

A Re-Examination of the Prologue Speaker Problem in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

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The Prologue to Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* is certainly an exceptional text, containing only 119 words, and may be considered one of the most debated and commented passages of the work, such that modern scholars have justified themselves in writing countless articles¹ and even in editing a single book wholly dedicated to it² and in which they discussed many linguistic, historical, geographical, biographical and literary topics. My objective in this paper will be limited to re-examining one of the basic questions: namely the meaning of the pronoun 'ille' which is contained in the interrogation 'Quis ille?'. Let me quote the whole passage where you can find the phrase in question (*Met.* 1.1)³:

At ego tibi sermone isto Milesio varias fabulas conseram auresque tuas benivolas lepido susurro permulceam, modo si papyrus Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami inscriptam non spreveris inspicere, figuras fortunasque hominum in alias imagines conversas et in se rursus mutuo nexu reflectas ut mireris. Exordior. **Quis ille?** Paucis accipe. Hymettos Attica et Isthmos Ephyrea et Taenaros Spartiatica, glebae felices aeternum libris felicioribus conditae, mea vetus prosapia est. Ibi linguam Atthidem primis pueritiae stipendiis merui. Mox in urbe Latia advena studiorum Quiritium indigenam sermonem aerumnabili labore, nullo magistro praeceunte, aggressus excolui. En ecce praefamur veniam, siquid exotici ac forensis sermonis rudis locutor offendero. Iam haec equidem ipsa vocis immutatio desultoriae scientiae stilo quem accessimus respondet. Fabulam Graecanicam incipimus. Lector intende: laetaberis.

But I would like to tie together different sorts of tales for you in that Milesian style of yours, and to caress your ears into approval with a pretty whisper, if only you will not begrudge looking at Egyptian papyrus inscribed with the sharpness of a reed from The Nile, so that you may be amazed at men's forms and fortunes transformed into other shapes and then restored again in an interwoven knot. I begin my prologue. **Who am I?** I will tell you briefly. Attic Hymettos and Ephyrean Isthmos and Spartan Taenaros, fruitful lands preserved for ever in even more fruitful books, form my ancient stock. There I served my stint with the attic tongue in the first campaigns of childhood. Soon afterwards, in the city of the Latins, as a newcomer to Roman studies I

¹ Cf. Harrison 1990, 507-508; Keulen 2007, 8-27; May 2013, 23-26.

² Ahuvia Kahane and Andrew Laird (ed.), *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

³ The quoted text and translation are those of the Loeb Classical Library: J. Arthur Hanson, *Apuleius Metamorphoses*, Book 1-6.

attacked and cultivated their native speech with laborious difficulty and no teacher to guide me. So, please, I beg your pardon in advance if as a raw speaker of his foreign tongue of the Forum I commit any blunders. Now in fact this very changing of language corresponds to the type of writing we have undertaken, which is like the skill of rider jumping from one horse to another. We are about to begin a Greekish story. Pay attention, reader, and you will find delight.

An unnamed speaker, 'I (*ego*)', begins by addressing his interlocutor 'you (*tibi*)', asks for a favorable reception of his Egyptian book written in 'his (the interlocutor's) Milesian style (*sermone isto Milesio*)', and says it is a story of metamorphoses. Let's start ... But suddenly he is interrupted by the question '*Quis ille?*', and the same (or an another?) speaker says he is Greek, learnt Attic Greek first, then moved to Rome to study hard Latin without any teacher (*nullo magistro praeunte*), and as being foreigner, he apologizes for his possibly imperfect Latin, adding that his book is a kind of horse acrobat. Listen. Enjoy.

Quis ille? (Met. 1.1.2)

In the passage cited above, ironically enough, the speaker who remains unnamed is interrupted by the question '*Quis ille?*' Hanson has translated this crucial phrase into 'Who I am?' This is not at all a literal translation. More exactly, it should have been 'Who is that (man)?' or 'who is that narrator (of the story)?' ⁴. This can be thus a central question not only for the Prologue but also for the interpretation of the entire novel. Yet this question is never clearly answered by this non-identified person who seems to have asked it. In fact, not only the identity of the subject 'ille' is disputed, but also that of the speaker asking '*Quis ille?*' and that of the person to whom the question is addressed.

