphoses* has a special interest in the world beyond the senses and that invisibility is one of the

⁴ Pater (1885) 65.

⁵ Theon, *Progymnasmata* 118.6: ἐκφρασίς ἐστι λόγος περιηγηματικός ἐναργῶς ὑπὲρ ὧν τὸ δηλούμενον; “Ekphrasis is a descriptive speech which vividly brings the subject shown before the eyes.” The translation is Webb (2009) 197.

⁶ Elsner (1998) 11. Several Roman authors privilege sight over the other senses, including Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 6.80, on which see Fredrick (2002b) 1–4, and Horace, *Ars Poetica* 180–182. The scholarship on visibility in Greece and Rome is sophisticated and extensive, as the bibliography in Morales (2004) 8 and 8 n. 39 makes clear; also see Squire (2015). On the Roman side, Barton (2002), Bartsch (2006), Elsner (1995, 2007a), the essays in Fredrick (2002a), and Jenkyns (2013) are essential reading. Studies focused on other senses in Classical antiquity include Butler and Purves (2014) and Bradley (2015).

⁷ Interpretations of Classical literature that make vision their organizing principle include Feldherr (1998) on Livy, Morales (2004) on Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Raucci (2011) on Roman elegy, and Salzman-Mitchell (2005) on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. This list is not comprehensive, but it still shows the wide currency of this approach to Greek and Latin literature.

⁸ Studies on the gaze in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, for the most part, are centered around descriptions of works of art and spectacles; for the Diana and Actaeon ekphrasis (*Met.* 2.4), for example, see Peden (1985), Slater (1998), and Paschalis (2002). For general discussion of the role of descriptions of works of art and spectacles in the ancient novels, see Bartsch (1989), Morales (2004), and Holzmeister (2014). Broader-ranging studies on vision in the *Metamorphoses*, which also bring into play Apuleius’ other works or other ancient novels, include Too (1996), Slater (1997), Panayotakis (2001), Bartsch (2006), and Elsner (2007b). The role the other senses play in the *Metamorphoses* was discussed at the *Fifth International Conference on the Ancient Novel* in Houston in 2015: there was a panel on the novels and the senses, and several of the papers concerned Apuleius, including Timothy O’Sullivan, “Human and Animal Touch in Apuleius,” and Donald Lateiner, “Smells and Smelling in the Ancient Novel.”

Introduction

3

central motifs in a narrative that explores problems of perceiving and representing what cannot be seen. In the process, this book deals with the major interpretive controversies, the central one still being whether the *Metamorphoses* is a serious, philosophical novel about a transcendent religious experience or a comic and much less earnest entertainment that satirizes Lucius' devotion to Isis.⁹

Recognition of the centrality of invisibility changes the way we read and understand the *Metamorphoses*, a complex and multifarious narrative that must not be reduced to a single tone and that, in my view, resists efforts to classify it as “serious,”¹⁰ “comic,”¹¹ or “serio-comic.”¹² First of all, invisibility is important because of Apuleius' philosophical background, and it raises questions about ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics that have their basis in Platonism. Apuleius proclaims himself a *Platonicus philosophus*, “Platonic philosopher” (*Apol.* 10.6), in the *Apology* (*Apologia Pro Se De Magia*), his defense speech of AD 158/159 against the charge he seduced his wife with magic,¹³ and his literary corpus includes a lecture that focuses on Platonic demonology, *On the God of Socrates* (*De Deo Socratis*), a handbook of Platonic natural philosophy and ethics, *On Plato and His Dogma* (*De Platone et eius Dogmate*), and a treatise on the Platonic universe, *On the Universe* (*De Mundo*).¹⁴ Apuleius the Platonist was sensitive to a world that

⁹ Schlam (1992) 1: “The chief divide among more recent studies of the Apuleian novel has been over whether the comic or the serious is its more essential quality.” Cf. Sandy (1978), Sandy (1997) 245, Harrison (2000) 235, Carver (2007) 1, Graverini (2012a) xiii, and Tilg (2014) 85–105.

¹⁰ The best-known serious interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* are Beroaldo (1500), Nock (1933), Festugière (1954), and Merkelbach (1962). Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2000) argues Apuleius' description of ritual practices and sacred space is accurate and realistic and suggests (pp. 89–91) that Lucius' three initiations are not a comic element.

