

A Gendered Reading for the Character of Psyche in Apuleius’

Metamorphoses

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Abstract

In analyses of the Cupid and Psyche story from Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, scholars have been faced with the issue of explaining the presence of a prominent female character. The usual response has been to interpret Psyche symbolically, either as a mirror of the male character Lucius and his journey, or as an allegory for the Soul’s journey or for the myth of Isis. However, this approach of turning Psyche into an abstract symbol negates the very substance of the issue, namely her femaleness. By foregrounding Psyche’s gender and making a reading of the text specifically for aspects of her femaleness, her nature and character in relation to marriage and family is revealed as a dominant theme, and a key motivating factor for much of the action of the narrative. Fully understanding and acknowledging this allows not only for new and more integrated interpretations of Psyche but also opens avenues of exploration for the interpretation of other characters in the novel.

Keywords

Psyche; Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*; gender; marriage; family

Its length, its detail, its literary depth, its difference in tone and its position in the middle of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*¹⁾ has made the Cupid and Psyche story one of the most discussed episodes among scholars. Few modern scholars today would deny a high level of sophistication in the Cupid and Psyche story or indeed the *Metamorphoses* as a whole, sophistication that can be traced to Apuleius’ known background as a trained rhetorician and student of philosophy.²⁾ Under these circumstances many scholars assume a deeper meaning to the Cupid and Psyche story.³⁾ The usual method of trying to search for meaning has been to look for intra-contextual links between the story and the main plotline or characters, to try and find an overall unity to the novel. Alternatively, scholars have drawn on Apuleius’ known Platonic beliefs and knowledge of Plato’s works, or his supposed religious beliefs, to find Platonic or Isiac elements in the Cupid and Psyche story.⁴⁾ In these efforts to find

¹⁾ Although the Cupid and Psyche story takes up the middle books of the *Metamorphoses*, Relihan (2009a, 80) points out that, in terms of page count, it actually occupies the second quarter of the novel.

²⁾ Several other works by Apuleius survive, including the *Apologia* and the *Florida* in which he mentions his extensive education, including rhetoric and philosophy, especially Platonism. Other ancient writers mention his reputation as a Platonic philosopher. See Harrison 2000, 5-6.

³⁾ See Moreschini 1999, 215.

⁴⁾ For *Cupid and Psyche* as a Platonic allegory for the soul striving towards love, see Walsh 1970, 222; Kenney 1990, 16; Dowden 1998, 4-9; and Puccini-Delbey 2003, 228–30, see also 234–42. Conversely, see Penwill (1998, 161) who argues against this interpretation and instead suggests a symbolic interpretation in which the Cupid and Psyche story is “the narrative of the soul’s fall from pristine innocence to enslavement to desire”. For *Cupid and Psyche* as Isiac allegory, see James 1987, 140; Krabbe 1989, 93-4. For Psyche and her story as a mirror of that of Lucius, see James 1987, 127-30; Kenney 1990, 14–6; Edwards 1992, 78; Barrett 1994, 73; Konstan 1994, 134; Shumate 1996, 252; Smith 1998, 69-82. For scholars who believe that all these

meaning an issue has arisen which scholars have had to explain, namely why Psyche, a female character, is so unexpectedly prominent in a novel in which women are usually portrayed one-dimensionally and which was written by a male in a patriarchal society. The solution for most scholars has been simple: all of their exegeses of the text interpret Psyche symbolically, either as a mirror of the main character of the novel, Lucius and his journey, or as an allegory for the Soul's journey or for the myth of Isis. They therefore have been able to rationalise the presence of a prominent female character by simply negating Psyche's gender altogether.

Recently the prejudice in favour of interpreting Psyche symbolically has started to disappear, especially in relation to social themes and intertextuality. A few scholars have looked at Psyche and the theme of marriage.⁵⁾ Another has interpreted Psyche as a child coming of age.⁶⁾ Yet others have noted the similarity between Psyche's portrayal and that of women from different genres.⁷⁾ However, only one of these studies has specifically questioned the "orthodox position"⁸⁾ or provided an alternative interpretation. Most importantly, none have recognised gender as a basic component in making any interpretation of Psyche.⁹⁾ In order to fully understand the purpose of Psyche within her story it is necessary to place gender in the forefront of any analysis of the text. Gender refers to the socially constructed notions of what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman'. These concepts are constructed in terms of behaviours, expectations, roles, representations and values that are applied to people by any given society based on whether they are male or female.¹⁰⁾ By making an in-depth reading specifically for gender markers in relation to Psyche, a new interpretation of this character can be formed, based on an accentuation rather than a suppression of the most essential part of her nature, her femaleness.

interpretations are valid; see Schlam 1992, 90-8; O'Brien 1998, 33-4. For a summary of these interpretations, see Sandy 1999, 127-8, 130-1, 133-5.

⁵⁾ For the legal aspects of marriage in relation to Psyche, see Papaioannou 1998, 314-22; Osgood 2006, 421-33. On the theme of the untrustworthiness of the sexual bond in Psyche's marriage, see Lateiner 2000, 320-1. For an extrapolation of marriage and family norms from the *Metamorphoses*, see Bradley 2000.

⁶⁾ Relihan 2009a, 72, 75.

⁷⁾ For Greek novels, see Lalanne 2002. For comedy, see May 2006, 222-30. For epic, see Finkelpearl 1998, 67-71, 96-101, 110-4; Harrison 1998, 51-68.

⁸⁾ Penwill 1998, 161. Relihan notes within the story inconsistencies with the Platonic and religious ideals which are usually mentioned by scholars in relation to *Cupid and Psyche*. These inconsistencies make a purely allegorical interpretation of Psyche impossible. From his analysis of the supposed similarities between Psyche and Lucius' stories, he also suggests that they are in fact quite different, and as such Psyche is useful as a contrast to, rather than a mirror of, Lucius (2009a, 77-80, 83-5). For detailed notes on these inconsistencies, see Relihan 2009b-d.

