

Parallel Cults?
Religion and Narrative in Apuleius'
Metamorphoses and Some Greek Novels

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1 Introduction

In this paper I want to compare the narrative function of the gods, their sanctuaries and oracles in the plot of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* with that of similar elements in the plots of Greek novels, and to argue that Apuleius probably knew most of the extant Greek novels and plays with their established literary uses of divine elements. This has additional relevance for the overall interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*, since it can be used to suggest that the religious element in Apuleius is more likely to have a literary, entertaining function rather than a serious, proselytising role.²

A recent investigation³ gives the following dates for the earlier Greek novels (all CE):

Achilles Tatius	before 164
Chariton	41–62
Xenophon	65–98

¹ My thanks to the audience at Rethymnon for useful discussion, and to Michael Paschalis and Stavros Frangoulidis for organising a splendid conference. The text and translation of Apuleius are cited from Hanson 1989, the translations of Greek novels from those collected in Reardon 1989 (Reardon's Chariton, Anderson's Xenophon, Winkler's Achilles, Gill's Longus, and Sullivan's *Onos*).

² Here I add to the case made in Harrison 2000, 238–52 and 2000–1.

³ Bowie 2002.

Of the other Greek extant novels, there is no doubt that either the *Onos* or the lost Greek *Metamorphoses* from which it derived predate Apuleius (and possibly both), since it is universally agreed that one of these texts gives Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* its plot, while Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* is generally dated to the period 150–250.⁴ This means that three of the six extant Greek prose fictions (the sixth is Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, which, whether it is a product of the third or fourth centuries, is generally agreed to postdate Apuleius⁵) certainly pre-date Apuleius and may have been used by him.⁶ For the two others (Achilles and Longus), work on Apuleius suggests that both may have been used in the *Metamorphoses*,⁷ which is not at all improbable if, as many believe, the *Met.* belongs to the later second century.⁸ For the purposes of this piece, I will assume that five of the extant six Greek novels (i.e. all of them excluding Heliodorus) can predate Apuleius' novel.⁹

2 *Apuleius and religious elements: the manipulation of the Greek ass-tale*

The obvious place to start any argument concerned with Apuleius' reaction to representation of religion in the Greek novels is the *Onos*. This extant text is generally agreed to be an epitome of the lost Greek *Metamorphoses* which was Apuleius' source, and whether or not the *Onos* itself also predates Apuleius, the strong likelihood that it is basically a compressed version of the Greek *Metamorphoses* allows us to treat it as prime evidence for the contents of Apuleius' main Greek model.¹⁰

I begin with two elements of Apuleius' novel which appear to be innovations and modifications of the Greek *Metamorphoses*. The most notable of these is the addition of the story of Cupid and Psyche. Though it seems likely that the *Onos* as an epitome cuts out the inserted tales of its Greek original, several traces of tale-telling remain and make it clear that (for example) the original seems to have contained tales on the road to Hypata (*Onos* 1) and tales of the robbers over their cups (*Onos* 21) which must have

⁴ See e.g. Hunter 1996, 369, Morgan 2004, 2.

⁵ See e.g. Morgan 1996, 417–21.

⁶ This has been argued for Chariton by Mattiacci 1993 and Mason 1999, 236; see also Brethes, Chapter 10 above in this volume.

⁷ See Effe 1976 (Achilles), Zimmerman et al. 2004, 552 (Longus).

⁸ See Harrison 2000, 9–10 for the arguments.

⁹ For somewhat different views on the dating of Apuleius and the relation of his novel to the Greek novels see Dowden's paper in this volume.

