ARACHNE'S DAUGHTERS: TOWARDS A FEMINIST POETICS OF CREATIVE AUTONOMY

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is all my own, and that all references have been cited accordingly.

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ABSTRACT

Although in patriarchal narratives female characters who challenge the dominant power structures of the society in which they live are often condemned for their dangerous sexuality, intelligence and creativity, classical myth continues to be attractive to women writers. In developing their theories of feminist poetics, scholars such as Nancy K. Miller interpret classical women associated with textile production (Arachne, Ariadne and Penelope) as symbols of the woman as artist. There also exists a tradition of female authors rewriting ancient heroines as artists, weavers, storytellers and figures of female wisdom and prophetic power, whose stories have the power to provoke social change.

I examine and adapt theories of authorship, influence and reception to a female writing subject. I apply this framework to three case studies, assessing the extent to which female authors have been successful in using classical myth to create positive representations of women, female creativity, voice and influence: the appropriation of Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche' and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in fairytales by French *salonnières*, which then influence Angela Carter's rewritings of 'La Belle et la Bête' in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979); Mary Shelley's reworking of Promethean myth and *The Arabian Nights* in *Frankenstein* (1818); and Margaret Atwood's and Ursula Le Guin's re-figurations of classical heroines in *The Penelopiad* (2005) and *Lavinia* (2008).

While these authors present interesting and effective techniques of rewriting, they sometimes reproduce a negative discourse of female creative inadequacy and authorial anxiety that does not reflect historical and contemporary reality. Extending Nancy K. Miller's theory of 'Arachnologies', I have developed a new framework for reading women's rewriting practices. My feminist poetics of creative autonomy reflects the woman writer's sophisticated and creative dialogue with the classics and her relationship to the literary cultures and reading communities with which she identifies.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Aen.   Virgil, *Aeneid,* 2 vols. tr. by H.R Fairclough (Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1999-2000)

ANE   *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments,* ed. by Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

AWTC   Nancy K.Miller, 'The Woman, The Text and The Critic' in *The Poetics of Gender,* ed. by Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 270-95

BBB   Jeanne- Marie Leprince de Beaumont, 'La Belle et la Bête' in *Le Magasin des Enfants ou Dialogues entre une sage Gouvernante & plusieurs de ses élèves de la première distinction* (Paris: Esslinger, 1756) 66-86

CLM   Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' tr. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1.4 (1976) 875-93

CB   Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, 'La Chatte blanche' in *Contes, Tome II* (Berlin: Tredition Classics, 2012) 1-31

CML   Angela Carter, 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' in *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Vintage, 2006) 43-55

F   Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] (New York and London: Norton, 1996)

FLB   'The Story of the Three Calenders, Sons of Kings and of the Five Ladies of Bagdad' in *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments,* ed. by Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 66-138

FVS   'The Fourth Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor' in *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments,* ed. by Robert L. Mack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 157-64

GA   Apuleius, *Apvlei Metamorphoseon Libri XI*, (*The Golden Ass*) ed. by Maaike Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

L   Ursula Le Guin, *Lavinia* (London: Orion, 2010)

LHC   Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory' in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* tr. by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) 3-45

LM   Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, 'Le Mouton' in *Contes, Tome I* (Berlin: Tredition Classics, 2012) 152-65

LWM   Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought,* ed. by Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Met.   Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2 vols. tr. by F.R. Miller (Cambridge Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1999)

MWA   Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984)

NWD   Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (London: Virago, 2008)

Od.   Homer, *The Odyssey,* tr. by Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1997)

OB   Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, 'L'Oiseau bleu' in *Contes, Tome I* (Berlin: Tredition Classics, 2012) 12-40

PF18   'Preface' to the 1818 edition, in Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York and London: Norton, 1996) 5-6

PF31   'Mary Shelley: Introduction to *Frankenstein,* Third Edition (1831)' in Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York and London: Norton, 1996) 169-73

R tr.   Apuleius, *The Golden Ass, Or a Book of Changes,* tr. by Joel C. Relihan (London: Hackett, 2007)

SW   Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2000)

TB   Angela Carter, 'The Tiger's Bride' in *The Bloody Chamber* (London: Vintage, 2006) 56-75

TP   Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006)

TWP   Joyce Zonana, '"They Will Prove the Truth of My Tale": Safie's Letters as the Feminist Core of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein' Journal of Narrative Technique* 21:2 (1991)170-84

VBB   Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, 'La Belle et la Bête' in *Le Cabinet De Fées Ou Collection Choisie Des Contes Des Fées, Et Autres Contes Merveilleux,* vol. 26 (Paris and Geneva : Barde Manget & Co, 1786) 35-238

Z tr.   Jack Zipes, ed. and tr., *Beauties, Beasts and Enchantment : Classic French Fairy Tales* (New York: Meridian, 1991)

Mlle de Lespinasse : Imaginez une araignée au centre de sa toile. Ébranlez un fil, et vous verrez l'animal alerte accourir. Eh bien ! si les fils que l'insecte tire de ses intestins, et y rappelle quand il lui plaît, faisaient partie sensible de lui-même ? [1]

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[1] Denis Diderot, *Le Rêve de D'Alembert* in *Diderot: Selected Philosophical Writings,* ed. by J. Lough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp.99-149 (p. 115).

PART I

INTRODUCTION

ARACHNE'S DAUGHTERS: TOWARDS A FEMINIST POETICS OF CREATIVE AUTONOMY

This thesis examines the appropriation of classical myth in fiction and feminist literary theory by women writers. It assess the extent to which the use of classical literature in women's rewriting practices has been successful in challenging patriarchal discourses of the cultural inadequacy and inauthenticity of female authorship in literary representations of female creativity. My aim is to produce a theory of feminist poetics that can account for the wide range of reading and rewriting practices that have been undertaken by women writers.

This thesis has grown out of my response to Nancy K. Miller's 'Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text and The Critic' (1986). I argue that Miller's rewriting of the myth of Arachne as a parable of feminist authorship is problematic in its portrayal of a suicidal disembodied female author and in its implicit assumption that two female authors who share an identification with a broadly feminist or women's interpretive community will read and rewrite weaving women in the same way. I examine the strengths and weaknesses of Miller's model of a feminist rewriting practice and the alternative literary history it constructs. Throughout this thesis, I draw on Miller's use of the myth of Arachne as a metaphor of 'woman's relation of production to the dominant culture, and as a possible parable (or critical modelling) of a feminist poetics' (AWTC, 272). However, whereas Miller presents her rewriting of the myth of Arachne as a singular homogeneous model, in my critical models I present three possible ways of reading Arachne, as a 'parable' of the continuities and differences in individual female authors' relationships to dominant culture. My multiple readings of the myth emphasise the mutability of classical myth and its openness to interpretation and appropriation. I refigure the myth of Arachne as a critical model of each rewriting practice that I examine in order to argue that the way in which a female author reads classical texts and the techniques of rewriting that she chooses to undertake are inextricably linked to the extent to which she feels excluded from dominant culture and the nature of that exclusion.

In ancient Greek and Roman culture, weaving and spinning was a conventional signifier of female virtue as defined by culturally specific constructions of a woman's duty or obligation to her house and family that implied a loyalty to the state and reverence for the gods.[1] In classical literature, women's domestic textile production is presented and valued as an important contribution to the continued wealth and comfort of the family. However, when the weaver chooses to use her creativity for another purpose, there are severe consequences for her deviant act of production. I would like to illustrate this by briefly looking at the representation of textile production in the myth of Arachne in book six of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Penelope's weaving of Laertes' shroud in book two of Homer's *Odyssey*.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Arachne's defiant protest against patriarchal power denies the cultural association of weaving and spinning with loyalty to the state and godhead. The low-born, poor and motherless Arachne initially uses her skill in weaving and spinning to provide for her family. She is famed throughout Lydia for her great skill in her craft, and she grows angry that everyone assumes that her ability is a gift from Athena (Minerva). Arachne is offended by the dismissal of her creative autonomy. She declares her skill to be greater than Athena's and challenges her to a weaving contest (6.1-25). When Athena answers Arachne's challenge and enters into the domestic space of Arachne's workshop, Arachne's weaving no longer serves the culturally-ordained purpose of providing for her family (6.26-69). Arachne now uses her skill to challenge Athena's authority over her creativity. The goddess does not deny Arachne's skill. However, she does punish Arachne for what she represents in her tapestry: the sexual abuse and betrayal that women have suffered at the hands of male gods. Athena destroys the tapestry and beats Arachne over the head with a shuttle, the shared emblem of their textile production. In humiliation, Arachne attempts to hang herself. Athena's supposed act of compassion is to change her into a spider (6.129-45). Forever cut off from real textile production, Arachne has no choice but to spin in a crude imitation of the skills she once possessed. The myth focuses on the arrogance of Arachne's belief in the autonomy of her textile production. Arachne is supposed to accept that she is nothing more than a vessel for the transmission of the creative power of the gods, that women lack the authority to create independently. Furthermore, Arachne's protest against the immoral law of the gods requires that she sacrifice herself in that act of defiance. She is saved only to be punished by a metamorphosis that restricts her

access to the tools of her creativity. From now on, her creativity can only come out of her own body.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Penelope is also famed for her skill in weaving. In his speech to the Ithacan council in book two, Antinous describes Penelope's 'exquisite workmanship' as above that of all other women and beyond anything he has ever seen or heard of, even in the stories of ancient times. Like the people of Lydia in Arachne's story, he too believes that this level of skill can only be the gift of Athena. Antinous argues that Penelope's intelligence is abnormal in a woman: like her skill in weaving, it must be the gift of Athena, since no woman could possibly have come up with this plan of resistance on her own (2.128-34). Penelope's association with weaving is used by men to deny the creative autonomy of her actions. Furthermore, at the Ithacan council, it is Penelope and not the suitors who are held responsible for destroying the wealth of her family. As the head of an aristocratic household, Penelope would have been responsible for overseeing the domestic production of cloth. The suitors' infringement on the domestic space of her household forces a change of the purpose of her creative act, from providing for her household to using her skill to defy the patriarchal law of the state which says that she must remarry. Under the premise that she must finish weaving Laertes' shroud before she chooses a suitor, Penelope weaves her 'great web'. Each night she unravels her work. It is three years before the suitors discover her deception and demand that she choose a new husband. During this time, the suitors have continued to feast on the dwindling resources and wealth of her household (2.91-142). From the perspective of the suitors, Penelope has subverted her skill in weaving from its conventional, conservative purpose of providing for the economy of the household. Penelope's resistance is ultimately vindicated because it forestalls the suitors long enough for Odysseus to return and restore peace to Ithaca. However, for the suitors Penelope's weaving is indicative of her dangerous cunning and trickery, an act of defiance that threatens the ordained organisation of society and of the state. Moreover, Penelope's art is reduced by the necessity dictated by her material circumstances to the production of a textile that can never be complete.

Against the association of women in classical texts with repressive notions of female virtue and creativity, there also exists a tradition of female authors rewriting ancient heroines as artists, weavers, storytellers and figures of female wisdom and prophetic power; whose stories have the power to provoke social change. Influenced

by the association of textile production with female storytelling, the archetypal image of the weaving woman has historically been read, and continues to be read by many female authors, as a literary representation of female text production. In this rereading practice, the weaving woman is re-figured in the new text as an archetypal female storyteller. Her attachment to the ancient past is utilised to construct a historical continuity of resistance to patriarchal power and representation in female-authored texts. This rereading practice risks causing the feminist author to become complicit with those foundational texts of androcentric thought, of reproducing narratives of the inadequacies of female authorship and images of a female artist who is punished, or sacrifices herself, for her art.

I present three case studies in which I examine the continuities and fractures of three models of women's rewriting in order to examine and develop Miller's theory of 'Arachnologies' into a critical model that can account for the wide range of rewriting practices undertaken by female authors. For these case studies, I use the labels 'The Rescue of Arachne', 'Arachne's Challenge' and 'Rereading Arachne'.

In the 'Rescue of Arachne', I examine the rewriting practices of Marie Catherine d'Aulnoy, Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont and Gabrielle de Villeneuve, three female authors who were *salonnières* and participated in the literary activities of French salons between 1697 and 1756. Although these authors can be broadly identified as belonging to the same reading community, the ways in which they appropriate the myth of 'Cupid and Psyche' from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*) in their versions of 'La Belle et la Bête' are very different. I have chosen to look at the fairytale tradition in this case study because it provides a strong example of a tradition of women's rewriting of classical texts. 'La Belle et la Bête' is significant because it has developed entirely through a dialogue of influence between female authors. By following a direct line of intertextual influence, each author can be seen to have adapted the character of the old woman who tells the tale of 'Cupid and Psyche' to a kidnapped girl in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. This character was given the attributes of the Fates and other classical goddesses in order to transform her into a fairy who represented the women of the French literary salon. However, the extent to which this character functions as an archetype of female power and wisdom degrades with each successive appropriation. This can be read as an explicit response to the socio-political environment in which the author found herself writing. The available profusion of

letters and primary historical sources relating to French salon culture during this period means that we can reasonably assess the way that the historical circumstances in which these female authors lived may have affected their rewriting practice. By the 1750s the French literary fairytale had moved on from its original purpose as a learned and tasteful entertainment to that of a pedagogical tool. Under the increasing influence of dominant patriarchal control over the French court and literary production, the female archetype became an authorising figure for increasingly explicit moral messages. In light of this, I examine the extent to which each rewriting is complicit with culturally specific discourses of female lack.

In the final section of this case study I argue that it has been the tendency of modern feminist authors rewriting the fairytale to identify and align themselves with the rewriting practices and appropriated storytelling archetypes of these early female authors as evidence of an early feminist tradition, obscured by later impositions of patriarchal value. I examine the extent to which Angela Carter's identification with the female fairytale writers of the French salon in her rewritings of 'La Belle et la Bête' – 'The Tiger's Bride' and 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) – can be seen to have contributed to her recognition of the complicity of her rewriting with a patriarchal discourse of female lack in 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' and her later re-figuration of this lack as a source of positive creative resistance against patriarchal control in 'The Tiger's Bride'. Carter's rewriting practice provides a very interesting example of the way in which the new feminist author may use her identification with past female authors to avoid reproducing the discourse of a female anxiety of authorship.

In 'Arachne's Challenge' I examine Mary Shelley's appropriation in *Frankenstein* (1818) of Prometheus Plasticator ('Prometheus, The Moulder of Men' in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), Prometheus Pyrphoros ('Prometheus, The Fire Bringer' in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*) and the 'Circe' episode of Homer's *Odyssey.* I argue that Shelley reads her classical source texts looking for positive representations of female authorship. This forces a painful self-identification with the representations of female creative lack in those classical texts. She rejects the classical weaving woman as an archetypal representation of female authorship, in an attempt to avoid reproducing patriarchal discourses of the cultural and linguistic inadequacy of the self-sacrificing female author. In *Frankenstein,* Shelley replaces the classical weaving woman with the analogous female storytelling figure of

Scheherazade from *The Arabian Nights*. Her association with the language of textiles describes the act of storytelling itself. When Scheherazade sees that dawn is approaching she abruptly stops her tale, only to 'resume the thread' of her story, the following night' (*ANE,* 28). Moreover, the narrative structure of the *Nights* itself imitates a spider's web, in which each story that Scheherazade tells spirals out from a central narrative before returning to the centre. Unlike her classical counterparts, Scheherazade's act of storytelling as survival is successful. In this way, the character of Scheherazade can be read as a more positive and explicit representation of female authorship that those that can be found in the classical tradition. My analysis of the narrative structure of *Frankenstein* reveals a striking correlation between its structure and that of *The Arabian Nights.* In this case study, I examine the way in which Shelley's *Frankenstein* appropriates and uses the figure of Scheherazade and the symbolic language, structure and content of 'The Fourth Voyage of Sindbad' and 'The Five Ladies of Bagdad'. I argue that this functions to transform the dominant patriarchal interpretation of Promethean myth and the significance of Circe's weaving by using these myths to address feminist concerns with the place of women in society and the implications this has for female authorship. While the influence of classical literature on Shelley's work has been well documented, very little critical attention has been given to the influence of *The Arabian Nights*, although she uses these two sets of allusions interchangeably. This has implications for, and gives a new perspective to, Gilbert and Gubar's influential study of Shelley's anxiety of authorship in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).

Shelley's appropriation of the character of Safie in *Frankenstein* is drawn from the 'Five Ladies of Bagdad'. In the *Nights*, Safie functions as a Scheherazade storytelling double. As I will argue, Shelley inscribes herself into the character of Safie and gives her a mother who can be seen to represent Mary Wollstonecraft. Through this transformative appropriation, Shelley constructs the narrative structure of *Frankenstein* as a web of stories, reflecting that of the *Nights.* As with Scheherazade's tales, *Frankenstein* is a narrative told between and for women – a fact that goes on unnoticed by the male characters in the text. I also examine the significance of Shelley's substitution of the '4th Voyage of Sindbad' for the 'Circe' episode of the *Odyssey* in Victor Frankenstein's imbedded narrative.

Both the Greco-Roman and Persian-Arabic literary traditions were recognized and valued by the dominant reading community of male Romantics from

which Shelley felt excluded and which contributed to her individual anxieties of authorship and of influence, caused by her identification with her biological mother and father as literary progenitors. My argument is that Shelley's rewriting technique stemmed from the hope that the linguistic and cultural competence she shows in being able to move between the two sets of allusions will prove her worthy of inclusion and acceptance. While Shelley's rewriting practice was in some respects problematic, it was also at least partially successful in that it allowed Shelley to displace and challenge her anxieties of female authorship within the text of *Frankenstein*.

I have used my third case study 'Rereading Arachne' to assess the continuities and differences in the rewriting techniques of two female authors who belong to the same reading community of critically aware feminist readers, and whose rewriting practices resemble those outlined in Miller's theory of 'overreading'. For this case study I have chosen to look at Margaret Atwood's rewriting of Homer's *Odyssey* in *The Penelopiad* (2005) and Ursula Le Guin's rewriting of Vergil's *Aeneid* in *Lavinia* (2008), because they are both authors who engage with feminist discourses and questions of female authorship in their critical and fictional work. However, they have also displayed some ambivalence about being identified as feminist authors. Their response to this identification is a contributing factor to the way in which they rewrite their classical source texts. Both Atwood and Le Guin represent their protagonists as silenced female authors who are already present in their source texts, authors of an alternative narrative of events that take place within the storyworld of the originating text.

Atwood reads Penelope as a woman whose voice has been undermined by the androcentric nature of the *Odyssey* and its scholarly interpretations. She appropriates Penelope from the *Odyssey* because her act of weaving can be read as a direct response to the infringement of the suitors on the domestic space of her household. In *The Penelopiad*, this is rewritten as an allegory of female authorship in which the gender tensions of the author's lived and reading experience determine the kind of text she produces. In contrast, Lavinia in the *Aeneid* can only be associated with weaving and spinning in her originating text through the general association of textile production with virtuous Roman women. Le Guin reads the absence of this signifier as a mistake in Lavinia's characterisation in the *Aeneid*. Vergil's Lavinia is silent and only expresses her grief and embarrassment through weeping and

blushing. Because she does not weave, she has no means of telling her story. Le Guin constructs a back story for Lavinia that includes a responsibility to produce cloth for her household. In doing so, she symbolically gives Lavinia a narrative voice which is associated with spinning as a signifier of the importance of her lived experience to the text she creates.

While the rewriting practices of Atwood and Le Guin can be categorised broadly as 'rereadings', their different critical positionings in relation to their source texts and reading communities can be seen to produce textual representations of female authorship defined by their individual engagement with the theoretical implications of modern feminist literary theory. *The Penelopiad* is deeply marked by Atwood's personal response to theories of a 'primary' anxiety of female authorship and a preoccupation with the relationship between author, text and the reader as critic. Atwood's rereading of Penelope and the twelve maids hanged at the end of the *Odyssey* exposes the absence of any inherently 'universal' or 'timeless' meaning in her source text. *Lavinia* is also concerned with dismantling the discourses of female lack that she sees as inherent in theoretical discourses on the anxiety of female authorship. However, Le Guin's engagement with French feminist theory causes her to approach to differ from Atwood's. Le Guin gives a voice to a previously silent female character, exploring the notion of what it means to read as a feminist and to write with a 'feminine voice'. Lavinia's dialogue with her creator functions to contest the high cultural value that is placed on the classical canon. Theoretically, there is no reason why these techniques should not be successful. However, both Atwood's and Le Guin's rewriting practices are problematic. At the end of Le Guin's novel, Lavinia's voice is represented as not being strong enough in itself to rescue her from her ghostly existence in Vergil's *Aeneid.* Similarly, the voices of Penelope and her twelve hanged maids are presented as being too weak to be heard, let alone successfully challenge the canonical *Odyssey.* I explore the practical problems which have contributed to the failure of 'Rereading Arachne' by comparing and contrasting the work of Atwood and Le Guin.

The breadth of literary periods and traditions covered in my three case studies is essential to determining the ways in which the convergence of dominant discourse, reading community and individual reading/writing subject in any given historical moment can be seen to give rise to different – if broadly feminist – rewriting practices. The research I have undertaken has allowed me to develop a critical model

for each case study which I outline in greater detail in the final section of this introduction. In part III of this thesis I use these case studies and critical models to assess the strengths and weaknesses of feminist revisions of classical myth. I argue that while all of these have, to some extent, failed, they nevertheless offer some effective techniques and strategies that go some way towards the creation of a feminist poetics of creative autonomy. I use my findings to develop a new framework for reading past and future writers that can account for the wide range of rewriting practices that have been undertaken by female authors.

My study, however, does not seek to assimilate all female authors within a single practice of rewriting. My feminist approach to the reception and rewriting of classical texts intends to highlight the historical specificity of the individual writer's appropriation and transformation of classical texts and, in particular, of models of female authorship. This specificity is determined by the particular ways in which an author's lived experience combines with the horizon of expectations of one or more reading communities, which they may be part of, aspire to be part of, be resistant to, or write against – or a combination of all these. Each author and each text, therefore, must be studied on their own terms and in their own particular context so as to prevent an assimilation that would, again, withdraw autonomy from the individual female writer.

To this end, I have based my study on a feminist approach to the study of the reception of classical texts. In the following sections of this introduction, I examine and respond to the key theories of reception, their difference from reader-response theories and the theoretical implications this has for a feminist approach to reception studies. I also examine and respond to the use of reception theory in the study of the classics, and situate my research within the existing body of feminist reception theory and its relationship to broader issues raised by feminist literary theory. Hélène Cixous' and Luce Irigaray's differing views on the on the use of classical myth in feminist discourses have formed the central debate of feminist approaches to the reception of classical texts. I situate my thesis within this debate and explore and extend upon Nancy K. Miller's reading of the implications of Roland Barthes' 'La Mort de l'auteur' (The Death of the Author) [1967] and *Le Plaisir du texte* (*The Pleasure of the Text*) [1973] when applied to the female reading and writing subject. I then examine the implications of a feminist theory of reception for my model of the female-specific 'primary' anxiety of authorship. In this I extend the discussions of

Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* (1973) in Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1978) and Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).

Using this framework, I outline my three critical models. I argue that since the rewriting practices examined in this thesis can be seen as inextricably bound to the author's own lived experience and her relationship to the reading communities with which she identifies, women's rewritings should be seen as the product of individual rather than general anxieties of authorship and influence.

I. THE ORIGINS OF RECEPTION THEORY

Reception theory originates in the German reception aesthetics or *Rezeptionsästhetik* of Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser's reader-response criticism and the Constance school. It was deeply rooted in Gadamerian Hermeneutics and emerged as a response to some aspects of Marxist and Formalist literary theory. Jauss argued that literature must be viewed as part of a wider superstructure (in the Marxist sense). In Jauss' model of reception, conventions and forms of literature must be viewed as a cultural construct formed over millennia by a succession of changes in a reading community's expectations of the genre, which are determined by the form and content of already familiar works. Literary critics must consider themselves to be part of this wider system of reading communities, in which their act of interpretation contributes to changes in the way that value and meaning are attributed to a text.[2]

The development of reception theory and reader-response criticism in the 1960s marked a significant change in the interpretation of the literary process, shifting the focus of the study of how the meaning of a text is created away from the author/text paradigm and onto the reader. While the two theories are related, there are significant differences in the way that reception theorists and reader-response critics study the role that the reader's socio-historical, political and cultural context affects his or her interpretation of a text. Whereas reader-response criticism focuses on the ways in which the meaning of a text is constructed by the individual reader (Iser) within his or her socio-historical context, the focus of Reception theory is on

the cumulative effect of reader responses within a reading community (Jauss) on the received meaning of the text and the aesthetic judgements by which the value of a text can be seen to change over time. Modern reception theory has extended the scope of this study to explore the ways in which texts are utilised and appropriated within subsequent cultural products as an indicator of a text's continued but ever changing value.

Reader-response theories tended to reject New Criticism's claims that a text could and should be interpreted without reference to the reader's experience of reading it or the context in which it was first composed and received.[3] Such theories implied that there are an infinite number of possible interpretations by an infinite number of possible readers, all of which must be considered as equally valid interpretations of the same text. Because reader-response criticism focuses on the individual reader and therefore cannot study the reading community to which he or she might belong, it undermines the notion of professional and institutional control of interpretation. In contrast, reception theorists have tried to avoid charges of relativism by focusing on sites of reception which can be objectively studied. This approach requires an assumption that conditions of reading and interpretation can be described and studied, and therefore sees the institution as contributing to the creation of expectations of genre, form, language and ideology that give value to a text at a particular moment, within a particular reading community.

Reception theory is a branch of modern literary theory that attempts to relocate the focus of criticism of literary away from literary biography, questions of authorial intent and the legacy of Romantic constructions of value based on the individual poet's authorial genius. It was a conscious and collective reaction to intellectual developments in West Germany during the 1960s at an institutional level.[4] Jauss criticised reader-response theories on the basis that the effect of individual responses to texts on literary history and change is almost impossible to quantify (LHC, 22-3). He sought to address the theoretical implications and failures of New Criticism and to solve the dispute between formalist and Marxist views on the problem of literary history. In 1967, he gave a lecture at the Constance school on 'Literaturgeschichte als Provokation' (translated as 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory'), in which he called for a reordering of literary history which challenges 'the prejudices of historical objectivism and the grounding of the traditional aesthetics of production and representation in an aesthetics of reception

and influence' (LHC, 20).[5] Jauss argues that Marxist and Formalist literary criticism share a common methodological problem: they both assume a universal reader. New Critics assume that every reader has the training of the philologist, while Marxist critics assume that each reader is a 'historical materialist' who is always interested in and is able to pinpoint the 'relationships between superstructure and basis in the literary work' (LHC, 18-9).

Jauss proposes that literary history should be viewed as a special kind of history that is both chronological and synchronic, allowing for a broader understanding of the 'dialogical and process-like relationship between work, audience and new work [...] the reappropriation of past works occurs simultaneously with the perpetual mediation of past and present art and of traditional evaluation and current literary attempts'. In this way any act of criticism on a text must be viewed as part of a greater system of interpretation that has the potential to contribute to a change in the way in which art is valued. The value and meaning of a text can only be understood by regarding literature as an 'event' that is mediated by the constantly evolving 'horizon of expectations' of an interpretive community within the context of a particular socio-historical moment, which must first be reconstructed: 'a literary event can continue to have an effect only if those who come after it still or once again respond to it – if there are readers who again appropriate the past work or authors who want to imitate, outdo, or refute it'. For Jauss, the 'horizon of expectations' shared by a community of readers in the reception of a text can be objectively studied, and it includes factors such as 'a pre-understanding of the genre, from the forms and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language' (LHC, 19-22). Jauss argues that since the 'artistic character' or value of any work is determined by the degree to which it has influenced a group of readers, a new work is, itself, capable of changing the 'horizon of expectations' by which literature is judged. Jauss defines reception theory as the study of this process of 'aesthetic distance'. This is the study of the extent to which the distance between a new work and a reading community's expectations forces a change in those expectations at a particular point in the history of a text's reception. Jauss also advocates studying the patterns of change in the history of a text's reception within a community of readers. If we accept that the 'horizon of expectations' of a reading community is in constant flux and the way in which we initially value or reject a text is determined by the pre-existing body of constantly

changing literary history then the works that are valued by any presupposed reading community will change to reflect the expanding 'horizon of expectations'. Jauss calls this process the sanctioning of a 'new canon of expectations' (LHC, 28).

The consensus of a community of readers at a particular point in history resembles Stanley Fish's concept of 'interpretive communities'.[6] However, Fish's focus on the role of individual interpretation within a wider interpretive community has invited charges of ahistoricism from some critics, for example, on the grounds that his acceptance of the idiosyncrasies of the interpretation of older texts by a modern reader legitimises misreadings of that text when the new reader fails to understand archaic uses of words. The new reader imposes on the text his or her own linguistic expectations, which may produce a meaning that was not originally intended.[7] Jauss' concept of 'horizontal change' within a community of readers attempts to avoid the charges of ahistoricism, affective criticism and relativism by making the object of study the general changes in the consensus of received opinion (LHC, 28). However, Jauss' attempt to avoid these charges is not entirely successful because his focus on a community of readers assumes that there will be a general consensus of opinion in that reading community at a particular time.

I would argue that individual receptions must be studied in the context of the historical moment and the interpretive community to which a reader belongs. However, it is possible to observe the responses of individual readers and to draw reasonable conclusions regarding the extent of the reader's identification with a reading community. If we are able to determine the different interpretive strategies that existed within the reader's interpretive community at the moment of a text's reception, we can then determine the way in which the individual reader's responses to a text were influenced by or diverged from the reception of the text by other individuals in the reading community with which she or he identifies. This avoids Jauss' generalising assumption that there will be a consensus of opinion within a reading community in a particular historical moment, and is particularly relevant to the study of intertextual appropriations and interpretations of existing literature in new writing. If we conceive of the author as being first a reader, whose response to and construction of meaning in a text is to some extent mediated by the socio-historical context and reading community in which she or he receives the text, then

the individual reader and the reading community to which he or she belongs must be seen as equally important subjects for the study of reception.

Jauss' reception theory is particularly relevant to my study of the way in which classical literature has been historically received and rewritten by women authors because he has been credited with providing a theoretical basis for feminist and postcolonial debates over the literary canon.[8] The concept of a community of readers is frequently problematised by feminist, postcolonial and queer theorists. For example in 'Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading' (1986) Patrocinio Schweickart argues that the androcentric bias of reader-response theory undermines the woman reader and women's texts because most of its theorists have been male and have focused on male-authored texts. She argues for a focus on female reading communities and a feminist way of reading that is capable of 'recovering, articulating, and elaborating positive expressions of women's point of view, of celebrating the survival of this point of view in spite of the formidable forces that have been ranged against it'.[9]

Greater attention should be given to the study of the extent to which the reception of a text within a minority reading community might be undermined or dismissed by more culturally dominant interpretive communities in any given historical period. We must question the implicit assumption that a group of people who share a common identification, for example, as women or as feminists, will share a common opinion, or that their reception will be comparable to that of the members of a 'community' or statistical grouping to which they can be broadly said to belong. In 1991, Janice Radway conducted an empirical study of the way in which a sample group of forty women received and responded to and interpreted contemporary fiction. The results of the study, published in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (1991), suggested that these women had sometimes radically different conceptions of genre recognition, different personal canons of literature and different preferences for thematic themes. Radway argues that their individual 'horizons of expectations' were related to the variations in their lived experiences 'tied to their daily routines, which themselves are a function of education, social role, and class position'.[10]

The use of aspects of reception theory in wider critical approaches to literary criticism has thus provoked further questions concerning the definition of what it means to read as a member of a more narrowly defined reading community. For

example, feminist critics are often concerned with questions of what it has historically meant to read as a woman, the extent to which an individual author can be seen to have belonged to a historical reading community and the ways in which this can be seen to have affected her reading and writing practice. By using this more nuanced model of reception theory it is possible to examine the way in which female authors who pre-date the emergence of the 2nd wave feminist movement in the mid-twentieth century, and so cannot be considered to be critically self-aware of what we might now term their feminist rewriting practice, were individually responding to the broader social and political concerns of their historically situated female reading community and the way in which this can be seen to have affected their reading and rewriting practice.

For example, Marie Catherine d'Aulnoy's appropriation of the myth of Cupid and Psyche in her animal bride and groom fairytales can be seen to represent the broader concerns of the female reading community with which she identifies. Because we can locate d'Aulnoy's individual reception of classical texts within a more precise context – that of the female-dominated salon literary culture of the aristocratic court in the later years of Louis XIV's reign – we can assess the extent to which her reading and rewriting practice conformed to the established 'horizon of expectations' and the cultural, political and social conventions of that particular group.

Exclusion from a reading community in the historical moment in which an author receives the originating text may also affect his or her reading and rewriting of texts. Mary Shelley's felt exclusion from the reading community of male Romantic poets played a significant role in her rewriting of Promethean myth in *Frankenstein*, as she substituted stories drawn from *The Arabian Nights* for analogous classical myths. In some respects this substitution recalls the interpretation of the *Nights* within bluestocking circles in the early 1800s as a subversive discourse on female experience, although Shelley cannot be historically located as a member of this reading community. Mary Shelley's lived experience gave her a radically different horizon of expectations from those of her inherently conservative bluestocking contemporaries. Understanding her isolation and exclusion from both the male and female Romantic reading communities with which she nevertheless partially identified can contribute to our understanding of Shelley's Romanticism in *Frankenstein.*

Under the influence of Jauss' general theory of reception, feminist reception theory requires that the critic remain objective in determining the way in which the reading/writing subject can be seen to have been affected by the socio-historical moment in which he or she receives and rewrites the text. It follows, then, that the use of feminist reception theory as an approach to the study of the appropriation of classical texts within feminist theoretical and fictional narratives requires biographical and contextual documentary evidence to inform the interpretation of the reading/rewriting subject's critical positioning and response to a particular socio-historical moment.

Many feminist writers of fiction are critically engaged with the theoretical implications of their writing practice and have published theoretical as well as fictional works, which allows us to read the latter in the light of the former. For example, in *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (2002), Margaret Atwood explores the ways in which the anxieties she had as a young female author have continued to influence her writing. Describing the act of writing as the result of a negotiation between the new author and her literary ancestors (*NWD*, 139-61), Atwood displays an awareness of an explicitly female anxiety of influence initiated by her reading of texts that emphasised and propagated the image of the self sacrificing female artist who is punished for her art (*NWD,* 73-9).[11] Moreover, Atwood's consideration of the socio-historical contexts of production and reception of the texts she examines can be seen as a rejection of her training in New Criticism, an approach that, for Atwood, tells us nothing about the circumstances in which an author is 'created', why they write and whom they are writing for (*NWD,* 12). These are the central questions that Atwood seeks to answer in *Negotiating with the Dead.* By assessing Atwood's critical responses to the anxiety of female authorship, reception theory and the relationship of author to text, we can better understand her critical positioning as a feminist author who rewrites the character of Penelope as the 'author' of an alternative version of Homer's *Odyssey.*

Similarly, Ursula Le Guin's essay 'Prospects for Women in Writing' (1986) links the status of female authorship, particularly narratives that speak specifically of female experience, with the problem of writing in a female voice and the importance of reader response. Furthermore, she sees it as the responsibility of feminist readers to recognise and propagate representations of female experience and women's writing.[12] In this essay, Le Guin clearly identifies herself as part of a feminist

interpretive community and as an individual reading/writing subject who is critically engaged with the concerns of French feminism, particularly Cixous' concept of writing 'a l'encre blanche' (in white ink). In 'Le Rire de la méduse' (The Laugh of the Medusa) [1976], Cixous argues that women's narratives will have more of an impact if their writing comes from their bodily experiences as women. She uses the metaphor of writing in 'white ink' or 'mother's milk' to represent a writing that comes from the body (CLM, 881). Le Guin's preoccupation with the nature of the female voice and the importance of a feminist reading practice in understanding and recognising that voice of female experience in women's writing can also be observed in *Lavinia*. Reading Le Guin's critical work gives us a better understanding of the critical framework that underpins her rewriting practice.

The implications of feminist responses to early reception and reader-response theory continue to resonate in the theoretical underpinning of the feminist reception of classical texts. The next section examines the development of the use of reception theory as an approach to classical studies. It discusses the conflicts and tensions that may arise from this approach and examines the way in which feminist critics who use reception theory as an approach to the study of classical literature have attempted to resolve these problems through an engagement with feminist literary theory.

II. RECEPTION THEORY AND THE CLASSICS

The use of reception theory as an approach to the study of classical texts is a comparatively recent development. In *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (1993) Charles Martindale observes that classicists have historically resisted, and in some respects continue to resist, 'pressures' to incorporate literary theory and the influences of 'new scientific and philosophical models' into their methodologies.[13] Trained in the tradition of New Criticism, Martindale outlines the benefits of its methodologies of close textual reading to the study of classical texts, but rejects and criticises the way in which it values the text as a static object, in possession of an inherent cultural value and meaning. In

Martindale's view, New Criticism's dedication to the objective observation of the text has acted to propagate 'positivistic modes of interpretation (and their teleological assumptions)' that continue to 'dominate in Latin studies'.[14] A positivist approach to Latin poetry might include an attempt to trace and document all of the classical sources of a poem or an intensive close reading of a poem, which implies that there is a static and unchanging value inherent in the text itself. Perhaps one of the most problematic aspects of the continued influence of positivism on the classics is the model of history as a linear chronological progression of change and development. This cannot account for the subjectivity involved in studying the text and past events, and the synchronic changes in value and influence that can be observed throughout classical literary history.

Martindale's central argument is that a critic must be conceived (and should view him or herself) as an 'artist', in that the body of interpretation they contribute to produces the meaning of the texts under their consideration. Using Bakhtin's theory of the dialogical text, Martindale postulates that the author as 'artist' should also be viewed as a 'critic' in that he or she will always be engaged in a critically creative process of interpretive construction and reconstruction of meaning through an appropriative dialogue with the existing textual body. Martindale argues that it would be a useful approach for classicists to view texts that are 'imitative' of classical texts as 'rereadings of the works imitated'.[15] The focus of Martindale's theory of reception is the historical study of the continuities and the interpretive fractures that can be observed in the way in which classical texts have been received, utilised, constructed and reconstructed by critics as artists and artists as critics from the classical through to the contemporary period.[16] Martindale presents his reader with three interlocked case studies of the critical artistic dialogues present in the reception, reading, rereading and appropriation of Vergil, Ovid and Lucan. He goes to great lengths to represent himself as part of this chain of rereading and interpretation, in which his reception and critical interpretation of these texts must be equally viewed as the creative act of the critic as artist.

Redeeming the Text is an important foundational text of reception theory in classical studies;[17] yet, Martindale's focus on the reception of Latin poetry in later western poetic traditions may invite charges of elitism. He does not consider how theories of reception might be applied to the reception of classical texts in contemporary prose and drama or the reception of classical literature in

contemporary popular cultures. His focus is on the critic as artist, in dialogue with the artist as critic, as a collective movement of interpretation and rereading capable of shifting the cultural 'horizon of expectations'. This focuses on the construction of meaning and legitimised interpretation at the institutional level of the academy, neglecting (and thereby undermining) acts of rereading undertaken by the unaffiliated individual reader and the broader interpretive community to which he or she might belong.

Accusations of elitism are to some extent countered by Martindale in the collection of essays *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (2006), edited with Richard F. Thomas, which includes feminist, Marxist and postcolonial approaches to classical reception studies. It also addresses the wider reception of classical texts in prose, dramatic writing and contemporary performance. This suggests a move away from the elitist influence of New Criticism (with its privileging of poetry over prose and drama) and goes some way to addressing the theoretical concerns of minority reading communities. However, Martindale also states that there are some texts which he does not view as legitimate areas for the study of classical reception.[18] This undermines the central argument of (the apparently more elitist) *Redeeming the Text,* which argues that the value of the text is not inherent but contingent upon the way in which it is culturally valued or devalued in the particular historical moment in which it is received.

Lorna Hardwick interprets the remit of classical receptions more broadly. In *Reception Studies: Greece and Rome* (2003) she compares and contrasts the theoretical underpinnings of 'the classical tradition' model with reception theory. Hardwick looks at the specific ways in which positivist approaches to classical texts have undermined the importance of the ways in which minority reading communities receive classical texts. Hardwick argues that the classical tradition and its influences were 'based on a rather narrow range of perspectives [...] Thus the associations of value carried with it were narrow and sometimes undervalued diversity, both within ancient culture and subsequently'.[19] In outlining the differences between the approaches of the classical tradition and reception theory, Hardwick attempts to move away from New Criticism's positivist assumption of inherent value in order to better understand the diversity of ancient cultures and their subsequent influence.

Hardwick's concern with reflecting the plurality and diversity of classical texts and their receptions is reflected in the editorial choices she made in compiling

the wide-ranging collection *A Companion to Classical Receptions* (2008) with Christopher Stray. Stray and Hardwick accept the inherent plurality of reception theory in a conscious attempt to disentangle classical reception from positivistic tendencies which acknowledge only one correct way of analysing the text. They view the differing theoretical frameworks of these collected essays as part of the continuum of the history of reception and make little distinction between the receptions of classical texts in 'high' and 'low' culture, film, visual cultures, the performing arts and contemporary literature. These areas of study are all represented and legitimated because they are examined within the context of the specific interpretive community and the specific socio-historical context into which they are received. Feminist, Marxist and a wide range of postcolonial approaches are represented here. The collection is not confined to a Eurocentric, western perspective, but considers the comparative reception of the classics in African, Arab and Israeli contexts. These sit alongside more traditional approaches to classical receptions into English poetry and broad reception studies of Homer and Vergil.

Hardwick argues that a precursor to modern reception studies can be found within classical texts themselves[20] and that 'interest in reception of classical texts is not just a modern phenomenon. Greek and Roman poets, dramatists, philosophers, artists and architects were also engaged in this type of activity – refiguration of myth, meta-theatrical allusion, creation of dialogue with and critique of entrenched cultural practices and assumptions, selection and refashioning in the context of current concerns'.[21] Methodological approaches to reception studies that address the way in which the positivist classical tradition has undermined the reception of classical texts in minority or marginalised reading communities must, by their very nature, be more critically engaged with the theoretical assumptions that more general approaches to classical receptions have made regarding the existence of homogeneous interpretive communities. Through a direct engagement with feminist literary theory, reception theorists can undertake a feminist critical approach to classical studies in which they read for, recover and examine instances of the reception of classical literature in minority groups, which they perceive to have been undermined or ignored by the historical and contemporary cultural dominance of patriarchal interpretive communities.

Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard's *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (2006) is an important text for feminist critics who are

interested in using reception theory as an approach to the study of classical texts. This collection of essays takes its name from Hélène Cixous' 'Le Rire de la méduse' (1976). The essays in this collection offer a comparative analysis of two or more rewritings of female figures drawn from classical myth. The collection outlines and explores two central arguments. Firstly, that a feminist theory of reception must be able to account for the variations in reader responses to classical texts within the same broadly defined reading community. Secondly, it outlines the uses of a feminist approach to classical reception as a methodological tool. It may be used to examine why feminist theorists and fiction writers are so drawn to the rewriting and revision of classical myth in their work. It can also be used to account for wide variation in the techniques used in these rewritings because reception theory advocates a close attention to the text itself while considering the socio-historical circumstances in which the text is constructed, received and rewritten. The collection places emphasis on Jauss' prerequisite for 'objective' study, which underpins the use of the rewritten texts themselves as evidence for the way in which the originating source was received by an individual at a specific historical and cultural moment. The collection also emphasises that differences in the horizontal shifts that take place in this reading community's horizon of expectations can be observed and accounted for by any number of variable influences on the individual reader's personal identification with social and national demographics (*LWM*, 11).

The collection directly engages with Cixous' theory of 'white ink'. It applies Cixous' concerns with what it means to write (and initially to read) as a woman and a feminist to the problem of interpretive communities raised by Jauss' rejection of individual reader responses as a legitimate area of study for reception theorists. In 'Le Rire de la méduse' Cixous defines 'woman' as at once a 'universal woman subject'– a homogeneous category that can reasonably be defined as such through a shared experience of 'inevitable struggle against conventional man' – and a heterogeneous community of individuals: 'there is [...] no general woman [...] you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes – any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another'. The collective 'universal woman subject' attempts to 'bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history' by 'inscribing' the 'bodily' – that is the lived experience of their existence as women – into the texts they create (CLM, 875-6). However, this group of women, identified as a community through a shared motivation, maintain

their individual identification. In *Laughing with Medusa*, Zajko and Leonard use Cixous' universal/heterogeneous woman as the basis for a feminist theory of classical reception that is capable of integrating the study of the plurality of individual interpretations while avoiding the charge of relativism by maintaining their broad attachment to, and identification with, a wider community of 'female' or 'feminist' readers and writers at a given historical moment in order to satisfy reception theory's requirement for objective study.

This commitment to a consideration of individual reception and the way in which it contributes to the constantly shifting horizon of expectations of a wider reading community can be observed in Zajko and Leonard's initial debate on the appropriation and rewriting of Achilles in a selection of texts by female writers who identify themselves as feminists. They present a comparative analysis of Elizabeth Cook's *Achilles* (2001) and Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969); two rewritings of Homeric epic that 'typify two different modes of feminism's engagement with classical myth'. In her 'lesbian *Iliad*' Wittig writes from a position of subversive resistance to classical myth and the Homeric epic as 'foundation texts' of patriarchal repression and misogyny. Her rewriting practice exposes the lack of female representation in her source text. In contrast, Cook's self-consciously intertextual *Achilles* does not seek a feminocentric overthrow of patriarchal traditions. Her focus is on an examination of the inequalities of representation between the male Achilles and female Helen of Troy in the *Iliad* (*LWM*, 2). Her rewriting practice aims to bring these characters to equal status within her new text.

Zajko and Leonard argue that their feminist approach to reception theory can be used to study why two readers/authors who identify themselves as belonging to the same reading community of female feminists, display such different responses to the same classical text. This exemplifies the dichotomy of Cixous' universal/heterogeneous woman. As feminist writers, Wittig and Cook share some common goals and preoccupations (analogous to that of Cixous' universal woman). Both rewritings evince a 'preoccupation with embodiment, [and] a desire to reclaim the materiality of experience from the abstractions of literary representation' (*LWM*, 2). Because of these shared goals and preoccupations, it would be reasonable to consider these authors to be part of the same reading community. However, that community must be regarded as a heterogeneous one.

Zajko and Leonard consider this difference in the execution of the feminist appropriation of myth to be a rich area for reception study. However, the use of classical myth in feminist discourses is also a deeply problematic issue for feminist literary theory. This is an issue on which the co-editors cannot agree. The use of classical myth in feminist writing and thought is in some senses a very strange choice: if feminist writers view classical myth as the 'products of an androcentric society' and the myths themselves as a justification for 'its most basic patriarchal assumptions', the appropriation of those myths in feminist rewriting risks reproducing the very same androcentric and patriarchal construction of female representation that they are attempting to resist and write against (*LWM*, 2). For Zajko, this tension between the androcentric bias of the originating classical myth and the enactment of a gynocentric subversion of it constructs the myth itself as a 'profoundly creative' dialogical imaginative space that allows for 'political engagement with' the way things have historically been and 'the way things could have been different' and makes resistance to normative order possible. In contrast, Leonard sees this same tension as one that 'expose[s] many of the conflicts within feminism itself': is it even possible to offer an effective resistance to the patriarchal systems of language and symbol if of necessity one is required to reproduce those same systems of language and symbolic order in order to articulate that resistance? (*LWM*, 3). While Leonard acknowledges that the call for a genuine *écriture féminine* holds the theoretical potential to resolve this conflict, she argues that in reality it seems impossible to escape the patriarchal order, since any new system of language will have to be derived from an originating system and that again risks reproducing androcentric and patriarchal elements of the linguistic system that it set out to reject (*LWM,* 3-4).

For Leonard and Zajko this theoretical tension is exemplified in Cixous' continual engagement with classical myth and the problem of language in her fictional and critical works. In 'Le Rire de la méduse', Cixous displays an awareness of the 'doubleness of myth': its potential for complicity and its potential as a subversive oppositional space. The potential to rewrite myth is both a suggestion for textual resistance and a metaphor for how to live as a 'universal' woman. Cixous rewrites Medusa from an archetypal female monster and murderer of men into a benign figure of female sexualised power (of course this is not unproblematic in itself). For Cixous the myth is only the framework or archetypal form that contains a

space that can be emptied of androcentric thought and filled with a subversive gynocentric discourse in the act of reading. Women can choose to believe in a 'meaning' that reproduces a myth of their female 'lack' or they can rewrite the 'meaning' of Medusa as a figure of female power and resistance against a patriarchal culture (CLM, 885-6). There is no obligation to reproduce the existing system. Myth can be repressive or it can serve as an active textual space of resistance against repression; the only difference is the critical position from which it is read. Cixous' position on the doubleness of myth in feminist thought was and remains somewhat controversial.

In *Speculum, de l'autre femme* (*Speculum of the Other Woman*) [1974], Luce Irigaray presented quite the opposite view, taking a more deconstructive approach to her rewriting of the 'Myth of the Cave' from Plato's *Republic* in order to expose and combat the persistence of classical myth in contemporary cultures where it functions to reproduce and 'fossilise' existing patriarchal hierarchies of value (CLM, 4).[22] In Irigaray's view classical myth offers a potential space of resistance only in so much as it provides a focus for exposing and deconstructing it as a patriarchal system of thought. Leonard and Zajko argue that this is a result of the way in which Irigaray defines feminism as a 'confrontation with history' (*LWM*, 5).

In the next section I will examine the problematic doubleness of the use of and attention to classical myth in feminist critical discourse by looking at how classical images, stories and characters have been used in conjunction with theories of reception and influence to create theories of feminist poetics.

III. FEMINIST CRITICISM, THE CLASSICS AND THE USES OF RECEPTION

Critically aware fictional narratives perhaps offer the most potential for creating feminist revisions of classical myths that do not inadvertently reproduce a discourse of female creative lack. Theoretically, a feminist author could employ a way of writing similar to Cixous' 'white ink' (which assumes the material attachment of author to text). The feminist author can also choose to read and appropriate classical images of the female artist in a way that explicitly acknowledges her creative autonomy. This is far more difficult to achieve within feminist theoretical discourses

that employ rereadings of classical myths as critical models of feminist authorship. The feminist critic encounters discourses of female creative lack from within the classical myth itself and through the dominance of patriarchal theoretical discourses, which she acknowledges as significant texts of influence on her work, in the act of arguing against them.

The feminist scholar must, of necessity, acknowledge the androcentric and patriarchal critical discourses that she is responding to in her construction of female literary history. Attempts by feminist theorists to construct female literary histories have been ineffective because the feminist scholar reproduces a patriarchal assumption of the female author's creative 'lack' in acknowledging the influence of existing models of literary history on her work. This can be observed in Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1978) and Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Both of these alternative literary histories directly engage with Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* (1973). In adopting some of his terms and applying them to female authors, they reproduce elements of Bloom's model of literary history which is entirely founded on male authors and male dynamics, and thus imply the cultural and creative lack of female authorship. In Bloom's model of text production, the new author suffers a kind of oedipal anxiety over the extent of the influence of his precursor and attempts to suppress this influence by misreading him, in order to 'clear imaginative space for himself'.[23] *The Anxiety of Influence* assumes the presence of a male poet in dialogue with a male literary canon and pays no attention to the possibility of a female author. Elaine Showalter's use of Bloom's theory in relation to female authors implies that the latter are incapable of identifying with male precursors. In Showalter's model of literary history, the 'anxiety of female authorship' stems from the female author's belief that the male dominance of the textual field suggests that she should not be writing at all. Showalter builds her alternative female literary history on the foundations of a theory that is complicit with Bloom's implication that female authors are 'weak poets', incapable of successfully 'completing' the work of their 'strong' male precursor poets.[24] This distinction between male and female types of anxiety regarding the authority to create is also made by Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. They argue

that a female author cannot and does not experience an 'anxiety of influence' in the same way as her male counterpart. A new female author encounters a textual field that is predominantly male and patriarchal. Her attempt to identify with her male precursors forces her recognition 'of her own gender definition:'[25]

> Thus the "anxiety of influence" that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary "anxiety of authorship" – a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a "precursor" the act of writing will isolate or destroy her. (*MWA,* 49)

Despite their attempts to open up literary canons to include female-authored texts and recover the history of women's writing, feminist literary critics have made little attempt to avoid reproducing the patriarchal discourses of female creative and cultural lack inherent in literary theory. When these discourses are left unchallenged by feminist critics, they continue to propagate a patriarchal horizon of expectations within feminist reading communities.

In 'Arachnologies', Nancy K. Miller does acknowledge the problematic influence of patriarchal critical discourses on feminist literary criticism. In her discussion of the use of the language of textiles in modern literary criticism, she implies that the feminist critic needs to be aware of the risk of reproducing a patriarchal discourse of female lack, when she employs the 'tropology of the loom' in her writing: 'the language of textiles tend to engender in the dominant discursive strategies of much contemporary literary criticism a metaphorics of femininity deeply marked by Freud's account of women and weaving' (AWTC, 271).

Freud argued that, apart from the invention of 'weaving and plaiting', techniques of textile production, women have made little contribution to the 'discoveries and inventions of civilization', and that women's textile production is motivated by unconscious desire to hide their lack of male genitalia.[26] In Freud's account any act of female creativity is made a suspicious and dishonest act of concealment that is an attempt to hide the fact that she is not a man. Freud's rhetorical staging of the female weaver/artist recalls the long standing cultural and semiotic association of storytelling with deception. The 'old wives' tale' is often told by a woman who is weaving or spinning. To tell a story is to 'weave a story' or 'spin

a yarn'. Such proverbial expressions are also used to express the opinion that someone is telling a lie, engaging in hyperbole, or in some way speaking an untruth.

Miller reads Freud's discourse on weaving women as an example of the male author's tendency to use the archetypal image of the weaving woman to make a generalised ideological statement about the condition of being a 'woman' and the way in which it affects female creativity 'without in any way addressing' the wide spectrum of sexualities, class, gender, race and national identities, or combinations thereof, that may be involved in the construction of female identity (AWTC, 271). In 'Arachnologies' Miller always employs her feminist reading and rewriting practice of 'overreading' in which she reads the weaving woman as a textual representation of female authorship. Freud's weaving woman becomes the author whose individual identity is subsumed by the function of the women's thread as text. In Miller's estimation, Freud's analysis of the weaving woman has contaminated the 'thread' of women's representation with a misogynistic discourse on the woman's text as a deception that is intended to hide the shame she feels at her female 'lack'.

Drawing on the work of Naomi Schor, Miller terms this 'masculine recuperation of the feminine' text as textile an 'Ariadne Complex'. Miller argues that this can be seen as 'a variant of the phenomenon Alice Jardine has named *gynesis* – "the putting into discourse of 'woman'"' (AWTC, 271).[27] In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Ariadne is never named. She is only described as the virgin who helps Theseus escape Daedalus' labyrinth ('ope virginea' / 'by a maiden's help'), and as the betrayed and abandoned lovesick girl who sits on the shores of Naxos complaining bitterly about her fate ('desertae et multa querenti' / 'to the deserted and much complaining girl').[28] Beyond Ariadne's archetypal roles as virgin and betrayed lover, her identity is inconsequential to a story that concerns the honour of men: Minos, the king and father (law), commissions Daedalus, the disgraced and exiled male architect/artist, to build a labyrinth to hide the evidence of his wife's infidelity and restore honour to his family and kingdom (AWTC, 283-4).

Miller argues that in this staging of 'woman', Ariadne's limited identity resides in the function of her thread. 'The agency of her desire' is subsumed into the solution to the puzzle of the labyrinth which she hands to Theseus, thus allowing him to construct his identity as a great hero who has managed to escape the abyss of the labyrinth. Furthermore, Ariadne's subsumed and carefully channelled passion functions to restore her father's law by counterbalancing the perverse and

uncontrollable sexuality of her mother. 'Domesticated, female desire becomes the enabling fiction of a male need for mastery' (AWTC, 285). Miller uses the myth of Ariadne as a critical model in order to expose what she sees as a problematic 'reading practice common to the poststructuralist models' of the text, that have acted to attenuate the importance of the relationship between the female author's identity and lived experience, the conditions of her text production and the text she creates. 'The critic suffering from [...] an "Ariadne Complex" dissolves the text maker into the text, 'follows the thread' and uses the 'metaphors and metonymies' of text as textile. In 'using this reading practice' the critic 'stages woman' by associating him/herself with the 'feminine' while abandoning the real representation of the 'woman in the text' (AWTC, 284-5). The image of the female author becomes an empty vessel or archetype to be filled with a discourse that is no longer her own.

Miller's reading of Roland Barthes' *Le Plaisir du texte* (*The Pleasure of the Text*) helps to further elucidate her concept of 'The Ariadne Complex'. She appropriates Barthes' construction of the 'text as tissue' and as spider's web. She explores the implications of the text as textile in 'La Mort de l'auteur' when applied to a female writing subject. In doing so Miller reintroduces the importance of the gendered body of the female author to the text she creates while maintaining Barthes' privileging of the text over the text maker:

> [...] when a theory of the text called "hyphology" chooses the spider's *web* over the spider, and the concept of textuality called the "writerly" chooses the threads of lace over the lace maker (S/Z, 160), the productive agency of the subject is self-consciously erased by a model of text production which acts to foreclose the question of identity itself. (AWTC, 271)

Barthes maintains the metaphor of text as textile but reduces the place of Author to a scriptor, a figure 'born simultaneously with the text'. The author is no longer perceived as a 'being preceding or exceeding the writing'.[29] Miller argues that in Barthes' theory of the text, the gendered body of the Author disappears into the genderless body of the scriptor subsumed into her text. This model of the text makes it theoretically impossible to assess the circumstances in which the text was produced or the way in which the individual identity of the author, her lived experience and her ideology may have affected her writing.

The recovery of the gendered body of the female author is essential to Miller's project of reading against the poststructuralist 'indifferentiation' of the

writing subject in order 'to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity' and 'to recover within representation the emblems of its construction'. Miller terms this an 'Arachnology' – A practice of 'overreading' in which the new author looks for representations of female creativity in the text that may be appropriated in her new writing as metaphors of female authorship. She hopes to produce a feminist literature and criticism in which a woman's writing is shown to be strongly and materially connected to the individual experiences of the author and the social, political and economic circumstances in which she wrote. These appropriated figurations of the female artist can be explicit signifiers, such as the classical representation of weaving women, that 'thematizes [...] the conditions of text production under the classical sex/gender arrangements of Western culture', or they may be more coded representations of female creativity and the female author's relationship to dominant culture (AWTC, 272-5). While I agree with the aims of Miller's practice of overreading, I would argue that Miller's use of the myth of Ariadne as a critical model of the subsuming of the female author causes her to misinterpret Barthes' concept of the scriptor. Miller's reading of the Ariadne story arguably functions to reproduce an androcentric discourse that undermines the importance of the female author's identity to the text she creates.

Miller's reading of the 'La Mort de l'auteur' as an 'Ariadne Complex' in which the critic has privileged the text and dissolved the writerly into it, does not take into consideration the subtleties of Barthes' concept of the scriptor. Miller reads 'La Mort de l'auteur' as if the woman in the text had been killed off by the androcentric bias of literary interpretation and theory and must be entirely re-imagined or reconstructed by the new feminist scholar or author. She equates the death of the Author with a 'self-conscious' erasure of the 'productive agency' of the female writer in which her material circumstances cease to have any bearing on the text she creates (AWTC, 271). Barthes' 'killing off' of the writing subject does function to 'foreclose' questions of writerly identity, posing serious theoretical problems for a feminist literary criticism that relies upon the theorising of gender identity. Barthes argues that 'writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin', an 'oblique space' where the writing subject is dissolved and 'all identity is lost'. He describes the Author as a figure who has been 'buried', with the birth of 'the modern scriptor' whose' hand' is 'cut off from any voice' who 'traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself'.[30]

However, despite Barthes' assertions, it is possible to see that the language of his text re-introduces the possibility of gender and performance which suggests that the scriptor as shaman possesses at least a measure of agency. While Barthes rejects the author as a figure of 'genius', the figure of the shaman suggests a 'channelling' of language through the performance and mediation of a 'narrative code' by a person.[31] The terms 'performance' and 'mediation' suggests that the writer/shaman possesses some ability to affect the way the text is written. The language of birth and the identification of this 'figure' with the profession of shamanic storyteller give a bodily substance to this creative figure. In the many and varied shamanic traditions, women are as likely to be shamans as men. The powers of the shaman to mediate prophecy, to move between worlds, to metamorphose into animal form, or to see things differently were often associated with a third sex: those who were considered to posses both male and female qualities, were transgendered or dressed in the clothes of the opposite sex to bring them closer to the sacred.[32] Thus the powers of the shaman to mediate and perform are often linked to a specifically sexed body and performativity.

In 'La Mort de l'auteur' Barthes' tendency towards the figuration of his hypothetical Author as male is far more ambiguous in his discussion of the shaman as a concept of the writerly that is opposed to modern western concepts of the Author as 'genius'. Barthes first begins his discussion with a male author entering into 'his own death'; however his transformation into the shaman appears to render the writing subject possibly male or female or at least androgynous. As Barthes begins to write of the modern concept of authorial genius, the author is described repeatedly as a 'human' person or the 'person' of the author. We are then given the first explicit indication that the writing subject under consideration may be either male or female: 'The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it'.[33] It follows then that the shaman, when thought of as a person who acts as a vessel for language, mediating the text without possessing any authority over it, could still be interpreted as a person whose gender identity and relationship to 'dominant representation' can be traced in his or her 'mediation' or 'performance' of a 'narrative code'.

