

CUPID RETURNS: AN ANALYSIS OF CUPID'S METAMORPHOSIS IN
APULEIUS' 'CUPID AND PSYCHE'

Matthew W. Sherry

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Approved by:

James Rives

James O'Hara

Emily Baragwanath

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ABSTRACT

Matthew W. Sherry: Cupid Returns: An Analysis of Cupid's Metamorphosis in
Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche'
(Under the direction of James Rives)

In this paper I focus on Apuleius' presentation of Cupid, arguing that Cupid rejects his traditional role and transforms into a more benevolent deity. I first analyze the way that his divine peers describe him in traditional terms: a mischievous figure who manipulates others and scorns marital fidelity. A close reading of the text shows that his actions in this story actually convey the opposite. These descriptions in fact better suit Apuleius' Venus. I then examine Cupid's "return to the wine jar" (6.22.1), a phrase that indicates a return to vice. Cupid's vice, as we learn from the traditional descriptions, is his manipulation of others. At the end of the tale, Cupid returns to this vice but in the service of a new goal: marriage to Psyche. I argue that Cupid's return marks the culmination of his transformation and that Apuleius presents Cupid as the personification of Unconditional Love.

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INTRODUCTION

In the world of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, things are rarely what they seem. From scenes such as Aristomenes' story of Socrates and the Festival of Laughter, the reader quickly learns that first impressions are often misleading. Aristomenes, the first inset narrator of the *Metamorphoses*, tells the story of his friend Socrates and their encounter with the witch Meroe (1.5–19). The two are traveling and decide to stay the night in an inn. In the middle of the night, Meroe and another witch attack Socrates, drain him of his blood, and replace his heart with a sponge. In the morning, Socrates wakes and seems to be normal, and Aristomenes believes the attack was a dream. The two men continue traveling, but when Socrates bends to take a drink from a river his previously invisible wound splits open, causing the sponge to fall out and Socrates to die. This story plays with perception and reality at the turning points in the narrative. It turns out that the first impression, almost immediately cast aside, was the truth. Although Aristomenes knows how the story ends, he gives no hint of that while relating it. The reader thus experiences it as he did, at first believing the events of the night to be real, then doubting them, and then in a surprise twist learning that they were real after all. Such is the reality of the *Metamorphoses*.

The Festival of Laughter similarly defies reader expectations. At the end of book 2, Lucius is attacked by three robbers, whom he slays. As the next book opens, Lucius is put on trial for murder. The audience at the trial constantly laughs at Lucius and, just before they announce a guilty verdict, they bring forth the bodies. When the bodies are revealed, they turn out to be wineskins. Lucius then learns that the entire affair was a prank in order to celebrate the town's annual Festival of Laughter. The three wineskins call into question the reader's initial impression

and force the reader to pay very close attention to the way Apuleius phrases his narrative. For in his narration Lucius states not that he was attacked by robbers but that he “reasonably assumed that they were robbers of the most violent kind” (*mihi potissimum non immerito latrones esse et quidem saevissimi viderentur*, 2.32.3).¹ The margin of uncertainty within such an assumption rests, for the first-time reader, on whether these robbers were “of the most violent kind.” But this assumption makes all the difference in the end when Lucius discovers that the “robbers” are so far from what they seemed that they are not even men but inanimate objects. Only the second-time reader is able to realize that the assumption truly lies in whether these “robbers” were men at all. Both the Festival of Laughter and the story of Aristomenes, and the many others like them, call the reader’s attention to the disparity between appearance and reality. In the magical world of the *Metamorphoses*, anything is possible. The reader must be attentive to what and how Apuleius writes and—what is more important—maintain a keen eye for what Apuleius, ever the master of misdirection, omits.²

The misleading power of perception is a pervasive theme throughout the novel. The inset narrator of the tale of Cupid and Psyche, an *anus* working with a band of actual robbers, articulates this theme as well as any other. For, set to the task of consoling Charite, a young woman recently kidnapped by the band and plagued by nightmares while in captivity, the *anus* explains: *Nam praeter quod diurnae quietis imagines falsae perhibentur, tunc etiam nocturnae visiones*

¹Text of Apuleius comes from Zimmerman (2012). Translations, unless noted otherwise, are from Walsh (1994),

²Much of my analysis of the tale of Cupid and Psyche is based upon an understanding that Apuleius misleads the reader. This deliberate misdirection not only colors any reader’s view of the text but is also crucial for its interpretation. I, therefore, follow Winkler (1985) and the weight he places on the differing experiences of the first-time and second-time reader. For example, despite Tatum’s (1979, 50) statement that “a reader with even a smattering of Plato would recognize that “monster” [of Apollo’s oracle (4.33)] as Cupid” (citing *Symposium* 178a–179b) and other commentators’ efforts to find subtle hints regarding the identity of Psyche’s mysterious husband, I believe that no first-time reader could predict that her husband was Cupid all along. As Winkler states, “even if the first-reader knows or can guess the solution [i.e. the husband’s identity], the Old Woman’s Tale is *constructed as a mystery about the identity of Psyche’s lover*” (93).

contrarios eventus nonnumquam pronuntiant (“For one thing, dreams in daylight hours are held to be false, and for another, even night-dreams sometimes tell of untruthful happenings,” 4.27.5). To convince Charite, and to “dissuade” (*avocabo*, 27.8) her from putting stock in dreams and visions, the old woman tells the tale of Cupid and Psyche. It should come as no surprise, then, that this tale is full of unexpected developments, a misleading prophecy, and more than a few inconsistencies.

One example of the misdirection with which Apuleius often misleads his readers is his focalization of this tale through Psyche, which prompts the reader to dwell on her actions. But are we right to do so? Psyche’s disregard of her husband’s request never to look upon his person, his subsequent departure after she disobeys this injunction, and her eventual salvation frequently form the basis of interpretations. Scholars often see Cupid’s departure as resulting from some flaw of Psyche’s that must be resolved. Kenney calls her revelation “premature,” caused by “the lust to know what she is not supposed to know and the failure to understand what she is shown and told.”³ Panayotakis describes Psyche’s desire to see Cupid as “the struggle of the soul to view divine light,” and states that Psyche first views Cupid with her mortal eyes.⁴ Rarely, however, do they explain how that flaw is resolved: if Psyche views Cupid improperly, what changes to allow her to view him properly?

The imagery of vision plays a central role in this part of the narrative. Cupid warns Psyche multiple times never to inquire into his appearance. The obstruction of sight emphasizes the incompleteness of their relationship. Psyche, unmoved by her husband’s *famulae* and noticeably

³Kenney (1990a, 183).

⁴Panayotakis (2001, 577, 579). Other scholars offer similar interpretations. Hooker (1955, 29–30) writes that Cupid’s warnings are an attempt to educate, but Psyche must go through the “purification of suffering.” Tatum (1979, 57): “When through her curiosity Psyche discovers what it was not meant to know ... she loses that *daimon* who has the power or *potestas* to bind her with the immortal gods ... but she will earn a reprieve.” Schlam (1992, 96): “Breaking the taboo is not simply another fall, but also a step toward knowledge of and reunion with the divine.” O’Brien (1998, especially 31–34), using Plato’s tripartite soul as a model, argues that Cupid and Psyche’s sisters represent knowledge and ignorance, respectively, while Psyche serves as the intermediary, guided by Cupid to “true knowledge.”

distraught by the nature of the relationship, attempts to find comfort (or, rather, companionship) in her sisters.⁵ There is great emphasis on replacing the sight of her husband with the sight of her sisters: *in vicem denegatae sacrosanctae imaginis tuae redde saltem conspectum sororum* (“allow me at least a glimpse of my sisters as consolation for your unwillingness to let me gaze on your sacred face,” 5.13.2). Psyche, therefore, attempts to fill the void enforced by Cupid, and it is this deprivation that leads to her transgression. Cupid, on the other hand, not only actively imposes this stipulation, but seemingly has no intention of lifting it. He says not “you are not ready to see me” but “never inquire into my appearance” (*Sed identidem monuit ac saepe terruit, ne quando sororum pernicioso consilio suasa de forma mariti quaerat*: “But he kept deterring her with repeated warnings from being ever induced by the baleful prompting of her sisters to discover her husband’s appearance,” 5.6.6).⁶ What room does this leave for Psyche’s growth? How can the reader expect Psyche to achieve a nonexistent (or at least unexpressed) goal? Why is the need for wholeness a fault of Psyche’s?

