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Intra Limen: An Examination of Liminality in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and Giulio Romano's Sala di Amore e Psiche

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Arts in Greek and Roman Studies

by

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Thesis Advisor:  
Professor Curtis Dozier

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INTRODUCTION
UNDERSTANDING LIMINALITY

Too often studies regarding Latin and ancient Greek literature restrict their scope to the words and to the historical context contemporary to the works. While this type of information is crucial, such limitations fail to understand or suggest how the themes and subjects that the stories contain resonate and find (or change) meaning in later ages, even in modern times. Recognizing the various receptions of these works not only demonstrates their continued relevance, but it also indicates how audiences understood and interpreted them over time. This type of scholarly work allows us to deepen our knowledge of both the text and the respective groups receiving it. Additionally, studies that examine questions of connections between the ancient and modern world has the potential to appeal to young, budding scholars, and encourages them to pursue classical studies. If we do not consider how ancient works have influenced generations and if we think about only the texts, then we compose an incomplete image of a multidisciplinary field.

A personal experience of this nature served as the impetus of this entire study of liminality and audienceship in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*. In the fall of 2012 I studied abroad with the Eastern College Consortium program in Bologna, Italy. I elected to take an art history course on 16th century Italian art, concerned primarily with artists from Bologna. Briefly departing from our bolognese focus, our class took the opportunity to visit Palazzo Te (also called Palazzo del Te) in Mantua, Italy. Giulio Romano, a pupil of Raphael, designed the

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1 I have chosen to use the term “audienceship” rather than “readership” or “viewership” (or a similar phrase) because I believe it better encompasses the experiences that I intend to discuss. These specifically include the reading of a written text and the viewing of artwork. While it is possible to argue that one can “read” art and, therefore, that “readership” should suffice, I instead discuss a reciprocal relationship between the art and the individual.
building's architecture and the frescoes within it, developing and defining the Mannerist style. Tucked away in a corner of the structure, one particular room enticed me, a student of Latin and antiquity: the Sala di Amore e Psiche (sometimes shortened to the Sala di Psiche; the Hall of Love (Cupid) and Psyche). The artist's lavish paintings, which Apuleius' *Golden Ass* inspired, covered nearly every inch of the walls and the ceiling. Knowing that the *Metamorphoses* served as the point of reference for the frescoes and understanding that some sort of interpretive relationship must exist between them and the Latin, I yearned (and continue to yearn) to understand what role the ancient author's work had in such a context and what messages Romano's images conveyed. Therefore, I resolved to consult and deepen my knowledge of the *Golden Ass*. In this way, I could also make my understanding of Romano's art in the palazzo much more complete. It is this type of work that I intend to execute here.

Before reading even the first sentences of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the work's traditional title – rather than *The Golden Ass* – allows the audience to begin to formulate ideas regarding the types of themes it contains. Particularly for modern readers, the name would probably evoke Ovid's 1st century BCE epic poem of the same name. We expect fantastical tales of wild transformations and adventures. In fact, Apuleius does include stories of those kinds, though not necessarily in the same way as Ovid. The primary, framing tale of the *Metamorphoses* has as protagonist Lucius, who metamorphosed into an ass because of his curiosity, and it recounts his adventures on his quest to achieve his human form once more.

As a work purportedly centered on the idea of metamorphosis, it is possible, interesting, and useful to consider the ways in which *Apuleius* plays with and relies upon notions or representations of the liminal, those “in-between” spaces in which natural laws typically do not
hold sway and where creativity and chaos reign. Metamorphoses cannot occur without the existence of these kinds of spaces. On the most fundamental level, there must always be some period of transition between the beginning and ending forms, even if those two forms are (physically) the same, such as in the work under examination here. Rather than focusing solely on the endpoints of the metamorphosis, Apuleius instead chooses to exploit those “betweens,” using them to create worlds turned upside-down in which absurd characters and situations flourish – often producing comedic effects. Later, it will become clear that Apuleius uses such elements as ways to construct liminal spaces within the various stories in the work, and then those constructed spaces themselves contain their own liminal features.

In the first chapter, I intend to use the vocabulary of liminality as van Gennep and Turner describe in order to closely examine the story of Cupid and Psyche, a mini-narrative within Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. The purpose of this first analysis, though deceptively simple, is to demonstrate that Apuleius is interested in liminality and in playing with liminal ideas. The second chapter, then, reads the artwork of Giulio Romano in the Sala di Amore e Psiche, which Apuleius' mini-narrative inspired, through a lens of liminality, with particular attention to the viewer's experience. Finally, chapter three continues this discussion of the role of the reader in relation to the final book of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Book 11, and aims to demonstrate how Apuleius leaves the narrative open through his account of the protagonist's religious initiations.

At this point we arrive at a deceptively basic question: what does “liminality” mean exactly? A useful starting point to answer this is the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition. Citing that it derives from the Latin *limen* (“threshold”), the *OED* states: “Of or pertaining to the
threshold or initial stage of a process.”2 What is striking about this is how it remains close to the Latin; there is the obvious inclusion of the direct translation of the word *limen* (“threshold”). However, it extends the concept to include additional, more specific and abstract ideas that the Latin word does not necessarily directly express. The entry indicates that “liminality” is used to describe a process of some sort – in their definition, specifically the initial stages of that process. I would like to partially challenge the limitation to only the initial stage because it seemingly disregards the fact that a threshold serves as a passage between two points – those being the beginning and the end, or Point A and Point B. It appears to ignore, or at least not take into account, the fact the *limen* by its very nature necessitates beginning, end, and middle spaces. It is this middle space – and all of its components – that is liminal. If we consider only the initial stage of a process to be liminal, we run the risk of misunderstanding the structures that make up these social processes. Obtaining a greater understanding of these spaces under question requires the examination and detailing of some foundational theories on liminality.

**THEORIZING LIMINALITY AND THE LIMINAL SPACE**

The theoretical framework that I intend to use as a basis for exploring Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* here derives primarily from the works of early-20th century French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep and mid-20th century British anthropologist Victor Turner. In his foundational study *Rites de passage*, the former provides a theoretical overview of the idea of rites of passage within communities, how communities construct them, and what their functions are within those social structures. He specifically addresses birth, initiations, marriage, and death as common examples of these rites. Turner then applied and expanded his predecessor’s

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2 *OED* s.v *liminal* a
theoretical frameworks in order to examine various aspects of the culture of the Ndembu people in southern Africa, in modern-day Zambia.

Van Gennep provides the basic structural analysis of ritual processes upon which Turner later elaborates; he identifies three principle phases in rites of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation.³ These progressions between stages, then, are accompanied by particular acts that facilitate the change or development of the individual or group. Turner clarifies the three phases:

The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both. During the intervening 'liminal' period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation) the passage is consummated.⁴ Though of particular concern in this study of the *Golden Ass* is the liminal period, a holistic understanding of the framework is necessary because they are inherently interconnected. The first and third phases – the departing from or the returning to – recognize the existence of certain states, which Turner here defines as “fixed [points] in the social structure,”⁵ that communicate particular cultural conditions and attributes within a community. The second phase – the liminal one – then exists between structures, interstitially. Through these three phases, rites of passage serve to break down, change, and put together in a new way the individual (or group) undergoing the transformation. Therefore, Turner argues that the one metamorphosing is a kind of *tabula rasa*, prepared to assume a new state within society, because they must necessarily be stripped of their former identity (with respect to social structures and conventions) in order to completely take on their new one.

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³ Van Gennep 1960: 11
⁴ Turner 1969: 94-95
⁵ Turner 1967: 97
In many ways, liminal spaces – and, therefore, those who occupy such spaces – are marginal in addition to interstructural. When individuals in rites of passage pass through the separation phase, they by definition no longer possess or are no longer able to assume a position within the community. They exist outside those social structures, and they do not have to conform to normative ideas of how one must appear or act.

It is this relationship between the interstructural, marginal nature of the liminal period and the idea of the *tabula rasa* which elucidate why processes of transition often have qualities of ambiguity that can manifest in absurd, subversive, or counter-intuitive ways – all elements which Apuleius generously includes and exploits within his *Metamorphoses*, as will be seen in later chapters. The liminal period exists after the deconstruction of the idea of a “state” and before its reconstruction. Therefore, we can imagine a space in which things appear to be contrary to social norms, or at least a space in which those norms or conventions are questioned. In fact, Turner writes that the condition of the individual undergoing the transformation “is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories.”\(^6\) In his anthropological studies, Turner describes that oftentimes monstrous or fantastic symbols or effigies are incorporated, vividly underscoring this lack of structure.

The explanation that Turner provides for the use of fantastical, absurd imagery in such rites is particularly useful for my purposes. He claims: “The second process, monster or fantasy-making, focuses attention on the components of the masks and effigies, which are so radically ill-assorted that they stand out and can be thought about...Liminality here breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation.”\(^7\) As will be seen in various scenes in the story of

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\(^6\) Turner 1967: 97

\(^7\) Turner 1967: 106
Cupid and Psyche and the initiations into the mysteries of Isis in Book 11, Apuleius takes great advantage of this opportunity for critical contemplation of social structures and statuses.

PROBLEMATIZING AND NEGOTIATING VAN GENNEP AND TURNER

Scholars in more recent times, such as Donald Weber, have pointed out and critiqued the limitations of the framework of liminality and have proposed the ways in which academia – particularly those disciplines related to cultural studies – have largely moved away from using it. Since the ideas of van Gennep and Turner are so significant to my analysis, it is both necessary and advantageous to discuss these critiques, how they relate to this examination of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, and how I intend employ ideas regarding liminality and negotiate the problems involved.

In his article “From Limen to Border: A Meditation on the Legacy of Victor Turner for American Cultural Studies,” Donald Weber points out a transition or displacement within cultural studies from Turner's theories to a reliance on “borderlands.” Basing much of his critique on the work of anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, he indicates that Turner's work appears to subscribe to a processual approach – that is, on a very basic level, anthropology which attempts to sort the world and human activity into processes.\(^8\) The post-processual school criticizes this methodology because it diminishes the complexity of humanity to simplicities and strict structures. Furthermore, perhaps one of the main rebuttals to the earlier anthropologist is that his model of liminality misses “a conception and recognition of culture as political contestation: the battle over narrative power, the fight over who gets to (re)tell the story, and from which position.”\(^9\) It is at this point where the language of “borderlands” supplants liminality because

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\(^8\) Weber 1995: 531  
\(^9\) Weber 1995: 532
borderlands take into account “those 'marginal' (now read as 'border') figures who resist incorporation.”¹⁰ This particular critique demonstrates that the idea of liminality as van Gennep and Turner describe it is in fact limited and does not take into consideration those individuals and groups who do not fit neatly into those processes.

Nevertheless, this debate will not be of great import to this examination of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Rather than serving as the end of the discussion, van Gennep and Turner’s liminality instead provide a vocabulary with which we can begin to understand the ancient work in one very specific way. I do not intend to argue that Apuleius intends to depict various rites of passage in order to communicate a single idea or meaning. Instead, we can use the language of liminality in order to uncover one interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*; the framework which van Gennep and Turner provide will serve as an entrance into the work. As will be seen, my approach will not limit the interpretive possibilities, but instead open them and recognize their mutual validity.

¹⁰ Weber 1995: 530
CHAPTER 1
DISCOVERING THE IN-BETWEENS:
LIMINALITY IN THE TALE OF CUPID AND PSYCHE

It should come as no surprise that Lucius' quest to (re-)metamorphose from the form of an ass, which resulted from his excessive curiosity, back to his human body has attracted audiences for well over a millennium. Perhaps even more than the work's framing tale, the story of Cupid and Psyche, the narrative within the narrative of Lucius, has itself enticed listeners and readers, and it furthermore has even inspired them to examine the work through both academic and artistic means. Rich in marvelous imagery and bereft of definitive answers to the many questions a reader might unearth in it, the fantastical narrative presents the willing audience with a seemingly open ground for exploration. In fact, scholars throughout time, such as James Tatum and Carl Schlam, have managed to interpret the work in such drastically different ways that there exists a significant amount of debate over countless features of the work, particularly on the section of Cupid and Psyche.

In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate that Apuleius does indeed have an interest in liminality and liminal ideas. If we examine these points at which this multiplicity of interpretations occurs, that interest begins to emerge. I address in the first section the way in which the author's construction of the actual text and his multi-layered structure of narrators creates a liminal space through extra-narrative features within which both the characters and the audience exist and act. Following this, I show that we can use van Gennep and Turner's language of liminality, specifically regarding rites of passage, in order to interpret in one particular way
Psyche's marriage with Death at the beginning of the tale and her metamorphosis to immortality at the end. In the third section, I discuss the relationship between liminality and one of the settings, Cupid palace, and how Apuleius' choice of such a setting displaces the peripheral to the center and thereby foregrounds the idea of liminality. Finally, I relate the multitude of arguments regarding the tale's genre to a specific section of the story – that of Psyche's tasks – in order to read Apuleius' use of liminality in a twofold fashion. First, the author employ liminal ideas and features in order to construct his narrative. Secondly, he then actually questions what it means to be “liminal.” This entire analysis provides the groundwork upon which chapters two and three build.

