

**Cupid and Psyche's Journey from Rome to the  
Castle East of the Sun and West of the Moon**  
An inquiry into the cross-cultural nature of fairy-tales

Kari Kvelstad Ellingsen

LITT2900

Spring 2019

## Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i> .....	2
<i>Close comparison of «East of the Sun and West of the Moon» and the tale of Cupid and Psyche</i> .....	3
<i>The politics of folktale collection in Norway</i> .....	7
<i>Moe on “East of the Sun and West of the Moon” and its relation to Apuleius</i> .....	8
<i>The origins of the tale of Cupid and Psyche</i> .....	9
<i>The spread of fairy-tales through oral and written sources</i> .....	11
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	15
<i>References Cited</i> .....	17

## *Introduction*

Ever since the Norwegian emancipation from Danish rule in 1814, the question of what is inherently Norwegian has been asked. In an attempt at answering this question, the folktale collectors Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe went out across the country to try and capture the spirit of the folk through a series of oral tales they believed to be distinctly Norwegian. The result of this project was the publication of *Norske Folkeeventyr* in the early 1840s, a work whose impact on the creation of a national, cultural identity can still be felt today.

In the increasingly commercialized modern-day Norway, objects illustrating our persistent connection to the folktales surround us every day. Examples of this could be the smiling trolls peering out at us from souvenir shops, or the Theodor Kittelsen-paintings decorating the fronts of postcards brandished with “From Norway with Love”. But one does not have to enter into the realms of tourist attractions and souvenirs in order to find evidence of how the folktales still affect how we see ourselves today. Enter into any grocery store, and you will find, right by the checkout-counter, a shelf exhibiting little, yellow squares displaying the word “Eventyrsjokolade”(Freia, 2019a), which translates “Fairy-tale Chocolate.” This brand of candy is carried by the company Freia, who, befittingly, is associated with the slogan “A little piece of Norway” (Freia, 2019b), and comes with a shortened version of a traditional Norwegian folktale printed inside the wrapping, most of which stem from the abovementioned collection, *Norske Folkeeventyr*.

One of these short tales goes by the name “Kvitebjørn Kong Valemon,” which also happens to be the object of one of Theodor Kittelsen’s most famous paintings, dating from 1912, and carrying the same name as the original tale (Kittelsen, 1912). This is a version of the much longer tale “East of the Sun and West of the Moon”, which has been characterized as one of the most famous and archetypical Norwegian folktales collected by Asbjørnsen and Moe (Gunnel, 2010). The fact that this tale is so prominent in our modern-day society bears witness to its importance as a symbol of our cultural identity. Together with other folktales, “East of the Sun and West of the Moon” is a key piece in our understanding of who we are as a nation and a people; it is simply Norwegian. But what would happen if that was proven not to be the case?

In the ancient Roman novel *The Golden Ass*, written by Apuleius in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, one can find the story of Cupid and Psyche, a tale that very much resembles “East of the Sun and West of the Moon.” In truth, they are so similar one might consider them versions of the

same tale. How can this be? How can the same fairy-tale exist simultaneously in two different cultures, despite being far apart both in distance and in time?

The main objective of the following will be to provide an answer to this question. In doing so, it will make use of a comparative approach focused on the Cupid and Psyche story and the Norwegian folktale, concentrating on similarities in plot and detail. Once the degree to which the stories resemble one another has been made clear, it will go on to discuss the legacy and origin of these tales. In this, it will at first be concerned with the shift in attitude towards the question in a broader sense. Here it will describe how early scholars such as Asbjørnsen and Moe and the brothers Grimm, changed their views on the topic from that of fairy-tales as pertaining to specific cultures, to that of them belonging to a broader, more cross-cultural tradition.

Following this, it will revert to focusing on the two tales specifically, as Ludwig Friedlander's theory of the Cupid and Psyche tale as having been based on an originally Indian folktale, is put forth and discussed. In light of this, there will be a brief presentation of the two opposing theories concerning the origin of folk- and fairy-tales, known as monogenesis and polygenesis, before focusing on Jack Zipes' explanation of how the popularization of the fairy-tale as a literary genre affected the oral folktales and vice versa.

After having applied all of this to "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" and the Cupid and Psyche story as found in Apuleius, a probable outline of the tale's journey will be presented. In addition to this, the need for a reassessment of the fairy-tale genre as a whole will eventually be addressed, raising the question of how it can still play an important role in the world today.

