

# Begoming a book : divination and fictionality in Apuleius' Metamorphoses

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# Becoming a Book: Divination and Fictionality in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

By Alexander Kirichenko, Trier

**Abstract:** This article argues that discussions about divination in Apuleius' novel are used to highlight the narrative's status as a piece of self-evident fiction. Numerous parallels between Apuleius and other ancient texts on divination (primarily Cicero's *De divinatione*) serve to corroborate this argument. Among other things, these parallels reveal the particular irony of the fact that, in order to fulfill Diophanes' prophecy and to "become a book" of fantastic fiction, Lucius has to be transformed into an Isiac priest – a figure that ancient critics of divination would have characterized as a superstitious charlatan, potentially as fraudulent as Diophanes himself.

## 1.

Book 2 of Apuleius' *Golden Ass* contains one of the most fascinating metafictional episodes in Roman literature<sup>1</sup>. During a dinner at the house of Lucius' host Milo, his wife Pamphile predicts the weather by looking at an oil-lamp<sup>2</sup>. To counter Milo's ridicule of Pamphile's prophetic skills, Lucius refers to his personal experience with divination: prior to embarking on his journey, he consulted a celebrated Chaldean prophet, and received from him the following information (Apul. *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 incredulam fabulam et libros me futurum.*

When I asked him about the outcome of this journey, his long reply consisted of quite wondrous and pretty varied things: now he prophesied that I would enjoy a flourishing fame, now that I would turn into a great story, an incredible tale several books long<sup>3</sup>.

- 1 Apul. *Met.* 2.11–14. W.S. Smith, "The Narrative Voice in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*", *TAPhA* 103 (1972) 532–533; J.J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (Berkeley 1985) 39–41; S.J. Harrison, *Apuleius the Latin Sophist* (Oxford 2000) 231–232. On the concept of metafiction, see P. Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London/New York 1984) and M. Scheffel, *Formen selbstreflexiven Erzählens* (Tübingen 1997).
- 2 Apul. *Met.* 2.11.
- 3 All translations are mine.

It turns out, however, that Milo, too, knows this wandering astrologer (his name is Diophanes) and that he has a much less flattering opinion of his divinatory ability. The point of Milo's amusing story is that Diophanes is a typical greedy charlatan incapable of predicting even his own future: the merchant Cerdo immediately takes back the money he has already paid for Diophanes' prediction, when he overhears the naive Chaldean chattering about his own narrow escape from a shipwreck. Milo concludes his tale on a more reassuring note, however, by saying (Apul., *Met.* 2.14):

*sed tibi plane, Luci domine, soli omnium Chaldaeus ille vera dixerit, sisque felix et iter dexterum porrigas.*

But for you, and for you alone, Master Lucius, this Chaldean certainly foretold the truth. I wish you good luck and an auspicious journey.

The most intriguing thing about this episode is that it seems deliberately to confuse the reader by bombarding her with conflicting, or even mutually exclusive, signals. On the one hand, Milo's skepticism with regard to different kinds of divination is not only self-consistent, but also perfectly conforms to the standard *topoi* of the oracle critique known from numerous other ancient sources, which greatly contributes to commanding our assent<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, the narrative really seems to go out of its way to suggest that the truth may in fact be on the side of Lucius' credulity rather than of Milo's skepticism. To begin with, we have by now read Aristomenes' tale, which also takes place in Hypata, features unequivocally real witches, and displays many other tangible parallels with Lucius' adventures in Thessaly as they have unfolded so far<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, our belief in Pamphile's divinatory skills is supported by the fact that Lucius' aunt Byrrhena has already described her as a typical Thessalian witch capable of accomplishing significantly more awe-inspiring things than a mere pyromantic weather forecast<sup>6</sup>. But most importantly, we realize that, despite Milo's sarcasm, the prediction given by Diophanes to Lucius has obviously been fulfilled, and we are now holding in our hands the incontrovertible proof of its veracity – the book (or rather the eleven *libri*) containing the incredible story into which Lucius has turned as a result of his metamorphosis into an ass<sup>7</sup>.

4 On the oracle critique in the Imperial period, see J. Hammerstaedt, "Der Kyniker Oenomaus von Gadara", *ANRW* II.36.4 (1990) 2844–2850 and 2853–2862.

5 Cf. A. Kirichenko, *A Comedy of Storytelling: Theatricality and Narrative in Apuleius' Golden Ass* (Heidelberg 2010) 33–35 and 59–63.

6 Apul. *Met.* 2.5.

7 Smith (above, n.1) 532–533: "Diophanes' prophecy is clearly a tongue-in-cheek reference to the *Metamorphoses* itself: the *libri* which will record Lucius' adventures are the eleven books which make up the novel as we have it." See also Winkler (above, n. 1) 158.



The remarkably ironic feel of this episode originates from the fact that it portrays a collision between two incompatible worlds – a world similar to our own empirical one, in which the only valid forces are rational causes and effects accepted as real by natural philosophers, and a fantastic, self-evidently fictional world of Thessalian witches, where miracles form an integral part of everyday reality. Of course, things have absolutely different meanings depending on which of these two worlds they are conceived as happening in. Milo takes the world he inhabits to be the former, and in this world an unlimited validity is granted to whatever skeptical notions he may have about miracles and divination. At the same time, he does not seem to realize that he, too, as Lucius reminds us at the very beginning of Book 2, *media Thessaliae loca tene(t)*<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, he misapplies stereotypes and conventions valid in the empirical world to the world of Thessalian fiction, with whose conventions he is, quite ironically, as unfamiliar as he seems to be unaware of the fact that he is married to a Thessalian witch. As a result, Lucius and Milo are both right and wrong depending on the frame of reference within which we locate their statements. Diophanes' prediction is as false in the "real" world as it is true in the world of Lucius' fantastic fiction. Most revealingly, however, it is only by becoming such a fiction that Lucius can prove Diophanes right<sup>9</sup>.

The main goal of this essay is to show how Apuleius employs the motif of divination in order to highlight the constant oscillation between the empirical world and the world of self-evident fictional fantasy (or rather, the dynamic process of transformation of the former into the latter) as one of the constitutive elements of the complex (meta-)fictional universe of his novel. Before I can turn to this point, however, I would like to dwell for a moment on the sense of indeterminacy with which we are left at the end of the dialogue that I have just discussed. We are presented here with two mutually exclusive opinions without, however, receiving any unequivocal indications as to whether one of them is to be preferred over the other. This kind of radical uncertainty is highly reminiscent of the widespread dialectical practice of *disputare in utramque partem* – where an exposition in favor of a certain thesis is followed by an exposition refuting that thesis, whereas it remains up to the recipient to assess the respective strengths and weaknesses of the two arguments<sup>10</sup>. This kind of reasoning was particularly typical of philosophical dialogues in the Academic tradition, for which some of Cicero's philosophical writings bear the most thorough surviv-

8 Apul., *Met.* 2.1. On Thessaly as a country of witches, see O. Phillips, "The Witches' Thessaly", in: P. Mirecki/M. Meyer (eds.), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden 2002) 378–385.

