

Breaking Time in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*: Initiation, Identity, and the Reimagining of Temporality

This paper re-examines the transformative journey of Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, focusing on the critical shift in his relationship with time and self following his engagement with the cult of Isis. It highlights how Lucius' experiences after re-transformation challenge linear narratives of identity and temporal progression, offering insights into the re-construction of selfhood around religious devotion. In examining Lucius' engagement with time in Book 11, I will demonstrate how the narrative proposes a non-normative understanding of temporality.

While some interpretations in the existing scholarship suggest a continuity in Lucius' character following his initiation (May, 2019), a temporality-focused examination reveals significant changes. After his re-transformation to human, Lucius exhibits a sharp change in his engagement with time, moving from an active to a more reflective stance, which suggests a radical reorientation of his life around religious devotion and temporal perception. For instance, when his friends come to visit him he quickly (*propere*) tells them what happened to him and then returns to watching (*conspectum*) the image of the goddess. (*Met.* 11.19) This act of recounting his antecedent experiences pales in comparison to the profound act of silent observation, a practice that reveals a newfound prioritization of meditative engagement with the divine. Furthermore, towards the narrative's conclusion, when he visits his family, he quickly (*raptim*) organizes his belongings for his return to the temple and his duties therein. (*Met.* 11.26) Additionally, Lucius recounts during his initiation, "In the middle of the night, I saw the sun shining with bright light." This statement aligns with other experiences that defy conventional possibilities. (*Met.* 11.23)

This analysis argues that Lucius' narrative exemplifies a break from the chronological time that aligns with societal expectations of growth and progression. (Halberstam, 2005; Stockton 2009) Instead, his story embraces a temporal model that values reflection and repetition over linear advancement. Originating from a position of affluence and societal privilege, where Lucius was accustomed to being served, he transitions to a state of eagerness to serve, aligning his future

aspirations with continued devotion to the cult which he ends up doing at the end and describe as “there was no more important daily occupation”. (*Met.* 11.21; 27) This model serves as a critique of the prescribed milestones that define normative life courses, proposing a non-normative understanding of future. The initiation into Isis’ cult transcends mere personal metamorphosis to offer a profound critique on the constructs of selfhood and the capacity for identities to be reshaped beyond the linear delineations. Lucius’ re-positioning is not merely a rejection of past but an embracement of both rupture and continuity between different stages of self. In sum, Lucius’ initiation and transformation under the Isis cult offer a strong narrative for reconsidering the ways in which time, agency, and identity intersect and diverge from traditional narratives, providing an important perspective for contemporary discussions on the fluidity of self and the construction of narrative time.

Bibliography

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