

FEMINISM AND BLUEBEARD

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The story of Bluebeard (AT 312) has had an especially lively history in written literature since it was first published in 1697. One reason for the attraction may be that it is hard to decide whether Bluebeard is about a woman or a man: each sex reads, and therefore retells, Bluebeard very differently. Out of the extensive field of literary rewritings of Bluebeard¹ this paper selects a number of stories by women writers whose response to the tale has been, by and large, a feminist response. The first of them is Victorian, and dates from 1874.² The most recent of them, Jane Campion's film *The Piano*, amply acknowledges the popularity of the story of Bluebeard in Victorian Britain while itself offering a very strange dream-reconstruction of Victorian pioneer society in New Zealand. In fact, it can even be argued that Bluebeard is not so much a story referred to in the film, as the film's underlying story.³

The Piano begins with a young woman's arranged marriage to an unknown man who may be wealthy and who is certainly acquisitive (like other Bluebeards, he goes away on business trips). It contains a kind of forbidden room scenario, in that newly married Ada (the character acted by Holly Hunter) is first encouraged by her husband Stewart (Sam Neill) to go to Baines's (Harvey Keitel's) hut to give him piano lessons, then locked up and forbidden to go, finally "trusted" not to go

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¹ Sharon Wilson lists the following authors who have written Bluebeard stories: William Makepeace Thackeray, Anatole France, Silvia Townsend Warner, John Fowles, Anne Hébert, Jay Macpherson, Vladimir Nabokov, Malcolm Lowry, Daryl Hines (poem called "Bluebeard's Wife"), Angela Carter, Kurt Vonnegut, and Susan Fromberg Schaeffer. See *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*, Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1993, p. 259. Sherrill Grace includes discussion of Bela Bartók's opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* and Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Ariane et Barbe Bleue, ou la délivrance inutile* (1901) in her article "Courting Bluebeard with Bartók, Atwood, and Fowles: Modern Treatment of the Bluebeard Theme" [*Journal of Modern Literature*, 11, 2 (July 1984), 245-262, here, 251-254]. Kari E. Lokke's "Bluebeard and The Bloody Chamber: The Grotesque of Self-Parody and Self-Assertion" [*Frontiers* 10 (1988): 7-12] compares Carter and Frisch.

² *Bluebeard's Keys and other stories*, by Ann Thackeray, Lady Ritchie, London: Smith, Elder. Ann Thackeray (her pen-name) was the daughter of the famous Victorian novelist mentioned above in n.1. Bluebeard also attracted scholarly attention: a study of forbidden chamber tales was published by Edwin Sidney Hartland in 1885. See "The Forbidden Chamber" *Folk-Lore Journal* 111, 1885: 193-242. Writing before this date, Thackeray reveals some knowledge of the motifs in the tale: she understands the equivalence of egg and key in the obedience test, not a difficult idea to arrive at if one has read Grimm as well as Perrault, but is also familiar with the related motif of the ogre whose heart is in an egg, an idea which is not explicit in the Grimms' Fichter's Bird, but might have been deduced from reading this tale and comparing Grimm 197.

³ The reviews of Campion's *The Piano* that I have read have nothing or little to say on Bluebeard. Two feminist scholars of fairy tale, though, Marina Warner and Cristina Bacchilega, offer readings. Warner points out analogies between Ada's mutism and the silencing of many fairy tale heroines: Bacchilega situates Bluebeard where (in my opinion) it should be – at the "very heart of the movie" (134). See Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers*, London, Vintage, 1995, 405-7, and Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*, (Philadelphia, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, 129-138.

there – an obedience test which Ada, of course, fails. The dénouement is brought on by revelations made by a key. It is a piano key and not a door key, but the pun is implied by the message Ada inscribes on the key – she is offering Baines the key to her heart. There is then a confrontation scene between outraged husband and “guilty” wife. Stewart’s brutal chopping off of Ada’s finger with his axe, (the finger is then sent to Baines by Stewart) recalls not just the dismembering of dead wives in many tales of this type but a dominant motif in a related series of tales, *The Robber Bridegroom* (AT 955), where the severed hand or finger of one of the bridegroom’s earlier victims can be the sign that reveals to the heroine the true nature of her husband, and may also be the evidence which condemns him.⁴

