



The Thorn and the Blossom

Theodora Goss , Scott McKowen (Illustrations)

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One enchanting romance. Two lovers keeping secrets. And a uniquely crafted book that binds their stories forever.

When Evelyn Morgan walked into the village bookstore, she didn't know she would meet the love of her life. When Brendan Thorne handed her a medieval romance, he didn't know it would change the course of his future. It was almost as if they were the cursed lovers in the old book itself . . .

The Thorn and the Blossom is a remarkable literary artifact: You can open the book in either direction to decide whether you'll first read Brendan's, or Evelyn's account of the mysterious love affair. Choose a side, read it like a regular novel—and when you get to the end, you'll find yourself at a whole new beginning.

The Thorn and the Blossom Details

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Author : Theodora Goss , Scott McKowen (Illustrations)

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From Reader Review The Thorn and the Blossom for online ebook

Hannah says

Rating Clarification: 1.5 Stars

I'm bummed I wasn't as taken with this story as I hoped to be. After all, it involves (cue Julie Andrews from *The Sound of Music*) "a few of my favorite things":

1. A Cornish setting
2. A quaint bookstore
3. A hunky Brit hero
4. A fairy tale/legend about Sir Gawain, the Green Knight, and Queen Elowen
5. Lost loves/past lives intertwining throughout the centuries
6. A beautiful cover (one of the most beautiful I've personally ever seen)
7. A very cool book design, with an accordian-like spine that allows the reader to read a two sided story narrated by the hero in one story and the heroine in the other story on the flip side. The reader can choose either story to read first, and any gaps from the first story will be explained by the narrative from the other.

((sigh)))

So why the 2 stars? Well, it's one of those cases where (apologies to author Theodora Goss) I kept thinking to myself that this would have been EPIC in the hands of another writer (like Susanna Kearsley). I realize that's not fair, and Goss had a wonderful idea for a story, but for me personally, I thought her writing was trite. And it really pains me to say this, but at times it was cringeworthy, and had me rolling my eyes. For a story idea like this, I was hoping (expecting, even) magical prose and a clever twist, not a lovescene with the hackney sentence:

"And when he entered her, it was like going home, like going where he should have been all along..."
(PUH-LEZE-- as if a woman's hoo-hah needs a doormat in front of it saying "Home Sweet Home" -- excuse me while I go barf in a quiet corner). This, and other less egregious examples of prose-gone-bad prevented me from liking this book.

I know many readers enjoyed this tale, and I respect their opinions, since I like many books that others find sub-par. I expect I'm just generally sorry about this particular book because I *wanted* to love it, and I even petitioned my local library to purchase it (and they did, bless them).

5 stars for cover and book design. Otherwise, a big, fat ***meh*** (with regrets) :(

Nikki says

Lent to me by a friend (thanks!) -- I received it in the post today and read it this evening in one go. It's a pair of connected novellas/short stories, which cover more or less the same events from the point of view of the two main participants. It doesn't really matter which you read first: each illuminates and complements the other. It's a lot of fun, actually: the physical copy of the book has concertina pages, so you read it one way, turn it round, and read back the other. It's a very nice little volume.

The story itself is a little bit thin, I think: it's vaguely based on the Arthurian romance tradition, though on a story that I've never heard of and which I think was invented by the author. I like the idea, but I feel like a lot more could've been done with it -- despite the freshness of the idea, it does feel a little... gimmicky.

Oh, and I liked the fact that the narratives didn't exactly mesh. They don't remember, word-for-word, what each said to the other. It's very human, and unreliable. I liked it, in this instance.

Isa Lavinia says

Originally posted at Paperback Wonderland.

Never judge a book by its cover.

I already knew this and yet, here I am.

This is, quite easily, one of the prettiest books I own. The book itself, as an object, is worth a whole star (perhaps even more...).

Now the story...

First of all, and this is important, it's **not** badly written.

The dialogue is a bit trite and at times unbelievable, but other than that it's fine.

