

Dreams in Apuleius' Metamorphoses

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Dreams are a recurrent motif throughout Greek literature, notably in the main genres of poetry, such as epic, tragedy and lyric, but also in genres of prose.¹ Historiography comes to mind here, with some

¹ For a survey see Kessels 1973; cf. further e.g. Walde 2001 (Greek and Roman poetry). Among general studies of dreams in antiquity, see e.g. Hanson 1980.

well-known stories from Herodotus, but some less renowned works may be mentioned as well, such as the famous book on dreams by Artemidoros, and the Greek novels.²

Roman authors did not hesitate either to adopt dreams as a literary device in a similar broad range of genres.³ In this essay I will concentrate on one Latin work of prose that may properly be seen as a synthesis of much that is best in Greek and Roman literature, the Latin *Metamorphoses* by Apuleius (ca. 125-180),⁴ and I will try to analyse the function of dreams in the plot of the novel. Within the structure of the narrative as a whole, so I hope to show, dreams constitute more than just ornaments or superficial motifs.⁵

The *Metamorphoses* open with a travel scene: the protagonist, young Lucius of Corinth, is on his way to Thessaly, the land of witchcraft. He meets some fellow-travellers, who tell him a number of gruesome tales, which may even be called horror stories. A certain Aristomenes tells Lucius about an old friend of his, Socrates,⁶ whom he has found sitting in the gutter, dressed like a poor beggar. Aristomenes takes Socrates to a bath and to an inn, where he helps him recover.⁷ Socrates claims that he has become the victim of a witch, Meroë, for whom he seriously warns Aristomenes.

² Some work has been done on dreams in the Greek novel. See e.g. Plastira-Valkanou 2001 on Xenophon of Ephesus, esp. p.137 with references to earlier studies.

³ There is no monography on dreams in Roman literature. Cf. however studies on specific genres, such as Bouquet 2001 (Roman epic) and titles mentioned in note 1.

⁴ For a survey of recent literature on Apuleius and a discussion on the state of affairs concerning his life and works, see Sandy 1999 and Harrison 2000, 1-38 (general) and 210-59 (the *Met.*); a recent book on the *Met.* is Finkelpearl 1998. Dreams and visions in the *Met.* are sometimes mentioned in studies of other themes in the novel; cf. e.g. Dowden 1998.

⁵ This paper about dreams in a thoroughly Roman text that nonetheless qualifies itself as a *fabula Graecanica* (1,1) is meant as a tribute to Prof. A. Kessels. With his never failing humour and good sense, and his love and knowledge of Greek literature, Ton Kessels has always been a great teacher and an inspiring colleague.

⁶ On the novelist's obvious play and irony with names such as Socrates and Plutarch, see: Hunink 2004.

⁷ It may be noted how Apuleius manages to bring his tale to considerable narrative complexity within just a few pages, even if the puzzling 'prologue' of the novel is left out of account. For what Socrates

Having finished his story Socrates falls asleep. Aristomenes, who has started sceptical but meanwhile has become afraid, barricades the door of their room in the inn and tries to stay awake and vigilant, but without much success. Strange things begin to happen.

...dein circa tertia ferme uigiliam paululum coniuo. Commodum quieueram, et repente impulsu maiore quam ut latrones crederes ianuae reserantur, immo uero fractis et euolsis funditus cardinibus prosternuntur. (1,11)⁸

What follows is a frightening scene. Two witches enter the room, cruelly cut the throat of poor Socrates, catch all his blood in a leather receptacle, take out his heart, and leave a little sponge in his wound while uttering an incantation. They also urinate on Aristomenes, who is, however, allowed to live in order that he may bury the corpse of Socrates.

Next morning the damage to the doors strangely appears to be undone. As a matter of fact, Aristomenes told us that as soon as the witches left, the doors reverted undamaged to their previous positions (1,14). Socrates does appear to be still alive, and both men happily resume their journey.

But what exactly did Aristomenes experience? Was it a dream or reality? Although the witch scene had been pictured very realistically and lively, and in a rather noisy fashion at that, the suggestion of a dream is unmistakable. Aristomenes himself explicitly says so to Socrates. He has had a bad dream, he argues, caused by heavy eating and drinking the evening before, in defiance of what

tells about Meroë (1,7-10) is, at least, a doubly embedded speech: the narrating Lucius quotes Aristomenes reporting Socrates' words. In recent years, the complexly structured *Met.* have proven to provide highly suitable material for narratological analysis; see e.g. Van Mal-Maeder/Zimmerman 1998.

