

# A Pivotal Metaphor in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*: Aristomenes' and Lucius' Death and Rebirth

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For my mother Chrysoula  
*In Memoriam*

It is only very recently that scholars of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* have come to observe and appreciate the theme of Aristomenes' metaphorical death and rebirth when he falls victim to the witches (*Met.* 1.15–17). Thus, Donald Lateiner has called attention to the imagery of death and rebirth when Aristomenes is on the ground, lifeless, naked and cold (1.14).<sup>1</sup> W.H. Keulen points out that Aristomenes describes his state of humiliation when the witches leave the inn “in terms of both new-born life and death”.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in their most recent article, Warren S. Smith and Baynard Woods briefly observe Aristomenes' vacillation between life and death, interpreting it in terms of Plato's *Phaedo* 72B and arguing ‘that “the living are generated from the dead as much as the dead from the living.”’<sup>3</sup>

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The text of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* is quoted from Helm's Teubner edition (1992). All Latin translations of Apuleius are from Hanson's Loeb edition (1989).

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<sup>1</sup> Lateiner 2001, 234 and 221.

<sup>2</sup> Keulen 2003, 258, also 260 and 261. For the theme of apparent death and rebirth in the novel see Zimmerman 2000, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Smith and Woods 2002, 191. For a thorough discussion of the Platonic elements in the entire tale, see Harrison 2002, 42-43 and Harrison 1998, 57. See also van der Paardt 1978, 83.

Apart from these isolated observations, the significance of the metaphor of Aristomenes' death and rebirth permeating the novel's opening tale has received no further elucidation. On close examination, the metaphor emerges as a skilful literary device, by which the author conveys the changes Aristomenes undergoes and the associated revision of his views about magic. This negative death and rebirth following contact with the witches in the shorter tale is best viewed in comparison with the positive conditions prevailing in Lucius' Isiac rebirth in the novel's larger story.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows I intend to compare and contrast the context of the above metaphors, and elucidate how Aristomenes' figurative death and rebirth in the tale also help to retain the codices' reading *pater meus* at 1.17, which textual critics either print or delete, but invariably fail to explain in adequate terms.

On arriving at Hypata, Aristomenes finds Socrates in a terrible state as a result of his affair with his mistress, Meroe the witch. Aristomenes takes his friend to an inn and advises him to leave the following morning, thus revealing his complete failure to comprehend the powers of magic. At around midnight the two witches, Meroe and her sister Panthia, burst into the inn to exact their revenge on Socrates for his act of desertion. Meroe plunges her sword into his neck, collects his blood in a jar and pulls out his heart, presumably in order to ensure that he will die. However, Socrates' death takes place the following morning, most probably so as not to implicate the witches in the murder. This delay becomes possible since Panthia inserts a sponge in Socrates' neck to conceal his wound, all the while exhorting it to return to the sea via a river (1.13): "*heus tu*", inquit, "*spongia, cave in mari nata per flumen transeas*", "listen, o sponge, born in the sea, take care to travel back through a river." Thus Meroe can teach a lesson to Aristomenes, who naively thinks that he can take Socrates away from her, unable as he is to comprehend the powers of magic. The witches' last act before leaving for good is to urinate over Aristomenes' face.

Scholars have either interpreted Aristomenes' drenching in urine as an act that places him under the control of the witches,<sup>5</sup> or have considered the

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<sup>4</sup> For the relationship between magic and religion, see Graf 1991, 188-213. See also Betz 1991, 244-59.

<sup>5</sup> Scobie 1975, 109, s.v. *vesicam exonerant*, observes that "urinating around or on someone prevented a person from escaping from a particular situation."

urine as equivalent to semen, thus interpreting the scene as a form of rape.<sup>6</sup> In our view, however, the incident is best interpreted as a metaphorical act of birth: according to one myth, Orion was born from his father's urine, a fact also reflected in the etymology of his name, which is related to the verb *ourein*, meaning to urinate. This reading is also backed up by Aristomenes' own words, when he describes his condition in terms of a series of death-rebirth metaphors (1.14):

at ego, ut eram, etiam nunc humi proiectus, inanimis, nudus et frigidus et lotio perlutus, quasi recens utero matris editus, immo vero semimortuus, verum etiam ipse mihi supervivens et postumus vel certe destinatae iam cruci candidatus.

But I stayed where I was, sprawled on the ground, lifeless, naked and cold, and covered with urine, as if I had just come out of my mother's womb. No, it was more like being half-dead but still my own survivor, a posthumous child, or at least a sure candidate for crucifixion.

