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ÉDITIONS LATOMUS – BRUXELLES

The Date of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

One of the literary genres in which the Romans may be said to have surpassed the Greeks is the novel. The two extant Roman specimina, Petronius' *Satyrica* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, can be ranked among the literary masterpieces of all times. In recent years, both novels have attracted considerable scholarly attention, with discussions concerning e.g. their authorship, purpose, literary genre, style, narrative and dramatic technique, to mention just a few areas of interest.

In this contribution I will concentrate upon the intriguing novel by Apuleius. More specifically, I will restrict myself to a problem that has troubled scholars for over a century : the vexed question of the date of composition of the *Met.*, for which proposals have been advanced ranging from before 150 to well after 180 AD. Although the matter may seem to be one of relatively small, or merely 'academic' relevance, it affects the general interpretation of the novel, its intention, and its cultural context. For this reason, a careful examination of the arguments and the evidence seems a worthwhile undertaking (1).

Let me start by stating the obvious fact : there is no certain date we can specify for the *Metamorphoses* (2). Apuleius' year of birth is commonly assumed to have been in the mid-120s AD, whereas the year of his death cannot be estimated with any precision. Most scholars assume Apuleius died in the 170s or even 180s AD, but this is no more than a guess. The *Met.* does not provide us with any clear internal evidence for a date. Although the novel is set in a recognizable 'Greco-Roman' world, it is, at the same time, a piece of fiction that is curiously timeless. Occasionally elements have been used in attempts to date it, such as the mention of historical persons, e.g. the philosopher *Lucius* (*Met.* 1, 2) or the Roman *Asinius Marcellus* (11, 27), but such references remain inconclusive.

For lack of evidence of an absolute date, the discussion has largely concentrated on finding a relative date. More precisely : did the *Met.* precede Apuleius' speech in defence of himself, known as the *Apology*, or did it follow it ?

The *Apology* in fact allows us to establish a date for the author's chronology. Apuleius' trial was presided over by Claudius Maximus, who was the proconsul

(1) An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 3rd International Conference on the Ancient Novel, held from July, 25th-31th, 2000 in Groningen, The Netherlands.

(2) For a survey of recent literature on Apuleius and a discussion of the state of affairs concerning his life and works, see most recently Sandy 1999 and Harrison 2000, p. 1-38 (general) and 210-59 (the *Met.*).

of Africa in 158/159, as scholars now agree. The trial may have taken place in the winter, so in late 158 or early 159 (3). Unfortunately, we do not know *whether* Apuleius was really sued at all (the text may be a rhetorical fiction !) and, if so, when he published the text and to what extent it was revised (4). So caution is due here, since the date of '158' is not as unproblematic as it might seem. But let us stick to the *communis opinio* and assume that there was a trial, that the text was only moderately revised, and that it was published not too long after the actual events.

In addition to the date of the *Apol.*, there are some passages in Apuleius' *Florida* that allow for specific dates. *Florida* 9 celebrates Severianus at his departure from office in 163, while his successor Orfitus, the addressee of *Fl.* 17, was proconsul in 163-4 (5).

The Novel as a Work of Youth. — Although most scholars seem to settle for a relatively late date of the novel, the minority theory, that the *Met.* preceded the *Apol.*, has its defenders too. To mention some of the better-known ones here : in the 19th century, Rohde (6) already proposed a very early date for the novel, which he argued to have been composed during Apuleius' stay in Rome (7). In recent years, the theory has been ardently defended, not to say fully revived, by Ken Dowden (8).

I cannot repeat their arguments at length, but it may be useful to recapture the main points that have been advanced.

First, there is nothing in the *Met.* that really speaks against an early date. The measureless style, the exuberant rhetoric, the pleasurable topics of sex, love, adventures, and gruesome stories, combined with an acute interest in fundamental issues of philosophy and religion, all this may seem to fit the talent of a young brilliant student in pursuit of the key to the secret of the world. Those who defend a late date often taken the very opposite view : that none but an experienced, wise man could write such a profound novel in such a splendid style. Meanwhile,

(3) See Hunink 1997, I, p. 12 (with references).

(4) See Hunink 1997, I, p. 25-7.