⁸ 'about half way through the night I began to nod off. I had just fallen asleep when the doors were suddenly flung open, with a violence greater than you would associate with robbers; indeed, the hinges were smashed and torn from their sockets, and the doors sent crashing to the ground'. (Walsh 1994, 7)

doctors commonly advice (1,18),⁹ and thinks he has been spattered with human blood. Socrates even laughs about it:

Ad haec ille subridens: 'At tu', inquit, 'non sanguine, sed lotio perfusus es, uerum tamen et ipse per somnium iugulari uisus sum mihi.' (1,18).¹⁰

The whole thus seems to become a lighthearted matter about a dream.¹¹ Both friends decide to have breakfast in an idyllic setting, under a plane tree near a gentle stream. But it is here that tragedy suddenly unfolds: Socrates seems to faint, and as soon as his thirsty lips touch the water, the wound in his neck opens up, the sponge rolls out with just a drop of blood, and he dies. Aristomenes buries him and escapes, to live in voluntary exile.

Aristomenes' tale is an exciting, sensational story, that makes good reading at the start of the novel. But it also leaves the audience, including the first listener, Lucius, teasingly in the dark. If Aristomenes' story is taken for granted, it remains unclear if what he reports about the visit of witches has been a dream or a live experience.

The witches were said to enter around midnight, the proper time for apparitions,¹² and although Aristomenes did not actually state at the beginning that he was dreaming, he did say he had fallen asleep. The impression therefore, that it was but a dream, seems clear, and it becomes stronger as the story goes on, until the unexpected death of Socrates.

⁹ On the ancient ideas about a relation between nightmares and heavy drinking, that play a role behind this scene, see Panayotakis 1998.

¹⁰ 'He smiled and said: "It's not blood but piss you were drenched with. But to tell the truth, I too had a dream, that my throat was cut."' (Kenney 1998, 16)

¹¹ It may be observed that Socrates even seems to discard a supernatural explanation for the urine with which Aristomenes has been covered. He does not actually say that Aristomenes wetted himself, but the insinuation is clear enough. The translation by Walsh 1994, 12 spoils the point by making it explicit ('you merely wet yourself').

¹² Cf. Keulen 2003, 224 ad. loc.

On the other hand, a first reader cannot not help reading the story of the witches as if it is really happening. The awesome noise with which the women burst into the room could even suggest that Aristomenes must have woken up. Moreover, although next morning both friends readily conclude that Aristomenes has had a nightmare, it does seem rather unsettling that Socrates' nightmare (1,18) closely corresponds to that of Aristomenes.¹³ And in the end, much of what Aristomenes has seen from the witches during their nocturnal visit, turns out to be true: the wound in Socrates' neck, the sponge coming out of it at his touch of water, and the few drops of blood that suggest that Socrates' blood has actually been taken. One wonders why nothing is said about Socrates' heart, which the witches were said to have taken out. Therefore, what first seems 'just a nightmare' appears to be as real and true as can be.

But what Aristomenes tells is so bizarre that serious doubts emerge as to his tale as such. For is it a true account or a piece of complete fiction? Is Aristomenes a reliable witness or an imaginative story-teller? Aristomenes' travel companion immediately calls his story into question, calling it a *fabula* and a *mendacium* (1,20), and asking Lucius if he can believe such fiction. In a rather complex statement Lucius says that he does, but his words show that he is mainly captured by the force of the story, rather than asserting anything positive about the possibility of its content.¹⁴

In the end, the whole tale remains enigmatic. The reader has been given mutually exclusive indications as to the status of what was told: it may have been a bad dream, but some horrible details of this nightmare seem all too real. That is, *if* the story-teller is to be believed, which is something we cannot know.¹⁵

Apuleius' use of the dream motif in the Aristomenes tale is highly effective both to captivate and to unsettle the reader. He or she will certainly be amused, but will also be forced to ask

¹³ For the motif of the 'double dream' which by mutual confirmation is bound to reveal the truth, see Keulen 2003, 306 ad loc., with further references.

¹⁴ See the sensible remarks by Keulen 2003, 335-5 on 1,20,5.

fundamental questions about the reliability of the various voices that may be heard in this narrative text, and about the nature of prose fiction as such.