9 A similar dialogue happens earlier on in the narrative. In the very first scene of the novel, Lucius overhears a dispute about the reality of supernatural phenomena. Here, too, the skeptic remains as skeptical, and Lucius as credulous as they were prior to hearing the tale (Apul., *Met.* 1.20), and it remains impossible to assign the truth to either party unless we consider the frame of reference to which their respective statements apply. Cf. Kirichenko (above, n. 5) 117–119.

10 Apuleius himself, too, seems to have composed dialogues of this kind. Cf. Apul., *Fl.* 18.

ing witness<sup>11</sup>. This is how Cicero formulates the chief principle of an Academic dialogue at the end of *De divinatione* (2.150):

*cum autem proprium sit Academiae iudicium suum nullum interponere, ea probare, quae simillima veri videantur, conferre causas et, quid in quamque sententiam dici possit, expromere, nulla adhibita sua auctoritate iudicium audientium relinquere integrum et liberum, tenebimus hanc consuetudinem a Socrate traditam.*

As the characteristically Academic way of reasoning consists in withholding one's own judgment, in approving what seems to be closest to the truth, in comparing arguments, in expressing what can be said in favor of each opinion, and in refraining from superimposing one's own authority so as to leave the audience's judgment unbiased and free, we shall hold on to this habit that we have inherited from Socrates.

Incidentally, *De divinatione* happens to be a text that sheds particular light not only on the form of the conversation Milo and Lucius but also on its content<sup>12</sup>.

## 2.

Cicero's *De divinatione* provides one of the best surviving testimonies on the Greco-Roman philosophical discourse of divination<sup>13</sup>. In Book 1, Cicero portrays his brother Quintus defending the reality of divination from the Stoic viewpoint<sup>14</sup>. For Quintus, the ability to look into the future is not only a clear proof of the gods' existence, but also a manifestation of their care for humankind<sup>15</sup>. He distinguishes between two classes of divinatory practices – natural divination, which includes dreams and prophetic rage, and artificial divination, which comprises all other traditional kinds, such as augury, haruspicy, etc.<sup>16</sup> Quintus' explanation of both kinds of divination is based on the Stoic doctrine of universal sympathy. Since human souls are of celestial (i.e. divine) origin, they are capable of partaking of divine knowledge when liberated from the constraints of the body (i.e., in the state of sleep or rage)<sup>17</sup>. In the case of artificial divination, he follows the Stoics in postulating that a certain divine force,

11 M. Schofield, "Cicero for and against Divination", *JRS* 76 (1986) 47–48.

12 On this aspect of Cicero's *De divinatione*, see M. Beard, "Cicero and Divination: The Formation of a Latin Discourse", *JRS* 76 (1986) 40–45 and Schofield (above, n. 11) 55–61.

13 Mary Beard (above, n. 12) speaks of *De divinatione* as marking "the formation of a Latin discourse" – not only of divination, but also of religion in general. See also Schofield (above, n. 11) 48–51.

14 On the sources of the *De divinatione*, see D. Wardle, *Cicero on Divination. De Divinatione. Book 1. Translated with Introduction and Historical Commentary* (Oxford 2006) 28–37.

15 See for instance Quintus' sarcastic outburst in Cic., *Div.* 1.33.

16 Cic., *Div.* 1.34.

17 E.g., Cic., *Div.* 1.70–71.



which suffuses the entire world, influences the matter in such a way as to make it provide meaningful prophetic signs<sup>18</sup>.

In Book 2, Cicero speaks *in propria persona* and adopts a consistently skeptical viewpoint in order to refute Quintus' Stoic theory. Not only does he deny the possibility of divination as such, but he also argues that, even if it were possible, knowing the future would be of no use<sup>19</sup>. To bolster his argument, he points to an irreconcilable contradiction between the notion of determinism, which makes prediction of the future conceivable in the first place, and the idea that divination concerns itself only with the prediction of things that happen by chance<sup>20</sup>. He further discusses Quintus' individual arguments in favor of divination, showing that they are either untenable on logical grounds or lack any reliable foundation in the empirical reality<sup>21</sup>.

Obviously enough, the discussion between Milo and Lucius about the belief in the supernatural is couched in terms reminiscent of Cicero's divination discourse. Here, too, Lucius expresses himself in the popular Stoic manner of Cicero's Quintus: he bases his argument on the Stoic doctrine of universal sympathy by pointing to the relation between the flame of the oil lamp and the celestial fire<sup>22</sup>. Milo's skeptical position, on the other hand, is virtually identical with that expressed in Book 2 of *De divinatione* by Cicero's *persona*<sup>23</sup>.

More importantly, however, Cicero's dialogue highlights one issue that is particularly crucial for our understanding of the way Apuleius treats divination. Examples of divination cited by Quintus derive not only from experience<sup>24</sup>, but also from literary sources, many of which he summarizes or even quotes verbatim. Interestingly enough, behind Quintus' recourse to literature there always lurks an awareness of the essentially fictitious nature of the prophetic dreams and other instances of divination that he cites. This awareness, however, does not prevent him from drawing the questionable conclusion that the sheer frequency with which successfully implemented divination is used in literature somehow makes these occurrences indicative of the way things happen in real

18 Cic., *Div.* 1.118.

19 Cic., *Div.* 2.12 and 2.20.

20 Cic., *Div.* 2.15 and 2.19.

21 J. Linderski, "Cicero and Roman Divination", *PP* 38 (1982) 12–38; F. Guillaumont, *Philosophe et augure: Recherches sur la théorie cicéronienne de la divination* (Brussels 1984) 95–109; N. Denyer, "The Case against Divination: An Examination of Cicero's *De divinatione*", *PCPS* 31 (1985) 1–10; Schofield (above, n. 11) 53–55.

22 Apul., *Met.* 2.12. On the Stoic origin of Lucius' reasoning, see D. van Mal-Maeder, *Apuleius. Metamorphoses. Livre II: Texte, introduction et commentaire* (Groningen 2001) *ad loc.*

23 Similarly, in his conversation with the skeptic in Book 1 Lucius states that the inexplicability of a certain phenomenon does not necessarily have to disprove its reality, but, on the contrary, may simply indicate that we have not come up with the right explanation for it yet (Apul. *Met.* 1.3). Quintus' defense of divination is based on essentially the same logic, when he remarks that there are no false portents, only interpreters who lack pertinent knowledge (Cic., *Div.* 1.60 and 1.118).

24 On the role of experience in Quintus' argumentation, see Schofield (above, n. 11) 51–53.

life<sup>25</sup>. One typical example should suffice to illustrate how Quintus treats his literary evidence. After quoting a prophetic dream from Ennius' *Alexander*, whose fictionality he openly concedes, Quintus continues to cite more examples of the same kind (Cic., *Div.* 1.43):

*sint haec, ut dixi, somnia fabularum, hisque adiungatur etiam Aeneae somnium, quod in nostri Fabi Pictoris Graecis annalibus eius modi est, ut omnia, quae ab Aenea gesta sunt quaeque illi acciderunt, ea fuerint, quae ei secundum quietem visa sunt.*

As I said, these dreams may indeed belong to poetic fictions, but to them we can also add Aeneas' dream: according to the Greek *Annals* of our own Fabius Pictor, all of Aeneas' accomplishments and all the events that happened to him had previously appeared to him in a dream.

