FALSE FORMS AND WICKED WOMEN: APULEIUS' ISIS BOOK AND OVID'S IPHIS STORY

Sarah H. Eisenlohr

A thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Classics in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Chapel Hill
2019

Approved by:

James Rives

Sharon James

Emily Baragwanath

ABSTRACT

Sarah H. Eisenlohr: False forms and wicked women: Apuleius' Isis book and Ovid's Iphis story
(Under the direction of James Rives)

In this thesis, I take a new approach to the study of Isis in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* by comparing the novel to the story of Iphis written by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. I begin by reviewing the history of Isiac worship in the Roman world and previous research on Isis' role in Apuleius. I then move on to a detailed study of literary allusions between the *Golden Ass* and Ovid's Iphis story. From there, I explore the literary evidence concerning Isiac ethics and use my findings to analyze further the two texts at hand. I argue that both Apuleius and Ovid use Isis to mitigate the effects of dishonorable conduct in their narratives, especially that of a sexual nature. In each story, Isis ensures that her followers avoid behavior that disrupts communal and familial life, ultimately reinforcing traditional morality and social norms.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to add a new dimension to the collective understanding of Isis' role in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, as Lucius' savior and as his patroness after his acceptance into her cult. While much recent scholarship on Isis has focused on Platonism and Apuleius' identification as a philosopher, I will turn away from philosophy in order to explore an understudied literary allusion between the *Golden Ass* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[1] Although Isis appears but rarely as a character in Latin literature, Ovid's story of Iphis in Book 9 of the *Metamorphoses* features her as a generous and supportive goddess, unlike many of the other deities in the same work. Isis answers the prayer of a desperate young girl and provides one of the few "happy endings" in the entire work, much as Apuleius' Isis returns Lucius to human form at the end of the *Golden Ass*, thereby ending his sufferings.

Here I will analyze the narrative elements of Ovid's and Apuleius' stories in order to pinpoint similarities between Iphis and Lucius, and to elaborate on how these similarities affect our understanding of Isis as an Apuleian character and, more broadly, as a goddess in the Roman world. First, I will give an overview of the history of Isiac cult within the Roman empire, before moving on to a brief discussion of the recent scholarship on Isis. Next, I will outline the general relationship between Ovid's Iphis story and Apuleius' Lucius narrative, then move on to more specific points, discussing how each protagonist experiences a conflict between his physical form and self-identification, and how his transformation ultimately leads to the conclusion of his

---

[1]In order to avoid confusion with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, I will throughout refer to Apuleius' work as the *Golden Ass* and employ the abbreviation *AA* (for *Asinus Aureus*).

narrative. I will argue that these stories bear more than a passing resemblance and that Isis' intervention brings balance to the protagonists' lives. In order to gain a better understanding of Isis' role in the Roman world, I will then embark upon a discussion of Isiac ethics, especially as pertains to sexual conduct. Because sexual desire is a prominent element in the characterization of both Lucius and Iphis, these topics are important to the two stories and to Isis' role in them. This analysis shows that Apuleius builds his Isis upon Ovid's earlier version, and that each version of the goddess provides her worshiper with an appropriate role in society: her presence is an equalizing force that mitigates the effects of sexual depravity and encourages individuals to adhere to traditional familial and communal structures. In transforming Iphis and Apuleius, Isis strengthens the community at large and reinforces social norms of marriage, gender, and morality.

ISIS IN THE ROMAN WORLD

The sudden arrival of a goddess into the narrative of the *Golden Ass* is surprising for the

reader, based on the trajectory of the first ten books, but Apuleius' choice of goddess is not so

strange. Worship of Isis was popular and widespread in the Roman Empire during his lifetime.

Evidence for Isiac cult in Greece dates back to the fifth century BCE, and a sanctuary to her was

built at Piraeus by the third century. Isis' influence grew even more during the Hellenistic

Period, as the Ptolemies adopted her as a patroness of the Egyptian monarchs and built many

temples for her, especially in Alexandria. Although most Romans were skeptical of Egyptian

cults when they were first introduced to Italy during the first or second century BCE, Isis

eventually gained a steady following. By the time of Caligula, her cult was in good standing

within the empire—the emperor himself was a devotee of Isis—and it eventually received

patronage from the Flavians after their accession to power in 69 BCE. Vespasian pushed his own

association with Serapis in an effort to legitimize his emperorship, and Domitian carried on with

this Egyptianizing influence by restoring the *Iseum Campense*, which had sheltered Vespasian

and Titus upon their return to Rome from Jerusalem. Though the Flavians themselves were not

Isiac worshippers, they were concerned with an image of piety toward the goddess who had

legitimized their takeover, and this concern helped the cult of Isis to gain popularity in the

following years. Thanks to Hadrian's interest in all things eastern, Rome went through another

Egyptianizing wave in the early second century CE, and Isis began to appear on coins. Antoninus

Pius minted a coin depicting his wife Faustina as Isis, and Marcus Aurelius used images of Isis

and Serapis on his coins.

Worship of Isis spread across the Roman empire. The most well-preserved of her temples are the three built by the Greeks on Delos in the second century BCE, and one in Pompeii, whose original structure dates to the Augustan Period. Because of Caesar's and Octavian's conflicts with Ptolemaic Egypt, worship of Isis was banned throughout Rome during the first century BCE. According to Cassius Dio (40.47), a senatorial decree from 53 BCE ordered the destruction of all private shrines to Egyptian deities; but, in 43 BCE, the senate commissioned a new temple for Isis and Serapis in the Campus Martius (47.15). Evidence of private worship of Isis—in the form of household shrines—has been discovered in houses in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Cumae, while votives have been found throughout the empire, from Britain to Syria. The cult of Isis also began to attract the attention of Greek intellectuals, as attested most notably by Plutarch's elaborate Platonic treatise *De Iside et Osiride*. During the first and second centuries CE, the cult of Isis was the most popular and widespread of the mystery cults in the Roman empire.[2]

---

[2]Melissa Dowling's entry on Isis in the *Encyclopedia of Ancient History* provides a helpful overview of relevant information about the spread of the cult in the Graeco-Roman world. For more detail, see Dunand 1973; Turcan 1992, 77-127; Takács 1995; Bricault 2001; Woolf 2014.

PLATONISM IN THE *GOLDEN ASS*

Most scholars have viewed Apuleius' inclusion of Isis in the *Golden Ass* as more than a mere nod to the popular cult. Isis and the other Egyptian deities represented a growing plurality of cultic options during the first and second centuries CE, which included the assimilation of Platonism into polytheistic mythology. Despite the differences between Apuleius' novel and Plutarch's treatise, there are good reasons to assume that the former was drawing upon the latter to inform his writing on the lore of Isis and on her relationship with Platonism. For instance, Apuleius mentions Plutarch as an ancestor of his protagonist, Lucius: *Thessaliam—nam et illic originis maternae nostrae fundamenta a Plutarcho illo inclito . . . prodita gloriam nobis faciunt*: "Thessaly—for from there also the foundations of my maternal stock, sprung from that illustrious Plutarch, fashion glory for me" (*AA* 1.2).[3] The combination of Lucius' heritage with Isis' intervention recalls Plutarch's treatise *De Iside et Osiride*, written in the decades prior to the completion of the *Golden Ass*. Much recent scholarship on this allusion argues that the entire work must be understood as a Platonist text, not only because of the invocation of Plutarch's Platonizing Isis, but also because of numerous possible references within the work to Platonic philosophy. For instance, many scholars have considered the extensive narrative of Cupid and Psyche to be a Platonic allegory because of its allusions to the union of the soul and divine love.[4]

---

[3]All translations cited in this paper are my own.

