

# To Baldly Go: A Last Look at Lucius and his Counter-Humiliation Strategies

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## A personal preamble

About 10 years ago I (PJ) gave a paper re-interpreting the Risus Festival in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. I was particularly interested in Lucius' attempt to restore his *dignitas* after the humiliation at Hypata. It seemed to me that the Apuleian hero was propelled towards shape shifting and the desire to take flight literally as a bird to counter his shameful experience performing for the god of Laughter. It was with characteristic generosity that Maaïke Zimmerman and Danielle van Mal-Maeder consequently commented, at my request, on the paper's strengths and weaknesses, but for a number of reasons it never came to fruition as a published piece.<sup>1</sup> Having travelled some distance away from Apuleian studies over the years, I returned for the purposes of this contribution, and with some trepidation, to the unfinished business of Lucius' counter-phobic strategies to shame. A small part of my original idea is embedded within the offering to this volume.

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<sup>1</sup> Lateiner 2001, 217–255 has written the most thorough exploration of Lucius' humility at the Risus festival to date. Massey 1976, pre Winkler, explored the alienation and detachment that comes as a price for metamorphosis but which guarantees protection of privacy. He saw (38) the transformation as a continuation of Lucius' festival experience.

## Beautiful Friendships!

It is a great honour to be part of this volume and very enjoyable to work with Maeve O'Brien who has added a philosophical and daemonic dimension to the somewhat unworked-out equation of my ideas about humiliation and self-definition. We believe that Lucius' depressed psychological state after the 'new fiction' of the Risus festival means that he does indeed need to find a way of redeeming his sense of self, his *dignitas*. This he does within the wider fiction of the novel. Taking as our main theme Lucius' redemption in terms of identity and social status, we have looked more closely at the very end of the novel and have both become intrigued by the apparent inappropriateness or, pardon the pun, wrong-headedness of Lucius' hairless state. Our intention is to uncover a connection between the hero's baldness and his earlier attempt to metamorphose his identity more drastically. The hero's goal has been to restore, perhaps even improve, his shaken status after the Risus festival, and so the starting point of this interpretation is the ramification of this one particular word, *dignitas*, a textual conundrum, we hope, after Maaïke's heart. We are sure that she could convert our questions into a scintillating study some day; her insights into the Apuleian text invariably encourage and empower critics of the ancient novel whatever tentative steps they take towards interpreting the multi-layered nature of the *Metamorphoses*.

## Dignity, always Dignity.

At the beginning of the film *Singing in the Rain* the silent screen star and heartthrob Don Lockwood (played by Gene Kelly) is interviewed in front of crowds of sighing and swooning fans. He proceeds to weave an impromptu narrative about his rise to fame and success. His voice over repeats the motto he has lived by: 'Dignity, always dignity' while the screen flashback tells the real story of his past with partner Cosmo Brown, playing vaudeville in low dives and then as a stunt man in spectacular crashes and pratfalls. It is a nice and neat underlining of the film's ironic focus on the end of the Silent Era and the coming of the Talkies. The movie audience sees the truth in pictures without dialogue; the crowd, fooled by the storyteller and supplying their own visualisation from his illusory version of the truth, has no idea that their idol could be literally false or fallen. They are also protected from the actual

sound the apparently elegant and refined leading lady, Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen) produces, which is so at odds with her (studio constructed) image.<sup>2</sup> In spite of his skill as a word spinner Don is later also forced to question whether he has ever been a proper actor or a kind of clown who simply does 'dumb show', however romantic, dashing and courageous a part he has played in past pictures.

This is perhaps a quirky introduction to the dilemma of Lucius in Apuleius' novel, a hero who goes from an excess of articulateness to voicelessness in the human sense. However, dignity is a commodity of great value to Lucius and his pursuit of its restoration takes some unexpected turns. The Latin word *dignitas* comes with an interesting set of associations and the hero's use of it is perhaps too little glossed in the commentaries. To make the most of this word in Apuleius we need to go beyond *dignitas* as function, office or even adornment. *Dignitas* is associated with the status necessary for and accruing from the status of office holding (for instance *dignitas consularis* – a person worthy of being a consul). Apuleius' choice of this word in a key scene before Lucius' transformation suggests how very high Lucius' hopes are for improving his status by the intended metamorphosis. It is necessary to set the scene and context for Lucius' recently damaged ego and identity.

