

“The only wife worth having”?¹ Marriage and Storytelling in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*

JOANNE MCNAMARA
University of Manchester

In this paper I will argue that the two themes in its title – “Marriage” and “Storytelling” – are vital to an understanding of Apuleius’ novel, and are to a certain extent inextricable from one another. Much has already been written on the complexities of narrative and narrator in the *Metamorphoses*,² so, to offer an alternative perspective, I intend to focus specifically on the inserted tales which are concerned with the theme of marriage. Tales form most of the novel, and marriage provides the subject-matter for a large number of these inset tales; including the story of ‘Cupid and Psyche’ (4,28,1–6,24,4), the narrative of Charite’s fortunes after she and Lucius are separated (8,1,5–14,5), and five tales of adultery and broken marriages witnessed or overheard by Lucius near the end of his adventures as an ass (9,5,1–7,6; 9,14,2–32,3; 10,2,1–12,5; 10,23,3–28,5). Also, the imagery and rituals of marriage are inserted into the main narrative (that is, Lucius’ ‘tale’) at important moments in the novel’s action. In particular, this is noticeable at the moment of Lucius’ Isiac conversion and initiation in Book 11,³ but wedding imagery is used elsewhere too.⁴ In the view of many critics, however, the novel provides an overwhelmingly pessimistic view of marriage.⁵ Most of the marriages depicted are unfaithful, deceitful, or end disastrously in one way or

¹ This quotation is taken from Lateiner 2000, 324, and refers to Isis.

² The most influential on this paper being Winkler 1985, Harrison 2000, 226–252.

³ See below p. 108, and Lateiner 2000, 326–7.

⁴ For example, when Tlepolemus is accepted by the robbers as ‘Haemus’ and the latest addition to their band, at 7,9ff (see Frangoulidis 1996, 196–201), or when Lucius is about to publicly copulate with the condemned murderess, at 10,29,3, see below, note 9.

⁵ Lateiner 2000, 313; May (forthcoming).

another.⁶ In this paper, by way of contrast, I intend to examine the marriages in the novel which present the reader with an optimistic view of the institution. Which, if any, are the good marriages in the novel, and in a narratological sense, in what manner are they presented to the reader? Through this investigation, I hope to draw some conclusions on the nature of marriage and storytelling in the novel as a whole.

Firstly, then, I must clarify my definition of a ‘good’ marriage. By this term I mean a partnership in the novel represented as offering a firmly positive and optimistic view of marriage. For instance, it is not enough that the relationship should survive; the surviving marriages include several unpleasant ones, such as the couple in the ‘Tale of the Tub’ (9,5,1–7,6) and Barbarus and Arete (9,17,1–21,7). Nor can the apparent contentment of both husband and wife be the sole criterion, as this would include the marriage of Milo and Pamphile, witnessed at first hand by Lucius in Books 1–3; neither Milo, a husband in blissful ignorance of his wife’s occult tendencies (e.g. 2,11,6), nor Pamphile, a powerful witch using her magic to pursue her adulterous desires (e.g. 3,15–16), are represented as particularly unhappy with their marriage (it seems to suit both parties), and theirs too survives. It is not an enviable relationship, though, and contributes nothing to an optimistic view of marriage. The only exceptional marriages in the novel, then, are those which are based on *fidelity*. In this respect, I would suggest that they purposefully stand in opposition to the repeated theme of *infidelity* in the novel, which first appears in Book 1, when Socrates is ruined after putting ‘the pleasures of sex and a leather skinned whore before [his] wife and children,’ (1,8,1)⁷ and remains a frequent theme until Book 10, via numerous tales of adulterous marriages. Just as infidelity is such a prevalent crime in the novel, so fidelity is a rare quality. We are left with just four faithful marriages to examine: those of Cupid and Psyche (4,28,1–6,24,4), Charite and Tlepolemus (4,26,1–27,4; 7,52–15,3; 8,1,5–13,5), Plotina and her unnamed husband (7,6,2–7,4), and Lucius and Isis (Book 11). In light of the last couple, perhaps I should now clarify my definition of ‘marriage’!

⁶ This is particularly true of the ‘adultery-tales’ in Books 9–10, which gradually worsen in their effects and are seen by some scholars as preparing the atmosphere of despair, ready for the arrival of Isis, as Lucius’ saviour. See Lateiner 2000, 323.

⁷ ‘*voluptatem veneriam et scortum scortum Lari et liberi praetulisti.*’

The relationship between Lucius and the goddess Isis can be read as representing that of a married couple. The final book of the *Metamorphoses* therefore provides the reader with a version of the climactic marriage found in the Greek ideal novel. As noted earlier, the passages of Lucius' conversion and initiation are littered with imagery and legal terminology relating to Roman marriages. Like Charite and Psyche,⁸ Lucius also undergoes a *deductio* (11,15,9 – a procession escorts him to his new home), linked, through the theme of marriage, to his initiation into the unknown.⁹ Lucius shows his devotion to Isis more like a lover than an initiate: her beauty and womanliness are emphasized when he first beholds her (11,3,4–4,1), and he admires her hair as he had that of Photis, the maid with whom he was temporarily besotted (2,8–9).¹⁰ The depiction of initiation mirrors the symbolism of a marriage ceremony: after taking leave of his family, Lucius goes to live with Isis, in a room in her temple, as though he were a bride (11,19,1),¹¹ and as part of the initiation ceremony (11,24,1–25,7) in which he “takes on the role of her divine consort”,¹² he spends several days with a statue of the goddess, indulging in “*inexplicabili voluptate*” (11,24,5), a sort of spiritual honeymoon.¹³ Moreover, Isis herself was closely identified with marriage. She fulfilled a divine role as a patroness of marriage and families,¹⁴ and is repre-

⁸ Both of these heroines have elaborate passages devoted to their unusual, but recognisable nuptials. Psyche is led to her death accompanied by citizens carrying wedding torches (4,35,2), and funeral wailing breaks off the wedding hymns (4,33,4). Similarly, Charite's real *deductio* is harshly interrupted by her abduction from her mother's house (4,26,5–8) – a violent and actual version of the usually symbolic ritual. See Papaioannou 1998, 311–313.

⁹ Papaioannou 1998, 318. Preceding this scene, and perhaps in preparation for it, Lucius had undergone a ‘mini-*deductio*’ when, as an ass, he was led towards his public ‘marriage’ with the condemned murderess in the arena – (10,29,3) “*Dies ecce muneri destinatus aderat: ad conseptum caveae... deducor* – The day appointed for the show was now at hand... I was led to the theatre”; See Zimmerman 2000, 359 s.v. *deducor* for this and other allusions to marriage in this episode. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are taken from Walsh 1994.

