

## Religious Feasting in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*: Appetite for Change?\*

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**SUMMARY:** The phenomenon of religious feasting in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* has been largely overlooked or played down by scholarship so far. In fact, food and feasting constitute a significant part of the last, so-called Isis Book of the *Metamorphoses*, all too often reduced to the story of a more or less ascetic religious experience. The significance of shared meals at the ultimate stage of Apuleius's narrative has consequences for our interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* in general and allows some conjectures about its potential secondary reception through recitals.

WHILE IT IS UNIVERSALLY AGREED THAT FOOD AND FEASTING PLAY A significant part in the first ten books of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, little attention in this respect has been given to the final, eleventh, book. It is either left out of consideration or is regarded as a book of fasting and abstinence. This view, however, does not do justice to the religious feasting referred to in Lucius's first, second, and perhaps also third initiation. The basic aim of the present paper is to draw attention to this phenomenon and to account for its function in the narrative economy of the *Metamorphoses*. In addition, I discuss a vexed textual problem in the final chapter of the *Metamorphoses* (11.30.1),<sup>1</sup> where an allusion to religious feasting can be inferred from the context and *may* even lurk behind a corruption of the transmitted text. Lastly, I consider the significance of Lucius's religious feasting for a reading of the *Metamorphoses*, especially regarding the serious or comic nature of this work.

\* My thanks to Wytse Keulen and Martin Korenjak for their comments on my first draft. I would also like to point out a general debt to the ongoing Groningen commentary project on Book 11 of the *Metamorphoses*, which inspired me to dish up this *hors d'oeuvre*.

<sup>1</sup> I use the text of Helm 1955, with the (now standard) paragraph division of Robertson and Vallette 1940–45. My translations are often based on Hanson 1989.

## 1. FOOD AND FEASTING IN *METAMORPHOSES* 1-10

There is no need here to demonstrate in any detail that food is an important motif in *Metamorphoses* 1–10.<sup>2</sup> However, I would like to touch on some aspects concerning the relation of food and narrative because this issue will become significant in my subsequent discussion. John Heath has spoken of “natural associations between eating and the telling of tales,”<sup>3</sup> and indeed there is a tendency in all ancient narrative to use shared meals, especially dinner-parties, as settings for storytelling.<sup>4</sup> This is partly due to the social conventions of the Greco-Roman world, in which convivial storytelling was one of the primary forms of entertainment, and partly to influential literary models, among which the *Odyssey* (especially Odysseus’s telling his stories at Alcinous’s dinner-party) deserves pride of place. As far as the novels are concerned, we may think of Petronius’s *Cena Trimalchionis* and of a number of similar situations in the Greek love novel, for instance Calasiris’s long autobiographical narrative, told over a meal, in Heliodorus’s *Aethiopica* 2.21–5.1.<sup>5</sup> Small wonder, then, that a number of inserted narratives in the *Metamorphoses*, like Thelyphron’s story in 2.21–30 or the robbers’ stories in 4.8–21, are told over dinner.

However, the motif of food in *Metamorphoses* 1–10 is also used for higher narrative purposes. It contributes, for example, to the theme of the human soul trapped in an animal body. After his transformation into an ass, Lucius never really gets used to animal food. It is clear that he sometimes must have eaten (unground) barley and similar equine fodder, but whenever the narrator focuses on his diet, Lucius the ass shows a distinct preference for human food.<sup>6</sup> Many passages could be cited in this context, but the most obvious is probably when Lucius the ass is sold to two cooks and his fondness of their pastries becomes a public sensation (*Met.* 10.13–17).

Food in *Metamorphoses* 1–10 is to some extent also a metaliterary metaphor for fiction and its unreliable nature. This is suggested by Lucius’s very first story (*Met.* 1.4), set in a programmatic discussion about the truth and falsehood of tales. When Lucius is on his way to Hypata, he meets two travellers

<sup>2</sup> The relevant passages are conveniently set out and discussed in Heath 1982 and Zimmerman 2008; cf. also May 2006: 143–56, who compares Lucius with the stock character of the comic parasite.

