

THESIS

FAIRY TALE MOTIFS

IN

MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN'S

*PEMBROKE*

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's second novel *PEMBROKE* (1894) and argues that the novel is rife with archetypal fairy tale features. An American writer whose career spanned the second half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, Mary Wilkins Freeman is commonly identified by literary scholars as a local color realist and proto-feminist writer. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, *PEMBROKE* is more accurately understood as an amalgamation of literary traditions. One important and until now unexplored aspect of the novel is its correspondence to fairy tale male and female characterization, plot movement, two-dimensionality, and marriage-resolution.

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## Introduction

Realism in American literature during the second half of the nineteenth century was vibrant and varied. Prolific author of fiction and criticism, editor at *Harper's*, and mentor to innumerable American writers of the period, including Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, William Dean Howells crystalized the general agenda of American writing during this period when he "...called for a literary realism that would treat commonplace Americans truthfully" (Baym 1154). This truthful portrait of life and people in America was especially important as the Industrial Revolution's consequences within the economic, social, and political realms reshaped the country and her people. As Americans' work lives were transfigured by industry throughout the second half of the nineteenth century so, too, were their social lives. Immigration and the diaspora from rural village to urban center created the Big City. Within these huge and claustrophobic urban centers people's creative energies as well as anxious frictions found vent. Ironically, Howell's insistence on truth in fiction came amidst a time in America of doubt: when religious surety and political practice were in flux and produced skepticism. Reflecting the dynamism of the time, the writers of this period reflect a great variety of styles and concerns; geographies and purposes. Alfred Kazin in *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* argues that:

Realism in America, whatever it owed to contemporary skepticism and the influence of Darwinism, poured sullenly out of agrarian bitterness, the class hatreds of the eighties and nineties, the bleakness of small-town life, the mockery of the nouveaux riches, and the bitterness in the great new proletarian cities. (16)

As the superlative example of conventional criticism and undeniably the "founder and chief practitioner" of realism during the last decades of the nineteenth century (Reichardt 33), Howells, vastly prolific and competent with the essay, travel book, biography, autobiography,

novel, and criticism, wrote “always with a sense of his genteel, largely female audience...[and] if he generally observed the proprieties, he often took real risks and opened new territories for fiction” (Baym 1154). An example at the opposite end of realism’s creative possibilities was Stephan Crane. A realist albeit quite distinct from Howells, Crane was not interested in proprieties and very interested in exploring how the human spirit can be sustained amidst an indifferent universe (Baym 1157). Realism in the terrain between Howells and Crane, in Kazin’s words “came to America from everywhere and nowhere...and it had no center, no unifying principle, no philosophy, no joy in its coming, no climate of experiment” (16). American writers such as Hamlin Garland and Bret Harte, writing of the west and mid-west, George Washington Cable and Kate Chopin, writing of the south, and Harriet Beecher Stowe and Sarah Orne Jewett, writing in the east, were inhabitants in this expanse of American realism as was the focus of this thesis Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (Baym 1157-58).

Wilkins Freeman (1852-1930) is primarily identified by scholars of American nineteenth-century literature as a local color or regional realist. Nearly universally noted in criticism of her time or ours are her New England Puritan villages and villagers who struggle to live together as the faith and rural ways they have inherited ebb away with the century. Dialect, material detail, honest representations of women, and psychological intensity all contribute to the writer’s appeal. Examining the history of Wilkins Freeman criticism beginning in the 1880s, Mary R. Reichardt in “Mary Wilkins Freeman: One Hundred Years of Criticism” succinctly captures the particular place Wilkins Freeman occupies in American literary history. Reichardt explains that early in her career, Wilkins Freeman was viewed as a successor to Hawthorne and his exploration of the Puritan will as well as a protégé of Howells and his realism “movement” which prioritized writing with accuracy the stories of real men and women (33). Emblematic of

the reception of her short stories throughout the 1880s and 90s is a review quoted by Reichardt which triumphed Wilkins Freeman's "...novelty, yet truthfulness" (33). Or another who addressed her subject matter: "She sees...-the pathos and beauty of simple lives" (quoted in Reichardt 33). Readers and critics appreciated both her language which was fresh and exciting because it was direct and simple and her themes which emphasized the mystery of human nature (Reichardt 33). In addition to a scholastically consistent identification as a regional realist, both Reichardt and Edward Foster, Wilkins Freeman's first biographer, identify the other various modes commonly highlighted in Wilkins Freeman's style. Foster summarizes it well when he writes in *Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*:

All of these [realistic] elements are in her writing and in addition much that is frankly romantic within the spirit of Emerson, more than a touch of the symbolism in which the moral or social significance is sustained throughout the story, and even some understanding of a naturalism rooted in cultural determinism." (90-91)

Just as Kazin noted the diffuse nature of realism's practitioners and products, Wilkins Freeman scholar have long hinted at the porous literary boundaries that one might observe in Wilkins Freeman's fiction. However, it will be decades into the twentieth century before critics answer the call and begin to delve beyond Wilkins Freeman's local color realism.

Despite her popular, financial, and lengthy success, it was not until Foster's biography of 1956 that the work and life of this prolific American author was seriously addressed in the twentieth century. In 1967 Perry D. Westbrook wrote a second significant work on the writer, *Mary Wilkins Freeman*. Westbrook builds on Foster's work while treating in detail several of her most popular stories and novels. *In a Closet Hidden: The Life and Work of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* by Leah Blatt Glasser, written in 1996, is in biographical terms a review of the two previous Wilkins Freeman biographies, but Glasser also provides the first book-length treatment from a feminist critical perspective on the author's life and work. Glasser's work is undoubtedly

the least conventional perspective when compared with Foster and Westbrook as she reads Wilkins Freeman with an eye trained by the feminist scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s. However, as James Bucky Carter argues in his 2006 essay exploring Wilkins Freeman's work, early feminist critics including Marjorie Pryse, Susan Allen Toth, Michele Clark, and Alice Glarden Brand "recontextualized Freeman in the proto-feminist camp of nineteenth-century women writers while otherwise staying the course that Foster and Westbrook set forth" (30). Attempting to put feminist critique of Wilkins Freeman in perspective, Reichardt advises caution when it comes to Wilkins Freeman's "strong, independent, 'rebel'-like women who defy social convention." She argues that "Freeman's rebellious women... constitute only one image, and a relatively limited one, in her overall portrait of women and womanhood" (40).

Fresh interpretive perspectives on Wilkins Freeman's work has suffered from a narrow classification of the writer as a local colorist and/or proto-feminist. Brent Kendrick in his introduction to *The Infant Sphinx: Collected Letters of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* posits that "from the beginning of her career on up to the present day, they have tagged her as local color or regional writer, thereby limiting her significance as well as her appeal..." (6). Reichardt, challenging the primacy of the subversive in Wilkins Freeman's short stories, argues "Her writing probes equally as sharply into the lives and sensibilities of women who accept the Victorian 'true womanhood' ideal of wife and mother"(40). Most recently, Carter in his essay "Princes, Beasts or Royal Pains: Men and Masculinity in the Revisionist Fairy Tales of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman" bemoans the stale treatment of Wilkins Freeman's work thus far and posits an exciting call-to-action:

...it appears that if Freeman is to gain more repute in literary studies, scholars must continue to find new niches for her work... Fortunately for her enduring legacy, her work is prevalent with fairy and folk themes that, to date, scholars have largely failed to recognize, lending yet another venue from which her vast



literary talent and merit may be examined and revealing new and important insights into her opus. (30)

I concur with Kendrick, Reichardt, and Carter that American literary scholarship has not done full justice to Wilkins Freeman's work. Prompted by Carter's identification of fairy tale themes in Wilkins Freeman's short stories, I intend to supplement interpretation of Wilkins Freeman's fiction by arguing that her novel *PEMBROKE* is rife with fairy tale features. In fact, the fairy tale motifs in the novel help explain the substrata beneath the novel's representation of men and women as well as providing a template for understanding the novel's resolution. I will also demonstrate that Wilkins Freeman's fascinating but narrow representations of the New England Puritan and his or her imprisoning will finds its precedent in the flat types and either/or moral code of traditional tales.

Using, adapting, refashioning, and refreshing traditional tale motifs and types is not unique to Wilkins Freeman. A. S. Byatt, in her introduction to *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* emphasizes the reoccurring tale motifs woven throughout nineteenth century fiction:

There is a layer of most nineteenth-century novels that is pulling with, or against, the fairy-tale paradigm. *Mansfield Park* is "Cinderella." *Middlemarch* contrasts the diligent and lazy daughters, the white and red of warmth and cold, and pulls against the paradigm with gritty moral realism. Witches and dwarves, ogres and wolves, lurk in Dickens and Hawthorne. Elizabeth Gaskell reunited the fairy-tale characters in a fantasy French chateau, in a tale all her own, and also played realist narrative games with stepmother and daughters in *Wives and Daughters*. Both Gunter Grass and Virginia Woolf use the tale of "The Fisherman and His Wife." In Woolf's case, particularly, one of the novel's purposes is to show that there is more than one way of telling the world, of imagining ambition and danger and safety. (xxx)

*PEMBROKE* belongs in Byatt's list. This novel breaks with the "Wilkins Freeman" conventions in many ways and sits apart from the enshrined short stories we associate with this prolific nineteenth century author. *PEMBROKE* is a compelling hybrid of realism and a refashioned fairy tale tradition. Fairy tales, or wonder tales, are marked by both magic and pedestrian elements.

Tales do not necessarily portray reality, yet take place on the roads, within the woods, and homes of the very real. Household objects and household work are the brick and mortar of the fairy story, yet these objects and homes take on symbolic significance far weightier than these familiar tokens usually receive. Wonder tales include definable, dependable, archetypal characters. Characters are not dynamic in tales. Instead, events change and fate follows. Endings, in the tales, are sudden and happy. *PEMBROKE* exhibits all these characteristics. Set in a rural past, rich in details of household objects and work, and laced with characters acting the updated roles of fairy tale hero, heroine, and witch this novel is an amalgamation of traditional tale story-telling elements and nineteenth-century realism. Even the tragic nature of Puritanism and its dark perceptions of human nature so central to *PEMBROKE* harken to the fairy tales' two-dimensionality. The Puritan division of human nature and experience into bold contrasts of black and white/good and evil/joy and despair melds perfectly with the stark world of man-eating wolves and nameless noble princes, evil stepmothers and fairy godmothers, extravagant rewards and hideous punishments in the Once Upon a Time world of the tales. *PEMBROKE*'s Puritan villagers come as black and white types – the immature boy/hero, the virtuous humbled girl, the irascible father, and the evil witch. Their prosaic lives are an extended meditation on the possibility of finding and keeping true love. But rather than a single story of human suffering and redemption, *PEMBROKE* grips us with several intertwining narratives of love. The patterns of plot and character are creative extensions and revisions of patterns of plot and character found in fairy tales.

The novel is set during the early decades of the nineteenth century in a New England village where the vitality of Puritanism is gone but its social codes and customs are still practiced. *PEMBROKE* tells the intertwining stories of the Barnard, Thayer, and Berry families

and their neighbors. Barney Thayer and Charlotte Barnard's engagement is broken after a quarrel between Barney and Charlotte's father Cephas. Another engagement, years in the making, between Richard Alger and Sylvia Crane is ended over a missed appointment. A marriage is contracted between William Berry and Rebecca Thayer under the meanest of circumstances in an effort to mitigate the most shameful of sins. The life of the village unfolds in relation to these three relationships over the course of ten years. At times oppressive in its portrait of the rigid conventionality of rural life, the novel also brings to life the beauty of the New England landscape and the humor of its natives. The conclusion of the novel resolves both the broken engagements with reunion and marriage and offers a glimmer of hope that even Rebecca Berry nee Thayer will find redemption through motherhood.

Wilkins Freeman is hardly the first to creatively rework fairy tales' plot and character. In fact, the entire literary history of the fairy tale is one of adaptive change. Folklore scholars have established that the stories which became the published fairy tales of the burgeoning nineteenth-century children's literature industry trace their lineage to countless nameless oral storytellers as well as some established collector/authors. These collector/authors include Giambattista Basile, Charles Perrault, and, of course, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm whose *Children's Stories and Household Tales*, an anthology of folk tales the brothers collected, reworked and republished several times between 1812 and 1852, was translated and published into English in 1823 by Edward Taylor. Retelling the tales in America, according to Gillian Avery in *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books 1621-1922* probably began with William Charles, a Philadelphia publisher during the early decades of the nineteenth century, who recycled from England the traditional tales and "published for all tastes [including] fairy stories such as *Cinderella*, *Jack the Giant Killer*, and *Blue Beard*" (72). Developing this history of adaption of

older traditions, Avery explains that “what Perrault did for [fairy tales] ...Nathaniel Hawthorne did for Greek myths...resiting them in New England, taming and emasculating them, and in certain instances creating something entirely new (126). Avery’s inclusion of Hawthorne’s writing for children as an exemplar of the literary exercise of creatively working with older stories and reimagining them afresh is also noteworthy as it marks a correspondence between Hawthorne and Wilkins Freeman often cited. Avery makes clear that American publishing for children in the early to mid-decades of the 1800s leaned heavily toward stories with “moral fiber” and commonsensical lessons about life, however, the post-Civil War years “were beginning to provide more entertainment than their predecessors, and...[children’s literature] was being written with a conspicuously lighter touch” (122). Avery documents the sizable portion of the children’s literature market committed to imaginative and traditional tales, while stressing that “publishers were often wary of offending those with strict views, concealing fairy legends or Grimm stories under titles such as *Wonder-World Stories* or *Tales of Adventure*” (124).