[4]Jeffrey Winkle has compiled a list of secondary sources for Platonic influence on "Cupid and Psyche" (2014, 1n2), which I copy here in full: Hooker 1955; Walsh 1970, 55ff., 195, 206ff.; Penwill 1975; Anderson 1982, 75-85; Kenney 1990, 17-22; Schlam 1992, 82-98; Shumate 1996, 259ff.; Dowden 1998; O'Brien 1998; Zimmerman 2004; Graverini 2012, 112-113.

The potential for Platonic allegory exists throughout the novel as well. Jeffrey Winkle has pointed out Apuleius' frequent references to Plato's *Phaedrus* outside of the inset tale, centering his argument upon the "Typhonic choice" (*Phdr.* 230a): after discussing the myth of Typhon with Phaedrus, Socrates uses the frame of mythology to evaluate the quality of his own character. Set against the example of Socrates is Apuleius' Lucius, who, upon hearing Aristomenes' story of a very different Socrates, "disregard[s] the power of the tale as an invitation to serious self-examination" (Winkle 2014, 104). Winkle also mentions (2014, 104) that the Egyptian god Seth, the enemy of Isis and Osiris, was associated with Typhon and with the ass, drawing a further connection between Apuleius and Plutarch. Such arguments, even if we do not accept all of their details, suggest that Apuleius' choice of Isis as a savior goddess reflects some connection between his work and Platonic philosophy. Although many scholars have interpreted the significance of Apuleius' Isis in terms of the author's supposed Platonism, they do not agree on the details and implications of this interpretation.[5]

In this paper, I intend not to build upon interpretations of Apuleius' Isis in regards to her philosophical significance, but rather to offer an alternate avenue of exploration by looking at how Apuleius drew on Ovid to characterize Isis. The philosophical approaches to Isis are relevant to my argument, so I return to Platonism where necessary. My focus, however, will be

---

[5]The most recent scholarship on Apuleius and Platonism has moved away from the idea that the *Golden Ass* must be a primarily philosophical work. Claudio Moreschini (2015, 69-70) rightfully points out that Apuleius only rarely addresses the tenets of traditional Platonism in the novel, and that while readers might view the narrative as "philosophical," it is unclear to what philosophy it should be attributed. Furthermore, Moreschini believes that the connection between Platonism and Isis does not confirm the novel's philosophical leanings but rather complicates them. In his words (2015, 79): "not even Platonism, the doctrine that Apuleius was so proud of at the time of the *Apologia*, seemed sufficient to him, at the time of the *Metamorphoses*, for the redemption or for the defense from evil." For Moreschini, Apuleius' identities as sophist and Platonist do not preclude his identity as an Isiac worshipper, and to view the work as implicitly autobiographical—or to view one of Apuleius' identities as more influential than the others—prevents the reader from making objective observations about its philosophical content: a series of fairly generic comments with only a tenuous connection to actual Platonism (2015, 82-83).

Similarly to Moreschini, Richard Fletcher does not interpret the *Golden Ass* as a true Platonist text; rather, he argues (2014, 16-20) that Apuleius creates an "impersonation of philosophy" throughout all of his works and speaks for the works of Plato, as a mouthpiece rather than a true philosopher.

on Ovid's earlier incarnation of Isis as a savior goddess in the *Metamorphoses,* which work

provides a contrast to the Apuleian model.

ALLUSIONS TO THE *METAMORPHOSES* AND IPHIS IN THE *GOLDEN ASS*

Relatively little literature survives in which Isis is a crucial fixture of the main narrative. All three Roman elegists—Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid—blame her cult for keeping them apart from their *puellae* during the ten days of ritual abstinence (Heyob 1975, 116-117; Solmsen, 1979, 68-69),[6] but Tibullus (1.5) and Ovid (*Am.* 1.13) also depict her as a healer of women. The elegists, along with later writers like Martial (2.14.7-8; 11.47.3-4), Juvenal (*Sat.* 6.488f., 534f.; 9.20-25), and Josephus (*AI* 18.3.4), decry the followers of Isis as immoral, defining "sexual promiscuity [as] the rule rather than the exception" (Heyob 1975, 112). Though Tibullus (1.3.9-14) shows openly sympathetic feelings toward exotic cult practices and Lucretius (2.598-660) describes in detail the religious procession of Magna Mater, Isis herself appears but rarely in Latin literature before Apuleius—and certainly not as a prominent character. The only significant exception is Ovid's Iphis story.

Scholarship on the cult of Isis paid relatively little attention to this tale, until the publication of Jaime Alvar's volume on oriental cults in the Roman world. The studies of Friedrich Solmsen and Sharon Heyob remain two of the most comprehensive treatments of references to Isis in literary texts, but neither makes extensive comments on the Iphis story: Solmsen does not mention it at all, and Heyob touches on it only briefly, though both scholars analyzed Ovid's other works to interpret attitudes toward Isiac practices during the Augustan

---

[6]The elegists are likely following the example set by Catullus in 63, where he criticizes the followers of the Magna Mater, not Isis (Solmsen 1979, 78).

Age.[7] While Iphis' tale has more recently become a popular subject for writing on issues of gender and sexuality, Ovid's version of Isis still remains largely understudied as an intertext for Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. Judith Krabbe's 1989 study points out numerous verbal echoes between the Iphis story and the Isis Book of the *Golden Ass*, but Ellen Finkelpearl disagrees with Krabbe's assessment and states that echoes between the two stories are too weak to support any argument for significant borrowing on Apuleius' part. In any case, while the brief tale of Iphis does not provide us with information about the real-world cult of Isis or about its reception, it does indicate that Apuleius had at least one precedent for Isis acting as a savior goddess and enacting the physical transformation of a mortal (Winkler 1985, 278). I argue that there is an undeniable kinship between Lucius of the *Golden Ass* and Iphis of the *Metamorphoses*, and that by understanding this kinship between the characters, we may better understand Lucius' transformation and the role of Isis in it.

Similarities to the *Metamorphoses* abound in the *Golden Ass*, and one can assume from Apuleius' literary acumen—as displayed in the *Apology* and the *Florida*—that he was intimately familiar with Ovid as well as more obscure authors (Harrison 2000, 39-135). Luca Graverini has studied Apuleius' more general allusions to Ovid, in narrative structure and stylistic choices. He points out (2004, 227) the similarity of Apuleius' prologue to sections of the third book of Ovid's *Tristia*, as well as (2004, 229-245) Apuleius' use of the "speaking book" trope, which echoes the style of *Amores* 1, the beginning and end of the *Metamorphoses*, and various parts of the *Tristia*. Stephen Harrison focuses on more specific intertexts: he writes (2012, 86-89) that Lucius' and Photis' erotic encounter in the *Golden Ass* draws upon martial imagery in Ovid's

---

[7]This type of analysis of Roman religion is fairly common in scholarship before the twenty-first century: scholars tended to overlook deities that were featured in narrative writing, believing the genre of literature not to be relevant to "real" religion. Meanwhile, they mined other texts for more direct references to the everyday religious habits of the Romans.

