

Renowned author, critic, and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis described *Till We Have Faces*, his final novel, as “far and away the best I have written” (Myers 2004: 1). The work is his retelling, from the perspective of one of Psyche’s two wicked sisters, of the tale of Cupid and Psyche found in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*. In his introduction, printed in some editions as a postscript, Lewis plays down his relationship to Apuleius: “...in relation to my work he is a ‘source,’ not an ‘influence’ nor a ‘model’” (Lewis 1980: 313). Yet there are at least three important respects in which Lewis’s adaptation reflects not the tale of Cupid and Psyche itself, but Apuleius’ novel as a whole, three ways in which Lewis has taken the embedded tale and reshaped it in the image of Apuleius’ larger work. This paper presents these three over-arching changes as moments in the reception of Apuleius, using the dialogue between Apuleius and Lewis as a means to a better understanding of both works. It looks in particular at their presentation of a central human problem, one which was important to Lewis’ life, and which is the focus of the third and most important of Lewis’s changes to Cupid and Psyche: the subjectivity of religious experience.

Lewis’s first alteration is the change of the heterodiegetic (“third-person omniscient”) narrative of Cupid and Psyche into an autodiegetic (“first-person confession”) narrative. He projects himself into the position of one of Psyche’s sisters and presents the tale from her perspective, as a sort of mixture between *Bildungsroman* and confession. Yet this new form is precisely that chosen by Apuleius for his novel, and Lewis has thus turned “Cupid and Psyche” inside out, taking a tale that has been recognized by many recent analyses of Apuleius as a mirror image of the larger narrative (e.g. Smith 1998), and turning it into the outermost narrative framework.

Or frameworks, one should really say, since the second change Lewis makes, which brings his novel still closer to the *Metamorphoses*, is the presentation of the narrative in two stages: the first, longer stage, written as an autobiography which “will accuse the gods,” presents a tale that is agnostic at best; the second, much shorter stage, is written as a correction to the tone of the first, and presents a first-hand encounter with the divine which has forced a drastic revision of the meaning presented in the first stage.

Both of these narrative shifts are implicated in the third change, what Lewis identifies as his “central alteration”: “...making Psyche’s palace invisible to normal, mortal eyes...” (Lewis 1980: 313). This change, which “forced itself upon” Lewis, is necessary for the presentation of the tale sympathetically from the perspective of one of Psyche’s sisters. It contains in it the essence of the problem addressed by both novels, a problem which is fundamental to the drastic reevaluation of meaning created by their structures: the invisibility of Psyche’s palace is one way of depicting the subjectivity of religious experience. However real, however glorious that experience may be for its subject, to the outside observer it is impossible to enter, impossible to enjoy or appreciate. This problem, as Shumate’s reading of Winkler has recently shown (Shumate 1996), is at the heart of Apuleius’ narrative project.

Thus by creating a dialogue with Apuleius, albeit a dialogue which he is eager to play down, Lewis has provided a lens through which we can see both his own work and Apuleius’ in better light. The problem of religious subjectivity is one which is pressing in modern society, though within drastically different parameters from those dealt with by Apuleius. Lewis has used the (imagined) Classical past as a pivot for distancing himself from modernity and viewing this problem from the outside; at the same time, he has provided us a way of seeing how Apuleius can be vital even now.