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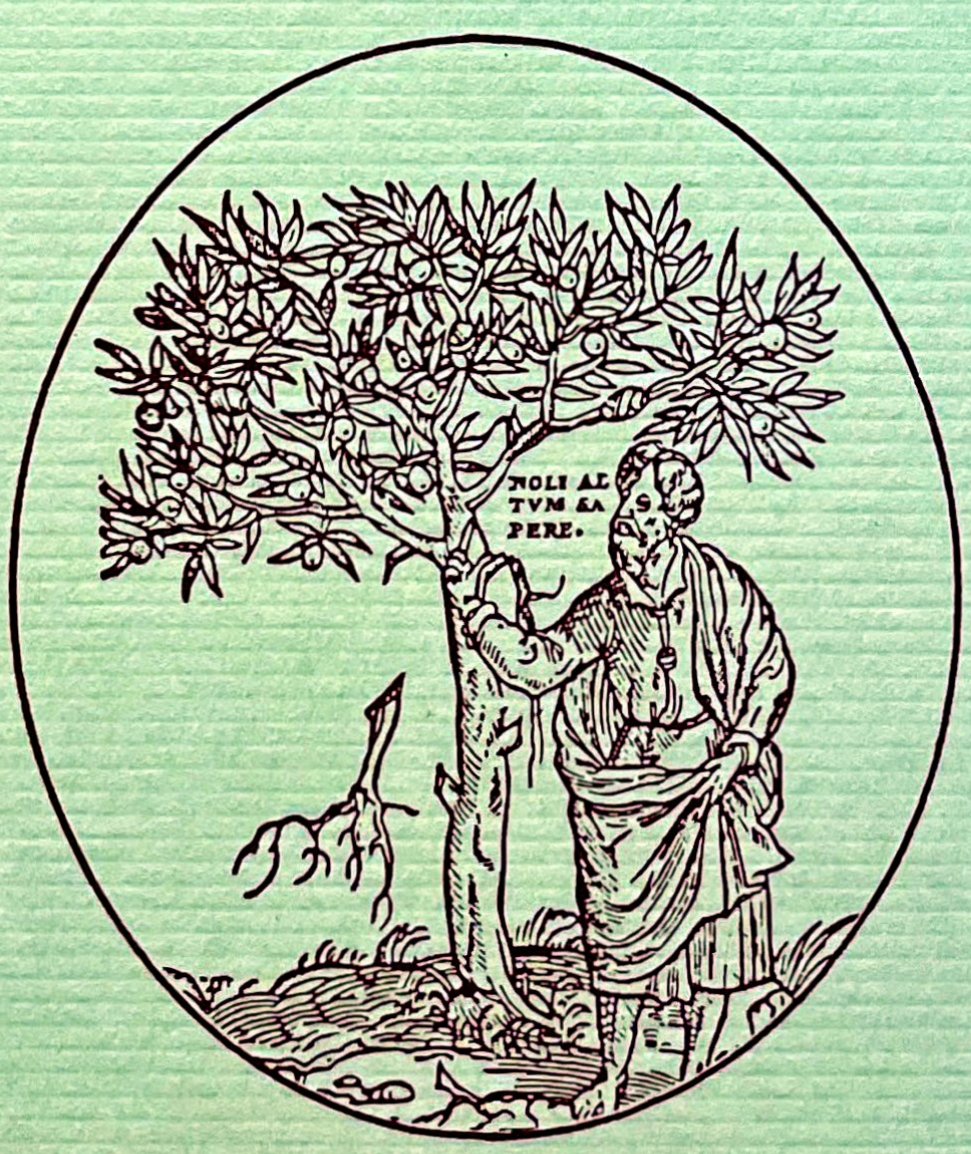

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THE ENIGMATIC LADY PUDENTILLA

VINCENT HUNINK

ROMAN LITERATURE, like Roman society in general, was dominated by males. From this "men's world" only a few women seem to stand out as individuals. Hence it is not surprising that whenever a Roman text presents a marked female personality, the relevant data from the text are readily used by scholars to reconstruct her biography.

This is certainly the case for Aemilia Pudentilla, the wife of the famous orator and Platonic philosopher Apuleius of Madauros, who lived in Africa in the third quarter of the second century A.D. Between the lines of his extant speech *Pro Se de Magia,* commonly known as the *Apology,* Apuleius seems to provide much information about his wife. And in fact, we do not know, about any other woman from this period and this province, even approximately as much as we know about Pudentilla.

