

APULEIUS AND DISCOURSE

ADKINS (E.) *Discourse, Knowledge, and Power in Apuleius' Metamorphoses*. Pp. xii+277. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022. Cased, US\$80. ISBN: 978-0-472-13305-5.

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The book under review originates from a doctoral thesis defended in 2014, dedicated to exploring how the novelist Apuleius portrays speech as a negotiation of social status, particularly but not exclusively through the lens of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of 'symbolic capital'. While the thesis' original structure, which did not follow the chronological development of the novel, is retained, the individual chapters have undergone substantial rewrites, along with an updated bibliography. Notably, a lengthy chapter on feminine discourse has been added. The volume comprises an introduction, six chapters: 'Discourse from the Margins'; 'Elite Discourse'; 'Asinine Discourse'; 'Feminine Discourse'; 'Silence'; 'The Novel as Discourse', and a conclusion: 'The Man from Madauros'.

The introduction offers an effective synthesis of the *De Magia*, justifying the book's adopted problem by demonstrating that the discourse of fictional characters is rooted in the novelist's rhetorical practice. Chapter 1, centred on the discourse of marginalised groups within the empire, such as Thessalian bandits and Cybele's priests, is the most remarkable, as it draws upon historical, anthropological and literary knowledge (evidenced in the compelling comparative analysis of the history of priests in the *Onos* and the *Metamorphoses*). These two groups employ the codes of legitimate discourse in a distinctive manner. It would have been relevant, concerning the satire of *cinaedi*, to also draw on F. Dupont and T. Éloi, *L'érotisme masculin dans la Rome antique* (2001).

Chapter 2 examines three male figures belonging to the elite, Thelyphron, Lucius (at the Festival of Laughter) and the insightful physician, to demonstrate the novelist's emphasis on the significance of knowledge underlying genuinely effective speech.

Chapter 3 delves into the attempts of the narrator Lucius, transformed into an ass, to communicate with humans, revealing a progression in the alienation of this character, who undergoes a traumatic experience akin to that of a slave denied their humanity.

Chapter 4 discusses four apparently disparate female figures, but fundamentally strong women who influence the narrator: Byrrhena, Photis, the matron of Corinth (Lucius' lover) and Isis. The aim is to show that Lucius undergoes a process that leads to the mastery of his body and sensuality, from the perspective of the Platonist Plutarch. This new chapter shares some aspects with the recent thesis of S. Hébert ('Les personnages dans les *Métamorphoses* d'Apulée, miroirs de l'itinéraire du héros', Ph.D. Diss., Paris-Sorbonne, 2021), which considers the characters in Apuleius' novel as markers of the character's philosophical quest, with particular emphasis on the analysis of female characters. In passing, it is worth noting that the approach followed by A. necessitates leaving aside the question of the axiology of women in the novel, which is somewhat regrettable, as it is a significant hermeneutical issue.

Chapter 5 represents the most developed elaboration of A.'s research on mystical silence, previously revised for *Les savoirs d'Apulée* (edd. E. Plantade and D. Vallat, 2018). Undoubtedly, it is one of the most innovative contributions of the book, as it contextualises the notion of *curiositas*, an essential aspect of scholarship on Apuleius, by showing its connection to broader views of the relationship with the divine, rooted notably in the doctrine of Plutarch. This research has major narratological consequences:

it becomes clear that the novel's events are closely related to the philosophical notion of asceticism.

Chapter 6 deals with narratological issues. It offers a critical review, consistently enlightening, of how certain strategic points of the novel have been analysed by critics. Here it is worth noting A.'s courage in frequently presenting original solutions to classic controversies, which are always stimulating for reflection. Nevertheless, one might wonder if another narratological chapter would have been helpful to put into perspective all the brilliantly highlighted elements throughout the book. Numerous passages in the book, especially its conclusion referring to *Met.* 11.27.9 (*Madaurenses sed admodum pauperem*), reinforced my belief that the question of the author remains central to the interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*. This feeling is strengthened by the progression from chapter to chapter, which gives readers the impression of being in front of a detective novel that precisely directs towards the figure of the true culprit, namely the author. In fact, the oratorical battle of the *De Magia* appears in many ways as the matrix of the novel, seen as an odyssey of discourse. Hence, one could question whether A.'s work indirectly invites a reassessment of biographical criticism (E. Cocchia, *Romanzo e Realtà nella vita e nell'attività letteraria di Lucio Apuleio* [1915]) that was thought to have been buried. In light of my own research on the Amazigh origin of *Psyche* (Plantade 2014, 2023), I believe that the hero's transformation into an ass should not only be read as a philosophical allegory but also as a symbol of an African identity difficult to assume in the eyes of the imperial elites.

A.'s book is both a readable introduction to the novel of Apuleius and a significant contribution to Apuleian criticism. Its reading is a necessary complement to the classic studies such as those by J. Winkler (1985), C. Schlam (1992), L. Graverini (2010) and S.J. Harrison (2015). While not its stated ambition, her book provides substantial elements, alongside that by S. Tilg (2014), to the fruitful vein of serio-comic interpretations.

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