Although Apuleius focalizes the story through Psyche, he also gives the reader hints that attempts to read the tale as one about her development are misguided by making it very clear that Psyche’s character remains unchanged throughout the story. Psyche learns nothing from her trials (nor does she even complete them on her own) but at their conclusion succumbs to the same vice as she did before she began them: curiosity. Psyche’s first trial (6.10) is to sort through a pile of seeds, beans, and grains. Regarding the task as impossible, Psyche does not even attempt it, but then ants perform the task for her. Her second trial (6.12) is to collect wool from dangerous sheep. Psyche, however, does not intend to complete the task but to end her suffering by throwing herself

⁵It should be noted that her misery stems more from Cupid’s daily departure than from her inability to see or know him, as she only weeps during the day and never actually asks to see him.

⁶Morwood (2010, 108): “He conceals his identity from her, threatens her, reproaches her for weeping, and allows her to see her sisters in the sure knowledge that this will lead to disaster. ... Can the relationship possibly work?”

into a nearby river. The river god instructs her to gather discarded wool from nearby trees instead of trying to approach the sheep themselves. The third task (6.14–15) is to retrieve water from a lofty cliff. Psyche, paralyzed by the impossibility of the task, is aided by an eagle. Apuleius emphasizes Psyche's stagnant character during these first three trials, which all follow the same pattern: Venus orders Psyche to perform an impossible task, Psyche despairs and contemplates suicide, and a *deus ex machina* rescues the hopeless girl from her seemingly inescapable doom. The final trial (6.17–21.2) varies only slightly. This trial involves a katabasis to retrieve a box of "beauty" from Proserpina. A tower provides Psyche with very detailed instructions (so detailed that Apuleius only briefly narrates the actual implementation of them), but Psyche still fails due to her persistent curiosity. For, regardless of her actual motivations, Cupid blames her curiosity for both transgressing his stipulation and opening Venus' box in the underworld. Cupid's address to Psyche when he comes to her rescue calls the reader's attention to the unchanging nature of her fault when he tells her *rursum perieras, misella, simili curiositate* ("Poor, dear Psyche ... see how as before your curiosity might have been your undoing," 6.21.4).

Apuleius thus makes it clear that Psyche does not undergo any real change or development: she is the same at the end of her trials as she was at the beginning.⁷ What, then, drives the tale's plot? If Psyche does not change, Cupid must. Instead of viewing their flawed relationship as the circumstance for Psyche's inevitable and necessary failure, I see it as an intermediate stage in the transformation of Cupid. Despite Psyche's role as protagonist, Cupid's actions are what drive the plot. But, while the consequences of Cupid's presence are manifested largely through Psyche's focalization, his motivations are pointedly veiled and often inconsistent. Rather than focusing on Psyche's mistake, in this paper I focus on Apuleius'

⁷Moreschini (2015, 113–114) argues that Psyche's inability to complete her tasks reflects Venus' inability to be appeased. "For this reason Psyche needs to be saved ... The only possibility of fleeing from the domination of fortune and irrationality, which dominate this world, is the gratuitous intervention of the divinity."

presentation of Cupid. At first glance, Apuleius presents the same winged miscreant who frequents Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Vergil's *Aeneid*, but, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that Apuleius' Cupid is at odds with the traditional character. I argue that Apuleius' Cupid rejects this traditional role and transforms into a much more benevolent deity. This reformed Cupid is the crux of the story.

I begin with an examination of the way that Cupid's divine peers consistently describe him as the traditional Cupid: a mischievous figure who manipulates others and has no concern for marital fidelity. A close reading of the text shows that his actions in this story convey the opposite. The descriptions of the manipulative Cupid in fact better suit Apuleius' Venus, who throughout the tale usurps her son's abilities. I then focus on a phrase that Apuleius uses at a key juncture in the narrative, one of the very few points in which he actually focalizes the narrative through Cupid. After he rescues Psyche, Cupid "returns to the wine jar" (*ad armillum redit*, 6.22.1). The phrase *ad armillum* indicates a return to vice. Cupid's vice, as we learn from the descriptions of Venus and Jupiter, is his manipulation of the desires of others. At the conclusion of the tale, Cupid at last returns to this vice but in the service of an entirely new goal: marriage to Psyche. Lastly, I consider the significance of Cupid's transformation for our overall understanding of this tale.

I. THE TRADITIONAL CUPID

Apuleius focalizes the tale almost entirely through Psyche, while Cupid acts primarily behind the scenes. The explicit mentions of Cupid occur mainly in descriptions provided by or presented through the perspective of other characters. The reader, therefore, must be careful in accepting these descriptions as accurate. The first is Cupid's entrance into the tale:

Et vocat confestim puerum suum pinnatum illum et satis temerarium, qui malis suis moribus contempta disciplina publica, flammis et sagittis armatus, per alienas domos nocte discurrens et omnium matrimonia corrumpens, impune committit tanta flagitia et nihil prorsus boni facit.

She at once summoned her son, that winged, most indiscreet youth whose own bad habits show his disregard for public morality. He goes rampaging through people's houses at night armed with his torch and arrows, undermining the marriages of all. He gets away scot-free with this disgraceful behavior, and nothing that he does is worthwhile.

4.30.4

Cupid's introduction to the tale casts him as a young boy armed with arrows who holds no regard for marriage. Following traditional descriptions, the narrator emphasizes his wings, arrows, and torch, which are Cupid's standard attributes.⁸ Although the narrator gives this description, Van Mal-Maeder and Zimmerman note that the perspective may be Venus'.⁹ Supporting this assertion is Cupid's description as a *puer*, since Venus is the only character to label Cupid as such.¹⁰

⁸Kenney (1990b, 123–124) lists many examples, especially from Hellenistic and Augustan poetry, which describe Cupid similarly. Mattiacci (1998) analyzes in more depth a number of descriptions of Cupid in the tale, noting references and allusions to especially Hellenistic and elegiac poetry. Cf. also Spencer (1932 a, b, and c), who outlines the depictions of Eros/Cupid in the tradition more generally.

⁹Van Mal-Maeder and Zimmerman (1998, 99).

¹⁰Venus directly refers to Cupid as a *puer* at 5.28.7 and 5.29.3. At 5.29.1, the narrator again refers to Cupid as a *puer*, but, given the situation, this can also be described as Venus' perspective. At 5.31.4, Ceres questions Venus' perspective asking "just because he carries his years well, does he strike you as a perpetual Peter Pan" (*an, quod aetatem portat bellule, puer tibi semper videtur*). Venus, therefore, is unable to comprehend the age of her son and,

Kenney notes that the model for Venus' recruitment of Cupid is *Aeneid* 1.657–684, which was itself modeled on *Argonautica* 3.111–166, but that it shares more with Apollonius' version than Vergil's.¹¹ Vergil's Cupid impersonates the *puer* Ascanius in order to infect Dido with a love for Aeneas. Apollonius introduces Eros as a very young child cheating at a game of knucklebones against Ganymede (3.129–130). So that he will bewitch Medea, Aphrodite then bribes Eros with an old toy of Zeus. Apuleius models Cupid's introduction on these scenes to firmly ground the reader's expectation in the tradition. By describing him in this way, Apuleius marks his Cupid as the young, mischievous Cupid (or Eros) of the Hellenistic period, rather than Hesiod's old, primordial deity. Most importantly, both Apollonius' Eros and Vergil's Cupid act at the behest of Aphrodite/Venus. The connections to Apollonius and Vergil encourage the reader to expect Cupid to be a young, powerful god who is loyal to his mother.¹²

At the end of the tale, Jupiter describes Cupid with a similar focus on arrows and contempt for marriage:

‘Licet tu,’ inquit ‘domine fili, numquam mihi concessu deum decretum servaris honorem, sed istud pectus meum, quo leges elementorum et vices siderum disponuntur, convulneraris assiduis ictibus, crebrisque terrenae libidinis foedaveris casibus, contraque leges et ipsam Iuliam disciplinamque publicam turpibus adulteriis existimationem famamque meam laeseris, in serpentes, in ignes, in feras, in aves, et gregalia pecua serenos vultus meos sordide reformando, at tamen modestiae meae memor quodque inter istas meas manus creveris, cuncta perficiam, dum tamen scias aemulos tuos cavere, ac si qua nunc in terris

through his actions' association with his youth, still assumes that they are mischievous. The uncertainty of Cupid's age is emphasized elsewhere in the tale. For example, Psyche's lies concerning the appearance of her husband disagree with each other in age: the first lie describes him as an attractive *iuvenis* (5.8.4), while the second as a middle-aged man (5.15.4). Similarly, Jupiter refers to Cupid as an *adolecentem*, whose *primae iuventutis caloratos impetus* and *luxuria puerilis* must be curtailed by marriage (6.23.2–3). In short succession, Jupiter refers to Cupid as an *adulescens*, *iuvenis*, and *puer*. Venus, although unable to comprehend the age of her son, is ironically insecure about her own age. She criticizes Cupid for allegedly thinking that she was too old to conceive (5.29.4), she despises the notion of being called a grandmother (6.9.4–5), and she presents the idea that she has “consumed” her beauty (6.16.4–5).

¹¹Kenney (1990b, 123).

¹²Apollo's oracle, which describes Psyche's husband as “a fierce, barbaric, snake-like monster” (*saevum atque ferum vipereumque malum*, 4.33.1) further implies that Cupid follows his mother's instructions and forces Psyche to love the most wretched of mankind (4.30.3). It is only in retrospect, however, that the reader learns this prophecy refers to Cupid.

puella praepollet pulchritudine, praesentis beneficii vicem per eam mihi repensare te debere.’

And then [Jupiter] said to him: ‘Honored son, you have never shown me the deference granted me by the gods’ decree. You keep piercing this heart of mine, which regulates the elements and orders the changing motion of the stars, with countless wounds. You have blackened it with repeated impulses of earthly lust, damaging my prestige and reputation by involving me in despicable adulteries which contravene the laws—the *lex Iulia* itself—and public order. You have transformed my smiling countenance into grisly shapes of snakes, fires, beasts, birds, and cattle. Yet in spite of all of this, I shall observe my usual moderation, recalling that you were reared in these arms of mine. So I will comply with all that you ask, as long as you know how to cope with your rivals in love; and if at this moment there is on earth any girl of outstanding beauty, as long as you can recompense me with her.’

6.22.3–5

Apuleius lends these two descriptions (4.30.4 and 6.22.3–5) particular emphasis by using them to bookend the narrative, coloring the reader’s view of Cupid at the beginning and end of the tale.

These portrayals of Cupid follow the tradition by characterizing him as one who bears no regard for public morals or the sanctity of marriage and constantly torments others with his arrows, presenting a familiar Cupid and directing reader expectations.

Yet, when we compare these descriptions to Cupid’s actions in the story, we notice that they both offer misleading information. The narrator’s description relates that Cupid spends his nights “rampaging through people’s houses” (*per alienas domos nocte discurrens*, 4.30.4), but, at least after he falls for Psyche, Cupid always spends his nights in his own house with her. Jupiter claims that Cupid has been responsible for his adulterous encounters, but his catalogue of transformations immediately reminds any informed reader of the Jupiter of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, who transforms of his own volition into various animals (or other gods) to rape unsuspecting maidens such as Callisto and Europa.¹³ It is possible for Jupiter to blame Cupid as the personification of desire as a natural force, but, to emphasize the absurdity of this idea,

¹³The list, as Zimmerman et al. (2004, 533) note, specifically references the catalogue of Jupiter’s transformations on Arachne’s tapestry (Ovid, *Met.* 6.103–114).

Apuleius' Jupiter concludes his speech by asking Cupid to repay his help by sending him a pretty girl: the very behavior he claims to critique. Jupiter, therefore, undermines his characterization of Cupid as one who forces love onto the unwilling, and, instead, assumes that role himself.

Apollo's oracle (once the reader learns the husband's identity) describes Cupid as a snaky monster, a characterization repeated by the warnings of the sisters, but this directly contradicts Psyche's realization that Cupid is "of all beasts the gentlest and sweetest" (*ferarum mitissimam dulcissimamque bestiam*, 5.22.2). Most importantly, both the narrator and Jupiter focus on the pervasiveness of Cupid's arrows and his disregard for marriage.¹⁴ Throughout the tale, however, he never fires a single arrow.¹⁵ The most obvious example is Cupid's refusal of Venus' order to punish Psyche *per tuae sagittae dulcia vulnera* ("by the sweet wounds which your darts inflict," 4.31.1).¹⁶

¹⁴Venus again refers to his remorseless use of his arrows at 5.30.1: *maiores tuos irreverenter pulsasti totiens* ("insolently striking your elders again and again" [my translation]).

¹⁵While Apollonius' Eros wields his traditional weapon, Vergil's Cupid also avoids his bow and arrow. In the *Aeneid*, Cupid infects Dido by sitting upon her lap (1.719–722).

¹⁶Throughout Venus' command she consistently expresses personal agency and instrumental means through *per* and an accusative, but interrupts the prepositional phrase (*Per ego te ... per flammae istius mellitus uredines*, 4.31.1). This perhaps emphasizes the disconnect between Venus' orders and Cupid's execution and Venus's projection of her volition into Cupid's actions, which turn out to be fruitless.

II. APULEIUS' CUPID

The contradictions between the descriptions of Cupid and his actions within the tale force the reader to examine the latter more closely. What does Apuleius' Cupid actually do? The first act that Cupid explicitly performs is the abandonment of Psyche after she illicitly beholds him. Cupid then retreats to his mother's home, only to return at the end of the tale in order to rescue and marry the woman he previously abandoned. Only a second-time reader is aware that Psyche's mysterious husband has been Cupid all along, as he initially masks his identity. Apuleius uses this anonymity to continue the charade that his Cupid is one with the traditional Cupid.

It is clear to the second-time reader, however, that, unlike his counterparts in Apollonius and Vergil, Apuleius' Cupid disregards his mother's instructions from the start and uses his "servant" (*famulo*, 5.6.8) Zephyr to take Psyche for himself.¹⁷ We should pause and consider in more detail this odd means of capture. Kenney discounts it, citing other stories in which winds sweep away women.¹⁸ Similarly, Walsh explains Cupid's use of Zephyr as an example of the inclusion of folklore.¹⁹ For a first-time reader, such allusions and folk tales could be sufficient. A second-time reader, however, may wonder why Cupid so noticeably avoids his traditional means

¹⁷It is important that when Psyche is wounded by Cupid's arrow, the wound is self-inflicted (*sic ignara Psyche sponte in Amoris incidit amorem*: "So all unknowing and without prompting Psyche fell in love with Love," 5.23.3). When Cupid wakes her with his arrow, the wound is an "innocuous prick" (*innoxio punctulo*, 6.21.3). Zimmerman et al. (2004, 526) write "*innoxio* makes it clear that the usual power of the arrow is not operating." In contrast to Kenney (1990b, 218), who sees the implication of the harmless arrow to be that "Psyche is now awakened to a true perception of Love," I would argue that the harmlessness of the arrow shows that the "damage" has already been done. After Psyche fell in love through the self-inflicted wound, what would the second wound accomplish?

¹⁸Kenney (1990b, 136).

¹⁹Walsh (1970, 203): "The Zephyr or west wind performs this service. This is so clearly a basic folklore theme that it is surprising that no trace of it has been found in the numerous collected versions of our tale."

of tampering with the desire of others. His unexpected behavior suggests that his methods are significant, not merely a literary allusion or a vestige of folklore. Furthermore, there is a notable difference between Ovid's Boreas (*Met.* 7.702–710) and Apuleius' Zephyr: Boreas takes Orithyia for himself. That simple distinction suggests there is something more at play.