¹⁰ Smith 1999, 210–211.

¹¹ This, of course, would cast Isis in the groom's role. See below, Part 4, for more on the reversal of gender roles in Lucius' marriage.

¹² Schlam 1978, 104.

¹³ For more marital terminology in the initiation passages, particularly legal language, see Lateiner 2000, 326.

¹⁴ See Witt 1971, 15–18, 41.

sented performing this function in other literature.¹⁵ Her own myth portrayed her as the archetypal faithful wife, patiently searching for the dead body of her husband, Osiris, and significantly, this aspect is evoked elsewhere in Apuleius’ novel, within the narratives detailing the adventures of two of the other faithful wives; in Psyche’s wanderings in search of Cupid (e.g. 6,1,1–2), and in Charite’s dream, in which she finds herself searching for Tlepolemus (4,27,2). Therefore, Isis’ religious association with wives and marriage, the reflection of her story in those of two other brides in the novel, and the wedding imagery in her ceremonial attachment to Lucius, lead me to believe that I am justified in regarding the relationship of Lucius and Isis as symbolically representing that of a legitimately married couple, and, consequently, worthy of inclusion in this study.

We are thus left with only these four representations of faithful marriages, symbolic or otherwise, in Apuleius’ novel. I intend to argue that the symbolic marriage of Lucius and Isis, in the final book of the novel, combines aspects of the other three, in much the same way as Book 11, in general, revisits many of the themes which had arisen earlier in the novel.¹⁶ The whole of Book 11, and therefore the ‘marriage’ of Lucius and Isis, is narrated by the primary narrator,¹⁷ whilst the tales of the marriages of Cupid and Psyche, Charite and Tlepolemus, and Plotina, are all embedded within the main narrative, and have different narrators. It is through this significant difference that I will link the themes of marriage and storytelling with the novel as a whole. After examining each ‘good’ marriage in turn (both as a ‘marriage’ and as a ‘tale’), I will show how they reflect upon the final, symbolic marriage of Lucius and Isis, and I shall go on to demonstrate that the narratological status of each of these embedded tales subtly affects our reading of this important part of the primary narrator’s ‘tale’.¹⁸

¹⁵ In Ovid (*Met.* 9,770–797), Isis brings about the marriage of two young girls, Iphis and Ianthe, by miraculously turning one of them into a young man, while she is attributed with reuniting the separated husband and wife in Xenophon of Ephesus’ *Ephesiaca* (5,13).

¹⁶ See Sandy 1978, 124–137, Schlam 1992, 115–122. On the *anteludia* at 11,8–11, which also provide a review of the novel, see Harrison 2000, 240–243.

¹⁷ For problems in identifying the primary narrator, and differing approaches to them, see e.g. Winkler 1985, 180–203, Harrison 2000, 226–233, Too 2001, 181–183, De Jong 2001, 204–212.

¹⁸ See Tatum 1999, on other ways in which the embedded tales reflect the primary narrator’s tale.

Part 1: Cupid and Psyche

This is the most extensive inserted tale in the *Metamorphoses*, running from 4,28,1 to 6,24,4, and is narrated by an old woman to a captive maiden (a so far unnamed Charite) at the bandits' hideout. The tale's length, central position and its apparent similarities to the adventures of Lucius, have led to a general acceptance of its role as a *mise-en-abyme*.¹⁹ But in terms of the action of the novel, and in terms of the direct explanation for the tale given us by Apuleius, the tale is narrated to entertain Charite, and to distract her from her misfortunes:

Sed ego te narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis protinus avocabo.

Come now, here and now I'll divert you with the pretty story of an old wife's tale. (4,27,8)

The narrator of the story, before commencing it, explicitly defines the entertaining purpose of the narrative.²⁰ She also characterizes the tale as *anilis*, an old-wives' tale, which implies a certain simplicity. In fact, the tale of Cupid and Psyche is a highly sophisticated literary work, containing elements of different genres, such as epic and dramatic poetry, and philosophy.²¹ Thus, the introduction to the story turns out to be inadequate and ironic, characterising the tale as ambiguous; it is a simple entertainment, but a highly allegorical one, it is an old-wives' tale, or 'fairy-tale', but also a literary masterpiece. On close inspection, the tale also provides us with an ambiguous representation of marriage.

¹⁹ See Walsh 1970, 273ff, Smith 1999, 209–210 and Konstan 1994, 138. Psyche's tale also has parallels with Charite's adventure; a loving couple are separated but eventually reunited (see Stabryla 1973, 267–272, who highlights the structural similarities of the two heroines' stories).

²⁰ I am paraphrasing Stabryla 1973, 269, who also (*ibid.* 270) points out how the housekeeper's introduction to her tale echoes the introduction to the entire novel— "*at ego tibi sermone isto Milesio varias fabulas conseram auresque tuas benivolos lepido susurro permulceam* – What I should like to do is to weave together different tales in this Milesian mode of story-telling, and to stroke your ears with some elegant whispers" (1,1,1). See below, Part 4.

²¹ For literary features see Mason 1978, 1ff, Harrison 1997, 53ff, Lateiner 2000, 313ff. For philosophical features, see DeFilippo 1999, 269ff, Harrison 2000, 256–257.

The happy ending of the tale of Cupid and Psyche, with its legitimate marriage, joyous wedding feast and birth of a daughter (6,24,4), appears to support many positive interpretations of the story. For instance, the legitimate marriage at the end of the tale has been seen as the resolution of male-female conflict through the ritual of marriage,²² or the eventual enlightenment of the suffering Psyche,²³ or a representation of the Platonic notion of Love and the Soul – that is, that physical and philosophical fulfilment must be combined to produce wholesome and rewarding love.²⁴ Certainly, there are plenty of romantic and entertaining elements to the tale. The lovers are represented as being very fond of one another, and converse lovingly (e.g. 5,5,2–4; 5,6,7–10), and both of them suffer terribly when separated (Cupid at 5,28,1–4, and 6,21,2; Psyche at 5,25,1, and 6,1,1ff). Their pleasant marriage is contrasted with the mortal marriages of Psyche’s sisters, initially called *beatas nuptias* (4,32,4) by the narrator, but later revealed to be highly flawed by the sisters themselves (5,9,3–10,4) after they have come face-to-face with Psyche’s apparently superior union. Another positive aspect of this relationship is that it is the only fruitful one in the novel;²⁵ the tale ends, after Jupiter’s sanctioning of the marriage ceremony, with the birth of a legitimate, divine child:

sic rite Psyche convenit in manum Cupidinis, et nascitur illis maturo partu filia, quam Voluptatem nominamus.

