PREEMPTIVE ENDINGS

by

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In this thesis I will examine a type of fictional novel that uses a technique termed the "preemptive ending." Books with a preemptive ending are those which begin their story by informing the reader of the ending of the story. To explore this type of fiction, I will develop three categories of books that utilize a preemptive ending, each category developed by analyzing one book that is exemplary of its respective category. *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera exemplifies novels that tell the reader the ending by announcing it at the start of a book. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston exemplifies novels that show the reader the ending of a book. *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller exemplifies novels that assume the audience already knows the ending of the book based on their cultural knowledge. Through the study of these texts I will explore how preemptive endings can be utilized to accentuate and effect the theming, tension, and arc of a story.

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Introduction

All books have an ending. An ending is defined as the final part of something, or the end. But what happens when a book's ending is at its beginning? In this thesis I will explore stories where the ending starts the story instead of ending it. This is what we will refer to as a preemptive ending.

In order to fully explore this concept, it is important to establish what specifically I am referring to when I discuss preemptive endings. It is difficult to say that the ending of the book is placed at the beginning, because wouldn't it then become the beginning of the book? What happens on the last few pages of the book if the ending is at the beginning? Are they not an ending? For the sake of this thesis, the endings that we will discuss are those that would come last if the story were told in a time-linear order. These endings, when invoked at the beginning of the story, become preemptive endings.

I am choosing to focus on preemptive endings in this thesis because they are an impactful and seemingly understudied means of manipulating time in novels. Traditionally, the ending of the book is the goal, the final destination, with the rest of the book being the journey to reach it. Revealing the end of the book at the beginning seems to be counter-intuitive, but it can be a source of great interest and thematic development in a novel. I want to explore texts that employ these preemptive endings so that I may better understand this practice, its reasoning, and its results.

Preemptive endings can come in many forms, but for the purpose of this thesis I have determined three categories that best describe the types of preemptive endings, each represented by a novel that exemplifies its category.

The first category involves books that *tell* the reader the ending of the story. These are books in which the ending of the text is announced to the reader at the beginning of the story,

before it occurs. There is no flash-forward; in the present of the text, the reader is informed of the end to come. For this category we will be analyzing Adam Silvera's 2017 science-fiction young adult novel *They Both Die at the End*.

The second category looks at books that *show* the reader the ending. These books often rearrange the linearity of time, placing the time-linear ending of the book at its time-linear start in order to show the ending preemptively to the reader. This category is exemplified by Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a coming-of-age classic of the Harlem Renaissance.

The third category investigates books where the readers *already know* (or think they know) the ending by virtue of their own cultural knowledge. These books utilize the pre-existing cultural knowledge of the ending, employing stories and ideas that are so well-known that it is difficult to find an audience that does not already know and expect its ending. For this category we will examine Madeline Miller's 2012 historical fiction and romance novel *The Song of Achilles*. Over the course of these studies, I will explore how each text employs its preemptive ending, looking closely at how it uses the device to support its own goals.

They Both Die at the End: Telling the Ending

Structure and Telling the Ending

The first text we will examine in this thesis conveys its preemptive ending most directly. In Adam Silvera's novel *They Both Die at the End*, two boys find out that they will be dead before the end of the day. A death-predicting technology called "Death-Cast" provides this knowledge. At the start, the novel preemptively informs both Mateo Torrez and Rufus Emeterio as well as the audience of the characters' deaths and of the end of the book. This novel is the most direct by virtue of the means through which it conveys this information: it simply tells the reader that the boys both die at the end, and thus dramatically shapes the perception and reception of the story.

This book focalizes the theme of the preemptive ending, asking what happens when a person knows that death is coming and how that changes the way they live the rest of their life. The text addresses this theme through both structural and paratextual strategies. To begin with, the title of the book is the first means of introducing the audience to the ending. Before an observer even takes the book off the shelf, they learn that "they both die at the end." Though the observer does not know the specifics of the story, knowing preemptively that some characters die goes against many of our core cultural tenets of storytelling. Preemptively knowing the ending of the story is often more colloquially referred to as a "spoiler." When someone goes to see the latest superhero movie at the theater, they don't want to know ahead of time which character will die, because that "ruins" the experience. Most modern storytelling media are constructed so that big events, such as deaths, will be experienced in a certain way, with authors using surrounding structural elements to shape the impact that the death will have on the reader. Deaths, or other narratively significant events, often are meant to be experienced in the process of the story

unfolding, not outside of it. So, when Adam Silvera does away with all the typical surrounding context and build-up to a death by putting it in the title and informing the characters of their fate in the first page, the story achieves a different effect. Instead of tension deriving from whether the characters will die, the tension shifts to focus more on their lives and the way that they live the remainder of them. This is not a story where we watch our heroes fight to survive. Knowing that our heroes will not survive, the audience looks instead at how our heroes cope with the knowledge of their fates and fulfill their limited time left.

They Both Die at the End is divided into four parts, and each part is divided into multiple chapters. None of these chapters have a number or a title, but instead are introduced by the name of the character it focuses on and the time of the day during which the chapter takes place. The first chapter additionally introduces the date of the story, like so:

> September 5, 2017
> Mateo Torrez
> 12:22 am

As the story progresses, so do the timestamps at the beginning of each chapter. They never overlap or move backwards in time; they only go forwards. Time is strictly linear in this book, and the use of timestamps makes sure the audience knows it. There are no flashbacks, no manipulations of time that alter the book's chronological progression. Just as Mateo and Rufus are sentenced to the brutal forward march of time, so is the book. The consistently linear structure further accentuates its ending, both in the minds of the audience and the characters. With the indicators of time showing up constantly at the beginning of each chapter, the presence of the known ending seems that much closer. Time's unflinching progression coupled with the knowledge of what is to come combine into a suspenseful countdown. Every minute that passes,

every page that is turned is another moment passed from the characters' lives and another moment closer to the ending of the book and the deaths of the characters.