The plot hinges on a cliché I personally hate: that of star crossed lovers who will fall in love because it was all meant to be. This may appeal to many people but it's a particular deterrent to my full enjoyment of a story. "Even so," I thought, "The characters... they'll be what will pull it all together, if they're great, it can still end up being good."

The characters didn't help.

I started with Evelyn's story, perhaps that was a mistake. Normally, when I find a character like this, I will dislike him or her. A spoiled rich girl whose "parents just don't understand" (thanks Fresh Prince) why she'll drop into whimsical considerations every other paragraph and whose only refuge is her poetry (which was criticised by the poet laureate, but that makes him an idiot because, really, what does he know, am I right?) Like I said, I don't like characters like this. But I couldn't even muster dislike for Evelyn. She was so wishy-washy, so barely interesting at all, that she gave me a serious case of "I **nothing** her."

Brendan's story was easier to get through. He was still annoying here and there, talking about how he'd never made real friends with the other boys in his fishing village because he "*was different, a scholar*", which just about tells us he doesn't know what friendship is at all, I mean, can you imagine how dull life would be if you were only friends with people who are like you? He just seemed snobbish, he was "*a little hurt - that she'd assume he was just a poor boy from Clews*." Seriously? Seriously? But not even that made him interesting.

In the end, the only thing I felt strongly about was the fact that I paid €12 for this :(

Giedre says

2.5/5

The book as an object is beautiful indeed. However, the writing felt extremely two-dimensional. I'm only rating this one as high because the packaging is truly a work of art.

Sarah says

If I was giving out an award for most creative book format **The Thorn and the Blossom** would win it hands down. Instead of a normal book you have an accordion style binding that allows you to read two different views of the same story depending on which side you start from. The book is held together in a cardboard sleeve to stop it unfolding when on the shelf.

One side of the book introduces Evelyn, a young woman with an interest in medieval literature who is in Cornwall on holiday after finishing a term studying at Oxford university. She only has a week to relax before she returns home to America to complete her education. The other side introduces Brendan, a local teenager who is currently working at his father's bookstore while trying to decide what he wants to do with his life. Their paths cross in the bookstore and then the book follows them over several years as life takes them both in different directions but always seems to draw them back together again eventually.

I absolutely love the idea of this book, the creative format is something I've not come across before and there are 4 beautiful illustrations by **Scott McKowan**. Although the setting is contemporary the two main characters share a love of Medieval literature - especially the tale of Elowen, the queen of Cornwall, and Gawan, one of the knights of the Round Table, who agrees to help her fight the giants plaguing her lands - so at times it has quite an old fashioned feel to it.

I enjoyed getting to see both sides of the romance but because it was written so you could read their stories in either order it meant that you ended up reading the exact same conversations and events twice which made it a little repetitive. Yes the character's internal thoughts were slightly different each time and they are both keeping secrets from each other but essentially you don't learn a great deal more by reading the second story no matter which one you start with. I think I'd have enjoyed it more if there was a set order to read the points of view in so that the second story could cover events that you hadn't seen in the first half, for example you wouldn't need to see their meeting twice if you read that in Evelyn's part and Brendan talked more about the first week they spent together while Evelyn's story skipped ahead to their second meeting etc. It would have allowed the author to flesh out the story a bit more and I think that would have made it easier for me to connect to the characters and become more invested in their romance.

As it was things happen a little too quickly, there are a few too many large jumps in time (they meet, spend a week together and the next thing you know it's 8 years later!), and Brendan in particular was keeping a major secret that I really would have liked a little more information on. I also would have loved more of a solid ending to the story, it's left with a feeling of hope to it but personally I prefer something more definite and less open ended.

There is no doubt that this is a beautiful and unique book though and I'm glad I have a copy on my shelves.

Yelda Basar Moers says

This book was incredibly disappointing for me! No substance here and not much of a tale; I don't know what to make of this book. Is it a book? No, it's more of a short tale (less than 40 pages each for the two tales). The characters were flat and there was not much of a story or plot. It's incredibly short and devoid of any details. I found it insipid and cliche and do NOT recommend it to my Goodreads friends!