The myth of Arachne has great potential as an allegory of feminist resistance against dominant androcentric and patriarchal modes of female representation, but I argue that Miller's conception of the 'Ariadne Complex' causes her to create a

critical model of feminist rewriting that reintroduces and positions the gendered body of the feminist author in the wrong place. Miller refigures Arachne as a defiant female text maker, who is punished for her countercultural account through an exile from her human body and the destruction of her attachment to her work:

> Against the classically theocentric balance of Athena's tapestry, Arachne constructs a feminocentric protest. [...] though the product is judged flawless in the signifiers of its art [...] its producer must be punished for its signified. [...] [Athena] goes on not only to mutilate the text, but to destroy its author [...] she is to hang and yet to live: her head shrinks, her legs become "slender fingers" and virtually all body – the antithesis of the goddess – she continues the act of spinning: "and now a spider, she exercises her old-time weaver art." (AWTC, 273)

The transformed Arachne is the re-embodied female author who writes outside and against representation. This can be read as a direct result of Miller's analysis of 'La Mort de l'auteur' as an 'Ariadne Complex' from which she has made the theoretical assumption of the 'killing off' of the female author through a critical over-attention to the text:

> [In] the text as hyphology [...] the mode of production is privileged over the subject whose supervising identity is dissolved into the work of the web. But Arachne's story [...] evokes a bodily substance and a violence to the teller that is not adequately accounted for by an attention to a torn web. (AWTC, 273)

Miller imagines and writes the female author as a woman whose writing is motivated by her feelings of exclusion from representation: 'Arachne is punished for her point of view. For this, she is restricted to spinning outside representation, to a reproduction that turns back on itself. Cut off from the work of art, she spins like a woman' (AWTC, 274). This implies that there is a linguistic and cultural incompetence to Arachne the spider's (the new feminist author's) work. Arachne's art of the spider's web may mimic the 'human' (male) art of the written text, but cut off from the mosaic of quotation and cultural reference, her web is represented as a crude imitation of what has gone before. Arachne's ability to create like the goddess Athena (representing the patriarchal godhead), is destroyed through an enforced metamorphosis, a transformation that alienates her from her human gendered body and forces her to try and reconstruct her art outside of normal representation.

Miller reads Ovid's Arachne and its dominant interpretation as an example of a patriarchal literary and critical tradition that has misrepresented the female artist's relationship with existing representation, propagating the image of the exiled, self-sacrificing female artist who is punished for what she creates. Miller argues for a recuperation of this severing of the female author's connection to dominant representation as a creative critical positioning that allows the new author to bypass traditional canonical readings that have erased women from the literary tradition and relegated them to bodies, to non-representation. Miller's practice of overreading originates in a rejection of existing literature and more specifically the canon of great works that have been authorised as such through the male critics' 'mastery' over the text. She perversely rejects a particular model of intertextuality in which texts are read and rewritten always in response to their relationship to other texts because the

> 'poetics of the "already read," depends upon the same logic as that of the "subject lost in the tissue": [...] Only the subject who is both self possessed and possesses access to the library of the already read has the luxury of flirting with the escape from identity – like the loss of Arachne's "head" – promised by an aesthetics of the decentred (decapitated, really) body. [...] as a counterweight to this story of the deconstructed subject, restless with what he already knows, is a poetics of the *underread* and a practice of "overreading" [...] It aims[...] to unsettle the interpretive model which thinks that it knows *when* it is rereading, and what is in the library [...] reading women's writing not "as if it had already been read," but as if it had never been read, as *if* for the first time. (AWTC, 274)

Miller argues that Barthes' privileging of the text over the writer is all very well for those that have been in the dominant position of controlling meaning, but this is another discourse that excludes those that, throughout history, have had to protest against the dominant discourse of female lack. Barthes' theorising of a text composed of language that has already been spoken, already been read and therefore always carries meaning with it, means that canonical, male-controlled meaning has already been imposed on women's writing. The ability to activate, subvert or play with these meanings implicitly requires a familiarity with traditional canonical readings. Miller argues that if we continue to use what is already 'in the library' to interpret women's writing, we will continue to interpret it according to patriarchal forms, running the risk of feminist interpretive strategies becoming inadvertently complicit with a discourse of female creative inadequacy. For Miller, to overread is to re-read everything that is in the library as if it were free of the traditional patriarchal readings that frame and influence our interpretations of women's writing.

Miller's theory of overreading offers an interesting interpretive strategy for reading and writing against negative discourses of female creativity, but I find it problematic: to read a text outside of the context of its reception in dominant critical traditions is to ignore evidence of the cultural conditions that have historically affected women's writing and the literary history of the woman writer's resistance to the dominant discourse of female lack. Throughout my case studies of the historical rewriting practices of women writers I have observed that when female authors write from a position of exclusion, they do so in a conscious act of protest against the dominant discourse of female 'lack', which they feel has relegated them to this position. They challenge this by asserting their linguistic and cultural competence, or to use Miller's phrase their 'mastery' of the text. They [re]write in response to their knowledge of the 'already read', reclaiming their creative autonomy by establishing that their level of competence with the text is equal to that of their male counterparts.

If we study the implications of Barthes' theory of the text for women's writing through an examination of the historical androcentric bias of the textual representation of women alone, then we are forced to conclude as Miller does, in her theory of overreading, that the woman in the text has been destroyed. However, by adapting Barthes' concept of the author as a scriptor/shaman into a figure with an active creative agency who mediates and performs the text, it becomes possible to recover the female writing subject from inside representation or, to use Miller's analogy, to reject our poststructuralist 'Ariadne Complex' and rescue Arachne from her fate. This is not to privilege the author over the text she creates. We must pay attention to both the author and the text if we are to examine the relationship between the author's reception and rewriting of the classical weaving woman, her lived experience and her relationship to the reading communities with which she identifies.

I argue that paying attention to the text does not need to mean falling into an 'Ariadne Complex'. We can avoid this if we reject Irigaray's feminist model of reading classical myth in order to expose it as a patriarchal system of thought that is continually being reproduced through its appropriation and influence on western culture in favour of Cixous's model of choosing to interpret myths of women as positive and powerful examples of female resistance to patriarchal control. As feminists, we can choose to read representations of the classical weaving woman and the importance of her attachment to her thread as a positive act of a woman's

resistance to patriarchal control and as a representation of her gynocentric protest against the dominant androcentric representation of women. This requires that we pay attention not to the simple existence of the textile as metaphor of literary production. We must also consider how this representation of the textile might be read as a tool of the weaving woman's resistance and protest.

Read from this perspective, the myth of Arachne becomes an allegory for the female author's explicit challenge of, and resistance to, the patriarchal representation of women. It is important to note that Arachne does not lose the contest. Athena cannot fault Arachne's technique. But for Arachne, to win by skill alone is not enough; she is determined to use her tapestry (text) to tell the truth about women's suffering at the hands of male gods, even though she knows she will be severely punished. To read and understand the classical weaving woman in this way is to take the first steps towards a feminist poetics of creative autonomy that explicitly rejects the woman writer's association with creative and linguistic inadequacy.

In 'Arachnologies', Miller emphasises that the goal of feminist rewriting must ultimately be a recovery of the woman in the text, which can account for the wide range of women's lived experiences in order to represent women as autonomous and independent individuals who 'may have lived in history' (AWTC, 288):

> Putting the matter politically, if we can't tell the difference between [...] [women's] stories, [embedded within dominant patriarchal discourses] what are our chances of identifying the material differences between and among women that for feminist theory remains crucial? If Arachne and Ariadne change places in the threads of the loom, is nothing lost in this translation? (AWTC, 283)

The aim of the three case studies presented in Part II of this thesis is to reintroduce the theoretical discussion of the active female writer's response to the already read. Studying texts as the product of the individual author's experiences, identity and her relationship to dominant literary cultures has allowed me to nuance and develop Miller's model into a more flexible framework for interpreting the wide range of reading and rewriting practices that have been undertaken by female authors.

IV. THE CASE STUDIES: THREE CRITICAL MODELS TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE FEMINIST POETICS OF CREATIVE AUTONOMY

My model of feminist reading and rewriting differs from Miller's practice of 'overreading'. I argue that many aspects of the reading practice outlined above can be observed in the existing rewriting practices of female authors. If the new female author is able to observe that the representation of the classical weaving woman – with a material and purposeful attachment to her thread – already exists within the source text she intends to rewrite, then she has no need to 'spin like a woman': to construct her gynocentric protest outside the sphere of authorised male representation. If she is able to identify with the representation of the woman and her act of defiance in the text she can choose to imagine herself as the 'woman in the text', discovering from within, and challenging the representation of women from within dominant representation. The sense of a blurring of authorial identity with the rewritten classical woman as storyteller is common to all the texts that I have examined in my case studies. This commonality can be explained by a model of women's rewriting in which the female author first reads looking for a 'woman in the text' whose association with textile production or another signifier of creativity can be read as a metaphor for female authorship. She identifies with this character, figuring herself as a female author recovered from the text. Through this identification she rewrites the originating source text as an alternative female account of narrative events in which the conditions of her female authorship are interwoven into the existing text in order to 'find' a positive representation of female creativity. The rewritten text places emphasis on the re-imagined character's material circumstances and her emotional response to the events of her source narrative, imagined as a recovered historical record of women's history.

While the rewriting practices of d'Aulnoy, Shelley, Carter, Atwood and Le Guin are, in many ways, extremely different, reflecting the lived experience of the author and her relationship to the reading communities with which she identifies, they do share some other important commonalities which strongly suggest that women's rewriting takes place on an intertextual model of dialogue with the already read. These are: (i) the construction of oppositional space using the textual details of places represented or appropriated as liminal spaces from the author's source text; (ii) the focus on ekphrastic representations of the weaver's art or other representations of female creativity (and the text she produces); (iii) a focus on the class, status and linguistic and cultural competence of the weaver/author that is

emphasised through the staging of the cultural tension between oral (illiterate) and written storytelling; (iv) the staging of mothers as a figuration of the female authors' anxieties of influence and authorship and (v) the appropriation of details from the source text that are then intertwined with autobiographical or historical events in order to present the weaving woman/author as the representation of a real woman, who lived in history and whose story was deeply affected by the material circumstances in which she wrote.

However, as I will show, it is the differences in the way in which these details of the source text are chosen, staged and reproduced for the purposes of specific kinds of ideological protests against the dominant representation of women that define the 'Rescue', 'Challenge' and 'Rereading' of Arachne as separate rewriting practices. In order to highlight the differences in the reading strategies and rewriting practices involved in each case study I have produced a critical model for each case study outlined below:

THE RESCUE OF ARACHNE

This is the feminist author's response to what she sees as the patriarchal repression of previous female authors' voices and classically-influenced stories that have damaged positive representations of female creativity, power and authorship within the literary tradition the new feminist author has chosen to write in. When the new author reads within this tradition she recognises the earlier female author's appropriation of the classical woman as a positive archetype of female power and creativity. She observes that over time, this initial positive literary representation of women can be seen to have been transformed – in subsequent intertextual appropriations of the archetype – into an empty authorising figure for the increasingly explicit patriarchal moral messages of the text.

The feminist author identifies with the rewriting practices of these early female authors as evidence of an early feminist tradition that has been obscured by later impositions of patriarchal value. She decides to follow in this tradition by reading her texts of influence looking for evidence of repressed or lost textual representations of classical archetypes of female authorship, power and creativity

that she can appropriate in her new text. Through the presence of this archetype, the feminist author figures her rewriting as a 'recovery' or 'rescue' and continuation of an ancient hidden tradition of subversive female authorship and resistance to the negative literary representation of women.

ARACHNE'S CHALLENGE

The reading and rewriting practice of 'Arachne's Challenge' alludes to a positive reading of the myth of Arachne (the female author) that places emphasis on the fact that Arachne believes enough in her own skill to challenge Athena to a contest of weaving in order to prove herself the equal of the goddess. In this contest Arachne uses her tapestry (text) to explicitly challenge Athena's patriarchal representation of women. A rewriting process of 'Arachne's Challenge' is one in which the new female author attempts to explicitly challenge and confront a contemporary patriarchal discourse of female lack that she believes is undermining her authority to create. She rewrites her classical texts of influence so that they are able to speak to her concerns with the position of women in society in a way that challenges her male contemporaries' literary representations of women.

This rewriting practice occurs when a female author feels that she has in some way been excluded from literary representation and the male reading community that dominates the culture in which she lives. She reads classical texts looking for positive representations of female authorship, forcing a painful self-identification with the representations of female creative lack in those classical texts. She therefore selects an alternative archetype of female storytelling from an analogous tradition. In her rewriting practice, the new female author identifies with this female character, taken as an archetypal image of a female author, in a process that often also relies on images of physical identification, as if the later writer placed herself into the body of the earlier figure of a female author.

Here, two literary traditions, thanks to the similarities of their narratives and archetypes, function as a single textual system of influence. The new female author inserts herself into the classical tradition and manipulates a dominant patriarchal

interpretation of classical myth to speak to feminist concerns with the place of women in society – i.e., with the conditions have contributed to her own experience of exclusion. As these are both literary traditions that are recognized and valued by the dominant, male reading community from which she feels excluded, the female author hopes that the linguistic and cultural competence she shows in being able to move between the two sets of allusions will prove her worthy of inclusion and acceptance. In this rewriting practice there is always a conflict presented in the new text between an assertive desire for revenge on, and a plaintive desire for admission into, the reading community from which the author feels excluded.

REREADING ARACHNE

I have borrowed the term 'rereading' from Charles Martindale's *Redeeming the Text.* Martindale argues that we should view the author who 'imitates' the classical text as a critic who has 'reread' or reinterpreted his or her source text from a specific ideological standpoint or purpose. I use the term 'rereading' to describe a critically engaged modern reading and rewriting practice in which the author rewrites her classical text with an awareness of, or as a response to, a particular argument of feminist literary theory.

In this rewriting practice, the modern writer appropriates a classical female character as a female *author* of a *written* text (even if, in the original, the character is not an author). In this, the writer attempts to avoid reproducing a patriarchal discourse of female creative lack and inauthenticity, by rejecting the cultural association of weaving with female *oral* storytelling. This new representation of female authorship is defined by the author's individual engagement with the theoretical implications of modern feminist literary theory. In the construction of this character, what is emphasized is her silence in the source text, or how her narrative was undermined. By identifying with the silenced female 'author', the writer uses her archetype to represent herself within the text as the author of an alternative narrative of events that take place within the storyworld of the originating text. The new female author will often draw on other classical and classically-influenced sources, to construct a back story for her newly created female author, in order to

suggest that female-authored texts are materially attached to the lived experiences of their authors.

The appropriated female character's association with weaving in the originating text is re-signified: either it is presented as an arbitrary cultural association, or the act of weaving results in a simple cloth. Whereas the textile production of a pictorial representation (i.e. a tapestry like that of Philomela or Arachne) can be read as an explicit representation of female resistance to patriarchal power, the weaving of everyday cloth functions through its association with a female character's actions to signify that the author's lived experience of a social and linguistic patriarchal system determines the kind of text she produces.

In this dissertation, I argue that while these rewriting practices have not been entirely successful in rejecting patriarchal discourses of female lack and creative inadequacy, every woman's rewriting of classical texts that I have studied has revealed some promising techniques of rewriting that are successful in explicitly rejecting the creative lack traditionally associated with female authorship. If these can be refined we might come closer to a more successful and effective model of feminist authorship that acknowledges the creative autonomy and authority of the female artist.

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[1] See Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London: Pimlico, 1994), pp.3-200. I will return to this theme in the chapter 'Rereading Lavinia: Lavinia's Blush', of this thesis.

[2] Hans Robert Jauss uses the terms 'horizontal changes' in a reading community's 'horizon of expectations' for this process. See LHC, pp.3-45 (p.23).

[3] Reader-response criticism is an umbrella term used to describe approaches to literature that focus on the interpretation of a text by individual readers. Norman N. Holland's 'Unity Identity Text Self' *PMLA* 90.5 (1975), pp.813-22; Wolfgang Iser's *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* [1972] (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* [1978] (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); and Stanley Fish's *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* [1980] (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990) , all to some extent locate the construction of a text in the act of reading and interpretation by the individual. Similarly, Louise M. Rosenblatt in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* [1978] (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994) locates the construction of a text in the transactional relationship between reader and author in which new texts are constructed and mediated in each act of reading and determined by the socio-historical contexts and individual circumstances in which a text is received.

[4] See Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p.xiii.

[5] See also *ibid,* pp.4-12.

[6] See Stanley Fish, 'Introduction', pp.14-7 and the 'Interpretive Communities' section of 'Interpreting the Variorum', pp.167-73 in *Is There a Text in this Class?*

[7] For example, see Hugh Wilder's criticism of Fish's notion of 'interpretive communities' in 'Intentions and the Very Idea of Fiction', *Philosophy and Literature* 12.1 (1988), pp.70-9.

[8] For example, see Vincent B. Leitch's introduction to 'Hans Robert Jauss' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (London and New York: W.W Norton and Company, 2010), p.1405.

[9] Patrocinio Schweickart, 'Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading' in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio Schweickart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp.31-62 (p. 51).

[10] Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.50.

[11] Atwood singles out Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*, George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* and Oscar Wilde's *Salome* as particular texts of early influence that negatively affected her identity as a female author.

[12] Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Prospects for Women in Writing' (1986) in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1989), pp.176-8 (pp. 177-8).

[13] Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.xiii. For a broad overview of Martindale's defence of the need for the use of theories of reception within classical studies and its historical and contemporary detractors see 'Five Concepts in Search of an Author: Suite', pp.1-34 and 'Postscript: Redeeming the Text, or a Lover's Discourse' pp.101-7 in *Redeeming the Text*.

[14] *Ibid.,* p.xiii.

[15] *Ibid.,*p.35.

[16] See for example, 'Rereading Virgil: Divertimento' in *ibid.*, pp.35-54.

[17] The importance of Martindale's *Redeeming the Text* to the development of classical reception studies over the last twenty years is discussed in a special volume of the *Classical Receptions Journal* marking the twentieth anniversary of its publication. See Lorna Hardwick, ed., *Redeeming the Text – Twenty Years On. Classical Receptions Journal* 5.2 (2013).

[18] Martindale states that it is not his intention to 'decry the study of a wide range of cultural artefacts (there are many more good things in the world than the canon knows) [...] It is simply to say that we inform ourselves by the company we keep [...] in general material of high quality is better company for our intellects and hearts than the banal or the quotidian.[...] Reception can still serve the interest of a wider range of those receivers than classics has traditionally acknowledged, by recovering or rescuing diverse receptions' See Charles Martindale, 'Introduction: Thinking Through Reception' in *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, ed. by Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p.11.

[19] Lorna Hardwick, *Reception Studies: Greece and Rome. New Surveys in the Classics, No. 33.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.3.

[20] See 'Reception Within Antiquity' in *ibid*., pp.12-31. See also Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray, 'Introduction: Making Connections' pp.1-3 and 'Part I: Reception within Antiquity and Beyond' pp.11-72 in *A Companion to Classical Receptions,* ed. by Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011).

[21] Hardwick, *Reception Studies,* p.4.

[22] For a closer examination of the influence of the Irigaray/Cixous debate on feminist approaches to rewriting see *LWM*, pp.3-7. See also Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp.148 passim.

[23] Harold Bloom, 'A Meditation upon Priority and A Synopsis' in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.5.

[24] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p.14. In her 'Introduction: Twenty Years on *A Literature of Their Own* Revisited' in *A Literature of their Own: British Woman Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp.xv-xvi, Elaine Showalter acknowledges the misgivings of later feminist critics who argued that her model of the emergence of a female literary tradition as a response to women's exclusion from, and rejection of, dominant patriarchal literary representation implies her complicity with Bloom's 'Anxiety of Influence'. She defends her position by arguing that her 'hypothetical model of a chain of female literary influence needs to be understood as a historically specific strategy rather than a dogmatic absolute'. p.xvi.

[25] See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar 'Infection in Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship' in *MWA,* pp.45-92 (pp.46-53).

[26] Sigmund Freud, 'Lecture 33: Femininity' in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Standard Edition Vol.22,* ed. and tr. by J. Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), pp.112-35 (p.132).

[27] See also FN4, p.289; Naomi Schor's reading of the Ariadne myth in 'For a Restricted Thematics: Writing, Speech, and Difference in *Madame Bovary*' in *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory, and French Realist Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.3-5; and Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[28] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. 2, tr. by D.E Hill (Oxford: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1992), 8:172- 6, pp.110-1.

[29] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image – Music – Text* (London: Fontana Press, HarperCollins, 1993), pp.142-8 (p.145).

[30] *Ibid.,*pp.142-6.

[31] *Ibid.,* p.142.

[32] See Mariko Namba Walter, *Shamanism: Eurasia, Africa, Vol.* 2 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), p.133.

[33] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', pp.142-3.

PART II

1. THE RESCUE OF ARACHNE

RESCUING THE FAIRIES IN 'LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE': THE INTERTEXTUAL
EVOLUTION OF A FAIRYTALE

In this case study I examine the structural, thematic and intertextual relationships
between Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche', in *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*
(Second Century CE); Marie Catherine d'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales 'Le
Mouton', 'L'Oiseau bleu' and 'La Chatte blanche' (1697-1698); Gabrielle de
Villeneuve's 'La Belle et la Bête' (1740); Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont's
'La Belle et la Bête' (1756); and Angela Carter's two feminist rewritings of 'Beauty
and the Beast' –'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' and 'The Tiger's Bride' in *The Bloody
Chamber* (1979) – as the intertextual evolution of myth into fairytale. The structural
and thematic similarities that exist between Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche', the many
folk and fairytales that use the animal bride or groom as a central theme, and the
eighteenth century French literary fairytale 'La Belle et la Bête' have been well
documented, for example by scholars using the Aarne-Thompson Index.[1]
D'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales appropriate the motifs, narrative structures
and archetypal characters of Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche' to speak to historically
specific concerns with women's reduced social standing and their loss of political
power and influence in late seventeenth century France.[2]

 'Cupid and Psyche' is an imbedded tale within Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*,
narrated by an old woman to Charite, an aristocratic young girl who has been
abducted by robbers. Charite complains bitterly about her fate and her loss of the
comforts that she is accustomed to, and threatens to kill herself (4.24-5). She relates
her own tale of how she was abducted by robbers on her wedding day and recounts
the upsetting dream she had in which she saw the robbers kill her fiancé Tlepolemus.
She fears that her dream is in fact a vision and grows hysterical (4.26-7). The old
woman argues that dreams and visions are rarely what they appear to be; images of
death and sacrifice may portend good fortune, while dreams of feasting and passion
warn of a coming sickness of body and soul (4.27). The story of 'Cupid and Psyche'
is told to 'divert' (*avocare*), in the sense of causing to turn away or dissuade Charite
from her fear that her dream will come true: '[...] sed ego te narrationibus lepidis

anilibusque fabulis protinus avocabo' (But I will tell you a charming story; an old wives' tale that will talk you out of this straightaway) [*GA*, 4:27, p.90]. I argue that d'Aulnoy reads 'Cupid and Psyche' as a warning against the ambiguity of prophecy and the dangers of accepting your fate.

In 'Cupid and Psyche', a king and queen have three daughters. The two eldest are attractive but the youngest daughter Psyche is so exceptionally beautiful that people begin to worship her in place of Venus. In a jealous rage Venus commands her son Cupid to avenge her by making Psyche fall in love with the poorest, ugliest man he can find (4.28-31). Meanwhile, Psyche finds herself isolated and ostracised from society. While all men worship her, they fear her terrible beauty and neither prince nor common man dares to ask for her hand in marriage (4.32). Psyche's beauty marks her difference from her sisters and this defining quality forces her into exile and isolation. Psyche's father goes to the oracle of Apollo at Miletus to pray for a husband for his shunned daughter. The oracle tells the king that he must dress Psyche for a marriage with death and make an offering of her on a high cliff face. He is also told that he should not dare to hope for a human groom for his daughter; he will be a wild, snake-like beast that flies over the whole world and saps the strength of everyone in it. The king and queen misinterpret the oracle's instruction and prophecy and make preparations to sacrifice their daughter to a monstrous beast. This beast is in fact the god Cupid; and the lust and infatuation caused by the prick of Cupid's arrows is the power that even gods fear (4.32-3). Cupid has become so enchanted by Psyche's beauty that he has forgotten Venus' plan to make Psyche fall in love with an ugly man of low social status, and decides to take Psyche as his own wife.

Psyche embraces her role as sacrificial virgin and willingly joins her marriage/funeral procession because she knows that her very existence has caused offence to Venus. She believes that her death is the only way to placate the goddess. Psyche stands on the edge of the cliff and is transported by the zephyr wind to Cupid's ornate palace set in the valley of flowers below the cliff face (4.34-45). Psyche soon falls in love with her invisible husband and promises him that she will never reveal his secret or attempt to find out his true identity (5.4-6). Her sisters, jealous of her newfound wealth and perfect husband, remind Psyche of the oracle's prophecy and convince her that she has married a great bloodthirsty snake who is just waiting for pregnancy to make her a fatter and richer dish before he eats her

whole. They tell Psyche that she must discover her husband's true form so that she can cut his head off (5.7-21). Cupid is woken when Psyche looks at him while he sleeps and a drop of oil from Psyche's lamp burns his chest. Injured and angry at his wife's betrayal he flees back to his mother Venus, who imprisons him (5.22-5).

Venus sets Psyche three impossible tasks which she must complete in order to prove herself worthy of Cupid. Psyche must sort a pile of seeds into four different piles of wheat, millet, barley and poppy; bring Venus a tuft of golden fleece from a herd of wild and vicious sheep who delight in murdering humans with their poisonous bite; and collect water from the river Styx in a small crystal vessel. Psyche is aided in these tasks by a variety of animals. Venus knows that Psyche could not have completed the tasks on her own and suspects Cupid of sending the animals to assist her. She charges Psyche with the task of retrieving a vial of divine beauty from Proserpina in the underworld, a task that Cupid cannot help her with and she will have to complete alone. Psyche fails in her task because she cannot resist taking the potion. The vial actually contains the sleep of death and transforms Psyche into a 'sleeping corpse'. Cupid escapes to rescue Psyche and helps her to complete her last trial (6.10-21).

The story of Psyche mirrors that of Charite: she is also a beautiful lost girl (4.23); like Psyche she finds herself alone in the world because her parents have failed to protect her; and she too fears that she has lost her husband forever (4.26-7). The tale of 'Cupid and Psyche' is offered to her as reassurance that hope is to be found even in the darkest and most desperate of situations. But the story also plays a more important function: it changes Charite's perception of herself as a passive victim. Charite saves herself by jumping on the back of Lucius (the ass) as he is escaping (6.27). After a long journey in which they are again captured, Charite is reunited with Tlepolemus who kills the thieves. All three make it safely back to the town (7.11-3).

D'Aulnoy appropriates the environments and settings in which the events of 'Cupid and Psyche' take place. Cupid's ornate and enchanted palace complete with enchanted servants; the cliff face to which Psyche is brought to be sacrificed; the flowering valley beneath it; and the settings of Psyche's quests are all clearly recognisable environments of d'Aulnoy's fairyland.[3] D'Aulnoy closely models her tales on the narrative structure and motifs of 'Cupid and Psyche', and uses it, as well as Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* as a source for the classical setting of her animal bride

and groom tales to create an idealised world (set in the distant past) that is ruled by women. However, she manipulates the themes of exile; sacrifice and rescue; falling in love with a beast; Psyche's betrayal of her husband; and the quest to win him back, to highlight the restrictive codes of female virtue and behaviour that undermine the social and political position of women in late seventeenth-century France. It is in d'Aulnoy's animal groom tales that Cupid first becomes the beast prince. This transformation from invisible god to animal or beast is the result of a play on the Oracle of Apollo's description of Cupid as a snake-like beast in Apuleius' text. D'Aulnoy's transformation of the god to beast makes the sexual threat to her Psyche characters more explicit; yet her animal grooms are often chosen to undermine the sexual threat that the mythical beast poses to the young brides.

It is easy to interpret Psyche as a passive and easily manipulated, self-consciously suffering innocent virgin. However, d'Aulnoy reads the character of Psyche quite differently, foregrounding her bravery and determination in fighting against her fate as a sacrificial virgin. D'Aulnoy similarly appropriates the trials of Psyche in order to explore women's complicity with patriarchal ideals of proper female behaviour. In her *Contes des Fées*, d'Aulnoy stages the female writers of the French salon as fairies whose words offer resistance to patriarchal states, and have the power to change the lives of mortal women. The power of d'Aulnoy's fairies to intervene in the lives of mortal women for good or ill replaces the function of classical goddesses.

We might imagine that, as female authors writing in the tradition of the French literary fairytale, Villeneuve and Beaumont might continue to use the image of the fairy and d'Aulnoy's appropriations of 'Cupid and Psyche' to call for the cultural and political freedom of women. I will show that Villeneuve's and Beaumont's versions of 'La Belle et la Bête' in fact function as consecutive filters and mediators of d'Aulnoy's work that strip away d'Aulnoy's positive representations of female power and creativity to the point where the fairy becomes an archetypal image used to authorise a highly didactic moral content. I argue that the differences in the use of classical allusion and of the fairy in Villeneuve's and Beaumont's versions of 'La Belle et la Bête' is representative of an increasingly patriarchal shift in attitude to the place of women in society that occurred in the years between their versions of the tale.

Beaumont's highly moralistic version of 'La Belle et la Bête' is the canonical version of the fairytale we know today, the most frequently translated, reprinted and adapted in fairytale collections intended for children because of its compact and didactic form. The continued success of this variant of 'La Belle et la Bête' that propagates such a damaging ideal of passive femininity and female sexuality has deeply troubled some feminist critics of the fairytale, who argue that the tale acts to acculturate young girls to narrowly defined gender roles.[4] The feminist critic and author Angela Carter compared Apuleius' construction of femininity in the character of Psyche to that of Beaumont's Beauty:

> Pre-Christian, Mediterranean Psyche is silly and sexy [...][But Apuleius'] Psyche is also admirably brave and determined, [...] Whereas [Beaumont's] French, eighteenth century Beauty is clean, tidy, a good housekeeper, prone to self-sacrifice and susceptible to moral blackmail.[5]

Carter interprets Apuleius' Psyche in much the same way as d'Aulnoy; she values Psyche as an archetype of female bravery. This was later undermined by Villeneuve and Beaumont's 'desire to transform' the literary French fairytale into 'parables of instruction' in which 'Beauty's happiness is founded on her abstract quality of virtue'.[6] I see Angela Carter's two rewritings of 'La Belle et la Bête' in *The Bloody Chamber* as an attempt to recover and restore a more positive interpretation of the Psyche/Beauty figure. Carter identifies with the reading and rewriting practices of d'Aulnoy as evidence of an early feminist tradition that has been obscured by later impositions of patriarchal value on the text of 'La Belle et la Bête'.

The Bloody Chamber is Carter's second collection of feminist fairytales, written in the 'gothic mode'. In her introduction to the 1996 edition, Helen Simpson argues that the collection 'is often – wrongly – described' as a collection of retellings of 'traditional fairytales given a subversive feminist twist' or as a collection of 'adult' fairytales. She quotes Carter as saying that: 'My intention was not to do "versions" [...] but to extract the latent content from the traditional stories and to use it as the beginnings of new stories'.[7] While Carter's fairytales are not exactly 'retellings', they are 'subversive' and 'feminist'. They could be more accurately described as feminist rewritings of the 'latent content' of traditional tales.

Using Carter's own terms for her rewriting practice we might say that she reads d'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales looking for 'latent' aspects of d'Aulnoy's fairy and for the Psyche archetype that can be 'extracted' and

appropriated for use in her characterisations of Beauty in 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' and 'The Tiger's Bride'. This is done in order to produce positive representations of female bravery, sexuality and creativity that challenge the persistent and pervasive image of the passive self-sacrificing virgin in literary representation. Through the use of ekphrastic representations of d'Aulnoy's tales in 'The Tiger's Bride' and 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon', Carter aligns her Beauty characters with the deeds of d'Aulnoy's fairies. In doing so she claims her characters' direct descent from d'Aulnoy's fairies and shows herself to be following in the same tradition of subversive female authorship.

I. D'AULNOY'S CLASSICAL FAIRYSCAPE: FAIRY *VRAISEMBLANCE* AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF OPPOSITIONAL SPACE

My analysis begins in the politically and socially volatile environment of salon culture in seventeenth-century France. The war being waged in the literary salon was one based on a desire for female inclusion in the political realm. Whether as a result of being on the losing side of a personal or political war, what connected all the women involved in the literary production within salon culture was the sense that they had been unjustly punished, exiled and stripped of any kind of power within society that might give them some right to self-determination. Between the years 1640 and 1715 there were over two hundred women actively involved in literary production within the relative freedom of the salon environment, where they found a way to voice their dissent.[8] Women writers were responsible for seventy-four of the one hundred and twelve fairytales produced in the first phase or 'vogue' of fairytale production (1690-1715).[9] The prevalence of women's literary production during this period can be attributed to a confluence of socio-political and historical events that first empowered aristocratic women and then later denied them the social freedoms and the political power they had enjoyed during the Fronde.[10]

The Fronde was the name given to the series of civil wars that took place between 1648 and 1653 and which tore apart the strict societal code of the French aristocracy. For the first time women found themselves in possession of real political and military power.[11] Faith E. Beasley notes many instances of the important role

played by women during the civil war; the military and political feats of the duchesse de Montpensier, for example, had a lasting influence on the cultural memory:

> Her principal feats include leading her troops into battle to conquer Orléans for the *frondeur* or princely party and even helping them to conquer Paris. She is etched into historical memory as the figure on top of the Bastille ordering the troops to fire upon those of the future sun king.[12]

When the war ended most of these women were sent into exile. Stripped of the political influence they once possessed – and consumed by a fermenting resentment of the new regime – many of these women turned their attention to literature and engaged in 'wag[ing] a [literary] war' against the state.[13]

After Louis XIV came to full power in 1661, all 'official' cultural products such as literature, art, music, architecture and even history were appropriated and utilised as propaganda to the glory of the Sun King. The development of the fairytale genre and the female-led, literate and aristocratic oral salon culture it grew out of were at the forefront of opposition to the absolutism of Louis XIV's rule. Although both men and women took part in the salon – which later became a recognised cultural institution for both sexes – it is important to note that the salons of the seventeenth century, unlike those of the eighteenth, were initiated and largely dominated by women.[14] It is therefore unsurprising that the state grew increasingly hostile in its attitudes towards 'women as creative agents of culture and specifically literature'. Lewis C. Seifert argues that this was 'part of a broader movement' in absolutist France to 'relegate women to the domestic sphere' through the strict legal regulation of 'their matrimonial status'. It is also reflective of a 'discursive trend' in denouncing 'the moral corruption of aristocratic culture in general and, especially, women's role in it'.[15] The moral and legal attack on women during the later years of Louis XIV's rule is known as the *grand renfermement* (great confinement).[16]

In her animal bride and groom tales, d'Aulnoy explicitly confronts the legal and social confinement of women that denied them the social, political and legal freedoms they had possessed during the years of the Fronde. Madame d'Aulnoy was not one of the *Frondeuses* exiled for their part in the political upheaval. However, her personal history reveals the story of a woman similarly exiled to the fringes of aristocratic society as punishment for her involvement in failed plots against the patriarchal power of the home and state. In 1666, at the age of sixteen she was forced

into an arranged marriage to François de la Motte, Baron d'Aulnoy, a man thirty years her senior. De la Motte was a notorious privateer and gambler, who may have been physically abusive towards his wife. Their first two children died in infancy.[17]

In 1669, d'Aulnoy, with the help of her mother, attempted to get rid of her husband by implicating him in a plot against the king. De la Motte counter-accused his wife, her mother and their respective lovers, Jacques-Antoine de Courboyer and Charles de la Moizière, of involvement in the same plot. Both men were executed, her mother fled to England, and d'Aulnoy was arrested and spent some time in the Bastille, before escaping into exile. In 1685 she was granted permission to return to Paris where she presided over her own salon in the rue Saint-Benoît. This was not the end of the intrigue and scandal that seems to have followed d'Aulnoy most of her adult life. In 1699 she was accused of being involved in a conspiracy to murder Claude Ticquet, a member of parliament. It is unclear precisely what part d'Aulnoy played in arranging Ticquet's assassination but she was implicated in the conspiracy during the trial of his wife Angélique Ticquet, d'Aulnoy's friend and fellow salonnière. Angélique was executed for the attempted assassination of her husband but d'Aulnoy was eventually cleared of any involvement.[18]

Despite the state's increasing hostility, women continued to occupy a dominant position in the realm of the salons. The question of precisely what constituted 'correct' social behaviour and conduct, good taste and the correct use of language were central to the discussions that took place there. Underpinning these discussions was the concept of *vraisemblance*. This was the primary criterion by which literary works were judged to have been successful: a work might be judged a success if it presented a moral truth or represented a reality that had a 'likeness' or relevance to the real world.

Seifert argues that the critical concept of *vraisemblance* within the context of seventeenth century France had ontological ramifications: since moral *vraisemblance* was determined by the 'polarization of characters according to moral and physical traits (for example, good vs. bad, industry vs. laziness, beauty vs. ugliness, and so on)', the way in which such traits manifested themselves in literature and the determination of their *vraisemblance* is 'fundamentally ideological'. The concept of *vraisemblance* tended to propagate the beliefs and ideologies of 'the most powerful by constructing to their own advantage what is perceived as truth [...] Not surprisingly, the history of this critical notion in seventeenth century France is that of

an overly political construct by which the absolutist state exerted control over cultural production'.[19]

However, within the reading community of the literary salon, what constituted moral, true-to-life literary representation – and the best way to achieve it – was not entirely agreed upon. Discussions on the concept of *vraisemblance* informed the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. Traditional concepts of *vraisemblance* advocated by the *Anciens* dictated the use of coded imagery that drew on classical literature to represent moral virtues. In contrast, the *Modernes* argued that truth in literature would be better served by avoiding the imitation of classical texts. They rejected classicism on the basis that modern Christian people possessed a superior sense of morality and that modern scholarship had reached the point where it surpassed classical knowledge.[20]

The development of the French literary fairytale was bound up in this debate. The *Modernes* Fontenelle and Perrault promoted the fairytale as a new vernacular genre that was capable of presenting a moral and aesthetic *vraisemblance* superior to that of classical myth.[21] In the preface to his *Contes en Vers* (1695), Perrault evokes the archetypal image of the nurse /governess to place his tale Donkey-Skin in an alternative modern vernacular folk tradition: 'Aussi voyons-nous qu'Apulée le fait raconter par une vieille femme à une jeune fille que des voleurs avaient enlevée, de même que celui de Peau d'Ane est conté tous les jours à des enfants par leurs gouvernantes' ('Thus we note that Apuleius has it told by [*sic*] an old woman to a young girl, who has been abducted by robbers, just as the story of Donkey-Skin is narrated daily to children by their governesses'). He emphasises Donkey-Skin's similarity to 'Cupid and Psyche', but argues that the style and morality of his tale is far more morally correct and instructive, pointing to his deliberate choice of 'une morale utile' ('a useful moral code') told in a clear and playful language that 'instruit et divertit tout ensemble' ('instructs and entertains at the same time'). Perrault reproaches the *Anciens* for valuing the 'authority' of classical fables and for expecting his tales to follow the 'example of antiquity'. He claims that where 'Cupid and Psyche' serves to corrupt women through 'mauvais exemple' ('bad example'), 'Donkey-Skin' shows women that no man is 'si brutal'('so brutal') or 'si bizarre' ('so bizarre') that he cannot be tamed by 'la patience d'une honnête femme' ('the patience of a respectable woman').[22] The frontispieces to Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l'Oye (Stories or*

Tales from Times Past with Morals: Tales of Mother Goose) also employ images of 'Mother Goose' as a poor peasant woman telling stories to the young children at her feet as she spins wool or as an old nurse telling stories to her charges in order to authorise the moral content of the tales as following in a vernacular oral tradition.[23]

In contrast to Perrault, d'Aulnoy uses classical allusions in her tales to explore and discuss the repercussions of the moral and aesthetic conflict of the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* for contemporary women. Her references to classical myth – in conjunction with her use of the storytelling fairy as a classically-influenced archetypal model of female power – formed her own concept of *vraisemblance*: one that reflected the truth of women's lived experience and challenged the misogyny of the cultural and social conventions of the French court. The use of classical myth allows d'Aulnoy's tales to conform to traditional conventions of taste and courtly conduct. However, the dissenting voice of her fairytales resonates with a concern for the material circumstances of aristocratic women that can be directly linked to her own experiences with arranged marriage, teenage motherhood and infant mortality, and her failed attempts to rebel against the patriarchal law of state and home.

Because d'Aulnoy's fairies belong to a fictional universe, set in the distant classical past, their behaviour and conduct is not constrained by the patriarchal absolutism of Louis XIV's court and the misogynistic morality of the *Modernes*. D'Aulnoy's classical fairyland functions as an oppositional space in which the misogynistic implications of the *querelle* are discussed and explored. The conversational quality of d'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales can be attributed to her desire to imitate the aristocratic and learned orality of the French *salonnières*. This opposes Perrault's staging of the female storyteller as a peasant or nurse figure in support of his ideal of the fairytale as a new vernacular genre.

In his introduction to *Beauties, Beasts and Enchantment*, Jack Zipes describes the process by which fairytales began to emerge in the salon environment as a way of encouraging intellectual debate. Zipes points to the influence of a vernacular folk tradition of parlour games based on storytelling that became popular amusements in salon culture from the mid-seventeenth century onward. The idea of such games was to tell a story based on a folk tale and embellish it by improving it with witty remarks and adapting it to the point where it conformed to the conventions of aesthetic and moral *vraisemblance* and was considered to have

correctly addressed issues of primary societal concern such as class and marriage, in a process known as *bagatelle*:

> The adroitness of the narrator was measured by the degree with which she was inventive and natural; the audience responded politely with a compliment; then another member of the audience was requested to tell a tale, not in direct competition with the other teller, but in order to continue the game and vary the possibilities for invention and symbolic expression.[24]

The game served as a forum in which the content and narrative of the literary fairytale was developed before it was ever written down and put into print. The refined and courtly language of the written literary fairytale and the staging of its female tale tellers as fairies recalls the oral literary culture of the salon and the game of bagatelle. Thus the relationship between oral and written fairytales must be seen as symbiotic.[25]

By 1697, when d'Aulnoy came to write her animal bride and groom tales, the fairytale was widely valued as an entertainment. However, for its female participants, it had a more serious function: the process of bagatelle afforded women a dialogue with each other and an opportunity to discuss their position within society and an arena in which to voice their dissent. The bagatelle was considered by its female performers and authors to be an aristocratic and refined mode of storytelling and they were very careful to disassociate themselves from Perrault's representation of the storytelling female as peasant or lower class. In *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, Zipes explores the way in which d'Aulnoy's term *Les Contes des fées* became 'viral' in salon culture and in the literature produced within its environs. He argues that it was only after d'Aulnoy used it as the title for her fairytale collection in 1697 (or possibly slightly earlier in the salon) that other writers began to use the term and use fairies as the central protagonists in their tales:[26]

> The term's usage was a declaration of difference and resistance. It can be objectively stated that there is no other period in Western literary history when so many fairies, like powerful goddesses, were the determining figures in most of the plots of tales written by women – and also by some men.[27]

One of the most significant ways in which female fairytale writers signalled their difference to their male counterparts was through identifying themselves and other *salonnières* as fairies when they told and wrote their fairytales. Through this

identification they explicitly disassociated themselves from the (commonly male-authored) construction of female orality as the purview of the peasant or servant storyteller, used by the *Modernes* to promote the moral and aesthetic superiority of vernacular folk traditions.

In *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale*, Elizabeth Wanning Harries suggests that the *salonnières* used images of the aristocratic woman as fairy to promote themselves as literate storytellers: 'The frontispieces of volumes of tales women wrote in the 1690's often seem to be designed to contest the ideological force of Perrault's' representation of female orality'.[28] Several editions of d'Aulnoy's tales figure the courtly aristocratic woman as a fairy or sibyl (1698 and 1711) in long flowing robes and a turban, who is either writing or reading her tales to her audience. In early frontispieces the audience is made up of children, but by the 1725 Amsterdam edition of d'Aulnoy's *Nouveaux Contes des fées*, the audience is almost entirely made up of other aristocratic women.[29] Female fairytale authors tended to use their fairy identities to associate themselves with a specifically female, literate, refined and aristocratic mode of oral storytelling. The stories they told and wrote were not presented as purely instructional entertainments (as Perrault did). They claimed to address the great issues of the time.

The comtesse de Murat was a contemporary of Mme d'Aulnoy. Her introduction to *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques* (1699) is revealing regarding the self-image of the *salonnières* after the publication of d'Aulnoy's *Les Contes des fées.* Murat dedicates the book to 'Les Fées Modernes' (The Modern Fairies), thus associating her female contemporaries with the archetypal image of the fairy. I believe the use of the word 'Modernes' here is deliberately ambivalent: it implies a belief in the importance of female writers to the progress of French literature and evokes the desire for change and the dawn of a new era. However, in the context of the *querelle* the term also implies the repressive atmosphere of absolutism and codes of conduct of the world that she and her contemporaries inhabit. Murat displays a resistance to these conditions by associating her modern fairies with a new way of writing that uses the conventional codes of *vraisemblance* – i.e. beauty vs. ugliness, eloquence vs. ignorance – to challenge the moral and aesthetic assumptions that underpin their definitions. Murat's modern fairies seek to give beauty and eloquence to the supposedly ugly and ignorant, through their storytelling. Murat is very careful

to distinguish her modern fairies from the fairies of folk tradition and to disassociate the aristocratic female writer from the image of the peasant female storyteller presented on the frontispiece of Perrault's Mother Goose Tales:

> Les anciennes Fées vos devancières ne passent plus que pour des badines auprès de vous. Leurs occupations étoient basses & puériles, ne s'amusant qu'aux Servantes [*sic*] & aux Nourrices. […] C'est pourquoi tout ce qui nous reste aujourd'hui de leurs Faits & Gestes ne sont que des Contes de ma Mère l'Oye. […] Mais pour vous MESDAMES, vous avez bien pris une autre route : Vous ne vous occupez que de grandes choses, dont les moindres sont de donner de l'esprit à ceux & celles qui n'en ont point, de la beauté aux laides, de l'éloquence aux ignorants, de richesses aux pauvres, & de l'éclat aux choses les plus obscures.

> The old fairies, your predecessors, were just gossips compared to you. Their occupations were low and childish, amusing only for servants and nurses. [...] That is why all that remains today of their deeds and actions are only tales of Mother Goose. But you, my ladies, you have chosen another way: you occupy yourselves only with great things, the least of which are to give wit to the men and women who have none, beauty to the ugly, eloquence to the ignorant, riches to the poor, and lustre to the most hidden things.[30]

When female fairytale authors rejected the cultural association of female storytelling with low class illiterate orality, they severed their link to an authorising vernacular tradition. However, another authorising tradition was at hand. The tendency of female fairytale writers to refer to and represent themselves as sibyls and fairies in the salon and in the stories and frontispieces they produced, provided them with a link to the classical past through which they were able to create a positive representation of female authorship.

The ability of d'Aulnoy's fairies to change the fate of newborn girls through a speech act such as casting a spell or curse, or making a declaration, can be read as an allegory of the power of storytelling to change women's lives. D'Aulnoy conflates the power of the Fates with the aristocratic orality of the *salonnières* to create a representation of a female storyteller whose words have the power to create a real resistance to the patriarchal law of the mortal realm. In *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, Jack Zipes points to the similarities between the powers and behaviour of d'Aulnoy's fairies and those of classical goddesses. D'Aulnoy's fairies can claim direct descent from the Greco-Roman goddesses associated with childbirth, fertility and prophecy. Myths about the Greek Moirai and the Roman Parcae or Fates have long been considered to have formed 'the foundation of a western belief in fairies. In the Greek tradition, their basic function was to prophesy the destiny of a newborn. Eventually the Romans endowed Fauna with some of these qualities as the goddess of fertility and prophecy'.[31] Importantly, the Fates also operated above the laws of

the gods and men. These are all qualities that d'Aulnoy bestows upon her fairies. Jane Merrill Filstrup notes the importance of birth and name giving ceremonies in d'Aulnoy's tales as 'the initial peripeteia [...] typically as an awryness either in the pregnancy desire of a previously childless woman or in the conferring of blessings by the fairies'.[32]

The fairies in d'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales all – for better or worse – concern themselves with the fate of the Beauty/Psyche character, either by bestowing gifts or curses upon her at her birth or by empowering her in her quest to rescue her would-be husband. D'Aulnoy's fairies also operate outside the moral and social laws of the mortal realm. Like Venus in 'Cupid and Psyche', these fairies can be violent and jealous towards mortal women and are responsible for setting the impossible tasks that the Psyche figure must complete, but they frequently act to change the fate of mortal or half-mortal women who have suffered under the patriarchal laws and dictates of the mortal realm. D'Aulnoy appropriates the powers of the Fates to prophesy the lives of men and women through the act of spinning, as an allegory of female authorship and creativity.

The specific sources from which d'Aulnoy gained her knowledge of classical literature and myth are unclear. While the French *salonnières* were well read, they were largely self-educated and this rarely extended to the learning of classical languages. Women's access to formal education was extremely limited in seventeenth century France. It was common for young aristocratic girls to be educated in a convent, where the curriculum was limited to reading and writing in French, basic arithmetic and needlework.[33] D'Aulnoy's memoirs confirm that she was educated in a convent in Normandy until her marriage at the age of sixteen.[34] If she did learn classical languages it must have been at a later date. There is evidence that two of d'Aulnoy's female contemporaries did know classical languages.[35] However, d'Aulnoy did not keep a reading diary and I can find no primary or secondary evidence to confirm what she was reading or her level of competence in classical languages. It is possible that she knew Latin and could read the original Latin text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*), but it seems more likely that she would have read both texts in French translation.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was very popular throughout Europe during this time and a number of French translations – Nicholas Renouard's *Les Métamorphoses*

d'Ovide (1637); Pierre Du Ryer's *Les Métamorphoses d'Ovide* (1677); and Isaac de Benserade's *Métamorphoses en rondeaux* (1676, reprinted in 1679 and 1697) – were in wide circulation during the late seventeenth century. Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* was also very popular and one of the most widely read classical texts during this era. It is likely that d'Aulnoy's written sources for 'Cupid and Psyche' were Jean de Montlyard's *L'Asne d'or ou les Métamorphoses de Luce Apulée Platonique* (1602 and reprinted throughout the 1600s) and Jean de La Fontaine's version of 'Cupid and Psyche': *Les amours de Psyché et de Cupidon* (1669). D'Aulnoy may also have had access to classical literature through other cultural sources: she undoubtedly heard recitations of classical literature in the salon. It is also interesting to note that by the late seventeenth century there was already a long tradition of stage adaptations of 'Cupid and Psyche' in plays, spectacles and ballets produced for the French court.[36]

The classical image in d'Aulnoy's tales is always double. D'Aulnoy reads Apuleius's 'Cupid and Psyche' and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* looking for images and characters that could be used to represent conventional misogynistic codes of female virtue but could equally be reinterpreted as codes for women's behaviour that promote intellectual and political power as positive and desirable qualities that the aristocratic woman should aspire to. In *Fabulous Identities: Women's Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-Century France,* Patricia Hannon attributes this ambiguity of the representation of women in d'Aulnoy's work to the success of the *grand renfermement*'s valorisation of the domesticated and subservient woman. Hannon reads this ambiguity as evidence of d'Aulnoy's acceptance of women's subordinate position within society:

> […] the unmistakable puritanical tendencies that characterized the early modern state existed in tension with the sexual liberty practiced at both court and salon. And […] feminists […] like women's detractors, valorized the engendering woman and accepted her subordinate position in the family household. Seventeenth-century fairy tales, written in the last decade of the century, appeared at a time when interest on defining women's "nature" so as to better designate their place in the newly reinforced hierarchy, was at its height.[37]

Hannon's analysis does not take into account d'Aulnoy's deliberate juxtaposition of the behaviour of mortal and fairy women. The fairies that inhabit the classical story world of d'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales undermine the conventions of the seventeenth-century French court. Their behaviour differs significantly from that of

her Psyche/Beauty characters who find themselves trapped between conforming to courtly codes of behaviour and pursuing a quest for power and self-determination. This struggle is represented through the use of double codes of *vraisemblance* associated with her Psyche/Beauty characters, while the power of the fairies to aid or hinder the Psyche/Beauty figure in her quest for self-determination is associated with the power of classical goddesses. In this way, female power is always associated with classical women.

In 'Le Mouton', Merveilleuse is the youngest and most beloved of three sisters born to a king. All three are gifted and beautiful, but Merveilleuse's intelligence marks her difference from her sisters. It is her father's fear that Merveilleuse will use her intelligence to construe a plot to overthrow him which forces her into exile. She suffers not because of her extraordinary beauty, but because of her intelligence. D'Aulnoy maintains the opening structure of 'Cupid and Psyche', but changes the qualities of Psyche to make the tale speak to the 'exile' of the intelligent and educated women from positions of political power and influence.

A comparison of the opening passages of d'Aulnoy's 'Le Mouton' with 'Cupid and Psyche' reveals d'Aulnoy's close modelling of her tale on the classical text:

> Erant in quadam civitate rex et regina. Hi tres numero filias forma conspicuas habuere. Sed maiores quidem natu, quamvis gratissima specie, idonee tamen celebrari posse laudibus humanis credebantur. At vero puellae iunioris tam praecipua, tam praeclara pulchritudo nec exprimi ac ne sufficienter quidem laudari sermonis humani penuria poterat. (*GA*,4.28, p. 90)

> Once upon a time there were, in a certain city, a king and a queen, and they had daughters, three in number, astonishing in their loveliness. Though the two eldest by birth were exceptionally appealing in appearance, it was thought that their glories could be appropriately sung in human songs of praise. But as for the youngest – her beauty was so exceptional, so outstandingly radiant, that in the poverty of human speech it could not have its measure taken, could not even be approximately praised. (R. tr., 86)

In 'Le Mouton', d'Aulnoy authorises her tale by evoking the political power and influence that aristocratic women possessed during the Fronde. The opening line: 'Dans l'heureux temps où les fées vivaient, régnait un roi qui avait trois filles' ('In those happy times when fairies still existed, there reigned a king who had three daughters') [LM, 152, Z tr., 387] can be read as a political comment on women's loss of power and influence under the absolutist regime of Louis XIV. D'Aulnoy prefaces her story by describing it as one that took place in some unspecified time in the past that was 'happy' because powerful women still ruled. This matriarchal

society of fairies is then juxtaposed against the life of the princess Merveilleuse in the mortal realm under the rule of her father. The past becomes an idealised space, controlled and presided over by a matriarchal regime that opposes the reality of patriarchal cultural dominance in late seventeenth century France.

D'Aulnoy appropriates the character of Psyche – conventionally evoked as an archetypal image of perfect virginal beauty – and transforms her into the character of Merveilleuse. In keeping with the traditional conventions of *vraisemblance* she names her protagonist according to the traits that will drive the narrative of the tale. The girl's marvellous qualities are first described in conventional terms; the extent of her beauty, her charm and her generosity. The princess's character reflects the prescribed courtly appearance and the virtuous behaviour of women:

> Le roi son père lui donnait plus de robes et de rubans en un mois, qu'aux autres en un an ; et elle avait un si bon petit cœur, qu'elle partageait tout avec ses sœurs, de sorte que l'union était grande entre elles. (LM, 152)
> Her father gave her more gowns and ribbons in a month than he gave the others in a year, and she was so good natured that she shared everything with them so that there might be no misunderstandings. (Z tr., 387)

In sharing the gifts her father gives her with her sisters she is shown to be generous, unselfish and good-natured. Merveilleuse to all outward appearances is everything we might expect from a courtly lady.

In Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche' the tale begins with a king and queen who had three astonishingly beautiful daughters, the youngest of whom was the loveliest. D'Aulnoy adopts this character structure, but rejects its objectification of female characters, redefining the way coded images of *vraisemblance* should be interpreted. She emphasises that Merveilleuse and her sisters possess many qualities and should not simply be admired for being beautiful:

> Elles étaient belles et jeunes; elles avaient du mérite mais la cadette était la plus aimable et la mieux aimée; on la nommait Merveilleuse. (LM, 152)
>
> Young and beautiful, all three possessed considerable qualities. But the youngest was the most charming and the favourite by far. Indeed, they called her Merveilleuse. (Z tr., 387)

The father initially appears to love and admire Merveilleuse the most because of her superior wit and intelligence. The three princesses each wear a different coloured

satin gown, coded signifiers of their personal virtues. The King asks each of his children to explain why they chose the colour of their dress. The first princess says that she chose to wear green to show her joy and hope; the second chose blue to show her piety and Merveilleuse says that she chose white: 'parce que cela me sied mieux que les autres couleurs' (Because it suits me better than the other colours) [LM, 152, my tr.]. Merveilleuse's response makes a mockery of traditional codes of female virtue. Her white gown would conventionally signify her purity, innocence and virginity but she refuses to identify with these virtues. She has valued her intelligence and wit above her virginity. Making a joke at the expense of her sisters' and her fathers' expectations of female virtue has serious consequences. Her father begins to see her intelligence as a threat to his sovereignty.

He asks his daughters to tell him their dreams. The first dreams that her father gave her an exquisite golden gown encrusted with jewels. The second said that she dreamed he gave her a golden distaff so that she could make herself some shifts. The sisters' dreams function as metaphors for their material dependence on their father. The dream of the distaff signifies the second sister's piety, her loyalty to the home and patriarchal law of her father and state. In contrast, Merveilleuse's prophetic dream expresses no loyalty to her father or the state. She dreams that the king will bring her water to wash with on the day that he marries off her second sister. The king interprets this dream as Merveilleuse's intent to overthrow him and keep him as her servant (LM, 152-3). He commands his Captain of the guard to take her to the forest and kill her. The Captain cannot bring himself to kill her and sets her free. Merveilleuse finds herself exiled because the king sees her intelligence and her independence of spirit as a threat to his sovereignty. Merveilleuse's exile can be read as an allegory for the *grand renfermement*. D'Aulnoy suggests that Louis XIV exiled women to the domestic sphere because he knows that their intelligence and refusal to conform to patriarchal ideals of female virtue pose a serious threat to his sovereignty. In 'Le Mouton', the king eventually concedes that his daughter is better suited to rule than he is and he willingly gives up his crown. The story of Merveilleuse's exile and return to claim her throne can be read as an allegory of d'Aulnoy's belief that women's return to power is both destined and inevitable.

Driven by her exiled status, Merveilleuse finds comfort and regains her material wealth and status by becoming the lover of an enchanted ram. Merveilleuse eventually grows to love him, but initially she uses his home to rest and wait 'un sort

plus heureux' (a happier fate) [LM, 161, my tr.]. In 'Le Mouton', d'Aulnoy transforms the supposedly beast-like sexual threat of Cupid into an animal that her Psyche character finds completely unthreatening. During her exile in the forest Merveilleuse comes across a herd of enchanted sheep. The ram is lying in a pile of orange blossoms under a golden canopy. He is garlanded with flowers and wears ropes of enormous pearls and chains of diamonds. He sits overseeing his own salon of sheep who are busily chatting away and enjoying coffee, ices and strawberries and cream (LM, 84). D'Aulnoy rejects the image of the beast groom as a signifier of male carnal desire, by creating a parody of the refined – vaguely effeminate – courtly behaviour of men at the French court. When the ram first speaks to her she reacts with astonishment at finding a talking sheep:

> Merveilleuse demeura si étonnée, qu'elle resta presque immobile […] Approchez, divine princesse, lui dit-il, ne craignez point des animaux aussi doux et aussi pacifiques que nous. Quel prodige ! des moutons qui parlent ! (LM, 156)

> Merveilleuse was so astounded that she remained stock still. [...] "Approach, divine princess" he said. "You have nothing to fear from such gentle and peaceful animals of our kind."
> "What a wonder! A talking sheep!" (Z tr., 391)

Merveilleuse is astounded and amused by the ram but she is not threatened by him.

The sheep as beast is also an import from 'Cupid and Psyche'. In Psyche's second trial she must steal a tuft of golden fleece from a wild herd of vicious sheep whose bite will kill Psyche. The sheep's bite may be read as a metaphor for sexual devourment. Psyche needs what the sheep can provide her with, but she is also so terrified of them that she thinks of committing suicide rather than attempting to complete the task: 'perrexit Psyche volenter non obsequium quidem illa functura, sed requiem malorum praecipitio fluvialis rupis habitura' ('So Psyche set out, and of her own free will, but no, not intending to fulfil her orders but to find rest and release from her misfortunes in a suicide leap from a rock at the river's edge') [*GA,* 6.12, p.130, R tr.,121]. Like Psyche, Merveilleuse needs the ram because he can provide her with what she needs to survive. However, Merveilleuse does not view him as a predatory male. D'Aulnoy appropriates her animal beast from 'Cupid and Psyche' in order to undermine the traditional association of virginal innocence and purity with

the Psyche archetype, and the codes of female virtue that promote passive suffering as an ideal of femininity.