I would like to concentrate my attention on the meanings of this expression '*quis ille?*'. But as this is only an aspect of the whole question about the identity (or identities) of prologue speaker(s) and as there are many different solutions proposed by modern scholars to answer it, I would like to pick up some of them to illustrate the point. According to them, respectively, the prologue speaker (or speakers) is (or are) to be identified as:

- (1) Apuleius the author⁵
- (2) Lucius the narrator⁶
- (3) a confusion, mixture or dialogue of Apuleius with Lucius⁷

⁴ Cf. Walsh 1994; Winkler 1985, 185.

⁵ Riefstahl 1938, 22; Edwards 1993, 375-377; cf. Clarke 2001, 103.

⁶ Burger 1888, 489-498; Robertson-Valette 1940, xiv-xv; Wright 1973, 218; van der Praadt 1981, 106; De Jong 2001, 205; cf. Keulen 2007, 11-16.

⁷ Cf. Winkler 1985, 195-203. (A) Beroaldus (cf. Carver 2001, 172). (B) Mixture: Rohde 1885; Drews 2006. (C) Dialogue: Calonghi 1915, 'due persone, da Apueio et da Lucio di Corinto. Il secondo pronunzia le parole fino ad exordior. Lo scrittore interrompe con un retorico quis ille?' (quoted from Scobie 1975, 71-72). For the confusion of Apuleius with Lucius in earlier periods, cf. Carver 2001, 163-174.

- (4) anonymous speaker like those of Plautine comedies' Prologues⁸
 (5) the book itself, 'conceived as a personified physical object'⁹
 (6) Prohibition, abstaining or resistance: 'No one shall seek to identify the speaker (singular) of Apuleius' Prologue'¹⁰

Harrison's intelligent solution (hypothesis n. 5) attributing the speaker's role to the book itself has, I assume, not convinced enough the specialists, as we see that the discussion has continued among them up to the present, even after Harrison's article was published in 1990. If I can not immediately agree with his theory, it is because the so-called prologue speaker never grammatically nor verbally identified himself with the 'book'. The prologue speaker in question does not say expressively for example: 'modo si *me* ... non spreveris inspicere.' In the examples cited as parallels by Harrison¹¹, the speaker '*nos*', '*tu*' and '*ego*' are expressively equated to 'book(s)'. But it is not the case of the prologue speaker of the *Metamorphoses*. The switching from Greek to Latin (*translatio*), metaphorically expressed by the transportation from Egypt/Greece to Rome (*Mox in urbe Latia advena*)¹², and the *ego primus* theme (*nullo magistro praeunte*)¹³, could be more easily understood as that of a translator-author or a narrator than as that of a speaking book.

The objections on which Harrison founded the necessity of his own interpretation can be partially resolved by De Jong¹⁴ and Edwards¹⁵. The latter, Edwards in 1993, tried to defend the hypothesis (n. 1), which identifies the prologue speaker to Apuleius, by answering to the following objections raised against this, rather conventional, identification: namely (1) that Apuleius was not Greek but African¹⁶, (2) that Apuleius as a Roman author did not learn Greek before Latin¹⁷, and (3) that Apuleius learnt Latin in Africa not in Rome¹⁸. According to Edwards, (1) *vetus prosapia*, equated with three geographical names, can not indicate Greek origin (in the sense of birth place) but Greek ancestry of the author Apuleius¹⁹, or more probably alludes to his literary career²⁰; (2) the fact that the prologue

⁸ Cf. Smith 1972, 517–520; Harrison 1990, 509 n.8; Tatum 1979, 25–27; Dowden 1982, 428; Dowden 2001, 128; Winkler 1985, 195; May 2006, 110–115.

⁹ Harrison 1990, 507–513.

¹⁰ Dowden 2001, 129; cf. Too 2001, 177–187.

¹¹ Ov. *Am.* Epigramma Ipsius : *Qui modo Nasonis fueramus quinque libelli, / tres sumus; hoc illi praetulit auctor opus. / ut iam nulla tibi nos sit legisse voluptas, / at levior demptis poena duobus erit.* Trist. 3.1.1-2: *Parue—nec inuideo—sine me, liber, ibis in urbem: / ei mihi, quod domino non licet ire tuo!* Mart. 10.1-4: *Si nimius videor seraque coronide longus / Esse liber, legito pauca: libellus ero. / Terque quaterque mihi finitur carmine parvo / Pagina: fac tibi me quam cupis ipse brevem.*

¹² Lucretius 1.117–119; Verg. *G.* 2.176, 3.10–11; Apul. *Flor.* fr.5.

