

Lucius Apuleius A Journey in Search of Identity

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Abstract. This article offers a comprehensive reexamination of *The Golden Ass: Being the Metamorphoses of Lucius Apuleius* by Apuleius as a profoundly hybrid and genre-defying narrative that integrates literary innovation with philosophical, religious, and cultural inquiry. The study foregrounds the novel's autobiographical and "ego-narrative" dimension, emphasizing the deliberate overlap between the author and the protagonist, Lucius, whereby the boundaries between narrator and character become fluid. Through this narrative strategy, Apuleius constructs a text that simultaneously performs fiction and gestures toward experiential authenticity. Central to the analysis is the motif of metamorphosis as an ethical and ontological paradigm. The novel thus articulates a profound meditation on human fallibility, the tension between bodily desire and rational illumination, and the possibility of spiritual regeneration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Questioning the research sample invested in engaging with this problematic moves within a space of composite subjectivity concerning the ontology of identity: first, speaking in terms of the position that led us to selection, for the act of choosing or selecting a topic does not depart from the writer's subjective and cultural inclinations; and second, the position inherited by Algerian culture throughout history, with all its artistic and intellectual contents, and its role in raising problematic about Algerian identity such as questioning the moment of its emergence and its connection to political history, which coincides with the birth of authority that embodied the relationship between ruler and ruled, and recorded the history of conflict and dispute among human beings, making them forget their generic and existential unity. For, the history that has been immortalized is the history of kings, emperors, and great men, who represent no more than a tenth of human society, while the rest, the overwhelming majority has been buried by authority in the dumps of history.

Moreover, the human group that settled North Africa, or Numidia, or Algeria, did not possess civic or civil affiliation before the Roman occupation, as if its presence in history before the Romans stripped it of its national or civil identity. Inasmuch as, truth always exists and is buried with the victim; therefore, the researcher finds in revolutionary and opposition movements some threads of the truth.

A problematic aspect has been added to the idea of combining the history of Africa and the Amazigh on multiple levels such as sociological and political, where pioneers of the Amazigh social context considered Amazighness a qualitative and racial specificity, not merely a cultural characteristic. For another group, it crystallized in Amazigh associative movements that engaged in political struggle, and the disagreement over the origin to which the Amazigh belong reveals an ideologization of the issue. Hence, in our study, we will settle on one fact: the existence of the Amazigh, or the Berbers as called in North Africa before the Romans.

The novel *The Golden Ass* will be the research sample, as it is considered the first novel in human history even if the term "first" stems from subjective and national constructs. Further, being the first novel, it served as a foundational reference for many of the characteristics and value standards of the art of the novel. In terms of content, it contains innumerable stories and tales within the narrative. It is a curious coincidence that the novel's main title, *The Golden Ass*, or its subtitle, *Metamorphoses*, intersects with the conference's problematic: identity and difference. On the other hand, as a literary genre, the novel presents transformations of identity and the human being's persistent search for constants amid the variables of identity. Through this novel, literature recorded its reflection on identity by a writer known for the openness of his identity on both the civic and cultural levels. For, from a civic perspective, we find ourselves before a historical political problem manifested in the moment of the emergence of the idea of identity and belonging. Inasmuch as, the inhabitants of North Africa specifically geographically west of Egypt are not precisely identified in terms of the region's original population, the Gaetulians as inhabitants of the region, to whom our philosopher Apuleius belonged, are the earliest group mentioned in history as having settled North Africa as they are cited in *The War with Jugurtha* (*Bellum Jugurthinum*) by the historian Sallust in several sections of the book: 18–19–80–88–97–99–103 (Sallust, 2014).

He is the Algerian Numidian thinker Lucius Apuleius who enrolled in his novel the human being's obsession and innate journey in search of identity. At the beginning, he declares the very content of the novel, which concerns transformations of identity, saying: "...you will be amazed how some people assume strange forms and then recover their original shapes in a different guise..." (Lucius, 2004, p. 41)

Thenceforward, for Lucius identity is not linked solely to biological individuality or to cultural and ethnic affiliations, but is also connected to the essence, which is reason. For, the secondary indicators of identity establish the material personality which is originally tied to the animal, irrational aspect of the human character. As for the noble element in identity the golden quality in the ass it is reason illuminated by sacred inspiration, and human humanity, for Lucius, is perceived only through liberation from the identity of the Ass and enlightenment by the light of golden reason (moderation), the light that enables one to perceive oneself and to know others the light illuminated by the universality of humankind.