⁹⁾ Relihan has come closest with his interpretation of Psyche (and Cupid) as maturing from childhood into adulthood. He gives examples of Psyche's lack of knowledge and experience, which are rectified during the course of the story as she becomes a wife and mother and learns that she is married to a man not a monster (2009a, 70-2, 75, 77, 79, 84-5, especially 72, 75). He believes this to be the core of the story. However, his interpretation fails to examine the gendered notions which were attached to females in the time period of the *Metamorphoses*, especially in regards to the roles of wife and mother. This has major implications for his interpretation of Psyche, as this article shows. His arguments as to a similar transformation in Cupid are more convincing, especially in light of May's discussion of Cupid as the immature young man of Comedy (2006, 221-2). However, even here Relihan fails to define what behaviour is expected from a *male* adult or to examine Cupid's actions in light of such a definition.

¹⁰⁾ Glover & Kaplan 2000, xxiii, xxvi.

Apuleius starts by introducing a particularly beautiful girl and her situation. She is described as the daughter of a king, *virginali flore* ('with the bloom of virginity' Apul. *Met.* 4.28),¹¹⁾ and old enough to be mistaken for a young avatar of the goddess of love, Venus. This establishes her as beautiful, of high birth, young and virginal, yet also sexually mature enough for marriage. From this, certain expectations in relation to her are immediately created in the mind of the reader according to the gendered norms of the second century AD. The first and most important norm for such a girl is that she should be married, namely to a man of high status and hopefully wealth which at least matched that of the family she was coming from. Marriage in the ancient Roman world was a means of connecting two families where the wife acted as the link.¹²⁾ In addition, the Augustan legislation on marriage, which was introduced in 18 BC, and which was in force during the time this novel was written,¹³⁾ entrenched a belief that marriage and children were the primary purposes of a woman's life by penalising woman who did not marry and rewarding those with several children (D.C. 54.16.1-2).¹⁴⁾ Part of this legislation also prohibited senators and their children from marrying those of low class, such as freedpersons, actors and their children. A high-class woman had no role outside of marriage. Therefore she was supposed to hope that her family made the best possible marriage for her, as well as for themselves, which she could take pride in and from which she could hope to have children to be proud of.¹⁵⁾ That the girl's story will involve marriage in some way is a logical expectation on the part of the reader.

Psyche's exceptional beauty has led to her inadvertently stealing Venus' worshippers and Venus wishes to punish her for it (4.28-30). As the sole purpose of a high-class woman's life is marriage, this is where Venus determines to punish her (4.31). Venus instructs Cupid to inflict upon Psyche a passion 'for the worst sort of man' (*hominis extremi* 4.31). Firstly, Venus does not even suggest that the man Cupid has Psyche fall in love with should be her husband, despite what Cupid later assumes (5.24), just that she should conceive a passion for him. This suggests that Psyche might be driven to become such a man's lover without the benefit of marriage, which would place her among one of the lowest ranks of females, especially according to Augustan legislation, namely those without chastity.¹⁶⁾ This worst sort of man is also described as lacking in station, wealth and health. Even if Psyche should marry him, finding herself in such a situation would indeed be a terrible torture for a girl in her position. She would take on the birth rank of her husband and according to Roman social *mores* of the second century AD her status would further be determined by his wealth and the respect he had gained in his community.¹⁷⁾ To marry a man without birth or wealth would

¹¹⁾ Unless otherwise specified, all references to Apuleius *Metamorphoses*. Text and translations based on Hanson 1989.

¹²⁾ Visser 1986, 150, 154.

¹³⁾ That Augustan legislation was influencing Apuleius when he wrote this story can be seen from his direct reference to it at 6.22.

¹⁴⁾ Men were also encouraged to marry and procreate in this way, but they were also expected to undertake other duties, while a woman was not.

¹⁵⁾ The realities of a woman's sense of worth being inextricably intertwined with marriage and children can also be seen in the actions and emotions of Venus within the novel.

¹⁶⁾ The main purpose of the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* (Augustan legislation on adultery) was to ensure women's chastity.

¹⁷⁾ See Treggiari 1991, 414, see also 250.

lower her considerably from her current high rank, as well as break the law laid down by Augustus. Furthermore, Venus means her to fall in love with a man without health, meaning that she would find herself with the responsibility of a sick husband. For a woman of Psyche's status, a more complete punishment could not have been devised.¹⁸⁾ Apuleius contrasts her prospects strongly with what she could have expected by noting that Psyche's less beautiful sisters have already married into royalty (4.32).

Psyche herself is not aware of Venus' punishment for her, but her beauty has created another problem for her in regards to the fulfilment of her gender roles as a woman. Her beauty has left men in such awe of her that no one, from royalty to commoner, has asked to marry her (4.32). Psyche's response is to despair and pine away in mind and body, as without marriage her life has no purpose. For a girl in Psyche's position to fail to obtain a husband is so unusual that her father suspects divine interference in the matter. However, considering the importance of marriage to a girl, he solicits an oracle for a marriage and a husband for her. The oracle gives both father and daughter what they want, but not in the way they could have anticipated. The oracle tells them of a husband who is a monster and suggests that the marriage will be fatal for Psyche (4.33). It seems that Venus' punishment is to be carried out, for this marriage will bring none of the normal benefits, such as status, wealth or ties between families, and it will end in Psyche's death as far as her family is concerned. Although her family do not want to carry out the divine injunction, Psyche is shown as hurrying to this marriage (4.34). She may not want to die, but without marriage she is purposeless. This 'marriage' will fulfil her purpose and the fatal nature of it will ensure that she will not have to endure it for long.

