

OF NYMPHS AND SEA: NUMENIUS ON SOULS AND MATTER IN HOMER'S *ODYSSEY**

The aim of this article is to briefly discuss the ingenious interpretations of *Od.* 13.104 and 11.122–3 that were put forward by Numenius of Apamea. As our understanding of this fascinating second-century forerunner of Neoplatonism has significantly improved over the last years, Numenius' importance is now generally recognized to be twofold.¹ First, he was instrumental in establishing a framework within which numerous philosophers from Plotinus onwards would operate. Second, he skilfully employed allegoresis for pedagogical purposes, which not only helped to promote his exposition of philosophy, but also stimulated critical investigations into the nature of myth and poetry.² In that, however, Numenius' hermeneutics marks a serious departure from Plato: when embracing allegoresis, Numenius combined Platonism with traditions sympathetic to the practice that Plato himself vehemently repudiated.

A remarkable feature of Numenius' philosophy is his use of allegory and allegoresis for the purpose of expounding his views. Following the

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¹ Most critically for this vast topic, see A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 4: *Le Dieu inconnu et la gnose* (Paris, 1954), 123–32; P. Merlan, 'Numenius', in A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967), 96–106; J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London, 1977, revised edition, Ithaca, NY, 1996), 361–79; W. Deuse, *Untersuchungen zur mittelplatonischen und neuplatonischen Seelenlehre* (Wiesbaden, 1983), 62–80; M. Frede, 'Numenius', *ANRW* 2.36.2 (1987), 1034–75; G. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, vol. 4: *Le scuole dell'età imperiale* (Milan, 1987), 410–26; G. E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry* (Oxford, 2006), 127–49; M. J. Edwards, 'Numenius of Apamea', in L. P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 2010), 115–25; and P. Athanassiadi, 'Numenius: Portrait of a Platonist', in H. Tarrant, D. A. Layne, D. Baltzly, and F. Renaud (eds.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity* (Leiden, 2018), 183–205.

² Groundbreaking work on Numenius' allegoresis of Homer has been done by F. Buffière, *Les Mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris, 1956), 413–59; and R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian. Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley, CA, 1986), 54–77.

established tradition, we may define allegory as a technique of *composing* a text (that is, a mode of *expression*) and allegoresis – as a technique of its *reading* (that is, a mode of *interpreting*).³ Let us illustrate this with some examples from Numenius.⁴ His portrayal (DP 18 = L 27) of the Demiurge as a ‘helmsman’ (κυβερνήτης) who sails on the ‘sea’ (θάλαττα) of matter is an example of *allegory*. His interpretation (DP 30 = L 46) of the Homeric Naiads (*Od.* 13.104) as ‘souls descending into generation’ (εἰς γένεσιν κατιούσαι ψυχαί), on the other hand, is an example of *allegoresis*. As both these cases will be discussed below, suffice it to say here that in the former case Numenius figuratively *presents* an idea (acting, thus, as an allegorical *writer*), whereas in the latter case he *unveils* the hidden (symbolic) meaning of the poem (acting, thus, as an allegorical *interpreter*).

Crucially, however, when espousing allegoresis, Numenius defied Plato, who gladly expressed his views allegorically, but flatly rejected the practice of allegorical interpretation. Thus, for example, in the *Republic* Plato presents his famous allegory of the cave (514a1–517a7), but frowns upon any attempts to reveal the ‘hidden meanings’ (ὑπόνοιαι) of Homer’s poetry (378d3–8). Plato’s dismissal of allegoresis triggered many discussions among Platonists. For instance, Plutarch, who provides us with the vital information (*De aud. poet.* 19e–f) that by his time the earlier term *huponoiia* was superseded by *allegoria*,⁵ is fairly ambivalent about allegoresis: he objects to it in his *On Listening to the Poets*,⁶ but practices it throughout his *On Isis and Osiris*.⁷ Importantly, there is no such ambivalence in Numenius, who frequently and consistently has recourse to allegoresis. A case in point is

³ The difference has been nicely put by J. Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie. Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes* (Paris, 1976), 488, according to whom the former consists in ‘hiding a message beneath the covering of a figure’ (‘cacher un message sous le revêtement d’une figure’), and the latter in ‘deciphering the figure to retrieve the message’ (‘décrypter la figure pour retrouver le message’). See further M. Domaradzki, ‘The Sophists and Allegoresis’, *AncPhil* 35 (2015), 247–58; M. Domaradzki, ‘The Beginnings of Greek Allegoresis’, *CW* 110 (2017), 299–321; and M. Domaradzki, ‘Democritus and Allegoresis’, *CQ* 69 (2019), 545–56.