Thus Pudentilla has become quite popular among modern historians of her place and time, perhaps even more so than her husband. She appears in many studies on the social and economic history of the Roman Empire.[1] In 1992 Andreas Gutsfeld devoted a lengthy article expressly to her, in which he attempted a reconstruction of her manifold possessions and her commercial activities, in the context of the economic mentality of the upper class to which she belonged. Even more recently, Elaine Fantham (1995) has attempted to correct Apuleius' picture of his wife and to examine the situation from Pudentilla's point of view.

Relevant and interesting as these approaches may be, some caution seems due here. It must be realized that we know absolutely *nothing* about Pudentilla from any other, independent source: every single detail is derived from Apuleius' speech. More important, however, is

[1]She figures in all of the general studies mentioned in the Bibliography here. Research interest has been directed, for example, to her legal position as a widow and to the special conditions in her ensuing marriage to Apuleius; also to estimations of her great wealth and to the way her estates were managed.

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that the *Apology* is not an official document but a judicial speech, which is, moreover, characterized by a strongly literary color. Historians have not always taken these special circumstances sufficiently into account.

Discussion below reviews the most important pieces of information about Pudentilla provided by the text and considers them in relation to the aims and strategies of the speaker. In the end, this will prove to be of some consequence for the portrait of Pudentilla.

There is a crucial problem concerning her, which lies at the heart of the speech. Apuleius' opponents have suggested that she must have been out of her mind to agree in marrying the much younger, impoverished philosopher Apuleius. Under the influence of magical powers, so they suggested, she was robbed by Apuleius of a great capital (e.g., 67.4).[2] He, on the contrary, asserts that she had rational, sensible, and practical arguments to marry him, and that she lost no money to him. So we immediately see two conflicting images of Pudentilla: she is considered either as a bewitched hysteric or as a prudent and responsible lady. Who is the real Pudentilla?

HARD FACTS

An entirely reliable answer to this question will always remain out of reach, since we only have Apuleius' account to go by. Nonetheless, in practice some pieces of information may be taken or inferred from his text. Surely, it contains some elements which seem beyond reasonable doubt.

First, the "previous history" to the marriage, as presented by Apuleius at 66–73, seems clear and plausible.

Apuleius says that he was a friend of Pontianus, Pudentilla's elder son. On his way to Alexandria, he fell ill in the town Oea, where Pontianus lived. He was forced to stay there for the winter, and there he met Aemilia Pudentilla. She had been a widow for fourteen years by then. From her marriage to Sicinius Amicus she had two sons, Pontianus and Pudens. The boys' grandfather was legally in charge of them and, moreover, could decide on the inheritance of their father. Being well

[2]Passages in the Latin text are referred to according to the paragraph numbers of P. Vallette in the French Budé edition (1960). This numbering has also been adopted in the latest edition, Hunink 1997.

aware of this, he put pressure on Pudentilla to marry his second son. Pudentilla, however, had rejected that idea and remained a widow. Only after this grandfather's death had she become freer to act, as Pontianus had become the legal *tutor* of his younger brother. She then decided she would remarry, mainly for specific, medical reasons. Pontianus offered himself as an intermediary, proposing that she should marry his old friend Apuleius and urging him to accept her.

Meanwhile Pontianus himself had married and came under the influence of his father–in–law, Rufinus, who strongly opposed a marriage of Pudentilla and Apuleius. As a result Pontianus began to resist the marriage he had previously worked to arrange. Rufinus also engaged the support of Pontianus' uncle Aemilianus, the second brother of Pudentilla's deceased husband (and third son of the deceased grandfather). Together, Rufinus and Aemilianus started spreading rumors that Apuleius had illegally taken possession of Pudentilla's extensive property. When Apuleius formally challenged them to sue him if they dared, they came up with a charge of "magic," which was then formally brought by Pudentilla's younger son, Pudens, who was still a minor. Pontianus died before the case came to trial, but he had repented his behavior and was fully reconciled to Pudentilla and Apuleius.

This reconstruction of events may have been influenced in parts by the interests of the defense, and indeed there are some shady points in it. But by and large we can assume it to be correct. It is difficult to imagine how Apuleius could have misrepresented these pieces of information, which must have been easy for anyone to verify.

