

Vigilans somniabar:
Some Narrative Uses of
Dreams in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

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The final book of the *Metamorphoses* presents the most difficult interpretive problem in the work.¹ At the start of this book, Lucius' life is turned around by an epiphany of the goddess Isis, who comes to him in answer to a prayer. A thorough interpretation of the novel requires that some account be given for Lucius' conversion and its relationship to the books that precede it: if it is taken seriously, and Lucius is believed to have achieved a truly blessed union with the divine, the meaning is drastically different from one in which Lucius is seen as a fool, a dupe who is deceived again and again by a false belief in a religious redemption that never takes place.²

In discussions on this question, however, an important element is often overlooked: the crucial role dreams play in Lucius' conversion. From the very beginning, Lucius' famous life-changing vision of Isis occurs in a

¹ Surveys of the various solutions suggested for this problem have become something of a fixture in Apuleian scholarship. The classic example is that given in Winkler 1985, 227–247. A survey which is more recent and more directly related to the topic of this article can be found in Gollnick 1999, 19–26.

² For the binary division “enlightenment” vs. “entertainment,” cf. Harrison 2000, 259. My own attitude towards this comparison, though not directly relevant, should be mentioned: I am more or less a “moderate,” or perhaps an agnostic, interpreting Apuleius more like Schlam than any other of the major players in Apuleian scholarship, e.g., Schlam 1992, 1–2: ‘The chief problem...has been to claim exclusive validity for either a comic or serious reading of the work,’ and again at 122: ‘We cannot exalt the religious content of the book by ignoring its comic dimensions. The comedy is rooted within a narrative and thematic framework that extends over the entire eleven books and provides a coherence which allows comedy to carry serious meanings.’

dream.³ This vision is not, however, Lucius' last dream. In fact, in describing his life after he has been rescued by Isis, Lucius characterizes his new relationship with the goddess by stating that not a single night passed without a dream visitation from her: *nec fuit nox una vel quies aliqua visu deae monituque ieiuna* (*Met.* 11,19,2). The several dreams that follow, then, each of which deals with one of his series of initiations into the cult of Isis and later Osiris, are not even the only dreams Lucius has after establishing the relationship with Isis: they are simply the most noteworthy ones. It is, in fact, on the authority of these dreams that Lucius becomes a religious devotee and experiences the progressive stages of religious development which provide the rather surprising and highly debated conclusion to the novel.⁴

This paper asks the question, then, upon which it seems an interpretation of the novel should at least partly depend: why dreams? Others have argued that the dreams in the novel are by no means coincidental or circumstantial, but instead that they are carefully placed at crucial points in the novel.⁵ I would add, however, that both this placement and the way the dreams are treated when they do occur create a very specific effect (one which may even

³ Cf. *Met.* 11,7,1: *Sic oraculi venerabilis fine prolato numen invictum in se recessit. Nec mora, cum somno protinus absolutus...* ('When she had reached the close of her sacred prophecy, that invincible deity retired to keep her own company. Without delay I was at once released from sleep'). All translations are by Walsh 1994. When I wish to suggest an alternate reading or interpretation, I include it in square brackets.

⁴ Cf. Gollnick 1999, 154: 'Once again we were confronted with the crucial role dreams play in the novel, figuring directly in both Lucius' conversion and initiation.' This is a summary of his main argument in his seventh chapter, which discusses the role of dreams in Lucius' religious experience. He argues for the serious religiosity of Lucius' experience, which he arrives at via an examination of dreams as a 'hermeneutic' for the novel as a whole; it is, in other words, a way of arriving quite usefully and subtly somewhere near the point made more bluntly by Griffiths 1975, 6: 'With certain reservations,...which concern consistency in the presentation of the main character, Apuleius may be regarded as conveying in Book XI his own experience as an Isiac initiate.'

⁵ Hunink 2006b points out the centrality of dreams in the *Metamorphoses*, a fact which a few others had observed earlier (notably Annequin 1996; Gollnick 1999; Lev Kenaan 2004), though none with so much concision. Of the earlier treatments of this subject, Gollnick's 1999 monograph is by far the most extensive; see the previous note for the main thrust of his work. It is also important to observe that dreams are by no means absent from, nor insignificant in, the other works of ancient narrative fiction which survive. The role of dreams in the Greek novels has been examined well by Bartsch 1989, especially in chapter 3, which she begins with the sweeping (but, I think, correct) statement that 'in the Second Sophistic, as indeed almost universally, the description of a dream is a conventional device for signaling the presence of a "deep meaning"...' (80). See further below, note 11.

account for the diversity of interpretations the novel has received).⁶ From the programmatic tale of Aristomenes⁷ all the way to Lucius' third and final conversion, dreams are presented in two conflicting roles: first, they serve as an interpretive model for accepting as "real" in a figurative sense (real inasmuch as they are "really" perceived and experienced) events which seem otherwise impossible or at least highly improbable because they lie outside "normal" experience;⁸ second, dreams serve as a form of communication and authorization, explaining or revealing things to the dreamer which he or she could not possibly have found out in the course of his or her "normal" experience, and further, validating those things as "true" beyond any doubt.⁹

It is through the combination of these two roles that the dream achieves its greatest importance in the novel: it serves at once to protect bizarre events or experiences from rejection as false, by allowing a reader to suspend disbelief as though confronted with a dream, thus protecting the narrative from absolute dismissal by skeptics. At the same time, however, it subtly suggests that these experiences, if dreams, far from being meaningless, in fact offer information and perspective on the world of the reader, the "waking" world (information, in fact, which may not be obtained by any other means). This literary game, which is enabled through careful and clever rhetorical structuring, and especially by the exploitation of the ambiguous status of dreams, shows us another side of the orator at play, not only thriving in but taking wholehearted advantage of the literary eclecticism which marks the Second Sophistic.¹⁰ He is thus able to create a novel which, at the very moment that it not only allows but even enables conflicting interpretations, surreptitiously

⁶ That the disagreement among interpretations of the novel has something to do with the dreams it contains is also suggested, if not explicitly stated, by Gollnick 1999, 153: 'Dreams and dreaming...constitute a contextual genre or hermeneutical perspective for resolving the striking contradictions which so frequently baffle readers of the novel,' and Hunink 2006b, e.g., 29.