This was how with due ceremony Psyche was wed to Cupid, and at full term a daughter was born to them, whom we call Pleasure. (6,24,4)

²² Katz 1976, 111–112.

²³ Lateiner 2000, 321.

²⁴ This notion is found in Plato’s *Symposium* (184c–185c) and *Phaedrus* (253d–257b). There are certainly Platonic motifs to be found in the tale of Cupid and Psyche (not to mention the novel as a whole). For example, the names ‘Love’ and ‘Soul’ appear to have been given to characters from a familiar folk-tale, whose names have never before been specified, perhaps thereby providing an allegorical aspect (Griffiths 1978, 145–151, and Schlam 1993, 65–72). Also, the scene in which Psyche hangs from the leg of the ascending Cupid (5,24,1–2) is reminiscent of *Phaedrus* 248c. (Harrison 2000, 256–257). However, a Platonic reading can only be part of the meaning, for it does not stand well against other features of the tale (see below, p. 112), and, as Stephen Harrison (*ibid.* 257) points out, “the romance of ‘Love and Soul’ is in fact seriously allegorised at no other point in the [novel]”. For a discussion of these and other points, see Kenney 1990.

²⁵ With one exception – see below, Part 3.

This passage provides the culmination of the tale, and a happy ending with which to cheer Charite's spirits. This sentence, however, simultaneously highlights some of the more negative aspects of Cupid and Psyche's story.²⁶

For instance, the legal term used for the wedding ceremony – *convenit in manum* – is one by which a wife comes into the power and possession of her husband.²⁷ Psyche is now subservient to Cupid. This aspect of her wedding fits in well with her role in the rest of her story: for much of the duration of her relationship with Cupid she is not allowed to see him (5,1,3–21,5), is inferior to him, and is subject to his threats (5,11,6).²⁸ Moreover, Psyche is fully enslaved to Venus, her mother-in-law: she voluntarily hands herself over to the goddess (6,5,3–4),²⁹ and is forced to endure beatings (6,9,1–10,1) and complete futile tasks (6,10,2–21,4). Therefore, Psyche, or 'the Soul', is enslaved by the two greatest Olympian personifications of 'Love' and 'Desire'. The power and seductiveness of Venus and Cupid are repeatedly emphasized – the reader is not allowed to forget which emotions they represent,³⁰ and is often made aware that their powers affect the other Olympian gods, as much as mortals (5,31,7; 6,22,3). Thus, Psyche's enslavement or subordination to erotic desire sits uneasily with the positive readings of the tale, and indeed, with a happy ending.³¹

Another negative, or at least ambiguous, element of the above passage is the name given to Cupid and Psyche's child. "The word *voluptas* abounds in

²⁶ Indeed, as Penwill points out, "the very emphasis on creating an expectation of a happy outcome should constitute a warning in an author who loves to indulge in surprise and sudden change." (Penwill 1975, 51); see also Penwill 1998.

²⁷ I am paraphrasing Penwill 1975, 51. For a detailed explanation of the term and its legal implications, see Treggiari 1991, 16–36.

²⁸ Although she does choose to ignore his threat – a decision which greatly effects the happy ending of her story – see below, p. 114.

²⁹ Venus had already been viewing Psyche as her property as early as 5,31,2, though – "*Psychem illam fugitivam volaticam mihi requirite*" – "I ask you to search... for that fickle runaway of mine called Psyche."

³⁰ For instance, Venus kisses Cupid like a goddess of love, rather than a mother (4,31,4), and her reward for the return of the fugitive Psyche is a sexual one (6,8,3). Cupid remains a secret for the first half of the story, but his first appearance reveals him as a handsome and adolescent god of love (5,22,5–7), the sight alone of whom urges Psyche to 'handle and admire her husband's weapons' (5,23,1, *pertrectat et mariti sui miratur arma*). Here, for the first time, if only metaphorically, Psyche takes an active sexual role.

³¹ Particularly the Platonic reading. Plato's moral theory condemned moral degradation and physical pleasures (e.g. *Phaedrus* 65c, *Rep.* 9,589e). Thus, the naming of the participants in the tale as 'Soul' and 'Love' serves both to suggest Platonic theory to the reader, and to undermine it.

evocative ambiguity,”³² and the emotion represented by the couple’s divine child is a vital one in Apuleius’ novel. The ambiguity is defined in a remark by Cicero, when discussing the meaning of the word *voluptas*:

Huic verbo omnes qui ubique sunt qui Latine sciunt duas res subiciunt, laetitiam in animo, commotionem suavem iucunditatis in corpore.

Every person in the world who knows Latin attaches to this word two ideas – that of gladness of mind, and that of a delightful excitation of agreeable feeling in the body. (*De Fin.* 2,4,13)³³

In the *Metamorphoses* the word is almost exclusively used in the latter sense, that of physical desire; moreover, it has highly negative associations. The adulterous, jealous and murderous characters in the novel are all driven by *voluptas*,³⁴ while at Lucius’ restoration to human form, Mithras the Isiac priest famously blames Lucius’ devotion to “*serviles... voluptates*” (11,15,1) for his misfortunes throughout the novel. These motivating pleasures are bodily and destructive. The only occasion in the novel at which *voluptas* could refer to a mental, or spiritual pleasure, rather than pleasure of a sexual kind, is at 11,24,5, when Lucius gazes at a likeness of Isis, *inexplicabili voluptate*. This is religious adoration and for once, it would seem, spiritual pleasure.³⁵ Apart from a handful of positive readings,³⁶ *voluptas* remains an overwhelmingly negative concept in the novel, and its personified appearance at the climax of Cupid and Psyche’s story (and its very origin therein), spoils the happy ending and positive readings of the old woman’s tale (for the reader of the whole novel, if not for Charite and Lucius... yet). Furthermore, of the two types of pleasure described by Cicero, there is little doubt left as to which type of ‘Pleasure’ Psyche has given birth to. As Penwill has

³² Kenney 1990, 196.

³³ Cited at Penwill 1975, 51. Translation by Rackham, H. (Harvard 1931).

³⁴ Lateiner 2000, 319.

³⁵ However, I have already noted that Lucius’ time spent with the statue of the goddess is reminiscent of a wedding-night (see above, p. 108), suggesting a joke on Apuleius’ part. He undermines his only ‘decent’ mention of the word *voluptas*.

