

Aspects of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*

Volume III: The Isis Book
A Collection of Original Papers

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PRUDENTIA and *PROVIDENTIA*

Book XI in Context*

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In the last decades, one of the most important hermeneutic issues about Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* has consisted in the seriousness of its religious ending. Is Lucius' conversion to the Egyptian religion narrated in earnest, or is he to be considered the gullible victim of a greedy cult? Is the goddess Isis described as something similar to, or different from the witches that got Lucius into so much trouble at the beginning of the novel? At the end of his adventures, is Lucius still the naïve and gullible young man he was at the beginning, or has he learned something from his adventures? What kind of connection is there between the first ten books of the novel and the last one: continuity or innovation?

I have attempted to answer these questions at length in an earlier study, arguing for a seriocomic character of the whole novel.¹ I have also suggested

* I am grateful to Stephen Harrison, Fausto Moriani, Lara Nicolini, Stelios Panayotakis, and Maaïke Zimmermann for their helpful advice. Last but not least, my heartfelt thanks to Wytse Keulen, both for his advice on several details of this paper and for his organization of the Rostock conference: it has been an extremely welcome opportunity to ponder and to discuss with friends and colleagues upon some fundamental themes for the interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*. Alexandra Cristache kindly agreed to revise my English.

1 Graverini 2007, 57-149, in partial opposition to Winkler 1985 and post-Winklerian criticism. When I was writing that, I did not know the very useful book by Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000 in detail: see esp. 73 ff. for another reaction against those critical approaches that consider the last book of the novel a satire of 'religiöse Scharlatanerie' (84). Jones 1995 offers a short but lucid analysis of the interactions between *providentia* and *fortuna* in the novel, that does much to reassert the 'seriousness' of the last book; however, he says, Apuleius "has left the reader room to manoeuvre ... the reader/listener ... is left with a sort of antinomy which might be simplified and represented by saying that in the text ... both of two propositions have their own autonomous existence, viz. 'sex with Fotis is fun' and 'sex with Fotis is a false start'". If we replace *and* with *or*, this could be a com-

that the ‘comic’ part of this definition does not mean that there is any satire of Lucius’ religious credulity in the last book; rather, it has to do with the fundamental features of the novelistic genre, a ‘low’ and entertaining literary form that can nevertheless convey some ‘serious’ (even though very generic) message, be it moral, philosophical, or religious. In this paper, I am going to bring forward further proof that there are some fundamental differences between the last book and the preceding ones, and that in the last book Lucius is no longer the rather ill-advised and incautious character he was at the beginning of his adventures. In my opinion, these differences suggest that we should not reject the ‘serious’ character of the Isis-book.

Several studies on the unity of Apuleius’ novel, and on the relationship between the first ten books and the last one, are grounded on lexical and thematic surveys of some fundamental keywords, like *curiositas*.² I suggest that, in the list of the most important themes in the *Metamorphoses*, we should also allot a prominent position to *prudentia* and *providentia*.³ Before dealing with their meaning in the novel, a quick but broad semantic survey will provide some ground for discussion.

pletely Winklerian formulation, but the difference is by no means minimal: cf. below, n. 60.

- 2 See Wlosok 1969; Hijmans 1995; further bibliography in Graverini 2007, 60 n. 5.
- 3 The subject has sometimes been broached (see above, n. 1, for Jones 1995), but not very thoroughly investigated. Fick 1999 produces some interesting material, but her overall interpretation seems rather confusing to me. For example, at p. 69 she links the three narrators of the novel (auctor, Lucius-actor, and other secondary narrators) to “tres illas Providentias, creatricem, ordinatricem ministramque” (she refers, I suppose, to *Plat.* 1,12 [205-206], on which also see Krafft 1979). The progressive disappearance of the two lower-level narrators (but I wonder where exactly Lucius-actor disappears from the text) would correspond to the final victory of Fortuna Videns over Fortuna Caeca. After this complex construction, her conclusion at p. 73 is very aporetic, in perfect Winklerian style: “ubi Providentia Lucii vitae divitiisque summa cum cura providet (xxx., ii.), nonne lector ad ridendum vel saltem ad subridendum invitatur? Quid autem in serium vertendum est nisi nihil esse pro serio habendum, in primis nullam vel Fati vel Providentiae Fortunaequae summam dominationem, sed minime illorum inertiam”. The short notes by the Groningen commentators will be discussed below, nn. 13 and 14. The most comprehensive treatment is offered by Kenney 2003 (esp. 171 ff.), who reaches conclusions on the general meaning of Book XI that are diametrically opposed to mine; I will deal with his positions in due course. Of course, *providentia* could also be analysed in connection with *fortuna*, but I have chosen another angle in this paper; on *fortuna* see e.g. Monteduro Rocavini 1979; Fry 1984; Schlam 1992, 58-66; Jones 1995. Puccini-Delbey 2009 came out too late to be taken into account.

1. A Quick Semantic Survey

Strictly speaking, *prudētia* and *providētia* are exactly the same thing, at least on a verbal, etymological level: *prudētia* derives from *providētia* through a syncopation, and both terms are connected with the ability to foresee future events, *providere*, and to act accordingly.⁴ However, the two terms tend to specialize in common usage, and to cover close, but partially different semantic fields. So, *prudētia* is mainly a moral virtue, to be demonstrated in all aspects of daily life. The best definition is offered by Cicero: *fin.* 5,16 *uiuendi ars est prudētia*, ‘*prudētia* is the art of living well’.⁵ As regards the meanings of *providētia*, of course there is some semantic overlapping with *prudētia*, especially if we consider the more general meaning of the term. So, *providētia* can be a practical virtue too. However, I would point out two small differences from *prudētia*: the connection with *providere*, ‘to foresee’, is usually made more explicit, and the virtue of *providētia* is more typical of a man in charge (like a military commander, or a magistrate) than of a ‘common man’.⁶ Going even further from the ‘common man’, *providētia* is a typical attribute of the Gods or of the Universe itself, with a meaning that is closer to the modern one of ‘providence’, though in a less personal way, as we will see later. Providence, like Fate and Nature, is the supreme force that rules the Universe.⁷ No surprise, then, that

4 This is clearly the case, for example, in Cic. *div.* 1,111 *Alii in re publica exercitati orientem tyrannidem multo ante prospiciunt: quos prudentes possumus dicere, id est providentes*. See also, e.g., *inv.* 2,160 *providētia, per quam futurum aliquid uidetur ante quam factum est*, and cf. with *sen.* 78,8 *memoria praeteritorum futurorumque prudētia*; or *nat. deor.* 2,58 *mens mundi cum ... uel prudētia, uel providētia appellari recte possit (Graece enim pronoia dicitur)*. See also Maltby 1991, 504 s.vv. *prudens* and *prudētia*; *ThLL* X.2 2375,52-69 s.v. *prudens* and 2380,10-27 s.v. *prudētia*.

5 Cf. e.g. Cic. *fin.* 5,67 *fortitudo in laboribus periculisque cernatur, ... prudētia in dilectu bonorum et malorum*; Fronto, *epist.* 1,3,9 p. 5 *VdHout ratio consiliorum prudētia appellatur*; Hor. *epist.* 1,16,32 *uir bonus et prudens dici delector* (cf. *ars* 445 *uir bonus et prudens*).