Before beginning this discussion, it is necessary to provide a general overview of the tale. The story of Cupid and Psyche occurs within the wider narrative regarding Lucius in a strikingly peculiar fashion. A band of thieves had stolen Lucius the ass, and they kidnapped a young woman. An old woman associated with the robbers attempts to console her, justifiably distraught and weeping, by telling her the story of the two mythical lovers, Cupid and Psyche. Those who are reading Apuleius' work for the first time – and perhaps even those already familiar with the old woman's tale – might view her choice as strikingly odd. For the majority of the narrative, the protagonist, Psyche, faces many losses, most at the hands of Venus, the mother of Cupid who is jealous of the mortal girl's beauty, but also even by her own sisters and by her own curiosity: the losses of her mortal family, her divine husband, and even her now will to live. Eventually, though, the couple's love for each other prevails, and Jupiter bestows upon them their happily-ever-after.

Upon finishing this mini-narrative in the wider *Metamorphoses*, the reader can see that
the tale seems remarkably out of place on a basic level, though it does possess some connections to the framing tale. The theme of misplaced curiosity is perhaps the most prominent of all. However, this appearance of detachment should prompt the audience to delve further into the work. After all, it would be difficult to imagine that Apuleius inserted the narrative haphazardly, without truly believing that it contained ideas that informed the framing tale, and the framing tale, it. However, this does not imply that readers must approach the *Golden Ass* in the same way, with the same frameworks, or search for similar interpretations. In fact, scholars have consistently argued about the significance of the Cupid and Psyche tale – both in and of itself and within the context of the framing story of Lucius; this merely indicates that there can exist multiple, equally valid and legitimate readings of the work. In this chapter, as well as in subsequent ones, I intend to use the ideas of liminality and liminal spaces to propose a particular reading of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*. Though such liminal spaces are typically conceived of as transitional, and therefore limited, they are in fact at the same time contradictory, open, and porous. Therefore, ultimately I aim to demonstrate that Apuleius is acutely aware of this fact, that he constantly is playing with the idea, and that he uses the liminal spaces he creates in order to invite the audience to read and re-read and become acutely aware of their own role in the relationship between author, work, and reader.

**FINDING LIMINALITY IN EXTRA-NARRATIVE AND NARRATOLOGICAL ELEMENTS**

While its content and style initially and superficially seem to starkly contrast with the framing tale, the story of Cupid and Psyche actually relates to the rest of the work in its inclusion of liminal spaces and ideas. One initial approach that the reader can take in understanding this
idea is to consider the actual construction of the work, rather than to delve straight into the content. Apuleius’ interest in liminality does not appear only in the story itself, but even in the extra-narrative elements. The position of the tale of Cupid and Psyche within the entire Golden Ass serves as a basic point of entry into an examination of the relationship between the work and liminality because it is a physical, visual representation of that very connection.

The space that the story occupies within the work possesses strong connections to basic ideas regarding liminality. Spanning from the middle of book four, throughout book five, and to the middle of book six, the tale lies precisely between the beginning and end of the eleven-book Metamorphoses. Traditionally, such a section would assume the title of “the middle,” and Apuleius's story is no exception – at least to a certain degree. However, when the audience considers the structure of the individual books that contain the story of the two lovers, it quickly becomes apparent that, like so much of the whole work, the author's treatment is much more complex and nuanced. As Apuleius reinforces narratological conventions by placing the tale evenly in the middle, he simultaneously complicates these very standards by beginning and ending it in the middle of books four and six rather than providing it with its own closed off sections. In this way, the position of the tale is three times liminal: the transition area between the beginning and the end of the entire work; the transition between the beginning and the end of book four; and, finally, the transition between the beginning and end of book six.

The fact that these beginnings and ends exist in places unexpected, then, defies the norm, allowing the story to concurrently subscribe in some regards and oppose in others. The audience can interpret Apuleius' choice of structuring the story in a variety of ways. Perhaps he is

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11 The sections following this one will discuss more specifically the relationship between liminality and the narrative content of the tale.
12 Smith 1998: 69
constructing the work conventionally by placing the internal narrative in the middle of the entire work, and then deconstructs the tradition by placing the story's beginning and ends in strange spaces. However, the exact opposite is equally possible. In fact, it does not seem that Apuleius provides any explicit (or even implicit) indication of which – if either of those – he is doing. Rather, more important is the fact that he has created a liminal space by positioning the tale in such an ambiguous way. This ambiguity incites questions regarding the work, invites readers to imagine the multitude of interpretations. In this process, the audience potentially gains a heightened awareness of their own readership, of the role that they play in discovering the meaning(s) of the work.

In a similar fashion and concerning another narratological element, Apuleius creates intricate, complex, and interwoven layers of narrators that the reader cannot easily unravel – if they even can or are meant to at all. In order to understand how this functions in the Cupid and Psyche story specifically, it is necessary to first briefly discuss the nature of the narrator of the framing tale. It significantly begins with an unnamed, unknown, and ambiguous narrator. Using the first person (ego, Met. 1.1), the narrator does not provide any hints as to his or her identity, but simply states that they intend to recount a fantastical tale of transformations. It is not until later that he reveals his name, Lucius, and then much later that he comes from Madaurus, which is where the author Apuleius was from. Due to these similarities of name and origin, the reader might feel the urge to conflate the voice of Lucius with that of the author. However, as some scholars have shown, making such an association is not always valid since readers cannot truly measure to what degree – if at all – Apuleius inserts his own voice into the work or what what

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13 Apuleius’s full name was Lucius Apuleius Madaurensis.
specific points such interjections occur. Nevertheless, what is definite is that we can identify two entities: Lucius and Apuleius. The degree to which the two conflate and the porousness of the boundary between the two are debatable points, but it is sure that there exist at the very least an author of the actual *Metamorphoses* and the primary narrator within the work.

This construction of narrators becomes even more complex in the context of the Cupid and Psyche episode because the author adds to the mix another layer, the old drunken woman who attempts to soothe the kidnapped girl. At this point, the reader can never completely identify from which voice(s) or perspective(s) they receive the words: are they those of the old woman, or are they mediated through Lucius and/or the author? In this way, Apuleius has mirrored his technique in his positioning of the section in his layering of the narrator(s). Although he conforms to the practice of using an embodied narrator, he plays with both this concept and with his audience to such an excessive degree that this too becomes a place of uncertainty. The “embodiment” refers to the old woman, who in one sense is a homodiegetic narrator because she exists as a character and type of narrator within the framing tale. However, she is also simultaneously a heterodiegetic one because she does not participate in the story of Cupid and Psyche. In this way, Apuleius-the-author's creation of a liminal space through the odd positioning of the tale contains features that exhibit liminal qualities – in this case, the blurring of the boundaries that traditionally divide narrators into separate entities and those that concretely classify them into particular types (either heterodiegetic or homodiegetic).

In their article “The Many Voices in *Cupid and Psyche*,” Danielle van Mal-Maeder and Maaike Zimmerman provide a particularly substantial discussion of the old woman, whom they

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15 That is, she is an embodied voice as opposed to an omniscient narrator who does not participate in the events.
refer to as the *anus*-narratrix, and how Apuleius uses his layers of narrators to subtly limit the knowledge available to the audience. They acknowledge that the *anus*-narratrix sets herself apart from the framing tale because she is more or less authoritative. However, despite this discrepancy, they argue that “the author, Apuleius, this time through an 'omniscient' subnarrator, the *anus*-narratrix, firmly controls the information conveyed to us, and applies much the same narrative technique to guide our reading as he does in the framing tale through his homodiegetic-actorial narrator, Lucius.”\footnote{Van Mal-Maeder et al. 1998: 84} In this way, Apuleius continues his process of superficially appearing to conform to traditional narratological conventions while actually potentially subverting them.

The author almost tricks the audience to believe that they share that pansophical perspective with the old woman when, in reality, he dictates the amount of knowledge they receive and when they can know it. Once the reader becomes aware of this, they then become more actively conscious of their own role and participation as readers, acutely questioning what information the author does or might not provide.

Not only can the reader view Apuleius's manipulation of the position of the tale and his multi-layered structure of narrators as elements that create a liminal space, but they can also understand them as the author's representation of the type of environment that exists within such spaces. Perhaps for Apuleius, these liminal spaces – which he here constructs in one way through his positioning of the tale – are a world turned upside-down, in which conventions, such as the nature of narrators, are mixed in such a way that they become strange or ambiguous.

**PSYCHE’S RITES OF PASSAGE**

Having thusly discussed the relationship between liminality and extra-narrative elements
of the Cupid and Psyche tale, it would now be advantageous to address some of the ways in which van Gennep's and Turner's ideas of rites of passage, as related to liminality, inform a reading of the section. It is important to acknowledge that the instances of such rites are not limited to those discussed here; they, in fact, appear throughout the old woman's story. I have chosen these in particular because they arguably have significance throughout the entire narration, rather than containing more limited or singular importance.

One of the first and most prominent rites that Psyche undergoes occurs at the beginning of the narrative: her wedding with Death. Her father, a king, eventually consults an oracle of Apollo because she, his most attractive daughter, has received no suitors – unbeknownst to them due to Venus' jealousy and wrath. Apollo answers him by declaring that Psyche is doomed to a marriage with a move unenviable, undesirable being – with Death. In many ways, a girl's marriage signals her metamorphosis from her youth to her womanhood. A wedding would indeed subscribe to van Gennep's discussion of liminal spaces as interstructural or interstitial; the girl is neither maiden nor wife, but somewhere in-between. However, Apuleius immediately unsettles the audience's expectations by transforming what typically could begin a kind of new life to a transition that essentially would end it. Apollo instructs her father, the king: montis in excelsi scopulo, rex, siste puellam / ornatam mundo funerei thalami (“Set on the lofty cliff of the mountain, king, the girl, prepared with the dress of a funerary marriage-bed,” *Met.* 4.33).

Stylistically juxtaposing two incongruent ideas in immediate proximity, the phrase *funereus thalamus* (“funerary marriage-bed”) sounds almost oxymoronic. The concept itself calls forth simultaneously and concurrently two significant rites, both with liminal implications: marriage and death. What does it mean, then, that the author inverts this ubiquitous and vital rite?

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17 *Van Gennep devotes an entire chapter of his Rites de passage to betrothal and marriage.*
Instead of dedicating a significant amount of focus to her status as a maiden at the beginning of the ceremony or her wifehood after, Apuleius actually details to a marked degree the actual period of transition, the liminal space. He describes at length the ceremony while Psyche marches to her new life in death, and the author introduces it by characterizing the event as dirae sortis...taeter effectus (“the hideous execution of the awful lot”).\footnote{Met. 4.33} What might often seem most critical to the reader would be the individual's initial state and the final product after the transformation – not the actual period of metamorphosis or rites it involves. In this way, the ceremony itself occupies a marginal space: not only is it potentially marginal in the minds of the readers, but it also appears less interesting or significant in the grand scheme of the plot. However, true to form and to his subject of metamorphoses, Apuleius here transports the marginal to the center, much like when he places a mini-narrative (that of Cupid and Psyche, arguably a digression from the framing tale) at the very center of his work. In this way, Psyche occupies a liminal space; or, rather, she exists within a liminal space and is subject to its constant motions, changes, and lawlessness. There is something not only haunting about the idea of a marriage with Death, but also innately incongruent or backwards. The various aspects of the production imitate the absurdity of the situation: the juxtaposed characterizations of the event as both funerary and matrimonial (feralium nuptiarum, “funereal nuptials”), the traditional marriage instruments altered to be befitting of Death (taedae lumen atrae fuliginis cinere marcescit, et sonus tibiae zygiae mutatur in querulum Ludii modum, “the light of the torch becomes weak with the ash of black soot, and the sound of the marriage flute was changed into the querulous Lydian mode”), and the wedding songs accompanied by ululations that recall depictions of women beating their chests and wailing at funeral processions (cantusque laetus...
hymenaei lugubri finitur ululatu, “the happy singing of the wedding song was finish with mournful ululations). 19 Similarly to the phrase funereus thalamus in Apollo's instructions to the king, Apuleius again repeats a construction that juxtaposes opposites, such as feralium nuptiarum, lumen atrae, and laetus...lugubri, for the same effect.

Furthermore, Apuleius' description of Psyche as a uiiuum funus (“a living corpse”) 20 punctuates the author's utilization of liminal themes in a remarkably simple, albeit morbid, way, and it also calls forth Turner's discussion of fantastical imagery in the in-between states. Though concerned more with an anthropological application of his ideas, the scholar's ideas are equally pertinent here: “The second process, monster- or fantasy-making, focuses attention on the components of the masks and effigies, which are so radically ill-assorted that they stand out and can be thought about...Liminality here breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation.” 21 The idea of this character as a “living corpse” is indeed a monstrous image, but on many levels it encourages the reader to question – if not their own spiritual customs, then at least how their understanding of religion interacts with Psyche's metamorphoses. Again, Apuleius does not necessarily propose a definitive response to this speculation, but rather allows room for a variety of readings.

In true Apuleian fashion, the author once more leads the audience to into a false sense of understanding. It is not until the ending of the tale in book six that they realize that the wedding, which had began earlier in the fourth book, actually finishes much later. Specifically, this epiphany occurs in the scene in which Cupid, fearing his mother, goes to Jupiter and begs for help. The god responds by informing Venus that he would ensure that the marriage between

19 Met. 4.33
20 Met. 4.34
21 Turner 1967: 106
Cupid and Psyche would not be shameful or unequal. He therefore makes Psyche immortal, and the tale then ends with a joyous wedding banquet, bountiful with music, dancing, and nectars, and with the birth of the couple's divine daughter, Pleasure. It is only when Jupiter finally makes Psyche immortal (*sume...Psyche, et immortalis esto*, “Take [this cup of ambrosia], Psyche, and be immortal”)\(^{22}\) that the marriage becomes legitimate and the couple become two equals; when he gives Psyche the cup of ambrosia and she drinks it, the rite finishes. In this way, Apuleius completely and unexpectedly reforms the reader's perception of the entire mini-narrative, from the beginning to Psyche's betrayal of her lover through her tasks and up to the end. Previously, it seemed as if Psyche's marriage ceremonies ended when Zephyr swept her off to Cupid's palace. However, it actually finishes in this scene with the gods. In this way, the whole narration can be read as focusing on a liminal space, the period of transition from maiden to legitimate wife.

