FEMINIST INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE BLUEBEARD STORY

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Feminist intertextual fictions reveal through negotiations with the Bluebeard fairy tale not only motivations for its continuing popularity but also a practical redefinition of what constitutes feminist intertextuality. The Bluebeard story metafictively illustrates two types of intertextuality: monologic (Bluebeard’s plot) and dialogic (the heroine’s plot revision). Feminist intertextual rewritings demonstrate that their revisionist focus is in fact on intertextuality itself; they are “meta-intertextual.”

Primary among the tenets of intertextuality theory revised through the Bluebeard intertext is “presupposition” and its implications for the reader. Feminist intertextual fictions reveal that intertextuality’s presupposed reader is a monologic textual construct. Presupposition is the intertextual reader’s Bluebeard.

Following an extensive introduction, three chapters perform close readings organized around the concepts of presupposition as a textual haunting, the mise en abyme, and the detective hermeneutic, respectively. The first juxtaposes William Godwin’s Caleb Williams and Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey to demonstrate Gothic metafictional treatment of presupposition. Chapter two considers Bluebeard’s depiction as a death-artist and his uncanny mise en abyme of the female reader in Bluebeard fictions by John Fowles, Peter Ackroyd, and Kurt Vonnegut, contrasting this with the reader’s “escape artistry” in Angela Carter’s The Magic Toyshop and Nights at the Circus, and Gloria Naylor’s Linden Hills. Third, the detective hermeneutic thematizes presupposition in the intertextual reading process. Casting the Bluebeard story as a mystery defamiliarizes presupposition in Margaret Atwood’s The Robber Bride and Emma Cave’s Bluebeard’s Room. Detection is a thematized reading strategy in Atwood’s “Bluebeard’s
Egg” and in Max Frisch’s Bluebeard. The enigma-solution model of presuppositional reading is dramatized in Donald Barthelme’s “Bluebeard,” and “Instructions for Navigating the Labyrinth” by Canadian Meira Cook.

Contemporary appeal in the Bluebeard story as an intertext may derive from the fairy tale’s own metafictional use of intertextuality and revisionism. Fictions reading the tale foreground the different strategies of Bluebeard and his reader, demonstrating feminist intertextual theory in practice. In contrast to intertextuality theory, the status and strategies of the female reader are of utmost importance to feminist intertextual fictions.
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Introduction: “something borrowed”

I

Contemporary fascination with serial murder finds a literary expression in the numerous recastings of the Bluebeard fairy tale of serial wife murder. However, "serial murder" is also an apt description of Bluebeard’s relationship with narrative and with many of the recastings of the story since Perrault’s “Bluebeard” (1697) and the Grimm brothers’ “Fitcher’s Bird” (1812). This study began with the question: why is the Bluebeard story so prevalent in fiction, and particularly in women’s fiction of the twentieth century? In the course of exploring this intertextual phenomenon, however, another came to light. As is evident in its use of the Bluebeard story in fiction, feminist intertextuality distinguishes itself as more than merely a synonym for feminist revisionism. In thematizing intertextual operations themselves to critique certain practices and theoretical assumptions, feminist intertextuality is “meta-intertextual” in nature.

Further, feminist intertextuality makes a new distinction between forms of intertextuality that may be termed monologic and those which may be called dialogic. Belying the belief that “Fairy tales ... just are, they exist,”¹ “the Bluebeard story”² presents and represents both paradigms for intertextuality. The story dramatizes the

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¹Margaret Atwood: “You could say that popular art is the dream of society, it does not examine itself. Fairy tales do not examine themselves. They just are, they exist. They are stories that people want to hear. ... You can ask all sorts of questions about why people wish to hear these particular stories, but popular art itself does not ask these questions. It merely repeats the stories.” Interview with Linda Sandler, “A Question of Metamorphosis,” (46, Atwood’s emphasis).

²This study will distinguish between “Bluebeard’s plot” and “the Bluebeard story” throughout, where the former designates Bluebeard’s murderous activities in serial repetition, while the latter also includes the transcendence of this plot through the revision of the surviving wife. This distinction creates another, between fictional “recastings” where Bluebeard’s plot is emphasized while the metamorphosis or revision of this plot is either minimized or excised altogether, and fictional “rewritings” where the principle of revision is foregrounded.
paradigm shift that occurs when “Bluebeard’s plot” (monologic and unreflective) is revised by the last wife to become dialogic (hence critiqued and relativized).

“Bluebeard’s plot” is unitary, univocal, and anti-narrative (because it ultimately forces the story and its reader into a fixed artistic tableau). It is infinitely repetitive and extends its proprietorship and law to its later recastings through the metonymy which is its organizing principle. The lemniscate is an apt figure for this eternal loop which has no discernible origins and whose serial endings signal only a new repetition. Fictions which use the Bluebeard story intertext in order to focus on this repetition may be read as “recastings” of the tale, participating in an extension of Bluebeard’s own intertextual monologism. “Rewritings” of the Bluebeard story, on the other hand, acknowledge the revision that occurs within the tale, freeing the heroine from this monologic textual carceral into the unpresupposed realm where dialogic narrative and metamorphosis are the principles. Such rewritings privilege renegotiation of the terms of Bluebeard’s plot. The staple tradition of Bluebeard plot recastings figures against these revisionary rewritings as the wives of Bluebeard in Maurice Maeterlinck’s symbolist opera libretto, _Ariane et Barbe-Bleue, ou la Délivrance inutile_ (1899, performed 1907), who, when offered rescue by Ariadne, refuse it. Despite the alternative paradigm demonstrated in the fairy tale, such intertextuality submits to the monologism of Bluebeard’s own plot, rendering the new text simply another retracing of the pre-written.

A crucial intertextual tenet which feminist intertextuality dramatizes and which finds apt expression in the Bluebeard paradigm is that of Presupposition: the agent of

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3Edward Dmytryk’s film _Bluebeard_ uses an asymmetrical lemniscate—a figure for “eternity”—for the actual keyring of the fairy tale’s keys: all keys are at one end of the figure-of-eight loop, save one ornate gold key to the forbidden room by itself on the other.

4“Presupposition” regards the projection of the “givens” of a sentence or text. The concept has a specific freightling in the context of intertextuality, which will form the basis for more detailed discussion in section IV below. In the way that “intertextuality” (the process) may be distinguished from “intertext(s)” (the resources and products of intertextuality), so the phenomenon of
monologism. Owen Miller has suggested, for different reasons, that Presupposition has "exhausted its potential" (35). Feminist intertextuality shows that Presupposition is in fact dangerous in its tyranny and its apparent self-perpetuating capabilities. Presupposition is intertextuality's—and the intertextual reader's—Bluebeard.

"Intertextuality" describes the processes by which texts are continually generative and regenerated within textuality's theoretically infinite, dynamic, synchronic field. Theories of literary intertextuality have also proliferated, particularly since the late 1960s, initially as a reaction against both the intra-textual enclosure of formalism, New Criticism and early structuralism, and diachronic author-oriented studies of influence and sources. However, structuralism's focus on the self-generative chain of semiosis forms the foundation for intertextuality's study of the text as a relativized "text-between": the recoded, provisional composition of (all) other texts, extant or potential. One critic makes a useful passing distinction between "old" intertextuality, that of source studies and allusions, and "new" intertextuality, that "defined by deconstruction" (Linderman 113, 114), thereby indicating their position on a continuum. While intertextuality has been widely hailed as a popular and viable solution to certain problems inherent in its own "precursor" literary theories, and while it has done a great deal to advance theories of literary relations, it is not without its

"Presupposition" (the process) will be distinguished throughout this study from "presuppositions" themselves.

5 Miller writes: "Does reconstituting the notion of intertextuality in terms of implication invite us to finally cut the umbilical cord linking us to one based on [P]resupposition? I would suggest that, both as the heuristic device to analyse texts and as a mode of securing the underpinnings of a theoretical argument, [P]resupposition has, at least in the theory on intertextuality, exhausted its potential. ... One might in fact go so far as to say that, in certain cases, a presuppositional notion of priority constitutes a methodological impediment" (35).
The problematic issue of Presupposition that intertextual theories have re-encoded will be discussed in greater detail in section IV of this introduction. It is essential to note here, however, that as intertextuality is not simply “a collection of literary works that may have influenced the text or that the text may have imitated” (Riffaterre, “Intertextual Representation” 142), so feminist intertextuality is not simply an ideologically motivated selection of such literary intertexts. Intertextuality is a process of which intertextual works are the traces. Feminist intertextuality is likewise a process, but one by which intertextuality is traced.

Feminist intertextuality adopts the intrinsic critical capabilities of intertextuality, but directs its focus not merely on another text, but on intertextual processes themselves. This distinguishes it from feminist revisionism in the traditional sense, which can be described as fundamentally intertextual but tending to focus on the relationship between the text and its select intertext(s), rather than on the operations governing that relationship: on specific “utterances” rather than on the “code,” as it were. Laurent Jenny’s description of the “focus” text (like Barthes’ “tutor signifier” in S/Z 13) in an intertextual relationship accurately describes the intertextuality which traditionally-termed feminist revisionism embraces: it is the feminism of the “texte centreur qui garde le leadership du sens” [the centring text which maintains the “leadership” of sense] (Jenny 262), mediating the treatment of thematic material. Yet feminist intertextuality is also a form of feminist revisionism; indeed these terms have been accorded synonymy in recent critical usage, as discussion in section VI of this introduction will show. However, feminist intertextuality is distinct from the narrower definition of feminist revisionism in its self-conscious metafictional practice. In short,

6Deborah Linderman goes on immediately to note, for instance, that “new” intertextuality “presupposes an ahistoricity that has been criticized by Marxist thought …” (115). The issue of Presupposition is central to the critique of intertextuality performed through feminist intertextuality, but Linderman uses the term in its general sense.
feminist intertextuality examines the textual and hermeneutic politics of feminist (intertextual) revisionism by dramatizing the revisionist, dialectical and transpositional process within a work itself. Revisionist operations thus not only shape but comprise the thematic content of feminist intertextual fictions, and they are thereby simultaneously practised, critiqued from within, and transmuted.

It is a presupposition regarding intertextuality that it cannot be "monologic," since the co-presence of texts necessarily engenders a dialogue between them. J. Hillis Miller writes: "Even an exact repetition is never the same, if only because it is the second and not the first" (155). On this spectrum of intertextuality whereby even an exact copy constitutes revisionism and dialogism, and a translation between languages is severely traumatic to a text regardless of its quality, it would indeed appear that intertextuality is inherently dialogic by definition. However, an already monologic story, as I will argue "Bluebeard’s plot" to be, in no way becomes dialogized by virtue of its repetition, even with respect to those recalibrations it may necessarily or deliberately undergo through the process of repetition. Such stories remain monologic, exercising a tyranny of sameness in their self-perpetuation, insidious because this recasting goes under the accepted guise of dialogic intertextual engagement. A “copy”

7The example of Borges’ story. “Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote” is frequently summoned to illustrate this principle. Gérard Genette says of the Borges story in Palimpsestes: la Littérature au second degré: “la plus littéraire des réécritures est déjà une création par déplacement du contexte" [the most literal of rewritings is already a creation by contextual displacement] (24-25). David Cowart, in Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Literature, discusses this "rewriting" at some length, and it is from Cowart that the model of the hypothetical “spectrum” of intertextuality derives (3-10, and chart on page 6).

8Bente Christensen asks the question in titular form: "L'Intertextualité: Système clos de reproduction ou ouverture relative?" [Intertextuality: closed system of reproduction or relative openness?] While the context of Christensen’s inquiry (summarized in abstract form only) is the hierarchical power invested in francophone texts taught in non-francophone environments, a similar suspicion is voiced. Such power risks invoking intertextuality in order to perpetuate "terrorisme"
of Bluebeard’s monologic plot, exact or not, is not dialogic in any meaningful sense by its status as "not the first." Renate Lachmann, in "Concepts of Intertextuality," provides perhaps the closest approximation of this distinction: "Deconstructive and conservative, dialogical and 'authoritarian-usurpatory' intertextuality respectively mark different semantic intentions" (399, author’s emphasis).9

"Bluebeard’s plot" is, in fact, the epitome of a monologic text, seeking authoritatively to erase otherness and to impose a totalizing fixity on the reader, represented here by the series of wives buried as Bluebeard’s secret mise en abyme.10 The ultimate teleology, the “last word” in Bluebeard’s plot, is indeed such a “representation”, making of the series of women a fixed tableau of death. The grisly corpses of the forbidden chamber are figuratively the writing on the wall of Bluebeard’s plot. This sign, the goal of the unwitting reader, in turn paradoxically

cultural" [cultural terrorism] of “une culture certifiée” [a privileged culture]. Christensen goes on to stress the important potential for relativity through intertextuality and the notion of “interénonciation,” which latter he develops further in his article, “Problèmes méthodologiques d’une lecture intertextuelle: Prise de la prose.”

9It is important to note in the context of what follows here that Michael Riffraterre is then paraphrased as an example of a theoretician whose metalanguage for intertextuality describes the second variety, that is conservative and authoritarian. This is a form of intertextuality “guaranteed” by the text, rather than one designating a “place of a dynamic and pluralizing constitution of meaning,” as Lachmann distinguishes them (399).

10The mise en abyme, (or abîme), named by André Gide, describes a self-referential image. Gide discusses the figure of heraldry where a shield depicts the same shield, and this regressus may also continue (the depicted shield depicting a shield, and so forth). Lucien Dällenbach in Le Récit spéculaire (translated as The Mirror in the Text) provides an initial topology of the mise en abyme in extending the concept to literature, and defines the levels of the mise en abyme as those of the utterance, of enunciation, and of the code. A further type of the same species may extend such self-reflexivity to the fiction of origins or endings and is classed as “transcendental.” Dällenbach’s work on the mise en abyme provides the foundation for use of the term here and its analysis with respect to the Bluebeard story, which chapter two of this study undertakes at some length.
disproves the notion that there is a space for the reader's "otherness" in Bluebeard's text: the wives are not active, aleatory readers with "free choice," but are instead tracing a pre-written script to a foregone conclusion for which they have been presupposed to bear witness and then become. Bluebeard's plot has no beginning (its predicate precedes each successive reader or witness); his tyranny is dated in Angela Carter's story "The Bloody Chamber" from "since time began" (142). As his plot does not develop (and hence has no "middle" either), the question of origins (what did the first wife see or do?) is moot. Like Presupposition itself, Bluebeard's plot is because it says so. This situation is compounded by the lack of an ur-text of the Bluebeard fairy tale group: the story appears to exist in an "always already" proliferating plural. Yet even as each further version enacts the story's proliferation, certain fictions may be read as repetitions of the plot in which dialogic engagement is suppressed by means of

11 As Anne Thackeray Ritchie puts it in an authorial intrusion prompting part two of her novella "Bluebeard's Keys," "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 of them ... No one makes any remark; there is not even an inquest. ... One question in particular will never be answered. What did the first wife see when she peeped in with the key?" (71, author's emphasis).

Many are the fictions that nevertheless seek to supply a story of origins. Perhaps one of the oddest may be found in Edward Dmytryk's film, Bluebeard, in which Baron Kurt von Sepper (Richard Burton) kills his first wife because she sings incessantly. As he explains to his last, American wife Annie (Oey [sic] Heatherton), "How else could I shut her up?" This film also supplies a reason for his blue beard: when his plane is shot down over Russia, the flames met with chemicals causing the reaction resulting in this colour. Again, though, Bluebeard's secret is sexual. Von Sepper projects a violently misogynist "street angel, house devil" notion onto women: "I knew their defects, they were monsters. They only began to look human when they were dead," and murders his wives because he is impotent. As Jerrold Hogle says of the multivalent crypt of Gothic literature: "Every looking back for a basis to the crypt just leads to another encrypting transforming the crypt's layers" (Hogle 346).

12 Kristeva writes on this presuppositional claim to exist that the verb "présupposer" is also "de se poser" [to presuppose is to posit oneself]. ("Le contexte présupposé" 340).
the intertext it has summoned. Alternatively, revisionist rewritings model themselves on the principle of metamorphosis rendered possible through that figured in the revisionist act of the last wife.

The Bluebeard story lends itself to narratological consideration as a thematized drama of agonistic, gendered author-reader relations within the riddled, many-chambered structure of the text. Bluebeard is the seemingly omnipresent yet unreadable author of the plot into which he captures or seduces the heroine and which manifests its terms in the form of the castle through which the plot unfolds. His generous permission for the heroine’s movement within his castle is belied by his prohibition of a single chamber, in which the heroine discovers both the key to Bluebeard’s tyrannical plot and its (and her) inevitable end. The vision of the murdered women or sisters represents the law of the plot which has bound her in its presuppositions from the outset: presuppositions realized (in both senses) on the threshold of the bloody, forbidden chamber. Yet “the Bluebeard story,” as a whole, which presents and then revises the teleological script comprising “Bluebeard’s plot,” also then describes the means of escape from such narrative tyranny, effected by the heroine who will survive it. In “Bluebeard’s Magic Key,” Phillip Lewis similarly distinguishes between “the tale’s global narrative sequence” [that is the Bluebeard story] and “its embedded narrative structure” [that is Bluebeard’s plot] (Lewis 41).13 This is the clearest example of the tale’s preoccupation with duality and doubling, in Lewis’ reading, turning on the double-sided key with its shifting signifier of blood. In changing the terms of the story, the heroine extricates herself from the script which was to enclose her, transcending both her role as passive or transgressive reader and

13 With the exception perhaps of Harriet Mowshowitz’s article on the role of vision in the Bluebeard fairy tale, “Voir est un acte dangereux,” Lewis’ brief paper appears to be the only work focusing on the tale as narrative and as concerned with issues of signification. The main tenets of Lewis’ argument will be recapitulated in section V, below, in discussion of the fairy tale as narrative.
the tyrannical dictates of the governing Presupposition. At the same time, the already “intertextual” plot (a series of monologic repetitions) becomes unleashed into the realm of revisionism, and Bluebeard’s plot becomes a mise en abyme within the Bluebeard fairy tale. “The Bluebeard story” thus contains its own first metafictional critique of “Bluebeard’s plot” within the intertextual paradigm it also figures. The story as a whole is already dialogized; revisionism is an inherent condition of the Bluebeard story.

II

The archetype of forbidden knowledge gained at great cost crucially shapes narratives from classical mythology and the biblical story of the Fall, and finds diverse expression in folk tales from diverse nations. The Bluebeard fairy tale and its tale variant group have accordingly been popular in western narrative long before their notable appearance in collections by Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers, distilling this familiar plot into its essential agonistic dynamic: prohibition and its transgression, punishment and its own retribution. After the publication of the French and, later, German collections, Histoires ou contes du temps passé and Kinder- Und Hausmärchen, however, the Bluebeard story pervades all art forms.14 No doubt

14While length does not permit an appendix of Bluebeard works here, these include operas, vaudevilles, plays, films, novels, poetry, short stories, engravings, collections of photographs (Cindy Sherman’s Fitcher’s Bird) and watercolours (by Margaret Atwood, reproduced and discussed in Sharon Rose Wilson’s two articles and book). For selected listings, see Marc Soriano’s “Lexique général” (510-11) which cites works from 1740 to 1986, and Georges Doutrepont in Les Types populaires de la littérature française cites works from 1746 to 1924 (417-23). It is curious to see how vaudevilles, comic operas and burlesques of the story dominate these lists. Perhaps as a logical extension of the reading which sees the bloodied egg or key as a symbol of adultery, Bluebeard has a lively figuration as a cuckold in such dramatic portrayals, leading in turn to the irony of passing comments such as that of Musetta in Puccini’s opera, La Bohème, who tells her beau while flirting under his nose, “Oh, stop acting like Bluebeard!” In the doctoral thesis, “Bluebeard and French literature,” Harriet Mowshowitz has a section on Bluebeard in theatre (85-100), and notes here that he is to be found in all varieties of
assisted by the late eighteenth-century emergence of the literary Gothic which readily embraced the story, (and perhaps the Romantic revival of Gilles de Rais as a literary figure), its use in fiction is rampant and has produced a proliferation of fictions which enter into negotiation with this intertext by one route or another, moving through the many doors—literal and metaphorical—which characterize this tale. Roger Schlobin identifies Bluebeard as one incarnation among many of an archetype, a "single entity," which Schlobin names "the femivore" and which may account for Bluebeard's frequent association with Don Juan. Similarly, there is no single tale from which such characterization derives, and it is necessary to delineate here the variety of sources from which a consistent composite "collage" for the purpose of this study may instead derive.

The designations "Bluebeard story," "Bluebeard story group" or even "Bluebeard fairy tale" are necessarily general as they describe a vast number of fairy tales, and in his confusion with the popular Don Juan type in particular, "Bluebeard finds himself cocu, or battered about in true commedia fashion" (86). In her master's thesis, Renée Van Raamsdonk also cites the popularity of the Bluebeard tale in all art forms, also noting this connection: "The curious mixture of eroticism and crime has strengthened Bluebeard's chances of survival, much like Don Juan's adventures" ("The Bluebeard Legend in French Literature" 28).

15 Roger C. Schlobin, "The Femivore: An Unnamed Archetype." I am indebted to the author for bringing his article to my attention.

16 By "collage," I would like here to invoke the discussion by M. Pierrette Malcuzynski in her article, "Mikhail Bakhtin and Contemporary Narrative Theory": "In short, whereas a collage produces an ensemble which is authenticated precisely in the otherness of its components in that these components constitute fragments of other, autonomous ensembles, the contemporary polyphonal device generates false alterities by the fragmentation of its own ensemble. A collage is a process of INTEGRATION, of bringing together of different, heterogeneous units in a vast dialectical relationship. What produces collage is the kneading together of these units into a new, original work of art without suppressing their fundamental differences" (63, author's emphasis). It is a "collage" of this heterogeneous nature that I am aiming for in my own necessary selection from the tale group's components to form a "Bluebeard story."
tales which comprise at least three different, if related, tale types (themselves a subcategory of the “forbidden chamber cycle” of stories)\textsuperscript{17} numbered according to their classification in the Aarne-Thompson tale classification system, \textit{The Types of the Folktales}. The characteristics which the three main types and their very diverse tales share, however, are those present in the broadest strokes of the Bluebeard story, as follows.

In Charles Perrault’s courtly \textit{conte}, “La Barbe Bleue,” Bluebeard courts and marries one of two sisters, who has overcome her initial disgust at both his blue beard and her trepidation at the disappearance of his former wives. Ostensibly leaving the castle for six weeks, Bluebeard gives his new wife the keys to every door in his sumptuous castle but forbids her to use one of them, a small key which opens one locked door. He promises her that she can expect anything from his anger should she disobey him:

\texttt{pour cette petite clef-\ldots, c'est la clef du cabinet au bout de la grande gallerie de l'appartement bas: ouvrez tout, allez par tout, mais pour ce petit cabinet je vous deffens d'y entrer, \& je vous le deffens de telle sorte, que s'il vous arrive de l'ouvrir, il n'y a rien que vous ne deviez attendre de ma colere.} \textsuperscript{18} (Perrault 24)

With almost unseemly speed she is overcome by her curiosity and opens the door, there discovering Bluebeard’s previous wives, their throats slit, hanging in grisly

\textsuperscript{17}E. Sidney Hartland, in “The Forbidden Chamber,” compiles a comprehensive survey of this cycle. Macleod Yearsley in \textit{The Folklore of the Fairy-Tale} also paraphrases Hartland’s earlier work. Despite the different etymologies of “tale” and “story,” I will be using both interchangeably to refer to the Bluebeard fairy tale, the Bluebeard story, or the Bluebeard story/tale group. “Story” will, however, also be used in a context-defined way and without any article to designate narrative.

\textsuperscript{18}“[a]s for this little key here, it is the key to the little room at the end of the long gallery of the lower apartment: open everything, go everywhere, but this little room I forbid you to enter, and I forbid it to you in such a way, that if you come to open it, there is nothing that you may not expect from my anger.”
fashion on the wall of the forbidden chamber. In her terror the heroine drops the small key into the pooled blood on the floor, and later finds that despite rigorous efforts, the stain on the key is (magically) indelible. On his untimely return that very day Bluebeard demands the return of his keys and the heroine demurs, but must ultimately render the bloody key. Bluebeard reads in the tell-tale stain her transgressive entry into the forbidden chamber and announces her consequent doom. She asks for time to pray, sending her sister Anne to the tower to watch for their brothers (who, by happy chance, are expected); each time she asks Anne if their brothers can yet be seen the answer is no, while Bluebeard calls insistently for the wife to come to him and submit to her fate. Finally the two brothers are perceived in the distance, and Bluebeard is about to strike off his wife’s head when they storm into the castle and kill him. The heroine inherits her husband’s great wealth and uses it to marry off her sister, endow her brothers with military commissions, and marry herself to a “fort honnest homme” (ironically, the same epithet was used in describing Bluebeard). Perrault’s tale ends with two morals, one concerning the cost of curiosity (“toûjours il couste trop cher” [always it costs too dear]), the other commenting that this is an historical tale, there are no such terrible husbands now, and in any case, no matter the colour of the “beard,” it is difficult to distinguish who is the master, husband or wife: “Il n’est plus d’Epoux si terrible, / Ny qui demande l’impossible; / Fut-il mal-content & jaloux, / Prés de sa femme on le voit filer doux; / Et de quelque couleur que sa barbe puisse estre, / On a peine à juger qui des deux et le maistre”19 (Perrault 29).
In Grims’ “Fitchers Vogel” (“Fitcher’s Bird”), Bluebeard is a wizard who magically kidnaps two sisters, giving each on their arrival at his castle both a bunch of keys and an egg, telling them not to open the locked chamber door and to carry the egg everywhere as great harm would result from its loss. In turn each sister opens the door, dropping the egg into the basin of blood and dismembered body parts she finds there. She is betrayed by the stained egg and murdered: “'Since you have gone into the chamber against my will,' he said, 'you must now go into it against your own’” (Grimm 73). The third sister, on the other hand, is “clever” and immediately places the egg out of harm’s way. When she opens the door to the chamber and finds her two sisters therein, she is able to resurrect them. The wizard, believing that he has found a woman who can master her curiosity (or who has none), announces that she has passed the premarital test. As she is to be his bride, he no longer has power over her, so she is able to command this Bluebeard to carry a basket of gold home to her family, hiding her sisters in the basket. She decorates a skull in bridal ornaments and places it in the tower window so that the wizard will believe she is watching him and will not pause on his way. She bedecks herself in honey and feathers to disguise herself as a bird whereby she tricks the wedding guests arriving at the castle and escapes. Even Bluebeard does not discern her identity after this metamorphosis, and she is able to

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20The Grimm story “Fitchers Vogel” has many translations of its enigmatic title. Most common are “Fitcher’s [or “Fetcher’s”] Fowl” and “Fitcher’s Bird.” Maria Tatar in “Taming the Beast” refers to the tale throughout as “Fowler’s Fowl.” The origin of this title is unknown, but is presumed to be connected with the bird disguise the heroine adopts when escaping the castle. The Grims associated it with the Icelandic word fitvogl, a web-footed or water bird. See Jack Zipes ed., trans., and intro., The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm (730-31n). In an article of Atwood criticism, Barbara Godard makes an interesting transposition by referring to the story as “The Fitcher’s Wife” (“Palimpsest” 54). In the notes to the article she nevertheless reverts to “Fitcher’s Bird” (60 n7). Van Raamsdonk prefers “Feather Bird” (7) for her translation. Elsewhere, “Fitches” becomes “Fezzy the Fetcher” [of women].
gather her kinfolk together to burn the castle, the wedding guests, and Bluebeard himself.

The Aarne-Thompson system groups the principal "Bluebeard" tales into three major types: "311 The Heroine Rescues Herself and Her Sisters," "312 Bluebeard" and "955 The Robber Bridegroom" ("Der Raüberbräutigam"). As these are categorized in Ashliman's guide, based on this classification, the first group lists approximately twenty-four principal variants of this tale, grouped by the characteristics of Grimms' "Fitcher's Bird." The variants include other Grimm stories, such as "The Hare's Bride" and "Old Rinkrank," but also include Finnish, Italian, Spanish, Scottish, American Indian and Arab examples of this type. One Norwegian tale in this category, "The Hen is Tripping in the Mountain," has itself been "collected in fifty-four Norwegian variants" (Christiansen 228), illustrative of the potentially limitless diversity each numerical type signifies. Even in this tale, however, chief elements of the Bluebeard story are clearly evident: the heroine falls through a trapdoor in a mountain like her two sisters before her, wanders through many fine rooms and finally arrives at "the innermost room" of a mountain. Here she encounters a troll who has murdered her two sisters, flinging their corpses into a cellar. As in "Fitcher's Bird," the heroine pieces them together again, and enables them all to escape (Christiansen 229).

The category "312 Bluebeard" derives its characteristic tale description from Perrault's conte, but also includes the Grimm version "Blaubart" ("Bluebeard") and nine or so other variants. The Grimms' "Bluebeard" was published in the 1812 edition of Kinder- und Hausmärchen but omitted from that of 1819 and thereafter, "on the grounds that it showed too many signs of its French origins."21 However, the

21 Maria Tatar, "Taming the Beast: Bluebeard and Other Monsters" (157). In another article, "Beauties vs. Beasts," which restates the fact of this omission (133), Tatar also adds that it was due in part to general criticism of the bloody content of the first edition (141). See also John M. Ellis, One
German version does not have the figure of “sister Anne” keeping watch at the window for the brothers who will rescue her sister from Bluebeard; that is particular to Perrault’s version but has since become one of the hallmark motifs of the fairy tale.22

Examples of the third group, type “955 The Robber Bridegroom” (invariably cross-referenced with the above two types), feature in common the “intended” who visits the groom’s house in the woods unannounced, there witnessing his murder of another woman. In some cases, the murdered woman is then eaten. In “The Robber Bridegroom” itself, the betrothed escapes but waits until the wedding feast before

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Fairy Story Too Many (90-92), for discussion of the dependence on Perrault and the expurgations between editions. “Blaubart” has been retrieved in Ruth Michaelis-Jena and Arthur Ratcliff, ed and trans, Grimm’s Other Tales: A New Selection by Wilhelm Hansen (135-139) and has returned to the general Grimm collection by Jack Zipes, ed and trans, The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm, where it is (erroneously) billed as one of the forty tales “that have never before appeared in English” (660-663).

22Harriet Mowshowitz notes this: “In fact, this repeated refrain [the call to sister Anne] has come to be the single element in the tale most readily identified with it by the audience at large, aside from Bluebeard himself” (“Bluebeard and French Literature” 78, citing Doutrepont 303). The figure is so associated with her function in the tale that she is recognizable in passing allusion such as that in Hélène Rioux’s short story “Jour de Chance” (English translation “Thirteen Chrysanthemum Avenue”): “Let’s call her Anne, like the girl who didn’t see anything coming” (104). A novel by Gertrude Arnold has this call (and its exclamatory force) as its title, Sister Anne! Sister Anne!! (1919) featuring a Canadian nurse in France during the First World War and making use of this theme elsewhere: “Sister Anne! Sister Anne! D’you see anybody coming?” (Arnold 216).

Other (and earlier) French versions such as the Méliusine (III, 1886-87, by E. Rolland, reprinted in Mowshowitz’s thesis as an Appendix, 225-26) instead use various “animal helpers” in this role: the wife sends a pet dog for help while she asks the cockrel whether help is coming. The delaying tactic, which in Perrault takes the form of requesting time to pray, is instead the ritual dressing of the bride to meet her fate which Mowshowitz speculates may have offended Perrault’s courtly audience (“Bluebeard and French Literature” 23). A blend of “Soeur Anne” occurs in one (presumably post-Perraultian) variant of the Bas-Poitou, classed by Paul Delarue, in which the helper dog is named “Sarène” and of whom the ritual question “…ne vois tu rien venir?” is also asked. (“Les Contes merveilleux de Perrault et la tradition populaire (suite) II. Barbe-Bleue” 355.)
recounting the murder she has witnessed, couching her story as a dream she has had: this exemplifies the trope of exposure through telling a tale within the fairy tale. After repeated and formulaic protests from the groom at each stage of her narrative ("It is not so, nor it was not so; and pray god it never shall be so"), she finally produces a severed ring finger (or hand) as incontrovertible evidence of the crime. The bridegroom is then summarily killed by the wedding guests. It is to this type that the anonymous English tale "Mister Fox" or "Mister Fox's Courtship" (and variants such as "Old Foster," or "Doctor Forster") also belong.23 This tale has its earliest recorded reference in Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene and, briefly but significantly, in William Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing,24 evincing two intertextual engagements with the story which greatly predate the editions in which its principal recorded variants were initially collected. The story informs an entire episode of Book III of The Faerie Queene (cantos 11-12), in which Amoret ventures into the wizard Busyrane's castle, whence she must be rescued by Britomart.25 This episode is

23See Katharine M. Briggs, ed, Dictionary of British Folktales in the English Language for "Dr Forster" (A. 1, 214), “Mister Fox” (A. 2, 446); and “Mister Fox's Courtship” (A. 2, 448). Angela Carter's edition, The Virago Book of Fairy Tales reprints Briggs' "Mr Fox" (8-10) while The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales includes "Old Foster," a “Hillbilly” variant of the British version (10-12). Rptd. from Journal of American Folklore 38 (1925): 360-61.

24Noted by MacLeod Yearsley, Folklore of the Fairy Tale (128); Opies, The Classic fairy Tales, (134); and McMaster, “Bluebeard: A Tale of Matrimony” (12). “Mr Fox” is first recorded in the Malone-Boswell edition of Shakespeare in 1821 (Opies 134).

25Jay Macpherson also notes this engagement, in The Spirit of Solitude (291n6). Anne Williams too, in Art of Darkness, presents a sustained reading of the episode (and in the context of the Bluebeard fairy tale): "Like Bluebeard's castle, the House of Busyrane hides patriarchy's secret, woman as the system's uncontrollable 'other.' But whereas 'Bluebeard' is organized around the laws of marriage, the House of Busyrane discloses the structure of courtly or romantic love; this episode 'realizes' the structure of male desire" (Williams 112). However, this chapter makes no mention of "Mr Fox" (or of "The Robber Bridegroom" which, while anachronous to Spenser, nevertheless shares affinities with this British tale).
discussed in greater detail in chapter two, below. The passing reference in
Shakespeare’s play sounds the formula the groom uses to protest the “dream” narrative
and indicates that the tale was already familiar (and already “old”) enough to recognize
in unnamed allusion: “‘Like the old tale, my lord—it is not so, nor ’twas not so, but
indeed, God forbid it should be so’” (1. i. 203-04).

Other tales are often fruitfully compared with selections from these three
categories, such as Grimms’ “Castle of Death” or “The Murder Castle” (“Das
Mordschloss”), a Dutch story which was also omitted after the 1812 edition, “due to its
Dutch origins and similarity to ‘Bluebeard’” (Zipes, Complete Fairy Tales 739n) but
which divides itself between the plots of both “Fitcher’s Bird” and “The Robber
Bridegroom.” In Grimms’ “Our Lady’s Child” (“Marienkind”) a young girl looks into
the thirteenth, forbidden door of the kingdom of heaven and is horribly punished by
the Virgin Mary; “Faithful John” (“Der getreue Johannes”), on the other hand, reverses
the usually brutal consequences of transgression to bring its protagonist great
fortune.26

For this study, though, the designation “the Bluebeard story” is the aegis
beneath which the principal versions of the tale (whose plots define and distinguish the
three tale types) are grouped in all cases when distinction between the French
(Perrault’s “Bluebeard”) and German (Grimms’ “Fitcher’s Bird”) versions is not
required. While these two national versions are fundamentally identical, despite their
different readerships, certain differences in the features of the tale itself are crucial in
the context of this study. One heroine must depend upon both a vigilant sister Anne

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26 This example of apparent double standards running through many of the tales is analyzed
by Maria Tatar in “Taming the Beast” (167). Tatar reads this same double standard in, among others,
the Russian folktale “Marya Morevna” in which Prince Ivan’s violation of a prohibition happily
brings wealth and marriage. (Ivan’s reward, however, does not prevent him from spending some time
dismembered in a barrel cast into the sea....)
and her avenging brothers for her salvation from the tyrant’s sword, while the other magically rescues her sisters as well as herself, tricking the trickster in the process and thereby shifting the focus from the dynamic of prohibition and transgression to that of violation (the punishment) prompting retribution. “The Robber Bridegroom” and “Mr Fox” are considered to be versions of one another, as well as variants of the Bluebeard story: both feature the series of warnings (above the doors, or spoken by a parrot at the outer door), the severed hand or finger, and the denunciation of the murderer by tale-telling. Similarly, the designations “heroine” and “Bluebeard’s wife” will be used here almost interchangeably in most cases; while the latter is often inaccurate, strictly speaking, it is the epithet by which this character has become known.

Of course, the Bluebeard story also has influential precursors in, among others, the stories of Eve, Psyche and Pandora. Commentaries which consider Bluebeard’s wives to be daughters of Eve or types of Psyche or Pandora focus almost entirely on female curiosity as the transgressive spring unleashing evil and bringing death into the world, rather than on the crime of its punishment. The “Tale of the Third Calendar” containing the story of Prince Agrib in The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments (Nights 60-62) is cited as a “Bluebeard” story, while Boccaccio’s Pentamerone contains another in the “Sixth Tale of the Fourth Day.”

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27 In a Basque version of the tale, however, the youngest sister kills Bluebeard herself with the sabre that was to be used upon her. See Maria Leach, ed, Standard Dictionary of Myth, Folklore, Legend (50). In Women who Run with the Wolves, Clarissa Pinkola Estés posits, from a feminist Jungian standpoint, that the brothers are the heroine’s own “intrapsychic energy” (62) resurging to rescue her and thus it is possible that in such a reading the heroine might be said to rescue herself.

28 Noted widely, for instance in Opie (133) or Lang (lxiii). Bluebeard frequently wields a scimitar, and his wife has acquired the name “Fatima.” Marina Warner discusses the tale’s Oriental influence (From the Beast 242-43) which no doubt also derives from Gothic orientalism (see Williams 20). In Anne Ritchie’s novella the poetic “argument” names Fatima’s two avenging brothers as “Ozman and Alee” (11). Bluebeard himself is often given the name “Racoul” as in Thackeray’s “Barbazer” whose title evokes the East; Grétry’s earlier opera bouffe has the title Raoul Barbe-Bleue.
The Breton legend of Triphine, her husband King Comorre ("the Accursed"), and St Gildas lends weight to symbolic interpretations of the egg in "Fitcher's Fowl," as the tyrannical husband in this historical myth kills his wives when they become pregnant. Comorre was a sixth-century figure, a minor Breton chieftain, and Triphine his mistreated, at-least-second wife. The legend has Triphine (or Tryphime, Tropheme) attempt to escape her husband when she becomes pregnant, only to be chased down and decapitated by him, and then resurrected by St Gildas. Comorre was ultimately slain in battle by his stepson from a first marriage to the widow of a chieftain he usurped. St Gildas de Rhuys was a British historian and monk, the author of De excidio et conquestu Britannicae, and perhaps a source for the two rescuing brothers in Perrault's fairy tale through his assistance to Triphine (Van Raamsdonk 4-19). Renée Van Raamsdonk cites a very persuasive piece of evidence for this historical source of the Bluebeard fairy tale:

Perhaps the most interesting connection of this legendary prototype with Bluebeard is a discovery made in 1850, inside a church now in decay on the Morbihan Gulf in Brittany. Hippolyte Voileau (Pélerinages de Bretagne) describes the discovery of a series of six frescoes during the repairs of the

(1789); also Marc Soriano’s list of Bluebeard works includes Monsieur Barbe-Bluée ou le Cabinet mystérieux, (folie en un acte, mêlée de couplets, par Dupin et Varmier, Variétés, Paris, 27 Nov 1828) which Soriano annotates: “Raoul B-B est marchand de vins en gros” (510). Bluebeard’s name is “Abomélique” in the works of both George Colman the Younger (Blue-beard; or Female Curiosity, 1798) and James Robinson Planché (Blue Beard, an Extravaganza, 1839) (McMaster 216n). Sylvia Townsend Warner’s story, “Bluebeard’s Daughter,” with its heroine Djamileh draws directly on such orientalism, while passing reference to a harem is made, for instance, in Angela Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber.”

29 Mowshowitz and Odio both note that the legend of Comorre appears as early as 1531 in the Grands Cronicques du Bretagne of Alain Bouchard, and had the status of a conte populaire. Odio adds that this work contains a "primitive literary version of the legend" (79). Albert le Grand borrowed from Bouchard for his work Vies des Saints de la Bretagne Armorique (1680).
chapel of St. Nicholas de Bienzy. These frescoes have been assigned to the thirteenth century, and represent the following details of the legend of St. Tropheme: first, the saint’s marriage with a Breton lord; second, her receipt of several keys from her husband; third, her discovery of a room where seven female corpses hang from a wall; fourth, her husband’s return, his anger, and her evident dejection; fifth, the saint at a window praying with a woman who is presumably her sister. In the sixth and last fresco, the saint, Tropheme, has been hanged, but St. Gildas resuscitates her, while her two brothers kill the murderous husband. (6-7)30

One historical “source” posited for the fairy tale is that of the fifteenth-century nobleman Seigneur Gilles de Laval Rais (1404-1440), lieutenant of Jeanne d’Arc. His macabre exploits were inextricably fused with the fairy tale in their oral circulation so that the degree to which they played a role in the development of the fairy tale is unknowable.31 This contributes to the confusion over the story’s multiple “origins.”

30Van Raamsdonk cites and adds to W. S. Walsh. Heroes and Heroines of Fiction: Classical, Medieval, Legendary (83). Walsh does not, however, provide a date for the frescoes, and gives details only of the first three. Jean-Pierre Bayard, however, states that the frescoes have been established as dating from 1704, “donc sept ans après la publication du conte de Perrault” [thus seven years after the publication of Perrault’s tale] (459n).

31Harriet Mowshowitz goes to great lengths in her thesis “Bluebeard and French Literature” to untangle the historical figure Gilles (and his own legends) from the legend of Bluebeard in order to reassess the confluence of figures and stories, which she associates with the rise of the travel diary genre through Stendhal and Flaubert, among others, both of whom visited the area of Rais’ château Tiffauges in Nantes, and the Romantic adoption of the battle between Eros and Death theme (for which Huysmans’ novel La-bas [Down There] is the culmination and the most-frequently cited evidence of such a revival). See also her article, “Gilles de Rais and the Bluebeard Legend in France.”

In her thesis, “Gilles de Rais in life, literature and legend,” Elena Baca Odio concludes both Comorre and Gilles de Rais were the joint precursors for the Bluebeard tale, reappearing in this form after centuries in which the historical tales had been circulated in an oral tradition. Debate, however, continues on the issue of the fairy tale’s historical provenance.
and also factors in the revisionist activity, as in this passage from the novel by Joris-Karl Huysmans, Là-Bas [Down There], the first full-length fictional work to draw on the legend of Gilles de Rais:

“But,” Chantelouve went on, “there is one point which I never have been able to understand. I have never been able to explain to myself why the name Bluebeard should have been attached to the Marshal, whose history certainly has no relation to the tale of the good Perrault.”

“As a matter of fact the real Bluebeard was not Gilles de Rais, but probably a Breton king, Comor, a fragment of whose castle, dating from the sixth century, is still standing, on the confines of the forest of Carnoet. … As you can see, this legend comes much nearer than the history of our Bluebeard to the told tale arranged by the ingenious Perrault. Now, why and how the name Bluebeard passed from King Comor to the Marshal de Rais, I cannot tell. You know what pranks oral tradition can play.” (Huysmans 168-69)

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An interesting point is raised through the conflation of figures: “a fusion of Bluebeard the wife-slayer and Rais the child-slayer, has certainly taken place” (Mowshowitz, “Gilles de Rais and the Bluebeard Legend” 85). Maria Tatar, in “Taming the Beast: Bluebeard and other Monsters” (169) notes that Bluebeard’s wife is cast in Freudian readings like Bruno Bettelheim’s as the child from whom adult sexual secrets are hidden.

32See Mowshowitz 194-212; Odio 195-202; and the chapter in Van Raamsdonk’s thesis, 46-56. It is interesting to note (in the context that will follow this discussion) that the story uses metafictional mise en abyme: the main protagonist Durtal is writing a book based on his research of Rais, and his characterization of the nobleman is that of a Romantic artist.

This novel also plays a role in the intertextual use of the Bluebeard story, as Angela Carter’s Bluebeard in “The Bloody Chamber” has this text as a prominent item in the heroine’s survey of his library: “A lectern, carved like a spread eagle that held open upon it an edition of Huysmans’s Là-bas, from some over-exquisite private press; it had been bound like a missal, in brass, with gems of coloured glass” (“The Bloody Chamber” 119-20). Its importance might be that ascribed to the work by Mowshowitz: “Only in Huysmans’ novel Là-bas does the professed goal consist precisely in the full
On occasion these two historical sources are both presented, as in E. A. Vizetelly’s *Bluebeard: An Account of Comorre the Accursed and Gilles de Rais*. However, “Gilles de Rais, dit Barbe Bleue” still enjoys the place of historical contender for the role, and from his first major biography by the Abbé Eugène Bossard, “Gilles de Rais, maréchal de France dit Barbe-bleue” (1885),

33 to works such as George Bernard Shaw’s *Saint Joan*. Rais is (retroactively) referred to as Bluebeard, the Original or development of the Bluebeard character in a major literary work” (“Bluebeard in French Literature” 184).

33This biography of Rais was submitted as a doctoral thesis in 1885 at the University of Poitiers and published the following year with the authorial assistance of René de Maulde, as *Gilles de Rais* (Paris: Champion, 1886). While the work *Le Sire Gilles de Retz: Mémoires de Barbe-Bleue* by Emilie Carpentier predates this (Limoges, 1882), Bossard’s biography may perhaps be attributed as a catalyst for several other works immediately after its release which make the Rais-Bluebeard connection in titular form, such as: Charles Lermé’s *Un maréchal et un connétable de France: le Barbe Bleue de la légende et de l’histoire* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1886), Jean de Roche-Sèvre, *Les Derniers Jours de Barbe-Bleue: Gilles de Rais* (Nantes, 1888), Percy Edwards, “Bluebeard: The Maréchal de Retz” (*Belgravia* 80 [1893]: 58-74), and the descriptive title of Thomas Wilson’s biographical work: *Blue-Beard: A Contribution to History and Folk-lore, Being the History of Gilles de Retz of Brittany, France, Who Was Executed at Nantes in 1440 A.D and Who Was the Original of Blue-Beard in the Tales of Mother Goose.*

34George Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue* (1923). Rais is referred to as “Bluebeard” in this play, but in another play by Vincente Huidobro called *Gilles de Raiz, Gilles* corrects the character “Shaw” in this appellation. At the end of Huidobro’s play, Gilles’ writers are drawn together to be judged by him, and the figures gathered together include de Sade, Don Juan, Huysmans, Anatole France, Shaw, and Huidobro himself (Paris: José Corti, 1932). I am indebted to Odio, “Gilles de Raiz in Life, Literature and Legend” (138-248) for her plot outline and discussion of this Chilean writer’s French play.

Authentic Bluebeard, or even noted in a title as “wrongly called Bluebeard.” The association is now so strong that a critic may allude to the “Bluebeard-Rais complex” (Mowshowitz, “Bluebeard and French Literature” 183) and as Odio notes of the role of literature in creating the association, Rais is “now virtually synonymous with Bluebeard whereas less than two hundred years ago, only Perrault’s tale bore that name” (Odio 286).

The label does not appear to have been very widely associated with another historical contender in King Henry VIII, however. In A Dictionary of the Noted Names of Fiction, William Wheeler states: “Bluebeard is also the name by which King Henry VIII lives in the popular superstitions of England” (49). The association is also ascribed to Jane Austen in her nephew’s “Memoir” of her where Henry VIII is “held to be an unmitigated tyrant, and an embodied Blue Beard” (Austen-Leigh 331).

In Anne Thackeray-Ritchie’s novella “Bluebeard’s Keys” (1874), two men in the street comment on “Barbi’s” chances of getting another wife in the following terms: “...he will not find much difficulty. Remember Henry Tudor, and the Sultan in Arabian poem: Barbe-Bleue, Jeanne d’Arc et mes Amours (24th series of his Ballades françaises, Paris: l’Edition, 1919; again, I am indebted to Odio’s thesis for her significant section on this poem). Similarly, in Edgar G. Ulmer’s film Bluebeard (1944), Bluebeard reflects that his first portrait model reminds him of someone and remembers this to be the statue of “The Maid of Orléans” (Joan of Arc). Gilles de Rais is thus obliquely evoked through allusion to his famous contemporary.


36Emile Gabory, La vie et la mort de Gilles de Rais dit à tort Barbe-Bleue (Paris, 1926).

37It is worth reiterating in Mowshowitz’s terms, that “Rais was never called a Bluebeard in contemporary documents” (“Bluebeard and French Literature” 65). The literature on Rais is exhaustive, and he is even called “an international leitmotif in the Western world” (in the subtitle of Odio’s thesis). For a bibliography of references and further works linking him with Bluebeard see Mowshowitz and Odio theses, and appendix B: “Bluebeard stories,” in Thomas Wilson’s biography of Rais (186-88).

38I am indebted to Van Raamsdonk for her reference to this work. Wheeler also quotes Holinshed referring to another Bluebeard, in the reign of Henry VI, anno 1450.
Nights” (Ritchie 28). A similar juxtaposition is made by Jean-Pierre Bayard in his comparative folklorist reading of the Bluebeard story, where he cites Henry VIII alongside John Christie as two Bluebeard figures, while Juliet McMaster cites both Henry Tudor and another modern British murderer, George Smith (alias George Rose or George Love) (11). In her book on the Gothic, Anne Williams also notes the connection: “Henry was simply a public version of Bluebeard, working within the system” (29). The novel by Emma Cave, Bluebeard’s Room (discussed in chapter three of this study), casts the persecution of fiancée Lucy as a vague extension of her ancestors’ religious persecution by King Henry. It seems, though, that references to Henry Tudor as a Bluebeard figure are scattered and comparatively recent.

However, in the trend generalizing the application of the Bluebeard label to killers of both sexes (and comprising spousal murder or not, as even the case of Rais the child-killer demonstrates), twentieth-century “true crime” offers a number of other notable “Bluebeards.” The Frenchman Henri Désiré Landru (1860-1922; the

39Jean-Pierre Bayard, “Les Thèmes éternels dans le conte de ‘La Barbe Bleue,’” (457, 459). Bayard also mentions the Frenchman Henri Landru, see below in this section. John Christie was the British murderer of a series of women, including a female lodger. When the woman’s own husband was tried and executed for the murder before Christie’s other bodies were discovered, the public outrage that ensued was directly instrumental in the abolition of the death penalty in Britain. The story is documented in the novel and film 10 Rillington Place.

40See Willard R. Espy, Q Thou Improper, Thou Uncommon Noun (165). (I am indebted to Janet Langlois’ book, Belle Gunness, the Lady Bluebeard, for this reference. [151n]) It is nevertheless possible in fact that the proper name derived from a noun in the first place. In “Qui était Barbe Bleue?” Jean Louis Pichérit speculates that the name could have its origins in an outdated term for werewolf, “barbeu.” In turn, Odio cites the following: “Around 1865, Anglican clergyman S. Baring-Gould... devoted four chapters to Gilles in his Book of Werewolves” (2d ed. London: Smith and Elder, 1865, 181-237). However, Odio (and therefore presumably Baring-Gould) makes no mention of “barbeu,” while Pichérit makes no mention of Baring-Gould in support of his argument.
irony of his middle name is unfortunate), “l’assassin bien aimé,” has this title. So too does Austrian Max Gufler, for his murders in the 1950s, and the American Ed

41 Henri Landru, L’assassin bien aimé [“the well-loved murderer”] is the title of a work on Landru by Sam Cohen (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1975). Landru went under a number of aliases in his marriage-and-murder-for-money racket during the first world war, but his assumption of the title “Bluebeard” is confirmed in the film directed by Claude Chabrol, Bluebeard (1963) dramatizing Landru’s murderous exploits (“These are hard times ... You can’t imagine what an honest man is obliged to do these days to earn a living”) in glorious technicolour. The associations are reinforced in his blue/black hair and beard, his clothing, decor and villa. In the popular contemporary card series, “True Crime Series Four: Serial Killers and Mass Murderers” (#172), Landru is depicted, as he is in the Chabrol film, with a very blue-black beard and moustache. Pierre Mille’s 1922 story parodying Landru’s exploits is titled: “Monsieur Barbe Bleue et ... Madame.” Further, there are interesting similarities in Landru’s “lonely hearts” method with Belle Gunness, the “female” (this is disputed) serial murderer. Both exploited newspaper advertising to canvas for partners. Belle is rumoured to have used the sausage mill to process her victims (see Langlois’ chapter on this) and while Landru’s defiant imperative during his trial (“Produce your bodies!”) was never met by the prosecution, Chabrol’s film depicts Landru at work with the sausage mill beside his stove. In the film Monsieur Verdoux (1947), Charles Chaplin depicts a dandified Landru in the film he also wrote, directed and produced, subtitled “a comedy of murders.” Despite the crafted comedy of episodes, such as the repeatedly failed attempts on an unkillable Martha Raye, the topical relevance of this 1947 film echoes Landru’s activities during the first world war. Chaplin has his Bluebeard make a larger point in court: “Mass killing. Does not the world encourage it? I am an amateur by comparison.”