### Humiliation – Hypatan style.

Lucius has suffered a terrible humiliation in Hypata where he is staying on business in the house of the miser, Milo. The townspeople have a yearly celebration for the god of Laughter, Risus, and Lucius seems to have been

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<sup>2</sup> The unfortunate Lina with her common and coarse voice is dubbed by Kathy Selden on screen (played by Debbie Reynolds but paradoxically it was Jean Hagen, with her naturally mellow and feminine voice, who provided the rich velvety crooning for her alter ego!). Lina's lack of singing talent is finally exposed to the audience at the end of the film. *Singing in the Rain* is full of ironies about constructed identities, about silencing and about learning to speak, sing or perform in unnatural registers: 'Academics love it because it is a movie about movies. College students steeped in semiotics loop it through their moviolas searching for cinematic syntax in the "The Moses Supposes His Toeses Are Roses" sequence.' John Mariani, *Film Comment*, May-June 1978.

Funnily enough on the embarrassment front, the art director had troubles with the third act ballet dance sequence as they had to disguise Cyd Charisse's dark body hair which was showing through her tight-fitting brilliant white body suit!

manipulated into giving a performance in the deity's honour. Book Three begins with Lucius' arrest and trial for the murder of three young local men of high standing. Lucius explains that he attacked them as they were forcing an entry into his host's house. However, his narration of past events (like Don Lockwood's!) is at odds with his previous description of the night-time confrontation (as narrated previously to the reader). In the embellished version delivered passionately to the Hypatan townsfolk he comes out heroic, even Herculean, in his battle and he ascribes speeches to the 'robbers' to build up his bravery and add to the drama of the occasion. His rhetorical defence is met with gales of laughter from all present. The corpses of the murdered men turn out to be goat skins for holding wine and the whole trial has been an elaborate hoax, possibly constructed out of Lucius' drink-induced misidentification of the animated skins.

During the terrifying trial Lucius is threatened with torture, as if he has no rights and no protection as a citizen of the Empire, in short no status or *dignitas*. This is just one indication of abnormality and anomaly in the proceedings. Only days before, Lucius has been clearly viewed as an educated young man; he has attracted the attention and praise of his aunt who is a leading figure in the town (*Met.* 2,2). So his *dignitas* matches a physical attractiveness that is described in some detail. This blazon of Byrrhena's could suggest a supernatural beauty – at the very least it should hold this moment and this meeting in our minds as a significant occasion. Lucius' comeliness is so eagerly looked at and looked over when he encounters his aunt Byrrhena and her entourage we might suspect that he has been chosen as the sacrifice cum scapegoat for the festival at this point.<sup>3</sup>

*'En' inquit 'sanctissimae Salviae matris generosa probitas. Sed et cetera corporis exsecrabiliter ad [regulam qua diligenter aliquid affingunt] amussim congruentia: inenormis proceritas, succulenta gracilitas, rubor temperatus, flavum et inaffectedatum capillitium, oculi caesii quidem, sed*

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<sup>3</sup> Choosing a suitably sleek and unblemished animal was an important part of the process. There has been a good deal written on the Risus festival as carnival, ritual and a *pharmakos* –like cleansing of the community. See for instance, James 1987, 87–106, Bartolucci 1988, Habinek 1990, McCreight 1993, Van der Paardt 1990; Frangoulidis 2002 argues contra the *pharmakos*-interpretation and views the festival rather as an integration rite into the community. For a similar view see Keulen in this volume.

*vigiles et in aspectu micantes, prorsus aquilini, os quoquoversum floridum, speciosus et immeditatus incessus.*'<sup>4</sup> *Met.* 2,2

'He inherited that well-bred behaviour,' she said, 'from his pure and virtuous mother Salvia. And his physical appearance is a damnably precise fit too: he is tall but not abnormal, slim but with sap in him, and of a rosy complexion; but he has blond hair worn without affectation, wide-awake light-blue eyes with flashing glance just like an eagle's, a face with a bloom in every part, and an attractive and unaffected walk.'<sup>5</sup>

Byrrhena appears to be part of the set-up, the conspiracy committee that has selected Lucius as a likely lad for the day of Laughter. She even suggests to Lucius at her banquet in Book Two that he finds some suitable material for the jesting god. And indeed Lucius has, but at great cost to his self-esteem. Once the wineskins have been uncovered and the whole theatre has erupted into laughter, Lucius collapses psychologically. Winkler (1985, 171–173) focuses on Lucius' immobility, his alienation and the anaesthetizing effect the shock of the discovery has upon his outward body while his inner self is in turmoil. Lucius later rejects the honour of a statue from the magistrates to celebrate his starring role in the Risus Festival. He views such a gesture as the externalising and eternalising of his humiliation. He is slow to exorcise the experience and inconsolable until Photis later explains how the goatskins came to be battering at the door of Milo's house.