³⁶ E.g. Lateiner 2000, 321, who believes that the divine birth constitutes a sufficiently happy ending for the couple, or Harrison 2000, 258, who suggests that the arrival of *Voluptas* represents the fulfilment of the narrator’s introductory promise to the reader that he/she would gain pleasure from the novel – (1,1,6) *laetaberis*.

pointed out,³⁷ the child cannot represent divine or religious pleasure, because Cupid's warning at 5,11,6, was unheeded by Psyche:

hic adhuc infantilis uterus gestat nobis infantem alium, si texeris nostra secreta silentio, divinum, si profanaveris, mortalem.

For this as yet tiny womb of yours is carrying for us another child like yourself. If you conceal our secret in silence, that child will be a god, but if you disclose it, he will be mortal.

Psyche does disclose their secret to her sisters (5,19,1–4), implying that when Voluptas is finally born, she represents pleasure of the mortal and physical kind,³⁸ rather than the divine and spiritual.³⁹

Therefore, the old woman tells her story to divert and comfort Charite, but its happy ending and faithful love-story have a darker side, which reflects on the themes of the novel as a whole – enslavement to *voluptas*, punishment of *curiositas*,⁴⁰ and so on. Furthermore, the birth of Voluptas *directly* affects the faithful marriage of the internal audience of the tale: the maiden Charite.

Part 2: Charite and Tlepolemus

Apuleius' portrayal of this relationship falls into two distinct sections; the first, witnessed by Lucius, our narrator, before the successful escape from the bandits' cave (4,23,3–27,7; 7,4,1–14,3), and the second, narrated by a young slave from Charite's household, after the escape and separation of Charite and Lucius (8,1,5–14,5). There are marked differences between the two sections. Firstly, they correspond to representations of the couple before marriage and after. For, although it can be argued that Charite "regards her-

³⁷ Penwill 1975, 59.

³⁸ The child's ancestry further supports her 'sexual' nature – her father and grandmother are the divine champions of eroticism.

³⁹ This denigration of the child is also marked by a change in sex, from male to female. From the first mention of the baby, the assumption is that it will be a boy (e.g. 5,11,6 *divinum*, 5,14,5 *Cupido*, 5,16,4 *deum*, 6,9,5 *filius*, etc.) The child, therefore, is of a lower 'quality' than everyone expected. Furthermore, *voluptas* is heavily associated with the feminine in the novel: e.g. the insatiable witches in Books 1–3, and the adulteresses in Books 9–10.

⁴⁰ DeFilippo 1999, 272–277, 286–288.

self” as married whilst in the bandits’ cave,⁴¹ the narrator of the earlier section always represents her as a maiden, an unmarried girl.⁴² In the second part of the story though, there is no doubt that she and Tlepolemus have officially married.⁴³ Another difference is a narratological one. The first part of their story is told by the primary narrator, Lucius, as he witnessed it,⁴⁴ and the second is told by an internal narrator, who has no other connection with the plot, with Lucius and some countrymen making up the internal audience. I feel this difference, in particular, to be a vital one, as will become apparent. I will treat the latter section first, as this is the tale which can be argued to be foreshadowed in the tale of Cupid and Psyche;⁴⁵ the destruction this time of a faithful marriage by *voluptas*.

For, like Psyche, Charite cannot escape *voluptas*, despite loving her husband and being a faithful and devoted wife. In her case, *voluptas* is an influence from *outside* the marriage;⁴⁶ a rival suitor, Thrasyllus, desires Charite and murders Tlepolemus to try and get to her. Thrasyllus is notably “the only male figure [in the novel] whose sexual passion is elaborately described,”⁴⁷ and he is deliberately characterised as a man who is *motivated* by *voluptas*.⁴⁸

Ecce rursus improvidae voluptatis detestabilis petitor aures obseratas de nuptiis obtundens aderat.

The abominable [Thrasyllus] now made a further appearance; in pursuit of his thoughtless pleasure, he assailed with talk of marriage the ears which she kept firmly barred. (8,9,4)

⁴¹ Papaioannou 1998, 311.

⁴² Charite is referred to as *virgo* (e.g. 4,23,3; 6,28,1; 7,10,1 etc.) and *puella* (e.g. 4,25,1; 7,4,1; 7,10,3, etc.).

⁴³ Charite becomes *recens nupta* at 7,14,3, and in Book 8, she is *nuptae* (8,6,4), *mulieris* (8,7,3), *coniunx* (8,8,7), *miserrimae feminae* (8,9,7) etc. Tlepolemus is *maritus* throughout (8,2,5; 8,4,1; 8,6,6, etc.).

⁴⁴ Although the limitations of his judgement become apparent at this point (see below, Part 3), as at other times throughout his narration (see Smith 1999, 202–8).

⁴⁵ See Papaioannou 1998, 322–323.

⁴⁶ *Voluptas* comes, very literally, from *within* Psyche’s marriage.

⁴⁷ Schlam 1978, 100.

⁴⁸ The sexual encounters of Lucius, who is the only other male figure whose desires are revealed to the reader, are not motivated by his desires. In his affair with Photis, he is motivated by *curiositas* (2,6,1–8), while the encounter with the rich *matrona* is arranged by Lucius’ owner, who is motivated by greed (10,19,4).

Thus, the old woman's proleptic tale has informed Charite (and the reader) of the origin of the emotion which is to prove so vital in Charite's own marital future: for it is contact with *voluptas* that destroys her marriage and forces Charite to change. After Tlepolemus' death she becomes a cruel and vengeful woman,⁴⁹ capable of plotting a gruesome revenge and manipulating Thrasyllus (8,9,5–11,4) when earlier, as a prisoner of the robbers, she had often failed to act. For instance, she had relied on Lucius (an ass) to take the initiative in their bungled escape attempt (6,26,3–30,3), and had been easily talked out of suicide with a *bellam fabellam* – 6,25,1 (cf. 4,24,6–27,8). In short, her reaction to destructive *voluptas* is to shrug off these passive, compliant characteristics and become an active heroine. She becomes more masculine as a result – she is 'animated by a man's courage' (8,11,4: *Charite masculis animis impetuque diro fremens ...*), and she dies by the sword (a traditionally male tragic suicide⁵⁰) showing *animam virilem* ('a manly heart' – 8,14,2). However, Charite's sudden change of character⁵¹ and tragic courage make more sense when looked at narratologically. The presentation of this part of her story is very different from Lucius' account of the first part.

