

## **BEYOND THE RETINA: FROM SEEING TO KNOWING IN THE ANCIENT NOVELS OF HELIODORUS AND APULEIUS**

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### **Introduction**

**A**mong all the senses, Greco-Roman thought privileges sight as the channel from perception to knowledge, assigning to vision a cognitive weight that exceeds its biological function. Vision readily becomes a model for thought: in both Greek and Latin, verbs of seeing extend into verbs of understanding. The Greek aorist εἶδον ("I saw") and the perfect οἶδα ("I know") share the same Proto-Indo-European root *\*ueid-*,<sup>1</sup> a genealogy that couples seeing with knowing. Latin preserves the same root in *videre* ("to see") and its passive form *videri* ("to seem").<sup>2</sup> In this case, what is seen and what is taken to be true converge in a single grammatical construction. Across both languages, seeing is fused with cognition.

Moreover, the claim that vision structures, rather than merely registers, knowledge is theorized across the ancient tradition from the Presocratics through Stoic philosophy. Although the various ancient models describe the mechanism of vision in different ways, they converge on a shared theme: sight is an active agent of organization and meaning. By analyzing these theories and their manifestation in ancient literary narratives, this essay demonstrates how Greco-Roman thinkers conceptualize vision as an active force in the production of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), s.vv. "εἶδον," "οἶδα."

<sup>2</sup> Michiel de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), s.v. "video."

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knowledge. Heliodorus' *An Ethiopian Story*<sup>3</sup> demonstrates this concept through recognition scenes where both vision and visual phantasia collapse traditional boundaries, enabling immediate knowledge that transcends conventional cognition. Apuleius' tale of Cupid and Psyche in *The Golden Ass*<sup>4</sup> reveals how forbidden sight transforms the viewer and the viewed at the same time, illustrating vision's power to elevate mortal understanding to true revelation. Read together, these episodes translate abstract optical theories into embodied experiences and confirm sight's unique capacity to acquire knowledge.

By organizing ancient optical theories alongside their application in the two novels, this essay invites modern readers into the mindset of the writers and readers who first imagined them. Inhabiting that way of seeing, we are able to grasp a new perspective on our own, and to bring into view a layer of these texts that ordinarily falls in the blind spot of modern reading.

## **1. Ancient Theories of Sight**

Ancient conceptions of vision encompass a spectrum of theories, each reflecting a distinctive way in which the ancient Greeks and Romans conceived of the experience of seeing. Across the Mediterranean world, philosophers and physicians developed diverse models of sight, from passive reflection theories to the more dynamic frameworks where the eye actively reached out to its object. These coexisting paradigms reflected both scientific

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<sup>3</sup> Heliodorus. "An Ethiopian Story (*Aithiopika*)," trans. J.R. Morgan, in *The Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, ed. B.P. Reardon, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 349-588. Hereafter cited parenthetically by book and section as (Heliod. *Aeth.*).

<sup>4</sup> Apuleius. *The Golden Ass (Metamorphoses; Asinus aureus)*, trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Hereafter cited parenthetically by book and chapter as (Apul. *Met.*).

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inquiry and a deeper philosophical view of the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived. Thinkers developed new ideas in dialogue with earlier ones, combining elements from previous frameworks and adding complexity. This rich area of study created a conceptual ecosystem where ideas spread across schools and generations. It even went beyond describing vision as a sensory mechanism, but established, using different models, a connection between seeing and knowing.

Early Greek philosophers, particularly the Presocratics, developed a variety of models to explain this interactive visual process. Kelli Rudolph categorizes these theories into three broad types: reflection, intromissionist, and extramissionist.<sup>5</sup> In the reflection theory, philosophers like Alcmaeon of Croton (fl. 500–450 BCE) and Anaxagoras (500–428/7 BCE), likened vision to the reflection of images in water. Alcmaeon described the eye as nature's mirror, reflecting external images in its moist, gleaming surface. He claimed that the eye's internal fire illuminated the surrounding lachrymal fluid, turning that water into a reflective surface in which images of external objects could appear. Even on this early model, vision is not wholly passive, as the eye supplies its own light. Anaxagoras refined the reflection account by proposing that bright colors reflected more clearly against dark surfaces. He explained the black color of the pupil in terms of its function to receive the bright images of the visible world more effectively.<sup>6</sup> The mechanism of the reflection theories was relatively straightforward: the inner light rendered the eye as a receptive mirror for external images.