¹¹ Supporters of the comic or satirical reading of Book 11 include Bétolaud (1835–1836), Perry (1967), Fredouille (1975) 12–13, Van Mal-Maeder (1997), Harrison (2000), Harrison (2000–2001), Kenney (2003), Murgatroyd (2004), May (2006) 307–328, Zimmerman (2006), Libby (2011), and Harrison (2012a). Bradley (2012) 205–228 can be aligned with this camp: he argues the ending of the *Metamorphoses* is “profoundly pessimistic” (p. 206) and that it portrays “the replacement of intellectual curiosity by degrading servile abasement to the gods Isis and Osiris” (p. 227).

¹² Important seriocomic readings of the *Metamorphoses* include Anderson (1982) 76–85, Schlam (1992), Graverini (2012a), and Tilg (2014).

¹³ Apuleius is a major figure in Platonic philosophy in the second century, and his brand of Platonism is described and assessed in Regen (1971), Dillon (1977) 306–338, Moreschini (1978), Hijmans (1987), Fletcher (2014), and Moreschini (2015). In Late Antiquity, Apuleius was commonly called *Platonicus*; for references, see Harrison (2000) 5 n. 19 and Gaiser (2008) 29–36.

¹⁴ For the fragments from Apuleius' translation of the *Phaedo*, see Harrison (2000) 23; for fragments of work known as *De Re Publica*, which “may or may not have been a version of the works of the same name by Plato or Cicero, though not a close translation of the former,” see Harrison (2000) 25. Stover (2016) argues that an overlooked Latin text, which summarizes fourteen of Plato's dialogues and is transmitted in an important manuscript of Apuleius' *philosophica* (R = Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Reginensis latinus 1572), is the lost third book of Apuleius' *De Platone*.

lies beyond the human senses, and he talks about this higher, unseen reality throughout his corpus. In *On Plato*, for instance, Apuleius reports that Plato made a distinction between two “essences” out of which the world is made:

Οὐσίαι, *quas essentias dicimus, duas esse ait, per quas cuncta gignantur mundusque ipse; quarum una cogitatione sola concipitur, altera sensibus subici potest. Sed illa, quae mentis oculis comprehenditur, semper et eodem modo et sui par ac similis invenitur, ut quae vere sit; at enim altera opinione sensibili et irrationabili aestimanda est, quam nasci et interire ait. Et sicut superior vere esse memoratur, hanc non esse vere possumus dicere. Et primae quidem substantiae vel essentiae primum deum esse et mentem formasque rerum et animam; secundae substantiae omnia quae informantur quaeque gignuntur et quae ab substantiae superioris exemplo originem ducunt, quae mutari et converti possunt, labentia et ad instar fluminum profuga.*

Plato says that there are two *ousiai*, which we call essences, through which all things and the world itself are produced. One of them is perceived by reasoning alone, the other is able to be subject to the senses. But the former essence, which is comprehended by the eyes of the mind, is eternal, consistent, and is found equal and similar to itself, in that it truly exists. However, the other essence, which Plato says comes into being and perishes, must be appraised by sensible and irrational opinion. And just as the former essence is said to exist truly, so we are able to say the latter essence doesn't truly exist. And the first substances or essences are first god, the mind, the forms of things, and the soul. The secondary substances are all things which are fashioned, and which are produced, and which derive their origin from the example of the superior substance; and these are able to be changed and transformed, slipping away and fugitive like rivers. (*Pl.* I.6 193–194)

Apuleius, channeling Plato, distinguishes the material, ever-changing world we can sense from the true, unchanging reality that is intelligible – that only the eyes of the mind can perceive. This distinction between the world we can sense and a higher, invisible reality has its basis in Platonic dialogue (e.g., *Timaeus* 28a and *Phaedo* 78b–d) and post-Platonic philosophical texts (Xenocrates fr. 83 Isardi-Parente), and it is an idea that Apuleius comes back to many times (e.g., *Soc.* 123, 126–127; *Fl.* 10.3).¹⁵

However, over the course of this book, subtle but significant differences between the *Metamorphoses* and the Platonic philosophizing in Apuleius' other works will come to the fore again and again. This book builds on recent work by Richard Hunter, Richard Fletcher, and Claudio Moreschini who do not simplistically superimpose the rest of Apuleius'

¹⁵ Lee (2005) 117–118.