⁷ For the tale of Aristomenes as programmatic, cf. Tatum 1969, 499: 'Aristomenes has anticipated not only the events in Books 1 to 3 which lead up to Lucius' metamorphosis, nor merely the atmosphere of magic and intrigue therein, but also the ultimate interpretation of the entire work. This tale is, in practical terms, an extension of the prologue, an expansion of the essential theme of *figuras fortunasque* in the first chapter.'

⁸ See below, note 55.

⁹ See further the discussion below, esp. note 37.

¹⁰ Cf. Gollnick 1999, e.g., 153: '...the novel reflects diverse ideas about non-literary dreams prevalent in the second century CE.' The third chapter of his book is dedicated to surveying the leading dream theories of the time. See also the following note.

proposes that some deeper meaning is hidden beneath any interpretation, a meaning which, like that of a dream, will only be confirmed in retrospect.¹¹

A reasonable course for the examination of Apuleius' use of dreams seems to be to examine the instances of dreams from Books 1–10, in order to determine what role Apuleius establishes for them there, and then to return our focus to the eleventh book. We should begin, then, with the programmatic tale of Aristomenes.¹² When Aristomenes witnesses the murder of his friend Socrates, he has no doubt that the event actually occurred, because he has seen it with his own eyes, and because the body of his friend is lying in front of him to prove that it has really happened. When, however, Socrates wakes up and speaks, Aristomenes is too surprised and overjoyed to think about his experience of the night before. Finally, when he has time to question it, as he and Socrates are walking on the road, he comes to the conclusion that he dreamt the whole thing (*Met.* 1,18,2–3): *'Vesane, aio 'qui poculis et vino sepultus extrema somniasti. Ecce Socrates integer, sanus, incolumis'* ('...and I said to myself 'You fool! You had too much wine to drink, and you had a terrible nightmare. You can see that Socrates is untouched and healthy and unharmed').

Like his future traveling companion, Aristomenes is a skeptic.¹³ We know this from his initial reaction to Socrates' revelation that Meroe is a witch (*Met.* 1,8,5): *'Oro te, inquam, 'aulaeum tragicum dimoveto et siparium scaenicum complicato et cedo verbis communibus'* ('Come, come,' I said, 'ring down the tragic curtain, fold up the backcloth, and do please use the language of every day'). This reaction is very similar to his traveling companion's first rejection of his story (*Met.* 1,2,5): *Ac dum auscullo quid*

¹¹ There seems to have been a marked interest during the Second Sophistic in the phenomenon of dreaming and its significance for human life (cf. Bartsch 1989, 80; see above, note 5). Of particular importance and interest are the works of Aelius Aristides and Artemidorus. For a neat treatment of parallels between Apuleius and Aelius Aristides, cf. Harrison 2000–2001. Artemidorus is, of course, the standard source for scholars wishing to refer to "the significance" of a dream-image in an ancient text. He is useful in this capacity (cf. Lev Kenaan 2004, e.g., 253). But he is more interesting generally for the focus of this volume inasmuch as he is a representative of the Second Sophistic because he seems particularly and unabashedly (even professionally) interested in examining the role of dreams in human life.

¹² See above, note 7. Cf. also Gollnick 1999, 59: 'Aristomenes' story sets the tone of the entire book, and creates an ominous sense of uncertainty about waking and dream realities and the relationship between them.' Winkler 1985, 117 also discusses the programmatic nature of the tale in terms of its narrative structure: 'This first tale is programmatic not only for the hermeneutic game of 'What is true?' but also for the game of 'Who is responsible for the crime [*auctor criminis*]?'

¹³ Cf. Tatum 1969, 497.

sermonis agitent, alte exerto cachinno 'Parce,' inquit 'in verba ista haec tam absurda tamque immania mentiendo' ('I overheard what they were saying. One of them guffawed, and said: 'Spare me this tissue of crazy and monstrous lies'). When Aristomenes witnesses the murder of his friend in his presence, of course, he cannot dismiss it as a lie. When, however, he observes Socrates alive and well, and can see no sign of the wound, his assumption is not that Socrates has been reanimated by magic. Despite the stories he has heard from Socrates about the powers of these witches (one of the several powers he attributes to Meroe is *manes sublimare*, 'the power to raise the dead,' *Met.* 1,8,4), he searches for some other explanation. Even the fact that he has seen the murder himself, and that even now he is drenched with urine from the experience, does not lead him to think his vision might have been real. Instead, he concludes that he suffered a nightmare because of excessive drinking and eating the night before.¹⁴ At this crucial moment in a tale that introduces many of the themes and patterns which predominate in the novel, it is particularly telling that *the narrator reacts to an experience which seems to him beyond belief by interpreting it as a dream*. And it is even more telling that he finds comfort in that interpretation, as though the status of his experience as a dream makes it no longer disquieting.

In response to his statement on dreaming, Socrates narrates a dream of his own, after reminding Aristomenes that he is still soaked in urine (*Met.* 1,18,7): *...verum tamen et ipse per somnium iugulari visus sum mihi. nam et iugulum istum dolui et cor ipsum mihi avelli putavi...* ('Mind you, I too had a dream in which I seemed to get my throat cut. I felt a sharp pain in my neck here, and I thought that my heart was being torn out'). Socrates, too, has had a dream in which he had his throat cut and his heart removed, and he is still weak from the experience. The narration of that dream then starts a sequence of events in which it becomes clearer and clearer that Aristomenes' nocturnal vision should not have been so lightly dismissed, but in fact reflected events that took place in the waking world. When Aristomenes gives Socrates some food, he devours it ravenously, becoming paler and paler (*Met.* 1,18–19). As Aristomenes observes this, he begins to be afraid again (*Met.* 1,19,1–2): *...macie atque pallore buxco deficientem video. Sic denique eum vitalis color turbaverat, ut mihi prae metu, nocturnas etiam Furias illas imaginanti...* ('...his face was gaunt and as pale as boxwood. In a word, his deathly pallor had so altered his appearance that I was terrified, picturing again those Furies of the night...'). The less likely it seems that the murder

