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Constructing Apuleius: The Emergence of a Literary Artist

This paper aims to be both a contribution to the history of scholarship and a stimulus to further research. In it I seek to follow some key themes in Apuleian scholarship, and to show how these themes and their treatments are necessarily affected by contemporary prejudices, which change over time as scholarship develops. In particular, I try to trace the emergence of the modern consensus that Apuleius is a careful literary artist, and that the *Metamorphoses* is a novel worthy of study and a complex and highly allusive literary text, a view which has come into being almost entirely during the twentieth century.

The few Roman verdicts on the literary quality and importance of the ancient novels are negative, usually on the grounds that these texts are too frivolous in content to join the serious canon of literature. This early marginalisation is partly revised in the Renaissance, where the allegorical interpretation of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (along with that of other novels) could be argued to confer the deep intellectual significance which seemed to be lacking on the surface, and where some at least admired Apuleius' Latinity, though it was also in the Renaissance that the then derogatory concept of 'African Latin' came into being. From the early modern period to the nineteenth century Apuleius was largely viewed as post-classical, inferior and decadent, whether or not he was also classified as 'African'.

Consequently, in the first half of the twentieth century Apuleius was widely viewed as a second-rate compiler of little literary talent or originality, even by those who did most work on his literary and narrative technique (e.g. Rudolf Helm or Ben Edwin Perry). However, since the 1960's a different consensus has emerged which sees Apuleius as a high-grade literary artist whose capacity for allusive reworking of intertexts and for narrative complexity matches that of traditionally admired 'classical' authors, and his *Metamorphoses* as a major and intensely textured work of Latin literature.

This paper looks at this development in Apuleian scholarship, especially on the *Metamorphoses*, and at its larger ideological explanations (e.g. 'canonical' prejudice against 'marginal' and 'late' authors and genres, more 'liberal' modern approaches, especially literary theory, and the search for a wider range of texts to study), and assesses the prospects for research at the start of the twenty-first century.