6 Cf. e.g. *Rhet. Her.* 4,43 *Scipionis providētia Karthaginis opes fregit*; Cic. *Catil.* 3,14 *quod uirtute, consilio, providētia mea res publica maximis periculis sit liberata*; Cic. *fam.* 6,6,9 [*scil. Caesar*] *homo ualde est acutus et multum providens*; Tac. *hist.* 2,19 *laudari providētia ducis quod coloniam uirum et opum ualidam robur ac sedem bello legisset*; Sall. *Iug.* 28,5 [*scil. Scaurus*] *patiens laborum ... satis providens, belli haud ignarus*; Liv. 25,34,7 [*scil. Scipio*] *dux cautus et providens*. See also *ThLL* X.2 2319,30-2320,20 and 2322,6-33 s.v. *providētia*.

7 Cf. e.g. Cic. *nat. deor.* 1,18 *anum fatidicam, Stoicorum pronoian, quam Latine liceat providēntiam dicere*; *div.* 1,117 *esse deos, et eorum providētia mundum administrari, eosdemque consulere rebus humanis, nec solum uniuersis, uerum etiam singulis*; Plin. *paneg.* 10,4 *Iam te providētia deorum primum in locum prouexerat*; Sen. *nat.* 2,45,1-2

Providentia became itself a divinity, closely connected with the Imperial cult. We will return to this subject later on, but for the moment it is useful to quote two inscriptions: *CIL* 6,2042a14 *IOVI BOVEM MAREM IUNONI VACCAM ... PROVIDENTIAE VACCAM* and *CIL* 5,1871 *PROVIDENTIAE AUGUSTAE*.

However, in spite of the distinctions I have suggested so far, it must be emphasized again that, on a deeper level, *prudentia* and *providentia* are simply the same thing: so, some authors can rightly speak of a divine, not human *prudentia*.⁸ In short, it would be impossible to construct a coherent system, valid for the entire Latin culture, that describes *prudentia* and *providentia* as being different from each other. We can certainly say that the common usage suggests some differentiation between the two terms, with *prudentia* more connected with human morality and *providentia* more connected with divine providence. But there are several exceptions and overlaps.

2. Prudentia and Providentia in Apuleius: Some Statistical Data

However, the first question I want to address in this paper is much more limited: Does Apuleius somehow differentiate between *prudentia* and *providentia*? This problem is easily settled by a very simple statistical analysis:

- *providentia* and related terms appear 18 times in the first 10 books, 11 times in the last.
- *prudentia* and related terms appear 15 times in the first 10 books, never in the last;

Vis illum [scil. Iovem] fatum uocare, non errabis; hic est ex quo suspensa sunt omnia, causa causarum. Vis illum prouidentiam dicere, recte dices; est enim cuius consilio huic mundo prouidetur, ut inoffensus exeat et actus suos explicet. Vis illum naturam uocare, non peccabis; hic est ex quo nata sunt omnia, cuius spiritu uiuimus; Quint. inst. 1,10,7 Oratio, qua nihil praestantius homini dedit prouidentia; Gell. 7,1,7 prouidentia, quae compagem hanc mundi feci; Plin. nat. 11,198 uiscera membranis propriis ... inclusit prouidens natura. See also ThLL X.2 2320,46-2321,16 s.v. prouidentia.

8 Cic. nat. deor. 2,162 *Illud uero ... mihi uidetur uel maxime confirmare deorum prudentia consuli rebus humanis; 2,80 omnia regi diuina mente atque prudentia; 2,58 talis igitur mens mundi cum sit, ob eamque causam uel prudentia, uel prouidentia appellari recte possit (Graece enim pronoiā dicitur), haec potissimum prouidet et in his maxime est occupata, primum ut mundus quam aptissimus sit ad permanendum, deinde ut nulla re egeat, maxime autem ut in eo eximia pulchritudo sit atque omnis ornatus; Petron. 18,3 adiuuatueros nos diuinam prudentiam.* It is also true that there is some confusion in the manuscripts between the two terms: see below, n. 9.

In other words, in the first 10 books we have an average of 1,5/1,8 occurrences of each word per book, while the last book alone counts as many as 11 occurrences of *providentia* and none⁹ of *prudentia*. So, indeed there must be a difference in Apuleius' usage of the two terms.

The next step, of course, would be to ask ourselves what this difference is, and most of all if and how this difference improves our understanding of the novel. But before addressing these fundamental questions, we need to see how the two terms are used in the most significant passages.

3. *Prudentia and providentia in the first ten books of the Metamorphoses*

In the first ten books, *providentia* is most often invoked as a divine force, even though Apuleius, like several other authors, does not attribute *providentia* exclusively to the gods (see e.g. 5,19,4, where Psyche remembers her sisters' *prioris providentiae beneficia* and asks for more help against the 'monster').¹⁰ For example, at 2,28,1 Thelyphron's uncle invokes *diuina providentia* to reveal the truth about his nephew's death; and at 5,3,1 Psyche realizes that her presence in Cupid's palace is a gift of *diuina providentia*. In many cases, however, this divine providence has little to reveal itself as truly divine, and the reference to its power is undermined by parody or irony. At 3,3,8 the general principle according to which *providentia deum* does not allow a criminal to go unpunished is invoked by the accuser in the farcical trial during the Risus festival; then, at 3,7,2 Lucius

9 There is a textual problem at 11,15,4, an important passage for defining the novel's 'ideology' (*en ecce pristinis aerumnis absolutus Isidis magnae providentia gaudens Lucius de sua fortuna triumphat*). The codex Laurentianus (F) has *prudentia*, but most editors accept Beroaldus' emendation *providentia* (among them Robertson 1971-1972⁴, from whom I always quote). As I have already stated above, the two words can be used as synonyms, and also *prudentia* can be applied to gods (cf. Apul. *Socr.* 15, 153 and 'Asclepius' 34: cf. Smith 1972, 526 n. 29). It is also true that there is a certain amount of confusion in ancient manuscripts as regards the two words: the *ThLL* s.v. *providentia* (X.2 2318,64 f.) notes that "confunditur in codd. saepe c. *prudentia*" (and the same happens "saepius" with *providentia*: see X.2 2377, 29 f.). Maaïke Zimmerman tells me *per litteras* that she is going to print *providentia* in her forthcoming edition for the Oxford Classical Texts series, because of the combination *Isidis magnae providentia* and for the eloquent contrast with the preceding *improvida ... malitia* of blind Fortune. I think this is the most sensible choice; of course, also the simple statistical analysis I have provided above supports it, even though it is impossible to cancel all doubts.

10 Cf. above, n. 8. More instances of non-divine *providentia* are provided by words of the same group: see e.g. 2,27,1 *inprovidi sermonis mei sero reminiscor* (Thelyphron); 2,32,1 *uix improvidae noctis caligine liberati*; 3,3,3 *Quare magis congruit ... uos pro dignitate publica providere ne nefarius homicida tot caedium lanienam ... inpune commiserit*.

is about to appeal to the same *deum providentia* to prove his innocence, when he realizes that everybody around him is bursting with laughter. At 8,28,1 *Caelestis providentia* increases the incomes of the charlatan priests of the Dea Syria. Again, at 9,27,1 *Caelestis providentia* helps Lucius expose the betrayal of an unfaithful wife.

