

The Fallacy of Tragic Heroes Among the Marginalized in “Lappin and Lapinova”
and *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (*Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy*)

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Abstract

Taken alongside Edward Albee's *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (*Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy*), Virginia Woolf's "Lappin and Lapinova" is placed in a new frame of reference: tragedy. Tragedy is a literary convention that has, in the modern day, been broadened to include the everyman, as opposed to the Aristotelian Greek in which tragic protagonists included the likes of heroes, princes, kings, nobles, and demigods. Despite this, marginalized individuals still fail to align with the criteria outlined by Aristotle. Rosalind, Woolf's protagonist, is parallel to Albee's Martin, yet the introduction of gender prevents Rosalind from serving as an Aristotelian protagonist as Martin does. This bears the question: can the marginalized ever be considered tragic heroes? A close reading of both works and a philosophical approach through G. W. F. Hegel's concept of the "Self" and the "Other", combined with French philosopher Simone Beauvoir's feminist perspective, imply that the two are incompatible, bearing the conclusion that characters whose tragedy and suffering come as a result of their own marginalization, who are not complicit in said marginalization, cannot be counted as Aristotelian tragic heroes.

Introduction

Tragedy has changed. Pity and fear are emotions that have always plagued mankind; subsequently, tragedy is an art form that has existed for centuries, providing its audiences with *catharsis*, a purgation of those very emotions and, in Joe Sachs' interpretation of Aristotle, "a beautiful metaphor for the peculiar tragic pleasure, the feeling of being washed or cleansed" (Sachs). However, the objects of this pity and fear and the catalysts for this *catharsis* have shifted in nature. Where once tragic protagonists included the likes of heroes, princes, kings, nobles, and demigods—look no further than Shakespeare, Aeschylus, and Sophocles for ample fodder—the dawn of the 20th and 21st centuries saw a rise in the tragic everyman. The protagonists of such famous modern tragedies and pseudo-tragedies as *Death of a Salesman*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, *Buried Child*, *'night*, *Mother*, *The Great Gatsby*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Flowers for Algernon* include farmers, school-children, washed-up actors, unemployed drifters, and depressed divorcees in their ranks.

It is into this context that "Lappin and Lapinova," a prominent story from Virginia Woolf's *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, published posthumously in 1944 by her husband Leonard¹, and *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (*Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy*), a 2000 play by the legendary Edward Albee, were birthed. *The Goat* has been turned over by academics for two decades in the context of its third title, *Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy*; in John Kuhn's summary, "the play contains characteristic elements of Renaissance tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy and pastoral. Nevertheless, Albee's second subtitle advises, and the play responds well to being called a tragedy" (26). Meanwhile, "Lappin and Lapinova" gives up its subtleties—and indeed, its very genre—less forthrightly. Categorized intermittently as a tale of mental illness, a cry for animal rights, a suicide motif, and even a modern-day fable, "Lappin and

¹ foreword by Leonard Woolf, 1st edition

Lapinova”, though well-enjoyed (and, as one of the few stories Woolf wrote explicitly to make money, financially successful [Simpson, 151]), failed to leave a lasting mark on the public consciousness. However, when read with Albee’s *Goat*, something strange emerges: though separated by nearly six decades, the two stories mirror each other to an eerie degree. Although it is well-known that Albee had an awareness if not an admiration for Woolf—his famous play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* attests to that—there is no evidence on whether he ever encountered “Lappin and Lapinova”; nevertheless, the similarities remain. At a basic level, both stories involve a spouse (for Woolf, the orphan Rosalind Thorburn; for Albee, the architect Martin Gray) spurning their loved one in favor of animal-related fantasies (for Woolf, a metaphorical rabbit; for Albee, a literal goat), leading to the destruction of a marriage and the ruination of a family.

Taken alongside *The Goat*, “Lappin and Lapinova” is placed squarely in a new frame of reference: tragedy. *The Goat* is a textbook example of this Greek literary convention, almost cheekily so, and the thrust of its story is near-identical to that of “Lappin and Lapinova”; by the law of transitive property, it would, therefore, seem logical to categorize “Lappin and Lapinova” as tragic as well. However, there is one major difference between them: gender. Rosalind, Woolf’s protagonist, is parallel to Albee’s Martin, and Rosalind’s husband, Ernest, squares up against Martin’s wife, Stevie. When applied to gender, the criteria for tragedy in its classic, Greek conception strangely crumble. In a way, it seems uniquely Woolfian that the introduction of sex could so deftly fell what seems on a surface level to be logical and true. Nevertheless, though Martin and Rosalind (as well as Ernest and Stevie) behave identically, the introduction of gender prevents Rosalind from serving as an Aristotelian protagonist, bearing the question: can the marginalized ever be considered tragic heroes? A philosophical approach to the question

through G. W. F. Hegel's concept of the "Self" and the "Other", combined with French philosopher Simone Beauvoir's feminist perspective, imply that the two are presently incompatible.

