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LUCIUS' SUICIDE ATTEMPTS IN APULEIUS' *METAMORPHOSES**

Suicide constitutes a thematic element that recurs frequently both in Greek and Latin literature, mainly, but not solely,[1] in tragedy,[2] comedy,[3] epigram,[4] and the novel.[5] The object of this paper is to examine the suicide attempts of Lucius, the main character in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.[6]

I

Lucius' first adventure after his unlucky transformation into an ass is his abduction by a gang of bandits and his stay with them in their hideout. His main concern is to find roses to eat, because, according to Fotis, the servant responsible for his transformation, this is the antidote to his metamorphosis (*Met.* 3.25). At a distance on the banks of a river Lucius thinks he sees a rose garden and starts running at full speed. Unfortunately, drawing near, he realizes that the flowers are not roses, but laurel-roses, trees with poisonous flowers:

> Hae arbores in lauri faciem prolixe foliatae pariunt in modum floris odori porrectos caliculos modice punicantes, quos equidem fraglantis minime rurestri uocabulo uulgus indoctum rosas laureas appellant quarumque cuncto pecori cibus letalis est. (*Met.* 4.2.17–22)

It is not by chance that Apuleius offers the rustic name of the plant (*rurestri uocabulo*), used by the *uulgus indoctum*. The term *indoctum* carries specific literary overtones and is particularly fitting to this case. In contrast to the uneducated crowd, Lucius is an inquisitive young man yearning for knowledge. It was this feature, this

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[1] Suicides and suicide attempts in other genres: epic (Hom. *Il.* 18.34, *Od.* 11.541–67; Verg. *Aen.* 4.642–92, 12.603; Ov. *Met.* 6.134–5, 7.604–5; Luc. 3.748–9), pastoral (Theoc. *Id.* 3.9, 25), elegy (Prop. 2.17.13–14; Ov. *Her.* 9.157, *Ars* 1.283–4).

[2] See e.g. Aesch. *Ag.* 875–6; Soph. *Ant.* 1234–9, 1282, 1315, *Trach.* 881; Eur. *Alc.* 897–8, *Hel.* 298, 352–6, *Supp.* 1016–17; Sen. *Tro.* 1102. See M. D. Faber, *Suicide and Greek Tragedy* (New York, 1970); Y. Grisé, *Le suicide dans la Rome antique* (Paris and Montréal, 1982), 236–7.

[3] See e.g. Ar. *Eq.* 82–3, *Nub.* 988; Men. *Dys.* 583, *Pk.* 869–70; *Koneiazomenai*, Plaut. *Aul.* 78, *Cas.* 307–8, *Mil.* 1239–41; Ter. *Eun.* 551, *Phorm.* 166. For the impressive indifference to life displayed by the characters in Roman comedy see Grisé (n. 2), 235.

[4] See e.g. *AP* 7.118, 470, 473, 9.44, 45, 450, 11.249.

[5] Some suicide attempts in the Greek novels: Ach. Tat. 3.17.1–4; Chariton 1.4.7, 1.5.2, 1.6.1, 3.3.1, 3.5.6, 4.2.1, 5.2.5, 5.10.9, 6.2.8–11, 7.1.6; Heliod. 1.17.5, 2.2.1, 8.15.2; Xenoph. *Ephes.* 2.1.4ff., 2.4.5ff., 2.7.1, 4.5.6, 5.6.3. See J. Maillon, *Héliodore: Les 'Ethiopiques* 1 (Paris, 1935) on Heliod. 2.2.1; S. Mac Alister, *Dreams and Suicides. The Greek Novel in Antiquity and the Byzantine Empire* (London, 1996).

[6] Other suicides in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*: Lamachus by the sword (4.11.19–20), the old servant of the bandits by hanging (6.30.17–8), Charite by the sword (8.14.3–6), Thrasyllus by hunger strike (8.14.9–15), the cheated wife by hanging (8.22.2–7), the estate-owner (9.38.18–21) and his son (9.38.27–31) by the sword. Unsuccessful suicide attempts in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*: Aristomenes by hanging (1.16.1–20), Psyche by the sword (5.22.3–4), Psyche by throwing herself into a river (5.25.3–6, 6.12.1–3) or down from a cliff (6.14.1–3) or from a tower (6.17.5–8), Charite by hunger strike (8.7.13–8), the cook by hanging (8.31.7–14).

curiositas, that landed him in all this trouble in the first place.[7] Hence, the *doctus* Lucius stands apart from the *indoctum uulgus*.[8] The *rosae laureae* prove *indoctae* indeed, since not only can they not bring Lucius back to his human form, but they can also be deadly (*cuncto pecori cibus letalis est*).

Fortune's sudden reversal[9] and the shattering of his hopes shock Lucius, who decides to put an end to his life by eating the poisonous laurel-roses (*Met.* 4.3.1–3): *talibus fatis implicitus etiam ipsam salutem recusans sponte illud uenenum rosarium sumere gestiebam*. The term *sponte* occurs frequently in cases of suicide in Latin texts.[10] Lucius is now in a terrible psychological state, as this is the fourth time that his hopes of regaining his human form by eating roses have been shattered.[11] After this dramatic series of events, it is only logical for him to be in despair and to think of suicide as his only *salus*, his only deliverance from his misfortunes.[12]

This is the only time that self-poisoning as a way of suicide occurs in the *Metamorphoses*. It constitutes one of the four basic ways of suicide, the other three being a sharp weapon, hanging, and jumping from a height.[13] In the great majority of cases

