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PLOTS, PARADOXES AND PARODIES: WOMEN WRITERS REWRITING "BLUEBEARD"

by

EMILY RUTH MOORE

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York**

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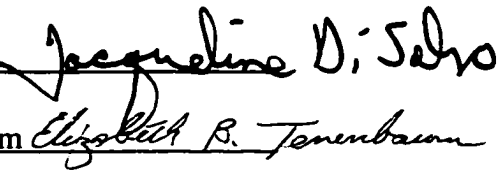
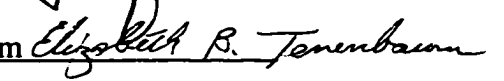
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Abstract

PLOTS, PARADOXES AND PARODIES: WOMEN WRITERS REWRITING BLUEBEARD"

by

Emily Ruth Moore

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In this study, I examine the plots, paradoxes and parodies in re-visions of one fairy tale—"Bluebeard" written by Charles Perrault in 1697—in selected works written mainly by women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Charlotte Brontë, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Shirley Jackson, Angela Carter, Suniti Namjoshi, Joyce Carol Oates, and Margaret Atwood. I argue that these authors re-vise the old tale using the narrative strategies of focalization, text embedding and intertextuality in order to create new tales, which enable their narrators/heroines to claim authority over their texts and their lives. (To show contrast and enrich the discussion, I also examine several works by male authors, such as William Thackeray, Charles Dickens, and Richard Wright.)

Since writers who weave fairy tales into their writings have inherited the legacy of a controversial tradition that either directly or indirectly influences their writing, to contextualize my study, in the first chapter, I present a brief history of the literary fairy tale, discussing the controversy surrounding it from the

eighteenth century onwards; the importance of acknowledging women as sources for the transmission of stories; the powerful effect fairy tales have had on our culture. The three subsequent chapters are devoted to analyses of retellings of "Bluebeard."

Whatever the meaning of this story, and that is what I discuss, the features, the focus, in all the retellings, tends amazingly not to change: the forbidden room concealing a secret, the keys, the wives who are dead or put away, the need for obedience in the new wife, generally her disobedience, almost always Bluebeard's demise. Clearly, this narrative is ingrained deep in the consciousness of our culture, and it is ingrained as a myth, that is, speaking in symbolic terms, as a universal paradigm, concretized in different ways by each writer, in each period, and occasionally in each genre, invariably and inevitably raising the identical questions.

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Fig. 1 Frontispiece of *Les Contes de Perrault* (1863) by Gustave Doré

Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode.

Angela Carter "Notes from the Front Line"

Blue Beard wanted his wife to find the corpses of his former wives. He *wanted* the new bride to discover their mutilated corpses; he *wanted* her disobedience. Otherwise he wouldn't have given her the key to the forbidden closet.

Lydia Millet "The Wife-Killer"

Chapter 1: "Gleams of Sunshine" or "Engines of Mischief": Fairy Tales and the Women Who Tell Them

In 1697, Charles Perrault (1628-1703), statesman, member of the Académie française, and writer, published a small volume of tales, entitled *Histoires, ou contes de temps passé avec des Moralitez*, many of which we first heard or read in childhood: "Cinderella," "Little Red Riding Hood," "Sleeping Beauty," "Toads and Diamonds," "Puss 'n Boots," etc. Although several of the fairy tales¹ predate Perrault's, his versions are more familiar.² Perrault also included in his volume a story that is quite *unfairy-tale* like:³ "Bluebeard."⁴ In addition, unlike the other stories in the *Contes*, no earlier version of this tale has been discovered.⁵

The story, as Perrault tells it, concerns a wealthy, ugly man who has, “par malheur,” a blue beard. He marries countless women, all of whom, except the last, he ends up killing. From the second wife on, each is given a key to a room, which she is told never to open. Out of curiosity, however, each of these wives does open the room to find in it the evidence of her husband’s misdeeds, and he quickly kills each one. The reason the first wife is killed remains a question in Perrault and one that some subsequent writers are aware of and seek to answer.⁶ The last of the wives is rescued miraculously by her brothers, and they slay Bluebeard. Bluebeard’s last wife inherits his estate and portions out her inheritance to her brothers and sister. Subsequently, she remarries a man who makes her forget her unhappy times with Bluebeard. Ever attentive to the need to instruct, Perrault appends two morals. The first one warns:

O Curiosity, thou mortal bane!
 Spite of thy charms, thou causes often pain
 And sore regret, of which we daily find
 A thousand instances attend mankind:
 For thou, O may it not displease the fair,
 A flitting pleasure art, but lasting care;
 And always costs, alas! too dear the prize,
 Which, in the moment of possession, dies. (Barchilon and Petit
 30).

The second moral reassures wives that husbands nowadays are not so terrible as to demand the impossible, that is, the stifling of their wives' curiosity. The morals, however, that were an important element in Perrault's stories, might be read ironically. After all, in "Bluebeard," the wife's curiosity ultimately makes her a very rich woman. Even though the former wives die, the last wife creates conditions to ensure her safety. In several variants, the sister summons her brothers' help after Bluebeard condemns her to die. In the Grimm's version, the last wife actually warns the brothers before she goes to Bluebeard's castle. She tells them, "If you hear me scream, leave everything standing or lying wherever you are, and come to my aid" (*Zipes Complete* 661).

According to Jeanne Morgan, Perrault chose traditional stories "to demonstrate the "moral superiority" of modern times over ancient times (35, 39). Whether one reads the morals ironically or not, it would appear that the narrator intends to instruct as well as to delight, a tradition that has persisted. In fact, Jack Zipes, folklorist, critic and translator, suggests, "The fairy tales we have come to revere as classical are not ageless, universal, and beautiful in and of themselves, and they are not the best therapy in the world for children. They are historical prescriptions, internalized, potent, explosive, and we acknowledge the power they hold over our lives by mystifying them" (*Subversion* 11). However, while Zipes suggests that writers hide or cover up meaning, I think they demystify meaning.

It is through this process of “demystification” that female authors, in later works, have been able to *uncover* submerged meanings in those fairy tales. For example, in Anne Sexton’s re-vision of “Snow White,” Snow White grows up to be a mirror image of the step-mother who tried to have her killed. In Angela Carter’s “The Company of Wolves,” Red Riding Hood is too smart to be eaten by a wolf: “The girl burst out laughing. She knew she was nobody’s meat” (*Bloody* 118). In “Cinderella,” by Anne Thackeray Ritchie, the Prince does not gaze upon Cinderella all decked out in a beautiful gown as she is at the end of Perrault’s tale. Instead, the prince sees her in her “shabby little gown” and recognizes her as the one he loves.

In this study, I examine the plots, paradoxes and parodies in re-visions of one fairy tale—“Bluebeard”—in selected works written mainly by women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Charlotte Brontë, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Shirley Jackson, Angela Carter, Suniti Namjoshi, and Margaret Atwood. By analyzing the female retellings of “Bluebeard,” I argue that women authors re-vision the old tale, enabling their narrators/heroines to claim authority over their texts in order to create new possibilities and new boundaries that define their lives. To show contrast and enrich the discussion, I also examine several works by male authors, such as William Thackeray, Charles Dickens, and Richard Wright.

Since writers who weave fairy tales into their writings have inherited the legacy of a controversial tradition that either directly or indirectly influences their writing, to contextualize my argument and to validate close readings of “Bluebeard” re-visions, I would like to discuss three points. First, from the late seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, the fairy tale was a genre of intense controversy.⁷ Writers, critics, publishers, and parents debated the appropriateness of fairy tales for children. This “debate,” of course, affected the kinds of reading material available to both children and adults. Next, although the more popular stories (“Cinderella,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Snow White,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” etc.) are stamped with Charles Perrault’s and the Grimm’s names, their sources are female.⁸ Third, fairy tales seem to affect writers in powerful ways regardless of gender, race, and the literary period that brackets them. In varying degrees, these three issues influence women authors and the narratives they create.

The first point that I will examine to contextualize this study is a consideration of the fairy tale debate that extended from the 18th and to the early 20th century. Many of the writers under discussion either grew up or wrote during this time or inherited its vestiges. Opponents and supporters of fairy tales wrote to friends and family members, and expounded their beliefs in such publications as *The Monthly Review*, *The London Magazine*, and *The Family Magazine*. When advertising a new book, publishers sometimes stated their positions. In

1783, John Marshall, publisher, advertised his latest book to be ““ totally free from prejudicial nonsense of *Witches, Fairies, Fortune-Tellers, Love and Marriage*” (Pickering 41).

Before the eighteenth century, fanciful literature without an edifying purpose had been criticized. In the preface to the *Tales in Verse* (1695), Charles Perrault criticizes the tales of the ancients and emphasizes that his tales are preferable because they “[incorporate] a useful Moral.” Thus, the stories perform the double duty of instructing as well as delighting (Zarucchi 120). Perrault concludes that his verse tales would entice children to adopt the behavior of those who become happy and avoid behavior of the “wicked [who have] fallen because of their wickedness” (122). In his preface to *Contes* (1697), he assures his readers that “they all contain a very sensible Moral, which reveals itself to a greater or lesser extent according to the degree of the penetration of those who read them” (123). Soon after Robert Samber’s English translation (1729) of Perrault’s *Contes* appeared, the tales came under sharp scrutiny and were deemed inappropriate for children. Nonetheless, fairy tales were circulated in chapbooks and sold mainly to the lower classes. Fortunately, these inexpensive and crudely put together editions preserved centuries of literature, and “they also, and they alone, found a home in print, among all the treasure and the rubbish they preserved, for two higher, more immortal things, the Fairy-Tale and

the Nursery Rhyme” (Darton 82). *Contes* and other tales of imagination were not supposed to be read by respectable people.⁹

Although when fairy tales entered middle-class culture in France, they were intended to socialize children, enabling them to play their proper roles when they became adults, in England, fairy tales were censured. Perhaps English critics simply ignored the morals and lessons integral to such tales, perhaps they believed that the stories overshadowed the morals, or possibly they felt that the values inherent in the stories were not the ones to be promoted. For example, the cat in “Puss ‘n Boots” cons a wealthy ogre out of his estate and then kills him. His efforts allow his young, penniless master to claim the estate. Poor, ragged Cinderella marries the prince; her privileged stepsisters get their eyes pecked out. Somehow, these poor creatures, Puss and Cinderella, manage to overturn the status quo. Their change in fortune, therefore, might be perceived as threatening the privileged, moneyed classes. Samuel Pickering cites a novel by Hannah More in which two farmer’s daughters are “contaminated” by “stories which describe the transformation of ‘Beggars to-day’ into ‘Lords to-morrow’ and ‘Waiting maids in the morning’ into ‘Duchesses’ at night’ [making] them contemptuous of ‘humble and domestic duties’” (57). These subversive thoughts and longings were blamed on fairy tales.

To keep people in their places and to preserve the status quo, a different sort of literature had to be promoted. Didactic and religious stories filled this

need. Although didactic literature existed before the eighteenth century, it was now competing with stories much more engaging to the imagination. The moralists, however, fought hard against nurturing the imagination. They also objected to the absence of Christian teaching and values in fairy tales. “Almost anyone conscious of a moral sense disliked them heartily, said so loud, and got a hearing” (Darton 94). Additionally, according to Darton, Alisoun, in Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath,” is the first fictional character to state the reason for the waning of fanciful literature in England. (94). In a voice of self-proclaimed authority, Alisoun says:

But now kan no man se none elves mo,
 For now the grete charitee and prayers
 Of lymytours and othere hooly freres,
 [.....]
 This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes.
 For ther as wont to walken was an elf
 Ther walketh now the lymytour himself (*Riverside Chaucer* 116-
 17:864-874).¹⁰

The clergy were not the only censors. On both sides of the fairy tale debate, critics positioned themselves. The group of critics against fairy tales included John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Sarah Trimmer, Richard and Maria Edgeworth, Mary Martha Sherwood. Those who approved of fairy tales

were, among others, Samuel Johnson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, Edgar Taylor, Charles Dickens, and William Thackeray.

John Locke explains the dangers of fairy tales to children in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693).¹¹ Briefly, Locke advises parents to start their children reading as soon as they learn to talk. “Some easy pleasant book suited to his capacity” should be selected rather than “perfectly useless trumpery.” He recommends Aesop’s *Fables* (116). He also warns parents against allowing servants to tell their children stories about “spirits and goblins or any fearful apprehensions in the dark. [. . .] Servants, he says, are prone “to awe children and keep them in subjection by telling them of *Raw Head* and *Bloody Bones*” (103). His ideas were “rigorously applied to fairy tales” and persisted throughout the century (Pickering 43). In the nineteenth century, Locke’s educational theories had a less direct influence, although his indirect influence remained great (209-10). Despite the criticism leveled at fairy tales, publishers continued to print them, and children, of course, read them. As Samuel Johnson says, “babies do not want [. . .] to hear about babies; they like to be told of giants, castles, and of somewhat which can stretch and stimulate their little minds” (Cott 3: xvi).

Not everyone agreed with Dr. Johnson, as the proliferation of articles and books supporting and advancing moral and didactic literature suggests. An article in *The Monthly Review* (1784) expresses pleasure that “the notion [. . .]

that the minds of children could only be amused with the idle tales of giants, fairies, & is happily exploded” (3: xvi). It also praises the substitution of “nonsensical trifling” with “rational information.” A few years later, the author of a *Monthly Review* article (1788) welcomes fairy tales’ loss of popularity “to publications of a far more interesting kind, in which instruction and entertainment are judiciously blended, without the intermixture of the marvelous, the absurd, and things totally out of nature” (Pickering 40).

A powerful woman during this period who continually attacked the “nonsensical trifling” in fairy tales was Sarah Kirby Trimmer. From 1778 to 1789, she published *The Family Magazine* “designed to counteract the pernicious tendency of immoral books” (Darton 159). In 1802, Mrs. Trimmer founded her journal *Guardian of Education*, and for the next four years, she reviewed the current production of children’s books and expended her energy attacking fairy tales and other “immoral literature.” She found very few “good” books to recommend: “In fact, even schoolbooks and grammars were contaminated: ‘In short, there is not a species of Books for Children and Youth, any more than for those of maturer years, which has not been made in some way or other an engine of mischief’” (160). The power that the *Guardian* wielded over writers, parents and publishers “manifested itself in a flood of moral tales and poems” (Jackson 183). Fairy tales had not disappeared, “but they had, to some extent, gone underground” (190).

Although Jack Zipes suggests that fairy tales were revitalized during the Romantic Period, when writers used the materials of imaginative literature symbolically, it would appear that criticism of fanciful literature remained strong, for in 1797, Coleridge writes a letter to his friend Thomas Poole fervently advocating fairy tales for children:

From my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c—my mind had been habituated *to the Vast*--& I never regarded *my* senses in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not my sight—even at that age. Should children be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii?—I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative.—I know no other way of giving the mind a love of ‘the Great’, & ‘the Whole.’ (Griggs 354)

If didactic and religious literature had been successful in supplanting imaginative literature, there would have been few models for many writers to use when creating imaginative works of their own. Charles Lamb’s letter to Coleridge seems to confirm the power of fairy tales over the imagination and the concomitant dangers of didactic literature. He condemns the bookshops where

Mrs. B’s and Mrs. Trimmer’s nonsense lay in piles about.

Knowledge insignificant & vapid as Mrs. B’s books convey, it seems, must come to a child in the *shape of knowledge* [. . .]

instead of that beautiful Interest [sic] in wild tales, which made the child a man, while all the time he suspected himself to be no bigger than a man. (Marrs 81)

Recognizing that he and others might be fighting a losing battle, Lamb ends by totally condemning the proponents of moral literature:

“Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with Tales and old wives fables in childhood, you had been crammed with Geography & Natural History? **Damn them.** I mean the cursed Barbauld¹² Crew, those **Blights & Blasts** of all that is **Human** in man & child. (82)

Children still read fairy tales even though some writers and critics, such as Maria Edgeworth, proposed ways to combat their “ill-effects.” First, in *Practical Education*, Edgeworth warns against allowing nurses to tell “dreadful stories to her infant audience” (612). She asks, “Would it not be imprudent in education to permit that early propensity to superstitious terrors, and that temporary suspension of the reasoning faculties, which are often essential to our taste for the sublime?” (611). Then she demonstrates how a story such as “Bluebeard” should be emended. She relates the following storytelling incident: “Just at the critical moment, when the fatal key drops from the trembling hands of the imprudent wife, the gentleman interrupted the awful pause of silence that ensued and requested permission to relate the remainder of the story” (*Practical* 612-

13). The gentleman's adaptation renders the wife "as a curious, tattling, timid, ridiculous woman. The terrors of Blue-beard himself subsided when he was properly introduced to the company" (613). We are left to wonder about the ending of this re-telling. What is curious is the silence on the issue of wife-abuse and killing. According to Edgeworth, "the denouement of the piece was managed much to the entertainment of the audience; the catastrophe, instead of freezing their young blood, produced general laughter" (613).

Mrs. Trimmer also lambastes fairy tales, singling out "Bluebeard" for special criticism. In 1803, Benjamin Tabart published a collection of fairy tales that included "Cinderella," "Blue Beard," and "Little Red Riding Hood." Mrs. Trimmer reviewed the book in "On the Care Which Is Requisite in the Choice of Books for Children." The title itself conveys the vehemence of her beliefs. She writes, "This is certainly a very improper tale for children" (Haviland 7). She objects not only to the tale itself but to the colored illustrations "in which the most striking incidents in the stories are placed before the eyes of the little readers in glaring colours, representations we believe of play-house scenes, (for the figures are in theatrical dresses)" (7). She ends by saying, "A moment's consideration will surely be sufficient to convince people of the least reflection, of the danger, as well as the impropriety, of putting such books as these into the hands of little children, whose minds are susceptible of every impression" (7).¹³ We can only speculate about Trimmer's specific objections. Again, there is

silence on the issue of wife-killing. Therefore, it is difficult to be certain whether she objected to the violence inflicted on women or on women's uncontrollable curiosity. In any case, she objected vehemently, and people listened to her.

In 1820, Mrs. Sherwood published *The Governess* and rallied against the fairy tale as an “improper medium of instruction because it would be absurd in such tales to introduce Christian principles as motives of action. [. . .] On this account such tales should be very sparingly used, it being extremely difficult, if not impossible, from the reason I have specified, to render them really useful” (*Zipes Dreams* 115-16). Maria Edgeworth, Mrs. Trimmer, and Mrs. Sherwood would have certainly disapproved of the “Bluebeard” published in *The Juvenile Library* (182?). The tale, written in tetrameter couplets, provides more delight than instruction. It tells of Bluebeard who “gains the fair Lady’s hand, / But alas he her deathbed already has planned (The tale is transcribed in the Appendix.)”¹⁴

In contrast to the previous tale, “The Parental Instructor; or a Father’s Present to his Children” (1820) seems not only to encapsulate the fairy-tale debate but also to illustrate appropriate reading material for children. The story concerns Charles, who asks his father, Mr. Elliot, to tell a story: “You must favour us either with the tale of Cinderella, Ass-skin, Tom Thumb, or Bluebeard” (De Vries 91). Mr. Elliot, outraged, replies, “At your age—would you wish me to relate stories which have not even the shadow of common sense in them?” Mr. Elliot gives his children “a collection of Anecdotes and Stories, with which I intend both

to amuse and instruct you, in place of your fairy tales" (92). The story Mr. Elliot tells his children is about a boy who makes a valiant effort to save his father from the jaws of a shark. The boy saves his father, but the shark leaps out of the water, grabs the boy and swallows the bottom half of his body, leaving the boy's top half hanging from his jaws. The narrator declares, "But the son cast his last look upon the author of his life and seemed, even while dying, to feel pleasure in having preserved his father from the fatal accident of which he himself became the victim" (De Vries 93). It is surprising that the narrator prefers this story in all its terrifying realism to one featuring glass slippers, inch-high people and talking wolves. However, this narrator presents an extreme example, I think, of a child's duty to his father, whereas the others are more concerned with amusement and the achievement of personal goals.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the fairy-tale debate took a different turn. In the year that the "Parental Instructor" was published, an article in *The London Magazine* criticized the displacement of fairy tales not by didactic and religious literature but by a modern crop of picture books, such as "Peter Piper's Practical Principles," an alphabet book published by John Harris and "The Dandy's Ball" published by John Marshall. This critic's chief objections to those new books for children are their simplistic rhymes,¹⁵ the caricatures of adult behavior and their colored illustrations. The children's books "[have] gone retrograde; the imaginations of [their] inmates have coarse and poisonous food

now collected for them, in comparison with the hoards of other days. A decent nurse would blush with shame to repeat what is daily put into the hands of her charges to read!" (479). Furthermore, according to the critic, the new literature was a pitiful contrast to *Mother Goose* (Perrault's *Contes*), which he describes as "enchanting" and "exquisite." Still, religious and didactic literature remained popular for most of the nineteenth century, as evidenced by the numerous re-issues. James Janeway's *Token for Children* (1672), relating accounts of children joyfully dying, remained in print for over two hundred years in both the United States and Canada. ¹⁶ Anna Laetitia Aikin Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose* (1743-1825) was published in 1781. By 1832, it had gone into twenty-seven editions and was still being published as late as 1880 (Cott 3:115). *The History of Little Goody Two Shoes*, first published by John Newbery in 1765, was still being published in 1881 (Cott 3: 75). Thomas Day's *The History of Sanford & Merton*, published in three volumes from 1783-1789, had gone through nine editions by 1812 and reached forty-three in 1883 (Cott 3: 133). *The Children's Friend*, an Evangelical penny monthly that circulated from 1824-1882, served as the model for *the Child's Guide* that Mr. Brocklehurst gives to Jane Eyre. The magazine includes the story of "the awfully sudden death of Martha G--, a naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit" (35).¹⁷

Against this kind of thinking, Edgar Taylor in 1823 translated Grimm's fairy tales into English. In the preface, Taylor bemoans the state of children's literature:

Philosophy is made the companion of the nursery: we have lispings, chemists and leading-string mathematicians: this is the age of reason, not of imagination; and the loveliest dreams of fairy innocence are considered as vain and frivolous. Much might be urged against this rigid and philosophic (or rather unphilosophic) exclusion of works of fancy and fiction. (iv)¹⁸

According to Zipes "the publication of *German Popular Stories* acted as a challenge to the anti-fairy tale movement in Britain, and its favorable reception led to a second edition in 1826 and a new wave of translations"(Zipes *Dreams* 117).

By mid-century, "middle class writers, educators, publishers and parents began to realize that the rigid, didactic training and literature used to rear their children was dulling their senses and creativity. Both children and adults needed more fanciful works to stimulate their imagination and keep them productive in the social and cultural spheres of British society" (118). Charles Dickens's essay "Frauds on the Fairies" embodies this concern and reproaches those writers--Cruikshank, in particular--who use fairy tales for propaganda: ¹⁹

In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales [sic] should be respected. Our English red tape is too magnificently red ever to be employed in the tying up of such trifles, but every one who has considered the subject knows full well that a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun. ("Frauds" 6: 58) ²⁰

Dickens concludes the essay by advising his readers against tampering with fairy tales. He writes, "Frauds on the fairies once permitted, we see little reason why they may not come to this and great reason why they may. The Vicar of Wakefield was wisest when he was tired of being always wise. The world is too much with us, early and late. Leave this precious old escape from it, alone" (6: 62). Six months after this essay was printed, Dickens published *Hard Times*, in which he shows the terrible consequences children suffer when they are reared on a diet rich in "facts." ²¹ Robert Lee Wolff suggests, however, that many Victorians thought that fairy tales should be altogether banned because the stories were fiction, and would inhibit young people from distinguishing between fact and fiction. "Secondly, fantasy was a waste of time when the young might be so much better engaged in learning the facts of some subject or other" (xvi).

As late as 1895, essayist Agnes Reppelier angrily notes the persistence of the debate over the fairy tale: "A warfare has been raging in our midst, the

echoes of which have hardly yet died sullen away upon either side of the Atlantic” (33). She satirizes “those anxious parents who think the stories of Bluebeard and Jack the Giant Killer too shocking for infant ears to hear” (33). Fortunately, she declares:

We could not banish Bluebeard if we would. He is as immortal as Hamlet, and when hundreds of years shall have passed over this uncomfortably enlightened world, the children of the future—who, thank Heaven, can never, with all our efforts, be born grown up—will tremble at the blood-stained key, and rejoice when the big brave brothers come galloping up the road. (35)

Happily, the authors I shall examine, who range in time, from Charlotte Brontë to Margaret Atwood have also experienced the pleasures of reading fairy tales, despite persistent public skepticism and distrust of the genre. Margaret Atwood’s parents unsuccessfully attempted to hinder Atwood from reading *The Complete Grimms Fairy Tales*. By the time she was about nine years old, however, she had memorized many of the stories.²² While Richard Wright, author of *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (1944) listened with pleasure to Ella, a young woman living with his family, tell the story of *Bluebeard and His Seven Wives*, his grandmother comes into the room. She immediately stops the story, telling her grandson, “You’re going to burn in hell” (46). Those words were recorded over sixty years ago. However, distrust of certain kinds of fiction is

still prevalent. In the most recent issue of *The Authors Guild Bulletin* (Winter, 2001), several children book authors discuss their methods for dealing with the censorship of their books. The article begins with the startling statement: "Censorship of children's books and literature for young adults is alive and well in the 21st century" (14).²³

Regardless of the presence or absence of external censors, women authors struggle against an internal censorship with regard to fairy tales. Women recognize that the beloved stories they read in their youth perpetuate gender stereotypes and devalue individuality, independence, and speech in girls and women.²⁴ Bluebeard's wife is sentenced to death for daring to uncover her husband's secrets. Little Red Riding Hood is eaten because she foolishly talks to a stranger. Sleeping Beauty is doomed to languish in a one-hundred-year sleep until a prince awakens her. These are not positive female images. Thus, women authors re-vision the traditional tales to reflect women's needs, desires and ambitions. The critical issue is that women must tell their stories from their own mouths.

The second point that helps to frame my study is a consideration of the fairy tale as a female genre, even though the essential body of these stories was given written form by Charles Perrault and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. According to Heinz Rölleke, a notable Grimm scholar, the Grimms, while they do not name their sources, present the exemplar of their storyteller as a peasant woman "hale

and hearty and not much over fifty years old" (Rölleke 103). About their storyteller, the Grimms also say, "She retains these old legends in her memory, narrates them deliberately, surely, and in an uncommonly lively way" (103).

Recent scholarship has revealed that the Brothers Grimm did not search the countryside transcribing stories from peasants. Rather, young middle-class women related many of the stories to the brothers in their home (106).

Jeannette and/or Marie Hassenpflug, daughters of a magistrate, told the brothers the stories of "Bluebeard," "Little Red Cap," "Robber Bridegroom," and "Briar Rose" (a variant of "Sleeping Beauty"). The brothers heard "Fitcher's Fowl" from Friederike Manuel, a minister's daughter, and Dortchen Wild, the daughter of a pharmacist (Zipes *Grimms* 411-13). An unknown woman told them "Cinderella." Of the 210 stories the brothers included in their 1857 edition, at least half were told to them by women. Marina Warner notes that female storytellers were Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's most "inspiring and prolific sources" (20).

Perrault as well owes a debt to female storytellers. In the Preface to his 1695 *Tales in Verse*, he attributes "The Tale of Donkey-Skin" to a woman. It "is here told with such naïveté, that it did not entertain me less than when, near the hearth, my Nurse or my Governess held my mind enchanted by telling it. [. . .] What pleases me even more in its simple sweetness, is that it amuses and makes us laugh, without a Mother, Spouse, or Confessor finding anything to rephrase" (Zarucchi 122). Later, when Perrault published *Histoires, ou contes de temps*

passé avec des Moralitez two years later, the frontispiece depicts an old woman sitting at the hearth telling stories to three children, thus creating a link between “stories from times passed” and women storytellers.²⁵

Other male writers have also acknowledged this link. For example, although it is probably common knowledge that fairy tales figure prominently in Charles Dickens’s writing, what might be less well-known is that “he heard fairy stories countless times from the lips of his nursemaid, Mary Weller, and he heard them also from his paternal grandmother” (H. Stone *Invisible* 33). In the *Uncommercial Traveller*, the narrator describes his nurse’s uncanny effect on him: “If we all knew our minds (in a more enlarged sense than the popular acceptance of that phrase), I suspect we should find our nurses responsible for most of the dark corners we are forced to go back to, against our wills” (150). Mary Weller was the repository of many strange stories that Dickens returned to again and again in his writing.²⁶

An interesting female source is proposed for “Mr Fox,” an analogue of “Bluebeard” in English folklore. The editor of the *New Variorum of Shakespeare*, Horace Furness, prints a “roundabout” re-telling of “Mr Fox” in a note on Act One, Scene One of *Much Ado About Nothing*. He states that in *Memoranda* (1879), B. Halliwell printed a letter dated 1807 in which Mr. Blakeway, who had contributed to the *Boswell-Malone Variorum* in 1821,²⁷ mentioned having heard “Mr Fox” from his ninety-two-year-old great aunt: “From the history of our

family I think it likely that she may have received the tale from persons born in Charles the Second's time.” He added, “but when I see her next I will ask her if she can recollect” (Furness 30). However, we do not hear the story from the great aunt. We get it third hand through a line of male tellers. Hassain Haddawy, the translator of the *Arabian Nights* (1990), recalls the times when he was a boy and a certain lady visited his grandmother: “And the lady would smile at me, and I would seize the proffered opportunity and ask for a story—a long story.[. . .] The lady would begin the story, and I would listen, first apprehensively [. . .]” (ix). Whatever stories the lady told can exist for us only in Haddawy’s memory. To gain access to the “certain lady’s” story as well as the stories of Ella, Jeannette and Marie Hassenpflug, Mary Weller, and the unnamed nurse in the Perrault household, we must hear them through a male voice.

This is an important point to make because in Western culture, for the most part, women have been forced into silence, into anonymity. While the names of Charles Perrault and Jacob and Wilhem Grimm are memorialized as the “authors” of our most beloved fairy tales, their female informants are essentially ellipses in the transmission of the stories. It is probable that in the creation and transmission of tales, male as well as female tellers make contributions unique to their own perspectives and concerns. As stories pass from generation to generation, change is inevitable. However, when women transmit stories through a male filter, additional omissions and emendations

occur. These changes inevitably affect meaning. To illustrate this point, I present four versions of Perrault's "Bluebeard." The selection reproduced depicts the scene in which the last wife discovers the dead wives in the forbidden room.

The Benchmark Text

(Perrault 1697)

D'abord elle ne vit rien, parce que les fenêtres étaient fermées. Après quelques moments, elle commença à voir que le plancher était tout couvert de sang caillé, dans lequel se miraient les corps de plusieurs femmes mortes, attachés le long des murs: c'étaient toutes les femmes que la Barbe-Bleue avaient épousées et qu'il avait égorgées l'une après l'autre. (*Contes* 14-15).

On the one hand, despite the two hundred years between them, Richard Samber's and Angela Carter's translations of Perrault's tale vary only on two points, each concerning the presentation of the heroine. The first difference--explaining how the heroine's eyes get used to the darkness, enabling her to see the horrors inside--is minor. The second difference seems minor but is quite significant. Samber encloses the information about the dead wives within parenthesis, symbolic of actual enclosure in the forbidden room. More important, Samber's parenthetical statement negates the importance of the dead wives and can potentially erase Bluebeard's crime if one eliminates or glosses over the parenthetical statement. Since Carter does not enclose the wives in a set of

parenthesis, her translation suggests that the dead wives are indeed central to the text and to the story.

Translations of Perrault

(Richard Samber, 1729)

But she could see nothing distinctly, because the windows were shut; after some moments she began to observe that the floor was all covered with clotted blood, on which lay the bodies of several dead women ranged against the walls.

(These were all the wives that the Blue Beard had married and murder'd one after another.) (Opie 107).

(Angela Carter, 1982)

The windows were shuttered and at first she could see nothing; but after a few moments, her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom and she saw that the floor was covered with clotted blood. In the blood lay the corpses of all the women whom Bluebeard had married and then murdered, one after the other.

(*Sleeping* 35).

On the other hand, texts that derive more directly from orally transmitted female sources reveal more startling differences. The Grimm Brothers heard the story from the Hassenpflug sisters. Clarissa Pinkola Estés records a version of the tale in *Woman Who Run With the Wolves* that combines Slavic and French elements. Estés says that the story she prints is very similar to the one her Aunt Kathé once told her.

Re-told from a Female Source

(Grimms, 1812)

'Who can possibly see when I open it?' she said to herself. 'I'll just glance inside.' Then she unlocked the room, and when the door opened, a stream of blood flowed toward her, and she saw dead women hanging along all the walls, some only skeletons. (Zipes *Complete* 325)

(Estés, published in 1992)

'Sister, sister, bring a candle.' So a candle was lit and held into the room and all three women screamed at once, for in the room was a mire of blood and the blackened bones of corpses were flung about and skulls were stacked in the corners like pyramids of apples. (Estes 42).

In these two versions from acknowledged female sources, the heroine has been granted a voice, speaking either to herself or to her companions. The presence of sisters when the heroine discovers the dead wives in the forbidden room not only gives her support, demonstrating the importance of social and familial ties, but also heightens the drama.

What these exemplars seem to suggest is that re-tellings from printed versions adhere more closely to their source but allow for individual differences. Re-tellings from oral sources deviate to a greater degree, as expected, and seem to imply a particular audience and purpose. For example, Estés's aunt, it seems, told her story with the exuberance and lavishness of a skilled storyteller, exciting

her niece into a state of delightful terror. The Hassenpflug sisters, on the other hand, were performing a task for professional folktale collectors. Their audience and purpose were very different, and the tales, it seems, reflect those differences in that the Hassenpflug's rendering seems less dramatic and more controlled than Estés's Aunt Kathé's tale.