Having recalled Psyche's marriage with Death, Apuleius then allows the earlier scene to inform Psyche's transformation from a mortal to immortal being in a complex fashion. The narrator yet again subverts the audience’s predictions: although Psyche has not technically died, she has indeed experienced a sort of “death.” In this way, the storyteller presents us with two scenes that simultaneously contrast with and validate one another. The death of the mortal Psyche has indeed occurred, just not concluding with the expected results. Instead, Psyche metamorphoses into an immortal being, which in her particular situation becomes a space that is wholly outside of life and death. It is indeed a liminal space in the sense that death neither exists nor does not exist in it. Immortality can be characterized as either the never-ending absence of death or the eternity of life, but really neither characterization is wholly definitive or complete. Therefore, the scene, though brief, is replete with layers of liminality: the period of transition

\(^{22}\) *Met.* 6.23
between mortality to immortality, the completion of a rite of passage, and the state itself of being immortal.

Such a discussion of the connection between the beginning and ending of the tale of Cupid and Psyche provides an opportune segue to examine one specific debate concerning various readings of the story. In his work *Apuleius and The Golden Ass*, James Tatum signals an allegorical interpretation as the most important: “...the names of the characters point us toward the most significant meaning of all. A myth about Soul and Love can pose a universal statement about all human souls, all human desires.”

He later elaborates on this idea, stating, “Through the birth of a child named Voluptas (Pleasure, or perhaps Joy), we infer that true happiness cannot come into being until such a time as Soul acquires knowledge of the divine.” While such a reading is entirely valid, and will in fact be useful in the following chapter in the discussion of an artistic representation of the tale, it is problematic to claim that this particular allegorical reading is the most significant. Proposing that one reading is more important than others seems largely contradictory and antithetical to what Apuleius is doing and his employment of liminality – that is, creating a space where the possibilities are endless and constantly changing, shifting.

In fact, Carl Schlam addresses this very issue in his work *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius: On Making an Ass of Oneself*. He argues:

Thus in the Apuleian narrative an assemblage of incidents, such as a marriage subject to a taboo and a series of tests to recover a lost mate, is cast to tell a story of Love and the Soul, figures who bring with them a mass of religious and philosophic associations. The tale can be read and enjoyed without such interpretations, but this does not exclude or invalidate them.”

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23 Tatum 1979: 54
24 Tatum 1979: 61
25 Schlam 1992: 90
Unlike Tatum, he recognizes a fundamental feature of Apuleius' work: it encourages multiple, possibly contradictory interpretations of the text. Therefore, claiming that a single meaning is more important directly opposes the ideas of liminality with which Apuleius plays because it limits and delegitimizes the plethora of readings. In fact, Schlam advises against attempting to find consistent allegory in every detail of the story because it potentially would “lose sight of the multifaceted qualities of the text.”

A multiplicity of interpretations flourishes within the text because the liminal space allows for questions to be posed, but not necessarily for answers to be given; Turner indicates this when he discusses how the liminal period of a transition allows for the normative social structure of a community to come under scrutiny and to be deconstructed.

In his foundational work *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' Golden Ass*, John Winkler presents this idea of the book asking questions that Apuleius does not answer.

One way of reading the general premise of the tale of Cupid and Psyche, then, is as a moment in which the author consistently lures the reader into a false sense of security in their expectations, but then ultimately subverts those very expectation. It seems as if Apollo condemns Psyche to death, but in fact the reader discovers at the end that she achieves neither life nor death: she becomes immortal. The entire story appears to be a version of the rites of passage which Turner and van Gennep later analyze, and it therefore possesses liminal features of absurdity, ambiguity, backwardness, and multiplicity of meanings.

**CENTERING THE MARGINAL: CUPID'S PALACE**

26 Schlam 1992: 96
27 Turner 1967: 106
28 Winkler 1985: 179
In the previous sections, it became apparent that liminality does indeed provide a vocabulary useful for reading and interpreting the Cupid and Psyche tale in a particular way. This section, then, expands upon the idea that Apuleius foregrounds liminal spaces, taking them from the margins to the center of focus. Though I have previously mentioned this concept, this discussion about the relationship between setting and liminality demonstrates that this inversion of the center-periphery dichotomy becomes a crucial factor to the tale – and really to the entire work – because it indicates that liminal elements permeate throughout the narrative and connect narratological components with the content.

Unsurprisingly, Turner's discussion of the relationship between marginality and liminality becomes significant when considering one of the primary settings of the Cupid and Psyche tale, Cupid's palace. The narrator describes at the end of book four that after Psyche's family and other mourners finish the combination marriage-funeral rites, they abandon her on a cliff, and Zephyr sweeps her away to the palace of her new husband, who is actually Cupid. Throughout a large section of the narrative, the god, concealing his identity from his new wife and addressing her as merely a voice, interacts with Psyche within this space, signaling that it deserves investigation. Although her journey to the palace is brief and its implications subtle, this small scene of Zephyr transporting this story's protagonist could potentially indicate the definitive point in which Psyche moves from the center to the periphery, which is characteristic of a liminal space. She theoretically moves from her known homeland to an unknown palace. However, since Cupid's palace becomes the focus and setting of major plot points, Apuleius complicates the marginality of this supposedly liminal setting by moving that space exactly to the center of the reader's
In this way, the narrative innovatively subverts the audience’s preconceived expectations of what it means to be “liminal.” Just as the author deconstructs narratological conventions and rites of passage by examining them through the lens of liminality, so too does he deconstruct and call into question the idea of liminality itself; it almost appears as if even the theory is subject to its own absurdity. In foregrounding the periphery, he forces the reader to consider those spaces of the narrative that would typically go unexamined or unexplored. Although the audience has up to this point gained a significant amount of information that serves as the foundation of the rest of the story, the true focus is what occurs within the confines of Cupid and Psyche’s palace, this space physically at the margins, away from the familiarity of Psyche’s home.

It is also worth noting that Psyche’s transition to the palace occurs while she is sleeping, also considered to be a liminal space, somewhere between consciousness and unconsciousness. Furthermore, it takes place between the fourth and the fifth books; she falls asleep at the end of the former and wakes up at the palace in beginning of the latter. Though not necessarily significant points regarding the larger discussion of the relationship between liminality and the tale, these two elements do perhaps demonstrate the more subtle ways in which Apuleius continues to include features that readers can interpret as liminal.

In his article “Cupid and Psyche Tale: Mirror of the Novel,” Warren Smith points out the

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29 We have already seen instances of the author doing this before, such as his placement of the digressive narrative of Cupid and Psyche at the center of the entire work and his choice to foreground the actual ceremonies, the liminal space, of the girl’s marriage with Death.

30 In the preface of his 2012 collection of essays and stories, entitled At the Borders of Sleep: On Liminal Literature, Peter Schwenger proposes the idea that sleep is a liminal state. Using language that evokes Turner and van Gennep, he writes: “Things are different on the far side of sleep, where one subscribes without question to the logic, or antilogic, of the dream world, only seeking to make sense of it later on, in the daylight. For this reason – that at the hither side of sleep one can watch the very transition from reason to something beyond reason – it has seemed worthwhile to investigate the various manifestations of this threshold or liminal state” (xi).
literary significance of the relationship between character and setting. He claims that “dwelling places often help define their inhabitants, as their geographical situation may call attention to dubious aspects of their character.” If this is accurate, his words further inform our reading of Psyche’s transition into a new setting. It then seems fitting that Zephyr transports the girl there during a rite of passage, her marriage with Death, because the palace itself exists on the periphery as a liminal space. Since her passage into a liminal space – that between maidenhood and being a wife, as seen through the ceremony – is arguably one of the significant subjects of the tale, it makes sense that the trend of liminal elements would continue and therefore that the palace, one of the primary settings, lies on the margins. While she passes through the liminal period of one of her rites of passage, she necessarily transitions into a marginal, liminal location.

The narrator's description of the palace reflects the place's unfamiliarity – a potential characteristic of liminal spaces – which suggests that s/he identifies liminal spaces as strange in some form. S/he states that “a palace was built not by human hands, but by divine arts” (regia est aedificata non humanis sed diuinis artibus). This description, along with the fact that the narrator later states that it might be the house of “a man, nay, a demigod, or certainly a dog” (homo immo semideus uel certe deus) points to the fact that the narrator and therefore the audience never actually discover who exactly constructed the palace. The text itself indicates that even the narrator questions the identity of its maker, recognizing at the very least that it was not the work of a human. Consistent with the idea that ambiguity is present in the liminal state, the palace necessarily exhibits such uncertainty with regard to the identity of its designer and

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31 Smith 1998: 70
32 “S/he” is used because of the discussion regarding the layers of narrators and their ambiguity in section 1.
33 Met. 5.1
34 Met. 5.1
architect.

Smith's discussion yet again provides us with a more meaningful insight into the description of the palace and its arguably liminal position with regard to its relationship to the rest of the work. He claims that “the ominous nature of the settings outside the tale are balanced by Cupid's beautiful and lavish palace...which promises a blessing...and ineffable pleasures to those who enter.” Initially, this idea of balance may appear incongruent with the previous interpretation of the palace as a peripheral space. After all, do Turner and van Gennep not claim that liminal settings in fact resist and even reject the balance and rigidity that typical social structures dictate? The narrator responds to this question by yet again complicating and, this time, expanding their definition of liminality. In one sense, s/he asserts that this kind of balance must necessarily exist because the not-liminal, the central, must by its nature have the liminal, the marginal, as its complement. However, on the other hand, s/he reemphasizes just how liminal the palace is by starkly contrasting it with the other settings of the larger novel. Regarding this, though, the narrator(s) reverse(s) conventional expectations of the relationship between primary and more secondary settings. One would imagine that the former would be the beautiful ones, and the latter would be the more grotesque or ominous. That is not in the case in Apuleius's work. Instead, no attention is given to any other settings in the Cupid and Psyche tale; the narrator dedicates all to the magnificent decadence of Venus' son's palace.

Just as the setting of the palace informs the characterization of Psyche, so too must it serve the very same function for its actual inhabitant: Cupid. The narrator devotes extensive detail to the sheer opulence of the space, describing the silver reliefs of animals, the tiles made of precious stones, the walls of gold, and the extravagant household goods. Surely this is reflective

35 Smith 1998: 70
of the character of the god: lavish and ostentatious. It is for this very fact that the relationship between Cupid and Psyche begins to become particularly odd. Immediately after the description, the narrator recounts: inuitata Psyche talium locorum oblectatione propius accessit et paulo fidentior intra limen sese facit (“Allured by the delight of such places, Psyche approaches nearer and, a bit more confidently, she crosses the threshold.”)\(^{36}\) No notion of love of Cupid attracts her, but rather the delights of the palace entice (inuitata...talium locorum oblectatione) her. Their love story does not begin through emotion, but rather is predicated on materiality. This scene serves as one of the first signs of the relationship between the two characters, and it implies that their relationship does not derive from pure, amorous emotions. One possible way of reading this is as the liminal space's effect on the concept of love; love based on something other than an emotional connect, which is the social norm, is not what occurs in the story, and instead enticement, an opposite of love, becomes that very norm.

Furthermore, the word limen is specifically used within this sentence. While many translate intra limen sese facit as “she crosses the threshold” and I myself have done so above for a fluid English reading, it is interesting to render it in a much more literal fashion. Taking a basic meaning of intra, the phrase could be translated as “she moves herself within the threshold.” The language is revealing because it explicitly identifies Psyche within this state of liminality and transition. Rather than use a phrase such as limen transit,\(^{37}\) which would imply a more complete action of crossing, the narrator chooses the more ambiguous preposition intra. Though subtle, the phrase clearly marks Apuleius' interest in liminality and establishes Psyche's entrance into the palace as a liminal experience, almost a rite of passage.

\(^{36}\) Met. 5.2
\(^{37}\) Seneca states writes ille multis annis non transit domus suae limen in his Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium 68.5.4-5.
In this way, the setting of Cupid's palace comes to collect and reflect many of the elements that have appeared thus far – one of the more prominent ones being the movement of the liminal from the margins to the center. However, one idea that is perhaps more significant and is in fact connected to this is that it is possible to interpret such a choice of the author as a sign of calling ideas of liminality into question. At the very least it reflects in the more theoretical world the same playfulness, perhaps arising from the process of social deconstruction in the liminal space, that the world of Cupid and Psyche exhibits.

THE GENRE OF THE CUPID AND PSYCHE TALE: PROBLEMATIZING PSYCHE’S METAMORPHOSIS

One of the major topics of discussion that has sparked a significant amount of debate has been how to determine the genre of the *Metamorphoses*. If the author were to have not included the tale of Cupid and Psyche, such a task would probably be much less challenging. However, as I have previously demonstrated multiple times, the reader can sense even on a first read the great disconnect between the framing story and the mini-narrative, which allows the work to resist easy categorization; the comedic element that is so crucial in the former is almost completely absent from the latter. On the whole, the Cupid and Psyche section seems to possess a much “higher,” refined style than the more vulgar story about Lucius.

