

Being an Ass: Embodied Identity vs. Internal Self in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

Lucius, in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, uniquely narrates a dual identity during his metamorphosis providing a tool through which modern models of Graeco-Roman selfhood and identity (particularly Gill, 1996; 2004) can be analyzed and ultimately nuanced. Lucius clearly narrates his dual nature as consisting of both the embodied identity of an ass and the remembered identity of a man. This interplay between an embodied identity policed by external forces and the attempted performance of a remembered self-identity forces us to reexamine the role of the body in Graeco-Roman identity formation (a role underemphasized in Gill). Additionally, remembered identity proves the existence of a self-identity existing apart from the body which must be protected when it feels threatened.

Gill has argued that our attempts to view the Graeco-Roman conception of self should be viewed through an objective-participant model (Gill, 1996; 2004); that is, an externalized identity with little to no vocalization of a subjective-individual identity. Yet a close reading of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* finds proof, contrary to Gill's assertion, that internal self identities could find the opportunity to be enacted. Modern conceptions of identity's performative nature (Butler, 1990; 1993) and the central place of embodiment in the formation of identity (Mascia-Lees, 2011; Prosser, 1998) can help explain why Gill sees no evidence of internal identity. Additionally, these conceptions of embodiment provide additional tools for examining identity in Graeco-Roman literature.

The two identities of Lucius, embodied ass and remembered man, create dissonance which Lucius throughout his narration tries to resolve through enacting his remembered identity, i.e., Lucius' self project is to claim a human identity. For example, Lucius tries to employ the

word *nos* to include himself with the other humans [e.g., 7.13, 8.1, 6.25], but Lucius' conception of *nos* as a human grouping is constantly disrupted as his subordination to his human owners reinforces an embodied identity [e.g., 3.28, 7.13; 8.15].

These external pressures, which demand that Lucius adopts the identity of an ass [e.g., 3.26, 3.29, 4.1], have a constant presence in his narrative. However, his own sense of remembered self-identity can be asserted when societal policing is absent [e.g., 9.2; 10.12], when his human desires and those natural to an ass coincide [e.g., 4.5; 10:17], or when the assault on his remembered identity is too great to tolerate.

Lucius' internal identity is focalized almost entirely through internal narrative. But in four instances, when Lucius feels like his remembered identity is under attack, this internal narrative is foregrounded by attempted external action. In these four instances, Lucius literally attempts to speak so that he might defend his internal understanding of self [e.g., 3.29 to end his slavery (Harrison, 2015); 7.3 to begin a legal defense on his indictment of robbing a host; 8.29 to end the deviancy of the Galli (fearing that he has become or is becoming the deviant castrated other (Hijman, 1985)); and 10.35 to protest the moral shame of public copulation].

In this reading, Lucius demonstrates a conception of internal self-hood that is partially divorced from Gill's objective-participant model. This internal self would be undetectable were it not for the fact that Lucius has been moved into a different body: Lucius moves from the unmarked identity of a *homo* into the marked identity of an animal. It is this momentary incongruence between embodied nature and remembered identity that allows us to see a glimpse of Lucius' internal sense of self. Recognition of the supreme importance of the body in identity formation and the dichotomy between unmarked/marked identities (Butler, 1990; Prosser 1998) could explain why Gill sees no internalized identity in other texts, for unmarked identities are

often invisible (Butler, 1990). Gill correctly notes that Graeco-Roman conceptions of self are heavily influenced by objective and external forces, but the performance of individual self-hood can be discovered on the margins, particularly in moments of bodily incongruence.

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