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Peace, Love and War: Venus as a Pacifist, Warmonger, and Powerful Woman in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene*

Maia J. Janssen

I n Peter Paul Rubens's painting *Venus and Adonis* (1653), the love goddess Venus implores the young hunter Adonis to stay with her as he clutches his spear and tries to abandon her for the hunt. Rubens's painting serves as an ideal case study for the most basic and typical Renaissance beliefs about femininity, violence, and peace. Juxtaposing Venus and Adonis achieves two things. First, Venus's placement opposite Adonis aligns her with peace and distances her from violence. Venus begs Adonis to abandon the hunt and the violence it will bring, suggesting that she wants him to join her in embracing its opposite: pacifism. Secondly, by linking Venus and peace, the painting associates the concept of peace with femininity itself. With her fair hair, pale skin, and nude body, Venus conforms almost perfectly to Western beauty standards. Physically, therefore, she resembles an "ideal" woman. Her actions further this resemblance. She clings to Adonis with a vapid expression on her face, and her son Cupid helps by clinging to his leg (Rubens). The positioning of Venus's body portrays her as helplessly enamored with Adonis and wanting nothing more than for him to stay. This helplessness and paralyzing desire indicate a passive nature that only further associates her with typical Renaissance femininity—Renaissance women had no power in virtually every respect. Since she is meant to represent peace through her opposition to Adonis's violence,

and this woman is not just a woman but an ideal one because of her physical appearance and helpless, passive nature, a connection clearly exists in Rubens's painting between femininity and peace.

This connection is not unique to one painting. Femininity and peace are associated in many Renaissance works of art, as well as other areas of early modern life. Perhaps this was most obvious in the realm of politics. Complicating discussions of peace and femininity in the Renaissance era was Queen Elizabeth I, a female ruler who enjoyed a successful, powerful regime that was not always peaceful. Elizabeth I both asked and provided answers for the questions regarding what it meant to be a powerful female, the place of femininity in leadership, and the place of peace in Renaissance England.

Amidst these questions, arts and culture flourished in the Renaissance, setting the stage for exploration of the relationships between femininity, war, power, and peace through poetry. Two of the early modern period's most prolific poets—William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser—did just that. In *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Faerie Queene* (1590), respectively, Shakespeare and Spenser work out the question of how war and peace should fit into a powerful woman's actions and personality. They do this through the character of Venus, who in both texts is a powerful actor in the spheres of war and peace.

In doing so, both Shakespeare and Spenser break down the binary logic present in other Renaissance art, such as Rubens's painting. In their portrayals, Venus is not intrinsically linked with peace or femininity, and these concepts are not polar opposites of war, violence, or masculinity.

In *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene*, Venus is a ruler who uses her power to act on her own desires. Sometimes she chooses to use her power for peacemaking, but just as often she decides to create war and violence. Venus's femininity is less important than her power and status as a god when it comes to her actions and decisions. Thus, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene* are two texts that ruminate on the fleeting whims of rulers and the self-serving nature of their power and desires.

Gender, Power, War, and Peace in the Renaissance

       Spenser and Shakespeare lived under one of the most powerful and influential rulers in England's history. Queen Elizabeth I also happened to be female; the presence of a powerful, successful female ruler in England prompted writings that explored the relationship between womanhood, femininity, and power.

       The life and rule of Elizabeth I is a study in contradictions between her identity as a woman and her status as a ruler. In a famous speech at the Battle of Tilbury, she declared that "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king" (Queen Elizabeth I). Elizabeth's separation of her female body and her royal status in this speech presents opportunities for interpreting her reign in the context of the Two Bodies Theory. This theory posits that a ruler has two bodies—their physical body and the body of people that they govern. Carole Levin emphasizes the particular importance of this theory for Elizabeth. Her individual, female body was subject to all the "pitfalls" of being a woman. Her body of subjects, however, would remain constant because of the trust

and faith already built between ruler and kingdom (122). The Two Bodies Theory, therefore, provides one way of reconciling womanhood with power—separating the two, even if they exist within one individual.

However, Elizabeth didn't always place her womanhood and her power in totally separate spheres. Sometimes, she embraced femininity, such as when she donned expensive jewels and furs in an attempt to present herself as the Virgin Mary. This encouraged loyalty to Elizabeth because it forced her subjects to associate defying the queen with defying a revered religious figure (Wagner-Wright). However, other times Elizabeth presented herself as more masculine. For example, she dressed just like her male soldiers in an armored breastplate when she appeared before them at the Battle of Tilbury. In doing so, Elizabeth made salient her strength and power, and any weakness associated with her sex became a non-issue (Wagner-Wright). Depending on what she sought to communicate to her subjects, Elizabeth portrayed herself in ways that, with respect to gender, were diametrically opposed. She sometimes harnessed femininity as a means of empowerment, and other times harnessed masculinity to minimize the liabilty that could come from being female. Regardless, Elizabeth was always conscious of her circumstances when choosing to present (or not present) as feminine.

Elizabeth's ambiguous gender presentation resembled her politics of warfare, as she demonstrated potential for both war and peace and gravitated towards whatever served her goals the best. She struck a balance between knowing that war was costly and thus avoiding it when necessary (Gittings 111), and unleashing violence and terror on some groups, such as English Catholics, whose beliefs clashed with her Protestant faith (Breight 2). As

with her femininity, Elizabeth chose war or peace depending on what was most advantageous for her.

Elizabeth's pragmatism differs considerably from the philosophy of Erasmus, who was perhaps the most well-known pacifist of the Renaissance. In his many writings on peace, one of the key ideas he emphasized was the idea of "positive peace," in which peace is not just the absence of war but a dynamic state in its own right and something that everyone must actively work towards. In "A Complaint of Peace" (1517), Erasmus declares that in order to have peace, "the very sources from which the evil springs and the base passions which give rise to your conflicts must be cleansed" (311). This is no small demand; cleansing society of all its strife requires serious time and energy.

In defining peace in this way, Erasmus insinuates that the maintenance of peace requires strength and assertiveness. His portrayal of peace as dynamic and requiring constant work suggests that individuals with the ability to problem solve, speak their minds, and take initiative will succeed at the "art of peace." Assertiveness, problem solving, and initiative are all characteristics associated with powerful people, because they are necessary for successful leadership. However, they are not usually associated with typical conceptions of femininity—Peter Paul Rubens's portrayal of a helpless, passive, and feminine Venus makes that clear. With these relationships (or lack thereof) between peace, power, and masculinity, a powerful Renaissance woman found herself in a delicate situation to navigate. Could one be feminine and a ruler in the early modern period? Must female rulers forgo their assigned gender scripts in order to fully engage in the warmongering

and peacemaking that leadership requires?

Because of the writings of Erasmus and the leadership of Queen Elizabeth, these types of questions were on the minds of writers trying to sort out the relationship between gender, power, war, and peace in the early modern period. Through their portrayals of the goddess Venus, William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser do just that.

Venus and Adonis—Venus as a Peacemaker and Warmonger

Initially, the source of Venus's power in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* seems obvious—her status as a lover and the love goddess. Early in the poem, Venus sees Adonis and her "desire [for him] doth lend her force/ courageously to pluck him from his horse" (l.29). Venus can overtake and capture Adonis because her desire for him lends her the strength necessary to do so. Later, Venus's "careless lust stirs up desperate courage" that helps her convince Adonis to pay attention to her another day and reconvene the next morning (l.556). Once more, Venus's desire helps her achieve her goals, suggesting that her desire gives her power. And, Renaissance culture's common association between Venus's desire and her femininity (such as in Rubens's painting) suggests that her femininity makes her powerful as well.

However, Venus's desire also weakens her. Before she even interacts with Adonis, Venus sees him and "[trembles] in her passion" (Shakespeare l.27). The word "tremble" portrays Venus as not a powerful goddess, but a mere damsel struck weak by the sheer force of love at first sight. Later, while trying to convince Adonis not to reject her, "the love-sick queen [begins] to sweat" (l.175). Once again, Venus's desire for Adonis renders her a weak,

sweating mess. And, because of its established link with her desire, Venus's femininity also becomes a source of her weakness in these situations.

Sean Lawrence attributes Venus's simultaneous strength and weakness to Venus's inaccurate perception of Adonis as a mere object that can be controlled through force. As she pursues this version of Adonis, Venus is "simultaneously more aggressive and weak. Her weakness and aggression relate reciprocally: her failure leads her to greater aggression, and the failure of her aggression further illustrates her weakness" (190). Lawrence's explanation for Venus's simultaneous strength and weakness begin to reveal the masculine undertones of her seemingly hyper-feminine desire. Venus's objectification of Adonis, the violent nature of her attempts to control him, and her aggression that results from her failures all resemble typical masculine stereotypes of objectifying the object of one's desire, being aggressive in one's pursuits, and being unable to accept failure gracefully. The presence of these masculine-coded characteristics within Venus's seemingly hyper-feminine desire reveals contradictions that Venus presents with respect to the gender binary. The desire that characterizes her femininity gives her strength, but it also prompts a masculine-coded pursuit of Adonis that weakens her. While many facets of Renaissance culture, such as Peter Paul Rubens's painting, held up associations between femininity and weakness, and masculinity and strength, Shakespeare subverts them, instead portraying Venus as exhibiting all four characteristics simultaneously. In the love goddess' pursuit of Adonis, therefore, we begin to see a breakdown of the gendered binary logic of the Renaissance. In *Venus and Adonis*, peace and femininity are not intrinsically linked, and they are not the polar opposites

of masculinity and violence.

Similar instances of masculine-coded characteristics arising from Venus's feminine-coded desire further suggest that Venus's seemingly feminine desire may be more masculine than it appears. For example, Venus's "lust stirs up desperate courage" (Shakespeare l.556), and courage was a feature that early intellectuals associated with masculinity. One reason for this is that the ancient Greek word for "courage" is andreia, which translates to both "courage" and "manliness." This linguistic relationship led early thinkers to conflate courage and manliness and consider courage to be "a manly virtue that cannot refer to anyone else" (Reeser 153). The fact that a result of Venus's desire—courage—is masculine-coded suggests that her desire has a certain masculine quality as well.

Venus's desire also results in her demonstrating aggression. Masculinity and aggression were linked in the early modern period due to a "persistent valorization of masculine aggression that creates a seeming necessity for male violence" (Feather and Thomas 2). In other words, male aggression was applauded in the early modern period, which made aggression a necessary feature of "successful" masculinity. One situation that demonstrates Venus's aggression is the actions of the boar. It has been previously argued that Venus's sexuality—something closely linked to her desire and a pinnacle of her femininity and identity as the love goddess—physically manifests in the boar that kills Adonis. Murder has an inherently aggressive quality, and so the connection of the boar to Venus's sexuality not only marks her as demonstrating aggression, but consequently codes her sexuality and desire as opposite to femininity (Hansen).

However, while the boar demonstrates violence and aggression, it also presents further evidence for the idea that desire, peace, and violence exist on a spectrum rather than as binary opposites. While the boar that represents Venus's sexuality commits violence in a way that seems antithetical to Venus's desire and its connections to her femininity and peace (as in Rubens's painting), it simultaneously acts in a way characteristic of the love goddess. Shakespeare describes the boar's murder of Adonis as a loving act as well as a violent one. Upon seeing Adonis, the boar "by a kiss thought to persuade him there;/and nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine/sheathed, unaware, the tusk in his soft groin" (l.1114). While the boar commits violence by killing Adonis, words such as "loving," "nuzzling," and "kiss" portrays this violent act as a more peaceful type of hunting that is gentle and amorous. The boar's murder of Adonis suggests violence, peace, and love are more closely related than they are opposed. Thus, the case of the boar provides further evidence for the idea that, in *Venus and Adonis*, the relationships between femininity and masculinity and violence and peace are a spectrum, not a binary.

After challenging binary logics surrounding gender, peace, and violence, Shakespeare uses Venus and her actions to demonstrate that those in power can act within the violence and peace spectrum any way they choose. Venus uses her power to create both war and peace, depending on what would benefit her. One instance of Venus creating peace is her seduction and "taming" of the war god Mars. She achieves this feat by convincing Mars to accept peace and love as a suitable substitute for war. Everything that Mars loves about war, Venus helps him find in peace. She makes her

"arms his field, his tent [her] bed" (Shakespeare l.108). Venus's power is so strong that it allows her to gain anything she desires—even if it requires a feat as large as pacifying the war god.

The story of Venus and Mars demonstrates Venus's ability to create peace. However, powerful Venus is just as capable of creating war, as demonstrated by her curse on love at the end of the poem. When Venus finds Adonis dead, she is distraught, and in her distress she curses love to have the violent, destructive traits that characterize war:

> It shall suspect where is no cause of fear;
> It shall not fear where it should most mistrust;
> It shall be merciful and too severe,
> And most deceiving when it seems most just;
> Perverse it thall be where it shows most toward,
> Put fear to valour, courage to the coward.
> It shall be cause of war and dire events,
> And set dissension 'twixt the son and sire (Shakespeare
> l.1153).

Here, Venus creates war out of love by declaring that love shall always be the cause of war and other "dire events." And again, Venus does this for no other reason than her own desires. She sees her love Adonis is dead; she is upset. She takes out her emotions on what she has power over—love. Venus's curse on love also reflects the nuances and contradictions of her own character. Just like Venus's desire and goddess status makes her both powerful and weak, love itself is merciful and too severe, most deceiving and most just. Polar opposites exist side by side in both contexts. And so, while the curse at first seems to contradict what Venus stands for, it ends up being quite a natural declaration for her to make.

Shakespeare furthers his breakdown of such binary logic with the

character of Adonis, who displays elements of masculinity, violence, peace, and femininity. Like Venus, he demonstrates that these characteristics can exist side by side. The multifaceted nature of Adonis's character is alluded to when Venus finds Adonis dead. She weeps and tears blur her vision, causing her to see double. "Her sight dazzling makes [Adonis's] wound seem three" (Shakespeare l.1064), and Venus knows that this is merely an illusion, because "oft the eye mistakes, the brain being troubled" (l.1068). However, she still laments the fact that "two Adons" have died (l.1070). These two Adonises can be observed in the way that Adonis bridges the gap between masculinity and femininity and war and peace. Within the same character, there exists a masculine Adonis and a feminine Adonis, a violent Adonis and a peaceful Adonis.

Adonis's connection to violence and the hunt is obvious. He is love-averse, wanting only to hunt down the boar. We learn this very early when Shakespeare states that "hunting he loved, but love he laught to scorn" (l.4). Previous criticism has suggested that Adonis' rejection of love and desire represents a rejection of femininity. However, the only reason Adonis must reject love and desire in the first place is because he is put in the typically feminine position of the one who is seduced. As Hansen puts it, "desire—and thus the desiring subject—is feminine. Adonis's lack of desire can be read as a rejection of his femininity" (Hansen). So, Adonis presents a duality where he is captivated by violence and hunting, which is often masculine-coded, but he also occupies a position that is typically feminine-coded. Consequently, this puts Venus and her feminine-coded desire in the masculine-coded role of the seducer. Thus, *Venus and Adonis*'s performances

of gender, love, war, and peace, and their subversion of binary logic surrounding these concepts, necessarily go hand in hand.

Shakespeare also takes several opportunities to draw parallels between Adonis and the goddess of love herself, and by consequence places Adonis towards the middle of the gender spectrum rather than fully at the masculine end. Venus and Adonis are described in equal, but opposite ways. For example, they are both described as "red," but Venus is red like "coals of glowing fire" (Shakespeare l.35), while Adonis is "red for shame" (l.36). Venus also observes the similarities between herself and Adonis, and even perceives him as exhibiting love's characteristics better than she herself does. Upon seeing him for the first time, she immediately declares Adonis to be "thrice-fairer than myself" (l.7). At one point, Venus, the goddess of love, refers to Adonis as "Love's master" (l.585). Clearly, Venus sees herself in this love-repulsed hunter. Thus, while Adonis is certainly meant to be a character who loves violence and detests love, he also serves as evidence that violence, peace and love are more connected than they are opposed through his similarities to Venus, who herself demonstrates violence, peace, and love all at once. Consequently, he provides evidence against the fact that femininity and peace are intrinsically linked, since he, like Venus, exhibits masculinity and violence alongside femininity and peace.

All in all, Shakespeare subverts the binary logics of violence and peace, masculinity and femininity by means of Venus's own characterization and actions as well as those of Adonis. And, in Venus's taming of Mars and the cursing of love, he suggests that Venus's power is unrelated to her being the love goddess and that she is just another leader acting on her own

desires.