Photis' story of Pamphile's witchcraft and her own part in the summoning spell manqué re-awakens Lucius' fascination with magic. He is finally able to laugh at his energetic attack upon and repulse of the wine skins which had arrived instead of the young Boeotian Pamphile had meant to attract. Photis had substituted goat hair for the Boetian's hair clippings (the barber had shooed Photis away as she attempted to steal the young man's cut locks, for he suspected that the human hair would play a part in some sort of magic ritual). The emotional release brought about by this laughter might suggest that Lucius has recovered from the Risus experience. He had been unwise in

<sup>4</sup> The expansive description makes the metamorphosis of the hero at 3,24 a striking and painful contrast. The ass has an immense face (*facies enormis*) and gaping nostrils (*nares hiantes*). The passage describing the hero while still human has been analysed in impressive detail by Van Mal-Maeder in her commentary of 2001, 71–79 and thoroughly discussed in her article of 1997a.

<sup>5</sup> Translations by Hanson 1989.

rejecting the god by refusing to share in the hilarity of the Hypatans. His active avoidance of Risus who surely is manifesting himself in the laughter after the festival demonstrates that he was unable to integrate himself into the community at the end of the ritual. By laughing later he does not seem to have redeemed himself and fails to reconcile himself to and with Risus. This is only one possible reading, but it does seem clear that if laughter is destined to be Lucius' constant companion (as predicted by the magistrates at 3,11 when they claim to recognise their victim's *dignitas*) his ass transformation is a sardonic fulfilment of the prophecy.

### Motivating the metamorphosis

Lucius forgives Photis for her part in the series of unfortunate events but begs her, in return, to let him into Pamphile's magical secrets. Photis takes Lucius to the attic to spy upon her mistress as she transforms herself into a bird. She then reluctantly agrees to assist him in a similar metamorphosis, but an application of the wrong ointment has disastrous consequences. Instead of becoming a bird, Lucius is turned into an ass. He could not be more landlocked or downward looking and he is continually frustrated from this moment on, as a human mind trapped within the body of a dumb beast. The question is why Lucius wanted to be transformed at all, magical metamorphosis being a risky business at the best of times. As this episode is one of the points where Apuleius and the Greek story coalesce, it is worth comparing the alleged reasons for both heroes' desire to become a bird.

The Greek *Onos* hero also asks the slave girl (Palaestra) to help him change form. He expresses an almost scientific or socio-psychological desire to find out if the human mind remains unaltered when the external form is transformed (*Onos* 13). Not so the Latin Lucius who wants to stand beside his beloved Photis like a winged Cupid at 3,22: '*Tuumque mancipium irremunerabili beneficio sic tibi perpetuo pignera, ac iam perface ut meae Veneri Cupido pinnatus assistam tibi*. 'Bind me as your slave for ever by a favour I can never repay, and make me stand beside you now, a winged Cupid next to my Venus.' Apuleius' hero has to reassure Photis that he is not going to take flight and find other partners for his sexual romps.<sup>6</sup> He seems

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<sup>6</sup> For the imagery of flight and Lucius' links with Cupid throughout the novel see James 1998.

very keen to be airborne and Apuleius avoids the standard 'oarage of wings' image and has his Lucius talk of the 'office of wings' *pinnarum dignitatem*:

*'ut ego, quamvis ipsius aquilae sublimis volatibus toto caelo pervius et supremi Iovis certus nuntius vel laetus armiger, tamen non ad meum nidulum post illam pinnarum dignitatem subinde devolem? Adiuro per dulcem istum capilli tui nodulum, quo meum vinxisti spiritum, me nullam aliam meae Photidi malle.'* *Met.* 3,23

'Even if I could traverse the entire sky in the lofty flight of the eagle himself, even if I were the unerring messenger and happy weapon-bearer of almighty Jupiter, don't you think I would still fly back down to my little nest after so nobly employing my wings. I swear by that sweet knot of your hair with which you have bound my soul that there is no other woman I prefer to my Photis.'

