

“The Hunt”
a novel
and the accompanying exegesis
**“A Voyage Through Darkness:
Finding a Voice in the Silence of Bluebeard’s
Castle”**

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The Exegesis

**“A Voyage Through Darkness: Finding a Voice in
the Silence of Bluebeard’s Castle”**

Chapter 1. Introduction

My journey towards writing the novel “The Hunt” began with a newspaper article by the journalist Caroline Overington, published in the Saturday edition of the Melbourne newspaper, *The Age* in 2003. As I flicked through the pages, the smiling face of a young teenage girl, Elizabeth Smart, caught my eye as she peered out from under her father’s enveloping embrace. The photograph evoked a sense of familial love and security; the girl was fresh faced and apple cheeked, nestled into the crook of her father’s arm. However, the article told a different, and inexplicable, story. Elizabeth Smart, a fifteen year old girl, had just been recovered from a nine month ordeal of captivity and sexual assault at the hands of a vagrant, Brian David Mitchell, and his wife, Wanda Barzee. During the period of Elizabeth’s disappearance she had been assumed dead, and yet when she was discovered, she was only twenty kilometres from her home, wandering the streets with her captors.

I could not get this article out of my mind. It raised many questions that were hard to answer. How did this young girl survive? Why was she not able to escape when she was so close to her house and family? Why was this man not a suspect of the initial police investigation, and most chillingly, what would lead him to commit such a crime?

In my writing journal at the time, I sketched an outline for a story based on this article. I would like to reproduce it here, because the framework I scribbled down remained consistent through the long and torturous development of the work that became my novel, “The Hunt”. This extract illustrates the themes and concerns I immersed myself in while formulating my ideas.

Think about this in reference to my next long story (novel?) idea ie exploration of captivity. The exploration of a story where one person targets, tracks, captures and holds another for an extended period of time – and during that time seeks to break them down psychologically, to transform them from a resistant to compliant or even willing victim. Explore this process – the way physical deprivation and often sexual exploitation (as a form of physical degradation), isolation etc. is used as a form of psychological torture to break someone’s spirit – to “break them”. Explore this “relationship” in all its complexities and little

known dynamics. (Think about the myths/cultural beliefs around girls, sexual politics etc.) And let the girl, (because it will be a girl) resist, and perhaps even escape, relatively intact.

When I did finally begin to write my novel, it ended up taking a narrative shape that departed from my initial intentions to write a story within the closed world of the captor/captive dynamic. For reasons outlined in this essay, my path to the completion of my novel took me in directions I did not expect and resulted in a story that, in terms of narrative, had travelled a long way from its starting point. But its thematic concerns had remained remarkably true to its origins.

This exegesis will chart my journey in writing “The Hunt” and seek to place my finished work in a critical, theoretical and creative context. I will show how an idea beginning with a newspaper article ended up becoming entwined with myth and fairy tale, particularly the tale of “Bluebeard”. I will look at the intertextual connections between the genre of female Gothic and feminist revision of fairy tales and how these influenced the development of “The Hunt”. I used the fairy tale narrative of “Bluebeard” as a structuring device in my novel, and describe how an ancient tale broke the impasse I had reached while writing my first draft, freeing me to bridge the worlds of reality and fiction through exploring a version of captivity that had its genesis in a factual event.

My definition of captivity in this context is specific. When I discuss “captivity narratives” I am not referring to the post-colonial body of work clustered around the experience of capture by indigenous North American Indians of white women in the nineteenth century, as described by Christopher Castiglia in his study *Bound and Determined: captivity, culture crossing and white womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patti Hearst*. Nor am I referring to Australian captivity narratives in the sense employed by Kay Shaffer in relation to “frontier tales” of the capture of Eliza Frazer (*In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Frazer Stories*), or to other forms of institutionalised captivity such as that experienced by the inmates of prisons, labour camps or prisoners of war. The captivity I am exploring is domestic, contained in (or confined to) a house or garden, or as in Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones*, an ordinary suburban environment of homes, schools and quiet streets. I am interested in the juxtaposition between the peaceful familiarity of this setting and the latent violence

inherent in the form of captivity I am looking at, where a captor has absolute power over his captive, to the point of deciding whether she will live or die. Further, I limit my scope to where the captor is an older, predatory male and the captive is a young girl, often tricked or duped into her situation through her naiveté and inexperience. In this captive space she risks physical and sexual assault or even murder at the hands of her captor. It is a story about power: the captive's struggle for survival and escape, and the captor's exertion of his will over her, so that she will perform whatever function he desires.

While I acknowledge that feminist Gothic theory is a contested area, I would like to clarify how it assisted in providing a critical framework around the development of my novel, particularly where it intersects with the "Bluebeard" tale. Eugenia Delamotte, in her pivotal feminist study of nineteenth century Gothic texts, *Perils of the Night*, points out the defining characteristic of Gothic plots as telling "again and again, the story of woman trapped in a domestic space" (157). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, references Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in its evocative title, placing Bertha Rochester's captivity as the central motif of the book. Carol Margaret Davidson, in her essay "Ghosts in the Attic: Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* and the Female Gothic", reinforces this point with her claim that "if a single trope is obsessively reiterated in the female Gothic as crystallising the experience of female terror, that trope is the confined woman" (207). Where the captive is not an adult female but a pubescent girl, Davidson makes a further point that is relevant to my novel; she states that "both the female Gothic and the bildungsroman concentrate on a young woman's rite of passage into womanhood, her vexed experiences of love and romance, and her ambivalent relationship to the multifaceted ideology of femininity" (206). This is also a point made by Christina Bacchilega when discussing the Bluebeard fairy tale, which she calls a "tale of initiation in which the protagonist successfully confronts death because she is bold and clever or because she has strong community ties" (14).

It was the tale of "Bluebeard" that transformed my ideas on power and escape when I was writing my novel. The "Bluebeard" tale is unusual in that it is told from the point of view of Bluebeard's young wife, and that it shows us how, using her wits, she

manages to escape and defeat him. These twin elements of voice and agency became central to my novel.

There are strong interconnections between female Gothic texts and “Bluebeard”. As Victoria Anderson writes in her essay “Investigating the Third Story: ‘Bluebeard’ and ‘Cinderella’ in *Jane Eyre*”, “there can be no denying the close correlation between “Bluebeard” and the general trajectory of the Gothic novel, from the *Mysteries of Udolpho* to *The Turn of the Screw* and beyond” (111). She goes on to point out that “all the conjoined props that would come to be identified as Gothic (the mansion, the secret chamber, the murderous patriarch, our goodly heroine) pre-existed the Gothic in tales of the “Bluebeard” type”(112). I will argue however, that the Bluebeard tale (with a particular emphasis on Perrault’s version) differs from traditional female Gothic texts in its portrayal of its heroine, who disobeys Bluebeard’s instructions not to search for the forbidden chamber and who marshals resources in the form of her brothers to come to her aid (Perrault 8). Her active disobedience and action in calling her brothers are what ensure her survival. By following this example, my novel departs from the female Gothic tradition, where the heroine remains “trapped in so many ways in the architecture – both the houses and the institutions – of patriarchy” (Gilbert and Gubar 85).

The narrative of captivity I was interested in exploring in “The Hunt” deals with violent crime, and yet I wanted my protagonist to reject the role of victim. I did not want her to remain trapped in the “house” of the Gothic heroine. As Helene Myers argues in her book *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*, “contemporary female Gothic explores the difficulties of, and the necessity for, taking gender oppression seriously without positioning women as pure victims” (Myers xii). It is this position I wished to explore in my novel.

I will seek to place my novel in a creative context with other works dealing with themes of power, violence and captivity of the type I am exploring in “The Hunt”. I will outline why Bluebeard was so important to the development of my novel, as it illustrates a power struggle between a young female captive/wife and her much older and more experienced husband/captor. I will analyse how I came to see it as a story with a subversive interpretation of this central power relationship, where the young bride is given an opportunity to gain her freedom and escape her grisly fate. I briefly look at the

social, political and literary evolution of “Bluebeard”, with an interest in locating the traces of a matrilineal folk tale heritage embedded within Perrault’s literary version of this story. I will look at how its interpretations have followed changes in social mores over the centuries, and I will examine how the fairy tale form embodied in the tale of “Bluebeard” offered me narrative choices as I wrote, particularly in regard to plot and point of view, and in the development of Alice, my protagonist. Rather than being a story about disobedient wives, I came to see “Bluebeard” as being about how a young woman can escape from a violent, predatory male: a modern serial killer.

Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” is a text which showed me the narrative possibilities of re-visioning fairy tales, and allowed me to consider using “Bluebeard” as a fictional “template” for my novel. This freed me from the constraints of working from a factually based interpretation of captivity, and I found this liberating when writing later drafts. Carter’s witty and bold re-interpretation of “Bluebeard” offered an example of telling an old story in a new way, where she engages with feminine stereotypes of the Gothic, giving us a heroine who, while being inexperienced and young, is also sexual and disobedient. Above all, she creates the character of the rescuing mother, literally riding across the ocean to save her daughter on a white horse, and who is a powerful oppositional force to the patriarchal killer Bluebeard.

John Fowles’ *The Collector* is a novel that came closest to describing the kind of domestic captivity I was exploring, and yet Fowles develops his characters and plot in a very different way to mine. I argue that his heroine, Miranda, embodies a version of the idealised heroine, whose “goodness” does not allow her to use violence and force to gain her freedom. Fowles structures this as a moral choice, allowing Miranda to retain her moral superiority at the expense of her life. This patriarchal version of captive womanhood ascribes positive moral value to her passivity and only allows her the ineffectual strategies of bargaining and withdrawal in her futile attempts to win her freedom. Gilbert and Gubar argue that “the ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel” (20) and Miranda is Fowles’ embodiment of this ideal. Gilbert and Gubar’s angel has “those ‘eternal feminine’ virtues of modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, politeness” (23), all qualities shared by Fowles’ Miranda. I argue that it is these very qualities that rob her of

the power to act and condemn her to her fate. While Miranda has a presence in the narrative through the existence of her diary, the story belongs to Clegg, and I argue that Fowles traps Miranda in his narrative just as firmly as Clegg does in his cellar, leaving her no opportunity for escape.

In Alice Sebold's novel *The Lovely Bones*, the story is told through the first person narration of a young girl, a fourteen year old victim of rape and murder, Susie Salmon. Susie narrates her story from beyond the grave, as she inhabits the peaceful and idyllic world of her "heaven", seemingly untouched by her grisly demise. Despite the unlikely premise of re-animating a dead girl to tell her story, I found the voice of the teenage protagonist helpful when trying to find a voice for my thirteen year old character, Alice. Susie's narration manages to remain convincing throughout the course of the book, largely because Sebold, while writing in the first person from Susie's perspective, uses her character's "supernatural powers" to frequently shift to an omnipresent point of view, giving her much greater narrative flexibility than would normally be possible with an exclusive use of the first person. I was interested in how Sebold had sustained this voice through the novel, but also felt uncomfortable about the necessary passivity of the central character, confined as she was to the limits of her "heaven". Thus Susie remains a captive, only able to view but not influence events as they unfold down on "earth". She has voice but not agency, and I wanted my novel to incorporate both for my central character, Alice.

In my chapter on "The Hunt" I will examine some of the challenges I faced in writing a novel about the form of captivity outlined above. I will describe how during the research and writing phase of my first draft, I struggled to find a narrative form for my story. I returned to non-fiction, particularly Sabine Dardenne's memoir, *I Choose to Live*, in order to learn more about her experience of the kind of captivity I was exploring in my novel. I reached an impasse, where the writing ground to a halt and I felt the story was wooden and unconvincing. I realised I needed to shift my story away from one of literal captivity to one where the definition of captivity was more subtle. The tale of "Bluebeard" helped me to make the leap to a fictional exploration of my story and the idea of voice and agency for my captive came together for me here, becoming a blueprint for the subsequent drafts. I will further expand on how my novel sits at the

intersection of feminist revisions of fairy tales and contemporary female Gothic narratives and how this opened up possibilities during the writing of “The Hunt”. I will explore the role of horses in the narrative and also reflect upon my journey to accept the story as it unfolded, even though at times it seemed to deviate far from the narrative framework I tried to impose upon it. Finally, I will seek to place my novel in an evolving space, in a critical and creative intersection between the tragedy of a real life event and the magic realm of story.

Chapter 2. Bluebeard's Wife: Passive Victim or Wily Protagonist?

In his book, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Jack Zipes describes the socio-political context of the development of modern fairy tales. He argues that “such a set and highly structured world can be linked to notions of medieval patriarchy, monarchy, and absolutism in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (7). Prior to Charles Perrault transcribing fairy tales as part of a “civilising process” begun by the rising bourgeoisie in France in the latter part of the seventeenth century, fairy tales had “entered into a specific institutionalised discourse before they were transformed into literary tales for children of the European upper classes” (7). Zipes argues the world of the fairy tale, full of “kings, queens, princes, princesses, soldiers, peasants, animals and supernatural creatures (witches, fairies, elves, dwarfs, goblins, giants)” (7) describes a pre-industrial society, without “machines, signs of industrialisation, or elaborate descriptions of commerce and town life” (7). This is a world of absolute power, where “might makes right” (7). Tales of oppression and exploitation form the root of many folktales in this pre-industrial period, including such conditions as “starvation and the abandonment of children, rape, corporeal punishment, ruthless exploitation”, (8) all part of the “violence and brutality of everyday life” (8) for the members of the audience in this oral folktale tradition.

During this period of absolute monarchy and feudal social structures, power and oppression became the key concerns of the oral folktale. As such, ordinary people, “largely peasants, were predominantly attracted to the tale and became its prime carriers” (7). The tale became a vehicle to explore alternatives to oppression, where “the impulse and critique of the ‘magic’ are rooted in an historically explicable desire to overcome oppression and change society” (8). In this process, power takes on a “moral quality” (8). It was this element of a “moral quality” that also attracted me to use the fairy tale, in my case the tale of “Bluebeard”, to explore a situation of power and oppression. The captivity I explore in my novel could well have come from an earlier age, where lack of legal and political recourse meant that certain members of society had absolute power over others. This question of absolute power and how the powerless

could find a way to defeat the powerful was an issue I was exploring in my novel, and much like the oral storytellers of the pre-industrial era, I was interested in “Bluebeard” as a narrative of subversion.

