

FUROR, DEMENTIA, RABIES:  
SOCIAL DISPLACEMENT, MADNESS AND RELIGION  
IN THE METAMORPHOSES OF APULEIUS

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*Apud Vivianum quaeritur, si servus inter fanaticos non semper caput iactaret et aliqua profatus esset, an nihilo minus sanus videretur. et ait Vivianus nihilo minus hunc sanum esse: neque enim nos, inquit, minus animi vitii aliquos sanos esse intellegere debere: alioquin, inquit, futurum, ut in infinito hac ratione multos sanos esse negaremus, ut puta levem superstitiosum iracundum contumacem et si qua similia sunt animi vitia: magis enim de corporis sanitate, quam de animi vitii promitti. interdum tamen, inquit, vitium corporale usque ad animum pervenire et eum vitare: veluti contingeret frenhtikw, quia id ei ex febris acciderit. quid ergo est? si quid sit animi vitium tale, ut id a venditore excipi oporteret neque id venditor cum sciret pronuntiasset, ex empto eum teneri. 10. Idem Vivianus ait, quamvis aliquando quis circa fana bacchatus sit et responsa reddiderit, tamen, si nunc hoc non faciat, nullum vitium esse: neque eo nomine, quod aliquando id fecit, actio est, sicuti si aliquando febrem habuit: ceterum si nihilo minus permaneret in eo vitio, ut circa fana bacchari solet et quasi demens responsa daret, etiamsi per luxuriam id factum est, vitium tamen esse, sed vitium animi, non corporis, ideoque redhiberi non posse, quoniam aediles de corporalibus vitii loquuntur: attamen ex empto actionem admittit.*

The question is raised in Vivian whether a slave who, from time to time, tosses his head about among religious fanatics and makes some pronouncements, is nonetheless to be regarded as healthy. Vivian says that he is; for he says that we should still regard as sane those with mental defects; otherwise, he proceeds, the position would be reached that on this sort of ground, we would deny that slaves are healthy without limit, for example, because he is frivolous, superstitious, quick-tempered, obstinate, or has some other flaw of mind. The undertaking relates to physical, not mental health. Still, says Vivian, it does happen that a physical defect affects the mind also and makes the slave thereby defective; just as happens in the case of a lunatic, because his madness comes about as a result of a fever. What then? If the mental defect be such that it ought to be taken up by the vendor and if the vendor did not say anything, although he knew of it, he will be liable to an action on the purchase. 10. Vivian says further that

although, at some time in the past, a slave indulged in Bacchanalian revels around the shrines and chanted responses, it is still the case that if he does it no longer, there is no defect in him and there will be no more liability in respect of him than if he once had a fever; but if he persist still in that bad habit, running mad around the shrines and uttering what appear to be demented ravings, even though this be the consequence of riotous living and thus a defect, it is still a mental, not a physical defect and so constitutes no ground for rescission, because the *aediles* pronounce in respect of physical defects; however, such facts give occasion for the action on purchase.

(Justinian, *Digest* 21.1.1.9-10, tr. Watson *et al.* 1985, modified.)

In the *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius exhibits his *desultoria scientia* (*Met.* 1.1) – his skill in driving his rhetorical chariot – as he jumps like a daredevil jockey from one galloping Milesian tale to another, describing in the process how the ‘shapes and fates’ (*figuræ fortunæque*) of humans are transformed into other forms (*imagines*) under the power of Egyptian magic, and then miraculously changed back by a shared and reciprocal bond (*mutuus nexus*).<sup>1</sup> The manic transformations of the title often involve humans turning into animals and (sometimes) back again: Lucius becomes an ass, Pamphile an owl, witches become weasels, robbers become bears, an old man becomes a dragon. Apuleius’s choice of the word *nexus* for these reciprocities calls to mind its cognate, *nexum*, a form of voluntary and temporary bondage that became the grounds of an important struggle in the early history of Rome between patricians intent on enforcing the law and their rights, and plebeians who strove to assert their natural liberty.<sup>2</sup> The prologue also proleptically invokes the adventures of Lucius by mentioning places he will meet in his travels: Athens (*Hymettos Attica*; cf. 1.24), Corinth (*Isthmos Ephyrea*; cf. Book 11), and Taenarus (the place from which Psyche descends into the underworld, 6.18-20) – all places in the heartland of ancient Greece. It further hints at his difficulties as an ass in communicating (*exotici ac forensis sermonis locutor*, 1.1; cf. 3.29, 7.3, 8.29), his labours in acquiring knowledge of Latin (*aerumnabilis labor*), and his change of voice or language in moving from Greek to Latin (*vocis immutatio*). From the beginning of the narrative a number of polarities are set up: human and animal, slave and free, and one

<sup>1</sup> For the prologue to the *Metamorphoses*, see Harrison 1990, Kahane 1996, the various contributions in Kahane & Laird 2001, and Graverini 2005. In this paper, I use the text and translation of Hanson 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Winkler 1985:188-92, esp. 189.

and the same person acts as both insider and outsider in the social world of the novel. All these starting and ending points are united in the metaphor of slavery that permeates the work. Only a slave – whom Aristotle assimilates to animals, but whom Roman law views as at least partly human; who were enslaved, but often, at least in Rome, later freed; and who regularly came from outside the hegemonic culture of Greece and Rome, but who were often later enrolled as citizens of the Roman state – would have been able to unify these opposites. Servitude is the central metaphor of the work and one that lends the many narratives within it a degree of coherence.

Bradley has shown how the ‘transformation of Lucius can be taken as a paradigmatic illustration of the animalization of the slave in real life, and as a guide to the meaning of animalization in the master-slave relationship.’ He argues that ‘the *Metamorphoses* shows how animalizing the slave served the interests of slave-owners by functioning as a mechanism of control and domination’, but that ‘the novel reveals the limits of how far manipulation of the slave could be taken.’<sup>3</sup> He identifies in the *Metamorphoses* a dialectical play of opposites between slave and free, tame and wild. The present article adds to Bradley’s analysis an exploration of the function of madness in the novel in the context of social and religious upheaval in the Roman Empire in the 2nd century of our era. I will argue that the interpretation of episodes of insanity in the work (expressed by *furor*, *dementia*, *rabies* and related words) is not only a reflection of their literary antecedents,<sup>4</sup> but also particularly resonant within the socio-economic and religious contexts of the Roman Empire in the 2nd century.<sup>5</sup>

Feigned or real madness occurs frequently in slave societies, especially where free men and women are suddenly enslaved or slaves experience a

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<sup>3</sup> Bradley 2000:110-25, here 113; see also Fitzgerald 2000:94-111.