Quite significantly, one of Cicero's strongest arguments against Quintus' reasoning is precisely the literary (i.e. fictitious) nature of most of his evidence<sup>26</sup>. By criticizing Quintus' constant use of examples from literature (no matter whether it be epic, tragedy, or historiography – all of these genres are presented as equally untrustworthy)<sup>27</sup>, Cicero effectively reduces successful divination to the status of a marker of fictionality. Even though he never formulates it quite so pointedly, his line of argument seems to imply that prophetic dreams, as well as other kinds of divination, always come true in self-evidently fictional texts, whereas they never, or only accidentally, do in empirical reality<sup>28</sup>. What follows is that the proleptic use of divination in a narrative text is nothing but a convenient literary device that allows one to present a chronological sequence of chance events as a cause-and-effect sequence controlled by a preordained, and thus morally or ideologically meaningful, logic. And since divination has no rational basis in reality, the uncritical presentation of its successful operation in a literary text has to be regarded as a clear indication of that text's fictitious nature.

In what follows, I will show that Apuleius uses the divination discourse precisely in the manner adumbrated by Cicero. The constant oscillation between the empirical reality and the world of self-evident fiction is clearly highlighted in his novel by the way divination is presented and perceived. Moreover, this

25 Cic., *Div.* 1.42. Cf. Schofield (above, n. 11) 52: "The underlying philosophical thought is presumably that it is precisely an authentically messy welter of allegedly divinatory experiences which gives the best chance of persuading someone of the case for divination. [...] Of course, there are alternative justifications available: pile up the evidence; if there is a lot of it, the reader may begin to think there must be something in it."

26 Cic., *Div.* 2.27.

27 Cf. Cic., *Div.* 2.113 (poetic fictions) and 2.58 (historical narratives). In this connection, Diophanes' prediction of Lucius' transformation into both a *historia magna* and an *incredunda fabula* acquires an additional significance.

28 On the role of divination in Cicero's views on history, see M. Fox, *Cicero's Philosophy of History* (Oxford 2007) 209–240.



oscillation ultimately serves to dramatize the recurrent motif of the transformation of a seemingly inconspicuous inhabitant of the empirical world into a personage of fiction. Apuleius subjects several of his characters to such a transformation – not only Lucius, but also Aristomenes and Charite<sup>29</sup>, – and each of these transformations is accompanied by references to the divination discourse, as we know it from Cicero.

Before I proceed to my individual case studies, I would like to stress that, by drawing parallels between Apuleius' and Cicero's portrayals of divination, I by no means want to suggest that Apuleius is directly dependent on Cicero's *De divinatione* as a 'source'. Rather, I use Cicero's treatise as the best surviving witness for the philosophical complexity of the Greco-Roman divination discourse – the philosophical complexity which Apuleius *indirectly*, and quite playfully, reflects in the (meta-)fictional universe of his novel.

### 3.

When upon his arrival in Hypata Aristomenes runs into his long-missing friend Socrates and hears about the disastrous consequences of his affair with a Thesalian witch, he reacts to the news like a typical skeptic who takes such stories for what they are worth – as tall tales suitable for the tragic stage rather than for a serious conversation (Apul., *Met.* 1.8):

*oro te aulaeum tragicum dimoveto et siparium scaenicum complicato et cedo verbis communibus.*

Please remove the tragic curtain, roll up the theatrical backcloth, and use ordinary language.

In other words, like Cicero's character in the *De divinatione*, who consistently rejects the evidence of *fabulae* as irrelevant for an intellectually sound discussion<sup>30</sup>, Aristomenes understands every reference to physically inexplicable phenomena as an indication of self-evident fictionality.

As Aristomenes' tale progresses, however, our attention is attracted – for the first time in the novel – to the collision between the empirical world and the world of fantastic fiction. The question of what kind of world the tale really takes place in is left in abeyance almost until the very end: the fantastic slowly intrudes on the familiar until the final resolution seals the transformation of what deceptively looks like the real world into an obvious fiction.

29 One could also add Thelyphron to this list (Apul., *Met.* 2.21–30). Cf. Kirichenko (above, n. 5) 59–63 and 170–171.

30 Even Quintus implicitly admits that poetic fictions have a rather limited value for his argumentation. E.g. Cic., *Div.* 1.68.



Aristomenes' adamant skepticism begins to flounder when he hears some more terrifying details about the preternatural capacities of Socrates' lover *cum* captor, the witch Meroe<sup>31</sup>. This surprisingly rapid process of conversion is virtually completed on the following night, when he sees two witches – Meroe herself and her sister Panthia – murder Socrates in a particularly gruesome fashion. The way Meroe thrusts her sword through the left side of Socrates' neck, gathers his blood in a leather bottle to the last drop, sticks her arm into the wound, and pulls out his heart, and the way Panthia, in turn, inserts the sponge into the wound and recites a magical formula prohibiting it to cross a river – all of this unfolds before Aristomenes' eyes with such horrifying vividness that there really seems to be no room left for doubt. To top it all off, the witches end up by urinating over Aristomenes' face, leaving him not only horror-struck and humiliated, but also noticeably malodorous<sup>32</sup>.

On the next morning, however, when Aristomenes is relieved to see his friend alive and well, the certainty of horror gives way to a confusing mixture of joy and excruciating doubt. On the one hand, he seems to be perfectly justified in taking everything he had witnessed on the previous night for a bad (i.e., false) dream. Quite significantly, he bases his reasoning on another element of the divination discourse familiar to us from Cicero (among others)<sup>33</sup>. Compare Apul., *Met.* 1.18 and Cic., *Div.* 1.60:

*et mecum: 'vesane', aio, 'qui poculis et vino sepultus extrema somniasti. ecce Socrates integer, sanus, incolumis. ubi vulnus, ubi spongia? ubi postremum cicatrix tam alta, tam recens?' et ad illum: 'non', inquam, 'im merito medici fidi cibo et crapula distentos saeva et gravia somniare autumnant; mihi denique, quod poculis vesperi minus temperavi, nox acerba diras et truces imagines optulit ut adhuc me credam cruore humano aspersum atque impiatum.'*

And I said to myself: "You are such a fool! You got drunk and had a nightmare. Socrates is uninjured, safe, and sound. Where is the wound, where is the sponge? Where is the incision – so deep and so fresh?" And then I said to him: "Trustworthy doctors are surely right in their opinion that those who have eaten or drunk too much have terrifying and troublesome dreams. Take me, for instance: Since I had one too many drinks last night, I had a harsh night full of disturbing and savage visions, so that I still feel as if I've been spattered and stained with human blood."

31 Apul., *Met.* 1.11.

32 Apul., *Met.* 1.13.

33 Cf. Artem., *Oneir.* 1.7.

*quae [sc. somnia] quidem multo plura evenirent, si ad quietem integri iremus. nunc onusti cibo et vino perturbata et confusa cernimus. vide, quid Socrates in Platonis Politia loquatur.*

Many more dreams would come true if we went to bed sober. Now that we are distended with food and wine, our dreams are disorderly and confused. Consider what Socrates says in Plato's Republic.

[follows a free Latin translation of Pl., *Rep.* 571c–572a to the same effect.]

