

7

On the Unity of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

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In his *Metamorphoses* Apuleius of Madauros, who called himself 'philosophus Platonicus',¹ employed the adventure story of the ass-man Lucius for the purposes of religious propaganda. He had the story itself before him in its Greek version—the first two books of the *Metamorphoses* by Lucius of Patrae²—of which we have a substantial excerpt among Lucian's works, entitled *Λούκιος ἡ ὄνος*.³ In general, Apuleius adheres closely to its plot.⁴ One major change, however, has been made: he turns the retransformation of the ass into an act of redemption brought about by the goddess Isis and into a prelude to the real metamorphosis, i.e. apotheosis in the mysteries of this goddess.

Even if the Greek version with its natural and burlesque ending is disregarded, this final turn of the plot in Apuleius comes as a surprise. For the preceding ten books of the *Metamorphoses* contain a loose series of very various and worldly adventures, narratives which are in part

loosely inserted into the main plot and which in tone and temper stand out markedly from the solemn seriousness of the final Isis book. Nothing seems to prepare for the religious denouement. Apuleius' ass reflects neither about the meaning of his path of suffering, nor about the cause for his unfortunate metamorphosis, which is the result of his own bold actions. Nor does he show the slightest sign of an increased inner maturity or even of a catharsis which would lead him towards being chosen for serving Isis. He remains stupid, lecherous, gluttonous, and curious, and in the end has learnt nothing new.

This fact makes it also impossible to understand the *Metamorphoses* as a 'novel of development', as has been repeatedly attempted over the past decades. I mention above all Paratore, Wittmann, and Riefstahl.⁵ If we use the idea of development, the unity of the work cannot be understood, and this has already been emphasized by critics.⁶ Accordingly, the question has been repeatedly raised whether Apuleius was ever aiming at an internal connection between the adventures of Lucius-ass and his redemption, that is between the main part of the *Metamorphoses* and the Isis book. Up to the present date opinions are divided, although a number of considered and very plausible arguments in support of a homogeneous conception of this novel have been advanced.⁷ Besides these, however, there are a number of somewhat speculative or at least awkward explanations, particularly using the history of religion, but also using philosophy and literary theory, which may have aroused suspicion towards any attempt at a unifying interpretation.⁸ In consequence, recent editors

⁵ Paratore (1928); Wittmann (1938, esp. 8, 151); Riefstahl (1938).

⁶ Especially Lesky (1941: 69 f.). On Paratore (1928), see in particular Helm (1928); on Riefstahl (1938), Pfister (1940) and Rüdiger (1963: 59 n. 3).

⁷ See above all Junghanns (1932: 159–65) and Dornseiff (1938). The most important arguments adduced are: (1) the parallelism of the fates of Lucius and Psyche; (2) the motif of *curiositas*; (3) the motif of evil *fortuna* and her role as the counterpart of Isis; (4) the relation of the ass figure to the cult of Isis. It is undisputably the merit of Reitzenstein (1906, esp. 32–4) to have pointed out that an intention of religious edification or even proselytizing goes well with that of entertainment and thrilling amusement, and that even in such serious works as the *Acta Ioannis* or the *Life of Paul* by Jerome' amusing interludes of a miraculous or even erotic-lascivious kind are not dispensed with. See also Pfister (1940: 540) and Weinreich (1962a: 226).

⁸ This applies above all to the interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* within the wider framework of a derivation of the novel from mystery cult as attempted by Kerenyi (1962) and Merkelbach (1958), and to further ineffective attempts at explanation like those propounded by Landi (1929) or Riefstahl (1938). Despite several good observations in detail, Morelli (1913, 1915), Scazzoso (1951), and Moreschini (1965), among others, may be classed amongst unmethodical and over-imaginative (and therefore rather unattractive) interpretations.

Lecture delivered at the 10th meeting of the *Mommsengesellschaft* in Münster on 6 June 1968 and (slightly abridged) as a probationary lecture in Heidelberg on 15 July 1964. I may be allowed to remark that I encountered the problem I am dealing with here in connection with my work on Lactantius and the Gnosis, and that the solution I suggest was basically reached during a seminar on Apuleius in the winter semester of 1959–60. This chapter was translated by Martin Revermann.

¹ *Apol.* 10. 6; cf. 64. 3 ('Platonica familia'); *Flor.* 15. 26 (pages from *Met.*, *Apol.*, and *Flor.* are quoted according to the editions of Robertson and Vallette 1956 and Vallette 1960).

² Photius was still able to read and compare it to the Lucianic *Onos*: *Bibl. cod.* 129 (p. 96b12 Bekker), cf. after Bürger (1887) especially Perry (1926) and Lesky (1941).

³ This can today be regarded as the solution to the problem of how the three versions of the ass novels relate to each other; see Perry (1926) and Lesky (1941: 43–50), and further Helm (1961) and Burck (1961: 275 = 1966: 393).

⁴ On the relation between Apuleius and his model, see above all Perry (1923) and Junghanns (1932); on the question of insertions, in particular Lesky (1941: 43–68) and Mazzarino (1950).

and translators⁹ have firmly refused in their introductions to accept any internal unity of the novel as a whole. At the same time they have denied any profound and serious intention on the author's part and characterized the *Metamorphoses* as an amusing novel of entertainment, made up of heterogeneous elements which are loosely bound together. From this point of view the religious ending must be regarded as disturbing, and to a scholar like Rudolf Helm, who has done great service in Apuleian research, the Isis book has appeared to be 'a dark patch on a many-coloured piece of cloth'.¹⁰

By contrast with these views and impressions I wish to show in the following that the whole work is based on a clear and carefully planned structure, which is rooted in its author's philosophical and religious views and which provides insight into the reasons which lead Apuleius to write propaganda for the Isis religion. Up to now the acknowledgement of such an interpretative route has been hindered by the fact that Apuleius neither sets out his purpose didactically nor pursues it with systematic rigour. But he has marked it by using certain concepts as a leitmotiv, and he has illustrated it by mythical analogies and expressed it by other artistic means in his presentation and composition.