### ***Close comparison of «East of the Sun and West of the Moon» and the tale of Cupid and Psyche***

As mentioned in the introduction, the Norwegian folktale "East of the Sun and West of the Moon," collected by Peter Christian Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe for their 1852 edition of *Norske Folkeeventyr* (Solberg, 2007), bears a striking resemblance to the tale known as "Cupid and Psyche" found in the ancient Roman novel *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius.

"East of the Sun and West of the Moon" tells of a poor husbandman with an abundance of children and no money to feed or clothe them. All of his children were pretty, but the youngest girl was the most beautiful by far. One day, there came a great White Bear knocking on their window, telling them how he would make them richer than they could ever have

imagined, if only they would give him their youngest daughter. Upon hearing this, the girl at first rejected the proposal, but when he came back the next week, she, having been persuaded by her family of the riches he would bring them, went with him without complaint. The Bear, taking her on his back, then carried her to a magnificent castle where she was waited upon by invisible servants day and night; she need only ring a silver bell, and she would get all that she desired. Yet, apart from those magical servants, she spent her days alone in the castle. At night, however, when she went to bed, a man came and lay alongside her. It was the White Bear, transformed into a human by the cloak of night. (Asbjørnsen, 1914)

Up until the female protagonist, who in “East of the Sun and West of the Moon” remains unnamed throughout the entire story and is only ever referred to as “the Girl,” enters the enchanted castle, the tale diverges slightly from that of Cupid and Psyche.

In the ancient version of Apuleius, it is told of a king and a queen with three lovely daughters, the youngest being the most beautiful. In fact, this girl, who we are soon to know by the name Psyche, was so beautiful people travelled far and wide to see her. But, thinking that she was the reincarnation of the goddess Venus herself, no one dared approach her. Thus, her beauty caused her only pain, never pleasure. Getting word of this mortal being worshipped as a god, the envious Venus called upon her son Cupid, planning to enact her revenge on the girl by causing her to fall in love with a beast. A prophecy warning of this eventually found its way to the King, who was told his daughter was to be married, and thus also sacrificed, to a gigantic snake-like monster. Despairing, but seeing no way out of this horrible fate, the girl was sent off, weeping but with her head still held high, to her doom atop a steep mountain. There, she was met, not by a monster, but by the West wind who swept her away to a green grove in which there was a magnificent castle worthy of a god. (Apuleius, 2011)

Though the Roman tale lets the girl be the daughter of a king, and thus a princess, limits the number of children to three, and makes no mention of a white bear, one can see that the basic elements of the story thus far remains the same: A beautiful girl is taken away by a (supposed) beast to a magnificent castle. However, an interesting difference between the two, is that Apuleius establishes the goddess Venus as the antagonist from the very beginning of the tale and devotes much of the story to describe her wrath towards Psyche. In this way, the motivation of the family to give up their girl is divine, and not one of their own personal gain in the form of money. Also striking is the differentiation in the relation of the antagonist to the love interest of the protagonist in the two stories. In the story of Cupid and Psyche, it is the mother of Cupid, in "East of the Sun and West of the Moon," it is another family member, the role of which will be made clear when they enter the tale at a later stage.

Just like in the Norwegian folktale, Psyche too was waited upon by invisible servants and visited by a mysterious lover in the night. For a while, both girls live happily in their separate stories, but soon succumb to loneliness and depression in the longing for their respective families. When they plead their cause to their lovers in the dark, they are warned against the potential danger it would put them both in, if they were to give in to the persuasions put forth by their family members to investigate who their husband might be. The Bear warns the girl against her mother, (Asbjørnsen, 1914) while Cupid warns Psyche against her malicious and jealous sisters (Apuleius, 2011). Both women swear to heed their husbands' warnings, but in the end, they fail to keep their word.

The motivation of the two women to break their promise to their husband are not the same, but their actions are. In regard to Psyche, her sisters only manage to persuade her by convincing her into believing that her husband really was the serpent-monster told of in the prophecy, and thus she lights a lamp with the intention of killing him in self-defence. In contrast, the girl from Asbjørnsen and Moe's tale lights the candle out of pure curiosity awakened in her by her mother. However, regardless of their reasoning behind lighting the candle, they both end up doing the one thing they were forbidden; they discover the identity of their lover. One is Cupid, the god of love, the other a lovely prince. Once they lay their eyes on these beautiful figures, both women fall so deeply in love they cannot keep themselves from kissing them. It is this act of reckless passion that drives them to their doom, for when they bend down to press their lips against the one sleeping there in the bed, a drop of searing hot wax (Asbjørnsen, 1914), or oil (Apuleius, 2011) drips onto him, and he wakes.