As the audience continues through the text, they meet a wide cast of characters, many of whom narrate their own chapter of the novel. The only recurring narrators are Mateo and Rufus; the rest have only one chapter. When each character gets their dedicated chapter to narrate, the chapter always begins with a matter-of-fact statement as to whether or not the character will die by the end of the book. The first sentence of Aimee's narration is "Death-Cast did not call Aimee DuBois because she isn't dying today" (*They Both Die* 107). Zoe's narration begins with "Death-Cast called Zoe Landon at 12:34 a.m. to tell her she's going to die today" (*They Both Die* 267). This approach defines the characters and their roles in the story by their preemptive endings. Their narrative does not start until the audience knows how it will end within the parameters of the book. Once the audience knows whether the characters will survive the length of the book or not, they then are able to see how these characters live their lives with the preemptive knowledge of how the next twenty-four hours will end. The concept of knowing the date of your own death is a daunting experience, one that cannot be encompassed in just Mateo and Rufus' perspectives of it, so the audience is given further glimpses of it through the perspectives of the other characters. Those characters who will die the day the novel takes place (sentimentally called "Deckers" to remind the characters that they are "all the captains on the decks of [their] own ships, setting sail for one last journey" (*The First to Die* 64)) react to their endings in ways unique to their personalities, some altering their days entirely and some living as they would have lived any other day, each with the knowledge that today contains the end. But those who will not die that day are also affected by the knowledge of the day's end. Many preemptively mourn loved ones whose lives will end that day. Others live recklessly, with the knowledge that

no matter what happens, by the end of the day they will be alive. Most, however, just live their lives as usual, changed only by the relief that another day is guaranteed for them. No one is untouched by the knowledge of the ending, and by invoking the ending at the beginning of each new narration, the text does not allow the reader to forget the looming presence of death in the ending to come.

The preemptive knowledge of endings also alters the setting of the book. When everyone knows upon waking if they will die or not by the end of the day, people will build a world that integrates that knowledge into daily living. Throughout the book there are details that enhance this setting. There are restaurants that provide free meals to Deckers. There are hospital protocols put in place so that medical personnel may be informed quickly if one of their patients is to die that day. There are companies dedicated to creating special experiences for Deckers. There are websites and games that exploit people's curiosity about death, encouraging Deckers to accumulate internet notoriety before their demise. Even the app that Mateo and Rufus find each other through is developed specifically for Deckers to reach out to someone for companionship on their last day. This preemptive knowledge of the date of death alters the whole world, and the audience is able to see how it evolved from a more familiar world into this new one. The preemptive ending alters the setting in such a way that even the backdrop of the story becomes another reminder of the end to come for both the characters and the audience. The preemptive ending becomes structural and essential to the story; without it, the story would not stand on its own.

Anticipation

When an ending to a story is preemptive, it comes with the anticipation of that ending. Anticipation is a key factor in the reading and study of *They Both Die at the End*; in this section

we will discuss how both the reader's and the character's anticipation of a known ending alter the story as well as the way that the story is read.

When an audience is told how a story will end, they expect that to happen. When a friend told me that in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* the character Han Solo dies, I anticipated that happening. The entire time I watched the movie I was mentally preparing myself every time Han Solo got himself into a dangerous situation, wondering how and when he would die. The experience of the film changed because I was preoccupied by my anticipation of the character's death. It got to the point where I was trying to guess when and how he dies before I was even supposed to narratively know he would. The movie lacked any narrative suspense, such that when Han Solo finally does die, the moment was devoid of the surprise and sadness that the filmmakers intended. I was sad, but I wasn't shocked or filled with sudden grief over the loss of a beloved character, because in a way I had preemptively lost him already. I hadn't experienced the film in the way it was intended, with the story building up to this point of loss so that I might experience a moment of narrative catharsis. But in *They Both Die at the End*, this anticipation of an ending is purposefully built into the text. Unlike my experience with *Star Wars*, the author has control of this preemptive ending. Silvera knows that the audience is anticipating the end, so he uses their anticipation as another story-telling device.

Though the readers do know the ending in this text, they do not know *how* it ends. We know that Mateo and Rufus both die at the end of the day, but we don't know how. Silvera toys with the audience's expectation of death by keeping it very present throughout the text. One way Silvera maintains the presence of death is via the chronology of the text, as discussed previously. Silver continues to keep death present by incorporating many near-death experiences into the story. Some of these are shocking and rare events, but some are things common experiences that

become frightening with the knowledge that the characters will die by the end of the day. A simple slip on the way out of a shower becomes harrowing. Both Mateo and the reader wince as he falls, unsure if this is the way he will finally meet his fate. Mateo does catch himself, but we know that he is only saving himself for a different death later in the day. The anticipation of a death to come becomes a point of suspense that replaces the suspense that typically comes with not knowing the outcome. As the story progresses, more things happen to our characters, and each time the audience has to wonder: is this it? Will this bike ride be the end? Will it be this explosion? A gunshot? Or will it end by crossing the street? If a character were to slip in the shower in a story where the audience does not know the ending promises death, the moment wouldn't have the same weight that it does in this story. Silvera uses the preemptive ending to engage the reader in a new form of heightened suspense not seen in texts where the ending is unknown.

Silvera's use of the preemptive ending and the suspense that comes with it allows him to change the way a reader consumes the story. In this book, the end of life becomes the focus of the entire story. It's all the characters think about, and it's present in every one of their actions; they change their whole day in response to it. The characters are consumed by the end, and therefore, so are the readers. But as the focus on the ending increases, its intrigue can decrease. Knowing the ending makes it static. There is nothing that the characters can do to change their fate. There is no mystery about the end of the book. They both die at the end, and that's it. So, while stories without preemptive endings will focus on a plot that shapes its own ending, the plot of *They Both Die at the End* is not confined to its ending. The characters can do whatever they want, and the ending will not change. This shift, while ceding much focus to the future ending, also emphasizes the present. The audience is not here to see the characters fight against their

ending or change it in any way; the audience is here to see the characters live and find happiness in their present, regardless of how their story will end. Mateo himself articulates this point: "No matter how we choose to live, we both die at the end" (*They Both Die* 79). The audience (and the characters) are told repeatedly throughout the book that the fate of the characters is sealed; all they can do is accept it. The core of the story thus shifts the audience's focus away from the outcome of the text, instead focusing on enjoying what one can before things come to an end.

Mark Currie in his work *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* brings up a more specific type of anticipation, what he calls "the anticipation of retrospection" (30). He describes this phenomenon by illustrating how, on both a cultural and personal level, we as humans take actions in deference to this anticipation of retrospection. With the knowledge that there does exist a future in which people exist, humans cater to their own hunger for the past. We preserve documents and items and ideas in the form of museums, archives, or even diaries, so that in the future, someone may be able to remember and learn about our past. This anticipation people have of looking back on the past with retrospection reaches further, especially in societies that value individuality. Many people have a desire to be remembered fondly, whether it be by close relatives, distinguished peers, or thousands of Instagram followers. Many aspire towards a form of immortality, intent to "make their mark on the world," similar to Achilles' pursuit in one of our other texts, *The Song of Achilles.*

Currie also gives the anticipation of retrospection another meaning, discussing how in some stories anticipation is structural in the text. He is more specifically referring to the sense of time a reader can gather from a story based on its grammatical tenses and timeline. For example, a story narrated in the past tense by a character (such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which we will discuss later) acknowledges that there is some future point from which the character is

able to reflect upon and narrate the past. This structurally integrates the anticipation of the act of retrospection into a narrative. In *They Both Die at the End*, we see this anticipation of retrospection integrated into the plot and story of the text itself. Instead of using the past tense to allude to a future from which a character can narrate, the story instead illustrates characters stuck in the present tense, who have no future from which to narrate. By taking away this future and outlining how the characters will die before they have a chance for their own retrospection, the story places the characters *at* that moment that is typically anticipated. In this unusual situation, the characters are able to be retrospective about the moment they are currently living because they are so close to being unable to be retrospective about anything anymore.