This discussion of genre is important for two reasons. First, Apuleius's decision to mix multiple literary styles, at times vastly different, serves as an example of the way in which the author further reinforces a conception of what occurs in liminal spaces, where all things mix in strange fashions. Secondly, it allows us to point to Psyche's tasks as point at which this question of genre become prevalent because it contains markedly epic elements in the context of a largely
un-epic, “low” tale. Carl Schlam remarks on the commonality of this choice: “Themes and incidents in the novels are often rooted in epic, though the characters are frequently unheroic. The epic journey, in which the hero, or both the hero and heroine, undergo all sorts of misfortunes, became a standard narrative pattern in the novels.”

In fact, in a way the character's tasks hearken back to the earlier discussion of liminality and rites of passage; the trials seem to be a continuation of pieces of Psyche's rites.

Before continuing this discussion, it is necessary to first briefly summarize this part of the tale in book six. Having betrayed Cupid's trust because she believed her sisters' trickery and having attempted to discover the identity of her husband, Psyche loses Cupid, and she therefore wanders in search for help to find him. Nevertheless, Venus manages to find the mortal girl first and swiftly beats her. The goddess then forces her to perform four sequential tests: sorting a heap of grains, taking golden wool from particularly feisty sheep, retrieving water from a spring near the source of the Styx and the Cocytus, and finally carrying from the Underworld to Venus a box of supposedly Proserpina's beauty, though in reality it full of a Stygian sleep. In the first three tasks, the destitute Psyche requires the assistance of other entities, unable to complete them on her own. She ultimately succumbs to her own curiosity once again in the forth, and the Stygian sleep washes over her.

The anus-narratrix's account of Psyche's various tasks supports an interpretation of the tale as Apuleius's way of connecting the liminal and the incongruent, unconventional, and backwards. Arguably, this section as a whole serves as what traditionally would be the period in which the character should experience their metamorphosis, enduring great difficulties while crossing through the liminal space. In this way, Psyche's tasks reflect those of the epic, heroic

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38 Schlam 1992: 19
tradition; the twelve labors of Hercules come to mind as perhaps the most famous of such endeavors. However, the fact that such a trope typical of epic writing is housed within the framework of a comedy highlights just how out of place and strange Psyche's quests are. Though discussing the framing tale of Lucius rather than the story of Psyche, Silvia Montiglio's analysis in her article “You Can't Go Home Again: Lucius' Journey in Apuleius' Metamorphoses Set Again the Background of the Odyssey” resonates similarly in this case. She states that “Apuleius has exploited both the Odyssey and contemporary philosophical interpretations of its protagonist for comic effects,” that “Lucius is only superficially like Odysseus,” and that Lucius is in fact “almost the opposite of Odysseus.”39 Though Lucius might not see the parallels between himself and Psyche, their share at the very least a fundamental flaw, curiosity, which allows us to consider Montiglio's discussion in relation to Cupid's wife. Much like Odysseus journeying home and experiencing difficulties, Psyche too endures a similar fate, though, unbeknownst to her, her home is immortality. Therefore, Apuleius conflates two remarkably different genres within his liminal space, illuminating just how dramatically changeable and unsure it is.

The specific content of the tasks further underscore this incongruity, and furthermore forces the audience to question whether or not Psyche experiences a “traditional” metamorphosis – or even if she experiences one at all. The points that are most necessary for this discussion are the following: 1) a group of ants sort the heap of grains; 2) a marsh reed instructs Psyche on how to safely obtain the golden wool; 3) Jupiter's eagle retrieves the water of the Styx from the black spring on the mountain for Psyche; and 4) the tower from which Psyche intends to throw herself tells her exactly how to obtain the box of beauty from Proserpina. What is one glaring factor all of the trials share? The fact that Psyche completes none of them by herself. While it perhaps is

39 Montiglio 2007: 111
not necessary for her to do them alone in order to experience a metamorphosis, the reader has the impression that she would otherwise not be able to fulfill Venus' commands if not for the help, which in some cases actually do the entire task for her. Therefore, the character of Psyche, self-pitying and desiring to quit along the way, complicates the idea of the epic hero enduring – and, ultimately, overcoming – grueling quests. In a way, Apuleius deconstructs the convention by initially creating a framework that appears similar to that of the epic, but then ultimately presenting an oppositional image – a rather incompetent protagonist.

Furthermore, the final task – retrieving Proserpina's beauty from the Underworld – suggests that Psyche's experiences (or, perhaps, lack of experiences) in fact have not forced her to undergo any transformation whatsoever. Instead of maturely heeding the tower's instructions, she – because of her *curiositas* – opens the box to find not beauty, but rather a Stygian sleep. Her actions and words explicitly indicate that she at this point in the narrative remains the same naïve girl (*inepta ego*, “I, inept...”),\(^{40}\) subject to her uncontrollable whims, that she was at the very beginning of the tale. Thus far, the liminal space has not transformed her, as it Turner and van Gennep's theories of liminality dictate that it restructures the entity (whether individual or group) during the re-aggregation period. Therefore, this fact should also serve as a sign to the reader that the third period of the rites of passage has not yet commenced and that the metamorphosis has not yet exited the liminal state.

However, despite the fact that it appears that she has not experienced a metamorphosis through the completion of these tasks, the consequences of her naïve actions in fact suggest the opposite, especially if we keep in mind that she was experiencing a “wedding with Death” at the beginning of the tale. The narrator describes that Psyche cannot resist using a small piece of

\(^{40}\) *Met.* 6.20
Proserpina's beauty, which she had retrieved for Venus, and she therefore opens it to find something but a Stygian sleep, which overcomes her. Psyche herself, then, perhaps seems to have arrived at the end – or at least near the completion point – of her marriage with Death, appearing to be dead herself (cadauer). Therefore, the reader can interpret this scene as the “beginning of the end” of her transformation (since Jupiter has not quite yet turned her immortal, though that occurs very soon after). This is interesting because it is not through newfound virtue that she changes, but rather through her vice, her curiositas. Through this narration, Apuleius once again challenges preconceived notions of what constitutes a metamorphosis and how a metamorphosis can come about (that is, by virtuous or respectable means). The marriage with Death scene and the end of this final task serve as the limina which frame the liminal space in which Psyche should experience her transformation. However, Apuleius forces the audience to consider the degree to which Psyche transformed – if at all – and how much of that transformation was through her own doing. In fact, Cupid's words once he finds Psyche in her Stygian sleep suggest that she has not changed; he refers to her as a misella (“poor wretch”),

punctuating her lack of sensibility or change by using the diminutive. By forcing the reader to think about such questions – questions to which answers are typically taken for granted – the author contributes to the oddity of his entire work, and furthermore suggests that the reader should likewise look as critically at the framing tale of Lucius as they have within that of Cupid and Psyche.

Thusly, Apuleius considers 'liminality' in two major ways. The first is that, when utilized in conventional means, it serves as a means by which he can construct his comedic, absurd tale. The second way is almost paradoxical to the first: his use of 'liminality' in fact questions what it

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41 Met. 6.21; It is also interesting to note that Apuleius uses this same epithet to describe Psyche during her marriage with Death at the beginning of the tale (4.34.1). In this way, the reader is reminded of the beginning, and there appears to be a sense of ominous symmetry to the work.
means to be 'liminal.'

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter has been deceptively simple: to demonstrate that Apuleius is indeed interested in ideas of liminality. Though prevalent and pervasive in the Cupid and Psyche tale, such an interest does indeed appear throughout the entirety of the work. Not only does this story serve as a microcosm for the myriad ways that liminality and liminal spaces appear in the rest of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, it also offers the reader an entrance point into such a discussion because of the way in which it seems to be a digression or, at least, it sets itself apart from the story about Lucius.

Apart from discovering how a close examination of extra-narrative features, various instances of rites of passage, and setting allow us to see how liminality functions within the work, perhaps one of the most significant findings of this chapter is the fact that the story of these two fated lovers has sparked such heated debate. Schlam writes: “Thus in the Apuleian narrative an assemblage of incidents, such as a marriage subject to a taboo and a series of tests to recover a lost mate, is cast to tell a story of Love and the Soul, figures who bring with them a mass of religious and philosophic associations. The tale can be read and enjoyed without such interpretations, but this does not exclude or invalidate them.” 42 We can understand the liminal space as one in which Apuleius can play with ideas and, therefore, in which the audience can act similarly. The author permits – even encourages – us to play, to imagine, and to propose new ways of thinking about the story. It is from this sort of multiplicity of interpretations that the

42 Schlam 1992: 90
CHAPTER 2
RE-IMAGINING THE TEXT: READING GILUIO ROMANO'S SALA DI AMORE E PSICHE THROUGH A LIMINAL LENS

As I related in the introduction to this study, my initial interest in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* derived from a visit to the Palazzo Te in Mantua, Italy, and from one particular room, the Sala di Amore e Psiche, enticing the classicist within me. In retrospect, my experience was akin to that of Psyche in many ways. A veritable Zephyr (that is, my art history professor, Dr. Vera Fortunati) swept up me and my classmates, and she brought us to an elaborate, unknown, and mysterious palace. Her voice (albeit not disembodied like Cupid's) guided us through the halls, and her commanding expertise implicitly warned us to not betray her knowledge or trust.

After moving the room to the back of my mind for a time and ultimately upon returning to it for this examination, I discovered that there exists a wide variety of ways that audiences have received and interpreted the work of the artist, Giulio Romano. Some, like Frederick Hartt, encourage neoplatonic readings, while others, such as Rodolfo Signorini, offer seemingly straightforward ideas that are tied more closely with the estate's historical context and with Apuleius' work.\(^{43}\) In this way, ancient text, art, and the viewer's experience intersect in an interesting and significant manner. By placing in the same context and juxtaposing various scenes and narratives in unconventional ways, Romano appears – in one possible reading – to reflect and re-imagine the ancient source text and the way in which Apuleius uses liminal

\(^{43}\) I will provide fuller explanations of these interpretations at the end of this chapter.
features with the result of providing a (liminal) space where the audience can creatively interpret the images.

According to Victor Turner, “The neophytes are sometimes said to 'be in another place.' They have physical but not social 'reality,' hence they have to be hidden, since it is a paradox, a scandal, to see what ought not to be there!”\(^{44}\) Though referring to the experiences of religious initiates, it is possible image this explanation as a way to examine the process of visiting the Palazzo and the Sala di Amore e Psiche. In this chapter we are transported to the site and into a liminal space, away from our social reality, and I analyze the ways in which the estate, its design, the artwork, and the resulting interpretations create dialogues between themselves that allow us as viewers to “see what ought not to be there,” to see the possibilities.

**HISTORY OF FEDERICO II GONZAGA AND PALAZZO TE**

The Palazzo Te was constructed between 1524 and 1534 for Federico II Gonzaga, Marquess (later, Duke) of Mantua. Federico II commissioned Giulio Romano to design the palace and its interior artworks. The Marquess' decision is indicative of both his relationship to his mother, Isabella d'Este, and of the artistic atmosphere of the period. Isabella was a major cultural figure during the Italian Renaissance and was a patron of the arts, and she passed this taste for artistry on to Federico, for whom she governed Mantua as regent for a time. According to Gian Maria Erbesato, unlike his mother Federico II understood “l'autonomia e la libertà creativa,” the autonomy and creative liberty, of artists.\(^{45}\) Though a pupil of Raphael and therefore learned in high Renaissance classicism, Romano could easily adapt to this new, less rigid image

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\(^{44}\) Turner 1967: 98
\(^{45}\) Erbesato 1981: 6
of artists, he would appear appropriate for the job and Federico's tastes.

Similarly important is Federico's tumultuous marriage history. After Isabella d'Este's regency, her son signed nuptial contracts to marry Maria Palaeologina, heiress to the Marquisate of Monteferrat. However, Pope Clement VII annulled this marriage at Federico's request because Maria was supposedly involved in a plot to poison Isabella Boschetti, Federico's long-time mistress. He then married Julia of Aragon, the third cousin of Emperor Carlo V, and thereby gained the title of Duke. Nevertheless, he yet again managed to cancel the marriage contract when he discovered that the father of Maria, his first wife, had died. However, Maria also died, and he therefore married her sister, Margaret, in 1531. In this way, the image of a man with significant political clout or influence – a man able to persuade the pope to grant him multiple nullifications of marriage contracts – and full of ambition, constantly seeking to climb the social hierarchy and to gain more power, begins to appear.

Hypotheses concerning the reasons for the construction of the palazzo are intertwined within Federico II Gonzaga's relationships. Despite the fact that no writing by or to the man indicates a specific explanation, Egon Verheyen claims that Giorgio Vasari, author of the foundational *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, reported that “the marquis wanted a villa for his pleasure but that when he saw what Giulio [Romano] had created he decided to transform this villa into a large palace.” This indicates two important points: first, that one of the main functions of the palazzo was its ability to offer Federico pleasure and respite, and, secondly, that the man found Romano's work so exceptional or, at the very least, attractive that he expanded the project. Whether or not these points are completely valid is

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46 Verheyen 1977: 18-19
47 Verheyen 1977: 16
debatable since they do not come from Federico himself. Nevertheless, the intricacies of the building support Vasari’s ideas, as will be seen later.

