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INDEX

Anders Ahlqvist	Notes on the Silesian Lugi	5
Iiro Kajanto	Women's praenomina reconsidered	13
Saara Lilja	Odour sensations in the Roman novel . . .	31
Bengt Löfstedt	Zu Tatwines Grammatik	47
Martti Nyman	Ma(vo)lo — a generative approach.	67
Teivas Oksala	»Polymythia» in Pindars Aigineten-Oden . .	93
Tuomo Pekkanen	Tac.Germ. 2,3 and the name Germani . . .	107
Eeva Ruoff-Väänänen	The Roman public prodigia and the ager Romanus	139
Heikki Solin	Analecta epigraphica	163
Jaakko Suolahti	Princeps Senatus	207
Holger Thesleff	Colloquial style and its use in Plato's later works	219

ODOUR SENSATIONS IN THE ROMAN NOVEL

Saara Lilja

Ever since my attention was drawn, a few years ago, to Martial's extraordinary sensitivity to odours, both pleasant and unpleasant, I have been interested in the significance of smell to Latin and Greek poets. This theme proved so fruitful as to give rise to a whole book entitled *The Treatment of Odours in the Poetry of Antiquity*, which will be published in 1972.[1] Since the abundant wealth of material compelled me to restrict my study to poetry, I have been aware of neglecting one important field of literature, artistic prose, which is represented in antiquity above all by the novel. The present essay is devoted to an investigation into odour sensations as expressed in the novels of Petronius and Apuleius.

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In Petronius' description of Trimalchio vivid colours play a conspicuous part. Trimalchio's first acquaintance is made at a public bath where, in a *tunica russea*, he is playing ball *pila prasina* (27, 1—2), then, seated in a sedan chair, he wears a *coccina gausapa* (28, 4), and his *pallium coccineum* is one of the visual factors in the highly amusing general impression made by his entrance at the feast (32, 2—4).[2] Auditory sensations are equally important. The whole staff of servants perform their duties singing — *pantomimi chorum . . . crederes* (31, 7) — and Trimalchio himself, after imitating a band of trumpeters (64, 5), gives free vent to his musicality in his bath-room induced to this practice (like so many modern people) by its excellent acoustics: *diduxit usque ad cameram os ebrium et coepit Menecratis cantica lacerare* (73, 3).[3] Considering that smell is

[1] Probably in the *Commentationes Hum. Litt. Soc. Scient. Fenn.* For a fuller discussion of all, bibliographic and other, details dealt with in the present essay, see my future book.

[2] Compare the doorkeeper, *prasinatus, cerasino succinctus cingulo* (28, 8), and Fortunata, *galbino succincta cingillo, ita ut infra cerasina appareret tunica* (67, 4). The significance of colour is revealed in minor details too, such as the whipping of a slave because he had bandaged Trimalchio's injured arm *alba potius quam conchyliata . . . lana* (54, 4).

[3] Similarly, when he is being carried home from the bath, *ad caput eius cum minimis symphoniacus tibiis . . . toto itinere cantavit* (28, 5), and he makes his entrance at the feast *ad symphoniam* (32, 1).

the most primitive of our senses and that vulgar primitiveness is the very thing that characterizes Trimalchio and his colibertines, one might feel certain that olfactory sensations play the main role in *Trimalchio's Feast.* Let us examine whether such an assumption is correct.

The ancient custom of anointing one's hair and wearing a wreath around one's head at a symposium held after the dinner proper is illustrated by Habinnas, who arrives later, already intoxicated after attending another feast, *oneratusque aliquot coronis et unguento per frontem in oculos fluente* (65, 7).[1] Trimalchio, because of his snobbery not content with this general custom, had ordered — *inaudito more* as the narrator Encolpius says — a similar treatment to be given to the feet of the guests: *pedesque recumbentium unxerunt, cum ante crura talosque corollis vinxissent* (70, 8). The anointing of feet, customary in itself, was unprecedented at a banquet, not to mention Trimalchio's new mode of wearing garlands. A considerable amount of the liquid unguent meant for the pedicure was poured into the wine-container and the lamp (70, 9). While the perfuming of wine was no innovation of Trimalchio's,[2] there are not many examples of pouring scented oil into a lamp. The evil smell of lamp-oil was proverbial; Juvenal's *olebit lanternam* (5, 87 f.) describes a guest's miserable cabbage as compared with the superior Venafran oil that his host poured over his fine fish. When a boy, to acquire a beard more quickly, Trimalchio had to content himself with plain lamp-oil: *ut celerius rostrum barbatum haberem, labra de lucerna ungebam* (75, 10). Now, delighted at being able to afford expensive unguents, he even sends for the phial of nard reserved for his funeral and, anointing all the guests with it, expresses a wish *ut aeque me mortuum iuvet tamquam vivum* (78, 3).[3] In all these passages, Petronius attaches importance to perfumed ointments without, however, expressly describing their sweet scent.[4]

What about Petronius' detailed account of the manifold dishes served at Trimalchio's feast? Not only does the visual aspect predominate in these descriptions, starting from that of the hors d'oeuvre (31, 9—11), but the

[1] The plural *aliquot coronis*, especially in connection with *onerare*, is undoubtedly meant to be humorous, but it was not unheard of in antiquity to wear several garlands.

