

LARA NICOLINI : *Apuleio, Le Metamorfosi* [Classici Greci e Latini]
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The splendid ‘BUR’ series of classical texts with facing Italian translation and widely available at very good value in Italy has now come up with a good new edition of Apuleius’ novel. The translator and editor is Lara Nicolini of Pisa, whose fine commentary on part of the novel (the parts dealing with Charite: 4.23-7, 6.25-7 and 8.1-14) appeared in 2000. Her expertise as an Apuleian scholar is shown in the extensive introduction to this volume (pp. 1-95), which covers many of the main issues in the study of the *Met.* and has carefully absorbed much recent scholarship.

Here, in sympathy with Winkler, she persuasively argues (5-32) that the *Met.* is an ‘interactive’ text which plays with and makes demands on the reader, and which often opens up interpretative possibilities rather than closing them down. She regards the Isiac hints in the earlier part of the novel as ‘suggestive but indecipherable allusions’ which do not necessarily contain the key to the work, and rightly points to the lack of reflection by the narrator of Book 11 on his redemption as a problem for the religious interpretation of the work. She rightly singles out the novel’s emphasis on metamorphosis and magic as programmatic of a world where truth and falsehood are continually inverted and exchanged: ‘appearances are not meant to be trusted’ (27). Here and elsewhere in her account one feels that the contrast of appearance and reality points strongly towards Platonic metaphysics and a dualistic ontology, something which she perhaps resists too much, but the perception that ‘in the world of the *Metamorphoses* nothing can be considered secure’ (30) is a crucial one in the analysis of the novel.

Her analysis of the ‘Cupid and Psyche’ episode (32-44) as a ‘real scale model’ of the main narrative (why not just say *mise en abyme*?) is well argued, and it is a shame that the new Groningen commentary on it emerged just too late to be taken into account. Here there is good material on the reception of the episode which supplements that available in Moreschini’s 1994 commentary (p. 35 n. 60 and n. 61). Her argument that the Platonism of the episode is literary decoration rather than a real ideological framework

is very attractive to the reviewer, though many will take a different view; her point that *curiositas* is not always a bad thing is salutary.

Her discussion of the role of Isis (44-57) neatly points out that no ancient mention of Apuleius connects him with the Isis-cult, and suggests that the overall Isis-plot (like the surface Platonism of ‘Cupid and Psyche’) is at least partly a literary convenience to create unity in the novel, while being fully compatible (cf. Plutarch’s *De Iside*) with Apuleius’ professed Platonism. That said, she remains unconvinced by the sceptical presentation of Winkler and others of the venality of the Isis-cult of Book 11, while sympathizing with his generally ambiguous approach: Isis can represent an ‘attempt to overcome the anxious disorder of the world in the order and peace of a religion’ (56). This is consistent with her overall view of the novel as grappling with a confused and slippery world.

The section on the author, his works and their transmission (60-72) is a generally competent brief summary of current scholarship, though her suggestion that the works *De Platone* and *De Mundo* could be early in Apuleius’ career perhaps does not square with their address to *fili Faustine*, presumably the author’s son (by Pudentilla?). She is prepared to entertain some sympathy for Pecere’s important arguments for a source of the Class 1 MSS independent of F, and is suitably sceptical about F’s readings: contrast the hyper-conservatism of Martos’ recent edition of the novel, reviewed by Maaïke Zimmerman in *AN* 4 (2004). The text presented here varies in only a few places from that of Robertson: of the 39 changes, 16 are returns to F, and there is only one conjecture which does not appear in Martos, Conte’s *qui [lustralibus piamentis]* for F’s *quibus lustralibus piamentis* at 3.2 (an attractive identification of an elaborate gloss).

The reviewer is not especially competent to judge the Italian translation, which sets out to be less free and closer to the text than some other versions and which importantly uses all the resources of a modern scholarly commentary, and seems to read well enough to a non-native speaker. It is certainly an exegetical help in interpreting the Latin text, the key function of a facing translation. The sporadic explanatory notes are often original and interesting, commenting on issues of text and interpretation as well as elucidating the subject-matter, though their spread is somewhat uneven. The list of critical judgements from previous writers (from Macrobius to 2003) is a helpful one (77-88), while the bibliography is impressively up to date and constitutes a good survey of work, both Italian and non-Italian (87-95).

In short, this is a fine volume which will help to present Apuleius' great novel to a Latinless readership and which will also be useful to students and scholars studying the original text owing to its full engagement with recent scholarly debate. Both its quality and its price (*o si sic omnes!*) will ensure that it is widely purchased and used.