Even though the Grimms acknowledged their female sources, they did not print the stories exactly as their informants had told them.²⁸ They attempted to “create an ideal type for the literary fairy tale, one that sought to be as close to the oral tradition as possible, while incorporating stylistic, formal, and substantial thematic changes to appeal to a growing middle-class audience” (Zipes *Complete* xxv). In their editing process, something was lost, namely, the female voice. Thus, if women are the sources for many of the literary fairy tales, and if their words have been muted or silenced during the process of transforming the spoken word to the written word, I would like to suggest that the texts we have come to privilege tell only partial stories. As women writers such as Brontë, Ritchie, Millay, Carter, Namjoshi, and Atwood re-vision “Bluebeard,” they are completing those partially finished stories in ways that might disturb and subvert the reader's expectations by altering her reading of the fairy tale or primary text. In “Bluebeard's Egg,” Margaret Atwood's retelling, presents an intriguing similarity to this current project, for Sally, the female protagonist, engages in a project to “write a five-page transposition [of “Fitcher's Bird,” a variant of

“Bluebeard”] set in the present and cast in the realistic mode” (172). Although Atwood offers a model for how women authors perform the task of claiming authority over their texts, paradoxically, the very act of writing, gives women authority, for as Susan Lanser writes:

Self-authorization, which, I argue, is implicit in the very act of authorship. In other words, I assume that regardless of any woman writer’s ambivalence toward authoritative institutions and ideologies, the act of writing a novel [poem or story] and seeking to publish it [. . .] is implicitly a quest for discursive authority: a quest to be heard, respected, and believed a hope of influence” (*Fictions* 7).

The third point that frames this study is a consideration of the claim that fairy tales affect writers in powerful ways, regardless of gender, race, and the literary period that brackets them, as several critics have noted. For instance, Karen Rowe states that fairy tales pass on “powerful romantic myths” and that “the traditional patterns, no less than fantasy characterizations and actions, contribute to fairy tale’s potency as a purveyor of romantic archetypes and, thereby, of cultural precepts for young women” (248). Jack Zipes claims the universality of the values inherent in the classical tales and the sense that “we are all striving for the same happiness, that there are certain dreams and wishes which are irrefutable, that a particular type of behavior will produce guaranteed

results, like living happily ever after with lots of gold in a marvelous castle, *our* castle and fortress that will forever protect us from inimical and unpredictable forces of the outside world” are reasons for our love of fairy tales (*Myth* 5). The title of Marcia K. Lieberman’s essay, “Some Day My Prince Will Come,” seems to capture the reasons for our attraction to these tales. So many young girls and young women have been indoctrinated to believe in the myth of the rescuing prince making the stories more than “repositories of the dreams, hopes, and fantasies of generations of girls,” as Lieberman suggests (385). They are, surely, as Rowe suggests, “purveyors” of dreams and fantasies, which are often more satisfying than real life, and they assure us that regardless of the magnitude of our troubles, things work out in the end.

In addition to the work of critics, we have numerous examples of the power of fairy tales from writers’ fiction as well as their non-fiction. To substantiate this claim requires close readings of the fairy-tale texts embedded in narratives and an examination of the significance of those intertexts to the primary narrative. For instance, one of the embedded fairy tales in *Jane Eyre* other than “Bluebeard” is “Little Red Riding Hood.” Jane looks into Brocklehurst’s face and visualizes him as the wolf: “What a face he had, now that it was almost on level with mine! What a great nose! And what a mouth! And what large prominent teeth” (32). This depiction of Brocklehurst as the wolf foreshadows the role he plays in the death of the girls at Lowood. While he does

not devour them literally, the conditions for which he is responsible and to which the girls eventually succumb do “devour them to death.” Although Jane associates the death imagery in “Little Red Riding Hood” with her experience at Lowood, she also remembers finding joy in fairy tales. “Bessie told me some of her most enchanting stories, and sung me some of her most sweetest songs. Even for me life had its gleams of sunshine” (40).

Several twentieth-century writers have confirmed their deep responsiveness to fairy tales. For example, as a child, Angela Carter found it painful to hear such tales: “Please God, make it stop. I used to say, when they read Hans Andersen’s stories to me at bedtime. Is there no end to human suffering?” (*Shaking* 452). Despite her early distaste for fairy tales, she not only retold several, including “Bluebeard” and its variants, “Mr Fox,” an English folktale, and “Old Foster,” an Appalachian version, but she also edited at least three collections of folktales containing variants of “Bluebeard.” Margaret Atwood recalls receiving *The Complete Grimms Fairy Tales* when she was five years old. She and her brother “ate this book up. Not one truffle at a time: the whole basketful” (“Souls” 24). Fay Weldon, who has written a re-vision of the “Bluebeard” analogue, “Mr Fox,” entitled *Words of Advice*, writes, “I was brought up on fairy tales. [. . .] The effect of these tales, so far as I could see, was to fill the heads of little girls with mystery, and provide them with those archetypes which make for unease [. . .] But these magically written yet awkward tales at

least acquainted me and many others with a turn of phrase which seemed part and parcel of the language of the King James Bible” (“Journey” 329).

A passage from Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* describes the intensity of emotion the narrator feels when he listens to *Bluebeard and His Seven Wives*:

I ceased to see the porch, the sunshine, [Ella’s] face, everything. As her words fell upon my ears, I endowed them with a reality that welded up from somewhere within me. [. . .] The tale made the world around me be, throb, live. As she spoke, reality changed, the look of things altered, and the world became peopled with magical presences. My sense of life deepened and the feel of things altered. (45)

Finally, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, the last author I consider, re-told nine fairy tales for *The Cornhill Magazine* from 1866-1873 then collected them in two volumes: *Five Old Friends and a Young Prince* (1868) and *Bluebeard’s Keys and Other Stories* (1874). Her love of fairy tales began in childhood, as her journal addressed to her niece seems to reveal:

One of the nicest things that ever happened to us when we were children at Paris was the arrival of a huge parcel, which my Grannie cut open and inside were piles and piles of the most beautiful delightful wonderful fairy tale books all painted with pictures—I

thought they would never come to an end but alas! in a week we had read them all. They were called the Felix Summerly series.²⁹ [. . .] There were a great many French books, too that I used to read & read our kind [sic] Cousin Charlotte Ritchie used to give them to us. (Shankman 200)³⁰

Possibly among the “great many French books” was a copy of Charles Perrault’s *Contes*. However, whether Perrault’s *Contes* was in that package or in some other package, it is clear that Anne Thackeray was thoroughly familiar with Perrault at least by the age of two when her mother read aloud “Little Red Riding Hood.” In a letter to Thackeray’s mother, Isabella Thackeray, Anny’s mother, writes, “William was drawing Little Red Riding Hood, but he was obliged to substitute a dog for the wolf, for Anny got very angry at the notion of wolf eating up the grandmother” (Ritchie *Daughter* 11). In addition, when she read the story of Old Mother Hubbard to Anny, her “great delight [was] to hear the History of Dame Hubbard and her dog, amplified by long conversations between the two which have to be invented” (11). As a toddler, Anne Thackeray performed a narrative strategy that she consciously performed as an adult and one that other women writers have also used in retelling traditional tales. She dis/membered “Old Mother Hubbard” and “Little Red Riding Hood.”

I use *dis/member* and *re/member* to suggest that the author/narrator is “breaking the sequence” of Perrault’s text into its various elements (as Bluebeard

has dismembered his wives' bodies) and then re/membered or reassembled all or some of the parts in ways that allow writers/narrators to acquire author/ity over their texts. To illustrate my use of dis/membering of texts, I propose to use one of the most powerful of storytellers—Alisoun, Chaucer's Wife of Bath. She might seem to be tangential to a discussion of Bluebeard retellings, but the connection is closer than might be initially believed. Alisoun objects to her inaccessibility to the knowledge to which she aspires. Interestingly, Roger Shattuck, author of *Forbidden Knowledge*, specifically links the "Wife of Bath" to "Bluebeard" (322). Alisoun suggests that women want that which is forbidden: "Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we" (*Riverside Chaucer* 112: 519). Throughout his book, Shattuck identifies this proclivity as "the Wife of Bath effect." "Something disturbing happens, however, when any limit is imposed from outside by or by apparently arbitrary prohibition" (166). We want what we do not have. We long to eat forbidden fruit, open boxes and locked doors in order to "know." Although Alisoun longs to know the contents of the books her husband Jankyn reads, she tells a tale in which she demonstrates her unassailable knowledge of authorities (Jerome, Ovid, Dante). Furthermore, in Alisoun's tale, it is the "olde wyf" who readily quotes such authorities as Juvenal, Boethius, and Valerius. King Arthur's knight, the "lusty bachelor," on the other hand, quests for an answer to a basic question—What do women want? It takes him a year and a day to learn that

**“Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee / As wel over his housbonde as hir love,
/ And for to been in maistrie hym above” (119:1038-1040).**

Similarly, Bluebeard’s wife is on a quest for knowledge. To her, as it is to Eve and Pandora, knowledge is forbidden. The price she pays for knowledge is death. In Alisoun’s tale, the knight’s reward is life and marriage. Because he ultimately accepts the “olde wyf” as his wife, he is rewarded with the traditional fairy-tale prize—to live until his “lyves ende/ In parfit joye” (121:1257-58).

For several other reasons, it is appropriate to begin with Alisoun. Despite the restraints placed on her, her voice resounds with authority. She blames the clergy for the disappearance of “fayerye.” In addition, examining female narrative voices at different moments in literary history, crossing genres, cultures and literary periods helps to see the circularity of our western cultural ideology. Women in later narratives even at the end of the 20th century have been faced with Alisoun’s dilemma—how to negotiate a place in the world “in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter” (Heilbrun *Life* 18).

Additionally, Alisoun boldly proclaims in her prologue: “Experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me” as she stands in the midst of a long tradition of Christian, anti-feminist literature, which she rejects (*Riverside Chaucer* 105:1-2). In her “long preamble of a tale,” Alisoun proceeds to dis/member the conventional texts and then to re/member them in

ways that fit her view of her place in the world. For example, according to St. Jerome, Paul clearly states that widows should remain celibate. Marriage is only advised when one cannot control one's passions. "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (Amt 20). Another reason that makes Alisoun a fitting starting point is that in several ways she personifies an inversion of Bluebeard.³¹ She too has been married five times, has outlived four of her five spouses, and "Welcome[s] the sixte, whan that evere he shall" (*Riverside Chaucer* 105:44). Alisoun, however, justifies her five marriages by *misquoting* St. Jerome. She says:

For thane th' Apostle seith that I am free
 To wedde, a Goddes half, where it yketh me.
 He seith to be wedded is no sine.
 Bet is to be wedded that to brine. (105:49-52)

Alisoun employs still another strategy to gain authority over the text. When Jankyn reads to her from the "book of wikked wives," she literally dis/members that text by tearing pages out of the book!

Before she spins her tale, the Friar interrupts, but the host allows the tale to proceed. "'Lat the woman telle hire tale.... Do, dame, tel forth youre tale, and

that is best” (116:851, 853). When Alisoun concludes, however, the Friar criticizes her for speaking with authority:

‘Dame,’ quod he, ‘God yeve yow right good lyf!
 Ye han heer touched, also moot I thee,
 In scole-matere greet difficultee.
 Ye han seyde muchel thing right wel, I seye.
 But, dame, heere as we ryde by the weye,
 Us nedeth nat to speken but of game,
 And lete auctoritees, on Goddes name,
 To preching and to scoles of clergie. (122:1269-77)

By interrupting Alisoun’s ending, getting the last word, *the* word, the Friar has effectively put Alisoun in her place, usurping her authority.

The friar’s victory is only temporary, however, for despite patriarchal attempts to silence women, they continue to speak even if speech costs them their lives. Two such stories are the tales of Chaucer’s “The Second Nun’s Tale” of the life of St. Cecilia and the Greek myth of Philomela. Both Cecilia and Philomela are victims of patriarchal dis/memberment. St. Cecilia speaks in defiance of the magistrate Almachius, who then orders her execution.³² Tereus cuts out Philomela’s tongue to prevent her from revealing that he has raped her. “[. . .] her speechless lips could tell / No tale of what was done” (Ovid

6: 576-577). Refusing to be silenced, however, Philomela weaves the story into cloth, enabling her to “speak” although she has no tongue.

Furthermore, as women narrators author/ize their heroine’s lives, in this process of dis/membering and re/membering, they destabilize patriarchal authority and its texts. They create narratives that subvert conventional ideas and put women at the narrative and focalizing center. When women also embed texts into their primary narratives, they change the texture of their narratives and expand interpretive possibilities. For example, consider a story of a newlywed couple. One evening, they have a violent argument. The wife says, “I should have known. They warned me that you were putting on an act.” Instead of the last sentence, suppose the wife says, “They warned me you were a Bluebeard.” Embedding “Bluebeard” into the text adds a layer of meaning with pernicious connotations as the reader conjures up an image of a wife-killer. Similarly, when Jane Eyre explores the third floor of Thornfield, for example, rather than describe it as merely dark and gloomy, she recalls the “corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle.” Not only has she implied the existence of a wife-killer but has planted in the reader’s mind the possibility that the unfolding story is one that has already been read and of which the ending is already known.

In addition, authors who re-vision “Bluebeard” also create a world in which female voices matter, in which women learn how to control their own lives. As Nancy Walker says, the re-visions have two-fold significance. Not only does

the new text “[subvert] the traditional text, but also [lays] claim to it, entering into dialogue with it on an equal plane” (3). And the women authors discussed in this thesis successfully challenge the fundamental ideas and beliefs defining a woman’s life; they create parodies of the old tale and new visions of what a woman’s place in the world might be.

¹ There is a distinction between fairy tale and folk tale. The stories under discussion are more accurately labeled *folk tale* or *wonder tale*. Fairy tale actually is a misnomer, since it refers to a story involving fairies. The term *fairy tale* came to be used interchangeably with folk tale. I shall use *fairy tale* to mean the stories that authors wrote down from either oral or printed sources. Vladimir Propp defines these stories as fairy tales (19).

² According to Iona and Peter Opie, “Cinderella” is at least a thousand years old. The earliest version comes from China and is dated 850-860 A.D. The earliest European version, “La Gatta Cenerentola” (“The Hearth-Cat”), is found in Basile, *Il Pentamerone* (Day 1, Tale 6), 1634 (Opie 117-121; Dundes *Cinderella* 3- 13). The earliest known version of “Puss ‘n Boots” is found in Straparola’s *Piacvevole notti* published in 1553 in Italy and 1560 in France (Night 11, fable 1). Also, it is included in Basile *Il Pentamerone*, 1634 (day 2, tale 4). (Opie 110-112). See also Ernest Alfred Vizetelly (1-33) for a generous listing of stories bearing similarities to “Bluebeard.” Jeanne Morgan notes that one of Perrault’s sources was *Bibliothèque Bleue*--comparable to English chapbooks--that contained abridged stories and were sold by calporteurs to the lower classes (55).

³ With the exception of the blood that will not rub off the key to the forbidden room, nothing magical occurs in “Bluebeard,” which is rarely the case in “Bluebeard.” Bruno Bettelheim associates the key with the phallus and the bloodstain on the key with breaking of the hymen “and blood gets on it. If this is one of the hidden meanings, then it makes sense that the blood cannot be washed away: defloration is an irreversible event” (301).

⁴ Scholars have sought to discover Perrault's sources. Although there seems to be no "direct" source, several possibilities that might have influenced Perrault are the historical accounts of Gilles de Rais (1404-1440), a Marshall in the French army and Breton nobleman, and of Comorre the Cursed b. 500 A.D., another Breton nobleman. The former was an infamous murderer. It seems he tortured, sexually molested and then killed more than one hundred people, mostly boys. Huysmans embeds an account of Gilles de Rais's gruesome murders in *Là-Bas* (1891) discussed in chapter four. Comorre the Cursed's wife, Tryphine, discovers he has murdered his previous four wives upon discovering they were pregnant. She attempts to run away. He catches her and stabs her with his sword. She is found lying in the road, nursed back to health and eventually starts a convent. What is interesting about this story is that in 1850, paintings depicting six scenes in Perrault's "Bluebeard" were discovered in a chapel dedicated to St. Tryphine. The paintings were created in 1704, however. The Opies suggest that it is remarkable that the legend of St. Tryphine should be associated with "Bluebeard" so soon after Perrault's death when his family members were still alive and could have rejected any relationship between the paintings and Perrault's tale. (105). Finally, in English folklore exists an analogue, entitled "Mr Fox." It predates "Bluebeard" by at least one hundred years, for it is alluded to in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-1600). This allusion is discussed fully in chapter 4.

⁵ The Opies suggest that we might take for granted the existence of an earlier version of "Bluebeard." There are earlier stories that feature motifs central to "Bluebeard," for example, Eve's disobedience and the story of Lot's wife whose disobedience turns her to salt. In Greek mythology, the gods give Pandora a box and warn her not to open it. Unable to curb her curiosity, she disobeys and causes plagues on the world. She quickly closes the box leaving—hope inside (Hamilton 70, 72). The forbidden room motif is the focus of a story in the *Pentamerone* (Day 4, tale 6), (1635).

An interesting case of gender reversal occurs in *Thousand and One Nights* (nights 60-62). The third dervish experiences the pleasures of forty girls every night. One day they must leave and entrust him with the keys of the palace. Inverting the prohibition theme in "Bluebeard," the forty women extract a promise of obedience from the dervish. They tell him, though, "Now this is how you will disobey us." They invite him to "eat and drink and enjoy looking around in every chamber [. . .] but there is one chamber you must never open or even approach, for its opening will cause our separation." They entreat him not to look into the forbidden room. "Be patient for forty days, and we shall come back to you" (Haddawy 129). *Nights* had been circulating in the Arab world for centuries

before they were written down in the tenth century. Antoine Galland first translated the tales into French between 1704-1717, a year after Perrault's death, seven years after Perrault published his *Contes* (Haddawy xvi). (Nothing I have read makes any links between the *Nights* and Perrault.) What is curious is that the women tell the dervish what will happen if he disobeys. The men who make the prohibition barely hint at what the consequences will be.

⁶ Anatole France's "The Seven Wives of Bluebeard" (1909) parodies "Bluebeard" and his deeds. According to this version, the first wife escapes through the so-called forbidden cabinet and everything Perrault has recorded is false (Zipes *Spells* 566-82). Lydia Millet provides another twist. The reason Bluebeard kills his first wife is that he has grown tired of her. "I knew that she had grown into furniture" (236).

⁷ Originally, literary fairy tales were written by and for aristocratic women who frequently assembled in salons and exchanged their stories for their mutual amusement and as a means to imagine better lives for themselves. In the 1690's fairy tales attained acceptability. Men and women began writing and publishing them. In the early eighteenth century, fairy tales began to be directed at children. See Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale* for a thorough historical introduction to the fairy tale.

⁸ For further discussion on the Grimm's sources, see Marina Warner, *From Beast to Blonde*, Heinz Rölleke, "New Results of Research on *Grimms' Fairy Tales*" and Jack Zipes, "Once There Were Two Brothers Named Grimm," (*Dreams*).

⁹ F.J. Harvey Darton notes that fairy tales were "frowned upon by moralists in the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth—when they had got firmly in print—by the theorists of Rousseau's school" (85).

¹⁰ Zipes notes that the Puritan code and the domination of Calvinism after 1688 were responsible for the emphasis on morality (*Dreams* 112-13).

¹¹ Samuel Pickering's *John Locke and Children's Books of the Eighteenth-Century* examines the history of children's books as influenced by Lockean philosophy.

¹² Mary Jackson notes that Lamb mistakenly blamed Anna Barbauld (191). F.J. Harvey Darton also suggests Lamb was in error in citing Barbauld (129).

¹³ Mrs. Trimmer also criticizes *Goody Two Shoes*, even though it was generally well-received. She suggests “proper emendations” in order to make the book more acceptable” (Haviland 6).

¹⁴ It is disturbing that the subject of wife-killing is often rendered humorously. It, of course, is indicative of Western culture’s attitude toward the subject which seems pervasive, not limited to specific cultures, ethnic groups, socioeconomic status, etc. (See Chapter 2 and 4 for further discussion.) F. N. Bayley wrote a comic “Bluebeard” in 1843. In 1910, Guy Wetmore Carryl ends his poem with the following:

The ordinary story isn’t glory, but a jest.
But here’s the truth unqualified: the husband wasn’t mollified;
Her head is in his bloody little study with the rest!

The Moral:

Wives, we must allow, who to their husbands will not Bow,
A stern and dreadful lesson learn when, as you’ve read, they’re
cut in turn. (37)

¹⁵ The critic objects to rhymes such as the following, which John Harris published in “Piper’s Practical Principles,” an alphabet book:

Lanky Laurence lost his lass and lobster:
Did Lanky Laurence lose his lass and lobster?
If Lanky Laurence lost his lass and lobster,
Where are the lass and lobster Lanky Laurence lost (*London Magazine* 479)?

The critic contends that these books were “evidently done by men ready to do any thing” (481).

¹⁶ See Carpenter and Prichard 529.

¹⁷ Reverend Carus Wilson founded *The Children’s Friend*. He also founded Cowan Bridge School, the one Charlotte Brontë attended and on which she modeled Lowood.

¹⁸ Zipes also quotes Taylor. See *Victorian* xvii.

¹⁹ "Frauds on the Fairies" was the opening article in the October 5, 1853 edition of *Household Words* (H. Stone *Dickens* 13).

²⁰ A complete explanation of Cruikshank's reply to Dickens's essay and how it might have affected Cruikshank's project for the publishing of his *Fairy Library* may be found in Harry Stone's *Dickens and the Invisible World*, 8-16.

²¹ The opening of *Hard Times* parodies the idea that fancy is an unnecessary commodity: "Now, what I want is Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!" (47).

²² In Chapter Three, I examine the embedding of "Fitcher's Fowl" in "Bluebeard's Egg."

²³ Cases of book banning have gone to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1982, in the case of *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico* was heard. A group of parents pressured the school board to remove books from the library shelves. The board defended its position in a press release which condemned the books as "anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy." In conclusion, the board said, "It is our duty, our moral obligation, to protect the children in our schools from this moral danger as surely as from physical and medical dangers" (246). (One of the books on the list was *Black Boy* by Richard Wright.) A group of high school students challenged the school board's action in court. Finally, the Supreme Court rendered its decision: "In brief, we hold that local school boards may not remove books from school library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books and seek by their removal to 'prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion'" (249). However, the court made it clear that its decision did not affect the local school board's ability to *add* books to the library. In effect, the school board still retained some control over what students read. In *Virgil v. School Board of Columbia County, Florida* [1989], the Supreme Court upheld two parents' petition to remove Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" from the high school curriculum (249). It seems, there will always be people who will be compelled to protect young people from certain ideas in books.

²⁴ See Ruth B. Bottigheimer, "Paradigms for Powerlessness" in *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys: Moral and Social Vision of the Tales*, for a comparison of silence in girls and in boys in Grimms' stories. See also Marsha Lieberman, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come' Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale."

²⁵ A discussion of Charles Perrault's authorship may be found in Jeanne Morgan's *Perrault's Morals for Moderns* (See Zarucchi, 120:1).

²⁶ See the references to Mary Weller in Harry Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World*.

²⁷ See Humphreys, 1981 p. 232

²⁸ In the introduction to *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, Zipes analyzes the editorial changes Wilhelm Grimm made in several tales (xxvi).

²⁹ Felix Summerly was the pen name for Sir Henry Coles who wrote the *Home Treasury*, a collection of retold fairy tales. The Cole children and Anne Thackeray were good friends.

³⁰ *L'Ami des enfants*, written by Arnaud Bequin (1746-1791), was published from 1782-1783. These were moral tales that showed the ill-effects of improper behavior. Christoph Von Schmidt (1768-1854) published sentimental and moral stories in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. (See Carpenter and Richard 132).

³¹ I am not suggesting that Alisoun is a Bluebeard although the similarities between the two are striking. One might argue that a woman cannot be a Bluebeard. However, living at the turn of the century in the United States was a woman, Belle Gunness, who was dubbed Lady Bluebeard because of the number of lovers she had killed. Janet Langlois writes, "Belle as the Lady Bluebeard reverses the patriarchal position of the ogre husband in the folk tale. [. . .] By reversing the sexes of this fairy tale pattern, stories about Belle Gunness, although equally grotesque, also invert the gender relationships and the power structures traditionally operating in the Victorian conception of marriage" (85).

³² Chaucer's Second Nun tells the tale of St. Cecilia, an early Christian martyr, who defies authority and chooses death rather than abandon her beliefs.

Because she will not submit to authority, the executioners try to boil her to death. When that fails, they chop off her head. The story of St. Cecilia is an important intertext in "The Bloody Chamber" discussed in chapter three. The story is indicative of the lengths women will go in order to gain power and keep it.

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.

Adrienne Rich “When We Dead Awaken”

Be bold, be bold...but not too bold,
Lest your heart's blood should run cold.

Mr Fox (English Folk tale)

Chapter 2 – The Silent, the Gullible, and the Dead

Bluebeard warns his young wife, “Ouvrez tout [. . .] mais, pour ce petit cabinet, je vous défends d’y entrer” (11). Synonymous with the tree of knowledge and Pandora’s box, indeed, the forbidden door looms as the tale’s most decisively identifiable feature. To a large extent, what the wife sees (or fails to see) behind the door and how she negotiates that space, determine her fate.

The focus of this chapter is on the heroine as focalizer. According to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *focalization* is the presentation of a story “through the mediation of some ‘prism’, ‘perspective’, ‘angle of vision.’” (71). As such, there is a differentiation between the narrator as the one who speaks and the focalizer as the one who sees. Although focalization has typically visual connotations, Rimmon-Kenan also notes, “its purely visual sense has to be broadened to include cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation” (71). Obviously, the heroine is able to speak as well as to see, but what she sees at the door and the

subsequent choices she makes about her life is what matters in the four works discussed below.

In the first work, “Bluebeard,” a sonnet by Edna St. Vincent Millay, Bluebeard’s wife opens the door in spite of her husband’s commands. In Shirley Jackson’s and Joyce Carol Oates’s narratives, the dutiful and obedient wives leave the doors unopened. However, their “reward” is a spiritual death that causes them to sleepwalk through life. They are as good as dead although they are physically alive. In the last work discussed, “A Room of His Own,” a short short story by Suniti Namjoshi, Bluebeard’s wife also obeys her husband and leaves the door closed. Paradoxically, the outcome is not positive even though Perrault and narrators tell us the woman’s trouble is a result of her transgression. The code of behavior circumscribing the relationship between a man and a woman manifests itself in such actions as punishment for “disobedience.” However, actions constituting disobedience are unpredictable and variable. So, while Bluebeard’s history assures us that *not* opening the door spares the heroine from punishment, the women writers in this chapter present evidence to the contrary.

Collectively, the women authors seem to maintain the idea that, on the one hand, “It is debilitating to be *any* woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters” as Gilbert and Gubar suggest (53). To be sure, the heroines seem to be “angels,” and yet

they are treated like monsters. On the other hand, the definition of the “proper” behavior of women is determined and controlled by the whim of male authority. The woman’s reading or *misreading* of the male authority has little correlation with its effect on her. Surely, there will be effects, for she is destined to confront male authority one way or another.

Not surprisingly, critics have often read “Bluebeard” as a story about a wife’s disobedience, manifesting itself in her curiosity or marital infidelity (Bettelheim 299-303). I agree with Maria Tatar, who notes that the folklorists have erroneously focused on the wife’s “disobedience” rather than Bluebeard’s multiple murders. “If we recall that the bloody chamber in Bluebeard’s castle is strewn with the corpses of previous wives, this reading of the blood-stained key as a marker of sexual infidelity becomes willfully wrongheaded in its effort to vilify Bluebeard’s last wife” (Tatar *Classic* 141). A consequence of her disobedience is to suffer harsh and cruel punishment.

Even though each heroine discussed in this chapter is the main focalizer, “the point from which the elements [of the story] are viewed,” and is, therefore, the center of her narratives, she has difficulty extricating herself from the position of victim. Indeed, the emotional as well as physical victimization of each wife discussed here is disturbingly graphic. The heroines Millay, Jackson, Oates and Namjoshi create are essentially voiceless and powerless to counteract the violence committed on them. Yet as the focalizers, they are “the agent[s] whose

perceptions [orient] the presentation” (Rimmon-Kenan 74). They have agency even though they might not speak.

In Chapter One, I suggested that women speak even when they are silent. In order for Philomela to convey Tereus’s crime, she weaves her story into cloth. Procne “reads” the tapestry by focalizing.¹ An excerpt from *Mythology* illustrates this idea:

The women were equally remarkable in their kind of work. They could weave, into the lovely stuffs they made, forms so lifelike anyone could see what tale they illustrated. Philomela accordingly turned to her loom. [. . .] With infinite pains and surpassing skill she produced a wondrous tapestry on which the whole account of her wrongs was unfolded. (Hamilton 270)

Procne unrolled the cloth and read the wordless tragic tale. “Her tongue could find no speech to match / Her outraged anger” (578-579). Procne focalizes the story of her sister’s rape. Speech is unnecessary, for Philomela relies on vision to communicate her story. The wives of Bluebeard function somewhat like Procne as well as Philomela in that they need no words with which to tell or to read a tale. Since women have been forced into silence, to find other means of communicating is a survival strategy. I would suggest, as does Joyce Carol Oates in reference to Shirley Jackson’s narrative, that many of the Bluebeard stories point quietly to an “eloquently rendered rage” (“Olden” 269). To survive is to

temper rage, to suppress it, and to find an effective means to communicate that rage. One such example is found in “Mr Fox,” an earlier analogue of “Bluebeard,” as retold by Angela Carter.

In the story, Lady Mary is betrothed to Mr Fox, a man about whom she knows little. One day, she decides to go alone to his house. When she reaches the gateway, she sees written over it, “Be bold, be bold.” When she reaches the doorway, she sees, “Be bold, be bold, but not too bold.” Then when she reaches the gallery behind which were Mr Fox’s secrets, she reads: “Be bold, be bold, /But not too bold/Lest your heart’s blood should run cold.” But Lady Mary is brave and opens the door. “And what do you think she saw? Why, bodies and skeletons of beautiful young ladies all stained with blood” (Carter *Wives* 8). Soon Mr Fox comes home. Lady Mary hides quickly, but she is able to see that Mr Fox is dragging a woman up the stairs. He notices a glittering ring on her finger and tries to get it off. When his attempts fail, he hacks off the woman’s hand, and it plops down in Lady Mary’s lap. Lady Mary gets away. The next evening at her wedding dinner, she tells the story as if it were a dream or a vision. All the while, Mr Fox denies the accusation. However, when Lady Mary finishes her story, she produces the severed hand as proof that what she has described, actually happened. The gathering people see evidence of the crimes committed. Using one’s voice is less important than using one’s vision. Lady Mary, it seems, knows

that an image has a much more powerful effect than words. She is right because her kinsmen and friends kill Mr Fox.

From the above examples, it would appear that focalization is a powerful means of communicating to the reader. Patrick McNeil quotes Mieke Bal as saying that “focalization ‘is the most important, most penetrating, and most subtle means of manipulation’ available to the narrative text, whether literary or otherwise” (83). Bal, Rimmon-Kenan, et al make the distinction, as do I, between the narrator and the focalizer, the voice of the text and the eyes of the text. Both mediate narrative. However, the voice of the text, belongs to the narrator as “a disembodied narrative voice or as a more or less personalized character-narrator, the latter to the *focalizer*, the perceived centre of consciousness, ‘who’ may or may not [. . .] be identical with the narrator” (McNeil 85-86). What concerns us here are the eyes that see, the narrative’s vision as discerned by the reader. The reader, replacing the narrator as external focalizer, becomes an active participant in this focalization process. The following diagram illustrates how I envision this process working.

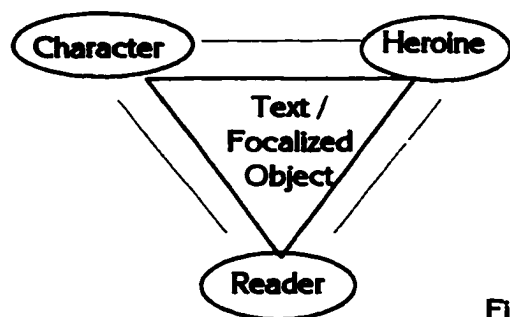


Fig. 2 The focalizer and the object of focalization

The “character” oval indicates any focalizer other than the heroine.² The source of focalization may be other characters, including the heroine, events, objects, places, ideas, etc. What matters is not only “who sees,” but “who, in what context, is presented as seeing?” (106). What does s/he see and how does the reader interpret the seeing? The focalizer is not necessarily unchanging throughout an entire narrative. As noted by McNeil, focalization may be fixed (events, characters, etc. seen through one focalizer) or it may vary. Focalization may also be external as well as internal (86). The narratives in this chapter are represented predominantly through variable focalizations, shifting from Bluebeard’s wife to Bluebeard or from the wife to another female character. Sometimes focalizations occur almost simultaneously. Recognizing that two focalizers perceive the event, object or character in different ways helps to shape meaning. For example, in Charles Dickens’s retelling of “Bluebeard,” “Captain Murderer,” Captain Murderer marries young, unsuspecting women and then murders them. He differs from Bluebeard in that he eats his brides rather than hides their corpses in a forbidden room. One month after Captain Murderer marries the fairer of twin sisters, he instructs her to make a pie. He produces a golden rolling pin and an enormous pie pan. He gathers the eggs, milk and flour and commands her to roll the dough. When she asks about the meat that will fill the pie, he responds: “/ see the meat in the glass!” Simultaneously, they look

into the mirror and are both focalizer and focalized, but what they see differs considerably.

