

**Regine MAY, Stephen J. HARRISON (eds.), *Cupid and Psyche. The Reception of Apuleius' Love Story since 1600***, Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2020 (Trends in Classics – Pathways of Reception, vol. 1), 465 pp., ISBN 978-3-11-064119-6, €109.95.

The book which is the subject of this review is the proceedings of a conference which was held at Leeds in 2016, containing twenty two contributions as well as a Preface, an Introduction, and an Index. In the Introduction, the editors, Regine MAY and Stephen J. HARRISON, point out that the volume focuses on the reception of the tale of Cupid and Psyche (henceforth *C&P*) after the year 1600, since there are already valuable studies on the earlier reception<sup>1</sup>, while there is no comprehensive study of the more recent history of *C&P* in various areas of culture.

The Introduction to the volume briefly considers a number of issues, such as the originality of Apuleius' tale (as opposed to the hypothesis that it is derived from earlier sources), its literary features or its reception up to the year 1600. The book is divided into five thematic parts, all of which touch upon not only the literary reception of *C&P*, but also cover opera, the visual arts and cinema. The first part is "Baroque and the Influence of La Fontaine" and it contains four papers on 17<sup>th</sup> century opera librettos and examples from the visual arts. The second, "Romanticism and Philosophy", consists of six papers on figures such as Mary Tighe, Thomas Taylor, John Keats, Walter Scott, Søren Kierkegaard and Robert Bridges. In the next part, "*Fin de Siècle* and Psychology", four contributions focus on literary sources, psychoanalysis and the visual arts at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The fourth part, "Twentieth Century and Modernism", also contains four papers about three prose works (by Eudora Welty, C.S. Lewis and William Faulkner) and the poetry of Sylvia Plath. The last part is entitled "New Audiences" and touches upon a variety of culture texts: stories for children, theatre, ballet and cinema.

I will say a few words about six of the twenty two contributions. Stephen HARRISON, one of the editors, wrote a piece entitled: "Apuleius at the Court of Louis XIV. *Psyché* (1671, 1678) and its English Version (1675)". He begins by pointing out that all those versions of the tale were based on La Fontaine's 1669 prose version, which made it *en vogue* in the 1670s in France. HARRISON compares the way the story was used in the 1671 *tragicomédie et ballet*, which was co-written by Molière, Pierre Corneille and Philippe Quinault, with musical interludes by Jean-Baptiste Lully (who was soon to become the main figure in baroque French opera, working in tandem with Quinault). HARRISON analyses the differences between the version by Molière et co. and a later adaptation of the tale in the 1678 *tragédie lyrique* composed by Lully to the libretto written by Thomas Corneille (the brother of Pierre) and the philosopher and essayist Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle. Examples of these differences are the disappearance or absence of the wicked sisters or the pre-marital pregnancy. In between these two versions there is an English adaptation, written by Thomas Shadwell in 1675. HARRISON shows the relationship between the theatrical versions and Apuleius' original novel, and he writes, quite interestingly, about their use of classical sources other than Apuleius. The socio-political context for all these adaptations is also treated, for example with the celebrations of peace in the two French plays (alluding to Louis XIV's ending of the wars with Spain and with Holland) and the religious and military motifs in Shadwell's version (the conflict between Protestants and Catholics and the war against Holland).

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<sup>1</sup> R.H.F. CARVER, *The Protean Ass. The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to Renaissance*, Oxford 2007; J.H. GAISSER, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass*, Princeton 2008.

The paper by Robert H.F. CARVER (“The Platonic Ass: Thomas Taylor’s *Cupid and Psyche* in Context (1795–1822)”), an author of the book on the reception of *C&P* from antiquity to the Renaissance, is a very fine treatment of Thomas Taylor’s translation of the tale in question. CARVER begins by giving a brief report on the presence of *C&P* in England before Taylor and provides some context for Taylor himself, a passionate Platonist who was mocked by his contemporaries as a religious eccentric and considered ignorant in classical languages, but who was, surprisingly, highly praised by Ralph Waldo Emerson during his meeting with Wordsworth. CARVER analyses Taylor’s allegorical interpretation of *C&P* as well as his translation of the tale. He shows that the latter was dependent on an earlier translation by Gildon (first published in 1708) and underlines Taylor’s strange attempts at rendering Latin words with their English etymological descendants whenever possible, producing such *curiosa* as “poisoned serpent” (*uenerati serpenti*) with his “various volumes” (*multinodis uoluminibus*).

Regine MAY, also an editor of the volume, wrote a very good piece on the presence of *C&P* in John Keats’ poetry (“Keats’s ‘Ode to Psyche’. Psyche as Poetry and Inspiration”). MAY begins by talking about Keats’ interest in and knowledge of classical languages and culture in general, and Apuleius’ novel in particular. She then proceeds to analyse three poems: “I Stood Tip-Toe upon a Little Hill”, “Ode to Psyche” and “Ode on Melancholy”. She aptly shows that Keats’ engagement with Apuleius was much deeper and more sophisticated than generally assumed. A particularly interesting case is ll. 6–8 of his “Ode on Melancholy”, where MAY finds not only an elaborate allusion to the Psyche/soul/butterfly motif, but also to two other places from the *Metamorphoses*, which are outside *C&P*: an owl (the bird into which the witch Pamphile transforms) and mysteries (into which Lucius is initiated at the very end).