In this extract, there are several allusions to Aristomenes' death and rebirth. The term *inanimis*, lifeless, may point to his death;<sup>7</sup> but the terms *nudus*, naked, and *frigidus*, cold, may suggest his birth, the newly-born Aristomenes having been separated from the warmth of his mother's womb. Such a reading is reinforced by the fact that Aristomenes likens his condition to that of one emerging from the maternal womb: *quasi recens utero matris editus*. Although Aristomenes does not specify the identity of this mother, the earlier reference to Socrates' sexual contact with Meroe helps to cast her in this figurative role: *ab unico congressu* (1.7).<sup>8</sup> In this context, the urine may be read as equivalent to the breaking of waters that precedes the act of birth, and therefore Aristomenes' 'rebirth'. The presence of Panthia should not create any obstacle to this view. On the level of metaphor, Meroe appears as Aristomenes' 'mother', and Panthia as a midwife, since she mediates and

<sup>6</sup> Keulen 2003, 253.

<sup>7</sup> Lateiner 2001, 221; while Smith and Woods 2002, 191, observe in brief that Aristomenes appears as a newly born babe.

<sup>8</sup> Meroe's role as mother also emerges in implicit terms. In 1.13 Panthia proposes that they tear Aristomenes apart in their Bacchic frenzy (*bacchatim*), thus establishing a remote link with the fate that befell the mythic Pentheus at the hands of his mother Agave and her sisters for spying on the rites of the Theban women.

shares in this act of magical ‘birth’. Viewed in another way, Panthia and Meroe as sisters may be seen as metaphorical representations of each other and thus their mutual actions can be interpreted as being accomplished by one of them. Although Aristomenes redefines his condition in the same sequence as *semimortuus*, ‘half-dead’ and *mihi supervivens*, ‘his own survivor’, his final self-identification as *postumus*, meaning ‘born after the father’s death’, hints at Socrates’ presumed death and his own metaphorical rebirth.<sup>9</sup>

As a newly born person, Aristomenes constantly misreads the world around him, much as one would expect of a naïve infant. His incongruent readings of the same events, one during the night and the other the following morning, reveal the deceptive nature of magic, associated as it is with appearances, and align with the novel’s key theme of metamorphosis.

In particular, during the night Aristomenes views the sleeping Socrates as already dead and imagines himself as a candidate for crucifixion. His decision to leave the inn in the middle of the night is prompted by a desire to avoid the death sentence associated with murder. However, any such plans are thwarted by the doorkeeper, who prevents him from leaving on the grounds that the streets are dangerous, and goes on to confirm Aristomenes’ worst fears by accusing him of having murdered his companion. Structurally, Aristomenes’ subsequent attempted suicide, when he falls comically on top of the sleeping Socrates and they roll over together on the ground, replicates his earlier failure to leave the inn. Aristomenes’ unsuccessful attempt either to commit suicide or leave the inn reveals the inability of humans to counteract the effects of magic without higher aid, thus foreshadowing Isis’ intervention to offer salvation to Lucius from his hardships at the novel’s end.

Aristomenes’ view of his friend’s condition in the morning differs considerably from his interpretation of events the previous night. This shift comes about at daybreak, when the doorman violently bursts into the room laughing and shouting for the guests to wake up, since it is time they left. Socrates then awakes, either from Aristomenes’ fall on top of him or from the doorman’s shouts. At this moment, Aristomenes sees Socrates to all appearances ‘alive’. In his unexpected delight, on introducing Socrates to the doorman he employs several terms of endearment and kinship, one of which betrays his own metaphorical rebirth (1.17):

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<sup>9</sup> OLD, s.v. *postumus* b.

'ecce, ianitor fidelissime, comes [et pater meus] et frater meus, quem nocte embrius occisum a me calumniabaris.'

'Look, my trusty porter,' I said, 'here is my friend and father and brother, whom in your drunkenness last night you slanderously accused me of having murdered.'

