***Apuleius***

*Apuleius, the author of the Golden Ass, was also unfortunate enough to also be charged with witchcraft, specifically with the charge of enchanting a rich widow, Pudentilla, into marrying him. The brother of her previous husband objected to this strenuously, as he had hoped she would marry back into his family. So too did her seventeen year old son, and, for a while, her older son, who had been friends with Apuleius during their studies overseas.[[1]](#footnote-1) Apuleius was charged in 158 CE and had to plead for his life before the governor, Claudius Maximus, and his advisory council, and presumably as many people in the town (Sabratha) as could fit around this law case. It, after all, promised everything: family intrigue, love, magic, fish, good-looking philosophers, extremely rich people, and more. The following are extracts from his defence speech, which must have been successful as he went on to a very successful career as a public intellectual in Carthage, even having statues erected to him there and other towns in the province. They show the avenues of attack that were employed against him, trying to paint him as barely Roman and devious. They also show that he was very effective in showing himself to be the true Roman, and his opponents as barely literate morons, who struggled to read Greek like every educated Roman man should.*

4. To begin then, only a short while ago, at the commencement of the indictment, you heard them say, `He, whom we accuse in your court, is a philosopher of the most elegant appearance and a master of eloquence not merely in Latin but also in Greek!' What a damning insinuation! Unless I am mistaken, those were the very words with which Tannonius Pudens, whom no one could accuse of being a master of eloquence, began the indictment.  I wish that these serious reproaches of beauty and eloquence had been true. It would have been easy to answer in the words, with which Homer makes Paris reply to Hector which I may interpret thus: `The most glorious gifts of the gods are in no wise to be despised; but the things which they are wont to give are withheld from many that would gladly possess them.' Such would have been my reply.

I should have added that philosophers are not forbidden to possess a handsome face. Pythagoras, the first to take the name of `philosopher', was the handsomest man of his day. Zeno also, the ancient philosopher of Velia, who was the first to discover that most ingenious device of refuting hypotheses by the method of self-inconsistency, that same Zeno was -- so Plato asserts -- by far the most striking in appearance of all the men of his generation. It is further recorded of many other philosophers that they were comely of countenance and added fresh charm to their personal beauty by their beauty of character. But such a defence is, as I have already said, far from me. Not only has nature given me but a commonplace appearance, but continued literary labour has swept away such charm as my person ever possessed, has reduced me to a lean habit of body, sucked away all the freshness of life, destroyed my complexion and impaired my vigour. As to my hair, which they with unblushing mendacity declare I have allowed to grow long as an enhancement to my personal attractions, you can judge of its elegance and beauty. As you see, it is tangled, twisted and unkempt like a lump of tow, shaggy and irregular in length, so knotted and matted that the tangle is past the art of man to unravel. This is due not to mere carelessness in the tiring of my hair, but to the fact that I never so much as comb or part it. I think this is a sufficient refutation of the accusations concerning my hair which they hurl against me as though it were a capital charge.

*He was also accused of being a poor philosopher trying to get a rich wife, and with a nobody for a father.*