In a couple of cases, *providentia* interacts with *fortuna* in curiously different ways. At 8,31,3 a cook is overcome by bad *fortuna* (he is *in ultimo fortunae turbine*): a leg of venison that he was about to cook for his master has been stolen by a dog. However, his wife tells him that *deum providentia* has prepared an easy way out of his dramatic situation: he can butcher the donkey Lucius, and cook his leg for his master. Not good for Lucius: he tries to escape, but in a moment of despair (9,1,5) he confesses that his *prudens consilium* ('wise planning') and his *sagacitas* ('shrewdness') are powerless against adverse *fortuna*, and can do nothing to change the dispositions of *diuina providentia*. So, as regards the cook *fortuna* and *providentia* are set against each other; after just a couple of pages, they seem to cooperate to get Lucius into trouble.¹¹

On the whole, these passages from the first ten books of the novel do not outline a coherent notion of providence – which is no surprise, since the *Metamorphoses* is indeed a novel and not a theological or philosophical treatise. *Providentia* is invoked in a rather conventional way and it is usually linked with rather trivial matters (with only two possible exceptions, concerning Thelyphron and Psyche).¹² It is also important to point out that *providentia* is not always secure against the all-pervasive attacks of parody and irony.¹³

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- 11 This interaction between *Providentia* (or *prudentia*) and *Fortuna* occurs also in *Socr.* 22, 172 *uerae beatitudinis, id est secundae uitae et prudentiae fortunatissimae*. Cf. also *Iuv.* 10,365 f. *nullum numen habes, si sit prudentia: nos te, / nos facimus, Fortuna, deam caeloque locamus* (note however that some manuscripts have *abest* instead of *habes*). These lines by Juvenal could be used as a gloss to Fick 1999, according to whom the misfortunes for which Lucius and other characters blame *fortuna* are actually the consequence of their own lack of *prudentia*. This is, in my opinion, a good point; but it should not prevent us from taking seriously the role *providentia* plays in the last book (cf. below, in the conclusions).
- 12 Maaike Zimmerman correctly notes that 'in the first ten books, the narrator or other persons in the story use the term (*diuina/caelestis*) *providentia* in case of good luck, whereas in the case of bad luck they speak of *fortuna*' (*GCA* 2000, 194).
- 13 Pace the Groningen commentators (*GCA* 1985, 275 *ad* 8,31,3 *deum providentia*; *GCA* 1995, 233 *ad* 9,27,1 *caelestis ... providentia*). They react against a statement by Heine 1962, 138, who dismisses the various references to divine providence as basically uncommitted embellishments; they do so mainly on narratological grounds: for example, on 9,27,1 they explain "we make a distinction between the actorial and the auctorial narra-

A similar picture can be illustrated for *prudentia* in the first ten books. Several times, *prudentia* is only mentioned ironically, like at 1,25,6 where the intervention of a *prudens condiscipulus* of Lucius leaves him without money and without food. At 5,25,5 the god Pan says that *prudentes uiri* call ‘divination’ his conjecture. There is a double layer of irony in Pan’s words. A god should not rely on the judgement of men, wise as they may be, to say that his own words are a ‘divination’. Besides this, Pan’s divination is based only on a generic literary culture: he can recognize that Psyche is in love thanks to his knowledge of the typical Sapphic symptoms. Lucius calls himself a *prudens asinus* at 7,12,1: he listens carefully to the brigand Haemus’ words, and realizes that he is actually Charite’s husband who came in disguise to rescue the kidnapped girl. Well done, but Lucius has just finished insulting the whole female sex after seeing Charite making sheep’s eyes at Haemus: so, at least this is an intermittent *prudentia*. Again, at 9,11,4 Lucius thinks he is *sagax ac prudens*: to avoid turning the grindstone, he pretends he does not know how to do it. Predictably, he only gains a good thrashing by doing this trick.

Some food for thought is offered by 6,13,3. Venus puts Psyche to the test, to see if she is endowed with *singulari prudentia*.¹⁴ Psyche however only succeeds in her task thanks to *providentia bona*, that sends an eagle to help her (6,15,1). Is Psyche a good parallel for Lucius? We will see that later (cf. p. 105).

As for the characters of the novel, on the whole, real *prudentia* seems to be out of their reach. Nevertheless, the text offers us two shining paradigms of *prudentia*, to show us what it is like to be really *prudens*. One is Socrates, *divinae prudentiae senex* at 10,33,3, whom the Athenians put to death: it is one of the several examples of bad judgement listed by an indignant and philosophizing Lucius-donkey, inspired by the sight of the pantomime on the judgement of Paris.¹⁵ The other is Odysseus, once again an unattainable example for Lucius, at 9,13,5. The epic hero became *prudens* through all his

tor. The latter probably no longer feels responsible for these expressions and thus in retrospect ironises his own views as an actor”. However, in my opinion, the text does nothing at that point to highlight such a dialectic between auctor and actor: therefore, it would be better not to build an interpretation on it.

14 The Groningen commentators point out that “for the coming task, Psyche will need exceptional courage and prudence, much like a Stoic hero” (*GCA* 2004, 463); clearly, Psyche is not up to these requirements.

15 On this and other instances of *indignatio* by Lucius, acting as a satirist, see Zimmerman 2006, 95-100.

adventures and sufferings; the donkey went through many vicissitudes himself, but he only became *multiscius*. That is, he satisfied his *congenita curiositas*, but did not become any wiser. I have already argued elsewhere that this adjective, *multiscius*, qualifies Lucius as a failed epic hero.¹⁶ In Homer, *Od.* 12,186-189, the Sirens promise to make Odysseus happier and πλείονα εἰδώς, ‘more knowledgeable’; Odysseus, a traditional paradigm for *prudentia*,¹⁷ can find a way to listen to them without bad consequences, but Lucius cannot satisfy his *curiositas* without becoming an ass. In short, my point is that *multiscius* is a sort of translation of πλείονα εἰδώς, and that Lucius is like an Odysseus without his traditional *prudentia*, an Odysseus who gave in to the enchantments of the Sirens.¹⁸

4. Prudentia and providentia in the last book of the *Metamorphoses*

So, in the first ten books *prudentia* is never really attained, by Lucius or other characters. In the last book, there is no trace of *prudentia* at all. Is the *Metamorphoses* in fact a novel without *prudentia*? In my opinion, not really. The Odyssean way to wisdom is not precluded for Lucius, who walks in Odysseus’ footsteps in the last book as well; but he does so in a more subtle way, to my knowledge not yet pointed out by commentators.

16 Graverini 2007, 165-173.

17 In Apuleius, see *Socr.* 18, 160 (Odysseus and Nestor are *sapientiae Graiae summa cacumina*, on a par with Socrates) and 24, 177-178 (Odysseus is always accompanied by Athena, who is the personification of *prudentia*). See Graverini 2007, 165 ff. for more sources and bibliography.

18 Kenney 2003, 175 f., following Winkler 1985, 166 f., suggests that this lack of *prudentia* affects Lucius also after his retransformation in the last book, since the words *etsi minus prudentem, multiscium reddidit* would be uttered by the narrator (who thinks back to the whole experience he narrates in the novel), and not by the actor (who thinks back only to the adventures he has lived *so far*). This seems very far-fetched to me. Even though the phrase *nam et ipse gratas gratias animo meo memini* “clearly indicates that now the auctorial narrator is speaking” (*GCA* 1995, 132), there is no need to think that *etsi minus prudentem, multiscium* describes Lucius *after* his retransformation: actually, following the most simple and reasonable reading of the text, it seems to me that the narrator is describing his condition when he was still an ass – that is, he is saying that his experiences as an ass made him if not prudent, at least knowledgeable; and this does not tell us anything about what happened to him when he was no longer an ass (actually, Lucius-narrator *never* anticipates his ‘Isiac future’ throughout book 1-10, not even in passages where he has an obviously auctorial perspective). In the last book, as I am going to show below, Lucius seems to finally reach some sort of Odyssean *prudentia*.