As an aside, one could add that the most strikingly ironic thing about Apuleius' application of this particular element of the divination discourse to a comic character named Socrates is of course the fact that it ultimately goes back to the Platonic Socrates.

On the other hand, Socrates jokingly remarks that Aristomenes' smell makes it more likely that he had been sprinkled with urine than with blood – an obvious indication that what had happened on the previous night might after all not have been a dream. To corroborate this impression, he proceeds to reveal that he, too, had a nightmare corresponding to Aristomenes' vision in every minute detail<sup>34</sup>. The last vestige of uncertainty finally disappears when, at the very end of the tale, Socrates bends down over a river for a drink of water, his wound opens up, and the sponge drops out of it, followed by just a few drops of blood<sup>35</sup>. Socrates is dead. Thus, it turns out that what we have to deal with is not a dream, but precisely the kind of fantastic reality whose very existence Aristomenes doubted in the beginning and whose active participant he has now inadvertently become. From a rationally thinking inhabitant of the empirical world Aristomenes is gradually transformed into a personage of a fiction so incredible that its reality by far surpasses what under normal circumstances would be regarded as a particularly eccentric dream.

#### 4.

A similar process unfolds in what is known in Apuleian scholarship as the 'Charite complex'<sup>36</sup>. Curiously enough, this episode begins with another version of the by-now familiar dialogue about the reality of divination. As in Aristomenes' tale, the focus here is on dreams. At the very beginning of her captivity, Charite relives her kidnapping in an intensely vivid nightmare, which culminates in the murder of her bridegroom. Charite is so much taken in by her terrifying vision that she is almost ready to kill herself from despair, and it is only

34 Apul., *Met.* 1.18.

35 Apul., *Met.* 1.19.

36 C. Schlam/E. Finkelpearl, "A Review of Scholarship on Apuleius' 'Metamorphoses' 1970–1998", *Lustrum* 42 (2000) 160–162.



the robbers' old female servant who manages to avert the impending disaster. She begins by reasoning about the falsity of dreams in general and, while doing so, sounds like a professional dream interpreter (Apul., *Met.* 4.27)<sup>37</sup>:

*'bono animo esto, mi erilis, nec vanis somniorum figmentis terreare. nam praeter quod diurnae quietis imagines falsae perhibentur, tunc etiam nocturnae visiones contrarios eventus nonnumquam pronuntiant. denique flere et vapulare et nonnumquam iugulari lucrosum prosperumque proventum nuntiant, contra ridere et mellitis dulciolis ventrem saginare vel in voluptatem veneriam convenire tristitiae animi, languori corporis damnisque ceteris viam datum iri praedicabant.'*

"Cheer up, my lady, and don't get frightened by the empty fantasies of dreams. To begin with, dreams one has during the day are generally false. But even nighttime visions sometimes indicate the opposite of the truth: for instance, tears, beatings, and even murders sometimes predict a profitable and favorable outcome. Laughter, on the contrary, as well as stuffing one's belly with honeyed sweets and enjoying sexual pleasure foretell that one is going to be afflicted with melancholy, physical illness, and other hardships."

There is another brilliantly ironic touch in the portrayal of this unusually philosophical old lady. To distract Charite from the horrifying effect of her obviously fictitious dream, she tells her the tale of Cupid and Psyche, which she explicitly calls *aniles fabulae*<sup>38</sup>. Now, this tale is of course an *anilis fabula* in the most literal sense of the word, since its narrator has repeatedly been referred to in the narrative as an old woman (*anus*). At the same time, *anilis fabula* is of course an old wives' tale – a technical term employed by philosophers (from Plato onwards) to signify the embodiment of self-evident fiction *par excellence*<sup>39</sup>. We thus have to deal with a highly sophisticated character here – 'an old wife' telling old wives' tales and yet perfectly aware of how little they are worth in the eyes of serious-minded, educated readers. The complexity of this portrait will only increase if we add to it the fact that in her tale the old lady displays an inordinate propensity for Platonic allegories and other kinds of literary sophistication<sup>40</sup>.

What the old woman implies here is that her narrative will be as ungrounded in reality as the girl's nightmare. And once again, one of the most prominent signals of this narrative's fictitious nature is that in it, contrary to the theory of

37 B.L. Hijmans Jr./R.Th. van der Paardt/E.R. Smits/R.E.H. Westendorp Boerma/A.G. Westerbrink (eds.), *Apuleius Madaurensis. Metamorphoses. Book IV 1–27. Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Groningen 1977) *ad loc.* with a reference to Artem., *Oneir.* 2.60. For a different approach to dreams in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, see V. Lev Kenaan, "Delusion and Dream in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*", *ClAnt* 23 (2004) 247–284.

38 Apul., *Met.* 4.27 *sed ego te narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis protinus avocabo.*

39 On *aniles fabulae* in Apuleius, see L. Graverini, *Le Metamorfosi di Apuleio. Letteratura e identità.* (Pisa 2007) 57–149; Kirichenko (above, n. 5) 107–121.

40 E.J. Kenney (ed.), *Apuleius. Cupid & Psyche* (Cambridge 1990) 17–22; C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself* (Chapel Hill 1992) 82–97.

divination that the narrator of the tale advocates in her empirical reality, prophecies are always fulfilled. Moreover, we find here once again a clear reference to the divination discourse familiar to us from Cicero. *At.* 4.33, the mercurial narrator of the tale quotes verbatim an oracle that Psyche's parents received from the Clarian Apollo and points to the fact that this time Apollo (who is referred to as *deus Milesius*!) made an exception and prophesied in Latin for the sake of this Milesian tale's author<sup>41</sup>. As befits a good oracle, this one, too, is blatantly misunderstood at first because of its obscurity, but later on, when the god of love reveals himself behind the winged serpent, the absolute ruler of the universe, with whom Psyche is supposed to celebrate funereal nuptials on a cliff, it turns out to have unequivocally predicted the truth from the very beginning<sup>42</sup>. The combination of an improbably accurate oracular saying with the fact that a Greek god prophesies in Latin in a piece of Latin literature is cited by Cicero, too, as a particularly ridiculous case of an obvious *fabula* that is of no use whatsoever in philosophical discussion. What he refers to here is a prophecy received by Pyrrhus in Ennius' *Annales* (Cic., *Div.* 2.116):

*quis enim est, qui credat Apollinis ex oraculo Pyrrho esse responsum: "aio te, Aeacida, Romanos vincere posse?" primum Latine Apollo numquam locutus est.*

Is there anyone to believe that Pyrrhus received from Apollo's oracle the following response: "I state, son of Aeacides, that your encounter with the Romans can lead to victory"? First of all, Apollo has never spoken in Latin.