¹⁰ See van Thiel 1971.

formed a basis for the matching tales in Apuleius. But the passage of the *Onos* which matches the setting of the narrative of Cupid and Psyche (*Onos* 22) gives no such indications, and scholars have rightly concluded that the tale is a purely Apuleian addition.¹¹

The religious elements in Cupid and Psyche are literary rather than mystical. Merkelbach's famous argument that this narrative is primarily an allegorical story of initiation has been generally seen as over-ambitious,¹² though it seems likely that certain religious details in Cupid and Psyche hint at future Isiac initiation, for example the emphasis on the *cista mystica* and the Eleusinian Mysteries in Psyche's prayer to Ceres (6.2.4–5), a goddess later to be identified as one of the forms of Isis (cf. 11.5.2 and note 11.11.2, the *cista secretorum* of the mysteries of Isis). The general pattern of divine action in the Cupid and Psyche story strongly recalls the Greek novels (see below), just as its overall plot (boy/girl love, separation and tribulation, happy reunion and marriage) reflects the key elements of the same genre. At the same time, its presentation of the Olympian gods owes a certain amount to the epic divinities of Vergil and Homer.¹³

The second very likely certain major addition to the Greek *Metamorphoses* is of course the Isiac ending of Apuleius' novel.¹⁴ The *Onos* ends with Lucius' return home and sacrifices to the gods in thanks for his retransformation (56); in the *Metamorphoses* Lucius' reuniting with his now conveniently local family (the location of his retransformation having been switched by Apuleius from Thessalonika to the environs of Corinth) is only a temporary closure and a mere prelude (11.18) to the further tale of his initiation(s) (11.19–30), and even when he does return home after his initiation (11.26) this is the briefest of sojourns before the divine call to travel on to Rome. The whole episode of the initiation thus looks very much like an addition to the Greek ass-tale, playing with the return home which formed that tale's end, which in Apuleius is divided into two elements, Lucius' brief reuniting with his loved ones in Cenchreae and his equally brief return to his ancestral home in nearby Corinth which he leaves after a few days. It could

¹¹ This involves the assumption that the Cupid and Psyche narrative by Aristophontes of Athens mentioned by Fulgentius *Myth.* 3.6 postdates Apuleius; see also Dowden, p. 145 and n. 14 in this volume.

¹² Merkelbach 1962.

¹³ See e.g. Harrison 2006.

¹⁴ Schlam 1992, 25 suggests that the *Onos* may here modify an original religious ending of the lost Greek *Metamorphoses* which then re-emerges in Apuleius, but I regard the *Onos* as an epitome of the latter which adds nothing to its original (see also Finkelparl, Chapter 15 below).

be argued that Apuleius is merely expanding the end of the *Onos*, turning thankful sacrifices into lifelong devotion and picking up Isiac elements from Xenophon of Ephesus (see 3 (c) below), but the length and intensity of the new ending clearly presents religious elements on a different scale and level. As we shall see, this Apuleian ending also owes something to the religious closures of other Greek novels, but its emphasis on personal religious experience is unique in the novel tradition (and perhaps picks up similar elements in Aelius Aristides).¹⁵

One major religious episode narrated *in extenso* in the *Onos* is the story of the corrupt priests of the Dea Syra (35–41). This occupies a substantial but proportionally briefer section of the ass-story in the Apuleian version (*Met.* 8.24–30). Apuleius' choice to keep and expand this part of his original, which could have been omitted or compressed, shows that he picks up on the satirical aspect of this religious episode. Here as elsewhere Apuleius is following a trait of Greek low-life fiction, an alternative source to Greek 'ideal' novels which we often forget but which was often concerned with the parody and satirical treatment of religious ritual and cult, as the discovery of the fragments of the *Iolaus* and Lollianus' *Phoenikika* reminds us; this element was of course also picked up in Petronius' *Satyrica*, full of broad religious parody.¹⁶

Thus in Apuleius' appropriation of the Greek ass-tale on the evidence of the *Onos* we see the introduction of literary religious material in the Cupid and Psyche episode, the addition of an ending based on a narrative of initiation, and the retention and expansion of an episode in the Greek original which presented a satirical view of a particular divine cult. Apuleius' novel clearly shows interest in religious elements, though not perhaps of a proselytising kind.

3. Religion and narrative patterns from the Greek novels in Apuleius

After looking at the evidence of the *Onos*, I now wish to consider the ways in which the shaping of Apuleius' narrative in the *Metamorphoses* matches the narrative use of religious elements in other (and probably again earlier) Greek novels.

