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# Anti-Romance: How William Shakespeare's "King Lear" Informed John Keats's "Lamia"

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

ANTI-ROMANCE: HOW WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S "KING LEAR" INFORMED  
JOHN KEATS'S "LAMIA"

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Shelly Stephanie Gonzalez

2014

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Shelly Stephanie Gonzalez, and entitled Anti-Romance: How William Shakespeare's "King Lear" Informed John Keats's "Lamia," having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Carmela Pinto-McIntire

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Maneck H. Daruwala, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 25, 2014

The thesis of Shelly Stephanie Gonzalez is approved.

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Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Science

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Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi  
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS  
ANTI-ROMANCE: HOW WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S "KING LEAR" INFORMED  
JOHN KEATS'S "LAMIA"

by

Shelly Stephanie Gonzalez

Florida International University, 2014

Miami, Florida

Professor Maneck H. Daruwala, Major Professor

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze John Keats's "Lamia" and his style of Anti-Romance as informed by William Shakespeare's own experimentation with Romance and Anti-Romance in "King Lear."

In order to fulfill the purpose of my thesis, I explore both the Romance and the Anti-Romance genres and develop a definition of the latter that is more particular to "King Lear" and "Lamia." I also look at the source material for both "King Lear" and "Lamia" to see how Shakespeare and Keats were handling the originally Romantic material. Both Shakespeare and Keats altered the original material by subverting the traditional elements of Romance.

In conclusion, the thesis suggests that Shakespeare's Anti-Romance, "King Lear," and his general reworking of the Romance genre within that play informed Keats's own experimentation with and deviation from the traditional Romance genre, particularly in "Lamia."

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In a January 23-24, 1818 letter to his brothers, George and Tom Keats, John Keats writes, “I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately ... Nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions, than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers” (54, 55). Keats’s comment is one of the first indications in his letters that his poetic style was undergoing a change. Indeed, Jack Stillinger indicates in “Keats and Romance” that Keats’s change in poetic style can be traced through many of his letters and poems during the winter of 1817-1818 (593). At the particular moment that Keats wrote the letter to his brothers, though, he was in the process of revising *Endymion*, which, by the subtitle the poet gives it, can be categorized as a Romance. Therefore, as Stillinger notes, the change in Keats’s poetic style was “... a turning against ‘romance’” (593) and a turning toward “anti-Romance” (593).

Evidence of this “... turning against ‘romance’” (593) in Keats’s poetry that Stillinger notes can be found within a poem that Keats includes in the January 23-24, 1818 letter to his brothers, “On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again.” The sonnet “On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again” begins with a clear rejection of the Romance genre:

O golden-tongued Romance, with serene lute!

...

Leave melodizing on this wintry day,

Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute

Adieu! (1, 3-5)

The fact that Keats bids goodbye to Romance immediately after claiming that his intellect has suffered a change leads one to the conclusion that the change in his intellect is related to the Romance genre in general. Indeed, Stillinger indicates in “Keats and Romance” that “accompanying this change is a growing dissatisfaction with ‘romance,’ a tendency that runs through Keats’s letters and poems of this winter” (593).

Further poetic evidence attesting to Keats’s turning away from traditional Romance and turning toward a new kind of Romance can be found in an epistle written a few months after Keats’s January letter to his brothers. According to Stuart M. Sperry’s article, “Keats’s *Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds*,” “the *Epistle to Reynolds* is the best poetic evidence we have as to the intellectual dislocation and self-questioning Keats underwent following the completion of *Endymion*” (592). The epistle is “... the greater part of a letter addressed to Reynolds on March 25, 1818” (593). In “Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in bed,” or the *Epistle to Reynolds*, Keats writes to Reynolds:

Do you get health – and Tom the same – I’ll dance  
And from detested moods in new romance  
Take refuge. (110-112)

Hence, by March 1818 it was clear that Keats’s poetic intention was to write a “new [kind of] romance” (111).

According to Stillinger, “[v]arious circumstances – among them dissatisfaction with *Endymion*, conversations with Benjamin Bailey, reading of Wordsworth, Fielding, Smollet, Shakespeare – combined in the winter of 1817-18 to produce ...” (593) this desire in Keats to write “*anti-Romance[s]*” (593). While there were many factors that



contributed to the change in Keats's poetic style, I will focus on the importance of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* to that change.

The importance of Shakespeare and *King Lear* to the change in Keats's poetic style is evidenced not so much by the epistle Keats wrote to Reynolds, but by something that Keats writes in the January 23-24, 1818 letter to his brothers, George and Tom Keats, "... As an instance of this [change in intellect] – observe – I sat down yesterday to read *King Lear* once again the thing appeared to demand the prologue of a Sonnet, I wrote it & began to read ..." (55). Following this statement, Keats includes the sonnet "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again". According to Caroline Spurgeon in *Keats's Shakespeare*, "... Keats was reading *King Lear* in the folio with intense absorption on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1818 ... The sonnet gives us a strange and vivid glimpse of what the reading of Shakespeare meant to Keats ..." (49).<sup>1</sup> The second half of "On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again" may be seen as an expansion not only on Keats's rejection of the typical Romance, but also an expansion on what he will now set out to do with the Romance genre.

Chief poet! And ye clouds of Albion,  
Begetters of our deep eternal theme!  
When through the old oak forest I am gone,  
Let me not wander in a barren dream:  
But, when I am consumed in the fire,

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier in the January 23-24, 1818 letter to his brothers, Keats makes a reference to ripeness. The reference is actually an allusion to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, when Edgar tells Gloucester that "ripeness is all" (5.2.11). The concept of ripeness is an important touchstone that Keats uses throughout his poetry and his recurring allusions to it are what one would expect of a poet of aesthetic lushness. Furthermore, the reference shows just how important *King Lear* was to Keats's overall work, since it demonstrates that the power of the play over him was such that it followed him throughout his career.

Give me new phoenix wings to fly at my desire. (9-14)

The poet that the sonnet refers to is William Shakespeare. As for “Albion” (9), it is a reference to England found in *King Lear*. The “deep eternal theme” (10) belonging to both Shakespeare and England – considering that *King Lear* is a play with its origins in the Romance genre – can be seen as being the theme of Romance. As for the “old oak forest” (11), it is not a reference to *King Lear*, but, rather, a reference to the forest found in *Endymion* (Briggs 126-127). Accordingly, Keats is indicating that his poetic stance toward Romance will change after he has completed *Endymion* – which was subtitled “A Poetic Romance”. Indeed, as “On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again” indicates in its final lines, for Keats to have continued writing in the typical Romance fashion would have been akin to him “wander[ing] in a barren dream” (12).<sup>2</sup> Rather than face this imaginative infertility, Keats wants his poetic creativity to be like a phoenix: to rise out of the ashes of his old interaction with the typical Romance genre and fly in a different direction (13-14). Indeed, Keats would fly in many different directions while experimenting with Romance after the completion of *Endymion* – each attempt showing a different twist on the genre. *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” and *Lamia*, for example, all show Keats utilizing and reworking the Romance genre in different ways, with *Lamia* being a particular example of the importance of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* in Keats’s altered relationship to Romance.

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<sup>2</sup> This is also why the sestet begins with Keats calling on the clouds of England. Clouds bring rain and, in turn, make the land fertile. Keats wants imaginative fertility for composing poetry. Additionally, the clouds might indicate uncertain possibilities. Clouds obscure the sky, but that does not mean that there is nothing there. Accordingly, Keats sees that his poetry has potential only that, at this moment, he’s uncertain of exactly how he will proceed. However, this was something he would work out over time as he experimented more with Romance and Anti-Romance.

According to Jack Stillinger's commentary on *Lamia* in Keats's *Complete Poems*, *Lamia* was "written at Shanklin and Winchester in early July, late August, and perhaps also the first few days of September 1819, with further revisions in March 1820..." (474). Accordingly, *Lamia* was written over a year after Keats's poetic intellect had turned against the typical Romance genre, approximately a year and a half after the writing of *Isabella*, almost six months after drafting *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and some three months after composing "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (441, 453, 463). Thus, by the time that he began to compose *Lamia*, Keats had had ample time to experiment with the Romance genre. Keats knew that it would take time to create the Anti-Romance because in the January 23, 24, 1818 letter to his brothers, George and Tom Keats, John Keats says that there would be a "...*very gradual* ripening of the intellectual powers... (italics mine)" (54-55). This "gradual" (54) process reaches its peak, I believe, with *Lamia*.

The current thesis will focus on Keats's *Lamia* and his style of Anti-Romance as informed by Shakespeare's own experimentation with Romance and Anti-Romance in *King Lear*. Accordingly, I begin by looking at the Romance genre and the literary elements that were traditionally a part of it. Although, as Barbara Fuchs notes in her introduction to *Romance*, the term "romance" is difficult to define with exactitude, it is nevertheless important for this thesis to expound what motifs are being considered a part of the Romance genre because it is partly upon that definition that the remainder of my analyses hinge (1-2). Similarly important is my definition of Anti-Romance. Although I borrow the term Anti-Romance from Stillinger, and owe the initial groundwork of its definition to him, I set up a different definition of Anti-Romance – one that is particular

to *King Lear* and *Lamia* and stems from Shakespeare's own handling of the Romance genre in the former.

Furthermore, I analyze Shakespeare's *King Lear* in light of the definitions of Romance and Anti-Romance. I also look at the source material for Shakespeare's play to see how Shakespeare handled what were, originally, romantic concepts. The Gloucester subplot in *King Lear*, for example, comes from Sir Philip Sidney's own Romance, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. Due to the importance of the Sidney source material, I pay particular attention to this Romance and Shakespeare's reworking of it. Similarly, the main plot of Lear and his daughters in Shakespeare's play originates from what was a happier historic event. Despite the source material for the play being along more romantic lines, Shakespeare alters the stories considerably, subverting the romantic motifs and ending on a much bleaker note than any of the original material; yet the play is not part of the genre of tragedy. Indeed, I believe, that, just as Dr. Carmela McIntire claims, *King Lear* is neither a Tragedy nor a Romance; rather, the play inhabits an area between the two genres (McIntire). Hallett Smith argues in "Shakespeare's Romances" that "the change to the point of view and technique of the romances occurred ... during the writing of *King Lear* ..." (285). Accordingly, I focus on how Shakespeare reworked the originally romantic source material of his play and made *King Lear* a model of Anti-Romance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> After *King Lear*, Shakespeare would proceed to write what have traditionally been labelled the Romances: *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Pericles*, and *The Tempest*. These, plays, I believe, are more along the lines of traditional Romances, not Anti-Romances. Hence, unlike Keats, Shakespeare moved, in my opinion, from writing in an Anti-Romantic manner – with *King Lear* – to writing in a more traditionally Romantic manner with his later plays.

Finally, I argue that Shakespeare's model of Anti-Romance, *King Lear*, and his reworking of the Romance genre informed Keats's own experimentation and deviation from Romance, particularly in *Lamia*. For this, though, I begin by briefly looking at Keats's handling of Romance – and Anti-Romance – before *Lamia* as a way of better understanding the position of the latter in terms of Keats's other poetry written around the same time. Afterward, I focus on *Lamia* itself. Similar to the Anti-Romantic model of *King Lear*, *Lamia*'s source material was much more in line with the expectations of the Romance genre than *Lamia* itself. Indeed, Keats not only takes the original sources and undermines the traditional conventions of Romance, but he also, like Shakespeare, alters the ending of the story to make it more tragic than originally conceived.

