Embedded Tales and the Story of Lucius:

Psyche-Charite-Lucius and Other Parallel Narratives

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In the prologue to his *Metamorphoses* Apuleius has Lucius the narrator declare that he is going to "tie together different sorts of tales for you in that Milesian style of yours" (*tibi sermone isto Milesio varias fabulas conseram*¹), namely, that he will expand on the original (Greek) story of Lucius² by inserting entertaining "Milesian"³ narratives. Apuleius seems to have inserted *mutatis mutandis* some 19 tales in total⁴. Several of them probably derive from the Greek original⁵ which is now lost but served as model for both Apuleius' Latin novel and the lesser Greek epitome transmitted among Lucian's works⁶. Identifying and differentiating Apuleius' own literary work from these Greek sources is a delicate proposition. As far as I know, no critic has denied Apuleius the authorship of the longest tale, Amor and Psyche (*Met.* 4.28–6.24), even if the adventures of Psyche are not the author's invention⁷. Thus, at least, situated at the exact centre of the novel we have a very long narrative complex. And to the extent that Psyche's story foreshadows at first that of Charite who has listened to

¹ For Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, I have used the Latin text and English translation of Hanson (Loeb Classical Library, no. 44 and 453). Other texts and English translations will be noted as they are cited.

² The phrase *fabula Graecanica* (*Met.* 1.1.6) that we find in the prologue can be interpreted as Apuleius' acknowledgment that his *Metamorphoses* is based on a single Greek text of Lucius' story, or as an expression of his indebtedness to Greek literary sources in general (cf. Mason 1978, 6–12). Cf. Perry 1923, 217; Scobie 1975, 67–68; Mason 1978, 11; Kahane-Laird 2001, 11; *GCA* 2007, 65–66; Sandy 1978.

³ For the "Milesiaca", see Harrison 1998, 61–73 (= Harrison 2013, 57–68).

⁴ The number given by Bernhard 1927, 259–260. They are: (1) the vengeance of a witch, Meroe, on Socrates (*Met.* 1.5–19), (2) Pythias (1.24–25), (3) Diophanes the seer (2.13–14), (4) Thelyphron mutilated (2.21–30), (5) Lucius accused of murder in a fake trial (2.32–3.14), (6) the death of three robbers Lamachus, Alcimus and Thrasyleon (4.9–21), (7) Amor and Psyche (4.28–6.24), (8) Haemus (7.5–8), (9) cruel boy killed by a she-bear (7.24–25), (10) vengeance of Charite on Thrasyllus (8.1–14), (11) dreadful snake (8.18–21), (12) cruel execution of a slave (8.22–22), (13) unfaithful wife hiding her lover in a storage-jar (9.5–7), (14) Barbarus cheated by his slave Myrmex and his wife's lover Philesitherus (9.17–21), (15) lover of the tanner's wife discovered because of his sneezing (9.24–25), (16) baker killed by a witch employed by his wife (9.30–31), (17) the host of Lucius' master loses his three sons (9.33–38), (18) attempted murder of a stepson by his stepmother refused by him (10.2–12), (19) criminal woman who killed her husband, his sister, her daughter, and a physician and his wife (10.23–28). Cf. Tataum 1969, 487–527.

⁵ See Van Thiel 1971, 151. Mason 1994 assumes that the original Greek *Metamorphoses* did not contain any of the inserted tales. For mime performances as the sources of Apuleius' tales, see Kirichenko 2010, 11–44.

⁶ Ps.-Lucianic *Onos*, or Λούκιος ή ὄνος (cf. MacLeod 1967). For the relationship between this Greek *Onos* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, see Schlam-Finkelpearl 2000; Harrison 2003; Finkelpearl 2007; Frangoulidis 2008, 13–45.

⁷ Walsh 1970, 191. Cf. Grimal 1963, 2; Kenney 1990, 12–22; *GCA* 2004, 10 n.33. On Amor and Psyche, see Kenney 1990, 17–22, who has divided Apuleius' sources into four categories: (1) folktale and myth, (2) literary texts, (3) Platonizing philosophy, (4) iconography.

it (4.23–27, 6.25–7.14) and then that of Lucius who will have heard both their stories, we may safely assume that Apuleius himself has elaborated a parallel or mirroring structure to the Amor and Psyche episode. Its interpretation, therefore, is crucial to explaining the structure and unity of the novel⁸, including the alleged anomaly of the 11th book⁹—another part of the novel for which Apuleian authorship is beyond doubt. I would like to show in this paper that not only the Psyche-Charite-Lucius narrative complex, but also other parallel elements in the *Metamorphoses* and beyond contribute to our understanding the structure of the entire novel and the 11th book.