In wrath and despair, the men awaken to discover what the girls have done. They curse them, for now they can no longer be together. Had they only heeded their warnings, all would have been fine, but now, betrayed by the one person who could have saved them, they fly away to other, more cruel fates.

It is only at this point that the antagonist in "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" is revealed. For when the Bear wakes, he cries: "What have you done? (...) now you have made us both unlucky, for had you held out only this one year, I had been freed. For I have a step-mother who has bewitched me, so that I am a White Bear by day, and a Man by night". (Asbjørnsen, 1914, p. 15). Thus, it is established that it is his step-mother who has put him in this situation, and now he has to go to her, so that he can marry her daughter; a long-nosed and ugly troll-princess, who lives in a castle that lies east of the sun and west of the moon.

After having been abandoned by their lovers, the two women are left alone and desolate, but not bereft of a purpose. All of their energy now goes into regaining what they have lost, and

that can only be achieved through trials and tribulations they cannot overcome without the help of supernatural means.

From this point on, the two women face a series of different obstacles, and the stories diverge to such a degree that the differences between them exceed that of the similarities.

Psyche wanders around, exacting vengeance on her sisters for the wrong they did her, and encountering a series of different gods before eventually facing her fate by giving herself over to the wrath of Venus. Once in the heavenly abode of the deity, she is given a set of tasks she is bound to complete if she is to survive. These tasks are four in number and include the following: (1) The separation of a mixture of wheat and barley, millet and poppy seeds, chickpeas, lentils, and beans, expected to be completed within a limited time frame. (2) The collection of golden wool from wild, violent sheep. (3) The gathering of water from a fountain guarded by snakes. (4) The journey into the underworld for the purpose of bringing back a box of beauty from Proserpina.

The first three tasks are completed by Psyche through the help of ants, a whispering reed and an eagle. However, the completion of the fourth and last task is only achieved through the help of her beloved Cupid, who saves her when she initially fails the mission. After this, the two are reunited and joined in a marriage resulting in the birth of a daughter who would bear the name Pleasure. (Apuleius, 2011)

In "East of the Sun and West of the Moon," the girl travels far and wide in her search for the enchanted castle in which her Prince dwells together with the troll-folk. On her way she comes across three hags, all of whom she asks for directions to the castle. None of them are in possession of the information she is in need of, but they each help her along the way, gifting her a golden apple, a gold carding-comb and a golden spinning wheel, telling her she might have use for them at one point or another.

Though these old women do not know the way to the place the girl is asking for, they direct her to the East Wind, for he might know the way. Unfortunately, he does not, and she ends up having to visit both the West Wind and the South Wind, before finally encountering the North Wind, who blows her all the way to the castle east of the sun and west of the moon. There she buys herself three nights with the Prince by selling the golden objects to the troll-princess. Of these three nights, the Prince spends the first two under the influence of a sleeping-potion, but on the third, having become suspicious that something might be awry, he manages to stay awake when the girl comes to visit him. The two are reunited, and together they manage to banish all the trolls from the castle, bringing with them all the gold and silver in the castle as they turn for home. (Asbjørnsen, 1914)

Although the tales differ in the way they unfold in the latter part of the story, one can still see how closely they resemble one another. While the details do not match, they follow the same redemptive arch as the women finally regain what they have lost and live happily ever after. This causes one to wonder, when the points of similarity have been proved to be as manifold as has here been shown, whether the connection between the two tales has been made before, and if so, how “East of the Sun and West of the Moon” has come to be accepted into Norwegian culture as *Norwegian*.

### ***The politics of folktale collection in Norway***

Key to understanding the role of folktales in modern-day Norway, and the impact they have played, and still play, in our conception of national identity, is the historical and political circumstances under which they were first collected and made relevant. In the article "Daisies Rise to Become Oaks. The Politics of Early Folktale Collection in Northern Europe", Terry Gunnell outlines how many of the early collections of folktales were closely connected to the movement known as national romanticism, and the project of constructing a national image. This is especially true for countries such as Germany, Scotland, Iceland and Norway, who were all attempting to regain autonomy and independence from foreign control at this time.

In 1814, 26 years before the first volumes of *Norske Folkeeventyr* were published in the 1840s (Gunnell, 2010), Norway had broken free from 400 years of Danish rule, only to enter into a political union with Sweden a couple of months later. Though short, this period of freedom provided the nation of Norway with a constitution, a king and a budding democracy (Frydenlund, 2019).

