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Latin 4

February 14th, 2023

Review of *Filia Regis et Monstrum Horribile* by Andrew Olimpi

Main Characters

- Psyche (mortal)
- Cupid (immortal)
- Venus (immortal)
- Psyche's two sisters (mortal)
- Zephyr (immortal)

Themes

- Love versus Praise
- Marriage
- Sibling Rivalry
- Envy
- Beauty Standards influenced by patriarchal ideals
- Conflicts between women

Summary

Filia Regis et Monstrum Horribile is a Latin novella by Andrew Olimpi which recounts the Greco-Roman myth *Cupid and Psyche*, originally written by Roman author Lucius Apuleius. The novella centers around the perspective of a girl named Psyche who is supposedly the most beautiful out of her two sisters. The townspeople are so captivated by her charm that they begin to praise her instead of Venus, angering the goddess. Overtaken by jealousy, Venus, goddess of beauty and love, orders her son Cupid, god of love and desire, to punish Psyche by giving her water from a cursed fountain so that she can never find love. Although Cupid gives Psyche the ill-fated water, he accidentally stabs himself with his powerful "sagitta amoris" or "arrow of love," causing him to feel attracted to her. Meanwhile on land, Psyche's parents are confused as to why no man wants to marry Psyche, despite her continuing to be praised by the citizens. They

seek an oracle which reveals that Psyche will marry a monster who lives on the top of a mountain.

After spending time in the monster's decadent house, Psyche, initially saddened by her fate, begins to enjoy her lavish lifestyle filled with dutiful invisible servants. She becomes acquainted with her monster of a husband and is surprised by his kindness, but is never able to see what he looks like. After a while, Psyche misses her family and asks her husband to see them, for which Zephyr, god of the West Wind, sends her two sisters to the mountain. Psyche tells her sisters that her husband is actually a friendly man, but they do not believe her and instead, suggest that Psyche discover her husband's true nature by shining an oil lamp near him and killing him with a sword if he is truly a monster. Psyche follows their advice and it is revealed that the "monster" is actually Cupid who, frightened in turn, flies away. Psyche, devastated, walks through every city to find Cupid. She even organizes the temple of the goddess Ceres so that she can receive help. Luckily Ceres is able to advise Psyche and she encourages the girl to ask Venus for forgiveness. Psyche begs Venus, but the goddess is still outraged by Psyche's beauty that she gives her three nearly impossible tasks to complete on her own as a testament to earn Cupid's love. Psyche completes the first two tasks with assistance but as she is completing the third task, she falls into a deep sleep. Later, Cupid finds Psyche on the ground and the two reunite and express their love for each other. Since immortals and mortals are not permitted to marry according to the laws in Olympus, Jupiter, ruler of the gods, turns Psyche into a goddess, allowing the two to marry.

Comparative Report

The historical research for this report is from a University of Pittsburg summary of the original myth *Cupid and Psyche*, written by Lucius Apuleius, that is derived from multiple

translations of the story. Andrew Olimpi's novella is almost parallel to the historical source with a few minor differences. In fact, in the preface Olimpi writes that he "simplified Apuleius' elegant and witty original to a simpler, straightforward narrative" so as not to take away from the story but to give beginner Latin students an easier read. One of the differences between the two works occurs during the part where the sisters visit Psyche on the mountain. In the original myth, the sisters go inside the monster's house and become envious of its grandeur and luxury. They even try to steal gold from the house later in the story, but are sent back to land by Zephyr. On the other hand, in the novella, the monster's house is invisible to the sisters. They do not even believe of the house's riches until Psyche returns to land with the golden lamp after Cupid flies away, prompting the sisters to steal just like in the myth. The other alterations in the novella occur when Psyche is completing her tasks for Venus. In the myth, Apuleius writes that Cupid assisted Psyche in completing her first task by sending ants to sort grains from a pile. Olimpi, on the contrary, omits this mentioning of Cupid's help and instead writes that the ants approached Psyche themselves. In addition, Olimpi writes that the invisible servant from the monster's house helps Psyche with her third order from Venus by giving her a map to find Persephone's lair, whereas the myth contains no reference of a map, even though both stories allude to an invisible servant giving Psyche instructions. Based on these small modifications, it is most likely that Olimpi changed parts of the original myth for clarity and to keep a consistent vocabulary within the book.

