

# Bryn Mawr Classical Review

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**Luca Graverini, *Le Metamorfosi di Apuleio. Letteratura e identità. Arti Spazi Scritture*, 5. Pisa: Giardini Editori e Stampatori in Pisa, 2007. Pp. x, 260. ISBN 9788877818690. €16.00 (pb).**

**Reviewed by Juan Martos, Universidad de Sevilla (juanmartosf@us.es)**

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[Original publications are listed at the end of the review.]

[The reviewer apologizes to the author and readers for the extreme delay in submitting this text.]

This volume brings together material already published by the author on the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius combined with new ideas developed in a number of its chapters; it therefore does not belong to the familiar genre of compilations of scattered articles but aims to be an original contribution with the incorporation of previous studies. In a brief introduction the author gives an account of the previous publications (pp. viii-ix) and of his intentions in the present volume, which he presents briefly.

The previous studies are not simply reprinted but have been reworked to varying degrees. Nevertheless, although it is true that several details as well as the way in which the ideas are set out are new, the reader who has followed the production of Graverini to date will observe that the basic lines of reflection set out in chapters 1, 3 and 4, as well as in part of chapter 2, are familiar.

It is no easy matter for a book of this sort to give an impression of unity; however, Graverini has managed to insert his previous works into a set which, if not homogeneous, is at least coherent, since the basic aim of his studies, in very general terms, remains the same: the interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius. Or perhaps, since it is obvious that the author's purpose is not to offer a new global interpretation of the work but to present ideas and data for a better understanding of it, making occasional use in doing so of revised versions of older critical arguments or else following other approaches to find new lines of research, it might be more accurate to say that almost the whole book is aimed at reconsidering our ideas about the novel and, in particular, about the author's intention when writing it. Both for this reason and because of the original sections and the revision of already-published material it contains, the volume deserves to be studied, and the ideas featured in it, though they may seem at times too personal or questionable, are, in most cases, of the greatest interest.

The whole of chapter 1 is devoted to the prologue (*Met.* I 1), a section of the work which has traditionally attracted the interest of critics concerned with the interpretation of the novel and which has even had a complete book published on it.<sup>1</sup> Of great interest is the analysis of the possible implications of the opening *at ego* as a genre-defining element and one setting the tone of the whole work. Graverini goes on to study the stylistic and literary connotations of certain expressions such as *rudis locutor*, *lepidus susurrus* and

*permulcere aures* in the light of other texts taken from very different genres such as eclogue (Theocritus and Virgil), oratory or Platonic dialogue. Graverini's research goes from a consideration of the *ego* of the prologue as a siren call or the ambivalent invitation to be amazed, *ut mireris*, as a possible philosophical reminiscence to the study of the prologues of the Greek novel, concluding that the latter clearly forms part of what is *dulce*. He finally reaches the terrain -- a necessarily slippery one owing to the lack of information -- of Apuleius' dependence on his models, especially, needless to say, the *Milesian Tales* of Aristides. The conclusion (p. 55), inevitably, is that the prologue announces a fantastic tale like those told to children by old women, based on a prose that is *dolce*. Although this conclusion was only to be expected, the connection established between the words of Apuleius and other literary categories and genres is, at the very least, stimulating.

Chapter 2 is probably the most important one in the book, and this for several reasons: it is the longest; it is the most original, since only one previous publication has been used in one of its sections (2.7 *anilis fabula*); and it is also undoubtedly the most ambitious, as it addresses the global interpretation of the work from various angles. After a study of the images and ideas evoked in the prologue, Graverini announces his intention to demonstrate that the novel, contrary to what is stated in its opening words, is not only a pure aesthetic and *musical* divertimento (p. 57). The key to understanding the motivation behind the novel and the intention of the author is, as is obvious from all the studies, the connection between book XI, added by Apuleius himself, and the rest of the work; indeed, Graverini's study opens with the comparison of the "prologue" to the transformation of Lucius (*Met.* XI 14, 1-2) and the prologue of book I, and almost immediately the author pauses to consider one of the most influential and transcendental books ever written on the subject, that of Winkler.<sup>2</sup> Winkler's ideas have in large measure become the vulgate of Apuleian studies; they are, at the very least, the starting point for anyone attempting to delve into the meaning of the novel. From this point of view, the fact that Graverini questions several of the ideas on which Winkler bases his whole conception of the work is remarkable and truly interesting, even if one simply does not agree. Graverini's revision affects first and foremost book XI and, more specifically, those aspects through which, according to Winkler, Apuleius provided the reader with keys towards an ironic interpretation of Lucius' whole conversion to the religion of Isis: the paradoxical name of the priest Mithras, for example, the payments to be made by Lucius for each initiation ceremony or the ridiculous final image of the protagonist and narrator with his head shaven. However much Graverini attempts to strip these and other details of decisive meaning - and he devotes a significant part of the chapter to the task - it is difficult not to continue to share the idea that Apuleius thus left open a possibility for his readers to mistrust the credulous words of Lucius himself and, in short, that he left it to the judgement of the reader to decide how to interpret the conversion to Isis, in contrast with the clear religious manifestations of books VIII and IX and, consequently, how to conceive the work as a whole. The lack of parallels for an *aporetic* reading in the cultural ambience of the 2nd century as alleged by Graverini (pp. 100-1) is not decisive: there are several ways to interpret other works and our ignorance of both the Latin and Greek narrative which might have served as Apuleius' model is obvious, because the texts have not come down to us. To offer one small example, is it not possible to apply to the novel as a whole the same uncertainty expressed in the words of Braund, reproduced by Graverini himself a few pages later, on p. 113, with reference to Horatian satire?