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<sup>5</sup> Kelli Rudolph, "Sight and the Presocratics: Approaches to Visual Perception in Early Greek Philosophy," in *Sight and the Ancient Senses*, ed. Michael Squire (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 36-53.

<sup>6</sup> Rudolph, "Sight and the Presocratics," 39-44.

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The intromissionist theories proposed a more dynamic model wherein objects continuously emitted particles that physically entered the observer's eye. Empedocles (ca. 495-435 BCE) developed this approach, suggesting that objects released "effluences" composed of fire and water elements, corresponding to light and dark colors. These effluences could enter the eye only if they matched the size and shape of the eye's pores. In Rudolph's formulation, the visual pores of the eyes were differentiated: some consisted of fire and admitted the effluences of white objects, while others consisted of water and admitted the effluences of black objects.<sup>7</sup> The intromissionist model established a material connection between the object and observer. For Empedocles, seeing was not a matter of the eye emitting rays, but of receiving information selectively from objects. This framework positioned the observer on the receptive end and the objects as active sources of information. The eye acted as a filter, allowing only what was compatible with the observer's ocular structure to enter the senses.

Democritus formulated a more complex model, the extramissionist theory, that incorporated earlier thinking into his own interpretation. According to Democritus, objects continuously emitted effluences that travel through space and encountered the air between the object and observer. Simultaneously, visual rays flowed outward from the eye in a conical pattern. When these visual rays met the object's effluences, they created a compression effect that molded the air into a distinct imprint, like pressing a seal into wax. These air imprints, along with the original effluences, entered the

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<sup>7</sup> Rudolph, "Sight and the Presocratics," 44-8.

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observer's eyes. What the observer perceived, then, was not raw effluence but a composite impression formed by the interaction of the object's original effluences and the air imprints. This account sought to explain why perception was not identical across all observers. The unique quality of each person's visual rays affected how the air imprints formed. The mind processed these combined inputs, resulting in a perception that depended on both the object's properties and the observer's active visual contribution.<sup>8</sup>

All three ancient theories of vision — reflection, intromissionist, and extramissionist — share a crucial characteristic that distinguishes them from the modern understanding of sight: they conceptualize vision as a physically interactive process rather than passive reception. As Helen Morales observes, "Ancient optics typically configures vision as haptic and corporal; seer and seen, through emanations, actually touch each other. Intromission and extramission are interactive and potentially reciprocal processes."<sup>9</sup> This tactile dimension of vision permeates all the ancient frameworks, whether through the reflection of images on the eye's surface, the reception of material effluences through selective pores, or the active projection of visual rays that compresses and guides incoming visual imprints. What emerges from these theories is a profound understanding of vision not as a detached observation but as a form of physical engagement. It is a type of touch that connects the perceiver and the perceived in an

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<sup>8</sup> Rudolph, "Sight and the Presocratics," 49-52.

<sup>9</sup> Helen Morales, *Vision and Narrative in Achilles Tatius' Leucippe and Clitophon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 29.

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intimate sensory relationship.<sup>10</sup> This materiality of vision engages closely with ancient philosophy and literary culture, positioning sight as a privileged pathway to knowledge while simultaneously raising questions about perception's reliability. The reciprocity invests the gaze with agency and intention, giving it an ethical and social weight that Greek and Roman literature and drama repeatedly explore.

## **2. Visual Encounter: When Seeing Becomes Knowing**

Heliodorus centers visual interactions in *An Ethiopian Story* as the primary medium of connection. In the first meeting of Charikleia and Theagenes, large paragraphs are dedicated to describing their interaction and love at first sight. The couple falls in love during the procession in Delphi, when Charikleia is extending a torch to Theagenes (Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.5). The torch itself, as it is passed forward, functions as an extension of their gaze, a physical manifestation of their vision projecting outward. This active emission emphasizes that vision is not mere reception but deliberate selection. As in Alcmaeon's reflection theory, the eye must actively emit light in order for the action of seeing to happen. The spotlight effect in this scene creates a paradox where the torch simultaneously expands and contracts the couple's visual field. It expands perception by illuminating what was previously obscured by darkness, while contracting perception by excluding everything outside the beam and

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<sup>10</sup> It is possible that ancient novelists amplified visual motifs to stage forms of intimacy, given that the written medium secludes audience from author both temporally and spatially. Lavish ekphrasis in novels may offer a compensation, drawing the reader into sensory encounters that the medium itself cannot supply. This is especially interesting under the extramissionist theory. If seeing is itself a form of contact, then a described gaze is a described touch, allowing the novelist to connect with readers within an additional dimension.

