

Love That Transforms: A Comparative Analysis of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Cupid and Psyche*

Anika Parade

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This study presents a comparative analysis of *Beauty and the Beast* by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve and *Cupid and Psyche* by Apuleius, examining their shared themes of love's transformative power and inner beauty. Despite having different origins, *Beauty and the Beast*, originating during the French Enlightenment, and *Cupid and Psyche* in the 2nd century AD Rome, these tales share a similar message of love transcending physical appearances and promoting self-growth. This paper explores these themes by analyzing each tale's cultural context and narrative details. This exploration argues that both narratives exhibit similarities in their investigation of personal growth, self-discovery, and inner character. This study also draws upon the scholarships of Maria Tatar, Bruno Bettelheim, and Jack Zipes. Utilizing a blend of qualitative analysis and engagement with both primary and secondary sources, this study identifies key motifs and cultural contexts that highlight the timeless appeal of these tales. The novel contribution of this analysis lies in its detailed exploration of how these narratives, despite different cultural and historical contexts, convey a similar message about overcoming adversity through love and inner character.

Introduction

"Beauty is not in the face; beauty is a light in the heart" (Kahlil Gibran). This quote captures the timeless message of love, which has been highlighted through generations of storytelling. Stories of love overcoming obstacles have captivated audiences since ancient times. *Beauty and the Beast*¹, originating during the French Enlightenment, and *Cupid and Psyche*², from 2nd century AD Rome, share universal themes of love transcending physical appearances and promoting self-growth. The hypothesis of this study is that despite their different cultural and historical origins, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Cupid and Psyche* share a core message that true love is transformative and transcends superficial appearances, promoting personal growth and moral integrity in both protagonists.

The main objective of this research is to identify and analyze the common motifs and thematic elements in both tales. It also aims to understand how these motifs and themes reflect the cultural values of their respective eras and to explore the impact of these themes on modern audiences and their relevance today. Primary scholarships are used to identify key themes and motifs through textual analysis, focusing on elements such as love's transformative power, inner beauty, and overcoming adversity. Secondary scholarship is used to support and contextualize the findings. This study contributes to the field of folklore studies by showing how love transcends the boundary of time and culture. The goal is to deepen one's understanding of how this timeless tale still shapes our thoughts and helps humans overcome challenges.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to compare the two tales. Primary texts include Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast*¹ and Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, translated by E.J. Kenney². These texts were chosen for their rich material and their historical significance. Both narratives were read to understand their thematic content and character development. Both texts were compared to identify similar themes and motifs. The narratives were also compared to understand their cultural setting and its influence on narrative.

Secondary texts include Maria Tatar's *The Classic Fairy Tales*³, Jack Zipes' *Why Fairy Tales Stick*⁴, and Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*⁵. These scholarships were chosen as they offer a good insight into the world of fairy tales and myths. Maria Warner's *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*⁶ was used to understand 18th-century French culture. Erwin F. Cook's *Psyche's Task: A Labor of Love*⁷ was used to study the influence of heroic elements in Greek mythology. Ruth B. Bottigheimer's *Fairy Tales and Society*⁸ was also used to understand the influence of fairy tales in shaping our society. Analysis for both tales is also based within the broader framework of feminist theory and psychoanalytic criticism. Feminist theory is used to offer insights into the gender dynamics in both tales. This study has relied on the translated text for *Cupid and Psyche*. Effort was made to acknowledge all text and adhere to the author's intention.

Results

The analysis reveals that both tales emphasize love's ability to transcend physical appearances and promote inner transformation. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Beauty's ability to see beyond the Beast's exterior reflects Enlightenment values of inner morality and humanistic ideals. Similarly, *Cupid and Psyche* portray Psyche's trials as a journey of self-discovery and transformation, echoing Greek heroic myths. The study also acknowledges that there are multiple translations of these narratives, and the results are limited to the chosen translations.