Twice in Zephyr's transport of Psyche and her sisters, Apuleius describes the wind as a *spiritus* (4.35.4, 5.16.1).²⁰ As commentators have noted, this word and the other terms for "soul" are on one level puns on Psyche's name,²¹ but the fact that Apuleius uses each in very different contexts suggests that he also had a more specific purpose in mind. Kenney combines the notions contained within *spiritus* and *anima* as the equivalent to one's ψυχή, and opposes them to the *animus*, or appetite (θυμός).²² But there is a great difference between the uses of *anima* and *spiritus* within the tale. What is undoubtedly of no surprise, Apuleius uses *anima* to refer to Psyche almost exclusively.²³ In three of the five usages, Psyche's *anima* is described as something needing assistance (*Psychoe animam gaudio recrea*: "rejuvenate the soul of your Psyche," 5.13.4; *miserandae Psychoe animae ... subsiste*: "lend aid to this soul of Psyche which is deserving of pity," 6.2.5; *Nec Providentiae bonae graves oculos innocentis animae latuit aerumna*: "But the privations of this innocent soul did not escape the steady gaze of benevolent Providence,"

²⁰*Spiritus* is also used to describe the wind that soothes the carnivorous sheep of Psyche's second task (6.14.4).

²¹*Spiritus* is the portion of the soul associated with breath, so it is the perfect choice to describe Zephyr (*OLD* s.v. *spiritus* 1, 4, 8).

²²Kenney (1990a, 182–183)

²³Of the five uses, the exception, in which it refers to the sisters, occurs at 5.7.6 (*afflictas animas ... recreate*: "gladden your hearts that were troubled"), but this usage still conforms to the characteristics discussed below.

6.15.1).²⁴ If we view Psyche's name allegorically, this motif of an *anima* requiring salvation interestingly foreshadows the outcome of the tale.

Unlike *anima*, however, *spiritus* is often associated with Cupid and possesses more agency or denotes the means by which something happens.²⁵ Along with Zephyr, Apuleius uses *spiritus* to describe Cupid's other disembodied *famulae* (5.3.3). The tower's warning to Psyche also illuminates a significant aspect of one's *spiritus*: *Nam si spiritus corpore tuo semel fuerit seiugatus, ibis quidem profecto ad imum Tartarum, sed inde nullo pacto redire poteris* ("Once your spirit is sundered from your body, you will certainly descend to the depths of Tartarus without the possibility of a return journey," 6.17.4). The tower describes a separation between the body and *spiritus* in death, but the separated *spiritus* still retains the objective of the once living body. A *spiritus* is, therefore, one's essence or life force, which is distinct from one's physical body,²⁶ but still maintains the will. The *spiritus* of Cupid's *famuli* are accordingly not just a pun on Psyche's name, but the active agents carrying out the will of Cupid. During the day, although Cupid is away in body, he is present in spirit, a clear indication of his benevolent intentions. Not only does Cupid forego his previous methods, opting to use means that are certainly less violent, but he also acquires a concern for the consequences of his actions. The Cupid of the tradition acts without regard for his consequences, as the fates of Apollonius' Medea and Vergil's Dido suggest. But no longer does Apuleius' Cupid provoke tragic outcomes, as he acts with an unprecedented care for Psyche's wellbeing. Cupid uses his *famuli*, as extensions of his own will, to ensure, although in a

²⁴The lone exception occurs at 5.6.9, in which Psyche refers to her husband as her *dulcis anima*. Here, Psyche asks her husband to allow her to see her sisters.

²⁵The exceptions to this occur when Psyche's *spiritus* is described (*Quid spiritum vestrum, qui magis meus est ... fatigatis*: "Why do you weary your spirit, which is rather mine," 4.34.3; *te ... diligo aequae ut meum spiritum*: "I love and cherish you ... as much as my own spirit," 5.6.7).

²⁶This illuminates a distinction between one's *spiritus* and *animus*. The *animus* is often used in association with the body (e.g. *et corporis et animi alioquin infirma*: "enfeebled in both body and mind," 5.22.1).

way that is ultimately insufficient, that Psyche is fed, bathed, entertained, and even accompanied in his own absence.

Apuleius provides another indication that Cupid is much more benevolent than the traditional descriptions offered by Jupiter and Venus suggest shortly before the end of this episode. After Psyche views her husband and he abandons her, a tern reports his actions to Venus. The bird goes on to describe the state of the world resulting from Cupid's time spent with Psyche: *non voluptas ulla, non gratia, non lepos, sed incompta et agrestia et horrida cuncta sint, non nuptiae coniugales, non amicitiae sociales, non liberum caritates, sed <infimarum sordium> enormis eluvies et squalentium foederum insuave fastidium* ("pleasure and favor and elegance had departed from the world; all was unkempt, rustic, uncouth. There were no weddings, no camaraderie between friends, none of the love which children inspire; all was a scene of boundless squalor, of unsavory tedium in sordid alliances," 5.28.5). Given the descriptions of Cupid as a mischievous miscreant, one would expect a world without Cupid simply to be free of adultery, or at least of a focus on sexual desire. But, instead, the world the tern describes is one without any sort of social harmony. The world lacks sexual desire, but also marital love, parental love, and friendship. Cupid's contribution to society, therefore, is any conceivable understanding of love, not just savage desire, his traditional association.

III. APULEIUS' VENUS

It is significant, however, that the text blames this world without love not only on Cupid but on Venus as well, since both had abandoned their posts (*ille quidem montano scortatu, tu vero marino natatu secesseritis*: “you both have withdrawn, he by whoring in the mountains, you by swimming in the sea” [my translation], 5.28.4). This accusation implies that Venus is just as responsible for the presence of love within the world as Cupid. Shortly afterwards, Ceres and Juno also conflate the two deities:

‘Mater autem tu et praeterea cordata mulier filii tui lusus semper explorabis curiose, et in eo luxuriam culpabis et amores revinces, et tuas artes tuasque delicias in formoso filio reprehendes? Quis autem te deum, quis hominum patietur passim cupidines populis disseminantem, cum tuae domus amores amare coerceas et vitiorum muliebrium publicam praecludas officinam?’

‘You are a mother, and a sensible one at that. Are you always going to pry nosily into your son’s diversions, and condemn his wonton ways, censure his love life, and vilify your own skills and pleasures as practiced by your handsome son? What god or what person on earth will bear with your scattering sensual pleasures throughout the world, when you sourly refuse to allow love-liaisons in your own house, and you close down the manufacture of women’s weaknesses which is made available to all?’

5.31.5–6

Ceres and Juno accuse Venus of chastising Cupid for condemning in him her own vices. They continue to argue that neither mortals nor immortals will tolerate her spreading of desire, while she at the same time imposes constraint on her son. This rebuke reveals that Cupid and Venus share *artes* and *delicias*. The conflation of the two is most apparent in the description of Venus sowing *cupidines*. The wordplay intertwines Cupid’s name with the effect of Venus’ power. While Venus uses Cupid as an intermediary with Psyche or Vergil’s Dido, we see in the wider literary tradition that she can also directly affect others, as Aphrodite forces Euripides’ Phaedra to desire

Hippolytus. Like her son, therefore, Venus manipulates the desires of others. Given the way that Apuleius modifies the traditional conception of Cupid, we must consider in more detail his depiction of Venus.