[2] See W. Younger, *Gods, men, and wine*, London 1966, 131 f. and 214.

[3] Thought of the phials of ointment located at the feet of his sepulchral statue calls forth a similar wish: *ut mihi contingat . . . post mortem vivere* (71, 6).

[4] The other passages dealing with unguents or perfumes are insignificant: at the bath Trimalchio *unguento perfusus tergebatur* (28, 2) and, when he returned to table after easing himself, *unguento manus lavit* (47, 1); *alabastra unguenti* are distributed among the guests as gifts (60, 3).

delicious smell of food is passed over in total silence. Even the rare descriptions of taste like *nescio quid boni* (33, 8) and *optime facta* (66, 2) are entirely colourless. Trimalchio's favourite spice, pepper,[1] was essential to the Roman cuisine in the first post-Christian century as can be seen from the cook-book of Apicius. Petronius was not perhaps equally attracted by its flavour, because he lets Encolpius abuse the cook who finally comes to recline beside him as *muria condimentisque fetentem* (70, 12). There is another negative observation upon spices in 60, 6, where the saffron spray squirting out of cakes and fruits if touched even lightly is called *molestus umor*, though the decisive factor here may be the unpleasant moment of surprise. The besprinkling of the floor with fragrant saffron liquid, one of the well-known ancient customs, is mentioned with sole regard to the visual effect: *scobemque croco et minio tinctam sparserunt* (68, 1).

Up to now we have found a single passage in the *Cena* where Petronius expressly describes an odour sensation, namely *cocum muria condimentisque fetentem* (70, 12). While the forceful verb *fetere* is here used in its strict sense, a kindred adjective *putidus* is employed in a more generally abusive way when it qualifies a circus acrobat (54, 1) or Trimalchio's bragging (73, 2). It is only in 34, 5, where Trimalchio explains why each guest has an own table, that *putidus* may have retained a trifle of its original meaning: *putidissimi servi minorem nobis aestum frequentia sua facient*. The bad smell of servants might be due to that of the kitchen or, because of their bustling to and fro, sweating.[2] Perspiration is mentioned twice, without any attention paid to its odour. In 62, 10 *sudor mihi per bifurcum volabat* expresses Niceros' great horror, and in 47, 1 *detersa fronte* alludes to Trimalchio's difficulties in easing himself, a topic which he analyses in detail in 47, 2—6. Here it is not smell, but auditory sensations that count: *circa stomachum mihi sonat, putes taurum* (3) and *rides, Fortunata, quae soles me nocte desomnem facere* (5). Urination is mentioned as a magical device (*circummingere* in 57, 3 and 62, 6) and in a playful formula together with drinking, *aquam foras, vinum intro* (52, 7) being explained by *caldum meiere et frigidum potare* (67, 10).[3] Odour is overlooked in these passages

[1] 33, 8; 36, 3; 38, 1; 49, 5 (together with cumin); 74, 5; in 44, 6—7 Safinius is called *piper, non homo*, because *quacumque ibat, terram adurebat*. The use of pepper is discussed by Younger 194 and J. André, *L'alimentation et la cuisine à Rome*, Paris 1961, 209.

[2] For the bad smell of cooking see *cocus fetens* above and Petr. 2, 1 below, p. 36. As for sweating, note *frequentia sua* and compare Hor. *Epist.* 1, 5, 29: *nimis arta premunt olidae convivia caprae*.

[3] The other instances of urination are abusive: *matella* about an adulteress (45, 8), *non*

and in a description of the slave-boy Croesus feeding his lap-dog with half-chewed bread, *nausea recusantem saginabat* (64, 6), *nausea* expressing repulsiveness in a general way.[1]

The unexpected conclusion is that Petronius, in *Trimalchio's Feast*, expressly treats an olfactory sensation only once. Apart from the cook stinking of brine and spices (70, 12), smell is mentioned in one other passage, in a matter-of-fact way, Trimalchio explaining why he prefers glass vessels to Corinthian bronze: *certe non olunt* (50, 7). Petronius may have meant this remark to be taken in a humorous vein, like Martial's jocular description of Mamurra as one who *consuluit nares an olerent aera Corinthon* (*Epigr.* 9, 59, 11), but actually metal articles often acquire a queer odour, which with different metals varies in character and intensity.[2]

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Let us next examine whether Petronius was more interested in describing odour sensations in the other fragments that are extant from his novel *Satyricon*.

