

Golden ass book review

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Apuleius. *The Golden Ass*. Translated by Joel C. Relihan.

Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, 2007.

Acknowledgements. Introduction. Maps. Index. Pp. xlv, 254. Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* describes the trials and tribulations of Lucius, a privileged man who's extreme curiosity leads to his unfortunate transformation into an ass. His journey as an ass leads to a newfound perspective, enlightenment, and eventual salvation. Relihan's translation is vividly descriptive and allows the modern reader to relate to the tale.

Although extremely complex and vulgar at times, *The Golden Ass* is an entertaining, humorous, and inspiring story which provides valuable insight into ancient Greco-Roman society. *The Golden Ass* consists of many stories which are all interconnected. Apuleius weaves folk tales and myths into the main story of Lucius, which draw parallels to the main theme of *The Golden Ass*. The reader must pay close attention to such tales, particularly that of Cupid and Psyche, as they are important in understanding Lucius' redemptive journey. Although the format is often difficult to follow, it is crucial to the significance of the story .

Lucius' intense curiosity and inability to control his desires lead to his transformation and all the negative consequences which follow. Apuleius may have been attempting to convey the downfalls of greed and lust, showing that they always lead to trouble. Lucius' experiences as an ass are often very funny and explicit. Apuleius' wit and use of sexual humor provide light-hearted entertainment for the reader. On the other hand, Lucius also lives the inhumane life of a slave after his transformation to an ass. He experiences a way of life he never thought of before his transformation.

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He is abused and fears for his life on several occasions. This perhaps reveals another moral of *The Golden Ass*, that is, treat others how you would like to be treated. *The Golden Ass* serves as an excellent historical document. It describes ancient Greco-Roman society's morals, social classes, and overall way of life. Apuleius offers insight into all sectors of society. Wealthy upper classes, thieves, artisans, and slaves are all depicted in great detail. The society portrayed in *The Golden Ass* is in chaos. Greed, immorality and crime are abundant.

When Lucius is living with a group of robbers, the reader gets to see how their society functions democratically, as well as their desperation and greed. Lucius' life as an ass shows his maltreatment as well as the abuse of the slaves around him. These descriptive passages cause the reader to empathize with both Lucius and the slaves. This makes his journey more meaningful and effective at the end. The portrayal of women in *The Golden Ass* shows that women were viewed very negatively. *The Tale of the Wife's Tub*, *Miller's Wife*, and *Drycleaner's Wife*, all describe women as adulterous and manipulative.

Another story, *The Tale of the Oppressive Land Owner*, shows the tyrannical nature of the small land owner's of the time. These were likely the characteristics of the society in which Apuleius lived. Relihan's translation offers several tools which are beneficial in helping the reader understand the text. The introduction provides a summary of the work and important background information about Apuleius. The maps and index are helpful to the reader, as they provide more detailed information about place location and character description.

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A glossary of major characters is not included, but would have been helpful. The Golden Ass is not for the conservative reader, as it contains explicit sex and violence. One must pay close attention to the story, as there are many details which could easily be missed. The Golden Ass is witty, descriptive, and historically relevant. Readers will be entertained by Lucius' journey to redemption and gain information about ancient society. As stated in the first chapter, " pay close attention and joy shall be yours. " (p. 3).