4a. Odyssean *prudentia*

The book begins with Lucius suddenly awake on the seashore; troubled and tired of being persecuted by Fate, he prays the Moon to be freed from his miseries. Finally, the goddess Isis appears to him and promises to save him and restore him to human shape. This scene is a turning point in the novel. Lucius is at last back in his homeland (Corinth) after a long journey and many adventures, even though the happy ending is still far away. The novel itself is about to change its shape: from a long series of picaresque stories to ... well, to something I will try to define better in the conclusions to this paper, but certainly to something different. Briefly, we are at a turning point, a provisional closure.¹⁹

The break is also pointed out by intertextuality. Let us focus for a moment on the general features of the scene I have just described: a provisional closure, a narrative change, the main character asleep on the seashore, an encounter with a goddess. The very same general features could describe Book 13 of the *Odyssey* as well. Odysseus finally arrives at Ithaca after ten long years of wanderings, on the ship of the Phaeacians. He is asleep, and the Phaeacians disembark him and leave him, still asleep, on the seashore.²⁰ He wakes up in unfamiliar surroundings, and is seized with rage and fear. The goddess Athena appears to him, and with her help Odysseus devises a plan to win back his kingdom and his wife – a plan that includes a metamorphosis. We are just past the middle of the *Odyssey*, and from here on the narrative changes its shape: journeys and fantastic adventures in the first 12 books, the events on Ithaca in the last 12.

I am not claiming that Apuleius is overtly imitating Homer here,²¹ the way he does in so many other passages.²² The similarities are indeed rather

19 Actually, the last book of the *Metamorphoses* is marked by several provisional closures: see Finkelpearl 2004.

20 Cf. *Od.* 13,119 καὶ δ' ἄρ' ἐπὶ ψαμάθῳ ἔθεσαν δεδμημένον ὕπνῳ with *met.* 10,35,4-5 *in quodam mollissimo harenae gremio ... dulcis somnus opprasserat.*

21 Yet, the similarity is perhaps more striking if we think that at this point Apuleius is no longer following his lost Greek model (at least, as we can reconstruct it from the Pseudo-Lucianic *Onos*); so, the adaptation of other literary models to build the plot is more likely. In Heliodorus 5,22,1 – that is, in the middle of the novel – Calasiris tells that Odysseus appeared to him in a dream; the epic hero is defined ἀγγίνους, and Fusillo 2006, 271 points out that this is a reference to Homer, *Od.* 13,332, where Athena appears to Odysseus on the shore of Ithaca. So, also in the *Aethiopian stories*, the first book of the second part of the *Odyssey* is adopted as a model in what we could appropriately define as the first book of the second part of the novel: the long retrospective story of Calasiris

subtle and only affect the structural and not the textual level; nonetheless, they are there, and they prepare the ‘careful reader’ for an important change in the narrative.²³ These similarities also strengthen the Odyssean character of Lucius.²⁴ Is he still a failed Odysseus – or better, will he be a failed Odysseus up to the end of the novel? I don’t think so. Right at the end of the book (11,30,4), the supreme god Osiris praises Lucius’ *laboriosa doctrina*. The translators usually connect this expression to the laboriously acquired erudition that is necessary to practice law in the Forum;²⁵ it could also be considered as a confirmation of the Prologue, where the speaker says that he learned Latin *aerumnabili labore*. As always, it is hard not to be fascinated

ends here, and from now on it will be mainly the primary narrator who will be entrusted with the task of narrating the story.

- 22 Some very interesting instances are provided, for example, by Harrison 1990, 1998, and 2009.
- 23 It is true that we are nowhere near the middle of the novel, and that Book 11 does not mark the beginning of the ‘second part’ of the *Metamorphoses* the way Book 13 does in the narrative structure of the *Odyssey*; and, of course, 11 books is a difficult number for ‘closures in the middle’ (on which see Nimis 2003). However, it could suggest a quasi-epic structure for the novel, that counts ‘nearly but not quite the twelve books of the *Aeneid*’ for Harrison 1998, 53 (and cf. Harrison 1996, 515). I would add the possibility that the first 10 books, before the happy ending in the last one (that aptly begins like *Odyssey* Book 13), match the 10 years of Odysseus’ wanderings; and, if we consider the narrated time rather than the narrative extension, the novel is actually rather well balanced, since both Books 1-10 and Book 11 cover a time-span of roughly one year. From this point of view, we can actually say that the first chapters of Book 11 mark the beginning of the second part of Lucius’ adventures. Heller 1983, 332 ff. instead connects the number of books in the novel with the symbolism of number eleven in the Platonic and Pythagorean philosophies (but the 10+1 structure is prominent here too).
- 24 That was also prepared by the fact that Book 10 ends, in the epic manner, with the sleep of the hero (Lucius ‘overcome by sleep’: 10,35,5): see *GCA* 2000, 10 with n. 13 and 415 *ad loc.* Dowden 1998a, 13 points out that Lucius’s sleep between Books 10 and 11, and Psyche’s sleep at 5,1, “are the transition to another world, or to other-worldliness”. He already suggests, in more general terms, a comparison with Odysseus’ sleep and his encounter with Athena in the *Odyssey* (pp. 13-14). Schlam 1992, 21 remarks that “the salvation of Lucius is a comic resolution in conformity with the Odyssean tradition of the Greek romances”; Isis plays the role of the divinity who oversees the action, like Athena in the *Odyssey* and Venus in the *Aeneid*. I would add that also the sea voyage metaphor adopted by Mithras to describe Lucius’ sufferings at 11,15,1 contributes to shaping the main character of the novel as an epic hero (cf. Frangoulidis 2008, 225). Beer 2011 offers a different, but still Odyssean interpretation of the transition between Books 10 and 11 of the *Metamorphoses*, which I could not read before this paper was completed.
- 25 ‘I miei faticosi studi e la mia erudizione’, Nicolini 2005; ‘la cultura che m’ero fatta a prezzo dei miei faticosi studi’, Fo 2002; ‘mon laboeur érudit et ma culture’, Vallette in Robertson 1971-1972⁴; ‘assiduous pursuit of learning’, Griffiths 1975; ‘industrious pursuit of legal studies’, Hanson 1989.

by a good *Ringkomposition*; however, I think that we should also look elsewhere. The adjective *laboriosus* hints at less bookish labours as well. *Laboriosus* describes Odysseus in Horace, *epod.* 17,16, where the adjective is a clear echo of the standard Greek epithet *πολύτλας*; and *laboriosi* are Odysseus' comrades in *epod.* 16,60. Traditionally, *labores* are the adventures of any epic hero: Aeneas at *Aen.* 1,10 and 8,380; the Trojan women at *Aen.* 5,769; Macareus in Ovid, *met.* 14,158.²⁶ So, Lucius' *laboriosa doctrina* is not far from the wisdom Odysseus acquired through his labourious adventures – and, more generally, from the philosophical *pathei mathos* of Plato, *Symp.* 222b.²⁷ This *laboriosa doctrina* praised by Osiris, then, is radically different from the pointless *doctrina* that, in the words of the priest Mithras (11,15,2), could do nothing to keep Lucius safe: the bookish and arrogant *doctrina* of the young *scolasticus* Lucius (2,10,2), a failed Odysseus, is at last replaced by the *laboriosa doctrina* of a (finally) truly Odyssean character.²⁸

If this is true, I would not locate this *laboriosa doctrina* far from the ever unattainable *prudentia* of the first ten books. However, it cannot be denied that this moral, human aspect of wisdom is rather played down (though not obliterated) in the last book. From the very beginning, this book is the realm of divine *providentia*, not of *prudentia*:²⁹ at 11,1,2 Lucius is already sure that

26 Not surprisingly, also Psyche's vicissitudes are *labores*: cf. e.g. 6,1,2 and 6,4,3. On the epic character of the story of *Cupid and Psyche* see Harrison 1998.

