

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* takes place in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic background of the second sophistic. Apuleius is himself from Africa; his work as a whole engages deeply with the literary and cultural traditions of both Greece and Rome. Book 11 has been used extensively as a source of information for the cult of Isis in the times of the Empire (Bricault), but more recent research has pointed out that the representation of religious experience described therein is a literary construct and should be treated with great caution (Keulen et al.). Critical frameworks that examine colonialism and issues of ethnicity, especially in relation to the categories of center and periphery, have also yielded fruitful interpretations of the *Metamorphoses*. Scholars have attempted a re-assessment of the multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan character of the work, its language, and its generic appropriations, as well as its relationship with Africa (Finkelppearl et al.). Taking into account these important perspectives, this paper focuses on the presence of Isis in the novel, with an aim at shedding light on the dynamic nature of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian elements that interact or co-exist in the scene of Isis' festival. Such an analysis enables us to reassess the larger negotiations, ideological, religious, and literary, that take place in the work.

In this light, I would like to examine the description of the festival in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 11 as a means to understand the role of Isis in the novel and the wealth of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian elements in it. At first glance, one can glean familiar oppositions between the "civilized" Romans versus the "primitive, animal-worshipping" Egyptians that structure the text and justify Roman imperial control. This narrative of "otherness" brings the foreign elements into the field of knowledge shared by audience and narrator alike through comparison or assimilation (Alston). As a result, in the *Metamorphoses* the otherness of Isis' cult is mitigated by its representation within the recognizable matrix of Greco-Roman culture. Yet I argue that a

closer examination of the various scenes that make up the festival (Isis' epiphany, the *anteludia*, and the procession proper) reveals that these various ethnic elements appear to co-exist, rendering impossible to draw a clear distinction that would identify Greco-Roman religion and culture as familiar, and Egyptian culture as barbaric and "other." What is more, I would like to caution against the collapsing of distinctions between Greek and Roman, important in their own right and enacting their own set of cultural and ideological negotiations. Isis' festival is the climactic moment in the novel: it is the locus of Lucius' transformation back to human form and the place where Greece and Rome on the one hand, and Egypt and Africa on the other, meet. Isis' festival, with its performative, literary, religious, social, and political character is the ideal locus for such an exploration and Apuleius fruitfully deploys in it the complex amalgam of cultural and ideological negotiations that were the hallmark of his time.

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