The ideas and politics that went into this process were symptomatic of the whole continent at the time, and one of the outcomes was a growing interest for the national heritage and culture of each individual country. Thus, the search for what was inherently and purely "Norwegian" became increasingly important for historians and poets alike (Haaberg, Selboe & Aarset, 2017). At the time of Asbjørnsen and Moe's publication, a series of other works were being developed, taking on the project of collecting Norwegian history and mythology, language and ballads (Gunnell, 2010). The collection of folktales can be seen as an essential part of this undertaking, as a significant motivation behind it was the belief that “Folktales sprang from the innermost life of a people/ nation” (Gunnell, 2010), as Moe stated in a prospectus in 1840, adding that folktales were an important tool in the process of determining the unique



character of a people. This is what the two Norwegian folktale-collectors had in mind when they started their fieldwork in the southern and western parts of Norway. Inspired by the directions set by their German counterparts, the brothers Grimm, they went out to meet the folk and collect their stories in person. (Gunnell, 2010)

It is this romantic image that has stuck in our collective memory of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the two wanderers crossing mountains, rivers and fields, reaching the innermost parts of our country, wandering stick in hand, intent on capturing the very soul of the folk. This perception has manifested itself in our minds like a romantic painting on par with *Brudeferd i Hardanger* (Gude & Tidemand, 1814), making it increasingly hard to separate the collectors from their work. Thus, the legend of how the fairy-tales were collected has become almost a fairy-tale in itself. Asbjørnsen and Moe are characters as dear to us as Askeladden and Kvitebjørn Kong Valemon. They have themselves become part of the very tales they collected, because in recording and preserving this important part of our cultural heritage, they helped define what made us unique from other nations. In other words, they helped us become Norwegians.

With this in mind, it is easy to believe that Asbjørnsen and Moe maintained such a romantic view of their work themselves. However, contrary to popular belief, this is not the case. Despite his writings in 1840, which very much give support to the conception of Norwegian folktales as originals displaying the Norwegian cultural spirit, Moe later published a detailed fifty-eight-page introduction to the 1852 edition of *Norske folkeeventyr*, revealing a more distanced and educated stance on the issue (Gunnell, 2010).

### ***Moe on “East of the Sun and West of the Moon” and its relation to Apuleius***

In his introduction to *Norske Folkeeventyr* Moe clearly states that the belief that our folktales originated in Norway, is dubious to those who have spent some time comparing them with foreign folktales. One can find not just motifs that are similar, but whole tales that are more or less identical to those who by their very character seem especially connected to Norway, in the furthest regions of the world. Therefore, one can begin to wonder whether these are imported in newer or older times, and if they really can be called “homely” (Moe, 1877).

He then goes on to list three well-known Norwegian tales as examples; *De tre prinsesser fra Hvidtenland*,” (The three princesses from Hvidtenland) “Soria Moria Slot” (Soria Moria Castle), and, most interesting for us, “Østenfor Sol og vestenfor Maane” (East of the Sun and West of the Moon). All of these belong to the same fable, in which the loved one is at first

saved, but then lost again by vanity or curiosity. Only after hard trials and tribulations does the one who has lost their beloved, find them again in a far off and inaccessible castle, which they can only gain access to by the help of supernatural means (Moe, 1877).

These three tales can be separated into two sub-groups, in which the first two belong to what he calls the northern group, and the latter to the so-called southern group. The northern group pertains to a tradition mostly connected to Germanic culture, and is thus not as widespread. However, he writes, the southern group has its origins in the story of Cupid and Psyche, as it is found in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* (Moe, 1877).

This is very interesting, as it leads Moe to conclude that there must be a common root or Ur-form of these tales that has since developed in different directions by absorbing the distinctive mythologies of the peoples, thus branching out over several continents. In this sense, he argues that Norwegian folktales are part of a broader international tradition than was first assumed (Gunnel, 2010).

This argument, in addition to the close comparison of “East of the Sun and West of the Moon” and the tale of Cupid and Psyche that has previously been presented, dismisses the notion of Norwegian folktales as originals in toto. However, it leaves the question of where they did in fact originate, and how they came to Norway, open for discussion.

### ***The origins of the tale of Cupid and Psyche***

Moe lists Apuleius' tale of Cupid and Psyche as the source of the Norwegian “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” and it is easy to believe that this must be the oldest version of the story, and thus also the original. *The Golden Ass* is a novel consisting of a main story serving as a frame for a series of other, shorter tales, and as most of these tales seem to be the invention of Apuleius himself, the same could be assumed for the Cupid and Psyche episode. This gives rise to doubts surrounding the origins of the tale; causing one to ask the question of whether it is a folktale, a myth, an allegory or the product of Apuleius' own imagination.