2. LUCIUS APULEIUS: [125–170 CE]

Lucius Apuleius or Afulay (in Amazigh) was born in the early second century, around 125 CE, in Madaura or Mdaourouch, and died around 170 CE during the period of Christian expansion in Carthage.

Madaura or Mdaourouch where Apuleius was born, was “an ancient Numidian city that belonged to the kingdom of Syphax [3rd century BCE], then was annexed by the Romans to the kingdom of Masinissa between the third and second centuries BCE at the end of the Second Punic War [218–201 BCE], and later became a Roman colony around the end of the first century and was famous for its schools, scholars, and bishops... The ruins of Madaura can now be seen near the present-day city of Mdaourouch in Algeria.” (Abdessalam, 2010, p. 47)

Madaura was also a scientific and intellectual center in that era, where Apuleius acquired his first principles, like many prominent figures of the time in art and culture, and Augustine of Hippo frequented it as well, and it was the city of the famous orator Maximus, Augustine’s fellow student. In the same city studied “the ancient Maghrebi historian Martianus Capella, one of those who transmitted Apuleius’ logic to the Middle Ages.” (Abdessalam, 2010, p. 107)

He was known for his self-made character and strong personality. André Julien says: “Apuleius was one of the most famous African writers. He was eccentric and full of contradictions: serious and reckless, superstitious and skeptical, self-admiring, eloquent, intolerable to people, yet dazzling them at the same time.” (Charles, 1969, p. 251)

Although “Madour” was renowned at the time as a center of cultural radiance, it was not sufficient to quench the intellectual thirst of the thinker Apuleius. Further, he pursued his studies in other scientific centers such as Carthage, then the intellectual capital of North Africa, where he completed his higher studies. Speaking of Carthage, he says: “In your city I see only men who have drunk deeply from the fountains of culture and mastered all sciences: they learned knowledge as children, adorned themselves with it as youths, and taught it as elders. Carthage is the sacred school of our province, the bride of poetry in Africa, and finally the inspirer of the class that wears the toga.” (Shafiq, 1989, p. 80)

Over and above, he acknowledged his African culture and Amazigh identity, saying: “I have never been possessed by any feeling of shame about my identity or my homeland.” He also declared proudly: “I am half Gaetulian and half Numidian; I see no shame in that for myself... One should look not at a young man’s origin but at his character, and consider not in what land he was born but according to what way of life he intends to live.” (Lucius, *Apologia*, p. 33)

Lucius Addressing the Carthaginians and revealing his civic belonging, stated: “My home is not far from here,” he told his audience in Carthage. “My childhood made you my family; my teachers are not strangers to you... My homeland, located in the province of Africa, is your homeland as well. I spent my childhood among you; you are my teachers. Even if my philosophical thesis matured in Athens in Attica, it sprang from here.” He completed his education through journeys to Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor, and became enamored of Middle Platonism and undoubtedly attended the lectures of renowned sophists in Athens. Furthermore, he lived the life of a creative genius and loved knowledge, renounced politics, and was passionate about adventure and travel, he continued writing, delivering speeches, and giving lectures, occupations closest to his heart until he became unable to continue and then devoted himself fully to writing, he also was known for his noble character, which enabled him to achieve rare glory by the age of thirty, and his intellectual curiosity and love of learning led him to dedicate a significant portion of the wealth he inherited from his father to building schools and institutions. He was keen to share and disseminate his knowledge among his fellow citizens as a traveling lecturer during his many journeys, following the example of Socrates. Additionally, history records that he was greatly honored and esteemed by the people of Madaura, as evidenced by the memorials and statues found in the Madaura Museum, at the archaeological site located about forty kilometers from Souk Ahras. On top of that, the writer Ahmad Hamdi presented a theatrical text about the life of Afulay Apuleius in 1987, and the text was published by the Arab Writers Union in Syria in 1990.