Here editors differ considerably. Some delete the MSS reading *et pater meus* as a case of dittography.<sup>10</sup> Others retain it, but explain it as an indication of Aristomenes' utmost delight in unexpectedly finding Socrates 'alive'.<sup>11</sup> In turn, we would argue that the controversial expression can be retained and extended for two reasons: firstly, Aristomenes can identify Socrates as his father, *pater meus*, given the latter's earlier sexual contact with the witch Meroe, which foreshadows the "son's" metaphoric rebirth; and secondly, he may also do so in view of the fact that Socrates introduced him to magic.<sup>12</sup> In this context the two other expressions, *comes* and *frater meus*, may also be explained figuratively: Aristomenes and Socrates are to be seen as friends and brothers as common victims of magic, just as the two witches, Meroe and Panthia, are figured as companions, sisters and co-practitioners of the black arts. In 1.11 the two witches burst together into the room to perform their deadly rites on the sleeping Socrates and later, in 1.12 and 1.13, address each other twice as *soror*.<sup>13</sup> The unusual accumulation of endearment and kinship terms in 1.17 is designed to remove every suspicion falling on Aristomenes as Socrates' possible murderer.

The violent entry of the doorman into the room calls to mind the sudden appearance of the witches in the same room the previous night. It thus signals the continuation of the witches' revenge plan on Socrates in the later part of the tale. However, Aristomenes surmises that nothing in fact transpired the previous night, because he unexpectedly sees Socrates apparently 'alive'. He further thinks that the time is ripe for the escape plan to be

<sup>10</sup> Helm 1992; Robertson-Vallette 1940-45 and Magnaldi 2000, 46. Also Ruebel 2000, 42, s.v. 320.

<sup>11</sup> Hildebrand 1968; Hanson 1989; Scobie 1975; and Keulen 2003, 293, s.v. *et pater meus*.

<sup>12</sup> The repetition of *et* should not create a problem in advancing this view (see examples in Kühner-Stegmann 1976, 34, s.v. *et...et*), while the reoccurrence of *meus* is intended to emphasize Aristomenes' close relationship with Socrates.

<sup>13</sup> For the term, 'brother', *adelphos*, at Eleusis (Plat. *Epist.* 7.333e) for those who receive initiation together see Burkert 1987, 45 and note 77, p 149, with further references there.

brought to a safe conclusion, and thus exhorts Socrates to depart (1.17): *'quin imus', inquam, 'et itineris matutini gratiam capimus?'*, 'Why don't we go and take advantage of travelling in the early morning?' This exhortation may be interpreted in precisely the opposite way, as revealing Aristomenes' eagerness to lead his friend unknowingly to death and then bury him when he dies, thus justifying Meroe's earlier resolve to spare his life (1.13).<sup>14</sup>

The final tragic act takes place when Aristomenes offers Socrates bread and cheese to recover his strength, thus precipitating the latter's thirst. Aristomenes' fear for his life is renewed, as he does not see any travelers on the road to bear witness to his lack of involvement in his friend's untimely demise when Socrates turns pale after eating (1.19): *'quis enim de duobus comitum alterum sine alterius noxa peremptum crederet?'*, 'Who would ever believe that one of the two companions was murdered without the other being guilty?'. The absence of road travellers contrasts with the earlier presence of the doorman, who burst into the room and witnessed Socrates 'alive', thus eliminating all evidence of the witches' deeds and placing any future suspicions exclusively on Aristomenes. Socrates' death takes place by the river when Aristomenes directs him to the spring to quench his thirst, completely unmindful of Panthia's earlier instructions to the sponge (1.13). As soon as Socrates puts water to his lips, the sponge falls from his wound to return to the sea via the river. The animation of the sponge as it falls into the river water and becomes swollen recalls the context of Aristomenes' ritual soaking in urine associated with his magical 'birth'.<sup>15</sup>

Upon Socrates' death, Aristomenes fully realizes the dangers of magic for the first time, therefore becoming a mature person, as evinced by his

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<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, on the road, having failed to see any wound at the point in Socrates' neck where Meroe plunged her sword, Aristomenes reinterprets the previous night's events as a nightmare caused by excessive eating and drinking. (For a rationalizing reading of this episode, see Panayotakis 1998, 126.) On the other hand, readers of the novel may recall that Panthia has concealed the wound with a sponge. Aristomenes interprets events by appealing to the authority of doctors who propose a connection between food and bad dreams. Socrates also defines his tragic experience the previous night and his present weakness as a bad dream. This is understandable if we consider that Socrates was presented as sleeping when the witches entered the room to carry out their murderous plot. This misreading of events by both characters involved in the episode allows Aristomenes to maintain the illusion of carrying through his own plan to rescue his friend, whereas he is in fact destined to do quite the opposite.

<sup>15</sup> Outside the water the sponge is inanimate, but when wet it is swollen and therefore becomes alive. I thank both Gareth Schmeling and Cathy Connors for this suggestion.

ensuing conscious decision to abandon Hypata as well as his home town and his family in Aigion and relocate to Aitolia, far from places that are associated with such dangers.

