

S. TILG: *Apuleius' Metamorphoses. A Study in Roman Fiction*
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In this compact and engaging study, Stefan Tilg (= T.) offers a sophisticated and original investigation of several long-standing controversial issues in Apuleian studies. The aim of his analysis, as stated in the introduction, is broad and ambitious, namely 'to show how the *Metamorphoses* works as a piece of literature, to explore its poetics, as well as the ways in which questions of production and reception are reflected in the text' (v). To this end, the book is successfully divided into seven chapters and a concluding summary, all organized in a linear manner that follows the narrative sequence from the first (*at*) to the very last word (*obibam*) of the novel. In this division of labour, the reader can also observe that the seven chapters of the volume are further grouped in two argumentative parts, with the first four chapters devoted to issues of intertextuality and metapoetics from Books 1 to 10, and the last three chapters concentrating on issues of closure and poetics in the final book of the *Metamorphoses*.

In the opening chapter, 'The Model: Religious *Metamorphoseis*', T. presents a complex and stimulating argument: reading against the established scholarly consensus, he argues that Apuleius' religious ending is not an original addition of his own contrivance but a creative adaptation of the (now lost) religious ending of the Greek original story composed by 'Loukios of Patras', the model for both ps.-Lucian's *Onos* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. T. supports his argument with four pieces of evidence. The first comes from the rather vague account of Photius, in which he claims to have read only the first two books of the Greek *Metamorphoseis*—a fact that, manuscript tradition withstanding, would easily allow for a religious finale. The second piece of evidence concerns the nature of ps.-Lucian's 'epitome' itself as a genre, which T. considers highly improbable for fictional texts, especially when it comes to epitomizing an already short work.¹ Based upon this line of reasoning, T. argues that, if ps.-Lucian did not summarize the original story but composed an original work, there is all the more space for a religious ending in the anonymous Greek *Metamorphoseis*. The third part of T.'s argument

¹ See T. Hägg, 'Die *Ephesiaka* des Xenophon Ephesios – Original oder Epitome?', *Classica et Medievalia* 27 (1966), 118-61; T. Whitmarsh, 'Epitomes of Greek Novels', in M. Horster and C. Reitz (edd.), *Condensing Texts, Condensed Texts* (Stuttgart, 2010), 307-20.

is innovative and appealing but also less conclusive, given the overall lack of primary sources regarding ancient fiction and its context. According to T.'s analysis, there are vague echoes of the religious ending of 'Loukios of Patras' in later Greek texts, including Xenophon's *Ephesiaka*, Palladius' *Historia Lausiaka* and the apocryphal *Syriac Infancy Gospel*. All these religious tales have certain affinities with the original *Metamorphoseis* that T. argues can hardly be regarded as coincidental: amongst others, he refers to the praise of Isis, the motif of equine transformation through magic, and the religious salvation which includes a re-transformation into human shape. Since Greek writers of such stories would not normally have used Latin models, as T. acknowledges (14), it seems more likely that these stories were actually inspired by a common Greek source, such as the Greek *Metamorphoseis*, than by a Latin novel, such as Apuleius' work. However, T. is quick to qualify his claim here by pointing to the difficulty of evaluating the sources of the reception of Latin literature in the Greek world (14), and allowing for individual exceptions to standard practices. Even with this disclaimer, however, T. insists on considering the original *Metamorphoseis* as the main common source of these narratives. The fourth and final piece of evidence for T.'s argument comes from Apuleius' life and works. In this context, T. argues that Apuleius had personal involvement only with Greek cults and rites. This may have allowed, according to T., for a need to follow the Greek original on Isis up to section 11.26 of the *Metamorphoses* (and before the section on Lucius' so-called 'Romecoming') and then to change only the last part of the narrative significantly by means of a literary *sphragis*, reminiscent of many Latin poets. Apuleius' novel is thus argued by T.—with the aid of a highly metaliterary appendix (17)—to be consistent with Latin poetry, such as that of Catullus, Horace and Ovid, a point which T. will illustrate convincingly later in chapter 7.

