

Social Commentary
in the *Metamorphoses*:
Apuleius' Play with Satire

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The *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius uses a variety of literary echoes to present a playful telling of the foibles and follies of a man transformed into an ass, yet at the same time, it has been suggested that we can also find a historical reality in the novel.¹ It seems then that the novel can be read on two levels simultaneously: on the one hand as a purely literary achievement that seeks to entertain the reader through laughter and mockery, and on the other hand as a serious reflection on aspects of historical reality, like for instance social disparity. It is my intention to address these two levels of reading in the novel and to align Apuleius' work with the satirical tradition in order to suggest that we can accept both a comic and serious purpose for the *Metamorphoses*. I will then shift the discussion to include a literary focus by demonstrating close verbal similarities and thematic resonances between the *Metamorphoses* and the *Satires* of Juvenal.² By viewing the novel in tandem with satire, we can see that the highly literary nature of Apuleius' text stands alongside a secondary function of providing social commentary, while also addressing the role of the work as a piece of fiction. It becomes clear that the novel can be read on many levels at once: as entertainment and censure, as demonstrating parody and realism, as emotionally involved and detached, and as satirical in its outlook yet not as satire in itself.

¹ Most prominently argued in Millar 1981.

² Cf. Smith 1996; Zimmerman 2006. For an extreme view of the role of satire, cf. von Möllendorff 2004.

The Second Sophistic and Apuleius' Play with Genre

In order to understand the relationship of the *Metamorphoses* to the genre of satire, we must first examine the novel with respect to the broader literary world of which it is a part.³ The adaptation of the Greek story of the ass into Latin should necessarily allow alterations and play with genre, especially during the period of the Second Sophistic.⁴ In his playful adaptation of the ass tale Apuleius takes part in a lively use of highbrow language mixed with a varied and changeable style that was common in this literary period. It is in this playful character of the novel that I see a place for Apuleius to project satirical commentary safely.

Consideration of Apuleius' position in the literary tradition has already shown his debt to previous authors and genres. The use of epic allusions in the *Metamorphoses* and the extent to which Apuleius may use the Second Sophistic author Aelius Aristides, for example, has been demonstrated by Harrison.⁵ Moreover, many stories in classical antiquity were the product of a corpus of ideas, stock stories, and adventures that were fair game for all ancient authors to adapt.⁶ The combined literary elements and variation in the *Metamorphoses* echoes the traditional definition of *satura* as a 'mixed bag'—a variety of topics and forms.⁷ In Apuleius' self-description in the *Florida*, he asserts his literary fluency with a claim to writing all genres, including satire.⁸ Therefore, we should not be surprised if Apuleius makes a

³ Zimmerman 2002, 123, 131–135.

⁴ For full treatment of genre mixing by Apuleius, cf. the volume edited by Nauta 2006, esp. Hunink 2006a.

⁵ Harrison 2003 *passim*, specifically on the beginnings and ends of books; cf. Harrison 1990 and 1997 for more general thematic comparisons. Harrison 2000–2001 *passim* argues strongly for direct knowledge and use of Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales*; cf. Finkelpearl 1998, for allusion generally in the *Metamorphoses*.

⁶ Winkler 1980, 156–157; for a general discussion of re-use of genre in the *Metamorphoses* and in satire, cf. Zimmerman 2006, 90–91.

⁷ Cf. Classen 1988 *passim* and esp. 96–97, for general discussion of Roman satire's use of varied forms, topics, and presentation.

⁸ Apul, *Flor.* 9,27–29: ... *sed pro his praeoptare me fateor uno chartario calamo me reficere poemata omnigenus apta virgae, lyrae, socco, coturno, item satiras ac griphos, item historias varias rerum nec non orationes laudatas disertis nec non dialogos laudatos philosophis atque haec et alia ...* ('I confess, that rather than these things I prefer a single papyri pen to compose poems of all sorts, epic, lyric, comedy, tragedy, even satire and riddles, various histories, orations praised by skilled speakers and dialogues praised by philosophers and these and similar things...'). Cf. Lee 2005, 43 for text, 96–112 for notes and commentary on fragment 9; cf. Hunink 2001a, 116–117. Winkler 1985, 6 uses this claim as the basis for a potential reading of the novel as an epideictic book written by

similar use of satire, a truly Roman literary form, in retelling the story of a man-turned-ass for a Roman audience.⁹

A more in-depth consideration of the impact of other genres on the novelistic tradition and the *Metamorphoses* itself is fruitful. Satirical elements within the broad tradition of the Latin novel have been investigated already, most often with respect to Petronius' *Satyrica*.¹⁰ Bakhtin's view that the ancient novel derives in part from comic origins such as satire is an important connection here, especially in light of his conclusion that novels are derived from contemporary reality.¹¹ Of particular importance for this study is the connection Finkelpearl draws between the two genres: that neither the Latin novel nor satire fits easily into broad, preconceived literary categories.¹² Relihan concludes that while the *Metamorphoses* is constantly conjured in one's mind in any discussion of the genre of Menippean satire,¹³ Apuleius' novel ultimately belongs in the category of picaresque fiction.¹⁴ Though not technically a prosimetric text, Relihan contests, the *Metamorphoses* has connections to Menippean satire in style and theme and, as Zimmerman has argued, belongs at least within the cultural trend of which the genre was a part.¹⁵

A more explicit relationship between satire and the *Metamorphoses* is noted by Smith in an argument demonstrating that the narrator of the *Meta-*

a sophist. Consider also *Met.* 10,2,4: *iam ergo, lector optime, scito te tragoediam, non fabulam legere et a socco ad coturnum ascendere* ('You should know, gentle reader, that you are now to read a tragedy and no mere anecdote; you are to rise from the comic sock to the tragic buskin'). All *Metamorphoses* translations are from Walsh 1994.