Introduction

5

corpus and other Platonic and post-Platonic texts onto the *Metamorphoses* but, instead, emphasize that the novel creatively adapts philosophy for its own ends.¹⁶ What W. R. Johnson says about poets is relevant to this novelist:

Poets are not theologians or philosophers or historians. They do not quite think thoughts, they do not quite deliver messages. They *see* their own feelings and the feelings of their contemporaries, and from what they see they fashion dreams of reality (as Nabokov put it, “the facts of fiction”).¹⁷

The *Metamorphoses* is elusive and esoteric. I am not using “esoteric” here in Reinhold Merkelbach’s sense: I will not be defending his controversial argument that the *Metamorphoses* and most of the other ancient novels are allegorical scripture of Isis’ cult, although I will support his intuition that the novel is cryptic.¹⁸ Instead, what I mean by esoteric is that the novel’s sentiments – its special pleasures and its particular kind of knowledge – cannot be easily revealed through the imposition of an outside theological or philosophical system. Nonetheless, some knowledge of Platonic philosophy, which audience members will possess in varying degrees, brings into focus what makes the *Metamorphoses* such a distinctive and creative text that sometimes challenges Plato and also prompts its readers to contemplate what aesthetic experience offers that philosophy and theology do not.

Second, paying close attention to what can *and* what cannot be seen in the *Metamorphoses* lets us read with fresh eyes Book II, the portion of Apuleius’ narrative that has attracted the most attention because of its importance for religious history and because it is at the center of the controversies about the novel’s unity and tone. This book develops John

¹⁶ Hunter (2012), Fletcher (2014), and Moreschini (2015) challenge and complicate the idea in Zimmerman (2009) 228–229 that there is a “deeper unity” across the Apuleian corpus. Fletcher (2014) 269 argues that “while Apuleius’ Platonic corpus can (and should) be read ‘whole,’ it is also essential to see each text as enacting its own methodology.” Hunter, Fletcher, and Moreschini therefore reject the kind of Platonic reading of the novel that Winkler (1985) 5 describes: “Apuleius was known as Platonicus, a named based on his pamphlets expounding a Platonic philosophy, on his (lost) translations of Plato’s works into Latin, and on his self-presentation as a philosopher in his *Apologia*. There are many themes and names and situations in the *AA* that can plausibly be read as references to Platonic dialogues and developments of Academic principles. The *AA* is a philosophic novel.” Platonic interpretation of Apuleius’ novel, along these lines, goes back at least to Beroaldo (1500), the Renaissance commentator on the *Metamorphoses*, see Gaisser (2008) 197–242 and Harrison (2013b) 16–17. Many recent books and articles maintain that Platonism is the novel’s underlying ideology, including Moreschini (1965), Thibau (1965), Schlam (1970), Heller (1983), DeFilippo (1990), Fick-Michel (1991), Schlam (1992), Münstermann (1995), O’Brien (2002), Tilg (2014), Winkle (2014), Fletcher (2014) 262–293, and Drews (2015).

¹⁷ Johnson (1987) ix.

¹⁸ Merkelbach (1962, 1968, 1988) argues the ancient novels (with the exception of Chariton’s *Callirhoe*) were secret scripture for mystery cults. For appraisal of this controversial thesis, see Beck (2003), Zeitlin (2008) 94–98, and Bieri (2013b) 82–86.

Winkler's argument in *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's The Golden Ass* (1985) that it is impossible to determine whether Lucius had a transcendent religious experience and that Book 11, therefore, is aporetic.¹⁹ However, I do not reach this conclusion in the way Winkler does. Winkler points out that Lucius the reflecting narrator never reveals whether he is still an adherent of Isis' cult, an argument described in more detail later. Instead, I focus on the focalization of the narrative in Book 11 – that is, the point of view from which events in a narrative are presented to readers. As Book 11 unfolds, Lucius gradually stops letting his readers visualize what he sees when he meets divine beings. Thus, readers are left in the dark, with no way of knowing whether Lucius encountered Isis and Osiris, as I argue in Chapter 5.