The trial and execution of Landru draws certain comparison with his compatriot and forbear, Gilles de Rais. (The French claim to Bluebeard as a national figure is perhaps exemplified by the choice of title for Rayner Heppenstall’s study of twentieth-century murderers, Bluebeard and After: Three Decades of Murder in France.) In Gregory Monk’s Hollywood Cauldron, the discussion of Edgar Ulmer’s film Bluebeard cites Landru as “History’s ‘real Bluebeard’” (275). Monk’s facts on this case are suspect though: Landru is not “the legendary strangler of women” (275), and the film’s Parisian setting is the only apparent connection.

42 See Encyclopaedia of Murder (283-84). This entry uses “Bluebeard” as an adjective, non-capitalized, and twice as a noun. Gufler, like Landru and Gunness (below) used “matrimonial advertisements” to his financial gain, but he answered rather than initiated them. The bodies of three of his victims were pulled from the river Danube; the waltz of this name has accrued the connection (either from the “Blue” of the music’s title or, later, from the Gufler connection). This music is used
Gein for his murders of the same period (immortalized in both films, Psycho and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre). The early twentieth-century American female serial murderer Belle Gunness has, thanks both to headlines of the time and to her critical biographer Janet Langlois, a claim to the counterpart title, “The Lady Bluebeard.” But in first according this title to Gunness in print, even the journalist Stewart H. Holbrook gestured to the multiplicity of contenders: “Of all the many Bluebeards of both sexes the United States has produced, none I believe has been the subject of more comment, or the source of more folklore than Mrs. Gunness.” Again, however, the label appears infinitely regenerative, as evinced by the title of a recent work on Idaho’s Lyda Dooley-McHaffie-Lewis-Meyer-Southard-Whitlock-Shaw (née Anna Eliza

43 See Harold Schechter, “The Bloody Chamber: Terror Films, Fairy Tales and Taboo.” Ed Gein was arrested in 1957, and among the multitudinous horrors of his house had the “trophy heads” of nine women. Schechter’s article discusses the facts and the films in terms of the fairy tales “Bluebeard,” “Fitcher’s Bird,” “The Robber Bridegroom,” and the epigrammatic warning from “Mr Fox,” and draws on E. Sidney Hartland’s essay on the forbidden chamber cycle, noted above.

44 For a comprehensive analysis of the Gunness stories and the folklorization process, see Janet Louise Langlois, Belle Gunness: The Lady Bluebeard. This work subsumes her earlier articles, “Belle Gunness, the Lady Bluebeard: Community Legend as Metaphor,” (and dissertation from Indiana University of the same title [1977]); “Belle Guiness [sic]: the Lady Bluebeard: Symbolic Inversion in Verbal Art and American Culture,” and “Belle Gunness, the Lady Bluebeard: Narrative Use of a Deviant Woman.”

In interpretive readings of the Bluebeard fairy tale, access to its symbolism has been achieved in thematic-based discussions through such features as the magically indelible blood-stained key, and the clean or the bloodied egg in the Grimm version (the only technically magical or “féé” aspect of this “fairy” tale). In these readings, female curiosity is considered carnal as well as cognitive; the transgression is one of defloration or adultery (or both). Bruno Bettelheim’s Freudian reading of the tale in The Uses of Enchantment ascribes this justification to it; since only marital infidelity has warranted, in certain societies, the sentence of execution, so “[t]he nature of the betrayal may be guessed by the punishment …” (300). In these terms, Bluebeard “is a tale about sexual temptation” (301); the woman (or child) is denied access to carnal secrets of the male. A related reading of the tale’s cautionary sexual message, with altered focus, is that “women should not become too familiar with their own bodies” (Stone, “Things Walt Disney” 47). This intriguing interpretation will be reconsidered in chapter two, in the context of the aesthetic uncanny and its defamiliarizing reflection used as Bluebeard’s mise en abyme. In the politics of a powerful man and the women he tests, Jungian critics read a psychological confrontation between female “anima” and

46Anderson picks up the “Lady Bluebeard” moniker presumably from the press of the period, as his book reproduces one San Francisco Chronicle headline describing her as “Mrs. Bluebeard,” and he refers to her as such periodically throughout this narrative history. Lyda Trueblood married and dispatched a series of husbands before her sensational capture in and extradition from Hawaii, trial and imprisonment in 1921 (contemporary with Henri Landru). She boiled the arsenic from flypaper after her husbands had been persuaded to take out large life insurance policies and to will their estates to her. The narrative of her escape from prison after a decade and recapture from another marriage in the interim continues the sensationalist aspect, as does her later pardon at age 49 when considered no longer a threat to society. She died of natural causes in 1958 after a further marriage, and while holding a position as cook in a home for wealthy bachelors.
destructive male “animus” that is necessary to personal individuation. In Symbolic Stories, Derek Brewer interprets the story in standard fashion as an encounter with death; mortality is the secret story. Marina Warner’s socio-historic reading is more specific on this point, as she reads the bloody egg through the legend of Triphine and argues that it symbolizes specifically the mortal dangers of childbirth:

... widowers married many times in quick succession because wives died young, and died in childbirth, their infants with them. The fairy tale may attest to serial murderers in the past ... but it may also enclose a more routine cause of mortality. One of the principal causes of death before the nineteenth century was childbirth, and both child and female mortality was high. In the forbidden chamber, Bluebeard’s wife had perhaps found herself face to face with the circumstances of her own future death. (Warner, From the Beast 263)

Critics seemingly encounter little difficulty in enumerating the covert meanings this tale encodes. To “Bluebeard,” as has been mentioned, Charles Perrault appends not one but two moral messages. The debate provoked by these moralités, which generally decries the ills attendant on female curiosity (and which occasionally appear unambiguously and outright in the title, as with: “The Story of Bluebeard, or, the effects of female curiosity”), focuses on the extent to which transgression is therein


48This elaborates Warner’s argument in her earlier article, “Bluebeard’s Brides: The Dream of the Blue Chamber” (130).

49Anonymous Scottish tale, cited in Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature, ed. H. Carpenter et al (OUP, 1984), cited by Maria Tatar (“Taming the Beast” 263n). A similar title names the play by George Colman: Blue-beard; or Female Curiosity (1798). Juliet McMaster notes the importance of the Colman play to Thackeray, and the significant revisions performed on another dramatic influence, that of Planché, who elected not to follow the orientalism of Colman (who used
foregrounded, obscuring the role played by the initial prohibition and the disproportionate punishment.

While the Bluebeard story group as a category is necessarily general, and the Bluebeards numerous and multiplying exponentially as the proper name becomes entrenched in noundom, use in this study of the two designations “Bluebeard’s plot” and “the Bluebeard story” derives from the collective elements furnished by the core tales “Fitchers Vogel” and “La Barbe Bleue.” As Harriet Mowshowitz states in her thesis, “the conte contains two essential characters, the episode of the forbidden room, and the murder-rescue as its final note” (“Bluebeard and French Literature” 12). The unmasking of the Bluebeard figure by telling a tale masked as fiction, present in both “The Robber Bridegroom” and “Mr Fox,” as well as the use of the severed hand or finger as evidence, will supplement this fundamental paradigm in certain areas of discussion. In selecting recastings and rewritings where no literal reference to a Bluebeard tale variant is made, the Bluebeard reference specifies more than the “marriage-and-murder racket” which often suffices in bestowing the moniker. Instead, “Bluebeard’s plot” comprises the prohibition given spatial, delimiting parameters, and the consequent “transgression” (which is, in fact, fulfillment of the law rather than its breach)\(^5\) realized on a threshold. This plot is invariable, presuppositional, metonymic, and infinitely (intertextually); repetitive. But “the Bluebeard story” also encompasses the escape from this imprisoning repetition into relativizing difference: the heroine leaves the castle triumphant. This exploration of feminist intertextuality’s use

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the Arabian Nights’ “Fatima”) but the legend of Gilles de Rais instead. ("[Bluebeard at Breakfast]: An Unpublished Manuscript" 228n.)

\(^5\)Anne Williams also reads this paradox: “The prohibition necessitates the discovery; Bluebeard really uses his power to incite rebellion and thus creates the opportunity to demonstrate even greater power, his control over his wife’s very life” (Art of Darkness 95). Williams also notes that the prohibition is “plot-generating.”
of the Bluebeard story privileges the story’s own reflexive, paradigmatic framework for intertextual narratives of two kinds. Beyond the background outlined above, therefore, this study does not attempt conclusions regarding national or international variations of the tale or its geographical or archetypal dispersal, or consider its transition from orality to text, or its diachronic development as a literary trope.

Examples from film, drama, and poetry will supplement this study but the primary focus of analysis is the story’s possibilities as narrative. In this context, then, and in the context of the story’s tendency to metafictional use, the following section considers the three components, or protagonists, of the paradigm: Bluebeard’s castle, Bluebeard himself, and the “wife,” or—metafictionally—the text, its author and the reader.

III

As the castle is not merely the “setting” for this plot but an intrinsic plot element and even a plot catalyst, it similarly constitutes a response-inviting structure that is the threshold of a narratologically symbolic or metaphorical level of interpretation. The symbolic castle may be—and has been—interpreted variously. It is the contested domestic castle that is a besieged Eden or its imprisoning inverse.51 In a tradition dating at least to the twelfth century, and to which Bela Bartók’s opera Duke Bluebeard’s Castle contributes, the castle is the externally represented soul,52 and the psyche in which anima and animus contend. Reading the castle as an external figure for internal or abstract concepts recalls the architectural mnemonic of the house of memory and its function as an aid to creative endeavour. Bluebeard’s castle is indeed “architectonic” in that its architecture also figures a knowledge system. This view of

51 See Kate Ferguson Ellis, The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology, in which this tension between two gothic treatments of the house is central to her analysis.

the castle signifies two related metaphors: that of a paradigm for the creative imagination, and that of a paradigm for the literary results of its creativity: that is, narrative, or textuality itself.

When the castle is read as a metaphor for text or for story, this fairy tale becomes a *mise en abyme* at several levels. The definition of the literary *mise en abyme* and its levels derives from Lucien Dällenbach's classifications in *The Mirror in the Text*. Dällenbach offers a pluralistic definition of the literary *mise en abyme* as follows: "a 'mise en abyme' is any internal mirror that reflects the whole of the narrative by simple, repeated or 'specious' (or paradoxical) duplication" (Dällenbach 36). He then classes the different (yet interconnected) levels as those of utterance, of enunciation, and of code. In an article, "Mise en abyme et iconicité," reviewing and " provisionally correcting" Dällenbach's book, Mieke Bal discusses these levels rather in the terms "fictional," "textual," and "metatextual" respectively, while pointing out a certain closed circularity to these types of the same species. If a *mise en abyme* is not at the level of the "*énoncé*" then it is not there at all; once the fictional *mise en abyme* occurs in literature, it is "textual," if not "metatextual," already. As Bal says, "*Il s'agit de déplacements d'accent plutôt que de différences fondamentales*" (121).53

Mieke Bal's discussion contributes an extremely useful distinction which my argument for the *mise en abyme*, both as it is used by Bluebeard and as it is reclaimed by the revision which the Bluebeard story effects, will elaborate. The *mise en abyme* has two opposite kinds of use. One use forecloses on polysemy by the repetition and

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53. "It is a question of shifts of emphasis rather than of fundamental differences." I suggest that the levels could describe more clearly the focus of the reflexivity in order to clarify them, rendering "metafictional" for Dällenbach's "*énoncé*,” "metatextual” for "*énonciation*,” and "transcendental” for both "code” and the "transcendental.” That each level is (already) “meta” accounts for one of Bal's objections to Dällenbach's system.
isolation which creates a mise en abyme, asserting its "univocal message." In contrast, another use of the same repetition and isolation is to draw attention to its status as text.

Deux types de textes, opposés l'un à l'autre, sont susceptibles de faire ce sacrifice [c'est à dire la réduction du contenu d'information par la répétition]: ceux qui veulent leur message univoque, et ceux qui veulent attirer l'attention sur leur statut de texte; la mise en abyme de l'énoncé, ou fictionelle, pourra aussi bien éclaircir qu'obscurer le contenu diégétique, restreindre ou élargir la signification.54 (Bal 119, author's emphasis)

These two types correspond to the distinction between Bluebeard's monologic use of the mise en abyme as restraining signification, and feminist intertextuality which uses the mise en abyme as a relativizing device, focusing on process (structuration) rather than on fixed textual product. Bal describes the mise en abyme as a subset of the "icon," in a partial return to the mise en abyme's pictorial origins and returning the mise en abyme to a broader context than Dällenbach's, recognizing that the mise en abyme has the semiotic status of "sign" (Bal 122). Both icon and "mirror" (the mise en abyme as textual, self-reflexive mirror) work their image through resemblance: "Un miroir renvoie l'image de l'objet réflété. Le reflet ressemble à l'objet réflété. Cette notion de ressemblance se trouve également dans la notion d'icône."55 (Bal 123, author's emphasis). This use of resemblance is crucial to Bluebeard's use of the mise en abyme in his plot. However, the icon with its resembling properties is used for different purposes in feminist intertextual fictions, where the icon is visually "quoted"

54 Two kinds of texts, opposed to one another, are susceptible to making this kind of sacrifice [that is the condensing of informational content by repetition]: those willing their univocal message, and those wanting to draw attention to their textual status; the mise en abyme of enunciation, or [of] fictiveness, can just as well clarify as obscure the diegetic content, restrain or amplify signification.

55 A mirror returns the image of the reflected object. The reflection resembles the reflected object. This notion of resemblance is equally to be found in the concept of the icon."
only in order to draw attention to its status as “not-fixed” and invested with resemblance in order to generate the “uncanny” likeness that is destructively and monologically assimilative.

The mise en abyme at the level of this (Bluebeard) story sees a paratactic repetition or reiteration of the plot, Bluebeard’s plot, finally thwarted by the revision of it effected by the “last” wife. Thus, this revision makes a mise en abyme of the actual plot of which it was a part and becomes further metafictionalized when the Bluebeard story is used intertextually, and is hence metonymically used as a mise en abyme in its entirety. Secondly, the mise en abyme of the code is created within the story by its own gesture towards the metaphoric nature of the castle structure: the story posits itself as the threshold of a “vertiginous” shift to a matricial dimension, pointing to the narrative model it contains and which must also, necessarily, contain it. Dällenbach’s description of this relativizing, metatextual level of the mise en abyme is as follows: “As a secondary sign, the mise en abyme not only emphasizes the signifying intention of the primary sign (the narrative that contains it), it makes clear that the primary narrative is also (only) a sign, as any trope must be—but with added power, according to its stature: I am literature, and so is the narrative that embeds me” (Dällenbach 57, original emphasis). Thaïs Morgan expresses the crucial connection: “The very notion of intertextuality turns out to be a mise en abîme …” (18).56

The architectural metaphor for textuality is embedded in the etymology of the word “story” itself, containing as it does its Latin sense of a cross-section of a layered building (distinguishable by “storey”). The Bluebeard story is intrinsically—and literally—the castle of story; the story describes the castle which describes the story. The physical structures in this story even shape the titles of some versions: “The

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56This is distinct from Michael Holland’s “meta-criticism” of intertextuality as pure textuality which has only itself as a referent, enshrined in “la mise-en-abîme de l’autodescription” (Holland 179), although this additional dimension is certainly viable.
Bloody House,” “The Cellar of Blood,” “The Murder Castle,” “The Bloody Chamber,” Duke Bluebeard’s Castle, In Bluebeard’s Castle, Bluebeard’s Room, and so forth. 57 Both Bluebeard’s castle and the Bluebeard story are characterized by a series of doors, by many chambers of surprising riches and one compelling chamber of horror, by a translation of prohibition and transgression into spatial terms, and by the liminal, transitional moment in a doorway. The castle is the figure which traces the lines and skirts the spaces of the protagonists’ dynamic. Bluebeard’s castle contains a spatial site for its mise en abyme in the form of the forbidden chamber; this chamber is a “crypt.” But as has been said, Bluebeard’s plot has a figurative crypt at its core for which this chamber is a structural translation. Its absence of origins, or more precisely, the absence from which Bluebeard’s plot nevertheless extrapolates itself, impels the mise en abyme as a metonymic structuring that motivates the perpetuation of Bluebeard’s plot more surely than a fiction of origins (that epistemological mise en abyme which Dällenbach designates “transcendental”). Because Bluebeard’s plot presupposes an origin on which its “last word” may always be predicated, it has a “crypt” at its core in ways which transcend the literal. This discussion of mise en abyme and the process of encryption that in-forms Bluebeard’s plot draws on Jerrold Hogle’s discussions of “cryptonomy.”

the diverting of traces to traces that makes crypts happen and produces crypts from crypts .... The result, as in all crypts, is at once a continuing horror ...

and a resurrection of the dead by narrative that galvanizes old signs into action

57 “The Bloody House” (AT 312. Ashliman 61); “The Cellar of Blood” (AT 955. Briggs A, 2, 390); “Das Mordschloss” (Grimm. Zipes Complete Fairy Tales 670-71); Angela Carter “The Bloody Chamber” in The Bloody Chamber (itself a mise en abyme); Bartók and Balázs, Duke Bluebeard’s Castle; George Steiner, In Bluebeard’s Castle: Some Notes on the Redefinition of Culture; and Emma Cave, Bluebeard’s Room. Even the Nancy Drew series has its eponymous reference, in The Bluebeard Room (Carolyn Keene). Ascribing such titles as Angela Carter’s The Magic Toyshop to this practice is a logical extension.
and sets up rhetorical expansions and deflections in a celebration of performative life. (Hogle 355)

Bluebeard's encryption, the mechanism creating the *mise en abyme* in his plot, is less comprised of resurrecting the dead than in drawing in the living, to "galvanize" performative life itself into his sign of mortification.

This "rhetorical expansion" that motivates the perpetuation of Bluebeard's plot and characterizes its relationship to many of its recastings has an illustrative structural analogue in the "Bluebeard" film by director Fritz Lang, *Secret Beyond the Door*. Here the castle expands with the replication of further crypts, and their determinate relationship to the plot thematizes the correspondence between the (castle) architectural structures and the story structures they reciprocally shape. The Bluebeard figure in this film, Mark Lamphere58 (Michael Redgrave), is an architect whose "hobby" it is to collect "felicitous rooms." He twice explains his "theory" or "thesis" that, beyond influencing events, certain rooms may actually determine what happens in them: "The way a room is built determines what happens in it ... certain rooms cause violence, even murder."59 He reconstructs the original rooms in which murders have occurred, and these form a wing in his own house. The only locked door (numbered seven) in the house proves on inspection by the transgressing second wife Celia (Jean Bennett) to be her own room, awaiting her murder in it. The key to this realization is the asymmetrical candles on the mantle: she had earlier shortened one for the wax with which to make an impression of the room's key. Since the candles are the sign of her

58 The man accused of murdering Belle Gunness and her children (prior to the discovery of the bodies at the "murder farm") was the handyman whom Belle had fired two months earlier, Ray Lamphere. Lamphere testified that he had delivered Belle to the train station (fueling stories of her sightings for many years after the events of 1908) after the fire which destroyed her house and prompted the discovery of bodies, but he nevertheless stood trial for arson and died of pneumonia in prison a year later. The connection may be coincidental.

59 Based on a story (unspecified) by Rufus King.
transgression, they are perhaps the room’s "determining" feature. The room will
betray her, determining her fate. The architect Bluebeard and the film’s architectural
preoccupations, from title and plot to Freudian rationalizations (the locked door in the
house corresponds to the locked door of Mark’s mind and Celia must open them both,
"for his sake") bear out the narrative thesis that the rooms determine the stories which
determine the rooms.

If there is any fictional genre that has just such an overdetermined investment
in its architectural structures and the spaces they create and enclose, it is the literary
Gothic. The Bluebeard story has obvious thematic affinities with this genre; Joanna
Russ’ descriptive summation of the popular Gothic in the title of her article,
“Somebody’s Trying to Kill Me, and I Think It’s My Husband,” speaks volumes.60
Two aspects of the hybridity that this generates warrant particular attention: the castle
(and its secret chamber) as site, symbol, metaphor, analogue and co-conspirator of the
plot, and (as chapter one will discuss) the metafictional preoccupation of the Gothic
and its possibilities in the Bluebeard tale. Mark Madoff’s comments regarding Gothic
dialectics of space are pertinent here:

The Gothic is full of locked rooms, of one kind or another: locked rooms
within its peculiar, involuted architectural space; locked rooms of the mind;
locked rooms of history; locked rooms of secret sexual expression. The
locked-room mystery is characteristic of the Gothic. It nearly is the Gothic.
Inside and outside is the Gothic dimension; inside and outside is the line along
which the protagonists move, between experience and innocence, between
danger and security, between chaos and order, between the subconscious and

60Margaret Atwood also comments, “The Gothic form centers on My husband is trying to
kill me, and that’s of great interest when you think about it.” Interview with Karla Hammond,
“Defying Distinctions” (107-08, original emphasis).
the conscious, between anarchy and civilization, between licence and repression. (49, emphasis added)

It is also notable that Anne Williams’ book on the Gothic, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, takes this structure for the chapter, “The House of Bluebeard: Gothic Engineering,” and uses the Bluebeard story as a metaphor for the skeletons in the closet of the “house of fiction” throughout. In an argument useful to that posited here, Williams asserts that Bluebeard’s secret plot is the patriarchal “law of the Father”:

Bluebeard’s secret is the foundation upon which patriarchal culture rests: control of the subversively curious ‘female,’ personified in his wives.

Therefore, this house with its secret room is not merely background, a source of incidental details that serve to convey a latent psychological ‘reality.’ Instead, it ‘realizes,’ makes concrete, the structure of power that engenders the action within this social world. (Williams 41)\(^1\)

*The Shining*, a twentieth-century popular Gothic novel by Stephen King that is also a “Bluebeard” fiction, exemplifies this determinate nature of a plot described by the “castle” and further prefigures the metafictional possibilities of the Gothic genre that many Bluebeard rewritings exploit. The Torrance family (Jack, Wendy, and son

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\(^1\)Williams’ book, while confining its area of study to the Gothic genre in particular (yet reading the Bluebeard story as Gothic, or Gothic B.[efore] W.[alpole]), accords with this study in its emphasis on the architectural structure as textual metaphor (used frequently in her own analysis) and organizing narrative principle: Bluebeard’s castle as a representation of culture, and as a figure for Bluebeard himself, and as representative of a materialist, masculine power or “le nom du père,” which is “overdetermined in this structure” of the castle (47). While I have elected not to rehearse the potential for analysis of the unconscious (Williams’ study of the Gothic nevertheless requires it, and her reading of Freud as Gothic writer is innovative), I concur with most of Williams’ analysis. Her work appears to be the first sustained consideration of the Bluebeard story as a narrative paradigm—used here, for the Gothic and the specifically literary laws that are encoded and transgressed. It is unclear, however, why Williams focuses on Perrault’s tale to the exclusion of even a mention of the existence of other variants.
Daniel) spends the winter as caretakers of the Overlook Hotel. The Overlook itself has
the demonic ghosts of its past which make up the hotel's own ghostly Gothic force
(and the ambiguity of the statement: "Every hotel has its ghost" [King 163]). This
hotel very much determines what happens in it, and King’s (over-determined) textual
structures follow this plan both formally and thematically. Chapter headings move
about or create chambers within the hotel, from “The Grand Tour” to “The Bedroom,”
“The Lobby,” “The Elevator,” “The Ballroom,” “Outside 217” (and the corresponding
“Inside 217”), and the chapter before the epilogue is the “Exit.” The novel toys with
notions of inside and outside, from the first page which presents an office tray: “Both
sides of the in / out were empty too” (King 3), to Danny’s horror-filled realization that
there is no outside text: “There was no place he could run where the Overlook was not”
(King 429). Jack is a writer with a novel “in some mental back room” (and an
“Underwood” typewriter) and the novel itself is partially contained again by five lines
of its tunnelling epigram: “The Overlook and the people / associated with it exist /
wholly within / the author’s / imagination.” The infinite, metafictive regression of
narratives is immediately established. To enter the novel is to enter the Overlook hotel
which is inside the author’s imagination. The Overlook contains Jack, another writer,
with a book in his imagination, containing the story of the Overlook hotel. The hotel is
first read layer by layer in the form of its floor plans which Jack “overlooks,” and then
“read” from within by the Torrance family. The playground boasts a playhouse that is
an exact replica of the hotel (the Gothic nature of such monstrous and uncanny self-

62 In “Complex, Archetype, and Primal Fear: King’s Use of Fairy Tales in The Shining,”
Ronald T. Curran discusses this use of the Overlook as Gothic castle: “In personifying this [psychic,
dark] energy King moves from the conventional domestic image of the Gothic castle or family
mansion to the collective one of the Overlook Hotel, one with an archetypal resonance” (34, original
emphasis).
replication is discussed in chapter one below). The structural mise-en-abyme is firmly grounded in textual correlates.

Key to King’s Gothic use of the Bluebeard story, explicitly retold as well as re-enacted in the novel, is the metafictional nature of the Gothic the novel thematizes. Jack Torrance is a writer; the hotel is literally built on a story. In the basement, along with the multitude of papers which absorb the caretaker (“The Overlook’s entire history might be here, buried in these rotting cartons” [King 20]), is the scrapbook of the hotel’s stories. Finding the scrapbook, Jack feels the weight of the entire hotel pressing down on him “from above, one hundred and ten guest rooms, the storage rooms, kitchen, pantry, freezer …” (King 159-60): “God, what a story!” (King 163). Jack fancies that he is to be Boswell to the hotel’s Johnson (King 282).

The architecture-plot intersection revolves most forcefully around the word “REDRUM”: Red-room, and the projected reflection of “murder.” This projected inversion is central to the novel’s mystery, and it is encoded in language as sign:

Danny Torrance is learning to read in order to decode the “indecipherable” signs his intuitive “spirit’s mirror” (King 34) persists in showing him. Danny, as intuitive reader (“the shining” enables him also to “read” people and places [King 84]) does

63Stanley Kubrick’s film adaptation of The Shining overlays this correspondence further by drawing from the “corridors that twisted and turned like a maze” (King 94) an adaptation for the moving topiary garden in the form of a hedge labyrinth. See Christopher Hoile, “The Uncanny and the Fairy Tale in Kubrick’s The Shining.” Hoile comments: “At one point Torrance looks over a model of the maze inside the hotel and the scene blends into an overhead view of the real garden maze occupying the entire screen with Wendy [his wife] and Danny at the center. … throughout the film we see he occupies the corresponding place working at his desk in the center of the main hall of the hotel trapped in the maze of his endlessly repeating sentence, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” which again fills the entire screen” (Hoile 8; this does not have a source in King’s novel). Kubrick also draws out the novel’s Bartók references (King 221) by using Bartók string music for the opening sequence. Interestingly, Kubrick has also directed the film Barry Lyndon, one of Thackeray’s “Bluebeard” works; see discussion of “Bluebeard’s Ghost” in chapter one of this study.
battle with a different kind of reading, one which tends to “overlook” and not see. The
dramatized dynamics between author(s) and readers in/of the castle/text that has
assumed the form of the Bluebeard story and will repeat itself intertextually is here in
the form of the godgame which the hotel itself “authors,” so that Jack can observe: “He
had not acted but had been acted upon” (King 116).

In a spatialized story such as the Bluebeard fairy tale, which concretely figures
and fixes textuality which never exists as a discrete, static entity (Hayles 20), there is
also the thread, or story line which runs through the story. This thread is the linear,
teleological narrative drive towards the end, towards the forbidden chamber, there to
discover the story’s own end, and it is traced by the heroine’s movement through the
castle. Reading the story as an encounter with death is informative at this meta-diegetic
level also; as Bluebeard’s repetitive plot at this point makes clear, it is the “death” of the
story and of all potential for other stories that is repeatedly effected here. The anterior
sequence of previously killed women dramatizes the teleological tyranny that Bluebeard
practices on the story line. In J. Hillis Miller’s words, “The end of the story is the
retrospective revelation of the law of the whole. That law is an underlying ‘truth’
which ties all together in an inevitable sequence revealing a hitherto hidden figure in the
carpet” (158).

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64 This is of course the paradox of the necessarily discrete and diachronic utterance that it
cannot capture the synchronic dynamism it would describe. In The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field
Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century, N. Katherine Hayles discusses this paradox
as it has become apparent in the “field theory” of twentieth-century thought, in the paradigm shift from
Newtonian atomistic particle theory to that of the quantized field in which particles are concentrations
of energy within the field. As the field is to language or textuality, so the particle is to any utterance.
If it is not, as Pynchon says, that the human consciousness can only grasp “fallen, preterite versions”
(Hayles 27) then it is certainly all that language is capable of expressing: dynamism must be rendered
“frame by frame” so to speak, in a static form that never existed as such. Similarly, Roland Barthes
writes (after Nietzsche) in The Pleasure of the Text (1973) that we are not subtle enough to perceive
the flow of becoming, and so may only grasp forms (60-61).
The grim law of Bluebeard’s plot is both revealed and revoked in the doorway. The moment of grisly revelation on the threshold when the prohibited door yawns open on the bloody corpses or basin of body parts immediately solves the supposed mystery of the fates of the previous women who ventured into Bluebeard’s castle and fell victim to his plot. In this interpretive instant, Bluebeard’s “true nature” is also disclosed but the role of the heroine is merely to read it and to realize that this is (now) her story also; if she was ever “outside” this story, then she is no longer. Whatever other knowledge is gained here, being inside the forbidden chamber confers the knowledge of being inside Bluebeard’s plot. Whatever other symbolic meanings the bloodied key ciphers, it serves also to mark the education of this thematized female reader. The pattern in Bluebeard’s plot is revealed by its ending: it is based on unvarying repetition, and his destructive authority overwrites the female story.

Yet also encoded at this “last” door is the revisionary act of the “last” sister or wife; this is the first revision of Bluebeard’s plot, and it is written into the fairy tale itself. The “last” intended extricates herself from the plot and its (en)closure, assuming authority over its revision and her inheritance. She is thus “changing the story,” “writing beyond the ending,” living on in “the other side of the story”—in other words, she effects certain feminist revisionist strategies\(^65\) and writes herself out of a fatally constrictive patriarchal script into new narrative possibility and as-yet-unwritten story. The text operates as a “text-between”\(^66\) as it adumbrates the threshold between actual and possible narratives, with curiosity as its motivating force. Narrative closure is

\(^{65}\)These are of course titles of three works which seek to chart such strategies: Gayle Greene, Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers; and Molly Hite, The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narratives.

\(^{66}\)Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text”: “The intertext in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text …” (1008).
inverted at the last door, becoming in effect the point at which the story draws itself
"inside out." On this threshold ("Redrum") the story is not killed, but triumphantly
propagates a new story.

The many chambers and doors on which the tale's import so crucially hinges
describe also the potential for movement through its matrivial structure. Illustrating
intertextual movement in which, echoing the player in Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are
Dead, "every exit is an entrance somewhere else," the castle structure posits a wealth
of discoveries accessible by movement from room to room. At the same time, the
conditions of the prohibition of such movement distinguish between narrative actual
and narrative potential, where the latter is more enticing (while it remains unwritten, at
least). Like André Gide's metaphor of the heraldic device whereby the escutcheon
represents itself within itself and so on, ad infinitum, (called "infinite reflexion" over
the "simple reflexion" of a single layering), so the riddled narrative artifact functions as
a structural metaphor from the morpheme to the virtual realm of "world text" and at
every stage of lexical process in between. The castle, then, is one conceptual metaphor
for the "cosmic web" as an artifact representing textual network around (and through)
meaning's space. J. Hillis Miller says of the labyrinth and its relation to the thread
which runs it through:

The line, Ariadne's thread, is both the labyrinth and a means of safely
retracing the labyrinth. The thread and the maze are each the origin of which
the other is a copy, or the copy which makes the other, already there, an
origin: Ich bin dein Labyrinth [I am your Labyrinth] .... (156)
The thread is the labyrinth, and at the same time it is the repetition of the
labyrinth. (159)

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67 Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead. (NY: Grove, 1968) 28. I am
indebted to David Cowart (43) for his quotation of this line.
So linear, diachronic language (re)creates the synchronic whole even as it describes a single, diachronic path through narrative potential, realizing one particular plot. Bluebeard’s castle is a paradoxically static figuration of dynamic textual potential. In short, it encapsulates and contends with all of the paradoxes of intertextuality, whose infinitely relational processes can only be studied or recorded in “freeze frame.”

The analogy between story line and Ariadne’s thread has gestured towards a connection between this castle paradigm and that of the labyrinth. Indeed, similar assertions have been made extensively for the labyrinth. Wendy B. Faris, in *Labyrinths of Language*, for example, argues that the labyrinth is an icon of narrative structural design and a “con-figuration” of discursive practices in general. The castle of the Bluebeard story shares with the labyrinthine model the co-creativity of the line and the surrounding structure; Bluebeard’s wife embodies the female daring of Ariadne; the monster (death) at the heart of the structure, Bluebeard or the Minotaur, threatens the same fates and creates an interior, spatial correlative for that threat. The partial merging of Bluebeard in his castle with both Minos, the wealthy king who ordered the Cretan labyrinth, and Daedalus, its crafter, is analogous to the roles of the author and reader as they are set en abyme along with the textual code of which their roles form a part.

The metaphor of the labyrinth is distinguished from that of the castle in particulars only. Faris describes the labyrinth as formal confusion, or orderly disorder; the castle, on the other hand, is a supremely ordered structure, also connotative of feudal authority. The Bluebeard story functions within this frame as a repetitive sequence and a paratactic progression from door to door with a logicality that creates the illusion of causality. It is not a story of apparent confusion or of accidental retracings of steps. As George Steiner writes, “We open the successive doors in Bluebeard’s castle because ‘they are there’, because each leads to the next by a logic of intensification which is that of the mind’s own awareness of being” (In Bluebeard’s
Bluebeard’s wife is not “lost” until she arrives at the dead end which alone reveals egress to be an impasse.

Yet the castle and the labyrinth intertwine and codepend most effectively in the Gothic, in its castles and texts, where the castle superstructure is literally undermined with dungeons and winding corridors of labyrinthine substructures, complementing in spatial terms the Gothic plot. Superficial order is eroded by the chaos it attempts to conceal but which is nevertheless intrinsic to it. However, the castle and the labyrinth have also met and merged in the stories of Bluebeard and of the Minotaur, and their cross-pollination charges the resulting hybrid story. Maurice Maeterlinck’s opera libretto, Ariane et Barbe-Bleue, ou la Délivrance inutile, complements the forceful character of his Bluebeard’s wife with the active heroine Ariadne. Sherrill Grace comments that the Ariadne story forms an interesting parallel with the Bluebeard story: “Ariadne because, in her thread, she holds the key to escape from a deadly place” (Grace 247). In Canadian poet Daryl Hine’s Bluebeard, the illustrator Virgil Burnett has named a single tombstone, “Ariane.” Margaret Atwood connects the stories through the musings of her anti-heroine, Joan Foster, in Lady Oracle:

Details would distract me, the candle stubs and bones of those who had gone before; in any labyrinth I would have let go of the thread in order to follow a wandering light, a fleeting voice. In a fairy tale I would be one of the two stupid sisters who open the forbidden door and are shocked by the murdered wives, not the third, clever one who keeps to the essentials: presence of mind, foresight, the telling of watertight lies. (152)

Joan’s final confrontation with Bluebeard’s other wives, her other selves, occurs in the middle of a labyrinthine garden maze, the “central plot” of a costume Gothic which
refuses to be contained by its embedding in the larger fiction that is Lady Oracle.\(^{68}\)

The short story by another Canadian writer, Meira Cook, “Instructions for Navigating the Labyrinth” (discussed in chapter three), uses the labyrinth to subvert the ostensible logicality of the castle in her merging stories; her intertextual thread, however, is not to be taken at face value.

As the castle of intertextual story, Bluebeard’s castle is a fabular template for the intertextual matrix and thereby represents the virtual translated into actual story. Yet, as intertextuality is not literary product but literary process, Bluebeard’s castle is one site and symbol to figure this. As Ovid’s—and later Chaucer’s—House of Fame is both a description of a place and of itself as an \textit{ars poetica}, Bluebeard’s castle is “a metaphor for the human imagination and ... a paradigm for the creative process”: “At least insofar as modern literature is concerned, language and the artist who deliberately manipulates and controls discourse function as castles and Bluebeards in relation to the processes of life and to us, the readers” (Grace 247). This is a particularly tyrannical metaphor for author-reader relations, but one which has particular relevance for women writers and women readers alike. The dynamic between Bluebeard and his intended embeds a power dynamic between author and reader within its paradigmatic structure of the text, and in the most strongly gendered terms.

The castle-text of Bluebeard’s plot accords with both the “weak” and “strong” types of labyrinths presented by Robert Rawdon Wilson in “Godgames and Labyrinths: The Logic of Entrapment,” and both of these represent the nature of Bluebeard’s relationship as monologic author to the heroine-reader. The “weak”

\(^{68}\) Atwood’s use of the Bluebeard intertext is notable, and only partly evidenced by the works discussed in this study. See in particular Sharon Rose Wilson’s work, \textit{Margaret Atwood’s Fairy Tale Sexual Politics}, which thoroughly charts the presence of this and other related intertexts across Atwood’s corpus. Chapter three of this study will consider both \textit{The Robber Bride} and “Bluebeard’s Egg” in terms of the detective hermeneutic paradigm.
labyrinth is the castle structure itself, the actual configuration that both “contains, generates and recodes” the “strong” labyrinth of the story, that is the plot:

The movement through such a labyrinth proceeds by decisions sequentially taken. Thus a strong labyrinth has no mandatory shape; the actual shape it takes, in any given fiction, merely manifests the sequence. (12) …

[The strong labyrinth possesses a determinate order, is massively functional, even to the point of providing the plot-steps of a narrative, and is inescapably perceived from the inside. (13)]

The sequential nature of the strong labyrinth is reflected in the doors of the “weak” labyrinth, the castle, which configures the inescapability of the plot and, as Jan Gordon writes of Gothic textual labyrinths, in “Narrative Enclosure as Textual Ruin”: “the discovery that … metaphorically endings and origins are identical … is the secret of the labyrinth” (234). The godgame and labyrinth topoi describe the agonism of the relationship since the author, as generator and overseer of the godgame, has set both the conditions and the rules. The heroine, as character and as reader, is the victim of the godgame, Bluebeard’s plot, in that she is being “played out” to a foregone conclusion. This predetermination is illustrated in the reflections of the heroine of Angela Carter’s short story, “The Bloody Chamber”:

The secret of Pandora’s box; but he had given me the box, himself, knowing I must learn the secret. I had played a game in which every move was governed by a destiny as oppressive and omnipotent as himself, since that destiny was himself; and I had lost. Lost at that charade of innocence and vice in which he had engaged me. Lost as the victim loses to the executioner. (137)

Reading the castle’s own terms, then, as labyrinth and godgame or as an over-determined structural analogue for Bluebeard’s Presupposition and plot law, gives clear guidelines for the Bluebeard such a castle characterizes. A wealthy nobleman or a wizard, Bluebeard is also a Minotaur/Daedalus and a puppeteer-god. In Spenser’s The
Faerie Queene, Busyrane is a wizard practicing "unhallowed arts" from a spell book. In Louisa May Alcott's *A Modern Mephistopheles*, as in Edgar Ulmer's film *Bluebeard*, the Bluebeard figure "naturally" plays Mephistopheles. In Charles Ludlam's absurdist play *Bluebeard: A Melodrama in Three Acts*, Bluebeard is a Prospero and a Dr. Frankenstein in a *Rocky Horror Picture Show* context. Based on the character in H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Ludlam's Bluebeard is an alchemist, magician, and "demigod" of an island on which he is experimenting with anatomy. Practising the alchemical arts, Bluebeard may be loosely associated with Dr. Dee (Gilles de Rais shares a position with Dr. Dee and Edward Kelly in a chapter on "The Alchemists" which is perhaps as close as the connection through the "black arts" can come) and recalled, obliquely, in Angela Carter's story "Alice in Prague, or The Curious Room." In many cases, Bluebeard is characterized as an artist if not an 69

Harriet Mowshowitz is thus confirmed in her belief: "It is an interesting fact that whereas Bluebeard is often confused with the myth of Don Juan, he is seldom compared to Faust. However ... there are certainly more overtones of the latter than of the former" ("Bluebeard and French Literature" 52). 70

The lurid plot of Ludlam's play is similar in nature to a novel (tangentially) on Gilles de Rais by Gregory Douglas (*The Rite*, NY: 1979). As Odio summarizes: "What it is mainly concerned with is the perilous adventures of a teen-aged nymph from Iowa who runs away from a lecherous stepfather in the hopes of becoming an actress and falls in with a band of Transylvanian exiles who are making a movie about Gilles on a skull-shaped island off the New York coast" (Odio 171-72). One might well concur with Van Raamsdonk, that literary portraits of Bluebeard enjoy the fictional equivalency of the picture of Dorian Gray, "reflecting attitudes and reactions to the story behind the legendary figure" (Van Raamsdonk 73). Juliet McMaster similarly notes the "astonishing set of variations" in the figure from Radcliffe on: "We meet Bluebeard's savage, appealing, plausible, and humorous; we encounter Fatimas pathetic, perverse, martyrish, enthusiastic. Bluebeard gets accused, defended, rehabilitated, and psychoanalysed. One way and another, the nineteenth-century novelists got a lot of mileage out of him" ("Bluebeard: A Tale of Matrimony" 19). 71

author: in all cases, his inventiveness is deadly in nature and at the expense of another (female) protagonist, or the reader.

Robert Wilson also posits the extension of this godgame dynamic from text to reader, whereby the godgame is in fact the exercise of reading the godgame. The transposition of this to the intertextual arena and intertextual reading invokes the spectre of Presupposition again. Presupposition may afford such constitutive structuring of Bluebeard’s castle whereby the reader is played out or plays out Bluebeard’s plot yet again. An over-determined reading, in other words, has the capacity to build a strong labyrinth out of a weak one. Presupposition is the agency of the intertextual godgame, effecting the same function as Bluebeard in relation to his wife. Before offering a narratological reading of the Bluebeard story which reads the tale through these conflicts, the specialized term “Presupposition” requires exposition as it describes the operations featuring so large in intertextual theories, and is thematized and dramatized in feminist intertextual fictions.

IV

Feminist intertextuality foregrounds certain of intertextuality’s contentious issues “meta-intertextually.” The largest of these concerns the ongoing debates between champions of the text as generator of intertextual meaning and champions of the reader as creator of intertextuality by the act of reading. On the one hand, the argument goes, as language is inherently intertextual, so intertextual meaning is to be found in the linguistic and literary devices of language: a text creating its own precursors. On the other hand, intertextuality is a dialogue that can only occur in the reader’s mind, not self-sufficiently within the text on the page. It is not, of course, in these polar extremes, broadly formalist and reader-response respectively, that intertextual complexities arise but in their contortions of compromise and negotiation of the contested middle ground. As Linda Hutcheon summarizes: “Despite these distinctions based on intention and form, in all of these types of intertextuality it is the
productive and dynamic interaction of text and reader that is held to determine meaning” ("Intertextuality” 351). Still, any acknowledgement that the process of meaning is achieved in a co-productive effort between the text and the reader nevertheless begs the issue of interactive degree. The issue might appear moot, if not for the question: if the reader doesn’t see it, is it still intertextual? It is at this point that the comfortable notion of co-productivity falters, and these questions posit themselves: to what degree is the text responsible for its intertextuality, and to what degree is the reader? Where does textually determined intertextuality end, and the reader’s aleatory intertextuality begin?

The debates negotiating this merger on the spectrum appear to have produced a nucleus of key terms which have ultimately assisted in further fuelling dispute, in which the present inquiry participates. The term central to analysis of this question is “Presupposition.” This issue goes to the heart of intertextual operations, theories of intertextual operations, and the politics between texts and readers, and it is fundamental to reading the thematized hermeneutics of feminist intertextual works and to the examination of them in this study. The larger issues of intertextuality will accordingly be read through this issue, and the components and proponents of “Presupposition” presented in some detail here.

“Presupposition” is a term primarily derived from linguistics, describing there one of the means by which information other than that in the assertions of a sentence is nevertheless conveyed. The sentence, “Bluebeard regretted his murder of women,”

\[\text{presupposition}\]

\[\text{Bluebeard regretted his murder of women,}\]

72 The same question has been put in relation to allusion: if the trigger is not perceived, then is it still allusive? In “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” Ziva Ben-Porat writes: “the reader has to perceive the existence of a marker before any further activity can take place” (109-10).

73 To summarize this complex linguistic issue from Ruth Kempson’s readable survey in the Cambridge Linguistic series, Presupposition belongs to “pragmatics” in the crude division of “semantics” (“Semantics = Truth conditions”) and pragmatics is “What’s-left-over” (or, “Meaning minus truth conditions,” Kempson 153, 139). The “what’s-left-over” is evidently the sets of context
is an assertion which presupposes that Bluebeard murdered women. The sentence, "Bluebeard did not regret his murder of women," is a negative assertion which nevertheless also presupposes that Bluebeard murdered women. The sentence, "Bluebeard murdered women, which he regretted / did not regret," does not presuppose that Bluebeard murdered women, since this information is now conveyed as an assertion, or a proposition of the sentence. Presupposition differs from implicit meaning in that the sentence depends semantically on the presupposition; presuppositions are (indirectly) stated, whereas implicit meaning is not (Prince, "On Presupposition" 25). Existential Presupposition (comprising presuppositions of "real world knowledge") is an integral feature of discourse and is generally subsumed as

propositions: Presupposition is a context-based beast. Presuppositional "implicatures" may therefore be determined grammatically (i.e. textually). Presupposition evinced as "implicatures" through such lexical determinism may be termed "sentential" or "semantic" Presupposition ("semantic" rather than "pragmatic" because the context is conveyed within the statements themselves, which are assumed to have theoretic-truth value in the same way that the assertions do). However, grammatical indicators of Presupposition such as those in the example above (here a condition of the use of "regret") do not fully account for the phenomenon. There are presuppositional statements whose effects depend instead on "real-world knowledge," "general information stored in memory," "nonlinguistic knowledge about the entities being described," or "a link of association" (Kempson 145, 147, 157, 143).

Finally, as the representative article, "Supposition, Presupposition, and Ontology" by Ian Hinckfuss in the Canadian Journal of Philosophy may indicate, there exists a broader, philosophical issue of "logical" Presupposition elided by linguistics but pragmatic on a still larger scale. Generalizing again, in this realm the statement "Bluebeard died horribly" would be less interesting for its grammatical (rhetorical, lexical, semantic) presuppositions ("there was a [man] called Bluebeard"; "Bluebeard died") than in the "dogmas of the dialectical society" that form the "preassertions of a dialogue" in which this statement is even possible (Hinckfuss 597). The statement implies an economy of dialogue, a society in which the concepts of proper names and of death are comprehensible, and so forth. While Julia Kristeva gives some weight to logical presupposition in the context of intertextuality and the ideological freighting of such "preassertions," it is nevertheless the type of presupposition termed "pragmatic" which is most often understood as "literary" presupposition.
background so that, for instance, the speaker of the presuppositional sentence above could be surprised to be answered with questions regarding the presupposed real world knowledge: “what is murder?” or “what is a woman?” Presupposition necessarily situates the speaker with regard both to the audience and to the utterance: the issue of “competence” is at the heart of Presupposition. As Gerald Prince phrases it,

When he presupposes something, [the narrator]—like anybody making presuppositions—puts himself in the position of someone whose audience knows that which is presupposed. The proportion of presuppositions in a narrative can therefore tell us how much a narrator has in common with his narratee, or would like to have in common with him. (Prince, “On Presupposition” 27)

In such situations, presuppositions may be said to be “shielded from challenge” in the background of discourse as they imply if not a shared knowledge between speaker and audience, then at least a contract of coproducive meaning-making. To argue, using the above example, that “Bluebeard did not murder women” is possible but breaches the “co-conspiracy” as this presuppositional discourse contract has been called: “attempted conspiracy … underlies all literary uses of [P]resupposition” (Hardy 10). Donald Hardy goes on to say, after Gerald Prince, that “Presupposition is not intertextual, but interpersonal, whether between narrator and reader or character and character” (Hardy 9). The topic under discussion in the above assertions is the issue of “regret” only, and it is “a rule of discourse according to which the presuppositions of a statement [do] not constitute a primary topic for discussion” (Prince, “On Presupposition” 25).

Finally, Presupposition exists only in the matrix of presuppositional constructions: while these constructions can be textually located, the presuppositions themselves are absent presences and thus shadow the text as “projections.” This “presupposition projection” may be described in Kempson’s words: “[p]resupposition projection is a problem of how information from one conjunct in a conjunction is used
as immediately accessible information for the second conjunct, and how information presumed to be accessible is interpreted as an implicit part of the context even when it is not an explicitly stated part of that context” (Kempson 158). Clearly, like intertextuality, in theories of which Presupposition plays a large part, Presupposition is also a context-defined as well as a context-creating phenomenon. And, like Presupposition, intertextuality has its own “projections” that are the absent-present intertexts whose matrices may be textual but which remain unactualized without a “competent” reader and communities of readers for whom these sets of context propositions and presuppositions are presumed to exist.

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74This paradox is described by N. Burton-Roberts in his review of Rob A. Van der Sandt’s book, Context and Presupposition (1988), focusing on Van der Sandt’s treatment of the issue: “If a context is ‘to be conceived of as a set of presuppositions’ how can Van der Sandt’s theory rest on the idea that ‘The context and the context set play a central role in the determination of the behaviour of presuppositions ... ’ (164)? On the one hand, context determines [P]resupposition; on the other, presuppositions determine context (act as ‘context selectors’).” (Burton Roberts 452).

75Bente Christensen’s argument, stemming from the reader’s role in actualizing the overdetermined coding of the text in the form of symbols, similarly makes clear this connection between Presupposition and the competence of a reading community: “Si l’on considère l’activité littéraire de cette façon, il me semble que ces fameuses surdéterminations ne peuvent pas jouer le rôle de justificateurs absous, mais qu’il faut renverser le problème et dire que c’est le potentiel du lecteur qui décide en grande partie les surdéterminations... Les symboles, lieu de rencontre entre la production et l’interaction, ne sont pas quelque chose d’inné, ils sont des significations apprises. Cet apprentissage est à peu près le même pour un group donné [...], et la compréhension de différentes énonciations tel le texte de fiction, dépend largement de quelques préssuppositions” (Problèmes méthodologiques” 62, author’s emphasis). (“If one considers literary activity in this fashion, it seems to me that these notorious overdeterminations can not play the role of absolute justificators, but that it is necessary to reverse the problem and to say that it is the potential of the reader which decides the overdeterminations in large part. Symbols, meeting place between production and interaction, are not something innate, they are learned significations. This apprenticeship is mostly the same for a given group ... and the understanding of different enunciations is such that the fictional text depends largely on some presuppositions.”) In this respect, the limits of poetic intertextuality, according to Christensen, depend on competence (a word he nevertheless does not
To return to the field of dynamic co-productivity, however; the concept of intertextual Presupposition has arisen not simply from the linguistic necessities of textual context-formation. Instead, Presupposition has been posited as the fail-safe and catch-all for the questions of "competence" and the ultimate query: "can intertextuality exist independently of the reader?" The-as I argue--dangerous nature of embracing Presupposition in the guise of a reader-oriented theory, whilst in fact reinforcing deterministic textual dominion, is most evident in examining the structural pragmatics of Michael Riffaterre. Riffaterre's work in analyzing the infrastructural workings of intertextuality has been voluminous and noteworthy. It is in the name of Presupposition, though, that Riffaterre makes his claims for the "compulsory reader response" of intertextuality, and even the rhetoric Riffaterre uses to describe this functional mechanistic quality consistently betrays its tyrannical nature beneath the guise of a reader-oriented project:

Only the writer knows the idiolect's sign system thoroughly. It is up to the reader to evaluate, categorize, and interpret this sign system by detecting its references to the sociolect, ... and this through, and in spite of, the idiolect's interferences. In short, the reader is able to interpret the text only by way of the intertext. To my mind, the real problem is understanding what makes interpretation mandatory rather than a matter of free choice. A related problem is to find out how the reader manages to pinpoint the locus of the intertext: even if he does not accomplish this, something within the text drives him to track down and make out the shape of the missing piece of the puzzle.

The answer, the factor that guides the reader and dictates his interpretation, seems to me to be [P]resupposition. ("Flaubert's Presuppositions" 2)

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use): a facility with codes in play which evinces "une sélectivité très forte" ["a very strong selectiveness"].
Ironically, in this article Riffaterre cites an example of Flaubert’s use of a quotation from the *Aeneid* that “fits the context” of *Madame Bovary*, but also “fits the context” of Riffaterre’s own arguments for the text, in that it is “[a] famous example of ironhanded dominion” (3). In order to contextualize this criticism, several related tenets from Riffaterre’s work must be summarized in brief.