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rendering it peripheral. The surrounding crowd fades as the visual connection intensifies. One could imagine in this scene how Empedocles' intromissionist selective pore filtration might work in parallel with Democritus' extramissionist compression: the couple's eyes actively emit rays that shape the space between them, while filtering incoming effluences to admit only those that attract them.

All three theories come together, building towards a metaphysical claim made by Heliodorus, where he establishes the connection between sight and the soul. Reflecting on the details about the encounter between Charikleia and Theagenes, Kalasiris narrates to Knemon that the couple falls into immediate and mutual love at the instant their eyes meet across the crowd. On this purely visual exchange, Kalasiris claims that "the soul is something divine and partakes in the nature of heaven" (Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.5) and that "the soul recognized its kin at the very first encounter" (Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.5). If the soul is divine and recognition occurs through sight alone — before speech, touch, or social introduction — then sight must itself be more than ordinary perception. The eyes do not merely register the bodies before them; they become the medium through which souls move toward one another. A passive or one-directional theory of vision cannot accommodate this. The soul cannot reach across the procession if the eye only receives what is given to it, nor can recognition be mutual if only one party emits. Vision in this scene must be reciprocal because the recognition is reciprocal: both Theagenes and Charikleia see, both are affected, and both recognize. The perceiver and the perceived briefly become indistinguishable in the act. This instant recognition shows that, for Heliodorus, vision is not a sense for exchanging information but one through which knowledge takes its purest

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form. In the procession at Delphi, for Charikleia to have seen Theagenes is the same as knowing him.

Kalasiris' later explanation of the evil eye gives this metaphysical claim a physiological mechanism. When Charikleia falls ill after meeting Theagenes, Kalasiris attributes her sickness to the "evil eye." A gaze cast in envy or spite charges the surrounding air with malevolence, and this corrupted air enters the victim's body and causes harm (Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.7-8). This accounts for how an envious eye can wound without contact, but the mechanism it describes is not specific to harm. If sight can transmit destructive affect through air, it may transmit erotic recognition by the same route. The same bodily process that lets envy spread also explains why the lovers' first look reaches both at once.

This collapse of perception and cognition explains a pattern that runs through the rest of the novel.<sup>11</sup> The characters consistently privilege what they have seen with their own eyes above any other source,<sup>12</sup> including spoken testimony and even verifiable fact. For them, having seen something is already a form of knowing it. Other forms of evidence become secondary or merely confirmatory. The Delphi encounter is therefore not an exception within the novel but its clearest instance.

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<sup>11</sup> Mario Telò, "The Eagle's Gaze in the Opening of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*," *AJP* 132, no. 4 (2011): 581-613. Telò proposes that the limitation of vision, and the resulting uncertainty in knowing, runs as a theme through the whole novel. He reads the opening scene of *An Ethiopian Story* as an "enigma" for both the audience and the pirates that can be only revealed retrospectively. In this way, Heliodorus invites the readers to participate actively in the narrative by testing the limits of vision and exploring its relationship to knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> Overreliance on sight is demonstrated, for example, by Theagenes' misidentification of Thisbe's dead body as Charikleia's in the cave (Heliod. *Aeth.* 2.4) and Charikleia's despair in the absence of witnessing Theagenes' return (Heliod. *Aeth.* 6.9).

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The same encounter also reveals sight's capacity to alter time. Heliodorus describes Theagenes' and Charikleia's momentary connection as containing "an infinity of expression" "in the space of an instant" (Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.5). This aligns with the concept that sight is itself a form of knowledge. If so, recognition does not need to unfold sequentially but arrives whole in the moment of contact. The ancient vision mechanism makes this concrete. Active emission concentrates the entire act of recognition into a single outward gaze, while selective reception filters the moment so that only the right person can register the full impression. An external observer would record only a momentary glance, but for Theagenes and Charikleia the moment dilates because it carries the full weight of mutual knowing. The lovers' gaze, therefore, becomes a way of transcending ordinary physical and cognitive constraints.

