

Thrasyleon: Man or Bear? Transformation through *eo* in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

Apuleius structures his *Metamorphoses* as a frame narrative containing many embedded stories which often seem disparate. He uses the verb *eo* and its compounds often, unusual word choice for the second century CE (cf. the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* and the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* for patterns of usage). By examining occurrences of this verb and comparing the thematic contexts in which *eo* appears, it is evident that Apuleius employs this verb for more than simple physical movement. *Eo* thematically connects seemingly unrelated stories through similar uses, frequently appearing in situations that involve both physical and internal metamorphoses. In the final book of the novel, several *eo* compounds express different nuances of meaning. *Eo* thus acts as a linguistic marker of metamorphosis, demonstrating transformation on the level of the text itself. The way in which Apuleius uses *eo* allows careful readers (*Lector intende*, 1.1) to detect patterns present throughout the novel and to find deeper connections among the stories.

In this paper, I argue that Apuleius' use of *eo* relates the embedded story of Thrasyleon, a robber who disguises himself as a bear, to Lucius' metamorphosis back into a human and conversion to Isiac religion. There is much scholarly debate concerning the sincerity of Lucius' conversion (Winkler 1985). Previous scholarly approaches concerning Thrasyleon have primarily discussed the boundaries that he blurs between man and animal (Finkelpearl 2006, Shelton 2005, Hopwood 1998). In addition, Panayotakis (2003) describes Thrasyleon's role as an actor in a stage-play, and Frangoulidis (1994) compares him to Tlepolemus, another minor character. I argue that Thrasyleon's story serves a much greater purpose within the *Metamorphoses*, acting as a lens through which readers can interpret Lucius' physical and religious transformations.

First, I will examine two *eo* compounds, *subeo* and *obeo*, to demonstrate their linguistic metamorphoses. In the first ten books of the *Metamorphoses*, forms of *subeo* occur in situations that involve changes in status and appearance – often as a result of punishments – through disguises (4.14-15), thoughts (3.29, 7.2-4, 7.15, 9.2), and legal scenarios (6.3-7, 7.10, 9.41). In book 11, *subeo* describes religious devotion (11.21), subverting the previous pattern of usage. Similarly, *obeo* conveys a new shade of meaning at the end of the novel. In the first ten books, *obeo* appears in predominantly negative physical contexts, like violence (1.7, 4.20, 7.23, 9.12) and illicit sexual activities (8.2-10, 8.29, 9.5, 10.21). In book 11, however, *obeo* occurs twice to describe Lucius performing devotions to Isis (11.22, 11.30). The meanings of both *subeo* and *obeo* change in nuance over the course of the novel, demonstrating linguistic transformations that underscore Lucius' own metamorphoses.

Next, I will examine the forms of *subeo* and *obeo* that occur within the story of Thrasyleon in book 4, comparing them to uses of the same compounds in Lucius' transformation and conversion in book 11. A close study of these compounds reveals linguistic and thematic connections between Thrasyleon's metamorphosis and Lucius' conversion. Thrasyleon visually transforms into a bear, and he also begins to behave like an animal. Despite sacrificing himself to save his companions, he never fully regains his human body. He dies while disguised as a bear and a butcher cuts open his pelt, but the story ends before the narrator reveals what the butcher discovers. In contrast, Lucius regains his human form, but the extent of his internal changes are questionable. He does not earn the divine salvation that he receives, unlike Thrasyleon, whose heroic sacrifice immortalizes him in glory (*Thrasyleon nobis perivit, sed a gloria non perivit*, 4.21). These connections are critical to interpreting Lucius' conversion in book 11. In the final book, Lucius – although returned to human form and devoted to Isis – displays the same

characteristics as he has shown throughout the novel (especially *curiositas*), calling into question how much he has actually changed over the course of his journey.

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