In 'Le Mouton', Merveilleuse's struggle against societal expectations of female behaviour is juxtaposed against the power of the evil fairy Ragotte. The ram tells the story of how Ragotte has cursed him. He was once a human king but has been transformed into a ram for five years and is now reduced to ruling over a kingdom of sheep because he rejected her declaration of love. Ragotte's power is ruled by her sexuality, her vindictive curse is evocative of the character and destructive power of Venus. While Ragotte's wrath is motivated by a perceived personal betrayal, it is also important to note that she punishes the ram by removing him from power and asserting that her power is far superior to anything he will ever possess. Just before she transforms the king into a ram, she wants him to understand just how powerful she is:

> [...] car encore que tu sois un grand roi, tu es moins qu'une fourmi devant une fée comme moi.[…] mes marmitons, quand je voudrai, seront plus puissants que toi, je demande ton cœur.[…] quand elle me dit, avec un sourire ironique: Je veux te faire connaître ma puissance ; tu es un lion à présent, tu vas devenir un mouton. (LM, 159-60)

> "[...] great king though you may be, [you] are less than an ant to a fairy like me" [...] "If I so desired it, my scullions would be more powerful than you. No, I demand your heart [...] the fairy said to me with an ironical smile, "I want you to become acquainted with my power. You're a lion right now, but soon you'll be a sheep." (Z tr., 394)

The power of the fairies evokes the sexualised power of Venus. This directly contravenes virginal purity and innocence as an ideal of femininity. D'Aulnoy's fairies – like the women of the Fronde – pose a very real threat to the patriarchal rule of the mortal realm. Merveilleuse can be seen to directly benefit from a fairy's interference in the world of humans. Ragotte's curse (unintentionally) allows Merveilleuse to survive and return to her own kingdom and take the throne. Before she returns home, for a time, Merveilleuse enjoys the domesticity, the entertainments of the salon, and the material wealth and comfort the ram can provide. However, when she hears that her sisters are to be married she grows jealous, not of their marriages, but because they are about to become queens. Merveilleuse becomes desperate to go to their weddings:

> […] me voilà sous la terre avec des ombres et des moutons, pendant que ma sœur va paraître parée comme une reine. […] De quoi vous plaignez-vous, madame, lui dit le roi des moutons, vous ai-je refusé d'aller à la noce? Partez quand il vous plaira, mais donnez-moi parole de revenir; si vous n'y consentez pas, vous m'allez voir expirer à vos pieds. (LM, 161-2)

> "[...] here I am underground, among ghosts and sheep, while my sister is about to be made a queen." [...] "What reason do you have to complain, madam?" asked the king of the sheep. "Have I refused you permission to attend the wedding? Depart as soon as you please. Only give me your word that you'll return. If you don't agree to that, I'll perish at you feet."
> (Z tr., 396)

D'Aulnoy subverts the jealous sister motif from 'Cupid and Psyche' in order to reject passivity as a female virtue. When Psyche hears that her sisters have heard about her being sacrificed and have come to the cliff face to look for her she begs Cupid to let her see her sisters: '"[...] sed istud etiam meis precibus, oro, largire et illi tuo famulo Zephyro praecipe simili vectura sorores hic mihi sistat."' ('"[...] yet be generous and grant to me my prayers, I pray you, this one more thing; give the order to your servant, the West Wind, to set my sisters here before me, conveyed as I was once conveyed."') [*GA*, 5.6, p.102, R tr., 95]. Cupid eventually agrees on the condition that she keeps his invisibility a secret. Psyche fails to hide this from her sisters. Jealous of her newfound wealth and status they convince her she has fallen in love the monster of the Oracle of Apollo's prophecy (5.16-22). D'Aulnoy places emphasis on Merveilleuse's self-determining character. Like Psyche, she must make a pact with the Cupid figure, by promising to return. Merveilleuse returns from the wedding of her first sister, but when she asks to leave again to attend her second sister's wedding, the ram foresees that she wants to leave him and that she will never come back:

> […] il n'eut pas la force de la refuser. Vous voulez me quitter, madame, lui dit-il; cet effet de mon malheur vient plutôt de ma mauvaise destinée que de vous. Je consens à ce que vous souhaitez, et je ne puis jamais vous faire un sacrifice plus complet.
>   Elle l'assura qu'elle tarderait aussi peu que la première fois. (LM, 162)

> [...] he did not have the heart to refuse her. "You desire to leave me, madam," he said, "and I must blame my sad fate for this unfortunate situation more than you. In consenting to your wish, I'll never make a greater sacrifice."
>   She assured him that she would return as quickly as she had the first time. (Z tr., 397)

Merveilleuse's rejection of her passive virginal identity means that she was never innocent enough to be threatened by male lust. She has always known the true nature of her lover and she cannot be bullied into betraying him. Merveilleuse leaves her

animal lover of her own accord. At the end of her second sister's wedding, her father recognises her and locks the gates to prevent her from escaping. He offers her a bowl of water to wash her hands. Merveilleuse declares that her dream has come true. The king asks her forgiveness for his cruelty and hands over his crown:

> Le roi l'aborda avec un grand respect et une soumission […] Ah! ma chère fille, dit-il, en l'embrassant et versant des larmes, pouvez-vous oublier ma cruauté? J'ai voulu votre mort, parce que je croyais que votre songe signifiait la perte de ma couronne. Il la signifiait aussi, continua-t-il; voilà vos deux sœurs mariées, elles en ont chacune une, et la mienne sera pour vous. Dans le même moment, il se leva et la mit sur la tête de la princesse, puis il cria: vive la reine Merveilleuse ! (LM, 163-4)

> The king approached her with a respectful, submissive air [...] "Ah, my dear daughter!" he cried, embracing her with tears in his eyes. "Can you ever forgive my cruelty? I wanted to take your life because I thought your dream predicted I would lose my crown. Indeed, it did just that, for now that your two sisters are married, each has a crown of her own. Therefore, mine shall be yours" Upon saying this, he rose and placed his crown on the princess's head, crying, "Long live Queen Merveilleuse!" (Z tr., 398)

'Le Mouton' is – at its heart – the story of a young woman's quest to fulfil her dream of gaining political power. To do so Merveilleuse must first overcome patriarchal society's hostility towards a woman who refuses to be defined by conventional standards of femininity. Merveilleuse becomes a queen by acquiring her father's throne and not through marriage to a beast who is later revealed to be a king under his animal skin. In d'Aulnoy's tale a beast will always be a beast and cannot be transformed into a handsome prince by the love of a good woman. Queen Merveilleuse has no further use for the ram and soon forgets him. He dies of a broken heart outside the gates of her palace. In the moral that follows the main body of 'Le Mouton' the narrator of the tale comments on the death of the ram. In a knowing, self-referential voice reminiscent of the *salonnières*, the fairy narrator questions the *vraisemblance* of traditional endings to romantic tragedies; for in reality, no one has ever died of a broken heart:

> *Sa fin même pourra nous paraître fort rare,*
> *Et ne convient qu'au roi Mouton.*
> *On n'en voit point dans ce canton*
> *Mourir quand leur brebis s'égare.*
>
> To us, even his end seems unusual,
> And only suitable for king Mouton.
> We do not see rams in this region
> Die when their ewes get lost.

<div align="right">(LM, 165, My tr.)</div>

D'Aulnoy's fairy narrator points to the absurdity of the belief that conventional literary constructs of *vraisemblance* in any way reflect a truth or standard of virtuous behaviour and courtly conduct. In 'Le Mouton', she employs the use of double codes of *vraisemblance* – in association with the Psyche/Beauty archetype – in order to represent the struggle women face to be recognised for their intellectual ability. In doing so, she suggests that there is more to a woman than the value patriarchal society places on her beauty. In the fairy Ragotte, d'Aulnoy suggests that there are more militant and vengeful ways to depose a king.

In 'L'Oiseau bleu' and 'La Chatte blanche', the association of the power of the fairies with classical goddesses is made explicit. In 'L'Oiseau bleu', the Psyche figure Florine is associated with the goddesses Diana and Flora. Florine's association with the latter functions as a double code of *vraisemblance* in which the interpretation of 'Beauty' as a coded representation of female virtue is shown to be entirely subjective. Florine's association with Diana is then used to align her political power with that of the fairies.

Florine is revered for her beauty, a signifier of her innocence and purity. This is juxtaposed against the ugliness of her stepsister Truitonne, an outward manifestation of her moral corruption. D'Aulnoy sets up a conventional binary representation of *vraisemblance*. However, by associating Florine with the goddess Flora she gives her Psyche character qualities of the fairy as goddess that mark her difference from other mortal women and signify her suitability to rule. Florine, like Merveilleuse and Psyche, finds herself exiled from her father's court because of her difference. Florine's beauty is not a conventional one. She is called Florine because her appearance resembles the goddess Flora: 'on la nommait Florine, parce qu'elle ressemblait à Flore, tant elle était fraîche, jeune et belle'. (She was called Florine, because she looked like Flora; she was so fresh, young and beautiful) [OB, 12].[38] Florine's appearance does not conform to the opulent high artifice of the standards of dress and behaviour at her father's court:

> On ne lui voyait guère d'habits magnifiques; elle aimait les robes de taffetas volant, avec quelques agrafes de pierreries et force guirlandes de fleurs, qui faisaient un effet admirable quand elles étaient placées dans ses beaux cheveux. (OB, 12)

> Seldom was this artless maid seen in splendid attire; she preferred light morning dresses of taffeta fastened with a few jewels and qualities of the finest flowers, which produced an admirable effect when twined with her beautiful hair. (Z tr., 322)

D'Aulnoy's description of Florine is drawn from Roman representations of the goddess Flora who is commonly depicted wearing plain, light summer clothes and a crown of flowers. Flora, like Diana, is a virgin fertility goddess but during the festival of Floralia she was also associated with sex and explicit sensuality.[39] By giving her Beauty/Psyche character the appearance and characteristics of the goddess Flora, d'Aulnoy questions the conventional female virtues signified by 'Beauty'. Florine's unusual goddess-like beauty is perceived by different people as either a conventional signifier of her innocence or as a signifier of her moral corruption and disregard for conventions of good taste. The gentlemen of the court are instructed by the queen to talk about Florine in the worst way they can imagine. They choose to attack the lack of virtue evident in her appearance:

> qu'elle était coquette, inégale, de méchante humeur; qu'elle tourmentait ses amis et ses domestiques, qu'on ne pouvait être plus malpropre, et qu'elle poussait si loin l'avarice, qu'elle aimait mieux être habillée comme une petite bergère, que d'acheter de riches étoffes de l'argent que lui donnait le roi son père. (OB, 14)

> She was coquettish, inconstant, bad tempered; she tormented her friends and servants, she could not be more unkempt, and she is so stingy that she'd rather dress like a little shepherdess than spend the allowance her father gives her on rich garments that befit her rank. (My tr.)

Florine's dress is considered a serious infringement of courtly conduct. It is seen to reflect her disrespect for her father, disloyalty, disregard for her rank and an open display of sexuality and emotion that contravenes courtly codes of female conduct. In contrast, King Charmant interprets her unusual goddess-like beauty as a signifier of her mildness and modesty:

> Non, disait-il en lui-même, il est impossible que le Ciel ait mis une âme si mal faite dans le chef-d'œuvre de la nature. [...] Quoi! Elle serait mauvaise avec cet air de modestie et de douceur qui enchante? Ce n'est pas une chose qui me tombe sous le sens; il m'est bien plus aisé de croire que c'est la reine qui la décrie ainsi. (OB, 14-5)

> "No," he said to himself, "it is impossible that Heaven would permit so worthless a soul to inhabit this masterpiece of nature. [...] How can she be ill tempered and coquettish with such an enchanting air of mildness and modesty? It makes no sense! I can much more easily imagine that it's the queen who's slandering her. (Z tr., 324)

'Beauty' as a code of *vraisemblance* is manipulated by the queen in order to malign her step-daughter. It is made so ambivalent that interpreting the code becomes entirely subjective. It can no longer be claimed that it represents a moral 'truth' regarding female virtue. D'Aulnoy suggests that the extent of a woman's virtue cannot be determined by the style of her dress.

King Charmant was to marry Truitonne. When he rejects her because he is in love with Florine, Truitonne's godmother – the fairy Soussio – curses him by changing him into a blue bird until he decides to accept Truitonne. Her stepmother convinces her father that Florine is a menace and an embarrassment and insists that she is locked away in a tower. Two years pass and her father dies. The people rise up against her step-mother and declare that Florine is the only woman they will accept as their queen:

> le peuple mutiné courut au palais demander la princesse Florine, la reconnaissant pour souveraine. [...]En même temps la sédition devint générale; on enfonce les portes de son appartement, on le pille, et on l'assomme à coups de pierres. Truitonne s'enfuit chez sa marraine la fée Soussio; elle ne courait pas moins de dangers que sa mère. (OB, 30)

> The people rose up and ran to the palace, demanding Princess Florine and claiming they would recognise her alone as their sovereign. [...] the revolt became widespread, and people broke into the apartments, pillaged them and stoned her to death. Truitonne fled for protection to her godmother, the fairy Soussio, or she would have shared the fate of her mother. (Z tr., 340)

Before she can take control of her kingdom she must find her animal husband and she must find a way to stop Souisso from helping Truitonne to take what is now her kingdom. Florine's quest is as much about solidifying her claim to the throne as it is about regaining her lost love.

Florine's power and right to rule is aligned with the power of the fairies through their shared association with the goddess Diana. Conventionally, the image of Diana might be evoked in order to signify the virginal purity of a female character. However, the earlier association of Florine with the goddess Flora destabilises conventional *vraisemblance* by pointing to the moral ambivalence inherent in the powers and responsibilities of virgin fertility goddesses. In 'L'Oiseau bleu' d'Aulnoy uses the classical figure of Diana – as an archetype of female power – for her association with fertility. The power of the fairies is associated with this aspect of the goddess Diana.

D'Aulnoy adopts the setting of the Diana and Actaeon episode in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3:155-252) in order to represent the 'Nemus ignotum' (unfamiliar woodlands) and 'fontibus' (fountain spring) of Diana's sacred grove (*Met.,*3:175-7, pp.196-7), as a liminal oppositional space in which a fairy initiates a dialogue with a mortal woman and 'teaches' her how to overcome the hardships she faces and claim her right to rule in the mortal realm. Actaeon's discovery of the bathing Diana and his punishment for having seen her naked is replaced by the discovery of Florine by a fairy:

> Un jour qu'elle s'était arrêtée au bord d'une fontaine […] elle ressemblait à Diane qui se baigne au retour d'une chasse. Il passa dans cet endroit une petite vieille toute voûtée, appuyée sur un gros bâton; elle s'arrêta, et lui dit:
> —Que faites-vous là, ma belle fille? Vous êtes bien seule ! (OB, 32-3)

> One day she stopped to rest beside a fountain [...] She looked like Diana bathing on her return from the chase. A little old woman, bent over and leaning on a stout stick, happened to be passing that way and stopped. "What are you doing there all so alone, my pretty girl?"
> (Z tr., 341)

Florine tells the fairy the story of how she came to be in the sacred grove: 'La reine le voulut bien; elle lui conta ses ennuis, la conduite que la fée Soussio avait tenue dans cette affaire, et enfin comme elle cherchait l'oiseau bleu'. ('The queen willingly told her about all her misfortunes, about the conduct of the fairy Soussio, and how she was presently searching for the blue bird') [OB, 33, Z tr., 340]. The omnipotent fairy already knows Florine's story well. She then adds to it by telling her that the Blue Bird is still alive and that the fairy Soussio, her sister, has been persuaded to return him to his human shape. The fairy is moved by Florine's plight. She consoles Florine and offers her help without being asked:

> —Incomparable Florine, lui dit-elle, le roi que vous cherchez n'est plus oiseau; ma sœur Soussio lui a rendu sa première figure, il est dans son royaume; ne vous affligez point; vous y arriverez, et vous viendrez à bout de votre dessein. (OB, 33)

> "Incomparable Florine, the king you seek is no longer a bird. My sister Soussio has restored him to his former shape. He's in his kingdom. Don't torture yourself, for you will reach it and obtain your goal. (Z tr., 342)

The fairy's willingness to help Florine directly opposes the queen's and Soussio's complicity in the patriarchal repression of women. This dialogue between the fairy and Florine imitates the storytelling form of the bagatelle. The oppositional space of

the sacred grove can be read as a metaphor for the salon. In this, d'Aulnoy stages the power of stories told between, for, and about women to enact a real and positive change in women's lives.

The nature of the fairy's power to help Florine also associates her with the goddess Diana. In the Roman period, Ephesian Artemis/Diana – in her aspect as a virgin fertility goddess –was often depicted with her chest covered in eggs.[40] The fairy gives Florine four eggs that will allow her to overcome the four obstacles that she will face on her journey to rescue her lost husband and secure the safety of her kingdom. These four obstacles allude to the four trials of Psyche: 'Voici quatre œufs; vous les casserez dans vos pressants besoins, et vous y trouverez des secours qui vous seront utiles'. ('Here are four eggs. Break one of them whenever you need help the most, and you'll find something in each that will be useful') [OB, 33. Z tr., 342]. This joint identification with Diana can be read as a call for a joint resistance to the exile of women from positions of power and influence under the absolutist rule of Louis XIV. In 'L'Oiseau bleu', d'Aulnoy argues for the necessity for women to support each other and work together if they are to ever be successful in furthering the cause of women.

D'Aulnoy also uses her technique of using classical allusions to create the oppositional space of fairyland in 'La Chatte blanche'. The cliff face on which Psyche is sacrificed is used as the setting for the 'christening' ceremony in which the baby princess who will become 'The White Cat' is given to the fairies in reparation for the enchanted fruit that her mother ate while she was pregnant with the girl:

> Itur ad constitutum scopulom montis ardui, cuius in summo cacumine statutam puellam cuncti deserunt, taedasque nuptiales quibus praeluxerant ibidem lacrimis suis extinctas relinquentes, deiectis capitibus domuitionem parant. (*GA,*4.35, pp.96-7)

> They arrive at the appointed crag upon the precipitous cliff and there, at the loftiest point of its summit, they all abandon her, the sacrificial victim. There too they leave behind wedding torches that had lighted their way, but only after they had extinguished them with tears. They hang their heads and make arrangement for the homeward recessional. (R tr., 91)

The ceremony is modelled on Psyche's funeral/wedding procession in 'Cupid and Psyche':

> leurs parures n'avaient rien de commun, mais il ne leur fut pas permis de mettre d'autres couleurs que du blanc, par rapport à mon innocence. Toute la cour m'accompagna, chacun dans son rang.

> Pendant que l'on montait la montagne, on entendit une mélodieuse symphonie qui s'approchait; enfin les fées parurent, au nombre de trente-six; elles avaient prié leurs bonnes amies de venir avec elles; chacune était assise dans une coquille de perle, plus grande que celle où Vénus était lorsqu'elle sortit de la mer. (CB, 21)

> Though their dresses were all different, they were not allowed to wear any colour but white in token of my innocence.
> While we were climbing the mountain, we heard a melodious symphony more and more distinctly. At length thirty-six fairies appeared, for the trio of before had invited their friends to accompany them. Each was seated in a peal shell larger than that in which Venus arose from the ocean. (Z tr., 535)

In the fairy's white dresses d'Aulnoy makes the coded image of *vraisemblance* explicit. However this is not the sexual innocence of Psyche, who trembles on the cliff edge in fear at losing her virginity. The White Cat's innocence represents to the fairies a blank slate, the opportunity to make a mortal girl in their own image. The White Cat's procession is one of joy rather than grief. The fairies believe that they are taking this girl to a life better than the one she would have as the property of her father in the mortal realm.

D'Aulnoy borrows the sacrificial imagery of 'Cupid and Psyche' to create an environment in which the fairies initiate The White Cat into a matriarchal society who resist the patriarchal repression of human women. The fairies of 'La Chatte blanche' are militantly violent and vengeful. Their power is associated with the goddess Venus. The thirty-six fairies that attend the initiation ceremony self-referentially imitate the goddess by using pearl shells for their thrones. However, the pearl shells of the fairies are larger than that of Venus. D'Aulnoy implies that while their power is similar in its qualities to that of Venus, the fairies are far more powerful than any classical goddess.

The White Cat is the narrator of the tale. She tells the story of how she came to live with the fairies in the learned and aristocratic voice of the *salonnières*. She has been raised by the fairies and they have educated her to the highest standard. D'Aulnoy focuses on the level of her access to education within this matriarchal society. The White Cat fondly recounts that she had many amusing books and that she was taught everything befitting her age and rank: 'Elles m'apprenaient tout ce qui convenait à mon âge et à ma naissance'.(They taught me everything that suited my age and birth) [CB, 22, my tr.]. No mention is made of what is appropriate for her sex. D'Aulnoy stages the importance of educating young aristocratic women to the

same level as men. Women must be adequately equipped to take positions of power and influence in society.

The military power of the fairies in 'La Chatte blanche' evokes the rebellion of the *frondeuses* against the French state. When the King realises that his wife has promised their daughter to the fairies he locks her up in punishment for her foolishness and refuses to give up his child. The king's actions anger the fairies who set loose evil on all his kingdoms and let loose a dragon:

> Quand les fées surent le procédé de mon père, elles s'indignèrent autant qu'on peut l'être; et après avoir envoyé dans ses six royaumes tous les maux qui pouvaient les désoler, elles lâchèrent un dragon épouvantable, qui remplissait de venin les endroits où il passait, qui mangeait les hommes et les enfants, et qui faisait mourir les arbres et les plantes du souffle de son haleine. (CB, 19)

> When the fairies heard of my father's conduct, they were highly indignant, and after demolishing his six kingdoms by inflicting every ill they could devise on them they let loose a terrible dragon that poisoned the air wherever he breathed, wilting all the trees and plants, and devouring man and child. (Z tr., 533-4)

D'Aulnoy transforms the snake-like beast of the Oracle of Apollo's prophecy in 'Cupid and Psyche' into the fairy's dragon attack:

> sed saevum atque ferum vipereumque malum,
> quod pinnis volitans super aethera cuncta fatigat,
> flammaque et ferro singula debilitat,
>
> Only a fell, snake-like beast, wild, sadistic, and cruel.
> Over the heavens it flies on its wings and assails the whole world
> Sapping the strength of each thing, fighting with fire and sword.
>
> (*GA,*4.33, p.95, R tr.,90)

D'Aulnoy reads the prophecy as a representation of the gods' ineffectual attempts to intervene in the lives of mortals and the attitude towards women it conveys. The prophecy implies that if Psyche is not marriageable then she is of no value to her father. His only option is to sacrifice her to the gods in hope of gaining their favour.

D'Aulnoy's use of the characters, settings and motifs of 'Cupid and Psyche' and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*– in conjunction with her redefinitions of codes of *vraisemblance* – are used to create a fictional universe of fairyland ruled over by a matriarchal society of powerful aristocratic women that values and promotes

women's education and intellectual pursuits. D'Aulnoy stages the female writers of the French salon as fairies whose words and actions have the power to affect change in the world. In the minds of contemporary readers this must have evoked the historical reality that there was a time – not so long ago, in a kingdom not so very far away – when educated, aristocratic women did hold significant positions of power and influence. D'Aulnoy's fairytales consistently suggest the possibility that they may do so again.

II. REWRITING D'AULNOY'S FAIRIES IN VILLENEUVE'S AND BEAUMONT'S 'LA BELLE ET LA BÊTE'

BURYING THE FAIRIES: VILLENEUVE'S FAIRYTALE ENDING

Villeneuve's 'La Belle et la Bête' was first published in *Les contes marins ou la jeune Américaine* (Tales of the Sea or The Young American Woman) [1740]. It is a long and complicated literary fairytale intended for an adult audience. For the first time Psyche becomes 'Beauty', named for the original defining characteristic of her difference to her sisters. The influence of d'Aulnoy's fairies and her classically influenced storyworld is clearly visible in Villeneuve's version. To a certain extent, the story world construction of d'Aulnoy's oppositional female space remains in fragmented references to a polytheistic pantheon of classical Gods and in the use of associative similes that liken the characters of Beauty and the beast to their classical predecessors Cupid and Psyche.

For example, in Villeneuve's 'La Belle et la Bête', Beauty has a dream in which she is spoken to by the beast in human form. The abundance of myrtle trees in Beauty's dream is a remnant of a classical coded mythological symbol for mourning: 'elle rêva qu'elle était au bord d'un canal à perte de vue, dont les deux côtés étaient ornés de deux rangs [...] de myrtes fleuris d'une hauteur prodigieuse' ('She dreamed that she was on the bank of a canal a long way off. Both its sides were adorned by two rows of [...] flowering myrtles of immense size'). It is used here to expresses Beauty's feelings of grief and loss: 'elle déplorait l'infortune qui la condamnait à passer ses jours en ce lieu, sans espoir d'en sortir'. ('she lamented the misfortune that

condemned her to spend the rest of her days in this place, without hope of escape')
[VBB, 79, Z tr.,169]. The association of the beast with the character of Cupid or
Amour recalls his classical origins and firmly grounds ʽLa Belle et la Bête' as
following in the tradition of the earlier classical tale.

No real attempt is made by Villeneuve to transform or redefine conventional
codes of *vraisemblance* or to manipulate classical or fairytale allusions for
ideological purposes. They are used purely as a reference to the written tradition in
which she positions herself. For this reason we may be tempted to think of
Villeneuve's text as a poor imitation of d'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales.
However, I would argue that Villeneuve's work is significant for the way in which
d'Aulnoy's fairies are re-figured to conform to the ideal of femininity and the model
of women's political power that Villeneuve wishes to promote. Villeneuve's
construction of the fairy archetype continues to value and promote the importance of
education for women, up to a point, but the political power and freedom of
d'Aulnoy's fairies is significantly reduced through her staging of the differences
between fairy and mortal women.

In Villeneuve's 'La Belle et la Bête', Beauty's strangeness, her level of
education and intelligence and her possession of 'une force d'esprit qui n'est pas
ordinaire à son sexe' (a strength of mind uncommon in her sex) [VBB, 40, my tr.]
are revealed to be a result of her being different from other women because she is
half-fairy:

> Non, non, la Belle, ne craignez rien, reprit la fée. Les malheurs que vous prévoyez ne
> peuvent arriver. Je fais un moyen sûr de vous en préserver, & quand le prince serait capable
> de vous mépriser après vous avoir épousée, il faudrait qu'il en cherchât un autre sujet que
> dans l'inégalité des conditions. Votre naissance n'est point inférieure à la sienne : l'avantage
> même est très-considérable de votre côté, puisqu'il est vrai, dit-elle fièrement à la reine, que
> voilà votre nièce; & ce qui doit vous la rendre respectable, c'est qu'elle est la mienne étant
> fille de ma sœur, qui, comme vous, n'était pas esclave d'une dignité dont la vertu fait le
> principal lustre. (VBB, 150)

> "No, no, Beauty, you have nothing to fear," the fairy replied. "The evils you anticipate
> cannot happen. I know a sure way of protecting you from them, and if the prince should
> become capable of despising you after marriage, he must find some other reason than the
> inequality of your rank. Your birth is not inferior to his own. In fact, the advantage is
> considerably on your side, for the truth is," she said sternly to the queen, "that you're looking
> at your niece, and what should make her even more worthy of your respect is that she's mine
> as well! She's the daughter of my sister, who, unlike you, wasn't a slave to rank, which has
> no lustre without virtue. (Z tr., 197)

Villeneuve uses d'Aulnoy's fairy archetype – to which female political power, intellect and freedom are linked – to explain away those characteristics in Beauty. This removes these as qualities that young women facing marriage should aspire to. Beauty has fairy heritage, and claims her right to rule through that aristocratic line; then it follows that she is living by the laws of the matriarchal society created by the feminised space in d'Aulnoy's tales and not the patriarchal laws of the mortal world. Villeneuve uses d'Aulnoy's fairies to argue that the laws that govern the powerful and privileged aristocratic female figures of French society cannot be applied to all women.

Through the character of Beauty, Villeneuve promotes the importance of a moral rather than an academic education for young women. Villeneuve focuses on the vanity, pride and greed of Beauty's father and siblings. She suggests that the sisters have been spoiled and made 'trop fières des grands biens' (too proud of their wealth) on which they can no longer rely and that this has made it impossible for them to endure their loss of fortune with grace (VBB, 35-6, my tr.). The father's loss of fortune is viewed by his peers as punishment for his greed and vanity: 'Ils débitèrent qu'il s'était attiré ces infortunes par sa mauvaise conduite, ses profusions, & les folles dépenses qu'il avait faites' (They uttered that his misfortunes had been brought on by his own bad conduct, his lavish lifestyle and the foolish expenditures he had made) [VBB, 38, my tr.]. Villeneuve places emphasis on the importance of material wealth in obtaining a husband. The patriarchal institution of marriage is represented as a business transaction in which the attractiveness of Beauty's sisters as prospective brides lies in the fortune they possess. Their loss of wealth is also their loss of choice in a financially beneficial match:

> Elles avoient perdu le plus beau de leurs attraits, en voyant comme un éclair disparaître la fortune brillante de leur père, […] Cette foule empressée d'adorateurs disparut au moment de leur disgrâce. La force de leurs charmes n'en put retenir aucun. (VBB, 37)
> They had lost the most beautiful of their qualities when, in a flash, their father's brilliant fortune had disappeared. [...] Their eager crowd of admirers had disappeared at the moment of their disgrace. The power of their remaining qualities was insufficient to hold the attention of even a single one of them. (My tr.)

Unlike her sisters, Beauty does possess qualities that make up for her lack of wealth. Beauty's goodness, her perseverance and resolve is then defined in opposition to the

greed and moral lack of her siblings: 'Cependant la plus jeune d'entre elles montra, dans leur commun malheur, plus de constance et de résolution. On la vit par une fermeté bien au-dessus de son âge prendre généreusement son parti'. (However, the youngest of them, though she shared in their common misfortune, showed more perseverance and resolution. She bore her part in these misfortunes bravely and with a strength of mind beyond her years) [VBB, 39, my tr].

Beauty functions as a role model for women who have neither the choice nor the freedom of material circumstance to challenge patriarchal society. Villeneuve attempts to console young women who must marry for the continued financial stability of their families. Beauty is able to marry the beast despite her lack of wealth and her perceived lack of social status because of the power to rule that she possesses as a half-fairy. Beauty's inheritance of matriarchal power is attractive to her prospective husband because it confers power and status upon him. Beauty's power ultimately resides in her prospective husband's acceptance of her heritage as valuable to him as equal to his own rank and not through a violent act that establishes her right and power to rule. Villeneuve attempts to resolve the issue of the lack of the right to choice and self-determination of women in society by suggesting that the way to maintain power is not to rebel against male dominated society as d'Aulnoy suggests in her animal bride and groom tales in which fairies declare war on the mortal world that tries to repress them; rather she suggests that a different kind of good match can be made: one in which the female political power is beneficial to both parties.

The beast accepts Beauty's true nature as a powerful fairy: 'Le prince de son côté, ravi de cette agréable nouvelle, en marqua sa joie par ses regards' ('The prince, for his part, was enraptured by this pleasant news, though he expressed his delight in looks alone') [VBB, 152, Z tr., 197]. The beast does not seek to change Beauty or undermine her power. The marriage of Beauty and the beast is one of equals who rule their kingdom together. Duty and obligation to the family and the state are shown to exist alongside female independence and power within the traditional conventions of marriage:

> ils avoient entièrement oublié la grandeur souveraine, [...] mais [la fée] cette sage intelligence leur représenta vivement, qu'ils étaient autant obligés à remplir la destinée qui les avait chargés du gouvernement de leurs peuples, que ces mêmes peuples l'étaient à conserver pour eux un respect eternel. [...] le prince et la Belle obtinrent qu'il leur serait

permis [...] pour aller [...] voir le roi de l'Isle heureuse, leur père, [...] Son [Belle's] pouvoir, joint à l'amitié de la reine des fées, conserva la vie, la santé et la jeunesse au roi son époux. (VBB, 235-7)

They had entirely forgotten about their realm and royal duties, [...] but the wise fairy made it clear to them that they were under just as great an obligation to fulfill their destiny as rulers of a nation as that nation was to remain loyal to them. [...] the prince and Beauty stipulated that they be allowed to visit [...] their father, the King of the Fortune Island, [...] Her [Beauty's] power, aided by the friendship of the queen of the fairies, preserved the life, health, and youth of her husband for ages. (Z tr., 228-9)

Villeneuve's highly romanticised fairytale ending offers consolation to its young female readers and provides a role model for the way in which young women should behave and what should be considered a good match, beyond the distraction of appearances. Villeneuve's fairy-Beauty cannot be said to promote an entirely negative role model for young women but we can recognise, in it, the first acts of transformative appropriation that began the process of repressing the learned, independent, proto-feminist fairy that so defined d'Aulnoy's tales. By the mid-eighteenth century, the burial of the fairies and of their political and intellectual prowess had only just begun.

BEAUMONT'S DREAM FAIRY AND THE USEABLE PAST

Beaumont's 'La Belle et la Bête' (1756) is far more morally didactic than Villeneuve's novella. It was first published in France as an imbedded tale within *Le Magasin des Enfants ou Dialogues entre une sage Gouvernante & plusieurs de ses élèves de la première distinction* (The Children's Magazine, or Dialogues between a Wise Governess and Several of her Pupils of the Highest Rank). It is a short, compact tale, written for children. Its primary purpose was to prepare and morally educate young girls to become virtuous wives and mothers. Beaumont appropriates classical allusions and uses the image of d'Aulnoy's archetypal fairy but only to authorise the moral content of her tale as following in the tradition of the female-authored literary fairytale.

Like Villeneuve, Beaumont continued to maintain and promote the educated woman aspect of d'Aulnoy's fairy archetype. Beaumont highlights the importance of a good education in promoting the good and proper behaviour of children, particularly young girls. In this version the merchant has six children, three boys and

three girls. He is described as being a sensible man for sparing no expense in their education. Beaumont implies that the boys and girls have received an equal education: 'et comme ce marchand était un homme d'esprit, il n'épargna rien pour l'éducation de ses enfants et leur donna toutes sortes de maîtres'. ('Since he was a sensible man, the merchant spared no expense in educating them, hiring all kinds of tutors for their benefit') [(BBB, 66, Z tr.,233]. However, the kind of education she had in mind was of a very specific kind: Beaumont sought to improve the moral and civilizing education of young children and in particular girls.

Beaumont's fairy only appears twice: she appears to Beauty in a dream and returns at the end of the tale to reward Beauty for her virtuous behaviour:

> Quelle fut sa surprise ! La Bête avait disparu, et elle ne vit plus à ses pieds qu'un prince plus beau que l'Amour, qui la remerciait d'avoir fini son enchantement. […] Ils allèrent ensemble au château, et la Belle manqua mourir de joie, en trouvant dans la grande salle son père, et toute sa famille, que la belle dame, qui lui était apparue en songe, avait transportés au château. La Belle, lui dit cette dame, qui était une grande fée, venez recevoir la récompense de votre bon choix : vous avez préféré la vertu à la beauté et à l'esprit, vous méritez de trouver toutes ces qualités réunies en une même personne. Vous allez devenir une grande reine : j'espère que le trône ne détruira pas vos vertus. (BBB, 84-5)

> How great was her surprise when she discovered that the beast had disappeared, and at her feet was a prince more handsome than Eros himself, who thanked her for having put an end to his enchantment […] Beauty was overwhelmed by joy in finding her father and entire family in the hall, for the beautiful lady who had appeared to her in a dream had transported them to the castle.
> "Beauty," said this lady, who was a grand fairy, "come and receive the reward for your good choice. You've preferred virtue over beauty and wit, and you deserve to find those qualities combined in one and the same person, you're going to become a great queen, and I hope that a throne will not destroy your virtuous qualities." (Z tr., 244)

The character of the beast continues to be associated with the Cupid figure, as the human form of the beast is said to be 'plus beau que l'Amour' (more beautiful than Love himself). The fact that he is more beautiful implies that Beaumont's representation has improved upon that of her predecessors. Similarly, the fairy archetype at the end of the tale is devoid of d'Aulnoy's fairies' rebellious independence and their power to control the outcome of mortal affairs. She appears after Beauty has proved herself to be worthy of the beast and has gained her crown and political power through marriage. She is reduced to the role of a fairy-godmother, handing out rewards for good and virtuous behaviour. Beaumont's fairy fulfils it early storytelling function as a character that pushes forward the narrative of the tale towards the conclusion of a happy ending. However, all traces of d'Aulnoy's

self-determining and rebellious behaviour have been removed. This representation of an aristocratic female storyteller becomes inextricably linked with the pedagogical function of 'La Belle et la Bête', subverting the original function of d'Aulnoy's fairy storytellers, invented to oppose Perrault's construction of an authorising figure for the patriarchal morality of his tales.

Beaumont's 'burial' or repression of d'Aulnoy's fairies reflects a return of a patriarchal ideology to the text of 'La Belle et la Bête'. Gender roles in Beaumont's version are strictly defined. When the family is first reduced to poverty, Beauty's father and brothers farm the land, while Beauty gets up early, cooks and cleans for the family and spins wool, without uttering a word of complaint. This dedication to her duty is contrasted with the behaviour of her lazy sisters:

> La Belle se levait à quatre heures du matin, et se dépêchait de nettoyer la maison et d'apprêter à dîner pour la famille. […] elle chantait en filant. Ses deux sœurs, au contraire, […] se levaient à dix heures du matin, se promenaient toute la journée, et s'amusaient à regretter leurs beaux habits et les compagnies. (BBB, 68-9)

> Beauty rose at four o'clock every morning and occupied herself by cleaning the house and preparing breakfast for all the family […] she sang while spinning. On the other hand her two sisters […] rose at ten, took walks the entire day, and entertained themselves by bemoaning the loss of their beautiful clothes and the fine company they used to have. (Z tr., 234)

The spinning of wool is a classical symbol signifying Beauty's virtue and piety and provides the character with a connection to the authorising tradition of her storytelling fairy predecessors. Beauty wins the admiration and respect of her father and her suitors through her virtue and dedication to duty, which they value above money and physical appearance.

Beaumont's 'La Belle et la Bête' promoted the importance of proper behaviour of women in society and criticised the behaviour of aristocratic society women, previously represented by d'Aulnoy's fairy:

> Cette cadette, qui était plus belle que ses sœurs, était aussi meilleure qu'elles. Les deux aînées avaient beaucoup d'orgueil, […] elles faisaient les dames, et ne voulaient pas recevoir les visites des autres filles de marchands ; il leur fallait des gens de qualité pour leur compagnie. Elles allaient tous les jours au bal, à la comédie, à la promenade, et se moquaient de leur cadette, qui employait la plus grande partie de son temps à lire de bons livres. (BBB, 67)

> Not only was the youngest girl prettier, she was also better natured. The two elder girls were very arrogant [...] They pretended to be ladies and refused to receive visits of daughters who belonged to merchant families. They chose only people of quality for their companions.

> Every day they went to the balls, the theatre, and the park, and they made fun of their younger sister, who spent most of her time reading books. (Z tr., 233)

Beauty is represented as not only beautiful but, more importantly, refined, educated and kind in comparison with her greedy and arrogant sisters, who are shown to be more concerned with trying to establish themselves in upper-class society than paying attention to their domestic situation and their position within domestic family life. It is Beauty's silent acceptance of her social situation that distinguishes her female virtue, in opposition to her sisters' lack of it. In Beaumont's version the silence and forbearance of women is the primary virtue a woman should display when seeking a husband.

Marina Warner notes in *From the Beast to the Blonde* that the change in function, between d'Aulnoy's tales and Beaumont's 'La Belle et la Bête', of the female archetype and the representation of women it helped to propagate is indicative of the urgent societal concern of the Enlightenment for the moral education of the general population:

> The mischief and wantonness of Psyche's troubles and discoveries, still captured by d'Aulnoy's bizarreries, fade before the moral enterprise of the Enlightenment. The stories begin to attempt to console young women beset by fears of marriage, of ogre husbands who might bring about their destruction in one way or another. And these functions – of steadying and training the young – have gradually gained ground over the critical and challenged rebelliousness of the first generation of women fairytale writers and become identified with the genre itself, establishing its pedagogical, edifying character.[41]

The repression of d'Aulnoy's fairy was the result of a sixty-year process of intertextual appropriation and rewriting by female authors, who adapted the archetype to address culturally and historically specific changes in attitude to the place of women in society. The fairy retained her identity as an educated woman and continued to be valued as an authorising figure of female literate storytelling. However, the resistance shown by d'Aulnoy's fairy archetype to the patriarchal and misogynistic laws and moral conventions of human society were rejected and left behind in the earlier layers of the text. This is not the end of her story: D'Aulnoy's archetypal fairy lurked just beneath the surface of 'La Belle et la Bête' waiting to be recovered, renewed and transformed.

III. THE SADEIAN FAIRY: ANGELA CARTER′S MORAL DISORDER

In *The Sadeian Woman* (1979) Angela Carter carried out a feminist reading of the work of the Marquis de Sade. The central premise of her argument is that Sade's work is of particular significance to women because of his refusal to equate female sexuality to reproductive function. Carter argues that in doing so, Sade succeeds in breaking down culturally determined morality on the nature of female sexuality, mythical representations of women and the nature of the relations between men and women that stem from it (*SW,* 2). In her introductory note to the book, Carter denies that *The Sadeian Woman* is in any way a critical theoretical study:

> It is, rather, a late-twentieth-century interpretation of some of the problems he raises about the culturally determined nature of women and of the relations between men and women that result from it – an opposition which is both cruelly divisive in our common struggle to understand the world and also in itself a profound illumination of the nature of that struggle. (*SW,* 2)

However, I would argue that *The Sadeian Woman* may be read as a theoretical accompaniment to *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Published in the same year, *The Bloody Chamber* also explores mythic representations of women and culturally determined assumptions regarding female sexuality. In *The Bloody Chamber,* Carter uses the tradition of female-authored fairytales in order to explore contemporary representations of women. The arguments that Carter makes in *The Sadeian Woman* on the purpose of myth, and the prevalence of a cultural mythology of women that defines the female as culturally lacking, can also be seen to underpin her feminist revision of fairytales in *The Bloody Chamber.*

Carter is critical of the influence of psychoanalysis on the interpretation of what she terms the 'elementary iconography' of the sexual differentiation of male and female genitalia (*SW,* 4). She argues that the influence of Freud and Jung on the interpretation of phallic symbolism and the 'metaphysic of sexual difference' is reductive and acts to obscure the complexity of individual female identity and presents sexuality as the most significant aspect of a person's humanity:

> In the face of this symbolism, my pretentions to any kind of social existence go for nothing:
> [...] as a woman, my symbolic value is primarily that of a myth of patience and receptivity, a
> dumb mouth from which the teeth have been pulled (*SW,* 4-5)

Carter acknowledges that women do sometimes play a speaking role in myth. However, she argues that under the influence of Jung the cultural myth of female silence still exerts an influence. She uses the myth of Cassandra as a study of a speaking woman in myth: she represents the female oracular mouth who 'always spoke the truth, although admittedly, in such a way that nobody ever believed her' (*SW*, 4). To Carter, myths of oracular women – and by extension constructions of the female storyteller – often serve a repressive purpose in literature. Women are allowed to speak, but only of things that are of no interest or are nonsensical to a male dominated society:

> I can hint at dreams, I can even personify the imagination; but that is only because I am not
> rational enough to cope with reality.
>   If women allow themselves to be consoled for their culturally determined lack of
> access to the modes of intellectual debate by the invocation of hypothetical great goddesses,
> they are simply flattering themselves into submission [...] All the mythic versions of women,
> from the myth of the purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are
> consolatory nonsenses [...] obscuring the real conditions of life. (*SW*, 5)

Carter goes on to explore the mythic representation of the virginal innocence and purity as an idealised state of female sexuality. She argues this is questioned in Sade's *Justine,* through his creation of oppositional space in which the reality of female sexuality is explored and the cultural ideal of the passive and virginal woman is deconstructed:

> [...] Sade contrived to isolate the dilemma of an emergent type of woman. [...] These self-
> consciously blameless ones suffer and suffer until it becomes second nature: Justine marks
> the start of a kind of self-regarding female masochism, a woman with no place in the world,
> no status, the core of whose resistance has been eaten away by self-pity. (*SW*, 57)

For Carter, Sade's Justine is a fictional representation of the archetypal female, who in believing in the myth of her own silence and cultural insignificance, propagates and revels in her own repression. I argue that in her two rewritings of 'La Belle et la Bête': 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' and 'The Tiger's Bride' in *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter examines the different representations of women in consecutive versions of

'La Belle et la Bête': first to illuminate the repressive function of Villeneuve's and Beaumont's tales and secondly to recover and remake d'Aulnoy's fairy – through her characterisations of Beauty – into a positive myth of female self-determination and sexuality.

In both stories Carter recovers d'Aulnoy's powerful and self-determining fairy, from the female archetype of passivity and endurance that the character of Beauty slowly became in the increasingly repressive rewritings of Villeneuve and Beaumont. It may be argued that d'Aulnoy's fairies are also – in Carter's terms – a kind of consolatory nonsense: d'Aulnoy created a myth of female power for the *salonnières* who had been disenfranchised under the patriarchal absolutism of Louis XIV. However, I would argue that d'Aulnoy's fairies provide Carter with a way to confront contemporary myths of the silent and sexually passive woman. D'Aulnoy's fairies are beings who offer resistance to patriarchal kingship and who possess status within society. Most importantly, they speak. What they say matters and has serious consequences to patriarchal society: they utter spells and curses, give declarations and punish those who fail to abide by them. Through the use of intertexts, and the juxtaposition of her two rewritings, Carter acknowledges the literary history of 'La Belle et la Bête' as a series of writings and rewritings that can be read as sequential acts of recovery and burial of opposing ideological representations of women. Through the ekphrastic representation of d'Aulnoy's tales, Carter stages her anxiety of influence as a positive creative dialogue between the new author and her predecessors.

'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' opens with a textual exercise in recovering and challenging the cultural ideal of virginal purity associated with the character of Psyche and the association with purity of spirit and domesticity that it acquired when transferred to Villeneuve's and Beaumont's characterisation of Beauty:

> Outside her kitchen window, the hedgerow glistened as if the snow possessed a light of its own; when the sky darkened towards evening, an unearthly, reflected pallor remained behind upon the winter's landscape, while still the soft flakes floated down. This lovely girl, whose skin possesses that same, inner light so you would have thought she, too, was made all of snow, pauses in her chores in the mean kitchen to look out at the country road. Nothing had passed that way all day; the road is white and unmarked as a spilled bolt of bridal satin. (CML, 43)

In this passage, Carter is concerned with revealing the prevalence of the cultural myths of purity, virginity and domesticity imposed on the female archetypal character of Beauty throughout the textual history of 'La Belle et la Bête'. In previous versions of the text Beauty is always joyfully and willingly engaged in some form of domestic work. Beauty's character archetype as the hardworking 'angel in the house' is always contrasted with her lazy and domestically inept sisters who view household tasks as beneath them and undermine Beauty for her willingness to perform such duties and her acceptance of their reduced social standing (See, VBB, 38-9 and BBB, 68-9). The kitchen which symbolises the cultural ideal of domesticity is described as 'mean' evoking both the unfair cultural repression of women tied to domestic roles, and the inadequacy she feels at her existence in her idealised role as a home-maker. Here Beauty is no longer joyfully engaged in her womanly duties; rather, she gazes out at the possibilities of the open, pristine and untraveled road that will take her away from her culturally idealised existence. At the same time, the landscape outside the kitchen window – symbolic of a patriarchal world view – propagates the very myth of her idealised domesticity and purity. In earlier variants of 'La Belle et la Bête', bad weather plays an important function: it keeps the father away from home; it causes him to get lost and forces him to take shelter in the beast's home:

> […] il fut obligé de partir dans la saison la plus incommode. Exposé sur la route à toutes les injures de l'air, il faillit périr de fatigue […] Quel chemin pouvait-il prendre? Aucun sentier ne s'offrait à ses yeux;[...] En avançant sans le savoir, le hasard conduisit ses pas dans l'avenue d'un très-beau Château. (VBB, 46-7)

> [...] he was obliged to start home in the most dreadful weather. Exposed on the road to piercing blasts of snow, he thought he was going to die from exhaustion, [...] Proceeding without knowing the direction, he chanced upon an avenue leading to a beautiful castle. (Z tr., 157)

> Il n'avait plus que trente milles pour arriver à sa maison, […] mais […] il se perdit. Il neigeait horriblement ; […] Tout d'un coup, en regardant au bout d'une longue allée d'arbres, il vit une grande lumière, […] et vit que cette lumière sortait d'un grand palais, qui était tout illuminé. (BBB, 70)

> He had only thirty miles to go before he would reach his house [...] but [...] he got lost in a raging snowstorm. [...] Suddenly he saw a light at the end of a long avenue of trees. [...] Soon he realised that the light was coming from a huge palace that was totally illuminated. (Z tr., 235)

However, in 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' snow is associated with the suffocating isolation that Beauty has endured because of the persistence of those patriarchal myths, which have endured well into the twentieth century. The purity of the untouched snow appears to possess a 'light of its own' and continues to cast an unearthly pallor on the landscape (which we may also interpret as text) despite the 'sky' darkening 'towards evening'. The myth of the passive virgin continues to shine through time with its own light and continues to exert its influence on the representation of women in literature even as the new 'soft flakes' (which we may take as the words of Carter's story) float down and become part of the (textual) landscape without making any change to its pristine appearance. In the image of the snowflake Carter acknowledges the difficulty of effectively challenging the persistent myth of the virgin, as her own initial representation of Beauty may be seen to be complicity with the myth of the virgin.

Carter's use of 'you' addresses the reader. She confirms that Beauty is indeed a 'lovely girl'. However, Carter then forces her readers to reconsider why they believe Beauty to be an archetype of the ideal woman: 'This lovely girl, whose skin possesses that same inner light so you would have thought she, too, was made all of snow' (CML, 43). Carter is asking the reader to consider why they equate goodness and beauty with virginity and purity before subverting those ideal qualities in her version of the Beauty character. Beauty does not idealise her own domesticity, her work is described as a chore. Furthermore, the symbolism of the untouched road as 'spilled bolt of bridal satin' suggests that she is neither pure or virginal. 'Spilled' implies the possibility of ruin and conjures up the possibility that the white fabric, symbolic of a virgin bride, may, in the language of the myth, have already been 'stained' or 'ruined'.

In *The Sadeian Woman,* Carter argues that women who find consolation in myths of idealised womanhood are complicit in their own repression. Like Justine, they are condemned to a passivity that results in self-inflicted suffering because they have not been taught the strategies by which they can make themselves seen and heard, through which they might force a change in the external forces that affect their lives (*SW,* 2-57). In 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' Carter continues an exploration of this thesis. Beauty is complicit in her repression through her submissive aspirational belief in purity and virginity as an ideal of womanhood.

Carter consistently uses the imagery of snow. The grounds of the beast's gardens are said to remain in perpetual winter. Just before the father agrees to give up his daughter to the beast in return for the stolen rose, the father notices that the door knocker – in the likeness of his host – has agate eyes:

> As the door swung to behind him, he saw the lion's eyes were made of agate.
>   Great wreathes of snow now precariously curded the rose trees and, when he brushed against a stem on his way to the gate, a chill armful softly thudded to the ground to reveal, as if miraculously preserved beneath it, one last, single perfect rose that might have been the last rose left living in all the white winter (CML, 46)

Blinded by the white purity of the snow – symbolic of his belief in the myth of purity – the father is unable to see the beast's true nature underneath his otherness and can only focus on the unnatural hardness of his eyes. He also fails to see the reality of his daughter's character, represented by the single perfect rose that has survived under the mounds of snow. This foreshadows the fates of Beauty and the beast. Beauty will survive and prosper once she is able to shake off the myth of her virgin purity. Similarly, the otherness of the beast's animalistic nature that supposedly threatens to devour Beauty's purity is shown to be a cultural myth of masculinity, as damaging to male identity as the myth of the virgin is to female identity. Through this imagery, Carter first suggests the possibility of a reality beneath the culturally propagated myths of the virgin and beast. These are stripped away to reveal that there is no threat inherent in the sexual difference and gendered behaviour of Beauty and the beast.

On her first meeting with the beast, Beauty wholeheartedly believes in her mythological identity, as well as the myth of sexual threat the beast represents:

> How strange he was. She found his bewildering difference from herself almost intolerable; its presence choked her. There seemed a heavy, soundless pressure upon her in his house, as if it lay under the water, and when she saw the great paws lying on the arm of his chair, she thought: they are the death of any tender herbivore. And such a one she felt herself to be, Miss Lamb, spotless, sacrificial. [...] Do not think she had no will of her own; only, she was possessed by a sense of obligation to an unusual degree and, besides, she would gladly have gone to the ends of the earth for her father, whom she loved dearly. (CML, 48)

It is significant that Carter points to the fact that Beauty has not been coerced into her situation. She chooses it for herself out of a misplaced sense of duty to her father

and her romantic complicity with her culturally imposed identity as a passive and self-sacrificing virgin, directly descending from Psyche's allowing and encouraging of her father's decision to sacrifice her on a mountain top.

Beauty only becomes aware of her complicity in patriarchal myths of femininity after she encounters a volume of the *Contes de fées* which contain the works of d'Aulnoy:

> As she browsed in a book she had found in the rosewood revolving bookcase, a collection of courtley and elegant French fairy tales about White Cats who were transformed princesses and fairies who were birds. (CML, 48)

Carter's Beauty recognises that the situation that she finds herself in is very similar to that of d'Aulnoy's mortal heroines, and that the exploits of d'Aulnoy's fairies offer the possibility of resistance to the patriarchal construction of passivity as a female virtue that has caused these women to suffer. Beauty discovers The White Cat of 'La Chatte blanche', and the storyworld of 'L'Oiseau bleu'. Through the knowledge of these alternative myths Beauty is able to take control of her own fate, and begins to identify with and emulate d'Aulnoy's more powerful, independent women:

> Returning late from supper after the theatre, she took off her earrings in front of the mirror; Beauty. She smiled at herself with satisfaction. She was learning, at the end of her adolescence, how to be a spoiled child and that pearly skin of hers was plumping out, a little, with high living and compliments. A certain inwardness was beginning to transform the lines around her mouth, those signatures of the personality, and her sweetness and her gravity could sometimes turn a mite petulant when things went not quite as she wanted them to go. You could not have said that her freshness was fading but she smiled at herself in mirrors a little too often, these days, and the face that smiled back was not quite the one she had seen contained in the beast's agate eyes. Her face was acquiring, instead of beauty, a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterizes certain pampered, exquisite, expensive cats. (CML, 52)

Beauty's 'pearly' skin – symbolic of her virginal purity – is shown to be fading as her own feelings of self worth and confidence increase. Her personality changes from extrovert to a tendency to be introverted. This implies that she is becoming more contemplative and self-aware of her position in the world. The fact that Beauty often looks in mirrors is furthermore symbolic of her self-realisation. The image of the beast's agate eyes that her father first notices is then repeated. Beauty no longer sees herself through the veil of the patriarchal myth of the virgin as the beast

continues to do. Through the comparison of Beauty to 'certain pampered, exquisite, expensive cats' Carter implies that Beauty has become – like The White Cat of d'Aulnoy's fairytale – an intelligent, politically and socially aware woman who is able to effect changes in her world, and determine her own fate.

Through the transformation of Beauty, Carter suggests that discovering alternative myths is essential for women seeking to escape their social framing. Beauty's discovery of d'Aulnoy's fairies in the *Conte de fées* can also be read as Carter's staging of the positive creative dialogue between the new feminist author and her predecessors. The absence of Beauty's mother and the dominance of her father's belief in her purity means that Beauty has no positive female role model. When Beauty finds the book of fairytales she immediately identifies with its female protagonists.

Carter's technique bears a striking resemblance to d'Aulnoy's method of challenging the conventional codes of *vraisemblance* that we have seen earlier in this chapter. I argue that this is not a coincidence. Carter identifies with the rewriting practices of d'Aulnoy, which she views as evidence of an early proto-feminist movement obscured by later impositions of patriarchal value. Following d'Aulnoy's example, Carter situates her own work in the storytelling tradition of the *salonnières*.

The last paragraphs of 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' suggest Carter's awareness that the recovery of oppositional myths from the underlying layers of the text, into the new layer of construction is not sufficient to ensure that they remain there, balancing the equality of representations of gender. Carter's knowledge of the literary history and development of 'La Belle et la Bête' provides her with ample evidence that each recovery is susceptible to a further repression. Beauty returns to the beast transformed by her new ability to acknowledge the reality of patriarchal myths of femininity and masculinity. No longer frightened by the sexual threat the beast poses to her virginity, she now views the myth of the beast as a cheap conjuring trick that has lost its charm:

> Dust, everywhere; and it was cold. There was an air of exhaustion, of despair in the house and, worse, a kind of physical disillusion, as if its glamour had been sustained by a cheap conjuring trick and now the conjurer, having failed to pull the crowds, had departed to try his luck elsewhere. (CML, 53)

No longer enchanted by this spell, the rooms now appear plain and dusty. The door no longer opens silently with the help of invisible hands, rather it groans loudly: Beauty is able to recognise the true plight of the beast's loneliness and emotional pain. Once more the image of the beast's eyes is repeated: 'His eyelids flickered. How was it she had never noticed before that his agate eyes were equipped with lids, like those of a man? Was it because she had only looked at her own face, reflected there?'(CML, 54)

In the *Sadeian Woman,* Carter argues that myths about masculinity and femininity mask the complex reality of a person's humanity and obscure relationships between men and women (*SW*, 4-5). Beauty no longer sees the beast through the prism of her fear regarding the sexual threat he poses to her virginity. The cultural myth of the bestial male is challenged through Beauty's newly acquired ability to recognise the beast's humanity. The beast's physical metamorphosis from animal to man is enacted through this change in Beauty's perception:

> When her lips touched the meat-hook claws, they drew back into their pads and she saw how he had always kept his fists clenched but now, painfully, tentatively, at last began to stretch his fingers. Her tears fell on his face like snow and, under their soft transformation, the bones showed through the pelt, the flesh through the wide, tawny brow. And then it was no longer a lion in her arms but a man, a man with an unkempt mane of hair and, how strange, a broken nose, such as the noses of retired boxers, that gave him a distant, heroic resemblance to the handsomest of all the beasts. (CML, 54-5)

When Beauty looks at the beast, she no longer sees threatening claws that might rip her apart; she sees his gentleness and his desire to protect her. His claws become outstretched fingers. Beauty's knowledge of d'Aulnoy's fairytales has presented her with the strategies to challenge cultural myths of masculinity and femininity.

In the simile that likens Beauty's tears to snow, Carter replaces the patriarchal myth of virginal purity with one of female equality and power. Whereas Beauty used to see the beast through the prism of the myth of her virginal purity – represented by the snow – she now views the beast through the prism of her tears – representing her knowledge of this alternative myth of female power – which fall on the beast's face. This change in perception enacts a 'soft transformation' that allows Beauty to see the beast as a man who in some respects resembles a beast but is far from dangerous. The use of the word 'soft' in conjunction with the image of falling snow recalls Carter's earlier use of the phrase 'soft flakes', which I interpreted as a

metaphor for Carter's rewriting falling onto the extant text of 'La Belle et la Bête' and failing to change the textual landscape or its representation of women (CML, 43). The repetition of 'soft' then implies that Carter understands that her rewriting has recovered a positive representation of women's power and creativity that is however too subtle and too vulnerable to subsequent rewritings to ensure any lasting change in the way Beauty is read.

In the tears-like-snow simile Carter also displays an awareness that she has simply replaced the cultural influence of one myth with another. Carter's 'civilized beast' allows for a 'happily ever after' ending for Beauty and the beast that does not fully address the staging of gender roles and sexual difference in 'La Belle et la Bête'. For Carter, the rewriting technique that I have described as 'The Rescue of Arachne' has limitations for exploring gender equality because it relies upon the tension between perceived inequalities in male and female representation in order for the model to function.

If 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' serves as an exploration of the function and operation of gendered myth in 'La Belle et la Bête' then 'The Tiger's Bride' is an attempt to overcome that cycle by rewriting Beauty (as well as some minor female characters) so as to give her new motivations and ideological identifications that have no basis in her source texts. Unlike the Beauty figure in 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon', the Beauty of 'The Tiger's Bride' springs forth fully formed and aware of the oppressive world she inhabits. She is never at any point complicit in her repression through a belief in herself as a sacrificial virgin. Furthermore, she consciously attempts to manipulate her environment to her advantage.

Beauty is under no illusions as to the motivations of her father's betrayal. It is significant that this story is told in the first-person as it serves as Beauty's personal narrative of her experience. She explicitly states an awareness of her status as the property of men. She is passed from her father to the beast as payment of a gambling debt. Beauty's narrative begins: 'My father lost me to the beast at cards' (TB, 56). Unlike earlier variants of the text and unlike The Courtship of Mr Lyon' (see CML, 48), no attempt is made by Beauty to defend the behaviour or immorality of her father. In 'The Tiger's Bride', Beauty's attitude towards her father is resentful and angry. She blames him for her mother's death and is critical of his gambling, drinking and whoring:

> The peasants said: 'The living image of her mother', crossing themselves out of respect for the dead. My mother did not blossom long; bartered for her dowry to such a feckless sprig of the Russian nobility that she soon died of his gaming, his whoring, his agonizing repentances. [...] Gambling is a sickness. My father said he loved me yet he staked his daughter on a hand of cards. [...] You must not think my father valued me at less than a king's ransom; but, at *no more* than a king's ransom. (TB, 57-9)

Carter appropriates the theme of the absent mother in 'La Belle et La Bête' and rereads the importance of the minor female figure, imposing an emotional reaction on the backstory of Beauty's family circumstances that is only ever implied in earlier versions. Beauty's remembrance of her mother implies an awareness that the position she finds herself in – valued only as a possession with a monetary value – has been the position of many women before her, including her own mother. This rereading of Beauty's mother imposes a new moral didacticism on the Beauty/fairy archetype. The idealised figure of a subservient and dutiful daughter ready to sacrifice herself to prove her love for her father becomes a figure that questions not her own moral fibre, but that of her father and the patriarchal society he represents. Through the imposition of new value on the female archetype, Carter is able to argue that the story is a fundamentally *immoral* one.

In 'The Tiger's Bride', Beauty's refusal to comply with her role as sacrificial virgin and her need to be seen as an equal by the beast collapses the cycle of burial and recovery within the text. In this, Carter uses a combination of the rewriting techniques that I have termed 'The Rescue of Arachne' and 'Rereading Arachne' in order to play on the theme of the fear of devourment and the sexual corruption of young women common to extant versions of 'La Belle et la Bête' and the animal bride and groom tales from which they derive:

> How I'd squeal in delighted terror, half believing her [Beauty's English nurse], half knowing that she teased me. And there were things I knew I must not tell her. In our lost farmyard, where the giggling nursemaids initiated me into the mysteries of what the bull did to the cows, I heard about the waggoner's daughter. Hush, hush, don't let onto your nursie we said so; the waggoner's lass, hare-lipped, squint-eyed, ugly as sin, who would have taken her? Yet to her shame, her belly swelled amid the cruel mockery of the ostlers and her son was born of a bear, they whispered. Born with a full pelt and teeth; that proved it. [...] Old wives' tales, nursery fears! I knew well enough the reason for the trepidation I cosily titillated with superstitious marvels of my childhood on the day my childhood ended. For now my own skin was my sole capital in the world and today I'd make my first investment. (TB, 62)

Carter retells the core story of 'La Belle et la Bête' as an oral folk version similar to that of 'The Pig King'.[42] The conventional cultural myths of virginal purity, beauty and female sexuality propagated through 'La Belle et la Bête' are re-figured as the dubious old wives' tales told by nursemaids to frighten their young charges. To Beauty, the stories of her childhood are vaguely ridiculous, nonsense superstitions, built on a myth of moral femininity that she rejects. Beauty refuses to see herself in the role of ruined virgin because she knows the story masks the reality of her own individual fear and excitement at the prospect of losing her virginity.