The Faerie Queen—Distancing Femininity and Pacifism

        Like *Venus and Adonis*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* challenges associations between Venus and pacifism by associating her with war and violence, and in the process demonstrates that Venus is just another ruler using her power how she desires. However, while Shakespeare demonstrates that femininity and peace can exist simultaneously, but do not always, Spenser drives a larger wedge between femininity and pacifism through the character of Amoret, who suggests that it is very difficult for these two concepts to coexist.

        The Faerie Queene separates Venus from peace through multiple direct associations between Venus and violence that happen in the tenth canto of the fourth book of the epic poem. In this section, Scudamore journeys to the temple of Venus to win back his love, Amoret. Venus and her temple present several challenges to Venus's link to pacifism (such as the one established in Rubens's painting). First, before Scudamore even meets Venus, he has to fight off the monsters guarding her temple—Doubt, Delay, and Danger. Particularly the latter is quite an aggressive monster to have guarding the temple of the goddess of love. Thus, a dichotomy already starts to form between what we expect of the goddess of love and what actually manifests in her territory. These monsters are also reminiscent of Venus's curse on love in *Venus and Adonis*. Doubt "[suspects] where there is no cause of fear" (Shakespeare l.1153). Delay "the strongest body [makes] most weak" (l.1145). And Danger is "too full of riot...raging-mad" (l.1147).

Spenser's Venus thus comes off as a logical successor to Shakespeare's Venus; this intertextuality facilitates Spenser's further portrayal of a vengeful, violent Venus.

Next, Scudamore meets Hate and Love, who are "begotten by two fathers of one mother" (Spenser 4.10.32). This common mother is Venus, for earlier in the canto she is said to be "of love the mother" (4.10.34). Thus, while Venus clearly can produce the love we all know her to represent, she can also produce hate—something often associated with violence and war. Not only did Venus mother Hate, but she bore him first. Although love is now the more powerful of the two brothers (4.10.32), there was a time where Venus's most powerful creation was something diametrically opposed to what she is known to represent.

This canto also presents a very obvious separation of Venus and peace through the figure of Concord. Before meeting Venus, Scudamore meets Concord, who is the "mother of blessed Peace" (Spenser 4.10.34). Spenser's version of Venus is not the primary creator of peace, despite the early modern period's frequent associations between Venus and peace. On the contrary, Venus and Peace appear on two separate family trees. Furthermore, while Concord is female, Peace's gender is not specified. Beyond anything related to Venus, this ambiguity makes it difficult to conflate peace and femininity in *The Faerie Queene*. If femininity and peace were meant to be associated, then surely the character of Peace would be a woman.

The situation of Concord also suggests Spenser's support for Erasmus's concept of positive peace. "Concord" translates to "agreement" (OED), providing a clue to where Spenser believes peace begins—har-

mony between people. However, Concord and Peace are not the same; rather, Peace is Concord's child. Their familial relation indicates a connection between the two virtues, but the generational gap suggests that Peace is meant to be more than Concord and exists to continue what Concord starts—as children often do for their parents. The notion that Peace is meant to do more than facilitate interpersonal harmony calls forth Erasmus's conception of positive peace. While Concord merely creates agreement between individuals, her child Peace goes further, doing the active work Erasmus believes is necessary to truly be at peace.

With Spenser's support of positive peace in mind, it becomes even more obvious that he means to distance Venus from peace. The text does give Venus some credit as a pacifying force, but not enough for her to be considered a great agent of peace. One soul in the temple gives a speech praising Venus for her role as a pacifist, but it describes Venus as engaging in a type of peacemaking that is quite passive. She is only praised for her ability to bring peace to the natural world—the seas, the clouds, the winds (Spenser 4.10.44). Nowhere in the speech does the speaker give Venus any credit for reconciling warring countries or feuding individuals, which is perhaps the true mark of a powerful pacifist. Additionally, the reason Venus can pacify nature is her "smiling looke" (4.10.44). This gives Venus a passive role in peacemaking because of the implication that any other beautiful person could achieve what she does. In no way is Venus meant to exemplify pacifism if the only power she has to create it is her appearance and she cannot bring peace to the most violent of situations. In short, her passive pacifism does not facilitate positive peace.

After separating Venus from peace in a similar way to Shakespeare, Spenser utilizes the character of Amoret to distance femininity from peace, as well as to demonstrate the fleeting desires of Venus and all others who have power. Amoret's relationship with Venus demonstrates Spenser's intent to separate the goddess from typical Renaissance ideas of femininity. While other works like Rubens's painting portrayed Venus as the "ideal woman," *The Faerie Queene* places Amoret in this role instead. Scudamore comes across Amoret sitting in a circle of virtues—womanhood, shamefastness, cheerfulness, modesty, courtesy, obedience, and silence (Spenser 4.10.49). Amoret's position in the center implies that she embodies all of these virtues, which were all associated with femininity in the Renaissance. Amoret also wears a "lily white veil" (4.10.52), which further emphasizes her purity. The same cannot be said for Venus—she also wears a veil, but one that depicts male and female genitalia (4.10.41), something that is in no way chaste. The depiction of Venus and Amoret portrays them as opposites of one another, with the latter being the "ideal woman" because of her association with traits valued in Renaissance women.

The circumstances of Amoret's birth and Venus's raising of her further the perception of Amoret as an ideal woman. Amoret was born alone in a forest to a chaste mother. Her conception story resembles the birth of Jesus—Chrysogonee was impregnated by a sunbeam from the heavens and then gave birth in her sleep. Kyndra Spaulding argues that this chaste, otherworldly birth means Amoret was born devoid of original sin. In this way, she can be read as a "Second Eve," who embodies the quintessential chaste, Christian woman of the sixteenth century (7). Eve, being the first woman

in the Christian tradition, sets forth the standards for what a woman should be. If Amoret is "Second Eve," then she must adhere to these standards, making her an "ideal woman" as well.

However, while Amoret is born an "ideal woman" in some respects, her birth also leaves plenty still to be determined. Chrysogonee "bore without pain that she conceived without pleasure" (Spenser 3.6.27). Childbirth is a painful, bloody, and almost violent act, while conception is a pleasurable and amorous one. But Amoret's birth was neither of those things. This absence suggests that we can interpret Amoret as being born predisposed to neither love nor violence, as someone to mold as one pleases. Venus does just this, adopting Amoret "to be upbrought in goodly womanhed" (3.6.28) and "trained up in trew femininitee" (3.6.51). With this rationale, Venus makes clear that she hopes to raise Amoret to be an "ideal woman." However, what exactly it means to be an "ideal woman" is ambiguous. In reading the text through a Christian lens like Spaulding does, Amoret is an ideal woman because she resembles the first woman—Eve. Erin Goss, however, reads Amoret's role as the ideal woman as coming from the goddess Psyche, whom Venus employs to train Amoret. Psyche, Goss argues, trains Amoret to be a different type of ideal woman. She teaches her to be chaste, and she also trains her to be passive, having "properly directed amorous energy that defers to the masculine for its status" (262).

The situation of Amoret changes the information necessary to answer the question of whether peace and femininity are linked. Amoret's status as the ideal woman who presents the idea version of femininity means that the answer lies in her, not Venus. And, Amoret's character suggests that

peace and womanhood do *not* inherently go hand in hand. Amoret does not possess the conflict-resolution skills necessary for a peacemaker doing active work to create peace. Peace requires assertion. It requires the ability to communicate and negotiate. In contrast, Amoret, being found by Scudamore in a circle of virtues that include silence and obedience, possesses characteristics that make her a passive figure (as Goss argues) who exists to serve the whims of others. She is not a self-sufficient, assertive person capable of doing the active work that peace requires.

Spenser's distancing of Venus from peace and peace from femininity suggests that his Venus, like Shakespeare's, is capable of producing peace and war, depending on what serves her goals the best. However, Venus's way of doing this differs in the two texts. While in *Venus and Adonis* Venus demonstrates her power and her individualistic reasons for using it through her seduction of Mars and her curse on love, in *The Faerie Queene* Venus demonstrates her power through delegation. Shakespeare's Venus does the work of creating war and peace on her own, but Spenser's Venus delegates these tasks to others—warmongering goes to Cupid, while peacemaking (or, more accurately, the illusion of peacemaking) goes to Amoret. Spenser's version of the powerful Venus means that she can not only afford to act totally according to her own desires, but she has enough power to force others to fulfill these desires for her.

In the case of Cupid, we see more links between *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser's Venus employs Cupid to carry out actions that closely resemble the curse she puts forth at the end of Shakespeare's poem, and when Venus loses Cupid in Canto six of Book three, she first

seeks him out in court, where she finds many people who bear the "fowle infamous blot/his cruell deeds and wicked wyles did spot" (Spenser 3.6.13). Here lies evidence of violence put forth by Cupid—the "infamous blot" implies bloodshed at his hands. Next, Venus looks for Cupid in the city, where she hears testimonies of his being "the disturber of all civill life/the enimy of peace, and the author of all strife" (3.6.14). Finally, she searches in the country, where she hears accounts from country-dwellers of "how he their heedlesse harts with love had fyred/and his false venim through their veins inspyred" (3.6.15). Together, these three instances demonstrate the violence Cupid incites through his powers of love. He is creating bloodshed through his arrows of love, disturbing civil life, and making an enemy of peace. He is creating war through love, which is quite similar to what Venus declared will happen at the end of *Venus and Adonis*—that love "shall be the cause of war and dire events" (Shakespeare l.1159).

Cupid's power is an extension of Venus's for three reasons. First, Venus is Cupid's mother. So, his power comes from her in a biological sense. Secondly, the resemblance between Cupid's actions and Venus's curse on love from *Venus and Adonis* is striking, and while this was perhaps not Spenser's intent, Venus's employing Cupid to bring this curse to life is a very logical conclusion to draw. And, finally, Venus is the goddess of love, so it is reasonable to assume that she is responsible for the actions of Cupid, another authority in the area of romance.

In many ways, Amoret is the "other side" of Cupid—upon losing Cupid and not being able to find him, Venus adopts Amoret to raise like she raised Cupid. Amoret is, of course, raised to be a passive figure who serves

the whims of others. Since Venus is Amoret's caretaker, Amoret at least in part serves to fulfill the whims and desires of Venus. And while Amoret is a passive figure who does not possess the assertiveness necessary for creating peace, she does serve to maintain the image of pacifism that most Renaissance readers would associate with Venus. In other words, Amoret does not serve as a pacifying figure herself, but she does serve to maintain Venus's reputation as one.

Amoret, as previously established, occupies the role of the "ideal woman"—traits that most would initially assume to be held by Venus. While Venus pursues her own desires such as cursing love or taming the god of war, Amoret serves as the idol representing common perceptions of Venus such as that in Rubens's painting—servile to her own feelings and embodying submissive, passive womanhood. Of course, this is not actually what Venus represents. She employs someone else to maintain her own reputation, and then she does whatever she pleases—often in the process subverting the image she means to present to the world.

Conclusion

In the worlds of Shakespeare and Spenser, powerful women are more complex, less feminine, and more self-serving than meets the eye. But why, then, does Venus always come off as a "typical" Renaissance woman, rendered helpless by her love and exuding sex appeal?

Throughout all of history, including the Renaissance but leading up to today, powerful women have had to maintain a carefully crafted image in order to appear legitimate. Despite the fact that Venus's image hardly

captures the nuances of her persona, this image is vital for her success as a leader. Venus's maintenance of a feminine image resembles the situation of Elizabeth I when she presented herself in the image of the Virgin Mary to maintain a respectable reputation (Wagner-Wright). While Elizabeth sometimes had the opportunity to present herself as more masculine, such as at Tilbury, Venus does not have this same luxury—she is too closely associated with femininity due to countless cultural artifacts such as Rubens's painting. In short, the love goddess' femininity (or, at the very least the illusion of her femininity) provides her with the reputation she needs to be taken seriously, because a feminine Venus is all most people know. So, this is why Venus uses her femininity as a facade, behind which she operates as any other powerful ruler, serving their own desires whenever they come about. Images matter—but they never capture the full picture.

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The Path to Piety in Anne Bradstreet's "Here Follows Some Verses Upon the Burning of our House July 10, 1666"

Preston Thompson

> *"Oh how sweet it must be, my Mother, to have travelled so far on the road of detachment that one never feels one can ever turn back."*
>
> —Francis Poulenc, The Carmelites

Anne Bradstreet's poem "Here Follows Some Verses Upon the Burning of our House July 10, 1666" was first published in 1867. As its title suggests, the poem details Bradstreet's reaction to a fire that consumed her Andover, Massachusetts home. Because of the poem's autobiographical content and its consistency with Puritan ideology, I will use the author's name and the term "speaker" interchangeably throughout this essay. A devoutly Puritan wife and mother, Bradstreet acknowledges her upset at her house's burning while also castigating herself for her attachment to the human and material worlds. Because of the stark difference between her attitudes at the beginning and the end of the poem, and because of the decisiveness and finality with which she turns her attention to God in the last lines, "Here Follows'' reads as an allegory of a Puritan's path to piety and proper detachment from earthly concerns and ties. However, though Bradstreet begins with horror and ends with piety, this is not a simple progression. Bradstreet suggests that the path to piety is not linear.

       The first section of "Here Follows" concerns Bradstreet's immedi-

ate horror at her house's burning and positions her as a helpless supplicant to God, but it also suggests that she is concerned not only with the earthly. Still, her concerns are *mostly* earthly. It is clear here that the speaker has not yet reached a state of submission to God's will, or a concern mainly with the afterlife rather than this life:

> In silent night when rest I took,
> For sorrow near I did not look
> I wakened was with thund'ring noise
> And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.
> That fearful sound of "Fire!" and "Fire!"
> Let no man know is my desire.
> I, starting up, the light did spy,
> And to my God my heart did cry
> To strengthen me in my distress
> And not to leave me succorless.
> Then, coming out, beheld a space
> The flame consume my dwelling place. (ll. 1-12)

"Silent night" refers not only to literal darkness and silence. It also serves to indicate the speaker's initial state of ignorance and lack of perception—her undue concern with material things, and, conversely, her failure to recognize the greater importance of spiritual contemplation and insight, which she will turn to by the end of the poem. In the speaker's psychological or spiritual silent night, she is unable to recognize the folly of her concern with earthly things like her house. She is blinded by these concerns. Fittingly, it is fire, which provides light, that will help to rouse her from this blind state.

Immediately one notices Bradstreet's iambic tetrameter couplets. The first syllable of "thund'ring" falls on the stressed syllable of the iamb, producing a rousing effect as the noise bursts into the sleeping speaker's consciousness (l. 3). This is also the first time we encounter the short *U*

vowel sound. Up to this point the verse has been dominated by long *I* sounds and the vowel digraph *oo*. Hence the *U* sound has a jarring effect in the reader's mind, reflecting the speaker's experience of being jolted awake by her family's screams. Overall, the iambs—pairs of differently emphasized beats—mirror the duality of religious conviction and earthly attachment present in the speaker at this point. If we interpret the poem as an allegory of a Puritan's path to pious detachment from worldly things, the coexistence of both this conviction and this attachment in Bradstreet's mind from the very first section of the poem supports the idea that the path to piety she depicts is not a linear journey.

Indeed, despite Bradstreet's concern for her house and family, she already seems to have the afterlife on her mind; the "thund'ring noise," "piteous shrieks of dreadful voice," and "fearful sound of 'Fire!' and 'Fire!'" serve to create a feeling of awe in the face of God's might, and they recall musical and artistic depictions of the final judgement (ll. 3-5). For example, one medieval hymn, the "Dies Irae," portrays Judgement Day as a time when "heaven and earth [will] in ashes lay," and when "The mighty trumpet's wondrous tone/shall rend each tomb's sepulchral stone" ("Dies" 2, 7-8). Having grown up in formerly Catholic England and having "read widely" in the library of the Earl of Lincoln, it seems possible that Bradstreet had encountered this famous hymn (Belasco 185). Even if she had not, she would likely be familiar with the passage from the Book of Zephaniah on which the hymn is based ("Dies"). The apocalyptic resonances in "Here Follows" create an atmosphere of foreboding which mirrors Bradstreet's own fear. The repetition of "Fire" emphasizes this ominous feeling. Like a sinner

on Judgement Day, Bradstreet is left pleading with God "To strengthen me in my distress/And not to leave me succorless" (ll. 9-10). The idea of God's ability to bestow or withhold succor suggests that Bradstreet is at his mercy and feels helpless. Fire might also represent God himself. God is traditionally associated with light, and as we shall see, he has reason to intervene in Bradstreet's life. The juxtaposition of fire, with its associations with light, and Bradstreet's "silent night" already implies that Bradstreet has not been living a pious life. Further, Bradstreet's language evokes not only the larger idea of Judgement Day; the phrases "thundering noise," "piteous shrieks of fearful voice," and the "sound of 'Fire!'" evoke particular auditory sensations, while the very idea of fire suggests heat. Bradstreet's frequent use of *S* sounds in the second half of this section—"starting," "spy," "strengthen," "distress"—suggests the hissing of the smoking fire (7-9). These appeals to the reader's senses add drama to the narrative and help the reader to empathize with the speaker, to experience what she experiences. However, the use of sensory detail also suggests her concern with the physical world at this point. Overall, Bradstreet's description of her home's burning at the beginning of the poem suggests both her Christian roots and her failure to live piously, showing the complexity and nonlinearity of her spiritual journey.