<sup>4</sup> Shumate 1996a:241-42 associates madness in the novel directly with religious conversion. I welcome her analysis, but argue here that the episodes of insanity in the work are primarily driven by power relations in society rather than an innate desire for God. This is not to say that madness and religion are not linked in Graeco-Roman antiquity, as the quotation from the *Digest* at the beginning of this article shows. For the madness (*furor*) of Charite and others in the novel see also Shumate 1996b:103-16, who argues (115-16) that *furor* plays a similar, but symmetrically opposite role in the development of the narrative of the *Metamorphoses* to that of Dido in the *Aeneid*.

<sup>5</sup> For the social background to the *Metamorphoses*, see Millar 1981:63-75, esp. 65: ‘It is undeniable that the novel expresses a rare and distinctive level of sympathy with the working lives of the poor.’

dramatic and shocking humiliation.<sup>6</sup> Such traumatic events may ultimately lead to religious conversion.<sup>7</sup> Justinian's *Digest* (21.1.1.9, given above) records a discussion raised by the jurist Vivian concerning whether a slave who 'tosses his head about among religious fanatics and makes some pronouncements' is to be considered sane.<sup>8</sup> Vivian's question is raised in the context of the legal conditions for a rescission of sale on the grounds that the slave was sold with a latent defect. According to him, slaves who appear to be religious fanatics should not be considered to have a latent defect, since otherwise slaves with other faults such as those who are 'frivolous, superstitious, quick-tempered, obstinate' (*levis superstitiosus iracundus contumax*) would have to be considered defective, whereas their behaviour can be put down to shortcomings in their character rather than to a permanent mental deficiency. The most important criterion appears to be whether the disassociative state of mind is temporary or permanent. Vivian does allow the possibility that the insanity of a slave might be permanent and that it might have a physical basis, as in the case of *phrenetici* whose condition may arise from a fever and so, if the demented behaviour of a slave in hanging around shrines and talking nonsense (*aliquando quis circa fana bacchatus sit et responsa reddiderit*) persisted and was not a passing phase, the purchaser would have an action arising from the sale.<sup>9</sup> This legal discussion raises a number of important

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<sup>6</sup> Spores's 1988 study of 'running amok' in Indonesian slave societies shows how dishonoured slaves and people who experience a sudden loss of status often react with indiscriminate violence and self-destruction. The phenomenon of 'running amok' originated probably among soldiers of the Indian kings ('martial amok'), who dedicated their lives to royal service and who would go on a destructive rampage, generally ending in their own deaths, if the ruler was injured or killed. Bladed weapons, such as the *keris*, were generally preferred in these attacks. An 'amok' could also be an individual ('solitary amok'), who went on an indiscriminate spree of murder directed at his own family and friends, as well as his perceived enemies, as a result of an insult to his honour.

<sup>7</sup> The religious experience of slaves has not been adequately researched to date. Slaves enjoyed the right of asylum at the altars of the gods in cases of extremely harsh treatment, at least in the Greek world. This right is attested in Eur. *Supp.* 268. At Athens the slaves could take refuge at the Theseum or at the altar of the Eumenides (Ar. fr. 567; *Eq.* 1312; *Thesm.* 224). Diod. Sic. 11.89.8 records the pledge of slave owners on oath to the god to treat slaves who had claimed asylum mercifully. For asylum under the Roman Empire, see Justinian, *Inst.* 1.8.2.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of this passage, see Gardner 1986:154.

<sup>9</sup> The recognition of temporary insanity is clear from *Dig.* 1.18.14, where Marcus Aurelius and Commodus rule that Aelius Priscus should not be punished for the

points in relation to the Roman understanding of insanity: first, it suggests that religious fanaticism was so alien to the established religious outlook of the day, at least in Roman society, that it could be seen as a mental defect (*animi vitium*) with a physical rather than a psycho-social basis; and second, that persistent ravings were a product of excess (*luxuria*) that, by implication at least, merited pruning and restraint (the metaphor is one of a plant that has become overgrown) through the exercise of power. This legal discussion raises questions concerning the extent to which insanity, real or apparent, occurred within Roman society, and the degree to which it was associated with shifting power relations. The *Digest* passage is written entirely from the point of view of lawyers who had the interests of the slave-owning class in mind, but it nevertheless suggests that religious fanaticism was a powerful force among slaves at the height of Roman imperialism.

There is certainly evidence of slave involvement in religious organisations such as the Bacchanalian cult in 186 BC. It was spread by 'a low-born Greek sacrificer and prophet' (*Graecus ignobilis ... sacrificulus et vates*, Livy 39.8) and the chief priestess was a woman from Campania assisted by two plebeian Romans. Two years later, in 184 BC, the *propraetor* at Tarentum, L. Postumius Tempanus, 'suppressed serious conspiracies among the shepherds and the remnants of the Bacchanals' (*magnas pastorum coniurationes vindicavit*, Livy 39.41), during which he condemned about 7000 men (39.29).<sup>10</sup> Further action was taken against the cult in 182 and 181 BC (40.19). Ranch owners in South Italy would have brought large numbers of slaves to Italy from the recent wars in the East.<sup>11</sup> Unrest sparked by religion occurred again in 213, and in 181 the books of Numa were burnt by Q. Petilius, 'at a time when the Bacchanalian *quaestio* was being reactivated.'<sup>12</sup> The appeal of the cult of Bacchus to slaves lay in the elimination of the distinctions in status in a world of brotherhood (*ILS* 3360, 4215).<sup>13</sup> Slaves were also found in the Campanian cult in 98 BC (*CIL* 1[2]:618) and in the list of magistrates from Minturnae. They could undertake religious obligations and their graves were considered sacred (*Dig.* 11.7.2 [Ulpian]). Plautus's play *Bacchides* appears to

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murder of his mother, as his insanity was penalty enough. However, they also allow the possibility that Priscus was only intermittently insane. They therefore impose on his relatives the obligation of looking after him.