(5) In addition, both *Fl.* 16 and *Fl.* 18 could perhaps be dated in the 160s. On dating the pieces in *Florida*, see further introductions and notes in Hunink 2001.

(6) Rohde 1885, p. 76-91. Later, Rohde, p. 90, suggests, Apuleius felt ashamed of this early work, and therefore kept silent about it. This part of the argument was rejected already by Hesky 1904, p. 77, who rightly argues that the time between (early) composition of the *Met.* and the *Apol.* would be too short for such a change of mind.

(7) The only passage that attests Apuleius' presence in Rome is *Fl.* 17, 4. It may be observed that the *Florida* passage does not prove beyond doubt that he actually visited Rome himself.

(8) See notably Dowden 1994.

arguments based on style are hazardous in the case of Apuleius : he uses widely different styles, depending on the genre ([9]).

The influence of Gnostic and other ideas current in Rome of the 150s, as studied by Dowden 1994, form a more convincing argument for an early date. Generally speaking, the focus on 'Roman' culture in the *Met.*, against the general background of 'Rome' as the centre of all Latin literature, would plead for a Roman rather than an African audience, as Dowden rightly argues.

In defence of the early date theory, one may perhaps underline two more points. First, in recent scholarship there is a certain tendency to question the seriousness of book 11 and the sincerity of Lucius' conversion ([10]). The *mocking* of facile belief and naive gullibility would surely be an attitude befitting a young intellectual. This is a new variant of the 'subjective' idea of "what befits a young man". Of course, one might also argue that the attitude is typical of a cynical old man, who has lost his belief in truth, but it seems more difficult to imagine the author Apuleius like that.

Second, I would like to point to the possibility of anti-Christian tendencies in the novel, as they have been studied by Walsh and Schmidt ([11]). Strangely enough, both scholars opt for a late date, but one might well argue that writing an anti-Christian novel would be a more promising enterprise in Rome of the 150s than in the provincial Africa of, say, the 170s. Christianity had become a rising phenomenon, and hence a problem, in Rome much earlier than in Africa, and Apuleius may even have known of a famous case of martyrdom in Rome in 152 ([12]). Such considerations make the hypothesis of an early date of the novel, in my view, quite attractive.

Possible Traces of the Novel in the Apology. — On reading the narrative, one readily assumes that it must have been a great success ([13]). So if the novel

(9) This is rightly observed by Hijmans 1987, p. 407f. One may observe the difference in style between *Apol.* and *Fl.*, separated by just a few years. So a chronological sequence of *Met.* leading up to *Plat.* or *De interpr.* does not seem less possible than *vice versa*.

(10) Cf. notably Winkler 1985, who argues for an aporetic end. Meanwhile, the trend observed here has not remained unchallenged. In defence of a 'serious' reading of book 11, see e.g. Van der Paardt 1996.

(11) Schmidt 1997 (with further references). For a discussion of anti-Christian or 'pro-pagan' motifs in *Apol.* and *Fl.*, see Hunink 2000.

(12) Cf. Justin's *Second Apology*, where the author, faced with increasing public outcries in Rome against Christians and the threat of persecution, sharply protests against the execution of three Christians. These executions, which took place at about 152, were ordered by the city prefect Lollius Urbicus ; cf. Dowden 1994, p. 429-30 and 1998, p. 4, who adds that this may have inspired Apuleius' tale of the Miller's wife in *Met.* 9. This is the same man as the one who is so kindly addressed by Apuleius in his *Apology* of 158 (*Apol.* 2) ; cf. also Hunink 2000, p. 86-8.

(13) One particularly thinks of the testimonia of Augustine and others, who show that in the course of time Apuleius gained considerable fame as a sorcerer and a magician, on account of this book which we call 'fiction'.

preceded the *Apol.*, it would be quite natural for it to be mentioned at some place in the speech. However, this is not the case, and it is this silence in the *Apol.* that is commonly adduced as a main argument *against* such an early date of the *Met.* This is the *argumentum ex silentio* that has dominated the discussion ([14]).