Bradstreet has not yet attained the detachment of the end of the poem, but, like her perhaps unconscious allusions to a Christian understanding of the apocalypse, the very act of praying shows that she is not wholly concerned with earthly things. Her repetition of *me* in lines 9 and 10 speaks to her personal connection to God. This personal relationship with God—uncomplicated by the presence of a confessor to mediate one's

dealings with him—is consistent with Puritan theology (Feldmeth). Perhaps her prayer in these lines is a step toward the piety she will later take on. Her ignorance is not total. The coexistence of earthly and spiritual ideas percolating in the speaker's mind at this point speaks to the complicated, nonlinear path to piety that she depicts.

In the second section, Bradstreet switches from an attitude of horror and helplessness to a counterintuitive sense of *gratitude* toward God in the face of her house's burning:

> And when I could no longer look,
> I blest His name that gave and took,
> That laid my goods now in the dust.
> Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just.
> It was His own, it was not mine,
> Far be it that I should repine;
> He might of all justly bereft
> But yet sufficient for us left. (ll. 13-20)

The words "I blest His name that gave and took," stress God's right to bestow and recall his gifts to humans. With the acknowledgement that her house "was His own, it was not mine," the speaker renounces human material ownership. Her insistence that her house's burning was "just" and that she has been "justly bereft" indicates her understanding that God is completely in control and has good reasons for burning her house. Furthermore, her observation that God has "yet sufficient for us left" suggests an understanding of God as merciful and as a provider even as he takes away her belongings. As a whole, these sentiments do not seem like part of a gradual progression toward religious submission and piety. There is no expression of grief here. It is a complete switch from the horror of the earlier section to

an acknowledgement of God's right to burn her house, his fairness in doing so, and his mercy in providing Bradstreet and her family with necessities, although Bradstreet does not specify which necessities—material resources or spiritual necessities—she is talking about. However, the section's brevity—it is just eight lines—compared with the lengthy materialistic section that follows suggests how quickly one can regress from upright religious zeal to indulgence in material attachment. This inconsistency demonstrates the non-linearity of the path to piety and detachment from earthly concerns as Bradstreet conceives of it.

In the third section of "Here Follows," Bradstreet's lapse into rumination on the loss of her house and treasured objects suggests that one can relapse from a spiritually conscientious attitude to an impious attitude, although some of her words still suggest an awareness that her home's immolation was justified. The rejection of material attachments that characterizes the second section of Bradstreet's poem proves to be short-lived:

> When by the ruins oft I past
> My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,
> And here and there the places spy
> Where oft I sat and long did lie:
> Here stood that trunk, and there that chest,
> There lay that store I counted best.
> My pleasant things in ashes lie,
> And them behold no more shall I.
> Under thy roof no guest shall sit,
> Nor at thy table eat a bit.
> No pleasant tale shall e'er be told,
> Nor things recounted done of old.
> No candle e'er shall shine in thee,
> Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be. (ll. 21-34)

The word "ruins" brings to mind the remains of grand, antique buildings.

Hence Bradstreet's use of this word to describe what is left of her presumably humble and modern house speaks to the house's importance in her mind. In line 29, she switches temporarily from first to second person, using "thy" to speak directly to her house. Her personification of the house further emphasizes its importance to her. Her lamentation of individual objects manifests her resurgent materialism (ll. 25-26). Strikingly, the objects she names, "that trunk" and "that chest," are vessels that hold other things. This implies that the speaker's materialism extends beyond the objects she is naming. Bradstreet returns here to the use of sensory detail that she used at the start of the poem. The word "eat" appeals to the reader's sense of taste. As before, the use of sensory detail is congruent with the speaker's attachment to earthly things.

One might wonder at the fact that Bradstreet mentions her husband among things she will ultimately dismiss as unimportant. However, it would be wrong to read the line "Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be" as implying that Bradstreet's husband is equal in value—or lack of value, as she will ultimately come to understand them as unimportant—to the inanimate objects she names (l. 34). According to historian Laurie Hochstetler, although marriage ceremonies in the early Massachusetts Bay Colony differed from their Anglican counterparts in England, marriage for Puritans was still "filled with religious significance" as a covenant similar to that between human beings and God (489-90). Therefore, Bradstreet cannot be implying that her concern for her husband should ultimately be discarded like her concern for inanimate objects. The emphasis of the line is on Bradstreet's materialistic, nostalgic feelings about the house itself. The line also

gives Bradstreet the opportunity to use more sensory detail. The mention of storytelling and talking, specifically the words "told," "recounted", and "heard," suggest auditory sensations to the reader's imagination. Once again, Bradstreet's use of sensory detail suggests her concern with the immediate physical world.

Notably, none of the activities Bradstreet remembers having engaged in inside the house in the passage above have to do with religious devotion, a large part of Puritan life. The words "oft I sat" and "long did lie" in line 24 suggest habitual, excessive inactivity and sloth, which seem inconsistent with the Puritan work ethic (Feldmeth). The telling of stories is frivolous compared to religious contemplation and practice, and the phrase "things recounted done of old" suggests boasting and hence vanity, perhaps her own (ll. 31-32). It also suggests Bradstreet's inordinate focus on the past, as opposed to the future she will turn her attention to in the final section. It is interesting that she laments specifically the fact that "no candle e'er shall shine in thee" when fire was the agent of her home's destruction (l. 33). This connection between her memory of activity inside the house and the agent of its burning may suggest that it is the very frivolity and inaction she describes having engaged in inside the house that made it necessary for God to destroy it. The juxtaposition of human-initiated and controlled candle burning with an ungovernable house fire, which can only be sent and managed by God, suggests that God has deliberately undercut Bradstreet's sense of control. He has asserted his omnipotence, an idea that is consistent with Calvinist theology, which features a God "all-powerful and completely sovereign" ("People").

Bradstreet here seems to see her home's immolation as a consequence of idleness. This interpretation explains why, in the second section, she speaks of God's burning of her house as fair. However, as the third section ends, the speaker has mostly abandoned the detachment and faith that she demonstrated in the second section of the poem, indicating the non-linearity of her spiritual path.

In the fourth and final section, Bradstreet rejects earthly attachments *once and for all* and turns her attention to the afterlife:

> In silence ever shalt thou lie,
> Adieu, Adieu, all's vanity.
> Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide,
> And did thy wealth on earth abide?
> Didst fix thy hope on mold'ring dust?
> The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
> Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
> That dunghill mists away may fly.
> Thou hast a house on high erect,
> Framed by that mighty Architect,
> With glory richly furnished,
> Stands permanent though this be fled.
> It's purchased and paid for too
> By Him who hath enough to do.
> A price so vast as is unknown,
> Yet by His gift is made thine own;
> There's wealth enough, I need no more,
> Farewell, my pelf, farewell my store.
> The world no longer let me love,
> My hope and treasure lies above. (ll. 35-54)

This is the only section that does not have a clear setting, fitting Bradstreet's change of focus from the earthly to the immaterial. She turns again to the second person, but this time, rather than personifying her house, she upbraids herself for allowing her happiness to become dependent on

material things. Her relegation of the house to "silence" is deeply moving, as it draws the reader's attention to the fact that the speaker has transcended her earlier "silent night," the state of spiritual blindness she was in at the beginning of the poem. She writes, "straight I 'gin my heart to chide," the abbreviation of *begin* and attendant amplification of the hard *g* sound coupled with the lacerating *ch* sound of *chide* suggesting her abrupt—rather than gradual or linear—*cutting* off of her previous indulgence in sentimental mourning of earthly things.

With the words "A price so vast as is unknown,/Yet by His gift is made thine own" (ll. 49-50), Bradstreet expresses gratitude toward God for giving her a place in Heaven. She contrasts the endurance of God and her place in Heaven with the transitoriness and unimportance of her material and earthly surroundings, her "pelf." And although it is tangential to my main argument, it is also interesting to note the contrast between God's industry as suggested by the lines "It's purchased and paid for too/By him who hath enough to do" with Bradstreet's idleness as suggested by the third section (ll. 47-48). This negative view of idleness and positive view of work is characteristically Puritan (Feldmeth). Historian Paul Seaver writes of a "Puritan abhorrence of time wasted" (42). Bradstreet's vision of godly industry thus further demonstrates her piety and spiritual health in this final section.

There is ample evidence that Bradstreet's newfound detachment and piety will endure. First, this section is the last. There is no subsequent change in the narrator's thoughts, giving the section and the sentiments expressed therein the last word. Second, the section is longer and the atti-

tudes expressed in it are more consistent than in any of the previous sections, suggesting the continuance of Bradstreet's current state. Whereas the first, second, and third sections were respectively twelve, eight, and fourteen lines, this final section is twenty lines; it is the first section with a number of lines evenly made up of tens, which has a stabilizing effect. The speaker has reached what Blanche de la Force, the neurotic nun who aspires to heroism in Francis Poulenc's opera *The Carmelites*—frequently translated as *Dialogues of the Carmelites*—refers to as "detachment [so long practiced that] one never feels one can ever turn back" (Poulenc 103).

Bidding farewell to her house and her former belongings, Bradstreet writes, "Adieu, Adieu, all's vanity" (l. 36). This is the first time in the poem that Bradstreet uses foreign words. Perhaps the newfound lingual breadth suggests the temporal breadth—the endurance—of the narrator's newfound state of detachment and spiritual integrity. The word "adieu" is especially appropriate here because, in French, it translates literally as "to God," and Bradstreet here redirects her focus to God.

It is also in this section that we first see Bradstreet use meter to play with word pronunciation. Implying that she should be grateful that God, with all his responsibilities, has set aside a place for her in heaven, she reminds herself, "Thou hast a house on high erect,/Framed by that mighty Architect,/With glory richly furnished,/Stands permanent though this be fled./It's purchased and paid for too/By Him who hath enough to do" (ll. 43-48). To fit the poem's rhythm and to maintain its rhyme scheme, the *e* in the word "furnished" and the *e* in the word "purchased" must be pronounced. The elongation of words here suggests the endurance and

permanence of God and of Bradstreet's destined place in heaven as well as the endurance and permanence of Bradstreet's newfound piety. Thus she uses pronunciative as well as lingual breadth to suggest temporal breadth. This broadening of words also reflects the broadening of her scope of focus as she contemplates eternity and her own immortality. Further, Bradstreet's metaphorical references to God as an "Architect" and to her place in heaven as a "house" directly juxtapose the eternal divine with her burned earthly house, which she no longer mourns. Although her path to this state has not been linear, she has now reached a state of stable piety and spiritual enlightenment.

Bradstreet's placement of verbs emphasizes her action even when she works toward a state of submission to God's will. Throughout the poem, Bradstreet frequently places verbs at the ends of lines. Not all of these verbs refer to her own actions directly. However, when they do, their placement at the ends of lines magnifies her agency and activity. In the nostalgic, materialistic sections—sections one and three, lines 1-12 and 21-34—these line-ending verbs that refer to actions undertaken by Bradstreet directly occur several times: "took," "look," "spy," "cry," "past," "cast," "spy," and "lie" (ll. 1, 2, 7, 8, 21, 23, 24). However, in the "submissive" sections—sections two and four, lines 13-20 and 36-54—they also occur repeatedly: "look," "repine," "chide," "fly," and "love" (ll. 13, 18, 37, 42, 53). It seems that Bradstreet is also active when working toward detachment.

In the end, Bradstreet's pious attitude seems equivalent to a passive submission to God's will. But it is a process of *active* contemplation and self-castigation—set in motion by the burning of her house—that

leads Bradstreet to this state. Furthermore, the poem itself seems an active religious exercise as she upbraids herself for her earthly, material concerns and redirects her attention to the spiritual. To Bradstreet, reaching a state of detachment and piety is as much an active pursuit as the acquisition, use, and mourning of material things. Perhaps the fact that Bradstreet's path to piety requires conscious effort and redirection is one reason that it also meanders and bends rather than moves forward in a consistent, linear way. Overall, "Here Follows" suggests that a Puritan's path to piety does not move forward steadily; one falters on the way to achieving an ideal state of detachment. Still, Bradstreet's poem indicates that with reflection, persistence, and a willingness to critically examine one's thoughts and behavior, one can ultimately assume a pious mindset.

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Andersen's Fairy Tales and the Bildungsroman

Joseph Torres

Though they appear to be simple children's stories, every reader of Hans Christian Andersen knows just how detailed and impactful his fairy tales are. The Danish writer, born in 1805, writes with an intricacy that effectively creates stories about growth and childhood. He has written several children's short stories collections, many of which were inspired by folktales Andersen had heard as a child. "Thumbelina" (1835), for example, though it was inspired by "Tom Thumb," was Andersen's own creation. The Danish reception towards his stories, however, was mixed, with some critics remarking that children's stories should educate rather than merely entertain. In response, Andersen wrote one of his most well-known stories: "The Little Mermaid" (1837). Like "Thumbelina," "The Little Mermaid" was inspired by a folktale, specifically the 1811 story "Undine." However, "The Little Mermaid" is creatively Andersen's own. This fairy tale is what resonated with international audiences and established Andersen's reputation as a talented fairy tale writer. Finally, it wasn't until 1843 that "The Ugly Duckling" was published in yet another collection by the author. Over time, Andersen's stories have been translated into over 120 languages, and have become classics of English-language literature, going on to influence many authors and inspire various adaptations, such as Walt Disney's very own *The Little Mermaid*.

Andersen's story structures are reminiscent of Johann Wolfgang

von Goethe's writing, more specifically his novel *Wilhelm Meister's Appren-
ticeship*, which created the literary genre of the Bildungsroman. Goethe's
novel focuses on growth and education in the protagonist's formative years,
which Andersen implements in his writing. Furthermore, both Goethe and
Andersen's readers can learn from the protagonist's struggles in maturation,
making each Andersen story an excellent educational device for children fac-
ing the struggles of adolescence.

Critical attention on Andersen and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* has
centered on their relation to the Bildungsroman genre. Petru Golban argues
that,

> The Bildungsroman creates complex portrayals of individuals and
> not symbols or ideals, not social or moral types… in realism…
> the round and dynamic protagonist… is an individual subject
> with feelings, thoughts, memories, dreams, a whole of a con-
> sciousness in progress, growth, and, above all, capable of change.
> (113)

Golban writes that the Bildungsroman flourished in the Victorian era and
suggests that the Bildungsroman is a realistic genre. However, Tammy Amiel
Houser makes it clear that the Bildungsroman functions in many stories and
not just realistic novels: "In contrast to the romantic fairy tales that have
been associated with the female Bildungsroman, which model the hero-
ine's weakness and the fantasy of a rescuing prince, "The Ugly Duckling"
provides an alternative context concentrating on individual growth and
strength" (550). Houser goes on to write about how Eliot's The *Mill on the
Floss* subtly nods to Andersen's fairy tale aid and its elements of Bildungsro-
man. However, she does not outright say that these fairy tales of Andersen's

are indeed Bildungsroman in their own right. Comparison between Goethe's work *Wilhelm Meister* and Andersen's fairy tales is a topic few scholars have touched on, with the only exception and connecting string being the brief mention of the Bildungsroman.

How does the literary genre of Bildungsroman work in a children's fairy tale? Does it work at all, and if so, is it effective in relaying the themes of maturity and growth? Andersen's children's stories such as "The Little Mermaid," "Thumbelina," and "The Ugly Duckling" effectively encapsulate the working themes of the Bildungsroman, such as growth, childhood, and responsibility. However, while I concede that Golban's comments on the significance of the Bildungsroman in the realism genre are correct, I insist that the Bildungsroman flourishes in many modes, not just realism. The relationship that flourishes between the Bildungsroman and fairy tales is unique and clear, essentially stripping down the Bildungsroman to its bare essentials.

