

“The Golden Root”: Cupid, Psyche, and Basile’s *Pentamerone*

Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* is known for its early use of inset tales, a tradition that has since been practiced by Boccaccio in his *Decameron*, Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*, and even the modern comedy troupe, *Monty Python*. While it is well-known that Boccaccio and Chaucer relied heavily on Apuleius, this paper will look at a lesser known author who relied on Apuleius’ *Tale of Cupid and Psyche*. More specifically, this paper will focus on the seventeenth-century writer, Giambattista Basile, and his incorporation of that specific inset tale into his own collection of fairy tales, the *Pentamerone*.

This paper will trace the literary genealogy of the *Tale of Cupid and Psyche* from Apuleius to Disney, with a primary focus on the role that Basile’s *Pentamerone* played in this transmission. The *Pentamerone* contained early versions of what would later become popular twentieth century Disney movies, including *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and *Cinderella* (1950), as well as variants of the *Tale of Cupid and Psyche* (including “The Padlock” and “The Golden Root”, among others). These variants all fall under the Aarne-Thomson-Uther folktale type “The Search for the Lost Husband” (425), a category which includes the sub-type “Beauty and the Beast” (425C). Both the Cupid and Psyche variants and the Disney “ancestors” inherited and/or adapted many motifs from the original account told by the old woman to the kidnapped bride, Charite, in the *Metamorphoses*. For example, Basile’s *Sleeping Beauty* variant, “Sun, Moon, and Talia”, is an adaptation of a story first seen in the fourteenth-century French prose work *Perceforest*. This tale incorporates many Apuleian motifs, and even has its own “Venus” character.

Through an analysis of the fairytale versions found in the *Pentamerone*, this paper will discuss the literary relationship between Apuleius and Basile; a relationship that was subsequently a major part of the Western fairytale canon due to Basile's influence on the tales of Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. The connecting motifs of these various accounts suggests the influence that the folktale nature of myth had on the later fairytale genre.

Bibliography

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