23. But if you despise these examples and challenge me, not to plead my case, but to enter into a discussion of the amount of my fortune, to put an end to your ignorance on this point, if it exists, I acknowledge that my father left my brother and myself a little under 2,000,000 sesterces -- a sum on which my lengthy travels, continual studies, and frequent generosity have made considerable inroads. For I have often assisted my friends and have shown substantial gratitude to many of my instructors, on more than one occasion going so far as to provide dowries for their daughters. Nay, I should not have hesitated to expend every farthing of my patrimony, if so I might acquire what is far better by contempt for my patrimony. But as for you, Aemilianus, and ignorant boors of your type, in your case the fortune makes the man. You are like barren and blasted trees that produce no fruit, but are valued only for the timber that their trunks contain. But I beg you, Aemilianus, in future to abstain from reviling any one for their poverty, since you yourself used, after waiting for some seasonable shower to soften the ground, to expend three days in ploughing single-handed, with the aid of one wretched ass, that miserable farm at Zarath, which was all your father left you. It is only recently that fortune has smiled on you in the shape of wholly undeserved inheritances which have fallen to you by the frequent deaths of relatives, deaths to which, far more than to your hideous face, you owe your nickname of Charon.As to my birthplace, you assert that my writings prove it to lie right on the marches of Numidia and Gaetulia, for I publicly described myself as half Numidian, half Gaetulian in a discourse delivered in the presence of that most distinguished citizen Lollianus Avitus. I do not see that I have any more reason to be ashamed of that than had the elder Cyrus for being of mixed descent, half Mede, half Persian. A man's birthplace is of no importance, it is his character that matters. We must consider not in what part of the world, but with what purpose he set out to live his life. Sellers of wine and cabbages are permitted to enhance the value of their wares by advertising the excellence of the soil whence they spring, as for instance with the wine of Thasos and the cabbages of Phlius. For those products of the soil are wonderfully improved in flavour by the fertility of the district which produces them, the moistness of the climate, the mildness of the winds, the warmth of the sun, and the richness of the soil. But in the case of man, the soul enters the tenement of the body from without. What, then, can such circumstances as these add to or take away from his virtues or his vices? Has there ever been a time or place in which a race has not produced a variety of intellects, although some races seem stupider and some wiser than others? The Scythians are the stupidest of men, and yet the wise Anacharsis was a Scyth. The Athenians are shrewd, and yet the Athenian Meletides was a fool.

I say this not because I am ashamed of my country, since even in the time of Syphax we were a township. When he was conquered we were transferred by the gift of the Roman people to the dominion of King Masinissa, and finally as the result of a settlement of veteran soldiers, our second founders, we have become a colony of the highest distinction. In this same colony my father attained to the post of duumvir and became the foremost citizen of the place, after filling all the municipal offices of honour. I myself, immediately after my first entry into the municipal senate, succeeded to my father's position in the community, and, as I hope, am in no ways a degenerate successor, but receive like honour and esteem for my maintenance of the dignity of my position. Why do I mention this? That you, Aemilianus, may be less angry with me in future and may more readily pardon me for having been negligent enough not to select your `Attic' Zarath for my birthplace.

*Apuleius defended himself vigorously on the charge of magic, but he was also willing to claim great things for it:*

25. I will now deal with the actual charge of magic. You spared no violence in fanning the flame of hatred against me. But you have disappointed all men's expectations by your old wives' fables, and the fire kindled by your accusations has burned itself away. I ask you, Maximus, have you ever seen fire spring up among the stubble, crackling sharply, blazing wide and spreading fast, but soon exhausting its flimsy fuel, dying fast away, leaving not a wrack behind? So they have kindled their accusation with abuse and fanned it with words, but it lacks the fuel of facts and, your verdict once given, is destined to leave not a wrack of calumny behind. The whole of Aemilianus' calumnious accusation was centred in the charge of magic. I should therefore like to ask his most learned advocates how, precisely, they would define a magician.

If what I read in a large number of authors is true, namely, that magician is the Persian word for priest, what is there criminal in being a priest and having due knowledge, science, and skill in all ceremonial law, sacrificial duties, and the binding rules of religion, at least if magic consists in that which Plato sets forth in his description of the methods employed by the Persians in the education of their young princes? I remember the very words of that divine philosopher. Let me recall them to your memory, Maximus:

When the boy has reached the age of fourteen he is handed over to the care of men known as the Royal Masters. They are four in number, and are chosen as being the best of the elders of Persia, one the wisest, another the justest, a third the most temperate, a fourth the bravest. And one of these teaches the boy the magic of Zoroaster the son of Oromazes; and this magic is no other than the worship of the gods. He also teaches him the arts of kingship. 26. Do you hear, you who so rashly accuse the art of magic? It is an art acceptable to the immortal gods, full of all knowledge of worship and of prayer, full of piety and wisdom in things divine, full of honour and glory since the day when Zoroaster and Oromazes established it, high-priestess of the powers of heaven. Nay, it is one of the first elements of princely instruction, nor do they lightly admit any chance person to be a magician, any more than they would admit him to be a king. Plato -- if I may quote him again -- in another passage dealing with a certain Zalmoxis, a Thracian and also a master of this art has written that magical charms are merely beautiful words. If that is so, why should I be forbidden to learn the fair words of Zalmoxis or the priestly lore. of Zoroaster?