3. HIS WORKS

3.1. The Golden Ass (Metamorphoses)

The *Metamorphoses* is the oldest Latin novel, and some consider it the first novel due to its completeness. It was translated into Arabic by the Libyan thinker Ali Fahmi Khashim from English and entitled it *The Metamorphoses of the Golden Donkey*. The Algerian writer Abu al-Eid Dudu translated it from French as *The Golden Ass*. It was later translated from Latin into Arabic by Ammar al-Jalassi under the title *The Golden Ass or The Metamorphoses*.

The novel recounts the journey of the hero Lucius to the city of Thessaly to visit his relatives, where he becomes a guest of the miser Milo, whose wife was among the most prominent witches. There he lives adventures with the host’s maid, through whom he is enabled to witness transformation by magic, he undergoes an inverse experience to his original desire which was to fly and soar into the realm of the sky and instead becomes a donkey. In this form, and within it, he experiences diverse daily human trials, mostly marked by deviation from values. In addition to this, the novel also carries a set of symbols, foremost among them praise and glorification of the Egyptian religion and its goddess Isis, in contrast to the Roman gods who control human destinies in a subjective manner that turns humans into instruments for fulfilling their will and sensual desires. In this, one may find an indication from Apuleius toward the Roman emperors, for whom the gods were merely tools to justify and legitimize their despotism.

3.2. On the God of Socrates (De Deo Socratis)

This book was originally a lecture in which Apuleius presented his conception of the world, clearly showing the Athenian Platonic impact that divides the world into one connected to matter and the senses, and another transcendent, abstract, and free from sensory qualities, he discusses how communication occurs between the upper and lower worlds, mediated by forces termed *daimones* (often translated as “the demon of Socrates,” though this distorts the intended meaning). The “inspiration of Socrates” seems closer to the meaning in terms of the functions performed by the *daimon*. In this context Apuleius says: “There exists a *daimon* in an intermediate place between the gods and us, by virtue of its domain and the nature of its intelligence. It shares with the higher beings especially immortality, and with the lower race the quality of suffering, it is exactly like us, possessing our same characteristics, subject to the impulses of the soul and its oscillation between calm and upheaval... They are beings finite in essence, dwelling in concealment from all humans, unless there is a valid reason for their appearance or the divine will calls them forth.” (Fathi, 2010, p. 34)

3.3. Apology (Apologia)

Translated from Latin into Arabic by the thinker Ammar al-Jalassi.

3.4. Florida

A collection of speeches, which Abu al-Eid Dudu believes these are not complete but rather selected excerpts, "nothing but passages chosen by a copyist who was content with what pleased him." They consist of twenty-three speeches divided into four books, the first contains nine speeches, including a comparison between the sight of a man and that of an eagle, a speech on India and its philosophers, and on Alexander, and the second contains six speeches, including one on divine providence, on the parrot, on the songs of birds, on Crates of Thebes, on Protagoras and his school, and on the philosopher Hippias. (Lucius, *The Golden Ass*, Book One, 2004, p. 13)

Among his other works are *Florida*, two books on the teachings of Plato, a book on the inspiration of Socrates, a book on the cosmos, a book of anecdotes (a collection of short poems), a book of tales containing stories, adventures, and romances, works on natural questions, fish, trees, the countryside, remedies, astronomy, mathematics, music, the philosophical Republic, the philosophical *Phaedo*, and a novel titled *Hermagoras*.

4. HIS LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSONALITY

Who was Apuleius? The question, posed in admiration and astonishment by Abd al-Salam Ben Mays, concerns a personality that combined multiple fields of knowledge and art in one being. He writes: "This man was at once an orator, lawyer, philosopher, art critic, historian, grammarian, poet, mathematician, logician, astronomer, anatomist, and psychologist. Of all these titles, he preferred that of 'philosopher.'" (Abdessalam, 2010, p. 109)

Afulay Apuleius mastered Latin and Greek in addition to his original Amazigh language, Tifinagh. Abd al-Salam Ben Mays, citing Monceaux, states: "Apuleius at first knew only the language of his country, that is, Amazigh. As for Latin and Greek, he learned them only at school, and he spoke them fluently but with an African accent. After finishing his primary studies in Madaura, he was sent to Carthage... where he studied Greek, Latin, and philosophy." (Abdessalam, 2010, p. 108)