In *They Both Die at the End*, we often see characters being retrospective about their present. Rufus throughout the story captures images for his Instagram in order to preserve his last day alive. Here, Rufus is anticipating the retrospection of his friends, saving these moments for them to look back on as memories, but he is also being retrospective of his own life as he does so. Each image that he captures is accompanied by his own sorrow and reflection upon the moment. As he takes a picture for the first time with the intention of creating his own online memorial, he reflects on the moment while he is in it. "I just sit here with my back against the wall," he narrates, "in the spot where I convinced my Last Friend to keep adventuring and where he gave me the idea to add some life to my profile. I don't even smile. I've never been a smiler and starting now feels off" (*They Both Die* 159). While this narration may not seem significant, the emphasis on his being in the moment is important. This narration is not for the reader's benefit; the reader had already witnessed this scene, and there is no reason to summarize the event for clarity's sake. This summation is for Rufus' sake. He's a boy coping with the sudden end of his life, so taking a moment of retrospection on the moment he's living in is his way of

processing the day. His knowledge of his impending death has put him in a state of retrospection, even while he is still in the moment. He experiences time in the present while simultaneously reminiscing about it and its near-immediate loss. At the end of his own life, stopping to take in and savor every moment becomes a necessity. The preemptive ending pushes the retrospection into the present alongside Rufus' anticipation of it.

Collapsing Time

In the same way that the preemptive ending brings together retrospection and anticipation, the preemptive ending unites the ending of the book with its beginning, an act which sets the trend of collapsing time throughout the story. The end and the beginning coexisting in the same narrative space opens the doors to the possibility that any moment of time can coexist with another disparate moment. As Mateo and Rufus' futures are forced to squeeze into the tiny space of a day, parts of their pasts are likewise pulled into the present. Both Mateo and Rufus confront past issues and future concerns throughout the span of this single day because the present is the only time they have left to do so. Most notably, Mateo pushes himself to start living according to his future expectations of himself and Rufus decides to rediscover the good in himself he fears was lost to time.

Mateo for his whole life has been living away from the world, excluding himself from participation to appease his own anxiety. His life is full of regrets and missed opportunities that don't become urgent until he learns of his own imminent death. Once he gets the call from Death-Cast, the illusion of future chances shatters: Mateo realizes that if he wants to live a fulfilling life, he must do it *now*. So, Mateo begins his quest for "Future Mateo." Future Mateo is the version of himself who "loosened up and lived," who spends his days "trying out new things" (*They Both Die* 9). Though he will never become the Future Mateo who lives to an old and

fulfilling age, Mateo can become the Future Mateo who loosens up and lives by trying new things, even in the short amount of time he has left. Throughout the day Mateo (with some help from Rufus) pushes himself to be adventurous, whether it be by jumping off a cliff into a pool or just by stepping out his own front door. He continues pushing himself to live boldly so that on page 227, he recalls saying goodbye to "Past Mateo," claiming that he is "more alive now than [he] was then" (*They Both Die*). The Death-Cast message made the future immediate by taking away Mateo's chances of reaching it later, and this collapsing of time was the push that Mateo needed to begin his life even as it ended. He uses his preemptive knowledge of the end to seize a future that will never come, in a way that he never has before in his life. Throughout the text he remarks on how many "firsts" he made happen on this last day of his life: his first kiss, his first time punching someone, his first time singing and dancing in public (*They Both Die* 331). The preemptive ending accelerates Mateo's experience of time to make up for the future he has lost, bringing these milestones that were firmly in the future to the present.

For Rufus, the Death-Cast begins his reconnection with his past. Ever since his family's death, Rufus claims to have lived his life in black-and-white, grieving the loss of his loved ones and finding that he too has lost an important part of himself. This is exemplified in his colorless Instagram account (*They Both Die* 158). The knowledge of his own imminent death pushes Rufus to bring color back to his life. He starts posting colorful pictures on his Instagram and rediscovering the "good Rufus" that he felt he had lost to time (*They Both Die* 71). Mateo understands how Rufus' past is tied to his present and decides to help him by pushing Rufus into a more intense confrontation with this past. Mateo takes him to a river, a place reminiscent of where his family died, and encourages Rufus to face his past. Though Rufus is reluctant at first, he eventually takes the opportunity to relive his family's death and address his feelings about it

in a way he never had before, crying and frustrated over his family's fate as well as his own (*They Both Die* 232). The past is forced into the present because he no longer has anywhere to run from it. His preemptive ending forces him to come to terms with his family's death and atone for his past actions because if he doesn't now, he never will have the time to.

As discussed earlier, these preemptive endings are not only limited to Mateo and Rufus; every time the audience is introduced to a new perspective, that section starts with that character's personal preemptive ending. At each introduction, the audience is informed of whether or not the character will get a call from Death-Cast, thus uniting every character's ending with their beginning. Quite literally, Silvera doesn't allow anybody's story to begin without first informing us of its end. This reinforces the connections between beginnings and endings, with each character's story unable to escape from its own ending. Even though these characters are not the focus of the text, they are just as confined to the end as Rufus and Mateo are, and Silvera makes sure the audience cannot forget that. For the audience, all the characters' lives begin the moment we know their endings, each of them having their time collapsed into the present and giving them the same opportunities as Mateo and Rufus to confront impossible futures or reckon with inescapable pasts.

Their Eyes Were Watching God: Showing the Ending

Structure and Frame Narratives

Zora Neale Hurston also utilizes a preemptive ending to confront a character's past in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This novel follows the life story of Janie Crawford as Janie herself tells it. In order to show the audience a preemptive ending, this story disrupts the linearity of time. In the beginning of the story, Janie returns home from a long journey. After she returns home, Janie tells the story of her life, from childhood to the present, to her friend Pheoby Watson. Janie's narration of her past encompasses the majority of the novel, with only the first chapter and the last residing in Janie's present.

Despite the breadth of its narrative, this book starts and ends at the same time and place: with Janie as a forty-year-old-woman, returned home with the knowledge and experience that comes from a life fully lived. This structure, where the beginning of the text matches its end, is called a frame narrative. The term frame narrative can encompass a variety of stories, but it is most frequently thought of as creating a story within a story, often created when a character in a story becomes the narrator of yet another story.