Zipes argues that a “matriarchal mythology” (7) from which many folk tales had sprung, was almost extinguished by the late Middle Ages. Various stages of patriarchal reinterpretation had changed the tales in a variety of ways, including transforming the “active, young princess” to an “active hero”, the goddess into “a witch, an evil fairy, or a stepmother” and revising “a pattern of action that concerned maturation and integration” into one which would “stress domination and wealth” (7). He argues that as the tales evolved from a “pagan or non-Christian art form” (7) they began to ascribe to the “morality and ethics of a male-dominated Christian civil order” (8). Therefore, fairy tales in their written form began to play a significant role in the socialisation of children. According to Zipes, children of all classes enjoyed folk tales. Peasants did not exclude their children when they told stories around the fireside and upper-class children heard them from their lower-class wet nurses and governesses (8). However, before the folk tale could become the basis for the “literary fairy tale for children” (8) it was necessary for it to be adapted to reflect the cultural and political hierarchies of its time.

When Charles Perrault published his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé avec des moralites*, in 1697, in which the first transcribed version of “Bluebeard” appeared, during a period of absolute monarchy in France, “French culture was setting standards of *civilite* for the rest of Europe” (9). Thus Perrault’s story must be seen in a socio-historical context in which “the individual symbolic act of writing the literary fairy tale expressed a certain level of social consciousness and conscience that was related to the standard mode of socialisation at that time” in order to create a society where the “manners and mores of the young would reflect the social power, prestige and hierarchy of the ruling classes” (9). Therefore, the political and social subversiveness of the earlier folk tradition was diluted, transforming the folk tale into a form of entertainment whose purpose was “to instruct and amuse; that is, to make moral lessons and social strictures palatable” (9). In this process, Perrault reinforces a view of femininity at odds with the one shown in the more robust folk version, where the “brave little peasant girl, who can fend for herself and shows qualities of courage and cleverness, is transformed into a

delicate bourgeois type, who is helpless, naïve, and culpable, if not stupid” (45). In Perrault’s tale of “Bluebeard”, the moral explains that “it is a sin for a woman to be curious and imaginative and that women must exercise self-control”, which reinforces Perrault’s message that the “female role is dictated by conditions that demand humility and self-discipline” (40). Thus Perrault’s version of “Bluebeard” is less an archetypal tale of feminine curiosity than a socio-political and literary construct of its time.

However, Bruno Bettelheim in his text *The Uses of Enchantment: the meaning and importance of fairy tales*, insists on a more archetypal view of fairy tales and assumes an essentialist position in relation to their cultural and psychological power. He says that:

Each fairy tale is a magic mirror which reflects some aspects of our inner world, and of the steps required by our evolution from immaturity to maturity. For those who immerse themselves in what the fairy tale has to communicate, it becomes a deep, quiet pool which at first seems to reflect only our own image; but behind it we discover the inner turmoils of our soul – its depth, and ways to gain peace within ourselves and with the world, which is the reward of our struggles. (309)

While a debate about how accurately fairy tales depict and describe our “inner turmoils” is beyond the scope of this exegesis, I raise Bettelheim’s point because it illustrates a commonly held belief about the archetypal nature of fairy tales. Zipes points out that “though aware of the historical origins of the folk tale, Bettelheim fails to take into account that the symbols and patterns of the tales reflect specific forms of social behaviour and activity” (“Breaking the Magic Spell” 169). Like Zipes, I believe that fairy tales are literary constructs which reflect the concerns and attitudes of the society from which they came, in this case the “ancien regime” of France in the late seventeenth century. Therefore, when Bettelheim echoes Perrault’s moral about the perils of curiosity, telling us that “Bluebeard” outlines “the motif that as a test of trustworthiness, the female must not inquire into the secrets of the male. Carried away by her curiosity, she does so nevertheless, with calamitous consequences” (300), he is reinforcing a three hundred year old social construct created by Perrault in his literary version of “Bluebeard”.

Patricia Duncker, in her essay “Reimagining the Fairy Tales, Angela Carter’s *Bloody Chambers*”, makes a similar argument for what she sees as “the received collective wisdom of the past” inherent in fairy tales, where they show “the way to knuckle down into uncongenial shapes, rather than as weapons of understanding and change” (69). She describes fairy tales as reflecting the “myths of sexuality under patriarchy” and therefore they provide a “vessel of false knowledge or, to put it more bluntly, interested propaganda” (68). In her view, fairy tales “expose the raw nerves of real conflicts between classes, families, men and women, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons” (72) and where “the boys must be taught courage. The girls must be taught fear” (77). Much like Bettelheim, Duncker makes assumptions about the “essential” nature of fairy tales, where she infers that similar notions of gender, power, sexuality and class are reinforced time and again across a range of narratives. This is a generalised view, which does not take into account the multiplicity of tales, their varied provenance and the differing socio-political and cultural frameworks in which they were transcribed. For Duncker, fairy tales, and the folk tale tradition from which they were derived, reinforce patterns of patriarchal oppression and any attempt at revisioning the form merely serves to reinforce a sexist mythology. She says that women “cannot fit neatly into patterns or models, as Cinderellas, ugly sisters, wicked stepmothers, fairy Godmothers, and still acknowledge our divers [sic] existences, experienced or imagined” (83). While I agree that some interpretations of fairy tales impose a patriarchal framework over the female characters and plots, in my own work I found the fairy tale to hold much more subversive potential than Duncker acknowledges. For my novel, “Bluebeard” was indeed a “weapon of understanding and change”, where the old tale unlocked the narrative potential of the contemporary story I was trying to write.

The origins of the Bluebeard tale are not clear. Gilles de Rais, the wealthy Breton nobleman, Marshal of France and celebrated combatant during the Hundred Years War, was executed in 1440 with two of his accomplices for the murders of hundreds of children. He is often believed to be the basis for Perrault’s “Bluebeard” (Warner, “From the Beast” 260). Yet the similarities between the fairy tale ogre and Gilles de Rais only extended to their murderous histories, rather than their choice of victim. Both were wealthy aristocrats, who owned large castles and committed murder in secret rooms kept

purely for that purpose. It appears that it was this “serial killer” quality of Gilles de Rais, along with his wealth and privilege, which marked him as a “Bluebeard” rather than any association with marriage and disobedient wives.

Later versions of “Bluebeard” began to further emphasise the young wife’s “fatal curiosity” or disobedience to her husband’s order as being the moral of the story. These versions often carried the subtitle “The Effect of Female Curiosity” or even “The Fatal Effect of Curiosity” (Warner, “From the Beast” 244). Even Perrault includes a “Moral” at the end of his story, which reads:

Curiosity, with its many charms,
Can stir up serious regrets;
Thousand of examples turn up every day.
Women give in, but it’s a fleeting pleasure;
Once satisfied, it ceases to be.
And always it proves very costly. (Tatar 179)

His wife’s terrible discovery and subsequent realisation of her own imminent fate is seen merely as a punishment for her trespass.

Ludwig Tieck, the German Romantic poet and dramatist’s 1797 drama, “Riffer Blaubart”, also takes this view. In his re-telling of the “Bluebeard” tale even Bluebeard’s wife berates herself for her actions. “O curiosity,” she declaims, “damned, scandalous curiosity! There’s no greater sin than curiosity!” (Tatar 134). Her lamentations are made in the centre of her husband’s killing chamber; the brutal facts of which do not seem to be worthy of mention. Bluebeard himself mirrors this view: “Cursed curiosity! Because of it sin entered the innocent world, and even now leads to crime. Ever since Eve was curious, every single one of her worthless daughters has been curious...” he exclaims (Tatar 135). It seems the real crime here was not murder, but curiosity.

The nineteenth century saw multiple re-workings of Perrault’s “Bluebeard”. The title of Francis Egerton Ellesmere’s two act play, “Bluebeard: or, Dangerous curiosity and justifiable homicide”, published in London in 1841 (Tatar 134), espoused a similar position, casting Bluebeard as an enraged husband betrayed by his treacherous wives. His response to their treachery is thus almost warranted, even if extreme.

There are clear parallels here to the stories of Eve and Pandora, other mythological women whose “cursed curiosity” brought disaster. The feminine desire for knowledge has long been equated with sin and wrongdoing, apportioning blame to women for nothing less than original sin and in the case of Pandora, the release of evil into an otherwise perfect world. Bluebeard’s wife falls neatly into this paradigm; according to the plot she disobeys her husband, acts of her own accord and searches for something forbidden to her, flouting authority as she goes. Bluebeard’s wrath appears to be a consequence of her actions: the justifiable outrage of a man whose one secret place is pried open by a stranger to his home, his castle. But her instinct to search is vindicated by the discovery of the corpses, an inconvenient reality often overlooked by versions of the tale sympathetic to Bluebeard. Rather than bring disaster, it is her curiosity which saves her from a grisly fate and allows her to defeat the blue bearded ogre who plans to kill her.

I began to think about the tale of Bluebeard during a difficult time in the writing of my first draft. I will describe this part of the process more extensively later in this exegesis, however “Bluebeard” became pivotal in assisting me to find a way out of the creative impasse I had reached with my novel. The emphasis on “disobedient wives” and the strong association with marriage initially led me to feel that “Bluebeard” had little to offer me in terms of narrative connections to the type of captivity I was writing about. It was not until I researched further that I found traces of the earlier tale under Perrault’s civilising layers and began to see how “Bluebeard” mirrored the story I was trying to tell more closely than I had initially thought. The central protagonists were the same: an older, predatory male and a young girl. The girl’s innocence and inexperience allowed her to be “captured” by Bluebeard, and held in his castle in apparent luxury, yet it was her vague sense of disquiet, a feeling that all was not what it should be, that led her to search for the hidden chamber, and thus learn of the danger she was in. With this knowledge, she was able to take action and save herself. The tale seemed to say: trust your instincts, be disobedient, follow your nose, and act on what you see. Rather than having anything to do with the “perils of curiosity” I began to see “Bluebeard” as a narrative of resistance, where disobedience to authority was a central motif, ensuring the captive’s survival. It still retained traces of its matrilineal oral folk tale beginnings,

remnants of the advice “Mother Goose” was giving to her three young charges beside the fireside, illustrated in the frontispiece of Perrault’s 1697 collection (Warner, “From the Beast” ii).

Bluebeard was a serial killer, a figure very familiar to me from popular culture. I started to see how an ancient tale could help me tell a contemporary story. The mythical Bluebeard seemed to step out of the pages of the newspaper, as a modern murderer and captor of young girls. As Marina Warner points out “The infamy of Gilles de Rais lives on, entangled with a different kind of murderer, the legendary Bluebeard ... Gilles de Rais has become the precursor of twentieth century serial killers and a founding father of their modern cult” (“No Go” 35). I started to imagine the narrative connections between past and present, fiction and non-fiction, fairy tale and novel. I had a sense of “Mother Goose” warning her young charges about the murderous Bluebeard, and that maybe some of the embedded wisdom of the tale could help me craft my novel of resistance and escape.

Once I had made a connection between “Bluebeard” and the kind of domestic captivity I was exploring, my novel began to take shape. The fairy tale was critical in progressing my narrative. I felt as though I was writing about a modern Bluebeard, and that the tale influenced my novel in many ways. It allowed me to envision a form of domestic captivity, which moved beyond literal bars on windows or doors to something intangible, but still oppressive. It opened up possibilities of writing about a place where appearances were deceptive, where things were not what they seemed. As I moved away from literal captivity in my novel, to a place where it is unclear what kind of situation Alice finds herself in, I wanted to create the same uncertainty in the reader who feels a sense of menace but is unsure if there is any cause for it. Is it real or imagined? I wanted a reader to ask. In this way, I felt I was mirroring the uncertainty of Alice, who knows there is something wrong and must act to find out what it is. I wanted to explore parallel worlds, where a force of violence and murder could co-exist and lie underneath an apparently everyday reality. This seemed to be the message of Bluebeard’s secret chamber, and for me, it came to symbolise a place concealed beneath the everyday, unimaginable to those who had never seen it, but existing nevertheless. Somehow this

idea seemed to fit with the captivity I was writing about, which occurred in quiet neighbourhoods, among people's homes.

It is Bluebeard's young wife who journeys into the chamber and unlike her predecessors, returns to tell of its secrets. Bluebeard's wife, with her courage and ingenuity, became the model for my protagonist, Alice. Her decision to follow her instincts and disobey her "master" led her to find the truth and then take action to save herself. The tale is told from her point of view, which in narrative terms hands the power over to her, by providing her with a "voice." Thus "Bluebeard" signposted a range of potential narrative solutions, allowing me to revision a story of captivity and oppression to one of resistance, where my captive can use her courage, instincts and actions to escape and survive. Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" expanded on these subversive elements and took Perrault's "Bluebeard" into new territory, showing me the narrative possibilities in re-visioning fairy tales.

Chapter 3. Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and feminine disobedience

Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" revises the tale of Bluebeard with audacious wit. As the title story in *The Bloody Chamber and other stories*, a collection of short narratives all loosely linked to fairy tales, it was first published in 1979, only two years after Carter's translation of *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* appeared in 1977. "The Bloody Chamber" is narrated in the first person, in the voice of Bluebeard's teenage bride. Despite its obvious connection to Perrault's "Bluebeard", "The Bloody Chamber" does not initially announce itself as belonging to the world of long ago and far away.

I remember how, that night, I lay awake in the wagon-lit in a tender, delicious ecstasy of excitement, my burning cheek pressed against the impeccable linen of the pillow and the pounding of my heart mimicking that of the great pistons ceaselessly thrusting the train that bore me through the night, away from Paris, away from girlhood, away from the white, enclosed quietude of my mother's apartment, into the unguessable country of marriage. (Carter 7)

This sentence begins the narrative and in it we are located somewhere recognizable: in a wagon-lit, leaving Paris, somewhere we know exists. The story is being told by a girl lost in "an ecstasy of excitement" with the train's "great pistons ceaselessly thrusting" in the background. The latent sexual overtones alert us to the fact that while this girl is young, innocent and inexperienced, she is on a journey "away from girlhood" and into the uncharted waters of adult life, represented by "the unguessable country of marriage". She finds this prospect exhilarating. Her excitement seems immodest; as readers it is not clear whether we are in the territory of the "good girl" or on a journey somewhere else.

Angela Carter is indeed taking us somewhere else. Carter's feminist re-writing of Perrault's "Bluebeard" opened narrative doors for me, allowing me to intertwine an old text into the new story I was shaping. Carter famously described this process, saying "I'm all for putting new wine into old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (qtd. in De La Rochere, 40). De La Rochere and Heidemann, in their analysis of the role of translation in the work of Angela Carter, argue that Carter viewed creation as "stemming from the interplay of reading and

writing” (40) and therefore her writing derived “a new energy from revisiting the cultural and literary past from the perspective of the present” (41). I feel I could apply this description to my novel in relation to “Bluebeard” and while I do not make comparisons between myself as a writer and Angela Carter, I took her free and iconoclastic process of re-writing “Bluebeard” as an inspiration for the possibilities of using the fairy tale as a narrative template for my own work. As De La Rochere and Heidemann point out, Carter’s bottle metaphor aptly “draws attention to the profoundly transformative impact of the re-writing process as it frees up anti-conventional readings of old texts that challenge expectations, certainties, and comfortable beliefs” (41). Carter’s “new wine in old bottles” let me imagine a way I could use the “Bluebeard” tale to reach into the trapped, silent space of the modern captive I was writing about. Her vibrant subversiveness in plot, characterisation and point of view all freed me to explore a space of my own, where fairy tale, fact and fiction merged into the creation of my novel “The Hunt”.