The fairy tale characteristics of Wilkins Freeman’s *PEMBROKE* have also remained concealed under the novel’s regional local color façade. However, in Carter’s words “Freeman left clues to her fairy and folk influence for those with a quick eye” (30). In this thesis I will explore those traditional tale influences and in doing so I hope to bring a greater appreciation of Wilkins Freeman’s remarkable novel *PEMBROKE*. Chapter one “Building *PEMBROKE*” will present *PEMBROKE*’s place in Wilkins Freeman’s corpus, a review of the novel’s critical reception, and an examination of the threads connecting Wilkins Freeman’s conception of Puritanism, fairy tale motifs, and their manifestation in *PEMBROKE*. Chapter two “The Hero” examines Wilkins Freeman’s adaption and revisions of the common fairy tale plot tradition

which necessitates a hero pass a character test of compassion. Chapter three “Patterns of Alienation” examines the influence of tales on the novel’s two-dimensional nature especially in terms of its thematic concern with alienation and its structured plot of patterning, doubling, and repetitions. “Barney,” chapter four, is a close reading of Wilkins Freeman’s protagonist Barney Thayer as an archetype tale hero: impulsive, egotistical, compassionate, yet passive. In chapter five “Silent, Sewing, and Humble” I examine how Charlotte Barnard and Sylvia Crane, the central female characters in the novel’s two love stories, are demonstrably written in the tradition of silent, sewing, humble fairy tale heroines. Chapter six “Wholly Compassionate” posits that the ubiquitous nature of compassionate understanding and deference found in the village woman of Pembroke is an adapted archetype of traditional tales. In “Deborah,” chapter seven, I argue that Wilkins Freeman’s Deborah Thayer, one of the most mesmerizing characters in the novel, is a creative meld of Wilkins Freeman’s uniquely dark expression of Puritanism with the traditional tales expression of the dark side of the maternal, the witch. In chapter eight “It’s All About the Dress” I showcase the way women’s work and aesthetic experience find expression in *PEMBROKE* as they have for hundreds of years in the ancient tales through the clothes women create and wear. Finally, in the conclusion, I propose that the novel’s “problematic” ending aligns seamlessly with the novel’s many other fairy tale characteristics.

## Chapter One: Building *PEMBROKE*

Successful and well-respected as first a children's stories author and then as a leading local color short writer, Mary Wilkins Freeman decided at some point in 1893 to tackle a second novel. Money may have called, or the professional urge to be recognized in the substantive genre of long fiction. Writing a sustained story was not really about experimentation for Freeman. *PEMBROKE*, published in 1894, follows the author's long road traversing New England and recounting the tales of her Puritan ancestors. In fact, not only does *PEMBROKE* stay put in Wilkins Freeman's well-tilled soil, but the novel is strangely "older" in some ways than her better known short stories. As a young author Wilkins Freeman wrote and sold quite quickly Christmas stories, which had been popularized in Britain and highly desirable by American families, also. Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is the most well-known and long-lasting in this category of specialized tale. Continuing to follow the British lead as well as Edgar Allan Poe's American success with the genre, Wilkins Freeman wrote many stories in the ghost and gothic tradition. The bulk of her early writings, however, were children's tales. Her very first published piece was accepted by *Wide Awake* in 1881 (Foster 50). The ballad "The Beggar King" has the irresistible ingredients of traditional tales: kings, princesses, beautiful gowns, and love at first sight. Some additional titles from that first year of publication reflect her consistent success with the tale genre: "Cross Patch," "Story of Miss Muffett," and "The Pumpkin Giant" (Foster 51-53). A combination of the mundane and magic, the ordinary with the extraordinary, Wilkins Freeman's earliest writing found the appealing symbiosis of stories set in the commonplace and peopled with the common folk and were engaging for being just so.

Foster emphasizes the author's publication in *Harper's Bazar* and the mentorship of its editor Louisa Booth as the beginning of Wilkins Freeman's prolific and successful career in the short story genre:

Miss Booth of *Harper's Bazar* was deeply impressed by the stories. 'The Bar Light House' appeared in the issue for April 28, 1883, 'A Symphony in Lavender' on August 25, 'A Tardy Thanksgiving' on December 15...and there were the usual contributions to *Wide Awake*." (56-57)

It was after reading "A Humble Romance" that Booth, already a Wilkins Freeman supporter, assured the editor Henry Alden of *Harper's New Monthly* that here was a story that deserved a place in his June 1884 edition. *Harper's New Monthly* would go on to publish "each of the important regional and realistic writers of the period..." (Foster 58). The story "A Humble Romance" was eventually published by Alden and became the story by Wilkins Freeman which bridged the gap between a niche magazine published for female readership and "the most popular literary magazine of this period (Foster 58). This short story would eventually be the title piece of the first collected edition of stories by Wilkins Freeman and remains one of her best known and anthologized signature pieces. "A Humble Romance" is also a fairy tale. Characterized and praised as American realism and affectively local color, "A Humble Romance" recounts the tale of a somewhat bumbling man who travels the road, who meets a humble hardworking virtuous girl, within a blink of an eye he proposes, there are sudden fortuitous difficulties, a death, and a marriage finale (*A Humble Romance* 7). Wilkins Freeman mined the rich ore of traditional tales, melded the patterns with New England personality and landscape, and readers hung on every word.

Critics aptly laud Wilkins Freeman for her strong, rebellious, and realistic women characters. Most often mentioned is Sarah Penn in "The Revolt of the Mother," Old Women Magoun, or Louisa in "A New England Nun." Juxtaposed to this critical point of view is the

author's interesting position. Wilkins Freeman's response to Sarah Penn was that there never had been and never would be a New England woman to be and do as Sarah Penn had done (Kendrick 39). The author considered this character an invention, and indeed her readerly tastes ran to the uncanny. Evidence from her earliest writing as well as a personal penchant for story magic help explain the sometimes odd combination of insightful realism, fantastic coincidences, and tidy resolutions which stump some scholars of Wilkins Freeman's novels. Less obvious or perhaps less jarring in the short writing, her novels often feature a marriage frame story, underdeveloped or static characters, multiple mirroring plots, and, in general, a conventional portrayal of early nineteenth century Puritan New England villages. Foster's conclusions in a review of *Jane Field*, the novel which preceded *PEMBROKE*, are clearly ambivalent:

One can notice these elements of power in *Jane Field* without being convinced that M. E. Wilkins could write a novel in 1892. The illusion is overwhelming when we are within the mind of her heroine; but the representation of the struggle in action and dramatic scene is commonplace, implausible, uneven in tone." (117)

"Commonplace," "implausible," and "uneven" might easily be noted as characteristics of the traditional fairy tale and this may help explain Wilkins Freeman's distinctive longer work.

Arthur Conan Doyle pronounced *PEMBROKE* "the greatest piece of fiction since *The Scarlet Letter*" (quoted in Foster 131), and Kate Chopin obviously agreed when she wrote in her diary on June 7 1894 the "subtle genius which created *Pembroke*...[has written] the most profound, the most powerful piece of fiction of its kind that has ever come to the American press" (quoted in the Introduction to *PEMBROKE*). Charles Miner Thompson writing for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1899 wrote "The people [of Pembroke] are not normal; they are hardly sane...it [the village] is a true picture; but it wholly represents New England life no more than the dying apple orchard wholly represents New England scenery" (666). Foster argues that in regards to the "*will* and *unselfish* love...[Wilkins Freeman] came within a hair's breadth of very



illuminating and quite modern insight” (129). Westbrook claims “In *Pembroke* Freeman presents a gallery of grotesques comparable to that in Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* ” (73). Examining over one hundred years of Wilkins Freeman criticism, Reichardt summarizes critical response to Wilkins Freeman’s long work by explaining that “When Freeman ventured away from short story writing to try her hand at longer forms of fiction, however, critics complained sharply about her prose...[and concluded] she was better off sticking with short fiction” (33). Glasser argues that “...the novel probes into questions of gender and politics. The central problem associated with heterosexual union in *Pembroke* is the woman’s inevitable loss of power and self-possession, her subjection as lover or wife” (99). Charles Johanningsmeier, in the introduction to the 2002 edition of *PEMBROKE*, suggests several areas in need of fresh perspective. First, “While *Pembroke* may be an account of how heroic, strong women fight patriarchal, Puritan control, Freeman here seems to be exploring, in an extremely complex way, how one defines ‘strength’ in a woman” and, secondly, “The ending, too, is quite problematic and deserves close examination”(xxx).

This curious amalgamation of critical response to *PEMBROKE* is a reflection of the novel’s amalgamation of literary traditions. To the realism endorsed by Howells and Hamlin, the brilliance celebrated by Doyle, the bleak, twisted characters and landscape noted by Thompson, the weaknesses alluded to by Reichardt, the subversion identified by Glasser, and the challenges highlighted by Johanningsmeier should be added the novel’s debt to traditional fairy tale motifs and characterizations. The men of the village of Pembroke are adaptations of many of the stock fairy tale characters: princes, fools, and beasts. The women, also, trace their prototypes to traditional tales. The plot tensions are communal and familial, the story foregrounds the materials and materialism of rural life, and the two-dimensionality of the novel achieves a certain

fullness with psychological realism and symbolism as well as doubling and paralleling of characters and situations. There are as in many wonder tales comic vignettes and characters used to destabilize conventional wisdom. Time in the novel starts, stops, and leaps. Just as in our favorite tales, the supernatural is woven into the mundane everyday while the natural world is a sensuous place of desire, danger, and transgression. Isolation and loneliness, themes of many of our oldest stories, are endemic in this novel. Likewise, speech and silence found in fairy tales as blunt pronouncement, condemnation, or disenchanting tool occur in similar refashioned form. And, finally, the villagers of Pembroke experience reward and resolution through marriage.

Describing fairy tales but applicable to *PEMBROKE*, Maria Tatar explains that:

With a stunning economy of means, they [the stories] manage to create thunderous effects, taking up matters primal and pertinent – the paradoxes and contradictions on which culture itself is based and with which we wrestle on a daily basis. (Grimm xix)

Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* writes that “‘Safe’ stories mention neither death nor aging, the limits to our existence, not the wish for eternal life. The fairy tale, by contrast, confronts the child squarely with the basic human predicaments” (8). *PEMBROKE* plumbs similar depths, asking existential questions about autonomy, our relational nature, and spiritual inheritance. What Wilkins Freeman refers to as the Puritan will is represented in the plot of the novel as a radical (even perverse) subjectivity. The damage this subjectivity does to the self and to others is the momentum behind the characters’ conflicts with each other and themselves. The quest for fairy tale hero and Wilkins Freeman protagonist alike is moving through and beyond the limitations of self-absorption.

The fairy tale tradition of story and the Puritan worldview share a penchant for dichotomies and extremes. According to Tatar, “The folktale in general, as Max Luthi has observed, has ‘a liking for all extremes, extreme contrasts in particular’” (Grimm 100). In both

the tale tradition and Puritanism conflict arises from excess, enduring hardship and loneliness are transformative, the self is inscrutable and to a certain extent two-dimensional, and harmony and balance individually as well as socially is represented through marriage. Tales begins with a boy who leaves home, experiences loss and hardship, and then acquires, not treasure, but the princess. The boy must journey from adolescent self-absorptions to companionable manhood. *PEMBROKE* features two men on this quintessential journey. Demonstrating an adaption of tale motif, Barney Thayer and Richard Alger are immature though not adolescent and while each faces challenges these obstacles to happiness are of their own making. Further, while fairy tale heroes pass a character test early in their journey in order to complete their story, it takes Barney and Richard ten years (the timespan of the novel) to pass the “initial” character test and demonstrate a wholly compassionate nature. In fact, Wilkins Freeman adapts the character test so that it is not only the qualifying test but the finish line itself. All roads in Pembroke lead inexorably to Barney’s and Richard’s moment of clarity. They finally and clearly see the women they love, the sacrifices these women have made, and recognize their own power to take care of them. Compassion is epiphany.

The “Introductory Sketch,” for the 1899 edition of *PEMBROKE* identifies compassion as the prerequisite to the finish of the hero’s journey. Wilkins Freeman explains “*Pembroke* was originally intended to prove...the capacity of the individual for a love which could rise above all considerations of self, as Barnabas Thayer’s love for Charlotte Barnard finally did” (xli). The problem and possibility of overcoming self- involvement drives all the multiple narratives of the novel. Overtly, Wilkins Freeman describes the insular self – the destroyer self - as the “Puritan will” and this is the corrupting influence Barney Thayer, the novel’s central figure, must win out against. As brought to life through Wilkins Freeman’s particular imagination, this Puritan will is

aggressively present in many of the community members of Pembroke and had been forged by two centuries of New England Puritanism. A social, economic, political, religious as well as psychological framework, Puritanism remained in the nineteenth century as the last stone of a fortress that was crumbling but not disintegrated. By the third decade of the nineteenth century, the time frame of the novel, Puritanism's effect on the New England character is tangible yet corrupt. Wilkins Freeman's characters in this novel "suffer" from a flinty stubbornness that threatens to destroy themselves and those around them. Writing about the interwoven nature of Puritanism and American women's writing the editor of *American Women's Autobiography* Margo Culley explains that convinced of innate human depravity, predestination, selective election, and selective atonement for the elect only, Puritans were caught within a web of contradiction: "While professing explicit self-denial, the Puritans engaged in obsessive self-absorption" (10). The Puritan tradition created a paradoxical position for the self: acknowledge the innate sinfulness of human nature (selfish, willful, corrupt), respond to this nature through self-denial while all the time maintaining a vigilant monitoring of the self in the (hopeless) event one receives underserved grace (Culley 11). Ann Taves explicates Puritanism's complexity in her essay "Early Memoirs of New England Women" when she writes "This complex notion of the self, with its paradoxical relationship between explicit self-denial and implicit self-assertion or individualism, infused [the] Puritan" (59).