Scholars have often connected the “pleasure” aspect with the Duke's lengthy affair with his mistress, Isabella Boschetti. In fact, some argue that one of the primary functions of the Palazzo Te was to house their relationship. Verheyen claims: “It has already been suggested that we see the construction of the villa on the Isola del Te in connection with Federigo's love affair with Isabella Boschetti, assuming that the apartment in the villa was prepared as a place where she could meet with Federigo away from the eyes of her husband, Francesco Calvisano Gonzaga, and Federigo's mother, Isabella d'Este.” He then continues on to report that one possible piece of support for this idea is that the estate had space for a single apartment in the western half of the building; most of the other areas were probably used for entertainment. Furthermore, though he does not provide it as evidence, the very location of the palazzo corroborates the interpretation of the structure as a “pleasure palace.” Unlike modern-day Mantua, in the time of Federico, “the city then found itself composed of two large islands, completely surrounded by lakes. Only a canal, the Rio, divided the islands from each other, while a third island, the Te, intervened between the city and the mainland.” Situated on its own secluded island, the estate would therefore seem to be a sort of haven or retreat for the couple.

Up until this point, there has been significant focus on the history behind the building and its commissioning family, so its connection to the work being done here might be vague. However, the Palazzo's separated location provides an opportune moment to introduce the idea of liminality into the discussion and as a point of entry that situates the estate in this study.

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48 Verheyen (1977) 19
49 Hartt (1950) 156
According to Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, “the attributes of liminality or of liminal *persona* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space.” While he surely intends for “cultural space” to refer to the relationships between individuals within groups and between groups and other groups, it is possible and advantageous to extend this idea to physical space as well. In a very tangible way, the Palazzo Te occupies an ambiguous position within the wider city area. As I discussed in the introduction, liminal spaces often have elements of marginal or somehow lie on the periphery of social activity. It is interesting to consider this idea of marginality with respect to Federico II’s estate because it, in fact, seems to reflect what we saw Apuleius doing with Cupid’s palace – that is, supplanting the liminal space from the periphery and moving it to the center, to the focal point. Though it offers the seclusion and characteristic ambiguity of the liminal, at the time the Palazzo Te rested on the Te island between the city and the mainland. This correlation and interpretation suggest that the estate, read as a liminal space, could potentially contain liminal elements. In fact, the aforementioned purpose of the structure – that is, to house the affair of Federico II and Isabella Boschetti – supports this idea because of the very nature of affairs as extra-marital, commonly considered deviant and outside of acceptable social activity.

**READING THE LIMALITY IN THE CUPID AND PSYCHE IMAGES**

One room in the northeastern corner of the Palazzo, the Sala di Amore e Psiche, provides even further evidence for the connection between Federico II’s desire for rest and the palazzo’s function as a space for erotic pleasure. Along the molding that separates the walls into large

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50 Turner (1969) 95
planes and lunettes, there is an inscription that states his purpose for building the estate:

FEDERICVS GONZAGA II MAR • V • S • R • E • ET • REIP • FLOR • CAPITANEVS •
GENERALIS • HONESTO • OCIO POST • LABORES AD • REPARANDAM VIRT • QVIETI

• CONSTRVI • MANDAVIT.\(^{51}\)

The phrase does not explicitly assert any notion of sexuality. However, *otium* (“leisure”) actually refers to non-business space or time, and could therefore possibly possess erotic undertones. Perhaps *honestum* (“honest”) was an attempt to legitimize that leisure – or, to put it more bluntly, an attempt by Federico II to legitimize or normalize his affair with Isabella Boschetti. In fact, there existed significant tension between so-called “honest leisure” and its perceived counterpart,

\(^{51}\) “Federico II Gonzaga, 5th Marquis of Mantua, Captain General of the Holy Roman Church and of the Florentine Republic, ordered that in honest leisure after labors this be constructed for the purpose of restoring his strength in quiet;” Images in this chapter come from Rodolfo Signorini’s *La fabella* di Psiche e altra mitologia.
idleness, in the late republican period, throughout the Empire, and especially when Christianity gained significant influence. As the image above indicates, the text exists within a very specific and important context that informs its meaning and visually represents this relationship, since the *honestum otium* is juxtaposed with nude, indulgent figures at a banquet. In a way, this interaction between text and image creates a sense of ambiguity characteristic of liminal spaces: if *honestum* is intended to dispel or legitimize what society considers deviant sexuality, then why does it appear in the context of such erotic frescoes? No interpretation seems clear or easy, and once again the audience (the visitor/viewer in this case, as opposed to the reader of the *Metamorphoses*) experiences that uncertainty of liminality.

Before discussing the room's content or the artwork any further, it is interesting to consider the way in which its location within the whole building possesses liminal features, much like the relationship between the city and the Palazzo Te. Even in the time of Federico II, it was impossible to reach the hall without traveling first through other rooms; there are two doorways, one to the west and another to the south. Situated in a corner, it in fact lies directly in middle of the two nearest exists of the building. Therefore, one can imagine an application of van Gennep and Turner's ideas of liminality to the position room itself; for visitors, it's almost as if the journey from one main entrance to the next is itself a *rite de passage*. Since direct access is not possible, one must pass through other spaces to be prepared to experience the Sala (the concept of van Gennep and Turner's separation phase comes to mind). Then, in order to exit the hall and reenter the outside world, one must again pass through other rooms, echoing the process of re-aggregation that the two anthropologists discuss. Furthermore, in this way the position of the Sala di Amore e Psiche relative to the rest of the northwest quadrant of the main complex

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resonates with the position of the tale of Cupid and Psyche relative to the rest of the *Metamorphoses*. Just as the mini-story was in middle of the text, so too does the room lie precisely in the center. Though it cannot be known whether or not such a decision was intentional or conscious – and I would imagine that it was not – Romano appears to mirror Apuleius’ narratological construction of the work in his architectural design.

Upon entering the Sala di Amore e Psiche, the visitor immediately sees that the artistic narrative covers all four walls and a majority of the ceiling, almost to an overwhelming degree. In fact, it is perhaps this sensation of great, slightly oppressive abundance that might encourage the visitor to become invested within the space and take part in the stories depicted. Though appearing in her article about Native artist George Longfish’s use of text and image, Molly McGlennen discusses the interaction and dialogue between viewer and art; in order for meaning of the art to arise, the individual scrutinizing it must also exert an effort to understand. In this way, the act of communing between audience and work “extends the narrative beyond the canvas.”\(^53\) It is easy to envision such a process taking place in this particular room, even simply due to the grandeur and enveloping nature of the frescoes. On the south and west walls is a continuous image of a lavish banquet, which is arguably\(^54\) that of Cupid and Psyche after their marriage. On the north and east walls are various images of other love-related stories, which will be discussed more specifically later. Immediately above these large images are lunettes – three on each wall – and above those are triangles with cherubs. On the ceiling proper are eight octagons, four half-octagons, and a square directly in the middle. All of these elements, save for the cherubs, the half-octagons (depicting nymphs and a Cupid out of context), the images on the

\(^53\) McGlennen 2011: 217

\(^54\) I say “arguably” because this interpretation is under debate, and it is a debate which I will address later on in the chapter.
north and east walls, narrate Apuleius's tale of Cupid and Psyche in his *Metamorphoses*.

Interestingly, the story does not begin with the massive walls or in the center square—in other words, in places that would allow the visitor to easily orient themselves—but rather it begins in the one of the octagons. In this way, the room reflects the ancient author's construction of the text; the tale of Cupid and Psyche did not begin at the beginning of a book, but rather in the middle. Romano has done nearly the same here, though it is not quite the middle of the space. Therefore, in order to know where the tale begins, the audience must have a pre-existing knowledge of Apuleius' work. If not, it would be remarkably difficult to find one's bearings. Using the concept of liminality as a point of departure, one interpretation of this disorienting effect is that it is the product of a liminal space—or, perhaps more aptly, it demonstrates the types of features and effects (such as disorientation) that exist within those spaces. In the upside-down world of the room, the narrative falls through the cracks of conventions and begins at an unexpected, arguably absurd location, moves from the octagons to the lunettes to the central square, and then finally ends back on the large banquet on the walls. Whereas it would feel more natural to read the images in a much more linear fashion—from bottom to top, top to bottom, or perhaps even in some sort of continuous spiral around the room—the artist, evoking Turner's idea that traditional structures (whether social, literary, or otherwise) break down in liminal spaces, constructs the space atypically.

Given that a critical point within this chapter is the nourishment of a multiplicity of interpretations, it would be antithetical to not provide consideration for those visitors who do not have a knowledge of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and who therefore would not be able to discern the “starting point” of the tale. Is it in fact necessary to be familiar with the story of Cupid and
Psyche in order to gain some semblance of meaning from the frescoes? It is possible to argue that it is in fact not required. Perhaps the fact that the images are not linear – or are at the very least positioned in such a way that allows for a simple, easy reading of room – disrupts a direct relationship with the ancient text and and therefore encourages the viewer – even those who possess that preexisting knowledge – to read the images in the manner that their eyes take them. This idea then recalls one of Winkler's interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* that has already been discussed: that the text poses possibilities and questions to which it does not provide answers; there is a measure of uncertainty, characteristic of liminal spaces, that the visitor must (or can) attempt to fill.\(^{55}\) Therefore, one particular reading of Romano's work exhibits a point of intersection (apart from content) between the images, the text, and liminality.

Since a major component of liminality concerns in-between spaces and the relationship between elements, it should not be surprising that I have not dedicated attention to individual episodes of the Cupid and Psyche story as Romano depicts them. Nevertheless, liminal features do indeed appear frequently in the specific images themselves. Not only might this occur from the fact that, as demonstrated in chapter one, the text lends itself to readings of liminality, but it could also be due to the changes occurring in the Italian art world during the period. It was at this time in the early 1500s that artists such as Romano began to move away from and react to the classical style of the High Renaissance, of Raphael, which exhibited a sense of harmony and proportionality of figures. This art historical period and style has come to be known as Mannerism. Liana De Girolami Cheney provides a brief overview of the style:

\[^{55}\text{Winkler 1985: 179}\]
the purpose of emotionality by abruptly heightening or diminishing light effects, thus creating visual disturbances by grouping the figures in a shallow or deep illusionistic space, thus creating a disjointed relationship between the space of the canvas and the painting and by depicting rich, elaborate, and exotic textures and creating a highly polished and decorative surface. The composition is a central, unbalanced, over-rhythmical, and devoid of physical harmony.\textsuperscript{56}

This lack of harmony and abundance of artificiality and ambiguity echo the vocabulary that we have encountered and employed regarding features of liminal spaces. Turner’s discussion of fantasy-making, which has been cited countless times in this study, manifests in the appearance of these types of figures in Mannerist art.

The representation of Psyche’s quest to retrieve the container of beauty from Proserpina in the Underworld provides a particularly exemplary example of the Mannerist style. In conjunction with this, it visually provides insight into the connection between Romano’s style and liminality in this particular interpretation of the frescoes.

\textsuperscript{56} Cheney 1997: 7
described appear vividly in this image. Though there is a focal point (the vessel of Proserpina's beauty), the artist does not center it and thereby creates a sense of disharmony, which the lack of symmetry then compounds further. If we compare the body of Pluto here (the white-haired figure) with that of the iconic Adam in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel, the attention to depicting a disproportionate, imperfect body becomes evident – and it is even more so when we consider the Furies on the left and right. These stylistic characteristics resonate with the notions of liminality that have appeared throughout this study: the figures rendered are outside of the norm (that norm being the classical style). It is important to note that this image is not singular in this regard, but instead each of the paintings in the room exhibit these features; I chose this one merely as an example.

**JUXTAPOSING NARRATIVES, CREATING LIMINAL SPACE**

Apart from the images that are directly and explicitly related to Apuleius' tale of Cupid and Psyche, there are also a number that refer to other mythological tales: Polyphemus and Acis and Galatea, Pasiphaë and the bull, Jupiter and Olympia, Mars and Venus bathing, Bacchus and Ariadne, and Venus and Adonis. Despite lacking an immediate contextual connection to the story on the ceiling and the other walls, all of these come from accounts of tragic or strange loves. In this way, yet again the artwork can be seen as representative of the products of liminal spaces – those things which are fantastical and absurd and which allude to Turner's discussion of monster-making in liminal periods.
It would be incomplete to ignore the fact that these six episodes interact with the tale of Cupid and Psyche, if not at least for their very existence within the same room. It is possible that this dialogue expresses particular ideas regarding the love affair between Federico II and Isabella Boschetti. While the “minor tales” seem to indicate that their love affair is one that is untraditional and at times tragic, Apuleius' story of Cupid and Psyche demonstrates that their love is enduring and able to overcome great difficulties, punctuated in the center of the ceiling by the depiction of Psyche's transformation into an immortal and her betrothal to Cupid. This dialogue then possesses a sort of palpable tension regarding each side's respective messages. However, again the artist, much like Apuleius, does not provide a clear indication of an answer to the interpretative problem that such tension creates; the juxtaposition of these narratives, oppositional in some readings such as this one, creates the now-all-too-familiar uncertainty and ambiguity.

Some scholars claim that those non-Apuleian stories in fact derive from another work.
entirely. Verheyen argues that the frescoes that are not part of the Cupid and Psyche narrative in Apuleius' work actually come from Francesco Colonna's 1499 *Hypnerotomachia*, which tells the story of Polia and Poliphilos, her lover who is searching for her. This basic plot indicates a superficial, albeit important, correlation or point of intersection between Colonna's work and that of Apuleius. One scene in the *Hypnerotomachia* describes a procession on the island of Venus, of which Cupid and Psyche take part. Therefore, Verheyen actually argues that the festivities depicted on the field of the western and southern walls actually are not of their nuptial banquet, as commonly believed, but instead illustrates this scene from the *Hypnerotomachia*. He substantiates his claim by indicating that the couple is depicted with their child, who was born after their union and celebration, and that none of the gods whom Apuleius claims were at their banquet appear in the frescoes. In this way, “the scenes depicted on the ceiling [those telling the tale of Cupid and Psyche] were only the prelude to the final happiness, belonging to the past, to a different world.”