[7] At Apul. *Met.* 11.15.1–8 the priest of Isis declares that Lucius' *curiositas* and his subordination to *seruiles uoluptates* were the reasons for his sufferings. For the importance of *curiositas* in the *Metamorphoses*, see A. Wlosok, 'Zur Einheit der *Metamorphosen* des Apuleius', *Philologus* 113 (1969), 68–84, esp. 71, n. 1; A. Scobie, *Apuleius Metamorphoses (Asinus Aureus) I* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1975), 80–2; F. Millar, 'The world of the Golden Ass', *JRS* 71 (1981), 63–75, esp. 64, n. 8; P. G. Walsh, 'The rights and wrongs of curiosity (Plutarch to Augustine)', *G&R* 35 (1988), 73–85; J. G. DeFilippo, '*Curiositas* and the Platonism of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*', *AJPh* 111 (1990), 471–92, esp. 472 nn. 3 and 4; C. C. Schlam, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius. On Making an Ass of Oneself* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 48–57.

[8] Lucius' *doctrina* is mentioned three times in the *Metamorphoses*: 3.15.9–12 (by Fotis), 11.15.1–8 (by the priest of Isis), 11.30.17–20 (by Osiris).

[9] P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel: The Satyricon of Petronius and the Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, (repr. Bristol, 1995), 181 comments on Fortune's importance in the novel: '. . . these hardships are inflicted by Fortune, whose cosmic role is indicated by the priest of Isis in the final book. Fortune symbolises the cruel, arbitrary and irrational course of events imposed on those bounded by the preoccupations of the material world, and deliverance from her comes only when Lucius raises his eyes to acknowledge the true reality.' Cf. *Met.* 7.16.1, 7.17.1, 7.25.3. See also J. Tatum, 'The tales in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', *TAPA* 100 (1969), 487–527, at 491–2, 494, 496, 519–20; J. J. Winkler, *Auctor and Actor. A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's The Golden Ass* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985), 107–8; Schlam (n. 7), 60–2.

[10] See Grisé (n. 2), 295–6.

[11] First chance (Fotis) *Met.* 3.25.13–6, second chance (in the stable) 3.27, third chance (on his way to the bandits' hideout) 3.29.16–24.

[12] A. Scobie, 'The structure of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', in B. L. Hijmans, Jr and R. Th. van der Paardt (edd.), *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (Groningen, 1978), 43–61, at 51 parallels Lucius' quest for *salus* in suicide with that of Aristomenes (*Met.* 1.16) and Psyche (5.22). Cf. R. Th. van der Paardt, 'Various aspects of narrative technique in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass*, 75–94, at 83, n. 73.

[13] See K. Dover, *Aristophanes Frogs* (Oxford, 1993) on Ar. *Ran.* 121. He continues: 'But three is a more "magical" number than four and Schol. Pind. *Ol.* 1.97ff. gives two alternative versions: "noose, poison, pit" and "sword, noose, cliff". Olympias sent Eurydice a sword, a noose and hemlock and commanded her to choose (Diod. Sic. 19.11.6). Herakles suggests in turn hanging, poison and jumping.' Ed. Fraenkel, 'Selbstmordwege', *Philologus* 87 (1932), 470ff. quotes *Schol. Pind. Ol.* 1.97e: τριῶν οὐσῶν πρὸ τούτου βασάνων δι' ὧν τις ἀπώλλυτο, βρόχου, κωνείου, βαράθρου, and 1.97–8: ἔνιοι δὲ ὅτι τρία λέγεται καὶ κοινῶς τὰ πρὸς τὸν θάνατον συνεργοῦντα, ξίφος, ἀγχόνη, κρημνός. Seneca believes there are many ways of suicide (*Ep.* 12.10) and mentions suicide by jumping, by drowning, by hanging, by the sword, and by opening one's veins (*De ira* 3.1.5.4). See B. L. Hijmans, Jr, et al. (edd.), *Apuleius Madaurensis Metamorphoses Book IV, 1–27. Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Groningen, 1977) on Apul. *Met.* 4.25.9–10.

the poison used is hemlock,[14] and undoubtedly the most familiar case is the suicide of Socrates.[15] It is possible that Apuleius had in mind this well-known case of hemlock-suicide when he wrote the scene in which Lucius is about to poison himself. He had already given the name Socrates to the wretched protagonist of Aristomenes' story in Book I, a lustful character most probably intended to parody Plato's restrained Socrates.[16] In this case, however, Lucius is constrained by the circumstances to use another poisonous plant, the laurel-roses. Nevertheless, this choice of poison is comical and undermines the tragic tone of the scene. Lucius is a man enclosed in the body of an ass. The laurel-roses are not deadly to humans but they are to animals, hence Lucius, who thinks and feels like a human, chooses to die like an animal.

Lucius' suicide, however, is prevented through the intervention of a gardener, who beats him up to punish him for the damage he had previously caused to his vegetable garden (*Met.* 4.3.3–9). This intervention, the punishment, and the thrashing, saves Lucius from certain death, as he defends himself and then finally escapes danger (*Met.* 4.3.9–12). In this way a would-be tragedy gives way to a comic and heavy beating.[17]

Together with his suicidal plans it seems that Lucius also abandons definitely his hopes of finding the antidote and of retransforming himself. From this point on, and as the winter begins, the search for roses is no longer a priority.[18] Lucius' striving to get the much hoped-for antidote yields to despair, which leads him to suicide. Besides, suicide may be taken as a curious form of transformation, a crossing from life to death, from existence to non-existence; therefore it fits well with a novel entitled the *Metamorphoses*.