¹⁴ For this application of the so-called somatic theory of dreams to Aristomenes' "nightmare," cf. Panayotakis 1997.

of Socrates was “just a dream,” the more afraid he becomes, until, when Socrates has died in such a way as to make it obvious that his “dream” took place in the waking world too, he can no longer even return home, but lives in exile, out of fear.¹⁵

By the conclusion of the tale, then, the idea of dreaming has played several roles. At first it serves as a mode of interpretation by which experiences that seem impossibly bizarre or extraordinary can be comfortably reassessed as dreams, a reassessment which makes them perfectly normal and believable. It is, moreover, the suggestion of this role for dreams which leads Socrates to narrate his dream. That dream, however, plays a completely different role: at the very moment that it becomes evident that Aristomenes’ nocturnal vision may not have been a dream, it becomes clear also that Socrates’ vision not only *was* a dream, but was also nonetheless *real*. As Shumate and later Hunink aptly observe, this tale blurs the boundary between dream and reality, so that we are not certain if Aristomenes’ vision was real or a dream. At the same moment, however, it does far more, for just as it suggests that bizarre events in real life may resemble or even *be* dreams, it also suggests, through the dream of Socrates, that *dreams can reveal the truth*.

When dreams are next mentioned, a connection is once again drawn between the bizarre world of witchcraft, magic, and metamorphosis, and dreaming. Lucius finally finds what he has spent the first three books looking for: he gets to witness a real witch in the act of transforming herself into an owl. This metamorphosis forms a turning point in Lucius’ story: immediately following, in an attempt to imitate Pamphile’s transformation, Lucius will turn himself into an ass. His experiences as an ass provide the substance of the remainder of Books 1–10, and it is his wish to escape his asinine form that eventually leads him to the conversion to Isiac religion that so surprises us in Book 11 and forms the conclusion to the novel. And at this crucial moment, the moment that will have such drastic consequences, he, like Aristomenes in the previous example, tries to explain what he cannot believe by calling it a dream (*Met.* 3,22,1–2): *...at ego nullo decantatus carmine praesentis tantum facti stupore defixus quidvis aliud magis videbar esse quam Lucius: sic exterminatus animi attonitus in amentiam vigilans somniabar.*

¹⁵ Hunink 2006b, 19–22 provides a useful discussion of this episode. He focuses, however, on the instability given the narrative by this whole sequence. This is a point made by others earlier, e.g., Shumate 1996, 62, 65: ‘Confusion between the waking or dreaming states blurs the picture even further...In Lucius’ world reality itself is assuming the puzzling nonlinear quality ordinarily associated exclusively with the ‘empty fictions of dreams.’ My focus here is instead on the significance of Aristomenes’ various reactions and what they can tell us about the role of dreams in this novel.

defrictis adeo diu pupulis an vigilarem, scire quaerebam ('I too was spell-bound, but not through any incantation. 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').

The fact that Lucius asks the crucial question when confronted with Pamphile's transformation "am I awake?" and that that question is never explicitly answered could even suggest that Lucius might well be dreaming at this point.¹⁶ If we take Pamphile's metamorphosis as a dream, however, it seems all the more logical to interpret Lucius' entire experience as an ass (and possibly many of his experiences before his transformation) as "merely a dream."¹⁷ Such an interpretation, however, hardly does justice to the ambiguity of this passage.¹⁸ It is true that the question "am I awake?" is never explicitly answered, but this is no more an argument for one answer than it is for another: what is significant here is not the answer, but the question itself. The question stems from the phrase Lucius uses to describe his reaction to Pamphile's transformation, a phrase that captures in two words the key role dreams play in this novel, and the nature of their relation to the waking world: *vigilans somniabar* (*Met.* 3,22,2).¹⁹

¹⁶ That the question is not answered is clear from the text (*Met.* 3,22,3): *tandem denique reversus ad sensum praesentium...* ('Finally I returned to awareness of my surroundings...'). This may (or may not!) be especially striking when contrasted with Apuleius' Pseudo-Lucianic model, which at this point makes it quite explicit that Lucius is not asleep, and thus implies more certainty that he is not dreaming (*Asin.* 13,5): ὥς δὲ μόλις καὶ βραδέως ἐπεισθῆν ἴτι μὴ καθεύδω, ἔδεόμην τότε τῆς Παλαίστρας... ('After I was persuaded, gradually and with difficulty, that I was not asleep, I began then to beg Palaestra...').

¹⁷ Winkler 1985, 9 points out that the novel might make more sense if the entire first ten books were read as a dream; he then rejects this idea by pointing out that there is nothing in the text to support such a reading. Cf., however, Lev Kenaan 2004, e.g., 261–262, 282 who seems to favor just such a reading.

¹⁸ Shumate 1996, 170 sees an important, though ambiguous, connection between Lucius' experiences in the first ten books and the dream experience: 'As far as we can tell, Lucius is not dreaming, but his newly anomic world resembles a dream, as Berger describes it. It is volatile down to its very physical matter, and its unstable character raises the suspicion that anything could happen, that 'shattering metamorphoses' could occur at any moment.'

¹⁹ As van der Paardt 1971, 165 informs us, the phrase is proverbial. He quotes several passages from Plautus to support this claim. Two aspects, however, preclude a proverbial interpretation for this particular passage: first, Lucius describes his state of mind exactly as a dreamer describes a dream experience (he uses a passive first person form of the verb *videre* combined with an infinitive describing the dream content); second, and more

Once again, then, we have the blurring of dreaming and waking reality; here Lucius, like Aristomenes earlier, uses dreaming as a way of interpreting events that seem too bizarre and extraordinary for straightforward belief. The absence of any answer to his question highlights the centrality of the ambiguity of dreams to their role in the novel: because impossible or bizarre events can be interpreted as dreams, there is no need to dismiss them as fictional inventions, the way Aristomenes' traveling companion reacts to his tale.²⁰ Yet just as in the tale of Aristomenes, the transformation of Lucius, whether dream or simply dream-like, will reveal important truths to Lucius. In a rare moment of what we may assume to be a self-reflection on his experiences from a point *after* his initiation, Lucius expresses gratitude for being made into an ass for the wisdom the experience brought him (*Met.* 9,13,5): *Nam et ipse gratas gratias asino meo memini, quod me suo celatum tegmine variisque fortunis exercitatum, etsi minus prudentem, multiscium reddidit* ('Indeed, I myself now gratefully recall my existence as an ass, for when I was concealed in the ass's covering and was tried by varying fortunes, I gained a knowledge of many things, though admittedly I was [am] less wise [than Ulysses]').²¹ Once again, then, at a crucial moment we see the dream functioning at first as a way of explaining away bizarre experiences, which then later turn out to have had something important to reveal to the dreamer.

significantly, Lucius actually tries to determine whether he is awake or not (*Met.* 3,22,2): *defricit adeo diu pupulis, an vigilarem, scire quaerebam* ('...and accordingly I rubbed my eyes repeatedly in an effort to discover whether I was awake'). See also above, note 16 for the difference between the answer here and that given in Apuleius' model.

