



THE EARLY RECEPTION OF APULEIUS: AN ECHO IN TERTULLIAN

ABSTRACT

Apuleius tells us of his own popularity as a writer, and yet both the literary and the material records are silent about his works for almost one hundred and fifty years after his death. Various attempts to identify allusions to his works before Lactantius and other fourth-century authors have proven unconvincing. This article suggests that there is a clear allusion to the Metamorphoses in Tertullian's treatise Aduersus Valentinianos (beginning of the third century). Tertullian uses Apuleius to denigrate the Valentinians and to assimilate the name of one of their gods to the braying of an ass.

Keywords: Apuleius; Tertullian; intertextuality; reception; Valentinians; Gnostic

Judging by his own writings, Apuleius became so famous in his own lifetime that statues were erected in his honour.¹ And yet, as Julia Gaisser has shown,² for a long time no extant source ever mentions him. Around 310, Lactantius broke the silence, stating that ‘many and extraordinary things are remembered about him’ (*Diu. inst.* 5.3.7). Scholars have attempted to identify echoes of Apuleius before the fourth century, but their endeavours remain speculative or ‘lack all cogency’, as convincingly argued by Barnes.³ Similarly, material evidence has been used to confirm his immediate renown: a second-century papyrus represents a scene from Cupid and Psyche;⁴ an inscription

¹ See e.g. *Flor.* 16 and 20.

² J.H. Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius & the Golden Ass. A Study in Transmission and Reception* (Princeton, 2008), 20–1; J.H. Gaisser, ‘How Apuleius survived: the African connection’, in B.T. Lee, E. Finkelppearl, L. Graverini (edd.), *Apuleius and Africa* (New York and London, 2014), 52–65.

³ T. Barnes, *Tertullian. A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford, 1971), 256–8; S.J. Harrison, ‘Apuleius eroticus: *Anth. Lat.* 712 Riese’, *Hermes* 120 (1992), 83–9 makes a case for attributing a poem cited by Gellius to Apuleius. Barnes is concerned with previous attempts to find echoes of Apuleius in Tertullian, including C. Moreschini, ‘Reminiscenze apuleiane nel *De anima* di Tertulliano?’, *Maia* 20 (1968), 19–20. Later C. Moreschini, *Apuleio e il platonismo* (Florence, 1978), 225–34 argued for other echoes of Apuleius before Arnobius, but still unconvincingly, and without acknowledging Barnes’s criticism. In a survey of the reception of Apuleius in North Africa, Gaisser (n. 2 [2014]), 52–65 properly starts from Arnobius, and R. Carver, *The Protean Ass. The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2007), 11–25 from Lactantius, the fourth century and the *Historia Augusta*.

⁴ A second-century papyrus, *PSI VIII.919*, portrays a young girl with butterfly wings and a winged boy; the girl stretches out her right arm with a torch (Minutoli, cited in A. Stramaglia, ‘Le *Metamorfosi* di Apuleio tra iconografia e papiri’, in G. Bastianini and A. Casanova [edd.], *I papiri del romanzo antico* [Florence, 2010], 165–92, at 167) toward the boy who is crowned with a garland. In addition to ‘soul’, *psychē* also means ‘butterfly’ in Greek; and already G. Coppola, ‘*PSI VIII 919*’, *Società italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto* 8 (1927), 85–7, tab. II identified this representation as a scene from Cupid and Psyche, but he mistook the torch for a mirror, and interpreted the scene as a symposium where Psyche gave a mirror to Cupid, as he woke up after being drunk. For E. Bassi, ‘*PSI Congr. XX*’, *Società italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto* 20 (1939), 93–6, tab. XII, the scene from the papyrus instead represents the moment when Psyche approaches Cupid with a lamp. For the two discussions with bibliography, see G. Messeri, ‘*PSI VIII 919*’, in G. Cavallo, E. Crisci, G. Messeri,