Amina says

Beautiful but could have been richer in events..

"

When Evelyn Morgan walked into the village bookstore, she didn't know she would meet the love of her life. When Brendan Thorne handed her a medieval romance, he didn't know it would change the course of his future. It was almost as if they were the cursed lovers in the old book itself . . ."

Evelyn, an american wealthy girl, litt student in Oxford, decides to spend a week in Cornwall to write something other than -according to professor Lambert- her fanciful nonsense. While exploring the little town, she comes across THORNE & SON, BOOKSELLERS where she meets Brendan Thorne. During that week, they get to know each other and he tells her the story of the "Gawan's Court" the same way his dad used to..

Evelyn has hallucinations (or can we really call them hallucinations?) since she was eight, she's been on and off medication and feeling better until Brendan (whom she didn't talked to about her condition) decides to kiss her, she panicked and ran away..

Ten years later, they meet again, as teachers at Bartlett college and this time Brendan has a little secret, and they grew apart again but not because of the truth...

Evelyn, goes back to Cornwall and so does Brendan, but none of them know about the other..so what happens then?

" Then Gawan turned and saw Elowen lying on the ground. He knelt beside her, raised her head, and said, "Why do you lie here, my love?"?

"The spell was too strong for me," she said. "I'm dying, Gawan. But I shall see you again. In another life, we shall be together, although we cannot be in this one."?

"That you shall not!" cried Morva. "Not for a thousand years. You have killed my father and brother, and so I curse you, queen of Cornwall. You shall not be with your beloved until a thousand years have passed." She cast her own spell and then clapped her hands, disappearing in flame and smoke."

The two of them decide to find each other again, but, were they really cursed? and when would the thousand years pass? Open ending for the reader to finish the story.

It was a good read and I kept imagining Tom Hiddleston as Brendan, I still don't know why :D

Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

Like most other readers, I was drawn to this little book by the format: an accordion book with the same story from two different perspectives printed on either side of the pages, so that you can start from either direction and get a different version. How cool is that? Answer: very cool.

The story is a well-written little romance that can be read in a sitting (each story has 36 pages of text). While the structure is traditional, the author's writing makes it feel fresh, and I was drawn into Evelyn and Brendan's love story. But I was happier with it after finishing the first story than after reading both, because Goss fails to take advantage of the dual-perspective format other than to add more texture to the life of the current viewpoint character. Brendan's and Evelyn's perspectives are very similar, and there are no big surprises waiting in either story that we don't eventually find out in the other. When I read the same story from multiple perspectives I want revelations that make me look back at the prior account with new eyes. Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* is the gold standard for that sort of story, this one not so much. This book would make a good gift idea for the romantic book nerd in your life. But while I enjoyed the first story quite a bit, the addition of a second, only slightly altered version of the same thing seemed unnecessary.

Samantha says

Note: This review will be done in 3 parts. One for each version of the story and then the final for an overview of the entire story as a whole. I began with Brendan's Story.

Brendan's Story:

In this part, we are introduced to Brendan Thorne. He lives in Clewes, where he helps his father with the Thorne & Son bookstore. This part left my heart aching with romantic longing. I was really hoping they would end up together. This is exactly the kind of romance I enjoy. One where there are obstacles, but the story is believable and the story so likeable that you just can't help but root for the star-crossed couple. =)

Evelyn's Story:

This part begins with Evelyn Morgan and her hallucinations. She attends Oxford but needs to get away after years of her poetry being degraded by everyone around her. So, she heads off to Clewes where her family was supposed to have been from. There, she meets Brendan Thorne, a local boy who helps run his fathers' bookstore. They spend a few days together but circumstances arise and they don't see each other for 10 years. They both end up working as professors at Bartlett. Evelyn's story fills the gaps that were formed in Brendan's story. This completed the romantic atmosphere and left me with a sense of hope but still a closure if the two did not end up together after all. (which I am still hoping for!!!) =)

