

Quis ille Asinus aureus?
The Metamorphoses of Apuleius' Title

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Introduction

Since the early history of its transmission, not one, but two different titles, have been attested for Apuleius' story of Lucius' extraordinary adventures: *Metamorphoses* and *Asinus aureus*.¹ This raises two separate, but related types of question: what was the original title which designated Apuleius' text, and what might that title mean? While both received titles have had their respective champions, recent scholarship has suggested that the original title may have been double; and that it may have referred either to the long ears, or to the Sethian aspect, of the asinine protagonist. This paper first surveys and extends these lines of enquiry, and then throws several new interpretative balls into the air, arguing for chromatic, monetary, metallurgical, and entomological readings of the title. These readings are as much a response to Apuleius' text as to his title; for it is the text which dramatises and makes sense of its otherwise enigmatic title, even as the title directs the reader's attention to certain motifs in the text which might otherwise have seemed less significant. In tracing the different semantic relationships that develop between title and text, I shall demonstrate that the meaning of Apuleius' title is as riddlingly elusive and infuriatingly multiple as the identity of the prologue's *ego* (*quis ille?*).

¹ A recent account of the traditional alternative titles can be found at Münstermann 1995, 47–56; cf. Winkler 1985, 292–321; Scobie 1975, 47–9; Robertson-Valette 1940, xxiii–xxv. I have not yet seen Grilli 2000.

Part 1: The Background of the Title *Metamorphoses*

The subscriptions of Sallustius, the earliest attested editor of Apuleius, refer to the text by the title *Metamorphoses*.² In his subscription to the ninth book, Sallustius states that he revised the text in two separate stages, and obligingly names the consuls contemporary with his revisions. Since these consul pairs can be positively dated to the years 395 and 397 C.E. respectively, Sallustius' testimony shows that the title *Metamorphoses* was in currency at least by the end of the fourth century C.E..

Metamorphoses makes good sense as Apuleius' title for several reasons. Firstly, it acknowledges the pedigree of Apuleius' *fabula Graecanica* (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,6), as *Metamorphoses* also seems to be the title of the lost Greek source for the story of Lucius.³ Secondly, Apuleius' prologue explicitly advertises metamorphoses, literally 'changes in form', as the subject of the work to follow (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,2 *figuras...conversas...*). The prologue also carefully qualifies and expands its promise to include varieties of metamorphosis which are not so literal: for example, there will be alterations in men's fortunes (*fortunas...conversas*), and even shifts of 'voice' (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,6 *haec...ipsa vocis immutatio*). Transformations of such a purely metaphorical nature have already featured in Ovid's homonymous work, and so are entirely consistent with the range of expectations evoked by the title *Metamorphoses*.⁴ Thirdly, Apuleius' narrative lives up to the prologue's promise, as it features metamorphoses, both literal and metaphorical, aplenty.⁵ Thus *Metamorphoses*, the title preserved by Sallustius, seems appropriate to Apuleius' shifty tales.

² Sallustius' subscriptions are preserved in the principal manuscript for Apuleius' text, Laurentianus 68,2 (i.e. F). See Pecere 1984.

³ The title of the lost Greek source text is attested as *Metamorphoses* both in the subscriptions of its extant epitome, *Lucius or Ass* (Vaticanus 90, tenth century C.E.), and in the booklists of the patriarch Photius (*Bibl. Codices* 129 and 166,111b, ninth century C.E.). The relationship between the Greek *Metamorphoses*, its epitome *Lucius sive Asinus*, and Apuleius' ass-tale, is discussed in detail by Mason 1994.

⁴ On the broad referential compass of Ovid's title *Metamorphoses*, referring as much to the work's 'functional principle' as to its 'actual subject', see Galinsky 1975, 1–14 & 42–70. For the close similarities between Ovid's and Apuleius' wide-ranging use of 'metamorphoses' as a theme, see Krabbe 1989, 37–73.

⁵ The physical transformations of Lucius and of others are catalogued by Perry 1923, 235–238; Robertson-Valette (1940) xxiv–v; and, most fully, Tatum 1972, 308. For less literal types of metamorphosis in Apuleius, see Tatum 1972, 308–9; Münstermann 1995, 49–50; Krabbe 1989, 38–43; Finkelpearl 1998, 22 & 107. Furthermore, the very process of

Part 2: The Background of the Title *Asinus aureus*

While Apuleius' African compatriot Augustine betrays no knowledge of the title *Metamorphoses*, he asserts clearly that the title *Asinus aureus*, or 'Golden Ass', was given to the text by Apuleius himself:

"...Apuleius, in the books which he inscribed with the title 'the Golden Ass' (*in libris quos Asini Aurei titulo inscripsit*), either indicated or invented how he himself came to take a potion and turn into an ass while retaining his human intellect." August. C.D. 18,18

Augustine's testimony is published around 413–426 C.E, but given Apuleius' celebrity in Africa, Winkler is surely right to suppose that 'Augustine presumably knew Apuleius's writings throughout his life'.⁶ Given that Augustine was born in 354 C.E., it would seem that *Asinus aureus*, the title familiar to him, enjoyed currency in the late fourth century C.E., existing more or less alongside the alternative title known to Sallustius. On this evidence, it is impossible to tell which of the titles, *Metamorphoses* or *Asinus aureus*, had chronological priority.

The title *Asinus aureus* is also appropriate to Apuleius' text, although its significance is not so immediately obvious as that of *Metamorphoses*. The word *asinus*, taken in isolation, makes good sense as part of the title. In the first place, it indicates Apuleius' generic affiliation to other texts with ass-titles or ass-characters.⁷ For example, six of Phaedrus' early first century C.E. verse translations of 'Aesop' feature the word *asinus* in their transmitted titles (Phaed. 1,11 *Asinus et leo venantes*; 1,15 *Asinus ad senem pastorem*; 1,21 *Leo senex, aper, taurus et asinus*; 1,29 *Asinus inridens aprum*; 4,1 *Asinus et Galli*; 5,4 *Asinus et porcelli hordeum*);⁸ Apuleius, like Phaedrus, translates Greek fiction into Latin; and in their prologues, both Phaedrus and Apuleius charac-

translation, so essential to Apuleius' text, is also characterised by the prologue as a species of metamorphosis (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,6 *haec...ipsa vocis immutatio*).

⁶ Winkler 1985, 294.

⁷ Freeman 1945, 34 observes that Greek fables, anecdotes and proverbs feature asses more than any other animals.

⁸ These titles are preserved by the ninth century C.E. Codex Pithoeanus (or P), which is the best manuscript for Phaedrus.

terise their tales as *fabulae*, and address a *lector*.⁹ There is a lost Atellan farce by Pomponius entitled *Asina* ('She-ass'), whose title and two extant fragments suggest that it, like Apuleius' text, featured an ass, or possibly even a human turned into an ass, as a main character.¹⁰ Plautus names a play *Asinaria* [sc. *fabula*]; it has been convincingly argued that the speaker in the prologue of Apuleius' *fabula* is modelled closely on Plautine *prologi* (who include the *prologus* of the *Asinaria* itself).¹¹ A satire by Varro is entitled ὄνος λύρας ('An ass [sc. listening to] a lyre'); Winkler suggests that 'the Varronian project of philosophy *cum* comedy for the masses may be the most important model for Apuleius's own work.'¹² So Apuleius' ass-title advertises the generic influence of all these texts. More obviously, an ass-title is appropriate to a tale whose protagonist turns into an ass. Presumably it is for this reason that the extant Greek epitome of Apuleius' principal source is entitled Λούκιος ἢ ὄνος ('Lucius or Ass').¹³ It should further be noted that in Latin, as in English (but not in Greek, importantly), the word for ass can also denote a fool (see OLD s.v. *asinus* 2). Apuleius' Lucius, literally an ass for much of the narrative, is also metaphorically an ass for all of the narrative, so that the inclusion of the word *asinus* in Apuleius' title is doubly pointed as an introduction to his Latinised protagonist.

The addition of the epithet *aureus* to the title is far more problematic. Certainly texts or utterances with a monumental or spiritual quality are sometimes

⁹ References in prologues to *fabulae*: Apul. *Met.* 1,1,1; 1,1,6; Phaed. 1 *Prol.* 7; 2 *Prol.* 2; 3 *Prol.* 33, 36; 4 *Prol.* 10; 5 *Prol.* 10.

Addresses in prologues to *lector*: Apul. *Met.* 1,1,6 *lector intende: laetaberis*; Phaed. 2 *Prol.* 11 ...*bonas in partes, lector, accipias velim...*; cf. 3 *Prol.* 31 ...*quem* [sc. *librum*] *si leges, laetabor*.

¹⁰ For the two surviving fragments of Pomponius' *Asina*, see Ribbeck 1962, 226. The addressee of fr.1 (the titular she-ass?) cannot speak, but may still learn to listen (*atque auscultare disce, si nescis loqui*); similarly Lucius-the-ass cannot speak (Apul. *Met.* 3,25,1f.), but is better able to listen (Apul. *Met.* 3,24,5; 9,15,6; 6,32,3). Fr. 2 is a first-person narrative of past experience at a mill-stone (*exilui de nocte ad molam fullonis festinatim*); cf. Lucius-the-ass' past experiences at a mill-stone, also narrated in the first person (Apul. *Met.* 7,15,3; 7,15,5; 7,17,1; 9,11,1f.; 9,22,1).

¹¹ On the influence of Plautine *prologi* on Apuleius, see Smith 1972, 516–520; Winkler 1985, 200–203; Dowden 2001, 134–6.

¹² Winkler 1985, 296. Varro's title derives from a proverbial expression (*Paræmiographi Graeci* 1:291–92; cf. LSJ s.v. ὄνος I.1), which probably derives in turn from an 'Aesopic' fable (Phaed. *Perotti's Appendix* 14, preserved without title).

¹³ The epitome's title is first attested by Phot. *Bibl. Codex* 129, from the ninth century C.E..

designated as ‘golden’;¹⁴ but these are not adequate parallels for Apuleius’ title, where *aureus* is used merely to designate an *asinus*, which is not normally so described.¹⁵ Heraclitus’ statement that ‘asses would choose rubbish over gold’ (Heraclit. D–K B 9) confirms just how paradoxical is the pairing of an ass with gold. Apuleius’ striking combination of noun and adjective confronts readers with a curious riddle: what is a golden ass, and what can it mean?¹⁶ Indeed, the famous question in the prologue, *quis ille?* (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,3), with its masculine deictic, can be understood to register precisely the enigmatic nature of the (masculine) title: ‘Who [or ‘what’] is that [sc. “golden ass”]?’ . An *ego*-figure in the prologue responds to this question obliquely with some autobiographical information (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,3–6) and a lengthy narrative in the first person (Apul.; *Met.* 1,2,1–end). This implies both that the first person is identifiable with the title, and that the entire narrative which follows might somehow serve as a solution to the title’s riddle. There is a two-way process involved here: the title foreshadows the asinine adventures of Lucius, and his adventures in turn promise to explain the title’s mysterious golden sheen.

Part 3: A double title?

It is of course possible that Apuleius’ original title might have been a combination of the two transmitted titles.¹⁷ This allows a neat explanation of how the variant traditions emerged in the first place: Sallustius and Augustine all avoided the cumbersomeness of the original double title by selectively abbreviating it. Certainly by the late fifth century C.E., Fulgentius refers to Apuleius’ text as either *Metamorphoses* (*myth.* 3,6; *serm. ant.* 36) or *Asinus aureus* (*serm. ant.* 17; 40) with apparent indifference. One might compare the common practice amongst modern scholars of abbreviating the title(s) even further, to *Met.*, *G.A.*, or *A.A.*.