⁴ In this study, two editions are used: E.-A. Leemans, *Studie over den Wijsgeer Numenius van Apamea met Uitgave der Fragmenten* (Brussels, 1937); and E. des Places, *Numénius. Fragments* (Paris, 1973). Although I provide my own translations, I have occasionally consulted R. Petty, *Fragments of Numenius of Apamea* (Westbury, 2012).

⁵ The relation between the two terms has been extensively discussed by Buffière (n. 2), 45–8; Pépin (n. 3), 85–92; J. Whitman, *Allegory. The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 263–8; and C. Blönnigen, *Der griechische Ursprung der jüdisch-hellenistischen Allegorese und ihre Rezeption in der alexandrinischen Patristik* (Frankfurt, 1992), 11–19.

⁶ For example, in the passage cited above, Plutarch diagnoses (19f) that the allegorists ‘forcibly pervert’ (παράβλαζόμενοι καὶ διαστρέφοντες) the myths they purport to interpret.

⁷ For an example, see below, n. 16.

his innovative account of *Od.* 13.104 and 11.122–3, to which we shall now turn.

The two interpretations that are the focus of this article have been preserved by Porphyry in his *On the Cave of the Nymphs* (10 and 34), who incorporates Numenius' views into his own allegoresis of the Homeric cave. Although this provides us with the invaluable context, it also makes Porphyry a somewhat problematic source for reconstructing Numenius' original input, because it is not immediately clear when this third-century Neoplatonist actually quotes Numenius and when he merely paraphrases him.⁸ Furthermore, Numenius' authentic contribution to Homeric allegoresis is difficult to separate from that of other thinkers, since Porphyry (rather vaguely) associates the first interpretation with 'the Pythagoreans' (οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι; 8.11) and the second with 'those surrounding Numenius' (οἱ περὶ Νομηνίου; 34.6–7). Notwithstanding all this, Numenius' paramount importance for the development of the Neoplatonist allegoresis of Homer's *Odyssey* can hardly be impugned.⁹

Given the challenges that the available evidence poses, it is advisable to place the extant testimonies on Numenius' allegoresis of *Od.* 13.104 and 11.122–3 in the context of his other views. Thus, in what follows it will be suggested that, if Numenius' interpretation of the Naiad nymphs is read in light of his account of ensoulment, and if his interpretation of the men who do not know the sea is read in light of his account of matter, then both these instances of allegoresis can be attributed to him with a great degree of probability. What emerges is a coherent picture of Homer's eschatology: a hedonistic soul clothes itself in the wet garments of corporeality as it descends into the material world, but, after a cycle of atoning reincarnations, it disrobes as it returns to its noetic home.

While *Od.* 13.104 specifies that the nymphs to whom the cave is sacred are called Νηϊόδες, Porphyry cites (*De antro* 10 = DP 30 = L 46) an interpretation that identifies the Naiads with souls descending into *genesis* (that is, falling into the material world) owing to their becoming moist. This testimony undoubtedly provides us with a glimpse of

⁸ Tellingly, des Places (n. 4) classified these two excerpts as *fragmenta* (30 and 33), whereas Leemans (n. 4) categorized them as *testimonia* (46 and 45).

⁹ In his classic discussion, Buffière (n. 2), 419, even went so far as to deny the relevance of Porphyry, claiming that, although *On the Cave of the Nymphs* 'is signed by Porphyry' ('est signé de Porphyre'), the latter 'only popularized the thought of Numenius and Cronius' ('n'a fait que vulgariser la pensée de Numénus et de Cronius').

Numenius' contribution to the ancient allegoresis of Homer, but it is somewhat challenging to determine what Numenius' innovation precisely comprises. Porphyry says first (10.8–9) that we 'specifically' (ιδίως) give the name of Naiad nymphs to the 'powers presiding over waters' (τῶν ὑδάτων προεστῶσας δυνάμεις), whereas they gave the name to 'all souls in general that descend into generation' (εἰς γένεσιν κατιούσας ψυχὰς κοινῶς ἀπάσας). As the 'they' refers to 'the Pythagoreans' (8.11), the question of the Pythagorean roots of Numenius' allegoresis has inevitably resurfaced, at least since the classic work by Armand Delatte.¹⁰ Of course, given the lack of reliable information on the Pythagorean allegoresis of Homer, no conclusive answer can be given.¹¹ There are, however, at least two indirect arguments that provide fairly strong evidence for Numenius' authorship of the above equation: on the one hand, it is justified in a manner that is consistent with Numenius' method and, on the other, it sits very well with his account of ensoulment. Let us examine this briefly.