¹⁵ See Harrison 2001.

¹⁶ See especially Barchiesi 1999.

(a) *From sanctuary to sanctuary*

One intriguing element here is the pattern by which Greek novels often begin and end in or near a religious sanctuary, and the way in which this pattern seems to be picked up in Apuleius. The two earliest complete Greek novels both show this pattern. The key first action of Chariton's novel, the meeting of Callirhoe and Chaereas, takes place at the festival of Aphrodite in Syracuse (1.1.4–6),¹⁷ Callirhoe then goes to Aphrodite's temple to pray for a marriage with Chaereas (1.1.7, see (b) below), while its climax represents Callirhoe visiting that same temple and explicitly drawing the ring with the novel's beginning (8.8.15).¹⁸

Ἔως δὲ ἦν τὸ πλῆθος ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ, Καλλιρόη, πρὶν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν εἰσελθεῖν, εἰς τὸ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἱερὸν ἀφίκετο. λαβομένη δὲ αὐτῆς τῶν ποδῶν καὶ ἐπιθεῖσα τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ λύσασα τὰς κόμας, καταφιλοῦσα “χάρις σοι” φησίν, “Ἀφροδίτη· πάλιν γάρ μοι Χαιρέαν ἐν Συρακούσας ἔδειξας, ὅπου καὶ παρθένος εἶδον αὐτὸν σοῦ θελούσης.”

While the crowd was in the theatre, Callirhoe went to Aphrodite's temple before entering her house. She put her hands on the goddess's feet, placed her face on them, let down her hair, and kissed them. ‘Thank you, Aphrodite’ she said. ‘You have shown Chaereas to me once more in Syracuse, where I saw him as a maiden at your desire...’.

In Xenophon of Ephesus, we find a very similar pattern, in which the initial contact of Habrocomes and Anthia again occurs at a religious festival, this time in connection with the famous temple of Artemis at Ephesus (1.3.1), while the climax of the novel represents the lovers (now married) returning to Ephesus and giving thanks at the shrine of Artemis, setting up an inscription which is a *mise en abyme* of the novel itself¹⁹ (5.15.2):

ὡς δὲ ἐξέβησαν, εὐθὺς ὡς εἶχον ἐπὶ τὸ ἱερὸν τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ἤεσαν καὶ πολλὰ ἠύχοντο καὶ θύσαντες ἄλλα <τε> ἐνέθεσαν ἀναθήματα καὶ δὴ καὶ [τῆν] γραφὴν τῆ θεῶ ἀνέθεσαν πάντα ὅσα τε ἔπαθον καὶ ὅσα ἔδρασαν·

¹⁷ The cult of Aphrodite in Syracuse does not seem to be recorded elsewhere, and may be a conveniently erotic invention by Chariton (note that the temple of Homonoia at Miletus (3.2.16) is similarly unattested – cf. Ruiz-Montero 1994a, 1028).

¹⁸ For a brief note of the link between the two scenes see Hägg 1971, 216.

¹⁹ Cf. Hägg 1971, 259 n.3.

And when they disembarked, they immediately went just as they were to the temple of Artemis, offered many prayers, and made their sacrifice, and among their offerings they set up an inscription in honour of the goddess, commemorating all their sufferings and all their adventures.

In the novels of Longus and Achilles, likely to be later in date, this basic pattern is interestingly varied. *Daphnis and Chloe* famously begins with an account of the Lesbian grove dedicated to the Nymphs in which is placed the picture of which the novel provides an ekphrasis (*Prologue*), while close to its end we find the happy couple making offerings in a cave of the Nymphs (4.39.2):

Καὶ τὸ ἄντρον ἐκόσμησαν καὶ εἰκόνας ἀνέθεσαν καὶ βωμὸν εἴσαντο
Ποιμένος Ἑρωτος· καὶ τῷ Πανὶ δὲ ἔδοσαν ἀντὶ τῆς πίτυος οἰκεῖν νεὸν,
Πανᾶ Στρατιώτην ὀνομάσαντες.