Prior to this horrific climax, the film splices together scenes of Stewart purchasing Maori land and wielding the axe with which he is felling the New Zealand bush (the decisive steps in British settlement), scenes in which Baines is seducing Ada, or perhaps she him, body part by body part, garment by garment, piano key by piano key, and scenes showing preparation, rehearsal, and enactment of a Bluebeard play. Each sequence reflects on the others. How did *Campion* arrive at this astonishing assemblage of images?⁵ My paper, a description of a female line of Bluebeard-telling, also offers a partial answer to this question.

I believe the proximate beginning of *Campion*’s story – as opposed to its ultimate beginning with the 1697 publication of Perrault’s *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* – is the 1874 production by Anne Thackeray, Lady Ritchie, of a collection of rewritten fairy tales called *Bluebeard’s Keys*.⁶ Thackeray’s technique was to re-present familiar fairy tale plots as fictions of the kind women liked to read: sentimental, realistic, domestic. Her rewriting had clear feminist intentions. In the Bluebeard story, through the figure of the heroine, Fanny, who is intelligent, dissatisfied, and uninterested by her life as goods on the marriage mart, Thackeray contributes to contemporary debate over “superfluous” middle-class women’s lack of access to higher education and meaningful, well-paid work – Fanny remains unmarried, and ultimately founds a small orphanage and school.⁷

Thackeray’s tales were barely out of print when Katherine Mansfield, in 1920, published another kind of Bluebeard story, “Bliss”. More recently, and more

⁴ Cristina Bacchilega considers tale types AT311, 312 and 955 “sister tales” and discusses them as a group (Bacchilega, 1997: 107ff).

⁵ In a PhD dissertation shortly to appear with the Otago University Press, (Dunedin, New Zealand) Mary Paul argues that the most important antecedent text of *Campion*’s *The Piano* is Jane Mander’s *The Story of a New Zealand River*. Paul cites convincing connections, such as the theme of settlement and tree-felling, the strong bond between mother and fatherless daughter, and the piano standing for European civilisation and feminine sensibilities. However, although it was Paul who first explained to me the connection between Mansfield’s “Bliss” and Atwood’s “Bluebeard’s Egg”, a matter she had written on before *The Piano* was made (see n. 11 below) Paul’s thesis is not interested in the Bluebeard reference in *The Piano*.

⁶ An earlier collection, *Five Old Friends and a Young Prince*, had appeared in 1868.

⁷ That Thackeray intended Fanny’s story (mild as it may seem to us) as radical critique is indicated in a coda more than half as long again as the story. When the author/narrator’s “familiar critic” H. wants to know if all came straight and Fanny married Barbi after all “I answered gravely that 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” [Thackeray, (1874) 1908: 71].

obviously, Angela Carter⁸ tried her hand at Bluebeard in the title story of *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Carter was in turn followed by (among other women) Suniti Namjoshi in 1981, Margaret Atwood (more than twice, but the 1987 and 1992 approaches stand out) and Joyce Carol Oates, 1988. All of these writers centre the female subject. Each is aware of female antecedents. If their stories cannot properly be regarded as new versions of Bluebeard, for what happens in them differs from the events in any traditional tale, they also cannot not be regarded as Bluebeards, for reading every one of these stories entails the mental retelling of Bluebeard by the reader. Most of these authors give evidence of a more than casual acquaintance with the fairy tale.⁹ All of them offer a reading of Bluebeard which is distinctively female.