The primary narrator of the novel, whom for convenience's sake I will name Lucius,⁵² narrates the earlier part of Charite's story. In this section, Lucius is the central character and the hero of the story, an autodiegetic narrator, while Charite is an incidental character, who is not even named until a long time after her first appearance.⁵³ The story of her doomed marriage, on the other hand, focuses on Charite as its protagonist. Its narrator is a slave from her household, who has no other role in the plot of the novel except for providing this information. His reliability is questionable, though; we find that he is relating vital parts of his information second-hand (8,14,1–2), while the rest of his detailed knowledge remains unexplained. How, for example could he know the exact circumstances of Tlepolemus' death, when he and his companions were hiding in the forest? (8,5,1–6,1) Nor could he know the extent of Thrasyllus' desire for Charite, or the workings of his

⁴⁹ Tatum 1999, 180.

⁵⁰ Loraux 1987, 11–17.

⁵¹ Tatum 1999, 185, "She seems almost another character, altogether different from the young girl who heard the tale of *Cupid and Psyche*."

⁵² Most of the novel appears to be narrated by its protagonist, but at several points, a voice 'behind' that of Lucius' is suggested. See Winkler 1985, 180–203, Smith 1999, 196–201, and Harrison 2000, 226–232.

⁵³ See below, Part 3.

mind (8,2,2; 8,2,6; 8,3,1, etc.) without them being revealed to him at some point by Thrasyllus, an event the text does not support; he only has this information according to “*fama*” (8,1,5). The slave’s information thus begins to appear somewhat unreliable, being either received, guessed, or perhaps even invented.⁵⁴ He also introduces the story thus:

sed ut cuncta noritis, referam vobis a capite quae gesta sunt, quaeque possent merito doctiores, quibus stilos Fortuna subministrat, in historiae specimen chartis involvere.

So that you may know the whole story, I shall tell you what happened from the beginning. It is a sequence of events which persons more learned than I, writers whom Fortune has invested with fluency of the pen, can appropriately commit to paper as an example of an **historia** (8,1,4)⁵⁵

A disclaimer of this sort raises questions; what is wrong with the young man’s account that others could improve upon? And if we are not about to receive an *historia*, then what *are* we going to hear? As on other occasions in the novel, Apuleius urges the reader either to expect a certain type of narrative, or to be aware that they might not get what they are expecting.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ As De Jong 2001, 209–210, points out, the narrator of the novel (Lucius-author), occasionally defends his statements (e.g. at 9,30; 10,33,4), explains his reasons for providing certain pieces of information (e.g. at 9,32; 10,7,3–4) thus revealing his awareness of his status as a narrator. Furthermore, he is often at pains to explain to the reader *how* the protagonist (Lucius-actor), has acquired the knowledge or information he is now narrating (e.g. at 6,25,1; 9,3,1; 9,16,1; 9,22,4–5, etc.), particularly on occasions when he has witnessed or overheard an event. The narrator of Charite’s *historia* cites *fama* as one of his sources (8,1,5), Charite’s confession as another (8,14,1–2), and his own concealed presence at the scene of Thrasyllus’ crime as the third (8,5,1–6,1). He gives no explanation for the rest of his detailed knowledge, though, and the reader must suppose that he has filled in the gaps around the story himself.

⁵⁵ Walsh has translated this word as “historical narrative,” but it can also mean a ‘story’ in the fictitious sense. I have left out the translation because the ambiguity inherent in the word serves to raise further questions about the slave’s account. See Hijmans *et al* 1985, 31, commenting on this passage as follows – “Apuleius himself is so proficient at handling the *stilus* that the end result remarkably resembles *historiae*, and what is more, *historiae* which neatly leave the reader to doubt whether he should allow himself... to be persuaded by their veracity, or whether he should rather insert his own question marks.”

⁵⁶ As with the old woman’s introduction to *Cupid and Psyche* as an ‘old wives’ tale’ (see above, Part 1), or the complicated prologue to the novel (see above n. 20), or Lucius’ frequent mis-categorizing of tales (6,25,1; 9,14,1; 10,2,4). See also Smith 1999, 202–208.

The slave's tale in fact most closely resembles a drama. Its presentation and its subject matter are highly dramatic (as indeed are many other parts of the novel⁵⁷), and it exhibits features characteristic of a tragic 'messenger-speech.' The slave's story therefore resembles more than anything else a piece of theatre and fiction, and as such is not intended to be unquestionably believed by its audience. For instance, I have already mentioned the elevation of Charite to the status of tragic heroine – she mourns elaborately (8,6,4) and tries to kill herself (8,7,4), and eventually, aware of Thrasyllus' crime, she stages the tragic *dénouement*, resulting in her piercing the eyes of the traitor (8,13,1) before falling on her own sword (8,14,1–2). Both punishment and suicide are highly typical of tragic plots. Thrasyllus too chooses a Sophoclean mode of death: he shuts himself in Charite's tomb 8,14,4–5).⁵⁸ Charite is also reminiscent of Vergil's Dido, herself a tragic-epic heroine.⁵⁹ Like Dido, who also dies by the sword, Charite rushes madly through the streets on receipt of the news of Tlepolemus' death (8,6,4), and is visited by the shade of her dead husband in her sleep (8,8,6–9).⁶⁰ Therefore, Apuleius inserts epic and dramatic motifs into this particular tale. Although this is not the only occasion on which the author combines literary genres in this way,⁶¹ I believe that here, particularly, our attention is drawn to the theatrical and fictional nature of the tale. There is a great emphasis on acting and pretence in this tale – Thrasyllus' deceit requires him to be a consummate actor (8,2,5, *amici fidelissimi personam mentiebatur*, 8,6,2, *dolorem simulat...omnia quidem lugentium officia sollerter affinxit*, 8,7,1, *Thrasyllus nimium nimius*

⁵⁷ Mason 1978, 10–12, Schiesaro 1988, 141–150, and Mattiacci 1993, 257–267.

⁵⁸ The whole finale evokes several famous tragedies: Charite's blinding of Thrasyllus (8,13,1) is reminiscent both of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, and Euripides' *Hekabe*; Charite stabs herself (8,14,1) in the manner of Sophocles' *Ajax* (just as Dido does), and Thrasyllus' death, sealed up in a tomb, is like that of *Antigone*. (These tragic elements are dealt with in more detail by May 2002, 220ff). There is a gender reversal at work in the tragic fates of the protagonists, though, with Charite undergoing a masculine death, Thrasyllus a feminine one. See Loraux 1987, 8–17.

⁵⁹ See Shumate 1996, 103–108, Harrison 1997, 63–67.

⁶⁰ See Verg. *Aen.* 4.662–5, 300–305, and 455–462, respectively.