Since a large part of my interest was predicated on the belief that the festivities were those in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, it might seem as if Verheyen's interpretation potentially disrupts my analysis of the Sala di Amore e Psiche and how it fits in with my other interpretations. In fact, his work actually provides an opportunity for a differently nuanced and complex reading of the room. If the banquet depicted is indeed from the *Hypnerotomachia*, then the room actually transforms even more into a remarkably Apuleian construct: it includes, within four walls, a dialogue between and a juxtaposition of narratives, just as the story of Psyche is placed next to (or, more exactly, between) that of Lucius. The hall seems to become a liminal space in that within it tales metamorphose and meld into one another, their boundaries becoming

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57 Verheyen 1977: 26
increasingly less distinct. The multiplicity of stories and their ability to coexist in a single area hearkens to the interstructural nature of liminal spaces; not only does the liminality of the entire room, if we read it as liminal, allow for such coexistence of disparate elements to occur, but the different narratives, when juxtaposed, in turn create liminal spaces between themselves. There is an “in-between” when the viewer passes from one to the next that reaffirms the ambiguity, the strangeness of those tales. In this way, the visitor-audience, standing in the middle, *intra limen*, seems to take part in the processes that would occur in the liminal period that the dialogues create between the narratives.

**THE LIMINALITY OF THE DEBATE**

Just as the juxtaposition of narratives creates the potential for a wide range of readings of the time, time has proven that a multitude of interpretations does indeed exist. Scholars, such as Frederick Hartt and Rodolfo Signorini, have participated in a heated debate around questions of the meanings of the hall and Romano’s artwork that it houses. However, it is not necessarily my purpose to totally support or drastically critique these analyses. Instead, I intend to provide an overview of some of them in order to demonstrate that the existence of that multiplicity intersects with the indeterminacy and creativity of liminality and liminal spaces.

In part of his 1950 dissertation “Gonzaga Symbols in the Palazzo del Te” and later publications, Frederick Hartt proposes a neoplatonic reading of the Sala di Amore e Psiche. He cites Philippus Beroaldus’ commentary on the *Metamorphoses* and Fulgentius Placidus to attain the structure from which he constructs his interpretation. The two commentators create an allegorical framework: “According to Fulgentius the state (*civitas*) of which Psyche's father is
king is the world (mundus), the king is really God (deus), the queen is matter (materia), and their three children are Flesh (caro), Free Will (libertas arbitrii) and of course the Soul (anima),” and Cupid is Desire (cupiditas).”

Hartt then continues:

The fable then resolves itself into a drama in which the Soul, child of God and matter, exalts herself impiously above the goddess of love. For punishment she is tempted by the latter into a blind and false happiness with Desire, but persuaded by her wicked sisters, Flesh and Free Will, betrays and wounds Desire and is expelled from his house. She can achieve true happiness only when...she has expiated her offenses against Love by labours...In each of these trials, incidentally, it is not the Soul who saves herself from the element in question, but the succeeding element which intervenes to save her...

Once the expiatory circle is closed, Desire whom the Soul has betrayed intervenes to rescue her from the consequences of her innumerable errors and to achieve her immortalization before the assembled gods. This union, which is to serve as a chain to the wayward activities of Desire, produces a child called Pleasure (Voluptas). And it is just this pleasure, says Beroaldus, that is the summmum bonum the philosophers tell us about.

The scholar asserts his moral interpretation of the Sala di Psiche by approaching the act of reading the room with a relatively unconventional method. He suggests that it must be read not by its linear narrative, but rather by the positions in which the art appears within the space, moving from the bottom to the top, floor to ceiling. In this way, we move from the floor of inanimate matter in labyrinths – a typical Gonzaga symbol – to the zone of gilded leather – probably containing animals and vegetation – then to frescoes, in which loves of gods and humans are immorally shared with animals and beget monsters. The following lunettes serve as a space of expiation through the Soul's labors, after which we see the Soul and Desire partially and imperfectly united in the octagons. Finally, the two are legally and properly united in marriage at the pinnacle and center of the room. Interestingly, Hartt's interpretation evokes the allegorical

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58 Hartt 1950: 167
59 In Hartt's neoplatonic interpretation, the grain is Earth, the ants are Fire, the golden sheep are Fire, the reed in the river is Water, the Styx is Water, Jove's eagle is Air, Proserpina's beauty is Air, and the tower is Earth.
60 Hartt 1950: 167-168
61 Hartt 1950: 172
reading – that is, the journey of the Soul – that the tale of Cupid and Psyche seems to encourage, though he applies it to the artwork.

This neoplatonic, moral-allegorical interpretation very easily lends itself to the concept of liminality. The entire room can be seen as a rite of passage; it is a space communicating the idea of transition, describing the journey from wild, animalistic baseness (that is, the indulgent banquet) to the discovery and completion of a proper form of pleasure (the union of Cupid and Psyche). Furthermore, his unconventional approach to reading the room aligns with the kinds of techniques that Apuleius appears to utilize within the *Metamorphoses* – specifically, the very subversion – or, at the very least, the “playing with” – of social norms and of narratological practices. Nevertheless, the analysis contains some very fundamental problems. First, when we consider the function of the palace and of the room itself – its size suggests that it was meant for entertainment purposes – there is a disconnect. The estate was meant to house the extramarital love affair between Federico II and Isabella Boschetti – a socially unacceptable relationship. In this way, to apply a moral reading is inconsistent with reality. Yes, it is possible that either Federico was attempting to communicate the idea that their love was somehow similar to Cupid and Psyche: ultimately achieving happiness after a tumultuous journey. However, it can be assumed that the Duke was not ignorant of the social norms and attitudes regarding such couples.

One response to this first problem is that the room and its contents in fact legitimize – or, at the very least, authorize – the activities that occur within it and the relationship between Federico II and Isabella. As has been discussed, liminality creates and exploits instances of inconsistency, such as this one between reality and content. Liminal spaces, then, deconstruct social norms, and it is therefore imaginable that the affair in this space becomes permissible in a
The second point of difficulty arises when we consider what exactly occurs in Apuleius' text. As John Winkler claims in *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius’s Golden Ass*, “the text can raise the question, play with a variety of answers, but cannot successfully endorse and hand over a solution to such a question.”\(^{62}\) Although this idea will be discussed more fully and completely in the next chapter, whose topic is Book 11 of the *Metamorphoses*, the concept of liminality provides a beginning understanding. Turner claims in his discussion of the fantasy-making aspect of liminal spaces that “liminality here breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation.”\(^{63}\) Therefore, Hartt's easily-packaged, cleanly-answering interpretation of Giulio Romano's work in the Sala di Psiche collides in a very significant way with the ancient author's relatively open treatment.

In *La 'fabella' di Psiche e altra mitologia secondo l'interpretazione pittorica di Giulio Romano nel Palazzo del Te a Mantova*, Rodolfo Signorini also questions the validity of using a neoplatonic approach to examine the hall. In his criticism, he points out as problematic the very foundational progression of Hartt's analysis – that is, working from the ground up. According to Signorini, Hartt's method opposes Apuleius' tale to such a degree that his interpretation becomes unable to be substantiated; in the *Metamorphoses*, the nuptial banquet occurs at the end of the tale, yet for Hartt it would be merely an intermediate point that precedes the couple's marriage.\(^{64}\) It furthermore appears as if Hartt forgets a very basic generic element of the work; it contains countless comedic elements, and therefore a strictly moral interpretation would create a sort of disjuncture between comprehensive meaning and analytical framework. Speaking to this,

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\(^{62}\) Winkler 1985: 179  
\(^{63}\) Turner 1967: 106  
\(^{64}\) Signorini 1987: 15
Signorini states that, like Egon Verheyen, he believes that the room is completely dedicated to the exultation of the themes of love and happiness.65

CONCLUSIONS

As this analysis shows, using a vocabulary of liminality allows us to read not only the frescoes, but also the visitor/viewer's experience. Despite a lack of knowledge regarding the specific intentions regarding the Sala di Amore e Psiche, the liminal space in which it stands and which it creates opens us the possibilities for critical interpretation and for imaging how the images speak to one another and to us. Liminality furthermore helps us to understand the merits of the various sides of the scholarly debate about the meaning of the room and to see how the magnitude of such debate is reflective of the multiplicity of meanings within the tale that inspired Giulio Romano.

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65 Signorini 1987: 16
CHAPTER 3
THE LIMINALITY OF LUCIUS' METAMORPHOSES IN BOOK 11
AND THE READER'S EXPERIENCE

The section of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* which has historically received the most attention and which has sparked the most scholarly debate has without a doubt been Book 11. Most importantly for this particular examination, the book recounts Lucius' salvation by Isis, his (re-)metamorphosis to human form, and his subsequent (and multiple) initiations into the mysteries of Isis and Osiris. Countless academics – including John Winkler, Nancy Schumate, and Paul Murgatroyd – have examined the peculiar ending to the protagonist's journey, which markedly sets itself apart from the first ten books because it contains significantly fewer overt or obscene comedic elements. Furthermore, save for a few allusions, the reader has up until this point been under the impression that the narrative would end once Lucius once more becomes a man, which has been vying for throughout the work; the fact that the story continues after his metamorphosis not only subverts our expectations, but the topical shift also creates a disjuncture between the last book and what preceded it. In negotiating the relationship between final book with the other ten, perhaps the primary point of contention between scholars has been whether or not the book is more parodic and comic or if Lucius does indeed find true religious salvation. While opinions have been strong on either side, others, such as John Winkler, have assumed an entirely alternative approach and argued that the ending does not have to be exclusively one of those two options. Instead, the book can have multiple, equally legitimate readings, and it can simultaneously be both comic and serious.

Book 11 finds particular resonance and importance within my examination of the relationship between Apuleius and liminality, even because of its more general connections to
ideas of transformation and rites of passage. With the physical metamorphosis of Lucius and his initiations – types of rites of passages – it evokes notions of liminal spaces on even the most basic levels. However, as seen in the study of the Cupid and Psyche story, those types of spaces extend much deeper than simply the content, permeating significantly into the narratological structures and the author's techniques. The final book is no exception to such subversive narrative choice. In chapter one, I argued that the entirety of the middle sections of the Cupid and Psyche story exists in a liminal space and presents liminal attributes after (and, really, through) the girl's marriage with Death and until her ascension to Mt. Olympus as an immortal being. On a first and superficial reading of Book 11, the instances of liminality appear to be much more discrete and separated; Lucius' religious initiations do not necessarily seem to directly result from his transformation back into a human. In fact, the protagonist himself is forced to wait a substantial amount of time before Isis will allow him into her mysteries. In this way, it appears as if Apuleius assumes a markedly different approach from that which he did earlier in the work: here, he does not describe at length these particular metamorphoses (arguably rites of passage). In fact, as I will later discuss, in one instance (Met. 11.23) Lucius explicitly states that the reader cannot completely know what occurs in the Isiac initiations, a liminal space. However, just like in the Cupid and Psyche section, it is actually once again possible to read the entire book as the liminal space of the initiations, with the protagonist's return to human form as the beginning. Furthermore, in one reading of the ending, the reader could question whether Apuleius indeed closes that liminal space of the initiations, or if he instead leaves it open. In Apuleian fashion, perhaps the Metamorphoses ends – or, rather, does not end – with the characters, the story, and the readers remaining in a liminal space.
RE-READING LUCIUS’ (RE)METAMORPHOSIS

From the very point at which the final book of the *Metamorphoses* commences, Apuleius fills it and its language with liminal features. It begins with Lucius being woken suddenly by a fear (*experrectus pavore subito*, 11.1) in the night, having fallen asleep at the very end of the previous book. In this way, it is possible to imagine the book as starting in a space of liminality, in an unconscious sleep. Furthermore, the choice of *pavore* can provide a sense of ambiguity to the atmosphere. Though its typical definitions refer to fear and terror, it can also mean “fear due to anticipation, thrill, trepidation.”66 This alternative definition better reflects the protagonist's current state of mind: his thrill at the thought of the goddess – whom he realizes is visiting him but whose identity he does not yet know – and the prospect of salvation she provides. Furthermore, the multiplicity and layers of meaning of the word evoke the indeterminacy of liminality.

It is also at the very beginning of the book that Apuleius sets into motion the mechanisms that ultimately lead to Lucius' transformation back into human form at the hands of Isis.67 The scene that the narrator describes appears highly ritualistic in nature: Lucius “immediately surrenders [himself] for purifying with zeal in a bath of the sea, his head having been submerged in the waves seven times.”68 In fact, he notes that Pythagoras has indicated that that number (*septies*) is appropriate for *religious* rites. Therefore, though this scene precedes Lucius' metamorphosis and does not necessarily lead directly to his initiations, it in fact possesses

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*OLD*² s.v. *pavor* 2c

*Met.* 11.1.
religious overtones. In this way, it appears as if a scene of a rite of passage is unfolding before the reader's very eyes. But a rite of passage for what exactly? The text only refers to “hope of salvation” (spem salutis), but at this point it does not indicate from what the goddess is to save him; it could be from his physical form, his journey, or even his troublesome curiosity.