For women have no doubt that this story is about a woman, in spite of the inappropriate classification of Tale Type 312 by Aarne and Thompson under the title of *The Giant-killer and his Dog (Bluebeard)* (1961).¹⁰ All my writers write their new Bluebeard story from the heroine's point of view. Carter, indeed, makes her heroine the narrator, as does Oates. In *The Piano* Ada, otherwise mute, narrates the beginning and end of her story. These feminist rewritings also tend to expand a female world round the figure of the heroine. Thackeray spends time on Fanny's sister and mother, and on other female characters including her Barbi's dead wives: she sets up a female narrator, and even a female audience, her "familiar critic" H, within the text (Thackeray, 1908: 71). Mansfield and Atwood introduce negative female characters: the heroine is betrayed by her own best, but newest, woman friend. Carter has the heroine rescued at the last minute by her own mother. Jane Campion achieves a similar radical expansion of narrative space by making her heroine the mother of a daughter. Sarah Gamble pointed out that Carter's "introduction of the mother ... changes everything" by adding a "third element into the fixed dualism of the couple" (1997: 155). But Gamble's comment

⁸ Carter had translated Perrault's tales into English at an earlier point in her writing career: she was subsequently to edit two volumes of *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*.

⁹ Carter, for instance, makes play with an egg motif, in that the ancestral wedding ring in her tale is a "fire opal the size of a pigeon's egg" which has been worn by each of her Bluebeard figure's ill fated brides in turn. Yet there's no egg in Perrault's Bluebeard, which is Carter's ostensible base text. Similarly, Ann Thackeray Ritchie has her heroine think that "her betrothed had hidden his heart in that old oaken chest" (59), a sentence unlikely to have been written unless Thackeray was aware of the external soul (E.710.) or ogre's heart hidden in an egg (E.711.1) motif. Margaret Atwood manages to combine reference to both Perrault and Grimm, calling her story "Bluebeard's Egg". Jane Campion's *The Piano* includes a severed finger motif (H57.2.1 Severed finger as sign of crime) which might have derived from knowledge of Grimm 40, The Robber Bridegroom (AT 955). One of the most striking elements in Campion's *The Piano*, the bargain over the piano keys, and the garment-by-garment seduction of Ada, might be related to, or derived from, tales of the "ogre kept at bay", where a quick-witted girl requests more and more garments to delay the ogre: the motif also occurs in Bluebeard tales: see Paul Delarue on "Une Version Nouvelle de Barbe-Bleue" in "Les contes merveilleux de Perrault et la tradition populaire: compléments et rectifications aux articles précédents", *Bulletin Folklorique d'Île de France* 15 (1952: 511-517), here 517. See also some Little Red Riding Hood tales (AT 333) with their disrobing in front of the monster (for example, The Story of Grandmother, collected by Paul Delarue c. 1885, rpt in *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (ed.) Jack Zipes (2nd ed.), New York, Routledge, 1993, 15-20. Ada's silence in *The Piano*, too, recalls many silent fairy tale heroines, as Warner (see n. above) has pointed out.

¹⁰ Torborg Lundell queried the bias against female characters shown in scholarly research tools like the Aarne-Thompson *Types of the Folktale* – especially, for instance, giving a male instead of a female credit in a title – (243) in "Folktale Heroines and the Type and Motif Indexes", *Folklore*, 94 (1983) pp. 240-246.

applies equally to Campion's film. Indeed, the final tableau of Bluebeard and "guilty" wife in confrontation, much beloved of Victorian and later illustrators, is exploded forever in Campion's movie when Maori – characters literally from "another world" – erupt onto the stage in a glorious tohubohu which also includes the suddenly resurrected "dead" wives.

But these expansions of the inner world of the narrative to accommodate more, and more significant, female characters rely for their radical effect, of course, on constant reference back to the old Bluebeard stories. The reference may be extensive – a matching of characters and events that is careful even of minor details. Thackeray, for instance, has her two sisters run through Barbi's rooms looking at treasures, she has a prohibition or obedience test, she even has a bloodstain on a key, although the blood is Fanny's. There is a final scene of violent reproach and terror, Sister Anne looks out for help, and Fanny is rescued by two brothers, though these are Capuchin monks and not her own blood brothers. The reader is invited into an elaborate game of matching motifs: Carter is another author who delights in this game.