²⁰ Cf. *Met.* 1,2.

²¹ Shumate 1996, 246–247, note 36 provides a good summary of some of the problems surrounding the interpretation of this authorial aside. Winkler's discussion of it is one of the main points of contention (1985, 267), but the commentators of *GCA* correctly point out that he and those who follow him misread the passage. The phrase *minus prudentem* is not a reflection at all on Lucius' prudence in comparison to himself at some past or future time; rather, it is a comparison to Odysseus: Lucius is not as prudent as Odysseus was; cf. *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1995), 132. Cf. also Apuleius' *De Deo Socratis*, which makes much of Odysseus' *prudencia*, citing, among other proofs of its exceptionality, the fact that Odysseus *Circae poculum bibit nec mutatus est* (*Apul. Soc.* 24,24). Clearly Lucius is less prudent, since he has changed himself into an ass! I thus interpret this aside at face value: Lucius is grateful to the ass he became because it imparted knowledge to him (though it was miserable at the time). This interpretation seems to make most sense in the context. For the interpretation of Odysseus as a philosopher and wise-man, a common *topos* among intellectuals of the Second Sophistic, cf. Tatum 1979, 119–122. For Odysseus as a favorite motif of Apuleius, cf. Harrison 1996.

The first dream of Charite parallels the dreams examined so far: Aristomenes and Lucius interpret visions that seem to occur while awake as dreams, to separate them from their waking lives and be able to dismiss events that they would have thought impossible outside of dreams as mere dreams. Charite, similarly, though her frightening vision occurs while asleep, is motivated to action as if the dream had occurred in waking life. When Charite wakes up from her dream, she is so upset that she considers suicide (*Met.* 4,25,3): *Em nunc certe, nunc maxime funditus perii, nunc spei salutiferae renuntiavi. Laqueus aut gladius aut certe praecipitium procul dubio capessendum est* ('Now it's all up with me for sure, now I'm utterly finished, now I've lost all hope of being saved. The noose or the sword must be my only recourse, or at any rate I must throw myself off a cliff, no doubt about that'). We find out later what her dream was actually about, but for the moment, it should be noted that her suicidal intentions reflect Aristomenes' reaction to his "dream" when he realizes he cannot escape from the inn (*Met.* 1,16,1): *In cubiculum itaque reversus de genere tumultuario mortis mecum deliberabam* ('So I went back into the dormitory, and began to ponder my quickest mode of death').²² The main difference, of course, between the two instances is that Aristomenes, at the point in the story when he contemplates suicide, does not yet believe his experience was a dream. Charite, however, knows full well that she has just woken up: she calls her vision a 'most savage dream' (*saevissimo somnio*: *Met.* 4,27,1). When Aristomenes begins to think that he had a bad nightmare, he is relieved, because it seems to him that Socrates is now safe: the nightmare is reassuring because the very fact that it is a nightmare allows him to separate it from his waking world. It is only when it becomes more and more obvious that his "dream" was not "only a dream" at all that he becomes frightened again.

Charite, by contrast, is just as ready to commit suicide because of a dream as she would have been had she witnessed Tlepolemus' death, as Aristomenes witnessed Socrates' death, while awake.²³ The old woman to

²² Suicide is a recurrent theme in the novel, and is especially prevalent in the Charite episodes: the story is introduced by her suicide threat. Shortly after it ends, the old woman who told it herself commits suicide. The death of Tlepolemus turns out to have been correctly predicted, and once he dies, Charite first attempts suicide by starvation, then later actually commits suicide. Cf. *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1977), 188. For interesting connections between the phenomena of dreaming and suicide, cf. MacAlister 1996.

²³ The explanation for this may lie in the fact that Charite's nightmare is already closely connected with her waking existence; she has, after all, just been kidnapped. This is made clear by the way she introduces the dream (*Met.* 4,27,1): *sed ecce saevissimo somnio mihi nunc etiam redintegratur immo vero cumulatur infortunium meum* ('Just now I had

whom Charite tells her dream, however, tries to reassure her by asserting that dreams are often either false (if they occur during the day) or reveal the very opposite of what they seem to predict (*Met.* 4,27,5): *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* ('Cheer up, my lady; don't be frightened by the baseless fancies of dreams. For one thing, dreams in the daylight hours are held to be false, and for another, even night-dreams sometimes tell of untruthful happenings [predict opposite outcomes]').²⁴ What we see here is a variation on the pattern already discussed: Charite has had a horrific experience, and is about to commit suicide in reaction to it. The old woman, however, tells her not to take it so seriously: it is, after all, *only a dream*. Nonetheless, she is aware that dreams can and do reflect waking reality, and so reassures Charite by asserting that this reflection is often the opposite of what we would expect: bad dreams can predict good ends, and vice versa.²⁵ Once again, then, dreams are given a paradoxical status: they provide a context in which intolerable events may be accepted as "unreal," but at the same time can provide information or perspective that, though not literally true, perhaps, can nonetheless provide an important *truth*.²⁶

a terrible dream; the whole of my misfortune has been renewed, or rather redoubled...'). The nightmare does not introduce something completely new, but worsens a misfortune that is already real. Hence, she uses the verb *redintegratur*, which refers to the first half of her dream, in which she re-experiences her kidnapping, followed by the correction *immo vero cumulatur*, which refers to the second half of the dream, in which her betrothed is slain. Charite thus does not dismiss her dream because it seems at least in part to reflect her waking life; one can easily imagine that, had she had this dream a few nights earlier, before she was kidnapped, it might have disturbed her, but she certainly would not have planned suicide.

