Madeleine is Sleeping Study Guide

Madeleine is Sleeping by Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum

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Plot Summary

Madeleine is Sleeping is an allegorical tale about a young girl's coming of age. Madeleine is first condemned by society, responds by taking flight and rebelling and ultimately embarks upon a doomed quest for redemption. Her condemnation takes place as a result of being caught playing sex games with the village idiot, a man by the name of M. Jouy. Although all the other girls in the village play the same games with the idiot, Madeleine is the only one who responds with fascination instead of revulsion. One of the other girls, Sophie, rats her out and Madeleine becomes the scapegoat for all the girls' behavior, as well as for the behavior of M. Jouy. The village gendarme sends M. Jouy to an insane asylum, but Madeleine's severe mother feels the need to inflict a permanent punishment on Madeleine, forever branding her for her sins. She dips Madeleine's hands into a pot of boiling lye, wraps her hands in homemade poultices and sends her off to a convent.

Madeleine, angry at her treatment, escapes the convent and joins a traveling band of actors, misfits and runaways posing as a gypsy caravan. The traveling company is led by Marguerite, an actress who encourages Madeleine to reject society's disapproval, transform herself and find redemption through the appreciation of an audience. Marguerite unwraps Madeleine's hands, which have grown together to form mitten-like paddles. To Marguerite's delight, Madeleine chooses to learn and perform contortionist acrobatics with her paddle-like hands.

Another member of the troupe, M. Pujol, is a man also seeking purpose and approval through a stage audience, as he desperately seeks to recapture his former success on the stage. M. Pujol's act demonstrates his unusual deformity-one that allows him to sing and play musical instruments through his rectum. In M. Pujol's mind, the humiliating nature of this "talent" was at least somewhat compensated for by the appreciation of his audience. Unfortunately, audiences have grown too sophisticated for his brand of humor and so M. Pujol now endures daily humiliation without the compensation of audience admiration. Perhaps because she feels so sorry for him, Madeleine falls madly in love with the flatulent man, although, ironically, she herself becomes the unwilling instrument of his humiliation.

Times have been hard for the gypsy troupe, as the audiences have stopped coming to their shows. Consequently, they accepted their only financial offer: to pose as live pornographic characters for a lecherous old widow's pleasure. As part of the pornographic tableau, the widow has Madeleine use her misshapen hands to beat M. Pujol's naked backside. A photographer named Adrien, who is also in love with M. Pujol, captures each night's paddling session on film.

The carnival freaks are afraid of the old widow and even more afraid of not earning a living, so they continue to gather each night and pose for another session. One day, Madeleine sees herself in the photos and gains a different perspective on her actions: She sees herself becoming the victimizer instead of the victim. In response, Madeleine refuses to paddle M. Pujol again, even though the widow beats her with an ivory fan to

try to change her mind. M. Pujol, who has accepted his nightly humiliations, balks at the widow's violent treatment of young Madeleine. He realizes that he can save Madeleine by leaving. Despite his fear of the widow, he slips a note under her door stating that he's going to the hospital to donate his body to scientific study.

Madeleine and Adrien's shared love for M. Pujol brings them together as friends, lovers and ultimately, traveling companions, when they set off to rescue M. Pujol from the hospital. Upon arriving at the hospital, which is actually more of an insane asylum, Madeleine's freakish hands nearly land her in a padded cell. However, Adrien claims she is his assistant and offers his photography services to the hospital director, who believes photography can help him diagnose his patients. The director, who is mad himself, plans to perform an exploratory surgery on M. Pujol that could be fatal to the flatulent man.

While they are at the hospital, Adrien's interest shifts from M. Pujol to Madeleine. Madeleine, however, resolves to save M. Pujol in every way: first, by rescuing him from the hospital and second, by restoring his career to its former luster. She plans to build a stage for him in her home village, believing that her narrow-minded neighbors are just the sort of people who would enjoy M. Pujol's act.

Meanwhile, Madeleine's mother is suffering from anger and depression. Mourning the loss of her daughter, she searches for a way to bring Madeleine home without having to face the horror of her own actions. Mother clings to her harshly judgmental beliefs in order to avoid seeing herself as a woman who permanently mutilated her own daughter. In addition, the villagers have turned against Mother because Madeleine is not the only one of Mother's children to behave wickedly. Beatrice, Madeleine's sister, has become the leader of the village girls and draws them into sexual games that the villagers consider wicked. The villagers refuse to buy Mother's preserves anymore and revile her in the village. However, joy finds Mother again when inspiration gives her the answer: Madeleine could marry M. Jouy, thus redeeming her in the eyes of both God and, hopefully, the village.

Madeleine envisions her triumphant homecoming. She will be the stage queen who brings the shining talents of Le Petomane (M. Pujol) back to life. Her hometown will shower her with praise and affection for bringing them such a treasure. In this way, she will be transformed in their eyes, finding acceptance, love and respect. As is the case with many ostracized misfits, Madeleine believes she has to achieve superstardom in order to be granted even basic acceptance by society. She aims high and her ultimate failure and public humiliation are proportionately monumental.

Through a tragic mistake, it is not Le Petomane who appears on stage, but M. Jouy, Madeleine's molester. Horrified at the error, Madeleine takes the stage herself and tries to wow the villagers with the acrobatics and pornographic tricks she learned from the traveling group of outcasts. The villagers see Madeleine's mutilated hands and are stunned by pity and guilt. Madeleine, however, is unwilling to play the part of the woman wronged. She scorns their pity and guilt and humiliates herself on the stage in her attempts to win their approval. Madeleine has rejected the stern morals of the village,

but without proper parental guidance, has replaced them with no morals at all. In her increasingly pathetic attempts to gain the audience's approval, she commits the most flagrantly hideous acts on stage, including spanking M. Jouy's naked backside in front of the Mayor and her parents. Finally, overcome by humiliation, Madeleine swoons to the ground and sleeps. The stage manager comes onto the stage and begins to explain Madeleine's story to the enraptured crowd.

Part 1

The author does not divide her story into traditional chapters. For the sake of analysis, this summary is divided into three parts, to correspond with the major action in the novel. Part 1 deals with Madeleine's life at home and with the troupe of players, Part 2 is the escape from the widow and Part 3 is the homecoming.

Part 1 Summary

Madeleine is sleeping. Mother hushes Madeleine's brothers and sisters. Madeleine is so beautiful when she sleeps that Mother does not want her woken.

Madeleine is dreaming of a grotesquely fat woman named Matilde. When Matilde walks to market, the village children line up around her like a parade and throw buttery fat at her; they mock her, asking if she is hungry. One day as Matilde walks through the rain of fat, she feels an odd sensation on her back. To her delight, Matilde realizes she has grown wings and she now flies high into the air, above the children.

Madeleine stirs in her sleep and Mother again hushes the children. "When Madeleine sleeps," Mother says, "the cows give double their milk. Pansies sprout up between the floorboards. Your father loves me, but I remain slender and childless." (pg. 7)

Madeleine dreams of Saint Michel, whose image decorates the church windows. He had once been a greedy, vain, decadent prince, but when plague and drought struck, Michel turned to God. He gave all his lands to the Church and spent the rest of his days doing penance. Michel vowed to destroy his handsome body with hair shirts and flagellations; the local abbot is more than happy to provide the beatings. Michel's wounds became infected and he died. In death, Saint Michel's body is miraculously restored to beauty. Madeleine thinks she would have loved him more had he remained disfigured. Madeleine stares at the stained glass portrait of Michel and realizes it is her own face carved in the glass. She stands at the altar, facing the congregation and then begins working her way down the rows of people. She touches each face tenderly, causing their hearts to unfold and bloom like flowers-heliotropic flowers, that, instead of following the sun, turn their faces to Madeleine.

When the chores are done, Madeleine's brothers and sisters play games with her sleeping form. They hold Mother's heirloom mirror to her nose, capturing her breath on the glass. They see animal shapes: Jean-Luc sees a whale, Claude sees a pregnant sow and Beatrice sees cows. Madeleine sleeps on.

Madeleine now dreams of a man named M. Marais, a musician. M. Marais orders a new viol be crafted in the shape of his neighbor's daughter, Charlotte. When Charlotte sees her face in the new viol, held between M. Marais' thighs as he plays, she christens it Griselda. When Charlotte comes of age, M. Marais requests her hand in marriage. Her father reluctantly gives up his favorite daughter. On their wedding night, M. Marais

leaves Charlotte alone in the house. She wanders past the servants like a ghost, searching for the bridal chamber. When she finds M. Marais, he is naked in the bedroom. He shrieks like a girl, covers his fat breasts and orders Charlotte out of the room. She watches him through the peephole, her eyes full of pity and desire.

As the days pass, Charlotte grows lonelier in M. Marais' house. Griselda, the viol, is her only friend. When her husband takes his afternoon naps, Charlotte sneaks into the music room and touches the beautiful viol. She touches her own body the same way and wishes aloud that she had strings too. Her wish is magically granted and Charlotte's black hair grows the length of her body until she, like the viol, has strings. M. Marais notices her disfigurement at the dinner table; he grips the carving knife and approaches his wife. Charlotte imagines that he will cut two f-holes into her body, like the curved openings in a viol but he only cuts the hair that has grown like strings along her abdomen. After dinner, Charlotte cuts Griselda's strings to compensate for her loss. She shreds her gown, using it to create a rope by which she escapes out the window into the night, naked and shorn.

Madeleine's father complains about the over-abundance of fruit hanging heavily from his orchard trees. Mother decides to use the excess fruit to make tarts and preserves. Madeleine stirs in her sleep.

Madeleine dreams of a woman named Marguerite. A performer, Marguerite sings on stages all over Europe; she is a much-beloved star who plays the roles of generals and kings. Marguerite always plays the leading man until one day she is usurped by a castrato: a grown man whose voice is forever trapped in the high range of adolescence thanks to the cruel operation performed on him. Marguerite tries to take her defeat gracefully, but before she leaves the stage, she makes crude gestures to the audience.

Meanwhile, Mother's preserve business is booming. She makes sure the children keep the sleeping Madeleine comfortable. One day, a handsome man appears at the door, announcing that he plans to awaken Madeleine with a kiss. Her brother, Claude, answers the door and asks the man to wait. Quickly, Mother mixes up enough dough to make one hundred tarts. She and the children fashion the dough in the exact shape of Madeleine. They let the man in. He looks at the sleeping princess and declares she is perfect. Already imagining the children they will have together, he bends over the feminine body and kisses her ardently. Crestfallen that Madeleine does not awaken at his kiss, he leaves with a free pot of preserves and crumbs on his moustache. Mother rewards her children's clever conspiracy by giving them pieces of the fake princess's body to eat.