Frame narratives have existed for centuries. One earlier and well-known example is *A Thousand and One Nights*, also known as *Arabian Nights*, a collection of Middle Eastern folk tales compiled during the Islamic Golden Age (the 8th century to the 14th). The collection is notably characterized by its frame narrative in which the character Scheherazade must tell stories to her husband in order to prevent her own execution (Haddawy et al.). These stories make up the collection of folk tales. Though the stories all stand independently as rich stories of their own right, the presence of the framing narrative alters their perception. As they are told through Scheherazade, they become a survival tactic. The stories she tells are seen through a new lens,

and readers try to find within them the underlying message from Scheherazade to her husband. When a story seems to advocate for the kindness of a husband towards his wife, the story is scrutinized not only for its own meaning, but also for the meaning Scheherazade gives it when she uses it to preserve her own life. When a story seems to *not* promote Scheherazade's interests, the reader is set on a new quest trying to determine *why* Scheherazade would tell *that* story. Without this external frame, the stories would be subject to only a single level of scrutiny; the external frame of Scheherazade's tales brings the story a new level of scrutiny. As shown by this early example of a frame narrative, many external framing devices are used to enhance or change the reception of the internal framed narrative.

Frame narratives have also been utilized as experiments with structure and form, as well as to further a central theme or thesis. By definition, a frame narrative contains within itself (at least) two layers of story: the story that the narrator inhabits, and the story that the narrator tells. Ideas can be expanded upon in both layers, giving the author plenty of room to explore and develop concepts both within and without a central story. A theme can have an impact within a story while also affecting the story that is external to it. This structure allows a story to operate on multiple levels, creating narratives that are multifaceted and complexly layered. As we will discuss later, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* utilizes the frame narrative to explore character growth and internal and external ways of thinking of and sharing parts of one's self.

When a frame narrative is about one character describing their own past, such as in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a preemptive ending is automatically developed. For a character to describe their own story, they must have within themselves the capacity to tell it. Therefore, the audience knows that no matter what happens in the interior story, the character who tells it must make it to the point in life when they first begin telling that story. When the story that the

character tells is a life story, this further reveals the ending of the story to the audience; they know that the character will not die or be otherwise incapacitated before the story's end, simply because they have already been shown that the character lives to tell their own tale. When the audience sees Janie struggling through the hurricane, for example, there is no fear that Janie will not survive the catastrophe; the audience already knows that she does. Although seemingly opposite to *They Both Die at the End* (the audience being guaranteed death versus being guaranteed survival), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* ensures growth and development and progression towards an end while *They Both Die at the End* desires that same growth but must struggle against the impending end to achieve it.

This preemptive knowledge of Janie's fate extends beyond simply knowing that she will be alive to tell her story. When we first meet Janie, she is an assured woman, undaunted by her petty neighbors. Her past is still a mystery to the audience, yet Janie claims to have been "a delegate to de big 'ssociation of life" (Hurston and Danticat 5). These claims are reflected in her mannerisms as well: she is worldly and confident and kind. When we enter the story of her past, however, we encounter a young Janie whose naivete and youthful optimism are quickly confronted by the harshness of the world. This Janie does not match the one that the audience was first introduced to, and this discrepancy is something that the readers will note. Because of the preemptive ending, where Janie is established as independent and strong, readers will anticipate the growth and development of Janie's character until she becomes that woman they first met. The differences between the young Janie and the adult Janie suggest that between these two iterations of herself Janie will experience life in a way that will shape her into her adult self.

Of course, it can be said that character development should be anticipated in any character-driven work. What sets apart *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and other frame

narratives in which the narrator stars as protagonist of the framed story is that the audience knows ahead of time who that character will eventually become. The story becomes less of a mysterious future and more of a fulfillment of a preexisting present. Instead of wondering who Janie will become and how she will end up, the audience is assured of her future and of her own personal fulfillment. This assurance is especially important in this story about black women and the challenges that they were facing in the aftermath of the Civil War. Stories about black women during this time are frequently filled with strife, and Janie's story is no different. By revealing her future ahead of time, Hurston incorporates a comforting assurance to her audience. Janie's story, though harrowing, does not end fatally or woefully as many other stories of black women did. The many challenges that she faces can be weathered by the audience with the security that they will not be her doom.

Reclaiming Your Own Story

Hurston utilizes the preemptive ending in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a means of furthering some of the central themes of Janie's story. We will be looking in depth at two of these themes, though the preemptive ending is not limited to just these. The first we will explore in relation to the preemptive ending is Janie's growth, to the point that she is able to take ownership over her own story. This novel is not just a story about Janie Crawford's life; it is about Janie Crawford using her own words to tell her own life story. The interior story of this text, of Janie's growth and life, could stand individually as a rich story on its own without the external framing device. Hurston's choice to frame it with Janie's adult voice is thus important. Through this device Hurston grants her character voice and power over Janie's own story and marks evidence of the growth we see illustrated in the interior story.

The book begins externally in regards to both the external framing narrative and the perspective the audience inhabits. Structurally, the text starts with the external framing narrative of Janie as an adult, as she returns home. The interior of the story is Janie's life story from childhood to adulthood. We then end the story with the other half of the external framing device, with Janie as an adult returned home. This dichotomy between exterior and interior is further expanded upon in the story itself. As Janie returns home at the beginning of the book, the audience does not read through her perspective; instead, they read through the perspective of Pheoby and the porch-sitters. The audience sits among the porch-sitters as they gossip about Janie's return, exploring Janie's exteriority only: how she looks, what she's wearing, what other people think of her. Only when Janie begins telling her story does the audience become more intimately involved with her narrative. For the first two sections of the book then, the frame narrative's positioning is united with the audience's perspective. When we start with the external narrative, we see Janie externally. When we enter the internal narrative, we see Janie's interiority. At the end of the book, however, we lose this unity.

After Janie has revealed her interiority to the audience in the internal section of the book, we return to the external section of the book, but we do not return to Janie's exterior. Even in the return to the present, we still retain access to Janie's mind because she has already granted it. The external narrative, which had previously followed Pheoby as she went to welcome Janie back home, does not continue to follow Pheoby as she returns to her own home and husband. Instead, we remain with Janie as she concludes her day and her story, lingering through her bedtime routine and the closing of the book. She reflects on the life she has lived and how she feels about it, and the audience is now welcome in her interiority. Janie's interiority now has a place in the exterior narrative, or in the present of her life. Where before her interiority had been

discouraged by her grandmother and husbands, it's now free to exist externally for the first time as Janie finally unites herself with her external appearance and attitude.