This dual presence of the self-in-the-world and the self-within-the-self is the prison Wilkins Freeman tries to capture in the following description of Barney Thayer: "it was as if he saw and heard everything from the inner most recesses of his own life, and everything seemed strange and far off" (6). This self-absorption explains how the man who believes after a simple quarrel with his future father-in-law over the election that his marriage is irrevocably doomed.

“The possibility that his misery might not be final never occurred to him. It never occurred to him that he could enter Cephas Barnard’s house again, ask his pardon, and marry Charlotte. It seemed to him settled and inevitable; he could not grasp any choice in the matter” (19). A legacy from the quicksand of New England’s Puritan soil, Barney’s trap is succinctly summed up by his betrothed Charlotte Barnard, “Barney Thayer has got a terrible will that won’t always let him do what he wants to himself” (68).

In *PEMBROKE* Wilkins Freeman clearly intuited the narrative parallels between her own family stories, her conception of Puritan psychology, and the tale motifs which feature stubborn youths and waiting women. As I will show in chapter eight, Wilkins Freeman’s own family lore featured stuck and lonely men. Her fictional New England villages were haunted by a self-defeating “Puritan Will” and the fairy tale hero is a character who starts self-centered and ends as relational. Wilkins Freeman clearly understood the natural affinities between her New England characters and the fairy tale archetypes. Over and over again, in tale after tale, the fairy tale plot enacts the evolution of the self-centered boy-man into the compassionate man-groom; the naïve, selfish peasant into the compassionate mature Prince. According to Tatar, “...the most lowly fairy-tale heroes - prove[s] his mettle by displaying compassion and humility” (93). The tale will unfold as the boy-man is challenged to become and awaken to the possibility of being a true Prince. Unlike the narrow and self-consumed world of the boy-hero, the Prince is compassionate and courageous while humble.

## Chapter Two: The Hero

Quite distinct from Wilkins Freeman's short fiction which features girls and women pushing against the constraints of a conventional New England community, *PEMBROKE*'s hero is male and the tide of the plot is quite conventional – marriage. *PEMBROKE*'s Barney Thayer is an atypical Wilkins Freeman protagonist and in many ways he strikes readers as decidedly unheroic; however, he demonstrates many typical fairy tale hero characteristics. Tatar in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* explains the interesting lack of heroism of the male fairy tale hero: “With the exception of Hansel, who shares top billing with his sister, male protagonists are exceptionally unmemorable in name, if not in deed” (85). Though counter-intuitive, popular thinking imagines the tale hero as handsome, brave, dragon-slaying, Aragorn-esque. But this misses the mark. According to Tatar, most wonder tale heroes are “...decidedly unworldly figures. ‘Innocent,’ ‘silly,’ ‘useless,’ ‘foolish,’ ‘simple,’ and ‘guileless’: [and] are the adjectives applied repeatedly to fairy-tale heroes...” (Tatar 86). So, Barney Thayer is in the company of dozens of fairy tale heroes who may be less famous than their storyland sisters and even perhaps less captivating, but whom none the less put their feet upon the road, journey into the forest, and ultimately win the girl.

This boy/hero's journey to manhood is the central tale of the novel (but it is not the only tale of the novel). Whether the journey is of an ancient Greek hero or near past folk hero their adventures fascinates us as it illuminates human transformation from the self-centered into the compassionate, “diseased will” into the loving heart, singularity into union. Tatar explains that “Although male fairy-tale figures have customarily been celebrated for their heroic feats, their greatest achievement actually rests on the passing of a character test” (89-90). The adventures

which lead to transformation in “A Fairy Tale About a Boy Who Left Home to Learn About Fear” begin after the boy demonstrates compassion. Characteristically, the boy’s foolishness is captured simultaneously with his sympathy. In the dark cold woods, camped beneath seven hanged men, the boy looks up at the men swinging from gallows and thinks “If I am freezing down here by the fire, the guys hanging up there must be really cold” (Grimm 20). Often the prerequisite for more experiences, compassion is a necessary attribute for the final maturity of the boy/hero. Likewise in “The Goose Girl at the Spring” when only after taking pity on an old woman thus displaying compassion does the young hero receive information and assistance in his adventure to gain the princess (Tatar 93). Formatted as the journey of the boy into Prince, Wilkins Freeman dramatized her hero’s successful growth from selfish desire into relational desire.

Overtly interested in capturing a particular perspective on the stagnant Puritan character and experimenting with the possibility of subduing its destructive tendencies, Wilkins Freeman expresses this struggle through an adaptation of a narrative model found in fairy tales. Despite the lack of complex narrative strategies we associate with “high literature,” fairy and traditional wonder tales do insist on certain moral absolutes when it comes to a hero’s character. Just as countless traditional tale heroes have done, Wilkins Freeman’s Barney Thayer must demonstrate his eligibility for final reward by exhibiting a nascent capacity for compassion. He does so in a riveting scene with Sylvia Crane. Sylvia Crane’s beau of twenty years, Richard Alger, stopped coming for Sunday evening visits six months ago, but Sylvia still waits for him every Sunday and on this particular Sunday evening she mistakes Barney Thayer for her Richard. Calling out beseechingly that Richard not just go past, Sylvia’s voice is variously “broken” and then “wailing.” She is “clinging” or “clutching” for support. Bewildered but sensing she is about to

collapse, Barney “stepped forward and caught hold of her elbow. ‘I guess you don’t feel well, do you, Miss Crane? I guess you had better go into the house, hadn’t you?’” (169). Initially baffled by Sylvia’s insistent mistake, Barney allows himself to be led into the parlor to the sofa bought ten years prior for Richard’s comfort.

Portrayed till now as handsome, passionate, quick-tempered, and introverted, Barney now reveals a patient compassion for Sylvia Crane’s broken heart. He complies when Sylvia asks that he put his arm around her; listens as she describes “all these months I’ve sat there at the window, strainin’ my eyes into the dark” looking for him; and nearly loses himself in her delusion when “he sat with a serious shamefacedness...[and] For a moment he could not stir; he had a feeling of horror, as if he saw his own double” (171). Compassion morphs into something closer to unification when Barney recognizes that “There was a subtle resemblance which lay deeper than the features between him and Richard Alger. Sylvia saw it, and he saw his own self reflected as Richard in that mental straining mental vision of hers...” (171). Wonder tale magic, which tells of frogs into princes, takes on an elegant depth as our boy/hero walks through a seemingly borderless boundary into someone else’s heartfelt reality. His shared experience with Sylvia is so convincing “He dashed his hand across his face with an impatient, bewildered motion...” (170). Salvaged from our condemnation as stubborn, self-involved, and undeserving of Charlotte Barnard, Barney’s gentle treatment of Sylvia Crane means he has passed the first test.



### Chapter Three: Patterns of Alienation

Significantly, the scene between Barney and Sylvia and which unfolds as Barney's prerequisite character test of compassion also weaves together another quintessential attribute of the wonder tale: the mundane and the magic. A moment of bittersweet mistaken identity becomes an eerie shared experience of doubling. For a moment not only does Sylvia see Richard in Barney but Barney considers the possibility that he really has morphed into the other man. Moments featuring Sylvia and Charlotte, Rebecca and Mrs. Sloane, Barney and his grandfather, as well as others connecting Barney and Richard use doubling, repetitions, and paralleling of character and situation to create patterns in *PEMBROKE*. These patterns, in turn, create density. The novel's superficiality is mitigated by the mirrored subplots and juxtaposed characters. Traditional narratives feature a similar mechanism. The substitute for complex characterization is emphatic repetition. For example, in the Grimms' "Cinderella," the stepmother's cruel nature is clear when she throws capfuls of lentils into the fire and demands their removal within two hours; but her irredeemably evil nature becomes clear when she reassigns the arbitrary task to Cinderella immediately upon completion of the first. Mystified at Hansel and Gretel's first abandonment in the forest, we are horrified when father and stepmother use new ruses to lure the children to their exile a second time. The fisherman's wife's initial wishes for comfort and ease are understandable, yet as she demands that her husband return over and over and over to the enchanted fish her sins of avarice and ambition stack up one upon another. Not only are there repetitions within the tales but repetitions between the tales. In fact, the centuries and geographies of all the tellings of "Cinderella" and "Little Red Riding Hood" attest to the real power of the formulaic fairy tale. Uncontestably ancient and enduring, two-dimensional stories

are quite capable of conveying our endless anxieties about desire and love, safety and danger, and nature and culture.

Like many contemporary novelists, Wilkins Freeman was concerned with exploring human social and psychological potential through characters wrestling with the conflict between private actualization and social needs and demands. Registered explicitly or not, traditional stories laid this ground work as they trace similar themes of a journey which necessitates being alone in order to gain union. Alone, vulnerable, and abandoned, the children of fairy tales, whether princesses or paupers, face a hostile world. The initiating conflict exiles the hero or heroine into the wild. Sometimes the wild is a tower, a cabin, a kitchen, or the true ever-lurking forest. Interpreted as echoes of the evolution of child/parent separation and the sometimes rocky process of the child's individuation, traditional stories creatively walk the listener through painful but necessary solitudes. The private experience in the tales is where the hard-work and/or danger lay. Cinderella is thrust down into servitude in her own home. Little Red Riding Hood meets the wolf, not once but twice, alone. Rapunzel is locked alone to create the gold to satisfy a materialistic monarch; yet, she welcomes marriage to this same greedy man as it means release from her private prison. The necessary conflict of the tales is the same necessary conflict of *PEMBROKE* - surviving the privations of loneliness and isolation. We know we must in order to find reunion and reconciliation. Wilkins Freeman spotlights that the terrors in the dark lonely woods are often self-made and psychological but no less dangerous and threatening than the predatory wolf.

One of the central horizontal patterns in *PEMBROKE* is the existential alienation of its characters. Inscrutable to themselves as well as to others, many Pembroke villagers live lonely and isolated lives for which they refuse to take responsibility or for that matter admit there was

ever any choice. This ambiguous notion of “will” occurs again and again in the text and in the author’s own commentary on the novel. The characters try to survive their self-made prisons all the while desiring love and companionship; however, narratively, the novel poses the problem of alienation by accumulating its victims rather than delving down into its complexity. Duplications in the narrative press the point. For example, doubled in Sylvia’s living room as each have abandoned the women they love, Barney and Richard double again when they claim powerlessness over their own actions. Mystified by his own self, Richard exclaims:

I’ve been meaner than sin, an’ I don’t know as it makes it any better, because I couldn’t seem to help it...there wasn’t a Sabbath night that I didn’t want to come more than I wanted to go to heaven! But I couldn’t, I couldn’t nohow. (280)

On more than one occasion Barney wails over his own lonely doom. Barney and Richard each claim helplessness over their private imprisonment. They claim their actions are beyond their own power or understanding. The possibility of an existential alienation so complete and private that it exiles a man from himself as well as all others is reminiscent of Hawthorne and Melville and presages naturalist concerns and many early twentieth century writers. The complicity of Charlotte Barnard and Sylvia Crane when they validate the nature of their men is another fortification. The village is written as a mimic of the theme. The overwhelming nature of an alienated, solitary existence plays out through the overwhelming accord of the Pembroke villagers that the universe is pre-determined and unchangeable as are their own natures. In this case, wishing it weren’t so won’t change it.

Private alienation is a solitary confinement of its own making. Wilkins Freeman tightens the vice of the alienation by expanding outward. Caleb Thayer, Barnabas’ father and in many ways a typical wonder tale “fool,” grapples with a variant of human loneliness: The loneliness between people; the “public” loneliness which results despite our best intentions and familiar

genes. In the tradition of countless “fools” of tales and literature alike, the simpleton Caleb Thayer is incongruously astute.

Caleb pushed his hat back and passed his hand across his forehead. It was hot, and his face was flushed. He watched his son following up his work with dogged energy as if it were an enemy, and his mind seemed to turn stupid in the face of speculation, like a boy’s over a problem in arithmetic.