Madeleine dreams of the first time M. Jouy placed his cock in her hand. She was ashamed to see it lie there, unanimated, because the other girls had told her it was very lively. However, when she wraps her fingers around it, it quivers and jerks in her hands, reminding her of the way a baby bird feels when she holds it. Sophie had instructed her to watch M. Jouy's face when it crumples, but Madeleine cannot take her eyes off his cock. Madeleine doesn't understand some of the older girls, who say they have outgrown this game with M. Jouy. When it's over, she wipes her hands in the long grass

and walks home. The next day, Sophie tells Madeleine's mother what Madeleine did. The gendarmes apprehend M. Jouy and Madeleine's mother places Madeleine's hands into a pot of boiling lye.

Beatrice asks to eat more of the sleeping princess. Mother agrees, but tells her to save some for her father. Beatrice is tempted by the buttery wound of the half-eaten leg, but she prefers the burnt parts, so she breaks off an entire hand. The hand looks exactly like her sister's: burned and baked together in the form of a mitten. Beatrice asks why only the hands burned. Mother replies that only the hands were wicked.

Madeleine dreams of the convent in Paris where her mother sent her after burning her hands. Madeleine takes pleasure in being helpless. With her bandaged hands, she feels like a princess. She must be waited on hand and foot each day because she cannot manage for herself. Another girl in the convent, Bernadette, takes care of Madeleine, even cleaning up her menstrual blood for her. Madeleine wonders if the abbot who ministered to Saint Michel was as devoted.

Meanwhile, M. Jouy has not forgotten Madeleine. He begins sending drawings to her mother's house. Mother gets them checked out by the local chemist, who informs her they are drawings of M. Jouy's brain pan. Having been reassured that the drawings are not ungodly, Mother uses them to decorate her pots of preserves.

Madeleine's warped hands burst the seams of her uniform, so Sister Clavel calls in the tailor. Madeleine, naked on a sunlit table as the tailor's deft hands take her measurements, feels like heaven. However, when the new uniforms arrive, she thinks their droopy arms make her look even more freakish.

On an outing with the convent, the gypsies choose Madeleine as the subject of a disappearing trick. Madeleine is wrapped in an endless piece of string and carried aloft by the gypsy mama. The other gypsies perform acrobatics and chant. A woman behind a velvet curtain opens her dress and saws a viol bow against her own tightly tuned hairs. As the music reaches a crescendo, the gypsy mama grabs the end of the string binding Madeleine and yanks it, sending her spinning like a top. When the string has unwound, Madeleine is gone.

Mother is startled by a loud thump on the roof. She looks up and sees that the flying Matilde has landed on their roof, leaving droppings by the chimney. She tells Matilde not today, because Madeleine is sleeping. Matilde bends to examine her own droppings and announces they smell like roses. Mother gasps and reminds Matilde that only saints' bones should smell like roses.

Madeleine awakes to the scent of roses. She sees the gypsy mama removing her dark makeup. Madeleine realizes the woman is not a real gypsy. The woman says she was only acting. In that case, Madeleine says to take her back to Sister Clavel. The woman just laughs and tells Madeleine to call her Marguerite.

Matilde has been making a scientific survey of her own droppings. Since she got her wings, she can often be seen on rooftops or treetops, clutching a notebook in her hand.

Matilde records everything she eats and the corresponding smell of her white, chalk-like droppings. Madeleine's brother, Jean-Luc, has been waiting for Matilde to visit. When she comes, he runs outside and climbs up the trellis to ask her to untangle his kites. She agrees, but he falls from the trellis, luckily into Mother's waiting arms.

Madeleine is disappointed by the cleanliness of the gypsy camp. Marguerite waves a deadly pair of shears in front of Madeleine; she slices off Madeleine's awful uniform. Madeleine realizes it must have been the unwieldy arms of the uniform that caught the gypsies' attention. Marguerite next unbandages Madeleine's hands. Her hands have healed, but the fingers have grown together and her hands look like paddles. Marguerite asks if it was an accident; Madeleine shakes her head. Marguerite tells her about the time she played the part of Lucretia, a woman raped by a tyrannical prince. Lucretia is filled with shame and rage and at the end of the show, kills herself. Marguerite hissed at the composer after the show, demanding he never write such a part for her again. "'I told him, make me a general. Make me a son. If you give me a sword, let me bury it in Ptolemy's side. For who wants to be a woman wronged? With no recourse but wretchedness and death?'" (pg. 56) Marguerite asks Madeleine if she understands. Madeleine shrugs. Marguerite cradles her injured hands and asks Madeleine what she will do now. Madeleine announces that she will become either a tumbler or a contortionist. Marguerite claps her hands and laughs.

Back in the village, the family receives a letter from Madeleine. Beatrice reads it aloud to Mother. Madeleine says she is happy in the convent and that a kind girl named Bernadette wrote this letter on her behalf. She adds that she prays for her family every night. Mother nods, satisfied. When she leaves, the children gather around a lit candle. Beatrice holds the letter up to the flame to reveal a second letter, written in lemon juice on top of the first letter. Madeleine says she's living with gypsies now and she doesn't miss anyone. She mentions a recent picture, in which they are all laughing at the photographer, who looks like a fool when he takes pictures because his rear end sticks out behind his camera gear.

Mother boxes Jean-Luc's ears for climbing the trellis. Watching Matilde untangle the kites, Mother gets an idea and asks Matilde to join her for tea. Mother says she's losing her touch: in the old days, she would have read Jean-Luc's mind and stopped him before he got out of the house. Mother appeals to Matilde as a woman of science to help her interpret the expressions on Madeleine's sleeping face. Matilde shows Mother her precious notebook and advises Mother to log each expression, sigh, or murmur. Eventually, Matilde assures her, the story will reveal itself.

Back with the gypsies, Charlotte and Madeleine begin to cry as they hear the mournful sounds that M. Pujol, the flatulent man, makes in his sleep. M. Pujol is always surprised when his performance inspires tears. For years, his act brought only laughter. He is a former star of the stage who makes his living creating musical sounds through his rectum. His remarkable abilities are the result of a childhood swimming accident. His mother had taken him to see a doctor, but the man was not a real doctor: instead of healing M. Pujol, he put him to work on the vaudeville stage. Tonight, as M. Pujol continues to make mournful sounds in his sleep, Charlotte opens her bodice and

accompanies him on her viol-like body, thinking sadly of her lost Griselda. Charlotte instructs Madeleine to listen carefully, because music teaches us emotion. Madeleine realizes her emotional vocabulary is limited to curiosity, amusement, grumpiness, delight and disappointment. She resolves to listen hard and to expand her range.

Mother knows her family is hardly the only one to experience tragedy, but she thinks that other tragedies make more sense than this sleeping Madeleine, who takes up space and does nothing. Mother takes to abusing Madeleine's sleeping form, growing careless with the broom handle and dripping hot wax on the sleeping girl.

The gypsy troupe is in despair. They are no longer attracting audiences. In the midst of this desperation comes a summons from a wealthy old woman. The woman has purchased every picture the photographer, Adrien, has taken of the carnival freaks and she has a proposition for them. The gypsies move onto the extensive grounds surrounding the old woman's house and she puts them to work creating freakish pornographic pictures. The tableau goes like this: M. Pujol, the flatulent man, stands naked as Madeleine uses her deformed hands to paddle his backside. The photographer catches the scene while the old woman watches, hand cupped to her ear to hear the smacking sound of Madeleine's hand hitting flesh. Madeleine likes Adrien's touch when he arranges her pose. However, Adrien touches M. Pujol and feels the man's skin burn into his hands: he is captivated. M. Pujol burns with shame.

Even though his backside has been put to another use, M. Pujol still practices his musical scales at night, dreaming of the day he will return to the stage. M. Pujol hopes to captivate the widow with his ability, but he realizes that only the prudish could take pleasure in his gift. For anyone who has moved beyond embarrassment at bodily functions, his gifts mean nothing. "How terrible it is to recognize that one's brilliance rests solely upon the small-mindedness of others." (pg. 79) M. Pujol has taken to telling the others about his days on the stage; he speaks of what a great star he was and takes pride in the fact that he always performed standing upright. Performing under the name Le Petomane, he filled theaters nightly until an impostor arrived to usurp his position. The theater hired a woman, La Femme Petomane. However, she did not share M. Pujol's talent: instead, she hid a wind-making device, like a bellows, under her skirt for each performance. The audience thought the act was even funnier coming from a woman and M. Pujol lost his place on the stage. A broken man, he was taken in by the band of gypsies.

One day in the orchard, Madeleine sees M. Pujol tossing an orange. She feels hungry and asks if he's planning to eat it. Apologetically, he plucks a second orange for Madeleine and then is embarrassed to realize that she cannot peel it with her maimed hands. He offers her his orange, but drops it in his nervousness. Madeleine looks at the soft hairs on the back of his neck and wishes desperately to be able to touch him there, delicately. For the first time, she realizes that all the pleasure she has taken from her disfigurement-of being waited on hand and foot-has vanished. She wants her hands back, if only to touch M. Pujol.

Part 1 Analysis

Madeleine's dreams mesh so smoothly with reality that we cannot tell what, if any, part of the story is real. Did her mother really mutilate her hands as punishment for her activities with M. Jouy? For Madeleine is sleeping even while this action takes place. Since we cannot separate dream action from waking reality in the story, we must turn to dream symbolism to better understand the author's intent.

Since the fledgling days of Freudian and Jungian dream analysis, hands, especially on a woman, have symbolized personal power. Little children who draw pictures of people and neglect to draw in the hands are demonstrating their feeling of powerlessness. From this psychological standpoint, then, author Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum is showing us how Madeleine has been made to feel powerless by her mother's harsh judgment of her. Madeleine's reaction to being rendered powerless by a parental figure is a typical adolescent reaction: she rebels. In this case, she rebels by joining a gypsy caravan instead of continuing to do penance at the convent. Madeleine is so entranced by her rebellion that she does not even miss the use of her hands at first.