<sup>3</sup> Heath 1982: 58, with examples in 74n10.

<sup>4</sup> Cf., e.g., Sandy 1970: 470–73, with numerous references to instances in various genres.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., e.g., Ciaffi 1960: 61–62 for more examples from the Greek love novels.

<sup>6</sup> Cf., e.g., Heath 1982: 61–63; Schlam 1992: 100–3.

quarreling about the truth of a story one of them has just told to the other.<sup>7</sup> Lucius, being a *sititor ... novitatis* (1.2.6 “one who thirsts after novelty”; note the connotation of drinking) eagerly supports the apparent “liar” and himself tells a story about the seemingly incredible performance of a sword swallower (note the connotation of eating), which he claims to have seen with his own eyes (1.4.2–5). To emphasize the perplexity of the sword swallower’s feat, Lucius starts from his own experience: he reports a dinner party during which he greedily swallowed a cheesecake and choked on it (1.4.1). If he could not manage to swallow a cheesecake, how much more difficult would it be to believe in the sword swallower’s performance? Given the larger context of truth and falsehood, it is surely relevant here that “making cheese” and “cheese” in Greek literature could also be a “metaphor for ‘concocting,’ ‘plotting,’ and the result, ‘contrivance.’”<sup>8</sup> At a metaphorical level, then, our scene would amount to Lucius’s gobbling up of fiction and thus characterize his insatiable appetite for stories at the very beginning of the *Metamorphoses*. Since this happens in or at the beginning of the first inserted story, the metaliterary comment seems most relevant exactly to the inserted tales, with their particularly incredible and fictitious “Milesian”<sup>9</sup> poetics. For a second-time reader, Lucius’s choking at this point could already imply a hint that, ultimately, this kind of stories is not going to do him any good.

## 2. FOOD AND FEASTING IN *METAMORPHOSES* 11

Now, scholars who have dedicated studies to the motif of food in the *Metamorphoses* tend to think that in the religious ending of the novel, food and feasting give way to fasting and abstinence. Heath declares that the “last book of the *Metamorphoses* is a book of *abstinentia*” and adds that Lucius, while “stuffing himself on food as he did in the past ... now feasts on religious

<sup>7</sup> For the self-referential significance of this quarrel for the fictionality of the *Metamorphoses*, cf., e.g., Winkler 1985: 27–33.

<sup>8</sup> Keulen 2000: 316; cf. 316–19, for a number of passages in which “cheese making” (τυπεύω, see also LSJ s.v.) is synonymous with “contriving.” Keulen furthermore points out that Apuleius relies on Greek texts throughout his novel. Generally for metaphors taken from cookery and applied to beguiling rhetoric, cf. O’Regan 1992: 60–62; also think of the English phrases “concoct” and “cook up” for “invent, make believe.” For a larger “analogy between food and literature,” see Gowers 1993: 40–46.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Met.* 1.1.1: *at ego tibi sermone isto Milesio varias fabulas conseram* (“but I would like to tie together different sorts of tales for you in that Milesian style”) with Keulen 2007a: 64–66 ad loc.

devotion.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Zimmerman argues that in the final book the “symposiastic” atmosphere that pervades *Metamorphoses* 1–10 is present only *ex negativo*, through various orders to abstain from meat and wine.<sup>11</sup> Add to this a number of similar, but more detailed observations, such as the contrast between Lucius’s involuntary fasting at the end of Book 1 (when his fish is trampled at the market and he does not get his fill at his host’s table) and the “willing abstinence of Book 11.”<sup>12</sup> Although these readings are valid up to a point, they neglect the fact that fasting in *Metamorphoses* 11 is a preparation for feasting. What we can observe in the religious ending of our novel is a different way of feasting rather than a simple renunciation of it.