¹⁴ Robertson-Vallette 1940, xxiv cites the χρυσᾶ ἔπη of Pythagoras and the *aurea dicta* of Epicurus (Lucr. 3.12f.); Winkler 1985, 298–9 n.16 gives a more comprehensive list of examples.

¹⁵ For this point, cf. Winkler 1985, 299 ‘the oxymoronic joining of the least valuable (*asinus*) with the most valuable (*aureus*)’; Münstermann 1995, 51–52.

¹⁶ Winkler 1985, 300–305 argues that for first time readers, a titular combination of ass and gold would suggest vague associations ‘of folktales, magic, and that curious area of suspect knowledge that later came to be known as alchemy’ (301).

¹⁷ Cf. Winkler 1985, 295–298, following a hint from Scobie 1975, 49.

Winkler regards Varro's *Menippeae* as 'the most telling model' for a double title in Apuleius.¹⁸ This may be correct, but requires some qualification. In a careful analysis of all the evidence for Varro's alternative titles, Astbury reaches two conclusions: a) satires are given a second title only by 'Varro *i*', which is one (of three) Varronian collections used by Nonius Marcellus (our chief source for the *Menippeae*); b) the most satisfactory explanation of this is 'that Varro did not add the sub-titles, but that they were added later by some reader or scribe of the particular group of satires in Nonius' *Varro i* collection.'¹⁹ It follows from Astbury's arguments that second titles were added to the satires in *Varro i* sometime between the date of Varro's original publication (c. first century B.C.E.) and Nonius' citations of them (c. fourth century C.E.).²⁰ It is therefore not certain that Varro's double titles yet existed to serve as a model for Apuleius, who wrote his text sometime in the latter half of the second century C.E.. If, however, some of the *Menippeae* were known to Apuleius from an edition featuring double titles (as they were later known to his fellow African Nonius Marcellus), then Varro's influence on Apuleius might have extended to the double form of his title.

Even if one is sceptical about Varro's satires, there are at least three other models for double titles. The first, also mentioned by Winkler in passing, is Thrasyllus' arrangement of the texts of Plato in the first century C.E..²¹ Diogenes Laertius writes:

"The titles which [Thrasyllus] uses for each of the works are double, one derived from the name (ὄνομα), the other from the subject (πρᾶγμα)." D.L. 3,57

¹⁸ Winkler 1985, 295.

¹⁹ Astbury 1977, 180.

²⁰ The argument that the double titles may not be original to Varro was first suggested by Riese 1864-7, 479-488. Winkler responds to Riese's arguments (Winkler 1985, 295 n.4): 'in any case the Greek περί-titles were known and used by Aulus Gellius (*Noct. Att.* 6,16: *M. Varro in satira quam περί ἐδεσμάτων inscripsit*) and therefore would be known to Apuleius' audience.' However, Astbury 1977, 178 is surely right in suggesting that Aulus Gellius' testimony is merely evidence for a satire with a *single* Greek title (περί ἐδεσμάτων). Therefore this does not, *contra* Winkler, constitute firm evidence that the double titles emerged before Apuleius wrote his text.

²¹ Winkler 1985, 294 & 295 n.4.

The two titles ascribed to Apuleius conform readily to Thrasyllus' prescriptions: *Metamorphoses* is the 'subject', *Asinus aureus* is the 'name'.²² One might reasonably expect Apuleius, a '*Platonicus philosophus*' (Apul. *Apol.* 10,6), to be familiar with the work of Thrasyllus. More particularly, there is an important figure in Apuleius' eighth book called Thrasyllus (Apul. *Met.* 8,1,5). Given that the narrator presents him as entirely un-Platonic in his behaviour and character, it seems likely that his name is antiphrastic;²³ Apuleius has already used a similar joke at Apul. *Met.* 1,6,1, where another un-Platonic character is named, of all things, Socrates. Thus Apuleius' use of the name Thrasyllus might in itself be evidence of his acquaintance with Thrasyllus' edition of Plato, double titles and all.

A third model for double-titles is the Lucianic corpus.²⁴ The first mention of Lucianic titles is made by the ninth century C.E. patriarch Photius;²⁵ and the first extant codices for the Lucianic corpus date from the beginning of the tenth century C.E.. With such late testimonies, one cannot of course be absolutely certain that the transmitted titles are original, but there is no evidence to suggest that they are not. In any case, Lucian is contemporary with Apuleius, and his comic prose fiction has many affinities with Apuleius'; and twenty-six of the texts from the Lucianic corpus are transmitted with double titles.

The fourth model for a double-title is Plautus. The *prologus* of Plautus often cites the original title of his Greek source alongside his new Latin title.²⁶ The prologue of *Asinaria* is a typical example:

²² Thrasyllus' list of double titles illustrates that the word ὄνομα ('name') encompasses not only proper nouns (e.g. D.L. 3,58 'Phaedo or about the soul') but also common nouns (e.g. D.L. 3,58 'the sophist or about being'). *Asinus* is a common noun denoting the protagonist, Lucius.

²³ Later Apuleius suggests an alternative, etymological significance for Thrasyllus' name, deriving it from the Greek *thrasy-*, meaning 'bold' (Apul. *Met.* 8,8,1 *Sed Thrasyllus, praiceps alioquin et de ipso nomine temerarius...*).

²⁴ By 'Lucianic corpus', I mean the eighty four titles listed at Macleod 1972, I v–viii. This is not to suggest that all these texts are in fact written by Lucian himself; Macleod 1972, I x questions the authenticity of fifteen of them.

²⁵ Phot. *Bibl.* Codex 128 mentions 'Phalaris', 'Dialogues of the dead', 'Dialogues of the courtesans'; 129 'Lucius or ass'; 166 'True stories'.

²⁶ Plautus varies in his practice of renaming his Greek models. Some of his new Latin titles are direct translations of the original Greek titles (e.g. Pl. *Cas.* 30f *Clerumenoe* > *Sor-tientes*); other titles involve an associative shift from the Greek (e.g. Pl. *Trin.* 18f *Thensaurus* > *Trinummus*; Pl. *As.* 10f *Onagos* > *Asinaria*); most pertinent to Apuleius' alternative titles, however, is a third category, where the connection between the original Greek title and Plautus' new Latin title is at first mysterious (e.g. Pl. *Poen.* 53f *Carche-*

“Now I shall say the reason why I have come out here and just what I wanted: it was so that you would know the name (*nomen*) of this play;...this play has the name *Onagos* in Greek; Demophilus has written it, Maccus translates it into foreign speech; he wishes it to be *Asinaria*.”

Pl. *As.* 6f.

The double-*nomen* reflects Plautus’ translation of the Greek play (*fabula*) into Latin (which is characterised, ironically, as the foreign language). Plautus’ play retains its old Greek name, but receives an additional Latin name, like a foreigner who has become naturalised in Rome.²⁷ Apuleius’ prologue also features a new immigrant to Rome (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,4 *in urbe Latia advena studiorum Quiritium*), to whom the language of the forum is alien (1,1,5 *exotici ac forensis sermonis rudis locutor*). Only a change of language (*vocis immutatio*) allows him to tell his own *fabula*, which is ‘Greekish’ (1,1,6 *Graecanica*). Like Plautus’ double names, the double title reconstructed for Apuleius would evidently combine the original Greek name of his text (*Metamorphoses*) with a new Latin name (*Asinus aureus*).

This still leaves open the question of what form Apuleius’ double title might have taken. Winkler, in keeping with his adoption of Varro as Apuleius’ chief model, champions the bilingual *Asinus aureus: περὶ μεταμορφώσεων* (i.e. ‘golden ass: concerning metamorphoses’).²⁸ Twenty of the transmitted double titles of Varro are similarly bilingual (e.g. *Desultorius: περὶ τοῦ γράφειν*, ‘horseplay: concerning writing’). A monolingual variation on this seems possible, since in the post-Ovidian era *metamorphoses* has become an accepted loan word. This would yield *Asinus aureus: de metamorphosesin* (i.e. ‘golden ass: concerning metamorphoses’).²⁹ Thirteen of Varro’s transmitted double-titles are monolingual, i.e. completely Greek (e.g. *σκιαμαχία: περὶ τύφου* ‘shadow-boxing: concerning delusion’). A third variation on this involves the insertion of a disjunctive between the first title and the second, thematic title, yielding *Asinus aureus sive de metamorphosesin* (i.e. ‘golden ass or concerning metamorphoses’). This pattern is found in twenty-seven of Thra-

donius > *Patruus*; Pl. *Vid.* prologue [fragmentary] *Schedia* > *Vidularia*; cf. Ter. *Ph.* 24f *Epidicazomenos* > *Phormio*).

²⁷ See Solin 1996, 1025 ‘When enfranchised, new citizens normally retained their individual name as their cognomen. They were free to choose their praenomen and nomen...’.

²⁸ Winkler 1985, 295

²⁹ For the propriety of this transliterated Greek dative ending, cf. Quint. *Inst.* 4,1,77 *ut Ovidius lascivire in Metamorphosesin solet*.

syllus' double titles for Plato (e.g. D.L. 3,58, 'Euthyphron or concerning holiness'), and seven of the double titles in the Lucianic corpus (e.g. Ἀνάχαρσις ἢ περὶ γυμνασίων 'Anacharsis or concerning gymnastic schools').³⁰ Yet another possible form for a double title has two nominatives separated by a disjunctive, i.e. *Asinus aureus sive metamorphoses* (i.e. 'golden ass or metamorphoses').³¹ This is paralleled by eighteen of the double titles in the Lucianic corpus (e.g. πλοῖον ἢ εὐχαί 'ship or prayers'),³² one double title attested for a satire by Varro (*Dolium aut seria*, 'jar or serious matters'), and seven of Thrasyllus' double titles for Plato (e.g. D.L. 3,59 Πρωταγόρας ἢ σοφισταί, 'Protagoras or sophists'; there is even a triple title attested at D.L. 3,60: Ἐπινομίς ἢ νυκτερινὸς σύλλογος ἢ φιλόσοφος, 'Epinomis or nocturnal gathering or philosopher').

One final possibility is that the two transmitted titles of Apuleius' text were originally one single title composed of nominative and genitive noun phrases, *Metamorphoses asini aurei* (i.e. 'metamorphoses of a golden ass'). This too has parallels in Varro (e.g. the Greek ταφὴ Μενίππου, 'tomb of Menippus' and the Latin *armorum iudicium*, 'judgement of arms'), Lucian (e.g. μῦθός ἐγκώμιον 'eulogy of a fly'; Δημόνακτος βίος 'life of Demonax') and Thrasyllus (D.L. 3,58 ἀπολογία Σωκράτους, 'defence of Socrates'). More importantly, it seems to have a parallel in the principal Greek source for Apuleius' ass-tale. The earliest witness to this text, Photius, refers to it as 'metamorphoses of Lucius of Patrae' or 'metamorphoses of Lucius';³³ evidently Photius was reading an inscription featuring the word 'metamorphoses' alongside the name Lucius of Patrae (in the genitive). This is deliciously ambiguous: the genitive could denote the author, as is conventional in titular inscriptions (i.e. "metamorphoses" written by Lucius of Patrae); but it might equally refer to a subject (i.e. "metamorphoses undergone by Lucius of

³⁰ From the Lucianic corpus, Ἁλκυὼν ἢ περὶ μεταμορφώσεων ('halcyon or about metamorphoses'), is particularly tantalising as a model for Apuleius' title; this book, however, is unlikely to be by Lucian himself (see Macleod 1972, I x), so it is difficult to know whether the book, let alone its title, pre-dates Apuleius' own publication.