This question is addressed by the German philologist Ludwig Friedlander, who undertakes a thorough analysis of the tale in the chapter titled “The Story of Amor and Psyche and Other Traces of the Folktale in Antiquity” found in his 1908 book *Roman life and manners under the early Empire*. Here, the scholar makes a point of the lack of literary sources of folktales in antiquity. This, he argues, is most likely due to the fact that such tales were dismissed on the grounds that they belonged to female territories such as the nursery or

amusement between girls and women, and thus not worthy of recording. This has given rise to the belief that such tales did not exist in Hellenic and Roman times, and as a consequence, the Cupid and Psyche tale has often been interpreted as having been based on an allegory for the relation of the human soul to the platonic eros, not a folktale.

Although Friedlander acknowledges that this explanation is in part befitting, he claims that to use it as the basis for the tale as a whole, would mean to go too far. If one were to explain the tale on the grounds of it being an expanded allegory, one would, in his own words, be "obliged to recourse to the most violent explanations, and even then there will remain many characters and incidents, which it is impossible to explain allegorically" (Friedlander, 1908, p. 100). This objection dismisses its origin as an allegory, but leaves the option of it being based on a mythological tale. Friedlander very quickly rejects this notion, as he points out that there are no ancient works of art that illustrate the story of Cupid and Psyche. The reason for which being that "classical art, like classical poetry, disdained to borrow its subject from the folktale" (Friedlander, 1908, p. 109).

In this way, he disproves the origins of Cupid and Psyche as both an allegory and as a myth. Instead, he thinks the Apuleian tale is a revision of an already existing folktale (Friedlander, 1908). If one is to set aside the mythological and symbolical elements of the story, and study it only in its essence, one can see that it belongs to a large group of tales described by the brothers Grimm in the following way:

The good and innocent daughter, generally the youngest, is promised to a monster by her father under stress of necessity, or she voluntarily gives herself up to it. Patiently she endures her lot, frequently troubled by human weaknesses, for which she has to atone by severe penalties; at last, however, she falls in love with the monster, who at once throws off his ugly form (hedgehog, lion, frog) and appears as a faultlessly beautiful youth (Friedlander, 1908, p. 101).

This pattern echoes the description Moe gave of the fable in his three exemplary tales, and is equally befitting for Cupid and Psyche as it is to "East of the Sun and West of the Moon." Since we have previously explored the similarities of these stories, and expanded on Moe's reflections on the connection between the two, this additional consideration does not provide new information in itself. However, Friedlander goes on to list a total of seventeen countries in which stories similar to that of Apuleius' appear. They are, in the following order: Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Germany, Czech Republic, Greece, Albania, Moldavia, Italy, Romania, Russia, Scotland, Belgium, Serbia and India. The number of countries included in

this list, proves the tale's prevalence in a multitude of different cultures and people, spanning across most of the European continent and well into Asia.

The conclusion Friedlander draws from this, is that; as the outlines of Apuleius' story recur in the tales of such a variety of different cultures, both of European and non-European origin, it is clear that he did not invent the tale himself. Instead, he must have built and expanded upon another tale, that he had come across in the form of a Greek or Roman folktale.

Thus, one can say that Cupid and Psyche is a literary fairy-tale based on an oral folktale, padded with elements of allegory and myth as ornamentations. The original tale on which it is based, has been lost, and will likely never be recovered, neither does it have to. It is enough to ascertain that such a tale existed, in order to connect Apuleius' tale to fairy-tale tradition in the rest of the world.

However, the arguments and reasoning of both Moe and Friedlander have thus far only provided evidence that the same tale can, and does exist in different cultures, without providing any answer as to how this is possible. In regard to this question, Friedlander only closes his chapter on Cupid and Psyche with the assertion that "the points of agreement in the tales of so many peoples of Asia and Europe are so numerous and substantial, that they can only be explained by the assumption of a common origin (Friedlander, 1908, p. 122)."

The nature of this common origin is not further debated on by Friedlander. Therefore, in order to address its existence, and explore how the tales might have spread and evolved in later years as the fairy-tale genre became increasingly popular in Europe, we have to turn to the American folklorist Jack Zipes and his *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*.

