

Stefan Tilg, *Apuleius' Metamorphoses: A Study in Roman Fiction*. xii+190 pages. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-19-870683-0.

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Tilg offers a literary study of the Latin novel *Metamorphoses* (also known as *The Golden Ass*, *Asinus aureus*) by Apuleius (ca. 125 – ca. 180 C.E.), born in Madaura in Africa, educated in Carthage and Athens, and then active in Rome and Carthage. “Apuleius straddled the Greek and Latin world like few other authors of his time” (19).

In the novel, the protagonist, Lucius, relates his adventures in the first person, after being retransformed, owing to his devotion to Isis, into a man, after living as an ass because of dabbling with magic that went awry. Walsh's English translation of the novel was often republished. The following is part of the précis of the last of the eleven books of Apuleius' novel, as retold by Keith Bradley (1998, p. 315):

On the beach at Cenchreae the fugitive ass awakes from his night-time sleep aware of the all-encompassing presence around him of the supreme goddess. Sensing the chance to end once and for all the misfortunes that have plagued him since his catastrophic, metamorphosing experiment with magic, he purifies himself by bathing in the sea, then prays to the almighty power to restore him to human form. Asleep once more, he has a vision of the goddess emerging from the water. She identifies herself as Isis, and says that she has come in answer to his prayer. The goddess tells the ass that he will find the roses he needs to escape his asinine form the following day, her special day, in the hands of a priest who will be taking part in a ceremony to mark the end of winter when a boat will be ritually dedicated to the sea. Next morning, as the townspeople prepare for the holy day, the ass finds the procession of Isis' worshippers and eventually eats the garland of roses the priest offers him. At once he returns to his human shape, and the crowd of onlookers recognises the miracle Isis has performed in their midst. The ceremony of the ship duly takes place, the new Lucius now among the worshippers, so filled with enthusiasm for the goddess that he afterwards takes up residence in her temple. There he has more visions, and learns that he must be initiated into the goddess's mysteries. The priest advises him how to prepare for the great event, and when Isis has signalled the appropriate day the priest initiates Lucius before a group of fellow devotees. Soon after, Lucius returns to his home in Corinth, until once more at Isis' command he travels to Rome and there devotes himself to a life of worship in her temple in the Campus Martius. [...]

In writing his novel, Apuleius followed a Greek model — the Greek story about an ass, by Loukios of Patras, lost but known to have existed — and Tilg discusses this. “While it [the *Metamorphoses*] is based on a Greek model, it provided Apuleius an excellent opportunity to do something unusual in Latin literature: for in Latin, prose fiction was very rare, with Petronius' *Satyrica*, conventionally dated to the Neronian period, being the only major exception” (Tilg, 20).

In the book under review, Tilg's “argument does not require extensive background knowledge [...] All Greek and Latin is translated” (1). Tilg “concentrate[s] on programmatic passages, junctures, structures, and literary techniques rather than on plot and characters as such” (1). Within the novel, as examined in Tilg's study, special attention is devoted to “the prologue, the comments on inserted tales, the story of Cupid and Psyche, and the Isis book with its significant ‘Romecoming’ [...] at the end” (1).

Tilg is also concerned with Apuleius' philosophy and career, and with the manuscript transmission of his works. “It will be seen how Apuleius, like other prose authors of the second century AD, adopts a number of techniques from poetry and fuses literature, rhetoric, and philosophy into a new whole” (1–2).

Il Ch. 1, Tilg suggests — contrary to the earlier scholarly assumption held for a century — that perhaps the religious ending was not Apuleius' own, but that he rather found it in his Greek model.