⁹ Classen 1988, 96.

¹⁰ Consider Petronius' inclusion in scholarly works on the genre of satire. For general thematic links an association is made between the *Cena Trimalchionis* and Horace's *Cena Nasidieni* (Hor. *S.* 2,8); cf. Rimell 2005, 171–172. The traveling adventures of Encolpius, Ascyltus, and Giton perhaps echo Horace's *Journey to Brundisium* (Hor. *S.* 1,5). A thematic parallel between Apuleius' adulterous women and Juvenal's sixth satire has been made clear and will not be reiterated here (Tatum 1979, 78–79; cf. Zimmerman 2006, 88, 93, note 25; Carr 1982, for similarities specifically between Apuleius and Juvenal in the treatment of women).

¹¹ Bakhtin 1981, 22–23 for comic origins, 111–129 for discussion of Apuleius. Cf. Smith 1996, 309–310 for laughter in the *Metamorphoses* as satirical in nature and for comment that the Roman tradition of self-mockery is a key part of Roman literary expectations.

¹² Finkelpearl 1998, 29–30.

¹³ Cf. especially Relihan 1993, 6–7 for a list of particular elements of Menippean satire as elucidated by Bakhtin; Rimell 2005, 164–169 for review of past arguments concerning the Menippean genre and the novel.

¹⁴ Relihan 1993, 21; cf. also Smith 1996, 309.

¹⁵ Zimmerman 2006, 90.

morphoses wears the mask of a satirist. Smith also reveals the shortcomings of Apuleius' narrator as a moralist because of his tendency towards self-mockery and laughter.¹⁶ This lucid discussion draws clear connections between the Latin novel and the satiric tradition, from its origins onward. In much the same way, Gowers has drawn an illustrative comparison between the prologue of Apuleius and the first satire of Persius by suggesting that the image of donkey's ears is used by both authors because 'everyone has ass's ears until they see the light of philosophy.'¹⁷ Moreover, Harrison argues that Book 11 of the *Metamorphoses* can be read as a parody or generally satirical representation of religious conversion.¹⁸ In a discussion of literary allusion in the *Metamorphoses*, Finkelpearl skirts around the connection to satire, and has in some way set the stage for this article.¹⁹ She briefly juxtaposes the two genres as 'nonconformist' and 'unsure in [their] status.'²⁰

Most recently Zimmerman has articulated the direct relationship between the *Metamorphoses* and satire.²¹ She applies general comparisons, specifically the re-use of genre by Apuleius, a key characteristic of the rhetorical nature of the novel and of its role in the literary movement of the Second Sophistic. Thematically she looks at *avaritia* and adultery in both satire and the *Metamorphoses*, and suggests that comedy is used as a source for caricature. I will add to Zimmerman's argumentation by expanding the comparison of the *Metamorphoses* to satire and showing close parallels to themes and language in Juvenal's corpus. Specifically I will look at the themes of social class and nobility that are clearly prominent in both works, and the insight that both Apuleius and Juvenal have into the role of fortune in a man's life.

The Metamorphoses as Satire

Parallel consideration of the Latin novel and satire has most often explored the *Satyrica* of Petronius as a candidate for providing social commentary; Petronius does not, however, take a moralistic standpoint and therefore can-

¹⁶ Smith 1996, 311; cf. von Möllendorff 2004.

¹⁷ Gowers 2001, 77.

¹⁸ Harrison 2002 *passim*. The direct parallel is made to the serious treatment of the subject in the *Sacred Tales* of Aelius Aristides; cf. Zimmerman 2006, 103 within a broader discussion of Book 11 and satire.

¹⁹ Finkelpearl 1998.

²⁰ Finkelpearl 1998, 29–30.

²¹ Zimmerman 2006 *passim*; cf. also Zimmerman 2006, esp. 88–90 for clear stylistic and tonal similarities between the *Metamorphoses* and Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*.

not be considered a true satirist.²² The *Metamorphoses*, by comparison, contains an undeniably moralizing thread that makes Apuleius' text a far better candidate than the *Satyrica* for connecting the Roman novel to the satirical tradition. The didactic component of moralism is particularly characteristic of Roman satire and especially of the invective form employed by Juvenal. Therefore, a comparison between the themes of Juvenal, arguably the most successful social satirist, and the *Metamorphoses* will show that Apuleius can be understood as writing from a satirical viewpoint, even more readily than Petronius, who has been positioned with the genre time and again.

