

ABSTRACT OF DOCTORAL THESIS

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APULEIUS' *METAMORPHOSES*

The rhetor's novel

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THEME AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

My doctoral thesis deals with Apuleius' novel entitled *Metamorphoses* or *Asinus aureus*. The multitalented sophist rhetor and philosopher's work during its long history of reception provoked extremely various, sometimes conflicting interpretations with its complexity and subtlety. The colourful embedded narratives, the unexpected turns, the frequent changes of tone and the surprising ending caused the readings both which emphasize its lack of coherence, the purpose of mere entertainment or the playful ambiguousness and which underline its elaborate structure, the serious meaning and the unambiguous message. The various approaches generally agree that the complexity of the *Metamorphoses* is a disturbing problem which needs to be solved.

My starting point is that this complexity is an essential feature of the *Metamorphoses*, and we should not regard it as the result of the author's carelessness or as a problem, but we need to acknowledge it as a characteristic quality of the genre and explore its nature. This great variety is present also in the reactions of receivers described in the work. All of these features and the unreliability of the narrator causes that the reader can not find his place, his role in the novel, and left without guide he has to make up his interpretation to his taste.

Beside the exploration of the characteristics of complexity I also investigate in my thesis the role of the reader. I consider the responses of the protagonist, the characters and the fictive reader, furthermore, the apostrophes to the reader and the words put into his mouth, on the basis of which I outline the fictive reader's caricaturistic portrait. The study of Apuleius' treatment of his sources

and style helps to reveal his expectations of his reader, so conflating these two portraits I characterize Apuleius' „ideal” reader as learned, responsive to belles-lettres, and ready to entertainment and play.

For my survey I adopt the methods of rhetorical criticism. This school of literary criticism, which is especially competent in the case of works written according to the principles of classical rhetoric, focuses on the work itself, and outlines the figures of the author and the audience on the basis of the „readings” of the text about them. This method, allowing sufficient objectivity, is prominently productive in the case of a rhetor's novel.

My thesis contains five chapters. In the foreword I briefly discuss Apuleius' life, locate the rhetorical criticism among the schools of literary criticism, and present its methods and most important features. In the first chapter I review the former scholarly interpretations of the *Metamorphoses*. In the second I analyze the consistent structure of the novel. The third chapter deals with Apuleius' treatment of his sources, including the survey of the generic features of the ancient novel, the other incorporated genres and the most important allusions. In the fourth chapter I examine the inner rhetorical situations of the *Metamorphoses*, and sketch the portrait of the fictive reader. In the fifth chapter I analyze how the author simultaneously constructs and deconstructs the credibility of his novel, then I observe how his style serves this double end and what it tells about the reader and his role in the novel.

1. APULEIUS-INTERPRETATIONS

The review of the published scholarly readings makes a good starting point to define the problems of interpretation of the *Metamorphoses*. The reception history of the novel is as colourful as the work itself, so I have classified the scholarly interpretations in four categories according to what characteristic of the novel the critics have stressed as the main problem. These are the followings: reality — fiction, unity — diversity, deep meaning — entertaining, unambiguous message — playful ambiguousness.

First the question of reality — fiction has raised during the reception history of the *Metamorphoses*. I have listed here the early authors who interpreted the novel as Apuleius' autobiography, and those critics who search for the elements of the contemporary reality or the details of Apuleius' life in the text. The readings of the category unity — diversity concentrate on the structure of the *Metamorphoses* and miss or prove its coherence. The essays listed in the category of deep meaning — entertaining try to apprehend the author's intention and his message coded in his work. Last I have put in the unambiguous message — playful ambiguousness category those readings which can find a clear, consistent meaning in the text (including the „standard”, Isis-focused and the platonic interpretations), and those according to which the novel can be read in many ways or can't be interpreted at all (Winkler and the last scholarship).

2. THE HARMONY OF CHAOS

The complexity of the structure is one element which makes the critic uncertain about the interpretation, so this is what I review and analyze first in detail. The *Metamorphoses* can be divided into three, firmly discernible parts: 1. Lucius' encounters with magic (1, 2–3, 26), 2. Lucius' adventures as an ass (3, 27–10, 34), 3. Lucius' retransformation and his initiations (11). I divide all the three parts into smaller passages, and examine their functions in the novel. I summarize the structure of the *Metamorphoses* in a perspicuous outline, too. In my analysis I state that the novel is thoughtfully structured and I show that parts of the structure which affect the interpretation of the whole work.

3. APULEIUS, THE READER

The multiplicity of the *Metamorphoses* is not only Apuleius' achievement, but it comes from the genre of the ancient novel too. In the first part of the chapter I look into this genre relying on chiefly T. Szepessy's and B. P. Reardon's studies. After Szepessy I discern two trends of the ancient novel: the Greek, so-called „ideal” romances and the Latin „realistic” novels, among which Apuleius' work belongs. The ancient novel is an extremely receptive, flexible and colourful genre by nature: it presents fictive, dramatic actions in the extensive, monumental manners of epic, in the prosaic form of historiography, adapting novelistic embedded narratives, lyrical elements and rhetorical devices. So the miscellany of genres present in the *Metamorphoses* is characteristic of the ancient novel in general.