Riffaterre argues that it is not possible for intertextuality to be “missed” in (and hence “missing from”) the text although it may remain unactualized in a real reader’s reading. The text’s linear course is interrupted by “ungrammaticalities” which are coded sememes from the intertext (they are “grammatical” in the intertext), and these disrupt the linear reading by posing an “enigma” that may only be solved by a detour from the linearity of the text, through the intertext which correlates. As the quotation above indicates, it matters little whether the reader’s competence does not enable the correlate to be actualized: it suffices that the text indicates its own incompleteness through its rhetorical indices for intertextuality to be operative. In this way, the text posits an enigma-solution mode which, in a second, retroactive reading (for significance over sense), compels an “obligatory” response in the reader.

The objections to this model of text-reader relations must be evident. In this model reading becomes, in Thaïs Morgan’s words, “the overdetermined hunt for the ghost intertext” (“Is There an Intertext” 29). While prescribing an heuristic, reader-oriented hermeneutic of “puzzle reconstruction,” Riffaterre in fact reconfirms the absoluteness of the control of the text over its reading, a reading which consists of decoding the text’s dictatorial triggers and traces. Lucien Dällenbach’s criticism of over-determining the text’s position in the triad may usefully be juxtaposed with the current argument:

The inherent danger of this sort of reading lies, of course, in making the text into an allegory—in other words, seeing its referential dimension as merely self-reference in disguise. Reminiscent in its categorical and distorting
approach of the readings of the Scriptures by some church fathers or Gnostics, this type of interpretation is self-fulfilling and impervious to any discussion. Imprisoned in a kind of scriptural idealism, it only appears to insist on the materiality of the text the better to ignore it, and creates a master-key to the text in order to avoid actually reading it. (Dällenbach 49) ... Have we not good reason to be seriously dissatisfied and concerned about this sort of commentary, which seems to turn [the] text into a mere cryptogram to be elucidated or ... “deciphered”? (204n)

Riffaterrean pragmatics constitute just such a “master-key” for a reading that is not complementary to the text, in his terms, but the “correct” reading of it: “Presupposition creates a logical need for gap-filling”; “[p]resuppositions then lead us on to the correct interpretation” (“Flaubert”s Presuppositions” 5, 9). The reader, then, is presupposed by the text that is being read, as a “superreader” or homogeneous community of readers, just as the reader is presupposed by Riffaterre out of necessity, even when competence is not:

Finding the hypogram is a matter of perception .... If it is part of his heritage, the reader will sooner or later catch the connection. It matters little that he may hit upon the hypogram only after reading the text it overdetermines: with such delayed identification reading will be correct, that is, pertinent to literariness, only after he has remembered the intertext that contains the hypogram. What I must emphasize is that even while the hypogram remains unidentified, the text’s troublesomeness keeps pointing to this need: the hypogram must be found, a solution outside the text must be found, in the intertext. (“Interview” 14, author’s emphasis)

In fact, this independence of intertextuality from the reader is Riffaterre’s stated defence from charges of elitism that such “compulsory reader response” and its
competency connection have provoked, as well as the protection built into his theory which allows it to stand regardless of the troublesome reader. The (i)logical extreme of this presupposition is that the reader, too, is present(ed) in the text as another lexical index—merely a rhetorical component of the text’s own poetics of the need to be read.

76 Uri Eisenzweig specifically targets Riffaterrean theory for its elitist, prohibitive competence in a brief article on this subject alone: “Un Concept plein d’intérêts.” Eisenzweig acknowledges that Riffaterrean theory offers itself as a target in part because it remains the most rigorous attempt to produce a theory of intertextual operations. Nevertheless, the attack is vehement. Riffaterrean theory argues that intertextuality is literary, but who, Eisenzweig asks, decides what is literary? Detective fiction, for instance, is intertextual at its essence, and yet is not the quintessence of literary. Riffaterre resorts to elucidating his work with specific examples displaying his own erudite knowledge. Eisenzweig states: “La théorie de l’intertextualité presuppose ainsi, par définition, une structure duelle, où le fonctionnement même du savoir (et donc de la littérature elle-même!) dépend de l’existence de l’ignorance” (169, author’s emphasis). [“The theory of intertextuality thus presupposes, by definition, a binary structure, where the very functioning of knowledge (and therefore of literature itself) depends on the existence of ignorance.”] The intertext of intertextuality, Eisenzweig damningly concludes, is the university career.

77 Riffaterre also states: “This may eventually make it possible for us to show that literary competence, as a special variety of linguistic competence, rests upon [P]resupposition. Reading in accordance with the rules of literariness, literary reading, may be found not strictly to require a knowledge of the intertext, a familiarity with a corpus: the only requirement may be a presupposition of the intertext” (“Interview” 16).

78 The reader is here the text’s desire, and exists as a textual projection of yearning. There is a similar circularity to Ross Chambers’ argument for textual alter ego alterity, itself similar to the presuppositional gesture. Chambers argues: “The text defines itself by defining an intertext as that which it is not; and the text defines itself as ‘text,’ in a similarly negative fashion, against its own ‘discourse,’ with which it should not be identified” (Chambers 143). The text is ex-centric to itself in the way that Derrida argues for the decentred subject. Yet, ultimately, these oppositional indicators are markers both of insecurity and of seduction: the text desires, or rather needs, a reader in order both to recognize and accept its gestures. In Riffaterre’s pragmatics, as in Chambers’ argument, the reader is less a coproducer of meaning than another absence for which the presuppositional, indexical, desirous “performative gestures” (to borrow a term from Paul Zumthor, “L’Intertexte performanciel”) of the text stand as the trace. In the Discritics “Interview,” Riffaterre alludes obliquely to this mirror-construction
Objections of this type raised in feminist theories of reading such as Gendering the Reader and elsewhere will be discussed more fully in section VI below. Rifaterre's pragmatics, then, do not acknowledge the second area of linguistic Presupposition (that for which grammatical indices cannot account), instead reducing all aspects of pragmatic—and even logical—Presupposition to its semantic branch, as his study of “ungrammaticalities” and the numerous types of “connectives” details. The damage that such a theory of intertextuality does to the very concept of the reader (despite Rifaterre's claim to be perhaps “the first to shift the focus of modern criticism from the text to the text-reader dialectic”) cannot be overemphasized, and the analogy with Bluebeard's plot paradigm will be developed below, further drawing on another aspect of Rifaterre's pragmatics which lends itself to the context of this study: Presupposition as metonymic.

Both Julia Kristeva and Jonathan Culler have also analyzed Presupposition in their intertextual theories, and certain additional qualities of the concept contribute to its negative potential in this arena. Presupposition is predicated on an “always already ‘since’” whose origins are lost, obscured, “ephemeral” or, at any rate, not obliged to

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79Rifaterre continues in this “Interview”: “In a first book, back in 1957 ... I defined compulsory perceptibility and the control the text imposes upon the reader’s deciphering of it as necessary conditions of the literary act of communication” (15). Linda Hutcheon says, generously, “Yet even Rifaterre masks this implied reader-focus in his formalist distinction between influence and intertextuality” (“Literary Borrowing” 232). I would argue still that in these contexts Rifaterre's implied reader-focus is not so much masked by his formalism as unmasked as illusory by it.

80Jonathan Culler: “... the notion of intertextuality names the paradox of linguistic and discursive systems: that utterances or texts are never moments of origin because they depend on the
be present in the utterance. This inflected quality can be said to relativize the utterance, positioning it in relation to that which has preceded it (the "déjà lu" [already read]) and, since it will prompt its own presuppositional use in turn, expressing its own liminal nature as a "text-between" deferring the "last word"; there is no "once and for all," as Kristeva puts it. Yet by positing its right to exist on Presupposition, an utterance also posits a relationship with the a priori that, as Kristeva has noted, includes two dominant (and dominating) principles: possession and law. To presuppose is, in a sense, to "own" that which is presupposed, and this ownership is exacerbated by the linguistic notion that the presupposed can be contained within the utterance ("à chercher à l'intérieur de chaque énoncé" [to be sought within each enunciation]) ("Le contexte présupposé" 339). Further, a text creates its contextual universe and the laws which govern it, both stipulating a norm and simultaneously evaluating its position with regard to that norm: in Riffaterre's terms, this is the "interprétant" function of the intertext (a function adopted from C. S. Peirce's semiotic system). Bakhtinian dialogism similarly incorporates the theory of accentual quotation marks which comprise an evaluative stance within the text, and contribute to the hierarchy of voices presented in and represented by the text. The difference is that the "presuppositional word," unlike the "dialogic word," does not mediate a relationship so much as evoke one in order to own it, and thereby to suppress it (evoking an agonism reminiscent of Bloomian models of inter-authorial relations). Here, a text presupposes its contextual corpus "pour totaliser le présupposé et sa propre polémique.

prior existence of codes and conventions, and it is the nature of codes to be always already in existence, to have lost origins" ("Presupposition and Intertextuality" 1382).

81 In "Présupposé, Topos, Ideologème," Marc Angenot says similarly: "Le présupposé est de l'ordre de l'évidence, il est actif mais absent du discours même, parce qu'il ne requiert pas de démonstration" (27). [The presupposed is of the order of evidence, it is active but absent from the discourse itself, because it does not require demonstration.] This absent presence is insidious. Angenot earlier calls it a "stratégie active mais invisible" (21) (an active but invisible strategy).
et pour en faire un nouvel acte juridique, une nouvelle loi, qui sera le nouveau présupposé des textes ultérieurs."\(^{82}\) (Kristeva, "Le contexte présupposé" 339, emphasis added). Presupposition is, for Kristeva, the key to understanding the politics of "trans-position"—transformation and transumption—which is intrinsic to intertextual relations, and a pillar of Kristeva’s theories of intertextuality.

Like intertextuality, Presupposition is necessarily implicated in relations with alterity, in the “traces and tracings of otherness” (Frow 45). In Riffaterrean analysis, though, it is the reader who is rendered a “trace(r)” and certainly no “other” for whom dialogic space is available in the text. An analogy with Robert Wilson’s ideas of the “godgame” discussed above may be seen in this view of intertextual Presupposition. In Kristeva’s analysis, the “other” that Presupposition deals with is “other texts,” but here again, in a relationship of possession and law. If “alterity” is being presupposed it is in order, monologically, to suppress its potential difference and hence deviance.\(^{83}\)

One of the ways by which this suppression of alterity is effected is through the metonymy which Presupposition exploits. In metonymic fashion, presuppositional constructions import a context larger than that which is represented or asserted (the “what’s-left-over”) in the surface structure. In metonymic fashion, the presupposed is “owned” in this way: it is a form of extension of the “selfhood” that a presuppositional nature asserts (recalling Kristeva, who also discusses the metonymy of Presupposition in “Le contexte présupposé.” 341) and, like metonymy, this self-replication has an exponential capacity. In “Intertextual Identity,” Owen Miller writes, representatively,

\(^{82}\)"...in order to complete the presupposition and its own polemic, and to make a new judicial act, a new law, which will be the new presupposition of subsequent texts."

\(^{83}\)Ironically, the monologic suppression of otherness is so effective that, in McMaster’s conjecture, Thackeray did not complete the manuscript play “[Bluebeard at Breakfast]” because the events of the story were already “prescribed” (McMaster 215). Thus, the only resistance offered to repetition is here an inability to write at all: incompleteness is the silence even of a text that cannot draw power from the metamorphic revisionism of the story as a whole.
"Constrained only by the inferential capacities of a presuppositional nature, the intertextual relationships of any work of literature are theoretically infinite, since potentially any sentence of a text (or fragment thereof) may engender a series of presuppositional statements" (24-25). This notion of self “engender[ing]” or seemingly limitless self-potentiating will feature in the next chapter in the context of the Gothic, with regard to the Gothic-marked text Caleb Williams. But the capacity for the presupposition to “stand in” for the intertext is a metonymic one, as Riffaterre also asserts by naming Presupposition and metonymy as “corollaries” (“Flaubert’s Presuppositions” 2). Riffaterre continues: “More generally, metonymy, as I have suggested, is the connecting link between novel and intertext: the instant the reader grasps the fact that the metonym is a fragment, a fraction therefore presupposing a whole, metonymy becomes a reference to the complex to which it owes its meaning…” (5); “Significance … depends upon the presuppositions contained in certain words. These words are metonymic…” (11).

The use made by Bluebeard’s plot of metonymy and Presupposition to suppress dialogic exchange extends beyond his plot in the fairy tale into his monologic possession of further fictions whose difference this plot suppresses. The innocuous agent of this metonymy, as of this Presupposition (as the two are corollaries), is the means by which intertextual connections are made: analogy. The rhetorical devices Riffaterre names as the intertextual triggers, or forms of ungrammaticality, evince this presupposition of likeness: “connective,” “syllepsis.” Even “opposition” and “negation” encode a relationship with likeness. While dialogic difference must also enter into the field of likeness in order to engage and negotiate in exchange, it is the unconstrained rule of analogy that is at issue here. The next chapter will discuss this intertextual, presuppositional danger in greater detail, and with regard to Northanger Abbey in particular. A presupposed likeness, intrinsic to metonymy and working through analogy, elides if not erases the principle of difference and hence works to
suppress the dialogic. Describing intertextuality through two relations between the phenotext and the referent text, Renate Lachmann states that it “can be characterized as relationships of contiguity and similarity” (396).

If we turn now to consider the reader in intertextuality, and particularly in the light of these relations with the text (whereby Presupposition attends to monopoly of the reader to ensure that intertextuality remains operative in spite of competency variables), it becomes clear that intertextuality, while hailed as a reader-oriented theory, has not provided conditions in which the reader as an entity (let alone as an individual) can thrive (let alone flourish). Announcing the death of the author and heralding the concomitant rise of the reader on the wheel of twentieth-century literary fortune, Roland Barthes nevertheless heralded a peculiar “reader” indeed:

... there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost.... the reader is ... simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. (“Death of the Author” 171, author’s emphasis)

What becomes evident in reading intertextual theorists is that by and large the theory that has been argued to signify the “birth” of the reader in fact requires the reader’s intertextual coproductivity to be restrained in a way that paradoxically erases the reader as a variable altogether. In order to bracket the reading subject as an empirical variable, the focus shifts instead to subjectivity, which is in a process of continual structuration (like the text). As it is subjectivity that arguably engages with textuality, this is the “interface” between the reader (who has been bracketed) and the book. But the reinstatement of subjectivity in literary theory is still in (halting) process, as intertextual theory evinces.
Working against structuralism's attempts to efface the subject in a science of forms, both Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva are credited with "attempt[ing] to reinscribe a trace of the subject, especially the sexual and political subject, into the space of intertextual relations" (Morgan, "Is There an Intertext" 18). Yet, generalizing both Barthes' and Kristeva's complex theoretical stances, is the reading subject recognizable in this "trace"? It is perhaps pertinent that Bente Christensen is ambiguous in the following parenthetical statement regarding Kristeva's stance on the status of the subject:

On peut croire que la lecture ne se passe pas à un niveau abstrait de rencontres entre textes, (comme on a une tendance à penser après avoir lu Kristeva). Il s'agit toujours d'une lecture concrète faite par un individu, un lecteur/scripteur.... Au lieu d'intertextualité il conviendrait peut-être mieux de parler d'interénonciation.84 (Christensen, "Problèmes méthodologiques" 62, author's emphasis)

Noting T. S. Eliot's attempts to retain an idea of the catalyst subject in the work (as Thaïs Morgan further notes, a catalyst dissolves, leaving no trace of itself in the resulting compound [5]) and the Derridean deconstructed "trace" of semiosis, how far is the concept of a real reader (not necessarily an empirical reader, but a reading subject or a gendered reading subject) being promoted? In The Pleasure of the Text, Barthes writes: "The text is a perpetual interweaving in which the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the [web]" (64). This intertextual self has the "generality of stereotypes," is "castrated" or has merely empty signs of gender (S/Z 10), is at the "schism between zero and its effacement" (The Pleasure 61-62) and is the irrecoverably

84 "It is possible to believe that reading does not occur at an abstract level of encounters between texts, (as there is a tendency to think after having read Kristeva). It is a question always of a concrete reading performed by an individual, a reader-writer... Instead of intertextuality it would be fitting perhaps to speak of interenunciation."
infinite self in the infinite text: "This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)" (S/Z 10). Similarly, for Barthes' "staged" plural there is Kristeva's correspondingly "irreducible" plural. Barthesian "zero identity" is at the Kris-tevan "zero moment," or rather ground zero for the catastrophic instant where genotext (subjectivity, already a tissue of signifiers) "dissolves" into the phenotext (grammatical surface of the text), effectively dooming subjectivity into a purgatorially infinite, dialectical interplay of textuality. The text performs a "logocentric assault" upon the reading subject. With the terms "trace" and "site", for instance, we are in the realm of the already textualized subject, yet with the term "genotext" (Kristeva) or even the phrase "figured in the carpet" (Barthes), some transformation of the subject into a textualized "interface" has already occurred. In either case, entry into textuality and intertextual dynamics is a punishing if not "fatal" transition for the reading subject. In becoming "reinscribed" by these theories, the subject has also been pluralized, shattered, neutered, and homogenized.

As should now be evident, a severe limitation in fact derives from this textualization of the reader. This carefully neutral presentation of the reader as a textual function and as a site across which the tensions of the text play is an erasure of magnitude. It prompts models of reading--and of intertextual reader response--which imply a homogeneous community of readers. In "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," Patrocinio Schweickart identifies the obvious fallacy here:

The feminist reader agrees with Stanley Fish that the production of the meaning of a text is mediated by the interpretive community in which the activity of reading is situated: the meaning of the text depends on the interpretive strategy one applies to it, and the choice of strategy is regulated (explicitly or implicitly) by the canons of acceptability that govern the
interpretive community. However, unlike Fish, the feminist reader is also aware that the ruling interpretive communities are androcentric, and that this androcentricity is deeply etched in the strategies and modes of thought that have been introjected by all readers, women as well as men. (Schweickhart 50)\textsuperscript{85}

In presuppositional constructions, as has been said, the presuppositions themselves serve implicitly to background the information they contain. In fact, the presuppositions are absent from the sentence which nevertheless depends on them semantically. The presuppositional constructions form the linguistic matrices of the text which shapes the indeterminacies or projects the presuppositions. As the presuppositions themselves are “shielded from challenge,” and this shielding is the result of a co-conspiracy or tacit contract between the speaker and the implied audience, so in effect the audience complies with the nature of the “competence” that is conveyed by these constructions. Yet this contract also appears to exist for Presupposition itself, in intertextual theory, especially since Presupposition is a “contractual” compromise that has been tacitly agreed upon to “background” the uncertain areas in the borderland area between text- and reader-oriented theories of intertextuality. In other words, having hailed Presupposition as the failsafe for a merger on the intertextual spectrum, the ramifications of Presupposition have been “shielded” from further inquiry in order to preserve the resulting uneasy peace. Perhaps this is why there are so few studies of...

\textsuperscript{85}In “Notes on the Text as Reader,” Gerald Prince gives a strident example of such androcentricity in its most obvious sense. He provides a lengthy paragraph describing many of the variables attendant on a particular reader’s experience of reading, beginning as follows: “Of course, a given reader may be very tired or not at all, very young or very old, in a good mood or in a bad one ....” (and so on) (229). That Prince refers eleven times to the reader as “he” and five times to the possessive “his” is not remarkable, except that in the list he is in the process of providing he does not mention gender as a variable. Of all the possibilities Prince charts for the reader, reading as male or female is not among them.
Presupposition in intertextuality theory beyond those which establish its role, yet almost invariably the term and the concept are evoked in the majority of studies and surveys of intertextuality. The lack of a challenge—as much as the need for one—manifests itself in the imprecision of its use.

Ironically, the intertexts themselves are doubly backgrounded through this process. On the one hand, intertextuality is said to operate in the same way as Presupposition does. The matrices of the text shaped by the intertextual constructions then shape indeterminate areas for the projection of the intertext: as presuppositions are absent-presences, so too are intertexts. In this way, the intertexts function in a similar way as “background” projections. In Donald Hardy’s article, Presupposition is described as tapping the Barthesian hermeneutic code by establishing enigmas and working towards resolving them. However, as Presupposition has also been touted as the mechanism by which intertextuality operates (and both have metonymy as their reflex, or import-agent) making intertexts the presuppositions of the text, the intertexts

86 There are comparatively few studies dealing with Presupposition in narrative at all. Prince’s early article perhaps forges the bridge from linguistics to literary studies, and an illuminating study of The Turn of the Screw by Helen Aristar Dry and Susan Kucinkas (“Ghostly Ambiguity: Presuppositional Constructions in The Turn of the Screw”), as well as Donald Hardy’s article on Presupposition and coconspiracies which reads several Hemingway stories in this vein, clearly demonstrate the value of this theory in practice. Studies of Presupposition in intertextuality appear limited to articles, and to those already mentioned, by Kristeva, Culler, Owen Miller, and Marc Angenot (“Présupposé, Topos, Idéologème”). Passing reference, on the other hand, is ripe.

87 In Thais Morgan’s article, “Is There an Intertext in this Text?” the term “presupposition” is nevertheless used repeatedly in many different contexts. In some cases it is evidently synonymous with “assumption,” but at others acquires more of its linguistic use, such as in the following sentence describing Derridean theory: “At the same time, each supplementation of a text has itself already been contaminated by previous discourses on that text and by other, presuppositionally related texts” (Morgan, “Is There an Intertext” 18). Morgan’s article itself criticizes Kristeva for “fail[ing] to explain exactly which ‘presuppositions’ are at stake (moral? religious? socio-political?)” in her own analysis (Morgan 23).
are thereby firmly relegated to the background of the text, and the intertextual process is doubly "shielded from challenge." As presuppositions are prescribed by the text even though they are not actually present in the text, so intertextuality is said to be dictated by the matrix of textual constructions so that in both cases, actualization by a reader is a perfunctory acknowledgment and is governed by the dictates of the constructed text.

As it is the linguistic and co-conspiratorial premise of Presupposition to "shield from challenge" the presuppositions of the text or sentence, then any breach of the tacit contract by challenging its terms is necessarily "metalinguistic." Further, the result of the metalinguistic challenge is to bring not only the presuppositions into the foreground where they may be studied, but also the speaker or author who presented them as shared premises. Feminist intertextuality, then, by making Presupposition itself a foregrounded topic of discussion and analysis is just such a metalinguistic challenge to the presuppositions of intertextual theory which had been effectively shielded. To challenge Presupposition as it is used in intertextuality theory is by definition a meta-intertextual inquiry and a rejection of the co-conspiracy to take the premises of these theories as given. Presupposition is exposed as a solution to intertextual problems only because it is able to background such problems and shield them from inquiry by its very nature. It is unsurprising in this context that Presupposition is for intertextuality theory the repository for many of the same problems which Presupposition was invoked to solve, and not least among these is the issue of the reader. It might be said in this particular instance that the presupposed reader is the point at which, for the particular audience comprised of feminist intertextualists, Presupposition has been loaded past the point where assumptions of

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the “given” can be accepted. In an intriguing article by Helen Dry and Susan Kucinkas, presuppositional constructions which overload the background and in turn prompt a metalinguistic challenge to it are posited to be the source of the notorious Gothic ambiguity and narratorial unreliability of Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*. Presuppositions are demonstrated to be the “ghosts” of this particular novel: sentential shadow projections behind the foreground of the governess’ thoughts. Equally unsurprising, therefore, it is Presupposition which is foregrounded in the meta-intertextual inquiry of feminist intertextuality, and it is metalinguistic in nature.

The exposure of this irony may in fact be one source of the ironic mode of many feminist intertextual works. As the Dry and Kucinkas article on Henry James’ novel notes, the use of Presupposition becomes a double-edged sword: “the presuppositional constructions in *The Turn of the Screw* seem to contribute in two intertwined ways to the equivocal discourse status of the ghosts. First, by positing the ghosts as assumed, not asserted, they establish the apparitions “in the background” in a discourse arena that is “shielded from challenge,” but that is also crucially dependent for definition on cooperation between teller and hearer. And, secondly, they compromise that cooperation, because eccentricities in their use call into question the governess’s competence as narrator (Dry and Kucinkas 83-84). As the presuppositional constructions are both the effect and the cause of questioning the effect, the situation is ironic—or rather, the nature of the use of Presupposition is ironized. It may be possible to hazard that much of feminist intertextuality is in the ironic mode, practising “ironic modification,” in Eudora Welty’s phrase (*Fairy Tale* 14), due to this aspect. Presupposition is the cause of a problem, not its solution, and the very mechanisms which seek to keep this hidden are those which give it away.

In summary, Presupposition is the Bluebeard of intertextual theory who directs the reader towards meaning that is assumed to be predetermined, a “shared” given. Feminist intertextuality is a sustained inquiry into and examination of the field
of inter-negotiations between reader and text. The text that positions its reader as a passive register of predetermined textual decodings (and thereby also as an homogeneous community with established and equally predetermined competences) is univocal or monologic. The text that works to suppress the space in which the reader may draw on strategies of resisting dialogue and alternatives to textual determinism, a space of difference, is a Bluebeard in relation to its reader. The Bluebeard story’s dramatization of the restricting power differential in the paradigm (in which Bluebeard and his text are one and the same) also relativizes this paradigm. It does so by dramatizing the dialogic possibilities available to the “resisting” reader, that which Bluebeard’s plot suppresses. Feminist theories of gender and the reader have recently turned to the issue of this negotiation in the fraught middle ground of co-productivity to assess theories of reading as well as theories of textuality in meaning production and this accounts in part for the re-energization of the Bluebeard story. Its narratological paradigms are not, therefore, simply two versions of textuality (monologic and dialogic), but also two versions of the relationship forged between text and reader: two versions of reading. Feminist intertextuality accordingly dismantles the assumptions and contradictions inherent in statements such as the following which point to an unquestioning assessment of the reader’s position: “There are at least two constantly recurring notions or concepts which appear in today’s literary studies: intertextuality and literary competence which point to interest in the reader as the main focus of attention” (Rulewicz 230).

V

The following narratological reading of the Bluebeard story privileges certain of its structural, thematic, and symbolic elements over others in order to explore how it may be read as a paradigm for two theories of intertextuality, or two theories of reading. Nevertheless, the distinction between a reading of specific story elements and a reading of these as elements of story remains crucial.
Structurally, Bluebeard's plot presents its elements, then re-presents them, in and through the sequence of heroines and their actions. The revelation of other corpses in the bloody chamber further reveals an anterior predicate on which this sequence is based and which predates the plot's enactment of it. This plot pivots on the threshold of the forbidden chamber. Here, both secret and prohibition are located; “transgression” (in fact the fulfillment of the law and conditions of the plot) is similarly effected and its retribution is revealed. From this liminal point no return to unknowing or innocence is possible. This structural plot pivot is manifested in the physical doorway which is a site of signification. In “The Robber Bridegroom” and “Mr Fox,” the doorway also literally signifies, bearing the sequence of written warnings overhead from gateway (“Be bold, be bold...”), to door (“But not too bold...”), to galley door (“Lest that your heart’s blood should run cold”).

It is significant, then, that the only “fée” element in the tale is the key—the liminar’s means of passage. The mute key is forced to signify—it carries the onus of communicative symbol within the story, bearing the indelible mark or stain of guilt and becoming the “tell-tale key.” Accordingly, the account of the breach is rhetorically imitative of the act:

89 In Daryl Hines' poem “Bluebeard” the heroine is alone throughout her exploration of the open castle, but the structure itself seems to warn her: “She did not listen to the hinges’ gruans, / Complaints in metal, warnings in the wood...” (stanza 2, lines 1-2). The overdetermined structure informs against itself.

90 As it is called in Louisa May Alcott’s children’s story, Under the Lilacs (206). In Jane Campion’s film, The Piano, the Bluebeard story’s key is further expressive. The piano (through its keys) is the substitute for mute Ada’s voice (“I do not consider myself silent”). When she removes one key to send to Baines, her lover, she inscribes on it the message that will betray her guilt to her husband, breaking his interdiction to communicate with Baines. She burns the message (“You have my heart, Ada”) into the side of the key—the mark is thus indelible. But crucial to this act's consequence is the fact that Baines, the ostensible addressee of this inscription, cannot read. When her husband instead reads this key, he interprets her transgression of his prohibition and rushes to punish her with an axe. The severed finger echoes the motif from “The Robber Bridegroom” and “Mr Fox.”
Estant arrivée à la porte du cabinet, elle s’y arrêta quelque temps, songeant à la défense que son mari lui avait faite, & considérant qu’il pourroit lui arriver malheur d’avoir été désobeissante; mais la tentation estoit si forte qu’elle ne put la surmonter: elle prit donc la petite clef, & ouvrit ....

(Perrault 25, my emphasis)

The sentence hinges on the hesitation and the impetus which overcomes it, over “mais” or “but,” marking the point of no return as well as the desire and intention that precedes and dictates the consequent act of taking the key to open the door, for “donc” [“therefore,” “thus”] expresses the heroine’s submission to a logic of consequentiality.

In this, it mirrors the syntax of the prohibition itself, in which the threshold is again rendered in conjunction: “ouvrez tout, allez par tout, mais pour ce petit cabinet je vous deffens d’y entrer ....” (Perrault 24).

Upon opening the door, the hermeneutic order is clear: first vision, then recognition (or sense and significance): “she saw,” “they were the wives/sisters.” Implicit therein is the realization of her own place in a sequence: this one. Her individual act is embedded in the instant, becoming a link in the metonymic economy of this story. The importance of vision in this story has been discussed briefly by Harriet Mowshowitz, in “‘Voir est un acte dangereux’: An Analysis of Perrault’s ‘La Barbe Bleue.’” Mowshowitz analyzes Bluebeard’s display of wealth by which he seduces his bride-to-be, noting the many actual mirrors in his castle and the mirror formed by the pool of blood in the chamber. In the Mélusine version of the tale,

but this further evokes the absence of another of these tales’ motifs: the unmasking by telling a tale. The drama in The Piano is instead one of the unutterable.

91“Having arrived at the door of the little chamber, she stopped there a while, thinking of the prohibition that her husband had given her, and considering that misfortune could happen to her for having been disobedient; but the temptation was so strong that she could not overcome it: she therefore took the little key and opened ....”
appended to Harriet Mowshowitz’s thesis, Bluebeard verbalizes the connection between vision of his spectacle and becoming part of it: “comme tu as vu, tu seras!” [as you have seen, so you will become!]. Perrault’s heroine is also rescued by sight (Anne’s watch from the tower), and the lesson of the tale in this reading regards the deception of appearances, or learning the unreliability of sight.\(^\text{92}\) In Mowshowitz’s earlier dissertation, “Bluebeard and French Literature,” she asks with regard to Bluebeard’s castle: “Are we not perhaps in a hall of mirrors?” (77). The contrast provided by the mirroring of blood is “well-calculated” (78) in this context, and it is possible to read the blood on the key as another answering reflection to the room. This manner of reflexivity\(^\text{93}\) is crucial in the present reading, as it lends a further dimension

\(^{92}\)Harriet Mowshowitz touches on these issues earlier in her dissertation “Bluebeard and French Literature” (67-85 passim) noted above.

\(^{93}\)In “Bluebeard’s Magic Key,” as has been mentioned above, Phillip Lewis also focuses on reflexivity in this fairy tale, reading it through Irigaray’s “speculum.” The crux of Lewis’ thesis is encapsulated in the following quotation from his paper: “For the protophallic key has lost its capacity to signify for Bluebeard his oneness, his unique phallic role, precisely because it has taken on the function of a mirror—indeed, singularly, of that cryptic (feminine) mirror of (feminine) difference that unsettles and muddles the ideally exact reproduction of the image, perturbing the transparent order of the Same with an encroachment of otherness (feminine otherness). Hence the crisis of representation, reflection, identification—of self and other—that emerged in the tale’s narrative structure and the discovery scene at the door of the crypt turns out to be, as we follow the trail of the magic key, a crisis for the specular order of phallogocentrism” (49-50). While Lewis’ claim that the mirroring describes feminine otherness does not accord with my own argument for uncanny reflection through Bluebeard’s projected vision of his wives, our idea that Bluebeard’s monologic vision meets with feminine otherness through the heroine agrees. I have no argument with Lewis’ formulation that the activity of mirroring, activated through the magic key, is one of dangerous resemblances: “Thus the magic key becomes the agent of identification that re-triggers the recognition of an alarming resemblance. … In the sphere of (self-)knowledge, this process of resemblance-doubling and mirroring that draw separate identities back into a fateful likeness, a dominant similitude—is threatening to the individual precisely because it is a great equalizer” (44). However, Lewis argues that the wife resembles the husband (thus
to the critical interpretation that "women should not become too familiar with their own bodies," and is key in the following discussions of Bluebeard's use of the uncanny.

Bluebeard projects his vision of women creating an artistic tableau of mortification. But the spectacle requires a viewer, and as the viewer on the threshold sees not simply the spectacle but her own place in it, she sees a form of reflection of herself, or becomes a reflection of the tableau. The effect of mortification (she freezes in horror before dropping the key, becoming symbolically marked with the shared blood) mirrors the effect of mortification. The viewer is almost, but not yet, a dead woman too. This use of "like-ness," that makes appearing "like" the vision in the "mirror," is thus assimilative. The secret of Bluebeard's death artistry, then, is in taking difference and making it into sameness. This is uncanny by virtue of "familiarization" rather than defamiliarization, and this has ramifications for considerations of monologic intertextuality which operates like-wise, by use of incorporative simile which makes otherness into sameness. This form of artistry is answered with revisionism which quotes the encrypting, mortifying structures of the prison, as the heroine's escape artistry. This reading of the Bluebeard story will be elaborated in detail in chapter two of this study, analysing the monologic and dialogic uses of the artistic *mise en abyme*.

Metonymy is a principal trope of Bluebeard's plot, as it is a trope which describes the semiotic chain process and the process of reading this chain: Barthes, for instance, describes reading as "absorbed in a kind of metonymic skid" (*S/Z*, 92). Bluebeard himself is a metonymic designation for the whole—the beard signifies the man. Further, the colour of the beard signifies his (perverse) nature. It is the blueness of his beard that causes fright to "femme" and "fille" alike, creating the aura of disgust and mistrust that he evokes. The heroine's capitulation to him as a suitor is removing the grounds for hierarchy) rather than that she is encouraged to see her resemblance to his previous wives.
metonymically rendered through this site, as the beard comes to seem “not so blue as it was.” In “Bluebeard’s Keys,” the heroine Fanny reflects: “If [she] had been more used to admiration, she might have hesitated before she surrendered herself so absolutely to this passing fancy for a diamond star, a blue ribbon, a blue chin” (Ritchie 29). Similarly, Bluebeard is metonymically representative of his castle, a physical extension as well as manifestation of his person and personality. In Perrault’s tale, he shouts so that the whole castle trembles at the noise: “La Barbe bleue se mit à crier si fort que toute la maison en trembla”94 (Perrault 28). The nature of the one room reveals the law of the entire castle and of its master. Once the chamber is revealed, the whole castle is tainted by it. The castle is never whole without the room. The “passe par tout” skeleton key offered to the heroine is qualified by the prohibition: Bluebeard, and thus the castle, excepts the chamber from her inspection. The reservation “except” thus belies all expansive versions of “any”where which Bluebeard generously allows in describing the heroine’s freedom of movement within the castle.

While the nature of the locked chamber within the castle remains unknown, it incites the heroine’s compulsion to discover it. It operates as a (false) indeterminacy in the castle/text, drawing the heroine/reader to it. Its overdetermined contents revealed, however, the heroine’s textual entrapment is simultaneously exposed to her; the “absent matrix” of the text’s indeterminacy (the forbidden chamber) is revealed as the very present and “determined” castle matrix around her. The “indeterminacy” is thus illusory in two ways. First, the story is presupposed, as the women affixed to the wall mutely testify. The heroine is merely a secondary figure, a witness destined to become a testimony of witness, first a mirror of the mortifying spectacle and then a part of the spectacle itself in consequence, but not a protagonist at all. Not until the end of the Bluebeard story is there an un-presupposed story, a “what next?” that is not

94 “Bluebeard began to shout so loudly that the whole house trembled from it.”
constrained by the fixed economy of Bluebeard’s plot. Only at this point does the heroine become a protagonist at all. The script terminated, her actions are no longer (to be) presupposed; they are not underwritten by a first plot to which they are simply the trace, an enacted replica. Secondly, the prohibition contains not only the enigma (what is in the forbidden room?) but also the solution to the enigma: “on pain of death I forbid you....” Death is in the chamber: Bluebeard himself avows it. Coupled with the prior information of mysteriously missing women, the specific physical manifestation of this Death is also quite evident. Yet the narrative is not complete until prohibition is written out in its transgression, as prohibition presupposes at least the possibility of infraction. What is realized at the chamber door is not therefore the solution to the enigma, as that has already been given, but instead its confirmation, or the truth of Bluebeard’s avowal.

Whereas the heroine had initially been “free” within the castle while remaining without the chamber, in the paradoxical realm of “anywhere except,” the breach of this embedded metonym transforms the spatial parameters (revealing the part as the hitherto concealed law of the whole, and the physical proof of the governing law of Presupposition in the story). The heroine is safe nowhere in the castle (come down or I’ll come up!). Accordingly, in “The Bloody Chamber,” Angela Carter’s heroine finds Bluebeard’s castle to be “this lovely prison” (127) even before she opens the forbidden door. Yet this creates the spatial inverse for Bluebeard’s demise—in Perrault’s version at least—when the brothers forcefully breach the door from without, invading the castle and causing Bluebeard, like the heroine, first to see (two soldiers), then to recognize (his wife’s brothers), and then to realize his doom pending at their hands:

Dans ce moment on heurta si fort à la porte, que la Barbe bleue s’arresta tout court: on ouvrit, & aussi-tost on vit entrer deux Cavaliers .... Il reconnut que
c'était les frères de sa femme ..., desorte qu'il s'enfuit aussi-tost pour se sauv... (Perrault 28)

The mirrored inversion and its significance (the murder of the murderer, the death of Death) are crucial to the story's representation of itself, through its repetition by revisionary principle. The story remains the same—Bluebeard's plot—but it is revised as it becomes, for Bluebeard, self-reflexive. The murder is reflected back (the projected "redrum" returns to "murder," and by returning, murders). The serial structure that is established is completed (as the tertiary sequence in fairy tale economy, such as that of three sisters in "Fitcher's Bird," also presupposes that it will be), but the author falls victim to his own script, invoking the teleology whose tyranny he had practised.

The revision of Bluebeard's plot within the fairy tale itself is intertextual; Bluebeard's death is the revised representation of the Bluebeard story which has now, as its intertext, Bluebeard's plot. Bluebeard, the metonym and symbol of the story, is finally also the site of the story's passage of cathartic return to itself, and its dialogic creation as intertext. Thus, while the heroine's transgression invokes a single consequence in grim intertextual paratactic series, Bluebeard's own demise unleashes his story into revisionary intertextuality. Interestingly, in Perrault's version Bluebeard does not even reach the "perron," or short flight of steps leading to an entrance door; clearly he is attempting to flee the castle. But Bluebeard is his castle (nor farther from himself can fly), and there is no escape to "outside" possible for him, for the condition of his intertextuality is that there is no outside text.

The Bluebeard story's self-created metaphorical status further extends to consideration of author-reader relations within the castle's paradigm of the text. That such relations are therein gendered is undeniable, as the Bluebeard story perpetuates

95 At that moment there was such strong striking at the door, that Bluebeard stopped short, and right away two cavaliers could be seen entering .... He recognized that they were the brothers of his wife ... such that he fled immediately to save himself ...."
itself through uxoricide, and in most cases the prohibition itself is framed as a (pre-) marital test of wifely obedience. Whether the nature of curiosity is read as gendered or not (and it usually is), the second of Perrault’s two morals focuses on the sexual ambiguity of the “beard” as symbolic gender trait, while commenting on the story’s gendered politics as a question of “maistrye.”

Bluebeard’s castle, then, governed by teleology and Presupposition, is a paradigmatic figure for monologic intertextuality. Until the revision of Bluebeard’s plot, however, the castle’s auto-intertextuality restrains potential to a death-driven drive of plot repetition. But the potential for revision is also embodied, preceding its actualization. The story thus presents two copresent models of its intertextuality: the first, figured in the castle structure, is a serial juxtaposition or matrix of text and intertext; the second (the revision), is an embedding. In these two ways the Bluebeard story is already dialogized. Its condition as a mise en abyme in later fictions using the fairy tale is only straightforward when this principle is elided—it is inherently self-critical, practising intertextual transposition and metacritical potential, problematizing itself. This property of the story charges its further intertextual use but is already also the template for these: intertextual revision is an inherent condition of the Bluebeard story.

VI

Thematizing the dramatic tension between Bluebeard and his intrepid “reader” in the castle text, feminist intertextuality explores the governing laws of intertextuality as it has been theorized. Ultimately, feminist intertextual fictions focus on the hermeneutic aspects of the theory and practice of intertextuality, and valorize the presence of the reader who thwarts Presupposition and thereby reclaims the position of subjecthood, or a revisionist variable. As Alice Jardine notes, “... we need to remember that any theory which has denied the subject has also, always, precipitously
denied sexual difference” (Jardine 9). One way or another, the female reader is a threatened species, and this also finds its apt expression in the Bluebeard story.

The importance of intertextuality to feminist writing and reading has been acclaimed as vital, and writers have been quick to exploit the principle of revisionist pluralities it offers:

...[the] relevance and importance [of intertextuality] to women’s writing becomes increasingly apparent. ... Women inherit stories, we could say, which are powerfully oppressive; part of that oppression lies in their unitary character, their repression of alternative stories, other possibilities, hidden or secret scripts. Juxtaposing stories with other stories or opening up the potentiality for multiple stories also frees the woman writer from the coercive fictions of her culture that pass as truth. If women’s texts point to other texts it is frequently with a sense of an imagined elsewhere, unacknowledged alternatives, other stories waiting silently to be told. (Anderson vii-viii)

This is certainly one of the liberating features of intertextuality and one of the imperatives of feminist revisionism. However, it is not a satisfactory definition for feminist intertextuality, which acknowledges that intertextuality as it stands is nevertheless a flawed model, one whose gaps are not simply as-yet-unwritten stories, but are also crucial suppressions.

Several critics have begun using the term “feminist intertextuality,” but as yet it has merely been equated with the use of intertextuality by feminist writers for thematically revisionist purposes. In her book, The Dragon’s Blood: Feminist Intertextuality in Eudora Welty’s The Golden Apples, Rebecca Mark addresses feminist intertextuality through Welty’s writing and argues that it is a dynamic, subversive process:

By feminist intertextuality I mean not merely resonances or allusions but a process that achieves a dialogic interchange of symbol and metaphor between
masculinist and feminist texts. Such interchange allows for the transformation of previously codified meanings, types, and representations. (4)

While the transformative capabilities of this literary strategy are unarguable, and while mention of "symbol and metaphor" points to metafictive potentials, it is unclear in Mark’s (undefined) feminist intertextuality how or even if this "dialogic interchange" is distinct from appropriation and revision of traditional themes. The thrust of her introductory chapter "Scissors and Pins: Feminist Intertextuality," in fact, draws largely on the vocabularies of both intertextuality and of feminist revisionism, implying that feminist intertextuality is simply the merging of these. The quotation above is immediately followed by the assertion that with feminist intertextuality Welty’s "problematic references" can instead "be seen as a detailed rewriting of the Western myth of the literary hero in all his manifestations" (Mark 4). Mark’s claims for feminist intertextuality, then, are that intertextual engagement (which "alludes to," "departs from," "inverts," "responds to," "directly engage[s]," "plays with" or "directly evokes" the intertexts) with masculinist texts enable the latter to be parodied, battled and transformed by a strong feminist presence (which keeps "le leadership du sens" in Laurent Jenny’s phrase). Mark, in fact, uses "intertextuality" to describe this process more than "feminist intertextuality" and without distinction, and her conclusion uses the former term exclusively. However, Mark’s mention of a "fury of inclusion" intertextually generating further fictions resembles a strategy identifiable in Angela Carter’s novel Nights at the Circus, which is discussed in chapter two below. Carter’s novel uses such "inclusion" to create excess, though, and breaches the notion of narrative inclusivity itself.

Similarly, in her article "Feminist Intertextuality and the Laugh of the Mother: Leonora Carrington’s Hearing Trumpet," Susan Rubin Suleiman does not distinguish feminist intertextuality from postmodern feminist revisionism and its parodic appropriation of traditional stories. In her later book, Subversive Intent: Gender,
Politics and the Avant-Garde (1990), Suleiman similarly discusses Carrington's "play with narrative representation and framing—texts within texts within texts" and her "carnivalesque accumulation of intertexts" (172, 173). In the lengthy section "Feminist Intertextuality and the Laugh of the Mother," Suleiman does not inquire further into the specific nature of the "feminist intertextuality" she describes. Here, "postmodern intertextuality" (196) seems determined by its "subversive intent," and this is read in the general context of the double-voicedness of women's subversive writings. 

Suleiman does, however, point to the feminist concern regarding "the political status of the 'decentered subject'" (190) which has relevance for consideration of the gendered reading subject. Suleiman voices her protest with reading "insistently intertextual, often multiply ironic work[s]" by ascribing meaning as if "immanent to the 'text,' rather than determined by its interpretive context" (192). (The phrase "insistently intertextual" brings Suleiman's definition to the very brink of meta-intertextuality, but this is not pursued.)

In "L'Intertextualité dans les écrits féminins d'inspiration féministe," Evelyne Voldeng attempts to typify features of intertextual process in play in a select corpus of women's writings from the 1970s. Again, however, this analysis does not go beyond the revisionist agenda of "revalorization" and "une réactivation du sens qui peut aller jusqu'à la subversion de la signification élémentaire"96 (Voldeng 525, 526). Voldeng identifies the predominant feature as "intervention" effected through parody, pastiche and so forth. Nancy K. Miller in "D'une solitude à l'autre: vers un intertexte féminin" argues for maternal discourse as both intratextual thematic generator and path of "filiation" between fictions. Feminist intertextuality in such terms would be a type of matricial (matrilinear) discursive filiation more conducive to intertextual contact.

96 "a reactivation of sense that can go as far as subverting the primary signification."
In her brief work on Audrey Thomas' use of fairy tales in her fiction, *Fairy Tale Criticism Within Fiction: The Feminist Elements*, Adriana Trozzi classifies three different (intertextual) methods ranging from reference to create parallelism to original creations partaking of fairy tale discourse and tropes. These she labels the "evocative / imitative method," the "reinterpretive method," and the "creative method." Trozzi nowhere uses the term "intertextuality," nor does she investigate the operations effecting the results she defines and investigates thoroughly. Trozzi nevertheless makes two crucial points. The first is that in summoning a fairy tale (to use as an intertext) "all the established meanings—manifest or not—throughout centuries attributed to the original motif converge as a whole in the new text" (Trozzi 99). An intertext acquires the baggage of its tradition as it is dispersed and reworked, and functions as a metonym for this when evoked. Trozzi's second point, in fact, reflects a charge of feminist intertextuality reiterated through this study. In noting Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood as predominant contemporary examples of writers using and subverting fairy tales in their work, she states: "It is interesting though to note that any effort towards a constructive criticism focuses mainly on reinterpretation and comes from literary works—almost never from a critical production" (105 n5, emphasis added). Feminist intertextuality is currently a literary practice forging its own theory.

In the dissertation "Feminist intertextuality: fiction by contemporary Argentine and German women writers," Lynda Jeep describes feminist intertextuality both as use of masculinist texts ("the intertextual echo of tradition"), but also as dialogic engagement with "specific masculine discourses from the Western tradition" (my emphasis). Feminist intertextuality uses its intertexts, in Jeep's formulation, in a double sense: the echo of tradition assures a "safer passage" that is a smuggler's entry into the intertextual arena and, once inside the realm of "social and political criticism," this becomes "the actual thrust of her intertextual engagement" (Jeep 557A). Jeep's argument for feminist intertextuality thus approaches the argument of this study.
However, while she also does not name "feminist intertextuality," it is nevertheless Judie Newman's context for her discussion of Alison Lurie's work that approximates most closely the process of feminist intertextuality in fiction explored here. In "The Revenge of the Trance Maiden," Newman discusses Lurie's book *Imaginary Friends* as drawing upon sociological methodology "in order both to proceed intertextually and to thematize intertextuality" (115, original emphasis). This way Lurie also thematizes the operations of reading and writing involved in the production of a text, by establishing a continuing analogy between the elaboration of a fiction, and that of a belief system of a small group. Since the establishment of the 'social text' itself involves interactive techniques, Lurie thus effectively sets up a *mise en abyme* or infinite regressus, in which the novel offers both a sociology of the sociologists and a metafictional fiction. As a result, its scope expands into a discussion of the manner in which cultural norms are established and inscribed, deviance and difference defined.

Intertextuality is also literary criticism from the inside, and its role as metacriticism is widely acknowledged: "Le regard intertextuel est donc un regard critique et c'est ce qui le définit" [the intertextual gaze is a critical gaze and it is that which defines it] (Jenny 260).\(^7\) Thematized intertextuality is intertextuality criticized from within.

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\(^7\)See also Alan Nadel, "Translating the Past: Literary Allusions as Covert Criticism": Leyla Perone-Moisés, "L'Intertextualité critique"; Peter Dembowski, "Intertextualité et critique des textes"; and Alice Fox, "Literary Allusion as Feminist Criticism in A Room of One's Own."

Without specifying the intertextual context, Gerald Prince nevertheless points to what he calls "reading interludes" in the text which provide the text with its own "metalinguistic commentary" ("Notes on the Text as Reader" 230). Such interludes perform the function ascribed elsewhere by Prince of creating the text's implied reader: "they serve to specify the assumptions made by the text as reader, the presuppositions of that text, and the decoding contracts endorsed by it" (237). In "The Dialectical and Intertextual Function of Irony," Wladimir Krysinski asserts that irony in intertextual relations performs a "meta-dialogism" whereby "novelistic texts tak[e] a stand in respect to each other" (4). Here, though, Krysinski's meta-dialogism is specifically between the text and intertext(s), rather than
and Laurent Jenny’s statements regarding intertextuality are thereby applicable to intertextuality itself:

Loin d’être un enfantillage anodin, la dislocation paronomastique de ce texte donne assez bien le sens du procès intertextuel: mettre en lumière les syntagmes figés (les “mythologies”) ankylosés dans les phrases, se distancier par rapport à leur banalité en les outrant et enfin dégager le signifiant de sa gangue pour le relancer dans un nouveau procès de signification. (Jenny 279)98

In this way, feminist intertextuality demonstrates that the community of readers implied by Michel Riffaterre’s “compulsory reader response” model is not at all homogeneous and that intertextual reader response is neither automatic nor automatized. In a model that regards the intertext as merely the solution to the enigma encoded in the text and intertextuality as the presupposed recovery of the solution, the intertextual process is both reduced and rigidified. Defamiliarizing the intertextual process itself, the movement between texts and the assumptions purportedly dictating this movement, is a means of foregrounding, recontextualizing, and ultimately revising these assumptions. The Bluebeard story is frequently evoked as an intertext, but the intertextual relations prompting and ensuing from its evocation in feminist intertextual works are revealed to be a web of intertextual, presuppositional ensnarement that is intent on revealing itself as such. This didactic element is one of its defining features. Riffaterre’s model is

98Far from being a harmless childishness, the paronomastic dislocation of the text gives the sense of the intertextual process quite well: to illuminate the fixed syntagms (the ‘mythologies’) fossilized in sentences, to distance itself with regard to their banality in foregrounding them and finally to shake the signifier from its sclerosis in order to impel it again into a new process of signification. (I am indebted to Nicholas Zurbrugg for his translation of “gangue” as “sclerosis.”)
inverted: the intertext is no longer the solution to the enigma but the enigma itself, and the contents of its chambers thought to be known are in fact not.

One of the means by which feminist intertextuality effects this inversion of intertextual assumptions is akin to the formalist tactic of defamiliarization which also enacts the feminist literary strategy of demythologizing. Here, though, the shock of unfamiliarity is paradoxically achieved by evoking a familiar intertext in familiar terms: the morphology of the fairy tale is disrupted and intertextual practice is turned upon itself. Such defamiliarization has direct affinities with Riffaterre’s formalist theorization of the intertextual function of “ungrammaticality” in the focus text which normally corresponds to a “grammaticality” elsewhere, and is one way of prompting the evocation of the intertext. In this model the catalyst is grounded in the language of the focus text, but is activated only in the relationship with an intertext and its own discursive matrix and thus serves to “foreground” elements of both texts metatextually. The enigma-solution model is thus used by feminist intertextuality against itself, since it is the familiar form of defamiliarization that is itself defamiliarized; intertextuality is no longer “presupposed” but itself becomes the subject of revisionist activity.