Secondly, some details about Pudentilla's capital and other possessions can be isolated from the text, for Apuleius has provided some numbers. He estimates her capital at 4 million sesterces (71.6) and indicates the extent of her dowry, 300,000 sesterces (92.3). He further mentions a small piece of land which Pudentilla bought for 60,000 sesterces (101.5) and the *sportula* she had given to the people at the occasion of Pontianus' marriage, worth 50,000 sesterces (87.10). He also mentions various houses owned by her, among which is one situated near the seaside (72.6) and one in Oea, donated by her to her sons (93.4, 100.6). Country houses are referred to in 78.5 and in the section on the wedding of Apuleius and Pudentilla, which was celebrated in a country house (67.4, 87.9–10, 88.1). The houses were probably richly decorated (93.4). In another passage we learn of various types of servants who worked at Pudentilla's estates, such as overseers, stableboys, and shep-

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herds (87.7). This at least implies that the estates were of considerable extent.[3]

Thirdly, the text contains some details of Pudentilla's biography and character which have the appearance of facts. She was, at the time of the *Apology,* slightly over forty years of age (89.5). She spoke and wrote Greek (30.11, 87.5, 98.8) and had a feeling for irony, as appears from the Greek letter Apuleius quotes in court (78.5–86). That she admonished her sons (87.8) shows an interest in education,[4] and throughout we are given the impression that she knew how to handle affairs at her great estate.

Finally, a number of judicial and financial points seem beyond doubt. To mention one or two of these: Pudentilla was already involved in another lawsuit when the case against Apuleius arose (1.5).[5] Her marriage with Apuleius was a marriage *sine manu,*[6] and her dowry was relatively small and had, moreover, not become part of Apuleius' possessions. In her will she only left a trifle to Apuleius, more or less for honor's sake, and did not disinherit Pudens (100.2–3). All in all, her marriage with Apuleius seems to have brought her only minor financial disadvantages. A legal detail provided by the text is that she had to obtain permission from her *tutor,* Cassius Longinus, for certain transactions, such as buying a small estate (101.4–7). Finally, she clearly was, in the formal sense, *compos mentis*—contrary to what Apuleius' accusers had insinuated (79–80).

All of these elements are presented by Apuleius as facts. Naturally we hear only his view on the events, but the nature of the information and the documentary evidence he produces (for example, Pudentilla's will and Greek letter) make it quite unlikely that he is lying on these points. It is difficult to imagine that he could have gotten away with fraud on points like these, which were probably universally known.

[3]The exact extent and the number of country houses cannot be established. The text suggests at least a "Streulage der Güter" (Gutsfeld 1992, 253), and Pudentilla seems to have been constantly moving from one house to another.

[4]Her son Pontianus is said to have studied in Athens (72.3) and was in Rome just before the events discussed in the speech (69.5). Pudentilla is likely to have paid all the expenses.

[5]Many speculations have been made about the nature of this trial, but we can only guess. It must have been some business affair of Pudentilla's.

[6]"In such marriages the wife remained in her father's *potestas* and, when he died or emancipated her, she acquired an independent right to own property, which was kept entirely separate from her husband's" (Saller 1984, 196).

SHIFTING IMAGES

From these pieces of information collected from the speech emerges a fairly coherent image of Pudentilla. The main impression we are given is one of a decent lady, a self–confident, sensible Roman matron running her own affairs in an excellent manner. She is a *mulier sapiens et egregie pia* (68.5), a *mulier sancte pudica* (69.2), who has *uirtutium . . . dotes* (73.7) to offer, displays towards her sons an *ingenium placidissimum* (77.6), and retains full control over the administration of her estate (87.7). Many similarly complimentary references may be collected from the text. Obviously we are supposed to see Pudentilla as a sensible woman, not subject to strong passions and leading a blameless life. This is, it may be added, more than just a reliable picture. It clearly reinforces Apuleius' claims that he himself is innocent of the charges: a decent woman, as Pudentilla is, would not likely have become bewitched.

On the other hand, there is much in the text which remains rather unclear. In general, it must be repeated that the *Apology* in its present state is a published literary text, not a documentary piece of evidence. Apuleius is likely to have reworked the speech, to some extent at least, when preparing it for publication.[7] Whether the picture he gives of his wife is touched up on essential points remains impossible to establish, but the possibility is certainly there. Without further pursuing this line of reasoning, let us for the moment take the information about her provided by the text at face value. Surprisingly, it is the text itself which, on closer examination, shows many points concerning Pudentilla that remain contradictory or dubious.

First, the overall portrayal of Pudentilla is by no means constant and invariable.

[7]Opinions among Apuleian scholars vary greatly here, but most would accept that some form of editing of the speech occurred after events had taken place. For a more elaborate discussion of the problems concerning the relation of our text and the reality in court see Hunink 1997, I 25–27.