They also decorated the cave and set up images in it and established an altar to Love the Shepherd, and gave Pan a temple to live in instead of the pine, calling him Pan the Soldier.

The cave of the Nymphs has already been described in the narrative as the find-spot of the infant Chloe (1.4), and the two passages clearly form a ring to round off the main narrative; but as scholars have pointed out,²⁰ there must also be a link back to the shrine of the Nymphs recorded in the Prologue, with which, though it is an *alsos* (grove) rather than an *antron* (cave), the cave of 4.39 shares several characteristics other than its dedicatees (a stream, grass, exceptional fertility). Once again a religious sanctuary which forms the spring of a novel's action returns at its end, but this time of course we are not dealing with a famous metropolitan cult but with a fictional rural shrine.²¹

In Achilles, the anonymous initial narrator arrives at Sidon, sacrifices there to Astarte (the local form of Aphrodite), and then finds amongst the votive offerings in the rest of the city (presumably in another temple)²² a picture of Europa, which stimulates the autobiographical narrative of Clitophon; this narrative then takes up the whole of the rest of the novel. It is

²⁰ See Hunter 1983, 42–3.

²¹ Cf. Morgan 2004, 248: ‘No temple of Pan is attested outside the Peloponnese ... and none is known on Lesbos’.

²² For an interesting discussion of which divinity the temple might be dedicated to see Morales 2004, 37–48.

tempting to see this use of an ekphrasis as a narrative trigger as a narratological variation on the prologue of Longus,²³ and the final sequences of the novel also seem to play on the appearance of metropolitan shrines in ring-composition at the end of Chariton and Xenophon. The spectacular test of Leucippe's virginity, the narrative's climactic event, takes place in Ephesus in a shrine of Pan associated with the cult of Artemis (8.6), and the end of the story sees journeys to the home cities of the two lovers (Tyre and Byzantium), with Tyre stressed as the shrine of Herakles. Here, then, an opening associated with two different shrines in Sidon is matched by a closure which brings in both the cult of Artemis at Ephesus (perhaps recalling Xenophon) and a Phoenician shrine at Tyre, the next city along the coast north of Sidon. This seems to be a deliberate distortion of the established pattern of ring-compositional shrines.

This pattern of ring-composition also (arguably) appears in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. The problems of interpreting the novel's prologue are well known,²⁴ but whatever one's reading, the opening of the *Metamorphoses* appears to be spoken from a Roman location: the words *mox in urbe Latia advena studiorum Quiritium indigenam sermonem aerumnabili labore nullo magistro praeunte aggressus excolui* ('soon afterwards, in the city of the Latins, as a newcomer to Roman studies I attacked and cultivated their native speech with laborious difficulty and no teacher to guide me', *Met.*1.1.4) seems to place the speaker as a foreigner in Rome. This is of course the location in which Lucius ends up at the novel's conclusion, as a pastophor of Osiris linked with the shrine of Isis on the Campus Martius (11.26.3, 11.30.4–5), and Winkler has brilliantly suggested that the prologue to Apuleius' novel is spoken from the same religious location by Lucius in the role of *aretalogus*, narrating his own bizarre story as the explanation for his presence in the sanctuary.²⁵ While this need not be regarded as the exclusive explanation of the enigmatic prologue,²⁶ it can be seen that the pattern of beginning from and ending at the same religious location is at least played on in Apuleius' novel, presumably exploiting and playing on an existing feature of the Greek ideal novel.

²³ Implied by Morales 2004, 37 and 46.

²⁴ See especially the wide range of discussion in Kahane and Laird 2001.

²⁵ See Winkler 1985, 233–42.

²⁶ And I would argue that it can be held together with my own view that the prologue is spoken by the physical book (Harrison 1990): the book might be imagined as deposited in Rome's Isiac temple as a thank-offering for salvation and as 'speaking' as it is voiced by the curious visitor/reader (given the ancient practice of reading aloud). This kind of deposit seems to be envisaged by Winkler 1985, 240.