The other people in the gypsy caravan are also lost and damaged souls. Having been cast out by society for being different, they choose to shove their differences in society's face by making a living off their freakishness. Charlotte, the woman who becomes a musical instrument, has escaped a bad marriage. Longing to be touched by her asexual husband in the way that he touches his viol, she morphs into a viol herself. When her husband still won't accept her, she flees and joins the caravan. Marguerite, the actress scorned, chose her gypsy life over her only other option, which was to play the part of a woman scorned. Marguerite believes a woman should act powerfully, not play a subservient role either in life or on the stage. When Marguerite sees how Madeleine has been debased, she tests Madeleine's resolve, to see how she will react. Had Madeleine reacted with tears, guilt, or sorrow, Marguerite wouldn't have allowed her to join the caravan. Madeleine's rebellious attitude warms Marguerite's heart and Madeleine is accepted into the fold.

Having rebelliously renounced everything that was taken away from her, Madeleine does not miss the use of her hands-until she begins to fall in love with M. Pujol. As Part 1 draws to a close, Madeleine suddenly realizes that she has lost the ability to act in the world. She wants to touch M. Pujol with the grace of a lover, but her paddle-like paws prevent this. Madeleine has reached a turning point. She no longer wants to throw away her life on rebellion.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Adrien, the formerly graceful photographer, has become suddenly clumsy. The performers grow impatient, as many photographs have to be retaken due to Adrien's klutziness. It seems that M. Pujol suffers the brunt of Adrien's accidents, however, as Adrien is constantly bumping and stumbling into him. The photographer never apologizes to M. Pujol for these incidents.

One day M. Pujol sits out by the widow's pond, thinking of his failure and humiliations. He is being watched by the small figure of Madeleine, whom he can see reflected in the pond's surface. He tells a story for the benefit of his hidden audience, about an orange carp who lived in the widow's pond. The carp was her favorite and the widow instructed the gardener to leave the carp in peace, even when he ate all the other fish. The widow enjoyed watching the sun flash off his orange scales all summer long. One day, the carp was struck by lightning. M. Pujol's hidden observer laughs at this, sensing justice at work in the carp's fate. The carp did not die, continues M. Pujol. The lightning bolt merely caused him to lose all his color and the ghastly grey carp now resembled a sunken chamber pot or the arm of a drowned woman. Madeleine's voice calls out from her hiding spot in the reeds, finishing the story by telling M. Pujol that the widow ordered the gardener to kill the washed-out carp. M. Pujol asks Madeleine how she knew the end of the story. Madeleine replies that the pond does not have any fish, so that must have been how the story ended. She asks M. Pujol whom the carp represents in his story. No one, he replies. The point of the story is that he is afraid of the widow.

Back in the village, all the young girls have disappeared. Mothers stand in their doorways, calling out for their daughters. The entire village is annoyed. Who will do the chores if the girls are gone? Papa discovers the girls. His discovery stuns him into silence when he sees what they are doing: Beatrice lies in the grass, strewn with flowers, as the other girls hold a mirror under her nose. It was Beatrice who came up with the game of playing Madeleine. She has also made up a host of rules: one must bring presents to Madeleine; one must say how beautiful Madeleine is; one must be very careful while stroking her temples or arranging her hair. If a rule is violated, Beatrice makes up the consequences: turn ten somersaults, be tied to a tree, run naked in a circle while singing. The idea of the game was to prepare the girls to see the sleeping Madeleine, but seeing Madeleine no longer matters. The game has taken on a life of its own.

Madeleine doubtfully examines one of the pornographic photos of herself paddling M. Pujol. She asks Adrien if he's certain that is her in the picture. Madeleine insists she tries to look noble and forgiving when she paddles M. Pujol. She cannot understand who the sulky and cruel-looking child in the photograph is.

That night, Madeleine fills a makeshift bag with gravel from the widow's long driveway. She takes away the gravel and comes back to refill the bag several times. Charlotte asks what she is doing and Madeleine answers that she likes to sleep to the sound of rain. Later, in the darkness, Madeleine crouches on the roof with her stockpile of gravel. She waits to hear the sound of M. Pujol moaning mournfully in his sleep. She tosses a fistful of gravel on top of his caravan, creating the sound of rain hitting the tin roof. M. Pujol's moaning subsides as she continues to toss gravel down on his roof to help him sleep.

While Madeleine continues to shower gravel on M. Pujol's caravan, Adrien shows up. Madeleine tells him to go away, but then she sees that he has brought a wagon full of gravel and wants to help. He tries to climb onto the roof. Madeleine steps on his fingers, eliciting a small cry of pain. In that instant, his pained cry reveals to Madeleine the truth of her heart: she is in love with M. Pujol. Madeleine falls off the roof, glaring angrily at Adrien for showing her this truth.

Mother tells the sleeping Madeleine she loves her. The prone girl does not so much as sigh in her sleep. Mother tries again, reminding Madeleine of how she used to brush her hair. The sleeping Madeleine remains unmoved. Mother cries in despair; Madeleine was always stubborn.

The widow cups her ear to hear Madeleine's hand smack down on M. Pujol tonight, but she hears no sound as Madeleine delivers the blows. Madeleine declares that the widow has gone deaf. She tries to get the others to agree with her, but they don't. The widow orders Madeleine to smack M. Pujol again, but this time Madeleine refuses. The widow rises and takes Madeleine into a private room. The others are afraid for her, but the widow speaks coaxingly to Madeleine, telling the girl that she, too, feels sympathy for M. Pujol. She starts to ask if Madeleine has fallen in love with the man, but Madeleine quickly interrupts her and says she refuses to paddle him anymore because he reminds her of her favorite saint. The widow is well versed in the saints. She reminds Madeleine that, unlike Saint Michel, M. Pujol has not been restored to perfection: he remains a sad wretch and that is why Madeleine wishes to spare him. Madeleine nods, thinking the widow understands. The widow tells Madeleine she's wrong, that by humiliating M. Pujol, she is providing him comfort. Madeleine realizes she is like the abbot who both tortured Saint Michel and lovingly bound his wounds. Madeleine jumps off her chair and screams that she is not like the abbot at all-she is more like Saint Michel.

In the village church, the priest notices how pious the girls are, bent studiously over their prayer books. He doesn't realize that Beatrice and Sophie are speaking to each other in code. Beatrice's hand touches certain words in her hymnal. Sophie reads Beatrice's message by putting together the first letter in each word: Handmaid - Unto - Shall - House. Beatrice has spelled out HUSH.

Madeleine leaves the private room behind the curtains and moves to return to the waiting tableau. Before she parts the curtains, she pauses to listen, but hears only small sounds on the other side. Where did everyone go? Madeleine had hoped to storm back

through the curtains and frighten the others. Now she realizes that she may be intruding by passing through the curtains into the room. Her curiosity wins out and she lifts the curtain. She sees M. Pujol, nearly dressed and is grateful that he's alone in the room. Before she can go to him, Adrien emerges from the wings and moves to help M. Pujol fix his tie. The touch turns into a caress, but before it turns into something else, Madeleine makes a slight sound in her throat. The men separate, looking around. They do not see her.

Madeleine's brother Claude rejoices at not being seen. He is invisible, he thinks, as he watches the girls play their Madeleine game. He sees naked skin and a belly button.

The Mayor of the small village clears his throat to speak to his youngest daughter, Emma. He begins by telling her he is an indulgent father. Sidetracked, he stares at her stubby fingers, musing on how they will one day become long and womanly. He repeats that he is an indulgent father, but that is the end of his speech. His older daughter makes his point for him, by refusing to allow Emma to eat any of the preserves on the table. She holds the treacherous jam pot in front of her father's face.

The photographer is also making a point to Madeleine. He tells her she is destroying everything with her refusal to obey the widow. Every night, the players dress for their pornographic scene. Every night, Madeleine refuses to paddle M. Pujol. The photographer warns Madeleine that the widow will send them away.

Mother arrives on the Mayor's doorstep with a gift of preserves. He shuts the door in her face. The door opens again: this time, the Mayor's oldest daughter stands there, glaring at Mother. She tells Mother that her preserves have a strange taste and that they are not interested in purchasing them or even accepting them as a gift. The door closes again, for the final time.

M. Pujol is tired. He finds he must nap now in the afternoons. When he awakes from his naps, he often hears the sound of the two people who have been watching him sleep making their escape into the bushes. He wants to call out to them, to tell them that he can no longer sleep at night because of the gravel rattling on his roof.

Adrien and Madeleine watch the sleeping M. Pujol. Adrien brags that he touched his face once. Madeleine stares down at the sleeper in fury; M. Pujol has usurped her. She is no longer at the center of her own affections; the flatulent man has replaced her.

M. Pujol pauses before entering the drawing room. He cannot face the humiliating photography anymore. He wonders whether it would be cowardly or brave if he refused to do it. The widow has taken to beating Madeleine for her continued refusal to paddle M. Pujol and he thinks he could rescue Madeleine by refusing. If he leaves, he will be the one to blame, not Madeleine. Saving her would be that simple. When he enters the drawing room and comes face to face with Madeleine, he realizes that something about the girl does not lend itself to being saved. That night, the widow beats Madeleine with her ivory fan again.

Bruises show up on Madeleine's sleeping form. Beatrice is concerned. Mother hides in the corner, thinking it is not her fault if she is occasionally clumsy with her broom. Mother stirs the preserves in the cauldron, wondering how to save her struggling business. The women of the village have turned against her. Jealousy, she thinks. Rumors sweep the village; Mother is unclean, a sorceress. The villagers have taken to throwing jars of Mother's preserves at the house. The other day, Mother saw a hand-lettered sign on the road:

"IF THE FLESH IS UNCLEAN THEN SO IS THE FOOD

BEWARE THE PRODUCTS OF AN UNHOLY HOME!" (pg. 140)

Mother blames Madeleine for her troubles.

M. Pujol watches Madeleine and Adrien quarreling in the bushes. He is packed and ready to leave, but he doesn't want to leave Adrien. He struggles against the desire to call out the photographer's name. Bargaining with fate, M. Pujol makes a deal with himself: if the leaf on that branch falls from the tree, he will not have to leave. The wind that had been rattling the leaf dies abruptly. M. Pujol desperately makes other bargains: if that crow takes flight, if that thistle bursts, if the noise of the handsaw in the distance ceases, then he will not have to go.

M. Pujol remembers the other man he once loved, a man named Hugh, who loved him for an entire year before announcing his engagement to a well-to-do woman. Soon after, M. Pujol again lost everything he loved to a woman when La Femme Petomane stole his act. , thinks M. Pujol now, the photographer is unlikely to dump him for a woman. His photography is second rate, he has no prospects in life and it is unlikely any woman would consider him marriage material.