The sexual adventures of the principal characters immediately preceding *Trimalchio's Feast* are likened to a wrestling-match: *palaestritae . . . nos legitimo perfusos oleo refecerunt* (21, 4). Plain oil seems to be an intended contrast to the catamite's abundant amount of perfumed hair-ointment: *perfluebant per frontem sudantis acaciae rivi* (23, 5).[3] It is only once that the odour of unguent is mentioned. When he tells a lie about how Encolpius and Giton had spent his money together with a girl and how he had dragged them away *mero unguentisque perfusos*, Eumolpus remarks: *adhuc patrimonii mei reliquias olent* (105, 3). One might think that Petronius here implies the bouquet of wine[4] — which certainly, however, had already changed into the following day's reek. The erotic significance of sweet scents revealed in the last two passages would be expected in the episode dealing with Circe, but Petronius' description of her beauty in 126, 15—18 is entirely restricted to visual points, and what he adds in 127, 5 is a praise of her beautiful voice. Furthermore, though the romantic

valet lotium suum (57, 3), and *tamquam mus in matella* (58, 9); compare *purgamentum* (74, 9), a term of abuse which Fortunata hurls at Trimalchio. For urination as a magical device see R. Muth, Urin, *RE*, Suppl. 11, 1292 ff.

[1] This noun is also used metaphorically: *ibat res ad summam nauseam* (78, 5). The metaphorical use of *subolfacere*, frequent in Roman comedy, is found in 45, 10.

[2] See R. W. Moncrieff, *The Chemical Senses*, 3rd ed., London 1967, 694.

[3] Similarly, *modica unctione* (130, 7) symbolizes Encolpius' efforts to restore his bodily condition.

[4] The Ephesian matron's maid is described by him as *vini odore corrupta* (111, 10).

scenery of the two love-scenes abounds in fragrant trees and flowers, their fragrance is not expressly mentioned. The scenery of the first rendezvous is compared in a poem to that of Jupiter's and Juno's as described by Homer (*Il.* 14, 347—349). While Homer speaks of fellblooms, saffrons and bluebells, Petronius writes:

> *emicuere rosae violaeque et molle cyperon,*
> *albaque de viridi riserunt lilia prato* (127, 9, 4—5).

The galingale is qualified by *mollis*, a word that expresses the sensation of touch,[1] whereas the verbs *emicare* and *ridere*, like the colour adjectives *albus* and *viridis*, convey a visual sensation. The odour of plants is also overlooked in the other poem that describes romantic love-scenery (131, 8), though the trees in question — laurel, cypress, and pine — are well known for their fragrance.[2] It is only in the description of the house of Priapus' priestess Oenothea that Petronius speaks of *odoratas . . . coronas* (135, 8, 13).

In the Circe episode there is one passage which deals with odours, although these are not sweet scents apt to heighten an erotic atmosphere, but bad smells condemned to arouse aversion. When, in spite of the thousand kisses, the lover turns out to be momentarily impotent, the offended belle exclaims: *numquid te osculum meum offendit? numquid spiritus ieiunio marcens? numquid alarum ⟨sum⟩ neglegens?* (128, 1). Circe's questions remind us of Ovid's instructions to women in Book III of the *Ars amatoria: cui gravis oris odor, numquam ieiuna loquatur* (277) and *quam paene admonui ne trux caper iret in alas* (193).[3] In the other passages where he speaks of sweating, Petronius does not refer to the odour of perspiration. Bad-smelling breath, on the other hand, is mentioned a few times, always connected with sexual abnormity. Encolpius abuses Ascyltos as *muliebris patientiae scortum, cuius ne spiritus ⟨quidem⟩ purus est* (9, 6). Elsewhere it is a catamite whose filthy kisses are stinking: *nos . . . basiis olidissimis inquinavit* (21, 2) and *immundissimo me basio conspuit* (23, 4). There is one further description of nasty 'breath' when the mercenary Corax, to give vent to his indignation, *tollebat subinde altius pedem et strepitu obsceno simul atque odore viam*

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[1] Compare *molles . . . herbas* in line 6 of this poem, *vario gramine* in 127, 8 representing visual perception. Another example of the importance of touch is *bracchiis mollioribus pluma* about Circe's arms (127, 8).

[2] The sensation of touch is expressed by *molles violas* in line 8. Circe's branch of fragrant myrtle, an attribute of Venus, is qualified as *florens* (131, 9).

[3] In the latter case Ovid playfully stops himself because he knows that his readers are not barbarians. Corresponding instructions to men are given in *Ars am.* 1, 519 f.

implebat (117, 12).[1] This scene of breaking wind is made all the more amusing by means of Giton's imitation: *singulos crepitus eius pari clamore prosequebatur* (117, 13). In the latter case Petronius contents himself with expressing the relevant auditory sensation.

In the field of imagery it is the visual point that prevails in Petronius' novel, to mention only *ne carmen quidem sani coloris enituit* (2, 8) and *controversiam sententiolis . . . pictam* (118, 2) as examples. There is, however, one longer passage where a comparison is based on gustatory and olfactory sensations.[2] At the very beginning of the extant part of the *Satyricon*, when he criticizes the teaching methods at schools of rhetoric, Encolpius says that all disciples turn out to be simpletons because they do not get anything but *mellitos verborum globulos et omnia dicta factaque quasi papavere et sesamo sparsa* (1, 3). Immediately after these metaphors derived from the sphere of taste there follows, with a play on the double sense of *sapere*, a comparison concerned with the smell of cooking: *qui inter haec nutriuntur non magis sapere possunt quam bene olere qui in culina habitant* (2, 1). This shows again, like the stinking cook in 70, 12, that Petronius did not appreciate the smell of food.