### ***The spread of fairy-tales through oral and written sources***

One of the theories put forth to settle the question of the origin of fairy-tales, is the theory of monogenesis. This theory supports the belief in a common place of origin of the genre, most likely in India. It is then believed that the tales spread to Persia and the Arabic speaking world, only to enter Europe via Spain, Greece and Sicily through trade and the crusades (Zipes, 2006). The brothers Grimm were supporters of this theory, so was Friedlander, as he believed India to be the birthplace of the Cupid and Psyche tale. (Friedlander, 1908)

In opposition to the theory of monogenesis, the theory of polygenesis proposes the idea that the folktale originated separately and simultaneously in different cultures. The reasoning

behind this was that “Since the human species was similar throughout the world, humans responded to their environment in similar ways, giving rise to identical tales that varied only according to the customs they developed” (Zipes, 2006, p. 46).

Both of these theories display their individual strengths and weaknesses. In the case of monogenesis, one can point out that the claim that the tales came to Europe through trade and the crusades, must be deemed incorrect due to the evidence we have that *Cupid and Psyche* was based on a Greek or Roman tale of this sort. As previously stated, *The Golden Ass* was published sometime in the second century after Christ, while the first crusade took place between 1096-1099 (Holmboe, 2018). This chronological feature places the genre in Europe much earlier than the theory proposes, and thus weakens the monogenetic argument. Polygenesis, on the other hand, also lacks convincing evidence to support its claim, as the points of similarity between tales from different cultures seem too manifold for it to be generally accepted.

As have previously been mentioned, there is very little information on how the practice of storytelling has been conducted through history, and thus there is too little evidence to confirm either of these theories. Yet, what scholars can agree on, is that the fairy-tale is part of a tradition thousands of years old (Zipes, 2006). This makes the question of how they originated less interesting than the question of how they have developed and mutually affected each other over the course of history, especially as they were written down and emerged as a literary genre.

Contrary to what the brothers Grimm and Asbjørnsen and Moe thought when they began their project of collecting folktales, these are not representative of particular cultures. There is no such thing as a pure national folk- or literary fairy-tale, they are all mixed and cross-bred. And although the tales are culturally marked, they have a great cross-cultural appeal that transcends their particularity. The truth is, in fact, that “The fairy tale is a polygenetic cultural artifact that has spread throughout the world through human contact and technologies invented to bring about effective communication” (Zipes, 2006, p. xiv).

It is a common mistake to underestimate the scale of globalization on the past, when in truth, countries were very much connected through trade and commerce. Especially after the printing press was invented in 1439 (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2018), the literary exchange between cultures increased both in quantity and effectivity, and as the fairy-tale genre had become prevalent by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, they were very much included in this exchange.

Jack Zipes stresses the role of Italian culture in both oral and print traditions. According to him, the literary fairy-tale as a short narrative, rose out of 14<sup>th</sup> century Florence. This led to the production of chapbooks and collections of novellas influenced and inspired by the likes of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. In this sense, Boccaccio can also be seen as the one to set the model

of the genre with his frame narrative and subtle, sophisticated style. This can be contended with the fact that *The Golden Ass* applies much of the same structure in its narrative. However, though it predates the *Decameron*, it did not incite the same degree of inspiration and imitation in its contemporaries. Therefore, to set 14<sup>th</sup> century Italy as the point in Europe from which the literary fairy-tale formed as an amalgamation of local folklore and influences from non-Christian, oriental and occidental myths and legends, and spread out across the continent as a popularized genre, seems accurate.

One of the tales named by Friedlander in his list of stories parallel to that of Cupid and Psyche, is that of “The Padlock,” by the Italian author Giambattista Basile, who wrote the fairy-tale collection known as *Lo cunto de li cunti*, or *The Pentameron*, in the 1630s (Zipes, 2006). One cannot determine for a fact whether he was acquainted with Apuleius’ version of the tale, or if he had come across it through folkloric tradition or oriental tales, which he was deeply acquainted with. (Zipes, 2006) However, due to the strong standing of *The Golden Ass* in Europe, and Italy in particular – Boccaccio himself is said to have been in possession of an early copy – it seems highly likely that he would have been familiar with Cupid and Psyche (Praet, 2017). Regardless of how the tale ended up in Basile’s work, it now existed in one of the most influential tale-collections of baroque Europe, and was well established in the tradition of fairy-tales.