The moralistic attitude of the narrative persona of the *Metamorphoses* can be found in the many inset tales within the novel, principally in the adultery tales of Books 9 and 10. Comprising over half of the entire narrative, such inset tales form a purposeful crescendo that culminates in the Isiac ending of Book 11, the themes of which are foreshadowed in the inserted stories.²³ Among modern interpretations of Apuleius' inset stories, Tatum's most strongly tends towards a moralistic or even 'humorless' reading of the tales.²⁴ Read as insertions of moral examples and lessons from which Lucius is meant to understand the consequences of his behavior, the tales take on meaning beyond entertainment. Before his transformation, Lucius, the aristocratic young traveler, is blind to his own vices. At this point the tales serve to warn Lucius of his own ruinous conduct, and at the same time point to the need for his redemption.²⁵ At the point of Lucius' transformation into an ass, the tales trace a downward spiral of human existence and behavior, ending with the horrors of female adultery and depravity in Books 9 and 10.²⁶

Nevertheless, as so many other aspects of the novel, these inserted stories take on a dualistic nature in the narrative. They are at once an important aspect of the novel as the means by which Lucius first sees (or fails to see), and finally understands the degradation of society, as well as an opportunity for the author to provide entertainment and poke fun at the foibles of society. Lucius, as an ass, condemns the behavior of certain individuals, but recognizes that moral and philosophical advice dispensed by a donkey is also

²² For the most recent treatment and consolidation of arguments, cf. Rimell 2005; cf. Sandy 1969 for refutation of the original thesis that Petronius is indeed a moralist (Highet 1941).

²³ Tatum 1969, 488.

²⁴ Tatum 1969, 493.

²⁵ Cf. Tatum 1969, 493. There is a brief moralizing moment when Aristomenes chastises Socrates for putting a *scortum scorteum* ('leather-skinned whore') before his own family: Apul. *Met.* 1,8,1.

²⁶ Bechtle 1995, 106–116.

somewhat ridiculous.²⁷ The tales then demonstrate very well the playful nature of the work as a whole, while allowing the potential for the inclusion of a satirical voice alongside the entertaining situational comedy of the stories.

Two brief examples illustrate this dual function. At *Met.* 9,27 Lucius treads on the fingers of the hidden adulterer exposing the baker's disloyal wife and his strong indignation against such behavior.²⁸ Lucius can be understood as condemning infidelity, but at the same time the scene undoubtedly expects a humorous reading. Therefore, the moralistic stance is present in the tales, but is at the same time rendered hilarious by their ridiculous nature and the very prospect of a donkey supplying these moral lessons.²⁹ At *Met.* 9,12–13 the often-discussed mill scene also exemplifies Lucius' commentary on the human condition. This scene does not expect humor, but rather provides Apuleius the opportunity to display rhetorical dazzle. Kenney has recently pointed out that Apuleius excelled at the set-piece ephra-sis, using the mill scene to demonstrate his literary dexterity.³⁰ He points toward the evidence that even Apuleius' own trial was used as an outlet for literary display.

This argument, however, can be approached from another angle: we consider the trial of Apuleius a historical event, and therefore the *Apology* as a reflection of reality. If Apuleius used the *Apology* also to display rhetorical expertise, then it must be read as a primarily historical document that also displays literary skill. Perhaps Apuleius similarly assigned a dual function to the *Metamorphoses* to provide a piece of fictional literature with embedded social criticism. Certainly Apuleius' literary talent is on display in 9,12–13, but there is no raucous ending, no comic upturn to lighten the heart of the reader. Both of these scenes contain secondary purposes and must be consid-

²⁷ Apul. *Met.* 10,33,4: *sed ne quis indignationis meae reprehendat impetum secum sic reputans: 'ecce nunc patiemur philosophantem nobis asinum.'* ('But I would not wish any of you to censure this onset of my indignation with the unspoken reflection: 'What? Shall we now endure that ass making pronouncements to us on philosophy?'). Cf. Smith 1996, 310–11.

²⁸ Cf. Apul. *Met.* 9,27,1: *quae res optatissimam mihi vindictae subministravit occasionem* ('This routine provided me with the opportunity for which I had devoutly prayed'). Smith 1996, 310–311 further points out Lucius' strong expressions of opinion of the degradation of the female sex generally (7,10,3–4), the eunuch priests (8,29,1–5), and the judgment of Paris (10,33,1–3).

²⁹ Consider the continuation of similar bawdy humor in, for instance, the *Decameron* or *Canterbury Tales*.

³⁰ Kenney 2003, 161–3 argues that we should accept Apuleius as an author primarily seeking artistic excellence in these passages. Cf. Riess 2001 for consideration of this literary character, specifically in the theme of the robbers.

ered for their value as entertainment and rhetorical display, but also as having potential for a more serious purpose through social commentary.

Apuleius perhaps exploits the tension between laughter, the most likely reaction from the reader, and the serious nature of the scenes which he describes, to render his meaning ambiguous. Therefore in one and the same place we have the possibility of pure entertainment through comedy and mockery, while at the same time the reader might sense elements of social criticism. One interpretation does not necessarily need to trump the other, and we may do well to consider that the ambiguity in the narrative may have been quite intentional. Indeed, the highly rhetorical nature of the *Metamorphoses* together with a more critical reading only adds to the literary layering already accepted in the novel. Just as Apuleius alludes to his vast literary repertoire with epic references, he achieves the same result with references to satire; however, his deliberate use of satirical elements also attains the secondary goal of providing social criticism.³¹

The argument that Apuleius used his *Apology* to display his own literary skill strengthens the connection between satire and the narrative of the *Metamorphoses*. Certain themes that recur throughout Apuleius' corpus (fiction and non-fiction), also appear in Juvenal's satires, a fact that draws further connections between the two authors and their literature. Moreover, the alignment of Apuleius' novel with satire emphasizes the highly rhetorical nature of both genres and highlights the fact that literary skill in satire stands parallel to its function as active social criticism. Surely rhetorical dazzle was of primary import for Apuleius, especially given the show of erudition that would only be natural for a Second Sophistic orator. I argue, however, that social commentary could still play a part in this artistic showpiece, if not become the very characteristic of the novel that allowed for safe, even subtle criticism.