Within the space of three years, from 1977 to 1979, Angela Carter worked on and wrote her translation of Perrault’s fairy stories, her non fiction essay *The Sadeian Woman* and her collection of fairy tales *The Bloody Chamber and other stories*. “The Bloody Chamber”, re-interprets Perrault’s “Bluebeard” and grew from her translation of the original and her desire to bring her “playful, irreverent and anarchic spirit” (De La Rochere 41) to the bare bones of Perrault’s narrative. It was also influenced by her study of the work of the Marquis de Sade, women and pornography, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, which was published in 1979, the same year as *The Bloody Chamber*.

In Carter’s version of “Bluebeard”, “The Bloody Chamber”, the story is told not only from the young wife’s point of view, but also in her own words, as Carter writes it in the first person with the young wife as narrator. She creates a world located in time and place, with signifiers clearly placing the reader in France in the early twentieth century. The girl’s “wardrobe of clothes from Poiret and Worth” (Carter 13), the Marquis’ “leather-gaited chauffeur waiting meekly beside the sleek black motor car” (14) and even his “cloisonné cupboard beside the bed that concealed the telephone and addressed the mouthpiece. His agent in New York. Urgent.” (20) drags the fairy story

into a contemporary space, complete with motor cars, telephones and agents. Her tale has left the “long ago and far away” realm of children’s fairy tales and placed itself in an adult world, in “a recognisable historical and geographical setting, as if to suggest that it is not so removed in time as we might think” (De La Rochere 47).

Ambivalence and ambiguity permeate the plot and characterisations of “The Bloody Chamber.” The young bride admits to “a strange, impersonal arousal at the thought of love and at the same time a repugnance I could not stifle for his white, heavy flesh” (Carter 18). Carter’s heroine appears both as a bewildered actor giving a performance in a play not of her own devising, and an “active protagonist” in the narrative. She is no passive subject; it is her story, first and foremost, and we make the journey with her as she enters Bluebeard’s castle, full of anticipation and apprehension in equal measure. Carter plays with the good girl/bad girl dichotomy: she allows her heroine to show both sweetness and innocence and a nascent sexuality coupled with a steely determination to discover the secret chamber and thus finally uncover the riddle of her husband’s “real self” (31). She strides down the gloomy corridor towards the forbidden room without fear, with “no intimation of dread. Now I walked as firmly as I had done in my mother’s house” (32).

The appearance of the narrator’s mother at this point in the narrative is significant. Later, we see that her mother is the one character who is more than a match for the power of Bluebeard. At this critical point in the story, as the young girl is poised to enter the forbidden chamber, she draws inspiration from thoughts of her intrepid mother, giving her the courage and resolve she needs to walk through the door and gaze on the horrors within. Once inside, her taper extinguishes itself and leaves her in darkness, but she does not run from the room in terror; instead, she holds her ground.

Until that moment, this spoiled child did not know she had inherited nerves and will from the mother who had defied the yellow outlaws of Indo-China. My mother’s spirit drove me on, into that dreadful place, in a cold ecstasy to know the very worst (33).

She fumbles in her pocket for matches, relights her taper and fully investigates the terrible fate of her predecessors.

Later, after she has returned upstairs and discussed her predicament with the sympathetic, blind piano tuner, her husband returns. She realises she has fallen into his trap. “I knew I had behaved exactly according to his desires; had he not bought me so that I should do so?” (41). She returns to her bed and pretends she was unaware of his return. “With the most treacherous, lascivious tenderness, he kissed my eyes, and, mimicking the new bride newly wakened, I flung my arms around him, for on my seeming acquiescence depended my salvation” (41). With cunning and resourcefulness, she tries to escape her fate, but the bleeding key betrays her. Even at this point in the narrative, however, Carter introduces an element of ambiguity into the character of Bluebeard. As his wife re-enters the room clutching the treacherous bunch of keys, she finds the Marquis sitting in his “immaculate shirtsleeves” (42) on the bed, slumped with his head in his hands.

And it seemed to me he was in despair.

Strange. In spite of my fear of him, that made me whiter than my wrap, I felt there emanate from him, at that moment, a stench of absolute despair, rank and ghastly, as if the lilies that surrounded him had all at once begun to fester, or the Russian leather of his scent were reverting to the elements of flayed hide and excrement of which it was composed. (42)

And yet his mood passes quickly. As he waits for his wife to hand him the keys, she notices a change in his demeanour.

I saw how he had lost his impassivity and was now filled with suppressed excitement. The hand he stretched out for those counters in his game of love and death shook a little; the face that turned towards me held a sombre delirium that seemed to me compounded of a ghastly, yes, shame but also of a terrible, guilty joy as he slowly ascertained how I had sinned. (43)

Carter’s Bluebeard seems to feel a mixture of remorse and guilty pleasure at his acts of cruelty and murder. He is an ogre, yet one that is trapped by his violent obsessions in an endless cycle of violence. In the moments prior to her execution by beheading, he demands that his young bride return her wedding ring. “It will serve a dozen more fiancées” (46) he remarks as he lovingly slips it on to the tip of his little finger.

Carter's heroine, however, has an ally who does not appear in Perrault's version of "Bluebeard". Like an echo of Demeter and Persephone, it is the young girl's mother who rescues her daughter and the hapless blind piano tuner from Bluebeard's sword. No brothers come galloping over the hill to rescue their younger sister, and in the story's final moments the young girl is powerless to save herself. She is resourceful and determined, but ultimately no match for her ferocious husband. His defeat is left to her mother, who gallops over the causeway towards Bluebeard's castle in order to rescue her imperilled daughter:

her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh, her skirts tucked round her waist, one hand on the reins of the rearing horse while the other clasped my father's service revolver and, behind her, the breakers of the savage, indifferent sea, like the witnesses of a furious justice. (48)

Moments later, the mother raises her pistol and shoots the sword-wielding Bluebeard dead with one shot between the eyes. The mother's violent skill saves them all.

"The Bloody Chamber" offers a feminist re-writing of the Bluebeard tale, where the avenging mother arrives at the last moment to defeat the ogre with a display of violence to rival his own. Carter's ending is full of the melodrama of the pantomime, as the mother shoots Bluebeard from the saddle of her rearing horse. In Bluebeard's young wife, Carter takes first steps towards creating a character with the capacity to defeat Bluebeard, but she does not provide her with the ability to save herself. She has to rely on rescue from her mother to do that. In my novel, I wanted to create a heroine who saves herself from the clutches of Bluebeard, without having to wait for a rescuer who may not come.

Sarah Gamble, in her analysis of "The Bloody Chamber", argues that in Carter's revisioned tale, she moves beyond the simple black and white binaries of good/bad, predator/prey and passive/dominant (Gamble 154). Robin Ann Sheets makes a similar point, arguing that while Bluebeard's wife is passive in terms of her capacity to save herself from her husband's murderous intentions, she is the "active instigator" of the narrative rather than its passive subject (Sheets 652). In this sense she is the one who defines the events, and tells us her story and, as the narrator, she is the one who holds the

dominant point of view. While the charade of leaving the castle and a pile of keys in his young wife's possession, with express instructions not to touch the smallest key, is of Bluebeard's devising, the decision to ignore his instructions and find out more about her mysterious new husband is the wife's own. She acts on her feeling of disquiet and desire to find out the true nature of her new spouse, which she suspects he has concealed from her. The wife disobeys her husband's instructions, but in doing so gives herself the opportunity to save her life.

In "The Bloody Chamber" the husband is both predator, and ultimately, prey to the pistol-wielding mother. He is a monster, and yet seemingly feels despair at his entrapment within a cycle of violence he is unable to escape. And yet Carter does not allow her captive to find the strength herself to overpower her captor. She operates within the narrative confines of the Bluebeard tale, and as such replaces the rescuing brothers with a rescuing mother of ferocious skill.

Ambiguity also exists in the way Carter treats the theme of sexual threat and violence. In "The Bloody Chamber" the lines between sexual desire and threat are blurred, where despite her innocence and lack of sexual experience the virginal bride discovers in herself a latent sexual desire, which is ignited by the attentions of her very new, much more experienced husband.

I saw, in the mirror, the living image of a sketching by Rops from the collection he had shown me when our engagement permitted us to be alone together... the child with her sticklike limbs, naked but for her button boots, her gloves, shielding her face with her hand as though her face were the last repository of her modesty; and the old, monocled lecher who examined her, limb by limb. He in his London tailoring; she, bare as a lamb chop. Most pornographic of all confrontations. And so my purchaser unwrapped his bargain. And, as at the opera, when I had first seen my flesh in his eyes, I was aghast to feel myself stirring. (17)

The young bride's sexual arousal is a consequence of viewing herself through the lens of the Marquis' lust for her, as the object of his gaze (Sheets 651). This thread of sado-masochistic sexual desire runs throughout "The Bloody Chamber" and was an interest of Carter's at the time she was writing the collection. As previously discussed, in

1979 she published *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, where she analyses female sexuality and pornography in reference to the work of the Marquis de Sade, particularly his novels *Justine* and *Juliette*.

According to Margaret Atwood, “Carter unwinds the Sadeian rhetorical ball of wool, undoing de Sade’s knots and logical paradoxes, and what she finds at the centre of it is a sort of Siamese twin, both halves entirely constructed by men: the traditional role female victim, Justine, and de Sade’s ‘new woman’, Juliette, who is instead a victimiser” (134). Atwood argues that “The Bloody Chamber” is “an exploration of the possibilities of the kind of synthesis de Sade himself could never find because he wasn’t even looking for it. Predator and prey, master and slave, are the only two categories ... that he can acknowledge” (136). Atwood describes the predator/prey dynamic as one that exists between “tigers” and “lambs”, and argues that Carter’s story was an exploration of the “narrative possibilities of de Sade’s lamb-and-tiger dichotomy” (136). In her view, Carter posits a synthesis between the “tiger and lamb” qualities as a way for women to achieve “an independent as opposed to a dependent existence” (137) and to avoid “becoming meat” (137). According to Atwood, Carter refutes the notion that men will always claim the predatory role and women will always be prey. She claims that Carter’s work illustrates that both tiger and lamb qualities can exist “in either gender, and in the same individual at different times” (137). Sarah Gamble agrees, arguing that Carter breaks up the “remorseless dialectic of opposition” (155) and opens out the “possibility of a conceptual space in which one need not always be ‘either/or’, but can instead move between the poles of opposing signifiers in order to form a creative, consistently mobile, synthesis between them” (155). Thus Carter’s blurring of the boundaries between power, gender and sexuality create possibilities for moving beyond the victim/victimizer binary. In her essay, *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter describes a new interpretation of de Sade’s work where:

Justine is the thesis, Juliette is the antithesis; both are without hope and neither pays any heed to a future in which might lie a synthesis of their modes of behaviour, neither submissive nor aggressive, capable of both thought and feeling. (“Sadeian Woman” 79)

In “The Bloody Chamber” she allows the young wife to experience the stirrings of masochistic erotic desire, while at the same time being horrified by it. As Sheets argues “it is impossible to categorize Angela Carter as a good girl or a bad girl, for she, like her protagonist, has escaped from absolutes” (656).

Carter however, does not shy away from the inherent power imbalance which is reflected in the mirror, namely between the clothed older man, the “purchaser” and the young girl, naked, “bare as a lamb chop”, literally a piece of meat. This example of a sexual transaction, an abuse of power, where a young girl is caught and held by an older man, for his use either sexually or for other forms of violence, is what I wanted to explore in my novel, “The Hunt”. The essential power imbalance of captivity, both literal and figurative, is at the core of my story. While in “The Bloody Chamber” the young girl is the Marquis’ wife, she is purchased by him as though at a market, with a “handful of coloured stones” (Carter 21). His ability to mask his true intentions and use the lure of his great wealth to hunt for a new plaything, a new actor in his deadly charade, allows him to locate and trap his next victim within a web of glamour and prestige.

In “The Bloody Chamber” the Marquis takes his wife’s virginity and then sets the events in motion for the denouement, her murder. The sexual act and murder follow closely together. Once she loses her innocence her fate is sealed: but for her own efforts at discovering the chamber and the action of her vengeful mother she would have become another addition to her husband’s grisly collection of corpses (Gamble 154). The bride’s courage as she searches the dark recesses of Bluebeard’s Gothic castle found its way into the characterisation of my protagonist, Alice. Like Bluebeard’s wife, she does not allow her innocence to immobilise her and she takes action to save herself.

Carter introduces the reader to a character who lies outside traditional versions of the tale of Bluebeard: the avenging mother. It is as though she has offered us an antidote to the predator himself, a woman who had “outfaced a junkful of Chinese pirates, nursed a village through a visitation of the plague, shot a man-eating tiger with her own hand” (Carter 7) and who is not afraid to use violence. She fights Bluebeard with his own weapons. With the appearance of this avenging force a new element is introduced into the previously closed world of the captor and captive, where the captor holds all the

power. According to Sarah Gamble, “the introduction of the mother, however, changes everything, for, just as in the story her intervention quite literally breaks up the victor/victim tableau” (155). Carter proposes another possibility outside of the fixed roles of victim/predator. Clearly her avenging mother is neither one nor the other; she displays neither the victim’s powerlessness nor the predator’s “power over”. She lies in a space between, a powerful figure who does not seek to dominate others and yet who is able and willing to use violent means if required to protect those she loves.

While I found Angela Carter’s use of the female avenger to counter the powerlessness of the young wife in “Bluebeard” appealing on a number of levels, I did not want my novel to be a narrative of rescue. In this way, my story departed from “Bluebeard” and “The Bloody Chamber”. I wanted to equip my young protagonist, Alice, with some of the “tigerish” qualities necessary to escape her captivity on her own. While Carter’s avenging mother saves her daughter from the back of a galloping horse, Alice partners with her horse to free herself from the clutches of Quilty and Bernie. In both cases, horses act as a pivotal agent for change in the narrative.