³¹ When Winkler 1985, 296 writes 'A double title consisting of two nominatives in different languages would, I think, be unparalleled', he evidently overlooks the fact that, after Ovid, the transliterated *metamorphoses* is accepted as a loanword by Latin.

³² As has been seen, the epitome of Apuleius' principal Greek source also has a double title, Λούκιος ἢ ὄνος (i.e. 'Lucius or ass'). On the question of whether Lucian himself wrote this epitome, see Mason 1994, 1677–1681.

³³ Phot. *Bibl.* Codex 129; Codex 166.111b cf. the subscript on [Lucianus] *Asin.* in Vaticanus 90 ('metamorphoses of Lucius').

Patrae”).³⁴ The revelation that the Greek text’s protagonist is indeed called Lucius of Patrae would bring this ambiguity into sharp focus. The title ‘metamorphoses of Lucius of Patrae’, it turns out, advertises precisely (but unexpectedly) the transformations of Lucius of Patrae, not only from man to ass, but also from (apparent) author to fictive protagonist.

It seems possible that Apuleius has adapted the title of his Greek source, so that ‘metamorphoses of Lucius of Patrae’ becomes ‘metamorphoses of ass of gold’. The first term, *Metamorphoses*, is merely transliterated. The second term, *asini*, is a more complicated transformation of the original ‘Lucius’: Apuleius’ Lucius will, like his prototype, be metamorphosed temporarily into a ‘donkey’; but he is also permanently a fool (which *asinus* can also mean, unlike the Greek word for ‘donkey’, *onos*). Of course, the genitive in Apuleius’ title, like that in his source’s title, would be provocatively ambiguous: just as the Greek *Metamorphoses* purported to be written by its protagonist, ‘Lucius of Patrae’, Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* purports to be written by an ‘ass’.³⁵ Furthermore, *asini* might, at least at first, be read as the genitive of the gentile name *Asinius*, raising the question of who *he* is (*quis ille?*). As only the *praenomen* (Lucius) of Apuleius’ protagonist is ever made explicit in the text, it always remains possible that *Asinius* is Lucius’ *nomen gentilicium*.³⁶ This possibility is recalled near the end of the text (Apul. *Met.* 11,27,7), where Lucius comments explicitly on the relevance to his own metamorphosis (*reformatio mea*) of the name *Asinius* (belonging to an Isiac priest whom Lucius encounters).³⁷ So if the original title of Apuleius’ text were indeed *Metamorphoses Asini Aurei*, it might herald the transformation not only of a man into an *asinus*, but also of a man called (*Lucius*) *Asinius* into Lucius-the-*asinus*.

Three possible options for Apuleius’ title have now been investigated: *Metamorphoses*, or *Asinus aureus*, or a combination of both. If one were forced to choose between the two received titles, *Asinus aureus* should be

³⁴ Cf. Mason 1994, 1669: ‘we must assume that Photios read a text of ‘Metamorphoseis’ in which “Lukios of Patrae” appeared to be the name of both author and narrator.’

³⁵ Apuleius flirts with the possibility of an ass-scribe at Apul. *Met.* 6,25,1. See the excellent discussion of Winkler 1985, 44–45.

³⁶ At [Lucianus] *Asin.* 55, Lucius’ ‘other two names’ (λοιπὰ δύο ὀνόματα) are also notoriously suppressed.

³⁷ If it is correct to identify the author Apuleius with the Ostian houseowner L. Apuleius Marcellus, then the Isiac priest called *Asinius Marcellus* (Apul. *Met.* 11,27,7) is apparently named after an influential Ostian patron and neighbour of Apuleius, Q. *Asinius Marcellus*; see Coarelli 1989, Beck 2000. In this case, the title might also involve a commemorative tribute to Apuleius’ neighbour (‘golden *Asinius*’).

retained as the *lectio difficilior*. Any half-competent editor could easily supply the title *Metamorphoses* simply by reading Apuleius' prologue, or by knowing the title of Apuleius' main Greek source. It will, on the other hand, be amply demonstrated that *Asinus aureus*, while certainly meaningful, is obscure, ludic and paradoxical; and so it is more easily ascribed to the author's playful wit than to a subsequent editor's casual reconstruction.³⁸ To my mind, putting both titles together is the most economical option, as it makes good sense of the double tradition; and, of the many possible permutations for a double title, *Metamorphoses asini aurei* is especially attractive, since its combination of nominative and dependent genitive finds precedent in the title of Apuleius' principal Greek source, 'the *Metamorphoses* of Lucius of Patrae'. Yet no matter whether one opts for a double title or for *Asinus aureus* alone, the titular phrase *asinus aureus* is inextricably associated with transformations; for even if the word *metamorphoses* is not an integral part of the title, transformations and the meaning of *asinus aureus* (*quis ille?*) are both thematised in the prologue. Indeed the phrase *asinus aureus*, like so many other things in Apuleius' text, will be subjected to a series of transformations, lending it different, often unexpected significances. The rest of this paper is concerned with pursuing these significances.

Part 4: 'Long-eared ass'

At the end of a stimulating paper on the thematic importance of ears and hearing to Apuleius' work, James 'mischievously' proposes emending Augustine's *asinus aureus* to *asinus auritus*, 'long-eared ass'.³⁹ James' emendation neatly obviates any difficulties engendered by the epithet *aureus*, and furnishes a perfectly appropriate title for Apuleius' text; it is also palaeographically plausible: Aug. *C.D.* 18,18 *ASINIAURITITITULO* could easily have been subsequently miscopied as *ASINIAUREITITULO* by haplography. Yet this emendation comes with problems of its own: for it seems unlikely that all subsequent editors of Apuleius should have adopted a difficult title (*asinus aureus*) based on a misreading of (or even by) Augustine, in preference to an easily under-

³⁸ Pace Vallette in Robertson-Vallette 1940, xxiv, who argues for the reverse, on the grounds that *Asinus aureus* is 'une désignation simple, claire et populaire' (!?) whereas *Metamorphoses* is 'vague et d'une propriété discutable' (!!??).

³⁹ James 1991, 168f..

stood title (James' *asinus auritus*) inscribed, according to the theory, on the already existing editions of Apuleius' text.

Apuleius' prologue, however, with all its insistence upon 'offences' to language and 'shiftiness of voice' (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,5–6), primes readers to expect a certain linguistic slipperiness. In such an unstable verbal environment, it becomes possible, without any need for James' emendation, to perceive a pun on 'ears' in the titular *asinus aureus*. The Latin words for 'ears' (*ures*) and for 'golden' (*aureus*) are very similar in both their orthography and pronunciation. Thus although the plural noun *aureae* ('reins') is formally indistinguishable from the adjective *aureae* ('golden', feminine plural), the late second century C.E. scholar Festus defines and etymologises it in terms of *ures* ('ears'):

“*Aureae* is what they used to call the reins by which the ears (*ures*) of horses are secured.”
Paul. *Fest.* p.27M⁴⁰

In Apuleius' text, an association between the titular *aureus* and ears is immediately suggested by the reference to *ures* in its very first sentence (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,1). Thereafter, considerable attention is paid to the ears of Lucius (the ass of the title): his human ears (Apul. *Met.* 1,20,6); their transformation into the ears of an ass (3,24,5); his asinine ears (6,32,3; 7,13,3; 7,18,3; 9,4,2; 9,15,6; 9,16,1),⁴¹ and their transformation back into those of a human (11,13,5). This emphasis on Lucius-the-ass' ears invites readers to reinterpret the titular *asinus aureus* as an “ear-y” ass'. After all, the word *aureus* can be described, just like Lucius' transformed ears, as 'ures with extravagant additions' (Apul. *Met.* 3,24,5 *ures immodicis...auctibus*) or as 'ures made abnormal' (11,13,5 *ures enormes*). This aural pun, aptly enough, involves a metamorphosis of the expected meaning of *Asinus aureus*.

⁴⁰ Cf. Paul. *Fest.* 8M s.v. *aureax*. Festus (or indeed his Augustan source, Verrius Flaccus) distinguishes *aureae* from the (better attested) *oreae*, which he defines as reins attached to the *os*, or 'mouth' (Fest. p.182M; Paul. *Fest.* p.8M s.v. *aureax*, 183M). In fact, *aureae* and *oreae* may be alternative spellings of the same word; for the confusion of *au* and (long) *o* in Latin, see Allen 1965, 60-1, and indeed Paul. *Fest.* p.183M.

⁴¹ Other quadrupeds' ears are mentioned at Apul. *Met.* 1,2,3; 2,4,4; 3,26,7; 4,5,2 (another ass); 4,19,5 (dogs are described as *auritos*); 7,16,4. For further miscellaneous references to ears in the text, see 1,3,2; 2,2,6; 2,24,3; 2,30,5; 2,30,6; 2,30,9; 3,16,2; 5,3,5; 5,4,1; 5,5,1; 5,8,1; 5,28,6; 6,9,1; 8,6,4; 8,9,4; 9,14,1; 9,19,3; 10,15,6; 10,28,3; 11,9,6; 11,23,5.

Part 5: Sethian readings of *Asinus aureus*

Several Apuleian scholars have interpreted the title *Asinus aureus* as heralding cryptically the work's surprising Isiac conclusion. The god Seth (or Typhon), who is the enemy of Isis and Osiris, is standardly figured as an ass in the Greco-Roman age. Thus *asinus aureus* can, in the light of the text's dénouement, be reinterpreted as 'Seth aureus'. There are then two different explanations of the meaning of *aureus* in this new Sethian context. The first is provided by Martin (1970), who suggests that it translates the Greek terms *pyrrhos* and *pyrrhochrus*, which Plutarch uses to describe the colour of Seth/Typhon.⁴² Winkler, for one, objects that 'the brilliant yellow hue denoted by *aureus*' is incompatible with the 'dry desert red' of *pyrrhos*;⁴³ but Winkler overlooks the testimony of Aristotle, who states that gold is like fire (*pyr*) insofar as both are *xanthos* and *pyrrhos*.⁴⁴ This assertion both acknowledges the etymology of *pyrrhos* ('fiery', from *pyr*), and plainly attests the propriety of describing gold as *pyrrhos* (as well as *xanthos*; cf. Pi. *O.* 7,49). The association between the colour of gold and of fire is also in evidence in Latin, where *aureus* can describe fire;⁴⁵ and Apuleius himself describes gold as having a 'flaming brilliance' (Apul. *Met.* 9,19,1 *auri...splendor flammæ*).⁴⁶ Thus it appears, *contra* Winkler, that *aureus* is a perfectly acceptable Latin term for Seth/Typhon's Greek epithet, *pyrrhos* (literally 'fiery'); the co-extension of the two terms is confirmed by a pun in Hor. *Carm.* 1,5, where Pyrrha (whose name transliterates the feminine of the Greek *pyrrhos*) is believed by her boyfriend to be 'golden' (1,5,9 *aurea*). In this light it makes good sense that an ass should be described as *aureus*, with particular reference to its colour, given that the overlapping Greek colour term *pyrrhos* is often used to describe animals (see LSJ s.v. πυρρός 3).