Apuleius and Juvenal

Satire in the Roman world, especially the harsh invective employed by Juvenal, was used explicitly to criticize the vices of humanity. Therefore, a close

³¹ Gianotti 1986, 32–52, esp. 38 places the novel solidly into the context of Roman imperial culture and suggests that Lucius' perspective as an ass shows us the philosophical ideal of the slave in the ancient world. Gianotti considers the bakery scene in this respect and shows it to be an engaged description of the lower social classes as well as a brilliant literary composition.

thematic and textual comparison between Juvenal and Apuleius proves fruitful in elucidating the satirical echoes present in the *Metamorphoses*. A careful reading of both authors shows close similarities that become more obvious as the *Metamorphoses* progresses. I will investigate themes that are quite clear in both works—true nobility, virtue, and the role of fortune in a man’s life—in order to elucidate Apuleius’ satirical posture and determine how he uses satire in the *Metamorphoses* to provide entertainment as well as commentary on human vices.

In Juvenal’s first satire, the poet states the objective of his work (Juv. 1,85–86):

*quidquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, voluptas,
gaudia, discursus, nostri farrago libelli est.*

All human endeavors, men’s prayers, fears, angers, pleasures, joys and pursuits, make up the mixed mash of my book.³²

The idea of a ‘mixed mash’ or ‘mixed bag’ of topics—specifically all the vicissitudes of a man’s life—is expressed in these lines, a theme which is reflected in the opening lines of the *Metamorphoses* and throughout the adventures of Lucius.³³ Through the wanderings of Lucius and the inserted tales, Apuleius presents good and bad aspects of human life. Lucius suffers sudden changes of fortune again and again, swiftly climbing the heights of joy and desire, and plunging without warning into the depths of fear and anger. The inserted tales describe even further extremities of human experience, through episodes involving slavery, prostitution, and thievery.³⁴

It is in these shifts of fortune that I would like to investigate the themes of true nobility and class status found in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Satires* of Juvenal. It is possible to read the primary metamorphosis of the novel—Lucius’ transition from human to ass—as his conversion from upper class aristocrat to lower class worker.³⁵ In fact, as a beast of burden Lucius de-

³² Compare to Apul. *Met.* 1,1,1: *At ego tibi sermone isto Milesio varias fabulas conseram...* (‘What I should like to do is to weave together different tales in this Milesian mode...’). Translations of Juvenal are taken from Green 1998, unless otherwise noted.

³³ Such variety could also be a result of a second-century trend toward ‘maximal internal variety’ (Winkler 1985, 228–229). Winkler also emphasizes the desire for combined literary flavors, but ultimately rejects a desire for variety as an explanation for the colorful character of the novel.

³⁴ Tatum 1969, 488.

³⁵ For a strong argument that Lucius’ transformation is a clear humiliation of status because of the animal-like status of slaves, cf. Gianotti 1986, 38; cf. Bradley 2000.

scends to the lowest position possible in the social order. In the first three books of the *Metamorphoses*, before Lucius' transformation, reference to the narrator's high social status is a recurrent theme.³⁶ His own background is clearly an elite one, as is his family, shown first through his relation to well-known authors, and then in descriptions of his aunt Byrrhaena's living conditions.³⁷ She has a full retinue in the forum and the description of her house clearly reflects elite status. Characters throughout the beginning of the story repeatedly point out Lucius' high social position: fellow travelers, Milo, Photis, and even Lucius himself.³⁸ Finally, just prior to Lucius' plunge into a low-class world, Photis once more confirms his elite status with a lengthy description.³⁹

Abundant references to Lucius' high social standing set up a distinct contrast to what he will become: a pack animal thrown into the stables. After he becomes an ass and is put outside to await the antidote to his misfortune, he is immediately assaulted by the very marker of his former social position. The pure white horse, used in Book 1 as a symbol of the human Lucius' elite status, beats down Lucius the ass in Book 3.⁴⁰ From this point forward there is no mention of Lucius' former privilege and the reader is then exposed

³⁶ Mason 1983 *passim*.

³⁷ *Apul. Met.* 1,2,1; 2,2,4–2,4,10.