Psyche's parents are instructed to leave her on a rock for her husband (4.33), where they duly abandon her (4.35). This marriage will not only be to a monster, it will not occur in the proper form, as her family and the wedding guests will not be in attendance as she goes into her husband's house. The establishment of the bride in her new home was what gave the wedding "legal status and public recognition" and the marriage was dated from this event.¹⁹⁾ When Psyche's parents leave her on the rock, although her marriage has not been completed in the proper form, she has to all intents and purposes now moved out of her father's household and is beginning her new life as bride and wife. Despite the promises of marriage to a monster and death, Psyche's first experience of her new home is a palace fit for a god and a store of wealth which lacks nothing and which is now hers (5.1-2), as well as voices for servants who can cater for her every need and pleasure (5.2-3). Just as Psyche and the reader are prepared for the worst, Psyche's situation is found to be far more in keeping with the expectations she could have had of her marriage. However, the rest of her marriage does not fall in with expectation. Her husband comes to her in darkness so that she cannot see his face (5.4). She not only has to cope with the unknown in terms of a husband, she is also forced to

¹⁸⁾ This is reiterated within the novel with Psyche's sisters. While trying to justify their envy of Psyche's marital situation they cast themselves in the role which Venus wished Psyche to occupy as a punishment, by complaining of husbands with exactly these faults. They bemoan their low statuses by saying that they have become slaves to foreign husbands (5.9), they describe their hearths as poor (5.10), and the old age and vigilance of the first sister's husband (5.9) and the chronic bad health of the second sister's husband (5.10), keep them from being able to act in the way they expected they could as wives.

¹⁹⁾ Papaioannou 1998, 306. See Treggiari 1991, 166-8.

face the loss of her virginity in circumstances that are even more frightening and uncertain than those usually experienced by a new bride, especially one in an arranged marriage.²⁰⁾ She has no real idea who her husband is and what status he holds, and because she has been removed from her family and society, he is her only companion in this place. Psyche has all the wealth she could want and time accustoms her to the sexual act as she learns about her own physical pleasure, but she has only disembodied voices and an unknown husband to comfort her and with whom to share her wealth and time. On a personal level she is lonely (5.5), and on a social level, without anyone being able to see her husband's wealth and his hopefully attendant high status, it is as if they do not exist and so she cannot take pleasure in having made such a good marriage (cf. 5.10).

Despite these unusual circumstances Psyche would still be expected to rise above them and to act in the ways a young wife should, namely to be loyal and obedient to her husband and to put the well-being of him and his family before that of herself and her blood family. Augustan legislation encouraged the idea that women were to put the family first and those that did not conform did not have the good of the state at heart. Roman literature also entrenched this ideal woman with *exemplum* literature that extolled the virtues of the perfect wife, such as Lucretia (Liv. 1.57.6-59.6).²¹⁾ However, Psyche is found not to conform to gendered norms of behaviour for a wife. Although it is unacceptable, she chooses to put her own needs before her duty and her husband's welfare. When her husband warns her that her sisters are due to arrive at her rock and that she is to ignore their lamentations on her behalf or risk causing him pain and herself destruction, Psyche promises to obey him. Nevertheless, the next day, as she thinks about her sisters, she breaks her promise and becomes distraught (5.5). She shows more care for her natal family than she does for her husband, wanting to save her sisters from mourning instead of obeying her husband's instructions. However, part of her lament after being told to ignore her sisters concerns her own loneliness and lack of human companionship. Psyche wants to help her blood family but she also needs them to authenticate her new life by making it public. Otherwise, she feels as if she is in a 'prison' (*carcer* 5.5). Unable to make a proper connection with her new but unknown husband and his interests, Psyche has betrayed the gender expectations of behaviour for a good wife in favour of her known blood family and self-interest.

Psyche's husband scolds her for failing to obey him, showing his disappointment in her lack of self-control over keeping her promise (5.6). This expectation on the part of the husband is double-edged. Although an ideal wife would be expected to display self-control, women in general were also considered to be inherently lacking in self-control.²²⁾ Psyche has promised ideal behaviour but has shown she is a stereotypical woman. She is also not

²⁰⁾ Relihan calls this event, and the unknown husband's subsequent visits, rape, and suggests that the repeated rapes 'lead to love' (2009c, s.v. 5.4 *habit and repetition*). Rape implies a lack of consent on the part of the woman and a need to impose power by the man. As traumatic as it must have been for a new bride to experience the personal, physical invasion of sexual intercourse for the first time, especially with an unknown man, this cannot be rape the way Relihan uses the word here. In addition, while repetition of the sexual act does lead Psyche to find *delectatio* ('pleasure' 5.4), all of her declarations of love concern requests for something she knows her husband will not like, and can therefore be seen as part of her attempts at emotional and sexual persuasion. (See later discussion of 5.6).

²¹⁾ See also Parker 1998, 164-8.

²²⁾ See for example Juv. 6.

carrying out her wifely duty, as she cries even as her husband is trying to make love to her. Despite the husband's display of mastery in taking his wife to task, his final response to her tears is also not expected gender behaviour for the head of the household. Faced with the difficulties of having sexual intercourse with a distracted and distraught partner, as well as her emotional blackmail, he does not forbid Psyche from seeing her sisters. Instead, he reduces his orders to constant warnings that she not listen to her sisters, who will try to convince her to discover what he looks like, otherwise she will lose her rank, wealth and him. By doing this, he gives in to her desire to see her sisters. Nevertheless this is not enough for Psyche. She must not only see her sisters, they must see her. Time seems to have not only accustomed Psyche to her husband's visits to the point that she starts to feel pleasure from their sexual encounters (5.4), she seems to have also learned her sexual power over him and obviously has no qualms about using sex to try and control him for personal gain. She now seduces her husband with flattery and kisses into instructing the wind Zephyr to bring her sisters to her so that they can see her in her home (5.6). She is also quite happy to take her husband's permission to give her sisters sumptuous gifts. In pursuit of her own interests, Psyche is now actively playing on her husband's weaknesses to secure her personal needs.