Whatever the unitarian¹⁰, separatist¹¹, or postmodern¹² explanation for the suddenly too "religious" or "serious" ending of the novel may be, it is mainly the motifs of magic and sex, together with those of *fortuna* and *curiositas*¹³, that dominate throughout the rest of Lucius' story. It seems that since Lucius himself qualifies his narrative as *sermone Milesio* (*Met.* 1.1) in his prologue, the novel is conceived basically as an entertaining text, stuffed with thrills and suspense, fantasy and imagination, humor and adventures, refined and grotesque literary tastes, eroticism and tragedy. Just as witches are guided by their lust for men (*e.g.* Meroe, Panthia, Panphile, Fotis, the wife of the baker), so Lucius is prone to indulge in both magic and sex when he has his human, as well as his animal, shape (cf. Fotis,

⁹ Scholars have tried to explain the sudden change in different ways. The most recent survey of this problem is, as far as I know, Schramm 2013, 171–173. Cf. Perry 1967; Schlam 1971, 293–294; Sandy 1978; Winkler 1985; Harrison 1990; Finkelpearl 1998.

¹² Winkler 1985, 124 "it is a philosophical comedy about religious knowledge"

⁸ For the structural position of Amor and Psyche, see Scobie 1978; cf. also Wlosok 1969, 75: "Das Schicksal Psyches spiegelt im Grossen das Schicksal des Lucius wider und trägt zu dessen Erhellung bei. Die entscheidende Parellele sehe ich in der Ursache für den Fall und den folgenden Leidesweg der beiden Helden: Psyche erliegt der gleichen *curiositas* wie Lucius"; Walsh 1970, 190: "Apuleius has here adopted the Alexandrian technique exploited Callimachus in his *Hecale* and taken over by Catullus in his sixty-fourth poem"; Sandy 1972, 180; Hooper 1985, 399: "The tale of Cupid and Psyche ... is a miniature version of the whole novel, and a careful foreshadowing of its religious significance"; *GCA* 2004, 9: "The structural position of the tale of Cupid and Psyche, and especially of Psyche's *katabasis*, supports the idea that at least one of the functions of the tale of Cupid and Psyche is that Psyche's adventures are a mythical projection of the adventure of Lucius".

¹⁰ The unitarians (there are different kinds): Merkelbach 1962 (the 11th book is the Isiac revelation of the work); Schlam 1968 (the thematic unity of *curiositas* and *fortuna* lasts through the work and is resolved in the 11th book); Tatum 1969, 488–493 (If they [sc. tales] do have some bearing on the story of Lucius and "Isiac" interpretation of his experiences in Book 11, then it will be possible to maintain that the *Metamorphoses* is a disciplined, purposeful composition throughout); Schlam 1970 (Platonic reading according to which the Amor and Psyche tale as well as the 11th book allegorically represent the ascent of the soul to the divine world with the aid of Eros); Scobie 1978, 46: "Western Europe's first Entwicklungsroman"; Hooper 1985, 398: "the lack of order in *The Golden Ass* is an illusion, and one carefully planned by Apuleius to draw us under the spell of his beloved goddess, ... the novel is a deeply religious work"; Harrison 2000, 248: "The text in the end ... prompts the reader to treat Lucius' account of the cults of Isis and Osiris in Met. 11 as an amusing satire on religious mania and youthful gullibility"; 259: "The view of the *Metamorphoses* sketched here suggests that literary entertainment and cultural display, rather than ideological commitment or didactic purpose, lie behind the undoubted deployment of both Isiac and Platonic elements in the novel"; May 2006, 307–328 (Isis as *deux ex machina*).

¹¹ For the separatists' idea, see Helm 1910 and 1956; Perry 1967, 242-245; Anderson 1982, 75-86.

¹³ Cf. Lancel 1961, 35; Sandy 1972, 180: "it (sc. the motif of *curiositas*) does not appear in the story of Eselmensch attributed to Lucian".