## II. ROMANCE AND ANTI-ROMANCE

### 1. The Traditional Romance Genre

According to Barbara Fuchs's introduction to *Romance*, "Romance is a notoriously slippery category. Critics disagree about whether it is a genre or a mode, about its origins and history, even about what it encompasses. Yet, paradoxically, readers are often able to identify romance almost tacitly: they know it when they see it" (1, 2). The term "Romance," then, is rather difficult to define. Indeed, the range of possible significations of the term "Romance" is so varied that Fuchs lists at least six possible definitions: 1) the use of vernacular French in lieu of Latin, 2) a poem in French about the adventures of a chivalrous hero, 3) a story with occurrences that seem remote from ordinary life, 4) a historical ballad or poem in Spanish, 5) romantic literature and love stories, and 6) an exaggerated work of fiction (3, 4).

Despite the difficulty in reaching an exact definition of the term "Romance," there are nevertheless examples of Classical Romances. In "Ancient Romance," Elizabeth Archibald points to the *Odyssey* and *The Ass*, or the *Golden Ass*, as examples. According to Archibald, the *Odyssey* is one of the early, classical Romances because "... although it is set in the context of epic ... it concerns the travels and tribulations of an individual hero trying to get home to his faithful wife, a hero who is tested not so much for martial prowess and courage as for resourcefulness and marital commitment" (10). In the *Odyssey*, then, we find the adventures of a chivalrous hero and the love story that Fuchs's definitions of Romance call for (Fuchs 3-4). Indeed, Archibald herself indicates that the *Odyssey* has three of the elements important to a Romance: "... love, travel, and adventure" (10). As for *The Ass*, the "... precursor for the Bottom subplot in

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (10, 11), Archibald notes that, like the *Odyssey*, it also has the Romantic elements of "... love, travel, and adventure" (10).

Other examples of Classical Romances can be found in *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*. In his book, Gilbert Highet points to *The Romance of Troy*, *The Romance of Aeneas*, *The Romance of Thebes*, *The Romance of Alexander*, and *Apollonius of Tyre* (the source of the character Apollonius in Keats's *Lamia*) as important examples of Classical Romances. These works, for the most part, adhere to the same standards Archibald used to identify the *Odyssey* and *The Ass* as Romances. *The Romance of Troy*, for example, was composed by the French poet Benoit de Sainte-Maure and, amongst the adventures, has the theme of love woven in. *The Romance of Aeneas* also deals, in part, with love. *The Romance of Alexander* likewise includes the themes of adventure and love. As for *Apollonius of Tyre*, it deals with both love and the loss of love (11, 50, 51, 54-56). While these Classical Romances seem to be united by the themes of adventure and love, they are nevertheless considerably diverse in terms of their actual plots. How, then, do we as readers know that we are reading a Romance?

Fuchs indicates that, while we may have trouble defining exactly what a Romance is, as readers we can often identify it when we see it (Fuchs 1, 2). Our ability as readers to identify a Romance upon sight stems from the fact that, despite our trouble in defining the term "Romance," we have learned to identify certain traditional elements as being characteristic of the genre. In "Romance Writing Among the Greeks," Charles J. Goodwin explains some essential features of the Romance:

In the conception of Romance, two elements, or characteristics, are of first importance: the story must deal with the passion of love, and it must be untrue ... untruth – *fiction*, that is – and love are imperative. The passion may be a successful or an unsuccessful one; pure or guilty; open or concealed ... The tendency of any tale may be moral or immoral; virtue may be rewarded or vice triumphant. But love we must have, and untruth we must have; and the romance is faithful to this latter requirement in having most often a happy and satisfactory ending. (290)

Love and untruth, then, are essential characteristics of the Romance. The love, as Goodwin notes, can be of any kind, so long as it is present in some manner. As for the untruth, Goodwin does not mean to say something that is unreal (290-291). Rather, by untruth he means "... a departure from historical truth ..." (291) and, instead, an adherence to "[t]ruth, in a higher sense – truth to human nature, and to the great principles that influence speech and action ..." (291). This kind of untruth in Romance is what, as Goodwin indicates, allows for the traditionally happy endings in the stories of that genre – the happy endings themselves being another characteristic feature of Romances.

However, while love, untruth, and happy endings are important features of the Romance genre, they, in and of themselves, are not limited solely to Romance. Indeed, what distinguishes the Romance genre from other genres is that these three elements – love, untruth, and happy endings – are themselves combined with certain other characteristics. In her introduction to *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to*



*Contemporary*, Corinne Saunders lists some of the other features that, together with love, untruth, and happy endings, form a Romance:

Despite their variety ... the romances ... are linked by the motifs that echo through the genre: exile and return, love, quest and adventure, family, name, identity, the opposition between pagan and Christian. Such motifs form the backbone of romance. Romances require heroes and heroines, figures distinguished from the everyday by their ideal quality, and offset by similarly extreme, negative figures; they typically oppose a social, usually conservative, ideal of order with the threat of disorder of various kinds. The focus is not the nation represented or protected by the hero so much as the individual and the ideals he or she embodies. The pursuit of love, the special realm of the individual, is the particular but by no means the only subject of romance, and love is often combined ... with the pursuit of chivalry ... (Saunders 2)

Accordingly, in addition to love, untruth, and happy endings, Romances also contain an extensive variety of motifs (2). It is the combination of these motifs – such as “... exile and return, love, quest and adventure, family, name, identity ...” (2) – that actually make up the foundation of the Romance genre (2). To these motifs is further added “the pursuit of chivalry” (2). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word chivalry means to display “[b]ravery or prowess in war; warlike distinction or glory” (“chivalry” def. 3b). So Romances also tend to have characters who distinguish themselves in battle, proving themselves to be braver than the other characters around them. Furthermore, the Romances contain the motifs of separation, reconciliation,

reunion, and discovery between characters, such as husband and wife, father and son, father and daughter, etc. (Smith 279, 284). Additionally, a Romance is characterized by both a central event that manages to transform otherwise inevitable defeat into, basically, miraculous success and by some kind of descent (Collier 52, 53; Smith 279, 284).

While, classically, a Romance contains all of these features, the conventions have at times been altered by the writers that inherited the Romance literary tradition. For example, it was from the Classical Romantic tradition of the descent that the later authors of the Renaissance period developed another facet to the Romance genre. Using the convention of the descent, Renaissance authors derived "... a pastoral movement and the ritual death and rebirth plot structure of [their] romance literature" (Collier 52). The "pastoral movement" (52) that Collier notes refers to the movement of the plot of a play or poem from an urban area, such as a principal city, to a rural area, such as the countryside or the woods. The rural area is often set up in contrast to the urban area for not only is the former based on a different set of ideals, but it also allows the characters to act in a manner contrary to how they normally would in the latter. Indeed, in Renaissance Romances, "... the hero flees or is forced out of the corrupt court or city into the pure and simplistic countryside where he works out his own problems, undergoes purgation, and as a redeemed soul returns to the court or city to purge it or to find it already purged" (52). Accordingly, what the Renaissance authors derived from the traditional Romance genre was movement from the city/court – which was corrupt – to the pastoral world – which was idealized and free from corruption – so as to resolve the underlying problems of the hero and, essentially, the plot of the work itself.

Furthermore, the Renaissance authors developed into their Romance genre a “... ritual death and rebirth plot ...” (52). The convention of death and rebirth, derived from the descent found in Classical Romances, can be seen in several of William Shakespeare’s Romances. In *Cymbeline*, for example, there are two death and rebirth plots. First of all, there is the death and rebirth plot of the female heroine, Innogen, whose brothers and husband incorrectly believe her to be dead. Secondly, there is the death and rebirth plot of Posthumus, Innogen’s husband. Near the end of the play, Posthumus has a near death experience and his life hangs precariously in the balance. Indeed, it is only through divine intervention that his life is spared and he is able to have a second chance in life – the entire process of this second chance in life being akin to death and rebirth.

Another notable Shakespearean Romance that deals with the death and rebirth plot is *The Winter’s Tale*. In the play, King Leonatus believes that his wife, Queen Hermoine, has been unfaithful to him with his best friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia, and is carrying the latter’s child instead of his own. Under this suspicion, Leonatus does not respect the days of confinement that a woman who has just given birth is entitled to and, instead, calls his wife before his presence to judge her. During the trial, word arrives at the court that Hermoine and Polixenes are innocent and that Leonatus’s oldest son, Mamillius, has died. Having lost both her newborn daughter and her young son, Hermoine swoons and dies. Leonatus is emotionally destroyed, having singlehandedly undone his entire family, and pines and repents for sixteen years. At the end of the sixteen years, Hermoine’s best friend, Paulina, brings Leonatus before a statue that resembles the dead Queen and bids him to have faith. When Leonatus agrees to exercise

faith, a miracle appears to happen: the statue comes to life. Therefore, with Hermoine alive, Leonatus gets a second chance at life with his wife and family.

Accordingly, while the Renaissance authors inherited a rich Classical Romantic tradition, they did not adhere to it without modifications and deviations. Instead, as most literary figures do with any tradition, the Renaissance authors used the Romance genre and modified it in such a way so as to make it their own. Similar, the later poets of the Romantic Era – particularly John Keats – would use and modify the Romance genre. Indeed, Keats would go on to utilize the traditional Romantic genre in such a way that, according to Jack Stillinger in the article “Keats and Romance,” it can be called “*anti-Romance*” (599).<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The Anti-Romance Genre

According to Stillinger in “Keats and Romance,” anti-romance is “... a tough-minded ‘modern’ recasting of ... a kind of naïve romance more appropriate to an age gone by ...” (599).<sup>5</sup> In Keats’s Anti-Romantic poetry, Stillinger identifies what seems to be a preoccupation with “[t]he weariness, the fever, and the fret” (qtd. Endo 111). In “Keats and Romance,” Stillinger also indicates that practicality in the story line becomes important to the Anti-Romantic poet (599). Later, in *The Hoodwinking of Madeline, and Other Essays on Keats’s Poems*, Stillinger expands on this concept and adds that Anti-Romance not only has a great deal of realism, but also deals better with human suffering

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<sup>4</sup> Although Stillinger labels Keats’s use of the Romance genre as “*anti-Romance*” (599) in “Keats and Romance,” I do not use the term for solely Keats’s poetry. Instead, I use Anti-Romance when referring to any literary work that actively deviates from and undermines the conventions of the traditional Romance genre.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Stillinger has worked extensively on John Keats’s poetry, Romance, and Anti-Romance.

than traditional Romance which, to Stillinger, is, at its most basic level, a set of attitudes that are no longer held valuable or true (44, 123).

However, for the sake of my thesis, which focuses on *Lamia* in the context of *King Lear*, I use the term Anti-Romance more along the lines of how a work that contains many of the traditional characteristics of Romance goes about undermining them. That is to say, the author of an Anti-Romance actively subverts the motifs of the Romance genre. Accordingly, while an Anti-Romance will have the elements of a Romance, the Anti-Romance will ultimately change how those elements are employed.

The Anti-Romance, then, alters how the elements of a Romance are traditionally employed. For one, as Goodwin indicates, there must be untruth in the Romance (290). The untruth is actually adherence to “[t]ruth, in a higher sense – truth to human nature, and to the great principles that influence speech and action ...” (291). However, an Anti-Romance does not adhere to untruth in this “higher sense” (291). On the contrary, while, like a Romance, the Anti-Romance is still a work of fiction, it does not uphold any of the “great principles” (291) that are so important in Romances. Instead, the Anti-Romance will often undermine the principles that the story itself is founded on and that the readers expect the writer to adhere to.

Since the Anti-Romance undermines the expected adherence to “great principles” (291), it also undermines the traditionally happy endings of the Romances. According to Goodwin, it is the peculiar untruth of the Romances that allows for the happy culmination of the Romantic tales (291). By working against the untruth so conventional to a Romance, the Anti-Romance not only avoids the happy ending but also lays the groundwork for ultimately tragic endings. That is to say, in the Anti-Romance, the ending

is akin to that of a work of tragedy.<sup>6</sup> In the Anti-Romance, unlike the Romance, there is often little to no hope left to any of the characters or any sense of restoration of order to the readers by the end of the work (Collier 52, 53).