Before each of Lucius’s three initiations, he is required to live on a vegetarian diet for ten days (11.23.2; 11.28.5; 11.30.1). While this is the only preparatory ritual constantly reported in all three initiations (we hear of Lucius’s shaving his head, by contrast, only in the second and third initiations), minor variations occur in the first and third instance: before the first initiation, wine is banned in addition to meat (11.23.2 *neque ullum animal essem et invinius essem*, “I should eat no animal and be wineless”); and before the third, Lucius voluntarily raises the number of days from ten to an unspecified period (11.30.1 *lege perpetua praescriptis illis decem diebus spontali sobrietate multiplicatis*, “I multiplied out of voluntary continence those ten days prescribed by everlasting law”). Both variations seem motivated by a particular narrative focus rather than a significant difference in cultic procedure: in 11.23.2, two phrases are needed to set up the wordplay with *essem* (in the meanings “to eat” and “to be”); and in 11.30.1, the additional days of fasting place emphasis on Lucius’s religious zeal, but they do not change the general rules (*praescriptis illis ... diebus*). Regardless of the exact number of days, it is worth noting that the period of fasting is limited and that its demands do not seem to be overly difficult. As far as vegetables are concerned, Lucius can eat as much as he likes, and not eating meat for ten days would have been fairly normal for most Greeks and Romans of the time.<sup>13</sup> Granted, members of the Roman elite were accustomed

<sup>10</sup> Heath 1982: 66–67. While the evidence for cultic feasting in *Met.* 11 is not lost on Heath (cf. 67–68), his focus is clearly on fasting.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Zimmerman 2008: 155. When Zimmerman speaks of “symposiastic,” she includes food and feasting.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Heath 1982: 58 and 76n30, with reference to Schlam 1968 (not accessible to me). Cf. also *Met.* 1.26.1: *Milonis abstinentiae* with Keulen 2007a: 454 on *abstinentiae*; 1.26.7: *cenatus solis fabulis* with Keulen 2007a: 466–67 ad loc. For a potential Isiac meaning of the scene containing the trampling of Lucius’s fish (*Met.* 1.24.3–25.6), cf. conveniently Keulen 2007a: 449.

<sup>13</sup> Cf., e.g., Garnsey 1999: 16–17 and 122–27 for meat as “prestige-food.”

to frequent and lavish banquets, and so Apuleius and his readers may have cringed a little; but sacrifice is something different.

Furthermore, banquets seem to be precisely the reward for Lucius's fasting once he has undergone the respective initiations. A similar reading of Lucius's fasting as preparation for feasting was, to my knowledge, first suggested by Jan Bergman, who adduces parallels from other cults and draws attention to meals mentioned in the context of Lucius's initiations.<sup>14</sup> Bergman goes on to give a symbolic reading of the fact that the period of Lucius's fasting comprises exactly ten days. He argues that this period constitutes an analogy to the months of pregnancy, as bestowed by Isis in a number of cultic texts. The initiation, following upon the ten days, could then be read as Lucius's "rebirth" (cf. 11.24.4 *festissimum celebravi natalem sacrorum*, "I celebrated my solemn day of birth into the mysteries"). This is not mutually exclusive with the idea of fasting as preparation for feasting: Lucius's "rebirth" could be marked by a new way of (religious) feasting. There are strong clues in the text which indicate that, in the last resort, shared meals were at least as important for Lucius's initiations as his preparatory fasting. If we consider what we know about the historical practice of cult meals, we may even conclude that Lucius's religious life as a whole (apart from the specific acts of initiation, and as it would continue beyond the end of our text) would have been characterized by feasting rather than fasting. In the following, I will first discuss Lucius's first and second initiations and then provide some cultural context. I will deal with Lucius's third initiation last since it involves a textual problem which needs to be discussed on its own.

### a) *The First and Second Initiations*

After the first initiation, Lucius's "solemn day of birth into the mysteries" is marked by "a delicious banquet and a cheerful party" (11.24.4 *exhinc festissimum celebravi natalem sacrorum, et suaves epulae et faceta convivia*), followed by a "sacred breakfast" (11.24.5 *ientaculum religiosum*) on the third and final day of the celebrations.<sup>15</sup> The second initiation is even metonymically announced as—depending on our reading of the Latin text—"a banquet of great sanctity" or "a lavish religious banquet" (11.27.4 *religionis amplae denuntiaret*

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bergman 1972: 334–37.