The second Sethian explanation of *aureus* is developed by Winkler from Hani.⁴⁷ This complicated reading of the title involves an interlinguistic pun in

⁴² Plu. *Moralia* 362E, 363A.

⁴³ Winkler 1985, 298.

⁴⁴ Arist. *Metaph.* 1054b13; for the proximity of *pyrrhos* to *xanthos*, cf. Gal. *Mixt.* 9,599K and Pl. *Ti.* 68C.

⁴⁵ For *aureus* describing flames or fire, Martin 1970, 349 cites Mart. 14,61 and Catul. 61,98–9. One might add Var. *L.* 7,83, Tiberianus fr. 5, and especially Lucr. 6,205 *color aureus ignis* ('golden colour of fire').

⁴⁶ Cited by Martin 1970, 350.

⁴⁷ Winkler 1985, 312–315; Hani 1973, 276.

both Latin and Egyptian. The principal city of Seth's worship is named in Egyptian *Nbt*, 'Gold City' (i.e. Ombos); accordingly in Egyptian mythology Seth is commonly given the epithet *Nbty*, 'of Gold City'. Since *Nbty* also means 'golden' (from *nb*, 'gold'), 'Seth *Nbty*' means both 'Seth of Gold City' and 'Golden Seth'. Thus *aureus* can be understood to translate Seth's epithet *nbty*.⁴⁸ According to these interrelated 'Egyptianising' interpretations of *Asinus aureus*, Apuleius' title encodes (for those in the know) not only the protagonist's transformation into an ass, but also into the asinine embodiment of 'golden' Seth, the arch enemy of the goddess Isis with whom Lucius is ultimately reconciled in Book Eleven.

Part 6: A golden(-haired) ass

It has already been seen that *aureus* can be used as a term denoting colour.⁴⁹ The only internal evidence of Lucius' colour is Byrrhaena's description of his hair as *flavus* (Apul. *Met.* 2,2,9 *flavum et inadfectatum capillitium*). Given the conventional synecdoche in Latin whereby persons with *flavus* hair can themselves be described as *flavus* or *flava*,⁵⁰ Lucius himself can properly be designated *flavus*. This description might even be imagined to extend to Lucius after he has been transformed into an ass.⁵¹ The *condition* of Lucius' hair is the first change mentioned in the account of both his metamorphosis into an ass and his subsequent anamorphosis into human form;⁵² yet there is no indication that the *colour* of his hair has also changed. Animals certainly can be *flavus*.⁵³ One especially pertinent example is found in Ovid's description of the centaur Chiron, half man, half horse, where it is specifically his latter, equine half which is *flavus* (Ov. *Fast.* 5,379f.). That *flavus* can be used to describe the

⁴⁸ A similar (mis)translation of Seth's Egyptian epithet may also underlie Plutarch's designation of him as *pyrrhos* (Plu. *Moralia* 362E, 363A).

⁴⁹ See above, Part 5; see also Gel. 2,26,5.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Catul. 64,98; 68,130; Verg. *G.* 4,339; Hor. *C.* 2,4,14; 3,9,19; 4,4,4; Ov. *Am.* 1,1,7f.; 1,13,2; 1,15,35; 2,4,39; 3,7,23; Ov. *Met.* 3,617; 9,715. Cf. the use of 'blonde' in English.

⁵¹ For the retention of colour after metamorphosis, see e.g. Ov. *Met.* 1,236-237; 1,743; 9,320-321; 11,404-405; 14,555.

⁵² Apul. *Met.* 3,24,4; 11,13,3; cf. also 10,15,3 for changes in the 'lustre' (*nitor*) of Lucius' hair.

⁵³ E.g. Col. 8,2,9 (a rooster's hackle); Stat. *Theb.* 4,154f. (lions' skins), *Silv.* 1,2,226 (fawn-skin); Cassius Felix 5 (fox hair).

colour of animal as well as human hair is confirmed by the second appearance of the word in Apuleius' text: when Photis tries to deceive her mistress Pamphile, the hairs from goatskins (*utres caprini*) which she substitutes for the hairs of a Boeotian man are '*flavus*-coloured and therefore just like that young Boeotian' (Apul. *Met.* 3,17,2 *capillos...flavos ac per hoc illi Boeotio iuveni consimiles*).

It therefore seems that Lucius, both as (foolish) human and as ass, might properly be described as *asinus flavus*. This is only a slight transformation of Apuleius' title, since the use of *flavus* as an exact synonym of *aureus* is well attested.⁵⁴ The equivalence of *flavus* to the colour of gold is foregrounded by the third use of the term in Apuleius' text: a tuft of golden fleece (called *coma*, or 'hair', at Apul. *Met.* 6,11,6) which Psyche fetches for Venus is expressly described as 'soft *flavus*-coloured gold' (6,13,1 *flaventis auri mollities*). And just as gold can be described as *flavus*-coloured, hair can be described as 'golden';⁵⁵ thus Cupid is said to have hair with a 'golden sheen' (Apul. *Met.* 5,30,6 *comas...aureo nitore.*; cf. 5,22,4); and Lucius' eulogy on hair singles out its 'pleasing colour and brilliant sheen' which is at times 'flashing with gold' (Apul. *Met.* 2,9,1f. *capillis color gratus et nitor splendidus illucet...nunc aurum coruscans...*). So, Lucius, the ass of the title, who has *flavus*-coloured hair, might be described as *aureus*.⁵⁶ It is the colour of Lucius' hair (and perhaps also his bristles) which brings meaning to the titular phrase *Asinus aureus*.⁵⁷

This reading suggests that the text's title, or *nomen*, is derived from a quadruped (*asinus*) and its colour (*aureus*). An incident late in the text dramatises precisely how a quadruped's colour can prove interchangeable with a

⁵⁴ *Flavus* is used, e.g., to describe the colour of gold itself (Verg. *A.* 1,592-593); of gold coins (Mart. 14,12,1f.; note especially 12,65,6, where *flavus* is used substantively to replace *aureus*, 'gold coin'); and of the hair of Pyrrha (Hor. *Carm.* 1,5,4), whose very name is a Greek colour term which can describe gold (see above, Part 5), and who is herself described as *aurea* (Hor. *Carm.* 1,5,9),

⁵⁵ For *aureus* used of hair, see e.g. Ov. *Am.* 1,4,9-10; Ov. *Met.* 12,395-396; and note the compound *auricomus* (Verg. *A.* 6,141; V.Fl. 4,92; Sil. 3,608).

⁵⁶ Lucius Verus, who was Marcus Aurelius' coemperor 161-169 C.E. (during Apuleius' lifetime), and whose name, significantly for Apuleius' text, means 'the Real Lucius', also apparently had hair with a *flavus/aureus* connection. According to the historian Julius Capitolinus, Lucius Verus 'is said to have taken such great care of his *flavus*-coloured hair, that he would sprinkle shavings of gold (*aurum*) on his head, in order that his brightened hair might seem all the more *flavus*' (SHA *Verus* 10,7); I am indebted to Eric Varner for this reference.

⁵⁷ For the general significance of hair as a motif in the *Golden Ass*, see Englert-Long 1973.

nomen: Lucius is perplexed by a dream promising the return of a slave ‘Candidus by name’ (Apul. *Met.* 11,20,1 *nomine Candidum*), especially since he is quite certain that he has never had a slave with such a name (11,20,2). The solution to this onomastic riddle soon emerges: the slave named Candidus turns out to be Lucius’ horse, which is *candidus*, or ‘white’, in colour (11,20,7 *equum...colore candidum*). In fact the horse’s white colour has been known all along: right at the beginning of the narrative it was designated as ‘all white’ (Apul. *Met.* 1,2,2 *equo indigena peralbo*), and it was later casually described (or even possibly named) as *candidus* (7,2,1). Thus the horse’s colour has given rise to its *nomen* (*Candidus*) in Lucius’ riddling dream. Similarly, it is the colour of Lucius-the-ass’ hair, said to be *flavus* early in the text (Apul. *Met.* 2,2,9), which helps to explain his *nomen* (*asinus aureus*), presented as a riddle in the text’s title.⁵⁸

Part 7: Antiphrastic advertisement for an *un*-golden ass

Is there an *asinus* in Apuleius’ text which is ever, in any straightforward material sense, ‘golden’? James complains that there are only four passages in the entire text where the ass-protagonist is directly associated with gold:⁵⁹

- 1) Charite promises to adorn Lucius with golden medallions (Apul. *Met.* 6,28,6);
- 2) Lucius is laden with treasure, including gold, seized from the robbers (Apul. *Met.* 7,13,6);
- 3) a stolen golden goblet is found, which Lucius has been inadvertently carrying on his back (Apul. *Met.* 9,10,1; cf. 9,9,5);⁶⁰

⁵⁸ The name of Achilles’ immortal horse *Xanthos* (Hom. *Il.* 16,149) is expressly connected by Eustathius (ad *Il.* 1,197) with the *xanthos* colour of its hair; and the colour *xanthos*, like *pyrrhos* and *flavus*, conforms to the colour of gold (see above, Part 5). Thus *Xanthos* from Homer is Apuleius’ prime literary model for a quadruped named after the ‘golden’ colour of its hair. Lucius also inherits from Homer’s *Xanthos* his ability (unusual for a quadruped) to show a tearful expression (Apul. *Met.* 11,1,4 *lacrimoso vultu*; cf. Hom. *Il.* 17,427 and 437-440).

⁵⁹ James 1991, 169.

⁶⁰ As it happens, *onos*, the Greek word for ‘ass’, is also used to mean ‘goblet’: see Ar. *V.* 616-7; Posid. fr.2 (*FgrHist* iii,225); cf. *PA* 14,28,1-2 (with Buffière 1970, 174 n.10). So it seems that Apuleius’ references here to a ‘golden goblet’ (Apul. *Met.* 9,9,5 *aureum cantharum*; 9,10,1 *aureum...cantharum*) might involve a riddling evocation (and transformation) of the titular ‘golden ass(-goblet)’. His description of another ‘golden goblet’ as ‘carefully polished’ (10,16,19 *lautum diligenter ecce illum aureum cantharum*) might re-

- 4) Thiasus decks out Lucius with valuable trappings, including golden disks, for a triumphant return to Corinth (Apul. *Met.* 10,18,4).

James' claim is that these examples are too few, and too vague, to justify acceptance of the title *Asinus aureus*. They do not, as it were, fit the bill. Yet the very conspicuousness with which the protagonist fails to be golden can equally be regarded as a reason to retain *Asinus aureus*.⁶¹ Apuleius' work constantly keeps in play the initial expectation of its title and yet at the same time assiduously frustrates that very expectation.⁶² There are many passages in the text which teasingly draw special attention both to the title *Asinus aureus* and to Lucius' failure to live up to it.

In Book Three, for example, the magistrates of Hypata offer to honour Lucius with a commemorative statue:

“And the whole city...has decreed that your likeness be set up in bronze
(*in aere staret imago tua*).”Apul. *Met.* 3,11,5

This decree to make an *imago* of Lucius recalls, and promises to fulfil, the prologue's advertisement of men transformed into other *imagines* (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,2). Yet the title's promise of gold is markedly frustrated, as the magistrates are expressly proposing to represent the form of Lucius (the titular ass) in bronze. Thus, the *asinus aureus* announced by the title has here been downgraded to an *asinus aereus*. This is precisely a transformation of the expected 'golden ass'.