The episode of the laurel-roses and the gardener also occurs in the Greek version of the story, the Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος, attributed to Lucian.[19] Apuleius' treatment of this specific episode is generally in line with the Greek text, except for a striking difference.

[14] For suicide by poison, see Grisé (n. 2), 109–13; A. J. L. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide. Self-killing in Classical Antiquity* (London and New York, 1990), 59–62.

[15] Pl. *Phd.* 116d ff. Cf. also Ar. *Ran.* 123–5; Andoc. *De pace* 10.7; Lucian, *Tox.* 38.19–21; Ov. *Her.* 2.139; Sen. *Phoen.* 149.

[16] For the relation of Apuleius' Socrates with the historic Socrates, see van der Paardt (n. 12), 82, n. 59 for further bibliography on the matter. For the historic Socrates' suicide by hemlock, see Apul. *Met.* 10.33.

[17] For Apuleius' constant and intended mixture of comic and tragic elements in the *Metamorphoses* see Walsh (n. 9), 148–9. The narrator's apostrophe to the reader at *Met.* 10.2.13–5 is symptomatic: *iam ergo, lector optime, scito te tragoediam, non fabulam legere et a socco ad coturnum ascendere*. According to Walsh (ibid.), 171 this is 'a significant indication of Apuleius' aim of a synthesis of the comic and the tragic'.

[18] Except for *Met.* 7.15.2–6, where Lucius hopes to find some roses in the spring. Cf. 10.29.8–13, just before his public sexual intercourse with the convicted woman in the amphitheatre.

[19] For the relation of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* with Pseudo-Lucian's Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος and the lost Μεταμορφώσεις by Lukios from Patras, see M. D. McLeod, *Lucian* 3 (London, 1967), 47–51; B. E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-Historical Account of their Origins* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), ch. 6; Winkler (n. 9), 252–6; Walsh (n. 9), 145–9; S. J. Harrison, *Apuleius. A Latin Sophist* (Oxford, 2000), 218, n. 35; H. J. Mason, '*Fabula Graecanica*: Apuleius and his Greek sources', in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (n. 12), 1–15 with further bibliography. At p. 3 Mason states: 'Where an incident is reported fully in both extant versions, Apuleius is clearly capable of, and interested in, giving the topic a quite different treatment from the Greek: a notable example is the presentation of Photis-Palaestra', and cites A. Scobie, *Aspects of the Ancient Romance and its Heritage* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1969), 56–65. Mason (ibid.) concludes at p. 6: 'In dealing with details, as with the major plot, Apuleius appears to range from close dependence on his source to almost complete alteration. Mere translation is rarely continued for more than a sentence or two.'

In the *Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος* Lucius' emotional response, when he discovers that the flowers are not roses, is not shown, nor does he decide to die by eating the poisonous laurel-roses. Lucius simply limits himself to a brief reference to the kind of the flowers and the etymology of their name (*Ὄνος* 17.23–6): *τὰ δὲ ῥόδα ἐκεῖνα οὐκ ἦν ῥόδα ἀληθινά, τὰ δ' ἦν ἐκ τῆς ἀγρίας δάφνης φυόμενα· ῥοδοδάφνην αὐτὰ καλοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι, κακὸν ἄριστον ὄνῳ τοῦτο παντὶ καὶ ἵππῳ*. It is also noteworthy that in the Greek text Lucius does not mention the *indoctum uulgus*, and so Apuleius' distinction between *doctus Lucius* and the *indoctum uulgus* is missing. What comes next is the intervention of the gardener and the savage beating of Lucius.

Apuleius' apparent addition of Lucius' imminent suicide[20] is important and intensifies the emotional tone of the episode. The hero's disappointment leading him to the brink of suicide endows the narrative with verve and colour. In contrast to the toneless Greek version, in which Lucius, acting like a neutral observer or a learned botanist, simply mentions the name, etymology, and characteristics of the plant, Apuleius displays his hero's emotions at this crucial turn of the story. This is the first time in the *Metamorphoses* that Lucius considers the possibility of suicide,[21] and this is only after his transformation into an ass. In his previous adventures, while he was still a man, his life had been at serious risk when he had been charged with the murder of three people during the fake trial at the Laughter Festival. Nevertheless, at that stage the thought of suicide had not crossed his mind. All Lucius did then was lament his bad luck (*Met.* 3.1.5–7, 15–16, 3.4.3–6, 3.7.1–4).

In the episode in the garden of the laurel-roses Lucius' psychological breakdown contrasts sharply with the enthusiasm and exaltation he experienced just before, when he thought that the flowers he had seen from afar were the much sought-after roses that would restore him to his human form. In this respect Apuleius' text surpasses the extant Greek version, since it is more descriptive and emotional. Let us take a closer look: in Apuleius the garden lies somewhere in a distant valley (*Met.* 4.2.1–5), whereas in the *Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος* the roses he thinks he sees conveniently decorate a nearby garden behind a yard (*Ὄνος* 17.14–6). In addition, two similes in the *Metamorphoses* enliven the narrative. First, in Lucius' excited eyes this valley appears like the abode of Venus and the Graces (*Met.* 4.2.5–7). Secondly, his eagerness and enthusiasm are so great that they give wings to his feet, and make Lucius feel like a racehorse rather than an ass (*Met.* 4.2.9–11). None of the above appears in the *Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος*, a fact that detracts somewhat from its effect. On the other hand Apuleius' emphasis on Lucius' happiness at his imminent salvation gives additional weight to his disappointment after the revelation of the harsh reality. In this way Lucius' demented decision to commit suicide is convincingly justified. Without the necessary psychological build-up this act would surely have seemed superfluous and uncalled-for.