Although Olimpi's novella is similar to the original myth, there are other retellings of the story that have apparent differences, such as in the book *Love in Color* by British author Bolu Babalola. Babalola's *Love in Color* reimagines Greco-Roman myths through a modern lens. In *Love in Color*, there is more dialogue between Cupid and Psyche concerning their relationship

and Psyche is aware of Cupid's appearance; whereas in the other two renditions, Psyche thought Cupid was a monster until she shined the light on him. Psyche also has more personal agency in *Love in Color*, contrary to the expectations of modesty placed on Roman Women. Throughout the book she challenges Cupid on what she values in a relationship, saying that she wants a partner with whom she "can be able to have a conversation" in addition to having a physical connection. She also opposes patriarchally influenced beauty standards in antiquity, asking Cupid and the rest of the Olympus gods and goddesses, "what really is beauty?" instead of accepting this inherent misogyny. However, the general storyline of the *Cupid and Psyche* myth remains the same throughout this version, specifically during the part where Cupid flies away from Psyche out of fear. Nevertheless, *Love in Color* creates additional depth within the original myth, analyzing the decisions and character of Cupid, Psyche, and Venus and exploring themes such as vulnerability and true love.

Book Review

Although Olimpi emphasizes that his novella is meant to be straightforward, he excellently balances a simple narration with the incorporation of complex themes regarding Roman women in antiquity that continue to exist today. The topic of beauty standards plays a major role in the myth, as the story centers around Psyche's beauty and how it affects other people's perceptions of her. Both Apuleius and Olimpi's renditions reveal how beauty standards in Ancient Rome were largely influenced by men since in the story, all of the citizens in the town, who were mostly men because women could rarely engage in the public, praised her. Not only do these patriarchal ideals impact women individually, but they also have control over relationships between women, another theme in both the novella and historical research. The root

of Venus' frustration for Psyche was most likely due to a lack of self-worth, since Venus believed that the townspeople thought that she was not as beautiful as Psyche. Instead of admiring the girl for her beauty, Venus resented Psyche out of envy. Conflict between women influenced by patriarchal ideals still exists today as many films and television shows display women arguing with each other over matters such as who is "prettier" or over the attention of a man.

Nevertheless, Olimpi makes sure to prioritize the female voice, especially through his use of internal monologue to describe how both Psyche and Venus are feeling. This literary element is important because it highlights the humanity of the characters. Although Venus was in the wrong for wishing harm upon an innocent girl, sentences in Venus's internal monologue such as "homines putant puellam esse me pulchriorem" or "men think that [Psyche] is more beautiful than me" allow readers to have empathy for the goddess and realize that the enforcement of beauty standards is the true antagonist in the story.

Conclusion

Overall, *Filia Regis et Monstrum Horribile* by Andrew Olimpi was a concise yet thought-provoking read. In reviews of the novella, many people enjoy the story's educational and direct nature as well as its relatability to common fairytales such as *Beauty and the Beast*, with reference to the monster, and *Cinderella*, alluding to Psyche's two sisters. The novella's connections to the present day in regards to beauty standards and envy between women are also significant and I applaud Olimpi for revealing the problematic nature of patriarchally influenced norms of feminine beauty in his recounting of the myth. For these reasons, I encourage Latin learners to read *Filia Regis et Monstrum Horribile* as it has the potential to play a meaningful role in future conversations about internalized misogyny and the representation of women.

Works Cited

"Cupid And Psyche". *Sites.Pitt.Edu*, 2023, <https://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/cupid.html>. Accessed 15 Feb 2023.

Olimpi, Andrew. *Filia Regis et Monstrum Horribile*. Dacula, Georgia, Comprehensible Classics Press, 2017.