OVERVIEW:

Separate, these stories are good. Put together, they are even better and really sew up the seams. In both parts, I felt that the story was a romance, but I felt a more romantic sense in Brendan's story. Evelyn's story seemed more like a story about a girl who is trying to find herself and figure out where she belongs. Granted, Brendan also has to find a place to belong, but I feel it even more so with Evelyn. She is in need of appreciation for herself. I am really hoping they end up together. At the end of Brendan's story, I had my

doubts. But when I finished Evelyn's I felt a sense of hope spark up. If it were up to me, they would meet on the hill on that very last day that they both made up their minds to accept whatever came. & I don't know if any one else was feeling it, but Evelyn and Brendan seem to be a part of the Gawan/Elowen tale. Maybe I'm just stating the obvious, but that's my theory.

Presentation:

The book is very unique in its printed style. I really liked the accordion fold. Very fun! Also, the Title is very pretty, but simple and very unassuming. Perfect for this story. The font is basic, but I liked the bigger letters that began each section. The pictures on either side of the stories were very well drawn and visually appealing.

Final Thoughts:

I enjoyed this story. It was simple and easy to digest, but still made me want to savor it for all its worth. I honestly believe that this could be a full-length novel and not just a short presentation. This would have been a delightful "lengthy" read. Definitely a book I would have sat through on a sunny summer day. Well-done, a very delicious-but simple-romance that kept me wanting to know more about the characters relationship outcome. =)

Additional Note: Best read with Celtic music playing in the background to create a wonderful atmosphere. --Soundtrack to Braveheart works well too. =]

Bonnie says

I received this book courtesy of Quirk Books in exchange for an honest review.

*Have patience, love, and we shall meet again
As surely as wild roses have their thorns
For weary years eventually pass.*

The 'Thorn and the Blossom' is quite literally a "two-sided love story" about Brendan Thorne and Evelyn Morgan. Intertwined with their love story is the tale of Elowen, queen of Cornwall and Gawan and their own timeless love story. Brendan and Evelyn first meet when she walks into Brendan's family bookstore in Cornwall. After introducing himself and finding out she's from America and will only be in town for a week he offers to show her around town. The two end up spending the entire week together and on their final day together something happens that results in her immediate departure without even a goodbye. The story of Elowen and Gawan is essentially what brings them back together 10 years later.

I was initially intrigued by this book after hearing about its unique accordion-fold binding which I've never seen done before. From a practical stand-point the book could be considered lacking as it's hard to hold since it's missing a binding; however, I think that it was still a beautifully executed idea.

You can start with either Brendan or Evelyn's side of the story. Read one side and then simply flip the book over and read the other persons point of view. I originally thought that this would be the same story simply retold from separate points of view but I felt that each person managed to tell their own story. I chose to

begin reading Brendan's story first and found myself glad I did. I felt that Brendan's side generated most of the questions while Evelyn's sufficiently answered them. I'm sure either way you start will suffice though.

I felt a bit put off how the story was progressing but I think it was because it wasn't the love story I was expecting. This was a bit more tragic than I had anticipated although I did enjoy how the ending left much to the imagination.

Aditi says

Mathias Malzieu, the singer of the French music band, Dionysos, has quoted while saying about "love":

"We love each other like matches in the dark. We don't talk, we catch fire instead"

Theodora Goss, an American author, has weaved a sweet fairy tale in her new book, *The Thorn and the Blossom* .

Synopsis:

One enchanting romance. Two lovers keeping secrets. And a uniquely crafted book that binds their stories forever.

When Evelyn Morgan walked into the village bookstore, she did not know she would meet the love of her life. When Brendan Thorne handed her a medieval romance, he did not know it would change the course of his future. It was almost as if they were the cursed lovers in the old book itself...

Well the story is mostly a corny love-story, where girl-meets-boy and falls in love in the very first sight! However, unfortunately evil magic curses their fate! Wow now that really sounds like a fairy tale!