When Psyche's sisters arrive, Psyche's first action is to assure them that she is well and they have the pleasure of a family reunion (5.7). Her care for the well-being of her blood family seems to be genuine. However, her next act is to invite her sisters inside and to show them the riches of her home and her magical servants, to treat them to a luxurious bath and a feast of delicacies (5.8). The sisters, driven by envy at what they see, begin to fulfil Psyche's husband's prophecy that they would inquire into his looks. Psyche remembers her husband's warnings and concocts a lie. To ensure that the sisters do not discover her in this lie she quickly sends them away, but not before loading them down with gold and jewels. It is the envy of the sisters which drives them to lay the worst possible construction on Psyche's actions (5.9-10), but Psyche's actions have still provided them some basis for their thoughts. The explicitly stated decision of the sisters not to show Psyche's wealth to their parents, or even to reveal that she is alive (5.10), shows that Psyche could reasonably have expected her sisters to tell her parents of her good fortune and for word of her excellent marriage to spread. Indeed her sisters consider not telling her parents, and the world, of her glory to be a suitable punishment for her perceived arrogance, 'for they are not glorious whose riches no one knows of' (*nec sunt enim beati quorum divitias nemo novit* 5.10).

Psyche's husband again warns her against her sisters, asking her to practice self-control and not talk to them again. However, her obvious inability to obey him when he gave these same orders before and his own weakness when it comes to his wife, leads him to create a loophole which will allow him to keep her happy and thereby get what he wants from her. He orders her, if she cannot keep herself from seeing her sisters, not to speak about him (5.11). He attributes her inability to obey him to natural simplicity and tenderness of spirit, even though Psyche has shown as much care for herself as for others, and a natural cunning in manipulating her husband. By creating the loophole, her husband acknowledges that she cannot control herself, so he tries to ensure her obedience by telling her she is pregnant. If she obeys him their child will be divine, but if she betrays him their child will be mortal. In addition to the expectation that a wife should be obedient, under such circumstances as these a wife would also be expected to be ambitious on behalf of her child and make his well-being

paramount. Dixon points out that there was a social expectation in Roman culture that a Roman woman would worry about her son and encourage his advancement. A mother was also expected to exert herself on her son's behalf, placing his interests even over those of her husband. A baby also committed the mother to her conjugal family more fully as she was helping to create it and the children belonged to the father's family.²³⁾ The knowledge that she is fulfilling her second purpose as a high-class woman and the possibility that she could cause her child not to have the best possible life should have become Psyche's highest motivating factor for obedience. In his final warning her husband explicitly commands 'Spare yourself and me, and by resolute self-restraint free your home, your husband, yourself and our little one from the catastrophe of ruin which threatens.' (*tui nostrique miserere, religiosaque continentia domum, maritum, teque et istum parvulum nostrum imminentis ruinae infortunio libera* 5.12). Psyche is very clearly expected as his wife, to place the good of her family by marriage, including her husband and child, above that of her own needs and her blood family, especially when that blood family have trampled on the 'ties of blood' (*sanguinis foedera* 5.12). Psyche protests that she has already shown her loyalty and discretion and insists that she can hold her own with her sisters (5.13), even though what she has really shown has been disobedience and an ability to get her own way with sex (cf. 5.6). Yet again she asks him for her sisters' company in her own home (5.13). Even though her husband has specifically asked her not to, she makes use of the loophole he provides without hesitation. She once again uses flattery and seduction to get what she wants, as well as a little guilt when she suggests that seeing her sisters will compensate her for not seeing his face. These actions might be realistically expected of a wife who has no other recourse to get what she wants, but ideally she should not be attempting to manipulate her husband. Her husband too does not act as a husband should, again giving in to her sexual persuasion, despite the fact that Psyche has already disobeyed him.

To ensure the success of their plan, the sisters play on Psyche's blood ties. They invade her heart (5.15) by congratulating her on her impending motherhood, flattering the looks of the unborn baby and noting the pleasure the baby's birth will give their house, namely her blood family (5.14). Psyche again uses the opportunity of her sisters' visit to show off her riches, with a feast and music. After the sisters question her about her husband, Psyche concocts another lie and immediately sends her sisters away again, once more loading them down with lavish gifts. The sisters soon return and make full use of Psyche's blood ties to them. They state that they are only doing their duty when they warn her that she is actually married to a hideous snake that is fattening her up to eat (5.17-8), and ask her to choose between her sisters' concern for her safety or furtive copulations with a snake (5.18).

Despite Psyche's obvious awareness that her husband is not a snake, as she herself had earlier described the feel of him as human (5.13), Psyche now agrees that he must be a beast (5.19).²⁴⁾ The narrator suggests that Psyche has been driven out of her mind by her sisters' terrifying words, which cause her to forget her husband's words and her own promises to him (5.18). This could perhaps account for why she also seems to have forgotten the evidence of her senses as to his anthropomorphism. However, the change in tone between

²³⁾ Dixon 1988, 175-6, 202; Visser 1986, 158; Parker 1998, 154.

²⁴⁾ See Relihan 2009a, 69.

the sisters' description of the *serpens* ('snake' 5.18), and Psyche's description of the *bestia* ('beast' 5.19), suggests a different interpretation. The sisters' description is very literal, describing the snake's coils, its gliding motion and its feeding habits (5.17-8). On the other hand, when Psyche agrees that her husband must be a beast, she substantiates her argument, not by agreeing to this physical description, but by suggesting he must be a beast because she has never seen his face, she has no idea where he comes from and she has to endure a husband of uncertain rank (5.19). It seems that, to Psyche, the beast aspect of her husband is his unknowability. She never describes him as a snake. In spite of the wealth her marriage has given her, and which she has shown off to her sisters, Psyche is still concerned about being married to a husband of unknown status. Psyche's fear for her own status leads her to reject her husband in favour of her sisters, and she in turn invokes their blood ties to ask for their help in escaping. Despite her husband's continued warning against the sisters, and his explicit request that she place her husband, child and her family by marriage first, when Psyche is pushed into making a decision, she chooses the family she knows, her blood family.