On the other hand, reference may be very slight or almost unnoticeable. At first sight, the title story of Mansfield's *Bliss and other stories* is very much a modern tale and its heroine, newly married Bertha Young, very much a modern woman. Only at the end of her modish dinner party, when Bertha inadvertently glimpses through an open door her husband Harry kissing one of the guests, the mysterious Pearl Fulton, does Mansfield take a moment to transform the pleasant Harry into a human monster:

His lips said "I adore you", and Miss Fulton laid her moonbeam fingers on his cheeks and smiled her sleepy smile. Harry's nostril's quivered; his lips curled back in a hideous grin while he whispered: "To-morrow", and with her eyelids Miss Fulton said: "Yes". (Mansfield, 1984: 105)

The Mansfield reader may also begin to suspect that another guest, Mrs Norman Knight, was once Harry's lover. Bertha loses her keys at the beginning of the story, a detail best explained as Bluebeard reference. But while overt guidance to the reader is minimal, the warning Thackeray's Barbi gives his Fanny seems to be more than coincidentally helpful in reading "Bliss": "Ah! remain at peace in the blessing of your unconscious innocence" (Thackeray, 1908: 56) Barbi tells Fanny. For Bertha, too, ignorance *was* bliss. Mansfield, whose garden and pear tree symbols evoke the Genesis story of the Fall of Man, itself associated with Bluebeard tales, as Maria Tatar has shown (Tatar, 1987: 159-60) depicts the tragically transforming power of unwanted vision. What has been seen cannot be unseen, what is known cannot become unknown again. In *The Piano*, it is Stewart, the husband, who will undergo this voyeuristic moment when knowledge is irreversibly and unhappily acquired.

The allusiveness of these texts, then, is their most essential quality. They have

a way of requiring double acts of reading, of *rehearsing* (Campion, as always, finds the right image) known stories of Bluebeard within new-sounding stories of a Bertha, Fanny, Sally or Ada. Their allusiveness works on at least three levels: besides allusion back to known Bluebeard stories there is also a second level of allusion (unfortunately beyond the range of this discussion) in which women writers use their Bluebeard stories to image or represent the kinds of texts that women read. And there is of course a third level of allusion – reference to each other. These women have already formed a story-telling circle, within which they create a tradition of feminist Bluebeards. For if Thackeray can assist in reading Mansfield's "Bliss", two later writers, Angela Carter in "The Bloody Chamber" and Margaret Atwood in "Bluebeard's Egg",¹¹ in turn incorporate reference to "Bliss" into new Bluebeard stories.

Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" acknowledges Mansfield's "Bliss" as an antecedent text with minor but unmistakable echoings. Two of the guests at Bertha's dinner party are Mr Norman Knight, who wears a monocle, and his wife, who wears a dress decorated with black monkeys on yellow silk and has the look of "a very intelligent monkey" (Mansfield (1920) 1984: 97); Mrs Norman Knight is also "awfully keen on interior decoration" (Mansfield 1984: 95). Carter gives her Bluebeard a monocle and provides this description of his last wife: "The sharp muzzle of a pretty, witty, naughty monkey; such potent and bizarre charm, of a dark, bright, wild yet worldly thing whose natural habitat must have been some luxurious interior decorator's jungle" (Carter, 1979: 10). Carter also employs the same image – admittedly a common biblical one – for her nameless heroine's happiness as Mansfield does for her Bertha's. "All that happened seemed to fill again her brimming cup of bliss" says Mansfield of Bertha (1984: 101) while Carter's heroine reflects: "My cup runneth over" (1979: 11-12). So many echoings must be more than coincidence, and this implies that other Carter sentences may be read as deliberately referring back to Mansfield's tale. In "Bliss" Bertha runs over to the piano:

"What a pity someone does not play!" she cried. "What a pity somebody does not play."