Amores, and that Photis' undressing evokes Ovid's description of Corinna in *Amores* 1.5. A more general link lies in the works' titles: there is no way to know for certain whether Apuleius himself styled his work as the *Metamorphoses*, but it is clear that this title was used by other authors to refer to the same work that Augustine of Hippo called the *Asinus Aureus*.[8]

Apuleius also adapted specific scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into parts of the *Golden Ass*. Finkelpearl argued that one of Apuleius' major inspirations was Ovid's telling of the Io story (1998, 189-194): both Lucius and Io are transformed into animals and both return to their former shape (a rare occurrence in the *Metamorphoses*); both must embark on long journeys in order to regain their humanity; both struggle and often fail to communicate with the people around them. Krabbe points out other numerous connections between specific passages of the two works, of which I will mention but a few: Ovid's Apollo wonders what Daphne's hair would look like arranged just as Lucius wonders the same about Photis (1989, 47-48); Ovid's palace of the sun bears resemblances to Apuleius' palace of Cupid (1989, 56-58); Ovid's Medea and Apuleius' Meroe possess similar magical powers and use similar tactics to harass the common people (1989, 62-64). Harrison (2012, 95-97), writing more recently, adds the tale of Actaeon to this growing list of literary echoes, which Ovidian story Apuleius recalls while describing the statue group in Byrrhena's courtyard.

While this list of intertextual studies is not exhaustive, it provides substantial evidence for a close relationship between Ovid and Apuleius, and more specifically between the two *Metamorphoses*. At the least, we can be confident that Apuleius was familiar with Ovid's story of Iphis and that other Romans learned in Latin poetry would have recognized similarities in the

---

[8]According to the manuscript evidence, Sallustius used the title *Metamorphoses* at the end of the fourth century, and it was not long afterward that Augustine named it as the *Asinus Aureus*. Fulgentius used both titles in the sixth century. *Metamorphoses* is generally accepted as the original title because of the homonymous works of Ovid and Lucius of Patra (Harrison 2000, 210).

stories even without the presence of verbal echoes. Apuleius' writing was likely informed by Ovid's Iphis, even if the textual parallels are more general than specific. Having provided a framework for intertexts between the two works as a whole, I will now compare the two accounts in question: Lucius' narrative and the Iphis story.

In Ovid's story of Iphis (*Met.* 9.666-797) a poor couple find out that they are about to have a child. The husband warns his wife Telethusa that if she bears a girl they will have to kill her, as they cannot afford to raise a child who will not bring income to their house. Isis then appears in Telethusa's dreams and tells her to keep the baby regardless of her husband's orders; if she bears a girl, she must raise her as a boy. Telethusa does give birth to a girl, Iphis, whose androgynous beauty hides her true sex. At thirteen, Iphis falls in love with a young girl named Ianthe, to whom she is betrothed, but she laments the fact that she can never consummate their marriage in the way that she wants: as a man. On the day of the awaited wedding, Telethusa and Iphis pray to Isis for guidance. After receiving a propitious omen in the temple, Iphis leaves with her mother and transforms into a man. The story ends with Iphis happily marrying Ianthe and delivering offerings of thanks to the temple of Isis.

Apuleius' *Golden Ass* tells the story of a young aristocrat named Lucius who travels to Thessaly on undisclosed business. After arriving in the town of Hypata, he learns that his host's wife is a witch. Upon stealing some of her magic ointment and applying it to his body, he transforms into an ass. Before he has a chance to eat the roses that will change him back, he is taken by bandits and driven away from his host's house. Over the course of the novel, Lucius is beaten, sold, threatened with castration, abused in various fashions, and dragged all over Greece. Finally, in Book 11, Lucius prays to the moon for deliverance from his asinine state, and Isis appears before him. She tells him how to find the roses he needs in a religious procession the

following day. After returning to his human form, Lucius becomes an initiate of the cult of Isis and later joins the cult of Osiris.

The most immediate similarity between the stories is that each protagonist exists in a liminal state between two disparate forms: Iphis is a girl who thinks like a boy and harbors (what she thinks of as) masculine desires for Ianthe; Lucius is for much of the novel an ass who retains both the intelligence and appetite of a human. Two dichotomies emerge, the first between man and woman, the second between human and beast. For each protagonist, physical form creates limitations: Iphis cannot have sex with Ianthe in the way that a man would, while Apuleius cannot speak, has little power over his fate, and finds himself subject to slavish demands and tortures.[9]

Lucius laments the limitations of his state often, as he cannot stomach grass and raw barley (*AA* 4.1, 22), and especially as he cannot beseech the emperor with his own voice (*AA* 3.29). The ambiguity of his form is best presented when the last of his masters—upon learning that the ass can handle human food—teaches him to behave like a person and even allows him to copulate with a wealthy matron of Corinth (*AA* 10.16-22). Although these feats are simple for Lucius, the fact that he is an ass makes them miraculous to those around him and highlights his marginalization; he is treated not as a person, but as an animal—a wondrous and talented animal, but not worthy of human respect.

Iphis' case is slightly different, but because she was raised as a boy for her whole life and never identified as a girl, her disposition tends toward traditional masculinity: she is mentally male, but physically female. Even the name Iphis represents sexual ambiguity, as it could be used interchangeably for girls and boys (*Met.* 9.708-710). Furthermore, as Stephen Wheeler

---

[9]For more on how Lucius' experience mirrors the experience of slaves in the ancient world, see Bradley 2012.

states (1997, 194-196), Iphis is derived from the Greek word ἴς, meaning "force" or "violence," which was in turn associated with the Latin *vis* meaning the same thing. Roman readers would have understood the connection between Iphis and *vis*, noting that her name was rooted in a masculine concept, but was formed from a feminine noun. Like Lucius, Iphis exists in a state of duality in which her nature directly opposes her physical attributes.

One striking difference between the two stories is the fact that Iphis undergoes only one transformation while Lucius undergoes two: Iphis begins as a girl and ends as a boy, whereas Lucius begins as a human and spends the larger part of the narrative trying to return to his *original* form—not to achieve a new form. This is an important distinction, because for a thorough analysis it is necessary to ask why these two characters eventually take their final forms.
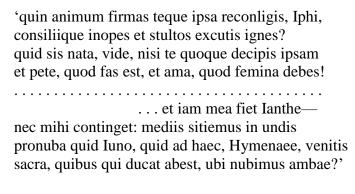
What drives Iphis' change is a contradiction between her interior and exterior identities: by transforming into a boy, she achieves equilibrium between her inner and outer realities. But the same cannot be said of Lucius. After all, it is unclear whether or not Lucius reaches the same kind of equilibrium at the conclusion of the *Golden Ass.* Each of his transformations is similar to Iphis' in different ways: if Iphis has been a boy internally for the majority of her life, then Lucius has been an ass, so to speak, for the majority of his[10]: each of these metamorphoses matches the physical form of the subject to his mental state. Meanwhile, Lucius' return to human shape matches his physical form to his mental capacity—but the implication of the transformation is that Lucius no longer possesses the human failings that previously caused him to be identified as an ass. This second transformation is more critical, as it brings the story to a close, ostensibly returns the situation to the natural order, and balances Lucius' internal and external identities.

---

[10]Nancy Shumate discusses (1996, 107-108) how Apuleius attributes animalistic qualities to humans so that characters become animals through language.

Therefore, if Lucius is an ass from the beginning, the question at the end is whether or not

Lucius' return to humanity reflects some sort of inner improvement on his part.

I argue that both Iphis' transition to manhood and Lucius' return to human form are

preceded by some degree of inner metamorphosis, a hypothesis supported by both Ovid's and

Apuleius' tendency to emphasize the powerful emotions and inexorable circumstances that

permanently alter the lives of their characters. Iphis' acclimation to the life of a boy constitutes

such an alteration, though we cannot infer from the narrative whether she truly considers herself

to be male. She speaks at length about how wrong it is for a woman to love another woman, but

alludes only obliquely to her own desire to be male (*Met.* 9.745-763):

> 'quin animum firmas teque ipsa reconligis, Iphi,
> consiliique inopes et stultos excutis ignes?
> quid sis nata, vide, nisi te quoque decipis ipsam
> et pete, quod fas est, et ama, quod femina debes!
> . . . .
> . . . et iam mea fiet Ianthe—
> nec mihi continget: mediis sitiemus in undis
> pronuba quid Iuno, quid ad haec, Hymenaee, venitis
> sacra, quibus qui ducat abest, ubi nubimus ambae?'