<sup>10</sup> See also Bauman 1990:341, 342 n. 26: 'it can reasonably be supposed that the *quaestio* was directed at the shepherds, hence at slaves.'

<sup>11</sup> Frank 1927:130-31.

<sup>12</sup> Bauman 1990:347.

<sup>13</sup> Westermann 1955:108.

have been composed at the time of this unrest as a parody of this major contemporary social crisis.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the importance of religion in the First Slave War is emphasised by Photius, *Bib.* 384 and Diodorus Siculus 34.2. Spartacus's wife was a prophetess, initiated into the ecstatic cult of Dionysos (Plut. *Crassus* 8.3). Finally, Macrobius (*Sat.* 1.11.3-5) tells the story of Autronius Maximus in 280 BC, whose ill-treatment of his slave was punished by Jupiter with physical illness. During the imperial period poor immigrant foreigners and slaves introduced Christianity, Isism and other mystery religions into the Roman world. These found a ready response among slaves.<sup>15</sup> There is therefore adequate evidence to show that Roman slaves participated enthusiastically in religious cults. Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* reflects many of the socio-economic concerns of the 2nd century and provides the reader with perspectives on life in the Roman Empire that are not those of the dominant élite. To what extent does it reveal the psychological and religious consequences of the volatile social order in the Roman Empire?

Changes in shape – especially into animals such as lions, bulls, snakes, or dogs, but also into trees, rivers, or fountains – were regarded in antiquity as a trope for madness.<sup>16</sup> Ovid's *Metamorphoses* provides a brief example: when her incestuous love (surely a perversion of normal family relations) is rejected, Byblis is consumed with insane fury, which overwhelms her to such an extent that she is transformed into a fountain.<sup>17</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that episodes of insanity appear from the beginning of Apuleius's similarly themed and entitled narrative. In the tale of Aristomenes, the witches Pantheia and Meroe pay a nocturnal visit to the narrator and his old friend, Socrates, in order that Meroe can get revenge on Socrates for disdaining her love and slandering her.<sup>18</sup> At his first appearance, Socrates, although he carries the name of a key figure in Greek intellectual life, is

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<sup>14</sup> Arcellaschi 1990:35-44.

<sup>15</sup> For Isis as the friend of slaves, see Witt 1971:23. The religious changes introduced at the height of the Roman Empire were fueled by massive demographic changes; cf. Nock 1933:99-137. For the importance of the metaphor of slavery in early Christianity, see Martin 1990. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96 concedes that Christianity was practised by 'every rank, age and sex' – a revolution in the context of élitist pagan religious cults. Minucius Felix's dialogue *Octavius* shows that Christianity included the 'illiterate, poor, and uneducated' (16.5-6); see Lane Fox 1986:300-01.

<sup>16</sup> Hershkowitz 1998:164.

<sup>17</sup> *Ov. Met.* 9.450-64; Hershkowitz 1998:164.

<sup>18</sup> For the attempted suicide, see Effe 1976:362-73.

depicted as a social outcast (*qualia solent Fortunae decermina stipes in triviis erogare*, 'like those broken branches of Fortune's tree who beg for money at street corners', 1.6). In some ways Socrates resembles Lucius – both are businessmen and sensualists who come to ruin (1.7) – and Lucius is shocked by this scandal (*flagitium*) and by the fact that Socrates's children have been put under guardianship and his wife has been urged to remarry.<sup>19</sup> Although witches are generally marginalised in Roman society, Socrates appears to be utterly subservient to Meroe, who enjoys erotic power over all men, including Indians and those who live on the opposite side of the world (*Met.* 1.8).<sup>20</sup> She also has the ability to transform them into animals (*Met.* 1.9) and to transport entire houses to remote locations. In their nocturnal visitation, with Aristomenes at their mercy, Pantheia asks Meroe whether they should tear him limb from limb in a Bacchic frenzy (*hunc primum bacchatim discerpimus*, 1.13) as Agave did Pentheus in Euripides's *Bacchae* (another case of the inversion of social norms). Instead, they decide to allow him to survive, but only so that he can bury his friend (undertakers were of low social status).<sup>21</sup> When the porter of the lodge at which they are staying enquires about Socrates, whom Aristomenes believes to have been murdered by the witches, leaving him to take the blame, he envisages himself transported to hell: 'I saw the earth gape open and beheld the pit of Tartarus with the dog Cerberus there ready to devour me' (*memini me terra debiscente ima Tartara inque his canem Cerberum prorsus esurientem mei prospexisse*, 1.15). He awakes to find himself on the ground, naked and covered in urine like a new-born baby (*quasi recens utero matris editus*, 1.14).<sup>22</sup> He believes that he has survived his own death (*supervivens et postumus*, 1.14). Yet, mysteriously, when the porter enters, Socrates awakes, seemingly unaffected by the visit of the nocturnal hags. Aristomenes can only think that he has gone mad, or at least that he has been drunk and has had a nightmare (*vesane ... qui poculis et vino sepultus extrema somnasti*, 1.18). Later, Aristomenes imagines them as 'those Furies of the night before' (*nocturnas etiam Furias illas imaginans*, 1.19). This story is set in Hypata and prepares the reader paradigmatically for the mind-altering experiences of Lucius in that town. In it the social order is inverted – women whose deviant

<sup>19</sup> Fitzgerald 2000:98 notes that merchants are like slaves in being detached from the community.

<sup>20</sup> Her name marks her as an outsider (Meroe, 1.7), and she is compared with Colchian Medea as a practitioner of necromantic magic (1.10). See Ferguson 1970:159-64.

<sup>21</sup> For the status of undertakers, see Petronius, *Sat.* 38.15; 78.6.

<sup>22</sup> For the metaphor of death and rebirth here, see Frangoulidis 2005:197-209.

supernatural power is associated with people living outside the borders of the Roman world, humiliate a prosperous Roman businessman. He finds himself cowering under his bed, transformed into a tortoise (*de Aristomene testudo factus*, 1.12) or like a slave 'a candidate for a cross that had already been decided on' (*certe destinatae iam cruci candidatus*, 1.14). Such an extreme derangement of the Roman order produces in Lucius a sense that he has gone mad, and that he has transgressed a religious sanction as sacrilegiously as did Pentheus. The forces of magic, servitude and insanity that are at work in this narrative will also confront him when he reaches his destination.