Upon looking into the mirror, Captain Murderer sees the object of his cannibalistic desires. His wife sees a husband whom she thinks she has displeased because of her lack of cooking skills. The reader, of course, knows no amount of skills would have saved her from what happens in the very next instant. Captain Murderer chops off her head, cuts her into pieces, salts and peppers her, fills the pie shell with her body parts, and sends them to the baker ("Nurse's Stories" 151). Eventually, he is stopped by his next victim, his dead wife's twin, the darker sister. Although she suspects Captain Murderer has killed her sister, she contains her rage and plans her revenge in silence. She marries the Captain, and when her month is up, she consumes a poison prior to the meat pie-making ritual. Thus, when Captain Murderer bakes his wife in the pie, the poison she has taken in turn poisons his body, causing him to die. So while Captain Murderer is eventually stopped, his wife must sacrifice herself in order to avenge her sister's death and to save the lives of other women.

Although not all of Bluebeard's victims die in the texts under discussion here, they all experience an uncomfortable degree of silence and powerlessness. The crucial point is that the focalizations converge in the reader, as she makes sense out of objects of focalization in her "transaction" with the visual text.³ As represented by the "reader" oval at the bottom of vertex of the triangle (fig. 1),

the reader's reading, therefore, extends beyond decoding and comprehending printed texts to suggest a real signification in "looking," especially when other definitions of reading are applied: "to discern or anticipate through examination or observation" or "to read a person." Another feature of this process is a "mutual" focalization by a pair of foregrounded characters, looking simultaneously at the same object, event, character, or each other only to make different interpretations. To demonstrate with a visual image, I would like to examine an illustration that Gustave Doré made for a mid-nineteenth century edition of Perrault's *Contes*.⁴

Doré depicts the scene in which Bluebeard offers his wife the key. He knows it is the key to his wife's temptation, and the key that will cause his wife's disobedience. His facial expression and the wagging finger warn her of the severity of his prohibition. At the same time, he also anticipates her certain disobedience proven by his/story.



Fig. 3. Illustration by Gustave Doré for *Les Contes de Perrault*, 1863.

She, on the other hand, demonstrates the expected response—deference to her husband as her master. The demeanor she presents conflicts with what she inwardly thinks, since as soon as Bluebeard leaves, she opens the forbidden door. In the scene in figure 2, she cannot possibly know that the key will mark her death.

The reader, however, privileged with knowledge of the story, knows that the key is a trap. In fact, in one gesture, Bluebeard seduces and betrays his naïve wife. The reader also takes pleasure in the dramatic irony of the seduction. When Bluebeard gives the key to his wife, he is opening the door to his own death.

Marina Warner also suggests the symbolic quality of the key as “a gigantic forbidden fruit, so engorged and positioned that the allusion can hardly be missed” (244). Furthermore, she sees in Bluebeard’s expression “the leer of a pornographer” (244). Although I agree with the pornographic leer, we might also see Bluebeard’s expression as the leer of a serial killer, reveling in the prospect of yet another victim to augment his collection. Other illustrators depict the key of huge proportions, emphasizing its sexual connotations. The key in Alfred Crowquill’s illustrations is so large that Bluebeard’s wife can barely hold it (Warner 244). Only the reader is in a position of objectivity, able to appreciate the paradoxes the contrasting representations create. I might even suggest that the meaning of the text originates in the reader’s reading of those focalizations made through the various focalizers. If meaning originates in the reader, it also

terminates there. Obviously, the meaning, however, is dependent on what the heroine and the other characters make visible (fig. 1), but if they conceal both thought and visions from the reader, complications and misreadings occur that the reader then must unravel.

While focalization is indeed grounded in sight, as I hope is evident from the above example of Doré's illustration (fig. 2), it can also be located in thoughts and emotions as McNeil indicates: "The vision involved is by no means limited to physical vision, but can also include psychological and/or ideological components" (86).⁵ In the above illustration, the ideological component that must not be overlooked is Bluebeard's conviction that he possesses unlimited authority over his wife. "The wife was not expected to do anything but pander in respectful, reverent silence" (Vecchio 112). What she possesses is determined by what he gives her. And just as Bluebeard gives, he has the authority to take away. Ultimately, the power he wields makes this story about neither curiosity nor disobedience but rather about the man's right to power, knowledge, and his right to keep it away from women even while they strive to obtain those same privileges.

This theme is most apparent in the stories in this section in which women who appear to be gullible and naïve attempt to take authority over the text of their lives. Ultimately, the heroines come to a bad end. They do not all die, but neither do they become integrated into the society as married or single women.

On the story level, these heroines all fail, it would seem. On a narrative level and textual level, however, the heroines do succeed in that they have gained access to another way of knowing /communicating through vision. The women in these texts, we might say, are capitalizing on their tradition of enforced silence.⁶

“Be Bold, be bold”

The first example of a wife reduced to silence and whose powers of sight are challenged is the one in Edna St. Vincent Millay’s sonnet, “Bluebeard,” published in 1917 in a collection of poems entitled *Renascence*. The sonnet is concerned with the initial scene of confrontation when Bluebeard has returned and finds his wife has opened the door to the forbidden room: “This door you might not open, and you did;” (*Sonnets* 6). He proceeds to enumerate all that she does *not* see in the room. The wife is silent. In the second quatrain, he continues his list, emphasizing that in the room are “no heads of women slain [. . .] no writhings of distress; / But only what you see. . . . Look yet again” (6). However, it is not possible to know what she sees, only what he tells us she sees. Absorbing her vision into his, he has transformed what she really sees into his representation of it. We never know what she has focalized, only what he tells us she has. He forces her into the room again, and in the last line of the second quatrain, he tells his wife that she sees a “slight thing”: “An empty room: cobwebbed and comfortless” (6). Contrary to Bluebeard’s claim, the cobwebbed

room suggests a place where life once thrived, but now where all life has been sucked dry. Moreover, the cobwebbed room, like a spider's web, is an almost imperceptible trap, which the spider has craftily and stealthily woven to seduce his prey. Once ensnared, the victim is powerless to escape. That the wife is able to open the door is an indication of her potential to escape the narrow boundaries that have placed her in a position of subordination and passivity.

Unable to accept his wife's right to choose, to act independently of him, Bluebeard flees from her. Ironically, he does not threaten her with physical abuse as he does in Perrault's tale. Instead, he tells her, "That I must never more behold your face. / This now is yours. I seek another place" (*Sonnets* 6). His leaving brings liberation to his wife and to the reader. Now that Bluebeard has stopped speaking and has left his web, focus can shift to his wife, and we can ponder questions concerning her as focalizer: What does she see and how does she evaluate her vision? How does it change her view of her husband, of her marriage, of herself? Paradoxically, the only way to answer these questions is to "put words into her mouth," to give her a voice although she has not exercised her power to speak.

The poem begins with the confrontation at the door. Bluebeard attempts to rob his wife of her subjectivity but speaking continuously. However, before the beginning of the poem, the wife has already opened the door. Although that forbidden gesture is her sole independent act in the poem, which actually occurs

outside of the poem, her defiance shows her power to do as she pleases even though these acts of authority are exercised in private, when no one is looking. The wife's intention remains a desire to access knowledge. I, therefore, disagree with Bruno Bettelheim's claim that the wife in the traditional tale is guilty of sexual indiscretion: "The behavior of Bluebeard's bride suggests two possibilities: that what she sees in the forbidden closet is the creation of her own anxious fantasies; or that she has betrayed her husband, but hopes he won't find out" (Bettelheim 301). Of course, Bettelheim bases his analysis of this tale and others upon Freudian psychology, and in that respect, his interpretation is possibly valid. Yet the fact that Bluebeard has killed several wives and stashed away their bodies seems less important than the wife's discovery of those atrocious crimes.

Shifting the focus from the woman's act of disobedience or of betrayal to Bluebeard's actions helps to adjust our received interpretations and views of the man but also of the various women he has lured into his trap. Paradoxically, the wife's total lack of speech in this sonnet aids in her acquisition of knowledge, allowing the focus to be fixed on Bluebeard. His wife seems to use her silence to triumph. She has opened the door, thus performing a significant act, but remains silent while Bluebeard admonishes her for her "betrayal" of him. Unlike the wives in Perrault's and other traditional renderings, this wife does not entreat his mercy. She stands quiet and still. Whatever she has seen is so disturbing to Bluebeard that he can no longer look at her nor stay with her. Nancy Milford,

author of the new biography of Millay, *Savage Beauty*, perpetuates the tradition of emphasizing the wife's act of disobedience rather than her husband's crimes. She calls him "a melancholy man of secrets" whose "wife's greedy intrusiveness has violated [his] necessary secret" (135-36). Rather, her opening the door is the act that permits her to be in control. Additionally, it gives her the understanding of what her Bluebeard fears most—knowledge of who he really is—a predator who seduces a naïve woman into his web, sucks the life from her and then abandons that web of deceit to spin new webs elsewhere.

Although the speaker in the poem demonstrates that if the wife is silent either because of the traditions and customs that sanction Bluebeard's acts of domination, he also demonstrates that the wife possesses other ways of accessing knowledge that will ultimately lead to authority over her life. As Estés notes about the significance of opening the door: "If she attempts to obey Bluebeard's command not to use the key, she chooses death for her spirit. By choosing to open the door to the ghastly secret room, she chooses life" (51). So, even though we might see the wife as weak and gullible because she has been ensnared into silence, we cannot overlook her defiance of Bluebeard, her purposeful confrontation with this formidable creature, exposing his destructiveness but also expanding the boundaries of her world. His departure might also indicate a shedding of those restrictions and demands a male dominated society has placed on her.

“Be Bold, be bold, but not too bold”

Helen Bertram expects that marriage at thirty-eight to Charles Smith will expand the boundaries of her world. What she does not know is that the man she has married has possibly murdered his previous six wives by drowning them in the bathtub and then burying the bodies in the cellar. “The Honeymoon of Mrs. Smith” by Shirley Jackson⁷ was perhaps written in the 1960’s.⁸ Unlike the other Bluebeard narratives, in which an older man seduces a younger girl,⁹ Mr. Smith (Bluebeard) seduces an older, mature woman. The couple comes to live in a small town while Mr. Smith ostensibly prepares their little house for their occupancy. In fact, he is preparing it for his wife’s death. The townspeople suspect that Mr. Smith is the man pictured in the newspapers charged with drowning six women in their bathtubs. It seems everyone wants to tell Mrs. Smith that she is in danger. When she is in the butcher shop, the grocer says, “Won’t *anybody* tell her?” But none of the customers do. Mrs. Smith mistakes the meaning of the grocer’s words. “You don’t need to tell me anything” (79).

Apparently, without offering any explanation, Mrs. Smith’s husband has convinced his wife that they should not read newspapers or listen to the radio. Of course, if she reads the papers or listens to the news, she might learn that her husband is a man wanted for murder. Her downstairs neighbor, Mrs. Armstrong, attempts in vain to convey this information by showing Mrs. Smith the newspaper

article in which a picture of Mr. Smith has been reproduced. But despite Mrs. Armstrong's urgings, Mrs. Smith refuses to look at the picture. What makes the narrative so poignant is the shifting of focalizations while the reader's perspective remains fixed. Although Mrs. Smith is the heroine, she, as well as Mrs. Armstrong, faces the same situation with strikingly different results.

Mrs. Armstrong holds the photograph that implicates Mrs. Smith's husband and is convinced the man in the photograph and Mr. Smith are the same individual. Therefore, she is certain Mrs. Smith's life is in danger. Mrs. Smith, however, dismisses her neighbor as a busybody, prone to "sensationalism" and therefore patronizes her. Mrs. Smith also believes that surrendering to Mrs. Armstrong's knowledge would be a betrayal of her husband's love and trust: "Mrs. Smith had a stern view of the obligation of a wife, particularly one who had been rescued from loneliness and unhappiness at what was surely the very last moment" (83). Mrs. Smith sees her husband as her savior; Mrs. Armstrong sees him as Mrs. Smith's destroyer: "'You think people around here are blind?'" (83). Mrs. Smith cannot possibly think Mrs. Armstrong is serious, which only serves to make Mrs. Armstrong more desperate in her attempts to save Mrs. Smith, to make her see:

'Look,' she said, 'all I can say is if you need any help—*any* help, *anytime*—just open your mouth and scream, see? Because my Ed will be up as fast as he can come. All you have to do is

scream or stamp on the floor, or if you can get away, make it downstairs to our place. One of us is sure to be there. Just remember—all you have to do is scream.’ (86)

Paradoxically, this near hysteria that Mrs. Smith perceives in her neighbor makes Mrs. Smith even more steadfast in her assessment of her new life. She recalls how she was “miserable and without a friend in the world. Father was gone, and there I sat, all alone and—she skipped hastily over the thought—even wondering what it would be like to walk out into the sea and just keep walking on and on” (86). And then her “prince” comes along with the promise to save her. Well-read in the fairy tale literature, as many young girls are, Helen Bertram Smith believes in the romance the literature perpetuates. Nothing would disturb her romantic image. Rather than see the truth, she fabricates a reality that does not upset her fantasy.

Thus, just as Mrs. Smith misreads Mrs. Armstrong’s protest, she also misreads the townspeople, who she thinks are critical because she behaves like a newly-wed, talking incessantly about her husband. Mrs. Smith “heard that distant sigh, and again the waiting silence. What do they want me to *do*, she wondered—pretend I’m a widow?” (79). The last part of her sentence, however, foretells her position as her husband’s victim.

At the town’s butcher shop, she has ordered lamb chops, which the butcher now places on the counter, giving “her one quick look over his shoulder,

and hurried back to the meat counter on the other side of the store" (79). It is almost as if he recognizes the lamb as a symbol of sacrifice but also of "one who can be duped or cheated." The contrast in focalization of the two characters creates ironic effect and suspense. Mrs. Smith sees the lamb as the ingredients for a fine dinner for her new husband. The butcher and people in the butcher shop see that she is sacrificing herself. Yet they have the power to help her avert danger. But no one will speak. "Won't *any*one?" the butcher reiterates after his plea to the townspeople to warn her. No one does speak, and Mrs. Smith is unperturbed. In fact, her misreading of the townspeople causes her to relish her new life: "And I'm a new person. Mrs. Charles Smith, she thought; I suppose I embarrass them because I am a little foolish about it" (80). Because there is no definitive action at the end of the story, the reader cannot be sure that the narrator has not altered the trajectory of the narrative.

Mrs. Smith is truly gullible. Enough evidence is presented to her at least to generate doubt about her husband. Instead of looking at the evidence directly, she allows custom and tradition regulating a wife's behavior to cloud her vision. Believing that her husband is a lonely widower, Mrs. Smith makes a promise to the former Mrs. Smith "that Mr. Smith should not be less happy in his second wife than he had been in his first wife" (81). The story about the drowning of six wives Mrs. Smith considers to be merely "vulgar horrors" and refuses to believe it even though the proof is in Mrs. Armstrong's hand. Mrs. Armstrong insists that

“maybe it wouldn’t hurt you this once—wouldn’t *hurt* you, listen to me!—just to glance a little at a clipping I got here. Just look at the picture, maybe” (84).

The more Mrs. Armstrong persists, the more resistant Mrs. Smith becomes, to the point of patronizing her neighbor: “‘Thank you,’ Mrs. Smith said, ‘I’ll be sure to call on you if I need anything’” (86). Even though she does not verbalize her thoughts, it seems as if Mrs. Smith believes her life to be a re-enactment of the Sleeping Beauty myth. As a result, no other interpretation is acceptable or possible in her view. Later, when Mr. Smith returns, he makes disparaging remarks about Mrs. Armstrong, reinforcing Mrs. Smith’s negative opinion of the neighbor and setting his wife apart from her. He asks, “What could someone like that have to say to *you*?” (87). Mrs. Smith dismisses all that Mrs. Armstrong has told her. Mr. Smith, however, suspecting the truth will soon come out, decides to take his wife to their new house that night rather than wait: “‘And that way,’ Mr. Smith said, as though talking to himself, ‘I can get started on the cellar first thing tomorrow morning’” (88). And Mrs. Smith will follow him because he represents her savior, her prince charming rather than her executioner.

Whatever Mrs. Smith’s fate is, she bears sole responsibility because she has elected alienation and isolation in favor of social ties, which are perhaps the major factors contributing to her probable death. In the Bluebeard tales in which the last wife is saved, she has established ties with family. For example, in

Perrault's tale, the wife cries out to her Sister Anne, who then looks out for their brothers. In "Mr Fox," Lady Mary gets the help of friends and kinsmen to destroy Mr. Fox. In "Fitcher's Bird," a German variant and in "Silver Nose," an Italian variant, sisters come to the rescue of their imprisoned siblings. Even in "Captain Murderer," the villainous captain is brought down because of the loyalty between sisters. In the version of "Bluebeard" that the Grimm brothers omitted from the revised editions of *Children's and Household Tales*,¹⁰ before Bluebeard's bride goes off with her new husband, she warns her brothers to listen for her screams: "Dear brothers, if you hear me scream, leave everything standing or lying wherever you are and come to my aid." They say: "If we hear your voice, we'll jump on our horses and soon be at your side" (Zipes *Complete* 661). In modern versions, such as *Jane Eyre*, "Bluebeard's Keys," "The Bloody Chamber," "The Lucky Leg," "Barbazure," etc.¹¹ social and familial ties are equally important. Even in "Captain Murderer," although the twin sister dies in the end, she is still the author of her text, having taken control of her life and of the man who has victimized so many other women. "The Honeymoon of Mrs. Smith" and the other stories in this chapter, however, are notable for the utter lack of social ties, especially with other women, even though the opportunity to make connections is present. Mrs. Smith is unable to establish a tie with other women for fear they will deprive her of the idyllic life she so desperately craves.

Joyce Carol Oates identifies a disturbing element in fairy tales—that “women are fairy tale beings yearning for nothing more than material comforts, a ‘royal’ marriage, a self-absorbed conventional life” (“Olden” 254). And the narrator of “Blue-Bearded Lover”¹² depicts a so-called royal marriage. The short story is divided into six parts, as if representational of the six dead wives. As in the other versions of the narrative, the wife is seduced and then betrayed. Thus far, betrayal has been abandonment, possible or actual murder and robbing of the wife’s identity and her potential for real knowledge and power. In Millay’s sonnet, the heroine dares to cross the threshold; Jackson’s heroine refuses to entertain the possibility of a fatal threshold to be crossed. Oates’s heroine has been beguiled into total, unquestioning submission. Her narrative parodies those female heroines who valorize fairy-tale romance in preference to real life. But she is behaving the way a good heroine should: “All good heroines accept their fate passively, unquestionably. To express even normal distress at being viciously mistreated would be in violation of the narrow strictures of fairy tale ‘goodness’” (“Olden” 251). Oates’s heroine is no exception. She epitomizes fairy-tale goodness the way Patient Griselda does.

The story begins with a short courtship, the marriage followed by the announcement. When Bluebeard tells her he is going away and cautions her about entering into the forbidden room, she does what no other wife does. She asks for a reason. His answer is simply: “Because I have forbidden it” (“Blue-

Bearded"185). She asks no other questions. She takes the key and he leaves for his journey.

In the next section of the story, the wife muses over the key. Recalling the Doré illustration above, this wife also focalizes the key as an object of trust. She also sees it as the object that separates her from Bluebeard's former wives and elevates her above them, for she sees the blood stain, the mark of their disobedience: "[The key] is faintly stained as if with blood" (185). Instead of seeing the bloodstain as a "mark of murder,"¹³ she sees it as a sign of his wives' betrayal: "Did I not know that my lover's previous brides had been brought to this house to die?—that they had failed him, one by one, and had deserved their fate?" (185). Clearly, she views the former wives as her rivals, and by contrasting herself to them assures her self that they deserved their fate because of some defect in their behavior. Oates underscores the point that: "The lot of women in a patriarchal society which privileges them as valuable possessions (of men), or brands them as worthless and contemptible, made it inevitable that women should perceive other women as dangerous rivals" ("Olden" 249). Just as Mrs. Smith is ultimately defeated because she refuses to trust other women, the heroine in Oates's story suffers as well. Sadly, she is ignorant of her suffering, which makes her predicament even more tragic.

Her suffering, however, quite different from that of Mrs. Smith, becomes evident in the penultimate section of the story when Bluebeard returns. The

homecoming scene nearly mirrors the scene in the Doré illustration (fig. 2) above. However, there is a critical difference. The Doré illustration depicts the scene by focusing on both Bluebeard and his wife as he gives her the key prior to departing on his journey. Bluebeard envisions the key as a sign of imminent disobedience; his wife erroneously sees it as an indication of his trust in her. As in the Doré illustration, the object of the focalization is the key. Unlike the wife in Perrault's tale, the one in Joyce Carol Oates's story does not use the key. Not using it is a sign of her indisputable loyalty. In turn, she believes she can appropriate Bluebeard's vision and thoughts. She says that he is "gratified to see the door to the forbidden room remained locked; and when he examined the key, still warm from my bosom, he saw that the stain was an old, old stain, and not of my doing" (185). Rather than be enraged at his apparent lack of trust in her, since he finds it necessary to examine the key, she exalts in his approval, failing to recognize his delegitimization of herself as an individual. He asks: "Do you give your life to me?" The suggestion in this story is that had Bluebeard's previous wife surrendered herself totally to her husband, he would not have put her to death. In effect, surrendering oneself to another is an alternate means of death—death of one's volition, one's spirit.

The final section of the story shows the extent to which the heroine has deceived herself into believing she accurately reads her lover's mind to become his true wife, loved "above all women." The cost of his "love" is immense, for not

only does Bluebeard control her waking vision, forcing her to see his murdered wives as being guilty of unspeakable crimes, he also takes control of her dreams. Bluebeard's wife says, "Sometimes in the morning my husband will recall them for me, for their marvels are such they invade even his dreams. How is it that you of all persons can dream such dreams, he says,--such curious works of art!" (186). Her inability to remember her dreams that he retains for his own pleasure is still another kind of victimization. Not only does he control her actions, he has access to her innermost thoughts. As a result, he has the potential to restrict what she thinks and dreams. Ultimately he has total control over her but not without her consent.

Sadly, the magnitude of her loss escapes her notice because mistakenly, she perceives his control over her as an expression of his love and devotion. Thus, she has no trouble surrendering herself to him, believing that "to be the receptacle for a man's passion is a woman's triumph" (184). Although the narrator's suggestion that "simply to be female is to be without volition, identity" might apply to her heroine in "Blue-Bearded Lover," the heroine does make choices even though they are the wrong ones ("Olden" 249). She also has an identity, which she has chosen to surrender. In effect, even though her story is unsettling in the intensity of her passivity, she has still authored her life. Granted, she is certainly not a bold one. In fact, she is probably the most gullible, the weakest Mrs. Bluebeard of them all, the representative of women who sees life

not as it is, but as she would like it to be; not a Mrs. Smith buried in the cellar, but a middle-class housewife “buried” in a two-car garage colonial home packing lunches for 2.5 children. If women obey and end up dead, what happens to women who are bold enough to disobey?

“Lest your heart’s blood should run cold”

Suniti Namjoshi, born in India, published *Feminist Fables* (1981) which includes “A Room of His Own,” a retelling of “Bluebeard” that is also anthologized in *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women*. The story inverts the prohibition / disobedience theme and is one of the few narratives in which Bluebeard’s wife does not open the door to the forbidden room, but Bluebeard kills her nonetheless.¹⁴ As in Edna St. Vincent Millay’s sonnet and Joyce Carol Oates’s story, Bluebeard and his wife are the only focalizers, and their point of focalization is the confrontation at the door to the forbidden room.

When Bluebeard returns from his voyage expecting to examine the proof of his wife’s betrayal, he is startled to discover a worse betrayal. The door has remained *unopened*. His wife has chosen to leave concealed the secrets that lie hidden behind it. In effect, she has in several respects “broken the sequence” of the story by her obedience. In Perrault’s narrative, when Bluebeard is away, all the neighbors come to visit. In Namjoshi’s narrative, the heroine spends her time

performing her wifely duties: cleaning, scrubbing, dusting, and minding her own business. Bluebeard asks, “But didn’t you want to want to know who I really am?” (85). The doubling of *want* suggests two things: that opening or not opening the door is irrelevant as compared to the *desire* to open the door and that he is concerned with her demonstrating a consuming interest in him.

Because the heroines in Oates’s and Jackson’s narratives surrender themselves to their Bluebearded husbands, their continued domination is ensured. Ironically, Namjoshi’s heroine recognizes the power of her husband, for she says, “You are Bluebeard and my husband” (85). Thus, her acculturation in how women are supposed to behave has been partially successful. She has learned that Bluebeard demands complete authority over his space. Her egregious error is in taking it upon herself to designate that space for him: “I think you’re entitled to a room of your own.” As a woman, she has no such authority. To assume that she has this right is to repudiate her designated role as a silent, obedient wife and to deny him unlimited authority. Her behavior “so incensed him that he killed her on the spot,” and at his trial for her murder, he pleaded provocation” (86). The cost of using her voice is to lose her life.

Although this last wife ends up dead, she is perhaps the most courageous of the women discussed in this chapter. In the introduction to the collection *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women*, Angela Carter writes: “Even if [the women] do not prosper exceedingly, they at least contrive to evade the victim’s role by the

judicious use of their wits, and they share a certain cussedness, a bloodymindedness” (xi). In other words, the heroine has a sense of her own authority and will fight to claim it and to keep it even if it means her death.

In a sense, Namjoshi’s heroine speaks for all women (real and fictional) who attempt authority over their texts and their lives in a world in which there is little justice. The good do not always win; the evil often triumph. Yet the victims, whether women or not, continue to struggle for their right to think, to act, to choose. “Fairy tales are thus primarily metaphors of the human personality, of the *individual’s* psyche’s struggle to be free of fear and compulsion” (Kolbenschlag 3). To return to the graphic above, what the reader sees from her vertex (fig. 1) at the convergence of the heroine’s and Bluebeard’s focalizations—is a husband disgraced by his inability to “read” his wife; a wife who also “misreads” her role in the marital relationship.

Cumulatively, these narratives suggest that obedience sidesteps the real issue. The wife is doomed regardless of her decision if she presumes to have the authority to make decisions about her space, her life. Even though Bluebeard too might err in his perception, he still maintains the authority to do as he pleases, a privilege backed for centuries by the sanction of custom and law.

The plight of women is an old story to be sure, a story of which many have grown tired, but one that compels women as well as men to re-tell it repeatedly. The narrative holds itself up as a mirror to life, offering its readers the

opportunity to see the reflection of truth and reality. “The Bluebeard archetype of the murdering husband/ helpless bride repeats, and repeats, and repeats through history; individuals lack all volition; caught in the impersonal cycle of murderer and victim, sexual psychopath and bride” (Oates “Olden” 267). Christina Pinkola Estés, author of *Women Who Run With Wolves*, identifies this syndrome as a “Bluebeardian mesmerization.” There is something attractive, perhaps, about a dangerous man. That might explain the reason the young woman marries Bluebeard when she has suspicions that his former wives have mysteriously disappeared. In addition, the woman thinks that the fairy-tale life she seeks will eventually materialize:

Many women have literally lived the Bluebeard tale. They marry while they are yet naïve about predators, and they choose someone who is destructive to their lives. They are determined to ‘cure’ that person with love. They are in some way ‘playing house.’ One could say, they have spent much time saying ‘His beard isn’t really so blue.’ (Estés 50)

Estés also suggests, and I too believe, that this “predatory potentate” is ever present in women’s lives disrupting their dreams: “It erupts in the midst of their most soulful and meaningful plans. It severs the woman from her intuitive nature. When its cutting work is done, it leaves the woman deadened in feeling, feeling frail to advance her life; her ideas and dreams lay at her feet drained of

animation” (40). The only thing remaining is her story, and the Bluebeard story becomes a metaphor for the story of men’s domination and violence against women and women’s attempt to survive.

Throughout human her/story, there have been numerous accounts of violence inflicted on women and wives. The laws made by and for men have been inadequate in protecting women. (Even now, the laws cannot fully protect a woman from a violent husband or lover.) Men unabashedly assert power and authority over women. In her recent book about the history of the Bluebeard tale, Mererid Puw Davies makes an explicit connection between the tale and domestic violence, saying, “And the tale reminds us of issues nearer home than literature,” namely, that men have committed the most horrible acts upon women in an effort to keep them in their place (254).

A late fourteenth-century merchant, *Le Ménagier*, married a young girl of fifteen. To instruct her in proper behavior befitting a wife, he wrote a manual for her. In the manual, he described an ideal wife as one who is dutiful, obedient and patient (Amt 169-70). He also informed his young wife that her chief concerns were the “the salvation of your soul and the comfort of your husband” (Anderson and Zinsser 1: 443).¹⁵ Failing her duty, she could expect severe punishment:

Little by little [some wives] try to show less respect and service and obedience, but—what is more—they take upon themselves

authority, command and lordship, first in a small thing, then in a larger, and a little more every day. Thus they attempt and advance and rise [. . .] And certainly, it is an ill thought and deed, for when the husbands see that they cease their service, and climb to domination, and that they do it too much, and that by enduring ill, good may come, then those women are all at once, by their husband's rightful will, cast down even as Lucifer was. (Amt 322)¹⁶

Le Ménagier also graphically describes the consequences of disobedience. He tells a story of a young bride who complains to her mother that her husband will not have sexual relations with her. Her mother's advice is to test her husband's ability to forgive in case she decides to be unfaithful. The wife performs several random acts of "disobedience." She chops down a tree, and she kills her husband's dog. At a Christmas dinner, she upsets the table. The husband is quiet, but the next day calls in the barber to bleed her:

Then he bade her right arm to be warmed at the fire and when it was warmed, he bade bleed her; and she bled until the thick red blood came forth...then bade her draw her other arm from out her dress. The lady began to cry mercy. Nought availed it, for he had the second arm warmed and bled, and they took so much that she swooned and lost all speech and became in hue as one dead. (Anderson and Zinsser 1: 439-40)

After this ordeal, the wife learns her lesson. She never hints at infidelity again. If *Le Ménagier's* wife harbored any thoughts of infidelity, she probably kept them to herself. Husbands had other means of keeping their wives in line: "A few cuffs on the ear given by a husband became a sign that a wife was being kept in her proper place. French and English sermons told of disobedient wives drowned, their backs broken, dead from poison, all because they had done what their husbands had forbidden" (1: 439).

Violence against women was tolerated and in some instances expected. An inheritance of Roman law is the notion that women were property and that men could do what they chose with them. As Marilyn Yalom notes in *History of the Wife* that in the Middle Ages, "battering was an accepted practice, sanctioned by law and custom, that allowed husbands to enforce authority over their wives" (47). She also notes that court records show that the husbands' illicit behavior was condoned: "Even when concerned family members and neighbors intervened and brought the matter to the attention of the courts, the husband usually got off with only a fine or pledge to 'receive his wife in his house and treat her agreeably'" (Yalom 47). In sixteenth-century France, a man could be pardoned for killing an adulterous wife. (Anderson and Zinsser 1: 436). Unfaithful husbands were never punished, however (1: 436). "The double standard of behavior and punishment for women and men prevailed. Initially in sixteenth-century Geneva, women were whipped, and their male companions banished. By

1604 the man only had to pay a fine while the woman was whipped and then banished if she committed adultery again" (1: 436).

Although violence against women was "commonplace" in earlier centuries, it has still not disappeared.¹⁷ In the nineteenth century, Frances Power Cobbe detailed numerous instances of wife abuse in her article, "Wife-Torture in England," published in the *Contemporary Review* in April 1878. She suggests that society condones and perpetuates wife-beating. She also suggests reasons for violence against women: "The notion that a man's wife is his PROPERTY, in the sense in which a horse is his property (descended to us rather through the Roman law than through the customs of our Teuton ancestors), is the fatal root of incalculable evil and misery. Every brutal-minded man, and many a man who in other relations of life is not brutal, entertains more or less vaguely the notion that his wife is his *thing*, and is ready to ask with indignation (as we read again and again in the police reports), of any one who interferes with his treatment of her, 'May I not do what I will *with my own*?' (300-01). In addition, Cobbe reproduces accounts from newspapers about violence inflicted on wives: "[Thomas Harlow] had some further altercation with his wife, which ended with him striking her a violent blow under the right ear, felling her to the floor. She died in a few minutes afterwards, the cause of death being concussion of the brain" (315). William Hussell, a butcher, ran a knife into his wife several times and killed her. Had threatened to do so often before" (312). Cobbe quotes an

article at length to demonstrate “the motives for Wife-murder, the sort of woman who is murdered, the man who kills, and the sentiment of juries as to what constitutes ‘provocation’ on the part of the wife” (314). Cobbe also discloses that for all the horrors reported, “at least three or four which *never are reported at all*, and where the poor victim dies quietly of her injuries like a wounded animal, without seeking the mockery of redress offered by the law” (311).

The offenses mentioned above were committed after the English Parliament passed a law against “Aggravated Assaults Upon Women and Children” in 1853. Men were subjected to six months in prison for beating their wives or children younger than fourteen years old. In the United States, laws protecting women were enacted twenty-five years later.¹⁸ These laws did not outlaw wife-beating;¹⁹ they restricted it, and only a few punished men guilty of breaking the law: “And because the laws were not enforced, the lives of women were little changed” (Jones 21). Wife-beating was practiced in many places into the nineteenth century, and even after it was no longer legal, husbands continued to maim countless wives from every ethnic and social sector (Yalom 47).²⁰ In fact, it wasn’t until the twentieth-century that laws forbade a man’s claim to the “‘privilege, ancient though it be, to beat [his wife] with a stick, to pull her hair, choke her, spit in her face or kick her about the floor, or to inflict upon her other indignities” (Jones 21). In fact, in Britain, as a component of Punch and Judy shows that began in the seventeenth century and are still being

performed, Punch throws his baby out of a window and when Judy confronts him, beating him with a stick, Punch wrestles the stick from her and beats her until she is dead. After Punch kills Judy in *The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Punch and Judy* published in 1827, he laughs and says, "To lose a wife is to get a fortune," and then he sings:

Who'd be plagued with a wife
That could set himself free
With a rope or a knife,
Or a good stick, like me. (Collier 12)

In fact, Frances Power Cobbe condemns the public acceptance of wife-beating "Certainly in view of the state of things revealed by our criminal statistics there is something ominous in the circumstance that 'Punch' should have been our national English street-drama for more than two centuries" ("Wife" 293).