My novel outlines a journey where Alice’s extreme youth and inexperience make it difficult for her to understand what is happening to her, much less put up an effective resistance. But she is not passive: she uses the limited resources at her disposal to save herself. Unlike in Perrault’s “Bluebeard”, Carter sees the wife’s disobedience as a positive virtue, and reframes her “curiosity” as the boldness needed to search for and find the hidden chamber that will reveal its horrible but life-saving truths. I also read “Bluebeard” as a story of triumph over a predator, and yet I wanted to take the narrative a step further, where the captive uses her wits and “agency” to free herself.

Carter’s vigour and daring in re-interpreting Perrault’s “Bluebeard” freed me to imagine other meanings and interpretations of the Bluebeard tale and use its symbols and encoded messages to unlock the closed world of captivity I was trying to write about. I found a story told from the young girl’s point of view, and whether she plays the role of a wife/victim/captive, or a combination of all three, she follows her instincts, recognises her sense of unease and acts on it, disobeys the directive of her powerful husband/oppressor/captor to discover a horrifying reality, the truth of which she does not turn away from but rather acts on and thus saves her own life. These elements provided a

template for my narrative, and showed me a way to transform a story of disempowerment and captivity into one of agency and triumph.

“The Bloody Chamber” drags “Bluebeard” back from the land of “long ago and far away” into a time and space recognisable to a modern reader. Its world of shifting perceptions and ambiguity was one which appealed to me as I was creating something similar in my novel, where dark subterranean undercurrents flowed under the everyday world of the female adolescent, full of school, friends, parents and horses. The secret of Bluebeard’s chamber symbolises this “other reality” and the next novel I wish to examine brings Bluebeard even closer in time and place. John Fowles’ *The Collector* explores a very different re-interpretation of Bluebeard, where the power dynamics of captor and captive are never challenged and the captive, Miranda, is given no opportunity of escape.

Chapter 4. Bargaining with Bluebeard: Miranda and Clegg in John Fowles' *The Collector*

John Fowles described the genesis of his novel *The Collector*, published in 1963, as arising from an idea which developed from a synthesis of Bela Bartok's opera, *Bluebeard's Castle*, and a "contemporary newspaper report of a boy who captured a girl and imprisoned her in an air-raid shelter at the end of his garden" (qtd. in Woodcock 27). In an interview with James Campbell in 1974 Fowles acknowledges that "I've always been interested in the Bluebeard syndrome, and really, that book was simply embodying it in one particular case" ("Conversations" 33). Of all the texts I read during the course of my research *The Collector* came closest to describing the kind of captivity I was exploring in my novel. I was interested to read the above quotes and to learn that the idea for Fowles' novel grew from the same source as mine: namely a newspaper article and a version of "Bluebeard", in his case Bela Bartok's opera, which used "the symbolism of the man imprisoning a woman underground" (qtd. in Woodcock 27).

John Fowles' novel can be seen, therefore, as a reinterpretation of the "Bluebeard" tale, envisioned from the imagination of a male author of the early 1960s. I would like to examine how the novel differs in its treatment of the female captive, Miranda, and how Fowles reinterprets "Bluebeard" for his own purposes. He shifts the focus away from the captive/wife and her escape from the murderous Bluebeard to a narrative where Bluebeard is fully in control: this is his story, and unlike in Perrault's "Bluebeard", the captive is given no opportunity for escape. The female captive is rendered powerless; Fowles leads her to Bluebeard's chamber and shuts her inside, where eventually she becomes one of Bluebeard's corpses. Fowles' novel reinforces a patriarchal world view, establishing the "female victim/male victimiser" dichotomy firmly in the plot and characterisations of its central protagonists, Miranda and Clegg. There is none of Atwood's "tigerishness" in Miranda. Fowles does not allow any of Carter's ambiguity here either: at all times in the novel Miranda is the victim and Clegg the one in control. Thus Fowles breaks with the subversive tradition embedded in Perrault's fairy tale, where the balance of power between Bluebeard and his young wife is challenged by her disobedience and action to call for help, which enables her to save

her life. There is no liberation here, no turning of the tables against the predatory Bluebeard. He triumphs absolutely, and Fowles' Miranda is the embodiment of a doomed Gothic heroine, whose "goodness" condemns her to become merely an anonymous corpse buried in Clegg's garden.

From the beginning of the novel, the dramatic tension is built around the question of whether Miranda will escape or die. Miranda's ineffectual escape attempts are all overcome by Clegg, and unlike in "The Bloody Chamber", no one comes to her rescue. When Clegg refuses her medical treatment and she dies of a respiratory illness she catches from him, he buries her body in a box under the apple trees. In the novel's closed world Miranda's fate is never discovered, and only the reader, and Clegg, know her story. Clegg places her diary and a lock of her hair in his deed box, not to be opened until his death, which he surmises, will not be "for forty or fifty years" (Fowles 283). Like the corpses of Bluebeard's former wives, she is eternally silenced.

Frederick Clegg, the collector of the novel's title, is chilling because he is someone recognisable: a clerk who works at his local Town Hall, living a life of pedestrian anonymity. Fowles offers us a Bluebeard striking in his ordinariness. No Marquis appears here: no Gothic castles, or servants, or ruby necklaces. Instead we have a pools win, and the purchase of a country cottage in which Clegg constructs his own secret chamber with items he purchases from the local hardware store.

Clegg lives in "our" world. As a Bluebeard figure he has migrated from the fairy story setting and lives among us. The novel, while set in early 1960s Britain, is close enough in time and place to feel modern: Clegg drinks Nescafe, watches "telly" and drives a van which he uses to abduct his captive, Miranda. His passion is butterfly collecting and he spends his free time pursuing this hobby, hunting and capturing rare specimens, which he kills and preserves in carefully arranged display cabinets. His other secret obsession is the beautiful young girl, Miranda, and he watches as her life unfolds beneath his office window. But the attraction is not mutual; there is no indication she is even aware of his existence. Unexpectedly he wins the lottery and an idea begins to form in his mind that she will become his "guest". Piece by piece his plan falls into place, until he accomplishes the capture of his prey.

The narrative structure of the novel allows us to hear from both protagonists in the story. While the central section of *The Collector* is written from the point of view of the captive, Miranda, in the form of her diary found by Clegg and read after her death, it is Clegg's first person narrative, written in the past tense, which encloses it. Apart from the central break in the novel taken up by Miranda's diary, his voice narrates the events from beginning to end. While Miranda's diary gives us a window into her experience, the story belongs to Clegg. In *The Romances of John Fowles*, Simon Loveday points out that, "Though Clegg's account makes up less than half the book by quantity (139 pages in the paperback edition to 141 of Miranda's), its position allows it to dominate: there are three Clegg chapters to Miranda's one, and hers (Chapter 2) is contained by his (Chapters 1,3, and 4)" (14).

The structure of the novel mimics its thematic concerns. Clegg's narrative, told in the first person, begins the novel and describes the events leading up to Miranda's capture and captivity up to the point of her illness. It is written in the past tense, as though Clegg has begun his account after the events have occurred and is thus writing from memory, constructing his narrative to suit his own purposes. "The episodes in Clegg's account tend to be more complete, more organised, and more linear than those in Miranda's: they bear the marks of deliberate, albeit unskilful, composition" (Loveday 21).

The point of view then shifts in the second chapter. Without warning, we are in Miranda's world, as she narrates her experience in the form of a diary kept in a notebook Clegg gives her on the seventh day of her captivity. Miranda's style is very different to Clegg's. While she also writes in the first person her diary is more personal, more inward looking. Much of it is written in the present tense, giving the impression she is writing it at the time the events take place, rather than retrospectively, as in the case of Clegg's narrative. This lends a sense of immediacy and honesty to the text (Loveday 20). It is written as though speaking to a confidant. As Susana Onega points out in her study, *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles*, in reference to the first person diary format, "the diary is never addressed to an implied reader. But, on the contrary, its message is directed to the writer himself. It is thus a convention traditionally used by heroes in isolation: Robinson Crusoe is the prototypical example" (24). This assessment

accurately describes Miranda's position in *The Collector*, as being a heroine "in isolation".

Miranda's diary is clearly not designed to put her point of view forward, to claim ownership of the story as Clegg's narrative does. Unlike his, it is not written with a reader in mind. Her diary takes up more than half of the novel, and yet it finishes with her last wild entries written in the delirium of her sickness, leaving the reader unaware of her fate. In Chapters Three and Four of the novel we return to Clegg who tells us what happened. He describes her illness and eventual death, and how he buries her body in his garden without notifying anyone. The novel ends with Clegg describing his interest in a new girl, Marian: "(another M! I heard the supervisor call her name)" (Fowles 283) and leaves us with the conviction he will continue his "collecting".

This structure mirrors the captivity described in the novel: Miranda's story is captured between the bookends of Clegg's version of events. As the novel is written entirely in the first person, both by Clegg and Miranda, a triumvirate effect is produced where the reader is the only witness to the events described, forced to listen to the story Clegg and Miranda are trying to tell. But it is Clegg who opens the story and closes it, before he recedes from our view. We know nothing of the fate of Marian, because he has chosen not to tell us. Despite the impression that we hear both "sides" of the story, in fact Clegg has total control, and we know as much or as little as he is willing to reveal.

Fowles introduces the reader to Miranda through Clegg's point of view. He illustrates how, in the early days and weeks of her captivity, Clegg keeps his sexual desire for Miranda at bay by thinking of her in idealised terms.

I could sit there all night watching her, just the shape of her head and the way the hair fell from it with a special curve, so graceful it was, like the shape of a swallow tail. It was like a veil or a cloud, it would lie like silk strands all untidy and loose but lovely over her shoulders. (64)

In his analysis of *The Collector*, Robert Huffaker argues that "as long as Miranda remains idealized in Clegg's mind, he cannot rationalize mistreating her. His worshipful attitude is closely linked to sexuality" (82). For Clegg, Miranda is less a living, breathing human being, and more a lovely object to be caught and observed, like a butterfly come to life. "What she never understood was that with me it was having. Having her was

enough. Nothing needed doing. I just wanted to have her, and safe at last” (95). Clegg describes a one dimensional, pallid, beautiful creature, without thoughts or feelings of her own. She thus resembles the figure described by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as the “angel in the house”, an idealised version of Victorian womanhood which emphasised purity, submissiveness and selflessness, and above all, service to the “good of others” (Gilbert and Gubar 24). Gilbert and Gubar further argue that in “the extremity of her alienation from ordinary fleshly life, this nineteenth century angel woman becomes not just a memento of otherness but actually a memento mori” (24). Extreme passivity is associated with the “moral cult” of the angel woman, obliging “genteel” women to transform themselves into “slim, pale, passive beings whose ‘charms’ eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead” (25). Clegg’s dead butterflies in their display cabinets are a direct metaphor for Miranda herself, whose captivity is a form of living death. Fowles creates a space for Miranda where she must sacrifice her “self”, and it is precisely this sacrifice which “dooms her both to death and to heaven. For to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead” (25). Trapped as she is within Fowles’ vision of the “perfect woman” she is destined to die, as the emblematic “beautiful woman” whose *death*, thought Edgar Allan Poe, “is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world” (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 25). It is the tragedy of Miranda’s death that lends the story its power and this is the only role Fowles provides for her.

Sherrill E. Grace, in her analysis of the Bluebeard theme in the work of Fowles, Atwood and Bartok, argues that “Clegg’s professed love for Miranda is for a static anima figure which will reflect favourably upon his crippled psyche. The real woman of will, intelligence, and sexuality he loathes” (255). Fowles’ Clegg is impervious to Miranda’s suffering and rarely remarks upon it in his narrative. He is not interested in the real girl underneath his idealised projection. Her outbursts and escape attempts wound him, and leave him feeling as though she has been ungrateful for his “kindness”.

All I’m asking, I said, is that you understand how much I love you, how much I need you, how deep it is.

It’s an effort, I said, sometimes. I didn’t like to boast, but I meant her to think for a moment of what other men might have done, if they’d had her in their power.

(62)

This tension runs throughout Clegg's narrative. He appears unaware of his thwarted desires and unable to acknowledge their intensity. Huffaker argues that "the more intimate his views and photographs of Miranda become, the more she loses the mystery essential to the anima figure" (82). In Fowles' world, it is Miranda's frozen state of victimhood that keeps her safe. She is forced into the role of a helpless Gothic heroine, but with each escape attempt, she becomes more exposed to the threat of violence running under the surface of Clegg's narration. Some of Miranda's fear leeches through Clegg's closed point of view when he reports her comment that "What I fear in you is something you don't know is in you" (70). He seems unaffected by this observation and dismisses it: "That's just talk" (70).

Clegg's reserve evaporates once Miranda makes her last, desperate attempt at freedom. The catastrophic seduction scene, where Miranda makes a sexual overture to Clegg, provides a turning point in the narrative. Clegg no longer disguises his need to dominate and sexually exploit Miranda and begins to reveal his brutality without attempting to disguise it under a veneer of "niceness". According to Huffaker, "only her sexual degradation sullies her image enough to warrant, in his mind, real cruelty. He is furious at her seeing his impotence, and now he can excuse punishing her for tainting his ideal" (82). Miranda's action destroys the fragile veil Clegg has drawn over his Bluebeard qualities. The effect on Clegg is immediate and dramatic.

I was like mad when I got out. I can't explain. I didn't sleep the whole night. It kept on coming back, me standing and lying there with no clothes on, the way I acted and what she must think. I could just see her laughing at me down there. Every time I thought about it, it was like my whole body went red. I didn't want the night to end. I wanted it to stay dark for ever.

I walked about upstairs for hours. In the end I got the van out and drove down to the sea, real fast, I didn't care what happened.

I could have done anything. I could have killed her. All I did later was because of that night. (102)

From this point onwards, Clegg's contact with the live woman repulses him, and engenders feelings of revenge towards her. Rather than being a prized possession, which he keeps for his own pleasure to admire and desire from a distance, she "had made

herself like any other woman, I didn't respect her any more, there was nothing left to respect" (104).