When Lucius, a handsome, well-educated, wealthy, young gentleman with good connections (1.2; 2.2-3; 11.15) arrives in Hypata,<sup>23</sup> he is consumed with curiosity about Thessalian magic.<sup>24</sup> Although he is warned by his aunt Byrrhaena, a respectable Roman *matrona*,<sup>25</sup> to avoid the witch Pamphile, he is crazed with impatience to escape her chains (*pecors animi manu eius velut catena quadam memet expedio*, 2.6) and rushes from her house like a madman (*amenti similis celero vestigium*) to grasp the opportunity that presents itself to witness acts of magic from beyond the everyday world. To facilitate his desire for what is supernatural and alien, Lucius plans to avoid forming any sexual bond with his hostess, but to take the low road and seduce the slave girl Photis instead. In this way, paradoxically, his enslavement really begins. The erotic relationship between Lucius and Photis is so excessive that it resembles a mad Bacchic revel (*bacchamur in venerem*, 3.20). Through this bond, he soon succumbs to the power of Pamphile's magic. Returning from Byrrhaena's dinner-party, he finds himself attacking three wineskins under the belief that they are robbers intent on ransacking Milo's house, whereas in reality they have been animated by Pamphile, using hairs shorn from the skins, because Photis had failed to obtain hair from the heads of her mistress's lovers (2.32). In this attack he is described as the legendary Ajax, driven insane by the award of the armour of Achilles to Odysseus, with the result that he attacks sheep thinking that they are his enemies (*in insani modum Aiakis armatus*, 3.18). Put on trial on a charge of manslaughter, Lucius becomes a ridiculous spectacle to the community of Hypata,<sup>26</sup> and although this occurs during Hypata's Festival of Laughter and although the Hypatans offer to put

<sup>23</sup> On the social status of Lucius as reflected in his physiognomy, see Keulen 2006: 168-202, esp. 169-70.

<sup>24</sup> On the theme of curiosity in the novel, see Sandy 1972:179-83.

<sup>25</sup> For the social status of Byrrhaena, see Keulen 2006:168-202, esp. 196.

<sup>26</sup> For Lucius as a spectacle here, see Slater 2003:88.



up a statue in his honour,<sup>27</sup> this experience is an indication of his increasing social isolation.<sup>28</sup> When Lucius finally gains his wish to witness the transformation of Pamphile, who is herself quite out of her mind (*Pamphile mea iam vecors animi tectum scandulare conscendit*, 3.17), he becomes utterly deranged:

*At ego nullo decantatus carmine, praesentis tantum facti stupore defixus, quidvis aliud magis videbar esse quam Lucius. Sic exterminatus animi, attonitus in amentiam vigilans somniabar.*

I, who had not been enchanted by any spell, yet was so transfixed with awe at the occurrence that I seemed to be something other than Lucius. I was outside the limits of my own mind, amazed to the point of madness, dreaming while awake (3.22, tr. Hanson).

During this time of madness, Lucius loses his freedom. Although, ironically, he tells Byrrhaena that he believes he has never been as free as he was in Hypata (*nec usquam gentium magis me liberum quam hic fuisse credidi*, 2.20), in fact it is here that he becomes enslaved, at first to Photis and later to the magic drugs of Pamphile, whose secret knowledge even the spirits of the dead, the stars, elements of the universe and the gods themselves obey (*secreta quibus obaudiunt manes, turbantur sidera, coguntur numina, serviunt elementa*, 3.15). In Book 11, he is told by a priest of Isis that in Hypata he had plunged into slavish pleasures (*ad serviles delapsus voluptates*, 11.15).<sup>29</sup> When Lucius initiates his relationship with Photis, he tellingly thinks of it as sexual bondage (*nexus venerius*, 2.6).<sup>30</sup> Lucius is willingly brought totally under the power of the fragrant breasts of his servile mistress (*fragrantibus papillis in servilem modum addictum atque mancipatum teneas volentem*, 3.19). On his metamorphosis, Lucius submits to his harsh fate like a slave (*durissimo casui meo serviens*, 3.26) and

<sup>27</sup> An honour granted to Apuleius, *Flor.* 16, who must have been very aware of the politics surrounding such matters.

<sup>28</sup> Frangoulidis 2002:177-88 interprets this episode as a community initiation rite. However, Lucius's initial sense of alienation is of greater importance for my interpretation because of its psychological effect on him as an individual. See also Finkelpearl 1991:221-36.

<sup>29</sup> As Socrates had done (1.7). I take the phrase to mean 'the pleasures of a slave' rather than 'pleasures that come from a slave'. See the discussion in Sandy 1974:234-44; Penwill 1975:49-82; and Bradley 2000:124-25.

<sup>30</sup> The phrase is used of the relationship with Pamphile, which he avoids (*a nexu quidem venerio hospitis tuae tempera*), but, by implication, it also refers to the connection with Photis, which he actively pursues. The words recall the prologue.

from this point on the language of slavery is regularly applied to him. In these episodes Lucius's social degradation to the status of a slave results in an extreme sense of alienation and madness expressed in terms of magic.<sup>31</sup> By venturing outside of his social class, Lucius is transported into an unreal world that shocks him into what resembles the experience of religious initiation.<sup>32</sup> His sense of wonder at the transformation of Pamphile is expressed in terms that resemble his amazement at the revelation of Isis (9.7).<sup>33</sup>

A similar pattern can be observed in the case of Psyche, who is often taken as a counterpart of Lucius.<sup>34</sup> Like Lucius, her experiences sweep her out of her everyday world into a vortex of magic and madness. Her marriage cuts her off from her family and transports her to another world of magical pleasure. Her sisters become swollen with insane envy (*vesania turgidae*, 5.11) at the sudden transformation of their sister and they reflect on their own social inferiority. They behave like awful Furies (*taeterrimae Furiae*, 5.12), and it is the force of this insane passion that brings them to their ruin (*vesanae libidinis et invidiae noxiae stimulis agitatae*, 5.27). The rams from which Psyche must gather wool are equally ferocious – they are governed by *furia* and *rabies* (6.12) – and she must also negotiate her way past the rabid Cerberus in the underworld (6.20). As a result, Psyche loses her mind (*amens*, 5.7), and falls under the power of Venus, who advertises for Psyche's recovery like Romans would for a runaway slave (5.28), indicating that Psyche has been traumatically demoted from her elite social position. When Psyche is found, Venus humiliates her further by having her punished by her slaves (6.9). For Psyche, just as for Lucius, sexual initiation is a magical but socially disruptive experience, one that brings with it derangement and servitude before her eventual salvation and marriage. Her *katabasis* is in itself a metaphor for her altered psychological state.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> On the degradation and humiliation of Lucius and his attempts to regain his dignity, see James & O'Brien 2006:234-51.