Apuleius' claim that it was Pudentilla herself who took the initiative to remarry brings up some disturbing dissonances. In itself, her active attitude strikes a rather jarring note, or at least we may surmise it would to Roman ears. She is pictured, as Fantham (1995) puts it, as "a very self-possessed and shrewd woman" (227).[8] This is how Apuleius describes her condition previous to the marriage:

> Mulier sancte pudica, tot annis uiduitatis sine culpa, sine fabula, assuetudine coniugis torpens et diutino situ uiscerum saucia, uitiatis intimis uteri saepe ad extremum uitae discrimen doloribus obortis exanimabatur. Medici cum obstetricibus consentiebant penuria matrimonii morbum quaesitum, malum in dies augeri, aegritudinem ingrauescere; dum aetatis aliquid supersit, nuptiis ualitudinem medicandum.[9] (69.2–3)

The idea is clear: when Pudentilla had become lethargic (cf. *OLD* s.v. *torpeo* 3a) through a protracted lack of sexual intercourse and had fallen ill, doctors advised her to remarry. It is noteworthy that Apuleius provides some clinical details which to us seem almost painfully intimate and suggest a lack of consideration for her private life. Without hesitation, he pictures her as a woman suffering from illness. Part of the ancient audience could even recognize the symptoms of "hysteric suffocation" and of fits not unlike those of epilepsy.[10]

[8] In general Fantham seems to feel much sympathy for Pudentilla. She adds that it was often wiser for a rich widow to marry an outsider, an idea for which she adduces evidence from fifteenth-century England and Italy. These parallels remain rather unconvincing.

[9] "This chaste and saintly lady, after so many years of blameless widowhood, without even a breath of scandal, languishing without the care of a husband and made ill by the long inactivity of her organs—the insides of her uterus were damaged—began to suffer internal pains so severe that they brought her to the brink of the grave. Doctors and wise women agreed that the disease had its origin in the absence of a marriage, that the evil was increasing daily and her sickness steadily assuming a more serious character; the remedy was that she should marry before her youth finally departed from her" (trans. Butler 1909, with changes). Butler's translation is the most recent integral English version published in book form. Characteristically for its time, it omits details considered "indecent," such as some of the medical expressions in this passage. A more up-to-date but still imperfect translation of the *Apology* has now been made available on the Internet by students of James O'Donnell at the University of Pennsylvania. That translation has been used here to correct Butler's version.

[10] Cf. esp. Gaide 1991, 40–42, on the present passage. Widows in particular were thought to be at risk here.

So although the passage seems to drive home the point that Pudentilla made a sensible, rational decision to marry, and that magic had nothing to do with it, it actually brings in some unpleasant and unflattering details: Pudentilla is what we might call "a medical case."

Things become even worse. In his attempt to present the marriage as hardly advantageous to him, Apuleius repeatedly draws the attention to Pudentilla's lack of physical beauty. This is how Pontianus is said to have put pressure on Apuleius to make him accept the marriage:

> Ni id onus recipiam, quoniam non formosa pupilla, sed mediocri facie mater liberorum mihi offeratur,—si haec reputans formae et diuitiarum gratia me ad aliam condicionem reseruarem, neque pro amico neque pro philosopho facturum.[11] (73.4)

That is, she is not a young, handsome girl, but a middle-aged mother of only mediocre looks. Apuleius is clever enough to avoid taking full responsibility for these uncomplimentary words, by putting them in the mouth of Pontianus, but the image he conveys to his audience is clear: his wife is closer to being old and ugly than to the contrary. The marriage is a burden (cf. 73.7) which Apuleius does not eagerly take on.

At a later stage in the speech, this element returns. Apuleius has *not* been promised a large dowry, he has argued. But then again, he says, would a large dowry not have been quite natural for a widow like Pudentilla?

> Quamquam quis omnium uel exigue rerum peritus culpare auderet, si mulier uidua et mediocri forma, at non aetate mediocri, nubere uolens longa dote et molli condicione inuitasset iuuenem neque corpore neque animo neque fortuna paenitendum?[12] (92.5)

[11] "If I were to refuse to undertake such a responsibility, simply because it was no fair heiress that was offered me, but a woman of plain appearance and the mother of children—if I were moved by these considerations and insisted on reserving myself for a more attractive and wealthier match, my behaviour would be unworthy of a friend and a philosopher" (trans. Butler).

[12] "Who that had the least experience of life, would dare to pass any censure if a widow of inconsiderable beauty and considerable age, being desirous of marriage, had by the offer of a large dowry and easy conditions invited a young man, who, whether as regards appearance, character or wealth, was no despicable match, to become her husband?" (trans. Butler).

Even a poor virgin has many qualities to offer to a husband, but what can an elderly widow do? She has already lost her virginity and is by all means unattractive as a partner. Therefore, money would have been the only solution, for Pudentilla too—had Apuleius not been a detached philosopher who does not care for material gain (92.8–11).

Here too, we see Pudentilla in a quite different light: in order to make his point, the speaker readily adds some disparaging remarks about his wife. The momentary rhetorical aim in these passages (that is, to deny the charge of fortune-hunting) also reflects rather unflatteringly on Pudentilla, the implication being that she is otherwise undesirable.