The 'dignity' of wings will not stop Lucius from returning to his modest 'nest' and his low-status lover. In fantasising about what free flight might allow him to do and be, he seems to have moved on from the horror and humiliation of the Risus festival. If Newbold's theories on Icarianism (1985) hold water, desire for this particular shape shift is Lucius' way of rising above his shame and restoring his worthiness. What Lucius seems to desire after the horrors of the Risus day is a dignity of feathers and he is of course cruelly disappointed when the magic goes wrong. In a novel that has as one of its many timbres the philosophical and platonic aspects of curiosity and identity, it seems strange that the verbose hero shows no inquisitiveness about altered states. Unlike his *Onos* counterpart, he does not pose any profound questions about metamorphosis and the fate of the soul but appears fixated upon the sensuous experience of being 'winged.' The desire for *dignitas* may be a strong hint that the hero is still in a psychological trauma from the Risus Festival and that shape shifting and especially the enjoyment of flight is his way of restoring the dignity he has lost. Newbold explored Icarianism as a counter-phobic strategy to shame in other ancient texts and much of his argumentation could be applied to the unhappy situation Lucius finds himself in at Hypata.

Lucius has sworn to return from this dignity of flight by the almost magical knot of Photis's beautiful hair. It is interesting to recall that *dignitas*

has occurred in Lucius' elaborate encomium on female hair at 2,9, an outburst prompted by the slave girl's seductive appearance:

*'Tanta denique est capillamenti dignitas ut quamvis auro veste gemmis omniq[ue] cetero mundo exornata mulier incedat, tamen, nisi capillum distinxerit, ornata non possit audire.'* 'In short, the significance of a woman's coiffure is so great that, no matter how finely attired she may be when she steps out in her gold, robes, jewels, and all her other finery, unless she has embellished her hair she cannot be called well-dressed.'

Apuleian commentators and critics have made interesting observations on the theme of hair in the novel.<sup>7</sup> Pamphile's intention to entice an attractive Boeotian to her bed by stealing his hair and bewitching him by this means is not the first example of hair appearing in the context of an erotic entanglement. Lucius is particularly attracted to the slave girl's coiffure and extols female hair as a prelude to his seduction of Photis.<sup>8</sup> He expressly talks of the *capillamenti dignitas* as the crowning glory for any woman. However lovely, Venus herself would be unattractive if she were bald.<sup>9</sup>

The hero's preoccupation with hair sets up a particular paradox when his narrative concludes – the old pre-ass Lucius would have been mortified, we assume,<sup>10</sup> to parade a bald head around the streets of Rome. As a priest of Osiris this is exactly how Lucius ends up. It is worth striking when the ironies are hot, however, and observing that the transformation into an ass makes the hero a marvellously hairy beast – he has an embarrassment of riches in that respect. His happiness to be hairless by the end of the book

<sup>7</sup> The theme of hair is explored in Englert and Long 1972–1973. See also Schmeling and Montiglio in this volume.

<sup>8</sup> Lucius may have made up his mind to win her over in order to gain access to her witch mistress Pamphile and satisfy his appetite for witnessing magic and metamorphosis, but Photis seems rapidly to take charge of the situation sexually and narratively. Lucius becomes enslaved to the slave girl and is soon in the throes of sex addiction.

<sup>9</sup> We are indebted to Joann Fletcher (see note 17) who has commented on our paper from the Egyptologist's perspective. She confirms just how potent a symbol hair is and that it can, across cultures, be viewed as 'a receptacle for physical and often secret power.' However, although the allure of real and also false hair was much admired in a woman, high status mummies sometimes have shaven heads and artistic representations can show bald women to advantage.

<sup>10</sup> It is the female of the species whom Lucius is praising in particular at this point. Perhaps we are in danger of overstating Lucius' attachment to his own human hair.



could be comically explained by his exorcising his hairy time as an ass but yet another interpretation will be on offer in due course.

### Defining 'dignity'

The use of the word *dignitas* evokes not just the 'function' of wings but might be an intentional pointer to Cicero's discussion of *dignitas* as a physical attribute in his treatise on practical philosophy, *de officiis* (1,36,130, quoted below). Cicero suggests when writing about the beauty of the body that *dignitas* is the male attribute equivalent to *venustas* in the female (comeliness, charm, the physical allure associated with the goddess Venus). Although both *venustas* and *dignitas* are qualities of adornment for the human species, for the male this is achieved by restraint in dress and appearance. It is worth looking at the discussion in more detail:

*sed quoniam decorum illud in omnibus factis, dictis, in corporis denique motu et statu cernitur idque positum est in tribus rebus, formositate, ordine, ornatu ad actionem apto, difficilibus ad eloquendum, sed satis erit intellegi, in his autem tribus continetur cura etiam illa, ut probemur iis, quibuscum apud quosque vivamus, his quoque de rebus pauca dicantur. Principio corporis nostri magnam natura ipsa videtur habuisse rationem, quae formam nostram reliquamque figuram, in qua esset species honesta, eam posuit in promptu, quae partes autem corporis ad naturae necessitatem datae aspectum essent deformem habiturae atque foedum, eas contextit atque abdidit.*

