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978-1-107-02547-9 - Apuleius' Platonism: The Impersonation of Philosophy

Richard Fletcher

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APULEIUS' PLATONISM

Apuleius of Madauros, writing in the latter half of the second century CE in Roman North Africa, is best known to us today for his Latin fiction, the *Metamorphoses* aka *The Golden Ass*, about a man who turned into a donkey and back again. However, he was also a Platonic philosopher, who, even though many of his writings are lost, wrote a range of rhetorical and philosophical works, which survive to this day. This book examines these works to reveal how Apuleius' Platonism is a result of his 'impersonation of philosophy', that is, a rhetorically powerful methodological tool that allows him to 'speak' on behalf of Plato and his philosophy. This book is the first exploration of the full scope of his idiosyncratic brand of Platonism across his multifarious literary corpus and is a major contribution to the study of the dynamic between literature and philosophy in antiquity and beyond.

RICHARD FLETCHER is Associate Professor in the Department of Classics at The Ohio State University.

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PREFACE

But let me tell you what this book is about. It explores the idiosyncratic brand of Platonism expounded in the multifarious literary corpus of Apuleius of Madauros. Apuleius, writing in the latter half of the second century CE in Roman North Africa, is best known to us today for his Latin fiction (*Metamorphoses* aka *The Golden Ass*) about a man who turned into a donkey and back again. However, he was also a Platonic philosopher, who, even though many of his writings are lost (e.g. a translation of Plato's *Phaedo*), wrote a range of rhetorical and philosophical works which we can read today. We have the speeches he delivered as a performing philosopher in the theatre of Carthage in a collection of excerpted orations (*Florida*) and also his defence speech as a Platonic philosopher on trial (*Apologia*). We also have a popular philosophical lecture on Platonic demonology (*De deo Socratis*), a translation of a cosmological treatise on the Platonic Universe (*De mundo*) and a handbook of Platonic natural and ethical philosophy (*De Platone et eius dogmate*). This book examines each of these works to reveal Apuleius' Platonism as a constant presence, in spite of diversity in approach, across his corpus. The consistency and diversity of Apuleius' Platonism is a result of what I call his 'impersonation of philosophy', that is, a rhetorically powerful methodological tool that allows Apuleius to 'speak' on behalf of Plato and his philosophy. This process of impersonation ranges throughout the corpus, from the display and forensic speeches of the philosopher on stage and on trial to the Platonic lecture, treatise and handbook. Rather than emphasise the complexity of either Apuleius' role in debates within so-called Middle Platonism or as part of the period of Hellenic cultural prestige in the Roman Empire (known as the Second Sophistic), this study sees Apuleius' Platonism as anchored by a

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simple synergy between philosophical ‘reason’ (*ratio*) and artistic speech (*oratio*). While this is far from an exhaustive study of either the Apuleian corpus or Apuleian Platonism, it does aim to be the first attempt at redirecting the conversation of Apuleian studies to a more responsible acknowledgment of the totality of his literary and philosophical achievement.

After an introductory chapter that sets out the main issues and key passages for approaching both the Apuleian corpus and Apuleius’ Platonism in terms of the idea of the impersonation of philosophy, each of the three main chapters of the book focuses on how Apuleius’ Platonism operates within each of his extant works. Following a general contextualisation within traditions of Platonic philosophy and genres of writing in the Roman Empire, Chapter 2 focuses on a close reading of the Platonic handbook *De Platone*. The claim of this chapter is that the methodological approaches utilised by Apuleius to expound Platonic natural and ethical philosophy are established by the prefatory biography of Plato, first as a form of what I call ‘biographical exegesis’, then into related modes of exposition, from other voices or conceptual personifications (e.g. Reason, the Beholder of Virtue, the Sage), culminating in the voice of the exegete himself, as a generalised protreptic or call to philosophy. The internal dynamic of *De Platone* is then allowed to resonate throughout the book, first in Chapter 3 in a discussion of the Platonic Universe in the treatise (*De mundo*) and lecture (*De deo Socratis*), then in Chapter 4 with the forensic speech (*Apologia*) and excerpts of display speeches (*Florida*). The final chapter is not a fully fledged analysis of Apuleius’ masterpiece (*Metamorphoses*), but a suggestive coda offering a few tentative steps towards how we would begin to read this work in the same spirit as the other works that formed the core of this study. My aim in giving Apuleius’ masterpiece such short shrift in this book is to challenge my readers to take my findings and bring them to bear on the novel. In this way, this book acts as a displaced reading of the *Metamorphoses* that understands Apuleius’ Platonic corpus as the ‘intertextual grid’ (to borrow the phrase of the iconic work of Winkler (1985)) for the *Metamorphoses*.