In addition to undermining the Romantic use of untruth and of its typically happy endings, the Anti-Romance also undermines the traditional employment of love. Although Goodwin indicates that the presence of love, be the passion successful or not, is enough for a Romance, this is not precisely the way that an Anti-Romance uses love (290). The Anti-Romance seems to consider love. However, unlike in the Romance, the motives behind the love in an Anti-Romance are not always merely for the sake of love. On the contrary, love seems to be play second to the greedy desires of one of the supposed “lovers.” Indeed, the subject of love, when observing certain characters in the Anti-Romance, can be called entirely into question as a subject at all. Furthermore, even if the subject of love is present, it is always complicated and results in some kind of negative, if not tragic, consequences.

Furthermore, while the Romances deal with separation and positive reconciliations, the Anti-Romances treat these two themes in a negative manner (Smith 279, 284). While the theme of separation would be negative in either Romance or Anti-Romance, the theme of reconciliation is certainly always a positive one in the Romances. The Anti-Romance, on the contrary, nuances the theme of reconciliation by normally having it bring about undesired, tragic, and unexpected consequences.

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<sup>6</sup> While an Anti-Romance resembles a tragedy in terms of its ending, the distinction – or similarity – between the two genres comes down to a matter of definition. In my opinion, based on the definition of Anti-Romance that I use for my thesis, an Anti-Romance is different enough from a tragedy in other aspects as to not render them equivalent.

Additionally, there is the Anti-Romantic undermining of the Romantic theme of chivalry (Saunders 2). In the Romances, chivalry is a laudable pursuit by the adventurous heroes. However, in the Anti-Romances, chivalry is either not an important pursuit or not a pursuit at all. Instead of being chivalrous, the characters will often deteriorate into acting in a “vulgar” manner, upholding few principles and respecting few traditions of propriety. Indeed, in the Anti-Romance, the very value of chivalry is brought into question and, ultimately, exhibited as an antiquated concern of little worth.

The Anti-Romances also undermine the ideal heroes and heroines that are conventional in the Romances (Saunders 2). The Romances will often present near perfect heroes and heroines, distinct from the other flawed characters of the story. It is easy for these characters to appeal to the readers and, instinctively, we cheer for them without reserve. However, the Anti-Romance nuances this Romantic convention. Rather than having idealized heroes and heroines, the Anti-Romance has flawed heroes. As readers, when we see their flaws, and the consequences of their flaws, it is more difficult for their appeal to us to be unreserved. Instead, while we maybe drawn to certain features of the main characters, we are simultaneously repelled by their faults. Essentially, the heroes and heroines of Anti-Romances are more realistic: individuals with good and bad attributes.

The Romantic treatment of the theme of family is another aspect that the Anti-Romance undermines (2). In the Romances, the family and the role of each family member is of central importance. Often, upon being separated in the Romances, the families are inevitably, and happily, reunited with one another. Although families are still important in Anti-Romances, there is no happy reunion of a severed family. On the

contrary, the focus in the Anti-Romance is on how the family is torn apart. Furthermore, if the family in an Anti-Romance is reunited, there are usually tragic consequences.

The Anti-Romance also works against the Romantic use of name and identity (2). In the Romances, the identity of a character is something that, for the most part, remains fixed throughout the story. That is to say, if there is a prince in the tale, the prince will act as a prince no matter what situation he finds himself because being a prince is part of his identity. Although the characters in a Romance will disguise themselves multiple times, they are always true to the same identity. In the Anti-Romance, on the other hand, there is little to no adherence to identity for the characters. Instead, the identity of the characters in Anti-Romances will often change depending on their costume and the circumstances that they find themselves in. Essentially, in the Anti-Romance, the characters have no fixed identity and that, in turn, finally leaves them with no identity at all.

However, the characteristic feature of Romances that the Anti-Romance most often undermines is the “fairy-tale feeling” (Fuchs 2). In a Romance, the story often seems like a fairy-tale to the reader. This fairy-tale element is possible in the Romances because of several reasons, but ultimately because of the miraculous turn of events that often stave off tragedy and usher forth a happy ending (Goodwin 290). Instead of allowing for a miraculous alteration to the otherwise inevitable tragedy, the Anti-Romance teases the reader with the possibility of a resolution. Often, the Anti-Romantic story will include something that can potentially avert disaster. However, much like a tragic play, the Anti-Romance will have the potentially disaster-averting turn of events come around too late to stop the actual tragedy or, perhaps, it will not allow the turn to



come even around at all. Therefore, while an Anti-Romance uses elements of the Romance genre, it does so in a manner that undermines their original intentions.

### III. KING LEAR: AN ANTI-ROMANCE

#### 1. The Romantic Origins of *King Lear*

William Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a play with Romantic antecedents. While developing the play, Shakespeare made use of several primary sources: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three daughters*, John Higgins's *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countesse of Pembroke's Arcadia*, James I of Britain's *The True Law of Free Monarchies* and *Basilikon Doron*, Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, and William Camden's *Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britaine* (Foakes 94; Ioppolo 137-159). Some of the different sources that Shakespeare used to develop the plots of his version of *King Lear* – that is to say, the main plot between Lear and his daughters and the Gloucester subplot – are, arguably, Romantic in nature.

First of all, there is the Romantic nature of *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three daughters*. The anonymously written play was staged in 1594 by the Queen's and Sussex's men. Scholars believe that Shakespeare performed in the play and was, therefore, familiar with and had access to the text before it appeared later in print. Whether or not the conjecture is accurate, what scholars are certain of is how closely Shakespeare scripted his own version of *King Lear* on the 1594 version (Ioppolo 137). According to R.A. Foakes, Shakespeare probably also consulted Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* – the earliest version of the Lear story, before composing his own version of the tale (94).

Monmouth's version and the anonymous version of the Lear story both have traditionally Romantic elements. In each of the versions, for example, there are the motifs of love, family, and reconciliation. These three motifs are usually centered on Lear and his daughters, particularly the youngest, Cordelia. The motif of love is present from the beginning with the love contest that Lear stages between his daughters to see which of them loves him most. In addition to love between father and daughters, there is also the love between husband and wife upon Cordelia's marriage. The motif of family is also present throughout the play. Little by little, Lear's family begins to disintegrate and his two oldest daughters turn murderously against him. Despite this, the family ties between Lear and Cordelia, although seemingly torn at the beginning, remain close as it becomes evident that she is the daughter who truly loves and cares for him. Lear and Cordelia are also central to the motif of reconciliation that, in the traditional Romantic fashion, leads to a happy reunion between father and daughter. Essentially, in both *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three daughters* and *Historia regum Britanniae* the Lear story remains faithful to the traditionally Romantic elements (Ioppolo 137-144; Foakes 93, 94).

In addition to the main plot of Shakespeare's *King Lear* having been grounded on previous works with traditional Romantic elements, the subplot of the play – that of Gloucester and his sons – also has its origins in the Romance genre: *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* is traditionally, and understandably, classified as a Romance (Frye 4). Indeed, Sidney's work adheres well to the characteristics expected of a Romance. For one, the book is filled with stories of love – be it love between man and woman, family members, mother

and son, father and son, servant and master, etc. In fact, much of the main story is based on the love that Pyrocles and Musidorus develop for Philoclea and Pamela and the adventures the men must go through in attempting to woo the two women. As for using a higher sense of truth, the actions, motivations, and thoughts of Pyrocles, Musidorus, Euarchus, and Philanax often convey adherence to higher principles, such as right versus wrong. There is also much scrutiny of family and family matters, particularly of the way in which Basilius and his family function. In terms of name and identity, most of the book explores what makes up each one as the characters switch from costume to costume (and name to name) yet, invariably, remain true to the sense of Self they possessed before donning the disguises. In terms of reconciliation, there is the eventually happy reunion of Euarchus with his son and his nephew. Furthermore, there is the display of chivalry and the pursuit of adventure in the different escapades that Pyrocles and Musidorus participate in to win themselves fame and glory.

Probably the most notable Romantic element in Sidney's work, though, is its undeniably miraculous "fairy-tale" (Fuchs 2) happy ending. At the moment when all hope seems lost – Basilius dead, Euarchus condemning Gynecia, his son, Pyrocles, and his nephew, Musidorus, to death, and the young lovers threatened with eternal separation – an unexpected turn of events takes place. "But as this pitiful matter was entering into, those that were next the Duke's body ... might plainly discern with as much wonder as gladness that the Duke lived" (Sidney 845). Just when tragedy seems inevitable, what seems like a miracle takes place: Basilius is alive. Upon awakening from the potion, he immediately sings praises of Gynecia's fidelity, pardons Pyrocles and Musidorus, and allows the young lovers to marry. So, just as all of the events in the story were running

headlong into tragedy, there is the sudden turn of events to happiness that is so characteristic of Romances (825-847).

The Romantic elements that permeate *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* can, accordingly, also be found within the story that Shakespeare used as the basis of his Gloucester subplot for *King Lear*. For one, Sidney's version of what Shakespeare would later work into his subplot deals with two kinds of love: the love of father for sons and the love between brothers. It also deals with reconciliations, first between father and son and later between the two brothers themselves. The adventure and chivalry so common to the genre are present by means of the occupation Leonatus takes up as a private soldier. As for reunion, there is the reconciliation of the Prince of Paphlagonia with his elder son, Leonatus, and the latter with his brother, Plexitrus (which also shows adherence to higher principles by Leonatus's willingness to forgive). Furthermore, while there is much suffering in the story – both with the introduction of Leonatus's father as blind, their story, and the prince's eventual death – there is still a doubly happy ending. For one, Leonatus was crowned prince before his father's death. Secondly, and most miraculously of all, Leonatus and Plexitrus, instead of entering in mortal combat, are reconciled to one another (Sidney 275-283). Accordingly, Sidney's version of the story handled the Romantic elements of the tale in a traditional manner.

However, while Shakespeare's sources for his version of *King Lear* may have either been traditional Romances or contained elements from the Romance genre, Shakespeare actively reworked the stories to undermine the Romantic motifs. Furthermore, Shakespeare also worked against the general traditions of the Romance genre itself while composing *King Lear*.

## 2. Undermining the Romance Genre: Shakespeare's *King Lear* as an Anti-Romance

According to Walter Cohen's article, "Shakespearean Romance," "The late plays [*The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *Pericles*] may ... be viewed as ... members of the distinct genre of romance ..." (103). Indeed, Shakespeare's Romances have many of the characteristics that are common to the Romance genre. Just as in Sidney's *Arcadia*, Shakespeare's Romances have the combination of "... a somber feel with a happy ending" (Cohen 103) through their miraculous, "fairy-tale" (Fuchs 2) solution to what would otherwise inevitably culminate in utter tragedy. The plays also deal extensively – and in a relatively traditional manner – with love, family, identity, reconciliation, adventure and chivalry, and the adherence to the truth of higher principles. While there is much suffering in all of the plays, the family is always reunited in a near miraculous way (most notably in *The Winter's Tale* with the statue of the queen coming back to life), the lovers are allowed to remain together, and everything else in general ends well – the principal good characters rewarded and the evil ones punished.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's Romances incorporated the traditional movement from the court to the pastoral so common to the Romance genre of the Renaissance. Before speaking about nature and the pastoral in the Romances and the Anti-Romances, I first wish to clarify what I mean by pastoral. Much like the term "romance," pastoral is difficult to define. According to Paul J. Alpers,

It [that is, pastoral] turns out to be a number of things. We are told that pastoral "is a double longing after innocence and happiness"; that it is based on the philosophical antithesis of Art and Nature; that its universal idea is the Golden Age; that its fundamental motive is hostility to urban

life; that its “central tenet” is “the pathetic fallacy”; that it expresses the ideal of *otium*; that it is founded on Epicureanism; that in the Renaissance it is “the poetic expression *par excellence* of the cult of aesthetic Platonism” or, alternatively, of the philosophical *vita contemplative*. (10, 11).