Charite, horses, zoophilic lady episodes). When the hero transgresses a taboo because of his *curiositas*—the most notable aspect of his character¹⁴—he is punished with his persistent subjugation to blind *Fortuna*, who will, however, be transformed into "seeing" Isis-Tychē¹⁵ at the end of the story. The Psyche and Charite tales can be interpreted according to the same set of dominant themes. Critics have compared their situations to that of the *rite de passage*¹⁶. Psyche's, Charite's, and Lucius' stories all share motifs of puberty and marriage closely connected with magic and sex as well as with initiation and mystery themes. Lucius' human-to-animal metamorphosis can thus be interpreted as representing the rite of passage, paralleled by Psyche's being offered as sacrifice to a monster (*Met.* 4.32–35) and Charite's abduction from her wedding (*Met.* 4.23–27, *funereus thalamus* theme). For after a long trial, all of them succeed in escaping from their critical situations and are eventually restored to their original—or rather better—status: to marriage by means of a wedding, to divinity through apotheosis, and to a priesthood by initiation. What then about *curiositas* and *fortuna*? While Psyche breaks taboos because of her curiosity, Charite admittedly does not seem to share in that particular theme. All three, however, are victims of *fortuna*. Charite and Psyche are young girls, but Lucius is not exactly an adolescent (cf. pornographic passages).

It is clear that the story of young Psyche and her conjugal partner Amor (4.28-6.25) mirrors the surrounding narrative of Charite and her fiancé-then-husband Tlepolemus (4.23-27, 6.25-7.14, 8.1-8.14). Both Psyche and Charite have the age, beauty, social status, and fame all proper to the heroines of Greek novels, and we can compare their stories to the standard type found in that genre: both narratives start with a separation (Charite kidnapped by robbers and Psyche abandoned to a mountaintop) and end with a marriage (Charite to Tlepolemus and Psyche to Amor). Additionally, these parallel narratives are framed by the main story of Lucius (1.1-4.22, 7.15-7.28, 8.15-11.30), who also wanders about after his metamorphosis and separation from his lover Fotis. Yet after his remetamorphosis and reintegration he does not get married; instead he becomes a priest of Isis. Despite the absence of marriage, Lucius nevertheless does at different points have a partner comparable to those of Charite and Psyche: in the first part of the story he is paired with Fotis, a terrestrial woman and thus like Tlepolemus, who is his partner in sex and magic (Venus vulgaria¹⁷), while in the last part, he is paired with a celestial goddess, Isis (caelestis Venus, cf. Met. 11.2), just as Psyche has Amor. Whereas his relationship with Fotis is described in almost pornographic terms (Met. 2.7-10, 2.16-17), Lucius shares with Isis not a physical but rather a spiritual relationship, which leads through initiations to the salvation of his soul-that is, higher pleasure without sex, an element of the novel's Platonic themes¹⁸.

¹⁴ *Curiositas* is a very rare word attested only once in extant Latin corpus before Apuleius (Cic. *Epist. ad Att.* 2.12.2). However, we find the word twelve times in the *Metamophoses* (1.12, 3.14, 5.6, 5.19, 6.20, 6.21, 9.12, 9.13, 9.15, 11.15, 11.22,11.23).

¹⁵ Apul. *Met.* 11.15: *In tutelam iam receptus es Fortunae, sed videntis, quae suae lucis splendore ceteros etiam deos illuminat* (But now you have been taken under the protection of a Fortuna who can see, and who with the brilliance of her own light illuminates all the other gods as well).

¹⁶ Habinek 1990; Lalanne, 2002; Takács 2008; Bierl 2013, 84-85.

¹⁷ Lucius likens Fotis to Venus when she gets undressed before him (Met. 2.17).

In the Charite-Tlepolemus narrative, both male and female partners are terrestrial. Unexpectedly, the story ends with their tragedy (8.1–14) and they will have no offspring despite their union. In the Psyche-Amor narrative, the celestial male makes his terrestrial partner immortal. It seems to be a happy ending and they will beget a celestial daughter named *Voluptas*, a personification of non-corporeal pleasure and delight, foreshadowing what is to happen to Lucius. In the Lucius-Fotis and Lucius-Isis narratives, Lucius changes his destiny through a kind of conversion process in which he substitutes his terrestrial partner for a celestial one and transforms back from animal to human form at an Isis festival—all of which contributes to the novel's themes of initiation and mystery. He never reunites with Fotis nor with the zoophilic woman who paid money to copulate with him in his donkey form¹⁹. This is, in my view, the scheme that can be distilled from these narratives and their triple parallelism which recalls Diotima's theory of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*. What, then, for the half divine Isis-Lucius pair is the equivalent of *Voluptas*, the offspring of the Amor-Psyche union? Although it is too vast a question for me to treat in this paper, I suggest it must be *Philosophia*.