27 See Graverini 2007, 171 and n. 47.

28 On this development of Lucius' character, Hijmans 1995, 376 points out that "We are not dealing with an '*Entwicklungsroman*' in which true insight is gained gradually ... but in Middle Platonic terms we cannot expect one either: the Wise Man is *repente* wise, and then possesses all the virtues". Therefore, I think that the fact that Lucius' conversion "is the result of instant revelation, not ratiocination" (Kenney 2003, 176) is in no way a reason to think that it is described as something false or pointless.

29 Note, however, that a connection of Isis with both *providentia* and *prudentia* would not be a contradiction. In *POxy* 1380,43-44 Isis is defined ἐν Καταβαθμῷ πρ[ό]νοιαν ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἄπειως Φρόνησιν (and cf. 123-124 γραμματικὴν, λογιστικὴν, φρον[ί]μην; text and bibliography on this aretalogy in Totti 1985, 62 ff.). Therefore, if we admit that Lucius actually becomes *prudens* at the end of the novel, there is no need to see this in contrast with his newly acquired religious perspective, as does Kenney 2003, 178 ("Such *prudentia* as he does display in his new incarnation is of the worldly variety. His culminating initiation into the cult of Osiris is rewarded by the conferment ... of a secure and prosperous career at the Roman Bar; and when we finally take leave of him, he is happily combining this role with that of a shaven-headed hierophant, comfortable in the service of both God and Mammon").

all human things are ruled by the *providentia* of the supreme goddess,³⁰ and a few pages later (11,5,4) Isis herself announces that the day of Lucius' salvation is dawning thanks to her *providentia*. The 'helping providence', *auxiliaris providentia*, of Isis is physically represented by an altar in the procession in her honour (11,10,4), and finally saves Lucius by offering him the occasion to eat the roses he has so long desired (11,12,1). The 'providence of great Isis' triumphs over *Fortuna* in Mithras' recapitulation at 11,15,4;³¹ and it is later virtually identified with Lucius' *fortuna* at 11,18,1. The goddess' *providentia* controls the initiation of Lucius at 11,21,4-7. In the final chapters, it grants Lucius renown and prosperity (11,27,9; 11,30,2).

So, I think we can say that *providentia* is among the most important forces that produce narrative in the last book; its presence is far from being conventional and occasional, as in the preceding books, nor is it ever treated with apparent irony. However, while this indeed gives the end of the novel a religious flavour, we are still far from a religious treatise, or even a really theologically oriented narrative. A lack of deep theological concern is shown, for example, by some unclear points. *Providentia* is evidently, in this book, one of the main characteristics of Isis: this seems to be an unprecedented point in previous literature, insofar as even historians of religion, when they speak about Isis' providence, usually refer to Apuleius, and only Apuleius.³² To my knowledge, such a *strong and sustained* connection between Isis and Providence can only be found in Apuleius.³³ Of course, even if it is an innovation, it is clearly not a revolutionary one. Isis is commonly identified with

30 In this passage, the supreme goddess is the moon, soon to be identified with Isis at 11,5,3.

31 See above, n. 9, on the textual problem in this passage.

32 Cf. e.g. Dunand 1973, III 272; Turcan 2007, 76.

33 Plutarch's *DIO* 51 (371e) briefly mentions only Osiris' *pronoia*: 'They depict Osiris by means of an eye and a sceptre, the one of which indicates forethought and the other power' (transl. Cole Babbitt 1936). More interesting is the evidence offered by *POxy* 1380: at ll. 43-44 ἐν Καταβαθμῷ πρόνοιαν and l. 85 ἐν Πάθμῳ Πρόνοιαν, Providence is listed among the attributes of the goddess (but without the overall prominence it gets in Apuleius; moreover, the epithet is localized in the *Katabathmos*, a region between Egypt and Nubia, and Pathmos). On the several points of contact between Isis' attributes in this papyrus and in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* Book XI see Magnani 2001. According to Griffiths 1975, 253 the idea of Isis Pronoia "probably reflects Stoic influence". See Griffiths' commentary also for a sceptic view on the statement by Grenfell and Hunt (the original editors of *POxy* 1380) that "Isis appears as Pronoia on Alexandrian coins". Griffiths also affirms that Apuleius' personal interpretation of providence 'is fully in accord with the Egyptian idea of the gods as kindly arbiters of providence'. However, he offers no further evidence of the diffusion of this idea in connection with Isiac religion.

Felicitas or *Fortuna*, and *Felicitas* especially (which properly means God's protection) is extremely close to the idea of *Providentia*. In any case, the real extent of the power of this *Isis providens* is unclear. In some passages, the goddess seems to be above fate;³⁴ in another case they are equivalent, or – which is the same – fate is the will of Isis' *providentia*.³⁵ We will see in a moment that the first is the normal Platonic view, while the second has a more Stoic flavour.

Indeed, these are only small innovations and contradictions; but the fact is that Apuleius is apparently not really interested in providing a very clear theological picture, and he is also probably introducing some new traits in the Egyptian faith, or enhancing old ones. This is, in my opinion, the consequence of two facts:

1. The *Metamorphoses* is a novel, that is a seriocomic literary piece. Indeed we can, or even should look for a deeper meaning in the narrative, but we cannot expect to be offered clear-cut and non-contradictory ideas. All we can find are some suggestions going in a general direction. The *Metamorphoses* is also satirical: not in the sense that there is a satire on religion or philosophy, but in the sense that, as in Horace's *Satires*, there is a generic interest in religion and philosophy; this interest is non-dogmatic, and presented to the reader in a seriocomic way.
2. It would be a mistake to try and differentiate too sharply between religion and philosophy: all the more so in Apuleius, a *philosophus Platonicus* and also an initiate in several mystery cults. Already in Plato's works, the progress of the soul towards true knowledge is often described in terms of religious initiation, and this aspect has even been enhanced by middle-Platonists.³⁶

34 11,6,7 *Quodsi sedulis obsequiis et religiosis ministeriis et tenacibus castimoniis numen nostrum promerueris, scies ultra statuta fato tuo spatia uitam quoque tibi prorogare mihi tantum licere*; cf. 11,25,2 *Fortunae tempestates mitigas*. The same view is expressed in the Kyme Aretalogy (55-56): 'I overcome Fate; Fate harkens to me' (the translation is by Kraemer 2004, 458). Cf. Dunand 1973, III 272; Turcan 2007, 76.

35 11,1,2-3 *certus etiam ... res ... humanas ipsius regi providentia ... fato scilicet iam meis tot tantisque cladibus satiatio ...*

36 Burkert 1987, 85 points out that "Following Plutarch, many Platonic writers invoked the mysteries for confirmation of the basic tenets of their philosophy, for illustration, or for the addition of a religious dimension to the exercises of philosophical dialectic". More specifically on Apuleius, see Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000, 98 ff., who interprets the last book of the *Metamorphoses* as "Harmonisierung, Verschmelzung und Feinabstimmung zwischen Mysterienreligion und Philosophie" (100). Kenney 2003, 183 states that "nothing that

I have explored both points at length in my book,³⁷ but I think I can add something new about the second one. In particular, it would be useful to consider *providentia* also from the point of view of Imperial philosophical thought.