### **3. Visual Allusion: Phantasia**

*Phantasia* is a faculty of imagination fundamentally rooted in visual perception. In *De anima* 3.3, Aristotle defined *phantasia* as the movement that arose from "an actual perception" from "beings that perceive of things." Based on perception, especially sight, it was the basis on which memory and thought proceeded.<sup>13</sup> The Stoics developed this idea further. For Chrysippus, a *phantasia* was an impression in the soul. Diogenes Laertius stated that thought followed the emergence of an impression, which allowed for the impression to be expressed in language.<sup>14</sup> In both traditions, *phantasia* is a multisensory

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<sup>13</sup> Gerard Watson, *Phantasia in Classical Thought* (Galway: Galway University Press, 1988), 14-37.

<sup>14</sup> For the full Stoic account of *phantasia*, or "impression," see A. A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge:

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experience that creates a sense of bodily presence within the imagined scene. With a visual foundation, it drives cognitive and emotional functions to allow individuals to share experiences and comprehend phenomena through the power of visual imagination.<sup>15</sup>

In *An Ethiopian Story*, Charikleia is separated from her father Hydaspes, the Ethiopian king, immediately after birth. Years later, their reunion presents a case of recognition that defies conventional explanation. The night before their meeting, Hydaspes dreams of having a daughter identical to Charikleia. Upon their encounter, he experiences "an instant attraction to his own flesh and blood" (Heliod. *Aeth.* 9.1) before even seeing her clearly. Hydaspes experiences a visceral pull toward Charikleia that manifests physically, a form of recognition operating at a primal, even instinctual level. The knowing at work is visual because it is mediated by Hydaspes' dream-image of Charikleia, which supplies the touchpoint for his bodily recognition before he perceives her.

This raises a crucial question: given that Hydaspes had never seen Charikleia close-up before, how do visual traces of her enter his mind in the form of a dream? Democritus' model provides a compelling explanation. Charikleia has been physically near Hydaspes only twice: first as a newborn, though she is given away by Persinna before Hydaspes has a chance to see her, and then as an adult, still at a distance. Even these brief encounters are enough for her effluences to propagate through

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Cambridge University Press, 1987), §39 ("Impressions") and §40 ("The criteria of truth").

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Webb, "Sight and Insight: Theorizing Vision, Emotion and Imagination in Ancient Rhetoric," in *Sight and the Ancient Senses*, ed. Michael Squire (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 205-11.

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the air and intersect Hydaspes' visual rays, forming air-imprints that remain in his phantasia. As impressions, they become the raw material of his dream. This framework could account for the temporal collapse of Hydaspes' dream-image, where he sees a girl "[having] been born to [him] this very day" and yet "matured instantly to just such a youthful beauty" (Heliod. *Aeth.* 9.25). The dream synthesizes the only two moments when Charikleia's effluence could have reached him, stitching a continuous identity across these time points and collapsing them.

Hydaspes' dream demonstrates the convergence of two forces moving towards one another — Charikleia's effluences reaching him and his visual rays extending outward to meet the effluences. The reciprocity matters because the recognition Hydaspes experiences is not a cognitive matching of impression to the person perceived, but an instant attraction to his own flesh and blood. Pure intromission could account for an image of Charikleia residing in Hydaspes' soul. However, it could not account for the soul's active moment towards her. Extramissionist theory supplies that outward orientation. The air imprints, therefore, are not a passive copy of Charikleia's effluence but a record of the encounter between her self-emanation and his act of looking. What his *phantasia* preserves is not merely her visible form, but the force of his original connection with her. The dream sustains that force in advance of their meeting, so that when reality validates the dream-image, recognition and strong emotional attraction fall naturally in place.

The birth of Charikleia is itself a manifestation of *phantasia's* power. Conceived as Persinna gazed at a painting of Andromeda, Charikleia is born with light skin despite her

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Ethiopian parentage (Heliod. *Aeth.* 4.8).<sup>16</sup> This origin makes Charikleia herself a product of visual influence, not merely a subject who emits effluences. This dual identity positions Charikleia as a unique convergence point where visual power is both received and transmitted, even across generational boundaries.

