

INTRODUCTION



1 *Apuleius' life and works*

Not that much is known for sure about the life of Apuleius. He was born in Madaura (a town in North Africa) round about 125 AD, the son of an important and rich man. After learning grammar, rhetoric and some philosophy in Carthage (a city in North Africa), he went to Athens for the equivalent of his university education, and there studied poetry, music, geometry, dialectic and especially philosophy (showing a great interest in the works and thought of the famous Greek philosopher Plato). While based in Athens, he travelled widely in Greece and beyond, and he spent some time in Rome. On his way to Egypt (probably late in 156 AD) he broke his journey at the African town of Oea, and there met Pontianus, who had studied with Apuleius in Athens, and who urged him to marry his wealthy and widowed mother (Pudentilla), to protect her fortune for her sons. Apuleius did marry her, but when Pontianus died not long after, the rest of the family took him to court, accusing him of poisoning Pontianus and bewitching Pudentilla to win her affection. Apuleius successfully defended himself in an elegant and learned speech (the *Apologia*). After that he went to live in Carthage, and in the 160s AD rose to a position of eminence there as an orator and philosophical lecturer. Nothing is known of him after the 160s.

Apuleius was a highly civilized and accomplished man, who travelled widely and had a broad range of interests and talents. He was also a very versatile writer, in both Greek and Latin, in both poetry and prose. Among his poems were love lyrics, satirical epigrams and hymns. In prose he produced novels and speeches and wrote on music, arithmetic, history, medicine, agriculture, astronomy and particularly philosophy. For more on his life see Harrison 2000 1ff.; for more on his writings see the brief summaries in Walsh 1995 xivff., and the much fuller account in Harrison 2000 10ff.

2 *The ancient novel*

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* belongs to the genre of the novel. Various types of extended narrative fiction written totally or very largely in prose are conveniently grouped together under the heading of novel (or 'romance'). Greek versions flourished especially in the first century AD onwards, and famous Greek authors in this genre include Chariton, Xenophon, Longus (whose *Daphnis and Chloe* is well known), Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus. The best represented type in Greek is the 'ideal' romance (as produced by the five writers just mentioned), an adventure story in which love predominates. There is a standard pattern whereby boy meets girl, the two fall in love, the pair are parted shortly before/after marriage, are exposed to various dangers (such as storms, pirates, attempts on life and chastity), barely escape and are finally reunited in a happy ending. Within this typical format there is variety (plotting may be simple or complex, the tone may be serious or humorous, and so on). There were also Greek novels in which the erotic element was not dominant, such as Lucian's *True Story* (a fanciful account of an imaginary voyage) and *The Alexander Romance* (a largely fictional and often fantastical life of Alexander the Great). For more on the Greek novel see Anderson 1982 and Hägg 1983; and for readable, modern translations see Reardon 1989.

Surviving novels in Latin (in addition to the *Metamorphoses*) include Iulius Valerius' Latin version of *The Alexander Romance*, the anonymous *Story of Apollonius King of Tyre* (which looks like a translation or adaptation of a Greek original, and has a plot similar to that of many Greek romances, concerned with a young man who is separated from his wife and daughter, travels far and has various adventures before being reunited with them in the end) and, most importantly, Petronius' *Satyricon* (written in the first century AD). This long picaresque novel survives only in part, but what we have is racy, vivid and realistic, and contains lots of sexual subject matter, irony and (especially bawdy) humour. It concerns the wanderings and disreputable escapades of the narrator and various companions. It is narrated by Encolpius, an impoverished and immoral young man, who is not too bright or sophisticated, and who is a parody of an epic hero, pursued by the wrath of the fertility god Priapus (who inflicts punishment on Encolpius by subjecting him to sexual assaults and an embarrassing bout of impotence). The best preserved episode centres on Trimalchio (an ex-slave who has become a millionaire) and depicts this vulgar upstart's

ludicrously unsuccessful attempt to ape high society, as he puts on his idea of a sophisticated dinner party, in which there is a dog-fight in the dining room, he has a noisy and violent quarrel with his wife in front of his guests, he constantly brags and shows off his wealth (picking his teeth with a silver tooth-pick, before eating!) and so on. The novel is often satirical, and here it satirizes the stupidity, cupidity, pretentiousness, superstition etc. of the host and his equally ignorant guests. For further comment on the *Satyricon* see Walsh 1970 and Courtney 2001; and for a lively and reliable translation consult Sullivan 1986 or Walsh 1997.