> 'Why don't you strengthen your heart and rally yourself, Iphis,
> and shake off your passions, foolish and without recourse?
> Consider how you were born, unless you are also deceiving yourself,
> And seek what is right, and love as a woman ought to!
> . . . .
> . . . and soon Ianthe will become mine,
> but she will not be granted to me. We will thirst in the midst of the waves.
> What of the bridal matron Juno, what of Hymen—are you coming to these
> Sacred rites, for which the groom is absent, where both parties are brides?'

The problem, as Iphis states, is the wrongness of a woman's loving another woman, but

focuses also on the fact that she, as a woman, will not be satisfied with Ianthe: the only way for

Iphis to possess her, so to speak, is with a male body. Although Iphis never says explicitly that

she wants to change her sex, Isis interprets her prayers in such a way, and Iphis' dedicatory offering indicates that she is pleased with the result (*Met.* 9.794): *DONA PUER SOLVIT QUAE FEMINA VOVERAT IPHIS*: "OFFERINGS IPHIS PLEDGED AS A GIRL AND PAID AS A BOY." Perhaps Iphis does not specifically desire to change her sex, but her falling in love with Ianthe and her dissatisfaction with being female have affected her self-identification.

Lucius, by contrast, poses more of a problem. Although he appears to have transmuted his sacrilegious *curiositas* into a desire for divine enlightenment, there is no clear textual clue to indicate that Lucius has undergone any significant alteration in his state of mind, prior to his transformation back into a man. Iphis has never before been male, but Lucius has been human, and so one might argue that he does not need to change in order for his essential nature to match his final form. Winkler (1985, 204-247) argues that the novel's ending is ambiguous, and that the story does not depend upon whether or not Lucius changes—though he does appear to favor the more cynical theory that Lucius has not truly changed, but is a dupe for the Egyptian cults. Some internal change, however, is necessary, especially if Lucius' initial transformation into an ass balances his internal and external states. In order for Lucius to become a man again, he must somehow shed the internal identity of an ass.

Joseph DeFilippo and Friedemann Drews agree that Lucius must change significantly in order to enact his return to humanity, by becoming, in some fashion, more philosophical. DeFilippo has stated (1990, 489) that "it is the intervention of Isis—worldly principle of rationality and order—that allows the man inside Lucius to come to the fore and rule over the whole person, just as in Platonic moral psychology only the just soul is ruled by the man within and not by a horde of bestial appetites." Drews, meanwhile, argues (2012, 119-121) that Apuleius' use of providence to oust an idea of "all-determining fate" coincides with a Platonic

idea that not everything is inevitable and the course of history may be altered by "divine counsel," which serves the interests of those who pray. In his writings, "Apuleius maintains that fate is *subordinate* to providence," though they are both essential aspects of divinity in the *Golden Ass* (Drews 2012, 121).

This approach directly opposes the belief of Stoic philosophers that fate was paramount and could not be circumvented. Drews claims (2012, 122-124) that Lucius aligns himself with Stoic philosophy at the beginning of the novel: he believes that nothing is impossible, and that everything will turn out for mortals as fate intends (*AA* 1.20.3). Thus, when Lucius flees from his master in Corinth and decides to pray to the moon goddess, he has not suddenly become intellectually illuminated, but he has at least recognized that providence can defy the seemingly invincible bonds of fate. I am hesitant to agree completely with Drews' analysis of Lucius, for his journey strikes me as more complex than a straightforward transition from Stoicism to Platonism. Nevertheless, given that Lucius does not pray to any deity before Book 11, his prayer to the moon goddess marks a shift in his attitude toward divinity.

Both Iphis and Lucius pray to Isis prior to their transformations, and each of their prayers is answered, thus bringing the narrative conflict to an end. Before the point of prayer, however, both protagonists attribute their misfortunes to some preternatural opposing force, an inevitable and unstoppable fate. In the *Metamorphoses*, fate takes the form of Nature, whom Iphis blames, saying (*Met.* 9.758-759) *at non vult natura, potentior omnibus, / quae mihi sola nocet!*: "But Nature, more powerful than all else, does not want the marriage—she alone who harms me!" Until this point, Iphis has accepted her situation as beyond her control, and has expressed grief over the wrongness of her love for Ianthe. To Iphis, even Pasiphae's lust for a bull is more proper because the bull was male, and, as she points out, no female creatures in the animal kingdom

long for other females (*Met.* 9.731-738). She believes that since she has been trapped by Nature, there is no hope for her, but once she sends up a prayer to Isis, the problem disappears.

Likewise, Lucius constantly curses Fortuna during his adventures as an ass, claiming that her blindness has led to his misfortunes. The priest Mithras delivers a concise version of this interpretation of events after Lucius returns to his human form, saying (*AA* 11.15.3) *sed utcumque Fortunae caecitas, dum te pessimis periculis discruciat, ad religiosam istam beatitudinem improvida produxit malitia*: "But however the blindness of Fortune tormented you with the worst perils, still she led you away from thoughtless wickedness toward this pious blessedness." According to Mithras, Fortuna *caeca* has been responsible for Lucius' troubles, whereas Fortuna *videns* is responsible for his deliverance and for bringing him into Isis' inner circle. Regardless, like Iphis, Lucius is transformed only after praying directly for liberation from the shape of an ass. Iphis prays to Isis to free her from the limitations of Nature, and Lucius prays to an unknown goddess to free him from (what he sees as) the machinations of Fortuna.

Let us now turn to the larger contexts of each of the stories and the other tales which surround them. Both accounts of transformation are placed within a series of stories about "inappropriate" love or sexual depravity. Moreover, each story places an emphasis on the sexual nature of the protagonist. As Anderson notes (1972, 464), the Iphis story is directly preceded by the story of Byblis, who falls in love with her brother (*Met.* 9.454-665). The two stories share certain features—in particular, Anderson points out several echoes of Byblis' monologue in Iphis'. But Iphis "has none of the demonic passion of Byblis: she merely utters words of pathetic despair, utterly hopeless, passive, colorless" (Anderson 1972, 464). In many ways, Iphis is the less corrupt version of Byblis—at least from a certain point of view. Rather than trying to justify her love as natural, she acknowledges that it is not. Instead of taking things into her own hands,

she prays to a higher power for aid. By contrast, Byblis briefly attempts to compare her love for her brother with that of deities married to their siblings (*Met.* 9.495-500) and then propositions her brother with a letter (*Met.* 9.520-573). Myrrha, the subject of one of Orpheus' songs (*Met.* 10.298-502), justifies her love for her father by pointing out the incestuous coupling of animals (*Met.* 10.325-328) and conspires with her nurse to carry on a secret affair with him (*Met.* 10.431-471). Byblis and Myrrha are brought low by hubris, and then metamorphosed by grief and shame, while Iphis admits her powerlessness and receives a reward for her honest and pious prayers.[11]

Similarly, Apuleius' *Golden Ass* contains numerous accounts of adultery, murder, and women who engage in otherwise illicit romance. One adulterous woman has sex with her lover directly above her husband, who has crawled into a sunken jar to see its flaws (*AA* 9.5-7). Another woman brings her lover to her house, where he leaves his slippers by accident; he escapes scot-free, claiming that a slave stole his slippers the day before (*AA* 9.17-21). A stepmother lusts after her stepson and, upon being rejected, attempts to poison him (*AA* 10.2-12). A wealthy matron of Corinth pays to have sex with Lucius, as an ass, multiple times (*AA* 10.19-22). Furthermore, racy scenes from the novel, general knowledge of Egyptian lore, and beliefs about the ass would have created sexual overtones throughout the story.[12] After Lucius returns to his human form, these tales of adultery and promiscuity vanish as Apuleius transitions from a

---

[11]It is, perhaps, possible that Byblis and Myrrha are more inclined to justify their incestuous desires because they are heterosexual, but the fact remains that Iphis' story ends happily—whether or not she felt that her homosexual feelings were too farfetched for her to justify them, her prayers and avoidance of hubris allow her to avoid Byblis' and Myrrha's fates.