"Bluebeard" too was published frequently throughout the century. In addition to his "Captain Murderer," Charles Dickens alludes to "Bluebeard" in many novels.²¹ Thackeray wrote at least four retellings: "Bluebeard's Ghost" (1843), "Barbazure" (1847), "The Awful History of Bluebeard" (1833), and "Bluebeard at Breakfast (1851)," an unfinished play in blank verse.²² He alludes to the "Bluebeard" in *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, and *Barry Lyndon*. "Bluebeard" was performed on stage frequently in pantomimes, harlequinades, burlesques, etc. and strangely seems to have been popular at Christmas time.²³ Violence against women is a serious

social issue. Even if the subject disturbs our sensibilities, evasion can neither meliorate nor eliminate the problem.

The number of women killed by husbands and lovers is astounding. According to Ann Jones, "in Massachusetts, in 1989, one woman was slain by her husband or boyfriend every twenty-two days. In 1990 such a murder occurred every sixteen days. As I write in 1992, it is happening every nine days" (7). The laws have failed women perhaps because they have been "written by men for men [. . .] designed to protect men from the power of the state and to adjudicate conflicts between men, to preserve order in a society of men" (23-24). Jones offers another staggering statistic on the number of wives and children murdered in a six-year period. She notes that from 1967 through 1973, 17,500 wives and children were killed in the United States. In 1991, the number of assaults, rapes and murders escalated to 21,000.

Two years after Jones published her book, the United States passed the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 "to increase the understanding and control of violence against women, including rape and domestic violence" (Crowell and Burgess 18). Recent research has found that violence against wives occurs throughout the world, cutting across ethnic, racial, socioeconomic lines.²⁴ "Male violence against women is a daily reality for women everywhere. [. . .] And a disturbing trend seems to be increasing violence in all countries" (Davies *Women* 224). It is not simply the stuff of fairy tales. Even though critics decried

“Bluebeard” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they did not seem to voice any public objection to wife-abuse or murder. A husband had rights, after all. In many places, husbands still have rights.

So women continue to retell “Bluebeard.” While the basic premise of the story perpetuates the myth that if only Bluebeard’s wife had behaved herself and curtailed her curiosity, she would not have been in such an awful predicament, the narratives in this chapter suggest the absolute unpredictability of Bluebeard’s responses to his wife’s actions. Whatever his behavior, his motive seems to be about maintaining power and control over his wife. The only solution, it seems, is to avoid his trap altogether.

Although women are widely expected to be obedient to men, the narratives in this chapter suggest that disobedience as well as obedience leads to death—literal, emotional or spiritual. In fact, Mereid Puw Davies suggests that women writers “try to provide an explanation of, the way in which circumstances of women’s lives can generate complicity and masochism. [. . .] In addition, she suggests, “women writers describe a more complex, fragmented, or split subjectivity which makes the heroine’s liberation more problematic” (252). In fact, the narratives examined in this chapter are the ultimate parody of the “obey or die” paradigm.

While it might seem that the heroines at issue have repudiated their personal authority, when we view their behavior from their perspective, we realize

that they have indeed told their own stories, despite the terrible contradiction between visions of what they desire their lives to be and our perception of what they really are. Their gullibility and naïveté may disturb us, but the fact that they have not broken free of domination does not make them less heroic. A soldier who dies in battle is honored as a hero. In fact, his death is the catalyst that elevates him to heroic status. To some extent, these wives who confront their spouses at the forbidden door are symbols of supreme heroism, for they dare to act in ways that subvert the expectations held not only by their husbands but often by both tradition and the community-at-large. Even when the heroine seems headed for her doom as in “The Honeymoon of Mrs. Smith,” she has authored her story in terms that uphold her personal vision of the world and her place in it.

These narratives risk our thinking once more about the unthinkable. They undermine the notion of “once upon a time” by confronting us instead with “today, in a town, on a block, and in a house just like yours:

1. Ruth Bunnell [. . .] called police and told them her husband was on his way to her house to kill her. Police told her to wait until he arrived. When the police showed up later in response to a neighbor's call, she had already been stabbed to death. (Jones 246 n 9)
2. '[Old Foster] caught women and boiled 'em in front

of the fire and eat 'em. [. . .] and get 'em to come out and catch em and jest boil thy breasts.' (Carter *Strange* 12)

3. James Mills cut his wife's throat as she lay in bed. He was quite sober at the time. On a previous occasion he had nearly tore away her left breast. (Cobbe "Wife" 311)

Of the three illustrations above, only the second is fiction. But whether fact or fiction, the endings of Millay's, Jackson's, Oates's, and Namjoshi's narratives are a disturbing but necessary challenge to Perrault and the tradition of story tellers who insist that good inevitably triumphs in the end. Good only wins when gender equality is widely accepted and strictly enforced. Even then, there is no guarantee. The women authors under discussion center their narratives upon heroines who may not be admirable, whose stories can rarely be envied and whose positions as wives of a Bluebeard make rational solutions to their circumstances difficult and problematic. Nonetheless, they might be, as Mererid Puw Davies suggests, complicit in their own oppression. They stand in front of doors, either opened or closed, at the threshold of knowledge, imagining their potential without ever fulfilling it. If only male domination weren't so pervasive, precarious, and formidable, these women might have become living heroines instead of dead, or self-abandoned ones.

The female protagonists examined in the following chapters offer alternative stories that are more appealing but perhaps less convincing than the

ones just examined. Nevertheless, the cunning, clever, and strong heroines / narrators in Chapters Three and Four present real challenges to their Bluebeards, and in most cases they win.

¹ Sophocles also has Philomela weave a picture. See notes to *Metamorphoses* 412: 582.

² Technically, the heroine would be called a narrating agent, as would other focalizers in the text. To avoid confusion and to maintain my emphasis on “story” and “narrative” rather than theory, I shall use the term *heroine* and character, but will occasionally refer to the character as the “other narrating agent” to make the point that characters other than the protagonist tell a story that affects the meaning as a whole.

³ Reader response theorists suggest that texts have no meaning until the reader makes sense out of the text. (See *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* by Louise Rosenblatt and “Death of the Author,” by Roland Barthes, for example.) I suggest here that the focalization has significance when the reader is also the focalizer, making sense and meaning out of the images she sees.

⁴ I am taking the liberty of reproducing and discussing an illustration because it seems appropriate, but also because Mieke Bal uses a picture to explain focalization in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Also, many of us, I think, tend to see the images text makes rather than the text itself.

⁵ McNeil cites *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan to support the concept of focalization extending beyond the visual.

⁶ See “Literary and Mystical Voices” by Danielle Régner-Bohler for a discussion of women’s silence during the Middle Ages and how they began to break their silences.

⁷ Jackson wrote two versions of this story, which were never published in her lifetime. In 1998, her children published a collection of previously

unpublished and uncollected stories in *Just an Ordinary Day*. They also suggest that this is one story that “tried to get [itself] written over and over throughout Jackson’s life (xi).

⁸ Joyce Carol Oates suggests this approximate date in her essay prefacing her own retelling in “In Olden Times, When Wishing Was Having” (266).

⁹ Estés notes that the older woman who fails to recognize the destructive power of a Bluebeard can also be a victim. She falls prey partially because she has no one to guide and support her (46).

¹⁰ See *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* edited by Jack Zipes, page 660-63; 738.

¹¹ “The Lucky Leg” is a story by Hesba Stretton published in *Household Words* 1859. What this Bluebeard collects is not the corpses of his dead wives but their wooden legs. His previous wives had wooden legs. He has made a promise to only marry women with wooden legs. In “Barbazure” by William Thackeray, Bluebeard’s wife is protected by a former lover.

¹² Joyce Carol Oates includes this short story in her essay “In Olden Times,” but I refer to the version in *The Assniation*, which includes the sixth section, omitted in the essay.

¹³ In Anne Thackeray’s verse argument prefacing “Bluebeard’s Keys,” the heroine calls the bloodstain the “mark of murder,” and thus shifts blame from the wife to the wife-killer.

¹⁴ In Donald Bartheleme’s story entitled “Bluebeard,” the wife refuses to look into the closet until her husband goads her into it. There is no question that the heroine knows her husband’s reputation. She believed that what lay “behind the door [was] nothing more than rotting flesh” (94). Because of his insistence on her opening the door, she begins to doubt. “Did he *want* me to open the door? To discover, in the room behind the door, hanging on hooks, the beautifully dressed carcasses of my six predecessors? But what if, contrary to informed opinion, the beautifully dressed carcasses of my six predecessors were not behind the door? What was” (94)? When she does open the door, she finds not dead wives, but corpses of zebras wearing Chanel dresses.

¹⁵ Excerpt taken from *Le Ménagier de Paris*.

¹⁶ It is notable that in some versions of "Bluebeard," e.g. "Silver Nose," the forbidden door is the entrance to hell where the former wives are burning.

¹⁷ See Amt and Anderson and Zinsser.

¹⁸ See *Next Time She'll Be Dead*, Ann Jones, p. 21.

¹⁹ Anne Thackeray Ritchie raises the issue of wife-beating in her fairy tale, "Sleeping Beauty." (See chapter four.)

²⁰ Ann Jones supplies ample facts and statistics about the frequency and seriousness of wife abuse in America, pp 6-7.

²¹ See Bentley, Slater and Burgis (26).

²² See "'Bluebeard at Breakfast:' An Unpublished Thackeray Manuscript" by Juliet McMaster for a discussion of allusions to "Bluebeard" in Thackeray's works.

²³ See *A History of Nineteenth-Century English Drama, 1850-1900* by Allardyce Nicoll.

²⁴ See *Women and Violence* by Miranda Davies for an examination of domestic violence as it occurs around the world.

That I and many women should go looking through the books for fairy tale heroines is [. . .] a wish to validate my claim to a fair share of the future by stating my claim to my share of the past.

Angela Carter *Old Wives Fairy Tale Book*

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.

1 Timothy 2, 9

Chapter 3: Wise, Clever and Alive

So far, Female writers' attempts at subverting patriarchal authority in "Bluebeard" tales so far considered here have mostly failed. Heroines have been abandoned, violated (physically and mentally), chopped up, salted and baked in pies. However, women's stories do not end there. It would be dismal indeed if they did. Fortunately, there is another group of stories in which authors have employed subversive narrative strategies to help women re-vision male texts by such authors as St. Jerome, Chaucer, Perrault, Grimm, and the anonymous writers of *Thousand and One Nights* to create texts of their own that are new, creative, and multifaceted.

The penultimate stage, then, of this study of re-visions of Perrault's "Bluebeard" is an examination of the ways in which women have laid claim to authority/authorship in a world which has a long-standing tradition of silencing

them and denying them both knowledge and authority. Although I continue to suggest that Perrault's "Bluebeard" ostensibly privileges patriarchal authority (despite Bluebeard's death at the end of the story), women writers, have reshaped their texts to make them more consonant with women's perspectives, an activity that starts even with the inception of the literary fairy tale in France. In 1696, Catherine Bernard, virtually unknown today, published a retelling of the folk tale "Riquet à la Houppe" and incorporated it into her novel *Inès de Coudoue*. However, a year after her story appeared, Charles Perrault published his rendering of the tale in his *Contes*. His name has become almost synonymous with the fairy tale, suppressing the female voices that preceded him.

In the last chapter, I attempted to show how "Bluebeard's" perpetuation of male dominance terminates in violence. Here, I would like to focus on "Bluebeard" as a metaphor for the silencing of women and keeping them in their places in the male/female binary. Therefore, it might be useful to examine briefly the environment in which Perrault produced his tales and how his work compared to that of his female contemporaries. "Although literary historians and critics alike have canonized only Perrault's tales, it is now widely recognized that seventeenth-century fairy-tale writing was concentrated in the salon milieu and monopolized by aristocratic women and their elite associates who authored two-thirds, or 74 of the 114 narratives published between 1690 and 1715" (Hannon 11). As might be expected, men were displeased about women dominating this

genre: “There is ample evidence that women’s encroachment on what was emerging as an important literary and political power-base elicited anxiety on the part of a number of men who were competing with their peers to establish a prestigious position for themselves in this newly surfacing cultural hierarchy” (166-67). Then Hannon proceeds to quote Monsieur A.B. A. who complained that if women continued to write, “Men [would] be forced to devote their talents to needlework: ‘Au lieu que notre Sexe hela / Serea reduit au Canevas, / Fitera par jour sa fusée, / ...N’aura l’oeil que sur sa famille, / Et travaillera de l’aiguille. / ...Les Sexes seront confondus, / Vous aurez par tout le dessus” (167). Given these attitudes, it is possible that there is a subtext to be detected in Perrault’s “Bluebeard,” one that is intended to censure women who dare to forget their place, one that calls for a return to an “ordered society” in which women demonstrate appropriate behaviors.

Griselde could serve as an appropriate model for such women. In the preface to *Tales in Verse* (1695), Perrault writes that the “Moral of Griselidis, [. . .] leads women to tolerate their husbands, and to show that there is no husband so brutal or so capricious that the patience of an honest woman cannot bring him around” (Zarucchi 121). Of course, Perrault’s beliefs did not escape his female contemporaries. According to Hannon, Henriette de Murat criticized Perrault’s tales for his valorization of menial household tasks: “the kind advocated for the homebound women in Perrault’s *Apologie*. The irreverent Murat expressly

disdains Perrault's frequently misogynist tales by ridiculing the outmoded 'art' of these ancient fairies together with their 'Contes de ma Mère l'Oye,' the very inscription found on the frontispiece of Perrault's *Contes du temps passé*" (185).

Henriette de Murat(1670-1716), Catherine Bernard (1662-1712), and even Perrault's own niece Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier (1664-1734) were writing on ideas that were not the usual ones for women. Patricia Hannon writes, "One discerns a topography of fairy-tale writing in which Murat's 'other routes,' her 'different routes,' and L'Héritier's own 'new routes' delineate a symbolic territory far from the confines of the family hearth so ubiquitous in the texts on women's nature" (180).

The writings of Charlotte-Rose Caumont de La Force (1650-1724) led to her expulsion from Louis XIV's court and forced her into a convent where she continued to write. (Zipes *Beauties* 76). Of Mademoiselle de Lubert (c. 1710-c.1779), Zipes says, "We must consider her perspective as that of a single woman opposed to marriage and traditional social norms, who saw her tales as a subversive means to make her critical private views extraordinarily public" (259). Third, Perrault's own niece, L'Héritier (1664-1734), also never married, kept a salon, and influenced the fairy tale form "for the next hundred years." Yet, she, like many of her female contemporaries, is virtually unknown today.

It is not within the scope of this project to ascertain the reasons that Perrault's tales are world famous, but it is interesting to note that when Perrault's

“Riquet à la Houppe” is contrasted to Catherine Bernard’s version of that tale, the issues of domination/subjugation; obedience/disobedience are treated from the author’s gendered perspective.

First, the beginnings of both narratives suggest gendered privileging.¹ For example, Perrault begins “Riquet” by introducing the male character as he also does in “Bluebeard,” even though it is the wife’s story. Perrault writes: “Il était une fois une reine qui eut un fils si laid et si mal fait, qu’on douta longtemps si’il avait forme humaine” (Perrault *Contes* 80). He begins “Bluebeard” similarly. “Il était une fois un homme qui.” By contrast, Bernard begins: “A grandnobleman of Grenada, whose wealth was equal to his high birth, experienced a domestic calamity that poisoned all the treasures of his fortune. His only daughter was so stupid that her naturally beautiful features only served to make her appearance distasteful” (Bernard 95). Perrault names neither Bluebeard’s wife nor the girl in “Riquet à la Houppe.” Bernard calls the girl Mama. In both stories, Riquet cast a spell on the girl, giving her brains in exchange for a promise of marriage. The marriage is to take place in one year. When the year is up, the girl reneges on her promise. Riquet threatens to make her stupid again. Neither the girl in Bernard’s nor in Perrault’s story relishes that idea.

A key difference between the two tales emerges at the conclusion of the tale. Perrault presents the conventional notion that the love of a good woman will transform the most hideous of men. Thus, once she is able to love Riquet, he is

metamorphosed and “parut à ses yeux l’homme du monde le plus beau, le mieux fait et le plus aimable qu’elle eût jamais vu” (*Contes* 90). In Bernard’s tale, Mama does not possess this transforming “power.” Rather, she uses her newly acquired intelligence to solve her dilemma. Nightly, she drugs Riquet so that he sleeps soundly and sneaks out of the house to spend the night with her lover. Eventually, however, Riquet discovers his wife’s deception. He kills neither wife nor lover. Nor is he transformed into a handsome man as he is in Perrault’s story. Instead, Riquet transforms his wife’s lover into a man who looks exactly like himself. Now, Mama has two Riquets: one, the husband, the other the lover. “And after looking back and forth and back and forth, Mama could no longer distinguish who her husband was. Thus she lived with two husbands instead of one, never knowing to whom she should address her lamentations for fear of mistaking the object of her hatred for the object of her love” (Bernard 100). The story ends with a startling conclusion that only a female narrator probably would have written. “But perhaps she hardly lost anything there. In the end lovers become husbands anyway” (100).

It seems safe to assume that Perrault intends the reader to believe that his heroine will live happily ever after just as Bluebeard’s widow is assured a happy life with her second husband, “qui lui fit le mauvais temps qu’elle avait passé avec La Barbe-Bleue” (*Contes* 20). Perhaps the “mauvais temps” is not the punishment Bluebeard is about to inflict on his wife but her disobedience, i.e.

succumbing to her “curiosity.” One of the two morals Perrault appends to the tale says, “Curiosity, in spite of its charm, / Too often causes a great deal of harm. / A thousand new cases arise each day” (Zipes *Beauties* 34). However, since the widow has a second chance at marriage, she has probably learned her lesson and will behave in a manner befitting a wife. Even though she might not be locked in a room, she remains a “[prisoner] of powerful convention,” a state Perrault seems to favor for women. Lilyane Mourey, interprets Perrault’s views on this matter as follows:

‘Perrault argues for the total submission of the woman to her husband. Feminine coquetry (which is the only privilege of the dominant class) disturbs and upsets him: it could be the sign of female independence. It opens the way for the amorous conquest which endangers one of the fundamental values of society—the couple, the family. As we have seen, the heroines of the tales are very pretty, loyal, dedicated to their household chores, modest and docile and sometimes a little stupid insofar as it is true that stupidity is almost a quality in women for Perrault. Intelligence could be dangerous.’ (qtd. in Zipes *Trials* 31)

In that statement, there seems to be at least a modicum of truth, since after Bluebeard’s wife opens the *petit cabinet* and gains knowledge, he sentences her

to death. It would be safer and easier to live in ignorance, but women often are attracted to what is dangerous, and knowledge fits into that category.

To escape the death sentence or (death of their sentence) female narrators exploit the power of narrative. Philomela weaves her story into a tapestry; Alisoun captivates her fellow pilgrim listeners with her stories; Shahrazad enthralls King Shahrayar by telling him a thousand and one stories in succession, each folding into the next one. Of course, Shahrazad is in a fight for her life as is Bluebeard's wife. Perrault spares her life but at the cost of severing her story. The last sentence of "Bluebeard" puts the wife in a state of passivity. The husband makes her forget her bad times. She has no story to tell. Given the opportunity to speak, Bluebeard's wife would, indeed, have many stories to tell.

Of the many stories that hers might suggest, I closely examine three: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber," and finally Margaret Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg"² to illustrate the extent to which women writers have used the bluebeard narrative to represent successful attempts to transgress patriarchal authority. The dead wives in Bluebeard's closet might now become a symbol of the consequences of defying male authority, of trying to take one's place in the world as an independent, thinking being while the last surviving one points ahead to women who will prove able to dis/member Perrault's tale and re/member it into a tale of their own.

Jane Eyre

The process through which Jane becomes the author of her own life begins with Charlotte Brontë herself and her feelings about herself as author. Initially, Brontë tenaciously guarded her anonymity, fearing the public's negative reception of a woman author. To her publisher, she wrote:

‘Currer Bell’ only I am and will be to the Public; if accident or design should deprive me of that name, I should deem it a misfortune—a very great one. Mental tranquillity would then be gone; it would be a task to write, a task which I doubt whether I could continue. If it were known, I should ever be conscious in writing that my book must be read by ordinary acquaintances, and that idea would fetter me intolerably.’ (Fraser 290)

According to Rebecca Fraser, “anonymity gave Charlotte [sic] additional confidence to breathe defiance at the world over *Jane Eyre* when, as Mrs. Gaskell—who was there to witness it—said, ‘the whole reading-world of England was in a ferment to discover the unknown author’” (290). Fraser also says: “writing was a way of getting round the social attitudes that made female writers ‘notorious’” (290). Brontë herself explains her preference for anonymity. She writes:

Notoriety I neither seek nor will have. If then any Birstallian or Gomersalian should presume to bore you on the subject,—to ask

you what 'novel' Miss Brontë has been 'publishing'-- you can just say, with the distinct firmness of which you are perfect mistress, when you choose, that you are authorized by Miss Brontë to say, that she repels and disowns every accusation of the kind. (290)

The effect of Brontë's denying her authorship is two-fold. She shields herself from public censure, but at the same time stirs public curiosity about her identity. Gaskell says, "In every town people sought out the list of their friends and acquaintances, and turned away in disappointment. No one they knew had genius enough to be the author. Every little incident mentioned in the book was turned this way and that to answer, if possible, the much-vexed question of sex. All in vain" (326). Upon her return to London, Ellen Nussey recollects that the public "'found a *fureur* about the authorship of the new novel. The work was quickly obtained, and as soon as it arrived it was seized upon and the first half page read aloud.'" (Fraser 277) Even Thackeray was both captivated by the novel and curious about the author's identity: "Who the author can be I can't guess, if a woman she knows her language better than most ladies do, or has had a 'classical' education. It is a fine book though [. . .] I don't know why I tell you this but that I have been exceedingly moved and pleased by *Jane Eyre*" (278). Many others were delighted by the novel, making it an immediate success with the reading public, even though some reviewers criticized it harshly. *The Economist*

exclaimed that if *Jane Eyre* had been written by a man, it would be due praise, but if written by a woman, “she must be a woman unsexed” (Monsarrat 254).

Even more vicious was Elizabeth Rigby’s attack. In *The Quarterly Review*, December 1848, Rigby speculated on the gender of the author and concluded no woman could have written the novel. “Without entering into the question whether the power of the writing be above her, or the vulgarity below her, there are, we believe, minutiae of circumstantial evidence which at once acquit the feminine hand” (Fraser 453). Rigby offers evidence against the novel as a creation by a woman. If the inconsistencies are used to disguise female authorship, says Rigby, “there is nothing gained; for if we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex” (453).

Although it is probably impossible to ascertain whether *Jane Eyre* would have engendered the kind of “*fureur*” it did had Brontë initially claimed authorship, we can surely say that her anonymity caused much talk and speculation in her day and perhaps heightened interest in the novel, helping to make it an instant success and an enduring tale. What is important to note is that *Jane Eyre* is one of the narratives, like *Shahrazad’s* thousand and one, that keeps the woman’s sentence alive. Barthes argues that the “death of the author” is necessary for the birth of the reader. For *Jane Eyre*, it seems that the “death” of the author aided the birth and life of the narrator herself. Young Anne

Thackeray Ritchie writes of her first impression of Brontë when the latter came to dinner:

‘This, then, is the authoress, the unknown power whose books have set all London talking, reading, speculating; some people even say our father wrote the books—the wonderful books. To say that we little girls had been given *Jane Eyre* to read scarcely represents the act of the case; to say that we had taken it without leave, read bits here and read bits there, been carried away by an undreamed-of and hitherto unimagined whirlwind into things, times, places, all utterly absorbing, and at the same time absolutely unintelligible to us, would more accurately describe our state of mind on that summer’s evening as we look at Jane Eyre—the great Jane Eyre—the tiny little lady.’ (qtd. in Fraser 370-71)

When Anne Thackeray conflates the fictional narrator and the author, it seems that Brontë, the author, slowly fades, and Jane takes over her “autobiography.” The novel seems to compel us to read it as if it were Jane’s independent creation. As such, I shall examine the narrative through several narrative strategies Jane employs: direct addresses to the reader; expostulation on her beliefs about appropriate female behavior; the embedding of numerous intertexts into her narrative, including *The Arabian Nights*, “Mr Fox,” “Wife of Bath,” “Beauty and the Beast,” the biblical story of Samson and Delilah, and of

course, “Bluebeard.”³ The last tale is most significant, I think, since it and its analogue, “Mr Fox,” frame the narrative from the moment Jane enters Edward Rochester’s world.

First, by using direct address to the reader, Jane creates a strong impression that she is constructing her own text of which she alone is the authority. She controls the events (in the sense that she records certain events and omits others) and the reader’s assessment of them. Each address seems designed for a specific purpose. For one, her addresses help to situate her story in time and place: “Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence: to the first ten years of my life, I have given almost as many chapters. [. . .] I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only necessary to keep up the links of connection” (83). With her addresses, Jane corrects the reader’s thinking: “Reader, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind” (94). She tells the reader what to remember, what to forget, what to think. “A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must forget you see a room in a George Inn at Millcote [. . .]” (94). She even invites the reader to continue reading even though she withholds information until a later time. “Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence” (278).

Sometimes, though, Jane merely conveys necessary information.

“Reader! —I forgave him at the moment, and on the spot” (302). After Mason stops the wedding, and Jane is leaving Rochester, she says, “I had already gained the door: but, reader, I walked back—walked back as determinedly as I had retreated. I knelt down by him; I turned his face from the cushion to me; I kissed his cheek; I smoothed his hair with my hand” (323).

Finally, she addresses the reader to gain her sympathy. “Gentle reader, may you never feel what I then felt! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding heart-wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and agonized as in that hour left my lips: for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love’ (326). She leaves, but in the end, the conflicts are all resolved, and then the famous words, “Reader, I married him” begins the final chapter of the book in which Jane ties the final pieces of her story together, including information about Rochester’s ward, Adèle (454).⁴

To address the reader in such a way as to modulate her responses helps to ensure Jane’s authority over her text. She not only writes her autobiography, which makes her an author/ity, but she speaks to the reader without encouraging the reader to make any independent response. Monod writes that when Jane queries her readers, “We are made to feel that we have answered, and that we have of course given the wrong answer. But we are also given a sense of our own

existence as readers, and of the fact that the novel is not being written in a vacuum but addressed to us" (Dunn 498). The problem is that the reader is often uninformed or is ignorant "so that many a 'Reader' has to be devoted to rejecting or correcting our mistaken opinions" (501).

Direct address to the reader is only one of the strategies Jane uses to establish herself as the author/ity of her text.⁵ The second strategy, which Jane uses only occasionally, is expostulation. Despite convention, Jane is painfully honest about her needs and desires. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that reviewers were not as disturbed "by the proud Byronic sexual energy of Rochester as by the Byronic pride and passion of Jane herself, not so much by the asocial sexual vibrations between hero and heroine as by the heroine's refusal to submit to her social destiny" (338). Yes, Jane refuses to accept the destiny society has designed for her.⁶ She will not sit and be silent. She proclaims her position in a voice as strong and absolute as does Alisoun, the Wife of Bath, who challenges the thinking of her day:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making

puddings and knitting stocking, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë 118-19)

How shocking those words were to Victorian readers. Critics retaliated. In the same *Quarterly Review* article cited above, Elizabeth Rigby condemns Jane for being proud and ungrateful. She considers Jane to be “an uninteresting, sententious, pedantic thing; with no experience of the world” (Dunn 3rd ed. 452). Finally, she lambastes the author for those qualities we now valorize—“the tone of mind which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home” (452-53). *Jane Eyre* survives the harsh criticism probably because the story and ideas Brontë expressed touched the hearts and minds of her readers in ways that few books have done. Her narrator tells a story that is simultaneously new and fresh as well as old and familiar.

Jane creates elements of her story out of the fabric of old stories, giving certain texts more significance than others. “Bluebeard” and Perrault are alluded to at the beginning of the narrative. For example, one of Jane’s teachers at Lowood is *Madame Pierrot*⁷ (pronunciation similar to Perrault) who teaches her French and tells her stories, which could have been Perrault’s “Bluebeard,”

“Cendrillon ou la petite panoufle de vair,” or even “Riquet à la Houppe.” These and other stories Jane submerges in her “autobiography.”⁸

Throughout her narrative, Jane threads the “forbidden chamber” motif central to “Bluebeard.”⁹ She introduces this “forbidden chamber” motif in chapter twelve, the chapter that begins the Thornfield years. Subsequently, many of the major events in the novel revolve around these two places in Thornfield. Soon after arriving, Jane’s restlessness motivates her to wander up to the third floor, and she discovers “two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle” (108). Behind the closed doors of the third floor room, Rochester has imprisoned his wife, Bertha. Of course, since Jane is narrating this tale long after the events of Thornfield have transpired, she already has knowledge of the imprisoned wife. Every reference to the forbidden room, though cloaked in mystery, is fully transparent to the narrator. Yet this third floor room haunts the text as an eerie counterpart of Bluebeard’s death chamber as well as Rochester’s secret.

A while after her first visit to the third floor, Jane expounds on her restlessness, admitting that the place:

agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind’s eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and certainly they

were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement which while it swelled in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously.

(110)

Another visit occurs after Bertha has set Rochester's bed on fire. Jane informs Rochester of the "the strange laugh I had heard in the gallery; the step ascending to the third story; the smoke" (150). When Rochester goes to investigate, saying, "I must pay a visit to the third story," he acts as though he is ignorant of the secret behind the door. (He knows, of course, and at the time of the writing, Jane, too, knows what lurks behind the door. However, instead of divulging the presence of Bertha, Jane allows the reader to remain in suspense at this point.) Still another visit to the third floor occurs after Mason stops the wedding. Jane writes, "We mounted the first staircase, passed up the gallery, proceeded to the third story: the low, black door, opened by Mr. Rochester's master key, admitted us to the tapestried room, with its great bed, and its pictorial cabinet" (295). Finally, the inhabitant is revealed. Bertha, referred to as "it," "groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face" (295). At the end of the novel, Jane returns to Thornfield to find it in ruins and learns that Bertha set a fire, which

killed her and maimed Rochester, and this information completes the “forbidden room” frame.

Although Rochester survives the destruction of his house-- a symbol of his power and authority as master of “some Bluebeard’s castle” and of a place that imprisons /encloses women (Grace Poole, Mrs. Fairfax, Adèle, Bertha, and Jane)—is necessary. To free them all, however, one woman sacrifices her life. Although probably not consciously deliberate, Bertha’s sacrifice might be compared to the dark twin’s sacrifice in “Captain Murderer.” The fire Bertha causes which results in the ruin of Thornfield and the maiming and blinding of Rochester impedes his power to seduce and control, for a symbol of his authority has now been eliminated. In Perrault’s “Bluebeard,” disturbing ellipses are the disposition of Bluebeard’s castle and the dead wives. Re-visioning Perrault, Jane’s narrative effectively fills those gaps and enables her to begin anew without the specter of former wives or lovers and of a man who will dominate her. For Jane to make use of the “forbidden chamber” motif alone as a continual thread in her narrative does not in itself establish her narrative as a re-vision of “Bluebeard.” However, when we examine additional biographical and textual evidence, the influence of “Bluebeard” on the novel is more apparent.

First, by the time of Brontë’s youth, “Bluebeard” was a staple in English life.¹⁰ Richard Samber published the first English translation of Perrault’s *Contes* in 1729, more than a hundred years before Brontë’s birth. In February 1833, an

article about Ludvig Tieck's *Bluebeard* appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*,¹¹ a periodical the Brontë family read on a regular basis. "Blackwood's' formed my chief delight, and I feel certain that no child before ever enjoyed reading as I did," Branwell Brontë maintained (Fraser 52). Maria Brontë claimed *Blackwood's* to be "the most able periodical there is" (54). It is possible that Charlotte Brontë read the 1833 article. It is also probable that she read Perrault either in the original or in the translated version. Lastly, Brontë also must have read or heard "Mr Fox," the analogue that predates "Bluebeard" by at least one hundred years, or she could have simply been referring to the scene in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-99). After the party with the Ingrams, Bertha attacks Mason. His screams cause the Ingram and Eshton women to cling to Rochester who exclaims, "All's right!—all's right! [. . .] It's a mere rehearsal of *Much Ado About Nothing*" (209). That play, moreover, contains a direct verbal echo of "Mr Fox." Benedik parodies Claudio for his unwillingness to admit that he is falling in love. Benedik says: "Like the old tale, my lord: 'It is not so, nor 'twas not so, but indeed, God forbid it should be so'" (*Riverside Shakespeare* 1:1 216-18).¹² In the folktale, Mr Fox utters those same words. His betrothed, Lady Mary, secretly witnesses him chopping off a woman's hand in order to steal a ring from her finger and then dragging her up to his bloody chamber. When Lady Mary recounts the story the next evening at dinner in Mr Fox's presence, he fervently denies her story, "It is not so, nor it was not so. And God forbid it should be so"

(Carter *Old Wives'* 10). Mr Fox denies a charge of immurement and murder; Benedik denies a charge of love. Rochester seems to compare himself indirectly but erroneously to Benedik, whose situation is much ado about nothing.