Considering that the *Cena Trimalchionis* is about half of the extant novel, its two descriptions of odour are few when compared with the nine mostly more detailed ones that are found in the other extracts.

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It will be of special interest to study those descriptions of odour in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius that are found in *Lucius or the Ass*, the extant abbreviated version of the Greek original, and, though the original is lacking, to attempt a comparison between the parallel passages.[3] I start with the erotic episodes which deal with Palaestra/Photis and the rich matron who fell in love with the Ass-Man.

In *Lucius or the Ass*, when the love-affair with Palaestra is about to start, she tells the young man to take to flight, *ὡς πολλοῦ πυρὸς καὶ κνίσης μεστά* (6), and though speaking of the kitchen fire she really means the fire of love.

[1] In Greek comedy, especially in the plays of Aristophanes, breaking wind is frequently used as a sign of contempt.

[2] Compare the metaphorical use of *olfacere* in 93, 3 with *subolfacere* above, p. 34, n. 1.

[3] The latest discussion of the relationship between the abridged version and Apuleius' novel is by P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel*, Cambridge 1970, 145—180. Walsh says about the author of the Greek original that »arguments from the traditional attribution and from stylistic features make Lucian an attractive candidate» (146).

Instead of emphasizing this point, Apuleius stresses *κνῖσα*, the savoury smell of cooking, when he describes the beginning of the episode concerning Photis: *quod naribus iam inde hariolabar, tuccetum perquam sapidissimum* (2, 7, 2). There follows, as a sort of digression, a long and enthusiastic eulogy of hair, that item of female beauty which seems to have been of paramount importance to the author.[1] He praises the *nitor nativus* of hair (2, 8, 3) and remarks that Venus herself, if bald, could not attract anybody though she were *cinnama fraglans et balsama rorans* (2, 8, 6), but on another occasion, when describing the lustre of hair, he speaks favourably of *guttis Arabicis* (2, 9, 3). It is the visual sensation that he repeatedly underlines: *color gratus et nitor splendidus inlucet . . . fulgurat . . . renitet* (2, 9, 1) and, when referring to Photis' hair, *renidentibus crinibus* (3, 19, 5). Photis' breath, on the other hand, is expressly qualified as sweet-smelling like cinnamon, *patentis oris inhalatu cinnameo*, and her tongue gives a delicious sensation of taste in kissing, *occursantis linguae inlisu nectareo* (2, 10, 4), as does Venus' lingual kiss called *mellitum* (6, 8, 3). When he speaks of her *fraglantibus papillis* (3, 19, 5), Apuleius means either Photis' personal sweet odour or a perfumed unguent she uses. The first of these alternatives seems more probable since it is her unadorned appearance he praises[2] and since he does not connect the use of unguents even with the first night of the loving couple. In *Lucius or the Ass*, when she likens a love-night to a wrestling-match, Palaestra does mention the erotically significant use of perfumed ointment: *ἔκδυσαι καὶ ἀλειψάμενος ἔνθεν ἐκ τοῦ μύρου συμπλέκου τῷ ἀνταγωνιστῇ* (9).[3] Both authors attach importance to the role of roses, the flowers of love, during that night without, however, expressly mentioning their sweet scent: *τῶν δὲ στρωμάτων ῥόδα πολλὰ κατεπέπαστο, τὰ μὲν οὕτω γυμνὰ καθ' αὑτά, τὰ δὲ λελυμένα, τὰ δὲ στεφάνοις συμπεπλεγμένα* (7) is reflected in Apuleius' description of Photis, who comes *rosa serta et rosa soluta in sinu tuberante* (2, 16, 1).

In the episode dealing with the rich lady who fell in love with Lucius, the ass, flowers are not mentioned among the preparations for the love-night,[4] but perfumed unguent plays an important part. This is the Greek writer's

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[1] Note, for example, Lucius' oath to Photis: *adiuro per dulcem istum capilli tui nodulum, quo meum vinxisti spiritum* (3, 23, 2).

[2] He says about her hair that *inordinatus ornatus addebat gratiam* (2, 9, 6); compare 2, 16, 7. For Ovid's similar view see Lilja, *The Roman Elegists' Attitude to Women*, Helsinki 1965, 129.

[3] Note also *πάραψαι τὸ λοιπὸν καὶ καταμάττου* at the end of § 10. Petronius, too, likens amorous fighting to wrestling (21, 4): see above, p. 34.