There was no human being so strange and mysterious, such an unknown quantity, to Caleb Thayer as his own son. He had not one trait of character in common with him – at least, not one so translated into his own vernacular that he could comprehend it. It was to Caleb as if he looked in a glass expecting to see his own face, and saw therein the face of a stranger. (111-112)

As a trope, the mirror Caleb seeks recognition in can be found as far back as Narcissus’ river and certainly evokes the Queen’s magic mirror in “Snow White.” Gazing into the mirror is a powerful metaphor for the limits of our understanding. Condemned to be self-centered and indulgent, we nevertheless gaze into a mirror seeking comfort, inspiration, insight. Caleb believes if Barney were an accurate reflection of himself then father and son would connect. But the alienation Barney feels from himself suggests the irony in Caleb’s desire. There is no evidence that a person can know themselves, therefore, how could it be helpful if our offspring were a reflection of us. Commonsense would predict a natural closeness and sympathy between father and son; an understanding born of love and heredity. *PEMBROKE* consistently denies this as cliché. Caleb’s befuddlement at the strangeness between him and his son is a variation of Barney’s and Richard’s befuddlement at the strangeness of themselves to themselves. Puritanism’s dark psychology and pessimism is the cover story for the way the novel insists that our desperate attempts at communion are doomed. Likewise, ancient tales have shown us again and again that despite what we may wish (step)mothers will be envious and murderous – “Sleeping Beauty”; fathers will be arbitrary and cruel – “The Seven Ravens”; or lecherous – “Donkeyskin” and siblings will be antagonistic competitors – “The Three Feathers” (Grimm).

That things and people are not what they seem and do not do as we would expect is a succinct summary of traditional fairy tales. Amplifying this theme and making its case that humans are inscrutable to themselves as well to others, *PEMBROKE* magnifies an anxiety around the private/public as it transmutes it into a tension between solitude and communion.

## Chapter Four: Barney Thayer

In addition to the character test for compassion and building plot density and thematic intensity through pattern, Wilkins Freeman crafts Barney Thayer with further archetypes found in traditional wonder tales including the hero's break with home, unchecked sexual desire, egoism, and passivity. When *PEMBROKE* begins, Barney Thayer, Wilkins Freeman's boy-hero, is on the verge of marrying Charlotte Barnard. The archetypal tale hero, Barney is young, untested, and on the precipice of change. Just past adolescence, Barney demonstrates the easily recognizable traits of the boy-hero eager to leave home. He is vain about appearance and gruff and impatient with his family. On the Sunday evening of courting, Barney's younger sickly brother Ephraim eyes Barney's, "...scented hair, the black satin vest with a pattern of blue flowers on it, the blue coat with brass buttons, and the shining boots..." (2). Ignoring his family as they listen to their father Caleb Thayer read from the Bible, Barney takes particular care with primping his "fine bell hat" (2). Just before leaving for Charlotte Barnard's, Barney and his mother have an exchange universal in families throughout history: Deborah Thayer, Barney's mother, exerting what is her quickly evaporating parental authority, commands, "Don't you stay later than nine o'clock, Barnabas...I ain't going to have you out as long as you were last Sabbath night" (3). In response, Barney "...murmured something unintelligibly, but his tone was resentful...went out quickly, and shut the door with a thud" (3). In addition to dressing the part of young fiancé and demonstrating stereotypical resentment of parental interference, Barney as boy-hero has been practicing the financier role of husband as "He often sat down with a pencil and slate, and calculated, with intricate sums, the amounts of his income and their probable expenses" (4). Written to convey naiveté, Wilkins Freeman writes that Barney, defensive of

Charlotte's family's poor resources, "...felt sensitive on the subject of Charlotte's bonnet, and resolved that she should have a white one trimmed with gauze ribbons for summer, and one of drawn silk [like his sister's] for winter" (4).

Eager, impulsive, naïve, this boy/hero tingles with desire: desire for adult home-making and for Charlotte. This youthful sensual desire is expressed as it often is in traditional tales as a rich combination of the mundane and material and the melodramatic and emotional:

'Her rocking-chair can set there,' said Barnabas aloud. The tears came into his eyes; he stepped forward, laid his smooth boyish cheek against a partition wall of this new house and kissed it. It was a fervent demonstration, not toward Charlotte alone, nor to the joy to come to him within those walls, but to all life and love and nature, although he did not comprehend it. (7)

Modernist realism and wonder tale mode are nearly indistinguishable when Barney collapses all his hopes and dreams and life into one fantastical image, assuring himself: "I shall marry Charlotte, we shall live here together all our lives, and die here...I shall lie in my coffin in the north room, and it will all be over" (7). Traditional tales share this penchant for compression and constraint. Skipping all the details of a complex lived experience, Barney collapses his desire for Charlotte so thoroughly that marriage, life, and death are practically simultaneous and synonymous. Time disappears or at least has no relevance. The consummation of desire, represented by the marriage, leaves no call for other action. For the ego (the boy/hero's psycho/sexual yearnings), once the object of desire is obtained all other action is reducible to the first. All existential questions pale and melt away once the immediate object of desire has been won. Of course this propensity to equate/mediate/evaluate all events and all relationships and all significance through only one's own lens is the crux of the problem. Barney's suffering, emotional, spiritual, and physical, is necessary before he will arrive at a compassionate and humble perspective.

The traditional fairy tale's ending is a reconciliation of nature and culture; the wild and the domestic; the chaotic and the tame. Young girls and boys are expelled from home into the forest. Animals, ogres, and monsters assail them. Hunger and deprivation are endured. The object in even the simplest of tales is to find safety and happiness in home and family. Long part of the traditional tales' code, the exploration of these same tensions is clear in *PEMBROKE*. Barney's sexual yearning as well as his untamed temper not to mention the unfinished house all represent that he is unfinished. Passionate, eager, and romantic, he is still unforged. Young and mistaken, Barney believes marrying Charlotte is "winning" some sort of battle as "He [Barney] stepped out proudly like a soldier in a battalion, he threw back his shoulders in his Sunday coat" (7). Here is the overconfident Aladdin of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, who "from his earliest years... was a headstrong and incorrigible good-for-nothing" (Tatar 88). Aladdin and Barney share naiveté, overconfidence, and some would argue undeserved success. Tatar explains that "In an almost perverse fashion, fairy tales featuring male protagonists chart the success story of adolescents who lack even the good sense to heed the instructions of helpers [and] paradoxically becomes the one most likely to succeed" (87). Barnabas Thayer is frustratingly stubborn, self-pitying, and takes an agonizingly long time to get himself out of his unfinished house and down the road to the Charlotte Barnard. Following in the footsteps of innumerable frogs and peasants, Barney ultimately proves the moral attached to "The Poor Miller's Boy and the Cat": "So don't let people tell you a simpleton will never amount to anything in life" (Grimm 346).

Enacting a struggle found throughout wonder tale literature, Charlotte Barnard is the site of a male contest. Barney's desire for Charlotte is tangible, selfish, and proprietary. But Barney is not the only male who feels this proprietary interest in Charlotte. Father and lover jostle with



each other using Charlotte as the embodied site of their competition. Meeting at the Barnard door, the couple's mutual sexual desire is clear as they look, kiss, and only then speak: "It's pretty cold out, ain't it?" said Charlotte, in a chiding voice which she could scarcely control. 'I've been in to see our house. Give me one more kiss. Oh, Charlotte!'" Again we see the alignment of the house and Barney's sexual desire for Charlotte. However, for the time being at least, Charlotte is still within the walls of her father's home. That the contest between Barney Thayer and Cephas Barnard will be represented in the language of house and home and clothing is introduced early in the narrative when Barney transgresses decorum and social codes during their courtship by giving Charlotte a blue shawl. Responding to Barney's impropriety and insult, Charlotte's father tells her, "I ain't goin' to have any young sparks buyin' your clothes while you are under my roof" (5). Attempting to clothe Charlotte before marriage, before Charlotte has left her father's home for her husband's, breaks social taboos which are really sublimated sexual taboos. Only the marriage rite will give Barney Thayer legitimate possession of Charlotte and thus the right to bring Charlotte under his roof, provide her clothing, and ultimately consummate their relationship.

The transference of the young woman from the father to the groom is contentious. Previously characterized as a soldier in battle, and subtly aligning him with his mother Deborah Thayer's sins of aggression, Barney's confrontational nature is clear when he greets the Barnard family "...in a brave tone which was slightly aggressive" (9). Emphasizing the tension created by male assertion and prerogative, Cephas Barnard, Charlotte's father, "orders" Charlotte to light a candle and she "obeyed." Further, we read that as a daughter "Charlotte had acquiesced forlornly; there was nothing else for her to do. Early in her childhood she had learned along with her primer her father's character, and the obligations it imposed upon her." (10). Sarah Barnard,

Charlotte's mother, likewise, "...had spelt out her husband like a hard and seemingly cruel text in the Bible. She marveled at its darkness in her light, but she believed in it reverently, and even pugnaciously" (11). The staging and language of the text plays out a very ancient and traditional representation of the transfer of the daughter from father to groom. Cloaked in the social and economic medium of the early nineteenth century New England village, the characters in this Thayer/Barnard family drama have little leeway. Wilkins Freeman's villagers mimic their antecedents in motive and response. The young gallant is impetuous and proud, the elder father is crotchety, and the women are intuitive and acquiescent. Nevertheless, the inevitability of plot and bluntness of character does not dampen the thrill in the tension as Cephas Barnard and Barnabas Thayer square off on a Sunday evening in the Barnard kitchen.

Cephas and Barnabas were grimly silent. The young man suspected that Cephas has prohibited the front room; he was indignant about that, and the way in which Charlotte had been summoned in from the entry, and he had no diplomacy. Charlotte, under her calm exterior, grew uneasy; she glanced at her mother, who glanced back. It was to both women as if they felt by some subtle sense the brewing of a tempest. Charlotte unobtrusively moved her chair a little nearer her lover's; her purple delaine skirt swept his knee; both of them blushed and trembled with Cephas's black eyes upon them. (12)

Male prerogative and barely checked sexual desire lead inevitably to the ultimate throw-down. Bringing to its conclusion a deliberately "dangerous topic" about the election, Cephas Barnard screams "Get out of this house, an' don't you ever dares darken these doors again while the Lord Almighty reigns!" (13). Taking equal offense, Barney promises "I never will, by the Lord Almighty" (13).

Thoroughly believable as the spark which becomes the conflagration of Barney and Charlotte's estrangement, Wilkins Freeman in a personal letter from 1912 reveals how mystifying and inexpert men's politics seem to her:

Also women have not as a majority enough time to waste on such disgraceful affairs as that Chicago Convention[of the Democratic Party], where all the little boys without their

mas[sic] handy to spank'em, fought and rolled in the dust of politics for office. Why instead of so much fussing over the presidential Election, did not some of the mighty men keep the Japanese from the coast of Mexico, and get first option on the Jap. Russo. Alliance? (Kendrick 340)

Impulsive and defensive, Barnabas leaves the Thayer home and ignores Charlotte as she stands in the village road calling after him. Sheldon Cashden writes, “The events that makeup a fairy tale typically play out...on the road to self-discovery” (31). Ironically, Barney Thayer’s “self-discovery” will be the discovery that wounds to his ego are superficial and hardly worth defending in sacrifice of love. This initiating conflict between the father-of-the-bride and the groom delineates the problem of interiority. Barnabas Thayer is consumed with his own urges – the urge to leave the parental home, the urge to marry Charlotte, and the urge to face-down real or perceived challenges. The priority is satisfaction of the self/ego. Just as in the scene in which Barney summarizes his entire life with Charlotte with a finality that demonstrates no understanding of life’s nuances, Barney reacts to an argument over political differences with brutish self-defense. In the context of early nineteenth century New England village social mores, when Charlotte Barnard ignores her mother and father’s directions and follows Barney Thayer out of the house actually calling from the center of the public road for him to return to her she models a courageous defense of love over reputation or social sanction. Callously, “Barney never turned his head; the distance between them widened as Charlotte followed, calling” (14). Because he is the youthful and immature boy/hero, Barnabas Thayer’s failure is one of compassion and humility. He is consumed by his own wounded ego: “A great grief and resentment against the whole world and life itself swelled high within him” (18). Modern literature gives many examples of this all too human reaction to our own tragedies and sufferings. The circumstances which prompt such existential writhing may sometimes justify such crises. In fairy tales and *PEMBROKE* we have a boy/hero whose error is to indulge in such

existential drama, without a justified crises. Further, in the Puritan psychology we have a young man who conflates his hurt feelings with divine rebuff: “Have I not kept all thy commandments from childhood? Have I ever failed to praise thee as the giver of my happiness, and ask thy blessing upon it? What have I done that it should be taken away?” (19). Both traditions combine in Barney Thayer. When he sees Charlotte walking to her Aunt Sylvia’s after she has been bared from her home “-he did not dream why” (18). The boy/hero is still entombed inside himself. He does not yet possess the ability to see from Charlotte’s perspective or deduce his actions’ ramifications for her.