As Alpers indicates, the word pastoral has a variety of possible definitions, some incredibly specific. However, for the purpose of my thesis, I will use a much more general definition of pastoral. Within the scope of the argument for my thesis, I argue that pastoral deals with “... the pathetic fallacy ...” (10) – the projection of human sentiments and states of mind onto nature – and with a “... hostility to urban life ...” (10) that is evidenced by the literal translocation of characters outside of the urban environment into some kind of natural environment, often in search of a positive, non-corrupt ideal that contrasts the corruption in the urban setting.

In *The Tempest*, for example, Prospero – along with all of the characters that contributed to injustice in Milan – are set upon a largely uninhabited island to solve the problems that began in the corrupt city. In *The Winter’s Tale*, there is the literal movement of the plot from Sicilia – where Leontes’s cruelty has torn apart his friends and family – to the pastoral Bohemia, where characters that would normally belong to the city and have to adhere to courtly rules are free to act “natural” and carry out their desires. In both of these plays, the pastoral world is the foil of the corrupt court and, furthermore, allows the characters to resolve the problems that began back in the city/court. Essentially, in the Romances, nature was a vehicle for the positive – it

provided the characters with elements necessary to attain resolution and, subsequently, a happy ending.

Shakespeare's *King Lear*, however, is not a Romance. Instead, the play seems to straddle the genres of Tragedy and Romance (McIntire). Indeed, in its use of the elements from the Romance genre, I would call it an Anti-Romance, for it clearly subverts most of the traditional characteristics of the former.

For one, Shakespeare's *King Lear* subverts the traditional use of nature in the Romances. While nature is used as a vehicle for the positive in Romances, *King Lear*'s use of nature is such that nature becomes a vehicle for chaos and an extension of the problems already present in court. Furthermore, while it seemingly provides the means necessary to solve the problems back at court, because the purgation of human nature fails to be carried out in the pastoral world, there is no resolution to the play's underlying problems – leading, essentially, to tragedy.

One of *King Lear*'s deviations from the idealized pastoral tradition found in the traditional Romance can be seen when Lear, out on the heath, shouts:

Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!  
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!  
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,  
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,  
Strike flat the thick rotundity o'the world,  
Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once



That make ingrateful man! (Shakespeare 3.2.1-9)

Lear's words in this scene demonstrate the atypical role that nature and the pastoral world are serving in the play. Unlike in the traditional Romances, where the pastoral world is, for the most part, serene, here the pastoral world is a tempestuous one.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, according to Lear's description and interpretation, the tempest is of such magnitude that the very existence of the world seems endangered: he says that the tempest has the power to "strike flat the thick rotundity o'the world" (3.2.7) and "crack nature's moulds" (3.2.8). Accordingly, rather than serving as a peaceful place where Lear can resolve his problems, nature merely presents him with "... sulphurous and thought-executing fires" (3.2.4) that threaten to "sing[e] [his] white head" (3.2.6). As Collier indicates, "... in the world of *King Lear* the antithesis to the court is no longer a place of sunshine, felicity, and the trappings of the golden age, but rather it is metamorphosed into a stormy heath, bleak and cold" (53). Indeed, "the world of mad Lear [out in the pastoral setting] is [grotesque] ..." (54), offering danger and chaos to such an extent that there is an "inversion of the pastoral to a grim picture of hell ..." (53).

The danger and chaos found in the "pastoral" setting in *King Lear* is further emphasized by the fact that it does not answer to any mortal petitions. The uncontrollability of nature parallels the lack of control that Lear faces back in the kingdom. This parallel is best highlighted by Lear himself when he tells Gloucester – still out in a pastoral setting – that:

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this undermining of the pastoral world could well be described as "anti-pastoral." However, within this paper, the anti-pastoral features will not be referred to as such, but merely as elements of the pastoral that have been subverted.

They flattered me like a dog and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say “ay” and “no” to everything that I said “ay” and “no” to was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found ‘em, there I smelt ‘em out. (4.6.96-103)

Lear compares the lies of the court (and his lack of true power there) to his lack of power in nature. According to Lear, while he was seemingly correct in his decisions at court, it was all a lie, for the courtiers merely went along with what he said. Once he divided his kingdom, the incorrectness of his decisions was underscored by the fact that no one would do his bidding anymore. His power over people stemmed merely from their desire to flatter him – it was not a power founded on his wisdom as a ruler. His lack of power back in the city – his daughters refusing to obey him, servants ignoring him, his followers abandoning him – is paralleled to his lack of power in nature. Since literal nature – like his daughters back in court – is in a position more powerful than his, it does not obey Lear’s commands.

Although nature is presented as uncontrollable and dangerous, it still manages to serve part of its function from the traditional Romance. For one, nature serves as a place of projection for Lear’s state of mind and feelings. While he is out on the heath, the storm that is raging mirrors the tempestuous feelings of anger, sadness, and remorse that are internally plaguing Lear. The storm also parallels the uncontrollable insanity of his mind. Furthermore, nature helps Lear to see where part of his problem as a character lies. “Go to, they are not men o’their words: they told me I was everything; ‘tis a lie, I am not

ague-proof” (4.6.103-104). Only while he is out in the natural setting does Lear realize that he is not infallible and, accordingly, makes mistakes. His failure to realize this during the first scene of the play was what brought on most of the subsequent chaos. After all, had Lear listened to Kent’s advice – instead of stubbornly refusing to alter his own whimsical resolution – then the kingdom would not have been divided, Cordelia would not have been disowned, and the “future strife” (1.1.43) he meant to prevent would have been effectively averted. Therefore, nature in the pastoral setting helps Lear to gain some degree of insight into his own character.

However, unlike the traditional pastoral scene in the Romances, nature here does not help Lear purge himself of his character flaws. One of these flaws lies in his desire to keep Cordelia’s love completely for himself. Cordelia makes him aware of his faulty logic and desire when she tells him, “... Haply when I shall wed, / That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry / Half my love with him, half my care and duty” (1.1.100-102). Lear’s youngest daughter makes it clear to him that, once she is married, he cannot expect her love to belong solely to him, nor can he expect her to be dutiful and obedient only to him. Nevertheless, after they are captured by the enemy forces, which is after Lear’s emergence from the pastoral setting, he shows that his desires are still unchanged: “No, no, no, no. Come, let’s away to prison; / We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage” (5.3.8-9). Although the passage makes it clear that Lear has changed to a certain extent – he no longer cares about power – it also demonstrates that he has not been purged of his desire for the complete and devotional love and attention of Cordelia. By the last act in the play, once Lear and Cordelia are captured, Cordelia is already a married woman who should, accordingly, be with her husband and divide her attentions between

her spouse and her father. However, Lear does not think about her being married when he contemplates going away with her to prison, he merely focuses on the fact that it will give him the opportunity to be with her and have her love and focus solely on him.

In addition to helping Lear see part of his personal deficiency, the purpose of the hostile, non-idealized pastoral setting can be further extended to encompass the very nature of his enemies. According to Jean E. Feerick:

When Shakespeare describes what we perceive to be [literal] “nature”... he sees not an externalized object opposed to the human world but rather a version of his social milieu written in another key: the same range of possibilities and principles structure those “green worlds” as do the social world. Those green fields, like the human subjects Shakespeare imagines into existence, can express moral conditions – embodying either depravity, savagery, and degeneracy or orderliness, cultivation, even royalty. (Feerick 36)

As Feerick indicates, nature in Shakespeare’s plays is not merely literal, it is also representational of the overall “social milieu” (36) and, by extension, of human nature. Accordingly, when *King Lear* presents a literal nature that is depraved, savage, and degenerate, it is because the characters in the play itself are also depraved, savage, and degenerate.

One of the first characters in *King Lear* in whom depravity can be seen is Gloucester’s illegitimate son, Edmund. Although in his apostrophe to Nature Edmund asks, “Why bastard? Wherefore base?” (1.2.6), he quickly proceeds to exemplify where his moral corruption lies. “Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land” (1.2.16). While there

is nothing wrong in Edmund wanting land, the problem is whose land he desires and how he intends to obtain it. Edmund wants to steal Edgar's legitimate birthright from him by means of deceit.<sup>8</sup> The gravity of Edmund's deceit is compounded by the fact that, due to it, Gloucester wishes to have Edgar killed. Accordingly, Edmund's moral depravity is such that he would have his own brother not only landless, but also killed, only so that he can "grow ... [and] prosper" (1.2.21) himself.

Edmund's moral depravity is further underscored when he betrays his father. "This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the Duke / Instantly know and of that letter too" (3.3.20-21). Although Gloucester has gone out to help Lear – an action which, although prohibited by Cornwall, is the morally correct thing to do – Edmund does not approve of this morally upright decision and, instead, sees it as an opportunity for his own social advancement. "This seems a fair deserving and must draw me / That which my father loses, no less than all. The younger rises when the old doth fall" (3.3.22-24). Just as when he decided to usurp his brother's birthright, Edmund is now intending to betray his father's morally upright action only to garner further social advancement.

Edmund's morally degenerate counterparts are Lear's elder daughters, Regan and Goneril. These daughters are first verbally equated with degeneration when Lear tells Regan that she is a "degenerate bastard" (1.4.245). Since Regan and Goneril are so alike – more than Lear initially perceives – they can both be said to be "degenerate bastard[s]" (1.4.245). Although Regan and Goneril are legitimate offspring (unlike Edmund who is illegitimate by birth), they nevertheless behave as cruelly as Gloucester's "bastard" son.

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<sup>8</sup> Edgar's claim to inheritance instead of Edmund's claim is twofold. For one, Edgar is the legitimate son and Edmund is illegitimate. However, even if Edmund were a legitimate son to Gloucester, Edgar is nevertheless the elder of the two brothers and should, according to the laws of that time, inherit his father's property.

Regan and Goneril's cruelty lies in their dispossessing Lear of his train of knights, robbing him of the title of king, and barring him from home on a stormy night. While the first two actions may seem of little consequence considering that, after all, Lear gave up the throne and all of his property, it should nevertheless be remembered that he did this with a set of conditions. For one, he added a "reservation of an hundred knights / By [them] to be sustained" (1.1134-135). He also indicated that he would retain "the name, and all th'addition to a king" (1.4.137). Despite these conditions, Regan and Goneril nevertheless proceed to dismiss his train and have their servants treat him and address him merely as their father instead of as the king. Accordingly, Regan and Goneril are unjustly breaching the terms by which they were given power, not to mention that they are also breaching the basic laws of human love and filial obligation.

Compounding Regan and Goneril's breach of terms and leading them straight down the path of pure moral degeneration, though, is their breach of the third term their father set while dividing his kingdom: "Ourself by monthly course, / ... / [shall stay] with you by due turn" (1.1.136). By the terms stipulated by Lear before giving away his kingdom, he was supposed to reside with Regan and Goneril. Despite this condition, Regan's actions lead her father to leave her house and prematurely seek residence in Goneril's home. Goneril then exacerbates Regan's actions by turning Lear away, upon which he is left outside in the storm with a death sentence on his head. By leaving their father out in a storm and, furthermore, by seeking his death, Regan and Goneril are perfect embodiments of morally "degenerate bastard[s]" (1.4.245).

In addition to morally "degenerate bastard[s]" (1.4.245), Regan and Goneril are also savage and uncontrollable. Regan, for example, seeing that a servant is standing up

to Cornwall, does not hesitate to draw a sword on the servant and inflict a mortal wound. Both Regan and Goneril are, to a certain extent, ungovernable, often doing as they please rather than how they are told to act, be it by their father, sister, or husbands. Additionally, they feel an uncontrollable sexual desire for Edmund and succumb, subsequently, to moral depravity as they savagely betray their husbands and each other in pursuit of another man.