Chapter 2, 'The Prologue: Loukios goes to Rome', explicates the issues of adaptation and translation in Apuleius' work, focusing particularly on the introduction to the novel. More specifically, T. tackles three main topics. To begin with, he deals with the first (and perhaps most controversial) question in this text: *quis ille?* T. addresses the issue of identity synthetically by identifying this *ille* as being simultaneously a Greek Loukios, a Latin (translated) Lucius and a meta-poetical Apuleius in a creative combination of authorial agendas. The analysis then moves from the 'who' to the 'how', and T. discusses a second, rather vexed, issue, that is, the significance of *at* in the introduction to the narrative. In this part of the argument, T. shows his profound knowledge of Classical Greek literature by examining the use of *at* in its Greek form, ἀλλά, from Aristophanes to Eusebius; T. concludes by identifying Apuleius' use of *at* with Xenophon's use of

ἀλλά. This use of ἀλλά becomes, for T., a most appropriate programmatic statement on Apuleius' part, in so far as both Xenophon and Apuleius use it to denote naïveté (ἀφέλεια) together with an opposition to a political elevated style (29). Such a reading of *at* becomes even more successful in the third and final part of this chapter, where the Latin concepts of *forensis*, *locutor*, *immutatio*, *desultoria* and *multiscius* add further layers to the overall argument that Apuleius chooses terms that signal ambiguity between high and low registers, with emphasis on the latter.

In chapter 3, 'A Poetics in Tales: Milesian, Neoteric, Odyssean', T. presents an original argument in the history of Apuleian scholarship. He claims that the literary programme of *lepos*/'charm', reminiscent of the Greek Neoteric movement, is the key to understanding the *Metamorphoses* in general. To illustrate his case, T. begins by discussing the concept of the Milesian tale, which he takes to be the most plausible narrative model for Apuleius. His discussion, though not innovative in itself, provides helpful support for the subsequent focused analysis of the poetics of *lepos*. Building upon his short but interesting discussion of the literary heritage of Catullus, Horace and Martial, T. lists ten instances where the term *lepidus* is used metapoetically in the *Metamorphoses* and argues that these instances are significant narrative junctures that connect the short stories with the broader narrative. He also claims that the poetics of *lepos* square with the introduction to the *Metamorphoses* and should therefore be considered as the major interpretative key to the poetics of the entire story. At the same time, however, this interpretative key has a counterpoint, namely, the Odyssean interpretative key of mock-knowledge (*varias fabulas multiscius*). When understood in this light, the *Metamorphoses* becomes a charming story that occasionally parodies lofty epic poetry or high ideas as well, and consistently dwells within the realm of sheer entertainment, which may involve seriousness as a by-product but not as the end-goal.

Chapter 4 is a study of philosophy in the ancient novel in general, and specifically in the *Metamorphoses*. T. starts by arguing that the *Metamorphoses* is significantly more philosophical than the rest of ancient fiction, given Apuleius' ability to transform high, Platonic, ideas into a popularized form of philosophy. To prove his point, T. moves deductively, presenting an overview of the general potential of ancient fiction to bear philosophical ideas. Therefore, he begins by describing and reviewing the modern sense of what makes a philosophical novel. His overview of Ibn Tufail as the first writer to tackle the philosophical novel with his work *Hayy Yaqzan* (better known in the West as *Philosophus Autodidactus*, composed approximately in the twelfth century C.E.) is short but very well in-