"Lappin and Lapinova" and *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*: A Comparison

Though seldom, if ever, considered together, "Lappin and Lapinova" and *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* have sufficiently similar plots and subtleties of tone and writing to make them plausible objects of comparison. In order to deconstruct the effect of gender marginalization upon the tragic form in these stories, a close reading of both becomes necessary.

Both stories open on scenes of, if not domestic bliss, then domestic contentment. Rosalind and Ernest Thorburn have just wed. Although ostensibly an enjoyable event, the wedding is given such brief and perfunctory description that the reader will miss it if they blink; quickly, the wedding celebrations have cooled, leaving behind a quiet scene as, four days later, Rosalind sits alone in her new house and acclimates herself to her new station. Despite the muted atmosphere, "[Rosalind and Ernest] were very happy," the servants surmise, watching the two enjoy breakfast together (Woolf). Much in the same vein, Martin and Stevie, though certainly not bubbling with marital bliss, share the comfort and ease of longtime companions, casually finishing one another's sentences as Martin struggles to get his day started:

MARTIN: What's the matter with me?

STEVIE: You're fifty.

MARTIN: No; more than that.

STEVIE: The old foreboding? The sense that everything going right is a sure sign that everything's going wrong, of all the awful to come? All that? [i; 10-11]

Martin and Stevie are both aware that passions wane—as Stevie phrases it, there are "inevitable... lessenings" [ii; 59]—but understand that this is part of life; the point is, in the

words of Catalina Florescu, “They are here and now for each other, and this is much more reassuring than anything else” (Florescu). Their wit shines through in their jokes and quips; more importantly, it is emblematic of their intimate familiarity with one another:

MARTIN: (*Serious*) Am I too young for Alzheimer’s?

STEVIE: Probably. Isn’t it nice to be too young for something?

MARTIN: (*Mind elsewhere*) Um-hum.

STEVIE: The joke is, if you can remember what it’s called you don’t have it.

MARTIN: Have what?

STEVIE: Alz... (*they both laugh, he kisses her forehead*) [i; 12-13]

Laughter imbues the first acts of both works. Rosalind and Ernest quickly establish an in-joke, making them feel, like Martin and Stevie, “in league together against the rest of the world” (Woolf). Rosalind, coming to the decision that Ernest “[does] not look like Ernest,” realizes that his nose twitches when he eats, making the “muscular young man with the straight nose, the blue eyes, and the very firm mouth” incongruously resemble a rabbit (Woolf). Ernest, amused at Rosalind’s laughter, begins to twitch his nose on purpose, and so a private world is established: “she laughed and laughed; and he laughed too” (Woolf). Similarly, Kuhn observes of *The Goat* that “the first of the three scenes rely on laughter—sympathetic in its recognitions, delighted at the quick wit and fast recoveries, drawn on by the intelligence and eloquence of the dialogue, sometimes uneasy or startled at the audacity of the conversation or image” (5). Like Ernest, Stevie, too, runs with her spouse’s strange sense of humor:

(The next several speeches are done in a greatly exaggerated Noel Coward manner: English accents, flamboyant gestures)

STEVIE: Something’s going on, isn’t it!?

MARTIN: Yes! I’ve fallen in love!

STEVIE: I knew it!

MARTIN: Hopelessly!

STEVIE: I knew it!

MARTIN: I fought against it!

STEVIE: Oh, you poor darling!

MARTIN: Fought hard!

STEVIE: I suppose you'd better tell me!

MARTIN: I can't! I can't!

STEVIE: Tell me! Tell me!

MARTIN: Her name is Sylvia!

STEVIE: Sylvia? Who is Sylvia?

MARTIN: She's a goat; Sylvia is a goat! (*Acting manner dropped; normal tone now; serious, flat*) She's a goat.

STEVIE: (*Long pause; she stares, finally smiles. She giggles, chortles, moves toward the hall; normal tone*) You're too much! (*Exits*) [i; 16-17]

Yet, unbeknownst to the protagonists, the readers sense turmoil on the horizon. Tragedy and comedy have often intertwined, even in the Greek; after all, in the words of the French poet Maurice Regnault, "the absence of tragedy in a tragic world gives birth to comedy." This story structure is not unknown to the audience. It could even be called prototypical: the jolly, expositional first act belying a change of fortune rumbling underneath: "[...] but how long does such happiness last?" the Thorburns' servants asked themselves, "and each answered according to his own circumstances" (Woolf); "It's probably the Eumenides," says Martin in response to the sound of the dishwasher [i; 22]. The audience can all but predict the coming tides, even in the face of apparent tranquility and humor—"God help us," says Kuhn, "we laugh" (5). Unfortunately for both couples, the laughter will soon cease, as Rosalind slips so deeply into her fantasy world of rabbits that she cannot cope without it, and it is revealed that Martin is, indeed, "screwing" [i; 43] a goat he calls Sylvia.

