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(Article begins on next page)

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The wisdom of the eagle: a (Middle) Platonic reading of Apuleius, *Florida* 2

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Abstract

The eagle of *Florida* 2 is the literary synthesis of many Homeric eagles. The description of this raptor is not only a display of erudition and rhetorical technique, but reflects Middle-Platonic thought on the animal's λόγος. The use of Homer, in addition to stylistically ennoble the described subject, documents the relationship between the eagle and the divine that is emphasized by Plutarch and Aelius Aristides and also occurs more than once in Apuleius' macro-text. The reference to *Odyssey* 6.42–46, which connects the ascent of the raptor to celestial heights with the Platonic motif of the *Himmelfahrt*, is particularly significant in this regard. The description of the downward flight of the eagle, based on several Homeric passages, emphasizes the lightning speed and the infallibility that are also pertinent to divine intelligence, which is capable, as Maximus of Tire observes, of catching its target anywhere and with the raptness of a glance.

Keywords: Animal's mind, Perception, Apuleius, Homer, Platonism

Florida 2, similarly to the other epideictic excerpts from the same collection, presents a small enigma: the text available to us focuses on the difficulty of accessing knowledge through the senses. In this speech, Apuleius discusses how Socrates needed sharpness of intellect, not of vision, to judge human beauty. If visual judgment were superior to intellectual, humans would have to yield the primacy for wisdom to the eagle: whereas human sight is limited, the eagle can spot its prey from a great height and swoop down on it like a thunderbolt. Intellectual knowledge is possible for humans only through hearing because the sense of sight is too weak; not so for the eagle, which Apuleius introduces *ex contrario* as an example of a creature endowed with excellent sight.

We can only speculate about the subsequent development of the argument: the *communis opinio* is that the discourse proceeds with the importance of eloquence, which, coupled with philosophical knowledge, offers the possibility of accessing deeper knowledge through listening.[1] However, in the absence of the complete version, the fact that half the extant text (*Flor.* 2.8–11) is devoted to the description of the eagle is striking; this emphasis is usually justified as a display of the

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[1] On this point all recent commentaries follow Hijmans 1994, 1733, except La Rocca 2005, 144, who thinks that the text focuses on the figure of the rhetorician.

sophist's skill in performing the rhetorical exercise of *ekphrasis*. If it is not possible to know with certainty how the text developed, we may perhaps add some elements to the interpretation of the part that we can read, examining it in the light of (Middle) Platonic thought in the early Imperial age. Particularly interesting, from this point of view, are the Homeric references, which are concentrated above all in the *ekphrasis* of the eagle. It is worth noting that the second part of *Florida* 2 (6–11) includes almost all the Homeric traces found in the extant collection. If we consider the sapiential role that the Middle-Platonic reflection attributed to Homer, such reminiscences can be an interesting path to follow in order to explore the context from which the image of the eagle emerges and to explain the privileged attention given to this subject.

1. Senses at stake: sight and hearing

At this point it is advisable to go back to the text, where the topic of the limits of perception is introduced through a Platonic reference; we encounter, in fact, an anecdote – the source is uncertain[2] – about Socrates (*Flor.* 2.1–2), claiming that he is not really able to know a person without listening to him (*tacentem hominem non videbat*). The idea that, in order to truly *see* someone – in the emphatic sense of recognizing his ethical and intellectual qualities – we must listen to him, is then further pointed out through the rewriting of a verse from Plautus. The statement of a vainglorious soldier in *Truc*. 489: *Pluris est oculatus testis unus quam auriti decem* ('One witness furnished with eyes is worth more than ten witnesses furnished with ears', trans. De Melo 2013) is semantically reversed by Apuleius with a minimal formal retouching: *Pluris est* ***auritus*** *testis unus quam* ***oculati*** *decem* ('One witness furnished with *ears* is worth more than ten witnesses furnished with *eyes*', my trans.). Such rewriting has to be placed against the background of Apuleius' reception of comedy, a complex phenomenon involving the whole Apuleian macro-text, including the philosophical works, where the comic voices sometimes resound to act as a counterpoint to the philosopher's voice.[3] In this case the rewriting is aimed at correcting, by overturning them, the beliefs of the common man[4], represented here by a comic stock-character. In fact, resorting to comic figures (the φαῦλοι, as Aristotle puts it in

[2] Cf. Opeku 1974, 55.

[3] In *Soc*. 11, p. 21 Moreschini (for Apuleius' *philosophica* I will refer to Moreschini 1991, but I will adopt the division into paragraph of Magnaldi 2020), Plaut. *Mil*. 4 is paraphrased: here the *miles* tells a truth he is not aware of; in *Soc*. 20,2, the common words of a *meretrix* from Ter. *Eu*. 454 are opposed to the expressions of Socrates, who is inspired by his daemon, cf. Portogalli Cagli 1992, 78, n. 27.

[4] As Luca Graverini reminds me (*per litteras*), the superiority of sight is also a historiographical *cliché* (Graverini 2007, 158-165). Moreover, as my anonymous reviewer rightly observes, in the *Florida* Apuleius seems very much concerned with sight; he is, however, no less concerned with hearing (*e.g. Flor*. 3, 4, 13, 17). Certainly in the collection the tension between the rhetorical need to convey sensory images through *ekphrasis* and a philosophical culture that distrusts sensoriality produces a complex (and sometimes paradoxical) balance. A serous investigation on this point would exceed the space granted to this contribution. Undoubtedly in *Flor*. 2, as in other cases within the same philosophical horizon (*e.g.* in Plutarch's *De audiendo*), hearing appears to be the best channel of access to knowledge, at least for human beings.