But why do the lights go out in Book 11, after ten books of vivid, ekphrastic writing? I argue in Chapter 6 of this study that the structure of the *Metamorphoses* – the tension between Books 1–10 and Book 11 – invites audience members to compare the aesthetic, imaginative experience of reading the novel and trying to visualize its invisible fictional world with the initiations in Book 11 that are believed to make the gods present in our world. Furthermore, this book ultimately aims to reaffirm the idea that *Metamorphoses* is an esoteric, visionary, and daemonic text – to be precise, a fiction that sits at the threshold between the sensible and the divine worlds.²⁰ I argue some ancient readers might have had a transcendent experience when interpreting the *Metamorphoses*. Platonists after Apuleius believed “hermeneutic activity might lift one up through ontological levels, anagogically, towards the One,” as Peter Struck puts it, and I suggest the *Metamorphoses* may anticipate this practice and, like a daemon, bridge the gap between the human and the divine.²¹

However, before I describe in more detail how the argument in this book is structured and executed over the course of six chapters, it is first necessary to explain what invisibility is and then to present a skeletal picture of its different manifestations in Apuleius' novel. Traces of this motif have been detected from time to time, but there has not yet been an attempt to build on earlier suggestive comments about this theme and to demonstrate that invisibility is one of the organizing principles in the *Metamorphoses*.

¹⁹ Winkler (1985) 124.

²⁰ For the angelic – or daemonic – position of poetry and fiction between the empirical world we can sense and the realm of the divine, see Bloom (1996) 4–6 and 147.

²¹ Struck (2010) 59.

Invisibility

Invisibility has captured the human imagination since antiquity. Objects that make individuals invisible can be found in stories from across the globe, from the distant past to the present,²² and this is also the case with Greek and Latin literary texts that Apuleius certainly knew, starting with Homer's *Iliad*.²³ In Book 5 of the *Iliad*, Athena “puts on the cap of Hades so that mighty Ares could not see her” (αὐτὰρ Ἀθήνη / δῦν' Ἀΐδος κυνέην, μή μιν ἴδοι ὄβριμος Ἄρης, *Il.* 5.844–845), and this helmet of invisibility makes appearances throughout subsequent Greek literature.²⁴ Plato mentions the cap in passing in the *Republic* (*R.* 612b), but his attention is on a different powerful object: a ring that makes Gyges' ancestor invisible and lets him kill the king and marry the king's wife (*R.* 359c–360d). The ring of Gyges, along with other rings that make their wearers invisible, is a popular subject in later Greek and Latin texts.²⁵

However, magical objects are not the only means for attaining invisibility in the Greco-Roman world. In Euripides' *Orestes*, for example, Helen “vanishes from the bedchamber through the roof . . . either by drugs or by arts of the *magoi* or by theft of the gods” (ἃ δ' / ἐκ θαλάμων ἐγένετο διαπρὸ δωμάτων ἄφαντος, / . . . / ἧτοι φαρμάκοισιν ἢ μάγων τέχναις ἢ θεῶν κλοπαῖς, *Or.* 1494–1497).²⁶ The reference in this sentence to drugs and arts of the *magi* points to another avenue for the attainment of invisibility in the Greek and Roman imagination – magic spells. Pliny the Elder describes several different invisibility spells in the *Natural History* (37.60.165, 28.29.115),²⁷ and the *Greek Magical Papyri* (*PGM*), a collection of Greek and Demotic ritual texts from Egypt and dating to the third to fifth centuries AD,²⁸ contains ten invisibility spells (*P.Oxy.* LVIII 3931; *PGM* I 222–231; *PGM* I 247–262; *PGM* VII 619–622; *PGM* XIII 234–237; *PGM* XIII 267–269; *PGM* XIII 270–277; also see *PGM* I 42–195; *PGM* V 459–489; *PGM* XII 160–178).²⁹ Apollonius of Tyana appears to put such a spell to use

²² For examples from other cultures of magic objects that make their wearers invisible, see Pease (1942) 26 and Phillips (2009) 1 n. 3, 8–9, 9 n. 44.

²³ For references to the *Iliad* in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, see Harrison (2013e).

²⁴ The cap of Hades is also mentioned in Apollodorus 2.4.2–3 and Aristophanes, *Archarnians* 390; for further references, see Phillips (2009) 10–12.

²⁵ E.g., Cicero, *De Officiis* 3.37–39; for further references, see Phillips (2009) 13 and 16.

²⁶ The translation is Phillips (2009) 14.

²⁷ For the invisibility spells in Pliny, see Phillips (2009) 15–17 and Phillips (2011–2012).

²⁸ For a detailed yet concise discussion of the discovery, background, and dating of the *PGM*, see Betz (1992).