But Rochester's situation in fact is much more serious. Repeating Mr Fox's words through the filter of Benedik's creates a weak link to Mr Fox. Later, when Rochester actually utters Mr. Fox's words, he seems to clinch the connection. However, Rochester's seductive techniques are more beguiling than Mr Fox's. After the house has recovered from the excitement of Mason's attack, Rochester begins to divulge his story to Jane. Jane assures him he has nothing to fear from her. Rochester responds, "God grant it may be so," (210). Like Mr Fox, Rochester knows his deception is about to be uncovered, and he tries simultaneously to minimize and justify his actions to Jane. Even though Rochester insists that he has not committed a "*crime*; I am not speaking of shedding of blood or any other guilty act, which might make the perpetrator amenable to the law: my word is *error*"(220), denying that he is a Mr Fox only serves to focus on his duplicity. Unlike, Benedik's comical linking of Claudio's denial to Mr Fox's, Rochester's comparing himself to Claudio is somewhat disturbing. Nonetheless, it offers a variety of interpretive possibilities. A final connection between "Mr Fox" and *Jane Eyre* is the location of the secret rooms. When Bluebeard's young wife abandons her guests to look into the room, Perrault writes, "Elle descendit par un escalier dérobé" (14). However, in "Mr

Fox,” the murderous husband’s secret room is upstairs as opposed to downstairs. Bertha is also locked away in an upstairs room. Few stories, as do *Jane Eyre* and “Mr Fox,” place the secret room at the top of the house. It is very clear where Mr Fox keeps his victims: “So at last he went on dragging the young lady up the stairs into the Bloody Chamber” (Carter *Wives*’ 9). As Mr Fox drags the woman upstairs, he tries to wrench a ring from her hand. Rochester has symbolically taken Bertha’s wedding ring when he fervently denies that his wife is alive. The struggle between Bertha and Rochester might also mirror the struggle between Mr Fox and his victim. Taken individually, the above allusions to the folktales in *Jane Eyre* might be insignificant or coincidental. However, their proximity to each other tempts us to take notice and make connections between the novel and the tales.

Despite Rochester’s correlation to Mr Fox, misrepresentation and imprisonment are not the equivalent of murder. And Rochester has not killed anyone, but he has imprisoned a wife and discarded several lovers: Bertha, Giacinta, Clara, Celine Varens, and Blanche Ingram. He grew bored with Giacinta, paid off Clara and Celine Varens, and ran off with an Italian. “‘Last January, rid of all mistresses [. . .] I came back to England’” (316). Rochester seems quite adept at “[ridding himself] of all mistresses” or effectively shutting them up both physically and verbally. Consequently, we might view Rochester as a symbolic Bluebeard. If we think of Rochester’s acts as a metaphoric shutting

up of women causing the death of their sentence as opposed to a literal death sentence, then Rochester's behavior is similar.¹³ Hence, locking up Bertha shuts her up both physically and verbally. Paying off Clara shuts her up. Rochester, disguised as a gypsy, tells Blanche's fortune and renders her temporarily speechless. Jane demonstrates how Rochester compounds his deceptiveness by surreptitiously proposing to shut Jane up as well. "You shall go to a place I have in the south of France: a white-walled villa on the shores of the Mediterranean. There you shall live a happy, and guarded, and most innocent life. Never fear that I wish to lure you into error" (308). His appeal is filled with contradictions. Although he already has a wife, he insists that Jane will be his wife but not live with him as a wife. In fact, he assures her he will not "lure [her] into error." His entire appeal seems transparently seductive. He says, "Jane, you understand what I want of you? Just this promise—I will be yours, Mr. Rochester" (320). If she succumbs, she becomes vulnerable to his whim as do Bluebeard's wives, Bertha, and the other women. Jane, however, will not compromise her morals or her independence. "Mr. Rochester, I will *not* be yours," an object of his desire, a role that would privilege him and subjugate her (320).

Therefore, in Jane's narrative, it is inevitable that she departs Thornfield even though she has no place to go. By chance, she finds refuge with her cousins Mary, Diana and St. John Rivers. By using this plot device, Jane introduces another element of "Bluebeard"—the importance of family

connections. In the previous chapter, heroines without social or family ties were doomed or abandoned. In the end, family connections save Bluebeard's last wife's life just as they save Jane's. In an expression of gratitude, Bluebeard's wife shares her inheritance with her sister and brothers and uses the rest to marry herself to "un fort honnête homme." Likewise, when Jane inherits twenty thousand pounds, she shares her fortune equally with her cousins. "Those who had saved my life, whom, till this hour, I had loved barrenly, I would now benefit," writes Jane and returns to Rochester an independently wealthy woman (390).

Perrault's "Bluebeard" concludes with the widow's second marriage. Jane's narrative goes beyond that ending, however. By the end of her narrative, Jane has woven in additional strands to demonstrate the strength of her relationship with Rochester, the intensity of their love, the nature of their marriage, and her position in it. Thus, in the penultimate chapter, Jane brings together several intertexts. First, the ending of "Beauty and the Beast" is mirrored in the circumstances of Jane's return to Rochester. Beauty who goes home to visit her family, dreams that Beast is dying and returns to discover him lying unconscious on the grass. Her love revives him, breaks the evil spell that was cast upon him and enables him to resume his human form. After St. John proposes to Jane, she hears Rochester calling her name. She runs to him and finds him blinded, maimed and almost beastlike. He "reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild-beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen

woe. The caged eagle whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson,” whose hair Delilah has cut off in order to take away his strength (436). However, unlike Delilah, Jane’s intention is to help restore Rochester to his former self. “‘It is time some one undertook to re-humanize you,’ said I, parting his thick and long uncut locks” (441). Her love will restore him to human form without sapping his strength. The juxtaposition of the contradictory images of Delilah and Beauty helps to underscore Jane’s positive use of power.

Secondly, Jane has woven *The Thousand and One Nights* ¹⁴ throughout her narrative. She reads the book at Gateshead as a child. At Lowood, she compares the children’s meal to the Barmecide feast in the Barber’s story. Rochester’s horse is named Mesour, a name similar to the executioner’s name in the tales. When she visits her aunt on her sick bed, she notices *Thousand and One Nights* “ranged just above” the other books on the shelves. These allusions remind the reader that Jane, like Shahrazad, is a storyteller skilled with another kind of power, the power to seduce her listener/reader into the desire for more stories. Replicating Shahrazad’s narrative strategy, Jane tells Rochester she will leave her tale (of her experience after departing Thornfield) “half-told.” This strategy prevents Shahrayar from killing Shahrazad. Rochester poses no such threat to Jane, however. Jane’s purpose is “to tease [him] a little, to make [him] less sad,” to rekindle his spirit by making him jealous, by making him care. She

also maintains control over her story. In a sense, she reverses roles and becomes the seducer.

Third, Rochester's second marriage proposal is infused with intertextual significance that goes beyond the Bluebeard narrative. Alisoun's story of the lustye bachelor and the loothly lady resonates in the proposal scene. Alisoun tells her tale of the errant knight who must ultimately marry the loothly wyf who is responsible for sparing his life. The lustye bachelor is miserable that he must keep his promise to the loothly wyf and bed her. As a result, she lectures him on gentillesse. When she has finished, she presents him with a choice-- to have her beautiful and perhaps unfaithful or ugly and forever true to him. The knight finally responds:

'My lady and my love, and wyf so dere,

I put me in your wyse governance:

Cheeseth yourself which may be most pleasance

And most honour to you and me.' (*Riverside Chaucer* 1230-33)

In effect, he has given her authority over him. When the "lustye bachelor" allows his wife to have mastery, she relinquishes it and becomes what he desires. Jane puts a choice to Rochester that echoes the lustye bachelor's.

Unsure of Jane's response, Rochester indirectly proposes by announcing that he wants a wife not a friend. He asks, "'Is it unwelcome news?'

Jane, aware of his meaning, engages him in a game of verbal “sparring.” She says, “That depends on circumstances, sir—on your choice.’ Responding as the knight does, Rochester encourages her to make the choice for him. Jane, still playing the game, says, ‘Choose then sir—*her who loves you best.*’ Rochester answers, “‘I will at least choose—*her I love best* (450).”¹⁵

Of course, the fact that Rochester is maimed and blind is of no consequence to Jane. In fact, her continued authority over her self is partially a result of his blindness:

I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye.¹⁶ He saw nature—he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of the field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam--of the landscape before us; of the weather round us—and impressing by sound on his ear what light could not longer stamp on his eye. Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing what he wished to be done. (456)

Although Jane takes Rochester where he wants to go and grants his wishes, it is her absolute choice to do so. She has already proven her ability to defend herself and to match her wit and determination to his own. Even after ten years of marriage, Jane writes, “To be together is for us to be at once as free as

solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and audible thinking" (456). Thus, Jane, like Alisoun and the looth wyf, has achieved mastery, but does not use it.¹⁷ Perhaps an expression of authority is irrelevant in Jane and Rochester's relationship. Brontë as well as Chaucer might be suggesting that when a marriage is truly grounded in equality, neither individual is compelled to dominate the other.

By dis/membering "Bluebeard," using the forbidden chamber motif as a frame for her primary text and then embedding other narratives into that text, Jane exercises her freedom to create new paradigms that challenge conventional authority and thereby completes the process of becoming an authority over herself and text. The "death of the author" has certainly allowed for the life of the heroine dissociated from that author. Jane takes on a life of her own, compelling the reader to forget she is Charlotte Brontë's fictional construct. No wonder when Anne Thackeray met Charlotte Brontë that summer evening in 1850, she exclaimed: "We look[ed] at Jane Eyre—the great Jane Eyre—the tiny little lady" (Fraser 370-71). Young Anne Thackeray's statement demonstrates how successful Brontë was in creating a fictional character that seems to live, breathe, and walk among us.

“The Bloody Chamber”

Chaucer’s Alisoun has aptly demonstrated the power of discourse. Furthermore, if a woman’s discourse assumes the form of narrative, she can cleverly weave together the individual threads of prior intertexts, her ideas and her beliefs into her narrative to create a richly textured design in which each individual thread almost becomes imperceptible to the reader or narratee. The new story, although created from pieces of other stories, becomes the narrator’s own story. Alisoun and Jane accomplish this feat. So does the Marquise, heroine/narrator in Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber.”¹⁸

The narrative strategies the Marquise employs transform “The Bloody Chamber” into an elaborate parody of “Bluebeard.” Unlike *Jane Eyre* in which “Bluebeard” and “Mr Fox” are embedded texts informing and framing the narrative, in “The Bloody Chamber,” “Bluebeard” is the ur-text. While adhering to the basic plot structure of “Bluebeard,” the narrator of Carter’s story simultaneously re-visions and parodies her source text. She also embeds into her narrative a multiplicity of other parodied texts, including *Tristan and Isolde* (an Arthurian romance, Tennysonian serial poems and the Wagnerian opera), Chaucer’s “Second Nun’s Tale,” Grimm’s “Castle of Murder,” “Mr Fox,” Joris Karl Huysmans’s novel *Là-Bas*, and the story of Medusa.

“The Bloody Chamber” is narrated by a young woman who marries a much older and very wealthy man. Her story has already ended and she looks

back on the horrific events of her marriage, which starts out as the epitome of a fairy tale union. For an engagement ring, he has given her “a fire opal the size of a pigeon’s egg set in a complicated circle of dark antique gold” (9). The narrator knows the Marquis has been married before and is puzzled that he would want her, especially since his last wife has only been dead three months. Like Bluebeard’s wife, the narrator explores the castle and discovers her husband’s bizarre diversions—pomographic photographs and books. A copy of Huysmans’s *Là-Bas* lies open, but the Marquise ignores it even though she is probably unaware that the story chronicles the horrific crimes of Gilles de Rais, a nobleman living in fifteenth century Brittany, who tortured and murdered hundreds of boys and who has been considered the prototype for Bluebeard. Like Gilles de Rais, the Marquis takes a perverted pleasure in his deeds and the suffering of his victims. Despite the narrator’s level of awareness, the author strategically placed *Là-Bas* rather than some other book in her narrator’s plain sight, and thereby making the text’s implications significant. In fact, because the narrator overlooks the book, its noteworthiness is magnified. One might say, the Marquis’s life is “an open book” just as Bluebeard’s life. The heroine in the folktale ignores her suspicions in order to make a lucrative marriage. The Marquise seemingly mirrors the folktale heroine’s actions. The story events in “The Bloody Chamber” also echo those in Perrault’s narrative.

Immediately after the Marquis and Marquise consummate their marriage, the Marquis, claiming he must go to New York on business, gives his wife the following warning:

‘All is yours, everything is open to you—except the lock that this single key fits. Yet all it is is the key to a little room at the foot of the west tower, behind the still-room, at the end of a dark little corridor full of horrid cobwebs that would get into your hair and frighten you if you should ventured there. Oh, and you’d find it such a dull little room! But you must promise me if you love me, to leave it well alone.’(21)

Paradoxically, the young bride decides to use the keys to discover “evidence of [her] husband’s true nature.” She fails to notice the pertinent evidence, explores the little room and discovers the Marquis’s instruments of mutilation, including the Iron Maiden. On cue, the Marquis returns moments after his wife has gone into his cellar of blood where he has entombed the bodies of his previous three wives. He sentences his wife to death. Her mother arrives just in time and saves her daughter.

Although “The Bloody Chamber” follows the basic story line of “Bluebeard,” it diverges significantly in its presentation of character and events so that the female narrator eventually achieves authority over herself and the story of her life. To accomplish this, Carter employs two narrative strategies:

creation of a bifocalized first-person narrator who alternates her perspective from her older, mature self to her younger, naïve self. In addition, Carter creates a narrator who is skilled in dis/membering and re/membering her text through the strategic placement of intertexts within her primary narrative.

First, the narrator speaks in the first person to a specific narratee¹⁹ with whom, it appears, she has established a relaxed, confidential relationship. In contrast to the narratee in *Jane Eyre*, the reader in “The Bloody Chamber” chiefly functions as an onlooker, able to make inferences, interpretations and judgments but unable to directly participate in the narrative.²⁰ For example, when the narrator commences by saying, “I remember [. . .],” the reader might infer that immediately before these words were uttered, an exchange between the narrator and narratee ensued in which the latter asked the narrator to tell her about “le mauvais temps qu’elle avait passé avec la Barbe-Bleue” (Perrault *Contes* 20). The narrator is not talking to the reader but to a listener whose presence is almost imperceptible, but a very close reading suggests her presence.

The narrator actually begins by piecing together her narrative in which the story has already taken place some time in the past. She says, “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 [. . .]" (7). Her words are charged with sexual overtones and an intensity of emotions which foreshadow later events. The narrator's motive seems to entail getting the narratee's understanding and sympathy for having entered into a marriage with the Marquis, even though, like Bluebeard's wife, she knew he would be the death of her (33). However, neither Bluebeard's wife nor the Marquise could resist the promise of a luxurious lifestyle.

Throughout the narrative, the Marquise addresses her narratee to absolve herself of guilt. For example, on her night at the opera with her future husband, she says, "That night at the opera comes back to me even now [. . .] the white dress; the frail child within it; and the flashing crimson jewels round her throat bright as arterial blood" (11). Though she is a "frail child," she wears around her neck a priceless ruby choker. As a child, she should be forgiven for this pleasure she takes in the Marquis' jewels. She explains to the narratee how the Marquis took her to see Wagner's *Tristan* opera. "And, do you know, my heart swelled and ached so during the Liebestod that I thought I must truly love him. Yes, I did. On his arm, all eyes were on me" (10). The narrator's comment serves multiple purposes. First, it reinforces the sense of a narratee interacting with the narrator. Her response--"Yes, I did," could have come after the narratee's questioning the truth of her feelings. The closer the narrator and narratee become, the more the reader recedes to the fringes of the text becoming a casual observer, an

eavesdropper. The narrator's remark could also signify her uncertainty. In fact, in the essay "The Woman in Process," Kathleen E.B. Manley suggests that the narrator has embarked on a journey of becoming, "still trying to make sense of her role in the events about which she tells; and she oscillates between insecurity and growing certainty, both in the story itself and after she has told it" (92). Thus, it is not surprising that the narrator performs a recurring strategy of alternating between her older, mature self and her younger, innocent self, mildly satirizing her younger self while simultaneously justifying her actions as a consequence of her inexperience. What can you expect from a young girl who wears "twice darned underwear, faded gingham, serge skirts, hand-me-downs" (11)? Finally, the fact that the narrator wears the ruby choker to see *Tristan* foreshadows the story's climax. Tennyson's "Last Tournament," the story of the tragic love affair between Tristan and Isolde, is another version of the tale that Carter has embedded in "The Bloody Chamber." Having won a ruby carcanet in a joust, Tristan gives it to Isolde, King Mark's wife, "for his last / Love-offering and peace-offering" (268:742). Tristan clasps it around Isolde's neck:

But, while he bow'd to kiss the jewell'd throat,

Out of the dark, just as the lips had touch'd,

Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek--

'Mark's way,' said Mark, and clove him thro' the brain (268:745-

48). The choker the narrator wears, given to her by her lover, is symbolic of

Isolde's choker. Linking Tristan's and the Marquis's jeweled necklaces transforms the narrator's seduction to Arthurian romantic fantasy, with tragic underpinnings of the Wagnerian opera, creating a double irony.

On one level, the Marquis does not consider the ruby choker as a token of love, but a symbol of his wife's blood spilling from her neck when he beheads her. Naturally, the Marquis fully expects to recover the choker to give to his next victim. In the end, however, the Marquise's mother shoots a bullet through his head, figuratively taking off his head, in other words, subverting patriarchal power. At the same time, the mother's act corresponds to King Mark's killing of Tristan. Mark uses his authority to right a wrong. The Marquise's mother usurps patriarchal power to kill the most powerful man in Brittany. On another level, *Tristan* perpetuates patriarchal myths of love, romance and death. At the opera, the Marquise substitutes the "swelling and aching" of her heart caused by emotions she experiences when she hears Isolde sing the final words of the *Liebestod* or love-death. Isolde loves Tristan so desperately that she cannot live without him. As the narrator imagines herself in the role of Isolde luxuriating in the Marquis's wealth that will soon be hers to share, she is embracing herself in this dangerous myth of a "romantic" love-death.

So, when the Marquis buys her a Poiret dress to wear to the opera, it is no wonder that she takes pleasure in everyone's stares and in her good fortune. What seventeen-year-old conservatory student would not? (11). Paradoxically,

the narrator, now older, fails to acknowledge a sense of her foolishness. In fact, she still seems spellbound by the romantic fantasies of her youth. Because the reader is on the sidelines and shares in the knowledge with the older narrator to which neither the younger narrator nor the narratee is privy, she reads the text against itself. The result produces a parody of the two texts: the one that the older narrator now narrates; the other, that the younger narrator lived. The parody functions in the two different modes Linda Hutcheon identifies: on the one hand, the conventional notion of parody as mockery and on the other hand parody as “repetition...with critical distance.” In the first instance, as the narrator speaks of her opera experience “even now” seeming to relish in the romance of the experience, her own words gently mock her.

The narrator uses the language of her naïve self rather than that of her adult self. However, since she is older and more experienced, she probably realizes that the sighs and tears she shed during the poignant Liebestod are an inaccurate barometer of love and only a response to the entire experience—the box seats at the opera, the designer dress, the two-inch wide ruby necklace, and being the fiancée of a Marquis, a man as wealthy as Croesus. In the second instance, the narrator parodies romantic fantasies perpetuated in stories such as *Tristan and Isolde* that ultimately victimize young, innocent girls.²¹ If, as Manley suggests, the narrator is in the “process of becoming,” it is understandable that

she would be conflicted in her thoughts and actions. Carter herself encourages varied readings that this and other passages generate.

In an essay, written in 1983, Carter comments on her writing methods saying, “I try, when I write fiction, to think on my feet—to present a number of propositions in a variety of different ways, and to leave the reader to construct her own fictions for herself from the elements of my fiction. (Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts (“Notes” 37). Specifically about the re-visioned fairy stories of *The Bloody Chamber*, she suggests that “folklore...is much easier to infiltrate with different kinds of consciousness” and that “It turned out to be easier to deal with the shifting structures of reality and sexuality by using sets of shifting structures derived from orally transmitted tales” (38). These intentional “shifts” in “The Bloody Chamber” signify what Carter calls “social fictions regulating our lives” resulting in parody as well as paradox. The supreme “social fiction” operating in tales such as “Cinderella,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and Perrault’s “Riquet à la Houppe” is that a prince (if he’s not a prince now, he can be transformed into one) will rescue the heroine and take her away to his castle to live happily ever after. Similarly, when the narrator recalls her train ride on her wedding night to her husband’s castle, she envisions it as a “fairy castle whose walls were made of foam, that legendary habitation in which

he had been born. To which, one day, I might bear an heir. Our destination, my destiny”(8).²²

Inherent in the Marquise’s words are several fictions that erroneously inform her life. First, Bluebeard has no heirs. Perrault tells us that: “Il se trouva que la Barbe-Bleue n’avait point d’héritiers, et qu’ainsi sa femme demeura maîtresse de tous ses biens” (*Contes* 20)²³ Secondly, the Marquise is once again casting herself as a heroine of a fairy tale romance: “Nothing, here, to detain a seventeen-year-old girl waiting her first embrace. I should have liked best of all, a novel in yellow paper; I wanted to curl up on the rug before the blazing fire, lose myself in a cheap novel, munch sticky liqueur chocolates” (“Bloody”16). Third, her husband’s castle is not the “foamy” fairy castle of “Beauty and the Beast” or “Cinderella.” Instead, it is the encasement of the murderous den in the “Castle of Murder,” the cellar of blood in the “Robber Bridegroom,” Mr Fox’s bloody chamber, Gilles de Rais’s²⁴ torture chamber, and Bluebeard’s forbidden “le petit cabinet.” Finally, the narrator’s destiny is to become the first and last of the Marquis’s wives able to narrate her own life. It is a story already written that the narrator has lived to write about. She makes choices about the presentation of her narrative which mirrors the presentation of herself. In most instances, she vacillates between guilt and innocence; knowledge and ignorance, maturity and *niaveté*, but in her “process of becoming,” her wavering is understandable.

On the one hand, she presents herself as a victimized naïve young girl: “I swear to you, I had never been vain until I met him” (12). Then, later she tells her listener, “You must remember how ill at ease I was in that luxurious place” (19). During the courtship, when the Marquis tries to surprise her, she “mimics surprise.” She tells her listener, “But sometimes he seemed to me like a lily.” The listener perhaps expresses doubt to cause the narrator to add, “Yes, a lily” (9). To show the difference between her younger self and older self, the narrator might have added. “But I was young, then, susceptible to...” She exonerates herself, however, while still enveloped in romantic fantasies. As a wedding gift, the Marquis gives her a choker of red rubies “two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat.” After she marries, she realizes the gravity of her error, how she has been seduced by his wealth. “This ring, the bloody bandage of rubies, the wardrobe of clothes from Poiret and Worth, his scent of Russian leather—all had conspired to seduce me so utterly” (12). “Even now,” as an adult, she hesitates to take full responsibility for her actions.

On the other hand, to the narratee, the Marquise reveals an awareness of what she was getting into. After recalling her wedding night train ride, she admits that going “into marriage” meant going “into exile; I sensed it, I knew it—that henceforth, I would always be lonely” (12). Finally, when she finds out about her husband’s carnage, the interchange between the narrator and narratee suggests that the two began talking before the narrator’s response. It seems the narratee

has said, “How could you know what he was like?” because the narrator response is, “How could I know, indeed? Except that, in my heart, I’d always known its lord would be the death of me” (33). When Bluebeard’s wife first meets Bluebeard, she does not want to marry him because she knows “qu’il avait déjà épousé plusieurs femmes, et qu’on ne savait ce que ces femmes étaient devenues” (Perrault *Contes* 10). Therefore, anything Bluebeard does should not be shocking. Yet his last wife is thoroughly horrified to learn what she should have known or at least suspected all along.

Although the Marquise’s narrative strategies have a destabilizing effect, they also give the female narrator mastery over her story. The reader might infer the narratee’s response; s/he never directly interrupts the narrative as the Friar does Alisoun’s. Of course, Jane’s “reader” does not have the capacity to respond, for it is apparent that the reader holds a book in her hand. Both Jane and the Marquise maintain control over their texts—Jane, by taking an almost dictatorial position with her reader; the Marquise, by presenting her narrative through shifting perspectives and denying her narratee the latitude or pleasure of responding to her text.

Carter dis/members “Bluebeard” and then weaves other tales into it only to re/member it in “The Bloody Chamber.” Her narrative strategies certainly do “explode those old wine bottles.” Moreover, Walker writes, “Carter, however, not only feels free to alter the plots of the tales, but also takes the reader inside

them” (74). Carter’s reader, unlike Brontë’s, does not enter into the tale in the sense of being the object of the narrator’s direct address, but in “The Bloody Chamber,” the reader is free to construct divergent meanings according to her perceptions of how the embedded texts interact with each other.

The effect is almost dizzying as the narrator weaves one intertext into another throughout the course of the primary narrative. At times, the narrator conflates texts; at other times, she plays them against each other. For example, in two passages that occur close together, the narrator alludes to “Beauty and the Beast,” the story of St. Cecilia, “Mr. Fox,” and *Là-Bas* that lies open on a pedestal in the Marquis’s library. Had she only looked into that book, she would have seen her husband. In fact, the open book signifies how openly evil the Marquis is.

First, the embedded text parodies “Beauty and the Beast.” As a wedding present, the Marquis gives his young bride a turret room of her own just as Beast gives Beauty an apartment. The Marquise, like Beauty, has music, instruments and other diversions. The Beast supplies books for Beauty to read. *Là-Bas* is what the Marquis has made available to his bride. He has also hung on the wall a picture of St. Cecilia, the Christian martyr. Of course, Beast turns out to be a prince who has been under an evil spell whereas the Marquis appears to be princely but in fact is far closer to a depraved beast than the beast himself. The portrait of Saint Cecilia is a representation of a double irony. When the Marquise

looks at the picture, she says, “I saw myself as I could have wished to be,” as if she is relishing in her romantic fantasies “even now” (14). However, she cannot remember the reason for Cecilia’s martyrdom. Certainly, if she knew that Roman executioners first tried to boil Cecilia to death, and then chopped off her head when this effort failed, the Marquise would not be having such fantasies. Even though she is now older and mature, it is possible that she still does not know the story of Cecilia, which makes her words painfully ironic. She wishes to be like Cecilia, and that is exactly what the Marquis has planned for her.

As part of the ritual that precedes beheading his wife, the Marquis forces her to put on the ruby choker and the white dress she wore to see *Tristan Und Isolde*. “Run to me, run! I have a place prepared for your exquisite corpse in my display of flesh” (39). She remembers the Liebestod.²⁵ While combing her hair in the mirrored room, she sees herself reflected twelve times, “comb[ing] out twelve listless sheaves of brown hair in the mirrors; soon, there would be none,” (37) recalling the nursery rhyme, “Ten Little Indians.” Infusing the rhyme into her reflection suggests her youthful innocence and the paradox of her life—essentially a child forced to endure adult experiences, conflicts, and passions.

When the Marquis is summoning his young wife down to her death, he says, “Shall I come up to heaven to fetch you down, Saint Cecilia?” (38). As the executioners do to Cecilia in the “Second Nun’s Tale,” the Marquis lays his young wife’s head on the stone. In Chaucer, the executioners chop Cecilia’s neck three

times before she dies. The blood spilling from her neck is so profuse that they use sheets to soak it up. The bloodied, severed neck is also symbolic of the Marquis's gift of the red ruby choker, an emblem of death.

The blind piano tuner Jean-Yves utters the words of Mr Fox when his crimes have been revealed, "Though it must be so, yet it might not be so" (38). He refers to the hoped-for arrival of the Marquise's mother, who might save her. When the Marquise can delay no longer, she goes to the Marquis. He takes back the ring he gave her. (In "Mr Fox," Lady Mary spies Mr Fox chopping off a woman's hand to get a ring off her finger.) Earlier in the story, when the Marquis is about to consummate his marriage, the Marquise, a virgin, says, "And yet, you see, I guessed it might be so—that we should have a formal disrobing of the bride" (15). The dash either gives the narratee an opportunity to respond or forces the reader to recognize the echo of Mr Fox's words. However, since the Marquise is about to experience sex for the first time, her words contain different meanings. First, like Mr Fox, the Marquis, is guilty of the crimes of which he has been accused. When the Marquis finally decides to consummate their marriage, the Marquise says, "'We've not taken luncheon yet; and, besides, it is broad daylight.'" He conjures up images of the wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood," when he says, "All the better to see you" (17). In Perrault, the wolf kills Red Riding Hood, and the Marquis probably sees himself as that clever wolf.²⁶ However, instead of foreshadowing the innocent young girl's death, it is a sign of his own

death. For example, when the Marquise finds a note the opera singer wrote to the Marquis sometime ago containing one word, “Until—“ the word might suggest “until we unite in death,” as implied in Isolde’s Liebestod. In addition, in the Marquis’s cellar of blood where the Marquis has buried his three wives are images ironically prefiguring the Marquis’s death not his wife’s. To underscore the eventuality of the Marquis’s death, surrounding the opera singer’s coffin are bouquets of white lilies, the flower the Marquise associates with her husband and death. “My husband [. . .] filled my bedroom with lilies until it looked like an embalming parlour” (“Bloody” 18). In the *Interpretacio* in “The Second Nun’s Tale,” Chaucer explains that *Cecilia* means “lilies” and “blind” or “lacking in blindness.” The narrator creates paradoxical associations between Cecilia and herself, Cecilia and her husband, and the blind piano tuner with whom she has fallen in love. Each character stands in opposition to Cecilia. In contrast to Cecilia, the Marquise is corruptible; the Marquis is corrupt. Cecilia is beheaded, but the Marquise’s life is saved. Although blind, the piano tuner is sighted enough to find the keys to the forbidden room and to return them to the Marquise. He also informs the Marquise that her home has been dubbed the “castle of murder.”²⁷

In the cellar of this castle of murder is another foreshadowing. The statement that the skull of the Marquis’s second wife “strung up by a system of unseen cords, so that it appeared to hang disembodied, in the still, heavy air,

and it had been crowned with a wreath of white roses, and a veil of lace, the final image of his bride" (29). Nearly every image in the narrative pointing to the Marquise's and/or her mother's death foreshadows the destruction of the Marquis. Therefore, when the Marquise's mother finally charges into the castle the way the wife's brothers do in "Bluebeard," we can be reasonably certain that the Marquis will die. Since Bluebeard asks the mother for her daughter's hand in marriage, it seems fitting that the mother would come to her daughter's rescue. Given the characteristics Perrault seems to value in his fiction, a heroic woman would be objectionable. So, in his tale, the brothers perform the heroics, but in Carter's, the mother executes the life-saving act.

In the climatic scene of "The Bloody Chamber" when the Marquise's mother confronts the Marquis, he "[stands] stock-still, as if she had been Medusa, the sword still raised over his head as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs" (40). Instead of the woman being the object of the male gaze, she turns her gaze upon the Marquis and causes him to freeze. None of the mirrors lining the walls of his castle can help him to deflect her gaze to enable him to obtain mastery over her. Thus, the Marquis does not, as Perseus does, take Medusa's head as a trophy. Rather, Medusa "puts a single irreproachable bullet straight through my husband's head," says the Marquise. In that one sentence, with the help of her mother, the narrator usurps patriarchal power and puts it into her own hands.

In the introduction to Angela Carter's folktale anthology, *Sometimes Strange Things Do Happen*, Susan Suleiman is quoted as saying that Carter's fiction is "truly breaking new ground for women by occupying the male voice of narrative authority and at the same time impersonating it to the point of parody, so that the rules are changed and the dreams become unruly, transformed, open to the 'multiplication of narrative possibilities,' themselves a promise of a possibly different future" (xv). Furthermore, Carter demonstrates that women possess the power to rewrite patriarchal myths if they are willing to challenge the old, accepted paradigms structuring their lives.

"Bluebeard's Egg"

Since women have been demanding and getting powerful positions in such areas as politics, education, business, medicine, law and entertainment, their voices in "Bluebeard" should reflect their authority to take control of their lives and end Bluebeard's existence once and for all. However, it is troubling that in the last years of the twentieth century, female authors continue to re-vision Bluebeard's wives surrendering to subjugation. In Suniti Namjoshi's 1981 story, Bluebeard's wife obeys, but he kills her anyway. "At the trial he pleaded provocation"(86). In "Blue-Bearded Lover" by Joyce Carol Oates (1988), the wife willingly accepts submission as her duty. "Did I not know that my lover's previous brides had been brought to this house to die? —that they had failed him, one by one, and had deserved their fate"(185)? In Margaret Atwood's "Allen Territory"

(1992), the girl permits Bluebeard to lead her into an abyss. Lydia Millet published "The Wife-Killer," in which Mrs. Bluebeard is content to lose herself in *Silhouette* romances. The narrator acknowledges that Bluebeard has set up each of his dead wives, but "in the postmodern world Mrs. Bluebeard doesn't take the bait" (230). Taking control of oneself is no easy task either as is demonstrated in Margaret Atwood's short story, "Bluebeard's Egg" (1983). Atwood's Mrs. Bluebeard, called Sally, contradicts notions we might have about independent, powerful women in the postmodern world.

What gives this story its special character is that the author weaves snippets of various Grimm's fairy tales including "Goose Girl," "The Crystal Ball," "True Bride," the Bluebeard variant, "Fitcher's Bird," and elements of popular culture into this modern-day fable of a troubled marriage. The treatment of the bluebeard story differs from that in *Jane Eyre* and "The Bloody Chamber." In Brontë's novel, "Bluebeard" frames the narrative to function as a recurring symbol informing and shaping the reader's interpretation of characters and events; in "The Bloody Chamber," it transforms the narrative into an intricate and exuberant re-vision of the seventeenth-century tale. In "Bluebeard's Egg," the old story is a mirror for the heroine's new story. In addition, it is the only narrative in which the embedded folktale is re-visioned self-referentially as well as the one closest to contemporary, quotidian life characterized by the golden arches of McDonald's, Monopoly games and service stations. If the story were written

fifteen years later, Nintendo would replace Monopoly as the pastime of choice. Many of the service stations would be self-serve.

