‘CHARITE DULCISSIMA’:
A NOTE ON THE NAMELESS CHARITE AT
APULEIUS’ METAMORPHOSES 7.12 (163.10)*)

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Scholarship has often drawn attention to the exceptional postponement of the name of the captive Charite who was abducted by the robbers from her parents’ house on the night before her wedding to Tlepolemus. The explanation often sought is that the withholding of this “eloquent” and “significant” name is primarily due either to a combination of artistic and narratological principles largely aiming at creating suspense, or, to the inner function of the name within a given context¹). B. Brotherton, for instance, takes into account distinct features of the literary quality of the tale of Tlepolemus (Met. VII. 4-14) as opposed to the number of fabulae in the Metamorphoses, broadly defined as oral tales or Märchen, which account for the anonymity and in turn explain the suspense²). B. L. Hijmans Jr., who also draws attention to the


¹) The quoted terms are from J. Tatum, Apuleius and the Golden Ass (Ithaca and London 1979), 69, also 68 and 146. Also S. Strabryla, The Functions of the Tale of Cupid and Psyche in the Structure of the Metamorphoses of Apuleius, Eos 61 (1973), 267 and note 14, who notices the postponement but makes no attempt at explaining its loss. On the other hand, M. Bernhard, Der Stil des Apuleius von Madaura. Ein Beitrag zur Stilistik des Spätlateins (Stuttgart 1927), 93, and note 45, considers the pattern as designed primarily to arouse the reader’s sympathy without any reference to the case under discussion. On the dramatic aspect imparted into the narrative of the Metamorphoses by the wide range of associations, etymological, historical, or even mythological, inherent in the meaning of the proper names see M. G. dos Santos Palma Granwell, Nómes proprios nas Metamorfoses de Apuleio, Euphrosyne 11 (1982-1983), 142-148.

²) B. Brotherton, The Introduction of Characters by Name in the Metamorphoses of Apuleius, CP 29 (1934), 51-52 and passim.
anonymity of Charite, detects a functional significance of the name within the setting in which it appears. Thus, the girl who so far in the narrative has been presented as misera is here identified as Charite, because "to Tlepolemus, Charite, the embodiment of grace, is of course precisely that (Charite dulcissima)".

What has not been taken into consideration, however, is that the mountain scenery with a cave and the use of wine and the remarkably Odyssean development of the persona of Charite in the account of her death later in Book VIII.1-14 may establish a reasonable comparison with the absence of Odysseus’ identity while in the Cyclops’ cave. The Homeric hero declines to reveal his real identity to the monster, although he might have identified himself to Polyphemus in the context of his own collective introduction of himself and his companions as associates of the chieftain, Agamemnon (Hom. Od. 9.263). The same pattern is noticeable in the absence of Charite’s identity. In the underworld of the robbers’ cave, the identification of Charite, a mark of her suspension from real life, is here reflected by the long absence of her name. Her identity is revealed when Tlepolemus, who is also developed here along the lines of Homer’s Odysseus, is about to liberate his fiancée and destroy this band of criminals with the Odyssean strategy of forcing them to drink too much wine. It is my purpose in this brief discussion to compare the device of the withdrawal of Charite’s name with the epic pattern of the concealment of Odysseus’ identity to Polyphemus in a similar situation in the monster’s lair. This connection makes the subsequent character development of Charite along the lines of Odysseus even more understandable. On another level this Odyssean development links the heroine more closely with Tlepolemus insofar as her means of taking vengeance on her opponent, Thrasyllus, coincides with the Odyssean tactic of Tlepolemus in punishing his own adversaries, the robbers.


4) The Odyssean development of the persona of Tlepolemus in the tale of Haemus/Tlepolemus (Met. 7.4/156.19-7.14/164.14) is part of another work cur-