Po. 1449a) as bearers of widespread opinions, but in contrast with the philosopher's discourse, is traditional: Seneca, in *De beneficiis* 1.2.1, quotes the lines of an unnamed comic poet who expresses the commonly held belief that benefits are generally not rewarded; Seneca then comments on the verses, correcting their meaning.[5] His purpose is to propose a new definition of *beneficium*, different from the current one. Unlike Seneca, Apuleius does not limit himself to correcting the quotation by commenting on it; rather he adapts the Plautine verse to his needs with a correction aimed both at appropriating and contrasting the original sense. In other words, he makes a counterintuitive concept acceptable, just as Seneca did. Indeed, up to this point, a crucial passage of the speech has remained implicit: sensory perception is an imperfect channel for accessing knowledge, which can be fully obtained only through the intellect. Hence the following statement: *si magis pollerent oculorum quam animi iudicia profecto de sapientia foret aquilae concedendum* ('Besides, if visual judgment were superior to intellectual, no doubt we would have to yield the primacy for wisdom to the eagle', trans. Jones 2017). What is decisive for gaining access to wisdom is thus the judgment of the Platonic soul (*animus*), which is distinct from and superior to the senses.[6]

2. Rational animals in (Middle) Platonism

The process of overcoming the senses to achieve intellectual understanding is a recurring topic in Middle Platonism. In this regard, Plutarch quotes more than once an enigmatic sentence, traditionally attributed to Epicharmus: νοῦς ὁρῇ καὶ νοῦς ἀκούει, τἆλλα κωφὰ καὶ τυφλά, ('mind has sight and mind has hearing; everything else is deaf and blind').[7] The same sentence is reported by Maximus of Tyre (*Or.* 11.10) and is interpreted by both Maximus and Plutarch as a recognition of the fundamental role played by the νοῦς in completing the process of knowledge.[8]

Typically, the development of this concept involves the comparison among the different ways of knowing of different living beings: the gods, who live in the highest part of the cosmos, use only

[5] Sen. *Ben*. 1.2.1: '*beneficia in volgus cum largiri institueris, / perdenda sunt multa, ut semel ponas bene*' [*fr. inc*. 83-84 Ribbeck[3]]. *In priore versu utrumque reprehendas; nam nec in volgum effundenda sunt, et nullius rei, minime beneficiorum, honesta largitio est; quibus si detraxeris iudicium, desinunt esse beneficia, in aliud quodlibet incident nomen* ('To shower bounties on the mob should you delight, / Full many must you lose, for one you place aright.' In the first verse two points are open to criticism; for, on the one hand, benefits ought not to be showered upon the mob, and, on the other, it is not right to be wasteful of any thing, least of all of benefits; for, if you eliminate discernment in giving them, they cease to be benefits, and will fall under any other name you please', trans. Basore 1928).

[6] *Animi iudicia* occurs in Cic. *de Orat.* 3.100, referring to the critical scrutiny that the *animus* should exercise on poetry and oratory: cf. Harnecker 1890, 445.

[7] Cf. Epich. *dub.* 319 Rodríguez-Noriega Guillen (= 249 Kaibel = 224 Olivieri = 214 Kassel–Austin) e Rodríguez-Noriega Guillen 1996, 179.

[8] Cf. Plu. *De fort. et virt. Alex*. 336b; *De fortuna*, 98c; *De soll. animal.*, 961a; 975b. For the reception of this verse in ancient philosophical tradition, Schottlaender 1927, 437.

the intellect, while animals and mankind, confined to Earth, rely above all on senses: these are less developed in humans, who are, however, more gifted with regard to rationality.[9]

For our purposes, what matters is the comparison between humans and animals: within the Platonic tradition influenced by Pythagoreanism, although man holds a position of superiority in nature, the inferiority of animals is not as clear-cut as it is in Stoic philosophy: indeed, animals' natural gifts are often pointed out in the wake of the naturalistic observations of Aristotle and Theophrastus.

Again Plutarch, in *De sollertia animalium* (960d–961f) argues that even animals are endowed, to a certain extent, with the faculty of reasoning, although they cannot perfect it through care and education; such means are instead available to human beings, who, however, even if favoured by nature, may not necessarily possess enough reason and wisdom.

That animals are not considered completely ἄλογα, namely, incapable of rationality and language – according to a definition that frequently occurs among the Stoics,[10] as well as in rhetorical schools[11] – is confirmed by the Middle-Platonic Philo of Alexandria, in the first part of his *De animalibus*, and later by the Neoplatonic Porphyry, who openly rejects the conventional definition of ἄλογα ζῷα in his *De abstinentia animalium* (3.2.4).

3. The eagle and the gods: Apuleius' trust in Homeric myths

Apuleius is no exception to this Middle Platonic theme of animal psychology: as far as the *Florida* is concerned, a confirmation comes from his interest in creatures such as the parrot, which is often mentioned by the Middle and Neoplatonists among the typical examples of the animals' rationality (λόγος).[12] In this context, this kind of interest is not only due to naturalistic curiosity but, as we have seen, is also part of the theory on the specific ways of knowing at different levels on the *scala naturae*, i.e. the hierarchical structure of all living beings.