Miranda's expression of sexuality in an attempt to gain her freedom repels Clegg, and results in her losing her status as idealised "angel woman", which proves fatal. Her act is used as an excuse by Clegg (and Fowles) to justify the abuse and neglect she subsequently suffers at Clegg's hands. Only while Miranda remains passive is she safe from Clegg's violence and cruelty. Her descent from a "good", obedient and "pure" Gothic heroine to a corpse is a result of her agency and action. Unlike in Perrault's "Bluebeard" her "disobedience" and initiative are not rewarded with freedom, but rather she is punished for them, and ultimately dies. There is no shift of power here; Miranda's fate is always in Clegg's hands. Fowles constructs a narrative where the expression of her resourcefulness, assertiveness and sexuality all contribute to her death. He punishes her for her "agency", by producing parallel violence in Clegg which seems to lay the blame for his rage at her feet. Miranda's transformation from an angel to what Gilbert and Gubar describe as the "antithetical mirror image of an angel" (28), the female "monster", occurs as she makes various attempts to resist Clegg and her captivity. Gilbert and Gubar's female monster figure "incarnates the damning otherness of the flesh rather than the inspiring otherness of the spirit" (28) and embodies the "sacrilegious fiendishness of what William Blake called the "Female Will" (28). Initiative, assertiveness and aggression are characteristics of a male life of "significant action", and do not belong to the feminine world of "contemplative purity" (28). Therefore, Miranda's actions transgress into a masculine world she is not permitted to enter, and her trespass is brutally punished. As Gilbert and Gubar point out "while male writers traditionally praise the simplicity of the dove, they invariably castigate the cunning of the serpent – at least when that cunning is exercised on her own behalf" (28). Fowles' revisioning of "Bluebeard" presents a nineteenth century view of the literary heroine, with its patriarchal, conservative limitations on her ability to take action and affect the outcome of the story. In this way, Fowles presents a much more limited view of gender possibilities and reinforces the male as predator/female as prey dynamic more rigidly than Perrault himself, who wrote his tales some three hundred years earlier.

After Miranda's fumbling attempt to make herself sexually available to Clegg, he ceases to care for her and begins to view her with resentment. He blames her for his refusal to provide medical attention for the illness he gives her when she kisses him that fateful evening. He is indifferent to her suffering and her pleas to see a doctor. Ultimately, he allows her to die.

She was lying with her head to one side and it looked awful, her mouth was open and her eyes were staring white like she'd tried to see out of the window one last time. I felt her and she was cold, though her body was still warm. I ran and got a mirror. I knew that was the way and held it over her mouth but there was no mist. She was dead.

Well, I shut her mouth up and got her eyelids down. I didn't know what to do then, I went and made myself a cup of tea. (274)

Clegg makes a quick recovery after Miranda's death. He rapidly decides against a "suicide pact" and then turns his mind to practical concerns: disposal of the body and cleaning out the cellar to remove the lingering odours of decay. He describes squeamishness at handling her corpse, but no other emotion for the girl he had once professed to love.

I couldn't stand the idea of having to look at her again, I once heard they go green and purple in patches, so I went in with a cheap blanket I bought in front of me and held it out till I was by the bed and then threw it over the deceased. I rolled it up and all the bedclothes into the box and soon had the lid screwed on. I got round the smell with fumigator and the fan.

The room's cleaned out now and good as new. (282)

The novel concludes with Clegg planning for the room's new occupant. He describes a new girl, Marian, who lives in an isolated country lane a quarter of a mile from her bus stop. He has clearly been following his new victim, unbeknownst to her, and getting ready for his next "guest". Despite this, the predatory Clegg does not openly admit to his intentions. After indicating that he has located Marian's house, followed her home, and identified a place where he could abduct her, he insists that it is "still just an idea. I only put the stove down there today because the room needs drying out anyway" (283). In the novel's final pages, it is clear that Clegg will abduct again but this time we know

nothing of his new victim. As Susana Onega points out, the novel finishes with the threat of “kidnappings that might take place, not only in the story’s future, or in Clegg’s future, but in our own future: as the gap between narrative time and story time narrows, the threat hanging over Marian’s head also threatens the reader: the collector is alive, he is one of us, and is perhaps watching us” (18). Thus Clegg has become one of the quintessential figures in the modern imagination, the serial killer.

The Collector is Clegg’s story. He is the most fully realised of the two characters and according to Peter Wolfe in reference to Miranda, “Readers have complained that Fowles’ liberal humanist conception of her makes her merely a literary man’s model of an ideal girl” (68). I would agree that this is the case. For all her intelligence and compassion, and vibrant will to live, her role in the story is fixed and passive. She is merely an ornament, a necessary but static element of the narrative. Fowles provides her with no opportunity to grow or change, and she remains trapped in the confines of the story, unable to act or develop beyond the walls of her prison. Her role is that of the tragic, doomed Gothic victim, beautiful and young, whose fate adds poignancy to the action driven by Clegg. It is Clegg who speaks with an authentic voice; it is his narrative that jumps off the page.

Miranda’s only real chance at escape occurs one evening when she notices Clegg has left an axe within reach on the kitchen windowsill. She manages to grasp the axe, however at the critical moment, she falters.

But then... it was like waking up out of a bad dream. I had to hit him and I couldn’t but I had to.

Then he began to straighten up (all this happened in a flash, really) and I did hit him. But he was turning and I didn’t hit straight. Or hard enough. I mean, I lashed out in a panic at the last moment. He fell sideways, but I knew he wasn’t knocked out, he still kept hold of me, I suddenly felt I had to kill him or he would kill me. I hit him again, but he had his arm up, at the same time he kicked out and knocked me off my feet. (227)

After a brief struggle, Miranda gives up. She ceases to fight, describing it as “too horrible. Panting, straining, like animals” (227) and Clegg manages to regain control. He bundles her into her cell and leaves her alone. The next day she justifies her lack of

resolution in her diary. "Violence and force are wrong. If I use violence I descend to his level. It means I have no real belief in the power of reason, and sympathy and humanity" (228). By framing her choice as a moral dilemma, Fowles posits a regressive position for Miranda, robbing her of the capacity to act firmly and decisively to win her freedom. He forces her back into her "chamber" by not allowing her to use the option of violence without losing her "virtue". Miranda decides to treat Clegg as "someone who needs all my sympathy and understanding" (228). Eugenia Delamotte refers to this kind of masochism in the Gothic heroine as "pseudopower", where she cultivates an illusion of control, which acts by "deluding the victim into experiencing her passive victimisation as active, self-generated desire" (157). It thus generates a "false sense of empowerment" (158). Once Miranda refuses the option of violence and active resistance towards Clegg, she has to resort to her "sympathy and understanding", namely manipulation and false concern in order to reclaim a sense of her worth and moral value as a "good" woman. Susana Onega argues that Miranda's dilemma "has to do with the right human beings have to exert power over other human beings and with whether the victim of oppression has a right to shake off the yoke by the use of force" (29). While a full examination of this question is beyond my scope here, the answer that Carter's "Bloody Chamber" and Perrault's "Bluebeard" would provide is a definitive yes. For Fowles, however, Miranda's resistance and violence are couched in moral terms. He puts her in an impossible position, where she cannot act to use violence in an effort to gain her freedom without losing her "humanity". For Fowles, she is either the passive, "pure", moral Gothic angel or a violent female monster. He gives her no middle path: the right to be human. He forces her to carry the moral obligation of the narrative. In contrast, despite orchestrating and carrying out the violence towards Miranda, Fowles excuses Clegg from facing any such moral dilemma.

In her diary, Miranda writes, "I am a moral person. I am not ashamed of being moral. I will not let Caliban make me immoral; even though he deserves all my hatred and bitterness *and* an axe in his head" (228). Miranda's position has the effect of disabling her in her power struggle with Clegg. Clegg as Bluebeard is not reasonable. He will not release her through persuasion and bargaining. Sympathy and kindness will have no effect on him. Miranda's diary is full of entries claiming her wish to survive her

captivity: “I spend hours lying on the bed thinking about how to escape. Endless.” (232) and “I don’t want to die. I feel full of endurance. I shall *always* want to survive. I will survive” (233). However, when her one real chance of escape presents itself Fowles does not allow her to strike the fatal blow. After her initial feeble attempt fails, she retreats to a state of passivity, allowing her captor to regain the upper hand. Fowles does not give Miranda another chance. As she describes in her diary, Miranda is trapped as surely as Clegg’s butterflies in his killing bottle: “I am imprisoned in it. Fluttering against the glass. Because I can see through it I still think I can escape. I have hope. But it’s all an illusion. A thick round wall of glass” (204).

The narrative tension begins to shift from the question of whether she will escape to when and how she is going to die. Fowles casts his heroine into the only role left to her: the one of victim. All her resourcefulness and lust for life come to nothing, only serving to highlight the tragedy of her eventual fate. For Fowles, this is ultimately Miranda’s only function in the narrative. She is designed for victimhood, the essential element in Clegg’s story. Fowles gives her no opportunity to be anything else. Without Miranda as captive and victim, there can be no Clegg, the collector of butterflies and women, and it is Clegg’s story that Fowles wants to tell. Fowles does not allow Miranda any agency in the narrative. Much as nineteenth century interpretations of “Bluebeard” blamed the wife for her fate because she displayed “curiosity”, Fowles blames Miranda for her action and attempt at agency in the novel, when she tries to make her escape from Clegg. Clegg’s shift in perception of her is crucial to her survival, because Fowles makes Clegg all powerful. Her action alienates Clegg, and thus her “fall from grace” leads directly to her death.

In this way, Fowles’s *The Collector* gives us a much less subversive view of the predator/prey dynamic than Perrault’s “Bluebeard”. Perrault at least gives his heroine a voice and a way to survive. Whereas Miranda is purely a victim, trapped as much by the confines of Fowles’ “literary man’s model of an ideal girl” as she is by the walls of Clegg’s cellar. Her passion for life, her beauty and vitality serve only to highlight the tragedy of her death, which is the dramatic high point of the novel. Miranda’s role in the story is to die.

The Collector is therefore a precursor to the modern thriller, a genre which dominates popular fiction. In these texts the woman, like Miranda, often occupies the role of victim/corpse, and this is not something I wanted to do in my novel. Fowles gives us a recognisable, modern Bluebeard, creating a character in Clegg that has come to dominate much popular crime fiction, the serial killer. *The Collector* provided a key literary bridge for me between fairy tale narratives and the contemporary examples of girls kept captive that had inspired my novel. But unlike Fowles, I wanted to give my character, Alice, both voice and agency. I wanted to write a narrative harking back to the subversive roots of Perrault's tale, taking some of the iconoclastic energy of Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" to write a story where the captive takes centre stage and where she manages to survive. I did not want to write another story about a woman who becomes merely a corpse, like the ones littering Bluebeard's chamber, or like Miranda, whose victimhood guarantees her a place in a homemade box buried at the bottom of Clegg's garden.

Chapter 5. Voice from beyond the grave: Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*

Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* was published in 2002 and tells the story of Susie Salmon, a fourteen year old girl who is abducted, raped and murdered by her neighbour Mr Harvey. The novel details the devastating effects of this crime on her family and community as the years pass after her death. Her killer is never apprehended, and her body is never found. Only her elbow bone is recovered, which is the only physical evidence of her that remains: the "lovely bones" of the novel's title.

The Lovely Bones is another variant on the Bluebeard theme. Mr Harvey, a serial killer who wears the disguise of an ordinary neighbourhood good citizen, lures Susie to a chamber he has constructed under the earth, where he rapes and kills her. It is Susie's curiosity that leads her to ignore her instincts and follow Mr Harvey: "I was no longer cold or weirded out by the look he had given me. It was like I was in science class: I was curious" (9). Susie does not escape from the chamber alive. As Mr Harvey tells her: "You aren't leaving Susie. You're mine now" (12). And yet *The Lovely Bones* is narrated in Susie's voice, in the first person. Like in "The Bloody Chamber", Susie tells her own story, but unlike Bluebeard's young wife, she does not escape. Her story does not have a happy ending.

The Lovely Bones is an attempt by Sebold to give the victim, Susie Salmon, a voice. It is clear from the first few sentences that she is no "ordinary" narrator, but rather is speaking to us from beyond the grave: "My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973" (1). Unlike Miranda, in *The Collector*, whose death marks the end of her story, Susie's narrative begins after her murder, when she arrives at her own personal "heaven". Death for Susie is not an act of finality, but rather a gateway to another dimension where she is able to exist relatively untouched, frozen into a permanent state of being fourteen. Susie watches the immediate aftermath of her killing from her "heaven", and is able to see her family disintegrate under the weight of grief left behind by her murder. While the years pass and changes occur for those she loves on earth, Susie remains the same, untouched by the trauma of her demise and the passing of the years.

Susie remains in her “heaven”, a place of calm and serenity, where she meets other female children and women, all Harvey’s previous victims. While Sebald’s heaven shares many of the elements of the paradise motif, such as “green trees and grass, gentle hills or steep mountains, colourful flowers, pure water, blue skies, balmy breezes, proximity to the divinity/divinities, joy, peace, harmony and freedom from fear, want, strife, disease and death” (qtd. in Daemmrich 213) it is also a place of confusion and frustration. “All this made me crazy. Watching but not being able to steer the police toward the green house so close to my parents, where Mr Harvey sat carving finials for a gothic dollhouse” (26).

Ingrid G. Daemmrich argues in her article “Paradise and Storytelling: Interconnecting Gender, Motif and Narrative Structure”, that the paradise motif is used by women writers as a “shaper of fluid, multidirectional narratives” (220) which “explore mystifying alien territories that destabilize the traditional paradisaic features” (220). In her view, “these narratives construct puzzling, open-ended tales that express both continuity and variation” (220). Clearly Sebald’s “heaven” falls into this category. It is both a place of sanctuary and reassurance for the dead Susie, and also a timeless stasis, where she is forced to watch the lives of her family unravel and is unable to act to influence events. Sebald’s paradise evolves with Susie’s changing desires, but is unable to provide her with what she longs for the most: development and growth, and the ability to contact her family. In other words, to live again. Daemmerich contrasts the paradise motif in “men’s tales of adventure and quest to women’s fiction centred on complex, fluid interconnections” (214). As the novel progresses, in Sebald’s “heaven” connections are made between the dead girls and women, producing a space where “their paradises are designed to be unreliable, changeable sites that challenge traditional notions of bliss” (Daemmerich 220) and yet which allow for “unfamiliar, open ended, fluid structures that signal stories in progress” (Daemmerich 217). As one of the dead girls dances, “other girls and women came through the field in all directions. Our heartache poured into one another like water from cup to cup. Each time I told my story, I lost a bit, the smallest drop of pain” (Sebald 186). Sebald links the stories of these victims of the predatory murderer Harvey, through the motif of paradise, or “heaven” in

her novel. Through this device, Susie's voice is linked with all murdered women and girls, and allows Susie to speak for them all.

Unlike in Fowles' *The Collector*, Sebold's story belongs squarely to Susie, the victim. As in Perrault's fairy tale, Sebold shifts the power in the narrative away from Bluebeard, and allows the victim to speak. Her killer, Mr Harvey, remains peripheral. He has no voice of his own. He is a silent, lurking presence in the narrative: a serial killer posing as the most ordinary of suburban citizens. Mr Harvey's very ordinariness, much like Clegg's, is a mask under which he hides himself. He is a modern day, suburban Bluebeard, disguised so he can better hunt for his victims.