<sup>15</sup> The phrasing in 11.24.5 (*dies etiam tertius pari caerimoniarum ritu celebratus et ientaculum religiosum et teletae legitima consummatio*, "the third day was also celebrated with a similar ceremonial ritual: a sacred breakfast and the official conclusion of the initiation") may even imply that the breakfast *was* the "official conclusion of the initiation."

*epulas*),<sup>16</sup> as if the shared meal of the initiates were the main event or final purpose of the sacred act.

Add to this that the purchases and preparations which Lucius is said to make before his initiations may be read as relating to the cultic meal at their end. In this sense, Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser interprets Lucius's purchases before the first initiation (11.22.8–11.23.1 *mihi praedicat, quae forent ad usum teletae necessario praeparanda. ea protinus ... procuro*, "he read out to me what was necessary to prepare for the initiation. I bought ... these things immediately") as shopping for food.<sup>17</sup> A similar argument could be made for Lucius's preparations before the second initiation, where the text reads (11.28.5): *ergo igitur cunctis adfatim praeparatis* ("when everything had been prepared to satisfaction"). The adverb *adfatum* is interesting here, for out of eleven occurrences in the *Metamorphoses* only a single instance (9.28.4 *adfatum plagis castigatum*) is *not* associated with food and feasting.<sup>18</sup> What is more, in the following paragraph (11.28.6) we hear that the second initiation provides Lucius with "a richer livelihood" (*victum uberiores*) and that his instantaneous success in the forum, somehow linked with the second initiation, "nourishes" him (*quaesticulo forensi nutrito* [sc. *mihi*]).<sup>19</sup> Even if these are not direct references to religious feasting, they suggest that at this point food is on the narrator's mind. *Nutrito* speaks for itself; in *victus*, both the narrower ("means of bodily sustenance, nutriment, food", *OLD* s.v. 1a) and the wider sense ("necessaries of life", *ibid.* 1b) appear to be present.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the sentence immediately following upon Lucius's second initiation, announced by a reference to its constituent meal, confirms the impression that this meal was an essential part of Lucius's religious experience.

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps *religionis amplae ... epulas* is enallage for *religionis amplas ... epulas*. The adjective *amplus* is more idiomatic with meals (cf., e.g., Caes. *B Gall.* 6.28 *in amplissimis epulis*; Juv. 14.170–71 *cena / amplior*) than with *religio* (no attestations apart from our passage).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000: 273–74 and 424–25.

<sup>18</sup> On *adfatum* in Apuleius, cf. Callebaut 1968: 475–76; Hijmans et al. 1977: 26 on 4.1.5 *adfatum*.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the full quote: *quae res summum peregrinationi meae tribuebat solacium nec minus etiam victum uberiores subministrabat, quidni, spiritu faventis Eventus quaesticulo forensi nutrito per patrocina sermonis Romani* ("this [the second initiation and the subsequent religious service] afforded the greatest comfort for my stay abroad in Rome, and furthermore it even provided a richer livelihood—not surprisingly, for thanks to the breeze of favoring Success I was nourished by some small profits in the forum through defenses in the Roman language").

<sup>20</sup> Drake 1969: 361 with n53 notices in *victum uberiores* an echo of the theme of food in several episodes of *Met.* 1–10 (cf. *ibid.* 354n37).