This intellectual background helps us explain why the eagle, although traditionally provided with exceptional gifts – and in particular with a proverbially acute sight –,[13] is assumed to be incapable of accessing *sapientia* in *Florida* 2.5. In fact, *sapientia* represents the highest degree of

[9] The impossibility for humans to rely on pure intellect is a recurring motive in Middle Platonism, cf. Whittaker 1990, 100-101, n. 175, *ad* Alcin. (10) 164.18–24. Apul. *Plat*. 1.14, p. 209–12 seems here influenced by Stoic doxography, as pointed out by Elisa Dal Chiele (*per litteras*).
[10] E.g. Chrisypp. *Phys*. *SVF* II, p. 205 no. 714.
[11] Rhetoric handbooks recommend comparisons with ἄλογα ζῷα / *muta animalia*: cf. Quint. *Inst*. 5.11.24; Hermog. *De id*. 2.4.7, p. 151, 1–8 Patillon.
[12] The parrot is the subject of *Flor*. 12: cf. Hunink 2000 e 2001, 62, Apuleius' interest in animals is noted, but not connected to the Middle-Platonic context, where the parrot is often mentioned: Plu. *De soll. animal.*, 973a; Philo, *De animal.*, 13, p. 94, 6 Terian, with Terian 1981, 129; Porph. *Abst.* 3.4.1, with Sodano 2005, 450–451, n. 16.
[13] Cf. Tosi 2017, 623 n. 864, who identifies the origin of the proverb in Hom. *Il*. 17.674 (on this passage, see § 5).

intellectual knowledge to which man can aspire through the constant exercise of philosophy; this exercise, in Apuleius' perspective, is inseparable from the ability to verbally express acquired knowledge (*eloquentia*).[14]

From a Middle-Platonic point of view, the impossibility for the eagle to reach this goal certainly marks a difference with mankind but does not make the eagle an ἄλογον ζῷον. Plutarch's *De sollertia animalium* 975a develops some interesting considerations on this point, arguing that among the different animals, birds are to be considered particularly intelligent, because 'their quickness of apprehension and their habit of responding to any manifestation, so easily are they diverted, serves as an instrument for the god who directs their movements, their calls or cries and their formations.'[15]

This privileged contact with the divine – which, in the case of the eagle, is deeply rooted in mythology –[16] is mentioned more than once in literature of the Second Sophistic: for example, Aelius Aristides (*Or*. 2.110), quoting Pindar, introduces the Zeus' eagle as a term of comparison for men who are wise by nature:

> Wise is he who knows much by nature;
> those who learn, impetuous,
> chatter vainly at the tops of their voices like crows
> competing with the sacred bird of Zeus.
> He (sc. Pindar) says that the voices of those who have learned and received their knowledge from others are the voices of crows compared to the eagle, who is naturally superior and has his eloquence and wisdom from god.[17]

As a messenger of the gods, the eagle ends up being endowed with that instantaneous and natural wisdom that is characteristic of the gods, in contrast to the laborious learning path that humans must follow.

[14] *Eloquentia* and *sapientia* are linked together in the Roman reception of the Academic-Peripatetic tradition: see Griffin 1989, 9–10; the same connection is found in Apul. *Plat*. 2, 20.
[15] Trans. Cherniss-Helmbold 1957.
[16] The eagle is traditionally related to Zeus: cf. Roscher 1924 VI, 709–720 (s.v. Zeus) and 1886 I.2, 1597–1603 (s.v. Ganymedes); Ferrari 1999, 64–5 (s.v. aquila).
[17] Pi. *O*. 2.86-88: σοφὸς ὁ πολλὰ εἰδὼς φυᾷ· / μαθόντες δὲ λάβροι / παγγλωσσία κόρακες ὣς ἄκραντα γαρύετον / Διὸς πρὸς ὄρνιχα θεῖον, trans. Trapp 2017.

The eagle's relationship with the divine is also recognizable in a speech by Dio of Prusa (*Or.* 34.4–5), where, however, the public is invited to listen instead to a human voice that is equally guided by the gods:

> For you must not think that eagles and falcons foretell to mankind what is required of them and that the counsel derived from such creatures is trustworthy because of its spontaneity and its divine inspiration, while refusing to believe that a man who has come, as I have come, having no connection with you from any point of view, has come by divine guidance to address and counsel you. (Trans. Cohoon and Lamar Crosby 1940)[18]

It is presumably to this passage that Sinko refers (in an article that is often quoted by the commentaries on the *Florida*), to argue that our text, after the description of the eagle, clearly affirms the superiority of the philosopher.[19]

However, it should be noted that the philosophical background of Dio is not identical to that of Apuleius; as pointed out by Michael Trapp,[20] Dio 'does not set himself up as a devotee of or an expert in Platonism, as, within half a century or so, generically similar figures such as Apuleius and Maximus will do.' Furthermore, Dio belongs to the generation before the 'Platonic revival', which promotes Platonism outside the professional schools.

The contrast regarding Apuleius can also be measured by their different consideration of Homer: for a Platonist such as Apuleius, Homeric myths contain indisputable truths, which sometimes can be brought to light with the help of allegory.[21] On the other hand, Dio, although recognizing in Homer a divine inspiration,[22] considers some myths nothing more than pleasant lies aimed at enchanting men.[23] A famous passage from Dio's speech *On Homer and Socrates* (55.9–11) is emblematic in this respect: according to the rhetorician, the true wisdom of Homer, like that of Socrates, is expressed through images taken from everyday life, even if common people prefer to be enchanted by more sensational ones: 'you admire only his (*sc*. Homer's) lions and eagles or Scylla and the Cyclops, with which he was wont to beguile stupid people, just as nurses beguile children with tales of the Lamia' (Trans. Lamar Crosby 1946). Homer's spectacular creatures and mythical