Sally, the focalizer of the primary narrative, actually begins to create and narrate her version of the “Fitcher’s Bird.” The way in which she weaves folktale elements into the primary story suggests contradictory readings of characters and events. In addition, the narrator’s embedding of fairy tales into her primary text seems as natural as Charlotte Brontë’s and Angela Carter’s. While the latter two narrators dis/member and then embed Perrault’s “Bluebeard” into their narratives, Atwood’s narrator prefers the Grimm’s versions of the tale. Like Brontë, Atwood too grew up on fairy tales. When she was about five or six, her parents gave her a copy of Pantheon’s *The Complete Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, published in 1944. As writers before her have done, Atwood conveys her adoration for fairy tales. She writes:

[They] were a taste that stayed with me; but although I went on to read all of the Andrew Lang *Blue, Green, Red and Yellow Fairy Books* that I could get my hands on, as well as the *Arabian Nights* and Lamb’s *Tales of the Gods and Heroes*, and Dickens’s *Christmas Carol* and Ruskin’s *King of the Golden River*, and the complete tales of Edgar Allan Poe, and *The Wizard of Oz*, and anything else of that kind I might stumble across, I kept returning

to the Grimm's stories. By the age of nine or ten I'd memorized a good many of them. ("Souls" 26)

The effect of Atwood's memorization is that her narrator in "Bluebeard's Egg" seamlessly melds together the embedded texts into the narrative, creating paradoxical layers of meaning. For example, the title conflates two stories: "Bluebeard" and "Fitcher's Bird" or "The Crystal Ball." (The crystal ball is the yolk of the egg.) Eggs do not figure in "Bluebeard," but they are featured prominently in the latter two stories. It would appear that Atwood intends the reader to read the two stories against each other while simultaneously reading them alongside "Bluebeard's Egg."

When Bertha,²⁸ Sally's instructor, is contextualizing "Fitcher's Bird" for a night school class, she says that it "is a variant of the Bluebeard motif, much earlier than Perrault's sentimental rewriting of it. In Perrault, the girl has to be rescued by her brothers; but in the earlier version, things were quite different" (172). In her essay "Of Souls as Birds," Atwood admits her preference for Grimm's variants. "When I came across the Perrault rendition a couple of years later, I was somewhat disappointed"(34). Atwood objects to Perrault's moralistic tone; the powerless heroine, "the many tears and considerable whinings, and finally the rescue" (34). Instead of re-visioning the tale to empower the heroine, Atwood constructs a tale in which the heroine starts out with the potential for self-empowerment. She achieves this goal of disrupting the reader's expectations

with regard to images, story and character by dis/membering the texts and then re/membering them into paradoxical narratives. Sally, the female protagonist in Atwood's story is the possessor of the authorial pen, the speaking and thinking subject. However, this position of authority and power is unsettling for a heroine even in the 1980's. Throughout the narrative, Sally struggles with her position of author/ity, which is played out both in the primary narrative, informed and transformed by the embedded folk tales, and in the updated "transposition" of "Fitcher's Bird" that Sally is in the process of writing.

At the primary level of the narrative, Sally is harboring doubts about her marriage to Ed, a heart surgeon and about herself as the "true bride." She asks herself, "What if [Ed] wakes one day and decides that she isn't the true bride after all, but the false one? Then she will be put into a barrel stuck full of nails and rolled downhill, endlessly, while he's sitting in another bridal bed" (148). The "true bride," represents a double allusion to "True Bride," and "Goose Girl," two stories in which the real bride is nearly forced to live the life of the outsider while a "false bride" marries the prince/king. Paradoxically, in "Fitcher's Bird," the third girl dresses as the true bride only to make her escape. Alternatively, Sally, Ed's third wife, desperately wants to be his "true bride" and will be if only she can protect Ed from the clutches of scheming, seductive women. She believes he is so stupid that he is totally unaware of what is going on around him. Sally and her best friend Marylynn make jokes about him.

So when Sally begins to re-vise “Fitcher’s Bird,” writing from a specific point of view, it is easy for her to write Ed into her re-vision of the Grimm’s tale. A reading of the tale in an evening class called “Forms of Fiction” prompts the assignment. Bertha, the instructor, reads “Fitcher’s Bird” to the class and gives her students the task of writing a modern, realistic version of the tale. Bertha adds another requirement: “They were supposed to remember the features that stood out for them” (172).

A wizard dressed as a beggar goes from house to house looking for young girls. He comes upon a house where three beautiful girls live. When one of the girls gives him a piece of bread and touches him, she is compelled to jump into his basket. He takes her away to his house. The wizard showers the girl with all sorts of gifts, but pretty soon must go away and gives her keys to the rooms in the house, an egg that she must guard, and the prohibition not to enter one specific room. Her curiosity overcomes her, and she enters the room to find a large basin of blood and cut up bodies. Frightened, she drops the egg into the blood. Of course, the blood will not disappear when she tries to scrub the egg clean. The wizard returns, sees the evidence of her disobedience, chops her up and throws her into the basin. He goes to get the second sister and does the same thing. The third time around is different. The remaining sister is “cunning and wily.” When she goes to the forbidden room, she sets the egg aside. She finds her sisters, re/members (reassembles) their bodies and devises a scheme to

escape. Sally recalls only certain parts of the story. She does not remember, it seems, the third sister's clever escape, which might suggest to Sally the need to flee her troubled marriage, but the prospect of leaving her husband frightens her.

It is not surprising that Sally has a selective memory. "This is what Bertha read, as far as Sally can remember" (172). Because Bertha will not allow her students to take notes, Sally is forced to reconstruct the details of the story. Her memory, however, distorts the printed version. The version Atwood probably read as a child and possibly memorized begins: "There was once a wizard who used to take the form of a poor man, and went to houses and begged, and caught pretty girls. No one knew wither he carried them, for they were never seen again" (*Complete Grimm's* 216). When Atwood, fifty years later, retells the story in her essay "Of Souls as Birds," her retelling is close to the text she received in 1944. She writes: "It concerned a wizard who takes the form of a poor man and goes begging, carrying a large basket on his back. Those who give him bread, and whom he touches, are forced to jump into his basket" (32).

Sally, though, makes additional changes to the story. She omits details such as the father and the wizard pretending to give to charity. In Sally's story, the girl touches the poor man; in Grimm's, "he did but touch her." Most important is Sally's foregrounding the victimized girls. Thus, she begins: "There were once three young sisters. One day a beggar with a large basket on his back came to the door and asked for some bread. The eldest sister brought him

some, but no sooner had she touched him than she was compelled to jump into his basket" (Atwood "Egg" 173). Like the women writers under discussion in this project, Sally has reclaimed the story as one in which women are at the center.

Although the narrator has recorded Sally's narrative, Sally herself has yet to put her words down on paper. By the end of the story, even though the reader may read what Sally has "written" thus far, the complete story does not yet exist, remaining a story like one of Shahrazad's "half-told" tales. Sally goes to bed still thinking about the direction her story will take: "This is something the story left out. Sally thinks: the egg is alive, and one day it will hatch. But what will come of it" (184)? Ending the story with a question is similar to Shahrazad's strategy of omitting the ending of her story and thus ensuring that Shahrayar will spare her life long enough for her to complete the ending to a story without an ultimate conclusion but only the beginning of the next story. In *The Thousand and One Nights*, Shahrazad decides to risk her life to cause Shahrayar' to stop murdering women by devising a scheme that put her at the very center of danger. She offers herself to Shahrayar but meanwhile has prompted her sister Dinarzad to ask to hear a story every night. No sooner has Shahrazad "finished" a story than her sister says, "'This is an amazing story,'" and Shahrazad replies, "What is this compared with what I shall tell you tomorrow night if the king spares me and lets me live!' The king says to himself, 'By God, I will not have her put to death until I find out what happened to the man with the two black dogs. Then I will have her

put to death' (Haddawy 25). This pattern continues. Nine hundred and ninety-six nights later, Shahrazad is still telling stories. Her final story ends not in death but in birth. Shahrazad bears the king three sons and eventually becomes his queen. Sally, however, has only *one* story to tell. If she is able to delay the ending, she might be able to prolong the fantasy she has created about Ed and her marriage. Whatever Sally does eventually write will be her creation.

As the reader finishes the story, pondering the answers to the questions—How will Sally re-vision "Fitcher's Bird?" What point of view will she use? What does it mean if Ed is the egg? Why does Sally mis/remember the beginning of "Fitcher's Bird" to foreground the sisters?—she knows that whatever she might infer, only she has the power to bring finality to her narrative. Sally as focalizer of the primary story and narrator of the embedded narrative still holds *the* central position in the text. The narrator tells Sally's story from her point of view. Sally, in turns, narrates her rendition of "Fitcher's Bird." As such, Sally has textual authority. As Angela Carter writes: "Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation" ("Notes 43). In the three primary narratives under discussion in this chapter, language has been used as an instrument of domination and liberation, but ironically, language is not as successful for Sally as it is for Jane and the Marquise.

For example, in addition to Jane's frequent addresses to the reader, she speaks her mind to figures of authority. When she is still a girl living at

Gateshead, Mr. Brocklehurst admonishes her for her lack of gratitude and deceitfulness. After he leaves, Jane and Mrs. Reed are alone, and Jane is compelled to speak the truth. “*Speak* I must: I had been trodden on severely and *must* turn but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist?” Her strength is in her voice. “I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence” (Brontë 36). Jane rarely fails to speak her mind. The narrator in “The Bloody Chamber,” manipulates language to create a favorable or justifiable presentation of herself and the events of her life. Sally is unable to complete her story, thus not using language effectively. However, the narrator’s intervention maintains the reader at a safe, critical distance from Sally even as she narrates her re-vision of “Fitcher’s Bird.” The effect is a double-parody. First, the narrator gently mocks Sally’s pretend world of Monopoly board games and a 1940’s coffee commercial, thus hampering the reader’s identification with her dilemma. On another level, Sally is parodied as a creator because of her unsuccessful attempts to author a re-vision of “Fitcher’s Fowl.” However, if she can write her story by “looking back [. . .] of seeing with fresh eyes, [. . .] of entering an old text [her marriage] from a new critical direction [re-vision of Grimm’s ‘Fitcher’s Bird’], this creative act will ultimately result in her survival (Rich 35). To complete the project that Rich has proposed would be difficult for Sally who is more comfortable with the familiar even though it might no longer be satisfying.

Perhaps Sally is unable to write her re-vision because she continually vacillates between playing the role of oppressor/victim; subject/object; author/reader. Other critics have noted Sally's role reversals. Cristina Bacchilega writes: "Sally also self-consciously doubles as the Bluebeard figure, the wizard. After all, she hunted Ed down; she is the one objectifying her husband" (114). For example, she spends a lot of time looking at him:

On good days she sees his stupidity as innocence, lamblike, shining with the light of (for instance) green daisied meadows in the sun. (When Sally starts thinking this way about Ed, in terms of the calendar art from the service-station washrooms of her childhood, dredging up images of a boy with curly golden hair, his arm thrown around the neck of an Irish setter—a notorious brainless beast, she reminds herself—she knows she is sliding over the edge, into a ghastly kind of sentimentality, and that she must stop at once, or Ed will vanish. (Atwood "Egg" 146)

Perhaps Sally's fear that Ed will disappear is her reason for creating different personae for him. Sally has even focalized Ed as the prince in Grimm's "Briar Rose" who must "make it through the forest with all its witches and traps and pitfalls and ends up with the princess, who is Sally, of course" (146). Sally's most original idea, however, is her casting of Ed as the egg in her re-vision of "Fitcher's Bird." "Ed egg, blank and pristine and lovely. Stupid, too. Boiled,

probably,” she thinks as she toys with the assignment during the last part of the story (176). However, on the night of her dinner party, she comes in for the cruel realization that her husband is probably being unfaithful to her. When Ed thinks no one is looking, he fondles Sally’s friend Marylynn’s behind. Thus, Sally’s image of married life and Ed shaped by television commercials, glossy photographs on wall calendars, Agatha Christie mysteries, and her own fantasies, concocted while she stands at her kitchen window watching Ed putter in the garden, has been instantly shattered.

On another level, Ed is identified with Bluebeard. The narrator notes that Ed too has been married several times. Neither Sally nor Ed knows the reason those marriages ended: “What happened with these marriages, what went wrong? His protestations of ignorance, his refusal to discuss the finer points, is frustrating to Sally, because she would like to hear the whole story” (148). More important than the fate of his former wives is the state of Sally and Ed’s current relationship. Sally thinks, “If he doesn’t know what happened with the other two, maybe the same thing could be happening with her and he doesn’t know about that, either” (148). Contrary to the situation in “Fitcher’s Bird,” in which the wizard seduces young women, Sally is the one guilty of seducing Ed into marriage. “What had she invented for him, in the beginning? [. . .] And he’d been so sweet, looking at her with those stunned brown eyes of his [. . .] And she’d felt such triumph, to have carried off her imposture, pried out of him that miniscule

token of concern" (152). Is this Sally's recognition that she is indeed the false bride who tricked Ed into marriage, or is this a foreshadowing of Ed, the false groom? Learning and accepting the truth is crucial for Sally's survival. She *must* look into the forbidden chamber, not simply into the pigeon-holes in her newly purchased *keyhole* desk where she sits to create her story, "fiddling with her felt-tipped pen."²⁹ Meanwhile, Ed has installed new equipment that allows him to monitor and "look" into his patients' hearts. Sally sees this room as a kind of bluebeardean chamber: "Put a batch of women in there with Ed and they would never want to come out. They'd want to stay in there while he ran his probe over their wet skins and pointed out to them the defects of their beating hearts" (161). While Sally is living a bluebeardean tale, she must write her own story, using the "Bluebeard" variant, "Fitcher's Bird." Yet, Sally wonders about the validity of her approach to writing the story. Trying to merge her perception of Ed and the egg, she asks herself, "But how can there be a story from the egg's point of view, if the egg is so closed and unaware" (176)? How, indeed? Although Sally says the egg is the most significant feature of the story, the key and the forbidden chamber also "[stand] out for her."

First, her insistence on purchasing a nineteenth century keyhole desk filled with pigeon-holes, the place that holds the secrets of her creative processes much like the forbidden rooms in the wizard's or Bluebeard's house suggests the importance these images hold for her. Additionally, Sally searches the key to

Ed's identity in the same way that the Marquise seeks to learn the Marquis' true character even though the evidence surrounds her.

As Sally mentally works on the story, she is bound "to do something more clever" (175). She even thinks of making herself the "cunning heroine" until she sees Ed fondle her best friend. Instantly, the narrator disrupts the reader's expectations and transforms Sally into the victim as well as the oppressor! As the wife who has just witnessed her husband's infidelity, she is certainly a victim. Yet because she has seduced Ed and has possession of the egg, she doubles as Bluebeard and the wizard who ultimately get their just deserts. Sally's comeuppance is the realization that she "has been wrong about Ed, for years, forever" (182). The question is both--Is Sally the true bride and is Ed the false groom? Paradoxically, Sally neither answers nor asks these questions outright. She continues to skirt reality as evidenced by the interplay among the embedded Grimm's tales and the primary text.

First, the "true bride" intertext, an emblem of Sally's desire, combines two Grimm's stories: "Goose Girl" and "True Bride." In "Goose Girl," a princess, accompanied by her waiting maid, journeys to meet her prince. Along the way, the servant girl gets power over the princess and forces the princess to surrender her royal garments. The servant enters the kingdom dressed as the princess, while the real princess becomes a servant who tends the geese. However, once the king discovers the deception, he tricks the false bride into pronouncing a

death sentence on herself. The false bride admits that “She deserves no better fate than to be stripped entirely naked, and put in a barrel which is studded inside with pointed nails and two white horses should be harnessed to it, which will drag her along through one street after another, till she is dead” (*Complete Grimm’s* 411). Immediately, the king acknowledges that the false bride has “pronounced [her] own sentence, and thus shall it be done” (411).

However, fearing Ed will perceive Sally as his false bride, she imagines herself being “rolled downhill, endlessly” in a nail-studded barrel (Atwood “Egg” 148). Why does she not pronounce the same sentence on Ed when she discovers his infidelity, thus making him the false groom? It is apparently easier to accept being the victim and the object of deception rather than the avenger of deception. It is interesting to note that traditionally women have been punished for being “false” (e.g. unfaithful in marriage).

Ironically, though, Sally has another chance at being the true bride as depicted in the conventional narrative, “True Bride.” In that story, the young girl waits so long for her groom to return to her that she eventually goes to seek him on her own and finds him. She does not ask his reason for not returning. Instead, she “stepped up to him, and kissed him on his left cheek, and in a moment it was as if scales fell from his eye, and he recognized the true bride” (*Complete Grimm’s* 759). Not confronting Ed about his infidelity is a way to hold onto the belief that Ed will “return” to her and make her the true bride and a way

to hold onto the belief that not Ed's, but her own eyes have deceived her. "Now she isn't sure whether she really saw what she thought she saw. Even if she did, what does it mean?" (Atwood "Egg" 182).

Ed too doubles as Bluebeard and victim, since he displays the characteristics of the women in "Fitcher's Bird." For example, his "experimenting" with other women could exemplify curiosity. Extending the role reversal even further, Ed only does what women expect of him. His curiosity leads him into the forbidden room of marital infidelity and causes his "key" to be bloody, i.e. stained by his crime. However, the key in this story is not a key but an egg. In her story, Sally has already cast Ed as the egg. Both the egg and key are "innocent and passive causes of so much misfortune," Sally believes. No wonder she has difficulty writing the story with Ed depicted as the egg.

The irony of Sally's representing Ed as an egg is that it is the one true symbol of disobedience, but it is also a victim of sorts. It has no will of its own. Others, including Sally, can manipulate it. Therefore, if Ed is associated with the egg, he has no will, no power and is consequently blameless, and if Sally can continue to believe that fantasy, she can preserve her safe marriage. Yet her marriage can never be of the kind typified in "Goose Girl," "The Crystal Ball," or in "True Bride." Sally's marriage can only parody those fantasies.

Consequently, when Sally lies in bed next to Ed mentally re-visioning "Fitcher's Bird," she sees the egg: "[She] is afraid of it, for 'it is larger than a real

egg and golden pink, resting in a nest of brambles, glowing softly as though there's something red and hot inside it.[. . .] the egg is alive, and one day it will hatch" (184).

Out of the egg might hatch a magical crystal ball, the key to happiness. In another Grimm's story, "The Crystal Ball," a young man seeks a crystal ball out of the body of a fiery bird "which bears in its body a red-hot egg and in the egg the crystal ball lies as its yolk" (*Complete Grimm's* 800). After he has safely retrieved the crystal, he breaks the evil spell on the princess, restoring her beauty, and then marries her. The egg might also be the egg in "Fitcher's Bird," that seems to have been left behind after the sisters made their escape. If so, then the egg burns in the fire along with the wizard and his friends. Of course, the egg could be almost anything else, for the story is still in Sally's head, and Sally is empowered with the authorial pen. Although Shahrazad eventually ends her thousand and one stories, Sally's one story does not end.

As a result, the reader resigns herself to a state of uncomfortable ambivalence not experienced in any of the texts discussed thus far. In *Jane Eyre*, the reader is assured that Jane has made her definitive statement to the world and is happy in her marriage to Rochester. In "The Bloody Chamber," the reader and the story's narratee look back with the Marquise on her past life already written. Sally's narrative, on the other hand, is yet to be completed. As the narrator says, "She can't afford to be wrong, or to be right either" (Atwood "Egg"

182). Therefore, she chooses not to choose. The reader can only wait and wonder. Sally's text, then, is re/membered as a manifestation of her inner self that struggles with her tenuous position of authority and the awareness that only she can write her own life. The stakes are high. Sally, like many other women, might not be ready for the challenge. At least, not yet.

¹ Annette Kolodny demonstrates how reading texts "correctly" is gender determined in her analysis of "A Jury of Her Peers," in which women are able to discern evidence implicating Minnie Foster in her husband's murder, but the male investigators overlook the evidence because they could not see the importance of "insignificant" household things. See "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts."

² These are by no means the only narratives that embed texts. I leave out several interesting texts—Nancy Drew mystery and a Harlequin Romance and Richard Wright's *Black Boy*.

³ This list is only a sampling of intertexts. One could also examine the novel in relationship to *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Bewick's*, *Gulliver's Travels*, etc. The stories I have chosen have been transmitted by women storytellers and with the exception of "The Wife of Bath" were once part of the oral tradition.

⁴ Sylvère Monod, in his essay, "Charlotte Brontë and the Thirty 'Readers' of *Jane Eyre*" discusses at length the various attitudes Jane has towards her readers.

⁵ Robyn Warhol suggests that in a number of nineteenth century novels by Elizabeth Gaskell, Harriet Beecher Stowe and George Eliot, the authors use engaging as opposed to distancing narrators. The former "evoke[s] sympathy and identification from an actual reader who is unknown to the author" (*Gendered* 32). Although Jane is not, by Warhol's definition, an engaging narrator, since she is a character in her story, I think, Jane's strategy of direct address does indeed engage the reader.

⁶ In the 1830's Sarah Ellis wrote: "The first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men, inferior in mental power in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength" (Perkin 33).

⁷ Paula Sullivan also notes this similarity and the possible allusion to Charles Perrault.

⁸ At Gateshead, in the eyes of Aunt Reed, Jane appears to be the disagreeable child depicted in "Les Fees" who spits out toads and snakes when she speaks. Aunt Reed says to her and sends her off to the red room as the disagreeable sister "alla mourir au coin d'un bois" (*Contes* 69). On another level, Georgiana and Eliza are similar to the evil stepsisters in Cinderella who treat the latter abominably. If Jane is to be Cinderella, she certainly does not look the part. Of course, Brontë writes about her construction of a heroine who is "as plain and..." Again, she takes pieces of texts to insert into her own for her own narrative purposes.

⁹ One could argue that Jane Eyre is not a re-vision of "Bluebeard" but rather a re-vision of "Beauty and the Beast" or "Cinderella." Those readings are certainly valid. A number of critics have examined the numerous and varied fairy tale elements in the novel. See Rowe and Sullivan, for example.

¹⁰ In 1798, George Coleman produced his opera, *Bluebeard*. Maria Edgeworth re-told the story in *Practical Education*. Sara Trimmer reviewed it in 1804. Of course, the analogue "Mr Fox" is an old English tale predating "Bluebeard" by at least one hundred years.

¹¹ Paula Sullivan discusses the possible influence this article might have had on Brontë.

¹² This scene is cited in the *New Variorum Shakespeare* as evidence of a folktale that predates Perrault's "Bluebeard."

¹³ Other critics have also read the "dead wives" symbolically. For example, Bettelheim suggests that the dead wives represent Bluebeard's wife's marital infidelity. "The blood on the egg [in "Fitcher's Bird" discussed in the "Bluebeard's Egg" section] and the key seems to symbolize that the woman had sexual relations. Therefore we can understand her anxious fantasy that depicts corpses of women who had been killed for having been similarly unfaithful" (301).

¹⁴ The forbidden room motif is also found in *The Thousand and One Nights*. During the sixtieth to sixty-second nights, Shahrazad tells the story of a dervish who opens the door of a “forbidden room.” The dervish comes to a palace where forty beautiful girls live. “Then they said, ‘Choose from among us whomever you wish to spend the night with, we are your maids, awaiting your command. ‘I choose a girl with a lovely face and a soft body like her of whom the poet said [. . .]’” (Haddawy 128). He sleeps with a different girl every night until they must go away for forty days. They give him all of the keys to rooms filled with jewels, gardens, tropical fruits, anything he could ever desire. “You have ninety-nine chambers to open and to enjoy looking at what is in them as you please, but if you open the one with the door of red gold, that will cause our separation” (129). One day before they return, the inevitable occurs. He opens the door. “I was met by a perfume that, as I smelled it, sent me reeling to the floor, and made me swoon for a long time (131). When the dervish revives, he sees a black horse and attempts to ride it. The horse throws him and lashes him with his tail so hard “that it gouged out my eye and made it roll on my cheek, leaving me one-eyed (132). Rochester’s horse, Mesour, throws him when he first meets Jane. Mesour echoes the name of the Masour, the executioner in the tales. A wild horse and an executioner, two symbols capable of inflicting harm, seem to coalesce to foreshadow Rochester’s blindness. Because Rochester has made women the object of his gaze, he now bears the consequences. Likewise, the young men in *Thousand and One Nights* say, “Because of our curious eyes, we lost our eyes,” (132). Ultimately, this is the reason for Rochester’s suffering. On a literal level, Bluebeard’s wife suffers because of her curious eyes. However, Bluebeard’s wife gets a second chance. Ironically, Rochester also gets a second chance.

¹⁵ Paula Sullivan also notes the allusion to the “The Wife of Bath” (64).

¹⁶ *Pupil*: “He cut asunder the Apple of the eye in several animals” (*OED*).

¹⁷ Alisoun says, “‘God help me so, I was to hym as kynde, / As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde, / And also trewe, and so was he to me.’” (*Riverside Chaucer* 116:823-25)

¹⁸ The heroine is nameless, but because she marries a marquis, I will call her either the narrator or the Marquise throughout.

¹⁹ I am speculating who the narratee might be. I think s/he might be the child the narrator might have had. She did sleep with her husband that one time. So, it is possible she is telling her child her life story.

²⁰ I would like to make a sharp distinction here between story and narrative. Since the story has already occurred, the reader cannot participate in events as they occur, but she can (as she does in *Jane Eyre*) participate in the narrative, telling of those events.

²¹ In her theory of parody, Linda Hutcheon allows for the participation of both "the decoder and the text." She goes on to say that "[parody's] enunciative context is even broader: both the encoding and sharing of codes between producer and receiver are central (37). Thus, in "The Bloody Chamber" because there now seems to be complicity between reader and author, the narrator is at a disadvantage.

²² This story is played out even in contemporary novels and films. See Karol Kelley's essay "Pretty Woman: A Modern Cinderella" for a comparison between the 1990 film *Pretty Woman* and "Cinderella."

²³ However, Sylvia Ashton Warner's re-vision of "Bluebeard," entitled "Bluebeard's Daughter," gives Bluebeard a daughter who has inherited her mother's bent toward curiosity which she channels into making astronomical discoveries.

²⁴ Gilles de Rais has been identified as the prototype for Bluebeard. However, his crimes included torturing and killing small boys. In Huysmans's *Là-Bas*, the protagonist-writer is obsessed with telling Gilles de Rais's story.

²⁵ In one version of "Bluebeard," the last wife begs Bluebeard to allow her to go upstairs and put on her wedding dress.

²⁶ Angela Carter wrote two versions of "Little Red Riding Hood," included in *The Bloody Chamber*: "The Company of Wolves" and "Wolf-Alice," both parodying Perrault's tale.

²⁷ The Grimms omitted "Castle of Murder" in the 1819 edition of their collected tales. In the cellar, an old woman is scraping out dead women's intestines. "Tomorrow, I'll be scraping yours too," she tells the young girl that the nobleman has seduced (Zipes *Complete* 670).

²⁸ There might be some significance to the fact that the teacher is named Bertha, the name of Rochester's first wife in *Jane Eyre*, and Sally's husband is named Edward, Rochester's first name. Both Edwards are womanizers.

²⁹ *Pencil* not *pen* is etymologically connected to *penis*. However, *pen* is, nevertheless, a phallic symbol. Sally seems to be attempting to acquire patriarchal power using her metaphorical pen/is.

It's rather awful to think that all this nonsense I am writing here, will be alive and full of meaning years after I too am lying in Kensal Green, and I wonder what will be written on these clean white pages of my diary, so silent and blank as to the future, so mournful and full of meaning as to the past, perhaps.

Anne Thackeray Ritchie, age 17

Women are freer under King Edward's rule, more independent, more impressionable, more generally interested in the affairs of life, and more probably a great deal happier than they used to be sixty years ago; but notwithstanding the spread of education—perhaps because of it—they seem in some ways less dominant and important, not so much considered, as they once were. *They may be authors now, but they are not such authorities* (my italics).

Anne Thackeray, age 82

Chapter 4- Empowered, Single and Free

Even as Sally lies in bed in a state of indecisiveness, the reader believes that she still possesses the power to choose the direction of her life. Absent is any sense that Margaret Atwood is manipulating Sally, for Atwood has constructed her narrative so that we fully believe in Sally's authority over her text and life. The same is not true for the heroine of Anne Thackeray Ritchie's¹ "Bluebeard's Keys" published in *The Cornhill Magazine* in two parts: February 1871 and June 1871.

Although Ritchie retained Perrault's basic storyline, she transformed his six-page narrative into a novella about Fanny de Travers, a young woman of eighteen, who knows little about the realities of marriage and becomes engaged

to Ottavio Barbi (Bluebeard). Almost immediately after her engagement, she realizes what marriage costs. She will be free of her mother's rule only to be controlled by her husband's iron grip. Frustrated and angry, she cries out, "What is the good of marrying if one can't do as one likes?" (212). More important, Fanny also learns that to marry Barbi is to put her life in danger. Subverting Perrault's ending in which Bluebeard's widow remarries "un fort honnête homme," who makes her forget her bad times with Bluebeard, there is no "fort honnête homme," no reformed Rochester, blind piano tuner or adulterous heart surgeon to take Barbi's place. Instead, unlike Jane Eyre, the Marquise or Sally, Fanny takes a bold step and rejects marriage altogether. As a result, Fanny is more free and empowered than the heroines in previous chapters. Paradoxically, though, she does not have authority over her text in the way that the previous heroines do.

Ritchie gives the authority conferred by narration to an elderly, single character who pervades "Bluebeard's Keys" and Ritchie's other fairy-tale revisions. For the most part, the narrator does not function as a dramatized figure but as an external narrator and commentator who uses strategies of engagement to get the reader's sympathy. She breaks the narrative sequence with discourses on topical matters and obtains a combination of intratextuality and intertextuality while weaving into her narratives several themes of social

relevance. The nature of *The Cornhill* made it all possible for Anne Thackeray Ritchie to present her narratives through the voice of a self-reflexive narrator.

Writing for *The Cornhill*²

First, in order to appreciate how Ritchie makes use of her narrator in the presentation of characters, stories and ideas, it is essential to examine “Bluebeard’s Keys” within the context of *The Cornhill*, which her father, William Makepeace Thackeray, and publisher, George Smith founded in January 1860. In 1859, in a letter to a “Contributor,” Thackeray communicated his plan: “I [. . .] invite pleasant and instructed gentlemen and ladies to contribute their share to the conversation” (Harden 346). He also hoped that “if we can only get people to tell what they know, pretty briefly and good-humouredly, and not in a manner obtrusively didactic—what a pleasant ordinary we may have, and how gladly folks will come to it” (346)! And they did. The debut issue was a phenomenal success, selling an unprecedented 120,000 copies. Although not all copies sold as well, and there were periods when readership diminished to 20,000, it was an important magazine in the nineteenth century and for most of the twentieth.³ Thackeray’s most important requirement also seemed to have invited his daughter to the magazine, for he writes: “At our social table, we shall suppose ladies and children always present” (346). This guideline has a double implication: that if topics were inappropriate for women and children, they were

unacceptable to the magazine⁴ and that the authors were engaged in conversations with “real” readers and, therefore, had to fulfill their expectations. Apparently, Anne Thackeray Ritchie had the necessary talent as well as the right connections to be a *Cornhill* author. At the age of twenty-two, she published her first essay anonymously in the May 1860 issue. In the course of her career, she retold nine fairy tales for *The Cornhill*. Five are retellings of Perrault’s *Contes*, including “Sleeping Beauty,” “Cinderella,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “Bluebeard,” She also retold the English folktale, “Jack the Giant Killer;”⁵ Grimm’s “Jack and the Beanstalk;” Mme de Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast;” and Mme. D’Aulnoy’s “The White Cat.”⁶ In fact, Ritchie made more contributions to the magazine than any other woman, publishing forty-seven titles, including novels, short stories and essays.⁷

Because of Ritchie’s close “literary” relationship with her father, she would have possessed intimate knowledge of the kind of essays and fiction acceptable to *The Cornhill*,⁸ and as a result of his mentoring, her writing would have surely fulfilled his stringent requirements.⁹ Even Ritchie herself acknowledged her advantage in being the editor’s daughter. In the introduction to *Centenary Edition of William Thackeray’s Works*, she writes: “The first time I realized the privilege of an editor’s daughter was one winter’s evening, when, instead of having to wait a month for the second number of “Framley Parsonage,”¹⁰ my

father sent me upstairs to the study to fetch the proof sheets which were lying on the table” (544).

But while Ritchie’s position as a *Cornhill* author might have been initially influenced by the fact that she was the editor’s daughter, it cannot be overlooked that Thackeray resigned his editorship in March 1862 and died on Christmas Eve, 1863, but yet his daughter continued to publish in *The Cornhill* until shortly before her death in 1919.¹¹ Thackeray certainly opened the door for his daughter, but she crossed the threshold and took her own place at *The Cornhill*’s “social table.”

A number of critics have noted the significance of being a part of that publishing circle. Helen Debenham suggests Ritchie published so extensively in *The Cornhill*, that one could say that she “[embodied] its feminine voice” (81). Moreover, as Manuela Mourão states: “part of Ritchie’s interest is that she was one of a relatively small number of women writers of non-fiction [. . .] who accessed a traditionally male, public, and authoritative discourse, and was able to use it to disrupt patriarchy from within” (74-75).¹² In addition, Caroline Sumpter believes that “publication in the *Cornhill* placed Anne Thackeray’s fiction within the bounds of an interactive literary construct -- a format of eclectic authors, genres and texts combined to produce a distinct periodical identity” (66).¹³ Undoubtedly, for Anne Thackeray Ritchie,¹⁴ the fact that she published in

The Cornhill Magazine was the first vital step in acquiring and maintaining authority over her texts.