Afulay was renowned for his high rhetorical ability, and was eloquent and, in his *Apology*, expressed his view of eloquence as the fruit of diligence and scholarly effort, not divine inspiration. In the *Apology* he says: "As for eloquence, if I possess some share of it, it should not be considered strange or objectionable, for from early youth I devoted myself to the study of literature under its greatest masters, scorning for its sake all other pleasures of life. I pursued it perhaps more than anyone else, with mighty effort night and day, without regard for my health and at its expense. Yet let no one fear the eloquence which, if I display but a small portion of it, I do not reveal as much as I aspire to." (Lucius, *Apologia*, pp. 11-12)

The text contains many judgments concerning education and learning: they are the result of continuous research, practice, and sacrifice. For, attaining knowledge and wisdom requires renouncing worldly pleasures and glitter. Besides, Apuleius acknowledges that the ultimate limit of eloquence and knowledge is unattainable; they are infinite. However great his capacity for eloquence, it remains a pursuit. Truth lies not in possessing it, but in striving toward it.

Some researchers assert Apuleius within the movement known as the Second Sophistic, which marked the early centuries CE a tendency aimed at reviving Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy after its stagnation during the Hellenistic period.

Abd al-Salam Ben Mays writes: "Apuleius belongs to a literary sub-period called the Second Sophistic (117–180 CE), this period was characterized by renewed interest in rhetoric and philosophy in general, by movement between scientific centers, abundant intellectual production, and cultural diversity due to the vastness of the Roman Empire and the multiplicity of its peoples." (Abdessalam, 2010, p. 109)

5. LUCIUS APULEIUS AND THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

The identity of the author of the novel, Lucius Apuleius, confronts us with multiple problematics concerning Algerian identity and the inhabitants of North Africa, especially during the Roman era. It portrays the Algerian or Maghrebi character as living in a state of transformation and personal oscillation: he is both a Roman citizen on the basis of colonial subordination under which Algeria belonged to the Roman Empire and native to Madaura (Algerian by birth), Carthaginian in culture and Greek in thought (Charles, 1969, p. 252).

André Julien states: "It is difficult to know exactly whether the African writers descended from Roman settlers; most likely many were Berbers influenced by Roman civilization, who expressed in the language of the conquerors what the Libyan and Punic languages were unable to convey."

Some Arab and Maghrebi thinkers reject Charles-André Julien's claim that the Libyan language was incapable of accommodating intellectual, scientific, and literary meanings. Professor Abbas al-Jirari, for example, holds that history preserved the names of numerous writers, philosophers, and religious scholars who graduated from this educational system across North Africa and expressed themselves mostly in Latin because it was the language of the conquering colonizer not because the national language was deficient (al-Jarari, p. 29).

6. GEOGRAPHICAL AND CIVIC AFFILIATION

Apuleius, is Algerian by birth, known as Apuleius of Madaura in reference to Mdaourouch (ancient Madaura), where he was born around 124 or 125 CE, the city was located on the border between Gaetulia which is named after the tribe of the Gaetulians and Numidia.

He is also Tunisian, or "Carthaginian," in terms of his scholarly status and intellectual and literary presence, his literary personality emerged through his brilliance in the art of rhetoric. Tunisia is likewise honored as the place of his death, he settled there and died around 170 CE. Libya, as well, may claim participation in shaping his identity on the basis of residence, as he stayed in the city of Oea that is known today as Tripoli, the current capital of Libya, it was one of the three cities alongside Sabratha and Leptis Magna that formed what was known as ancient Tripolitania (Tripolis). Moreover, it is believed that the Phoenicians founded it, then the Romans ruled it from 146 BCE until 450 CE; afterward it came under the control of the Vandals (5th century CE), then the Byzantines (6th century CE), until it was entered by the Arabs in 645 CE (Abdessalam, 2010, p. 48).

What must be emphasized is Apuleius' constant pride in his identity: "I have never in my life felt any shame about my identity

or my homeland." He also declared with pride: "I am half Gaetulian and half Numidian." And among those who defended his Amazigh identity was Mohamed Chafik, who included him alongside the playwright Publius Terentius Afer and his among the writers of Amazigh culture in the pagan era who engaged intellectually with Greek and Latin literature (Shafiq, 1989, p. 78).