But the argument is not as decisive as it seems. Advocates of the late date invariably assume two things. First, so it is argued, if the novel had existed, Apuleius' opponents would have used it as proof against him. Second, the defendant could easily have rejected their claims by proudly showing that it is a very religious book. However, neither point seems convincing. For the opponents need not have known the novel or have deemed it fit to bring as formal evidence in court ([15]). Perhaps they simply did not understand it. Moreover, this very lack of understanding could pose a serious threat to Apuleius : confronted with less intelligent readers, as his opponents seem to have been, he might have had quite a hard time in defending his tale as a profound work, since it could easily raise doubts about his reputation, the issue that is so clearly at stake throughout the speech. Therefore, it would certainly have been wisest for him to leave the *Met.* unmentioned.

The defendant Apuleius does not include any explicit reference to the novel, although he repeatedly refers with pride to his various literary works and even quotes from them ([16]). It may be added here that there is no reference to the *Met.* in the *Fl.* either ([17]). Nonetheless, we cannot exclude that there are some traces or allusions to the novel in the *Apol.* So let us have a fresh look at the speech and look at some of the passages that could somehow allude to the novel.

In the *Met.* itself, the main term employed to refer to the tale itself is *fabula* or *fabulae* (e.g. 1, 1 ; 10, 2 ([18])) 'amusing story'. The Cupid and Psyche tale is also called *fabella* (6, 25), a generic term that might provide a clue. The term actually occurs in the *Apol.*. The two most interesting places are 25, 5 and

(14) Among the many scholars who adduce it are Helm, IX ; Scobie 1975, p. 93 ; Schlam 1992, p. 12 ; and Harrison 2000, p. 10.

(15) This argument was put forward already by Rohde 1885, p. 88 and agreed upon also by Hesky 1904, p. 76.

(16) Cf. 4,1 *philosophum formonsum et tam Graece quam Latine' — pro nefas ! — 'disertissimum'* ; further 6, 1 ; 9 ; 24, 1 ; 33, 7 ; 36, 8 ; 38, 5 ; and 55, 10.

(17) Two lists in the *Fl.* proudly parade Apuleius' works (*Fl.* 9, 27-9 ; 20, 4-6), but the *Met.* are conspicuously absent again. It has been argued that the *historiae uariae* mentioned in *Fl.* 9 refer to the novel ; some scholars compare *Met.* 1,1 *uarias fabulas* and Photius' term *logoi diaphoroi*, both referring to the lost model of Apuleius' novel *Metamorphoses*. However, it is more likely that the term *historiae* applies to a mixed work much like Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* of Aelianus' *Varia Historia*, or to a historiographical work, as in *Fl.* 20, 5 ; cf. also Harrison 2000, p. 15.

(18) See *GCA* 2000, p. 69.

(19) *Aggredior enim iam ad ipsum crimen magiae, quod ingenti tumultu ad inuidiam mei accensum frustrata expectatione omnium per nescio quas anilis fabulas deflagrauit.* (25, 5) ; *Tam rudis uos esse omnium litterarum, omnium denique uulgi fabularum, ut ne fingere quidem*

30, 3 ([19]). The first one, with 'old wives' tales', is quite exciting, if we think of the Cupid and Psyche story in the *Met.*, which is introduced in remarkably similar terms. For there the old woman says she will cheer Psyche *narrationibus lepidis anilibusque fabulis* (*Met.* 4, 27). Interestingly, this *Apology* passage comes at a crucial point, where the central issue of magic is first tackled. Could Apuleius speak disparagingly of his opponent's words as the sort of 'old wives' tales' like he inserted them himself in his novel ? It would not seem entirely impossible ([20]), but it does not seem very likely.

In the second passage Apuleius argues that his accusers have made up a clumsy lie, without bothering to make it at least credible : so they were ignorant even of 'the people's stories' (*uulgi fabularum* 30, 3). The lie in question concerned the alleged magical properties of fish. The accusers had referred to this, but, Apuleius adds, foolishly so, for there is no connection between fish and love magic. This is surprising indeed. For the connection between fish and magic in the Roman world, a phenomenon that is amply attested ([21]), is here expressly denied by the speaker. He even argues that it is not in accordance with popular stories, although we may be sure that popular belief in magic was not non-existent, but, on the contrary, widespread, as the *Met.* themselves amply show ([22]).

