

Rudis Locutor: Speech and Self-fashioning in Apuleius' Metamorphoses

For the elite Roman male, speech was a primary tool in the self-fashioning and presentation of gender, identity, and social status (Gleason 1995, Gunderson 2000). Speech, status, and the body were entwined such that the failure of one threatened all three. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the protagonist's displacement, or loss of social status, is spurred by his physical metamorphosis. Lucius' transformation into an ass precipitates a change not only in shape but also in status, as he falls from his rank as a Greek aristocrat and Roman citizen to become a beast of burden akin to a slave, his body subject to physical abuse. He cannot protest his condition or assert his human status, as his new body deprives him of the main form of social agency allotted to citizen men: speech.

Apuleius' preoccupation with self-fashioning through speech fits within the Roman rhetorical tradition. Handbooks aimed at teaching the reader how to speak like a Roman male proliferated in the Roman Empire. While some treatises like the *Ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* focused on proscriptively training young men in how to speak properly, others such as Plutarch's *De Garrulitate*, Aulus Gellius' diatribe against loquacious men (1.15), and Lucian's satirical *Teacher of Rhetoric* focused on how *not* to speak, providing negative examples of the overly garrulous man, the empty-headed babbler, and the nauseatingly appealing, effete orator.

I argue that Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* engages with this dichotomy of contemporary rhetorical discourse on how to speak and how to be silent by forcibly silencing its protagonist while providing him with negative examples of incorrect speech. Failures of speech lead to humiliation and loss of status for elite and non-elite characters alike. On the elite side, the garrulous Milo fails as a host, providing Lucius with an empty banquet of words instead of

supper (1.26), while Thelyphron's assumption of an orator's pose is belied by his physical deformity and examples of thoughtless speech (2.21-30). The non-elite Syrian priests reveal themselves as effeminate in both appearance and speech (8.25-29), while the robbers' heroizing, military language is humorously contrasted with their foolishness and low status (4.8-21).

Lucius himself fails in speech as both a man and an ass. His self-defense during his trial at the Risus Festival only spurs the laughter of the crowd as he is convicted like a common criminal (3.3-11). As an ass, he is deprived of speech entirely, highlighting both his animal state and lost status (Schlam 1992, 106-107; Bradley 2000, 114-116; Finkelppearl 2006; Sorabji 1993, 80-86). In three instances, Lucius tries to speak in defense of himself or another, calling on the emperor's name or speaking as though in court (3.29, 7.3, 8.29; Winkler, 1985, 196-197). Instead of human speech, he emits an ass's brays, provoking the robbers and priests to beat him. Every time Lucius tries to act as a responsible Roman citizen - through speech - he is reminded of his animal status through both the sounds he utters and the floggings he receives from his non-elite masters. He is essentially a slave, his body under external control and deprived of even the agency of speech.

Although Lucius eventually regains his human body and voice through the beneficence of the goddess Isis, he does not regain his original status. Instead, he exchanges his identity as a leisured Greek aristocrat to become a Latin-speaking lawyer and priest of Isis and Osiris in Rome. Yet by the end of the novel, he has finally learned how to speak. Through his reverent taciturnity concerning the mysteries of the gods and his successful career as a lawyer and public speaker, he exemplifies the appropriate uses of speech and silence called for in contemporary rhetorical treatises.

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