For the first time in her life Bertha Young desired her husband. (Mansfield, 1984: 103)

The association of female desire and piano-playing established here by Mansfield's narrator is purposefully returned to by Carter at more length:

¹¹ Mary Paul (see n. 5 above) first pointed out to me the connection between Atwood and Mansfield. In a paper entitled "Bluebeard's Bliss: A Discussion of how a Traditional Fairytale is a Palimpsest for works by Katherine Mansfield and Margaret Atwood" presented at the Australasian Universities Languages and Literatures Association Conference, Macquarie University, (January 1989) Paul showed how similar the revelation or dénouement scenes are in "Bliss" and "Bluebeard's Egg", noted that Mansfield's heroine's name, Bertha, reappears as the name of Sally's *writing teacher* in "Bluebeard's Egg", and also recorded other minor resemblances. She did not note that the "other woman", Marylynn, in Atwood's story is yet another interior decorator: to me the apparently widespread suspicion that Bluebeard's home would benefit from interior decoration by a competent woman is one of the most likeable aspects of these female Bluebeards.

on the first day of the honeymoon Carter's neglected bride sits down at her piano to fill in time:

I'd been blessed with perfect pitch and could not bear to play any more. Sea breezes are bad for pianos; we shall need a resident piano-tuner on the premises if I'm to continue with my studies! I flung down the lid in a little fury of disappointment; what should I do now, how shall I pass the long, sea-lit hours until my husband beds me?
I shivered to think of *that*. (Carter, 1979: 18)

Carter's heroine, in fact, is a serious pianist: a student at the Paris Conservatoire when her monstrous bridegroom first meets her, and later in life, with her husband, the founder of a small music school. When rescued by her mother Carter's heroine already has a young lover, too, a blind piano tuner brought to the castle to care for the piano. He reappears in Campion's New Zealand, contributing both to Flora's mysterious absent father, the music teacher, as well as to the figure of the blind piano tuner (understandably much older and somewhat the worse for wear) who is otherwise rather an unaccountable presence in the film. And thus we arrive at *The Piano*! As voice of the female passions the piano may be something of a cliché, but in the powerful retrospective vision of Campion it now intrudes forever between Carter's tale and the female reader.

If these patterns of allusion indicate a tradition of feminist Bluebeards, though, a tale-telling tradition, once established, exists only to be creatively subverted in its turn. Four tales from across the Atlantic seem to me to acquire meanings by announcing their difference: the earliest, Suniti Namjoshi's "A Room Of His Own" is a spare, parable-like text which concentrates attention on the confrontation scene in Bluebeard. It appeared in 1981: at that time Namjoshi, who was born in Bombay but who had gone to McGill University in 1969 to do a PhD, was teaching English Literature at the University of Toronto. Like Joyce Carol Oates, another university teacher of literature, she was no doubt aware of Angela Carter's recent *The Bloody Chamber*, as well as of the early stages of Margaret Atwood's brilliant career, in which *The Edible Woman* (1969) and the poem "Hesitations Outside the Door" (*Power Politics* 1971) as well as a climactic scene in *Lady Oracle* (1976) had demonstrated Atwood's fascination with Bluebeard and Robber Bridegroom stories. But Namjoshi's brief "fable" is not interested in realism and women's favourite fictions, and her feminism is overt, radical and pessimistic – an effect mainly achieved by the wonderful otherness of her new ending. Oates's "Blue-Bearded Lover", published in *The Assignment* in 1988¹², also uses an upside-down ending and an incurious wife, one who never looks into the forbidden chamber. And more or less simultaneously Margaret Atwood, who has recycled Bluebeard

¹² New York, Ecco Press, 1988. My source, however, was *Caught in a Story: Contemporary Fairytales and Fables*. Eds Christine Park and Caroline Heaton, London, Vintage, 1992 (pp. 182-4).

and other fairy tales almost obsessively,¹³ was using another tactic: the most important antecedent text in her story of “Bluebeard’s Egg” is not Perrault’s Bluebeard but the Grimms’ Fichter’s Bird (KHM 46), while the part of her “Alien Territory” which reverts to retelling a Perraultian Bluebeard, goes indeed, as it claims, “deeper” into the forbidden chamber than any previous female rendering of the tale: the chill and darkness which close around the reader at the end of this short piece truly renew the theatrical horror of past Bluebeards.¹⁴