Understanding the Bildungsroman's Structures and Themes

To understand the way Bildungsroman operates in a fairy tale, an understanding of the genre is necessary. The Oxford English Dictionary defines Bildungsroman as "A novel that has as its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person" ("Bildungsroman"). The Dictionary goes on to state the etymology of the word, breaking it down into two pieces: *bildung*, deriving from German and meaning "education," and *roman*, deriving from multiple languages—including Danish—and meaning "novel." Therefore, the core understanding of the Bildungsroman is that the stories written in this genre center around the education of its protagonist.

The kind of education that the protagonists of these novels undergo is usually vast, covering the physical, mental, and spiritual sides of the character. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is an excellent model for observing the Bildungsroman in action, as it also educates the reader in turn:

> In *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* we saw a form of learning and emotional growth grounded in a body that finally resisted regimentation… But the question remained as to how readers might themselves be involved in such a process of growth…one of [the novel's] achievements is to demonstrate that it takes a visceral engagement to break our habits and that it is through the body that we transform how we live our relation to ourselves and indeed to others. (Morgan 358-359)

The story starts with a protagonist who is portrayed as young and naive. For Goethe's novel, that is Wilhelm Meister. This person must choose between a business lifestyle and an artist's lifestyle, and being the naive boy he is, he chooses the latter. However, Wilhelm grows distracted by a newfound love for Marianne, an actor who sees Wilhelm in addition to another lover who is rich and older. When Wilhelm finds Marianne with her lover, he feels crushed, and so retreats back to his father's plan, which is to become a businessman. Wilhelm's actions after his encounter with Marianne reflect his depressed state of mind and desperation to find purpose. Wilhelm going back to his father is a retreat because he witnessed the harsher realities of the world and grew fearful. This instance of Wilhelm falling back to an earlier lifestyle is an example of Carl Jung's idea of "Regressive Restoration of the Persona." This idea encapsulates the phenomenon of an individual who undergoes a crisis and retreats to a previous way of living. As Jung writes, "Formerly perhaps he wanted more than he could accomplish; now he does

not even dare to attempt what he has it in him to do" (164). Regressing, or retreating to a past state, does not work because one cannot live out a previous identity that is fundamentally different from one's current situation. For example, Wilhelm's new knowledge is that love and theatre life are not what he thought they would be, but the earlier Wilhelm was ambitious about theatre life and didn't know the reality of it. Therefore, Wilhelm's attempt to return to a previous self is futile, resulting in his breakdown in front of Werner, his close friend.

Oftentimes when people are far from living an ideal life, there are a few things that can get them back on track. *Wilhelm Meister* shows a few of them, namely love, adventure, and responsibility. Wilhelm's love for Marianne is fresh when it is broken, and the break is what wakes him up to reality. However, his reaction is to retreat, which is not exactly ideal. What brings him out of this depressive state is finding adventure and gaining a sense of responsibility. Wilhelm finds responsibility in Mignon after finding her when she was beaten and then adopting her. Through this sense of responsibility, Wilhelm finds a sense of purpose that is outside of himself. Furthermore, in Wilhelm's previous state of regression, finding a reason to be useful is the answer to his question of what good he is on earth. The journey to self-knowledge and knowledge of others is why it is necessary for Wilhelm to leave his home, as he acknowledges: "From youth, I have been accustomed to direct the eyes of my spirit inwards rather than outwards; and hence it is very natural that to a certain extent I should be acquainted with man, while of men I have not the smallest knowledge" (Goethe 150). What separates this journey with the theatre from his first attempt with

Marianne is the responsibility he carries for Mignon and his newfound knowledge of young love.

After Wilhelm returns to the business world, he meets his friend Werner. While Wilhelm is poor, happy, attractive, and healthy, his friend Werner, who did not undergo this emotional journey, is rich but unattractive, depressed, and sickly. Because of the education Wilhelm received through his endeavors, he has found meaning and purpose in his life. This discovery occurs because Wilhelm leaves home to find himself, eventually becoming educated by the harshness of reality, and comes back to his previous community not in search of his previous life, but to come back to a family to provide them with the knowledge he has learned. This circular journey is a common theme in the Bildungsroman: leaving home, pursuing education away from home, and returning home. In completing the full circle, one completes the crossing between childhood and adulthood.

Categorizing novels within the Bildungsroman genre still remains a difficult task. Golban discusses the Bildungsroman in history and how it grew in popularity because of its realism. A key aspect to note is that while Bildungsroman succeeded because of its application to realist novels, it does not solely operate in realism. In fact, limiting the label of Bildungsroman to very specific novels, as Aleksandar Stević writes, is problematic in understanding the genre: "a category with well-defined borders but limited membership is not very useful" (163). Stević continues to point out the unique structural quality in Goethe's story that acts as a literary map for non-German writers: "the Bildungsroman is not merely a novel about individual development, but a novel about individual development within a world that

is caught up in the process of social transformation" (169). *Wilhelm Meister* has this quality, since it confronts what it means to grow up in a changing world.

Understanding Andersen's Fairy Tales

The Bildungsroman is clearly evident in Goethe's story, and in identifying the patterns in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, readers start to find these structures elsewhere, such as in Andersen's fairy tales. One of Andersen's stories that has the clearest example of Bildungsroman is "The Little Mermaid." This story centers around a nameless mermaid at the age of fifteen. Once a mermaid or merman turns fifteen, he or she is allowed to swim up and observe the surface. However, after some time, he or she "longed to be at home again; and after a month had passed they said that after all it was far prettier down at the bottom, and there one was so comfortable at home" (*Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories* 4). At the surface, all of the mermaids experience something like a more vivid reality and reject it, eventually going back to their home, which is less painful and intimidating; each one of them initially has an interest in the surface world, yet they quickly grow weary of it. However, the youngest mermaid is the only sister to keep her fascination with the surface world because of a newfound captivation with a prince. Through this encounter with a prince, she grows more inclined to learn about humans in general, and she learns that humans have souls that can continue living in the afterlife. She desires to live forever like humans do, and seeks out ways to obtain an everlasting soul by consulting the sea witch, who tells her that she can get a soul if the prince loves

her and only her. The price for the witch to give the little mermaid legs is her tongue, or her ability to speak, and in addition to being mute she will be in constant pain since the feet she will soon have will not be accustomed to walking on the ground. Lastly, if she fails to get the prince, she will die. Regardless of such conditions, the little mermaid agrees.

The little mermaid does not succeed, and the prince falls in love with someone else, later getting married to her. However, at the prince's reception, the little mermaid starts to accept her fate and continues to dance: "all was joy and merriment aboard the ship till long past midnight. She laughed and danced with the thought of death in her heart" (*Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories* 13). Even when the sisters of the little mermaid propose to her that she kill the prince so she can return to the ocean—ultimately giving up on the pursuit of a soul—she refuses. In this surrender, she triumphs over suffering. With arms spread out she falls overboard, accepting that she will perish. As she disintegrates into the seafoam, air spirits appear and give the little mermaid a new purpose: to travel the world as an air spirit and help humans as an angel-like figure. Even though she does not obtain a soul, her rebirth reveals to her a clear path to earning one. As the little mermaid lifted her "bright arms towards God's sun, for the first time she felt the gift of tears" (15). In her death, she is finally able to feel and understand like a human.

The Bildungsroman reveals itself in "The Little Mermaid" by bringing an understanding of both physical and spiritual growth to both the protagonist and the readers; when individuals make the crossing from childhood to adulthood—which is symbolized in the story by the water and

the surface—they will find hardships like they had not before, much like the little mermaid felt pain in order to receive legs. In addition, the little mermaid was able to overcome her pain and find an altruistic purpose for herself, achieving a full identity. Andersen's other female protagonists seem to have similar growth patterns in terms of their character development. For example, the Danish author's work "Thumbelina" is a story centered around a miniature girl who grows emotionally and mentally rather than physically. "Thumbelina" starts with a woman wanting to have a child, so she goes to a witch for advice. This witch tells the woman to plant a special seed, and when she does, a little girl sprouts out of the flower, growing to the height of a thumb.

Eventually, Thumbelina leaves home and begins to travel. During those travels, she finds a white butterfly and befriends it, tying it to the water lily so that they may travel together and sail faster as well. However, the miniature girl is picked up by a beetle-like bug, and Thumbelina is described as "sorry for the beautiful white butterfly which she had fastened to the leaf, for if he could not free himself he would die of hunger" (*Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* 83). This butterfly—appropriately a white butterfly, symbolizing purity and innocence—is Thumbelina's first encounter with her actions as negatively impacting those she knows. There is now a realization of responsibility towards others around her, which is something she will come to understand.

After the summer passes, Thumbelina ends up living with a mouse for quite some time, eventually meeting their neighbor, a rich, yet blind, mole. This mole shows them the body of a swallow in its tunnels, saying

that it must have frozen to death. As the mouse and the mole leave the swallow, Thumbelina goes back to pay her respects to the bird, eventually learning that the bird is not dead, but simply injured and frozen. While she fears that taking care of the swallow will anger the mole and the mouse, she takes courage and commits to caring for the bird, becoming the first instance where Thumbelina stands up for herself. Up to this point, she has been a passive character, and in this act of selflessness she grows exponentially. After the winter passes and the swallow recovers, he asks Thumbelina if she would like to follow him to where he flies, where the weather is perfect all year round. She accepts the second time he asks and rides the bird as he flies to a beautiful country. She ends up meeting a little prince who gives Thumbelina the title of "queen over all the flowers" and grants her the ability to fly (*Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* 99). Her new ability to fly is an analogy for the experience of living a virtuous life, for in living according to a moral code and practicing this code, there lies true happiness. The Bildungsroman is understood in this story through Thumbelina's search for purpose and responsibility, which she eventually finds; Thumbelina searches for responsibility throughout the story, and only after taking care of someone is she able to understand her purpose: motherly devotion. Just like in reality, where all people are born from mothers, yet only other women have the potential to become mothers themselves, Thumbelina—being born from a flower—completes her character arc of mother of the flowers by receiving a feminine version of self-transcendence.

Thumbelina is able to find a community. This aspect of character development seems to be a large theme for Andersen. It is evident in "The

Little Mermaid," who wants to belong to the human community, and, especially in "The Ugly Duckling" as well, for all the ugly duckling desires is to belong. The story of the ugly duckling is one of turmoil, and though the ugly duckling will eventually find peace and belonging, he must first persevere through quite a bit of suffering. Before the winter sets in near the end of the story, the ugly duckling spots a flock of swans. He experiences a connection with these swans from a distance, and longs to fly away with them to warmer lands. However, he cannot, because he cannot fly like them. The ability to fly relates back to Thumbelina, when she receives her wings at the end of the tale; because she lived a life of virtuous purpose, she gained true happiness. However, the duckling has not lived his life and faced the hardships of winter, which is a necessary skill to learn since all people and animals must learn to survive through the winter. It's only until this cold season has passed when the duckling feels a change: "Then the young bird felt that his wings were strong, as he flapped them against his sides and rose high into the air" (*Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* 48). He finally finds the swans he had seen before, and after being ridiculed all of his life, he commits to letting the swans murder him. However, just as he bows his head in defeat, he sees his own reflection and finds that he has been a swan this whole time, and that he is fully grown and beautiful. The now-realized swan also finds that the swans around him did not have the intention of murdering him, but instead were attempting to befriend him. He then goes and enjoys all that the garden he resides in has to offer, playing with the children and living with his new family. In the end, the ugly duckling's dream that he would one day belong becomes realized in the presence of his new family

as he metamorphosizes into who he was meant to be: a beautiful swan. In terms of the Bildungsroman, it is necessary for the characters to find a place to belong because it aids in the protagonist's attainment of their identity. In the story of "The Ugly Duckling," it is found after suffering through hardships. From the beginning of the story, the ugly duckling never belonged anywhere he went, and it's only through the ridicule of others and the harshness of nature that he is able to grow up and both metaphorically and literally "swim with the adults."

The Relationship Between the Mythical and the Bildungsroman

All three of these Andersen stories offer the theme of education and growth that is the hallmark of the Bildungsroman. The little mermaid desires the love of the prince, eventually growing past it; Thumbelina finds growth in the task of responsibility; and through the ugly duckling's adventures, he is able to mature. The journeys the protagonists take are reflective of the archetype of "The Hero's Journey," a concept created by Carl Jung. Archetypes are common characters or plot patterns that appear in literature often enough that their tropes seem familiar. For example, the archetype of "The Hero's Journey" deals with an individual who faces the hardships of reality in the journey he or she takes in order to fulfill his goal. After conquering said hardships, the hero returns home, as seen in *Wilhelm Meister*. All three Andersen stories mentioned offer this archetype, but simply in different fashions. The little mermaid has her journey to the surface, and in returning to the sea as sea foam, she completes her cycle of growth. Thumbelina leaves the flower she was born in to eventually become queen of the

flowers, and the ugly duckling has to leave his first family before he can come back to a new one. Readers will find that they are familiar with many of the archetypes present in stories, and because of their familiarity they find an aided understanding of the larger plot of the novel. In terms of the Bildungsroman, many archetypes may appear within this genre, but it is their formulaic use that creates a unique atmosphere of growth and education amongst its readers.

Conclusion

Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales create unique worlds with captivating atmospheres, but they also overlap with other popular genres and themes, such as the Bildungsroman. The structure of this genre is credited to Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. Emotional aspects of the genre—including love, adventure, and responsibility—as well as psychological aspects—distress in the midst of physical change, archetypes, and "Regressive Restoration of the Persona"—all work together to build the Bildungsroman structure. In addition, observing Andersen's stories independently from one another may still reveal similar structural choices: "The Little Mermaid's" readers may find that in loving a human and orienting herself to helping others, the little mermaid finds purpose; "The Ugly Duckling's" readers may see that in persevering and growing up, the duckling finds a community; and "Thumbelina's" readers may find that in finding and assuming responsibility, Thumbelina finds her identity. The hardships the protagonists in these stories experience are all for the sake of growth and self-knowledge. These fairy tales of Andersen work with ancient

archetypal ideas about growth and responsibility that transcend the pages he writes. And with an understanding of the Bildungsroman that Hans Christian Andersen's stories contain, readers can become educated in their growth from child to adult.

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The Seduction Novel's Awakening

Julia Francis

The Awakening by Kate Chopin is an 1899 novel depicting the self-actualization of its heroine, Edna Pontellier. Her epiphany comes in the form of an extramarital sexual awakening that reveals to Edna a purpose for existence other than being a mother and running a household. The novel follows Edna's exploration further and further into her own individual aspirations while she neglects her familial duties, ultimately ending with Chopin's suggestion that Edna commits suicide. Although the novel was controversial at the time of publication for its feminist ideas and anti-establishment ways of thinking about motherhood, the text can also be read as a revision of traditional American literary themes and genres. Specifically, the structure and plot of *The Awakening* closely follows that of a much earlier American seduction novel, Susanna Rowson's Charlotte Temple (1791): a young woman is seduced, becomes pregnant, is isolated from society, and subsequently dies. Chopin's novel can be read as a story of Edna's empowerment as she becomes pregnant with ideas and is reborn as a new woman, but the comparison can also open up new readings of Rowson's and other sentimental work. Scholarship on the seduction novel articulates plot points and tropes that are applied and changed in *The Awakening* as a way to emphasize Edna's individuality of character. *The Awakening* can be read as reinventing and transforming the

early American seduction novel's ideas about women by giving its heroine the power and choice to make the decisions that ultimately isolate her from her community as well as her gender.[1]

The seduction narrative intersects with the emergence of the sentimental genre in American fiction. Emerging just after the Revolutionary War, the sentimental genre reflected the newly founded American goals "to construct as well as to celebrate union" (Barnes 1). The new union was focused on creating an individual body politic out of a complex group of people. Sympathy played an important role in articulating the democratic ideas on which the new nation was founded, leading to the rise of sentimental fiction. The focus on women in the genre could be explained by the idea that "in the post-revolutionary period, women become increasingly associated with the dangers of psychological penetration; they embody, both figuratively and literally, the suggestibility requisite for sympathetic identification" (Barnes 8). Thus, the sentimental narrative became a way for countrymen to align themselves with the new nation; as explained by Elizabeth Barnes, "for men to be *truly* American, that is, truly sympathetic, they must learn to be more like women: more suggestible, more seducible, more impressionable readers of both literature and human relations" (xi). The seduction novel inspired more sympathy for the women it depicted, as well as sympathy for the country that it often represented. At the same time, women in the seduction novel served as a potential liability for the United States: young, vulnerable, and perhaps naive in deciding whether or not to trust outside forces. In this sense, the women in these novels deal with the

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[1] I would like to thank Dr. Ashley Reed for all of her support and encouragement during my time at Virginia Tech.

same trepidation and endangerment that concerned the young country in which the novels were being written.

Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* is described by Shelley Jarenski as one of "the most popular seduction narratives of the late eighteenth century," and it is often seen as a template for the traditional plot structure of the seduction novel (59). Barnes describes the eighteenth-century seduction novel as "typically chronicling the single woman's fall from grace and family into the snare of her seducer" (157). *Charlotte Temple* tells the story of the seduction and ultimate downfall of its eponymous heroine. Charlotte is tempted away from her home, family, and country by her seducer, Montraville, and dies while birthing his child at the novel's conclusion. These plot points of *Charlotte Temple* reflect the broader genre of the eighteenth-century seduction novel, which in turn can be applied to *The Awakening*.

The first way Chopin utilizes and transforms the seduction novel's plot structure in *The Awakening* is through the act of seduction itself. Although Edna is sexually awakened by both of her lovers, Robert and Alcée, Chopin's writing suggests that other events in the novel are equally significant for Edna. The catalyzing event of seduction which eventually turns into a symbolic pregnancy happens for Edna during her first experiences in the sea. Before Edna has learned how to swim, Chopin describes the voice of the sea as "seductive" and the touch of the sea as "sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace" (Chopin 25). Chopin's word choice associates the beginning of Edna's spiritual enlightenment with the idea of seduction. With this reading, the sea can be viewed as playing an encouraging role in Edna's seduction, physically isolating her in order to force her to think independently.

Chopin describes Edna's experience swimming for the first time "as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and soul" (51). In this sense, Edna can be thought of as both the seducer and the seduced in her story.

Instead of a man seducing her and swaying her opinion, Edna has seduced and isolated herself. In contrast, in *Charlotte Temple*, the seducer Montraville, in pursuit of Charlotte, claims, "'I will not sacrifice internal happiness for outward show…. I will seek content; and, if I find her in a cottage, will embrace her with as much cordiality as I should if seated on a throne'" (Rowson 5). Montraville's placement of individual happiness over adherence to social expectations is also present in one of Edna's conversations with Adele Ratignolle. In response to Adele's question about what a mother owes to her children, Edna responds, "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children, but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (Chopin 88). In her awakening, Edna has assumed an identity marked by individuality and her own personal happiness, rather than allowing society's judgement of what makes a good mother dictate her actions. By putting Edna's individual desires in front of anyone else's, Chopin has used the seduction novel's characterization of the seducer to apply to Edna as well as to tempt her in her awakening.

In keeping with the structure of the seduction novel, Chopin isolates her heroine from her family and places her in an unfamiliar and uncomfortable environment; however, Chopin's version of the plot func-

tions as a catalyst for her heroine's self-actualization rather than her down-fall. Charlotte Temple, taken to America by Montraville, is an example of the displacement of the seduction novel heroine. The mood of the post-Revolutionary time during which *Charlotte Temple* was written is described by Blythe Forcey as "one of distrust, alienation, and isolation, which was exaggerated by a nostalgic idealization of a supposedly stable, communal, and cooperative colonial or European past" (226). This mood is prevalent in *Charlotte Temple*, whose heroine is described as feeling like "a poor solitary being in the midst of surrounding multitudes" after she arrives in America and realizes Montraville will not marry her (Rowson 38). Forcey remarks that Charlotte is taken to "a New World where homelessness and foreign-ness define the conditions of her life" (226).

In *The Awakening* it is clear to the reader that the Creole com-munity into which Edna has married is completely foreign to her. Just as Charlotte Temple's elopement with Montraville is viewed as an act of rebellion, so is Edna Pontellier's marriage to Léonce, which meets with "the violent opposition of her father and her sister Margaret to her marriage with a Catholic" (Chopin 34). Marie Fletcher discusses Edna's unfamiliarity and embarrassment with Creole culture, and argues that Edna's "Protestant rigidity, anarchic individualism, pride, and conscience" force her to adapt to this Creole environment in her own way (126). Fletcher's point that Edna has changed her mentality in response to her foreign environment distin-guishes her from the traditional seduction novel heroine. Like Charlotte, Edna is placed in a setting that is unfamiliar and at first uncomfortable. Unlike Charlotte, Edna is able to embrace this environment and allow her

discomfort and timidity to evolve into her own personal awakening. Much like Charlotte in America, Edna is at first overwhelmed and embarrassed by the frank and honest Creole culture. However, she uses these differences to change her thinking as well as distinguish herself from her peers rather than to wallow in her isolation. Edna's refusal to fit into the motherly role designated for women in the community reflects her contrast with the seduction novel's heroine.

A comparison can be made between the traditional seduction novel with *The Awakening* in terms of how each heroine uses her own agency. In *Charlotte Temple* and other seduction novels, the heroine's "strongest sensation almost immediately becomes that of not knowing what to do" (Rust 102). Marion Rust comments on the lack of agency apparent in Charlotte once she has been seduced and taken to America, describing it as an "absence of self-direction" (103). This lack of self-direction contrasts with Edna. While it can be argued that Edna is simply neglecting her household duties rather than taking on new responsibilities, she clearly has a sense of direction and self-awareness that heroines in the traditional seduction novel lack. This lack of agency, as pointed out by Rust, confines them to their eventual roles as mothers and they subsequently allow their situations to dictate their lives and actions rather than controlling them themselves. Instead of Edna acting as one of the "mother-women" described in the novel, confined to one role, she instead mothers her newborn identity as an individual (Chopin 16). After allowing the sea to awaken her, Edna emerges with a newfound sense of self.

By placing Edna in the role of seducing herself, Chopin gives her

back the agency taken from seduced women. The idea of a lack of agency in motherhood is articulated by Chopin, who describes the births of Edna's own children as involving "a stupor which had deadened sensation" (205). The deadened sensation Edna feels is her lack of control over the situation she is in and her inability to take any kind of action due to the medical practices of the time. Rust explains that in the traditional seduction novel, it is "in relaxing her sensitivity to her own impulses, not in giving in to them" that the heroine is trapped in the plot of the seducer (102). Chopin is able to flip this in that Edna's sensitivity to her own impulses gives her the "power of significant import" that enlightens her to the fact that she is her own person and not confined to motherhood and domesticity (51). In partially abandoning her role as a mother after returning to New Orleans, Edna assumes the agency to make her own decisions. Rather than confining her to one role, Edna's seduction and self-birth open her up to the individual freedom possessed solely by men in the seduction novel.

After Edna impregnates herself with the idea of her own identity, she in turn rebirths herself. Chopin uses figurative language in several locations to allude to Edna's newly born, developing self. This is prevalent in the passage in which she learns to swim "like the tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence" (51). The simile that Chopin uses to compare Edna to a young child represents her rebirth as she tests the waters of being on her own for the first time. Symbolism is also used to indicate the birth of Edna's awakened soul. Examples of this symbolism occur in several instances in which Edna's eyes are mentioned, including the "different eyes"

she sees herself with after spending the day with Robert, and her feeling that she is "some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world it had never known" at the end of the novel when she stands naked on the beach (74, 214). If the eyes are connected to the soul, Chopin's repetition of the idea that Edna's eyes have been opened in a new way reiterates the idea that she is a markedly changed person who has been reborn out of her own thoughts and awareness.

A common feature of seduction novels is the often debilitating social pressure faced by the heroine. Just before she gives birth and is searching for any available help, Charlotte Temple's neighbors comment that she is a "'nasty impudent hussy'" who is searching for someone to help her "'to maintain her and her bastard'" (Rowson 60). Charlotte has been isolated from and shamed by her society, leading to degradation and her subsequent death. This extreme exile from society as well as shame about Charlotte's pregnancy is also present in Edna's narrative. A scene takes place in which her husband, Léonce, visits Doctor Mandelet to present his concerns about Edna. Léonce says to the doctor, "'she has abandoned her Tuesdays at home, has thrown over all her acquaintances, and goes tramping about by herself, moping in the street-cars, getting in after dark'" (Chopin 123). At the end of the exchange, the Doctor decides not to ask Léonce if he believes there is another man in the picture, though he notably considers it an option. The Doctor's willingness to allow Léonce to believe that his wife's behavior is entirely her fault reflects the idea that a woman bears full responsibility for any wrongdoing, whether it be a change in personality that flouts societal norms or the birth of a child out of wedlock. This idea can be traced back to

Charlotte's assumed guilt for her unfortunate situation. The phrase "'tramping about by herself'" suggests that Edna is being promiscuous, though not with anyone else, but with herself and her own thoughts. The use of this language to describe his wife's behavior aligns Léonce with the townspeople who ostracize and look down on Charlotte Temple. Although Edna goes through her seduction in isolation, the public treats her with the shame and ridicule that the traditional seduction novel faces; Chopin treats this ostracism as a through line in history of the treatment of women by society.

The paternal figure has a prevalent role in both the traditional seduction narrative and *The Awakening*. Elizabeth Barnes articulates this point as it is presented in the seduction novel, arguing that early America embraced "an ethos of seductive paternalism whereby the positions of father and lovers become confused and intertwined. The seduction novel exploits such confusion, evincing the ceaseless modulation of masculine identities and exploring its effects on female characters" (56). This recalls the roles of Edna's father and her husband in *The Awakening*. Both Léonce and the Colonel express their need to control Edna. Even at the start of the novel, before Edna's true awakening, Léonce expresses his frustration with Edna: "he reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business" (Chopin 11). Léonce has many thoughts that he should exert more control over Edna yet has a difficult time actually doing so. This is expressed to him by the Colonel, who says, "'You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Léonce…. Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard;

the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it'" (133). This exchange is immediately followed by Léonce's thought that the Colonel had "coerced his own wife into her grave" (133).

Barnes' claim that male figures in the seduction novel often act similarly appears in *The Awakening* as a way to redirect Edna's narrative. If Chopin had followed the trope of the father-lover, Léonce would have a much larger role in Edna's suggested death, mirroring the suggestion that the Colonel contributed to his own wife's death. However, because Chopin suggests that Edna's awakening possibly drove her to commit suicide, the idea that the Colonel and Léonce exert any control over Edna is untrue. Although they both have the same intention of controlling her and exerting dominance, Chopin chooses an alternative path from that of the seduction novel, giving Edna the power. Before she walks into the ocean at the end of the novel, Edna's children and the "slavery" she is held in as their mother are mentioned, but Chopin writes that "she was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach" (213). The fact that Edna's responsibilities in life are not in her thoughts suggests that although her husband and father emulate each other in attempting to exert control over her, Edna's individuality prevailed. This both invokes the idea of male authority figures and debunks the power that Barnes finds in the seduction novel genre. Rather than allowing the male figures in her life control her actions, Edna assumes the role of the male figure by controlling her own narrative.

The final plot point of the seduction novel that Chopin uses in *The Awakening* is the heroine's eventual death at the end of the novel. In the conclusion of *Charlotte Temple*, Charlotte dies in childbirth mid-thought:

"unable to finish the sentence, she sunk back on her pillow" (Rowson 68).
In the traditional seduction novel, an early death serves as punishment for
the female protagonist's sins. The suggestion made by this ending is that
the woman is dying out of shame for sinning against the societal code; she
is dying for and because of her child. In the aforementioned scene between
Adele and Edna, Edna argues that she would give up her life and money
for her children, but not her "self," to which Adele replies, "'a woman who
would give her life for her children could do no more than that—your Bible
tells you so'" (Chopin 88). Shelly Jarenski suggests that it is a lack of educa-
tion provided for the heroines of seduction novels and the "social structures
in which these characters are trapped that dictate the endings of these
novels" (65). Jarenski's point illuminates Edna's reasoning that she would
die for her children rather than die to conform to society's idea of mother-
hood. In becoming self-educated and enlightened, Edna has learned that she
would die for her children because of her love for them rather than because
society has told her it is what a mother should do for her child. Edna takes
the idea of death into her own hands, viewing it not as a punishment, but as
a welcome sacrifice for her "self" and her children. This places Edna outside
the realm of traditional motherhood, and therefore outside the realm of
traditional womanhood, in that she does not conform to society's expecta-
tions of her as a woman.

Edna's suggested suicide at the novel's close is the second way in
which the idea of death is addressed. When walking into the ocean she
thinks of her children "who had overpowered and sought to drag her into
the soul's slavery for the rest of her days" (Chopin 213). The "soul's slavery"

that Chopin refers to can be read as Edna's own personal hell: motherhood. Unlike a young woman condemned to hell after dying in childbirth in a seduction novel, Edna seems to be freeing herself from the hell on earth that she faces in being a mother without the ability to express her individuality to its fullest potential. The stages of Edna's awakening are repeated in the final scene. The sea is again "seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude" (Chopin 213). Edna is going through the stages of her awakening for the second time, as Chopin describes her entering the water without any thoughts of her family in her mind. By contrast, *Charlotte Temple* concludes with Charlotte dying in childbirth and her former mentor Madame La Rue passing away in the care of Charlotte's family, "a striking example that vice, however prosperous in the beginning, in the end leads only to misery and shame" (Rowson 71). Chopin's ending revises the ending to the traditional seduction novel, giving Edna the power to take her own life rather than succumbing to a fate that reflects the view that society has of her.

Still, Chopin does not provide her readership with a definitive ending to Edna's story. At the novel's close, Edna Pontellier is in the liminal space of the water which birthed her awakening in the first place. Chopin does not explicitly state whether Edna chooses to swim back to shore or commit suicide by drowning in the Gulf; it is left unanswered for the reader to interpret. This idea of leaving the character's actions up to the readership is reminiscent of the seduction narrative; *Charlotte Temple* is narrated by a voice representative of larger societal values, who instructs the audience on what to make of the novel's lesson (Barton). Although Chopin creates Edna

to break out of the helpless narrative of the seduction heroine, her fate is still left to the public to decide. Early in the novel, Edna is described to have a kind of double life: "At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin 27). The final scene of *The Awakening* illustrates these two lives. The novel places these two existences at odds with one another, Edna's family and friends pushing her toward the former, while her awakening inspires her to embrace the latter. It could be argued that Edna does in fact commit suicide; she could be using her own individuality as a way to break away from her society, or her suicide could be interpreted as society's punishment for her behavior, that a woman with her values cannot survive in their society. However, just as *Charlotte Temple* is dictated by a narrator who represents larger social values, effectively giving society the narrative power, Chopin's ending gives her readership, the public, the power to decide and judge Edna's fate.

Both the seduction novel and *The Awakening* are historically viewed as one-sided narratives that reflect either the empowerment or oppression of women. Critics have often seen the seduction novel as an example of the shame cast on women in the post-Revolutionary period, while *The Awakening* is thought of as a "commentary on and illustration of the evolution of the literary feminist movement" (Williams 53). However, by emulating the traditional seduction narrative plot and consequently transforming it, Chopin questions how society views womanhood and femininity. By acting as both the seducer and the seduced, Edna Pontellier subverts the traditional seduction story and uses it to facilitate her self-actualization. Chopin weaves

the plot structure of the seduction narrative into her novel seamlessly, all the while transforming it into a tale of one woman's path to her destiny.

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Fracturing the Mirror: *Girls Made of Snow and Glass*

Abigael Good

Maria Tartar emphasizes the multiplicity of fairy tale variants that create "kaleidoscopic variations with distinctly different effects" (ix). For example, Little Red Riding Hood may be eaten in one variant, rescued in another, or slay the beast herself in a third (ix). We think of these variants as having developed naturally through parallel thinking in different cultures and through the mutating of tales within and between cultures, but there are also by now a proliferation of *retellings*—new variants which are intentionally different, rather than incidentally different. While a variant assumes it is a valid, or even the only valid, telling of the tale, retelling assumes that there is a more authentic original tale at its base and draws its meaning from this relationship. How elements of the original are retained, excised, or turned slantwise create meaning in the retelling. Retellings of every popular story in the public domain exist (and even of stories not in the public domain, if one considers fanfiction), and many retellings bring a queer subtext or queer reimagining to the surface of the new story. Young adult fantasy authors have been especially prolific in this area. For example, Malinda Lo's *Ash* and Kalynn Bayron's *Cinderella is Dead* each use Cinderella as a base for stories in which two girls fall in love with each other. Fairy tales lend themselves particularly well to queer retellings because their high level of familiarity allows them greater flexibility to be queered and yet still recognizable, to be bent out of shape and yet still resonate within our collective unconscious,

our shared understanding of the meaning of symbols. I will explore the
potential of fairy tale symbols to be queered by examining Melissa Bashar-
doust's retelling of "Snow White" in her novel *Girls Made of Snow and Glass*.