Note how we as the audience do not have access to Janie's interiority until Janie chooses to reveal it. Hurston does this in order to give Janie the power to tell her own story instead of giving it to some omniscient narrator. In doing this, she emphasizes the importance of Janie asserting her ownership over her story. A story can be told about anything, but not everyone can wield their own story with truth and confidence. By the time Janie returns home to Eatonville, she has grown and experienced life in such a way that she has, in the words of Edwidge Danticat, "earned the right to the griot of her own tale, [become] the heroine of her own quest, [and] the 'member' of her own remembering" (x). For much of her life Janie has lived at the sides of others, whether those others are her grandmother, Logan Killicks, Jody Starks, or even beloved Tea Cake. As she lives by the side of each person, she realizes, one companion at a time, more and more about herself, until she returns home to Eatonville with no one at her side. First, her life is commanded by her grandmother, who arranges Janie's marriage with Killicks. After living under Killicks' command for a while, Janie takes her own initiative and decides to run away with Jody, only for him to then take new command over her life. After Jody's death, Janie for the first time is able to choose love for herself in Tea Cake, and it is here that she finds a life with a partner who allows her to fulfill her own desires. When death takes away Janie's last partner, she finds herself on her own. The power falls into her hands, no one else's. Even though Tea Cake loved Janie and permitted her some individuality, she still had to obtain that permission. On her own, she answers to no one but herself for the first time in her life. Now, independent and knowledgeable of life, Janie becomes the "'member' of her own remembering," (Hurston and Danticat x) finally able to recollect and tell her story once she's finally lived it through. Would a

Janie at any other point in her life be able to sit down and tell her own tale as she does at the beginning of this book? It is only once she has lived and learned, has gone there and known there (Hurston and Danticat 192), that she has the capacity to voice herself and her story.

Janie's ownership of her story is also important because of the cultural context she is living in. As a black woman in the early 1900's living in rural Florida, Janie faces both racism and sexism as she struggles to gain power over her own life. Though Janie's story does not involve the toppling of these oppressive systems, she is still able to assert herself through her voice, something that Hurston comments on as "the only real weapon left to weak folks" (Hurston and Danticat 186). Janie may not have political, social, or even physical power, but the power of language is still hers to command. And as Janie reaches the point in her life at which the audience first meets her, she finally exercises that power to assert herself into her own narrative.

The End as New Beginning

It is important that this story has a preemptive ending, because it is the core of the novel's emphasis on endings that are the starting place for new beginnings. I have been calling the first few pages of this text a preemptive ending because that scene would linearly end the story of Janie's life up until this point, but instead has been placed at its start. So in that sense, yes, the beginning of this book encompasses the end of the rest of Janie's story contained in the book. But this preemptive ending could also be thought of as the beginning of a new section of Janie's life.

Returning to Currie's concept of the "anticipation of retrospection," Janie's story is told entirely in the past tense. This confirms what we already know: Janie is narrating the story of her past from a point during which she is capable of retrospection. We lose some of the

"anticipation" here, because thanks to the external narrative of the novel, we already know that Janie is narrating from a point of retrospection. What is interesting is that it isn't just the internal narrative that is in the past tense; the external narrative is also in the past tense. This once again suggests the anticipation of retrospection, but this time in a less obvious place. When Janie is forty years old and constructing a retrospective on her past, there still remains the implication that even that moment is subject to further retrospection. By narrating this in the past tense, Hurston is telling the audience that Janie has further to go in her own story; she hasn't yet reached her next point of retrospection, but its existence is acknowledged in the past tense narration. One section of Janie's past has concluded, but the audience can anticipate that she will continue on to another section of living that she will eventually also be able to look upon from a place of retrospection.

The imagery in Hurston's story continues this theme of endings leading to new beginnings. Throughout the story Hurston invokes metaphorical imagery of the sun and its journey throughout the day, connecting it with new beginnings and endings in Janie's journey. She leaves Logan Killicks and starts her new life with Jody Starks wearing the "morning road air… like a new dress" (Hurston and Danticat 32), but by the time they are married she sees "the sun plunge into the same crack in the earth from which the night emerged" (Hurston and Danticat 33). What is true of the sun is that there is never a permanent end to its cycle; following each sunset there will always be a new beginning in the form of a sunrise. This is also true of Janie's life: at the end of her childhood with Granny, she marries Logan Killicks; at the end of her marriage with Killicks, she runs away with Jody Starks; at the end of her marriage with Starks, she begins to court Tea Cake; and finally, after Tea Cake's death, Janie begins a new part of her life. Janie knows "that God tore down the old world every evening and built a new one by

sun-up" (Hurston and Danticat 25), and this knowledge much resembles the path of her life. Every time the sun sets on part of her life, she reaches a new part of her life by the time the sun rises again. We meet Janie at the beginning of this book in flux, between the sunset of Tea Cake's life and the sunrise of the new chapter of her own life.

By placing this moment of Janie at the end of her journey at the beginning of the book, Hurston is pointing out that this moment is not truly an ending; for Janie, it's the beginning of a new section of her life, and this section is more important than the many other beginnings Janie has experienced. As described earlier, Janie has never truly lived on her own, of her own accord. This is the first beginning that she will experience on her own, and it is the beginning in which she has all the resources she needs to live a life as she chooses to. This beginning can be well described in the same way that Hurston describes the porch-sitters on the first page of the novel: the "sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long" (Hurston and Danticat 1). Janie has likewise spent her life working and suffering, often without regard for her own thoughts and desires. Even Tea Cake, though the most freeing of Janie's partners, often did things without Janie's input. But she, like the sitters, is freed by the end of the day, or the end of her life thus far. When "the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human" (Hurston and Danticat 1). With the sunset comes the freedom to live, talk, and laugh according to one's own wishes and Janie, at the nightfall of her journey and all on her own for the first time ever, is able to join in on that freedom.

Hurston even tells the audience herself that this ending of Janie's journey is not an ending for her. "The beginning of this," Hurston writes in the first page of her novel, "was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead" (Hurston and Danticat 1). This description acknowledges the endings present in this story, those being the dead in the form of Tea Cake and

the others from Janie's past, while also indicating that they have led to a beginning, Janie's beginning. The "this" that Hurston refers to, is the dream that is the truth she describes previous to this sentence:

> Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (Hurston and Danticat 1)

This paragraph describes Janie's conceptualization of her past and her dreams. The story Janie tells to Pheoby are the memories that she has preserved and built her life and story from. These are the moments she chooses to remember, such that she may define herself accordingly. Her dreams, once rosy and wishful during her childhood, have been shaped by the truth of the life that she has lived, and now she is living according to that truth which she has learned. And this truth begins only once she has done all this mental work, when she ends the story of her life as we hear it by coming back from burying the dead.