Cic. *offic.* 1,35,126

But the propriety to which I refer shows itself also in every deed, in every word, even in every movement and attitude of the body. And in outward, visible propriety there are three elements – beauty, tact and taste; these conceptions are difficult to express in words, but it will be enough for my purpose if they are understood. In these three elements is included also our concern for the good opinion of those with whom and amongst whom we live. For these reasons I should like to say a few words about this kind of propriety also. First of all, Nature seems to have had a wonderful plan in the construction of our bodies. Our face and our figure generally, in so far as it had a comely appearance, she has placed in sight; but the parts of the body that are given us only to serve the

needs of Nature and that would present an unsightly and unpleasant appearance she has covered up and concealed from view.<sup>11</sup>

*'cum autem pulchritudinis duo genera sint, quorum in altero venustas sit, in altero dignitas, venustatem muliebrem ducere debemus, dignitatem virilem. ergo et a forma removeatur omnis viro non dignus ornatus, et huic simile vitium in gestu motuque caveatur.'* Cic. *offic.* 1,36,130

'Again, there are two orders of beauty: in the one, loveliness predominates; in the other, dignity; of these, we ought to regard loveliness as the attribute of woman, and dignity as the attribute of man. Therefore, let all finery not suitable to a man's dignity be kept off his person, and let him guard against the like fault in gesture and action.'

Cicero is establishing precepts of propriety and decorum in every aspect of human bodily actions and linking in a traditional way outer appearance with inner and abstract qualities and attributes. Cicero measures appropriateness by three main qualities: *formositas*, *ordo*, *ornatus* – beauty, tact and taste. He recommends the golden mean in deportment, bodily decoration and general demeanour. Cicero describes Nature's wonderful plan for exposing to view those parts of the body most to be looked at. Any coarse aspect of the body must be kept hidden. Personal appearance must be neat but not fastidious or affected. In fact the admiring description of Lucius in Book 2 quoted earlier corresponds rather well to the positive role model of manhood constructed by Cicero, that behaviour and appearance should be modest, unaffected and in proper proportion. Lucius starts off with plenty of *dignitas* in this respect. As well as all these advantages and admirable qualities, Lucius also enjoys a reputation for *doctrina*, according to Photis at *Met.* 3,15. Photis trusts Lucius with her mistress's secrets because of his noble pedigree and his knowledge of cultic practices. However, as this paper progresses Lucius' physiognomy will prove to be a site for all kinds of fascinating readings, not least of which is Wytse Keulen's contribution to this volume.

Photis has been portrayed by Lucius in fulsome praise as a Venus look-alike and substitute. Her clear claim to *venustas* makes her an ideal match for Lucius who hopes to become a Cupid by acquiring *dignitas* and to stand by her side in this guise. Thinking back to the elaborate description of Lucius in

<sup>11</sup> Tr. Walter Miller in the Loeb (1975).

Book 2 which is followed by the hero's similarly constructed address to the reader about the attributes of Photis, we can assume that this couple are reflections of each other in physical beauty. The pair of lovers are beginning to look like a near parody of the heroes and heroines of Greek novels who invariably come as an alluring package. Lucius is destined not only to be separated from Photis (which does not break his heart!) but also to be divided from his true self, going through much suffering before he is re-united with his human exterior.<sup>12</sup>

### Journey's end?

The Laughter Festival is important in propelling the narrative along by giving an extra motivational push to the hero to take part in a transformation, to be 'hands on' rather than simply staying as a voyeur of magic and metamorphosis. However, Newbold's article raises the issue of the misfire in such shame-attacking techniques and the unfortunate outcome for Lucius is that he loses his humanity and becomes the essence of coarseness as an ass. His human mind and sensibilities remain but he picks up bestial habits that are a comical contradiction to everything Cicero recommends for looking 'dignified.' Spraying his tormenters with excrement at 4.3 is a case in point, something Lucius the ass does without a thought to retaining humanity or avoiding humiliation.<sup>13</sup>

Lucius becomes acclimatised as an ass to being an object of wonder and laughter once he reveals his affinity with things human. When in Book Ten he is faced with another theatrical performance, however, the copulation with the condemned woman (with its attendant dangers from the wild beasts that will be let loose upon them both) he runs away and begs to shed his shameful ass skin. He regains his human form, by the grace of Isis, and provides a different awesome kind of spectacle. Lucius is stark naked in the crowded festival, not a promising start to his repossession of *dignitas* as

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<sup>12</sup> Photis does not reappear and with hindsight her role seems more sinister. Lucius tells family and friends that a witch was responsible for his traumatic transformation. He is returned to his own self. See James 1998, 49.