As well as conforming generally to the genre, Apuleius' work has specific similarities to Petronius and the Greek novel. Like the *Satyricon*, the *Metamorphoses* concerns a rather dim anti-hero, contains extensive humour and irony, and has its satirical aspects too; the close links with the Greek *Onos* are covered in the next section; see also Hijmans and van der Paardt, 1978, 8f., 17ff.; Schmeling 1996, 502f.; Sandy 1997, 242ff.; and Harrison 1999, 229ff.

3 Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

The *Metamorphoses*, which has exerted considerable influence on European literature (Haight 1927; Walsh 1970, 224ff.; Harrison 1999, xxxviiiif.), was also known in the ancient world as *Asinus Aureus* (= *The Golden Ass*), a title which probably denoted a golden (i.e. splendid, precious) story about an ass. We do not know for sure when in Apuleius' lifetime it was composed, but it was probably later on, after his trial, as (to judge from the *Apologia*) his accusers made no use of this novel of his with its tales of sorcery when charging him with bewitching Pudentilla (see further Harrison 2000, 9f.).

The narrator is a young Greek called Lucius, who in the course of the novel reveals himself as a rather disagreeable rogue (selfish, lecherous, callous, cowardly, foolish, gullible and so on). At the start he makes a business trip to Thessaly (in northern Greece) and stays with a man called Milo, to whom he has a letter of introduction. As he is fascinated with magic and wants to find out all about it, Lucius is delighted to be in an area renowned for witchcraft and stubbornly ignores various warnings about the dangers of sorcery and curiosity such as his own. When he learns that Milo's wife is a witch, he begins an affair with her maid Photis, so that he can through Photis discover the secrets of her magic arts. Reluctantly Photis allows him to watch her mistress rub on an ointment, change herself into an owl and fly off to her young lover. He presses Photis to get the ointment

for him, so that he too can become a bird, but in her nervous haste she brings him the wrong ointment, and when he rubs it on, he changes into an ass. She assures the enraged Lucius that eating roses will restore his human form and promises to bring him some at dawn. Meanwhile he goes off to the stables, but later that night the house is robbed and Lucius is driven off, laden with plunder, to the robbers' den. There now follows a series of frustrated attempts to get to roses and escape his fate as a working animal for the robbers and later for other owners too, during which he witnesses and hears about various unpleasant incidents and has various unpleasant experiences himself (being flogged, overworked, nearly castrated, almost killed and disembowelled etc.). Finally when his last master learns that a woman has bribed his keeper so that she can have sex with Lucius, the man decides that he will put the ass in a show, copulating with a condemned murderess. The horrified Lucius bolts, just before being put on show, to a nearby beach, where he falls asleep and dreams that the Egyptian goddess Isis promises that in her sacred festival the next day a priest of hers will have some roses for him. He duly gets the roses from him on the following day and regains his human shape. Subsequently, with quite some trouble and expense, he becomes initiated into the rites of Isis and into those of her husband Osiris, moving to Rome and becoming a priest of Osiris there. (This is of necessity merely a summary, and you are encouraged to read the whole novel, as translated by Kenney 1998 or Walsh 1995.)

Apuleius had a particular Greek model for the *Metamorphoses*, but it is not certain what this model was. Among the works ascribed to the second century AD Greek writer Lucian is a short narrative called the *Onos* (= 'The Ass'), in which a certain Lucius tells how he was transformed magically into an ass and had various adventures before reverting to a human. Apuleius has the same overall plot, and several of his passages are very close to sections in the *Onos* (although there are numerous differences too, over incidents, details and the ending: see Walsh 1970, 145ff.; Sandy 1997, 237ff.). Most critics now think that both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Onos* derive from a common original (of which the *Onos* is an epitome and the *Metamorphoses* is an adaptation). For this original they turn to Photius, a ninth-century AD Byzantine scholar, who mentions a Greek work (now lost) called the *Metamorphoseis* by a Lucius of Patrae, and who claims that the first two books of the *Metamorphoseis* seem to have been abridged in the *Onos*. However, some modern experts have argued that in fact it worked the other way round, that the *Metamorphoseis* was an expansion of the *Onos*,