formed, combining few but important facts about how this genre is normally perceived, with a view to Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) and Murdoch's *Unicorn* (1963). The discussion then focuses on the ancient vista, examining the philosophical potential of the remaining ancient Greek and Latin novels. T. is critical of any sweeping approach to the ancient novel as 'philosophical' if this term is solely concerned with what is 'of human interest' (63); he prefers a more solid approach that works on the basis of specific references to philosophical schools and to philosophers themselves. He considers that the more promising philosophical stories and philosophical nuances are to be found within 'fringe' literary genres, such as those exemplified through the letters of Chion of Heraclea or through Antonius Diogenes' fragmentary *Wonders Beyond Thule*. This approach seems to me sweeping in itself, especially when it comes to the treatment of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*. The ubiquitous presence of dubious moral choices on the protagonists' part (for example, Charicleia's massacre of bandits in the introductory scene, as well as Calasiris' lying tactics throughout the entirety of his presence in the novel), the argumentation in favour of lying for the right reasons (1.26.6), the protagonists' development of coping mechanisms against blind fate through education (6.9.3-4), the suggestive presence of wise men (Gymnosophists) as paragons of virtue to be imitated (10.14.7) and the sophisticated finale against human sacrifice (10.39.3) all suggest that there may well be more philosophical ground in the 'canonical' novels than normally acknowledged. From these broader concerns with philosophy and the novel in general, the argument moves on to its main point, namely, retracing key philosophical ideas and motifs in Apuleius, including the leitmotif of curiosity, the concept of the ass-man and the transmigration of the soul, the tale of the Two Venuses, the story of the afterlife, and demonological theology. In his careful examination of these motifs, T. offers a convincing and praiseworthy reading of the Cupid and Psyche narrative that puts it in juxtaposition with Plato's *Gorgias* (523a-527b). T. has an eye for detail, it should be noted, especially when it comes to the comparison with Greek models. The second important point of this chapter is of broader focus, namely that the entire presence of philosophy in the *Metamorphoses* is about structures rather than intentions. In other words, philosophy may be explored humorously, and serious ideas and comic procedures are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The last three chapters are concerned with Book 11 and closure. Chapter 5, 'The Isis Book: Serious Entertainment', analyses the significance of the last book of the *Metamorphoses* in both its serious and its comic circumstances. The argument moves from the serious to the comic and finally to the seriocomic. The analysis of each part is not of equal length or of equal argumentative rigorousness for that matter; the serious reading is seriously downplayed, in fact, as it is analysed

in under two pages, without paying heed to important and excellent studies such as that of Shumate.² T. concludes by stating that the serious and the comic approaches to such a complex work are precarious when one considers the trickiness of such definitions (105). Rather, T. is convinced that in Apuleius' novel we have a philosophical-rhetorical seriocomedy that is consistent with Apuleius' general agenda made explicit in his *Apology*, which T. proceeds to analyse very closely. While this view is certainly well argued, it is not a solution to the question of what is the more appropriate reading mode for Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. In that sense then it would appear that T. associates with the deconstructionist interpretative tradition of the *Metamorphoses* that refuses definitive solutions.

In the following chapter, 'The Epilogue: Autobiography and Author's Biography', T. discusses how the seemingly autobiographical issues of the epilogue should be taken only as reality effects that stylize Apuleius' image *qua* author (108). In the first part of this chapter ('Romecoming'), T. argues persuasively that Lucius' coming to Rome is not connected to the story; it represents, rather, a meta-poetic statement by Apuleius himself that locates his work on the literary map. Next, we have the discussion of the autobiographical and much-debated passage at 11.27.9, where Lucius of Corinth is called *Madaurensis*—a discussion referred to in the scholarship on the novel as relating to 'the Unmasked I'. T. dismisses any accidental slip of pen in this part, considering this statement as belonging to a *sphragis*-like process. Along these lines, T. reads the two subsequent initiations of Lucius as a ritual of the *Dichterweihe*: the author has to be initiated to gain his literary fame and then to move on to the future of his literary career. To this interpretation T. adds close readings of the famous *sphragides* of Virgil, Horace and Ovid, concluding that the final paragraphs of the *Metamorphoses* should be read as a *sphragis* in the literary sense, both by bringing a Greek story to Roman literature and by making a bold claim about the significance of Apuleius' own work. T. is at his best when he argues about metapoetical agendas, and this chapter is very successful in that respect.

The final chapter, 'Is This the End? Closure and Playfulness in the Last Sentence', starts with a review of the palaeographical evidence and refutes the hypothesis of a missing ending of the *Metamorphoses*. T.'s analysis of the manuscripts is excellent, and his argumentation for the implausibility of a longer ending is convincing; no researcher would have much evidence to refute his point. If there is any text missing, T. suggests, it must be short and it would not alter the closural character of the extant ending. On this basis, T. moves towards the analysis of the last (surviving) word of the manuscript: *obibam*. In his discussion of the word, T. skilfully presents what he considers to be the 'alter ego' of such an ending: Ovid's

² N. Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius' Metamorphoses* (Ann Arbor, 1996).

famous ending of his *Metamorphoses* with the exact opposite verb, namely *vivam*. Apuleius is offering, according to T., a new way of writing a *sphragis*, one that emphasizes rebirth by ending with death. Moreover, T. offers an extra layer of interpretation, which requires the shaving of the head to be viewed as a way of polishing off a papyrus roll; as T. argues, in fact, shaving is an attractive image for finishing (in the sense of finishing the book and also polishing the papyrus roll), an image that is in strong opposition to the image of the ending in Ovid's *Tristia* (*hirsutus passis sed videre comis*). Reading Apuleius against Ovid (and Propertius) should be seen in this context as a good idea, an idea that is completely consistent with T.'s view of reading Apuleius as a writer who engages with, and attempts to surpass, the Augustan tradition.