[4] Perhaps the lady was afraid that her beau might then be too much attracted by eating.

narration: *μύρον ἔκ τινος ἀλαβάστρου προχεαμένη τούτῳ ἀλείφεται, κἀμὲ δὲ μυρίζει ἔνθεν, μάλιστα τὴν ῥῖνά μου μύρων ἐνέπλησεν* (51). Apuleius' version is almost literal: *multo sese perungit oleo balsamino meque indidem largissime perfricat, sed multo tanta impensius etiam nares perfundit meas* (10, 21, 1). Both authors pay special attention to the anointing of the ass's nostrils,[1] and both clearly acknowledge the erotic significance of fragrance, *τῷ χρίσματι τοῦ μύρου οἰστρημένος* (51) being repeated in *unguento fraglantissimo prolubium libidinis suscitaram* (10, 21, 4). The description of the lady's dinner with Lucius after he had regained his human form, a turn of the story which is omitted by Apuleius, is brief and conventional: *πολὺ ἐκ τοῦ μύρου ἀλείφομαι καὶ στεφανοῦμαι τῷ . . . ῥόδῳ* (56).

The writer of *Lucius or the Ass* and Apuleius narrate the episode concerning the lady and the ass in a similar manner and with considerable literal agreement, but their treatments of the other amorous episode are very different. Walsh rightly points out that »whereas Palaestra is no more than a gratifying means to an end, Apuleius' Photis enchants the hero with her physical attractions» (152), and we may add that one of Photis' attractions as described by Apuleius is her fragrance. In order to decide whether this was the Roman novelist's own addition or whether it possibly derived from the Greek original, let us examine the tale of Cupid and Psyche, which is known to be wholly independent.

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In Apuleius' description of Cupid such as Psyche sees him for the first time, *corpus glabellum atque luculentum* (5, 22, 7) does not necessarily imply that the god's whole body was anointed, but *caesariem ambrosia temulentam* (5, 22, 5) shows that at least his hair was fragrant after being oiled with ambrosia. Robertson and Vallette comment upon the latter passage: »Dans les poèmes homériques, l'ambroisie est la nourriture, le nectar le breuvage des dieux. Apulée en fait une liqueur: ici, c'est un parfum.»[2] This comment does not hold good, for as early as Homer the distinction between nectar and ambrosia is vague and each can be used as a perfume.[3] We know from the story of

[1] For an explanation of the custom of anointing one's nostrils, which is mentioned already by Hipponax, see fr. 190 of Alexis (Kock).

[2] Apulée, *Les Métamorphoses* II, 3rd ed., Paris 1958 (Coll. des Univ. de France), 61, n. 1.

[3] See, for example, *Il.* 14, 170 ff. and 19, 38 f. The earliest instance of the power of ambrosia to make mortal beings immortal, which Apuleius mentions in 6, 23, 5, is from the Homeric hymn to Demeter (235—238).

Photis that Apuleius was particularly attracted by the beauty of hair, his chief interest lying in visual qualities. Similarly, in the description of Cupid's hair, he speaks of *splendore nimio fulgurante* (5, 22, 5) as a result of Venus' treatment: *comas quas istis manibus meis subinde aureo nitore perstrinxi* (5, 30, 6). It is, however, the fragrance of Cupid's hair — *cinnameos* (5, 13, 3) — that, naturally enough, is praised by Psyche before she has even seen him. Venus is characterized as *fraglans balsama* (6, 11, 1) when she returns from a banquet, and at the wedding of Cupid and Psyche the Graces *spargebant balsama* (6, 24, 3). Proserpina's divine beauty, *divina formositas*, conceived of as an unguent to be brought to Venus in a small pyxis (6, 16, 4 and 6, 19, 7)[1] is reminiscent of a passage in the *Odyssey* where Athene washes Penelope's face *κάλλεϊ . . . ἀμβροσίῳ, οἵῳ . . . Κυθέρεια χρίεται* (18, 192—194).

We have seen that in the story of Cupid and Psyche only gods and goddesses are qualified as fragrant. When Psyche's jealous sisters say of her *deam spirat* (5, 9, 7), they do not refer to any specific odour of divinity, but are accusing her of haughtiness. I think that it is characteristic of a folk-tale to make such a big difference between the human and the divine. The erotic significance of sweet scents is revealed by Psyche's appreciation of Cupid's fragrant hair, by the perfumed unguents of Venus, the goddess of love, and by the balms sweetening the celestial wedding. It seems, then, that the fragrance of Photis might reflect Apuleius' own personal interest in the treatment of odour sensations.

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Flowers are naturally associated with a love-story ever since Homer's description of Zeus' and Hera's rendezvous in *Il.* 14, 347—349. Psyche, too, is put down by Zephyrus *florentis cespitis gremio* (4, 35, 4) and by the gentle river *super ripam florentem herbis* (5, 25, 2). The odour is not expressly mentioned in these passages, and at the wedding of Cupid and Psyche it is the colour of roses and other flowers — *purpurabant* — that Apuleius points out (6, 24, 3). Similarly, in the description of Venus coming from a banquet *totum . . . revincta corpus rosis micantibus* (6, 11, 1), the verb *micare* denotes a visual sensation. One might think that the cypress was purposely chosen by Apuleius because of its fragrance for Cupid to fly upon when he bids farewell to Psyche (5, 24, 2), were it not that an old crone, the house-keeper of the robbers' band, hangs

[1] Note also the verbs *delinere* (6, 16, 5) and *delibare* (6, 20, 6).

herself from a cypress (6, 30, 6). This tree simply seems to have been the author's favourite.[1]

