

*Tanta capillamenti dignitas: A Re-evaluation of Hair in Apuleius' Metamorphoses*

In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 2.9, Lucius offers a eulogy of hair in the encomiastic tradition of Second Sophistic rhetoric (e.g. Dio Chrysostom's *Encomium of Hair* found in Sinesius of Cyrene; Eumolpus' *capillorum elegidarion* in Petr. Sat. 109). In this polished piece of epideictic rhetoric, Apuleius' protagonist resorts to an odd analogy in order to praise Photis' hair appropriately: hair's color and sheen, when it comes to meet the eyes (*amatoris oculis occurrens*), returns an image just like a mirror (*ad instar speculi*). The analogy is further reinforced by the elaborate description of hair that likens it to a mirror in the way that it changes over time and responds to varying intensities of light with a change in color.

I propose that a more thorough analysis of this strange hair-mirror analogy, which appears in the encomium and recurs in Lucius' epiphany of Isis (*Met.* 11.3), can offer a better interpretive framework for addressing the conclusion of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Lucius shaves his head in response to his conversion to Isis. Lucius' encomium of hair has already inspired a number of scholarly treatments on the importance of hair in the work of Apuleius (see Englert and Long (1973)). For instance, the language of waves and undulation that Apuleius employs to describe Photis' hair and body in book 2 connects her closely to Pamphile and Isis, creating a metonymic relationship between those characters and suggesting that Lucius remains subservient after his conversion (Schmeling and Montiglio (2006)). James and O'Brien consider Lucius' loss of *dignitas* in the Risus festival (*Met.* 3.11-12) in light of the dignity assigned to hair in the encomium (*Met.* 2.9) in order to assess Lucius' baldness at the end of the novel (James and O'Brien (2006)).

In this paper, I argue that Lucius' encomium of hair blends two separate literary traditions – a well-known Platonic mirroring scene and the tradition of hair encomia – into a comic pastiche that foreshadows Lucius' final position vis-à-vis Isis. The famous mirroring between the *ἐραστής* and *ἐρώμενος* in Plato's *Phaedrus* is conceived of as a moment of 'erotic reciprocity' (Halperin (1986)) in which the subordinated beloved figure looks into the eyes of the lover and sees himself as if in a mirror (*ὥσπερ δὲ ἐν κατόπτρῳ ἐν τῷ ἐρῶντι ἑαυτὸν ὁρῶν λέληθεν*); there, the *ἐρώμενος* is given his own internal experience of an erotic encounter that culminates in self-knowledge. Apuleius, adopting the Platonic motif of a visionary, mirroring encounter, turns the subordinated beloved into an object to be consumed by the *ἐραστής* figure. It is not Photis' eyes that provide the erotic mirror of self-knowledge, but rather the *color* and *nitor* of her hair. What kind of statement does this inversion of the famous Platonic scene make?

I will conclude the paper with a discussion of how the hair-mirror analogy ultimately calls into question the notion of inter-subjectivity and the retention of identity under the empire. The mirror and hair share metaphorical associations in as much as they are both markers of identity and means of defining selfhood. For instance, when Psyche first gazes upon Cupid (*Met.* 5.22), she recognizes him from his hair, the trait that marks his identity, whereas Lucius is defined as an Actaeon-like voyeur when he gazes into the reflection of the water beneath Byrrhaena's statuary scene (*Met.* 2.4; cf. Slater (1998)). The fact that the markers of identity are conflated into an anti-Platonic mirroring scene, in which the inter-subjective mirroring is changed into a subject looking at an object, reflects doubt about the locus of identity and the possibility of maintaining subjectivity. If we apply this statement to the final scenes of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Lucius

becomes a bald-headed mirror for Isis, we can see that Lucius loses his own subjectivity through his conversion to the cult of Isis and he, like Photis, becomes yet another object subordinated to the goddess. With the loss of his hair, he loses his *dignitas*, and perhaps even his identity.

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