One of Atwood’s defamiliarization techniques in this regard is the shock of recognition, of over-familiarity, with the (already recognizable fairy tale) intertext. A statement such as that in “Alien Territory”: “Believe it or not, this sister was in love with [Bluebeard], even though she knew he was a serial killer” (83), is an example of this activity resonating in both texts simultaneously. Aside from the surprise registered in reading that the sister knows already of Bluebeard’s nature (which is evidently consonant with his fairy-tale characterization), and that she disregards the import of this knowledge, the use of the contemporary term “serial killer” jars with the fairy tale register which is thus evoked as an absent presence through this intertext. In “The Thieves of Language,” Alicia Ostriker has identified a specific use of this general tactic as a feature of certain women writers, including Atwood: “The gaudy and abrasive
colloquialism of Alta, Atwood, Plath, and Sexton, for example, simultaneously modernizes what is ancient and reduces the verbal glow that we are trained to associate with mythic material" (Ostriker 331). Elaine Jordan identifies a similar device in the writing of another author who recasts the Bluebeard story repeatedly: Angela Carter. "Something likezeugma—the yoking together within the same syntax of incompatible elements—is Angela Carter's most characteristic device" (Jordan 24). The deviation from intertextual parallelism, immanent (perhaps only) at the moment of naming Bluebeard, that is represented by the term “serial killer” certainly numbers among its effects the initially incongruous modernization of a story which exists in distant non-time of “once upon a time.” It also “reduces the verbal glow” by which Ostriker presumably means the effects of a shift in register and its concomitant effects on the tone with which the recontextualized material is spoken. The invisible quotation marks of Bakhtinian dialogism are reinvested with altered meaning. However, there are further-reaching considerations introduced by the paradoxical defamiliarization that this use of colloquialism effects.

What exactly is being defamiliarized? The even more familiar term, “serial killer,” replaces the terms with which we are made familiar by fairy-tale and “Bluebeard” tradition, thereby dislodging the story from a generic discourse that preserves its unassailability by its formulaic and didactic nature. With this breach Atwood alters the relationship between text and intertext by introducing another discourse speaking the story, and so one which foregrounds a (contemporary) subject of utterance, largely effaced if not absent from fairy tales. This term is not revisionist with regard to thematic content (Bluebeard always was, literally speaking, a serial killer). Instead, a revision of intertextual expectations has been triggered at this level of discourse which, as a result of the embedded regressus, informs all planes of the text. The presuppositions attendant on intertextual reference—even in a revisionist context—
instead come to signify a deferral of expectations. The name Bluebeard is unhinged from its synecdochic, automatized intertextual function.

It is perhaps for this reason that, while the variants themselves have a (not widely used) collective term in “Blaubartmärchen,”99 and while literary revisions or recastings of the Bluebeard story number in the hundreds, it has not constituted a trope-defined collection of literary works like the “Robinsonnade” for versions if not revisions of the Robinson Crusoe “master” text. Certain works recasting the Bluebeard story continue to privilege the theme of acquisition of forbidden knowledge and the drama of punishment. Certain among them draw principally from the tale’s Gothic horror. The descriptive theme, “someone’s trying to kill me and I think it’s my husband” is, as has been mentioned, central to the genre. The fictions selected for this study are instead those which generate new narrative possibilities specifically from the story’s self-reflexive paradigmatic structure, and the dramatized liberation of the reader from a limiting, terminal text to the role of authorial revisionism. Further, the texts discussed describe the processes of feminist intertextuality, thematizing within them both the tyrannical aspects of a purportedly liberating theory of text operations and also the alternatives to them. The fictions discussed in this study privilege intertextual free play, transforming “[p]ower of a door unopened” (Atwood, “Doorway” 29) from an interdictory condition to the impulse which generates a writerly act and its issue. It is no longer sufficient to desire to dismantle the master’s house, with his tools or without them. It is not circumspect “not only [to] open doors, but [to] destroy the castle” (Grace 262); instead if, as Grace herself asserts, the castle is a paradigm for the creative imagination, it is necessary to transform it from a Gothic “place of foreboding

99The term is from the title of Frederick II, King of Prussia’s (1712-1786), Das Buch Blaubart: eine Satire / Frederich der Grosse mit den Blaubartmärchen von Charles Perrault und den Brüder Grimm.
where the heroine will be enclosed” (Warner, *From the Beast* 265) to an open paradigm of creative possibility.

Feminist intertextuality is not a new term for intertextuality; it is instead a model of literary activity already evident in fiction. Its intricate negotiations evince a collective enterprise to keep the castle while reforming its constrictive parameters from within. In fact, notions of “within” and “without” are themselves renegotiated, since they are often impossible to distinguish:

‘The only way out,’ said the first woman, ‘is through that door.’

She looked at the door. It was at the other side of the graveled plot, affixed to a door frame but otherwise unsupported. She walked all the way around it: it was the same from both sides. It had a plain surface and a doorknob; there was a small pane of glass at the top, through which she could see blue sky and some grayish-pink clouds. (Atwood, *Lady Oracle* 342)

The “murder” of the reader that presuppositional intertextuality, and Bluebeard’s plot, effects, may be seen in the example of a literary critical reading of two texts by an author drawing on this model (and using Riffaterre as the only secondary source). In “A Presupposition of Intertextuality in Clarín’s *La Regenta* and Chopin’s *The Awakening,*” Maria S. Suarez-Lafuente reads the texts’ “intertextual system of similarities and oppositions” in terms of their cued “ungrammatical[ities] that makes the reader stop and look for a plausible interpretant that would allow for such an image” (492, 495). The result of this illusory detective activity is a reconstruction of the hypogram through the “screen” of the focus text, giving such statements as: “It is not difficult to read Edna’s attempt *behind* the flight of Ana’s bird” (497, my emphasis). The illusion that the reader has become is then expressed in her concluding sentence, which submits the role of intertextuality to the text in entirety: “So does literature become art, inducing the reader to perceive and organize clues and presuppositions that constitute the literary interplay” (501). While rhetoric denouncing
the “tyranny” of the “Bluebeard” nature of certain intertextual operations may seem exuberant, it is this reading which is the result, and the reader is nowhere in evidence. Images of textuality like the following—“The literary text is first of all a grid of constraints upon and directions for a very special type of reading behavior” (Riffaterre, “Interview” 13)—also have a very special type of relationship to Bluebeard’s castle. From the perspective of inside this castle, it may well be the case that “[t]heory must therefore explain the reader’s reactions and the assumptions … dictated to him by the literary work of art” (Riffaterre, “Interview” 13); but feminist intertextuality recalls that there is the possibility for alternative reading perspectives which are not merely replays of murder in the dark by a more colourful name. This study therefore focuses on the work of those fictions which foregrounds presupposition, both in the fairy tale and in intertextuality, in order to dramatize the possibilities of dialogic resistance and metamorphosis and to render the performance reflexive, and create a symbolic “third position” outside the constrictive binaries of Bluebeard and his plot.

Chapter one will examine the Gothic use of Presupposition as the “hunt for the ghost intertext” in juxtaposed analysis of two Gothic-marked novels: William Godwin’s Caleb Williams and Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey. These two works foreground the specifically metafictional potential of both the Bluebeard story and the proliferation of encryption through rhetorical structures. But while Caleb Williams expertly dramatizes the over-determined monologic replications of Bluebeard’s plot with Ferdinand Falkland as Bluebeard to Caleb’s “wife,” Northanger Abbey illustrates the transfer of Bluebeard from figure in the story to a purely presuppositional reflex of (Catherine Morland’s) reading. While Caleb Williams ultimately participates in an endless repetition in which Bluebeard’s plot proliferates in a Gothic, monstrous life of its own, Northanger Abbey stylistically effects an alternative positioning through its subversive use of double negative constructions. Bluebeard’s ability to “haunt” texts in the form of his repeated story is shown in both works to be effected through the
medium of intertextual Presupposition, and the larger thematic "possession" this effect in both works is shown to be resisted by the infrastructures of Austen's text.

The second chapter looks at the nature of the mise en abyme as it is used in Bluebeard's plot and juxtaposes this with consideration of feminist intertextual works which focus their meta-intertextual revisionism on the mise en abyme. The nature of the mise en abyme in Bluebeard's plot, a tableau of corpses that are at once a projection of Bluebeard's vision of the reader and an uncanny reflection of the witness this tableau encodes and presupposes, often leads to portraits of Bluebeard as a visual artist. Therefore, in this chapter, analysis of two films (Bluebeard, by Edgar Ulmer and Edward Dmytryk, respectively) first prefaces a reading of John Fowles' The Collector, Kurt Vonnegut's Bluebeard, and Peter Ackroyd's Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem. These works depict the monologism of Bluebeard's artistry and its further encryption in their own rhetorical structures. However, in Angela Carter's The Magic Toyshop and Nights at the Circus, and Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills, the mise en abyme is not of the subject or the reader, but of the Bluebeard story itself, reflecting instead the mise en abyme already effected by the Bluebeard story. These analyses return to a consideration of the "presupposition projection" in intertextuality theory and its recasting of the mise en abyme.

Chapter three examines the rise of the mise en abyme to the grammatical surface structure of the feminist intertextual text (the place of propositions instead of presuppositions) as a mise en scène of the text's game of murder in the dark. Feminist intertextual fictions which dramatize resistance as a practice of reading foreground the submerged enigma-solution model and its relation to textual overdetermination and to readerly entrapment by creating a thematicized "detective" hermeneutic. The paradox of Presupposition (that it must be evoked in order to be disproven as a reliable, reader-oriented model) itself becomes a feature. The "detective lie" at the heart of Bluebeard's story is frequently used in this way. Both Atwood's The Robber Bride and Emma
Cave's *The Bluebeard Room* draw thematically on the Bluebeard story as a contemporary murder mystery. The theme of research in detection becomes foregrounded in the thematized detective readers of Atwood's story, "Bluebeard's Egg," and Max Frisch's novel based on the model of a trial, *Bluebeard*. In the third section of this chapter, the two postmodern stories which dramatize the hermeneutic that will be discussed are Donald Barthelme's "Bluebeard," and Meira Cook's "Instructions for Navigating the Labyrinth." This last fiction offers a "shattered mosaic" or puzzle form for which Presupposition is dramatized as the crucial reconstitutive principle.

The concluding comments of this study review the revisionism of feminist intertextuality by summarizing its own terms as expressed through the fictions considered here. This may point to active participation in the contemporary concern over the erasure of the reader as a reading subject rather than a necessary function and hence fiction of intertextuality theory.

Elaine Jordan sums up the feminist revisionist investment in context: "Whether a myth is liberatory or oppressive depends on the existing power relations, the company it keeps, the context of its use" (Jordan 23). This is dramatized in the Bluebeard fairy tale but, as importantly, it is also dramatized through its intertextual recastings and rewritings.
1. The haunted text: Gothic presuppositions and the Bluebeard intertext.

[intertextuality: the] overdetermined hunt for the ghost intertext

If we make stories for each other about what is in the room we will never have to go in.

This chapter aims to demonstrate, in a close reading of two “Gothic”-inspired novels, three interrelated and fundamental principles of the Bluebeard story’s use in fiction: principles on which feminist intertextual use of the tale is founded. First, that the very presence of the Bluebeard story suffices to precondition a thematically metafictional mode. This condition may then be actualized in varying degrees, dependent upon the focus text, but fiction which actualizes this metafictionality also demonstrates its generative potential. To this end, thematic and structural correspondences with the Gothic genre, with which the fairy tale has an obvious affinity, will underpin this analysis. The result of such metafictionality, enhanced by the metafictionality of the Gothic, is a multi-layered, self-critical intertextuality.

Secondly, in such a metafictional mode the Bluebeard story dramatizes the relations between author and reader in the castle/text. In this dynamic, the (thematized) author is tyrannical, and the power attendant on this position is one of literacy, while the transgression motivated by curiosity is analogous to the act of reading and usurpation of such authority. In the third place, the intertextual use of the Bluebeard story engenders a didactic hermeneutic in which Presupposition performs an integral role. Here, a crucial elision with the point above has occurred. Where Bluebeard’s story

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1Morgan, “Is There an Intertext in This Text?” (29).
2Margaret Atwood, “Hesitations Outside the Door” (137).
functions as a model of Presupposition that constrains movement, such presupposition suffices to evoke the intertext. This latter evidently presents a double bind, since the Bluebeard story is indeed the presupposed intertext, yet to presuppose this from within the new fiction makes this so: to presuppose the presence of the intertext is to summon or create it. What this effects, however, is the following merger: Presupposition becomes (the) Bluebeard. An actual Bluebeard is no longer a required feature as the reader imports him through Presupposition of his presence: *intertextual Presupposition is the reader’s Bluebeard.*

While all three of these principles are true for both William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794) and Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1794/98; 1818), close reading of these two novels aims to demonstrate a progression through these principles. The reading of *Caleb Williams* will therefore focus on its metafictional nature and on the generative aspects of its metafictionality, and further on the relationship between Caleb and Ferdinando Falkland as one between the authorities of reading and writing, together creating the castle. That Caleb presupposes a Bluebeard in Falkland is intrinsic to this reading as it is to the novel itself. Analysis of *Northanger Abbey* will in turn assume these principles illustrated in *Caleb Williams* in order to focus more briefly on how presuppositional reading has assumed the role of Bluebeard for the thematized reader, Catherine Morland, and how Austen’s novel writes out of the paradoxical double bind. These two fictions are selected as they precede both the nineteenth-century penchant for the Bluebeard tale (ascribed by Juliet McMaster to its marriage plot) and the theoretical specifics of contemporary use. Instead, the focus here is on the tale’s inherent metafictionality, which is enhanced through its hybridity with the literary Gothic and its use as a critical fiction. Since both *Caleb Williams* and *Northanger Abbey* read the Gothic critically, and both do so by using the Bluebeard story and by thematizing Presupposition, this analysis aims to demonstrate enduring aspects of the tale’s intertextual use. *Caleb Williams* and *Northanger Abbey* both
contribute to the meta-intertextual context of the Bluebeard story through their focus on Presupposition.

The emblematic use of the Bluebeard story as a textual haunting by its absent presence, through the function of Presupposition, may be illustrated by William Makepeace Thackeray's burlesque, "Bluebeard's Ghost" (1843). Widow Fatima Bluebeard, in stylish mourning and inherited comfort, is suitably affected by the remaining household traces of "the best of husbands" (338), Mr. Bluebeard. To escape Bluebeard Hall, now "rendered ... too wretched," Widow Bluebeard moves to their townhouse which is similarly haunted by images of his "likeness": the portrait of Bluebeard over the side-board, the silhouette in the bedroom, the miniature in the drawing room, and the new monument to Bluebeard over the Bluebeard family vault, visible from the townhouse window. When Bluebeard’s ghost appears, then, he does so as a replica (or product) of these images of him: "The vault door was open; and there in the moonlight stood Bluebeard, exactly as he was represented in the picture in his yeomanry dress ..." (352). That Bluebeard's "ghost" is, in fact, the masquerade of one of the Widow's eager new suitors (assisted, among others, by a theatre manager impersonating a medium) is later determined. But this fiction of Bluebeard’s ghost is a convenient one for the Widow herself, as the ghost is to foretell the identity of her second husband: "the grave will tell all" (354).

The presupposition, conveyed in the story's title, that Bluebeard has turned out of his vault to haunt Fatima, also occasions a haunting of Thackeray's entire short story, in the form of the return of Fatima’s “old curiosity” (354), the vault key being "ponderous" (351) with the weight of its intertextual associations, and the narrator’s introduction of Gothic motifs (the midnight disorder, the "yeomanry sword" lying on the ground, the screaming maidservants and the "excessive terror" of John the footman [352], recalling Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto). The story also enjoins a readerly presupposition, encouraged both through reference to the familiarity of the
inter text and appeals to the reader's own imagination, that parallels the presuppositions of poor Fatima. The familiarity of the intertext is presupposed in statements like "as we all very well know" (340) with regard to the location of Bluebeard Hall and in the use of formulae such as the appeal to sister Anne to tell what she can see from upstairs. But the appeals to the reader's own "fancy" to complete the fabrication are also frequent. The story's conclusion refers explicitly to its own textuality and to its (consequent) claim as a sequel or supplement to its intertext: "You will say that the story is not probable. Psha! Isn't it written in a book? and is it a whit less probable than the first part of the tale?" (356). The "first part of the tale" is thus critiqued, metafictionally, by this supplement, but it is also relativized. In this chain, the text that is here "written in a book" also relativizes its own position by its intertextual affiliation with the story: its status as text rendered liminal, it is another "text-between."

Thackeray's Bluebeard story encapsulates certain crucial elements drawn from the Gothic tradition, and the "haunting" as the projected presuppositions of the reader which overwrite the story at hand is a notable theme. This paradoxical emblem ("not Bluebeard's ghost") may be lent to the discussion of the Bluebeard story's engagement with the Gothic genre and the metafictional thematics this produces in Caleb Williams and Northanger Abbey.

The Bluebeard story encapsulates many of the elements characteristic of the literary Gothic genre. Among such traits from the Gothic "complex" are: secrecy, murder or the suspicion of murder, transgression, and of course the castle and its delineations of space. The fairy tale plays out the stock-in-trade Gothic theme of anxiety over the permeability of boundaries (whose breach point may be expressed in the threshold) and the mirroring interplay between "outside" and "inside" which signals an uncertainty in the very existence of boundaries. Every aspect of the Gothic drama, as in the Bluebeard story, finds its structural correlates in the castle, chamber, dungeon prison, and labyrinth. The first two sentences of Kate Ferguson Ellis' book,
The Contested Castle, make this claim for Gothic structures: “The strand of popular culture we call the Gothic novel can be distinguished by the presence of houses in which people are locked in and locked out. They are concerned with violence done to familial bonds that is frequently directed against women” (3). Still, this correspondence of story and genre would be no more than an interesting but superficial hybridity if not for the intense literary self-consciousness of both the Gothic and of the Bluebeard story. The further use of the Bluebeard story within Gothic or Gothic-inspired fictions ensures a metafictional self-examination. This, paradoxically, is most fully actualized in fictions which displace themselves from the Gothic in order to comment on it, as both Caleb Williams and Northanger Abbey do. In these fictions, Bluebeard haunts the narrative as an absent, “revenant” intertext: and a revenant must always be invited to enter.

The narrative forms of the Gothic—fractured, fragmented, unreadable, missing, cyphered and secreted texts—figure the Gothic themes or plots. In these, the secret is often either recorded in, or consists of the actual existence of, a text: letter, will, diary, or confession. As Jan Gordon writes in “Narrative Enclosure as Textual Ruin,” “it is the world of language, books, texts, infinitely parsed meanings, which appears as the ultimate repression in the Gothic novel” (220). Many of the equally characteristic “difficult[ies] the story has in getting itself told” (Sedgwick, Coherence 13), and the labyrinthine parallels traced between story and twisted plot, result from attempts to suppress certain crucial narratives: records of patrimony, for example. Anxiety regarding permeable boundaries is inevitable given situations where narrative is arbitrarily demarcated and suppressed (embedded) within the larger narrative of Gothic fiction: the imposition of such boundaries is “unnatural” in a textual economy; seepage through such boundaries is a precondition, and this makes a threshold of the whole text. This bears on Sedgwick’s exploration of Gothic doubleness, in which it is not a case of “X within, against Y without” but instead “‘X within and X without’” or “an
X within an X [within an X…]” (Sedgwick, Coherence 34)—a linguistic “live burial” of language attempting to self-enclose or self-demarcate.

The examples of escaped prisoner stories that “will out” are many, and the multiple but broken or partial frames intrinsic to the Gothic form in any period are routinely breached from “within.” Hence Frankenstein’s creature appears in the frame narrative intended to enclose him, and, similarly, dead Cathy Earnshaw’s hand comes through the window (frame) as Lockwood’s otherwise normative reading succumbs to that of a “raised, restless, and frightened imagination” inside the Wuthering Heights of Wuthering Heights. The framing narrative of Margaret Atwood’s contemporary (Bluebeard) Gothic The Handmaid’s Tale is revealed only after the fact, and is so unequal to the task of enclosure that it becomes the fragment itself. The structurally imprisoned female narratives of other “Bluebeard’s wives” (Helen Huntingdon in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Miranda in John Fowles’ The Collector, Antoinette in Jean Rhys’ Wild Sargasso Sea) all bleed out into the surrounding, male-authored and structurally enclosing text. This permeability is inscribed unambiguously in another of William Thackeray’s several Bluebeard narratives, when the imprisoned wife of the novel’s eponymous Barry Lyndon (“the Irish Bluebeard” [276]), for example, writes out of her confinement in lemon juice between the lines of a constrained letter to

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3 Quotation is from Northanger Abbey, (34) and describes Catherine’s state as she reads a Gothic novel (Udolpho, specifically). This reading of Wuthering Heights is an inversion of Jan Gordon’s reading of this episode: “Like the window in Cathy’s abandoned room which ‘contains’ Lockwood while simultaneously admitting Cathy’s arm during his nightmare, ‘openings’ often function as enclosures in Gothic fiction” (Gordon, “Narrative Enclosure” 225). However, the point of such liminal breaches is two-way traffic. Sedgwick cites this same instance in her analysis: “The hands battling through the smashed window are a figure for many of the kinds of violated separation we have been calling Gothic … with the violent entry of the supernatural hand, the novel [Wuthering Heights] is forcibly opened up to possibilities of terror, where before there had been only unpleasantness and secretiveness” (Sedgwick 105-06).
friends. This breaching of arbitrary boundaries is a supreme example of Jan Gordon's argument in favour of Gothic terror as that of the collapse of difference or, rather, of Sedgwick's account of the violence and magic attendant on the reunification of space(s) at and by means of the threshold.

Gordon's argument for the literarity of the Gothic accords closely with the perspective of this analysis and warrants quotation at some length:

The significant terror of the Gothic novel may well lie not in the wanton unleashing of the monstrous which threatens civil authority and bourgeois space, nor in the incestuous chemistry of the laboratory that breaks down spaces between subjects and objects, fathers and sons, but, more importantly, in the procreation of de-constructed texts which replace "difference" with différence. While attempting to set up a world of texts within texts which establish some order in a succession of literary priority and hence authority, what the Gothic mode actually achieves is a constant questioning of the respective legitimacies and status of competing texts by narrowing the difference between them. Even as it appears to enclose, to order textuality, the Gothic mode tends to make of the text itself a constituted narrative. Its ontic situation, as one more text among many, challenges the nature of the authority which it strives to enforce. The structural correlate of this enclosure that releases is to be found in the structure of Gothic houses involving a succession of ruins, in the labyrinthine spatial enclosures of underground tunnels and secret chambers, and in the crossed lines of withering family trees which tend to confuse consanguinity with legal relationships that derive their authority outside the self. (Gordon 211)

Sedgwick remarks that there is a literary analogue to almost every Gothic convention, even as literarity is one of such conventions itself (narrative form deserves mention in some form in any such list of Gothic apparatus).
In Gothic literature, then, the Bluebeard story is more than its aptly uxoricidal theme. Its presence charges the Gothic narrative as an embedded (and Gothic) fragment of self-potentiating metonymy. The buried, suppressed “secret” here is not that of Bluebeard’s chamber, but rather the intertext of Bluebeard. The nature of the secret is textual, as is the nature of the breaches of confinement and the monstrous replication of the story once it has burst its textual enclosure (Pandora’s Box meets “the sorcerer’s apprentice”). The disruptive use of this intertext in novels such as Godwin’s Caleb Williams and Austen’s Northanger Abbey then enables and enhances a metafictional critique of such Gothic narrative. As a suppressed intertext whose inevitable seepage across would-be enclosures and equally self-generative replication creates a textual “haunting,” the Bluebeard story dramatizes the reading protagonists’ fearful search for their own (story of) origins. It thereby also dramatizes the process of the protagonists’ entrapment by the “terrible application of the story” (Godwin 137) in which they figure. This is most evidently thematized in fictions where the secret chamber is expressly a place of writing, as it is in Louisa May Alcott’s novel, A Modern Mephistopheles:

“Come and see the den where I shut myself up when the divine frenzy seizes me. Mr. Helwyze is jailer, and only lets me out when I have done my stint.”

Full of some pleasurable excitement, Canaris led his wife across the room, threw open a door, and bade her look in. Like a curious child, she peeped, but saw only a small, bare cabinet de travail.

“No room, you see, even for a little thing like you. None dare enter here without my keeper’s leave. Remember that, else you may fare like Bluebeard’s Fatima.” Canaris spoke gayly [sic], and turned a key in the door

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4References to the novel’s original ending and to the Preface of Fleetwood are also from McCracken’s edition.
with a warning click, as he glanced over his shoulder at Helwyze. Gladys did not see the look, but something in his words seemed to disturb her. (75-76)

Accordingly, the secret this chamber hides is one of a “literary rivalry” (186) and of assumed authorship. Such metatextual castings position the transgressor as reader, and the transgression as the act of reading, since this will reveal the secret or, alternatively, as an attempted usurpation of authorship.

While the texts of Caleb Williams and Northanger Abbey are haunted indeed, the instrument of Gothic and of literary exploration and critique is in both cases the thematized reader (Caleb himself, and Catherine Morland, respectively), and the literary secret is not in fact the embedded intertext, but rather the reader’s presupposition which has evoked and empowered the “ghost” intertext to function as a narrative mystery and carceral. While Caleb and Catharine read the world around them, and furthermore read it as Gothic, to describe these two novels as emblems of Gothic-inspired misreadings is grossly to simplify them, just as it would be to cite the (also valid) qualification of this misreading: that both readers are guaranteed to be proven “right” in their misconceptions after all.

Furthermore, neither Godwin’s nor Austen’s novel is unmediated or “pure” Gothic: both novels posit an extra-literary direction for their referentiality described by

5Felix Canaris has allowed Jasper Helwyze to author works for which Canaris will accept the credit and resulting fame. In this Faustian contract, however, his liberty and his wife are to be sacrificed. Helwyze’s former lover Olivia guesses their secret because of “certain peculiar phrases” that she recognizes to be his (192). When this contract, after leaving everyone dissatisfied and miserable, then indirectly causes the death of Felix’s wife and newborn son, Helwyze suffers the stroke which effects a “live burial” as his punishment: “No words could describe the terror such a fate had for him, since intellect had been his god, and he already felt it tottering to its fall” (199).

6Eric Rothstein says of Caleb that he “tries to read life within the system of a novel” (Systems of Order 217). Of course, as characters in novels, both Caleb and Catharine are actually set within the system of a novel.
the term “political Gothic.” In Caleb Williams this concerns the corruptly class-conscious legal system, but also reflects Godwin’s political agenda whereby the novel is expressly a form to reach the masses and a vehicle for his meliorative philosophy of perfectability.7 In Northanger Abbey the political referent comprises the same scope of 1790s England, in critical discussions of which the enigmatic night-time activities of General Tilney are writ large.8 Yet even this extra-literary gesture is turned back, Janus-like, on the text, foregrounding the foundations of privilege and power inscribed in literacy itself. Thus the education of the reader, who is both thematized in Caleb and Catherine and who is also implied as the object of direct and didactic addresses, is simultaneously a literary and a political act. Caleb Williams describes the agonistic struggle for power, even the power of self-rule, as the right and ability to author the text, dramatizing the power differential between author and reader.9 Northanger

7See Tilottama Rajan, “Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel.” Rajan also argues, however, that the romantic political novel has self-reflexivity as a generic trait (222n) and twice refers to the novel as “political metafiction” (239, 243). See also David McCracken, “Godwin’s Literary Theory: The Alliance Between Fiction and Political Philosophy.”

8See Robert Hopkins, “General Tilney and the Affairs of State: The Political Gothic of Northanger Abbey.”

9A number of comparatively recent critical examinations of this novel discuss its metafictional nature—without, as yet, deriving this reading from the Bluebeard intertext, which has been largely ignored. However, certain of these readings are superb, and my argument draws support from those posited in the following articles in particular.

Kristen Leaver argues, in “Pursuing Conversations: Caleb Williams and the Romantic Construction of the Reader,” that both Caleb and Falkland err as authors by using out-moded eighteenth-century literary paradigms (of “fixed selfhood”) both to express themselves and to impose on one another: “Thus, in Caleb Williams literary character acts as the site at which political and literary typologies become enmeshed. Both Caleb and Falkland adhere to identical codes of socially sanctioned behavior that ultimately form the basis of a power struggle enacted through literary forms. As a result, social conflict is played out as each character attempts to impose a different set of literary conventions on the other” (595). Further, the portrayal of “ideal,” middle-class readers in Brightwel and Clare, as well as the “failure” of Caleb and Falkland as readers, “acts as the basis for a reading
Abbay in turn both thematizes and enacts the hermeneutic drama in which
Presupposition and analogy are taught and explored, principally through the mode of
parody. But if Gothic is “anti-language” (Gordon 220), or anti-literature, and parody
both is and is not that which it parodies, then Northanger Abbey, constructed through
double negatives, is neither a Gothic (and hence “anti-” or “not-language”), nor a
parody of a Gothic (‘not-un-Gothic’). It is not “not-un-Gothic.”

practice that would draw on individual judgments arrived at through developing faculties of
interpretation” (599). Finally, the characters’ struggle ultimately privileges reader response, making
the reader of the novel a projected “site of hermeneutic reconciliation” (607) for the characters. This
reading is supported by Donald R. Wehrs in an earlier article, “Rhetoric, History, Rebellions: Caleb
Williams and the Subversion of Eighteenth-Century Fiction.” Wehrs argues that Caleb’s
“counterhegemonic” criticism (497) of Falkland locates the inconsistencies of his official story as the
site of insecurities in eighteenth-century fictional norms which Caleb himself attempts to shore up by
“construct[ing] his own story as an exemplary—and hence convincing—realization of eighteenth-century
fiction’s assumptions” (506).

In “Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel,” Tilottama Rajan
reads Caleb Williams as thematized divinatory hermeneutics in which the legal trial of the revised
ending is the figure both turning the novel back on itself and opening the hermeneutic to the reader of
Caleb Williams: “It is also a novel that psychoanalyzes reading so as to implicate readers in the
strategies they use. It is the story of how Caleb becomes a spy in order to ‘divine’ the truth, and it
thus creates an infinite regress in which his ‘truth’ is necessarily suspect, subject to a reading that will
make it too disclose its hidden secrets” (223). As Rajan’s evocation of the regressus indicates, Caleb’s
characterization as “spy” renders the reading process infinite [Caleb describes himself at one point as
“the subject of detection” (CW. 168)] and the novel’s projection of hermeneutics to its readers a
continuation along this spectrum.

See also Karl N. Simms, “Caleb Williams’ Godwin [sic]: Things as They are Written”;
Garrett A. Sullivan, “A Story to be Hastily Gobbled Up: Caleb Williams and Print Culture”;
II

Caleb Williams’ intertextual engagement with the Bluebeard story has been documented by the author in the preface to the 1832 Standard Novels edition of Fleetwood:

I rather amused myself with tracing a certain similitude between the story of Caleb Williams and the tale of Bluebeard, than derived any hints from that admirable specimen of the terrific. Falkland was my Bluebeard, who had perpetrated atrocious crimes, which if discovered, he might expect to have all the world roused to revenge against him. Caleb Williams was the wife, who in spite of warning, persisted in his attempts to discover the forbidden secret; and, when he had succeeded, struggled as fruitlessly to escape the consequences, as the wife of Bluebeard in washing the key of the ensanguined chamber, who, as often as she cleared the stain of blood from the one side, found it showing itself with frightful distinctness on the other. (Godwin 340-41, my emphasis)

Caleb’s gender, as well as that of Falkland’s purported victims (Barnabas Tyrrel, and the Hawkinses—father and son) underwrites his characterization as a Gothic hero(ine) and creates a dialogue with the tropes of Gothic genre as well as those of the traditional western hero of adventure or romance (in a manner similar to that inversion Margaret Atwood examines in her contemporary novel, The Robber Bride). The nature of the “curiosity” that is purported to be Caleb’s main spring of action is decidedly unhinged from its traditionally female gendered typing, and his “mistaken thirst for knowledge” is put to the service of his characterization as a Reader and a (literary) critic.

The layering of narrative self-reflexivity in Caleb Williams is intricate, but its predominant feature is its sheer prolific nature. The paper chase that constitutes the novel generates from a specific source whose origin the narrative traces by its conclusion, forming an uroboros: a paradoxical figure of self-originating, eternal
process that is nevertheless also self-enclosing. This “source” is the supposed contents of the trunk in Falkland’s library. When Caleb Williams transgresses his master’s sphere of authority and seeks to know the answer to Falkland’s murderous secret that he presumes he will find therein, he provokes Falkland’s indefatigable wrath. The trunk in the library in the middle of Caleb’s tale is already set within a narrative regressus, which is further reflected in the sentence in which it is represented:

I set out for that purpose; and my steps by some mysterious fatality were directed to the private apartment at the end of the library. Here, as I looked round, my eye was suddenly caught by the trunk mentioned in the first pages of my narrative. (131)

Yet Caleb’s transgressive breach of the trunk to discover its (or Falkland’s) contents is arrested by the sudden appearance of Falkland himself:

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10 This tracing of fictional sources would seem to be borne out in Godwin’s own (fictional?) story of the novel’s origins, in which he asserts that it was written “backwards”: that is, third section first, and first section last. (See the Fleetwood Preface, Godwin 338.) It is tempting to speculate on this assertion in the context of this reverse trace at work in the novel; however, Gerald A. Barker’s article “The Narrative Mode of Caleb Williams: Problems and Resolutions” casts sufficient doubt on Godwin’s own account to render such speculation of dubious value. Nevertheless, the originary “mysteries” of Caleb Williams are similarly evoked by Karl Simms in his search for the beginning of the novel (Simms 346). The “lost origins” are thus evident at both ends of the novel, producing the “metonymic skid” of a narrative tracing its own tale.

11 The connection between Falkland’s “sphere of authority” and its literary nature, in the form of the library, is made most clearly in the novel as Caleb wonders: “I was still more astonished at the super-human power Mr. Falkland seemed to possess of bringing the object of his persecution within the sphere of his authority. … I was conducted to the library …” (CW 163). Karl Simms analyzes the importance of the library and of the trunk in the novel in great detail: “The library, Caleb’s context, is made the location of a con-text, a place where a fabricated fiction is produced in order to con the law’s representative” (Simms 348). Simms also points out that the discovery of the trunk, the attempt at opening the trunk, and Caleb’s first trial, all occur in the library.
... the fastenings gave way, the trunk opened, and all that I sought was at once within my reach.

I was in the act of lifting up the lid, when Mr. Falkland entered, wild, breathless, distraction in his looks! ... At the moment of his appearance the lid dropt down from my hand. (132)

The presupposition of Caleb's transgression in turn prompts Falkland to disclose the very secret, or at least to tell the very tale, that Caleb is so "desirous to know" (136) and the burden of Falkland's story suffices to make Caleb the prisoner of invisible "'snares'" (144). Yet Caleb's curiosity regarding the trunk has not been satisfied with Falkland's tale, and Caleb's memoir concludes with a crucial revelation which instantly frames the novel as a self-perpetuating, over-determined reading of the central crypt, the trunk. Caleb's narrative becomes, retrospectively, another mystery of the literally "unspeakable": "May be, you do not know that, where there is mystery, there is always something at bottom that will not bear the telling" (148). For Caleb (if not for Falkland) this is the trunk and its presupposed contents:

The pen lingers in my trembling fingers!—Is there any thing I have left unsaid?—The contents of the fatal trunk from which all my misfortunes originated, I have never been able to ascertain. I once thought it contained some murderous instrument or relique connected with the fate of the unhappy Tyrrel. I am now persuaded that the secret it incloses is a faithful narrative of that and its concomitant transactions, written by Mr. Falkland .... But the truth or the falsehood [sic] of this conjecture is of little moment. ... In that case this story of mine may amply, severely perhaps, supply its place. (315-16)12

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12 As indicated above, Karl Simms' reading of the trunk accords with my own. Simms states: "... both inside and outside the text, the title is a summary of what it does not tell. (This is paralleled within the text by the trunk)" (363). Falkland's household is a "textual frame" for Caleb (347); the discovery of Caleb opening the trunk (a reversal of Falkland's earlier discovery by Caleb)
This, then, is the key to the novel's continual self-perpetuating and layered self-reflexivity, and it is based upon Caleb's presupposition that Falkland is Bluebeard and that the narrative confirming him as such lies in the trunk in the library. As Karl Simms also notes, "According to Caleb's own words, the tracing of effects produces narrative, and, his soul possessed, he becomes a narrative himself: Caleb Williams becomes Caleb Williams by the effect of a silent trace. Through the economy of this trace, it becomes evident that narration is the effect of which it is the cause ..." (Simms, 347). To trace this trace is to delineate the numerous frames of the novel's intricate mise en abyme of the Bluebeard story, but also the instability of these multiple, imbricated frames without reference.

The outer-most frame rendered is the nature of this novel. As Caleb Williams writes a memoir, so he writes Caleb Williams. In doing so, Caleb creates himself since, as a fictitious character, he has no extra-literary "life" to record beyond his memoirist's testimony of it. The history of his life is thus referred to variously as his "life," "story," "history," "adventures," "narrative," or "tale" which rather lends support to the artfulness of the project than credence to its verisimilitude even to a forged, literary referent. However, "verisimilitude" features as a purely formal device. It is dependent upon narrative features such as the "consistency, which is "converts penetration into dissemination, and the history [itself a 'disseminating series of repetitions' (354)] is conceived" (352); the trunk is a lacuna whose textualization is "a constant deferral of representation of an impenetrable truth" (352) whose space is filled with Caleb's own writing, and this writing conjecturing its own "pre-text" is a "palimpsestial mediation" (358).

13The problems with Caleb's truth claims are the subject of much critical discussion. Simms states the central issue: "The truth-claims he makes within this text are themselves verified only within the text. Lacking an extra-textual referent, the reader is confronted with an aporia: is this history or his story?" (348). Even the ultimate truth-claim of Falkland's confession is collapsed at the end of the novel when "the reader is brought to realize that there is nothing to authenticate Caleb's (written) report of Falkland's (spoken) confession" (358). Gay Clifford also discusses this in relation to the first-person narration in her article, "Caleb Williams and Frankenstein: First-Person Narratives
seldom attendant but upon truth” (3), and it is similarly undermined by inconsistencies such as the statement that narrative “connection and progress” is unlike life in the form of village incidents (106). This narrative consistency is furthermore the foundation for doubting Falkland’s story. Caleb’s artfulness, then, does not have verisimilitude as its only end, resulting in realism, however contrived. Instead, his self-consciousness about the literarity of his undertaking and the rhetoric of persuasion used to create his “artless and manly story” (324) foregrounds its aim to “carry in it an impression of truth” (304). While the narrative thus aims for plausible effect, Caleb’s life nevertheless reads as the narrative it is. Caleb follows Mr Forester’s advice to: “Make the best story you can for yourself; true, if truth, as I hope, will serve your purpose; but, if not, the most plausible and ingenious you can invent. That is what self-defence requires from every man ...” (162-63). Caleb makes a dubious qualification even to this advice, however, when he declares “I am writing my adventures and not my apology” (194).

Yet Caleb is not more gravely disadvantaged in this than any memoirist, but his authorial self-consciousness exceeds that condition of the autobiographical genre. Caleb inscribes his own awareness of the literarity of his narrative, its progress and digressions, and its presumed or intended effect, selecting “specimen[s]” (110) of representative events to narrate, acknowledging that in “collecting ... scattered incidents” he is “annex[ing] ... an explanation” he could not then have had to hand (118), or promising cohesion and suspense: “Hitherto I have spoken only of preliminary matters, seemingly unconnected with each other .... But all that remains is rapid and tremendous” (37). Caleb’s addresses to the Reader are frequent and are similarly a means of commenting on his own work: “To the reader it may appear ...”

and Things as They Are”: “Caleb’s account of himself invites criticism from the outset; the structure of the narrative and its matrix in the first-person singular (things as I would like them to be) invites scepticism about literary forms based on the absolute authority of self” (606).
"the reader will easily imagine" (110); "The reader will feel ..." (113). But these instances in which Caleb as author appeals to a reader evidently fashioned in his own image (and tutored by the portrayal Caleb provides of himself as a reader) reveal this "reader" to be the name of a site towards which Caleb can project anxieties about his authorship ("It may seem strange ..." [64]; "I hope the reader will forgive me ..." [123]; "The reader will forgive this digression" [182]; "I know not whether my readers will pardon ..." [194]). These addresses thus serve to mark moments of instability in Caleb's authority, moments when the need for the invocation of a sympathetic audience is a rhetorical last resort.

However, Caleb's self-characterization as a reader is a crucial feature of the novel's plot. He assumes for himself the characterization of literary types he has encountered: variously a victim of a Gothic plot "pregnant with horror beyond what the blackest misanthropy could readily have suggested" (79) and a hero of romance or adventure: "Perhaps it will be found that the greatest hero owes the propriety of his conduct to the habit of encountering difficulties and calling out with promptness the energies of his mind" (144). Certainly Caleb combines these standard tropes for his Bildungsroman: "Persecution at length gave firmness to my character, and taught me the better part of manhood" (154). As an avid reader he makes little distinction between himself and the protagonist. His early reading is described as voracious ("I read, I devoured compositions of this sort" [4]), and eclectic ("My reading in early youth had been extremely miscellaneous" [188]). Caleb's relationships with other characters and the textualized world of the novel are all mediated through the operation of reading.

Inset within this literary frame are stories juxtaposed to invite analogy with Caleb's own, and this selection and arrangement contributes to the narrative quality of the memoir. These inset narratives of Pisani, Tyrrel, Mr Clare, Miss Hardingham, Emily Melville, Hawkins, Brightwel, the thieves in the forest and Laura Denison serve
several of Caleb’s purposes. Caleb clearly manipulates the intertextual power of analogy, as revealed by his comments on the story which Falkland hears:

This was the story of which Mr. Falkland was called upon to be the auditor. Though the incidents were for the most part wide of those which belonged to the adventures of the preceding volume, and there had been much less policy and skill displayed on either part in this rustic encounter, yet there were many points which, to a man who bore the former strongly in his recollection, suggested a sufficient resemblance. (128-29)

Caleb is not averse to using literary simile in his own authorship, writing of Laura’s father that he was “like Prospero in the Tempest” (290). Similarly select stories have analogies bearing on Caleb’s own, serving as literary exempla which foreshadow or complement his own narrative.

The story of Emily Melville’s pitiable persecution by the tyrant Barnabas Tyrrel is not only a catalyst for Falkland’s own tyranny, but reflects the pitiable state in which Caleb finds himself under Falkland. Her story represents an embedding of a pure Gothic type which reflects Caleb’s analogous characterization as the persecuted hero. Both characters are left orphans, without resources: “She had not a human being with whom to consult . . .” (58); Caleb “had not now a relation in the world, upon whose kindness and interposition I had any direct claim” (5). Emily is thrown “without resource” upon the callous mercy of her benefactor’s son Tyrrel, while Falkland also takes Caleb “into his family” (5). But Emily’s reactive role serves also to counterpoint Caleb’s turn from relative passivity into an active protagonist in his own right, contrasting his potential fate with his actual: “Didst thou imagine that I was

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14 In “Allusion and Analogy in the Romance of Caleb Williams,” Eric Rothstein discusses these features in the service of moral exempla to support his reading of the novel as “spiritual autobiography” (18). Twice, however, Karl Simms refers to Caleb’s narrative as “intertextual” in the sense that I use here (349, 355).
altogether passive ...? Didst thou believe me impotent, imbecil and idiot-like, with no understanding to contrive thy ruin, and no energy to perpetrate it?" (314).

Aspects of Caleb’s situation are similarly analogous to that of the Hawkinses, who are also persecuted by Tyrrel but who supposedly meet their end through Falkland. Again, their narrative serves as a cautionary tale reflecting also the enormity of Caleb’s ultimate triumph:

It was mere madness in him to think of contesting with a man of Mr. Tyrrel’s eminence and fortune. ... Nothing could have been more easy to predict, than that it was of no avail for him to have right on his side, when his adversary had influence and wealth, and therefore could so victoriously justify any extravagancies that he might think proper to commit. This maxim was completely illustrated in the sequel. (72, my emphasis)

These inset stories contribute to the self-conscious literary artfulness of the memoir and posit a universality to the despotic abuse of the “letter of the law.” They also demonstrate Caleb’s abilities both as author (of them) and as affective and critical reader by turns: “it went to my heart to read it” (119); “surely never was a story more affecting!” (107); “Every part of this story was extraordinary” (103); “I read this letter with considerable attention, and it occasioned me many reflections” (115). The novel’s metafictiveness, however, is generated entirely through Caleb’s intertextual presupposition. Once he presupposes Falkland as Bluebeard, the narrative perpetuates in myriadic dimensions and overlays the presuppositional “crypt” which is its source.

Caleb is present (and presents himself) in his narrative not merely as its author but also as his own first reader, and hence critic (“These are not the declamations of a man desirous to be eloquent” [182]). Caleb begins his history as a reader of the first order, and this operation similarly characterizes his relationship with other characters and to the textualized world in which he lives. His first education is with books, and this activity is coupled with Caleb’s characteristic feature, put to the service of reading:
curiosity. The act of reading and its ascribed motivation are inextricably meshed in Caleb Williams:

The spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterised the whole train of my life, was curiosity. It was this that gave me my mechanical turn; I was desirous of tracing the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes. ... In fine, this produced in me an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance. (4)

In the context of the Bluebeard story, this signification both strengthens the characterization of the heroine as reader in Bluebeard’s castle or text, but it also rehabilitates the nature of the “inquisitive mind” (3) since it is this “govern[ment of] absolute dominion” (116) which impels Caleb to read below the surface story. Curiosity is justified, apparently, when there is specifically “something arbitrary and tyrannical in the prohibition” (107), and Falkland is implied to inflame Caleb’s curiosity by posing himself as a dense text: “The more impenetrable Mr. Falkland was determined to be, the more uncontrollable [sic] was my curiosity” (108); “The curiosity, which, as I have said, constituted my ruling passion, stimulated me to make [Falkland’s countenance] my perpetual study” (118). Curiosity, then, inspires Caleb’s readership and motivates its intensity. This reading in turn supplies Caleb with positive resources: “The story I had now heard, and the curiosity it excited, restored me to activity, eagerness and courage” (108). In short, Caleb’s curiosity shapes his credentials as a tireless literary critic, examining stories “a thousand ways, and ... in every point of view” (107) and “accurately to compare ... observations and study the inferences to which they led” (108-09). His employment in Falkland’s library is similarly a training in criticism, transcribing his master’s work which includes: “an analytical survey of the plans of different authors, and conjectural speculations upon hints they afforded, tending either to the detection of their errors or the carrying forward their discoveries” (6).
Caleb initially styles himself a naif experiencing the world at a literate remove: “Though I was not a stranger to books, I had no practical acquaintance with men” (5); “Hitherto I had had no intercourse with the world and its passions; and, though I was not totally unacquainted with them as they appear in books ...” (106); “New to the world, I know nothing of its affairs but what has reached me by rumour, or is recorded in books” (173). In fact, Caleb’s experience of the “world” is the world of the novel in which he figures, and which he has written, and he reads its characters and its landscapes as a book. Entering the larger world (in the textualized form of Falkland’s library in “Falkland House” [159]) Caleb directs this means of comprehending and interpreting his environment to it and others in it.

He is assisted by the fact that the characters in the narrative are “legible characters”; like those in which they are written, these characters can likewise be read. When Caleb reads, he feeds himself textually and the “effects ... [are] discernible in my external appearance and my health” (4). He can remark of Gines that “habit had written the characters of malignant cunning and dauntless effrontery in every line of his face” (265, my emphasis). Similarly, Caleb finds “every ... line of [Falkland’s] countenance ... pregnant with meaning” (5); Falkland’s physiognomy betrays “every mark of horror and despair” (129) or “every token of extreme distress” (134), and most expressly, “Misery was at that time inscribed in legible characters upon his countenance” (280). Falkland is constantly overlaid with Caleb’s reading of this legible Falkland:

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15See Sedgwick’s chapter in The Coherence of Gothic Conventions, “The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel” (140-75). Sedgwick discusses the tension between the surface physiognomy and selfhood traditionally motivated from images of depth. The “contagion” of characters (misidentification being the major proponent) she describes of course reaches its epitome in the notion of the textual facsimile. Gordon in turn discusses the “monstrous” aspect of such replication.
These symptoms are uninterrupted, except at certain times when his sufferings become intolerable, and he displays the marks of a furious insanity. At those times his language is fearful and mysterious, and he seems to figure to himself by turns every sort of persecution and alarm which may be supposed to attend upon an accusation of murder. (105)

Caleb’s reading is portrayed as inseparable from Falkland’s expression of meaning. Even in “silent” intercourse (118), “His look bespoke” (5). Caleb is thus able to make Falkland his “study” (6), to “interpret” (8) him, to find him “uncommonly worthy of ... analysis” (148). Of course, a great degree of Caleb’s interpretation involves, by definition, much “speculation and conjecture” (6) so that Falkland’s symptoms are the projections of the text Caleb presupposes for him, and these again have their origins in an unreadable trunk.

He similarly creates his character as a signifying body in his text. Caleb, the printed character, is “strongly susceptible of impression” so that “the alternate impressions my mind received, visibly displayed themselves in my countenance and gestures” (142). There is therefore an ambiguity in such remarks as “I have been a mark for the vigilance of tyranny” (3) and “what a prisoner! All my actions observed; all my gestures marked” (143). Again, when Caleb adopts disguise he must study his new traits, but they are also to be studied in order to “trace out” (255) his person: “My gait, my gestures, my accents were all of them to be studied” (256). Professed attributes thus “serv[e] to mark” (107) aspects of his character, annexing them to the catalogue of his traits. It is no wonder, then, that Caleb and Falkland communicate to one another in “volumes” (126, 132, 292).

Caleb also reads the landscape in which he finds himself. The transference from book to environment is as marked as his reading of Falkland and other characters like Mr. Collins or Mr. Forester. In strange country Caleb produces a pocket Horace and reads an episode in which the pastoral scene is described to a grammarian (230).
Caleb then goes to the window to meditate on the scene before him. Earlier, he reads “The face of the country” (207) in the same way that he reads the legible countenance of Falkland. His intercourse with the world remains mediated by books, and in one such book this world is set.

As the characters are legible, signifying bodies in this narrative, it is also unsurprising that the struggle between Caleb and Falkland is metaphorically mortal, focusing on attempts at character assassination. Within this particular volume, authority is associated firmly with literacy and the literate authority of the “letter of the law” (160): so then are prohibition, curiosity and consequent transgression, punishment and its retribution. The struggle for power or authority between Caleb and Falkland is based on the right and ability to author. The abuse of authority which is one of the novel’s central concerns as political Gothic is enacted in the abuse of authorship, whereby narrative is Falkland’s tool for persecution but also, as Caleb finds, the means of overturning it. In this respect, the Künstlerroman that Caleb writes describes his means of wresting authorial power from Falkland, and reversing their respective stations as reader and author of one another. It is also the ultimate expression of this reversal, as Caleb embeds “Falkland” in his narrative even while narrating his own history of attempts to escape the prison of Falkland’s script.

The distribution of literate power between the two men is established at the outset when Caleb is installed in Falkland House as Falkland’s secretary. Falkland himself is an author–like Bluebeard–and displays authorial (pro–)creation in his works:

My employment … consisted partly in the transcribing and arranging certain papers, and partly in writing from my master’s dictation letters of business, as well as sketches of literary composition. … All of them bore powerful marks of a profound and elegant mind, well stored with literature, and possessed of an uncommon share of activity and discrimination. (6)
Falkland writes, and his writing displays other stores of literature: the generative aspects of intertextuality are shown even as Falkland stamps his creations with his own image or marks of mind. Caleb reads and transcribes Falkland’s creations, and his literary criticism bears on Falkland’s writings and Falkland alike. This is the normative standard. As even Barnabas Tyrrel must confess of his foe, "... if the world were to be governed by words, he would be in the right box" (31).16

However, when Caleb begins to usurp the power of telling tales he threatens Falkland’s authority and becomes its victim. He feigns the “artless and untaught” air that conveys “an apparent want of design” (108). When Caleb presumes to allude to Falkland’s secret by telling a story analogous to it, he unleashes Falkland’s wrath: “I remember an affecting story of a poor man .... In saying this I touched the spring that wakened madness in his mind” (117). The charge Falkland levels in riposte is that Caleb is an “‘artful wretch’” who should be more respectful (118); Caleb returns immediately to chastened passivity. His next self-expression takes the form of a letter he writes indicating his desire to leave Falkland’s service. His master’s response is contemptuous: “That is your letter, said he, throwing it” (153). Caleb is imprisoned metaphorically in Falkland House which is the paradigmatic prison of the story Falkland authors for Caleb,17 disallowing him the freedom to engineer a life history of

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16In her article, “The Imperfect Tale: Articulation, Rhetoric, and Self in Caleb Williams” Jacqueline Miller writes that “A hierarchy of verbal ability is ... erected,” and she analyzes conflicts involving Falkland, Tyrrel and Caleb in terms of battles of verbal power intended to silence the opponent (374.) This holds perhaps even more true of the literary translation of this power. One strain of criticism nevertheless focuses on the distinctions between speech and writing in the novel, and the different paradigms to which they belong: see for instance Kristen Leaver, “Pursuing Conversations” and Leland E. Warren, “Caleb Williams and the ‘Fall’ into Writing.”