[12]Because the ass was associated with the Egyptian god Seth, the enemy of Isis, it came to represent lust and "sexual powers that are not entirely beneficent" (Griffiths 1975, 24-25). Furthermore, specific attention is paid to the size of the ass' penis in the *Golden Ass*, first during Lucius' initial transformation (*AA* 3.24.6) and later when he copulates with the Corinthian matron (*AA* 10.22.1). Such associations are also visible in Ovid's *Amores* 2.7, where Cypassis is compared to a donkey (Mills 1978, 304-305).

fabula to a pseudo-conversion narrative (Winkler 1985, 206-207). It must be noted that many of these inset stories of sexual degeneracy also involve—or result in—a more general moral and social degradation of the community at large: families are thrown into chaos, public trials ensue which involve entire villages. More so than Ovid's stories, the *Golden Ass* draws attention to the breakdown of social norms on a broad scale, but as in the *Metamorphoses* these larger problems are often reflected specifically in problems of immoral sexuality.

Despite these links between Lucius and Iphis, and between their situations, Finkelpearl argues (1998, 196) that the connection between the two stories is weak at best and that "Apuleius does not seem . . . to be using Ovid in any way that would call attention to the debt." Her main concerns (1998, 195-196) are the paucity of textual overlap between the Iphis story and Book 11 of the *Golden Ass* and, more generally, the fact that Apuleius' proposed imitation of the scene is not as obvious as his other intertexts. Krabbe (1989, 50-53), however, has identified literary parallels between the two works, especially in the initial speeches and descriptions of each Isis. Let us consider Ovid's introduction of the goddess (*Met.* 9.699-703):

> 'dea sum auxiliaris opemque
> exorata fero; nec te coluisse quereris
> ingratum numen.' monuit, thalamoque recessit.
> laeta toro surgit, purasque ad sidera supplex
> Cressa manus tollens, rata sint sua visa, precatur.

> 'I am a helpful goddess, and having
> been beseeched I bring aid. You will not lament that you have worshiped
> an ungrateful deity.' She spoke and retreated from the chamber.
> The Cretan woman happily rises from her bed and, as a suppliant, lifting her
> blameless hands to the stars, she prays that her visions may come to pass.

Krabbe compares these lines to a corresponding passage from Apuleius (*AA* 11.7.1), *sic oraculi venerabilis fine prolato numen invictum in se recessit. nec mora, cum somno protinus absolutus*

pavore et gaudio ac dein sudore nimio permixtus exurgo summeque miratus deae potentis tam

claram praesentiam . . . : "Thus, when the end of the venerable prophecy had come, the

unconquerable divinity retreated into herself. There was no delay—immediately having been

freed from fear along with sleep, thoroughly mixed with joy and then with excessive

perspiration, I rise and afterward I marvel much at such a distinguished presence of the mighty

goddess . . ." Krabbe (1989, 53) sees "verbal correspondences between Ovid's 'ingratum numen

. . . recessit . . . surgit' and Apuleius' 'numen invictum . . . recessit . . . exurgo'," which

Finkelpearl (1998, 195) finds fairly convincing but not enough to support a deliberate allusion to

Ovid by Apuleius. I agree with Finkelpearl's assessment that Apuleius most likely did not intend

to create an echo of Ovid's Iphis story in his introduction of Isis. I do, however, find significance

in the many parallels between the two accounts—the lack of verbal echoes notwithstanding—

especially because of the extensive connections between the two larger works, which I have

discussed above.

  The striking similarities between the two stories and their protagonists suggest that these

writings, and their representations of Isis, are related. Both Iphis and Lucius cope with the

struggle of being confined to physical forms that prevent them from living their lives freely. Both

are transformed into the "right" form by the goddess Isis after undergoing an internal change—

Iphis upon falling in love with Ianthe and professing the need for a man in their marriage; Lucius

upon praying to a deity for the first time in the *Golden Ass* and, as Drews suggests, recognizing

the limited power of fate. Both transformations are surrounded by accounts of "wrong" love,

sexual depravity, and the disruption of social harmony. The arrival of Isis then resolves any

problems of internal identity and unchastity.

  In fact, the presence of Isis seems to mitigate the pervasive sexual immorality of both

Ovid's poem and Apuleius' novel. In the entirety of the *Golden Ass*, there is perhaps only one

traditionally honorable young woman: Charite, whom the robbers kidnap in Book 4. Even in her

case, Lucius quickly jumps to the conclusion that she is as immoral as any other woman and

eager to betray her betrothed (*AA* 7.10-11).[13] If so much of the *Golden Ass* focuses on the

unchastity and bloodthirstiness of women, why then is Lucius eventually saved by a patroness of

women, especially one who encompasses so many aspects of female divinity? In order to find a

satisfying answer, we must examine Isiac ethics in the Roman world at large.

---

[13]The only respectable woman in the *Golden Ass* other than Charite is Byrrhena, Lucius' mother's old friend. While there is not space here to explore her character fully, it is worth wondering why Byrrhena is an exception to the Apuleian rule.

SEXUALITY AND ISIAC ETHICS

Having now concluded my comparison of Ovid's and Apuleius' accounts, I will move to a discussion of Isis' cult and expectations of female participants, aiming to show that Isis' relationship with femininity and chastity was a crucial reason that both Ovid and Apuleius chose her for these stories and depicted her as they did. Unfortunately, knowledge of women's roles in Roman Isiac cult practice is limited to the works of authors already discussed here (Apuleius and the elegists) and to representations of the goddess and her initiates from material culture.[14] One might expect to learn something of the cult's gender ethics from the myth of Isis, but evidence for the myth is also lacking: the only full account of the Isis myth still extant is Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*, with only some small fragments of the original Egyptian story preserved in the Pyramid Texts (Alvar 2008, 39).[15] Even with a fairly comprehensive account of the myth, Alvar argues, one cannot extrapolate ethical tenets from its plot—as he has done for the cult of Cybele—because the narrative of adultery, incest, and violence is "unedifying" (2008, 177). Further, in framing the Isis myth as a Platonic allegory, Plutarch made changes to its structure

---

[14]One of the most significant sources of evidence for women's participation in Isiac cult is a collection of Attic grave reliefs that depict women in the dress of Isis. Elizabeth J. Walters has provided a comprehensive analysis of these reliefs, which all date to the Imperial period, and the sheer number of them attests to a significant number of women who took part in the cult—although, since these findings are confined to the provenance of Attica, it is difficult to gauge how relevant they are to the larger Roman world. Depictions of Isis herself are much more common and can be useful as comparative pieces for identifying whether a statue is meant to depict the goddess or a member of the cult. Certain accoutrements of Isis, such as her iconic crown of the sun disk and horns, are never included in depictions of women worshipers (Walters 1988, 54).