But if these accusers of mine, after the fashion of the common herd, define a magician as one who by communion of speech with the immortal gods has power to do all the marvels that he will, through a strange power of incantation, I really wonder that they are not afraid to attack one whom they acknowledge to be so powerful. For it is impossible to guard against such a mysterious and divine power. Against other dangers we may take adequate precautions. He who summons a murderer before the judge comes into court with an escort of friends; he who denounces a poisoner is unusually careful as to what he eats; he who accuses a thief sets a guard over his possessions. But for the man who exposes a magician, credited with such awful powers, to the danger of a capital sentence, how can escort or precaution or watchmen save him from unforeseen and inevitable disaster? Nothing can save him, and therefore the man who believes in the truth of such a charge as this is certainly the last person in the world who should bring such an accusation.

*In this section Apuleius attacks his accusers’ ability in Greek, while touting his own. Knowledge of Greek as well as Latin was one essential element of being an elite Roman citizen, and, as you can see, that sometimes extended to women as well as men, as Pudentilla clearly could write good Greek:*

87. But I cannot bring myself to believe Aemilianus such a fool as to think that the letter of a mere boy,[[2]](#footnote-2) who is also one of my accusers, could seriously tell against me. There is also that forged letter by which they attempted to prove that I beguiled Pudentilla with flattery. I never wrote it and the forgery is not even plausible. What need did I have of flattery, if I put my trust in magic? And how did they secure possession of that letter which must, as is usual in such affairs, have been sent to Pudentilla by some confidential servant? Why, again, should I write in such faulty words, such barbarous language, I whom my accusers admit to be quite at home in Greek? And why should I seek to seduce her by flattery so absurd and coarse? They themselves admit that I write amatory verse with sufficient sprightliness and skill. The explanation is obvious to everyone; it is this: he who could not read the letter which Pudentilla wrote in Greek altogether too refined for his comprehension, found it easier to read this letter and set it off to greater advantage because it was his own.

One more point and I shall have said enough about the letters. Pudentilla, after writing in jest and irony those words `Come then, while I am yet in my senses,' sent for her sons and her daughter-in-law and lived with them for about two months. 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, that she earnestly warned his brother Pontianus to be on his guard against the designs of Rufinus, that she rebuked him severely for having freely published the letter she had sent him without having read it honestly as it was written! Let him deny that, after what I have just related to you, his mother married me in her country house, as had been agreed some time previously!

*He then moves on to a somewhat surprising praise of magic:*

90. I have done with this. I come now to the very heart of the accusation, to the actual motive for the use of magic. I ask Rufinus and Aemilianus to answer me and tell me -- even assuming that I am the most consummate magician -- what I had to gain by persuading Pudentilla to marry me by means of my love potions and my incantations. I am well aware that many persons, when accused of some crime or other, even if it has been shown that there was some real motive for the offence, have amply cleared themselves of guilt by this one line of defence, that the whole record of their lives renders the suspicion of such a crime incredible and that even though there may have been strong temptation to sin, the mere fact of the existence of the temptation should not be counted against them. We have no right to assume that everything that might have been done actually has been done. Circumstances may alter; the one true guide is a man's character; the one sure indication that a charge should be rejected or believed is the fact that through all his life the accused has set his face towards vice or virtue as the case may be. I might with the utmost justice put in such a plea for myself, but I waive my right in your favour, and shall think that I have made out but a poor case for myself, if I merely clear myself of all your charges, if I merely show that there exists not the slightest ground for suspecting me of sorcery. Consider what confidence in my innocence and what contempt of you is implied by my conduct. If you can discover one trivial reason that might have led me to woo Pudentilla for the sake of some personal advantage, if you can prove that I have made the very slightest profit out of my marriage, I am ready to be any magician you please -- the great Carmendas himself or Damigeron or Moses, or Jannes or Apollobex or Dardanus himself or any sorcerer of note from the time of Zoroaster and Ostanes till now.