The concept on which our demonstration is to hinge is the word *curiositas*,¹¹ which has long been recognized and discussed by scholars

⁹ Robertson and Vallette (1956: 35); Helm (1928: 20–2); Brandt and Ehlers (1958: 503 ff.); Burck (1966). Rode (1956) and Grabar-Passek (1956) do not deal with the question of unity at all (I owe this reference to E. G. Schmidt).

¹⁰ Helm (1961).
¹¹ References to the important role of *curiositas* for the conception of the *Metamorphoses* are already made by Junghanns (1932: 161 f.) and Wittmann (1938: 81) (on which see Dornseiff 1938: 233). Cf. also Lesky (1941: 71), who emphasizes the ambivalence of the concept in the *Metamorphoses* and therefore accepts the function of *curiositas* as a leitmotiv only in a limited way. Rüdiger (1963: 57–82), on the other hand, emphasizes both its employment as a leitmotiv and its ambivalence, and rightly sees the significance of Apuleian *curiositas* in its 'fatal tendency towards the forbidden' and the 'inquisitive violation of the numinous' (69; see also his afterword to Rode 1960: 531–8). Fundamental for the mental history of this concept, which in Latin culture occurs first in Apuleius, is Mette (1956; see also 1962). Further important contributions to the history of *curiositas* are Blumenberg (1962, 1961 (where Apuleius, however, is omitted, referring the reader to Schneider 1954: 445)) and Labhardt (1960) (wrong criticism of Mette's categorization combined with misguided attempts of derivation in July 1961: 33–44). Most effort to apply the concept to the work of Apuleius has, it appears to me, been made by Lancel (1961, esp. 25–33) (even if I cannot agree with his equation, inspired by Merkelbach, of Eros-Cupid with Harpocrates-Horos and, in consequence, a mystical-theurgical interpretation of the Amor and Psyche story; but see p. n.28 below). Riefstahl (1938: 29), Merkelbach (1958) (cf. Merkelbach 1962: 1 ff., 19–22, 42 ff.), and, in passing, Schneider (1954) have also adduced the notion of *curiositas* for an interpretation of the novel as a whole. The following have most recently argued against any

as the leitmotiv of the *Metamorphoses*. It hardly ever occurs before Apuleius.¹² In the *Metamorphoses* it denotes from the very beginning a fundamental disposition of Lucius. In the course of the narrative he himself repeatedly talks of his *familiaris*, *genuina*, or *ingenita curiositas*.¹³ And in the revelation speech of the priest of Isis (II. 15) the priest names precisely this characteristic as the prime cause of his unfortunate transformation into an ass¹⁴: '*curiositatis inprosperae sinistrum praemium reportasti*'. What is meant by *curiositas* here? And why is it condemned from the viewpoint of the Isis religion?

According to Lucius' own account his *curiositas* is a deep and all-embracing desire for knowledge. He is 'thirsting for news', 'he wishes to know everything or at least very much', he is 'very eager to get to know rare and miraculous things'. In this or similar ways he introduces himself to the reader in the first chapters.¹⁵ It emerges very quickly, however, that this drive for knowledge has its specific direction: towards magic.¹⁶ Lucius is representing a particularly enhanced form of human desire for knowledge: he is '*coram magiae noscendae ardentissimus cupitor*' (3. 19. 4).

For Lucius magic is a *divina disciplina*, a secret art, which deals with the hidden divine powers in nature and the cosmos. To him it appears to be the perfect example of knowledge, as the culmination of human wisdom and of intellectual capacity. The magic powers of Thessalian witches are repeatedly praised in hymnlike enumerations.¹⁷ In the end it is always the same: they possess power over the stars and the elements, over ghosts and the gods, that is to say over

unifying function and significant use of the motif: Brandt and Ehlers (1958: 503) (*curiositas* in the *Metamorphoses* is nothing but a 'dramaturgical motif') and Burck (1961: 285) (on Lucius' desire for knowledge: 'this is nothing but a part of narrative technique, a literary play').

¹² Its only occurrence is Cic. Att. 2. 12. 2 (from 59 BC), on which see Labhardt (1960: 209), who makes it appear probable that it is a spontaneous new creation of Cicero which he himself forgot again.

¹³ '*familiaris curiositas*' (3. 14. 1, 9. 12. 2; cf. 1. 2. 6, 2. 6. 1); '*genuina curiositas*' (9. 15. 3); '*ingenita curiositas*' (9. 13. 3).

¹⁴ See Junghanns (1932: 162 n. 73); Wittmann (1938: 81); Mette (1956: 229 f.); Lancel (1961: 32).

¹⁵ 1. 2. 6: '*sitor . . . novitatis . . . qui velim scire vel cuncta vel certe plurima*'; 2. 1. 1: '*nimis cupidus cognoscendi quae rara miraque sunt . . .*'.

¹⁶ As is set out at 2. 6.