The rose, of all flowers, plays a prominent part in the *Metamorphoses*, because the ass is destined to regain his human shape by eating roses. Without entering into a discussion of the symbolic value of that flower as an attribute of the goddess of love, let us examine the passages where it is mentioned. The writer of *Lucius or the Ass* speaks of *ῥόδων χλωρῶν φύλλα* (54), fresh rose-petals, at the decisive moment when the ass is about to eat them in order to become human, but elsewhere he does not attach any epithets to the rose. In the *Metamorphoses* there is a detailed description of rose-bushes which turn out to be rose-laurels (4, 2).[2] Apuleius pays most attention to the colour of the flowers: *fulgentium rosarum mineus color renidebat* (1), *floris genialis regius nitor relucebat* (2), and *caliculos modice punicantes* (7). These observations are interspersed by his remark about the rose being the flower of Venus: *Veneris et Gratiarum lucum illum arbitrabar* (2) and *rosas . . . madidas divini roris et nectaris* (5). The rose's scent is not mentioned until the ass recognizes his error because the flowers of the rose-laurel, though looking like fragrant roses,[3] are *fraglantes minime* (7). In a charming description of spring, after vividly expressed visual sensations, Apuleius also speaks of the scent of the rose: *quod ver in ipso ortu iam gemmulis floridis cuncta depingeret et iam purpureo nitore prata vestiret et . . . spirantes cinnameos odores promicarent rosae* (10, 29, 2).[4]

In all other passages roses, and flowers in general, are mentioned without any attention being paid to their odour. Sometimes Apuleius refers to the colour, as when the tunic of Isis is described as *croceo flore lutea* and *roseo rubore flammida* (11, 3, 5), but mostly he omits even that detail and, for example, simply speaks of *floribus sertis et solutis* (4, 29, 4) brought to Psyche, who was adored as a new Venus (compare 10, 32, 2). Metaphors derived from the colour or freshness of flowers are used by Apuleius considerably more often than by the writer of *Lucius or the Ass*. While the latter has scarcely anything but *ἱμάτια ἀνθινά* (4), Apuleius, whose version of that particular passage is the richer *floridae vestis hilaris color* (2, 8, 3), employs a whole scale of various shades.[5] Here is a selection of the most conspicuous turns of phrase: *floridis palmulis* (2, 7, 3), *gloriam satis floridam* (2, 12, 5), *nuntio . . . laeta florebat*

[1] Another passage where the cypress is mentioned in a wholly insignificant way is 8, 18, 4.
[2] The rose-laurel is probably *Nerium Oleander*; according to others, *Rhododendron*.
[3] In spite of textual difficulties, the sense of *in ⟨odori⟩ modum floris* is clear.
[4] The rose was the typical spring flower: *veris initio pratis herbantibus rosas* (7, 15, 1).
[5] Once, however, it is the Greek author who describes how the ass's coat *ἐπανθούσῃ τῇ τριχὶ ἀπέστιλβεν* (47), Apuleius only speaking of *liberali nitore* (10, 15, 3).

(5, 12, 1), *oves . . . auri vero decore florentes* (6, 11, 5), *sole florido* (8, 15, 8), and *virenti florentes aetatula* (10, 29, 4). In a description of autumn, which deals with grapes and other fruits, Apuleius connects olfactory with visual sensations: *cum mustulentus autumnus maturum colorem adflaverit* (2, 4, 8).

The cult of Isis is characterized by Apuleius not only by large quantities of flowers,[1] but also by an abundance of perfumed unguents. Isis herself is *spirans Arabiae felicia germina* (11, 4, 3), and, when her cortege passes by, the spectators *ceteris unguentis et geniali balsamo guttatim excusso conspargebant plateas* (11, 9, 3). The female initiates have *crines madidos* owing to perfumed hair-oil,[2] and this is also the natural interpretation for *verticem praenitentes*, an epithet of the bald-headed male initiates (11, 10, 1). The account of Isis' sacred ship attaches equal importance to sweet scents: *vannos onustas aromatis et huiusce modi suppliciis certatim congerunt* (11, 16, 9). In these passages Apuleius expresses an odour sensation in clear words only when he describes the goddess herself. There are two other passages where smell, though connected with a visual impression, seems to be the predominant factor. Charite is recalling her late husband: *adhuc . . . facies pulchra illa in meis deversatur oculis, adhuc odor cinnameus ambrosei corporis per nares meas percurrit* (8, 9, 6). In my opinion, the vigorously expressed olfactory sensation *adhuc . . . per nares meas percurrit*, rather than the more conventional *in meis oculis*, makes her exclaim: *adhuc . . . in meo vivit pectore*. The other description of odour marks the end of the mythological pantomime dealing with Paris and the three goddesses: *in excelsum prorumpit vino crocus diluta sparsimque defluens pascentis circa capellas odoro perpluit imbre* (10, 34, 2). After a detail which expresses the visual point, the white goats being changed into saffron yellow, the above adjective *odorus* is resumed by the phrase *tota suave fraglante cavea*.[3]

Apuleius probably means by *oleum*, the oil for anointing the body after a bath, unperfumed olive-oil (1, 23, 8 and 4, 7, 5). Its Greek equivalent ἔλαιον is used in *Lucius or the Ass* of the magical unguent which changed Hipparchus' wife into an eagle-owl (12), Apuleius calling it *unguedo* (3, 21, 4), *unctulum* (3, 22, 5), and *unctum* (3, 24, 2).[4] Neither of the authors speaks of the possible odour of this ointment. On the other hand, both mention the

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[1] See 11, 3, 4; 4, 1; 6, 1; 9, 2; 13, 2.