17In a reverse of the architectural mnemonic, Caleb in actual prison “task[s] his memory and “counted over the doors, the locks, the bolts, the chains, the massy walls and grated windows that were between me and liberty” (181). Falkland House is a prison that extends to, but also beyond, the
his own. As Caleb says of his own memoir, "To his story the whole fortune of my life was linked" (10) and more clearly, "Mr. Falkland is the principal agent in my history..." (11). Falkland’s authority is "unsurmountable power" (154) and extensive as that of "omnipresent God" (144) over Caleb, his creation.

The use of Falkland House as the structural manifestation of textual imprisonment—Bluebeard’s castle-text—extends beyond the obvious metaphor of the library itself. When Caleb first comes upon Falkland in his private apartment, the slammed door brings with it narrative closure: "I heard the door shut after me with violence, and thus ended this extraordinary scene" (8). A door is initially the extent of Tyrrel’s power over the confined Emily Melville: "Thus saying, she arose, and went towards the door .... Seeing however that she was upon the point of being out of the reach of his power ...." (56-57). But as soon as Tyrrel assumes legal authorship over Miss Melville, his role as the "author" of her “catastrophe” (90) is inescapable. His authority overwrites other protagonists, such as the bailiff who serves Tyrrel’s authority (in both respects) when he is sent to arrest Emily: “I have got a writ against you .... There is our authority. Look at it” (83-84). In the self-generative way of paperwork in Caleb Williams, this writ also writes another version of itself, so that in Emily Melville’s face is seen a copy of it: “a warrant of death written in her countenance” (86).18 Falkland House, however, is an extension of Falkland himself:

physical manifestations of imprisonment: Caleb is a prisoner in mind also, and cannot withdraw himself from “this complexity of horrors” (184).

18The number and variety of copies in the novel represents the textual proliferation that is a precondition of it. There are forgeries ("forged" lies (287), "forged accusation," [322] “counterfeit character” [256]), several copies of Falkland’s defence (which may also not be authentic, and of which Collins has only one; 100), the copy of his own letter Caleb produces at his “trial” by Mr. Forester [170]. Falkland himself is a copy of a figure: “He exhibited, upon a contracted scale indeed, but in which the truth of delineation was faithfully sustained, a copy of what monarchs are, who reckon among the instruments of their power prisons of state” (177). Falkland House indeed also comes to
“he quitted the apartment abruptly, and flung the door with a violence that seemed to shake the house” (113), but the house is also a manifestation of the narrative tyranny Falkland practices over Caleb’s story:

I seemed as if conducting to one of those fortresses, famed in the history of despotism, from which the wretched victim is never known to come forth alive; and, when I entered my chamber, I felt as if I were entering a dungeon. I reflected that I was at the mercy of a man, exasperated at my disobedience, and who was already formed to cruelty by successive murders. My prospects were now closed .... (151)

This is Falkland’s “Miserable sentence!” (145), every “word” of which may be “executed to the severest letter!” (144) should Caleb disobey Falkland in any further “article” (153). As has been mentioned above, however, the “mortal” struggle between these two targets their characters which, as fictional creations, is all they have.

As character is composed of name and fame, and as these are life itself to fictional characters, it is these which are targeted for de(con)struction. The mortal nature of their fame is described repeatedly, with the coupling of “life and fame” (325) almost as synonyms, and of writing as an analogue to both of these. Caleb laments, “my good name or my life was deemed as of no consideration” (190), while imputation is to Falkland, “worse ... than death” (101). In law, however, the narrative of fame is sufficient to have a direct correlation on the life, as the imputation on Falkland’s fame makes clear: “This rumour was of too much importance to the very continuance of his

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copy such prisons. “Caleb” is also a number of less faithfully delineated copies of Caleb, in his disguises, but also in his physical presence and the paper which describes it: “Having read for a considerable time, they looked at me, and then at the paper, and then at me again” (222). Even this “discovery” prompts yet another immediate “representation” (224) as the Captain attempts to counter the effects of the wanted felon bill.
life, to justify its being concealed from him” (99). The continuance of “life” has for Caleb the “appendages” of “Writing” (304).

The two men become adversaries in fame, then. Caleb fears being “blotted from the catalogue of the living” (151). So Caleb's fame becomes Falkland’s victim, and he is “execrated [by] name” (3). If “terror” can be “annexed to the name of Tyrrel” (85) by “fearful catalogue” (92), then name and character can also be un-annexed from one another. “Virtue” can be sought as a “substance” and found “an empty name” (117); the power of denomination is not to be underestimated where the value of a “spotless” name is as life, so even the name of “Villain” is “a very serious appellation and must not be trifled with” (162), let alone the “dreadful appellative, ‘a murderer’” (136). What has been written, in other words, can be unwritten and rewritten too.

The first instance of Falkland’s rewriting of “Caleb” is the handbill, “published on the part of Mr. Falkland” (252) which makes Caleb its “object” (223) by describing his person in detail. This paper is aptly termed “a piece of intelligence” (223) by Mr Raymond, as it imparts information but also bears the stamp of Falkland’s literate cunning. It subjects Caleb to detection and forces him to adopt a “counterfeit character” (256) through disguise in order to escape this fiction of himself. In a sense, though, Caleb’s self-“metamorphosis” merely complies with Falkland’s authored fiction since the series of disguises he assumes appear to confirm his status as a fugitive from justice. This handbill similarly subjects Caleb to a further distortion of his fame and also his name, as his history is now “circumstantially told” (236) by the customers in a public house who “styled [him] the notorious housebreaker, Kit Williams” (235). Falkland has effectively delivered up Caleb’s fictional fame to a multiplicity of “historians and commentators,” depriving Caleb of self-authored recognition (fame) and indeed of self-recognition. It is after a delay, and only then “with astonishment and terror,” that he realizes he himself is the subject of questions from the two men on horseback.
The next instance of Falkland’s persecution of Caleb through the agency of narrative is through his agent Gines who publishes a “halfpenny legend” by his brother the printer. This also has “Caleb” as its subject and again Caleb does not initially recognize himself in this textual version:

... my ears were struck with two or three casual sounds from the mouth of a hawker who was bawling his wares. I stood still to inform myself more exactly, when to my utter astonishment and confusion I heard him deliver himself in nearly these words: ‘Here you have the most wonderful and surprising history, and miraculous adventures of Caleb Williams .... All for the price of one halfpenny.’ (268-69)

Caleb is forced to listen to his rewritten story summarized as a textual commodity authored by Falkland and authorized by another “secretary” like himself; and since he has become this version of the tale through his adventures in evading authority, his person has become another commodity and thus one of the hawker’s wares, indistinguishable from the text for sale. While the text informs on him, Caleb resorts to it to inform himself. He is made a consumer and reader of himself—as Falkland would have him be—by the legend which even incorporates the previous handbill as well as “All my disguises” (269). His pursuit by Falkland’s story is now closer, in that it has caught up with Caleb’s subsequent adventures, so that it almost appears that the story of himself has begun to dictate his present and future actions in order to make them his fiction. His “life was all a lie” (256) because his “character” is now “counterfeit”—not Caleb’s own, but Falkland’s stamp of “Caleb.” It is “the history of my future life” (4) of which Falkland, not Caleb, is at this moment the author.
It is this text of Falkland's which pursues Caleb more effectively than Falkland himself could and appears to have acquired a life of its own: 19 "Was the odious and atrocious falsehood that had been invented against me, to follow me wherever I went, to strip me of character, to deprive me of the sympathy and good will of mankind, to wrest from me the very bread by which life must be sustained?" (301). The fictional "Caleb" follows (fictional) Caleb to Wales and is responsible for Laura's letter shunning him. Reading this letter, Caleb again reads the mortally dangerous script that Falkland has destined for him. This in turn finally decides Caleb to "trace" the narrative back to its "absolute author" (296) or "the true author of this unprincipled attack" (302), which he names "Falkland."

In the penultimate confrontation with Falkland in person, Caleb is offered a "composition" (284) of Falkland's to read and sign: "I insist then upon your signing a paper declaring in the most solemn manner that I am innocent of murder" (282). This would constitute Caleb rendering himself up to Falkland's fiction. In the very act of "authoring himself" in text, representing himself in his signature, Caleb would consign himself to Falkland's complete authority and right of authorship over him. There is a suggestion of this consequence in the ambiguity of "your signing a paper declaring": the paper is "declaring" Falkland's innocence, but by signing it Caleb would also be "declaring" it and would become in a sense no more than the paper upon which Falkland's textual version of him is written. "Caleb" would merely be a textual version of Falkland's having "sign[ed] away [his] own reputation" (283) or "sign[ed] himself a

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19 In "Narrative Enclosure as Textual Ruin," Jan Gordon writes of Caleb that he "encounters his own life story as the demonic double" so that: "His own life story is detached from the self that is its subject. ... The loss of self is reflected in the de-centering of the text; no longer capable of being collected in some library, Caleb's life now appears as a circulating, unguarded public document whose author(ity) is hidden" (Gordon 210).
villain” (323). When Falkland thunders “‘You refuse the composition I offer!’” (284), this composition is “Caleb” as Falkland would have him be.

When Caleb Williams in turn accedes to authorship, he undergoes a process of writerly self-education.20 His first attempts are “poetical compositions” (258), echoing the work of author Mr Clare and Falkland’s own poem, which Mr Clare read aloud. These “productions” of Caleb both are and are not his own, however, for he has yet another “literary dictator” in the form of his publisher who forces Caleb’s revisions. He also works on “translation,” and when he attempts prose, it is in the life stories of others in narrative: “the histories of celebrated robbers” (259). It is interesting to note the similarities in this enterprise with Falkland’s own, with the difference that Caleb assumes a referent in the persons of whom he writes which corresponds to the actual story of their lives. He assumes that his prose narratives are based on “true” fame, while Falkland writing “Caleb” in this way has not.

Another important stage in his accession to authorship is the “etymological analysis of the English language”; he studies dictionaries (294) and writes papers on the subject (303). This is a powerful tool in Caleb’s authorial education which supplies him with a stronger understanding of language and meaning.21 Fruits of this

20 Gordon’s reading of this process reverses my own completely: she reads the stages towards the etymology of the language as a form of dissolution, and thereby supports instead the argument that Caleb is a failed artist.

21 Jacqueline Miller, arguing like Jan Gordon that Caleb fails in his authorial enterprise, nevertheless outlines this education (which Falkland already has) as the means to its achievement: “The artist, then, or the person who controls words, can control our conception of ‘things as they are.’ The man deficient in the ‘science of words’ is thus truly the slave of language, capable only of a ‘servile repetition’; if his own speech is impotent and lacking the self-creative and world-creative energy potentially available in words, then he will be subject to the shaping principles of a more powerful rhetoric. This is, in part, the story of Caleb Williams—a man who never succeeds in becoming his own author” (Miller 372). While this may be accurate of the power distribution at the time Caleb first
are perhaps apparent in Caleb's fastidiousness over the application of the term "insanity" in describing Falkland: "His fits of insanity, for such I must denominate them for want of a distinct appellation, though it is possible they might not fall under the definition that either the faculty or the court of chancery appropriate to that term ..." (124); "It was in one of the lucid intervals, as I may term them" (125); "The reader however must not imagine, though I have employed the word insanity in describing Mr. Falkland's symptoms ..." (125-26). Notably, when Falkland's persecution forces Caleb to abandon these papers, he replaces this enterprise with the penning of his memoir. The Künstlerroman thus documents Caleb's stages of authorial education which have culminated in the memoir itself, that is the application of his various lessons.

However, the most important function of Caleb's memoir is that it is the vehicle for stemming authorial persecution by Falkland and turning it upon its author by the same means. Falkland's name and fate are here subjected to Caleb's ultimate authorship. Caleb earlier muses of the soldier Brightwel: "Were it possible for my pen to consecrate him to never dying fame, I could undertake no task more grateful to my heart" (191). By the end of the events recorded in his memoir, Caleb has realized both the power of the pen to create or destroy (a) character, and his own potential as author: he will consecrate Falkland's name to never-dying infamy. Caleb takes the "spotless" (282) name and makes of it another palimpsest on which to overwrite his version of Falkland: as "indelible" is "immortal," then Falkland's fame is rendered mortal through Caleb's erasure of the significance attributed to the name and his rewriting of it. Caleb authors a symbolic "death" of Falkland with his pen as the weapon:

enters Falkland's library as his secretary, it is not the case by the time Caleb has set out to study the etymology of the English language and to practice, if not master, the "science of words."
No, I will use no daggers! I will unfold a tale—! .... I will tell a tale—! ....
His fame shall not be immortal, as he thinks. These papers shall preserve the truth .... With this engine, this little pen I defeat all his machinations; I stab him in the very point he was most solicitous to defend! (314-15)

Robert Uphaus drives the point home: “he will do to Falkland with words what Falkland did to Tyrrel with a knife” (Uphaus 286).

In writing this memoir, Caleb achieves authorial right not only over his own story, but also over those characters who appear in his narrative, as his narrative productions, and their “characters” as well. This is clear in Caleb’s use of inset stories. He even assumes the narrator’s privilege of selective omniscience, despite his repeated and necessary claims of “scrupulous fidelity” in limiting himself to events which came under his own knowledge. It is unclear, for example, how Caleb comes to know what Tyrrel said to his unnamed confidant, and he frequently slips into reporting the thoughts and feelings of both Tyrrel and Falkland. Harald Kittel points out that these are moments where Caleb “appears to violate the laws of narrative logic by presenting thoughts and feelings of persons long dead, whom he has never met while they were alive …” (Kittel 346).22 It is interesting to note, however, that when Caleb encounters Mr Forester’s messenger recalling him to face his accuser the man says: “You are in the devil of a hurry … to guess my intentions, and tell your own. But your guess is right” (159). Caleb’s interpretation of others’ thoughts is portrayed to be “right” nevertheless.

Caleb embeds Falkland in his memoir, effectively burying him beneath layers of paper and story versions. He begins the first two paragraphs “My life” and “I was born,” before detailing his background and the reading which formed his perceptions.

22Eric Rothstein also mentions Tyrrel and his confidant as one such instance (Systems of Order 210). Gerard A. Barker also discusses these instances in “The Narrative Mode of Caleb Williams: Problems and Resolutions” (Barker 8).
The memoir’s second chapter repeats this formula now in a biographical context, describing Falkland’s background and the reading which formed his perceptions. Caleb thus begins by framing his creation in his own image, but this device also expresses an intent to render Falkland a “completely understood” (11) character and his story “fully understood” (326). What is interesting in these assertions is both that Caleb assumes this to be a narrative possibility and, further, that it is only in Caleb’s own narrative that this can be achieved.

Falkland’s story is thus embedded in layers of (Caleb’s) narrative voice. When he tells Caleb, “What a story is mine!” (135), the nature of the voice saying “mine” is doubled. Later, when Caleb says “There are certain parts of my story that I have not told” (170), he is in fact referring to the secret that is Falkland’s (presumed) story. Falkland’s written self defence for the murder of Tyrrel is read aloud from a copy by Collins whose voice Caleb also assumes for purported reasons of clarity: “I shall ... assume to be myself the historian of our patron” (10). Falkland’s actual text is

23 This is one of the ways in which Caleb and Falkland are doubled in the novel. Some critics argue, for different purposes, that Caleb becomes Falkland; among them are Kelvin Everest and Gavin Edwards. Generally this argument is used to support the inability of language to convey difference; one “I” cannot articulate itself any differently from any other “I.” Donald Wehrs argues that the entire representation of Falkland’s history accords with eighteenth-century fictional norms, and so expresses their “fraudulence ... as they operate in Falkland’s ‘cover story’” but that Caleb himself “cannot conceive of his own ‘story’ in their absence” (Wehrs 499).

24 Clifford says “... Falkland has no voice, for his story is told by Caleb to whom it has been told by the steward Collins ...” (606). Andrew Scheiber disputes this reading in his article, “Falkland’s Story: Caleb Williams’ Other Voice”: “[Falkland’s voice] is not a personal one like Caleb’s, but one of public belief and opinion, which speaks the story of Book I and makes of Falkland a romantic hero; it is a mythic voice rather than an actual or historical one” (Scheiber 260). Scheiber says that Falkland has “claims on the discourse rivaling those of Caleb himself.” However, the “claims” are unmet: Caleb establishes imposes his narrative structure over “Falkland—the predominance of Falkland’s character in the first volume does not in itself constitute a rivalry whereby Caleb and Falkland are thereby “equal forces in the book’s dialectic.”
thus recorded at several removes (unlike Caleb’s letter to Falkland, for instance, which is represented in full and unmediated by voice) and with Caleb as the historian. As Karl Simms points out:

What Caleb presents us with is not a transcription of this narrative as such, but a transcription of what Collins says when he reads it out, after producing it from “a private drawer in his escribire” (CW 100). Falkland’s story of his innocence is therefore a written account of a spoken account of a [written copy of a] written account, taken from a secret place within a place of writing and (eventually) comes to us as a text within a text within a text. (Simms 354)

Notably, however, after assuming Collins’ voice to tell Falkland’s story here, Caleb then relinquishes his role when the narrative excerpt tends towards its conclusion, returning the voice to Collins. This return is inexplicable given the reasons for adopting the ventriloquism, but what he achieves by this is a disavowal of Falkland’s defence and subsequent acquittal. Caleb withdraws from the narrative in order to analyze, rather than simply report, the story he has heard, and consign it firmly to the realm of narrative hearsay. He also reminds the reader that he does “not pretend to warrant the authenticity of any part of these memoirs, except so much as fell under my own knowledge” (106) This effectively precludes Falkland’s defence, denying Falkland’s text any warrant of authenticity.

The memoir is also another type of the summons which Caleb has served on his persecutor. The summons makes Falkland the reader of “Falkland,” and puts him at Caleb’s mercy: “Upon reading the paper he was seized with a very dangerous fit” (319). Caleb is able to declare himself to be both the “author of the charge” and “the author of this hateful scene” (320). Falkland is reduced to the status of “witness” to his own “overthrow” (325). Having thus achieved public and official authorship, Caleb is free to eulogize Falkland as he does, supplying the “species of eulogium” (274) which Falkland had intended to be able to supply him, but which exalts rather
than condemns the man, and forces him to confess publicly and to concede, "Williams ... you have conquered!" (324). Jacqueline Miller argues that the end of the novel demonstrates a failure of both would-be authors to articulate themselves, as they merely exchange views of each other and adopt these as their own:

... Caleb tells his story, and seems to perform the act of self-articulation and self-assertion that has always eluded him. But, in the end, the act betrays itself and presents Caleb as the person Falkland has always proclaimed him to be; he finally can only portray himself as that character which Falkland has constructed ... Consequently, Caleb loses his sense of self—"I have now no character that I wish to vindicate" [CW 326]—and also surrenders his claim to authorship (379). The men simply exchange, rather than expand, the terminologies of their tales ... Caleb Williams is thus the story of unsuccessful artists. (381-82)

25 Among the majority of critics who read Caleb's professed dismay at his supposed success as a genuine desire to retract his accusations and his articulation of himself, Everest and Edwards write that "when Caleb is left more desperate than ever by the final triumph of his narration of events over Falkland's" it is "because to win his victory he has to accept entirely his enemy's premise that truth is commensurate with public credence" (135). This is a standard reading of the ending, echoed for instance by Leland Warren: "he finally comes to see himself as morally bankrupt ... at his story's end" (Warren 65).

Yet Caleb has been aware of this and the necessity of using this fact to vindicate himself almost from the outset of his persecution. His desire has all along been not only to know his innocence but to communicate this to the public at large to preserve his character, and his memoir is tailored to achieve this. Similarly, these critics argue that communicating his innocence in the face of Falkland's authoritative despotism short-circuits the act of persecution entirely: "If he can [convince people of his version of events] the power of despotism, at least in this instance and for the moment, is broken" (Everest and Edwards 139). Again, Caleb is assuming both the means and the power of legal and authorial despotism for himself and once he has done this his memoir testifies that he does not treat Falkland any differently than Falkland had treated him, with one difference: Caleb succeeds.
However, Caleb’s rhetorical apotheosis of his erstwhile master can also be read as the privilege of the victor conceding the worthiness of his conquered opponent. Part of Mr Forester’s advice to Caleb for undertaking self-defence involves just this kind of concession: “If you desire to be believed honest, you must in the first place show that you have a due sense of merit in others” (173). Caleb does this both in the first place and again in the last, with Falkland’s exaltation. In the interim, however, Caleb has deprived Falkland of the name and fame which Falkland had authored for himself: his name is no longer “a denomination … for the most exalted of mortals, the wisest and most generous of men” (300) as Laura deems it. The denomination has instead been altered so effectively that Caleb can afford to refer to this previous fame and indeed show the degree of the divide. Furthermore, Caleb values the “resources of his mind” or “reverenced the sublime mind of Mr. Falkland” (133) because it is this sublimity that he aims to attain for himself. Caleb wants the knowledge that Falkland has. It is only in the unpublished ending of the novel that Caleb fails as an artist, as his narrative dissolves, becoming nonsense, and leaves him with “a BLANK” (333) instead of a story. But again, this blank marks the true absence of a story to tell: it is the mark of the unreadable trunk which has generated instead Caleb’s entire memoir and in effect, Caleb himself. The return to the blank occurs in both published and unpublished versions; at the bottom of this mystery is something that “will not bear the telling.”

This blank to which the novel returns is the blank from which it originated, impelled by Caleb’s presupposition that its ellipsis marks the space of an absent intertext: Falkland as Bluebeard. This presupposition of narrative has no narrative pretext, however, so that the narrative paradoxically comes into being as a trace of
something other.\(^{26}\) This relativizes the position of the narrative, destabilizing it, rendering it a partial frame, or another trunk and thus another shell of narrative. In this it is like the (history of the) Gothic novel, the history of the Bluebeard story, and the Bluebeard story itself. But the metafictional generator that the Bluebeard story supplies the novel sets a chain process in motion, a textualized semiosis, in which the written is always being read. Caleb Williams has as its outer-most narrative frame a text being rewritten and a reader being reread. The liminality of this position in the chain process, or the “text-between,” is a palpable condition. Garrett Sullivan writes that Caleb is “caught between writing himself and being written” (337), while Tilottama Rajan notes that the novel “traces the inscription of reading” (223). As it is intertextual
Presupposition which creates the novel describing Caleb’s persecution, however, Caleb has first read and then written his own entrapment and is, in fact, from the outset, the sole author of himself in Caleb Williams, or forger of his own “calamities” (322). Jacqueline Miller states: “Language has imprisoned him, but it can also free him; his own words are the only instruments that can defeat Falkland’s control …” (378). This is true only to a degree: while Caleb has assumed authorship, he devotes his resources to describing the prison. Presupposition is the despotism which precedes

\(^{26}\)Ironically, The Iron Chest by George Colman the Younger, which adapts Godwin’s novel for the stage and which locates the chest as the core of the work by its title, nevertheless erases the novel entirely. It does so by supplying the trunk with contents: the very narrative which Caleb presupposes is here produced as a matter of course. By plugging this “hole” in Caleb’s narrative, it robs the memoir of its reason for existing, that is to supply the narrative that such a manuscript would confirm if it was ever produced …. Similarly, Anne Thackeray Ritchie adopts the mysterious “oak trunk” for “Bluebeard’s Keys,” to ignite the heroine Fanny’s imagination after she sees Barbi bending over it, his back to the door: “‘But then she had got to think—she could not have told you why—that her betrothed had hidden his heart in that old oaken chest” (59). However, when she finds the lost set of keys with entwined hearts and opens it, she finds mementos and letters inside, and reads of Barbi’s first wife. Here too, this trunk is a legible one. At the end of this Gothic romance, while Barbi is last seen at a Capucin retreat, Fanny opens an orphanage and teaches … reading.
that of the letters of the law in which it is made manifest and which form the political nature of the Gothic critique. The importance of literary criticism is borne out in the legal metaphor, where the aim of both Caleb Williams and his memoir is to achieve conviction, perpetuating the despotism of one text over another with no evidence but the rhetorical force lent by Presupposition, which is in fact the only foundation for the narrative.

III

Northanger Abbey manifests another metafictional use of both the Gothic and the Bluebeard story, using the Bluebeard story to enhance the inherent metatextuality of the Gothic and thereby to create a heightened critical vantage from which to examine both. The result of this examination is a critique of Presupposition (of which parody is already an intertextual expression) and the role of Presupposition in hermeneutics. Both Presupposition and hermeneutics are, as has been said, crucial considerations of intertextual theory and practice, and of their feminist intertextual critique in turn. Austen’s novel effects this critique through thematics and through relativizing the genres of both Gothic and parody, the which critique is reinforced in the novel’s syntactic structure.

In thematic terms, the novel’s “anti-heroine” Catherine Morland is ostensibly a naïve reader, misreading the world through Gothic novels (“I should like to spend my whole life in reading Udolpho” [23]) and presupposing a Bluebeard in her potential suitor’s father, General Tilney. In this characterization she is supported by her personal “artless[ness]” (53) and a want of parental guidance in her readerly education. Such is the generally accepted reading of Catherine Morland and of the novel as parody of the Gothic, illustrated by the following quotation from Eino Railo’s respected work

27This comment of Catherine’s refers of course to Udolpho, but the reflexivity of the sentence is interesting.
on the Gothic, The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism: “With such light touches does Jane Austen stamp the whole of this species of literature as the favourite reading of foolish girls and of stupid persons, people who have not the faintest idea of what literature, rightly understood, denotes” (Railo 78).28 As a parody must, by definition, be also a specimen of that which it parodies, Northanger Abbey is also a Gothic romance. Criticism of Northanger Abbey thus extends to the nature of the “real” Gothic dangers which Catherine in her haste to misread has overlooked. These may be found in General Tilney’s excessive consumption (his pineapples, his parish at work in his garden) in an age of food riots; in his night-time “pamphlets,” and in his very real impropriety towards Catherine in having similarly presupposed her to be that which she is not: “She was guilty only of being less rich than he had supposed her to be” (199). Catherine’s personal security is at risk in her long carriage ride home, “alone” and “unattended.” The novel’s “Gothic,” then, lies in the reinscription of the Gothic as ever-present in the “manners of the age” which Henry Tilney mistakenly invokes to disprove it.29 Here Caleb Williams’ “scopophobia” is grounded in the existence of voluntary spies who are the polite practitioners of a scopic regime as imprisoning as any Abbey chamber. This reading relies on the misdirection of Catherine’s—otherwise accurate—reading: “Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel, 

28Such a reading is echoed, again representatively, by Kenneth Graham, frequently published on the Gothic: “Northanger Abbey uses references to The Mysteries of Udolpho to encourage restraint and control. Jane Austen’s response to the Gothic transgression of psychological and social constraints is to redefining a reality of limited possibility. In such a reality, an over-active imagination is punished by social embarrassment …” (“Afterword” 263).

29See Paul Morrison’s excellent article, “Enclosed in Openness”—Morrison also argues this panoptical power to be inherent in literacy. Legibility is the condition of vulnerability to surveillance; the laundry lists are here an ominous expression of the power to delineate each and every operation. Henry Tilney seeks to render Catherine not a reading subject, but a subject to be read, and thus embodies the threat of the “voluntary spies” he invokes in his own person.
that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty” (201). This evidence for the “political” nature of the Gothic is put to the service of the parody of the literary Radcliffian and Lewisite Gothic; it does not relativize the status of parody itself in the novel.

In fact, a revisionist reading has posited a third position which mediates both the novel’s Gothic and its parody, and it is key to Catherine’s characterization as a thematized reader. In “Northanger Abbey and the Limits of Parody,” Tara Goshal Wallace argues that Henry Tilney is the character most closely aligned with the novel’s parodic voice. But the narratorial voice is not in turn aligned with Henry Tilney, and this severely relativizes the position of parody in the novel:

Rather, it is possible to see this episode [parodying Bath conventions] as acutely specific auto-criticism: the narrator’s commentary on the limits and falsities of parodic discourse. Henry Tilney’s targets—social conventions, obsessions with clothing—are either too entrenched or too trivial to engage the sustained commitment of the narrator, and her resistance to his parody forces the reader to re-evaluate the parodic discourse of the novel. (Wallace 264, original emphasis)

This reading of a vantage which relativizes the novel’s parodic voice will be adopted in a broader context of the novel’s escape from the binding structures of Presupposition, below. It is notable here, though, that Henry Tilney may parody (and later, memorably, censure) Catherine’s tendency to Presupposition, to reading life as a book, but it is precisely her “teachableness of disposition” (139) which he praises as a “great blessing,” and Catherine learns Henry’s hermeneutic lessons only too willingly and well.

What Henry teaches Catherine is the art and rhetoric of analogy: simile and synonymity or, in other words, the operations of intertextuality (on which his own
parody depends). What he does not teach her is the fine distinction between two
modes on the spectrum of intertextual reading, which Owen Miller has delineated as
“presupposition” and “implication.” Diverging in his use of the term “presupposition,”
then, from Riffaterrean pragmatics, Miller’s description of this gestures more in the
direction of the reader’s aleatory intertextuality than “implication,” which is more
grounded in the text. As a question of degree, and not ultimately of kind, it is an issue
for Catherine to acknowledge a “grey area.”

Catherine is quick to accept the worldly-wise Henry Tilney as her self-appointed tutor. New to Bath and to Bath conventions, Catherine’s engagement in
Henry’s parodic initiation to them resembles that of a student in a Socratic dialogue.
Catherine, however, is as ready to accept Isabella Thorpe as her fashionable mentor in
Bath, and Isabella’s vainglorious brother John also: “To go before, or beyond him was
impossible. His knowledge and her ignorance of the subject, his rapidity of
expression, and her diffidence of herself put that out of her power; she could strike out
nothing new in commendation, but she readily echoed whatever he chose to assert . . .”
(46). John Thorpe’s exuberant and boastful contradictions show Catherine’s
perplexity in reconciling them, even where to do so can only result in paradox: “she
knew not how to reconcile two such very different accounts” (47). But it grounds the
nature of such contradiction in expressly linguistic terms: “Her own family were plain
matter-of-fact people, who seldom aimed at wit of any kind; her father, at the utmost,
being contented with a pun, and her mother with a proverb . . .” (47, my emphasis).
When Catherine allows the contradiction to stand without further attempt at synthesis,
she makes the “bold surmise” (48) on her own authority that John Thorpe is the
disagreeable man he is.

The next conversation with Henry at the cotillion ball inaugurates Henry’s
lessons in analogy: to adopt Jan Gordon’s thesis, Catherine’s fears at Northanger,
which have their origins here in Bath, begin with Henry’s collapse of (Catherine’s)
demarcations of difference. Against Gordon's point, it is possible to read the novel's important interplay of similarity and difference. Henry's analogy: "a country-dance as an emblem of marriage" (56) provokes Catherine's protest: "But they are such very different things! -" (57). Tilney completes her reasoning: "-That you think they cannot be compared together" (57). Henry explicates the terms of his analogy with the refrain "-You will allow ... You will allow all this?" (57). Catherine's defence begins reluctantly to crumble faced with such imperatives: "Yes, to be sure, as you state it, all this sounds very well; but still they are so very different" (57). At an ostensible loss to comprehend Catherine's resistance, Henry charges her with what is essentially a lack of "teachableness of disposition," a severe critique: "This disposition on your side is rather alarming. You totally disallow any similarity in the obligations...."

The encounter continues with Tilney's prophecy that after six weeks Catherine must tire of Bath for its "sameness" (58). Catherine asserts instead, three times, its "variety" in contrast to the "sameness" of a country life, whereupon Tilney collapses her distinction with a pertinent question. Catherine must then answer against herself, "I do not believe there is much difference" (59). This conversation ends with the couple melding into the dance—one of Henry's emblems of the "sameness" of Bath—noticeably because it will not tolerate "a divided attention" (59) such as they have attempted in their conversation.

Henry's teaching then turns to the rhetoric of analogy as well as to encouraging Catherine to read herself into a Gothic novel: "I shall soon leave you as far behind me as what shall I say?—I want an appropriate simile;—as far as your friend Emily herself left poor Valancourt when she went with her aunt into Italy ..." (83). At this juncture, Henry has taken upon himself a lecture regarding proper diction and accordingly tasks Catherine to defend her choice of "torment" and "instruct" as "synonymous" [sic] or as "synonimous words" (85). Similarly, Henry performs the
act of synthesis for Catherine and Eleanor Tilney when Catherine’s herald of a new (literary) horror from London is taken by Eleanor to be a political prophecy. Henry shows their two stories to be in fact two versions of the same story.

Catherine is thus encouraged in a use of simile whereby she draws on “like” situations (in which she is well-read) to supplement her reading of the world in which she remains inexperienced. It is a short distance for Catherine between simile and sameness, however. Catherine is keen to see Blaize Castle once its character is promised to be as its name connotes: “But is it like what one reads of? ... Then I should like to see it” (63). Blaize Castle, unseen, is thus made to approximate Udolpho, which has at least been read, and becomes “an edifice like Udolpho, as her fancy represented Blaize Castle to be” (65). The confusion of analogies in Catherine’s mind is represented in a syntax of likeness: zeugma and alliteration, for instance: “she meditated, by turns, on broken promises and broken arches, phaetons and false hangings, Tilneys and trap-doors” (65). Blaize Castle is here a (ruined) linguistic structure, rendered Gothic through the “story” Catherine invents for it. This foreshadows her linguistic response to the evocation of Northanger Abbey. The very name of Northanger Abbey suffices to connote for Catherine a likeness to what she has read: “Northanger Abbey!—These were thrilling words, and wound up Catherine’s feelings ... Her grateful and gratified heart could hardly restrain its expression within the language of tolerable calmness” (109). In order for it to be more like what she has read, Catherine hopes that the castle will occasion “some traditional legends” (110); in effect, Catherine hopes it will reproduce itself in story so as to be more like itself. The castle must needs affiliate itself with the literature of Gothic, whence it derives its identity for Catherine, to be comprehensible in a grammar of simile. And again, this is supplied by Henry Tilney in the form of a “story” which is a Gothic parody but which draws on his actual knowledge of the castle to supply particulars and to create for
Catherine on arriving there a foretold impression of likeness. Northanger Abbey is presupposed for Catherine to be a Gothic (inter)text before she arrives there to read it.

To Catherine’s question, “‘Is it not a fine old place, just like what one reads about?’” (124), Henry tells a story that, as Catherine says, is “‘just like a book!’” (125). In this story, Henry presents Dorothy, the housekeeper, a “helper” figure, who in fact thematicizes what Henry himself is at that moment doing: “‘Dorothy … drops a few unintelligible hints. To raise your spirits, moreover, she gives you reason to suppose that the part of the abbey you inhabit is undoubtedly haunted …’” (125). He breaks off, “obliged to entreat her to use her own fancy” (126). In this manner, Catherine is delivered to Northanger which, of course, is unlike what she has read about, represented to herself, or had represented to her. It is this reality which is “odd and inconsistent” (127) and, to one now tutored in the principle of synthesis, unsurprisingly: “the difference was very distressing” (128). Catherine’s reaction to the uncanniness of Northanger Abbey is a two-fold attempt at synthesis: she “invents” the desired story that General Tilney is a Gothic villain, a Bluebeard, and she sets out to find proof of likeness in a form she will recognize: a written record.

Like Caleb Williams tracing a presupposed manuscript, Catherine sets out ultimately to discover “those proofs of the General’s cruelty … in the shape of some fragmented journal” (154-55). On the path of this quest, Catherine finds in sequence a “mysterious cypher” (129) that is a monogram on a linen trunk (which, like Caleb, she is interrupted in opening, the lid dropping from her hand at the crucial moment, but which also contains a “BLANK”[et]: a white folded cotton counterpane). Next, deep within a Japan box (or a chinese box narrative structure) she finds a “roll of paper,” “written characters,” or a “manuscript” (135) that proves on examination to be domestic inventory and bills. Looking for the overdetermined “familiar” produces records of the familiar that surprise, because they have become defamiliarized: in the same way, Catherine’s “natural” character becomes “strange, unaccountable” (2), her
ability to keep an engagement "unnatural" (82), and the motivation for her marriage match "a new circumstance in romance" (198). In a novelistic context, the familiar is altogether different simply because it is not being looked for in these terms.

Looking for likeness and finding instead difference, ("How inexpressibly different ... from such as she had read about" [147, my emphasis]). Catherine makes the bridge to intelligible analogy through Presupposition. After her arrival at Northanger, the frequency of words describing this is noticeable: "much less than she had supposed" (136), "'I suppose'" (144, 149), "the suspicion" (146), "all favoured the supposition" (151), "to suppose herself" (154), "a supposititious funeral" (153). This is what Henry targets in his reprimand: "'You have erred in supposing ...'" (158). But while Catherine blames her own reading of Northanger's passageways, Mrs Tilney's closed bedroom, and General Tilney's disposition on "the influence of that sort of reading" (160) she has been indulging, Henry Tilney is an influence closer to hand. He has tutored Catherine in a form of reading which lacks discernment, which is in essence intertextual reading bent on finding similarity and using Presupposition to force analogy where similarity is sought. Austen's narrator encourages a similar activity from the outset of the novel, while disallowing it in her reader: "the maternal anxiety of Mrs Morland will be naturally supposed .... Who would not think so?" (5).

It is interesting that when Catherine does not look to recognize likeness, and Henry Tilney is not there to argue it, she once again resorts to a "bold surmise" which is again proven to be the right response:

If Henry had been with them indeed!—but now she should not know what was picturesque when she saw it. ...

Catherine had seen nothing to compare with it; and her feelings of delight were so strong, that without waiting for any better authority, she boldly burst forth in wonder and praise. (141)
Presupposition instead creates of Northanger Abbey a narrative prison; supposing Mrs Tilney to have been shut away in her bedroom chamber, at the very least, the way to this chamber is convoluted and out of the way. For Henry, the chamber is along the shortest route between two quotidian household points. That the door has become “forbidden” (154) in epithet, if nowhere else, is a form of narrative lock-down as effective as that which provokes Catherine to lock a cabinet already open in her assumption that she is doing the reverse. What the novel emulates in regard to the Gothic, to parody, and to Catherine’s readerly education is a hermeneutic of neither sameness nor difference, but one of “not unlike.” This double negative that is not a binding contradiction but a way of reading outside, of reading shades of difference, extends to the entire syntactical structure of the novel.

Northanger Abbey is a novel that reads as a “post-dialectical transposition” (the word “murder” after it has been read through “redrum,” as it were). The binary opposition between a positive assertion and its negation becomes a “double bind” through Presupposition, since Presupposition renders the dyad a synthesis. A presupposition encompasses the negation of an assertion as well as the assertion in which the presupposition originates. In other words, Presupposition does not distinguish difference, since the space of the other is already presupposed. Henry Tilney has tutored Catherine to read presuppositionally, seeking synthesis, so that difference becomes uncanny—but only because it is not more like. Syntactically, however, the entire novel is positioned on the threshold where the story turns inside out. This is achieved through Austen’s use of double negatives and their role in relation to Presupposition and to the nature of the novel’s parodic voice. With a double negative, sense moves forwards, backwards, and forwards again with new sense. The argument for the novel’s use of double negatives disagrees with Julia Kristeva’s claim for these under the ever-expanding province of Presupposition. Delineating the types of presuppositional transformation that are possible, Kristeva writes of the double
negative that, while not identical with the positive from which it originates, it is an attempt to presuppose the negative other, or to appropriate the presupposition:

De la double négation, morpho-syntaxique et lexicale, appliquée tour à tour aux deux phrases coordonnées, il résulte que la signification de la présupposé et de la résultante est la même, mais leur économie sémiotique est différente et par conséquent leur sens n’est pas identique. La positivation s’obtient par une redondance de négations. (Kristeva, “Le contexte présupposé 347)”

This argument recalls Kristeva’s argument for Presupposition’s ownership of that which it presupposes (so that a double negative appears to own both the positive and negative in this way). Instead, however, the negative other is removed from the province of Presupposition by becoming an assertion (and hence no presupposition). While “like” presupposes “unlike,” and vice versa, the phrase “not unlike” makes “like” and “unlike” simultaneously assertions of the phrase, and yet the sense of the phrase is not constrained by either of them. In reading likeness, difference remains a marked consideration.

The adjective “worthy” is not synonymous with “not unworthy” (128), for example. This latter has passed dialectically through the negatives presupposed in the positive term “worthy” (“not worthy,” and “unworthy”), both of which still contain the positive and its negative shadow. The preponderance of negative constructions in Northanger Abbey (even in the novel’s title) has been noted, but even absent negatives shadow the narrative as in rhetorical questions like the following: “But to what purpose did she speak?” (65) which presupposes its answer: “none.” However, the arrival at “not unworthy” is not an unmediated return to the positive source (“worthy”) but a

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30—From double negation, morpho-syntactical and lexical, applied to two conjunctive sentences in turn, the effect is that the sense of the presupposed and of the result is the same, but their semiotic economy is different and, consequently, their sense is not identical. Positivity is obtained by a redundancy of negations.”
transposition of it. The spectre of negation is raised only to do syntactic battle with the same, in the “not-un” (or “not-dis,” and so on) formulation: its trace is not erased but remains.

Variations on this double negative formula in *Northanger Abbey* are many, such as “not but,” “not the less,” “not without,” “never, nor, nor” (113), “neither nor,” “without any further,” “not vain was ...” (135). These give rise to the phrases which characterize this novel: “by no means unreasonably” (129), “by no means an ill-sized room” (131), “not unlikely” (151), “nothing worse than” (127), “not wholly unintricate” (146), “no endeavours shall be wanting ... to make Northanger Abbey not wholly disagreeable”” (109), “could not but” (117, 190), “Catherine had read too much not to be perfectly aware” (153), “Her explanation, defective only in being ... no explanation at all” (78). It is also a feature of the phrase describing General Tilney as “proof positive of the contrary” of “unnatural and overdrawn” (144).

This double negative construction in turn characterizes the novel’s post-dialectical, transpositional relationship with both the Gothic genre and with parody, and hence with the Bluebeard story and with intertextual reading. While parody both is and is not that which it parodies (so that a parody of the Gothic novel is “not unGothic”), parody nevertheless remains within the economy of Presupposition by generic definition. Parody is an accepted intertextual mode in which the critical context performs a reading of the intertext, but the status of the intertext (that which is parodied) is necessarily a given of the parodic text. In *Northanger Abbey*, as has been shown, the Bluebeard intertext is not a given of the parodic text, nor is the Gothic novel. The double negative on which *Northanger Abbey* is instead founded is: “not unparodic.” Parody is filtered and relativized by this position outside Presupposition, and Gothic is doubly filtered and doubly relativized by this critical distance. By being “not unparodic,” the novel reflexively and metalinguistically challenges intertextual modes of reading and the presuppositions attendant on these. Figuratively, Austen's
novel writes out of a double bind of reading, undoing the synthetic binarism of 
presuppositional constructions, while thematizing this through Catherine Morland, 
who learns this as a reader. A similar strategy for escaping Presupposition's double
bind can be seen with respect to the *mise en abyme* both in the Bluebeard story and in 
the story's intertextual use, in the following chapter.
2. Buried secrets: the *mise en abîme*

Where are we going? she said, because it was getting dark, and there was suddenly no floor.

Deeper, he said.\(^1\)

The very notion of intertextuality turns out to be a *mise-en-abîme*, an abyss of infinite semiosis at whose brink we stand, delighted or terrified.\(^2\)

The site of the *mise en abîme* in Bluebeard’s plot is the forbidden chamber, a place of enclosure and buried secrets. The corpses of Bluebeard’s former wives are thus set within a structural *mise en abîme* and comprise the motivating force for the *mise en abîme*’s metonymic extension. Its incorporating gesture is infinitely extensible and the castle which contains the chamber is also metonymically engulfed by it. Yet, as presuppositions exist only as projections of the matricial constructions which structure their absent presence, so the contents of Bluebeard’s chamber, when viewed as a projection of his vision or his plot, are similarly the projection of the matrical structure (the castle-text) which encodes it. In Bluebeard’s monologic vision, the Presupposition of his plot is given a fixed form. The collection of women in the forbidden chamber form a single sign, one which stands for an inter-referring series or repetition, but which is nevertheless an imagistic sign of fixity, totality, and enclosure. The dead women in the chamber, then, bear the encrypted coding of Presupposition. In this sense, they are “in-formation” (they form a spectacle-mirror in and of Bluebeard’s plot and are the revelation of its nature); they also illustrate the in-forming principle of Bluebeard’s plot, that is, the tendency to *mise en abîme* which characterizes it.

\(^1\)Margaret Atwood, from “Alien Territory” (85).

\(^2\)Thaïs E. Morgan, “Is There an Intertext in this Text?” (18).
Furthermore, as a fixed projection of Bluebeard’s monologic artistry, the iconic tableau that the corpses form encapsulates the anti-narrative artistry of Bluebeard. Bluebeard as author here meets Bluebeard as a visual artist.\(^3\) at the point where narrative ends in an anti-narrative “statement” that seeks to replicate itself by consuming other narratives. The key to this reading of the plot lies in this use of spectacle, as Bluebeard creates his artistic vision in the form of an illusion of reflection. The spectacle is one of mortification. The corpses form a tableau depicting literally mortified women and this tableau is encoded with its intention to replicate this effect. A spectacle is created for viewing. Yet if this particular spectacle is viewed at all, then the viewer is already metaphorically the same as the viewed spectacle (a dead woman), recalling Bluebeard’s statement in the Mélusine version: “comme tu as vu, tu seras!” (“as you have seen, (so) you will be!”). In the doorway, the viewer is also correspondingly mortified, frozen in horror: her narrative ends abruptly on the threshold at the point where vision takes over, and in this she almost becomes a reflection of the spectacle too. Bluebeard’s monologic vision is “uncanny” for this reason: it is an illusion of reflection that can generate corresponding reflection, creating a mise en abyme of reflexivity within the mise en abyme of the chamber (and so on) as the live affect of mortification imitates the dead artifact, on the way to becoming in

\(^3\)In “Bluebeard: A Tale of Matrimony,” Juliet McMaster notes parenthetically after her synopsis of the tale: “(I like the neatness suggested by that sequence, and the tidy ranging of the corpses. It suggests Bluebeard took a pride in his job, and in other circumstances might have made an excellent museum curator)” (11). The notion of a museum—and of a secret museum, with its links to pornography—recurs in relation to the Bluebeard figure, but despite McMaster’s irony the reflection that Bluebeard takes pride in his job already points to his characterization as an artist. In the otherwise fatuous poem of Vere Jameson, the two lines: “Strange that they should move him now / More than in their lives!” (Jameson 7, lines 3-4) also reflect Bluebeard as a death-artist and implies that it is his own tableau, not the women, which “moves” him. In Daryl Hine’s poem, “Bluebeard’s Wife,” the castle contains a “room of artifice” (stanza 4) en route to the chamber containing the women. The connection is clear: “each one was at once an image and a deathless mould” (4, line 9).
consequence a literal replication of the artifact. It is interesting in this context to recall that when Charles Dickens’ Captain Murderer is asked to show his wives the meat for the pie they are baking, he leads them to a mirror. It is also interesting to note that in a variant of the tale, listed by Paul Delarue, Bluebeard revives after the brothers kill him. Only when they break his mirror is he cut down.4

Yet these buried encryptions of Bluebeard’s monologic, anti-narrative intertextuality are in fact deflections away from the telling absence at the heart of the plot. The real *mise en abyme* is the empty crypt: the story lacks origins on which to predicate itself (what of that first wife?) and so fills itself instead with traces which disguise this central absence. This discussion of *mise en abyme* continues to draw from the concept of cryptonomy adopted from Jerrold Hogle in his article on the Gothic. In both the death-as-art representation (the spectacle of mortification) and the suppression of otherness that it encodes through its assimilative inclusivity (it reduces difference to sameness through making uncanny likeness), Bluebeard’s *mise en abyme* is crypt-like. It is a central absence akin to that which Hogle positions and describes in the Gothic: a rapacious hollow. As in Hogle’s analysis of cryptonomy, and as argued earlier in discussion of metonymic expansion and in the “encryption” effected by presupposition and presupposed intertextuality, this absence is a generative one. Bluebeard’s plot is, as in Hogle’s words, “a process of crypts supplanting crypts where every attempt to hide a destruction points to a sealing up before it that only reconceals itself” (Hogle, 333). The crypt evinces an assimilative movement through the rhetorical structures which circumscribe it, seeking constant, restless and provisional reconfigurations prefigured by the vacuum at its core. Bluebeard’s artistic use of the *mise en abyme* is for monologic ends.

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As seen in the previous chapter, the Gothic evinces a generic preoccupation with the mise en abyme, both literal and figurative. The thematic incidences of encryption (such as live burial) are endemic, but so too is the use of the artistic mise en abyme as metafictional reflection. The multitudinous portraits, and portrait miniatures worn as surface tokens of identity, serve as texts of physiognomic intertextuality, portals for frame-breaching genealogies and revenant histories, and “contact zones” between the overdetermined artistry and the thematized reader or viewer. Ann Radcliffe uses such an uncanny mirror of the story in the scene where Emily finds a painting within the chamber of Udolpho in The Mysteries of Udolpho, a Gothic “Bluebeard” story. Hogle describes the moment of Emily’s encounter with the assimilative artistry of Montoni as “the crypt in the larger crypt” (Hogle 336), and “already a representation of constructed representations with further representations rising to interpret it” (337). But just as overdetermined artistry produces these ghosts of the Gothic in the crypts or indeterminacies where only projections of the surrounding structures may be, so presupposition projects icons and images and renders a fixed, eidetic intertextuality. The child in Stephen King’s The Shining can only perceive the set-pieces of narrative in the projections of the Overlook hotel: he recalls of the Bluebeard story only “those images,” the “severed heads”:

It seemed vaguely to Danny that the story had had a happy ending, but that had paled to insignificance beside the two dominant images: the taunting, maddening locked door with some great secret behind it, and the grisly secret itself, repeated more than half a dozen times. The locked door and behind it the heads, the severed heads. (King 170)

However, when the surviving heroine extricates herself from this in-forming process, Bluebeard’s plot itself is made a mise en abyme, and it is finite and closed. Angela Carter’s story, “The Bloody Chamber,” pauses at the point of reversal to contemplate what has become of Bluebeard: “sword still raised over his head as in
those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs" (142).
Vision has become revision, and Bluebeard’s plot is now viewed critically from
without. The heroine turns Bluebeard’s plot inside-out, and the means by which she
achieves this revision of the plot and its mortifying artistry are dialogic. The dialogic
revision of the mise en abyme in “Fitcher’s Bird,” “The Robber Bridegroom,” and “Mr
Fox” signal intertextual difference in the place of Bluebeard’s own mise en abyme of
uncanny likeness. The heroine creates and occupies a space of alterity, a figurative
“third position” outside and beyond the framing and assimilative binaries of
Bluebeard’s monologic reflexivity. In the first place, Bluebeard’s plot is “quoted.” In
“Fitcher’s Bird” a simulacrum is used as a palimpsestic place-marker for Bluebeard’s
spectacle and its presupposing encryption. The third sister displaces herself from the
reflection that presupposes her own image as it is encoded in the basin of blood. In a
narcissistic pool of uncanny likeness (even more “like” as it contains her two sisters),
she reads or sees there not only Bluebeard’s assimilative vision of her but also a
metamorphic possibility for revision. In remembering her two sisters and in disguising
herself to escape the castle, she acts on the revisionist principle. But she also reflects
her own recognition of Bluebeard’s text back to him at the same time as removing
herself from its in-closure and renouncing its totalizing predicate. She sets a death’s-
head (skull) adorned in her own bridal finery in the tower window to stand in for her,
setting it to “watch” the Bluebeard figure on his way. She thereby reendows the
simulacrum with her gaze as it is presupposed by Bluebeard (the skull “sees” inasmuch
as it reflects the perspective she has gained from her vision of how Bluebeard sees her,
and it is invested with this new encoding even as Bluebeard now sees the skull as the
same wife without crucial awareness of its difference). Gilles Deleuze argues this
subversive “difference-within-the-like” as an inherent aspect of the simulacrum itself,
and his statement is useful here:
If the simulacrum still has a model, it is another one, a model of the Other from which follows an interiorized dissimilarity. ... The simulacrum includes within itself the differential point of view, and the spectator is made part of the simulacrum, which is transformed and deformed according to his point of view. In short, folded within the simulacrum there is a process of going mad, ... a constant development, a gradual process of subversion of the depths, an adept avoidance of the equivalent, the limit, the Same, or the Like: always simultaneously more or less, but never equal.5

Framed by the window, itself perhaps a quotation of the threshold on which this new movement outwards against the inward pull of the castle has turned, the fixed skull plays out Bluebeard’s binary enclosure as it fixes him in the same “dead” stare in which Bluebeard fixes his wives. This expression is the more remarkable since the Bluebeard character no longer has power over the heroine after her trick with the egg: this act appears to be a purely interpretive expression of Bluebeard’s projection of his own gaze. The heroine meanwhile occupies a space outside this reductive, fixed parenthesis between Bluebeard’s vision which operates as a simulacrum (making the illusion of sameness) and the simulacrum which reflects this vision back to him. He actually can no longer “see” her at all, since he does not recognize her in disguise as they pass outside the castle. Between the pristine egg (which has no “tale” to tell since it is unstained) and the blank skull, two signs are set to re-mark the nature of Bluebeard’s encrypting *mise en abyme*, now emptied of its encrypting rhetoric.

