

E. ADKINS. Discourse, Knowledge, and Power in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 2022. Pp. 278. Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press
Hardback \$ 80.-
ISBN 9780472133055

Reviewed by Leonardo Costantini, University of Bristol, eu20184@bristol.ac.uk

The last two decades or so have seen a sharp increase of scholarship dedicated to Apuleius' novel, the *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass*, as it was referred to already since late antiquity (see e.g. Bitel 2002, 212-218): this includes various monographs on the novel, the most influential of which is possibly that by Graverini (2007, Engl. trans. 2012), and more recently on its reception; a new critical edition for the *Oxford Classical Texts* series by Zimmerman (2012); the completion of the celebrated *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius' Metamorphoses* series; and the commencement of another series of commentaries, in Italian, published by the Lorenzo Valla Foundation.

The book under review is the first comprehensive exploration of how communication between characters is constructed to express social status and power in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Given the amount of dialogue in the novel, focusing on this topic affords interesting insight into the dynamics and interactions between characters, particularly the protagonist Lucius. In fact, Adkins casts more light on the possible meaning of Lucius' own 'character arc,' i.e. his progression from the beginning of the novel, in which he is presented as a young member of the elite fascinated by magic and easily led astray by passions, to a devotee of the Egyptian deities Isis and Osiris and a successful advocate in Rome, in Book 11.

The volume opens with an introduction to Apuleius' life, his intellectual *milieu* and literary production, with a particular focus on the novel as well as its Greek counterpart, the *Onos*, preserved in the Lucianic corpus and ascribed to him (on its spuriousness, see Nesselrath 2014). Adkins sets out the content of the following six chapters and clarifies her approach to discourse, giving an overview of the relevant studies from the fields of sociology and linguistics and explaining how dialogues are crucial for the (positive or negative) characterisation of elite Roman men, such as Lucius' himself, in the age of the Second Sophistic. An idea central to this book is how speeches are a way of constructing social identity and Adkins illustrates this first by considering Apuleius' self-presentation in the *Apolo- logia*.

The following six chapters are thematically arranged and revolve around the use of discourse in the novel through a set of case studies. The first of them deals with marginalised figures such as the robbers in *Met.* 3-7 and the priests of the

Syrian goddess in *Met.* 8-9. As Adkins argues, the kind of speeches of the priests of the *dea Syria*, fashioned to present them as women despite their being male, enhances their marginalisation. Likewise, the heroic, military tone of the speeches of the robbers does not match their social position, ultimately leading to the same result. In chapter two, Adkins shows that elite figures, too, can make use of discourses that do not match their actual status, leading to their alienation in the novel. To exemplify this, attention is paid to Thelyphron in Book 2 and Lucius during the Risus Festival episode in *Met.* 3,1-12. The way Thelyphron is laughed at due to his dignified self-presentation, which does not mirror his real social standing, is similar (if not proleptic) to the public derision of Lucius in Hypata's theatre, where he is tried for 'killing' three wineskins animated through magic. Adkins suggests that Lucius' defence speech, in which he claims to have eliminated three dangerous robbers and protected his host as a good citizen would, is so artificial and far from the truth – which the citizens of Hypata know well – as to be perceived as laughable by the Hypatan audience. Adkins also includes a positive example, i.e. the wise physician at the start of Book 10: in this case, the physician's mastery of medical craft and the reliability of his speech brings the truth to the light and is applauded by the audience in the courtroom, saving the lives of two innocents. Although much of the emphasis is on masculinity, Photis' self-presentation as an expert of magic in *Met.* 3,15-23 is perhaps worth considering as the same dynamics seem to apply: indeed, the knowledge of magic Photis professes to have is ultimately insufficient given how she clumsily confuses the various jars with the magical ointments, which causes Lucius' transformation into an ass (*Met.* 3,24).

From chapter three onwards the focus is gradually more on Lucius. From the beginning of the novel until his theriomorphosis, we learn that Lucius is a wealthy and well-educated young man. However, his behaviour does not fit this urbane characterisation, given how he is driven by all sorts of desires. The loss of his human aspect denies him the faculty of speech, placing Lucius at the lowest position in his contemporaneous social hierarchy, as he can be abused by anyone, slaves and other animals included. However, Lucius-ass' lowest status is actually reached when he tries to behave like a human, much to the amusement of his last master, Thiasus of Corinth, in *Metamorphoses* 10: once again, Lucius-ass' behaviour and communicative strategies do not match his current asinine identity, and nearly cost him his life. Chapter four investigates the ways in which Lucius (in both his human and animal forms) interacts with four female figures in the novel, i.e. Byrrhaena, Photis, the unnamed Corinthian matron, and the goddess Isis. Adkins traces a development in Lucius' behaviour, culminating in his acquisition of mental and physical self-control in Book 11, which is further discussed in chapter

five. Here the contrasting concepts of curiosity and revelation, magic and divine knowledge, loquacity and mystical silence are investigated, drawing attention to the important role they play in Lucius' behaviour throughout the novel. Adkins also discusses how Psyche's characterisation in *Met.* 4,28-6,24 mirrors that of Lucius, noting how only at the end of their respective stories, Lucius and Psyche seem to learn to restrain their passions and *curiositas* and, for this, they are finally rewarded with access to the divine. All these points converge on chapter six and the ensuing conclusion, in which Adkins reads in a positive light Lucius' conversion and his oratorical activity in Rome at the end of Book 11. This is followed by a bibliography, an *index locorum*, and a general index.

This is an interesting volume, lucidly written and handsomely produced, which offers much food for thought to everyone interested in the ancient novel, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* in particular. While the reviewer is still puzzled by the meaning of the novel's ending and tends to side with Winkler's aporetic reading of it (1985), recently defended by Benson 2019, he praises Adkins for offering new, compelling ideas and tapping into previous scholarship, showing not only profound knowledge but also pushing these interpretations further. This makes this book pleasant and stimulating to read for experts and non-experts alike.

Bibliography

- Benson, G. C. (2019). *Apuleius' Invisible Ass. Encounters with the Unseen in the Metamorphoses*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bitel, A. (2002). 'Quis ille Asinus aureus? The Metamorphoses of Apuleius' Title', *Ancient Narrative* 1, 208-244.
- Graverini, L. (2007). *Le Metamorfosi di Apuleio. Letteratura e identità*, Pisa: Pacini Editore (Engl. trans. 2012 by B. T. Lee).
- Nesselrath, H.-G. (2014). 'Language and (in-)Authenticity: The Case of the (Ps.-)Lucianic *Onos*', in: J. Martínez (ed.), *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature. Ergo decipitur!*, Leiden - Boston: Brill, 195-205.
- Winkler, J. J. (1985). *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass*, Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press.
- Zimmerman, M. (2012). *Apulei Metamorphoseon libri*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.