

If I were you, this thinksheet would not interest me much unless I were to put my own name in the place of yours. And as I think this meditation may have some boot for you if you read it slowly, please strike my name from the title and put your own, transposing as necessary as you go.

1. Here we have (Loeb Classical Library/46 & Collier/62 paper & a Penguin fresh translation by Robt. Graves) the only pagan novel from NT times. As novels more reflect than affect their times, here's a unique opportunity to peer into the pagan soul Paul (and the other evangelists in the pagan world) addressed, and to do so with one's whole being. From decades of teaching theological students, I must say that they (and many of their teachers) have not owned their bodies nor dis-owned (in our Lord's word, "lost") their souls (i.e., been converted, born again). I shudder that such multiply crippled creatures are spiritual guides! How helpful it could be for them to work through, in a c.e. group, the novel before us! For Lucius (both author and hero, the novel's "I") learns first to own his all and then to surrender it in conversion (not to Jesus but to Isis, the all-mother who integrates in him his feelings-anima, his philosophizing antipodal to his earth-mother-drivenness and his actual psychophysical experience of women, his fantasizings homo- and hetero-erotic, and his spiritual yearning with all its primitivity and sophistication. The novel is (to use a Paul XXIII title) THE JOURNEY OF A SOUL who makes an ass of himself (literally!), struggles to deliver himself back into humanity, and is saved forward into his centered dignity as a conscious creature.

2. While I've had in mind for at least five years the writing of this thinksheet, the actual occasion is my reading of a Jungian reading of it (a 900-p., now o.p. Spring/70 book of Marie-Louise vonFranz, A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE GOLDEN ASS OF APULEIUS) I became aware of when psychiatrist Gil Gordon loaned me his copy. As we humans have no transperspectival consciousness, I can't object to the author's running her number on this classic: every way of seeing the world is tested, refined, accepted-rejected on the basis of its digestive-illuminative power: Can it both comprehend (leaving nothing unexplained) and illumine (render plausible) (1) its own historic materials (e.g., the Bible) and (2) other ways of seeing the world (including their classics)? This is the hermeneutic question. I was pleasantly surprised at how consonant, at most points, vonFranz's interpretation of Lucius is with my own; and, here, I must set out of the way the fundamental disagreement with her (and all committed Jungians), viz. the reduction of the transcendent to the individual-collective psycho-interior, with perpetually threatened loss of society and therefore of history (as history is the usefully remembered experience of person-in-society). [vonFranz is upfront about this, though neither humble nor humorous: "With the key of Jung's psychology," I saw that "it could be interpreted in a coherent manner" (p.2), excising neither the pornography (as some edd.) nor the spirituality (as many modern edd.). Here is the Jungian power, to insist on integration (=["individual"]"individuation") against Manichean reductionism in either direction (for Jung was saying to his fellow Freudians, "It's what you are leaving out that is wrecking you"--yet he himself fell into another reductionism, introjecting his clergy-father's pulpit-church-religion in a psycho-imperialistic captivity of biblical religion).]

3. As also in the NT, we can see in this novel that that was a time of spiritual decay and of distrust in institutions--as is ours! Literature should be interpreted in light of the life which produced it (the main point of my Th.D. thesis), and this novel illumines much in the NT (e.g., read Paul's insistence on female head-covering [1Cor.11] in light of ASS chap.9, Lucius almost dead with lust upon seeing a slave-girl's naked hair; and Mars Hill's "cool" [ASS chap.44]; and Corinthian corruption [ASS chap.46]; and gospel origins [ASS chap.47, conversion with "fear, joy, and heavy sweat"]; and the I-am-all-the-characters-in-the-story way to interpret a parable of Lucius or Jesus, with "nothing impossible" in life in God [ASS chap.5].

4. Dirty-tricks department (12.16-18): Converts theologians to metaphysicians, then destroys them by great-mother-Kali eating them!