Aristomenes' condition as the witches' victim closely foreshadows that of Lucius in the incident with the wineskins (2.31–32) and the ensuing mock trial in the narrative of the Laughter festival (3.1–12). In particular, Lucius returns late at night from Byrrhene's dinner party to Milo's house, accompanied by his slave (2.32). In his drunken state he sees what he thinks are three robbers and kills them one by one with his sword. He then goes to sleep, satisfied in the belief that he has accomplished an epic deed (2.32). As we learn later, these robbers are revealed to be nothing but wineskins animated by Pamphile's magic (3.18). The following morning, Lucius weeps as he envisages his likely prosecution for murder (3.1). The protagonist's two differing perceptions of the same events call to mind the pattern of Aristomenes' two different views of Socrates' condition, one during the night and the other the following morning. The connection becomes stronger as both Aristomenes and Lucius fall victim to witches. Thus the narrative makes clear the deceptive world of magic.

These resemblances, however, are designed to disclose a stark contrast between the two episodes. Lucius does not leave Hypata after murdering three 'citizens', despite his fear for his life. The Hypatans then take advantage of Lucius' foolish imaginings and put him 'on trial' in the public space of the theatre, as part of their annual celebration in honor of their god of Laughter. It is noteworthy that the Hypatans who laugh at Lucius' expense in the mock trial of the laughter festival are also victims of laughter, as they ignore the crucial information that Lucius is a victim of witchcraft. In this 'trial', Lucius is humiliated as the robbers are revealed to be wineskins.<sup>16</sup> With regard to their respective reactions to the likelihood of being tried for murder, Lucius contrasts with Aristomenes. Though both fear the death penalty, the former elects to stay in Hypata, while the other banishes himself from the town and never returns to his family.

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<sup>16</sup> The entire chain of events in the Laughter festival acquires the function of a ritual catharsis, preceding the offer of integration into the Hypatan community and their fellowship of Laughter. Quite understandably, Lucius turns down the offer of the Hypatans. For a discussion of the Laughter festival as an integration ritual and its relationship with Isis' festival in Book 11, see Frangoulidis 2002, 177–88.

Aristomenes' self-imposed banishment aligns with the character's rebirth as a new person with revised views about magic, while simultaneously bringing to fulfilment his earlier unsuccessful attempts to flee the inn or commit suicide, as his exile is a form of "social death". In Aitolia Aristomenes remarries, starting a new life, thus bringing the metaphor of his rebirth at the hands of magic full circle.

The metaphor of Aristomenes' rebirth is also evinced, long after his encounter with the witches in the inn, by his role as narrator of the tale to a sceptical listener and the gullible Lucius on their way to Hypata. Evidently, Aristomenes' goal in life is to recount the cautionary tale of his dreadful experience with the witches, and thus to warn others of their evil powers. In so doing, Aristomenes is set in opposition to Lucius, the primary narrator, who not only relates the story of his sufferings through magic, but also Isis' benevolent role in delivering him from hardship.<sup>17</sup>

Having heard Aristomenes' cautionary tale, Lucius should stay away from Hypata, as do Aristomenes and the sceptical listener, who turn to the left upon their arrival at the city gates. Instead, our protagonist willingly enters the town and deliberately involves himself in an affair with the witch's slave girl, Fotis, in order to gain access to magic through her. His transformation into an ass, which marks the beginning of his woeful misadventures in the novel, may be said to replicate Aristomenes' experience as the witches' victim. In narrating his tale, then Aristomenes may in turn appear to assume Socrates' earlier role, acting as Lucius' mentor, father and brother, i.e. the person who first warns him of the destructive power of magic.

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<sup>17</sup> On the level of narration, Aristomenes tells his story of the evil powers of the witches to an unnamed sceptical listener, who rejects the tale as pure lies, and the gullible Lucius, who asserts his belief in the story. Aristomenes, who fully believes in magic only after observing the witches performing their deadly rites in the inn (*haec ego meis oculis aspexi* 1.13), recalls the listener Lucius, who first declares his belief in the supernatural after having watched a street performer at the Stoa Poecile in Athens swallowing a cavarly sword without suffering any wound (*gemino obtutu circulatorem aspexi* 1.4). Furthermore, when Aristomenes reveals himself as a superstitious person by stating that he has set out on his journey to Hypata on the wrong foot (*sinistro pede profectum me* 1.5), he calls to mind Lucius as a believer in the supernatural (1.3). By book 11, however, Lucius has come into contact with the positive magic of Isis that governs the universe, counterbalancing the negative magic of the witches. As an Isiac devotee, then, Lucius may be seen as identifying to some extent with the sceptical listener to Aristomenes' tale, who dismisses the story as a pure lie, *mendacium*.