The second step toward Ritchie's acquisition of authority was the creation of the narrator and her companion H., whom Ritchie first introduces in "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." The narrator begins the tale by saying, "A kind enchantress one day put into my hand a mystic volume prettily lettered and bound in green, saying, 'I am so fond of this book. It has all the dear old fairy tales in it; one never tires of them. Do take it'" (556). The narrator then pores over the fairy tale collection. She and H. identify a *mélange* of characters with their real-life counterparts:

We had dined with Lord Carabas only the day before and met Puss in Boots—Beauty and the Beast were also there; we uncharitably counted up, I am ashamed to say, no less than six Bluebeards [. . .] a girl with toads dropping from her mouth: we knew three or four of each. Cinderellas—alas! who does not know more than one dear, poor, pretty Cinderella, and, as for sleeping Princesses in the woods, how many one can reckon up! Young, old, ugly, pretty, awakening, sleeping still. (557)

The narrator's endeavor to relate fairy-tale characters to real characters, according to Robyn R. Warhol, is a strategy of engagement. She writes, "The

characters are possibly as 'real' as the narrator and narratee, who are, in these cases, to be identified with the actual author and actual reader" (814).

In another attempt to engage her reader, the narrator consciously constructs her own versions of familiar fairy tales. Near the beginning of "Little Red Riding Hood," she writes, "This is no place to write of some stories, so sad and so hopeless that they can scarcely be spoken" (440). And at the start of "Bluebeard's Keys," she writes, "This little story is written under the shadow of the great keys of St. Peter's" (192). There is no doubt that the narrator wants us to feel that she is actively and currently writing these stories down. But at the same time, she suggests these stories are illustrative of reality. H. says, "All these histories are the histories of human nature, which does not seem to change very much in a thousand years or so, and we don't get tired of the fairies because they are so true to it" ("Sleeping" 557). As Warhol states, the engaging narrator suggests "that the fictions reflect real-world conditions" (815). Thus, the narrator informs the reader that she has seen the "Little Red Riding Hood" characters in a hotel in Fontainebleau. She also has the ability to become a dramatized character if the events warrant her intervention. When Belinda (Beauty) has returned home to her father, and Beast (Guy) is pining for her, H. fetches Belinda in her carriage to take her to Guy and thus ensures the happy resolution. In the last part of "Bluebeard's Keys," the narrator assures H. that Fanny is in London and that she has seen Barbi on her last visit to Rome.

Instead of distracting the reader, these interventions underscore the narrator's authority to alter and connect narratives in ways that might challenge conventional notions. Although Perrault seems to present each tale in his *Contes* as a separate entity, Ritchie links them to emphasize their thematic relationship to one another. For instance, she connects the beginnings and endings of "Sleeping Beauty" (May 1866) and "Cinderella" (June 1866) to obtain intertextuality. The former tale ends with: "It is not in fairy tales only that things fall out as one could wish. [. . .] Some day I may perhaps tell you more about the fairies and enchanting princesses of my acquaintance" (566). Then the following month, "Cinderella" opens with: "It is, happily, not only in fairy tales that things sometimes fall out as one could wish, that anxieties are allayed, mistakes explained away, friends reconciled." (721).

The narrator's textual manipulation in "Bluebeard's Keys," however, is more complex. As in Perrault, Part One (February 1871) of the tale ends when the brothers come to rescue Fanny and her sister Anne. In Ritchie's, the brothers who save the girls are not their siblings but brothers of the church. Rather than kill Barbi [Bluebeard], they lead him away to a monastery, and Part One ends. Four months later, the narrator begins Part Two, with a reference to Part One. H. then asks, "'How did it all come straight'" (688). The narrator responds, "I told her that I was surprised that, with all her experience of life, she should imagine

that things *did* come straight, or that people extricated themselves from difficulties” (688).

The irony is that Fanny does extricate herself although she does not replace Barbi with “un fort honnête homme” as the heroine in Perrault’s tale does. In fact, Ritchie’s narrator tells us, “the point of my story was, that they did *not* marry. Most stories end with a wedding, the climax of mine was, that the wedding was happily broken off” (688).¹⁵ Hinted at in earlier retellings, but now, the narrator thoroughly challenges the possibility of the “happily-ever-after” marriage while simultaneously breaking the narrative sequence to interject a synopsis of a more traditional re-telling of Perrault’s tale:

When the brothers appear galloping into the celebrated Bluebeard’s castle just in the nick of time, to rescue their sister from the hands of that ferocious noble, the history finishes off, but we don’t know what happens to any them, except that Fatima¹⁶ is safe from her horrible husband; the brothers have cut off his head with his own scimitar. No one makes any remark; there is not even an inquest. The executioners peacefully succeed (such is the state of the law in fairy tales) to a share of the rich inheritance, and we take it for granted that Fatima gives a decent burial to the poor wives hanging up so long in the cupboard. One question in

particular will never be answered. What did the *first* wife see when she peeped in with the key? (689)

Contrary to the narrator's claim about our ignorance of the fate of the characters, in the traditional version of this tale, what happens to the characters is clear: the brothers get commissions in the army, and Sister Anne and Fatima marry. The narrator has empowered herself to change the traditional story but has not extended that power to offer a solution to a genuine puzzle in the tale: namely, what *did* the first wife see? Rather than answer, the narrator resumes her narrative, paraphrasing the opening lines of Part Two: "When I tried some months ago to tell a little story about one of the many Bluebeards of our generation, I left off somewhat abruptly, where the two Brothers of the confraternity came in by a garden staircase, and delivered the Marchese's frightened betrothed from his violence" (689). Not only does the narrator transform the traditional tale into a contemporary one, she embeds a portion of the former into her present narrative, omitting fundamental details and raising an important question that few re-tellers have contemplated.¹⁷

Infusing topical issues into the narrative is another strategy of self-authorization that is readily seen in the opening paragraphs of "Bluebeard's Keys."¹⁸ The narrator engages in a short discussion on her penchant for old keys, commenting on different kinds of keys and their significance: "Some of us have held the key of the mystery that puzzled us so long. There is the key of a

heart's secret, too [. . .] and the key of the cupboard, where the skeleton is hidden—and, besides all these ghost keys, there are the real keys" (2). Moreover, because the key is in the opening position in the narrative, its significance seems even greater than it is in Perrault's tale. Since readers were familiar with "Bluebeard,"¹⁹ they would recognize the key as an essential element in the narrative.

In addition to establishing the key as an important motif, the narrator's discourse obtains intertextuality with another article in *The Cornhill*, published six years before "Bluebeard's Keys," entitled "A Few Thoughts on Keys." The entire article is a discussion of the infinite variety of keys and their disposition. The author of this essay takes a more distant, journalistic tone and speaks to men, mocking the carelessness of their wives: "Instead of the desired key, you find a mob of little nameless, objectless keys, staring you in the face, tripping up your fingers, and maddening you by their multiplicity and inane uniformity of aspect" (627).

When "A Few Thoughts on Keys" and the opening of "Bluebeard's Keys" are read together, we become aware that Ritchie is "[contributing her] share to the conversation," something "the world is talking about." (Harden 346). An even more important observation is that the epigraph for the essay, "A Few Thoughts on Keys" is taken from a work entitled *A History of Blue Beard*: "Now,—this key was a fairy" (623). The author looks forward to "Bluebeard's Keys," and the

narrator of “Bluebeard’s Keys,” in turn, looks back to the 1865 essay. Even though it appears that Ritchie did not contribute to that particular issue, she perhaps read the essay and saw a natural connection.

The narrator’s achievement of intertextuality has a double significance. On the one hand, following Thackeray’s plan for the magazine, the narrator engages the reader in an ongoing conversation on a commonplace topic. A regular *Cornhill* reader would possibly have remembered the 1865 essay, and this short discourse would have helped to create a comfortable sense of “already read.” On the other hand, the key in “Bluebeard’s Key” becomes more than an object for discourse or for satire. It emphasizes its importance in the narrative. Rather than being a symbol that points to the heroine’s near tragic end as it does in Perrault, the key, which the narrator “gives” to the heroine, denotes her acquisition of knowledge, resulting in her ultimate liberation.

More important than the narrator’s self-reflexiveness and strategies of engagement is the fact that she creates a story that is about more than a young woman who frees herself from a Bluebeard. It is also about how mothers behave destructively towards their children, how marriage can endanger women’s lives, and how women can choose to be single, happy and free despite society’s opposition. The narrator weaves these themes into her earlier retellings of Perrault’s fairy tales, but she brings them to a crescendo in “Bluebeard’s Keys.”

Ineffectual, Destructive Mothers

Central to “Bluebeard” and to “Bluebeard’s Keys” is the theme of ineffectual, destructive mothers who exploit their daughters. It is important to remember that Bluebeard’s reputation for having disappearing brides is well known to the neighboring “dame de qualité,” mother of two young girls, one of whom Bluebeard wants as his next wife. After Bluebeard hosts an eight-day visit to one of his country estates, the younger daughter accepts, and apparently, the mother has consented to the marriage,²⁰ for Perrault writes: “Enfin tout alla si bien, que la cadette commença à trouver que le maître du logis n’avait plus la barbe si bleue” (11). When mother and daughters return to the city, “le mariage se conclut” (11). The mother disappears from the narrative, leaving her daughter to fend for herself. The narrator of “Bluebeard’s Keys,” however, develops the mother’s character, illustrating the extent to which the mother abandons her parental responsibilities in favor of her own material comforts. Prior to writing about destructive mothers in “Bluebeard’s Keys,” however, the narrator critiques mothers in her retellings of several other Perrault’s tales. Her censure ranges from a denouncement of physical abuse inflicted on children as depicted in “Sleeping Beauty” to parental neglect and exploitation as seen in “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Bluebeard’s Keys.”

Lillian Shankman notes that the presentation of ineffectual mothers might be a result of Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s own family situation:²¹ “It is

understandable that Anny's literary mothers are usually absent, ineffectual, or cruel, so that the heroine sometimes must mature within a single-parent home and often will have difficulties owing to this limitation" (67). Ritchie did not invent these "bad" mothers. They are also in the traditional tales. Philip Lewis suggests that "there are far more self-centered, deficient, or maleficent mothers (in nine of eleven tales) than deplorable fathers who appear (in five of eleven)" (180). He also notes the "parental delinquency" of Little Red Riding Hood's mother in not forewarning her daughter of the dangers in talking to wolves. "la pauvre enfant qui ne savait pas qu'il était dangereux de s'arrêter à écouter un loup" (Perrault *Contes* 4).

Ritchie's first-hand knowledge of ineffectual, destructive mothers might have been acquired at the age of three. She and her mother were walking on the beach. Without warning, "she felt herself suddenly and fiercely caught up by her mother and thrown into the surf. Incapable of realizing the meaning of the action, she could only feel, and intensely feel, the terror and resentment roused by her mother's conduct" (Gérin 10). In her journal of 1878,²² Ritchie also wrote about being physically punished as a young child. She describes a time when she was beaten: "One year we went to Montmorency where I was very unhappy & naughty & shut up in my room for a long time & I was whipped" (Shankman 199).

Although in the journal, Ritchie seemingly understates the cruelty of the punishment inflicted upon her, she makes a stronger case against such treatment in her fiction.²³ For example, in “Sleeping Beauty,” she criticizes parents who resort to corporal punishment as a means of disciplining their children: “A great many people think there is nothing in the world so good for children as scoldings, whippings, dark cupboards, and dry bread and water, upon which they expect them to grow up into tall, fat, cheerful, amiable men and women (558). Instead of presenting Cecilia’s mother as purposely abusive, the narrator gently satirizes her, recalling that the mother and governess have been improperly reared themselves, and although Cecilia’s mother:

had grown up stupid, suspicious, narrow-minded, soured, and overbearing, and [. . .] Miss Bowly, her governess’s daughter, had turned out nervous, undecided, melancholy and anxious, and had never married at all, yet they determined to bring up Cecilia as they themselves had been brought up, and sincerely thought they could not do better. (558)

It is interesting to note that despite the narrator’s disapproval of corporal punishment, she excuses Cecilia’s mother and governess by acknowledging that they “sincerely thought they could do no better.” However, for readers of “Cinderella,” the abusive behavior of Ella’s (Cinderella’s) stepmother is

unsurprising. Moreover, the narrator makes no allowances for the stepmother's cruel treatment of Ella.

In "Little Red Riding Hood," the mother is guilty of abdicating her maternal responsibility by inadequately preparing Patty for the wolf's (Rémy's) seduction. When Patty puts on the flamboyant red bonnet, her mother is silent on the danger. Patty's father says, "It is too conspicuous. You can't walk about Paris in that" (461).²⁴ Even though the parents know Rémy is trying to get Patty's inheritance, her father consents to the marriage after he finds Rémy in the dining room having devoured a whole pie and a bottle of wine. He "had finished off everything but the bones and cork and bottle" (473). In the ultimate parody of how momentous life decisions are made on such scanty evidence but also how parents who are supposed to protect do not fulfill their responsibility, the narrator ridicules Patty's father's decision based on the fact that "such a good appetite should imply a good conscience" (473). Ultimately, Rémy will devour Patty as he devoured the meat.²⁵ I agree with Sumpter when she suggests, "in Anne Thackeray's tale, the social system is the villain, more destructive and rapacious than either suitor or grandmother. The narrator warns her readers that such destructive forces make victims of both genders" (70). Parents intent on protecting their daughter's inheritance might make foolish and dangerous decisions in granting permission for their daughter to marry. However, I disagree

with Sumpter when she suggests Rémy has reformed. In the final scene, the narrator seems to suggest Patty's parents' misreading of their future son-in-law.

While the narrator implies parental neglect in "Little Red Riding Hood," in "Bluebeard's Keys" she overtly condemns Fanny de Travers's mother, who represents Ritchie's most powerful statement against the destructiveness of some mothers. First, Mrs. de Travers's name, *de travers*, means "fault" or "failing," signifying the deficiencies in her character. Indeed, she is askew in her perception of the world and her place in it. She knows Barbi's (Bluebeard's) reputation, but foolishly proclaims, "I care for deeds not words." Mrs. de Travers is depicted as a self-serving woman who would sacrifice her daughters for her material comforts, and she refuses to see the truth because she will not jeopardize the wealth and social position Fanny's marriage to Barbi will afford her. Thus, after Barbi takes an interest in Fanny, her mother, according to the narrator, imagines that her own bills have all been paid. The narrator is unrelenting in her criticism and parody of Mrs. de Travers. Riding in the carriage with Barbi and Fanny, Mrs. de Travers thinks, "Here was the reward of her long sacrifice" (207). Her "sacrifice" consists in sitting in her chair dreaming of her social position or criticizing a relative for not giving her an inheritance before he dies. And when Fanny is finally engaged to Barbi, the narrator reveals Mrs. de Travers's thoughts and adds the following commentary: "I knew that I should be rewarded! cries the silly woman" (210). However, when Fanny, upon learning the

truth about Barbi—that he abandoned his first wife and that she committed suicide—breaks off the engagement, her mother insists that she should marry Barbi regardless of his conjugal history.

When Mrs. de Travers attempts to locate Barbi to achieve a reconciliation, the narrator finds another opportunity to criticize her by noting that Mrs. de Travers, who “prided herself upon her devout adherence to the Church, greatly against her will stopped short to perform a profound genuflection” during a religious procession and then runs off after Barbi, more concerned with her fortune than her religion (698). Neither Barbi’s violence towards her own daughter nor his crimes toward other women are of any consequence to her. The narrator finds another opportunity to satirize her when she writes that Mrs. De Travers “thought herself the most injured and ill-used of women: it was a martyrdom she inflicted on her daughters” (705).²⁶

Ultimately, Mrs. de Travers becomes powerless to harm her daughters and has been reduced to silence. She takes ill but recovers sufficiently to attend her daughter Anne’s wedding until she realizes the dressmaker has made a mistake on her dress, causing “another attack, and she sank a few days after, holding Fanny’s hand, and trying to speak as she looked wistfully up in her face” (709). It is important to observe how Ritchie is able to tease through the memories of her life, even painful ones, to re/member them into her fiction in

such a way that she escapes didacticism and sentimentalism, while allowing her narrator to speak from a position of authority.

In addition, by depicting the different parents, especially mothers, within the context of her retellings, Ritchie creates a powerful picture of the varieties of destructive mothers. Each instance, from Cecilia's mother to Mrs. de Travers, exceeds its predecessors in intensity and seriousness. While the narrator suggests that mothers are not the angelic guardians of the hearth, she also shows them as dangerous figures with a real potential for being destructive to their daughters. The narrator's message is that if the daughter is to survive and live the life of her own choosing, she must be strong enough to oppose her mother without feeling guilty.

When Danger and Marriage Are One

The second theme central to "Bluebeard's Keys" is the threat of dangerous marriages. Again, the narrator introduces the topic in earlier retellings of Perrault, but in "Bluebeard's Keys," she makes her strongest statement. As suggested in the previous chapter, the subject of violence to women and wives was topical and pervasive at the time Ritchie was writing, and she brings this subject to *The Cornhill's* "social table." According to Sumpter, "[Ritchie's] allusions became acceptable within the whimsical frame of the fairy-tale,

embedded within highly readable and commercially successful short stories that could also work as fictional 'sweets'" (77).

When the narrator takes up the issue of wife-beating in "Sleeping Beauty," it might appear that she is downplaying its seriousness. Cecilia, portrayed as a silly, uneducated girl whose dinner conversation is limited to a discussion of the slugs she observes in the garden, proclaims she does not want to marry because sometimes husbands physically harm their wives. "I don't intend to marry," said Cecilia, peeling an orange, and quite unmoved, and she slowly curled the rind of her orange in the air. 'I think people are very stupid to marry. Look at poor Jane Simmonds—her husband beats her; Jones saw her'" (562). Because of the presentation of Cecilia, we might disregard her statement, convinced that the narrator is mocking her alone. However, she might also be criticizing a society that permits wives to be victimized by their husbands. According to Françoise Basch, "the cruelties inflicted by husband or lover became notorious, and kept the newspapers well supplied: kicks and punches, brutalities causing the death of the victim, attempted murders" (48).²⁷ Basch also quotes from *Eliza Cook's Journal*, which details men's victimization of women:²⁸ "You hear of men occasionally leading out their wives with a halter round their neck, and selling them amid shouts of laughter, not of disgust'" (48). Although the widespread reality of wife abuse was probably well known to Ritchie, she perhaps had privileged knowledge of its lurid details from reports given by Caroline Norton,

one of her father's friends.²⁹ Norton, granddaughter of dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan, publicly revealed the abuse she suffered. One evening after only two she and her husband were having a conversation. In response to a claim he made, she said "(very uncivilly), 'I thought I had never heard so silly or ridiculous a conclusion.' This remark was punished by a sudden blow and violent kick" (Norton 134). On another occasion, Mr. Norton "desired I would 'cease my contemplations,' and retire to rest, as he had already done; and this mandate producing no result, he suddenly sprang from the bed, seized me by the nape of the neck and dashed me on the floor" (135). Norton was not afraid to expose her husband's cruelty to her. It is possible that Ritchie was drawing upon privileged information, since she might well have heard her father talking about Norton's predicament, as well as from her reading. (It is interesting to note that in "Sleeping Beauty," Cecilia marries Frank Lulworth, who, like Caroline Norton's husband, was a lawyer.) Ritchie, however, makes no further suggestion of wife-beating in this tale. None of Ritchie's male characters commits any noticeable violence upon women until "Bluebeard's Keys."

Through allusions intensifying in seriousness in tales leading up to "Bluebeard's Keys," the narrator has prepared her readers to despise violence toward women as well as destructive mothers. Thus, in "Sleeping Beauty," the narrator hints at marital discord, but at the end of the story, undermines its importance: "Certainly the story would not have been worth the telling if they had

not been married soon after, and lived happily all the rest of their lives" (566). Following that comment is a line break, which suggests an ellipsis in the text, giving the reader pause to think about the narrator's comment and to note she does not say they lived happily, only that the story would not have been worth the telling had they not. Because the narrator makes similar comments in subsequent tales, the reader might be inclined to question the existence of an idyllic marriage. For example, in "Cinderella," the next tale Ritchie publishes, the narrator admits: "To this or that young fairy couple, age, trial, and trouble may be in store but now at least the present is golden; the innocent delights and triumphs of youth and nature are theirs" (721). However, in the final scene of "Cinderella," the narrator suggests the prospect of subsequent marital problems. As the couple speeds away in their wedding carriage, the fairy godmother (Lady Jane) "[flings] the very identical satin slipper after [Ella and the prince] which Ella should have lost at the ball" (742). This narrative gesture recalls the scene in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* when Becky Sharp throws Johnson's *Dictionary* out of the carriage window as she leaves Miss Pinkerton's Academy, suggesting Becky is rejecting the past and will defy convention and authority. The slipper thrown after the departing couple subverts the traditional ending of the fairy tale and its implications. The marriage will not be free from disturbances, a fact the narrator states at the beginning of the story and clinches at the end.

To strengthen the thematic connection between the tales, the narrator reintroduces Cecilia and Frank Lulworth, the main characters in "Sleeping Beauty," in "Little Red Riding Hood," a story in which marital discord is more apparent even though in Perrault's tale, marriage is not a theme. The narrator subverts the tale as well as the moral of Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood," transposing it from a cautionary tale for pre-adolescent girls to a story of marriage and the acquisition of property. According to Sumpter this narrative "works on several ideological levels. It can be read as a critique of male courtship practices and predatory sexuality, it can also be seen as a pointed warning against an insidiously institutionalized system of semi-arranged marriages, in which financial motives allow elders to manipulate the affections of their charges" (70-71). Sumpter's analysis of several other fictional and non-fictional selections in the October 1867 issue of *The Cornhill* shows how the selections function intertextually to make pointed statements suggesting that the social system is constructed to make courtship and marriage destructive. The point I would like to suggest is that Rémy will eventually devour Patty: "He had come with a set purpose, this wolf in sheep's clothing, to perform his part in the bargain, without thought of anything but his own advantage" (454-55). He has set his sights on his grandmother's vast fortune, which Patty will inherit. The narrator reminds the reader of Perrault's moral, saying, "although good old Perrault, in his simple way, to some poor Red Riding Hoods straying from the path, utters a word of warning

rhyme at the end of the old French edition--" (440-41). However, she leaves her sentence incomplete, perhaps a suggestion of the inadequacy of Perrault's warning to young girls against talking to strangers:

On voit ici que de jeunes enfants,
Surtout de jeunes filles,
Belles, bien faites et gentilles
Font très mal d'écouter toutes sortes de gens,
Je dis le loup, car tous les loups
Ne sont pas de la meme sorte. ("Le Petit")

The two-legged wolf is not to be trusted at any cost. Sumpter notes that the "wolf" in Victorian literature was a recognized image of "a woman hunter or sexually aggressive male" (69). The narrator explicitly identifies Rémy as a wolf: "The wolf was playing the fiddle under Little Red Riding Hood's window. Little Red Riding Hood was peeping from behind her cotton curtains. Rémy (that was the wolf's Christian name) could see the little balls bobbing and guess that she was there" (441). Even though it seems Rémy may have developed real affection for Patty, he remains a wolf. His surname, de la Louvière, suggests "le loup." His sweetness toward Patty only supports Perrault's warning that these wolves:

Suivent les jeunes demoiselles
Jusque dans les maisons, jusque dans les ruelles.
Mais, hélas! qui ne sait que ces loups doucereux,

De tous les loups sont les plus dangereux! ("Le Petit")

There is, of course, no one to save Little Red Riding Hood in Perrault's story, and in Ritchie's story, readers might surmise the same, for rather than Patty's parents saving her from the wolf, their consent to Rémy's marrying her seals her fate. Had Rémy truly reformed, I think, Ritchie would have written a different ending, linking her story to some other version of "Little Red Riding Hood," since she was familiar with several, including Grimm's, Summerly's, and Dinah Mulock Craik's. In Grimm's, a woodcutter cuts open the wolf's stomach to release the grandmother and the little girl. In Summerly's retelling, the girl's screams prompt her father and several faggot makers to rush in and save her. In Craik's version, the wolf summarily devours the girl. Ritchie, however, chose to retell Perrault's version in which the wolf devours both the grandmother and the young girl.

Therefore, although the narrator assures us that her story "is no terrible tragedy, but a silly little tale, so foolish and trivial that if it were not that it comes in its place with the others, I should scarcely attempt to repeat it" (441), "Little Red Riding Hood" is indeed strategically placed within Ritchie's fairy-tale revisions. By downplaying the seriousness of the tale, she paradoxically draws attention to it. At the same time, the narrator shields herself from criticism, since her defense is that what she has written is too implausible to be taken seriously. Perhaps this was a strategy for demonstrating an adherence to *The Cornhill's*

strict guidelines restricting controversial topics. In any case, “Little Red Riding Hood” makes a vital intratextual connection to “Bluebeard’s Keys,”³⁰ in which Ritchie fully dramatizes the incomprehensibility of marrying someone like Barbi (Bluebeard) and the violent consequences of such a marriage.

Thus, when Fanny first decides to marry Barbi, the narrator asks, “How she could make up her mind to marry that man with all those stories about, and that well-known temper, was more than anyone could imagine, except that it was what was done every day” (210). Clearly, Barbi’s wealth is a deciding factor in Fanny’s decision to marry him. Prior to meeting Barbi, she and her family must rely on the generosity of well-to-do relatives: “Poor little Fanny! How she hated the stealings and scrapings of fashionable life that fell to their share” (194). Married to Barbi she would be wealthy in her own right, able to purchase delicate pastries, beautiful dresses and expensive jewels.

Although Fanny initially collapses under Barbi’s gaze, she soon surrenders herself to him. Sympathetic to her predicament, the narrator observes, “If Fanny had been more used to admiration, she might have hesitated before she surrendered herself so absolutely to a passing fancy for a diamond star, a blue ribbon, a blue chin” (203). Because of the narrator’s apparent fondness for Fanny and the reader’s fondness for and trust in the narrator, the reader easily sympathizes with Fanny’s feelings of good fortune when Barbi gives her a necklace “of great diamonds, each worth a moderate-sized house” (214).

However, Fanny's desire for material possessions comes into direct conflict with the realities and inequities of her future marriage when she enters a room and discovers Barbi looking into an oaken chest, Ritchie's version of the forbidden door. Wanting to know the contents of the chest, Fanny declares, "You know I have a right to all your secrets now." In response, Barbi informs her, "All that is mine will be yours, Miss; but my own past,' he added, 'and the secrets of others, I warn you to leave them undisturbed. [. . .] Remember, I allow no questions concerning my private affairs'" (215). He then warns her of his expectation of obedience to him.³¹ Soon after, he goes away as Bluebeard does in Perrault's narrative. While Barbi is gone, Fanny hears gossip that stirs her curiosity about his love life and marriages:

He had been twice four times married. He had been about to be married, and the marriage had been broken off at the last moment. He kept a death's head and cross-bones in a box by his bed. There was no end to the stories which seemed to fall from every side, like the arrows of an unknown enemy. (215)

Nevertheless, the wealth and prestige marriage to Barbi will bring still attracts Fanny, causing her much inner turmoil:

Fanny tried to think of china and tapestry instead of crime and hidden mystery, and to be content with the sense of all these magnificent possessions, instead of the confidence of an

undoubting heart. And yet she had rather have known the contents of a certain old oaken box than look through all these cupboards and galleries of rich possessions put together. (216)

Unlike Perrault's narrator, Ritchie's allows Fanny to think seriously about the stories she has heard about Barbi in order to weigh them against the riches she is about to acquire. Fanny considers how she once felt so honored "to be noticed by [Barbi]." Now she is becoming increasingly uncertain. "Already she began dimly to feel she had made a mistake, that a life is a terribly large sum which can only be paid by instalments—not all at once, but day by day" (216). She tears off her diamond ring and throws it down. Just as Lady Jane's throwing the shoe after Cinderella and her prince mimics Becky Sharp's gesture of defiance, Fanny's action is also a tossing aside of conventional ideas that compel her to marry. Throwing down the ring and picking up the key subtly suggest her valuing truth over the fantasy of a fairy-tale marriage.

Determined to learn the genuine nature of her future husband, Fanny opens the chest to find "a large heap of clothes" worn by a peasant girl, clothes worn by a woman of higher class, some letters, a lock of hair, trinkets, a coral necklace, a diamond ring, and "a long iron chain rusted in places, with spikes" (218). Absorbed in reading the letters, Fanny overlooks the possible significance of the iron chain that appears to have both literal and symbolic importance. First, on the literal level, the iron chain might well be an instrument of torture that

Barbi has used on his wives.³² Ironically, after her engagement to Barbi when Fanny realizes that Barbi would have dominion over her, and she regretfully thinks, "If she had been ruled by a rod of flax, it was a rod of iron now" (212). When she finds the "rod of iron," she seems to disregard it. Neither does the narrator intervene with a comment. However, because Fanny finds the chain amidst women's clothing, hair, and jewelry, it is reasonable to assume the validity of the literal and symbolic connections between the iron chain and Barbi's women, especially since upon his return, he inflicts violence upon Fanny: "He seized her little wrist with such a grip that the blood came starting where the diamond-ring cut her fingers" (219). Barbi is so angry, the narrator claims, that he "seemed [. . .] capable of killing Fanny on the spot" (220). After this incident, Fanny breaks the engagement once and for all:

She had not known until now how she had dreaded the thought of a life spent with that man. The thought had seemed to choke and freeze and weigh her down, though she had never owned it; she might be miserable, she might be lonely some day, but she was free. This feeling of liberty seemed to give her a courage and strength that she had never felt before; she feared no one any more—not her mother—not even poor Barbi in all his mad rage and frantic agony. (690)

Fanny's action seems to demonstrate that if she is to free herself from Bluebeard's iron chain, she must weigh the value of preserving her self-respect against her desire for material wealth and comfort, and if necessary, defy the authorities that dictate how her life should be lived. She must realize that for women, marriage and self-determination often conflict. She cannot have authority over herself while being married. Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, nineteenth-century feminist and journalist, summarizes the wife's position in marriage: "A man and wife are one person in law; the wife loses all her rights as a single woman, and her existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband" (119). This kind of life would be objectionable to the narrator as well as to Fanny.

The idea of marriage as imprisonment is suggested in two essays in the June 1871 issue of *The Cornhill* in which Part II of "Bluebeard's Keys" also appears: "The Escape from the Prisons of the 'Piombi'" and "An African Harem." Together the three pieces create a dialogue on the topic of marriage as prison. "An Escape from the Prisons of the 'Piombi'" describes in detail a prisoner's clever escape from a real prison. In the latter essay, a debate between an Arab Prince and an Englishman implies that it is easier to escape from a real prison than it is from marriage. What ensues between the two men is a debate on the management of wives. The Arab prince has a poor opinion of English wives because "they are disobedient, self-willed, do what they like, and will not do what their husbands like" (734). Bluebeard's wives suggest the prince is

correct in his assessment even though the Englishman continues to argue. Eventually, the narrator abandons the subject, unable to convince the Arab Prince that English wives are as good as Arab wives. Implicit in the author's defense of English wives is a condemnation of them as well, since he, at last, gives up arguing, unable to make his case. In addition, he defends the kind of marriage in which wives know their places. This position runs counter to the argument of the narrator of "Bluebeard's Keys." Barbara Quinn Schmidt notes that *The Cornhill* often published related pieces in a single issue "to emphasize a philosophical, political, or moral message or create a dialogue that could not be explicitly stated. Or ideas were examined from different perspectives" ("Introduction" 205). It would appear, then, that the two essays and the novella attempt to balance the issue of the imprisonment of marriage, giving the magazine, a position of neutrality, and thus maintaining its uncontroversial standard. Yet it is clear that Ritchie's narrator has made a strong case for remaining single.

Empowered, Single and Free

Hence, the last socially relevant theme developed in "Bluebeard's Keys" is the plight of single women. In this case, Ritchie's narrative obtains intertextuality with essays in *The Cornhill* and essays appearing in other periodicals. As the narrator does with her discussion of the first two topics found in "Bluebeard's

Keys,” she introduces the notion of the plight of single women in previous works, both fiction and non-fiction.

Fanny de Travers is adamant in her desire to maintain her independence. But to be a single woman poses real problems. If young women, like Fanny de Travers, reject marriage, what possibilities are open to them? The difficulty facing Fanny and other heroines questioning a conventional life is that if they opt out of marriage, there is not much for them to do.³³ In other words, what does a middle-class young woman, brought up to do nothing, do with her life? In response to this question, Ritchie injects still another important issue that may be read intratextually as well as intertextually—the inequities in opportunities for girls and boys, a concern that is evident in her journals and letters. In her journal for June 1855, she writes:

O! if I was only a boy, I should make myself a clergyman in order to give a sermon w^h would make their hair stand on end. [. . .] I should like a profession so much—not to spend my life crocheting mending [sic] my clothes & reading novels-- w^h seems the employment of English ladies unless they teach dirty little children to read w^h is well enough in its way—but no work to the mind--& I don't mind to write poetry & flummery—so I am in a fix what to do when I leave off lessons. (Shankman 43)

Ritchie certainly envisioned herself earning a living: “I think I should like to earn very much, and become celebrated like the aforesaid Harriet [Martineau] who is one of the only sensible women living beside thee (Mrs. Fanshawe, wife of curate Rev. Charles S. Fanshawe)³⁴ and me and 2 or 3 more I know” (43). However, she also realized the disadvantages to which girls were subjected, and she fiercely objected.