Honestly, for the first time ever, I am going to praise about the book's look-and-feel instead of its content! The plot could have been very enchanting and interesting because I felt the author's story telling was quite articulate. Nevertheless, readers will not fall for her story telling since there is no charm the way she has narrated the story! Sorry to say, the book is not up-to-the-mark and I was very heart-broken!

I will tell you why:

- A) The book comes in a cool book-jacket like an old record!
- B) The book does not open like any typical book; instead, it opens like an accordion.
- C) Two protagonists and there is no hard-and-fast rule to read the girl's story first or the boy's story first.
- D) Benefit of two POVs
- E) The book illustrations will arrest your mind and soul. Moreover, for that I would like to applaud Scott McKowen for his hard work.

When these factors were involved in the making of this book, I wished the story could have been better, and then it would have won millions of hearts! Most above all, I thought there will be some kind of mystery fore-playing for their fate, instead the plot became very predictable!

The only thing that I liked the most was character-development, which is okay and somewhat strong! Since this was a fairy tale, so you can obviously expect a fragile girl and a hunk kind of person and trust me, this is where the book will not fail you.

If you read from Evelyn's side, you will feel like "this is the cheesiest love-story ever written!" Also fills up your heart with joy and happiness! Although it is a modern-day love-story but lets, you feel like inside the pages of a fairy tale. However, it was not that touching and moving, instead, I felt like it ended so abruptly.

If you read from Brendan's side, you will terribly hate the story! Although he is a very strong character, like some hot brooding hunk, still I felt very incoherent. Moreover, at times, I felt myself drifting away from it. The narration was not at all striking enough.

For fairy tale lovers, this book can be their perfect getaway to the enchanting land of love, thrill and magic. Hence, I would like to appreciate author's approach for writing this mystical story!

Verdict: *This two-sided love-story looks flawless only from the outside!*

Courtesy: *Thanks to the publishers from Quirk Books, for sending me over a copy of this book, in return for an unbiased review.*

Amy A says

I will be honest. The thing that attracted me first to this book was the different way in which it was packaged, an "accordian style binding". The whole concept was pretty clever I thought, one story told from two different people's perspectives.

The underlyning message of the story was not cloaked by any means. The reader knows right away who the characters are / were and the fate that they face, but instead of making the story boring it was more interesting to be able to pick out the details of the original legend and superimpose it upon the characters in the story (as I'm pretty sure we, the reader, are encouraged to do).

Obviously it's up to the reader to decide with whom's story to begin. I chose to start with Brendan's story mainly because the title of the book "The Thorn and the Blossom" and his name is Brendan Thorne. I will say that his telling of the story is more hopeful and real. While Evelyn's story seems more mystical and magical.

It's a quick read, and while reading Evelyn's story I was trying really hard to line it up with Brendan's in terms of dialogue and places they went, comparing what one person saw as opposed to the other person. Different perspectives. I immediately wanted to go back and re-read Brendan's story to then compare it to Evelyn's, but I didn't. I think I read through the book too quickly. Although it's a short book at only about 80 pages total, I think the details need to be drawn out more. I do intend to go back and read this book again. Probably starting with Eveyln's story. Until Then!

Athena Shardbearer says

I'm totally a Shardbearer!

So this morning was not such a great morning. I woke up late, forgot to wash my hair last night, the puppies had accidents in their kennels, forgot to write a check for my daughters school pictures...the day was not going so well :(

Until this baby was in the pile of yesterdays mail. I would like to thank Quirk Books Publishing for sending me a copy of The Thorn and the Blossom by Theodora Goss. I was not expecting this in the mail! WOOP WOOP!!!

Look at the detail and the illustration! UGH...Totally in love!

Here is the synopsis.

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The Thorn and the Blossom is a remarkable literary artifact: You can open the book in either direction to decide whether you'll first read Brendan's, or Evelyn's account of the mysterious love affair. Choose a side, read it like a regular novel—and when you get to the end, you'll find yourself at a whole new beginning.