and Photius does allow for this possibility. So Apuleius may have based his novel on the *Metamorphoseis*; but alternatively he may have used the *Onos*, if he did not know of the *Metamorphoseis*, or if (as an expansion of the *Onos*) the *Metamorphoseis* had not been produced by the time that Apuleius was writing. One would certainly expect to find independence in an author as lively and intellectual as Apuleius, but the exact extent of his originality is unclear. Although we can see definite differences from the *Onos*, that work may not have been his model; and, of course, if his source was the *Metamorphoseis*, we have no way at all of telling how much Apuleius added to or subtracted from a composition which we no longer possess. For detailed discussion of this whole complex issue see especially Mason 1994.

Apuleius' version of the ass-tale is consistently entertaining and also highly sophisticated. In the first ten books the racy and engaging narrative contains a piquant mixture of wonder and horror, tenderness and cruelty, tragedy and comedy. Humour predominates, is generally dark and bawdy, and often involves irony and verbal play. Apuleius likes to tease his readers (puzzling, misleading and surprising them), but in so doing he is making a serious philosophical point too, about the deceptiveness of appearances, in line with Platonic thought (compare *Apologia* 53, and see further Penwill 1990). Also serious is his exploration in the course of the novel of various themes, such as sex, magic, curiosity and the influence of fortune (Schlam 1992, 48ff.). He effectively utilizes rhetoric (Schmelting 1996, 504) and a broad range of narrative techniques, like foreshadowing, embedding, aperture and characterization (see the Appreciation below). This is also a very learned work: in addition to a complex blend of literary reminiscences, there is allusion to religion, myth, philosophy, science, law etc. (see above and cf. also Walsh 1970, 52ff.; Finkelppearl 1998; and Harrison 2000, 222ff.). In the light of all this the *Metamorphoses* has reasonably been termed a 'sophist's novel', as Apuleius parades his educational attainments and his alignment with the Second Sophistic, a revival of declamation and general cultural flowering in the contemporary Greek world (see further Harrison 2000, 215ff.; and Sandy 1997).

The eleventh (and final) book at first sight seems to constitute a startling change, as the reprobate Lucius suddenly becomes devout, the Egyptian goddess Isis intervenes to restore his human form, and he becomes initiated into the rites of Isis and her husband Osiris. The interpretation of all this and its effect on the novel as a whole is controversial, and you should realize that

this book follows just one possible explanation of this obviously important issue.

Most scholars are swept along by and take at face value all the solemnity, religiosity and cultic detail. Basically they fall into two camps. Some believe that 11 just does not work and is a clumsy and pointless addition. But this seems superficial and makes a whole book extraordinarily inept, spoiling the entire novel (certainly not what one would expect from Apuleius). Other critics feel that the final book represents a deliberate surprise and gives the work a brand new direction, turning it into the edifying tale of a fallen soul who suffered grievously until rescued by the merciful Isis. But Apuleius dwells on and clearly relishes all the low-life material in the first ten books to a degree surprising in someone with a stern moral purpose; and if 11 was a celebration of Isis and Osiris (and we have no evidence that Apuleius was a devotee of theirs), it would be rather long, boring and irritating. In fact, there are numerous elements which militate against the face-value approach (such as Lucius' improbable facility for seeing religious visions, the cost of the cults to him, his own doubts about them, and all the stopping and starting, as the end seems to have been reached, but then the story continues). Winkler (1985, 209ff.) spotted some of these subversive aspects and concluded that 11 suggests both a comic and a serious interpretation of Lucius' religious experience, leaving us unsure whether he is a privileged initiate or a dupe. More recently Harrison 2000 (238ff.) pointed out still more undermining (cf. also Murgatroyd 2004) and argued convincingly that book 11 is ultimately parodic, presenting Lucius as a gullible victim of the venal and exploitative cults of Isis and Osiris, which fits with Apuleius' negative attitude to religion earlier in the *Metamorphoses*, with the characterization of Lucius as lacking sense and proportion, and with the essentially entertaining tone of the work. It seems that in fact a trick is played on readers here: after making it appear initially (in the first 26 chapters of the original) that the *Metamorphoses* has abruptly turned into a serious novel of redemption, Apuleius finally comes clean as all the visions, initiations and expense for Lucius reach ridiculous proportions, amid an amusing succession of false endings (see the Appreciation on 11.A–B and 11.C–E). So (like Lucius) the work regains its original form, as a fundamentally comic tale of an anti-hero who is still asinine even after he escapes from the skin of an ass; and book 11 becomes typically clever, cynical and ironical, acquiring real bite and toying with readers by means of the longest and most elaborate of many teases in the novel.