Of course monetary transactions in the Roman empire are measured in metal: 250 (copper) *asses* = 100 (copper alloy) *sestertii* = 25 (silver) *denarii* = 1 (golden) *aureus*.⁶³ Thus the 'gold' in Apuleius' title might allude to financial

fer as much to the literary refinement of the 'Golden Ass', as it does to the rinsed sheen of the golden vessel.

⁶¹ Cf. Genette 1997, 82f. On the type of thematic title which 'functions by antiphrasis, or irony, either because the title forms an antithesis to the work...or because the title displays a provocative absence of thematic relevance...The non-relevance also may be only apparent...'

⁶² A similar titular flirtation is to be found in Lucian's narrative entitled 'True stories'. For while its historical form continuously evokes the meaning of its title, its patently fictitious content exposes the inappropriateness of its title. This is an amusing, and thoroughly acceptable, incongruity.

⁶³ Apuleius himself apparently had a keen interest in the history of monetary conversions: (Prisc. in *G.L.* 2,250f.) 'Apuleius says in the *Epitome*: "But at that time a *sestertius* was

transaction;⁶⁴ and episodes in the text which involve monetary exchange have the potential to explain the title *Asinus aureus*, because any ‘ass’ can be said to be ‘golden’ if its price is at least an *aureus*.⁶⁵ One such episode, in which the title *Asinus aureus* at first seems to be played out in terms of monetary value, but is then repeatedly disappointed, comes long before Lucius himself has metamorphosed into asinine form. At Apul. *Met.* 1,24,3f Lucius sees some fish on sale for 100 *sestertii*. The price is striking, both because it is the first explicit price found in the text, and because it amounts to exactly one *aureus*, corresponding to the value quoted in the title. The type of fish on sale for an *aureus* is not specified in the text, but as it happens, there is a common fish known to the ancients as an ‘ass’: the Greeks named it simply *onos*, ‘ass’ (LSJ s.v. ὄνος II), while the Romans called it *asellus*, the diminutive of *asinus* (OLD s.v. *asellus* 3).⁶⁶ Apuleius, who wrote books on fish in both Greek (*Apol.* 36,8; 37,4; 38,1–4) and Latin (*Apol.* 38,5–9), and who took special pride in his ability to find Latin translations for the Greek names of fish (*Apol.* 38,5–9), was certainly familiar with the fish called ‘ass’ (*Apol.* 40,11 *aselli piscis*). So readers who are eager to identify the puzzling ‘golden ass’ of Apuleius’ title might well imagine (at least momentarily) that the fish on sale for an *aureus* at Apul. *Met.* 1,24,3f is an ‘ass’. For Apuleius appears to be exploiting the possibility that an ‘ass’ can be a type of fish:⁶⁷ the scene in which a fish is sold for exactly one *aureus* dangles before the reader a possible solution to the riddling title.⁶⁸ Lucius, however, in keeping with his status as a business-

worth a *dipondium* and a half *as*, a *quinarius* was worth five *asses*, and a *denarius* was worth ten *asses*.”

⁶⁴ Similarly, four of Varro's *Menippeae* have titles which refer to monetary value and financial exchange: i) *Magnum Talentum*; ii) *Sexagessis* (‘Worth sixty copper halfpennies’); iii) *Octogessis* [περὶ νομισμάτων] (‘Worth eighty copper halfpennies [On coinages]’); iv) *Sardi venales* (‘Sardinians for sale’); cf. Plautus *Trinummus*.

⁶⁵ While *aureus* does not usually denote ‘worth an *aureus*’, in a monetary context it can certainly carry that connotation: note especially the opening pitch of Plin. *Ep.* 2,20,1: ‘Have your *as* ready and you’ll get a story worth gold (*auream fabulam*)...’, which plays on the contrast between *as* and *aureus*.

⁶⁶ For a detailed account of the fish called *onos/asellus*, see Thompson 1947, 182–183.

⁶⁷ The ambiguity whereby *onos/asellus* can refer to both a donkey and a type of fish is also exploited by Petr. 24,7 (see Sullivan 1968, 225) and by a Greek ‘ass’ riddle (*PA* 14,28, with Buffière 1970, 47–48 and 174).

⁶⁸ It is perhaps relevant to Apuleius’ *Asinus aureus* that Plin. *Nat.* 9.58 lists alongside the fish *asellus* another fish called *aurata* (so-named for its golden colour; see Fest. p.182M, Paul. *Fest.* p.183M, s.v. *orata*). For that matter, Aus. *Mos.* 120f mentions a type of fish

man (Apul. *Met.* 1,2,1), quickly haggles the price of the fish down to twenty *denarii*. Thus just at the moment where Apuleius' mysterious title seems about to be realised in the text, his foolish protagonist rejects its 'golden' price, cheapening, so to speak, the value promised by his own text's title.

In the sequel to this episode, when Lucius' old schoolfriend Pythias, now an officious market inspector in Hypata, hears the price which Lucius has paid for his fish, he marches back to the fishmonger and berates him:

“So now...you do not even spare my friends or indeed any visitors, in that you mark up worthless fish at such high prices (*tam magnis pretiis pisces frivolos indicatis*)...”
Apul. *Met.* 1,25,3

Pythias' words here are applicable as much to Apuleius himself as to the fishmonger (note the second plural endings). Just as the fishmonger advertises fish, Apuleius advertises *Asinus* (which can be a type of fish, *onos/asellus*). Just as the fishmonger is accused of attaching an artificially high price to his fish which is not reflected by the quality of the product itself, Apuleius prices his *Asinus* with the value *aureus*. Thus Pythias' words can be taken as humorously reflexive, alluding to the false gleam of gold in Apuleius' title. In any case, the possibility that *Asinus aureus* might be explained as 'golden fish' ends up being nothing more than a red herring.

Once Lucius has been literally transformed into an ass, he becomes a commodity himself. Each time he is passed from one master to another, he is assigned a different monetary value. Thus as the ass-protagonist's price shifts, his progress towards becoming, as it were, 'golden' (i.e. towards becoming worth no less than an *aureus*), can be accurately gauged:

a) Apul. *Met.* 8,23,6a professional auctioneer expresses his readiness to give Lucius away for nothing.

b) Apul. *Met.* 8,24,3: the auctioneer talks up Lucius' worth and (8,25,6) sells him to the priest Philebus for 17 *denarii* (c. two thirds of an *aureus*).

c) Apul. *Met.* 9,10,5 the miller buys Lucius 'for seven *nummi* more than Philebus had previously paid for me'. The word *nummi* is ambiguous: it could

called *Lucius* (see Thompson 1947, 151–152); Apuleius' protagonist is first explicitly named Lucius in the course of the fish episode (Apul. *Met.* 1,24,6).

refer either to *sestertii* or to *denarii*.⁶⁹ If the former, Lucius has progressed to 75 *sestertii* (three quarters of an *aureus*); if the latter, he has progressed to a staggering 24 *denarii*. On this reading, Lucius-the-ass is but a single *denarius* short of being worth an *aureus*, and so tantalisingly close, but not quite close enough, to fulfilling the promise of his title. This is that rare phenomenon, an accounting joke.

d) Apul. *Met.* 9,31,3: a gardener buys Lucius for fifty *nummi*. Given the emphasis on the gardener's excessive poverty (9,31,3; 9,32,3–4) this must surely mean 50 *sestertii* (half an *aureus*).

e) Apul. *Met.* 10,13,2: we are told rather emphatically that although Lucius cost the soldier absolutely nothing (*sine pretio*), he is sold on to Thiasus' slaves for 11 *denarii* (under half an *aureus*).

f) Apul. *Met.* 10,17,1: Thiasus purchases Lucius from his slaves for four times what they paid (*servis suis emptoribus meis iubet quadruplum restitui pretium*); this is 44 *denarii* (nearly two *aurei*).

It is only near the end of his adventures, in this last transaction, that Lucius-the-ass brings the golden price promised by the title.⁷⁰ Yet under the ownership of Thiasus, when Lucius' monetary value has reached its highest point, his moral value plummets to its lowest point: he becomes a prostitute to the Corinthian matron, and is assigned to perform a public act of sex with a convicted mass murderer, before at last fleeing to the salvation of a goddess. So the 'golden' value of the ass, when it is finally attained, is immediately called into question and found somewhat wanting. Indeed, the title's promise of an ass which is golden in value proves to be, for the most part, nothing more than the seductive hook of an author with something to sell: a deliberately hyped advertisement of dodgy goods worth less than their stated price.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Hijmans et al. 1985, 220 interprets *nummi* here as *denarii*, with references; Hijmans et al. 1995, 270 reinterprets *nummi* here as *sestertii*, with different references. The jury is still out.

⁷⁰ In fact there are two further values, this time unspecified, which attach to Lucius: the curious pay Lucius' overseer 'not inconsiderable' sums to see the ass' antics (Apul. *Met.* 10,19,1 *non mediocri quaestui*; 10,19,2 *non parvas summulas*); and finally the Corinthian matron pays the overseer 'large' sums for the opportunity of intercourse with the ass (10,19,4 *grandi...praemio*; 10,23,1 *mercedes amplissimas*). In both these cases, the specific prices involved remain a mystery.

⁷¹ Cf. the smooth patter employed by the professional auctioneer to sell *his* worthless ass at Apul. *Met.* 8,24,3f..

Part 8: 'Gold debased with bronze'

Besides its function as an adjective, the masculine of *aureus* can be a substantive: an *aureus* (sc. *nummus*, 'coin') is a Roman coin, minted from gold. Seeing that elsewhere in Apuleius' text *aureus* is often used substantively to denote this gold coin, it is worthwhile considering what the title might signify if its masculine *aureus* is likewise a substantive.⁷² This would necessitate reading *asinus* as an adjective. Apuleius' prologue prompts the reader to expect verbal shiftiness and deviation from linguistic norms (Apul. *Met.* 1,1,5–6), so one need not feel too concerned that there is in fact no adjective *asinus* attested in Latin.⁷³ If *aureus* is construed as a substantive, then it evokes the most valuable coin in Roman currency; in this monetary context, *asinus* can readily be construed as an adjective formed from *as*, the word for a humble copper coin whose worthlessness was proverbial (see OLD s.v. *as* 2).⁷⁴ This 'coined' adjective would mean something like 'made of a bronze penny'. Thus the paradoxical *asinus aureus* would denote a gold coin that is debased with bronze, or counterfeit.

Three factors make such a reading of the title pertinent to the overall text. The first is that the Latin word family used to denote debased or counterfeit metals and coins (*adulter-*) also denotes sexual adultery, which is a central motif of Apuleius' text. Apuleius employs *adulter-*words almost exclusively to refer to his characters' sexual infidelities;⁷⁵ but three exceptions highlight the word's alternative meaning 'counterfeit', thus associating *adulter-*cognates with the title's punning announcement of debased metals:

⁷² *Aureus* is used substantively by Apuleius at Apul. *Met.* 2,22,5; 2,26,5; 7,4,2; 7,8,2; 9,18,4; 10,9,3; 10,12,4; *aureus* is conjoined to the noun *nummus* at 4,8,2; 9,19,4.

⁷³ The noun *asinus* is modified with an adverb, *as though* it were an adjective, at Apul. *Met.* 7,21,1 (*nimis asinum*); 10,13,7 (*tam...vere asinus*); see Hijmans et al. 1981, 216 ad loc.; Zimmerman 2000, 209 ad loc..