[2] In accordance with his special liking (see above, p. 37), Apuleius begins the description of Isis with a praise of her hair (11, 3, 4); note also 11, 9, 3.

[3] Apuleius attaches one new trait to the custom of besprinkling theatrical scenes with saffron liquid: the basis of the dilution is wine, instead of water. For *per latentem fistulam* compare Sen. Luc. 90.

[4] The other Greek terms are φάρμακον (13) and χρῖσμα (54).

burning of incense as an important magical rite. The Greek writer simply says that the witch threw two grains of frankincense into the flame of the lamp, but Apuleius, after mentioning *omne genus aromatis* as part of the magical equipment (3, 17, 4), gives a detailed account of the process (3, 18, 2—4).[1] The witch puts her beloved's coils of hair *cum multis odoribus . . . vivis carbonibus adolendos*, and it is the very odour, *nidor*, that brings about the miracle: *corpora, quorum fumabant stridentes capilli . . . qua nidor suarum ducebat exuviarum, veniunt.*[2] The witch's *odores* suggest that the magical unguent, too, may have been odorous. As a matter of fact there are several passages in ancient poetry that corroborate such an assumption.[3] Even the supernatural power of the witch herself was perhaps thought to be due to the odour of her breath. Apuleius' words about Lucius' hostess Pamphile seem to hint in that direction: *surculis et lapillis et id genus frivolis inhalatis omnem istam lucem mundi sideralis imis Tartari . . . submergere novit* (2, 5, 4). A sweet scent, as is well known, was believed to characterize gods and all divine things, and Hippolytus' address to Artemis *θεῖον ὀδμῆς πνεῦμα* (Eurip. *Hippol.* 1391) illustrates the fact that the specific divine odour and the breath of a divinity could be combined into one notion.[4]

It is all the more natural to think that a magical unguent was odorous since most medicines did emit a smell, usually an offensive one. When fretting about her husband's arthritis, Psyche's sister speaks of *fomentis olidis et pannis sordidis et fetidis cataplasmatibus* (5, 10, 1). Sulphur, which was used as a means of purification, is notorious for its pungent stench.[5] Apuleius narrates a story of a young lover who, thrust by his mistress *viminea cavea, quae . . . lacinias . . . fumo sulpuris inalbabat*, was suffocated *acerrimo gravique odore* (9, 24, 2—3). The evil smell caused by dirtiness is mentioned in the *Metamorphoses* when the ass grumbles about the *manum . . . fetore sordentem* and the *putidis . . . digitis* of those who were fingering at his mouth (8, 23, 4). Perhaps both *fetor* and *putidus* might be regarded here as abusive more generally like *clandestinae*

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[1] This may be Apuleius' own invention rather than taken from the Greek original; the *Apologia*, or *Pro de se magia*, shows why he was so greatly interested in magic in the *Metamorphoses*.

[2] Those that come are he-goats, for Photis had brought her mistress tufts from their fleeces, instead of the coils of hair she could not get.

[3] Medea's magical herbs, for example, are odorous: see fr. 491 of Sophocles (Nauck), Apoll. Rhod. 4, 158 f., and Ov. *Metam.* 7, 236 f.

[4] Apuleius' *spiraculum Ditis* (6, 18, 2), too, may imply the sensation of a deadly odour, as probably does the Homeric epithet of Hades, *εὐρώεις* (*Il.* 20, 64 f.; *Od.* 10, 512 and 23, 322).

[5] Actually sulphur itself is odourless, but when burning it forms sulphur dioxide, which emits an acrid smell. Apuleius mentions the ritual purification of Isis' ship by means of sulphur (11, 16, 6).

veneris fetidi . . . concubitus (5, 18, 3) and *spurcissima illa propudia* (8, 29, 4).[1] Purely abusive is not only *rancidi senis* (1, 26, 7), but also *putres isti tui pedes* (6, 30, 5) hurled by one of the robbers at the ass who pretends to be limping. In 6, 18, 8 *putres . . . manus* really signifies hands in a state of decay since the old man in question is dead, though an olfactory sensation is not implied. On the other hand, the stink of decomposition — *fetore nimio nares aestu⟨abit⟩* — serves as an aggravating factor in the robbers' plan to sew the young girl alive into the emptied stomach of the killed ass (6, 32, 2).[2] Apuleius is clever at inventing macabre punishments: in another case the culprit's body is anointed with honey, and ants, attracted by its sweet scent, eventually kill the victim with their burning stings (8, 22, 5—7). It is surprising that the fragrance of honey is described by means of *nidor*, which usually means the savoury smell of roasted meat. In 1, 21, 8 *nidor* is used in the pejorative sense of the smell of cooking when Lucius expresses his delight at living in miserly Milo's house where he need not fear *nec fumi nec nidoris nebulam.*[3]