Vision thus operates through complementary physical and mental mechanisms on Charikleia. Physically, visual emanations traverse space, creating pathways for connection across distances. Mentally, these scattered visual traces transform into vivid, first-person experiences through phantasia's reconstructive power, bridging both spatial and temporal divides.

## **4. Visual Narrative in Cupid and Psyche**

In Apuleius' tale of Cupid and Psyche in *The Golden Ass*, vision emerges as a complex combination of power, knowledge, and desire, driving the narrative and ultimately reconfiguring the relationship between mortal and divine realms. The narrative begins with a fundamental visual asymmetry that establishes the power hierarchy between the protagonists. Cupid can see Psyche freely, while she is forbidden from seeing him. This imbalance embodies the essential boundary separating mortal from the immortal and establishes the conditions for the narrative's central tension.

Within this framework of restricted vision, Psyche develops what Brethes identified as *temeraria curiositas*

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<sup>16</sup> Tim Whitmarsh, "Written on the Body: Ekphrasis, Perception and Deception in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*." *Ramus* 31, nos. 1–2 (2002): 111–5. Whitmarsh describes the conception of Charikleia and her skin color as a "walking ekphrasis," a living embodiment of visual impression.

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("reckless curiosity"),<sup>17</sup> which becomes the driving force behind her actions and those of multiple characters throughout the novel. This curiosity inevitably focuses on the visual realm, where sight is the primary instrument through which forbidden knowledge is sought. The lamp that Psyche eventually uses becomes a material embodiment of this desire to know through seeing: when "the light is freed, the truth will shine,"<sup>18</sup> connecting illumination with revelation, sensory perception with truth-seeking.

Apuleius explores the power of seeing by examining the conditions under which vision is constrained. In the extreme scenario of total darkness, the "limits of the tactile dimensions of ancient theories of vision are tested."<sup>19</sup> In the darkness, Psyche must interact with her husband without seeing him, and vision is thus replaced by a profoundly multisensory experience. Touch and hearing do not merely compensate for the absence of sight, but rather they become constitutive elements of a more embodied form of perception. Her fingers become eyes, tracing the contours of her invisible lover; her ears attune to his voice. This synthesis of sensory information engages directly with ancient theories that understood vision as inherently tactile. Where the intromissionist and extramissionist theories describe the effluences of the objects as touching and interacting with

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<sup>17</sup> Romain Brethes, "Who Knows What? The Access to Knowledge in Ancient Novels: The Strange Cases of Chariton and Apuleius." In *The Greek and the Roman Novel: Parallel Readings*, ed. Michael Paschalis, Stavros Frangoulidis, Stephen Harrison, and Maaïke Zimmerman (Groningen: Barkhuis & Groningen University Library, 2007), 182-3.

<sup>18</sup> Costas Panayotakis, "Vision and Light in Apuleius' Tale of Psyche and Her Mysterious Husband," *CQ* 51, no. 2 (2001): 583.

<sup>19</sup> Niall Slater, "Apuleian Ecphraseis: Depiction at Play." In *Paideia at Play: Learning and Wit in Apuleius*, ed. Werner Riess (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2008), 249.

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the eyes and imprinting the air, Psyche substitutes this with literal touching. Psyche's experience suggests that vision, in such conditions, may be extended into a composite act, drawing from multiple senses what sight could not obtain.

The materialization of vision is demonstrated as harmful when Psyche finally illuminates Cupid with her lamp. In this moment, the narrative transforms abstract visual transgression into physical harm when the lamp "disgorged a drop of burning oil from the tip of its flames upon the god's right shoulder" (Apul. *Met.* 5.22). The oil drop functions as a material extension of Psyche's forbidden gaze. Her sight literally burns Cupid's divine body. Apuleius emphasizes this connection by personifying the lamp: "O you rash, reckless lamp, Love's worthless servant, do you burn the very god who possesses all fire" (Apul. *Met.* 5.23). The instrument of vision thus "acquires an identity of its own"<sup>20</sup> and takes on its own transgressive agency.