## b) The Cultural Background

This focus on religious feasting is not a whimsical idea of Apuleius but reflects the significance of opulent shared meals in all of the so-called ancient “mystery cults.”<sup>21</sup> The initiates of these cults were usually part of the affluent elite, and for them, varying ritual implications apart, feasting was also a way of affirming the exclusivity of their expensive religious clubs. In the case of Isis and Sarapis in particular, religious feasting is one of the best attested characteristics of the cult.<sup>22</sup> Arranged for initiations, but also for more private forms of conviviality, it is best known from a number of papyrus invitations to dinner. The form of the invitation is typically a request to come to the κλίνη, “(banquet) couch,” of Sarapis.<sup>23</sup> The association of meals and Sarapis was such that Apuleius's African compatriot Tertullian could write not long after the *Metamorphoses* (*Apol.* 39.15, deriding pagan dining rituals): *ad fumum cenae Serapiacae sparteoli excitabuntur* (“the smoke from the banquet of Sarapis will call out the firemen”). Against this background, the importance of meals in Lucius's religious experience seems a more or less realistic trait and affirms his membership in an exclusive circle. That Apuleius was well aware of the phenomenon of religious feasting as such is evinced by his references to the proverbially luxurious banquets of the priesthood of the *Salii* in *Met.* 4.22.2 (*ut equus quidem meus ... saliares se cenas cenare crederet*, “so that my horse [i.e., Lucius himself] ... thought it would dine on a Salian dinner”) and 7.10.5 (*epulas saliares*, “a Salian banquet”).<sup>24</sup>

## c) The Third Initiation and a Textual Problem in *Metamorphoses* 11.30.1

Before I move to a more general consideration of the evidence, I would like to turn to the motif of fasting in Lucius's third initiation, left out of this account so far. Is Lucius's abstinence here, too, balanced by an allusion to feasting? Although there is no obvious reference in the text, hints can be gathered from the context, and perhaps a manifest reminder is even nested in a textual corruption. This is Helm's text of the passage in question (11.30.1):

<sup>21</sup> Cf., e.g., Burkert 1987: 109–10, with examples from the cults of Dionysus, Eleusinian Demeter, Magna Mater, Isis and Sarapis, and Mithras. For a detailed survey of the archaeological evidence for and significance of kitchens and dining rooms in Roman sanctuaries, cf. Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000: 272–329.

<sup>22</sup> Cf., e.g., Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000: 272–74; Merkelbach 2001: 165–66; Fotopoulos 2003: 100–14.

<sup>23</sup> Cf., e.g., Youtie 1948; Fotopoulos 2003: 106–110 with a full list of extant examples.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Hijmans et al. 1977: 168 on *saliares ... cenas*. In the following section I discuss *Met.* 4.22.2 in greater detail.

inanimae protinus castimoniae iugum subeo et lege perpetua praescriptis illis decem diebus spontali sobrietate multiplicatis instructum teletae comparo largitus ex studio pietatis magis quam mensura rerum collatis.

I immediately submitted to the yoke of inanimate abstinence, increased out of voluntary continence those ten days prescribed by everlasting law and procured the supplies for my initiation profusely, meeting the expenses more in accordance with religious zeal than with the measure of my assets.

If readers have difficulty understanding the last part of the Latin text, this is due to transmission and Helm's editorial choices rather than to their language skills. Helm thinks that the obviously corrupt reading of our main manuscript (F), *mensurarum*, can be remedied by a correction of this phrase only. A subject to go with *collatis* (e.g., *rebus*) would be implied, but would not necessarily have to be expressed in the text. This *may* be Apuleian liberty, but it definitely reads awkwardly.<sup>25</sup> While the conjecture *mensura rerum* is usually accepted, a considerable number of suggestions have been made for a subject to go with *collatis*.<sup>26</sup>

Nor is this the only difficulty in the Latin text. There is also an issue with *largitus*. This word is usually taken as a rare adverbial form of *largus*, on the single authority of Nonius, who reports the use of *largitus* for *large* in Afranius.<sup>27</sup> But the fact that, apart from the present passage, Apuleius uses only *largiter* as the adverb of *largus* raises suspicion.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps rightly, some critics have adopted *largiter*.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Cf., e.g., Terzaghi 1954: 5.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., *rebus* (the editio princeps of 1469 and many following editions); *necessariis* (Hildebrand); *impendiis* (van der Vliet); *omnibus* (Helm in his first and second editions; similarly Robertson and Hanson); *stipibus* (Brakman 1907: 112–13); *sumptibus* (Griffiths 1975: 108).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Nonius 514 M: *largitus, pro large. Afranius Materteris: ... quid istuc est? quid fles? quid lacrimas largitus? proloquere* ("largitus, for large. Afranius in his Aunts [v. 212]: 'What is that? Why do you cry? Why that abundance of tears? Speak!').