The sisters in turn continue to invoke the blood tie by saying their common origin leads them to disregard danger for her sake. After suggesting a plan to her to kill her husband (5.20), they tell her they will make 'a desirable marriage' (*votivae nuptiae* 5.20)²⁵⁾ for her, human to human. This was the final persuasion Psyche needed to carry out the plan, as then she would be sure of her husband's status and would certainly have her marriage publically acknowledged. Psyche vacillates over finally committing the act as she 'hates the beast' (*odit bestiam* 5.21) but at the same time 'prizes the husband' (*diligit maritum*), suggesting that her fear of the unknown is in conflict with the knowledge of what she has. Nevertheless her fears over her uncertain status, her need for recognition and her loyalty to blood, rather than to her husband and child, convince her. As she seizes the blade to kill the monster, Apuleius describes Psyche as changing her sex (5.22). Psyche has broken faith as a good wife and has instead fulfilled every negative perception of wives and now she has also taken on a male role against the expected gender behaviour of a woman. Men were often concerned about the loyalty of wives as they were both insider and outsider. As outsiders their loyalty was suspect because of their natural loyalty to their blood family. As insiders their intimate knowledge of their conjugal family gave them all the information they needed to destroy it.²⁶⁾ Due to the strange circumstances of her marriage, Psyche has chosen her blood family and her own interests over those of her conjugal family, thrown away her roles as wife, mother and even woman, and deliberately set in motion her conjugal family's destruction.

On discovering that her unknown husband is actually Cupid and that she was about to commit the sacrilegious act of trying to kill a god, Psyche's first thought is for herself. Forgetting that she is pregnant with the child of that god,²⁷⁾ her responsibility to another as

²⁵⁾ The phrase *votivae nuptiae* more correctly means 'the marriage you wish for'. Apuleius is the first to use *votivus* which usually means 'vowed' to mean 'wished for/prayed for' (Zimmerman et al. 2004, 261).

²⁶⁾ Parker 1998, 153-6.

²⁷⁾ Psyche will be seen to forget her child often throughout the rest of the story, except when it is convenient for her to remember. Relihan (2009a, 78) suggests that Apuleius seems to forget logical narrative sequence in the interests of creating drama. It is possible that in his desire to evoke the reader's emotions with Psyche's continual suicide attempts, Apuleius is the one forgetting the pregnancy. However, considering the consistency with which Psyche forgets the baby, I find it unlikely that Apuleius "forgot" the baby so often without a purpose.

mother and the purpose this child would bring to her life, she tries to commit suicide using the dagger, to expunge her near act. However, the blade will not allow her action (5.22). Realising she is safe from the monster, she gazes at Cupid and her spirits begin to revive. With all her worries as to the status of her husband finally put to rest, Psyche might now be expected to act as a good wife should. She has the chance to save herself after she has discovered his identity but before he wakes up by hiding all evidence of what she has done. However, once again, heedless of the consequences, Psyche allows her own desires to dictate her actions, instead of caring for the preservation of her conjugal family. Psyche forgets both her sisters' tricks and her husband's warning requests for self-restraint and allows her curiosity over her newly revealed husband and everything he stands for to hold sway over her mind. Psyche starts marvelling at and handling her husband's weapons (5.23), just as she marvelled at her first sight of all the treasures of her new home (5.2).

While handling Cupid's weapons she manages to draw her own blood when she pricks her finger on an arrow and unknowingly causes herself to fall in love with him (5.23). This event redirects her desires from needing human companionship and recognition of her wealth and status through marriage to an all-consuming passion for her husband.²⁸⁾ Even as she destroys her family by breaking the ultimate prohibition and looking on Cupid's face, she unwittingly (re)commits herself to her husband, but due to passion rather than wifely duty. Her kisses are no longer manipulative but impassioned and impetuous. She is aware that her behaviour is not appropriate both because her husband warned her never to try and see his face as well as because of her unrestrained behaviour. Having thrown away the roles of wife and mother she has become the desperate lover. Even as she covers him in kisses, her main fear is that she will wake him and bring her illicit time with him to an end.

When Psyche first sees Cupid he is described as the gentlest and sweetest of beasts (5.22). This brings to mind all the previous descriptions and actions of both Cupid and the unknown husband, which previously would not have converged in the mind of the reader or Psyche, but which are now found to be about one and the same person. The narrator first described Cupid as destructive to marriages and 'naturally unrestrained' (*genuina licentia* 4.30). The oracle described the unknown husband as a monster who terrorises the world, up to and including Jupiter (4.33). As a force destructive to marriage and the world in general, as well as a character who is lacking in self-control, the weakness displayed by the unknown husband in continually giving in to Psyche becomes more understandable, but also marks his requests to Psyche for self-restraint as hypocritical. Woken by a drop of burning oil and seeing the 'ruin of betrayed trust' (*detectae fidei colluvies* 5.23),²⁹⁾ Cupid does actually carry out his threat to leave Psyche. Before he leaves however, he stops to tell her what he has done, a description which only shows him to be every bit as destructive to family as Psyche.

²⁸⁾ Although, the words used to describe this episode suggest that even if Cupid had not been her husband, she would still have fallen in love with him.

²⁹⁾ This is Hanson's translation, or perhaps more accurately, interpretation. This phrase has provided difficulties for translators as it literally means 'filth of uncovered trust' (Kenney 1990, 172), which is ambiguous within the context of the passage. Kenney suggests that the phrase refers to Cupid finding himself betrayed and contaminated, and that it is his identity rather than his trust which has been uncovered (1990, 172). In addition, Zimmerman et al. (2000, 292) suggests that *detecta* is being used in the sense of a taboo being broken. Consequently, the most likely sense of the phrase is that Cupid has discovered Psyche disobeying his order that she should not see his face and thereby betrayed his trust.