Dream-like tales

In the rest of the opening books of the *Met.*, many more mysterious stories follow. The motif of dreams does not play an explicit role here, but the magical and incredible character of many of them might tempt readers to interpret them as yet other instances of nightmares. This goes notably for the horrible tale of Thelyphron in the second book (2,20-30).¹⁶ His bizarre story hardly merits more credit than Aristomenes' and it would not seem unnatural to take what he reports as another instance of a bad dream. But here too, the dream would then have come true: for Thelyphron actually has injuries in his face that he has suffered as a result of the events he told about. Since the story-teller could, if asked, show the wounds, his story, as unlikely as it may seem, cannot be dismissed as readily as Aristomenes'. Nonetheless, it is received with laughter by his immediate listeners (2,31), possibly under the influence of wine.¹⁷ Again, it is only the entertainment value that appears to count.

Much the same goes for the famous episode of the 'Festival of Laughter' in the third book (2,32-3,11).¹⁸ Lucius is strongly convinced he has done the right, lawful thing in killing three criminals,

¹⁵ On the alternative explanations of the Aristomenes tale, see further Winkler 1985, 82-6.

¹⁶ Thelyphron relates how he was hired to guard a corpse during the night, to prevent witches robbing it of certain limbs or parts. Although he could not keep awake all night, next day everything appeared to be fine. Only after some further unlikely developments, with the dead man resuscitated by an Egyptian magician, it appears that it is Thelyphron himself who has been robbed of his ears and nose, instead of the dead man.

¹⁷ Cf. Van Mal-Maeder 2001, 397 ad.loc. Cf also above, note 8.

¹⁸ Late at night, so Lucius tells, and rather drunk he killed three robbers who were breaking into the house of his host Milo. The next morning he is arrested and put on trial, where he has to plead his case

but finds himself sued for this on a capital charge. His feelings could perhaps be described as a bad dream. It only ends when people make him understand the practical joke that he has undergone. In the end, the trial is only comedy, whereas the murder he has committed turns out to be unreal. Again, reality and illusion are mixed up in a confusing way, leaving Lucius and his readers with many questions as to what really took place.

As if to make the point that such scenes have a dream-like quality, shortly afterwards, Lucius actually says that he believes to be dreaming. On witnessing the magical scene of a woman changing into a bird, he asserts:

praesentis tantum facti stupore defixus quiduis aliud magis uidebar esse quam Lucius: sic exterminatus animi, attonitus in amentiam uigilans somniabar; defrictis adeo diu pupulis, an uigilarem, scire quaerebam. (3,22)¹⁹

An intriguing, dream-like quality may also be attributed to the largest inserted story in the *Met.*, the much appreciated tale of *Cupid and Psyche*. In the story as a whole, many strange, unnatural, and mysterious motifs and events may be seen, from the supernatural beauty of Psyche and her mysterious encounter with a divine lover, to her final reunion and marriage with Cupid in heaven. Women transported by the wind Zephyrus towards lofty dwellings, rivers and trees gifted with human speech, helpful animals assisting poor Psyche in carrying out impossible tasks, all of this reinforces the fictional character of the story, or, for that matter, suggests that everything is but a dream.

in the theatre. After some further developments, the three murdered robbers turn out to be damaged, inflated wineskins. Lucius appears to be the victim of a practical joke in honour of Risus. In recompense, he is awarded a statue.

¹⁹ 'I was rooted to the ground with astonishment at this event, and I seemed to have become something other than Lucius. In this state of ecstasy and riveted mindlessness, I was acting out a waking dream, and accordingly I rubbed my eyes repeatedly in an effort to discover whether I was awake'. (Walsh 1994, 52)

Interestingly, the *Cupid and Psyche* story is told in the *Metamorphoses* as a remedy against a horrible nightmare. Lucius, by now transformed into an ass, has been captured by a group of robbers. He hears how the robbers' housekeeper, an old woman, tries to comfort a young girl, Charite. The girl has told her about her sad fate: on her wedding day she was kidnapped by the robbers from the arms of her mother. She also had a nightmare: she felt she was dragged away from her house, after which her husband came after her, but one of the robbers killed him with a big stone (4,26-7).

