

From the time that Lucius in his asinine form is taken into service by the lord chief justice his development shows rapid progress. Working as a pack animal attached to the kitchen he begins to leave his hay and to feed on human food left over from the banquets.

He is discovered in this, but his masters, far from punishing him, encourage him to do more human tricks. They teach him to sit at table, to wrestle, to dance, to nod or shake his head in answer to questions, and even to wink at the wine waiter when he needs a drink. He soon becomes quite famous as a result.

We have in this episode an analog of spiritual initiation. Just as the ass is being trained to become more human, prior to resuming his original and proper human form, from which state he has fallen; so in the initiation process is the human personality trained into more spiritual attitudes and patterns prior to regaining its original and proper spiritual condition from which it has fallen.

In *The Golden Ass* this process reaches its peak in the visit of a noblewoman who takes the ass and trains it to be her lover. Keeping in mind the consistent symbolic parallels we see how Apuleius has transformed the original dirty joke into an initiatory parable, for this represents the human soul being taken into close consummation with the goddess—the higher realms of inner nature—or Isis unveiled.

However, just as the highest mysteries are capable of the greatest profanation, so in the story do we get a degrading of the situation. The relationship between the noblewoman and the ass is treated by Apuleius with considerable literary skill and good taste. It is a genuine love that is depicted, which reminds one of the delicacy of the feelings of Titania the fairy queen for Bottom, the ass-headed, in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the story, word gets out, and it is decided that it would be amusing and profitable to make a public spectacle of this new feat of the ass.

This kind of divertissement occurred frequently in Roman times. Scenes from mythology were used as the material for public spectacle. In this instance the show is to be the Judgment of Paris, which provides an excuse for a display of feminine nudity. And as a sequel to this, a condemned criminal woman is to be coupled with the ass, before she is torn to pieces by wild beasts.

However, the ass has by now achieved a measure of sensibility and morality superior to his human owners, and rather than take part in such public profanation of the Mysteries, he runs away—renouncing a life of asinine ease, fame, and fortune.