The fairy-tale genre had since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, gained increasing popularity as it spread from Italy to the salons of French society and German libraries. In order to illustrate how this might have happened, one can make an example of how the medieval bestseller *Fortunatus*, which was printed in Germany in 1509, appears to be based on the 13<sup>th</sup> century Latin book *Gesta Romanorum* (Zipes, 2006), which contains a series of fairy-tale elements and was hugely influential in Italy, thus causing it to be reproduced in many forms and media, such as chapbooks. Lisa Rubini outlines how the spread could have taken place in the following way:

If we assume that the German “Fortunatus” was produced at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Augsburg region, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the German author was acquainted with the Italian Chapbook (or had heard it being narrated) (...). Lively economic and cultural exchange between southern Germany and (northern) Italy are amply documented for that period, and the presence of Italian literature, both serious and popular (also in the form of cheap prints) in German libraries provides further evidence. (Zipes, 2006, p. 57–58)

If this is true for *Fortunatus*, the same might be said about “East of the Sun and West of the Moon”. Having become established in the Italian fairy-tale tradition from Cupid and Psyche

through the likes of Basile, it might have travelled to Germany through trade, and then eventually continued its journey in the same way until ending up in Norway. As the commercial bond between Norway and Germany has been strong since the beginning of the Hanseatic period in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, this is a plausible route for the tale to have taken in order to reach the northern parts of the continent. However, if the spread of fairy-tales had taken place purely through the exchange of written sources through trade, we would not find as many variations of them as we do today. They would have mainly stayed intact, and thus truer to the form in which they were first rendered into writing. This would also mean that one would have to disregard the stance of oral storytelling, which at this point was still strong in Europe.

Therefore, despite the fact that one might think the institutionalization of the literary fairy-tale would distance it from the oral tradition, that is not the case. The truth is that the split between oral and literary narrators was never as great as we imagine it to be, for even when a tale was written down, most people at the time were illiterate, and thus experienced it through readings. When these literary fairy-tales were read to the general population, they filtered down into the lower classes and were appropriated by them. This percolation, in turn, brought them back into the oral tradition, and these “folk” versions of the tales would then be brought back into the literary tradition by writers such as the brothers Grimm or Asbjørnsen and Moe (Zipes, 2006).

Now, if we apply all of this to “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” along with what we have learned from Friedlander about the origins of Cupid and Psyche, we can assume for our tale a journey of the following kind: after originating as an oral folktale at an unknown date, quite possibly in India, it was written down and expanded upon by Apuleius in *The Golden Ass* as the “Cupid and Psyche” version sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. From this time on, it circulated for a while both in its “original” oral form and the literary form created by Apuleius, before being institutionalized in the emerging genre of literary fairy-tales. Then it spread in various written forms from Italy and into other nations, including Germany, France and eventually Norway, where it was incorporated into the different cultures and revived as an oral folktale, often mixing with other, already existing folktales, before being picked up again by folktale collectors in the form that we know today.

## *Conclusion*

The outline of the tale's journey here provided offers a clean and concise summary of how it made its way north, but in reality, this is not a journey one can trace with a red line on a map. Though it is clear that the Cupid and Psyche story and "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" are in many ways the same story, they also display their differences. This means that while the basic tale spread across the continent, it would have relied on the ability to adapt to the various cultures it encountered to such a degree that they could accept it as their own, all the while staying true to its original narrative. This is a fine line to tread, and one that must be considered in full before reaching a conclusion.

One must not forget that although a version of the original folktale was written down and preserved by Apuleius, the tale in its oral form would have continued to exist separately. Therefore, it is plausible to believe that it would have taken on a life of its own as it was transmitted through various retellings, continuing its spread in this way and possibly establishing itself in many of the different cultures in which we can still find it today. Based on the theory of monogenesis, this is most likely the way the tale spread to Greek and Roman culture before Apuleius. However, it would have been a slow process, and due to the fact that retellings are rarely accurate in detail, it would have undergone various changes every time, quite possibly rendering it unrecognizable.

For this reason, it was vital that the tale had been written down for it to have survived in an identifiable form. Whenever an oral retelling strayed from the original, it would come in contact with a written one and revert to an earlier version in order to sort out the inconsistencies. Although this was most likely not a conscious process, it would have been part of the circuit it made between oral and literary retellings, and to have an established version like that found in *The Golden Ass* as a reference point, will have contributed greatly to its preservation.

Consequently, the answer to the question of how the same fairy-tale can exist simultaneously in two different cultures, despite being far apart both in distance and in time, lies in the fact that the tale has simultaneously continued to exist in three different forms and genres; oral folktale, literary fairy-tale and prose novel.

This contributed both to making the tale widespread and to keeping it somewhat true to its original form. It opened for the possibility for it to disseminate and adapt to different cultures all the while making sure it stayed recognizable. «With each repetition through the oral and



literary traditions that mutually influenced each other, diverse cultural experiences became intertwined and interlaced with the instinctual drives of the human species to survive, (Zipes, 2006, p. 84).