Developing a complexity beyond most wonder tales where a plot of entirely external experiences leads to the boy/hero’s transformation, the experiences which culminate in Barney Thayer’s transformation will be internal, psychological, imaginative, and emotional. While harnessing character and motif of traditional tales, Wilkins Freeman emboldens her novel beyond the tales with her insistence on the interiority of human experience. When Barney Thayer turns his back on Charlotte he is turning his back on a perfectly *imagined* future. In many ways a character of inaction, Barney Thayer lives very actively in his imagination. Not coincidentally a common characteristic of young children and adolescents. We are introduced to Barney’s imagination during an early scene in which he projects himself through his married life and onto his death bed in a matter of quick flourishes. Next, upon learning of the eminently eligible Thomas Payne’s courtship of Charlotte, Barney’s response is to fantasize his actions:

He flung himself down on his face... ‘Oh, Charlotte!’ he groaned out...sobbing and crying like a child as he lay there; he moved his arms convulsively, and tore up handfuls of young grass and leaves, and flung them away in the unconscious gesturing of grief. ‘Oh, I can’t, I can’t!’ he groaned. ‘I – can’t – Charlotte! I can’t – let any other man have you! No other man shall have you!’ he cried out fiercely, and flung up his head; ‘you are mine, mine! I’ll kill any other man that touches you. (108)

Adept at capturing the quick volatile passions of jealousy, Wilkins Freeman also captures how fleeting these fantasies of action are for our boy/hero. Still imprisoned by his own juvenile pride, Barney's imagined response to a competitor is illusionary. As quickly as his passions flare they "...were drowned out by the manifold rustling of the young birch leaves, as a human grief is overborne and carried out of sight by the soft, resistless progress of nature" (109). The impulsive and aggressive fantasies soon yield to torturous imaginings of Charlotte and Thomas Payne's married life. Emphasizing the boy/heroes' inexpert understanding of women as well as a subtle indictment of the early nineteenth century materialism and sexual politics, Wilkins Freeman describes Barnabas Thayer's internal monologue full of false assumptions and sublimated desire:

Of course Charlotte wanted to be married, like other women. This probable desire of Charlotte's for love and marriage itself, apart from him, thrilled his male fancy with a certain holy awe and respect, from his love for her and utter ignorance of the attitude of womankind. Then, too, he reflected that Thomas Payne would probably make her a good husband. 'He can buy her everything she wants,' he thought, with a curious mixture of gratulation for her and agony on his own account. He thought of the little bonnets he had meant to buy for her himself, and these details pierced his heart like needles. He sobbed, and the birch-trees quivered in a wind of human grief. He saw Charlotte going to church in her bridal bonnet with Thomas Payne more plainly than he could ever see her in life, for a torturing imagination reflects life like a magnifying-glass, and makes clearer and larger reality. (110)

While certainly in emotional pain, the boy/hero is as yet unready and undeserving of his princess. He naively assumes Charlotte's chief objective is be married, possess material security, and be flaunted as a properly bonneted object. The problem, of course, is that Barney's "torturing imagination" still does not understand Charlotte or real love. The fact that Wilkins Freeman is primarily concerned with the possibility of surviving our own self-destructive musings and preconceptions is nowhere clearer than in Barnabas Thayer's long-awaited "aha" moment: "Without overhearing a word, suddenly a knowledge quite foreign to his imagination seemed to

come to him” (327). Insight is delivered through the imagination. Interior reality outweighs externals.

Passivity is an intriguing “heroic” tale trait. Classic tales derive their nature (their two-dimensionality) partly from this propensity to feature characters that have little dynamism. Especially in tales spotlighting male protagonist, the narrative tends to provide events that happen *to* the boy/hero. The boy/hero in turn receives the event and responds (Tatar 86-87). This is the template for *PEMBROKE*’s Barney Thayer. Breaking his engagement to Charlotte is not an action initiated by our boy/hero. Jilting Charlotte is a secondary effect of Barnabas’ and Cephas Barnard’s spat. Not marrying Charlotte is a consequence of not being able to reconcile with Charlotte’s father. Clearly in love with Charlotte and desirous of married life, Barney nevertheless conceptualizes his position as immutable. Wilkins Freeman adjusts the perspective. While other New England writers had explored the human toll and consequence of Puritan social organization, this novel features a man petrified/stultified by his Puritan genes. Without the rewards of faith and yet left with the provisions of the faith, *PEMBROKE*’s boy/hero is frozen/locked/impassive. When a faith places the sinful self at the center of its theology, it follows that the psychological consequence is to overindulge the importance of the ego. Barney Thayer receives a wound to the ego and all his forward motion ceases. Over the course of the novel’s ten-year span Barney Thayer initiates nothing until the very final denouncement, when he rises from his sick bed only after his imaginations hits upon the actual reality; “Without overhearing a word, suddenly a knowledge quite foreign to his imagination seemed to come to him” (327). Charlotte’s constancy to him brings with it dire consequences. The fourteen chapters preceding this positive action, meanwhile, illustrate time and time again Barney Thayer’s trapped, intransigent nature.

Puritan stoicism and a penchant for substituting imagined fantasies for real actualities highlight the passivity of Barney's nature; but, there are also appeals from others for action that are met with refutations. Classic myths of the heroes' journey often feature helpers and advice-givers as do traditional stories; however, as Tatar points out:

In an almost perverse fashion, fairy tales featuring male protagonists chart the success story of adolescents who lack even the good sense to heed the instructions of the many helpers and donors who rush to their aid in an attempt to avert catastrophes and to ensure a happy ending." (87)

Concentrating both the rigidity and the passivity of her main character, Wilkins Freeman extends appeal after appeal to Barnabas Thayer to take action and fulfill his betrothal to Charlotte Barnard. Charlotte herself is the first to ask Barney to see the distinction between his argument with her father and their relationship. She will also return weeks later to reiterate her appeal. Rose Berry, Charlotte's cousin, confronts Barnabas in the fields and offers to be a covert liaison reuniting the couple. Deborah Thayer, as intimidating as any Old Testament ancient, is refused when she orders her son to reconcile the situation. Even Cephas Barnard, under cloak of dusk, knocks on Barney's door to apologize and request his daughter's future no longer be jeopardized by their tempers. Barnabas Thayer's father Caleb Thayer finds his son working in the fields and desperately insists that there is time and opportunity for Barney to regain Charlotte's hand. Barney responds as he has responded to all the appeals by refusing to listen or speak. An astute representation of aggressive passivity and interiority, silence or verbally refusing to speak is a suspended narrative moment. Confronted with numerous appeals to make the gentlest of swerves and reinstate his marriage plans, we hear Barney say, "There's no use talking, Charlotte" (117), or we are told, "Barney was silent" (117), or "Barney worked on silently" (112), or in a slight variation Barney demands silence from another, "I don't want another word out of your mouth about it, father" (113). In one extended scene the theme of Barney Thayer's silence reaches

almost comic proportions when Sarah Barnard questions Charlotte Barnard about a conversation her daughter had with Barnabas:

‘What did he say to you? I want to know.’  
‘He didn’t say much of anything. He thanked me for what I did about his mother.’  
‘Didn’t he say anything about anything else?’  
‘No, he didn’t.’  
‘You don’t mean that he didn’t say anything, after the way he acted that day his mother died.’  
‘I didn’t expect him to say anything.’ (254)

Refusing to speak is the refusal to engage. It is a wall which frustrates the interlocutor and imprisons the self. Interestingly, it is Charlotte Barnard, the object of desire for our boy/hero, who at one point forces words from our boy/hero and then challenges the hypocrisy and self-deception of those words. Barney attempts to persuade Charlotte that having heard of Thomas Payne’s courtship of her “I felt as if – if it would make you happy. I –“ (118). Charlotte will not cooperate with Barney’s self-serving congeniality. She demands that Barney confront the implications of his words:

“Do you mean that you want me to marry Thomas Payne, Barney Thayer?”  
“I want you to be happy, Charlotte.”  
“Do you want me to marry Thomas Payne?”  
Barney was silent.  
“Answer me,” cried Charlotte.  
“Yes, I do,” replied Barney, firmly, “if it would make you happy.”  
“You want me to marry Thomas Payne?” repeated Charlotte. “You want me to be his wife instead of yours, and go to live with him instead of you? You want me to live with another man?”  
“It ain’t right for you not to get married,” Barney said, and his voice was hoarse and strange.  
“You want me to get married to another man? Do you know what it means?”  
Barney gave a groan that was half a cry.  
“Do You?”  
“Oh, Charlotte!” Barney groaned, as if imploring her for pity.  
“You want me to marry Thomas Payne, and live with him – “  
“He’d- make you a good husband. He’s – Charlotte – I can’t. You’ve got to be happy. It isn’t right – I can’t –.” (119)



Charlotte confronts Barney with her question six times. The drilling of this question to her beloved over and over again emphasizes that neither Charlotte nor the reader should believe Barney's words. These words are in fact trite and empty. It is false for Barney to claim he desires Charlotte's happiness. We all know at this point he has the power to make Charlotte truly happy. It is naïve for Barney to assume Charlotte's principle goal is marriage – marriage to just anyone. It is hypocrisy for Barney to have just passionately swept Charlotte into his arms and kissed her and then claim he is reconciled to her in another man's arms. His naiveté, immaturity, and selfish egoism is another version of the wall of silence. This exchange between the central couple of the novel highlights the re-measured and intensified ingredients of our wonder tale hero. Barnabas Thayer's egoism, passivity, and imagination are all challenged by Charlotte's insistent repetition of her question. She wants to force him to confront himself and his "fantasy" wishes for her happiness. He may be uttering sound into the air between them but he is still hiding behind silence.

## Chapter Five: Silent, Sewing, and Humble

Silence and gender intertwine often in the oldest traditional tales. In fact, contrary to modern notions of inscribed powerlessness, silent fairy tale girls and women often do the work of disenchantment. In “The Twelve Brothers” a father pledges to kill his twelve sons when his wife bears him a daughter to insure the daughter’s inheritance. The girl eventually discovers the secret existence of the brothers and seeks them out. Their reunion is followed by the boys’ transformation into ravens. Ready, willing, and able, the boys’ sister willingly takes on a vow of silence in order to return them to themselves.

The girl wept and said, ‘Isn’t there any way to disenchant them?’  
‘Yes,’ the old woman said. ‘There is one way to save them, but it is so hard that you can’t possibly hope to free them that way. You would not be able to say a word for seven years, and you wouldn’t be able to smile at all. If you speak just one word, or if only a single hour is missing in the seven years, then everything will be in vain – in fact one word would kill your brothers.’  
The girl vowed to herself: ‘I know that I will be able to free my brothers,’ and she went and found a hollow tree, seated herself in it, and began spinning. She neither spoke nor smiled. (Grimm 41)

In the “Six Swains” as in “The Twelve Brothers”, the youngest sister asks if there is a way to break the spell that has transformed her six brothers into six swains:

“Oh, yes...there’s a way to do it, but it’s just too hard. For six years you would have to go without speaking or laughing. You would have to spend all that time sewing six shirts for us from star flowers. If a single word came out of your mouth, all your work would be for nothing.” (Grimm 235)

Eliza, a sister with eleven enchanted brothers, in Hans Christian Andersen’s “Wild Swans” is “enjoined to remain silent; otherwise the first word she utters will pierce the hearts of her brothers ‘like a deadly dagger” (Grimm 230). Scholar Ruth Bottigheimer refers to this process whereby a girl voluntarily remains silent to save her siblings “redemptive silence” (110). Tatar explains that “The story of a girl who disenchants her brothers through silence and sewing is

among the most powerful in the collection [of tales]...” (Grimm 230). Narratively, in the traditional tales, silence conjoined with hand work becomes not an absence but a presence; not an erasure but a sign of endurance, loyalty, and enduring love.

*PEMBROKE*'s Charlotte Barnard is clearly the elder sister of silent, sewing wonder tale girls. So sharply different than her Wilkins Freeman predecessors, Charlotte Barnard is a near-perfect fit for the heroines of the fairy tale as Tatar so eloquently summarizes: “Through her beauty, silence, and sewing she succeeds in attracting a king and breaking the spell cast on her brothers” (Grimm 230). In this case, our heroine’s patient endurance, skillful work, and fidelity will win her a husband. While Charlotte initially breaks village code and propriety by publically calling after Barnabas and later directly appealing to him to reinstate their engagement, finally, after he refuses, she vows, “I shall never speak to you about this again” (118). For much of the central portion of *PEMBROKE*, Charlotte Barnard is a presence but not a participant. Narratively silent, she nevertheless is woven into the pages devoted to the unfolding of the Thayer family and the Sylvia and Richard dramas. In an extended passage, Wilkins Freeman returns to Charlotte:

Charlotte had never learned any trade, but she had a reputation for great natural skill with her needle. Gradually, as she grew older, she settled into the patient single-woman position as assister at feasts, instead of participator. When a village girl of a younger generation than herself was to be married, she was in great demand for the preparation of the bridal outfit and the finest needlework. (310)

Wilkins Freeman emphasizes Charlotte’s silent suffering when she juxtaposes Charlotte’s public face of “cheerfulness” with the private silent fact that “...every stitch which she set in wedding-garments took painfully in a piece of her own heart” and “her faithful needle, as she sewed, seemed to keep her old wounds open like a harrow, but she never shrank” (310). Crystallizing

Charlotte's fairy tale features, Wilkins Freeman writes that despite hard work and heart ache, her beauty never fades:

Except for an increase in staidness and dignity, and a certain decorous change in her garments, Charlotte Barnard did not seem to grow old at all. Her girlish bloom never faded under her sober bonnet, although ten years had gone by since her own marriage had been broken off." (311)

In narratives featuring perfectly opposed dualities, such as fairy tales, beauty is shorthand for virtue. The village of Pembroke's Charlotte is the beautiful yet modest and virtuous heroine who works steadily and surely.