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Apol.* 28.1 and *Met.* 4.7.5; 8.16.4; 8.26.6; 8.28.4; 9.22.3; esp. the similar context in 11.18.3: *cum mihi familiares, quo ad cultum sumptumque largiter succederet, deferre prospicue curassent* ("since my friends had thoughtfully taken care to bring me enough to relieve my living expenses in a generous manner").

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Brakman 1907: 112–13, who also points out that the general negligence of script and abbreviations on the last page of F (where the scribe obviously wished to save space) could have led to the mistake. Note that F uses abbreviations for *largiter* (*largit* with a dash on the *t*) and *largitus* (*largit;*), which make the manuscript words look very similar. For the option of reading *largitus*, see below.



In any case, the uncertainty as to the correct reading of the phrase *instructum ... collatis* is considerable and no convincing emendation has been proposed so far. I do not claim to have found the single reading that makes sense of our passage, but I would like to draw attention to a context of religious feasting perceptible even in the obscure transmission. A good starting point for this is a remarkable parallel to our phrase in *Met.* 4.22.2, adduced by Jean-Claude Fredouille in favor of understanding *largitus* as a participle of *largiri*: *nobilis anus illa recens ordeum adfatim et sine ulla mensura largita est* ("the old woman gave us generous, immeasurable quantities of fresh barley").<sup>30</sup> At this stage of the narrative, Lucius is in the robbers' cave, and the old woman taking care of the household feeds him and his equine companions with a large amount of barley. Now, the first thing that is striking in a comparison of the two passages is the shared vocabulary: *largita* corresponds to *largitus* (regardless of the specific reading of the latter word as adverb or participle); *sine ulla mensura* to *magis quam mensura* in our passage. Even more significant, however, is that the remainder of the sentence in 4.22.2 (*ut equus quidem meus ...*) implies a (comic) cultic context by referring to the opulent banquets of the *Salii*.<sup>31</sup> The link of our passage with food and feasting appears to be all the stronger considering that all other Apuleian combinations of *largus/largiter* with *instruo/instructus* (as in 11.30.1 *instructum teletae comparo largitus*) relate to opulent meals: in 4.7.5, the tables are lavishly heaped with food (*mensas dapibus largiter instructas*); in 8.29.1, a larger than usual profit is spent on a festal banquet (*copia laetati largioris quaesticali gaudiales instruunt dapes*); and in 9.22.3, another "Salian dinner" (*cenae saliares*) is lavishly put on the table (*mensa largiter instructa*). It could be argued that by virtue of these parallels alone our *instructum teletae* would by *any* reading most probably refer to food for a shared meal.<sup>32</sup>

However, I would like to add a conjecture, one of whose precarious nature I am well aware. I propose it as a reading well worth considering in the context of feasting, not because I think it is intrinsically more likely than other suggestions or because the passage could not as it stands be related to food. That said, let us consider *mensarum* instead of the corrupt manuscript *mensurarum*.

<sup>30</sup> Tentatively put forward in Fredouille 1975 ad loc.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the end of section 2b above.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. also in the following paragraph 11.30.2: *quidni ... stipendiis forensibus bellule fotum* ("not surprisingly ... I was nicely fostered by my income from the forum"), which clearly echoes 11.28.6: *quidni ... quaesticulo forensi nutrito* (cf. n19 above). An idea of feeding is often implied in *fovere* (cf. Vollmer 1912–26: 1220.78–1221.26). As to the rare adverb *bellule*, cf. *Met.* 10.16.4: *bellule suffarcinatus* (said of the well-fed ass).