On closer scrutiny, even the more positive passages on Pudentilla seem to fulfill a specific rhetorical function. For instance, her portrayal as a prudent landowner, checking the accounts of her estate (87.7), is not meant as a compliment, let alone an "accurate description," but serves mainly to demonstrate that she was not under any magic spell from Apuleius. If she is said to have chosen Apuleius on her own account (e.g., 71.1, 73.8), this merely emphasizes that the philosopher himself was not responsible for the plan. And when she is suggested to have admired and loved him,[13] whereas to him the marriage was at best a "philosopher's task" and a service rendered to his old friend, surely we are reading, not facts, but a rhetorically effective model which promotes the case of the "disinterested" speaker at the cost of all else.

But if the image of Pudentilla is constantly changing, both positively and negatively, according to the speaker's rhetorical needs of the moment, how can we distinguish between what is realistic and what is not?[14]

VAGUENESS

The presented image of Pudentilla is not only so variable as to be inconsistent, it is also strikingly vague even on some decisive points.

[13] "Pudentilla s'est mariée par amour, ce n'est guère douteux," is the confident conclusion of Fick (1992, 44). But this is to underestimate other motifs suggested by the text, such as a wish to be protected and the medical grounds discussed above.

[14] Readers of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* may face rather similar doubts. In this fictional tale, characters or situations are often presented from various, even opposing angles, dependent on the narrator and on his or her momentary interest; see Van Mal-Maeder 1995 (esp. 123).

There is, for example, the issue of her precise age. The accuser Aemilianus has alleged that she was sixty,[15] a claim which Apuleius can rather easily refute by producing her birth certificate in court.

> Porrige tu Aemiliano tabulas istas: linum consideret, signa quae impressa sunt recognoscat, consules legat, annos computet, quos sexaginta mulieri adsignabat. Probet quinque et quinquaginta: lustro mentitus sit. Parum hoc est, liberalius agam; nam et ipse Pudentillae multos annos largitus est. Redonabo igitur uicissim decem annos: Mezentius cum Vlixe errauit. Quinquaginta saltem annorum mulierem ostendat. Quid multis? Vt cum quadruplatore agam, bis duplum quinquennium faciam, uiginti annos semel detraham. Iube, Maxime, consules computari. Nisi fallor, inuenies nunc Pudentillae haud multo amplius quadragensimum annum aetatis ire.[16] (89.4–5)

Apuleius spins out the point as best he can, emphasizing again and again that the prosecution has been exaggerating and deliberately lying. The latter is also shown in an interesting note on counting gestures (89.6–7), with which the accusers could not have made an error. The evidence and the powerful rhetoric, which includes even a Homeric reference (89.4), cannot have failed to impress and convince the judge and the audience. Apuleius even ends the passage by ironically mentioning another number, the age of "thirty": the accusers may have said she was

[15] It was generally considered socially unacceptable if a middle-aged widow married a younger man (see Krause 1994, 116–17). There was also a legal aspect to this: Roman law prohibited marriage for women over fifty, and for men over sixty (120–21). If marriage took place beyond those limits it caused a scandal, as the partners, held to be sterile by then, obviously did not marry to have children but only *ad libidinem*. See also Guarino 1988.

[16] "Please hand the documents to Aemilianus. Let him examine the linen strip that bears the seal; let him recognize the seal stamped upon it, let him read the names of the consuls for the year, let him count up the years. He gave her sixty years. Let him bring out the total at fifty-five, admitting that he lied and gave her five too many. Nay, that is hardly enough. I will deal yet more liberally with him. He gave Pudentilla such a number of years that I will reward him by returning ten. Mezentius has been wandering with Ulysses; let him at least prove that she is fifty. To cut the matter short, as I am dealing with an accuser who is used to multiplying by four, I will multiply five years by four and subtract twenty years at one fell swoop. I beg you, Maximus, to order the number of consuls since her birth to be reckoned. If I am not mistaken, you will find that Pudentilla has barely passed her fortieth year" (trans. Butler).

sixty because they really thought she was thirty and counted both consuls for every year.

Meanwhile, however, Pudentilla's real age is not mentioned at all. *Haud multo amplius quadragensimum* might be as much as forty–four or forty–five. Even if she is only forty–one, the promise *uiginti annos . . . detraham* is not kept to the letter.[17] The rhetorical show draws a smokescreen over the plain fact under discussion.

To go one step further, the long discussion of Pudentilla's age seems designed to divert attention from what the accusers are most likely to have insinuated in the first place: that she was old and rich, and Apuleius was a legacy hunter. The defendant does not waste a single word on such an implication, but seems to have picked out one element, her age, turning the entire argument into a simple matter of counting.