²⁴ The first piece of information, that daytime dreams are all false, is useless, since Charite had her dream at night; otherwise the old woman would not have to say anything about nighttime dreams. Cf. *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1977), 205. The main thrust of her argument is thus that dreams often predict their opposites, but she passes quickly over this point to the distraction technique of the tale of Cupid and Psyche (cf. Winkler 1985, 52–56), which suggests that even that is a tendentious argument, and she knows it.

²⁵ For this theory as a common attitude to dream interpretation, cf. e.g., Hunink 2006b, 24, note 21.

²⁶ For the relative "truth" of this dream, which is somewhat immaterial, cf. Winkler 1985, 53; *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1977), 203–204; Hunink 2006b, 25, note 23. Some argue that the dream does not "really" come true, e.g., *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1985), 5: 'That dream does not come true, but there seems to be a link between the robber-element there and the characterization of Thrasylus in the present tale as *factionibus latronum male sociatus* (177,8).' I suppose that the assertion that the dream 'does not come true' is meant to indicate that Charite's dream does not correspond precisely with what actually occurs: in

What is particularly interesting is that the old woman seems to know that the explanation “it was only a dream” can provide Charite only with little comfort, and so she turns to distraction tactics, introducing the splendid tale of Cupid and Psyche as an alternative way of comforting Charite, instead of explaining away her dream as insignificant (*Met.* 4,27,8): *Sed ego te narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis protinus avocabo* (‘Come then, here and now I’ll divert you with the pretty story of an old wife’s tale’).²⁷ In effect, the old woman offers Charite an alternative vision, one which provides comfort, a happy ending in place of the gloomy one offered by Charite’s dream.²⁸ What role this embedded tale plays in the novel is a topic far too complex and debated for discussion here.²⁹ Suffice it to say that whereas the old woman suggests that both the dream and the tale are to be accorded little significance because they are both mere fictions (whether dreams or stories), as the events of the novel play out the suggestion is made that quite the opposite is true: both have a deeper meaning that remains independent of their reality or unreality.³⁰

In Charite’s second dream, at the conclusion of the tragedy of Charite, which occupies the largest portion of Lucius’ experiences of any episode in the novel, we again see a truth revealed by a dream (*Met.* 8,14,1): *Et enarratis ordine singulis quae sibi per somnium nuntiaverat maritus quoque astu Thrasyllum inductum petisset...* (‘She then recounted in sequence all that her husband had told her in her dream, and the trickery she had employed to

that case, the commentator here is absolutely correct. But I do not think that the criterion for a dream ‘coming true,’ in the sense that the outcome it predicts actually comes to pass, should be whether events unfold exactly as they appeared in the dream: if that is the case, then Lucius’ dream of his ‘slave’ Candidus and of the many gifts that Mithras gives him (*Met.* 11,20) does not ‘come true,’ nor does Asinius Marcellus’ dream that he will meet a ‘man from Madauros’ (*Met.* 11,27), since, after all, Lucius is not from Madauros at all (see below). Should we then reject those dreams as lacking predictive power, since the correspondence between dream and outcome is not direct?

²⁷ For the tale as a distraction, cf. Winkler 1985, 52–56 and above, note 24.

²⁸ Cf. Winkler 1985, 56.

²⁹ E.g., Tatum 1979, 62–68; *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1981); Kenney 1990, 12–17; Smith 1998.

³⁰ Cf. Hunink 2006b, 27; see also below, notes 39 and 55. In fact, the interpretation of the tale of Cupid and Psyche turns out to be more important for Lucius than for Charite. The main mistake she makes in her reaction to the tale is that she seems lulled by it, as the woman intends her to be, into separating her dream from her reality again; in a way, the tale replaces her dream as a portent of her fortune. The mistake here is the same as for the dream: she has interpreted the tale literally, at the cost of having dismissed the dream. Neither, in fact, should be taken at face value, but require careful interpretation. Both possibilities represent the same mistake: dismissing the counsel of one in favor of the literal prediction of the other.

deceive and to lay hands on Thrasyllus’).³¹ The difference is that here, for the first time in the novel, the authority of dreams is not even called into question: Charite, it seems, has learned from her previous experience, and her assumption (and the assumption we are to make as well) is that dreams authorize, not a dismissal of the truths they communicate, but instead an absolute belief in those truths, however “unreal” the dreams themselves might be.³²

The last dream that occurs in the first ten books provides the conclusion to a complex web of narratives that Lucius himself describes as ‘a good tale, more sweetly polished than all the rest’ (*fabulam...bonam, prae ceteris suave comptam...*, *Met.* 9,14,1).³³ The baker at whose mill Lucius is currently a worker has been betrayed by his wife; as a result, he has divorced her and driven her from his house. She, incensed at being thus insulted, hires a witch to settle things with her husband, either by reconciling him or by killing him. Failing to accomplish the former, the witch sends the ghost of a violently murdered woman to destroy the baker. Then, suddenly, Lucius interrupts his tale with a strange and much discussed aside to the ‘scrupulous reader’ (*Met.* 9,30,1): *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 censure my version of events with an argument of this kind; ‘how could you, clever ass though you were, ascertain as you claim what these women were secretly hatching, when you were enclosed within the confines of a bakery’’).³⁴ What is the point of this aside? Why should Lucius or Apuleius³⁵ wish suddenly to invoke a ficti-

³¹ *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1985), 4–6, however, presents a challenge to the veridical nature of this dream: the commentators suggest interpreting Charite’s revenge as unjustified, and the tale as unauthorized. See further the next note for a discussion of this issue.

³² Cf. Annequin 1996, 173. Winkler 1985, 72 makes the point that here a story, which at first seems to be narrated from an omniscient perspective, is later authorized as a real story by the switch in narrative form (from a ‘heterodiegetic narrative posture’) to a chain of word-of-mouth accounts (a ‘homodiegetic’ perspective), which validates belief in the whole tale of Charite. We can add, however, that the chain *ultimately* derives its authority from a story that is told in a *dream*. Winkler 1985, 70 claims that the authority of the dream itself derives from the fact that it is a dead man who tells it.