Next I examine the relation of the *Metamorphoses* to its Greek „original”, the lost *Metamorphoseis* ascribed by Photius to Lukios from Patrai, and to the *Lukios e Onos* which survived among Lucianus’ works. Contrary to the general assumption according to which the *Metamorphoseis* had been the source both of Apuleius’ novel and the *Onos*, I question the priority of the *Metamorphoseis* to the *Onos* and regard the latter a variant rather than *epitome*.

After I have described the „realistic” novels with the help of Petronius’ *Satyricon* I present the traits of the „ideal” trend in the Charite and Psyche-story of the *Metamorphoses*. In the next point I review the elements adopted from the drama: the typical comic characters, their parodically tragic gestures and ambitions, the real tragedy in the third part of the Charite complex, and the adaptation of the Phaedra story in the tenth book. I find the epic traditions in the descriptions of dawn, the cyclopiian cave of the robbers, the similarities between Charite and Dido and Psyche’s *katabasis*. Finally I consider the elements borrowed from historiography and biography, love poetry and the Milesian tales. Similarly to the ancient novel in general almost the whole ancient literary tradition is present in the *Metamorphoses*, thus the diversity of the various genres transforming into each other or being present side by side significantly contributes to the complexity of the whole.

4. STORYTELLERS, LISTENERS, WITNESSES, READERS

In this chapter I analyze the inner rhetorical situations of the *Metamorphoses*, and try to answer the question if the responses contained in the work help the reader to interpret the novel or to find the role meant for him by the author. Most of the inner rhetorical situations are related to the embedded narratives, so first I talk

about their general features, then examine them one by one and those scenes of the main narrative which take place in the presence of an audience.

In these we face the question of the credibility of wondrous things, the unreliability of the narrator, the unpleasant consequences of the sudden turn from an outsider into protagonist, the different interpretations and errors caused by different viewpoints, lessons missed by their addressees but evident for the reader, and the caricature of the curious, gossipy, nagging and easily manipulated fictive reader. So while the role of the reader becomes more and more clear, the possibilities of interpreting the novel multiply: at the scene of Lucius' retransformation the priest's famous speech explains Lucius' adventures uniquely in the novel, but set against the opinion of the audience and followed by the suspiciously numerous initiations even this explanation loses its general force.

I conclude that the fictive reader contained in the novel and Lucius the narrator make the perfect pair of the curious and the babbler. Both of them are comic characters and inhabit the same fictive world. The real reader can play the role proffered to him, and enter the universe of the *Metamorphoses*, where the author manipulates him like the other characters with the unexpected and surprising turns.

5. PERSUASION AND AESTHETICS

Even the fictive narratives seek after credibility. In this chapter I examine the persuasive devices and that how Apuleius deconstructs the previously constructed credibility constantly reminding to the fictive nature of his story. A world familiar to the contemporary audience, the real geographical sites, the general truths, the

mode of narration and the careful answers for the question „how do you know?“ help to construct the illusion of verisimilitude, but at the same time Apuleius deconstructs this illusion with the miraculous elements, the unreliability and the misleading comments of the narrator and other devices, even sometimes bringing up his own Romanity.

His style, which is at the top of the *elocutio novella*, can produce this same effect persuasively provoking the feel of presence while its carefully selected words, rhythmical sentence structures and figures praise the author's talent. I thoroughly examine this style analyzing two passages: the prologue and the Actaeon and Diana *ecphrasis*.

The prologue imitates the tone of personal, informal and intimate conversation, and characterizes itself both as present talking and written, finished document. In the centre of the prologue functioning as *captatio benevolentiae* stands the reader, who can immediately experience the promise of *laetaberis* coming true.

The Actaeon and Diana *ecphrasis* expressively presents the antithesis of *natura* and *ars*, and describes the viewer's/reader's receiving process rather than the statue. In this process the role of the viewer/reader becomes equal to the author's: his gaze gives life to the possibility contained in the work of art.

In the last point of the chapter I complete the results of the structural analysis with the review of the stylistic devices applied on macro level.

IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE THESIS

The main achievement of my thesis can be located in the productive application of the methods of rhetorical criticism to Apu-

leius the rhetor's novel. With the help of these methods I was able to draw important conclusions about the complexity, the most essential feature of the *Metamorphoses*, and to define the role of the reader meant for him by the author. The fictive reader's caricaturistic portrait and the structural, stylistic and allusive techniques aiming at the real reader together point to a reader-figure who is learned, responsive to belles-lettres, and ready to entertainment and play.

I hope that my approach which has acknowledged and explored the complexity without the aim of simplification, the thorough analysis of the inner rhetorical situations and my own achievements being also present in the details promote the better understanding of this extremely complicated and controversial novel and its colourful history of reception.