Besides setting the right emotional tone for the narrative, Lucius' decision to die affects the way in which the readers view him. The violent reversal of his fortune along with his despair earns the readers' sympathy and pity. This is very important, since we are practically at the beginning of Lucius' adventures under his new form. Up to the point of his transformation into an ass Lucius appears consistently as an inquisitive

[20] Even though it cannot be determined with absolute certainty whether Lucius' suicide attempt actually occurred in the Greek original version of the story, epitomized in the *Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος*, it is possible that Apuleius introduced this element because of the notable concern of the Romans with suicide.

[21] However, this is not the first suicide attempt in the work. Aristomenes was the first to try (*Met.* 1.16).

young man, ready to go to considerable lengths to satisfy his insatiable thirst for knowledge. Nevertheless, his transformation into an amiable animal turns him at the same time into a tortured hero, mercilessly chased by blind *Fortuna* and bound to attract the reader's eager interest in his fate.

Lucius' decision to commit suicide is also related to the course of the narrative itself. The fulfilment of this plan would automatically signal the sudden and unheroic end of the novel. Both Lucius' fate and the development of the story are at stake; the introduction of the theme of imminent death is a clever way of capturing the reader's interest and enhancing suspense.[22] On the other hand, in the Greek version of the story there is no danger threatening either Lucius' life or the progress of the narrative.

II

Lucius' adventures continue after the bandits' hideout, as he falls into the hands of a boy, who abuses him with extraordinary cruelty. By charging Lucius with a number of unjust and false allegations (*Met.* 7.21, 22) the boy manages to convince the other herdsmen to punish him by death. However, Lucius is saved by one of them, who suggests that the best way to get rid of Lucius' supposed sexual attacks is not to kill him, but rather to castrate him (*Met.* 7.23).[23] Lucius uses a distinctively Vergilian phrase to describe his new salvation (*Met.* 7.24.1): *Tali sententia mediis Orci manibus extractus.*[24]

However, this heightened epic tone soon subsides, as the alternative proposed by the herdsman, that is, castration, is rather mundane. This is a far worse solution for Lucius, an *extrema poena* as he calls it (*Met.* 7.24.2). In fact it is so terrible that he prefers to die either by hunger strike or by throwing himself down from a cliff (*Met.* 7.24.4–5):[25] *inedia denique continua uel praecipiti ruina memet ipse quaerebam extinguere.*[26]

Lucius' choice to commit suicide may seem comical, paradoxical, and exaggerated. Even though he escapes execution thanks to the herdsman's proposal, he himself decides to die. He is quick, however, in justifying this apparent illogicality: his decision will surely kill him, but at least he will die with honour, escaping the terrible castration and keeping his body intact (*Met.* 7.24.5–6).[27]

A similar thought had crossed Lucius' mind when he was about to be tortured in his

[22] See Scobie (n. 19), 50; id. (n. 12), 45. The ending of some books at the point when the life of the hero is in danger creates suspense. See Scobie (n. 12), 50; Winkler (n. 9), 142–4.

[23] In the episode of the laurel-rose garden Lucius' suicide was similarly thwarted at the last minute by the intervention of a gardener. For the recurrence of mutilation or dismemberment in the *Metamorphoses*, see Scobie (n. 12), 51, 55.

[24] For the epic-Vergilian tone of this phrase, see S. Frangoulidis, 'Epic inversion in Apuleius' tale of Tlepolemus/Haemus', *Mnemos.* 45 (1992), 60–74, at 67. Cf. Aristomenes' words at *Met.* 1.15.15–7.

[25] For Lucius' double option of suicide, cf. R. J. Tarrant, *Seneca: Agamemnon* (Cambridge, 1976) on Sen. *Ag.* 972ff.: 'Deliberation over the proper place for the fatal blow also forms part of the topic in which possible methods of suicide are enumerated, cf. *Oed.* 1036ff.'

[26] *se extinguere* is relatively less common in cases of suicide and is not listed in Grisé's (n. 2) appendix. The speaking tower uses this expression in its effort to prevent Psyche's suicide (*Met.* 6.17.9–10): *'Quid te' inquit 'praecipitio, misella, quaeris extinguere?'*

[27] The episode with the herdsmen occurs in the Greek Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος too, where Lucius thinks and acts in a similar manner. His salvation from death is counterbalanced by the heavy price he has to pay (Ὄνος 33.9–11), Lucius wishes to die with his body intact (33.26–7), and his suicide plan involves the same alternatives, hunger strike or jumping from a cliff (33.24–6). Both these ways of suicide occur for the first time in the surviving Greek version of the story, preceded only by the hanging of the old woman at the bandits' hideout (Ὄνος 24).

fake trial during the Laughter Festival in Hypata. The hero was desolated by the fact that he would not be allowed to die unmutilated (*Met.* 3.9.1–4). However, as has been noted above, despite his despair, Lucius did not consider suicide as an option at the time.

What is it, then, that makes Lucius change his mind in this new episode? The answer is his extreme fear at the prospect of castration, because he is particularly proud of the size of his genitals. This was his single consolation at the time of his transformation into an ass (*Met.* 3.24.15–7). Fearing he may lose the most valuable thing he has, Lucius turns to the curious kind of salvation that suicide offers him.[28] In such a context and with this paradoxical train of thought, the imminent suicide loses its innate tragic essence and contributes to the light and comical tone of the episode. In the end, Lucius' plan is not realized, since his young owner takes him with him to chop wood, a fierce bear attacks them, and Lucius escapes in fear (*Met.* 7.24.6–21).