It is first worth noting that Venus, along with Cupid and in contrast to Psyche, is one of the main agents of the story's plot, although the results of her actions are often at odds with her intentions. For example, as the second-time reader knows, it is Venus who initially kindles the desire for Psyche within Cupid, although her aim is to force upon Psyche an undesirable spouse (*verbis quoque insuper stimulat et perducit ad illam civitatem et Psychen ... coram ostendit*: "he was further roused by his mother's words. She took him along to that city and showed him Psyche in the flesh," 4.30.5). Venus similarly (and at times inadvertently) directs the course of Cupid and Psyche's relationship. Why does Cupid insist on his anonymity? The purpose of the anonymity lies in the aftermath of his discovery. After Cupid abandons Psyche, Venus learns of their affair: *Tunc avis ... Venerem lavantem natantemque propter assistens, indicat adustum filium eius ... iacere* ("But then a bird, sitting beside Venus as she swam and bathed, told her that her son lied burned" [my translation], 5.28.2–3). Apuleius emphasizes the temporal, and therefore causal, relationship between Cupid's departure and Venus' revelation through *tunc*: the tern only learns of the affair after Psyche learns of the identity of her husband. After the tern informs Venus, the goddess immediately redoubles her efforts to find Psyche and enlists the help of Mercury. Walsh correctly writes that Venus' recruitment of Mercury has an insignificant effect on the plot,²⁷ but that does not mean it is merely an inconsistency resulting from the mixing of myth and folklore. Instead, by incorporating Venus' extra efforts to find Psyche (and her subsequent torture), Apuleius uses Venus to hint at the motivations of Cupid, which he never directly describes. The

²⁷Walsh (1970, 211).

purpose of Cupid's anonymity is to prevent Venus from learning of their relationship in an effort, albeit a flawed one, to protect Psyche.²⁸

Second, we may note the way that Apuleius uses Venus to emphasize the sexual nature of the early stages of Cupid and Psyche's relationship. Cupid's anonymity during his nights spent with Psyche forces the relationship to be purely physical, a dynamic that manifests as meeting in *Veneris proeliis* ("the battles of Venus" [my translation], 5.21.5). This phrasing again connects Cupid's anonymity to Venus, but it also connects Venus to sexual desire. Contrary to the implications of Cupid's name, in the tale itself Venus has a much stronger association with sexual desire and its effect on others than does her son. Venus' sexual acts of kissing her son and offering kisses as a reward for the whereabouts of Psyche are unnecessarily detailed and explicit.²⁹ In fact, in Mercury's heraldic speech, Apuleius alludes to a similar scene in Moschus in which Aphrodite notifies the public that Eros is on the run and also offers kisses as a reward:

Ἄ Κύπρις τὸν Ἔρωτα τὸν νύκτα μακρὸν ἐβώστρει·
ὅστις ἐνὶ τρίδοισι πλανώμενον εἶδεν Ἔρωτα,
δραπετίδας ἐμός ἐστιν· ὁ μανύσας γέρας ἐξεῖ.
μισθός τοι τὸ φίλημα τὸ Κύπριδος· ἦν δ' ἀγάγης νιν,
οὐ γυμνὸν τὸ φίλημα, τὸ δ', ὧ ζένε, καὶ πλέον ἐξεῖς."

Cypris made public proclamation about her son Eros: "If anyone has seen Eros loitering on street corners, he is a runaway from me, and anyone giving information about him shall have a reward. The reward shall be a kiss from Cypris; but if you bring him along with you, my friend, you shall have more than just a bare kiss.

Moschus 1.1–5³⁰

'si quis a fuga retrahere vel occultam demonstrare poterit fugitivam regis filiam, Veneris ancillam, nomine Psychen, conveniat retro metas Murtias Mercurium praedicatorum,

²⁸Rambaux (1985, 190, 197) sees the purpose of Cupid's anonymity as his desire to avoid detection by his mother and the other gods. Cf. Schlam (1992, 87, 96).

²⁹4.31.4: *osculis hiantibus filium diu ac pressule saviata, proximas oras reflui litoris petit* ("she kissed her son long and hungrily with parted lips"). Venus' reward (6.8.2–3) is quoted below.

³⁰Text and translation of Moschus are from Hopkinson (2015). Cf. Meleager 37 = *AP* 5.177, which also casts Eros as a runaway slave, while alluding to Moschus.

accepturus indicivae nomine ab ipsa Venere septem savia suavia et unum blandientis
adpulsu linguae longe mellitum.’

‘If anyone can retrieve from her flight the runaway daughter of the king, the maidservant of Venus called Psyche, or indicate her hidden whereabouts, he should meet the herald Mercury behind the *metae Murciae*. Whoever does so will obtain as reward from Venus herself seven sweet kisses and a particularly honeyed one imparted with the thrust of her caressing tongue.’

6.8.2–3

Apuleius alludes to and escalates Moschus’ euphemistic reward. Instead of “more than just a bare kiss,” Apuleius’ Venus promises “seven sweet kisses and a particularly honeyed one imparted with the thrust of her caressing tongue.” By building on Moschus’ already sexually charged reward and defining “more,” Apuleius casts Venus as explicitly sexual. Furthermore, as Zimmerman et al. note, the *metae Murtiae*, where Venus’ informer will claim his reward, were associated with prostitutes.³¹ Most importantly, as stated above, it is Venus who initially inflames the passions of Cupid first with words and then by showing her to him (4.30.5).³² Venus, therefore, takes on the traditional role that Cupid rejects, and inspires passion, becoming the true embodiment of sexual desire.

After Cupid departs, both he and Psyche fall further into the dominion of Venus, but, at this point, Venus unleashes *Sobrietas* upon them (5.30.3–6). The pendulum now swings to the opposite extreme and instead of spending their nights in a physical embrace, they spend them in abstinence: *sic ergo distentis et sub uno tecto separatis amatoribus taetra nox exanclata* (“So the lovers though

³¹Zimmerman et al. (2004, 417). The inconsistency of including a Roman landmark in a story supposedly set in Greece acts to emphasize Venus’ unnecessarily sexual reward.

³²Contrary to Panayotakis (2001, 577), I would argue that the significance of the first mention of Psyche’s name lies not in Cupid’s first glimpse of her, but in Venus’ first mention of her, as Venus’ words, not Cupid’s sight, are emphasized. Venus’ inflaming of Cupid reflects a trend in the power of words. Psyche frequently manipulates her husband with her words, whether seductive (*Vi ac potestate venerii susurrus succubuit maritus et cuncta se facturum sponndit*: “Her husband unwillingly gave way before the forceful pressure of these impassioned whispers, and promised to do all she asked,” 5.6.10) or threatening (*illa precibus et dum se morituram comminatur extorquet a marito cupitis adnuat*: “Psyche with prayers and threats of her impending death forced her husband to yield to her longing,” 5.6.4).

under one roof were kept apart from each other, and were made to endure a wretched night,” 6.11.3). In this way, Venus takes on another of Cupid’s traditional roles: to repel love. As Ovid writes, Cupid possesses two types of arrow: one that inspires love and one that puts love to flight (*fugat hoc, facit illud amorem*: “one puts to flight, the other kindles the flame of love,” *Met.* 1.469).³³ Venus’ use of Cupid’s traditional abilities and the manipulation of his desires emphasize his newfound role as a lover. Traditionally, Cupid only forces desire on others but never experiences such feelings himself. Now, however, Cupid loves. This love is what drives him to alter drastically the use of his abilities.

Venus enlists the help of *Sobrietas* to “empty his quiver, immobilize his arrows, unstring his bow, [and] extinguish his torch” (*pharetram explicet et sagittas dearmet, arcum enodet, taedam deflammet*, 5.30.5). This heavy emphasis on the arms of Cupid further stresses the fact that he is not actually using them. At the conclusion of the tale, Cupid escapes from his mother’s confinement to rescue Psyche and then flies to heaven to plead his case to Jupiter. It is at this crucial juncture that Cupid “returns to the wine jar” (*ad armillum redit*, 6.22.1). Apuleius explicitly describes Cupid as pleading his case to Jupiter because he “feared the sudden arrival of his mother’s sobering presence” (*matris suae repentinam sobrietatem pertimescens*, 6.22.1). In turning to Jupiter, therefore, Cupid at last rejects his mother’s looming presence (and also her usurpation of his own abilities) and shines a light on the previously illicit affair.

³³Text and translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* are from Miller (1977). Ceres and Juno also call attention to this ability in their tongue-in-cheek rebuke of Venus (5.31.6). Venus’ usurpation of Cupid’s role is perhaps emphasized in her claim to find another to do his job (5.29.5).