[18] For the image, see Bost Pouderon 2006, II 135.
[19] Sinko 1912, 157–158.
[20] Trapp 2000, 239.
[21] Cf. Apul. *Soc*. 24, p. 38, 9–18, with Pasetti 2020, 171–173.
[22] Cf. Kindstrand 1973, 124–125.
[23] On Dio's distrust of some myths, cf. Gangloff 2017, 99–136 and 119–120; see also Trapp, this volume.

monsters are the same as those that appear in the children's tales told by old nurses: the implicit reference is to the well-known Platonic theory according to which the storytelling power of the myth grips the passionate and irrational part of the soul, the one that dominates in children, who are in fact the typical audience of myths, but also infects adults, when they renounce rationality.[24] It is known to interpreters of the *Metamorphoses*, however, that the speeches of old nurses may also partake of wisdom, at least within Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*: here, as Graverini points out,[25] the novel's narrator and protagonist Lucius does not hesitate to play the part of a naive and ignorant man, reporting tales that, while seeming futile at first, actually conceal a deeper meaning; and it is an old woman that retells the story of Cupid and Psyche, the part of the novel most exposed to symbolic interpretation, where the eagle of Zeus, a divine helper of Psyche, leaves 'Jupiter's ways of the high sky' (*diales vias*), flying down to earth.[26]

All this confirms that Apuleius places in Homer's wisdom and myths a less conditioned trust than Dio's: this trust leads us to suppose that in *Florida* 2 the relationship between the eagle and the divine realms should be taken seriously.

4. The ascent of the eagle: Odyssey 6.42–46

In *Florida* 2.7, indeed, Homer himself comes into play: the excellence of the poet – expressed here by the epithet *egregius* – is also reaffirmed by Apuleius on other occasions, when he comes to define Homer as *divinus*,[27] placing him on a par with Plato and Pythagoras.[28]

In our passage, Homeric wisdom first of all confirms the weakness of human sight: si *ad oculos et optutum istum terrenum redigas et hebetem, profecto verissime poeta egregius dixit velut nebulam nobis ob oculos offusam nec cernere nos nisi intra lapidis iactum valere* ('When it comes down to the eyes and or dull, earth-bound vision, what the great poet said is surely very true—that a kind of fog is spread before our eyes, and we do not have the capacity to see beyond a stone's throw', trans. Jones 2017). The cloud (*nebula*) that prevents man from correct vision recalls the mist (ὀμίχλη) in Homer, *Iliad* 3.10–12:

Εὖτ᾽ ὄρεος κορυφῇσι Νότος κατέχευεν ὀμίχλην,

[24] Cf. Plato *R*. 377a–d; moreover, Favreu-Linder 2016, 291; Gangloff 2017, 64–5 (on Dio's passage and its relationship with Plato's theory).
[25] Graverini 2007, 148–149 and 105–147.
[26] Cf. Apul. *Met*. 6.15.1; on *diales vias*, cf. *GCA* 2004, 479.
[27] E.g. Apul. *Met*. 9.13.4. A quick observation: the fact that Apuleius attributes to Plato, Homer and Pythagoras the ability to penetrate truths of divine origin does not make them true gods (*dei*): however inspired (*divini*) they may be, they are still human beings. Consequently, the idea that Apuleius himself, as an interpreter of Plato, Homer and Pythagoras, may be considered a 'daemonic persona' (so Benson 2016 and 2019), raises some perplexity.
[28] For the epithet *divinus* applied to Plato, see the Introduction in this volume.

ποιμέσιν οὔ τι φίλην, κλέπτῃ δέ τε νυκτὸς ἀμείνω,
τόσσον τίς τ᾽ ἐπιλεύσσει ὅσον τ᾽ ἐπὶ λᾶαν ἵησιν·.
Just as when the South Wind pours a mist over the peaks of a mountain, a mist that the shepherd loves not, but that to the robber is better than night, and a man can see only so far as he can throw a stone (Trans. Murray and Wyatt 1999)

Following Harrison, Lee (*ad loc.*) points out the allegorical meaning of this image: 'a metaphor for the inadequacy of our worldly perceptions'.[29] Furthermore, the phrase *terrenus optutus* presents the weakness of sight as a direct consequence of the confinement of mankind to the sub-lunar dimension.

The dizzying heights that the eagle reaches in flight are immediately contrasted with a foggy terrestrial space:[30]

Aquila enimvero cum se nubium tenus altissime sublimavit evecta alis totum istud spatium, qua pluitur et ninguitur, ultra quod cacumen nec fulmini nec fulguri locus est, in ipso, ut ita dixerim, solo aetheris et fastigio hiemis [...]
An eagle, by contrast, when he has risen high, high up to the clouds, soaring on his wings above this space where rain and snow fall, up to a height beyond which there is no room for thunderbolt or lightning flash, to the very floor of heaven and the roof of the storm cloud, so to speak... (Trans. Jones 2017)

Starting from the bottom – as highlighted by the terms *evecta*, *sublimavit* and *extulit* – the eagle reaches the very base of the aether (*in ipso solo aetheris*), which is described as the place above the part of the cosmos where perturbations occur.

This image also derives from Homer: some commentaries on *Florida* 2 have rightly identified here a reference to the description of Olympus,[31] reached in flight by Athena in *Odyssey* 6.42–46:

Οὔλυμπόνδ', ὅθι φασὶ θεῶν ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ

[29] A different allegorical interpretation features in Max. Tyr. *Or.* 19.4.
[30] On this contrast, see the detailed examination of Opeku 1974, 60–61, who refers to Servius, *ad Verg. Aen*. 2.604–606: *dicitur... nebula orta de terris obesse nostris obtutibus, unde aquila, quia supra nebulam est, plus videt* ('a mist arisen from earth ... is said to obstruct our sight; therefore the eagle, being above the mist, sees more', my trans).
[31] Opeku 1974, 63; Hunink 2001, 66.