³⁸ *Apul. Met.* 1,20,2: 'tu autem ... vir ut habitus et habitudo demonstrat ornatus...' ('Your clothes and deportment show that you are a man of culture'); *Met.* 1,23,3: 'ego te ... etiam de ista corporis speciosa habitudine deque hac virginali prorsus verecundia, generosa stirpe proditum et recte conicerem' ('I could rightly have guessed from your civilized appearance and your quite innocent modesty that you come from a good family'); *Met.* 2,18,4: 'tibi vero fortunae splendor insidias, contemptus etiam peregrinationis poterit adferre' ('your conspicuous status, together with their lack of respect for a stranger travelling abroad, may cause them to lie in wait for you'); *Met.* 3,6,3: '... sed probe spectatus apud meos semper innocentiam commodis cunctis antetuleram' ('As one highly respected in my community, I had always placed unblemished behavior before any advantage'). Cf. Tatum 1969, 491. Aristocrats in Rome would have been outwardly distinguished by various *insignia*, presented here as Lucius' *habitus* and *habitudo*. In relation to Apuleius' works, cf. Ifie – Thompson 1977/78.

³⁹ *Apul. Met.* 3,15,4: 'sed melius de te doctrinaque tua praesumo, qui praeter generosam natalium dignitatem, praeter sublime ingenium sacris pluribus initiatus profecto nosti sanctam silentii fidem' ('But I have considerable trust in you and your learning. In addition to the noble distinction of your birth and your outstanding intellect, you have been initiated into several sacred cults, and you are certainly aware of the need for the sacred confidentiality of silence').

⁴⁰ *Apul. Met.* 3,26,7: '... vix me praesepio videre proximantem: deiectis auribus iam furentes infestis calcibus insecuntur' ('Scarcely had they spotted me approaching the stall when they laid back their ears, and with flying hooves launched a frenzied attack on me').

only to the lives of lower-class provincial workers. The theme of class distinction comes full circle and culminates in Lucius' redemption by Isis in Book 11, where he is required to reject his former elite status and realize the importance of inner spiritual goodness rather than outward material perceptions.⁴¹

Prior to his transformation into asinine form, then, Lucius represents the elite classes of the empire, corrupted by their *serviles voluptates* and *curiositas*. Through an extreme change of fortune and class status, Lucius' perspective as the ass provides a window onto the poor lives and horrible existence of the lower classes. In Book 9, after Lucius has witnessed the misery of the human condition for nearly six books, he understands what these experiences have done for him (*Met.* 9,13,5):

nam et ipse gratas gratias asino meo memini, quod me suo celatum tegmine variisque fortunis exercitatum, etsi minus prudentem, multiscium reddidit.

Indeed, I myself now gratefully recall my existence as an ass, for when I was concealed in the ass's covering and was tried by varying fortunes, I gained a knowledge of many things, though admittedly I was less wise.

This realization is most pathetically presented in the description of the bakery.⁴² The workers are the lowest of man's existence: they are covered in black and blue welts, barely clothed, branded, and in chains. What began as Apuleius' playful reworking of a Greek tale has become a grave image of his contemporary world.

Lucius' moralistic reaction to the pitiable condition of man stands out prominently from an otherwise fictional story in the mill scene especially.⁴³ After witnessing the wicked acts of adultery and being exposed to the most pitiful levels of human existence, Lucius condemns this world and seeks redemption.⁴⁴ Through lampooning stock characters such as the *latrones* or adulterous women,⁴⁵ Lucius the ass becomes the agent by which the narrator

⁴¹ Mason 1983, 141–142.

⁴² Apul. *Met.* 9,11,1–9,13,2.

⁴³ For other potentially moralistic moments, see above, notes 25–28; cf. Holzberg 1995, 78. Holzberg describes this passage as showing ‘that the “ass’s-eye view” is meant to represent in fictional form the “spectacles” used by satirical observers of men and morals.’ Cf. Kenney 2003, 160–161 for the opposing view that Lucius' reaction is in fact passive, not intended to express a moral standpoint.

⁴⁴ Cf. Tatum 1969.

⁴⁵ Tatum 1969, 502–506. Riess 2001 for the role of the robber generally.

presents this deplorable state of humanity within an otherwise witty and humorous account. As human once more and greatly enlightened, the narrator first shows the way to redemption through inner nobility rather than outward manifestations of wealth.

It is with the theme of social status and its connection to noble character that a strong relationship with the *Satires* of Juvenal is visible. Both authors are clearly very concerned with social class. The satirist's moralistic view of the world is often voiced similarly through the struggle of Juvenal's narrative persona to penetrate social status and come to the realization that high birth does not, in fact, constitute true nobility. The entirety of *Satire* 8 is devoted to the theme that high-class pedigrees amount to nothing if one does not act virtuously in his lifetime. The poem begins (Juv. 8,1–9).⁴⁶

*Stemmata quid faciunt? Quid prodest, Pontice, longo
sanguine censeri, pictos ostendere vultus
maiorum et stantis in curribus Aemilianos
et Curios iam dimidios umerosque minorem
Corvinum et Galbam auriculis nasoque carentem,
quis fructus generis tabula iactare capaci
Corvinum, posthac multa contingere virga
fumosos equitum cum dictatore magistris,
si coram Lepidis male vivitur?*

What avail your pedigrees? What boots it, Ponticus, to be valued for one's ancient blood, and to display the painted visages of one's forefathers—an Aemilianus standing in his car; a half-crumbled Curius; a Corvinus who has lost a shoulder, or a Galba that has neither ear nor nose? Of what profit is it to boast a Corvinus on your ample family chart, and thereafter to trace kinship through many a branch with grimy Dictators and Masters of the Horse, if in presence of the Lepidi you live an evil life?

