

The Prologue to *The Golden Ass* [Discussion]

Read the following passage(s); Latinists, read both please:

What I should like to do is to weave together different tales in this Milesian mode of story-telling and to stroke your approving ears with some elegant whispers, as long as you don't disdain to run your eye over Egyptian paper inscribed with the sharpened point of a reed from the Nile. I want you to feel wonder at the transformations of men's shapes and destinies into alien forms, and their reversion by a chain of interconnection to their own. So let me begin! Who is the narrator? Let me briefly explain: my antique stock is from Attic Hymettus, the Ephyrean Isthmus, and Spartan Taenarus, fertile territories established for ever in yet more fertile works of literature. In those regions, in the initial campaigns of boyhood, I became a veteran in Attic speech. Later in Rome, as a stranger to the literary pursuits of the citizens there, I tackled and cultivated the native language without the guidance of a teacher, and with excruciating difficulty. So at the outset I beg your indulgence for any mistakes which I make as a novice in the foreign language in use at the Roman bar. This switch of languages in fact accords with the technique of composition which I have adopted, much as a circus-rider leaps from one horse to another, for the romance on which I am embarking is adapted from Greek. Give it your attention, dear reader, and it will delight you.

At ego tibi sermone isto Milesio uarias fabulas conseram auresque tuas beniuolas lepido susurro per mulceam — modo si papyrum Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami inscriptam non spreueris inspicere — figuras fortunisque hominum in alias imagines conuersas et in se rursus mutuo nexu reffectas ut mireris. exordior. 'Quis ille?' paucis accipe. Hymettos Attica et Isthmos Ephyrea et Taenaros Spartiatica, glebae felices aeternum libris felicioribus conditae, mea uetus prosapia est; ibi linguam Atthidem primis pueritiae stipendiis merui. mox in urbe Latia aduena studiorum Quiritium indigenam sermonem aerumna bili labore nullo magistro praeunte aggressus excolui. en ecce praefamur ueniam, siquid exotici ac forensis sermonis rudis locutor offendero. iam haec equidem ipsa uocis immutatio desultoriae scientiae stilo quem accessimus respondet. fabulam Graecanicam incipimus. lector intende: laetaberis.

Make an attempt at answering the following questions:

1. What does the phrase 'Milesian mode of story-telling' (*sermone...Milesio*) suggest?
2. What does this prologue tell us about the relationship between the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius and of Ovid?
3. **WITHOUT** paraphrasing, analyse who is the author-narrator.
4. Why are Hymettus, Isthmus and Taenarus 'fertile territories established for ever in yet more fertile works of literature' (*glebae felices aeternum libris felicioribus conditae*)? What does this say about the work we are reading now?
5. What is the author-narrator implying when he claims that he is 'a novice in the foreign language in use at the Roman bar' (*exotici ac forensis sermonis rudis locutor*)?
6. Explain the relationship between Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and the Greek romance on which this novel is apparently based on. FOR LATINISTS: what is the significance of *fabulam Graecanicam*?
7. How similar/different is this prologue compared to e.g. the prologue to the *Daphnis and Chloe*?

Useful Reading

- Harrison, S. J. (2003) 'Epic extremities: the openings and closures of books in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', in S. Panayotakis et al. (eds.) *The Ancient Novel and Beyond* (Leiden, Brill), 239-254
- Kahane, A., and Laird, A. (2001) *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' Metamorphoses* (Oxford) → **Main Library PA 6217.C6**
- Walsh, P. (1998) *The Roman Novel*. 2nd edn. (Bristol), ch. 6 'The *Memamorphoses*'