

**Regine May, *Apuleius: Metamorphoses or The Golden Ass, Book 1. Aris & Phillips classical texts.* Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 2013. Pp. vi, 223. ISBN 9781908343819. \$39.99 (pb).**

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### Preview

The *Metamorphoses* by the second-century Latin author Apuleius of Madauros, once considered a curious work well outside the scope of the average classicist, has meanwhile gained the status of an all-time classic. The publication of Maaïke Zimmerman's long awaited OCT edition of the novel (see BMCR [2013.11.62](#)) in 2012 marks the end of this process. There are also several good bilingual editions (such as the two volume Loeb by J. Arthur Hanson), modern translations (in English one may refer to the versions of P.G. Walsh (see BMCR [1995.05.8](#)), E.J. Kenney (1998), and Joel C. Relihan (see BMCR [2008.11.26](#)), as well as a stream of studies (both monographs and papers), which seems to increase still every year. For commentaries, there is the renowned series *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius* (GCA), which now comprises nearly all books of the novel, except for books 3 and 11; for the latter, a new full commentary by W. Keulen a.o. has been announced by Brill editors for October, 2014.

In terms of material fit for students, there is comparatively little. Paul Murgatroyd's attractive 'Intermediate Latin reader' (see BMCR [2009.11.29](#)) offers perhaps not quite enough for university students, whereas complete editions or the GCA volumes may be rather too much.

The publication by Regine May of a separate volume on the first book of the *Metamorphoses* is therefore most welcome. The author, well known for her monograph *Apuleius and the drama. The ass on stage* of 2007 (see BMCR [2008.02.45](#)), offers a practical volume of 223 pages with Latin text and facing English translation (pp. 63-91), preceded by a long introduction (pp. 1-62) and followed by detailed annotation (pp. 92-221). A rather short index (pp. 222-223) concludes the volume. The book allows students to dive into the fascinating world of Apuleius' novel, without having to work themselves through all of modern scholarship. This useful edition of book 1 may well inspire them to read further books of the novel, or even some of the 'minor works', such as Apuleius' ever fascinating speech *Apologia sive de magia*.

The Introduction deals with pretty much all relevant issues of modern research into the *Metamorphoses*: the author and his times; the genre of the novel; the relation between this Latin novel and the Greek *onos*; the structure of book 1 within the novel as a whole; the inset tales of Aristomenes and Socrates; and key themes such as guest-friendship, food, curiosity, and suicide (topics that sound familiar to those who already know the novel). There are also separate sections on the hotly debated 'prologue' of the novel; fictionality and truth; the protagonist Lucius; Plato and Isis; and ancient magic. The introduction ends with sections on language and style; the reception of book 1; and the textual transmission. Twelve pages of good bibliography add to the practical use of this introduction.

After reading this broad and yet succinct introduction, the reader is well prepared for the text itself. I particularly liked May's characterization of Apuleius' style, which is often described as difficult or obscure. May makes the excellent observation that Apuleius' syntax is, on closer scrutiny, rather straightforward (despite the sheer length of his sentences), and that the author's focus is rather on the meaning of single words.

This Latin text owes much to existing editions, such as Zimmerman's OCT, but occasionally disagrees with them. The digitised images of two of the most important manuscripts, F and φ, (see [Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana](#); search for 'Plut. 68.02 and Plut. 29.02') have no doubt been a great help. How wonderful that every Apuleius reader now has the option to personally check the Latin in these manuscript versions online, a privilege strictly reserved for just a happy few among scholars until quite recently.

The English translation aims 'to be as close as possible to the Latin original, but not a grammatical crib' (p. V). Although it also wishes to bring out some of Apuleius' flowery style, it is, generally speaking, more a help to the reader who wishes to approach the Latin than a literary achievement in itself.

Typographically, text and translation do not look very inviting. Both are set in a smaller font than the introduction, and the texts have been largely arranged according to chapter numbers. In some cases, there is a subdivision into paragraphs (particularly in case of dialogues), but more attention might easily have been paid to this editorial aspect. On a practical note, meanwhile, it is easy to jump from Latin to English or vice versa, given the clearly printed chapter numbers.

As to the annotation, there seems to be some hesitation with respect to its status. The cover and title page refer to 'notes', whereas the section is called 'commentary' within the book itself. Given the scope and coherence of the material May offers, I think 'commentary' fits best. Does that word, in the eyes of the publisher, carry negative connotations which might deter a possible reader? Let us hope this is not the case, since commentaries remain one of the most important scholarly instruments in the field of classics even in the present age.

The commentary deals with a wide range of issues but concentrates mostly on literary elements, such as the story line, the protagonists, important themes, and Apuleius' choice of vocabulary. References to scholarly literature as well as to parallel texts (both in Apuleius and in other classical works) are included, but the reader is never overwhelmed by them, as may quickly be the case in commentaries such as GCA. May's lemmata are headed by words from the English translation, which can be a nuisance for those who prefer to study the text from the Latin original, but will no doubt be a pleasing feature for readers less well versed in Latin.

All in all, the commentary offers valuable help and inspires further reading and study. What more can one ask? Of course, every experienced Apuleius reader will miss something of his or her personal liking. For instance, I regret the absence of explanatory notes on places where Apuleius appears to achieve special narratological effects (such as the complex focalization in Aristomenes' words in 1,14,3-5 or the involuntary self-irony in Pythias' direct speech in 1,24,6-9f, although May does note 'comic language throughout the scene', p. 210). But then again, whatever seems to be missing leaves room for readers to discover for themselves. There is no need for a commentary of this scope to be complete in every respect, and it would be unfair to ask the same kind or amount of information from May as from the parallel GCA

volume on book 1 (by W.H. Keulen, 2007). On the whole, May's explanations are instructive and relevant.

To sum up: this is a useful volume for students and readers who wish to know more about the *Metamorphoses*, without having to face the breathtaking flood of modern scholarship on Apuleius and the Roman novel. May's initial claim that book 1 may be seen as a self-contained text' (p. I) may sound rather exaggerated (and is not confirmed or proved by the author, as far as I can see), but the volume actually is a good starting point for further study. I think it will also render good service in Latin courses for graduate and perhaps even undergraduate students.

If being 'self-contained', to a certain extent at least, counts as a valid reason to publish separate editions on books of Apuleius' novel, I would next propose books 3, 9, and 11. One may indeed hope for some further Apuleius volumes in the Aris and Phillips Classical Texts.

[For a response to this review by Ellen Finkelpearl, please see BMCR [2014.11.25.](#)]