4b. Philosophical *Providentia*

Plato and Aristotle did not elaborate much on the concept of divine providence. Plato's *pronoia* is impersonal, foreign to any idea of pity or love; *pronoia* does not care for individuals, but in a broader perspective it looks after the well-being, the harmony and the beauty of the Universe. Even less is the space for *pronoia* in Aristotle's system, where God is pure *noesis noeseos*, 'thought of thought'.³⁸ The true advocates of *Pronoia* in philosophical literature were the Stoics. Their Fate is rational, strictly connected with God and Nature: so, it was easy for them to suggest a complete identification between Fate and Providence. A great part of the Stoic philosophical efforts about Providence were devoted to finding an answer to the eternal question: 'if there are Gods, why does evil exist?'. Their answer was that if we look at things from a general point of view, there is no real evil and everything contributes to the Supreme Good of the Universe (an idea of Platonic origin). From a more personal perspective, it certainly happens that good and wise men suffer more than bad ones: but this is just an opportunity to improve and to show their moral qualities. So, the Stoic hero does not fear adversities, nor blame Providence for them, but faces them and even rejoices in them as occasions of self-improvement. Several Stoics wrote treatises *De providentia*: Chrysippus, Panaetius, Seneca, Epictetus.

The Stoic interest in the subject urged other philosophical schools to deal with it. In Imperial times, we have treatises 'On Providence' by the Platonist

can be called specifically Platonic can be identified in Lucius' account of his life after his conversion: Isis and Osiris have it all to themselves". However, see Graverini 2007, 19-132 and n. 195 for some Platonic overtones in Mithras' speech (even though it is true, as Kenney points out, that the Platonic emphasis is much less manifest in the last book than in the story of *Cupid and Psyche*; my point is that the novel in its entirety suggests an interaction of religious and philosophical perspectives).

37 Graverini 2007, 57-149.

38 On *pronoia-providentia* in ancient philosophical thought see Sharples 1987 (esp. 1216-1218); Dragona-Monachou 1994; Ferrari 1999. See also Narducci 1979, esp. 71, on the (mild) tension between Lucan's attitude towards *providentia* and his Stoicism. I could not fully take into account Drews 2009 before the publication of this paper.

Philo of Alexandria and the Aristotelian Alexander of Aphrodisias; but several other authors address the issue, like Cicero (in the *De natura deorum*), Plutarch (in several of his moral treatises), Pseudo-Plutarch (*De fato*), and, in the 2nd Century, Atticus, Numenius, Marcus Aurelius, Maximus of Tyre. Most of them were of Platonic or Pythagorean inclination; of course, they are often in dispute with other philosophical schools,³⁹ but there is also a very high degree of eclecticism. In particular, Stoic positions appear to be very pervasive.

So, the least we can say is that in Apuleius' times there had been, and there still was, much debate on the idea of providence: discussing providence was, so to speak, 'fashionable'. No surprise, then, to see that Apuleius keeps in touch with what is going on in the cultural milieu of his times. He discusses *providentia* in his *De Platone*, and does this with more than a touch of eclecticism: for example, he seems to consider Providence and Fate on the same level, and almost identical with each other:⁴⁰ this is an almost thoroughly Stoic view, while Platonists usually considered Providence hierarchically superior to Fate. The *Metamorphoses*, as we have seen, seems to fluctuate between the two positions. Another Stoic idea is the equivalence of Providence with Nature, and in the novel, Isis is both the source of *providentia* and *rerum naturae parens*.⁴¹

It must be said that there is a great difference between the religious, personal and maternal providence of Isis in the novel and providence as described by philosophers, be they Stoic, Platonic, or Aristotelian. Philosophical providence is almost invariably not really concerned with single individuals and their lives, but takes care of the Universe as a whole. From this angle, it cannot be denied that providence, in the *Metamorphoses*, is a more religious than philosophical idea – as long as these two concepts can really be separated, as I said before. Nevertheless, the philosophical debate about

39 Cf. e.g. Atticus' polemic against Epicurus and Aristotle: frg. 3,9-10 p. 48 des Places. For more detailed references about the single authors quoted in the text, see the bibliography in the previous footnote.

40 *Plat.* 1,12 (205) *si quid providentia geritur, id agitur et fato, et quod fato terminatur providentia debet susceptum uideri*. On Apuleius' philosophical views on *providentia* see Krafft 1979; Hijmans 1987, 444-448. More generally, on the interaction between Platonic and Stoic philosophies in Imperial times (an interaction that is not always to be labelled as 'eclecticism') see the collection of essays edited by Bonazzi and Helmig 2007.

41 *Met.* 11,5,1 and 4 '*En adsum tuis commota, Luci, precibus, rerum naturae parens ... [...] iam tibi providentia mea inlucescit dies salutaris*': on the verbal level, of course, the influence of Lucretius is manifest too. Also for Monteduro Roccavini 1979, 172 "nelle *Metamorfosi*, accanto agli indubbi influssi medio platonici, ce ne sono altri di derivazione stoica".

providentia leaves at least some traces in the last book of the novel. A comparison with Seneca's *de providentia* will prove useful, and not in contrast with the already mentioned eclecticism that characterizes both Apuleius and his contemporaries. Notice however that I am not advocating a direct inter-textual relationship between the two authors:⁴² I will only try to point out that the last book of the *Metamorphoses* makes use of some topics that are also typical of the philosophical debate on *providentia*.

Lucius is clearly not the typical Stoic moral hero, who endures all the adversities confiding in his shining virtue.⁴³ However, he does not lack some positive features, even before the intervention of Isis. Mithras praises his *natales, dignitas, doctrina* (*met.* 11,15,1); then the crowd points out the *innocentia* of his preceding life (11,16,4). These passages have been variously discussed and interpreted;⁴⁴ here, I only point out that such statements fit the Senecan idea that Fortune puts the good men to the test, not the bad ones (*prov.* 4,7).⁴⁵ From this point of view, the fact that Lucius was a good man before his disgrace is no surprise.

The workings of *Fortuna* are blind, because they produce unexpected results. In Seneca, *Fortuna* wants to prostrate and annihilate her victims, but she only succeeds in making them better and in offering them as a paradigm of virtue to be admired (*prov.* 3,9). In Apuleius, *Fortuna* has persecuted Lucius, but the final result of her persecution is only to lead Lucius towards Isis, and to make a model of him for the *inreligiosi* (*met.* 11,15,2-4). That the man troubled by fortune is a paragon, and even a spectacle, for other men and for the gods themselves, is also a common topos in Seneca (*prov.* 6,3; 5,9; 3,9)

Other generic analogies between Mithras' speech and Seneca's repertoire of images are the idea that the life of a man persecuted by Fortune is like a hard and troubled journey, or a sea voyage (Apul. *met.* 11,15,1; Sen. *prov.*

42 Even though it must be noted that Seneca can actually be a model for Apuleius' philosophical works: see e.g. Harrison in Harrison, Hilton, Hunink 2001, 189 with n. 14, 193, and 213f. nn. 72 and 75 (on *Socr.* 21, 168 and 22-23, 172); Harrison 2000, 166f.

43 Cf. n. 14. This does not necessarily mean Lucius has no paradigmatic value. Would we think of Phaeton as a Stoic moral hero, Phaeton who put at risk his own life and the whole Earth to feel the thrill of driving the chariot of the Sun? Probably not, but nevertheless he figures among the main paradigms of *uirtus* for Seneca, who even highlights it with the only two extensive poetic quotations of his short treatise (*prov.* 5,10-11).

44 Graverini 2007, 66-70, with further references.

45 Cf. also Monteduro Roccavini 1979, 172.

5,9);⁴⁶ and the triumphant address to defeated Fortune (Apul. *met.* 11,15,3; Sen. *epist.* 24,7).