Beauty vows to do so on her own terms, viewing her 'skin' or sexualised body as the only commodity she owns and the only currency she has that the beast will accept. The beast demands to see her naked in return for which a fortune will be given to her father and she will be released:

> I could scarcely believe my ears. I let out a raucous guffaw; no young lady laughs like that! my old nurse used to remonstrate. But I did. And do. [...] 'You may put me in a windowless room, sir, and I promise you I will pull my skirt up to my waist, ready for you. But there must be a sheet over my face, to hide it; though the sheet must be laid over me so lightly that it will not choke me. So I shall be covered completely from the waist upwards, and no lights. There you can visit me once, sir, and only the once. After that I must be driven directly to the city and deposited in the public square, in front of the church. If you wish to give me money, then I should be pleased to receive it. But I must stress that you should give me only the same amount of money that you would give to any other woman in such circumstances. (TB, 65)

Beauty's apparent willingness to prostitute herself is set against the voice of the remonstrating nurse that warns Beauty about her un-ladylike behaviour. This is further enforced by the image of the church: the ultimate upholder of patriarchal morality. Both signify the moral disapproval of Beauty's planned actions. Beauty's response to this moral objection is to laugh again. Through this process of rereading Beauty and imposing on her archetype new motivations for her behaviour, Carter contests the patriarchal morality of the existent text by suggesting that being willing to do everything to save yourself is never immoral. The terms of the transaction include the objectification of her body as a sexual commodity. The fact that she at first requires her face to be covered suggests her refusal to engage emotionally with the beast on unequal terms. It is only once the beast shows himself to her naked, later in the text, that she agrees to strip for him. She argues that: 'The tiger will never lie down with the lamb; he acknowledges no pact that is not reciprocal. The lamb must

learn to run with the tigers' (TB, 71). Since Beauty does not believe in her own myth of subjugation, she refuses to believe in the myth of the beast's power to dominate her. Their nakedness is a vow that they will do no harm to each other: 'The tiger sat still as a heraldic beast, in the pact he had made with his own ferocity to do me no harm. [...] I therefore, shivering, now unfastened my jacket, to show him I would do no harm' (TB, 71). Beauty and the beast are forced to meet as equals, bringing the two characters to equal status within the text.

After Beauty has faced and defeated her fear of sexual devourment, she is led to her new bedroom in the beast's mansion. It is decorated in the ornate oriental style of an 'old-fashioned' French salon: 'The valet did not return me to my cell but, instead, to an elegant, if old-fashioned boudoir with sofas of faded pink brocade, a jinn's treasury of oriental carpets, tintinnabulation of cut glass chandeliers' (TB, 72). Carter uses what I have termed the 'Rescue of Arachne' technique to evoke the imagery of the French salon, in order to align Beauty's first-person narrative with the aristocratic storytelling of the French *salonnières*; a storytelling tradition that opposes the patriarchal morality of the old wives' tales told to Beauty by her nurse. Beauty's tale of resistance against conventional codes of moral behaviour may be said to follow in the tradition of d'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales, and can be interpreted as a representation of Carter's own rewriting practice.

Beauty is free to return to her father at any time, but having experienced equal status with the beast, she refuses to return to the patriarchal control of her father. She dresses her clockwork maid in her clothes and sends her back to play the role of subservient daughter who is the property of her father. Beauty rejects a life of silent role-play, where people are indifferent to her existence, in favour of a life without the trappings of myth:

> I felt as much atrocious pain as if I was stripping off my own underpelt and the smiling girl stood poised in the oblivion of her balked simulation of life, watching me peel down to the cold, white meat of contract and, if she did not see me, then so much more like the market place, where the eyes that watch you take no account of your existence.
> And it seemed my entire life, since I had left the North, had passed under the indifferent gaze of eyes like hers. (TB, 73-4)

Carter rereads the character of Beauty in previous versions of 'La Belle et la Bête' looking for the implied repressions and sexual objectifications that act on this character, and writes Beauty's response to the wrongs she has suffered under the

influence of this discourse. Beauty's reaction is one of anger at her lack of voice, her lack of social position and her invisibility and insignificance to patriarchal society. Beauty chooses to reject the conventions that have dictated her existence and returns to the beast in whose company she can exist as an equal individual:

> He will gobble you up.
> Nursery fears made flesh and sinew; earliest and most archaic of fears, fear of devourment. The beast and his carnivorous bed of bone and I, white, shaking, raw, approaching him as if offering, in myself, the key to a peaceable kingdom in which his appetite need not be my extinction. [...] Tiles came crashing down from the roof; I heard them fall into the courtyard far below. The reverberations of his purring rocked the foundations of the house, the walls began to dance. I thought: 'It will all fall, everything will disintegrate'. [...] And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shining hairs. (TB, 74-5)

Beauty revolts against the cultural myths of femininity that have affected her life, which Carter represents through her repetition of the warning from her old wives' tale. In creating a Beauty character who is openly hostile to the idea of her repression and fights for her right to be seen by the beast as his equal, Carter recovers d'Aulnoy's fairy: an archetype of female power equal to her male counterpart; a Sadeian fairy, who avoids becoming a self-regarding masochist like Justine, because she recognises and fights against the conditions and patriarchal moralities that threaten to oppress her. Beauty forces herself to face the 'most archaic of fears, fear of devourment'. The world that has repressed her dissolves, self-destructing around her. The beast rips skin after skin away from her body to reveal that underneath all the cultural constructs dictating masculine and feminine behaviour, we are all equally bestial.

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[1] The Aarne-Thompson Index is a system of classifying folk tales and their cultural variants by 'type' according to a commonly shared themes and motifs. In recent years, it has been used in the classification and analysis of the shared themes and motifs of written and literary fairytales. See Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, tr. and enlarged by Stith Thompson (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1981). Scholars of the fairytale have used the AT classification system to establish the link between Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche' and 'La Belle et la Bête'. For example, Jacques Barchilon, in 'Beauty and the Beast: From Myth to Fairy Tale' *Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalytic Review* 46.4 (1959), pp.19-29, discusses the animal groom tales written by French female authors of the fairytale in the 1690s and Beaumont's 'La Belle et la Bête' as variants of the tale type AT 425a: Cupid and Psyche; Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Penguin, 1976; repr. 1991), pp.226-307, uses the AT-index to argue that a number of fairytales – including 'Beauty and the Beast', 'Cinderella' and 'Sleeping Beauty' – listed under the tale type 'AT 400-459: Tales of a Supernatural or Enchanted Spouse or Other Relative' (Aarne, pp.128-56), are variants of 'Cupid and Psyche'; Ruth B. Bottingheimer, in 'Cupid and Psyche vs. Beauty and the Beast: The Milesian and the Modern' *Merveilles & Contes* 3.1 (1989), pp.4-14, grounds her argument in the historical and

cultural specificity of 'Cupid and Psyche' and Villeneuve's 'La Belle et La Bête' by using the AT-index to show that 'vastly different' stories may be produced from tales that have similar or identical motifs; Pasquale J. Accardo, in *The Metamorphosis of Apuleius. Cupid and Psyche, Beauty and the Beast, King Kong* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), p.68, discusses 'Beauty and the Beast' in the context of its relative relationship to 'Cupid and Psyche' in the AT-index; Jan M. Ziolkowski, in *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), pp.209, 431, uses the Aarne-Thompson Index to locate 'Cupid and Psyche' and Beaumont's 'La Belle et la Bête' in a European tradition of animal groom tales.

[2] D'Aulnoy's *Serpentin vert* is perhaps the most explicit (and best known) of her rewritings of the myth of 'Cupid and Psyche'; in this tale, the character of Laidronette compares herself to Psyche and fails to learn from her predecessor's mistakes. See Madame d'Aulnoy, 'Serpentin vert' in *Cabinet des fees Vol. 1*, ed. by Élisabeth Lemirre (Arles: Picquier Poche, 1994), pp.253-86. Ideally, I would have liked to examine this tale in greater depth. However, for the purposes of this thesis it has been necessary to limit my discussion of d'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales to those that had the most influence on Carter's later rewritings of 'La Belle et La Bête'.

[3] It is interesting to note that Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche' was also a significant source of classical tale motifs and images in Mary Shelley's work. Shelley translated around half of Apuleius' 'Cupid and Psyche' in November 1817. See entry for November 3, 1817 in *The Journals of Mary Shelley 1814-1844,* ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p.182. The translation survives in one of Percy Shelley's notebooks now held in the Library of Congress. In *Matilda* (1820) in Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, *Mary, Maria and Matilda* (London: Penguin, 2004), Shelley appropriates the setting of Cupid's enchanted palace and compares Matilda's incestuous relationship with her father to that of the passion and joy of Psyche for Cupid. Interestingly, Shelley describes the 'enchantment' of Matilda's few weeks of happiness as a 'faery habitation', pp.163-4. Further allusions to 'Cupid and Psyche' can be found in: *Valperga* [1823] (London: Kessinger, 2010), pp.75-6; *The Last Man* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2004) pp.370-1 and 'Stanzas: Oh come to me in dreams, my love!'(1839) in *Keepsake for 1839,* ed. by Fredric Mansel Reynolds (London: Longman, 1839), p.201.

[4] See Marcia R. Lieberman, 'Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale' *College English,* 34.3 (1972), pp.383-95; Karen Rowe, 'Feminism and Fairy Tales' *Women's studies* 6 (1979), pp.237-57; Maria Tatar, 'Introduction to *Beauty and the Beast'* in *The Classic Fairy Tales* (New York and London: Norton, 1999), pp.25-32 (pp.26-7); Angela Carter, 'About The Stories' in *Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Fairy Tales*, ed. by Angela Carter (Boston: Otter Books, 1991), p.128.

[5] Angela Carter, 'Review of *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale* by Betsy Hearne' *Folklore* 102:1 (1991), pp.123-4 (p.124).

[6] Carter, 'About the Tales', p.128. Also quoted in Tatar, *'Introduction to Beauty and the Beast',* p.26.

[7] Helen Simpson, 'Introduction to the Vintage Edition 1996' in Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber* (Vintage, London, 2006), pp.vii-viii.

[8] See Faith E. Beasley, 'Chapter Three: Altering the Fabric of History: Women's Participation in the Classical Age' in Sonya Stephens, ed., *A History of Women's Writing in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.64-5.

[9] Lewis C. Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality and Gender in France 1690-1715: Nostalgic Utopias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.8. Seifert takes these statistics from Joan DeJean's major study of women writers and the origins of the novel in France. See Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.128.

[10] On the relationship between the increase in women's literary production and the events of the Fronde see Beasley, pp.64-83; Patricia Hannon, 'Chapter 5:The Signature: Revising Definitions; The

Literary Domain and the Status of Women Writers' in *Fabulous Identities : Women's Fairy Tales in Seventeenth-Century France* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp.169-209; Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain: Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985), pp.133-291; DeJean, pp.17-70.

[11] For a detailed history of the Fronde see Orest Ranum, *The Fronde: A French Revolution* (London: Norton & Co, 1994).

[12] Beasley, p.65.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.,* p.67.

[15] Seifert, p.7.

[16] 'This term was coined by Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme français,* 2 vols. (Paris: des femmes, 1977). See especially, I: 196-200'. Seifert, FN 18, p.228. See also 'Imagining Femininity: Binarity and Beyond; The *Grand Renfermement* and the Valorization of Motherhood' in Seifert, pp.178-190.

[17] See Jane Merrill Filstrup, 'Individuation in "La Chatte Blanche" *Children's Literature* 6 (1977), pp.77-92 (pp.77-8).

[18] For a more in-depth account of Mme Ticquet's trial and execution see, Camille Naish, *Death Comes to the Maiden: Sex and Execution1431-1933* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.76-7.

[19] Lewis C. Seifert, 'Marvelous Realities: Reading the Merveilleux in the Seventeenth-Century French Fairy Tale' in *Out of the Woods: The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France,* ed. by Nancy L. Canepa (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), pp.135-6.

[20] Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle presents an influential contemporary account of the debate in 'A Digression on the Ancients and Moderns' *(Digression sur les anciens et les modernes)* in *The Continental Model: Selected French Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, in English translation,* tr. by John Hughes, ed. by Scott Elledge Schier (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp.357-60. Coming down on the side of the *Modernes,* Fontenelle argues that it is not that people are fundamentally changed from ancient times. It is rather that the external force of history and intellectual progress has changed people's minds. See also Douglas Lane Patey, 'Chapter 2: Ancients and Moderns', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Vol. 4: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Hugh Barr Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp.32-74 (pp.37-8).

[21] See Fontenelle, pp.364-68 and Charles Perrault, 'Préface' in *The Complete Fairy Tales in Verse and Prose / L'intégrale des Contes en vers et en prose* [dual language] tr. and ed. by Stanley Appelbaum (New York and Dover: David & Charles, 2002), pp.2-8.

[22] Perrault, 'Préface', pp.3-5.

[23] For example, see Antoine Clouzier's frontispiece to Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1697) Houghton Library, Harvard University and 'Frontispice : Devant une cheminée, une vieille dame fait le récit de contes à trois enfants', in Illustrations de Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé avec des moralités* [artist unknown] (La Haye, Liège : Basompière, 1777). Bibliothèque nationale de France, microfilm R.24829. Both frontispieces show an evening scene. An old woman in a plain cap (possibly a nurse or servant), sits beside a fire. In her hands, she holds a spindle. Around her sit three well dressed children, who appear to be listening intently to her tale. A placard on the door reads: '*contes de ma mère l'Oye'.*

[24] Jack Zipes, 'Introduction: The Rise of the French Fairy Tale and the Decline of France', in *Beauties, Beasts, and Enchantment: Classic French Fairy Tales* (New York: Meridian, 1991), p.3.

[25] For in-depth studies of the complex relationship between oral salon culture and the French literary fairytale see Ann Defrance and Jean-François Perrin, ed., *Le Conte en ses paroles: La Figuration d'oralité dans le conte merveilleux du Classicisme aux Lumières* (Paris: Éditions Desjonquères, 2007); Elizabeth Wanning Harries, 'Voices in Print: Oralities in the Fairy Tale' in *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp.46-72; Marina Warner, 'Part One: The Tellers' in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), pp.3-181.

[26] Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp.23-5. Zipes attributes the presence of 'powerful and precocious fairies' in Henriette Julie de Murat's *Contes de fées* (1698) and *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques* (1699); Catherine Durand's *La Comtesse de Mortane* (1699) and *Les Petits Soupers de l'été de l'année 1699* (1702); and Louise de Bossigny's *La Tyrannie des fées détruite* (1702) (amongst others) to the influence of d'Aulnoy's construction of the aristocratic fairy.

[27] *Ibid.,* p.24.

[28] Harries, p.31.

[29] For a detailed analysis of the frontispieces to d'Aulnoy's *Contes*, see Harries, pp.52-6. See also, Frontispiece, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, *Suites des contes nouveaux* (Paris: Compagnie des libraries, 1711) Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Reproduced in Harries, (fig. 6), p.53 and Frontispiece, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, *Nouveaux contes de fées,* vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Etienne Roger, 1725). Pierpont Morgan library, New York. PML.84636. Reproduced in Harries, (fig. 7), p.54.

[30] Henriette-Julie de Murat, *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques, dediées aux fées modernes* (Paris: Florentin & Claude Delaune, 1699), p. iii. Quoted in Harries, pp.56-7. Harries' translation.

[31] Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale,* p.29. On the relationship between the Greek and Roman Fates and the prevalence of fairies in the western tradition see, Laurence Harf-Lancer, *Les Fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine, la naissance des fées* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1984). For a study of the similarities between the Fates and French fées in the context of the *salonnières'* use of fairy identities see Ann Duggan, *Salonnières, Furies and Fates: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005). For a study of the broader origins of the western beliefs in fairies in classical mythology see, Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (London: Allen Lane, 2000).

[32] Filstrup, p.77. See also Holly Tucker, *Pregnant Fictions: Childbirth and the Fairy Tale in Early Modern France* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

[33] On the curriculum of women's convent education in seventeenth-century France see H.C Barnard, *The Little Schools of Port Royal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p.208.

[34] See R. Foulché-Delbosc, Introduction to Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, *Travels into Spain* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1930), p.xii.

[35] Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier de Villandon (1664-1734) was famous for her translations of Ovid's *Heroides;* Madeline de Scudéry (1607-1701) received an unusually wide education: she studied medicine, agriculture, Italian and Spanish alongside the more conventional needlework and dancing. Her work demonstrates such an extensive knowledge of classical history that it is believed that she must have also received lessons in Latin and ancient Greek, possibly by sitting in on her brother's lessons with his tutor. See Jane Donawerth, *Madeleine de Scudéry: Selected letters, Orations, and Rhetorical Dialogues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.3.

[36] Hendrik Müller-Reineke gives Molière's play *Psyché* (1671) and '*Ballet de la reine tiré de la fable de Psyché* of 1619 and Isaac Benserade's *Ballet de Psyché* of 1656' as important examples of this tradition. See Hendrik Müller-Reineke, 'Recent Theatrical and Musical Adaptations of Apuleius' Metamorphoses' *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies,* 4 (2009), pp.1-26 (p.4). For a study of

the general reception and translations of Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* in early modern Europe see Julia Haig-Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass: A Study in Transmission and Reception* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp.243-95.

[37] Hannon, p.22.

[38] Zipes' translation does not include the simile that explicitly links Florine's likeness to the goddess Flora. Her beauty and appearance are described as: 'Considered the eighth wonder of the world, she was named Florine because she was so sweet, young and beautiful', p.322.

[39] See Mary Crane, 'Flora' in *OGOD: The Obscure Goddesses Directory*, http://www.thaliatook.com/OGOD/flora.html (2006) [Accessed Jan 2013] OGOD is an ongoing project that aims to collect and correlate information on ancient goddesses into a single database.

[40] Three Roman statues depicting Ephesian Artemis/Diana in this way are now housed in the Ephesus Archaeological Museum, Turkey. They are known as the 'Great Artemis' (Ephesus Museum Inv. 712, 1st Century CE, from the Trajan Period); the 'Beautiful Artemis (Inv. 718, 2nd Century CE, from the time of Hadrian); and the 'Small Artemis' (Inv. 717, 2nd Century CE. The museum catalogue's description of this iconography reads: 'The distinctive feature that all these three statues have in common in the presence of multiple pieces resembling eggs, hanging on the goddess, [...] this was thought to have a connection with the way of worship, and initially, since these were believed to represent breasts, the Artemis Ephesia was referred to as the Multi-breasted Artemis for years'. See Cengiz Topal et. al (Curators of the Ephesus Museum), *Ephesus Museum Guide* (Istanbul: BKG Publications, 2010), p.120.

[41] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde,* p.294.

[42] 'The Pig King' is of general tale type AT 400-459: tales of a supernatural or enchanted spouse or other relative, and of the subcategory AT441: in an enchanted skin. In common with 'La Belle et la Bête', it contains motifs of AT425: the enchanted husband. This folktale in literary form may itself be read as a precursor to 'La Belle et la Bête'. 'The Pig King' first appeared as a written fairytale in Straparola's in *Le piacevoli notti* (1550-53) and was rewritten as a French literary fairytale by Catherine Bernard in *Riquet a la Houppe* (1696), Perrault in *Riquet à la Houppe* (1697), d'Aulnoy in *Prince Marcassin* (1698), and Murat in *Le Roi Porc* (1699). *Riquet à la Houppe* is generally acknowledged as one of Villeneuve's sources for 'La Belle et la Bête'. See, 'Beauty and the Beast' in *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales: Vol. 1: A-F,* ed. by Donald Hasse (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008), p.104.

2. ARACHNE'S CHALLENGE

THE FEMALE PROMETHEUS: THE *ARABIAN NIGHTS* AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CLASSICAL MYTH IN *FRANKENSTEIN*

I. 'A SERIES OF SUPERNATURAL TERRORS': MARY SHELLEY'S ANXIETIES OF FEMALE AUTHORSHIP

In *The Arabian Nights*, Scheherazade's stories are derived from her study of written texts: 'she had read abundance [*sic*], and had such a prodigious memory, that she never forgot anything. She had successfully applied herself to philosophy, physic, history and the liberal arts; and for verse, exceeded the best poets of her time' (*ANE,* 10). Her storytelling is a conscious act of survival and resistance to dominant patriarchal power. Scheherazade's life, that of her sister Dinarzade, and the lives of countless other women depend upon her creative ability. She must weave together the stories and knowledge she has gained from her readings into a convincing and subtle narrative that challenges, offers resistance to, and manipulates the Sultan Schahriar into giving up his matricidal quest for vengeance and his pathological distrust of women.

The influence of *The Arabian Nights* on English literature and on the development of the European literary fairytale should not be underestimated. Between 1704 and 1717, Antoine Galland published the first translation of *The Arabian Nights* in a European language. *Les Mille et Une Nuits, Contes Arabes* appeared in French only seven years after the first publication of Perrault's *Contes de ma mère l'Oye* and d'Aulnoy's *Contes des fées* in 1697. In the interim years the courtly fashion for reading, telling and creating literary fairytales had not diminished. Perrault had the same publisher as Galland and was a great admirer of his work. Robert Irwin argues that as Galland's translations started to appear, they were eagerly taken up, disseminated and discussed by the same literary salon culture. Aristocratic women, who had always been the most eminent and influential devotees and writers of the French fairytale, took to *The Arabian Nights* with equal interest and fervour: '[...] society ladies were Galland's most influential partisans. The publication of the *Nights* inaugurated a mania for oriental stories whether translated or made up'.[1] Galland's translation initiated a craze in aristocratic circles for everything oriental: court fashions imitated Arab and Turkish dress, reading while

being seen to lounge lazily draped over a day-bed became an act of cultural performativity, and Turkish coffee overtook tea as the fashionable, exotic, and exorbitantly expensive drink of choice in the salon. This craze soon translated into a pattern of European-wide translation, influence and imitation.[2]

In *Stranger Magic: Charmed States & The Arabian Nights,* Marina Warner argues that the introduction of the *Nights* into French salon culture marked a new phase in the development of the French literary fairytale. The early fairytales of the 1690s tended towards an expression of decadence in their attention to the ornate description of fabrics, jewels, clothing, and of the spectacular furnishings and architecture of utopian fairy palaces. By the first decades of the eighteenth century the representation of such details had become explicitly arabesque:

> The Abbé Bignon, a friend of Galland's, immediately gave his Beauty and the Beast names out of the *Mille et une nuits*. [...] This first European version of the *Arabian Nights* reads as a sophisticated [...] fiction in line with fairy tales and romances by Galland's contemporaries, especially Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy and Madame de Murat. The resemblances of style are marked: the frieze-like structural repetitiousness, exaggerated effects of splendour and luxury, heightened passions and other manners of the arabesque-baroque.[3]

There is no native English tradition of the literary fairytale. They exist only in translations and adaptations of the French. However, Ros Ballaster argues that the influence of the learned storytelling figures of Scheherazade and her sister Dinarzade affected women's literary production in England in a different way. The *Nights* arrived in England soon after its publication in France. The *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, anonymously translated from Galland's French edition, started to appear in 1705 in cheap chapbook and journal editions. These translations brought with them the French craze for all things oriental, combined, as Ballaster argues, with the sophistication of the French salon and its literary pursuits.[4] The influence of French Orientalism and the appearance of the *Nights* in English changed the representation of female authorship and women's consumption of literature:

> The role of Dinarzade can be consciously reprised by heroines of the eighteenth-century novel. [...] [T]he scenario of the oral tale told by a woman to household dependents while a powerful male may or may not be listening nearby [...] was one nostalgically evoked in many eighteenth-century novels [...] It is a long journey from the eastern magical tale to the formal realism of the English eighteenth-century novel, yet practitioners of the latter frequently conjure up the trace of the former in the act of narrating their own histories of becoming storytellers.[5]

The archetypal roles of Dinarzade and Scheherazade begin to manifest in the representation of sisters who collude against male figures of authority through storytelling. The elder sister shares her knowledge and experience of womanhood and presents thematic, often politically and subversively charged warnings to her younger sister, right under the nose of the of the male authority figure, who fails to acknowledge or understand them. Ballaster suggests that for these authors to choose to represent women as reading or listening to stories as Dinarzade does with Scheherazade is an acknowledgement of their feelings that male-authored narratives did not represent them or address their concerns. With the introduction of the storytelling figure of Scheherazade and the archetypal listener Dinarzade, women's writing starts to be represented as women's stories told to and for other women.[6] While Ballaster's study focuses on English women writers of the eighteenth century, I would argue that this critical positioning against domineering patriarchal figures and dominant patriarchal discourses continues into the nineteenth century, and can be observed in the narrative structure of *Frankenstein.*

The reception of Scheherazade and *The Arabian Nights* by English male authors could not have been more different. From the earliest eighteenth-century re-figurations of her character by male authors from various European literatures, Scheherazade was represented as an often sexualised, oriental fantasy providing inspiration for the male poet.[7] The figure of Scheherazade as an oriental muse appears in Byron's *Don Juan* (1818-23) and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1815-18) and in Percy Shelley's 'Alastor' (1815) and *Prometheus Unbound* (1818-19).[8] Byron and Shelley, also make more explicit use of oriental symbolism, alluding directly to Scheherazade and the *Nights.* Mary Shelley's adoption of Scheherazade and the narrative structure of the *Nights* in *Frankenstein* can be seen as a direct response to her male counterparts' appropriations.

Shelley's recovery of Scheherazade recognised that in the hundred and twelve years since its first appearance in a European language, the Scheherazade archetype had undergone numerous manipulations. The Scheherazade of the male Romantics no longer spoke of female resistance to dominant representation; she had been taught to speak with the voice of the male poet to serve as authorisation for his creative voice. In this case study, I will argue that Shelley's appropriation of Scheherazade and of *The Arabian Nights* is one of restorative elocution rather than exhumation. I use the term 'restorative elocution' to describe a rewriting practice in

which the new female author rejects the dominant patriarchal discourses with which her storytelling archetype has become associated. She replaces this with a discourse of female experience that she constructs as the original function of the archetype's narrative voice. The new female author can thus be seen to teach her archetype to speak 'properly': like a woman, with a voice that narrates her female experience to and for other women. Shelley pulls through her storytelling archetype from the layers of male Romantic text and weaves it together with classical allusions that belong to a male Romantic literary discourse. I use the term 'pull through' here to describe the act of appropriation through a metaphor of text as textile production. I take the term from knitting, crochet and tapestry weaving where it is used to describe the process by which a new stitch is made on top of an existing stitch by pulling through loops of wool from an existing layer and joining them together by passing new wool through the loops.

Shelley also uses a kind of intertextual allusion in her rewriting practice, which I have termed a 'substitutive appropriation'. I use this to describe the replacement of a classical story or archetype by an analogous counterpart in another literary tradition. The new author chooses the two traditions because she shares their influence with a male reading community from which she feels excluded. She hopes that the linguistic and cultural competence she shows in being able to move between the two sets of allusions will prove her worthy of inclusion and acceptance into the literary tradition and community from which she feels she has been unfairly excluded. Through this pulling through of the Scheherazade archetype in conjunction with the technique of substitutive appropriation, in which she chooses to use intertextual allusions to the *Nights* over their analogous classical counterparts, Shelley manipulates the conventionally male Romantic usage of Promethean myth to locate Promethean revolution in the slow social change of the domestic sphere, not in a radical and rapid political change initiated by the male poet as political or religious saviour.[9] I argue that her purpose in doing so is to make both classical allusion and female storytelling archetype speak of female experience and to represent the act of female writing as equal to that of her male contemporaries.

In aligning herself with Scheherazade, Shelley was able to maintain the Romantic ideal of a feminised creative imagination, while emphasising that her knowledge and scholarship of classical texts was essential to her storytelling. This reveals Shelley's anxiety that she lacked the formal classical education of her male

contemporaries. Shelley's largely autodidactic education and the influence of classical texts on her writing have been well documented.[10] That *The Arabian Nights* too played an important role in Shelley's early education and in her writing has however not been sufficiently explored.[11] I examine the ways in which these two sources of influence intersected and contributed to the reading and rewriting practices undertaken by Shelley in creating *Frankenstein.*

'I SHOULD PROVE MYSELF WORTHY': MARY SHELLEY'S CLASSICAL EDUCATION

Mary Shelley's classical education was unusual in that she learned Latin and Greek as a young married woman, partly from her husband, by listening to and transcribing his translations of Greek texts, and partly through her own self-imposed intensive study. From the very beginning, Mary Shelley's classical education was bound up not only with her sexual and social transgression, but also with the transmission of illicit and restricted knowledge from the male to the female mind, with all the sexual and intellectual implications of male dominance and control over the female mind and consciousness that it implied.

Mary Shelley's journals suggest that her acquisition of classical languages, particularly Greek, was difficult but enjoyable. She appears to have learned Latin very quickly, but found Greek more of a challenge. She first studied Greek in 1814, and later in 1821, a more sustained attempt. Conventional societal expectations of what constituted a good female education meant that in choosing to pursue a serious and largely independent study of classical literature and history she constantly came up against the patriarchal assumption that she lacked the intellectual ability of her male contemporaries. Percy Shelley's sexual relationships with women often had a pedagogical element to them. Quoting Jenifer Wallace's *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism* (1997), Isobel Hurst argues that for Mary Shelley:

> Greek was bound up with their elopement from the first: '[Percy] Shelley's relationships with women tended to be pedagogic', and the 'illicit' reading of classical texts with women 'lent the subject an extra frisson' for the tutor. He also taught Greek to Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairmont, and had taught his first wife Latin so that she could read Horace and Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*[12]

During her first attempt at learning classical languages, Mary Shelley was reading from a wide range of Latin texts including Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Vergil's *Georgics*, Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, Petronius's *Satyricon*, Tacitus's *The Histories* and *Annales*, Cicero's *Cato Maior de Senectute* and the works of Livy and Pliny the younger. She read very few Greek texts during the same period.[13] Her access to Greek literature during this time was through Percy Shelley. He translated Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* for her, a text that had a major influence on the writing of *Frankenstein*. At first glance, Shelley's learning of classical languages, literature and history seems to conform to the dominant patriarchal Romantic narratives of 'a husband teaching his wife to interpret the classical literature which had previously been forbidden to her'. However, Hurst argues that Shelley's second attempt at learning Greek suggests the extent to which her classical studies were undertaken independently from her husband: 'Shelley's attempt to study Greek by memorising poetry recalls the methods of public schools, which required the learning of portions of literature every day'. This independent study was then supplemented through her continued reading of 'Greek texts at a faster pace with her husband'.[14]

This narrative of a husband mediating and teaching his interpretation of classical texts to his wife to the exclusion of the possibility of her independent female scholarship cannot be seen as the result of later critical discourses alone. Shelley could not read Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* in the original Greek when she wrote *Frankenstein* between the summer of 1816 and May 1817. This contributed to Shelley's anxiety over her level of classical education in relation to that of her husband. This was intensely bound up in the conflicting desire for 'illicit' classical knowledge and a concern over the sexual and social transgression that it implied.

Mary Shelley's 1831 preface to *Frankenstein* is a useful tool in further analysing her anxieties of authorship, and the way in which she was responding to and attempting to resolve them through her reading and rewriting practices.[15] In the preface, Shelley is responding to a question from her publisher: 'How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?' (PF31, 169). She displays an extraordinary self-awareness of the sources of her creative anxiety. She begins her preface by acknowledging William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft as being not only her biological, but also her literary progenitors, and then adds: 'It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I

should very early in life have thought of writing'. She also undermines her writing: 'As a child I scribbled [...] I was a close imitator – rather doing as others had done, than putting down the suggestions of my own mind' (PF31, 169).

Shelley is dismissive of her writing, which she regards as always being imitative and derivative. Her journals reveal that she frequently read and reread the works of her parents.[16] She dedicated *Frankenstein* to Godwin as an important philosopher whose ideas underpin the work: 'To William Godwin, author of *Political Justice*, *Caleb Williams* &c. these volumes are respectfully inscribed by the author' (*F*, 4). Her anxiety was compounded by her difficult and estranged relationship with her father after her elopement with Percy Shelley and the fact that she felt she was responsible for the death of her mother, who died from complications of childbirth. It also seems that throughout her life, Shelley had been made keenly aware of what a great loss Mary Wollstonecraft's death had been to radical philosophy and literature. As far as Mary Shelley was concerned, her birth had been at the cost of the death of a politically radical female writer whom Shelley herself describes as a 'great soul', a 'lofty spirit', a 'being who appears perhaps once in a generation', a 'genius', who was an 'idol' to everyone who had known her.[17] It is clear from Shelley's writings that she idolised her mother as a literary figure and that she sought to emulate her.

Shelley's creative anxiety, and the critical positioning that results from it, is curious in that she appears to have experienced both a Bloomian 'anxiety of influence', which is usually associated with male authors, and a 'more primary anxiety' of female authorship similar to that described by Gilbert and Gubar.[18] In Shelley's writing, these two types of anxiety are interlinked: *Frankenstein* can be read as an attempt at completion of both her parents' work, an assumption of their work as a model for her own creativity, and also, however, as a forced recognition of her own female creative 'lack'.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft makes explicit demands for both a political and social revolution. Her writing made consistent use of classical allusion juxtaposed with female storytelling archetypes to authorise and underpin her arguments against misogynistic cultural practices and the negative literary representation of women.[19] Wollstonecraft's transformative appropriation of classical texts allowed her to insert herself into dominant patriarchal intertextual discourses and manipulate them to question normative patterns of text

production. This suggested to Mary Shelley a way in which she might subvert the negative association of female classical learning with social transgression in her writing to challenge patriarchal discourses on the mediation of interpretation and control of female classical learning. *A Vindication* also presented to Mary Shelley, a way to make classical allusions speak to the material circumstances that negatively affected women's lives.

Identification with her mother's rewriting practices was not enough for her to overcome her anxiety of authorship. Shelley's mother as a female precursor and the critical positioning by which she inserted herself into male classical traditions provided ample evidence that what you created in defiance of normative representation had the power to destroy you. Shelley's desire to 'recover' her lost family, her fear that she could never attain the literary fame and prowess of her parents, and her reading of Wollstonecraft as a negative example of the consequences of transgressive female authorship, caused her such a creative anxiety that in order for her to write at all, these fears and desires had to be displaced.

In Shelley's preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein,* this anxiety concerning her lack of creative originality is contrasted sharply with the role of her imagination in writing *Frankenstein*: 'the formation of castles in the air – indulging in waking dreams – the following up trains of thought, which had for their subject the formation of a succession of imaginary incidents. My dreams were at once more fantastic and agreeable than my writings' (PF31, 169). This can be read as Shelley's attempt to clear an imaginative space for herself by constructing her novel as a product of the wild and fantastical imagination of her girlhood, rather than a project originating in the desire to write and prove herself 'worthy' of her literary heritage. Shelley displaces her authorial anxieties of authorship onto her more 'cultivated' and 'literary' husband and his literary circle:

> My husband, however, was from the first, very anxious that I should prove myself worthy of my parentage and enrol myself on the page of fame. He was for ever inciting me to obtain literary reputation. [...] study, in the way of reading, or improving my ideas in communication with his far more cultivated mind, was all of literary employment [*sic*] that engaged my attention. (PF31, 170)

Rebecca Nesvet argues that the preface also reveals Shelley's creative and emotional anxiety over Byron's intimidating challenge 'to write a ghost story'.[20] Shelley makes

a distinction between male and female acts of writing and constructs her writing of the prose *Frankenstein* as less valuable than Byron's composition of poetry and beneath Percy Shelley's poetic sensibilities:

> In the summer of 1816 [...] [Byron] was writing the third canto of Childe Harold, [and] was the only one among us who put his thoughts on paper. These, [...] clothed in all the light harmony of poetry, seemed to stamp them as divine the glories of heaven and earth [...]'We will each write a ghost story', said Lord Byron; and his proposition was acceded to. The noble author began a tale [...] Shelley, [was] more apt to embody ideas and sentiments in the radiance of brilliant imagery [...] than to invent the machinery of a story [...] The illustrious poets [were] annoyed by the platitude of prose, [and] speedily relinquished their uncongenial task. (PF31, 170-1)

Shelley's statement suggests that she recognised – and perhaps even agreed with – the cultural tendency to privilege poetry over prose and to admire the male Romantic poet as a visionary genius. Shelley records her overwhelming impression of Byron and Percy Shelley as figures of Romantic genius. She describes Byron's poetry as recording his 'divine' thoughts on all the 'divine glories of heaven and earth'. This is starkly contrasted with the inadequacies of her choice of the prose genre. Mary Shelley dismisses Percy Shelley's and Byron's failure to complete the challenge as the result of it being beneath their poetic sensibility, while she took the challenge far more seriously than the other participants:

> I busied myself *to think of a story,* – a story to rival those which had excited us to this task. One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror [...] if I did not accomplish these things, my ghost story would be unworthy of its name. I thought and I pondered – vainly. I felt the blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations. *Have you thought of a story?* I was asked each morning, and each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative. (PF31, 171)

Shelley's profound anxiety over Byron's challenge, together with her awareness of Percy Shelley's desire for her to 'prove' herself 'worthy of' her 'parentage' by 'obtain[ing a] literary reputation' suggests that she heard Byron's challenge as a profoundly personal, bullying demand that she prove her literary worth.

Byron's challenge resulted in a crisis of creativity for Shelley. Nesvet suggests that in recollecting her motivation for writing *Frankenstein*, Shelley aligns her writing with Scheherazadic storytelling, creating for herself a 'mythical tradition or lineage of female storytellers for whom literary creativity is a survival strategy'.[21]

For Nesvet, in this configuration, Byron is constructed as playing the sultan Schahriar to Shelley's Scheherazade:

> Byron plays Schahryar's role by making the storytelling "proposition", which is immediately "acceded to". Shelley exaggerates the stakes in this game: a negative response, given in the morning, to the question "*Have you thought of a story?*" would be "mortifying." [...] For Scheherazade, to fail to come up with an interesting story by morning would be literally fatal. Shelley's word choice ratchets up the dilemma of writer's block to suggest a crisis of that degree.[22]

Nesvet's interpretation of these roles is not entirely accurate. In the *Nights*, it is Dinarzade who requests the stories from her sister, and remains Scheherazade's direct addressee. While it is true that the tales that she chooses to tell are intended to move the sultan, they are transmitted as knowledge shared between two women, which Schahriar is set up to overhear, in the hope that it will change his murderous and misogynistic attitude. Shelley's casting of Byron as Schahriar to her Scheherazade, however, begins to make more sense if we see it in relation to the actual performance and result of Shelley's writing practice – that is, if we consider the story of *Frankenstein* as one that is meant to be 'overheard' by Byron, so as to lead him to change his misogynistic attitude. In transferring her anxiety of influence onto forces outside of her own psyche, Shelley was thus able to explore the condition of female authorship and deconstruct the patriarchal myth of female creative 'lack', viewed not as an internalised inadequacy of her female creativity but as a misogynistic discourse imposed on her writing body. Shelley's desire to complete her task is the desire to change Byron's mind about her creative and intellectual inadequacy and his misogynistic attitudes towards well-educated women.

However, by her own account, Shelley continually fails to come up with a story to rival those of *Das Gespensterbuch* or *The Book of Ghosts* (the book of German ghost stories that inspired Byron's challenge) or the creative 'genius' of the male Romantic poets she has set herself up against.[23] I would argue that Shelley's 'mortification' over being forced to reply negatively to Byron's and Shelley's question: 'Have you thought of a story?' does not represent to Shelley the literal death of the female storyteller Scheherazade, but a very real manifestation of her fear that her powers of female creativity and intellect could be figuratively killed off by the male demand that she must prove herself a genius of originality, worthy of the company of Romantic male poets and of her parents as literary progenitors. Mary

Shelley's appropriation of the Scheherazade archetype and of classical myth in *Frankenstein* can therefore be seen as the direct result of her anxieties regarding her classical education and female authorship.

'AN ACTIVE MIND AND A WARM HEART': MARY SHELLEY'S EARLY EDUCATION AND *THE ARABIAN NIGHTS*

If Shelley's experience of learning Latin and Greek as a young woman presented a seductive and yet troubling potential to prove herself the intellectual equal of her male contemporaries, then *The Arabian Nights*, a book that she associated with her earliest experiences of a 'proper' education as a young girl, provided her with a set of allusions, narrative structures and stories through which she could explore and overcome her anxieties of female 'lack' and social transgression.

William Godwin was to a certain extent supportive of his daughter's early scholarly activities. However, Godwin agreed with his second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont, that the daughters of Mary Wollstonecraft did not require a formal education. Mellor recounts that when, in 1812, Godwin was asked if he had educated his children according to the pedagogical principles of Mary Wollstonecraft, he replied:

> I lost her in 1797, and in 1801 I married a second time. One among the motives which led me to chuse [*sic*] this was the feeling I had in myself of an incompetence for the education of daughters [...] neither Mrs. Godwin nor I have leisure enough for reducing novel theories of education to practice.[24]

In 1802, Godwin wrote to William Cole asking for recommendations of texts to be used in the education of Fanny and Mary. Cole replied:

> You enquire respecting the books I think best adapted for the education of female children from the age of two to twelve. [...] I should make no difference between children male and female. [...] I will put down the names of a few books, calculated to excite the imagination, and at the same time quicken the apprehensions of children. The best I know is a little French book, entitled "Contes de ma Mère, [*sic*] or tales of Mother Goose." I should also recommend "Beauty and the Beast" [...] and the "Arabian Nights." I would undoubtedly introduce before twelve years of age some smattering of geography, history, and other sciences; but it is the train of reading I have here mentioned which I should principally depend upon for generating an active mind and a warm heart.[25]

While Cole believed that boys and girls should be educated in the same way, Godwin did not. Both William and Charles attended Charterhouse School, where they received a classical education. Godwin's statement clearly implies that he did not consider the education of his daughters to be a duty that he was fully equipped – or interested enough – to undertake.

Cole's recommended choices of reading materials are significant because he chooses them for the specific purpose of developing a child's sense of morality through their imaginative faculties, rather than logic and reason. While Cole rejects the notion that a girl's education should be any different from that of her brother, there is clearly a cultural gender bias in his recommendation of reading materials. As I have discussed in my case study on the Rescue of Arachne, during the early nineteenth century fairytales were increasingly utilised as a moral pedagogical tool in the education of young girls. The same can be said of *The Arabian Nights*, which had long been criticised for being less academically rigorous than the classical epic, but was increasingly being used as a more entertaining alternative. For example, it was sometimes recommended as an aid to the early study of the classics and as an alternative for women who had not been educated in Latin and Greek.[26]

The pedagogical use of the *Nights* in relation to the teaching of classics is not as strange as it may first appear. The earliest known fragment only dates back to 800-900CE, while the earliest full manuscript is estimated to date back to1290 at the earliest, with 1490 considered to be more likely.[27] The stories in Galland's *Nights* did not develop in a cultural vacuum but follow trade routes: traces of the *The Romance of Alexander* (late 2nd or early 3rd century BCE) can be found in many of its motifs.[28] Gustave E. Von Grunebaum in the 1940's established that there are formal and structural similarities between Greek and Arabic narrative literature which find their way into the *Nights*.[29] Greek kings, merchants, doctors and sages populate its pages and there are obvious parallels between the long journeys and adventures of Sindbad, the Greek Odysseus and Roman Aeneas. Similarly, many of the tales in the *Nights* are concerned with human to animal metamorphoses, often as punishment for sins against god or on the whim of genii, in marked parallels with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It does not therefore seem odd that, from very early on, the *Nights* was recognised and used for its similarity to classical literature.

Even before its serialisation in *The Lady's Magazine* in the 1790s, there was a long-standing and far more negative association of the *Nights* with the imagination

of women and children. In 1711, only six years after the first appearance of the *Nights* in English, the Third Earl of Shaftsbury in his 'Advice to an Author' advocated that new authors should refrain from indulging in the current taste for 'Moorish Fancy', 'Monsters and monsterland'. He was unable to fathom why 'we may often see a philosopher [...] tale gathering in these idle deserts as familiarly as the silliest woman or merest boy'.[30] In 1728, Bishop Atterbury was not particularly impressed with the gift of a two-volume edition of *The Arabian Nights* that he received from Pope. To him they read as 'the product of some silly Woman's Imagination'.[31] In *Remarks on the Arabian Nights Entertainments* (1797) Richard Hole wrote that 'they are seldom thoroughly relished but by children, or by men whose imagination is complimented at the expense of their judgement'.[32] It seems that Cole's reading list for Godwin's daughters, despite his best intentions, was at the very least culturally biased.

However, in the case of Mary Shelley, the *Nights* seem to have been received in entirely positive terms. Shelley never rejected the *Nights* as a childish book, nor did she negatively associate it with women. Her journals reveal that she continued to read the original and its numerous imitations as an adult. In 1814 she records reading Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) *and Zadig* (1749); in 1815 William Beckford's *Vathek* (1787); in 1815 and again in 1817 she read Dom Chavis' and M. Cazotte's *Arabian Tales; or, a Continuation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments* (1793) and in 1818, Antoine Galland's *Les Mille et une Nuits, contes arabes* (1704-1717).[33] Assuming that Godwin took Cole's advice, and assuming that Mary Shelley at some point became aware, either consciously or unconsciously, of the principles of developing the imagination that underpinned her early education, it is possible to say that through her early exposure to *The Arabian Nights* Shelley came to associate the storytelling figure of Scheherazade with the creative power of a 'feminine' imagination.

Interestingly, Shelley shared with many of her male contemporaries the tendency to associate the 'feminine' power of the imagination with an oriental muse. However, whereas they tended to use this figure as an authorisation or inspiration for their own classical appropriations in their poetry, Shelley identified with a Scheherazade figure in full possession of her female creative power. By associating herself with the teller of *The Arabian Nights*, Shelley came to possess Scheherazade's set of mythological allusions, alternative but analogous to the

classical. In her ability to move between the two sets of allusions, Shelley was thus also able to show the extent of her knowledge of classical texts. In *Frankenstein*, these classical and oriental threads of influence intertwined to produce a text grounded in the classical inheritance of the male Romantic tradition, and yet *Frankenstein* can be seen to express an explicitly 'feminine Romantic' aesthetic. Shelley found that the symbolic language and structure of the *Nights* could provide her with a code through which she could safely express her resistance to patriarchal discourses of female creative lack.

THE INFLUENCE OF *THE ARABIAN NIGHTS* ON THE POETRY OF BYRON AND PERCY SHELLEY

Byron's *Don Juan* is an interesting example of the male Romantic poet's use of the muse/Scheherazade archetype. Byron splits the archetype into two opposing aspects of female creative power: Scheherazade, whose creative power derives from her scholarship, and the sexualised oriental muse who is shown to bestow her creative power on the male poet. Byron attributes these qualities to the two opposite female characters of Donna Inez and Donna Julia. Donna Inez's learning and intelligence imitates that of Scheherazade in *The Arabian Nights*:

> His mother was a learned lady, famed
> For every branch of every science known
> In every Christian language ever named,
> With virtues equalled by her wit alone;
>
>   [...] she knew by heart
>   All Calderon
>   (I.10-1.73-82) [34]

> [Scheherazade] [...] had courage, wit, and penetration infinitely above her sex, she had read abundance, and had such a prodigious memory, that she never forgot anything. She had successfully applied herself to philosophy, physic, history and the liberal arts; and for verse, exceeded the best poets of her time; besides this, she was a perfect beauty, and all her fine qualifications were crowned with solid virtue. (*ANE,* 10)

Like Scheherazade, Donna Inez is learned in a wide range of subjects: both have an exceptional memory and knowledge of written texts. Just as the stories that Scheherazade relates to Dinarzade are those that she has memorised from her

extensive study of written texts, Donna Inez can recite word for word the written literature of her native country.[35]

However, this representation of the female scholar and storyteller is not a positive one. Donna Inez is a parody of Byron's learned female contemporaries. Although Byron always denied that she was a caricature of his estranged wife Annabella Milbanke, Donna Inez's taste for mathematics and her knowledge of classical languages are those of his highly educated wife. In *Don Juan*, Byron casts suspicion on the usefulness, and academic standards of female learning. Donna Inez is said to confuse 'fancies with realities', and he suggests that intellectual women make bad wives to their well born but less educated husbands: ''Tis pity learned virgins ever wed/ With persons of no sort of education, [...] But—Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,/Inform us truly, have they not henpecked you all?' (1.22.169-76). Byron also suggests that Donna Inez's classical education is more limited than she admits: 'She knew the Latin – that is the Lord's Prayer,/and Greek – the alphabet, I'm nearly sure' (1.13.97-8). Furthermore, Donna Inez's classical learning is shown to have a negative impact on Juan's education. She hires the best tutors for him but interferes with the syllabus, insisting that his learning should be 'strictly moral'. She disdains the 'filthy loves of gods and goddesses' and Juan's tutors are forced to make an apology for 'their Aeneids, Iliads, and Odysseys/ [...] For Donna Inez dreaded the mythology' (1.41.322-8). Donna Inez's prim morality, her pure virtue and lack of a single moral fault is described as 'insipid in this naughty world of ours' (1.16-8.122-38).[36] Byron's disdain for the intellectual women of the aristocratic bluestocking circle is well documented. Cheryl Fallon Giuliano reports an often referenced letter that reveals Byron's casual misogyny and 'characteristic disdain for intellectual women, particularly women writers'. In a letter to his publisher John Murray he wrote: 'I do not despise Mrs. Heman[s] - but if [she] knit blue stockings instead of wearing them it would be better'.[37] In *Don Juan*, Byron's appropriation of the scholarly aspect of Scheherazade, which in the *Nights* is said to be 'crowned' by her possession of 'solid virtue' (*ANE,* 10), satirises the intellectual and moral pretensions of his female contemporaries.

In contrast, Scheherazade's 'perfect beauty' (*ANE,* 10) is given to Donna Julia: 'The darkness of her oriental eye/Accorded with her Moorish origin' (1.56.441-2), 'Her glossy hair was clustered o'er brow/[...] Her cheek all purple with the beam of youth/Mounting at times to a transparent glow/[...]Her stature tall'

(1:61:481-7).[38] Juan's infatuation with Donna Julia can be read as a representation of the male poet's obsession with an orientalised muse figure, whose body inspires the male soul, but who does not create for herself. After thinking of Donna Julia's eyes, Juan thinks that: 'true wisdom may discern/Longings sublime and aspirations high'. Furthermore, combining the figure of the oriental muse with that of the simple, uneducated woman, the effect of Juan's reading on his mind is described in terms of his 'soul' being 'shook,/ As if 'twere one whereon magicians bind/Their spells, and give them to the passing gale,/According to some good old woman's tale' (1.92-95.736-60).[39]

Byron's fantasy of the orientalised female muse can also be seen in the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, where the classical figure of the prophetess Pythia (81.761-3) is transformed into to the feminised wilderness of Lake Leman and its surroundings with its 'soft murmuring [...] as if a sister's voice reproved' (85.803-4) and her 'floating whisper on the hill' (87.819). Byron then orientalises the prophecy written on sibylline leaves (88.825-6) that 'stirs the feeling infinite' (90.843) in Childe Harold by aligning his sentiments with those of the 'early Persian' who is not mistaken in worshipping the wilderness of the mountains (91.851-3). The night sky becomes lovely in its 'strength, as is the light/of a dark eye in woman!' (92.860-3).[40] Unattached to the gendered identity of a female body, this disembodied muse does not speak for or about herself but to and for the reinvigoration of the wandering male soul.

In 'Alastor', Percy Shelley engages in a similar transformative appropriation of the Scheherazade archetype as an authorising figure for the male poet. As the poet wanders through Persia and 'arabie'[*sic*], he has an inspirational 'vision on his sleep' of a 'veiled maid' who talks:

> [...] in low solemn tones.
> Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
> Heard in the calm of thought; its music long,
> Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held
> His inmost sense suspended in its web
> Of many-coloured woof and shifting hues.
> Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme,
> And lofty hopes of divine liberty,
> Thoughts most dear to him, and posey,
> Herself a poet'.
>
> (140-61) [41]

Percy Shelley associates his oriental muse with the act of weaving. While it is true that the male poet acknowledges this female figure as a poet in her own right, he only values her words because they sound like the words of his own soul and conform to his own political and moral ideology. In 'Alastor' the female poet/muse does not speak for herself, but is an inspirational vision who speaks like and to the soul of the male poet.

Percy Shelley's Orientalism can further be seen in *Prometheus Unbound* through his feminisation of Asia and his ornate description of the 'leaden coloured east' (Act 1.47); his repetitive use of 'genii' (Act 1.42-3, 62; 664-8 and Act 4.215, 539-40); and allusions to the 'weaving' the power of language, spells and webs of 'mystic measure' which represent the power and spirit of the storm and the chorus of spirits and hours (Act 4.69-79,129-30, 414). This chorus can be read as feminine, storytelling figures through their association with weaving and enchanted webs.[42]

Prometheus Unbound contains an explicit allusion to 'The Story of the Grecian King and the Physician Douban' from *The Arabian Nights*. Towards the end of Act I, the third spirit sits 'beside a sage's bed [...] near the book where he had fed' (Act 1.723-5). The Fifth Spirit then passes overhead observing 'Great sages bound in madness,/and headless patriots and pale youths who perished' (Act 1.768-9).[43] In the story, the Physician Douban, often referred to as a sage, cures the Greek King of a mystery illness. In return for his services the King makes him his most trusted advisor. Jealous of the foreign physician's power and angry at the loss of his position, the old advisor (vizier, or sometimes sage) plots to overthrow his successor. He convinces the King that Douban is planning to betray him. The king orders Douban to be beheaded but before the sentence is carried out Douban tells the King that after he is dead, his head will still speak to him if the King turns to a specific page in the doctor's enchanted book (which holds all his power and knowledge). The head does speak, but only to tell the king that the pages of the book have been poisoned and that by licking his fingers to turn the pages the King had poisoned himself and is about to die too (*ANE,* 36-64). The line 'pale youths who perished' alludes to the two imbedded tales of 'The Story of the Vizier that was Punished' (*ANE,* 41-53) and 'The History of the Young King of the Black Isle' (*ANE,* 54-64). These are cautionary tales told against trusting too much in a single person, and the moral dangers of a lack of compassion for a man who pleads for his life.

In the *Nights* these two young princes survive, but Percy Shelley reads and appropriates the story cycle in *Prometheus Unbound* as an imbedded myth of failed Promethean rebellion. Douban's knowledge, drawn from his enchanted book, allows him the power to restore the life of a dying king and to achieve power and influence over a foreign land, before he is brutally punished for his usurpation of power. While Shelley's two pale youths serve as a reminder of the dangers of Promethean rebellion, Douban's final act of revenge echoes Prometheus's sustained defiance in the poem.

Mary Shelley's use of Scheherazade can be seen as a direct response to her male counterparts' 'oriental masquerades'. In *Stranger Magic* Warner defines the purpose of oriental masquerade as one in which a poet can 'speak from behind a mask, and invite his readers to imagine an emancipatory change of identity, a psychological projection out of one old self into another new being'.[44] For many of Shelley's male contemporaries, this use of masquerade often involved not only an emancipatory flight into the body of an oriental alter ego, but a flight into a female body through which they could embody the Romantic construction of a wild and often eroticised imagination.

TALES OF EARTH AND FIRE: THE PROMETHEAN POLITICS OF REVOLUTION IN *FRANKENSTEIN*

Prometheus is a typically recurrent figure, not just in Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* but also in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (see for example 'this clay will sink/Its spark immortal, envying the light'[45]) and 'Prometheus' (1816). This poem is a call to resistance and revolution of the individual against political authority even if that means his own torture and death: 'a firm will, and a deep sense,/Which even in torture can descry/[...] Triumphant where it dares defy,/ And making death a victory'(55-9).[46] The power of such a resistance is located in man's recognition of the 'endurance and repulse' of his own 'impenetrable spirit' as a gift inherited from Prometheus's act of defiance against Zeus: 'Thy godlike crime was to be kind/[...] And strengthen man with his own mind;/[...]A mighty lesson we inherit:/Thou art a symbol and a sign/To mortals of their fate and force' (35-46).[47] In the poetry of Byron and Shelley, Prometheus is as a representation of the poet as a heroic religious

saviour figure who – having learned the 'mighty lesson' of the mythological figure's eternal suffering and continual sacrifice – is willing to suffer and die for his beliefs.

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley's appropriation of Promethean myth falls into the two categories of 'Prometheus Pyrphoros' (Prometheus the Fire Bringer) and 'Prometheus Plasticator' (Prometheus the Moulder of Men). The division originates in two main sources of Promethean myth. The first is the Greek tragedy *Prometheus Bound* attributed to Aeschylus (c.430 BCE), which, in turn, drew on the myth of Prometheus recounted by Hesiod in *The Theogony* and *Works and Days* (eighth-seventh century BCE). In this version, Prometheus steals fire from the gods and gives it (and, therefore, civilisation) to humans. As a punishment for this act he is chained to a rock:

> KRATOS: And now, Hephaestus, thou must execute
> The task our father laid on thee, and fetter
> This malefactor to the jagged rocks [...]
> He stole and gave to mortals; trespass grave
> For which the Gods have called him to account'.[48]

A spike is then driven through his chest, and Prometheus is tortured eternally by an eagle that tears out and eats his miraculously regenerating liver. Aeschylus's tragedy and its representation of Prometheus Pyrphoros is the version of the Promethean myth most favoured by male Romantic poets. The association of fire with enlightenment and with the theft of divine knowledge, as well as Prometheus's act of revolutionary rebellion and his willingness to suffer for the salvation of humanity perfectly articulated the concerns and ideologies of male Romanticism with the possibilities of transcendence and revolution located in the development of individual consciousness and the construction of the saviour poet inspired by the divine spark of female inspiration.

In *Frankenstein,* Mary Shelley used the myth of Prometheus Pyrphoros to expose the male Romantic poet's infringement on female oppositional space. For example, it appears in association with the divine spark of life; with the restriction of 'stolen' or 'illicit' female knowledge of Victor Frankenstein when he creates his monstrous progeny; with the creature's attempts to achieve an autonomous identity through his stealing of 'fire' as knowledge in his self-education; in the creature's misuse of fire when he burns down the De Laceys' house; and, structurally, in the narrative frame of *Frankenstein* where Walton and Frankenstein subvert

Scheherazadic storytelling. Through her recovery of Scheherazade and her appropriation of the narrative frame structure of the *Nights*, Shelley presents herself as a female Prometheus, stealing the power to create from male authority and the male mind and locating it, along with the power of a feminine imagination, in the female mind.

The second source of Promethean myth, 'Prometheus Plasticator', comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which Shelley could read in Latin. In this text, Prometheus is responsible for the creation of man:

> [...] recens tellus seductaque nuper ab alto
> aethere cognati retinebat semina caeli.
> quam satus Iapeto, mixtam pluvialibus undis,
> finxit in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum,
> pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram,
> os homini sublime dedit caelumque videre
> iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus:
> sic, modo quae fuerat rudis et sine imagine, tellus
> induit ignotas hominum conversa figuras.
>
> (*Met.*, 1.80-8, p.8)

> [...] the earth that was freshly formed and newly divorced
> from the heavenly ether retained some seeds of its kindred element –
> earth, which Prométheus, the son of Iápetus, sprinkled with raindrops
> and moulded into the likeness of gods who govern the universe.
> Where other animals walk on all fours and look to the ground,
> man was given a towering head and commanded to stand
> erect, with his face uplifted to gaze on the stars of heaven.
> Thus clay, so lately no more than a crude and formless substance,
> was metamorphosed to assume the strange new figure of Man.[49]

In *Frankenstein*, Prometheus Plasticator appears in connection to the domestic spaces privileged by what Mellor calls 'feminine Romanticism' and in opposition to the male infringement of that space. For example, it is used in the narrative of Frankenstein's creation of the creature and juxtaposed with the divine spark, drawing attention, by opposition, to Frankenstein's infringement on the female space of childbirth.

As we shall see later, the myth of Prometheus Plasticator holds obvious appeal for a female Romantic discourse concerned with change through social, domestic revolution and an 'ethic of care'.[50] Shelley however also uses this birth myth as an allegory of deviant text production. Like Victor Frankenstein, Prometheus creates man from materials that have been separated from their original whole. In order to animate the dead clay, he sprinkles it with raindrops (analogous to

the divine spark of spirit and imagination so favoured by male Romantics), but most significantly, in forming men in the likeness of gods, he deviates from the gods' normative pattern of creation. These beings are nothing like the animals previously created by the gods. Like Frankenstein's creature, they stand upright and look upwards towards the stars as if to question their origin and place in the world. However, Shelley's creature finds no answers in the stars, which only seem to mock his existence:

> I quitted my retreat and wandered in the wood [...] I was like a wild beast that had broken the toils, destroying the objects that obstructed me and ranging through the wood with a stag-like swiftness [...] The cold stars shone in mockery, and the bare trees waved their branches above me; now and then the sweet voice of a bird burst forth amidst the universal stillness. (*F,* 92)

Given Ovid's tendency to draw attention to the recursive thematic patterns of myth through the narrative structure of *The Metamorphoses*, the myth of Prometheus Plasticator in book one may foreshadow Arachne's deviation from divinely sanctioned patterns of creation in book six.

Victor's deviant creation of life and its consequences has consistently been interpreted as a birth myth by feminist critics. Such readings of *Frankenstein* often posit that this can be read as an allegory of Shelley's anxieties of female authorship.[51] While I agree that Victor *acts* like a female author, I do not precisely read his character as a masked representation of Mary Shelley, as other feminist critics have suggested. I believe that it would be more accurate to say that in the character of Victor and his deviant, transgressive creation of life as text, Shelley displaces her own primary and general anxieties of authorship onto her representation of a male author. Shelley constructs Victor's deviance as a creator, not as that of a female author, but of a male Romantic author who appropriated Scheherazade in order to imitate her and her act of storytelling as survival for his own ideological purposes. In Victor, Shelley creates a male narrator whose imitation of Scheherazade denies the creative autonomy of the female author. Victor fails to understand the nature and content of her textual production. Frankenstein's desire to create a new kind of superior being (as text) is ultimately a failure that destroys its creator and everyone around him. This is testament to the level of authorial anxiety Shelley felt, even as she identified with and masqueraded as Scheherazade, the most

powerful and successful literary representation of a transgressive female storyteller that she knew.

Mary Shelley's 1831 preface springs from a desire to record the circumstances of authorial anxiety under which *Frankenstein* was written and the way in which those anxieties contributed towards the content of her novel. It contradicts Percy Shelley's narrative of those circumstances. In the 1818 preface to *Frankenstein,* Percy Shelley, aptly masquerading as Mary Shelley, denied that *Frankenstein* was a 'mere tale of spectres or enchantment' or a 'work of fancy'. Speaking in Mary Shelley's voice he concluded: 'I have not considered myself as merely weaving a series of supernatural terrors' (PF18, 5). In this much he was correct. There is nothing 'mere' about the 'spectres' of authorial anxiety that permeate *Frankenstein.* Shelley's fears over the inadequacies of her female authorship may have been wrapped up in the 'supernatural' occurrences of her first novel, but they were keenly felt, and they were all her own.