Discussions

Textual Evidence

Identified themes and motifs were substantiated through direct textual evidence from the primary sources. For instance, Beauty's capacity to look past the Beast's appearance allows her to connect with his inner goodness. This is evidenced when, according to de Villeneuve (95), Beauty says, "It is your heart, not your form, that I have come to cherish"¹. This illustrates the theme of inner beauty overcoming external appearances. Psyche, too, can see beyond the monstrous form she is told to expect; it marks a turning point for her as she begins to see beyond the surface appearance. This is aptly quoted by Apuleius (84), "She saw hair of golden sheen, ambrosial perfume, snowy neck and roseate cheeks, and locks beautifully arrayed... The god's wings, dewy with shining drops, lay quiet, gleaming at the shoulders of their resting master... At the foot of the bed lay his bow and quiver and arrows, the gracious weapons of the mighty god"². These excerpts give concrete examples of how love gives the protagonists the ability to look past physical appearance and promote inner growth.

Justification of Thematic Similarities

Comparative textual analysis is used to justify the thematic similarities between *Beauty and the Beast* and *Cupid and Psyche*. Both tales showcase protagonists who demonstrate inner beauty and strength of character. Beauty's sacrifice for her father and subsequent relationship with the Beast parallels Psyche's sacrifice for her family and her devotion to Cupid. When the Beast takes her captive in place of her father, Beauty reassures her father, as noted by Beaumont (36), "Do not worry, father," said Beauty. "Since the monster wants to accept one of your daughters, I will give myself up to his fury, and I am quite happy to expose myself to danger to save you"⁹. This quote reflects her noble nature and strength of character. Her ability to form a relationship with the Beast demonstrates her inner beauty. Psyche's inner beauty and sacrifice are reflected when she accepts her terrible fate. Psyche addresses her parent's distress and

tells them she is ready to accept her faith and fulfill the oracle's prophecy. Apuleius (76) describes Psyche's sacrifices when he quotes, "My poor parents," she said, "you are worn out with prolonged grief and anxiety on my account. The time has now come to implement the oracle's pronouncement. Lead me to the appointed rock and leave me there to meet my destined husband. Why delay? Why put off my encounter with this grand personage who was born to be the destruction of the whole world?"². It is Psyche's inner strength that helps her succeed in Venus' trials and emerge as a goddess.

Engagement with Existing Scholarship and Competing Perspectives

This study critically engages with existing scholarship on both tales. Maria Tatar's work on inner transformation through love in *The Classic Fairy Tales*³ helps us highlight the importance of transformation in fairy tales. Tatar highlights how the transformative power of love emerges as a key theme in many fairy tales, where it serves as an antidote to narcissism and functions as the agent of change, metamorphosis, and maturation³. This quote encapsulates Tatar's view on how love acts as a transformative force in fairy tales.

Ruth B. Bottigheimer's analysis in *Fairy Tales and Society*⁸ of magical elements in fairy tales provides a foundation for understanding how characters overcome obstacles. Bottigheimer states that magic in fairy tales often serves as a catalyst for transformation, whether physical, social, or moral. It provides a means by which characters can overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles and achieve their goals⁷. Ruth B. Bottigheimer's analysis discusses the role of magical elements in fairy tales and how these elements often facilitate transformations and trials that the protagonists must undergo.

Additionally, Jack Zipes' exploration in *Why Fairy Tales Stick*⁴ of that fairy tales connect with humans offers alternative interpretations that enrich the analysis. Zipes states that fairy tale as a genre has become a cultural institution, regulated as to form and content by social and political interests⁴. This quote from Zipes suggests that tales like *Beauty and the Beast* and *Cupid and Psyche* can be read as reflections of the society that produced them. Jack Zipes' analysis provides a different viewpoint for analyzing the cultural context of society.

Maria Warner's work in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*⁶ is a valuable source for our analysis of the environment in 18th-century France. Warner's work on *Beauty and the Beast* reflects this fairy tale as a vehicle of Enlightenment values. The beast's transformation in 'Beauty and the Beast' is a metaphor for the human capacity for change and improvement, reflecting the Enlightenment belief in progress and the perfectibility of mankind. Warner also says that stories like these are designed to impart moral lessons and encourage virtuous behavior through their narratives of reward and punish-

ment⁶. This context helps us resonate with the societal climate of 18th-century France.

Erwin F. Cook's essay *Psyche's Task: A Labor of Love*⁷ is used as a source to compare Psyche's tasks to those of other Greek heroes like Hercules. Cook compares Psyche's labor to other male heroes like Hercules. He also points out how Psyche's trials highlight feminine heroism. A heroism that values perseverance, wit, and emotional fortitude, which differs from the Greek male hero's tasks⁷. Cook's analysis helps situate Psyche in the broader philosophy of Greek heroism.