91. See, Maximus, what a disturbance they have raised, merely because I have mentioned a few magicians by name. What am I to do with men so stupid and uncivilized? Shall I proceed to prove to you that I have come across these names and many more in the course of my study of distinguished authors in the public libraries? Or shall I argue that the knowledge of the names of sorcerers is one thing, participation in their art another, and that it is not tantamount to confessing a crime to have one's brain well stored with learning and a memory retentive of its erudition? Or shall I take what is far the best course and, relying on your learning, Maximus, and your perfect erudition, disdain to reply to the accusations of these stupid and uncultivated fellows? Yes, that is what I will do. I will not care a straw for what they may think. I will go on with the argument on which I had entered and will show that I had no motive for seducing Pudentilla into marriage by the use of love philtres. My accusers have gone out of their way to make disparaging remarks both about her age and her appearance; they have denounced me for desiring such a wife from motives of greed and robbing her of her vast and magnificent dowry at the very outset of our wedded life.

I do not intend to weary you Maximus, with a long reply on these points. There is no need for words from me, our deeds of settlement will speak more eloquently than I can do. From them you will see that both in my provision for the future and in my action at the time my conduct was precisely the opposite of that which they have attributed to me, inferring my rapacity from their own. You will see that Pudentilla's dowry was small, considering her wealth, and was made over to me as a trust, not as a gift,[[3]](#footnote-3) and moreover that the marriage only took place on this condition that if my wife should die without leaving me any children, the dowry should go to her sons Pontianus and Pudens, while if at her death she should leave me one son or daughter, half of the dowry was to go to the offspring of the second marriage, the remainder to the sons of the first.

92. This, as I say, I will prove from the actual deed of settlement. It may be that Aemilianus will still refuse to believe that the total sum recorded is only 30,000 sesterces, and that the reveNion of this sum is given by the settlement to Pudentilla's sons. Take the deeds into your own hands, give them to Rufinus who incited you to this accusation. Let him read them, let him blush for his arrogant temper and his pretentious beggary. He is poor and ill-clad and borrowed 400,000 sesterces to dower his daughter, while Pudentilla, a woman of fortune, was content with 300,000, and her husband, who has often refused the hand of the richest heiresses, is also content with this trifling dowry, a mere nominal sum. He cares for nothing save his wife and counts harmony with his spouse and great love as his sole treasure, his only wealth.

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? A beautiful maiden, even though she is poor, is amply dowered. For she brings to her husband a fresh untainted spirit, the charm of her beauty, the unblemished glory of her prime. The very fact that she is a maiden is rightly and deservedly regarded by all husbands as the strongest recommendation. For whatever else you receive as your wife's dowry you can, when it pleases you and if you desire to feel yourself under no further obligation, repay in full just as you received it; you can count back the money, restore the slaves, leave the howe, abandon the estates. Virginity only, once it has been given, can never be repaid; it is the one portion of the dowry that remains irrevocably with the husband.

A widow on the other hand, if divorced, leaves you as she came. She brings you nothing that she cannot ask back, she has been another's and is certainly far from tractable to your wishes; she looks suspiciously on her new home, while you regard her with suspicion because she has already been parted from one husband: if it was by death she lost her husband, the evil omen of her ill-starred union minimizes her attractions, while, if she left him by divorce, she possesses one of two faults: either she was so intolerable that she was divorced by her husband, or so insolent as to divorce him. It is for reasons of this kind among others that widows offer a larger dowry to attract suitors for their hands. Pudentilla would have done the same had she not found a philosopher indifferent to her dowry.

93. Consider. If I had desired her from motives of avarice, what could have been more profitable to me in my attempt to make myself master in her house than the dissemination of strife between mother and sons, the alienation of her children from her affections, so that I might have unfettered and supreme control over her loneliness? Such would have been, would it not, the action of the brigand you pretend me to be.

But as a matter of fact I did all I could to promote, to restore and foster quiet and harmony and family affection, and not only abstained from sowing fresh feuds, but utterly extinguished those already in existence. 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.
cursed Rufinus and praised my conduct. Pontianus together with his very inferior brother had come to visit us, before his mother had completed her donation. He fell at our feet and implored us to forgive and forget all his past offences; he wept, kissed our hands and expressed his penitence for listening to Rufinus and others like him. He also most humbly begged me to make his excuses to the most honourable Lollianus Avitus to whom I had recommended him not long before when he was beginning the study of oratory. He had discovered that I had written to Avitus a few days previously a full account of all that had happened. I granted him this request also and gave him a letter with which he set off to Carthage, where Lollianus Avitus, the term of his proconsulate having neariy expired, was awaiting your arrival, Maximus. After reading my letters he congratulated Pontianus with the exquisite courtesy which always characterizes him for having so soon rectified his error and entrusted him with a reply. Ah! what learning! what wit! what grace and charm dwelt in that reply! Only a `good man and an orator' could have written it.