From a palaeographical point of view, *mensarum* does not seem much more difficult than *mensura rerum*, with the syllable *-ur-* in *mensurarum* possibly being a reverse dittography of *-ru-* in the ending of *mensarum*. *Mensa* in the meaning “loaded table, meal” is widespread and familiar.<sup>33</sup> Add to this that tables (τράπεζα, *mensa*) were used for offering food—later partly consumed by the priests—to the gods.<sup>34</sup> A number of relevant examples from the Isiac cult are known from inscriptions.<sup>35</sup> Finally, note that from the three phrases including both *largus/largiter* and *instruo/instructus* cited above, two refer to loaded tables (4.7.5 *mensas dapibus largiter instructas*; 9.22.3 *mensa largiter instructa*).

An interpretation of the passage with *mensarum* could take two different forms. If the genitive *mensarum* is, like *pietatis*, dependent on *ex studio* we would get something like: “I ... procured the supplies for my initiation profusely, meeting the expenses more out of zeal for religion than for the tables [i.e., meals].” This would also imply a reading of *collatis* as a participle belonging to an incomplete (as suggested by Helm) or a complete (as suggested by the supplements of various critics) ablative absolute. Another reading, however, might take *collatis* as a nominalized adjective<sup>36</sup> in the function of an instrumental ablative: “I ... procured the supplies for my initiation profusely, more out of religious zeal than with the contributions of tables [i.e., meals].” It is another question how exactly we should interpret these sentences. Do they in fact imply that Lucius shows a certain restraint towards feasting in his final initiation, or do they just amusingly characterize his religious enthusiasm in procuring a (still lavish) cult meal? The following sentence—*nec hercules laborum me sumptuumque quidquam tamen paenituit*, “yet, by Hercules, I felt no regret for any of my toils and expenses”—seems to suggest the latter

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Buchwald 1936–66: 741.56–742.76; in *Met.*, e.g., 5.8.11: *inhumanae* [i.e., *divinae*] *mensae lautitii*; 8.29.4: *ante ipsam mensam*; 9.24.2: *mensam nobiscum ... participat*; 9.26.3: *mensam ... postulabat*.

<sup>34</sup> For Greek cult tables, cf. esp. Gill 1991; for examples from the Greek and Latin world, see, e.g., Kruse 1931. The distinction from dinner tables is not always clear, cf. the prominent passage in 1 *Cor.* 10.21, in the context of Paul’s condemnation of idol-food: οὐ δύνασθε τραπέζης κυρίου μετέχειν καὶ τραπέζης δααιμονίων (“you cannot sit at the table of the Lord and at the table of the demons at the same time”).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. for τράπεζα, *RICIS* 202/0410; 304/0802; 305/1301; for *mensa*, *ibid.* 113/1006; also see 202/0321 (ἄβαξ). Some of these examples have also been interpreted as referring to dinner tables (cf., e.g., Fotopoulos 2003: 101).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. for the use of the participle as substantive Lommatzsch 1906–9: 176.78–79 and *OLD* s.v. *confero* 9, citing inscriptions (*CIL* 6.3180; 9.3383; 10.5657) in which a noun *collatum* has the meaning of collected “(financial) contributions.”

option. Either interpretation, however, makes clear that religious feasting is thought of as a normal and essential part of the initiation(s).

### 3. FURTHER THOUGHTS

What does all this mean for our understanding of the *Metamorphoses*? If we take our start from modern, more ascetic ideas of religion and from the notion that *Metamorphoses* 11 is somehow supposed to be a “book of abstinence,” it may seem tempting to assign the evidence for religious feasting a place in the comic readings of Apuleius’s novel that have recently enjoyed some success.<sup>37</sup> Lucius’s cult meals would then indicate that he continues to be the old, gluttonous and—recalling the link between food-intake and fiction outlined at the beginning of this paper—credulous ass he has always been. But clearly asceticism is not what ancient mystery religions were about, and the sense that *Metamorphoses* 11 *should* correspond to any such ideal is unfounded. Rather than creating comedy or even parody, the allusions to feasting in the Isis Book mark Lucius’s finding his place in a powerful and exclusive religious club, as there were many in Apuleius’s time.