The tale of *Cupid and Psyche* is thus presented as an *anilis fabula*, an entertaining and obviously fictitious tale designed to make Charite forget the horror of her equally fictitious dream<sup>43</sup>. At the same time, the old woman's tale serves as an illustration of the opposite – happy – outcome, which in her oneirocritic expostulation she had predicted to Charite's dream. The beginning of the tale of *Cupid and Psyche* runs perfectly parallel to Charite's misfortunes (like Charite, Psyche, too, is separated from her lover and is forced to suffer all manner of privations). Its conclusion, however, is exactly the opposite of Charite's apocalyptic vision, as Psyche is in the end happily reunited with Cupid. What is more, when we read on, we cannot help but notice that the actual outcome of Charite's nightmarish experiences with the robbers quite faithfully reproduces the ending of the tale of Cupid and Psyche: Charite, too, is rescued by her husband and celebrates a triumphant reunification with him<sup>44</sup>. So, the old lady at

41 Apul., *Met.* 4.33. On Apuleius' 'Milesian' storytelling, see Kirichenko (above, n. 5) 178–184.

42 Cf. Kenney (above, n. 40) 132; M. Zimmerman/S. Panayotakis/V.C. Humink/W.H. Keulen/S.J. Harrison/Th. D. McCreight/B. Wesseling/D. van Mal-Maeder (eds.), *Apuleius Madaurensis. Metamorphoses. Books IV 28–35, V and VII 1–24. Cupid and Psyche. Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Groningen 2004) 86–87.

43 On the tale of Cupid and Psyche as an *anilis fabula*, see Graverini (above, n. 39) 122–127.

44 Apul., *Met.* 7.12–14.



first seems to be perfectly right in claiming that Charite's dream is nothing but a meaningless figment of imagination, which in fact promises exactly the opposite of what it signifies on the surface.

But this happy ending is not the last thing we hear about Charite. Quite surprisingly, Charite and her husband Tlepolemus do end up implementing the scenario adumbrated in the nightmare that she had at the robbers' den: he is murdered by a robber-like character (Charite's disappointed suitor Thrasyllus), whereas she kills herself on her husband's grave and, by doing so, puts into practice the imaginary suicide which she considered in reaction to Tlepolemus' death in her dream<sup>45</sup>. In other words, what was first declared to be a meaningless nightmare retrospectively turns into a prophetic dream. For the third time in a row, we are confronted with a seemingly irresolvable indeterminacy involving the divination discourse. Once again, both the skeptic and the believer turn out to be both right and wrong each in their own way. And once again, this ambiguity is a result of Apuleius' use of the divination discourse to bolster his rhetoric of fictionality.

There is an important detail about the way Tlepolemus' and Charite's deaths are presented in Apuleius, which becomes particularly significant by comparison with the treatment of the same matter in the *Onos* – the epitome of Apuleius' Greek original<sup>46</sup>. Whereas the *Onos* wastes no more than a sentence on this occasion<sup>47</sup>, succinctly saying that the newly-weds were snatched away by a wave while taking a walk on the beach, Apuleius turns it into a long elaborated narrative marked by the sense of high dramatic suspense.

Before I discuss this tale in some detail, I would like to make a brief preliminary remark. When Charite attempts to flee from the robbers on Lucius' back, she notes the similarity between her escape and a number of similar mythological occasions (Apul., *Met.* 6.29):

*nam memoriam praesentis fortunae meae divinaeque providentiae perpetua testatione signabo et depictam in tabula fugae praesentis imaginem meae domus atrio dedicabo. visetur et in fabulis audietur doctorumque stilis rudis perpetuabitur historia "asino vectore virgo regia fugiens captivitatem". accedes antiquis et ipse miraculis, et iam credemus exemplo tuae veritatis et Frixum arieti supernatasse et Arionem delphinum gubernasse et Europam tauro supercubasse. quodsi et Iuppiter mugivit in bove, potest in asino meo latere aliqui vel vultus hominis vel facies deorum.*

45 Apul., *Met.* 8.1–14.

46 On different versions of the ass-tale, see H.J. Mason, "Greek and Latin Versions of the Ass-Story", *ANRW* II.34.2 (1994) 1665–1707.

47 Ps.-Luc., *Onos* 34.

For I shall celebrate with a lasting testimony the remembrance of the fortune that divine providence has now sent me. I shall consecrate a painting depicting the image of this escape of mine and put it in the atrium of my house. The crude story entitled “A Royal Maiden Fleeing Captivity on a Donkey’s Back” will thus become visible; besides, it will spread by word of the mouth, and learned men will immortalize it with their pens. You, too, will be included among the miracles of old, and the truth of what you have done will be used as an example to make us believe that Frixus swam on a ram, that Arion steered a dolphin, and that Europa lay on a bull. So if Jupiter mooded in the form of a bull, my donkey, too, may conceal the image of some human or even a divine appearance.

It is of course quite ironic that Charite inadvertently discerns the human identity of her donkey. But what has even more far-reaching reverberations in the context is that, overwhelmed by the unusual nature of her deliverance from captivity, she declares it to be worthy of an artistic representation – a work of art or a historical narrative that would vie with heroic myths of old. Carried away by her own imagination, which transforms her into a heroine of high literature, she even invents a stilted sounding title for the unwritten work that would celebrate this momentous occasion<sup>48</sup>. Although this attempt to flee is preempted by the robbers and dissolves into a disappointing gruesome farce, Charite’s wish to become a literary character is nevertheless granted in the end. Curiously enough, this happens in the narrative of her death. This account is provided by a narrative double of the robbers’ female servant, who presented us with the complex fictional texture of the tale of *Cupid and Psyche*. This time we are confronted with an illiterate slave who claims to be incapable of, and yet ends up delivering, precisely the kind of narrative, whose heroine Charite had wanted to become (Apul., *Met.* 8.1):

*sed ut cuncta noritis, referam vobis a capite, quae gesta sunt quaeque possint merito doctiores, quibus stilos fortuna subministrat, in historiae specimen involvere.*

So that you know everything, I will tell you what happened from the very beginning. Those who are more learned than me, those to whom Fortune has granted literary skills could appropriately turn these events into an example of historical narrative.

48 Charite displays an inordinate propensity for exaggerated tragic histrionics from the very first moment she appears in the novel. E.g., one could compare possible means of suicide that she considers in Apul., *Met.* 4.25 (*laqueus aut gladius aut certe praecipitium*) with Sen., *Phae.* 259–260 (*laqueone vitam finiam an ferro incubem? | an missa praeceps arce Palladia cadam?*).



The tragic story is not only introduced as worthy of being immortalized in the literary manner characteristic of historiography, but it is also based on a number of historiographic narrative patterns. The combination of the love triangle, the murder of the husband by the rejected suitor, and the revenge taken by the wife is attested in the story of Camma, Sinatus, and Sonotrix reported by Plutarch<sup>49</sup>. Furthermore, the hunting scene in which Tlepolemus is wounded by a boar and then finished off by Thrasyllus is reminiscent of the Atys episode in Herodotus' Book 1<sup>50</sup>. Finally, Charite's suicide is depicted with a noticeable touch of exaggerated pathos, which is clearly reminiscent of the conventions of the so-called 'tragic historiography' – an extremely widespread kind of history that deliberately blurred the line between factual truth and poetic fiction and, for that reason, was explicitly rejected by Apuleius' contemporary Lucian in *How to Write History* and, as we have seen, by Cicero in *De divinatione*<sup>51</sup>. That is to say, like Lucius, Charite, too, ends up becoming the heroine of the literary genre that she treasures most – in her case, a heavily poeticized (i.e., fictionalized) pseudo-historical account that she had wished for during her failed escape<sup>52</sup>.