All of a sudden, the world conspires to fill M. Pujol's heart with joy: the crow flies away, the handsaw ceases and the leaf falls from the tree. M. Pujol clears his throat, preparing to cry out for his love, Adrien. However, he can no longer see Adrien and Madeleine behind the bushes. M. Pujol searches the horizon, wondering how he could have lost Adrien, who was there just a moment ago. What M. Pujol doesn't know is that Adrien and Madeleine are no longer visible because they have sunk to the ground together, behind the bushes. "If you were M. Pujol," Adrien says, I would press my mouth against your pulse. Like this."

"If you were he," she says, "I would cup your chin in my fingers."

"If you were he," he says, "I would take those fingers into my mouth."

"Then my mouth would envy my fingers," she says.

"Then your mouth must usurp your fingers," he says.

"And then," she says, "I would do this." (pg. 145)

From her window, the widow watches the photographer and the child, bodies tangled together in the bushes. She must have a picture, she thinks. How absurd-the photographer is too occupied to take a photograph at the moment. The widow sighs, for in their embrace she has found the perverse joy she seeks. The tableau photographs of the child spanking the man are too sterile to satisfy her lusts. She deems the experiment a failure and so is not very sad when M. Pujol slips a note under her door informing her that he plans to leave and donate his unusually capable body to science. Madeleine and Adrien, however, are inconsolable. They cling to each other like orphans, staring at photos of M. Pujol for comfort. They slip a second note under the widow's door, informing her that they, too, are leaving.

Back in the village, the boys are misbehaving, causing mayhem and confusion with their racket. In that moment, Mother looks at the sleeping Madeleine and for the first time in a very long time, tells her daughters how beautiful Madeleine is when she sleeps. She orders the children, as before, to arrange Madeleine's hair and make her comfortable. Mother stares affectionately at her inert daughter and has a wonderful idea.

Adrien and Madeleine, traveling along the road in search of M. Pujol, take shelter under a tree. They are startled by a loud crashing noise in the branches above and Madeleine looks up, delighted to see a familiar face from home. It is the flying Matilde! The girl and the photographer appeal to Matilde to help them find M. Pujol. Matilde agrees to fly into the air and look around. She spots M. Pujol making his way along the road towards the hospital at Maréville. The hospital is called the Institute for the Study of Aberrant Behaviors and Conditions: in short, it is a lunatic asylum. When Madeleine and Adrien knock on the door, the nurse who answers takes one look at Madeleine's hands and bids them to enter.

Mother again consults with the learned village chemist for advice on how to write a letter requesting the release of M. Jouy from the hospital at Maréville. He advises her that she make no mention of her reason for wanting him released; they will likely not approve of her plan to marry Madeleine off to this man.

At the hospital, Adrien protests that they are not patients. The skeptical director asks why they have come. Adrien, not knowing the right thing to say and realizing it will be difficult to spirit M. Pujol away from the hospital, merely tells the director that he is a photographer. The director is interested in his services, believing that he can capture his patients' symptoms in a photograph. Madeleine hides her hands and claims to be Adrien's assistant. The matron leads them away to the staff quarters.

After leaving Adrien and Madeleine in the staff quarters, the matron stops at M. Jouy's room. She sees something alive and sane inside of M. Jouy, struggling to get out. The matron tells the director to refuse the request to release M. Jouy; he must remain under their care.

Mother will not be so easily deterred. Beatrice asks why Madeleine cannot be given to a better husband than M. Jouy. Mother insists that in Nature's eyes, he is already her husband. Beatrice snorts to herself that if that were true, M. Jouy would be married to

half the girls in the village. Mother warns Beatrice to stay away from her sister's intended.

Madeleine cannot find M. Pujol because she is too short to see in the windows placed high up on every patient's door. Adrien is taller, so he searches each room, finding the dregs of society. Meanwhile, the director poses his patients for photographs.

Mother hatches a plan: she will send her children to rescue M. Jouy from the hospital. They will stand on top of each other's shoulders to reach his window and tempt him to come out with one of Mother's homemade treats. Beatrice holds Mother's mirror up to Madeleine's face to show her a cow and assure her that Madeleine is still sleeping. Mother stares at herself in the mirror, wondering if she has done evil in the way she has controlled her children.

The director tells Adrien that the first patient photograph will be entitled "Terror!" He instructs Adrien to make the subject look terrified. Adrien does his best to terrify the patient, but elicits only a smile for his troubles. He thinks of how his brother Félix used to terrify rabbits. Thoughts of his brother overwhelm Adrien. Under the dark cover draped over his camera, he slips into a meditative state and begins shouting his brother's name repeatedly. This crazy behavior finally inspires fear in the patient and the photograph is a success.

Adrien asks Madeleine if she's found M. Pujol yet. She tells him no, because she is too short. Adrien is beginning to worry. Madeleine assures him they will find their lost love and escape the hospital together. She secretly worries what will happen after they escape. Three is not a good number. Will M. Pujol seek her out, or Adrien? She hopes a fourth person will accompany them; someone loveable to console the loser.

The search is over. Adrien's next subject, for the director's study of Embarrassment, is M. Pujol. However, M. Pujol's expression upon spotting the photographer causes the director to change his mind: the picture will be called Stupefaction. Adrien, too, is surprised by the sight of M. Pujol. The hospital does not allow facial hair, so M. Pujol's brilliant mustache has been shaved. Without mustache, Adrien thinks M. Pujol looks wrong and he mentally changes the title of the photo to Revulsion. M. Pujol asks about the widow. Adrien tells M. Pujol he and Madeleine have come to rescue him, but M. Pujol doesn't seem to hear. The flatulent man thinks they have come to the hospital for the same reason he did, to devote their bodies to science. Adrien tries to explain that Madeleine loves him and wants to rescue him, but that he, Adrien, is only helping Madeleine.

Meanwhile, the children have liberated M. Jouy. Pleased with their cunning, they travel home by pony cart. M. Jouy says not one word, but only munches silently on a cookie.

Madeleine awakes in her cot at the hospital. She asks what all the noise in the corridors is about. Adrien informs her that a patient has been kidnapped. He climbs under the covers with her, placing her hand carefully on his body. Madeleine is pleased to learn that escape is possible.

On the pony cart, Beatrice laughs at Jean-Luc's childish idea of whipping M. Jouy. Instead, she unbuttons M. Jouy's pants.

In bed with Adrien, Madeleine is stunned to learn that he has found M. Pujol. She withdraws her sticky hand from his body and demands to know why he did not tell her. He was thinking of other things when he joined her in bed, he says. She feels betrayed, thinking Adrien did not tell her because he wanted to be alone with M. Pujol.

The children protest Beatrice's plan of leaving M. Jouy behind, alone. Beatrice snaps that he is no good as a husband: his cock no longer works. Mimi, the youngest, insists that Beatrice just didn't work it properly, that she didn't pull hard enough. Beatrice wins the argument and they leave M. Jouy by the side of the road.

Madeleine again accuses Adrien of wanting to be along with M. Pujol. Adrien doesn't answer; instead, he embraces Madeleine. At first, this feels good to her, but after a moment, she feels suffocated by the embrace. Kindly, she pretends to be asleep and turns gently away from Adrien. She seeks the furthest part of the bed, but once away from him, she longs for his touch again, even though he is not the one she loves. "Tomorrow?" she demands to know. She imagines escaping with M. Pujol. At last, Adrien admits that M. Pujol doesn't want to leave the hospital with them.

Mother sings as she washes the sleeping Madeleine's hair. She dreams of the coming marriage between Madeleine and M. Jouy. The bonds of matrimony will restore her daughter to her.

Madeleine asks why M. Pujol won't leave with them. Adrien says it is because he is without hope. Madeleine asks why and Adrien explains that M. Pujol has accepted that he will never again be allowed to perform on stage for an audience, because the audiences have grown too sophisticated for his brand of entertainment. Madeleine has a plan. She will build her love a stage back home in her own village; the villagers, she insists, are unsophisticated and will love him. She has planned it all, down to the advertising posters that will feature a photo of M. Pujol from the rear, delicately parting his coat tails. When Adrien awakes, she is gone.

Part 2 Analysis

Having reached a turning point earlier, Madeleine begins to see herself differently. She examines the pornographic photos taken with M. Pujol and is stunned to see her own cruelty so evident in the picture. In an attempt to make up for it, she embarks on her nightly project of tossing gravel on M. Pujol's roof to help him sleep. Earlier in the book, Madeleine stated that she would have loved Saint Michel more if he had remained a sad, pathetic figure, instead of being miraculously transformed, after death, into his previous, beautiful personage. It is no surprise that she falls in love with M. Pujol when she sees him day after day in a pitiable state.

When the old woman tries to convince Madeleine to continue beating M. Pujol, she makes the mistake of telling the girl she is like the abbot who whipped Saint Michel.

Madeleine doesn't want to be the perpetrator of cruelty. She shouts at the old woman that she is more like Saint Michel than like the abbot, meaning that Madeleine sees herself as a fellow sufferer of M. Pujol's, not as the cause of his suffering. Indeed, she is right. As a minor, Madeleine is not responsible for her actions in the twisted pornographic tableau and she is too young to save herself or even realize that she needs saving. M. Pujol realizes that Madeleine is trapped and by leaving, he saves Madeleine from both the widow and from herself.

The widow's character is a parallel to Madeleine's mother. Like the widow, Mother believes that young Madeleine is the responsible party in her encounter with M. Jouy. When the villagers turn against her, Mother also holds Madeleine responsible for this. However, toward the end of Part 2, Mother looks in the mirror and begins to see herself differently. She begins to realize that she is responsible for her children's upbringing and for the cruelty she inflicted on Madeleine. Mother searches her judgmental heart for a way to free Madeleine and comes up with the awful plan to marry her to M. Jouy. In Mother's mind, this marriage will redeem her daughter's evil behavior. Not once does it occur to her that she is delivering her innocent daughter into the hands of the very man who molested her.

