



## Apuleius

Stephen Harrison

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### Introduction

Apuleius (no other names certain, c. 125–after 170 CE) is one of the key Latin writers of the 2nd century CE, a period that marks the transition from the end of traditional classical culture (Tacitus and Juvenal were probably still alive when Apuleius was born) to the new world of the high empire (Tertullian was certainly born before his death). He can be seen as representing in the Latin West some key aspects of the so-called Greek Second Sophistic, such as a focus on rhetorical performance and an interest in archaic language. He practiced as rhetorician and teacher in Carthage, and his writings were clearly well known in Late Antiquity in Roman North Africa (he is often mentioned by Augustine) and in Gaul (he is cited by Sidonius Apollinaris). He is best known for his novel *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*, and for its remarkable style: it is the apex of Asianism in Latin, full of poetic and archaic words and apparent coinages, rhythmical and rhyming cola, and colored with colloquialism and Graecisms. His *Apologia* (self-defense from 158 to 159 CE) is an immensely learned speech that combines Ciceronian forensic fireworks with sophistic *epideixis*, while the *Florida*, twenty-odd excerpts from Apuleius's showy declamations delivered at Carthage in the 160s, show considerable rhetorical and stylistic talent, and the *De deo Socratis* (probably from the same period) is a declamation on the personal deity of Socrates as seen in Plato. Three extant works ascribed to Apuleius are of debated authenticity: *De dogmate Platonis* or *De Platone*, two books of mediocre exposition of the philosophy of Plato; *De Interpretatione*, a treatise on formal logic; and *De mundo*, a translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise. Lost Apuleian works known from later citations include further speeches, poems, another novel, and a wide range of scientific and other didactic works. Little known in the medieval period, Apuleius was enthusiastically rediscovered in the Renaissance, and much read and studied, forming the center of debates about Latin prose style (Apuleius versus Cicero); his novel influenced important writers such as Shakespeare and Sidney, and the story of Cupid and Psyche from the *Metamorphoses* has provided consistent inspiration for further works of art and literature over the last five centuries. Little favored by classicists until the second half of the 20th century, he is now a much-researched author.

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### Career

The biographical evidence on Apuleius is well collected in Sandy 1997 and Harrison 2000. He was born into the local elite c. 125 CE at Madaurus in Africa Proconsularis, and educated in Carthage, Athens, and Rome; at Athens he gained enough philosophy to be called *philosophus Platonicus* by himself and others. He claims to have traveled extensively as a young man; in the winter of 156 at Oea in North Africa, he met an ex-pupil from Athens, Pontianus, whose mother Pudentilla he then married. Accused of having induced Pudentilla to marry him through magic means, Apuleius successfully defended himself in 158 or 159 in a case of which his extant *Apologia* is a (no doubt tendentious) record. The *Florida* shows that he practiced rhetoric and had students in Carthage in the 160s. Nothing certain is known of him after 170; if the *De Mundo* and the *De Platone* are authentically Apuleian works, as seems not unlikely (they show differences in prose rhythm from his other writings, perhaps attributable to a later date of composition), then Apuleius may have had a son Faustinus, perhaps by Pudentilla, to whom these works are addressed, maybe in the 180s. Scholars are divided over the date of the *Metamorphoses*, some seeing it as the work of an exuberant young writer written for a Roman milieu, others viewing it as the chronological climax of his career. Another point of debate is how far Apuleius engages with his dual African and Roman identities (see, e.g., Finkelpearl 2009), a subject on which a conference was held in 2010 (now published as Lee, et al. 2014).

**Finkelpearl, E. 2009. Marsyas the satyr and Apuleius of Madauros. *Ramus* 38.1: 7–42.**

An interesting presentation of the debate on Apuleius's African identity.

**Harrison, S. J. 2000. *Apuleius: A Latin sophist*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.**

The standard modern work of orientation on Apuleius; the first chapter summarizes the life and works and main debates and has a useful bibliography.

**Lee, B. T., E. Finkelpearl, and L. Graverini, eds. 2014. *Apuleius and Africa*. New York and London: Routledge.**

Proceedings of "Apuleius and Africa" conference, Oberlin College, Ohio, 29 April to 2 May 2010. Presents a useful summary of the various positions in this scholarly debate.

**Sandy, G. 1997. *The Greek world of Apuleius: Apuleius and the Second Sophistic*. Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.**

Another good overview, with important material on Apuleius's intellectual formation and relation to the Greek intellectual world.

**Tatum, J. 1979. *Apuleius and the Golden Ass*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press**

Important in bringing together the previously separated novel and rhetorical works, and a good treatment of the novel.

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