While there is scholarship on fairy tales in general and on feminist
criticism in particular, it is harder to find queer retellings and examina-
tions of queer retellings. I argue that this gap demands more attention. If
any kind of retelling reveals the enduring power and importance of fairy
tales to our modern world, as so much academic literature is interested
in discussing, it is the queer retelling. When it comes to how far fairy tale
symbols can stretch and still retain their meaning, queer retellings are both
a challenge and proof of the fruitfulness of answering that challenge; they
suggest revelatory uses of those symbols and in their execution demonstrate
their full potential as literary shorthand for important concepts that perme-
ate our culture. Christy Williams approaches the topic of feminist retell-
ings in much the same way: "retellings that pull fragments rather than plot
structure from fairy tales have more possibilities in conceptualizing gender
because they are removing recognized fairy-tale elements from their expect-
ed context, thereby invoking a particular fairy tale without reproducing the
source tale's ideology through plot and other patterns" (3). I approach these
fragments somewhat differently—I believe they invoke not only their fairy
tale of origin but also the tale's ideology. However, through manipulation
of carefully chosen symbols, an author can invoke the ideology of these
tales—heteronormativity, feminine passivity, the all-important beauty—and
then systematically dismantle that ideology. This is economical storytelling:
the author need not first flesh out such an ideology in order to then destroy

it—she can use the symbols already familiar to Western culture.

Because fairy tales are so commonly associated with childhood nowadays, and queerness is still largely restricted to the realm of adults (as wrong as it is to assume that queerness is too explicit for children to learn about), using fairy tale symbols for a queer story is a greater challenge than a feminist retelling, and a higher-impact pairing. And, yet, to tell a story of love between women, it is just as necessary to tell a tale of women's emancipation, so Bashardoust's retelling is also strongly feminist. I will now examine Bashardoust's use of "Snow White" fragments such as the mirror, snow and blood, the kiss, and others throughout her novel in service of emancipating and queering Snow White.

In Bashardoust's retelling, her Evil Queen begins life simply as Mina. Though beautiful, Mina is an outcast: she is the daughter of a ruthless sorcerer who saved her life as a child by giving her a glass heart and, as a side effect, the magic of manipulating glass. Bashardoust chooses to give her Evil Queen power over glass because through this she can control mirrors, turning the tables on the original story, in which the Queen is controlled by her mirror. While Mina is obsessed with her reflection, it is because she is cognizant that others only value her for her beauty and that it is therefore her only source of non-magical power. Her mantra, repeated throughout the book, is: "If they love you for anything, it will be for your beauty" (11). Love here refers not only to romantic love, but also to the love of the court and people she will eventually rule over, translating into respect from or power over them. Her anxiety over retaining her beauty is not merely frivolous and vain or rooted in hatred of other women, as is so common in

the stories we tell; it comes from a sensible and acute fear of being power-less without it. Bashardoust acknowledges that women who care about their appearance have been influenced to do so by their surroundings, and does not condemn them for it—in contrast to the original story which values beauty so highly while villainizing women who seek to retain their beauty. In the original tale, a woman ought to be beautiful but never to want, acknowledge, or work at it. In *Girls Made of Snow and Glass*, beauty cannot go unacknowledged; it is a force constantly shaping the characters' lives, and the reader is forced to critically confront its influence.

When the king's wife dies, Mina's sorcerer father creates a daughter for him out of snow and blood, in the exact image of his dead wife. The sorcerer is as much obsessed with this act of creation as the king is with how much his daughter resembles his wife, both of them invested to an unset-tling degree with Lynet's unnatural origins and beauty. Blood is so strongly identified with women, and both women and blood identified with giving life (Gilbert and Gubar 292), that it stands out as particularly strange that it is a male sorcerer who creates this girl out of blood and snow, a man who harnesses the feminine symbolism of virginal blood on pure snow to create a child. By bringing a child into the world, the sorcerer transgresses the boundaries of gender. His infringement reveals how flimsy those boundaries are. Lynet has no true mother, only artifice and fathers. Her femaleness, like her person, is entirely constructed, specifically constructed by men to be beautiful and delicate. She is a symbol of the social construction of woman-hood in our world, where one might add that womanhood is also construct-ed to be heterosexual. Lynet will eventually defy all of these expectations.

In payment for his daughter's creation, the king invites Mina and her father to live at Whitespring Castle, the frozen capital of the kingdom. Encased in endless winter for hundreds of years, this is a world perpetually on the brink of spring, of change, yet never changing at all. There, Mina tries to prove she can love and be loved despite her glass heart by seducing the widowed king. To practice loving someone, she turns her mirror into a man made of glass, an act of creation that parallels Lynet's creation out of snow. However, while Lynet was created to be the platonic ideal of a woman, Mina makes her huntsman gentle, obedient, and devoted, in contrast to the prototypical Western idea of masculinity. Unlike her father, who used one woman as a mold for another, Mina's creation breaks the mold. While the novel repeatedly asks what makes a woman, the glass huntsman forces the reader to also consider what makes a man. The book suggests that perhaps a man is not so different from a woman; both of them are constructed by the other in the image of past men and women, with no true original, as Judith Butler would write.

Though the king seems to come to love her, he insists that Mina never grow too close to his daughter, though young Lynet loves Mina wholeheartedly. He worries that idolizing Mina will prevent Lynet from growing into the perfect copy of his late wife. On their wedding night, an incident between Lynet and the sorcerer who created her causes the king to regret marrying Mina, and he distances himself from her, giving her the South to rule but telling her they are husband and wife in name only. Miserable, Mina turns to her glass huntsman for comfort, a twisting of the Evil Queen's obsession with her mirror. Mina's 'mirror' does not control her by

taunting her with another's beauty; rather he is under her control and considers her the most beautiful woman in the world because he loves her. The huntsman, her rule of the South, and Lynet's love are Mina's only consolations as she and her husband come to despise each other.

The figure of Snow White is filled by Lynet, the young princess. Though everyone praises her uncanny resemblance to the late queen, Lynet longs to be like Mina, and harbors a secret fear of becoming like her dead mother. Her prince figure is not a prince at all, but a young surgeon named Nadia. When Nadia arrives at Whitespring, she reveals to Lynet the secret of her creation. This revelation shakes Lynet to her core: "Made, created, shaped—all those words meant the same thing: she was something artificial. She was a duplicate, created to live out all the days that had been stolen from her mother […] Had Lynet ever had anything of her own? Was she even a person?" (Bashardoust 56). Lynet's fears raise questions about the formation of womanhood. Is a woman who was made, created, shaped by the patriarchy even a person? Does she have anything of her own, or only what the world tells her to have? Does she have a purpose beyond beauty and having children? Because Lynet's formation symbolizes the formation of womanhood to benefit men, it is significant that Nadia, her future love interest, is the one to reveal to her that heteronormative womanhood is constructed. She raises the possibility that Lynet, and any woman, can choose to reject that kind of womanhood, and she embodies one option they can turn to: romantic love of women.

This secret brings the two girls closer together, forming a tentative relationship. But then Lynet's relationship with Mina fractures. Her father

gives Lynet control of the South, Mina's homeland and former responsibil-
ity, and then, having finally successfully driven a wedge between his wife
and daughter, dies in a hunting accident. He leaves a void in power right-
fully meant to be filled by his daughter—but Lynet is young, and everyone
knows that Mina has always been ambitious. Lynet witnesses a tryst between
Mina and the huntsman and learns of her glass heart, magic, and inability
to love. Terrified that the stepmother she never truly knew might kill her to
keep the crown, she flees the castle.

  Alone and on the run, Lynet discovers she has magic of her own:
the power to create new things out of snow. Once again, even while she
and Mina are on opposite sides of the conflict, they are aligned symboli-
cally by both possessing a kind of magic. Out of snow, Lynet creates a
false corpse of herself, a sort of precursor to the false death of every "Snow
White" tale. This is especially interesting in light of Greenhill's assertion
that "Woman centering and lesbian orientations signify in the doubling of
the female image—reflections in mirrors, for example—or in the reproduc-
tion of female counterparts—sisters with parallel but different qualities,
mothers and stepmothers, and so on" (9). *Girls Made of Snow and Glass* is
full of doubling: Lynet as a copy of her dead mother, Lynet's two mother
figures, Lynet's living body and her false snow body, Mina and her reflec-
tion reflected over and over again, Mina's living body and her false glass
body. Both Lynet and Mina are duplicated again and again throughout the
story. Both of them confront perfect(er) images of themselves and ask if this
or that reflection is what other people would rather they be. Both of them
eventually turn away from these images to embrace themselves as they are:

not the women their patriarchal world wants them to be, but the women they want to be.

While Mina believes she is dead, Lynet heads South to find the magician who made her. She hopes he will know how to make Mina's glass heart real and so heal the rift between them. At this point in the story, one expects Lynet to meet seven dwarves and move into their home for safety. But there are no dwarves in *Girls Made of Snow and Glass*, or any characters one might see as stand-ins for them. This part of the tale, so well-known to the Western audience, is missing. Its absence makes Bashardoust's use of "Snow White" more interesting, because we recognize Snow White without her dwarves. We recognize the story's most powerful motifs—blood on snow, the mirror, the deceptive gift, awakening from death—and the ideas they in turn allude to: awe at the creation of life, the ultimate death that is the death of mothers, beauty and vanity and corruption. Bashardoust does not have to include every aspect of "Snow White." It is enough just to invoke the story, and therefore its cultural weight. These readymade symbols are ideal building blocks for the book because they bring with them a host of already potent meanings which Bashardoust does not have to set up herself before she can subvert them. She can begin manipulating them from the start, trusting in the reader's preexisting knowledge of what they already meant. Bashardoust takes advantage of this when she gives Mina power over glass, for example. But she can also manipulate a symbol by excising it. The absence of the dwarves and their safe domestic space from *Girls Made of Snow and Glass* suggests that safety offered by men is unnecessary, or perhaps nonexistent.

Back in Whitespring, Mina clings to her throne. As she mourns the death of her stepdaughter and distant husband, she realizes that the king would have loved her if she died: "He would mold her memory into a wife he could love, and he would worship her dead body just as he had shunned the living one. *He loves nothing so much as his own grief*" (Bashardoust 215). Thus the prince's love of Snow White's dead body becomes the king's love of dead women in Bashardoust's retelling, making explicit the message that lies hidden in "Snow White": the most desirable, most loveable woman is one who has no life or troublesome personality, nothing but an empty vessel to be filled with a man's imagination of who she is. Especially in a retelling that gives us a female/female romance, the implication that few men truly love women for who they are takes on a queer tint. Greenhill goes further, in her analysis of the fairy tale "Fitcher's Bird," by identifying women-focused tales of women-identified women, in which men are the villains, as inherently queer, and I agree that they challenge heteronormativity. Bashardoust's queer retelling does not make all men villains—the huntsman, who is gentle and devoted, and loves Mina until the end—but she understands that there can be no queer liberation without women's liberation from the rule of men. Lesbian love cannot be accepted if women are not respected in the absence of a man. *Girls Made of Snow and Glass* stands as much as a testament to the intertwinement of feminism and queer liberation as Greenhill's analysis of "Fitcher's Bird," but in a way that rejects gender essentialism and does not preclude the ability of men to be better.

In the South, Lynet finds the sorcerer, but he has no desire to heal Mina's glass heart; he only wants to cut out Lynet's heart in order to steal

her magic and vitality. Having once spent his own magic and vitality to create her for his own interests, he now feels entitled to her very life. From the beginning, Lynet's fathers created her for their own needs and desires, never thinking of her as an independent human. Is a woman a person, Lynet wondered? The answer is clear: not in her father's eyes. With Nadia's help, Lynet escapes. She has gained a better understanding of how the sorcerer's cruelty turned Mina into the person she is now, as well as a newfound belief in her power. Armed with this knowledge, she believes she can convince Mina of her love and make up with her. If not, she is resolved to kill her to take the throne. Lynet and Nadia return to Whitethorn, racing the sorcerer who still wants her heart.

When the two women confront each other, Mina realizes that Lynet's love is worth more to her than the crown. She rejects the hatred that the king, representative of the patriarchy, tried to instill between them, the hatred that drives the plot of the original tale, "that voice of the looking glass [that] sets them against each other" (Gilbert and Gubar 293). Though Mina has always literally had control of glass, this triumph marks the moment she gains control over all the symbolic representations of glass: the wall that separates two people though they can see each other and the mirror that tells a woman she is nothing more than her image.

But her father acts before she can. He creates an imitation of Mina out of glass and has it give Lynet a poisoned silver bracelet that will put her to sleep while he cuts out her heart. Figuring this out only in time to stop him from operating, and believing Lynet truly dead, Mina snaps and kills her father rather than let him take Lynet's heart. While Mina and the

sorcerer battle each other, Nadia is actually awakening Lynet. Then the girls kiss. Nadia in the prince role reinforces what Bashardoust has been saying all along, that women can save each other, as friends, as family, and as lovers. The story showcases all of these relationships between women. They are bonds that can be warped by competitiveness, manipulated by others, and fall into familiar tropes pitting women against each other. But they can also be fair, resilient, and healing. Lynet is already awake during the kiss. The quasi-necrophiliac implications of the original story have been transferred totally to her father, rather than to her love interest, who loves her far more when she is alive and vibrant than when she is asleep and silent. It is a consensual kiss that frees Lynet not from a sleep like death, but from her father's expectations.

With both of their fathers dead, Mina passes the crown to Lynet, who names her governor of the South. Being a good woman, in this story, does not have to mean giving up power. A powerful woman in Bashardoust's world is not necessarily an evil one. They will rule together, and Nadia will stay by Lynet's side. With her power over snow, Lynet ends the unnatural winter that had frozen the kingdom in place, letting the seasons finally change. In contrast to the traditional beginning of "Snow White" with the ominous image of blood on snow to symbolize new life, the trees of Whitespring begin to bud with new life of their own. The story that began with two men as the most powerful figures in their lives ends with "two girls made of snow and glass who were more than their origins"—that is, more than their fathers meant or wanted for them to be—becoming "two queens who had come together to reshape their world" (Bashardoust 370).

Bashardoust's deft handling of fragments of "Snow White" confronts their meaning in the original tale, challenges them, and ultimately reimbues them with new meaning. Blood is power, mirrors are weapons, and snow is but a blank canvas for a new future to be written upon. This retelling works not in spite of the meaning these symbols carry over from "Snow White," but specifically because they already carried meaning. That contrast, like bright red blood against pure white snow, is the point. Other authors have already discovered this, but few have extrapolated from the heteronormative world of fairy tales to create one in which a girl can be a prince and a princess kiss a girl.

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Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* as a Dystopian Fairy Tale

Karla-Claudia Csürös

Introduction

Ever since its publication in 1985, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* has been not only controversial, mainly for its subject matter and real-life inspiration, but also extremely popular, even to this day, thanks to its eponymous critically acclaimed TV show, whose success, alongside recent political developments in the United States, prompted Atwood to write a much-anticipated sequel, which she published in 2019 under the title *The Testaments*. This study will focus on both novels' extensive use of fairy tale imagery and tropes in the creation of its dystopian world.

There have been many studies which explore the fairy tale elements found in some of Margaret Atwood's novels. Fiona Tolan talks about *Surfacing* and *The Blind Assassin* in the context of gothic fairy tales. W. J. Keith examines the various (mis)interpretations of "Bluebeard's Egg" as a meta-fairy tale. Essays from *Once Upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings* discuss a multitude of Atwood's novels, with a brief mention of *The Handmaid's Tale* being made in Scheckels' article. To the best of my knowledge, only one researcher has analyzed *The Handmaid's Tale* in terms of fairy tales: Sharon R. Wilson in *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*.

Nonetheless, this study focuses on its sequel, *The Testaments*. Given

the fact that it was just published, it is hardly surprising that there is no research available on *The Testaments* yet, let alone any interpretation of the fairy tale-inspired mythos of Gilead. This paper aims to show that the fairy tale elements present in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* are used on two levels: a textual one and a meta-textual one. On a textual level, fairy tale elements are repurposed by the Gileadean authorities to enforce specific gender roles. On a meta-textual level, Atwood rewrites traditional fairy tales in a postmodern feminist key to comment on socio-political aspects of womanhood.

The Dystopian Fairy Tale

To define the dystopian fairy tale, a few key concepts will be introduced and linked to the fairy tale and dystopian literature, which are then analyzed in the context of postmodernism and the feminist movement. The fairy tale is defined by Bacchielega as a transitional genre between folklore and literature, a "literary appropriation" of the folk tale, which still resembles the latter in terms of orality, tradition, and performance (3). Propp observes that many fairy tales share similar structural patterns, which he then classified into 31 functions. Propp summarizes each function with a title (e.g., function II "interdiction"), then offers a brief explanation of the trope. While they do not generally occur at the same time and in the same order, Propp's functions of the fairy tale offer an empirical approach to identifying fairy tale elements in other writings, which will become relevant later in this study. The main purpose of the fairy tale is to present a hero's journey as he explores quests and meets character types to develop "social

codes, norms, and values" in the "civilizing process" of children (Zipes 14). The fairy tale must suppress disorder to achieve order, reflecting its utopian tendencies (15).