<sup>32</sup> For the experience of initiation into a mystery cult, see Burkert 1987:89-114.

<sup>33</sup> The astonishment of Lucius here resembles the amazement of Socrates at the blasphemies of Aristomenes against Pantheia and Meroe (1.8), Lucius's wonder at the magic of Thessaly (2.2), the astonishment of the priest of Isis at the appearance of Lucius (11.14), and the amazement of Lucius at the dream he experiences (11.20).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Walsh 1970:190.

<sup>35</sup> Psychological interpretations of the Cupid and Psyche tale are numerous; see, for example, Neumann 1956; Katz 1976:111-14; Makowski 1985:73-78; Johnson 1989; Von Franz 1992; Gollnick 1992; and Paglia 2006:1-14 on Neumann.

As in the tales of Aristomenes, Lucius and Psyche, the story of Charite features the onset of madness after her sudden transition from the position of a free and privileged young woman to a captive at the mercy of outlaws. At 4.25 a young girl, later identified as Charite, awakens 'like a madwoman' from a dream (*lymphatico ritu somno recussa*) of how her fiancé had been attacked and she had been kidnapped on her wedding day by a gang of gladiators.<sup>36</sup> Tellingly, none of her slaves had offered any resistance (*nec ullo de familiaribus nostris repugnante*, 4.26). The gladiators had shown no interest in murder or robbery. Theirs was an act of targeted kidnapping directed at a wealthy and prosperous family. Charite's terror arises from her transformation from being the daughter of respectable parents, in a home with many slaves (*tanta familia*), cared for by loving home-bred slaves (*cari vernuli*), to being the loot of robbers and a slave herself (*mancipium*), who is treated as a slave (*serviliter*). Her madness may have been exacerbated by her powerlessness – she had been unable to do anything during the attack.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, in a later narrative, Plotina behaves fearlessly among the bands of soldiers guarding her, and their naked swords (*inter ipsas custodientium militum manus et gladios nudos intrepida*, 7.6). Charite, on the other hand, like her mother, is 'pathetic and fainting from intense fear' (*misera, exanimis saevo pavore*) during the attack (the gladiators likewise have swords drawn: *nudis et infestis mucronibus coruscans*, 4.26). Whereas Charite does nothing to rouse her slaves to her defence, Plotina reacts immediately to the sound of Haemus's men breaking into their house, calling on her soldiers and her own slaves by name, and generally rousing the neighbourhood to their help (*milites suosque famulos nominatim, sed et omnem viciniam suppetiatum convocans*, 7.7). One important difference between the two cases is instructive. While Plotina retains her social position, Charite experiences a violent displacement. Charite's loss of status and her servile degradation by her attackers produce within her a sense of alienation, unreality and madness, emphasised by the fantastic tale of Psyche, with whom she is closely associated.

Charite is eventually rescued by her fiancé Tlepolemus and restored to her family (7.13). On their return they are greeted by 'parents, relatives, clients, wards and slaves' (*procurrunt parentes, affines, clientes, alumni, famuli*). After her marriage, Charite becomes a *matrona* and able to dispense patronage to all, including Lucius, who had aided her escape. Her happiness does

<sup>36</sup> For the wedding imagery in this narrative, see Frangoulidis 1999:601-19.

<sup>37</sup> Charite is initially nameless, a fact that underlines her marginalised status in the story in comparison with her actual social position; cf. Frangoulidis 1991:387-94.

not last, however. Her husband, Tlepolemus, is killed by a jealous lover, Thrasyllus. Once more Charite's status changes, she is now no longer *matrona* but *vidua*, and her grief, exacerbated by her public following, is intense. In her deranged state she is visited by the ghost of her husband (8.8), who could not wait for her disturbed state of mind (*percitae mentis ... furor*) to calm down.<sup>38</sup> Like Dido, she runs out of the crowded public spaces of her city to the country meadows in a frenzy of grief, lamenting her husband's death in a crazy voice (*amens et vecordia percita cursuque bacchata furibundo per plateas populosas et arva rurestria fertur, insana voce casum mariti quiritans*, 8.6), accompanied by the whole city (*civitas cuncta*) drawn by a desire to see this public spectacle (*studio visionis*). Her fellow citizens attempt to reassert the social order by preventing her suicide and giving her husband a public funeral (*prosequente populo*). Charite nevertheless exacts her self-destructive revenge. In language reminiscent of Seneca's *Oedipus*, she entices Thrasyllus into a trap, gets him drunk and stabs his eyes out with a pin, before stabbing herself to death with Tlepolemus's sword which she clutches in her 'frenzied hands' (*vesanis manibus*), after a crazy chase through the middle of the city (*per mediam civitatem cursu furioso proripit se*, 8.13). By contrast with this public drama, Thrasyllus's solitary suicide by starvation occurs in the same tomb, but without the accompanying crowds and spectacle. The narrative recalls the breakdown in the social order in Dido's Carthage, and at Thebes during the reign of Oedipus.<sup>39</sup>

Another episode in the narrative, which also has a lot in common with its counterpart in the pseudo-Lucianic *As* (35), illustrates how madness could be used as an act of resistance within the context of the humiliations of Roman slavery. Arriving at a large and famous city, Lucius in his asinine form is put on sale at an auction (8.23-35). The other animals are sold off quickly at high prices, but Lucius is left alone and suffers the repeated

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<sup>38</sup> See Lateiner 2003:219-38. Charite here is as insanely suicidal as Dido. For this see Finkelppearl 1998:115-48.