*This is the opening of The Golden Ass, where Apuleius as narrator takes on another persona, that of a Greek still not confident of his Latin:*

1 Now, what I propose in this Milesian tale[[4]](#footnote-4) is to string together for you a series of different stories and to charm your ears, kind reader, with amusing gossip - always assuming that you are not too proud to look at an Egyptian book written with the sharpness of a pen from the Nile; and to make you marvel at a story of men’s shapes and fortunes changed into other forms and then restored all over again. So I’ll begin. But who is this? In brief: Attic Hymettus, the Isthmus of Corinth, and Spartan Taenarus, fruitful lands immortalized in yet more fruitful books, these make up my ancient ancestry. It was there that I served my earliest apprenticeship to the language of Athens. Later, arriving in Rome a stranger to its culture, with no teacher to show me the way, by my own painful efforts I attacked and mastered the Latin language. That then is my excuse, if as an unpractised speaker of the foreign idiom of the Roman courts I should stumble and give offence. In fact this linguistic metamorphosis suits the style of writing I have tackled here - the trick, you might call it, of changing literary horses at the gallop. It is a Grecian story that I am going to begin. Give me your ear, reader: you will enjoy yourself. 2 I was on my way to Thessaly - for on my mother’s side our family goes back there, being proud to number among our ancestors the distinguished philosopher Plutarch and his nephew Sextus - I was on my way, I say, to Thessaly on particular business.

*Apuleius, The Golden Ass* 1.1

*Saint Augustine, who came from Carthage, discusses Apuleius’ remarkably successful life, even if he did not, as Augustine points out, ever make consul or even any lower office.*

19. Apuleius (of whom I choose rather to speak, because, as our own countryman, he is better known to us Africans), though born in a place of some note, and a man of superior education and great eloquence, never succeeded, with all his magical arts, in reaching, I do not say the supreme power, but even any subordinate office as a magistrate in the Empire. Does it seem probable that he, as a philosopher, voluntarily despised these things, who, being the priest of a province, was so ambitious of greatness that he gave spectacles of gladiatorial combats, provided the dresses worn by those who fought with wild beasts in the circus, and, in order to get a statue of himself erected in the town of Oea, the birthplace of his wife, appealed to law against the opposition made by some of the citizens to the proposal, and then, to prevent this from being forgotten by posterity, published the speech delivered by him on that occasion? So far, therefore, as concerns worldly prosperity, that magician did his utmost in order to success; whence it is manifest that he failed not because he was not wishful, but because he was not able to do more. At the same time we admit that he defended himself with brilliant eloquence against some who imputed to him the crime of practising magical arts; which makes me wonder at his panegyrists, who, in affirming that by these arts he achieved some miracles, attempt to bring evidence contradicting his own defense of himself from the charge. Let them, however, examine whether, indeed, they are bringing true testimony, and he was guilty of pleading what he knew to be false. Those who pursue magical arts only with a view to worldly prosperity or from an accursed curiosity, and those also who, though innocent of such arts, nevertheless praise them with a dangerous admiration, I would exhort to give heed, if they be wise, and to observe how, without any such arts, the position of a shepherd was exchanged for the dignity of the kingly office by David, of whom Scripture has faithfully recorded both the sinful and the meritorious actions, in order that we might know both how to avoid offending God, and how, when He has been offended, His wrath may be appeased.

Augustine, *Letters* 138.19

1. Everyone involved was a Roman citizen. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This was his stepson. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This was part of Roman law: they were very careful to keep dowries separate from the husband’s property, and to demand not only that the husband return it, but pay interest and make up any losses that she might have incurred due to any bad management on his part. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Milesian tales seem to have been highly pornographic and loosely related stories. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)