(b) Divine plot motors and closures

A related pattern of Greek novelistic narrative involving the gods is that where a one-to-one comparison between a novel's protagonist and a divine character triggers the main action of the plot, this establishes a relationship of patronage between god and human which is important for a successful outcome to the love-story. In Chariton, Callirhoe's beauty is said to rival that of the locally important goddess Aphrodite (1.1.1–2):

θαυμαστόν τι χρῆμα παρθένου καὶ ἄγαλμα τῆς ὅλης Σικελίας. ἦν γὰρ τὸ κάλλος οὐκ ἀνθρώπινον ἀλλὰ θεῖον, οὐδὲ Νηρηΐδος ἢ Νύμφης τῶν ὀρειῶν ἀλλ' αὐτῆς Ἀφροδίτης Παρθένου.

She was a wonderful girl, the pride of all Sicily; her beauty was more than human, it was divine, and it was not the beauty of a Nereid or mountain nymph at that, but of the maiden Aphrodite herself.

Likewise, it is to Aphrodite that Callirhoe appeals to help her get Chaereas for her husband (1.1.7):

ἡ δὲ παρθένος τῆς Ἀφροδίτης τοῖς ποσὶ προσέπεσε καὶ καταφιλοῦσα, “σύ μοι, δέσποινα” εἶπε, “δοῦς ἄνδρα τοῦτον ὃν ἔδειξας.”

The girl, for her part, fell at Aphrodite's feet and kissed them. ‘Mistress’, she cried, ‘give me the man you showed me for my husband’.

This appeal is eventually successful, since it is indeed Aphrodite who brings the lovers together in the final book (8.1.3, 8.8), just as Callirhoe's prayer in her Syracusan sanctuary provides an element of topographical ring-composition at the novel's end (see (a) above).

In Xenophon, this motif of divine aid in reaching a happy conclusion is initially reversed: Habrocomes' scorn for Eros (1.1.5) gets him into severe trouble, but the theme of divine comparison appears again in the figure of Anthia, who is worshipped by the Ephesians as the equal of the local goddess Artemis (1.2.7):

Πολλάκις αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ τεμένους ἰδόντες Ἐφέσιοι προσεκύνησαν ὡς Ἄρτεμιν. Καὶ τότε οὖν ὀφθείσης ἀνεβόησε τὸ πλῆθος, καὶ ἦσαν ποικίλαι παρὰ τῶν θεωμένων φωναί, τῶν μὲν ὑπ' ἐκπλήξεως τὴν θεὸν εἶναι λεγόντων, τῶν δὲ ἄλλην τινὰ ὑπὸ τῆς θεοῦ περιποιημένην·

Often as they saw her in the sacred enclosure the Ephesians would worship her as Artemis. And so on this occasion too the crowd gave a cheer when they saw her, and there was a whole clamor of exclamations from the spectators: some were amazed and said it was the goddess in person, some that it was someone else made by the goddess in her own image.

As we have seen, the sanctuary of Artemis at Ephesus provides the setting of the novel's climax (5.15), where we may assume that the great local goddess is acting on the side of the lovers: she has certainly been regularly invoked as their protector in oaths and prayers (1.11.5, 2.11.8, 3.5.5).

This pattern of initial divine comparison and eventual aid from the same divinity seems to be played on in Achilles Tatius. At the beginning of *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Clitophon, on first catching sight of Leucippe, compares her to Selene (1.4.3):²⁷

τοιαύτην εἶδον ἐγὼ ποτε ἐπὶ ταύρῳ γεγραμμένην Σελήνην· ὄμμα γοργὸν ἐν ἡδονῇ· κόμη ξανθή, τὸ ξανθὸν οὐλον· ὄφρυς μέλαινα, τὸ μέλαν ἄκρατον· λευκὴ παρειά, τὸ λευκὸν εἰς μέσον ἐφοινίσσεται καὶ ἐμμεῖτο πορφύραν, εἰς οἷαν τὸν ἐλέφαντα Λυδία βάπτει γυνή·

Such beauty I had seen once before, and that was in a painting of Selene on a bull: delightfully animated eyes; light blond hair – blond and curly: black eyebrows – jet black; white cheeks – a white that glowed to red in the centre like the crimson laid on ivory by Lydian craftsmen.