On hearing the girl's account, the old woman makes an important observation about dreams:

'Bono animo esto, mi erilis, nec uanis somniorum figmentis terreare. Nam praeter quod diurnae quietis imagines falsae perhibentur, tunc etiam nocturnae uisiones contrarios euentus nonnumquam pronuntiant. Denique flere et uapulare et nonnumquam iugulari lucrosum prosperumque prouentum nuntiant, contra ridere et mellitis dulciolis uentrem saginare uel in uoluptatem ueneriam conuenire tristitie animi languore corporis damnisque ceteris uexatum iri praedicabunt. Sed ego te narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis protinus auocabo' (4,27)²⁰

So according to the old woman, a daylight dream such as Charite has had, is by definition untrue.²¹ This reassuring claim, and the following, long story of Cupid and Psyche, which takes up about two books

²⁰ "Cheer up, my lady; don't be frightened by the baseless fancies of dreams. For one thing, dreams in daylight hours are held to be false, and for another, even night-dreams sometimes tell of untruthful happenings. So tears, beating, even murders sometimes portend a profitable and favourable outcome, while on the other hand, smiles, bellyfuls of honey-cakes and pleasurable love-encounters foretell future afflictions with melancholy, physical illness, and all such hardships. Come then, here and now I'll divert you with the pretty story of an old wife's tale.'" (Walsh 1994, 74).

²¹ For the notion that unfavourable events may predict a happy outcome and vice versa, Mignogna 1996, 95 compares Artem. *Oneir.* 2,60. Hijmans 1977, 205 further adds Plin. *Ep.* 1,18,2 *refert tamen, euentura soles an contraria somniare. Mihi reputanti somnium meum istud, quod times tu, egregiam actionem portendere uidetur.* On the complex Roman attitudes concerning the truthfulness of dreams, see Harris 2003.

(4,28-6,24), is bound to make Charite, Lucius and others forget all about the nightmare. However, matters ultimately take a grim turn for Charite. After she and the ass Lucius have been rescued by her husband Tlepolemus, who has come to save her, her man becomes the victim of envy by a rival, Thrasyllus, who kills him during a hunting scene. Charite discovers the truth, which her dead husband himself reveals to her in a nocturnal dream (8,8-9). In an act of cruel revenge she cuts short Thrasyllus' illusions by blinding him,²² and commits suicide (8,1-14).

Returning to her initial nightmare as reported in 4,27, one might observe that it has more or less come true.²³ Thrasyllus does not actually belong to the group of robbers who has captured her, but he is characterized as a degenerate drunk, who is explicitly said to associate himself with gangs of robbers (8,1). So, by extension, he may well be identified with the robber from Charite's nightmare. And although he uses a hunting lance to get Tlepolemus killed (with the help of a boar) (8,5), rather than a stone, as the nightmare foretold, such differences are of minor importance. In the end it amounts to this: Charite's husband, who has come to save her, is killed by a robber, and this was the essence of her nightmare.

On a further note of irony, not only has her bad dream come true, but the truth about Tlepolemus has been revealed to her in a second dream.²⁴ Charite does not call it into question for a moment, although the old woman has warned her about the unreliability of all dreams, even those

²² Charite delivers a proper farewell speech to Thrasyllus in 8,12. In her speech, she repeatedly refers to his eyes seeing her beauty and his dreams of having sex with her, something she will make impossible by condemning him to eternal darkness. So the motifs of human vision and illusion play a role at this final stage of the episode as well.

²³ In Hijmans 1985, 5-6 it is argued that Charite's first dream does not come true, although it is admitted that 'there seems to be a link between the robber-element there and the characterisation of Thrasyllus in the present tale as *factionibus latronum male sociatus*', 8,1. Hijmans 1977, 203-4 on 4,27 had remained undecided on the issue. Other scholars argue that Charite's first dream, with a few changes, has actually come true; e.g. Mignogna 1996, 95-6; cf. further Winkler 1985, 52-3.

²⁴ According to Hijmans 1985, 5-6, Charite's second dream rather reflects only her subconscious imagination. A psychological interpretation, while perfectly legitimate by itself, does not seem to be suited to explain the Latin text here.

experienced at night. Dreams can be misleading and confusing, but in the *Metamorphoses* they do seem to contain a disturbingly high proportion of truth.

At the end of the Charite episode, we may safely conclude that everything that the old woman told was false and unreliable. Her characterisation as a *delira et temulenta illa... anicula* (crazy, drunken old hag) (6,25) now gains special significance: she cannot be trusted. Her statements about the lack of veracity of dreams are contradicted by the developments in the story, and the comfort she gave Charite turns out to have been an illusion.