Not all contributions are equally solid and interesting. Zacharias ANDREADAKIS writes about “Kierkegaard as a reader of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*” and as much as I found his treatment of the Danish philosopher’s familiarity with classical languages and literature engaging, I am not convinced by the main point of his paper. ANDREADAKIS demonstrates the presence of *C&P* in Kierkegaard’s *œuvre* (both in personal notes and in his famous works, such as *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling*) and points out that for Kierkegaard Psyche stands for the Christian faith as the Danish existentialist understood it. However, ANDREADAKIS attempts to show that there might be some inspiration drawn from Apuleius in Kierkegaard’s highly original proto-existentialism, and specifically in his famous concept of anxiety as the awareness of the limitations of the self. ANDREADAKIS fails to show that there is such an inspiration in the first place. I do not think that the fact that Apuleius uses the word *anxius* twice, both in *C&P* and at the end of the novel, has anything to do with Kierkegaard’s own thinking about anxiety. ANDREADAKIS suggests that Kierkegaard’s belief that true conversion may be impossible might have been influenced by the fact that Lucius, after his conversion, is still described as *anxius*. Well, it might have been influenced or it might not have. ANDREADAKIS’ final remarks that we often lack any hard evidence for literary and philosophical influence hardly strengthen the case he makes.

Geoffrey C. BENSON wrote a piece about Franz Riklin’s psychoanalytical interpretation of *C&P* (“Psyche the Psychotic. *Cupid and Psyche* in Dr. Franz Riklin’s *Wish Fulfilment and Symbolism in Fairy Tales*”). Riklin was a Swiss psychiatrist and a Freudian who collaborated with C.G. Jung during his early years. BENSON discusses Riklin’s interpretation of *C&P* (discussed many years earlier by James GOLLNICK)<sup>2</sup>, which was the first psychoanalytic reading of the Apuleian story. BENSON tries to rehabilitate Riklin and points out, in general, that classicists could benefit more from psychoanalytical readings of Apuleius. But these are two quite different claims. Riklin, with his shallow and naïve interpretation of *C&P* which was rightly criticised by GOLLNICK in his monograph, is strangely incompetent when compared to the contemporary, fascinating, albeit unorthodox

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<sup>2</sup> J. GOLLNICK, *Love and the Soul: Psychological Interpretations of the Eros and Psyche Myth*, Toronto 1992, pp. 36–39.

psychoanalytical readings of literature by Sigmund FREUD himself (e.g. Wilhelm Jensen's novel *Gradiva*) or by Gustaw BYCHOWSKI (in his 1930 monograph on one of the greatest Polish Romantic poets, Juliusz Słowacki)<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, Riklin's interpretation is done in the footnotes he gives to *C&P* and even from a purely psychoanalytical point of view it is embarrassing. Riklin's "reading" should definitely remain a historical curiosity.

I will end by saying a few words about an excellent paper by Friedemann DREWS ("*Cupid & Psyche* and C.S. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces*. A Christian-Platonic Metamorphosis"), one of the best in the whole collection, if not simply the best. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces* is a work which is very difficult to read due to its complexity and allusiveness which is characteristic of Lewis' method of concealing literary and philosophical meanings in his prose works<sup>4</sup>. It is also almost experimental in its attempt to recreate the religious experience of listening to the myth as a "sacred story". DREWS competently discusses the relationships between the novel and Apuleius who is openly declared by Lewis to be his "source" and nothing more. It seems that Lewis' engagement with his "source" is much more sophisticated than assumed and DREWS opens a path for further study of this. In the tantalisingly short third section of his paper, he writes about structural parallels between the two novels. But the longest and most important part of his contribution is the section on ancient philosophy in *Till We Have Faces* and on Christianity in relation to that.

DREWS does a solid job in showing the Stoic sources for Orual's (the main protagonist) mentor, Fox. But the matter is not as simple as DREWS suggests, since Fox's Stoicism sounds very often much more like 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalism than the works of Seneca or Marcus Aurelius that DREWS quotes in his argument. Perhaps it is due to the limited space of the piece, but it is striking how different Fox is from, say, Marcus Aurelius, since Fox's Stoicism is quite irreligious or even antireligious, and reminds us very much of the contemporary forms of Stoicism which are increasingly popular among younger people and on the Internet. This is a Stoicism without its essential part which Anthony LONG calls the "theocratic postulate"<sup>5</sup>, that is, without a personal God, and that picture, in the end, is quite alien to the spirit of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*<sup>6</sup>. DREWS shows very convincingly, however, how this Stoicism is contrasted with Platonism in Lewis' novel. DREWS avoids (perhaps, due to his knowledge of Augustine) the mistake of opposing Platonism and Christianity in Lewis and makes a very good choice in underlining the fact that the key, distinctly Christian motif in *Till We Have Faces* is the idea of Psyche as a mediator between the gods (or God) and humans. DREWS' paper is a model example of reception studies.

All in all, the volume in question provides the reader with exactly what it promises: a panorama of how *C&P* was read, understood, felt, and used from 1600 to our times.

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<sup>3</sup> G. BYCHOWSKI, *Słowacki i jego dusza. Studium psychoanalityczne*, Warszawa–Kraków 1930.

<sup>4</sup> The feature of Lewis' fictional prose brilliantly demonstrated in Michael WARD's *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis*, Oxford 2008.

<sup>5</sup> A.A. Long, *Stoic Studies*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 2001, p. 150.

<sup>6</sup> See LONG on Marcus Aurelius: *ibidem*, p. 197, n. 21. LONG's interpretation has been challenged, for instance, by Julia ANNAS. For the discussion of the debate and bibliography, see Ch. GILL, *Marcus Aurelius*, in: R.W. SHARPLES, R. SORABJI (eds.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy 100 BC–200 AD*, London 2007, vol. I, pp. 175–187, on p. 181.