⁶¹ For example, the adultery tales in Books 9–10 are highly influenced by Roman mime (Lateiner 2000, 316–319), and display features of comic and tragic drama (Mason 1978, 10–12), while, as I have already remarked, the narrative of Cupid and Psyche's marriage exhibits a combination of literary features (see above, Part 1).

clamare, plangere, ... fallere etc.⁶²), Tlepolemus’ ghost reveals the truth to Charite (*omnem.. scaenam sceleris illuminavit* at 8,8,9⁶³), which incites Charite’s plan to trap Thrasyllus (*placuit Thrasyullo scaena feralium nuptiarum... 8,11,1*⁶⁴). The vocabulary of the stage, and of pretence, supports the dramatic and fictional nature of the slave’s tale. Moreover, it is inconsistent with Charite’s own version of her history, which features in Lucius’ main narrative (at 8,2,1, Thrasyllus is described as the chief of several suitors, while at 4,26,3–5, Charite implies that Tlepolemus had been the only man considered for her hand), and the slave exaggerates, deliberately undermining his own veracity (at 8,7,4–5, he tells his audience that Charite tried every manner of suicide, admitting immediately after that she attempted only one method). The narrator, too, seems to be a performer, and his internal audience reacts appropriately:

haec ille longos trahens suspiritus et nonnunquam illacrimans graviter affectis rusticis annuntiabat.

Tunc illi mutati dominii novitatem metuentes et infortunium domus erilis altius miserantes fugere comparant.

This was the news that the slave brought, punctuated with extended sighs and occasional tears; his audience of country-workers was deeply moved. *But fearing the unfamiliarity of a change in ownership, and, more deeply, pitying the misfortune of their former master’s house, they prepared to leave.* (8,15,1)⁶⁵

The slave thus delivers a messenger speech (“*annuntiabat*”) of the kind found in tragedy, informing the audience of climactic events, who listen and react, with fear (“*metuentes*”) and pity (“*miserantes*”),⁶⁶ but soon move off, more concerned with ‘real life’ and their employment, than with the tragic world of Charite. Nor does Lucius, Charite’s comrade in former hardships, express sadness at her strange death; he is more concerned for his penis

⁶² “He falsely played the role of the truest of friends,” “he feigned sorrow... he made practised pretence of performing all observances of mourners,” “Thrasyllus made a show of crying out and beating his breast all too vehemently” .

⁶³ “He revealed the nefarious plot in all its entirety.”

⁶⁴ “This staging of a marriage with death pleased Thrasyllus.”

⁶⁵ The translation marked by asterisks is my own.

⁶⁶ The emotions, according to Aristotle, which are provoked by a good tragedy (*Poetics*.1452b–1454b).

(8,15,4).⁶⁷ This contrasts with Charite's grateful devotion to Lucius after their rescue from her kidnappers (7,14,1–4): his lack of emotion is puzzling to the reader.

This tale, like others in the novel, is highly dramatic, and somewhat unreliable; its participants are continually associated with renowned fictional characters, its narration is characterised as a performance, and its source of information is dubious. While it is no doubt an emotive tale, and one that affects the reader of the novel, it is presented as a piece of drama and is received as such by the internal audience.⁶⁸ This tale of female strength and loyalty is represented as unrealistic and incredible, and, as such, it can be paralleled with another of the faithful marriages in the novel, itself a tale, inserted into Lucius' narration of the story of Charite and Tlepolemus.

Part 3: The marriage of Plotina

Plotina appears to be the best wife in the entire novel. She has reared ten children,⁶⁹ is suitably chaste for a *matrona*, and is fiercely loyal to her husband, following him into exile and taking equal responsibility for their safety and that of their possessions (7,6,3–4). Moreover, she rids herself of the dangerous and desirous femininity exhibited by many of the women in the novel:

Spretis atque contemptis urbicae luxuriae deliciis, fugientis comes et infortunatii socia, tonso capillo in masculinam faciem reformato habitu...

She rejected and disdained the pleasures of high-life at Rome to accompany her exiled husband and to share his privations. Her hair was cropped and her appearance mannish. (7,6,3–4)

Plotina firmly rejects pleasure and is “virtually unique in the *Metamorphoses*, both for her *pudicitia* and as a woman who succeeds in noble pur-

⁶⁷ This comical motif contrasts sharply with the ‘tragedy’ we have just witnessed.

⁶⁸ Zimmerman 2001, 252 ff, suggests that audience reactions within the fictional world of the novel are an important guide against which to assess reader response.

⁶⁹ This, then, is the only other fruitful marriage in the novel, apart from Cupid and Psyche's (see above, Part 1). It is typical of Plotina's status as an impossible ideal that she should be *so* productive.

poses.”⁷⁰ However, her existence is also a lie. Her story is narrated to the bandits, Charite, and the eavesdropping Lucius by ‘Haemus,’ a character invented for himself by Tlepolemus to infiltrate the robbers’ hideout and rescue his fiancée. Just as Tlepolemus is “using a sham autobiography for a deadly serious purpose,”⁷¹ so is he using the story of Plotina for a reason. For in the audience listening to his account of the perfect wife is Charite, his future bride. The narrative of Plotina’s marriage is placed within Lucius’ narrative of the earlier section of Charite and Tlepolemus’ relationship, during which the couple are unmarried. This idealistic marriage narrative foreshadows the slave’s subsequent idealisation of the events of their actual marriage.⁷² But it is not the only model of behaviour Tlepolemus lays down for Charite. After ‘Haemus’ has told the Plotina story (7,6,2–7,3), and has been accepted into the robbers’ band (7,9,1), he suggests an alternative fate for Charite (who had been condemned to death inside the belly of Lucius at 6,31,3–32,2), with another untruthful tale; he claims to know some brothel-keepers, to whom he suggests the girl should be sold (7,9,6). These then, are the two options secretly offered to Charite by Tlepolemus – fidelity, exemplified by Plotina, or promiscuity, exemplified by prostitution. These two extremes provide Charite with a choice, and her decision initially causes considerable confusion.

At first, although he is unaware of the precise nature of this ‘testing’ of Charite, Lucius believes that she has chosen the role of prostitute;

ut mihi merito subiret vituperatio totius sexus, cum viderem puellam, proci iuvenis amore nuptiarumque castarum desiderio simulato, lupanaris spurci sordidique subito delectari nomine; et tunc quidem totarum mulierum secta moresque de asini pendebant iudicio.

My natural reaction was to criticize the whole sex when I observed that this girl, who had pretended to be in love with her young suitor and to long for a chaste marriage, welcomed the prospect of a foul and filthy brothel. At that moment the whole female sex and its morals lay perilously poised on the judgement of an ass. (7,10,3–4)

⁷⁰ Schlam 1978, 100.