The researcher Mohamed Handain also took Afulay as an example of the strong Amazigh personality in ancient world literature, one who mastered many languages and authored numerous books, the most famous being his novel *The Golden Ass*, through which he influenced the ancient global novel and dazzled the Romans and Greeks to the extent that they accused him of sorcery (Mohamed, 1992, p. 47).

The same position was adopted by the Libyan writer Dr. Ali Fahmi Khashim, who regarded Apuleius as an African Amazigh and Arab writer who moved between Algeria, Carthage, and Libya, and considered *The Golden Ass* the first Arabic novelistic text.

However, some researchers have classified him among Latin writers and stripped him of Amazigh identity. It thus appears that Apuleius' identity is Algerian by birth, African by origin, Amazigh by ancestry, Roman by citizenship, Greek in culture and thought, and Eastern in belief.

7. CULTURAL AFFILIATION

The initial observation regarding Apuleius' cultural personality appears through his very name: he is the Madauran Platonic philosopher, his foundational culture begins in Madaura, as a defined geographical and cultural belonging with distinct features, then crystallizes into the universal dimension manifested in philosophy, he says: "One of the wise men said, speaking about table manners: the first cup is for thirst, the second for cheer, the third for pleasure, and the fourth for madness. We may say the opposite when speaking of the cup poured out by the Muses of arts and sciences... The first cup is that of the schoolmaster, refining the mind; the second is that of the teacher of rhetoric, endowing it with eloquence of tongue. Nevertheless, most people limit themselves to drinking from these two cups. As for me, I have tasted other cups poured in Athens: the cup of poetry with its dazzling imagination; the cup of geometry with its radiant clarity; the sweet-tasting cup of music; the cup of dialectic marked by seriousness and dignity; and above all the cup of comprehensive universal philosophy, inexhaustible and nectar to its drinker." (Fathi, 2010, p. 43)

Apuleius considers education to begin with the schoolmaster, who lays the foundational ground of thought, whether we interrogate the text, we find that the first cup from which Apuleius drank his scientific orientation and love of truth was in Madaura with his first teacher, who directed his thinking. For, a person's future is shaped there, for education in childhood is like engraving on stone, he also refers to the teacher of rhetoric, who refines speech and grants eloquence. Further, it is well known that Apuleius was a distinguished thinker and an eloquent orator, which are the qualities that matured through upbringing and education in his first cultural environment, Madaura and Carthage.

In the text there is also an indication of what was added to his original Madauran and Carthaginian culture: Greece-Athens where he drank from the cup of poetry that shaped and unleashed his imaginative faculty. For, artistic images are born of poetic imagination, and Greek poetic texts provided Apuleius with raw material for shaping and refining his own prose. Besides, in *The Golden Ass*, we find the employment of Greek themes in a style that blends Amazigh culture with Hellenistic culture. Inasmuch as, the Milesian style to which Apuleius refers at the beginning, is a Greek literary form. Ammar al-Jalassi notes in a footnote to his translation: "The Milesian style is a literary genre based on collecting stories usually containing erotic excitement; it originated in the city of Miletus in the second century BCE." (Lucius, 2000, p. 7)

In addition to his poetic gift, Apuleius became acquainted in Athens with geometry and mathematics, the sciences of clarity and self-evidence as well as music, founded by Pythagoras and his disciples. He also drew the art of dialectic from the Greeks. Despite that Apuleius was not a mere compiler of knowledge; he was a philosopher who, by virtue of his wisdom and distinctive talents, digested these scientific and philosophical elements and produced a philosophy of his own. As he states: "Indeed, Empedocles composes poems; Plato writes dialogues; Socrates composes hymns; Epicharmus produces dramatic scenes; Xenophon writes historical narratives; Crates of Thebes fashions satirical pieces. But your Apuleius gathers all these genres and deals equally with the nine Muses, rendering to each her due. For, merit in every good work belongs to effort, while success depends on fortune." (Fathi, 2010, p. 44)

8. THE TEXT AND THE PROBLEMATIC OF IDENTITY:

The questioning of the text, according to normative reference frameworks, intersects in many respects with the human problematization of identity foremost among these is the fluidity of the research process itself. For, divergence among schools and orientations has become an established and self-evident matter in the mind of the recipient, just as the indicators and criteria of identity fluctuate between political scientists and sociologists, so too does the question of textual authenticity remain past and present among schools of literary criticism, continually proposing new horizons of considerations and standards in evaluating the literary text.