IV. CUPID RETURNS

Cupid's transformation culminates at his "return to the wine-jar" (*ad armillum redit*, 6.22.1). But what does this phrase mean? The only extant use of *ad armillum* outside of Apuleius occurs in the satires of Lucilius: *anus rursus ad armillum* ("back goes the old woman to the wine-pot," Lucilius 767 Marx = 832 Warmington).³⁴ Warmington, in his Loeb volume of Lucilius, points to one of Phaedrus' fables, titled *anus ad amphoram* (3.1), as an interesting parallel. In this fable, an old woman stumbles upon an empty amphora still smelling of its former contents, Falernian wine. Eagerly sniffing, the old woman comments on how good the wine must have been. The vague concluding line (*hoc quo pertineat dicet qui me noverit*: "Anyone who knows me will tell you what this refers to," 3.1.7)³⁵ does little to clarify the meaning of the fable, but, at the very least, there is a strong association with alcohol. Warmington concludes that the phrase *ad armillum* is used as a jeer "at the man who falls back again and again into besetting sin as an old hag goes back to her tippling."³⁶ This phrase, therefore, implies a return to one's vice.

In the context of Cupid and Psyche, this rare expression is frequently translated, in one form or another, as "reverted to type."³⁷ Kenney, for example, asserts that "[i]t can only be taken as meaning that the real Cupid is back and that all his behavior in the meantime has been out of

³⁴*TLL* 2.0.616.59f.

³⁵Text and translation of Phaedrus are from Perry (1965).

³⁶Warmington (1938, 269 n. a).

³⁷So Kenney (1990b, 113). Walsh (1994, 112) translates it as "reverted to his former role," Relihan (2009, 48) as "back to his old tricks," and Zimmerman et al. (2004, 529) as "returned to his old ways."

character.”³⁸ Penwill, in contrast, offers a more subtle reading by comparing this scene to the similar expression in the inset narrative of the miller’s wife (*ad armillum revertit*, 9.29.1) and concludes that it does not describe a change in character, but rather a recovery after a “temporary setback.”³⁹ I, however, find Penwill’s analysis also to be incomplete. For, while he correctly argues that the miller’s wife undergoes no change in character, the following clarification (*et ad familiares feminarum artes accenditur*: “and was fired to have recourse to practices naturally favored by women”) suggests that her return *ad armillum* refers not to a recovery after a setback but a return to her typical practices. The similarly phrased return of Cupid, who as I have suggested has undergone a change in character, must also refer to his practices, since a description of his actions also follows his return.

Unlike Kenney, who views Cupid’s character as oscillating between Amor Uranius and Amor Vulgaris (Amor I and Amor II, respectively),⁴⁰ and Morwood, who sees Cupid’s progression as an emotional education through which he learns “to understand and accept human weakness,”⁴¹ I see Cupid’s progression as a transformation from the mischievous boy to a more mature, benevolent deity. His transformation begins with his first sight of Psyche, since it is at that point, as the second-time reader realizes, that he starts to distance himself from the expected stereotype. Rather than obeying the commands of his mother, as does the Eros/Cupid of Apollonius and Vergil, or even using his traditional weapons to cause Psyche to fall in love with him, he works through ministers both to take her for himself and to protect her as best as he knows how. Apuleius thus portrays a Cupid who rejects his traditional role of meddling in the

³⁸Kenney (1990a, 195). Moreschini (1994, 238) understands the phrase to reflect Cupid’s recovery from his injuries.

³⁹Penwill (1998, 173). The setbacks to which he refers are the burn and Venus confining him to his room; “but now [Cupid] has recovered.”

⁴⁰Kenney (1990a).

⁴¹Morwood (2010, 114).

desires of others. Cupid's return *ad armillum* marks both the culmination of his transformation and the recovery of this role, the return to his vice, but to a different end.

Cupid, returning to form, rejects his mother's control and reclaims his "arms"⁴² (i.e. his abilities). But, most importantly, Cupid returns to his vice. As is clear from the two extremes imposed by Venus upon the relationship of Cupid and Psyche, purely physical sexuality and enforced separation, Cupid's vice is not merely imposing sexual desire on others, but manipulating the will of others more broadly. His abilities are not limited to inspiring one emotion, but have a full spectrum of effects. Zimmerman et al. write that "the point [of *ad armillum*] is surely that Cupid is returning to his familiar old ways in manipulating the higher gods to his own erotic purposes, continuing as in his rescue of Psyche to abandon his previous uncharacteristic inaction."⁴³ The meaning, however, goes further than this. Throughout the tale, Cupid has been manipulated by others: Psyche convinces him to allow her to see her sisters and Venus, although inadvertently, enflames his passion for Psyche. She motivates him at first to take part in the relationship in secret and then keeps them apart.⁴⁴ When Cupid returns *ad armillum*, however, after the recurrent slander of his character, he at last does what he has repeatedly been said to do: he manipulates another's will. But this is not a full return to his former ways. We have seen that, in addition to his use of arrows, another key element in Cupid's traditional stereotype was his disregard for marriage. It is clear from his request of Jupiter, however, that Cupid has learned to commit.

⁴²The pun on *arma* implied in *armillum* is clear from the manuscript reading *armilem*, which must be a diminutive of *arma*. Another example of witty word play, as Zimmerman et al. (2004, 530), is the contrast between the literal meanings of *armillum* and *sobrietas*.

⁴³Zimmerman et al. (2004, 529). James (1998, 45) argues the opposite: "Jupiter does all the talking, indicating perhaps that Cupid really has reverted to type ... no longer being the active mover in a fantasy and myth of his own."

⁴⁴This reversal of manipulation is emphasized by Jupiter's warning to "cope with your rivals" (*scias aemulos tuos cavere*, 6.22.5).

It is significant that this is the point in which the final traditional description of Cupid occurs (6.22.3–5, quoted above). Cupid resumes the persona of his traditional self, one who manipulates the desires of others, in order to manipulate the desire of Jupiter.⁴⁵ Jupiter, therefore, “forces” Cupid to marry:

‘Dei conscripti Musarum albo, adulescentem istum quod manibus meis alumnatus sim profecto scitis omnes. Cuius primae iuventutis caloratos impetus freno quodam coercendos existimavi. Sat est cotidianis eum fabulis ob adulteria cunctasque corruptelas infamatum. Tollenda est omnis occasio, et luxuria puerilis nuptialibus pedicis alliganda.’

‘You gods whose names are inscribed on the register of the Muses, you all surely know this young fellow who was reared by my own hands. I have decided that the hot-headed impulses of his early youth need to be reined in; he has been the subject of enough notoriety in day-to-day gossip on account of his adulteries and manner of improprieties. We must deprive him of all opportunities; his juvenile behavior must be shackled with the chains of marriage.’

6.23.2–3

Jupiter’s use of *existimavi*, the passive periphrastic (*coercendos*, *tollenda*, *alliganda*), and the shackle imagery (*nuptialibus pedicis*) demonstrates that he believes this course of action is not only his own decision, but also a necessary hindrance to prevent Cupid from continuing to torment the other gods. But this is exactly what Cupid wants. By manipulating Jupiter to issue a decree forcing Cupid to be with Psyche, Cupid has arranged things in such a way that Venus is now powerless to intervene.⁴⁶

The phrase *ad armillum*, therefore, bears a multifaceted meaning. On the surface, it carries the connotation of a return to one’s vice, in the same way as Lucilius’ *anus* returns to her alcoholism. Cupid’s return *ad armillum* does indeed mark a return to his vice of manipulating the desires of others, but he now directs it to a very different end. Just as Cupid’s actions noticeably

⁴⁵It is interesting that the tool consistently used to manipulate others is speech.

⁴⁶Harrison (2006, 173) writes that Jupiter was “effectively blackmailed” by Cupid, but it is significant that Apuleius omits what Cupid actually says to the father of the gods. The reader is not meant to know how Cupid, now supposedly “back to his old tricks,” manipulates Jupiter: here, as elsewhere, Cupid’s actions are intentionally veiled.

differ from the perceptions of the other characters, Apuleius uses *ad armillum*, and its negative associations, as another example of misdirection. The negative connotation of *ad armillum* causes the reader to expect negative behavior (i.e. the return of the traditional Cupid), just as Kenney interprets it to mean the return of Amor II.⁴⁷ The pun on *arma* implied in *armillum*, however, calls the reader back to the disparity between Cupid's reputation and his actions. Throughout the tale, other deities consistently mention his use of a bow, his traditional attribute, but, when he finally returns to his vice, Cupid solves his dilemma by other means. The result of Cupid's return *ad armillum* similarly defies reader expectation. Cupid's vice traditionally has a negative outcome, but, here, Cupid's vice results in his marriage to Psyche, a positive outcome. Instead of forcing love upon another, Cupid uses his vice to legitimize his own monogamous relationship. Apuleius' positive twist on *ad armillum* marks his positive twist on Cupid's vice and confirms that his Cupid is vastly different from the traditional Cupid. Apuleius' Cupid has transformed.