There is the lost *Metamorphoseis* by so-called 'Loukios of Patras' (perhaps first century AD), and there is what seems to be an abbreviated version, the so-called *Onos*, transmitted in the oeuvre of Lucian but maybe by another, anonymous, author. Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* in eleven books is a significant expansion of the Greek *Metamorphoseis*, which may have comprised two or three books. Judging from the comic ending of the *Onos*, scholars usually believe that the Greek *Metamorphoseis* also ended comically. This would be a clear contrast with Apuleius' religious ending, in which Lucius (as the name of the protagonist is rendered in Latin) is retransformed into a man thanks to the help of the goddess Isis, to whom he devotes the remainder of his life as an initiate. In this account, then, Apuleius would have replaced the original comic ending of the ass story with a religious conclusion of his own invention. I do not exclude this account, but I focus on an alternative scenario in which the religious ending was already in the Greek *Metamorphoseis* and is more or less reflected in Apuleius. In this scenario, it is the *Onos* which diverges from the original by replacing a religious with a comic ending. (149)

Tilg marshals evidence in support of his hypothesis, from a statement by Photius, and from Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesiaca*. Moreover, "two late antique Christian texts, the *Historia Lausiaca* and the *Syriac Infancy Gospel*, have a peculiar combination of motifs which could be conveniently found in a religious ending of the Greek ass story: on the one hand transformation of a person into an equine through magic; on the other hand retransformation of that person through religion" (150). Besides, Tilg challenges the idea that Apuleius himself was an Isis devotee. "There is no suggestion of any particular interest in Isis in Apuleius' life and further works" (150).

The seven chapters that lead to Ch. 8, "Summary" (which begins with a useful recapitulation, chapter by chapter) each comprise five sections, except Chs. 1 and 2, which have four each. After Ch. 1, "The Model: Religious *Metamorphoseis*?", Ch. 2 is concerned with "Apuleius' prologue, which acts as a link between the well-known Greek model and the following Latin version" (20).

Chapter 3, "A Poetics in Tales: Milesian, Neoteric, Odyssean", leads to Ch. 4, "A Philosophical Novel: Platonic Fiction". In Ch. 5, "The Isis Book: Serious Entertainment", Tilg critiques serious and comic readings (to say it with the title of Sec. 5.4, followed by Sec. 5.5, "Philosophical-rhetorical seriocomedy").¹ Chapters 6 and 7 are "The Epilogue: Autobiography and Author's Biography", and "Is This the End? Closure and Playfulness in the Last Sentence", ending with Sec. 7.5, "The closure of polishing: Lucius' baldness", as he shaves his head when becoming a priest of Isis.

In conclusion, Tilg's book is interesting and important, an important addition to Apuleius studies. It also has important and thought-provoking things to say about comedy in the *Metamorphoses*.

I take this opportunity to signal studies of wordplay in Apuleius: refer to Nicolini (2011, 2012). Also see Nathan Watson's (2014) reinterpretation of satire in the last book of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Mike Fontaine has claimed, in an unpublished paper circulated informally, that "Lucius, the narrator of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, meets the diagnostic criteria of Schizophrenia".

Howard Jacobson (2007) — this is a classicist at the University of Illinois, Urbana, not the British novelist, who is a former academic — argues for discarding the editors' emendation

¹ Brigitte Libby (2011) has claimed instead: "This article supports a satirical reading of Book 11 by showing a previously unrecognized way in which Apuleius and her priests. An analysis of moon and mirror imagery as well as his philosophical and rhetorical works will show inherent difficulty in Isis' lunar symbol and the mirrors used moon-goddess Isis will turn out to be an opportunistic fraud reflects light without producing" (from her abstract).

into *iacentis* (“or the recumbent”) of the manuscripts’ *tacentis* (“of the silent”: the adjective is applied to the statue of the goddess) in *Metamorphoses*, 8.30.3 “non meae salutis sed simulacri iacentis contemplatione”. Jacobson points out: “It might suggest that the priests are reluctant to kill the ass without any verbal direction from the goddess. This I think is probably true, but there is more to say. Roman culture was very familiar with silent goddesses” (Jacobson 2007, p. 798). “Thus, there is perhaps a touch of humour here. The goddess remains silent because, after all, she is a ‘silent goddess’” (*ibid.*). In the following paragraph in his paper, Jacobson claims, concerning *Metamorphoses*, 9.7.4, “I think the commentators have missed the understated joke”, and proceeds to explain.

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