from Madauros, Apuleius' birthplace, dedicates a statue (now lost) 'to the Platonic philosopher', who can be safely identified with him;⁵ and both Augustine and Christodorus mention statues dedicated to Apuleius.⁶ However, none of these pieces of evidence casts light on his early reception: the inscription cannot be dated with certainty; neither Augustine nor Christodorus specifies how old the statues were; and Antonio Stramaglia has demonstrated that the papyrus most likely predates the *Metamorphoses* and belongs to a tradition of representations of Cupid and Psyche which is independent from Apuleius.⁷ As a result there seems to be a gap of one hundred and fifty years: on the one hand, Apuleius was allegedly known and celebrated in his own lifetime; on the other hand, literary sources remain silent until Lactantius and Augustine, and no piece of material evidence can be safely used to illuminate the early reception of Apuleius. In this paper I wish to fill this gap and suggest that, about a hundred years before Lactantius, Tertullian made a clear reference to a passage from the *Metamorphoses*.

ADVERSVS VALENTINIANOS

Sometime between 207 and 210, Tertullian turned his attention against the Valentinians, a group founded by Valentinus and based on teachings he had drawn from Greek philosophy and from Gnostic and Christian beliefs.⁸ Valentinus' doctrine seems to have given little concern to Tertullian: what prompted him to write *Aduersus Valentinianos* was both the growing size of the movement (cf. *Adu. Valent.* 1.1) and their unwillingness to separate themselves from other Christians.⁹

Tertullian shaped the structure and style of his work more to ridicule than to disprove their beliefs.¹⁰ The treaty reads like a prosecution speech but consists solely of an

R. Pintaudi (edd.), *Scrivere libri e documenti nel mondo antico* (Florence, 1998), 231–2 and Stramaglia (this note), 166–76. I thank Julia Gaisser for pointing me toward this contribution by Stramaglia.

⁵ This inscription must have been originally placed at the base of a statue, but the date of the dedication and inscription remains uncertain, and the statue is now lost. The inscription reads: '[PH]ILOSOPHO / [PL]ATONICO / [MA]DAVRENSES / CIVES / ORNAMENT[O] / SVO D D P...'; see S. Gsell, *Inscriptions latines de l'Algérie. Tome premier: Inscriptions de la Proconsulaire* (Rome, 1965), 196, 1.2115. The upper and lower lines of the inscription are damaged, but Gsell has convincingly proposed the following reconstruction: 'Apuleio ... Philosopho Platonico Madaurenses ciues ornameto suo. Decreto decurionum pecunia publica'; Gsell also cites evidence for calling Apuleius 'the Platonic philosopher' (e.g. *Apul. Apol.* 10, *Plat.* 3 and some *tituli* from manuscripts with his works).

⁶ *Aug. Ep.* 138.19. Christodorus (end of fifth / beginning of sixth century) wrote 416 verses to describe about eighty statues by Zeuxippus in Constantinople. The statues represented poets, orators, gods and mythical heroes and included only four Romans: Caesar, Apuleius, Pompey and Virgil. These verses are collected in the Palatine Anthology (Book 2, lines 303–5 for Apuleius). See F. Baumgarten, 'Christodorus', *RE* I.6 (1899), 2450–2 and R. Scarcia, *Latina Siren. Note di critica semantica* (Rome, 1964), 13–24.

⁷ See Stramaglia (n. 4), 166–76 for the relation between some gems representing Cupid and Psyche and Apuleius. C. Schlam, *Cupid and Psyche: Apuleius and the Monuments* (University Park, PA, 1976), 31–40 previously proved that these representations were well established before the *Metamorphoses* and are independent of Apuleius.

⁸ For the doctrine of Valentinus, see C. Marksches, *Valentinus Gnosticus?* (Tubingen, 1992) and G. Quispel, 'The original doctrine of Valentinus the Gnostic', *VChr* 50 (1996), 327–52; and for Tertullian's treatment, see E. Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge, 1997), 191–208.

⁹ Cf. *De praescriptionibus* 1.1. For Tertullian on heresies, see J.-C. Fredouille, *Tertullien: Contre les Valentiniens, II. Commentaire et index* (Paris, 1981), 117 (on 1.1). Cf. B. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths we Never Knew* (Oxford, 2003), 185.