However, it is not only the long Psyche-Charite-Lucius narrative complex that provides paradigms, mirrorings, models, examples, foreshadowing of, or allusions to, what will and does happen to the hero of the main story, but also relatively short ones²⁰. The parallelisms of such episodes can extend far beyond their limited scope²¹. Moreover, such narrative functions are not reserved for embedded stories alone but can be found equally in any passage of the novel and even in any literary work preceding it. For example, the description of Actaeon's transformation into a stag (Met. 2.4-6), which must have been taken from Ovid (Met. 3.138-252), is not narrated in an inserted tale but described in an *ekphrasis* provided by Lucius the narrator. As opposed to Ovid's Actaeon, Apuleius' Actaeon is depicted, remarkably, as a curious man: inter medias frondes lapidis Actaeon simulacrum curioso optutu in deam versum proiectus, iam in cervum ferinus et in saxo simul et in fonte loturam Dianam opperiens visitur²². Furthermore, it is exactly at the moment when Lucius is "staring again and again at the statuary" that Byrrhena, his maternal aunt, reveals that Pamphile, the wife of his host, is a notorious witch and warns him not to be her victim, saying "everything you see belongs to you" (tua sunt ... cuncta quae vides). This is a tragic irony, foreshadowing the metamorphosis of the hero. Actaeon thus described can be considered no less a transgressive figure than Lucius or Psyche, because by observing a prohibited object and thus overstepping the boundary, he is punished by being transformed into an animal by a deity and thus foreshadows the coming metamorphosis and misfortunes of Lucius²³. The episode of Io, again taken from Ovid and used to describe Lucius'

¹⁸ Tatum 1969, 491.

¹⁹ Met. 10.17-22.

²⁰ Cf. Tatum 1969, 488.

 $^{^{21}}$ Cf. Tatum 1969. From a unitarian point of view such as Merkelbach's, all the events of the first books should be symbolically interpreted as anticipating the Isis book, because all the human events are imitations and repetitions of Isis-Myth. But I would like to avoid such *a priori* arguments.

²² Trans. by Manson: "In the middle of the marble foliage the image of Actaeon could be seen, both in stone and in the spring's reflection, leaning towards the goddess with an inquisitive stare, in the very act of changing into a stag and waiting for Diana to step into the bath."

transforming and retransforming scenes (*Met.* 3.24–25 and 11.13), has special significance to, and offers a far from negligible paradigm for, the future of Lucius, not only because she is one of very few examples of re-transformation and of human consciousness retained within an animal form, but also because according to Ovid "Now, with fullest service, she is worshipped as a goddess by the linenrobed throng" (*nunc dea linigera collitur celeberrima turba, Met.* 1.747)²⁴, which suggests Lucius' ultimate transformation into an Isiac priest. The image of human consciousness preserved in the body of a beast will appear again in Thrasyleon, one of the bandits, who disguises himself as a bear and is killed in that disguise. This embedded story also foreshadows the destiny of Lucius. The scene at the festival of laughter is also significant: there Lucius is accused of murder in a fake trial and falls into a liminal situation. Moreover, when the Chaldean seer Diophanes foretells Lucius' (and possibly the author's) glorious future²⁵, the reliability of his prediction is immediately brought into question by Milo's tale. But the seer is proved right in the end. These are just a few examples.