This series of questions concerning pedigree, birth, and status is answered in one poignant statement (Juv. 8,19–20):

*tota licet veteres exornent undique cerae
atria, nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus.*

⁴⁶ The translation is taken from Ramsay's Loeb edition.

You may line your whole hall with waxen busts,
but virtue, and virtue alone, remains the one true nobility.

Reminiscent of what Lucius finally discovers, the narrator of *Satire 8* strongly states that no matter what lineage a man may claim, if he is not virtuous he cannot be truly noble. At the end of *Satire 8* the importance of pedigree, which stood for so much in Roman social order, is destabilized (Juv. 8,272–275):

*et tamen, ut longe repetas longeque revolvās
nomen, ab infami gentem deducis asylo;
maiorum primus, quisquis fuit ille, tuorum
aut pastor fuit aut illud quod dicere nolo.*

Yet however far back you can trace your ancestral
pedigree, it began in a kind of ill-famed ghetto;
your first forefather, whatever his actual name, was either
a shepherd – or something I’d much prefer not to mention.

A similar focus on one’s actions in life rather than ancestral pedigree can be found in the *Metamorphoses*. Commentary on true nobility is quite apparent in the novel when the work is considered as a whole. Though in material possession and outward appearance Lucius is a part of the elite class, he certainly would not have been considered noble by the standards of Juvenal’s narrator because of his *serviles voluptates*. Juvenal’s nobles by birth similarly fall from their high social standing because of greed and adultery. We can compare the Juvenal passages to a sentiment voiced by the priest of Isis in *Met.* 11,15,1 after Lucius’ transformation back into a man:

nec tibi natales ac ne dignitas quidem, vel ipsa, qua flores, usquam doctrina profuit, sed lubrico virentis aetatulae ad serviles delapsus voluptates curiositatis inprosperae sinistrum praemium reportasti.

Your high birth, and what is more, your rank and your accomplished learning have been of no avail to you whatever. In the green years of youth, you tumbled on the slippery slope into slavish pleasures, and gained the ill-omened reward of your unhappy curiosity.

It is precisely to this realization that Lucius comes in Book 11: that his outward noble appearance has no impact on his moral self, that his inner *voluptas* has led him astray, and that he is in need of redemption.

The abandonment of his family, the marker of his aristocratic self, is a prerequisite for Lucius' salvation; without that separation he cannot be redeemed. In this realization there are echoes of Juvenal's concept of true nobility as found prominently in *Satire* 8. In fact, Mason points out that in all of Apuleius' other works, the author himself directly takes a moralistic path, choosing virtue over nobility of birth.⁴⁷ In the *Apology*, for instance, there is clear reference to the importance of inner qualities over physical birth, which suggests that this sentiment rests not only with the speaker, but perhaps even with the author himself.⁴⁸ Apuleius echoes this familiar theme found in Juvenal by including it in the *Metamorphoses* and presents it explicitly in his other writings.

Similarly, Lucius' lack of *virtus* coupled with his incessant *curiositas* and uncontrollable appetite for *voluptas* can be compared to a primarily Juvenalian theme—the breakdown of morality in Rome. Juvenal's portrayal of moral collapse is characterized by an overabundance of *luxuria*. Contained within his invective, Juvenal's narrator preaches the path of *simplicitas* while condemning *luxuria* and immorality. *Satires* 5 and 11 are devoted to gluttony and greed, and the latter poem begins with a standard denunciation of the over-expenditure on banquets typical of the Roman upper classes (Juv. 11,9–11):

*multos porro vides, quos saepe elusus ad ipsum
creditor introitum solet expectare macelli,
et quibus in solo vivendi causa palato est.*

You'll find plenty more like him, men who live for their palate and nothing else, whose creditors—bilked once too often—now lie in wait for them at the entrance to the market.

The narrator of *Satire* 11 preaches simplicity by extolling the virtues of an uncomplicated meal (Juv. 11,64):

fercula nunc audi nullis ornata macellis
Here's the menu—all homegrown, nothing from the market.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Apul. *Apol.* 22; *Fl.* 22; *Soc.* 23–24; Mason 1983, 141–142. See Stefan Tilg's contribution to this volume, especially section III.1.

⁴⁸ For invective against one's place of birth in Latin literature, cf. Koster 1980, 2.

⁴⁹ The theme of a hoped for, yet denied, banquet is also echoed nicely in both works. *Satire* 5 illustrates the position of the client at the lowest end of the table who is subject to watch others eat large amounts of elaborately prepared food and drink, all the while with

Apuleius does not subscribe to the same form of invective and harsh social criticism as Juvenal, but the novel achieves a similar result with commentary on social mores. In the first three books of the *Metamorphoses* Lucius is overcome by the desires that make him a slave to pleasure and he lives only to satisfy bodily needs. Only after his punishment for such behavior will Lucius see a future in virtue and simplicity and only when he gains morality can he be considered truly noble.

The priest of Isis reveals in Book 11 that it was Lucius' overt *curiositas* and *serviles voluptates* that caused him suffering and pain. In order to be released he must find a life of contemplation and redemption in Isis. The final outcome and realization by Lucius that a chaste life is a good life echoes the Juvenalian denunciation of immorality, closely associated in the *Satires* with excessive bodily desires. This theme leads to Juvenal's definition of the true nobles as those who live a simple, virtuous life, rather than those who are of high birth. In *Met.* 1–3, Lucius represents Juvenal's elite man living in overabundance and *luxuria*, displayed prominently in his social engagements and sexual encounters with Photis. As an ass, he is then shown the degradation of the human condition and the true path to enlightenment in simplicity and faith.