The identification with Selene surely reminds the reader that Selene is one of the three divine forms of Artemis, and as we have seen the shrine of Artemis at Ephesus and the goddess' vindication of Leucippe is an important part of the novel's climax. At the novel's opening Leucippe is thus compared to the goddess who will act as her patron throughout the novel: note the dream-advice from Artemis to Leucippe at 4.1.3–5, Artemis' prophecy to Leucippe's father Sostratos at 7.12.4, and Leucippe's flight to refuge in Artemis' Ephesian temple at 7.13–15. Achilles is here indirectly adopting the initial comparison of the protagonist and her ultimately protecting goddess seen in Chariton and Xenophon.

This divine function in the Greek novel is wittily played on in Apuleius' tale of Cupid and Psyche, which is in so many ways a miniature Greek novel

²⁷ Morales 2004, 38–40 rightly argues that the equivalence with Selene and not the alternative textual reading identifying her as Europa (a facile repetition of the opening ekphrasis) should be adopted at 1.4.3.

inserted into Apuleius' text. At the very beginning of the tale, Psyche is worshipped as Venus, following the pattern of Callirhoe, Anthia and Leucippe and indeed raising the stakes by including foreigners as well as fellow-citizens amongst the admirers (*Met.* 4.28.3):

Multi denique ciuium et aduenae copiosi, quos eximii spectacula rumor studiosa celebritate congregabat, inaccessae formositatis admiratione stupidi et admouentes oribus suis dexteram primore digito in erectum pollicem residente ut ipsam prorsus deam Venerem religiosis uenerabantur adorationibus.

Many citizens, as well as multitudes of visitors, whom the rumour of an extraordinary spectacle was attracting in eager throngs, were dumb-founded in their wonderment at her unapproachable loveliness and would move their right hands to their lips, forefinger resting upon outstretched thumb, and venerate her with pious prayers as if she were the very goddess Venus herself.

But Venus' further role in the plot is of course not that of an aiding deity; on the contrary, she is offended by the comparison with a mortal, obstructs the love of Cupid and Psyche which comes about against her will and assigns Psyche perilous labours which almost end in her death. Apuleius' narrative clearly inverts the traditional pattern of the Greek novel here. It is true that Venus is 'reconciled' to the union of the lovers in the divine discussions of 6.23–4 by the orders of Jupiter, rather as Juno is 'reconciled' at the end of the *Aeneid*, and she even dances in the wedding celebrations as Cupid and Psyche are finally united in marriage (6.24); but her function in the plot clearly plays on that established for a protecting goddess in previous Greek novels, and is motivated by literary rather than ideological interest.²⁸

Apuleius also plays on issues of gender in his presentation of these divine plot-elements. The standard plot-line of the Greek novel, as we have seen exemplified in Chariton, Xenophon and Achilles, is that a female god (usually belonging to the heroine's home city) acts as protectress to the heroine and ensures a happy ending. In Longus the gender is varied: though as we have seen (see (a) above) the cave of the female Nymphs is an important ring-compositional element, the key divine power in the novel is the hyper-masculine Pan,²⁹ whose epiphany prevents Chloe's kidnap (2.26–7) and who is a recipient of a temple at the end (4.39.2). In Apuleius, the final saving

²⁸ For an argument for Venus' ideological function see Kenney 1990.

²⁹ Note the story of his rape attempt on Syrinx (2.34).

god turns out to be both male and female, since the initial rescuer Isis (11.3.1–26.3) is succeeded by her divine consort Osiris as Lucius’ patron deity (11.26.4–30.5), and the two together promote Lucius’ ‘happy ending’ as a cultic devotee. This witty gender complication, combined with the comically unexpected turn to the Osiris climax when it is Isis who has dominated the last book and whose appearance has been prepared for throughout the novel,³⁰ suggests that Apuleius’ presentation of divine power once more plays entertainingly with the traditions of gods and their interventions in the Greek novel.