Having grown in character through her love for M. Pujol, the rebellious Madeleine is ready to return home. She devotes herself to the idea of making him happy by bringing him back to the stage. At the end of Part 2, Madeleine has made her decision. She will break M. Pujol out of the asylum and restore him to his career and former happiness. By these kindnesses to M. Pujol, she can prove to herself that she is nothing like the abbot. She is not cruel, as both her mother and the widow have made her out to be. She realizes that she was a victim and she resolves to help her fellow victim, M. Pujol. By finding the courage to stand up to the widow, Madeleine gains the courage to stand up to her mother's cruel accusations. Now that she knows who she is, Madeleine is confident she is not like the cruel abbot and so she is no longer afraid to go home.

However, Madeleine has never understood M. Pujol. She is not fully aware that he is gay and loves Adrien, not her. She and Adrien seek each other out as consolation, a substitute for the love of M. Pujol. Ironically, they find each other just at the moment M. Pujol is ready to declare his love for Adrien. Furthering the irony, Adrien's love turns to revulsion when he finds M. Pujol in the asylum. Adrien becomes more interested in Madeleine, even as she desperately plans her true love's escape.

Madeleine, an awakening adolescent, finds herself surprised at her attraction to Adrien. How can she be attracted to a man who is not her true love? In fact, though, none of the misplaced love is really relevant. It matters very little whether M. Pujol loves Madeleine or Adrien or whether Adrien loves Madeleine or M. Pujol. Madeleine believes her choices are based on her love for M. Pujol, but really it is all about her. Although young Madeleine doesn't realize it, her love for M. Pujol is only an excuse: her motivation to reclaim her life.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

The children approach their home in the pony cart, moving more quickly than Mother had expected now that M. Jouy's weight is no longer slowing them down. They find Mother opening her private cedar chest. The children have never been permitted to see what is inside the chest and so they watch reverently, unseen, from the road as Mother opens the chest and withdraws her wedding veil. The wind lifts the veil. As it rises into the air, its destruction becomes apparent. It is not the veil that floats in the wind: the veil has been eaten by countless moths that now take flight, having been liberated from the chest.

Beatrice is horrified. Knowing her mother's temper, she is about to suggest they turn back and come home tomorrow. However, young Mimi is already running toward her mother, impressed that Mother wore a veil of moths to her wedding.

Madeleine rides home in the back of a wagon filled with beehives. As they near the village, Madeleine sees the familiar houses. "And though Madeleine knows that her long spell of weightlessness has finally come to its end-the tug of the string, the smell of damp earth-she feels, contrary to all expectations, her heart begin to lift." (pg. 194)

Matilde lands on top of the chemist's shop and writes in her scientific journal the record of her day's activities. She reports seeing Madeleine, wearing a dirty dress, slide out of a wagon carrying beehives at dawn. Mid-morning, she saw the children arrive in their pony cart, a beautiful, unknown woman riding in the cart with them.

Mother notices the strange woman in the cart staring longingly at the house full of children. She asks who she is and where M. Jouy is. Beatrice raises her mother's suspicions by announcing that they have quite a story to tell her. Mother listens skeptically as Beatrice tells of finding the woman on the road, covered in blood. They asked the woman about the blood and she told them it is her husband's blood. The woman explained that she had left her husband, but over time grew lonely for the sight and sound of a viol carved to look like her own face. She returned home to her husband. As she approached the house, she heard the sound of her husband playing her beloved viol. However, when she entered the house, she found him only eating his dinner.

Claude interrupts Beatrice's story to say the woman killed her husband. He is banished to the orchard to see his father. Father asks about Claude's trip and wants to know where they went, explaining that their busy mother had forgotten to tell him. Claude stalls for time by taking another bite of fruit from the orchard.

Meanwhile, Beatrice continues her story. The woman demanded to know where Griselda was. Her husband told her the viol bearing her likeness had been destroyed.

She knew he was lying, having heard him playing Griselda upon her approach to the house. She ran further into the house to search for the viol. She stumbles upon a door that had previously been kept locked. Beatrice begins a long description of the shrouded furniture the woman had found inside. Young Lucie interrupts her story with impatience, instructing Beatrice to tell her mother about the girls.

Claude has escaped his father's prying questions. He spots a girl moving silently through the orchard. He just catches a glimpse and cannot be sure if it was one, two, or three girls. He thinks it was three.

Beatrice goes on with her story, finally coming to the room where the woman's husband, a musician, kept all of his failed compositions. The husband had insisted the woman stay out of that room to prevent his embarrassment at her, or anyone, seeing his failures. Now she enters and finds room after room of viols, all shaped like different women, all destroyed, decapitated and abandoned by her husband. The woman is sickened. She had always sensed these abandoned women were there in the house and now is distraught to learn she had been right. Understanding her husband's cruelty better now, the woman realizes where Griselda has gone: Her husband has surely swallowed her whole.

Mother interrupts, impatient with Beatrice's long story. Mother already knows the end of the story, thanks to Claude and wants only to know where M. Jouy is. Mother and daughter face off as Beatrice insists on finishing her story. The other children have already wandered off, bored or banished and, for once, no one supports Beatrice. Triumphantly, Mother stalks off to find M. Jouy. Moments later, a cry arises as Mother realizes the bridegroom is missing. Beatrice is furious that anyone would dare to be upset-after all, she had removed the ugly M. Jouy and replaced him on the pony cart with a beautiful woman.

In the orchard, Madeleine hears a furious howl. Unaware that the sound came from her mother when she discovered M. Jouy was missing, Madeleine raises her own voice in a howl of sympathy. Back at the house, the howling cry awakens the sleeping Madeleine. She thinks she recognizes the voice and slips out of bed to the orchard to meet it.

Later that night, Mother is still furious. She throws fruit at the house, creating a steady thunking sound, like a heartbeat. Claude decides it would be wise to make himself scarce until Mother calms down. He thinks of the three girls he saw in the orchard. He's certain now there were three and knows they are hiding in a forgotten barn in the woods. They must be hungry, he thinks, as he fills his pockets and he slips out of the house into the night.

In the barn, Madeleine looks up at the moonlight and imagines it shining on the hospital at Maréville. She sees her own moonlike face in its light and knows how attractive she is. At the hospital, M. Pujol stands at the window. Adrien stands behind him, encouraging him to look out on the moon. M. Pujol feels Adrien's hands travel down his body and he surrenders.

As Claude steals towards the barn hidden beyond the orchard, he imagines how pleased the three girls will be to see him. In the light of the moon, he peeks through the slats in the barn, trying to catch a glimpse of his feminine prey. He is disappointed to find only one girl wearing a dirty dress. He cannot see her face, but imagines she is suffering by the stiffness of her body. Only her hand moves, furiously, between her legs. He thinks she is hurting herself, but understands that she seems to be enjoying it. Claude realizes his presence is not wanted; he dumps out the sausages he'd brought in his pockets and leaves. When Madeleine's hand drops to her side, the photographer stops kissing the flatulent man's neck.

In the morning, Madeleine finds three sausages on the ground outside the barn. She is hungry enough to eat this mysterious food, but first roots through the ground looking for some radishes to accompany her meal. As her hands explore underneath the earth, she feels something clinging to them, like a worm. Madeleine pulls her hands out and shakes them to rid herself of the disgusting thing. When she looks at her hands, she realizes they are healed. Her mitts have become slender fingers again, ten perfect wiggling digits. She rejoices in the miracle, remembering the day she looked at Saint Michel's picture in church and recognized herself in his face. Today, she is like Michel, miraculously restored to wholeness. Looking down at her wonderful hands, she remembers the reason they have been restored to her: she must build M. Pujol a stage. Now she can do it; now she can draw the posters too and write his name across the top in large, red, capital letters.

Depression has immobilized Mother. She looks around at the mess she created throwing fruit at the house. She sees that the housekeeping has gone neglected and finds just enough strength to clap for her children. When they answer, she sets them to work, cleaning up the house. To the youngest, Mimi, she assigns the task of picking apples and pears. Mimi protests that no one buys Mother's preserves anymore. The children watch for their mother's reaction to this sad truth. Instead of being infuriated by it, Mother sinks, defeated, into her chair. "Silently, Mimi vows: 'I will fill a hundred baskets for her.'" (pg. 224)

In the hidden barn, Madeleine steps off the measurements for her new theater. She pictures a private dressing room, an orchestra pit and seats made of red velvet. As her toe bumps the far wall, she realizes it's only a barn. She will have to make do with a stage made from apple crates, its curtain a sheet hung from the rafters. She notices the light flicker through the slats in the barn and after a moment, realizes the barn is surrounded by short people-children actually. She asks the walls what they want. They want to see what Claude saw, the walls reply; it made him feel strange. Her heart leaps at the thought of her brother, but the children tell her he's not there. Her brothers and sisters are in trouble and cannot leave their own yard. Madeleine asks the children if they feel strange, as Claude had reported. They do not. Madeleine opens the door and tells her new helpers what she needs for her theater.

Back at the insane asylum, M. Pujol studies an anatomical drawing to envision the operation that will open up his body and reveal his gifts to the world. A shadow at the window obscures his light. He looks up to see a huge fat woman with tiny wings outside

the window and asks her to move out of his light. She tells him she is on an errand to distribute the flyers clutched in her hand and hands him a stack. Matilde flies away from the window and drops another bunch of flyers in the air above the garden, where the patients eagerly grab them and loll about on the grass to read them. The flyers show a picture of a man delicately parting the tails of his coat. His name is splashed across the top of the flyers, in tall red capital letters. However, M. Pujol doesn't bother to read the flyers; the moment Matilde is no longer blocking his light, he returns to the anatomical sketches. The hospital director looks in on him, smiling fondly. Never has he had a patient so interested in the science of his own operation. To avoid dampening M. Pujol's enthusiasm, the director has decided not to mention the risks involved in the surgery.

Adrien has left the hospital. A flyer, caught by the wind, strikes him in the back, forcing him to turn back towards the hospital. Adrien examines the flyer and remembers his promise to Madeleine. He was supposed to show M. Pujol the poster and convince him to come perform in the village. Adrien remembers Madeleine in bed with him; he also remembers her jealousy of him and M. Pujol. Adrien's face drains of emotion. He looks to the road ahead and turns his back on the hospital.

Madeleine is enjoying the use of her fingers. She particularly likes to use them for counting. She counts the seats in the theater: there are nine chairs, plus a milking stool, a piano bench and a daybed. She tells the children they need thirty-six more seats. She then realizes her calculations are off and that there should be three of them: her, the photographer and M. Pujol. She further realizes that she is too shy to speak to M. Pujol directly and needs the photographer as an intermediary. A new thought strikes her as she looks at her restored hands-she can now touch M. Pujol with the grace of a lover. At the thought, she drops the braided cord she was holding between her fingers. A boy hands it back to her, but she drops it again.