<sup>39</sup> The intertexts here are well-known. For example, the word used to describe her frenzy (*lymphatico*) recalls how, after her rejection by Aeneas, Dido rages through the city of Carthage like a madwoman (*furit lymphata per urbem*); there are many other parallels between these two narratives. However, the basic facts of the Charite story are present also in the *As* narrative attributed to Lucian, which shows no intertextual relationship with the *Aeneid*. Charite's madness may therefore be taken to be independent of the Dido story. Nevertheless, in both cases self-destructive rage is the result of a traumatic social humiliation. On the function of madness in the novel as a whole, see Shumate 1996b:103-17.

indignity of having his teeth inspected by potential buyers to assess his age. Annoyed by this, he viciously crushes the hand of the next customer in his jaws (*manum ... mordicus arreptam plenissime conterui*, 8.23). As a result he is considered *ferocissimus* and no-one shows any interest in buying him until he is bought by a bald old *cinaedus* making a living out of exhibiting his devotion to the Syrian goddess in the streets of the city. In a scene that recalls a second-hand car sale today, the auctioneer at first plays up his goods, describing the ass as a Cappadocian, as Cappadocian slaves were famous for their strength. When the *cinaedus* goes on to ask the age of the ass, the auctioneer sarcastically responds that an astrologer had told him that he was only five years old, as the ass himself could confirm on the evidence of his tax returns (*ipse scilicet melius istud de suis novit professionibus*, 8.24), which only Roman citizens were liable for. The auctioneer goes on to deliver a transparent sales pitch:

*Quamquam enim prudens crimen Corneliae legis incurram, si civem Romanum pro servo tibi vendidero, quin emis bonum et frugi mancipium, quod te et foris et domi poterit iuvare?*

Now, though I know full well that I am risking a charge under the Cornelian law if I sell you a Roman citizen as a slave, why not buy yourself a good and useful piece of property here, which can give you satisfaction both at home and away? (8.24, tr. Hanson)

These words are ironic because the auctioneer is indeed selling a Roman citizen, Lucius, into slavery. This is made clear by the auctioneer's assurance that the ass is so tame that 'you would think that inside this ass's hide dwelt a mild-mannered human being' (*in asini corio modestum hominem inhabitare credas*, 8.25). The reader recalls that before his metamorphosis, Lucius actually was mild-mannered and considerate – he allows his horse to rest while climbing a steep hill, for example (1.2).<sup>40</sup> The words also suggest by innuendo that the *cinaedus* does not want the ass only for transport, but also for the kind of sexual exploitation no doubt often carried out by Roman masters on their slaves – this is made clear by the auctioneer's recommendation that his client put his head between the thighs of the ass to find out 'how great a passivity he would display': *nam si faciem tuam mediis eius feminibus immiseris, facile periclitaberis quam grandem tibi demonstrat patientiam* (8.25). If they are not entirely ironic, these words imply that the ass's large sexual organs would guarantee

<sup>40</sup> Fitzgerald 2000:103 sees Lucius's sympathy for his horse as an anticipation of his sufferings as an ass.

his compliance. His servitude is a consequence of his prodigious sexuality. For Lucius, this is a deeply humiliating experience. He is reminded of the contrast between his former status as a Roman citizen and his present condition as an ass sold as the last of the lot to Syrian priests for their sexual gratification.<sup>41</sup> He is not only treated as an *instrumentum* but also as a woman who would demonstrate great passivity (*grandis patientia*) in matters of sex. His ‘femaleness’ is borne out by the use of the variant form *feminibus* for *femoribus* (‘thighs’) here. Apuleius uses the regular form at 7.23, after Lucius is accused of murdering the cruel boy who had been put in charge of him. One of the ass’s handlers proposes to castrate him to make him more docile. This is the way, he says, in which even the most wild horses who are driven mad by excessive sexual desire (*ferocissimi equi, nimio libidinis laborantes atque ob id truces vesanique*), are made tame (*mansueti ac mansues exinde facti et oneri ferundo non inhabiles et cetero ministerio patientes*, 7.23). He proposes to get the necessary tools and spread the ass’s thighs, castrate him and make him gentler than any wether (*dissitis femoribus emasculare et quovis vervece mitiorem efficere*, 7.23). The two passages are linked; the earlier one underlines Lucius’s degradation here.

Lucius is appalled at the prospect of being sold to the Syrian priest at the auction and thinks of pretending to be mad (8.25), so that he would be judged unsuitable for carrying the image of the goddess around the towns of Greece (*cogitabam subito velut lymphaticus exsilire, ut me ferocitate cernens exasperatum emptionem disineret*, 8.25). The word *lymphare* is also found at 8.27, where the devotees of the Syrian goddess perform a ‘frenzied ecstatic dance’ (*lymphaticum tripudium*) during one of their dervish performances. Varro (*Ling.* 7.87) notes Pacuvius’s use of the word and traces its origin from *nympha* (‘water goddess’) and the Greek belief that men could be driven mad by nymphs (*nympholeptoi*). He associates it closely with the ecstatic Bacchantes. The word occurs also in the dramas of Seneca in contexts of the sudden and traumatic change of status from royalty to slave. Thus the fall of Troy is foretold by Cassandra (*ore lymphatico, Tro.* 34). In *Medea* the nurse describes the behaviour of her crazed mistress on hearing of Jason’s remarriage, ‘bearing the marks of insane frenzy on her face’ (*furoris ore signa lymphati gerens*):

*Incerta qualis entheos gressus tulit  
cum iam recepto maenas insanit deo  
Pindi niualis uertice aut Nysae iugis,  
talis recursat huc et huc motu efferro,  
furoris ore signa lymphati gerens.*

<sup>41</sup> On the sexual exploitation of slaves, see Glancy 2002:21-23, 49-53, 61-70.