Not only is Pudentilla's exact age left in the dark, but also the precise extent of her possessions. Of course we hear *some* details, such as the estimated 4 million sesterces in capital (71.6) and the scattered references (mentioned above) to other holdings. But many passages do not really provide clear information, although they might appear to do so. Take, for example, the passage describing Pudentilla as a prudent landowner, already referred to above:

> Dicat hic pius filius, quid in eo tempore sequius agentem uel loquentem matrem suam propter insaniam uiderit; neget eam rationibus uilliconum et upilionum et equisonum sollertissime subscripsisse.[18] (87.7)

The three types of special servants (overseers, stablemen, and shepherds) whose accounts she checks indirectly characterize her as a very wealthy woman. But can we really draw further conclusions here?

Many scholars tend to regard these few lines as factual information on aspects of social and economic history: for example, that Pudentilla produces for the market, that the use of overseers points to slave labor in African agriculture, or that this is evidence for *uilici rustici* in Roman Africa.[19] Such far–reaching conclusions seem hazardous, to say

[17]Scholars often misread Apuleius' words and simply state that Pudentilla was forty; so, e.g., Lassère 1977, 469–70.

[18]"I beg this most dutiful of sons to tell us whether he then noticed his mother's alleged madness to have affected for the worse either her words or her deeds. Let him deny that she showed the utmost shrewdness in her examination of the accounts of the bailiffs, grooms, and shepherds" (trans. Butler).

[19]See, respectively, Fick 1992, 31; Gutsfeld 1992, 254; and Carlsen 1991, 628–29.

the least. Apuleius is presenting an opportune picture of Pudentilla, not an account of her workforce.

Later in the speech, the speaker again illustrates some of Pudentilla's possessions. At his request, he says, she paid back a debt to her sons, and even added a donation.

> Suasi uxori meae, cuius, ut isti aiunt, iam uniuersas opes transuoraram, suasi, inquam, ac denique persuasi, ut filiis pecuniam suam reposcentibus—de quo supra dixeram—ut eam pecuniam sine mora redderet in praedis uili aestimatis et quanto ipsi uolebant, praeterea ex re familiari sua fructuosissimos agros et grandem domum opulente ornatam magnamque uim tritici et ordei et uini et oliui ceterorumque fructuum, seruos quoque haud minus CCCC, pecora amplius neque pauca neque abiecti pretii donaret, ut eos et ex ea parte quam tribuisset securos haberet et ad cetera hereditatis bona spe inuitaret. Haec ergo ab inuita Pudentilla—patietur enim me, uti res fuit, ita dicere—aegre extudi, ingentibus precibus inuitae et iratae extorsi, matrem filiis reconciliaui, priuignos meos primo hoc uitrici beneficio grandi pecunia auxi.[20] (93.3–6)

Indirectly, this description creates a vivid impression of wealth: the boys receive fertile lands, a house, much wheat, barley, wine, oil, and other fruits of the earth; further, four hundred slaves and a great number of precious cattle. If such opulence is merely an "advance" and a friendly gesture, one starts to realize what huge interests were really at stake in this trial.

This passage, too, has aroused great interest among historians. For example, it has been observed by Pavis D'Esurac (1974, 90–91) that whereas oil production in Roman Africa is well attested, wine production is referred to only here. The four hundred slaves have also attracted

[20]"I urged my wife—whose whole fortune according to my accusers I had by this time devoured—I urged her and finally persuaded her, when her sons demanded back the money of which I spoke above, to pay over the whole sum at once in the shape of farms, at a low valuation and at the price suggested by themselves, and further to surrender from her own private property certain exceedingly fertile lands, a large house richly decorated, a great quantity of wheat, barley, wine and oil, and other fruits of the earth, together with not less than four hundred slaves and a large number of valuable cattle. Finally I persuaded her to abandon all claims on the portion she had given them and to give them good hopes of one day coming into the rest of the property. All these concessions I extorted from Pudentilla with difficulty and against her will—I have her leave to tell the whole story as it happened—I wrung them from her by my urgent entreaty, though she was angry and reluctant. I reconciled the mother with her sons, and began my career as a step–father by enriching my step–sons with a large sum of money" (trans. Butler).

some discussion. It is usually held that extensive slave labor was not common in North African agriculture of the second century, but Pudentilla's case shows that this scenario was not without exceptions; our perceptions may need some adjustment.[21] Moreover, if Pudentilla donated four hundred slaves, she evidently must have possessed many more. Scholars have arrived at different estimations, with six hundred as the absolute minimum.[22]

As a rule the speaker does not specify numbers and precise amounts, and when he does so, the numbers may well be exaggerated or rounded off for the sake of effect.[23] The prices and capitals specified in the text are often too easily taken for granted as reliable data which permit further financial study of the Roman Empire (as in Di Vita 1968). Moreover, some intriguing points are missing in the *Apology*: there is, for example, no mention of Oea's busy harbor and, more importantly, only silence on possible income from interest or trade in general.[24]

But here again, we must take into account that this is a rhetorical text, aiming at rhetorical effects. The speaker poses as a philanthropist, a "beneficent stepfather" (to the Romans a paradox in itself), an unselfish promoter of peace and harmony. The elements he mentions mainly illustrate the generosity of his wife and the advantages her sons have enjoyed due to his influence.