¹³ Hor. *Od.* 3.1.2–4, 3.30.13–14, *Ep.* 1.19.32–33, *Propert.* 3.1.3–4, *Lucr.* 1.136–142.

¹⁴ De Jong 2001, 206–207.

¹⁵ Edwards 1993, 375–77.

¹⁶ Harrison 1990, 511.

¹⁷ Harrison 1990, 508.

¹⁸ Harrison 1990, 508.

speaker learnt Greek before Latin does not mean that Greek was his native tongue, but only that he was raised among the Latin speakers who ordinarily should start their schooling and literary training with Greek; (3) both of *exoticus* and *forensis* mean 'exotic' because the Latin of the capital, Rome, cannot be but 'exotic' for a man like Apuleius who learnt the Latin of North Africa.

Yet the objection which can be raised against Edwards' identification of Apuleius with Lucius the narrator (hypothesis n. 1) will be, first, the fact that the name of Apuleius is never mentioned in the prologue nor in the whole text of his *Metamorphoses*, except - possibly - in a passage of book 11 where the author's home town, Madauros, is mentioned as that of Lucius the narrator²¹. Second, the biographical informations which Edwards defended as being those of Apuleius (Greek ancestry or literary career, later learning of Latin and particularly that of the language of the capital) could be interpreted as those of Lucius the narrator as well. And third, further objection to his hypothesis will be that his identification concerns only the part after the interrogation '*Quis ille?*' and not the interrogation itself nor the part preceding it.

According to Robertson's Budé, Zimmermann's OCT and, the most recently, May's Aris & Philipps Classical Text editions²², the question '*Quis ille?*' is put into quotes, implying that there are at least three distinct spoken parts in the Prologue, before the main narration beginning by 'Thessaliam ... petebam (*Met.* 1.2)²³: '*Quis ille?*', the part preceding it (*At ego tibi ... Exordior*) and the part following it (*Paucis accipe ... Lector intende: laetaberis*), making thus a kind of conversation with switching speaking parts. Even if the last part matches well Apuleius as Edwards defended it against its critics, the two preceding parts have no clear key to identify the speakers of them as Apuleius or as Lucius.

	At ego tibi ... Exordior	Quis ille ?	Paucis accipe ... Lector intende: laetaberis.	Thessaliam ...
Winkler 1985		'any listner or reader'		
Harrison 1990	the book	'an imaginary reader'	the book	Lucius
Edwards 1993	Apuleius	?	Apuleius	Apuleius]
De Jong 2001	'ego' (narrator/fictive author)= Lucius	'tu' (narratee/fictive reader) asks a third person who ille (narrator) is.	Lucius = 'ego' (narrator/fictive author)	Lucius
Drews 2006	Apuleius	Apuleius	Lucius	Lucius

¹⁹ Cf. Hildebrand 1842, xix "Cur autem suas res enarrasse Apuleium credamus, quum graecam se tractasse fabulam profiteatur Metamorphosis initio diversam personam ideoque plane ... quomodo Atticam, Spartam et Corinthum veterum suam prosapiam nominare poterant, si de se ipso sermonem fecisset?" (quoted from Carver 2001, 173)

²⁰ Cf. Clarke 2001, 101-110.

²¹ *Met.* 11.27 ... *audisse mitti sibi Madaurenses, sed admodum pauperem, cui statim sua sacra deberet ministrare ...* . Cf. Scobie 1975, 72.

²² Robertson-Valette 1940; Zimmerman 2012; May 2013. Cf. Winkler 1985, 180-181.

²³ Cf. Drews 2006.