Direct Engagement with Primary Texts

To provide a clearer understanding of the themes and motifs, this research has engaged directly with the primary sources in their original context. In *Beauty and the Beast*, the narrative's emphasis on Beauty's love and acceptance and the Beast's transformation aligns with Enlightenment ideals. The story reflects the period's focus on rationality and humanistic values. It is evident when Beauty mentions that is not a man's wit or handsome face that makes a woman happy; it is the goodness of his character.¹ Beast's inner transformation is also witnessed when he states, that he no longer feels like a monster when he looks at himself¹. This illustrates the theme of inner beauty overcoming external appearances, which aligns with Enlightenment ideas.

In *Cupid and Psyche*, the complex interplay between human passions and divine forces highlights the philosophical and religious thought of ancient Rome. Psyche's trials mirror the Greek tradition of heroic traditions when Venus imposes a series of what she considered impossible tasks upon Psyche.² This mirrors the Greek heroic traditions. Psyche's growth as a goddess reflects divine intervention, often a common theme in Roman mythology. This is evident when Jupiter intervenes. It is evident when, according to Apuleius (105), Jupiter says, "Take it, he said, 'Psyche, and be immortal. Cupid shall never break away from the bond in which he is united to you, but these nuptials of yours shall be perpetual'"². These cultural influences are evident in the characters' actions and the stories' settings, helping provide a deeper understanding of their themes and motifs.

The concept of inner beauty is central to both tales and can be defined through specific qualities exhibited by the characters. In *Beauty and the Beast*, inner beauty is characterized by qualities such as kindness, empathy, and moral integrity. Beauty's willingness to sacrifice herself for her father and her ability to look beyond the Beast's exterior to see his true nature exemplify these qualities. The Beast's transformation is driven by his developing inner virtues, such as his growing kindness and humility. In *Cupid and Psyche*, inner beauty is reflected in Psyche's perseverance, devotion, and selflessness. Psyche's trials and ultimate transformation into a goddess highlight her inner strength and commitment to love. Both characters' journeys emphasize that true beauty comes from within, shaped by their

actions and moral choices rather than physical appearance.

Analysis for both tales is also based within the broader framework of feminist theory and psychoanalytic criticism. Feminist theory is used to offer insights into the gender dynamics in both tales. It helps us identify how protagonists challenge traditional gender norms. Beauty's role transitions from a passive to an active character who makes her own choices. What starts as a sacrifice for her father becomes a choice for Beauty¹. Her acceptance of the Beast showcases her taking control of her life. As Scholar Zipes aptly highlights, Beauty's resilience and agency challenge traditional gender roles. He states how fairy tale heroines like Beauty represent early examples of female characters who navigate and, at times, challenge patriarchal structures⁴. Beauty's role challenges the expected norms of her time.

Psyche's endurance and ultimate transformation can be studied through a psychoanalytic lens as a journey of self-realization and empowerment. When Psyche declares, she will go, and if she does not return, one can assume she has perished². Here, she exhibits a determination that defies the passive role often assigned to women in classical mythology. This aligns with Bruno's Bettelheim observation: The protagonist's supernatural transformation often represents the realization of one's full potential and the integration of the self.⁵ Psyche's determination to overcome Venus's trials and her attainment of godhood can be seen as achieving psychological maturity.

This perspective adds depth to our understanding of these characters and the stories' enduring appeal. This analysis shows how the tales weave complex ideas of psychological development and the power of gender.

Conclusions

This comparative analysis of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Cupid and Psyche* highlights the timeless appeal of their shared themes. Despite originating in different cultural contexts, both tales convey messages about the transformative power of love and the importance of inner beauty.

Future Directions

Future research could explore additional cultural influences and alternative interpretations, furthering our understanding of these enduring narratives. For instance, examining other cultural adaptations of these tales could reveal how different societies interpret and value these themes. One can also study how modern adaptations reflect the theme of love's power to transform. There can also be a study of different versions of these tales to highlight how these tales have evolved across retellings. Additionally, a comparative study with other mythological or fairy tale traditions could provide a broader perspective on the universal elements of these stories. The implications for the study of

folklore and mythology are significant, as these stories continue to inspire and offer valuable lessons about love, transformation, and inner beauty.

References

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