But most importantly, the fictionality of this account is further underscored by a successful act of supernatural communication. Unlike in the tale of *Cupid and Psyche*, we are dealing here not with an oracle, but with a prophetic (or more precisely, truth-revealing) dream. The account of Tlepolemus' murder by Thrasyllus is presented at first as if it were a matter of incontrovertible truth. At the same time, the narrator implies that there were no witnesses to vouchsafe for it<sup>53</sup>. For this reason, Thrasyllus continues to live unpunished and even begins to accost Charite with erotic propositions. Later on, however, the sole source of information on Tlepolemus' death is finally revealed: it is a dream in which he appears to Charite, tells her of Thrasyllus' treachery, and demands revenge<sup>54</sup>. It is particularly ironic that this dream displays a great degree of similarity to the nightmare which scared Charite at the robbers' den and which in the end was declared to be nothing but a figment of her imagination. The use of such a seemingly authoritative but in fact patently unreliable source sounds like a parody of a mechanism of authentication typical of historiography. The best-

49 B.L. Hijmans Jr./R.Th. van der Paardt/V.Schmidt/C.B.J. Settels/B. Wesseling/R.E.H. Westendorp Boerma (eds.), *Apuleius Madaurensis. Metamorphoses. Book VIII. Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Groningen 1985) 6.

50 Hijmans *et al.* (above, n. 49) 6–7.

51 On the concept of 'tragic history', see F.W. Walbank, "Tragic History. A Reconsideration", *BICS* 2 (1955) 4–14 and "History and Tragedy", *Historia* 9 (1960) 216–234. On Lucian's *How to Write History*, see O.S. Schmitt, "Bemerkungen zu Lukians Schrift *Wie man Geschichte schreiben muß*", *Klio* 66 (1984) 443–455.

52 On the romance of Charite as a full-fledged tragedy, see J.L. Lopes Brandão, "O romance de Càrite: uma tragédia em quatro actos", *Humanitas* 48 (1996) 183–195.

53 Cf. Apul., *Met.* 8.5.

54 Apul., *Met.* 8.8.

known comparable parody of this kind of device in earlier literature is certainly the beginning of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* (1):

*si quis quaesiverit unde sciam, primum si noluerō, non respondebo. quis coacturus est? (...) si libuerit respondere, dicam quod mihi in buccam venerit. quis umquam ab historico iuratores exegit? tamen si necesse fuerit auctorem producere, quaerito ab eo qui Drusillam euntem in caelum vidit: idem Claudium vidisse se dicet iter facientem 'non passibus aequis'.*

First of all, if someone asks me where I know it from, I won't answer if I don't feel like it. Who is going to force me? But if I do choose to answer, I'll say whatever occurs to me. Who has ever required that a historian produce witnesses? But if it's really necessary to present a source of information, ask him who saw Drusilla ascending to heaven. He will tell you that he has seen Claudius traveling in the same direction 'with unequal steps'.

Seneca cites here a self-evidently untrustworthy source: a man who swore in the Senate to have seen Drusilla ascending to the sky can obviously testify to any kind of nonsense<sup>55</sup>. Similarly, the narrator of Apuleius' tale authenticates his account by referring to a dream resembling the one that was previously presented as meaningless. Within Apuleius' overall rhetoric of fictionality, this move seems to imply that this time, too, Charite's dream would have remained absolutely inconsequential, had she dreamed it in the real world. But now that she has become the heroine of a fictionalized historical narrative, her dream also complies with conventions of that genre and, for that reason, has to reveal the truth and nothing but the truth.

## 5.

Lucius' transformation into an ass clearly fulfills his desire to become a literary character too – the protagonist of a typical Thessalian tale<sup>56</sup>. The epistemological uncertainty that marks Lucius' adventures prior to his metamorphosis is apparently resolved in favor of boundless credulity. Surprisingly enough, this ostensibly complete transformation of the empirical world into the world of fantastic fiction does not put an end to Apuleius' play with the divination discourse in the primary narrative. Moreover, at the end of his narrative Lucius is destined to become a character of yet another – completely different – kind of fiction.

55 P.T. Eden (ed.), *Seneca. Apocolocyntosis* (Cambridge 1984) *ad loc.*

56 From the viewpoint of the divination discourse, Aristomenes' and Thelyphron's tales, as well as the Diana-and-Actaeon ekphrasis, all of which anticipate the unfortunate consequences of Lucius' involvement with magic, seem in retrospect to play the role of portents – divinatory signs prophesying Lucius' misfortune. On these episodes as warnings to Lucius, see A. Wlosok, "Zur Einheit der *Metamorphosen* des Apuleius", *Philologus* 113 (1969) 68–84 and J. Tatum, *Apuleius and The Golden Ass* (Ithaca/London 1979) 38–40.



Even after his transformation, which seems to have resolved the matter once and for all, the narrative of Lucius' adventures continues to exploit the sense of uncertainty with regard to miracles and divination. On the one hand, the effeminate Syrian oracle-mongers are portrayed as a classic case of Oriental frauds using the same oracular saying to answer a virtually unlimited variety of their naive victims' concerns<sup>57</sup>. This portrayal is based on a number of familiar *topoi* that find parallels not only in Cicero's *De divinatione*, but also in other polemical or satirical, discussions of popular religion, such as for instance Lucian's *Alexander*<sup>58</sup>.

On the other hand, Apuleius continues to present cases of unquestionably fulfilled predictions, portents, and prophetic dreams. And as before, he uses them as markers of the self-evident fictionality of his narrative.

The last in the series of the generally light-hearted adultery tales in Book 9 has an unexpectedly gruesome ending. The miller's adulterous wife, unwilling to accept a divorce, hires a witch – in order to make her husband more lenient or, in case that did not work, to kill him through the agency of a ghost. Lucius the narrator is in the middle of sharing with us some intricate details of the clandestine arrangement entered upon by the two women, when all of a sudden he checks himself with the following remark (Apul., *Met.* 9.30):

*sed forsitan lector scrupulosus reprehendens narratum meum sic argumentaberis: 'unde autem tu, astutule asine, intra terminos pistrini contentus, quid secreto, ut adfirmas, mulieres gesserint, scire potuisti?'*

But perhaps, diligent reader, you will find fault with my narrative and argue in the following manner: "How could you find out, you clever ass, what the women were secretly doing, when you, as you confirm, were kept within the confines of the bakery?"