Mother is thinking of all of her losses: the bridegroom, her preserves business, her wedding veil and, most importantly, the respect of her neighbors and the trust of her children. Mimi appears just then, holding something in her skirts, her face streaked with tears. She lets go her skirt and fruit comes tumbling out. It is rotten, misshapen. Mimi whispers that it was all she could find.

Madeleine calls up to the flying Matilde. The fat woman tells Madeleine that she sees him coming even now down the road. Is he tall, wearing a smock and with no moustache, asks Madeleine. Yes, replies the flying woman. Matilde has been given the title of stage manager and now she announces to Madeleine that her star is approaching; he is heading for the barn.

The Mayor wakes in the morning to find his chamber pot gone. The captain of the gendarmes notices his kitchen chair has gone missing. The chemist has lost both his curtains and his daughter.

The villagers pound on Mother's door, informing her they've been robbed and they wish to speak with her about her daughter. Mother opens the door to the mob to prove to them that her children are all accounted for; the children surround their mother

protectively. The mob is not looking for Beatrice, Lucie, or Mimi. They want Madeleine. Mother laughs; Madeleine is sleeping. The chemist informs her in an apologetic voice that she is mistaken. Mother runs to the bed to prove him wrong, but finds that the sleeping form in the bed is not Madeleine. It is Charlotte, the beautiful woman the children brought home on the pony cart.

Just then, the Mayor's daughter, Emma, arrives. She urgently tells her father if he wants a good seat he must come to the barn immediately. In the barn, the audience is thrilled to find their stolen items. They settle down pleasantly among their friends and neighbors as the lights dim in the theater.

Madeleine takes the stage. Showing off, she spreads her arms and launches into a dazzling introduction of M. Pujol. The curtain is lifted. On stage are the items M. Pujol will need for his debut: a large basin of water, a candlestick placed on top a stool and a tarnished little flute with which he will play "Clair de Lune." Everything is ready, but the great man is not on stage.

Suddenly, with a great fluttering of wings, the stage manager pushes the star out onto the stage. Matilde has followed Madeleine's instructions precisely, replacing the man's hospital gown with a black evening coat and even trying to smooth down the cowlicks in his hair. Feathers cover the man, lost from Matilde's wings in the struggle to fix his appearance. The man looks back over his shoulder, as if in appeal to the winged stage manager. He doesn't know what he's supposed to do. Then he sees Madeleine and it becomes clear. The man unbuttons his pants and takes Madeleine's hands into his own, ready to guide them around his cock. However, he sees her hands and begins to weep.

The crowd gasps, "What happened to your hands?" (pg. 245) Madeleine looks down at her hands. They have resumed their former mutation; once again, they are paddles. She looks out at the crowd, seeing their faces for the first time: the chemist, the Mayor, her mother and father and her brothers and sisters. Every face wears a look of guilt and pity. Madeleine cannot bear it. She holds up her hands and insists that they are not something to be pitied, that they make her special. The audience is not convinced, so Madeleine shows them the tricks she learned from her time with the gypsies. She tucks her feet behind her ears and waddles on her hands; she claps them together to make the sound of thunder; she joins them together and blows through them to make a sound that starts the bullfrogs singing. The audience only looks at her with greater pity.

Madeleine resorts to trying to impress the audience with the act that, she assures them, impressed a very rich widow. She arranges M. Jouy into the pose that M. Pujol always held and she paddles the idiot's naked behind, telling the audience how she had been welcomed into the home of the rich widow. She displays her hands proudly again, although her heart feels like death at the return of her deformity. She will not accept the pity that stares back at her from the crowd. If only Le Petomane were here, she tells the audience.

As Madeleine utters the words, she sees M. Pujol-not in the barn, not on the stage, but lying inert on an operating table. M. Pujol sleeps, anaesthetized, as the excited director

prepares to cut into him. Meanwhile, Adrien is miles away from the hospital. He has returned to his brother's house, but no one answers the doorbell. Madeleine pauses with her paddle hand in mid-air. She sees the devastation about to occur to M. Pujol and Adrien. She wants to stop them, but with her paddle hands, she can do very little. Madeleine looks out at the audience and thinks of everything she has lost. She will never be able to keep a house clean or wear a ring. She will never build another thing. She has failed her audience and most of all, her mother. As she looks down on the face of her mother, the face she has known best and feared most, Madeleine falls down on the stage, stretches out along the floor and closes her eyes.

Charlotte opens her eyes. She is in a strange house, in a strange bed, wearing strange clothes. She wanders into the kitchen and sees a cauldron on the fire. She tastes its contents. It tastes somewhat sweet, but also like lamb's meat. She goes out into the orchard, where even the fruit looks strange and misshapen. At last, she sees something familiar: Leaning up against a tree, waiting for her, is the viol, Griselda.

Now that all of Marguerite's company has abandoned her, the former gypsy mama finds herself alone with the widow. Marguerite unlocks her costume trunk and pulls out her old theater costumes, from her days of playing the heroic male parts. In her hero's disguise, she attracts the old widow, who showers her with roses and love notes. Marguerite cannot turn down love. She marries the widow and takes up residence in the great house, turning her talents to growing a fine moustache.

The moon creeps into a darkened home in a fishing village at the edge of the sea. Inside, the moon illuminates the belongings of Adrien and M. Pujol, mingled together in the room, just as the bodies of the two sleeping men mingle together on the bed. The moon extends her delicate fingers and shyly caresses the men, so softly that when they wake, they will never know they've been touched.

Madeleine stirs in her sleep. The audience in the barn watches her intently. In sleep, she has regained her innocence. They cannot take their eyes off this innocent sleeper with her tiny, deformed hands. The silence is disturbed by Matilde, who comes out onto the stage. The audience is irritated by the disturbance, but Matilde insists on speaking. She pulls out her diary and tells the audience that they know her as a woman of science and that they have watched her record her observations in her journal. At last, she announces, she is ready to share with them her findings. She turns to the first entry in her journal and reads the words, "Hush... It is all about to begin." The audience joins her "hush" with a "shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh." (pg. 257) The barn fills with quiet expectation.

Part 3 Analysis

Madeleine has plotted and planned a triumphant homecoming, but her expected triumph turns to disaster. Just like Mother's plan to marry her off to M. Jouy, Madeleine's plan is poorly conceived and doomed to failure. Madeleine has had poor role models all along and their choices caused her personal and public downfall in the first place. When Madeleine ran off earlier in the novel, it was both a rejection of the humiliation and

censure she had endured and an embrace of her independence and determination to make her own life choices. One would think Madeleine's choices couldn't be any worse than Mother's and certainly, she doesn't hurt herself or anyone else physically. However, Madeleine learned from the worst and her choices wind up hurting her emotionally.

Already emotionally fragile from the damage she has sustained, Madeleine is surprisingly innocent for a girl society would consider a wanton woman. She is a purveyor of pornography and yet, because of her age, doesn't really understand what she's doing. She acts older than she is because she is modeling the behavior she sees around her. The author provides this interesting commentary in an era of televised gratuitous sex and violence. Madeleine is still so immature that she is, in fact, too shy to directly approach the man she loves. Instead, she needs Adrien to act as a buffer between herself and M. Pujol. Furthermore, while she has matured sexually, her emotional development is lacking. Therefore, she pairs off sexually with Adrien instead of the man she actually loves; this demonstrates that she is not ready for the intimacy involved in a mature, adult relationship.

Madeleine's plan to save M. Pujol's career and restore her reputation in her community is a childish plan that would have been merely embarrassing had she not incorporated the freakish, pornographic elements the gypsies taught her. Instead, she winds up humiliating herself beyond all redemption. Gracefully, however, the audience responds with pity and guilt at their own complicity in her fall from grace. Madeleine cocoons herself in sleep to avoid their pity, but Matilde speaks as her advocate at the end. The reader is left with the impression that if and when Madeleine wakes, her community will have received her back into their fold, having replaced pity and guilt with forgiveness.

Characters

Madeleine

Madeleine is a young girl much beloved by her mother, until the fateful day in which she is caught in a compromising position with the village idiot. Madeleine's friends and family forsake her and her controlling mother punishes her by dipping her wicked hands in a pot of boiling lye. Madeleine's hands grow together as they heal, giving her a permanent deformity that robs her of her ability to create the life of her choosing. In defiance, she runs away and joins up with a band of fellow misfits. Their influence on Madeleine seems empowering to the young girl, but the lifestyle she learns from the gypsies ultimately increases her disgrace.

Madeleine plans a grand homecoming in the hopes of redeeming herself in the eyes of her village and most particularly, her mother. Madeleine's plan is nothing more than a childish dream. The plan fails dramatically, as Madeleine's story culminates in an act of public humiliation that she may never live down.

Mother

Mother is a bitter woman who resents the brood of children she's produced. She wishes she were still slim and childless and that her husband adored her. Mother's longings are no different than many women's, but Mother goes too far when she takes her frustration out on her children. Not only does she prevent Madeleine from meeting her Prince Charming: she actually mutilates her own daughter's hands as punishment for her sins and later decides that Madeleine can atone for those sins by marrying the village idiot.

Mother's need to control her children comes from her desire to be well thought of in her community. When Madeleine behaves in a way that Mother believes the community will judge, Mother doesn't try to teach her daughter to learn from her mistakes. Instead, she distances herself from Madeleine and makes her offending daughter into a permanent scapegoat. In so doing, Mother not only weakens the very fiber of her family, but also destroys her reputation within the community. Mother hasn't learned the simple lesson upon which the United States of America was founded: United we stand, divided we fall.

M. Pujol (Le Petomane)

Based on a real stage performer named Le Petomane, M. Pujol is a flatulent man with the unique ability to create music with his rear end. The ability is thanks to some mutation or deformity of his body. Rather than hide his deformity, M. Pujol, like Madeleine herself, chooses to use it to earn a living on the stage. M. Pujol becomes, over time, accustomed to the nightly humiliation of his act. When he was Le Petomane, the stage star, he felt compensated for the humiliating nature of his stage act by the

level of respect his performance commanded from his unsophisticated audiences. When he loses even that minor respect, M. Pujol becomes hopeless and despondent.