¹⁷ 1. 8. 4: '*caelum deponere, terram suspendere, fontes durare, montes diluere, manes sublimare, deos infimare, sidera extinguere, Tartarum ipsum inluminare*'; 3. 15. 4: '*quibus obadiant manes, turbantur sidera, coguntur numina, serviunt elementa*'; cf. 2. 5. 4 and 1. 3. 1.

the cosmos as such. The believer in miracles calls the witch 'divini potens' (1. 8. 4). She has the divine element at her disposal, inasmuch as it is present and effective in the cosmos by its powers. From this point of view access to magic is tantamount to the mysterious access to the divine. Magic enables the surpassing of human boundaries, and grants participation in divine power.

In view of these aims Lucius' *curiositas* is nothing but his own decision to penetrate into areas of knowledge from which humans are barred by their very nature. Yet from the viewpoint of a religion of revelation—and such the Isis religion is—it is not just curiosity but *hybris*.¹⁸ This religious aspect of *curiositas* is crucial for Apuleius. He makes this clear twice in the course of the narrative: the first time at the beginning of book 2 by confronting Lucius with the statue of Actaeon,¹⁹ who is described as the mythical *exemplum* of presumptuous curiosity; the second time in the middle of the story by the inserted story of Psyche's fate, a downfall similarly caused by a *curiositas* explicitly condemned by a god.

First, the unhappy fate of Actaeon is emphatically demonstrated in the introduction to Lucius' adventures in the Thessalian city Hypata. It is the motto, as it were, for the subsequent events. The situation is, in brief, the following. On the first morning after his arrival Lucius is having a look at the Thessalian city full of curiosity (*curiose*). By chance he meets a relative from his mother's side, Byrrhaena, a noble lady from the family of the philosopher Plutarch, as is specifically remarked. She leads him into her house. In the middle of the atrium there is a magnificent marble sculptural group, which attracts the view of Lucius as he enters. It represents Diana going to bathe, accompanied by dogs and being stared at by Actaeon. Apuleius devotes an extensive and rhetorically refined description to this work of art. It is clearly modelled on Ovid's description in the *Metamorphoses*

¹⁸ Wittmann (1938: 81 f.), Lancel (1961: 28–32), and, more generally, Blumenberg (1961: 53) (and elsewhere).

¹⁹ As I found out after having completed this article, this interpretation has already been advanced by Lancel (1961: 31). Riefstahl (1938: 67–9) too noted the importance of the Diana–Actaeon group and applied it to Lucius' fate. He, nevertheless, misunderstood the character of this *curiositas*. Mette (1956: 231) also briefly points to the 'predictive' character of the scene. Less to the point is Merkelbach (1962: 339 n. 3), who, probably in the wake of his mystery interpretation of the *curiositas* in Apuleius, which he refers to the secret of mysteries and the initiand's duty of silence (19–22, 42 f., 48; cf. Merkelbach 1958: 109 f., 113), speaks of the 'punishment of the eavesdropper'.

(3. 138 ff.)²⁰ and seems to presuppose a knowledge of it. In comparison with Ovid, however, two things are remarkable: Apuleius stresses the nobility of the goddess on the one hand, and the urgent *curiositas* of the human on the other. In Ovid, who seems to follow a common version of the myth,²¹ Actaeon comes upon the goddess' bath by chance.²² Apuleius, however, describes how he leans forward, curiously looking (*curioso optutu*) at the goddess: already turning into a deer, he is observing the goddess, who is about to take a bath (2. 4. 10). The punishment, his transformation into an animal, is therefore due to Actaeon's *curiositas*, and this *curiositas* is characterized as presumptuous curiosity, which intends to penetrate into the secrets of the divine, and to behold them without permission.

The very deviation from Ovid's version of the myth shows that Apuleius wishes to give more than a mere artistic ekphrasis of a work of art.²³ The inserted description is, as we saw, very carefully fitted into the frame and has an important statement to make within the whole. This becomes particularly clear through the way it is connected with the plot as a whole. While they are inspecting the work of art, Byrrhaena warns Lucius of the magic powers of his hostess Pamphile, directly invoking the goddess depicted in marble: 'per hanc deam . . . cave tibi, sed cave fortiter' (2. 5. 3). This is saying that here Diana is to be viewed as the goddess of magic.²⁴ Actaeon, then, becomes the mythical embodiment of the human being who attempts to gain divine power by means of magic and is punished and destroyed for this *hybris*. Beside the momentary interpretation of the pictorial situation, his fate, in the

²⁰ Cf. Ov. *Met.* 3. 158 f.: 'simulaverunt artem | ingenio natura suo' with Apuleius' remark: 'quae ars aemula naturae veritati similes explicuit' (2. 4. 7) and Ov. *Met.* 3. 200: 'ut vero vultus et cornua vidit in unda' with Apuleius: 'Actaeon simulacrum et in saxo simul et in fonte . . . visitur' (2. 4. 10). Riefstahl (1938: 68 f.) points to correspondences in the description of Lucius' metamorphosis in Apuleius and that of Actaeon in Ovid.

²¹ Cf. Call. H. 5. 113 f. (ὄρε ἐθέλων); Hygin. *Fab.* 181: 'in conspectum deae incidit'.

²² Emphasized in lines 141 f. and 174 f.; cf. *Trist.* 2. 103 f. ('inscius Actaeon vidit'). Riefstahl (1938: 68) completely overlooked this fundamental difference.

²³ Thus Bernhard (1927: 280) regards this description, together with those at 4. 6 (the robbers' cave) and 5. 1 (Amor's palace), only as 'description of a locale'. Ehlers (1983: 515) has it among his examples of 'high poetry', 'poetical gloss', and 'rhetorical twists'. Similarly, Burck (1961: 398) counts it as one of the artistic showpieces of the 'flamboyant orator Apuleius'.