The Song of Achilles: Knowing the Ending

Structure and Cultural Knowledge

The final novel we will look at is Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*. This novel is a retelling of the story of Achilles, a well-known Greek hero largely popularized by Greek mythology and Homer's *The Iliad.* The story follows Achilles' life from boyhood until his death in the Trojan War, all from the perspective of his close companion, Patroclus. In retelling this story, Miller, a scholar of classics, works carefully with the Homeric mythology while balancing cultural perceptions and expectations and a modern viewpoint. As such, her story becomes a new and unique insight into the lives of both Achilles and Patroclus, following their story until they become the heroes of myth as we now know them.

Like *They Both Die at the End*, from the moment a reader reads the title of *The Song of Achilles*, they know the ending. In this case, however, it is not because the title says how the book will end. Instead, the reader already knows the ending from their own knowledge of Greek mythology. Simply from cultural osmosis the reader knows of Achilles and the Trojan War, though how much a reader knows will vary. Many know that Achilles was the greatest warrior to fight in the Trojan War until he was struck down at its end. As the reader navigates Miller's novel, they will encounter familiar names, places, and stories such as the hero Odysseus, the legendary Trojan Horse, and the many stories that the centaur teacher Chiron tells of his famous pupils. This reliance on pre-existing stories and knowledge does not, however, limit the consumption of the story. Though the novel is perhaps more predictable to scholars of Greek mythology, it is still easily accessible to those who only know Achilles as the guy who got shot in the heel.

To claim almost all readers will know the end of *The Song of Achilles* is a sweeping assumption. Not everyone experiences culture in the same manner; what may seem like common knowledge to one person could be an absolute mystery to another. But when it comes to the story of Achilles, it is rare to find someone who is not aware of the myth due to how saturated our culture is with it. To start, Greek mythology remains a staple of early education. Many schools have Greek myths in their curriculum, and the most common Greek literature to read in class includes translations of Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

In addition to this, Greek mythology has been a staple of cultural curiosity for centuries. *The Iliad* was performed and recited often to the public immediately after its creation, and a few centuries later tragic playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were writing their own versions of the events. Homer's works weren't confined to Greek adaptations, however; Latin poets such as Virgil and Ovid introduced their renditions of the events, and eventually medieval and Early Modern writers such as Chaucer and Boccaccio began writing even *more* variations of the stories. Even now, the modern consumer can enjoy adaptations of the *Iliad* in forms such as music (Bob Dylan's "Temporary Like Achilles" (1966) and Led Zeppelin's "Achilles Last Stand" (1976)), television (*Doctor Who's* "The Myth Makers"' episode (1965), the BBC miniseries *In Search of the Trojan War* (1985), the *Phineas and Ferb* episode "Troy Story" (2013)), and comics (the *Marvel Illustrated's* rendition of *The Iliad* (2008)). You can even catch Brad Pitt starring as Achilles in the 2004 movie *Troy.* So, it is reasonable to assume that nearly every participant in Western culture knows Achilles' story to some degree. And, with the constant of each of these adaptations being Achilles' pivotal fall in the Trojan War, we can further assume that most everyone is aware of Achilles' death.

Perhaps where Achilles is most well-known is where his name has been adapted to common terms and phrases referencing the tendon in the back of our legs. In his widely read text *Corporis Humani Anatomia* (1693), the anatomist Philip Verheyen describes the tendon as the "cord of Achilles" (269), the first record of this piece of anatomy being named after Achilles. Though the term wasn't an immediate hit, it began to find its way into surgical and anatomical textbooks as the "Achilles tendon" in the 19th century. The phrase "Achilles heel" entered our vocabulary starting with a militaristic use of the term, referring to points of weakness that can lead to a downfall ("The Austrian Navy" 537).

This phrase comes from a myth of uncertain source that Achilles' mother, the goddess Thetis, worried about Achilles' mortality and dipped him into the River Styx to make him invulnerable. However, she neglected to dip his heel, the part of the body she held him by, and thus the vulnerable heel led to his downfall when he was eventually shot there towards the end of the Trojan War. Even though this story is not in *The Iliad* (and neither is Achilles' death), it was commonly adopted into the story of Achilles, with many adaptations utilizing the arrow in the heel as his downfall. Madeline Miller, however, does not ascribe to this trend, instead drawing on other sources where Achilles is not invulnerable and is simply shot in the chest. Though this decision in some ways undermines the preemptive ending (most readers will be surprised at the end of the novel when Achilles is not shot through the heel as expected), Miller still plays on this cultural expectation. Throughout the text Patroclus praises Achilles' feet and heels as symbols of his demi-godhood, and each mention of his "miraculous feet" (Miller 135) reminds the reader of their cultural expectations of Achilles' death. This allows Miller to string the readers along with mistaken knowledge of an ending they will not receive. And though Achilles does not die via heel, he does still die, and the constant reference to his heel keeps that important preemptive

ending fresh in the minds of the readers, for the connection between Achilles' heel and his death are near inseparable.

Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, though it does revolve around Achilles, is not narrated by Achilles himself. Instead, the story is told through the first-person perspective of Patroclus, well-known in mythology as Achilles' close friend, whose death was the catalyst to the end of the Trojan War. Through Patroclus' perspective both pre- and post-mortem (Patroclus continues to narrate after death as a somewhat omniscient specter) we get a more intimate look at Achilles' life, watching him and learning about him from the perspective of someone who loves him. We stand by Achilles' side throughout his rise to fame and watch him crash against the war that heralds the end of his life, but why not investigate Achilles' character through his own perspective? As a lauded hero of myth and culture, Achilles is rendered almost untouchable. How to portray the man that everyone has their own assumptions about and expectations for? Patroclus, however, is not as well-known as Achilles despite being at his side throughout his whole life. He does not carry the same cultural expectations that Achilles does. Patroclus can also give us an insight into how Achilles' contemporaries perceived him; Achilles himself would likely have a less clear view of this. Through Patroclus we can see Achilles' private moments while also witnessing his actions that will lead to him becoming a public figure in both his own time and in the modern world.