[15]The Pyramid Texts are the oldest extant religious texts of Ancient Egypt, written in Old Egyptian and carved into the walls and sarcophagi in the pyramids at Saqqara. The most ancient of these texts date to the end of the Fifth Dynasty, around the middle of the twenty-fourth century BCE.

that may prevent a full understanding of the original Egyptian version and its implications for the cult itself: it is unclear how much of Plutarch's treatise preserves original Egyptian beliefs and which aspects are the result of Graeco-Roman influence.[16]

Because of the limited source material, speculation on the moral and ethical expectations of Isiac women is fraught. Despite its complex fictiveness, the *Golden Ass* turns out to be one of the most comprehensive sources for study of the cult's inner workings. There are, however, several texts conventionally known as aretalogies of Isis that offer important insights into Isiac value-systems, all of them hymn-like accounts concerned with "praising one or other of the Isiac group of deities" (Alvar 2008, 187).[17] The aretalogies are particularly useful for understanding the cult of Isis because they speak directly about the role of the goddess in an exclusively religious context. These aretalogies were evidently votive texts for temples, and their purpose seems to have been didactic—that is, they were meant to be memorized and repeated in order to pass along the cult's value-system.[18] There exist many interrelated texts of this type, but Alvar ascribes particular importance to one text that survives in five different versions. It was "evidently composed in Greek at Memphis in the Fayyûm around 100 BCE or somewhat earlier," and the five versions come from Maroneia, Andros, Kyme, Thessalonike, and Ios (Alvar 2008, 186).

---

[16]As Alvar points out (2008, 177), Plutarch suppresses adulteries by husbands in the myth, which "play an important symbolic role."

[17]Alvar notes that the title "aretalogy" is somewhat misleading, as "the actual content of these texts goes far beyond the semantic field of *aretai*" (2008, 186n122).

[18]The context and origin of the aretalogies have been hotly debated. Richard Harder and Jan Bergman (among others) have argued for an Egyptian context, while A.D. Nock and André-Jean Festugière have favored a Hellenistic context. Because we possess no aretalogies of this type dating to before the late second century BCE—a time when there was much cultural exchange between Egypt and Greece—it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of these documents. Alvar rightly dismisses the question of origin because it has little to no bearing on the real significance of the texts; it is more important to ask how they were received and what purpose they served among practitioners of the Isiac cult (2008, 187-188).

Through an examination of Apuleius' writings, and the Memphis aretalogies—particularly its versions from Maroneia and Kyme—Alvar has sketched out a useful description of Isiac ethics. The caveat is that relying overly on Alvar's analysis may seem to create a cyclical argument, i.e., using the *Golden Ass* to support other arguments about the *Golden Ass*. For my purposes, this type of reasoning will not be problematic: my analysis of Isis relies primarily not upon the lived reality of the cult's practitioners, but rather upon the representation of the cult created by Roman authors for Roman audiences. In this respect, Alvar offers a fitting view of Isiac cult depicted through literature, especially because he supplements his analysis of the Roman texts with his findings from the Memphis aretalogies. Therefore, I will make use of his work with only limited reservations.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of Isiac ethics is a devotion to chastity, whether in the short or long term. Pointing out that "sexual abstinence was understood both as a mark of piety and as a technique to attain moral purity over a life-time," Alvar argues that such abstinence was more prominent in the cult of Isis than in other similar cults (2008, 179). In order to join the cult or to gain good standing in it, one had to be chaste within the parameters of Isiac ethics. Total abstinence from sex was one acceptable way of achieving chastity, but there was a spectrum of chaste conduct for both initiates and those who worshiped the goddess more casually.

Most evidence for the prevalence of chastity within Isiac cult comes from the Roman authors discussed above, and especially from the *Golden Ass*. In fact, Isis' requirements of abstinence are one of the major reasons Lucius is hesitant to join the cult (*AA* 11.19):

> at ego, quamquam cupienti voluntate praeditus, tamen religiosa formidine retardabar, quod enim sedulo percontaveram difficile religionis obsequium et castimoniorum abstinentiam satis arduam cautoque circumspectu vitam, quae multis casibus subiacet, esse muniendam.

But, although endowed with an eager willingness, I nevertheless delayed myself with nervousness about the religion, because, in fact, I had found out through careful inquiries that adherence to the faith was difficult, that abstinence in matters of purity was rather strenuous, and that my way of life, which would be subject to many misfortunes, must be protected through careful circumspection.

Apuleius' references to *castimonia* and *abstinentia* do not necessarily refer to sex, but rather involve a general purity of morals and a restraint from all excess, whether of food, luxury, or any other vice. The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* gives three possible meanings for *castimonium* (TLL v. *castimonium* I, II, III): pertaining to the maintenance of any religious tenets, pertaining to sexual abstinence or fidelity, and pertaining to the pursuit of a moderate way of life. *Abstinentia* is an even broader term, with five major avenues for interpretation listed in the *TLL*. Of those five the two most specific indicate avoidance of excess eating and avoidance of sexual activity (TLL v. *abstinentia* II, III). A more general interpretation of *abstinentia* is individual independence, *de eo, qui nihil sibi ab alio petit nec accipit* (TLL v. *abstinentia* I): "concerning him, who neither seeks nor accepts anything from another."

In accordance with this semantic range, one may take *castimoniorum abstinentia* any number of ways, especially given that *castimonium* can indicate any type of adherence to religious tenets. Elsewhere in the *Golden Ass*, *abstinentia* "refers specifically to restraint in eating," which may speak here of the Isiac cult's requirement that Lucius "abstain from meat and wine for short periods" (Keulen et al. 2015, 338). Perhaps, combined with *castimonium*, this word may convey a specifically sexual meaning, but Jean-Claude Fredouille (1975, 96) believes that *castimoniorum abstinentia* refers to all of the habits of self-restraint required of Isiac initiates. Nevertheless, because both words often relate to venereal matters, it is likely that sexual

chastity was a critical element of Isiac practice.[19] Thus, it should be assumed that the restored

Lucius either will not engage in sex at all or will observe strict rituals of cleansing and abstention

to negate sexual pollution. Unfortunately, Apuleius does not elaborate on the exact behaviors

that Lucius is expected to perform upon joining the cult of Isis, but, because he describes the

cult's practice of chastity as "rather strenuous" (*satis arduam*), it is possible that total, lifelong

celibacy was expected of some Isiac initiates—perhaps the unmarried.

Those who worshiped Isis but were not initiated into the cult would also have had to

uphold some degree of chastity, which fact is supported by the Augustan elegists. For these

authors, the chastity expected of Isis' followers prevents the poet-lover from having sex with his

puella whenever he wishes: all three mention the ten ritual days of Isis, when the goddess'

worshipers were expected to abstain from all sexual contact. Propertius writes the following from

the perspective of the *lena*, who advises the *puella* on how to gain the most benefits from her

lovers: *denique ubi amplexu Venerem promiseris empto, / fac simules puros Isidis esse dies*

(4.5.33-34): "Finally, when you have promised love for a purchased embrace, be sure to pretend

that the chaste days of Isis are happening." For the poet-lover of Propertius, the days of Isis are

an excuse for a woman to pursue other lovers while he himself believes that she is practicing

abstinence.

The elegiac *puella* is neither a priestess nor an initiate of Isis, and therefore she would not

be expected to abstain from sex consistently. As a worshiper, however, she would have had to

observe a certain number of celibate days in order to maintain the goddess' favor. This idea is

---

[19]Heyob points out (1975, 112-113) that material evidence indicates the strict regulation of sexual activity in the Isiac cult, and she attributes criticism of the cult to men's displeasure with the large number of female participants. According to her analysis, worship of Isis allowed women to leave the home and be the equal of men in certain religious contexts. She also mentions (1975, 112) that many must have been suspicious of the emotion shown in Isiac festivals, which was not typical of Graeco-Roman religious ceremony.

presented clearly in a more sympathetic passage from Tibullus (1.3.23-26):

> quid tua nunc Isis mihi, Delia, quid mihi prosunt
>   illa tua totiens aera repulsa manu,
> quidve, pie dum sacra colis, pureque lavari
>   te—memini—et puro secubuisse toro?