Viewed as a whole, then, T.'s analysis of the *Metamorphoses* is rich and enlightening. T. has a keen eye for poetic allusion and does a remarkable job in pointing out Apuleius' poetic and metapoetic agenda. This agenda is further illustrated by his comparison of the *Metamorphoses* with Greek prose literature, over which T. has an excellent command. I believe that it is especially from this perspective that T.'s work will be highly significant for years to come.

However, there are criticisms that one could make of T.'s book. The first concerns the novelty of Apuleius' project. For instance, on page 20 (and footnote 5) T. claims that Roman prose fiction was very rare, and that Petronius' *Satyrica* was the only major exception. Given the recent studies on Dictys' *Ephemeris*,³ however, this claim should be radically qualified with regard to the prose of the late first and second centuries C.E. T. might have benefited from approaching the issue synthetically, that is, by placing Apuleius' project within the broader translation contexts of the era of the Second Sophistic. After all, looking at the work from this perspective would make an even stronger case for Apuleius' literary agenda, since similar metaliterary claims could be traced in both the poetry and the prose of the period.

My second, and more substantial, criticism has to do with the serious reading of ancient novels in general and the *Metamorphoses* in particular. T. is certainly right to be sceptical about wholesale definitions of philosophy, or about philosophical and serious readings of every piece of literature (63). Yet stating, without further qualification, that the romance plot of the love novels does not suggest any affinity to philosophy (63) is a strong claim, and the subsequent discussion seems to include only the citation but not the argumentation of some very influential

³ P. Gainsford, 'Diktys of Crete', *Cambridge Classical Journal* 58 (2012), 58-87.

studies in the field of ancient narrative that make compelling cases about philosophical presences in the ancient novel.⁴ In that sense, then, T. seems to indulge a bit too much perhaps in reading the novel, especially Books 1-10, as sheer entertainment, in a manner that may appear undertheorized, especially with regard to issues of ethics in the narrative.⁵ The statement, for instance, that some tales might not convey any message (55) could be taken as a somewhat provocative and controversial view, especially in the context of such a complex author like Apuleius, who appears never to miss an opportunity to introduce ambiguity in both the linguistic register and its interpretative connotations. In other words, whereas T. claims to avoid taking sides with regard to the serious and the comic readings of the *Metamorphoses*, since both of them have shortcomings (93), his solution of interpreting the *Metamorphoses* as a philosophical-rhetorical serio-comedy (98) seems a bit too wholesale itself, downplaying the complexities of both serious and comic readings.

Leaving all these criticisms aside, I recommend T.'s work as a valuable contribution to the study of Apuleius, especially for the way in which it combines both useful summaries of, and interesting new suggestions about, long-standing issues. Clarity of thought and effective presentation of material are two of the principal merits of this short book. The manuscript is carefully edited, and the English is smooth. The bibliography at the end is not comprehensive (and it is not meant to be, given the size of the book), but readers will greatly benefit from both of the indexes (an *index locorum* and a general index), which are helpful and thorough.

⁴ K. Dowden, 'Heliodoros: serious intentions', *Classical Quarterly* 46 (1996), 267-85 (not cited in T.'s bibliography); J. Morgan and M. Jones (eds.), *Philosophical Presences in the Ancient Novel* (Groningen, 2007); L. Graverini, 'Amore, "dolcezza", stupore: romanzo antico e filosofia', in R. Uglione (ed.), *Atti del convegno nazionale di studi: "Lector intende, laetaberis"*, *Il romanzo dei Greci e dei Romani; Torino, 27-28 aprile 2009* (Alessandria, 2010), 57-88.

⁵ The reviewer recommends the new book by Richard Fletcher as an important point of counterstudy in the discussion of Apuleius' agenda: R. Fletcher, *Apuleius' Platonism: The Impersonation of Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2014).