ἔμμεναι· οὔτ’ ἀνέμοισι τινάσσεται οὔτε ποτ’ ὄμβρῳ
δεύεται οὔτε χιὼν ἐπιπίλναται, ἀλλὰ μάλ’ αἴθρη
πέπταται ἀννέφελος, λευκὴ δ’ ἐπιδέδρομεν αἴγλη·
τῷ ἔνι τέρπονται μάκαρες θεοὶ ἤματα πάντα
So saying, the goddess, flashing-eyed Athene, departed to Olympus, where, they say, is the abode of the gods that stands fast forever. Neither is it shaken by winds nor ever wet with rain, nor does snow fall upon it, but the air is outspread clear and cloudless, and over it hovers a radiant whiteness; here the blessed gods are happy all their days. (Trans. Murray and Dimock 2014)

The meaning of the expression *in ipso solo aetheris* can be better understood in the light of two other Apuleian passages, which until now have been considered only as formal parallels, namely *De mundo* 33, pp. 181–182 and *De deo Socratis* 8, pp. 17–18, where the Homeric verses are respectively quoted and implied.[32] The *aether* is, according to post-Aristotelian cosmology followed by Apuleius, the highest part of the sky, where the divinities have their abode;[33] this justifies the analogy with the Homeric Olympus which, however, is not included as a physical place in the *aether*, but in the sublunary sphere.

This difference between *aether* and Olympus emerges in *De mundo* 33,[34] and even more clearly in *De deo Socratis* 8: here the position of the *earthly* Olympus is better specified, and it is also pointed out that birds would not be able to fly over the top of the mountain, even if it is located below the moon.[35] In our passage from *Florida* 2, however, the eagle seems to be capable of flying across the entire sublunar sphere (*totum istud spatium, qua pluitur et ninguitur*), up to the extreme border between the *aer* and the *aether*, which, strictly speaking, should be placed under the moon, and, consequently, well above Olympus.

Apuleius, therefore, presents the flight of the eagle in terms that are at least hyperbolic, if not explicitly symbolic; such a description seems to confirm the idea that the eagle has a privileged

[32] On Apul. *Mun*. 33.2-3, pp. 181–182, cf. Opeku 1974, 63; on *Soc.* 8, Hunink 2001, 66 only mentions the intransitive value of *sublimo*.
[33] Beaujeu 1973, 219–222; Schmidt 1976, 75–81 and n. 28.
[34] Beaujeu 1973, 334 emphasizes the importance of the etymology of Olympus as ‘all radiant’, which is more widely developed in the Pseudo-Aristotelian source (400a): on the etymology, also Ps.-Plu. *De Hom.* 95, with Hillgruber 1999, 217s.
[35] Apul. *Soc*. 8.5: *nam quidem qui aves aeri attribuet, falsum sententiae meritissimo dixeris, quippe* [*quae aves*] *nulla earum ultra Olympi verticem sublimatur*, (‘For indeed if anyone were to attribute the air to birds, one would be quite right in calling him mistaken. No bird soars above the summit of Olympus’, trans. Jones 2017).

relationship with the higher spheres, and that it plays the intermediary role of celestial messenger that is attributed to it also in the *De deo Socratis*.[36]

Furthermore, the allegorical interpretation of *Odyssey* 6.42–46 should probably be traced back to Stoicism; to better understand the sense in which Apuleius uses it, it is worth considering here the sources that might have influenced him.

In the Latin context, we have to mention Lucretius' rewriting of this Homeric passage (3.18–22), as he uses Homer to symbolize the peace enjoyed by the gods in their abode (*intermundia*):

> Apparet divum numen sedesque quietae,
> quas neque concutiunt venti nec nubila nimbis
> aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina
> cana cadens violat semperque innubilus aether
> integit et large diffuso lumine ridet.
> Before me appear the gods in their majesty, and their peaceful abodes, which no winds ever shake nor clouds besprinkle with rain, which no snow congealed by the bitter frost mars with its white fall, but the air ever cloudless encompasses them and laughs with its light spread wide abroad (trans. Rouse 1975)

By comparing Apuleius' passage with this renowned predecessor, it can be observed that, while Lucretius particularly insists on the brightness of the place[37] – an aspect also stressed in the above-mentioned passage of *De Mundo* 33 – the account in the *Florida* emphasizes rather the absence of storms (*perturbationes*): *perturbatio* here is a meteorological term that also occurs in *Mun*. 33, p. 181, 18 as a translation of κίνημα;[38] however in Latin philosophical language it is often transferred to the psychological sphere as the parallel for πάθος:[39] the double meaning is well documented in Apuleius' work.[40]

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[36] Apul. *Soc*. 7.1-2: *horum* (*sc*. *daemonum*) *enim munus atque opera atque cura est* [...] *ut nonnullis regni futuri signa praecurrant, ut Tarquinius Priscus aquila obumbretur ab apice*, ('For it is their [sc. demons'] duty, task and concern to ensure that ... some receive prior tokens of their future reigns – the eagle that overshadowed Tarquinius Priscus', trans. Jones 2017). The function of divine messenger is also recognized in *Met*. 3.23.1 where Lucius imagines turning into an eagle; moreover in *Met*. 6.15 (see below) and in *Met*. 6.6.4: here raptors, as divine messengers, are expected to fly down from Olympus.

[37] Cf. Kenney 2014[2], 78, *ad* 21–22.