⁷⁴ In Latin, *-inus* is a productive adjectival suffix (cf., e.g., *asin-inus*). Compounds formed from *as* have a double 's' (*assiforanus*, *assipondium*), so that one might expect *assinus* rather than *asinus*; but Ahl 1985, 57 states as one of his principles of punning in Latin: 'The fact that one word has a doubled consonant and the other only a single consonant does not prevent wordplay'.

⁷⁵ *Adulter-* words used in the text to denote sexual infidelity: Apul. *Met.* 2,27,5; 2,29,5; 6,13,3; 6,22,4; 6,23,2; 7,16,3; 7,22,2; 8,3,1; 9,4,4; 9,5,2; 9,5,6; 9,7,5; 9,7,6; 9,15,4; 9,21,2; 9,22,3; 9,22,5; 9,22,6; 9,23,2; 9,24,1; 9,27,2; 9,27,4; 9,28,3; 9,28,4; 9,31,1; 10,22,4.

1) At Apul. *Met.* 4,16,2 robbers trick Demochares ‘with that “adulterated” letter’ (*cum litteris illis adulterinis*). In context *adulterinus* clearly means ‘counterfeit’ (cf. 4,16,1 *litteras adfingimus*, ‘we make up a letter’).⁷⁶

2) At Apul. *Met.* 6,13,3 Venus declares: *nec me praeterit huius quoque facti auctor adulterinus*. Kenney rightly detects an ambiguity in these words, which he says can mean both ‘I know who is the licentious agent behind this deed too’ (where *adulterinus* denotes infidelity) or ‘It does not escape me that the doer of this deed too is not the real one’ (where *adulterinus* denotes counterfeit).⁷⁷

3) Most telling, however, are the words uttered by the cunning doctor of Book Ten:

ne forte aliquis...istorum quos offers aureorum nequam vel adulter reperiatur...
Apul. *Met.* 10,9,3

“lest any of those golden coins which you offer should be found worthless or counterfeit...”.

Here the doctor uses *aureus* substantively to mean ‘gold coin’, and describes this gold coin with adjectives meaning ‘counterfeit’ or ‘debased’. This is a studied reflection of the titular *Asinus aureus* in its transfigured sense ‘gold coin debased with bronze’; indeed, it directs the reader towards just such an interpretation of the title. Furthermore, by using the word *adulter* to denote monetary debasement, this passage (which comes in a tale concerned with sexual adultery) subtly shifts the terms of the title: *Asinus aureus* has come to signify not only a ‘gold coin debased with bronze’, but also *adulterium* more generally. Given the thematic prominence of adultery in this text, it is only appropriate that it should be advertised in the title. It need hardly be added that *adulterium*, as its etymology suggests (*ad* + *alter*, ‘to’ + ‘other’), is itself a variety of metamorphosis.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ This can be read as a metaliterary reference to Apuleius’ own written text (*litterae*), which is itself ‘adulterous’ in three respects: 1) it is fictive (‘counterfeit’, like the thieves’ letters); 2) it includes many tales of adultery; 3) its title, *Asinus aureus*, alludes punningly to *adulterium*.

⁷⁷ Kenney 1990, 208 ad loc.. In context Venus is stating her awareness of Cupid’s hand in Psyche’s successes; but the phrase *facti auctor adulterinus* can also be understood to refer to Apuleius himself, the overall *auctor* who counterfeits what happens in the story.

⁷⁸ See e.g. Ov. *Fast.* 1,373 *ille* (sc. Proteus) *sua faciem transformis adulterat arte*.

A second reason for reading *Asinus aureus* as ‘gold coin debased with bronze’ is that counterfeit coinage can be used as a metaphor for fiction. Thus Lucian advises historians to avoid writing ‘outright fiction’ (τὸ κομιδῆ μῦθῶδες) in their texts, on the grounds that critical readers of history

“examine each expression like money-changers (ἀργυραμοιβικῶς), rejecting at once what is counterfeit (παρακεκομμένα), but accepting what is approved and legal tender, correctly minted (τὰ δόκιμα καὶ ἔννομα καὶ ἀκριβῆ τὸν τύπον)...” Lucianus *Hist. Conscr.* 10

So Apuleius’ title, when construed as referring to a counterfeit gold coin, is a ‘brazen’ advertisement of the ‘debased’ fiction to come. *Caveat emptor*.

The third reason for reading *Asinus aureus* as ‘the debasement of gold with bronze’, like the second, involves a metaphor for fiction. There was a highly valued alloy of gold, silver and bronze known as ‘Corinthian bronze’ (*aes Corinthium*). The production of genuine Corinthian bronze ceased with the sack of Corinth in 146 B.C.E.;⁷⁹ yet by Apuleius’ time a number of myths about the treasured alloy and its origins had seized the popular imagination. In one such myth, transmitted by Pliny (Plin. *Nat.* 34,6, this amalgam of metals emerged by accident in the conflagration which followed the capture of Corinth. In Petronius’ *Satyrica*, the character Trimalchio tells a humorously garbled version of this myth:

“When Troy was captured, Hannibal, a crafty man and a great trickster, heaped up all the statues, bronze and golden and silver, onto the one pyre and set fire to them; they unified into a hotchpotch of bronze. So craftsmen took pieces out of this lump and made bowls and plates and statuettes. That’s how Corinthian bronzes were produced, from the whole lot joined together, neither one kind nor the other.” Petr. 50,5–6

This is an extraordinarily reflexive passage:⁸⁰ the origins of Corinthian bronze, described as a confused amalgam of disparate elements, are presented in a speech which is itself a confused amalgam of disparate elements; and Trimalchio’s speech appears in a text which is in its turn a confused amalgam of dis-

⁷⁹ See Emanuele 1989

⁸⁰ Cf. Connors 1998, 21: ‘this story of Corinthian bronze has a programmatic or metapoetic significance’.

parate elements. If the title *Asinus aureus* is interpreted as denoting a bronze/gold amalgam, Apuleius might be following Petronius in using a prized metal alloy as a powerful metaphor for the heterogeneous, syncretic nature of his prose fiction, where myth and history, the high and the low, the valuable and the frivolous, all amalgamate into something precious and ingenious. How appropriate, then, that Lucius-the-ass should finally achieve his miraculous reintegration and conversion in, of all places, Corinth – the city where gold and bronze were transformed into a perfect unity.

Part 9: The entomological subtext ('insects in chrysalis')

The important rôle and unifying significance of insects in Apuleius' text have not been properly recognised. In this last section I shall trace the complex network of references to insects (the entomological subtext), and then consider what further light they cast on the metamorphoses of Psyche and of Lucius, and on the interpretation of Apuleius' title.

Several of Apuleius' characters are endowed with names which have entomological associations. The first such character encountered in the text is the witch Pamphile, who has two connections with the insect world. The first is her name:⁸¹ both Aristotle and Pliny, in their discussion of the metamorphic stages of the silk-moth, describe how the worms' cocoons can be unravelled and rewoven into silk;⁸² they ascribe the invention of this process to the daughter of Plateas of Cos, who is called Pamphile. There is a ludic correspondence between Apuleius' and Aristotle's respective Pamphiles: for just as Apuleius' witch can magically transform human appearance into the guise of animals, her namesake famously dressed humans in a fabric woven from insects. The second association of Apuleius' Pamphile with insects is opened up by the fact that her husband is called Milo: for, according to Iamblichus, the wife of (another) Milo, the famous athlete of Croton, was called Myia, which

⁸¹ For other Pamphiles, without entomological associations, who may also have influenced Apuleius' choice of the name, see Bitel 2000, 68 n.171.

⁸² Arist. *HA* 551b Plin. *Nat.* 11.76. Silk clothing features in Apuleius' text at *Apul. Met.* 4,8,2 *vestisque serica et intextae filis aureis*; 4,31,7 *serico tegmine*; 6,28,6 *sinu serico*; 8,27,1 *bombycinis iniecti*; 8,27,3 *serico...amiculo*; 10,34,4 *veste serica*; 11,8,2 *serica veste*.

is Greek for a ‘fly’;⁸³ and elsewhere in Apuleius’ text it is revealed that Thesalian witches (like Milo’s wife) can take on the form of ‘birds, and in turn dogs and mice and – what is more – even flies’ (Apul. *Met.* 2,22,3).

The famous tale which spans the three central books of Apuleius’ text is dominated by a rather less obscure insect-character. This tale’s protagonist is called Psyche, which is of course the Greek word for ‘soul’;⁸⁴ but it is also Greek for the insect ‘butterfly’.⁸⁵ Indeed, Schlam shows that from as early as the fifth century B.C.E. Psyche was being portrayed in the plastic arts with the wings of a butterfly.⁸⁶ By the time Apuleius wrote his work, the iconography of Psyche as a girl with butterfly wings had become completely conventionalised, so that Apuleius’ readers would be culturally predisposed to associate Psyche with the insect which shared her name in Greek.

The characters with the most obvious entomological associations of all both appear in the same adultery tale in Book Nine. The tale is introduced by its narrator with the question:

“Do you know a certain Barbarus, an alderman of our town, whom the people call Scorpio because of the fierceness of his character?”

Apul. *Met.* 9,17,1

Apart from the priest Asinius Marcellus (Apul. *Met.* 11,27,7), Barbarus is the only human character in Apuleius’ text to be endowed with more than one name;⁸⁷ and his nickname, Scorpio, is lent great emphasis because it is not

⁸³ Iamb. *VP* 267; Pythagoras was the father of this Myia (Clem.Al. *Strom.* 4,19,121; Porph. *VP* 3; Lucianus *Musc.Enc*; Suid. s.v. Theano and Myia), no doubt naming her after an insect because of his theories of metempsychosis. For the relevance of Pythagorean metempsychosis to the theme of metamorphosis, see Ov. *Met.* 15,60-478. Apuleius also refers respectfully to Pythagoras in his final book (Apul. *Met.* 11,1,4 *divinus ille Pythagoras*).

⁸⁴ Kenney 1990, 16 lists several appearances in the text of etymological puns which underline the derivation of Psyche from ‘soul’, marking the tale as an allegory of the soul: Apul. *Met.* 5,6,7; 5,6,9; 5,13,4.

⁸⁵ *Psyche* = ‘butterfly’: Arist. *HA* 551a14; 551a24; Thphr. *HP* 2,4,4; Plu. *Moralia* 636C; cf. Beavis 1988, 121f..

⁸⁶ Schlam, 1992, 90–1.

⁸⁷ Tlepolemus merely pretends to have a different name at Apul. *Met.* 7,5,6. Divine characters, who should be distinguished from human characters, go by many different names (6,4,1f.; 11,2,1f.; 11,5,1f.).

merely stated, but also explained.⁸⁸ Here Apuleius explicitly informs his readers that Scorpio is a *redende Name*, derived from the proverbially aggressive scorpion. Of course, according to ancient taxonomy, scorpions are insects.⁸⁹ Several lines later it is revealed that Barbarus/Scorpio's slave is called Myrmex (Apul. *Met.* 9,17,3); this name is the Greek for 'ant', another insect.⁹⁰

The presence in the text of four characters who are linked by name to insects (including the central figure Psyche) suggests that entomology may be something of a leitmotif – a system of signification deeply encoded within Apuleius' text. To appreciate the range of meaningful associations which this entomological subtext brings to Apuleius' text and its title, it will first be necessary to consider ancient theories of insects and their generation. Aristotle describes the life-cycle of insects in his work *de Generatione Animalium*:

“Insects first produce a larva; the larva develops and becomes egg-like (for what is called a ‘chrysalis’ is in effect an egg); then from this an animal is born which, in its third metamorphic stage, has achieved the perfection of its birth (ἐν τῇ τρίτῃ μεταβολῇ λαβὼν τὸ τῆς γενέσεως τέλος).”
Arist. *GA* 733b12f

Aristotle clearly thinks that there are three distinct stages in the generation of insects.⁹¹ In a subsequent, more detailed discussion of insects, Aristotle says that the second stage is clearly observable (δῆλον) in the case of bees, wasps

⁸⁸ Apuleius appears to delight in (multiple) explanations of nicknames. In the *Apologia*, he cites and explains two separate nicknames for Aemilianus: ‘Mezentius’ (Apul. *Apol.* 56,7) and ‘Charon’ (Apul. *Apol.* 23,7; 56,7). The latter nickname is explained as alluding not only to the undeserved legacies which Aemilianus has gained from the many deaths of his relatives, but also to his frightful visage and temperament.