In addition to Charlotte's virtuous beauty and her reparative work in the community (her care of both the bride and the dead), she understands the inefficacy of speech. Challenging our notions of the power of words or for that matter attaining power through words, Charlotte learned early on that neither her beseeching words nor her threatening words carried any magic when it came to Barney Thayer. Work matters. Doing what needs doing matters. Hearing that Barney lay deathly ill with no caregiver, Charlotte rises to go to him and "... crossed the floor with a resolute air" (318). The succeeding scene between Charlotte Barnard and her parents frames *PEMBROKE*'s heroine as a poised embodiment of the inadequacy and insufficiency of speech against the beseeching wails of her mother Sarah and the impotent threats of her father Cephas. When challenged as to her actions, Charlotte replies "I shouldn't think you'd ask me" (318) and proceeds to reply *quietly* to every entreaty by her parents "Of course I'm going over there", "I've got to go, mother", "I am going, father". Acceding only once to explain herself, Charlotte argues that nursing Barney is mandatory. For Charlotte, the marriage contract is life-long and she considers her contract still active though vows were never said. "I was willing to marry him, and that amounts to the same thing...I am going. There's no use talking, I am going" (320). Intention translates into duty and integrity supersedes convention. When it comes to

presence and power Wilkins Freeman creates a character who puts her faith in action and is suspicious of talk. Responding to William Berry's hints that town gossip is amassing against her, Charlotte responds, "I am not afraid, if I know I am doing what is right" (325). In the context of the early nineteenth century New England village, Charlotte's unconventional behavior brought huge risk. Wilkins Freeman enacts the full measure of this risk when she writes that "At last there came a day when the minister and one of the deacons of the church called and asked to see Charlotte privately" (326). Charlotte does not dispute, discuss, explain, or excuse herself. There is no dialog presented between the churchmen and the wayward woman. Instead, Charlotte, after the interview, is described as "very pale, but she had a sweet, exalted look as her eyes met Barney's" (327). Charlotte is wordless – silent, but hardly subdued. Wilkins Freeman's "exalted" transforms Charlotte's perceived impropriety into a virtuous act; exposing the hypocrisy of the village code in contrast to Charlotte's truly lived goodness. Ultimately, Barnabas Thayer breaks out of his "confinement" and rises (literally from his sick bed) to reunite with Charlotte. Ten years of quiet diligence is rewarded when Charlotte Barnard's lover returns to her.

If Charlotte Barnard is one adaptation of the common motif of the silent and sewing girls of the tales, then Sylvia Crane is an example of another common and gendered fairy tale motif - the humbled heroine. Easily the most recognizable situation from fairy tales, the storyline featuring a young woman who loses her social status and economic security and is plunged into dire straits only to be re-elevated/rescued by a prince is the generic template of innumerable traditional tales. Tatar explains that a heroine often

...suffers a humiliating fall that reduces her from a princess to a peasant, from a privileged daughter to an impoverished menial...heroines become the beneficiaries of helpers and rescuers only after they have been abased and forced to learn humility." (94)

The heroines are not simply humbled in a material sense. They represent an internalization of their humbled state. Tatar goes on to describe examples of this motif:

The princess in the tale known as “The Mongoose” also finds herself humbled by her prospective husband. Nonetheless, she takes the defeat in stride and observes to herself with more than a touch of satisfaction: “He is cleverer than you!” The princess-heroine of “The Six Servants” is also cheerfully repentant and resigned to her fate by the end of the story [saying] “I’ve only got what I deserved...” (94)

The tales present these heroines as completely devoted to their redeemer without a trace of resentment for their own wretched experiences. Sylvia Crane’s plummet into emotional despondency, physical frailty, and economic catastrophe after Richard Alger fails to propose represents Wilkins Freeman’s reproduction of the “humbled heroine” in a thoroughly recognizable nineteenth century New England village. In Sylvia Crane wonder tale and realism conjoin to create the story of a woman humbled in economic, social, and physical circumstance before being rescued at the last moment by her prince. During the years following Richard Alger’s last visit, Sylvia Crane loses everything – home, health, and independence. It is the beginning of the end as Sylvia had “come to the end of her small resources, and nobody, except the selectmen of Pembroke, knew it...and they kept her secret well...she conducted herself as if it were a guilty intrigue, and all to keep her poverty hid as long as may be” (257). The extent of Sylvia’s humiliation at borrowing against her unproductive land magnifies as we read that while in Squire Payne’s study what she most fears is being seen by his servant Margaret. Sylvia is ashamed that a woman with the lowest possible socioeconomic status will learn of her situation. Then, as Sylvia desperately plots how to host tea for her sisters and nieces with her last pennies, a spoonful of damson, and a few scant logs for the stove her vulnerability takes on physical form: her hands are “thin” and “red”; she moves through the cold dark house on “bare feet” and “her thin body...[is]cramped with long rigors of cold” (263-264). Intensifying the depth and

loneliness of her isolation, Sylvia Crane's desperate state remains elusive to those closest to her even her sister and niece: "... neither of them dreamed of the true state of affairs: how poor Sylvia Crane, half-starved and half-frozen in heart and stomach, was on the verge of bankruptcy of all her little worldly possessions" (265). Finally, when there is literally no place lower to sink and Sylvia rides in the back of the wood-sled on her way to the poor house, she imagines she is "... a dead woman and riding to her grave... with a pang of parting forever" (276). Sylvia Crane has been humbled by circumstance to the brink of despair.

Straight from oral tradition is the sudden, startling, irresistible and *deus ex machina* "prince" Richard Alger who stops the wagon, orders the driver to turn around, stands protectively next to Sylvia, promising to pay the back taxes and marry her. True to her fairy tale foremothers, Sylvia, thoroughly humbled through Richard's benign neglect, nevertheless remains completely loyal and wholly selfless. Despite her own frail condition Sylvia's concern is only for Richard's health and comfort: "You'll catch cold without your coat"; and when Richard tries to take responsibility for his passivity, Sylvia stops him again and again with "Don't, Richard"; "Don't feel so bad, Richard"; and, as the ultimate demonstration of the heroine's compassionate fidelity, she observes un-ironically "I'm afraid you've had a dreadful hard time, livin' alone so long, an' tryin' to do for yourself" (280). As the novel continues, Wilkins Freeman tells us of Sylvia and Richard marrying quietly and attending meeting together; however, the lover's penultimate moment occurs in the final lines of chapter twelve when the author writes "And Sylvia laid her head on Richard's shoulder. She felt as if she were dreaming of a dream" (281).

## Chapter Six: Wholly Compassionate

Sewing, silent, and humbled, the Pembroke village women share further features with their wonder tale foremothers. Echoing female characterization in traditional fairy tales, the women of *PEMBROKE* are wholly compassionate beings who will defend their men even as their social, economic, and for some psychological status suffers. Tater explains:

Women [in tales] suffer by being forced into a lowly social position. In short, male heroes demonstrate from the start a meekness and humility that qualify them for an ascent to wealth, the exercise of power, and happiness crowned by wedded bliss; their female counterparts undergo a process of humiliation and defeat that ends with a rapid rise in social status through marriage but that also signals a loss of pride and the abdication of power. (94-95)

Snow White, a princess, becomes a housekeeper; Cinderella, an aristocrat's daughter, becomes a maid; Thousandfirs, of noble birth, becomes a kitchen drudge. Fairy tale heroines are rewarded when they are uncritical, quiet, patient, and hard-working. Charlotte Barnard and Sylvia Crane, atypical of the classic Wilkins Freeman female character, represent traditional fairy tale patterns of female loss, humiliation, work, and restoration and the nearly universal pattern of uncritical compassion. For the male hero of the tales compassion is a character test which leads to further trials and ultimate success. For girls and women in the tales compassion is an elemental prerequisite. Wilkins Freeman takes this trait of the tale's girls and women and extends and intensifies it in her Pembroke village women. Richard Alger like Barney Thayer represents male fragility and passivity. Each man allows himself to be turned back from his desires by the simplest of oppositions – one a cranky old man and the other a stone in a doorway. Yet the women who love these flawed men will let nothing interfere with their commitment, even the men's own foolishness. But if the men are foolish, the women's self-abnegating compassion makes them objects of consternation to some readers. The women of *PEMBROKE*, unlike many



of Wilkins Freeman's best known women characters, do not live lives of independence or protect younger vulnerable girls or speak their minds and claim their power. Interestingly, they actually doubt their loved ones have deterministic power. Sylvia Crane, Charlotte Barnard's maiden aunt, frustrated after years of patiently waiting for her beau Richard Alger to propose sums up the problem, "I don't think much of free-will, an' I ain't goin' to say I do when I don't" (41). The women characters of the novel protest repeatedly that their sons', husbands', and fiancés' "set ways" while mysterious are immutable. In a skillful comic vignette four women gathered in a kitchen take turns criticizing and defending their men's overly determined behavior: "'Oh, I was jest sayin' that I thought Barney was kinder set,' said her sister, mildly. 'He ain't no more set than Cephas,' returned Sylvia. 'Cephas ain't set. It's jest his way.'" An extension of the static/stock characters of fairy tales, the village men of Pembroke are narrowly drawn – they are stubborn, odd, foolhardy, greedy or naïve. Whether it is Cephas Barnard's eccentric nutritional theories or Barney Thayer's self-aggrandizing pride or Silas Berry's miserly machinations these men of *PEMBROKE* lack psychological depth but they do not lack champions. The village women of Pembroke walk heel to toe across a narrow bridge as they continually come to the defense of their husbands', fathers' and fiancés' behavior despite its thoughtlessness and cruelty.

Unlike the men of the village who lack intuition and compassion, the women villagers of Pembroke possess what seems to us as an overabundance of defensive loyalty. In fact, Charlotte, Sylvia, and Sarah Barnard display compassion to the point that it borders on martyrdom. Wives, daughters, and betrothed stand in defense of "his ways" with nary a critical eye. The scene in which Sylvia Crane and her niece Charlotte Barnard retire for the night in Sylvia Crane's little cottage and then lie in bed agonizing over their lover's hurt pride begins by emphasizing the women's identical exterior: "Both of their faces were sober, but perfectly staid" (24). We then

see the identical internal commiseration as first Charlotte is described as she, “shook with great sobs. ‘Poor Barney! Poor Barney!’” (24), and then Sylvia’s heartache, “lamenting as sorely as the younger maiden up-stairs. ‘Poor Richard!’ she repeated, piteously. ‘Poor Richard!’” (24-25). Thrown off the course of an eighteen-year courtship by a single stone rolled in front of a doorway, Richard is seen by Sylvia as the victim. She mourns and regrets only his pain:

Sylvia, with the roof settling over her head, with not so much upon her few sterile acres to feed her as to feed the honey-bees and birds, with her heart in greater agony because its string of joy had been strained so high and sweetly before it snapped, did not lament over herself at all; neither did she over the other women who lay up stairs suffering in a similar case. She lamented only over Richard living alone and unministered to until he died. (36)

With intuitive surety, Sylvia reflects that there was “no doubt that this was the end of everything...‘He’d got ‘most out of his track for once,’ she groaned out softly, ‘but now he’s pushed back so hard he can’t get out again if he wants to. I dunno how he’s going to get along’” (35-36). Later, Sylvia worries that Richard must be suffering without a woman to maintain his home and prepare his meals. Despite her broken heart, she fantasizes to herself that Richard should marry one of the young village women for his own good.

Sylvia’s compassionate disposition is mirrored by numerous other village women. Cephas Barnard’s bizarre nutritional schemes are defended by his wife Sarah. She also interprets her husband’s reversal on the “strengthening” importance of animal food and his new dictate that “we’d better eat green things an’ garden sass” as an apology for his part in Charlotte’s broken engagement. When her husband is mocked by her sister Hannah Berry, Sarah Barnard loyally replies, “I dunno but he’s right...Cephas thinks a good deal an’ looks into things” (45). Charlotte Barnard though presented with more dignity than her mother is nevertheless molded in a way similar to her aunt and mother. A witness to the exaggerated importance apportioned by her father and her fiancé to their argument over the ‘lection, Charlotte nevertheless defends Barnabas

to his own mother, “‘He hasn’t been doing anything wrong!’ Charlotte cried out again; ‘you ought to be ashamed of yourself talking so about him when you’re his mother!’” (58). While on one hand we may argue that the women’s Puritanism has prepared them to accept male authority as well as male mystery, the blind allegiance and passionate defense by a wife for a husband, daughter for father, and bride-to-be for groom systematically appears as a prerequisite for innumerable traditional tale heroines.

## Chapter Seven: Deborah

Charlotte Barnard and Sylvia Crane are female characters adapted from heroine types invested with admirable traits and thus reap their just rewards, but Deborah Thayer finds her genesis in the fearful wicked witch lurking in our nightmares. While Wilkins Freeman took up the single, widowed, outcast woman in much of her short fiction and challenged the society which cast these outsiders as witch, the template for Deborah Thayer is literary not historical. Glasser observes “In Deborah, Freeman presents a single alternative to female passivity within marriage, feminine power in destructive form...Freeman grants Deborah power over others, has her abuse that power, and then punishes her for the abuse” (107). Various thinking herself a “warrior,” “soldier,” “triumphant,” and gleaming with “warlike energy as she...confused King David’s enemies with those people who crossed her own will” (8), Deborah Thayer is recognizably the dark side of maternal love. Responsible for the alienation of her eldest son, the ostracizing of her daughter, and the death of her youngest, Deborah is a fierce and mesmerizing character. Created by combining the most destructive elements of Puritan zeal with ancient elements of the fairy tale witch, Deborah sacrifices all three of her children, Barney, Rebecca, and Ephraim, to her religious vanity. Deborah is the epicenter of Wilkins Freeman’s delve into the dark underside of Puritan New England’s conventional morality just as the fairy tale witch is the threat waiting within the candy cottage.