³³ Cf. *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1995), 133 on what, precisely, is meant by this phrase. It is strong praise, in any case, and thus interesting for our purposes that this *fabula* has, at its heart, a tragic tale authorized by a dream.

³⁴ Winkler 1985, 60–76 makes much of this aside. See further the discussion below.

³⁵ Whichever of the two is responsible for this aside: another important question raised by the passage. Cf. *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1995), 257.

tious *lector*, whose description as *scrupulosus*, as the Groningen commentators observe, ‘makes implicit demands on the concrete reader’?³⁶

The answer to the question posed by this hypothetical *lector* is postponed by Lucius until the conclusion of the tale in the next chapter. The baker’s daughter arrives from the next town, where her husband lives, grieving for her father, and claims that the truth of the matter was revealed to her in a dream (*Met.* 9,31,1): *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* (‘The sorrowing image of her father had appeared to her in sleep, his neck still encircled with the noose, and had revealed to her all the details of her stepmother’s criminal behaviour—the adultery, the witchcraft, and his descent to the realm of the dead when constrained by the ghost’). In answer to the question, then, which Lucius (or Apuleius) imagines his reader asking—how could you possibly know this?—comes the dream of the baker’s daughter. What is most surprising about this conclusion to the tale of the baker is that Apuleius, for the first time specifically raising the question ‘how could you know this?’ and acknowledging that there may be readers who doubt the truth of his novel, gives a dream as the ultimate source and stamp of the truth of a story. Not only does the dream provide important information which would otherwise be inaccessible, it also authorizes the truth of that information.³⁷

The possibility remains of rejecting the story on the very basis upon which it is supposed to be accepted: dismissing this tale, that is, on the grounds that it is derived from a dream, and cannot, therefore, be believed.³⁸

³⁶ See previous note.

³⁷ Cf. *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1995), 266. Winkler 1985, 60–76 provides a good analysis of the problems entailed here, concluding that the contrast between the idea that a story be held accountable for its veracity, and that that veracity should be confirmed by a phenomenon that is generally considered to be fantastic (‘the paradox of using the implausible to authenticate the unknown,’ 70), suggests that a narrative game is being played (76).

³⁸ Cf. *GCA* (Hijmans et al. 1995), 266: ‘...the sudden arrival of the daughter leaves the narratee...little room to doubt that she has had a dream...the fact that much of the information concerning the end of the *pistor* is based on a dream seems designed to create doubts as to the ‘veracity’ of that information.’ What is missing from this comment is the observation that the very parts of the story that are based on the dream are those which would make the tale incredible: the idea that the woman was a ghost, e.g., or that she was summoned using magic. Compare the skeptic’s reaction to Aristomenes’ tale in *Met.* 1,3: his *comparanda* for what he deems a ridiculous story are the alleged powers of witches. If these elements are disbelieved on the basis of the ambiguous status of dreams, the tale becomes an unlikely, *but not at all impossible* story of murder or suicide.

The fact that authorizing stories or information with dreams leads to the possibility that they will be disbelieved need not, however, be seen as a flaw in Apuleius' narrative technique. On the contrary, it has a very important effect upon his novel. By authenticating strange, cruel, or shocking stories with dreams, which have an ambiguous, undefined relationship to waking reality, he protects those stories from absolute dismissal by skeptics. Had Lucius offered some more definite proof of the truth of this tale, any reader who did not believe in magic curses or ghosts or any of its less credible elements would have discarded the story as a lie.³⁹ As it is, since the incredible derives its authority from a dream, that reader is able, if not to believe the story, at least to listen to it, and to search for its meaning. Essentially, then, authorizing the story with a dream makes the story itself dreamlike, not because it is bizarre or unlike reality, but because its relation to reality is ambiguous.⁴⁰ And just as anyone who dreams is able to search his dreams for some meaning, without necessarily believing that they either will or did actually happen, the reader is able to hold this tale in that same attitude of simultaneous belief and disbelief on different levels.⁴¹ The story is thus ensured consideration as a vehicle for meaning no matter how improbable or impossible the events are judged to be: it borrows the open-mindedness of

³⁹ As the skeptics do; see above, note 13. We might also compare Winkler's discussion of the function of the skeptic in the Aristomenes story (Winkler 1985, 27–29). He observes: 'That cynic is not so much a character as he is an emblem of one way of perceiving the tale' (28). He goes on to argue, however, that we are not really meant to adopt this position, though it is presented as one which is open to the reader: 'In his debate with the cynic we are certainly meant to regard him as giving better counsel...' (29). We are thus led towards a credulous interpretation while the skeptical interpretation is explicitly made open to us. This is exactly parallel to the role of dreams being discussed here: they allow for a skeptical interpretation, but lead towards a credulous one, rather than forcing a decision between the two upon the reader and thus causing those who are naturally cynical to doubt the tale (since they would then have to decide whether Lucius is a liar or telling the truth: no other options would be open).

⁴⁰ Cf. Hunink 2006b, 30.

⁴¹ Annequin 1996, 170–171, addressing the question of the truth of the Aristomenes tale, sums up the effect upon the reader of the dreams in the story, which allow two interpretations depending upon how dreams are interpreted, at the same time suggesting one more strongly than the other, and masking a third possibility for interpretation (that the whole story is a lie): '*Si on croit à la magie, Aristomène et Socrate n'ont pas rêvé, ils ont respectivement vu et vécu une opération magique; si on ne croit pas aux sortilèges, ils ont l'un et l'autre rêvé. Que croire? Apulée nous suggère une réponse en apportant une preuve inattendue de la véracité des meurtres par magie...Il reste encore au lecteur une possibilité, rejeter d'un bloc tout le récit!*' This last option is, of course, always open to the reader or listener of any account, just as it is open to any dreamer: until an event is actually experienced, it can always be dismissed as impossible.

the dreaming state to allow its acceptance into the psyche.⁴² This function of the dream becomes crucial as we move into the controversial eleventh book.