⁸⁹ Arist. *HA* 555af and Plin. *Nat.* 11,86f & 11,100 include scorpions in their treatment of insects.

⁹⁰ Though renowned for his faithfulness (Apul. *Met.* 9,17,3), Myrmex becomes the perfidious pimp of his master's wife. This radical metamorphosis of Myrmex's character is brought about by the seductive gleam of ‘gold coins’, or *aurei* (9,18,4–19,4) – as advertised by the title. Hijmans 1978, 111 and n.32 rightly draws attention to the association of Myrmex's name with the mythical *myrmex chrysoorychos* (‘gold-digging ant’) of Hdt. 3,102 et al.; for which, see Beavis 1988, 209f.

⁹¹ Cf. Arist. *GA* 759a3 τριγενῆ... (‘thrice-born’); *GA* 758b27. Modern entomology identifies these three stages as larva, pupa and imago respectively; while these terms derive from Latin, they are not so used in the ancient world.

and caterpillars (Arist. *GA* 758b19);⁹² but nonetheless he states that in theory this tripartite life-cycle holds true for *all* insects without exception (Arist. *GA* 758b6f.; cf. *HA* 551a26f.). The transitions of insects from one life phase to the next are described either as births (γένεσις/γένεσθαι/τριγενή) or, more importantly, as metamorphoses.⁹³

Several considerations make this entomological theory highly relevant to a reading of Apuleius' text. First, it has already been argued that Apuleius' text most probably had a double title, part of which concerns metamorphoses. Apuleius' prologue then picks up this theme and takes it further, expressly promising metamorphoses which will have three distinct stages:

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
<i>Figuras fortunasque hominum</i>	<i> in alias imagines conversas</i>	<i> et in se rursus...refectas</i>
		<i>Apul. Met. 1,1,2</i>

“People’s figures and fortunes | transformed into other images | and returned again to themselves”

The life-cycle of insects, as has been seen, provides an observable model not only for metamorphoses in general, but for tripartite metamorphoses in particular. The third stage of an insect's cycle is not in fact the same as the first, so that an insect does not, strictly speaking, return to itself (*in se rursus*). Nor, however, are Apuleius' characters restored to exactly the same status as they had at the beginning: Psyche is not returned to her homeland and her parents as the virgin she was, but is instead immortalised in heaven, becoming a wife and a mother (Apul. *Met.* 6,23,5–24,4); and Lucius is not, in the end, a businessman travelling through Greece, as he was at the beginning (Apul. *Met.* 1,2,1), but an Isiac priest settled in Rome (Apul. *Met.* 11,30,4–5). Insects, it seems, offer a more precise model for the tripartite metamorphoses in the text than the simpler tripartite process outlined in the text's prologue.

Entomology also furnishes a context for understanding the 'ass' of Apuleius' title. There are several insects which go by the name 'ass' in the ancient

⁹² Similarly Ovid states that the transformation of larvae into woven cocoons and thence into butterflies is 'a thing subject to observation' (Ov. *Met.* 15, 373 *res observata*).

⁹³ Insects are metamorphic: Arist. *GA* 733b16 μεταβολή; *GA* 758b14 τὸ ὅλον μεταβάλλειν, 'total transformation'; *HA* 553a10 μεταβολαί; *HA* 551b13 ἐν ἕξ δὲ μηνὶ μεταβάλλει ταύτας τὰς μορφὰς πάσας, 'in six months it goes through all these changes in shape'; Plin. *Nat.* 11,120 *mutationes et in alias figuras transitus*; Ov. *Met.* 15,373–4 *agrestes tineae...ferali mutant cum papilione figuram*.

world. For example, the Greek word for ‘ass’, *onos*, and its diminutive, *oniscos*, is used to refer to a kind of pill bug. Most of the references to this insect are preserved in technical or medical texts,⁹⁴ but one telling exception suggests that usage of the word was not restricted to specialists: a fragment from the tragedian Sophocles uses the ‘ass’-insect as the vehicle of a simile:

“rolled up like a pea-like ‘ass’” [= ‘pill-woodlouse’; cf. Hsch. and Phot. s.v. ὄνος ἰσόσπριος.] S. Fr. 363

This insect is also known to writers in Latin. Pliny preserves the Greek diminutive in a Latinised form, *oniscus* (Plin. *Nat.* 29,136; 30,53; 30,68); and later glossarists and medical writers use the Latin diminutive *asellus* to refer to the same creature.⁹⁵ It seems plausible that Apuleius’ titular *asinus* might allude to this insect.

A second insect called ‘ass’ is described by Dioscorides:

“The locust called ‘asiracus’ or ‘ass’ (ἀσίρακος ἢ ὄνος) is wingless and large-limbed when fresh. When it has been dried out, it benefits those who have been stung badly by scorpions if it is taken with wine. It is used to excess by the Libyans around Leptis.” Diosc. 2,57

While this locust is only mentioned in medical texts, it would have been particularly familiar to Africans like Apuleius, as it was evidently common in many regions of North Africa. Dioscorides speaks of its use amongst the Libyans, and Galen (12,366K locates the same ‘asiracus’ in the areas around Egypt (κᾶν τοῖς κατ’ Αἴγυπτον χωρίοις). This insect is another possible candidate for Apuleius’ titular *asinus*.

The metamorphoses of insects are regarded as teleological: a gradual passage towards perfection. Aristotle says:

⁹⁴ *Onos* is used at Thphr. fr. 185 (Wimmer); Thphr. *HP* 4,3,6 (citing the Libyans, Apuleius’ neighbours, as his source); Galen 13,111K, 13,113K; the *Cyranides* (p.271; Diosc. 2,35; Paulus of Aegina 7,3. *oniscos* is used at Galen 12,366K, 12,634K; *Corpus Glossarum* 2,24,1; 2,24,4; 3,400,64; 3,439,72. See Beavis 1988, 14–15.

⁹⁵ *Asellus*: *Corpus Glossarum* 2,24,1; 2,24,4; 3,400,64; 3,439,72; Cass.Fel. p.44; Theodorus Prisc. *Eup.* 2.44; Cael.Aur. *Chron.* 1,119; 1,129. See Beavis 1988, 14.

“...the creature emerges, as though from an egg, perfected at its third birth (ἐπιτελεσθὲν ἐπὶ τῆς τρίτης γενέσεως).” Arist. *GA* 758b27⁹⁶

Perhaps the best external indication that an insect has completed its metamorphoses and achieved ‘perfection’ is its development of wings and the ability to fly. Aristotle’s and Pliny’s descriptions of different insects make it clear that, for those insects which do indeed develop wings, the power of flight comes only in the final stage of metamorphosis.⁹⁷ It is therefore striking that the metamorphic careers of many of Apuleius’ characters are similarly motivated by a desire to grow wings for flight. The witch Pamphile intends to use magical transformation so that she can fly to her lover:

“Photis indicates...that her mistress [Pamphile]...will feather herself into a bird and fly down like that to the object of her desire.”

Apul. *Met.* 3,21,1

Shortly afterwards Lucius watches Pamphile do precisely that:

“Pamphile turns into an owl...; soon she is raised aloft and flies out of the house on full wing.”

Apul. *Met.* 3,21,6

Lucius’ own disastrous metamorphosis is set in motion by his aspirations to fly like Pamphile. He tells his lover Photis that he wishes to become for her a ‘Cupid with wings’ (Apul. *Met.* 3,22,5 *Cupido pinnatus*). Photis asks if she will ever see him again here once he has been ‘made winged’ (Apul. *Met.* 3,22,6 *alitem factum*). When Lucius uses the wrong ointment, his accidental transformation into an ass is in part described negatively as a failure to grow wings:

⁹⁶ Cf. *GA* 733b16, cited above.

⁹⁷ For insects flying in the final stage of their development, see e.g. Arist. *GA* 758b27; Arist. *HA* 551a24; *HA* 551b20; *HA* 551b25f.; *HA* 552a8; *HA* 552a20; *HA* 552b20; *HA* 554a29; *HA* 557b24; *HA* 557b27; Plin. *Nat.* 11,48; *Nat.* 11,92; *Nat.* 11.; *Nat.* 11,101–104. Exceptions prove the rule: the king bee, unlike all other bees, is born with wings, bypassing the larval stage (Plin. *Nat.* 11,48 *rex...neque vermiculus sed statim penniger*; cf. Arist. *HA* 554a26–27); and some wasps can also bypass the larval stage, with some even flying at birth (Plin. *Nat.* 11,71 *fetus ipse inaequalis et varius, alius evolat, alius in nympa, alius in vermiculo*; cf. Arist. *HA* 555a2f.).

“And by now with successive exertions I poised my arms and tried to make gestures in the manner of a bird like her [i.e. Pamphile]: but there were neither feathers nor wings anywhere (*nec ullae plumulae nec usquam pinnulae*)... I saw that I was not a bird, but an ass...”

Apul. *Met.* 3,24,3–25,1; cf. 9.15.6

All this emphasis on Lucius’ impulse to grow wings reflects the typical teleology of insect metamorphoses. Lucius’ failure to grow wings, on the other hand, reflects the life cycle of the two ‘ass’ insects to which Apuleius’ title may allude. For the pill-bug is only called ‘ass’ when it is in its initial, larval form, and so lacks wings;⁹⁸ and the African locust called ‘ass’ is described by Dioscorides (2,57) as ‘wingless’ (ἄπτερος).⁹⁹ As an ass, Lucius attains ‘wings’ only in the figurative sense that his (land)speed is often compared to the flight of the winged horse Pegasus. Thus he is taunted for no longer outdoing ‘the winged speed of Pegasus’ (Apul. *Met.* 6,30,5); after fleeing a bear at top speed (7,24,5), he likens himself implicitly to Pegasus by calling his rescuer Bellerophon (7,26,3); having just outrun a horse in his blind terror (8,16,3), Lucius imagines that Pegasus’ ascent to heaven was similarly inspired by fear; finally, at the *anteludia* of Isis, an ass is likened to Pegasus, but the comparison is exposed as a mere joke (11,8,4 *diceres Pegasum, tamen rideres...*), since in fact the ass walks, and its wings are merely fake attachments (11,8,4 *asinum pinnis adglutinatis adambulantem*). Nonetheless, when Lucius is finally restored to human form he does achieve a sort of (wingless) perfection through his initiations into the rites of Isis. These initiations are repeatedly called *teleta* (Apul. *Met.* 11,22,8; 11,24,5; 11,26,4; 11,27,3; 11,29,1; 11,30,1). This is a Greek word, borrowed here for the very first time into Latin; it means ‘initiation’, but is derived from the Greek *tel-* family of words, denoting ‘finality’ or ‘perfection’ (cf. ‘teleology’), which Aristotle uses to describe the final stage in the insect’s life-cycle.¹⁰⁰ In the end, it is not through the attainment of wings,

⁹⁸ Photius (s.v. ὄνος ἰσόσπριος) states that the ‘ass’ pill-bug is a ‘larval creature’ (ζῷον...σκωληκῶδες).