(c) *Apuleius and Xenophon: Oracle and Isis*

I conclude with what seems to be the most striking and detailed example of Apuleius’ appropriation of a divine mechanism from a Greek novelist. In Xenophon of Ephesus’ *Ephesiaka*, the plot is set in motion by an oracular response solicited from the shrine of Apollo at Colophon by the parents of the wasting lovers Anthia and Habrocomes (1.6.2).³¹

Τίπτε ποθειίτε μαθεῖν νούσου τέλος ἡδὲ καὶ ἀρχήν;
 ἀμφοτέρους μία νοῦσος ἔχει, λύσις ἔνθεν ἀνυστή·
 Δεινὰ δ’ ὀρώ τοῖσδεσσι πάθη καὶ ἀνήνυτα ἔργα·
 ἀμφοτέροι φεύζονται ὑπεῖρ ἄλλα ληστοδίωκτοι,
 δεσμὰ δὲ μοχθήσουσι παρ’ ἀνδράσι μιξοθαλάσσοις
 καὶ τάφος ἀμφοτέροις θάλαμος καὶ πῦρ ἀΐδηλον,
 καὶ ποταμοῦ Νείλου παρὰ ρεύμασιν Ἴσιδι σεμνῆ
 σωτήρῃ μετόπισθε παραστῆς ὄλβια δῶρα.
 Ἄλλ’ ἔτι που μετὰ πῆματ’ ἀρείονα πότμον ἔχουσι.

Why do you long to learn the end of a malady, and its beginning?
 One disease has both in its grasp, and from that the remedy must be accomplished.

But for them I see terrible sufferings and toils that are endless:
 Both will flee over the sea pursued by madness;
 They will suffer chains at the hands of men who mingle with the waters;
 And a tomb shall be the burial chamber for both, and fire the destroyer;

³⁰ A crucial point made by Winkler 1985, 216–7.

³¹ On the oracle and its narrative function within Xenophon’s novel see Zimmermann 1949–50, 255–60, Hägg 1971, 228–31.

And beside the waters of the river Nile, to Holy Isis The savior you will
 afterwards offer rich gifts;
 But still after their sufferings a better fate is in store.

This episode is surely used in detail by Apuleius at the beginning of Cupid and Psyche, though this has never been argued; only the verbal parallel of τάφος ἀμφοτέροις θάλαμος with Apuleius' *funerei thalami* (see below) has been noted by scholars.³² There Psyche's royal parents are in despair since no suitor makes an offer for their beautiful daughter, and the daughter herself is wasting away just like Anthia and Habrocomes (4.32.1–4): Psyche's failure to attract erotic interest, too, is a neat inversion of the all-too-great erotic interest in Xenophon's pair of lovers. Psyche's parents also consult an oracle of Apollo in their distress, that at Dindyma, not far south of Ephesus on the coast of Asia Minor, just as the fathers of Anthia and Habrocomes consult that at Colophon, not far north of Ephesus on the same coast (1.5.1). Both oracles reply in verse at very similar length, in nine hexameters in Xenophon and in four elegiac couplets in Apuleius (4.33.1–2):

*Montis in excelsi scopulo, rex siste puellam
 ornatum mundo funerei thalami.
 Nec speres generum mortali stirpe creatum,
 sed saevum atque ferum vipereumque malum,
 quod pinnis volitans super aethera cuncta fatigat
 flammaque et ferro singula debilitat,
 quod tremat ipse Iovis quo numina terrificantur,
 fluminaque horrescunt et Stygiae tenebrae.*

‘Set out thy daughter, king, on a lofty mountain crag,
 Decked out in finery for a funereal wedding.
 Hope not for a son-in-law born of mortal stock,
 But a cruel and wild and snaky monster,
 That flies on wings above the ether and vexes all,
 And harries the world with fire and sword,
 Makes Jove himself quake and the gods tremble,
 And rivers shudder and the shades of Styx’.

