

Eloquence as Innocence: Rhetorical Skill as Defense and Offense in Apuleius' *Apologia*

Apuleius of Madauros, accused of using magic to trick a woman into marrying him and steal her money, defended himself with an *Apologia* full of scientific facts, elaborate rhetorical plays, and literary quotations. Many scholars use the display of Apuleius' rhetorical training in the *Apologia* as an argument for his inclusion in the Second Sophistic movement (Binternagel 2008). Others have interpreted Apuleius' reliance on quotation and interpretation as a way to advertise his skill as a teacher and orator, and eventually lead the audience to Plato, the master teacher (Fletcher 2009). In general, recent scholarship views Apuleius' stylish rhetoric in the *Apologia* as primarily a scheme of promotion (whether of Apuleius himself or of some discipline he espouses). However, focusing on how his rhetoric functions outside of the speech misses the most relevant function of Apuleius' rhetoric. Throughout all of the tangents on fish and Plato, he relies on one thing to exonerate him: his eloquence.

In this paper, I trace Apuleius' claims to eloquence and his accusations of ineloquence, especially as they appear at key moments in his speech. This falls into two sections. First, I examine how Apuleius uses his eloquence defensively, promoting himself as a learned speaker and then establishing eloquence as innocence. Early in the speech, through a paraphrase of Caecilius Statius, Apuleius equates eloquence with innocence (*Apol.* 5.3), and this becomes his main strategy of defense from every accusation of the prosecution, whether the accusation pertains to his looks, his interest in fish genitals, or the enchantment of his wife. In this way, eloquence by its very presence becomes an argument of the defense.

Apuleius displays this exonerating eloquence through his ability to recite lengthy quotations, his ease in explaining philosophical concepts, and his skill in multiple languages, and

these are all skills cultivated through rhetorical training only available to the elites in his society. As Harrison notes, Apuleius' emphasis on rhetorical training reinforces the social dynamics of those in the audience by privileging and flattering those with elite training (Harrison 2000). Correspondingly, his accusers speak with what Apuleius calls rustic language. He constantly points out their stuttering, blushing, and euphemisms as indications of falsehood. Thus, in this section I will also examine the social dynamics Apuleius establishes in the *Apologia*, noting how Apuleius attempts to convince his audience to implicitly trust him because of his rhetorical style while at the same time poisoning the well against his opponents.

Second, I examine how Apuleius relies on his eloquence (his *verba*) to sway the audience, rather than using the content of his defense (the *res*). Eloquence of this type does not only persuade, it beguiles, and scholars have noticed this in the speeches of another notable apologist: Socrates (Gellrich 1994). de Romilly, while considering the curious treatment of magic in Plato's work, identifies two different types of magic: the magic of the sophists, which hides truth with illusion, and the magic of Socrates, which destroys all illusion and leaves only truth (de Romilly 1975). Using this evaluation of magic, I conclude that Apuleius relies on displaying his eloquence as an overarching strategy precisely because he knows that his eloquence is capable of creating a convincing illusion. In this way, his speech is tantamount to magic, the very charge he is attempting to refute. Although eloquence and rhetorical training are in general the mark of the Second Sophistic, in Apuleius' *Apologia*, they beguile the audience into believing that Apuleius is innocent, regardless of if that is true.

Bibliography

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