> What use is your Isis to me now, Delia, what use to me
>   those bronze instruments struck by your hand so many times,
> or what of the fact that, while you piously cultivate her rites, you bathe
>   purely—as I recall—and that you have slept alone in an untouched bed?

In this context, the speaker is praying to Isis to save Delia from illness, citing the *puella*'s pious worship as a reason for her to be spared. He highlights Delia's nights with a "pure bed" (*puro toro*) as her most important offering to Isis, listing her abstinence as the final pious act in a triad: clearly Delia's maintenance of the ten celibate days is meant especially to earn protection from the goddess, or the speaker would not be offering them as a reason for Isis to heal her. So, even for non-initiated worshipers of Isis, practicing ritual abstinence at certain points of the year was important for maintaining a good relationship with the goddess.[20]

Despite such evidence that chastity was a crucial aspect of Isiac ethics, these same authors—as well as Juvenal, Martial, and Josephus—are quick to accuse Isiac worshipers of being depraved and promiscuous.[21] In fact, Ovid is the first author to claim that temples of Isis were sites of prostitution (*Ars. Am.* 1.77-78), though it is likely that this statement should not be taken seriously, especially given the role that Isis plays in the *Metamorphoses*. In any case,

---

[20]More generally, in the foundation-narrative of Sarapeion A at Delos, the priest Maiistas stresses that both Isis (and Serapis) are propitious to "good people who have only pure thoughts in their hearts" (Alvar 2008, 179-80). Women in particular viewed her as a protectress and overseer of the most crucial turning points of their lives, especially birth, marriage, and death—though she also provided protection during childbirth (Heyob 1975, 80).

[21]In his sixth satire, Juvenal uses Isiac practice to criticize the conduct of credulous women in the upper echelons of Roman society. Part of his motivation may stem from a skepticism of eastern religions and a desire to defend the purity of old Roman beliefs (Solmsen 1979, 72).

Roman opinions about Isis and her cult were mixed, especially during the Augustan period, directly following Cleopatra's death.

Attitudes toward chastity are less clearly defined in the Isis aretalogies from Memphis, which focus more on Isis' role as a founding goddess of civilization: in the Maroneia aretalogy she is praised as the divinity who established justice, created the languages of men, and set down laws, among other things. More than a patroness of chastity, Isis is presented as the protectress of well-managed communities and of adherence to social norms. In the Kyme aretalogy, there is more of an emphasis on Isis' establishment of marriage and the relationship between men and women. This is an appropriate association, as Isis is known for her steadfast devotion to her husband Osiris. In Egyptian myth, Seth imprisons Osiris in a coffin and sends him to the ends of the earth. After tirelessly traveling the world, Isis finds her husband, only to have Seth rip apart his body and scatter the pieces far and wide, so that she is forced to find and unite all of them (Alvar 2008, 41-44).

Isis' role as a protectress of marriage further defines the idea of chastity within the bounds of Isiac ethics. While total celibacy was one avenue of interpretation, one might also practice chastity by adhering to the gender roles within a traditional marriage: sexual activity was acceptable as long as it was confined within "the civilized community" (Griffiths 1978, 158). Despite popular belief, female initiates of Isis did not enjoy a status equal to their male counterparts; rather, women were encouraged to stay within their traditional sphere and not try to elevate themselves to a higher position (Alvar 2008, 189). Isiac cult accepted sex as a means of preserving organic family life, but extramarital sex was condemned as destructive to the community. Isiac cult promoted total celibacy and the regulation of sexual desires as a way of preserving the roles of men and women in marriage and the wellbeing of the community at large.

How do the Isiac ethics of chastity affect our reading of Isis in the *Golden Ass*? If Isis represents the ideal of appropriate sexual conduct, then the many adulteresses and murderesses represent the sphere of inappropriate conduct—both sexual and social—that Lucius inhabits in Books 1 through 10. For as long as Lucius remains in his asinine form, he is surrounded by characters who reflect his own corrupt morals—particularly women. These women are the antitheses of an ideal Isiac woman: they cuckold their husbands and murder kinsmen, bringing chaos to their own families and to their communities. Apuleius' inset narratives about these wicked women, which do not occur in the pseudo-Lucianic epitome of the original, act as harbingers of Isis' eventual arrival. That is, the presence of so many morally corrupt women signals the need for intervention, which comes in the form of Isis. As a goddess, she represents the ideal of feminine chastity and of traditional values; after her arrival, not only does Lucius return to human form, but the previously ubiquitous wicked women vanish.

Ovid's Isis functions in much the same way, standing apart from the other divinities of the poem because of her beneficence.[22] Furthermore, her presence separates Iphis from problematic female protagonists like Byblis and Myrrha, who receive no divine help. The compassion of Isis ultimately prevents the story of Iphis from ending in tragedy as many of Ovid's narratives do: her first intervention with Telethusa saves Iphis' life, and her second solves Iphis' existential crisis. Throughout, Iphis remains unblemished by the illicit love of the narratives around her. By entering into a traditional marriage, Iphis is able to adhere to the social role laid out for her—that of a husband.

---

[22]In the *Metamorphoses*, Isis is contrasted less with the other women of the *Metamorphoses* and more with the Graeco-Roman gods in the work, who rarely bestow kindness upon mortal characters. Anderson writes (1972, 465) that Ovid purposely chose a foreign deity for the Iphis story because she "was not tarnished by the usual subhuman associations he gives gods," whereas Graf argues (1988, 60-61) that Ovid chose her specifically because of her association with women and her relevance to the city of Rome.

Lucius' narrative follows a similar pattern. When the reader meets Lucius, he is not yet balanced—a credulous man with asinine tendencies—and his initial transformation into an ass seems to align his physical form with his boorish nature, although not with his mental capacity. The imbalance persists. The reputation of the ass and its associations with sexual proclivity indicate to the audience that Lucius now inhabits the sphere of moral repugnance, and his adventures throughout the first ten books only reinforce his position. In particular, the wicked women of the later books bring to the narrative an emphasis on sexual depravity and the suffering that it causes within a community. Ironically, when Lucius flees from his final master, it is because he is ashamed to copulate publicly with a murderess (although it is arguably much more shameful for her to be forced to copulate publicly with a donkey). This small recognition of moral integrity seems to rekindle Lucius' desire for humanity, and he flees the embrace of a wicked woman, finding instead the embrace of Isis. If the women throughout the narrative reflect Lucius' own socially unacceptable attitudes, then Isis represents the acceptance of social order and moral responsibility. Although Lucius does not enter into a traditional marriage, he becomes the "goddess' consort" (Alvar 2008, 182), and by practicing ritual abstinence performs his appropriate social role.

CONCLUSION

Although most scholarship on Apuleius' Isis has focused on her connections to Plutarch and Platonism, there are other elements of her characterization in the *Golden Ass* that expand our interpretation of Lucius' journey and final transformation. In addition to Apuleius' philosophical leanings and possible participation in the Isiac cult, we must pay attention to the previous representations of Isis upon which he builds his narrative. Ovid's Iphis story provides a unique opportunity for comparing two literary depictions of the goddess in two thematically parallel stories. Over the course of these narratives, both protagonists experience disharmony between their mental and physical identities, but both ultimately achieve equilibrium through the intervention of Isis. Although the specific intertexts between the two works are weak at best, the strong correlation between the two characters and their stories indicates that Apuleius consciously drew upon Ovid's Iphis tale when writing the *Golden Ass*. Furthermore, the narratives of both Lucius and Iphis are surrounded by stories of "wrong" love or sexual depravity, which create a vivid contrast with Isis' presence.