However, the epitome of savagery in *King Lear* is the unnecessary blinding of Gloucester. Before blinding Gloucester, Cornwall reasons:

Though well we may not pass upon his life  
Without the form of justice, yet our power  
Shall do a courtesy to our wrath, which men  
May blame but not control. (3.7.24-27)

Like his wife, Regan, Cornwall knows no moral restraint. Accordingly, it is easy for him to succumb to the savagery of blinding a morally upright man who "... would not see thy cruel nails / Pluck out [Lear's] poor old eyes" (3.7.55-56).

All of this uncontrollable savagery – which, in a way, also entails depraved and degenerate behavior since such actions always lead to savage consequences – in the villains of the play is what Lear sees represented in the pastoral scene turned nightmare. Rather than allow Lear to purge himself of his own corruption and solve the underlying problems of the play, the movement to the pastoral merely presents him – metaphorically – once again with the very problems he was fleeing from: savage human nature (Collier 52). This failure to escape from the savagery, corruption, and overall problems of the city

while in the pastoral settings is one of the reasons that Shakespeare's *King Lear* is an Anti-Romance.

Another reason why Shakespeare's *King Lear* can be considered an Anti-Romance is because of how the playwright undermines the Romantic motif of reconciliation found in his primary sources for the main plot. In the Romance genre, the reconciliation between characters is not only an essential element, but also a happy – at times even miraculous – event. For example, in one of Shakespeare's Romances, *The Winter's Tale*, there is a miraculous reunion between Leonatus and Hermoine after she has been thought dead for sixteen years. It is this reconciliation, along with their lost daughter Perdita being found and reunited with them, which ushers in the final happy moments of the play before it ends. This kind of happy reconciliation is also what the primary sources of *King Lear* had for Lear and Cordelia. Despite their separation and Lear's mistreatment of Cordelia, they are supposed to be heartwarmingly reconciled and, with her by his side, the old king is supposed to regain his throne.

Shakespeare's version of the reconciliation initially seems to follow the lines of the original, more Romantic versions. Indeed, the reunion scene itself is one of the most touching scenes in the entire play.

LEAR. Be your tears wet? Yes, faith; I pray weep not.

If you have poison for me, I will drink it.

I know you do not love me, for your sisters

Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.

You have some cause, they have not

CORDELIA. No cause, no cause. (Shakespeare 4.7.71-75)



Upon being reunited with his daughter, Lear admits to her that he has made a mistake. Throughout the play, Lear has become aware that, although his eldest daughters said they loved him the most, their love was false. Accordingly, for him to have disowned Cordelia was an unforgivable mistake and, by this point in the story, he has become poignantly aware of that. Thus, seeing Cordelia before him, and knowing well that he has erred, Lear asks her to go through with what should be the consequences of his actions. That is to say, if his eldest daughters, who he did not harm, wanted to kill him, Cordelia should have the right to kill him because he has done her harm. Nevertheless, Cordelia is willing to forgive her father by simply saying, “[n]o cause, no cause” (4.7.75). Even though she has the right to be upset at her father, Cordelia replies as if he had done nothing to hurt her – she forgives him entirely and without reserve.

Indeed, by returning to England after having been safely in France, and out of the reach of a family that wanted nothing to do with her, Cordelia’s return to save her father and put him back on the throne is a true and unconditional sign of filial love. Accordingly, until the moment of their reunion, the Romantic motif of reconciliation is handled traditionally, as the motif was in Shakespeare’s primary sources. Subsequently, though, the motif unravels and, instead of the reunion between father and daughter resulting in Lear happily ascending the throne, tragedy ensues.

First of all, Lear and Cordelia do not win the military confrontation with Regan and Goneril; instead, they are captured and imprisoned. Cordelia’s comment upon being captured, though, seems to still follow along the lines of what would be expected from a traditional Romance: “[w]e are not the first / Who with best meaning have incurred the worst. For thee, oppressed King, I am cast down” (5.3.3-5). For one, Cordelia is

appealing to a higher sense of truth, to the principal of doing an action because it is the right thing to do. In line with this principle, Cordelia engaged in battle with her sisters because the right thing to do was to get her father back on the throne as king. There is also the reappearance of the motif of love. Cordelia admits that she has pursued the right course of action for the sake of her father. This is, additionally, an appeal to the higher principle of true love – one that remains constant despite everything (amidst the good and the bad).

Indeed, even after a soldier is sent to murder Cordelia while she is in prison with her father, there still seems to be a chance of adherence to some kind of miracle that will stave off the impending tragedy of death. Having carried her in before the other characters after killing her murderer, Lear tests to see if Cordelia is still breathing: “[t]his feather stirs, she lives: if it be so, / It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows / That ever I felt” (5.3.263-265). For a brief moment, Shakespeare presents the readers with the possibly redeeming miracle: Cordelia might still be alive. If she is alive, then, as Lear says, it will redeem him from all of the sadness that he has faced. In true Romantic fashion, if Cordelia would miraculously remain alive, the play would, essentially, end on a happy note.

However, the true consequences that follow the capture of Lear and Cordelia, triggered by their initial reconciliation, completely undermine the Romantic ““fairy-tale”” (Fuchs 2) element and the traditionally happy, miraculous ending.

No, no, no life!

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life

And thou no breath at all? O thou’lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never.

...

Do you see this? Look on her: look her lips,

Look there, look there! (5.3.304-309)

These final lines by Lear, spoken just before his death, seem ambiguous in terms of Cordelia's actual state. One possibility (and the one that I believe to be the case) is that Lear notices that Cordelia – who he had previously thought to be alive – is no longer breathing. Crushed by this sad truth before him – that the daughter that loved him and that he loved the most has died and will not miraculously come back to life – Lear once again loses his mind. Desperate for a miracle, he begins to imagine that she might still be breathing, beckons those around him to look at her lips for the breath of life, and dies under the mad (and false) impression that Cordelia is still alive. Far from the ““fairy-tale”” (Fuchs 2) feeling that Romances traditionally leave the reader with, all that the reader is left with at the end of Shakespeare's *King Lear* is bleakness and desolation – a tragedy more poignant than any of the others because of the possibility of a miracle that does not actually come. Even though Lear believes his daughter to be alive and dies with this in mind, the impression is false, merely the result of his renewed madness.

However, there is another matter of the reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia that makes *King Lear* an Anti-Romance. In Shakespeare's traditional Romances, such as *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, the reunification of fathers and daughters is important; however, the daughters in those Romances are unmarried and, accordingly, owe their principal dues to their parental figure(s). In Romances such as *Cymbeline*, though, with Innogen already a married woman, the main reconciliation is between husband

(Posthumus) and wife (Innogen). In the latter cases, the reunion of husband and wife is more important and takes precedence over the reunion between father and daughter. Hence, for Cordelia to be separated from her husband in order to be reunited with her father – although her motives are entirely along the traditional lines of Romance – is a sweet but, essentially, Anti-Romantic element of the play. Thus, Shakespeare’s version of *King Lear* is an Anti-Romantic play because he undermined the traditional Romantic elements essential not only to the primary sources of the Lear story, but also to traditional Romances in general.

In addition to reworking the main plot of *King Lear* into an Anti-Romance, Shakespeare also undermines all of the Romantic elements of Sidney’s version of the story in *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* for his Gloucester subplot.

The first manner in which Shakespeare undermines the Romantic elements of Sidney’s story is in his treatment of the chivalry and adventure. In Sidney’s version, the legitimate son, Leonatus becomes a soldier. ““But those thieves, better natured to my son than myself, spared his life, letting him go to learn to live poorly; which he did, giving himself to be a private soldier in a country hereby”” (Sidney 278). Having been spared his life, but still in danger of losing it had he remained near his father, Leonatus leaves to work as a private soldier. His employment as this was very successful, for “...he was ready to be greatly advanced for some noble pieces of service ...” (278). Accordingly, although having to earn a living for himself, Leonatus is never reduced to destitution; instead, he works in a profession that allows him to gain distinction and glory in battle.

In Shakespeare’s version, though, the legitimate son does not go into a profession that will allow him to gain any kind of distinction or glory.

While I may scape  
I will preserve myself, and am bethought  
To take the basest and more poorest shape  
That ever penury in contempt of man  
Brought near to beast.  
...  
The country gives me proof and precedent  
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,  
Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms  
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, and sprigs of rosemary;  
...  
[To] [e]nforce their charity. Poor Turlygod, poor Tom,

That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am. (Shakespeare 2.2.176-180, 184-187, 191-192)

Unlike Sidney, Shakespeare has the legitimate son degrade himself. Rather than finding a profession that will allow him to keep some amount of self-respect or to gain any sort of social distinction, Edgar becomes a beggar (2.2.176-180, 184-187, 191-192). Indeed, he takes on the shape of the basest of beggars (McIntire). While this choice seems like the safest, since Edgar knows his life is in danger, it is nevertheless a danger that the original Sidney character was willing to face in order to avoid excess identity and social degradation. Edgar, on the other hand, not only becomes a beggar instead of a soldier, but also reduces himself to harming his body to force people to give him money. Unlike Leonatus, and far from pursuing any kind of glorious career, Edgar seeks to

stimulate pity and force charity from those around him. Such is that state of his reduction that, rather than man, Edgar is brought closer to the state of an animal (2.2.176-180, 184-187, 191-192).

In reducing Edgar to such an animalistic and base state, Shakespeare also undermines the Romantic notion of identity. In Sidney's version of the story, Leonatus never stopped acting like the son of a prince – hence the type of profession he sought (Sidney 275-283). Edgar, on the other hand, becomes the complete opposite of what he was born and raised to be, that is, a nobleman. This is why he finishes his monologue with "... Edgar I nothing am" (Shakespeare 2.2.192). Edgar repudiates his sense of Self and everything that composes it. Essentially, in changing his apparel, Edgar also completely changes his identity into that of a mad beggar: poor Tom. Further undermining the Romantic notion of identity is the fact that the name he takes on is the general name of a beggar – that is to say, Edgar's new name is not even an individual one; thus, his sense of individuality is even further reduced (McIntire; Shakespeare 2.2.176-180, 184-187, 191-192).

In addition to chivalry and identity, Shakespeare also undermines the Romantic use of love in Sidney's story. For one, there is the love and reconciliation between the father and the legitimate son. In Sidney's version, knowing he has misused his son, the Prince of Paphlagonia pleads, "[w]ell Leonatus," sad he, "since I cannot persuade thee to lead me to that which should end my grief and thy trouble, let me now entreat thee to leave me ... fly, fly from this region only worthy of me" (Sidney 276). Nevertheless, Leonatus refuses to either help his father commit suicide or to abandon him. "Dear father," answered he, "do not take away from me the only remnant of my happiness.

While I have power to do you service I am not wholly miserable” (276). The love that Leonatus feels moves him to try and serve his father and continue his life.

Shakespeare, however, undermines the love and reconciliation between the father and his legitimate son. In Sidney’s story, Leonatus does not conceal his identity from his blind father, thus allowing the latter to feel some kind of gratification in knowing that his son is alive. Edgar, on the other hand, conceals his true identity from his father on more than one occasion. While on the first occasion Edgar’s continued disguise is reasonable, for he meets with his father while the latter still has a death sentence on his head, the other instances of concealment are not. For example, upon seeing his father blind and led by an old man, Edgar says, “[b]ad is the trade that must play fool to sorrow, / Angering itself and others. [to *Gloucester*] Bless thee, master” (Shakespeare 4.1.40-41). Instead of revealing who he is, Edgar continues to play the part of poor Tom in front of his father; hence, the reconciliation, although having literally taken place, for father and son are physically reunited, is deferred. Not only is Gloucester unaware that he has been reunited with his son but, also, because Edgar continues to play the role of Tom, Edgar cannot act like himself in front of his father.