Lucius' punishment for his involvement in magic reveals similarities and contrasts not only with Aristomenes as victim of sorcery, but also with Thelyphron, yet another character who falls victim to witches (2.31–30). Like both Aristomenes and Lucius, Thelyphron is “reborn” in a negative sense after his contact with magic, since he loses both his nose and ears to the witches. This disfigurement renders him a permanent object of ridicule at Hypata, whereas Lucius is only temporarily the centrepiece of the Laughter festival in the same town (3.1–12). Furthermore, in his self-imposed exile, Thelyphron suffers full, unredeemable social death; moreover, unlike Aristomenes, his appearance is such that he cannot hope to remarry and start life afresh. These different forms of punishment meted out to the three characters can be accounted for: Aristomenes is allowed a new life through remarriage perhaps because his motive in involving himself in magic was to save his friend. In the case of Lucius, punishment is due on account of his insistent pursuit of magic, which is mirrored in his transformation into an ass, an animal known for its foolishness, stubbornness and sexuality. Thelyphron suffers the harshest treatment of all because his involvement in witchcraft was motivated by pure greed, despite his full awareness of the witches' evil powers. Thelyphron's becoming a permanent object of ridicule at Hypata may help to explain why Lucius decides to reject the Hypatans' offer to remain in their community after being ridiculed in the ‘trial’ of the Laughter festival.

The metaphor of Aristomenes' negative ‘rebirth’ in the introductory tale best emerges on brief comparison with the positive version of it in Lucius' Isiac experience in the novel's larger story. The latter has its beginnings in Lucius-ass' secret exit from the Corinthian arena in fear for his life, and continues with his subsequent unplanned arrival at Kenchreae, where the cult of Isis flourishes. At the same time, Lucius' escape and unplanned arrival at Kenchreae signals his exit from the world of appearances and entrance into Isis' uniform world, in which deception is conspicuous for its absence. The difference between Hypata, where witches rule, and Kenchreae, dedicated to Isis, explains the completely different fortunes of those individuals who arrive in either place.

At Kenchreae, Lucius-ass first prays to the moon goddess, later identified as Isis, to deliver him from his hardships, and then goes to sleep (11.2). His pious appeal to the goddess for help is an indication of his rejection of magic. As such, it represents the complete overturning of his strong interest

in the subject in the novel's opening books. Isis responds to Lucius-ass's prayer, appearing in his sleep, and promises to restore him to his former human form the next day during the festival of *Ploiaphesia*. She further offers him glory and the prospect of a happy life under her protection, but demands devotion to her in return for this favor. His restoration to human form takes place amidst the celebrations and festive spectacles in honor of the goddess. The offering of roses by Isis' priest Mithras to Lucius during the festivities amounts to the fostering of a new life, as he turns from animal to man again and is therefore reborn both physically and spiritually, *renatus* (11.16).<sup>18</sup> The admiration of the crowd that witnesses Lucius' reformation contrasts with the reaction of the townsfolk at Hypata, who laugh at the protagonist's misfortune in the narrative of the Laughter festival. The very same instant, Lucius becomes fully aware of the blessings of Isis, as goddess of positive magic. His moment of insight the following morning mirrors Aristomenes' full comprehension of the dangers of magic following Socrates' death. This contrast between the negative powers of witches and the benevolence of Isis explains the difference between Aristomenes' decision to relocate to Aitolia and Lucius' acceptance of Mithras' advice and his entry into Isis' fellowship for even greater protection from the vicissitudes of fortune.