The role of fortune provides a further point of comparison between Juvenal's *Satires* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, and is also associated with virtue in these works. Both authors present an unyielding picture of fortune in a man's life, while also offering potential to overcome this force. Juvenal's narrator presents a world in which Fortuna has great power, and of which humanity has little control (Juv. 7,197–198):

si Fortuna volet, fiet de rhetore consul;

si volet haec eadem, fiet de consule rhetor.

If *Fortuna* so pleases, you may rise from teacher to consul;

Let her frown, and presto! The consul's a teacher once more.

Here Juvenal's narrator understands the sudden changes that are absolutely unpredictable in a man's life, in much the same way that Lucius realizes that fortune is a driving force in his wanderings. Juvenal's narrator further understands that fortune may be good rather than bad if one leads a virtuous life, a realization to which Lucius comes in his salvation in Isis.

a rumbling belly. This scene is reminiscent of Lucius' denial of food when he first enters Milo's home and then again with the trampling of his fish in the market in Book 1.

In his travels as an ass and subsequent attempt at a virtuous life, Lucius realizes the need to surrender to the whims of fortune, e.g., at *Met.* 7,2,4:

...veteris fortunae et illius beati Lucii praesentisque aerumnae et infelicis asini facta comparatione medullitus ingemebam subibatque me non de nihilo veteris priscaequae doctrinae viros finxisse ac pronuntiasse caecam et prorsus exoculatam esse Fortunam...

I was mentally contrasting the earlier condition of the happy Lucius I had been with the immediate hardships of the wretched ass I had become. I groaned in the depths of my heart, acknowledging that learned men of old had good grounds for envisaging and describing *Fortuna* as blind and utterly sightless.

Though still lamenting his *misfortune*, not yet able to ascribe his troubles to his *voluptas* and *curiositas*, Lucius moves closer to an understanding of the connection between virtue and good fortune. At the same time he realizes the lack of control held by humanity over *Fortuna* and the potential horrors she can inflict. Fortune is the primary agent of Lucius' wanderings, especially after his transformation into an ass, and specifically because of his inability to exert self-control.⁵⁰

The role of fortune as a driving force in Lucius' life comes full circle in Book 11.⁵¹ When he reaches the shores of Cenchreae, Lucius seeks liberation from hardship and from his long punishment as a beast. He appeals to the offended deity and asks for death rather than remaining in his asinine form.⁵² Lucius' transformation will begin by his gaining knowledge and realization of his wrongdoing up to this point. Isis will now control his fortune, but it is explicitly one with sight and purpose, rather than blindness and caprice (*Met.* 11,15,2–3).⁵³

sed utcumque Fortunae caecitas, dum te pessimis periculis discruciat, ad religiosam istam beatitudinem improvida produxit malitia... in tutelam iam receptus es Fortunae, sed videntis, quae suae lucis splendore ceteros etiam deos illuminat.

⁵⁰ For further analysis of the role of fortune, cf. Tatum 1969, 491–494, 496.

⁵¹ The many arguments about Lucius' conversion to Isis will not be discussed except with reference to a few interesting points mentioned here.

⁵² *Apul. Met.* 11,2,1–4.

⁵³ Cf. Tatum 1969, 492.

Yet somehow *Fortuna* in her blind course, while torturing you with the most severe dangers, has in her random persecution guided you to this state of religious blessedness... You have now been taken under the protection of *Fortuna* with eyes, who with the brilliance of her light lends luster even to the other gods.

After plunging into the sea seven times, Lucius finds Isis and the path to his redemption.

Both Apuleius' and Juvenal's works show a path towards conquering the whims of fortune, again through the familiar theme of living a virtuous life. An example from Juvenal presents a situation where *virtus* even trumps *Fortuna*, showing the prominence of a high moral standard in the themes of the *Satires*. Only here do we find *Fortuna* in a subordinate position to man, but with the sense that this can only be achieved through a virtuous life. *Satire* 10 describes the greedy man who will never achieve happiness because (Juv. 10,363–366):

*semita certe
tranquillae per virtutem patet unica vitae.
nullum numen habes, si sit prudentia; nos te
nos facimus, Fortuna, deam caeloque locamus.*

there's one
path, and one only, to a tranquil life—through virtue.
Fortuna has no divinity, could we but see it: it's we,
we ourselves, who make her a goddess, and set her in the heavens.

While yet again alluding to virtue, not birth, as the marker of nobility and well-being, these lines also show the potential that man could indeed shape his own happiness. Such a possibility is also similar to Lucius' triumph over fortune in his acceptance of Isis. The priest announces (*Met.* 11,15,4):

*'En ecce pristinis aerumnis absolutus Isidis magnae providentia gaudens
Lucius de sua Fortuna triumphat.'*

'Behold, here is Lucius who rejoices in the providence of mighty Isis, he is loosened from the bonds of misery and victorious over his fate.'