The aforementioned 'Pythagorean' interpretation is clarified by Porphyry (10.10–15) with several concepts that are explicitly attributed to Numenius:

Ἦγοῦντο γὰρ προσιζάνειν τῷ ὕδατι τὰς ψυχὰς θεοπνῶφ ὄντι, ὡς φησὶν ὁ Νουμῆνιος, διὰ τοῦτο λέγων καὶ τὸν προφήτην εἰρηκέναι ἐμφέρεσθαι ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος θεοῦ πνεύματος τε Αἰγυπτίους διὰ τοῦτο τοὺς δαίμονας ἀπαντας οὐχ ἰστάναι ἐπὶ στερεοῦ, ἀλλὰ πάντας ἐπὶ πλοίου, καὶ τὸν Ἥλιον καὶ ἀπλῶς πάντας· οὐστὶνας εἰδέναι χρὴ τὰς ψυχὰς ἐπιποτωμένας τῷ ὑγρῷ τὰς εἰς γένεσιν κατιούσας.

For they believed that the souls settle on water breathed-by-god [god-inspired], as Numenius says, who also maintains that this is why the prophet says that 'the breath [spirit] of god was borne above the water', and this is why the Egyptians place all *daimones* not on anything solid but all on a boat, the Sun and absolutely all the others, and that these ought to be understood as the souls who float upon moisture while descending into generation.

¹⁰ A. Delatte, *Études sur la littérature pythagoricienne* (Paris, 1915), 129–31. Delatte does not discuss the Naiad nymphs interpretation as such, but considers the 'general theme' ('thème général') of Porphyry's allegoresis to be 'manifestly of Pythagorean inspiration' ('manifestement d'inspiration pythagoricienne') (129). This account has been convincingly challenged by Buffière (n. 2), 452–3 (see also n. 11 below). For an overview of the Pythagorean tradition to Numenius, see J. Dillon, 'Pythagoreanism in the Academic Tradition: The Early Academy to Numenius', in C. A. Huffman (ed.), *A History of Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, 2014), 250–73.

¹¹ Lambertson (n. 2), 31–43, who surveys the literature on the first Pythagoreans' influence on the development of the allegorical tradition, finds the evidence for the early Pythagorean allegoresis of Homer to be 'slim at best' (43). With regard to the Naiad nymphs interpretation, he cautiously notes that Numenius' authorship is 'quite likely' (71), but he does not pursue the matter further.

Porphyry ascribes to Numenius the view that the descending souls reside on water imbued with divine *pneuma* ('breath', 'spirit') and reports him to have buttressed this conviction with an allusion to Genesis 1:2¹² and an interpretation of Egyptian religious belief. This use of a variety of sources to substantiate an opinion is remarkably consistent with what we know about Numenius' method. Eusebius cites (*Praep. evang.* 9.7.1 = DP 1a = L 9a) Numenius' famous postulate that when seeking the truth one should take into account diverse sources: from the 'testimonies' (μαρτυρίαι) of Plato, through the 'teachings' (λόγοι) of Pythagoras, to the 'rites' (τελεταί), 'beliefs' (δόγματα), and 'consecrations' (ιδρύσεις) of the Brahmans, Jews, Magi, and Egyptians. This suggests that Numenius would select those ideas that appeared to him useful for extracting ancient wisdom: Plato confirmed what Pythagoras revealed but the truth could also be discerned in the various cultural practices of non-Greek peoples. From this perspective, allegorizing the Homeric nymphs as souls drifting on water before incarnation does not seem particularly eccentric. Numenius drew on multifarious sources as he identified human souls with both Moses' *pneuma theou* ('spirit of God') borne on water and the Egyptian *daimones* floating on boats. The Homeric Naiads presiding over waters fit well in the picture.

Although recourse to the authority of venerable tradition and foreign civilizations is not that original per se, the richness of Numenius' sources is surely worth emphasizing.¹³ Numenius' appropriation of the Old Testament sits very well with his recommendation that Jewish wisdom be utilized in the search for truth (see further DP 1b = L 9b, DP 1c = L 32, DP 8 = L 17, DP 9 = L 18, DP 10a = L 19 and DP 56 = L 34).¹⁴ While the same applies to Numenius'

¹² It is possible that Numenius was here inspired by the Gnostics, on which see M. J. Edwards, 'Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews', *VChr* 44 (1990), 69–72.