Again, like Madeleine, M. Pujol was brought into this freakish lifestyle when he was just a child, before he could have known better. Madeleine senses in him a kindred spirit, although neither of them realize what it is they have in common. Both were pushed into a degrading life when they were too young to know better and both are determined to pursue that life as they grow older. Their dual pursuit of humiliation is a badge of the mistreatment they received as children, but neither Madeleine nor M. Pujol can accept the pity they would receive if they admitted this life was not of their choosing. M. Pujol blindly pursues his humiliation, seeking to recover his stage career, or barring that, to dedicate his body to science for the betterment of humanity. Meanwhile, Madeleine seeks to make this man whom she loves happy by promoting his ridiculous act.

M. Marais

M. Marais is an older man, a musician, who has his eye on his neighbor's youngest daughter, Charlotte, even before she comes of age. He commissions a viol, carved in the shape of her face. The moment Charlotte attains her confirmation, he marries her. However, once Charlotte becomes his, he neglects her, refusing to lavish the love and physical affection on her that he shows to the viol.

Later in the novel, when Charlotte returns to his home after having fled the marriage, she discovers M. Marais to be a serial predator of young women, as symbolized by the many mangled viols found in his possession, all shaped to resemble different girls.

Charlotte

Charlotte is M. Marais' young wife and the model for the female-shaped viol he commissions, which Charlotte calls by the name of Griselda. Charlotte is desperately lonely and unhappy in her marriage to the asexual and controlling M. Marais. She flees her marriage and winds up in the gypsy troupe with Madeleine.

Charlotte later returns home, only to discover that her husband is a serial predator of young women and has swallowed Griselda. Charlotte slices open her husband in an attempt to rescue Griselda. Toward the end of the novel, when Madeleine returns home, Charlotte sneaks into Madeleine's home and bed, jealous of the family life her late husband denied her.

Marguerite

Marguerite is a strong woman, with little respect for weak women. Her desire to play the male hero on stage is not only due to her desire for fame. She is also wise enough to realize that there is no percentage in living-or playing-the part of a woman wronged. Marguerite's attitude and manner suggest that she knows what it is like to be wronged,

but she chooses not to roll over and give up on life. One can easily imagine her as the hero who avenges the wronged woman.

The Widow

The widow likes to watch. A rich old letch, she has the money to pursue whatever eccentric pleasure suits her fancy. She seems to have no shame about the amount of time and money she spends pursuing her bizarre lusts and in fact rationalizes her behavior by quoting biblical lore. The entire gypsy company is afraid of this woman, although for the most part she is not overtly threatening. It is most likely the power of money that keeps her captives enthralled, combined with the widow's ability to use shame to manipulate others.

Sophie

Sophie is the girl from the village who betrays Madeleine. Although all the girls, including Sophie, played the same illicit game with M. Jouy, Madeleine's reaction to the game is somehow different. This difference prompts Sophie to tell Madeleine's mother, who tells the authorities about Madeleine's experience with M. Jouy.

Adrien

Adrien is the photographer turned pornographer who shares Madeleine's lust for M. Pujol. While M. Pujol is admittedly homosexual, Adrien still struggles with his sexual orientation. He is in love with M. Pujol, but he also interacts sexually with Madeleine. At the end of the story, the author puts Adrien and M. Pujol together, which seems to demonstrate Adrien's acceptance of his sexual orientation.

Matilde Cochon

Matilde is the fat woman who grows wings and travels freely between dream and reality, visiting both Madeleine and her mother. She keeps a scientific journal and maintains that if she meticulously records the details of life, the overall picture will eventually emerge. She is the stage manager who, at the end of the novel, takes the stage with her heretofore-secret journal, to report her findings to the audience of villagers. The novel ends before Matilde draws her conclusions, but her intent appears to be to defend and explain Madeleine's character by reviewing the events recorded in her journal. The journal, of course, symbolizes this very book, *Madeleine is Sleeping*. Through Matilde's character, author Bynum seems to be asking us to view all the details in the novel and to arrive at our own conclusions.

Objects/Places

Griselda

Griselda is the viol shaped to look like Charlotte's face. Commissioned by her husband, M. Marais, Griselda becomes Charlotte's only friend during the lonely days of her marriage.

William II Moustache

Worn by M. Pujol, this style of moustache is sported by all the best leading men, including Charlotte. When M. Pujol is forced to shave his moustache in the hospital, Adrien no longer finds him attractive.

The Orchard

The orchard provides fruit for Mother's preserves. At first, the fruit grows in great abundance, but by the end of the story, the only fruit available for Mother's preserves is mutated and mealy.

The Widow's Parlor

Act two is centered on this parlor, where each night the pornographic tableau of girl, photographer and flatulent man is assembled.

Matilde's Log

This log is described as a scientific journal kept by Matilde. She begins keeping the log when she discovers that her droppings have begun to smell like roses and thus many of the log entries are dedicated to what Matilde eats each day. However, she records every pertinent fact she sees-and since the flying Matilde has a bird's eye view of everything that goes on in town, her journal promises to provide answers for the townspeople at the end of the story.

Themes

Individuality / Self-Perception

The novel centers on exploring the self, both individually and in relation to the wider community. An individual's self-perception is often very different from the community's perception of that individual, although each perception influences the other. Le Petomane's character (M. Pujol) is an example of the power of public perception in defining the self. Le Petomane is M. Pujol's stage name and in Pujol's view of himself, the fame associated with that name defines his greatest success in life. M. Pujol longs to return to the stage as Le Petomane, but is blocked in his ambition by society's perception of his act. Back when audiences were unsophisticated, they could appreciate Le Petomane. His star fell, however, because his success depended on the appreciation of a small-minded audience. As the audience's level of sophistication grew, Le Petomane's character remained the same. His failure to evolve as an individual leaves him no reason to live when the applause has faded.

Of course, stage stars require an appreciative audience if they are to succeed in their careers and here again is the interplay between an individual's self-perception and public perception. The novel is replete with references to the stage, echoing Shakespeare's metaphor that all of life is a stage. Marguerite lost her audience and her stardom, but her self-perception would not allow her to play the part of a woman wronged. Her individual persona requires her to be a leader, a winner. Since public viewpoint-especially in the distant past when this story is presumably set-requires its successful leaders and heroes to be males, she uses her stage costumes to symbolically become a man. She even grows a moustache through sheer willpower. These affectations are but mere props to influence public perception of her, allowing Marguerite to become a leader (by forming her own gypsy/acting troupe) and thus achieve her own goals as an individual. Her individuality would not have been allowed to flourish had she not first perceived herself as an individual and then manipulated public perception to reinforce her self-perception.

Madeleine's perception of herself is the basis of the novel and the other characters, in finding or losing themselves, serve as mirrors to reflect Madeleine's search for self. However, Madeleine too often gauges her perception of herself on the approval of others. This flaw leads to her public humiliation on stage at the end, when she tries so hard to impress her home crowd with the same depraved behavior that impressed the lecherous old widow. Madeleine believes her town is small-minded and indeed she shows her own small-mindedness by thinking she can impress society using the tricks taught to her by society's outcasts.

Coming of Age

The events in the novel are geared toward exploring a young girl's coming of age. As Madeleine awakens sexually, the village judges her misguided experimentation with M. Jouy as intentional evil, rather than the innocent, naïve exploration of sexuality it actually was. Given the differences in their ages, had M. Jouy been of sound mind, he would rightfully be held responsible as a child molester. Since M. Jouy's brain capacity is limited, the village unconscionably holds Madeleine responsible for her own molestation, instead of accepting that neither she nor M. Jouy knew better. Madeleine, of course, is of sound mind and capable of learning to take responsibility for her actions. However, her controlling mother does not allow for any mistakes or bad behavior on Madeleine's part. Instead of realizing that mistakes are a part of growing up, Mother condemns Madeleine to eternal mutation for her sin and casts her out the village into a convent. In this way, Mother becomes the biggest obstacle to Madeleine's personal growth.

In order to move on with her life, Madeleine must find another model for her character. Her first attempt at finding an authority figure to emulate is symbolized by her interest in Saint Michel, a man who, like her, endured both mutilation and humiliation and yet left a lasting legacy of respect behind him when he died. Her next male role model is M. Pujol, who somehow managed to create a popular name for himself through a stage act that was humiliating by its very nature. M. Pujol made a lifestyle out of humiliation; instead of running from it, he has used humiliation to glorify himself-just as Saint Michel did.

Given the influences of Saint Michel and M. Pujol, it is not surprising that Madeleine chooses the same route for herself. However, glory is rarely found through humiliation, a truth Madeleine realizes too late. She has made her terrible reputation worse. Madeleine lacks any guidance or positive role models to support the growth she seeks. Thus, by the end of the book, she has succeeded only in further humiliating herself. Madeleine is unable to obtain the growth and maturity she so desperately seeks. Unfortunately for Madeleine, Mother's permanent and harsh punishment has limited Madeleine's ability to find good role models. The only people she can model her character on are victimized, freakish outcasts like herself.

Humiliation

Madeleine is Sleeping is a study of humiliation, an attempt to explain the seemingly inexplicable. Humiliation is an emotion that all human beings feel at one time or another and yet ironically we do not, as a species, show much mercy to those suffering from humiliation. A more common response is relief that the humiliation is not being directed at us. At the beginning of the book, Madeleine becomes a scapegoat for her village and especially for her mother. Scapegoats are the targets of humiliation and we as a society tolerate the practice of scapegoating precisely because it directs all those uncomfortable, shameful feelings away from us and onto the chosen sacrificial lamb.

However, this is an ancient, almost tribal practice, as symbolized by the unsophisticated setting of the novel, which takes place in an unenlightened era.

Through the character of Madeleine, the author attempts to explain how and why people humiliate themselves. Madeleine's homecoming is brutally humiliating and the worst part is, she does it to herself. What Bynum has given us is an explanation of *why*: why someone like Madeleine would publicly shame herself. The answer is simple-she does it out of ignorance. She misunderstands the social cues that most of us live by. Having been marginalized to the sidelines of society, Madeleine's only role models are a motley group of victims and victimizers. She attempts to impress them, as any of us attempt to make ourselves shine in the eyes of our friends. Her friends, from having suffered humiliation themselves, have no remaining self-respect. What they consider cool and what Madeleine does to impress them, is doomed to be scorned by wider society.