There is a further, intriguing implication for our interpretation of the *Cupid and Psyche* story, if the point of its dream-like character is briefly pursued. For according to the old woman's claim, the story would not qualify as a true account, but as a lie, or at best as an entertaining piece of fiction. That is how the old woman actually announced it in 4,27 (*narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis*), and how it seems to be perceived by the listening Charite and by Lucius.²⁵ But if the old woman is not to be trusted, her story of Cupid and Psyche may in the end be 'true' at some higher level, of which the story-teller herself is unaware.

The distinction between dreams and reality, between truth and fiction, is deliberately blurred in a rather intricate way. In the *Metamorphoses*., a dream or a story may somehow be false, or true, or both at the same time. Every new example thus poses a further little puzzle to the reader, who must be ready to expect just about anything.

After the Charite episode, many scenes follow that are in some way unpleasant to Lucius and other protagonists, but the sense of magic and mystery becomes less prominent.²⁶ Accordingly, the motif of dreams recedes into the background, although it is readily activated when the storyline requires so. Thus, in 9,31, in one of the inserted stories in book 9 that focus on the motif of

²⁵ Having heard the story, Lucius regrets not having writing-tablets and a *stilus* to write down *tam bellam fabulam*. (6,25)

²⁶ For instance, in the episode of the exotic priests of Dea Syria (8,24-9,10), it is not their religion or

'cuckolding', the truth about a wicked stepmother's criminal behaviour is revealed in a dream: a loyal daughter receives a vision of her dead father, who tells her everything.²⁷

Dreaming of Isis

In the final, eleventh book of the novel, the so called 'Isis' book, the atmosphere is dominated by magic, wonder, religion and Egyptian mystery cult. No wonder, perhaps, that dreams occur with increasing frequency.

The first dream brings a great surprise. At the point of his deepest misery, Lucius the ass has escaped from the theatre of Corinth and arrives on the coast near Cenchreae, where he falls asleep at the end of the day (10,35). In the early evening he wakes up and watches how a full moon rises from the sea. Inspired by a religious awe, he delivers a fervent prayer to Isis, entreating her to finally liberate him from his asinine shape. After this long, impressive prayer (11,2), he falls asleep again.

*Nec satis coniueram, et ecce pelago medio uenerandos diis etiam uultus attollens emergit
diuina facies...* (11,3)²⁸

This divine figure appears to be none other than Isis herself, of whom Lucius gives a vivid, detailed description (11,3-4), and who in turn delivers a long, personal address to Lucius (11,5-6), in which she

other special quality that is highlighted, but their lowly lusts and their trickery.

²⁷ The dream motif comes at the end of what is a rather complexly structured episode about a baker's wife. It is used almost casually to quickly round off the narrative, and so it cannot be said to fulfil an important, structural role, as e.g. in the scenes with Aristomenes or Charite. Meanwhile, we may note that once again, a dream contains the 'truth' of the matter, in a context of bizarre, incredible events.

²⁸ 'But scarcely had I closed my eyes when suddenly from the midst of the sea, a divine figure arose.'.. (Walsh 1994, 219)

instructs him about the manner in which he is to be liberated and to regain his human shape. He must wait for a certain procession for Isis, and approach the priest, who will hand him some roses that will change him back into a human being. After this, he is to become a priest of Isis.

The apparition of Isis, as elaborately as it has been described, is nonetheless clearly characterised as a dream: immediately afterwards, Lucius wakes up (11,7), and meditates upon his instructions. The overall situation rather resembles that of the first passage that has been discussed (1,11): it is night, the protagonist has barely closed his eyes,²⁹ and an impressive sight imposes itself upon him. The explicit dream character of the scene in 11,3 would seem to confirm a reader (or 'second reader') of the *Met.* that the parallel scene in 1,11 certainly must have concerned a dream. At the beginning of the novel, this was not yet entirely clear, as has been argued above.