This moment, in the Greek tradition, is known as *peripeteia*, a reversal (Aristotle). Rosalind's comes in the form of a dinner party. Rosalind and her husband had ended their honeymoon with their fantasy identities firmly established:

He was King Lappin; she was Queen Lapinova. They were the opposite of each other; he was bold and determined; she wary and undependable. He ruled over the busy world of rabbits; her world was a desolate, mysterious place, which she

ranged mostly by moonlight. All the same, their territories touched; they were King and Queen (Woolf).

It is now Rosalind's in-laws' fiftieth wedding anniversary, a party she has "dreaded"; her extended family are wealthy and numerous, while she herself is an orphan of no means (Woolf). Lost among the opulence and unfamiliar faces, Rosalind finds herself entirely miserable until her brother-in-law unknowingly speaks the magic word:

"Little devils! . . . Shoot 'em! Jump on 'em with big boots! That's the only way to deal with 'em . . . rabbits!" (Woolf)

Instantly, Rosalind is revived. Upon seeing Ernest's nose twitch, the dinner party transforms: her father-in-law became a poacher; "Celia, the unmarried daughter, who always nosed out other people's secrets... she was a white ferret with pink eyes" (Woolf); the table becomes a golden moor. Retreating further into her fantasy world, even the prose takes on animalistic characteristics:

"Oh, King Lappin!" she cried as they went home together in the fog, "if your nose hadn't twitched just at that moment, I should have been trapped!"

"But you're safe," said King Lappin, pressing her paw.

"Quite safe," she answered.

And they drove back through the Park, King and Queen of the marsh, of the mist, and of the gorse-scented moor (Woolf).

Insulated in fantasy, Rosalind's obsession worsens. She tosses and turns in bed at night, "twisting, in and out, round and round, hunting, being hunted, hearing the bay of hounds and horns; flying, escaping" (Woolf); she sits before the fire in her home and instead feels as if she is squatting in wet grass at a stream. She begs Ernest to return to the rabbit world with her, yet her

constant cajoling begins to chafe; he becomes angry at her when she wakes him up in the middle of the night and refuses to soothe her fears, leaving her to face the terror alone.

Martin, too, must deal with a reckoning, a moment in which his fantasy is held to the fire. His *peripeteia* arrives in the form of a tell-all letter from his friend Ross, delivered to Stevie. Instantly, Stevie's laughter dies alongside the audience's:

STEVIE: Do you know what I thought—what I thought after I'd read the letter, right to the end? [...] Well, I laughed, of course: a grim joke but an awfully funny one. "That Ross, I tell you, that Ross! [...] It's funny... in its... awful way, but it's way overboard, Ross!" So, I shook my head and laughed—at the awfulness of it, the absurdity, the awfulness; some things are so awful you have to laugh—and then I listened to myself laughing, and I began to wonder why I was—*laughing*[...] And just like that (*snaps her fingers*) I stopped; I stopped laughing. I realized—probably in the way if you suddenly fell off a building—oh, shit! I've fallen off a building and I'm going to die[...] that it wasn't a joke at all; it was awful and absurd, but it wasn't a joke[...] You told me! You came right out and fucking *told* me, and I laughed, and I made jokes about going to the feed store, and I *laughed*. I fucking laughed! Until it stopped; until the laughter stopped. [ii; 58]

Just like Rosalind driving home from the dinner party with Ernest, Martin attempts to persuade Stevie of his taboo's finer qualities. For him, his affair has never been about lust; rather, he considers himself to be in true, deep, pure love with Sylvia. In fact, when Ross suggests that Martin is simply using Sylvia to get off, Martin is offended: "You *don't* understand. I didn't know *what* it was—what I was feeling! It was... it wasn't like anything I'd felt before; it was... so... amazing, so... extraordinary! There she was, just looking at me, with those *eyes* of hers..." [i; 43]; "I *am* seeing her; I *am* having... an affair, I guess. No! That's not the right word. I am... (*winces*) screwing her, as you put it" [i; 44]. When Stevie demands that Martin tell her the details, no matter how gruesome or gorey, Martin is coy as a new lover:

MARTIN: (*Shy*) You really want to?

STEVIE: What? Kill you?

MARTIN: No; learn about it.