He has disobeyed his mother and taken her worst enemy as his wife (5.24), an accusation which will be echoed later by Venus herself (5.29). Venus declares that Cupid has erroneously assumed that she would accept a woman she hates as a daughter-in-law. She also calls Cupid a boy, saying that his love-making is ‘unrestrained’ (*licentiosus* 5.29) and ‘immature’ (*immaturus*), that he has no respect for her and thinks her too old to conceive another son to oust him (5.29-30). She thereby shows that she feels her feminine power as child-bearer within the family will be threatened by having to acknowledge a grown son and accept a younger, fecund female into the family as a rival for her place.³⁰⁾ Venus would particularly feel such a loss of power as Cupid’s father does not seem to have provided for him, so she has assumed this additional responsibility and power within his life (5.29). By thinking only of his own desires, Cupid has brought Psyche into a marriage in which she cannot have the opportunity to form a relationship with her mother-in-law. All of Cupid’s actions are tainted by the reminder that he is just as uncontrolled and destructive as Psyche, beginning their marriage in darkness and secrecy, without thought for his conjugal and blood families. In his own way he is similarly to blame for the destruction of his conjugal family and Psyche cannot be held solely responsible.³¹⁾ This sharing of blame is reiterated by Apuleius as he creates sympathy for Psyche by describing her several times as ‘pitiable’ (*miseranda* 5.24, 6.2) from this point,³²⁾ despite her far from sympathetic actions.

Psyche has now gained a new passion in life which has replaced all others, but she has just as quickly lost its object. This passion so dominates her life from this point that her reaction to the loss of Cupid is to try to commit suicide (5.25), yet again without giving a thought to the baby she is carrying. Pan prevents the suicide and suggests to Psyche that she try to find succour for her passion by praying to Cupid. Cupid is again described in unflattering terms as a pleasure-loving and soft-hearted youth. Before any further progress is made on the repair of her marriage, Psyche comes across her sisters. She begins the campaign of commitment to her lover/husband by destroying the members of her blood family who betrayed her. Using their own greed and lust for wealth and status against them, she tricks them into killing themselves (5.26-7).³³⁾ Psyche now seems to turn her concentration

³⁰⁾ This fear of being seen as beyond child-bearing years may seem ridiculous for an immortal goddess, but much of Venus’ depiction in the *Metamorphoses* is that of a mortal Roman matron. However, her hatred of Psyche as a domestic rival does add to her existing hatred of her as a rival for her divine worship (4.30).

³¹⁾ This reading of Cupid is in direct contrast with many scholars who interpret Cupid as the symbol of Platonic Love towards which the Soul strives (see Walsh 1970, 222; Kenney 1990, 16; Dowden 1998, 4-9; and Puccini-Delbey 2003, 228-30, see also 234-42). I agree with Penwill (1998, 164-5) and Relihan (2009a:74, 77-9) that scholars have ignored the negative and immature portrayal of Cupid in order to make the story fit a Platonic theme. See Relihan (2009a, 70-2) for a social interpretation of Cupid which negates a symbolic interpretation.

³²⁾ For a discussion of Psyche’s sympathetic portrayal, see Haskins 2008, 124-50.

³³⁾ The sisters foreshadow the destructive path that Psyche is on by showing a similar level of self-interest. The sisters have no loyalty to either their blood or conjugal families. They are so easily envious of Psyche (5.9-10), despite their earlier grief for her and concern for their parents’ grief (5.4), that they can plot to destroy Psyche without a qualm (5.9-10), and they can leave their parents to painfully mourn her after they discover she is alive and well (5.11). On the other hand, they also do not honour their conjugal families, complaining that their husbands are without wealth, health or appropriate status (5.9-10). In addition, their desire to increase their status and wealth leads them to throw away their marriages and blindly trust Psyche’s story that Cupid wishes to marry each of them (5.26-7). After heedlessly sowing the seeds of destruction for their blood and conjugal families, this self-interest kills them as they throw themselves to their deaths off Psyche’s cliff, expecting to be caught and carried to Cupid by the Zephyr (5.27).

completely to reacquiring Cupid, and rebuilding her life, however this is based on passion rather than marriage expectations. She wanders the world so determined to win him over that if he will not lessen his anger to her because of her previous sexual persuasion, then she is willing to use a slave's prayers (6.1). She even goes so far as to call Cupid her 'master' (*dominus* 6.1) rather than husband. From worrying about her status and destroying her marriage because of this worry, she is now willing to take on the lowest status possible, that of a slave, in order to gain the object of her passion. Her new identification as a slave will be reiterated throughout most of the remainder of the story.³⁴⁾ When she comes across Ceres' shrine during her efforts to find Cupid, she discovers that Venus is searching for her to punish her (6.2). In a moment her seeming all-consuming passion for Cupid is replaced purely with concern about herself. Rather than asking Ceres for help in finding her husband, she asks for protection for herself (6.2). Turned away by Ceres, she turns to Juno, finally remembering her pregnancy when it becomes useful in praying for protection from the goddess of childbirth (6.3-4). Juno also turns her away stating that she cannot help a runaway slave (6.4). Psyche's motivation for her next act shows that her passion for Cupid has not made her selfless. Knowing that she will find no help and blocked from finding her husband, she gives up all hope of being saved and decides to try to soften Venus' anger by submitting herself to her (6.5). However, she also hopes to find Cupid in his mother's house, which suggests that at least part of her reason for trying to find Cupid now is in order that he can rescue her from Venus, and they can live happily ever after.