⁴⁷Kenney (1990a, 194).

V. CUPID'S TRANSFORMATION

One important detail that Apuleius omits, however, is the reason why Cupid “returns to the wine jar.” Why does Cupid rescue Psyche? Apuleius has once again concealed Cupid’s motivations for his actions in a crucial turning point of the story so that once again the reader is forced to infer them from the few hints that Apuleius provides. The last the reader has seen of Cupid, apart from the brief reference to his wallowing in Venus’ home (5.28.1, 29.1), is the climactic scene in which Cupid abandons Psyche (5.24). He abandons her, flying off and leaving her prostrate on the ground, because—as Apuleius is careful to emphasize in one of Cupid’s few direct speeches⁴⁸—she has broken her word to him and he can no longer trust her. In order for Cupid to rescue Psyche, therefore, we would expect Cupid’s demeanor to change: he must forgive Psyche. That is not, however, the way that Apuleius presents Cupid at the rescue itself:

Sed Cupido iam cicatrice solida revalescens, nec diutinam suae Psyches absentiam tolerans, per altissimam cubiculi quo cohibebatur elapsus fenestram, refectisque pinnis aliquanta quiete longe velocius provolans, Psychen accurrit suam.

But Cupid was now recovering, for his wound had healed. He could no longer endure Psyche’s long separation from him, so he glided out of the high-set window of the chamber in which he was imprisoned. His wings were refreshed after their period of rest, so he progressed much more swiftly to reach his Psyche.

6.21.2–3

Here, the Latin does not suggest forgiveness, but rejuvenation and escape. *Revalescens* and *refectis* emphasize the idea of a return to a previous state of strength, not the ascension to a new state. The wound seems to have hindered his ability to fly, and, combined with the house arrest mandated by Venus, prevents a return to Psyche. But, now that the wound has healed, Cupid is

⁴⁸Throughout the tale, Cupid speaks only to Psyche. The only other examples of Cupid’s direct speech are his warnings to Psyche (5.5.2–3, 6.2–3, 11.3–6, 12.4–6) and at the point of her rescue (6.21.4).

able to “glide out” (*elapsus*) from the room in which he was “imprisoned” (*cohibebatur*) to rectify the separation he had been “enduring” (*tolerans*). The passage suggests not the willing abandonment of a lover due to broken trust, but an imposed separation.

Through this inconsistent portrayal of Cupid, Apuleius hints at the completion of a largely off-stage transformation. This transformation, I would argue, begins as soon as Cupid falls for Psyche. For the first time, Cupid learns how it feels to desire and as a result he must now rectify his two disparate halves: the manipulator and the lover. As stated above, Cupid’s newfound role as a lover is highlighted by his experience of his own abilities (i.e. the inspiring and repelling of desire) at his mother’s hands. The tern (5.28.4–5, quoted above) hints at his rejection of these abilities. During her speech, the tern blames the absence of love from society on Cupid’s “whoring in the mountains” (*montano scortatu*) and Venus’ “swimming in the sea” (*marino natatu* [my translations]). The fact that Venus must be informed of Cupid’s actions and of the state of the world above the water colors the goddess as oblivious and indifferent. The mirroring of these causal ablatives equates Cupid’s absence to that of Venus and implies that he is similarly distracted—a view especially noticeable from the disdainful *scortatu*, a word Apuleius apparently coined to make the parallel obvious.⁴⁹ Cupid’s absence, however, cannot be the result of distraction or negligence. For he does not spend all his time with Psyche, but only his nights. If he spends his days away from Psyche, why is his presence in society still lacking during the day? I would suggest that Cupid’s absence is due not to distraction but to a deliberate choice and an active refusal.⁵⁰ Now that he knows how it feels to love, Cupid can no longer force others to love.

⁴⁹Zimmerman et al. (2004, 327).

⁵⁰Kenney (1990b, 181) comments on the parallel with the lack of Demeter’s presence after the abduction of Persephone in her *Homeric Hymn*, another active withdrawal.

As we have seen, in the tale of Cupid and Psyche, Apuleius frames the narrative largely through the focalization of Psyche. Psyche's role as protagonist has led most scholars to focus their attention on her, but a closer reading reveals that the true agent of the narrative is Cupid. Cupid's unwavering insistence on his anonymity necessitates Psyche's eventual transgression. Psyche merely reacts to Cupid's and then Venus' stipulations. Her character, although faced with multiple challenges, remains stagnant. As we have seen, however, Cupid's character must transform, as this is the only explanation for the obvious inconsistencies in his characterization and motivations.

Why, then, does Apuleius construct the story in this way? Why does he create a protagonist who is merely reactive, while veiling the workings and fundamental changes of the character who is most important to the plot? To answer this question, we must first briefly compare the tale of Cupid and Psyche to the rest of the *Metamorphoses*. Scholars have often attempted to connect this inset tale to the novel as a whole, usually through the similarities between Psyche and Lucius.⁵¹ Both mortal characters possess similar flaws (i.e. curiosity), and, although neither overcomes their flaws, divine *dei ex machina* (Cupid and Isis) eventually rescue both. The abrupt shift in the narrative at the epiphanies of both these divine saviors emphasizes the unforeseen and undeserved nature of Psyche's and Lucius' salvation. The reader, therefore, must wonder why they are saved. But, as Apuleius creates an intentionally elusive Cupid, perhaps the reader is not meant to understand. For one possible explanation for Cupid's veiled motivations is that the divine is simply inscrutable. Following this interpretation, we could interpret Psyche (as her name suggests) as the representation of all mortals.

⁵¹For similarities between Psyche and Lucius and interpretations of those similarities, see Walsh (1970, 190–192), DeFillippo (1990), Kenney (1990b, 12–15), James (1998), Graverini (2011, 90–93, 105–106), and Moreschini (2015, 114). Penwill (1975), however, denies the similarities between the tale and the novel as a whole and instead proposes that they are meant to oppose one another.

The text provides some support for this interpretation. Despite Psyche's royal status at the beginning of the tale, Mercury's heraldic proclamation (6.8.1–3) casts her as an escaped slave. When Psyche arrives at Venus' palace, *Consuetudo* also suggests that Psyche has been a servant of Venus all along (*tandem, ancilla nequissima, dominam habere te scire coepisti?*: "Most wicked of all servants, have you at last begun to realize that you have a mistress?" 6.8.6). Apuleius calls attention to this discrepancy when Mercury states that he is searching for "the runaway daughter of the king, the maidservant of Venus" (*fugitivam regis filiam, Veneris ancillam*, 6.8.2). The juxtaposition of these two seemingly disparate statuses, emphasized by asyndeton, suggests that Psyche's status never changes. In the human sphere, Psyche is a princess, but, in the divine sphere, she is a slave. The revelation that Psyche is at once mortal royalty and enslaved by Venus signifies that she, like all mortals, is entirely at the mercy of the divine. But Psyche is unable to meet the requirements of her masters, as she repeatedly fails both Cupid's and Venus' stipulations. She is unable to escape her human flaws. In spite of these failures, however, she is saved from her destruction. Cupid, despite initially condemning her, eventually rescues her, with his change of heart happening off stage and defying explanation. We mortals, therefore, are unable to understand the workings of the divine. Our fate is inescapable and salvation is inexplicable.