¹³ It has even given rise to the notorious controversy over Numenius' 'orientalism'. The leading proponent is undoubtedly H.-C. Puech, 'Numénius d'Apamée et les théologies orientales au second siècle', *Mélanges Bidez* 2 (Brussels, 1934), 745–78. However, E. R. Dodds, 'Numenius and Ammonius', in *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 5. *Les sources de Plotin* (Geneva, 1960), 1–32, who sought a more nuanced picture of Numenius' position, ultimately concluded that Numenius 'welcomed all the superstitions of his time, whatever their origin, and thereby contributed to the eventual degradation of Greek philosophical thought' (11). For criticisms of excessive emphasis on Numenius' 'orientalism', see Festugière (n. 1), 130–2; Merlan (n. 1), 99–103; and, more recently, M. Bonazzi, 'Numenio, il platonismo e le tradizioni orientali', *Χόρα. Revue d'études anciennes et médiévales. Hors-série* (2015), 225–40. For other balanced assessments, see Edwards (n. 1), 124–5; and Athanassiadi (n. 1), 201–2.

¹⁴ For a detailed and sober study of Numenius' acquaintance with Jewish literature, see Edwards (n. 12), 64–75.

accommodation of the aforementioned Egyptian belief (see further DP 9 = L 18, DP 31 = L 43 and DP 37 = L 49), one can easily adduce parallel interpretations from the period. Thus, for example, Philo allegorizes the same verse from the Bible for his own purposes, when he deciphers (*Gig.* 22) the phrase θεοῦ πνεῦμα as signifying the ‘flowing air’ (ρέων ἀήρ), that is, the third ‘element’ (στοιχείον) that ‘rides on the water’ (ἐποχούμενον ὕδατι), precisely on the basis of Genesis 1:2.¹⁵ Numenius’ explanation of the above-mentioned Egyptian religious belief, on the other hand, can be juxtaposed with the one we find in Plutarch, who clarifies (*De Is. et Os.* 364c) that the Egyptians pictured the Sun and the Moon as traversing their courses in ‘boats’ (πλοίοις) rather than chariots, thus, ‘hinting enigmatically at their nourishment and generation from moisture’ (ἀνιττόμενοι τὴν ἀφ’ ὕγρου τροφὴν αὐτῶν καὶ γένεσιν).¹⁶ Still, even if Numenius did take advantage of certain ideas that were already in the air, one can hardly deny the boldness of the interpretation that Porphyry credits him with: that the Naiad nymphs are souls resting on water is reflected in the Egyptian images of their deities as floating on boats and in the words of Moses about the divine *pneuma* borne on water. The next step is to provide a link between descending into generation and being wet.

Porphyry relates further that Numenius combined Heraclitus and Homer to establish a connection between moisture and pleasure. According to this testimony (*De antro* 10.16–17), Heraclitus said (DK 22 B 77) that for souls ‘to become moist is delight not death’ (τέρψιν μὴ θάνατον ὑγρῆσι γενέσθαι), and Numenius equated this ‘enjoyment’ (τέρψις) of the souls with their ‘fall into generation’ (εἰς τὴν γένεσιν πῶσις). This identification of pleasure with humidity takes advantage of Heraclitus’ view that the fiery soul’s perdition results from its indulgence in hedonism (epitomized by excessive drinking), which leads to the dampening of the soul’s fire (see esp. DK 22 B

¹⁵ See D. Winston and J. Dillon, *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria. A Commentary on De gigantibus and Quod deus sit immutabilis* (Chico, CA, 1983), 248. Although it cannot be proved that Philo played any role in the formation of Numenius’ positive assessment of Judaism, it cannot be ruled out, either. For a recent discussion, see G. E. Sterling, ‘The Theft of Philosophy: Philo of Alexandria and Numenius of Apamea’, *StudPhilon* 27 (2015), 71–85. Moreover, it may not be superfluous to note here that Philo, like Numenius, employed both allegory and allegoresis for the purpose of explicating his views: see M. Domaradzki, ‘The Value and Variety of Allegory: A Glance at Philo’s *De gigantibus*’, *StudPhilon* 31 (2019), 13–28.

¹⁶ See e.g. T. Hopfner, *Plutarch. Über Isis und Osiris, Teil 2. Die Deutungen der Sage* (Prague, 1941), 157–9; or J. G. Griffiths, *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride. Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Swansea, 1970), 426–7.

36, 117, 118). Thus, if Heraclitus said (DK 22 B 36) that ‘for souls it is death to become water’ (ψυχῆσι θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι), then Numenius’ allegoresis of Heraclitus’ words (DK 22 B 77 = DP 30 = L 46) apparently consisted in replacing their literal meaning (‘souls are destroyed by water’) with a figurative one (‘souls are destroyed by delight’). The implication is that the soul retains its *pneuma* (that is, continues to be spirit), as long as it does not imbibe pleasure: sensual enjoyment moistens the soul and leads to its descent into a body. Hence, the soul’s wetness marks its entrapment in flesh.