¹⁰ Cf. J.-C. Fredouille, *Tertullien: Contre les Valentiniens, I. Introduction, texte critique, traduction* (Paris, 1980), 13–20.

exordium (1–6) and a *narratio* (7–41), with no proper *confirmatio*. In Tertullian's view, the Valentinians' doctrines were so obscure and absurd that a full engagement could wait, and a simple exposition of their credo would do (6.2). The *narratio*, following ancient theory and practice, exposes a strongly biased account of the Valentinian doctrine. Tertullian draws heavily from the section on the Valentinians found in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* (1.1–20), but his choice of style fits his plan of exposing and deriding his opponents (6.3).¹¹ This promise, while intriguing the reader and inflicting another blow on the opponent, sets the tone for the entire work, which is filled with mocking irony.¹² This pervasive *festiuitas* stands out in comparison with Tertullian's sources and with his other writings,¹³ and has a highly literary character, as proven by the many citations and references both to Christian and to classical literature. For example, unlike his other extant works, in *Adversus Valentinianos* Tertullian names Ovid and the *Metamorphoses* (12.1) and quotes Ennius (7.1). Equally prominent, though less exceptional, are the citations and references to Christian scriptures. Since the Valentinians were recruiting members among Christians and non-Christians alike, Tertullian probably tried to address both audiences and hence drew from both sides in order to discredit his target from both directions: citations from Christian writings help Tertullian to argue that Valentinian beliefs were incompatible with Christian teachings;¹⁴ and citations from classical literature help him to portray their beliefs as conflicting with traditional Roman values and, indeed, even more absurd than the stories found in Graeco-Roman mythology (for example 10.2 and 21.1–2).

TERTULLIAN'S USE OF APULEIUS

Remarkably, when departing from Irenaeus, Tertullian often makes references to North African characters, who must have appealed to his immediate audience. For example, in targeting the Valentinian proclivity to multiply the names of demigods, he asks 'why not call them also Sterceia?' (8.5). Sterceia, from *stercus*, was the slave in charge of changing babies, a sort of 'poop-maid', and, as Kajanto has shown, eleven out of fourteen occurrences of 'Sterceia' come from North Africa, where 'the peculiarities of Latin nomenclature were perhaps more striking than elsewhere'.¹⁵ Similarly, Tertullian mentions and scorns Phosphorus, a useless orator from Carthage (8.3).

Given the literary character of the work and its immediate North African audience, one should not be surprised to find references to Apuleius as well. In a learned commentary, Jean-Claude Fredouille has shown that Tertullian and Apuleius share some unusual terminology, word meanings, word order and ideas.¹⁶ Given their common North

¹¹ Tertullian seems to follow Cicero, who recommended laughter to ridicule one's opponent in *De or.* 2.236 (cf. 2.264), and employed this tactic in philosophical dialogues: e.g. *Cic. Nat. D.* 3.61.

¹² J.-C. Fredouille, *Tertullien et la conversion de la culture antique* (Paris, 1972), 152: 'Le rire n'y est plus destiné à souligner chez l'adversaire une contradiction ou une erreur, mais est érigé en un vaste système de réfutation.'

¹³ He cites four (5.1), three of which we do not have (Justin, Miltiades and Proculus), but Tertullian follows closely Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* 1.1–20, which at times he translates literally.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford, 1995), 229–30.

¹⁵ I. Kajanto, *The Latin Cognomina* (Helsinki, 1965), 246 and id., 'Peculiarities of Latin nomenclature in North Africa', *Philologus* 108 (1964), 310–12.

¹⁶ Terminology: Fredouille (n. 9), e.g. *fartilis* 27.1 and *Apul. Met.* 6.31.6; *pompaticus* 16.2 and

African origin and identity, it is reasonable to assume that Tertullian knew Apuleius; and yet, taken *per se*, none of the parallels Fredouille finds proves that he had read him, let alone that he was activating an intertextual link with any of his works.