The many faces of maternal evil in fairy tales represent the obverse of all the positive qualities associated with mothers. Instead of functioning as nurturers and providers, cannibalistic female villains withhold food and threaten to turn children into their own source of nourishment, reincorporating them into the bodies that gave birth to them. Like the Jungian *magna mater*, they take ferocious possessiveness to an extreme... (Tatar140)

Harnessing the powerful imaginative pull of the dark witch of ancient stories, Wilkins Freeman explores the destructive force of religious rigidity. Following in the ancient story-telling tradition in which three is a magical number, Deborah Thayer is given three trials. Each offers her the opportunity to demonstrate compassion. Ironically, compassionate selflessness is the generic characteristic of most girls and women in the tales and is characteristic of *PEMBROKE*'s other two central women – Charlotte Barnard and Sylvia Crane. But Deborah Thayer diverges from the archetypal feminized model of old tales and represents Wilkins Freeman's unique creation of a female character who lacks compassion and empathy but possesses plenty of righteous conviction. This imbalance produces a destructive mother, that is, the witch.

Deborah's first trial is her eldest son's renegeing on his marriage to Charlotte Barnard. That this event of the broken engagement is not only Barney's trial but is simultaneously one of Deborah's trials is clear when Deborah is described marching into the Barnard kitchen, exclaiming "I want to know what he's done. If it's anything wrong, I shall be jest [sic] as hard on him as the Lord for it" (58). Equating herself with divine justice and retribution, Deborah represents hubris disguised as righteousness. This positions her perfectly as a character in need of a transformation through compassion. She also mirrors another characteristic of the fairy tale: that is that events and characters' reactions to these events are kept in the social realm. In other words, Deborah interprets Barney's behavior in terms of social norms rather than emotional or psychological effects. After gathering information on the quarrel which occurred the night before between Charlotte's father Cephas and Barney, Deborah says "I've got a sense of justice, and if my son, or any other man, has asked a girl to marry him, and she's got her weddin' clothes ready, I believe in his doin' his duty, if he can be made to"(62). Taking responsibility for her son, his misbehavior and vowing to set him right, Deborah orders Barnabas to return to the Barnard

home and fix matters with Charlotte's father, Cephas; however, "Barnabas stood immovable, his face set past his mother, as irresponsively unyielding as a rock" (103). Met with her son's refusal to obey her will, Deborah proclaims, "...you needn't come home to dinner. You sha'n't ever sit down to a meal in your father's and mother's house whilst this goes on" (103). Compassion, the ability to step outside of one's self, see with the other's perspective, and take action based on the other's needs and wants, had been nearly suffocated by the Puritan emphasis on human degradation. Wilkins Freeman recognized that her native New England characters were text-perfect to take a fairy tale journey because they by their very nature lacked that which all fairy tale heroes must seek – compassion. Deborah Thayer has abundant faith and obedience but lacks compassion. She ostracizes her son from the family nucleus.

Deborah Thayer's second trial involves her second child. Deborah's rule and guidance of her daughter Rebecca demonstrates the severe limits of her understanding and the severity of her punitive judgment. Having forbidden a courtship between her daughter and William Berry because William's mother, Hannah Berry, is Charlotte Barnard's aunt:

She never thought it possible that Rebecca could be persisting in her engagement to William Berry against her express command. Her own obstinacy was incredible to her in her daughter; she had not the slightest suspicion of it, and Rebecca had less to guard against." (188)

Deborah's (misplaced) self-confidence (which almost mimics naiveté) is at times endearing. Mitigating some of the terror evoked by Deborah Thayer's staunch rule of her family, Wilkins Freeman portrays Deborah flummoxed by Rebecca's fatigue, fainting spells, pallor, and anti-social behavior. The reader as well as much of Pembroke knows Rebecca never gave William up and has in fact consummated her relationship with him. The reader is subjected to a voyeuristic tension as Wilkins Freeman describes Deborah, anxious lately about her daughter, as she "watched over Rebecca with a fierce, pecking tenderness like a bird" (187). Deborah brews

herbs, cajoles Rebecca to rest one day and attend social events the next. She also continues to work alone and unheeded at night upon Rebecca's trousseau.

The ancient tales, oral and compressed, traditionally offer a limited number of opportunities for learning compassion. Wilkins Freeman is more generous with Deborah Thayer. Deborah is presented with a second tribulation (following her conflict with her son Barney), and a second commensurate opportunity to commiserate with another. But Deborah will fail this second trial with Rebecca as she failed with her son, Barney. Determined that Rebecca will have a new dress, Deborah navigates a New England snow storm alone, returns with fabric, and within three-quarters of a day announces the dress is ready for a fitting. Wilkins Freeman tenaciously builds the tension toward the "unveiling" of the truth. The town has been whispering Rebecca's secret for weeks, the reader has suspected Rebecca's secret for pages, and, now, Deborah and Rebecca are alone in the house. When Deborah Thayer sees the indisputable proof that her daughter has acted in violation of her mother's commands; acted in violation of her mother's marriage fantasies; acted in violation of religious and social prescription; and most damning of all acted with sexual agency, she "...gave a great start, pushed the girl violently from her, and stood aloof. She did not speak for a few minutes; the clock ticked in dreadful silence" (192). This is a superbly suspended narrative moment. Simultaneously, Rebecca's situation is revealed physically as Deborah Thayer's response to the situation is revealed emotionally. Stark and powerful, the syntax is so well-crafted we are as repelled by Deborah as she is repelled by her own daughter: Deborah "pushed," "violently," and stood "aloof." Offered the opportunity to respond with kindness, generosity, sympathy, and of the greatest value, compassion, Deborah Thayer provides her daughter with five brutal words "Go out of this house" (198).

As a character Deborah Thayer is as compelling as a force of nature. In fact her family operates as the flotsam whirling about the centrifuge that is Mother. However, Wilkins Freeman also leans on the female archetype of witch in her characterization of Deborah. Writing on the psychological resonance of the fairy tale, Cashdan explains in *The Witch Must Die*:

Of the many figures who make their presence felt in a fairy tale, the witch is the most compelling. She is the diva of the piece, the dominate character who frames the battle between good and evil...Few figures in a fairy tale are as powerful or commanding as the witch.” (30)

In children’s tales the good Mother and the evil Witch represent the psychological perceptions of the child-mind. The satisfaction of the tales resides in the systematic splitting of the good and the evil. Adapting the fairy tale template, Wilkins Freeman coalesces the traditionally distinct roles of Mother and Witch into one. Mature perceptions understand the complex and disturbing experience of the good and evil nature joined in one. Deborah Thayer is this complex and disturbing portrait of the Mother/Witch as one. Within the homespun context of village life so similar to the homespun context of most wonder tales, Wilkins Freeman illuminates the unveiling of Deborah Thayer from concerned mother into heartless witch. When Deborah learns of Rebecca’s pregnancy she is not disappointed, humiliated, anxious, or even angry. She is surgical, heartless, brutal, and vengeful. Without a moment’s pause she turns her daughter out into a storm. Rebecca is forced from the shelter of the home; the protection of the family into the freezing tempest. Waiting an entire day, Deborah finally sends her son Barney “to go after William Berry and make him marry Rebecca” (196). In their exchange, Deborah expresses no sympathy or concern for her daughter. Once she arranges for the marriage she proclaims, “I ain’t got anything more to do with it” (197). Wonder tales recognized that the universal Mother is psychologically the site of safety and nurturance necessary during vulnerable childhood. The tales similarly represent the experience when this safety and nurturance is absent or withdrawn.



This is the Witch. Wilkins Freeman's Deborah Thayer is that brutal portrait of mother/witch in one. She is the fearful Puritan mother strict and unflinching in the raising and caring of her children until she is the heartless witch abandoning these same children to the wilderness. In each trial Deborah's failure is clear. Barney and Rebecca are each forced to leave the physical representation of the symbolic sight of familial protection and love, the home.

One of the enduring and universal appeals of fairy tales and by extension of *PEMBROKE* is the economy of language and the primacy of plot. This simplicity in form and narration creates an intuitively symbolic experience. Tatar observes that

By rigorously avoiding psychological analysis, the plots of fairy tales become charged with symbolic meaning. The physical descriptions and outer events of the tale serve not only to further the plot, but also to fashion ciphers of psychological realities.” (79)

In *PEMBROKE* Deborah Thayer is a model of righteousness. Significant threads of the novel are woven with Deborah's relationship to her children and her reaction to their human frailties and desires. These relationships are narrative opportunities for Deborah to recognize and accept faults and sin without judgment. Ultimately, Deborah is wrestling with the question of whether or not she is capable of compassion. Textually, just as in the ancient tales, the outer reality symbolizes the inner reality. That Deborah fails to learn compassion when Barney breaks his engagement or when Rebecca's pregnancy is revealed is abundantly clear in that in each situation Deborah literally turns her son and daughter out of the family home. This idea of the threshold between the familiar interior and the transgressive exterior occurs again in the third trial between Deborah and her youngest son Ephraim.

Young Ephraim Thayer comes alive under the pen of Wilkins Freeman who is adept at conveying childhood with all its wants and needs and all the frustrations of those under the yoke of authority. Sickly, Ephraim is treated with a strange combination of indulgence and restriction.

Deborah Thayer, convinced as is the whole village of Pembroke that Ephraim will not survive into adulthood, does not require Ephraim to attend regular school and his teasing and mischief receives verbal rebukes and nothing more. But these benefits brought by his vulnerable health are balanced with severe restrictions of his activities and foods. Ephraim is denied plums, apples, molasses after spoonfuls of grimace-inducing medicine, not to mention pound cake and even games of holly-gull with his father. Deborah monitors Ephraim's diet and activities not for his physical maintenance as much as for his spiritual maintenance. After the village doctor prescribes a more relaxed and easy manner with Ephraim, Deborah demands "Would you have me let him have his own way if it were for the injury of his soul?" (219). Confusing deprivation and suffering with grace, Deborah's statement to the doctor highlights the Puritan conflict - namely how to reconcile earthly happiness with original sin. Fashioning herself wholly responsible and culpable for Ephraim, Deborah is dutiful but not affectionate; a sentry more than safe-harbor.

Ironically, Deborah's third trial with her third child will reverse the order of previous operations. Rather than an expulsion from the interior to exterior after a transgression, this trial will follow after a child of Deborah's escapes the confines of the familial home for the forbidden pleasures of the outside. In the "crowning act of revolt and rebellion of his short life" Ephraim steals out into the winter night to sled with his older brother's winning sled down slopes he has been denied all his life:

Ephraim lay there in the moonlight, and longed as he had never longed before to go forth and run and play and halloo, to career down those wonderful shining slants of snow, to be free and equal with those other boys, whose hearts told off their healthy lives after the Creator's plan." (224)

Rising, padding quietly, putting on the seldom-worn hat and cap, and running through the yard to the woodshed, Ephraim was chasing after "all the innocent hilarity of his youth which he had

missed” (224). Ephraim goes into the frozen night and “...outspeeded [sic] all infirmities of the flesh in his wild triumph of the spirit...having the one playtime of his life, speeding on his brother’s famous sled against bondage and deprivation and death” (229). Indulging in physical delight doesn’t end with the sledding. Ephraim, after successfully reentering the house, acquiesces to another desire, mince-meat pie. Ephraim and his night of youthful joy is irresistible. Identifying with Ephraim’s impulse to taste life’s excitement and full-flavor is easy.

Neglecting to love in her zeal to discipline, Deborah creates relationships which are sustained only on obedience. It therefore follows that disobedience will end her relationships. Sitting in judgment and condemnation of Barney and Rebecca, Deborah loses them. Ephraim is her last child; her last chance; her last trial:

Your brother and sister have both rebelled against the Lord and against me. You are all the child I’ve got left. You’ve got to mind me and do right. I ain’t goin’ to spare you any longer because you ain’t well. It is better you should be sick than be well and wicked and disobedient. It is better that your body should suffer than your immortal soul. Stand still.” (239)

Deborah whips Ephraim not because she knows he went sledding but because he neglected to tell his father to peel apples. Despite recognizing that Ephraim is not well, Deborah will not relent. She will not be compassionate. Failing the third trial, Deborah brings the switch down on Ephraim and he falls to the floor, dead.

Remaining always with action and reaction and at the level of plot, Ephraim’s death is a communal experience. There are no descriptive passages describing the internal experience of loss or sadness. No one mourns for Ephraim, not even the reader. The text does not allow it. Narratively, his death is not about the tragic loss of a child. Instead, Ephraim’s death as an event in the plot emphasizes Deborah’s static nature while also highlighting (with writerly aplomb) the cruel nature of village life. Deborah’s reaction to Ephraim’s death demonstrates this third trial’s

failure to transform her self-absorption. Terrified by what she thinks she has done, she remains nevertheless defensive of her actions, praying “... in self-justification and agonized appeal” (245). The villagers meanwhile are affected by the child’s death only in so far as they are called to participate in the rituals of death and burial and following those

...the dark gossip in the village swelled louder. It was said quite openly that Deborah Thayer had killed her son Ephraim. The neighbors did not darken her doors. The minister and his wife called once. The minister offered prayer and spoke formal words of consolation as if he were reading from invisible notes. His wife sat by in stiff, scared silence.” (244)

Emotional distance is further inscribed when Wilkins Freeman bookends Ephraim and Deborah’s story with a vignette showcasing Wilkins Freeman’s talent for local color detail. Arriving at the Thayer door to relieve Deborah of her guilt, the doctor’s wife and Mrs. Ray fuss over who will deliver the news to Deborah:

’I think it’s your place to, seeing as ‘twas your Ezra that knew about it,’ returned the doctor’s wife. Her voice sounded like the hum of a bee, being full of husky vibrations; her double chin sank into her broad heaving bosom, folded over with white plaided muslin. ‘Seems to me it belongs to you, as long as you’re the doctor’s wife,’ said Mrs. Ray. She was very small and lean beside the soft bulk of the other woman, but there was a sort of mental uplifting about her which made her unconscious of it. Mrs. Ray had never considered herself a small woman; she seemed always to see the tops of other women’s heads. (245-246)

While Deborah’s rigidity misshapes her out of plumb and she becomes a mother without loving sympathy, a witch, there is also the irony of the doctor’s wife and Mrs. Ray bickering over who will deliver news which will provide a balm to Deborah Thayer. The implication is clear that the women take a certain mean pleasure in Deborah’s suffering and they prolong assuaging this suffering by refusing to be the one to deliver the good news. Wilkins Freeman may represent motherhood deformed by conviction in Deborah Thayer but she hardly spares the rod in her condemnation of the village’s own mean-spiritedness.