Taking into account the expectations of chastity for women within Roman Isiac cult, I have argued that Isis ultimately leads both Iphis and Lucius into roles that are socially appropriate for each of them. Iphis becomes a man and is therefore able to perform the duties required of a traditional husband; Lucius becomes human and enters the priesthood of Isis, acting in some ways as a "husband" to the goddess. Both Iphis' and Lucius' new states are characterized by a balance between internal and external, and by the appropriate regulation of

sexual activity. As a man, Iphis no longer has to worry about engaging in non-traditional homosexual relations, and at the end of the *Golden Ass* Lucius sedulously avoids sexual activity, keeping chaste according to Isis' wishes. While Ovid's tale focuses on sexual immorality, Apuleius' novel offers a broader range of communal and social problems: often the actions of depraved people—especially women—lead to a breakdown of families and communities in the *Golden Ass*. The function of Isis in both works is to return the protagonist to an appropriate social role, as defined by appropriate sexual conduct and moral responsibility.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alvar, Jaime. 2008. *Romanising Oriental Gods: Myth, Salvation and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras*, translated and edited by R. Gordon. Leiden; New York: Brill Academic Publishers.

Anderson, Graham. 1982. *Eros Sophistes: Ancient Novelists at Play*. Chico: Scholars Press.

Anderson, William S. 1972. *Ovid's* Metamorphoses*: Books 6-10*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Bradley, Keith R. 2012. "Animalizing the Slave: The Truth of Fiction." In *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays*, 59-78. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Bricault, Laurent. 2001. *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques (IVe siècle av. J-C. – IVe apr. J.-C.)*. Paris: Diffusion de Boccard.

DeFilippo, Joseph G. 1990. "*Curiositas* and the Platonism of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*." *AJP* 111.4: 471-92.

Dowden, Ken. 1998. "Cupid and Psyche: A Question of the Vision of Apuleius." In *Aspects of Apuleius' 'Golden Ass'. Vol. 2: Cupid and Psyche*, edited by B. L. Hijmans, R. T. van der Paardt, and M. Zimmerman, 1-22. Groningen: Egbert Forsten Publishing.

Dowling, Melissa B. 2013. "Isis in Greece and Rome." In *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, edited by R. S. Bagnall, K. Brodersen, C. B. Champion, A. Erskine, and S. R. Huebner, 3515-3518. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Drews, Friedemann. 2012. "ASINUS PHILOSOPHANS: Allegory's Fate and Isis' Providence in the *Metamorphoses*." In *Aspects of Apuleius' 'Golden Ass'. Vol. 3: The Isis Book*, edited by W. Keulen and U. Egelhaaf-Gaiser, 107-131. Boston; Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Dunand, Françoise. 1973. *Le culte d'Isis dans le bassin oriental de la Méditerranée*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Finkelpearl, Ellen D. 1998. *Metamorphosis of Language in Apuleius: A Study of Allusion in the Novel*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Fletcher, Richard. 2014. *Apuleius' Platonism: The Impersonation of Philosophy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fredouille, Jean-Claude. 1975. *Apulei Metamorphoseon, liber XI*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

Graf, Fritz. 1988. "Ovide, les *Métamorphoses* at la véracité du mythe." In *Métamorphoses du mythe en Gréce antique*, edited by C. Calame, 57-70. Geneva: Éditions Labor et Fides.

Graverini, Luca. 2004. "A Book-like self. Ovid and Apuleius." *Hermathena* 177: 225-250.

_____. 2012. *Literature and Identity in the* Golden Ass *of Apuleius*, translated by B. T. Lee. Columbus: Ohio University Press.

Griffiths, J. Gwyn. 1975. *The Isis-Book ('Metamorphoses', Book XI)*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

_____. 1978. "Isis in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius." In *Aspects of Apuleius' 'Golden Ass'. Vol. 1.*, edited by B. L. Hijmans and R. T. van der Paardt, 141-166. Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis.

Harrison, Stephen. 2000. *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____. 2014. "Ovid in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*." In *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, edited by J. F. Miller and C. E. Newlands, 86-99. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

Heyob, Sharon K. 1975. *The Cult of Isis among Women in the Graeco-Roman World*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Hooker, Ward. 1955. "Apuleius's 'Cupid and Psyche' as a Platonic myth." *The Bucknell Review* 5.3: 24-38.

Kenney, Edward J. 1990. *Apuleius: Cupid and Psyche*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keulen, W.H., S. Tilg, L. Nicolini, L. Graverini, S. J. Harrison, S. Panayotakis, and D. van Mal-Maeder. 2015. *Apuleius Madaurensis:* Metamorphoses: *Book XI: The Isis Book*. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers.

Krabbe, Judith. 1989. *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius*. Classical Languages and Literature Series, 17.9. New York.

Mills, Suzanne. 1978. "Ovid's Donkey Act." *CJ* 73.4: 303-306.

Moreschini, Claudio. 2015. *Apuleius and the Metamorphoses of Platonism*. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers.

O'Brien, Maeve C. "'For Every Tatter in Its Mortal Dress': Love, the Soul, and Her Sisters." In *Aspects of Apuleius' 'Golden Ass'. Vol. 2: Cupid and Psyche*, edited by B. L. Hijmans, R. T. van der Paardt, and M. Zimmerman, 22-34. Groningen: Egbert Forsten Publishing.

Penwill, John. 1975. "Slavish Pleasures and Profitless Curiosity: Fall and Redemption in

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*." *Ramus* 4: 49-82

Schlam, Carl C. 1992. *The* Metamorphoses *of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself*. Chapel
    Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Shumate, Nancy. 1996. *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius'* Metamorphoses. Ann Arbor:
    University of Michigan Press.

Solmsen, Friedrich. 1979. *Isis among the Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge: Harvard University
    Press.

Takács, Sarolta A. 1995. *Isis and Sarapis in the Roman World*. New York: Brill Academic
    Publishers.

Tatum, James. 1972. "Apuleius and Metamorphosis." *AJP* 93.2: 306-313.

Turcan, Robert. 1992. *Les cultes orientaux dans le monde romain*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Walsh, Patrick G. 1970. *The Roman Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____. 1981. "Apuleius and Plutarch." In *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought*,
    edited by H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus. London: Variorum Publications Ltd.

Walters, Elizabeth J. 1988. *Hesperia: Supplement XXII. Attic Grave Reliefs That Represent
    Women in the Dress of Isis.* Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

Wheeler, Stephen M. 1997. "Changing Names: The Miracle of Iphis in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'
    9." *Phoenix* 51.2: 190-202.

Winkle, Jeffrey T. 2014. "'Necessary Roughness': Plato's *Phaedrus* and Apuleius'
    Metamorphoses." *Ancient Narrative* 11: 93-131.

Winkler, John J. 1985. *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's* The Golden
    Ass. Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: The University of California Press.

Woolf, Greg. 2014. "Isis and the Evolution of Religions." In *Power, Politics and the Cult of Isis:
    Proceedings of the Vth International Conference of Isis Studies, Boulogne-sur-Mer,
    October 13-15, 2011*, edited by Laurent Bricault and Miguel John Versluys, 62-92.
    Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Zimmerman, M., S. Panayotakis, V. C. Hunink, W. H. Keulen, S. J. Harrison, T. D. McCreight,
    D. van Mal-Maeder, and B. Wesseling. 2004. *Apuleius Madaurensis:* Metamorphoses
    IV.28-35, V, and VI.1-24. Text, Translation, and Commentary. Groningen: Egbert Forsten
    Publishing.