So even in such seemingly "economic" passages, the speaker's specific aims are no less dominant than elsewhere. The ensuing picture of Pudentilla is, therefore, incomplete and inexact at best.

[21] See Pavis D'Esurac 1974, 92, and Gutsfeld 1992, 253–54. For some general studies see Kehoe 1988, 24–25, and Aubert 1994, 139 n. 164.

[22] Duncan-Jones (1974, 347–48) ventures a reconstruction of the price of Pudentilla's land on the exclusive basis of this number of slaves mentioned by Apuleius. An earlier study (Henchir Snobbeur 1932, cited in Pavis D'Esurac 1974, 92) estimated the value of the slaves themselves at 800,000 sesterces, thus representing one-quarter of Pudentilla's capital.

[23] This can also be said for ancient historiographical sources, where numbers are notoriously unreliable and seem largely influenced by rhetorical rules and literary aims.

[24] Cf. Pavis D'Esurac 1974, 93, 100–101; and notably Gutsfeld 1992, 264–68, explaining these silences as being due to the economic mentality of the upper class.

LITERARY OVERTONES

Finally, the "Pudentilla" in this speech shows some characteristics which seem to belong to the realm of literature.

The *Apology* as a whole shows a consistent and important layer of references to Greek and Roman literature, with particular emphasis on Roman comedy.[25] Several of its personae are pictured as caricatures, such as the drunken witness Crassus (59) or the immoral pimp Rufinus (74). This may also have affected the image of Pudentilla: she is stylized as a loving mother who forgives her sons' errors while firmly sticking to her principles (87.7, 77.5–6; cf. 100.5). We find powerful imagery and elevated style in the defense of the couple's country-house wedding:

> Immo, si uerum uelis, uxor ad prolem multo auspicatius in uilla quam in oppido ducitur, in solo uberi quam in loco sterili, in agri cespite quam in fori silice. Mater futura in ipso materno sinu nubat, in segete adulta, super fecundam glebam, uel enim sub ulmo marita cubet, in ipso gremio terrae matris, inter suboles herbarum et propagines uitium et arborum germina.[26] (88.4–5)

Even from this highly literary and rhetorical passage, clearly aimed at making Pudentilla look younger and at justifying the choice of a private place for the wedding, factual information has been deduced. Thus it has been argued that forestry was practiced on Pudentilla's estates. Gutsfeld (1992, 254) even specifies that the elm must be the "Feldolme," a tree that usually grows only in a moderate climate. Such speculations seem doomed to remain fruitless.

On the other hand, when the defendant's argument requires it, he does not shrink from indirectly comparing Pudentilla to a "lethal woman" such as Phaedra (79.1), whose love was illicit, who wrote a false

[25] The numerous theatrical elements in the *Apology* even make it possible to read it as a text based on the model of Roman comedy. For such an analysis of the speech see Hunink 1998 (with further references to the field of the ancient novel).

[26] "Indeed, if you would know the truth, it is of far better omen for the expectation of offspring that one should marry one's wife in a country house in preference to the town, on rich soil in preference to barren ground, on the greensward of the meadow rather than the pavement of the market-place. She that would be a mother should marry in the very bosom of her mother, among the standing crops, on the fruitful ploughland, or she should lie beneath the elm that weds the vine, on the very lap of mother earth, among the springing herbage, the trailing vine-shoots and the budding trees" (trans. Butler).

letter and killed her husband. The three points are clearly not applicable to Pudentilla, but once the name of Phaedra has been dropped, it inevitably adds another shade to the general portrait of Pudentilla.