These selections of necessity have a tight focus with regard to literary criticism and opt to highlight the (attractive, important and often neglected) humour and narrative techniques; but this is a work of many facets and various levels, and there are other approaches which should also be taken into account for full and informed appreciation of this long and complex novel. In addition to the controversy over the thrust of the final book, scholars have emphasized different aspects worthy of consideration. Tatum 1979 shows how the *Metamorphoses* is connected to Apuleius' other compositions, whereas Winkler 1985 investigates it as a piece of hermeneutic playfulness and a philosophical comedy about religious knowledge, much concerned with the interpretation of texts and revision of meaning. James brings out the structural unity, especially thanks to the recurrence of themes with variations. In a set of essays Krabbe 1989 covers the relationship of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* to Ovid's; females in the novel; verbal and thematic links; and comparisons with modern literature. Krabbe 2003 has more essays, on interweaving of motifs, verbal patterns, allusion and number games. According to Schlam 1992 the work is serio-comic and is given unity by a network of motifs; for Shumate 1996 it is a narrative of the experience of conversion; while Finkelppearl 1998 concentrates on the extensive literary allusion. Harrison 2000 sees this as an essentially erudite and entertaining composition, and relates it to Apuleius' philosophical and literary interests, and to contemporary philosophy and religion in general.

4 *Apuleius' Latin*

Another important aspect is Apuleius' rhetorical and highly individual manner of writing in the *Metamorphoses* – a virtuoso display that is by turns striking and stylish, eloquent and effective, flamboyant and exuberant. Although his syntax tends to be simple and easy to follow, favouring plain co-ordination (with words and phrases just tacked on one after another, with or without connecting links, rather than in involved subordinate clauses), his diction is elaborate and *recherché*. His expression is lush and expansive (amply descriptive, and saying the same or virtually the same thing more than once), and also bold and colourful (he has much archaic, poetic and rare language, he invents new words, and gives novel meanings to old ones). Apuleius is also fond of verbal play in various forms (such as the double entendre and the combination of words with similar sounds, like *savia suavia*). His polished prose contains all the major features of style,

especially balance, contrast, isocolon, tricolon and pointed word order such as juxtaposition and chiasmus (for explanation of these terms see the next section). He also pays close attention to rhythm and sound, repeating vowels, consonants and whole syllables, often extensively and expressively. For illustration of all of the above see the notes, and for further discussion consult Tatum 1979, 135ff.; and Kenney, 1990, 28ff.

5 Glossary of technical terms

The following grammatical and stylistic terms may not be familiar to all students. For more information on them and on other terminology employed in this book see Kennedy 1962 and Woodcock 1959.

ablative of attendant circumstances denotes the circumstances under which an action is performed (*mortuus est ingenti luctu* ‘he died to the accompaniment of/amid great grief’)

ablative of cause expresses the reason behind a state or action (*pallidus formidine* ‘pale because of fear’)

ablative of description: a noun and adjective in the ablative are attached to another noun to describe it (*vir nigris capillis* ‘a man with black hair’)

ablative of instrument/means denotes the thing (instrument) with which or means by which an action is performed (*gladio caedit hostes* ‘he kills the enemy with a sword’)

ablative of manner expresses the manner in which something happens or is done (*magna cura scribit* ‘he writes with great care’)

ablative of measure of difference expresses the amount of difference in a comparison (*altior decem pedibus* ‘taller by ten feet’)

ablative of respect specifies that in respect to which a verb or adjective applies (*corde tremit* ‘he trembles in respect to his heart’)

ablative of route expresses the route taken (*longa via eo* ‘I am going by a long road’)

accusative of exclamation: an accusative noun or pronoun generally accompanied by an adjective is used in exclamations (*me miserum* ‘o poor me!’)