<sup>13</sup> Lucius' excessive histrionics at the mock trial signified his slip from a measured manner and discourse as recommended by Cicero in his portrait of the ideal man. His shuffling gait around the city beforehand and the way he carried himself when led back to Milo's house were also crimes against the Ciceronian precepts of *dignitas*.

Cicero would see it, but he is immediately given an outer tunic to cover himself. The priest addresses the tongue-tied newly re-born mortal with words of wisdom about his suffering and its causes. He observes that none of his natural advantages protected Lucius from a misfortune brought about by the rashness of youth:

*Nec tibi natales ac ne dignitas quidem, vel ipsa qua flores usquam doctrina profuit, sed lubrico virentis aetatulae ad serviles delapsus voluptates, curiositatis improsperae sinistrum praemium reportasti. Met. 11,15*

‘Not your birth nor even your position, nor even your fine education has been of any help whatever to you; but on the slippery path of headstrong youth you plunged into slavish pleasures and reaped the perverse reward of your ill-starred curiosity.’

The emphasis upon *dignitas* in this significant summary of Lucius’ suffering should encourage us to see this attribute as bound up in Lucius’ inner and outer being before its disintegration at the Risus Festival. He seems to have lost it forever when he is changed into the ass, because his attempts to re-launch himself as a being of nobility by a metamorphosis into a bird and therefore a creature akin to and closer to the gods went disastrously awry. The priest pronounces that Lucius is about to have a happy ending; he has arrived at the port of Isis, goddess and Seeing Fortuna. The hero is strongly urged to enlist in her cult and after a good deal of expense and various drawn-out processes he becomes a priest of Osiris, enrolled in the directorate of the Shrine Bearers (*pastophori*). At the end of the novel Lucius tells the reader that he goes everywhere with his bald head uncovered and joyfully carries out his duties.<sup>14</sup> Scholars of Apuleius have offered persuasive arguments that there is a strong vein of satire in this conclusion.<sup>15</sup>

The Greek Ass story ends on a comic, indeed a farcical note; the hero tells a final anecdote against himself, how the loss of the large sexual organ the ass possessed had made him far less attractive to the high-born and beau-

<sup>14</sup> Winkler’s contention that the use of the imperfect tense suggests that the novel (and Lucius’ conversion) is open ended has been countered and problematised. See Penwill 1990, 24, Finkelpearl 1998, 187 (see also Finkelpearl 2004). Laird 2001 and van Mal-Maeder 1997b have produced persuasive theories about where to find the ‘real’ ending.

<sup>15</sup> Heiserman 1977, Winkler 1985, Murgatroyd 2004.

tiful woman he had copulated with when he was a beast. In spite of all the lyrical writing and religious fervour we find in Apuleius' version and his acceptance by the female goddess and her consort, his manipulation by the cult and the considerable expenditure it involves could point to the hero's gullibility and his continued manipulation by powerful females. It is true that Lucius is willing to give up his pleasures and to accept aspects of slavery in the service of the divine, but the priest had alerted him at the end of his speech to the dialectic of surrendering to the goddess in order to be free.

We could approach Lucius' fate from a different angle and ask just how appropriate it was for him to sport his baldness at every opportunity, and this brings us back to *dignitas* again. It has been pointed out by Winkler (1985, 225–227), Doody (1996, 123), and Lateiner (2001, 235) that priests of Isis and Osiris were figures of fun and butts of derision for Roman satirists, that baldness was the attribute of jesters and could also be regarded as an infirmity. Lucius is still exhibiting asinine qualities after his re-transformation and is as much a dupe of the duplicitous cult as he was a victim of witchcraft.<sup>16</sup> It would certainly seem that Lucius' baldness is a barrier to being taken seriously, especially by the scrupulous reader.

The interesting point about Lucius' embracing of this visible aspect of the cult is that priests of Osiris were expected to wear wigs when on everyday business and to reserve their baldheaded state for the time when they were actually and actively involved in a ritual.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the fact that Cicero may well have frowned upon shaven heads as inappropriate for a dignified citizen (revealing what nature has designed to be hidden?!), the cult itself may not have favoured such a blatant, in-your-face kind of baldness being constantly on show. So, can we suggest that the motif of hair and hairlessness can be taken even further in the novel?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> We are grateful to Wytse Keulen for his summary of the satiric perspective upon the priesthood of Lucius. He points out that Lucius has, however, been reflective about his initiations and the implications of denial they bring (*Met.* 11,19; 11,29). His lack of means is as much due to expensive city life (*Met.* 11,28) as his financial outlay for his religious ceremonies!