The consequences of this visual transgression demonstrate the fundamental problem at the heart of the narrative: knowledge obtained through forbidden sight cannot be maintained without a transformation of the viewer. When Psyche looks at Cupid, she disrupts the established visual asymmetry of knowledge. Cupid's immediate departure reasserts the original power dynamics, now reinforced by physical separation. This consequence suggests that true reconciliation requires not simply a different way of seeing but a fundamentally different kind of seer. As Panayotakis observes, "failure of the soul to reach the divine regions is expressed in terms of failure of the soul to see."<sup>21</sup> Psyche's initial vision is

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<sup>20</sup> Panayotakis, "Vision and Light in Apuleius' Tale," 583.

<sup>21</sup> Panayotakis, "Vision and Light in Apuleius' Tale," 579.

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harmful precisely because she remains mortal while attempting to perceive the divine. The narrative resolves this conflict through transforming Psyche from a mortal being to an immortal one. Only after she achieves divine status can she fully see and know Cupid without harmful consequences. This transformation, which Kenney reads as a Platonic allegory of the soul's ascent through trial to the divine, resolves the initial asymmetry. Through trials and suffering, Psyche becomes a being fitted to apprehend divine reality without being injured by it.<sup>22</sup>

In Apuleius' narrative, the progression from forbidden sight to divine vision traces Psyche's development from curiosity-driven transgression to true knowledge. Vision, in the story of Cupid and Psyche, embodies active engagement in the form of knowledge and danger.

## **Conclusion**

The ancient theories of vision, from the reflection model to intromissionist and extramissionist theories, reveal a world where sight was never understood as mere passive reception but as a dynamic, tactile engagement between the observer and the observed. This understanding of vision may not be intuitive for a modern reader, for whom vision is a one-way transmission

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<sup>22</sup> E.J. Kenney, ed., *Apuleius: Cupid and Psyche*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 12-21. Since Psyche's name in Greek means "soul," Kenney argues that Apuleius invites a Platonic reading in which Psyche is caught between lower, bodily desire and higher, divine love. Psyche represents the soul's exposure to destructive *curiositas*, its trials, its descent into the underworld, and its final reunion with Love. Kenney argues that Psyche is not educated into enlightenment, but rather her salvation depends on divine intervention. Her apotheosis, on this reading, is not a reward for her suffering. It changes her nature, making it possible for her to meet Cupid without harm. The lamp scene fails not because of the act of looking itself, but rather the person carrying that action is mortal, who cannot bear what only divine sight can hold.

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in which light enters the eye, stimulates the retina, and triggers neurological processing. For the ancient thinkers examined in this essay, the eye is an active participant: it emits fire, projects rays, filters effluences, and physically touches the objects of sight. To read Heliodorus and Apuleius without recognizing this difference risks missing a central cognitive component of their narratives.

Read against those theories, three scenes in Heliodorus and Apuleius make a consistent claim, that vision is not merely a theme or metaphor in these novels but a mechanism through which the plot generates recognition, desire, and knowledge. The torch-lit visual exchange between Charikleia and Theagenes compresses space and time so that two souls can recognize each other at a glance. Hydaspes' dream-recognition of his daughter, reconstructed through a Democritean account of air imprints, shows *phantasia* operating as a bridge between perception and knowledge across spatial and temporal divides. Psyche's forbidden gaze at Cupid demonstrates that a mortal gaze reached too far can wound the divine and forces the seer's own transfiguration before she can safely see again.

What this essay claims is that these visual mechanisms are present, identifiable, and actively participating in the narrative. Their presence is itself a signal that Heliodorus and Apuleius are engaging with the intellectual culture of their time, drawing on a discourse of vision that runs from Presocratics through Aristotle and the Stoics. Fully appreciating the depth and consistency of this engagement, however, would require extending the analysis to other surviving novels by Achilles Tatius, Longus, and Chariton.

Recognizing the ancient understanding of vision as interactive, reciprocal, and material changes how we read the

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novel's central scenes of recognition, love, and transformation. It brings into view a conceptual architecture that these texts assume rather than explicitly state. In Heliodorus and Apuleius, vision drives the plot, while the plot sometimes pressures the optical theory in turn beyond what any single ancient philosopher would have endorsed. In these novels, optics is not cited but performed.

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