While the evidence here provided centres around the tale known as “Cupid and Psyche” and “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” it is natural to assume that the same applies to a series of other tales as well. Therefore, it is important that we see fairy-tales not as belonging to “us” or “them,” but as belonging to everyone. Though we know them as the product of a project meant as a contribution to the building of a sense of national identity, it might be time that we change the way we think of them. Asbjørnsen and Moe did, so did the brothers Grimm when they discovered the true, international nature of the tales. Because the truth is, that «Though we don't realize it, we bring ourselves closer to people from many different cultures through the cross-cultural connections of the tales» (Zipes, 2006, p. 84). And in a world in which cooperation between nations is vital if we are to tackle international challenges like climate change, poverty and increasing inequality, maybe the tales can serve a new purpose; Not as building blocks in the creation of separate national identities, but as something that brings us together. This is not to say that we should put away Kittelsen's *Kvitebjørn Kong Valemon*, stop reading *Norske Folkeeventyr*, or throw out the fairy-tale chocolates, but that maybe we should think of them not as “A little piece of Norway,” but rather as a little piece of the world.

## References Cited

- Apuleius. (2011). *The Golden Ass*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Asbjørnsen, P. CH. (1914). *East of the sun and west of the moon – Old tales from the north*. London: Holder & Stoughton
- Encyclopædia Britannica (2018). Printing press. Retrieved 26.04.19 from <https://www.britannica.com/technology/printing-press>
- Freia (2019a) Freia Melkesjokolade Eventyr. Retrieved 09.05.19 from [https://www.freia.no/produkter/freia-melkesjokolade-eventyr-\(24-g\)?p=1837&provider={D193998A-4A6D-4EA5-BAA8-209357B27A09}](https://www.freia.no/produkter/freia-melkesjokolade-eventyr-(24-g)?p=1837&provider={D193998A-4A6D-4EA5-BAA8-209357B27A09})
- Freia (2019b) Freia Melkesjokolade. Retrieved 06.05.19 from [https://www.freia.no/produkter/freia-melkesjokolade-\(200g\)?p=1831&provider={D193998A-4A6D-4EA5-BAA8-209357B27A09}](https://www.freia.no/produkter/freia-melkesjokolade-(200g)?p=1831&provider={D193998A-4A6D-4EA5-BAA8-209357B27A09})
- Friedlaender, L. (1908). *Roman life and manners under the early empire*. London: G. Routledge
- Frydenlund, B. (2019). Historien om 1814. Retrieved 10.04.19 from <https://eidsvoll1814.no/1814/historie>
- Gude, H. & Tidemand, A. (1814) *Brudeferd i Hardanger* [Painting] Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet
- Gunnell, T. (2010). Daisies Rise to Become Oaks. The Politics of Early Folktale Collection in Northern Europe. *Folklore*, vol. 121 (No. 1), 12-37. From <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29534106>
- Haarberg, J., Selboe, T. & Aarset, H. E. (2017). *Verdenslitteratur - Den vestlige tradisjonen* (2. Opplag) Oslo: Universitetsforlaget
- Holmboe, H. (2018). Korstog. Retrieved 25.04.19 from [https://snl.no/korstog#-Det\\_f%C3%B8rste\\_korstoget](https://snl.no/korstog#-Det_f%C3%B8rste_korstoget)
- Kittelsen, T. (1912) *Kvitebjørn Kong Valemon* [Painting] Place: institution (Unknown)
- Moe, J. (1877). *Samlede skrifter*. Kristiania: Cammermeyer
- Praet, S. (2017) “Se lieie la favola”: Apuleian Play in Basile’s *Lo cunto de li cunti*. *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, vol. 25 (No. 4), 315-332. From <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12138-017-0454-6>
- Solberg, O. (2007). Østenfor sol og vestenfor måne – eit klassisk eventyr i europeisk og norsk tradisjon. *Edda*, vol. 94 (No.1), 3-17. From [https://www.idunn.no/edda/2007/01/ostenfor\\_sol\\_og\\_vestenfor\\_mane\\_-\\_eit\\_klassisk\\_eventyr\\_i\\_europeisk\\_og\\_norsk](https://www.idunn.no/edda/2007/01/ostenfor_sol_og_vestenfor_mane_-_eit_klassisk_eventyr_i_europeisk_og_norsk)
- Zipes, J. D. (2006). *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group