Shakespeare further undermines the reconciliation between father and son by having, as a consequence of it, the death of the former. As Edgar informs Albany of Gloucester’s death, he says:

Never – O fault! – revealed myself unto him  
Until some half-hour past, when I was armed,  
Not sure, though hoping of this good success.  
I asked his blessing and from first to last

Told him our pilgrimage. But his flawed heart,  
Alack, too weak the conflict to support,  
'Twist two extremes of passion, joy and grief,  
Burst smilingly. (5.3.191-198)

Shakespeare defers the reconciliation between Gloucester and Edgar until the very end, just before the latter is going to fight with Edmund. Only then – and during a scene that takes place off stage, though we are informed of it indirectly by Edgar – does Edgar reveal his true identity to his father and, thus, allow the reunion to fully take place. However, while in Sidney's version of the story the Prince of Paphlagonia survives the reconciliation, Shakespeare's version does not allow for this. Upon hearing Edgar reveal himself, Gloucester immediately dies. Since Edgar never acted like himself until the moment of the revelation, Gloucester was never able to actually enjoy the company and consolation of having his son by him...for his son was not then himself (5.3.191-198). Hence, the manner in which the reconciliation was carried out in *King Lear* undermined Sidney's Romantic use of it.

By having Edgar conceal his true identity from his father, though, Shakespeare not only undermines the reconciliation, but also the love between father and son. In Sidney's version of the story, Leonatus does not conceal who he is from the Prince of Paphlagonia. "Dear father,' answered he, 'do not take away from me the only remnant of my happiness. While I have power to do you service I am not wholly miserable'" (Sidney 276). Leonatus openly tells his father what his identity is. Furthermore, as a demonstration of the love that he bears his father, Leonatus clearly pleads to be allowed to serve him. The Prince of Paphlagonia understands the depth of Leonatus's love



because he answers, “‘Ah, my son,’ said he, and with that he groaned as if sorrow strave to break his heart, ‘how evil fits it me to have such a son, and how much doth thy kindness upbraid my wickedness’” (276). There is no question of the love that Leonatus feels for his father, for even the Prince of Paphlagonia, although knows he does not deserve it, admits its existence.

Edgar’s love for his father, on the other hand, can be called into question by his decision to keep from Gloucester the truth about who he is. Grieved by the knowledge of his mistakes, Edgar hears Gloucester say to a servant:

O dear son Edgar,  
The food of thy abused father’s wrath,  
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,  
I’d say I had eyes again. (4.1.23-26)

This scene takes place before Edgar speaks to his father for the second time as poor Tom. Accordingly, he is conscious of the fact that Gloucester longs to be reunited with him once more. Nevertheless, Edgar’s knowledge of this does not make him more inclined to reveal himself.<sup>9</sup> Instead, he continues to play the part of poor Tom. In this way, he deprives his father of his love and true companionship, for he cannot act as himself while pretending to be poor and mad. What, then, is his supposed love for his father? It is clear that Shakespeare’s Gloucester is ashamed of his actions, as was Sidney’s Prince of Paphlagonia, and loves his son; however, this love does not seem to be

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<sup>9</sup> Edgar eventually gives a partial reason as to why he does not reveal himself to Gloucester. It seems to be that Edgar intends to use his disguise as a way of helping him make his father regain the will to live. Nevertheless, knowing that Gloucester has repented and wishes to see his son again, it is difficult to agree with Edgar’s continued deception.

equally reciprocated by Shakespeare's Edgar, as it was by Sidney's Leonatus (4.1.40-41, 23-26).

Shakespeare further undermines the Romantic use of love by having Edgar pretend to do what Sidney's Leonatus obstinately refused: help his father commit suicide. "There is a cliff whose high and bending head / Looks fearfully in the confined deep: / Bring me to the very brim of it" (4.1.76-78). Like the Prince of Paphlagonia, Gloucester wishes to end his miseries by ending his own life. Unlike Leonatus, though, Edgar's response to his father's petition is: "Give me thy arm, / Poor Tom shall lead thee" (4.1.81-82). When the Prince of Paphlagonia asked his son a similar thing, Leonatus ardently protested and would not consent to his wishes. Edgar, on the other hand, accedes. Although he does not lead his father to an actual cliff, Edgar would have Gloucester believe that he has indeed jumped off the edge and survived the fall. Upon seeing that he is still alive, Gloucester complains, "[i]s wretchedness deprived that benefit / To end itself by death?" (4.6.61-62). By fooling his father in these various ways, Edgar shows little love for him: he won't let Gloucester know who he is, he pretends to allow him to commit suicide but then, by preserving his life, won't even let him escape from his miseries in death.<sup>10</sup> While Edgar may prolong Gloucester's life, it is with little meaning that he does so, for he offers his father no sort of filial comfort.

What Edgar seems to offer his father instead of filial comfort is moral counsel. As Edgar pretends to have brought Gloucester to the edge of a cliff he says as an aside, "Why I do trifle thus with his despair / Is done to cure it" (4.6.33-34). Edgar is acting

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<sup>10</sup> Edgar attests that the deception is to make Gloucester believe his life to be a miracle and that this will, accordingly, make Gloucester want to live. However, my point is not so much about Edgar's motives as the mere fact that he is deceiving his father in every possible way.

deceptively, but with a clear purpose in mind: he wants to help his father. Later, after Gloucester believes he has miraculously survived the fall from the cliff, Edgar tells him, “Bear free and patient thoughts” (4.6.80). Patience is one of the virtues that characters from Romances are always learning, and Edgar is attempting to teach his father, in traditional Romantic style, to be patient (McIntire). However, the fact that, in order to offer his father moral counsel, Edgar delays his reconciliation with Gloucester makes his actions Anti-Romantic (for, in the Romances, patience is merely a way of attaining the reconciliation, but not a matter more important than the latter).

In addition to undermining the reconciliation and love between father and son, Shakespeare also undermines these two elements between the brothers. In Sidney’s version, Leonatus and his illegitimate brother, Plexitrus, are reunited in brotherly affection. “But so fell out of it that though at first sight Leonatus saw him with no other eye than as the murderer of his father, and anger already began to paint revenge in many colours; ere long he had not only gotten pity but pardon, and ... an opinion of future amendment” (Sidney 282). Instead of killing his brother and, thus, avenging their father’s death, Leonatus forgives him and they are happily reconciled. This, on Leonatus’s part, shows both love and an adherence to higher principles and virtues, such as forgiveness. However, this is far from the case of the two brothers in Shakespeare’s play.

The reunion between Edgar and Edmund in *King Lear* is anything but a happy one. For one, Shakespeare ends their reunion with the death of Edmund, having him mortally wounded in battle by Edgar in man-to-man combat. Unlike Plexitrus, Edmund is not willing to be humble or seek forgiveness. Likewise, Edgar, unlike Leonatus, is never inclined to be forgiving of his brother’s actions. In a strange and ironic turn of events, it

is Edmund who forgives his elder brother.<sup>11</sup> “... But what art thou / That hast this fortune on me? If thou’rt noble, / I do forgive thee” (Shakespeare 5.3.162-164). Only after his younger brother forgives him does Edgar concede to any sort of “charity” (5.3.164). This “charity” (5.3.164), however, is nothing close to forgiveness – it is merely Edgar allowing his brother to know his true identity.<sup>12</sup> In no moment of his reunion with his younger brother does Edgar exhibit any kind of adherence to higher principles, such as the capacity to forgive, that are themselves features of the Romances.

Shakespeare finishes undermining the Romantic characteristics of Sidney’s version of the story by the end he has in store for Edgar. In Sidney’s version, Leonatus is crowned king and makes no attempt at avoiding to act like one: he assumes his responsibilities. Indeed, there is even the subsequent “fairy-tale” (Fuchs 2) ending of happy brothers in a peaceful kingdom (for the rebels were quelled) (Sidney 282). Arguably, had Leonatus not assumed his role, there would have been no peace in the kingdom and no reconciliation between himself and his brother. However, Shakespeare’s Edgar does not show signs of being a very promising king. Upon being offered the crown, he says:

The weight of this sad time we must obey,

Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

The oldest hath borne most; we that are young

Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (Shakespeare 5.3.322-325)

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<sup>11</sup> At this moment of the play, it is Edmund who suddenly adheres to the higher principles of forgiveness by forgiving the individual who has just mortally wounded him.

<sup>12</sup> According to Sarah E. Gordon, “... the romances challenge the notion of identity ... thanks to knights who do not reveal their names” (76). Thus, for Edgar to abandon anonymity is another Anti-Romantic element of *King Lear*.

In this final speech by Edgar, which culminates the play, there is no ray of hope, no “fairy-tale” (Fuchs 2) ending to repair the suffering and damage that has been caused throughout the play. Instead, everything remains starkly bleak: the time is sad and the new generation will not live as long as the older generation. Edgar is not capable of handling the “weight” (Shakespeare 5.3.322) of the matters that have just occurred: the entire royal family has died and, suddenly, he is asked to be king...to be the leader of the nation. If this is the beginning of Edgar’s reign, it is a very bleak and unpromising one, for it shows that he does not know how to handle and overcome difficult situations and, in fact, that he has no desire to do so or to lead at all (5.3.322-325).

Overall, then, Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is an Anti-Romance because it undermines most of the traditional, Romantic elements not only of the genre itself, but also of the primary sources.

#### IV. *LAMIA*: AN ANTI-ROMANCE

When readers think of John Keats, they often remember him as a poet of Romance (Cox xi). Keats's poetry calls to mind amorous, idealized affairs and swoons from excessive emotion (be it happiness or sadness). Indeed, it is almost inevitable for such notions to be generally accepted by readers when there are lines such as the following from "You say you love, but with a voice:"

O breathe a word or two of fire!  
Smile, as if those words should burn me,  
Squeeze as lovers should – O kiss  
And in thy heart inurn me –  
O love me truly! (21-25).

The poem "You say you love, but with a voice" is filled with such passion that it is difficult to think of anything but romance when reading it. The words are made of "fire" (21) and the smiles are hot enough that the words have the incendiary potential of "burn[ing]" the recipient (22). The speaker even begs the beloved to "squeeze" (23), "kiss" (23), and bury him in her heart – ending only with the plea that has been repeated throughout the poem: for the beloved to love the speaker truly (24-25). The poem is, essentially, saturated with elements of love and romance. Indeed, much of Keats's poetry seems saturated with romance and, furthermore, seems to adhere well to the standards of the Romance genre.

However, as Stillinger indicates in "Keats and Romance," Keats eventually became dissatisfied with the Romance genre and began writing in an Anti-Romantic manner. Stillinger also notes the importance of Shakespeare to Keats's change in poetic

fashion (593). I argue that Keats's *Lamia* is a prime example not only of his Anti-Romantic experimentations, but also of the importance of Shakespeare, particularly *King Lear*, to his altered poetic attitude. Indeed, by using Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a frame with which to read Keats's *Lamia*, I believe that we, as readers, can come to a fuller understanding of Keats's Anti-Romance, *Lamia*.

The presence of two plots is one of the many ways in which *King Lear* can be a frame of understanding for *Lamia*. Like Shakespeare, Keats was drawing from more than one source to compose *Lamia*. The Hermes and nymph plot comes from a different source than the love story between Lycius and Lamia. For the latter, Keats was probably drawing upon Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Edward Berwick's translation of Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (Chambers 586; Daruwala 83; Norris 322).

Keats's *Lamia* also resembles Shakespeare's *King Lear* in that each has Romantic elements in it. One of the traditional Romantic elements that *Lamia* seems to share with other Romances – and with *King Lear* – is the theme of love. In Shakespeare's play, there is the subject of love between Lear and his daughters, Cordelia and the King of France, Gloucester and his sons, and Kent and Lear. The subject of love is so prevalent in *King Lear* that its importance becomes unquestionable, for it can even be seen as the trigger of the play when Lear, to divide his kingdom, establishes a love test. As for Keats's *Lamia*, the poem also has the theme of love not only present within it, but also as a catalyst for the poem itself.