Entrance into the fellowship takes the form of initiation into Isiac rites involving symbolic death and rebirth. The purification with sea water, which Lucius undergoes in 11.23, is the positive expression of the ritual, and contrasts sharply with Aristomenes' defiling ritual of drenching in urine (1.14). Lucius' ensuing nocturnal descent into the realm of Proserpina, which symbolizes his voluntary death, and appearance the next morning in full glory, dressed in his *Olympica stola*, as a manifestation of his inner born self, *renatus* (11.26), counterbalances Aristomenes' nudity and filthy rebirth when the witches urinate over his face. Lucius' new attire is in complete harmony with

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<sup>18</sup> The attending crowd express their awe at Isis' miracle of Lucius' reformation and hail him as *renatus*, reborn (11.16). The reaction of this crowd calls to mind the participants in the festival in honor of the god of Laughter at Hypata (3.1-12). Note, however, the stark contrast: in the Laughter festival the Hypatan crowd burst into sadistic laughter at Lucius, who has been fooled into believing that he killed three robbers. The "victims" are subsequently revealed to be wineskins animated by Pamphile's magic. On the other hand, the participants in Isis' festival do not laugh at Lucius when he enters the festival procession in the form of an ass, the outcome of his involvement in magic, but instead express their awe at the miracle of his restoration to human form. For parallels between the *Ploiaphesia* festival and the Laughter festival see Frangoulidis 2002, 185, n. 21.

the metaphor of his rebirth; as a newly born person he needs new clothes that mark him as a man transformed. In his new status as Isis' priest, he enjoys happiness and bliss, unlike Aristomenes, who remains in constant fear for his life long after his horrible experience with the witches in the inn. Here we should note that Meroe, like Isis, has been pointedly labelled *femina divina* (1.8).<sup>19</sup>

After his initiation, Lucius identifies the goddess as mother of all the wretched: *dulcem matris affectionem miserorum casibus tribuis*, 'you apply the sweet affection of a mother to the misfortunes of the wretched' (11.25), and views Mithras the priest as *meum iam parentem*, 'who was now also a father to me' (11.25).<sup>20</sup> Taken together, these two features call to mind Meroe and Socrates, who appear as Aristomenes' figurative parents. Here again, the contrast between the two narratives is striking: Aristomenes is portrayed as the metaphorical offspring of Meroe's sexual union with Socrates, while Lucius is figured as the spiritual offspring of Isis and her priest. After a while, Lucius receives instructions from the goddess to travel to Rome, where he undergoes two further initiations, both of which underline his joyful rebirth. Thus the narrative of the earlier adventures as an ass with the ever-present risk of death draws attention to the fact that joy cannot be found outside Isis' uniform world.

Advancement both on social and religious levels is the direct consequence of Lucius' entrance into the Isiac fellowship, as with Osiris' help he enjoys a distinguished career as a lawyer and becomes a pastophor priest and member of the quinquennial board of directors. Lucius then shaves his head once more, proudly displaying his baldness everywhere he goes.

Some scholars have argued that the final image of Lucius' proud demonstration of his shaven head is comical.<sup>21</sup> Others have pointed out that the Isiacs were often the target of ridicule and satire for their credulity and naiveté.<sup>22</sup> Lucius' ostentatious display of his baldness, however, may be read

<sup>19</sup> Harrison 1990, 194-95. See also Dowden 1998, 11, who observes that the cosmic powers of Isis are already prefigured in Meroe's portrait.

<sup>20</sup> In 11.5 Isis identifies herself to Lucius-ass as mother of the universe: *rerum naturae parens*. In 11.21, prior to initiation, Mithras kindly reprimands Lucius for wanting to be initiated into the mysteries without Isis' order. Lucius compares this reaction with that of parents who try to restrain the premature wishes of their children: *ut solentis parentes immaturis liberorum desideriis modificari*.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Winkler 1985, 224-27.

<sup>22</sup> van Mal-Maeder 1997, 105-06.

along the lines of self-assertion of his reborn identity as a pastophor priest. Moreover, in many cultures, both ancient and modern, members of religious orders may appear “strange” or “old-fashioned” to outsiders.

Following Aristomenes’ contact with the witches in the novel’s opening tale, the skilful employment of the metaphor of death and rebirth becomes an appropriate literary device with which to convey his change in social status and revised views about magic. As a newly born person, Aristomenes is presented as the metaphorical offspring of Socrates’ sexual union with Meroe. This in turn foreshadows the employment of the metaphor of the ‘son’s’ rebirth and explains the MSS reading *pater meus*, a kinship term applied to Socrates by Aristomenes, which makes clear the latter’s figurative rebirth. Furthermore, Aristomenes’ negative rebirth contrasts sharply with the positive connotations of the same metaphor in Lucius’ Isiac experience in the novel’s larger story. The fact that Aristomenes never reaches Kenchreae after his experience with the witches, as Lucius does after his own involvement in magic, explains their completely different fortunes. This difference between the rebirth of Aristomenes and Lucius in the novel’s larger story clearly illuminates the vast contrast between the negative powers of the witches and the positive magic of Isis.

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