²⁴ As such she is, for instance, invoked in Catullus' hymn (34. 15: 'tu potens Trivia . . . es dicta'). In the sixth book of the *Aeneid* Vergil also calls Apollo's divine sister Trivia (*Aen.* 6. 9–13, 35, and, above all, 69).

present context, also serves as a strong warning, which menacingly underlies the superficial meaning of Byrrhena's words.

Lucius is blind to these connections, and this is an essential characteristic of his *curiositas*, which is a form of *hybris*. Byrrhena's express warning causes the opposite outcome: his appetite for magic becomes an obsession (in hindsight he calls himself 'vecors animi' and 'amenti similis', 2. 6. 3 ff.). Of Byrrhena's words he picks up only the possibility of an acquaintance with magic in the house where he is staying, and in passionate blindness he plunges headlong into disaster.

A second illustration of Lucius' *curiositas* is given in the most extensive inserted story of the *Metamorphoses*, the so-called fable of Amor and Psyche.²⁵ An old woman tells it in the robbers' cave to the captured bride Charite in order to console her. The ass is listening. In the story the two separated lovers are reunited after a long and painful separation—this is the consolatory hint at Charite's liberation. Further parallels between the fates of the two couples can only be constructed with much strain and are hardly intended by the author.²⁶ The real meaning of the Psyche story lies, as has repeatedly been said,²⁷ in its symbolic relation to the main plot. Psyche's fate mirrors that of Lucius and serves to illustrate it. I regard as the decisive parallel both the reason for the downfall and the subsequent path of suffering of the two heroes: Psyche is succumbing to the same *curiositas* as Lucius.

Despite several warnings and strict prohibition (5. 6. 3, 11. 3–6, 12. 3 ff.) she is possessed by the desire to find out the secret of her unknown husband, who approaches her only in the darkness of the night. While he is sleeping she gazes curiously at him in the light of a lamp (5. 22 ff.). She looks and tremblingly recognizes the radiant god.²⁸

²⁵ 4. 28–6. 24. Note the edition with notes by Grimal (1963), with an overview of the various attempts of interpretation (6–21). The most important literature is now in Binder and Merkelbach (1968). As regards more recent literature I wish to point to Portogalli (1963) and Moreschini (1965), who see the story as a philosophical allegory in terms of a Middle Platonic and Apuleian demonology.

²⁶ Against Merkelbach (1958; cf. 1962: 1–3), who states that 'the content of the stories of Psyche, Charite and of Lucius are the same in the end. Psyche and Charite are separated from the beloved and, after some ordeals, are reunited with him again. Charite is liberated from the robbers' hands, Lucius from being an ass. Like Psyche, he is united with the divinity after long ordeals.'

²⁷ By Junghanns (1932: 159–65) and Dornseiff (1938: 225).

²⁸ 'divini vultus intuetur pulchritudinem'. In this section Cupid is called 'deus' seven times. As far as his appearance is concerned, the effect of light is particularly mentioned. In this respect we are in fact dealing with an enforced contemplation of the divine, an epiphany, and in this sense with theurgy. To this extent I regard the 'theurgical' interpretation of the scene, which Lancel (1961: 35 ff.) proposes, as worth consideration.

As had been predicted, this indeed destroys her happiness. The god himself had previously condemned Psyche's 'curiosity for the forbidden sight', the 'vultus curiositas' (5. 19. 3), as 'sacrilega curiositas' (5. 6. 6). Psyche falls prey to *curiositas* a second time, at the end of her path of suffering. This means that she too does not learn anything new; she does not mature in view of what has happened to her. She has already accomplished her difficult task and fetched unopened from the underworld the box containing 'divine beauty', i.e. a magic device, when she is seized by a rash desire—'mentem capitur temeraria curiositate' (6. 20. 5)—and opens the box so as to acquire some of the divine beauty. This deed of *curiositas* is presumptuous clutching at divine power or the magic device.²⁹ Only by Amor's intervention is Psyche saved from death. The god sums up: 'ecce rursum perieras, misella, simili curiositate'. Thus in the story of Psyche *curiositas* is taken apart into its main components: presumptuous desire to behold or understand the divine and presumptuous greed for divine power.

Tellingly, the story fails to have an effect on the ass. He sees it as nothing but a 'nice little story', *bella fabella* (6. 25. 1). He is very far from learning from it. For this he will need the priest's revelation.

Here we have arrived at the most important point of Apuleius' conception. He does not make the person himself gain the insight that his *curiositas* is a misdeed, even a sort of original sin, but has a priest pronounce this. This insight is already a part of the revelation; *curiositas* and revelation are antithetically related to each other. Thus the prehistory of the Apuleian concept of *curiositas* leads us into the area of Hellenistic gnosis, more exactly into the kind of Jewish and pagan philosophy of revelation as represented by Philo of Alexandria and the Hermetic tradition.³⁰ This has already been seen by Wittmann³¹ and, more clearly, Mette³² in his sketch of the history of

²⁹ Here again the forceful warning of the tower precedes (6. 19. 7).

³⁰ On this see Wlosok (1960).

³¹ Wittmann (1938: 81 f.). In order to show the negative evaluation of human desire for knowledge from the viewpoint of a theology of revelation, Wittmann has already adduced the hermetic Asclepius (14 = *Corp. Herm.*, ed. Nock-Festugière, ii. 312. 16 ff.) and also pointed to the role of *curiositas* in the Latin church fathers, especially Tertullian and Augustine.