Another candidate in the speech for an allusion to the novel is a reference to a well-known animal, the ass. In 24, 6 the defendant flings back the insult of poverty at the accuser, who barely manages to cultivate his little piece of land with the help of a small *asellus*. Now readers of Apuleius can hardly avoid an association here, but it must be said that there are no further elements that would support the pun. The animal is not called *asinus*, let alone that he is qualified as *aureus*. It may be added here that in the *Florida* too, for all the "zoo" it presents its readers with (elephants and snakes, parrots and crows, delphins, swans, *cicadae* and all sorts of birds), there is no mention of an ass. That would really have been something that might have been expected, if the *Met.* had preceded the *Fl.*

In addition, there are a number of verbal parallels that may be listed between expressions in the speech and the novel. Some of them are adduced by

possitis ista uerisimiliter ? (30, 3). The other occurrences of the term are *Apol.* 42, 2 (story) ; 69, 2 (*sine fabula* 'without gossip') ; 75, 7 (pantomime) ; *Fl.* 16, 6/10/17 (comedy) ; 16, 15 (mythological tradition).

(20) In that case it would be up to the learned reader to understand the subtle irony : for the 'earlier' Cupid and Psyche tale was hardly the sort of 'nonsense' as the accusers alleged.

(21) For a comprehensive account see ABT 1908, p. 135-231, esp. 140-4 ; see also notes on *Apol.* 29-41 in HUNINK 1997.

(22) There is even an anecdote early in the *Met.* in which fish play a major role : the market scene in Hypata in *Met.* 1, 24. For a magical interpretation of this scene see DERCHAIN/HUBAUX 1958, also referred to by SCHLAM 1992, p. 33.

Dowden ([23]), who regards them as material supporting the claim for an early date. However, such minor verbal parallels may be used either way. At best they prove that the same idiom was in Apuleius' mind when writing these works. This would plead for two dates that are not too distant in time.

The first comparison between *Apol.* and *Met.* leaves us with very little in the end. The theory of an early date is, in my view, attractive, but it is hard to find any sort of evidence in the texts. The obvious absence of the novel in the *Apol.* and *Fl.*, although an *argumentum ex silentio*, remains a difficult point for the hypothesis. There might be just one or two possible allusions that look intriguing enough but in the end seem rather far-fetched.

A Late Date for the Novel. — Let us look at the other possibility, that the *Met.* was written at some time after the *Apol.* This may be called the majority view ([24]), which is, therefore, only rarely closely examined.

Some of the main arguments here have already been dealt with above : they concern the maturity of the style and the richness of the literary texture, which would betray an experienced, aged writer. Furthermore, there is the conspicuous silence in *Apol.* and *Fl.*

There have also been attempts to connect various elements in the novel to known and datable *realia*. For example, geographical or judicial details have been screened to this end ([25]), but even defenders of a late date admit that such attempts remain unconvincing ([26]). It is a typical problem with fiction, one is inclined to remark.

Alleged Traces of the Speech in the Novel. — If Apuleius was acquitted, as most scholars readily assume ([27]), and subsequently enjoyed wide fame as a

(23) DOWDEN 1994, p. 426-8 with note 19.

(24) In some form or other, it may be found in most general handbooks of literature and studies of Apuleius and the *Met.* Most of the arguments were already given early in the century, cf. HESKY 1904, p. 75-80 discussing (and rejecting) the arguments for an early date of ROHDE 1885 ; HELM, praef. VII-XI. Among recent contributions I mention WALSH 1994, p. XIX-XX ; KENNEY 1990, p. 2 ; and HARRISON 2000, p. 9-10.

(25) See the critical discussion in SUMMERS 1973, who himself remains highly cautious, suggesting that earlier attempts by Bowersock and Walsh are not supported by their evidence, and giving 'ca. 147' as a *terminus post quem*, on account of 1, 6, where a *iuridicus* can be identified. This date, of course, does not help much.

(26) Cf. e.g. HARRISON 1999, p. XXIX ; HARRISON 2000, p. 9-10. In a footnote in the latter contribution (p. 9, n. 35), HARRISON declares himself in favour of a date under Commodus, that is, after 180. In HARRISON 1996, p. 514-5 it was already argued that parallels with Aelius Aristides may point to a date after 170-171. However, these parallels concern religious vocabulary as it must have been current in the 2nd century, and they do not convincingly show a specific relationship between the texts of Apuleius and Aelius Aristides.