[38] Cf. *TLL* X.1, 1828, 30–46, for the synonymy with *procella* and similar terms.

[39] Starting from Cicero, cf. *TLL* X.1,1826.13–1827.20.

[40] Cf. Apul. *Met*. 5.1.1 *perturbatio* refers to the emotional agitation of Psyche. For this rare expression, cf. *GCA* 2004, 114 *ad loc*.

On this point some convergences emerge with the reception of the Homeric descriptions in Middle Platonic works, where the absence of turmoil in Olympus is interpreted, in a psychological sense, as the absence of emotional affliction. According to Plutarch, *Odyssey* 6.42–46 is one of the cases in which poetry tells the truth about the condition of the gods, who are even too often represented by poets as being possessed by passions that are supposed to be extraneous to their nature. The epilogue of the *Life of Pericles* (173 a–c) is significant in this regard:

> (The poets) declare that the place where they say the gods dwell is a secure abode and tranquil, without experience of winds and clouds, but gleaming through all the unbroken time with the soft radiance of purest light implying that some such a manner of existence is most becoming to the blessed immortal; and yet they represent the gods themselves as full of malice and hatred and wrath and other passions which will become even men of any sense. But this, perhaps, will be thought matter for discussion elsewhere (Trans. Perrin 1958)

The problem is deepened, indeed, in the *De audiendis poetis*, where the same Homeric passage is quoted to argue that poets, sometimes, express: 'sound and true opinions about gods',[41] and therefore the kind of truth that Plato finds in myth,[42] can sometimes emerge also in their poems.

For his part, Maximus of Tyre (*Or.* 30.4) interprets the same passage in an openly allegorical sense, to describe the condition of the wise man that is led to 'a safe sea' (εἰς πέλαγος ἀσφαλές), because he is free from the turmoil and storms caused by pleasures:

> καὶ θαλάττῃ διὰ τοῦτο ἀπιστῶ, κἂν νήνεμος ᾖ, κἂν γαλήνην ἔχῃ· ὑποπτεύω γὰρ αὐτῆς τὴν ἡσυχίαν· εἰ δέ με βούλει πιστεῦσαι γαλήνῃ, ἄγε λαβὼν εἰς πέλαγος ἀσφαλές,
> 'ἔνθ' οὐκ ἔστ' οὔτ' ἄρ χειμὼν πολὺς οὔτε ποτ' ὄμβρῳ
> δεύεται, ... ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἴθρη
> πέπταται ἀννέφελος, λευκὴ δ' ἐπιδέδρομεν αἴγλη.
> This is why I mistrust the sea, even when there is no wind, even when the waves are still; her calm arouses my suspicions. If you wish me to trust the stillness of the waves, then take me and lead me to a safe sea,

[41] Cf. Plu. *De aud. poet.* 20e: ὑγιαίνουσαι περὶ θεῶν δόξαι καὶ ἀληθεῖς.
[42] Cf. Nannini 2018, 154, n. 21 on 20e.

> ‘Where winter’s weight is never felt nor is it ever drenched / In rain [...] but bright and cloudless / Skies spread all around, suffused with radiant white.’ (Trans. Trapp 1997)

The image of Olympus here contrasts with the metaphor of the stormy sea, which in Middle-Platonic works is often associated with the condition of the human soul submerged in the instability of the material world: the same image often occurs also in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, where its allegorical meaning is implicit, but not might easily have been recognized by ancient readers.[43]

Even more significant for our enquiry is Maximus’s *Oration* 11, which also describes the path that the soul has to take to perceive true beauty (11.10); in order to undertake this journey, the human soul must emancipate itself from mundane passions; then it will proceed to the heavenly realm under the guidance of reason and love:

> We must [...] emerge beyond the heavens, into the region of true reality and the peace which reigns there, ‘Where winter’s weight is never felt nor is it ever drenched in rain [...] but bright and cloudless skies spread all around, suffused with radiant white.’ (Trans. Trapp 1997)

In order to describe ‘the region of true reality’ (ὁ ἀληθὴς τόπος), the image of Olympus is once again combined with the marine metaphor of calm (τὴν ἐκεῖ γαλήνην). In the light of these parallels, the upward flight of the Apuleian eagle towards the aether in *Florida* 2 could evidently remind – especially to an audience familiar with Middle Platonism– the motif of the *Himmelfahrt*, namely the rise of the soul towards the celestial regions, which is modelled on well-known Platonic passages.[44] This image, which La Rocca regards as a suggestion,[45] is in fact firmly placed, as we have seen, in the Middle-Platonic reception of *Odyssey* 6.42–46.

[43] In the last book of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* the metaphor of stormy sea is pervasive (11.5.5; 11.7.5; 11.15.1; 11.25.2); this image is related to the memory of the ‘Platonized’ Odyssey, cf. Pasetti 2020, in particular 175-181 e 186–188.
[44] Cf. Brumana 2019, 690, n. 69 *ad loc*. with reference to Plato, *Phdr*. 247b–248c.
[45] Cf. La Rocca 2005, 144.