Apart from this apparent explanation of Lucius' decision to kill himself, there may be a deeper, underlying cause. The Romans were preoccupied with honourable death without damaging their bodies.[29] In this aspect they were particularly influenced by the Stoics, who approved of suicide in cases when one was threatened by mutilation.[30] Hence, Lucius' choice of suicide instead of mutilation is in complete harmony with current Roman beliefs. The fact, however, that in his case mutilation equals castration and the loss of his enormous genitals allows Apuleius to make a good joke with sexual overtones at the expense of an established philosophical *topos*.

As far as Lucius' proposed ways of suicide are concerned, his dilemma of whether to starve himself to death or jump from a height (*Met.* 4.25.9–10)[31] poses some problems. Both these means of suicide are well-attested in the literary tradition;[32] however, they are dramatically different. Jumping from a height is an act of great despair and intense emotional suffering, whereas starving oneself to death requires a steadfast mind and great determination and is carried out in a tranquil mental state.[33] Besides, whereas self-precipitation is instant and requires only a good spot (rock, cliff, for example), starvation is a much longer procedure and its success depends not only on the person involved, but also on the relatives and friends, who very often intervene to deter the imminent suicide.

It may be deduced from the above that Lucius' apparently nonsensical dilemma aims at undermining the seriousness of his situation and endows the narrative with a

[28] C. C. Schlam, 'Sex and sanctity: the relationship of male and female in the *Metamorphoses*', in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (n. 12), 95–105, at 101 speaks about Apuleius' use of the 'phallic potency' theme in the *Metamorphoses* and Lucius' fear of castration. Cf. R. Th. van der Paardt, *Apuleius, The Metamorphoses: A Commentary on Book III* (Amsterdam, 1971), 181.

[29] See van Hooff (n. 14), 77. This is probably why suicide by hanging or poison did not appeal to them, because in both cases the body of the dead suffered serious deformation. For hanging as an ἄσχημον kind of death, see N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 9.

[30] For the Stoic beliefs on suicide, see J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1969), 233–55; Grisé (n. 2), ch. 7; van Hooff (n. 14), 189–91.

[31] Charite considers three different ways of suicide, namely by hanging, by the sword, or by jumping: *Laqueus aut gladius aut certe praecipitium procul dubio capessendum est.* See Hijmans et al. (n. 13), ad loc.

[32] Hunger strike: Chariton, 6.2.8 (Chaereas); Petr. 111.3 (the Ephesian widow). Self-precipitation: Aesop, 143 (hares), 192 (ass and mule); Eur. *Andr.* 848–50, *HF* 1148; Ar. *Ran.* 127–33; Heliod. 1.17.5; Hor. *Epod.* 17.70, *Carm.* 3.27.61–3; Ov. *Am.* 3.6.79–80, *Her.* 15.219–20, *Met.* 4.525–30; Sen. *Her. O.* 860, *Phaed.* 260; Luc. 2.155–6, 8.654–6, 9.106–8; Petr. 94.11.

[33] For suicide by jumping, see Grisé (n. 2), 113–17; van Hooff (n. 14), 73–7. For suicide by *inedia* see Grisé (n. 2), 118–20; van Hooff (n. 14), 41–5.

comical tone. Previous cases of suicide by *inedia* or jumping may be the target of Apuleius' parody here. Hunger strike as a way of suicide may have appeared frequently in the so-called Milesian stories. It was the choice of the Ephesian widow in Petronius' *Satyrica* (111.3.1–3), an allusion surely not to be missed by Apuleius' readers.[34] Later in the *Metamorphoses* Charite considers killing herself by *inedia*, but is deterred by her relatives and friends (*Met.* 8.7.13–8), while Thrasyllus actually dies in this way (*Met.* 8.14.9–15). It is noteworthy that whereas Charite considers hunger strike a route to death that is *lenem otiosamque nec telis ullis indigentem, sed placidae quieti consimilem*, Thrasyllus sentences himself to death in this way because he is convinced that death by the sword would not be enough to punish his crimes (*certusque tanto facinori nec gladium sufficere*).[35]

In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* both hunger strike and falling down from a cliff can be associated with previous episodes. Hunger strike appears for the first time in the story, but can be paralleled by Lucius' attempted suicide in the garden of the laurel-roses. In that case he was determined to die by *eating* the poisonous flowers, whereas in this case death will result from his conscious *abstinence* from any kind of food.

Lucius' second choice, throwing himself from a cliff, has already been used in the *Metamorphoses*. Psyche chooses this way[36] four out of the five times that she considers suicide:[37] the first two times she attempts to throw herself into a river (*Met.* 5.25.3–6,[38] 6.12.1–3), the third time she attempts to jump from a cliff (6.14.1–3),[39] the fourth time from a tower (6.17.5–8).[40] The analogies are important and cannot be discarded. It is true, of course, that the cases of Lucius-the-ass and Psyche differ considerably in seriousness, so that their relation through this common motif may look comical.