## Chapter Eight: It's All About the Dress

Dresses and gowns, stitching, spinning and sewing, rags to riches: clothes are everywhere in fairy tales. As, too, in *PEMBROKE*. The New England village is no less concerned with signifying status and marking rites with dresses and gowns than are the tales. Wilkins Freeman's own enduring passion for a beautiful gown is found throughout her personal letters (Foster). But in addition to the obvious demarcations, clothing in the tales and the novel highlight origins of story, women's work, and artistic sentiment.

Fairy tales had their origin in an adult oral storytelling culture, where tales were told to shorten time devoted to mending, sewing, spinning, repairing tools – to the myriad repetitive household chores that required physical concentration but left the mind open to wander and daydream.” (Grimm xxxviii)

The fairy tales collected and lyrically edited by the Grimm brothers and others first found voice around hearths where hands held needles and muslin and shoulders hunched and straightened as the stories shocked and amused. Wilkins Freeman sat with her kin, working with her hands, and heard stories she would not forget. Foster describes the scene in his biography of the author:

Mother, Aunt Louisa, and the grandmothers could gossip too. There were so many things to say of Abby\_\_who had bought a new bonnet for May's first Sunday when everyone knew she had had one the year before, about the cake Mrs.\_\_had contributed to the church social, about Hatty\_\_and what she was doing for her backache, about the disgusting way that chit Sarah\_\_ was chasing the boys (you would think she had no pride at all), about the rumor that old Lucius\_\_ had finally popped the question after calling on Martha\_\_for nearly twenty years. (21)

The genesis of *PEMBROKE* was a family story told and retold when Mary was growing up. The fictionalized version shares elements with the historical family saga: the wedding dress had been finished, the house almost complete and the father, Mr. Thayer, (a Democrat), and the groom, Barnabas Lothrop, (a Whig), argue. Old Thayer announces the engagement null and void and despite wishes and hopes there was never reconciliation. The wedding dress remained packed

and preserved and the house unfinished until Barnabas Lothrop Senior, Mrs. Wilkins' father, gave it to her and Warren Wilkins, Mary's father (Foster 22). Another wedding dress is featured in another old New England story which was "one of those tales which women were always telling in Randolph and Brattleboro" – Wilkins Freeman's hometowns (Foster 54). This tale inspired both "Two Old Lovers" and the Richard and Sylvia storyline in *PEMBROKE*. After David Emmons nearly proposes, Maria Brewster chooses "pearl-colored silk" for her wedding dress. Ten years later, anticipating the final proposal, Maria stitches the dress together. Fifteen years later and still courted but not married, Maria gives her wedding gown away to a young bride. On his death bed, David finally finds the words and says, "Maria, I'm-dyin', an-I allers meant to-have asked you-to marry me" (Foster 55). Inextricably woven together are stories and dresses, tales and gowns, histories and futures.

The transformational significance of a gown traces through many traditional tales, but probably none have captured our imagination as much as "Cinderella." Forced to wear rags, demoted to the lowliest household work, yet remaining patient and kind, Cinderella's "...true beauty is concealed by soot, dust, and cinders" (Grimm 122). This tale demarcates gowns as juxtaposed signs: of vanity when attached to the evil stepsisters and of humility and virtue when attached to Cinderella.

Vanity ranks high among the cardinal sins of fairy-tale figures, and the two sisters distinguish themselves from their downtrodden stepsister by demanding finery and jewels. Cinderella, by contrast, makes the modest choice and thereby prepares the way for her accession to the throne. (Grimm 125)

Earning the accession of a throne is represented with the finery of a beautiful gown.

*PEMBROKE*'s Charlotte Barnard is similarly a modest, virtuous, humbled young woman.

Moreover, as with Cinderella, these traits reveal themselves through the character's connection to work and clothing. Demonstrating reserve and dignity, Charlotte remains self-possessed the

morning following Barney and her father's argument. Charlotte manages her emotions quite well until her cousin Rose expresses the tragedy of the situation through the exclamation, "Your wedding clothes all done and everything" (70). At the mention of the dress, Charlotte finally breaks down: "'They're—pretty near—done.' She tried to speak steadily, but her voice failed. Suddenly she threw herself on the bed and hid her face, and her whole body heaved and twisted with great sobs" (70). The broken engagement and all that signifies for Charlotte is concentrated in the material of the wedding dress. In fact, all the complicated emotionality of a broken engagement – the personal and public consequences – are twined within Charlotte's reaction to talk about her wedding clothes.

'It's all right...I needn't have minded; I know you didn't mean anything. It was just—the last straw, and—when you said that about my wedding-clothes—'  
'Oh, Charlotte, you did speak about them yourself first,' Rose said, deprecatingly.  
'I did, so nobody else would,' returned Charlotte. She wiped her eyes, drooped her stained face away from her cousin with a kind of helpless shame. (71)

More than an affectation, an adornment, or superficial vanity, the wedding dress's material reality is where Charlotte's skill has materialized beauty and thus materializes her loss. The design, expense, and hours and hours of sewing put into creating a dress such as Charlotte creates is work worthy of pride. Wilkins Freeman captures this density of meaning of the handmade gowns for the women of New England through her portrayal of Charlotte's quick flip between shame and pride. While Charlotte's feelings of shame and loss over the broken engagement manifest as shame and loss over the now "uselessness" of the wedding clothes, her satisfaction with the dress is clear when she invites Rose to see the garments.

Material experience and concrete objects are central to traditional tales. Virtue and vice, beneficence and gluttony, generosity and jealousy appear as fair-faced and winkled, shelter and trespass, and god-mothers and witches. Likewise, *PEMBROKE* places a high priority on the

“things” of life. When Charlotte brings Rose to the north chamber, a room preserved as a memorial to an older, dead brother, the simultaneous nature of past and present, life and loss is beautifully conveyed through Charlotte’s enjoyment of her own gown. Purple, silken and thick, with a luster to the fabric’s surface the girls pour over the dress spread across the dead brother’s bed. Unbidden, “Charlotte took up the skirt, and slipped it, loud with silken whispers, over her head. It swept out around her in a great circle; she looked like a gorgeous inverted bell-flower” (74). Barney Thayer, Cephas Barnard, and the broken engagement are not present. The scene plays out between Charlotte, Rose, and the dress for three full pages during which we are immersed as are Charlotte and Rose in the aesthetic experience of putting on a beautiful gown. Aesthetic and transformational. Whereas moments before entering this dressing-room Charlotte’s “voice failed,” she “threw herself down,” “hid her face,” and “heaved with sobs”, putting on the gown Charlotte “thrust her firm white arms into the flaring silken sleeves...Her neck rose from it with a grand curve. She stood before the glass and strained the buttons together, frowning importantly” (74). As the verbs show, Charlotte goes from downtrodden to regal through the dress. The material and immaterial parallel each other. Clearly something Rose intuits when she thinks, “It was as if the bridal robes, which were so evident, became suddenly proof of something tangible and real, like a garment left by a ghost” (75). Cinderella’s ball gown is so powerfully transformative, neither her stepsisters nor stepmother recognize her at the Prince’s palace; the gown remakes a girl covered by ash into a woman who captivates royals and dances through the night. In *PEMBROKE*, the gown’s transformative power represents the nexus of women’s handiwork, appreciation of beauty, and inner self. Sylvia Crane’s white wedding bonnet, a common bridal custom, in Wilkins Freeman’s hands becomes the material manifestation of a remade Sylvia Crane:



The wrought net-work, as delicate as frost, softened all the hard lines and fixed tints, and gave to her face an illusion of girlhood...All the people saw Sylvia's white bonnet; it seemed to turn their eyes like a brilliant white spot, which in turn reflected all the light in the meeting-house." (290)

## Conclusion

*PEMBROKE* ends when Barney Thayer stands at the Barnard door, puts his arm about Charlotte's shoulder, and "...entered the house with his old sweetheart and his old self" (330). Straight from the traditional tales, reconciliation, resolution, and harmony find their expression in the union of man and woman, a marriage. Of course, any reader with the least experience of real-world relationships, especially marriage, will have reservations about the notion that Barney and Charlotte's marriage will now usher in a perfect future. That really would be a fairy tale. However, above and beyond the obvious observation that while a marriage might end a story it hardly ends all conflict, there is a call to address the finale of the novel which scholars have variously described as "ambiguous," "sentimental," and "problematic" (*PEMBROKE* xxxii). Johanningmeier characterizes Barney's attitude toward Charlotte during the last scene of the novel as one who "is reclaiming a dog who has no say in her fate" (xxxiii). Another critic quoted by Johanningmeier and written at the time of *PEMBROKE*'s publication in 1894 worried "whether Charlotte, in marrying Barnabas, has not united herself to a nature as irretrievably warped and diseased in spirit as his body is bent and broken by work and rheumatism" (xxxiii). Glasser, one of Wilkins Freeman's most committed critics, interprets the couple's reunion as evidence of Wilkins Freeman's personally ambiguous attitude to her own life as a single woman. Obviously the ending of *PEMBROKE* has provoked a quandary. How do we explain that after ten years Barney is now suddenly ready to walk back into the Barnard home? Why does Wilkins Freeman express the couple's reunion as one between "his old sweetheart and his old self" (330)? And where are Charlotte's words?

The finale of *PEMBROKE* follows in the fairy tale footsteps laid throughout the novel. First, in crisp, clear prose Wilkins Freeman captures the magical quality of Barney Thayer's epiphany: "He sat still and waited, breathing hard. A terrible dread and curiosity came over him. It seemed as if his soul overreached his body into that other room. Without overhearing a word, suddenly a knowledge quite foreign to his imagination seemed to come to him" (327). Barney is attuned with "his soul" and understands with "his imagination." Gone are ego, vanity, and rationale. Wilkins Freeman creates a moment in which sympathetic concern and yearning yields epiphany. Barney is transformed and thus able to act because of an experience which is intangible, invisible, and insubstantial. The elusive nature of what happens to Barney does not negate it. Nor should it be suspected as inauthentic. If Barney's crippling will can manifest as the apparition of a bent spin why not his sudden empathy as a galvanic credible transformation? In Rebecca Solnit's words "To love someone is to put yourself in their place... which is to put yourself in their story, or figure out how to tell yourself their story" (3). Loving Charlotte and desiring all their marriage might mean has never been the antidote to Barney's suffering. Crossing from his own story into hers is the antidote. Recognizing that Charlotte's devotion to him is going to bring condemnation upon her, breaks the curse. Barney is disenchanted. The story he has so steadfastly maintained to justify himself gives way. The young Barney who Charlotte fell in love with became a victim of his own tale of imprisonment. Following a journey traversed in so many traditional tales, Wilkins Freeman's boy hero quests until he is awakened. Being awakened, being disenchanted, means putting off the curse which has kept him apart from the woman he loves. The curse broken, the disenchanted prince is reunited with his true love.

In Wilkins Freeman's hands the transformation of Barney, *PEMBROKE*'s flawed hero, is both an awakening and a renewal. Barney's epiphany frees him to leave his own house and

reenter Charlotte's. Critics scoff at the implication that Barney has really changed and, of course, the novel's final line "And Barney entered the house with his old sweetheart and his old self" (330) seems to negate any true progress. But it is not "progress" in the linear sense that Wilkins Freeman's novel charts. *PEMBROKE* and its characters and their lives do not reflect a linear conception of human experiences, relationships, or the evolution of the self. Just as our most ancient stories chart the course of a journey as a returning, *PEMBROKE* charts the return of the man Charlotte fell in love with. Barney Thayer has endured hardships and enchantments, granted these were of his own making and thus arguably all the more harrowing, but eventually he gains not self-knowledge but selflessness and is rewarded with a return home. Fairy tales feature conflicts which if either endured or defeated with just the right magic reward the victor with love. Wilkins Freeman rewards Barney with Charlotte. When Wilkins Freeman claims "I didn't even know that I'm a realist until they wrote and told me" (Kendrick 25) I suggest we take pause. Kendrick seems to have taken such a pause when he observes "her artistic modus operandi seems to have been intuition" (25). More porous and fluid than simply local color, proto-feminist, or regional realism, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's novel *PEMBROKE* leaves bread crumbs traced back to an assortment of traditions not the least of which is the ancient fairy tales where true love with all its imperfections wins the day.

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