STEVIE: (*Big*) No! I *don't* really want to! [ii; 61]

Tragically for Martin, Stevie does not appreciate Martin's sweetness, either for Sylvia or for herself. When Martin cries out that he loves Stevie, it enrages her. She is, after all, only a human being; she possesses only two breasts, uses the toilet, gives milk only on special occasions—"How can you love me when you love so much less?" [ii; 52] Even worse, this equation degrades both himself and Stevie. In Scene 2, when a "helpless" Martin says that "I love [Sylvia]... and she loves me, and..." [ii; 87], Stevie produces "*a huge animal sound: rage; sweeps the bookcase of whatever is on it*" [ii; 87]. She has begun to internalize Martin's zoomorphism-by-equation. Before departing to find and kill Sylvia, she cries, "You have brought me down, you goat-fucker; you love of my life! You have brought me down to *nothing!*" [ii; 89] Although Martin is anthropomorphizing Sylvia, the practice of placing Stevie on Sylvia's plane zoomorphizes Stevie and Martin both, much in the same way that Rosalind practices zoomorphism in her fantasy world:

MARTIN: [...] and it isn't about fucking.

STEVIE: YES!!

MARTIN: (*As gentle as possible*) No; no, Stevie, it isn't.

STEVIE: (*Pause; then, even more sure*) Yes! It is about fucking! It is about you being an animal!

MARTIN: (*Thinks a moment; quietly*) I thought I was.

STEVIE: (*Contempt*) Hunh!

MARTIN: I thought I was; I thought we *all* were... animals. [ii; 86]

With "cold rage," Stevie spits in return that "We stay with our own kind" [ii; 86]—drawing a battle line, an inflexibility, a revulsion for fantasy that will ultimately lead to destruction, just as the Eumenides portended.

After the dinner party, and after Ross's letter, both families find themselves in an untenable state. Unnatural fantasy has run amok, forcing a decision; resolution, of one kind or another, *must* occur—and so it does, at the hands of Ernest and Stevie. In the final moments of "Lappin and Lapinova," Ernest delivers a crushing blow. The scene is already grim as he returns

to find a trembling Rosalind sitting in the dark. Rising and “glancing wildly at him out of her great startled eyes” (Woolf), she cries his name repeatedly: “Oh, Ernest, Ernest! [...] It’s Lapinova... She’s gone, Ernest! I’ve lost her!” (Woolf) But Ernest exudes unnerving composure, just as Stevie does in Scene 3 when she “turns to face [Martin]; evenly, without emotion” [iii; 110]. Ernest frowns and presses his lips together, “smiling rather grimly at his wife. For ten seconds he stood there, silent” (Woolf). At last he acts:

“Yes... Poor Lapinova . . .” He straightened his tie at the looking-glass over the mantelpiece. “Caught in a trap,” he said, “killed,” and sat down and read the newspaper. (Woolf)

Similarly, Stevie kills Martin’s fantasy at the eleventh hour of *The Goat*. At the end of Scene 2, Stevie had stormed from the house, declaring that “You have brought me down, and, Christ!, I’ll bring you down with me!” [ii; 89]. She is conspicuously, unsettlingly absent throughout the third and final scene as Martin wraps up matters with his son, Billy, and his friend, Ross—until, in the last moments, she returns:

(A silence. Then we hear a sound at the door [...] STEVIE is dragging a dead goat. The goat’s throat is cut; the blood is down STEVIE’s dress, her arms. She stops...)

MARTIN: What have you done!? Oh, my God, what have you *done*!?

(BILLY is crying; STEVIE regards MARTIN for a moment; ROSS is immobile.)

STEVIE: *(Turns to face him; evenly, without emotion)* I went where Ross told me I would find... your friend. I found her. I killed her. I brought her to you. *(Odd little question)* No?

MARTIN: *(A profound cry)* ANNNNNNH! [...] *(Crying)* What did she *do*!? What did she ever *do*!?

STEVIE: *(Pause; quietly)* She loved you... you say. As much as *I* do.

MARTIN: *(To STEVIE; empty)* I’m sorry. *(To BILLY; empty)* I’m sorry. *(Then...)* I’m sorry.

BILLY: *(To one, then the other; no reaction from them)* Dad? Mom?

(Tableau)

End. [iii; 109-110]

So; both stories open on scenes of domestic comfort, though both protagonists, Rosalind Thorburn and Martin Gray, are addled and somewhat distant. Eventually, dysfunction reigns in the form of zoomorphic fantasy; Rosalind becomes unable to cope with daily life without imagining herself and her husband as rabbits, and Martin is deluded into thinking that the goat Sylvia loves him, painting both he and his wife as animals alongside Sylvia. Both of their spouses kill the objects of their lover's fantasy, Ernest symbolically and Stevie quite literally, resulting in the certain dissolution of one relationship—"So that was the end of that marriage," Woolf concludes, whether literally or figuratively—and the implied destruction of another. In Stevie's own words: "You've broken something and it can't be fixed" [ii; 88].