The following section of the chapter (2.7), which has appeared previously, deals with another key moment for the exegesis of the novel, as it is in all likelihood a part added by Apuleius himself in his recreation of the book: the tale of *Psyche and Cupid* and, more specifically, the expression *anilis fabula* with which the same old woman who is about to tell it describes the story. Graverini explores the different meanings of this *iunctura* and

the contexts in which it is used in various authors, such as Plato, Quintilian, Horace, Phaedrus and Aesop, and concludes that certain terms that are in principle pejorative reveal, when used with obvious self-irony, the mixed comic-serious nature of a work (p. 122). Be that as it may, according to Graverini, this is not a defining characteristic when it comes to assigning the novel to a specific genre (p. 139).

Chapter 3 explores the relationship between the *Metamorphoses* and other literary genres: philosophical dialogue, historiography, epic. The comparison of the different criteria of veracity applied to the novel and these or other genres such as history is interesting, although at times the parallels between Lucius and Socrates or Ulysses (even in spite of *Met.* IX 13, 4) seem somewhat forced and perhaps contribute little to the understanding of our protagonist. The last part of the chapter is devoted to the vision of the narrative as dramatic representation.

The final chapter recovers a text with which I concerned myself in these same pages (BMCR [2003.10.01](#)) and which analyses spaces in the novel from a two-fold perspective: the places between which Lucius moves and the regions where Apuleius might have written the work and at whose inhabitants he might have aimed it. As regards the opening sections, Graverini describes how, taking the *Onos* as reference, the localities through which the protagonist passes changed, paying particular attention to two cities whose by-no-means-coincidental presence is indubitably the product of our author: Corinth and Rome. The former, famous for its destruction in 146 B.C., had become a symbol of relations between Greece and Rome, while the latter is a sign, perhaps the most striking but by no means the only one, of a fundamental process in the construction of the text: the Romanization of all the preceding material. But this Romano-centrism, according to Graverini, should not necessarily lead us to locate the work's audience in Rome, as proposed by Dowden [3](#): a significant part of this section is therefore given over to rebutting this scholar's arguments. Consequently, Apuleius carried out a real Latin adaptation of the Greek model, but this adaptation cannot be consigned to any specific part of the Empire, either the capital or any province in particular.

The book is very carefully produced; typographical and other errors are practically nil.[4](#) In short, even taking into account the differences in originality and solidity of argument in its different sections, the work as a whole is undoubtedly worthwhile: it is a collection of studies full of stimulating suggestions and intertextual associations which will be of interest to any reader captivated by the brilliant novel of Apuleius.[5](#)

#### Premessa

##### 1 Una poetica 'dolce':

"Sweet and Dangerous? A Literary Metaphor (*ures permulcere*) in Apuleius' Prologue" in Harrison, S. J. - Paschalis, M. - Frangoulidis, S. (eds.), *Metaphor and the Ancient Novel* (*Ancient Narrative* suppl. 4), Groningen 2005, 177-96.

"A *lepidus susurrus*. Apuleius and the fascination of poetry", in Nauta, R. R. (ed.), *Desultoria Scientia. Genre in Apuleius' Metamorphoses and related Texts. Caeculus 5*, Leuven - Paris - Dudley (MA) 2006, 1-18.

"The Ass's Ears and the Novel's Voice: Orality and the Involvement of the Reader in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*" in Rimell, V. (ed.), *Seeing Tongues, Hearing Scripts: Orality and Representation in the Ancient Novel* (*Ancient Narrative* suppl. 7), Groningen, 2007, 138-167.

## 2 Storie da vecchie e piaceri servili:

"An Old Wife's Tale", in W. H. Keulen - R. R. Nauta - S. Panayotakis (eds.), *Lectiones Scrupulosae. Essays on the Text and Interpretation of Apuleius' Metamorphoses in Honour of Maaike Zimmerman*, Groningen, 2006, 86-110.

## 3 Metamorfosi dei generi:

"The Ass's Ears and the Novel's Voice: Orality and the Involvement of the Reader in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*" in Rimell, V. (ed.), *Seeing Tongues, Hearing Scripts: Orality and Representation in the Ancient Novel (Ancient Narrative suppl. 7)*, Groningen, 2007, 138-167.

"La scena raccontata: teatro e narrativa antica" in Mosetti Casaretto, F. (ed.), *La scena assente. Realtà e leggenda sul teatro nel Medioevo*, Alessandria, 2006, 1-24.

## 4 Grecia, Roma, Africa:

"Corinth, Rome, and Africa: a Cultural Background for the Tale of the Ass", in M. Paschalis--S. Frangoulidis (eds.), *Space in the Ancient Novel, Ancient Narrative suppl. 1*, Groningen 2002, 58-77.

Abbreviazioni bibliografiche

Indice dei brani citati

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**Notes:**

- [1.](#) Kahane, A. - Laird, A. J. W. (eds.), *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' Metamorphoses*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001.
- [2.](#) Winkler, J.J., *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius' The Golden Ass*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985.
- [3.](#) Dowden, K., "The Roman Audience of *The Golden Ass*" in J. Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel*, Baltimore-London, 1994, 419-434.
- [4.](#) There is an extremely curious exception: on p. 155 the old woman should be referred to as telling the tale to Charite, and not to Psyche.
- [5.](#) I am deeply grateful to J. J. Zoltowski for his English translation of this review.

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