So, at least from a literary point of view, I think we can say that the last book of the *Metamorphoses* also reflects the ongoing philosophical debate on *providentia* and *fortuna*. We cannot ask a narrative text to be absolutely coherent, but then we have seen that eclecticism and slight indecision were also features of contemporary philosophical treatises.

4c. Imperial *Providentia*

But let us take a step further. The prominence of *providentia* at the end of the novel can be considered a ‘trendy’ and ‘fashionable’ feature also from a political perspective. I pointed out at the beginning that *providentia*, in the human and not divine sphere, is usually more a virtue of a man in charge (a military commander, a magistrate) than of a ‘common man’.⁴⁷ In Imperial times, it is especially a virtue of the emperor – and since the Emperor is himself divine, the circle is closed.

The cult of Providence is attested from the early Empire; temples and altars are devoted to her in Rome and in the provinces, and we know that a priesthood of *providentia* and *salus publica* existed at Corinth.⁴⁸ In the second century, *Providentia* is especially commemorated in the coinages of the first years of the reign of each Antonine emperor: the goddess sets her seal on the accession to the throne of the emperors, vouches for divine protection they enjoy, guarantees Imperial continuity, and reassures the populations of the Empire of their prosperity under the new ruler.⁴⁹ Jean-Pierre Martin sets

46 For a balanced assessment of the possible metaphorical meanings of the several passages mentioning hard and slippery roads in the *Metamorphoses* see Zimmerman 2002.

47 This is also true for the Greek *pronoia*. Cf. Martin 1982, 8: “L’utilisation la plus fréquente du terme *pronoia* se trouve, avec ses dérivés, dans un domaine à la fois large et au contenu précis, celui de l’exercice du pouvoir”.

48 Polito 1994, 562.

49 See Martin 1982, 307: “*Providentia* ... est devenue l’élément moteur du pouvoir impérial, indispensable à son exercice dans le respect des décisions prises par les empereurs précédents. Elle est l’élément de légitimité et de stabilité, dans le même temps qu’elle est seule capable d’assurer l’avenir et la continuité du pouvoir impérial. De ce fait, les séries monétaires portant la légende et l’image de la Providence sont extrêmement nombreuses sous les règnes d’Antonin, de L. Verus et de Marc Aurèle, de Marc Aurèle seul, et, enfin, dans les années où Commode organise son pouvoir sur le monde romain”. Cf. also Mattingly 1960², 163; Polito 1994, 566; De Ranieri 1997, 325 (who, in partial opposition to Mattingly and Martin, points out that on Commodus’ coins *Providentia* has also the function of highlighting his divine right to the throne).

the apogee of her popularity in Imperial coinage during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, both together with Lucius Verus (161-169) and alone (169-180):⁵⁰ in these years, PROVIDENTIA DEORUM is a classical subject for imperial coinage, on a par with FELICITAS AUGUSTI. Marcus Aurelius' concern with Providence is also testified by his literary work, inspired by Stoic philosophy.⁵¹ In some coins from the reign of Commodus, *Providentia* and *Felicitas* are coupled with the representation of a sailing ship: it is not a new motif in Imperial coinage, but as it seems it is now adopted without any connection to a particular event, such as a voyage or a sea expedition of the Emperor. The sailing ship is now simply the symbol of the Emperor's *Felicitas*.⁵² This symbolism, and the popularity of the *Providentia* theme, are especially tantalizing parallels to the *Metamorphoses* if we think that Egyptian cults enjoyed a wide diffusion under Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. Isis and Sarapis appear frequently in coins and other iconographical sources; according to Sarolta Takács "Isis and Sarapis were the divine equivalent to the living *augustus* and the *augusta*",⁵³ and therefore they provided iconographical themes also for emperors that were not necessarily initiated into their mysteries. However, there is some evidence that links Commodus to the Egyptian cults. The *Historia Augusta* is certainly not the best historical source we can refer to, but it is worth mentioning that it says that 'Commodus worshipped Isis, so much so, that he shaved his head and carried a mask of Anubis'.⁵⁴ Isiac symbols also appear on his coins.⁵⁵

50 Martin 1982, 321: "le thème de la Providence devient tout à fait commun dans tous les métaux. C'est même certainement un des thèmes les plus répandus et les plus classiques durant cette période". Cf. also Martin 2001, 74 ff.

51 See e.g. *Meditations* 2,3; 12,14,1-2; 6,44,1-2; 2,11,2-3; 6,10; 4,10; 6,36.

52 See e.g. Martin 1982, planche 2 n. 85. But Polito 1994, 566 points out that "l'interpretazione corrente mette invece in relazione quest'ultima emissione con un'altra raffigurante Ercole-Commodo che riceve spighe da Africa ... ed entrambe con la creazione di una flotta annonaria d'Africa da parte di Commodo". Cf. also Alföldi 1955, 252 f. On the coin depicting Commodus receiving spikes from Africa see e.g. Martin 1982, planche 2 n. 91, and Alföldi 1955, 254 fig. 6.2: Isiac symbolism is evident here, since Africa holds a sistrum. Also, 'Isis sailing' was not an uncommon theme on 2nd Century coins: see e.g. Bricault and Veymiers 2008 (on Corinthian coins), esp. 404 ff.

53 Takács 1995, 112. On 'Isis as a type of Faustina' see *RIC* III, 16; description at p. 169, n. 1197.

54 *Comm.* 9,5.

55 Not an unprecedented innovation, but not a very common trend either: cf. Mattingly 1960², 157: "The emotional cults of Syria and Egypt, which were so popular among certain grades of society in Rome, were but slowly admitted to the official world. Serapis and Isis appear once under Hadrian, then again under Commodus and more freely later. The Dea Caelestis of Carthage comes in with the dynasty of Severus who married into a

5. Conclusions

Now, it is true that these peculiar aspects of imperial propaganda are not explicitly referred to in the *Metamorphoses*. However, Lucius' *dies salutaris*, that shines on him thanks to the Providence of Isis, is also the day of an Isiac religious festival, the *navigium Isidis*, itself a symbol of prosperity (11,5,4-5).⁵⁶ And of course we know very well that Lucius, at the end of his adventures, goes to Rome, the centre of Imperial power. Should we read in these details a sort of implicit support by Lucius/Apuleius for Imperial propaganda, through the celebration of Isiac religion? An interesting question, that unfortunately can have, in my opinion, no direct and exact answer. In the last book of the novel, and in the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, we can read Isiac religion for what it is, that is, a religious cult,⁵⁷ but we can also read it in connection with Imperial philosophical literature, and, as I have suggested above, with common themes of Imperial propaganda. As it happens, Apuleius himself was both an initiate of several mystery religions, a Platonic philosopher, and a priest of the imperial cult, so in a way all these interpretations can find support in his biography.

My point is that, as I have stated above, a novel is not a religious, philosophical or political treatise, so we should not expect to find very detailed and clear-cut religious, philosophical or political ideas in the *Metamorphoses*. The minimal interpretation of the results of my research is the only one I suggest we should take for granted: Apuleius is really a 'sophist', and continually engages with several important themes of contemporary culture; he clearly likes to present himself as learned, sophisticated, up-to-date.⁵⁸ However, a novel indeed *can* suggest some generic religious, philosophical or political ideas; it *can* allow the reader to read between the lines, to search for 'other' and 'higher' meanings that go beyond the simple narrative and cultural entertainment. For those readers who are willing to engage in such

Syrian priestly family". Cf. also *RIC* III, 362: "Other types, a little outside the ordinary usage, betray something of the extravagant dream, in which Commodus spent his last year of life. Cybele and Serapis again appear as the Emperor's protectors. A new type, which shows Serapis and Isis greeting Commodus, may preserve the memory of some special concession of the Emperor to Egyptian religion". See description at p. 394 n. 246; 436 n. 614; 437 n. 621 and 628; 438 n. 630; and Martin 1982, 439.