Divested of their original presupposing ciphers, they now have no power except over Bluebeard himself, who is “bracketed” by them unwittingly. But they are also a pronouncement of the innate value of such signs: the signs that have been set by

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Bluebeard to mask the empty crypt are stripped of their masking traces and revealed as the blank voids they are at core. To quote them this way reveals not simply that they no longer have power over anyone but Bluebeard, but also that they do not have signifying value for anyone but him. Their quotation in the form of palimpsests, adopting and adapting the *mise en abyme*, is a dialogic critique.

This dialogic quotation is primarily imagistic in “Fitcher’s Bird,” reflecting the eidetic and anti-narrative principles of Bluebeard’s plot back to him. In one Nova Scotian variant of Perrault’s “La Barbe Bleue,” called “Le Gros cheval blanc,” two sisters are reincarnated by the youngest and sent home one a day in a basket, hidden by straw, on the back of their abductor the white horse. Having assured herself that the horse will take another basket, the third sister makes a “doll” or “statue” of herself to stand in for her at the butter churn. Only after she is safely home with her mother and sisters does the horse realize his error of perception.6

In “The Robber Bridegroom” and in “Mr Fox,” however, this use of “uncanny likeness” against Bluebeard is done through tale-telling where the heroine quotes Bluebeard’s plot by framing it in her own context as a fiction, notably a dream “vision.” Two effects are thereby created. The groom’s new efforts to suppress the story are prompted, foregrounding the attempts of his plot to end the narrative of others, and thus of otherness, in closure. But in his attempts to deny the story by negating the tale she is telling, he is denying his own story. That he is prompted to do so demonstrates his awareness of the exigencies of context in which this retelling

6Paul Delarue, “Les contes merveilleux de Perrault et la tradition populaire (suite) II. Barbe-Bleue,” 350. Delarue cites the variant, collected in 1946, of which the relevant excerpt follows: “elle a fait une grand-catin de hardes, une sorte d’epure-corneilles, pour faire comme si c’était elle qui brassait le beurre; elle l’a mise sur la chaise pour faire accroire qu’elle était encore là.” Delarue notes “catin de hardes” as “poupée de chiffons” [rag doll]. Later, the doll-image is referred to as “cette sorte d’estanteux,” which Delarue notes as “[a sort of] statue.”
occurs, which is specifically the context of otherness that he would suppress. The vision is recounted at the wedding feast: in other words, in the presence of the tale-telling community. The fact that the groom tries to deny his story indicates his responsiveness to the audience whose values are being brought to bear on his plot. These efforts fail to prevent the narrative from continuing to its conclusion, which is another form of the quotation reinvested with critical comment. The heroine of both these tales ends the narrative recitation or denunciation with the revelation of the severed hand or finger which she brought with her from the groom’s house. Here, then, is the reproduction of the end of the story: by ending her tale with this visual proof she is quoting the anti-narrative principle of the groom’s plot. The hand (or finger from a hand) signifies the whole woman from whom it was severed, and the revelation of a single hand confirms the entirety of the would-be victim’s story as well as the serial repetition of the plot. As in “Fitcher’s Bird,” the methods and construction of the groom’s “artistry” are exposed. And as in “Fitcher’s Bird” again, the commentary that engages with Bluebeard’s plot is metafictive and dialogic.

As this discussion aims to show, the type and use of the mise en abyme in Bluebeard narratives may signal either Bluebeard’s monologic encryption or the strategies of adopting and adapting the mise en abyme for the heroine’s (and feminist intertextuality’s) revisionist purposes. This chapter continues in two further sections. The first section examines several examples of representations of Bluebeard as an artist and the monologism of his artistic, mortifying spectacle and use of the mise en abyme. These fictions all feature inward movement towards the thematic or stylistic core of the work. The forms of the artistic “mirror” in and of the text are therefore mirrors invested with the figurative “mortifying” terms of Bluebeard’s vision rather than a subversive questioning of its nature and the means of its projection. Bluebeard is frequently portrayed as a visual artist, his art depicting death-artistry. The assimilative, uncanny reflexivity will first be considered by recourse to two films entitled Bluebeard,
in order that the visual nature of the examples may serve in the fictions to follow.

"Bluebeard" is a photographer in Edward Dmytryk's film Bluebeard (1972), and a painter and puppeteer in Edgar Ulmer's film of the same title (1945). In John Fowles' The Collector, he is also a photographer, a butterfly collector and kidnapper-murderer (as in The Silence of the Lambs, by Thomas Harrison, analysis of which will supplement that of Fowles' novel below).

Photography is an apt artistic medium for Bluebeard. In his analysis of Michel Tournier's use of the photographer as a character, David Bevan draws in associations of Barthesian "death-coded" photography, a voracious appropriation of the subject. Bevan relates this death-artistry tangentially to Bluebeard: "It is not surprising, therefore, that its equally enigmatic practitioner-ogre, alchemist and high-priest—appears in Tournier to be as menacing and yet as, dare I say, 'charming' to his or her prospective victims ... as Bluebeard himself!" (70-71). Bluebeard's photography is often represented as a pornographic collection. The parallel with his collection of women is clear: as you have seen, so you will become.

The visual and physical mise en abyme gives way to the dramatic and metafictive structures of encryption in Peter Ackroyd's novel Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem. Kurt Vonnegut's novel Bluebeard also features a painter. Discussion of this novel will form a hinge between this section and that to follow, as the novel ends with a turning away from these types, literally, with a painting entitled "Now It's the Women's Turn," and described as a "Renaissance."

Accordingly, the final (third) section of this chapter looks at dialogic use of the mise en abyme as the creation of a dialogic "third position." Against the juxtapositional foil of discussion for the monologic mise en abyme, the feminist intertextual renegotiation of this representational impulse in literal, and both visually and narratively figurative terms will be considered through readings of Angela Carter's The Magic Toyshop, Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills, and a second novel by Carter...
employing a different strategy to similar effect, *Nights at the Circus.* In these works, the heroine has escaped with knowledge of the *mise en abyme,* with its secrets and its power, and uses it from without as a form of "double-voicing." In *The Magic Toyshop,* the encrypting artistry of Bluebeard (Uncle Philip Flower), the puppeteer of people, is analyzed from within the "castle" (toyshop) by the young protagonist, Melanie. In *Linden Hills,* the double movement is pronounced as the *mise en abyme* is traced from without and within simultaneously, illustrating the liberatory force of the convergence of these movements for the heroine Willa Nefe. Finally, in *Nights at the Circus,* the dialogism is performative. The novel features many quotations of Bluebeard's artistic *mise en abyme,* but from a critical position, and the main protagonist, Fevers, is a thematized correlative for the stylistic surplus of magic realism which threatens throughout to explode all containing structures, including that of imposed narrative. These works read the *mise en abyme* as a dialogic text rather than as a representation of the "last word" or anti-narrative icon. Rather than replicating the emblematic process and inwardly-oriented patterning of fictions depicting the monologic *mise en abyme* at work, these works instead open the trope to dialogic hermeneutics and illustrate a movement of surfaced from deep encoding structures to productive interplays of reflections on (and of) the surface grammar. The "double-voicing" characterized here as quotation and criticism is demonstrable in these fictions, and this chapter concludes with a reassessment of the presuppositional "projection problem" of intertextuality.

II

The emblematic nature of Bluebeard's own use of the *mise en abyme* is clear in filmic examples which portray the *mise en abyme* as a visual effect framed within a visual medium. Prefatory to considering the transgeneric (and ekphrastic) use of the *mise en abyme* in Bluebeard literary recastings, a brief consideration of two films entitled *Bluebeard* is useful. In Edgar Ulmer's *Bluebeard,* John Carradine's Bluebeard
figure, Gaston Morrell, creates a mise en abyme of two forms. Gaston Morrell is a Parisian street puppeteer who makes the puppets he then controls (or, in the terms of the godgame, plays out). The play-within-a-play effect derives from this activity as he performs Faust (and "naturally" takes the part of Mephistopheles). This puppet show in turn lures his female audience and potential victims. Thus Lucille is drawn to Bluebeard and her sister later recognizes him from this context, drawing the analogy: "'Lucille's puppeteer!'" (Monk 282). It is, however, in the actual crafting of the puppets that the notion of killing into art is manifested, as Bluebeard himself admits: "Every time I painted again, I painted Jeanette. I turned to making puppets, because I could make them of wood. Because when they became Jeanette, I could take out my fury on them" (Monk 283-84). The crafting of puppets is merely another figure for killing women into art, so that in a sense Bluebeard dramatizes a representational oscillation between women as works of art (painted, murdered, remade as puppets) and the women who model for these only to become them. The hunt for the killer is conducted with the painting of one model-victim as courtroom evidence: the painter who "executed this canvas" is the Bluebeard the police are seeking. Bluebeard must be traced across the rooftops of Paris, but also through his artistic style and the encodings of his art.

In Edward Dmytryk's film Bluebeard, Richard Burton's "Bluebeard" (Baron Kurt von Sepper) is a photographer, and the pornographic elements of the mise en

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7Recalling Louisa May Alcott's A Modern Mephistopheles: the terms of the godgame are very clear in this intertextual engagement. Further, the play within a play mise en abyme has Hamlet as its famous example, and Carradine's Bluebeard is depicted in the analysis in Hollywood Cauldron as "Carradine's Hamlet" (Monk 272). The description of Ulmer's film is interspersed with quotations from Shakespeare's play (and film stills are complemented by a photograph of Carradine as Hamlet). Perhaps ironically, these literary figures meet in Paul Fort's poem, Barbe-Bleue, Jeanne d'Arc et mes Amours, as Gilles de Rais, Dante, Hamlet and Faust are damned souls holding a vigil in the fourth song of Fort's ballad (I am indebted to Odio for her thesis chapter on Fort's poem).
abyrne are more pronounced here. But again, the visual mise en abyme takes several forms, all of which connect the artistic effect produced with the serial murder of his wives. The film opens with images of intricately wrought black-line tracings of complex figures on a blood-red ground. These, after lengthy depiction of them as indistinct patternings, turn out to be the traced outlines of a photographed face of a woman, doubled symmetrically from the center as a mirror image and then retraced so extensively as to become finely embedded within the resulting baroque pattern. The face can be traced within the work with difficulty: it is so infrastructurally encoded that the image is on harmless public display in von Sepper’s castle/mansion. Further, the photographic cell forming the artistic ground (blood red in the darkroom) is opaquely transparent and forms a shadowy window of surveillance through which the Baron (or, at times, his mute housekeeper) is able to watch the new wife looking uncomprehendingly at the image, aware of its uncanniness, but not of the encoded distortional mirroring producing this effect. The camera’s portrayal of von Sepper’s shadowed face behind the window-mirror-image reveals the mise en abyme of Bluebeard’s vision. Further, the camera filming the photograph through which the photographer may be seen peering back as through his own camera creates the infinitely reflexive mise en abyme as with two mirrors set in mutual reflection. Finally, von Sepper’s murder of women into works creates the embedded encoding so effectively that Dmytryk’s film metonymically re-presents the serial act through a seemingly autonomous replication of these images on the wall around a central clock. The women modelling (for) the images are no longer present in this process.

Through the perspective of the last wife, Annie, tracing the figures through Bluebeard’s ground(s), the secret chamber is finally depicted. The entrance is through a life-sized hunting portrait of Bluebeard (the portrait not only conceals the entrance but the ring on the painted figure’s hand “encodes” the means of passage), and this reveals a room that is a freezer. The baron’s wives are literally frozen images doubly captured
within this room. The act of opening the door triggers a hidden camera to photograph the evidence of transgression; first the image is formed, then the women are formed into these images. The Baron takes Annie into the darkroom to show her the photograph of herself which he has developed: the moment recalls the uncanny mirror or projection-as-reflection in “Captain Murderer.” Again the film’s representation of this image is redoubled, by virtue of Annie’s previous discovery of a room filled with headless dressmaker’s mannequins (whose clothes she and her housegirl assume, modelling themselves on these images) from whom these frozen women are indistinguishable. John Fowles’ characterization of his “collector,” Frederick Clegg, a pornographically-inclined photographer, also draws on these elements of the gaze.

The mise en abyme acquires its iconic dimension in its narrative framing. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the end of the third Book of Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene offers the earliest recorded use of what has (since?) become an element of the tale “Mr Fox.” The ekphrastic emblem (Gloriana on Arthur’s shield) assumes its poetic form in the Book’s proem as the poet laments the imperfections of narrative portraiture in this superlative case and brings the mirror into the text:

But liuing art may not least part expresse,
Nor life-resembling pencill it can paint,
All were it Zeuxis or Praxiteles:
His daedale hand would faile, and greatly faint,
And her perfections with his error taint:
Ne Poets wit, that passeth Painter farre
In picturing the parts of beautie daint,
So hard a workmanship adventure darre,
For fear through want of words her excellence to marre.

(3, proem, 2).
Chastity requires multiple “mirrors” to see herself portrayed (3, poem, 5, line 6); Britomart is questing for Artegall “Whose image she had seen in Venus looking glass” (3, 1, 8, line 9) fashioned by Merlin and “Like to the world it selfe.” (3, 1, 19, line 9).

At the end of Book three, Britomart must rescue Amoret from the vile enchanter Busyrane who has imprisoned her in his castle. In the protracted and difficult process of reaching the couple in an “inner roome” (3, 12, 26, 9), Britomart is witness to Cupid’s masque, an embedded play of theatrical as well as allegorical conventions, ritually parading Amoret’s torture. Spenser’s poem describes Busyrane’s play which takes place in silence and is hence a text of appearances which Britomart must read and interpret: this is the sequel to her reading of the series, “Be bold…” The spectacle takes place “as on the ready flore / Of some Theatre” (3, 12, 3, 5-6), with characters in garments “fit for tragicke Stage” (line 9). A figure begins by “beckning with his hand, / In signe of silence, as to heare a play (3, 12, 4, 3-4; my emphases). The characters’s names are “cyphered” on the garments (3, 12, 4, 9). When Britomart finally comes upon Busyrane (by tracing the masque to its source, “whence it came” [3, 12, 26, 9]) he is depicted depicting: “Figuring straunge characters of his art, / With living bloud he those characters writ” (3, 12, 31, 2-3). The mise en abyme is a series of encoding structures traced by Britomart to their generative source, or author.

In Art of Darkness, Anne Williams reads this particular episode as a Gothic precursor and notes its patriarchal symbolism as well as its connections to the Bluebeard story:

Spenser’s villain appears to find an even more explicit and sinister pleasure in such manipulation than does Bluebeard—he has in fact elevated it into an art. He quite literally “makes a spectacle”—a play, a masque—of his power and Amoret’s suffering. Busyrane’s “dark spells” and magic writing even more
explicitly than Bluebeard's spoken word imply male cultural authority to break
the female spirit. (Williams 112)

As evident from this quotation, Williams does not specifically read the spectacle
embedded within the Bluebeard fairy tale as a representational analogue to Bluebeard's
spoken word. She does, however, draw attention to the importance of Britomart and
Bluebeard's wife as witness: "Like the House of Bluebeard, the House of Busyrane is
engineered around a desire to blame the female who has some will of her own and
refuses to give it up, and to horrify the female (Britomart or Bluebeard's wife) with
this spectacle of superior strength" (114).

These various implications of Bluebeard's monologic structuring and staging
of the mise en abyme combine disturbingly in John Fowles' novel The Collector. Far
from seeing himself as Busyrane's magus, the Bluebeard-like "collector" Frederick
(“Ferdinand”) Clegg portrays himself as the puppet of fate as he proceeds, “against
[his] will almost” (17) to capture a live "specimen" in Miranda, a young woman with
whom he is obsessed. The thematic mise en abyme is achieved when Clegg imprisons
Miranda in his renovated basement in the Surrey countryside: Miranda calls it a "crypt-
room" (117) and “little crypt” (125). Miranda is kept here for months as Clegg
flounders in the shortfall between his desires and the reality he has created, but refuses
to release her. This complex live burial in Clegg's house, a layered "killing jar" of a
house and an outer as well as inner cellar chamber, continues through Clegg's attempts
to fix her in a death-in-life: "I am one in a row of specimens. It's when I try to flutter
out of line that he hates me. I'm meant to be dead, pinned, always the same, always
beautiful. ... He wants me living-but-dead" (203). Miranda ultimately dies of
pneumonia and is buried in the garden: Clegg has since begun watching her

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8Williams further notes that the masque "as 'spectacle' is a means of punishment and
control" (112).
replacement, planning the replication of his monologic vision. The novel revolves around the contradictions which ensnare both "Caliban" and Miranda regarding art and life. Clegg collects butterflies, killing beauty in order to preserve and own it (his private "display" cases are for his eyes only): Miranda calls them her "fellow-victims" (54, 127). The camera he buys is intended to "take butterflies living" and becomes a tool and extension of his imprisoning gaze: "She looked a real picture lying there ... I got the old camera and took some photos" (87). The principle of the collector is, as Miranda (an art student) expresses it, "anti-life, anti-art, anti-everything" (123), and this is "the great dead thing" in Clegg (161). The projection of this principle is artistic murder. Clegg's pornographic photographs of Miranda have her gagged and "defaced" if not "decapitated," but Clegg sees these photographs as an expression of his artistry, noting their "interesting motif" (110). Miranda comments on the distortional effect his vision reflects through the photography which is supposed to reflect as well as replicate her: "... he gets me in focus, and that's all. No imagination. It's weird. Uncanny" (139, my emphasis). Miranda reflects this artistic vision, participating in her own objectification of Clegg as she draws him, returning the "compliment" (58) of perceiving him as an object, "not as a person." The encryption that is at the absent heart of the novel encodes the forms of representation it engenders.

Art is used as the place beyond language, standing-in as the "unutterable" contact zone, between these two characters. Miranda records her own inability to express her vision in language:

When you use words. The gaps. The way Caliban sits .... I can draw it. I can draw his face and his expressions, but words are all so used, they've been used about so many other things and people. I write "he smiled." What does that mean? ...

Words are so crude, so terribly primitive compared to drawing, painting, sculpture. ... Like a messy daub. (149-50)
In a situation where dialogue is negated by the power differential that cancels Miranda as a speaking subject and a subjectivity in process ("I felt unreal, as if it was a play and I couldn’t remember who i was in it" [148]), art is the medium by which each character attempts to represent their vision of the other. In these terms, narrative simply traces and thereby records these attempts to fix and delineate the other. In replicating this vision, narrative simply compounds the process of encryption. Miranda is first fixed in Clegg’s capturing and relentless, covetous gaze, and this is literally recorded in Clegg’s diary of entomological observations. Once imprisoned by the collector, Miranda is also captured and framed by The Collector, as the novel’s tripartite structure serves to enclose her prison diary (which “lives under the mattress” in her cell [150])9; when Clegg records his discovery of Miranda’s text after her death, the “frame” his record of the discovery provides retroactively re-encrypts the text within Clegg’s own gaze (he has now read the innermost, private text previously withheld from him, but which he has also authored in scripting the conditions for its existence as well as much of his nature). Further, Miranda’s first-person speech is reported within (and rendered by) Clegg’s narration marked out (framed again) by quotation marks which his own first-person reported speech does not have. Conversations recorded in turn by Miranda (notably in play-script style, without quotation marks) become representations, repetitions of those already written in Clegg’s hand, and Miranda is at a third remove from her own speech. Miranda’s speech is never uttered directly because it is doubly traced by narrative: she is an encrypted silence whose rhetorical markers

9In “Narrative Voice and Focalization: The Presentation of the Different Selves in John Fowles’ The Collector,” Dominique Costa also notes that the form of this novel mirrors the content (114). Costa analyzes the different styles of the two autodiegetic narratives in order to argue that the pair “misread” each other throughout; further, Miranda’s diary is a means to self-discovery while Clegg’s record is a self-justification. In contrast, while the article “John Fowles’ Variations in The Collector” further analyzes the contrapuntal form and the characterization that results from this paired misreading, Perry Nodelman argues there against standard critical belief in Miranda’s development.
circumscribe absence seeking to fill itself: she writes to prove to herself that she still exists. Miranda’s diary is buried by Clegg just as she is buried by Clegg, in an attic box, sealed and not to be reopened in his lifetime. The return to Clegg’s voice in the novel’s third section removes the hope of establishing a third position, a place “outside.” Clegg creates a Bluebeard’s castle of a world-view. “His fairy story” (188), an inwardly projected vision which Miranda cannot escape and which holds the two fixed: “He doesn’t believe in any other world but the one he lives in and sees. He’s the one in prison; in his own hateful narrow present world” (212). As Sherrill Grace says, both for Miranda and for the novel’s reader, “there can be no escape, only repetition”:

Through its carefully formulated tripartite structure and its first-person narrative, Fowles ensnares his unsuspecting readers much as Frederick Clegg traps his victim, Miranda Grey. (“Courting Bluebeard” 254)

And we have been allowed to open the doors of Fowles’s text until we come face to face, in the small present space of the novel’s last page, with the Bluebeard who lives there. From this innermost room of obsession there can be no escape, only repetition. (255-56)

As Clegg’s monologic vision asserts only its encrypting power, Fowles’ novel similarly makes “metonymic use of Miranda” (Grace 256) for his readers, the “living beings trapped in the castle of his art” (257). The novel’s structure and patterning are indomitable.

A useful intersection may be noted between The Collector and Thomas Harris’ later novel The Silence of the Lambs (1988).10 The serial murderer Jame [sic] Gumb has inherited a house with a basement “maze” (137, 203) that is a literal labyrinth of crypts and an oubliette, in which he rears exotic butterflies, has chambers of tableaux

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made of corpses, and keeps the women he kidnapsh in order to “harvest” their hides for his own metamorphosis. He is making “a girl suit out of real girls” (163, 320).11 The bodies of young women are found flayed, with cocoons containing the Death’s-head moth in their throats (Acherontia styx [261] bears the image of a human skull resting on pelvis bones on its back).12 Clarice Starling, a neophyte FBI agent working with behavioural scientist Jack Crawford is tracing Gumb by means of another serial murderer in captivity: the psychiatrist Dr. Hannibal Lecter. Lecter draws Clarice’s attention to the “first principles” in Gumb’s motivation: he covets. “It’s his nature to covet. How do we begin to covet, Clarice? Do we seek out things to covet? ... No, precisely so. We begin by coveting what we see every day”” (227; also 296, 315).

Jame Gumb has progressed beyond Frederick Clegg, however: his basement already contains a number of rooms containing series of “tableaux” (354, 360) he has made with corpses, the thresholds of these “chambers” sprinkled with lime. Gumb clearly sees himself as an artist and able to harness a butterfly’s capacity for self-metamorphosis. In the present analysis of the mise en abyme, however, the connection that Hannibal Lecter draws for Clarice with regard to the “imago” butterflies (like Clegg’s) is primary:

“‘It’s a term from the dead religion of psychoanalysis. An imago is an image of the parent buried in the unconscious from infancy and bound with infantile

11This grisly detail may be another attributable to Ed Gein, the inspiration for Psycho and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Among the horrors of his house was found “a skin-vest, complete with breasts” (see Harold Schechter’s article, “The Bloody Chamber: Terror Films, Fairy Tales, and Taboo” 75).

12One of the novel’s two epigrams is a quotation from John Donne: “Need I look upon a death’s head in a ring, that have one in my head?” from “Devotions.” A second quotation in the novel from an ee cumming’s poem and applied to Gumb (alias “Buffalo Bill” and “Mr. Hide”) may complement: “how do you like your blueeyed boy Mister Death” (71): another serial murderer, Gumb is nevertheless associated as an embodiment of Death itself, as is Bluebeard.
 affect. The word comes from the wax portrait busts of their ancestors the ancient Romans carried in funeral processions.” (163)

The imago then signifies a burial of or in memory (and the black irony of the basement “oubliette” in which his victims are kept is unmistakeable) and simultaneously an icon associated with death. At one point in her article on Angela Carter’s use of the uncanny, Robyn Ferrell mentions not the image in the mirror, but “the imago in the mirror” (Ferrell 140) that is the repressed subject, and this is an apt encapsulation of “Bluebeard’s” use of encryption as reflection. It is also emblematic of the destructive way in which “metamorphosis” or change is viewed in Bluebeard’s story.

Peter Ackroyd’s novel, Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem, imposes narrative overdetermination to extremes. But where this level of structuration evokes self-reflexivity in its use of intratextual leitmotif, intertextual and auto-intertextual quotation, these self-reflexive forms mark their use as tokens. The self-reflexivity they may generate never gets beyond its nascent stage. Ultimately, the limitless difference signified in the novel’s many voices is subsumed by an inclusive system of representation and of repetition.

The crypt at the center of Ackroyd’s novel, the death whose non-existence and deferral engenders the play of replicating simulacra to fill the vortex it creates, is the “golem” and its self-originating, self-perpetuating status as folklore or legend. The golem is a variously represented figure for death itself, which evades its own figuration by being a shape-shifter, and the creation of those whom it then proceeds to terrorize. The golem then embodies in its protean form(lessness) the paradox of infinite variety subjected to a totalizing framework circumscribing emptiness. Its manifestation, only finding fixed form in the proper noun “golem,” is lent to emblematic use as a rhetorical place-holder, an empty signifier able to function as a generator of fellow signs, and essential absence monstrously able to generate the replications able to serve as its provisional incarnation: “cabbalists believe that the very sound or letters of a word can
themselves become signs of its spiritual meaning. So in the intonation of ‘golem’ the public may have divined the horror of an artificial life and a form without a spirit—the cadence and inflection of the word echoing and mocking ‘soul’” (Ackroyd 88). The golem is the mark, trace, creator and creation of the protean representational mise en abyme in Ackroyd’s novel.

The (literally) gothic horror of this novel is that the golem as the creation of a multitude creates its replications which then invoke the golem as their form, as their own “medieval counterpart” (4, my emphasis). The golem creates its own uncanny mirroring. The horror emanates from the idea that death cites intertextuality as its origin: “I am not committing murders. I am invoking a legend, and anything will be forgiven me as long as I remain faithful to my role” (126). One of the novel’s counterparts for the golem is Dan Leno (whose initials are mirrored in the title by the name of the L[imehouse] G[olem]). The actor, mimic and contortionist star of London’s music halls embodies and reflects the macrocosm of his audience of Londoners, as the man with “a Million Faces” (51), and even “The Universal Man” (67). Dan Leno is recognizable as the essence of protean representation, and is “uncanny,” or defamiliarized, to the policeman seeking to recognize the man at home, without the stage backdrop of London to foreground him as a persona. As the golem is a creation and hence a representational “emblem for the city” of London (88), Dan Leno is a similar “vivid identification” for plurality, and both in Ackroyd’s historical fiction are to be found “within the annals of London’s past” (4). The golem appears in newspaper reports (themselves describing accompanying illustrations), the illuminated manuscript describing the golem and page-marked with the blood of one of the victims, the word itself traced in the blood of another victim, and the varied reported “sightings” of the figure by frightened Londoners. One form of representation of the golem is as Bluebeard.
The Bluebeard references in Ackroyd's novel mirror the type of intertextuality characteristic of Ackroyd's works. Solomon Weil (friend of the character Karl Marx, for whom he is initially mistaken by his murderer, making Weil an unfortunate stand-in for the absent Marx) has playbills among his scholarly books, featuring a photograph of Dan Leno dressed as "Sister Anne" in Bluebeard (67). Dan Leno later reflects that "It was not enough to dress as Sister Anne or Mother Goose; it was necessary to become them" (194) making the playbill in fact a representation of an embodiment. Dan Leno is later portrayed as Sister Anne in the pantomime of Bluebeard (with the murderer among the audience recording the performance in a diary) but, like the golem, "Bluey" is not himself delineated although this stage version is nevertheless described in some detail (168-70). Two gentlemen in the foyer remark (again, overheard by the murderer) that the contemporary murders resemble the story: "comparing the Limehouse Golem with Bluebeard himself" (166). Later, the analogy is drawn inversely by the prosecutor in the trial of Elizabeth Cree, deriding the notion that her allegedly murdered husband could be "some Bluebeard" or, "to use a modern analogy, some kind of Limehouse Golem" (189). Finally, though, in a gruesome inversion of the analogy, the "golem" stages the "play" that is the murder of the entire Gerrard family, and produces the story's script from one of the soon-to-be victims who calls downstairs to a murdered woman: "Annie? Are you down below, Annie?" (161). This inverts the traditional location of Sister Anne in the tower window keeping watch, but makes of the victim "the woman who couldn't see anyone coming" and, in the pantomime opposite "Bluey," Annie is the "woman who knows" (what the rest of the family does not). The Bluebeard pantomime, far from being a "diversion" from the horror (159) is simply another manifestation of it. The irony of the comment, "How much more charming to see Bluebeard kill twenty women in his chamber than to think of it being performed upon the streets!" (159) is refracted again as it is written by the self-confessed murderer who does indeed see murder as performance and as art.
A similar inversion of irony (a process like Dan Leno’s “backwalking,” entering and exiting at the same time, 190) informs the intertextual use and replication of Thomas De Quincey’s satirical essay, “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” (1839). This essay and, notably, its “Supplement” and a second supplement entitled “Three Memorable Murders,” are the prompt-books for the golem’s performance-as-reenactment in 1880. De Quincey’s work derives from John Williams’ 1812 murder of two families in Limehouse: the Marr family and, twelve days later, the Williamson. Ackroyd’s murderer does use De Quincey’s work and Williams’ history, researching the murder of the Gerrard family now resident in the Ratcliffe Highway home formerly inhabited by the Marris. De Quincey’s narrator, speaking for the “Society of Connoisseurs in Murder” posits murder as a genre with aesthetic and stylistic criteria of its own and independent of its “moral handle” (De Quincey, “On Murder” 533), and thus susceptible to comparison in a “great gallery,” to “profitable criticism” (537), and also to plagiarism (564). John Williams, in these terms, is an artist and his first mass murder a “début” (575). Williams created a work (and then duplicated it) whose “mute traces” (636) could be “read” by the police and traced, in turn, by De Quincey, whose own work is generative of Ackroyd’s novel which ascribes De Quincey’s influence widely among his characters, fictional and historical.

The character George Gissing is portrayed in the British Museum Reading Room, reading his own new article in the Pall Mall Review entitled “Romanticism and Crime” in which he recapitulates and analyzes the murders and De Quincey’s ambivalence of treatment, pointing out a Romanticization of Williams as the genius artist even as the satire is invoked to subvert this characterization. Gissing attributes to the event the power of literary and performative influence (on Dickens and Wainewright respectively). The murderer also traces Ratcliffe Highway in person and in a diary, quoting Williams’ work unironically as “great performance.” The reenactment is a conscious expression of design: “They were about to become patterns
of eternity, and in their own wounds reflect the inflictions of recurrent time" (160). The influence of Williams' crime is attributed further to Dorian Gray (164). Reading by the light of these "mute traces," and reading there the ritual and theatricality that points to the reenactment's self-reflexivity as aesthetic expression, the police hunt for the murderer follows the trace of De Quincey's circulating essay, "On Murder." Dan Leno has a copy of De Quincey's work open at this essay when the police arrive to question him, but he has been reading of Grimaldi and pantomime. This latter essay, "Laugh, Scream and Speech," is also read by the murderer who overlays the two texts, reading the carnivalesque theory through associations derived from murder considered as art: "What a wonderful phrase that was—crimes that delight us—and of course it quite explained all the popular interest in my own little dramas on the streets of London" (191, author's emphasis). But another work of Thomas De Quincey is also read, in Ackroyd's novel, by Karl Marx, and the revelation that Elizabeth Cree has also read his essay on murder at the Reading Room is critical.

Elizabeth Cree, former actress of the halls alongside Dan Leno, is being tried for the murder by poison of her respectable husband, John Cree. Excerpts from her trial transcripts interleave the narrative, itself composed of interleaved excerpts from the diary of John Cree, Elizabeth's first-person narrative autobiography, and various other

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13 This is a staple theme in Ackroyd's works, which bring different periods together in one work using strong patterning structures and leitmotifs to illustrate historical recurrence. Further, this novel (as others in Ackroyd's oeuvre) brings together auto-intertextually characters and references to Ackroyd's other works, in the presence of Dickens and Oscar Wilde, the reference to Death of Chatterton (echoing the subject of the 1856 painting of Chatterton by Henry Wallis and modelled by George Meredith, simply called Chatterton) as a work (164), the use of Last Testament in a title (279, recalling Ackroyd's The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde), as well as The Great Fire of London (184). Ackroyd as novelist plants a self-reflexive gesture through Gissing as a character, reflecting on the music hall subject as unbecoming a serious novelist (137): Ackroyd is of course writing on the music hall theme with the novel.
points of view (those of George Gissing, Solomon Weil, Karl Marx). While Elizabeth is being tried by the novel’s reader who is attempting to determine the veracity of the charge, suspicion of sufficient motive is provided and comprises a substitute or standing for the revelatory reading which suggests the reverse to be the case. The diary of John Cree is the narrative of the murderer, or Limehouse Golem. The novel’s resolution, however, contains a confession by Elizabeth in which she claims to have written the diary herself in order to deflect guilt to him (273); she poisons him when he discovers and threatens to reveal her secret.

Elizabeth Cree is thus another incarnation of the golem (whose legend she “invokes” with the appropriated voice of John Cree) as shape-shifter. Of particular importance then is the pantomime (traditionally cross-dressed) and the music hall where gender is performance (the music hall recalling perhaps Barthes’ “staged plural” subjectivity). Dan Leno is billed as a “screamer”: a talented female impersonator. His cast-off costume is found on the body of Alice Stanton, a prostitute, leading the police reading to question whether Dan Leno is being killed through “surrogates” (201).

Elizabeth Cree also begins her stage career performing a female role that is the fictional progeny of a stage character (a role begot from a role) as “Little Victor’s Daughter.” After a while, however, she creates another role from this one: “Little Victor’s Daughter’s Older Brother” (abbreviated to “the Older Brother,” erasing its presupposed origins en route). She also takes “him” out at night, to show him “the other world” (153) of the streets, performing him on the public stage of Limehouse. This “travesti” is another form of representational mise en abyme in Ackroyd’s novel since the novel’s central mystery (who is the Limehouse Golem? Is it John Cree, and did Elizabeth kill him in turn?) is situated in this performance of gender. Recalling the central, overdetermined mystery Barthes dissects with his own performance (on Balzac’s story “Sarrasine”) in S/Z, where the “crypt” and encryption is formed by the body of the castrato, much of this novel’s overdetermined patterning also derives from the
costumes and performances which encrypt this central knowledge. Elizabeth Cree performs the golem, the "scourge of God," and performs her husband for the reader (the diary is a sustained work en travesti), just as she performs the Older Brother. In this supreme performance, the police fail to read her traces, and Dan Leno steps in to "impersonate" the role of the police in order to question a survivor of the golem’s "play" and approximate the profile she recalls. Conforming (contorting) himself to the profile the survivor renders, ("Like this?" "That is closer" [208]), Leno attempts to trace the embodiment of the golem, and so reflects the travesti: he is a man performing a woman performing a man.

The performance becomes yet more intricate after Elizabeth’s execution. The play John Cree began writing in order to star his actress wife Elizabeth is completed by Elizabeth herself (her first appropriation of "John Cree” as a role) and is called Misery Junction. Elizabeth does perform the lead female role, Catherine Dove, on the stage. After her death, though, Elizabeth’s reworked script is again reworked by the playhouse owner Gertie Latimer, and reappears as The Crees of Misery Junction in which, naturally, Elizabeth “herself” is the lead female role. The role is played by Aveline Mortimer (Elizabeth’s actress-maid) who is accidentally hanged at the outset of the performance when the deus ex machina-style contraption proves another scourge of God. The hanging, mirroring at the end of the novel Elizabeth’s actual hanging at the novel’s outset, is staged in front of an audience who does not realize it is not a performance (itself recalling Elizabeth’s accidental near-strangulation of Leno earlier on stage). The play is then rescued by Dan Leno “himself,” that is, Leno playing Aveline playing Elizabeth, or female impersonator playing the male impersonator, as above. The play is a further displacement of performative layers generated by—even as they obscure—encryption. The play is dismissed by critics as "pantomimic” and ‘unreal” (280); yet the pantomime has already been described as an emblem for the “ritual humiliation of women” (171) and the judge in Elizabeth’s trial as resembling
"Pantaloone in the pantomime" (209). Elizabeth Cree's own hanging is a formerly public spectacle made private, but nevertheless staged by the novel (and restaged through Aveline Mortimer), and her dress is taken to the governor who dons it, signifying his transvesticism but also the staged replication of Elizabeth, since to dress as her is to become if not her, then another surrogate.14

A final, interrelated and interrelational emblem for the novel's plurality held, provisionally, under a title or proper name, is intertextuality: in the form of the British Museum Reading Room, itself an emblem for a cosmic library-as-Babel, and having an analogue in Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine. George Gissing is in the Reading Room tracing Babbage's vision of London's humanity and the Engine which he sees by turns as an "[extraordinary] narrative" (121) and a monstrous technological golem, but certainly an expression of Babbage's vision of Babel:

"Thus considered," he wrote, "what a strange chaos is this wide atmosphere we breathe! Every atom, impressed with good and with ill, retains at once the motion which philosophers and sages have imparted to it, mixed and combined in ten thousand ways with all that is worthless and base. The air itself is one vast library, on whose pages are for ever written all that man has ever said or woman whispered." (116-17)

Gissing later places himself in relation to this "vast library" and "perpetual, infinite London" as holding this "in him" (246). Intertextuality is the infinitely protean creation of individuals, but Elizabeth Cree also reads her inspiration in Thomas De Quincey's

14Reminiscent of Henri de Régnier's symbolist poem, "Le sixième mariage de Barbe-Bleue," in which Bluebeard only kills women in order to obtain their dresses, perfumed with their scent. The first thing the governor does on opening the bag containing the hanged woman's dress is to breathe its odour. (Bluebeard's last wife comes to him naked, instead of clothed, ending the cycle of repetition.) Régnier's poem is discussed at length by Harriet Mowshowitz in her thesis, "Bluebeard and French Literature" (108-21). The poem itself is in Entretiens politiques et littéraires (November, 1892): 221-32.
essay in the Reading Room where all the “participants” of the novel’s “riddle” and “mystery” have come (269). Babel can be put to the service of the golem. In this context, the italicized framing text introducing John Cree’s diary in its first appearance acquires a new dimension:

These extracts are taken from the diary of Mr John Cree of New Cross Villas, South London, now preserved in the Manuscript Department of the British Museum, with the call-mark Add. Ms. 1624/566. (24)

The reader of Ackroyd’s novel is situated in the Reading Room of this Babel as well. In the novel’s spiralling use of mise en abyme and its potential as distortional funhouse mirrors, the “crimes that delight us” are accorded an aesthetic value, where the intertexts are a gallery of murder (and “thus” of comparison, criticism, and plagiarism). The Limehouse murders (leading to Elizabeth’s “house of lime” in a crypt) are an elaborate lime trap for the reader. The murdered are “beautifully slain” (191) and the reader is likewise caught by the interplay of representations in an intricately executed novel.

Forms of representation are at issue in all these works. In The Collector, it is specifically the forms of twentieth-century modern art that are evoked by Miranda’s reflections. Miranda battles her draughtsman style (criticized by her mentor G.P as “photographing” [159]) and her desire “to paint like Berthe Morisot … The essences. Not the things themselves” (131), presumably envisioning the essence of escape in her idea of a garden viewed through a door. Trapped inside Clegg’s photographic gaze and the realism of her desperate situation, Miranda’s own visions evade capture by the deficiency of ekphrastic rendering (“It sounds silly in words. But I see it as something very special” [157]): the essence remains buried. Miranda realizes Clegg’s own (photographic) vision and wavers between perception of his ugly “Calibanity” and a desire to acknowledge an essence that eludes her, “to get to the bottom of him” (149). As Clegg’s vision is paramount, and imprisons Miranda absolutely, the fledgling
Bildungs- and Künstlerroman of metamorphosis are ultimately killed, in the same way that Clegg kills emerging imago butterflies. This struggle between forms of representation in reflexive and metamorphic terms achieves some degree of independent expression in Vonnegut’s Bluebeard, however. Modern art is examined with regard to its position in the struggle over representation, pitting abstract art against photographic realism. In recording such a struggle, Vonnegut’s novel may be read as a “border” text in the context of this analysis.

Rabo Karabekian, a seventy-one year old painter and art collector, began his artistic career apprenticed to a fascist “Bluebeard,” Dan Gregory. Now writing his autobiography in his vast Long Island gallery/mansion, at the prompting of his new acquaintance and “authoritative” (11) house-guest Circe Berman, he is undergoing his second resurrection as “Lazarus” (285) under her tutelage. Karabekian’s description of his career illustrates a palimpsestial process through at least three discernable and distinct phases, each expressed by an artistic work on the same canvas at three different times. The uppermost painting is locked in the potato barn which Circe is forbidden to enter in terms no less strict than Gregory’s prohibition of the Museum of Modern Art to his apprentice: “‘Your loving Papa asked just one thing of you ... “Never go into the Museum of Modern Art”’” (157); “‘I am Bluebeard, and my studio is my forbidden chamber, as far as you’re concerned’” (46, author’s emphasis). By the end of writing his autobiography, however, Karabekian has not only unlocked his barn and the painting in it to Circe, but has opened it to the public and to co-creative dialogue.

The novel Bluebeard describes the opposition of two modes of artistic representation, realism and expressionism, on a dialectical path to a new perspective, or third position outside this binary opposition. Dan Gregory is an illustrator whose works are almost indistinguishable from photographs, and the novel associates his photographic realism with artistic fascism. He is an admirer and advocate of Mussolini (after serving in whose army he is later shot by firing squad) who would, he says,
"burn down the Museum of Modern art and outlaw the word democracy." (132).

Gregory's realism translates what Karabekian's father sees in a camera: "all it caught was dead skin and toenails and hair which people long gone had left behind" (76).

Gregory is described as a brilliant "taxidermist" (82). His house (in fact, a sprawling three interconnected houses) has a Gorgon-head door-knocker on the front door and eight human skulls on one of the mantles. The photographs of his wife, Marilee, in which she is posed and costumed to model for his illustrations, renders her uncannily unrecognizable to Karabekian, who sees them representing "nine different women" (77). However, all of these replications are as captive as she is, and the young apprentice is likewise "incarcerated" (106) in this house on his arrival. Gregory's art uses mimesis as a weapon and repels the spectator, as the objects in his studio (his models) do to Karabekian:

A simple inventory of the weapons and tools and idols and icons and hats and helmets and ship models and airplane models and stuffed animals ... in the masterpiece would be amazing enough. But think of this: there were fifty-two mirrors of every conceivable period and shape, many of them hung in unexpected places at crazy angles, to multiply even the bewildered observer to infinity. (96)

Karabekian's own talent as a "camera" (44) who can "capture the likeness of anything [he could] see" (43, 236) remains his hidden "reserve" when he turns to the new school of Abstract Expressionism, and this is the mise en abyme which prevents these works from being the form of expression he is hoping for in his counterfeit.

Abstract Expressionism is described by one critic of this novel in the following way:

Characterized by very bold uses of color and mass to convey such basic human emotions as joy and sorrow, [Abstract Expressionism] claims as its most significant element the always tentative interrelationship between subject and viewer. Given its intensely psychological nature, its subjective
epistemology, and its existential ethic, Abstract Expressionism proves to be a
powerfully instructive analogue to Vonnegut’s own literary constructions.

(Broer 219n)15

This, however, is not the expression that Karabekian achieves. His deprecatory
comment that soul has eluded his art is not mere modesty: what prevents his “big fields
of color” from being the sheer “beginnings” (236) he aims for is their latent encoding.
In the orange “field” titled “Hungarian Rhapsody,” Karabekian first sketches a
caricature of his friend intended to display the talents he holds in reserve, but this face
remains and reemerges after the demise of the painting, when the Sateen Dura-Luxe
that “degrade[s] over time to a very deadly poison” (38) flakes off the canvas. In
attempting to escape (his) history by painting over it, he has only achieved a
camouflage, just as in the war he served on a camouflage unit comprised of artists.
The seven strips of tape on this orange canvas themselves encode a “secret fantasy”
(202) and are not the “pure abstraction” (256) as which they masquerade. These
represent “secretly” six deer in a glade and the lone hunter who has them in his sights
(256). The mise en abyme of the soul in the body, or “meat,” is encoded in his
painting. And, like Gregory’s art which is antagonistic to the viewer because of the
absoluteness of the mimetic vision, these Abstract Expressionist works are professed
to be “about nothing but themselves” (229), with titles that are “‘meant to be
uncommunicative’” (35). The works produce responses like the following, from
Karabekian’s cook: “‘They just don’t mean anything to me … I’m sure that’s because
I’m uneducated. Maybe if I went to college, I would finally realize how wonderful
they are’” (127). Karabekian has recast the same image he painted of Gregory’s studio

15Part of this quotation is also quoted by both David Rampton in “Into the Secret Chamber:
Art and the Artist in Kurt Vonnegut’s Bluebeard” (25n), and Edward A. Kopper, “Abstract
Expressionism in Vonnegut’s Bluebeard” (583n).
with its *mise en abyme*: the "fields of color" as artistry representing nothing but itself and repelling the viewer.

This is Circe Berman's criticism of his art ("'What's the point of being alive ... if you're not going to communicate?" [35]) and this process of communication, or "viewer response–human relevance theory of art" (Rampton 21) brings Karabekian to open up his secret museum in the potato barn. The canvas in the barn is used twice as a representational *mise en abyme* and again as an interactive work. Its first incarnation as "Windsor Blue Number Seventeen" (straight from the can) is Abstract Expressionist: its material decay is a sign of Karabekian's artistic shame and his failure to get materials ("meat," his own physical body) to approximate soul. The canvas is retrieved and reprimed as white ("far whiter than [he] would have believed white could ever be" [263]). This is, he explains to his wife, an "exorcism," but even this label is an attempt to express the unutterable, "why and how a painting came to be" (263). This "*tabula rasa*" (Rampton 20), intended to be a complete statement in itself, is simply another camouflage for the "failure" that has been "cleaned up" as its overdetermined title announces: "I Tried and Failed and Cleaned Up Afterwards, so It's Your Turn Now" (264). This white expanse is simply another encryption generating the rhetoric that will justify its absent presence.

The third painting is a "Renaissance" (265) in that it involves a turning away from the independence of enclosing mimetic representation in either photographic realism or Abstract Expressionism, to a communicative vision. Karabekian elsewhere

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16 This "rebirth" is important in the aesthetic context the novel posits. Karabekian has said that in any great painting, life and death are on the canvas. Rampton contrasts this with the death alone that is Bluebeard's painting: "In Bluebeard's secret chamber is death; in Rabo's, a painting that depicts life and death, the survivors of a six-year nightmare of bloodletting caused by people who make Bluebeard look like Mr. Rogers" (Rampton 22). This image of Renaissance ties the artistic period with the outlook of the painting: it is spring, May 8 1945.
explains his notion of redeeming the body for the soul as "flense and forgive" (246).
As an expression of this process, the painting paradoxically sees a return to realism and
scrupulous perspective to render representative humanity (in 5,219 figures) that is
Karabekian's vision on D-Day: the "soul" is here in the "meat" but not en abyme: the
painting is a response-inviting structure that prompts narrative engagement in order to
(co-)produce this vision. From one point of view (as in Karabekian's earlier
perspective) the painting is all-material: foreshortened, it is a triangle of painted
"jewelry" (268). From the center of the work it is not a museum of art, but of natural
history. There is a story for every figure, but after the potato barn is opened to the
public the painting is offered as a return to a dialogically intertextual dimension (and
signals Karabekian's return from hermit-like seclusion to a world of community) with
Circe "the witch"'s metamorphic influence. The painting's name signals this return:
"Now It's the Women's Turn."17 Earlier, Marilee (now remarried post-war) summed
up Abstract Expressionism as a male artistry that prescribes "The End." In turning
back from "the end" to D-Day, this work is the revisionist pivot on the threshold of
Bluebeard's chamber. Karabekian's "forgiveness" is opening his work to the dialogic
hermeneutic principle: "Make up your own war stories as you look at the
whatchamacallit'" (270). The unutterable and its encrypting rhetoric (how and why a
painting came to be) is given free expression.

The expression of tracing the mise en abyme in order to bring it to the surface
is well-turned in the episode from The Faerie Queene: Britomart traces Busyrane in
order to get "his charmes backe to reuerse" (3, 12, 36, 2). This, too, is the essential
work of feminist intertextual fictions with regard to the mise en abyme.

17Lawrence Broer reads this in the context of the Bluebeard story: "By contrast to the
obscenely destructive male of the seventeenth-century tale by Charles Perrault, Rabo notes that it is
the female of the species who plants the seeds of something beautiful and edible" (Broer 168). Like
Karabekian, Broer is quoting Marilee's comparison of men planting mines and women planting seed.
The mise en abyme is by no means excluded in feminist intertextual fiction. Instead, its mutability as a large and complex body of Bluebeard's forbidden chambers serves a symbolic turn.

"Bluebeard's Mise en Abyme as Interpretable gadget and re-vised by Bento"  

"Feminist intertextual fiction accordingly use the mise en abyme in two ways."

The mise en abyme is worked in a large and kale-riellie community.  

The mise en abyme is worked by the position outside, mysterious is possible, and  

search always in all. From the position outside, mysterious is possible, and  

power to perform the theoretical structures which justify and express the encounter in  

(picture) which also literally enmesh the chamber by resuming her sisters) and of its  

enables a revision of its contours. The mise en abyme is employed of its encounter  

new position outside the repetition of the monologic mise en abyme as representation  

figures from a different point of view, one that does not presuppose the viewer. This  

Abyme by setting an empty simultaneity in its stead and re-reading the position it  

been said. Fiction is a large and kale-riellie community. The mise en  

moreover becomes process and dialectic possibility. In "picture" blank, as has  

beginnings, the secret of the hyperlink may each (more) movement our again  

departure. The mise en abyme is a metaphorical source (since endings may also be  

fiction. Like Bluebeard's Wife, adopt the mise en abyme as an adaptive point of  

and always ecological, impelled from outside towards inside), feminist intertextual  

embracing the abyme as a vortex of conjugate and fixed identity. An  

enrobing the mise en abyme as a vortex of conjugate and fixed identity, an  

outside from the threshold of Bluebeard's forbidden chambers. Rather than  

reflection of the hope as generator of metaphorophysics and opaque process in which  

name of the subject manifest. Second, surmounting this use of the mise en abyme is the  

story. From perspective of the subject, the narrative loses its ability to reflect the  

name as real property isnegated by its own representation within the Bluebeard  

blackwell (literally, in gondola, and perfectly, as a sitting aside), its monologic  

First, Bluebeard's mise en abyme is interpreted generally and revised by Bento.  

"The mise en abyme is worked in a large and kale-riellie community.  

The mise en abyme is worked by the position outside, mysterious is possible, and  

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instead, its mutability as a large and complex body of Bluebeard's forbidden chambers serves a symbolic turn.

The mise en abyme is by no means excluded in feminist intertextual fiction.
point of view is not fixed, single, and presupposed but shifting, always enabling
alterity, and restored to the media of narrative and relativizing hermeneutic readings.
These two types figuratively conceptualize a two-way movement involved in the
threshold (instead of the one-way use Bluebeard prescribes), which revises the
contents within the chamber in order to know them and then to look outwards from this
point and move past. In feminist intertextual works, in other words, the *mise en
abyrne* is not symbolic of metonymic self-mirroring and imprisoning gaze, but of
metaphor and transumption in which viewing is a process of kaleidoscopic refraction.

At the end of Angela Carter’s story, “The Bloody Chamber,” the escape from
Bluebeard’s plot is described as the puppets’ revolt: “The puppet master, open-
mouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last, saw his dolls break free of their strings,
abandon the rituals he had ordained from them since time began and start to live for
themselves; the king, aghast, witnesses the revolt of his pawns” (142). This moment
of overthrow of the god and his game occurs as the heroine’s mother arrives in the nick
of time: it leaves Bluebeard frozen for a moment in his own mechanical *mise en abyme*
in an inversion of that which he had imposed, “sword still raised over his head as in
those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs” (142). In
*The Magic Toyshop*, the revolt of the puppets is given predominance, once the
conditions of the puppet master’s dominion have been set at some length. Uncle Philip
Flower’s perversely violent reign in the London house with its toyshop front,
workshop and “Flower Microcosm” theatre in the basement is an explicit Bluebeard’s
castle in the novel. Venturing timorously about her new “home,” the orphaned
teenager Melanie explores upstairs, the “new domestic geography” that makes her feel
“so alien” (58):

She felt lonely and chilled, walking along the long, brown passages, past
secret doors, shut tight. Bluebeard’s castle. Melanie felt a shudder of dread
as she went by every door, in case it opened and something, some clockwork
horror rolling hugely on small wheels, some terrifying joke or hideous novelty, emerged to put her courage to the test. (82)\textsuperscript{18}

Bluebeard's castle, it was, or Mr Fox's manor house with "Be bold, be bold but not too bold" written up over every lintel and chopped up corpses neatly piled in all the wardrobes and airing cupboards, on top of the sheets and pillowslips. (83)

Later, when this fairy tale analogy has proven only too apt for the absolute tyranny or "patriarchal majesty" (73) under which the household labours, Melanie has a grisly vision while peering into the cutlery drawer:

She opened the dresser drawer to put away the knives and spoons. In the dresser drawer was a freshly severed hand, all bloody at the roots.