The essential question that confronts any reader of the *Metamorphoses* when faced with the religious odyssey described in Book 11 is whether Lucius' experience should be taken seriously or not: is Lucius a sage or a buffoon?⁴³ The question itself is, as Winkler and others have argued, inherent in these final books: there is something about the way Lucius' religious experience is presented that raises the question.⁴⁴ Two things stand out: the repeated initiations and the stress on the financial side of his relationship with the priests of Isis.⁴⁵ Taken together, these elements suggest the possibility of interpreting Lucius as a dupe, the victim of 'a con game by venal priests,'⁴⁶ to the point that even Lucius, when he finds out about the third initiation, begins to have his doubts (*Met.* 11,29,3): *et hercules iam de fide quoque eorum opinari coeptabam sequius. Quo me cogitationis aestu fluctuantem ad instar insaniae percitum sic instruxit nocturna divinatione clemens imago* ('I swear that I even began to take a jaundiced view of their good faith. But while I tossed on the tide of such speculation, and was being driven to the point of madness, a kindly apparition of the god in a prophetic utterance at night explained the situation to me').

What is important to note here is that Lucius does not question his religious devotion for an instant—only the competence or honesty of the priests. When he receives a dream explaining the reason for his third initiation, he accepts it without hesitation, even gladly.⁴⁷ Lucius has no reason to doubt his

⁴² Cf. States 1993, 140. This idea of using a dream to protect a story by allowing for its separation from the waking world reflects Freud's famous theory of dreams in an interesting way: cf. e.g., Freud 1954, 141–144. It is interesting (and tends to support the theory I am putting forward here) that despite the controversy that continues about the "correct" interpretation of Apuleius, no scholar, to my knowledge, argues that we are meant to believe that *Lucius is lying*.

⁴³ Winkler 1985, 226–227.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Harrison 2000, 245–248 lists a third category, which we might term "Lucius' wishful thinking:" notably, these are often cases where Lucius interprets a dream in an optimistic way, i.e., as meaning something it may not, in fact, mean. Here, then, we are dealing with precisely the sort of contrast under discussion. Harrison, taking a decidedly skeptical attitude towards the events in the novel, is able to see the irony spread pretty thickly. This interpretation, however, depends on how he interprets Lucius' dreams and their relation to "reality." Cf. also Winkler 1985, 217; Shumate 1996, 325.

⁴⁶ Winkler 1985, 221.

⁴⁷ *Met.* 11,30,1: *nec deinceps postposito vel in supinam procrastinationem reiecto negotio...ex studio pietatis...* ('So without relegating or idly deferring the business...with religious zeal...').

religious experience, since it is based not upon what the priests have told him, but upon his own dreams and their relation to his waking life.⁴⁸ As for the charge of venality, if it is to be placed upon anyone, it should once again be Lucius' dreams.⁴⁹ In the case of his first initiation, the amount he is required to spend is specified not by the priests, but by Lucius' own dream (*Met.* 11,21,4): *...sumptus etiam caerimoniis necessarios simili praecepto destinari* ('...and in addition the expenses necessary for the ceremonies were indicated in the same instruction'). We are most likely meant to assume that it is again his dream which commands him to sell his own clothes to raise money for his second initiation. And it is certainly in a dream that Lucius is both instructed to undergo a third initiation, and is reassured when he has doubts. If the financial position in which Lucius' religious devotion places him is enough to weaken the sincerity of his experience, the blame is due not to the priests or the cult of Isis, but to Lucius' dreams, which must then be taken to be misleading.

This deceptiveness would then parallel the role of dreams that was first introduced in the novel, in the tale of Aristomenes, and which was used again both in Lucius' reaction to the transformation of Pamphile, and in the old woman's attempt to comfort Charite, although there, as discussed earlier, the focus was already shifting from the unreal side of dreams to the very real truths they reveal.⁵⁰ Aristomenes, Lucius, and the old woman were all able to call into question the reality of something difficult to accept by interpreting it as a dream. The occurrence of those events in dreams would then have allowed them to be dismissed as unreal or insignificant. Similarly, by placing every one of Lucius' visions and instructions from Isis in his dreams, making his relationship with the goddess the very substance of his religious experience, dependent on the veracity of those dreams, Apuleius has made it possible for anyone listening to Lucius' story to take a skeptical attitude, and to view Lucius as a naïve fool who is being duped, and who, like Charite in the robbers' cave, puts too much trust in his dreams.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See above, note 4.

⁴⁹ There is always the remote possibility that the priests are manipulating his dreams as well, although how that could account for the first dream of Isis is questionable. This is not an altogether preposterous proposition. For the manipulation of dreams through magic, cf. Eitrem 1991. It does not seem to be what Lucius has in mind when he questions the good faith of the priests (*Met.* 11,29), and anything more than that must be implied by the reader. Cf., however, for a slightly more elegant (though no less reader-supplied) possibility, Hunink 2006b, 30, note 40.

⁵⁰ See above, note 26.

⁵¹ See above, note 30.

Why would an author undermine the authority of his narrative in this way? This question might be more easily approached by posing two more specific questions: why did Apuleius not have Lucius visited by Isis while awake? Surely that would have given his tale more authority, like the many divine epiphanies in epic poetry. Or if he wanted Lucius' experience to be interpreted as a deceit, why not show it more clearly, making it the priests who suggest to him the amount he should spend on his initiation, or who insist on a second and third initiation, rather than Lucius' own dreams? Surely that would have drawn a clearer parallel with the deceptive priests of the Dea Syria for whom Lucius works earlier in the novel.⁵²

Apuleius was a skilled orator and philosopher,⁵³ a pre-eminent product of the eclectic literary milieu of the Second Sophistic.⁵⁴ He knew that it is impossible to convince an audience using brute force: one must coax and persuade them, and above all keep their trust and attention. It is crucial for the *Metamorphoses*, then, if it is to carry any message, that Lucius' honesty not be called into question. Yet a reader's own biases may lead him to reject Lucius' account, if it does not conform to what he believes to be possible in the "real" world: such a rejection may be inevitable given the extraordinary nature of Lucius' experience. By blurring the boundary between dream and reality, then, and showing that apparently impossible or improbable events derive their authority from dreams, may even *be* dreams, Apuleius thus protects Lucius from the charge of lying, of deceiving the reader. A skeptic may disbelieve that Lucius actually saw what he claims to have seen, but it is no longer because Lucius is lying, but because he is dreaming.⁵⁵ And even if he believes that dreams have no meaning, he will still listen to the story, still

⁵² *Met.* 8,24–9,10; cf. Hunink 2006b, 26, note 26.