⁷¹ Winkler 1985, 49.

⁷² See above, Part 2.

Lucius and reader alike are shocked by this turn of events, until our narrator realises that ‘Haemus’ is Tlepolemus, and that the maiden is not relishing the thought of a brothel, but of rescue, survival, and marriage to her hero (7,12,1). At the very point of this revelation, we also find out Charite’s name for the first time (7,12,2) – she had been an unnamed *virgo*, or *puella*, since her arrival at 4,23,3. This name, which means ‘Grace,’ is an apt one; the reader is thus reassured that she will make the right choice, and her name foreshadows her future behaviour – in her subsequent adventures, she chooses Plotina’s role, rather than that of a prostitute. For, as mentioned earlier, in her active revenge for the death of Tlepolemus, Charite becomes masculinised and heroic, in a similar manner to Plotina. Plotina follows her husband into exile, while Charite follows hers into death. Unexpectedly, Charite *does* live up to Tlepolemus’ fictional ideal of wifedom, but in doing so becomes a fiction herself. By becoming an idealised tragic heroine, her life has to be represented as a drama.⁷³ For emphasis, Apuleius opportunely provides us with an implicit warning to resist believing everything we see and hear in this novel. Lucius’ misjudgement of Charite at 7,10,3–4, shows that by not questioning the nature of the stories we are being told, we may jump to incorrect conclusions.

Part 4: Lucius and Isis

The only other female character who approaches Plotina in her sanctity and safety is Isis, the goddess into whose cult Lucius is initiated in Book 11. Isis is represented as Lucius’ saviour, and her arrival dramatically alters the course of the novel’s action and, arguably, its tone and meaning. The goddess is joined to her initiate in “a very special kind of heterosexual union,”⁷⁴ a spiritual and celibate marriage, thus saving him from the persecution of *Fortuna*, the goddess blamed for Lucius’ misadventures while he was devoted to *serviles... voluptates* (11,15,1). Like Plotina, Isis rejects pleasures of the physical kind: her followers must be celibate (11,19,3) and must restrict their intake of certain foods (11,21,9). Above all, they are characterised by their fidelity and holiness. ‘Haemus’ sums up Plotina’s character with the following words:

⁷³ See above, Part 2.

⁷⁴ Lateiner 2000, 326.

sanctissima – vera enim dicenda sunt – et unicae fidei femina...

this most holy woman, faithful and true to her husband (as the truth must be declared)... (7,7,3)⁷⁵

Isis’ mythic and divine role was “above all else the faithful wife and indeed the divine patroness of family life,”⁷⁶ and it is to her “*numen... sanctissimum*” (11,25,6) that Lucius devotes himself during his initiation. Although Psyche and Charite are faithful wives, their devotion to their husbands is questioned in the narrative (whether justly or not) – Psyche disobeys Cupid’s orders and is punished accordingly (5,24,3–5), while Charite is responsible for Lucius’ vilification of the entire female sex (7,10,3–4). Only Plotina and Isis remain uncriticised. Furthermore, they both seem to have a feminizing influence on the men in their stories: Lucius’ appearance at 11,24,2 (*sed floride depicta veste conspicuus*⁷⁷), as he approaches the goddess’ statue to proclaim himself her eternal follower, is reminiscent of Haemus’ cross-dressing at 7,8,1 (*sumpta veste muliebri florida*⁷⁸) when he flees the consequences of Plotina’s righteous approach to Caesar. All of the human female characters involved in these marriages (Charite, Psyche, and Plotina), are masculinized by their actions,⁷⁹ but Isis and Plotina, the ‘ideal wives,’ are masculinized in two additional ways. Firstly, by their emasculating effect on male characters (Lucius and ‘Haemus’), and secondly, (and more importantly) by their distancing from the typically dangerous female characteristics of the women in the *Metamorphoses*; they are faithful, honourable and dignified, and are dissociated from the destructive and overwhelmingly feminine force of *voluptas*. It is this important differentiation of Plotina and Isis from all the other female characters in the novel, which represents them as ‘the only wives worth having.’

Therefore, the only two examples of female nobility in the *Metamorphoses* can be closely compared. Yet why is there such an association between the supposedly meaningful representation of Isis in Lucius’ primary narrative, and the entirely untruthful and manipulative embedded tale of

⁷⁵ His assertion that the “truth must be declared” in the middle of what turns out to be a manipulative lie, is ironic.

⁷⁶ Witt 1971, 41.

⁷⁷ “The... garment that I wore made me conspicuous, for it was elaborately embroidered.”

⁷⁸ “I put on a lady’s dress with a floral pattern.”

⁷⁹ See above, Part 2, for Charite’s active masculinity. May (forthcoming) points out how dangerous Psyche is when provoked – she cunningly brings about her sisters’ deaths.

Plotina? I would like to suggest that an answer lies within a summary of the three tales already discussed, and their reflection on the novel in its entirety.

Firstly, in the tale of Cupid and Psyche, we have a clear declaration of its status as an entertainment, which is, however, complicated by the obvious and multifarious meanings thrown up by the narrative. It is an attractive and beautifully written tale, intended to cheer up a captive girl, yet it has philosophical content and sinister undertones. Secondly, in the slave's narration of Charite's marriage and death, we are presented with a dramatic and exaggerated performance, intentionally presented as misleading and limited, with inconsistencies and its disclaimer. It does not lead its internal audience into contemplative reflection, or displays of sincere emotion. And thirdly, Plotina's story is represented as an elaborate untruth, told with an explicit purpose in mind, but also with a hidden one. It is both a lie "credible only to an imperceptive audience of loutish bandits,"⁸⁰ and simultaneously, it is a test for the character able to pick out the true nature of the tale. It is a tale, therefore, designed with both the naïve and the astute in mind. These three different types of tale, simplified in this way, can be seen to display characteristics of the novel as a whole, a discussion of which will lead me to a conclusion on the nature of 'Marriage' and 'Storytelling' in the *Metamorphoses*.

Like the tale of Cupid and Psyche, the *Metamorphoses* at its opening characterises itself as an entertainment;

*At ego tibi sermone isto Milesio varias fabulas conseram auresque tuas
benivolas lepido susurro permulceam...
lector intende; laetaberis.*

What I should like to do is to weave together different tales in this Milesian mode of story-telling and to stroke your approving ears with some elegant whispers... Give it your attention, dear reader, and it will delight you. (1,1,1–6)

We are to be diverted, then, with a pleasant series of tales, like Charite was with the old woman's delightful story. However, just as *Cupid and Psyche* was perhaps mis-categorized by its narrator, the *Metamorphoses* also has a misleading introduction.⁸¹ By no means is the whole of the novel pleasant –

⁸⁰ Lateiner 2000, 321, n.20.