However, this part of Porphyry’s testimony may appear somewhat uncertain.¹⁷ In Proclus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus* the same use of Heraclitus is explicitly attributed to Porphyry. When discussing the Porphyrian interpretation of the destruction described at *Timaeus* 22d3–5, Proclus reports (1.117.5–8) Porphyry to have quoted Heraclitus in support of his explanation of the death of ‘intellective’ (νοερῶν) souls in terms of their ‘becoming moist’ (ὕγρησι γενέσθαι). This could *prima facie* suggest that it is Porphyry rather than Numenius who is responsible for the above citation of DK 22 B 77.¹⁸ However, two arguments speak in favour of Numenius’ authorship. First of all, we know that Numenius held Heraclitus in high esteem: Calcidius reports (*In Tim.* 297 = DP 52 = L 30) him to have explicitly praised the Ephesian philosopher.¹⁹ Thus, it is more than probable that Numenius did utilize Heraclitus for the purpose of his exposition: Porphyry may easily have used the same quotation from Heraclitus independently, or Proclus may be crediting him elliptically with a view that he culls from Numenius with approbation.²⁰ Secondly, and

¹⁷ Thus, for example, C. H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus. An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge, 1979), 245, notes: ‘Although this passage is often cited as a “fragment” of Numenius, it is in fact a paraphrase by Porphyry which may have only the most tenuous connection with Heraclitus’ own words.’ In a similar vein, Petty (n. 4), 179, observes: ‘it seems that Porphyry is revising Heraclitus here for the sake of argument’.

¹⁸ As noted by H. Tarrant, *Proclus. Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus. Vol. 1. Book I. Proclus on the Socratic State and Atlantis* (Cambridge, 2007), 212, n. 496. See also J. Dillon, *Iamblichus Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta* (Leiden, 1973), 276–7. For a recent stimulating discussion, see N. Akçay, ‘*Daimones* in Porphyry’s *On the Cave of the Nymphs*’, in L. Brisson, S. O’Neill, and A. Timotin (eds.), *Neoplatonic Demons and Angels* (Leiden, 2018), 154–6. Proclus was a fifth-century author of voluminous commentaries on Plato which contain excerpts from otherwise lost Platonic authors. On the issue of his reliability, see below.

¹⁹ Calc. *In Tim.* 297: *Numenius laudat Heraclitum*. See also Edwards (n. 12), 74, n. 31.

²⁰ Besides, if one doubts Porphyry (e.g. on the grounds that Numenius’ use of Heraclitus is ascribed by Proclus to Porphyry himself), then one might certainly feel entitled to doubt Proclus (I thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me).

far more importantly, Numenius' use of Heraclitus accords very well with his account of ensoulment. Let us investigate this issue.

The final part of this testimony (*De antro* 10.18–20) contains an amalgamation of Heraclitus and Homer: the former's words that 'they live our death' (ζῆν ἐκείνας τὸν ἡμέτερον θάνατον) are explained by the observation that 'the poet calls those in generation "liquid", because their souls are wet' (διερούς τοὺς ἐν γενέσει ὄντας καλεῖν τὸν ποιητὴν τοὺς διύγρους τὰς ψυχὰς ἔχοντας). This coalescence of the views of Heraclitus (see DK 22 B 62) and Homer (see *Od.* 6.201) builds on the ambiguity of the adjective διερός,²¹ which makes it possible to associate being moist with falling into *genesis* and reveals that embodiment and hedonism are the death of the soul. The explication concludes with a telling analogy: 'blood' (αἷμα) and 'wet seed' (δίυγρος γόνος) are as dear to these descending souls as is water to plants. While it is clear that the passage ascribes to Homer the doctrine of incarnation, it must be somehow connected with Numenius' account of the generation of the soul.²²

Porphry relates (*Ad Gaurum* 34.26–35.1 = DP 36 = L 48) that the soul's entry into the embryo was of great interest to Numenius:

κάνταῦθα πολὺς ὁ Νομηνίος καὶ οἱ τὰς Πυθαγόρου ὑπονοίας ἐξηγοῦμενοι, καὶ τὸν παρὰ μὲν τῷ Πλάτῳι ποταμὸν Ἀμέλητα, παρὰ δὲ τῷ Ἡσιόδῳ καὶ τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς τὴν Στύγα, παρὰ δὲ τῷ Φερεκύδῃ τὴν ἐκροὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ σπέρματος ἐκδεχόμενοι.