Susie's death occurs at the end of the first chapter of the novel, and for the rest of the story, Susie inhabits her personal "heaven". She does not appear traumatised by her ordeal, but rather continues unchanged, as though death marks no great transition for her other than she no longer has an earthly form. As such, Susie operates as a cipher in the narrative, where the focus of the novel is on her murder and the effect it has on her family and community. *The Lovely Bones* is not really a story about Susie, but rather about her murder. In this way, she resembles *The Collector's* Miranda, whose role in the narrative was to play the part of murdered victim. There is little character development or progression, and Susie does not change through the course of the book, but remains fixed, in the same place she started. Sebold does not give her the power to act, and she remains unaffected by the trauma of her demise. Anis Shivani in his article "The Shrinking of American Fiction", points out that, strangely, "The prematurely dead do not resent being so. Each person gets to work out unfinished business, and meanwhile inhabit a custom made heaven" (687). This is certainly true for Susie, as she gazes down on events that unfold on "Earth" in the aftermath of her murder. Her parents' grief, her sister's rage, the fumbling attempts of the police to piece together how she died and their failure to apprehend her killer are all observed by the dead girl. As Elizabeth Tallent argues in her article "The Trouble with Postmortality", it is as if "it has been agreed for the purposes of contemporary fiction that what persists after death is a consistent, coherent individual consciousness – a self, pretty much, and a self that hasn't suffered much disruption or disorientation" (1). Sebold's narrative device has the effect of giving

us a protagonist who narrates her own story and yet has no power within it to change events.

Her death has the effect of preserving her whole; it seems to have no consequence for her other than placing her in a disconnected form of captivity. Susie's "heaven" is a bubble firmly tied to her former life, where she floats seemingly unmarked by her brutal and savage demise, but equally, is unable to reach out and influence the events surrounding her death. She cannot comfort her loved ones, or avenge her murder. She cannot leave clues or mend the fissures that appear in her family after she is gone. The only power Sebald gives her is the power to tell her story. Although trapped in her "perfect world" she is able to speak, if not to the other characters in the novel, she can speak to us, the readers.

Even though the narrative is written in the first person, Susie's special position of being in the "Inbetween" means she is capable of much more insight than is usual in a first person narrator. Sebald asks the reader to suspend disbelief, and rely on a narrator who has died. As Ruediger Heinz asks, in his analysis of Sebald's technique, "How, then, can one conceptualise first person narrators in fictional narratives whose quantitative and qualitative knowledge about events, other characters, etc., clearly exceeds what one could expect of human consciousness and would thus make them prone to being labelled "omniscient?" (1). When her father assists her killer, Mr Harvey, to build a tent in his front yard Susie is privy to his private thoughts and suspicions.

"You know something," my father said.

He met my father's eyes, held them, but did not speak.

They worked together, the snow falling, almost wafting, down. And as my father moved, his adrenaline raced. He checked what he knew. Had anyone asked this man where he was the day I disappeared? Had anyone seen this man in the cornfield? (Sebald 56).

Sebald's narrative sleight of hand in re-animating the dead Susie, forces the reader to suspend disbelief and thus accept these shifts in point of view. Heinze argues that: "The 'only' suspension of disbelief demanded from the reader, here and generally, pertains to the fact that these narrators breach the usually impenetrable barrier between life and death (or simply do not die)" (6). With this technique, Sebald has the benefit of

an omniscient perspective, which allows her free ranging access to multiple points of view, while retaining the intimacy of a first person narrative with none of the limitations that come with narrating a story exclusively in the voice of a fourteen year old girl. As a dead narrator she has supernatural powers of observation and perception, giving Sebald the narrative freedom to explore the story in more depth and breadth than she would otherwise have been able to achieve.

I too was writing a novel exploring a teenage girl's confrontation with a Bluebeard figure, and like Sebald, I wanted to tell the story from her point of view. However, I also wanted to write a story that upset the balance of power between captor and captive, and provide the girl with agency and the ability and opportunity to free herself. I did not want merely to allow the dead to speak, but rather, like Bluebeard's wife, have the young captive survive the encounter. I initially began writing my novel using first person narration, in the voice of my central protagonist Alice, a girl of thirteen. What I quickly discovered were the limitations of the first person, which created an intimate, almost confessional connection with the reader, but also placed restrictions on how I could tell the story. Plot, characterisation and even setting had to be funnelled through the point of view of the narrator, as the single point of reference in the novel. In the case of having a teenage girl as the central protagonist, I felt constrained by her lack of maturity and the limited understanding of adolescence. The adolescent voice became too restrictive. While I wanted to preserve Alice's primary point of view in the novel, I also wanted to be able to step away from the first person narrative and broaden my story. Sebald's approach avoids these limitations and allows her to craft a novel which, while narrated in the voice of an adolescent victim of sexual violence and murder, is not restricted exclusively to her point of view. Ultimately, I chose to sacrifice the intimacy of the first person narrative and write my novel in the third person, which allowed me the bird's eye view of an omniscient perspective and yet still retain Alice's point of view as the primary one in my novel.

In *The Lovely Bones* we have moved a long way from Angela Carter's wealthy marquis, to a suburban setting full of families, identical duplexes and high schools. And yet we have all the essential elements of the "Bluebeard" narrative: an underground killing chamber, a young, innocent female victim, a close association between sex and

death, a predatory older male who appears innocuous and yet disguises his murderous impulses under a cloak of normality. Here is a truly modern Bluebeard, whose crime is indistinguishable from the ones we read about in the newspapers and see on the television news. In death, Sebold gives Susie supernatural powers of observation, but she takes away her power to act and influence events in her own narrative. Her death is a form of stasis, of captivity, trapping her in an unchanging afterlife: the ultimate disempowerment. Like Miranda, she is trapped in a glass bottle, where she can see out but from which she will never escape. In this way, Sebold refers back to a Gothic tradition outlined by Delamotte, where “the soul’s ‘voyage out’ is everywhere the Gothicism’s theme. Characters in Gothic romance are continually going on long journeys, escaping from confinements, looking out of prison grates and casement windows, longing to be free” (121). Sebold’s vision of Susie’s “heaven” offers a place of transcendence, where murdered victims can reunite and share their burden of suffering, even though they are still “longing to be free”. It was this freedom I wished to grant to my protagonist, Alice, where she is able to avoid Susie’s imprisonment beyond the grave and be the active instigator of her own salvation.

Chapter 6. Escape from Bluebeard's Castle: Alice's quest for freedom in "The Hunt"

As earlier outlined, my novel "The Hunt" had its roots in the experience of a fourteen year old American girl, Elizabeth Smart, who was abducted from her bedroom at knifepoint by an itinerant man, Brian David Mitchell, and held captive for nine months. During her captivity she was repeatedly raped and held tied to a tree in the woods close to her home. Mitchell's wife, Wanda Eileen Barzee, was also present and assisted in holding Elizabeth captive. While at times she was left tied up and alone, without food or water for up to a week, she survived her captivity and was finally freed when she was recognised by a passerby as she walked with her captors in a suburb near her home ("Kidnap victim" 2).

Like many readers, I wondered about the blonde girl who stared out from her photograph in the newspaper. How had she managed to survive? Was it just luck or resistance on her part that meant she was smiling from the pages of the newspaper rather than lying in a shallow grave somewhere in the woods near her home, where she was held captive for so many months? Her experience of captivity appeared to be so different from that of other, more well documented captives, who had been held as political prisoners, or prisoners of war or inmates of labour camps. And yet this girl had lived through an experience of captivity equally as harrowing, and somehow survived. I began to wonder about this form of domestic, solitary captivity, usually sexually motivated and primarily perpetrated on women and children, where its victims live, and often die, among us.

As Elizabeth Smart lay trapped in a makeshift cabin in the woods, she was close enough to her home to hear the voices of her would-be-rescuers calling out to her as they searched. It seemed unbelievable that two such divergent realities could share the same physical space. Many questions swirled in my mind; how could ordinary and everyday events take place in the same setting as a life and death struggle for dominance and survival? How could a child be kept captive for so long in a domestic environment and go unnoticed by those who lived nearby? I wondered about the captives themselves and

how some survived, while many others did not. What were the subtle forms of resistance they displayed? How did they keep themselves alive? What strength of mind had they shown to finally wrest their freedom from their captor's grasp?

I was also surprised at the public response to Elizabeth Smart's ordeal. There seemed to be those who believed she was complicit in her own captivity, but to me this seemed implausible. The calm face staring out of the photograph in the newspaper was pretty and very young. Why would she want to stay voluntarily with a vagrant so much older than herself, who already had a defacto wife in tow? Readers did not seem to understand why she did not run away, or shout for help. Perhaps, people wondered, she did not want to be found. Caroline Overington, the author of the original article I read in *The Age* newspaper about this case, further reported that journalists questioning a man, Dan Gorder, who was present at a party attended by Elizabeth, Mitchell and Barzee, struggled to understand why Elizabeth did not ask the other party goers for help. When asked whether Elizabeth could have "bolted" or asked to be rescued, Gorder answered "Oh, absolutely" ("The Strange Ordeal of Elizabeth Smart" 3). Overington describes the case as "perplexing" and yet from her article the inference is clear, that Elizabeth's captivity is puzzling because for an outsider the boundary between captivity and compliance is blurred. Prisons with bars and chains are much less ambiguous.

My aim became to write a novel that explored a relationship of captivity between an older, predatory male and a young girl. Sexual threat and violence, even murder, lay at the core of the story. I wanted to write from the point of view of the female captive and answer some of the questions Elizabeth Smart's experience had raised. Female captives of the kind I wanted to write about did not appear often in literature, and thus were largely absent from the collective cultural landscape. I asked myself whether this was because the experience of captivity rendered a victim silent, or perhaps it was because so many did not live to tell the tale. They therefore entered our consciousness only as victims, as silent corpses whose experience of captivity prior to their death we could only guess at, because they were not able to inform us from beyond the grave. However, when I began my research I began to find traces of their existence, and I followed their literary footprints to try and find out more. Both Fowles' *The Collector* and Sebald's *The Lovely Bones* formed part of this process. However, ultimately I was

surprised when these footprints led me to the door of Bluebeard's castle, in the mythical land of the fairy tale.

I began to piece together a narrative, and I decided I wanted my captive to survive and like Bluebeard's wife, to use her ingenuity and "disobedience" to eventually escape her captor. I found I wanted to write a story of victory over the power of the male predator. I began my first draft with these lofty aspirations in mind, but found quickly that my novel developed along pathways I had not originally intended it to follow.

At the beginning of the research and writing process I found myself floundering. After having such a clear idea of what I felt I wanted to write about, I struggled to find a way "in" to my story. There appeared to be a paucity of material in the area of captivity I was looking at, both literary and non-fiction. The writing I began during this early period felt wooden and inauthentic, and the development of my heroine, the captive, was stymied by my inability to create a credible characterisation of a young girl in this situation. As Simone de Beauvoir aptly observes: "When totally immersed in a situation, you cannot describe it. A soldier in the midst of the fighting cannot describe the battle. But equally, if totally alien to a situation, you cannot write about it either. If somebody were to try to provide an account of a battle without having seen one, the result would be awful" (27). I could not find a link between the fictional story I was writing and the factual event which had inspired it. Despite my best efforts the work did not flow and I felt I needed further research to find a way through the impasse I found myself in as I tried to write my novel. I felt I needed to understand more about the experience of captivity as lived on the inside, to shine a light into a very dark space.

I Choose to Live, published in 2005, describes the eighty days Sabine Dardenne spent as a captive of the notorious Belgian paedophile and child killer, Marc Dutroux. Abducted in 1996 at the age of twelve while riding her bicycle to school, she was kept captive by Dutroux in an underground cellar. She underwent tremendous deprivations: sexually assaulted daily, told lies about her parents having abandoned her to a paedophile ring, and forced to live in unsanitary conditions without sufficient food or water. Throughout her ordeal, Dardenne displayed great resilience. She refused to be cowed by her captor and continued to ask for better conditions and extra privileges, but

fear was still her constant companion. In her memoir, she describes how “the black angel of death was always hovering above me, among the filth and the tears” (56).

Judith Herman M.D, in her seminal work *Trauma and Recovery*, which examines the effects of violent trauma on both victims and perpetrators, describes this technique of isolating the captive as a method used by captors to increase their power and psychological influence: “As long as the victim maintains any other human connection, the perpetrator’s power is limited. It is for this reason that perpetrators universally seek to isolate their victims from any other source of information, material aid, or emotional support” (80). She goes on to add that captives’ accounts of their experiences describe “their captor’s attempts to prevent communication with the outside world and convince them that their closest allies have forgotten or betrayed them” (80). These elements found their way into later drafts of my novel, as I wrote about Alice’s captivity. Herman’s study assisted me in trying to understand more about the psychological processes around captivity and she links victims of trauma from both public and private spheres; political prisoners, war veterans, domestic violence, sexual assault and incest survivors all come together in her wide ranging study. Her work helped me to place the experience of Dardenne in a theoretical and psychological context. I felt more “informed” about the captivity I was exploring and thus more confident about being able to write about it. In a background sense, her theories found their way into my novel, and helped me to shape my main characters and elements of my plot.

Herman describes patterns of behaviour used by perpetrators to establish complete control over their victims. She argues that a wide range of perpetrators of abuse share these patterns. “The methods that enable one human being to enslave another are remarkably consistent. The accounts of hostages, political prisoners, and survivors of concentration camps across the globe have an uncanny sameness” (76). Herman includes violence perpetrated in domestic settings in her list: “Even in domestic situations, where the batterer is not part of any larger organization and has had no formal instruction in these techniques, he seems time and again to re-invent them” (76). The methods used by Dutroux to undermine Dardenne’s belief in her parents, his systematic physical and sexual abuse, his insistence on describing himself as her “saviour” rather than the abuser he clearly was all fall within Herman’s described patterns of behaviour.

She outlines the use of intermittent violence, capriciously committed, as being effective in engendering a state of constant fear in the victim. “Although violence is a universal method of terror, the perpetrator may use violence infrequently, as a last resort. It is not necessary to use violence often to keep the victim in a constant state of fear” (77). I also adopted this principle when writing about Alice’s captivity. The cruelty shown towards animals becomes an unsettling metaphor for the potential of violence that Alice faces. Herman’s views led me to treat the portrayal of violence in my novel with a light touch, and to realise that all that was needed was the threat of violence rather than its direct execution for it to operate as an effective form of control.