<sup>17</sup> On wigs, hair, cleanliness and head lice, see Fletcher 2004, 79–116. She goes into a great deal of detail in her thesis (unpublished) of 1995, an especially relevant section being 211–253. The shaven head and body guarded against the contamination of parasites while priests were about their duties but the devout formed a guaranteed clientele for wig makers and could wear their false hair with pride.

<sup>18</sup> One of Psyche's sisters complains of having to put up with a husband balder than a pumpkin at 5,9 (see Zimmerman et al. 2004, 170 f. ad loc.). Of course, Psyche's sisters

Lucius has compromised his *dignitas* once again by not preserving the custom of priests of Osiris to sport wigs and restrict the clean and shining bald heads for processions and priestly rites. Lucius professes to be deeply impressed by the *magnae religionis terrena sidera* – ‘earthly stars of the great religion’ as he dubs the shaven pates of the men in the *navigium Isidis* at 11,10. Small wonder he too wishes to parade his catasterised head around Rome as a sign that he has finally reached a heavenly state as a follower of Isis and Osiris. Is this another attempt to reach the stars and restore his dignity? The joke seems to be on Lucius as the hero is responsible for this final humiliation and it is his over-zealous embracing of the cult that results in his baldly and boldly going around Rome uncaring of the attention he is attracting. Lucius would appear to be oblivious to the fact that yet another counter-phobic strategy to shame has missed the mark and that true *dignitas* continues to elude him. If only things were that simple.

### The ‘Right’ Reader Response?

Is it legitimate to laugh and then take stock as we read the finale of Apuleius’ novel with its strongly visual image of our handsome hero ‘baldly and boldly’ going around the city of Rome? A comedy of errors on Lucius’ part does not necessarily mean that he has failed to reach an exalted state. Our interpretation may hedge the bets, but it has implications for the bigger question about the nature of the narrative itself and harks back to Winkler, 1985, 275 who writes: ‘Religious knowledge as such has this comedic aspect, that one person’s saving system is another person’s joke. In a certain light the deacon of Isis looks rather like a clown.’ As Maeve O’Brien has argued in *Apuleius’ Debt to Plato in the Metamorphoses* (2002, Prefatory Note): ‘Another approach is to combine the two [views of the novel as purely comic or religious allegory] and say that Lucius’ fall is a *felix culpa* because through it Lucius is finally re-united with Isis, and that the story has a heuristic purpose, the comedy or levity designed to win the sympathy of the reader for the final –serious – message.’

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come with a tradition of philosophical symbolism. See most recently O’Brien, 1998, 23–34. Hair is an important attribute not just for beauty but for counter-humiliation strategies. Thelyphron grows his hair long to cover the mutilation he has suffered, the loss of his ears (*Met.* 2,30).

On that note, we suggest an alternative 'happy' ending for Lucius.<sup>19</sup> Self-conscious self-definition was a common feature in the iconography of 'learned portraits' of the second century. In his discussion of this vast topic Zanker shows that the 'intellectual look' – baldness and a beard – was a fashionable image to adopt.<sup>20</sup> For our purposes it is sufficient to note that costume or disguise seemed necessary to indicate on the outside what was going on on the inside: a person had to be read by his cover. The intellectual or philosopher had to look bald or the complete opposite, wildly hairy and old as fashion demanded. Apuleius' own remarks on his wild coiffure in the *Apology* are intended to show his concern with higher things, though he does plead that philosophers might also be good-looking (*Apol.* 4). This is 'branding' ancient style and, taking our argument into profounder philosophical realms, is the reason why Apuleius himself feels it necessary to state in *On Plato and his Doctrine* that outward appearance is of no account at all in the philosopher's search for true wisdom (*Plat.* 2,22 p. 251).