*flammata facies, spiritum ex alto citat,  
proclamat, oculos uberi fletu rigat,  
renidet: omnis specimen affectus capit.*

Just as a maenad uncertainly directs her ecstatic steps  
when she has taken in the god and rages  
on the peak of snowy Pindus or the ridge of Nysa,  
so she runs back and forth with wild movements this way and that  
bearing the marks of insane frenzy on her face.  
Her face is aflame, she draws her breath from deep within,  
shouts out, and waters her eyes with copious weeping,  
smiles, and wears the mask of every emotion.  
(Sen. *Med.* 382-88, my translation)

Lucius's plan to act mad comes to nothing, however, as he is quickly sold before he is able to do so. Ironically, his intended 'madness' is directed towards a rational end. Nevertheless, the episode suggests that 'mad' behaviour from a slave, especially one who could not communicate, would have been considered a defect (as Justinian, *Digest* 21.1.1.9 – discussed above – makes clear) and could have been an effective form of slave resistance to abusive treatment.

Apuleius's account of this episode is considerably longer than what we have in the *Ass* version. What is similar in both is that there was an auction; that the teeth of the asses were inspected by buyers; that Lucius was the last to go; that Fortune had turned on him for the worse. However, in the *Metamorphoses* it is the auctioneer who describes the ass as a Cappadocian, whereas in the *Ass* it is the Syrian priest who does so, when he presents his new purchase to his fellow devotees. There is no suggestion in the *Ass* that he was in any way Roman and, rather surprisingly, there is no overt discussion of his sexual organ. Missing also are the biting of the hand of a purchaser, the repartee between auctioneer and Syrian priest and the plan to act mad. Judging from this, Apuleius's narrative has irony, humour, social realism and more authentic emotional sensitivity to the humiliations experienced by slaves. It brings together Lucius's humiliating loss of his Roman identity, his sexual degradation and his resulting feigned insanity.

Lucius's ploy to escape his sale to the *cinaedus* does not succeed, but he does manage to turn the tables on his human persecutors in a later episode of madness. To escape the fate of being butchered to cover up the loss of a

haunch of venison,<sup>42</sup> Lucius flees from a cook into the dining-room of a rich man who has shown hospitality to the devotees of the Syrian goddess. He is ordered to be locked up, but before this instruction can be carried out, a slave brings a report of a rabid dog that has bitten a number of people and animals in a frenzied attack (*ardentique prorsus furore*, 9.2). Everyone assumes that the strange behaviour of Lucius means that he has been bitten and that he is rabid. They therefore hunt him down in order to kill him, but Lucius escapes into the house-owner's bedroom, where he is locked up for the night in the hope that the poison will do the job for them. The next day they offer Lucius water as a test to prove whether he is still rabid, as such animals were said to shun water. Lucius understands this and drinks the water avidly until he has disproved the madness of his human handlers (*quoad contra uesanam eorum praesumptionem modestiam meam liquido cunctis adprobarem*, 9.4). The incident neatly subverts the social order – the bestialised Lucius is able to use his human knowledge against his handlers. Once again, unlike the version in the *Asi*, Apuleius adds the detail of the rabid dog in order to expose insane assumptions of the rich man's household. The incident belongs to the context of slavery; Lucius is a runaway (*fugitivus*), but one who is able to turn the tables on his owners through his intelligence and knowledge of arcane lore – the water test for rabies was one found only in ancient books (*libri pristini*, 9.3).

From this point on in the narrative, episodes of madness escalate. While Lucius and his owner were visiting the farm of a neighbour, for example (9.35-38), a slave reported the deaths of the owner's three sons. A young, rich and lawless aristocrat had reached a position of power that enabled him to do whatever he liked (*cuncta facile faciens in civitate*, 9.35).<sup>43</sup> In a model of what often became wars between entire states, this youth attempted to drive his poor neighbour off his land by instigating a baseless lawsuit over the boundaries of the property, killing his cattle and destroying his crops. The poor farmer, supported by others, including three brothers of the landowner whom Lucius and his owner were visiting, attempted to reason with the youth and to resist his encroachments. However, the madman (*vesanus*), although addressed in gentle terms (*blanditiae*), expressed his contempt for the mediators in violent and unrestrained language (*non ... verbis temperare voluit*) and swore that he would have the poor farmer immediately ejected

<sup>42</sup> The story is Aesopic, and as such emanates from slave discourse. See further Finkelppearl 2003:37-52.

<sup>43</sup> For this episode, see also Shumate 1996a:111-13.



from his hut by his slaves (*per suos servulos sublatum de casula longissime statimque proiectum iri*). One of the three brothers intervened to say that even the poor were protected from arrogant tyrants by the law. This provoked the youth to rage (*ad extremam insaniam vecors*, 9.36) and he ordered savage farm dogs (*furiosa rabie conciti*) to be let loose on the crowd. The insane savagery of these dogs gains colour from the description of the wolves the travellers had met earlier. These are rabid and driven mad by insane hunger (*vesana fame rabidi*, 8.15). The dogs belonging to the rural workers, who attack them on their way, are ‘mad, enormous creatures, fiercer than any wolf or bear’ (*canes rabidi et immanes et quibusvis lupis et ursis saeviores*, 8.17). The youngest of the three brothers was devoured by the ferocious hounds (*ferocissimis canibus*) after tripping over a stone. The other two, in turn driven to madness by grief (*ardentibus animis impetuge vesano*, 9.37), attacked the *dives*, only for a second to be struck by a lance. The third brother was wounded by a sling-stone fired by the rich man’s slave, and pretended to have been lamed by it. He further incited the *dives*, who then attacked him in a frenzy (*furiosus*) with a sword, only to be killed by the repeated blows of the last surviving son, who in turn cut his own throat ‘to liberate himself from the slaves of the *dives*, who were running up to attack him’ (*ut accurrentium etiam familiarium manu se liberaret*, 9.38). This incident portrays both parties in the conflict in a state of mad fury: the young aristocrat driven insane by the slightest rebuke from those he considered his social inferiors; the three brothers enraged by the overbearing arrogance of the rich aristocrat. The emotions of these four young men are exacerbated by the crowd watching events unfold and by the repudiation of their only remaining recourse – the law. With the restraints of civil governance removed, all are consumed by madness that reduces them to the level of savage animals, like the ferocious mastiffs.