Sabine Dardenne was finally freed by police after they traced her fellow captive, Laetitia Delhez, to one of Dutroux’s houses. His van had been spotted during Laetitia’s abduction and six days later he was arrested while gardening with his wife (Dardenne 108). While Dardenne’s memoir and Herman’s work on the perpetrators and their victims provided me with greater factual and theoretical understanding of captivity, I still found myself at an impasse, where the leap from non-fiction testimony to fictional narrative continued to be problematic. As I wrote my first draft, I found the story ground to a halt as I detailed Alice’s captivity, which at that point was modelled on the literal form of captivity I had been researching. It involved Alice being abducted by force and then held against her will, bound and locked into an enclosed space. The story felt inauthentic, and I struggled to breathe life into the narrative and the characters I was writing about.

As I tried to find a form for my novel, I was drawn towards fairy tale narratives. These stories mirrored the territory I was trying to explore: a naïve protagonist, who makes a journey into the unknown, meets a dark force whom the naïf, using only their wits and cunning, must overpower in order to survive. The journey to wisdom and fulfilment is complete when the dark force is vanquished, and the protagonist can then live happily ever after. While this narrative trajectory is so familiar as to be a cliché, I was drawn to this story arc as I wrote and it eventually formed the basis for my novel. It outlined a process of maturation that I wanted my character, Alice, to follow as she moved from the relative helplessness of naivete to a greater wisdom and a belief in her own capacity. The religious historian Mircea Eliade argues in *Myths and Fairy Tales*

that myths, which he defines as describing the “world of the Gods” (198) can be contrasted with the fairy tale, which “breaks away from the divine and mythical universe and ‘falls’ to the level of the people” (199), and yet both are intertwined in a continuum of “myths, sagas and folk tales” (200), in which “motifs and characters” of the mythical world are camouflaged within the fairy tale. Eliade argues that “though in the West the tale has long since become a literature of diversion (for children and peasants) or of escape (for city dwellers), it still presents the structure of an infinitely serious and responsible adventure” (201). Eliade argues this narrative trajectory describes an initiatory process, where “again and again we find initiatory ideals (battles with the monster, apparently insurmountable obstacles, riddles to be solved, impossible tasks etc.), the descent to Hades or the ascent to Heaven (or – what amounts to the same thing – death and resurrection” (201). In his view, these tasks fulfil a function in the reader of outlining a “terrifyingly serious reality: initiation, that is, passing, by way of a symbolic death and resurrection, from ignorance and immaturity to the spiritual age of the adult” (201).

Eliade’s claims made sense to me as I began to shift the narrative structure of my novel away from a focus on the struggle for survival within the closed world of the captive towards a story which engages with the inherent power imbalance of captivity in a more active way, where my captive, Alice, uses her ingenuity and resistance to finally gain her freedom. I began to see my story as sitting within a narrative tradition which incorporates an initiatory structure, where tales “have the role of re-creating the ‘initiatory ordeals’ on the plane of imagination and dream” (Eliade 202). In my search for a story form to bridge the worlds of fact and fiction, the fairy tale seemed to provide a template for me to explore in fiction a story which came to me from a factual source. I started to think of fairy tales as echoes from a verbal storytelling tradition that pre-dated our literate culture, and that far from being simply entertainments for children, they also had a role in helping a modern reader to understand that “what is called ‘initiation’ co-exists with the human condition, that every existence is made up of an unbroken series of ‘ordeals’, ‘deaths’, and ‘resurrections’, (Eliade 202) and thus still had relevance in a vastly changed modern world. Jack Zipes explains the enduring popularity of myth and fairy tale as narratives that compel us to “return to them time and again for counsel and

guidance, for hope that there is some divine order and sense to a chaotic world” (“Fairy Tale as Myth” 3).

It was when I began to consider Perrault’s tale “Bluebeard” as a fictional template for my novel that the story I was trying to write began to flow again. Like my novel, “Bluebeard” is written from the captive’s point of view, being less about the ogre of the story’s title than about his young wife and her journey to discover the true nature of her captivity in the castle and the fate that awaited her. As I began to examine the tale closely I started to see hidden messages in its structure: like encoded clues to managing an encounter with a Bluebeard figure “in the flesh”. I imagined echoes of “Mother Goose” and her fireside stories embedded in the fairy tale, where her firm advice to disobey the ogre’s wishes and “follow your nose” was the way the young girl avoided her grisly fate and achieved her freedom. These twin features of “voice” and “agency” became the central motifs of the novel I was to write. I read “Bluebeard” as a story of resistance, where the young, innocent girl has the courage to disobey the strange and powerful older man and acts to find out a horrifying truth which enables her to save herself. In this story, knowledge becomes salvation. My decision to base my novel around a revisioning of the Bluebeard tale allowed me to explore the territory of captivity in a fictional space, freeing me from the constraints of basing my story on factual events and thus avoiding any ethical issues related to basing my narrative on someone else’s lived experience.

For me as I wrote, the bridge between the seemingly disparate worlds of the fictional narrative I was crafting and the “real life” experience of captivity suffered by Elizabeth Smart and Sabine Dardenne was the fairy tale “Bluebeard”. As the sinister figure of the older, male predator loomed out of the “Bluebeard” tale, he seemed to step neatly into the contemporary story I was writing. Bluebeard’s wife, too, lent many of her attributes to Alice, my protagonist. I used elements of “Bluebeard” in the structure of my narrative, in order to build a sense of tension and foreboding. The archetypal elements of the tale: an isolated setting, a mysterious, slightly sinister older man, a young, innocent girl and a hidden room containing dark secrets were all incorporated into my story. As Peter Brooks argues in *Reading for the Plot*: “Folktale and myth may be seen to show narrative as a form of thinking, a way of reasoning about a situation” (9). He goes on to

say that “The narrative impulse is as old as our oldest literature: myth and folktale appear to be stories we recount in order to explain and understand where no other form of explanation will work” (3). In my case, the decision to use “Bluebeard” as an intertext to underpin the structure of my novel certainly helped to “explain and understand” the previously closed world of captivity I was writing about. It worked to unlock the story’s narrative flow, and allowed me to overcome the impasse I had been struggling with during early drafts, where the gap between what was appearing on the page and a credible and authentic fictional world seemed cavernous.

Sharon Rose Wilson, in her book, *Myths and Fairy Tales in Contemporary Women’s Fiction*, describes this process as the creation of “metafiction” (7). She contends that women writers such as Toni Morrison, Doris Lessing, Jean Rhys and Margaret Atwood, among many others, use fairy tale and mythic intertexts in their novels to generally “convey characters’ transformation from alienation and symbolic amputation to greater consciousness, community and wholeness” (1). Thus my novel sits within a broader contextual framework of work by women writers who seek to place their characters within a narrative structure which mimics the “quest” or “initiatory” story arc of the fairy tale. As Wilson points out, “two main quests in contemporary women’s metafiction are the struggle to survive sexual politics and the quest to tell the story – to be an artist creating meaning in the world” (5). Of the ten texts written by significant women writers that Wilson explores in her book, five of them embed “Bluebeard stories in which the woman outwits and survives both the destructive male and society who try to kill her” (6). Wilson contends that: “fairy tales and mythic intertexts thus foreground sexual politics and other political issues” (7). My novel, “The Hunt” sits within the literary context of feminist re-visioning of fairy tales, or the creation of “metafiction” as outlined by Wilson.

Christina Bacchilega, in her analysis of the influence of “Bluebeard” in Margaret Atwood’s “Bluebeard’s Egg”, Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” and Jane Campion’s film *The Piano*, argues: “The cumulative performative effect of their revisions is itself double: empowering female protagonists as well as reader/viewers, while interrogating the fairy tale’s naturalizing of gender dynamics” (113). She goes on to say that doing so “involves focusing on agency, but also on the protagonist’s voice”

(113). These two elements also drive the story of my novel, “The Hunt”. Through her study of Atwood, Carter and Campion’s work, Bacchilega shows how “a gruesome fairy tale often deployed against women becomes recuperated as the story of a successful, socially meaningful female initiation” (138). My novel thus sits within the context of the theoretical framework established here by Wilson and Bacchilega, as an example of feminist revisioning of fairy tales, or “metafiction” which also seeks to engage with the inherent power imbalance of the kind of captivity I was writing about. I too, was interested in framing my narrative as a journey from immaturity and powerlessness to one of greater autonomy and wisdom, thus replicating the trajectory described by Bacchilega. This revisionist re-writing of an old story allowed me to re-structure the female subject, the young captive, Alice, to give her voice and agency in the narrative. In a literary context, this goes some way towards righting the balance of power in the captive’s favour in terms of plot and story, giving her a “voice” and the opportunity to act to influence the outcome of events. In this context, the idea of a “happy ending” moves beyond its implied banality, and rather is re-imagined as the conclusion to a journey, where the protagonist reaches a state of greater knowledge and autonomy, Eliade’s “spiritual age of the adult” (201). As Bacchilega points out, “the tale’s resolution reaffirms the protagonist’s membership in a variety of social groups – humanity, women, family, the town – and establishes her right to make a home for herself with her own kind. She is transformed by the experience” (111).

At all times when writing my novel I knew I wanted the story to end with the captive’s escape and freedom. I wanted to write a narrative of empowerment, and of reconnection with community: a “happily ever after”. According to Zipes, fairy tales continue to speak to us for this reason, because they are “survival stories with hope. They alert us to dangerous situations, instruct us, guide us, give us counsel, and reveal what might happen if we take advantage of helpful instruments or agents, or what might happen if we do not” (“Why Fairy” 27). He goes on to argue their wide appeal is because:

They have arisen out of a need to adapt to unusual situations, and many of these situations are similar the world over so that many of the same tales have arisen

and been disseminated and transformed so that new generations will learn to adjust to similar situations in changing environments (“Why Fairy” 27).

I found that through my decision to base my novel around a feminist revisioning of “Bluebeard” it began to take shape, and flow. The old tale provided a fictional template to explore the story of captivity I had first read about in the newspaper, and offered an opportunity for me to avoid encroaching on factual territory and was therefore much more freeing in terms of narrative choices.

As I moved deeper into my story, I emulated craft techniques from popular fiction, such as the ability to build tension, create suspense and a sense of dread while manipulating pace and rhythm in order to maintain momentum in the narrative. I sought to create a rising sense of disquiet in the reader, which would lead to the revelation of the horror held within Bluebeard’s chamber. Ken Gelder in *The Horror Reader* asserts that “once, horror was condemned to be otherworldly; but now ... it inhabits the very fabric of ordinary life” (2). In my novel I wanted to create a sense of duality: where the familiarity of the everyday could co-exist with another, darker place. This “other world” would be parallel but separate, so much so that unless exposed to it we would struggle to believe in its existence. Much like in “Bluebeard” this hidden, dark world is inhabited only by the predator and his victims, and only they have knowledge of his secret chamber and what occurs within.

Roger Salomon describes this place in his study of horror narratives, *Mazes of the Serpent*, where he argues that horror stories “involve thresholds – a narrative in which two worlds, settings, environments impinge, where crossing (and the resulting experience of horror) is the basic action. Movement (at least in many explicitly fictional contexts) can be in either direction in these mirror worlds” (9). He goes further, and makes parallels between this element of the horror genre and historical events from the twentieth century. He equates the experience of the Holocaust survivor and the front line trench soldier of World War One, who both have experience of “other worlds” which lie parallel and yet totally separate to “normality”. The world of the concentration camp and the front line share similar physical space to the more commonplace spheres of existence around them and yet they are so separate as to be as “two planets” (9). These two groups of trauma victims figure prominently in Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*,

discussed earlier, and provide linkages between the trauma of domestic captivity and abuse, the frontline soldier and the concentration camp inmate, who all have experience of the “other world” of Bluebeard’s secret chamber, explored so frequently in the horror narrative. Salomon points out that “this pattern – the delineation of two apparently alternative spaces, the violation of boundaries between them, the overwhelming power of the more negative and deconstructive environment – is widely, almost universally shared by horror narratives” (10). Salomon uses both real and imagined examples to make his point, citing both the “real life” experiences outlined above of World War One soldiers and Holocaust survivors and Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein*, indicating that narratives of “horror” can transcend the boundary between fact and fiction.

The motif of Bluebeard’s secret chamber and its symbolic power to represent this “other world” of the horror narrative helped me to imagine a space of captivity in my novel, where nothing was as it seems. Marie Mulvey-Roberts, in her analysis of the intersection between “Bluebeard” and female Gothic narratives points out that: “The bloody chamber is a haunted site to which both reader and writer endlessly return” (98). In my novel, Alice finds herself in a world where the chamber is concealed from her, and, like Bluebeard’s wife, she discovers its existence through her desire to find answers and a way out of her confinement. As previously outlined, while the term female Gothic is a contested one, the “confined woman” is one of its most persistent motifs. Ellen Moers, who first used the term in her work, *Literary Women*, defined the typical Gothic female protagonist as “simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine” (91). Mulvey-Roberts adds that: “Her predecessor may be found in the ‘Bluebeard’ fairy tale, which in turn is a re-working of the archetypal narrative of female disobedience prompted by curiosity which appears in classical mythology as in the tale of Pandora’s Box and in the Bible as the story of Eve” (98). As already suggested, “Bluebeard” is a common intertext in the work of nineteenth century women novelists, such as in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, which is itself a “parodic retelling of Ann Radcliffe’s version of the ‘Bluebeard’ tale in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*” (103). Thus there is long standing common ground between female Gothic novels and tales of the “Bluebeard” type, which stretches from the early work of women writers in the late eighteenth century onwards.

Punter and Byron, in their work entitled *The Gothic*, define female Gothic as a category distinct from Gothic texts written by men. Their definition revolves around the main protagonist's relationship to the dominant spaces around them. In their view, male Gothic texts tend to "represent the male protagonist's attempt to penetrate some encompassing interior; female Gothic more typically represents a female protagonist's attempts to escape from a confining interior" (278). While an exploration of Gothic texts written by men is beyond the scope of this exegesis, this definition further highlights the interconnection between texts categorised as female Gothic and "Bluebeard", as both being stories of escape from confinement and the restrictive "representations of gender and female identity" (Haase 20). My novel "The Hunt" sits specifically at this point, as an exploration of female domestic captivity and the horror which lies within Bluebeard's forbidden chamber.

Donna Heiland in *Gothic and Gender*, extends definitions of female Gothic narratives, describing them as:

... stories of transgression. The transgressive acts at the heart of gothic fiction generally focus on corruption in, or resistance to, the patriarchal structures that shaped the country's political life and its family life, and gender roles within those structures come in for particular scrutiny. Further, and importantly, these acts are often violent, and always frightening. For gothic novels are above all about the creation of fear – fear in the characters represented, fear in the reader (5).

While there is a long tradition of Gothic literature written by women which draws on similar themes of horror, captivity and violence, both real or imagined, my novel seeks to reinterpret the Gothic heroine's relationship to power by giving my female captive both voice and agency in the narrative. In this way, it is perhaps closer to postmodern feminist revisioning of fairy tales, in my case using "Bluebeard" as the fictional basis for my story. It is clear that "Bluebeard" in its various forms and female Gothic novels have many narrative and thematic interconnections which were very helpful to me when crafting my story of contemporary, domestic captivity.