As acts of interpretation, how do feminist readings of Bluebeard differ from non-feminist ones? In *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales* Maria Tatar shows how male readers over three centuries have tended to “turn a tale depicting the most brutal kind of serial murders” into a story about the punishment of female curiosity (Tatar, 1987: 161). She finds only one male reader who managed to question the logic of the “disobedience” test.¹⁵

But I would claim that by retelling the tale women readers have often questioned the “logic” of Bluebeard. A major difference in this female tradition is the emphasis on *male* infidelity. Where male commentators, notably Bruno Bettelheim and Alan Dundes, have found in bloodstained eggs and keys the suggestion that Bluebeard’s wife is unfaithful, (ctd. by Tatar, 1987: 263, n. 6) of the texts I have discussed only the most recent, *The Piano*, depicts an unfaithful wife: and this film, of course, defends woman’s freedom to make a sexual choice and even finds in that freedom her salvation. Oates and Namjoshi, on the other hand, point out that perfectly virtuous wives are not necessarily fortunate; Thackeray and Mansfield are preoccupied with *male* unfaithfulness; Atwood makes Bluebeard represent the serial monogamy of the North American suburban male, and Carter turns her moral spotlight on the monster or beast himself, not glossing over but rather illuminating the male butcher or predator in his relations with woman as (half-complicit) victim. In short, these stories present a completely different set of Bluebeard readings to those described by Tatar. In particular Campion, perhaps the most thorough re-reader of all, takes up a number of ideas others have ignored in Bluebeard stories: the barter or exchange of goods between men which is implicit in the “arranged” marriage; the image of a body – especially a female body – being taken apart into pieces (visually or literally) and put back together; and the female resurrection or rebirth wonderfully imaged in

¹³ Atwood’s fascination with fairy tale is well known: it was discussed by Barbara Godard in her article “Tales Within Tales: Margaret Atwood’s Folk Narratives” in 1986, *Canadian Literature* 109 (Summer 1986): 57-84) and has been extensively documented and described by Sharon Rose Wilson, whose Margaret Atwood’s Fairy-Tale *Sexual Politics* (Jackson, UP of Mississippi, 1993) contains a lengthy appendix listing all the relevant tale types and motifs in the Aarne-Thompson index and the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*: Wilson considers “Fichter’s Bird” the most important of all fairy tales to Atwood. It is hard to think of any other novelist and poet for whom such an appendix would be as useful.

¹⁴ “Alien Territory” is in the collection called *Good Bones* (pp. 82-5): the Bluebeard story is only one part of “Alien Territory”, which is a reflection on the male body.

¹⁵ Emil Heckmann, in his Dissertation at Heidelberg in 1930. (Tatar, 1987: 263, n. 5). Tatar’s discussion does not distinguish between male and female readers, but in fact all the readers she mentions are male. Her survey is especially interesting for indicating the origins of a dominant strand in interpretation – I would say, male interpretation – of the tale. Perrault himself, who describes the forbidden chamber as “the small room

Campion's Venus-from-the-sea sequence in *The Piano* but previously played out in many tales of the Rescue by the Sister (AT311) type as the result of a resilient trickster-heroine's actions.

Are tales like these – sophisticated, self-conscious, witty, openly engaged in reflection on gender politics and female desire, deliberately and complicatedly intertextual – properly the subject of folk literature research? At first sight their “intertextuality” is a quality which appears to remove these Bluebeards to another world from the realm of folk narrative. But is there reason to believe that oral and traditional tale telling *lacks* intertextuality? Angela Carter acknowledges both continuity with oral tale tellers and the fundamental similarity of the enterprise in which she and they are engaged in her “Notes from the Front Line”:

At any time up to the early twentieth century, I could have told as many stories as I wanted, and made them as wonderful and subversive as I wished, had I survived the births of my children or the hazards of working-class or peasant life to a sufficient age to have amassed a repertoire of orally-transmitted fiction (Wandor, 1983: 73)