Here Numenius is important, as are the interpreters of Pythagoras' hidden meanings who understand the river Ameles in Plato, the Styx in Hesiod and the Orphics, and the outflow in Pherecydes as semen.²³

In his discussion of the ensoulment of human beings, Numenius allegorically identified the underworld rivers Ameles (Pl. *Resp.* 621a5) and Styx (Hes. *Theog.* 361 or DK 1 B 10 = Kern F 25), as well as

²¹ Which means 'alive' (Hom. *Od.* 6.201) and 'wet' (Ar. *Nub.* 337); for other examples of the latter meaning, see LSJ.

²² See esp. H. S. Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros* (Oxford, 1990), 113–17. See also M. J. Edwards, 'Numenius, Pherecydes and the *Cave of the Nymphs*', *CQ* 40 (1990), 258–62; and H. Tarrant, 'The *Phaedo* in Numenian Allegorical Interpretation', in S. Delcomminette, P. d'Hoine, and M.-A. Gavray (eds.), *Ancient Readings of Plato's Phaedo* (Leiden, 2015), 138–9.

²³ In his otherwise excellent translation, J. Wilberding, *Porphry. To Gaurus on How Embryos are Ensouled and on What Is in Our Power* (London, 2011), 32, renders the original ὑπόνοια as 'thought', but 'hidden meanings' are clearly preferable given the allegorical context (thus, for example, Schibli [n. 22], 174; or Tarrant [n. 22], 139). Des Places (n. 4), 87, has 'allegorical senses' ('sens allégoriques'); Petty (n. 4), 79, follows with 'allegorical meanings', E. Vimercati, *Medioplatonici. Opere, Frammenti, Testimonianze* (Milan, 2015), 1433, suggests 'allegorical thoughts' ('pensieri allegorici'); and G. Boys-Stones, *Platonist Philosophy 80 BC to AD 250. An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation* (Cambridge, 2018), 322, opts for 'hints'.

the mysterious Pherecydean ‘efflux’ (DK 7 B 7 = Schibli F 87), with semen so as to show that souls descend into the human seed, which – as James Wilberding aptly notes – was apparently taken as ‘the fluid border between the sensible and intelligible world’.²⁴ If the soul enters the embryo with the seed, then a connection between the material (‘corporeal’) and noetic (‘spiritual’) realm is necessary.²⁵ This connection was provided by Numenius’ famous account of two souls in human beings. Porphyry relates (ap. Stob. *Anthol.* 1.49.25a = DP 44 = L 36) that Numenius distinguished two souls in humans: the ‘rational’ (λογική) one and the ‘irrational’ (ἄλογος) one. While the former is divine, the latter derives from matter. Though the details are unclear, Numenius apparently identified the soul originating from matter with seed so that the soul and semen were deposited simultaneously.²⁶ Thus, his allegorical interpretation of the aforementioned rivers and outflow as σπέρμα linked ensoulment with incarnation: souls float upon semen, which carries them (like a river) to embodiment in matter (that is, into *genesis*). This suggests strongly that the whole interpretation of the Naiads as souls falling into generation was authored by Numenius: the descent into the material world begins with becoming moist, which is why the Naiads are souls settling on water before falling into the realm of becoming. That this allegoresis of *Od.* 13.104 comes from Numenius is corroborated by his depiction of matter and his allegoresis of *Od.* 11.122–3.

Given his philosophical background, it is hardly surprising that Numenius characterizes both matter (see esp. Calcidius, *In Tim.* 295–9 = DP 52 = L 30) and embodiment (see esp. Iamblichus ap. Stob. *Anthol.* 1.49.40 = DP 48 = L 40) as evil.²⁷ Matter, in which souls become embedded, is the primary cause of souls’ corruption, for it is inherently irrational and unstable. Indeed, Eusebius has preserved Numenius’ telling descriptions of matter as being ‘irrational’

²⁴ Wilberding (n. 23), 58. For brilliant discussions of Pherecydes’ ἐκροή, see M. L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient* (Oxford, 1971), 25–6; and Schibli (n. 22), 114–17.

²⁵ Reale (n. 1), 424, correctly points out that Numenius’ view of soul as ‘absolutely incorporeal’ (‘assolutamente incorporea’) makes it necessary for him to assume the existence of ‘an intermediate phase’ (‘una fase intermedia’).

²⁶ See Schibli (n. 22), 115; and Tarrant (n. 22), 139.

