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**Lara Nicolini, *Ad (L)usum lectoris: etimologia e giochi di parole in Apuleio. Testi e manuali per l'insegnamento universitario del latino, 117. Bologna: Pàtron editore, 2011. Pp. 220. ISBN 9788855531085. €18.00 (pb).***

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Readers of Apuleius have often noted the marked inclination of the author for stylistic peculiarities. Among these, linguistic plays, particularly puns involving Latin words and names, stand out as a typical feature of his prose writings. Not only do his rhetorical texts such as the *Apology* and *Florida* show many examples of such verbal play, but much can also be found in his famous novel *Metamorphoses*.

Many academic authors on Apuleius indeed draw their readers' attention to puns and verbal play. For instance, the well known *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius* allot a relatively large amount of space to such detailed stylistic observations. This goes particularly for volumes published most recently, such as the final volume, on *Cupid and Psyche* (4,28-35; 5,1 - 6,24) which appeared in 2004.

Lara Nicolini has now published a monograph on etymologizing puns in Apuleius, which provides a useful overview of the field and contains valuable discussions of many individual places in Apuleius. Although few people will read Nicolini's book from beginning to end, it will be a useful tool for researchers of Apuleius' ever intriguing prose.

In her first chapter (pp. 13-37), Nicolini deals with the theme of ancient etymology as a whole. The author also draws attention to Apuleius' special interest in language. Her subtitle 'un' attenzione "non naturale" alla lingua' (p.31) suggests that Apuleius, although being a non native speaker of Latin, is fascinated by the possibilities of his acquired language.

The largest part of the book (pp.39-174) then turns to individual passages of Apuleius, analyzed along various lines. The following categories are used to group the collected material into separate sections: (1) etymological figures, polyptoton, and paronomasia; (2) ambiguity (double entendre); (3) 'hypersemantization' (that is, lexical choices where the sense seems to be made uncommonly 'dense'); (4) 'taking things by the letter' (that is, ambiguities due to

literal understanding of common phrases and proverbial turns); (5) revived metaphors; (6) hapax legomena and semantic innovations. Finally, the subject of hapaxes is then given some added paragraphs, on a special case in *Met.* 6,19, on hapaxes based on Greek words, on what may be called 'semantic hapaxes' (existing words used once in a thoroughly reworked sense). Finally, some cases are discussed where the innovation seems to have a syntactic component.

An appendix on the verb *divorto* (pp.175-180), bibliography (with a certain preference for publications in Italian) and four indexes (pp.193-220) conclude the volume. Its format is convenient and its modest price will not deter libraries or private scholars.

It is impossible to discuss everything in this book, as literally hundreds of places in Apuleius' works are analyzed in some detail. A majority of the chapters in the *Met.* have an entry in the *index locorum* and many of them are dealt with under two or more of the six headings mentioned above.

To give an impression of the work done by Nicolini and, to some extent, allow for debate, I will discuss the passages referring to the first chapters of book 11 of the *Met.*, chosen because a new, literary commentary on *Met.* 11 is very much a *desideratum*.<sup>1</sup>

The first place in *Met.* 11 to be mentioned is 11,1,2 *nec tantum pecuina et ferina uerum inanima (diuino eius ... nutu uegetari)*. Nicolini (p.36 note 70) regards this *inanima* as a 'criptato ... ragionamento etimologico': *pecuina* and *ferina* vary on the common word *animalia*, which is left unmentioned here but emerges, in a way, in *inanima* now taken in its primary sense of 'lifeless'. This seems a fine and helpful remark.

A phrase from the same sentence in 11,1,2 *diuino eius luminis numinisque nutu* is given as an example of category (1). The sound play between *luminis* and *numinis*, combined with the etymological connection between *numinis* and *nutu* strikes the eye of every intelligent reader, one would say, unlike the previous observation, which is more recherché.

The 'normal' use of *emergo* with separative ablative in 11,1,1 *emergentem fluctibus* is adduced in the same paragraph (p.55) as evidence against F's reading *emersi me* (transitive, with accusative) in 1,2,2. There is no pun in 11,1,1 involved here.<sup>2</sup>

The next entry in the *index locorum* refers to 11,1 at p.165. This appears to be a typo, for p.165 does not mention 11,1 but contains a brief mention of 11,11 (not listed in the *index*). Errors do occur, of course, but in a book such as this, they can easily cause problems.

The next relevant items discussed for their own sake (rather than as parallel texts)<sup>3</sup> are 11,2,2 *triformi facie* (of Proserpina) and 11,25,1 *humani generi sospitatrix*. Unfortunately, both cases involve typos again: the first is listed in the

index as discussed on p.141, which must be p.142. The second is actually quoted and indexed as '11,2' rather than as 11,25.4 (The former is relatively easy to solve for the average reader, but the second one creates a problem for anyone who has a digital text at his or her disposal.) As to the interpretation, Nicolini takes both as Apuleian coinages on the basis of Greek examples (TRIMORPHOS and ANDROSOOTEIRA), the former following the example of i.a. Horace, *Carmina* 1,27,23. Nicolini takes some time to make the point that Apuleius is actually doing something new here, and the whole point seems oversubtle. *Sospitatrix* is actually used first by Apuleius, but more than once and so technically not a hapax.