Presumably, Lucius realizes now that he is about to be caught red-handed as a confabulating liar. To preempt any unwelcome objections against his questionable truthfulness, he resorts to providing what is obviously supposed to sound like a reliable source of information (Apul., *Met.* 9.30). He begins by describing how one day an ugly barefooted woman with disheveled hair appeared at the mill, how she entered the miller's room, how the door remained locked afterwards for so long that everyone became worried, and how the slaves eventually broke in only to find their master dead and the mysterious woman gone. No doubt, this peculiar event gives enough reason to suspect some connection with magic, but it is by no means sufficient to provide all the specific details that Lu-

57 Apul., *Met.* 9.8.

58 Cf. D. Clay, "Lucian of Samosata: Four Philosophical Lives (Nigrinus, Demonax, Peregrinus, Alexander Pseudomantis)", *ANRW* II.36.5 (1992) 3438–3445 and P. Pilhofer/M. Baumbach/J. Gerlach/D.U. Hansen (eds.), *Lukian. Der Tod des Peregrinos. Ein Scharlatan auf dem Scheiterhaufen* (Darmstadt 2005) 155–168.

cius' has already disclosed to us. A little later, however, he finally reveals what turns out to be his sole source (Apul., *Met.* 9.31):

*die sequenti filia eius accurrit e proximo castello, in quod pridem denupserat, maesta atque crines pendulos quatiens et interdum pugnīs obtundens ubera, quae nullo quidem domus infortunium nuntiantē cuncta cognorat, sed ei per quietem obtulit sese flebilis patris sui facies adhuc nodo revincta cervice eique totum novercae scelus aperuit de adulterio, de maleficio et quem ad modum larvatus ad inferos demeasset.*

On the following day, his daughter came running from the nearest village, where she lived after she had married some time earlier. She inconsolably shook her loose-hanging hair and now and then beat her breasts with her fists. Although no one had told her about the misfortune of the house, she knew everything, since the mournful face of her father had appeared to her in a dream, with the noose still tied around his neck, and disclosed to her the entire crime of her stepmother – the adultery, the magic, and the way he had been bewitched and departed for the dead.

Like Charite in the narrative of her death, the miller's daughter ends up learning the truth from a dream. We have seen that prophetic (or generally, truth-revealing) dreams are used elsewhere in the novel as indications of the indubitably fictitious nature of the portrayed events. The fact that Lucius' only source here is a dream is of course part of the novel's overall rhetoric of fictionality too. Besides, it further underscores the parodic absurdity of the narrator's claims to truth.

A similar parody occurs at the very end of Book 9, in the tale about the tragic death of the three sons of the gardener's benefactor. A series of monstrous omens (*divina praesagia*) precedes the ultimate revelation of this tragic story: a hen gives birth to a fully formed chicken, a fountain of blood gushes directly under the dinner table, the wine in the cellar begins to boil, a weasel carries a dead snake in its mouth, a green frog emerges from a dog's mouth, while a ram kills that dog by biting it only once<sup>59</sup>. A great number of similar *ostenta* are discussed in the *De divinatione* (adduced as proof by Quintus and ridiculed by 'Cicero'), with most examples deriving from epic and historiography<sup>60</sup>. In other words, from the perspective of Cicero's *persona* such miraculous occurrences are as fictitious as any other kind of divination, while historical works that mention them tell nothing but bogus. What these portents turn out to have prophesied is a narrative based on conventions of (at least) two literary genres – historiography and declamation. The manner in which the three brothers are

59 Apul., *Met.* 9.33–34.

60 E.g. Cic., *Div.* 1.36 and 2.58. Cf. also Petronius' parodic use of this hackneyed device of epic and historiography in the *Bellum Civile* 122–143 (Petr., *Sat.* 122), where various monstrous portents turn out to indicate the beginning of the civil war.



murdered one by one by their single adversary is vaguely reminiscent of the Horatii and Curiatii legend as reported by Livy in Book 1 of *Ab Urbe Condita*, whereas the fact that they die while helping their poor friend in a dispute with his rich neighbor points to an entire subgenre of declamatory fiction that dealt with conflicts between a rich and a poor man<sup>61</sup>. Once again, a trite cliché of poetry and fictionalized historiography turns out to portend recognizably literary events.

By the time we reach the final book of the novel, we are already so fully attuned to Apuleius' general tendency to use successful divination as an element of his overall rhetoric of fictionality that we are almost bound to interpret the seemingly never-ending succession of prophetic dreams in Book 11 in the same vein too<sup>62</sup>. The book begins with a nocturnal vision in which Isis provides Lucius with a set of instructions as to how to regain his human appearance<sup>63</sup>. When he follows her commands and approaches her priest Mithras during an Isiac celebration, it turns out that the latter saw exactly the same dream on the previous night (quite significantly, it is a standard *topos* of the divination discourse that only prophetic visions appear to two different people at once)<sup>64</sup>. After the first apparition, visions of Isis quickly become a daily routine for Lucius. It is these visions that urge him to undergo the initiation for which he has been destined for a long time. Lucius, however, constantly puts it off, daunted by the difficulties of the ascetic life after the initiation<sup>65</sup>. It is only after a real-life occurrence makes one of his dreams seem to have come true (while he dreamt that a slave of his named Candidus returned from Thessaly, it was his white (*candidus*) horse that was found and brought back to him) that his doubts give way to an adamant determination to receive the rites<sup>66</sup>. This pattern is reproduced on two more occasions. A little later in the same paragraph, Lucius is summoned to undergo another initiation, which plunges him into a state of utter perplexity. His confusion is dispelled by another vision, which explains to him that now he has to be initiated into different rites (the rites of Osiris). As a result, Lucius

61 Cf. D. Russell, *Greek Declamation* (Cambridge 1983) 27–28 and D. van Mal-Maeder, *La fiction des déclamations* (Leiden 2007) 121–122. See also Petr., *Sat.* 48, where this topic serves as an emblem for a hackneyed declamation. Cf. Luc., *De salt.* 65.

62 See D. van Mal-Maeder, “*Lector, intende: laetaberis*: The Enigma of the Last Book of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*”, in: H. Hofmann/M. Zimmerman (eds.), *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel*, VIII (Groningen 1997) 93–110 for numerous other correspondences between Book 11 and the first ten books, which make Apuleius’ portrayal of the Isiac religion appear rather satirical in tone.

63 Apul., *Met.* 11.1–6.

64 For instance, in *P.Oxy.* 11.1381 the god gives the same command to the writer in a dream and to his mother in a waking vision. The text is conveniently reprinted in M. Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion* (Hildesheim 1985) 15, 138–140. There are a great number of such double visions in Aelius Aristides’ *Sacred Discourses* as well (e.g., 1.66; 2.30 etc.).

65 Apul., *Met.* 11.19.

66 Apul., *Met.* 11.21.

yields to the feeling of joyful certainty<sup>67</sup>. The injunction to be initiated for the third time meets with the same lack of comprehension on Lucius' part and even makes him question the reliability of the priests who have administered the previous rites<sup>68</sup>. Once again, however, it is followed by another vision, which sets everything straight by explaining to Lucius the logic behind the seemingly senseless multiplication of rites and, as before, plunges him into a fit of unhesitating religious fervor<sup>69</sup>.

We can now clearly see that the fact that Lucius' prophetic dreams invariably come true marks Book 11 as a piece of self-evident fiction. This time, however, we are not dealing with a fantastic fiction about Thessalian witches, but with something Greek and Romans of a skeptical mindset would probably have described as a superstitious lie<sup>70</sup>.