⁵³ For the conflation of the two terms during this period, cf. Tatum 1979, 18.

⁵⁴ Cf., e.g., Harrison 2000.

⁵⁵ For the uncertain status of the dream in antiquity, cf. Harris 2003, 18, who challenges the normal flattening of the attitude towards dreams: 'Scholars normally assert that almost everyone in antiquity believed in the mantic potential of dreams, without asking what counted as a prediction in the classical world, or what it meant to 'believe', or how one might find out what was believed by 'almost everyone', or how reactions might have changed.' In the *Metamorphoses*, for example, the very first inserted tale depicts at least one character who does not seem to believe in the mantic potential of dreams, since he dismisses his nighttime dream as nothing more than the product of too much wine. If one can argue that the reaction of the cynic is introduced as a symbol of a possible interpretive stance that will be open to the reader, it is surely feasible to argue that Aristomenes' interpretation of dreams is left open as a possible attitude the reader can have or adopt towards the dreams in the *Metamorphoses*. For the complexity of the question of ancient beliefs about dreams, a good summary can be found in MacAlister 1996, 4–6.

believe that it happened, in Lucius' mind at least, if not in the objective "real world."⁵⁶ If, finally, he is led again and again to believe that dreams may actually have some important relation to reality, he may begin to believe that he has something to learn from Lucius' story.

An interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*, then, that focuses on the dreams in the novel must recognize two important facts: 1) that the final interpretation of Lucius' religious experience will depend on how the cluster of Isis-dreams is seen to relate to the waking world and 2) that, within the narrative universe of this novel, dreams are never false, and are always borne out by subsequent events. They both authorize stories and are themselves authorized by actual events.⁵⁷ The conclusion that can be drawn from these facts is clear: in the simplest terms possible, Lucius' religious experience depends on his dreams; the narrative suggests that dreams correspond to waking reality, and can reveal waking reality from a perspective that is new, but not false; Lucius' religious belief, then, is not false belief. This does not, of course, solve the riddle of the "message" of the novel, but that riddle will never be solved: it has been woven into the fiber of the novel itself.

The role dreams play in Apuleius' narrative is perhaps best exemplified in the celebrated passage from Book 11, when a glimpse is caught of Apuleius' author figure lurking behind Lucius' identity. The priest of Osiris, Asinius Marcellus, who was shown to Lucius in a dream before they ever met, recognizes Lucius immediately, and explains that he had a dream vision in which Osiris told him that he would meet Lucius the next day (*Met.* 11,27,9): *Nam sibi visus est quiete proxima, dum magno deo coronas exaptat, * * * [et] de eius ore, quo singulorum fata dictat, audisse mitti sibi Madaurenses, sed admodum pauperem, cui statim sua sacra deberet ministrare* ('The previous night he had had a vision: while he was adorning the great god with garlands, he had heard from the statue's mouth (this is the means by which Osiris proclaims the future of individuals) that a man from Madauros who was quite poor was being sent to him, and that he must at once initiate him into the divine rites'). In this vision comes the simplest and

⁵⁶ See above, note 42. Gollnick 1999, 3–4 recognizes that the universal experience of bizarre dreams allows the dreaming state to set up a 'narrative genre' that is significantly more open to odd occurrences.

⁵⁷ There are two caveats to add to these facts: 1) all of the dreams can, through very contorted logic, be explained away as being meaningless: this is the element that ultimately protects the narrative from straightforward dismissal (see above, notes 38 and 41); 2) some of the dreams (Charite's first dream, for example, or Lucius' dream of Candidus at *Met.* 11,20) are not directly predictive, but use slightly obscure symbolism to communicate their message.

yet most powerful confirmation of the authority of the dream in the novel: this dream not only knows who Lucius is, it knows it better than he himself does. The awareness that Lucius is ‘a man from Madauros’ is a paradoxical moment of super-narrative: of course, Lucius himself is not really a man from Madauros, any more than his white horse was literally a ‘slave named Candidus’ (*Met.* 11,20,1).⁵⁸ The dream offers a perspective that is not available to any of the characters in the novel in their waking reality: the perspective from which they can see that they are all fictional, literary creations, all the product of a Madauran author. This dream, then, offers the deepest truth of all: Lucius is ‘a man from Madauros,’ (the word ‘man’ is not actually present: the word simply means ‘Madauran’) in as far as he was created by someone who came from Madauros.⁵⁹

As one is reading these final chapters and wondering what to make of all Lucius’ dreams and his religious conversion, one fact stands out: this is a novel, a fictional creation, by Apuleius, the man from Madauros. That is the one thing about this novel of which a reader is certain; it is part of his own waking life, the link between this strange tale and the world he lives in. Then, suddenly, one of the characters in the fictional world betrays an awareness of the reader’s world, the place where *Madaurenses* finds its referent, as though he had turned and stared directly at the reader. This goes beyond a mere “blurring” of dream and reality: in other examples, the “reality” referred to is that of the *fictional* universe of the novel, but here the reality at once fictionalized via the dream, yet at the same moment truthfully represented, is precisely that: *our* reality, the reality of the readers, of our own existence. And here, then, at the very end of the book, there may be a hint of something deeply unsettling: Aristomenes’ dream, if a dream, still *mattered*, Charite’s dreams, though ‘mere dreams,’ the old woman’s tale, though just an “old wives’ tale,” the dreams of the baker’s daughter, and finally Lucius’ dreams, all of these, though dreams, still *meant* something in the fictional universe to which they referred. But now comes this dream of the priest of Osiris: it finds its referent not in the world of Lucius, but the world of Apuleius, the world of you and me. In that world, does it, too, *mean something*?

⁵⁸ See previous note.

⁵⁹ Cf. Winkler 1985, 219 for the ‘paradoxical structure of authorization.’