It is against this background that one should look at Lucius' physical appearance in the *Metamorphoses*. As with everything else in Hypata, Lucius' image is in a continuous state of becoming. It is no surprise that he does not want it to be made into a statue after the Risus festival. He has too much shape-shifting yet to embark upon. He has the single necessary ingredient for this voyage into the unknown, not wings but quality or uprightness, the *probitas* inherited from his mother (*Met.* 2,2). This uprightness drives his desire or curiosity to know more about everything: magic, love, and novelty of every kind. Apuleius maintains elsewhere that this desire is important in the search for knowledge and that no appearance of the body (*deformatas corporis*) can ever shake this desire:

It is the wisdom of a good man that makes a youth love him, but only a youth who by the uprightness of his innate nature (*probitate ingenii*) is well-disposed towards the good arts. Shapelessness of the body cannot drive away such a desire: for when the soul herself has captivated the affections, the person as a whole is loved, but when it is the body which is sought out eagerly, only his inferior part is held dear (*Plat.* 2,22 p. 251).

<sup>19</sup> The 'happy ending' of Lucius' journey in the different space of Book 11 and with difficult roads behind him, is suggested by Maaïke Zimmerman in her aptly named article of 2002, 'On the Road in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', especially p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> See Zanker 1995, esp. 224–250. Cf. Dowden in this volume, n. 35.

Even if one is possessed of such uprightness one can be led astray in seeking out transient delights. Lucius is changed into a donkey in pursuit of such delights. But this is not a punishment, rather it is just one more way, as is the Risus festival debacle, for him to continue his quest. The desire to seek out a higher knowledge (represented in the novel possibly by the Isiac cult) is different in that this level of the quest is conducted by means of learning to love the soul. This is of necessity what happens to Lucius, because after he loses his human body all he has left is his human soul. It is with this soul that he communes with Isis, a metaphor for divine knowledge in the eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses*. As readers then we might be entitled to think that Lucius has reached nirvana – but, have we? Lucius' bald pate is so well polished it has blinded us as readers. We cannot see Isis but can access her only through Lucius' description. Isis is the goddess of Egyptian religion but in Apuleian terms she is a god in literature. According to Plato, Olympian gods in literature relate to true divinity as objects of illusion relate to objects of true knowledge.<sup>21</sup> As a Platonist, Apuleius must have known that true communion with the gods, the only true love, will be truly achieved when one beholds them with the eyes of the soul.<sup>22</sup>

Apuleius discusses the gods as they appear in literature in the context of a wider discussion of daemons in *On the god of Socrates* (*Socr.* 11-12 p. 145-6). Daemons are made of stuff so fine that they are invisible (11 p. 145). The literary examples used to illustrate the point are Homeric Minerva, who is visible to Achilles alone, and also noted is Vergilian Iuturna's invisibility to the army. The *effect* of the invisibility is also illustrated with a literary exemplum: daemons then are invisible because the eyes of those trying to see them are blinded much as when the enemy is blinded by the sunlight reflecting off the braggart soldier's shield (*Socr.* 11 p. 145). On the other hand it has been noted that a glimpse of the gods is achieved sometimes by means of the sight of the soul (*mentis*) (2 p. 121), but that the inadequacy of human speech is such that they cannot be described (3 p. 124).

The god in the *Metamorphoses* is not Minerva or Iuturna but Isis. She is not an Olympian god but a description of her is attempted by Lucius who bemoans the inadequacy of language as he does so. The hero has achieved the status he desires as his shaven head proclaims. He is now the intellectual,

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<sup>21</sup> *Symp.* 210a; *Rep.* 389d-390c. Or *Phaedrus*, 250e-251a, where soul is corrupted by the influence of Olympian gods.

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Symp.* 212a.



he has learned to love his soul and by means of this soul he is able to look upon Isis. The introduction of the Isiac cult into the novel at this point is a device used to show how Lucius has made this progression and achieved a new level in his quest for knowledge. He has glimpsed the god and tried to describe this vision to us. The point of the eleventh book is to show how such a quest might be pursued.

The quality of *probitas*, so prominent in the description of Lucius' physical qualities as a human, occasionally re-asserted itself during his unpleasant adventures (the sleek, comely and handsome ass.). He and we have learned that his outward appearance is no bar to achieving the highest knowledge. But while he continues on, we ourselves cannot follow the imperfect tense of the last word in the novel. Lucius gaily marches on almost inviting us to go on as well, but we cannot, because he, the lovely fair-haired braggart, has been shorn. His shining head, like the braggart soldier's shield, is the means by which we are blinded to his new status: he has himself become like a daemon in literature, an earthly star indeed. Unless we can catch sight of him by means of the eyes of the soul, he will be ever elusive. So blinded by the sheen off Lucius' bald head, the search continues. In this quest we shall, as we said at the outset of this interpretative journey, be guided by Maaïke's insights and take no more tentative steps until she gives us her distinctive 'reader response.'

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