In *Satire* 13 Juvenal's narrator rails against the guilty conscience of the wrongdoer. In this example there is similar instruction for conquering the whims of fortune, in this case through wisdom (Juv. 13,19–20):

*Magna quidem, sacris quae dat praecepta libellis,
 Victrix fortunae sapientia;*
 Great wisdom, which gives precepts in sacred books,
 is the conqueror of fortune.⁵⁴

By accepting the wisdom handed down by a divine presence, whether through adherence to Isis or to a sacred book, it seems that one can overcome fate. Juvenal's malefactors, however, do not always see the route proposed through knowledge and philosophy. Choosing greed and wealth over virtue, the rapacious man says (Juv. 13,92–94):

*decernat quodcumque volet de corpore nostro
 Isis et irato feriat mea lumina sistro,
 dummodo vel caecus teneam quos abnego nummos.*

‘Let Isis’

they argue, ‘dispose of my body as she pleases,
 let her strike my eyes and blind me with her vengeful rattle—I’d forgo
 my sight to keep all the cash I’ve denied receiving.’⁵⁵

In this instance Isis seems to be a protector of virtue and punisher of avarice. In the *Metamorphoses*, Lucius does indeed see his path to salvation and is thereby freed through his devotion to Isis, but not without more trials and tribulations of service to the deity.

In these themes of true nobility and virtue and their relationship to the whims of fortune, I see strong parallels between the works of Apuleius and Juvenal. In Lucius’ redemption and realization of true nobility, Apuleius may have intentionally employed Juvenalian echoes concerning the social order and its correlation to birth, fortune, and a man’s ability to control the outcome of his life. Both authors use the character of capricious Fortuna who will guide man howsoever she pleases; at the same time the path towards wisdom and virtue is revealed as the way to gain power over fortune.

Apuleius plays with sudden changes of fortune throughout the *Metamorphoses*, and uses these changes to drive the action of the novel forward. The continual references to Lucius’ high-class status in Books 1–3 serve to highlight characteristics that will prove to be his ruin. The combination of excessive wealth and solid pedigree is reminiscent of Juvenal’s corrupt aristocratic

⁵⁴ The translation is my own.

⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that here Isis’ power to inflict blindness is stressed, whereas she will provide sight to Lucius as ‘Fortuna with eyes’ (*Met.* 11,15,3).

Romans, who prove to be hardly noble at all according to the poet's definition, regardless of their high-born status. Lucius' sudden collapse into the world of the lowest ranks, his subsequent wanderings driven by the dictates of fortune and eventual conversion to Isis, might be compared to Juvenal's condemnation of the wealthy and pronouncement of a virtuous life as the only path to victory over harsh fortune.

Conclusion

Literature has always in some way reflected the virtues and vices of the society in which it was produced. A strong focus on morality, virtue, class struggle, and divinity pervades the corpus of Latin literature. An attempt to reveal social concerns can be achieved in different ways, both by alluding to current social problems through comment on the past, perhaps the safer route of criticism, or by satirizing and parodying the present. Both Apuleius and Juvenal chose the latter form to voice their disapproval and both authors used a rhetorical flourish that gives a greater sense of literary character, a feature that allowed the novelist a subtle critical voice. Within a fictional premise, Apuleius sought to present the baseness of the contemporary human condition; to this end he chose to echo a genre that precisely embodied the voice of social commentary in Roman literature—that of satire.

In the guise of entertainment, Apuleius chose a discreet and playful approach in order to explore moralistic issues and illuminate the dark sides of his world. Juvenal chose a harsh form of invective with a xenophobic narrator concerned about the state of Rome and the world in which he lives. The thematic similarities between the two allow us to see Apuleius' ability to pick and choose from different genres, in order to perform a more indirect social criticism as compared to Juvenal's direct invective. By using a fictional premise—turning a man into an ass, not unlike Aesop's fables or Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*—together with a variety of entertaining stories and playful scenarios, Apuleius' narrator presents the shortcomings of humanity and the degradation of society.⁵⁶ When adapting his novel of the ass, Apuleius creates a combination of genres and rhetorical dazzle. Through his participation in this literary tradition Apuleius gains greater license to

⁵⁶ For strong connections between Aesop and Apuleius, cf. most recently Mason 1978, 10; Winkler 1985, 280; Finkelppearl 2003. This connection strengthens the argument for a moralistic motivation in Apuleius' novel.

provide social criticism, perhaps from a safe position through a fictional narrator and an entertaining premise.

I have suggested that Apuleius' novel can be read as a certain kind of satirical writing due to its use of themes similar to those found in Juvenal and its parody of certain character types. Apuleius and Juvenal embrace certain philosophical ideals, such as the belief that nobility accompanies virtue rather than birth, and both narrators seem to advertise a similar road to a virtuous life by way of morality and simplicity and denial of vice and pleasure. But where does a satirical reading of the *Metamorphoses* leave us? This outlook adds a literary perspective to the contention that the *Metamorphoses* represents some form of historical reality, a concept argued strongly by Millar. By aligning Apuleius' novel with a genre that aims to criticize social vices, I have suggested that Apuleius intentionally provided social commentary, while at the same time the highly rhetorical nature of the work and its entertainment and comic value allow layers of interpretation that might make the critical nature of disapproval more subtle. If we can accept the *Metamorphoses* as a work in the satirical tradition, then Apuleius can take his place as a writer of social criticism, and the novel can shed some light on the real world of second-century Rome.