In addition, our evidence signals real change that goes through Lucius’s stomach. There are a number of ways in which Lucius’s good appetite becomes a means for that change. He does not stop feasting but takes a different approach to it. In contrast to *Metamorphoses* 1–10, all references and allusions to meals in *Metamorphoses* 11 are clearly to human food and thus contribute to Lucius’s rehumanization.<sup>38</sup> Just as importantly, they all relate to one specific cult, which guarantees a new, religious quality of feasting.<sup>39</sup> As regards metaliterary implications, it would be difficult to relate the instances of feasting in *Metamorphoses* 11 to the charms and beguilements of fiction. The “Milesian” poetics associated with Lucius’s gobbling at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses* does no longer apply. Inserted stories are conspicuously absent from *Metamorphoses* 11, and there is a general tendency to make the Isis Book look like a true, historical account.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Cf., e.g., Van Mal-Maeder 1997; Harrison 2000: 210–59.

<sup>38</sup> I have not here discussed the somewhat obscure allusion to food in Lucius’s dream-vision at 11.20.1: *partes illas de Thessalia mihi missas* (“those scraps of food sent to me from Thessaly”; cf. 11.20.3 *partium oblatione*), in which the priest offers a lapful of Thessalian *partes* (for the probable reference to food, cf. OLD s.v. *pars* 1c). There is no reason to doubt, however, that human food is alluded to.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Heath 1982: 67.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. esp. the last chapters with their precise references to dates (11.26.2 *dies ... Decembrium*), locations (11.26.2 *Augusti portum*; 11.26.3 *Campensis*), and historical fig-

That Apuleius continues to tell his story in a good-humored manner is a stylistic question that should not be mixed up too much with the question of the seriousness of the Isis Book as such. And after all, nothing prevents us from thinking of Lucius as a convivial and cheerful narrator. The narrative situation of the *Metamorphoses* has sometimes been paralleled with aretalogical storytelling, dealing with sins and miracles and performed by priests and confessors in and around temples.<sup>41</sup> Others have thought of a symposium of educated men: the symposium has been suggested both as a likely narrative frame for one of Apuleius's main models, the *Milesian Tales*,<sup>42</sup> and as a possible setting for recitals of the *Metamorphoses* itself.<sup>43</sup> Now, Apuleius clearly addresses his novel to a reading audience (cf. *Met.* 1.1.1 *si papyrus Aegyptiam ... non spreveris inspicere*, "if only you will not begrudge looking at Egyptian papyrus"; 1.1.6 *lector intende*, "pay attention, reader"), but if we wish to hold on to the idea of secondary reception through recitals, the results of this paper suggest combining the ideas of aretalogy and symposium (or rather the similar idea of shared meals). A suitable image for that secondary narrative frame might then be Lucius telling the story of his life at an animated Isiac dinner-party. With Apuleius, we should never underestimate an Isiac's capacity to feast and laugh.

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ures (Asinius Marcellus—perhaps pseudohistorical—in 11.27.7; Sulla in 11.30.5); not to forget the famous substitution of the author Apuleius for the character Lucius in 11.27.9 (*Madaurenses*), on which see van der Paardt 1981.

<sup>41</sup> Cf., e.g., Winkler 1985: 233–42; generally on aretalogy and the novel, see Merkelbach 1994; Beck 1996.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. n9 above.

<sup>43</sup> For the symposium and the *Milesian Tales*, cf. Lucas 1907, esp. 21 and 32. Harrison 1998: 65 seems to me too skeptical about the incompatibility of such a setting with the considerable length of Aristides' *Milesian Tales*. Harrison himself cites Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae* as an example of long symposiastic literature. For the idea of recitals of the *Metamorphoses* at dinner-parties (without religious background), cf. Keulen 2007b: 110–11; Zimmermann 2008: 154–55.

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