5. The downward flight: a synthesis of many Homeric eagles

Homeric traces are also evident in the description of the downward flight of the eagle: here scholars have recognized an intertwining of echoes from both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*,[46] where the eagle appears as a divine messenger,[47] or as a term of comparison for the extraordinary qualities of a hero.[48]

The main hypotext is *Iliad* 17.674–678, which was first noted by Opeku and carefully analysed by Marangoni.[49] The coherence with our passage from *Florida* 2 is first of all thematic, given that in the Homeric verses the penetrating gaze of Menelaus is compared to the visual acumen of the eagle, whose exceptionality is explicitly recognized:

> Ὣς ἄρα φωνήσας ἀπέβη ξανθὸς Μενέλαος,
> πάντοσε παπταίνων ὥς τ' αἰετός, ὅν ῥά τέ φασιν
> ὀξύτατον δέρκεσθαι ὑπουρανίων πετεηνῶν,
> ὅν τε καὶ ὑψόθ' ἐόντα πόδας ταχὺς οὐκ ἔλαθε πτὼξ
> θάμνῳ ὑπ' ἀμφικόμῳ κατακείμενος, ἀλλά τ' ἐπ' αὐτῷ
> ἔσσυτο, καί τέ μιν ὦκα λαβὼν ἐξείλετο θυμόν.
> So saying, tawny-haired Menelaus went away, glancing warily on every side like an eagle, which, they say, has the keenest sight of all winged things under heaven, by whom, though he be on high, the swift-footed hare is not unseen as he crouches beneath a leafy bush, but the eagle swoops on him and swiftly seizes him, and takes away his life. (Trans. Murray and Wyatt 1999, adapted)

Furthermore, the passage presents the same sequence of movements that as in *Florida* 2.10 and 11: the circular gaze (πάντοσε παπταίνων / *cuncta ... circumtuetur*), which the eagle shoots when suspended at a high altitude (ὑψόθ 'ἐόντα / *loco pendula*), the impetus while dashing on its prey (ἔσσυτο / *sese ruat*) and the sudden grab (μιν ὦκα λαβὼν, which Apuleius amplifies with the expression *unde rostro transfodiat, unde unguibus inuncet*).[50]

The memory of this Homeric simile is enriched by intertwining it with that of other passages describing the attack of the eagle,[51] in particular *Iliad* 22.306–311, where Hector, unleashed against his enemies, is compared to a hunting eagle:

[46] Cf. Marangoni 2000, 31–37 and Hunink 2001, 62.
[47] Hom. *Il*. 24.315–320; *Od*. 2.146–154; *Od*. 19.538–539.
[48] Hom. *Il*. 15.690–695 (Hector); 17.674–678 (Menelaus); 21.252–253 (Achilles); 22.306–311 (Hector).
[49] Cf. Opeku 1974, 61 and Marangoni 2000, 36–37.
[50] For some of these parallels cf. Marangoni 2000, 37.
[51] Cf. Hom. *Il*. 21.252 and *Il*. 15.690 (the swoop); *Od*. 19.538 (the attack).

οἵμησεν δὲ ἀλεὶς ὥς τ᾽ αἰετὸς ὑψιπετήεις,
ὅς τ᾽ εἶσιν πεδίονδε διὰ νεφέων ἐρεβεννῶν
ἁρπάξων ἢ ἄρν᾽ ἀμαλὴν ἢ πτῶκα λαγωόν·
He (Hector) gathering himself swooped like an eagle of lofty flight that darts to the plain through the dark clouds to seize a tender lamb or a cowering hare. (Trans. Murray and Wyatt 1999)

In this passage, already noted by Brakman,[52] both the lamb and the hare appear as preys of the raptor, just like in *Florida* 2.11: (*aquila*) *cernens, unde rostro transfodiat, unde unguibus inuncet vel agnum incuriosum vel leporem meticulosum vel quodcumque esui animatum vel laniatui fors obtulit* ([the eagle] 'looking for the place where to impale with his beak or grasp with his talons an unsuspecting lamb, a cowering hare, or whatever living thing chance has offered for him to devour or dismember', trans. Jones 2017).

Then Apuleius offers the detail of the frightened hare which is also emphasized in the Homeric *scholia vetera*.[53] The same exegetical tradition could explain a further detail, which remains implicit in these Homeric verses and is instead emphasized in the *Florida*: namely, the fact that the eagle arrives unexpectedly (*improvisa*), without the prey noticing it; the lamb, indeed, is *incuri**osus***, a term that forms with *meticul**osus***, referring to the hare, a euphonic combination typical of Apuleius' style.[54] On the other hand, animals are taken by surprise by the eagle's attack in another Homeric passage which is likely alluded to in *Florida* 2, that is *Iliad* 15.690–695: here the raptor pounces on a flock of birds that are quietly feeding at a river: in this case also the Homeric scholia explicitly point out the carelessness of the prey.[55] In as refined a writer as Apuleius, it is unsurprising to find this use of Homeric exegetical tradition,[56] which is also employed elsewhere in the typically Roman procedure of artistic translation (*vertere*).[57] Furthermore, in the *Florida*, the lamb and the hare are chosen by way of example, as two of the many possible targets actually envisaged in the Homeric poems, with the precise purpose of clarifying that the eagle, thanks to its extraordinary qualities, is capable of striking without fail and in any conditions.

[52] Brakman 1908.
[53] *Schol. ad Il.* 22/310b, p. 325 Erbse.
[54] On this kind of homeoteleuton, see Traina 1999, 110–112; 114; on its presence in Apuleius, see Pasetti 2007, 76, 95.
[55] In *Schol. ad Il.* 15.690–695, p. 143 Erbse careless animals are compared to the Greeks surprised by the attack.
[56] A more complex explanation can be found in Marangoni 2000, who thinks of a mistake in the edition of the *Iliad* used by Apuleius.
[57] On Roman artistic translation (*vertere*), see e.g. Mariotti 1952; Feeney 2016. From its very beginning, *vertere* takes into account the exegetical tradition on Homer: cf. e.g. Fränkel 1932, 306; Traina 1974[2], 13; Cappelletto 1984.