Isis provides a particular emphasis on notions of the ritual cleansing of impurities. In the previously mentioned quotation, Lucius the narrator reports that he must have purified himself (purificandi) in order to be in the presence of the goddess. Then, she instructs Lucius that he must be neither agitated nor impious (nec sollicita nec profana).\(^69\) Though addressing Lucius' later initiations into Isis' mysteries, James Gollnick’s citation of S. Eitrem helps make a connection between ritual purification and liminality:

> Regarding the purification symbolism involved in this process, S. Eitrem stresses that, through sin, the elements composing a human being are made impure. When the initiate is decomposed into the separate elements and then reconstituted, s/he relinquishes any connection with sin associated with the previous constitution and is recomposed of renewed or purified elements. Consequently, the reconstituted soul of the initiate is considered pure.\(^70\)

This type of language should not seem new, but instead should recall the framework of rites of passages that van Gennep and Turner constructed. Both refer to the initial stage – Gollnick uses the term “decompose,” while Turner refers to the period of “separation” – and both address the third stage – Gollnick says “reconstituted” and “recomposed,” and Turner names it the period of “re-aggregation.” Not only does this demonstrate that the vocabulary of liminality is appropriate for examining Book 11, but more importantly that it helps uncover connections between various parts of the story. Gollnick originally makes this observation in the context of Lucius' initiations, but it has become evident that a similar process also occurs much earlier in the narration.

\(^{69}\) *Met.* 11.5
\(^{70}\) Gollnick 1999: 142
Given this religious language and the seemingly deliberate ambiguity – whether the narrator refers to the metamorphosis or the initiations – I argue that this scene has two intertwined meanings. First, on a basic level it establishes Lucius' relationship with Isis, thereby introducing the path to his physical transition from ass to human. The second layer, then, is that it represents the initial steps of the protagonist's induction into the cult of Isis. After describing to the supplicating Lucius how he will achieve human form once more, the goddess' response demonstrates the relationship between his physical and spiritual transformations: “You shall certainly remember this and you shall always hold it hidden in your mind's depths – that the remaining courses of your life and your last breaths, all the way to the end, are pledged to me.”

Though previously two seemingly disparate events, Isis now establishes an explicit connection between Lucius' metamorphosis and his initiations into her mysteries. In fact, the relationship appears almost *quid pro quo* (*vadata*, “pledged”); she provides him with salvation, and he then promises to be bound to her. In this way, Lucius' process to become one of her followers does not appear to begin later, when the more explicit procedures occur. Instead, Isis includes his transformation in the initiations rites – arguably even as the beginning point.

The goddess saturates with liminal language her oration to Lucius about his devotion after the initiations, apart from the more superficial connections in the metamorphosis and the mysteries. She states: “When you, having traveled through the space of your lifetime, descend to the dead below, there too in that subterranean hemisphere...you will worship me.” In this passage, the author plays with the borders that traditionally separate the living from the dead. Isis indicates to Lucius in a rather explicit manner that his dedication is required not only in life, but

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71 *Met.* 11.6
72 *Met.* 11.6
even in death. Though not necessarily immortal, an initiate's responsibility indeed transcends mortality and the traditional boundaries between life and death, existing instead in a liminal space that spans them. Her words recall Psyche's marriage with Death earlier in the work, which possessed similar implications. In a way, then, the author creates a connection between these seemingly disparate episodes that transcends the boundaries of the books.

The exact way in which this interaction between Isis and Lucius occurs has particular implications regarding the book's connection to liminality. According to Harrison, “Read attentively, the dialogue with Isis in Book 11 is set out in a way which leaves it very much open whether the scene is in fact a waking or dreaming experience.” This interpretation introduces the fact that the exchanges between Lucius and Isis, mortal and goddess, occur through dreams and visions. If we consider the ideas of Turner and van Gennep once more, such mental spaces lie outside of typical social structures; they are liminal spaces. This point is important because it indicates that interactions with the divine happen oddly both directly and indirectly. They are direct in that the goddess explicitly addresses the protagonist. However, they are also indirect in that it is not during a time of consciousness for Lucius. The practice of Isis – and, later, Osiris – speaking with Lucius through visions will recur throughout the remainder of the book.

This characterization of their interaction as direct and indirect evokes notions of liminality from a much wider scope; the border between the two becomes blurry, and therefore the exact nature of the exchange becomes ambiguous, a trait of liminal spaces that has appeared throughout this study. In this way, the situation is doubly liminal from the perspective of the audience. Since we understand the story through the words of Lucius the narrator, we also enter into the liminal space in which Isis speaks with the protagonist. However, we, conscious and

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73 Harrison 2013: 112
attentive readers, are able to remove ourselves from the situation and recognize that the exchanges occur in interstitial spaces. Interestingly, we straddle this border and have the privilege of being able to move between the spaces and within that border space.

After Isis first appears to Lucius and speaks to him of his so-called salvation, the tone of the story alters dramatically. Gollnick, who espouses a more superficial, direct interpretation of Book 11 regarding the protagonist's religious conversion that takes his initiations at face value, points out that even the character's environment seems wholly new and positive. In reference to this shift, he states that “such a remarkable alteration in one's perception of the world is a key feature in religious conversions. He also observes that new beliefs and inner peace usually accompany conversion, further mirroring Lucius' situation.” This point, then, allows us to understand the transformation from ass to man and the discussions around it in reference to the religious conversion. It supports the idea that the metamorphosis is a necessary point for Lucius to pass through in the liminal space that will end with him as an initiate of Isis.

Though discussing Lucius' initiation, Gollnick's interpretation actually can inform a reading of his physical metamorphosis itself. The scholar discusses the protagonist's form:

To sum up, whether regarded as a common folk symbol of lust, curiosity and grossness or a specifically religious symbol of an orientation completely opposed to Isis, the ass effectively symbolizes Lucius' divided state – and a deep personal crisis...If Lucius' being in the body of an ass represents the divided self that James characterized as the typical pre-conversion condition, the conversion itself is associated with, and symbolized by, his return to human form.

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74 Gollnick's interpretation is “superficial” or “direct” in that it takes Lucius' conversion at face value and as sincere; he does not consider it as an opportunity for a continuation of comedic elements, though scholars like Winkler indicate that such an approach is possible. This is perhaps due to the nature of Gollnick's study, which is interested in representations of spirituality and psychological dreamworlds in the text.

75 “A sunny and placid day had suddenly followed the frost of the previous day;” pruinam pridianam dies apricus ac placidus repente fuerat insecutus, Met. 11.7

76 Gollnick 1999: 136

77 This is a reference to the ass as a symbol for the Egyptian god Seth.

78 Gollnick 1999: 133
His analysis supports my interpretation of Book 11; it implies that the metamorphosis is a part of the larger initiation. In fact, he argues that the process of metamorphosing from ass to man microcosmically reflects the wider journey of his initiation. Furthermore, the characterization of the ass-form as “divided” – that is, the physical manifestation of Lucius' unpreparedness (or perhaps even unworthiness, due to his flagrant curiosity and vulgarity) for the initiations – evokes Turner's ideas regarding liminality. If social norms and constructions deconstruct in liminal spaces and produce the ambiguity and inversions that have appeared throughout the Metamorphoses, it should come as no surprise that a human-as-an-ass can represent a sort of divided state. It is possible to read the ass-form in a variety of ways, one of which has already been noted: the incarnation of his vices. What makes his state divided, then, is that the audience has throughout the work been privy to Lucius' human voice within the ass; he is neither fully ass nor fully human, but remains in a liminal space between them. In this regard, it is necessary to reformulate Gollnick's interpretation of the ass as a “pre-conversion condition.”

Instead, another possible interpretation is that the ass-form indicates that the protagonist is already within the conversion process – or, to use more familiar language, within Turner's liminal period. If we consider the metamorphosis to be part and parcel of his initiation into Isis' mysteries, as my reading thus far has indicated is possible, then the ass-form does not represent a pre-conversion state. Rather, it exists within the liminal space, in which his former identity becomes mixed and reformed into something new; his physical appearance outwardly shows that tension, that more internal process.

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79 Gollnick's conception of the “pre-conversion condition” can refer to two different states: either that entirely before Turner's first period of separation, or that during the period of separation (but before the liminal period, in which the conversion takes place). It seems to me that the latter is the case here.
Lucius-the-narrator describes the metamorphosis itself very briefly. What the protagonist has been vying for throughout most of the work, what the audience has been awaiting receives a marked lack of consideration. Therefore, the fact that the narrator has subverted expectations, a strategy which we had seen countless times in the tale of Cupid and Psyche, should make us vigilant for possible liminal features. Furthermore, his rapid treatment of such a seemingly significant event represents another technique that relates to liminality, one which also should by now be familiar: inverting the central (here, the metamorphosis) and the peripheral (the spaces leading up to the physical transformation). What the audience expects to be the focus actually becomes a marginal concern. The description of the metamorphosis itself has very graphic elements. The narrator makes particular use of striking adjectives with his changing body parts, such as *squalens pilus* (“rough hair”), *cutis crassa* (“thick skin”), and *venter obesus* (“fat stomach”), and he punctuates such images with equally colorful alliteration (*pedum plantae per ungulas...exeunt*, “the soles of my feet extend through my hooves”).\(^{80}\) This description seems to be a vivid representation of what Turner refers to as the process of “monster- or fantasy-making.”\(^{81}\) For the anthropologist, this process appears in rituals by the participants incorporating fantastic masks or symbols. In the context of the *Metamorphoses*, this monstrous iconography actually comes to life. In this way, Apuleius draws a dramatic, dynamic image of the liminal space: the line between man and ass becomes indiscernible, and the ambiguity and paradoxical state of the man (seemingly both human and ass, but also not fully either) become almost as tangible and malleable as Lucius' form.

It is immediately after Lucius' retransformation that the tension between readings that

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\(^{80}\) *Met.* 11.13  
\(^{81}\) Turner 1967: 106
take the spiritual conversion more directly and those more comically becomes particularly palpable, and it injects doubt into the interpretation of his transformation as sincerity. After Lucius finally obtains his human form, the audience would expect something revolutionary or at least significant to occur. Building up the suspense, the protagonist's thoughts do indeed suggest that will be the case: “What first thing above all should I utter, which beginning should I assume for my new voice, in what speech should I more auspiciously begin with my tongue, now born again?”

Devoting so much mental energy to the matter, it is clear that Lucius desires to mark the occasion with a majestic, memorable return. Interestingly, though not unprecedented, he characterizes his transformation back into a man as a rebirth (renata, “reborn”) of sorts because van Gennep Turner include birth as a type of liminal experience, a fundamental rite of passage. Additionally the terminology of the newness of his body (novae vocis, “new voice”) suggests that he experienced a sincere transformation and that he had passed through the anthropologists’ third phase, that of re-aggregation into society in a new form. However, the narrator immediately undermines the sacred nature of the event by inserting a rather unsophisticated response to Lucius' unstated questions. He states: “As much as I, naked, could, I had guarded myself well with a natural covering.”

This image calls into question the legitimacy and sincerity of the protagonist's transformation and whether or not he had actually learned from his experience. The narrator's word choice in this simple phrase is also poignant given the context. Though meaning “covering” in general terms, velamento is interesting because it can specifically refer to “a covering or veil for ritual purposes” or “an emblem carried by a suppliant, typically
an olive branch wrapped in wool.” The word, then, assumes dual meaning in the context: it refers to Lucius literally covering his genitalia, while it also creates another connection between his metamorphosis and his religious conversion. It is a clever play on words that is liminal because its exact usage here is ambiguous, and most likely intentionally so. The use of *muniveram* (“I had guarded”) adds to this tension because it typically possesses more military connotations regarding battle or fortifying cities; here it refers to his hands covering his penis. It is arguable that these humorous double entendres along with the general premise of the scene, are indications that Book 11 in the end does exhibit comical elements and that the audience should question moments in which it appears as if Lucius has indeed changed or when the narrator seems to propose a particular moral to the story. However, instead of proposing an answer to the dilemma, at this time it is perhaps more interesting to consider the fact that this question exists. In this liminal space of the initiation processes, word meanings have become ambiguous and multiple, and the boundary between the comedic and serious becomes blurry. These typically dichotomous pairings simultaneously merge and diverge, complement and challenge one another. The absence of a clear answer to these issues indicates that indeterminacy of the situation – and, as will be seen, of the ending as a whole – is not to be solved, or indeed is not a solvable matter. Instead, it serves as a method of marking instances of liminality. In those instances, the fact that we as reader experience confusion over those ambiguities and that the borders that traditionally allow us to sort through these meanings continue to disappear demonstrates that we, too, exist in the liminal space of the text with Lucius.

85 *OLD*² s.v. *velamentum* 2b
READING THE LIMINALITY OF LUCIUS' INITIATIONS

Having finally regained his human form once more, Lucius is then able to begin the preparation rituals for the initiations into the mysteries of Isis. Though scholars have long debated the highly contentious issue, many have pointed to the protagonist's disposition as he enters into this stage as evidence that indicates that he has in fact learned nothing from his journey as an ass. Relating Apuleius' story to other mythological figures who undergo metamorphoses, Takács succinctly states that “the core of their being, the inside, remained unchanged.” Although Isis had clearly disclosed that he would have to be a devout initiate even after death in order to earn his salvation and even though he was eager to quickly (and perhaps superficially) accept such responsibility, Lucius reveals that he harbors significant apprehensions when it is time for him to sacrifice certain vices. He bemoans the obedience of religion as difficult (difficile religionis obsequium) and the abstinence of chastity as amply hard castimoniorum abstinentiam satis arduam. For someone who has experienced such extreme punishment for his flagrant curiosity and who is now so near a religious awakening, it should seem strange that Lucius would be so susceptible to ignoble worries and desires. According to Murgatroyd, this inconsistency demonstrates that “Lucius will simply exchange his earlier slavery as a human and an ass...for another form of slavery, to the goddess” and that “amusingly the naïve Lucius completely fails to see any of this, even while narrating it all.” In this way, it becomes evident that logic does not dominate within the liminal space as it traditionally does outside of it. More importantly, though, this distinct possibility that Lucius has
not changed further implicates the reader, drawing us deeper into the text; we begin to wonder what the purpose of his experience was if he perhaps did not learn from it, and therefore we ponder what we have – or have not – learned in our reading.