(27) In fact, we do not know for sure ; cf. HUNINK 1997 on *Apol.* 103, 5.

sophist and speaker, he might have wished to mention his famous self-defence in some way.

The parallels between Lucius and Apuleius himself induced readers throughout the ages to take the novel as a proper autobiographical account (both are young, well educated, have an investigative nature, to mention just one or two points). We may recall that Augustine took the novel more or less as a direct account about Apuleius himself ([28]). Nowadays, however, the differences loom large : for instance, Lucius is almost invariably pictured as rather naive, foolish, enslaved to lust, — not really the way Apuleius would like us to see himself. Past generations have easily confused the narrative 'I' with the author's 'I' (in part an effect that was probably intended by the author) ([29]). In this respect, literary studies of the past decades have really made substantial progress. Particularly since the rise of narratology the autobiographical approach can no longer be defended ([30]).

It is mostly a small group of passages in the novel that are quoted in support of the link between *Apol.* and *Met.*, whether as directly 'autobiographical', or as 'authorial jokes' for the advanced reader, places where the author allegedly inserts details that reflect his earlier personal experiences in court. I will briefly discuss the most important passages.

The words *Madaurensem sed admodum pauperem* in 11, 27 form a well-known problem. I agree with Van der Paardt 1981 that here we have a case of deliberate fusion between the narrator Lucius of Corinth and the author Apuleius of Madauros, perhaps motivated by a sense of humour. However, I would limit the point to the name *Madaurensem*. For the 'poverty' and *studiorum gloriam* referred to in the text do *not* necessarily refer to Apuleius himself. The *Apol.* does have a long section on the speaker's poverty (17-23), in which he mentions the loss of patrimony (23, 1-2). But in Lucius' case, the details are perfectly functional within the story : his great expenses make him poor, and both the opening and final words of the novel suggest its narrator — that is : Lucius — is an accomplished and established writer and man of culture.

Much has been made of the parallel in 6, 9, 6, where Venus argues against the 'marriage' of her son and Psyche because it is 'unequal', and has been 'concluded without witnesses in a country house without the father's consent' and hence is illegal and will result in a bastard child. According to the *Apol.* (87, 10-

(28) Augustine, *Ciu. Dei* 18, 18.

(29) Cf. *Met.* 11, 27 *Madaurensem* with Van der Paardt 1981.

(30) The major contribution here for Apuleian studies was Winkler 1985. The modern approach is summarized in e.g. Schlam 1992, p. 9-10 : '(...) it is nevertheless unsound to take any details of the novel as autobiographical.' However, the notion has not disappeared from scholarship. For instance, in his recent introductory essay on Apuleius, Sandy 1999 raises the question of the possible autobiographical nature of the *Met.* right at the start (p. 81), without clearly rejecting it.

88, 1) the accusers have levelled a similar point against Apuleius. There are, however, significant differences. The *Apol.* passage misses both the element *sine testibus* ([31]) and *patre non consentiente*, and it is these two elements that form the legal point, since marrying in a *uilla* was by no means illegal, as Apuleius argues himself (*Apol.* 88, 2-3). Moreover, from the *Apol.* it does *not* appear that Apuleius' accusers had contested the legality of his marriage : the point was that he had secretly extorted a large dowry.

That leaves just 'marrying *in uilla*' as the common point, which seems a fairly small one. Venus is making a legal point, which is quite relevant for her characterization, and it does not require a biographical explanation. On the contrary, in the *Met.* passage the element *in uilla* is well prepared by the beginning of book 5, in Cupid's palace. It is here that Psyche and Cupid first make love, and are called *maritus* and *uxor* ([32]). This is what 'marriage' means in this part of the story, and what Venus refers to here. The point of *in uilla* is ironical, certainly, for Cupid's palace was splendid and divine, not really a small country house. But an ironical reference to the author's life does not really impose itself.