²⁹ While scholars are more interested in ancient magic than ever before, Phillips (2009) is the first major study of the invisibility spells in the extant magical papyri. Phillips (2009) 4 n. 20 surveys the few preceding studies that mention this material – Reitzenstein (1906) 133 n. 2; Abt (1908) 51–53;

when he “vanishes” from Domitian’s courtroom (ἡφανίσθη, Philostratus, *VA* 8.5), and other divine men have a similar power. Jesus “vanishes” from the sight of two companions on the road to Emmaus (αὐτὸς ἄφαντος ἐγένετο ἅπ’ αὐτῶν, Luke 24:31) and a mysterious figure from the third century AD, whom Cassius Dio calls a *daimon* and who claimed to be Alexander the Great, “disappears” after traveling through Thrace (ἄφανής ἐγένετο, Cassius Dio 80.18.1–3).³⁰ This brief survey represents just a fraction of the material from the Greco-Roman world. The depth and extent of ancient Mediterranean societies’ fascination with invisibility is illustrated in Richard Phillips’ commentary on the invisibility spells in the *PGM*, *In Pursuit of Invisibility: Ritual Texts from Late Roman Egypt* (2009), which builds on Arthur Pease’s article on divine and human invisibility (1942). Phillips not only discusses all the relevant Greek and Latin texts from Homer to Late Antiquity but also draws attention to the portrayal of invisibility in Egyptian literary texts and Christian sources.³¹

Interest in the acquisition and powers of invisibility arguably has only grown in the past two centuries thanks to scientific discoveries that opened up the microscopic and atomic realms beyond our senses and introduced us to dark matter, nanotechnology, and stealth and also thanks to the increasing pervasiveness of surveillance technologies.³² In 2006, in fact, scientists at Duke University created an “invisibility shield” (albeit one that works only for microwaves in two-dimensions), and research into “transformation optics” and materials that refract light is accelerating.³³ On top of this, invisibility still fascinates literary and visual artists. For example, H. G. Wells drew attention to the problems of becoming invisible in his classic novel, *The Invisible Man* (1897); J. R. R. Tolkien also highlighted the evil invisibility could produce in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) with Sauron’s ring of power; and Harry Potter uses an invisibility cloak on occasion in J. K. Rowling’s septology. Other recent writers have used invisibility as a metaphor for groups that are socially marginalized. For instance, Ralph Ellison employs the metaphor in *Invisible Man* (1952) to capture what it is like to be an African American in a society dominated by whites. China Miéville, in *The City & the City* (2009), imagines two

Weinreich (1929) 347; Pease (1942) 25; Smith (1978) 120–121, 200–201; Graf (1997) 24; Mirecki (2001) 173–180; Ogden (2002) 272–274 – and stresses that all these treatments are “cursory.” For invisibility magic after the Middle Ages, see Ball (2015) 9–51.

³⁰ For Jesus’ vanishing acts, see Smith (1978) 120–121 and Phillips (2009) 52–55.

³¹ For invisibility in Egyptian texts, including *Horus and Seth* and the Demotic *Setna and Sa-Osiris*, see Phillips (2009) 17–20.

³² For the interest in invisibility in modernity, see Ball (2015).

³³ For an introduction to the Duke University invisibility shield and the growing field of “transformation optics,” see Ball (2015) 255–282.

interwoven, overlapping cities called Beszel and Ul Qoma where inhabitants of one city have no visual and no physical contact with the people who live in the other city, drawing attention to how many people and things city-dwellers “unsee.” Lastly, the Chinese artist Liu Bolin is sometimes called the “Invisible Man” because of “Hiding in the City,” a series of photographs where Bolin is painted by his assistants so that he blends into his environment like a chameleon and becomes invisible.³⁴ Bolin embarked on this project after the Chinese government destroyed the Beijing art village, Suo Jia Cun, in 2005. Bolin states in an interview that this act “made me feel like people can exist or completely disappear,” and he also says, “I was a meaningless person according to society.”³⁵

However, in spite of the enduring fascination with invisibility, those who write about it in its modern contexts have trouble explaining what invisibility actually is. For example, Philip Ball near the start of his fascinating cultural and scientific history of invisibility, *Invisible: The Dangerous Allure of the Unseen* (2015), claims “there is no single view of what invisibility consists of, or where it resides. These ambiguities recur throughout the history of the invisible.”³⁶ What makes invisibility so hard to define? A person can disappear by becoming transparent, as Griffin does in H. G. Wells’ novel, and this does not seem problematic. However, is someone who is camouflaged and blends into the surroundings invisible? Is it appropriate to say that someone becomes invisible by employing random color schemes that dazzle and confuse those who try to see him? The larger question, here, is whether invisibility should be defined in strict optical terms, as a vanishing act. Or can the term be defined more broadly, as any instance where someone escapes notice and goes unobserved?