Espousing a similar conclusion, Sandy draws a comparison between the framing narrative of Lucius and the inner story of Cupid and Psyche. He argues that “Lucius learns nothing from the example of Psyche's curiositas: for him it is a bella fabella.” 90 This point reiterates a comical incongruity within the work to which only the attentive audience can be privy: despite recounting his exploits and the many internal narratives that he encounters along his journey – including that of Cupid and Psyche – the protagonist never seems to internalize or even begin to think about the very words that his own voice relays. It is possible to view this tension as a characteristic or product of the liminal space in which the story occurs; the world has become so backwards that even simple, obvious ideas are incomprehensible. Nevertheless, it is also at this point that my own interpretation diverges from Sandy's. He claims that “Lucius' trials cannot be said to be a part of Isiac initiation.” 91 In one reading, the initiations might appear to begin with his retransformation into a human. This type of interpretation seems befitting, given that the primary force in his conversion is Isis, whose first appearance leads to his metamorphosis.

However, it is not unthinkable or impossible that another, equally legitimate reading considers the entire work before the actual initiation rituals as a part of those rituals themselves. In Turner's view of liminality, the deconstruction of initial forms and constructions occurs before and into the liminal space, and then the entity is reconstituted in a different way in the final stages; it is his division of rites of passage into the period of separation, transformation, and re-

90 Sandy 1978: 128
91 Sandy 1978: 129
aggregation. Therefore, Lucius' first physical metamorphoses into the ass would demonstrate this deconstruction, which is necessary for the initiate to undergo in order to assume a normative place within society after the final stage, in which the individual joins the community once more. The first transformation signals a separation from the human world and from the possibility of interacting with humans on human terms.

Once the priest first informs Lucius that he must avoid impurities, he then reiterates the fact and declares that all potential initiates must practice such care. Significantly, in his dialogue he refers to the initiates as “those set on that threshold” (in ipso...limine constitutos, 11.21) The character's use of limine signals to us that there are probably liminal elements present in the situation. In fact, though a brief phrase, the priest makes a verbal connection between liminality and what it means to be an initiate – that is, the initiate is on a border, within the threshold of entering into a new spiritual consciousness. Lucius ultimately decides that becoming an initiate of the Isiac mysteries merits abandoning his fickle yearnings; he successfully represses his desire for food, abstaining from both animal and wine.\textsuperscript{92} These requirements represent a significant way of acting that is atypical of traditional procedure; after all, food is necessary for survival. However, existing within the liminal space demands a reject of this very law of nature, and instead institutes its own, one which is directly opposed (as in, you must not nourish oneself) to the norm.

Similarly to Lucius' metamorphosis back into human form, the actual initiation process – a critical liminal period that the audience has been waiting for – receives markedly little description. In this way, Apuleius once again reverses the central with the marginal. Though scholars have debated the genuineness of Lucius' conversion, it is at least possible to read it as

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Met.} 11.23
demonstrative of a rite of passage and as containing liminal characteristics. He describes:

Accessi confinium mortis et calcato Proserpinae limine per omnia vectus elementa remeavi; nocte media vidi solem candido coruscantem lumine; deos inferos et deos superos accessi coram et adoravi de proxumo.\(^\text{93}\)

Though brief and selectively vague, the description provides a significant material for consideration through a framework of liminality. The mention of the Proserpinae limen ("threshold of Proserpina") strengthens the relationship between Lucius and Psyche in terms of liminality, and the association of Lucius with approaching the borders of death (accessi confinium mortis) recalls Psyche's marriage with Death personified. More importantly at this point, though, the word limine demonstrates that the initiation requires this liminal experience in order for the initiate to enter into Isis' mysteries. In fact, the narrator emphasizes the idea of approaching the periphery and exploring those marginal spaces. In this space, opposites of dichotomies can commune: death (mortis) and an implied life (in Lucius), night (nocte) and day (solem, "sun," and lumine, "light”), and the gods of the underworld (inferos) and those above (superos). When on the borderland, then, the divisions between these pairings become ambiguous; ideas that are typically opposites or antithetical begin to mingle and intermix, and they can counterintuitively coexist.

Not only is there a coexistence of elements within the text, so too do contrasting interpretations about the scene exist, similarly to what was discussed in the previous two chapters. Apart from creating these types of connections with other sections of the Metamorphoses, this multiplicity of interpretations demonstrates that Apuleius' work ultimately ends without definitive answers. It instead encourages readers to consider what knowledge they

\(^\text{93}\) Met. 11.23; "I approached the border of death, and on Proserpina's threshold I, dragged through all the elements, went back; in the middle of the night I saw the sun trembling with a white light; I approached the gods below and the gods above, face-to-face, and I worshiped them beside them."
do and do not have and to think creatively about the story. Schumate, whose analysis of Book 11 echoes the work of Turner and van Gennep, provides a relatively straightforward reading of the initiation. In large part, it unsurprisingly recalls the language surrounding rites of passage:

“At the center of [a religious superstructure] is the longed-for transcendental signified – that is, God or a god or gods – which acts as the ultimate standard of truth, knowledge, and reality-definition...The basic problem for all our preconverts is that in some sense the center of their worlds no longer holds; with the adoption of a religious world view, a center is again located, and the result is that the entire world is reanchored and restabilized.”

When Schumate describes the state when the initiates' center no longer holds, there exists a connection with the liminal space without structures or support. The adoption of the religion – here, the initiation into the Isiac mysteries – then signifies the period of re-aggregation that Turner discusses. Gollnick shares this more literal, direct reading of the conversion section. He claims that “the images of the passage through the elements and the descent to Hades both dramatize the death and rebirth of a novice such as Lucius. Passage through the cosmic elements symbolizes the initiate's decomposition and subsequent reconstitution into a new individual.”

Before offering that rather vague description of his initiation ceremonies, Lucius (and, by extension, Apuleius) makes the reader aware of their own role in the narrative. The narrator addresses the reader: “Perhaps, rather anxious, eager reader, you would inquire what then was said, what was done: I would say it if I were allowed to tell, you would know it if you allowed to hear.” Lucius-the-narrator explicitly states that the reader cannot fulfill their desire to know, their own curiosity. Just as it appeared as if Lucius' knowledge was previously limited, so too does that very same fool call attention to our own ignorance. His words prompt us as readers to

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94 Schumate 1996 287
95 Gollnick (1999) 142
96 *Met.* 11.23
think back and question everything that he has narrated to us thus far, even from the first book. In this way, we the readers exist in a liminal space between knowing and not knowing: surely since we have just read almost the entire book, we know *something*, but at the same time we now must be hesitant and approach the narrator with a degree of doubt. What results is an altogether ambiguous relationship between us, Lucius, and knowledge.

Opposing interpretations of this passage complicate and make even more unclear the reader's relationship to what is known and what is unknown. Harrison rejects the notion that Lucius had successfully served as a gatekeeper of information and had thereby retain knowledge from the reader, claiming that “in seeking not to disclose the secrets of initiation, Lucius has actually reported them, showing that he is his old indiscreet self.”97 Despite his rhetoric of being unable to reveal the secret procedures of the initiations to the reader, the scholar believes that the narrator has in fact done just that. Another scholar, Sarolta Takács, responds to Harrison's assertions by state that Lucius actually told us “nothing more than what an uninitiated one would know.”98 In this way, the ambiguity about the reader's knowledge appears as contradictory claims from even modern scholars. Furthermore, Harrison's reading contrasting with Schumate and Gollnick because he interprets the conversion as having no effect on Lucius; ultimately he has not changed. In these debates, it is not necessary to determine which side is truer. Instead, for the purposes of this study it signals a space in which both the characters and readers exist in a liminal space, where contradictory elements (in this case, interpretations) can be equally valid and where the position of any given stakeholder (narrator, audience, author) is unknown.

Since at this point Lucius has finally achieved the salvation for which he had longer

97 Harrison 2013: 119
98 Takács 2008: 86
throughout a majority of the work, the reader might assume that the ending is near and that the protagonist's journey through rites of passage and liminal spaces has finished. However, the narrator once more undermines these expectations by inserting two additional initiations – one yet again into Isis' mysteries, and another into those of Osiris. With each of these initiations, Lucius must pay certain prices for access. Though he recognizes that he becomes increasingly more impoverished because of his religious devotion, he disregards the fact that the divinities take all that he has, and he continues to sell his clothes and resources. 99 Stavros Frangouldis provides a succinct, pertinent overview of the two major assertions regarding this seemingly never-ending chain of initiations:

Lucius’ repeated initiations into Isis’ and Osiris’ cult have provoked uneasiness among scholars, most especially because the goddess has fulfilled her role as saving deity after restoring Lucius to his human form - his second and third initiation have thus been read as intended to reinforce the impression that Lucius remains as naïve as before, when he sought access to magic. Yet the opposite claim could also be made: the repeated initiations may be intended to stress the great difference between Isis’ cult and magic… 100

Setting aside determining whether or not Lucius has changed and whether or not he experienced some sort of genuine spiritual conversion, what Frangouldis’ analysis indicates is that the text – which we can view as a liminal space – creates a (paradoxically) familiar sense of ambiguity that fosters competing interpretations. This ambiguity is reflected in the idea that, since Lucius has already undermined our expectations by participating in two additional initiations, the text seems to suggest that these religious conversions will potentially continue. When do they stop? Will they stop? Apuleius furthermore never resolves this uncertainty; he never provides an answer, but instead leaves the book open.

99 Met. 11.28
100 Frangouldis 2008: 200-201
The final image of the book poignantly incarnates this sense of openness and lack of closure. Lucius, having shaved his head to enter into the cult of Osiris, voices his joy: “My baldness neither shaded nor covered, but everywhere exposed, I wandered joyously.”\(^{101}\) The protagonist's baldness has sparked significant debate among readers of Apuleius' work because it can depict Lucius as either a devout initiate or a fool, unable to understand that he has lost all of his possessions, even his hair. Winkler's interpretation signals a connection between this debate and the idea of liminality: “Because baldness is both a potential funny and shaming 'infirmity' and is, because of its very extremity, sought out as a religious sign by Isiacs and shipwreck survivors, it makes here a picture of exquisite ambiguity.”\(^{102}\) How are we to read Lucius' baldness? Though the concept of liminality does not answer such a question, it does help in understanding why it exists. By providing these instances of liminal spaces and by placing the reader into them, the author can produce a sense of heightened awareness in his audience. He motivates us to think about our own insatiable curiosity, which is parallel to that of Lucius, and to ask ourselves why we desire to know.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Is it not fitting that these two opposing schools of thought arise from this ending, that the debate has continued for so long, and that there is no clear answer? Just as the dichotomies existed simultaneously and arguably harmoniously in the description of Lucius' first initiation rites, so too do these interpretations arise from and exist within the liminal space of the work. According to Winkler, there exists “the impossibility of authorizing an answer to the question of

\(^{101}\) Met. 11.30
\(^{102}\) Winkler 1985: 226
the meaning of the whole, any whole. The text can raise the question, play with a variety of answers, but cannot successfully endorse and hand over a solution to such a question.\textsuperscript{103}

Liminality allows us to see connections between previously separate events in Book 11, but it also reveals the degree to which the narrator (and, by extension, Apuleius) has potentially been selective with the information he provides. We therefore become acutely aware of our role as readers and, perhaps more importantly, of our similarity to Lucius: like him, we have an insatiable curiosity to discover, to know. While the openness of the ending might not gratify that hunger, it does encourage us to continue to seek that nourishment.

\textsuperscript{103} Winkler 1985: 179
CONCLUSION
WE ARE ALL BALD

Though it might frustrate some readers to arrive at the end of the *Metamorphoses* without a single answer or response, perhaps this conclusion (or, rather, lack of conclusion) demonstrates that the experience has not finished. The fact that Lucius becomes an inductee twice after we begin to think that his journey is over suggests that we, as attentive audience members, must wonder if he has really completed all of his inductions into the various cults. In this particular interpretation, then, the narrator leaves open the ending of the *Metamorphoses*; it is distinctly possible that the more rites of passage are to come. All of these liminal elements that have appeared throughout Apuleius' work and in Romano's art add up to produce various spaces of creativity, oddity, and ambiguity. The liminal spaces that the author and the artist have constructed in fact do not close. Though Psyche marries Cupid, she, immortal, forever remains in a liminal, transcendental space between life and death. The visitor to the Palazzo Te becomes involved in the images that s/he views, but no single meaning can arise because many are in fact simultaneously legitimate. Finally, despite regaining his human form, Lucius exists within a continuous cycle of liminal initiations, of which no idea is visible. He does not definitively achieve Turner's stage of re-aggregation and reincorporation into society, and neither do we as audience members. In essence, we too leave the work with bald heads, shaved of any certainty of interpretation of the work.
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