Just as there exists a divide between Achilles the person and Achilles the hero, there also exists a divide in Miller's work between what details are drawn from myth and which are her own elaborations on the story. There does not exist such an intimate portrayal of Achilles in the Ancient Greek source texts. Much of what she portrays does come from those sources, but she alters the perspective of those sources to make the story as full and intimately detailed as a

modern reader would expect from a romance novel. Miller structurally addresses this discrepancy by switching back and forth between the present and past tense in her novel. This striking technique harkens back to our discussion of Currie's anticipation of retrospection introduced in the *They Both Die at the End* section; the parts of the book when Patroclus narrates in present tense are the parts that Miller perhaps took more creative liberties with. Patroclus first seeing Achilles in the Olympics, Patroclus trying to save Briseis from Agamemnon, and Patroclus' existence as a ghost are all moments narrated through present tense, and what they all have in common is that these are moments where Patroclus is without Achilles, moments that exist apart from his legend. Odysseus notes that Achilles' "fame will be so great that a man will be written into eternal legend just for having passed a cup to [him]" (Miller 165). It is in this way Achilles makes Patroclus notable through his relationship with him; most other parts of Patroclus' life are not documented in the Ancient Greek source texts, for Patroclus on his own was not as worthy of myth as Achilles was. These moments are thus less remarkable in terms of their historic value. Conversely, the vast majority of the book, when Patroclus is constantly at Achilles' side, is narrated in the past tense. Like Currie suggests, a story narrated in the past tense acknowledges that there is some future point of retrospection possible. By marking the majority of the story about Achilles in the past tense while allowing Patroclus his private moments in the present tense, Miller points out the audience's position as consumers of historic material. Achilles' life is not a brand-new story to unfold, because we know it well already. Patroclus' story, however, has never been told for the sake of its own merit; his life is usually an accompaniment to Achilles'. These sections of present tense acknowledge that his story is new in the eyes of the audience, new and unhistoricized in contrast to the centuries-long celebration of the story of Achilles.

Prophecy

As we shift from an external perspective of the book to a more internal one, we also bring a more forwards-looking perspective to complement our backwards-looking one in the form of prophecy. Like all of humanity, the Ancient Greeks wanted to know the future. They satisfied this desire through divination. Divine advice on both public and private affairs of everyday Greek life came from oracles, people through whom the gods spoke. The words of these oracles were often so vague that they could be interpreted in many different ways, such that they were usually construed to be true. In *The Song of Achilles* we encounter many prophecies, each of which is treated in the same way that the Ancient Greek culture treated their prophecies: immutable. It is in this form that we encounter the first form of preemptive endings in this text, the preemptive ending that both the characters and the audience know.

Prophecies shape the arc of this story, informing characters of their indisputable destiny and the conditions they must meet to fulfill it. Some may resist the prophecy or desire it to be false, but in the world of this text, there is no such thing as a false prophecy. Prophecies are to be understood as inescapable by the characters in this novel as well as the audience. Furthermore, these prophecies are often corroborated by the audience's cultural knowledge. When Achilles states that he is prophesied to "be the greatest warrior of [his] generation" (Miller 38), the audience does not question it, for they know it to be true. Achilles is often the *only* warrior of his generation that a modern person can name. Though not all promises a prophecy may make are as well-known by the audience, their existence alongside indisputable prophecies about Achilles' legacy lends them credence. If some of the prophecies are undeniably true, it easily follows that they might all be, and in the story that Madeline Miller tells, they all are.

Prophecy dictates much of Achilles' life for him. Achilles' birth does not take place in this novel, but it is discussed in relation to two prophecies. One tells his mother Thetis that her "son will be greater than his father" (Miller 367), while the other claims that he will "be the greatest warrior of [his] generation" (Miller 38). Achilles' life is thus begun with two promises of greatness, promises that begin Achilles' journey to achieving that greatness. He is defined by this promise of future greatness, living life as the supernaturally gifted golden boy, already famous despite not yet having fulfilled his prophecy. The prophecies reap him the rewards of their truth before they even come to pass. Achilles is well-respected and admired for future deeds he has yet to commit. Despite never allowing anyone to witness his skill as a warrior, his prophecy gains him the attention of Odysseus and Diomedes. They seek for him to join the Trojan War not because of any actualized abilities they have seen, but because of the promise of his future greatness. They have never met Achilles, let alone tested his skills, yet their faith in the prophecies is so strong that they travel far and wide just to convince him to fight on their side. It is uncertain if Achilles would have joined the war without their entreaties. He is not eager to do so, yet their appearance brings him the knowledge he needs to make his decision. Odysseus and Diomedes could very likely not ever have known of Achilles' existence if it weren't for his prophecies, and would therefore never have convinced him to fight in the war. Yet their preemptive knowledge of the future ensured their efforts to recruit him. It is in this way that prophecy solidifies the future while also ensuring its occurrence by exerting its pressure on the present.

Odysseus and Diomedes' efforts are furthered by the introduction of a new prophecy. These prophecies, along with the audience's cultural knowledge, carve a distinct path in the story Miller tells. As more prophecies are introduced, the characters feel more confined by their future.

Patroclus tries to postpone the future by asking Achilles not to go to war, but both Patroclus and the audience are shown that the prophecies are inevitable. The audience likewise reads the story as one confined to the parameters of history. If it deviates from the prophecies, and by extent our cultural knowledge, then it is no longer Achilles' story. It would be a new story altogether, perhaps based on the story of Achilles, but not rooted in it. When Odysseus tells Achilles that his only choices are either fighting in the Trojan War and dying young or living a long life of anonymity (Miller 165), Achilles can feel the path of his life narrowing. A prophecy states that he can only have one or the other, not both. The audience experiences this narrowing more acutely, for they already know the choice Miller's Achilles must make in order to stay true to his myth.

Fiction based on well-known myth becomes confined by the narrative it draws upon, to the point that, like *They Both Die at the End*, the intrigue must come from somewhere besides the mystery of a hidden ending. Miller does this by emphasizing Achilles' private life instead of the public narrative that is already so well-known. She utilizes Patroclus' point of view as Achilles' lover in order to uncover the more human side of the heroic figure. Patroclus' concern in the face of Achilles' growing fame is never about his legacy or his power, unlike the rest of the characters, but is instead about loving and preserving Achilles' humanity. We witness Patroclus falling in love with the Achilles we previously knew primarily as a legend. Patroclus' love for Achilles brings him back down to earth, such that he becomes a character that the reader can better relate to, more than the untouchable hero of Greek myth. The existence of the preemptive ending thus connects Achilles' story of humanity to the audience's perception of him as a hero, adding a new facet to his tale while retaining the cultural impact of the original myth.

Legacy

Legacy plays both a forward-looking part in this story as well as a backward-looking one: the characters in this story are aware of and dedicated to their future legacies, while the audience knows that this story is already a cultural legacy. This results in an interesting back-and-forth between the characters who are seeking to become legends, and the audience who already knows the characters were successful in that effort. Achilles' story in this book is largely driven by that effort to obtain legendary status. Without the prophecy of promised fame, Achilles likely would not have fought in the Trojan War. He did not want to fight, but he did "not think [he] could bear" (Miller 167) the loss of his legacy. "Who was he," Patroclus questions, "if not destined for fame" (Miller 167)? The answer is that Achilles would be just like every other person in the world: largely unremarkable for historic purposes. If he were not destined for fame, Miller's book would not exist. But his choice to pursue his own legacy is what secures his legacy and this book's very existence. The modern audience's attention, their interest in and knowledge of Achilles, embodies his goal. Us reading this book now, hearing his story and discussing it, is what Achilles desires and what Achilles fights for when he chooses to go to war instead of living long and without remembrance.