II. TELLING TALES, STEALING FIRE: *FRANKENSTEIN'S* ARABESQUE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AS FEMALE PROMETHEAN WEB

SCHEHERAZADE'S WEB

Reading *Frankenstein* as 'consciously feminist in content and form, rather than as unconsciously shaped by the contingencies of Mary Shelley's female existence', Joyce Zonana argues that the character of Safie and the undocumented content of her letters function as the literal and figurative core of *Frankenstein's* 'concentric' narrative structure: 'Safie's letters are the only tangible, independent evidence of the truth of Walton's tale' and they are 'located at the physical, textual centre of Mary Shelley's novel' (TWP, 170-1).[52] Zonana acknowledges that the 'frame narrative' of *The Arabian Nights* 'may have provided a model' for the narrative structure of *Frankenstein* but she does not elaborate on the link between what she terms *Frankenstein's* 'concentric' narrative structure and that of the *Nights* (TWP, 177). While the position of Safie's letters at the centre of the novel is clearly important, I would argue that the narrative structure of *Frankenstein* is akin to a spider's web and

that Shelley appropriated this structure from the *Nights*. (See fig. a. and fig. b., for a visual representation of the structure of *Frankenstein* and its relationship to the structure of the *Nights*).

Zonana also emphasises that we never hear Safie tell her story directly, nor are we privileged to see the actual content of her letters:

> Safie never directly tells her tale within the text of the novel. She inscribes it in a set of letters whose "substance" (119) the creature reports to Victor Frankenstein. Frankenstein tells *his* tale to Captain Walton, who enfolds all the previous tales into his written narrative to his sister. (TWP, 171)

I would argue that this representation of a restricted and controlled transmission of female knowledge is precisely the function of *Frankenstein*'s narrative structure. I agree with Zonana that it seems odd that Shelley – normally obsessed with providing written evidentiary authorisation for the oral narratives that she constructs – does not provide us with the written record of Safie's letters (see TWP,170). This has led some critics such as Marc Rubenstein to suggest that this is an unintentional 'narrative flaw' in *Frankenstein*, and that it reveals the presence of an 'unconscious conflict about her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, at the heart of Mary Shelley's text'. But, as Zonana points out, attributing this 'flaw' to a reverse Oedipus complex bypasses the question of whether 'what he [Rubenstein] calls a flaw might not be part of a larger, purposeful design' (TWP, 170-1).[53]

Frankenstein's narrative structure can be read as Shelley's attempt at resolving her anxiety of influence through the textual expression of her belief in the power of women's texts to communicate a continuity of female experience and resistance to patriarchal repression. In this way, *Frankenstein* can be read as an explicitly feminist novel that documents female lived experience within a misogynistic, patriarchal society. Shelley appropriated Scheherazade's web of stories structure from the *Nights* in order to construct *Frankenstein* as a narrative of female Promethean defiance (Safie's letters) against the dominance of Promethean male Romantic oral narratives (the creature - to Frankenstein - to Walton). Shelley's narrative is reliant upon its representation of the 'illicit' information transmitted between Safie and her mother and then further disseminated by the creature, Frankenstein and Walton to the eventual recipient: Margaret Saville. To steal the

'male' word and classical Promethean image, and to use it against and for the subversion of patriarchal discourse is to 'steal fire' for women.

The character of Safie can thus be read as Mary Shelley's inscription of herself into the gendered body of an archetypal Scheherazadic storyteller, while the ghostly presence of Margaret Saville throughout the novel can be read as a textual acknowledgement of Shelley's implied female addressees, who play Dinarzade to her Scheherazade. *Frankenstein* is influenced by the work of a literal and textual mother, written by a woman, and, as we shall see, representing, in the female characters of Caroline Beaufort, Justine and Elizabeth Lavenza, the fatal consequences for women who blindly play out the narrowly defined gender roles dictated to them by the patriarchal dominance of Genevan society.

This is why I think that it is problematic to describe the frame structures of the *Nights* as 'concentric'. To visualise its structure as a web of stories is a far more accurate analogy. While many of the imbedded tales in Scheherazade's text are cyclical and thematically linked to previous stories in the cycle, they always return back to the primary linear core. This can be observed in the narrative structure of the tale cluster of 'The Story of the Three Calenders, Sons of Kings; and of the Five Ladies of Bagdad', and its recursive relationship to the primary linear core structure of the *Nights* (see fig. a). At its foundational level we can observe a surprisingly linear structure (point II; the primary linear core) in which Scheherazade starts her story from point a., transmitting her story to her sister, Dinarzade (at point b.), for the specific purpose of changing the Sultan Schahriar's mind about women (at point c.).

The narrative in one sense reaches its completion once the frame tale (point I.) concludes because the Sultan has overheard enough (at point c) to convince him that he has been wrong. Scheherazade's stories are always directed to the same explicit addressee of her sister Dinarzade, even when she is narrating a story that is told between two characters in her story. In 'The Five Ladies of Bagdad', Scheherazade begins by narrating the sisters' preparations for a night of hedonistic pleasure, but within the tale we also hear two of the sisters' narrations of their life stories in 'The Story of Zobeide' (18) and 'The Story of Amine' (19). Within 'The Story of Zobeide' is also narrated the story of their two sisters and how they became dogs. We also hear 'The Story of the Porter' (9); 'Giafur's Tale of the Three Merchants' (2); the stories of the three Calenders who are guests in the sister's house (10, 11 and 13) and the additional story of the second Calender who tells the tale of

'The Envious man, and of him that he Envied' (12) to elucidate his own tale. These male acts of storytelling are those of survival, as only by telling their stories will they be allowed to live. However, it is important to remember that in every narration of a story it is always Scheherazade speaking directly to her addressee. The narratives are not a concentric overlap of different voices and narratives. Each voice is spoken by and for the purposes of the narrator to a direct addressee.

However, in terms of the *Nights*' secondary narrative structure (III), there is a sense of the inherent impossibility of narrative completion. Built around the foundational threads of the primary narrative core and frame tales (I &II) are the individual stories that Scheherazade relates. Like the construction of a spider's web, each thread of story, while attached to the foundation linear thread at its beginning and end, can turn back on itself, connecting to the thread of a previously told story, or it can spread out from its point of attachment to the foundation chain, to which other threads of other stories may be linked, while always remaining attached to its foundation thread of the primary linear core. In such a structure, the potential for the intertextual growth of stories is infinite. But, importantly, as receivers of this infinite text, it is not for us to hear all of them.

Although Scheherazade's knowledge is extensive, not even she as keeper of this infinite text knows every story. For example, in the story cluster of 'The Five Ladies of Bagdad', for every story that is related to us there are many that we do not hear: we never hear the stories of two sisters who have been turned into dogs from their perspective; nor do we hear the second 'discourses' of Giafur the Vizier (3), Mesrour, the chief eunuch's tale (16), or that of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid (15) (himself a prodigious collector and teller of tales does not relate a tale on this particular night). Most importantly, in the frame structure of *Frankenstein*, 'The Story of Safie' (20) also remains untold. She is the only one of the three human sisters who does not relate her life story.

There are two possibilities for what such a narrative structure suggests: either Scheherazade does not know the stories that she does not tell, or she deliberately restricts the transmission of them; possibly because they would be detrimental to the purpose of her narrative. In his poem 'To Scheherazade', Grevel Lindop eloquently sums up the tension created between the possibilities for the transmission and the restriction of knowledge that is present in the narrative structure of the *Nights*: 'but Allah alone is wise.../[...] In that and the knowledge/ (on which

especially your love is founded)/[...] there is a story opening/inside every other story, / and that of these it is given us to know/an infinite number, but still less than all'.[54] The use of the common formula: 'but Allah alone is wise' suggests that only an omniscient creator could conceivably know every story. There is a recognition here that, within the *Nights,* while the existence of an infinite number of stories is suggested, it is not for us to know all of them. Like the untold story of the character of Safie in her incarnation in the *Nights* and her partial recounted narrative in *Frankenstein*, we may be privy to part of her story, but the full unexpurgated version isn't for everyone to hear.

In the case of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as with Scheherazade's *Nights*, the function of Safie's storytelling is to be kept from direct public view. The 'essence' of Safie's letters is retold by the creature to Frankenstein, who passes them on to Walton. Their meaning is transmitted, received and mediated by men who recognise that their thematic content is significant, though, as Ballaster suggests, this is never fully explained or understood by them. Safie functions both as one of Scheherazade's many doubles and Scheherazade's antithesis: she is the storyteller whose story we do not hear and one of the many women for whom Scheherazade has to speak.

In 'The Five Ladies of Bagdad', Safie is the gatekeeper of an opulent and rich house of earthly pleasures, into which a number of weary male travellers are invited to stay and partake of food, wine, music and storytelling. The story provides one of the most opulent and hedonistic representations of abundance and seductive pleasures in the *Nights*. Long passages of the story are given over to the description of food –

> she bought several sorts of apples, apricots, peaches, quinces, lemons, citrons, oranges, myrtles, sweet basil, lilies, jessamine, and some other sorts of flowers and plants [...] twenty-five pounds of his best meat; [...] she took capers, cucumbers, and other herbs preserved in vinegar; at another shop she bought pistachios, walnuts, small nuts, almonds, kernels of pine apples, and such other fruits; and of another she bought all sorts of confections. (FLB, 66)

– and to the importance of storytelling and music to the representation of a refined culture:

> After the calenders had eat [*sic*] and drank liberally, they signified to the ladies, that they had a great desire to entertain them with a concert of music. [...] they willingly accepted the

proffer, and fair Safie going to fetch them, returned again in a moment, and presented them with a flute of her own country fashion, another of the Persian sort, and a tabor [...][Amine] She came near Safie, and opened the case, from whence she took out a lute and presented her; and after some time spent tuning it, Safie began to play, and accompanying it with her voice, she sang a song about the torments that absence creates to lovers, with so much sweetness, that it charmed the caliph and all the company.[...] [Zobeide said] Those who tell us their history, and the occasion of their coming, do them no hurt (FLB, 72-9)

In the *Nights* the sisters provide material comfort for their male guests and it is this, together with Safie's collection of musical instruments and her ability as a musician, that provides inspiration for the Calenders to tell their stories. Safie in this tale offers a perfect model for the male Romantic idealisation of the oriental female muse. Therefore, I would argue that it is not by chance that Shelley appropriates and adapts precisely this character, transforming her into a Scheherazade figure capable of telling her own stories (rather than just inspiring those of men), and whose full narrative is known and transmitted to other women in written form.

Shelley's use of the name 'Safie' cannot be seen as a mere coincidence. The final manuscript draft of *Frankenstein,* held in the Bodleian library, shows evidence of Shelley's indecision about the naming of this character. The names 'Amina' and 'Maimouna' appear crossed out and replaced with the name 'Safie'. 'Amina' or 'Amine' is the name of one of Safie's sisters in the 'The Five Ladies of Bagdad'. She is married on the condition that she will never speak to another man. Amina accidently breaks her vow by kissing another man who maliciously bites her causing her to cry out. 'Maimouna' is a name drawn from the same story cluster of 'The Five Ladies of Bagdad'. 'Maimoun', the masculine form of 'Maimouna', is the name of a jealous Jinn who possesses a princess he is in love with in 'The Tale of the Second Calender' and who is also named in 'The Story of the Envious Man, and of him that he Envied'.[55] The use of these names in manuscript clearly shows that Shelley was working from this story cycle as a basis for Safie's story. However, choosing the object of her appropriation seems to have been a difficult process. The unnamed princess possessed by Maimoun may have been suggestive of a way to expose female subjection, but it is hardly an ideal model for Shelley's critical positioning. Amina's defiance of patriarchal control seems promising, but her story comes too close to becoming once again complicit with the patriarchal discourse of severe punishment for acts of female creativity. It is thus not surprising that Shelley eventually chose to appropriate the character of Safie: she is a gifted musician, who

sings and plays a song about the separation of lovers, acts which can read as a representation of text production. Even though we never hear it in the *Nights*, Safie clearly has a tale to tell.

Furthermore, Safie is the doorkeeper to the world of opulence and earthly pleasures which men are invited to enjoy only if they promise never to tell what they have seen or experienced inside the house: 'my friend, in consenting that you stay with us, I must forewarn you, that it is not only on condition that you keep secret what we have required you [*sic*], but also that you observe exactly the rules of good manners and civility' (FLB, 69). The secret that Safie requires her male guests to keep is that while they are there they will witness her and her sisters beating two dogs. We later learn that the dogs are actually the remaining two ladies of Bagdad who have been transformed as punishment for their wanton display of lust and envy. On the orders of the Jinniya who transformed them, Zobeide is required to beat her sisters every day. If she does not the Jinniya has promised to return and inflict the same punishment on her. The male guests are asked to observe 'the rules of good manners' and never question the sisters' actions.

This element of the story can be read as a myth of female complicity in the patriarchal subjugation of women. The two sisters are first punished by a female Jinn for their infringement of the patriarchal laws that govern the conduct of women. Secondly, Amine and Safie never question if this punishment is just. Perhaps fearing that they will suffer the same fate, they mechanically help Zobeide to carry out the orders of the Jinniya. In *Frankenstein,* the original role that Safie plays in ensuring that the secret narrative of female subjugation is kept between the three sisters is subverted. As we shall see, Safie's letters can be read as the representation of a written text that contains a 'secret' knowledge of women's strategies for resisting their subjugation.

The directness of Shelley's appropriation can be seen in the way that she describes the songs that Safie sings as the 'divine airs' in the style of her 'native country' (*F*, 83), recalling the sound of Safie's flute of her own 'native design' (FLB, 76). But, more importantly, the title of Safie's 'Song of Separated Lovers' could easily be applied to her tale of separation from Felix as overheard by the creature and reported to Frankenstein, which he then transmits to Walton. We might conclude that the importance of the secret and unreported female knowledge contained within Safie's letters has something to do with the truth behind the

reported tale of her separation from Felix. This certainly forms part of their content. The creature tells Frankenstein that 'the zeal of Felix was warmed by several letters that he received from this lovely girl, who found means to express her thoughts in the language of her lover by the aid of an old man, a servant of her father's who understood French'. He reports the 'substance' of them, but not their full content to Frankenstein: '[...] I have copies of these letters; for I found means, during my residence in the hovel, to procure the implements of writing. [...] Before I depart, I will give them to you, they will prove the truth of my tale; but at present [...] I shall only have time to repeat the substance of them to you' (*F*, 82-3).

In some versions of the *Nights*, the sultan commands his scribes to record Scheherazade's orally told tales.[56] Similarly, in the 'Five Ladies of Bagdad', the Caliph Haroun al-Rashid praises the quality of the sisters' stories and commands his scribes to record their tales for posterity (FLB, 124). In *Frankenstein*, Safie's letters are twice mediated by men: the old man who effectively records her tale for posterity after having heard her oral story and the creature who mediates the meaning and content of those letters when he relates their content to Frankenstein. The narrative structure of *Frankenstein* and the way in which it places emphasis on the quick transmission of the sense of Safie's letters – night is coming and the creature must finish his tale, just as Frankenstein must find time to repeat it to Walton before he grows too ill to do so – draws attention to what these men thought was important and needed to be related, leaving out what they thought unimportant.

Not only does Safie's text relate her experience of separation and exile, she also tells of her mother's past and reflects a continuity of female experience. We learn that the content of the letters documents the teachings of her mother and the way in which they deeply affected Safie's conduct in her involvement with the De Laceys and the wrongful imprisonment of her father:

> Safie related, that her mother was a Christian Arab, seized and made a slave by the Turks; [...] she had won the heart of the father of Safie, who married her. The young girl spoke in high and enthusiastic terms of her mother, who, born in freedom spurned the bondage to which she was now reduced. She instructed her daughter in the tenets of her religion, and taught her to aspire to the higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit, forbidden to the female followers of Mahomet. This lady died; but her lessons were indelibly impressed on the mind of Safie, who sickened at the prospect of again returning to Asia, and being immured within the walls of a harem, allowed only to occupy herself with puerile amusements, [...] The prospect of marrying a Christian, and remaining in a country where women were allowed to take a rank in society, was enchanting to her. (*F*, 83)

The creature is concerned that the sun is 'already far declined', and he has very little time left to complete his tale. While the creature feels that it is important to spend time on relating the full reported narrative of Safie's separation from Felix and their reunion, the content of Safie's letters are retold in a redacted form. The teachings of Safie's mother are the 'secret' female knowledge transmitted by Safie, in her role as Scheherazade, to Margaret Saville as Dinarzade. This knowledge travels unremarked by the male characters, all of whom read Safie's letters but fail to ever value those teachings enough to recount the entire content.

The ghostly presence of Safie's mother in *Frankenstein* is important to understanding Shelley's rewriting practice. She can be read as a textual representation of Mary Wollstonecraft. The creature's brief description of Safie's mother's teachings reflects one of the central arguments of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women.* Zonana argues that Shelley's constant allusion to Safie as 'the Arabian' in *Frankenstein* is an appropriation of the 'rebellious "Arabian" woman' (TWP, 172), a recurring archetype of female resistance in *A Vindication*:

> In making *Frankenstein*'s central (though unrecorded) narrator a "lovely Arabian" who escapes the harem, Mary Shelley firmly binds her novel, philosophically and textually, to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*
> "Mahometanism," for Mary Wollstonecraft, is a figure for an error she finds central to Western culture: the refusal to grant women full membership as rational beings in the human race. References to the harem, to "Mahometanism," to the seraglio and to "Egyptian bondage" form a persistent thread in her text. (TWP, 173)

Zonana rejects Ann Mellor's and Marc Rubenstein's analysis of Safie's letters. Both critics 'have found in these letters an "incarnation" of Mary Wollstonecraft: Rubenstein sees Safie's mother, Mellor sees Safie herself as the representation of the notorious eighteenth-century feminist'. Zonana argues that this appropriation of orientalist imagery from *A Vindication* has more to do with the influence of Wollstonecraft's work on the core philosophy of *Frankenstein* than it does with inscribing the body of Wollstonecraft into her text (TWP, 173). However, I would argue that when we view Safie as Shelley's representation of herself in the text, the distinction between Wollstonecraft as a textual and literal progenitor collapses. I argue that by inscribing the relationship between herself and Wollstonecraft into the

text of *Frankenstein,* in the relationship between Safie's mother's teachings and Safie's actions, the relationship between mother and daughter as women writers becomes one of textual influence.

Zonana argues that Wollstonecraft's use of Orientalism drew on the 'eighteenth-century, European "Orientalist" construction of the East' (TWP, 173). However, unlike Ballaster, Zonana does not note the significance of the cultural inheritance of this reception by women writers during this period. They tended to read the *Nights* and other oriental tales as texts that offered the possibility of the transgression and subversion of patriarchal society and normative representation. They embodied this aspiration in their representation of female storytellers, telling women's stories to and for other women. This is very much in line with Wollstonecraft's use of the term 'Mahometanism', and her appropriation of the orientalised imagery of the 'eastern harem' in a *Vindication.* In the introduction Wollstonecraft states that in books written by men for the instruction of women:

> it is asserted, in direct terms, that the minds of women are enfeebled [...] in the true style of Mahometanism, [...] [women] are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, [...] improvable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above brute creation, and puts a natural sceptre in a feeble hand.[57]

Wollstonecraft's central argument is that the subordination of women to men and misogynistic attitudes towards the female mind has led to women being poorly educated. The education they do receive is not sufficient to prepare them for their life in the wider world. Wollstonecraft repeatedly states that, at present, a woman's education only equips her for a life of 'Egyptian bondage' in the 'Eastern Haram' or the 'Haram of an Eastern bashaw'.[58] She argues that women must either be 'shut up like eastern princes or educated in such a manner as to be able to think and act for themselves'.[59] This is an allusion to the story of 'The History of the Young Prince of the Black-Isles' in the *Nights.* In the story a young prince is paralysed from the waist down by a magic spell cast by his wife, who is tired of living in isolation with him. He is shut up in his palace, unable to move, until a visiting King decides to rescue him (*ANE,* 54-66).[60] In her defence of the female logical mind and of women's right to be treated as rational human beings, Wollstonecraft uses oriental imagery and an allusion to the *Nights* to challenge dominant patriarchal discourses on women's intellectual inadequacies, which she compares to 'Mahometanism'. This was taken

up by her daughter in *Frankenstein* and embodied in particular in the character of Safie, who learns from the teachings of her mother how to resist and escape the 'slavery' and 'bondage' of the female followers of 'Mahomet'. Instructed in her mother's beliefs or 'religion' from an early age, Safie aspires to possess 'the higher powers of intellect' and an 'independence of spirit'. In other words, Safie, as a textual representation of Shelley, is shown to have learned how to resist a patriarchal textual construction that would deny her possession of the creative and intellectual autonomy of a logical mind, by copying the critical positioning of her mother.

In sum, the influence of Safie's mother's teachings on the content of Safie's letters can be read as a textual representation of the influence of Wollstonecraft's life and work on Shelley's writing practice. By accepting this influence and by constructing, at the core of her novel, a Scheherazadic resistance to the patriarchal representation and control of women's lives and texts, Shelley appears to displace her authorial anxiety, and to signal her assertion that resistance in women's texts is a collective act of continuation and dissemination of their collective core values. In these terms, *Frankenstein* must be seen as an explicitly feminist novel in which Shelley resisted the construction of female creative lack that she saw as a dominant discourse of male Romanticism. While male Romantics often evoked the inspiring figure of the oriental female muse, Shelley conflated traditionally 'male' and 'female' aspects of creativity by locating female creative power in the logical mind of the character of Safie.

Safie's text, in its written form, is located in the domestic space of the De Laceys' hut. This contrasts with the opulence and hedonistic pleasures offered to men by women in the 'The Five Ladies of Bagdad' and may be seen to promote an ideology of ethical care and sense of community, expressed and advocated by the life and material circumstances of Safie and the De Lacey family. The De Laceys suffer in exile for their part in the escape of Safie's father. Yet the creature's focus in recounting their story is not on the act of repression of the individual by the state. It is on the way in which the De Laceys form an ideal community based on compassion, kindness and the equal division of domestic labour and responsibility for each other. This 'ethic of care' is further idealised by the arrival of Safie who, like the character in the *Nights*, brings abundance, happiness and culture to the home of the De Laceys, where she plays and sings for them:

> Spring advanced rapidly; the weather became fine, and the skies cloudless. It surprised me that what before was desert and gloomy should now bloom [...] Felix went out to his work; and, after the usual occupations of Agatha were finished, the Arabian sat at the feet of the old man, and, taking his guitar, played some airs so entrancingly beautiful, that they at once drew tears of sorrow and delight from my eyes. She sang, and her voice flowed in a rich cadence, swelling or dying away, like a nightingale of the woods. (*F,* 77-9)

Safie respects and cares for the old man, while Agatha and Felix share an equal division of labour. Furthermore, Safie's appearance as spring approaches marks the end of the De Laceys' struggle to find work and provide food for their community. Because Safie, in her originating text, only provides for the comfort of strangers on the condition that they keep her secret, the creature's act of narration to Frankenstein and his act of Promethean theft of female knowledge when he copies Safie's letters can be read as an infraction of the rules of the hospitality of this female Romantic ideal of community. The creature fails to comprehend the importance of their contents. He only transcribes them because they can provide authorisation and prove the 'truth' of his own tale. For this act of infringement on the female oppositional space of the De Laceys' hut, the creature is excluded from their community.

This would at first suggest a gendered reversal of women's texts to a position of dominance over male patriarchal discourse, which would furthermore trouble Shelley's ideal of the equality of male and female representation within the text. However, it is important to recognise that the creature – himself an outsider – can be seen to reject the ethics of patriarchal social inequality in the classical texts propagated by male Romanticism, in favour of learning more about and attempting to join the idealised female Romantic space of the De Laceys' community. It would be erroneous however to read this as Shelley's enactment of a poetic revenge on misogynistic male Romantic authors. Shelley displaced her own attempts at a conventionally male classical self-education onto the creature and thus into the text of *Frankenstein.* Shelley's representation of the creature's self-education can therefore be seen to suggest that the exclusion of anyone from an education based on their gender or their difference from the normative is a great injustice.

On one of his 'scavenging trips' the creature finds Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther,* Milton's *Paradise Lost,* and Plutarch's *Lives* in a 'leathern portmanteau', along with some articles of clothing (*F,* 85-6). These books reflect

Shelley's own reading list around the time that she wrote *Frankenstein.* Mellor notes that:

> In the years before and during the composition of Frankenstein, Mary Shelley read or reread the books found by the creature in an abandoned portmanteau -- Goethe's Werther, Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Romans, Volney's Ruins or. . . the Revolutions of Empire, and Milton's Paradise Lost, as well as these poets, the creature occasionally quotes Coleridge and Byron.[61]

The discovery occurs shortly after the creature has acquired the basics of language from observing the De Lacey family. This is significant and marks a new stage in his civilising self-education. Through a continual study that 'exercised' his 'mind upon these histories, whilst [his] friends were employed in their ordinary occupations', the creature claims to have acquired 'In the *Sorrows of Werter'* a knowledge of 'obscure subjects, [...] a never ending source of speculation and astonishment. The gentle and domestic manners it described, combined with lofty sentiments and feelings, which had for their object something out of the self' (*F*, 86). This leads him to believe that he has acquired a degree of logical thought and reason, and that he has risen above the De Laceys, who are engaged in 'ordinary occupations'. While this would align him with an ideal (and male) superiority conferred by classical education, the creature's identification with Werther also forces his recognition of his own lack of a coherent identity:

> [...] I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike the beings concerning whom I read, [...][I] partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependant on none, and related to none. [...] My person was hideous, and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually reoccurred, but I was unable to solve them. (*F,* 86)

Similarly, the creature finds his reading of Plutarch's *Lives* rewarding but difficult. It presents him with a view of ancient history which he attempts to apply to his own narrow experience of life:

> [...] Plutarch taught me high thoughts; he elevated me above the wretched sphere of my own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages. Many things I read surpassed my understanding and experience. [...] I felt the greatest ardour for virtue [...] and abhorrence for vice, as far as I understood the signification of those terms, relative as they were, I applied them to pleasure and pain alone. (*F,* 86-7)

As was the case for Shelley herself, the creature's self-imposed project of study of male Romantic and classical texts forces an identification of his cultural lack and his assumed limited understanding. He seeks but finds no answers in the *Sorrows of Young Werther* and he is unable to fully understand Plutarch's *Lives*. His failure, attributed to his being 'unformed in mind', may be read as an allegory of Shelley's own anxieties regarding her lack of a formal classical education, and her consequent inability of achieving an autonomous self-identity.

Despondent and depressed by his hours of study, the creature soon returns his attention to the De Lacey household, and reflects on the positive changes that have occurred there because of Safie's presence. The creature's desire to belong is transformed from an internalised, individual philosophical desire to know himself and where he fits into the grand scheme of the universe (consistent with the Romantic masculine ideals of individual autonomy and 'unity of being' as defined by Mellor) into a desire to belong to an idealised, utopian community, reflecting Shelley's 'Romantic feminine' concern with enacting a social rather than political Promethean revolution:

> "These were the reflections of my hours of despondency and solitude; but when I contemplated the virtues of the cottagers, their amiable and benevolent dispositions I persuaded myself that when they should become acquainted with my admiration of their virtues, they would compassionate me, and overlook my personal deformity. [...] I resolved, at least, not to despair, but in every way to fit myself for an interview with them which would decide my fate. [...] "Several changes, in the mean time took place in the cottage. The presence of Safie diffused happiness among its inhabitants; and I also found that a greater degree of plenty reigned there. Felix and Agatha spent more time in amusement and conversation, and were assisted in their labours by servants. They did not appear rich, but they were contented and happy; their feelings were serene and peaceful, while mine became more tumultuous. Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was. (*F,* 88)

Outside of the cottage and on the edge of transgressive female Romantic space, the creature overhears and is intrigued by the cottagers' conversation. The creature, like the Sultan Schahriar, overhears a female dialogue that is not directly addressed to him but is nonetheless deeply affecting to his sense of identity. Moreover, like Shelley – who knew all too well what it was to feel excluded from the text and to question her identity as a female author because of that exclusion – the creature is made to occupy a liminal space between the value attributed to a canonical classical education (the reserve of the male, and achieved in isolation) and the value of a simple but rewarding life realised within a community (and associated with the

feminine). His condition of (male) outsider, excluded from full humanity, however, shuts him out of both spheres, and this has dire consequences.

Through his self-education, the creature comes to associate his inability to grasp fully the meaning of the texts he has studied –and therefore his inability to belong to Safie's oppositional domestic space or the patriarchal world outside it – with Victor's failure to apply his stolen Promethean knowledge to the successful creation of life. In the creature's reading of *Paradise Lost*, he is unable to identify fully with Adam:

> Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the empirical care of his creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: But I was wretched, helpless, and alone. (*F,* 87)

The creature reads *Paradise Lost* as a 'true history' of God's creation of Adam in his own image and compares it to Victor's journals which document his own creation. Unlike Adam's creation which he views as perfect 'beautiful and alluring', the creature interprets Victor's detailed description of his creation as a 'series of disgusting circumstances' that 'form[ed] a creature so hideous' that his own creator 'turned away' from his creation in disgust (*F,* 87-8). Victor's use of Promethean knowledge is read by the creature as a pale imitation of God's creation. He fails to create in his own image and then rejects his creation. Victor's parental negligence forces the creature to learn on his own.

Through his inability to identify with textual representations of characters that might provide him with role models, the creature comes to believe in a self-fulfilling prophecy that he is the monstrous and dangerous result of the misuse of Promethean fire as knowledge. He views himself as more like Satan than Adam, because he envies the happiness of the De Laceys: 'for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me' (*F,* 87). It is this envy that leads the creature to destroy the De Laceys' home. The creature's theft of knowledge – in his regime of self-imposed study as a substitute for the formal education he was denied by Victor's negligence – can thus be seen as directly responsible for the creature's retaliation. Unable to find either community or individual identity, the creature enacts a final revenge on the site of his exclusion by

burning down the De Lacey's hut in a startling misuse of his stolen knowledge as Promethean fire. The creature acknowledges a

> kind of insanity in my spirits, that burst all boundaries of reason and reflection. I lighted the dry branch of a tree and danced with fury around the devoted cottage. [...] the wind fanned the fire, and the cottage was quickly enveloped by flames, which clung to it, and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues.
> "As soon as I was convinced that no assistance could save any part of the habitation, I quitted the scene. (*F,* 94)

Initially the creature has no idea how to create fire. He comes across it accidentally when he finds a fire that has not been extinguished by travelling beggars (*F,* 69). The fire quickly burns away to nothing and the creature wracks his brain trying to think of how he might recreate it: 'I gave several hours of consideration to this difficulty; but I was obliged to relinquish all attempt to supply it' (*F,* 70). The creature's theft of fire signifies and foreshadows his Promethean theft and misuse of knowledge. By the time he has stolen Safie's Scheherazadic text, and thanks to the textual knowledge he has acquired, the creature knows all too well the dangers of the misuse of knowledge, and he uses fire to seek revenge on those who would exclude him. In the creature's final revenge Shelley shows an awareness of the dangers of exclusion. However, in transferring her own sense of exclusion onto the creature, Shelley also suggests that the desire for revenge – however destructive – is a powerful motivation in the construction of female narratives.

'LISTEN TO MY HISTORY': VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN'S SUBVERSION OF SCHEHERAZADIC STORYTELLING AND 'THE FOURTH VOYAGE OF SINDBAD'

The tension between the transmission and the restriction of knowledge present in the narrative structure of the *Nights*, can also be seen in Victor Frankenstein's tale, its imbedded reported narratives (fig b. II & III) and its relationship to the primary linear core of *Frankenstein* (fig b. I). In conjunction with the imagery of Prometheus Pyrphoros, this represents Victor Frankenstein's restricted access to the academic knowledge that would have allowed him to successfully create life. This knowledge, couched in the imagery of Prometheus Plasticator, is constructed as a secret and privileged female sphere of creation from which Victor, as a male creator, is

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excluded. Victor's encroachment into the female territory of Scheherazadic storytelling and his theft of the 'female' knowledge of childbirth and child rearing ultimately make both of these attempts at creation a failure. In her appropriation of the narrative structure of the *Nights*, Shelley can be seen to have subverted the dominant classical Promethean myths surrounding knowledge and creation, in order to displace her anxieties of female authorship onto the creative failures of a male character. In her exclusion of Victor Frankenstein from the proper understanding of privileged and secret female knowledge, Shelley enacts a revenge of poetic justice on those who would deny her creative autonomy.

The web-like narrative structure of *Frankenstein* consists of thirteen tales (fig b. III) contained within the direct linear transmission of Walton's narrative as told to his sister Margaret in letters and journal entries in which he records and preserves Victor's oral narrative together with Safie's letters (fig b. II). I define the thirteen tales in the tertiary structure (fig b. III) as separate stories where they begin and end with a conventional formulaic storytelling phrase uttered by the narrator of that section to signify the beginning and the end of the frame. For example, Victor begins the story of his childhood (fig b.III:1) with the phrase: 'listen to my history' (*F*, 17). Each imbedded tale in this story cycle: (a) 'The Tale of Beaufort the Poor Merchant and his Daughter'; (b) 'The Tale of Elizabeth Lavenza'; (c) 'The Story of Henry Clerval (The Merchant of Geneva's Son)'; and (d) 'Frankenstein's Education' is separated by a justification of why it is important for Victor to relate this story in order for the general story of his childhood to make sense. Phrases such as 'I cannot refrain from relating them' (*F*, 18)[62] or 'before I continue with my narrative, I must record an incident' (F, 19),[63] return each imbedded tale (a, b, c and d) back to the story of Victor's childhood. These imbedded tales are used as evidence in support of Victor's rhetorical argument in which he hopes that he can enlist Walton in his search for the creature. However, the story cycle of Victor's childhood is not complete until Victor closes his narration by completing the frame, with a warning to Walton that he should heed Victor's words and learn from the story. This returns the story to its point of origin (fig b. II). Victor's warning then opens up the story cycle of 'The Creation of The Creature' (2) with the words 'listen patiently' (*F*, 31).

Victor believes that the fate of humanity rests on his ability to get Walton to accept the 'truth of his tale', in the hope that he can convince Walton to continue his quest to destroy the creature: 'The task of his destruction was mine, but I have failed.

When actuated by selfish and vicious motives, I asked you to undertake my unfinished work; and I renew this request now, when I am only induced by reason and virtue' (*F,* 151). As with Scheherazade in the *Nights,* the lives of countless others are reliant upon Victor's ability to convince his listener. Shelley presents Victor Frankenstein as a male storyteller whose narrative technique evokes for the reader an analogy with Scheherazade's storytelling.

When Walton expresses sympathy for Frankenstein's plight and his desire to help him, the latter makes it clear that his fate is now sealed, as his story will show: '"[...] nothing can alter my destiny: listen to my history, and you will perceive how irrevocably it is determined"' (*F,* 17). In effect, Frankenstein's story, which starts with his early childhood and education and ends with his bestowing 'animation upon lifeless matter' (*F,* 30), enacts a Promethean myth. As Prometheus Plasticator, Victor – who, as we have seen, is also aligned with an oriental female storyteller – is associated with female creativity and giving birth. Victor's creation of life and text, however, goes against sanctioned modes of reproduction and representation. Just as Prometheus Plasticator sprinkled his clay with rainwater before he moulded it to create men instead of animals, Victor deviates from normative sexual procreation and instead creates life from an amalgamation of dead body parts:

> Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses. My attention was fixed upon every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings. [...] I paused, examining and analysing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me – a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it had illustrated, I was surprised that among so many men of genius, who had directed their inquiries towards the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret. (*F,* 30)

Spending days and nights among the dead building blocks from which he will create, at first all he can see is dead material that is not conducive to the expression of 'the delicacy of human feelings' without the divine spark of imaginative power, the Promethean light of divine inspiration and stolen knowledge, a light at once simple and 'brilliant and wondrous' to behold. Prometheus Plasticator needs Prometheus Pyrphoros: until Victor is in possession of both 'male' knowledge and 'female' imagination he cannot create anything.

The Promethean knowledge and the Promethean material he will create from is doubly stolen. Victor's theft of dead body parts can be read as an intertextual theft of fragments of the existent textual body, while his act of embracing the Promethean light of inspiration can be read as his theft of the female storytelling archetype for the purposes of inspiring the male Romantic poet. Victor's affiliation with the storytelling practices of Scheherazade gives him access to illicit and secret female knowledge, which he fails to understand fully. He repeatedly describes his newly found power to create as a 'secret' knowledge from which other men of genius have been excluded.

In Victor's Promethean story of stealing knowledge and the creation of new life, I read Shelley's representation of anxiety of authorship and, specifically, of female authorship. Victor can be seen as the representation of a male Romantic poet who masquerades as Scheherazade, and in this male imitation of a patriarchal representation of a female text maker, Shelley can be seen to displace her female authorial anxieties. Victor Frankenstein's work is fated to destroy him, his life's work and everyone around him. Directly after Victor's Promethean theft of female knowledge and inspiration, Shelley explicitly alludes to 'The Fourth Voyage of Sindbad':

> What had been the study and desire of the wisest men since the creation of the world was now within my grasp. Not that, like a magic scene, it all opened upon me at once: the information I had obtained was of a nature rather to direct my endeavours so soon as I should point them towards the object of my search, than to exhibit that object already accomplished. I was like the Arabian who had been buried with the dead, and found a passage to life aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual, light. (*F*, 31)

This is a substitutive appropriation in which Shelley chooses to allude to a story drawn from the *Nights* rather than an available classical equivalent, presumably because it can speak of and to female experience in a way that classical allusions cannot without bringing with them the ghost of Arachne's defeat. For example, in book ten of *The Odyssey*, blown back to Aeaea by the winds released from Aeolus's bag of winds, Odysseus and his men become embroiled in Circe's web of deceit. Circe attempts to keep Odysseus and his crew on her island by offering them a feast laced with a potion that turns all who eat and drink into swine, and makes them forget their desire to return home. This is explicitly linked with her act of weaving:

Circe —and deep inside they heard her singing, lifting
her spellbinding voice as she glided back and forth
at her great immortal loom, her enchanting web
a shimmering glory only goddesses can weave [...]
and how she sings—enthralling! [...]
She ushered them in [...]
then she mixed them a poison—cheese, barley
and pale honey mulled in Pramnian wine—
but into the brew she stirred her wicked drugs
to wipe from their memories any thought of home.
Once they'd drained the bowls she filled, suddenly
she struck with her wand, drove them into her pigsties,
all of them bristling into swine—with grunts,
snouts—even their bodies, yes, and only
the men's minds stayed steadfast as before.

(*Od.,*10.242-65, pp.237-8)

Like Penelope's weaving of Laertes' shroud, Circe's webs are also associated with female deceit and the dangerous power of female creativity – a danger that threatens women too, as Arachne's fate shows.

Whereas the representation of Circe's creative power as destructive female magic functions to undermine female text production and has nothing to say about the lived experience of women, the 'Fourth Voyage of Sindbad' does. The stories are startlingly similar. After setting out on his fourth voyage Sindbad is shipwrecked by a sudden gust of wind. He and his five surviving comrades wash up on an island and are invited to feast by the natives of the island who ply them with food and drink including a black herb that makes them forget and lose their senses. However, like Odysseus, Sindbad, suspecting some trickery, avoids being affected by this enchantment. The fate of his comrades is to be fattened up and eaten by the natives:

[they] gave us a certain herb, which they made signs to us to eat. My comrades, not taking notice that the blacks eat none of it themselves, consulted only the satisfying of their own hunger, and fell a-eating with greediness. But I, suspecting some trick, would not so much as taste it, which happened well for me; for a little time after, I perceived my companions had lost their senses [...] the blacks gave us that herb [...] on purpose to deprive us of our senses, that we might not be aware of the sad destiny prepared for us: for being cannibals, their design was to eat us as soon as we grew fat. (FVS, 157-8)

Because he has not been affected by this herb Sindbad is able to escape. It is significant that here the secret knowledge of the other as a magical deceit is conferred not onto a woman, but onto a savage cannibalistic tribe of black natives. Despite the disturbing implications of this encounter with otherness, Shelley

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appropriates Sindbad as a story of escape from deceitful enchantment and return to a domestic space. Reiterating the topos of storytelling as survival, when Sindbad arrives, he tells the story of his narrow escape, and the king allows him to stay, rewarding him with the hand of a rich and virtuous lady of the king's court. Sindbad learns too late that it is the 'barbarous' custom of this country to bury the spouse alongside their dead husband or wife. Sindbad grows understandably concerned: 'the fear of my wife's dying first, and that I should be interred alive with her, occasioned me to have very mortifying reflections' (FVS, 160). Indeed, as he fears, his wife soon dies and Sindbad is buried alive with her body. It is the custom that some water and a loaf of bread is left for the living spouse. In order to survive until he can escape from an underworld in which he is surrounded by the bodies of the dead, Sindbad kills each new arrival and steals their bread and water. Eventually Sindbad finds a way out of the catacomb: 'At last I perceived a light resembling a star: I went on towards the light, and sometimes lost sight of it, but always found it again; and at last discovered that it came through a hole in the rock, large enough for a man to get out' (FVS, 162).

While the story is about Sindbad, it is also a text concerned with female mortality, and it is for this that, I would argue, Shelley appropriates it. In Sindbad's recognition that it is likely that his wife will die before him the text indicates an awareness of the dangers of procreation and maternal mortality. This can be also read as an allegory of the dangers inherent in female text production. The fact that the two most violent murders that Sindbad commits are against women, whose deaths ensure his own survival and his acceptance of the 'gift' of a rich courtly lady for his wife, suggest that women's lives are a disposable commodity. Women are only useful to the male hero for what their lives and deaths will provide him with. The story of Sindbad contains representations of the suffering of women and the material circumstances in which they must live. Let us not forget that it is Scheherazade – whose storytelling saves her from being murdered by her husband – that recounts Sindbad's tale. It is then possible to argue that the allusion to Sindbad at this juncture of Frankenstein's tale allows Shelley to reintroduce the significance of the autonomous female text maker who subtly transmits a subversive representation of female lived experience to her sister Dinarzade.

However, Shelley attributes this allusion to her male narrator who fails to recognise the 'secret' female transmission of knowledge contained within the text.

Victor uses the allusion of 'The Fourth Voyage of Sindbad' as an allegory of his own discovery and he fails to recognise its links to female experience of a fear of death in childbirth and the anxieties of creation. The *Nights* is used by Victor here only for what it can provide in terms of another source of Promethean light imagery, the 'passage to life aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual, light' (*F*, 31). Once again, the female text (Scheherazade's) is utilised for the male narrator's inspiration, fulfilling the function of the female oriental muse that we earlier saw evoked in Shelley's and Byron's Romantic texts, and with no recognition either of the muse's autonomy or of the text's concerns.

Shelley manipulates the classical myth of Prometheus Plasticator by merging it with a Scheherazadic structure in order to criticise its male Romantic usage. Through the substitutive appropriation of these allusions, Shelley's classical intertexts are made to speak with a female voice, for and to the material circumstances of women. Moreover, though Victor may disregard it, Sindbad's story continues to resonate in the text of *Frankenstein*. Sindbad's forced journey into the underworld is followed by his immediate return to the domestic feminised space of home where he makes reparations for his absence by helping his community and giving alms to the poor (FVS, 163). Shelley's allusion to 'The Fourth Voyage of Sindbad' anticipates the customs and ethic of care that the creature witnesses at the De Laceys' hut.

Shelley's use of an arabesque narrative frame structure to narrate Victor's experience to Walton further suggests an analogy with Scheherazade's storytelling. Zonana picks up on the character of Victor Frankenstein's representation as an orientalist. After he escapes the birth of his monstrous progeny:

> Victor Frankenstein seeks "consolation in the works of the orientalists" (64). His friend Clerval has been studying Oriental languages and literature; Victor reads the tales in translation, finding in them that "life appears to consist in a warm sun and a garden of roses, in the smiles and frowns of a fair enemy, and the fire that consumes your own heart" (64). In presenting Victor's attraction to Oriental tales of languor and sexual paradise, Mary Shelley shows that Victor [...] is more "Mahometan" than he knows. Perhaps Victor later preserves the copies of Safie's letters because, as far as he can see, they too present an "Oriental" tale, though he fails to grasp how their message challenges his fantasies of sensuous bliss in "a garden of roses." (TWP, 177)

Victor as a male Romantic orientalist values the seductive qualities of the oriental tales and the storyteller that he appropriates. However, in doing so he fails to recognise their importance as a transgressive text, laden with the female knowledge

that he desires and has been excluded from. Victor consistently fails to conform to the rules and functioning of the web-like structure of Scheherazade's tale telling. He also fails to understand the true significance of the content of the Scheherazadic texts he uses: in his use of 'The Fourth Voyage of Sindbad' and in his transmission of Safie's letters for his own purposes of authorisation, Victor fails to recognise that these are narratives that speak of female experience.

Like the Scheherazadic storyteller, Victor tells his tales in the hope that he can convince the listener to act in accordance with his wishes. The purpose of his storytelling is to convince Walton to act on his behalf soon enough to capture and kill the creature. However, his failure to truly understand the power and functioning of Scheherazade's storytelling makes the fulfilment of its purpose impossible. In *The Arabian Nights* Scheherazade tells her tales under the cover of night. In the day the Sultan Schahriar must work and go about the business of running his kingdom. Night functions as a liminal oppositional space. Dinarzade asks for her story in the hours before dawn. In the space between night and day, between waking and dreaming, Scheherazade's storytelling makes use of the Sultan's altered state of consciousness, to change his perceptions in the hope that it will affect the way in which he will conduct business throughout the day. The Sultan enjoys the stories and is affected and influenced by them but only until they begin to encroach on the day and his time of work must begin. At this point Scheherazade recognises that the time for storytelling is over and she must fall silent: 'As Scheherazade had spoke [*sic*] those words, perceiving it was day, and knowing that the sultan rose betimes in the morning to say his prayers, and hold his council, Scheherazade held her peace' (*ANE,* 18).[64]

In *Stranger Magic,* Warner explains this curious arrangement by arguing that in the *Nights* there is a distinct separation between the hard realities of life, and the explorative possibilities of our experience of it through storytelling: '"The night is for ourselves, but the day is for God," the writer and film-maker Nacer Khemir says, offering one way of explaining these mysterious arrangements'.[65] In *Frankenstein,* Victor subverts this important separation between the reality of day and the transgressive oppositional space of night. He narrates his story during the day and Walton records it at night. Walton writes to Margaret:

> I have resolved every night, when I am not engaged, to record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what he has related during the day. If I should be engaged, I will at least make notes. This manuscript will doubtless afford you the greatest pleasure: but to me, who know him, and who hear it from his own lips, with what interest and sympathy shall I read it some future day. (*F,* 17)

To an extent, Victor's act of storytelling, particularly in this first set of tales, is successful in that he manages to convince Walton of his good and trustworthy character and of his storytelling ability. In the journal entry Walton writes to his sister Margaret, dated August 13th — , Walton notes Victor's noble and cultivated character and the eloquence of his tales:

> My affection for my guest increases every day. He excites at once my admiration and my pity to an astonishing degree. How can I see so noble a creature destroyed by misery without feeling the most poignant grief? He is so gentle, yet so wise; his mind is so cultivated; and when he speaks, although his words are culled with the choicest art, yet they flow with rapidity and unparalleled eloquence. [...] if you will, smile at the warmth of my expressions, while I find every day new causes for repeating them. (*F,* 15-7)

Although Victor does not begin his story until the next entry of the 18th August, there is no suggestion that Walton's warmth may have abated.

However, the fact that Victor narrates his tale during the day directly leads to the failure of his plan to have Walton continue north and pursue the creature on his behalf. Walton's obsession with hearing the continuation of Victor's tale during the day distracts him from his duties as a captain. The ship sails into dangerous waters where it is surrounded by mountains of ice. Walton's authority with his crew is damaged, and they begin to rebel and consider mutiny:

> I mentioned in my last letter the fears I entertained of a mutiny. This morning, [...] I was roused by half a dozen of the sailors who desired admission into the cabin. They entered and their leader addressed me. He told me that he and his companions had been chosen by the other sailors to come in deputation to me, and to make me a demand, which, in justice, I could not refuse. [...] I should engage with a solemn promise, that if the vessel should be freed, I would instantly direct my course southward. (*F,* 149)

Walton must agree to turn south for home and away from his intended purpose of pursuing the creature to avoid the mutiny of his crew. Victor's failure to understand the significance and function of the arabesque frame structure he uses is detrimental to the fulfilment of its purpose as an act of survival. In a last desperate act of

storytelling before his death, Victor attempts to convince the sailors that their decision is cowardice:

> "[...] Return as heroes who have fought and conquered, and who know not what it is to turn their backs on the foe."
> He spoke with a voice so modulated to the different feelings expressed in his speech, with eyes so full of lofty design and heroism, that you can wonder that these men were moved. They looked at one another and were unable to reply. I spoke; I told them to retire and consider what had been said: that I would not lead them further north, if they strenuously desired the contrary. [...] the men, unsupported by ideas of glory and honour, can never willingly continue to endure their present hardships. [...] I have consented to return, if we are not destroyed. Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed. (*F,* 150)

Although they are not unaffected by his eloquence, the encroachment of Victor's storytelling into daylight and the sailors' harsh reality, fails to convince them to continue north.

Victor's further deviation from the narrative structure he appropriates can be seen in the disconnection between its content and its form. Within the frame tale of Victor's narrative of his childhood are imbedded four interrelated tales (see fig b. III.1). In the first tale 'The Story of Beaufort, the Poor Merchant and his Daughter Caroline' (a), Victor recounts how his father rescued his mother from destitution by marrying her after her father's death. Since Beaufort, the merchant, is also Victor's maternal grandfather, it is significant that the story also recounts that he fell into poverty through misfortune rather than through any nefarious activity, and that he honourably paid off all his debts. This story is told in order to impress upon Walton that Victor comes from a good, morally upright family.

'The Story of Elizabeth Lavenza' (b) serves to reinforce the notion of the good moral character of his family through their willingness to take in Elizabeth as their own daughter without any hesitation: 'my father did not hesitate, and immediately went to Italy that he might accompany the little Elizabeth to her future home' (*F,*19). Arguably, Victor utilises the web-like structure of the *Nights* for his own purposes, not to express any concern for Elizabeth and Caroline's experience of their own lives, which should be the focus of a Scheherazadic narrative, but in order to authorise his own moral credentials and to prove the good and kindly characters of the men who rescue them.

For example, the tale of Caroline focuses on the proud character of her father and his fall from grace and Frankenstein's father's act of 'compassion' in grooming her to become his wife. Victor's framing of the importance of his tale undermines Caroline's representation and the expression of her life as a woman:

> This man, whose name was Beaufort, was of a proud and unbending disposition [...] could not bear to live in poverty and oblivion in the same country where he had formerly been distinguished for his rank and magnificence. [...] His daughter attended him with the greatest tenderness, but she saw with despair that their little fund was rapidly decreasing, and that there was no prospect of support. But Caroline Beaufort possessed a mind of uncommon mould; and her courage rose to support her in adversity. She procured plain work; she plaited straw; and by various means contrived to earn a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life. [...] He came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl [...] placed her under the protection of a relation. Two years after this event Caroline became his wife. (*F,* 18-19)

A major aspect of feminist criticism of *Frankenstein* has been that Shelley fails to represent women and female experience positively in the novel and that she became complicit with the patriarchal representations of women and femininity.[66] Shelley hides her positive representation of female experience in the male framing of the tale which functions to undermine that experience. Caroline is actually represented as a resilient woman of courage who, because of her 'unusual' intelligence, is able to support herself and nurse her father. It is her relegation to the permanent occupation of care and childrearing in her marriage to Frankenstein's father that will cause her premature death, and Victor's subordinating of her experience to the foregrounding of his father's generosity that appear to devalue her. Like Scheherazade's, Shelley's narratives of female experience within a patriarchal and misogynistic society are in fact a subtle and thematic representation of female resistance to her Dinarzade-like sisters as the implied receivers of a subversive text.

Victor's fourth tale within this first cluster of stories similarly begins with a justification of his actions as a 'Promethean' revolutionary man of science. Victor feels that he cannot be held fully responsible for his obsession with creating life: 'I desire therefore, in this narration, to state those facts which led to my predilection for that science' (*F,* 21). He then recounts his education and how he accidentally became interested in, and latter obsessed by, the darker possibilities of natural science offered up to him by his early reading of outdated and archaic theories. Victor blames his father for not successfully redirecting him to the study of modern chemistry sooner:

My father looked carelessly at the title-page of my book, and said, "Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash."

      If instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me, that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed much greater powers than the ancient [...] I should have thrown Agrippa aside, and, with my imagination warmed as it was, should probably have applied myself to the more rational theory of chemistry which has resulted from modern discoveries. It is even possible, that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin. (*F*, 21)

In the story of his education, Victor thus shifts the blame for his deviant intellectual interests from himself to his father, an accident of fate and the inadequacies of his early education – which can also arguably be read as further evidence of Shelley's displacement of her authorial anxiety over her lack of a formal classical education onto her construction of Victor as a flawed narrator.

     The explicit moral statement at the beginning of the first frame serves to reinforce the implicit thematically linked didactic message that is common to the three imbedded tales. Each tale builds and impresses upon Walton, and the reader, the message that Victor is a man of good moral character, from a good family, but that even good men, like himself and his father and grandfather before him, can make terrible mistakes and are subject to accidents of fate and circumstance. Shelley figures Victor as a male storyteller who misuses a Scheherazadic narrative to narrate an account of male rather than female experience that is primarily concerned with constructing and maintaining his own Promethean identity.

     Within the *Nights,* Scheherazade, the narrator of a whole web of stories, never explicitly states the purpose or the moral of her tales. Unlike Victor's, her storytelling is not simply for and about her own survival. Marina Warner argues that Scheherazade's stories:

gradually introduce maltreated wives, subjugated daughters, faithful female lovers, clever and courageous slave girls, courageous loving mothers, intelligent teachers, loyal sisters and devoted peris or fairies in an increasingly shining procession of women: refracting the virtues of the storyteller herself and her audience – but not so undilutedly or obviously that her purpose shows too much. By the end, the reader, like the Sultan, can agree that she deserves to live[67]

Story by story, thread by narrative thread issuing from the linear frame of her own tale, Scheherazade builds her case for why she should be allowed to live and subtly

argues against Schahriar's belief that all women are deceitful, dishonourable and unfaithful and deserve to die.

Victor Frankenstein narrates the history of himself, his family and his ancestry as a similar succession of instances of triumph over adversity, humble acts of sacrifice and noble acts of kindness in order to redeem himself, under Walton's scrutiny, as a Promethean creator of both man and text. However, his act of storytelling is only ever for the purpose of authorising himself and justifying his own actions. He displays the selfish concerns of the male Romantic poet with his own revolutionary spirit. This is quite unlike Scheherazade, who not only saves herself through her storytelling, but reflects the suffering and bravery of women in her text to bring about, at least ideally, a reality in which all women are safe from such harm.

Importantly, it is at the crucial point of Frankenstein's account, when he deals with the birth of the creature that Frankenstein deviates most markedly from the narrative structure of the *Nights*. He interrupts his tale at this stage by closing this frame with a moral rebuke to Walton's curiosity and his desire to be let in on this secret Promethean knowledge:

> I see by your eagerness, and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be: listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject. I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow. (*F,* 31)

The repeated formulaic storytelling phrases 'listen to my history', 'listen patiently until the end of my story', in conjunction with Frankenstein's moral warnings to Walton on the dangers of acquiring knowledge here actually begin to align with the European folk and fairytale traditional narrative structures and the explicit morality of their beginning and end structures, thus implicitly also evoking the illiterate female orality associated with those traditions.

Frankenstein's warnings to Walton on the dangerous pursuit of knowledge are again reiterated at the end of the framed tale describing the birth of the creature:

> A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind. [...] I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule. If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste

for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquillity of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed.

But I forget that I am moralizing in the most interesting part of my tale; and your looks remind me to proceed. (*F,* 33)

Victor self-reflexively chastises himself for moralising and ruining the building tension of his exciting tale. As I have shown at length, in Victor's narrative Shelley alludes to the structure of the *Nights* in order to depart from it by deploying a (male) narrator who lacks the skill of Scheherazade. It is not just in the similarity, but also in the divergence of these models of storytelling that the significance of Shelley's critique can be found. Shelley's representation of Victor as a failed storyteller can be read as an implicit denunciation of the way male Romantic poets have misappropriated the figure of Scheherazade. Moreover, as I argued earlier in this chapter, Shelley also represents in the character of Safie acts of literate and scholarly female storytelling and authorship; the transmission of a female discourse from which men are excluded; and the establishment of a community based on an ethic of care that undermines the male Romantic ideal of the individualist self. Taken together, these representations of male and female storytelling provide strong evidence of Shelley's adoption of *The Arabian Nights* as a strategy to prise open – in the interests of women and of a new set of ethical values – the system of literary and philosophical values that had prevailed in Europe since classical times. These were values which the self-styled 'revolutionary' Romantics were in fact happy to continue to assent to and propagate.

Shelley is able to displace and overcome both her primary and general anxieties of female authorship within the text of *Frankenstein*. Through her inscription of herself and her own struggle for acceptance and validation into the dominant oriental muse archetype utilised in the male Romantic text, she is able to transform classical allusions (for example, to The *Odyssey* and, most manifestly, to Ovid's Prometheus Plasticator and Aeschylus' Prometheus Pyrphoros) in order to make them speak with her own female voice as a Scheherazadic storyteller. Shelley as Scheherazade is able to speak to, for and about the material experiences of female existence from within the dominant literary patriarchal discourses.

The great achievement of *Frankenstein* is the subtlety of the feminist message at its narrative core. Safie's female text relates to us only *the possibility* of the equal representation of women. In her 'secret' transmission of a message of feminist resistance to Margaret Saville as a Dinarzade figure (and to the implied female receiver of Shelley's narrative that such a structure implies), Shelley imitates and encourages the use of a Scheherazadic narrative that resists textual completion. Through the association of Mary Wollstonecraft with Safie's mother and Shelley's explicit identification with and continuation of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* in her characterisation of the intellectual relationship between Safie's actions and her mother's philosophy, Shelley suggests the presence and continuity of a female resistance to established and pervasive patriarchal dominance. The fact that we do not know if Margaret Saville (as Dinarzade) ever received Safie's (Scheherazade's) letters suggests the possibility of the non-fulfilment of the purpose of her storytelling. In *Frankenstein,* the onus of interpretation and the completion of Scheherazade's web is placed upon us, and we are required to engage in feminist reading practices. It is up to us to inscribe ourselves into the textual body of Margaret Saville. We must become Dinarzade to Shelley's Scheherazade and be willing to listen for the woman in the text.

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[1] Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1994), p.18.

[2] For detailed studies of the cultural and literary influence of the *Nights* on English Literature see, *The Arabian Nights in English Literature: Studies in the Reception of The Thousand and One Nights into British Culture*, ed. by Peter L. Caracciolo (Macmillan, London, 1988); Ros Ballaster, *Fables of the East: Selected Tales, 1662–1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England, 1662–1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Ballaster explores the English and European Literary and cultural contexts of the *Nights* and its influence on English women's fiction of the 18th century. For detailed studies of the cultural and literary influence and the reception of the *Nights* in western cultures see Ferial Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996). Ghazoul traces the literary influence of darkness metaphors and the narrative structure of the *Nights* on storytelling as survival motifs in western literature. For general introductions see Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*; *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West,* ed. by Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States & The Arabian Nights* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011).

[3] Warner, *Stranger Magic,* p.15.

[4] Ballaster, *Fabulous Orients,* pp.3-4.

[5] *Ibid.,* pp.4-5.

[6] *Ibid.,* pp.3-5.

[7] For examples of this tradition see Anthony Hamilton, *Princess Mayblossom*, tr. by Horace Walpole (London:William Dodsley, 1783); Henry W. Weber, *Tales of the East,* 3 vol. [1812] (London: Kessinger, 2010) and François Pétis de La Croix, *Les mille et un Jours; Contes persans* (1766) ed. by Pierre Brunel, Christelle Bahier-Porte and Frédéric Mancier (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006).

[8] For more examples of the use of an oriental muse in Romantic poetry see Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' (1816) in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Blackwell, 2008), pp.620-2 and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Poems of the West and East: West-Eastern Divan; West-Östlicher Divan*, bilingual edition of the Complete Poems (Germanic Studies in America 68) tr. by John Whaley, ed. by Katharina Mommsen (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p.318. Coleridge enacts an oriental feminisation of the river Alph, and refigures Scheherazade as a singing 'Abyssinian Maid' who inspires the male poet to recreate her song. Goethe similarly makes use of a sexualised oriental muse in his *West-Östlicher Divan* (1814-1819). In the 'Book of Suleika', Goethe casts his lover Marianne Von Willmer as Suleika. Throughout the cycle, this character is conflated with the personalities of the Romantic heroines of the *Nights*. Tellingly, Suleika believes that her renewal of life through erotic desire is only granted 'from his [Hafiz; the male poet's] mouth/from his breath', p.318. The orientalised female storyteller in Goethe's cycle is a mouthpiece for Goethe's masculine representation of Romantic love. For a closer examination of Goethe's use of oriental muses see Warner, *Stranger Magic,* pp.309-22.

[9] In *Romanticism and Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), Anne K. Mellor argues that this difference in the representation of political and social revolution is a defining characteristic of the differences between what she terms 'masculine and 'feminine' Romanticism. For Mellor 'masculine Romanticism' is concerned 'with political (as opposed to social) revolution, with the role of the creative writers as political leader or religious saviour'. This is rejected by 'feminine Romanticism', which 'tended to celebrate, not the achievements of the imagination, nor the overflow of powerful feelings, but rather' it located creativity in the intellectual mind and located social change in the domestic sphere, pp.2-3.