⁸¹ Indeed, the entire prologue is hugely perplexing. See Winkler 1985, 180–203, Harrison 2000, 228. As well as Too 2001, and De Jong 2001, whose discussions of the narrator of

many of the tales are very distressing – and up until Book 11,⁸² the worldview of the *Metamorphoses* is overwhelmingly negative. It is also surprising to find within a ‘Milesian tale’ such varied philosophical and literary interpretations.⁸³ Thus, for a supposedly pleasant, diverting story, the *Metamorphoses* is surprisingly sophisticated and cynical. For every positive reading one could make, there appears to be an opposite meaning; for example, Lucius could be seen as finding salvation through religion and the wisdom of the Isiac priests in Book 11, but these priests are reminiscent of the corrupt Syrian priests in Books 8 and 9, particularly when it comes to Lucius’ money (11,18,3; 11,21,4; 11,23,1; 11,28,1, etc.).⁸⁴ Similarly, any Platonic readings of the novel are marred by a representation of a man named Socrates as a lustful fool, in Book 1.⁸⁵ Like the old woman’s tale of Cupid and Psyche, the *Metamorphoses* is full of ambiguities and its ending can be read either as positive or negative.⁸⁶

Apuleius also reminds us of the novel’s limitations as a narrative in a similar manner to the slave introducing his narration of Charite’s *historia*. Lucius, as our narrator, frequently reveals his own shortcomings; he misjudges characters (like Charite at 7,10,3–4), and stories (6,25,1; 9,14,1; 10,2,4), he shows himself to be naïve (1,3,2–4,6; 2,12,3–5) and fickle (he changes his opinions of Photis at 2,6,6ff, and 3,26,2; similarly with Charite at 7,10,3–4 and 7,12,1), and he sometimes feels the need to defend his narration to the reader (9,30,1; 10,33,4).⁸⁷ Therefore, we are presented with an unreliable narrator, who not only narrates his experiences, but also relays to the reader the tales which have been told to him, or overheard while he was an animal! As with the dramatic story of Charite’s death, the reader has to be vigilant throughout the *Metamorphoses* and its embedded tales, and insert

the prologue are cited above, there are many more helpful articles in Kahane and Laird (eds) 2001, which address varied aspects of the prologue.

⁸² And, perhaps, including Book 11. See Harrison 2000, 236ff.

⁸³ See Schlam 1992, 27, “Testimonia establish the character of such tales as short, comic and bawdy.”

⁸⁴ See Harrison 2000, 248.

⁸⁵ For Platonic readings see Schlam 1971, 479–487 who, in particular, tries to reconcile the problematic portrayal of Socrates to a Platonic reading, and DeFilippo 1999, 277–289. For limitations of the Platonic readings, see Harrison 2000, 252–259.

⁸⁶ See Winkler 1985, 204–247, and Harrison 2000, 244–248 for differing interpretations of the ending.

⁸⁷ For Lucius’ limitations as a narrator, see Smith 1999, 202–208, Harrison 2000, 219–20.

his/her own “question-marks”⁸⁸ into the information Lucius is equipped to give. Also, like the audience reacting to the slave’s story with detached interest, perhaps the reader of the *Metamorphoses* is expected to assume a similar air of detachment – for how could we invest our emotions in a story told by such an unreliable narrator?

However, behind the incompetent Lucius lurks the sophistic author, Apuleius,⁸⁹ and I believe the manipulative ‘Plotina’ story goes some way towards revealing his purpose. As I noted earlier, I believe the Plotina story to have a dual purpose, attuned to the different audiences within the novel;⁹⁰ the story is both an elaborate lie, and a cunning test. These two manifestations of the same story can be applied to the *Metamorphoses* just as aptly. While it is a fantastic and diverting tale in the manner of *Cupid and Psyche*, and the performance of Charite’s story, it is also a challenge to the astute reader. And the challenge lies, I believe, in not becoming too embroiled in one particular reading of the novel. As Apuleius demonstrates by Lucius’ example immediately after the ‘Plotina’ story (7,10,3–4), drawing incorrect conclusions is easy to do, but can result in appearing foolish. Also, the sheer abundance of possible interpretations of the novel, and the impossibility of finding an entirely satisfying one, would appear to support this theory. By paralleling Isis, in his primary narrative, and Plotina, in an embedded tale, as ideal wives and honourable females, Apuleius encourages further comparisons, particularly (given Plotina’s status as a fictional, idealised construct) narratological ones. He thus reminds the reader that he is behind Lucius’ tale, just as Tlepolemus manipulates ‘Haemus’ and his tale. Lucius’ Isis is just as fictional as ‘Haemus’ Plotina, the entire novel as fictional as its contained, often misleading stories. The author therefore undermines the most explicit ‘meaning’ in his novel’s primary narrative, that of Isiac redemption, by equating it with a tricky tale, that teaches us not to interpret stories too literally, as their true meaning(s) may be multiple, or hidden.

The theme of marriage that features so extensively in the *Metamorphoses*, can thus be used to provide a further insight into the sophistication of the novel. If we look at the ‘good’ and faithful marriages in the novel, instead of concentrating on the more numerous unhappy, adulterous and

⁸⁸ See above, n.55.

⁸⁹ For Apuleius’ ‘revealing’ sophistic moments in the text, see Harrison 2000, 227–8, 229–235.

⁹⁰ See above, Part 3.

deceitful unions, we can see how they subtly reveal the ambiguous, manipulative and fictional nature of the whole novel. As we have seen, Apuleius makes clear the limitations of these embedded tales, and the idealistic nature of the partnerships, thereby foreclosing any overly simplistic or positive readings of the final book (that is, Lucius’ narration of his ‘redemption’). Furthermore, the common status of these narratives as ‘tales’ reveals a great deal about the nature of ‘storytelling’ in the novel. It is clearly possible for the same story to be a charming diversion and a meaningful allegory, a simple tale and a literary masterpiece, a pleasant story and a sinister warning, a trick and a challenge. And the *Metamorphoses*, the story which contains them all, thus implicitly reflects itself, within itself.⁹¹

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⁹¹ My sincere thanks are owed to Regine May, Stephen Harrison, and Alison Sharrock, for their helpful ideas, comments and criticism during this paper’s production. I am also grateful to the editors of *Ancient Narrative* for publishing this paper, which started life as an essay for my MA at the University of Manchester.

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