That switching is assumed by many scholars, is clear from the table above and the texts of the recent editions. In regard to this (real or imaginary) conversation, or pseudo-dialogue, particularly attractive is the analysis of De Jong²⁴ who considers the Prologue to be a kind of ongoing (fictive) conversation between *ego* and *tu*, which is to be imagined as a reaction of *ego* to something already said by *tu*, and she compares this Prologue to those found in some dialogues of, among others²⁵, Plato as it's literary models. Interrogatives and certain connective particles are characteristic of the opening of such dialogues. 'Keeping Apuleius' Platonism in mind', she argues, 'one of literary influence on Apuleius' Prologue is that of the (abruptly opening) Platonic dialogue'. This opening dialogue, as she suggests, seems to be mirrored by the next one between Aristomenes and his unnamed interlocutor whom Lucius overtakes and interferes (*Met.* 1.2.4 ff.). Then, she attributes '*Quis ille?*' to the narratee *tu* interrupting the first speaker *ego* to ask a third person who is '*ille*' (= the narrator). For, if the question were directly addressed to the first speaker *ego*, it should have been '*Quis tu?*,' not '*Quis ille?*'

However, the difficulty of her solution consists, in my view, in the introduction of the 'third person', who has no other speaking part and is never mentioned elsewhere in the text. Again, De Jong identified Lucius with *ego* the first speaker (hypothesis n. 2), because 'no clear break can be pointed out between the 'I' of the Prologue and the 'I' of the main narrative'²⁶. Nowadays, it seems that 'a majority of scholars agrees that the prologue speaker is Lucius'²⁷, as is also shown in the result of the voting game performed by the specialists of Apuleius at the end of their colloquium, where the participant scholars did put to a vote the following motion: 'This House believes that the speaker of the Prologue is Lucius'. The result was: twelve were 'for', four 'against' and nine abstained from voting.²⁸ In any case, the first speaker *ego* does not identify himself with Lucius the hero of the Ass story.²⁹

Drews' 'four chiasmic metamorphoses theory', which was published in 2006, is also attractive from the point of view of how to distribute, on a large scale, different roles of speakers indicated by the switching³⁰. He considers the Prologue to be a mixture of speaking parts of Lucius and Apuleius (hypothesis n. 3). According to Drews, it is first Apuleius the author (until '*Quis ille?*' included), then Apuleius transformed into Lucius the narrator, followed by Lucius transformed into an Ass, then Lucius re-transformed into human being, who finally transformed back again into Apuleius, all of them playing successively their speaking parts, in a way parallel to the metamorphoses declared in the Prologue (*figuras fortunasque hominum in alias imagines conversas et in se rursus mutuo nexu refectas*). Thus, the above mentioned strange introduction of the third person can be avoided and the

²⁴ De Jong 2001, 201-212; cf. Tatum 1979, 24-28.

²⁵ Xenophon, Plutarch and Horace.

²⁶ De Jong 2001, 205.

²⁷ Keulen 2007, 13.

²⁸ Kahane & Laird 2001, 5.

²⁹ Cf. Keulen 2007, 12.

³⁰ Drews 2006, 403-420.

irregular apparition of the author Apuleius in the eleventh book explained. Yet, it is not only in the last part of the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 11.27) but also in the first half of the work that the author puts his head out of window (*Met.* 2.12)³¹.

The (imaginary) reader (or interlocutor) addressed as *tibi* by the first speaker *ego* in the Prologue cannot pronounce '*ille* (that man)' to designate the first speaker *ego* as the next narrator, even if this '*tu*' is addressing a third person whom De Jong required as addressee of '*tu*', because both *ego* and *tu* are (imagined to be staying) on the same spot. And such an imaginary third person as completely detached from them constitutes a strange *ad hoc* fabrication and is difficult to support. Certainly '*ille* (that man)' is a very strange expression as such, because 'that man' is here and none is here to call him 'that man.' After all, '*ille*' must be referring to the narrator who is to play the next part of Lucius, as many scholars agree. But '*ille*' does not mean 'narrator.' Here, exists clearly a distinction of narration between the first speaker *ego no.1* and the narrator Lucius *ego no.2*. Even if their parts are pronounced by the same voice and the same reader/actor, the natures, or levels, of narrations should be different.