³² Mette (1956: 227–35), who makes the important reference to the Momos speech of Kore Kosmou (*Corp. Herm.*, ed. Nock-Festugière, ii. 312. 16 ff.). Less to the point is the use of Philo, *Migr. Abr.* 216 ff. Passages like *Migr. Abr.* 184–7 (on which see Blumenberg 1961: 58 f.), *Somn.* 1. 52 ff., *Mut. nom.* 66–76, and *Ebriet.* 167 should rather be adduced. Further, the description of *πεπλεγτοι* in Vettius Valens should be considered (e.g. p. 7. 30 Kroll, 37. 29, 42. 33).

the concept *curiositas*. From this provenance of the concept we can explain the striking fact that after Apuleius' time the word and the concept are to be found mainly in the Christian theologians, starting with Tertullian up to Augustine,³³ for whom *curiositas* is part of a supreme triad of desires, i.e. one of the cardinal sins.³⁴

How deliberately Apuleius is aiming at the idea of revelation can be demonstrated by a comparison with the Greek *Onos*.³⁵ Here the motif of *periergia*—the Greek equivalent of *curiositas*³⁶—is already present. But it is neither stressed nor evaluated in any way, and is always used in the sense of everyday curiosity or at most a thirst for new experiences and a desire to learn new things. In the three passages of the pseudo-Lucianic version which feature the word³⁷ there is a jocular play on the proverbial curiosity of the ass.³⁸ There is, then, a touch

³³ The passages are in *TLL* (Schwering), even if not always assigned to the correct lemma. On their evaluation see Mette (1956), Blumenberg (1961, 1962), and, in particular detail, Labhardt (1960).

³⁴ Cf. Theiler (1933 = 1966: 205–12), Labhardt (1960: 221–3), and Blumenberg (1962: 296). The attempt to deduce this triad from Porphyry has been called into question by Labhardt.

³⁵ Made also by Mette (1956: 229 f.). The differences, however, are not made clear with the necessary precision, nor is *curiositas* in Apuleius determined with sufficient accuracy. Above all, too little has been made of the material for evaluating Apuleius' conception.

³⁶ The first firm occurrence is provided only by Apuleius in the *Metamorphoses*. Quintilian (*Inst.* 8. 3. 55) still glosses *περιεργία* by *supervacua operositas*. In the *Italia* translation of *Acta* 19. 19 (τὸν τὰ περιεργα πράξαντων = *qui curiositates gesserunt*; *TLL* iv. 1491. 7), *curiositas* has already acquired the precise sense of magical practice and superstitious activity. The adjective *curiosus*, on the other hand, is used in comedy since Plautus as a rendering of *περιεργος* (besides *πολυπράγμων*); see Labhardt (1960: 207 f.). Has Apuleius really freshly created the word *curiositas* in analogy to the Greek pair *περιεργος*–*περιεργία* without any relation to Cicero's earlier coinage (see n. 12 above), as Labhardt suspects?

³⁷ (a) *Onos* 15: the curse of the narrator's own *περιεργία*, which has led to the unfortunate metamorphosis, missing in the corresponding passage in Apuleius, instead being transposed to the priest's speech at *II*. 15. 1. (b) *Onos* 45: the curious behaviour of the ass while in a gardener's service, which leads to the creation of the proverb: *ἐξ ὄνου παρακύψεως*, exact correspondence with *Met.* 9. 42; (c) *Onos* 56 (the end of the story, Lucius after his retransformation and return): "There I made sacrifices and set up memorials to the gods who had preserved me, since after so long and so narrowly I had escaped home, not by God, "from the ass of a dog", as the saying goes, but from the snooping of an ass" (tr. Sullivan, in Reardon 1989: 618). In Apuleius this is similarly transformed and integrated into the theological context of the Isis book.

³⁸ The proverbial expression *ἐξ ὄνου παρακύψεως* (first occurrence: Men. fr. 211 Körte; cf. Otto 1890: 41 f., *asinus* no. 8, and Mette 1962: 398) is based on the characteristic curiosity of the ass, which tends to poke its nose into everything, usually at the wrong time. This is shown by aetiologies such as can be found at *Onos* 45 and Apuleius 9. 42. 2 and 4 ('unde etiam de prospectu et umbra asini natum est frequens proverbium'). For a proper understanding of the Greek ass novel and of the opportunities for

of tragicomic self-knowledge in the Greek Lucius uttering the following execration after his transformation (15): 'Oh, what mistimed meddling! (*periergias*)' (tr. Sullivan 1989).³⁹ In this passage, the description of the transformation, Apuleius agrees in every detail with the *Onos*. But he omits exactly this self-critical remark. Apparently he has been saving it for the priest's speech (*II*. 15. 1), in which the accusation is literally repeated: '*curiositatis improspere*'.

A last example is to show that, and how, Apuleius is playing off magic against redemption through the mysteries, *curiositas* against revelation. The magic transformation in the third book of the *Metamorphoses* is clearly stylized as an initiation,⁴⁰ and the introduction into magic is obviously modelled on a mystery initiation. By this means the magical transformation, as a sort of magical mystery, is in deliberate contrast with the Isis initiation later on. The comparison is demanded by the author through striking cross-references and antithetical correspondences. Only the most important may be mentioned here.