Further details can be found in other Homeric texts: for instance, the eagle's imposing size that are touched upon in *Florida* 2.9 (*tanta mole corporis*) are briefly mentioned also in *Odyssey* 19.538 (μέγας αἰετὸς) and – more extensively– in *Iliad* 24.315–320, where the wingspan of the raptor is compared to the door of a great palace. Additionally, the initial phase of the downward flight (*Flor.* 2,9–10) is also found in *Odyssey* 2.146–154, in which the flight of a pair of eagles is taken as a premonitory sign: in the Homeric lines, the birds remain suspended in flight letting themselves be carried away by the wind (*Od.* 2.148–150): τὼ δ' ἕως μέν ῥ' ἐπέτοντο μετὰ πνοιῇσ' ἀνέμοιο, / πλησίω ἀλλήλοισι τιταινομένω πτερύγεσσιν ('for a time they flew in the stream of the wind side by side with wings outspread'); then, once identified their goal (150–151), they turn towards it:

> ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ μέσσην ἀγορὴν πολύφημον ἱκέσθην
> ἔνθ' ἐπιδινηθέντε τιναξάσθην πτερὰ πυκνά,
> ἐς δ' ἰδέτην πάντων κεφαλάς, ὄσσοντο δ' ὄλεθρον.
> but when they reached the middle of the many-voiced assembly, then they wheeled about, flapping their wings rapidly, and down on the heads of all they looked, and death was in their glance. (Trans. Murray and Dimock 2014)

In *Florida* 2, the two sequences seem to be reversed: the eagle first wheels in the desired direction (*velificatas alas quo libuit advertens modico caudae gubernaculo*) and then slows down the movement of its wings (*pinnarum remittens indefessa remigia*), thus remaining suspended in the air.

Recent editors print *eminens* ('raising [the wings]'), but I follow Galli in emending to *remittens* ('relaxing [the wings]'), previously conjectured by Thomas.[58] *Eminens* suggests indeed an upward movement of the wings, but the meaning of the passage requires instead that the eagle slows down or stops moving, gliding in the air until the moment when it identifies precisely the target to swoop on. The Homeric intertext, which is clearly at play here, would confirm this interpretation: the participle τιταινομένω conveys the same image – i.e. the wings that are outspread in the air – even if from a different point of view.[59]

The eagle of the *Florida*, therefore, possesses all the excellent qualities of the mythical Homeric 'hunter' (θηρητήρ):[60] it is the same eagle that is defined τελειότατος in *Iliad* 24.315,

[58] *Eminens* was first conjectured by Helm 1910 and accepted by Vallette 1924=1960, Hunink 2001, Lee 2005, Piccioni 2018; for a detailed discussion see Galli 2022.
[59] The Latin participle focuses on the interruption of the wings' rowing, the Greek one, on the force that keeps them immobile (cf. *LSJ* s.v. 4), but the effect is the same: the wings are outspread in the air.
[60] The term θηρητήρ occurs in *Il*. 21.252–253, as mentioned by Opeku 1974, 70; the same kind of eagle is found, according to the exegetical tradition, also in *Il*. 24.315–320.

precisely because of its relationship with Zeus τέλειος, 'who fulfills the vows'. Thus, this kind of raptor is a credible divine messenger;[61] it is significant that Plutarch in *Amatorius* 751 indicates this creature as a term of comparison for true love (that is, in tune with Plato, the homoerotic one).[62]
The same extraordinarily acute eyesight, which allows the Apuleian eagle to unerringly identify and relentlessly snatch any target, is a term of comparison for the divine intellect within the philosophical reflection that Maximus of Tyre develops in *Oration* 11, 9:

> Divine intellect is like sight, while human intellect is like speech: for while the beams of the eye are immensely rapid and gather in an impression of their object all at once, the operation of speech is like a leisurely stroll. Or better, think a comparison along these lines. Divine intellect, like the entire embracing circuit of the sun, sees the whole surface of the earth at once; human intellect is like the sun's progress as it passes over different parts of the whole at different times. (Trans. Trapp 1997)

Maximus focuses here a difference between divine and human knowledge by resorting to the contrasting images of sight and speech, but also underlines the temporal factor: the divine intellect, like the gaze of the eagle (Apuleius' *cuncta ... circumtuetur* again) is all-encompassing,[63] as well as rapid, while the human one needs a longer time.

We cannot know whether Apuleius concluded his reflection by once again shifting his attention to the peculiarities of human intellect, or by turning to the divine intellect and to its ability to possess wisdom, which humans obtain only after a long time,[64] with the lightning speed of an eagle that grabs its prey. Certainly the description of the Homerized eagle, as we have seen, does not seem to point to the mere purpose of rhetorically amplifying a naturalistic curiosity, such as the peculiar sharpness of sight that is typical of certain birds, but rather emphasizes the relationship between the eagle and the divine realm in a clearly Platonic perspective.

[61] Cf. Richardson 1993, 305–306 *ad loc*. 'Surest of omens' is the translation of τελειότατος by Murray-Wyatt 1999, 587; Apuleius translates the epithet in *Met*. 3.23.1 *supremi Iovis certus nuntius*. A discussion in Porph. *ad Il*. 24.315–316, pp. 270–271 MacPhail.
[62] On this Homeric reference, cf. Flacelière–Cuvigny 1980, 134, n. 4.
[63] Opeku 1974, 64 finds it strange that the eagle, despite the clouds, is still capable of seeing below: this inconsistency reinforces the analogy between the eagle's gaze and divine intellect.
[64] Apul. *Soc.* 4, p. 12.

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