After these observations, I would like to propose considering the '*ille*' in the question '*Quis ille?*' to be a kind of quoted word in the question which itself is a quoted phrase as well. So, we should print: "**Quis 'ille'?**", or '**Quis *ille* ?**' in italic, because, in my opinion, the expression '(*at ille*)' often introduces, in the *Metamorphoses*, the switch of, not only speaker, but also nature of narration or quotation. '(*At ille*)' is often (but not exclusively) used when the first person narrator switches from his narration of his own first person's direct speech to that of the third person's direct speech³². '(*At ille*)', in this function, occurs so frequently that, I suppose, '*ille*' means in this context 'that person *ego no.2* who will be the principal speaker of the story which I (= *ego no.1*) am now starting to narrate, and under whose role I (= *ego no.1*) am going to play, by switching his part with the expression (*at ille*.' Again, the '*at ille*' corresponds to '*at ego*', another switching phrase, changing the quote of the third person's speech into that of the main first person's speech, as is attested at the very beginning of the Prologue and elsewhere.

According to this interpretation, in my view, it may be unnecessary to define the identities of the first

³¹ *Met.* 2.12: "*Mihi denique proventum huius peregrinationis inquirenti multa respondit et oppido mira et satis varia; nunc enim gloriam satis floridam, nunc historiam magnam et incredulam fabulam et libros me futurum* (When I asked him [sc. a Chaldaean] about the outcome of this trip of mine, he gave several strange and quite contradictory responses: on the one hand my reputation will really flourish, but on the other I will become a long story, an unbelievable tale, a book in several volumes)". Here, no doubt, the allusion is made to Apuleius the author.

³² Cf. *Apul. Met.* 1.3.1 (switching from a 1st pers. speech. at *ille* = unnamed interlocutor of Aristomenes), *Met.* 1.5.1 (switching from a 1st pers. speech. at *ille* = Aristomenes), *Met.* 1.7.1 (switching from a 1st pers. speech. at *ille* = Socrates), *Met.* 1.8.2 (switching from a 1st pers. speech. at *ille* = Socrates), *Met.* 1.15.4 (switching from a 1st pers. speech. Ad haec *ille* = Ianitor), *Met.* 1.17.5 (switching from a 1st pers. speech. at *ille* = Socrates), *Met.* 1.20.1 (switching not from a 1st pers. speech. At *ille* = unnamed interlocutor of Aristomenes), *Met.* 2.13.5 (switching not from a 1st pers. speech. At *ille* = Diophanes), *Met.* 2.20.25 (switching not from a 1st pers. speech. At *ille* = Thelyphron), *Met.* 3.7.14 (at *ille*) etc. This list is not a comprehensive one.

speaker *ego* and of his addressee *tibi* any more, these being just functional ones, simply *ego* and *tu*. In the above defined meaning, '*Quis ille ?*' can be pronounced by any of *ego* and *tu*. As the very first phrase of the Prologue '*At ego tibi*' suggests, in this unlimited, ongoing series of narrations, which extends from far before up to present one, and which themselves can be conceived as scenes quoted by some preceding narration, Apuleius could be also the person designated as '*tibi*' who is supposed to have spoken before the first speaker starts the Prologue with '*At ego tibi*.' The first speaker (*ego no.1*) takes then the role of the main speaker (*ego n.2*) of the quoted narration, who will be named later Lucius of Corinth. 'The author' disappears in this imaginary *mise en abîme*, which guarantees the fictionalization, because there no speaker is Apuleius and every speaker can be Apuleius as well. But the author (*auctor*) in a historical meaning, or the traits of Latin author matching Greek one, can reveal himself only if he wants the dramatic illusion to be broken. Such a procedure to indicate or reveal the identity of an author is well known as '*sphragis* (signature).' Just as the Roman poets inscribed their signatures in their own poems, so Apuleius the author, in his own novel, makes his signature by inscribing on his own hero, Lucius, a mark of his historical native town and biographical information as well as his fictive identities in the Prologue³³.

Burger 1888: K. Burger, 'Zu Apuleius', *Hermes* 23, 489–498.

Calonghi 1915: G. Calonghi, 'Il Prologo delle Met. Aufl.' *RFIC* 43, 1–33.

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³³ *Met.* 11.27 Madaurensen. *Met.* 1.1 modo si papyrum Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami inscriptam. *Met.* 2.12 (see note above). Cf. Horace discribing himself as poet of Apulia and as Roman Alcaeus, Virgil as poet of Mantua, Roman Theocritus and Hesiod.

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