Tragic Heroes: the Question of Gender

It was Aristotle who first refined the qualifications for tragedy—qualifications which, though oft-analyzed, discussed, and occasionally argued, especially in the contexts of certain subgenres, have remained largely respected to this day. First and foremost, Aristotle declares in his *Poetics* that "the finest form of Tragedy" must "imitate actions arousing pity and fear, since that is the distinctive function of this kind of imitation." Pity is elicited when a character experiences hardship or befalls misfortune; the audience experiences fear when they contemplate that, in similar circumstances, such misfortune could befall them as well. Next, the hero's *peripeteia* should arise "not through vice or depravity, but by some error of judgment" called *hamartia*, a tragic flaw or error (Aristotle). (This absence of depravity is reflected in Albee's staunch determination to portray Martin's infidelity not as carnal lust, but as an affair that in Martin's view—somehow more disturbingly—stems from pure, genuine devotion). Jules Brody extrapolates,

Hamartia is a morally neutral non-normative term, derived from the verb *hamartano*, meaning ‘to miss the mark’, ‘to fall short of an objective’. And by extension: to reach one destination rather than the intended one; to make a mistake, not in the sense of a moral failure, but in the nonjudgmental sense of taking one thing for another, taking something for its opposite. *Hamartia* may betoken an error of discernment due to ignorance, to the lack of an essential piece of information. Finally, *hamartia* may be viewed simply as an act which, for whatever reason, ends in failure rather than success. (23)

Hamartia is often associated with *hubris*, the excessive pride or arrogance that blinds a hero to a divine warning or compels them to break a moral dictate. Finally, in the process of witnessing such a tale and emerging unscathed, the audience experiences *catharsis*. Aristotle mandates that six elements are present overall in a tragedy: plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. The two which most relate to the tragic hero himself are plot and character, which can further be broken into four subcategories: his fate 1) arouses pity and fear and 2) produces *catharsis*, and he possesses 3) *hamartia* and 4) *hubris*.

There are three other qualities of a tragic hero that will not be evaluated. Firstly, tragic heroes must not be evil; in general, they must have the desire to do good, even if they do not have the capability to actually accomplish it. This is true for both Rosalind and Martin. Secondly, tragic heroes experience *anagnorisis*, Aristotle’s term for “a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune”; that is, a moment of realization or character development. This occurs in both “Lappin and Lapinova” and *The Goat*. Rosalind struggles with her experience of *anagnorisis* throughout the latter half of the story as her fantasy slips away; Martin’s *anagnorisis* is solidified after

Sylvia's death with his repetition of "I'm sorry." Those two qualities are self-evident in both works, so they will not be further addressed. The third quality—that a tragic hero must, according to Aristotle, be of "noble birth"—is not self-evident, but, in the scheme of theatrical analysis, it is often viewed as inapplicable to any modern-day works, as the concepts of monarchy and nobility are not relevant in the current world, unlike Aristotle's other, more universal criteria. According to the modern interpretations of Aristotle, all six of these criteria—the arousal of pity and fear, the production of catharsis, *hamartia*, *hubris*, the desire to do good, and *anagnorisis*—must be present, but for "Lappin and Lapinova", the first four are arguable.

In Albee's play, each of these four elements are present. No one can deny the evocation of pity and fear in the light of that final bloody tableau; Martin's loss is catastrophic. Still, the audience survives; the emotional pain, coupled with the balm of comedy, leaves them in a state of *catharsis*. Next, Martin's *hamartia* is complete in any sense of the word. His error is stark in the unspeakable societal taboo he commits; his flaws are nearly too many to count, chief among them being his penchant for illogically anthropomorphizing Sylvia, his inability to accept help or see reason, and his extramarital passions; finally, he fails to obtain his wife's forgiveness and blessing and cannot secure his family's future. As for *hubris*, Martin attends support groups for those afflicted by bestiality, yet, blinded by his infatuation, cannot understand why it is wrong or why the other attendees would want to be free of it.

Rosalind, too, fits these criteria—but only if one ignores environmental forces. Aristotle, for one, would encourage us to focus only on the hero's own qualities and not on their societies; he stresses that the hero's own actions drive him to his demise, not the external powers of another. Under those criteria, Rosalind does qualify. Rosalind too errs, struggles, loses; even the very beastlike details are uncannily similar to Martin's. She and Martin act the same, and yet, the

world consists of more than actions; it seems ignorant to disregard environmental forces. There are multifaceted societal, structural, cultural, interpersonal, financial, and political forces which influence individual functioning. In “Lappin and Lapinova,” it is the patriarchal forces that make Aristotle’s requirements sit uneasily on Rosalind’s female shoulders, where for Martin’s they are tailor-made.