If fairy tales reflect the human need of an ideal life and are concerned with attaining a model society through its civilizing purpose, utopias envision a perfect world. Following the horrors of the twentieth century, such idealism is harder to sustain, leading to the emergence of the dystopian narrative (Moylan xi). Schlobin suggests that utopias and dystopias are created as antithetical responses to the same issues. He claims that, while utopias depict a dream society and "the reverie of the ideal world to escape" real-life concerns, dystopias empathize with the oppressed and "satirize the impotency of the will to free itself" (14-15). Taking this argument further, it becomes evident that dystopias and fairy tales share some fundamental features: both are presented as cautionary tales whose main purpose is to scrutinize societal standards by having an individual challenge an entire system (Coste 95).

Social issues present in dystopias mirror and magnify the faults of different socio-political systems, often presenting totalitarian oppression (Booker 19-21). Postmodern dystopias change the paradigm from a distant future to the present and critique pop culture, conformity, technology, gender identity and more. A type of literature that soared in popularity in the 21st century is that of Young Adult (YA) dystopias, i.e., narratives created with a younger (often female) audience in mind, catering to their specific interests and seeking to empower them (Coste 99). Feminist dystopias, which includes Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*, are another postmodern

subgenre that focuses on gender inequality. Feminist dystopias employ post-modern strategies such as parody, irony, intertextuality, and subversion to deconstruct and critique patriarchal representations of women (Bacchielega 152).

The dystopian fairy tale develops as a mixture of both feminist and YA dystopian literature. Coste defines the dystopian fairy tale in relation to Propp's trope of the hero's journey, in which the focus is shifted from the experience of an individual to raising society-wide awareness needed to enact change (95). In other words, the hero no longer acts in his or her own interest against the regime, but rather for the "greater good." Such narratives are concerned with social activism, rape culture, the problematic nature of romance and female embodiment, highlighting feminist concerns by plac-ing them against an oppressive dystopian background. Dystopian fairy tales "call upon a long history of feminist fairy tale subversion" and empower girls through narratives that highlight the significance of female agency (95-96).

As dystopian fairy tales are postmodern, subversion is one of its main features. One manner of subversion is metafiction, a type of writ-ing which highlights its own artifice to examine and critique the relation-ship between reality and fiction (Waught 2). The "meta" of metafiction can then be extended to meta-fairy tale, identified by Wilson as a "text […] about fairy tales [that] uses straight or deconstructed fairy tale form or style (including structure, language, characterization)" (31). Meta-fairy tales are thus achieved through intertextuality, defined by Roland Barthes as the impossibility of understanding a text outside of its relation to other texts (36). As an example, Connor notices the use of Propp's functions of

fairy tales as a form of intertextuality in which these structures are flipped and parodied (64). This requires the re-contextualization of a text, achieved through re-writing (Pope 3). In the case of dystopian fairy tales, the purpose of re-writing is not to enchant, but to disenchant by "holding a mirror to the magic mirror of fairy tale" (Bacchielega 23).

To sum up, the historical evolution of fairy tales encompasses both utopian tendencies and distinct dystopian elements. Socio-political aspects of womanhood are depicted in fairy tales and dystopias, both types of cautionary tales, and are expressly emphasized in postmodern feminist rewritings of such narratives. This perspective offers the possibility for an innovative approach to contemporary literature, particularly to Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Testaments,* whose dystopian fairy tale elements will now be analyzed.

The Testaments of Fairy Tale Heroines

The Testaments is set 15 years after the events of *The Handmaid's Tale* and explores the political dynamics in Gilead on a larger scale than its predecessor, whilst exposing the cracks in the system that threaten its existence. It is narrated from three different points of view, each corresponding to the three main characters: Aunt Lydia, who witnessed the rise of Gilead from its very beginnings, managed to secure her own safety by becoming part of Gilead's elite, and now plots the downfall of Gilead; Agnes Jemima, a young woman born and raised in Gilead who has no knowledge of the outside world and who must confront the harsh reality of her oppression; and Nicole, a Canadian teenager who, unbeknownst to her, was born in

Gilead and plays a major part in its demise. As in other dystopian tales, the implicit goal of the totalitarian regime is to destroy human individuality and create standardized and obedient citizens. This requires a "scapegoat," a demonization and persecution of "the others," blamed for the shortcomings of the system (Booker 10-11): in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments,* women are considered the scapegoats. In this case, the oppressive power of the state in dystopian totalitarian regimes manifests itself through controlling the characters' sexual expression, among others. Booker argues that the regime's stringent views on sexuality derive from the Freudian view that political and societal power is achieved and maintained through repressing sexual desires (11).

In *The Handmaid's Tale,* Margaret Atwood underlines the similarities between the patriarchal oppression found in traditional fairy tales and in the dystopian Gilead. Atwood subverts fairy tale elements primarily on a metatextual level by having the story of its female narrator, Offred, follow Propp's functions of the fairy tale. This is achieved by enacting a meta-fairy tale, i.e., a fairy tale about fairy tales, against a dystopian backdrop (Wilson 279). Fairy tale elements are present in the narrative itself as well, albeit on a much smaller degree: the state-imposed colors of women's clothing. Its sequel, *The Testaments*, delves deeper into this textual presence of fairy tales in the society of Gilead through an exploration of the inner workings of Gileadean culture. Another significant notion that will be discussed in this study is the contrast between the tone of the two novels, which this paper attributes to Atwood's sense that Western culture risks "sanitizing" aspects of literature. This switch has been noted both in the history of fairy tales from

their oral versions to Walt Disney's (Zipes) and, more recently, in the ever-growing popularity of YA dystopian literature (Coste). As expected from a sequel, *The Testaments* follows in *The Handmaid's Tale*'s footsteps of rewriting, re-centering, and subverting influences from fairy tales and dystopian literature. If we are to extend Wilson's proposition to this novel as well, *The Testaments* is a meta-fairy tale, as it mirrors the typical fairy tale narrative (271) and features Propp's functions of fairy tales faithfully.

Agnes Jemima's biography is clearly inspired by the Brothers Grimm's "Cinderella": she grows up in an affluent family and has a close relationship with her "biological" mother, Tabitha (Atwood 18). This status quo is quickly shattered by Tabitha's death from an unnamed illness (73) and the subsequent rushed marriage between Agnes Jemima's father, Commander Kyle, and Paula, who, as Agnes herself notes, takes on the role of the cruel stepmother, a trope which is regarded by Ashliman as an outlet for children's pent-up aggressive feelings towards authority figures, in this case the replacement of their closest parent ("Step Relatives" 362-366): "My mother, Tabitha, had been my protectress; but now she was gone, and my stepmother did not wish me well" (Atwood 83). Agnes Jemima falls in status both in her family structure and in her social circles at school, as Paula did not consider Agnes her child (81). Despite not having any stepsisters who abuse her, the wicked stepmother is more than enough: Paula despises and mistreats Agnes (83), wishing to dispose of her quickly through marriage, a prospect that Commander Kyle, "whom [she] no longer thought of as [her] father," did not object to (148). Even in a fairy tale setting the blame scarcely falls on the patriarchal figure (Ashliman "Step Relatives" 362-

366).

      We will now focus on the bonds between the two young protago-
nists and their presumed "real" parents. The parental figures in the novel
fulfill the first of Propp's functions: "absentation" from the status quo, in
which one of the protagonist's relatives disappears, setting the narrative into
motion. Agnes Jemima reminiscences about her happy childhood and the
loving relationship she had with Tabitha, as they would spend hours playing
with a dollhouse, tell stories, and pray together at bedtime (Atwood 18,
21). On the other hand, the relationship between Nicole and her parents is
distant and often antagonistic, as Nicole claims that "[Melanie] didn't smell
to me like my mother" and that both acted suspiciously cautious around
her: "It was like I was a prize cat they were cat-sitting: you'd take your own
cat for granted; [...] if you lost [someone else's] cat you would feel guilty
about it in a completely different way" (49). Tabitha, Melanie, and Neil are
eventually revealed to have adopted their children.

      Once the status quos are interrupted, the heroines are expected to
begin their quests. The quest is seen as a test of the hero's prowess, with the
goal of achieving individuation. Garry remarks that the quest is part of the
hero cycle, where a hero is "marked, called and tested" (Garry and El-Shamy
248-249). This is true for all three characters, who are initially marked on
a social level: Aunt Lydia is chosen from the group of female inmates in the
Time Before, Agnes Jemima becomes a victim of bullying, and Nicole feels
like an outcast at school. Propp's challenges addressed to the hero (function
II "interdiction") occur in the present time for our young heroines and in
the Time Before for Aunt Lydia. Nicole's interdiction is simple: she is not

allowed to get involved in the anti-Gilead campaign. Nicole misunder-
stands the reason behind her interdiction, which leads to her rebellious act
of going to the protest and having to be rescued (Atwood 50-52). On the
other hand, Agnes Jemima's life has been a series of challenges: she cannot
think for herself or learn to read, as females "had smaller brains that were
incapable of thinking large thoughts" (19). She must always obey Gilead-
ean laws and regulations, which means having no choice in her future (25).
Aunt Lydia is the only one whose interdiction is set during the Time Before,
when she is abducted from her workplace and tortured until she "converts"
(67-68).

In both fairy tales and dystopias, some characters are often not what
they appear to be at first sight. They can be deceivers, malevolent individuals
who seemingly fulfil the role of a helper character but instead mislead the
protagonist towards their downfall (function VI "trickery"). The opposite
is true for Atwood's *The Testaments*: characters are presumed to have evil
hidden agendas, when in fact they have pure intentions, fulfilling the role of
donors (function XII "first function of the donor"). This confusion echoes
the unfamiliarity of dystopian culture (Coste 101). One such character
is George, a homeless man who spends his time at The Clothing Hound.
Nicole first sees George as a dangerous man (Atwood 45-46); instead, he
turns out to be a Mayday operative who ensures Nicole's safety and prepares
her for her mission (178). His role in the narrative is didactic: he proves to
Nicole that she is wrong in considering herself a contemporary Little Red
Cap capable of recognizing the Wolf approaching. Her limited perspective
attests to her immaturity and lack of real-world experience. Another such

character is Ada, who initially appears as a daredevil: "She looked like a biker, but not a real biker—more like an ad of a biker" (46). Contrary to her tough image, Ada is akin to a fairy godmother: she rescues Nicole from violent protests (60) and brings her to safety when Neil and Melanie are murdered (Chapter VIII).

Donor characters ensure the acquisition of the magical agent needed by the heroine for her journey (function XIV "receipt of a magical agent"). In Nicole's case, the "LOVE GOD" tattoo on her arm is the key to dismantling Gilead (Atwood 194). This tattoo is neither magical nor meaningful, as Nicole is atheist (47). It proves useful in her journey away from home (function XV "guidance") to Gilead and her escape alongside Agnes Jemima to Canada. This is a journey of self-discovery for both characters, but also a chance for self-reflection. Nicole's musings regarding her departure reveal her naivete: "I hadn't considered what it was like to leave a place you knew, and lose everything, and travel into the unknown." It also proves her strength of character: "How hollow and dark that must feel, except for maybe the little glimmer of hope that had allowed you to take such a chance" (253).

Agnes Jemima and Nicole must endure multiple trials before earning their victory. During their expedition to Canada, the heroines engage in an ongoing effort to escape (function XVI "struggle") both psychologically and physically. Firstly, Nicole knocks Aunt Vidala unconscious before leaving Ardua Hall (Atwood 333). They travel across the land to discover the true feelings of the working classes regarding the Gileadean oppression (335-337) and are assisted by a rogue Economan (338-341). After becom-

ing ill on the *Nellie J. Banks* ship (349), they are forced to leave by rowboat under the threat of being discovered (356). The young protagonists then rescue themselves from their plight on the inflatable rowboat and are found by the Mayday operatives (function XXII "rescue").

As opposed to *The Handmaid's Tale*, in which Offred did not have a "happy ending," *The Testaments* ends on a positive note. The heroines are immediately recognized as international heroes and reunited with their long-lost mother (Atwood 368-369). Even Aunt Lydia receives due credit: "in recognition of the invaluable services provided by A.L." (382), thus fulfilling function XXVII ("recognition"). The villains of the novel, the Commanders of Gilead, are defeated by having their deeds revealed to the entire world (function XXVIII "exposure") under the form of a document cache (Atwood 368)

The ultimate function of fairy tales is marriage (function XXXI "wedding"). A patriarchal pattern of fairy tales is noticeable when a strong heroine is often "saddled" with a male savior with whom she shares a romance (Coste 104). The romance plot is decentered in some dystopian fairy tales by having the male love interest reject the female protagonist's affection (103-104), an initiative that is visible in the novel. In *The Testaments*, Aunt Lydia and Agnes Jemima do not share any romantic feelings in their narratives. Nicole develops a "hopeless, puppyish" crush on Garth, the Mayday operative tasked with training her; however, a relationship never occurs (Atwood 191). Ultimately, the marriage function is shown in the *Thirteenth Symposium* section to have been fulfilled: Pieixoto unveils the transcription beneath Becka's statue, which "was erected by her sisters Agnes

and Nicole […], their children and their grandchildren" (382), although it remains unclear who Nicole marries.

Throughout the novel, Nicole's perception of Garth is idealized and distorted. She views him as a Prince Charming figure, a "first boyfriend" who is attracted to her. She believes Garth's sole purpose is to "protect [her], and he did, including protecting [her] from himself," to which she adds "I like to think he found that hard" (Atwood 246). According to Scheckels' classification of Atwood's male characters, Garth is an "uncertain prince," as the reader is never aware of his true feelings. Nicole describes him as "a real hero" and attempts to flirt with him, but she is aware that his reciprocity is probably insincere: "his hug was acting" (241-245). For the inexperienced Nicole, her pseudo-relationship with Garth is meaningful, fulfilling her romantic fantasy and giving her the opportunity to reminisce about it as a form of escapism: "I really missed Garth. I daydreamed about the things we'd done together. […] Garth probably had a girlfriend. […] I'd never asked him because I didn't want to hear the answer" (303).

In addition to their rejection of romance, the protagonists of the novel can be considered progressive fairy tale heroes. Propp distinguishes two types of heroes in fairy tales: seeker-heroes, who proactively embark on an adventure, and victim-heroes, who are often compelled to act. Most seeker-heroes are male, whereas victim-heroes are generally female (39). *The Handmaid's Tale* follows the traditional path for a female-led tale, with Offred being the passive heroine awaiting rescue and rarely taking risks (Wilson 278). In *The Testaments*, all three main characters are proactive "seeker-hero[in]es" who undertake journeys full of adventure and danger, a

feat that Bacchielega considers unachievable for women in traditional fairy tales (5-7); it is likewise unattainable under the Gileadean law. To achieve their shared goal of fighting Gileadean oppression, each heroine performs a specific role which mirrors a fairy tale figure.

       The first protagonist is Aunt Lydia, the ambiguous mastermind behind the plan to overthrow Gilead. A clear-cut villain in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aunt Lydia appears as a multi-faceted individual in *The Testaments,* revealing the major role she played both in the making and un-making of Gilead. As a neutral character, Aunt Lydia could be considered a trickster: trickster characters are not merely deceptive, but they are creators and destroyers of worlds, heroes, and villains at the same time. More than that, she is a *female* trickster, performing her role as a hero stealthily. As Tatar notes, the trickster is mainly a male figure in the fairy tale mythos, travelling to fulfil his hunger and (sexual) appetite with a mobility that was impossible for women. The female trickster appears in less obvious narratives and operates clandestinely, "covering her tracks to ensure that her powers remain undetected" (60-61). Indeed, Aunt Lydia works in secret, ensuring that she does not fall victim to the Gileadean regime. Other characters recognize Aunt Lydia's trickster efforts, acknowledging that she "must know the most secrets of all because she had the most power" (Atwood 86). Aunt Lydia is aware of her own multiplicity as she describes her ruling as having "an iron fist in a leather glove in a woollen mitten" (63). She recalls:

> In the early days of Gilead, I used to ask myself whether I was Fox or Cat. Should I twist and turn, using the secrets in my possession to manipulate others, or should I zip my lip and rejoice as others outsmarted themselves? Obviously, I was both, since—unlike

many—here I still am. I still have a bag of tricks. And I'm still high in the tree. (238)

Multiple aspects of the trickster type exist in Aunt Lydia's character, beginning with her hidden identity. Despite the novel being opened by her manuscript entitled *Ardua Hall Holograph*, her identity remains unknown until her second appearance, corresponding to her second journal entry (Atwood 35). She upholds this secrecy of character not only with the reader, but also with other characters. With Commander Judd, she pretends to be a faithful follower to "get [him] back for" the suffering she endured in the Time Before (144). With the other Aunts, Lydia is guarded, preparing to manipulate them later: "Don't share too much about yourself, it will be used against you. Listen carefully. Save all clues. Don't show fear" (169).