²⁷ For discussions, see e.g. M. Baltes, ‘Numenios von Apamea und der platonische *Timaios*’, *VChr* 29 (1975), 247–57; Dillon (n. 1), 373–8; Deuse (n. 1), 62–8, 77–9; Frede (n. 1), 1050–4, 1070–4; Reale (n. 1), 423–4; Karamanolis (n. 1), 139–40; and, most recently, G. Boys-Stones, ‘Numenius on Intellect, Soul, and the Authority of Plato’, in J. Bryan, R. Wardy, and J. Warren (eds.), *Authors and Authorities in Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2018), 192–4.

(ἄλογος), on the one hand (*Praep. evang.* 15.17.3 = DP 4a = L 13), and as ‘having a desiring and flowing character’ (ἐπιθυμητικὸν ἦθος ἐχούσης καὶ ῥεούσης), on the other (*Praep. evang.* 11.18.3 = DP 11 = L 20). In light of everything that has been said so far, it is understandable why Numenius consistently allegorizes matter as water. Eusebius reports him to have frequently presented the generated world in terms of various aquatic images. Thus, for example, in the aforementioned fragment (*Praep. evang.* 11.18.24 = DP 18 = L 27), the Demiurge is a ‘helmsman’ (κυβερνήτης) who sails on the ‘sea’ (θάλασσα) of matter. In yet another fragment (*Praep. evang.* 15.17.2 = DP 3 = L 12), matter is a ‘river’ (ποταμός) that is ‘running violently and rapidly, deep and broad, unlimited in length and never-ending’ (ρόωδης καὶ ὀξύρροπος, βάθος καὶ πλάτος καὶ μῆκος ἀόριστος καὶ ἀνήνυτος). In still another fragment (*Praep. evang.* 11.22.1 = DP 2 = L 11), matter is that which is ‘between the waves’ (μετακύμιον).²⁸ These images of fluidity show, on the one hand, that, prior to receiving form, matter is capable of taking various forms and, on the other, that the material world is ever-changing. While water symbolizes, then, the ephemeral and malleable nature of everything that comes into being, an embodied soul is immersed in the surging sea of this *genesis*. With that, we come to the other testimony that will be briefly touched upon here.

Porphry commends (*De antro* 34.6–10 = DP 33 = L 45) those ‘surrounding Numenius’ (περὶ Νουμήνιου) for the view that Odysseus is an ‘image’ (εἰκόν) of a soul that ‘passes through [a series of] successive [stages of] generation and returns to those who [live] beyond every wave and [have] no experience of the sea’ (διὰ τῆς ἐφεξῆς γενέσεως διερχομένου καὶ οὕτως ἀποκαθισταμένου εἰς τοὺς ἔξω παντὸς κλύδωνος καὶ θαλάσσης ἀπείρους). Numenius’ ‘associates’ must have included Cronius. Porphyry himself puts it in no uncertain terms earlier (*De antro* 21.3–4 = DP 31 = L 43) that Numenius and his ‘companion’ (ἐταῖρος) Cronius interpreted the cave as an ‘image’ (εἰκόν) and ‘symbol’ (σύμβολον) of the cosmos.²⁹ While hardly anything certain

²⁸ On the difficult phrase μετακυμῖοις ἐχομένην, see H. Whittaker, ‘Numenius’ Fragment 2 and the Literary Tradition’, *SO* 68 (1993), 96–9.

²⁹ On the interchangeability of the two terms, see J. Dillon, ‘Image, Symbol and Analogy: Three Basic Concepts of Neoplatonic Allegorical Exegesis’, in R. Baine Harris (ed.), *The Significance of Neoplatonism* (Norfolk, VA, 1976), 247–62, esp. 254. Given the extent of the controversy that surrounds Numenius’ allegoresis of Homer, this article will not discuss his interpretation of the two ‘entrances’ (θύραι) to the cave (*Od.* 13.109–12) as the northern and southern gates of the zodiac through which the souls pass (DP 31 = L 43, DP 32 = L 44, DP 34 = L 47; and DP 35 = L 42), on which see Buffière (n. 2), 438–58; and Lamberton (n. 2), 66–72. N. Akcay’s recent *Porphyry’s On*

can be said about Cronius,³⁰ this remark by Porphyry, and everything that has been said so far about Numenius, leave no doubt that Numenius allegorized Odysseus' wanderings as symbolizing the soul's exile to the material world.