But legacy has another role in this story as well. For Patroclus, legacy plays the part of the antagonist. As Achilles and his supporters strive toward his legacy, Patroclus struggles against it, trying to stop the legend Achilles from taking over the person Achilles. For the audience, Achilles already is a legend. We preemptively know that this is where Achilles will end up. Miller introduces Patroclus' fight against the preemptive ending by telling the *song* of Achilles instead of the legend we already know. Her book is not precisely faithful to the source of the myth, nor is it faithful to the legend modern readers know. Instead, she revives romance

where it had been obscured through the long reception of the myth, she introduces peace when before there had been war, and she introduces modern language and sentiment to present this new side of Achilles to the modern reader. Patroclus and Miller together fight to preserve Achilles as a person like any of us, a person who loves and cries and bleeds like the rest. This approach to the preemptive ending recontextualizes the legend we know completely. Achilles' death is no longer the fantastic story of felling a giant that modern readers are familiar with; instead it's a lifetime of love culminating in sorrow. The book further thwarts our expectations of the ending by continuing it past Achilles' death; the book does not end when Achilles is buried under his gravestone. The book doesn't end until Patroclus' name is etched upon the gravestone as well, transforming it from a monument to Achilles' legend to a grave for two people who loved each other in life and will continue to do so in death. This act punctuates Achilles' story with an act of humanity instead of an act of legend.

Miller's story in the same vein works to carve out a space for Patroclus alongside the legend of Achilles. Patroclus is a name not nearly as well-known as Achilles; most people who know of Achilles do not know Patroclus unless they have studied Achilles' myth. Miller's book brings into question which names are preserved in history and which are forgotten. We know Achilles because of his heroic yet violent deeds, serving as a pivotal force of the Trojan War. Patroclus did not serve the war's violent ends, yet he still remains a pivotal force in it. When Achilles' arrogance and stubbornness brings about the death of hundreds and the weakening of the Greek army, Patroclus impersonates Achilles to rally the troops and to maintain Achilles' legacy as a kind and humane person. When Patroclus is killed by Hector because of these actions, he is the catalyst that will lead to the end of the war. Achilles had thus far refused to kill Hector, despite it being a necessity to secure victory, because of a prophecy that stated Achilles

would not die until after Hector did (Miller 170). It is not until Hector kills Patroclus that Achilles seeks in earnest to kill Hector and thereby bring about the end of the war. Patroclus' dedication to preserving the lives of his countrymen and preserving the goodness of Achilles bring about the eventual fall of Troy, yet Patroclus, "best of men, best of the Myrmidons" (Miller 314), does not have the same fame as figures such as Achilles and Odysseus. In writing this story, Miller makes an attempt to bring at least some of Achilles' fame to Patroclus, telling Patroclus' tale just as Patroclus tells Achilles' tale to us. Though Patroclus will likely never be as well-known as Achilles, more people recognize his name now than did before, and recognize his role in the Trojan War. Miller's championing of Greek figures who have been obscured by modern reception of Greek myth also prevails in her other novel *Circe*, as she works to secure both Patroclus and Circe a legacy with different nuance than what comes from their legends. She utilizes the audience's knowledge of what is mostly Achilles' preemptive ending (and Odysseus' in *Circe*) in order to draw the audience in and expand upon their expectations. The story is richer because it does not follow the same path that so many adaptations of Achilles' myth do; it alters the story until it accomplishes something unique enough to change a reader's preconceived perception of history and myth.

Conclusion

Preemptive endings in narratives are something that have been explored before, but not usually as a subject on its own. Scholars have often addressed the structure and purpose of frame narratives, but in the course of my research I have not found many studies on other preemptive endings. The frame narrative is the most common of the three types of preemptive endings that I have detailed in this essay, but, as I have also detailed in this essay, it is not the only one. As writers engage with temporality and preexisting knowledge of stories, we see more of these phenomena emerge into our culture. For one example, take a look at all the Disney movie remakes we have seen in the last decade. As a writer myself, I thought it important that we study this topic, for both the purposes of further understanding and further iterations.

As I began this thesis process, I cast my net wide. I was attracted to the potential that fiction offers for skewing the typical linearity of temporality. This is something that I am fascinated by in texts I read as well as something I am interested in engaging with in my own creative writing. I began by reading texts about literary temporality, familiarizing myself with the terms and ideas associated with the area. As I narrowed down my research to the topic you encounter in this paper, I realized how little literature there is on this specific area. The texts I had been reading provided an excellent foundation, but from there, I was on my own. I had to take my learning into my own hands, shifting my focus entirely to the three texts I had chosen. I read and reread these texts, paying close attention to their preemptive endings, how they were executed, and their effects on the novels. The result has become a thorough understanding of the concept of a preemptive ending and to what ends it can be utilized. The structure of a preemptive ending by its nature stimulates its audience in a way that a reader will not encounter in everyday life by changing the linearity of

time. This phenomenon is striking, and this study has granted me a greater appreciation and understanding of it.

For the purposes of this thesis, I limited myself to three texts, each exemplary of their respective categories. I feel that this study could be expanded, perhaps into three theses, wherein we take a closer look at each of these three categories, including other works that fit in them. From here, it would be interesting to see how texts within each category compare to each other, and how they contrast. Do all texts from the "Telling the Ending" category have so firm an ending as death? What other possibilities lie in this category? The "Showing the Ending" category is more widely studied out than the others, as discussed before, but are there methods of showing the ending besides frame narratives? How do these other methods compare? And as we see an ever-increasing flood of remakes and retellings into our culture, the "Knowing the Ending" category could be fruitfully expanded beyond literature, perhaps to film and to theater as well. This thesis is only a beginning that has many potential futures that I hope to see studied and developed even further.

Through my engagement with the three texts, I explored the previously undefined concept of a preemptive ending and expanded it to encompass structures we are very familiar with as literary scholars as well as some that we are less familiar with. I have learned why each of these three authors chose to structure their text with a preemptive ending and how that choice alters and enhances the stories they tell. In the future I anticipate encountering many variations on the idea of a preemptive ending and look forward to exploring how it fits (or doesn't fit) into my definition of the term. I am excited to utilize my newfound understanding of this subject in creative works of my own.

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