Lucius caps his decision to gain access to magic at any cost with the formula: 'quod bonum felix et faustum itaque, licet salutare non erit' (2. 6. 8). This formula returns, significantly varied, in the priest's mouth in book *II* before the final initiation: 'quod felix itaque ac faustum salutareque tibi sit' (*II*. 29. 5). The two events are thus combined and at the same time separated from each other. The earlier self-authorized decision is contrasted with election by the goddess, and the wrong initiation, the disastrous mystery, is confronted with the true mystery of redemption.

By this the two main aspects of the comparison have been pointed out too. Magic is to be unmasked as a rival to and a perversion of religion. One way is to characterize it as sacrilege, another as the road

associations which it was offering to an author such as Apuleius it may be important that for quite some time the ass had become an 'allegorical animal' (a phrase of Ernst Zinn *per litteras*): see also Mette (1962) as above.

³⁹ More closely defined at 13: 'for I wished to find out by experiment whether, changed from my human shape, I would have the soul of a bird also' (tr. Sullivan). It is thus primarily desire for knowledge which resorts to magic for the sake of experiment rather than self-elevation, as is done by Apuleius' Lucius, who in the same context thinks of the 'dignitas pinarum' (3. 23. 1).

⁴⁰ It consists of two parts: (1) a sort of prelude, 3. 13–20, which contains the revelation of the arcana of the house or Lucius' first initiation as a preparation for the magic part proper; that is to say, (2), the nocturnal magic scene, 3. 21–4, which is divided into (a) a magic contemplation (metamorphosis of Pamphile) and (b) Lucius' magic metamorphosis.

to disaster. This is why the scene of transformation is stylized in such a way that parallels in terminology and subject-matter that are as far-reaching as possible are established, but its impact is represented as exactly the opposite of a redemption.

One of the parallels is, for instance, that the servant Photis is behaving like a mystagogue whose role is to disclose divine secrets;⁴¹ that she is asking her initiate Lucius to keep silent, expressly referring to other initiations,⁴² and that she is regarding outsiders as uninitiated.⁴³ Others are that she praises the overwhelming power of the witch, her mistress,⁴⁴ using attributes which return in the Isis hymn of book II,⁴⁵ and that Lucius voluntarily declares himself her servant,⁴⁶ whereas later on he is obliged to obey the rules of the Isis religion at all costs.⁴⁷

Above all, the main elements of the magical mystery are assimilated to the cultic one:⁴⁸ Lucius is participating in both a vision and a

⁴¹ Above all 3. 14 ff.; cf. esp. 3. 15. 3: 'arcana dominae meae revelare secreta'; 3. 15. 7: 'erae meae miranda secreta'. I think it possible that the change of the servant's name (in the Greek version she is called Palaistra, which is significant in another way) is to allude to her magic-mystagogical role. As opposed to Isis, the true inspiration with her salvation-bringing 'light' (see n. 58 below), Photis would thus be a light which leads astray, a fatal 'illumination'. Similarly also Lancel (1961: 46).

⁴² 3. 15. 4 ff.: 'qui . . . sacris pluribus initiatus profecto nostri sanctam silentii fidem, quaecumque itaque comiserō huius religiosi pectoris tui penetralibus, semper haec intra conceptum claustra custodias, oro, et simplicitatem relationis meae tenacitate taciturnitatis tuae remunerare'; 3. 20. 2: 'rei tantae fidem silentiumque tribue'. Cf. II. 21. 7. 22. 1, 23. 4, 24. 7.

⁴³ This becomes very obvious at 3. 15. 1 and 6 f.

⁴⁴ 3. 15. 7: 'erae meae miranda secreta, quibus obaudiunt manes, turbantur sidera, coguntur numina, serviunt elementa'.

⁴⁵ II. 25. 3: 'tibi respondent sidera . . . gaudent numina, serviunt elementa'; previously: 'te observant inferi' and similar expressions.

⁴⁶ 3. 19. 5: 'in servilem modum addictum atque mancipatum teneas volentem'; 22. 5 when asking for the magic ointment: 'tuumque mancipium inremunerabili beneficio sic tibi perpetuo pignera . . .'; cf. 23. 2: 'per dulcem istum capilli tui nodulum, quo meum vinxisti spiritum'.

⁴⁷ II. 6. 5: 'plane memineris . . . mihi reliqua vitae tuae curricula adusque terminos ultimi spiritus vadata. nec iniurium, cuius beneficio redieris ad homines, ei totum debere, quod vives'; 7: 'quodsi sedulis obsequiis et religiosi ministeriis et tenacibus castimoniis numen nostrum promoveris'; in addition 15. 5: 'da nomen sanctae huic militiae, cuius non olim sacramento etiam rogaberis, teque iam nunc obsequio religionis nostrae dedica et ministerii iugum subi voluntarium. nam cum coeperis deae servire . . .'; 16. 4: 'statim sacrorum obsequio desponderetur'. On 3. 22. 5, cf. esp. II. 24. 5: 'inremunerabili beneficio pigneratus'.

⁴⁸ Described II. 23–4. Of central importance are the symbolically encoded events of the mystery night at II. 23. 7, narrated from the perspective of personal experience (death and resurrection, contemplation of the divine light, communication with the gods). Further, described in more detail at II. 24, the initiate's resurrection as image of the god on the following day, through which the initiate's apotheosis (as rebirth; cf. II. 21. 7) is demonstrated. On the details, see Dibelius (1917), Berreth (1931), Wittmann (1938); cf. Reitzenstein (1927: 19 ff., 220 ff.), Hopfner (1940–1), Merkelbach (1962) (who has further literature on pp. 6 f.).

transformation. But here the reversal starts. The magic transformation does not cause him to become a god but an animal, and that of the humblest sort, which is at the same time the most remote from the divine, for, as is expressly said later on, the ass is associated with the opponent of Isis, the evil god Typhon.⁴⁹ The content of the vision is not constituted by noble gods and their effects, but by the naked old witch and her metamorphosis into an eagle owl, that is to say into a bird of night and of the dead. The consequences for Lucius are his wanderings and sufferings as an ass, who, enslaved and driven about without respite, is subject to the mercilessness of blind *Fortuna*.⁵⁰ The Isis religion, however, leads to 'the haven of tranquillity' and 'the altar of mercy' (II. 15. 1); it protects its adherents by the shelter of the all-powerful and all-wise 'saviour-goddess'⁵¹ *Fortuna videns*, whose mystery of rebirth brings about the true metamorphosis.