Some addresses to Pudentilla are manifestly dictated by literary and rhetorical aims. For example:

> O infelix uterum tuum, Pudentilla, o sterilitas liberis potior, o infausti decem menses, o ingrati XIIII anni uiduitatis! Vipera, ut audio, exeso matris utero in lucem proserpit atque ita parricidio gignitur; at enim tibi a filio iam adulto acerbiores morsus uiuenti et uidenti offeruntur. Silentium tuum laniatur, pudor tuus carpitur, pectus tuum foditur, uiscera intima protrahuntur.[27] (85.5–6)

Such melodramatic lines—quite after the taste of the ancients—although part of Apuleius' own words, will have been interpreted by no one as relevant to Pudentilla's biography, except for the number of years: "fourteen."[28]

Perhaps the most powerful literary role model occurs earlier in the speech. Pudentilla waited for many years before she could remarry. All the time, she managed to shake off all *procos* which her father–in–law proposed to her (68.4). When he threatened that he would not give his grandsons their due from their father's will if she did not give in, she took action.

> Quam condicionem cum obstinate propositam uideret mulier sapiens et egregie pia, ne quid filiis suis eo nomine incommodaret, facit quidem tabulas nuptiales cum quo iubebatur, cum Sicinio Claro, uerum enimuero uanis frustrationibus nuptias eludit eo ad dum puerorum auus fato concessit.[29] (68.5–6)

[27] "Oh, your unlucky womb, Pudentilla! Barrenness would have been better than children! Oh, those lamentable ten months! Oh, those fourteen thankless years of widowhood! The viper, I am told, reaches the light of day only by gnawing through its mother's womb and is thus born by parricide. But your son is fullgrown and the wounds he deals are far bitterer, for they are inflicted on you while you yet live and see the light of day. He insults your reserve, he tears away your dignity, he wounds your breast and exposes your inmost organs" (trans. Butler, with important changes).

[28] Here again, the text is curiously imprecise. In 27.7 Pudentilla's widowhood is said to have lasted *thirteen* years, and in 68.2 it is *about* fourteen years (*per annos ferme quattuordecim*). It may be observed that here and at 68.2 a higher number is opportune, whereas at 27.7 rounding it down seems most effective.

[29] "When she saw that nothing could move him to alter the condition that he had laid down, such was her wisdom, and so admirable her maternal affection, that to prevent her sons' interests suffering any damage in this respect, she made a contract of marriage with Sicinius Clarus in accordance with her father–in–law's bidding, but by trifling evasions managed to avoid the marriage until the boys' grandfather died" (trans. Butler, with a change).

Particularly after the occurrence of the word for "suitor," we must surely think of Penelope here: a wise and dutiful lady, cleverly postponing a marriage to which she is forced, inspired by a sense of loyalty and duty towards her closest relatives. It is significant that in the age of Apuleius the mythological character Penelope had become a symbol of philosophy and wisdom.[30] This would, of course, imply that Pudentilla's Odysseus is none other than Apuleius—an association which the second–century philosopher would certainly not reject.[31]

RHETORIC AND BIOGRAPHY

In the end, we are left with rather few reliable details on Pudentilla. Even if we leave aside the methodological problem that all we read about her is based on only one source, Apuleius' text, the text itself produces a portrait which is not as clear–cut as is often asserted. Apuleius does not intend to give a faithful and objective account of his wife's personality and life: rather, he wants to defend himself against the charges brought against him, charges of magic and of seeking financial gain.

This leads him to present his wife in a constantly changing light. Yes, she is exceedingly virtuous and pious, but she also appears as a patient desperately looking for physical relief, or as a far from beautiful middle–aged mother looking for help and support (cf. also 77.7). She must be persuaded by her son to marry Apuleius, but then again it looks as if she has made this choice herself. She is also a pathetic widow, with hardly any qualities left to recommend her, yet also, somehow, a learned woman who came to admire the famous, detached philosopher Apuleius. She acts as a prudent landowner, but also as a generous mother. Apart from these changing roles, much is left unsaid, such as her exact age, and details concerning her possessions and activities.

[30] See in particular Helleman 1995, referring to the works of Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius.

[31] In Apul. *Soc.* 24 Odysseus is given a prominent, positive role as the model par excellence of virtue. In the *Apology* Odysseus (Ulixes) is repeatedly alluded or referred to: cf., e.g., 31.7, 55.6, 57.4, and 89.4.

Finally, her portrait is not only inconsistent and incomplete but also seems to be stylized according to rhetorical and literary patterns, as in the passage where she behaves like a real Penelope.

The *Apology* is not about Pudentilla, it is about Apuleius. What seem elements of *her* portrait really are scattered bits and pieces in the argument highlighting *his* defense. The reliable information about her is so scanty that we cannot really get any closer to her.

The text nowhere suggests that Pudentilla was actually present in court during the trial, and she most likely did not attend it. But to us Pudentilla remains absent in more than one way: we can rely on the speech only for some general points concerning her, but her biography cannot be reconstructed from this rhetorical, literary text. Modern scholars should be very wary in using the *Apology* as evidence for their theories about Pudentilla.[32]

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