accusative of respect specifies that in respect to which a verb or adjective applies (*nudae lacertos* ‘bare in respect to the arms’)

alliteration: repetition of the same initial letter(s) in closely successive words (e.g. *sedebat, scissili palliastro semiamictus*)

- assonance:** repetition of the same or similar vowels (e.g. rabid malice)
- asyndeton:** the omission of connecting links (like *et* and *sed*)
- chiasmus:** an ABBA arrangement (e.g. ablative, accusative, accusative, ablative; or noun, verb, verb, noun)
- cumulative impact:** the powerful effect achieved by piling up point after point in a sentence or passage
- dative of agent:** the dative is sometimes used on its own in place of *a(b)* and the ablative
- dative of disadvantage:** the person to whose disadvantage something happens or is done is put into the dative (*nobis stulti sumus* ‘we are stupid to the disadvantage of ourselves’)
- dative of purpose:** a gerund, noun or noun plus gerundive can be put into the dative to express purpose (*urbi condendae locum elegerunt* ‘they chose a place for founding a city’)
- deliberative subjunctive** is employed when people deliberate about what is/was to be said etc. (*quid faceret* ‘what was he to do?’)
- dicolon** denotes a group of two
- genitive of cause** expresses the reason behind a state or action (*iustitiae miror* ‘I marvel at his justice’)
- genitive of definition** expresses that of which a thing consists (*praeda hominum* ‘spoil consisting of men’)
- genitive of quality/description:** a noun and adjective in the genitive are attached to another noun to describe it or indicate a distinctive quality (*vir summae virtutis* ‘a man of supreme bravery’)
- genitive of respect** denotes that with respect to which an adjective applies (*audax ingenii* ‘bold with respect to intellect’)
- historic infinitive:** the infinitive used for variety in place of a past tense of the indicative, and often found alongside imperfects, perfects and historic presents
- historic present:** a verb in the present tense which refers vividly to a past action as if it is happening at the present time (often found in conjunction with the perfect and imperfect indicative)
- homoeoteleuton:** similarity of sound in word endings
- impersonal expression:** the third person singular passive of a verb is used in place of the verb with a personal subject (*curritur* ‘it is run’ instead of *currunt* ‘they run’)
- inverted cum clause** is the name given to the construction whereby X is happening when Y happens

- isocolon:** the grouping together of individual words or phrases with an equal number of syllables
- jussive subjunctive** expresses a command (*fiat lux* ‘let there be light’)
- juxtaposition:** the placement of words right next to each other for a particular point (for emphasis, to stress contrast etc.)
- litotes** is affirmation by negation of the contrary (*non tacitus* ‘not silent’ = ‘loud’)
- local ablative** denotes a place where or whence without a preposition (*muris stant* ‘they are standing on the walls’)
- objective genitive** denotes the object of the activity implied by a noun or adjective (*vir propositi tenax* ‘a man holding to his purpose’ = *vir propositum tenet*)
- onomatopoeia** is a term used when the words sound like what they are describing
- partitive genitive** names the whole of which part is being considered (*fortissimus Graecorum* ‘the bravest one of the Greeks’)
- polysyndeton:** frequency of connecting links (like *et* and *-que*)
- possessive dative:** the dative of a noun or pronoun is employed to denote the possessor (*est mihi filia parva* ‘I have a little daughter’)
- potential subjunctive** expresses a possibility, what would or might happen/be happening/have happened (*hoc velim* ‘I would like this’)
- tricolon** denotes a group of three; with a tricolon crescendo the three members become successively longer (like ‘friends, Romans and countrymen’); with the tricolon diminuendo the three members become successively shorter (like *occidit brevis lux* ‘brief light dies’)