[34] Suicides and suicide attempts are frequent in Petronius' *Satyrica* and have most probably been used as models by Apuleius: Encolpius (80), Encolpius and Giton (94.8–15), Giton and his friends (102.16), Giton (108.10), the Ephesian widow (111.3), the soldier (112.6). Aristomenes' attempted suicide at *Met.* 1.16 surely takes into account, among other models, Encolpius' attempt at Petr. *Sat.* 94.8. For Aristomenes' attempt, see V. Ciaffi, *Petronio in Apuleio* (Turin, 1960), 30ff., 127; Scobie (n. 7), 113–15; B. Effe, 'Der missglückte Selbstmord des Aristomenes (Apul. *Met.* I,14–17). Zur Romanparodie im griechischen Eselsroman', *Hermes* 104 (1976), 362–75; S. Mattiacci, 'La *lecti inuocatio* di Aristomene: pluralità di modelli e parodia in Apul. *Met.* 1.16', *Maia* 45 (1993), 257–67. For the relationship between Petronius' and Apuleius' novels, see E. Paratore, *La Novella in Apuleio* (Messina, 1942²), 55ff.; Ciaffi (ibid.); P. G. Walsh, 'Petronius and Apuleius', in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (n. 12), 17–24.

[35] Grisé (n. 2), 118 maintains that Thrasyllus chose to die by starvation because he considered it a worse punishment than death by the sword. Van Hooff (n. 14), 42, n. 7 disagrees, stating that Thrasyllus' decision to end his life by starvation and not by the sword does not prove the infamy of *inedia*.

[36] Hanging and leaping from a height is considered a womanly and dishonoured death in contrast to death by the sword, which is appropriate for heroes. See Grisé (n. 2), 107–9; Loraux (n. 29), 9–11, 16–17; van Hooff (n. 14), 64–72; E. Fantham, *Lucan De bello ciuili Book II* (Cambridge, 1992) on Luc 2.154–7.

[37] She considers killing herself with a knife only once, when she sees her invisible lover for the first time (*Met.* 5.22.3–4).

[38] This unsuccessful attempt is reminiscent of Ilia's attempt at Ov. *Am.* 3.6.45–82 and *Fast.* 3.51–2. See E. J. Kenney, *Apuleius: Cupid and Psyche* (Cambridge, 1990), ad loc..

[39] E. Finkelpearl, 'Psyche, Aeneas and an ass: Apuleius *Met.* 6.10–6.21', *TAPA* 120 (1990), 333–48, at 38 comments on Apuleius' *at illa studiose gradum celerans* (*Met.* 6.14.1), which recalls Verg. *Aen.* 4.641 (*illa gradum studio celerabat anili*): 'Apuleius seems to have been attracted to the *context* of Vergil's line; the nurse is unknowingly hurrying to help Dido commit suicide, just as Psyche here hopes to end her miserable life by jumping from the mountain that she is climbing.'

[40] For the idea that cliff fall is the right and nice way for someone to commit suicide Kenney (n. 38), ad loc. cites Ar. *Ran.* 127ff., Hor. *Epod.* 17.70, Tib. 2.6.39–40.

However, the fact that Lucius-the-ass thinks and reacts just like Psyche—besides being comical—is one more proof that the embedded narrative of *Cupid and Psyche* is closely connected with and reflects the main story of Lucius.[41]

III

Right before the expected public intercourse of Lucius-the-ass with the convicted woman in the amphitheatre, the hero is tortured by guilt and fear about his imminent humiliation and his probable contamination by such a criminal woman (*Met.* 10.29.1–2). What is more, he is frightened by the possibility that he may be attacked in the arena by wild beasts (*Met.* 10.34.20–5). The episode at the theatre is also present in the Greek *Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος* (52.14–8). However, Apuleius' treatment is much more elaborate, since he offers a detailed account of the woman's criminal career, which is missing from the *Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος* and possibly from the lost *Μεταμορφώσεις* too.[42]

Another important difference between these two versions concerns Lucius' reaction: in the Latin text he considers suicide (*Met.* 10.29.3–6): *expectabam diem muneris, saepius quidem mortem mihimet uolens consciscere,*[43] *priusquam scelerosae mulieris contagio macularer uel infamia publici spectaculi depudescerem.* Lucius' efforts to commit suicide apparently constitute Apuleius' innovation and addition and are missing from the Greek version, in which only Lucius' embarrassment about his humiliation and his fear of the wild beasts in the arena are mentioned (*Ὄνος* 53.16–8): *ἐγὼ δὲ ἅμα μὲν ἡδούμην ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ κατακείμενος, ἅμα δὲ ἐδεδίειν μή που ἄρκτος ἢ λέων ἀναπηδήσεται.* The Roman preoccupation with suicide and Apuleius' intention to exploit fully this motif account for this new suicide attempt. Lucius acts in accordance with the Stoic belief, which approved of suicide before a punishment as a way of preserving one's dignity and avoiding humiliation (Sen. *Ep.* 70.6).

Of course, as was the case with his previous attempts, Lucius' new attempt to put an end to his life proves fruitless, yet this time it is not the intervention of a third party that destroys his plan, but rather the innate difficulties of his venture: he lacks human hands (*Met.* 10.29.6–8: *sed priuatus humana manu*), fingers (*priuatus digitis*), and he cannot possibly hold a sword and turn it on himself with the round stump of his hoof (*ungula rutunda atque mutila gladium stringere nequaquam poteram*). His animal form, that has caused him so many troubles so far, is now beneficial to Lucius and saves him from certain death.[44]

Lucius' choice of the sword as a means of suicide is highly ironic. Suicide by the

[41] For the relation of the Psyche story to the main plot, see Wlosok (n. 7), 75; Tatum (n. 9), 509; id., *Apuleius and the Golden Ass* (Ithaca, 1979), 56–62; R. W. Hooper, 'Structural unity in the Golden Ass', *Latomus* 44 (1985), 398–401. For the close analogy between the *curiositas* of Lucius and Psyche, see DeFilippo (n. 7), 477, n. 16 for further bibliography. Finkelpearl (n. 39), 345 suggests that Psyche is a substitute for Lucius in her descent to Hades.