This juxtaposition of magic and religion, of the works of man and redemption, is inherent already in the title, if it is correctly referred to its content. For Apuleius called his work *Metamorphoses*—in the plural!—without giving a collection of transformation stories, as we know them from Ovid and as, according to the testimony of Photius,⁵²

⁴⁹ II. 6. 2, spoken by Isis: 'pessimae mihiq; detestabilis iam dudum beluae istius corio te protinus exue'. The relation of the ass to Typhon (Seth) is testified, among others, by Plutarch, *Isis* 362f, 363c. Further passages in Hopfner (1940: 137 ('ass' as a name of Seth), 21 n. 9). Representations of Seth-Typhon with an ass's head occur, for example, in the magical papyri (illustrations in Preisendanz 1931, table. II fig. 11). To me it seems to be worth noting that Seth-Typhon was associated with bad or black magic, whereas Isis is called 'the great magician' in the laudatory sense (Hopfner 1940: 137 f.). On the Egyptian Seth, see now Te Velde (1967). The 'Typhonian role of the ass' is also recognized by Kerényi (1927: 184–6) as well as Merkelbach (1962: 1) ('the shape of the ass represents life without Isis'); see already Morelli (1913: 153) and Junghanns (1939: 104).

⁵⁰ 7. 2–3, 16. 1, 17. 1, 25. 3, 8. 24. 1, 9. 1, 5, II. 12. 1, 15. 2–4. The motif of *Fortuna* (cf. after Morelli 1913, 1915, above all, Junghanns 1932: 163 f.) as a power hostile to man is used as a leitmotif in the *Metamorphoses*. It is particularly prominent in the later books (from 7 onwards), in which the *curiositas* motif could no longer be applied as well. It thus takes over its unifying function and, like the *curiositas* motif, is taken up by the priest's speech at II. 15 and interpreted in a theological sense, so that *Fortuna* and her blindness as well as malice seem integrated into the divine salvation plan, the *Isidis magnae providentia*, and serve as an instrument of salvation (II. 15. 2; cf. 12. 1). Beyond that the motif is also used for ring composition. At the beginning, in the first inserted story, it is demonstrated in the figure of the pitiable Socrates, who serves as a warning *exemplum*: like Lucius later on, he had, albeit unwittingly, started a sexual relationship with a witch (on the combination of 'eroticism' and magic, see Lancel 1961: 32 ff.). Socrates becomes 'the trophy of triumphant *Fortuna*' (I. 7. 1). With this corresponds at the end the counterweight of the redeemed Lucius, who, as the protégé of Isis, now 'triumphs over *Fortuna*' (II. 15. 4)!

⁵¹ Isis as 'sospitatrix dea': II. 9. 1, 15. 4; at II. 25. 1 she is praised as 'humani generis sospitatrix perpetua'.

⁵² See n. 2 above.

also occurred in the work of Lucius of Patras.⁵³ In Apuleius the diversity of *Metamorphoses* occurring in Ovid is reduced to two contrary types: the transformation of human being into animal, which is attributed to the area of magic, and the sacred apotheosis of the human being, which is reserved for the Isis religion.

In this confrontation magic is the exemplary area of human *curiositas*, which in its blind and perverse drive for knowledge is reaching out towards powers held by the divine. Religion, by contrast, appears to be the space in which the divine graciously descends towards the human being, reveals itself to him, and gives him that which he is not capable of achieving on his own. Thus the selection of Lucius starts with the epiphany and self-introduction of Isis, who reveals herself as the all-powerful goddess and ruler of the cosmos (II. 3, 5). The end is constituted by the highest revelation of the divine, the epiphany of Osiris, which is not described because it is indescribable, and whose loftiness can only be denoted by stammering and ever greater attributes.⁵⁴

The magic metamorphosis, the transformation into an ass, shows how the divine withdraws from the pressing clutches of the human and how, as I tried to demonstrate using Actaeon and the words of the Isis priests quoted above as examples, this *curiositas* is condemned as a grave sin. Before Lucius is selected for the first initiation Apuleius spends a whole speech by a priest (II. 21) in condemning any sort of human impetuosity and urging as wrongdoing. The pious attitude which he is preaching is characterized by patient waiting and humble quietude, accompanied by ascetic exercise and contemplative preparation. In this context there are expressions like 'patientia',⁵⁵ 'mitis quies', 'taciturnitas' (II. 22. 1). In contemporary religious speculation, however, patient quietude, silence, and tranquillity of the soul are the fundamental conditions of mystical unification with the divine.⁵⁶

⁵³ Apuleius' title is usually explained as sheer borrowing from the Greek model (thus, most recently, Burck 1961: 288 f.). By contrast, Reitzenstein (1927: 262) and Junghanns (1932: 180 f.) already counted the mystery transformation as a metamorphosis.