One may draw on the Kantian expression in philosophy. Immanuel Kant states: "The person who approaches the study of philosophy believes he will find books to read and memorize in philosophy; but philosophy is a search, not a doctrine." The same applies to critical studies in literature: they do not offer the student a ready-made body of knowledge with fixed laws and standards to which the text must submit for research or evaluation. Instead, the horizon of criticism and the ground of evaluation take on the color of each orientation toward the text. Over time, humanity has classified certain literary legacies as exemplary models, and textual production became obliged to imitate that standard in order to be granted eligibility among world texts. Yet the very criteria of universality or humanity by which literary and artistic creations are measured also require academic reconsideration, one that rises above ideological attachments to specific cultural or geographical structures.

This subjectivity whether individual or collective, has been at the root of stagnation and regression that accompanied growth and development within the literary field. For, when textual inquiry imitates the study of the human being, it places both research and researcher within a cage of double consciousness: the researcher conceals himself as an essence within the text and merges with it to the point that the text becomes a substitute for the author an announcement of the end or death of the author.

The text, as an institution or as the author's creative gestation, places the original textual core the essential idea constituting the primary essence of the creative work before the touchstone of the linguistic institution. Hence, this regulated institution through its morphological, syntactic, and semantic system, especially when the author finds himself compelled to pursue and adapt the central meanings of the creative embryo to a world strange to its nature, one that may even generate it in a negative sense, that is in a condition of deprivation which acts as the driving force of artistic work. Necessity is the mother of invention. The author's

touch is the gateway to human legitimacy and artistic creativity, for the force and coerciveness of the social system whether as language or as culture, place most artistic production before the necessity of imitation and conformity.

The fundamental obstacle in critical and literary studies is the consciousness that lies behind every judgment or description of the text. The conditionality of the recipient and his value-based stance toward the artistic work become indicators that help establish the universality or humanity of the artistic effect, and to exclude the ear or the eye from the criteria of creativity is to abolish art altogether. Howbeit, the hidden manifestation of consciousness also appears in the researcher approaching the text, standing as an obstacle to objectivity in judgment and to precision in results, which is confirmed by the European tendency to diminish the Arabic or Islamic text or any text divergent from the spirit of the West which swept through Arab thought in its evaluative references. Thence, the result was an inclination toward belittlement within the Arabic text itself, reflecting a form of intellectual racism founded by Western modernity and nurtured among certain semi-literary figures. Meanwhile, ideologically driven doctrinal orientations shaped thought operating within an Islamic sphere, leading to disagreement and divergence concerning the relationship between identity and the text.

9. THE EGO NOVEL: LUCIUS AS AUTHOR AND PROTAGONIST

The Golden Ass belongs to the genre of the ego-novel that is a narrative in which the writer speaks within the text in the first-person voice. Besides, there is a clear intersection between the novel and the personality of Lucius Apuleius in many aspects, which has led some critics to argue that the central character in the novel is none other than the author himself, and the following passage from Book Two indicates this meaning: "...He told me certain things... strange and somewhat varied. At one moment he predicted that I would become a famous and distinguished figure; at another he foretold that a great event and a strange story would happen to me, and that I would compose a book in which I myself would be the central subject." (Lucius, 2001, p. 79)

Through this text, the overlap between the character of the novel and the character of the author becomes evident. The narrative thus appears as a sincere expression of the author's personal experiences. Inasmuch as, the prevailing culture of the time which formed a common foundation among the people of the region was itself the historical and civilizational product of multiple cultures: Roman, Greek, and Egyptian.

10. LUCIUS THE REBEL

The texts of Lucius contain many revolutionary themes in which he takes pride in his origin and his Madauran or Libyan, as some agree to call it culture. For, in both the Apology and The Golden Ass, a spirit of resistance to Roman hegemony and pride in his authenticity becomes evident. Moreover, in the Apology delivered at Sabratha, he openly boasts of his Libyan origin in the ancient North African sense, challenges the Roman world, compares himself to the great and renowned figures of his age, and defends his beliefs, and this follows his rejection of the Roman religion and his departure in search of an Eastern spiritual identity. His praise of Isis and Osiris the ancient Egyptian deities represents a religious and cultural challenge within the Roman world.