Both responses offer a perilous future, but there is also a contrast: in the case of Apuleius' oracle the dark future is unrelieved by hope, while Xenophon's

³² See also Zimmerman *et al.* 2004, 83–4; 87.

claims that Isis will play a saving role. The second-time reader of Apuleius' novel who knows Xenophon cannot avoid recalling the promise of the saving role of Isis in Xenophon's oracle: he/she will surely be aware of Isis' similar saving role in the larger frame of Apuleius' novel in rescuing Lucius, the very narrator who reports the tale of Cupid and Psyche. This is a nicely ironic intertextuality which gives the reader work to do.

Xenophon is the only pre-Apuleian Greek novelist in whom Isis plays a substantial role.³³ Indeed, only Achilles Tatius amongst the others mentions her, relatively casually,³⁴ and as we have already seen (p. 206 above) Apuleius seems to introduce Isis as an addition to the Greek ass-tale tradition. In Xenophon, Isis is a key protective deity for the lovers, as the oracle predicts: Anthia uses a fiction of chaste dedication to Isis to ward off the sexual threat of the Indian prince Psammis (3.11.4–12.1) and makes two heartfelt prayers to her for help in her temple at Memphis,³⁵ one asking to be returned safe to Habrocomes (4.3.3), and another to preserve her from the sexual threat of the Egyptian soldier Polyidus (5.4.6). Apuleius, I would argue, takes Xenophon's characterisation of Isis as protector of the heroine and uses this to characterise her relationship with Lucius, whose prayer of despair and powerlessness to Isis after his escape from the arena at Corinth (11.2) recalls the abject petitions of Anthia to the same goddess.

Once again, there is playful wit and variation in Apuleius' appropriation of this material. First, Isis, a goddess closely associated with women both in the Greek novel and in Roman culture,³⁶ is made the protecting deity of a man. Second, she is invoked by Anthia as a goddess of chastity to keep her sexually pure for Habrocomes, whereas for Lucius Isis represents the future absence of sexual activity from a life in which (in Books 1–10 of the *Metamorphoses*) sex has figured very prominently, just one of the ways in which Apuleius' plot parodies that of the Greek ideal novel. Third, if we return to the initial oracle of *Ephesiaka* 1.6.2, the prediction that the despairing parents will offer rich gifts to Isis for saving their children looks forward to the novel's dénouement in the temple of Isis in Rhodes (5.13.2–4), followed by sacrifices, presumably to the same goddess, who is specifically thanked for saving them;³⁷ but it could also be ironically recalled by the heavy emphasis

³³ On the role of Isis in Xenophon see Merkelbach 1962, 91–113 (well criticised by O'Sullivan 1995, 139–44) and Ruiz-Montero 1994b, 1126–9 (with full bibliography).

³⁴ The temple of Isis at Alexandria (founded by Alexander: Arrian *Anab.* 3.1.5) is the location of a meeting between Clitophon and Melite (5.14.2, recalled at 5.26.2).

³⁵ This is presumably the temple founded by Amasis according to Herodotus (2.176).

³⁶ See e.g. Turcan 1996, 87–8, Beard, North and Price 1998, 2.301–2.

³⁷ See Zimmermann 1949–50, 255–60.

on the need for extensive gift-giving in the cult of Isis in *Metamorphoses* 11.20–29, which I would follow Winkler in viewing as evidence for Lucius' financial exploitation by the priests of Isis and Osiris.³⁸

Conclusion

I have argued here that Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* knows and exploits the various ways in which religious elements such as sanctuaries, protecting deities and oracles are used in constructing the plots of the extant Greek novels. These narrative structures are consistently appropriated in a playful and ironic manner, which not only stresses the difference between the Greek ideal romances and Apuleius' more comic-realistic approach to fiction, but also bolsters those readings of his novel which stress that it includes religious elements for the purpose of entertainment rather than enlightenment.

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³⁸ Cf. Winkler 1985, 204–27 and Harrison 2000, 244–8.

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