In relation to Agnes Jemima and Nicole, Aunt Lydia also fulfils the role of a helper character. In particular, she embodies the wise old person, the protective figure who aids the hero in their journey and shares their knowledge to help the hero (De Rose 342-345). This role, however, is undermined by her trickster nature. She appears as an authority figure whose purpose is to educate the young protagonists on their duties, "a model of moral perfection to be emulated" (Atwood 35). On a personal level, she does not embrace the moral values imposed in Gilead. In fact, Aunt Lydia does not hesitate to use the secret knowledge she has gained over the years to betray the society she helped build. She selectively reveals information to the protagonists according to her own agenda: Aunt Lydia secretly places folders on Agnes Jemima's desk that expose unpleasant truths about Gilead without admitting her own involvement (285-289) and

conceals Nicole's identity and her relationship to Agnes Jemima until it is advantageous for her plan to destroy Gilead (313).

The protective dimension of Aunt Lydia's wise old person role is left uncertain, as she cannot be entirely considered a protective figure of the heroines. She offers Agnes Jemima and her friend Becka a chance to escape marriage by becoming Supplicants (Atwood 203-205, 216-217). After discovering that Dr. Grove has sexually assaulted the two girls, Aunt Lydia brings him to justice by forcing Aunt Elizabeth to falsely testify against him (260). However, Aunt Lydia also endangers the girls by sending them on a dangerous journey which ends in Becka's death (360) and near-death experiences for Agnes Jemima and Nicole (380). This fatal mission, however, accomplishes her plan of initiating the downfall of Gilead. If Aunt Lydia is not necessarily the helper of the fairy tale protagonists, she can be considered a protector of humanity itself, the undercover agent that destroys the dystopia she helped create.

Aunt Lydia is an adult woman who has already reached maturity, both physical and psychological. On the other hand, Agnes Jemima and Nicole are both teenagers who represent "the adolescent experience of "waking up" to the power structures that govern our lives" (Coste 96). Since "tough-girl teenagers who fight against patriarchal oppression" is a prevalent trope in YA dystopian fairy tales (99), it is no wonder then that Atwood created such characters in her novel. Atwood makes ironic references to this trope in *The Thirteenth Symposium* section, where Pieixoto claims that the age of the two protagonists is suitable for an adventurous narrative, "as the young are idealistic, have an underdeveloped sense of their own mortality,

and are afflicted with an exaggerated thirst for justice" (378).

At first glance, Agnes Jemima and Nicole, by Nicole's own admission, would correspond to the two sisters with opposing personalities from Grimm's *Snow-White and Rose-Red*: "It was weird to think of her as my sister; we were so unlike" (Atwood 336). Agnes Jemima resembles Snow-White, the quieter of the two who has domestic interests, such as kneading bread (25), baking cheese puffs (74), and being interested in motherhood (307). Nicole, on the other hand, is the bolder and more adventurous of the two, disobeying her parents to attend an anti-Gilead protest (53-54), undergoing intense training (189), and physically attacking Aunt Vidala when threatened (333). The sisters are raised to be inseparable in the Brothers Grimm's tale: "We will not leave each other […] Never so long as we live" (602). Conversely, Agnes Jemima and Nicole become aware of their sisterly bond late in the novel (Chapter XX).

More than being depictions of a fractured fairy tale sisterhood, Agnes Jemima and Nicole are metaphorical Sleeping Beauties. They are females who must "wake up" and have an epiphany about the societies they live in (Coste 98-99). As Coste remarks, the awakening of these Sleeping Beauties is illustrative of the shift from general passivity to political action. By facing up to the damaging aspects of their culture, characters are forced to question their own privilege (102-104). Undoubtedly, all three narrators are privileged, despite having the disadvantage of being female. Aunt Lydia is the most powerful female in Gilead by her own admission (Atwood 35). Nicole lives in a two-story house in Canada (44) and attends a private school (51). Agnes Jemima has three Marthas at her disposal because her

father is a high-ranking Commander (24).

       The three main characters eventually become disillusioned, or perhaps enlightened. Essential to dystopian fairy tale heroines, these revelations lead to personal growth and political revolution (Coste 102). Aunt Lydia berates herself for depending "as if on a magic charm" on her education and values: "all that claptrap about life, liberty, democracy and the rights of the individual" leaves her blindsided by the coup d'état (Atwood 114). Nicole's epiphany concerns her hidden identity. She initially feels secure in her Canadian lifestyle as Daisy, but her sixteenth birthday marks her "awakening" as Baby Nicole: "That birthday was the day I discovered that I was a fraud. Or not a fraud, like a bad magician: a fake, like a fake antique. I was a forgery, done on purpose" (41). Indoctrinated from birth in the Gileadean system, Agnes Jemima must be exposed to the most eye-openers. Her first revelation is the fraudulent nature of her family history (84, 90). Then, she realizes that she can avoid marriage by becoming an Aunt (216). As Aunt Victoria, she learns to read, eventually discovering the truth about Gilead from Aunt Lydia's secret folders (285). Her greatest finding is her own identity: she is the daughter of a fugitive Handmaid and the sister of Baby Nicole (307-309, 313-314). As is the case in traditional fairy tales, the journey to self-discovery involves the continuous growth of the heroines.

       In *The Testaments*, character growth is depicted symbolically through non-traditional instances of the fairy tale trope of transformation. Most frequently, transformations occur when a character escapes a pursuer and is most often related to gender or social status (Garry and El-Shamy 125). Adopting the brown Aunt outfit can be regarded as a desired change

in social status for women. On the other hand, puberty is an imposed trans-formative episode: after she begins to menstruate, Agnes Jemima discovers "she was no longer a precious flower, but a much more dangerous creature" (Atwood 82). Heroines in fairy tales usually become princesses and experi-ence a lift in social status after being transformed by their donors; Nicole's experience is the opposite, having to wear second-hand clothes which might have lice or bedbugs (121). The success of this transformation is guaran-teed, as she "really did look like a waif who needed to be rescued" (252). Another instance of transformation has Agnes Jemima and Nicole disguise themselves as Pearl Girls (333) and later dress in "male attire" (339-340) to escape Ardua Hall and Gilead.

In *The Testaments,* fairy tale tropes are used as a means of explaining the Gileadean system to young girls. This method is employed to preserve their innocence and to discourage thoughts of rebellion. As an example, Tabitha tells Agnes Jemima a story about saving her from evil witches and choosing her as a daughter:

> I went for a walk in the forest, [..] and then I came to an enchanted castle, and there were a lot of little girls locked inside, and none of them had any mothers, and they were under the spell of the wicked witches. I had a magic ring that unlocked the castle, but I could only rescue one little girl. So, I looked at them all very carefully, and then, out of the whole crowd, I chose you! (16).

Agnes Jemima later discovers that this story is a fabrication with some truth-ful elements. She *was* taken from a woman in the forest, but that woman was not a "wicked witch." Rather, she was Agnes Jemima's birth mother, who was found attempting to escape Gilead by foot and later turned into a

Handmaid (90). Tabitha's magic ring seems to grant wishes, achieving one of the main goals of fairy tales (Ashliman "Wishes" 172-173). After granting Tabitha's wish, the magic ring is disenchanted: "[it] had only one wish in it, and I used that one up on you. So now it's an ordinary, everyday mother ring" (Atwood 17). Agnes Jemima, at age thirteen, considered herself "old enough now to disbelieve the choosing story," affirming "[t]hat's only a fairy tale" (26). Just as the ring lost its magic properties when her mother "chose" her, Agnes disenchants her mother's tale, as she "knows" that she came from Tabitha's womb, a belief that likewise turns out to be false (84).

Agnes Jemima's narration does not only offer a glimpse into the effects of fairy tales on girls' psyche and how they are employed by women themselves. It also presents the chilling viewpoint of a young woman who grows up in a dystopian world without realizing its true nature. In Gilead-ean schools, young girls' lessons echo general fairy tale tenets addressed to women: "Just learn your lessons and trust your elders to do what is best" (Atwood 15). There are also references to "women's duty of caring for other people, especially little children and the elderly" (87), which embodies the didactic value of fairy tales (Bacchielega 5) and further links *The Testaments* to the Grimms' *Little Red Cap,* placing Red Cap's mother, a symbolic "domestic woman," on a pedestal.

The Aunts' associations between fairy tales and sexuality have a damaging effect on Agnes Jemima. Agnes recalls Aunt Vidala warning her at a young age of "the urges of men" in a tale inspired by *Little Red Cap*: men are uncontrollable beasts with heightened senses that lurk and devour innocent girls. In her tale, Aunt Vidala likens virginity to fairy tale motifs:

an "invaluable treasure" that could be stolen and "precious flowers" that could be torn. The violence of the tale underlines the dangers of embracing sexuality: "We would be ripped apart and trampled by the ravenous men who might lurk around any corner" (Atwood 14-15). She develops anxiety related to her relationship with men, leading to her sexual repression: "Aunt Vidala's tales were about things girls shouldn't do and the horrifying things that would happen to them if they did" (Atwood 274). She even contemplates suicide as an alternative to forced marriage. Unlike Rapunzel, she cannot be saved from her unjust imprisonment: "I fantasized about miraculous escapes, but all of them required help from other people, and who would help me? It would have to be someone I didn't know: a rescuer, the warden of a hidden door, the keeper of a secret password. None of that seemed possible" (216).

Agnes Jemima's perspective is distorted by her frequent references to fairy tales, leading to her subconsciously adopting toxic ideas about womanhood. When recalling her impressions of Ardua Hall from her youth, Agnes describes it as an "enormous" building with "magic properties" where "so much subterranean but ill-understood power" (i.e., feminine power) was found. For young Agnes, a place where the "others"/women exert power must be wicked. As she begins to doubt the nature of Ardua Hall, she realizes that the women inside did not have genuine freedom: "[w]as it a huge castle, or was it more like a jail?" (Atwood 224).

Agnes Jemima's story is not her own narrative, but rather a transcript of her witness testimony. The orality of her tale reveals itself as an aspect that is lost. In fact, the only narrator who writes her story down is

Aunt Lydia, an educated judge from the Time Before. Her usage of fairy tale imagery is undoubtedly deliberate. For her, subverting fairy tale elements is a means of coping with her traumatic experiences. For instance, she avoids regret for her choices during the early days of Gilead by associating them with the fairy tale crossroads leading to an adventure: "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and I took the one most travelled by. It was littered with corpses, as such roads are. […] My own corpse is not among them" (Atwood 67). Aunt Lydia acknowledges that her choice to become involved in Gileadean politics is widespread and brutal, thus establishing it as the reversal of the decision to walk the road "less travelled by" in Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken." In her case, conformity "has made all the difference" since her survival depends on it. As opposed to "The Road Not Taken," Aunt Lydia does not regret her decision, even if it means accepting violence against her peers.

Aunt Lydia molds herself as a fairy tale character and her references are often ironic, meant to soften the horrors of reality for the reader. She considers herself "a guide" for the reader, "a wanderer in a dark wood," disassociating the image of the wood from the previous innocent yellow and suggesting that the Gileadean regime is much worse than it seems: "It's about to get darker" (136). She masks her trauma by ironically claiming that "three is a magic number" when recalling the torture endured at the hands of Commander Judd's assailants (144). Her most obvious fairy tale reference is correlating Commander Judd to Charles Perrault's Bluebeard. Commander Judd's behavior is so abhorrent that Aunt Lydia cannot consider him a real human being; instead, she reduces him to a stereotypical fairy

tale villain with no redeemable qualities: "His Wives have a habit of dying: Commander Judd is a great believer in the restorative powers of young women" (64); "I have no wish to have [Shunammite] join Judd's Bluebeard's chamber of defunct brides" (325).

The Testaments can be interpreted as a satirical critique of the evolution of fairy tales and dystopian stories. This would explain the shift in tone from the claustrophobic The Handmaid's Tale to the action-filled The Testaments. The Testaments is a written appropriation of oral storytelling, one that toys with concepts related to folk and fairy tales. In her story, Agnes Jemima realizes that literature becomes devoid of meaning when it is manipulated for political and ideological purposes (283). Professor Pieixoto, for instance, works with bits and pieces gathered over years and manipulates information to suit his academic narrative. He does not have the full story of Gilead, or even the specific stories of Offred, Aunt Lydia, Nicole, or Agnes. In The Handmaid's Tale, he crafts Offred's narrative to cast doubt on the validity of her experiences (293-294). In The Testaments, he is forced to apologize for his crude and dismissive humor at the previous symposium and proposes a new sanitized agenda that is just as damaging to the accuracy of the tales he studies (375-376). In this sense, Crescent Moon's description of Pieixoto's work as "spellbinding" is somewhat inaccurate (375)—he is more akin to a folklorist than a storyteller.

The idea of altering folk tales to suit political agendas is not a recent development. Perrault and the French women writers of the 17th century started the trend of the *contes de fées,* or literary fairy tales, by appropriating folk tales to suit their social agenda of sheltering women and children from

any perceived dangers (Zipes 29-58). The "literary 'bourgeoisification' of oral tales" remarked by Zipes in Perrault's writing was continued during the next century by the Grimm Brothers, whose collections of fairy tales were initially regarded as unaltered collections of folk tales originating from the lower classes. This idea has been disproven, as the tales were collected from the upper-middle classes, reflecting their own biases (43, 61). Similarly, the idea that Pieixoto is an authority on Gileadean history is disproven throughout the Appendixes of both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*.

Nowadays, fairy tales are especially known for their "prudish" adaptations into animated children's movies under the umbrella of the "twentieth-century sanitation man," Walt Disney (Zipes 67). This, alongside the increased popularity of YA dystopian literature, which could be considered a "sanitized" version of classic dystopian literature, allows us to see that Pieixoto falls victim to his own subjectivity and socio-political biases of his time, just as transcribing folklorists did before, and as contemporary YA dystopian authors do nowadays. We will end with his following statement, where segments that prove the paradoxical and hypocritical nature of his work are in italics:

> "My colleague Knotly Wade and I have *prepared a facsimile edition* of these three batches of materials, which we have interleaved in an order that made approximate narrative sense to us. You can take the historian out of the storyteller, but you can't take the storyteller out of the historian!" (Atwood 380-381; emphasis added).

In *The Testaments,* Atwood integrates her knowledge of fairy tale archetypes into key aspects of her novel: plot, characters, and setting. Atwood also adopts and subverts elements of Young Adult dystopian literature. This

allows Atwood to re-write the traditional fairy tale as to have a genuine happy ending for its female characters by dismantling the imposed status quo.

Conclusion

In *The Testaments*, a dystopian fairy tale, Margaret Atwood reveals the patriarchal nature of fairy tales by rewriting them in a postmodern feminist key and dramatizing gender politics. Fairy tale tropes and motifs are repurposed in the dystopian Gileadean society to enforce patriarchal stereotypes about women, while long-established plot structures and character types are subverted and parodied on a meta-textual level. As a meta-fairy tale, the novel enables Atwood to use fairy tale archetypes and tropes in the creation of the dystopian society of Gilead and the tales of the women who survived it; additionally, she also subverts said elements and rewrites them in such a manner as to underline the idea that fairy tales are, at their core, harmful and destructive on a societal level, promoting misogynistic perspectives on womanhood. Furthermore, by dramatically changing her style from *The Handmaid's Tale* to *The Testaments*, Atwood comments upon the changes made to fairy tales throughout history, highlighting the fact that transcribers fall victim to their own biases by inevitably intervening inside the text they are attempting to faithfully reproduce and by subscribing to socio-political agendas of their time, often "rearranging" pre-existing tales in a way that brings a happy ending.

The classifications made in this paper agree with those made by Wilson and prove that the fairy tale elements found in Atwood's other

novels exist in *The Testaments* as well. This paper attributes most of the same characteristics identified by Wilson in *The Handmaid's Tale* to *The Testaments*, proving that despite the stylistic differences between the two, they share the same fundamental purpose. Moreover, by adding the label of dystopian fairy tale to those already mentioned, Atwood manages to capture the zeitgeist of the 2010s, bringing academic attention to a relatively unexplored (and perhaps underrated) genre of literature.

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