[10] On Mary Shelley's studies in Latin and her unpublished translations see Jean de Palacio, 'Mary Shelley's Latin Studies: Her translation of Apuleius'. *Revue de littérature comparée* 38 (1964), pp.564-71. On Shelley's informal classical education see Isobel Hurst, *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.52-100 (pp. 57-9); Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Methuen, 1988), pp.8-12;and Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp.144-71. On Shelley's mythological dramas *Proserpine* and *Midas* and their links to her revision of classical Promethean myth in *Frankenstein* see Alan Richardson, '*Proserpine* and *Midas:* Gender, Genre and Mythic Revisionism in Mary Shelley's Dramas' in *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein,* ed. by Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.124-39. On the influence of the myth of Proserpine and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on Shelley's writing see Julie Carlson, 'Coming After Shelley's *Proserpine*' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41 (1999), pp.351-72; Robert Ready, 'Dominion of Demeter: Mary Shelley's "Mathilda"' *Keats- Shelley Journal* 52 (2003), pp. 94-110. On Shelley's use of classical allusion with particular emphasis on the significance of sibylline prophecy in *The Last Man* see Audrey A. Fisch, 'Plaguing Politics: AIDS, Deconstruction, and *The Last Man*' in *The Other Mary Shelley*, pp.279-80 and Anne K. Mellor, "Love, Guilt and Reparation: *The Last Man*," in *Mary Shelley*: *Her Life,* pp.146-64. On classical appropriations in *Valperga* see Kari Lokke, 'Sibylline Leaves: Mary Shelley's *Valperga* and the Legacy of *Corinne*' *Cultural Interactions in the Romantic Age: Critical Essays in Comparative Literature*, ed. by Gregory Maertz (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp.157-73; Barbara Jane O'Sullivan, 'Beatrice in *Valperga*: A New Cassandra' in *The Other Mary Shelley*, pp.140-58.

[11] In the last twenty years there has been some research undertaken on the influence of *The Arabian Nights* on Mary Shelley's novels. On *Frankenstein* see David Ketterer, '(De)composing *Frankenstein*: The Import of Altered Character Names in the Last Draft' *Studies in Bibliography* 49 (1996), pp.232-76; Joyce Zonana, ' "They Will Prove the Truth of My Tale": Safie's Letters as the Feminist Core of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' *Journal of Narrative Technique* 21:2 (1991), pp.170-84; responding to Zonana's article, Erin Webster Garrett, 'Recycling Zoraida: The Muslim Heroine

in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein' Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*, 20.1 (2000), pp.133-56, makes some brief but interesting points regarding the influence of the *Nights* on the character of Safie; Rebecca Nesvet, '"Have You Thought of a Story?": Galland's Scheherazade and the 1831 *Frankenstein' Women's Writing* 12: 3 (2005), pp.369-80. On *Perkin Warbeck,* with some references to *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* see, Rebecca Nesvet, 'Like the Sultaness Scheherazade' : The Storyteller and the Reading Nation in *Perkin Warbeck'* in *Mary Shelley*: *Her Circle and Her Contemporaries*, ed. by L. Adam Mekler and Lucy Morrison (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp.169-84. Apart from these articles, there has been very little sustained analysis of the influence of the *Nights* on Mary Shelley's writing or her appropriation of its structures, themes and archetypal characters. However, I have found numerous brief references to Mary Shelley in surveys of the influence of the *Nights* on English and European Literature that suggest that the presence of explicit allusions to the *Nights* in Shelley's fiction has been noted. See, Irwin, p.208; Caracciolo, p.68; Warner, *Stranger Magic,* pp.140, 291.

[12] Hurst, FN 25, p.59; Jenifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p.34.

[13] Based on 'The Shelleys' Reading List' in *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* pp.631-84.

[14] Hurst, p.60.

[15] There are two prefaces to *Frankenstein.* The original 1818 preface was authored by Percy Shelley writing as Mary Shelley. The 1831 preface was written by Mary Shelley. While Mary's preface explicitly recalls the events that led to her writing *Frankenstein* and her creative process, Percy's preface is concerned with defending *Frankenstein* as a serious work of literature. See PF18 and PF31.

[16] Mary Shelley's reading journals list fourteen entries for books by William Godwin and seven entries for Mary Wollstonecraft's work (including two entries for her complete posthumous works) from 1814 to May 1817, when Shelley completed *Frankenstein*. Based on 'The Shelleys' Reading List', pp.631-84. Shelley's journals and letters provide the documentary evidence for her reading of her parents work. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that she may have read their work in her childhood. For a discussion of this see Charles E. Robinson, 'A Mother's Daughter: An Intersection of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women'* in *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives*, ed. by Helen M. Buss, D.L Macdonald and Anne McWhir (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), pp.127-38 (pp.130-3).

[17] Robinson notes that in Shelley's preface to the Colburn and Bentley edition of *Caleb Williams* (1831), 'Mary Shelley offered the following remarks on her mother: "The writings of this celebrated woman are monuments of her intellectual superiority. Her lofty spirit, [...] Even now, those who have survived her so many years, never speak of her but with uncontrollable enthusiasm. Her unwearied exertions for the benefit of others, her rectitude, her independence [...] made her the idol of all who knew her."[...] four years earlier in an 1827 letter to Francis Wright [she wrote]: "The memory of my mother has always been the pride & delight of my life; & the admiration of others for her, has been the cause of most of the happiness...I have enjoyed. Her greatness of soul... [has] perpetually reminded me that I ought to degenerate as little as I could from those whom I derived my being" (LMWS 2:3-4) [...] in a fragmentary biography that she wrote in the 1830's about her father: "Mary Wollstonecraft was one of those beings who appear once perhaps in a generation, to gild humanity with a ray which no difference of opinion nor chance of circumstances can cloud. Her genius was undeniable" See Robinson, 'A Mother's Daughter', p.129.

[18] See Gilbert and Gubar, 'Infection in Sentence' in *MWA,* pp.45-92 (p.49). On Shelley's anxieties of female authorship see, 'Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve' in *ibid,* pp.213-47.

[19] See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (London and New York: Penguin, 2004). In 'Dedication': Pandora and Luke 16:8, pp. 6-7. In 'The rights and involved duties of mankind considered': Fabricius, Spartans and Pope, Rousseau, pp.23. In 'The prevailing opinion of a sexual character discussed' and 'The same subject continued', Wollstonecraft is focussed on surveying the cultural constructions of inherent feminine virtue and allusions to classical texts are

absent. However, the presence of a storytelling nurse figure is used here to elucidate her objections to Rousseau's *Émile*, pp.56-8. In 'Observations on the state of degradation to which woman is reduced by various causes': Saturnalia and Milton, Pope, pp.72-8; Sappho and Rousseau, pp.95-8. In 'Animadversions on some of the writers who have rendered women objects of pity, bordering on contempt': Cicero and Rousseau, pp.99-112; Telemachus in relation to the slaying of Penelope's suitors and Dryden, p.116;Atlas and Proverbs 4:7, 1:22, pp.127. In 'The effect which an early association of ideas has upon the character': Dryden's 'Palamon and Arcite', p.149. In 'Modesty, – Comprehensively considered, and not as a sexual virtue': Diana and Corinthians 6:16, pp.161-2. In 'Morality undermined by sexual notions of the importance of a good reputation': Argus and Rousseau, pp.164-6; Lucretia, Romulus and Shakespeare, p.169. In 'Of the pernicious effects which arise from the unnatural distinctions established in society': Cerberus (through Shakespeare's *Macbeth)* and Rousseau, pp.179-81. Classical allusions are absent from 'Parental Affection' and 'Duty to Parents'. These chapters set out Wollstonecraft's ideas on the rearing and education of girls. I would argue that classical allusions do not appear in these chapters because they form Wollstonecraft's personal manifesto and do not directly argue against existent literature on the subject. In 'On national education': Juno and Shakespeare*,* pp.211-5. In 'Some instances of the folly which the ignorance of women generates': Cato the Elder and Rousseau, Swift and Pope, pp.232-5.

[20] See Nesvet, 'Have You Thought of a Story?' p.4. In her introduction to the 1831 edition Mary Shelley explicitly recalls this as Byron's challenge to 'all write a ghost story'. See PF31*,* pp.170-1. In the 1818 preface to *Frankenstein,* Percy Shelley attempts to undermine this connection by leaving Byron's challenge unattributed to him. In this version of the novel's genesis three unnamed friends agree 'to each write a story, founded on some supernatural occurrence'. See PF18, pp.5-6.

[21] Nesvet, 'Have You Thought of a Story?', p.4.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Marina Warner argues that while the circumstances of Byron's challenge are well known, the significance of the book from which they were reading is not widely acknowledged: 'It was *Das Gespenterbuch* (*The Book of Ghosts*) by Friedrich Laun and Johann August Apel, first published in Leipzig in five volumes between 1811 and 1815; the first volume was immediately translated into French under the title *Fantasmagoriana.* [...][It] stages several stories-within-stories, and this framing device inspired the English poets to take up the challenge that was to prove so astonishingly productive. [...] Shelley and his friends were reading the French edition, which includes only some of the tales from Laun and Apel; the English translation, *Tales of the Dead*, by a Mrs Utterson (1813), selected even fewer - six stories (one of which she wrote herself). Since then the stories have remained elusive, editions and translations rare'. See Marina Warner, 'An Introduction: Forgotten Gem: *Das Gespenterbuch 'The Book of Ghosts'* by Johann August Apel and Friedrich August Laun, editors' *New Books in German*, Issue 20 (2006). Kindly lent by the author. It is interesting to note that the narrative structure and imagery of *Das Gespenterbuch*, and a number of stories included in the collection bear a striking resemblance to the *Nights.* In particular see 'The Spectre Barber' in Friedrich Laun and Johann August Apel, *Fantasmagoriana: Tales of the Dead,* ed. and tr. by A. J Day (St Ives: Phantasmagoriana Press, 2005), pp.13-36. This tale bears a close resemblance to 'The Man Who Became Rich through a Dream'. See *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1,001 Nights*: Vol., 3, tr. by Malcolm and Ursula Lyons (London: Penguin, 2010), pp.118-21. This is sometimes regarded as a variant of the Sindbad cycle, a significant source of Shelley's allusions to the *Nights* in *Frankenstein.* It does not appear in the *ANE* as it is part of the Calcutta II manuscript (1839-42); derived from an eighteenth-century Egyptian manuscript. However, it appears to have found its way into Europe much earlier, possibly through a 12th Century Latin translation/adaptation by Petrus Alphonsi. See *An Encyclopaedia of the Arabian Nights,* vol. 1, ed. by Richard Van Leeuwen and Ulrich Marzolph (Denver and Oxford: ABC Clio, 2004), p.354.

[24] C. Keegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries,* vol. 2 (London: Henry S. King & Co, 1876) pp. 213-4. Also quoted in Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life,* pp.8-9.

[25] Paul, pp.118-20. Also quoted in Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life,* pp.9-10.

[26] Caracciolo, pp.1-80, gives an excellent overview of the use of *Nights* in England as a pedagogical tool and the way in which it came to be seen as an alternative to the classical epic.

[27] For a discussion of the complex and tangled history of attempts to date the *Nights* and Galland's sources see Nabia Abbott, 'A Ninth-Century Fragment of the "Thousand Nights": New Light on the Early History of the *Arabian Nights'*, pp.21-82; Heinz Grotzfeld, 'The Age of the Galland Manuscript of the *Nights*: Numismatic Evidence for Dating a Manuscript', pp.105-21 and Muhsin Mahdi, 'The Sources of Galland's *Nuits*', pp.122-36 in *The Arabian Nights Reader,* ed. by Ulrich Marzolph, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press: 2006).

[28] See Warner, *Stranger Magic,* p. 7.

[29] For details of the influence of Greek form and narrative structure on the *Nights* see Gustave E. Von Grunebaum, 'Greek Form Elements in the *Arabian Nights'* in *The Arabian Nights Reader*, pp. 137-69.

[30] Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 'Advice to an Author', section iii, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times,* ed. by John M. Robertson (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), pp. 221-5. Quoted in Caracciolo, p. 3.

[31] Alexander Pope, '23, 28 Sep 1720' in *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope,* vol.2, ed. by George Sherburn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) pp. 53-6. Quoted in Caracciolo, p.3.

[32] Richard Hole, *Remarks on the Arabian Nights Entertainments* (London: Cadell & Davies, 1797), p.8. Quoted in Caracciolo, p. 4.

[33] Based on 'The Shelleys' Reading List', pp. 631-84. For an exploration of the significance of Voltaire's imitations of the *Nights* see Warner, 'Magnificent Moustaches: Hamilton's Fooling, Voltaire's Impersonations', pp.265-81; for an exploration of the significance of William Beckford's imitation of *The Nights* in *Vathek,* see 'Symbols of Wonder: William Beckford's Arabesque', pp.289-308 in *Stranger Magic.* For the significance of the many Oriental tales 'translated' by the Syrian monk Dom Denys Chavis and the fabulist Jacques Cazotte and their publication history in the *Le Cabinet des fees* see Warner, 'Introduction', p.13 in *Stranger Magic* and Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion,* pp. 262-3.

[34] George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan* in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, pp.938-1035 (p.940).

[35] Scheherazade instructs her sister to ask her for a story using these words: 'I pray you, [...] tell me one of the fine stories of which you have read so many' *ANE,* p.16. In doing so she associates her storytelling prowess with her scholarship of the written word.

[36] Byron, *Don Juan,* pp.941-7.

[37] Cheryl Fallon Giuliano, 'Gulnare/Kaled's "Untold" Feminization of Byron's Oriental Tales' *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 33.4: Nineteenth Century (1993), pp.785-807 (p.785).

[38] Byron, *Don Juan,* pp.950-2.

[39] *Ibid.,* pp.958-9.

[40] George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, pp. 852-87 (pp. 876-80).

[41] Percy Shelley, 'Alastor' in *Romanticism: An Anthology,* pp.1053-71 (pp. 1057-8).

[42] Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, pp.1095-164.

[43] *Ibid,* pp.1115-6.

[44] Warner, *Stranger Magic*, p.309.

[45] Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 3:123-4, p.856.

[46] George Gordon Byron, 'Prometheus' in *Romanticism: An Anthology,* pp. 887-8 (p. 888).

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound,* tr. by G.M. Cookson (London: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p.1.

[49] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, tr. by David Raeburn (London and New York: Penguin, 2004) 1.80-8, pp.8-9.

[50] See Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender,* pp.83-4. Mellor uses the term 'ethic of care' to describe the philosophy that underpins 'feminine Romanticism'. Mellor does not provide her source for this term. However, I believe that it has its origins in Carol Gilligan's sociological research into gender and concepts of morality. See *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982). Gilligan is credited with creating a feminist 'ethic of care' as an alternative measure of 'moral maturity' that emphasises the importance of empathy and compassion for other people within a community. This branch of feminist ethics is extremely critical of the way in which society negatively regards care based labour as the responsibility of women. It emphasises that caring roles and a social obligation to care for, understand, and help others should be regarded as the moral duty of both men and women. See Rosemary Tong, 'The Feminist Case for and Against Woman's Morality' in *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp.160-71 (p.160).

[51] For a good overview see Ellen Cronan Rose, 'Custody Battles: Reproducing Knowledge about Frankenstein' *New Literary History*, 26.4: Philosophical Resonances (1995), pp.809-32. Rose argues that Ellen Moers 1974 article 'Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother' *New York Review of Books* (March 21, 1974), pp.24-8, was the first feminist criticism of *Frankenstein* that offered a reading of the novel as a birth myth. While it is not explicitly stated that Shelley's concern with monstrous birth is interwoven with her anxieties of female authorship, it is implied in Moers biographical reading of *Frankenstein*, in which she associates Shelley's anxieties over childbirth with the guilt she may have felt over the death of her literary mother ten days after her birth. Marc A. Rubenstein's '"My Accursed Origin": The Search for the Mother in Frankenstein' *Studies in Romanticism* 15 (1976), pp.165-94; and Sandra Gilbert's 'Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve' *Feminist Studies* 4. 2: Toward a Feminist Theory of Motherhood (1978), pp.48-73 (later reproduced in *MWA,* pp.213-48). Both explicitly developed Moers implicit suggestion that in Shelley's creative imagination, childbirth was inextricably linked with literary creation and female authorial anxiety. Mary Poovey and Barbara Johnson in the 1980s continued to draw attention to the relationship between birth myth and female authorship; arguing that Victor Frankenstein can be seen as a projection of Shelley's authorial self, through which the creature can be read as a failed attempt at literary production. See Mary Poovey, 'My Hideous Progeny: Mary Shelley and the Feminization of Romanticism' *PMLA* 95. 3 (1980), pp.332-47 (later reproduced in Poovey, 'My Hideous Progeny: The Lady and the Monster' in *The Proper Lady,* pp.114-42) and Barbara Johnson, 'My Monster/My Self' *Diacritics* 12.2, *Cherchez la Femme: Feminist Critique/Feminine Text* (1982), pp.2-10. See also Mary Jacobus, 'Is There a Woman in This Text? *New Literary History* 14.1 (1982), pp.117-41 (pp.130-41); Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse' *Feminist Studies* 13.1 (1987) pp.49-82; and Paul Sherwin, 'Frankenstein: Creation as Catastrophe' *PMLA*, 96 (1981) pp. 883-903.

[52] The narrative structure of *Frankenstein* has been variously described as a Chinese box or frame tale by other critics. See for example George Levine, '*Frankenstein* and the Tradition of Realism' *Novel* 7 (1973), pp.14-30 and Beth Newman, 'Narratives of Seduction and the Seductions of Narrative: The Frame Structure of *Frankenstein' ELH* 53 (1986), pp.141-63. Also referenced in TWP, FN 6 and 7, pp. 182-3.

[53] See also Rubenstein, 'My Accursed Origin', pp.169-94.

[54] Grevel Lindop, 'To Scheherazade' reproduced in 'Introduction' to Caracciolo, p.xxix

[55] See Ketterer, '(De)composing *Frankenstein,* pp.271-2.

[56] In the Breslau/Habicht edition (1825-1838) the *Nights* concludes with Schahriar commanding that Scheherazade's stories are to be written down 'on y lit que le roi « fit venir les historiens et les scribes, et leur ordonna d'écrire tout ce [...] depuis le commencement jusqu' a la fin. Ils écrivirent alors un livre en trente volumes qu'ils intitulèrent *Le Livre des mille et une nuits.* Le roi le déposa dans sa bibliothèque » / it says that the king "sent for historians and scribes and ordered them to write down everything [...] from beginning to end. They wrote a book in thirty volumes and titled it *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights,* which the king placed in his library'. See Abdelfattah Kilito, *L'Œil et l'aiguille: Essai sur "les mille et une nuits. "* Textes à l'appui: série islam et société (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 1992), p.20.

[57] Wollstonecraft, 'Introduction' in, *A Vindication,* p.12. Also quoted in TWP, p.173.

[58] For the phrase 'Egyptian bondage' see p.146 and pp.242, 260. For the use of the imagery of the 'Haram' see p. 93, pp.109, 114 and p.216 in Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication.*

[59] *Ibid.,* p.61.

[60] The use of 'king' here instead of 'prince' is the result of a mistranslation in the original Grub Street edition. Within the story, 'prince' is used interchangeably with 'king'.

[61] Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life,* p.45 and FN 8 '[...] these books are listed [in Shelley's journal] with the exception of Volney's *Ruins.* For knowledge of Volney, she probably relied on Percy Shelley, who read the book in 1814'. See also 'The Shelleys' Reading List', pp.631-84

[62] This line opens the imbedded story of 'The Tale of Beaufort the Poor Merchant and his Daughter' (III.1a).

[63] This line opens the imbedded story of 'The Tale of Elizabeth Lavenza' (III.1b).

[64] From 'The Merchant and the Genie' Galland found this formulaic narrative framing device a repetitive irritation to the western reader. After he establishes the pattern of Scheherazade's storytelling in the first tale cycle, it is indicated in the 'Advertisement' that we should take this formulaic structure as read, and it is redacted from subsequent tale cycles (*ANE,* p.65). Therefore, I cannot make the argument that this has been directly appropriated from the structure of the Sindbad tale cycle. However, I would argue that this aspect of *Frankenstein's* narrative structure is a subversion of the wider narrative structure of the *Nights.*

[65] Warner, *Stranger Magic*, p.2.

[66] See for example Mellor, ' Usurping the Female' of *Mary Shelley: Her Life,* pp.115-26 (pp. 115-6); Kate Ellis, 'Monsters in the Garden: Mary Shelley and the Bourgeois Family' in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, ed. by George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1979) pp.123-42; Anca Vlasopolos '*Frankenstein's* Hidden Skeleton: The Psycho-Politics of Oppression' *Science-Fiction Studies* 10 (1983) pp.125-36. While I acknowledge that these critics are all arguing that Shelley purposefully constructs her female characters as weak, submissive and self sacrificing in order to represent the narrowness of female experience in *Frankenstein,* and to document the rigid division of sex roles in society, I would argue that this analysis fails to acknowledge the imbedded stories of the female characters in *Frankenstein* as narratives of resistance to their restricted roles.

[67] Warner, *Stranger Magic*, p.2.

Fig. a) *The Arabian Nights* Narrative Structure: 'The Story of the Three Calenders, Sons of Kings; and of the Five Ladies of Bagdad'

I. Frame Tale
II. Primary Linear Core
III. The Story of the Three Calenders, Sons of Kings; and of the Five Ladies of Bagdad

1. The Story of the Porter and the Five Ladies of Bagdad
2. Giafur's Tale of the Three Merchants
3. Giafur's Unreported Discourse
4. Caliph Harun al-Rashid's unuttered request for the story of how all three Calenders came to be blind in the night eye
5. Caliph Harun al-Rashid's unuttered request for the story of the two dogs
6. Safie's Unheard Song of The Separated Lovers
7. Amine's Unheard Song of Grief
8. Caliph Harun al-Rashid requests the story of the two dogs
9. The Story of the Porter
10. Tale of the First Calender
11. Tale of the Second Calender
12. Story of the Envious Man and of him that he Envied
13. Tale of the Third Calender
14. Giafur repeats his Tale of the Three Merchants
15. The Untold Story of Caliph Harun al-Rashid
16. The Untold Story of Mesrour
17. Caliph Harun al-Rashid demands to hear the stories of the sisters
18. Story of Zobeide
19. Story of Amine
20. Untold Story of Safie

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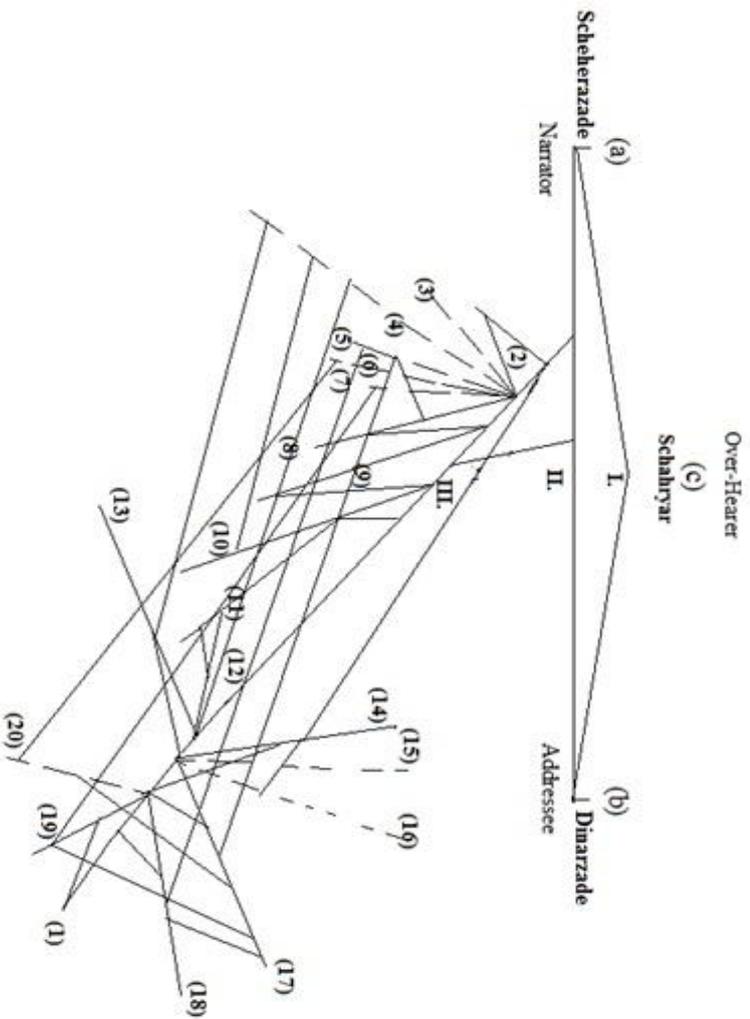
Fig.b) The Narrative Structure of *Frankenstein*

IV. Opening Frame: Walton's voyage as told to his sister in letters/journals/transmission of Safie's letters

   1. The Story of How Walton Came to be a Sailor
   2. The Story of the Ship's Master
   3. How Victor came to be aboard Walton's ship/Walton decides to recorded his story

I. Primary Linear Core (Safie's written letters)
II. Victor Frankenstein's Narrative (as addressed to and recorded by Walton)
III. Victor Frankenstein's Tale and its imbedded Reported Narratives:

   1. Childhood
     a. The Tale of Beaufort the Poor Merchant and his Daughter
     b. The Tale of Elizabeth Lavenza
     c. The Story of Henry Clerval (The Merchant of Geneva's Son)
     d. Frankenstein's Education
   2. The Creation of the Creature
     a. The Birth of the Creature
     b. The Dream of Elizabeth
     c. Henry Clerval/Frankenstein's Illness
   3. Elizabeth's Letter
     a. Ernest
     b. Elizabeth tells The Story of Justine Moritz
     c. William
     d. Gossip
   4. Frankenstein's Recovery
   5. Alphonse's Letter
     a. William's Murder
   6. Return to Geneva
   7. Ernest Relates Justine's Arrest
   8. Victor Defends Justine
     a. The Trial
     b. Justine's Defence
     c. The Verdict

   9. Frankenstein's Main Narrative
   10. The Creature's Tale
     a. Survival
     b. Learning
     c. The De Laceys
     d. Safie: 'The Arabian'
     e. The History of the Cottagers
     f. The Content of Safie's Letters
     g. The Creature's Education
     h. Frankenstein's Journals
     i. The Meeting
     j. The Creature Travel's to Geneva
     k. The Creature Kills William
     l. The Creature Demands a Mate
   11. Frankenstein's Main Narrative
     a. Victor Travels to England
     b. Meeting Clerval
     c. Journey to Edinburgh Creation of Female Creature/Creature's Visit
   12. Elizabeth's Letter
   13. Frankenstein's Main Narrative
     a. Death of Elizabeth
     b. Return to Geneva
     c. Victor's Tale (as told by the magistrate)
     d. Frankenstein's End Narrative

IV. End Frame: Walton's voyage as told to his sister in letters/journals/transmission of Safie's letters

   1. Walton Meets The Creature
   2. The Creature's Version of events
   3. The End

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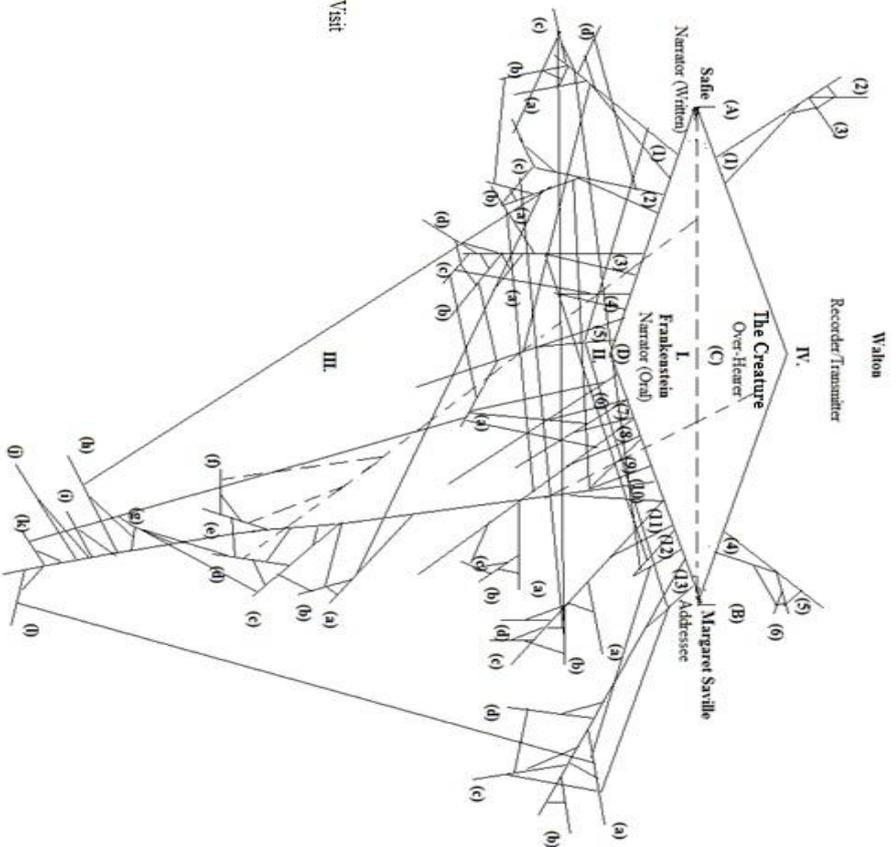
3. REREADING ARACHNE

DIALOGUES WITH THE CLASSICS: MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE PENELOPIAD* AND URSULA LE GUIN'S *LAVINIA*

This case study examines the continuities and differences in the reading and rewriting practices undertaken by Margaret Atwood in *The Penelopiad* (2005) and Ursula Le Guin in *Lavinia* (2008). Through the use of fractured narratives Atwood and Le Guin represent Homer's *Odyssey* and Vergil's *Aeneid* as unstable and historically contingent myths that are open to revision and reinterpretation. Atwood's Penelope and Le Guin's Lavinia are both represented as women engaged in producing textiles: Penelope's weaving of Laertes' shroud and Lavinia's spinning of thread for her summer palla can be interpreted as metaphors for female authorship. Atwood rereads Antinous' account of Penelope's weaving in book two of the *Odyssey* as a metaphor of the female author's resistance against the patriarchal literary representation of women. In *The Penelopiad,* Penelope establishes the independent agency of her weaving. By teaching her maids to weave; she confers the same independence of thought and logical action onto them. In Vergil's *Aeneid*, Lavinia does not speak and is not associated with textile production. She expresses her grief by blushing and weeping – physical signifiers of her virtue and her correct social conduct. In her novel, Le Guin gives the ability to produce textiles, and therefore the ability to write, to Lavinia.

In the multiple narratives of *The Penelopiad,* Atwood re-figures the *Odyssey* as a collection of misogynistic myths, 'low lies', 'edifying legends', 'scandalous gossip', 'plausible' stories and jokes that undermine the characters of Penelope and the twelve maids hanged in book twenty-two of the *Odyssey* (*TP*, 2-4). Myths are presented as narratives that are susceptible to the imposition of new and often ideologically motivated meanings and values, which are contingent on the new socio-historical context into which they are transposed.[1] Atwood suggests that the androcentric myths contained in the *Odyssey* can be adapted to create alternative myths of women's resistance to the misogynistic patriarchal society that has caused them to suffer.

Atwood initially presents the canonical epic *Odyssey* as the official, male written and authoritative version of Odysseus' experience of events. In contrast –

and playing on the cultural association of weaving women with oral storytelling and creative lack – Penelope's alternative narrative of her experience of the events of the *Odyssey,* and that of her twelve hanged maids, are represented as stories that will never be taken seriously and so can offer no real opposition to the negative representation of their characters in the *Odyssey.* This rhetorical device of representing women's stories as dubious oral texts in conflict with the male written word[2] is used as a metaphor for the conflict between male and female authors that is implied in any model of women's rewriting in which the new female author views herself as writing against, rather than from inside of dominant representation.

Through the use of genre change in *The Penelopiad*, Atwood presents Penelope as the author of a secondary epic. Penelope's first-person narrative chapters are intersected by the oral songs, poems and narratives of the maids. These are presented to us in written form, drawing attention to the oral origins of the *Odyssey* as a primary epic.[3] Penelope's narrative conflicts with those of her twelve maids, and reads with, rather than contests, the narrative content of the *Odyssey*. Penelope's version of events has no greater or lesser claim to being an authoritative account of events than that of the *Odyssey*. By collapsing the initial gendered distinction she makes between the authority of the primary (oral) and secondary (written) epic, Atwood represents women's rewriting as a dialogue between the new author and her classical source text.

Le Guin's rewriting of the *Aeneid* suggests that the canonicity of her source text is no guarantee of the high quality of its composition or the importance of its content. Through the use of techniques of narrative fracture in *Lavinia*, the canonicity of the *Aeneid* is shown to be the result of an accident of history that ensured its survival. Le Guin suggests that even texts that are unfinished and are considered flawed by their authors can and do become canonical. Le Guin uses the gendered tensions that she perceives to be present between her rewriting and the androcentric perspective of Vergil's *Aeneid* in order to transform Lavinia into a female author whose ability to write her story allows her to escape the confines of her narrow representation in the *Aeneid*. Le Guin uses a temporally shifting narrative and changes between Lavinia's internally focalised first-person narrative and the externally focalised male characters in order to first depict and then correct the inequalities of male and female representation in the *Aeneid.* Le Guin portrays these

gender tensions between male and female representation as a positive creative dialogue between the new female author and her texts and authors of influence.

In common with the rewriting practices of d'Aulnoy and Shelley, Atwood and Le Guin present their female authors as aristocratic and literate storytellers, who are the equal of their male counterparts. However, in *The Penelopiad* and *Lavinia*, the negative representation of women and female creativity in the classical epic is not presented as a deliberate attempt by a male author to undermine female characters or to silence women's stories. Atwood's Penelope is at times indignant about her representation in the *Odyssey*. However, she never mentions Homer by name, and makes no attempt to contact her creator, or to challenge the creative choices Homer made in creating her character. This is because Penelope perceives her characterisation to be the result of a long process of oral storytelling, revision and interpretation involving the conflation and solidification of misogynistic rumour, hearsay and outright lies about her into an official written version that 'gains ground' or becomes the widely disseminated 'official version' of events (*TP*, 2). She understands herself in terms of a legend or myth of femininity that has no specific origins in the imagination of a single author. Atwood represents all acts of storytelling (male or female, written or oral) as inauthentic and dubious. Rather than creating a positive representation of female creativity, Atwood perversely reduces the representation of the male storytellers to a position of creative 'lack' more commonly associated with representations of female creativity and authorship. I argue that this can be read as Atwood's attempt to collapse the concept of the modern female author's anxieties of authorship and influence by refiguring the *Odyssey* – and its status as a founding canonical text of androcentric thought – as collection of historically contingent myths.

In *Lavinia*, Le Guin uses the concept of rewriting as a dialogue between the new author and her predecessor to create a more positive representation of female authorship. Lavinia views Vergil's characterisation of her as the mistake of an old and dying poet, rather than a deliberate attempt to undermine and silence her character. In the liminal space of the sacred grove of Albunea, Lavinia discusses her character with Vergil and tells him about her experiences of the events he depicted in the *Aeneid.* Lavinia's dialogue with her poet is shown to increase Vergil's awareness of the way in which his representation of female characters in the *Aeneid* failed to accurately represent their lived experiences and the motivation for their actions. Le

Guin's Lavinia is shown to have surpassed and transgressed Vergil's characterisation of the young woman as a silent caricature of femininity. Confronted with this new Lavinia and her version of events, Vergil freely admits that he has made a mistake and encourages her to tell her own story. Lavinia creates her alternative narrative of events through a dialogue with her predecessor that fractures and reforms the *Aeneid* into a new text. I argue that this can be read as an allegory of Le Guin's own writing process and her rejection of the female author's 'primary' anxiety of authorship and a more general anxiety of influence. Through this representation of a women's rewriting as a dialogue between the revered ancient male poet and modern female author, Le Guin represents the new female author as the creative equal of her male predecessor.

I. REREADING PENELOPE: PENELOPE'S WEB

In the short opening chapter of *The Penelopiad,* entitled 'A Low Art', Atwood sets out the methodology of her rewriting project: the title reflects the critical positioning from which she rereads the *Odyssey,* in which all forms of storytelling and literary interpretation are a 'low art'. All narratives are suspect, subjective and ideologically motivated accounts of a 'truth' that is unrecoverable. Atwood initially presents Penelope's first-person narrative as a gynocentric challenge to the *Odyssey* and its reception as a collection of androcentric myths that propagate Odysseus' version of events and undermine the characters of Penelope and her twelve hanged maids as reliable reporters of their own actions and motivations. However, Atwood's Penelope does not assert the superior authority and veracity of her account of events and that of her twelve hanged maids: she suggests that all narrators are unreliable, and that their versions are equally dubious attempt at 'story-making'.

In the last twenty years a significant amount of feminist criticism has argued for the centrality of Penelope and her weaving to the plot of the *Odyssey*.[4] Feminist readings of the *Odyssey* often cast Penelope's weaving and unravelling of Laertes' shroud as an act of resistance against the suitors and the threat they pose to her independence or as a signature of female authorship. Carolyn Heilbrun reads Penelope's textile production as an allegory of female authorship. Penelope voices

her story in order to 'counter male violence' only to unravel it again as if to silence herself. She cannot complete her story because she has no female predecessor to follow. For Penelope, women's narratives have yet to be written: Heilbrun asks how a woman can 'manage her own destiny when she has no plot, no narrative, no tale to guide her'.[5] John J. Winkler interprets Laertes' shroud as an act of trickery and deception that marks Penelope's similarity to Odysseus. 'Constrained as she is by the competing and irreconcilable demands of social propriety' her weaving allows her to exert 'some degree of real control over events and makes possible the homecoming of her husband, outwitting many deadly enemies and a few friends in the process'.[6] Nancy Felson-Rubin sees Penelope's weaving as a representation of female storytelling. Barbara Clayton similarly analyses it as a 'figurative replication' of the process of oral poetic composition. She argues that the ambiguity and indeterminacy of Penelope's character and motivations explicitly resists 'phallocentric discourse' by undermining the stability and fixed meaning of the *Odyssey*.[7]

Atwood rereads the story of the shroud as Penelope's rebellion against the suitors, and as a metaphor of female authorship and its anxieties. Penelope refuses to choose a new husband until she has completed her duty to her current family by making a death shroud for Odysseus' father. In book two of the *Odyssey* Antinous gives a speech at the Ithacan assembly in which he describes Penelope's deception: 'by day she'd weave at her great and growing web—/by night,[...]/she would unravel all she'd done. Three whole years/she deceived us blind./[...] one of her women[...] told the truth/and we caught her in the act'. He defends the suitors' occupation of Odysseus's household, and blames Penelope's trickery for the damage and drain on resources they have caused on Odysseus' estate. This is the one substantial instance in the *Odyssey* where Penelope is credited with a clear attempt at resisting the suitors and restoring peace to Ithaca:

> So long as she persists in tormenting us,
> quick to exploit the gifts Athena gave her—
> a skilled hand for elegant work, a fine mind
> and subtle wiles too [...]
> So, we will devour your worldly goods and wealth
> as long as *she* holds out, [...]
> Great renown she wins for herself, no doubt,
> great loss for you in treasure.

(*Od.,*2.104-40, pp.96-7)

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It is important to note that Antinous reports Penelope's act of speech within his narrative. Unlike Lavinia, Penelope is not a classical representation of a silent woman. Atwood rereads Penelope as a character whose original representation has been undermined by successive acts of interpretation that have failed to pay adequate attention to her voice of resistance and the function of her weaving. In *The Penelopiad,* Penelope's weaving and speech act become a narrative of resistance in which she refuses to be defined by her relationship to her husband and objects to the way in which the autonomy of her actions has been undermined by successive interpretations of the *Odyssey* that have sought to promote and uphold her as an archetypal good wife, a paragon of female virtue and passive endurance.

If we read Penelope's textile production as a signature of female authorship, then we must also regard Penelope's maids as contributing authors to the same text of resistance. Homer's Antinous recounts that the maids were in on Penelope's plan and presumably helped her to weave and unravel Laertes' shroud until one of the maids betrayed her mistress and revealed her deceit to the suitors. Atwood rereads this betrayal to suggest the possibility of the woman writer's complicity with patriarchal values and the variation in the lived experiences of different women. Through the use of genre change, *The Penelopiad* is presented as a dual narrative. Penelope's alternative narrative of the events depicted in the *Odyssey* is intersected by that of her twelve hanged maids, whose version of events often challenges Penelope's account. In this sense Atwood does suggest that the notion of 'recovering' a collective voice of feminist resistance that can speak to and for all women is a deeply problematic critical assumption of feminist rewriting. However, I would argue that Atwood's presentation of the narrative voice of the twelve maids as a chorus does not depict the potential for there to be differences in the experiences and stories of women who share a class identification. Atwood's representation of individuated female voices in *The Penelopiad* is in some ways weakened by her play on the function of the chorus in the Greek tragedy and satyr play.

The classical representation of Penelope's weaving as a deception presents a serious problem for the feminist writer seeking to reinvent her as a female author. Penelope's failed attempt to trick the suitors necessitates the continual unravelling of her work, suggesting a dubious, flawed text that can never be completed. Penelope and her maids suffer for their art, and in the case of the maids, may be said to have

died because of it. This is inevitably carried over in Atwood's use of the metaphor of textile as text and must be challenged in order to present Penelope as a positive representation of female authorship.

In *The Penelopiad,* Atwood uses the negative implications of Penelope's weaving to stage and challenge Penelope's primary anxiety of authorship. Atwood figuratively represents the creative lack and inauthenticity of Penelope's narrative – and by extension that of her twelve hanged maids – by associating female storytelling with a dubious peasant oral tradition, juxtaposed against the high cultural authority of Odysseus' version of events as depicted in the male written text of the *Odyssey*. However, Penelope repeatedly points to the fact that Odysseus is also a liar and a trickster. For example: 'He was always so plausible. Many people have believed [...] his version of events [...] Even I believed him, from time to time. I knew he was tricky and a liar' (*TP*, 2). The only difference between his storytelling and that of Penelope and her maids is that everyone believes his lies, whereas everyone suspects Penelope's narrative to be a deception. Atwood rejects the notion of the female author's creative lack, by disassociating Penelope from the tradition of peasant orality and presenting her as the aristocratic author of a written text. Atwood's Penelope is a disembodied shade who does not have the ability to speak (*TP*, 1), thus associating the spinning of her thread with the creation of a written text:

> [...] it's my turn to do a little story-making. I owe it to myself. I've had to work up to it: it's a low art, tale-telling. Old women go in for it, strolling beggars, blind singers, maidservants, children – folks with time on their hands. Once, people would have laughed if I'd tried to play the minstrel – there's nothing more preposterous than an aristocrat fumbling around with the arts – but who cares about public opinion now? [...] So I'll spin a thread of my own. (*TP*, 3-4)

Through the use of genre change in successive chapters, Atwood further collapses the dichotomy between the authority of the written word and the inauthenticity of orality by pointing to the fact that the *Odyssey* is a primary epic. In Atwood's refiguration of Penelope and Odysseus as trickster-storytellers, the representation of male and female creativity is brought to equal status not by conveying a sense of authority onto her female-storytelling characters, but by creating a representation of male storytelling that is equally inauthentic. It is important to note that neither Penelope nor Odysseus actually write texts in the *Odyssey*. However, if we read Penelope's weaving as metaphor for her creation of a written text (as I do), it is

possible to interpret Penelope as Atwood's representation of a female author, who writes her secondary epic in response to the stories that male characters (such as Odysseus and Agamemnon) tell about her in the primary epic of the *Odyssey*. Using this configuration it is possible to read Atwood's Penelope as a female author who does not suffer from a primary anxiety of authorship because she is able to identify with the representation of male-storytellers in her source text. Atwood's Penelope may be said to identify with Odysseus as a male predecessor who is depicted in her source text as a master of deception whose storytelling has been extremely successful despite the fact that he has no inherent authority to create.

The final aspect of Atwood's appropriation of Penelope's weaving concerns the way in which Antinous attributes her skill to the influence of Athena. Antinous assumes that Penelope could not have come up with such an elaborate ruse on her own, and that she must have had help from the goddess. Atwood rereads the presence of Athena as a representation of an Author/god predecessor, whose influence Penelope must undermine or reject in order to declare her creative autonomy and the right to tell her own story. This appropriation is used to address the woman writer's anxiety of influence in relation to her female predecessors. In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood presents Penelope as a female author who feels far more anxiety over her relationship to her female predecessors than she does with her male ones.

The novel begins with Penelope's first-person italicised statement: '*Now that I'm dead I know everything* (*TP*, 1). Penelope's declaration may be read as Atwood's version of Barthes' declaration of 'La Mort de l'auteur'. In *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (2008), Atwood discusses the relationship between the author, text and reader and the possible anxieties of authorship that may be created by this complex relationship. As with Nancy K. Miller's 'Arachnologies', Atwood can be seen to reject the aspects of 'La Mort de l'auteur' that deny the authorial identity of the writing subject, while approving of the effect it has in deconstructing Romantic notions of an individual authorial genius.[8] She suggests a model of the text in which 'writer and audience are invisible to each other', and are both responsible for the creation of meaning:

> A book may outlive its author, and it moves too, and it too can be said to change – but not in the manner of the telling. It changes in the manner of the reading. As many commentators

have remarked, works of literature are recreated by each generation of readers, who make them new by finding fresh meanings in them. (*NWD,* 43-4)

Atwood is careful to maintain the importance of authorial identity in this creation of the text. However, she also argues that the Romantic cult of the author does need to be challenged since it is damaging to the author's creative identity, because it creates an ideal image of the author that can never be lived up to: 'as a great man, a genius, the genuine article in a crowd of philistines'. The living Author, aware of the illusion of permanence and authority that the physical book creates, experiences considerable anxiety over his/her condition of doubleness. The author knows that s/he is not the figure of genius and authority that the book suggests and the reader purports the author to be. The author fears that s/he, and the text they created, will be found to be fraudulent: 'The writer might not only be a forger [...] but also a forgery. An imposter. A fake' (*NWD,* 45). Atwood argues that this fear may cause a 'syndrome of the writer's anxiety about his other self' (the individual who exists before and after writing), in which the author experiences a potentially crippling creative anxiety over the inauthenticity of his/her writing and attempts to overcome this by creating a representation of an ideal self in his/her text (*NWD,* 40).

Atwood goes onto argue that this anxiety of the other self is particularly problematic for female authors. In order to create a public persona of authorial genius the female author – like her male counterpart – must accept the destruction of her non-writerly identity. However, for the female author this death of the other self and the creation of her new authorial identity becomes conflated with the cultural construction of the female artist who must sacrifice her life for her art and will eventually be destroyed by what she creates:

> When I was an aspiring female poet, in the late 1950s, the notion of required sacrifice was simply accepted. [...] You couldn't be a wife and mother and also an artist, because each one of these things required total dedication [...] The drawbacks to being a female writer – especially a female poet – were well known by the time I got there. [...] Now it is more possible for a woman writer to be seen as [...] neither more nor less than human. Nevertheless, the mythology still has power, because such mythologies about women still have power. (*NWD,* 74-9)

For Atwood, the female author's anxiety of her other self is far more profound than that of her male counterpart. The recognition of the lack of authenticity of her writing is conflated by her belief that she must give up her life as an 'ordinary

woman' if she is to create at all. The new female author/reader encounters a literary field that is full of female predecessors who accepted and promoted the image of their suffering in the image of their authorial selves that they inscribed into their work and have achieved the revered status of genius. The new female author comes to believe in both the inauthenticity of her art and 'the notions of sacrifice that came to be associated with this dedication' to becoming a great author of great art (*NWD*, 79).

In *Negotiating with the Dead*, Atwood offers very little in the way of strategies for opposing the cultural constructions of authorial genius and high art that she believes continue to persist and are responsible for these authorial anxieties. However, her discussions offer a great deal of insight into why she refigures Penelope and her maids as dead authors and presents all acts of writing and storytelling as 'A Low Art' in *The Penelopiad*. Atwood removes the construction of the female author as a figure of self-sacrificing genius, and can be seen to inscribe her own authorial identity into the character of Penelope in order to represent her rejection of the female author's more profound sense of anxiety over her 'other self'.

Penelope's death is represented as the end of her attachment to her female body:

> Since being dead –since achieving this state of bonelessness, liplessness, breastlessness – I've learned some things I would rather not know, as one does when listening at windows or opening other people's letters. You think you'd like to read minds? Think again. (*TP*, 1)

Penelope's lack of a sexualised female body – a state of 'liplessness' and 'breastlessness'– can be read as Atwood's rejection of the notion that a female author suffers from a far more profound anxiety regarding the construction of her authorial identity. Penelope is a disembodied, 'boneless' shade inhabiting the underworld. This is symbolic of the removal of her constructed authorial identity, as a figure of self-sacrificing genius, from the text to a place outside representation. Penelope might be said to inhabit the words that she is writing but she has no position of authority over them: 'Down here everyone arrives with a sack, like the sacks used to keep the winds in, but each of these sacks is full of words – words you've spoken, words you've heard, words that have been said about you'. Penelope's sack of words is 'of a reasonable size'. However, most of the words that have been spoken about her 'concern' Odysseus and the extent of her fidelity to him

(*TP*, 1-2). If we read this as a metaphor of the literary representation of women, Atwood can be seen to suggest that it is not the lack of female representation that she is seeking to change through her rewriting practice, but the way in which women have been represented. Penelope believes that her reputation has misrepresented her true character. She states that 'some say' that Odysseus' stories have made 'a fool' of her *(TP*, 2)*. This may be read as Atwood's acknowledgement of the previous feminist criticism and rewriting practices that have attempted to 'recover' Penelope from her maligned position in the *Odyssey*. However, Atwood suggests that few people have ever questioned the authority and authenticity of Odysseus' storytelling.

Penelope objects to her representation in the *Odyssey* as an archetypal loyal wife and paragon of female virtue who has continually been upheld as an example to women: 'Why couldn't they be as considerate, as trustworthy, as all-suffering as I had been?' (*TP*, 2). This alludes to an epigraph to *The Penelopiad* drawn from book twenty-four of the *Odyssey* (*TP*, xiv)*. The shade of Agamemnon praises Penelope's virtue and upholds her as an example to all women, unlike his own wife Clytemnestra:

<div align="center">

"Happy Odysseus!"

</div>

[...] —what a fine, faithful wife you won!
[...] The fame of her great virtue will never die.
The immortal gods will lift a song for all mankind,
a glorious song in praise of self-possessed Penelope.
A far cry from the daughter of Tyndareus, Clytemnestra—
what outrage she committed, killing the man *she* married once!—

<div align="right">

(*Od.,*24.210-20, p.474)

</div>

The comparison between a virtuous Penelope and a murderously unfaithful Clytemnestra is cut curiously short by Atwood. In *The Penelopiad,* the intertext ends at line 218 where Agamemnon proclaims that songs will be sung in honour of Penelope. Atwood's truncated quotation refuses to uphold the virtue of Penelope as a role model for the proper behaviour of women in the absence of their husbands. Atwood refuses Homer's comparison between a faithful and unfaithful wife, and suggests that to compare Clytemnestra and Penelope is grossly unfair; Penelope is certainly abandoned by her husband, but neither the emotional pain this causes nor the abuse she suffers at the hands of the suitors can begin to compare to the suffering inflicted on Clytemnestra by her husband. Agamemnon murdered her first husband,

raped her and forced her into marriage with him, and sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia to Artemis in return for a good wind. Clytemnestra had ample provocation. The murder of Agamemnon is not the evil coldblooded attack that Homer's *Odyssey* suggests.

In 'A Low Art' Atwood's Penelope confronts Agamemnon's assessment of her character and virtue. Penelope views the songs that Agamemnon promises will be sung about her as a collection of 'edifying legends' that promote suffering and passive endurance as a female virtue. Atwood reduces the perceived permanence and authority of the *Odyssey* by suggesting that it is nothing more than a collection of myths and legends that have been told and retold by a succession of 'singers' and 'yarn spinners' (*TP*, 2). By pointing to the oral origins of the *Odyssey* as a primary epic, Atwood casts doubt on the stability of the text. Myths are inherently open to interpretation and are subject to change and manipulation in each retelling.

Penelope is angry that Agamemnon's story about her continues to be used as a 'stick to beat other women with' and she wants to beg women: '*Don't follow my example,* I want to scream in your ears – yes, yours!' This can be read as Penelope's recognition that she has until now been complicit with a patriarchal representation of herself as a woman whose art is inextricably attached to her suffering. However, when she attempts to speak against her representation she cannot make herself heard or understood over the authority of Homer's text: 'when I try to scream, I sound like an owl', and so she chooses to remain silent most of the time. When Penelope does speak it is always in praise of Odysseus: 'I kept my mouth shut; or if I opened it, I sang his praises' (*TP*, 2).

Penelope believes that if she had attempted to defend herself, while the words of Odysseus and Agamemnon still held authority, her narrative would have been dismissed as an attempt to conceal the truth about her character. Penelope's story can only be heard after 'La Mort de l'auteur' has gained ground and the reader no longer conceives of the Author as a figure of genius with authority over the text he or she creates. This is represented through the metaphor of the authors who have been making up stories about Penelope having 'run out of air' (*TP*, 3), combined with Penelope's weaving as a signature of female text production. However, even after these authors have lost authority over their texts, Penelope continues to find it difficult to make herself heard and 'understood' in our 'world'. Although Penelope's disembodiment was earlier used to imply that she is writing her story, Atwood's use

of 'I have no listeners', 'whisper', and the repeated use of 'squeak' to describe Penelope's authorial voice as one that is barely audible and might be mistaken for 'breezes rustling the dry reeds' (*TP*, 4) suggests an oral text, and the creative inadequacy associated with it in *The Penelopiad.*

Atwood's creation of Penelope's authorial identity may be seen as problematic. By presenting Penelope as a disembodied shade, Atwood depicts the voice of her female author-character as being so weak that Penelope believes that her quest to have her story heard has failed before it really begins. Atwood may be suggesting that the myths of female creative lack that continue to persist in literary representation are too strong for the feminist author to change by creating one positive representation of female authorship. However, Atwood's use of 'La Mort de l'auteur', also gives her Penelope the voice and space of protest that traditional representations and interpretations of Penelope have denied her. Penelope is determined to 'spin a thread' documenting her experience of the events depicted in Homer's *Odyssey*, even if nobody will ever hear or read it: 'I like to see a thing through to the end' (*TP*, 4). This suggests that while Penelope believes that her writing will be ineffective, she feels that she has an obligation to try. Even if the feminist author cannot change the negative literary representation of female creativity on her own, she can help to promote and propagate positive representations in her work. In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood suggests that when female authors produce negative representations of female creativity it can be extremely damaging to their female descendant author's sense of authorial identity and creative autonomy.

In contrast to the simple undermining of the authority of dominant male discourses on female creativity, Atwood gives far more space to the discussion and representation of the complexities of the anxieties of influence and authorship experienced by the new female author in relation to her female predecessors.[9] Atwood's Penelope refuses Athena's direct authority over her creativity. However, she can also be seen to refuse to align herself or her weaving with that of Arachne as a female predecessor who denied Athena's authority. Penelope then confronts Helen of Troy as another weaver, and therefore by extension a symbolic author who is present in the underworld. Penelope is critical of Helen's construction of a discourse on her own sexuality, which she sees as being complicit with her representation in the *Iliad*. Penelope refuses Helen's help in creating her text.

Atwood alludes to Antinous' praise of Penelope's cunning, her keen mind and her skill in weaving which he attributes to the influence of Athena: '[...] I was nothing special to look at. I was smart though: considering the times, very smart. That seems to be what I was known for: being smart. That, and my weaving, and my devotion to my husband, and my discretion' (*TP*, 21). Penelope later denies Athena's authority over her art by stating that it was her own idea to invoke Athena and claim that she was the source of inspiration for her weaving trick in order to avoid being accused of being proud:

> When telling the story later I used to say that it was Pallas Athene, goddess of weaving, who'd given me this idea, and perhaps this was true, for all I know; but crediting some god for one's inspirations was always a good way to avoid accusations of pride should the scheme succeed, as well as blame if it did not.[...]
> No one could oppose my task, it was so extremely pious. All day I would work away at my loom, [...] saying melancholy things like, 'This shroud would be a fitter garment for me than for Laertes, wretched that I am, and doomed by the gods to a life that is a living death'. But at night I would undo what I had accomplished, so the shroud never got any bigger. (*TP*, 112-3)

Penelope does not entirely discount the possibility that she was inspired by Athena, but she was not consciously aware of it. Read as an allegory of a condition of authorship, Penelope's recognition of Athena's divine influence may be interpreted as her identification with a female precursor, in which she acknowledges a possible debt to her. Atwood's Penelope asserts her creative autonomy by suggesting that she invoked Athena as the inspiration for her weaving because she did not want to be held responsible for the consequences of her undoing of the text. Borrowing the authority of Athena made her act of creativity seem like the respectable and pious act of a dutiful wife. The presence of Athena in Antinous' account of Penelope's weaving is transformed from a perceived attempt to undermine her creative autonomy into a conscious attempt on Penelope's part to protect herself and her text from accusations of female creative lack. Reduced from her position as Author/god, Athena becomes part of Penelope's text and enables her writing as an act of resistance against the patriarchal representation of her character as a paragon of female virtue.

Penelope claims to be the author of part of Antinous' speech. Atwood suggests that Penelope's authorial voice is already present in the text, but has been masked by Homer's attribution of her words to a male character. Homer's Antinous

speaks for Penelope in order to justify his own actions and to assert the suitors' right to occupy Penelope's household. Atwood refuses to align Penelope with Athena because her presence in the *Odyssey* enables Antinous to create a male fantasy of female inadequacy that justifies the suitors' desire to possess and control Penelope. Penelope can be seen to create a new voice for herself that is not complicit with a patriarchal discourse of femininity. It would be logical for Penelope to identify with Arachne as a female artist who also rejects Athena's authority over her creative agency and declares her creative independence.[10] However, Atwood rereads the myth of Arachne as one in which the new female artist rejects the influence and authority of her goddess predecessor with disastrous consequences. For her, Arachne is a problematic subject for feminist rewriting, because her text depicts scenes in which mortal women are raped by gods. For Atwood, Arachne's tapestry is not an attempt to expose the cruelty and abuse suffered by mortal women but suggests Arachne's complicity in a male fantasy of their power over and their possession of the female. At the end of the chapter 'The Shroud' Atwood has Penelope refuse the comparison of her weaving with the work of a spider's web, through her rejection of the phrase 'Penelope's web':

> The shroud itself became a story almost instantly. 'Penelope's web,' it was called; people used to say that of any task that remained mysteriously unfinished. I did not appreciate the term *web*. If the shroud was a web, then I was the spider. But I had not been attempting to catch men like flies: on the contrary, I'd merely been trying to avoid entanglement myself. (*TP*, 119)

This likening of the female weaver to a spider can be read as an allusion to the myth of Arachne. If Penelope were to align herself with Arachne by accepting that she is the spider in the metaphor of her text as web, this would be to accept that she deserves to be punished for writing against dominant representation and in defiance of the authority of her precursor. Moreover, Penelope believes that aligning herself with the image of the spider would also suggest that her writing is complicit with a male fantasy of femininity, the purpose of which is to trap men by presenting them with a seductive image of their power.

Atwood also compares Penelope's resistance to her representation as a paragon of female virtue with Helen of Troy's eager acceptance of her role as an archetypal seductress in the *Iliad.* Helen is also represented as a weaving woman. In book three of the *Iliad,* Helen weaves a tapestry depicting both armies of the Trojan

War engaged in battle and 'trials braved for her sake'.[11] This may be read as a metaphor for Helen's acknowledgement and acceptance that she is responsible for having 'authored' or caused the war. Helen's narrative of the Trojan War is accepted by male characters because what she weaves reflects a seductive image of their power and their right to possess her. As with Penelope in the *Odyssey,* this signature of female authorship is juxtaposed against the meeting of an all-male council. Priam sits with his ageing counsellors, who are too old to engage in battle so instead sit and watch the war play out beneath them. Unlike Penelope, who is absent from Nestor's council and is only spoken of, Helen is invited to join the council in which she joins in their storytelling and helps Priam name and identify the Achaean heroes. Priam and his counsellors accept Helen's storytelling and forgive her for causing the Trojan War, because they believe that she is so beautiful that it is no wonder that men are willing to go to war over her (3:163-69). Helen's text reflects and endorses Priam's version of events.

In *The Penelopiad,* Atwood rereads this episode as another instance in which a woman's story is only accepted as part of the dominant male-authored tradition because it is complicit with a patriarchal discourse of the power and right of men to possess women. Whereas Atwood's Penelope has to reclaim her voice from Antinous' speech at Nestor's council and is very concerned that she will never be able to make herself heard because she must contend with Odysseus's voice and version of events, Helen is represented in *The Penelopiad* as a female author who has always found it very easy to have her voice heard, disseminated and reproduced in dominant representation.

In *The Penelopiad,* Helen and Penelope are both characters who are summoned up out of the underworld by new authors when they are alluded to or written about in the new text. Helen is more often conjured up by these 'magicians [...] messing around in the dark arts' and 'risking' their 'souls' because of her reputation as a seductress 'a woman who'd driven hundreds of men mad with lust and had caused a great city to go up in flames' (*TP*, 21-2). This is because Helen has cultivated her reputation as a seductress, by making up stories about herself and her exploits that propagate her original representation in the *Iliad.* Helen loves to be written about and has 'fun' playing the seductress every time she is reborn into a new text:

> If we wish to, we can get ourselves reborn, and have another try at life; [...] Helen has had more than a few excursions. [...] 'I've been having such fun,' she'll begin. Then she'll detail her latest conquests [...] Then she'll make a speech about how naughty she's been and how much uproar she's been causing and how many men she's ruined. Empires have fallen because of her, she's fond of saying. (*TP*, 186-7)

In contrast, Penelope has consistently fought against the interpretation of her character as a virtuous wife in the *Odyssey*. Penelope does not want to be written about in a new text unless she can be sure that her new 'life' would be significantly better than the one she lived in the text of the *Odyssey*: '[...] I can see the point, but I don't want to take the risk. My past life was fraught with many difficulties, but who's to say the next one wouldn't be worse?'(*TP*, 188). This contrast between the complicity of Helen's narrative with her mythical representation and Penelope's refusal to allow herself to be represented in a way that is complicit with patriarchal myths regarding her character and female virtue is used by Atwood to assert the independence of Penelope's narrative.