What follows is an identification (*De antro* 34.11–13) of 'the men who know not the sea and eat no food mingled with salt' (οἱ οὐκ ἴσασι θάλασσαν ἄνδρες οὐδέ θ' ἄλεσσι μεμιγμένον εἶδαρ ἔδουσιν) at *Od.* 11.122–3 with disembodied souls. The equation builds on the assumption that 'the ocean, the sea and the waves [represent], also in Plato, the material constitution' (πόντος δὲ καὶ θάλασσα καὶ κλύδων καὶ παρὰ Πλάτωνι ἢ ὑλικὴ σύστασις). While this is clearly a reference to *Politicus* 273c2–e4, where god is the 'helmsman' (κυβερνήτης) who saves the ship of the universe from sinking in the 'boundless ocean of unlikeness' (ἀνομοιότητος ἄπειρον πόντον),³¹ it is consistent with Numenius' portrayal of matter as water and his account of souls as floating on water to incarnation: those who have no knowledge of the 'sea' (that is, matter) are in fact souls that are no longer embodied (that is, 'immersed in water and consuming brine').

In connection with this, it is also worth noting that, in his *Commentary on the Timaeus* (1.77.3–5 = DP 37 = L 49), Proclus cites Numenius' celebrated interpretation of the Atlantis story as representing a 'conflict' (διάστασις) between two different souls: the 'more noble' (καλλίωνων) ones who are 'nurslings' (τροφίμων) of Athena, against others who 'work at generation' (γενεσιουργῶν) and 'belong to the god presiding over generation' (τῷ τῆς γενέσεως ἐφόρῳ θεῷ προσήκουσι).³² While the god that oversees *genesis* is Poseidon (see Pl. *Criti.* 113c2–3 and Procl. *In Plat. Tim.* 1.173.14–15), he is obviously also the lord of the sea (see, for example, Hom. *Il.* 15.190), who delays

the Cave of the Nymphs in Its Intellectual Context (Leiden, 2019), which appeared when this article was already written, also gives thorough consideration to this issue.

³⁰ Vimercati (n. 23), 1460, n. 62, observes that it is difficult to say whether Cronius was 'a fellow disciple (*condiscipolo*) or a pupil (*allievo*) of Numenius'. However, Athanassiadi (n. 1), 195, aptly points out that the 'precedence normally assigned to Numenius in our sources implies seniority'. Be that as it may, Dillon (n. 1), 379, is clearly right that Cronius 'is plainly not of the same level of importance'.

³¹ Let us recall that, according to Eusebius (*Praep. evang.* 11.18.24 = DP 18 = L 27), one of the images that Numenius employed to describe the Demiurge was precisely that of a helmsman. See further Buffière (n. 2), 425; Dodds (n. 13), 18; Dillon (n. 1), 370–1; and Deuse (n. 1), 66–7.

³² The above translation partly follows Dillon (n. 1), 378, and partly Tarrant (n. 18), 170. For discussions, see esp. Edwards (n. 22), 258–62; and Tarrant (n. 18), 60–84. See also Baltes (n. 27), 242–3; and Akcay (n. 18), 149–50.

Odysseus' homecoming (by making the hero wander the waters of *genesis*). Thus, in line with his doctrine of two souls in human beings (see above), Numenius interpreted the battle between the Athenians and Atlanteans as an allegory of the choice between wisdom (personified by Athena) and generation (personified by Poseidon). The former entails return to the intelligible world, and the latter drifting on the sea of *genesis*. Accordingly, Athena leads to liberation from the body, and Poseidon to enslavement in the body.

Let us recapitulate. This article has argued that, when taken together, the above testimonies do warrant attributing to Numenius the authorship of allegorical interpretations of *Od.* 13.104 and 11.122–3 (even though neither of them is explicitly ascribed to him alone). Numenius' allegoresis coheres entirely with his other views on the generation of the soul, the misfortune of embodiment, and the evil nature of matter. In his allegorical interpretation of Homer, Numenius used various sources and fused diverse concepts with a view to explicating the cyclical journey of the soul. The following is the gist of his allegoresis. The humidity of the cave symbolizes the material world, and the wetness of the soul symbolizes embodiment. As souls descend into the realm of becoming (ruled by Poseidon), they become exposed to all sorts of hedonistic temptations. At first, these souls only float on water (as can be seen in the iconography of Egyptian religion and in the words of Moses), but as they are immersed in the sensual reality and embrace the life of pleasures, they sink deeper and deeper into the depths of *genesis* (the 'sea' of delight and illusion). When they dissociate from the body, these souls return to the noetic world (where they 'neither know the sea nor eat food mixed with salt'). Odysseus is an εἰκὼν of a soul achieving just that: the hero is liberated from the cycle of reincarnation, stripped of the body, and restored to the unchanging intelligible realm of disembodied souls that have nothing to do with the material world and no longer have to battle with the body and its desires.

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