56 On this festival see Griffiths 1975, 31-47.

57 This is the approach chosen by Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000, who offers a wealth of information to place Lucius' conversion in the context of ancient religion.

58 For Apuleius as a sophist, see Sandy 1997 and Harrison 2000.

an activity, the text offers some guidelines. One of these guidelines is precisely the careful treatment of the *prudential/providential* theme.

The lexical and thematic analysis offers some data that cannot be considered casual results, and allow us to draw some conclusions. The first ten books describe a world in which *prudential* is mostly unattainable, and *providential* is usually more a conventional idea than an effective and protective force. The last book suggests that Lucius has finally, and suddenly,⁵⁹ reached some form of *prudential*; but it especially presents us with an effective, personal, benevolent, and maternal *providential* embodied in the goddess Isis, to whom Lucius owes his salvation (and, implicitly, his renewed wisdom). This movement from failed wisdom to divine providence is anticipated, like so many other important themes in the novel, in the tale of *Cupid and Psyche*: as we have seen (p. 92), when Psyche's *prudential* fails, divine *providential* comes to her rescue (6,13,3-6,15,1).

In the first ten books there is some uncertainty as to the real nature of *providential*, the extent of her powers, and her benevolent nature. Should this lead us to be doubtful also about the Isiac *providential* in the last book?⁶⁰

59 See above, n. 28.

60 This is the typical Winklerian and post-Winklerian approach, according to which the comical outlook of Books 1-10 can deconstruct any possible seriousness of Book 11; it is the task of the reader to choose a comic *or* a serious interpretation. A well-balanced and cautious example of this hermeneutic stance, applied to the *providential* theme, is offered by Maaike Zimmerman, who sees irony in the fact that "there are a few passages where the use of *diuina/caelestis/deum providential* seems to illustrate that an event can be considered as *diuina* (etc.) *providential* for one person, but bad luck for another" (*GCA* 2000, 194: referring to 8,31 and 9,27); she concludes that "this kind of passage may lead the reader of the entire *Met.* to wonder what exactly the implication is of Isis' *providential*, which the narrator exalts so much in the eleventh book". Zimmerman tries to balance the serious and comic interpretations of *providential*, fundamentally replicating John Winkler's 'aporetic' stance. Other scholars settle the conflict between Books 1-10 and Book 11 by granting the comic/satiric outlook the final victory, and preventing any possible 'serious' reading of the religious ending of the novel: see e.g. above, n. 3, on the conclusions reached by Fick 1999. Another option to reach the same conclusion is to blur the differences among Books 1-10 and Book 11: for example, Kenney 2003, 171 f. states that "*Providential*, whose operations in the *Metamorphoses* overlap with and blur into those of *Fortuna*, *Fatum*, *Sors*, *Invidia* and *Euentus*, and who is eventually subsumed into the all-embracing figure of Isis, plays a prominent part in Lucius' vicissitudes". For a more thorough analysis of Winklerian and post-Winklerian criticism see Graverini 2007, esp. 57-149; there I have also offered a more comprehensive interpretation of the whole *Metamorphoses*, that supports the conclusions I have reached here. My point is, briefly, that there is indeed a comic/satiric aspect to the novel, but the text does not support a deconstruction of its possible 'serious' meanings. The reader is not urged to choose between a satiric interpretation, and a philosophically or religiously committed

Again, I think that the text offers some guidelines for interpretation: in the last book, contrary to what happens in the preceding ten, there is no trace of deconstruction of divine *providentia*. Instead, her role becomes more prominent, and she clearly directs the plot towards its end – that is, she does what *fortuna* has been doing for ten books. This, and the statistical analysis of the occurrences of *prudentia* and *providentia*, suggest that we should read the last book in opposition to the previous ten. More specifically, all this suggests that the world-view of the first ten books is overcome in the last. If Lucius was naive and gullible, if *providentia* was not much more than an abstraction, this by no means forces us to think that they are still unchanged at the end of the novel – in fact, if my analysis is correct, it is quite the opposite. In my opinion, this makes it extremely difficult to read the Isis-book in terms of satire of religious credulity. The conclusion to the *Metamorphoses* has a paraenetic nature, and it conveys religious, moral, and philosophical ideas; but this does not mean that a reader who is looking only for a learned diversion cannot choose to read it simply as the happy ending of a novel that is basically entertaining and literarily intriguing.

one; on the contrary, he has to recognize the seriocomic quality of the *Metamorphoses*, enjoy it as an entertaining tale, and grasp its hidden and generic ‘meanings’.

General Bibliography

Abbreviations

- AAGA* = B.L. Hijmans jr., R.Th. Van der Paardt (edd.), *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass. A Collection of Original Papers*, Groningen 1978.
- AAGA 2* = M. Zimmerman, V. Hunink, Th.D. McCreight, D. van Mal-Maeder, S. Panayotakis, V. Schmidt, B. Wesseling (edd.), *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass. Volume II. Cupid and Psyche. A Collection of Original Papers*, Groningen 1998.
- ANRW* = H. Temporini and W. Haase (edd.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, Berlin 1972 -.
- ANS* = *Ancient Narrative Supplementa* (2002 -)
- BNJ* = I. Worthington (ed.), *Brills New Jacoby*, Brill online.
- BTL* = *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina*, electronic database.
- CIL* = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin 1863 -.
- CIM Rel. Mithr.* = M.J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae*, 2 vols., Den Haag 1956; 1960.
- DIO* = *De Iside et Osiride* (Plutarchus, *Moralia* 351c – 384c)
- E–M = A. Ernout, A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, Paris 1979.
- GCA* = *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius: GCA 1977 on Met. IV,1-27* (B.L. Hijmans Jr., et al.); *GCA 1981 on Met. VI,25-32 and VII* (B.L. Hijmans Jr. et al.); *GCA 1985 on Met. VIII* (B.L. Hijmans Jr. et al.); *GCA 1995 on Met. IX* (B.L. Hijmans Jr. et al.); *GCA 2000 on Met. X* (M. Zimmerman); *GCA 2001 on Met. II* (D.K. Van Mal-Maeder); *GCA 2004 on Met. IV 28-35, V, and VI,1-24* (M. Zimmerman et al.); *GCA 2007 on Met. I* (W.H. Keulen).
- GCN* = *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel*, ed. H. Hofmann, Groningen, 1988-1995, ed. H. Hofmann and M. Zimmerman, Groningen 1996-1998.
- IEG* = *Iambi et elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati*, ed. M.L. West, Oxford 1971.
- LIMC* = *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zürich, München 1981 -.
- OLD* = *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford 1968-1982.
- Ostia* = *Topographical Dictionary* at <http://www.ostia-antica.org/regio2/8/8-2.htm> (18 Sept. 2009)

- RIC* III = H. Mattingly, E.A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. III. *Antoninus Pius to Commodus*, London 1930.
- SIRIS* = L. Vidman, *Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae*, Berlin 1969.
- ThLL* = *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, Leipzig, Stuttgart 1900-1999; München, Leipzig 2000-2006; Berlin and New York 2007 – (De Gruyter; also available as on-line database)

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