Carter's enterprise and the oral tale teller's may resemble each other more than we expect. It would be interesting to look at collections of transcribed oral tale-tellings for deliberate and overt allusion across fairy tales such as occurs in the Brother Grimms' tales: there is an example in the opening to Frau Holle (KHM 24) where the wicked mother makes her daughter into a “Cinderella” (“der Aschenputtel im Hause”, Grimms 1, 1980)¹⁶ and another in KHM195, when the mysterious man with big riding boots remarks “Ich bin wie der Junge, der ausging, das Gruseln zu lernen” (Grimms 2, 1980: 411). The guests at the Hare's Wedding (KHM 66) come out of a widespread folksong, The Birds' Wedding: Frau Holle herself is likewise known elsewhere (Grimms 3, 1980: 56) and the beauties of Snow White are traditional as well (Bolte and Polívka 1, 1963: 461-3). Such allusions have exactly the same functions of opening up a wider field of meaning as allusion or cross-textual reference in written literature does.

Choosing to situate tales as interpolations in the middles, openers at the beginnings, or add-ons at the end, of other tale types also has an effect on meaning: everybody who works with fairy tale is familiar with this phenomenon. One example involving a Bluebeard is the English tale Peerifool, (Briggs A, 1970-1:

at the end of the long passage on the lower floor” (qtd by Tatar p. 157) must bear much responsibility for subsequent determination to read the wife's offense as not just curiosity, but sexual curiosity: the forbidden room has become the vagina to many commentators including Alan Dundes, who is cited by Tatar in her *Off With Their Heads!* (1992: 254 n. 27).

¹⁶ In the opening of the earliest version of the Grimm's Frau Holle the two girls, kind and unkind, are full sisters. In later editions of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* the mother becomes a stepmother to the kind girl. Rather than a move to defend the sanctity of motherhood (as Maria Tatar suggests (*Hard Facts* 143) this may be a deliberate variation intended to remind the reader of Cinderella, especially as the heroine is described as Cinderella. In Perrault the opposite process occurred as the opening of his story of Les Fées was altered (from step-sisters to full sisters) between MS and published versions, perhaps in order to make it less like Cinderella in its opening situation. Here can be traced the sort of decisions which I suggest are being made all the time by tale tellers, (not only by literary men who left records of them). All have their effects in producing meaning.

446-7) which incorporates, unusually, a AT500 sequence as well as a Kind and Unkind motif (Q2). A Grimm example of adding on is *The Three Little Men in the Woods* (KHM 13) which contains a well-developed Kind and Unkind story (AT480) as well as types 403 and 450. At the International Society for Folk Narrative Research Congress, Göttingen 1998, at which this paper was first presented, various ways of widening the range of meaning in folktale were described: Jacques Barchilon spoke of the unusual blending of Cinderella and Hansel and Gretel tale types in Mme d'Aulnoy's *Finette Cendron*, John Shaw described the general conversation or discussion that followed the end of each tale on Scottish Gaelic tale-telling evenings he had attended; and Linda Dégh showed how tellers deliberately arrange their tales in a sequence to produce certain effects.

Another kind of intertextuality is the way figures known from other stories or other cultural environments, perhaps in local folklore, appear as the fairy in a tale: the Bluebeard figure may be Mr Fox, the Devil, a wizard or magician, Silver Nose, a neighbouring farmer, or Captain Murderer. Scholars of folk tale, although well aware of the instability of the fairy figure in tales, do not in my experience use the interpretive ideas or methods developed by the literary discussion of intertextuality to reflect on the impact of such cross-referencing or to speculate about the meanings created by such choices. Yet such cross-referencing should be read as choice: artistic, purposeful, meaningful choice. The alternative explanation, that the variety of forms thrown up even in our scanty records of oral fairy tale is naive or accidental, simply does not seem plausible. Do not the very facts of oral transmission imply precisely the conditions of literary production now called "intertextuality"? Folk narrative specialists, never having had an author, have never had to announce the death of the author: they have always known that the necessary precondition for the telling of stories is the prior existence of stories, and are well aware of the dialogic nature of literature, its dependence on earlier texts to which it is always in some sense a response.