To give an example of such a skeptical attitude to popular religion, I would like to turn again to Cicero's *De divinatione*. It is indeed quite remarkable that, despite their numerous differences, Quintus and Cicero as interlocutors of *De divinatione* agree on one fundamental issue, namely that superstition is to be avoided in matters of religion by all possible means<sup>71</sup>. They only disagree on what exactly constitutes superstition. For Cicero's *persona*, every form of religion uncontrolled by the strict postulates of philosophical reason is of necessity a superstitious lie. The only kind of traditional religion that he accepts is that which is of use for the state: even if it has nothing to do with the truth, it nonetheless has to be retained only because it constitutes a highly convenient instrument of ideological control<sup>72</sup>. For Quintus, on the other hand, the notion of superstition comprises first and foremost different forms of popular cult practices, especially those performed for money (Cic., *Div.* 1.132):

67 Apul., *Met.* 11.27.

68 Apul., *Met.* 11.29.

69 Apul., *Met.* 11.30.

70 Cf. Stephen Harrison (above, n. 1) has suggested that Book 11 as a whole could be considered a straightforward parody of the piously hypochondriac effusions of Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Discourses*. I would generally subscribe to this view, with the only proviso that there is no need to pinpoint a specific target for Apuleius' parody: Aelius Aristides' religious journal is after all only one example of the complex, albeit fairly uniform, ancient discourse of miraculous healing, whose numerous other fragments have come down to us not only through literary transmission, but also as inscriptions and sub-literary papyri. Cf. O. Weinreich, *Antike Heilungswunder. Untersuchungen zum Wunderglauben der Griechen und Römer* (Giessen 1909). On miraculous healing in Apuleius, see Kirichenko (above, n. 5) 71–75.

71 Cf. Schofield (above, n. 11) 57: "The main point is to distinguish the superstition of divination, which is to be torn up by its roots, from true religion, which Cicero takes to include belief in a divine being, accepted for the Stoic reasons advanced in *ND* 1."

72 Cf. Cic., *Div.* 2.70. On the possible political dimension of 'Cicero's' stance, see Linderski (above, n. 21); Guillaumont (above, n. 21) 43–119.



*nunc illa testabor, non me sortilegos neque eos, qui quaestus causa hariolentur, ne psychomantia quidem, quibus Appius, amicus tuus, uti solebat, agnoscere; non habeo denique nauci Marsum augurem, non vicanos haruspices, non de circo astrologos, non Isiacos coniectores, non interpretes somniorum; non enim sunt ii aut scientia aut arte divini, sed superstitiosi vates impudentes haurioli.*

Now I will affirm that I recognize neither the drawers of lots nor those who prophecy for money, nor the necromantic séances that your friend Appius used to frequent. In fact, I care nothing about Marsian augurs, rustic haruspices, astrologers from the Circus, Isiac prophets, and interpreters of dreams. They are diviners neither by science nor by skill, but are superstitious prophets and shameless seers.

Another similarly critical portrayal of popular superstitions can be found in some of Lucian's satirical dialogues. The butt of Lucian's ridicule in the *Philopseudeis*, for instance, is not only the unquestioning credulity with which seemingly respectable philosophers treat what, from their enlightened viewpoint, should be regarded as old wives' tales<sup>73</sup>, but also the enthusiasm with which they claim to have first-hand experience of miracles performed by various religious charlatans – a Libyan sage, unspecified old women (γρῶες), a Chaldean from Babylon, a Hyperborean, an Arab, a Syrian wise man, and an Egyptian priest who had learnt magic from Isis herself<sup>74</sup>. In a similar vein, in the *Alexander* Lucian discloses the workings of the complex illusionistic stage machinery that the venturesome oracle monger Alexander of Abonouteichos uses to dupe the naïve adherents of his cult – the birth of the serpentine god from a goose egg (Luc., *Alex.* 13–14), a human mask attached to his head during his epiphanies before the shuddering crowd (Luc., *Alex.* 15–16), a sophisticated system of hollow tubes through which a person hidden off-stage delivered prophecies that seemed to issue forth directly from the god's mouth (Luc., *Alex.* 26)<sup>75</sup>, etc. Moreover, perfectly in keeping with a typical commonplace of the ancient oracle critique, familiar to us both from Cicero's *De divinatione* and from Apuleius' portrayal of the priests of Dea Syria, Lucian describes Alexander's predictions as sometimes deliberately ambiguous, that is, capable of predicting both a positive and a negative outcome depending on the point of view, sometimes based on his secret knowledge of the petitioner's circumstances of which he publicly claimed to be unaware, sometimes forged *post factum* to make them fit the past events they were originally supposed to predict, and, almost always, completely off the mark<sup>76</sup>.

The goal of both Cicero's polemics and Lucian's satire is obviously to unmask the miraculous stories as superstitious lies and to point to the blatant fictitiousness of the charlatan's claims to truth. Apuleius achieves more or less the

73 Luc., *Philops.* 9: γρῶν μῦθοι.

74 Luc., *Philops.* 7, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 34.

75 Luc., *Alex.* 13–16, 26.

76 Luc., *Alex.* 22, 27–28; 33; 44 etc.; Cf. Hammerstaedt (above, n. 4) 2853–2862.

same result. All of Apuleius' characters who practice divination find correspondences in the lists of superstitious charlatans in Cicero's *De divinatione* and in Lucian's *Philopseudeis*: Diophanes is reminiscent of Cicero's astrologers from Circus (*de circo astrologi*) and Lucian's Chaldean from Babylon, the priests of Dea Syria evoke Lucian's Syrian from Palestine, and finally the Isiacs of Book 11 seem to be virtually identical with Cicero's *Isiaci coniectores* and Lucian's Egyptian priest taught by Isis herself. There is another thing that all these Apuleian characters share with Cicero's and Lucian's superstitious charlatans. Both Cicero and Lucian explicitly highlight the fact that religious charlatans practice for money as one of the most repellent things about them<sup>77</sup>. This continuous emphasis on the pecuniary aspect finds a clear parallel in Apuleius too. Money paid for obvious religious fraud constitutes the main satirical focus in both the Diophanes and the Dea Syria episodes<sup>78</sup>. Similarly, one of the central leitmotifs of Book 11 are the horrendous costs that Lucius has to scrounge up for his multiple initiations. There is no doubt that everyone in the ancient world was aware that initiations into mystery cults cost a lot of money<sup>79</sup>. For this reason, the fact that Lucius has to come up with a sizeable sum to cover his ritual expenses does not necessarily have to be understood in the satiric vein *per se*<sup>80</sup>. However, in a context so consistently informed with the ridicule of religious charlatans and superstitious dupes, such an emphatic stress on fees for religious services becomes highly significant<sup>81</sup>.

We can thus clearly see that in his portrayal of popular religion Apuleius resorts to an entire repertoire of *topoi* that are used elsewhere to criticize or ridicule superstition. This adds another important dimension to Apuleius' rhetoric of fictionality. I mentioned at the beginning of this article that the obviously fraudulent astrologer Diophanes predicts that Lucius' adventures will result in his transformation into a book of fiction. As we approach the novel's conclusion, we cannot help but notice the irony of the fact that, to prove Diophanes right, it is not enough for Lucius to 'become a book'. In order for this book to be narrated, he has to become one of the *Isiaci coniectores* – a superstitious charlatan every bit as fraudulent as the '*de circo astrologus*' Diophanes himself<sup>82</sup>.

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77 Cic., *Div.* 1.132; Luc., *Alex.*, *passim*.

78 Apul., *Met.* 2.13.

79 R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven/London 1981) 112.

80 Graverini (above, n. 39) 76–83.

81 Harrison (above, n. 1) 248–249.

82 On Lucius as a superstitious charlatan, see Kirichenko (above, n. 5) 123–141.