A third passage concerns some harsh words directed at 'false judges' (10, 33) in an emotional outburst of Lucius after witnessing the mime of the judgement of Paris. Lucius' words seem to imply a general misgiving about jurisdiction. But could this be an allusion to the author's own experience ? By no means, I would argue. Apuleius might certainly feel dissatisfied with his accusers, and so the first few insults may indeed have been intended for disreputable lawyers like them. But he would not complain about his judge Claudius Maximus, whom he flatters and praises all the time. If he was acquitted or at least not declared guilty, there was little to whine about any 'inequity of justice'. The suggestion that false judgments were for sale would even be impolite and offensive to Claudius Maximus. The criticism of the *togati uulturii*, harsh as it is, is what one may expect in such a context. By the days of Apuleius, there must have been quite enough precedents of unfair trials to explain the general prejudice voiced here by Lucius ([33]). One may also observe that the whole novel represents a cruel world full of injustice (robbers, illegal occupation of land, theft and fraud, etc.) ([34]).

(31) One might adduce the announcement of the issue in *Apol.* 67, 4 *atque ita dixere me grandem dotem mox in principio coniunctionis nostrae mulieri amanti* remotis arbitris *in uilla extorsisse*. But the point here is not the absence of legally required witnesses, but the more natural point that a crime was performed without by-standers.

(32) See especially *Met.* 5, 4 and the following paragraphs, which show many terms relating to marriage. The marriage element has already been prepared in 4, 32-35.

(33) Apuleius may simply have wished to distance himself from the 'lower' forms of the lawyer's trade ; cf. also Hunink 1997, on *Apol.* 3, 7. Constantly pleading at the forum was generally seen as disreputable ; cf. Vössing 1997, p. 458, n. 1543, who compares Cicero, *Or.* 47 *rabulam de foro* ; and *De orat.* 1, 202 *rabulam*.

(34) For a historical analysis of such elements see Millar 1981, p. 71. A survey of passages in the *Met.* with legal terminology may be found in Elster 1991.

Finally, there is Lucius' fake trial in *Met.* 3, which is often adduced in the discussion. It may be briefly said that the parallel is valid only in very general terms : both cases involve a trial on the basis of an accusation that is untrue, or even absurd. Lucius' case does not involve love, magic, or a marriage to a rich widow.

Lucius is first ridiculed and in the end receives a bronze statue (*Met.* 3, 11). This element too is taken by some as an autobiographical element. But the obvious irony in the *Met.* passage seems hard to reconcile with the author's personal eagerness and pride of having a statue dedicated to him at Carthage ([35]). Lucius is then given the chance to respond to the charges (3, 4-7). First he just cries, but then he begins to speak. His speech may be called a model speech, perfectly planned according to the rules : he asks for attention and raises pity, pleads innocent, tells what happened (this takes up much of the speech), repeatedly addresses the *quirites* ([36]), presents himself as a brave hero, doing justice to his country by fighting crime, and in the end bursts out in tears and makes pitiful gestures begging for help. Surely, Lucius' degrading attitude in the end and the mockery he is confronted with cannot be considered self-referential allusions. Lucius is simply delivering a standard speech as it was taught in declamation schools, much unlike the *Apol.*

So these key passages do not help much : the arguments are far from 'overwhelming' as Walsh calls it ([37]). While it is not impossible that the *Met.* somehow reflects the *Apol.*, there is nothing that really proves the case.

This leaves us with two theories, both of which would be attractive for our interpretation and for the intertextual allusions one might then assume. But neither can find sufficient evidence in the texts. The alleged links do not, in my view, stand the test of a closer reading, and all passages can be explained from their own contexts, rather than as intertextual elements.

Magic. — So are we to pronounce a *non liquet* ? Strictly speaking : yes. But there is one element that has not sufficiently been taken into account, namely the crucial topic of magic ([38]). This is what Apuleius has been charged with at his trial, and it is also one of the key concepts of the novel.

In his speech Apuleius pleads innocent. But he does so in a remarkable way : he professes utter ignorance of magic whatsoever. The very few descriptions of black magic he gives as opposed to white magic as it is known from Plato and the Persians (*Apol.* 25, 9-11), are quite vague (26, 6-7 and 47, 3) and irony and sarcasm constantly show in almost every remark on magical practices.