It was a soft-looking, plump little hand with pretty, tapering fingers the nails of which were tinted with a faint, pearly lacquer. There was a thin silver ring of the type small girls wear on the fourth finger. ... Melanie heard blood fall plop in the drawer.

"I am going out of my mind," she said aloud. "Bluebeard was here." (118)

It is the hand, or the ring finger, which is severed in the story of "Mr Fox" or "The Robber Bridegroom" and which the heroine produces to confirm the reality of her vision. The severed hand is also one of Freud's examples of the uncanny in his essay "Das Unheimliche" (244). In her article, "Life-Threatening Life: Angela Carter and the Uncanny," Robyn Ferrell uses this example of the severed hand as one of the

\textsuperscript{18}Such a contraption is described in Carter's story, "Alice in Prague, or the Curious Room" where it has been built by Dr. Dee. The "Alice" reference similarly works in this novel: Melanie wonders, Alice-like, whether she is a figment of her nurse's dream (95) and later is convinced "She was hallucinated" (166). She has no mirrors by which to measures herself while the environment works to make her unrecognizable to herself, and to have her shrink. The real and the reflected are difficult to distinguish in the distorting witch-ball (169).
castration images she reads in this novel as a whole. It is interesting, though, that
Melanie’s frightful vision of the severed hand is sited in a cutlery drawer; as in
Margaret Atwood’s short piece in “Alien Territory” (from Good Bones) where
Bluebeard’s wife rummages through Bluebeard’s linen closet (which does in fact
contain his ironed and folded wives) and medicine cabinet for clues to Bluebeard’s
secret self, it is a specifically domestic geography that this house distorts. Home for
Melanie is an alien territory that is uncanny, or un-home-like. But her previous
experience at this dresser drawer also prefigures the nature of this intertextual
projection:

Then she dried and put away knives, and spoons, also. She was a wind-up
putting-away doll, clicking through its programmed movements. Uncle Philip
might have made her over, already. She was without volition of her own.

(76)

In the act of seeming to have lost her sense of self and her self-will, becoming a
puppet-doll, this vision of the heart of the story (Uncle Philip’s plot) is an expression
not just of uncanniness but of the production of the uncanny to confirm the uncanny in
action.

Other Bluebeard analogies are intertextually drawn: Melanie likens herself to
Jane Eyre, another orphan (32), and briefly speculates on her baby sister Victoria
becoming a back room secret, “like Mrs Rochester” (7). Uncle Philip is likened to
Henry VIII (160) at one point, also rendering the cruelly “barbaric” (113) silver choker
collar Aunt Margaret must wear on Sundays a Renaissance reminder of Bluebeard’s
penchant (itself echoed in Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” as “A choker of rubies, two
inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat” [114] that is called “the
necklace that prefigures your end" (139)19 The intertext Jane Eyre conflates again in the final conflagration of the house. As Melanie and Finn had once passed together by “the closed doors of Bluebeard’s castle” (146) at Philip’s puppet-master behest, they now ascend again past the “sinister doors of Bluebeard’s castle” (198) as it begins to burn beneath them.

If this “toyshop” is the expression of Bluebeard’s uncanny artistry and power, it is also the symbol of the destructive “alchemy” (168) or magic he practices. The mise en abyme of his artistry is the puppetry which is his private “‘hobby’” (64) or “‘obession’” (67). Like John Carradine’s Bluebeard in the Ulmer film, Uncle Philip creates puppets who are “disconcertingly life-like” (41) in his basement workshop where Melanie is told not to explore.20 The basement bench is strewn with “carved and severed limbs” (66). But if the puppets themselves are life-like, reconstructed from lifeless dismemberment, this Bluebeard’s creativity is anti-life with respect to the people in his house whom he fixes with “Medusa glances” (72). Margaret became mute on the day of her wedding (she is a “pressed flower” [73] to Philip Flower’s own crushing weight of silence) and sits as “like an icon” (113) in her ceremonial choker, buried in silence. Victoria, the baby, is immediately “integrated” (83) to her role as baby doll. Arriving weary at the house for the first time, she is “instantly entranced” by a cage of mechanical birds, but as they wind down so does she: “They were growing exhausted. Victoria drooped again” (42). Margaret’s brother Finn is finally broken by Philip when he is thrown from the flies for mishandling a beloved puppet. Finn’s fall leaves him as “stiff-limbed” as the puppets themselves (39), robbing him of

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19 The Magic Toyshop also likens Margaret in her collar to the puppet of Mary, Queen of Scots (another decapitated queen) in a similar choker.

20 Also, like Carradine’s Bluebeard and recalling the Alcott novel A Modern Mephistopheles, this character features in the Bluebeard plot: Philip’s mask of Mephistopheles (with real hair) resembles him (67; 73).
his natural grace: “He creaked, indeed, like a puppet” (148). In this house ruled by the “master” artist (64) who is “his own master” (95) as well as the puppet master, Melanie has been “put away” (138): the house of the “Beast of the Apocalypse” (77) is a tangible setting for the mise en abyme “in an empty space at the end of the world” (77) that contains Melanie within her own idea of death: “a room like a cellar, in which one was locked up and no light at all” (6). Even before the fire that destroys the house and any remaining occupants, it is a house of death.

The absence of actual mirrors in this house is notable and repeatedly noted (56, 58, 84, 103, 125, 188), and this both contributes to Melanie’s sense of loss of self and forces her to seek her reflection in the uncanny distorted projections of Philip’s vision of her. As a child she had received a toy as a gift from her uncle, a jack-in-the-box that sprang a “grotesque caricature of her own face” (12) at her: the uncanny distortion-reflection formed by excess. Similarly, in the basement she receives an impression of vertigo through such excess:

“There is too much,” she repeated. This crazy world whirled about her, men and women dwarfed by toys and puppets …. She was in the night again, and the doll was herself. (68)

In this world through the looking glass, it is the “grotesque inventiveness” of Uncle Philip’s artistry that creates a projection of Melanie’s own sense of identity to align it with his own vision. The last time Melanie looks at herself in a mirror before arriving here is after the fateful night with her mother’s wedding dress: she modelled for herself as a bride to a phantom groom of her own regard. Believing that the accidental destruction of the dress caused her parent’s death (and her own Eve-like expulsion from “Eden”) she destroys this mirror the next day and leaves behind the ghost of this image “to appear in mirrors” (31) in the house. Yet the photograph of her mother as a bride which inspired the mirror play in the first place describes the woman “as if stabbed through the middle by the camera and caught for ever under glass, like a
butterfly in an exhibition case” (12-13). In the absence of mirrors, this is the nature of Melanie’s own memory of this image of herself, (another buried imago-icon), so that when Philip requires her to dress as Leda, she accords this projection the status of reflection: “he saw her as once she had seen herself” (141). Instead, Philip has set Melanie in a metaphorical “glass box” (134) like that into which Finn retreats after his fall: the exhibition case of Philip’s microcosm stage. Here Uncle Philip’s treatment of people as puppets becomes literal and emblematic in the mise en abyme of Melanie’s bullied performance as Leda to his puppet’s Jovian swan.21 This inset private spectacle of the classical rape scene is the performance whose encoding structures inform the household dynamic under Philip’s reign and is at the core of his use of the uncanny to assimilate Melanie’s subjectivity into a self-alienating reflection of his distorted vision. While this scene is at the metaphorical core of the novel, it is the crucial turning point illustrating the performance of revision through the mise en abyme.

In her article, Robyn Ferrell discusses the novel in relation to Hoffmann’s story The Sandman, itself the principal example of the uncanny in Freud’s essay. She argues The Magic Toyshop to be a view from the inside, or from the other side of the story: from the point of view of Olimpia the puppet-woman, and comments: “The story is uncanny from the other side” (Ferrell 141). Ferrell identifies the “overacting” which frustrates Philip’s vision of the rape (Melanie is no longer acting when she screams and is overcome by the “grotesque parody of a swan” [165] but Philip charges her with “melodrama” nonetheless) as her “melodrama of live womanhood” (Ferrell 141). As Philip points out, “‘Puppets don’t overact’” (167). Yet what is effected in this accident of vivification is a strategy of defamiliarization turned back on itself.

21Interestingly, the rape of Leda features among Busyrane’s tapestries in Faerie Queene (3, 11, 32).
Melanie is required to perform, a “staged fantasy” (166), making her uncanny in her own eyes (“watching this whole fantasy from another place”) because she is seeing herself through Uncle Philip’s fantastic vision of her to which she has to some degree attempted to conform by aligning it with her preserved self-image. Her melodrama is a use of the “excess” to reform the uncanny by exaggerating what is already grotesque exaggeration in turn. She renders the performance “grotesque” for Philip as a viewer not simply by not being a puppet but by making the aspect of her performance itself visible. In her inability to act, the performance itself is staged. In this she echoes Francie’s resistance strategy when, forced to fiddle accompaniment to an earlier show, his overture evinces “excessive, perhaps derisive, use of tremolo” (129).

As the mise en abyme is theatrical play, so play is the medium by which Philip’s mise en abyme is resisted and finally thwarted in the novel. In quiet subversion (“‘When the cat’s away . . .’” [97]) the siblings Finn, Francie and Margaret, and with them Melanie, perform for themselves. Where even “the idea of laughter” is actively “suppressed” by Philip (124), in his absence hilarity rules. Finn uses laughter as a constant retort until he is “broken.” But the mise en abyme of the Leda play is the point at which such passive resistance becomes active subversion. Finn destroys the swan puppet, and in the final “play” that they unleash he acts as the “Lord of Misrule” (183).

Finally, while Philip is the Bluebeard and his workshop is his private territory in the heart of the house, his right to secrecy is usurped by his household who are there in order to practice and preserve a secret from him: Francie and Margaret are incestuous lovers, cuckolding Philip in his own house. As Finn tells Melanie, “‘That is our secret . . . You know our heart’s core, now’” (195), and Finn and Francie continue to reside in the house in order to protect this. The mise en abyme of secrecy is wrested from Philip and displaced so that there is an inviolable preserve which excludes him, and
this also negates his absolute hold in the house. When Philip returns after the day of
misrule, he finds the lovers in the kitchen and proceeds to barricade doors (too late)
and lay fires: but as the “unutterable” of incest has surfaced, so Margaret’s voice
returns out of its burial in silence.

While the oppressiveness and elaboration of the layers of entrapment in this
novel has been seen to outweigh such reversals, and the inferno in which it concludes
is an ambiguous release from the dystopia that the fire will destroy, the use of the
uncanny to construct Bluebeard’s distorted mirror of artistry—as in “Fitcher’s Bird”—is
vital to Carter’s fiction in stylistic terms elsewhere as here in the thematic terms so
central to The Magic Toyshop. While analysis of Nights at the Circus at the conclusion
of this chapter agrees with the premises for that novel articulated in Paulina Palmer’s
article, “From ‘Coded Mannequin’ to Bird Woman: Angela Carter’s miraculous
Flight,” to depreciate the value of the deconstructionist approach of The Magic
Toyshop as this article does, is to elide the foundation on which the “utopian vision” of
novels like Nights at the Circus stand.22 Further, the use of “excess” as a means to
disrupt the mise en abyme’s constrictions and to move outwards from it is essential to
Nights at the Circus, but derives from The Magic Toyshop in which the encrypting

22Paulina Palmer’s article classes Carter’s early and later works into a binary in which The
Magic Toyshop is symptomatic of the early works’ deconstructionist and analytical representation
which does not go far enough to subvert and explore patriarchal structures, in fact making them out to
be “worse than they really are” while the later works like Nights at the Circus are celebratory, utopian
and concerned with female community. The tale “The Bloody Chamber” is cited as transitional, its
first half allied with the early works’ approach while the end introduces the feminist rescue of the
heroine by her mother, evincing a celebration of female community.

Both this article, and that by Avis Lewallen, “Wayward Girls but Wicked Women?: Female
Sexuality in Angela Carter’s The Bloody Chamber,” laden their criticism with uneasy value judgments
about Carter’s use of pornographic elements in this story. Similarly, in “Re-imagining the Fairy
Tales,” Patricia Duncker writes: “Carter’s extraordinary fascination with de Sade simmers at the root of
what is both disturbingly reactionary and sadly unoriginal in her work” (229).
powers of Bluebeard’s art are re-presented as the means of extrication from the \textit{mise en abyme}.

Like Miranda in \textit{The Collector}, Willa Prescott Needed is another woman physically imprisoned in a basement oubliette by a Bluebeard figure whose encrypting \textit{mise en abyme} is elaborate and whose artistry is mortification and death. While Gloria Naylor’s \textit{Linden Hills} does not explicitly reference Bluebeard as one of its (many) intertexts, the fairy tale themes and ideology appear vehemently manifest in this novel. Its “Bluebeard” is the monologically and eerily self-reproducing Luther NEEDED eternally replicating his own image, “stamp and will” (18) in a single son always called Luther NEEDED, through five generations to the novel’s present: “It seemed that when Old Luther died in 1879, he hadn’t died at all …” (4). The NEEDED wives, all nameless and faceless “Mrs NEEDEDs,” thus form a series of women to have suffered similar fates through the will of their husband, Luther NEEDED. The novel recalls these fates through the recuperative reading of Willa, the present wife, whom NEEDED has imprisoned in the disused basement morgue with her son who has died there. Luther determines to “turn her into a wife” (19) against a perceived transgression, that is, the breach that her pale maternal genes have effected in the illusion of a purely patrilineral NEEDED self-reproduction: the sixth generation NEEDED son is “uncanny” to his father by resembling him in all but colour: “a white son. … a ghostly presence that mocked everything his fathers had built” (18). The means by which Willa resurrects memory and history from this live burial reveals the multi-layered, anti-creationist artistry that has embedded her predecessors and encompasses the geographical frame of Linden Hills. Like Willa herself these female histories are unearthed from their literary oubliette and restored to narrative in \textit{Linden Hills}. As K. Sandiford writes:

\[\text{K. A. Sandiford, in the excellent article “Gothic and Intertextual Construction in Linden Hills,” discusses the character of these intertexts (canonical versus disruptive, for instance) and the nature of their use in providing a feminist dialogic critique of patriarchal overtexts.}\]
... Naylor adopts certain polyphonic strategies to accommodate a diversity of
textual voices, providing thereby a ground for engagement between her
novel's over-voice and the legitimized, canonical voices of the novel's
intertexts, opening up new "discursive spaces" for "other" (unlegitimized,
uncanonized) voices to represent themselves in texts that are often radical and
extra-literary. (Sandiford 120)

From its founding by the first Luther Nedeed, Linden Hills is the empty anti-
creation of a vision of beauty or "mirage of power" erected to mirror the Nedeeds
themselves "in a hundred facets" (16), and thus portray an inverted reflection of white
middle-class America: "an ebony jewel that reflected the soul of Wayne County but
reflected it black" (9). After "exactly seven days" (2) of contemplating his new arid
land, "Old" Luther begins the work or "labor" that, through five generations of his
embodiment finds dual forms of the same expression. Luther Nedeed as an undertaker
is an artist of death and stasis:

His women were always like this. ... With the proper touch, you could work
miracles. ... Just the right pressure and resistant muscles in the face, neck,
arms, and legs gave themselves up completely to your handling. Moved when
you made them move, stayed where you placed them. ... it took gentleness
and care to turn what was under your hands into a woman. (185)

The secrets of the Nedeed embalming process that is likened to a male reproductive
ceremony24 also contains the ritual placement of a catfish head within the corpses: the
specific purpose is withheld in the novel, but recurs as an enigmatic leitmotif, lending it
connotations of purely emblematic patterning. The second labor or undertaking
contemplated by Old Luther and achieved by his descendants as owners of Linden

24 In "The Woman in the Cave: Recent Feminist Fictions and the Classical Underworld,"
Margaret Homans analyzes in detail the "androcentric myths of reproduction" in the novel.
Hills, is the housing on the land leased to its residents for a millennium and a day ("a small eternity" [244]) with a seemingly eternal Luther Nedeed to oversee it. The living residents are similarly embalmed by the Nedeedes: they also move when they are made to move, and stay where Nedeed places them. They are to be "carbon paper dolls" (10); Willie Mason draws the analogy, criticizing the Nedeed vision of empire: "They wanted a bunch of puppets" (260). Nedeed's characterization as a puppeteer is effected through the many doors of Linden Hills that belong to him, and the "will to possess" that has been inspired in his tenants is the extension of the Nedeed will that passes from father to son. Like Bluebeard's castle, Linden Hills is an extension of Nedeed "himself": "It would have been easier to separate the elements in his breath than to separate his soul from the material in that house, than to separate that house from that hill" (285).

The "strange topography" (258) of Linden Hills is the geographical frame for the mise en abyme which mirrors the encrypting and inverted vision of the Nedeed dynasty and in which the Nedeed wives (and the residents, described by the equally resident historian as "family") are held thrall. The novel is an elaborately-worked inversion of Dante's Inferno, with the concentric drives forming the layered circles of the damned.25 The wedge of land is "V-shaped" (1), echoing the fifth Nedeed (Luther V) and "hemmed in" at the bottom by the town cemetery; the Nedeed house is "dead center" (2) at the inverted apex, concrete morgue for a basement, and is completely surrounded by a (frozen) lake or "moat" (6). From above, the Hills "fall into an abyss" (47) or drop "off into a dead void" (61). The physical abyme of Linden Hills is narratively retraced by the form of Linden Hills: the novel travels "drive by drive"

25See Catherine C. Ward's article, "Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills: A Modern Inferno." Nedeed may be a dystopic name of undoing, or anti-creation: "de Eden." Ward also argues that the reader of the novel is on the same "perilous pilgrimage" (80) as Willie and his guide Lester, reinforcing the novel as a moral tale.
down toward the Nedeed house, in the consciousness of an outsider critical of the residents' blind impulse for social mobility where "up is down." Willie Mason, a twenty-year old oral poet, and Lester Tilson, a friend and reluctant tenant of the Hills, walk this path in the four days before Christmas. working odd jobs and reading the Linden Hills phenomenon so, as Lester tells Willie, "That way you won't miss a thing" (46). Passing back and forth across the hills as they thread their way down they are the focal point stitching together the narratives of various residents and tracing the figurative as well as literal *mise en abyme* towards Willa. At the same time, the novel dramatizes a working out of the *mise en abyme* in excerpts from Willa's imprisoned perspective. The parallels between these two opposing and converging movements are reinforced by the counterpart names Willie and Willa (two versions of nascent self-wills that ultimately evade the powerfully imposed will of Luther Nedeed). Willie becomes aware of Willa's pervasive absence over the course of his descent towards her, and the enigma she comes to represent and which is mirrored in the empty condition of other women and wives in Linden Hills becomes the goal of Willie’s emerging quest. The physical intersection of their paths occurs within Nedeed's own house: Willie is stepping down from the attic as Willa is beginning her twelve-step ascent from the basement, and Willie inadvertently unbolts her prison door at the moment Willa reaches to open it.

This physical mirroring, however, underwrites a reflexive quest in narrative and intertextual terms. Willie's journey through the themes of Linden Hills is filtered through his intertextual store of memorized poems, whose fragmentary evocations become a critical intertextual gloss to the narrative at hand. In this sense, Willie perhaps resembles the narrator of Chaucer's *House of Fame*. Like the House of Fame itself, Linden Hills is built on the northern face of the plateau and founded on Luther’s frozen lake, or on ice, and his journey through it is through a storehouse of intertexts. In the course of reading Linden Hills, however, his quest assumes the form of a quest
for the first line of his own poem, which is also his way of conquering the form of intertextuality with which Linden Hills has metaphorically sterilized his creativity:

"Other people's work had kept cramming itself into his mind. ... And to unstop it, he would have to put Linden Hills into a poem" (275).26 The first line he arrives at is the "question about Nedeed" (276): "There is a man in a house at the bottom of a hill. And his wife has no name" (277). Willa's quest also assumes narrative form as she discovers in the morgue documents belonging to previous wives, all of whom had, like her, no names that even her husband could recall: all were "Mrs Nedeeds." In the process of reading these metaphorical prison diaries, Willa recuperates them from the *mise en abyme* in which Linden Hills and Luther Nedeed placed them. Her reading is interpretive and dialogic; her own experience is realized in her engagement with these intertexts so that the enigma Willie gradually approximates from outside is being resolved in narrative terms from within.

In both cases, the enigmatic absence at the core of the *mise en abyme*, the crypt for which all of Linden Hills serves as elaborate, rhetorical camouflage, is the death-artistry of the Nedeeds' creation. A "wizard," the second Luther Nedeed reflects to himself: "a magician's supreme art is not in transformation but in making things disappear" (12). In giving corpses the illusion of life, he makes the reality of death (and so nature) "disappear": the result is uncanny, for corpses become life-like. The reverse is true of the Linden Hills residents, who live as empty masks of themselves, as walking corpses. At the core of the Nedeed vision is effacement or erasure, and the absence or void created is the common theme in the two narrative quests to delineate and recuperate which Willie and Willa undertake to find their own repressed wills.

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26Margaret Homans notes the "conspicuous infertility" in this novel in her reading of its *Aeneid* echoes: "the narrative details the childlessness, through accident or choice, of each family or individual in Linden Hills" (378).
Willie and Lester occasion the representation of Linden Hills’ stories, all individualized expressions of erasure and the Linden Hills inversion where down is up. Lester’s grandmother’s image of the soul in the mirror—an antidote to the uncanny mirror of Linden Hills—stands in counterpart to these facets of sameness. Despite their individual differences, in other words, the residents have succumbed to the assimilative encoding of Nedeed vision projected in the spatialized form of the Hills. Winston Alcott sacrifices his homosexual identity under pressure from Nedeed: his wedding is overseen by the undertaker and is “‘burying one way of life for another’” (74). That is, he is assuming a death-in-life. The new deed gift to a house on Tupelo drive is accompanied (and symbolized) by a diamond and platinum key necklace with matching cuff links is the bond through which Nedeed’s will is expressed. Alcott himself becomes a “frozen” mask of himself, and only his “image” remains to be “captured” for the wedding album. His lover David cannot be his “wife” in Linden Hills, but as a wife who cannot exist his identity is erased as effectively as those of all wives in the Hills. The return of this repression is a prime example of the hermeneutic intertextuality that is the means to subvert the authorized reading of Linden Hills: David reads a poem at Winston’s wedding which Willie recognizes as an abbreviated Whitman poem addressed to a man. Willie’s intertextual engagement is a restorative reading between the lines of erasure. At the wake for Lyncentia Parker the following day, Lester and Willie are hired to strip and redo the wallpaper of the dead woman’s bedroom in order to make ready for her successor in the wings. The “will” of Mrs Parker is repeatedly invoked only in order to be palimpsestically overwritten by the whims of her husband: his justification for any desire is that “Lycentia would have wanted it that way.” Reverend Hollis’ wife disappeared (to Willie’s question “‘Is she dead, too?’” Hollis replies “‘You might say that!’” [173]) and this disappearance is symbolically rendered through the sheets on their bed. Hollis joked that if the sheets on the bed were darker he would not be able to find her in the dark: after his numerous
affairs she brings home dark brown sheets for the bed, and is metaphorically lost to him. The Reverend’s address (000) is set in opposition to Nedeed’s (999; itself an inversion of 666 in this inverted abyme).27 Despite his protest that it symbolizes eternal process, the “Almighty Divine” of Linden Hills is “simply the will to possess” (17), and Hollis’ own spirituality is correspondingly negated by the hollow zeros that symbolize the emptiness of his own faith. Xavier Donnell is the occasion for Lester and Willie to encounter Maxwell Smyth, an extremely successful black who has made his colour disappear behind his success. Smyth has purified himself into a state of programmatic automation devoid of spontaneity and community belonging. Finally, Laurel Dumon is gradually erased through the personal emptiness of her own successes in education and marriage until she is symbolically faceless and homeless. After Nedeed serves her eviction notice (the house is leased to her separated husband), she is literally homeless and erased: “‘There is no way that this conversation is taking place in my living room, with this man looking at me straight in the face and telling me that I don’t exist’” (245). Her metaphoric facelessness is physically realized with gruesome literality in her symbolic suicide in an empty diving pool.

In the course of his intertextual education, Willie’s path has thematically intersected with Willa’s journey of historical discovery, and their convergences are rendered as stylistic intertextualities, creating a zone of narrative border crossings. Thematic correspondences appear mutually generative, as when the Donnell marriage is followed by Willa’s discovery of Luwana Packerville’s bible wrapped in a bridal veil, and the food of communion at the Parker wake appears to prompt Willa’s own discovery of Evelyn Creton Nedeed’s cookbooks and grocery records, themselves blending the themes of food and death together. These border crossings are most

27Catherine Ward, quoting from a personal correspondence with Gloria Naylor: “Naylor says that she gave the house this number because in Linden Hills, where up is down, 999 ‘is really 666, the sign of the beast’” (Ward 69n).
pronounced when they bridge narratives following Willie’s experience and the inset narratives from Willa’s perspective, which are set in a different typeface within the novel and are themselves inset with the excerpts of Willa’s reading in smaller font. Such bridges comprise a prelude to their physical convergence by which Willie and Willa meet, but as they have mirrored one another throughout the novel it is fitting that they “meet” in the border of the mirror that each has created individually but both have also created between them. Instead of simply collapsing into sameness, these stylistic convergences provoke intertextual dialogue which requires that “same” be read as accommodating a difference of perspective. When Willie arrives at his statement of the enigma, Willa begins with that statement as a departure point, one which displaces the enigma from herself:

“There is a man in a house at the bottom of a hill. And his wife has no name.”

Her name was Willa Prescott Nèdeed. After thinking about it for hours, she knew she was safe starting from there. She had owned that first name for as long as she had the face she was now certain that she possessed. (277)

These border crossings of histories create an alternative position to that offered by the authorized historian Braithwaite, whose house is the last stop on Linden Hills before the Nèdeed residence. Braithwaite has authorized access to Hills history, both in the form of official records and the “‘privilege’” (258) of a wall of transparent plexiglass looking up at the Hills through which his metaphorical “‘camera’” eyes (265) capture what Braithwaite boasts to be a “‘written photograph’” (261) of “‘minutest detail’” (262) and “‘immeasurable accuracy’” (265) that he amasses in tomes which comprise “‘the whole story, the real story’” (263). Yet this historian has literally turned his back on the Nèdeed wives: the window that looks down the hill has the curtain drawn across it. Willie is alone in persisting to look through this window, recording Braithwaite’s omission: “History is a written photograph. Closing the drape, Willie wondered if Braithwaite would have gotten a much different picture all these years by keeping his
desk up against this window” (266, author’s emphasis). Braithwaite has applied the Nedeed metaphor literally, so to Willie’s question about the Nedeed family he responds by gesturing to the residents of Linden Hills: “‘The family is right out there. … You see Linden Hills and you see them’” (259). Braithwaite becomes an extra pair of eyes witnessing Nedeed’s vision and so he does not see Willa even to miss her when she is present.

It is not until Willa is enclosed as an absence, a crypt set in a multi-layered crypt, that she is forced to confront her own loss of identity and alienation from herself. Here, in the absence of any mirror or shiny surface by which to see herself, Willa, like Bluebeard’s wife, is forced to look for herself in the mirror of her predecessors and to rediscover the internal “soul mirror” that will counteract her erasure. Willa’s reading performs the liberatory act of Bluebeard’s last wife inasmuch as she reads with recognition but rejects this assimilative vision of her identity for one that “Bluebeard” cannot recognize.

The reflections of the three women whose records Willa reads are distinct from one another. Luwana Packerville Nedeed interpolates her Bible with her “diary of a slave” (117), adopting the genre of subversive writing, and letters to herself (as Celie does in Alice Walker’s The Colour Purple, and in the absence of the God both characters can no longer believe in) which reveal her gradual disillusionment with and dissolution into marriage and motherhood. The “dialogism” of Luwana’s letters to Luwana flounders into the monologic record on her body that are the tattooed incisions marking the solitary greeting required of her twice daily for a year. Even this indelible record of the days “of a corpse” (123) that merely recreates prison stripes or bars on her body are erased in her actual death. In contrast to Willie’s search for a first line or source of enigma, Willa is seeking the last line of these records as a means to interpret them, but the “last word” is withheld as an absence and thereby creates the possibility for Willa’s own engagement with these texts: “She had hoped to find some other
records left by Luwana Packerville, but the woman seemed to have disappeared” (139).

Notably, in reading Luwana’s diary, Willa must learn the “key” to her “buried memories” (118) that is the hermeneutic intertextuality of the Bible passages and the placement of the diary’s annotations. This lesson is developed by Willa’s reading of Evelyn Creton’s culinary records where her history of an increasingly absent body must be interpreted literally. The frequency of baking dates and the quantity of ingredients gleaned from the grocery lists prompt speculation which translates into close reading and study through the medium of the word “shame weed,” revealing that the grocery lists are now of aphrodisiacs, a record of attempts to catch her husband’s notice. The words “Henna. Umber” (150) describe attempts to darken the colour of her skin, an inversion of Willa’s own attempt to bleach hers paler to resemble the octoroon wives who precede her (and which allowed them “to fade against the whitewashed boards of the Nedeed home” [18]). Finally, the record of laxatives inscribe her disappearance: like Willie eating the storebought cake Nedeed claims to have been baked by his wife, this record is one of “tasting her absence” (147). Again, this disappearance has a literary expression: “[the] heavy skirts she was buried in were no longer enough to mask the empty cavities that had been living all along between the covers of this book. The real Evelyn Creton” (188). For Willa to find Evelyn Creton involves the literary, interpretive exercise of reading between the lines.28

Finally, the photograph album of Priscilla McGuire is a visual series of monologic intertexts providing an imagistic record of this wife’s gradual erasure in the

28 It is tempting to draw analogy through the two titular names Linden/Lyndon with the writing out of imprisonment of Mrs Lyndon in William Makepeace Thackeray’s Barry Lyndon. The letters she writes are written in lemon juice between the lines of the authorized letter to friends: it is an invisible, disappearing script, a repressed document that resurfaces when in the hands of an astute reader.
form of the shadow of her son that creeps up her figure year by year until she is veiled in shadow. She recalls Laurel Dumont who, "when she finally took a good look around ... found herself imprisoned within a chain of photographs and a life that had no point" (228). Willa reflects: "the only thing growing in these pictures was her absence" (209). This metaphorical facelessness (recalling Laurel Dumont) is realized by Priscilla herself, as she smudges out her own face and writes "me" figured in the abyme or crypt that remains. But this is the secret key to reading the records of these Nedeed wives, where Willa must learn to translate a statement of disappearance to one of reemergent identity: the inviolability of the "me" that writes out of the abyme.

As in The Magic Toyshop, the conclusion of Linden Hills has been read as a Pyrrhic victory. Resurfacing from her live burial, Willa sets automatically to compulsive house cleaning, still clutching her son's corpse in its bridal-veil shroud. Use of the terms "Amazon," "queen" and "soldier," describe Willa's genetic self-recoding as an army ant with the indomitable will of an implied collective (bearing the histories of the three Nedeed wives with her like an egg sac). Such terms, however, render a dubious identity. The literal inferno that kills her along with Luther and their dead son between them in one triune mass can only be read as metamorphic triumph, akin to that of Captain Murderer's wife who kills her husband by ingesting poison before she is to be eaten by him. It has furthermore been argued that the identity of wife and mother which Willa steels herself to reclaim above ground is the same identity as the one she had before and so negates any suggestion of development, let alone metamorphosis.29 However, this latter reading reinforces the erasure of Willa as a blind spot of the Nedeed vision: Willa reaffirms her own identity and its extension through the roles of wife and mother which Nedeed had denied. He imprisoned her in

29In "Significant Others," Henry Louis Gates writes: "Willa's final ascent is thus represented as a resumption of the identity Luther has imposed upon her" (607).
the first place to “turn her into a wife” (19) (which in the Nedeed vision of
transformation is to make her disappear) and refuses to accept her son: “To accept her
child was to deny himself” (286). Instead, Willa walks up from the basement with the
sense that Willie has also gained from his experience of the Hills: a refusal to believe in
a predetermined fate and hence a refusal to be Nedeed’s puppet. As K. Sandiford also
writes, “However all-consuming this may seem, the Nedeed text is, ultimately, only an
intertext of Linden Hills and, as such, is inevitably brought into dramatic confrontation
with the voice of another text” (125). In determining individual responsibility for
making personal choices, Willa does not blame herself for her punishment but rejects
Nedeed’s right and power to impose judgment at all. It is symbolic then, as it is in
“Fitcher’s Bird,” that Willa emerges as a woman unrecognizable to Nedeed: she does
not allow him to take her son from her (a second time) in order to teach her to be a
Nedeed mother. Nedeed interprets her original performance of these roles as an
attempt to erase his labor which is, in fact, what Willa reemerges to effect. The return
of Willa is uncanny because it is a literal return of the repressed, which has been stated
in literary as well as physical terms throughout Linden Hills, and this use of the
uncanny to restate the uncanny that has been used to effect a rigorous mise en abyme is
the triumph of all Bluebeard’s wives.

“Fevermania” is the neologism describing the passionate public reception of
the protagonist Fervers in Angela Carter’s Nights at the Circus, but it may also
describe the stylistic, metafictional magic realism of the novel and its liberatory tropes of
excess and breach. The novel actively evades any sustained intertextual assimilation by
the sheer surplus of textual reference and allusion, and the dialogism of the narrative
which erupts through any single discourse that might otherwise form a containing
structure. The novel, in other words, is rhetorically imitative of what its heroine
effects physically and thematically: at every level it defies any form of unifying
framework and does so in an explicitly metafictional way. It is not a novel of a single

story, and its central figure is the embodiment of the tall tale: a female "grotesque." excessive in every respect, whose body is the site of the metafictional enigma: are her famed wings real? The set narratives that are episodic "pockets" of *mise en abyme* are self-relativizing by their numerous in-settings and commentaries, so that Fevvers the "bird" woman escapes any monologic attempt to frame her as a consummated spectacle within—either within a predatory male gaze, a single narrative, or within the novel itself. As her wings are said to erupt through the confinement of clothing, and Fevvers breaches ideas of decorum, evincing femininity and character traits in excess, so she figures the "tall tale" that breaches the novel's own generic framework and all attempts to perceive her as a unified fiction. It is worth noting that in a tall tale, presuppositions are themselves suspect and often thematized and are hence not "shielded from challenge" so much as forming a metalinguistic complement of and dialogue with the narrative that is as much in the foreground as the tale itself. The novel's stylistically self-reflexive use of puns, hyperbole, and exotic diction is lent to the theme questioning forms of representation, and the palpable literariness of the work is complemented by its own literary analysis from within.

The Bluebeard story is not in overt evidence, yet its central character "Fevvers" embodies the triumphant bird-woman trickster of "Fitcher's Bird." In the same way that the novel plays with and through different languages, dialects (such as Cockney), and narrative voices, so the novel makes its tall story up through sheer intertextual multiplicity. The use of simile in all its lexical manifestations is perhaps the novel's main trope: here, simile certainly evinces a form of narrative surplus and this may be one of the discursive features that contributes to its "carnivalesque" quality. The predominant image, character, and symbol of Fevvers as a bird-woman reads alongside the fairy tale counterpart as an image, character, and symbol of female trickery, alterity, escape artistry, and magic realism. Fevvers is a natural object of spectacle, lent to artistic purposes (in the circus arena) and hence of the gaze, but as an
enigma she is a subject of dialogic negotiation of the nature of this spectacle, causing the gaze to be necessarily self-reflexive and narrative as much as visual. Her status does not depend on the sight of her but on story and on her role as generator of stories, and as the bird-woman escape-artist Fewers creates and occupies the position “without” from which perspective the structures of “within” may be questioned.

The present discussion will focus on three attempts at framing in the novel which demonstrate instead Fewers’ escape from the imprisoning mise en abyme of another’s speculative artistry: that is, from Bluebeard’s monologic plotting of her. In the first section of the novel, “London,” Fewers describes to Jack Walser, an American reporter, a picaresque autobiography. She narrates a period spent as a private “freak show” spectacle in Madame Schreck’s “chamber of imaginary horrors” (70), a pornographic secret chamber of “‘tableau[x] vivant[s]’” (23). In the second section “Petersburg,” Fewers describes her experience with the Grand Duke who sought to make her one of his “collection of toys” and who tries (almost successfully) to seduce her with miniature images of the mise en abyme by which he tries to entrap her. The third example, for the present purpose, is the attempts of the reporter Jack Walser to contain Fewers in his own speculative narrative, as he makes a study of her both visually and narratively in order to create his own work on Great Humbugs of the World. His thematized reading of Fewers—the metafictively resisting subject—produces an analogue for the novel’s performative escape artistry; Fewers achieves flight in fancy and extends this artistry through the “suspension of disbelief” required of her audience, and the novel concludes, for instance, not in the epic structural pattern of circular return home, or “grounding,” but in flight, in an “Envoi.” Ultimately, Walser’s attempts to read Fewers contribute to the dialogic refractions of the novel, since Fewers performs her multiplicity for a reading audience which is a “kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness” (10), and Walser’s reflections on his reflective representations of Fewers become a means by which the mirrors of the text reflect the
struggle with and breach of the mise en abyme. Metafiction is literary criticism from within. Intertexts are viewed in the novel as forms of representation and their surplus foregrounds instead the stylistic process of intertextuality. Presupposition fails in this intertextual process, becoming a “metatheme” rather than a hidden textual mechanism of projecting its reading, for Fewers is a genuine metafictive enigma who signals the hermeneutic code but actively evades its resolution through Presupposition. The use of literary analysis within the novel is key to the critical vantage within the fiction and signals an approach to the metatheme of Presupposition.

The “apprenticeship” which Fewers serves in Ma Nelson’s brothel house as a “living statue” (39) and model for the originals of Winged Victory or Venus is already marked with the double vision that creates a threshold of her body and of her story. While she is not in active service as a prostitute, Fewers is an “object in men’s eyes” (39) as a performed statue. Even as spectacle, though, she projects a symbolic commentary which disrupts this visual encoding from without. She notes the superficiality of her modelled sign (“nought but the painted, guilded sign of love” [23]) for the “eye of the beholder” (23) as analogous to the nature of the product for sale, “we sold only the simulacra” (39), a critical comment that by definition escapes the eye of the actual beholder in the brothel. Fewers further wears this role as a shell or “artificial egg” inside which she is “vibrant with potentiality” (39). Even this idea of a “fixed” spectacle, then, is invested with the potential for its subversion and breach from within. Fewers makes the object/subject distinction.

This apprenticeship leads directly, and by dint of financial necessity, to her next position inside Madame Schreck’s “museum of woman monsters” (55), again modelling a guardian angel of the house in the form of tombstone statuary to the living corpse of “Sleeping Beauty.” (This forms an interesting connection with Jules Supervielle’s play, La Belle au Bois, in which Bluebeard has the title role and has his eye on the “love interest,” Sleeping Beauty. The hundred-year sleep is the
Madame Schreck's "vault," "crypt" (61), or "morbid sepulchre" (71) of a pornographic peep-show arena known as "'Down Below,'" or "'The Abyss'" (61) (and modelled in its walled niches like the panopticon featured later in the novel) where she "dispose[s] of women (and one "bipartite") in a "'series of tableaux'" (62) is referred to as "'confinement'" (61) of "'prisoner[s]'" (63). Yet the house and its secret Black Theatre run by the deathly Living Skeleton (59) or self-stringing marionette, Madame Schreck, serves narratively as a matrix for the stories of the women working there. It is also little match for Fewvers when her picaresque period there is done. She becomes instead an "'avenging angel'" (72), changing the coding of her spectacle-surface at will, in order to "'negotiate from a position of strength'" (72) her release from "'Our Lady of Terror's triple-locked doors'" (55).

Fewvers' opportunism prompts her subsequent adventure with Christian Rosencreutz, however, which may be seen as a continuation of the Schreck museum episode. She has been bought by one of her beholders, and gradually comes to the realization of Rosencreutz's sacrificial intentions: "'this man is going to do me harm'" (82). Expanding now on the earlier "'upward leap'" she had made to Madame Schreck's ceiling which proved not far enough, Fewvers now takes flight from this attempt to sacrifice her or frame her as a symbol: "'Before he'd gathered his wits together, I was off and out of that open casement like greased lightning, I can tell you, although it was

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30 Jules Supervielle, La Belle au Bois (Version de 1953) (Paris: Gallimard, 1953). I am indebted to Renée Van Raamsdonk ("The Bluebeard legend in French literature," chapter three) for this reference, as to her description of the play which I have not seen.

31 In "Feminist Metafiction and Androcentric Reading Strategies: Angela Carter's Reconstructed Reader in Nights at the Circus," Beth Boehm notes of the suppressed characters (like Mignon, later in the circus, and presumably Sleeping Beauty and the characters at Madame Schreck's) that "The elaborately detailed and embedded narratives center these characters, and the authorial reader, like Jack Walser, must step across the threshold to the unknown ..." (44).
a tight squeeze and I left enough feathers to stuff a mattress caught on the frame’’” (83).

With this tale Fevvers literally dislodges Walser’s own frame mechanism: his reporter’s notebook. As Fevvers thrusts her foot on his lap to show the scar allegedly resulting from the escape, Walser’s notebook is knocked to the floor, and he can retrieve it only “weakly” (83). This almost concludes the narrative of the novel’s first section, but not before Fevvers makes palpable the dazzling inversion of the mise en abyme for the bewildered Walser that has been effected by virtue of her narrative alone:

During the less-than-a-blink of time it took the last chime to die there came a vertiginous sensation, as if Walser and his companions and the very dressing-room itself were all at once precipitated down a vast chute. It took his breath away. As if the room that had, in some way, without his knowledge, been plucked out of its everyday, temporal continuum, had been held for a while above the spinning world and was now—dropped back into place. (87)

Fevvers achieves flight in fancy and the narrative creates this perspective of outside the frame: for Walser this vertiginous inversion is felt only at the point of its interruption, so that it is “realism” and its attempts to capture her story that are the representational mise en abyme viewed for the duration of her narrative perspective from without.

In the second section, Walser is travelling as a clown with the circus on the Grand Imperial Tour in what he believes will be an effort to apprehend Fevvers but turns out to be his literal undoing. During this section, the narrative perspective is refracted so that the circus section is viewed kaleidoscopically through different narratives. At one point Fevvers reflects on her experience with the Grand Duke who, like Rosencreutz, invited her (alone) to his palatial house. While still a reflection of the predatory gaze which seeks to fix Fevvers in appropriate vision, here the mise en abyme is represented as less physical (in the thematic attempts at entrapment such as those noted above) than iconic. The Grand Duke is a “‘great collector of all kinds of objets d’art and marvels’” (187), and his possession of Fevvers aims to take this form.
Like Bluebeard’s “hall of mirrors” castle, the Duke’s house is full of reflective, lifeless surfaces:

His house was the realm of minerals, of metals of vitrification—of gold, marble and crystal; pale halls and endless mirrors and glittering chandeliers that clanged like wind-bells in the draught from the front door ... and a sense of frigidity, of sterility, almost palpable, almost tangible in the hard, chill surfaces and empty spaces. (184)

It is notable that the Duke appears to Fevvers as “Croesus-wealthy” (184) recalling the description of Bluebeard in Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber”: “He was rich as Croesus” (114). Fevvers first sees “herself” in the Duke’s representation of her as a life-sized statue of ice: “a cold masterpiece” (186). The Duke makes the symbolic connection from the outset: “May you melt in the warmth of my house just as she melts,” he murmured, with a nod to the ice-sculpture” (186). The Duke then presents Fevvers with the disappearance of the “trompe l’oeil” bookshelves and revelation of a clockwork orchestra behind them, which includes a bird. Fevvers registers further unease and the Duke’s satisfaction at her fear. Where earlier the marionette quality of Madame Schreck had been called “uncanny,” now the adjective is applied to this puppet orchestra.

This display is prefatory to the final episode in the collector’s gallery lined with cases which appear to contain “a distinct little world” (189) in each. Fevvers is shown a series of precious eggs, “full of surprises” that invert her earlier sense of a shell containing her own vibrant potentiality. The Duke’s eggs are jewelled miniatures representing a series of enclosures in elaborate mise en abyme:

What inwards things his eggs were! And, indeed, full of surprises. For this one is made of pink enamel and opens up lengthwise to reveal an inner carapace of mother-of-pearl which, in turn, opens to reveal a spherical yolk of hollow gold. Inside the yolk, a golden hen. Inside the hen, a golden egg.
Now we have diminished to the scale of Lilliput but we have not done yet; inside the egg there is the tiniest of picture-frames, set with minute brilliants. And what should the frame contain but a miniature of the aerialiste herself, in full spread as on the trapeze and yellow of hair, blue of eye as in life. (189)

The repeated reference to “inwards,” and hollowness create the artist’s mise en abyme which is then intensified by the inclusion of a “picture-frame” calling attention to this artistry. Fewers is portrayed here, notably in the third person, and as a circus artist which is her performed role, “mirrored in the subtext” as it were, uncannily life-like. She is a representation of a representation: an “unnatural artefact” (of an unnatural artefact in performance) like those toys the Duke collects. The conditional nature of the “should” in the above quotation, “what should the frame contain,” is only realized in the last of the gallery displays. The next in the series refracts another aspect of Fewers’ artistry, containing a caged bird singing her signature song: “Only a bird in a gilded cage.” Fewer’s discomfiture is described in terms of getting “out of [her] depth” (191), reinforcing the work of the mise en abyme. The final egg also contains a gilded cage, but the cage is empty. “No bird stood on that perch, yet” (192). At this point Fewers’ sense of “imminent and deadly danger” (190) is given concrete form and she “contemplated life as a toy” (192) in the Duke’s private gallery collection. At this crucial point in the artistic rendering of the mise en abyme, however, Fewers effects her escape. And even more so than above, where Walser’s notebook is dislodged, here narrative sequentiality is disrupted altogether in transformative magic.

Fewers has a “few seconds” in which she finds herself aboard the train again with Lizzie and Walser, while the train appears to be that contained in the penultimate egg she had viewed, a model of the Trans Siberian Express. The narrative rupture makes liberatory use of magic realism:
In those few seconds of his lapse of consciousness, Fevvers ran helter-skelter down the platform, opened up the door of the first-class compartment and clambered aboard.

“Look what a mess he’s made of your dress, the pig,” said Lizzie. (192)

The train itself carries the “freight of dreams” as well as its known occupants, and yet Lizzie’s pragmatic comment carries instead the freight of deflating realism. Fevvers has again achieved flight in fancy, this time of a stylistic nature over a thematic one, and has again escaped with knowledge of the mise en abyme: “‘I’ve learned my lesson’ said Fevvers…” (192).

Jack Walser’s own attempts to frame Fevvers in his apprehension of her, in resolving the enigma she poses (fact or fiction?) and in reporting his findings in his own language are a larger framing device within the novel that just as surely fails to frame. Walser is a thematized reader of Fevvers as he attempts to decode her through her performance, spectacle, and narrative, and his attempts to frame her take the metafictive form of language just as they are thwarted through language. The first chapter establishes the fracturing of perspective with which Walser tries to contend and which he tries to unify into one “true” perspective (his own). Here, “Fevvermania” is shown as the subject of representationality, visual and linguistic, itself. Fevvers’ dressing room reflects both anonymity in the lack of what Walser deems personal items, and a surplus both of “personal items” in undergarments and self-advertisements where the self being advertized is that of her own construction. Fevvers describes herself through the manifold quotation of others and reference to others. In the first two pages of the novel alone she is “the ‘Cockney Venus,’” “‘Helen of the High Wire,’” “‘just like Helen of Troy,’” “[‘l’Ange Anglaise,’” “‘not English but an angel,’” “‘the prodigal daughter [of London].’” She is billed by advertizers, has a slogan, which is also a query, and is dubbed by the press with their own slogans. She is the subject of a self-propagating mythology, her physique “notorious and much-
debated” (7); she is “on the lips of all” and launches “a thousand quips.” Walser’s own attempts to perceive her only increase the multiplying representations as he tries to label her various facets and finds himself (by the second section of the novel) reflecting on his excessive use of adjectives and hyperbole (98). The use of simile, exotic diction (the word “steatopygous” is a single, but representative, example) juxtaposed with Cockney slang, foreign languages, shifts in voice, and perspective (at many points the perspective is unattributable) let alone register, and compulsive reference to other figures and texts by any number of means combine to create a narrative explosion reflecting dialogic engagement with the generative and transpositional figure of Fewers. In one instance, the “‘Queen of ambiguities’” as she is later called (81), tips Walser a wink in “the ambiguity of the mirror” (8) of her dressing-room, characterizing her use of the *mise en abyme*:

Walser felt the strangest sensation, as if these eyes of the *aerialiste* were a pair of sets of Chinese boxes, as if each one opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of worlds, and these unguessable depths exercised the strongest possible attraction, so that he felt himself trembling as if he, too, stood on an *unknown* threshold. (30, my emphasis in the latter two cases)

Like her possession of both arms and wings, described as “impossibility squared,” her reflections in all forms are generative of profusion.

If Fewers performs as an iconic figure, then she does so as an icon which challenges forms of representation themselves. She dramatizes instead the escape artistry of Fitcher’s “feathered” bird, and harnesses the transformative magic of fairy tales that this bird herself figures. To recall Mieke Bal, the *mise en abyme* can be used either to constrain or to unleash signification. Fewver’s relationship to the artistic *mise en abyme* accordingly characterizes its use in feminist intertextuality, where the constraining usage is quoted while unleashing is enacted.
3. Murder in the dark: the textual mise en scène

With regard to information about the story, the following homology must be observed:
'author : reader as criminal : detective.'¹

If you like, you can play games with this game.
You can say: the murderer is the writer, the detective is the reader,
the victim is the book.
Or perhaps, the murderer is the writer, the detective is the critic,
and the victim is the reader.
In that case, the book would be the total mise en scène,
including the lamp that was accidentally tipped over and broken.²

Elusive, but fascinating. It seemed to him that these things were like pieces in a jigsaw, things that would eventually fit together if he could find the right linking pieces.³

I

The textual encoding of intertextuality projects an implied reader as a detective.
This intertextual detective-reader gathers and "decodes" clues from the presuppositional constructions in order to reconstruct the text's metonymic puzzle—that is, the "missing" intertext. The detective's "lead" that is like "Ariadne's thread" in the labyrinth of the text (Tani 48-9) takes on an explicitly intertextual form. The nature of such sleuthing, prescribed to the degree that Michael Riffaterre can refer to it as "compulsory reader response," has been criticized as--to repeat Thaïs Morgan's phrase--the "overdetermined hunt for the ghost intertext." The term "intertexter," one critic's term for the reader,⁴ may be used here, critically, to connote such an agent of the text's own programmed

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¹Tzvetan Todorov in "Typology of Detective Fiction" (163) summarizing S. S. Van Dine's "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" from The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. Howard Haycraft (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 189-93.

²Margaret Atwood, "Murder in the Dark" (30).

³Stephen King, The Shining (214).

⁴Renate Lachmann, "Concepts of Intertextuality" (399).
recovery of the intertext. The reader's co-production of the text is, in such a paradigm, as illusory as the "enigma" which the text posits in the place of its intertext. This model of intertextuality relies on presuppositional constructions to "guarantee" the presence of a mystery, while the mystery's solution is also textually encoded. The (linguistically specific) phrase, "presupposition projection problem," may be recalled for this context in order to consider how the "intertext-as-enigma-and-solution" is overdetermined. The prevalence of this enigma-solution model of intertextuality may be illustrated with the following quotation from Renate Lachmann's article, "Concepts of Intertextuality":

By contrast [to an intertextual "montage"], the anagram consists of elements distributed throughout the phenotext which, when taken together, allow the coherent structure of an alien text to be recognized; the referent text is presented as an anatext. The anagrammatic signaling creates a puzzle structure that can be decoded through a combinatory, analectic and prolectic reading. The contaminatory signal requires a reading that in compensatory fashion reproduces the original textual orders and relates the identified elements back to their original contexts without at the same time dismantling the complex of meaning that arose in the (ludistic) heterogenization of elements. (Lachmann 397, my emphasis)

Intertextual reading, when described in this way, is the textually prescribed reconstruction of an intertextual puzzle. The reader in such a paradigm is like Bluebeard's wife: presupposed by the very puzzle whose outcome is a foregone conclusion.