Penelope attempts to disrupt the authority of Helen's complicit narrative and rejects her as a female predecessor by pointing to the fact that the stories she tells about her powers of seduction and her ability to destroy empires are based upon a patriarchal myth of femininity that can easily be reinterpreted:

> 'I understand the interpretation of the whole Trojan War episode has changed,' I tell her, to take some wind out of her sails. 'Now they think you were just a myth. It was all about trade routes [...] 'Oh, Penelope, you can't still be jealous,' she says. 'Surely we can be friends now! Why don't you come along with me to the upper world, next time I go?' (*TP*, 187-8)

Helen accuses Penelope of being jealous of her reputation and the ease with which she can return to the upper world. The success with which Helen has her narrative accepted and reproduced in dominant representation is not shared by Penelope who remains a disembodied shade, who cannot make herself heard in the 'upper world' (the text). Penelope is reporting Helen's speech, in which the latter believes that Penelope's attempt to cast doubt on the authority and veracity of her text stems from a recognition of her (Penelope's) creative inadequacy and her inability to achieve the success and fame of her predecessor. Penelope's narrative is indicative of her anxiety that her text will never be taken seriously because she refuses to be complicit with patriarchal interpretations of her character.

Despite this anxiety, Penelope refuses Helen's offer to take her with her on her next trip to the upper world, or to use Helen as a model for her writing, although this would make it easier for her narrative to be disseminated. She is unwilling to make the compromise of complicity with the dominant interpretation of her character as a paragon of female virtue. Penelope is not attempting to clear an imaginative space for herself by pointing to a mistake that her predecessor has made and attempting to complete her precursor's failed text. She is rejecting her predecessor's model of authorship entirely and choosing to write differently despite her anxiety that what she writes may never be read.

This may suggest that Atwood views her female precursors as harmful to her feminist rewriting practice. In having Penelope reject Athena, Helen and Arachne as female precursors, Atwood suggests that the fact of an author being female is no guarantee that her text will contain positive representations of women and female authorship. Penelope declares creative autonomy over her narrative by creating a new way of writing that refuses to be complicit with her representation in the *Odyssey*. She then teaches this skill to her maids. Penelope becomes a precursor by rejecting the influence and authority of her female precursors.

It is Penelope's refusal to weave a representation of women that is complicit in female-authored myths of femininity that allows Penelope's maids – the lowest female characters in the *Odyssey* – to be heard. Atwood constructs the women's side of the house as a female oppositional space in which the maids first learn Penelope's new way of weaving and thus learn how to use their voices to contest their representation in the *Odyssey*. However, Penelope's giving of a voice of resistance to her twelve maids is then shown to have backfired. After the maids are executed and become, like Penelope, dead authors who write from a position outside of representation, they can observe everything that has been said about them and come to hold Penelope and her weaving partially responsible for their deaths. The maids now use their position in the underworld as an oppositional space from which they contest both the *Odyssey* and Penelope's version of events. Like Penelope before them they also reject the authority of their female predecessor and claim the autonomy of their text and their right to their own voices and stories.

When Odysseus leaves for the Trojan War, Penelope finds herself overwhelmed by the responsibility of running his estate and keeping control of her household. Penelope states that she was never prepared for this role as a young girl

and suggests that this is the fault of her mother's poor example: 'She disliked ordering the slaves about [...] and she had no use at all for weaving and spinning. "Too many knots. A spider's work. Leave it to Arachne," she'd say' (*TP*, 86). Penelope's ability to weave is presented as the means by which she is able to maintain control of her household and her slaves. This is a rereading of Antinous' account of Penelope's weaving, as an act of resistance that allows her to maintain control over her household. Atwood combines this association with her rereading of Penelope's weaving as a signifier of female authorship in order to stage the new female author's attempt to become a predecessor by rejecting the negative influence of her female precursors.

Penelope's mother is a Naiad. She speaks of herself as an immortal who has no need to 'hoard' food stores (*TP*, 86). She has no use for weaving and believes that it is beneath her. Penelope's mother tries to dissuade her daughter from weaving and from teaching her art to her maids, evoking Arachne to suggest that weaving is a pointless and useless art. The comparison of Penelope's weaving with that of Arachne implies that Penelope's weaving as an attempt to maintain control over her household is doomed to fail. Penelope's mother can be read as a female precursor whose negative representation of female authorship causes the new author to reject her because she provides a 'bad example' of female creativity by propagating a discourse of female lack in her text that suggests to her daughter/descendant that she should not be attempting to write at all.

Penelope states that she has to 'learn from scratch' (*TP*, 87) how to run and maintain her household. She achieves this by raising her slaves to be loyal to her and teaching some of her slaves to weave so that they can aid her in her trick of weaving Laertes' shroud. Penelope's ability to weave is directly connected to the running of her household and so Penelope's statement that her mother was a poor example and that she had to teach herself can be read as a rejection of her literary female precursor, an assertion of her own creative autonomy and a desire to propagate her writing technique by teaching it to new authors:

> Though slave garments were coarse, they did fall apart after a while and had to be replaced, so I needed to tell the spinners and the weavers what to make. [...] if a pretty child was born [...] I would often keep it and rear it myself, teaching it to be a refined and pleasant servant. [...] Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks, was one of these. (*TP*, 87-8)

Atwood appropriates the minor character of Melantho from the *Odyssey* to represent the maids' voice of resistance against the patriarchal infringement of the female ruled domestic space of Penelope's household. Melantho is the only maid who is named in the *Odyssey*. She is the insubordinate and ungrateful maid who mocks Odysseus 'shamelessly' for his appearance as a beggar. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus suggests that the maids should be weaving at Penelope's side. He orders Melantho and the other maids to go 'to the room where your queen and mistress waits./Sit with her there [...]/combing wool in your hands or spinning yarn'. The narrator suggests that Melantho's speech is an act of disloyalty to Penelope, who has 'brought her up' and cared for her: 'her heart/ felt nothing for all her mistress' anguish now' (*Od.,*18.355-67, p.386). In *The Penelopiad,* Atwood refigures Melantho's inadvertent confrontation with Odysseus into an active and conscious act of resistance against patriarchal control. Atwood uses this in conjunction with Melantho's association with Penelope's weaving, and the fact that Melantho was raised by Penelope, to refigure the twelve hanged maids as female authors, who have been taught their voice of resistance by Penelope. The appropriation of Melantho's character to represent the authorial voices of all her twelve maids may be seen to damage the coherence of Atwood's rewriting practice. A significant portion of Penelope's narrative is given over to asserting the creative autonomy of the female author and rejecting the feminist rewriting practice of 'recovering' a single female voice as if it can be made to speak for the experiences of all women. However, Atwood's rewriting of Melantho does precisely this; she is used to speak for eleven other women.

I do see this as an inconsistency in Atwood's rewriting practice, but I would also argue that she presents the maids as a chorus whose stories reflect the shared experiences of a community of slave women for a good reason. Through the chorus, Atwood depicts what life may have been like for female slaves during Odysseus absence. This illuminates and exposes an aspect of women's lives in ancient Greece that the aristocratic perspective of Penelope's narrative often sanitises. Atwood's use of a dual narrative links questions of gender to those of class and education in order to further critique the kind of feminist rewriting practice that essentialises women. In using a chorus, Atwood may also be seen to acknowledge the limitations of her own rewriting practice of individuating women's lived experiences. Exploring the way in which dominant patriarchal discourses have historically affected women's lives will

sometimes necessitate generalisation. This does not have to mean reducing all women to a problematic type, because individual women are likely to have had some shared or similar experiences to other women, especially if they see themselves as belonging to the same community. Using the maids to represent a community of women, who have suffered abuse and trauma over several generations, allows Atwood to present *an example* of the way in which the pervasive nature of the misogynistic cultural attitudes towards women have historically worked to justify physical and sexual violence against women.

Atwood uses the conventional function of the chorus in ancient Greek tragedy and the satyr play in order to explore the problematic assumption of a recovered collective voice of feminist resistance to patriarchy. In the notes to *The Penelopiad*, Atwood comments that: 'The Chorus of Maids is a tribute to the use of such choruses in Greek drama. The convention of burlesquing the main action was present in the satyr plays performed before serious dramas' (*TP,* 198).[12] Andrew Brown notes that the Greek chorus is treated as a singular voice that is indifferent to the individual:

> The chorus [...] collectively take on a role within a play (usually the role of women or old men) but not given any identity as individuals. [...] A chorus can refer to itself or be referred to by actors, as either singular or plural, more or less indifferently.[13]

In *The Penelopiad,* the role of the maids' chorus should be, and is initially presented as, one in which they speak for and explicate the suffering of Penelope as the main protagonist and preface or reaffirm the central action of 'the play', or in this case novel. However, by associating the maids' chorus with the satyr play, Atwood then has the maids' chorus chapters parody and undermine Penelope's main narrative in both its content and form.

Penelope sees her control over what is created in her household as a way of educating and civilising her young female slaves. The maids are initially taught how to weave and sing by Penelope so that they can aide her in resisting the suitors:

> To help me in this laborious task I chose twelve of my maid servants – the youngest ones, because these had been with me all their lives. [...] They had lovely voices, all of them, and they had been taught well how to use them. [...] it was they who helped me pick away at my weaving, behind locked doors, [...] We told stories as we worked away at our task of destruction; we shared riddles; we made jokes. (*TP,*113-4)

All these women, locked in the female oppositional space of the women's quarters, are engaged in speech acts and forms of storytelling. Penelope states that they all have 'lovely voices' and that they have been taught to use them well. While the extended use of the metaphor of Penelope's text as textile suggests that the maids are creating a written text, the focus on the acts of oral storytelling in this passage also suggests the presence of oral elements in their written text. This reflects the way in which Atwood presents all the narratives in *The Penelopiad* as hybrids of written and oral texts in which the distinction that she initially sets up between the authority of the written male word and the inauthenticity of female oral storytelling is collapsed.

Penelope's first-person narrative chapters are intersected by the songs, poems, plays, a lecture and the prose of her twelve maids. The genre forms of the maids' chorus chapters are diverse. They include various oral poetic forms that are alternated with written poetic forms that have been interpreted as originating in or imitating oral traditions: a skipping rhyme is followed by a lament; a popular tune is followed by an idyll; a sea shanty is followed by a ballad; a love song by an envoi.[14] The narratives of Penelope and that of her twelve maids can both be seen to voice a resistance to the way they have been represented in the *Odyssey*. However, Penelope appears to have taught her maids to voice their resistance – in a way that maintains their creative autonomy and is not complicit with their source texts or the negative representation of female creativity created by their female precursors – almost too well. The content of the maids' chorus chapters often challenges Penelope's version of events and her depiction of their lived experiences as much as they challenge the version of events depicted in the *Odyssey*. The maids, like Penelope before them, rebel against their female precursor by exercising their creative autonomy in departing from the style, content and ideology of the way they were initially taught to speak. By playing on the function of the chorus in the satyr play, Atwood is able to transfer Penelope's creative autonomy onto the collective voice of the maids, demonstrating the differences in the lived experiences of women from different classes. I will now explore the function of genre change in *The Penelopiad* by focussing on the maids' chorus chapter 'A Rope-Jumping Rhyme', Penelope's first-person narrated novel chapter entitled 'My Childhood', and the chorus chapter 'Kiddie Mourn: A Lament by the Maids'. I will also look at the later sequence of

Penelope's first-person novel chapter 'Odysseus and Telemachus Snuff the Maids', and the maids' chorus chapter 'An Anthropology Lecture'.

The 'Rope-Jumping Rhyme' is an oral form of storytelling usually associated with children. Atwood suggests the childlike innocence of the maids was shattered by the suitors' occupation of Penelope's household and the return of Odysseus. Atwood manipulates the narrative content of the *Odyssey* to make it speak to the lived experience of the twelve hanged maids. The presence of a female-authored 'inauthentic' oral text disrupts the perceived authority created by the apparent stability of the male-authored book. In the chapters under consideration here Atwood consistently uses the content of the *Odyssey* to speak to a modern concern with the abuse and sexual exploitation of young girls.

In this chapter, Atwood shifts the focus of book twenty-two of the *Odyssey* from Odysseus' reassertion of power and control over his household, to the maids' experience of events. Odysseus gives orders to Telemachus, Eurycleia and two servants and they respond (*Od.*,22.415-90, pp.451-3).We never hear the maids speak. They have no voice through which they might defend themselves, or at least tell their version of events. Their deaths are described by a distant narrator through a simile of birds caught in a snare net and the image of their twitching feet that so haunt Atwood and Penelope: 'as doves or thrushes beating their spread wings/against some snare/ [...] so the women's heads were trapped in a line/ [...] they kicked up heels for a little—not for long' (*Od.*,22.494-9, pp.453-4).[15]

For Atwood the potential for another variant of this narrative is present but silenced in her source text. In the *Odyssey,* the maids are described by rhetorical figures of speech that function to dehumanise these 'low' women. Atwood rereads the maids as silenced women whose voices and stories need to be recovered. She reinterprets the narrative content of the *Odyssey* to produce an alternative female-authored account of events in a genre that is more suited to placing emphasis on the emotional and physical trauma that the maids suffer at the hands of Odysseus than the epic form. However, it is important to note that the poem does not challenge the content of the *Odyssey*; it reinterprets its meaning. Atwood's poem relies on our ability to recognise the events depicted in the *Odyssey* in order for it to function:

> We are the maids
> the ones you killed

> the ones you failed
>
> we danced in the air
> our bare feet twitched
> it was not fair
>
> <div align="right">(TP, 5)</div>

The hard and sharp sound patterning imitates the sound of a skipping rope hitting the floor. The maids' skipping alludes to the way in which their feet continue to twitch after their deaths, thus the skipping sound imitated in this sound patterning can be said to allude to the snap of the ropes from which they were hanged. The repeated use of hard consonants is used to emphasise the anger and resentment the maids feel toward Odysseus. In this rhyme Atwood points to the misogynistic double standards of behaviour for men and women in the ancient Greece. The maids protest that Odysseus was guiltier of the crimes of unfaithfulness and adultery than they were:

> with every goddess, queen and bitch
> from there to here
> you scratched your itch
>
> we did much less
> than what you did
> you judged us bad
>
> <div align="right">(TP, 5)</div>

and yet Odysseus is never punished for the crimes for which they lost their lives.

Furthermore, Atwood rereads the slaughter of the suitors to reveal the horror of its aftermath and the experience of the maids being made to clean up the bloody mess of the massacre: 'at your command/we scrubbed the blood/ of our dead/paramours from floors, from chairs/from stairs, from doors,/we knelt in water while you stared' (TP, 5). The poem expands upon the events of the Odyssey to explore the material circumstances in which the maids worked and suffered without challenging its narrative:

> First they carried out the bodies of the dead
> [...] Odysseus
> shouted commands himself, moving things along
> and they kept bearing out the bodies—they were forced.
> Next they scrubbed down the elegant chairs and tables,
>
> <div align="right">(Od.,22.473-8, p.453)</div>

The 'Rope-Jumping Rhyme' focuses on the extent of Odysseus' control over the maids. Odysseus' supervision of the maids is emphasised as a command in which Odysseus sadistically looks on as the maids are forced to clean up after he has brutally massacred their lovers. The reality of the sheer volume of blood that must be scrubbed off of every surface is emphasised as is the amount of water required to cleanse and purify the house of the slaughter carried out in it. The suitors are humanised in Atwood's version, described as the maids' 'paramours', emphasising the emotional connection these young women shared with their lovers. Atwood imagines the maids' response to trauma that is absent from the source text. However, the maids also acknowledge that Odysseus has the power of the 'word' of Homer's *Odyssey* on his side and they accept that he has the right and the physical power to punish them and reassert patriarchal control over his kingdom: 'you had the spear/you had the word/at your command'(*TP*,6). The canonical epic is made to play out against numerous feminist interpretations and revisions of it. In the later chapter 'Kiddie Mourn', the maids will state that they were in fact raped and abused by the suitors and men like them their entire lives. The 'Rope-Jumping Rhyme' is only one possible variant of the maids' story that can be derived from a source text that is infinitely open to interpretation and manipulation. Feminist variants of the *Odyssey* are shown to be as equally open to interpretation and revision as the male-authored text from which they derive.

In the chapter 'My Childhood' we expect to return to Penelope's first-person narrated novel that we read in 'A Low Art'. However, we very quickly become aware that the genre that Penelope has chosen appears to have slipped:

> Where shall I begin? [...] my father ordered me to be thrown into the sea. I never knew exactly why, during my lifetime, but now I suspect he'd been told by an oracle that I would weave his shroud. [...] Do I remember the waves closing over me, do I remember the breath leaving my lungs and the sound of bells people say the drowning hear? Not in the least. But I was told the story: there is always some servant or slave or old nurse or busybody to regale a child with the awful things done to it by its parents when it was too young to remember. (*TP*, 7-9)

Atwood invokes the presence of oral storytelling archetypes – the 'the servant', 'slave' or 'old nurse' – in order to suggest that Penelope's narrative is not her own, but an amalgamation of several stories that have been told about her character. The presence of these storytelling archetypes acts to reference three possible variations of the same story. Penelope's narrative becomes more conversational because she is

imitating the oral storytelling of her predecessors. It is this imitation of the oral form that has shifted the genre from novel to something that more closely resembles a conversational autobiography. The content of the chapter deals with Penelope's traumatic childhood, her abusive father's attempt to murder her and the casual negligence of her naiad mother:

> But perhaps this shroud-weaving oracle idea of mine is baseless. Perhaps I have only invented it in order to make myself feel better. [...] When I was little I often tried to throw my arms around her, [Penelope's mother] but she had a habit of sliding away. [...] she preferred swimming in rivers to the care of small children, and I often slipped her mind. If my father hadn't had me thrown into the sea she might have dropped me in herself, in a fit of absent-mindedness or irritation. She had a short attention span and rapidly changing emotions. (*TP,* 8-11)

This firmly places Penelope's narrative in the relatively new modern sub-genre known within the publishing industry as the 'Misery Memoir'.[16] Atwood uses it to manipulate Penelope's weaving of Laertes' shroud in the *Odyssey* into a new myth that speaks to a modern concern with the abuse and neglect of children. Penelope ascribes Antinous' story of her weaving to a misunderstanding (by her father, King Icarius) or a misinterpretation (by the oracle) of the prophecy about her weaving of a shroud, leading to her father's attempt to murder her in the belief that he could thus prevent his own death.

In this passage Atwood creates several untold variants of the story of Penelope's near-drowning that Penelope may have been told by 'servants', 'slaves', 'nurses' and 'busybodies' and two possible interpretations of the role that Penelope's weaving played in her father's attempt to murder her. But Penelope is unsure of the truth of her own story and concedes that she may have made up this myth in order to make herself feel better about the neglect she suffered as a child. She concedes that even if her father was not guilty of attempted murder then her parents were still emotionally and physically negligent. This statement again casts doubt on the authenticity of Penelope's narrative. Atwood uses the allusion to different genres within the same chapter in order to present the possibility of numerous alternative manipulations and interpretations of the significance of the same myth, none of which have a claim to authenticity or absolute truth. In the introduction to *The Penelopiad*, Atwood figures her rewriting as a response to feeling 'haunted by the hanged maids; and in *The Penelopiad,* so is Penelope herself' (*TP,* xxi). Given the

way Atwood projects onto Penelope her own sense of being 'haunted' by the maids, this chapter could be read as a further projection of Atwood's motivation for her rereading and rewriting, due to a personal need to understand and 'recover' the supposedly lost voices of female characters already represented in her source text. However, in her representation of the instability of Penelope's narrative, Atwood acknowledges that such a construction of imagined female voices is only another variation of classical myth brought about by a critical positioning made possible by the contemporary socio-historical context in which she received her source texts; including, in particular, the concern with the neglect and abuse of children that often informs the narratives of misery memoirs and contributes to their popularity.

The presence of orality in Penelope's written text is used to disrupt the authenticity and autonomy of her writing. Penelope's mistake is to imitate the orality of her female predecessors. The inauthenticity and creative lack associated with their storytelling is carried over into Penelope's written text. While Atwood is perhaps attempting to warn against the dangers of imitating a female precursor whose text is complicit with patriarchal discourses of female lack, the inauthenticity of Penelope's narrative nonetheless implies that the female-authored text lacks the authority of the male written word.

The chorus line chapter 'Kiddie Mourn: A Lament by the Maids' immediately follows 'My Childhood'. This chapter sees genre shift in two significant respects: Firstly, we expect the maids' chorus chapters to continue to imitate the supposedly 'low' folk/children's orality of the previous chorus chapter 'A Rope-Jumping Rhyme' (*TP*, 5-6), but in this chapter the maids' protest takes the form of a lament. We might expect a lament to take a poetic form, especially since it is a genre form present in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. However, and although it does contain poetic elements, this lament is in prose, thereby remaining close to Penelope's aristocratic female written text. The maids' imitation of Penelope's written text functions to parody and undermine Penelope's account of the abuse she suffered as a child in the chapter 'My Childhood'. Secondly, a lament is a poetic form that is conventionally performed by women mourning their husbands and sons or the male hero. In *The Iliad,* Andromache and her serving women perform laments for her husband Hector (6.494-500; 22.515 and 24.726-745). Briseis' lament for Patroclus also recalls the death of her husband and brothers at the hands of Achilles. Her lament foreshadows the death of Achilles (the man she now considers to be her

husband). By publically mourning for Patroclus – Achilles' ritual substitute – she legitimises her relationship with Achilles (19.291- 300). In the *Odyssey* Penelope repeatedly laments Telemachus and Odysseus.[17] In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood subverts this convention by having the maids use a lament to draw attention to their own suffering.

Through a narrative play on the pun of the title with 'kiddie porn', Atwood has the maids narrate an account of the sexual abuse and exploitation that they suffered in Odysseus's household:

> We too were children. We too were born to the wrong parents. Poor parents, slave parents, peasant parents, and serf parents; parents who sold us, parents from whom we were stolen. These parents were not gods, they were not demi-gods, they were not nymphs or Naiads. We were set to work in the palace, as children; we drudged from dawn to dusk, as children. If we wept no one dried our tears. If we slept, we were kicked awake. We were told we were motherless. We were told we were fatherless. We were told we were lazy. We were told we were dirty. We were dirty. [...] If our owners or the sons of our owners or a visiting nobleman or the sons of visiting nobleman wanted to sleep with us, we could not refuse. It did us no good to weep, it did us no good to say we were in pain. (*TP,* 13-4)

The repetitive use of 'We too' links their lived experience to that of Penelope in the previous chapter 'My Childhood' through which they express their anger at Penelope's claims of neglect which seem insignificant when compared to their suffering in her household. The low social status of their parents and the suffering inflicted on them over two generations is emphasised through the repetition and alliteration of the successive short and hard phrases that describe their parents. This is then compared to Penelope's semi-divine and aristocratic background. The rhetorical poetic language that is used in this chapter combined with the maids' imitation of Penelope's aristocratic female written text can be read as the maids' declaration of their creative autonomy. The maids were supposed to speak like and for Penelope; instead, they have turned that voice of resistance against her. The maids refuse to allow Penelope's narrative to speak for them and assert the right to own their own stories.

It is significant that the maids challenge Penelope's alternative narrative and not the *Odyssey*. Atwood rereads Odysseus' accusation that the maids have been disloyal to him by becoming 'the suitors' whores' (*Od.,*22.490, p.453) as a representation of their sexual exploitation and rape in which the maids never had the choice of refusing the suitors. The repetition of fathers and sons of the household and

as visiting nobleman, all using the female slaves for sex suggests that it was a common and accepted social practice that had been going on for generations. When Leodes pleads for Odysseus to spare him in the *Odyssey*, he appears to suggest that the suitors are guilty of sexually abusing the maids:

> Never, I swear, did I harass any woman in your house—
> [...] I tried
> To restrain the suitors [...]
> They wouldn't listen, keep their hands to themselves—

<div align="right">(Od.,22.328-31, p.449)</div>

This could be interpreted as an implication in the text that the maids are not responsible for the crimes that they were executed for. However, a socio-historically specific interpretation of this passage in the *Odyssey* would suggest that Leodes is referring to the suitors' violation of their guest rights. The female slaves are Odysseus's property. If the suitors are guilty of either raping or sleeping with his slaves then Odysseus is the victim of these unrighteous acts and not the female slaves. The maids' imitation of Penelope's first-person narrated novel manipulates the text of the *Odyssey* to speak to a modern concern with the abuse and sexual exploitation of women and children.

In 'Odysseus and Telemachus Snuff the Maids' and 'The Anthropology Lecture' Atwood shifts the genre of the chapters again, in order to suggest that the change in meaning of a text that occurs when it is read and interpreted in a new socio-historical context is partially responsible for silencing the individual voices of the twelve hanged maids and for undermining Penelope's voice and her importance to the narrative of the *Odyssey.* Atwood plays on the collective identity and voice of the maids' chorus in the 'Anthropology Lecture' in order to suggest that the female artist continues to be undermined by patriarchal myths of femininity and the self-sacrifice required of the female artist.

Much of the negative criticism of *The Penelopiad* has focussed on Atwood's inadequate and overly simplified representation of the maids, particularly in regard to the claims that Atwood is perceived to have made for their symbolic significance as moon-maidens in 'The Anthropology Lecture'. In her review of *The Penelopiad,* 'A New Spin on Homer', Mary Beard is critical of the extent of the influence of

Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* (1948) and *The Greek Myths* (1955) on *The Penelopiad*:

> The only blot on this brilliant book is a chapter entitled "An Anthropology Lecture." This insists, through the mouth of the murdered maids, that deep beneath the story of Penelope lies the cult of the Mother Goddess, [...] Graves has a lot to answer for here [...] his Greek Myths, […] has been the standard reference work for half a century now (and is acknowledged by Atwood as a "crucial" source). [...] you need to skim only a few pages of the introduction to get the clear message that the Great Mother is the key to most of what will follow.[18]

Beard reads 'The Anthropology Lecture' as Atwood's attempt to appropriate Graves' association of Penelope with a matriarchal cult of the Mother Goddess for use in her feminist discourse. I would argue that Atwood appropriates Graves' ideas in order to present New Age matriarchy as a patriarchal myth of femininity that misrepresents Penelope's character and that of her twelve maids and reinforces an image of the female artist who must sacrifice herself for her art.

'The Anthropology Lecture' parodies Graves' argument. The maids challenge Penelope's account of their deaths in the preceding chapter, the mythical variants of the *Odyssey* and Graves' interpretation of their significance in *The Greek Myths.* Atwood cites *The Greek Myths* as a 'crucial' source:[19]

> Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths* [...] was crucial. The information about Penelope's ancestry, her family relations – Helen of Troy was her cousin – and much else, including the stories about her possible infidelity, are to be found there. [...] It is to Graves that I owe the theory of Penelope as a possible female-goddess cult leader, [...] Graves lists numerous sources for the stories and their variants. These sources include Herodotus, Pausanias, Apollodorus, and Hyginus, among many. (*TP*,197)

In *The White Goddess,* Graves argues that ancient myths contain the last surviving traces of a 'pure' or 'true' poetry that derives from a mythical 'magical language' that originated in the religious rites and rituals associated with a 'Moon Goddess' or 'muse' trinity representing birth, love and death. He argues that this matriarchal culture and language was destroyed in the late Minoan period when 'invaders from central Asia began to substitute patrilinear for matrilinear institutions and remodel or falsify the myths to justify the social changes'.[20] *The White Goddess* is an attempt to recover this 'pure' poetic language, figured as female, and which would belong to an earlier idealised matriarchal culture. However, Graves'

arguments should not be construed as a call to female poets to write to recover a lost *écriture féminine.* Graves is primarily addressing the role of a male poet and casts the female poet in the role of a muse, who inspires her male counterpart. Moreover, Graves argues that if women do write poetry they must fulfil the role of hand-maiden, maenad or priestess figure to the moon-goddess and in doing so they must pay the price of a sacrificial offering for anything they create. [21] His fetishized view of a matriarchal god-head can only be a patriarchal construction of femininity and female creativity since it encourages all women to occupy the archetypal image of a muse for male creativity, undermines the autonomy of the female poet and suggests that she must be willing to sacrifice herself completely to the cult of art.

Atwood is consciously aware of this negative discourse on female creativity present in Graves' work. In *Negotiating with the Dead*, she cites *The White Goddess* as the first book in which she encountered the self sacrificing female artist/priestess of Art. Far from aligning herself with this image, Atwood states that as a young female author, she found it deeply disturbing:

> Graves did shake me up, though, and cause me to wonder whether I was really cut out for the life of Art. [...] Unless you were willing to put your life on the line – or rather, dispose of it altogether – you would not be taken quite seriously as a woman poet. Or so the mythology decreed. (*NWD,* 75-9)

The literary representation of the self-sacrificing female artist is something that Atwood makes a conscious effort to challenge in her own writing; in particular, the recasting of Penelope as a matriarchal fertility goddess and the mother of Pan in *The Greek Myths* propagates an image that she wants to challenge in *The Penelopiad*.

In *The Greek Myths,* Graves argues that Penelope's failure to prevent the deaths of her maids and the fact that Odysseus does not reveal himself immediately upon his return to Ithaca is evidence of Penelope's infidelity to Odysseus and her role as a fertility goddess and mother of Pan.[22] In Penelope's first-person narrated novel chapter 'Slanderous Gossip', Atwood has Penelope challenge this interpretation of her character. Penelope states that she feels a need to address these slurs that have been made on her character:

> At this point I feel I must address the various items of slanderous gossip that have been going the rounds for the past two or three thousand years. These stories are completely

untrue'. [...] The more outrageous versions have it that I slept with all of the Suitors, one after another – over a hundred of them – and then gave birth to the Great God Pan. Who could believe such a monstrous tale? Some songs aren't worth the breath expended on them.

Various commentators have cited my mother-in-law Anticleia, who said nothing about the Suitors when Odysseus spoke to her spirit on the island of the Dead. Her silence is taken as proof: if she'd mentioned the Suitors at all, they say, she would have had to mention my infidelity as well. Maybe she did mean to plant a toxic seed in the mind of Odysseus, but you already know about her attitude towards me. It would have been her final acid tooth.

Others have noted the fact that I did not dismiss or punish the twelve impudent maids, or shut them up in an outbuilding to grind corn, so I must have been indulging in the same kind of sluttery myself. But I have explained all that.

A more serious charge is that Odysseus didn't reveal himself to me when he first returned. He distrusted me, it is said, and wanted to make sure I wasn't having orgies in the palace. But the real reason was that he was afraid I would cry tears of joy and thus give him away. (*TP*, 143-5)

Atwood is not complicit with Graves's interpretation of the significance of Penelope to matriarchal sex and fertility cults. However, she does use it to suggest the possibility that Penelope may be lying about her inability to save the lives of her maids.

In the footnotes to *The Greek Myths*, Graves cites later classical written sources such as Pseudo-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* and Hesiod's *Works and Days* in order to authorise his interpretation of Penelope's character. In *The Penelopiad*, Penelope undermines the authority of Graves' written sources by suggesting that Graves' work is nothing more than a collection of the slanderous gossip and lies that have been 'going the rounds' for thousands of years. The use of this phrase and the word 'gossip' points to its oral origins. However, Atwood also suggests the possibility that Penelope's alternative account of events is an attempt to conceal the truth that she is the mother of Pan, a fertility goddess and cult leader. If this were true, then either the maids' deaths become the sacrifice of the female artist to the cult of high art, or they are the victims of Odysseus' attempt to repress Penelope's power as a cult leader, by re-establishing patriarchal control over his kingdom. In either event, Penelope is to be held responsible for their deaths.

Every argument of Graves' *Greek Myths* that Penelope refutes presents a misogynistic view that a woman's honour lies not in her heroic deeds but in her fidelity to her husband and her family: if Penelope is the mother of Pan then she is a whore. If Anticleia did withhold information from Odysseus then she is a treacherous liar and that lie is taken by Graves to be proof of Penelope's infidelity. Moreover, Penelope's failure to punish her maids is taken to be proof that she is as guilty as her maids of infidelity to her master. It is significant that Atwood makes

Penelope's objection to the variant of myth in which she is the mother of Pan particularly strong in comparison to her objections to the actions of Anticleia, her failure to dismiss or punish the maids, or the charge that Odysseus was distrustful of her, and suspected her all along of infidelity. Penelope can explain away Anticleia's silence and she has already provided an alternative myth as to why she did not punish the maids. In 'The Shroud' she explains that the maids aided her in her weaving and that the maids' disrespectful behaviour and their sleeping with suitors was part of Penelope's plan to deceive the suitors (*TP*, 117-8). In the chapter 'Yelp of Joy' Penelope recounts her own version of Odysseus' homecoming in which his disguise is simply a tactical move that allows him to infiltrate the palace and assess the threat that the suitors pose to him. Penelope recognises Odysseus immediately but chooses not to acknowledge him because she needs him to remain in disguise in order for her to set up the contest of the bow and ensure Odysseus' victory (*TP,* 135-41).

However, Penelope provides no alternative myth that challenges Graves' assertion that she is the mother of Pan or that she is an aspect of the Moon Goddess and leader of a fertility cult. Since Penelope is unable to provide any explanation for the origins of this variant, other than to refute it by claiming that some myths 'aren't worth the breath expended' in telling them, our attention is drawn to the possibility that it may be true and that the tale that Penelope has been weaving in her first-person narrative is an attempt to conceal her true nature. The staging of a conflict between male and female-authored texts in Penelope's first-person novel chapters is used to present all myths as inherently unstable and subject to change and interpretation. This has significant implications for Penelope's narrative: if Penelope's motivation for writing her story stems from a desire to conceal or deceive, then *The Penelopiad* becomes a feminist text that is complicit with a Freudian discourse of creative lack and the cultural inadequacy of the female artist. Moreover, if we interpret Penelope's maids as artist handmaidens in service to Penelope as a Moon Goddess and the cult of high art, then Penelope becomes responsible for the necessity of their deaths as female sacrifices to the cult of high art.

This discourse of the suffering and sacrifice required of the female artist is challenged by Atwood through the genre change that occurs between Penelope's first-person novel chapter 'Odysseus and Telemachus Snuff the Maids' and the

maids' 'Anthropology Lecture'. Penelope acknowledges that the death of the maids was her fault and states that they died because of the part that they played in helping her to weave Laertes' shroud. However, she also claims that there was nothing she could do to prevent their deaths. Penelope explains that she slept through the massacre of the suitors and the murder of the maids because Eurycleia drugged her to prevent her from interfering with Odysseus' restoration of order to his kingdom:

> I slept through the mayhem. How could I have done such a thing? I suspect Eurycleia put something in the comforting drink she gave me, to keep me out of the action and stop me from interfering. [...] Eurycleia described the whole thing to me, and to anyone else who would listen. [...] Odysseus summoned her, and ordered her to point out the maids who had been, as he called it, 'disloyal'. [...] – hanged them all in a row from a ship's hawser. [...]
> 'Which ones?' I said, trying to control my emotions.
> 'Only twelve,' she faltered. '[...] The ones who used to thumb their noses at me. Melantho of the Pretty Cheeks and her cronies – that lot. They were notorious whores'. [...]
>   It was my fault! I hadn't told her of my scheme [...] There could be a more sinister explanation. What if Eurycleia was aware of my agreement with the maids [...] What if she singled them out and had them killed out of resentment at being excluded and the desire to retain her inside position with Odysseus? (*TP,* 157-61)

Atwood initially associates Odysseus' return with the patriarchal overthrow of a matriarchal culture and language that Graves describes in *The White Goddess.* Penelope holds herself responsible for the maids' deaths because she taught them to weave and so she is responsible for them becoming producers of the matriarchal culture and language that Odysseus overthrows with their deaths. In Graves' reading of the *Odyssey* in *The Greek Myths,* Penelope as a high priestess of matriarchal culture is not to be harmed in this violent assertion of patriarchal power. Odysseus must marry the high priestess in order to solidify his right to rule. Graves uses the fact that Odysseus wins the contest of the bow and wins Penelope's hand in marriage for a second time as evidence of this.[23] The maids effectively die in Penelope's place, as punishment for what they have created.

The presence of Eurycleia's reported oral narrative within Penelope's first-person novel chapter is then used to challenge her interpretation (influenced by *The White Goddess*) of the symbolic significance of the maids' deaths. Eurycleia's account causes Penelope to doubt her own interpretation. In response to Eurycleia's story, she creates another variant of Eurycleia's conversation with Odysseus (*Od.,*22.443-60, p.452) in order to abrogate her responsibility for the maids' deaths. Eurycleia was a nursemaid to both Odysseus and Telemachus and as such she fits the conventional archetype of a female storyteller. In *The Penelopiad,* Atwood uses this

association to imply that there is something dubious and even sinister about Eurycleia's account of why Penelope chose the twelve maids who helped her to weave Laertes' shroud as those who should be executed. She picks up on the language and tone of resentment and moral outrage that Eurycleia uses when speaking about the maids. She creates a new myth in which Eurycleia was fully aware of her efforts to resist the suitors and chose the twelve maids who helped Penelope in retaliation for being excluded from their plan and her desire to prove her loyalty to Odysseus.

In the chorus chapter 'The Anthropology Lecture' the maids contest both Graves' mythopoetic interpretation of their deaths and the alternative myth that Penelope has created from Eurycleia's narrative. For the maids, the problem with both these versions of their deaths is that they stem from symbolic readings of their characters that do not acknowledge that they are representations of real women who were raped and abused by the suitors before being murdered at the hands of Odysseus and Telemachus. The genre change from Penelope's first-person fictional narrative to a non-fictional genre functions to separate this account of the maids' lives and deaths from the cycle of numerous, conflicting and questionable myths that they and Penelope have previously recounted in *The Penelopiad.* The maids seek an acknowledgement and recognition that they were sexually abused and murdered. Their previous attempts to challenge Penelope's account of their sexual relationships with the suitors has had very little effect on changing their characterisation because their version of events has no greater claim to being the truth than Penelope's stories or the *Odyssey.* In this chapter the maids shift their focus onto challenging the way in which their characters have been interpreted and manipulated by literary critics for their own modern ideological purposes. In using a non-fictional genre, Atwood is able to present a 'truth' about the maids as real women who lived in ancient Greece, without disrupting her construction of storytelling as deception.

In 'The Anthropology Lecture' Atwood has the maids giving a lecture – in which they paraphrase Graves' *The White Goddess* and his interpretation of the *Odyssey* in *The Greek Myths* – to an audience of male academics. The maids appropriate Graves' written male word and present it in an oral form that nonetheless derives from a written script. In this, Atwood suggests that the maids are literate and that their oral narrative has been influenced by a written academic discourse. This transformation of a male written text into a female oral discourse represents the

appropriation of a patriarchal and misogynistic text for use in a feminist discourse, in which the maids challenge and reject the implications of female creative lack present in their source text while using its imagery and symbol for their own ideological purposes:

> For we were not simply maids. We were not mere slaves and drudges. Oh no! Surely we had a higher function than that! Could it be that we were not the twelve maids, but the twelve maidens? The twelve moon-maidens, companions of Artemis, virginal but deadly goddess of the moon? Could it be that we were ritual sacrifices, devoted priestesses doing our part, [...] indulging in orgiastic fertility-rite behaviour [...] We would then have willingly sacrificed ourselves, as was necessary, [...] Why should Iphigenia be credited with selflessness and devotion, more than we? (*TP,* 163-4)

The maids first challenge Penelope's myth regarding Eurycleia, in which Atwood presented a feminist interpretation of them as female artists who were unfairly punished for what they created and died in Penelope's place. The repeated use of exclamation marks, rhetorical questions, and the hyperbolic language in which the maids allude to their transformation from slaves to female artists in Penelope's narrative, sarcastically imitates Penelope's voice. The maids state that had this been the case, then they 'would have' willingly gone to their deaths for their art, but Penelope's *White Goddess*-inspired myth-making has given them no choice in the matter.

The comparison that the maids make between themselves and Iphigenia is significant here as it emphasises the lack of self-determination for women in Ancient Greek society. In Euripides' plays *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Iphigenia is credited with choosing to sacrifice herself. In *Iphigenia at Aulis,* Iphigenia appears to make the choice to be sacrificed to Artemis for the greater good of all Greece. However, she has no real choice but to accept the fate that her father has chosen for her: Iphigenia is born to be bartered for the wealth and wellbeing of her country, whether through marriage or as a sacrifice, her fate is sealed from her birth.[24] Similarly in *Iphigenia in Tauris,* sacrificing her life to the service of Artemis is never really a choice for Iphigenia but a question of duty to the gods and her family.[25]

Atwood uses Graves' theories in order to refigure the maids as representations of real women, who suffered real pain and injustice as a result of the deeply misogynistic laws and customs of ancient Greece. Through the change in

genre to a non-fiction narrative, Atwood suggests that this narrative is not another dubious attempt at myth-making but a truth that has been obscured by the continuous reinterpretation of the symbolic significance of the maids and their deaths in the previous chapters of *The Penelopiad.* However, it may also be argued that the appropriation of Graves' reading of the *Odyssey* for use in the feminist 'recovery' of women's actual lives from the *Odyssey* is itself a kind of interpretive myth-making in which Atwood reads and interprets the maids' deaths in a modern historical context and through the lens of modern feminist theory.

Through the use of genre change, Atwood consistently suggests that the *Odyssey* is not a static text. Its meaning is dependent upon the socio-historical circumstances into which it is transposed. The *Odyssey* – a foundational text of androcentric thought and its later revisions and interpretations – can be easily manipulated to speak to and for women and contemporary feminist issues. Through her use of genre change, Atwood presents a nuanced and interesting exploration of the contradictions and ideological conflicts that are present in feminist interpretive strategies. This exploration occasionally causes problems for her rewriting practice. Atwood enacts a number of different manipulations to the *Odyssey* that produce conflicting female accounts of their true experiences. This is intended to address a significant and completely valid concern that feminist rewriting practices often seek to 'recover' the silenced or undermined' voice of a single female character as if she can be made to speak for the lived experiences of all women. However, Atwood never fully addresses the theoretical implications of using the collective voice of the maids' chorus to tell the story of the *Odyssey* from the perspective of female slaves. Moreover, while Atwood presents *The Penelopiad* as the product of her creative dialogue with her male-authored source texts, the multiple voices and female-authored stories that arise from that dialogue are used to stage the feminist author's quest for creative autonomy as a rejection of her female precursors.

II. REREADING LAVINIA: LAVINIA'S BLUSH

In contrast to Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*, Ursula Le Guin's *Lavinia* has no clearly defined chapter structure. The story is told entirely in the first-person by

Lavinia herself and consists of a single chapter and an introductory passage. Le Guin fragments the narrative not (as Atwood does) through changes in genre and point of view, but temporally and through shifts between Lavinia's first-person internal narrative and the focalised male characters of Vergil and Aeneas. Le Guin uses these techniques to represent Lavinia as the creative equal of Vergil, a female author in direct discourse with her author/creator and predecessor. Lavinia is not an obvious candidate for refiguration as a female author. She is not associated with textile production in Vergil's *Aeneid*, and unlike the wealth of scholarship that exists on Penelope and the centrality and importance of her character to the narrative of the *Odyssey,* critics have traditionally paid very little attention to her.

Much of the scholarship that does exist consists of philological analyses of the symbolism of Lavinia's hair catching fire and the burning bee nest in book seven of the *Aeneid.*[26] There are a few notable exceptions in which critics have attempted to draw attention to the significance of Lavinia's silence in the *Aeneid* and have argued for her centrality to the narrative of the second half of the poem. In 1930, Dorothea Clinton Woodworth noted that Lavinia's brief characterisation is incongruous with 'the part that Lavinia actually plays in the *Aeneid.* [...][She] exercises an influence on the plot out of all proportion to her few and brief appearances'.[27] R.O.A.M Lyne argues that scholars have never paid much attention to Lavinia and have refused to see her as a fully formed character 'with feelings and emotions'. He argues that a deeper consideration of Lavinia's silent blushing and weeping in book twelve allows for a deeper more complex 'emotional if not [...] moral response to the rapidly approaching denouement'.[28] More recently, Crescenzo Formicula has similarly argued for more attention to be paid to the significance of Lavinia's blushing, weeping and extended silence in book twelve of the *Aeneid.* He argues that this is a psychosomatic response to the trauma and isolation that Lavinia knows that she will suffer if Turnus dies and she becomes Aeneas' wife, through which Vergil foreshadows the death of Turnus and Amata's suicide.[29]

There is no tradition of feminist literary criticism that reads Vergil's Lavinia as a female artist or author. It was not until after the publication of Ursula Le Guin's *Lavinia* in 2008 that the character of Lavinia received any attention from feminist critics. In a chapter on Le Guin's *Lavinia* in *Sibylline Sisters: Virgil's Presence in Contemporary Women's Writing* (2011), Fiona Cox argues that while Le Guin's recasting of Lavinia as an author emphasises a modern feminist agenda of recovering

a lost female voice from history and asserting her identity, Lavinia's voice employs a 'language that is haunted by Virgilian echoes'. The presence of fragments of Vergil's poetry in Lavinia's narrative emphasises the parallel that is drawn between Lavinia's sense that her attempts to recover her voice has failed and Vergil's 'deathbed [...] realization [...] of the inadequacy of his work to withstand the abuses of civilization'. This 'serves as a reminder that the silencing of women's voices, their exclusion from history, is also a part of the oppression and tyranny from which the dying Virgil attempted to wrest the *Aeneid* and its receptions'.[30]

In comparison with the wealth of scholarship on Penelope that Atwood engages with when she rereads Penelope's association with weaving as a metaphor for female authorship, Le Guin has very little in the way of a critical tradition to support her refiguration of Lavinia as a female author. However, there is a common thread throughout the scholarship that does exist on Lavinia that Le Guin appears to pick up on when she recasts Lavinia as a female author: even when these critics are unable to fully articulate or account for the oddities of Lavinia's characterisation in the *Aeneid*, they share a sense that Lavinia is more important than her briefly sketched character may first imply. Lavinia's silence and her barely contained emotional response to the events that she is witnessing and her mother Amata's emotional speech suggest that Lavinia knows more and feels more than she is letting on. For these critics, Lavinia's silence seems to be haunted by everything that she cannot or will not say.

For Le Guin, Lavinia's silence in the *Aeneid* similarly suggests a potential for speech and that there is a lost story behind her silence that needs to be 'recovered'. Le Guin faces a significant obstacle in recasting Lavinia as an author: how can a silent woman tell her story? An influential episode from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the story of Philomela who weaves a tapestry depicting her rape and sends it to her sister Procne, after Tereus has raped her and cut out her tongue so that she can tell no one about the crime he has committed (*Met.*,6.424-674, pp.316-35). Unlike Philomela or Penelope, Vergil's Lavinia cannot make herself heard in this way.

However, the *Aeneid* does contain images of weaving women.[31] In Roman culture spinning and weaving was considered to be the duty of every respectable woman. The loom was displayed in the centre of the aristocratic house (the atrium). It represented the centrality of the domestic activity of the ideal Roman woman to the respectability and honour of her family:

Woolwork was morally charged, since it was taken as evidence of womanly virtue, particularly chastity, so the loom interestingly tied a woman's domestic labour with her role as protector of the family's respectability, and its display in the atrium worked as female equivalents to the men's military spoils.[32]

Livy, Cicero, and Suetonius all present a woman's ability to weave as evidence of her honour, piety and dedication to her family.[33] An epitaph for a Roman matron named 'Claudia' (2nd Century BCE) clearly makes the association between spinning and the virtuous woman: '[...] she loved her husband with her whole heart. She bore two sons [...] She was charming in conversation. Yet her conduct was appropriate. She kept house. She made wool'.[34] During the reign of Augustus, the moral health, religious observance and domestic stability of the Roman family increasingly came to be seen as a reflection of the health of Rome itself. The existing cultural association of a women's 'woolwork' with her family's respectability took on a new significance. Augustus is said to have used the weaving skills of the women of the imperial family to promote these values and his own self-styled image of domesticity and austerity. In *The Lives of the Caesars,* Suetonius says that Augustus brought up his daughter Julia and his granddaughters Julia the Younger and Agrippina very strictly: they were taught spinning and weaving and Augustus wore the homespun cloth they produced. He forbade them from speaking or doing anything that could not be recorded in the household diary and restricted their contact with strangers.[35] Weaving and spinning were conventional signifiers of female virtue and correct behaviour in Augustan Roman culture; symbolising a woman's duty or obligation to her house and family, which also implied a loyalty to the state and reverence for the gods, equivalent to the pietas for which Aeneas is famed.

In *Lavinia,* Le Guin appropriates the trope of woman as weaver from elsewhere in her source text, and through its more general cultural association with Roman female virtue, she gives the ability to produce textiles, and therefore the ability to write, to Lavinia. Le Guin's Lavinia is presented as spinning a fine thread that she will use to make her summer palla, as she spends the day alone in the forest of Albunea:

> I spent the next day alone in the forest of Albunea. [...] I had my spindle and a bag of wool; a woman usually carries some of her Penates with her. I was spinning the very finest thread for a summer toga or palla, so my light bag of wool would last me a good while. (*L*, 63)

In creating a back story for Lavinia that includes a responsibility to produce cloth for herself and her household, Le Guin symbolically gives Lavinia a narrative voice through which she is able to resist her patriarchal literary representation as a silent caricature of female virtue.

It is significant that Le Guin chooses to represent Lavinia spinning thread in this location because this is the very place where Lavinia will meet Vergil and confront him about the way in which she has been represented in the *Aeneid.* In representing Lavinia as a new author who creates her narrative through a dialogue with her male precursor Vergil, Le Guin can be seen to examine her own rewriting practice through the character of Lavinia. Le Guin is clearly able to identify with Vergil as her male precursor poet, a historical figure who could be held singularly responsible for Lavinia's representation in the *Aeneid,* and considers herself to be in a creative dialogue with him. Le Guin's representation of Vergil in *Lavinia* is very sympathetic. She interprets Vergil as an author whose writing of the *Aeneid* was deeply affected by his material circumstances and the historical contexts in which it was written and interpreted. In the aftermatter to *Lavinia*, Le Guin describes her rewriting as a product of having listened to both Lavinia and Vergil:

> In the epic, a pivotal character, the Italian girl Aeneas is destined to marry, is silent, barely sketched. Who was Lavinia? What was *her* destiny?
> My desire was to follow Vergil, not to improve or reprove him; but Lavinia herself sometimes informed me that the poet had been mistaken [...] I listened to her; I listened to him. And between them, they gave me my novel. (*L,* 9-10b)

While Le Guin is haunted by Lavinia's silence and her fate, the desire to tell her story is not motivated by a quest to avenge her by 'reproving' Vergil, creating a negative representation of him, or by representing Lavinia's narrative as one that silences or represses the male voice of the *Aeneid.*

Le Guin uses the mask of Lavinia to problematise her novel as a feminist project of rewriting and recovery. She challenges two dominant assumptions of feminist literary criticism: that women writers suffer from a 'more primary' anxiety of influence than their male counterparts, and that the feminist author writes to

'recover' a lost or repressed 'feminine voice' that has been deliberately silenced in a male-authored source text. In *Lavinia,* Le Guin questions the very concept of a 'feminine voice'. In presenting Vergil's failure to give Lavinia a voice as the mistake of an old and dying poet, Le Guin argues that the presence of a silent woman in an androcentric text does not necessarily constitute a deliberate attempt by a male author to silence her. Moreover, Le Guin's characterisation of Lavinia's relationship with her mother Amata stages the anxieties of female authorship that the new author experiences with regard to her female precursors. In the same way as Atwood stages the new female author's anxiety of authorship by presenting Penelope's mother as an abusive and negligent mother who expresses nothing but contempt for Penelope's weaving, Le Guin characterises Amata as a malignant and abusive enforcer of her daughter's silence.

The principles that inform Le Guin's representation of Lavinia's dialogue with Vergil and her problematisation of common feminist writing practices can be traced to her 1986 essay 'Prospects for Women in Writing'. Here, Le Guin links the status and success of feminist authorship, particularly narratives that are engendered through the writerly body and speak specifically of female experience, with the importance of reader response in creating and maintaining positive literary representations of women and female creativity. Le Guin sees it as the responsibility of female readers to recognise and culturally propagate the positive representation of female experience and female writing:

> The writer only does half the job. It takes two to make a book. [...]There is no more subversive act than the act of writing from a woman's experience [...][and] for a whole generation now, women have been writing, publishing, and reading one another, in artistic and scholarly and feminist fellowship. To keep women's words, women's works, alive and powerful – that's what I see as our job as writers and readers for the next fifteen years, and the next fifty.[36]

Through the rejection of the position of the male author as god in favour of the representation of a discourse between author and reader/writer, Le Guin promotes the arguments that she first makes in 'Prospects for Women and Writing'. The creation of meaning in a text is given to the dialogue between author and reader in the creation of a narrative that re-writes and transforms the myth of Lavinia. In this way she suggests that feminist texts will only become canonical through the cultural propagation of texts that represent female experience. Le Guin's feminist

writing project at first seems to be at odds with her use of narrative techniques that function to collapse gendered authorial hierarchies in the text. We might expect to find in *Lavinia* a repression of male authorial authority and a promotion of importance of the gendered body of the author to her writing of female experience and not an apparent rejection of them. Yet *Lavinia* is a novel about female experience. What Le Guin rejects is not the gendered body of the author itself but the notion that there should be any difference in the authorial authority of a text based on the gender of the author alone.

Lavinia's voice is not an angry or vengeful one precisely because Le Guin is not interested in engaging with a futile process of the burial and return of the repressed woman in the source text:

> I am not the feminine voice you may have expected. Resentment is not what drives me to write my story. Anger, in part, perhaps. But not an easy anger. I long for justice, but I do not know what justice is. It is hard to be betrayed. It is harder to know that you made betrayal inevitable. (*L*, 71)

Read as an allegory of the complacency of female readers, this suggests that feminist authors can only go so far in changing the inadequacy of the literary representation of women and female authorship. Le Guin's rewriting of the *Aeneid* is a subtle one and in many respects requires a feminist reading practice from its readers in order to draw out her representation of female experience and the way in which it confronts Vergil's representation of female silence as a virtue in the *Aeneid.* In her use of a first-person narrative in which the female protagonist directly poses questions to her readers that invite acts of interpretation, Le Guin is demanding a close reading practice from her readership in which they must seek out Lavinia's motivations for her actions and interpret her experiences of negative female representation within the *Aeneid*.

Le Guin's concept of writing her new narrative through a dialogue with her predecessor and source text is clearly evident in the way in which she creates a voice for Lavinia by reading the *Aeneid* as if it were an account of historical events in which the author had failed to include the experiences of women. Le Guin presents Lavinia's alternative first-person narrative as one that attempts to fill in the gaps in the historical record. Le Guin reads looking for instances in which Lavinia is depicted as a silent woman and rereads key events of the *Aeneid* as a motivation for

that silence by imagining what Lavinia might have to say to Vergil regarding the way in which he has chosen to represent her.

Lavinia, unhappy with her poet for depicting her as a silent woman given to blushing uncontrollably, states her desire to 'take the word' from Vergil:

> [...] the life he gave me in his poem, is so dull, [...] so colourless, except when my maiden cheeks blush like ivory stained like crimson dye –so conventional, I can't bear it any longer. If I must go on existing century after century, then once at least I must break out and speak. He didn't let me say a word. I have to take the word from him. He gave me a long life but a small one. (*L,* 4)

Lavinia does not deny her tendency towards silence, or that she was blushing and weeping during the events depicted in book twelve of the *Aeneid*. She states that if we had met her when she was a girl 'you might well have thought that my poet's faint portrait of me, [...] was quite sufficient: [...] a marriageable virgin, chaste, silent, obedient'. However, she does want to fill in the gaps in Vergil's barely 'sketched' image of her by providing a reason for her behaviour: 'I was silent and meek because if I spoke up, if I showed my will, she [Amata] might remember that I was not my brothers and I'd suffer for it. I was six when they died'. (*L,* 5-6).

Le Guin creates a backstory for Lavinia by amalgamating the two instances in the *Aeneid* in which Lavinia appears, to produce an alternative narrative in which Lavinia is no longer silent because she is virtuous and obedient, but because she is terrified of her mother. The full extent of Lavinia's representation consists of a tear stained face: 'accepit vocem lacrimis Lavinia matris/flagrantis perfusa genas' ('Lavinia heard her mother's words, her burning cheeks steeped in tears') and the narrator's description of Lavinia's blush: 'indum sanguineo veluti violaverit ostro/si quis ebur, aut mixta rubent ubi lilia multa/alba rosa' ('As when one stains Indian ivory with crimson dye /or as when white lilies blush with many a blended rose') [*Aen.,* 12.64-9, vol. II, pp.302-3]. To this Le Guin adds the description of Lavinia in book seven in which the narrator alludes to early death of Latinus' male children, the importance of Lavinia's marriage and the expressed concern for the need for male heirs:

> filius huic fato divum prolesque virilis
> nulla fuit, primaque oriens erepta iuventa est.
> sola domum et tantas servabat filia sedes,
> iam matura viro, iam plenis nubilis annis.
>
> To him by Heaven's decree was no son or
> male descent, cut off, as it was, in the spring of early

youth. Alone, to preserve the house and noble home,
was a daughter, now ripe for a husband,
now full of age to be a bride

<div align="right">(Aen.,7.50-3, vol. II, pp.6-7)</div>

In 'Lavinia's Blush', Lyne argues that of the two similes used to describe Lavinia's blush, have not 'been properly explained. Nor for that matter has Lavinia's weeping'. Lyne asks 'Why does she weep? And why does she blush?'[37] Lyne argues that Lavinia is perhaps in love with Turnus and in all likelihood so is her mother Amata. He analyses Lavinia's blush and her weeping as a poetic device of empathic connection between Lavinia and her mother:

> Lavinia's sense of propriety, Vergil's sense of propriety, forbids Lavinia herself to speak. But Amata's words seem in some way to have spoken for her, to have caught her mood; anyway to have affected her. She reacts to Amata's words, more particularly (as I would stress) she reacts in line with them. She weeps: *accepit uocem lacrimis*: like, and with, Amata.[38]

Through an examination of Le Guin's technique of rereading, it is possible to conclude that Le Guin interprets Lavinia's blush and her weeping in a similar way. Le Guin starts with this interpretation of the significance of Lavinia's blush and uses its implications to create a backstory for Lavinia and Amata that can account for their actions in book twelve of the *Aeneid.*

Lavinia's silence appears in contrast to Vergil's representation of Lavinia's mother Amata, who does speak; she weeps and begs Turnus not to meet Aeneas and the full might of his Trojan soldiers in battle: '"Turne, per has ego te lacrimas, [...] unum oro: desiste manum committere Teucris."' ('"Turnus, by these my tears, [...] one boon I beg: forbear to fight the Trojans."') [*Aen.*,12.56-60, vol. II, pp.302-3]. Turnus' reply suggests that Amata has in some way spoken out of turn and in a way that is inappropriate to the situation. He does not want to be reminded of what is at stake, and believes that Amata's words and tears are a omen of death: '" ne, quaeso, ne me lacrimis neve omine tanto/prosequere in duri certamina Martis euntem [...] "' ('"Nay, I beseech thee, not with tears, not with such omen, as I pass to stern war's conflicts, do thou send me forth."') [*Aen.*,12.72-3,vol. II, pp.302-3].

Amata's words function as a rhetorical device through which Vergil foreshadows Turnus' death at the hands of Aeneas and so her daughter's fate. Where

Amata could not control herself and speaks with disastrous consequences, Lavinia, the virtuous maiden and future mother of Rome, maintains propriety and custom by remaining silent. While this contrast between Lavinia's virtuous silence and Amata's improper speech may be read as an implication that women's speech is dangerous and that female silence is a virtue, Amata's speech does give a woman's opinion of the events depicted in the *Aeneid.* Lavinia's silence cannot be seen to represent a deliberate attempt by a male author to silence or repress women's voices. Le Guin's rewriting of the relationship between Lavinia and Amata recognises this. Lavinia's silence is represented as a mistake that has had the unintended consequence of allowing Amata to speak for Lavinia. In *Lavinia*, it is Amata and not Vergil who enacts the patriarchal control of Lavinia and is responsible for the silencing of her daughter's voice. Le Guin appropriates the tension between Lavinia's silence and Amata's speech in the *Aeneid* in her characterisation of their mother-daughter relationship. Amata's speech to Turnus is reread as Amata's attempt to control the fate of Lavinia by speaking and acting for her and so repressing her daughter's voice.

In regard to Amata's less than motherly intentions toward Turnus, Le Guin is, in some respects, in agreement with Lyne's analysis. The way in which she places emphases on Amata's reaction to the presence of Turnus and her rage at Lavinia's refusal of his proposal is suggestive of romantic desire. Amata encourages the match between her daughter and Turnus with such intensity that Lavinia begins to suspect her of being in love with Turnus: '"Among them all, all the young possibilities, there really is only one who is possible. Who is inevitable. Intended." She smiled again, radiantly. I thought, she is like a girl speaking of her betrothed'. (*L,*74). However, Le Guin seems to reject the notion that Lavinia is also in love with Turnus. Lavinia is for a time flattered by his attentions and in the beginning is even infatuated with him. The famous blush is re-written as the reaction of a girl who is embarrassed, frightened and confused by her realisation that she is an object of sexual desire:

> He didn't stare, but he looked again and again, with a slight smile. I became embarrassed as I had never been. His intense blue eyes began to frighten me. Every time I dared glance up, he was looking at me. [...] My realm was virginity and I was at home in it, unthreatened and at ease. No man had ever made me blush. [...] I cowered with shame. [...] My mother, beside whom I sat, was well aware of my discomfort, and it did not displease her; she let me cower, and talked away to Turnus about Ardea. (*L,* 20)

Lavinia's distress is not shared by Amata. Despite their close physical proximity, Lavinia's emotional distance from her mother suggests a lack of warmth or affection in their relationship. Lavinia feels this distance so intensely that she interprets it as possible evidence that her mother is enjoying her distress.

Throughout the novel Lavinia continues to be frightened of Turnus. She believes that he lacks 'piety' and for that she cannot trust or love him. It is on this basis that she rejects him as a suitor. Lavinia tells her friend Silvia: "' [...]He has no piety. He looks only at himself." [...] I think she knew I was frightened, but would not ask me what I was afraid of, so I could not speak to her as I longed to' (*L,* 80). Recalling Turnus' death, she remarks to Aeneas: 'I think there was some evil in Turnus' heritage. In my mother's family. Something frantic. A madness. A darkness. It ran in their blood like a black snake, a fire without light' (*L,* 198). In contrast, Amata is represented in such a way that she might flirting with Turnus at the last feast before his departure: 'My mother was ten or twelve years older than her nephew, but tonight she did not look it; her eyes shone and she laughed. She and Turnus got on well together and were at ease. They talked lightly across the table' (*L,* 22).

