



Review
Reviewed Work(s): Apuleio: Le novelle dell' adulterio (Metamorfosi IX) by S. Mattiacci
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S. MATTIACCI (ed.): *Apuleio: Le novelle dell' adulterio (Metamorfosi IX)*. Con testo a fronte. (Il Nuovo Melograno, 28.) Pp. 186. Florence: Casa Editrice le Lettere, 1996. Paper, L. 30,000. ISBN: 88-7166-279-2.

Present day readers of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* are well equipped with modern editions and studies, such as the recent translation by P. G. Walsh (Oxford, 1994) and the monograph of Nancy Shumate (reviewed in *CR* 47 [1997], 316–7). For book 9, the book of the famous 'adultery tales', there is the recent volume of the *Groningen Commentaries on Apuleius* (Groningen, 1995). Now M., who is known for several important articles on Apuleius (e.g. on his reception of archaic poetry), has published another edition of book 9 with a commentary in Italian. It is a convenient, moderately priced pocket book, characteristics which clearly distinguish it from the *GCA* volume. It contains the Latin text with face-to-face Italian translation, preceded by forty-five pages of introduction and followed by sixty-eight pages of (small printed) commentary.

In her introduction M. gives a brief survey of the different scholarly approaches to the novel and takes a moderate view herself: she opts for the 'Winklerian' position that the novel offers various levels of meaning, which leaves it to the reader to choose and to join in the *gioco ermeneutico*. Thus the tales of book 9 may be read as amusing stories about sex and cunning tricks, but also seem to form a coherent cycle, preparing for the mystico-religious finale of the 'Isis book'. In the introduction, M. also devotes some attention to the influence of Apuleius on later novelistic authors, such as Boccaccio and Morlini. The actual commentary remains closer to the Latin text. It includes many notes on the constitution of the text and Apuleius' often peculiar vocabulary, and provides ample literary parallels for many relevant matters of subject and style.

Most of this is useful and thorough, but one cannot help wondering which readers M. had in mind when writing this book. Given its format and the existence of the *GCA* volume (which M. has used), one would expect it above all to offer help to an inexperienced reader, or, alternatively, to focus on intertextual relations between Apuleius and the Italian Renaissance novelists. Neither of these two goals seems to have been aimed at. Instead, the range of matter covered largely corresponds to that of *GCA*, with which M. agrees in many, although not all, details. M.'s remarks are usually shorter than *GCA*, but not always clearer. This is mostly due to a tendency to cluster a number of different observations in larger, and so less well-ordered, notes.

The smaller number of pages available to M. (with *GCA* measuring well over 300 pages) inevitably imposed severe restrictions on the number of topics to be dealt with. But regrettably, it is not quite clear what principle of selection has been adopted. For example, the commentary on 9.3 contains some modest notes on textual and linguistic points (e.g. *cubilis*; the nexus *excubias agere*; the rare form *uirus*; and a parallel for *sanum . . . sobrium*), but also not less than a whole page on the theme of hydrophobia in asses and animals afflicted with rabies. Finally, literary models are sometimes overestimated at the expense of other explanations. This may be seen, for instance, in the famous picture of the evil miller's wife who worships only one God (9.14). This passage is now explained by many scholars as a parody or a veiled attack on Jewish or Christian

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religion (see recently V. Schmidt in *VChr.* [1997], 51–71). However, after briefly discussing the issue, M. considers the passage to be chiefly dependent on the general, negative picture of women in Sall. *Cat.* 24.3—a rather meagre conclusion.

Apart from these shortcomings, M.'s book is a welcome contribution to Apuleian studies. Given its format and scope, it will benefit above all readers who have no access to *GCA* or who prefer a study in Italian. For a general readership, however, it seems less suitable.

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