It also appears that the hero of the novel is deeply solicitous with the art of magic, harboring an inner attraction to the cult of Isis, to which he ultimately adheres as both religion and way of life. Lucius' transformation into a donkey is paralleled by another transformation: from a being enamored with travel, risk, pleasure, and discovery into a devotee of Isis from adventurer to priest. The novel is defined by its ending, where the donkey carries the statue of Isis, symbolizing an initiation into a realm of purity and sanctity. His contemplative experience on the seashore, where he invokes the moon symbol of Isis, goddess of the moon and motherhood among the ancient Egyptians grants him, through her grace, guidance and the first steps toward the freedom he had long hoped to attain. The religion of Isis thus appears as a form of salvation, an eternal deliverance from the sins of his previous experiences, including even his earlier pursuit of knowledge.

11. IDENTITY CRISIS

The identity crisis in the novel takes on a moral dimension for Lucius. Giving that, human nature tends toward what is forbidden; in Qur'anic expression, it is "inclined to evil." This is due to the nature of the bodily constitution with which man was created: through its needs, the body draws the human being toward the world of vital necessities and narrow urgencies. Yet despite this, it contains a golden element the intellect, or the divine light, and the transformation that Lucius hoped to attain was flight: liberation from the world of the earth and communion with philosophy, or wisdom. The owl, among the Romans, is a symbol of wisdom; therefore, Lucius' use of the owl in his request for transformation signifies a desire to rise to the realm of thought and spirit, distancing himself from people and migrating to the world of ideals, far from corruption and human baseness.

The owl may also symbolize a being in whom the evil human desire to know secrets capable of controlling others is mixed. So as to, the witch's choice of the owl as a bird suggests the implication embedded in its symbolism. Seeing that, in Amazigh belief (taoukt in Amazigh), the owl is a bird symbolizing evil and is believed to be a devil embodied in the body of a bird.

By the same token, "Lucius' ambition to become an eagle" embodies the vertical dream of humankind, aspiring since the beginning of creation to soar and fly, drawn to celestial mystery in order to explore the unknown that lies above (the eagle is the messenger of Jupiter, god of thunder, as mentioned in some chapters of the novel). Yet the ironic fate of the caricatural tale decrees that he cling more to the earth than he did when he was free and light as a human, through his transformation into a beast: a donkey. This regression from the distinction of a bird to the lowliness of a donkey reinforces the wisdom of being bound to the experience of what is earthly and of exploring human existence by inhabiting the body of an animal. Nonetheless, the animal here, represented by the donkey, still retains a human value: the intellect of Lucius, which was not subjected to distortion or transformation (Ismail, 2014).

The overlap between the author's name and the hero's name signifies an identification between the two personalities to the point that the author's personality dissolves into the hero, or reflects the shared human inclination toward evil. The narrator's declaration of the name Lucius carries many connotations: "The identification with the author's own name: Lucius. The text's illusion of the realism of the narrative content and the truth of its actual occurrence aims to reinforce the magical idea of the power of what is irrational and illogical as an existing mode for interpreting phenomena and reading things." (Ismail, 2014)

Deviation from the ceiling of values and the moral system, in Apuleius' view, constitutes a flaw in identity and an entry into alienation from it. Seeing that, transformation is the reality of the deviant human being, not mere imagination. For, once one departs from the universal human norm, one becomes deserving of punishment in the form of transformation into another being, yet with a human determinant consciousness. In the novel, consciousness lives its estrangement by existing in a body strange to

it, and yet part of it at the same time. This is the harshest form of punishment to which consciousness can be subjected.

12. CONCLUSION

It is difficult to classify the novel *The Golden Ass* and place it within a specific epistemological or literary genre, for it resists every form of limitation and definition. The cognitive content of the novel is multiple and diverse, as reality intertwines with imagination. Myth is present as an illusionistic art and a creative technique for engaging the reader, alongside history, sculpture, painting, geography, cooking, botany, philosophy, linguistics, poetry, and religions. It thus constitutes a creative multiplicity that makes it a cartographic text and reinforces its generic identity as a novel.

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