More correctly, 11,3,3 *elocutilis* (in the rather redundant phrase *elocutilis eloquentiae*) is said to be an absolute hapax (p. 131). The adjective is said to have been coined after the model of the archaism *dapsilis*, only two words earlier in the sentence (in the likewise redundant nexus *dapsilis copia*. The richly laden double combination, as Nicolini rightly argues, surely conveys something of the sublimely divine eloquence with which Lucius aspires to be gifted by Isis. All of this seems fine, although here too, even a beginning reader of the Latin might have picked up the hint: the words as they stand actually form one phrase: *dapsilem copiam elocutilis facundiae*.

Two expressions in close proximity are given as examples of lexical innovation and enallage: *Arabiae felicia germina* in 11,4,3 and *fluctuantes Cyprii* in 11,5,2 (both on p. 169). In the former case, there may be a small pun on *Arabia Felix*, the ancient name for Yemen, which seems a good observation. In the latter example the adjective transposes a quality of the island to its inhabitants (p. 169). Here again, the point appears rather obvious.

Next I skip a number of references and a few points relevant to the end of book 11. On p.114-5 there is an excellent note about the expression *inter sacrum ego et saxum positus cruciabar* in 11,28,2. The words normally refer to the dire position of a victim 'between the altar and the sacrificial knife', that is 'in a tight corner' (OLD s.v. *sacrum* 1c). The funny thing here, as Nicolini rightly observes, is that Lucius is not in a really painful position at all; he merely has to wait between two successive initiations in the rites of Isis and Osiris. Additionally, the phrase is taken literally by Apuleius, since Lucius actually is between a *sacrum* in the normal, plain sense of 'cult' and something else.

One wonders whether *saxum* would not equally hide some sort of pun here. Could Apuleius perhaps allude to the asine *dentes saxei* that Lucius has lost only shortly before, 11,13,5; cf. also 10,22,1; or the hostile *saxa* which are thrown at him (still as an ass) and his companions in 8,17,4?

The final chapter of book 11 of the *Met.* (11,30) is given five entries. One of them does not involve a pun itself (p.158 note 496) and three of them concern the nexus *inanimae castimoniae* 11,30,1, an exquisite turn for '(religious, penitential) abstaining from meat' with another instance of special use of *inanimus* (cf. the first example in 11,1, discussed above). At p.36, note 70, the

phrase is quoted as a parallel, and at p.74 it is said to be opposed to *pecuina et ferina*. Here again something seems to have gone wrong. Nicolini appears to confuse 11,1 and 11,30 (where the words *pecuina et ferina* do not occur). Correct, again, is the reference on p.165. Finally, at p.127 Nicolini defends a conjecture *ibidem serebat* by Oudendorp for F's text *deseruiebat* in 11,30,4, commonly corrected to *exciebat* or *exciuerat*. As Nicolini suggests, this could count as yet another example of her subcategory (5) of 'revived metaphors'.

Here I am less inclined to follow Nicolini. Accepting old or new emendations because they fit a specific category of puns seems hazardous to me. In many other instances it struck me that the author puts perfectly acceptable manuscript readings into question to produce new illustrations of the kind of puns she focuses on. I would advocate defending manuscript readings and making sense of them as they are, rather than changing the text.<sup>5</sup>

This short survey of places at both the beginning and the end of book 11 shows some typical features of Nicolini's monograph. It can sometimes be seen as making much of what seems fairly obvious or natural, or of trying to adapt the Latin text to make it fit a certain type of pun. Furthermore, I was disturbed to find more than just the odd typo in the index, particularly in a book such as this, which is bound to be consulted for special places rather than systematically read. On the other hand, many attractive ideas, both great and small, certainly merit the attention of scholars and will be able to inspire further interpretation.

One can only hope that this book with its firm grasp of Apuleian language and style, based on good philological research, will be used by scholars studying texts by the great man from Madauros. It may prove particularly useful to future commentators as a source of interpretative ideas and points of discussion.

[For a response to this review by Nicolini, please see BMCR [2012.01.51.](#)]

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#### Notes:

1. I refrain from discussing passages from the *Apology* and the *Florida*, on which I have written commentaries (Gieben: Amsterdam 1997 and 2001; not included in Nicolini's bibliography).
2. With the recent commentator on *Met.* 1, Wytse Keulen, (2007,99-100), I would be inclined rather to defend F in 1,2,1 and read *emersi [me]* or *emersi in*. The problem is not relevant for the interpretation of 11,1,1, which as such seems unproblematic.
3. Thus I leave aside cases like 11,2,1 *exordium* in its normal sense 'beginning', adduced (p.124) to explain a more complex pun in 5,16,5 *exordio sermonis huius*, and similar places of minor interest.
4. In the present review, references to the *Met.* are given, as is fairly common, with three numbers (book, paragraph, and subparagraph), e.g. 11,25,1 rather than 11,25. Unfortunately, Nicolini consistently quotes places with just two numbers.

This makes consulting her book unduly troublesome.  
5. My own 'conservative' stand in textual matters may be an obstacle to properly appraise Nicolini's efforts here. By contrast, textual critics fond of coming up with new emendations to ancient Latin texts are bound to like Nicolini's various proposals to change the accepted text, resulting in new puns.

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