I'm totally psyched to get into this book! Also, Quirk Books you guys rock!!!

P.S. As a graphic designer, I'm in love with the detail of this book. From the inside jacket to the folios. It's all beautiful and not over done. Ugh...I can't express enough how awesome this is!

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

I can't review this book without first commenting on the physical design. Accordion-style, printed on both

sides, the book doesn't have a spine. That forces you to hold the book carefully, almost cradling it, which (for me) enhanced the sort of magical-artifact-found-in-my-grandmother's-attic artifact nature that I ate up. I suppose others will find it gimmick-y, but I was immediately charmed.

The book tells the same story from two different viewpoints, that of Evelyn, an American medievalist who spends a week in Cornwall before returning to the States to pursue, she hopes, her academic career; and Brendan, a British medievalist who meets Evelyn during her week in Cornwall.

This is a romance with academics, sort of A.S. Byatt-lite (in a good way!): Oxford scholars turned medieval professors, a kiss, a misunderstanding, some magic... Their brief romance echoes that of a local myth -- a variation on Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight -- and has a mix of realism and mythic grandness that I found compelling. Goss' writing style is simple, but pretty, and she slightly alters her narrative style to fit the voice of Evelyn and Brendan. I read Evelyn's story first, and let out a serious sigh upon finishing, then quickly flipped the book to gobble up Brendan's story. (Who, by the way, needs to be my boyfriend. Hello, Mr. Dreamy.)

In conclusion: read Theodora Goss no matter what; and if you can get your hands on this book, do it, because it's very neat.

Kelly says

Evelyn and Brendan are both students at Oxford when they meet in the tiny Cornish town of Clews, where Evelyn is taking a much-needed break and Brendan is working in his father's bookstore. A romance begins to bloom between the two, and Brendan shares with Evelyn his favorite legend: a local Arthurian variant about star-crossed lovers Gawan and Elowen. Then something uncanny occurs, and Evelyn and Brendan part and lose touch. Ten years later they meet again while teaching at Bartlett College in Virginia. They reconnect, but still all is not smooth...

Theodora Goss unfolds this love story in a unique format. The book is printed in an accordion fashion, with printing on both sides, so that if you open the book one way you read the story from Brendan's point of view, and then you can flip it over, open it again, and read Evelyn's. Or vice versa, because you can start with either. The downside to this is that it lacks the usual spine binding, so it is more difficult to hold than a "regular" book. There are four illustrations: one each of Evelyn, Brendan, Gawan, and Elowen. The book comes in a beautiful slipcover whose design calls to mind a medieval tapestry. The book as a physical object is a work of art in and of itself.

Inside is a story of love found and lost and found again -- both within Evelyn and Brendan's own lives and possibly over the course of a thousand years, as it's suggested that these present-day lovers may be the reincarnations of the ones from the legend. It's also a story of creativity lost and found. Both lovers are writers whose imaginative minds often go unappreciated by those around them and even in academia: one of Evelyn's professors tells her to stop writing poetry on "fanciful" topics, and Brendan at one point realizes he'd rather write a story than write *about* stories. During the course of the book, the two characters are each navigating their own relationship with their creativity in addition to their relationship with each other.

Perhaps the most clever aspect of the "two-sided" story is that, no matter which one you start with, the ending is unresolved. But when you read the other side, it fills in other details about the ending that give it more of a sense of resolution. There is still ambiguity, but one can make a pretty good guess what will

happen next.

I'm slightly uneasy with the parallel drawn between the character of Isabel and one of the figures from the legend. It seemed that this somewhat hampered the reader's capacity to feel sympathy for her, when Isabel had done nothing wrong in this life (and possibly not ever, depending on whether the reincarnation is real).

The Thorn and the Blossom is a short read; each of the two versions of the story is only about 40 pages long. You can read it in one leisurely afternoon. The way the two perspectives play off one another, however, may have you wanting to read it again!

written for FantasyLiterature.com