Invisibility is a slippery concept, but discussion of the rich trove of material in Greek, Latin, and Egyptian literary and technical texts by Phillips gives us a good sense of the different ways in which invisibility was conceived in the Mediterranean world when Apuleius was writing.³⁷ While invisibility is often imagined as a vanishing act in literary sources, as Phillips shows, the invisibility spells in the *PGM* indicate invisibility can be defined more broadly. As we proceed, it is worth bearing in mind that the *Metamorphoses* may draw on material from sources similar to the *PGM* and

³⁴ Images from Liu Bolin’s “Hiding in the City,” along with a biography of Bolin by Silvia Mattei and an assessment of his work by Philippe Dagen, can be found in Bolin (2014).

³⁵ For the quotes from Liu Bolin about the rationale behind “Hiding in the City,” images of this project, and a video of Bolin being painted, see www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/Liu-Bolin-the-Artist-Who-Makes-Himself-Invisible-166239236.html (accessed May 20, 2018).

³⁶ Ball (2015) 14.

³⁷ Pease (1942) exhibits extraordinary learning about invisibility, but he never explains how it is defined in the texts he discusses and says very little about the Greek and Latin terminology for invisibility. Accordingly, his article is not as useful as Phillips (2009).

that Apuleius knew quite a bit about magic, something very evident in the *Apology*.³⁸ According to Phillips, to become invisible in the context of the *PGM* means the practitioner “avoids the perceptions of others,” and he subsequently emphasizes that “however conceived, ‘invisibility’ in practice usually means going unnoticed or unobserved.”³⁹ Phillips stresses that invisibility can be attained in a number of different ways, “by (1) materially altering the body as in [*PGM* XIII 270–277], (2) invoking darkness as in [*PGM* XIII 267–269], and (3) physically affecting the eyes or perceptions of other people as in [*P. Oxy.* LVIII 3931].”⁴⁰ The spells, Phillips goes on to note, do not define invisibility as a vanishing act, although they assign this power to gods and other divine beings such as *daimones* (e.g., καὶ ἀφανῆς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, *PGM* I.95).⁴¹ Studies centered on subsequent time periods also favor the broader definition of invisibility. For example, according to Karl Morrison and Giselle de Nie in the introduction to *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (2005), “There are many kinds of invisibility, beings and ways of being beyond the range of physical vision.”⁴² And Ball, who focuses on modernity, also prefers a definition that includes disappearance through camouflage and confusion – what he calls “perceptual” invisibility.⁴³

This book operates on this premise that invisibility has many different manifestations, but what evidence is there that invisibility interests Apuleius? The most explicit references to invisibility in Apuleius’ corpus are found in the philosophical works; they reveal Apuleius’ familiarity with the Greek technical terminology for invisibility that was popular in Platonic and post-Platonic philosophical theology and also bring into focus the important fact that an equivalent terminology had not yet been developed in Latin. The passage in Apuleius’ corpus where this is most evident is the description of the supreme god in *On Plato*:

³⁸ For an argument that the *Metamorphoses* draws on ritual material from works similar to the *PGM*, see Winkler (1991) 224. Winkler suggests that Pamphile performs an *agoge* spell at *Met.* 3.18, a kind of erotic spell that is found throughout the *PGM* and that is supposed to force a potential love object (usually female, but in the case of the *Metamorphoses* a young Boeotian man) to her home. Faraone (1999) 38, 62 accepts Winkler’s reading. There is reason to be confident Apuleius was familiar with technical magical material. Gaisser (2008) 16 argues Apuleius’ knowledge of magic was expert; in support of this position, she claims Apuleius’ attack on Sicinius Aemilianus at *Ap.* 64.1–2 is “a magical curse if ever there was one,” a position many other scholars maintain, including Abt (1908) 303–306, Regen (1971) 94, Hijmans (1987) 422, and Hunink (1997) 169. Dickie (2001) 8–9 suggests the *Apology* is one of the few literary sources for the study of ancient magic written by someone with first-hand experience with magic.

³⁹ Phillips (2009) 24.

⁴⁰ Phillips (2009) 24; there are a number of spells, including *PGM* I 222–231 and *PGM* I 247–262, in which the practitioner’s conceptualization of invisibility is unclear, see Phillips (2009) 30.

⁴¹ Phillips (2009) 24–25. ⁴² Morrison and de Nie (2005) 2. ⁴³ Ball (2015) 237.