The story shows a resemblance to the duel between the Horatii and Curiatii in Livy (1.22.3-1.26.14). Whereas in Livy two sets of three brothers fight, in Apuleius the rich landowner is assisted by his dogs and slaves in his contest with three sons of a poor farmer. Livy’s account concerns ‘the love of power’ (*cupido imperii*, 1.23.7) and a choice between ‘power or slavery’ (*imperium servitiumque*, 1.23.9), just as Apuleius’s youth was motivated by outrage at an attempt to curb his desires by his social inferiors. In both stories two brothers die before the third flees, turns on his pursuers and kills them all. Apuleius’s tale ends in the tragic suicide of the remaining son and his father, while Livy has the surviving Horatius stab his sister to death for mourning her lover, who was one of the Curiatii. Livy’s narrative explains how Rome came to control Alba Longa, whereas Apuleius’s story of savage-

ry provides an ominous precursor to an act of resistance against an arrogant Roman soldier (9.39) by his current master, a poor gardener. In the world of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, justice is rarely upheld and the corruption of the courts is commented on openly (10.33), although the cases cited are from mythology and ancient history and Lucius himself undercuts his own lecture by commenting that it is asinine.<sup>44</sup> Unlike Lucius, Psyche and Charite, the insanity of the aristocrat and his sons is not brought on by their displacement from their social position but from an abuse of power (*maiorum gloria male utens*, 9.35).

Turning from the arbitrary madness of men, we find a group of equally mad women towards the end of the novel. In a story recalling the passions of Phaedra, a stepmother is driven mad with the raving fire of lust and is turned into a bacchant of love by her desire for her step-son (*completis igne vesano totis praecordiis, immodice bacchatus Amor exaestuabat*, 10.2). She becomes more and more agitated by her intolerable madness (*impatientia furoris ... agitata*, 10.3) to the extent that she comes down with an illness (*aegritudo*). Eventually, she confesses her love to the boy. He rejects her and, after an abortive plot to poison him, she unsuccessfully frames him for both rape and murder. Her counterpart is a Corinthian lady who, like Pasiphaë, is overcome by an insane passion (*vesana libido*, 10.19) for the ass and indulges in full-on sex with him, complete with rabid thrusting (*nisus rabidus*, 10.22). Finally, a vile woman, who is later condemned to be executed in the arena (*vilis bestiis addicta*), is driven mad by jealous fury (*libidosae furiae stimulus efferata*, 10.24) for a woman whom she suspects of having an affair with her husband and savagely murders her. Her husband is driven insane (*acerrimae bilis noxio furore perfusus*, 10.25) by this act of malice and falls into a burning fever, for which she finds the cure in poison. These women are all led by erotic mania to destroy themselves and others. The social world they inhabit is overturned by their emotional excess; they are swept up in self-destructive criminality that transforms them into bestialised outcasts.<sup>45</sup>

This series of insane acts is finally resolved when Lucius flees from his enslavement to the human world to reach 'the harbour of Peace and the altar of Mercy' (11.15). He becomes a slave of Isis and his whole life is pledged to her service. Like many Roman slaves, including those working in the mill that Lucius observes (9.12), his hair is shaved off to mark his servitude to the

<sup>44</sup> Tarrant 1999:71-89; Summers 1970:511-31.

<sup>45</sup> Shumate 1996a:114 comments here that these stories create 'an overwhelming sense that social law has entirely broken down. There is a cataclysmic movement of the action toward a total dissolution of the social fabric ...'

goddess.<sup>46</sup> His conversion is as much social as it is religious – unlike his old friend Socrates, he avoids the fate of being one of the *decemina Fortuna*. Lucius now joins a universal cult (Isis's *numen* is *unicum multiformi specie*, 11.5). Isis promises that no-one will shrink from his ugly appearance and that he will return to the world of men (*redieris ad homines*, 11.6) in all their variety. The multiplicity of these *homines* is represented according to their own choice (*votivis studiis*) in the Isiac procession (11.8): soldiers, men playing women, gladiators, magistrates, philosophers, fowlers, fishermen, bears dressed as women, a monkey dressed as Ganymede. The Isiac initiates belong to every gender, rank and age (*viri feminaeque omnis dignitatis et omnis aetatis*, 11.10). Lucius eventually recovers his family, status and wealth, and leaves behind the madness of fortune (*eat nunc et summo furore saeviat*, 11.15). Ironically, it is the malice of fortune that won him his present happiness (*ad religiosam istam beatitudinem improvida produxit malitia*, 11.15). But he cannot leave the world entirely behind him – his frustration with the long process of initiation drives him once more to the point of madness (*ad instar insaniae percitus*, 11.29).<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, he revisits his ancestral home (*patrius lar*, 11.26) and travels to the heart of the Empire, Rome, where he conducts a successful legal practice (11.28).

The above analysis of madness in the *Metamorphoses* argues that it is the progressive breakdown of Lucius's social world that brings about his psychological disorientation. Unlike madness in epic, there is no heroic code to fulfil or to question (as in the *Iliad*), no imperial mission to promote or subvert (as in the *Aeneid*), no chain of civil wars to condemn (as in Lucan).<sup>48</sup> Even the insanity arising from the shifting boundaries of the self in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* cannot adequately embrace them.<sup>49</sup> At the beginning of the work Lucius appears to have it all; he is kind, well-educated, handsome (2.2-3), rich and born into the ranks of the élite in the Roman Empire, but this is not enough to save him from madness and a life of suffering and slavery (11.15). Once a slave, he is exposed to the insane passions of the powerful and attempts to resist them with his own invented delirium or to expose

<sup>46</sup> Shaving the head as a sign of enslavement is found also in Petron. *Sat.* 103, and Achilles Tatius 5.17, 8.5.4. For other interpretations of Lucius's baldness, see Schmeling & Montiglio 2006:39; James & O'Brien 2006:241, 246-50.

<sup>47</sup> Shumate 1996b:116 sees the *Metamorphoses* ending in a resolution at least on the level of Lucius the *actor*. But 11.29 shows that this resolution is not total.

<sup>48</sup> Apuleius's work has been characterised as an 'anti-epic'; Cooper 1980:436.

<sup>49</sup> Hershkowitz 1998:125-60 (Homer); 68-124 (Virgil); 197-246 (Lucan); 161-96 (Ovid).

them to criticism and punishment. Increasingly, however, he finds his own judgement at fault and experiences a level of meaningless mania that makes moral condemnation pointless. He seeks to escape into the service of or slavery to Isis, but while this is a temporary reprieve, it is only a partial refuge from the world and Lucius still needs to reintegrate fully with the human society he had left behind.

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