At twenty-two, a year before Ritchie debuted in *The Cornhill*, she attended a dinner party at which her partner made disparaging remarks about women. Although she realized he was joking, he “aggravated” her, especially since he would have all the advantages simply because he was a man while she would have none:

O ye heavens! Look at him and then look at me! Why am I to be contemptible all my days long?—Why is he to be so much more worth in his own, in everybody else’s estimation? Why has he got work and leisure and strength and height and a thousand more advantages which I can’t get at, not if I try till I burst like the frog in the fable?³⁵ Why am I ridiculous when I spar at him with foolish little thrusts? I’m sure my brains are as good as his. I could feel this last night while I was listening to his talk with Mr. Brookfield.³⁶ (Ritchie *Daughter* 118)

A year later, she began to publish her articles and stories. Thereafter, her private views and feelings on a variety of topics, including the Woman Question, found a means of public expression. Given Ritchie's apparent intense feelings, it seems inconceivable that she would purge those feelings and beliefs from her writing in deference to *The Cornhill's* strict guidelines against issues engendering controversy, since from childhood, she was intent on getting her way.³⁷ Instead, she would find a way to incorporate her ideas and feelings into her writing while engaging her readers. Debenham suggests, and I agree that "[Ritchie] writes not as she ought but as she is. *The Cornhill* simultaneously helped shape her as a 'proper woman' and gave her the freedom to be herself. The end result, one might say, of being formed by the market was, as least for her first twenty years, the ability to ignore the market" (88). Linking the fairy tales with her personal beliefs and creating an engaging narrator to achieve intratextuality among those tales and intertextuality among other works within *The Cornhill Magazine* and works within society-at-large, instill in Ritchie the voice of authority over her texts as well as over this important social issue. The voice we hear in the various works, however, is that of the narrator, who, perhaps, ostensibly functions as the author's spokesperson.

In the characters of Cecilia, Ella, and Patty, the narrator depicts heroines who have little to do in life except wait for marriage. They engage in mindless activities but are otherwise inactive and uneducated. Cecilia knows how to read,

but never does. Ella dusts off housekeeping books rather than reads them; Patty is so naïve that her wolfish cousin seduces her. Fanny de Travers, however, realizes there is more to life than fumbling in her sewing basket or wearing diamond rings, necklaces and expensive dresses. Freedom and the right to engage in meaningful work are far more precious commodities. So Fanny renounces wealth in favor of independence.

Escaping the prison of marriage ironically encloses Fanny de Travers in another prison, the prison of redundancy. H., the narrator's constant companion, alludes to this topic when the narrator remarks, "Most stories end with a wedding, the climax of mine was, that the wedding was happily broken off" (688). H. teasingly says, "That if this was my ideal of perfect happiness, there seemed to be no lack of it in the world" (688). By rejecting marriage, however, Fanny, the elderly narrator and H, the three characters who might be considered Ritchie's fictional representations of single women who are able to lead purposeful, fulfilling lives, join the ranks of the half million "redundant women" living in England,

Although Ritchie rejects the belief that marriage is the answer for everyone by the dubiously happy ending of her first novel, *The Story of Elizabeth* that was being serialized during the period (September 1862 – January 1863) when William R. Greg and Frances Power Cobbe were writing their essays, it is not until "Bluebeard's Keys" that Ritchie enters her fairy-tale fiction into this dialogue. In

1861, she wrote “Toilers and Spinsters,” in which she celebrates single women and argues for equal opportunities. Single women need not wait for a man to rescue them. They could be useful and productive individuals and make important contributions to society:

They have gone out to battle in top-boots, danced on the tight-rope, taken up the Italian cause, and harangued the multitudes. They have gone to prison for distributing tracts; they have ascended Mont Blanc, and come down again. They have been doctors, lawyers, clergywomen, squires—as men have been milliners, dressmakers, ballet-dancers, ladies’ hairdressers. (392)

In his essay, “Why Are Women Redundant?” published in April 1862 in *The National Review*, William R. Greg, however, argues against women remaining single. For him, a single female population is problematic: “There is an enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation, a number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number which, positively and relatively, is indicative of an unwholesome social state” (158). These single women “constitute the problem to be solved, the evil and anomaly to be cured” (159). Greg’s cure is to send 440,000 single women to Australia. A few months later, Frances Power Cobbe argues with Greg’s solution, comparing his plan “to the noxious exertions of quacks to mitigate the symptoms of disease and allow the patient to persist in her evil courses” (237). Rather than immigration, Cobbe,

seemingly supportive of Ritchie's position, lobbies for female employment.

Women, she says, should have access to professions for which they are paid the same as men: "She will be a larger, richer, nobler woman for art, for learning, for every grace and gift she can acquire" (253).³⁸

Two years following the publication of "Bluebeard's Keys," Ritchie revised "Toilers and Spinsters" and took her initial proposal even further. I agree with Lillian Shankman, who suggests that a major difference in the two essays is that in 1873, Ritchie asks "not only for more and better education for women but for the right of women to declare themselves as women—to come into their own and be themselves" (168). It is important to note the change in tone evident in the opening sentences of these essays. In 1861, Ritchie seems to be agreeing with critics of idle, single women: "I confess that I have very little sympathy for those unmarried ladies whose wail has of late been so constantly dinning in the ears of the public" ("Toilers" 318). Revising the essay at the age of thirty-six and still single, she appears more sympathetic to the situation of single women: "If one is to believe some people, there are a certain number of unmarried ladies whose wail has of late been constantly dinning in the ears of the public" (*Toilers* 1). "I confess" suggests the author's certainty, whereas "If one is to believe" suggests doubt about people's beliefs regarding the expressed discontent of single women. Even though the difference in tone is subtle, it is present nonetheless. Possibly, Ritchie's age and the fact that she had been a successful

single, professional woman for fourteen years accounted for her skepticism. In addition, people were demanding changes regarding women's rights. Bodichon founded the Woman's Suffrage Committee in 1866. In that same year, she wrote *Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women*. In 1869, John Stuart Mill published *The Subjection of Women*. A year later, the Married Woman's Property act was passed. For women, the world was changing. Fanny de Travers, Ritchie's heroine, was part of that change.

To illustrate in her fiction that women need not be imprisoned in the marriage plot, "revolting and struggling to be free," the narrator allows Fanny de Travers to remain a single working woman (much like the narrator herself). When her sister suggests that she marry, "Fanny laughs, and shakes her head, and runs away to the little orphanage she has set up with Barbi's money, and where she teaches the children to read" ("Bluebeard's" 709). She never marries, she works, and she is happy--not the conventionally acceptable life for a young Victorian woman.

In her own understated way, Ritchie brings a controversial topic to *The Cornhill's* "social table." To study her is to marvel at her ability to rewrite fairy tales to advance a political position in a publication that avoids politics. Sumpter states that Ritchie "replaces fairy-tale simplicity with social observation that is both wry and perceptive, producing a winning formula that creates realism within fantasy and uneasy social commentary within engaging popular fiction" (78). In

“Bluebeard’s Keys,” Ritchie goes further. She turns the fairy tale on its head by presenting a young woman who has the capacity and the will to survive on her own, who can also break the sequence of the marriage plot and write an original plot of her own.³⁹ It means, though, that the young woman must be bold and not afraid to be very bold.

¹ Even though Anne Thackeray Ritchie published the works I discuss prior to her marriage on August 2, 1877, I will use her married name throughout.

² The only period Ritchie's work was absent from *The Cornhill* was during the editorship of James Payn from 1883-1896. When women writers were notably absent during this time.

³ See "Discourses of Distinction": Reception of *The Cornhill Magazine*, 1859-1860" by Andrew Maunder and "The Cornhill Magazine—Number 1" by Peter Smith for a fuller discussion of the reception of the magazine and its sale history.

⁴ Thackeray rejected a poem in April 1861 by Elizabeth Barrett Browning because "there is an account of unlawful passion felt by a man for a woman—and though you write pure doctrine and real modesty and pure ethics, I am sure pure readers would make an outcry, and so I have not published this poem" (See Ray 4: 227). Thackeray also rejected a story by Anthony Trollope who responded to the rejection in a letter dated November 15, 1860: "I will not allow that I am indecent [. . .] I of course look back for examples to justify myself in alluding to a man with illegitimate children, and to the existence of a woman not as pure as she should be" (Ray 4: 207).

⁵ Elizabeth Teare discusses the intertextual relationship between "Jack the Giant Killer" and Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, showing how both Ritchie and Arnold deal with "social conditions that might produce anarchy" (131).

⁶ Anne Thackeray wrote an introduction to the works of Mme. De Aulnoy's fairy tales in 1892.

⁷ See Lillian Shankman, *Anne Thackeray Ritchie: Journals and Letters* (357-64) for a listing of Ritchie's publications.

⁸ Gérin writes that [their relationship] "became a close partnership that ended only with [Thackeray's] death" (60).

⁹ A brief discussion of the role Thackeray played in Ritchie's creative development appears in the "Addendum."

¹⁰ Anthony Trollope's novel was to be serialized in *The Cornhill Magazine*, beginning with the premier issue of January 1860.

¹¹ Ritchie outlasted most of *The Cornhill* editors. The list includes her father, who edited the magazine from 1860 until May 1862; a committee consisting of, then, George Henry Lewes, Frederick Greenwood and George Smith; Frederick Greenwood from 1864 to 1868; Mr. Dutton Cook and George Smith from 1868 to 1871; Leslie Stephen from 1871 to 1882; James Payn from 1883 to 1896.

¹² Manuela Mourão cites "The Hero as Man of Letters": Masculinity and Victorian Nonfiction Prose."

¹³ Caroline Sumpter and Mark Turner have demonstrated the intertextual nature of *The Cornhill* and how Ritchie's works were part of its texture. It would appear that to date the intratextuality/ intertextuality of "Bluebeard's Keys" has not been examined.

¹⁴ The magazine published many women authors, including Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë (posthumously), Eliza Lynn Linton, Harriet Martineau, Dinah Mulock, and Frances Eleanor Trollope (Harris 385).

¹⁵ H. persists in wanting to know "whether Barbi would really have killed Fanny." The narrator responds that "it was not a real actual death with which Fanny was threatened by marriage with Barbi [. . .] but rather a slow extinction of life" (688). This scene also echoes what the marriage to St. John Rivers would have been for Jane Eyre. Jane says to St. John, "If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now" (Brontë 417). Of Fanny, the narrator says, "It was not a real actual death with which Fanny was threatened by marriage with Barbi,' I said, 'but rather a slow extinction of life.'" We know Ritchie was enthralled by *Jane Eyre*, and the notion that marriage as a slow extinction of life might have come from her earlier reading of that novel.

¹⁶ Fatima is the name many authors have given Bluebeard's last wife.

¹⁷ Anatole France wrote a parody of "Bluebeard" entitled "Seven Wives of Bluebeard." In his version, he depicts Bluebeard as a man much maligned.

¹⁸ In "Sleeping Beauty," the narrator enters into the fairy-tale debate, claiming that despite an article appearing in the *Saturday Review*, Thomas

Day's characters Harry Sandford and Tommy Merton "are not familiar playfellows in our nurseries and school rooms, and have passed somewhat out of date. But not so all these centenarians—Prince Riquet, Carabas, Little Red Riding Hood, Bluebeard, and others" (556). The narrator's remarks eschew passionate criticism of the instructive literature, the kind we find in the writings of Maria Edgeworth and Sarah Trimmer, for example, nor does she embrace fairy tales with passion as Lamb, Coleridge, Dickens and Thackeray do. Quietly and almost surreptitiously, she states her position, illustrating how fairy tale characters, both admirable and deplorable ones, have ubiquitous analogues in everyday life.

¹⁹ See Nicoll Allardyce, *A History of Early English Drama, 1850-1900* for a listing of the many performances of "Bluebeard" in the nineteenth-century. Examples include the following: *Bluebeard from a New Point of Hue* (1860); *Bluebeard* (December 26, 1871); *Bluebeard Revived* (December 26, 1879); *Bluebeard the Great Bashaw; or, The Loves of Selim and Fatima* (March 29, 1869) *Blue Beard and Fat Emma, or, The Old Man Who Cried Heads* (September 25, 1877); *Bluebeard* (December 26, 1879); *Harlequin Bluebeard, A Great Bashaw; or The Good Fairy Triumphant over the Demon of Discord* (December 26, 1854). In a diary entry dated July 18, 1872, Lewis Carroll comments on a rehearsal of *Blue Beard* he and his sisters saw (Cohen 1: 184).

²⁰ Mererid Puw Davies proposes the possibility that the mother has given the daughter the freedom to make her own choice (44).

²¹ In the summer of 1840, when Ritchie was three years old, her mother tossed her into the sea: "As she walked on the sands at Margate with her mother along the margins of the sea, to watch the great waves come in, she felt herself suddenly and fiercely caught up by her mother and thrown into the surf. Incapable of realizing the meaning of the action, she could only feel, and intensely feel, the terror and resentment roused by her mother's conduct" (Gérin 10). A few months later, Thackeray confined his wife to a mental facility, and she remained confined for the rest of her life (12-14).

²² The journal was written for Laura, Ritchie's sister's child.

²³ Ritchie recognizes how looking back changes perceptions of events—"One's early life is certainly a great deal more amusing to look back to than it used to be when it was going on. [. . .] the intervening periods are no longer the portentous cycles they once used to be" (*Chapters* 14). What matters is her ability to change events—pleasant or disagreeable—and use them as material for

her writing. This ability adds authenticity to the voice of the narrator and gains the reader's trust in her. The reader welcomes the narrator's presence, confidences, observations, and good deeds (for example, when she fetches Belinda so that she would marry Guy).

²⁴ This scene is reminiscent of the time when Thackeray forced his daughters to take off conspicuous bonnets.

²⁵ This image suggests Dickens's "Captain Murderer" (1860) in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, pp 148-153.

²⁶ Joan Perkin notes that family members convinced women to stay with violent husbands when they thought the fortune at issue was great enough (120).

²⁷ See also p. 380, n. 6-8.

²⁸ Eliza Cook (1817-1889) published her *Eliza Cook's Journal* from 1849 to 1854. The intended readership was middle-class, and she published pieces consistent with middle-class values and mores (Blain, Grundy, Clements 230-31).

²⁹ On January 5, 1847, Thackeray wrote to Mrs. Norton: "The little book [*Aunt Carry's Ballads for Children*] arrived yesterday at last to the delight of my daughters" (Ray *Letters* 2: 263). Mrs. Norton was mentioned, among others, as someone whom Thackeray had been "taken up by" near the start of 1847. (Ray *Wisdom* 34). Ritchie's journals contain several references to Norton. (Ritchie *Daughter* 118, 199, 151)

³⁰ The next tale in her sequence is "Jack the Giant Killer," which I do not discuss here, for in that tale, Ritchie's concerns focus primarily upon the "Condition of England" question. Caroline Sumpter discusses the intertextual connections between "Jack the Giant Killer" and *Culture and Anarchy*.

³¹ Ritchie made several additions and omissions in the text when she published the story in book form. In the later version, Barbi says to Fanny before he leaves, "Another woman, less worthy than you, broke her word, and the consequences fell upon her head" (56).

³² In "Wife-Torture in England," Frances Power Cobbe alludes to men who have struck their wives with a poker and an "iron instrument" and stamped their wives' faces with their studded boots (313-14).

³³ See Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra* and Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Woman's Thoughts About Women*.

³⁴ Mrs. Fanshawe, wife of curate Rev. Charles S. Fanshawe (Shankman 15).

³⁵ Ritchie might have been referring to the fable by La Fontaine (1621-1695) entitled "The Frog Who Wanted To Be As Big As The Ox," which appears below:

In envy stretched and strained in an effort to blow
Himself up to the same size.
[. . .]
At which the poor frog, overloaded
With wind and vanity, exploded.
The world is full of men as foolish as that.
The tradesman wants to build like an aristocrat.
The petty prince employs
Ambassadors; the marquess errand-boys. (6)

³⁶ Rev. William Henry Brookfield, close friend of Thackeray until he forbade his wife to have any contact with the latter (Peters 200-01).

³⁷ Ritchie's grandmother wrote to Thackeray when Anne Thackeray Ritchie was just eight: "I assure you Nanny wants a firmer hand than mine. She fights every inch of her way—if it's only to wash her face or put on her stockings she will not do it without an argument—She is so clever: so selfish: so generous: so tender-hearted yet so careless of giving pain" (Ray *Letters* 2: 240).

³⁸ The editors note that although Cobbe's essay was quite controversial, it was also influential in women achieving reforms in education, work and marriage (Broomfield and Mitchell 235).

³⁹ Even though Ritchie ultimately married, the union might be considered unconventional. First, she did not marry until she was forty. Her husband was a much younger man who was still in his twenties.

What a queer thing it is to think that I care more if my father's finger aches than if the whole Imperial family be extinguished. That to me everything happens only to make part of *my* existence.

Thackeray Ritchie (*Thackeray and His Daughter* 69)

In five or six years, [Anny] will be able to do the writing business; and I can sit on the sofa as easy as the Professor of Department in *Bleak House*.

William Thackeray (*Ray Letters* 3:238)

Addendum:¹

Although this study has focused on narrative strategies women writers have utilized to demonstrate authority over Bluebeard, the man as well as the text, an examination of biographical details contributing to the success of their efforts might deepen our understanding of their projects. Because of William Thackeray's stature in Victorian literary society and his close relationship with his daughter as father and literary mentor, a brief examination of Anne Thackeray Ritchie's development as a writer is of particular interest. She contemplates her "career" in her journals and letters. In addition, from the time she was a toddler, her father predicted the course she would take and created conditions to make it a reality. He nurtured her imagination, supported her feelings and beliefs and gave her opportunities many children growing up in any period lack. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration when Gérin writes, "Everything in Anne Thackeray Ritchie's upbringing had conspired to make a writer of her" (100).

When Anne Thackeray Ritchie was just two years old, her father wrote to his mother sharing his plan for his daughter. His letter is significant because it firmly places Thackeray on the side of the fairy tale debate that advocates fairy tales for children and vehemently objects to the kind of child rearing practices promoted by Maria Edgeworth and others, calling them those “horrid matter-of-fact child rearers [. . .] with their cursed twopenny-halfpenny realities” that stifle a child’s “most beautiful privilege.” He will not have his daughter brought up knowing only “facts.” Therefore, he promises, “Anny shall have a very extensive and instructive store of learning in Tom Thumbs, Jack-the-Giant-Killers &c what use is there in the paltry store of small facts that are stowed into these poor little creatures’ brains?” (Ray *Letters* 1: 395). He was true to his word and beliefs, supplying his daughter with numerous books. The summer she was eight years old, Thackeray bought his daughter *Arabian Nights* and *Grimms Fairy Tales* (Gérin 23).²

Anne Thackeray Ritchie had a life rich in cultural and literary experiences. When she was a young girl, she lived in Paris with her grandparents. She saw Napoleon III riding a horse down the Champs Elysées. She went to Chopin’s house and heard him play. She went to parties at the Dickens’s home. She attended her father’s lectures on the “English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century.” In the summer of 1850, the Thackerays visited Weimar, where Thackeray had seen Goethe many years before: “For Anny it was an entrancing

experience, finding herself 'actually *alive* in past shadow, almost living it alongside with him'" (Gérin 63).³ She became acquainted with many famous people, including the Brownings, Mrs. Sartoris, the singer Fanny Kemble and William Story, the sculptor, among others. Ritchie writes in her memoirs, "My father liked to take us about with him, and I am surprised, as I think of it, at the great good-nature of his friends, who used so constantly to include two inconvenient little girls in the various invitations they sent him. We used to be asked early and to arrive at all sorts of unusual times" (*Chapters* 94).

Because Thackeray was a single father, his relationships with Anny and Minny were closer than if their mother, Isabella Thackeray, had been present. Assuming the role of mother and father, Thackeray took charge of his daughters' education, their dress, and their social life. According to Gordon Ray, Thackeray "was devoted to his children and bent his mind and energy to provide them, even in the absence of their mother, with the 'best learning of all, love and usefulness, and the kindly play of interest, and the faith of home, its peaceful rest and helpful strength'" (*Wisdom* 14). He was a gentle parent, "[insisting] on treating them as fellow human beings with rights and individualities of their own. [. . .] Like Esmond he brought up his descendants 'with as little as possible of the servility at present exacted by parents from children (under which mask of duty there often lurks indifference, contempt, or rebellion)'" (15).

The letters Thackeray wrote to his mother and sister-in-law as well as to his children seem to confirm this view. When his mother complained about Anny's obstinacy, Thackeray's response was, "I am afraid very much she is going to be a man of genius: I would far sooner have had her an amiable and affectionate woman" (Ray *Letters* 2: 240). Rather than curbing his daughter's will, reminding her of the behavior befitting a proper middle-class girl, he acknowledged the kind of person she was. For example, Anny battled constantly with her grandmother over religion. Her grandmother, wrote to Thackeray, appalled at "poor Nanny's [. . .] stiff heart of unbelief, and it came upon [her] like a thunderbolt when [Anny declared] that she 'did not care for the old Testament and considered the New only historical'—it was tremendous to hear such words." Anny's grandmother "consolation [was] that [Anny could] give no reason for her unbelief" (Ray *Letters* 3: 86). Thackeray's response suggests the extent to which he allowed his daughter to think and act independently. In October 1852, he advised Anny to "read all the books that Granny wishes [. . .] and you must come to your own deductions about them as every honest man and woman must and does" (Ray *Letters* 3: 95-96). What is important for a young, impressionable fifteen-year-old girl is the reassurance her father gave her: "Every one of us in every fact, book, circumstance of life sees a different meaning and moral and so it must be about religion" (3: 95-96).

He did not allow his daughters complete independence, however. He knew when to exercise his parental authority over his children. On a trip to the Continent, Anny and Minny put on bright colored bonnets. When Thackeray saw them, he said, “My dear children, go back and put those bonnets away in your box, and don’t ever wear them any more! Why, you would be mobbed in places if you walked out alone with such ribbons!”⁴ (*Chapters* 105). Minny did not seem to mind, but Anny was older and wrote about this crushing experience: “[. . .] at thirteen and fourteen one’s clothes begin to strike root. I felt disgraced, beheaded of my lovely bonnet, utterly crushed, and I turned away to hide my tears” (105). While Thackeray allowed for his daughters’ individuality on some matters, he exerted his authority over other decisions, perhaps those of far more consequence than bonnets.

One of the important decisions concerning Thackeray was the quality of Anny’s education. For years, he searched for the perfect governess. With the arrival of the Anny’s first mentor, Bess Hamerton, “began the ten-year saga of Thackeray’s governesses, who caused him more annoyance, insomnia, and loss of appetite than whole chapters of his books in arrears for the printer. In the space of the next four years the children disposed of as many governesses—with long interregnums—each one proving more unsatisfactory than the last” (Gérin 27).

Thackeray's opinion of his daughters was much higher than that of the governesses hired to instruct them. Of Bess Hamerton, Thackeray told his mother: "This is not the woman to rule such a delicate soul as my dearest Nanny's" (Gérin 33). Another governess was respectable enough, but "not by any means wise, or fit to guide Anny's mind. But she can teach her geography and music and what they call history and hemming—and my dear old Nan goes on thinking for herself, and no small beer of herself. [. . .] They are noble children. Thank God. And the governess—a nuisance" (Gérin 35). Of another governess, Thackeray writes, "She is not clever enough for Anny, 'my dear, old girl. She is as wise as an old man'" (Gérin 36; Ray *Letters* 2: 282). Gérin notes the difficulty Thackeray faced in rearing a child such as Anny:

The problem of fathering a too-clever child—whose sharp perceptions delighted him, even while needing corrections—was becoming as permanent a feature of Thackeray's life as the problem of his creative work. Like the fictional characters taking shape in his mind, Anny seemed to have a way of slipping out of his control and leading a life of her own. (Gérin 36)

Although Thackeray's problem could have possibly been solved by sending his children to boarding school, as Gérin suggests, he probably "delighted in their company" (36). Rather than send them off to school, he cared for them at home, taking them to parties and then fetching them home afterwards, taking them

around Europe visiting famous people and places. Nevertheless, Thackeray felt the pangs of single parenting. On March 8, 1854, from Naples, Thackeray writes in his diary: "But O how I wish I was well back: and how beat I am by these constant family cares!—To be father and mother is too much work for any one: let alone such a lazy fellow as me—" (Fuller 82).

Thackeray also directed his daughter towards a career in writing. Ritchie kept a journal intermittently from girlhood. At seventeen, in her new diary, she wrote: "I begin to-night to write down my week's doings and I have no doubt this diary will last just as long as the thirty others that I have commenced" (*Ritchie Daughter* 65). At the age of fourteen, Ritchie became her father's amanuensis, copying out his novels. As if desiring that his daughter take his place, Thackeray writes, "When my weary quill is worn to the stump, please God she'll be able to use that honest pen of hers" (*Ray Letters* 3: 248). There was never a doubt that his daughters, especially Anny, would have a profession. This seemed to have been an expectation from Anny's early childhood.

Another important factor influencing Anny's decision to become a writer was accidentally finding Fanny Burney's diaries on her father's desk in September 1855. Anny "fell completely under their spell. Reading them set her a new incentive; she resolved on keeping her own journal, so sporadic up to then, regularly and fully, and deplored her wasted opportunities and lost time" (*Gérin* 100).

Because Ritchie lacked the formal education she probably would have received had she been a boy, Thackeray took care to nurture those aspects of his daughter's character necessary for a successful writing career. He encouraged her to think for herself. He encouraged her reading diversely. For example, she read Macaulay's *History of England* at his suggestion. Thackeray corrected her writing and made stylistic suggestions. For instance, when Ritchie was twelve years old and had apparently written to Thackeray's friend Jane Brookfield, he stringently criticized her style: "Don't make doggerel verses and spell badly for fun. There should be a lurking prettiness in all buffoonery even, and it requires an art wh. you don't know yet to make *good* verses bad verses—to make bad ones is dull work" (Ritchie *Daughter* 32). Ritchie's daughter writes that her mother had appended the following note in 1898 to a letter from Thackeray: "I never write an untidy letter but I think of this one. Alas! it has not yet made me into a tidy woman" (32). Interestingly, Ritchie signed the note with her initials A.I.R. just as her father signed his letter with his initials.⁵

Thackeray's effect on his daughter was indeed immense and positive. Even his instruction to stop writing and read other people's books does not seem overbearing. As a writer, he knew the importance of reading widely and diversely. Given his daughter's obstinate disposition, sanctioning her might have been the more effective means to ensure that she would be well-prepared for the writing profession. She explains to George Smith, the publisher of *The Cornhill*, in a

letter of 1900 that she had written “several novels and a tragedy by the age of fifteen, but then my father forbade me to waste my time any more scribbling, and desired me to read *other* people’s books” (124). She claims that she never wrote anymore, “Except one short fairy tale,⁶ until one day my father said he had got a very nice subject for me, and that he thought I might now begin to write again” (124). His idea prompted her first published essay for *The Cornhill*, which appeared in the May 1860 issue. “‘That was ‘Little Scholars’ which he christened for me, and of which he corrected the stops and the spelling, and which you published to my still pride and rapture’” (124).

Thackeray had sent his daughter’s manuscript to George Smith with the following letter:

And in the meantime comes a contribution called *Little Scholars*, which I send you, and which moistened my paternal spectacles. It is the article I talked of sending to *Blackwood*; but why should *Cornhill* lose such a sweet paper because it was my dear girl who wrote it? Papas, however, are bad judges—you decide whether we shall have it or not! (Fuller 88)

When the article finally appeared, he wrote to a friend: “‘Read *The Cornhill Magazine* for May; the article Little Scholars is by my dear old fat Anny” (Shankman 66).

In the three years left before he died, Thackeray was to feel fatherly pride in seeing his daughter fulfill the dream he had for her. Ritchie's first novel, *The Story of Elizabeth*, was serialized in *The Cornhill* from September 1862 to January 1863 while Thackeray was still the editor. However, it is uncertain whether he read the novel. When George Smith asked Thackeray if he had read the proofs of the novel, Thackeray responded, 'I could not, I read some of them and then broke down so thoroughly I could not face the rest'" (Gérin 126).

Another story suggests that Thackeray not only read the novel but also induced Anny to write a different ending: "By the bye, it was Anne Thackeray's father who made her change the end of 'The Story of Elizabeth' into a happy one," writes Desmond MacCarthy in the introduction of *Thackeray's Daughter* (Fuller 9).

Despite the contradictory accounts about Thackeray's involvement in Ritchie's writing, Ritchie herself acknowledges her father's help with "Toilers and Spinsters." In the revision written in 1874, Ritchie suggests her father's influence on the work. "One hand—that which ruled and blessed at home—wrote a title to the rambling little paper" (*Toilers* 24). After the publication of *The Story of Elizabeth*, The actress Mrs. Kemble told Thackeray "that people were beginning to say that Anny stood next to him as a writer, and he replied with emotion, "Yes, it tears my guts out'" (*Ritchie Daughter* 128).

Although Ritchie was rapidly becoming a respected writer and a regular contributor to *The Cornhill*, Shankman suggests that Thackeray's "death

released her to a significant degree from the unhealthy syndrome in which she was trapped. [. . .] The restraining influence that Thackeray, in all his love, held over her, was gone!" (117). Perhaps the restraining influence is symbolized in the image of the young heroine in *The Story of Elizabeth* as a caged bird, while Ritchie's later sense of freedom may be deduced from her depiction of Fanny's freeing herself from her bird-cage room. Like Shankman, Katherine Hill-Miller argues that Thackeray's influence was "domineering, and apt to stifle [Ritchie's] personal and professional autonomy," and that Ritchie "lost the clarity of purpose that had earlier marked her attitude towards writing as a career" (Hill-Miller 372).⁷ I believe both these critics' claims are too extreme. Thackeray was a domineering figure, and his influence on Anny was profound. He even overpowers his daughter's biography, in which nine of the first eleven chapters begin with a discussion of Thackeray. Moreover, his work, often, resonates in her own. For example, the beginning of Ritchie's novel *Mrs. Dymond* echoes the ending of her father's *Vanity Fair*.⁸ Nonetheless, I judge his influence primarily not restraining but rather stimulating.

At any rate, it seems that because of Thackeray's careful mentoring and nurturance, Ritchie became a prolific writer over the half century following his death. Her works include novels, stories, essays, and the important biographical introductions to her father's corpus. Her texts are distinctively self-reflexive and rooted in the every-day life of middle-class Victorian England. She exemplifies a

writer reared on fanciful literature and given the latitude to think on her own. Therefore, it is not surprising that her tales freely comment on the sources introduced to her in her childhood and parody the ideas of her time, which do not embrace her own. She was her father's daughter, a fact apparent in her relationship with her editors. For example, when Ritchie was writing *The Story of Elizabeth*, George Henry Lewes was editor of *The Cornhill*. Ritchie left town without sending the final installment to him: "But I am savage with Miss Thackeray—she has gone abroad without sending the finale of her story and without letting me know how much it will make. Chip off the old block!" (Shankman 68-69).⁹

¹ I refer to Anne Thackeray Ritchie as Anny in the addendum, because I am only referring to the time when she was a girl.

² *The Arabian Nights* was first translated into French in 1704 and appeared in English shortly thereafter. The first story from the *Nights* written expressly for children was published by Elizabeth Newbery in 1791. *Sinbad*, *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba* were published as separate books for children at the end of the century (Carpenter and Richard 27).

³ Ritchie writes in vivid detail of the Weimar experience in *Chapters*, pp 103-122.

⁴ In Ritchie's "Little Red Riding Hood," Patty's father echoes Thackeray's objection. When Patty puts on her red bonnet, her father says, "I don't like that red bonnet of yours. [. . .] It's too conspicuous, You can't walk about Paris in that" (461). Patty's mother is noticeably silent, as if she were absent, and Patty ignores her father; Anny did not. She vicariously gets her way in her writing.

⁵ It is unclear whether Ritchie wrote the note in 1898 or simply appended it in that year.

⁶ In August of 1855, Anny writes a little fairy tale in her journal: "The young prince isn't born yet, my extraordinary loveliness has disappeared, Minnie's is hidden under the bedclothes, the soap is lying resignedly in the soap-dish, the Eau de Cologne is bubbling in the uncorked bottle, and as for the matches! I am sure if they don't take care, their rage will set themselves and the books on fire and what will become of the poor Genie then?" (Thackeray Ritchie *Daughter* 76). After completing her tale, Anny scolded herself for writing fairy tales when "the bells were ringing for the taking of Sebastopol, the guns are firing from Cremorne" (76).

⁷ In her essay, Hill-Miller examines how Thackeray's influence on his daughter created conflicting emotions, which she suggests are revealed in her writing (371-73).

⁸ *Mrs. Dymond* begins with: "Before the game of chess begins to be played, the heroes and heroines of the coming catastrophe are to be seen in orderly array" (3). *Vanity Fair* ends with: "Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out" (878).

⁹ See also *George Eliot Letters*, 4: 209.

Appendix

Bluebeard

The tyrant Blue Beard here behold,
Who boasts of coffers full of gold

His person and carriage you here plainly view
And his heart is as black as his beard long and blue.

Behold him urge of Love his tales,
Which ah too fatally prevails.

In marriage he gains the fair Lady's hand,
But alas he her deathbed already has planned.

Oh a journey he goes and his lady he leaves,
Who the keys of the Chamber forbidden receives. [sic]

The fatal door when once unlock'd
Each feeling of her heart was shock'd

With bloody threat he seiz'd her hair
And rais'd his Sword to kill the fair

To the Lady's relief her Brothers fly,
And Blue Beard himself condemn'd to die.

(From *The Juvenile Library* containing *Tom Thumb*, *Jack the Giant Killer*, *Children in the Wood*, *Whitting and his Cat*, *Robin Hood and Bluebeard*. Brighton: C. & R. Sickelmore, 182?)

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