The narrator suggests that Psyche risks certain destruction by going to Venus (6.5), which by extension means she is also risking her child. On the other hand, although it is not explicitly stated, Psyche may have hoped to evoke pity in Venus, and thereby establish a connection with her conjugal family, because of the evidence of her pregnancy with Venus' grandchild, as Venus later suggests (6.9). She could have had no way of knowing that her very pregnancy would play on Venus' fears of old age, being pushed from the role of mother to grandmother before she is ready and losing her power as a child-bearer (5.29), and that this would only increase Venus' hatred of her. The final indignity for Venus is to have her own status threatened by having a mortal – a slave-girl in her eyes – as her grandchild's mother. If Psyche did indeed have such a plan in mind, it is not surprising that it is unsuccessful. Venus' reaction to finally finding Psyche is to have her tortured and to beat her (6.9-10). She tortures Psyche further, though unintentionally, by telling her that Cupid is in the house with a critical wound that Venus blames on her (6.9). Venus then completely rejects Psyche as a member of her family by declaring Psyche's marriage invalid because it was not made in the accepted manner. The marriage was between unequals, it took place in a country house without witnesses and without the father's permission (6.9). Psyche, who had feared for her status, is now both a slave and an unwed mother-to-be. As the ceremony was incomplete on the bride's family's side as well (4.35), the 'marriage' has started in the most inauspicious circumstances. It has brought out the worst possible behaviour in Psyche in terms of what could have been expected of her. Her actions in seeing her husband's face have not only seemed to ensure that her child will be born mortal as he promised (cf. 5.11), but it will now be declared illegitimate by Venus, if she even allows it to be born. Psyche has not only

³⁴⁾ For example, 5.31, 6.4, 6.6–10.

destroyed her marriage, lost all status but she has also once again not made the well-being of her child paramount.

In a rather obvious effort to rid herself of Psyche permanently, but ostensibly to test her worth, Venus sets her a series of impossible tasks (6.10). Faced with the mental torture of being set impossible tasks after everything she has experienced, Psyche gives up.³⁵⁾ Given a pile of seeds to sort into their different types, Psyche is dumbfounded and does nothing to complete the task or help herself in any way (6.10). An ant takes pity on her and completes the task. However, when Venus is unimpressed and accuses her of having Cupid's help (6.11), her despair is complete. When confronted with two further impossible tasks (6.11, 6.13), each time she tries to commit suicide (6.12, 6.14) and is only prevented from doing so when others help her to complete her tasks. She seems once again to have forgotten her baby. Considering the future Venus has in mind for him, Psyche may feel that she is protecting her baby by killing both herself and him, but her baby is never mentioned as part of her decisions to kill herself. Apuleius merely says that she wishes to rest from her ills (6.12) and end her wretched life (6.14).

She finally realises Venus wants to destroy her when she is sent on a final task to Tartarus (6.17). Again Psyche reacts with attempted suicide and is saved by a tower who gives her detailed instructions on how to survive the upcoming trial (6.17-9). Psyche very carefully obeys every one of the detailed commands she is given and manages to return to the world of the living with the box of beauty she was sent to get (6.20). This should have been a great victory for Psyche as she seems to have finally learnt to obey instructions and, with the completion of this final task, Venus should now stop persecuting her. Instead the obstacle to a happy marriage that has plagued Psyche from the beginning of the story, her inability to connect with the interests of her conjugal family that led her to place her own needs over the well-being of others, and later her passionate love for Cupid, prompt her to disobey the greatest injunction given by the tower, that she is not to open the box. Hoping to please Cupid and thereby win him back, she tries to steal a little of the beauty and instead plunges herself into a deadly sleep (6.20-1). Psyche has now broken her second major prohibition. At the moment of what should have been her triumph, Psyche has learnt nothing from her earlier experience and once again finds herself suffering and having to be rescued by another.³⁶⁾ Cupid had been kept under guard to prevent him from meeting Psyche and from aggravating his wound through self-indulgence (6.11). However, as soon as his wound heals, and despite his threat not to see Psyche again, he cannot endure his absence from her and immediately flies to her, just in time to rescue her (6.21). Cupid blames Psyche's curiosity for her actions, but her curiosity has been motivated by heedless self-interest and equally heedless passion.

Cupid proves himself to be no better for, 'consumed with excessive love' (*amore nimio peresus* 6.22), he goes behind his mother's back to a higher authority, Jupiter, in order to get his own way, namely Psyche. Jupiter is willing to oblige for the bribe of a beautiful girl. From this point, Psyche takes no further active part in the story. Jupiter takes command

³⁵⁾ See Konstan's (1994, 137) comments on the strength shown by Psyche as compared to that shown by the heroines of the Greek novels.

³⁶⁾ Lateiner (2000, 321) notes along with Kenney (1990, 14) that Psyche does not deserve to be rescued by Cupid, but Lateiner attributes her redemption to divine grace, interpreting her story symbolically and failing to account for Cupid's selfish motives in rescuing her, as Kenney does.

of everything. He accuses Cupid of ‘hot-blooded impulses’ (*calorati impetus* 6.23), ‘adulteries and all kinds of immoralities’ (*adulteria cunctaeque corruptelae*), ‘self-indulgence’ (*luxuria*) and of robbing Psyche of her virginity (*virginitate privavit*). However, he also gives Cupid what he desires, to keep Psyche and to have his mother reconciled to the match. Jupiter explains his actions to the other gods by telling them that Cupid’s destructive tendencies must be ended by shackling him in marriage (*nuptialibus pedicis alliganda* ‘must be bound with nuptial shackles’ 6.23). Despite Cupid’s attempts to make Psyche his wife, these shackles have obviously not been in place. This seems to be because the marriage was not made in the proper manner, as Jupiter applies the shackles by legalising the marriage according to the civil law.

He does so by addressing the three grounds on which Venus earlier declared the marriage invalid (6.9). Jupiter undercuts Venus’ assumed role as head of Cupid’s family in the absence of a man (cf. 5.29), by claiming the role of Cupid’s father (6.22, 6.23) and giving his consent to the marriage (6.23). However, he also subtly forces Venus into becoming reconciled to the marriage by consoling her over her worries for her own status with the assurance that he will make the marriage between equals. He does this by making Psyche an immortal. Finally, he has a wedding take place in front of an assembly of the gods to act as the necessary witnesses (6.24). With these actions he not only ensures the legitimacy of the marriage, he removes Venus’ legal objections and brings her under his power, making it impossible for her again to try to break up the couple and destroy her rival, Psyche. Venus, once more subject to a male head of the family, even dances at the wedding. Thus, finally, the wedding is conducted ‘properly’ (*rite* 6.24) so that the marriage is now on the foundation it should have started on.³⁷⁾ All the reasons Psyche had to destroy her marriage because of a lack of public recognition, status and connection with her conjugal family, have been removed. Her destructiveness has been shackled just as completely as Cupid’s. Only after this, is her baby, the completion of her family, able to be born, and although it is a girl, it can also still have the promised divinity (5.11).