⁵⁴ II. 30. 3: 'deus deum magnorum potior et maiorum summus et summorum maximus et maximorum regnator Osiris'.

⁵⁵ II. 21. 5; by contrast with the specifically Roman meaning of the word *patientia*, the word here already has the sense which is found in Christian authors such as Tertullian and Cyprian; see Kunick (1955).

⁵⁶ Cf. e.g. Philo, *Fuga* 132–6, *Heres* 263 ff., *Somn.* I. 119; Max. Tyr. II, 10; on which, see Wlosok (1960: 93, 255 f.).

After all this it does not come as a surprise that Apuleius describes the experiences of the night of the mysteries as an enlightenment⁵⁷ and the Isis religion as 'sobria' and 'purissima religio' (II. 21. 3, 9), i.e. as a spiritual religion, that he calls Isis 'the seeing one' and the great 'illumination',⁵⁸ and that he recommends her religion as the field for philosophical contemplation, now unfolding on the basis of the revelation. Turning to the doctrine of revelation is only the corollary to the negative evaluation of *curiositas* and the human drive towards knowledge which it represents.

The question from which we started, whether the Isis book is in some way or other closely interconnected with the whole of the *Metamorphoses*, may thus be positively answered. But our scholarly *curiositas* does not allow us to stop as yet. At the end of the *Metamorphoses* Apuleius identifies himself with the Isis initiate Lucius (II. 27. 9). This is more than a literary commonplace of authentication. For this celebrated man, who was already honoured with statues during his lifetime,⁵⁹ is thus making a stand for the Isis religion and its theology of revelation by virtue of his person and authority. The same Apuleius had already proudly confessed himself a 'philosophus Platonicus'⁶⁰ in his earlier writings, and through his activities as an author and translator disseminated contemporary Platonic doctrines in the Latin-speaking world. One is therefore forced to address the question: is there a connection between Apuleius' Platonism and his belief in the mysteries?

The answer is hinted at in the *Metamorphoses* by the author himself. The narrator, behind whom the author is hiding, claims descent from 'the famous philosopher Plutarch' on his mother's side. This is claimed twice, in the self-introduction right at the beginning of the work (I. 2. 1) and again on the occasion of Lucius' meeting with his aunt Byrrhena,⁶¹ who then plays an important role as a warning figure. This remark makes sense only if understood as a confession of Plutarch's philosophical denomination. In our context one may think in particular of Plutarch's work on Isis and Osiris, in which the myth and rites of this Egyptian mystery religion are philosophically

⁵⁷ II. 23. 7: '... nocte media vidi solem candido coruscantem lumine'.

⁵⁸ II. 15. 3: '... videntis, quae suae lucis splendore ceteros etiam deos illuminat'.

⁵⁹ We know of several statues, e.g. two in Carthage (Ap. *Flor.* 16. 1 and 39 ff.) and one in Oea (Aug. *Ep.* 138. 19).

⁶⁰ See above, n. 1. Nowadays it is commonly accepted that the *Metamorphoses* belong to the later works of Apuleius and were written after the *Apologia* (c.160). On the date, most recently Carratello (1963).

⁶¹ See above, p. 146.

interpreted in various ways.⁶² Its introduction is most telling.⁶³ It contains Plutarch's justification of the Isis religion on the basis of a conviction which corresponds to the one hinted at by Apuleius. Thus in Plutarch Isis is the 'wise and wisdom-loving goddess' (351e). She leads her adherents, who devote themselves to her in pure and spiritual veneration, to the truth and to understanding of the highest god.⁶⁴ Her temple and her cult are the places of revelation (352a). Here the initiates receive 'the sacred lore about the gods' (352b), free of *deisidaimonia* and *periergia*, as is expressly noted. Here, finally, in the mysteries of the chief god, Osiris, the contemplation of being takes place, of the first, initial, transfigured, supreme *noeton*. For this contemplation Plutarch uses the well-known description of enlightenment⁶⁵ from Plato's seventh letter,⁶⁶ thus transposing the last philosophical insight into the mysteries and making philosophy reach its fulfilment in the mystery initiation. In this Apuleius seems to follow him. In his philosophical writings we find the view expressed that the supreme god heralded by Plato in his *Timaeus* (28c) is only accessible via a mystic contemplation, a mystery of enlightenment.⁶⁷ In the *Metamorphoses* the practical experience of mysteries, the nocturnal contemplation of mysteries, is interpreted in the sense of such an enlightenment (II. 23. 1). Like Plutarch, therefore, Apuleius, as a Platonizing philosopher, is open to a theology of revelation and could regard the Isis religion as the fulfilment and perfection of his Platonism.

⁶² Cf. Hopfner (1941), on which Wlosok (1960: 56–9 with n. 38).

⁶³ Chs. 2 and 3 = 351e–352c.

⁶⁴ About worshipping her 351f says: 'the end of which is the knowledge of the first, the sovereign, the intelligible'.

⁶⁵ 373a–e, 382c–d; cf. 351f–352a, 372e, and other passages.

⁶⁶ Plato, *Ep.* 7. 344b; cf. Wlosok (1960: 58 with n. 35).

⁶⁷ *De deo Socr.* 3: 'When Plato . . . very frequently proclaims that this being alone, through its extraordinary and ineffable excessive greatness, cannot be even to a small degree comprehended in any discourse, owing to the poverty of human language; even for men of wisdom, when they have separated themselves from their bodies as far as possible by force of mind, the understanding of this god only sometimes flashes, like a bright light with the swiftest of flickering in the depths of darkness'; on which, see Wlosok (1960, n. 226, 255).