We should, therefore, examine every example of such liminal figures in the Metamorphoses and literary works preceding Apuleius, so that we can really say to what extent and in what sense the Psyche-Charite-Lucius parallelism should be considered as crucial and decisive for our interpretation of the main story of Lucius. That is well beyond the scope of this paper, but I think it is clear that the structure and network of foreshadowing and parallelisms in the Apuleian novel is much more complex and far-reaching than we expect and does not easily yield an easy schematization (I mean any simple and unambiguous religious, philosophical, or autobiographical interpretation). We can discover many such liminal figures in the tales in the Metamorphoses: e.g. Aristomenes, Socrates, Telyphron, Actaeon, Thrasyleon, Thrasyllus,²⁶ The Psyche-Charite-Lucius parallelism is but one such paradigm, even if it is the most prominent and well developed. The story of Charite, although it greatly resembles a Greek novel, does not square completely with that literary framework, because it is given a final twist, namely, its ending, which is reported by a messenger, para pros dokian, and makes Charite's story into a kind of tragedy (Met. 8.1-14). The tragic death of her bridegroom is already adumbrated when she has a nightmare in which he is killed by robbers (Met. 4.27). The parodic double suicide of Charite and rejected Thrasyllus recalls the deaths of Haemon and Antigone in Sophocles' play²⁷, and the figure of Thrasyllus (*zelotypos* theme) anticipates in an inverted form the subsequent long series of "rejected women" stories in the novel (Met. 8.22, 10.2-12, 23-28). On the

²³ Takács 2008, 76-79.

²⁴ Cf. Finkelpearl 1998, 189 ff.; Harrison 2014, 90-97.

²⁵ Met. 2.12 "Mihi denique proventum huius peregrinationis inquirenti multa respondit et oppido mira et satis varia; nunc enim gloriam satis floridam, nunc historiam magnam et incredundam fabulam et libros me futurum" (When I asked him about the outcome of this trip of mine, he gave several strange and quite contradictory responses: on the one hand my reputation will really flourish, but on the other I will become a long story, an unbelievable tale, a book in several volumes).

²⁶ Tatum 1969:

 $^{^{27}}$ It is under the false name of Haemus the Thracian, a famous brigand, that Tlepolemus succeeded in massacring the robbers and rescued Charite from them (*Met.* 7.5). His pseudonym echoes the Sophoclean Haemon and can be seen as alluding to his tragic death.

other hand, the conclusion of the Psyche story with a kind of *deux ex machina* (*Met.* 6.22–23) foreshadows a happy ending for Lucius' story with another *deux ex machina*²⁸.

Lastly, I would like to compare the remetamorphosed Lucius with the figure of Socrates as narrated by Aristomenes in the novel's first embedded tale (Met. 1.5-19). These two figures, placed at the very beginning and end of the whole work, clearly share common features: they are both Greek travelers in Thessaly, entangled with witchcraft by transgressing a boundary, as a result of which they both experience misfortunes. While Socrates is murdered in a gruesome way by a witch, Lucius unites with Isis, goddess of all magic, through initiations. The name of Socrates unmistakably alludes to the Athenian philosopher, and particularly to Plato's literary version of him²⁹. It makes a sharp contrast to Apuleius the author in the final episode of the novel, because Lucius the narrator is called there Madaurensis and identified to Apuleius (Met. 11.27). Indeed, even in the form of an ass, Lucius has a tendency not only to being a prose writer but also to lecture on philosophy (cf. Met. 10.33 Ecce nunc patiemur philosophantem nobis asinum?). Socrates' entanglement with the witches and strange death foreshadow Lucius' love affair with Fotis and his misfortunes after his transformation into an ass. In the end, however, it is ironically not Socrates, despite his having a philosopher's name, but Lucius the narrator who becomes a philosopher. Accordingly, if the Psyche-Charite-Lucius parallel symbolizes the author's Platonic ideal of *philosophia* in the exact centre of the novel, the Socrates-Lucius parallel at the very beginning and end of the whole romance mirrors an autobiographical conclusion that Apuleius the author has managed to become a Platonic philosopher.

²⁸ For the *deux ex machina*, see May 2006, 314–318.

²⁹ That the death of Apuleius' Socrates takes place at the river located under a plane tree (*Met.* 1.19 *haud ita longe radices platani lenis fluvius in speciem placidae paludis ignavus ibat argento vel vitro aemulus in colorem*), where Aristomenes proposed sitting down (*Met.* 1.18 *juxta platanum istam residamus*), is a clear allusion to Plato's *Phaedrus* (229a). In that passage, Phaedrus proposes that (Plato's) Socrates either sit or lie down under a very high plane tree on the Irisus river to read together Lucias' book. For further correspondences between Platonic and Apuleian Socrates, see Kirichenko 2008.

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(2018年10月31日受理, 12月4日掲載承認)