First and foremost, there is a power imbalance between Rosalind and Martin’s opening stases. Aristotle stipulates that a tragic hero’s change in fortune “should be not from bad to good, but, reversely, from good to bad” (Aristotle), a requirement that both protagonists readily meet. Aristotle does not prescribe what *quantity* of good the hero possesses; the importance, rather, is on the state of decline. And yet it is notable that Rosalind and Martin do possess quite a different quantity of good. After a somewhat disimpassioned description of a wedding, Woolf switches to free indirect thought presentation from Rosalind’s point of view, divulging that, four days later, she found that “Ernest was a difficult name to get used to. It was not the name she would have chosen [...] He did not look like Ernest either [...] But here he was. Thank goodness he did not look like Ernest—no. But what did he look like?” (Woolf). This search for an alternative identity for her husband would, of course, soon constitute the story’s very plot, painting her situation already at odds with the central marriage of *The Goat*, whose participants can finish each other’s thoughts.

Still, the narrative insists that “they were happy,” and yet this theme of identity—specifically, the lack thereof—percolates beneath the surface, subtly gendered. “She had still to get used to the fact that she was Mrs. Ernest Thorburn,” writes Woolf; “Perhaps she never would get used to the fact that she was Mrs. Ernest Anybody, she thought...” (Woolf). Indeed, the protagonist’s name is not spoken throughout the entire wedding. The very first sentence

immediately links her identity to that of Ernest's: "They were married" (Woolf.) It is Ernest's name that is spoken first, with Rosalind's identity defined in relationship to his: "Ernest Thorburn led *his bride* to the car..." (Woolf, emphasis added). Furthermore, at the dinner party Rosalind "felt bitterly that she was an only child and an orphan at that; a mere drop among all those Thorburns assembled in the great drawing-room" (Woolf), further establishing her as a woman with nothing. Take this against Martin Gray. After he is outed, Stevie asks, "Martin, did you ever think you'd come back from your splendid life, walk into your living room and find you had no life left?" [ii; 61]; however, it is remarkable to note that at one point, Martin *had*. Before his *peripeteia*, he experienced a state of *having*: Martin, the TV personality and Pritzker-award winning architect awarded a \$200 billion dollar project, "a decent, liberal, right-thinking, talented, famous, gentle man (*hard*) who right now would appear to be fucking a goat" [ii; 49]. Rosalind was never awarded the same liberties.

Simone Beauvoir, a French essayist and feminist philosopher whose magnum opus, *The Second Sex*, was published three years after Woolf's suicide, wrote extensively about women's struggle for identity, especially post-marriage. Building off G. W. F. Hegel's theory of the Self and the Other, she argues that women in society will always be placed as the "Other," robbing them of both identity and agency:

Women—except in certain abstract gatherings such as conferences—do not use "we"; men say "women," and women adopt this word to refer to themselves; but they do not posit themselves authentically as Subjects [...] They live dispersed among men, tied by homes, work, economic interests, and social conditions to certain men—fathers or husbands—more closely than to other women. As bourgeois women, they are in solidarity with bourgeois men and not with women

proletarians; as white women, they are in solidarity with white men and not with black women [...] The couple is a fundamental unit with the two halves riveted to each other: cleavage of society by sex is not possible. This is the fundamental characteristic of woman: she is the Other at the heart of a whole whose two components are necessary to each other. (Beauvoir, 28-29)

Notice how even in Rosalind's fantasy world she commits herself to a patriarchal sexual economy, as suggested by the moniker she invents, "Lapinova," with its Slavic patronymic suffix. However, as an alternative to her everyday life in which she possesses no Selfhood, whether it be sexual, societal, or financial, she as "Lapinova" is actively creative and adventurous. Where King Lappin ruled over the kingdom of rabbits, "[Lapinova's] world was a desolate, mysterious place, which she ranged mostly by moonlight. All the same, their territories touched; they were King and Queen", placing herself and her husband on an equal plane. In the words of Kathryn Simpson, "Rosalind's fantasy and her active sexuality [put] them at odds with the sexual dynamic conventionally associated with patriarchal marriage" (Simpson). In a small way, this fantasy even bridged the gap between Self and Other in the real world, situating "[Rosalind and Ernest] in league together against the rest of the world" (Woolf). Thus, Rosalind's fantasy is explicitly affirmed as a coping mechanism against a society organized for the denial of her very Selfhood; this is shown in microcosm at the dinner party, where "She felt that her icicle was being turned to water. She was being melted; dispersed; dissolved into nothingness; and would soon faint" (Woolf). Beauvoir heartily validates Rosalind's experience, placing words to the sensations that Rosalind can only describe in metaphor: "What singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an

attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness” (Beauvoir, 37). Even on a basic level, Rosalind enacted fantasy on *herself*, while Martin’s fantasy took the form of an Other which, in the stereotypically masculine sense, he physically dominated and claimed. Ultimately, in the eyes of Beauvoir, this diminution, this Othering, is the very source of women’s woe. If indeed “every subject posits itself as a transcendence concretely, through projects; it accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing toward other freedoms” (Beauvoir, 37), then Rosalind’s natural human desire to perpetually surpass toward other freedoms is *forced* to express itself in the realm of fantasy. She has no other possible means to achieve transcendence in her everyday life. If she then has been forced into her actions, she cannot have culpability in them; if she cannot have culpability, she cannot possess *hamartia*.

It is here in the light of fantasy-as-coping-mechanism that the friction between Rosalind and the tragic hero begins. First, return to the concept of *hamartia*, the deadly flaw or error. If, like Martin, the crux of Rosalind’s tragic reckoning lies in the indulgence of fantasy—and we must accept that it does, as for both of them that is what finally drives their families apart and results in the destruction of the lives they knew—then for Rosalind, can embracing it truly be called a flaw? The error lay in her surroundings, her society, not in herself, and although Aristotle was firm in his belief that the hero’s actions and not his environment make him tragic, the act of dubbing Rosalind’s escape into fantasy as *hamartia* verges into victim-blaming. Martin, who had a cherished marriage and a near-perfect family and through the course of the play proclaimed his equal, genuine, and almost childlike love for both them and Sylvia, was given every advantage to steer him from animal-rape, down to collective therapy in a beastiality support group; he had perfect satisfaction with the life he had before, yet still risked it by

attempting to obtain more, earning *hamartia* in spades. The same cannot be said for Rosalind, who faced Othering and marginalization that, due to her society's rigid sexual and marital constructs, she could combat only through fantasy.

A similar friction occurs when attempting to apply the criteria of *hubris*. Though *hubris* could be extrapolated from Rosalind's blindness to the effects that her fantasy has on her marriage, she still, on some level, is aware of the *purpose* of her fantasies:

[Ernest] snored. But even though he snored, his nose remained perfectly still. It looked as if it had never twitched at all. Was it possible that he was really Ernest; and that she was really married to Ernest? A vision of her mother-in-law's dining-room came before her; and there they sat, she and Ernest, grown old, under the engravings, in front of the sideboard. . . . It was their golden-wedding day. *She could not bear it.* (Woolf, emphasis added)

Rosalind expresses terror at the possibility of being left in this marriage without the crutch of her fantasy; thus, her escape into fantasy is specifically linked to her inability to cope with her patriarchal, marital world in its absence. This awareness of her situation does not align with *hubris*, often referred to as "pride that blinds" (Hollow). Rosalind does not suffer from a *hubris* that causes her to act in foolish or abusive ways that contradict common sense or, in the classic Greek, transgress against the gods; in fact, it appears to be the exact opposite: although Rosalind's actions lead to her ultimate demise, they are a logical result of having open eyes to the truth of her station.

As for the final two of Aristotle's criteria, consider the effect that Rosalind's story in its feminine context has on its audience versus that of Martin's. According to Kuhn, "*The Goat* 'heals' its audience by its medicative treatment of what Aristotle would call the Gray family

‘history.’ The main characters go through an emotionally painful and informative action that arouses in its course potentially destructive judgments and emotions in its audience as well” (29). In the course of expunging these emotions, *The Goat* achieves ample *catharsis*. However, for “Lappin and Lapinova,” what is expunged? When the final page is turned, from what has the female reader been spared? Perhaps for men, they are spared from a world where women almost achieve Selfhood; in a broader sense, they may fear the destruction of a marriage, yet for women, nothing has changed when the curtains fall. For them, Woolf’s short story is not “medicative.” Men may pity Rosalind, moved by Woolf’s prose, but they cannot experience *fear* of the misogynistic oppression she experiences. So, although Rosalind’s tale can certainly arouse both pity and fear for half of its audience, its male readers have no way to resonate with the latter, leaving them with only *pathos*, or mere suffering, not tragedy.