(35) The pride clearly shows in *Fl.* 16 (esp. 41) ; another statue of Apuleius at Oea is mentioned by Augustine ; cf. Augustine, *Ep.* 138, 19.

(36) The typical word is absent in the *Apol.* and occurs 5 times in the *Met.*

(37) Walsh 1994, p. xx.

(38) E.g. in the discussion of the problem by Helm (IX-XI) the motif is more or less played down.

However, the crucial point is not that Apuleius pleads innocent (for what else could he do ?), but that he firmly rejects and denies the very existence of certain magical practices. We already saw his astonishing remark that fish has got nothing to do with magic, a statement in stark contrast with all known Roman facts ([39]). But there is more : Apuleius also denies the existence of 'name magic', or 'sympathetic' magic in 34, 6. Given the importance of this basic magical form, this may be called a deliberate falsehood, that could have been detected on the basis of *Met.* 3, 17, which clearly refers to such forms of magic ([40]).

Finally, in a climax of audacity, at the end of his speech Apuleius almost ventures to deny the very existence of magic : for, he argues, it would be powerless against fate (*Apol.* 84, 3-4). He manages to ascribe the thought to his wife Pudentilla, but I am not sure every listener would notice the subtle point. Ancient magicians actually were assumed to be able to *break* the power of fate, and the existence of magic was widely believed in, most likely also by Apuleius himself.

Apuleius' daring strategy of the outright denial of 'facts' and 'bluffing his way through the trial' aims at silencing the opponents. However, it seems impossible to imagine Apuleius denying in court features which he had described himself in a popular novel. Where magic was flatly denied, what could the accusers do but protest and refer to Apuleius' own text ([41]) ? This is, again, an *argumentum ex silentio*, but in this form it may be decisive : Apuleius could not deny well-known facts, notably his literary elaboration of magic. Moreover, the sequence of *Met.* following the *Apol.* makes more sense now : after losing a trial about magic, what could be more fun than composing a novel literally crammed with magic from its very first pages ?

Composition and Circulation. — Neither the early, nor the late date of the *Met.* can be proved, since no allusion passes a thorough test. But magic may well be the key here : the speech cannot be possibly imagined if the novel with all its magic had preceded. Hence, we may assume the speech is to be dated earlier than the publication of the novel.

Perhaps I may finish on a rather speculative note. The theory about the early date of the novel remains tempting indeed, but there is no decisive proof for it. But what if the novel was *in preparation* during the time Apuleius was in Rome, but kept in portfolio and published a few years later ([42]) ? It may be observed here

(39) The point is even repeated in 32, 1-2 ; and 42, 2.

(40) In that passage, one may note above all the remains of wrecked ships, ridiculed in *Apol.* 35, 4 (see Abt 1908, p. 221-2) and the element of skulls, ridiculed in *Apol.* 34, 6.

(41) Cf. also *Apol.* 5, 5 *nullum dictum uel factum de quo disserere publice non possim.* Could the accusers accept such words if they knew the novel ?

(42) Already Hildebrand 1842, p. xxvi-xxvii briefly suggested that Apuleius kept his written text *in scriniis* for some time. The idea, however, was not further developed and it met with disparaging remarks from other scholars ; cf. e.g. Rohde 1885, n. 1.

that composition of a literary work does not imply its immediate circulation (43). In the discussion about the date of the novel, the phases of composition and 'publication' have not sufficiently been distinguished.

Apuleius, then, might have composed a first version of his novel a few years before the *Apol.*, perhaps during a stay in Rome in the 150s. Then he may have waited until after the events of his trial, before bringing it into circulation, most likely with a few extra touches of magic. This 'publication' may have taken place in Rome or in Africa not too long after 160, that is : at the same time, or shortly later than some of the *Fl.*, in which the novel is still unmentioned.

With this tantalizing solution, we would, in a way, have it both ways : an early date for the composition of the *Met.*, and a middle or relatively late date for its first stages of circulation among a literary audience.

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(43) Moreover, publication in Rome does not necessarily imply a wide readership in Africa, particularly in the lesser educated class of Apuleius' accusers. On the concept of circulation and 'publication' of Roman texts, see STARR 1987.