In the course of book 11, the truth of what Isis has suggested to Lucius gradually comes to light, with dreams continuing to play a major role in this. Isis already announced to Lucius that she would reveal everything about him to her priest in a dream³⁰ and a few pages later, the priest in question, looking exactly as she foretold, appears to be informed by her in this manner, so Lucius tells us.³¹ Next, Lucius is actually retransformed and regains his human shape (11,13-14).³²

By now, all seems well and clear: Lucius is a man again, and Isis has kept her promise. No more uncertainty, no more ambiguity, no more narrative complexity, but only the simplicity and clarity of

²⁹ Cf. 1,11 ...*paululum coniuero. Commodum quieueram, et repente...* and 11,3 *Nec satis coniueram, et ecce...*

³⁰ '*quae sunt sequentia sacerdoti meo per quietem facienda praecipio*'. (11,6)

³¹ *At sacerdos, ut reabse cognoscere potui, nocturni commonefactus oraculi miratusque congruentiam mandati muneris, confestim restitit* (11,13).

³² Having discussed a number of episodes from the *Met.* in terms of dreams, one might feel tempted to regard Lucius' entire account of his unlikely change into an ass, the following dangerous adventures, and the no less unlikely change back into human shape as one long-drawn-out dream; cf. Winkler 1985, 9 who mentions the idea of books 1 to 10 as 'a long narrative dream' with book 11 as a 'waking coda'. However, there are no concrete indications in the text in support of such theories. The whole *Met.* are, by all means, a piece of fiction. It is to be noted that Lucius himself firmly believes everything that he tells us.

the Isis religion, to which Lucius now devotes himself. Dreams turn out to be a vehicle of the supernatural, and appear not to have revealed lies but truth.

A problem, however, is that our storyteller Lucius, has shown himself to be credulous and naive throughout the novel. In an incessant urge to experience new things (his infamous *curiositas*), he does not reject any story, as unlikely as it may be. Shortsighted and not too intelligent, rash and silly at times, a prey of voracity³³ and carnal desires, Lucius has appeared to be highly impressionable to anything remotely magical or 'supernatural', and he does not seem to have undergone any development in the course of his adventures as an ass and his latest metamorphosis. That is, at this stage dreams are presented by Lucius as vehicles of truth, but there are some grounds to disbelieve the story-teller himself.

In the end, even Lucius himself might have felt some doubts, one feels inclined to say.³⁴ For by the time he is to obtain his initiation as a priest, he receives innumerable dreams:

*Nec fuit nox una uel quies aliqua uisu deae minituque ieiuna, sed crebris imperiis sacris suis me, iam dudum destinatum, nunc saltem censebat initiari. (11,19)*³⁵

Nocturnal visions are almost piled up, occurring with a rather alarming frequency, which reveals perhaps more about Lucius and his ardent desire to devote himself to Isis than about her divine power.

Meanwhile, dreams are invariably presented as reliable: in 11,20 Lucius is told in a dream about a slave of his, Candidus, who has arrived from Thessaly; next morning, slaves bring back a white

³³ Even at the crucial moment of receiving the liberating roses, Lucius almost devours them: *coronam... auido ore susceptam cupidus promissi deuorauit* (11,13).

³⁴ Cf. Harrison 2000, 247 about the doubts repeatedly expressed by Lucius (e.g. 11,29,3), which produce a comic effect: 'even the dupe Lucius suspects that all is not well'.

³⁵ 'No single night, no siesta passed which was not haunted with the vision and the advice of the goddess. By numerous sacred commands she decreed that since I had been so inclined for some time, I should now at last undergo initiation'. (Walsh 1994, 230).

horse (*equum... colore candidum*) that once belonged to Lucius. Shortly afterwards, the impatient Lucius finally obtains nocturnal instructions by Isis about his initiation, and the exact expenses he will have to make (11,22). After his festive initiation, the goddess inspires him, no doubt in yet another dream, to travel to Rome (11,26), where he is to receive another, costly initiation in the temple of Isis at the Campus Martius, into the cult of Osiris.

As in earlier cases, the priest,³⁶ who will perform this sacred act is equally instructed by the goddess in a dream:

audisse mitti sibi Madaurem, sed admodum pauperem, cui statim sua sacra deberet ministrare; nam et illi studiorum gloriam et ipsi grande compendium sua comparari prouidentia (11,27)³⁷

This is a hotly debated passage in the novel, since the author Apuleius of Madauros here seems to confuse his real name and biography with that of his protagonist Lucius, who was told to be a Corinthian. This would be a breach of the most basic of narrative conventions. The passage can reasonably be explained as a deliberate, practical joke by Apuleius to confuse the readers at the end of the book.³⁸ But perhaps the dream element of the context has not sufficiently been taken into account.