[42] See J. G. Griffiths, 'Isis in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius', in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (n. 12), 141–66, at 154. Tatum (n. 9), 522 comments on the woman: 'She is beyond question the wickedest woman in the *Metamorphoses*, and her story forms a significant expansion of the simple description in the *Onos*.'

[43] *mortem mihi consciscere* is the most common expression in cases of suicide in Latin. See Grisé (n. 2), 291–2.

[44] Lucius' animal form has proven useful in some other cases too: *Met.* 3.24.15–17 (the size of his new genitals), 9.13.21–4 (thanks to his new form he has gained knowledge of many things), 9.15.19–24 (thanks to his long ears he overhears the conversation of the baker's wife and her old friend), 10.14.1–4 (he eats the food without raising any suspicions).

sword was considered a manly death, requiring a great degree of courage and determination.[45] Lucius, however, chooses this very virile way of suicide when he is not a *uir* any more, but an ass. He exhibits courage, knowing that he cannot possibly go all the way with his plan. It is very characteristic that, while he was still a man, Lucius had not considered killing himself by the sword when his life had been at great risk at the Laughter Festival.

Apuleius' introduction of the suicide theme at this particular point serves a multiple function. Its first goal is to entertain the readers. Apuleius cleverly elaborates on the theatrical possibilities offered by a hero who thinks and feels like a man, but is enclosed within an ass's body.[46] Lucius' desperate efforts to commit suicide and put an end to his sufferings are doomed to failure right from the start, since he lacks the necessary and suitable 'technical equipment', namely hands and fingers.

Secondly, Lucius' unsuccessful attempt to kill himself with a knife plays a double role, both intratextual and intertextual. Apuleius now treats in a witty and light manner a scene that has already appeared four times in the *Metamorphoses* in its more or less tragic splendour (Lamachus,[47] Charite,[48] the estate-owner and his son[49]) and of course it has a rich literary background.[50] The author's obvious intention is none other than to parody such a tragic and well-established scene.

Finally, the introduction of the suicide theme at this particular point is related to the narrative course of the novel. This is Lucius' final adventure, since after the

[45] Grisé (n. 2), 96 considers suicide by the sword a 'suicide viril par excellence' and notes (97): 'Les auteurs anciens s'accordent à dire que les femmes montraient peu d' inclination pour ce genre de mort.' Cf. van Hooff (n. 14), 50.

[46] Apul. *Met.* 3.26.1–3: *ego uero quamquam perfectus asinus et pro Lucio iumentum sensum tamen retinebam humanum.* Walsh (n. 9), 249 notes: 'Throughout the whole of the adventures of Lucius-turned-ass, the situation of a human intelligence contemplating action impracticable for an ass' body inspires a riot of ass-jokes and puns, some taken over from the source but some clearly original.' A characteristic model for Lucius is Ovid's Io (Ov. *Met.* 1.635–8): *illa etiam supplex Argo cum bracchia uellet / tendere, non habuit, quae bracchia tenderet Argo, / conatoque queri mugitus edidit ore / pertimuitque sonos propriaque exterrita uoce est.* For the continuity in essence and character of the people transformed under their new forms in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, see K. S. Myers, *Ovid's Causes: Cosmogony and Aetiology in the 'Metamorphoses'* (Michigan, 1994), 28, 30–40.

[47] Apul. *Met.* 4.11.19–20. For the mock-heroic tone of this story, see Tatum (n. 9), 502–3. For its connection with satire, see G. F. Gianotti, 'Memoria letteraria e giuridica nell' episodio di Chryseros e Lamachus (Apul. *Met.* 4.9–11)', *QFC* 3 (1981), 61–83.

[48] Apul. *Met.* 8.14.3–6. In taking revenge for her husband's death Charite assumes the role of a man, just like Plotina in Haemus' speech (7.6). Tatum (n. 9), 517–18 states: 'This change of sex, figurative perhaps in the case of Charite, but in outward appearance quite literally true for Plotina, constitutes a kind of "metamorphosis" of the two heroines, for both play the role of a man when their husbands are no longer able to defend them.' For the epic background of Charite's story, see S. Frangoulidis, 'Charite's literary models: Vergil's Dido and Homer's Odysseus', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin History and Roman History 6*, Collection Latomus 217 (Brussels, 1992), 445–50. For the analogy between Charite's capture and Odysseus' stay in Cyclops' cave, see S. Frangoulidis, '*Charite dulcissima*: a note on the nameless Charite at Apul. Met. 7.12', *Mnemos.* 44 (1991), 387–94.

[49] Apul. *Met.* 9.38.18–21 and 27–31.

[50] Sword: Hom. *Il.* 18.34, Ajax' suicide after his dramatic monologue (815–65) in Sophocles' tragedy (for Ajax' suicide, see among others M. D. Faber, 'Suicide and the "Ajax" of Sophocles', *PR* 54 [1967], 441–52; D. Cohen, 'The imagery of Sophocles: a study of Ajax' suicide', *G&R* 25 [1978], 24–36); Eur. *Alc.* 228, *Andr.* 811–3, *Hel.* 301–2, *HF* 1149–50, *Ion* 1063–5, *Or.* 953, 1035–6; Ach.Tat. 3.17.1–4; Chariton, 6.2.11, 7.1.6; Heliod. 2.2.1; Hor. *Epod.* 17.70–1, Ov. *Rem.* 19, *Met.* 4.118–19, 4.162–3; Sen. *Her.O.* 845, 858, 867–9, *Oed.* 1036–9, *Phaed.* 258–9, *Pho.* 147; Luc. 9.106; Petr. 94.11, 94.12–4, 112.6.

amphitheatre he will seek recourse to Cenchreae, where the divine intervention of Isis will secure his salvation. However, even at this final stage, just one step away from regaining his human form, Lucius unknowingly seems ready to abandon everything and put an end to his life, having lost his courage to fight. He seeks a way out from his sufferings, a *salus* provided by suicide, when the real and divine *salus* is very near.[51] The course of the narrative once again is at serious risk, right before Apuleius' most significant and genuine contribution to the story of the man-turned-ass, the intervention of the omnipotent Isis.