⁹⁹ Pliny (*Nat.* 11,100) observes that there are some insects which lack wings (*quaedam insecta carent pinnis*); and Aristotle (*GA* 758b27) contrasts winged insects (τὰ πτερωτὰ) with those that walk (τὰ πεζά).

¹⁰⁰ Arist. *GA* 733b16 (*telos*) and 758b27 (*epitelesthēn*), both cited above. The derivation of the Greek *telete*, ‘initiation’, from the *tel-* family is observed by the Stoic Chrysippus: (*EM* 751,16f.) “Chrysippus says that it is with good reason that discourses about divine matters are called ‘initiations’ (τελετάς/*teletas*); for these discourses should be

but through initiation into religious ritual, that Lucius achieves his final form and is able to reach for the heavens.

Another insect-character who fails in an attempt to fly is Psyche. When her divine lover Cupid flies off, Psyche tries to follow him:

“The god...flew off. But as he was rising, Psyche at once grasped his right leg with both her hands – she was a piteous appendage of his soaring flight and a trailing attendance of dangling companionship through the cloudy realms – at last, exhausted, she fell to the ground.”

Apul. *Met.* 5,23,6–24,1

It is universally accepted that the fall of Psyche is intertextual with a passage in Plato’s *Phaedrus* on metempsychosis:

“...a soul (*psyche*)...which has been unable to follow God fails to see, and when she has suffered some mischance and been filled with forgetfulness and evil, she grows heavy, and when she has grown heavy she sheds her wings and falls to earth...”

Pl. *Phdr.* 248C

Plato uses the word *psyche* to mean ‘soul’; but it seems clear that he also exploits the associations of its second meaning, ‘butterfly’, to shape his allegory. Plato’s *psychae* go through life-phases (each of which lasts a thousand years); and the good souls of philosophers develop wings in the third stage of their life-cycle:

“These [sc. *psychae*], in their third period of a thousand years, if they have chosen this sort of life three times in a row, thus grow wings and leave in their three-thousandth year.”

Pl. *Phdr.* 249A

taught last (*teletaious*), after all other lessons, when the soul (*psyche*) has support and strength and is able to maintain silence before the profane...”. Similarly, it is only at the end of Lucius’ reported experiences, in the *final* book, that Lucius undergoes his *teletae*, and that Apuleius’ text becomes overtly what Chrysippus calls a ‘discourse about divine matters’. For possible connections between the teachings of Chrysippus (whose name means ‘Golden Horse’) and Apuleius’ ‘Golden ass’, see Bitel 2000, 38-57 (esp. 53f.).

Similarly the life-cycle of butterflies is in three stages, culminating in the development of wings.¹⁰¹ In Plato's allegory, however, the *psyche's* acquisition of wings allows it not merely to fly, but to ascend to the heavens and join the ranks of the gods:

“The natural function of the wing is to soar up and carry that which is heavy to where the race of the gods lives.” Pl. *Phdr.* 246D

Apuleius, I would suggest, follows Plato in using the model of the butterfly's life-cycle as part of *his* allegorisation of *Psyche*. At first Apuleius' Psyche, like Plato's flawed *psyche*, is unable to fly up with her divine lover; but by the end of Psyche's tale, she is allowed to enter heaven and indeed to become a god herself:

“...and at once [Jupiter] instructed Mercury that Psyche should be snatched up and brought to heaven. Offering her a cup of ambrosia, he said ‘Take it, Psyche, and be immortal.’” Apul. *Met.* 6,23,5

Just before her apotheosis, Psyche makes a journey to the Underworld (Apul. *Met.* 6,20,1–5), and upon her return is afflicted by a sleep which renders her immobile:

“an infernal and truly Stygian sleep...attacked Psyche and a thick cloud of slumber washed over all her limbs...And she lay motionless (*immobilis*), nothing but a sleeping corpse.” Apul. *Met.* 6,21,1–2

In their discussion of insects, Aristotle and others are at pains to stress that insects harden in the period immediately preceding their third and final life-stage, and, like Psyche here, they become motionless.¹⁰² We have already seen that Aristotle characterises insects' metamorphoses as multiple births. Similarly Psyche's transition to an immortal life amongst the gods is heralded by a figured rebirth: her revival from a living death.

¹⁰¹ For the tripartite life-cycle of butterflies, see Arist. *HA* 551a13f.; Thphr. *HP* 2,4,4; Plin. *Nat.* 11,112; Plu. *Moralia* 636C; cf. Ov. *Met.* 15,372-374.

¹⁰² Immobility before emergence of perfect form of insect: Arist. *GA* 758b17; *GA* 758b25; *GA* 758b31 [on butterflies]; *GA* 759a4; Arist. *HA* 551a18 [on butterflies]; Plin. *Nat.* 11,112 [on butterflies] *fit immobilis*.

In fact, Aristotle says that insects undergo three births (Arist. *GA* 759a3 τριγενῆ). So indeed does Apuleius' Psyche. Her first birth is by her parents, mentioned in the first line of her tale (Apul. *Met.* 4,28,1). Her third birth is the death followed by apotheosis just discussed. Her second, intermediate birth takes place when she enters a new phase of life with her mysterious fiancé. From the moment an inauspicious oracle has enjoined Psyche to marry (Apul. *Met.* 4,33,3f.), her impending wedding is figured as a death. A brief representative quote will suffice to demonstrate this:

“...when the ceremonial preparations for this funereal marriage had been completed amidst the utmost grief, the living corpse was led from the house with the entire populace in train, and it was not nuptials which tearful Psyche was attending, but her own funeral.” Apul. *Met.* 4,34,1

During her first night with her husband, Psyche's predicted death is realised in an unexpected manner. For her attendants, we are told, 'took care of the new bride's slain virginity' (Apul. *Met.* 5,4,4 ...*novam nuptam interfectae virginitatis curant*). Her transition from virgin to bride is figured as a murder, but also as a rebirth: Psyche has now become a *nupta*. *Nupta* translates into Latin the Greek *nymphē* (lit. 'bride'), which is the term used for the second, intermediate stage in the life-cycle of bees and wasps.¹⁰³ A different term, *chrysallis*, exists specifically for the intermediate life-phase of butterflies (*psychae*) and moths.¹⁰⁴ There is no indigenous equivalent in Latin for the Greek *chrysallis* (Pliny merely transliterates the Greek term; Plin. *Nat.* 11,112; 11,117.); but as *chrysallis* clearly derives from the Greek word for 'gold', *chrysos*, one might expect to find a reference to gold (*aur-*) in any attempt at a Latin translation of *chrysallis*.¹⁰⁵ Apuleius, I believe, offers a Latin version of the *chrysallis* of a butterfly (*psyche*) when he describes Psyche's new bridal residence as a

¹⁰³ For the entomological 'bride', see Arist. *GA* 758b33; *HA* 551b1f.; *HA* 555a2f.; Pliny Latinises the Greek term as *nympha*: Plin. *Nat.* 11,49; *Nat.* 11,71.

¹⁰⁴ For the term *chrysallis*, see Thphr. *HP* 2,4,4 "from a caterpillar is born a *chrysallis*, then from this a *psyche* [butterfly]."; cf. Arist. *HA* 551a13f.; *HA*; *GA* 733b15; *GA* 758b29f.. Arist. *HA* 551a20 and Plin. *Nat.* 11,112 both say that the *chrysallis* has a hard shell, from which the butterfly ultimately escapes.

¹⁰⁵ Compare the English use of 'aurelia' as a synonym of chrysalis; 'aurelia' derives from the Italian feminine form of *aurelio*, 'golden' (which in turn derives from the Latin *aurum*, 'gold'); see *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second edition, Oxford 1989 s.v. 'aurelia'.

‘golden house’ (Apul. *Met.* 5,8,1 *domus aurea*).¹⁰⁶ This house, into which Psyche moves from the house of her parents (stage 1), and from which she eventually moves to heaven (stage 3), is described in terms which recall the midlife, chrysalid period of a butterfly. Thus Apuleius has structured his allegory of Psyche around the tripartite life-cycle of the insect which shares her name.¹⁰⁷

Like Psyche, the protagonist Lucius undergoes metamorphoses in three identifiable stages. First he is a businessman, secondly (and for the longest part of the text) he is an ass, and finally in the eleventh book, he is ‘reborn’ (11,16,4 *renatus*) and ‘restored to the daylight from the land of the dead’ (11,18,2 *diurnum reducemque ab inferis*), becoming an initiate in the *teleta* of the goddess Isis. It has already been seen that the words *asinus* and *metamorphoses* from the title have entomological associations. It seems possible that the word *aureus* might also gain meaning from the insect world. ‘Golden’ could allude to the chrysalid status possessed by Lucius as he wanders the earth in an ass’ skin, trapped midway between his past human life and his dreams of flight into the heavens. This entomological subtext, enshrined in the title and suggested at various points in the text, provides a paradigm from the observable world for the fictive metamorphoses of Lucius and other characters.

Conclusion

So what is that ‘golden ass’? It is always open for readers to privilege one or several of the readings found here over the others (or indeed to find still more interpretations). Umberto Eco commends titles which serve to ‘muddle the

¹⁰⁶ The phrase also recalls the riches of Nero’s so-called ‘golden house’.

¹⁰⁷ There also seem to be correspondences between the life of Charite (the narratee of the tale of Psyche) and the phases of insects. Robbers snatch Charite away from her parents and home on the night she is due to enter her ‘nymphal’ stage (Apul. *Met.* 4,26,5 *votisque nuptialibus...destinatus...ad nuptias*; 4,26,6 *munro nuptiali*; 4,26,8 *dispectae disturbataeque nuptiae*). When Tlepolemus, disguised as a bandit, comes to help Charite escape from her confinement, he promises the robbers that he will transform their house into a golden one (Apul. *Met.* 7,8,3 *lapideam istam domum vestram facturum auream*). This ‘golden house’ may again allude to the ‘chrysalis’ phase of a butterfly, foreshadowing Charite’s impending escape to the world beyond the robber’s cave.

reader's ideas, not regiment them'.¹⁰⁸ The titular readings presented here may seem muddled in their variety, even contradictory; yet this very multiplicity of interpretations available for the title makes the title itself a fitting signifier for Apuleius' complex and polysemic text, with its ever-changing *ego (quis ille?)*.¹⁰⁹

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¹⁰⁸ Eco 1985, 3; similarly Pliny admires the 'marvellous felicity' of the Greeks' titles, even though they fail to describe straightforwardly the content of the books which they advertise (Plin. *Nat. Pr.* 24).

¹⁰⁹ I am grateful to Raymond Astbury, Ewen Bowie, Peter Brown, Stephen Harrison, Paula James, Robert Maltby, Regine May, Stelios Panagiotakis, Charles Weiss, Michael Winterbottom, Maaike Zimmerman and two anonymous members of the editorial board of *GCN*, all of whom have provided helpful comments; and most of all to Kerstin Hoge, *sine qua nihil*.

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