Unlike what is often thought, Lucius does not actually identify himself as a man from Madauros who will earn glory in literature, but he tells that this is what the priest heard in a dream. At this stage of the novel, dreams bring information that is presented by Lucius as 'true', but for him dreams do not

³⁶ He is called *Asinius Marcellus*, with a name ironically recalling Lucius' asinine nature.

³⁷ 'he had heard... that a man from Madauros who was quite poor was being sent to him, and that he must at once initiate him into his divine rites. By the god's providence this man would gain fame in his studies and the priest himself would obtain a rich reward'. (Walsh 1994, 237-8).

³⁸ Cf. Van der Paardt 1981; for further discussion see e.g. Finkelpearl 1998, 215-7.

have to be literally exact to qualify as true, but some changes seem allowed, as was shown in the dream about Candidus, which was true only as a linguistic pun. Thus, the motif of dreams has allowed the author Apuleius to insert his own name. This seems teasing and funny indeed, but it cannot properly be said to form a break with narrative conventions.

After Lucius' second initiation, the gods still do not seem to have enough. The divinity instructs poor Lucius for a third, again costly (,) initiation. In a final vision in the last paragraph of the novel (11,30) Osiris himself appears to Lucius, in person, telling him not to hesitate to continue his work as an advocate in court and to neglect all envy he is confronted with, and announcing Lucius' appointment to the college of *pastophori*. Lucius does not question the dream at all (would the great god Osiris really care about Lucius' success as a lawyer?) and joyfully starts on his career.³⁹

Scholars have pointed out that his joy seems rather misplaced: after three successive initiations, he has spent an enormous amount of money on the cult of Isis, without obtaining much more than a post in a relatively unimportant class of priests. One might argue that the gullible Lucius has been tricked somehow by shrewd, calculating priests into exercising his professional talents for their material benefit.⁴⁰ But even if one takes Lucius' religiosity and the Isis cult rather less lightly, the end of the novel, with its repetitive, almost tiresome sequence of dreams, is bound to raise doubts and questions.⁴¹ What if, in the end, all these dreams are but deceit and illusion?

³⁹ The last words of the novel are *gaudens obibam*. Laird 1997, 275-6 notes the ambiguity of the final word, which as such might also refer to death, a common motif at the end of a book.

⁴⁰ The Isis priests, then, would be like the priests of Dea Syria in *Met.* 8, whom Lucius-the-ass so vehemently condemned for their bad practices. The notion of Lucius as a dupe of the Isis priests, as one among several possible readings of book 11, was first advanced by Winkler 1985, esp. 215-23. Cf. further e.g. Van Mal-Maeder 1997, 100-10 and Harrison 2000, 238-52, who regards book 11 as a satire of the Isis cult. In this reading, one may add, Lucius' 'truthful dreams' could be explained as opportune ideas deliberately suggested to him by *Isiaci coniectores*, interpreters of dreams given to Isis adepts, as mentioned by e.g. Cic. *Div.* 1,132.

⁴¹ According to Finkelppearl 2004, Apuleius ends the *Met.* at least three times, playing with the narrative device of closure, and producing a complex text that stands somehow outside the text, much

Focus

Dreams in the *Metamorphoses* play an important role at what may be called crucial moments in the narrative. Right at the start, in the opening scenes, they serve to raise tension and ambiguity, and to picture an atmosphere of wonder and mystery. A first reader is likely to be uncertain about the reality of many of the stories that are told. The dream-like quality and narrative ambiguity of some of the later parts, including the striking story of Cupid and Psyche in the centre of the novel, and the Charite episode that encircles it, are bound to fascinate the reader and keep his or her attention. In the final book, dreams invariably reveal the 'truth', even if not always in a literal way. But by the end of the book, the truths of the narrator Lucius have become at least questionable to the reader. At the end, certainty is no more within reach than in the horror stories of the beginning.

Both at the opening and the close of the book, as well as in its central part, dreams are artfully inserted, furthering doubts about the nature of what is told and about the persons who are telling or the man who is writing it. Postmodern readers may even raise additional questions about those who are reading the text.

In the end, Apuleius' narrative remains thoroughly elusive, and this may well be considered as one of its most fundamental qualities. It has made the novel into a classic work, worthy to be mentioned among the most enjoyable and lasting achievements from Greek and Latin literature.

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as the prologue to book 1.

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