Lucius' decision to commit suicide in the amphitheatre closes the circle that had opened in the garden with the laurel-roses. There, at the beginning of his adventures, the hero had decided to die by eating the deadly flowers. Now, in his final adventure before his salvation, the option of suicide remains open. These two suicide attempts do not appear in the surviving Greek version of the story and have been most probably invented and added to the original story by Apuleius, in order to frame the hero's adventures in the form of an ass.

IV

We have now reached the end of this examination and the following conclusions can be drawn: (i) Suicide as a thematic element is a recurrent theme in the *Metamorphoses*, much more frequent than in the Greek version of the story, the Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος. Apuleius' wider use of suicide in his work (compared with, for example, the Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος or Petronius' *Satyrica*) is possibly due to his long and deep concern with philosophy. Although Plato[52] and Aristotle[53] rejected suicide, later Greek and Roman philosophers, such as Seneca[54] and Epictetus,[55] approved of it as a solution that brings relief from suffering. It is noteworthy that Apuleius, a *philosophus Platonicus*, as he calls himself (*Apol.* 10.6), does not adopt the Neoplatonist negative stance towards suicide.[56] Instead, he appears to be closer to the Stoic belief, which approved of suicide when it was dictated by reason (λόγος), as a desirable exit from an intolerable life. Besides, no matter what Apuleius' own views were, suicide with its long literary tradition was too good a thematic element to be dismissed. (ii) Nowhere in the *Metamorphoses* is suicide presented negatively or morally condemned. Lucius is free to put an end to his life without ever questioning the moral implications of this act.[57] (iii) Apuleius' heroes turn to suicide every time things come to a dead end. Self-inflicted death seems to be the only solution not only for the main character,

[51] See Tatum (n. 9), 488 for the importance of *salus* at this particular point.

[52] Pl. *Lg.* 8.873c–d, *Phd.* 62b–c. See also A. Chiapelli, 'Del suicidio nei dialoghi platonici', *AAL*, IV/I (1884–5), 222–33; Grisé (n. 2), 170–2; van Hooff (n. 14), 186, 191–2.

[53] Arist. *EN* 1138a. See also Grisé (n. 2), 172–3; van Hooff (n. 14), 187.

[54] Seneca condones suicide in cases in which age prevents us from living as we should (*Ep.* 58.35).

[55] The Stoics maintained that we should resign ourselves to whatever fate has in store for us. Epictetus suggests that each one of us has certain limits of tolerance in this life and, when these limits are exceeded, one is free to end one's life (1.24.20). Cf. 1.25.18–19.

[56] See e.g. Plot. *Enn.* 1.9, Porph. *Abst. Carn.* 2.47.

[57] What is more, in some cases the author approves or even praises those who commit suicide. Lamachus, the chief of the bandits, is praised for his honourable decision to kill himself after losing his arm (*Met.* 4.11.21–12.2). At the moment of her death Charite exhales her 'manly soul' (*Met.* 8.14.3: *proflauit animam uirilem*, see n. 48 above), while Thrasyllus purges his hideous crimes by dying from *inedia*, thinking it would not be enough to kill himself with a sword (*Met.* 8.14.9–15). See n. 35 above.

Lucius, but also for other characters of the novel, whose stories are parallel with the main plot. (iv) Lucius (and the other characters) can move through a wide range of ways of suicide and select the one that best suits a given context. In both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Λούκιος ἢ Ὄνος* the writers elaborate on the rich stock of Greek and Latin literature and adapt it to new contexts, thus parodying it and achieving a curious *uariatio*,[58] even in this aspect of their novels. Of the three more usual ways of suicide, by the knife, by jumping from a cliff, and by hanging, Lucius considers the first two, whereas hanging, which would have been impossible anyway for technical reasons, is replaced by hunger strike and the consumption of a poisonous flower. (v) Lucius' suicide attempts introduced by Apuleius enliven the text, set the appropriate emotional tone, and increase the reader's sympathy for the wretched hero. The imminent suicides threaten not only Lucius' life but also the development of the story itself, thus enhancing the reader's suspense. (vi) Lucius considers suicide only *after* his transformation into an ass and this is solid proof of his terrible psychological state. (vii) It is noteworthy that suicide appears at crucial moments in Lucius' adventures, the beginning (the garden of the laurel-roses), the middle (in the hands of the herdsmen), and just before the end (in the amphitheatre, before his public intercourse with the criminal woman). (viii) Finally, none of the attempts is thwarted by internal factors, that is, Lucius' change of heart or repentance. In every case Lucius remains steadfast about his decision to put an end to his life: the failure of his plans is due either to an external intervention (the first two cases) or to the lack of the necessary means for the suicide (the third case).

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[58] For Apuleius' goal of achieving variety for his readers, see Scobie (n. 12), 47–9; E. J. Brzenk, 'Apuleius, Pater and the Bildungsroman', in *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (n. 12), 231–7, at 233.