There is one other figure who makes an appearance in some "Bluebeard" variants who also appears in the modern newspaper accounts of captivity, particularly in

the cases of Smart and Dardenne. This figure is Bluebeard's female helper, an ambiguous character whose motivations I struggled to understand, and yet who came to play a prominent role in my novel through the character of Bernie. For me she is embodied in two "real life" figures in particular: Wanda Barzee, Mitchell's defacto wife who was complicit in the capture and abuse of Elizabeth Smart ("Kidnap Victim" 2) and Marc Dutroux's wife Michele Martin, who remained with her husband even when she was aware he was holding young girls captive (Dardenne 166).

Daniela Hempen, in her paper on Bluebeard's female helper, discusses the presence of this female figure in two little known Grimm's brothers' "Bluebeard" variations "The Castle of Murder" and "The Robber Bridegroom" (48). In "The Castle of Murder" (Grimm, ch. 225) she describes the heroine's discovery behind Bluebeard's "secret door" of an old woman, scrubbing the intestines of previous female victims. This figure is ambiguous: she shares her master's secrets, being the only living human other than Bluebeard himself who is permitted into his secret chamber and yet it is her intervention that saves the young woman's life (Hempen 46). It is unclear why the elderly woman agrees to save this particular young woman, when she has clearly not acted to save those who have already passed through the chamber and died at her hands (46). In "The Robber Bridegroom" (Grimm, ch. 40) the female helper is also ambiguous, although she shows more sympathy to the plight of the young woman, claiming that she too wishes to escape, even though the young woman's life is dependent upon the cunning of the old woman herself (Hempen 46). Thus the old woman appears to be both prisoner and accomplice of the murderous robber band.

Rose Lovell-Smith explores further the role of Bluebeard's female helper introduced through Hempen's work, by pointing out that this figure does not appear in Perrault's "Bluebeard", although the mysterious presence of Sister Anne is another unexplained female figure that appears and then disappears from the story. She is the only other inhabitant of the castle other than the young wife and Bluebeard himself and while she acts as a lookout for the rescuing brothers, she does little else to try to save her sister from the murderous Bluebeard. She is "there but not there" and so resembles the "apparently compromised but potentially compassionate 'female helpers' in the tales discussed by Hempen" (198). Lovell-Smith argues that both Grace Poole in Bronte's

Jane Eyre and Mrs Danvers in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* fulfil similar functions to the female helper figure in the Grimms' "Bluebeard" variants, where these characters' roles in relation to the heroine are not clearly defined. As she points out, Grace Poole is both "prosaic and sinister" (201) and Mrs Danvers is "halfway between pitiable and evil" (205). Nevertheless, both Hempen and Lovell-Smith seem reluctant to place this figure in total complicity with Bluebeard, rather arguing that "the female helpers in these stories all have in common that they are at bottom the heroine's helpers. With cruel benevolence, they offer her their dreadful knowledge: knowledge essential for life" (Lovell-Smith 207). Hempen argues that the communication between the heroine and this ambiguous helper figure "contains a positive message" in emphasising the importance of female connection in the "patriarchal world of the *Marchen* in which a woman's isolation only too often translates into her victimisation" (48).

When I began to consider the role of "Bluebeard's female helper" in the context of Dardenne's and Smart's experience of captivity, I found it hard to maintain a sense that either Barzee or Martin acted with any kind of benevolence towards the female child victims of their husbands. As Sabine Dardenne discovered during Dutroux's trial, his eight year old captives Melissa Russo and Julie Lejeune both died of starvation when Martin was "too frightened" to bring them food and water while Dutroux was briefly imprisoned for car theft (Dardenne 127). Two teenage girls, An Marchal and Eefje Lambreks, were buried alive by Dutroux when drugged and "asleep" (127). Dardenne asserts that Martin "had been involved right from the early eighties. He'd told her everything, and she even allowed this psychopath to father her children" (166). As my knowledge of the "Bluebeard" tale deepened, I was intrigued by this fictional figure of "Bluebeard's female helper" and her "real life" doppelganger. As with other elements of the "Bluebeard" tale previously discussed, I started to feel she may also bridge the seemingly separate worlds of fact and fiction. I was unable to share Hempen and Lovell-Smith's utopian reading of this character, and felt her relationship with the female protagonist of the story contained greater sinister overtones than their interpretation allowed.

As I wrote my novel, the character of Bernie began to take this place in the narrative. Her role is ambiguous, and at all times there is tension around why she is

there, and where her allegiances ultimately lie. Will she save Alice? Or at least help her to escape? These were questions I asked myself as I wrote, but ultimately I decided to have her serve the Bluebeard character, Roger Quilty, rather than assisting Alice in her efforts to escape. Bernie never changes allegiance, but at times it seems as though she might. This ambiguity increases dramatic tension, and I therefore preferred to leave her motivation unclear, partly because I felt her behaviour resisted an easy explanation. I felt that ultimately it served my story to keep her as “Bluebeard’s helper” and while a more utopian reading of Bernie’s behaviour may be more comfortable for a reader I felt it was not consistent with my research and with the story I was trying to tell. Much as with the behaviour of Michele Martin and Wanda Barzee, I did not want to attempt to explain the inexplicable.

As I worked on the first and subsequent drafts of my novel, I found myself struggling to incorporate plot elements into my narrative framework that I had not initially envisaged. I learned to allow myself to accept the story that evolved, rather than force myself to stick to a pre-determined plan. When I tried to force the writing into a particular direction it did not work, and my progress on the novel would grind to a halt. Surrendering to the narrative which appeared on the page was a skill I had to learn again and again as I wrote my novel. I had to “let go” of rigid pre-conceived notions of what I wanted to write about. I had to trust that the mysterious, intuitive creative process would result in a novel that functioned as a piece of storytelling. Perhaps because of the difficulty I had in finding my way during early drafts, learning to “trust the process” was a challenge to me as I wrote. I now believe this is an essential skill for a creative writer and it involves a sense of surrender rather than control. As Stathis Gourgouris points out: “The most precise preview of what is to be covered turns out to owe its precision to a hunch, to an intuitive apprehension, which lies much closer to the psychic terrain of the wish than the certainty of intellectual projection” (xx). When writing a novel inside the “academy” I believe there is a tension between the intellectual formality of the institution and the freewheeling, intuitive approach which is an essential element of the creative process. As Gourgouris so aptly points out: “we fail to experience the real pleasure of discovery if we remain fearful of our hunches, if we extract our intuition from our method, if we dismiss the exactitude of our fantasy” (xx). The journey of

writing “The Hunt” involved learning to trust the magic uncertainty of the writing process.

As the novel unfolded, I found myself writing a story about young girls, bikes and horses. The horses appeared early and I struggled to justify their significant place in the narrative. Eventually I found a way to weave them in, as objects of longing for both Alice and Miranda. As I researched the connection between girls and horses I realised that horse obsessions are a common interest in pre-pubescent girls. Melissa Holbrook Pierson, in her study of women and horses, describes this obsession as “dreaming, urgent dreaming. Sometimes it takes place during the day, but the dreamer is no less somnambulant for that” (22). She describes “the months and years in thrall to an animal” (12) that takes place when girls fall under the spell of the horse’s “magisterial beauty” (15). This quality of longing was something I tried to capture in my novel. Longing seemed to form part of this early pubescent period, where the child is placed awkwardly between the powerlessness of early childhood and the fierce individual desires of adolescence. The desire for a horse is a powerful symbol for the wish for autonomy and freedom in my character, Alice. However, when she finally succeeds in her goal of horse ownership it is not as she imagined. The animal her father purchases for her is unsuitable. Despite this, the horse becomes her partner in the narrative: as a prey animal displaying both power and vulnerability, he forms a symbolic parallel between himself and Alice. The horse is a paradox: a creature which is fearful and yet powerful, strong and yet easily controlled, a “stirringly impossible mixture of power and delicacy, size and fragility” (Pierson 15). This mirrors the paradox of Alice herself, who is young and naïve and yet has a latent, undeveloped force of character. Pierson describes the necessity to leave behind any gendered definitions of femininity that involve fear of physical labour, dirt and muck when caring for horses:

Bits of hay fleck clothing; clots of manure stick to boots. There is ample chance for injury, scratches and bruises and rope burn and certainly blisters. Muscles strain: move that pitchfork fast, throw that bale, run that wheelbarrow up the pile, scrub that tack till it shines ... Little girls are fragile things. They love their dolls and their dress up. They are not naturally aggressive. They are afraid of spiders and dead mice.

They keep their secrets well when they leave the barn. (16)

Thus the introduction of horses into the narrative allowed me to further explore notions of gender expectation and femininity already raised by the tale of “Bluebeard”. As in Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber*, where the avenging mother shoots Bluebeard from the back of a horse, Alice is only able to make good her escape from Quilty and Bernie by partnering with her wayward horse, Bruce. In both cases, horses are linked to subversive action by the female characters.

The use of horses in the plot also enabled me to explore my narrative on two different levels. The novel begins as a form of young adult “pony story” but transforms into something much darker; a type of “modern fable”, where the comfortable familiarity of the story is subverted to become something other than it had initially appeared to be. As in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, where the comfortable, recognisable “fairy tale” structure shifts to a story that more closely resembles the world of horror and nightmare, I also wanted to retain something of the shock created by a shift in genre.

My deepening understanding of the “Bluebeard” tale, along with reoccurring examples in the media of the abduction and confinement of young girls ran concurrently as I wrote my novel. Elizabeth Smart was one of the first to appear, and as outlined earlier, commentators struggled to understand the dynamics of such a “rare” crime. Then other girls began to emerge from dark cellars deep underground. Natascha Kampusch, abducted as a ten year old and kept for eight years in a narrow cell in her 44 year old captor’s garage in a residential suburb of Vienna, emerged in 2006 after a lucky escape (Bennhold). The Fritzl case, also in Vienna, is equally shocking and arguably even harder to comprehend. Josef Fritzl kept his daughter for 18 years in an underground dungeon in the basement of his apartment building with three of their six surviving children, who grew up locked behind a concrete door without any opportunity to ever see daylight. They were discovered in 2008 when the oldest child became critically ill and were finally released along with their mother (Marsh and Pancevski 237). An even more recent case, of the American girl Jaycee Lee Dugard, only came to light in the last twelve months. She was abducted at the age of eleven, in 1991, and held captive for eighteen years, bearing her captor two children while in captivity (Harlow). While

researching these cases to try and uncover a critical or theoretical interpretation of the dynamics of this kind of captivity, I encountered the limits of scholarly research in this area. Only the popular media, particularly newspapers and magazines, contained articles about these crimes. My interdisciplinary search ranged across literary criticism, feminist and gender theory, psychology and criminology, and I discovered critical gaps which I believe will be remedied as more scholarly research is conducted in this area.

In conclusion, the two threads of the fictional fairy tale “Bluebeard” and the contemporary newspaper reports of child captivity, merged to form the basis of my novel “The Hunt”. Both the fictional tale and the real life events are concerned with the captive’s struggle against the absolute power of her captor. In my novel I attempt to explore this story, where I posit an alternative resolution to the captive’s quest for freedom that does not rely on rescue or capitulation in the hope of salvation, as with Fowles’ *Miranda*, but rather seeks to revision my heroine’s response to the power imbalance of captivity using the twin notions of “voice” and “agency” and where the embedded “Bluebeard” tale shows how she can triumph over her oppressor by being disobedient, following her curiosity and acting upon what she discovers. She escapes her captivity using her own resources, and by foregrounding her point of view throughout the story, I provide a way, in a literary context, to right the balance of power in her favour.

My novel “The Hunt” reaches towards a new definition of captivity, where I seek to “engage readers in joint creation of the text; and remythify intertexts distorted or amputated by ... patriarchy” (Wilson 7). While acknowledging my debt to feminist Gothic research, I place my work in an evolving space, where an ancient tale is revisioned and restructured to allow the female subject to step out of the confinement of the Gothic narrative to be both agent and creator of her own story. My novel is located at the intersection between feminist re-visioning of fairy tales and contemporary Gothic narratives, and explores a form of captivity relatively untouched in theoretical terms. While I am reluctant to label the approach I take in my novel as “post-feminist”, my desire to write a novel that deals with the theme of captivity where the captive uses her ingenuity to save herself, shifts the narrative away from the Gothic emphasis on the heroine’s status as victim to one where she is the initiator of her own survival. Helene

Myers acknowledges this contested space, when she argues that: “The Gothic, with its aesthetic links to both realism and post-modernism and its thematic emphasis on violence against women, becomes a site to negotiate between the scripts of “male vice and female virtue” associated with cultural feminism and the “gender scepticism” associated with much poststructuralist criticism” (xii). Brabon and Genz put forward an alternative critical approach, “postfeminist Gothic” which in their view “marks this point in Gothic and feminist criticism that asks us to remain self-critical and alert about the complex issues surrounding the processes of power in contemporary culture” (7). My novel seeks to locate itself within this fluid critical context and uses an old story to help shine a light into the darkness of the contemporary Bluebeard’s secret chambers.

I began the journey of writing my novel with the belief that stories help to shape our understanding of the world in which we live. As Rick Altman writes in *A Theory of Narrative*:

Among human endeavours, few are more widely spread or more generally endowed with cultural importance than narrative – the practice of storytelling. Not only are stories universally told, stored and analysed, but also they regularly occupy a place of honor in society. Stories constitute the bulk of sacred texts; they are the major vehicle of personal memory; and they are a mainstay of law, entertainment and history. (1)

Like echoes from a long distant past, stories help shape the way we view ourselves and form the landscape in which the dramas of life and death play out. Peter Brooks points out that: “Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semi-conscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue” (3). When there is silence, it leaves a hole in the web of narrative which helps us to make sense of our world. According to Katherine Dalsimer, “the force of great fiction or great drama lies not only in the power of its language, but in the power of its insight into particular situations, which language delivers and which the reader, with a shock of personal recognition, acknowledges to be just” (2). My novel “The Hunt” attempts to speak in a

dark and silent space. It is one of the voices in the eternal dialogue of narrative, or as Iff the Water Genie explains in Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*:

Iff explained that these were the Sea of Story, that each colored strand represented and contained a single tale. Different parts of the ocean contained different sorts of stories, and as all the stories that had ever been told and many that were still in the process of being invented could be found here, the ocean of the Streams of Story was in fact the biggest library of the universe. And because the stories were held here in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories; so that unlike a library of books, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was much more than a storeroom of yarns. It was not dead but alive. (72)

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