In 4, 3, 10 *nidor* signifies a much more offensive smell to which the ass took recourse in self-defence against those who were whipping him: sick of diarrhoea after a surfeit of raw vegetables, he drives away his torturers, *quosdam extremi liquoris aspergine alios putore nidoris fetidi.* The threefold expression of stench, *putor nidoris fetidi*, is very much stronger than the Greek text's simple *κάτωθεν ἐξεμέσαι* (18).[4] Apuleius was so delighted at this scatological theme that he applied it once more, in 7, 28, 3—4, where the ass soils an old woman's face and eyes *liquida fimo strictim egesta* so that, *caecitate atque fetore*, she had to take to flight. The other passages in the *Metamorphoses* dealing with faeces are brief and colourless (1, 2, 3 and 1, 12, 2), without any attention to odour, but there is a vivid account of the urination of the witches — *super faciem meam residentes* (1, 13, 8) as the narrator says self-pityingly. First we are told of *urinae spurcissimae madore*, then explicitly of *odore . . . spurcissimi humoris* and *fetor extremae latrinae* (1, 17, 5—6).[5] Perspiration may conclude our discussion of bodily secretions. Apuleius speaks of sweating caused by bodily

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[1] Note that the metaphorical expression *contorta* or *detorta nare* (7, 9, 2 and 8, 26, 3) is derived from our reaction to an offensive smell.

[2] The Greek author writes: *τῇ τε ὀδμῇ καὶ τοῖς σκώληξι πεφυρμένη* (25). Maggots are mentioned by Apuleius, too (6, 32, 1).

[3] There are very few descriptions of taste in the *Metamorphoses* (only 4, 7, 4 and 10, 13, 3), a fact which also characterizes Petronius' *Cena:* see above, p. 33.

[4] The usual sense of *ἐξεμέω* is 'vomit'.

[5] Note also the vivid comparison describing the immorality of the miller's wife: *ut in quandam caenosam latrinam in eius animum flagitia confluxerant* (9, 14, 3).

exercise (1, 2, 3 and 2, 32, 7) or he associates cold sweat with horror (1, 13, 1 and 10, 10, 1); in 11, 7, 1 it is the profound emotion of awe and joy in the presence of Isis that makes Lucius, the ass, perspire excessively. When he speaks of perspiration, Apuleius never associates smell with it.

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Let us summarize what we have discovered in this essay. Unexpectedly odour plays a very insignificant part in the *Cena Trimalchionis* of Petronius as compared with the vivid descriptions of visual and auditory sensations. In the other extracts that remain from the *Satyricon* the author is more interested in conveying olfactory impressions. Secondly, since Apuleius attaches special importance to the erotic significance of fragrance in the tale of Cupid and Psyche, which is independent of the Greek original, it seems that the sweet scents characterizing Photis, who is the heroine of the first part of the *Metamorphoses*, reflect his own personal liking — this trait is lacking at least in the abridged Greek version. Charite also reveals Apuleius' interest in treating fragrance as a powerful erotic factor. Petronius, on the other hand, does not pay any attention to the erotic significance of sweet scents in Circe's amorous adventure with Encolpius. On the contrary, in a realistic manner Circe speaks of bad smells hampering an erotic atmosphere, such as bad breath and perspiration in the arm-pits.

Apuleius thus proves to be the more romantic of the two Roman novelists. This romantic impression is heightened by his interest in flowers, not unexpectedly because the rose acts as the decisive factor in the intrigue, although the rose's scent is expressly mentioned only a couple of times. It is the colour of roses and other flowers that enchants Apuleius more, and in metaphors derived from flowers, which he employs considerably frequently, it is also their colour or freshness that counts. There are, however, several descriptions of sweet scents in the *Metamorphoses*, for example the fragrant saffron liquid perfuming the theatre.

In spite of his romantic inclinations, Apuleius can be a fast realist when he describes the evil-smelling compresses of Psyche's sister's husband or the hideous stink of the ass's carcass, not to mention the reek of the witches' urine and the *putor nidoris fetidi* of the ass sick with diarrhoea. Such descriptions are wholly lacking from the abridged Greek text, but Petronius does speak of the evil smell of breaking wind and the nasty kisses of sexual perverts, and in the only vivid description of odour in the *Cena Trimalchionis* the cook is

characterized as stinking of brine and spices. These realistic traits of Petronius and Apuleius obviously connect the Roman novel with Roman satire,[1] but before arriving at a final conclusion we ought to study not only the character of olfactory sensations as treated in Roman satire, but also the treatment of odour in the Greek novel.[2]

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[1] Walsh, in Chapter II entitled »The Formative Genres» (7—31), discusses some points of contact between Roman satire and the novel.

[2] I am planning another essay on the part played by odour in the Greek novel, and Roman satire will be dealt with in my future book indicated in the preface of the present essay.