When Lavinia reveals her intent to reject Turnus as a suitor, it is implied that Amata's threatening behaviour towards her daughter is motivated by her desire to keep Turnus close to her:

> [...] she said in a low, harsh voice, 'but I tell you now, you will marry Turnus and be queen of Ardea. You don't have to cower and whine about it;[...] it's a political marriage, not a rape. There's one thing a girl is good for, and that's to be married well, [...] So do your duty, as I did mine. If you ruin this chance I'll never forgive you'. It was not what she said so much as how she said it that terrified me; [...] I felt that she was about to strike me, to claw me with her nails as she had done long ago. Her voice shook and hissed and her breath came hard. [...] Marriage was my duty and my destiny. My mother was right even if she spoke in her own interest, not in mine. (*L,* 82)

Lavinia believes that Amata is speaking for her own interests rather than those of her daughter, and while it is never explicitly said, there is an implication in Amata's word's that in a political marriage Turnus might be inclined to seek love elsewhere. Le Guin subtly suggests that it may be Amata's hope that he seeks it with her. The text is deliberately ambiguous, reflecting the ambiguity of Amata's language and her actions in the *Aeneid.* Le Guin is careful that these ambiguities of the text remain as Lyne suggests 'disturbing insinuations' rather than 'floodlit revelations'.[39]

These ambiguities of Amata's character and her motivations function to provide an explanation for the significance of Lavinia's blush. Lyne argues that in the *Aeneid* it is Amata's love for Turnus that causes Lavinia's silence. In *Lavinia* it is more the case that it is Lavinia's suspicion that her mother is in love with Turnus and her belief that Amata is forcing the marriage for political gain that contributes to her silence. Through her belief that Amata was in love with Turnus, Le Guin is able to reread the character of Amata as a threatening, sometimes abusive, negligent and manipulative mother who is a malignant influence on her daughter's life and the choices she must make.

In *Lavinia,* the loss of her sons has driven Amata mad and is shown to have destroyed her relationship with King Latinus long ago. Amata often appears jealous of Lavinia and cannot forgive her for having lived when her brothers died:

> [...] my mother went mad with grief.
> My father [...] grieved bitterly for his sons. [...][He was] never unkind, and never weak, except in this: he let my mother do as she would, [...] For him she had only contempt; for me, rage. [...] if I annoyed her she would turn on me suddenly and tell me in a hard flat voice that I was a fool, ugly, stupidly timid. 'You're afraid of me. I hate cowards,' she would say. Sometimes my presence drove her into actual frenzy. She would strike me or shake me till my head snapped back and forth. Once the fury drove her to tear at my face with her nails. [...] I was too stunned to cry, (*L,*7-9)

Le Guin argues that it is Amata's violence towards her daughter and Lavinia's memory of it, as Amata threatens the dire consequences that will ensue should she reject Turnus, which are the causes of her silence in the *Aeneid*.

Lavinia's rejection of her mother's attempt to transfer her own feelings and reactions to Turnus onto her daughter can be read as Le Guin's rejection of the feminist rewriting technique of having their new constructed 'feminine' voice represent a collective voice of feminist resistance to androcentric literary representation; as if one woman's narrative can be made to stand in for all women. For Le Guin, this implies that sharing the same sex is enough to guarantee a shared reaction to the experience of the same life event. To construct a homogeneous feminine voice is to be complicit with the patriarchal representation of women from which it originated. Le Guin makes it clear that Lavinia's narrative of her lived experience is hers alone. Lavinia and Amata are no longer characters that mirror each other's emotions. Rather, they become oppositional to each other. The act of blushing itself is shifted to an earlier point in the narrative. This separates it from the

act of weeping in empathy with her mother and is dismissed by Lavinia as a commonplace reaction brought on by a feeling of garden variety adolescent embarrassment. Le Guin separates Lavinia's blush from her silence through a temporal fracturing and reformation of the narrative of the *Aeneid*. Lavinia's blush can no longer be read as a signifier of silence as an inherent female virtue that Lavinia possesses. It is shown to be a reaction to her mother's patriarchal repression of her. Le Guin amalgamates the lack of a son or male heir with the crimson-stained ivory simile as if to complete the fragmentary and incomplete representation of Lavinia that Vergil presents in the *Aeneid.* In bringing these threads together from different points in the narrative timeline of the *Aeneid,* she suggests that Vergil was ignorant of this explanation for Lavinia's silence.

Amata can be read as both Lavinia's biological mother and her literary precursor. Her speech in the *Aeneid* and her association with weaving in Le Guin's *Lavinia* can be read as metaphors for female authorship. Lavinia remembers that before her brothers died, Amata used to sing to her children while spinning wool: 'Often she sang to us as we played. Sometimes she stopped spinning and leapt up, took my hands and Latinus' hands and danced with us' (*L*, 6). However, when Vergil asks Lavinia if her mother taught her to spin and weave, Lavinia does not confirm or deny it. The answer remains a secret between her and Vergil:

> Tell me when you spin, when you weave. Did your mother teach you those arts? [...]
> 'You know it all'.
> 'No. Only what you can tell me'.
> So I told him what he asked, and comforted him with what he knew. (*L,* 62-3)

This relationship between Lavinia and Amata can be read as an allegory of a different kind of anxiety of female authorship that I have termed an 'anxiety of potential'. Gilbert and Gubar's theory of a primary anxiety of female authorship assumes that the female author is unable to identify with her male precursors. Le Guin rejects this by presenting Lavinia as a new female author who does identify with her male precursor poet (Vergil) and engages in a dialogue with him. Gilbert and Gubar's theory does not account for what happens when a new female author does identify with a female precursor whose representation of women and female creativity is negative. In the 'anxiety of potential' the potential female author is able to identify with a female predecessor, and knows that it is possible for a woman to

become a 'precursor'. However, the potential female author also comes to recognise the negative representation of female creativity in her female precursor's text. Le Guin can be seen to stage this theoretical problem of feminist literary criticism. While Lavinia identifies with Amata as her mother and recognises her authority. Amata's actions creatively cripple her daughter and force her into silence. The new author comes to fear that 'the act of writing will isolate or destroy her' and chooses not to write at all.

A parallel between Atwood's Penelope and Le Guin's Lavinia may be drawn here. In *The Penelopiad,* attention is drawn to the fact that Penelope's negligent mother is a Naiad. While Penelope's mother never forbids Penelope's weaving, she attempts to undermine Penelope's authorship and the means by which she is able to make her voice heard. She tells Penelope that weaving is a pointless act and that she should 'leave it to Arachne'. (*TP,* 86). The characters of Amata and Penelope's mother function as a kind of bad mother archetype (so often found in fairytales, in the guise of old witches, evil fairies and wicked stepmothers) who attempt to prevent or undermine the progress of other women. In this incarnation, the evil mother archetype attempts to enforce her daughter's silence.

However, unlike *The Penelopiad*, the previously enforced silence of the main female protagonist is not the result of the conflation of misogynistic lies and myths about female creativity. It the unforeseen result of Vergil's creation of Amata as a dominant female authority whose speech act (read as a representation of female authorship) acts to silence Lavinia (the new female author). Lavinia only finds her voice because she can identify with a male precursor, a notion that has disturbing implications for Le Guin's feminist rewriting practice. Le Guin seems to suggest that male authors can be 'taught' to be more aware of the way in which they produce androcentric texts that undermine the representation of women, but that the negative representation of women and female creativity by female authors poses a more intractable problem.

The oppositional creative space from which Lavinia regains her voice and creates her narrative is quite different from Atwood's representation of Penelope writing from her place in the underworld. This reflects the way in which she views the female author as writing from a critical position in which she feels excluded from dominant literary representation. In contrast, Le Guin does not view herself or her writing as being in opposition to that of her male predecessor or her source text. The

underworld is rejected in favour of a dream-state consciousness through which Lavinia and Vergil exist in dialogue with each other between the land of the living (representation within the text) and the land of the dead (outside representation; the position of the writer's authority over representation). It is through this dialogue that Lavinia challenges her representation within the *Aeneid* by drawing attention to the lack of control that Vergil has over his text and its interpretation. It is significant that Vergil (literally) and Lavinia (symbolically) are both authors of a text and characters inside it. By blurring the line between represener and represented, Le Guin to some extent aligns herself with Barthes' theories on intertextuality by suggesting 'the impossibility of living outside the infinite text'. However, whereas Barthes argues that this is only ever a circular memory 'what comes to me, not what I summon up, not an authority',[40] Le Guin does maintain the position of the author in order to explore the extent of the author's authority over his or her text and the implications this has for feminist rewriting.

The first pages of *Lavinia* serve the same function as the opening chapter 'A Low Art' in *The Penelopiad*. Both authors use the opening passages of their novels to set out the methodologies of their re-writing projects. It is here that Lavinia first describes the way in which Vergil was mistaken in his representation of her and sets out her motivations for her writing her own narrative of events. However, she also attributes her existence to him and acknowledges her debt to him:

> Before he wrote, I was the mistiest of figures, scarcely more than a name in a genealogy. It was he who brought me to life, to myself, and so made me able to remember my life and myself, which I do, vividly, with all kinds of emotions, emotions I feel strongly as I write, perhaps because the events I remember only come to exist as I write them, or as he wrote them.
> But he did not write them. He slighted my life, in his poem. He scanted me, because he came to know who I was only when he was dying. It was too late for him to make amends, rethink, complete the half-lines, perfect the poem he thought imperfect. He grieved for that, I know; he grieved for me. Perhaps where he is now, down there across the dark rivers, somebody will tell him that Lavinia grieves for him. [...] I can't bear it any longer. If I must go on existing century after century, then once at least I must break out and speak. He didn't let me say a word. (*L,* 3-4)

Lavinia pities her creator as a failed artist, a frail and dying old man embroiled in an Augustan political power struggle beyond his control. However, this is not to suggest that Le Guin is engaged in a narrative attempt to 'kill off', in an act of Bloomian anxiety, the presence and influence of Vergil on her writing of *Lavinia.* Le Guin presents a model of influence as a creative dialogue between the new author and her

predecessor that rejects both the female author's primary anxiety of authorship and the presence or the authority or superiority of the predecessor poet.

Le Guin's Lavinia conceives of herself as a disembodied shade who both inhabits the text and is an author of it. But unlike Atwood's Penelope, Lavinia refuses to take her place in the underworld, to see herself as a woman writer who is excluded from literary representation. Le Guin suggests that Lavinia will go on 'living' in some form as long as the text of the *Aeneid* survives:

> I won't die. Of that I am all but certain. My life is too contingent to lead to anything so absolute as death. I have not enough real mortality. No doubt I will eventually fade away and be lost in oblivion. [...] But I won't have to tear myself from life and go down into the dark, as he did, poor man, first in his imagination, and then as his own ghost. We each have to endure our own afterlife, he said to me once, or that is one way to understand what he said. But that dim loitering about, down in the underworld, waiting to be forgotten or reborn – that isn't true being, not even half-true as my being is as I write and you read it. (*L,* 3-4)

Furthermore, Lavinia repeatedly suggests that her 'life' is contingent upon the text. Through this positioning of the character of Lavinia Le Guin initially suggests an opposition between a male author who takes a position of authority over and outside the text, and a female author whose text is materially connected to her lived experience. In this Le Guin suggests the importance of the gendered body of the female author who must write through her body to construct a representation of female experience.

Lavinia's ghostly, eternal existence within Vergil's poem is unpleasant and tedious. As a silent archetype of femininity in Vergil's *Aeneid* she has until now endured a silent and repetitive afterlife trapped inside a text that she perceives to be controlled by a Vergil's authorial authority. Lavinia will later realise that Vergil has very little control over his text but initially Lavinia sees it as her duty to write herself out of male representation, using a 'feminine voice' to create a text that speaks for a female experience that complements Vergil's narrative of male experience.

As the eldest daughter of the king it is Lavinia's duty to help him in the ritual duties. She collects sacred salt, and keeps Vesta's fire burning. It is also believed that she has a gift, inherited from her father, that enables her to converse with the spirits. It is because of this that she often attends and assists him in his vision quests and maintenance of their 'sacred place' in the forest of Albunea, but Lavinia also undertakes these quests alone. She states that she does this not through any sense of

religious conviction or faith in the importance of her abilities. Lavinia pretends to undertake these spiritual duties to get away from Turnus, her mother and her life at court:

> It was useful to me as my reason not to be always at home, dressed in white, the meek garlanded sacrifice, while the suitors paraded through and drank their wine, and Turnus [...] looked at me as a butcher looks at a cow. [...] I needed no blood sacrifice when I went to Albunea. I scattered salsamola on the altar, slept on the old fleeces of other sacrifices and sought no vision or guidance. All I wanted when I went there was to sleep there, in that silence, with those spirits around me [...] A night there clarified my heart and quieted my mind, so that I could come back home and do my duty. (*L,* 36-8)

Here Lavinia provides an explanation for why she is perceived as a dutiful daughter, ready to marry for the good of her father's kingdom, when she is in fact very upset about the situation she finds herself in. Lavinia does not directly contest Vergil's representation of her here, but only when she is in dialogue with him. She simply suggests that Vergil never knew the entire story. This is symbolic of the female author's attempt to read her female characters out of male representation, by creating a more complex motivation and characterisation for them that opposes the under-representation of women by building on what is already represented in the source text.

Lavinia is accompanied on her journey by her servant girl, Maruna. Just as the maids helping Penelope to weave Laertes shroud refigures the women's quarters as an oppositional space in which Penelope can construct her alternative narratives in *The Penelopiad,* Maruna opens Lavinia's mind to the dream state of consciousness that allows her to converse with Vergil. As a young woman from the lower servant class, Maruna is associated with the dissemination of knowledge and wisdom that is explicitly constructed as female and is orally transmitted from mother to daughter:

> She had learned some of her mother's lore, [...] and sometimes we talked about what the dead might have to say to us. [...] to me the dead were best left buried, left undisturbed, thought about as little as possible; one did not want their unhappy shadows creeping across the floor [...] but according to Maruna's mother, the matter of the dead was not that simple.
> Maybe it was she who had opened my mind so that when I slept in Albunea that night, the night in April when I was eighteen, on that ground that is so thin a roof above the underworld, the poet could come to me, and I could see and speak to him. (*L,* 38-9)

Lavinia suggests that it was hearing this female narrative about conversing with the dead that allowed her to speak to Vergil, rather than a gift inherited from her father. Lavinia can be seen to read herself out of male representation, into a liminal

oppositional space, by rejecting the male voice of her father and listening to and learning to speak with a female voice. Through their dialogue, Le Guin presents Vergil and Lavinia as equals in a model of the text in which the position of the Author (with complete authority over the text) is reduced to the same status as a reader. The historical figure of Vergil, culturally valued as a figure of genius, is re-figured as a disembodied shade like figure who – with Lavinia as the representation of a new author who is first a reader – channels and interprets literary representation to create a new text, but knows that he has little authority over the way that the *Aeneid* has historically been, and continues to be, used and interpreted. Vergil functions as a symbolic representation, not of the need for the 'Death of the Author' as Barthes might suggest but of a reduction of his status to an equal and dialogic relationship with his new reader/author as signified by the character of Lavinia.

Left alone in the sacred space of the grove, after praying, Lavinia sees a figure approaching and tells him to 'be welcome here'. Vergil immediately recognises that he is in his own poem and identifies the sacred grove as a place created in his own imagination:

> 'Albunea!' he said. I could see that he was looking around, though it was quite dark [...] after a minute he said again, wondering, almost with a laugh in his voice, 'so it is! [...] So maybe I am a bat that has flown here from Hades. A dream that has flown into a dream. Into my poem. To Albunea, the sacred grove, where King Latinus heard his grandfather Faunus prophesy, telling him not to marry his daughter to a man of Latium..'. [...] he thought; and he said, 'perhaps not yet'. [...] He went on, hesitant, 'I think it has not happened yet. Faunus has not spoken to Latinus. Perhaps it never did – never will happen. You should not be concerned about it. I made it up. I imagined it. A dream within a dream... within the dream that has been my life...' (*L,* 40-1)

Vergil says that he is a wraith; a projection of himself from where he lays dying on a boat sailing from Greece to Italy. Vergil is able to enter his text from a position of authorial authority outside of it because he perceives it as a dream-work construction of his own consciousness.

Vergil recognises the text as his own poem by alluding to Faunus' prophecy in book seven of the *Aeneid*, but he is unable to recognise where he has arrived in the narrative timeline of his poem. Le Guin appropriates the description of the environmental details of Albunea, where king Latinus receives the prophecy: 'at rex sollicitus monstris oracula Fauni,/[...] adit lucosque sub alta/ consulit albunea' ('But the king, troubled by the portent, visits the oracle of Faunus, [...] and consults the

groves beneath high Albunea') which 'fonte sonat' ('echoes with the sound of a spring'). She also appropriates the description of the rituals that take place there: '[...] huc dona sacerdos/cum tulit et caesarum ovium [...]/ pellibus incubuit stratis somnosque petiuit' ('[...] hither the priestess brings the offerings, [...] she lies [...] on the outspread fleeces of slaughtered sheep and woos slumber') [*Aen.*,7.81-8, vol. II, pp.8-9]. Le Guin describes the same forested area with a spring, situated in a grove below a rocky outcrop (*L,* 39). Lavinia herself takes on the role of the unnamed priestess who lies down to sleep on the fleeces of recent sacrifices (*L,* 40). Le Guin's Lavinia questions the existence of the prophecy that she is destined to marry Aeneas and that her father should not seek to marry her to Turnus (*Aen*.,7.96-101, vol. II, pp.8-9), because she has never heard of it: 'I said quite sharply, "Did he?' I couldn't help it. Surely my father would have told me if he had received such a warning. Why would he keep it from me?' (*L,* 31). The suggestion that Latinus may have kept this secret directly challenges the events of the *Aeneid* in which Latinus didn't keep the prophecy secret but quickly spread news of it throughout the Ausonian cities (*Aen.,*7.102-6, vol. II, pp. 8-9). Vergil and Lavinia are engaged in a discourse of oral story-telling similar to that of the French bagatelle in which a story is told orally and each successive teller points to where they believe the story could have been improved and changes to the oral text are agreed upon. The result was often a written manuscript of a fairytale.[41] Lavinia and Vergil's storytelling is similarly represented as an oral dialogue between two authors that creates the new text of *Lavinia.*

Through her selective appropriation of the *Aeneid,* Le Guin suggests that Vergil's presence in his own text has enabled Lavinia to change it. It is significant that the dialogue between Lavinia and Vergil takes place in a liminal space. The sacred grove in Albunea is constructed as being removed from both Lavinia's and Vergil's reality (or their place in textual representation). It is also a space in which the line of distinction between the represented (Lavinia and Vergil as characters inside representation) and Vergil and Lavinia (as authors of that representation) is at its thinnest. Temporal fractures and reformations of the *Aeneid* are enacted in the dialogue between Lavinia and Vergil which suggest the equality of and the continuity of experience between male and female authors.

Vergil's inability to locate himself temporally within the narrative of the *Aeneid* is a metaphor for his lack of authority over literary representation in a model of the text in which the Author is reduced to equal status with the reader in the

creation of meaning. Lavinia as the new reader/author now has as much authority over the *Aeneid* as her male counterpart and begins to directly contest his narrative of events. The metaphor is extended by Vergil's inability to locate himself in the timeline of his own existence and influence within the textual field. Lavinia dislikes Vergil's representation of what happens to the souls of dead babies in the underworld. She questions him on this and accuses him of writing something unspeakable. She uses the word '*nefas*': an undoing of the right order of things. She accuses him of being cruel and weak, for writing it; before she quickly takes it back (*L,* 64-5). She asks Vergil how he knows that it is true and he replies:

> 'I was there'.
>
> 'You were in the underworld? With Aeneas?'
>
> 'Who else would I be with?'[...]He looked about uncertainly. His voice was low and dull. He went on, hesitant, 'It was the Sybil who guided Aeneas ... What man did I guide? I met him in a wood, like this. A dark wood, in the middle of the road. I came up from down there to meet him, to show him the way...But when was that? Oh this dying is a hard business, Lavinia. I am very tired. I can't think straight any more'. (*L,* 64)

Vergil is represented as both a historical person and a literary representation of a male author. The text has become synchronous rather than chronological and he cannot separate the text he authored from his authorial representation within Dante's *Inferno*. Vergil no longer controls the text but is part of it. Vergil does not seem to recall that Lavinia too, has lived in Dante's vision of hell. She appears in Canto four in which she sits with her father as an example of a noble pagan: 'da l'altra parte vidi'l re Latino/che con Lavina sua figlia sedea'. ('and on the other side I saw King Latinus,/who sat with his daughter Lavinia').[42]

Lavinia shares an affinity with the dead babies because like them, in her eyes at least, she has committed no sin. But having been born before Christ, she cannot reach salvation. Lavinia's rejection of Vergil's representation of sinful babies is deeply personal and masks what she sees as the true horror of a religion that would condemn those who could not have sinned to hell. Lavinia and Vergil are represented as having shared the same experience of Dante's vision of hell, but have had extremely different reactions to it. It is this individual reaction, and not the author's gender identity which is shown to determine what they would choose to represent and what they would choose to leave out of their account of the same event. Lavinia and Vergil's shared experience of a text that is yet to be written at the point in the

literary timeline that they currently inhabit points to a conception of the text as an infinite, synchronous system that is constantly reforming and subject to change.

It is Vergil's lack of control over his own text and his literary representation as a character that allows Lavinia to contest the *Aeneid*. Vergil acknowledges that his text is imperfect. He also acknowledges that he has no control or authority over the way in which the text has been and continues to be used and interpreted:

> 'If it is wrong, I will take it out of the poem, child,' he said. 'If I am permitted to'. [...]
> 'Who is it that permits or forbids you?'
> 'The gods. My fate. My friends. Augustus'. [...]
> ' But surely you're a free man,' I said at last. 'Your work is your own'.
> ' It was till I got sick,' he said. 'Then I began to lose my hold on it, and now I think
> I've lost it. They'll publish it unfinished. I can't stop them. [...] 'It's not the right ending'.
> 'Tell me the right ending'. (*L,* 65-6)

Vergil accepts that after his death (literal within the narrative of *Lavinia* and figurative in terms of his death as an Author with authority) the text will continue to have a life of its own that is susceptible to changes and manipulations and the forces of historical change and context upon it. Vergil's realisation that his text is imperfect and his frustration that it remains unfinished is presented as the result of his mistake in the way he represented Lavinia: '"I know very little. And what I thought I knew of you – what little I thought at all – was stupid, conventional, unimagined. [...] It's all wrong," he said. I will tell them to burn it' (*L,* 61).[43] Vergil knows that he has learned the truth too late. He is dying and will never be able to make changes to, or finish, the *Aeneid.* He begs Lavinia to finish it by telling him her story and thus fulfilling her destiny by becoming Aeneas' wife and the mother of Rome:

> You're almost nothing in my poem, almost nobody. An unkept promise. No mending that now, no filling your name with life, as I filled Dido's. But it's there, that life ungiven, there, in you. So now, at the end, when it's too late, you have it to give it to me. My life. My earth of Italy, my hope of Rome, my hope. (*L,* 66)

Lavinia's dialogue with her dying predecessor results in his giving her permission to change and complete his text. In rewriting the *Aeneid,* Lavinia is careful to honour her predecessor, by only filling in the gaps of his poem rather than directly challenging what is represented in the *Aeneid.* Lavinia's narrative can be read as an allegory of Le Guin's own rewriting practice. Through her dialogue with Vergil, Lavinia is able to recall, experience and comment on events that she was not

present for in the *Aeneid.* The emphasis on Lavinia's absence during these events draws attention to Vergil's limited representation of women in the *Aeneid.* The narrative structure of *Lavinia* is written as a non-linear variant of the androcentric *Aeneid*, in which ruptured threads of the source text's narrative have been pulled through and reformed by a new female author to create a gynocentric text: the central character of *Lavinia* is a woman, who is writing a narrative that focuses on the lived experiences of women. However, it is important to note that Le Guin's goal is not to undermine the existing literary representation of men, but to bring about an equality in male and female representation in her rewriting practice.

This strategy is apparent from the outset of *Lavinia.* At the beginning of the novel Lavinia witnesses black ships coming up from the south and sailing down the river mouth:

> Out beyond that on the dim sea I saw ships – a line of great, black ships, coming up from the south and wheeling and heading in to the river mouth. [...] His [Aeneas'] face is stern yet unguarded; he is looking ahead into the darkness, praying. I know who he is. (*L,* 1-2)

Lavinia's narrative consistently shifts from focalised male characters to the internal focalisation of her emotional and intellectual response to her experience of events. Le Guin uses this shift to represent and correct the inequalities of gender representation that she perceives to be present in the *Aeneid.* Aeneas' and the Trojans' arrival in Latinum at the beginning of book seven becomes the beginning of *Lavinia*. This temporal shift in the narrative timeline of the *Aeneid* is directly followed by Lavinia's own narrative commentary on her life as a woman who may have lived in history and her new identity as a female author:

> I know who I was, I can tell you who I may have been, but I am, now, only in this line of words I write. I'm not sure of the nature of my existence, and wonder to find myself writing. I speak Latin, of course, but did I ever learn to write it? That seems unlikely. No doubt someone with my name, Lavinia, did exist, but she may have been so different from my own idea of myself, or my poet's idea of me, that it only confuses me to think about her. [...]how can it be that we can all talk to one another? I remember the foreigners from the other side of the world, sailing up the Tiber into a country they knew nothing of: [...]and made polite speeches in fluent Latin. Now how could that be? Do we know all the languages? [...] How is it that you understand me, who lived twenty-five or thirty centuries ago? Do you know Latin? (*L,* 3-5)

These commentaries always follow a shift to focalised male characters. They are never situated within the story timeline, but appear as if they are being written from a

place of observance; from the liminal oppositional space of Albunea and through her dialogue with her predecessor. Through this shift between a female internal focaliser and male focalised, Le Guin is literally filling in the gaps of female representation in her source text. However, Le Guin's description of Aeneas looking out from the prow of his ship to the forests of Latinum and the ships turning about is taken directly from the *Aeneid*: 'atque hic Aeneas ingentem ex aequore lucum prospicit. [...] flectere iter sociis terraeque advertere proras / imperat, et laetus fluvio succedit opaco'. ('Then lo! Aeneas, gazing forth from the flood, sees a mighty forest. [...] He bids his comrades change their course and turn their prows to land, and joyfully enters the shady river'.) [*Aen.,*7.29-36, vol. II, pp. 4-5]. The existing literary representation of male characters is not undermined or repressed in Le Guin's new gynocentric text. Le Guin might even be said to enhance the literary representation of Aeneas, by describing his facial expression and foreshadowing the 'darkness' that is to come. Furthermore, in her use of rhetorical questions, Le Guin can be seen to present Lavinia's new text as necessarily open to interpretation by her readers.

This is a consistent narrative structure throughout the novel and there are too many examples to list fully here. However, there is another significant example of temporal shifts in the narrative structure of the *Aeneid* that also involve shifts from the focalised Aeneas to Lavinia's internal focalisation. Lavinia remembers facts about the battle at the end of book twelve of the *Aeneid* that she never witnessed. She questions her husband Aeneas about Turnus' death. In the *Aeneid,* Aeneas character is defined by a struggle to maintain his pietas and control his *furor*. Aeneas clings to his sense of stoic virtue, but this is ultimately undone in the final scene of the poem in which he kills Turnus in an act of impious vengeance. In *Lavinia,* the protagonist gives her perspective on the events of the battle:

> 'But Aeneas, nobody spared anybody in that battle, not even when they begged for their lives – you said so'. Later, I remembered that it was not Aeneas who had told me that, but the poet.[...] It doesn't matter if you were crazy with bloodlust or cold as seawater, you did what you had to do. [...]He said nothing for a while, and then very little. I thought he was struck by my argument. He was stricken by it.
> It was only much later that I saw I had taken from him the self-blame that allowed him some self-justification. If he could not see his battle rage as the enemy of his piety, as fury for a moment overcoming his better self, [...] then he had to see the fury as part of his true nature, (*L,* 198-9)

Lavinia's perspective is shown to change the way in which Aeneas thinks of himself. He is forced to contemplate the idea that the violent rage he felt may be inherent in his character, rather than a lapse in his normally honourable behaviour. Lavinia's narrative lends a different perspective to the events of the *Aeneid* and its male characters, without altering the Vergil's representation of events.

This passage has the same narrative structure of temporal fracture through shifts between male focalised and female focaliser as my earlier example: Lavinia recalls something about the way Aeneas is depicted in the *Aeneid* that she never witnessed. It is her discourse with Vergil in a liminal space that allows her an observational position of the text and gives her the knowledge to fill in the gaps in Vergil's representation of her. Lavinia completes Vergil's unfinished representation. She then asks two questions of the reader: if Aeneas believes that his killing of Turnus was 'a righteous act, was it, itself, righteous?' She reminds us that 'As he struck, Aeneas had called the killing a sacrifice'. she asks 'But of what, to what?' (*L*,199). Through Lavinia's narrative Le Guin continually invites her readers to enter into a dialogue with her to create the meaning of her new text.

Narrative structure in *Lavinia* functions to disrupt authorial authority over the text. Vergil is brought to equality with Lavinia in a textual model where the reader makes an equal contribution to the author in the construction of meaning. However, at the end of the novel Lavinia is still a ghostly representation of a woman, trapped inside the text of the *Aeneid:*

> I can hear the endless sound of the engines of war on all the roads of the world. But I stay here. I fly among the trees on soft wings that make no sound. Sometimes I call out, but not in a human voice. My cry is soft and quavering: *i, i,* I cry: go on, go.
> Only sometimes my soul wakes as a woman again, and then when I listen I can hear silence, and in the silence his voice. (*L,* 287)

Lavinia lives only in the act of being read, and since she is mostly being read as a silent archetype of femininity in Vergil's *Aeneid,* she is mostly silent. While Lavinia and Vergil consider their texts to have equal authority, the reality is that Vergil's *Aeneid* has remained the canonical version of events. Lavinia's is represented as one that is barely read and Lavinia's female voice of protest has become almost inaudible and barely human. This ending serves a subtle reminder to the feminist reader that the feminist author's giving of voice to previously silent female characters is only

the first stage in improving the literary representation of women and female creativity. Le Guin creates a voice for Lavinia that is not angry or vengeful and does not seek to repress Vergil's male voice. Le Guin's novel requires a feminist reading practice from its readers in order to draw out the positive representation of female creativity in *Lavinia*. Moreover, in the narrative structure of Lavinia, the myth of Lavinia's silence is transformed into a positive representation of female creativity through a dialogue between author and reader. In this, Le Guin suggests that feminist voices promoting the positive representation of women and female creativity will only become canonical through the conscious collective efforts of the feminist reading community to propagate and promote texts that represent female experience.

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[1] In *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1954), W.B. Stanford similarly argues for the historical contingency of the *Odyssey* and its interpretations and revisions.

[2] Atwood's figurative representation of a conflict of values between oral and written texts takes up a central discussion of Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*: *The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). In a chapter on 'The Homeric Question', Ong argues that modern readers have difficulty reconciling their concept of a poetic genius who created, in writing, a static unchanging text, with the sophisticated , yet, oral and formulaic composition of the Homeric epic, without an identifiable author or a stable original text. See pp.18-30.

[3] Peter Toohey separates the classical epic into two categories: 'the type of epic which was passed from generation to generation by word of mouth ('oral' or 'primary' epic such as Homer's *Odyssey*) and the epic which was composed with a pen ('secondary' or 'written' or 'literate' epic such as Virgil's *Aeneid)'*. See *Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.1.

[4] For a good overview see Richard Heitman, *Taking Her Seriously: Penelope and the Plot of Homer's Odyssey* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005) pp.1-10. See also John J. Winkler, 'Penelope's Cunning and Homer's' in *Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp.129-61; Marilyn Katz, *Penelope's Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in* the *Odyssey* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1992); Carolyn Heilbrun 'What Was Penelope Unweaving?' in *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp.103-11; Nancy Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope: From Character to Poet* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Barbara Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford: Lexington, 2004).

[5] Heilbrun, p.108.

[6] Winkler, p.133.

[7] See Felson-Rubin, passim; and Clayton, pp.21-52.

[8] For further discussion of Miller's response to Barthes 'The Death of the Author' as an 'Ariadne Complex' and the implications it has for feminist writing see 'Part I Introduction: Towards a Feminist Poetics of Creative Autonomy' of this thesis, pp.26-33.

[9] The patriarchal repression of women by other women is a consistent theme throughout Atwood's novels. I would argue that this reflects a broader concern in Atwood's writing with the woman writer's anxieties of authorship and influence in regard to her female predecessors. This manifests in

her representation of her central protagonists' familial and social relationships with other women. Atwood's mothers are extremely manipulative characters who control their daughters through emotional blackmail and often attempt to restrict or undermine their creative activities. Moreover, Atwood's novels are often concerned with destructive and damaging female friendships. See for example, Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (London: Virago, 1989); *The Robber Bride* (London: Virago, 1994); *Cat's Eye* (London: Virago, 2007). Similarly, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996) can be read as a critique of feminism in which Atwood explores the ability of a matriarchal community to control a younger woman's behaviour through the use of language that reinforces the misogynistic moral codes of the patriarchal totalitarian regime in which they live.

[10] For a more in depth discussion of the use and interpretation of the myth of Arachne in feminist literature and theory see 'Part I Introduction: Towards a Feminist Poetics of Creative Autonomy' of this thesis, pp.1-2, 28-31.

[11] Homer, *The Iliad,* tr. by Robert Fitzgerald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3:125-9, p.46.

[12] Hilde Staels, 'The Penelopiad and Weight: Contemporary Parodic and Burlesque Transformations of Classical Myths' *College Literature* 36.4 (2009), pp.100-18 and Coral Ann Howells, 'We Can't Help But Be Modern: *The Penelopiad'* in Sarah. A. Appleton, *Once Upon A Time: Myth, Fairy Tale and Legend in Margaret Atwood's Writings* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp.57-72, both note the use of the maids chorus in *The Penelopiad* to parody or burlesque Penelope's main narrative. However, their analysis of the use of genre change in *The Penelopiad* is extremely limited by their conceptualisation of the classical epic as an unsophisticated genre. Staels and Howell's both argue that Atwood is responding to the limitations of the classical epic by rewriting its content in more sophisticated modern genres.

[13] Andrew Brown, *A New Companion to Greek Tragedy* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p.61.

[14] It has been suggested that the later Greek traditions of pastoral poetry such as the Idyll developed in the Alexandrian school in opposition to earlier epic traditions in order to avoid imitation of the epic in these new forms. James B Pearce in 'Theocritus and Oral Tradition' *Oral Tradition,* 8.1 (1993), pp.59-86 argues that 'in particular, they avoided large works and strove to expand upon previously treated material in ways that emphasized individuals' emotions or peculiarities. [...] [There is] general consensus that the genre was most likely based somewhat upon a pre-existing folk culture of Sicily and the Peloponnesus, more particularly upon the actual songs of the shepherds of these regions'. pp.59-61.

[15] See Irene de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey* (Cambridge University Press 2001), p.543.

[16] The term was ostensibly coined by *The Bookseller Magazine* in 2007. See, Liz Bury, 'Tugging at Heart Strings' *The Bookseller* (22 June, 2007) http://www.thebookseller.com/feature/tugging-heart-strings.html [Accessed May 2012].

[17] For a detailed examination of the women's lament in the epic tradition see Margaret Alexiou, *Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

[18] Mary Beard, *A new Spin on Homer,* The Guardian, Saturday 29th October 2005, (Archived at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/oct/29/highereducation.classics) [Accessed January 2011].

[19] A significant number of the myth variants that Atwood uses in *The Penelopiad* are drawn from Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*: 2 vol. (London: The Folio Society, 1996). See for example: Penelope as Mother of Pan, pp.102-3, 589, 664-5. This is appropriated in *The Penelopiad,* 'Slanderous Gossip', p.144.Odysseus plots with Tyndareus to win Penelope at the marriage contest for Helen, pp.571, 580, appears in 'My Marriage', pp.35-7. Penelope's mother was a Naiad, Penelope thrown into the sea at the behest of her father and was given the name Penelope, meaning duck, p.580, is used in 'My Childhood', pp.7-11.Odysseus breaks with cultural convention in demanding that Penelope comes to his kingdom as his bride, p.587, is appropriated in 'The Scar', pp.48-9.The significance of the contest of the bow and the ring of axes to pagan moon-cults, p.602, appears in

'The Anthropology Lecture', pp.164-5. The emasculation and death of Melantheus, p. 665, is appropriated in 'The Anthropology Lecture', p.167. Odysseus's distrust of Penelope, suspicion of unfaithfulness, the role of Anticleia, pp.664-5, appears in 'Slanderous Gossip', p.144. Odysseus's refusal to die at the end of his term of kingship, pp. 665-6, appears in 'The Anthropology Lecture', pp.167. It is important to note that every appropriation of Graves' work is used as an example of a false patriarchal myth that Penelope or the maids challenge in their narratives.

[20] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1997), pp.9-10.

[21] *Ibid.,* pp.445-6.

[22] Graves, *Greek Myths*, pp.664-5.

[23] *Ibid.,* p.602.

[24] See Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis,* tr. by Don Taylor (London: Kessinger, 2004), p.58.

[25] See Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* in *Alcestis and Other Plays,* tr. by Philip Vellacott (London: Penguin, 1974), pp.129-78 (p.132).

[26] See for example, J. D. Jefferis, 'The Theology of the "Aeneid": Its Antecedents and Development' *The Classical Journal* 30.1 (1934), pp.28-38; Michael C. J. Putnam, '*Aeneid* VII and *The Aeneid*' *The American Journal of Philology* 91.4 (1970), pp.408-30; Susan Skulsky, '"Inuitus, Regina...": Aeneas and the Love of Rome' *The American Journal of Philology*, 106. 4 (1985), pp.447-55.

[27] Dorothea Clinton Woodworth, 'Lavinia: An Interpretation,' *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 61 (1930), pp.175-94 (p.176).

[28] R.O.A.M Lyne , 'Lavinia's Blush: Vergil, '*Aeneid* 12.64-70' *Greece & Rome, Second Series*, 30.1 (1983), pp.55-64 (p. 55).

[29] See Crescenzo Formicula, 'Dark Visibility: Lavinia in the "Aeneid"' *Vergilius* (2006), pp.76-95.

[30] Fiona Cox, 'Ursula Le Guin' in *Sibylline Sisters: Virgil's Presence in Contemporary Women's Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.247-63 (pp.250-1).

[31] The Trojan women are depicted as weaving women in book 8.408-9: '[...] femina primum,/ cui tolerare colo uitam tenuique Minerva' ('[...] a housewife, whose task it is to eke out life with her distaff and Minerva's humble toil'), *Aen.,* vol. I, pp.412-3. In book 4.262-4, Dido is said to have made Aeneas' expensive and ornate cloak:'[...] erat Tyrioque ardebat murice laena / demissa ex umeris, diues quae munera Dido/fecerat, et tenui telas discreuerat auro'. ('and a cloak hung from his shoulders ablaze with Tyrian purple – a gift that wealthy Dido had wrought, interweaving the web with thread of gold'), *Aen.,* vol. II, pp.88-9.

[32] Beth Severy, 'Family and State in the Late Republic' in, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp.7-31 (p.20). For a more extended examination of the importance and significance of women's textile production in classical antiquity, see Pomeroy, pp.3-200.

[33] See Livy's account of the rape of Lucretia in *Ab Urbe Condita I & II* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1.57-9, pp.199-205; Cicero's attempt to discredit Clodia's testimony in the *Pro Caelio,* 32, 57 in *Orations*: *Pro Caelio. De Provinciis Consularibus. Pro Balbo* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp.374-85; the distaff and spindle joke that Cicero reports in *De Oratore I & II* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 2.227, pp.408-9 ; and Suetonius's account of the education of the female members of Augustus's family in *De Vita Caesarum* 2.64, 73 (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp.220-1, 238-9.

[34] CIL 1.2.1211. This translation is from Pomeroy, p.199.

[35] Suetonius, 2.64, p.73.

[36] Le Guin, 'Prospects..'. pp.177-8.

[37] Lyne, p.55.

[38] *Ibid*., pp.55-6.

[39] *Ibid.,* p.55.

[40] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* tr. by Richard Miller, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), p. 36.

[41] For further information on the bagatelle in French salon culture and its influence on women's rewriting practices see, ' 1.The Rescue of Arachne' pp. 51-3 of this thesis.

[42] Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno,* tr. by C.S. Singleton (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989), 4.125-6, pp.42-3.

[43] This is a reference to the tradition that Vergil requested that the *Aeneid* be burned after his death. Le Guin may also be alluding to Hermann Broch's *The Death of Vergil*, tr. by Jean Starr Untermeyer (London: Penguin, 2000). This long and complex novel deals with Vergil's last hours. It is mostly taken up by Vergil's interior monologue and his dialogues with Augustus, two friends who have been employed by Augustus to get Vergil to change his mind about burning the manuscript, a shepherd and a former lover. In the end, Vergil arrives at the decision not to destroy the *Aeneid.*

PART III

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis, I raised the question of why women writers use myths of intelligent, resourceful, weaving women like Penelope and Arachne in their work. These are classical patriarchal narratives in which female characters who challenge dominant power structures are punished for their rebellion and are often condemned for their dangerous sexuality, intelligence and creativity. When these myths are read as metaphors for female creativity and authorship, misogynistic concepts of female virtue and creativity can be carried over in the appropriated metaphor. When figures of female power or wisdom such as the goddess and Sibyl, or characterisations of virtuous women like Penelope, Lavinia and Psyche, are re-figured as female authors it runs the risk of reproducing a discourse of female lack and creative inadequacy in a feminist discourse. Similarly, when myths of deviant creation and failed revolution, like that of Prometheus, are used in a discourse on the nature of female creativity and authorship, there is a risk of creating the connotation that female authorship is deviant and doomed to failure. The rewriting practices I have studied in this thesis suggest that feminist authors have not always been entirely successful in challenging repressive notions of female virtue and the discourse of creative lack, and that this is a persistent problem of women's rewriting.

As I have shown in this thesis, female authors are often aware of the discourse of female creative inadequacy that may be carried over in their appropriations of classical myth. The authors studied here make use of the tension between the representation of strong female characters and the discourse of creative lack present in classical myth to create safe and profoundly creative dialogical spaces in which the female author can respond to the historical position of women and attitudes towards female creativity. This allows her to imagine and write about how things could have been different and might be changed in an allegorical mode. Though this she is able to explore and critique the conditions that have affected her own creative process without directly challenging the dominant power structures of her society.

We can choose to read and rewrite classical myths in a way that consciously avoids reproducing negative representations of women and female creativity. For example, Arachne's tapestry depicts the rape and punishment of mortal women by male gods. How are we to read Arachne's text? Is she simply rendering a more exquisite and technically brilliant image of the sexual subjugation of women? Or is she attempting to reveal and emphasise the suffering of mortal women at the hands of male gods? Is Arachne deliberately reproducing images of the power of the gods to control mortals in the hope that her art and skill will be acknowledged? Or is this a text of feminist resistance to patriarchal control that is attempting to expose the reality of sexual violence against women? As Cixous suggests in 'Le Rire de la méduse', the feminist author can choose to read and interpret Arachne's text as an act of feminist resistance, but she needs to be explicit about the way she is reading and appropriating this image in the new text, addressing the issues that may arise from a more conventional reading.

The women writers of the French salon re-figured the prophetic ability and literacy of the Sibyl as a metaphor for their storytelling. Sibylline figures in fairytales prophesy an improvement in the social status and political power of aristocratic women, and the *salonnières* used her image to represent themselves on the frontispieces to their fairytales. Aspects of the powers and appearance of pagan divinities such as the Greek Moirai and the Roman Parcae, Diana, and Flora are used by d'Aulnoy to create her good fairy-storyteller characters. These powerful goddesses operate outside the laws of men and live and rule independently from their male counterparts. D'Aulnoy appropriates the powers of the Fates, whose spinning determines the lives of mortals, and the speech acts of classical goddesses, which so often drive the narratives of classical myth and initiate a change in the life of its mortal heroine, as allegories of the power of storytelling to change women's lives. She conflates the power of these classical goddesses with the literate oral storytelling of the French *salonnières* to create her fairy female storytellers whose words, in the form of spells, curses and declarations, have the power to change the lives of mortal women and offer resistance to the patriarchal laws and moralities of the mortal realm. D'Aulnoy also adopts environmental details from the myths of 'Cupid and Psyche' and 'Diana and Actaeon' to create the classically inspired oppositional space of fairyland in which her fairy characters meet her mortal heroines and teach them how to resist their fate.

However, d'Aulnoy's reading and appropriation of classical myth also recognises that ancient goddesses are not always benevolent: they interfere in the lives of mortal women out of jealousy, or to punish women when their appearance or actions come too close to being godlike. Psyche suffers at the hands of Venus because she is so beautiful that people have begun to worship her in place of the goddess. D'Aulnoy appropriates the anger and violence that Venus shows towards Psyche to create her evil and malicious fairies. In doing so she suggests that women's stories and actions may be complicit in promoting and enforcing misogynistic standards of female virtue, behaviour and sexuality. Ragotte in 'Le Mouton', Soussio in 'L'Oiseau bleu', and the vengeful and warlike society of fairies in 'La Chatte blanche' all curse or punish mortal women for their subversive behaviour and threaten the lives of women who challenge their authority and power.

When Angela Carter reads d'Aulnoy's fairies as representations of female authors whose stories are intended to teach women how to resist their patriarchal repression, she aligns herself and her rewriting practice with that of d'Aulnoy and the French *salonnières*. In 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' and 'The Tiger's Bride' Carter evokes the presence of the French *salonnières* and attributes her Beauty character's ability to change her life to the influence of d'Aulnoy's fairytales. In doing so Carter stages her positive relationship to her predecessor author and figures her rewriting practice as a continuation of an already existing female literary tradition. Both of Carter's characterisations of Beauty explicitly confront women's potential complicity in myths of female passivity and the dangers of female sexuality, and avoid reproducing the negative discourse of female power that was carried over in d'Aulnoy's transformative appropriation of the classical goddess as female author.

The storytelling crone who narrates the story of 'Cupid and Psyche' to a kidnapped girl in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* serves a similar function to d'Aulnoy's good goddess-inspired salon fairies and sibyls. Her storytelling changes Charite's perception of herself as a passive, sacrificial virgin, it encourages her to be brave, plants the idea of escape in her mind and prophetically warns against the dangers of accepting her fate. Despite her initial passivity, Psyche challenges the gods' right to control the lives of mortals, and the influence her story has on Charite becomes a model for the Beauty characters of d'Aulnoy and Carter: young women who learn how to resist the dominant power structures that threaten to destroy their lives by

reading or listening to the stories told to them by other women. However, despite her virtuous behaviour, Psyche is effectively exiled from society, condemned to death and pursued by an angry and jealous goddess, because of her dangerous beauty and sexuality that she cannot control. This forms part of the broader discourse of the *Metamorphoses* on the danger that female sexuality poses to male virility and piety. When d'Aulnoy appropriates Psyche as a model for the heroines of her animal bride and groom tales she uses subverted codes of *vraisemblance* to write against conventional codes of female virtue and behaviour that might otherwise have been reinforced by her appropriation of classical myth. Here, Angela Carter aligns her rewriting practice with that of d'Aulnoy, by subverting the conventional codes of female virtue associated with Psyche, presenting the sexuality of her Beauty characters as the means by which they are able to resist and overcome their patriarchal oppression.

Mary Shelley's decision to appropriate the storytelling figures of Scheherazade and Safie from the *Nights* instead of classical female characters should not be taken as evidence of her inability to recognise or identify with classical representations of female creativity. *The Arabian Nights* provided a set of myths analogous to the classical tradition but offering a positive model of transgressive female authorship. When she did turn to classical myth for a figure representing failed and deviant creativity, it was that of a male creator, Prometheus, frequently invoked as the self-image of Romantic poets. Shelley transferred the discourse of creative inadequacy more usually associated with female creativity onto the male character of Victor Frankenstein; using classical allusions to enact a poetic revenge on the male poets who she felt had undermined her creative ability.

Both Atwood and Le Guin consciously figure their rewriting practice as a dialogue with their classical source texts. In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood draws comparisons between the actions of Penelope and those of Helen and Clytemnestra. She also locates Penelope's weaving in the women's side of the house. It is here that Penelope teaches her maids to weave, so that they can aid her in the weaving and unravelling of Laertes' shroud. In the absence of men, these women display unruly behaviour, sing songs, tell stories and jokes and collude with each other to deceive the suitors. Atwood uses the anxieties regarding women and female creativity that are present in The *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* to explore the conditions of female authorship. These texts are products of a patriarchal and misogynistic society that deeply

distrusted women and female sexuality, where women were confined to the house, and held almost no political power. The characterisation of Helen, Clytemnestra and Penelope and their exploits in a war-torn Greece seems to be playing on male anxieties about women's activities within the domestic sphere, and what deceptions and betrayals they might be capable of during a time of war and in the absence of men. In the *Odyssey* Penelope is consistently upheld as a paragon of female virtue and defined by her loyalty to her husband. The comparisons that are repeatedly drawn between the virtuous, loyal and faithful Penelope, the murderous and unfaithful Clytemnestra and the dangerous sexuality of Helen in the *Odyssey*, reinforce conventional moral codes of female behaviour.

In *Lavinia*, Le Guin plays on the tension between Lavinia's silence and her potential for speech in the *Aeneid*. Vergil represents women as a threat to Aeneas' piety and as an obstacle to him fulfilling his destiny. He presents his female characters as virtuous, passive and silent victims of events that they have no power to change, like Lavinia or as irrational, hysterical women who commit suicide rather than endure their fate, such as Amata and Dido. However, Vergil is at times sympathetic to the plight of women. Lavinia's silent blushing and the fact that she weeps in empathy with her mother implies that Lavinia understands the implications that Turnus' death will have for her. Lavinia's barely controlled emotional response is neither hysterical nor irrational. It is a heartfelt response to the tragedy of war and losing the man that she loves. Vergil's subtle and sympathetic characterisation of Lavinia imbues her with an emotional depth that suggests her importance to the second half of the *Aeneid.* This allows Le Guin to read and identify with her character as a woman who has a story to tell.

Both Atwood and Le Guin attribute their desire to refigure their classical characters as female authors to a sense of being haunted by these characters and their underrepresentation or silence in their source texts. In *The Penelopiad,* Atwood presents Penelope and her maids as dead disembodied shades who write their alternative narratives from Hades. Le Guin appropriates the environmental details of the forest of Albunea from the *Aeneid* as the sacred liminal space in which the barely-sketched and ghostly Lavinia haunts the world of the *Aeneid*, and creates her narrative through her dialogue with Vergil's wraith. Atwood appropriates Penelope and the twelve hanged maids from the *Odyssey* for their association with weaving Laertes' shroud and refigures them as female authors who produce two conflicting

alternative narratives of their lived experiences during the events of the *Odyssey*. Atwood's appropriation of weaving women is the most problematic of all the female authors studied in this thesis because she plays on the inauthenticity of Penelope's text in order to present all myths as dubious and inauthentic. In this respect, she plays on rather than challenges the discourse of creative lack that is carried over in her appropriation of Penelope's weaving. Moreover, she does not fully addresses the theoretical problems of using a collective voice of feminist resistance in the maids' chorus chapters, and she uses the multiple female voices she creates to stage the feminist author's quest for creative autonomy as a rejection of her female precursors.

Le Guin's refiguration of Lavinia as a female author is unusual in that she is in no way associated with textile production, creativity or storytelling in Vergil's *Aeneid.* However, the oddities of Lavinia's representation intrigued Le Guin and caused her to imagine what Lavinia might have to say if she had a voice and a means to tell her story. Le Guin figuratively represents her giving of voice to Lavinia by presenting her as a weaving woman in *Lavinia.* Le Guin's appropriation of weaving as a signature of female authorship plays on the use of weaving and spinning in Roman culture and literature as a signifier of female virtue and piety. By associating Lavinia with weaving Le Guin risks reinforcing the aspect of Vergil's characterisation of Lavinia that she originally sought to write against. However, Le Guin avoids reproducing a misogynistic representation of female virtue by having Lavinia confront Vergil about why he chose to represent her as he did. Lavinia's characterisation in the *Aeneid* is represented as the mistake of an old and dying poet rather than a deliberate attempt to silence Lavinia's voice.

The practice of reading classical myth looking for representations of female characters whose acts of creativity can be read as a signature of female authorship is an effective way of illuminating the way in which women have always had a presence in literature. All the rewriting practices studied in this thesis use the settings of their source texts to create an oppositional space from which female-author characters produce their alternative narratives or offer resistance to the misogynistic codes of female behaviour that negatively affect their lives. My case studies suggest that there is also a tendency for women writers to present their female-author characters as aristocratic literate women. D'Aulnoy's fairy storytellers imitate the aristocratic literate and learned orality of the French *salonnières*. Shelley aligns herself with Scheherazade, the educated daughter of a vizier, because her ability to

tell stories derives from her study of written texts. Atwood refigures Penelope as an aristocratic author who rejects the cultural association of her weaving with peasant, oral and illiterate storytelling. Le Guin's Lavinia is the daughter of a king who is surprised to find herself writing her story in Latin. The aristocratic class of the female author-character often functions as a figurative representation of her cultural and linguistic competence and her authority to create. This is sometimes juxtaposed against the creative ability of male author-characters or other male figures of authority in order represent a conflict between male and female authored literary representation.

The fact that the authors studied in this thesis identify with female characters and read their association with textile production, other acts of creativity or storytelling as signatures of female authorship provides substantial evidence that the female author does not normally suffer from the primary anxiety of authorship that Gilbert and Gubar suggest. However, an anxiety of potential may arise if the feminist author identifies with a female precursor or a classical image of female creativity that implies either the creative inadequacy of female authorship, or that the female author will be destroyed for what she creates.

When I first started researching women's rewriting practices, I never expected to find that the female author appears to suffer as much of an anxiety of influence regarding their relationship to their female predecessors as they do with their male ones. The use of mother figures to stage the new female author's relationship to her female predecessors is common to all the rewriting practices I have studied. In d'Aulnoy's animal bride and groom tales the Psyche/Beauty figure's mother is either dead, imprisoned or inexplicably absent. Without a mother to protect and guide them, these women find themselves at the mercy of their fathers. D'Aulnoy's fairies fulfil the role of a mother teaching the Beauty/Psyche figure to fight against the conventional codes of female behaviour that repress them. In 'The Courtship of Mr Lyon' and 'The Tiger's Bride' Carter appropriates the theme of absent mothers and the role of the fairies as predecessor/ mother figures to stage her relationship to d'Aulnoy as a positive creative dialogue between the new author and her predecessor. Mary Shelley aligns herself with the character of Safie and has her mother's teachings reflect the arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in order to stage and overcome the anxiety of influence she feels towards her mother as predecessor. Margaret Atwood and Ursula Le Guin both

use the difficult relationship between the central female protagonist and her mother to stage the new female author's anxiety of potential.

ARACHNE'S WEB: A FEMINIST POETICS OF CREATIVE AUTONOMY

I conclude by presenting my own model of feminist authorship and the female author's relationship with her source texts and predecessors. In creating this model I have drawn together the most successful rewriting strategies from each of the three rewriting practices that I have studied. I have termed this rewriting practice 'Arachne's Web' because I believe that for the feminist author to create a truly positive, coherent and consistent representation of women and female authorship she must write with attention to what is represented by the signature of female authorship that she appropriates in order to ensure that she does not inadvertently reproduce a discourse of female lack and creative inadequacy through her appropriation of the classical woman and the myth that she is associated with. Writing with an attention to 'Arachne's Web' also implies that it is the responsibility of the feminist author and her readers to read classical myth and its revisions with a feminist intent.

Feminist authors do not write from a true position of exclusion from literary representation. This is only ever a creative critical positioning from which they may choose to stage their opposition to the particular themes, motifs or negative representations of women and female creativity that they wish to write against. While this may be inspired or influenced by the particular ways in which an individual author's lived experience combines with her felt exclusion from or belonging to a reading community, her writing is always a response to the already read.

The authors studied in this thesis read their source texts looking for the representation of a woman whose act of creativity can be read as a metaphor for female authorship. They appropriate and align themselves with their chosen character in order to figuratively represent themselves and their individual rewriting practices within their new texts. One way to avoid reproducing images of classical women that strongly imply the female artist's creative inadequacy would be for

feminist authors to choose to align themselves with the most positive image of female creativity available to them. This is taken to an extreme in Mary Shelley's rewriting practice of Arachne's Challenge, where the author rejects classical signifiers of female authorship and creativity in favour of more positive models, drawn from an analogous tradition. However, it could be argued that this does nothing to confront the discourse of female creative inadequacy that is present in classical representations of women. A more effective way of exposing this discourse would be to read and rewrite classical signifiers of female authorship with a particular awareness that their negative connotations will need to be directly and explicitly confronted and written against in a feminist text.

The practice of appropriating environmental details or settings from source texts and using them to represent an oppositional space from which the re-figured classical character creates her alternative narrative may inadvertently imply that female authors write from a place cut off from dominant literary representation, reproducing a discourse of female creative inadequacy. This is a particular problem when the female protagonist is presented as writing from Hades (as with Atwood's Penelope). In *The Penelopiad*, the world of the living may be taken to represent dominant literary representation. Penelope and her maids create their alternative narratives from their place in the underworld. Their voices of protest are presented as being too weak to reach the world of the living and so their stories are unable to make an effective challenge to the way their characters have traditionally been represented and interpreted. While the creation of an oppositional space is often used to stage the female author's anxieties over her felt exclusion from literary cultures and communities this does not always reflect the author's profoundly creative dialogical relationship with her source texts and predecessors. Ursula Le Guin's technique of creating a liminal space as a dream-state of consciousness in which the female-author rewrites her source text by entering into a dialogue with her predecessor author more productively reflects this relationship and creates a far more positive and interesting representation of female authorship.

The authors studied in this thesis appropriate the androcentric myths from which their re-figured female protagonists originated, and transform these narratives, motifs and images to make them speak to the lived experiences of women. The new gynocentric narrative is presented as a recovered historical record of women's history. The historical specificity of this 'recovered' narrative is used to emphasise

the creative autonomy of female authors. This focus on revealing and illuminating the lives and experiences of individual women has sometimes been problematic to the rewriting practices I have studied in this thesis. For example, through her salon fairies and princess heroines, d'Aulnoy may be said to have created her fairytale narratives from the narrowly defined point of view of a privileged aristocrat, glossing over the importance and significance of the stories of lower class women. In *The Penelopiad,* Atwood retells the events of the *Odyssey* from the perspectives of both the aristocratic Penelope and her maids. This practice of creating dual narratives in which two characters with different socio-economic backgrounds tell their versions of the same story, has the potential to be a very effective way to present a more nuanced representation of women's history. In *The Penelopiad,* Atwood uses the class difference of her dual narrators to present the potential for conflicting narratives to undermine the authority, veracity and importance of women's stories. While this is entirely legitimate and may help to expose the issue of class-conflict within feminism itself, another way to represent the differences in women's experiences of the same 'historical' event, would be to present the existence of multiple women's voices within the same text, as a reflection of the individual texts that are part of a wider collective feminist movement to recover women's voices and experiences from literary representation.

Furthermore, when the aristocratic class of the female author-character is used to stage her superiority over her male counterparts the creation of a positive representation of women and female authorship comes to imply the repression or reduction in status of the male authored-text and representations of male authorship. Theoretically, this sets up the conditions necessary for the return of these repressed elements in subsequent rewritings. Staging the relationship between male and female authors as one of conflict or as a battle for control over literary representation ill suits feminist rewriting practices that seek to bring about equality in male and female literary representation. Le Guin's representation of Lavinia's creation of her narrative through a creative dialogue with her predecessor poet Vergil offers a more productive, alternative model for representing the woman writer's relationship with dominant literary cultures and her male predecessors.

I believe that the use of mother figures to stage a negative relationship between the new author and her female predecessor has the potential to undermine feminist rewriting projects. Staging the new female author's inability to identify with

her female literary precursors implies that female authors suffer from a negative anxiety of authorship. This has the effect of propagating a patriarchal and misogynistic discourse of female creative lack within a feminist literary discourse. Moreover, staging the new female author's rejection of her 'mother' as a female precursor, even if this is done in order to expose and explore legitimate theoretical problems of feminist rewriting, implies a rejection of existing female literary traditions. The creation of an alternative female literary history that focuses on exposing and propagating positive images of women and female creativity in order to challenge the negative literary representation and interpretation of women and female authorship has long been a key strategy of feminist literary theory.

Mary Shelley's rewriting practice of 'Arachne's Challenge' offers a possible way to represent the historical continuity between the rewriting practices of previous female and feminist authors and those of the new feminist author, while maintaining the representation of female creative autonomy. In *Frankenstein,* Shelley creates the relationship between Safie and her mother to stage the continuity of the arguments and rewriting practices of Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and the theoretical concerns that underpin her own rewriting of Promethean myth and *The Arabian Nights.* She displaces her anxieties of authorship and influence regarding her mother onto the characters of Frankenstein and the creature in order to explore and overcome the negative effect her feelings of creative inadequacy had on her creative process.

The nature of the anxieties of female authorship and influence staged within the text are determined by the individual author's relationship with her reading communities. An alternative way for female authors to productively stage and challenge these anxieties is through the appropriation of mother and father figures, whose speech acts or association with acts of creativity can also be read as metaphors of authorship. These characters may be transformed to represent the female author-character's literary precursors. By staging and rejecting the negative implications of the anxieties of female authorship and influence in relation to both her male and female precursors, an individual author can represent herself as the creative equal of her male predecessor, while presenting her rewriting as following in a literary tradition of subversive feminist authorship. By using a mother figure to associate her rewriting practice as following in a tradition of feminist authorship, the 'recovered' autonomous voice of her central female protagonist can be represented

as part of a wider tradition of feminist resistance to patriarchal literary representation.

Using my model of 'Arachne's Web', I hope to promote and propagate literary representations of the creative autonomy of female authorship by exposing, challenging and writing against culturally constructed notions of female creative lack. I emphasise the numerous ways in which feminist reading and rewriting techniques have been used (and may be extended upon) to avoid reproducing negative images of women and female creativity in a feminist discourse. Continuing the work of Arachne's web: developing new techniques of feminist reading and rewriting by extending on the work of their literary mothers, keeping women's voices present and powerful – these are what I see as the tasks and challenges for Arachne's daughters in the twenty-first century.

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