This interpretation, however, is incomplete. The other divine figures in the story (the most prominent being Venus) are much more consistent in their depiction. Why does the reader understand Venus, Jupiter, Ceres, and Juno more easily than Cupid? Apuleius has deliberately constructed a story in which Cupid is difficult to grasp, but the other gods are much more transparent. Apuleius explicitly states the motivations of Ceres and Juno: fear of Cupid's arrow (*metu sagittarum*, 5.31.7). It is only Cupid who is obscure. The theory that Cupid's individual

obscurity reflects the inscrutability of the divine necessitates that Cupid alone reflects the divine or divine grace in general.

As Apuleius veils the motivations and workings of Cupid alone, the answer to the question of his obscurity must center on him. Interestingly, however, as discussed above, Cupid and Venus are personifications of the same force, and, traditionally, their powers are almost interchangeable. Eros/Cupid acts at the bidding of his mother in the *Argonautica* and *Aeneid*, but, as her *Homeric Hymn* and Euripides' *Hippolytus* suggest, Aphrodite is capable of inspiring passion herself. In fact, Moschus conflates the two gods in his *Europa*, stating that Aphrodite, “who alone can overcome even Zeus,” inspires his passion for Europa with her “arrows” (Κρονίδης ὥς μιν φράσαθ' ὥς ἐόλητο / θυμὸν ἀνωίστοισιν ὑποδηθεὶς βελέεσσι / Κύπριδος, ἧ μούνη δύναται καὶ Ζῆνα δαμάσσαι: “No sooner had the son of Cronus noticed her [Europa] than he was in turmoil in his heart, overcome by the unexpected arrows of Cypris, who alone can overcome even Zeus,” 74–76).

If the two gods traditionally work together, why does Apuleius set the pair at odds? Why does he characterize them as having such opposite reactions to the same individual? Clearly, in Apuleius' tale, the two are not interchangeable. Through the contrast between Venus and Cupid, Apuleius personifies different aspects of love. As we have seen, Venus is highly sexualized. Her act of kissing her son (4.31.4) and the kiss offered for the reward for Psyche's whereabouts (6.8.3) are unnecessarily explicit. The highly physical portion of Cupid and Psyche's relationship is characterized by *Veneris proeliis* (5.21.5), and it is only after Venus recruits *Sobrietas* that she is able to impose the opposite. Venus, therefore, is representative of sexual passion. Traditionally, it is Cupid who represents sexual passion, and the descriptions provided by Jupiter and Venus follow this stereotype. As we have seen, however, Cupid transforms during the tale. Although

these descriptions may mark his starting point, they do not suit his actions as the story unfolds. If Cupid begins the tale overlapping with Venus and associated with sexual passion, what sort of “love” does he become?

As stated above, Cupid’s relationship with Psyche is noticeably different from his traditional interactions in other works. Apuleius’ Cupid acts with an unprecedented regard for the consequences of his actions and displays a genuine concern for Psyche’s wellbeing. Similarly, Cupid’s progression through the tale moves him further from his mother and her associations with sexual passion. The plot of the tale and Cupid’s transformation build to the point in which Cupid and Psyche are freed from Venus’ domineering presence and are allowed to be together without fear. Off stage, Cupid learns to love and accept Psyche in spite of her flaws. In veiling Cupid’s motivations and development, Apuleius demonstrates not only the inscrutability of the divine, but also, and more precisely, the inscrutability of love. The reader can never truly understand why Cupid rescues Psyche, only that he was motivated by love. I would argue that Apuleius presents Cupid as the personification of what we would now call Unconditional Love, a love that transcends mere sexual attraction and sees beyond imperfections. It is the union of the Soul and Unconditional Love, defying expectation and explanation, that ultimately yields true Pleasure.

VI. CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, I have deliberately avoided Platonic and allegorical interpretations, which make up much of the scholarship on this tale. It was my intention to delay turning to these common interpretive strategies and to focus instead on what the author himself says in the tale. At the beginning of his own allegorical interpretation, Tatum writes “[a]s in the interpretation of any allegory, much depends on which key one thinks unlocks which door.”⁵² Allusion and intertextuality are powerful tools (especially for an author as learned as Apuleius), but, as any reader of Apuleius knows, nothing can be taken at face value.⁵³ I wished to forgo trying to fit the right key to the right door or any reliance on external material and base my interpretation on what the text itself contains.

That said, my conclusion that Apuleius’ Cupid evolves from sexual passion into a more wholesome and complete, unconditional love necessitates a discussion of Plato. The two most commonly quoted passages of Plato in scholarship on this tale come from the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*.⁵⁴ While it was in no way my motivation, the Platonic readings of this tale are

⁵²Tatum (1979, 53), referring to the commonly cited Platonic dialogues mentioned below and Apuleius’ own philosophical treatise, *De Deo Socratis*, on which he bases his interpretation.

⁵³I agree with Graverini (2007, 119), who argues that the comic/satiric interpretations and philosophical interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* are dependent on one another and that “each is incomplete when taken individually” (cf. Moreschini 2015, 115). Apuleius’ text is intentionally comical, and, therefore, nothing can be taken too seriously.

⁵⁴In the *Symposium* (180c–181a), Plato discusses the two Aphrodites (Οὐρανία, “Heavenly” and Πάνδημος, “Common”) and the two corresponding Erotes (cf. Apuleius’ *Apologia* 12). In the *Phaedrus* (248c), Plato describes the fall of the winged soul that is unable to follow the proper divine path, a passage which bears an obvious similarity to Psyche’s fall at 5.24.1. For such Platonic interpretations of Cupid and Psyche and references to these Platonic passages, see Schlam (1970, 480), Walsh (1970, 206–207), Tatum (1979, 51–58), Kenney (1990a, 184–185), Schlam (1992, 95), Harrison (2000, 256–257), Wright (2000, 56–52), Panayotakis (2001), Zimmerman et al.

compatible with my own. The types of love outlined in the *Symposium* (i.e. οὐρανόφιλία, “heavenly” and πάνδημος, “common”) map well onto my interpretations of Apuleius’ Venus and Cupid, respectively. Instead of Kenney’s hypothesis about two Venuses and two Cupids, each embodying the two sides of love in Platonic terms,⁵⁵ I see, at the conclusion of the tale, a simple contrast between Venus and Cupid, with each representing one form of love. In Kenney’s terms, I argue that Venus is more *vulgaris* (II), while Cupid is more *uranius* (I). My one caveat lies with the conclusions regarding the *Phaedrus*. While Psyche’s fall clearly resembles the fall of the winged soul in the *Phaedrus* (248c), Psyche never earns any semblance of redemption but stumbles at the same pitfalls again and again. At no point does her character change. The figure who does change is Cupid. On my analysis, the tale is about not Psyche’s journey to the divine plane but Cupid’s journey away from “common” love (represented in the story by Venus) toward “heavenly” love (which I label as “unconditional”). Cupid’s abandonment of Psyche reflects not that Psyche is flawed and incapable of properly seeing Cupid so much as that Cupid is flawed and not yet ready to be seen. At the culmination of his transformation, he becomes “heavenly” love and is at last ready to be the salvation Psyche requires. To develop this interpretation in detail, however, is beyond the scope of this paper and requires additional work, but I believe that further focus on Cupid may better illuminate the relationship of the tale to Platonic philosophy and the *Metamorphoses* as a whole.

Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* consistently compels readers to reevaluate their expectations. At every turn, Apuleius reveals new information that forces readers to question what they thought they knew. The tale of Cupid and Psyche is no different. At face value, the tale

(2004, 283), and Winkle (2013). Moreschini (2015, 87–115) provides an overview of scholarship and the various interpretations (i.e. folklore, allegorical, Platonic, etc.) as they evolved since antiquity.

⁵⁵Kenney (1990a).

concentrates on Psyche, the mortal protagonist. On account of her name and her literal fall from grace, the reader expects the tale to center on her retribution. A closer reading, however, reveals that the true driving force of the story is Cupid. It is Cupid who rescues Psyche from the wrath of Venus and attains divine status for Psyche. By framing the story in such a way, with its main player acting off stage, Apuleius creates a Cupid who is inexplicable and paints Unconditional Love as a phenomenon that is not a goal to be obtained but a saving grace that itself must find, rather than be found by, those who need saving.

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