In at least one case, however, Tertullian clearly models his words after a passage from the *Metamorphoses*. According to the Valentinians, the world was created through the mediation of demigods, the Aeons: specifically, after Christ shaped and left Enthymesis (Inclination), she went on a quest for him. But another Aeon, Horos, got in her way. Tertullian writes (*Adu. Valent.* 14.3–4):

fortasse adprehendisset, si non idem Horos ... nunc tam importune filiae occurrisset, ut etiam inclamauerit in eam 'Iaō!', quasi 'porro Quirites!' aut 'fidem Caesaris!' inde inuenitur Iao in scripturis.

she might have reached Christ, if that same Horos ... had not gotten in her way so rudely that he even screamed to her 'iao' as if to say 'give way, citizens!' or 'by Caesar's good faith!' For this reason, 'iao' is found in their scriptures.

A comparison with Irenaeus demonstrates Tertullian's method. Specifically, the corresponding description from Irenaeus' *Aduersus Haereses* provides the factual information and is translated almost verbatim; but Apuleius helps Tertullian to keep his promise and add much *festiuitas*. Irenaeus writes (1.1.7 [= Mass 1.4.1]):

ἐπὶ ζήτησιν ὁρμηῆσαι τοῦ καταλιπόντος αὐτὴν φωτὸς καὶ μὴ δυνηθῆναι καταλαβεῖν αὐτό, διὰ τὸ κωλυθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ Ὁρου. καὶ ἐνταῦθα τὸν Ὁρον κωλύοντα αὐτὴν τῆς εἰς τοῦμπροσθεν ὁρμῆς εἰπεῖν 'Iaō· ὅθεν τὸ 'Iaō ὄνομα γεγενῆσθαι φάσκουσι.

[they say that] ... she went out in search of the light which had abandoned her, but she was unable to reach it, because she was prevented by Horos. Hence Horos, preventing her from advancing further, said 'iao'. They say that the name 'iao' comes from this.

Having read Tertullian, this passage sounds familiar, but Tertullian adds the suggestion that 'iao' may stand for *porro Quirites* or *fidem Caesaris*, and this is where Apuleius comes into play: this language and context call to mind a vivid passage from the *Metamorphoses*. In Book 8, Lucius, still in the form of an ass, witnesses various misdeeds by the priests of the Syrian goddess. They invite a guest to dinner, strip him naked, lay him on his back and demand his services. Lucius' eyes can no longer tolerate the view, and he tries to intervene (*Met.* 8.29.5):

'porro Quirites' proclamare gestiui, sed uiduatum ceteris syllabis ac litteris processit 'O' tantum, sane clarum ac ualidum et asino proprium, sed inopportuno plane tempore.

I tried to scream 'give way, citizens', but only an 'O' came out, stripped of the other syllables and letters; it was clear and loud, as it fits an ass, but badly out of place.

These two passages present many similarities. Both Apuleius and Tertullian use the expression *porro Quirites*, which occurs only one other time in Classical Latin, in a

Apul. *Met.* 11.19.2; *commentator* 32.2 and Apul. *Apol.* 74.6. Word meanings: e.g. *indulgentia* for *donum*, 29.3 and Apul. *Mund.* 25.343; *explorator* for intellectual, 51 and Apul. *Flor.* 18.30. Word order: e.g. the prolepsis of a relative, *quem mox induerit Christum*, 26.1 and *istam quam geris faciem*, Apul. *Met.* 11.6.4. Ideas: e.g. the understanding that for Plato matter was uncreated, 15.1 and Apul. *Plat.* 1.191; the obligation to keep some mysteries secretive, 1.2 and Apul. *Met.* 3.15.4.