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Preface

For Apuleius' works, I have used the texts of Moreschini (1991), Vallette (1924) and Zimmerman (2012). All translations are my own, although I have greatly benefited from, and therefore must acknowledge here, my predecessors in the always challenging task of rendering Apuleius' Latin into another language. They are: Burges (1876), Beaujeu (1973), Hanson (1989), O'Donnell (1996), Kenney (1998), Harrison, Hilton and Hunink (2001), Lee (2001), Trzaskoma (2002), Relihan (2009) and Villalobos (2011).

This book originated in my 2006 Cambridge doctoral thesis, but has been substantially altered, expanded and rethought in the intervening years. I have David Fotheringham at Highgate to thank for making me a Latinist and Paul Millett at Downing for making a Classicist of me. I thank Philip Hardie, who first turned me on to Apuleius (via Winkler) during my Cambridge MPhil, and John Henderson, for supervising my PhD thesis and thus making me a fully fledged Apuleian. I thank my thesis examiners Stephen Harrison and Malcolm Schofield for their careful and encouraging comments at the start of this process. I am grateful to Michael Sharp and the series editors at the Cambridge Classical Studies Series (initially Michael Reeve, then Robin Osborne). I thank Richard Hunter and David Sedley in particular for all their help with improving the manuscript and for their patience throughout the process. During this time I am grateful for all the support and encouragement I have received for this project from many Classicist friends and colleagues. I have been fortunate to have presented my work on Apuleius to a range of audiences in North America and Europe, and I appreciate all the feedback I have received. For their support, professional, intellectual and personal, I want to thank the following in particular: Tony Boyle, Kirk Freudenburg, Erik Gunderson, Richard Hunter, Helen Morales and David Sedley.

Ohio State University (OSU) has been a wonderful place to work and I thank all my colleagues in the Classics Department here. For general mentoring, as well as advice on the manuscript, I am especially grateful to Ben Acosta-Hughes, Will Batstone, Frank Coulson, Fritz Graf, David Hahm, Anthony Kaldellis and Allan Silverman. I thank the OSU

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graduate students, whose own work on Apuleius has made me rethink this project: Sarah Dubina, Sam Flores, Steve Maiullo, Aaron Palmore and Anna Peterson.

In terms of my thinking on Apuleius beyond OSU, I have benefited from many like-minded interlocutors, from pivotal conversations at conferences to more extended exchanges. I thank Ken Dowden, Denis Feeney, Julia Gaisser, Luca Graverini, Stephen Harrison, Vincent Hunink, Wytse Keulen, Andrew Laird, Claudio Moreschini, Eleanor Rust, Sonia Sabnis, John Penwill and Maaïke Zimmermann. I also want to especially thank Ellen Finkelpearl and Ben Lee for their singular enthusiasm and support for my project throughout.

I owe John Henderson the *pulchra merces* for teaching me by example, for inspiration and for the constant support throughout this process ('Words, Don't come easy'). Perhaps the point of the present book (and the original dissertation – that is, before it became itself again, *mutuo nexu*) has always been to explain how one of his footnotes (Henderson (2001) 189 n.10) relates to the statement it is set to explain.

It has been a long process for my closest friends and family, and I want to thank them here for their love and patience: my friends Ben Berlyn, Brendan Cooper, Jonathan Edwards, Hywel John, Richard Tacon, Duncan White; and my family: Eneko Campos-Fletcher, Abbe Fletcher, Alan Fletcher, Shielagh Finlay, Louise Jones, Dan Leonard and Lois Ray Leonard.

For our son Eneko, for our life together, for her daily love and guiding inspiration, this book is dedicated to *mi pareja*, Rebeka Campos-Astorkiza.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Periodicals are cited according to the abbreviations in *L'Année philologique*, except for the usual anglicisations, e.g. *TAPA* for *TAPhA*.

Works within the Apuleian corpus are referenced with the following abbreviations:

<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologia</i>
<i>Fl.</i>	<i>Florida</i>
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>Mu.</i>	<i>De mundo</i>
<i>Pl.</i>	<i>De Platone et eius dogmate</i>
<i>Soc.</i>	<i>De deo Socratis</i>

Unless otherwise stated, the texts and editions used throughout are:

Moreschini (1991) for *Mu.*, *Pl.*, *Soc.*

Lee (2005) for *Fl.*

Hunink (1997) for *Apol.*

Zimmerman (2012) for *Met.*