The graphic depiction of Madeleine's utter abasement seems hideous and sordid at first, until one realizes that Bynum is, in a way, writing a defense for society's cast-offs. Having been ill-treated by their loved ones, the characters in the book learned to treat themselves with a lack of respect. They mimic the actions of their tormentors and only after humiliating themselves do they even realize their behavior was degrading. The ultimate example of this is the horrible climax of Madeleine's homecoming and stage debut. She is actually in the act of paddling the naked M. Jouy and proudly telling the town of her adventures in pornography when it hits her: she suddenly realizes, based on the feedback she sees on the audience's faces, that she is humiliating herself in the most enormous way. Her shame is so large she cannot face it and she retreats instantly into sleep.

Society condemns Madeleine's character for actions considered immoral. Perhaps the next time a civilized people seeks to crucify someone on the altar of humiliation, they might take a page from Bynum's book and consider that the humiliated soul actually didn't know any better than to behave in that fashion. Humiliation, in her book, is a trait of the ignorant. The trait is forgivable in a young girl like Madeleine, presuming that she will outgrow it. In a responsible adult like M. Pujol, the pursuit of humiliation is more pathetic. At some point along the road to maturity, knowledge should supersede ignorance. For Madeleine, that point comes when she swoons to the stage at the end. The reader presumes that upon awakening, she will never again repeat the practice of self-debasement.

Style

Point of View

Madeleine is Sleeping is written from the third person point-of-view. It primarily deals with Madeleine, but the omniscient narrator also shares the stories of Madeleine's friends, family and dream characters. Although the third-person narrator is omniscient, the narrator chooses not to share too much information with the reader. It is as if author Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum doesn't want to connect the dots for the reader, preferring that readers develop their own interpretation of events.

Forcing the reader to read discriminately is a goal well-suited to the author's experiment in hyperfiction. Since hyperfiction is organized similarly to how an internet search engine operates, reading *Madeleine is Sleeping* is a bit like researching a subject on-line. When searching for information on the internet, the searcher must carefully the interpret the results of their search, weeding out the hyperbole from the earnest factual information-just as the reader of *Madeleine is Sleeping* must differentiate the dreamlike reality and the characters' wishful thinking, from the core human truths about love, lust and sexual awakening depicted in the novel.

Setting

Pastoral in setting, *Madeleine is Sleeping* takes place in an apparently French village, during an unspecified point in the past when butter was churned by hand and the best available transportation was the pony cart. So while the setting reads like something out of Charles Dickens, the style is more reminiscent of Gabriel Garcia Marquez' magic realism. Bynum uses Marquez lush and carnal style imagery to evoke the pastoral village, the orchard and the country road leading to the Dickensian insane asylum where the main characters are trapped for a time.

Given the flexibility of the dream sequences employed by the author, the novel can wander freely in time and space. Madeleine's sleeping body serves as the anchor point for all the action, but her spirit wanders from one setting to the next in the blink of an eye.

The characters are constantly interacting with nature and it is in the natural setting where love blooms. Outdoors on the grounds of the widow's mansion, Madeleine has her first tryst with the photographer. It is also outdoors, by the pond, where she falls in love with M. Pujol. By contrast, the indoor settings represent unnatural behavior and humiliation. The stiff, photographic tableaus recreated each night in the widow's parlor are an ongoing form of humiliation. Madeleine's ultimate and monumental humiliation before the eyes of the townspeople takes place inside the barn, on a stage of her own making. The stage itself is a symbolic setting, present throughout the novel and not

fixed in any one physical place. The stage represents not a physical location or setting, but rather represents the stage of life upon which all action, everywhere, takes place.

Language and Meaning

The language in *Madeleine is Sleeping* is written in the form of poetic prose. The poetry is filled with bold, ripe, sexual imagery. Each page or two comprises its own poem, one poem leading to another with an easy fluidity. The author often uses similar words or phrases at the end of one poem as at the beginning of the next, so that the ideas flow seamlessly, from one to the next. This technique is similar to the "match cut" technique in film and also fits in well with the author's concept of hypertext fiction, in which various narrative pages can be linked together through one phrase or on-line search term.

Titles are used to great effect in the story. Each section of poetry is headed with a brief title that both sums up and adds meaning to the poem. Often, titles are repeated to indicate that two or more distinct passages treat the same theme. For example, "impostor" on page 24 is the title of a passage introducing the castrated man who takes over Marguerite's starring role. This same title is used again on page 51 as Marguerite removes her makeup, revealing that she is actually an actress, not a real gypsy at all. Finally, on page 83, the title "impostor" refers to the woman who usurps M. Pujol on the stage by faking flatulence with a hidden windbag. These titles also fit in well with the author's hyperfiction construct; one can almost imagine typing in a title as a search term (such as "impostor") and receiving the corresponding pages of the book as a result.

Structure

Madeleine is Sleeping is structured in a unique, experimental manner. The author uses the precepts behind modern internet search engine technology to create individual story elements-almost like individual web pages-that she links around a common hub or theme. Madeleine herself, the dreamer, is the link binding the disparate elements together. This unusual method of plot organization is an example of the modern art form called hyperfiction, or hypertext fiction.

The book is not divided into traditional chapters. It is comprised of individual sections of poetic text, each running between a quarter of a page and two pages. The sections are individually titled and each can stand alone as its own poem. The author orders and arranges these poetic bits of text into one coherent, albeit dreamlike, narrative. Several sections are often pieced together to tell the story linearly for several pages, before a new thread is introduced or elaborated upon.

Because Madeleine, the dreamer, serves as the central link of the book, the use of hypertext fiction allows her dreams to mesh seamlessly with the on-going reality of life in the village. The reader is often unaware of where dreams end and reality begins and this boundary actually becomes irrelevant to the telling of a story grounded in such fantastical, poetic narrative.

Quotes

"When she walks to market, she must gather up her fat just as another woman gathers up her skirts, daintily pinching it between her fingers and hooking it over her wrists. Matilde's fat moves about her gracefully, sighing and rustling with her every gesture. She walks as if enveloped by a dense storm cloud, from which the real, sylph-like Matilde is waiting to emerge, blinding as a sunbeam." Part 1, pg. 2

"The musician methodically withdrew the carving knife from where it was burrowed in the turkey's haunches, which sputtered in protest as he pulled it out. Rising with a sigh, he trundled down the length of the dinner table and the room seemed to quiver with his seismic grace. The knife dripped fowl juices onto the tiles, leaving a trail of congealing fat as if M. Marais, like Hansel lost in the woods, might need to find his way back to his seat." Part 1, pg. 18

"Papa grows impatient with the fruit that litters his orchard. The air assumes the rich rot of a winery; he complains that breathing alone will make him drunk." Part 1, pg. 20

"Every Midsummer morning, Mother woke her before dawn and ordered her to kneel down and bathe her face in the dew: it ensures a year's worth of loveliness, she explained. As a child, Mother had performed the same ritual." Part 1, pg. 37

"Beatrice sidles up to the sleeping princess and surveys the devastation: one leg lost, from the knee down. The open wound looks tempting and buttery, but she likes the acrid edges best, where the dough has blackened and breaks off an entire hand." Part 1, pg. 39

"How fortunate, he thought, that this dear woman and her extraordinary child should have come to me, rather than a medical practitioner. Joseph and his mother, of course, were unaware of their mistake, for the doctor, not being a man of rigid principles, neglected to alert them." Part 1, pg. 68

"Like this? Madeleine asks, paddle suspended in midair.

Just so, the widow says.

The girl's hand falls squarely upon the backside of M. Pujol. Smack! Is the sound of her palm meeting the flesh of his bared cheeks. His elegant tailcoat, his white butterfly tie, his black satin breeches, are folded neatly in a pile that sits by the door." Part 1, pg. 74

"After his encounter with the lightning bolt, the carp resumed his lazy circles about the pond. Instead of resembling a great golden shield, flashing in the green depths of the water, the fish was now mistaken, by turns, for a sunken chamber pot, an abandoned bed sheet, for the swollen arm of a drowned woman." Part 2, pg. 94

"Madeleine studies her toast. There are three raisins remaining, clustered like a birthmark and the crust, which isn't burnt.

The widow says, So you must not think that I am unfriendly.

Is it better to take many small bites, that taste almost of nothing, or to devour it all at once and feel regret?" Part 2, pg. 112

"And notices, as he often does, the stubbiness of her fingers. It would be quite impossible to pry those fingers from anything they might decide to grasp. One day, he expects, they will lengthen into cool, slender, white fingers, from which will issue all sorts of gentle touches and the pretty, even handwriting that he sees on invitations." Part 2, pg. 125

"His hands fly up from his pockets, fluttering with urgency, making all the arguments that language has failed to provide him with. Madeleine notes this carefully, the articulateness of his hands. He has become, quite suddenly, interesting to her." Part 2, pg. 128

"She calls down to Madeleine, Your mother doesn't know what to make of you!

The girl grins back at her: She never did!" Part 2, pg. 150

"Because a certain symmetry is required. If not everyone is accounted for, the plot seems less bold, the escape less like an escape. What had once seemed a story is revealed as nothing more than a series of miscalculations, muddles, trap doors, false alarms." Part 2, pg. 175

"Prompted by their poor pleading faces, I went from room to room, finding more: those with gaping, half-finished bodies; those with their own strings twisted about their necks like a noose; also the decapitated, their heads turned to paperweights. It took no effort to imagine what had happened in these brilliant rooms. What hunger, on his part. What extreme terror on theirs." Part 3, pg. 205

"Madeleine wishes that she could remain wrapped in this curtain until her moment of unveiling, muffled in the darkness of her dusty red cocoon. There is still work to be done." Part 3, pg. 234

"Mysteriously, these faces she remembers as so particular are now almost indistinguishable to her, every one of them stricken, every one of them wearing an identical look: of guilt and most especially of pity." Part 3, pg. 245

"Seeing at last the three of them-girl, photographer, flatulent man-caught forever thus and thus forsaken, she thinks, What terrible things we do, in our efforts to be admired." Part 3, pg. 251

Topics for Discussion

Discuss the symbolism used by the author in comparing Madeleine to the nocturnal moon.

The novel ends with something new about to begin. What do you believe happens to Madeleine after the show?

Describe the significance of Claude's confusion in the orchard, when he couldn't be sure if he saw one girl, or three.

Why do you suppose the author chose to take away the use of Madeleine's hands again at the end of the book?

Do you believe Mother shows any character growth by the end of the novel? Why or why not?

Discuss the similarities between Beatrice's character and Madeleine's.

The character of Madeleine's father is notably absent throughout most of the novel. What is the significance of his absence in the story?