mime by Laberius.¹⁷ Macrobius reports that in 47–46 Caesar invited Laberius to act his own mime on stage; Laberius, who was a Roman knight, felt he could not refuse but expressed his resentment in a prologue and in scattered remarks, such as *porro, Quirites! libertatem perdimus* (Macrobius *Sat.* 2.7). It is unlikely that Tertullian modelled this passage after Laberius; but various features in Tertullian resemble Apuleius. The solemn language in the mouth of Horos or in the mouth of an ass triggers the same comical effect;¹⁸ and other common vocabulary and a similar context further strengthen the intertextual link. Two verbs from the same root introduce Horos' and Lucius' shout (*inclamauerit* and *conclamare*); this shout produces a similar sound, 'Iaô' and 'O', and in either case the open 'O' derived from a Greek omega.¹⁹ In either case, this inarticulate utterance stands for *porro Quirites* and is meant energetically to invite the addressee (Enthymesis or the priests) to desist from their enterprise; in spite of the inarticulate utterance, neither intervention proves effective, but is perceived as out of place (*tam importune* and *inopportuno plane tempore*). The context of hypocritical Syrian priests who hide their sexual immorality beyond a façade of mysterious rites perfectly fits Tertullian's grotesque portrayal of the Valentinians and their mysteries: for example, in the first paragraph, Tertullian programmatically declares that, for all its secretive aura of divinity, the object of their devotion turns out to be a phallus (1.1; cf. 1.3), a detail not found in Irenaeus.²⁰ Taken together, these similarities both in language and in context suggest that Tertullian is intentionally calling to mind this misadventure from the *Metamorphoses*.

In this way, Tertullian elicits the spectre of charlatan Syrian priests in the background of Valentinian mythology, perhaps also hinting at Lucius' indignation as the proper response. Readers can still make sense of Tertullian's passage without grasping the reference to *The Golden Ass*, but more *festiuitas* is in store for those who do. The allusion equates Horos to an ass and Enthymesis to the innocent victim of deceitful priests, who may implicitly stand for the other Valentinian gods. Moreover, Tertullian covertly suggests that Horos' failure to utter meaningful words produced a futile sound, 'Iaô', and adds that 'from this is found "Iaô" in their scriptures'.²¹ As seen, this etymology is confirmed by Irenaeus, but the allusion to Apuleius colours it with

¹⁷ Cf. C. Panayotakis, *Decimus Laberius. The Fragments* (Cambridge, 2010), 46–7 and 473–4; O. Ribbeck, *Comitorum Romanorum Fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1898³), 361, 125; G. Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre* (Cambridge, 2011), 275–6; cf. also *Priap.* 26.1; Fredouille (n. 9), 277 (on 14.4) and B. Hijmans et al., *Apuleius Metamorphoses VIII. Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Groningen, 1985), 259 (on *Met.* 8.29).

¹⁸ For the solemnity of this expression, see Ottink in *TLL* 10.1.2768.24–30 and Panayotakis (n. 17), 474.

¹⁹ The open 'O' pronounced by Lucius corresponds to the exclamation omega of 'o Zeu schetlie', which is found in the matching Greek passage of *Λοῦκιος ἦ Ὀνος* 38 and is reproduced by the first 'o' in *porro*; cf. J. Heller, 'Lucius the ass as a speaker of Greek and Latin', *CJ* 37 (1942), 531–3. Similarly, the Gnostic god Iao was spelled with a final omega (cf. Iren. *Adversus Haereses* 1.4.1). For the ass bray rendered by Greek words with the 'o' sound, see B. Snell, 'Das I-Ah des goldenen Esels', *Hermes* 70 (1935), 355–6.

²⁰ On Tertullian's strategy to ridicule the Valentinians and portray their beliefs as absurd and their rituals as immoral, see L. Grillo, 'Tertullian's attack on the Valentinians and the rhetoric of fake', in A. Guzmán and J. Martínez (edd.), *Animo Decipiendi? Rethinking Fakes and Authorship in Classical, Late Antique, & Early Christian Works* (Groningen, 2018), 217–28.

²¹ Iao is both a common name for gods or demons in magical papyri (cf. R. Gordon, 'Magical Spells', *Brill's New Pauly* [2006], 8.147–8) and short for Yahweh in the Gnostic pantheon (cf. Fredouille [n. 9], ad loc.).

a quite different meaning: it tracks the name of the known Gnostic god Iaô back to a 'heehaw' uttered by an ass.

In conclusion, one could argue that Tertullian's reference to Apuleius suggests that at least some of his readers were familiar enough with the *Metamorphoses* that they could appreciate the allusion. If correct, the proposed intertextual link, which connects *Adversus Valentinianos* to the *Metamorphoses*, bridges the gap of one hundred and fifty years in the sources between Apuleius himself and the evidence of Lactantius and material culture. Indeed, Apuleius was known and read also in the immediate aftermath of his death.

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