A reading of Psyche specifically highlighting aspects of her femaleness shows a character in conflict with the most basic building block of ancient society, the family. She is cast in the typically high-class female roles of wife and mother, but her wedding is incomplete and she is unable to connect with her conjugal family due to the actions of Cupid and the hatred of Venus. A properly made marriage, namely one made with the open knowledge and consent of both families, and a mutual understanding and common goals between the married couple, ensures that a wife has all her thoughts centred on family and that she is consequently under the control of her male family members. As Psyche is not properly situated within her marriage, she is purposeless and uncontrolled. To find her place and purpose, Psyche decides to take matters into her own hands and instead becomes thoughtless, self-centred and destructive to herself and the family around her. She is only redeemed once her marriage is made in proper form. However, this is not the deserved result of any personal development on her part, or the result of her own actions. Her happy ending

³⁷⁾ Papaioannou (1998, 314) also recognises the plotline of the Cupid and Psyche story as the trials and tribulations of a couple’s relationship as they head from an incomplete wedding ceremony towards official and legal recognition of their marriage, but she focuses mainly on the legal rather than the social aspects.

only comes about once any further action on her part is prevented, when the males of her conjugal family take control, not for her sake but due to their own desires. A gendered reading of Psyche therefore shows her to be an example of what women who are not properly situated, and thereby given purpose, within marriage, can become. Psyche's role within the Cupid and Psyche story can be seen as an *exemplum* for the importance of traditional marriage rituals and family values to the happiness of both women and their male conjugal relations.

Such an interpretation naturally has implications, not only for other interpretations of Psyche, but for the interpretation of other characters in the novel. It raises questions for the 'orthodox position' in terms of Psyche as philosophical or religious symbol. Rather than learn something from her experience of marriage and her journey to find Cupid, Psyche is actually proven to learn nothing and not to develop in any way. Prevented by circumstances from making a connection with her conjugal family and their interests, she is instead motivated throughout by thoughtless self-interest. This is firstly, because of her vanity over her public status and her concern for her loneliness, and later, because of concern for her physical well-being and her selfish passion for Cupid.³⁸⁾ Her happy ending is not earned but instead brought about by others for their own convenience. The issue of the importance of traditional values also reflects on and highlights the main character, Lucius' decisions throughout the novel. If one is reading Psyche as a mirror of Lucius, Psyche's lack of development and 'undeserved' happy ending calls interpretations of Lucius' personal growth into question. If, as Relihan suggests,³⁹⁾ Lucius is meant to be read in contrast to Psyche, then the most basic contrast, that between female experience and male, and/ or animal, experience must be considered.⁴⁰⁾

Another important impact this interpretation has, is on the interpretation of other female characters within the novel. Psyche's intratextual relationship to Charite can be seen to take on an additional significance. The Cupid and Psyche story is accused of giving false hope to Charite, namely that she too will have a happy ending.⁴¹⁾ A gendered reading of Psyche can actually strengthen this argument. On the surface, Psyche's story shows Charite that a marriage will find success no matter what the obstacles thrown in its path as long as it comes from the foundation of a proper beginning. As Charite's marriage has started in the proper manner,⁴²⁾ she has every reason to be reassured. However, the fact that Psyche's happy ending is the result of the desires of others, actually foreshadows Charite's unhappy ending in that it shows no woman is really in charge of her fortune for long, and how easily

³⁸⁾ Cupid is also shown not to be a worthy goal for her to pursue. Cupid has tried to play the masterly husband, but is described throughout as thoughtless and destructive. He further proves this with his cowardly disobedience of his mother, his weakness in not resisting Psyche and his inability to follow through on his own threats of punishment to her. In the end, he attains his happy ending not by propitiating his mother, but by circumventing her and forcing a reconciliation.

³⁹⁾ Relihan 2009a, 85.

⁴⁰⁾ For a discussion of the link between the perception of females and the perception of animals in the *Metamorphoses*, see Shelton 2005.

⁴¹⁾ Winkler (1985, 55–6) suggests that the story of Psyche is actually a betrayal by the cook in suggesting a happy ending as Charite will lose her husband and commit suicide. See also Relihan 2009a, 81.

⁴²⁾ Although Charite has been kidnapped, she has been engaged to make a proper marriage, organised by her parents, known to all and most importantly, as he is a family member, she shares his interests (4.26). Charite's dream, which prompts the old woman to tell the Cupid and Psyche story, also concerns the well-being of her husband-to-be (4.27).

others can change the course of her future. Psyche's actions and motivations must also be considered within the context of the many other women in the novel, most of whom seem to be conforming to the negative gender expectations of women and wilfully destroying their marriages and men. The issue of traditional family values and the place of women within marriage, as displayed in Psyche's story, provides a backdrop against which these women must be read. For example, the fact that a beautiful, chaste, rich girl could so easily find herself willing to destroy her family brings into question the motivations of these other wives.⁴³⁾ Reciprocally, how do these women, who previously seemed to have nothing in common with her, impact on the interpretation of a destructive and dangerous Psyche? A gendered reading of Psyche therefore provides not only a new interpretation of this character but also opens new and unexplored opportunities for further interpretation of her and the novel as a whole.⁴⁴⁾

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⁴³⁾ Cf. the ass' easy assumption that Charite has chosen a bandit over her husband (7.11).

⁴⁴⁾ I gratefully acknowledge the constructive comments of Dr Koos Kritzinger (University of Pretoria) and the anonymous reader for *Mnemosyne*, especially in relation to my conclusion. Any remaining errors are my own.

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