*Lamia* begins with the love tale of “[t]he ever-smitten Hermes ...” (Keats I, 7) and the object of his affection, the nymph:

Ah, what a world of love was at her feet!

So Hermes thought, and a celestial heat

Burnt from his winged heels to either ear,

...

From vale to vale, from wood to wood, he flew,

Breathing upon the flowers his passion new (I, 21-23, 27, 28)

It is because Hermes is in love that he is searching for the nymph and, in the process, meets Lamia (which then leads to the remainder of the poem). As in “You say you love, but with a voice,” the Hermes of *Lamia* is burning with passion for his beloved. To Hermes, there is a “... world of love ...” (I, 21) at the feet of the nymph, and this makes his passion for her ardently strong. The adherence to the traditional Romantic theme of love is made twofold by the presence of a second love plot: that between Lamia and Lycius. As Lamia tells Hermes, “I love a youth of Corinth – O the bliss” (I, 117).

The presence of a second love plot in *Lamia* further emphasizes the traditional Romantic element of love in many ways. For one, there is the motif of love at first sight. Lamia first sees Lycius in a dream and, upon doing so, “... fell into a swooning love of him” (I, 219). Similarly, upon first seeing Lamia, Lycius is struck with love for her. “... [S]o delicious were the words she sung / It seem’d he had lov’d them a whole summer long” (I, 249-250).<sup>13</sup> The intensity of the love he feels for this woman he has never seen before is such that he feels as if he has already been in love with her for an extended period of time. Furthermore, the depth of his love is such that he cannot help but exclaim,

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<sup>13</sup> The motif of love at first sight is doubly emphasized by the manner in which both Lamia and Lycius fall in love with each other.



“For pity do not this sad heart belie – / Even as thou vanishest so I shall die” (I, 259-260). Lycius’s sudden love for Lamia is such that he feels that, without her, he would die. Indeed, his love for Lamia is so intense that he goes to the point of completely idolizing her. “...Ah, Goddess, see / Whether my eyes can ever turn from thee!” (I, 257). Upon seeing Lamia, Lycius immediately places her upon a pedestal and makes her the object of his adoration, for he does not merely see her as a beautiful woman, but as a “Goddess” (I, 257).

In addition to the theme of love, Keats’s poem also has several “fairy-tale” (Fuchs 2) elements typical of Romances. The magical, “fairy-tale” (Fuchs 2) element is present from the very beginning of *Lamia*: “Upon a time, before the faery broods / Drove Nymph and Satry from the prosperous woods” (Keats I, 1, 2). The poem opens in a time before fairies and nymphs. And yet, *Lamia* is full of features that seem to come straight out of fairytale: wishes are granted, transformations take place, love comes about at first sight and, for a while, there is nothing to stop the lovers from being together. Indeed, by the end of the first part of the poem, there even seems to be the potential for the traditionally Romantic “... happy and satisfactory ending” (Goodwin 290). This potentially happy ending is evident by the terms in which the lovers are described in *Lamia*: “Happy in beauty, life, and love, and every thing, / A song of love, too sweet for earthly lyres ...” (Keats I, 288-289). Their love is such that it is beyond the limitations of human language and, as such, the reader comes to believe that nothing should go wrong. Indeed, even when danger seems to ominously enter the stage in the figure of Apollonius, there is still hope for a happy ending because the lovers initially “[s]hut [themselves] from the busy world ...” (I, 397).

In addition to the ““fairy-tale”” (Fuchs 2) elements, *Lamia* also has characters in it who, like those in Romances, “... are distinguished from the everyday by their ideal quality ...” (Saunders 2). The best example of such an idealized individual seems to be the titular character of *Lamia* herself:

[Lamia] was a maid  
More beautiful than ever twisted braid,  
...  
A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore  
Of love deep learned to the red heart's core:  
Not one hour old yet of sciential brain  
To unperplex bliss from its neighbor pain;  
...  
As though in Cupid's college she had spent  
Sweet days a lovely graduate ... (Keats I, 185-186, 189-192, 197, 198)

Lamia is the perfect, idealized woman. Not only is she beautiful, but she is also (simultaneously) virginal and knowledgeable of love. In fact, she is so knowledgeable about love that Keats describes her as being a graduate of Cupid's college. Additionally, her beauty is crowned by an intelligence that can penetrate and divide the usually inseparable Keatsian duo of happiness and pain. Indeed, the extent of Lamia's idealization is such that there are no boundaries to contain or limit it. This is best noted when Lycius first turns to see her:

And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,  
Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,

And still the cup was full ... (I, 251-253)

Lamia is simply more than anyone can take in. She is, in a way, like Cordelia in *King Lear*: a character who stands out from the others – ideal and more appealing than the negative characters around her. In the words of Shakespeare's King of France:

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,  
Most choice forsaken and most loved despised,

...

Not all the dukes of waterish Burgandy

Can buy this unprized precious maid of me. (Shakespeare 1.1252-253,  
260-261)

Cordelia is an unparalleled, ideal woman. Indeed, her worth is such that, despite her father's attempt to devalue her, she is made even more valuable by his actions; her worth cannot be diminished by anything. Similarly, Lamia is described as an ideal woman, one with no seeming parallel. Such is Lamia's beauty that, even when there seems like there can be no more to take in of it, it is still there, endlessly and persistently present.

In addition to having an idealized character, *Lamia* has another feature typical of a Romance: a death and re-birth scene. This parallels, in a way, what may be interpreted as the death and re-birth scenes in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The first scene of such a nature is between Gloucester and Edgar. When Gloucester wants to jump from a cliff, rather than stop him, Edgar pretends to assist him in committing suicide. Subsequently, when Gloucester awakens, he believes that his life is a miracle – that he has been given a second chance and should, accordingly, take advantage of it. The second death and re-

birth comes about when Lear walks in carrying Cordelia's body. When he walks in with her, she is still breathing and, up until the last moment, Lear fancies that his daughter will come back to life. In fact, at the moment of his death, Lear firmly believes that his daughter is not dead and still breathes.

Like *King Lear*, Keats's *Lamia* has two death and re-birth scenes. The first one is for Lamia herself as she is transformed from a snake into a woman:

Left to herself, the serpent now began  
To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,  
Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,  
Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;  
Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear,  
Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,  
...  
Whither fled Lamia, now a lady bright,  
A full-born beauty new and exquisite? (I, 146-151, 171-172)

The transformation scene can be taken as a kind of death and re-birth. The serpent dies. However, somewhat like the phoenix, there is a life that emerges from that death. Lamia is reborn – while the snake version of her dies, the female version is born, and we can now see Lamia as a beautiful woman.

The second death and re-birth scene is for Lycius:

He, sick to lose  
The amorous promise of her lone complain,  
Swoon'd, murmuring of love, and pale with pain.

...

[But Lamia] Put her new lips to his, and gave afresh

The life she had so tangled in her mesh[.] (I, 287-289, 294-295)

Upon Lamia threatening to leave, Lycius begins to swoon to death out of the prospect of losing her. His death is only staved off as Lamia revives him with a kiss. Accordingly, Lycius is re-born in Lamia's love, just as Lamia was re-born out of love for him.<sup>14</sup>

However, despite the initial, superficial adherence to the Romance form, Keats moves away from the traditional expectations of the genre in *Lamia* just as Shakespeare did in *King Lear*. For one, there is the manner in which the source material is handled. Like Shakespeare, Keats alters the source material considerably. Shakespeare, for example, has Cordelia die before any sort of happiness can be re-established in the play, unlike the source material that preserved her. Similarly, Keats has Lycius die at the end of the poem, unlike the source material for the Lamia and Lycius plot that, while making Lamia vanish, kept the Corinthian youth alive. Indeed, the manner in which Keats handled the overall material for *Lamia* is a reversal of the way in which one of his sources, Burton, handled it (Daruwala 87).

Furthermore, like *King Lear*, *Lamia* undermines the traditional Romantic element of love.<sup>15</sup> According to Terrence Allen Hoagwood, "Keats and Social Context: Lamia,"

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<sup>14</sup> I say that Lamia is re-born out of love for Lycius because when she petitions Hermes to change her back into a woman she says, "I love a youth of Corinth – O the bliss!/ Give me my woman's form, and place me where he is" ("Lamia Part I" 119-120).

<sup>15</sup> I say that love is undermined in Shakespeare's *King Lear* because of the manner in which several of the relationships that call for love actually function. Although love should not be measured, Lear establishes a love contest at the beginning of the play. There is also the lack of love that Regan, Goneril, and Edmund show their fathers and their murderous attempts on the people they are supposed to love.

“the poem presents, and then undermines, a sentimental and conventional fantasy about love ... [*Lamia*] insists equally on the falsehood of sentimental and idealized fictions ...” (691). Idealization and love – two central components of the Romance – are completely subverted in Keats’s *Lamia*. This can be seen in Lamia’s feelings toward Lycius when he is swooning to death. “The cruel lady, without any show / Of sorrow for her tender favourite’s woe” (Keats I, 290-291). Although she claims to love the Corinthian youth, she seems unmoved by his near death – a death brought on by his great love for her. Although, in typical love fashion, she knows that Lycius will not really die at this moment, she is nevertheless taking advantage of his feelings for her, exploiting them unnecessarily.<sup>16</sup> While she may have been described as an ideal woman, Lamia sometimes seems to lack the feelings of a true lover. Furthermore, she utilizes her beauty merely to bring him under her control. “And as he from one trance was wakening / Into another, she began to sing” (I, 296-297). Lamia is initially, contrary to the ideal female hero of a Romance, a kind of femme fatale.

Another aspect of Romance that Keats deviates from is the change in setting. Typically, a Romance will move from the corrupt city out into the ideal, pastoral world (Collier 52). *Lamia*, however, moves in the opposite direction. Part I of the poem begins in a pastoral setting. There is the opening pastoral scene of vales and woods in which Hermes finds Lamia and the nymph he has been seeking. Then there is the valley, away from the city, where Lamia meets Lycius and where he falls in love with her. While they are in the pastoral setting – as is typically the case – there is no danger to their love.

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<sup>16</sup> Lamia’s behavior toward Lycius when they meet might be seen by some as playful and, to a certain extent, it is. However, my point is that Lamia is being playful with love when, in fact, love is not a game and should be taken seriously. Accordingly, she should not be playing with the feelings of the man she claims to love so much.

However, in *Lamia*, Keats moves the lovers' setting from the pastoral to "... [past] the city gates ..." (Keats I, 348) – he has them enter the city of Corinth. Once inside the city, there is the immediate intrusion of the exterior world on that of the private sphere of the lovers (an intrusion that, in Keats's work, as in most other works of literature, is always ominous). Both Lycius and Lamia feel the disturbance of the outer world, for he "[muffled] his face, of greeting friends in fear" (I, 362) and she had her "... 'tender palm dissolve[d] in dew'" (I, 370). This movement, contrary to that so typical of the Romances, is one of the features that make *Lamia* an Anti-Romance.

*Lamia* is also an Anti-Romance because, like *King Lear*, there is an attempt to test and display love. In Shakespeare's play, the testing and display of love open the play with the love contest in front of the royal court between Lear's daughters – a contest of quantification that triggers the rest of the disastrous tragedy of the play. Similarly, in *Lamia*, there is an attempt to put love on display.

'What mortal hath a prize, that other men  
May be confounded and abash'd withal,  
But lets it sometimes pace abroad majestic,  
And triumph, as in thee I should rejoice  
Amid the hoarse alarm of Corinth's voice.  
Let my foes choke, and my friends shout afar  
While through the thronged streets your bridal car  
Wheels round its dazzling spokes.' (II, 57-64)

The display of love is prompted by Lamia's lover, Lycius. In fact, his purpose in marrying Lamia is solely so that the public can see and envy his private felicity and love.