In closing my paper I want to evoke the continuing dialogue. Chicago cartoonist Nicole Hollander is another one of that community of women who, across considerable distances of space and time, have contrived to talk to each other about Bluebeard. "*The Piano* ended beautifully" says Hollander. "And twice!" After recounting both endings, though, the capsizing of the piano with the triumphant emerging from the sea that follows, and the delicate chopping off of "one, only one, of Ada's tiny fingers" after which "Baines fashions her a single finger stronger and more beautiful than mere flesh" Hollander cannot resist unleashing her own imagination: "I know that when Ada learns to speak again Baines will be sorry, because she won't be limited by writing in pencil on those tiny pieces of paper. They will bicker; she will have the verbal edge; lust will wane, and she'll ask him to have the tattoo removed But looking ahead is always depressing" (Hollander, 1995: 27).

The feminist critique of fairy tale has always been conducted less cogently in scholarly institutions than in other places, by women simply telling the tale anew. Whether the reader shares Hollander's scepticism about the fate of Baines and Ada, in her story may be recognised the compulsion to retell that, for the feminist scholar of Bluebeard stories, makes looking ahead very far from depressing. Bluebeard evidently has a healthy, if unpredictable, future: the story retains the power to require of women its own retelling.

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ABSTRACT

Since it was first published in 1697, Bluebeard (AT 312) has had an especially lively history in written literature. The centrality of the tale in Victorian times was recently acknowledged in Jane Campion's film *The Piano*, but Campion was following a series of women writers, including Katherine Mansfield, Angela Carter, and Margaret Atwood, who have felt compelled to rewrite this story from the heroine's point of view. By referring to one another's work, these women have even managed to talk among themselves, across considerable distances of space and time, about Bluebeard. Their readings of the tale are very different to male readings. Women rewriting Bluebeard in English have thus constituted something like a story-telling circle. The feminist critique of fairy tale may be carried out most powerfully by women writers retelling the tale they know.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Seit seiner Erstveröffentlichung im Jahre 1697 hat das “Blaubart”– Märchen (AaTh 312) eine außergewöhnlich lebendige Geschichte in der Literatur gehabt. Die zentrale Bedeutung der Erzählung in der victorianischen Zeit wurde kürzlich durch Jane Campions Film “Das Piano” bestätigt, doch Campions folgt bereits einer Reihe anderer Schriftstellerinnen, wie Katherine Mansfield, Angela Carter und Margaret Atwood, die sich bewogen fühlten, diese Geschichte vom Standpunkt der Heldin aus umzuschreiben. Durch gegenseitige Bezugnahme auf ihre Werke schafften es die Frauen sogar, sich miteinander ungeachtet beträchtlicher Entfernungen von Raum und Zeit über Blaubart zu unterhalten. Ihre Auffassungen von der Erzählung unterscheiden sich sehr von männlichen Lesearten. Die Frauen, die “Blaubart” in englischer Sprache umschrieben, haben auf diese Weise so etwas wie einen Erzählkreis geschaffen. Feministische Märchenkritik kann am wirkungsvollsten von Schriftstellerinnen ausgeübt werden, die eine Geschichte, die sie kennen, neu erzählen.

RESUMO

Desde a primeira vez que foi publicado, em 1697, “O Barba Azul” (AT 312) tem tido uma história particularmente animada na literatura escrita. A importância do conto na era vitoriana foi recentemente reconhecida no filme de Jane Campions *O Piano*, mas Campions chegou depois de uma série de escritoras como Katherine Mansfield, Angela Carter e Margaret Atwood, que se sentiram compelidas a re-escrever esta história do ponto de vista da heroína. Referindo-se ao trabalho umas das outras, estas mulheres conseguiram estabelecer um diálogo, através de distâncias consideráveis de espaço e de tempo, em torno do “O Barba Azul”. As suas leituras do conto diferem muito das leituras masculinas. Re-escrevendo “O Barba Azul” em inglês, essas mulheres criaram assim uma espécie de roda de contadoras. A crítica feminista do conto de fadas pode ser transmitida com uma imensa força por escritoras que recontam a história que sabem.