Counter-arguments and Conclusion

Others have observed these flaws and suggested alternatives for the function of tragedy and the marginalized. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir aptly notes how ill-fitting the original Greek is to the plight of women:

When Hercules spins wool at Omphale’s feet, his desire enchains him. Why was Omphale unable to acquire long-lasting power? Medea, in revenge against Jason, kills her children: this brutal legend suggests that the bond attaching the woman to her child could have given her a formidable upper hand. In *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes lightheartedly imagined a group of women who, uniting together for the social good, tried to take advantage of men’s need for them: but it is only a comedy. The legend that claims that the ravished Sabine women resisted their

ravishers with obstinate sterility also recounts that by whipping them with leather straps, the men magically won them over into submission. (Beauvoir, 29)

It is no surprise, then, that none of the above women are ranked among tragic heroes in the annals of history; it would ironically seem that only by becoming free and equal (a victory) would a woman have the possibility to become an Aristotelian hero (a tragedy). Her freedom is the freedom to fail. One could then argue that freedom is not the desirable state for the woman, that Rosalind would ultimately be happier in her ruined state with Ernest because her personal capacity for failure is potentially diminished when subjugated to his will; however, Beauvoir would remind us that “it is always easy to call a situation that one would like to impose on others happy” (Beauvoir, 37). For all Martin’s flaws, he ultimately flies or falls on his own terms. For Beauvoir, it is important that “in focusing on the individual’s possibilities, we will define these possibilities not in terms of happiness but in terms of freedom” (Beauvoir, 37).

The famed playwright and essayist Arthur Miller also acknowledged the change in tragedy, observing that he lived in an era where “the tragic mode [had become] archaic, fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly” (Miller). Subsequently, in defense of his play *Death of a Salesman*, he claimed that, in modern tragedy, *hamartia* lies rather in society, not in the hero himself. (Note the gendered pronoun, as in Miller’s view the tragic hero is always male.) In return, the martyred tragic hero inspires the audience to consider what is wrong with a society that would “[suppress] man, [pervert] the flowing out of his love and creative instinct” (Miller). However, one wonders what Miller would make of *hubris*, often contextualized as going against the natural order (and well-represented by Martin’s decision to transgress against the order of the human and natural worlds—a theatrical genius such as Edward Albee could not have been unaware that the original Greek roots of the word “tragedy,” *tragos* and *oidos*,

translate literally to “goat-song” [“Tragedy”]). For marginalized individuals, *hubris* would become an oddly admirable trait against a natural order that is represented as oppressive and immoral; he is nobly “ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity” (Miller). With the displacement of *hamartia* and the rewriting of *hubris*, little of the original conception of tragedy would remain; the results are what Aristotle would categorize as *pathos*.

It could also be argued that, in the modern era, all but the most select portion of the population are marginalized in some way, whether by gender, class, sexuality, race, religion, and more. If Othering is incompatible with tragedy, then tragedy cannot exist except for amongst those who are privileged to an onerous degree. However, marginalization only misaligns with tragedy in stories whose *peripeteia* are inextricably related to that marginalization. Rosalind’s fate cannot be separated from her gender, but many stories about women are not tied to their status as Other, opening the possibility for feminine tragedy. For example, although Sam Shepard’s *Buried Child* contains gender roles in the form of a traditional husband-wife dynamic, it cannot be said that the wife is presently being marginalized by her gender in the course of the play, so the same forces impressed on Rosalind and warring with the tragic genre are not explicit; the same cannot be said for works such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* or Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, nor for “Lappin and Lapinova,” which directly ties Rosalind’s fate to her gender and the sex-based construct of marriage in her time period.

Even then, Simone Beauvoir does raise one opportunity in which the marginalized Other, in a story whose *peripeteia* does revolve around their Otherness, can still emerge as tragic: “Beside every individual’s claim to assert himself as subject—an ethical claim—lies the temptation to flee freedom and to make himself a thing: it is a pernicious path because the

individual, passive, alienated, and lost, is prey to a foreign will, cut off from his transcendence, robbed of all worth. But it is an easy path: the anguish and stress of authentically assumed existence are thus avoided. The man who sets the woman up as an Other will thus find in her *a deep complicity*. Hence woman makes no claim for herself as subject [...] because *she often derives satisfaction from her role as Other*” (Beauvoir, 30, emphasis added). Thus, *hamartia* could be invoked by marginalized protagonists complicit in their own Othering; take, for example, the women of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Rosalind Thorburn, however, is not complicit in her marginalization. Her persistent, valiant attempts to assert herself as Self are forced, by no fault of their own, to express themselves through fantasy; she actively struggles against her station, absolving her of the blindness of *hubris*; her tale does not end in *catharsis*, and pity and fear can only be evoked in “Lappin and Lapinova”’s feminine audience, robbing half its readers of completion. Rosalind’s actions do mirror those of Martin Gray’s in *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*; yet, on the mere basis of her sex—or, in Simone Beauvoir’s interpretation of Hegel, on the basis of her lack of Selfhood—she cannot assume the role of a tragic hero. We must conclude, then, that characters whose tragedy and suffering come as a result of their own marginalization, who are not complicit in said marginalization, cannot be counted as Aristotelian tragic heroes.

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