Lycius is behaving, in a way, like Lear: he is putting love out for public display. Lamia, on the other hand, behaves like Cordelia upon learning of Lycius's intentions: "Beseeching him, the while his hand she wrung, / To change his purpose" (II, 68-69). Like Cordelia, Lamia does not want to participate in a public exhibition of love. As the love test in *King Lear* begins, Cordelia says to herself, "What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent" (Shakespeare 1.1.62). Cordelia refuses to put her love on display at court (which is where the love test was being held). Thus, when her father asks what she has to say about her love for him she replies with a simple "[n]othing" (1.1.89).

However, unlike Cordelia, Lamia eventually "consented" (Keats II, 82) to the petition. As in *King Lear*, such a public exhibition of love is one of the factors that steer the plot of Keats's *Lamia* down tragic path:

The day appear'd, and all the gossip rout.  
O senseless Lycius! Madman! wherefore flout  
The silent-blessing fate, warm cloister'd hours,  
And show to common eyes these secret bowers? (II, 146-149)

Keats clearly indicates that the public exhibition of Lycius and Lamia's affection would make the lovers suffer and refers to Lycius as a "senseless" (II, 147) "madman" (II, 147).

Another element from the Anti-Romantic *King Lear* that *Lamia* contains is separation and reconciliation (Smith 284). However, in *Lamia* the separation and reconciliation that take place is between Lycius and his instructor, Apollonius, who treats the youth as a father would a son. Their separation comes about due to Lamia. The first time Lycius sees Apollonius after encountering Lamia, he shrinks "... closer, as they met



and past, / Into his mantle, adding wings to haste” (I, 366-367). Lycius did not wish to be with his ““good instructor”” (I, 376). Afterward, Lamia explicitly asks Lycius to maintain this separation:

‘But if, as now it seems, your vision rests  
With any pleasure on me, do not bid  
Old Apollonius – from him keep me hid.’ (I, 99-101)

It is due to Lamia, then, that the instructor and his student are kept separate from each other. Despite this initial separation, which is maintained throughout most of the poem, they are later able to reconcile.

[Lycius led] the old man through the inner doors broad-spread;  
With reconciling words and courteous mein  
Turning into sweet milk the sophist’s spleen. (II, 170-173)

Just as Lear and Cordelia and Gloucester and Edgar are reconciled in *King Lear*, so are Lycius and Apollonius in *Lamia*. However, the reconciliations that take place in *King Lear* lead to negative consequences. For example, when Cordelia reappears and reconciles with her father, the events that follow are merely tragic because they lose the war, she is murdered, and Lear, having lost what he loved most, dies. As for Edgar’s reconciliation with his father, it tears his father’s heart in two between extreme joy and extreme suffering. Accordingly, while the paternal/filial reconciliations that take place in the play manage to bring about some joy and good (the reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia being a prime, and touching, example), they inevitably also lead to a great deal of suffering and death.

Similarly, the reconciliation between Lycius and Apollonius is also one that leads to suffering and death. The first victim of this reconciliation is Lycius's bride, Lamia.

Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,

...

Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made

The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade. (II, 234, 237-238)

The destructive power of this kind of philosophy – of sheer reason and rationality – is being highlighted in this passage. According to Keats, philosophy is a destructive burden that hinders flight (probably the symbolic flight of creativity and imagination) and undoes beauty.<sup>17</sup>

In *Lamia*, Apollonius stands for philosophy: he is reason itself and wields the power of reason unwaveringly. Thus, once he is reconciled with his pupil, he does not care that the young Corinthian youth is happy and in love. Rather than bothering to notice – much less care about – the feelings of Lycius, Apollonius utilizes his position to attack and destroy what Lycius loves: Lamia.

‘And shall I [Apollonius] see thee [Lycius] made a serpent's prey?’

Then Lamia breath'd death breath; the sophist's eye,

Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,

Keen, cruel, perçant, stinging ...

...

He look'd and look'd again a level – No!

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<sup>17</sup> In this sense, philosophy – Apollonius's kind of philosophy, emphasizing rationality above all else – is Anti-Romantic. Romances leave the reader with a “faity-tale feeling” (Fuchs 2) – a feeling that is, by its very nature, beyond the scope of philosophical rationalization.

‘A Serpent!’ echoed he ... (II, 298-301, 304-305)

Resolutely, Apollonius reveals Lamia’s identity to Lycius. Apollonius’s gaze – a look which represents the adherence to “reality,” to what one can see as what is true – goes right through Lamia. Under his penetrating stare she suffers and, eventually, has no choice but to vanish “... with a frightful scream ...” (II, 306). Ironically, the other victim of the reconciliation is Lycius himself. From the moment that Lamia vanishes, “... Lycius’s arms were empty of delight, / As were his limbs of life, from that same night” (II, 307-308).

Furthermore, the vanishing and death of the bride and groom, respectively, reveal another element that *Lamia* has in common with the Anti-Romantic *King Lear*: the intrusion of a man who manages to separate the husband from his wife (Smith 279). In *King Lear*, the man who intrudes upon and disrupts the marriage between Goneril and Albany and Regan and Cornwall is Edmund.<sup>18</sup> In *Lamia*, the intruder is Apollonius. It is because of his intrusion that Lamia is forced to disappear and, consequently, that Lycius dies.<sup>19</sup> Apollonius effectively and irrevocably manages to separate the groom from his bride through death.

Additionally, the manner in which Apollonius intrudes is akin to another element in *King Lear*: a paternal decree that frustrates the marriage of the young couple (Cohen 105). This intrusion is carried out by Apollonius – the father figure, in a way, of Lycius – when he says:

‘Fool! Fool!’ repeated he, while his eyes still

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<sup>18</sup> Even though Regan and Goneril woo Edmund, what is very clear is that, once Edmund enters the scene, the two wives are anxious to leave their husbands and be with him instead.

<sup>19</sup> Although Lycius has much of the blame – Lamia, after all, did not want to go through a public display – the fault is, ultimately, Apollonius’s. Only when he comes in does Lamia then vanish.

Relented not, nor mov'd; 'from every ill  
Of life have I preserv'd thee to this day,  
And shall I see thee made a serpent's prey?' (Keats II, 295-298)

Apollonius decrees that Lycius cannot marry Lamia because she is a serpent and, consequently, he believes she will only harm Lycius. It is only after this decree from Lycius's father figure that Lamia "... breath'd death breath ..." (II, 299). Essentially, the decree that Lycius and Lamia cannot be together triggers their effectual separation: Lamia vanishes and Lycius dies. While in *King Lear* the father's decree does not effectively stop the marriage of Cordelia and the King of France, it is nevertheless just as present as it is here in *Lamia* and, eventually, has consequences just as negative. For, although Lear does not stop the marriage of his youngest daughter, his decree sets off a chain of events that eventually make Cordelia leave her husband and come back to rescue him. This temporary separation from her husband, though, is made permanent because, in attempting to save her father, Cordelia is eventually killed.

Another Anti-Romantic element that *Lamia* shares with *King Lear* is the futile cry for divine intervention. Despite Lear's incessant calls for Nature and his gods to intervene on his behalf and bring about justice, there are no replies to his pleas. This is contrary to the divine intervention from the gods that usually takes place in the other Shakespearean Romances – an intervention that manages to avert the otherwise inevitable tragic culmination of the plot. The absence of such an intervention in *King Lear* is an element of Anti-Romance and, additionally, an element that is clearly seen in *Lamia* when Lycius cries:

'Shut, shut those juggling eyes, thou ruthless man!

Turn them aside, wretch! or the righteous ban  
Of all the Gods, whose dreadful images  
Here represent their shadowy presences,  
May pierce them on the sudden with the thorn  
Of painful blindness; leaving thee forlorn.' (II, 277-282)

In this passage, Lycius is asking his gods to intervene on his – and Lamia’s – behalf and punish Apollonius with blindness. Considering that it is the philosopher’s gaze that “like a sharp spear, [goes] through [Lamia] utterly” (II, 300), if he were to be struck with blindness the tragedy would be averted: she would not suffer and vanish due to his penetrating stare and Lycius would not die as a result of her absence. However, as in *King Lear*, the cry for divine intervention goes unanswered and tragedy inevitably ensues.

In fact, the tragedy that ensues in *Lamia* is closely related to two other elements found in *King Lear*: painful, psychological illumination and intensely poignant emotional effects (Greenblatt 103). In *King Lear*, these moments are found throughout the play as Lear gradually realizes that Cordelia was the daughter that loved him most and, likewise gradually, suffers the consequences of his bad actions. However, in *Lamia*, the moment of illumination and pain come simultaneously, and suddenly, at the end. Throughout most of the poem, Lycius is ignorant that Lamia was (and, in Apollonius’s opinion, still is) a serpent. Indeed, the very entrance and the stares of Apollonius do nothing to indicate to Lycius that something might potentially be wrong (he merely believes that Apollonius is harming his bride). Only after Lycius suddenly being to plead for help in vain does the moment of illumination come. At this moment, Apollonius reveals one of the truth’s

behind Lamia: she is ““a serpent”” (II, 305). This moment of illumination is accompanied by Lamia vanishing from sight. However, rather than saving his pupil, Apollonius’s revelation – and Lamia’s subsequent parting – is too painful for Lycius to bear, leading, essentially, to his death: “And Lycius’ arms were empty of delight, / As were his limbs of life, from that same night” (II, 307-308).

The final Anti-Romantic element that *Lamia* and *King Lear* have in common is the presentation of flawed heroes (Greenblatt 103). In *King Lear*, none of the heroes – be it Lear, Cordelia, Kent, Gloucester, or Edgar – is presented without some kind of essential flaw in their natures. For Lear, it is the continual desire to quantify love. For Cordelia, her flaw lies in her inability to express her emotions. Kent, on the other hand, has the character flaw of speaking too bluntly. Gloucester’s flaw lies in his inability to discern the character of others. As for Edgar, his flaw is, initially, naiveté (although, arguably, he is the only character to overcome his flaw).

Similarly, none of the heroes in *Lamia* is presented as perfect. Lamia, for one, seemingly the perfect woman, can be cruel and manipulative when it comes to Lycius. Indeed, when they first meet in the valley, she puts him through a near death experience simply to later revive him and enchant him with a song. Nevertheless, the pain she goes through to attain Lycius, her fear of Apollonius, the public display of her love for Lycius that she unwillingly submits to, and her futile pleas to Lycius make her a character that the reader can greatly sympathize with. This is likewise the case with Lycius – a youth with whom the reader initially sympathizes upon seeing him entangled in Lamia’s beauty and lies but who, afterward, paves the path for his own destruction by wishing to ostensibly display his love publicly and marry Lamia against her will. As for Apollonius,

it is seemingly admirable that he desires to save his pupil from Lamia; however, his flaw lies in not considering that perhaps Lycius has no desire to be saved and, accordingly, Apollonius merely intrudes where such an intrusion is not welcomed and, consequently, brings about tragedy.

Overall, *Lamia*'s tragic ending is one of its most obvious parallels with *King Lear*; nevertheless, it is not what makes the poem an Anti-Romance. Rather, Keats's Anti-Romance is achieved through his undermining of Romance genre expectations and his use of *King Lear* as an Anti-Romantic model. Although Keats experimented with a wide array of Anti-Romantic poetry, I believe that *Lamia* is the culmination of his attempts. Furthermore, I believe that much of the power and appeal of *Lamia* comes from the role that Shakespeare's *King Lear* played in the former's conception. Writers live in a world of writers and, as readers, it is important for us to understand this, for it opens a window that allows us to comprehend a single work of fiction in light of other works that may have contributed to it. Indeed, when we read intertextually, we expand our horizons and understanding of literature in general.

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