We have seen that the "enigma" in Bluebeard's story is actually a false leerstellen; it is already overdetermined, and its "resolution" is encoded within the very terms of the enigma's presentation (death is in the chamber). As with the detective in conventional (generically overdetermined) detective fiction, textual indeterminacy is
here simply a “temporary illusion,” on the way to “the one true meaning; the story of
the crime.” The enigma: “what is in the forbidden chamber?” is answered at the point
where Bluebeard prescribes the chamber to be forbidden, threatening “death” or “grave
consequences” should his prohibition be transgressed. The mystery is empty or
illusory. As each wife nevertheless seeks in turn to know the contents of the forbidden
chamber, what she actually discovers is simply that she is not the first to have been so
taken in. The enigma is therefore present only inasmuch as it exists in the curiosity
which enacts and thereby confirms a presupposition that there is a mystery to solve. It
is heavily ironic that curiosity has become the standard focus for the Bluebeard story
since “curiosity” masks the operations of Presupposition in Bluebeard’s plot. As has
been seen, the enigma prompting curiosity in Bluebeard’s reader does not even exist.
The bodies in the chamber are a “resolution” of a second order: they comprise a second
secret standing in the stead of an originary secret. They mark the place of an absence.
The absence of an originary mystery on which Bluebeard’s plot could be founded is
therefore of further note. It is significant that Bluebeard’s plot does not posit a
foundation for its serial repetitions, existing instead as a self-created and self-
perpetuating crypt. The question of the plot’s origins is only posed by others, as it is
in Anne Thackeray Ritchie’s novella, “Bluebeard’s Keys”: “One question in particular
will never be answered. What did the first wife see when she peeped in with the key?”
(Ritchie 71). Kurt Vonnegut’s “Bluebeard,” Rabo Karabekian, also foregrounds this
“missing mystery” of origins:

[Bluebeard] catches her just at the point she is gazing aghast at the bodies of
all his former wives in there, all of whom he has murdered, save for the first

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5Peter Hühn, “The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective
Fiction” (455).
one, for looking behind the door. The first one got murdered for something else. (Vonnegut 46)

While the creative pursuit of this apparent enigma has offered a number of fictional resolutions, any such story of origins deprives Bluebeard’s plot of its characteristic circularity, its distinctive grim joke. There is nothing in the chamber save the evidence of the presupposition that there is something in the chamber, and this “evidence of presupposition” (the bodies, in other words) now becomes the secret instead.

Conversely, an unresolved and unresolvable enigma is preserved in, for example, the bird disguise adopted by the heroine in “Fitcher’s Bird.” While the Icelandic derivation of the Grimm story title and its bird (“fifugl”) has been suggested (yet not definitively), its meaning and symbolic importance remain ambiguous. This unresolved ambiguity in the story outside Bluebeard’s plot may then be said to constitute further comment on the monologism of narrative closure which Bluebeard’s plot enforces. Escape from the confines of Bluebeard’s plot enables the open-endedness of ambiguity.

It is the grim joke which is elaborated and exploited in fictions exploring only the presuppositions of Bluebeard’s plot in relation to the thematized reader. As seen in Caleb Williams, the “enigma” of the trunk’s contents is not foregrounded precisely because it is so overdetermined that the entire memoir or novel is at once the encoded presentation of the enigma and its own resolution or working out. As the contents of the trunk are presupposed by Caleb to be Falkland’s narrative, so Caleb’s narrative is written to supply the place of genuine inquiry: Presupposition thus determines the story’s every aspect. It does not matter what was actually in the trunk because Caleb’s narrative allows no room for the enigma to be posed; for Caleb, the trunk is “full.” The revelation of the lack of textual foundation for the novel effectively deconstructs the novel at its end, rendering the work a self-consuming, yet self-producing, artefact. What is revealed at the end is the degree to which the reader (anyone who has read the
novel up to this point) has colluded with Caleb’s presupposed justification for his narrative which is a hollow claim. Similarly, *Northanger Abbey* thematizes intertextual Presupposition: through Catherine Morland’s erroneous presupposition that General Tilney could be a Bluebeard, and through Henry Tilney’s erroneous presupposition that his father could not be. Presupposition creates entrapment in the form of this double-bind. It is perhaps in acknowledgment of Presuppositional games that Rabo Karabekian in Vonnegut’s *Bluebeard* must confirm for the reader early on that “the mystery” in his barn (46) truly exists: “And, yes, there is something in there. This is no shaggy dog story” (39). Once mystery is confirmed, clues can continue to mystify: “Tantalizing? Here’s a hint: it’s bigger than a bread box and smaller than the planet Jupiter” (39).

In order for feminist intertextual works to dramatize the dangers of Presupposition, the workings of both the enigma-solution hermeneutic and of intertextual Presupposition need to become foregrounded aspects of the text. A metafictional framework constitutes the structure inviting this potential to be actualized. And as a text’s implied reader may be said to be characterized by the presuppositions of the text (as Gerald Prince suggests), Presupposition features large in such metafictional uses of the Bluebeard story. Of course, this creates a paradox: the Bluebeard story is the intertext which all presuppositional constructions of the text project, but it is evoked in order to render the mechanics of Presupposition palpable and reflexive, and in order to displace Presupposition as a viable concept of solution-seeking, or “right reading.” This paradoxical project suspiciously echoes the workings of the “godgame” outlined by Robert Wilson and mentioned in the introductory chapter of this study. However, it is one for reasons similar to those Stefano Tani ascribes to the “anti-detective” form, where “detective fiction” must first be generically recognizable before the stock conventions which distinguish it can be subverted.
All the other elements must seem apparently unchanged so that the fiction at
the beginning can be identified by the reader as a detective novel and reveal
itself as a negation of the genre only at the end. ... Conventions hence become
deceitful clues planted by the writer to rouse the attention of the reader before
disappointing his expectations; conventions are paradoxically functional in the
disintegration of the genre. (Tani 42-43)

Here too the "conventions" overtly signalling the Bluebeard fiction as intertext
(simultaneously evoking and confirming the presupposition that the Bluebeard story is
the intertext) are "paradoxically functional," since after such confirmation then
subversion can begin.

The "grim joke" of Bluebeard's plot is replayed again through foregrounding
Presupposition, which is the substance of the double-bind of Bluebeard's chamber
contents. The paradox used in feminist intertextual fictions then exploits the same
circularity as Bluebeard's plot, which is quoted. The latent conditions for a reader's
actualization of both enigma and Presupposition, encoding and decoding the solution,
are a prescription for metafictive entrapment. The reader is played out to some degree
by the overdetermined manoeuvres of the meta-intertextual work that constructs the
pre-text in order that presuppositional operations may flourish. In this context again,
the term "intertexter" is useful in describing the nature of the implied reader that these
texts project through their own presuppositional gestures towards the Bluebeard story.

It is this "intertexter" (detective-dupe) who is projected by these texts through
Presuppositional gestures towards "the Bluebeard intertext," even as the reading
strategies of Presupposition are reencoded to subversive effect. But the paradox noted
earlier, that in order for a presupposed intertext to be used subversively it must, by
definition, be presupposed, is not simply camouflage for the double-bind when created
in feminist intertextual fictions. Rather, this paradox is an intrinsic component of the
trap that aims not merely to be sprung but to display its intricate workings. Or, to
return to the principle of Bluebeard’s plot: feminist intertextual fictions ensure that Presupposition’s serial murder of the reader does not occur in the figurative dark.

Finally, as any challenge to Presupposition is a resort to a metalinguistic (and hence, self-reflexive) level, so foregrounding Presupposition with the strongly metafictive structures of the detective hermeneutic establishes this level while at the same time mimicking the enigma-solution model that has been ascribed to intertextuality. The themes and structures of fictional detection create generically metafictional conditions for the hermeneutic model of reading. They do so as a framework for criticizing intertextual constraints and investigating alternatives to it.

To summarize these layers: Bluebeard’s plot itself thematizes a detective paradigm (associating it with [female] curiosity) in the apparent presence of an enigma and concomitant solution to that enigma. Frequently, Bluebeard’s plot is recast in later fictions in the context of a quintessential Gothic theme—the overdetermined “whodunnit” (someone is trying to kill me and I think it’s my husband). As Gothic is the “grandparent” of the detective story genre, so the Bluebeard plot and its overriding themes of curiosity and death structured around a “locked-room mystery” reappear frequently in this context. In the Nancy Drew mystery The Bluebeard Room, for example, the Bluebeard intertext is loosely evoked in the context of an unhappy wife in a Cornish castle and an intriguing locked room also accessible through smuggling tunnels. The denouement involves the discovery of the room’s contents (a witches’ coven-turned-smuggling ring-turned-cocaine runners): “Just then a key grated in the lock. The door opened and Hugh Penvellyn stepped into the Bluebeard Room. … [his] face darkened with rage. “‘So you’re the filthy witch-cultists who ruined my uncle!’” (Keene 147-48). The Bluebeard intertext is evoked in this instance purely for its inspiration to detection.
When the Bluebeard story is overtly associated with the act of reading, it also metafictively dramatizes the detective hermeneutic—itsfelf already a metafictive form. In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes defines the "hermeneutic code" as follows:

Let us designate as hermeneutic code ... all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution. (17, original emphasis)

Barthes later goes on to delineate a number of ways in which the hermeneutic code may render a work more "writerly" and these include the "snare," "equivocation," "the partial answer," "suspended answer," and "jamming" (acknowledgment of insolubility) (*S/Z* 75-6). Interestingly, these are the devices ascribed by Tani to the anti-detective subgenre, and particularly in its subversion of the ending (that is, of solution). As Linda Hutcheon writes of detective fiction's generic narcissism: "Often a detective story will explicitly thematize [the] hermeneutic paradigm" (*Narcissistic* 72).

Frank Kermode writes similarly: "...although all [novels] have hermeneutic content, only the detective story makes it pre-eminent." Correlations between the activity of the heroine in Bluebeard's story and that of the reader have already been drawn.

Spenser's use of "Mr Fox" in *The Faerie Queene* is an early example illustrating the activity of reading, and moreover of "riddling," in this context:

Tho as she backward cast her busie eye,
To search each secret of that goodly sted,
Ouer the dore thus written she did spye
Be bold: she oft and oft it ouer-red,
Yet could not find what sence it figured:
But what so were therein or writ or ment.

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*6 Frank Kermode, "Novel and Narrative" (160).*
She was no whit thereby discouraged
From prosecuting of her first intent,
But forward with bold steps into the next roome went.

And as she lookt about, she did behold,
How ouer that same dore was likewise writ,
Be bold, be bold, and euery where Be bold,
That much she muz'd, yet could not construe it
By any riddling skill, or commune wit.
At last she spyde at that rooms upper end,
Another yron dore, on which was writ,
Be not too bold; whereto though she did bend
Her earnest mind, yet wist not what it might intend.

(Spenser 3, 11, 50 and 54, my emphasis)

Within the context of the Bluebeard story, which already thematizes certain stock conventions of the classic detective formula, then, the presence of the heroine as a thematized reader enhances the story's metafictive potential and foregrounds hermeneutic activity.

This is yet further enhanced in meta-intertextual fictions which thematize the intertextual hermeneutic as echoing conventions of the detective formula: in other words, the "solution" in this "mystery" paradigm is the intertext (the Bluebeard intertext) whose embedded plot also happens to use the self-same paradigm. Finally, as this paradigm within the Bluebeard story is revealed by the surviving heroine to be a trap (the murders mask the absence of mystery), it may be said deconstructively to subvert the model which Bluebeard's plot uses for its themes and structure. In fact, it is possible to describe the revision and subversion of Bluebeard's plot by the heroine in the fairy tale and particularly the plot's conventional (serial and circular) teleology as
“anti-detective” in the context argued for the formal postmodern subversion of the detective genre. In the same way, feminist intertextual fictions use the Bluebeard story’s use of Bluebeard’s plot to show Presupposition’s snares as another intertextual enigma of false pretences. This creates a meta-intertextual subversion while drawing on the detective hermeneutic. Contemporary fiction executing this subversion in engagement with the Bluebeard story can be shown to display “anti-detective” devices. In “The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination,” William Spanos says of this subgenre:

It is … no accident that the paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination is the anti-detective story (and its anti-psychoanalytical analogue), the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to “detect” and/or to psychoanalyze in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime (or find the cause of the neurosis). (154, my emphasis)

As David Richter writes of the endemic open-endedness of such subversive fictions in “Murder in Jest: Serial Killing in the Post-Modern Detective Story”: “In the post-modern mystery … the final explanation either never comes … or, when it does, it subverts the entire process of investigation …” (108). In “Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction,” Michael Holquist also summarizes the subversive effect of such a form for the reader:

Thus the metaphysical detective story does not have the narcotizing effect of its progenitor; instead of familiarity, it gives strangeness, a strangeness which more often than not is the result of jumbling the well known patterns of classical detective stories. Instead of reassuring, they disturb. … And in this attack on the reader lies all the difference … (155)

Richter’s “postmodern mystery” and Holquist’s “metaphysical detective story” are simply labels for the same thing, called by Spanos and Tani the “anti-detective” form. Tani’s work in particular informs this chapter’s discussion of devices that subvert the
detective genre. In David Richter’s words, “One universal theme within postmodern mystery is that of textuality itself” (Richter 108), and that is true for the concept described by all of the above terms.

This chapter will proceed in two further sections to demonstrate (in stages) fictions which respectively thematize and dramatize the detective hermeneutic in rewritings of the Bluebeard story, illustrating (by showing, and by enacting) the overdetermination of the intertextual “hunt” and hence the way in which the so-called “enigma-solution” model of intertextual reading actively precludes the reader’s aleatory engagement with the text. The framing devices which create a mise en abyme of Bluebeard’s plot become in these texts metalinguistic grids “framing” the reader in the paradoxical double-bind of a Presuppositional hermeneutic. In using Presupposition as the encoding of intertextual “clues,” however, the overdetermined feminist intertextual text masquerades as a criminal who desires to be caught, while playing out the detective-“intertexter” all the while. The overt criminality of this godgame is that the detective-reader is numbered among the plants of the text. In other words, the detective reading Presuppositionally is obliged to order and frame the puzzles of the text using a methodology that depends on the text to offer up its intertextual suspects. The following observation by Peter Hühn may be lent both to thematized readers in such works and to the implied reader of works dramatizing this paradigm:

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7Stefano Tani’s categories of anti-detective modes are: innovative, deconstructive, and metafictional. While all categories merge at a number of levels, there is a general progression through these categories from thematized to dramatized detection and subversion of conventions, until in the metafictional anti-detective mode the conventions of detective fiction dramatize relations between author, reader and text. Indeed, as Tani notes, contemporary fiction makes such use of this mode and of anti-detective conventions that it is possible to say they are “for the most part the same thing” (149), and that such conventions and their subversive use have been “subsumed into the ‘free circuit’ of literature” (152).
One essential factor in the detective’s eventual success is his ability to question
preconceived notions and break through automatized modes of perception:
because the clues normally appear in suggestive contexts that automatically
trigger (erroneous) assumptions about their significance, the master-detective
consciously frees himself from such suggestions, thus being able to formulate
an unorthodox interpretation of the mystery. (Hühn 455)

(The master-detective can also be a woman: as Tony in the novel The Robber Bride
says of that novel’s gender inversion in the fairy tale retelling, “It’s odd what a
difference it makes, changing the pronoun” [Atwood 340].)

The next section first considers three works which use the Bluebeard story to
foreground its “murder mystery” aspects while using subversive thematic strategies of
feminist detective fiction. The novels The Robber Bride (1993) by Margaret Atwood
and Bluebeard’s Room (1995) by Emma Cave both draw on the detective conditions
inherent in the Bluebeard story for their narratives. Furthermore, both works thematize
the detection processes in inherently metafictive terms. In Atwood’s short story,
“Bluebeard’s Egg,” Presupposition is set in a context which explicitly stages
intertextual reading of this fairy tale, whereby the thematized reader learns that
Presupposition is the secret plot.

In the three works discussed in this chapter’s final section, the metafictive
themes become the metatextual surface and Presupposition’s double-bind is dramatized
in the process of reading the works themselves. In Max Frisch’s novel, Bluebeard: A
Tale (1982), the trial-transcript excerpts juxtaposed with the first-person narrative by a
confused and apparently amnesiac “Bluebeard” render the mystery and the act of
reading intensely self-reflexive. While Herr Felix Schaad is reading himself as a
mystery, the reader is reading Bluebeard and “trying” the case through reading
Schaad’s character against the intertext. Finally, two “anti-detective” short stories use
the Bluebeard story to dramatize the intertextual puzzle with a readerly twist. Detailed
close reading of Donald Barthelme's "Bluebeard" and Meira Cook's "Instructions for Navigating the Labyrinth" demonstrates that the entire enigma-solution model in intertextual reading is gleefully subverted by these stories. In these three works, the implied reader is invited to actualize the lessons of the thematized readers noted above.

II

Margaret Atwood's novel, The Robber Bride, draws heavily on thematic and structural conventions of detective fiction even as it subverts these same conventions. The title at once signals an intertextual engagement with the fairy tale "The Robber Bridegroom" and the feminist revisionist nature of this engagement ("bride," not "groom"). The criminal of this story is invoked from the intertextual realm of fairy tale criminals (robber and murderer), and her gender difference from this figure simultaneously announces an inversion or "travesti" such as that of Caleb Williams in the role of Bluebeard's wife, and an early subversion of intertextual Presupposition that will charge the work as a whole.8 Zenia, the robber bride, is textually over-determined. She invokes many other irreconcilable stories; as a narrative catalyst she is a roving and rogue figure for intertextuality. Yet at the same time, Zenia is a spectral figure, a cryptic hollow at the core of the novel. Zenia draws in others' narratives provisionally to fill the gaps she creates; she invites narrative co-conspiracies which rely upon the Presupposition of other protagonists to create her snare. Zenia is thus also an enigmatic figure for a hermeneutic mise en abyme, and the novel is consequently charged with two contradictory narrative tensions: burial within (like

8In "Legal Aliens: Feminist Detective Fiction," Maggie Humm describes the feature of gendered scripts and their inversion as a generic trope: "What binds all these feminist writers is their oppositional stance to the constraints of traditional detective fiction and to conventional gender scripts. What marks their fiction as feminist are the strategies they use to unpack and demolish traditional gender representations" (210). Changing the gender of the intertext's "script" in The Robber Bride may thus permit the work to be considered a feminist detective fiction.
Zenias empty urn which is buried at the outset, drawing attention to the verb “inter” (13), and movement between (or inter-). The novels three “detective” characters, Tony, Charis and Roz, are each preoccupied with language in different ways which not only characterize them but which foregrounds different modes of reading, and particularly different modes of reading the robber-stories of Zenia; that is, reading “the robber bride.” Because Zenia gives the novel its/her name, the novel signals the thematized and metafictive activity of reading intertextual revisions such as those the novel and Zenia both generate in relation to the fairy tale intertext.

While Zenia-as-narrative is an insoluble enigma, it is in learning to read intertextually that Tony, Charis and Roz together escape the binding dualities and mirroring patterns that Zenia prompts and which are the essence of the Gothic as well as of detective fiction.9 As Stefano Tani notes, “Duality is the basic principle of detection, since the sine qua non requirements of the detective story are a detective and a criminal” (Tani 4). Similarly, despite this novel’s highly patterned structure of symmetry, circularity, repetition and return, it maintains an explicit open-endedness whereby the narrative evades being engulfed by the mise en abyme from within (as does happen to some extent in the film The Piano, for instance).10 In these ways, The Robber Bride is a thematized, metafictive, anti-detective work of fiction.

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9Doubleness and constricting binaries are a theme in Atwood’s poetry and fiction, as is the necessity and means for escaping the “power politics” of dualities. In The Robber Bride, mirrors and doubles are pervasive, but the most obvious among these include Tony’s reversals (and reversed self), Charis’ previous self and alter ego Karen, and Roz’s twins. Zenia is a doppelgänger, or “dark twin,” for each of the women. The tripling of central protagonists as well as the collectivity they form together in order to escape their struggle in duality with Zenia or their own alter egos (perhaps the same thing) subverts the entrapment of the binary in this novel.

10In Jane Campion’s The Piano, the embedded dramatization of Bluebeard (the wives’ heads discovered through a bloody curtain, and the axe work effected through shadow play with a Gustave Doré-like Bluebeard figure) is firmly relegated to the realm of fiction at the (controversial) point where the Maori audience take the axe-play for real threat, the play is interrupted, and the stage machinery is
The novel makes overt its use of conventions drawn from the detective genre. The opening section, “Onset,” narrated from Tony’s perspective, meditates on Zenia as a “puzzle” and creates suspense in retroactively searching for a beginning from which to tell the narrative of the puzzle. Zenia, a vampiresque femme fatale from the past who has, over three decades, wreaked havoc in the lives of the three protagonists who focalize the narrative, changes her self-representation physically and fictively. Tracing the “true” Zenia through her stories about herself (when even her name is made up) becomes one of the tasks of each of the three friends who suffer through their relationships with her. 

Zenia also uses secrets, stories about the past, as currency:

Zenia is full of secrets. She laughs, she throws her secrets casually this way and that, her teeth flashing white; she pulls more secrets out of her sleeves and unfurls them from behind her back, she unrolls them like bolts of rare cloth, displaying them, whirling them like gypsy scarves, flourishing them like banners, heaping them one on top of another in a glittering, prodigal tangle. (187)

Even at this juncture, the language of Zenia and of Tony who is perceiving Zenia here is enmeshed. The adjective “gypsy” reflects Zenia’s story of her White Russian origins, while the simile “like banners” is one from Tony’s own vocabulary as a war explained. Toward the film’s end, however, the safely embedded theatricality engulfs the action of the whole when Ada’s husband reads her adulterous transgression of his prohibition to communicate with Baines and he runs homewards, wielding an axe. That he then severs one of Ada’s fingers on the chopping block as punishment is further confirmation of the Bluebeard/Robber Bridegroom intertextuality: the mise en abyme is not contained, but containing.

Again, this is a feature of feminist detective fiction according to Maggie Humm: “The social base and physical skills of masculine individualism are displaced from a privileged position in these works. Set in contrast are collectivity, vulnerability, and women’s friendships. If the fiction of the feminist detective is to destabilise the fixed boundaries of class and sexual preference then the figure of the detective cannot be reliably constant” (Humm 206).
historian. Zenia provides Roz with a story of her father to make sense of his mysterious history as an art-thief during the Second World War. The burial of Zenia’s ashes, which begins the novel, has already been countered with the statement that Zenia came back from the dead; this too creates a mystery that is paralleled in the scattering of Zenia’s ashes at the end when the means of her death and the identity of her killer remain unsolved. After Zenia’s initial, sudden “return” in the Toxique restaurant where the three women are lunching together, this moment becomes the new point of departure for each of the three narratives making up the novel. In turn, it is revealed that Tony is prompted by Zenia’s return to look on her husband’s desk, on “a hunch” (45), where she finds the cryptic reference she must decode: “Z – A. Hotel.” For Tony, interpreting the existence of this note in West’s papers is paramount. Charis crosses the street in order to spy on Zenia, immediately after the three women take their leave of one another, and follows her when she leaves the restaurant. Charis aims to solve the mystery of her lover Billy’s disappearance (“It’s as if her story, the story with Billy and Zenia in it, was going along a path, and suddenly there were no more footprints” [80]); instead spying on Zenia reveals a new mystery when she is seen to be kissing Larry, Roz’s son. Roz in turn goes back to her office and contacts the private detective she had hired with regard to Zenia before, and complements this by imagining herself at the geographical apex of the three friends, forming a signal triangle such as might feature in a mystery of “Nancy Drew the girl-detective” (336). Each woman has her different motivation for discovering Zenia’s agenda, as each has a different story of their relationship in the past. This is the tantalizing enigma for the reader of *The Robber Bride*.

At the time the narrative returns to another meeting of the three women in the Toxique, paralleling this named section of the novel earlier, certain conventions of detective fiction become more pronounced still. Each character narrates her attempt to see Zenia at the hotel (having undergone different sleuthing methods to discover which
hotel that is), and each creates the opportunity to be considered a potential murderer. In each case, there is motive and opportunity; Tony goes to meet Zenia again with the express intention of killing her, and carries a gun. The conventions of detective fiction collide with their ironic parallel in Tony’s thoughts: "If she could murder Zenia with a cordless drill, what policeman would be smart enough to figure it out?" (468-69); “She could always do an ambidextrous murder: gun in the left hand, cordless drill in the right, like the rapier-and-dagger arrangements of the late Renaissance” (469). The ironic contrast between these “dexterous” reflections and the “rodent-like shriek” she gives at Zenia’s unexpected appearance in the flesh is profound. Roz similarly envisages the scene in such genre-determined terms: “She could sneak up behind Zenia, bop her on the head with a lamp or something. Tie her up with pantyhose. Make it look like a sex killing. ... She populates the room with detectives, cigar-smoking detectives ...” (513).

When Charis has a premonitory vision (or memory?) of Zenia’s fatal fall from the hotel room balcony, and a glimpse of her own alter ego “Karen” pushing her, they go to the hotel only to find the vision true, inasmuch as Zenia is lying dead in the courtyard fountain beneath the balcony. Zenia’s suspicious death creates a number of possible narratives, none of which can be privileged as unitary or “true”: she jumped, she overdosed and fell, she was pushed by one of the three women (or by Karen) each of whom consider that one of the others may indeed have done it, she was killed by Larry who had also been to see her, or by Tony’s husband West, or else one of Zenia’s own stories had enough truth to it to create other suspects. The denouement is one of the more inviolable conventions of detective fiction; providing the solution to the enigma is the privileged method of this genre’s narrative resolution. Here, however, the solution is as over-determined with narrative possibilities as the enigma (herself) was (“There was too much of her” muses Tony at the beginning [111]), and this creates an open-endedness to the story that is made more pronounced as Tony reflects on the
arbitrariness of endings (paralleling the reflection of the arbitrariness of beginnings at the novel’s beginning). The conventions of detective fiction are most strongly thematized in such instances of their subversion. The novel itself signals the convention through Roz’s reading of detective fiction: “But mostly she likes the fact that there’s a reason for every death, and only one murderer at a time, and things get figured out in the end, and the murderer always gets caught” (389). Each of these conventions is duly subverted by the co-existence in the novel of the number of plausible options. Tony acknowledges this plurality: “… Zenia will prove too smart for the men in overcoats. … Let them sweat! Why should everyone know everything? It’s not as if there are no precedents: history teems with people who died in unclear ways” (530).

The theme of reading accordingly takes precedence over narrative determination in Atwood’s novel. Each of the three “detectives” are readers of different kinds. Tony, the historian and professor, reads as a historian and reads history as a construct-like narrative: “Any point of entry is possible and all choices are arbitrary” (4). She thus reads Zenia as a researcher, “decod[ing] her motives” (4). Tony’s own relationship with language is doubled by her use of inversion: she is ambidextrous and able to think of language in reverse as well as to write it this way. Her relationship with this “other language” (22) is almost a prescription for the narrative revisionism undertaken with the inversion of the intertextual reference of the title (and itself an echo of the “new wine in old bottles” analogy for feminist revisionism): “If you said a word backwards, the meaning emptied out and then the word was vacant. Ready for a new meaning to flow in” (178). Charis’ language is talismanic: she reads words as pictured images evoking physical emotions: “for Charis the words are pictures” (74); words are “bland” (65), “pinching is a hurtful word” (67), she sees the word “Zenia” with a black line drawn through it (51). Charis (somewhat like Danny in The Shining) also reads people intuitively, although Tony is
“hard for Charis to read” because she uses “too many words,” “Leaving no space, no space for the unsayable” (71). In her confrontation with Zenia this reading strategy also fails her, and she notes that she is “not getting a reading” (493). Her other reading strategy is also divinatory while largely requiring interpretive extrapolation: she reads the tarot deck and “random” excerpts from the Bible to interpret the future. Roz, on the other hand, is a lifetime consumer of classic detective fiction and refers to this frequently (82-83, 84, 372, 389, 414) as a point of reference for herself; she is comforted by the surety of the genre’s predictable, formulaic intelligibility. Roz has wrapped herself in protective “layers of language” (401) which includes her secretary Boyce who serves as a comfortable protector-figure and quotes from literature incessantly, particularly to deflate a tense situation.

Each of these detective-readers fails to decode Zenia while they attempt to do so in a motivated quest for a single truth or single story, for Zenia creates with each woman a mise en abyme by reflecting the story each woman wants to hear. Zenia plays on the presuppositions of her readers and invites a bond of likeness with each through the nature of the narrative she prompts each to interpolate from her. Tony finds a familiar bond with Zenia in her narrative of parental desertion, as Tony’s mother left her and her father committed suicide: “So far Tony has seen Zenia as very different from herself, but now she sees her as similar too, for aren’t they both orphans?” (192-93). Zenia reflects the essentials of this story back to Tony so that Tony sees in Zenia “her own reflection: herself, as she would like to be. … Herself turned inside out” (193). Charis also finds “a bond in common” (313) with Zenia in the narrative of losing a father in the war. While Zenia plays to Charis’ need to rescue and nurture her, Charis responds with her own presuppositions in Zenia’s narrative of

12 For discussion of the readability of detective fiction, in the Barthesian sense of “lisible” text, see Dennis Porter’s “The Detective Novel as Readable Text.”
illness and healing: “This sounds exactly right to Charis” (253). Charis envisages that Zenia creates “a circle of language” which contains just the privileged two of them; similarly, Roz feels privileged by Zenia’s story, “told just to her, for her, for her ears alone, by one outsider to another” (425). Roz had speculated that Zenia could even be more kindred, as a “long-lost half-sister” (367) given her father’s proclivities and Zenia’s reference to Roz’s father. When Roz does hear Zenia’s narrative for her, she responds to it as terrific story material, finding it “hard to resist” on both personal and (as magazine editor) professional levels. Zenia offers a story and Roz chooses to appoint her the messenger about her father, Roz’s “Great Unknown” (369). Roz hears the story she desires: “Zenia stops talking. This is what people often do when they come to the hard part, Roz has discovered. ‘A bad story,’ she prompts” (417). In her confrontation with Charis who had nurtured Zenia through what she thought to be terminal cancer, Zenia reminds Charis of her own role in creating and maintaining this story: “‘Hell, you did the rest!’” (496).

Zenia is the shadow image of each of the protagonist’s own projections of a twin self, rather than the “pure freewheeling malevolence” (481) she is described as being. Charis cannot envisage what the “Zenia-ness of Zenia” might constitute, for Zenia’s “own” narrative is missing from the novel. Charis thinks of “Zenia in relation to herself, or to Billy, or even to Tony and Roz …” (524) which is unsurprising as Zenia exists only in relation to others, whose narratives create her in response to their own. In this sense she can only enter when invited in. Zenia herself can be read only as a crypt: a “dark sunflower” (60) in a moment of time “devoid of content” (61), a piece cut out of the newspaper (15) and the silence of an agreement not to discuss her. Zenia is instead a context-based figure, both created by and creating context.

This context is limiting when it is based only on the presuppositions of the reader she is reflecting in her narrative; it excludes alternative readings in order to privilege the notion of the one “true” story (at a time). However, Zenia’s “negative
gift" (329) is a difficult education in intertextual revisionist reading for the three protagonists who turn Zenia’s narrative mise en abyme into a celebration for alternative narratives to exist and to co-exist. Tony laughs when she hears of the account of Zenia’s history that Charis had believed, and with this contradictory version Tony finds the secret of Zenia’s narrative power. This becomes Tony’s narrative power as she inherits Zenia’s revisionist accounts:

But what is Tony to make of her? The story of Zenia is insubstantial, ownerless, a rumour only, drifting from mouth to mouth and changing as it goes. As with any magician, you saw what she wanted you to see; or else you saw what you yourself wanted to see. She did it with mirrors. The mirror was whoever was watching, but there was nothing behind the two-dimensional image but a thin layer of mercury. (535)

As Linda Hutcheon writes of the detective plot and its relation to reading: “On a more covert level, the detective plot itself, the following of clues by the detective, is a hermeneutic allegory of the reader’s act” (“Metafictional Implications” 10). In the anti-detective plot, the privileging of reading over the clues of textual determinacy (or, the failure of the detective plot) is then a hermeneutic allegory of another order. The form which the failure of the detective plot takes in The Robber Bride is one which demonstrates the education of the reader from an exclusionary approach to narrative based on Presupposition to one which can concede insolubility and celebrate the possibilities of revision. Dennis Porter also writes of the defamiliarization the anti-detective form celebrates: “Where the detective story has pursued the goal of perpetual refamiliarization, much of the serious fiction of our time has been committed to the task of defamiliarization, often by means of a more or less explicit parody of the detective genre” (Porter 245). The effect of these anti-detective fictions is to defamiliarize Presupposition, which looks instead to find familiarity and likeness, itself.
Emma Cave’s novel, *Bluebeard’s Room* (1995) is a detective “psychological thriller” set in London and billed as the first of a series of “Room Chronicles.” Lucy Riven is engaged to Rupert DeynTree (a man with three ex-wives: Sarah, Barbara and Chris). Rupert’s mysterious past (as a spy doing intelligence work) causes Lucy’s mother concern, and it is she who refers to Rupert as “Bluebeard.” When Lucy’s American friend Vee arrives in London for a visit, she sets about doing some independent sleuthing with “sisterly curiosity” (Cave 267) that involves tracing Rupert through the stories of his wives. Lucy suffers an assault in the manner of Jane Eyre (Lucy is in fact referred to at one point as “Fairfax Rochester’s girl-bride” [170]). Her waist-length braid is severed in the crowded underground in a fetishistic attack akin to Bertha Mason’s attack on Jane’s clothing. The woman most likely responsible is another from Rupert’s past: D. November (“Fatima” to one of her clients), nicknamed Jeanne Duval after Beaudelaire’s black mistress, the “black Venus” of Angela Carter’s novel of this name, has followed Rupert from South Africa and works as a prostitute. In her bedroom the closet mirror serves as a window behind which there is an armchair and a video camera. Her own murder is recorded here; the tape and Lucy’s braid are discovered in Rupert’s own apartment by Vee.

Rupert DeynTree is a “murderer and a rapist” (321) “whose origins are obscure” (163) and who has uncannily blue (“ceanothus-coloured”) eyes. His Bluebeard-like qualities are more pronounced in times of his fiancée’s refusal to credit them: “‘It’s not funny,’ Lucy said. ‘It’s awful. I mean, Bluebeard murdered his wives. Yours are perfectly all right’” (9). Rupert repeats this fact in his own defence:

“‘That name she gave me—Bluebeard.’

“She only meant you’d been married so often.”

“But Bluebeard murdered his wives. Kept a room full of corpses. Dreadful secrets. ‘That Bluebeard chamber of his mind into which no eye but his own must look.’”
“Is that last bit a quotation?”

“Yes, but heaven knows where it comes from.” (160)

This exception to the intertextual parallel is (falsely) contradicted in a drunken anonymous call to Lucy by Rupert’s first wife, Sarah, when she says, “‘He’s killed three wives already!’” (177). This “Bluebeard” is, however, a mosaic of intertextual citations; he quotes constantly. His references to Browning are menacing in this context, particularly as the novel closes with the image of Rupert playing with Lucy’s “golden rope of hair” (323) in the style of Porphyria’s lover. As with other allusions, this one receives comment elsewhere in the novel, as Rupert’s friend Francis quotes Browning to Lucy:

“Browning, you know. Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what’s become of all the gold Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old.” (190)

Rupert is compared at one point to the changing portrait in The Picture of Dorian Gray (248), and one might recall Renee Van Raamsdonk’s observation that the figure of Bluebeard has superficially undergone similar intertextual metamorphoses.

The detective conventions in this novel are not subverted, but they are used in a metafictive manner as Vee traces her way through the “maze of hell” (315) that is the narrative tangle of Rupert’s past. At one point she falls asleep reading Graham Greene’s The Heart of the Matter (250) which provides a comment on Vee’s role as amateur sleuth getting to the heart of the matter of this story. In this context, Bluebeard’s castle is the narrative itself. Vee comments to James (Rupert’s son by his first marriage to Sarah):

“The more I find out about Rupert, the more I want to. It’s sort of like a series of rooms that open out of each other. You go deeper into the house, unlocking door after door.”

“Till you come to Bluebeard’s chamber? The forbidden room.”
“No room’s forbidden,” said Vee.... (259)

That Vee undertakes this detective work at all reinforces the theme of feminist sisterhood that is explicitly addressed in the novel (“‘Oh, you’re one of those Americans. “Sisterhood is powerful” and all that garbage’” [266]) as well as evoked through the intertextually apt dedication: “To Anne, with love / ‘For there is no friend like a sister’ / Christina Rossetti.” The novel is made up of narrative repetitions: it is structured in two parts, “Lucy” and “Vee.” Conversations in which Lucy reports her experiences to Vee and others reiterate the events already described as they occurred. Similarly, the novel records Vee’s experiences as well as her reports of these in conversation. There is also Rupert’s best friend Francis, whose conversations with his mother about Rupert’s activities form a commentary on the novel’s action. This novel positions itself in the detective thriller genre using the Bluebeard story intertext for its atmosphere of “terror, sexual menace and murder,” as the back cover attests, and yet integral to this rather uncomplicated use of the Bluebeard story is its metafictiveness. If, as Linda Hutcheon says, metafiction “again makes overt the intertextual reference of perhaps all fiction” (“Metafictional Implications” 9), Bluebeard’s Room further demonstrates that thematizing such intertextual reference seems to be the metafictional prerogative of almost any feminist intertextual text engaging the Bluebeard story.

While both Emma Cave’s Bluebeard’s Room and Atwood’s The Robber Bride recreate the Bluebeard story specifically as a murder mystery—already thereby calling the fairy tale’s overdetermination of the “whodunnit” into question at the diegetic level—the association of detection with actual intertextual reading and interpretation is made explicit in Margaret Atwood’s “Bluebeard’s Egg.” In this short story, the protagonist Sally tends to “read”—in the broadest sense—to a presupposed image which she uses to shape and frame the incidents so that, in circular fashion, these become self-fulfilling “evidence” of the bigger picture. Standing at the kitchen window watching her
husband Ed, Sally’s thoughts similarly “frame” him as she “pictur[es]” him imaginatively:

[Ed] is just so stupid. Every time he gives her another piece of evidence, another tile that she can glue into place in the vast mosaic of his stupidity she’s continually piecing together, she wants to hug him, and often does; and he is so stupid he can never figure out what for. (Atwood, “Bluebeard’s Egg” 134)

But the ambiguity of this, later referred to as Ed’s “puzzled way” (137) is less Ed’s confusion than Sally’s puzzle-like approach to him. It is interesting to recall Helen Dry’s and Susan Kucinkas’ work on Presupposition in The Turn of the Screw where the presuppositional constructions arise largely from the presentation of information through the thoughts of the governess. The intense subjectivity of her perceptions draws conspicuous attention to itself, causing her perceptions to be suspect. This is metatextually enhanced in “Bluebeard’s Egg” when Sally turns her thoughts parenthetically to the process of her thoughts and the way these create her image of Ed:

(When Sally starts thinking this way about Ed, in terms of the calendar art ..., dredging up images ... [she knows that] she must stop at once, or Ed will vanish, to be replaced by a stuffed facsimile, useful for little else but an umbrella stand. Ed is a real person, with a lot more to him than these simplistic renditions allow for; which sometimes worries her.) (135)

Further, Sally reflects on her reading matter, Agatha Christie murder mysteries, and the way in which she characterizes herself as “the clever and witty heroine” (135) with Ed as the second-lead male in the scenario, rescued through her “cleverness.” When the Bluebeard intertext is introduced at the story level with mention of Ed’s two previous wives, Sally has predetermined her role as the successful heroine, the “clever” one, but it is crucial that Sally does not have “the whole story” (136) of Ed’s previous life and marriages, while her imagination supplies this story instead: “Since their actual fates have always been vague to Sally, she’s free to imagine all kinds of things...” (150).
The story develops its meta(inter)textual mise en abyme through Sally’s night course, *Forms of Narrative Fiction*. Her intertextual education begins there with study of the Epic (*The Odyssey*) and its transposition by James Joyce in *Ulysses*. The class studies the ways in which Joyce adapted the epic form for use in the modern-day novel. The class proceeds to the ballad form, where Sally indulges in her own thematic transposition: “she had no difficulty concocting a five-page murder mystery, complete with revenge” (155). By the time the class arrives at “Folk Tales and the Oral Tradition,” Sally has characterized herself as an astute reader/detective. The conditions of the Bluebeard assignment are provided: Sally is to remember its features and write another transposition, set in the realistic mode and from a chosen point of view. The teacher Bertha reads from “Fitcher’s Bird,” and part of this story is embedded within Atwood’s story with occasional parenthetical asides from Sally’s thoughts on hearing it. It is prefaced by the following ambiguous statement: “This is what Bertha read, as far as Sally can remember” (156). The excerpt is doubly quoted, as Sally’s version does not reproduce Bertha’s version, but signals ahead to the point where Sally stops listening or hears but forgets the story. It is crucial again that this point comes when Bluebeard tells the third (“clever”) sister that she is to be his wife:

> The wizard no longer had any power over her, and had to do whatever she asked. There was more, about how the wizard met his come-uppance and was burned to death, but Sally already knew which features stood out for her.”

(158)

Sally’s “reading” of Bluebeard forecloses on the story’s dialogic representation of Bluebeard’s plot as a means of demonstrating escape artistry through critical reading. The salient feature of the story as the heroine of “Fitcher’s Bird” shows it is precisely what Sally needs as a key concept: the relativity of point of view. Without this key to context, Sally remains within the mise en abyme of limited vision and does not even realize that she is trapped. Sally reflects on what she remembers in the process of
determining how she will transpose the story in her assignment, and this assessment of
different features of the fairy tale is literary criticism from within. She decides on the
“intriguing thing about the story” which for her is the egg and what perspective it might
afford as a catalyst for the plot. The egg is another enigma which Sally sets about
detecting or reading, but she does so in her method of puzzle construction according to
a presupposed story recovery. This is revealed in her association of the egg with her
husband Ed (“Ed Egg” [159]), both presenting a story she does not have but has read
in by providing her own simplistic text in the form of a palimpsestial overlay: “blank
and pristine and lovely. Stupid too. Boiled, probably” (159). In her article,
“Palimpsest: Margaret Atwood’s Bluebeard’s Egg,” Barbara Godard discusses the
metafictive levels of the story’s mise en abyme and its focus on processes of narrative
construction: “It is a text about reading and writing, about the hermeneutic puzzle that
is narrative, and it is constructed as a recursive paradigm, a Chinese-box narrative”
(Godard 53). But Godard sees the story as reclaiming multiple relativizing
perspectives, and it is in that context that she offers these comments:

> It is the egg in the title which makes all the difference ... the egg as silent
other, whose absence this text and Sally’s transposed story seek to cover by
giving it a perspective and eventually a voice. (Godard 51)

Significantly, Ed’s replies do not develop into complete narratives. His
silence is the gap which Sally’s anecdotes, and the narrative she is planning to
write from the point of view of the egg in the Bluebeard story, seek to cover.
(Godard 54)

In fact, this is the presumption which is the cause of Sally’s own misfortune, as her
presuppositional reading leads her to “cover” the enigma of another’s point of view
with a recovery of her own reading.

> With the evidence of an alternative reading—Ed’s hand on Marian’s thigh
beside the keyhole desk—Sally realizes that she has been misreading the “intertext” that
is her husband. However, she does not identify her own use of Presupposition as the misleading factor:

If this is it, Sally has been wrong about Ed, for years, forever. Her version of Ed is not something she’s perceived but something that’s been perpetrated on her, by Ed himself, for reasons of his own. Possibly Ed is not stupid. Possibly he’s enormously clever. (164)

What is important is not that Sally has misjudged Ed’s story, but that this new version (Ed as Bluebeard) is equally superimposed by Sally. By remaining silent, he reserves his ambiguity and Sally may yet realize that he is not perpetrating a story but prompting her hermeneutic activities nonetheless. Sally at least is aware of a new dimension in reading, that of “As if” (165). Ed lies in bed “as if asleep,” and Sally has not yet located “as if” to be not in Ed’s “pretences” but in her own interpretive manoeuvres. The story ends with a question: “This is something the story left out, Sally thinks: the egg is alive, and one day it will hatch. But what will come out of it?” (166). The story ends here, poised on the brink of the principle of transformational possibilities and the un-supposed realm: at the same point where Sally turned from the embedded intertext, but for a different reason this time. Sally no longer stops at reading the features which stand out for her, but opens the question to include how she comes to such decisions. One critic has posited: “The meaning of the egg eludes Sally until the very end.”13 It is perhaps rather that meaning’s elusiveness has eluded Sally until this point. Similarly, Barbara Godard argues “…Sally is able to move from the fictions of life to the texts of art only when she is capable of perceiving the story of the other, of the egg.”14 This is perhaps the case when Sally is able to perceive that the story of the

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13 Nancy J. Peterson, “‘Bluebeard’s Egg’: Not Entirely a ‘Grimm’ Tale” (136).
14 Barbara Godard, “Tales Within Tales: Margaret Atwood’s Folk Narratives” (72). The section on “Bluebeard’s Egg” in this article is largely the same as that in RANAM (noted above) but which reduces the section on this story.
other is "other," and not a reflection of her own perception. Perhaps unaware of its potential, Sally has nevertheless isolated the key term by which Presupposition works ("as if"), and Presupposition is shown as central to the question of the text-reader merger in intertextuality. Bluebeard's plot works through creating this assimilative resemblance, and so too does intertextuality when it presupposes likeness. Sally still thinks it originates in the text (Ed) as something perpetrated on her, but stops short of reflecting on her own collusion with the "givens" of presuppositional constructions. In reading presuppositionally, she invests the intertext with overdetermined properties she no longer analyzes, and the story ends on the very border of the metalinguistic challenge to Presupposition required to call intertextual reading strategies into question.

III

The issue of Presupposition in intertextual readings—in detecting and decoding the intertext—forms the thematic content for characters who are detective readers in these fictions. This section now considers three works which dramatize this issue in their relationship with "outside" readers. Discussing such a text's relationship to the "reader" invites the objection that an homogeneous readership is again implied (one that is textually constructed and presupposed). It recreates the critical double-bind being addressed in this study. Here again, however, it is possible to read textual conventions as "paradoxically functional" as it is in their overt, self-reflexive use by "writerly" texts that the conditions of "compulsory reader response" may be identified and discussed. In other words, these fictions are almost compendiums of the textual constructions Michael Riffaterre points to in construing compulsory directives of the text to its textualized readership; it is in their self-reflexivity and self-criticism that they differ in nature. Peter Hühn can say of the conventional ("readerly") detective story, for example: "In its elaborately contrived structures, the detective novel thus presents a number of entangled writing-and-reading contests that ultimately only serve to
demonstrate the superior power of writing ....” (Hühn 459). It is this “ultimate” end that differs in emphasis in the anti-detective form, and it is in the metafictional category of this subgenre, which includes “Parody and intertextual detection” (Tani 44), that may indicate a (re)turn to the reader:

By now the detective is the reader who has to make sense out of an unfinished fiction that has been distorted or cut short by a playful and perverse “criminal,” the writer. Thus detective, criminal, and detection are no longer within the fiction, but outside it. The detective is no longer a character but a function assigned to the reader as the criminal is no longer a murderer but the writer himself who “kills” … the text and thus compels the reader to become a “detective.” The fiction becomes an excuse for a “literary detection” … (Tani 113)

Yet even Tani must here note that the reader is “forced reluctantly” (146) into this role. It is the task of meta-intertextual fictions to demonstrate in self-reflexive practice how it is that they co-opt literary detection and use Presupposition in the hide-and-seek relation with the reader that flourishes in this genre. It is now the implied reader who must unlearn “automatized modes of perception” (Hühn 455) through the defamiliarizing process of Presupposition’s evocation and then snare.

Max Frisch’s novel, Bluebeard: A Tale, comprises remembered and imaginary excerpts from Herr Felix Schaad’s trial for the murder of Rosalinde Zogg, his sixth ex-wife, and of Schaad’s own first-person reflections. Schaad was acquitted (perhaps “because of insufficient evidence,” [Frisch 2] although this is not recorded in the verdict15), but is unable to resume his previous life as a doctor. Most of his patients have left him, and he passes time playing billiards alone to dispel thoughts of the trial.

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15Schaad later recalls “Because of insufficient evidence—/ Where did I hear that? / It is not mentioned in the verdict” (104).
or piecing over the trial in an attempt to make sense of it. The testimonies of his five ex-wives and his current wife, as well as acquaintances and former patients, comprise a reflection of his life. Schaad also inserts what the trial omitted, such as childhood incidents he remembers which perhaps cast his character in a guilty light. The cruel childhood fettering of another child (rescued by police three days later) becomes potential “evidence” when reviewed through the event of Rosalinde’s bound ankles. For instance, and cutting up a pet rabbit with a razor blade may have more significance than Schaad’s apprenticeship in internal medicine. Clearly, the interrogative and impersonal voice of the prosecution has been internalized, for Schaad tries to account for even insignificant actions—a walk in the woods—to this persistent questioner as he would under oath. The novel presents a thoroughly examined life from the perspective of the only figure who can examine it thoroughly, yet it also presents the paradox that Schaad is by definition an unreliable narrator of his own experience. Just as the trial omitted much of his life, so Schaad also suppresses important information. This unreliability is only compounded in the context of the trial. As Schaad claims he is unable to remember much of the day of the crime and offers a number of contradictory accounts to the disbelieving prosecution, he is “reading” himself as an enigma whereupon aspects of his own character and incidents from his life prior to the murder assume the nature of clues. The fact that Rosalinde worked as a prostitute is conveyed as provocation, since the prosecution “reads” Schaad as a pathologically jealous man. The photographs of the body of Rosalinde are also a text that has been edited (a black band conceals her genitals) and is subject to interpretation. In the paragraph-long description of these photographs the word “significant” is used three times. It is then officially interpreted for the jury, presumably in the voice of the prosecuting attorney: “The procedure the murderer used, suffocating his victim with a sanitary napkin, suggests jealousy as a motive ….” (24).
Difficulties arise in reconciling the potentially guilty suspect with the acquitted man. Schaad contributes to this difficulty through such contradictory statements as “I am not the murderer” (1); “I am not innocent” (54) and “Only I did not do it…” (55). At the end of the novel, Schaad lies in hospital after having driven into a tree. It transpires that he confessed to the murder (now over a year later) after all. In another swift reversal, however, it is revealed that he confessed before driving into the tree and so was not detained. In fact, he is told that his confession is false: he is not the murderer. The killer is Nikos Grammaticos, a Greek student (or a pun). In the course of the novel, though, the entire question of guilt or innocence has been rendered suspect, as has the impulse to achieve narrative closure with a determination of either innocence or guilt. Schaad himself is unable to live with the open-endedness of an acquittal, so forces narrative closure first through confession (which fails) and then by presumably attempting suicide (which also fails). In “Max Frisch’s Blaubart: A Trivial Pursuit?” Mary Stewart comments that the novel “undermines the very assumptions by which the text moves forward” (249)—which in detective fiction is towards closure and solution, and yet Schaad cannot cope “with precisely that endless deferral of meaning” (Stewart 252) which the novel promotes through its evasion of closure and solution. The introduction of the killer on the last page as a hitherto unheard-of suspect from a trail of evidence the novel does not pursue defies the golden rule of classic detective fiction, whereby all suspects and pertinent information must be made known to the reader (a tenet to which even the narrator of Northanger Abbey adheres with marked and self-reflexive irony).

It is not merely in its lack of a unitary ending that the novel actively evokes narrative closure in order to frustrate it: this is instead the source of the novel’s ambiguity throughout. In every respect, though, the novel goes beyond thematizing reading in relation to the Bluebeard story to dramatizing it at the level of its implied readership. Mary Stewart again raises an interesting interpretation from the novel’s use
of the Bluebeard intertext that links the narrative methodology of Bluebeard's plot to this novel's themes:

One might even say that the Bluebeard material here not only alerts us by way of an example to our use of encompassing fictions, but also itself enacts the violence inherent in any act of distinguishing, separating, giving meaning.

(Stewart 253)

The impulse to closure of the hermeneutic process as well as the recourse to "encompassing fictions" (both totalizing narratives in general and also the intertext as a source of such totality) is at specific issue here in the use of the Bluebeard intertext and in the use of the intertext as a title.

Like our detection of Bluebeard analogies despite Frisch's warning, it may indeed be a product of our own deeper need to exercise coherence. Rather like an M.C. Escher picture—both finite and infinite, überschaubar and yet endlessly regressive—Frisch's text thus both frames every reading with a further reading and yet also circles round on itself, bringing us back to the questionable desire for satisfying narrative with which we started. Both that entrapping circular movement and the emphasis it gives to writing are deeply appropriate; for our endless involvement in structures, fictions, is of course inseparable from our dependence on language itself, in which we are just as entrapped and from which we can no more escape ourselves than Frisch's murderer can, by literally stifling his victim.... (Stewart 254)

It is "the use we make of fictions" that is the meta-intertextual focus of the novel.

What the novel's title—and thereby its intertextual appeal to "encompassing fictions"—does, of course, is invoke Presupposition in order to question it. If Schaad is "Bluebeard" (and he has married seven times), then he must be guilty of Rosalinde's murder. But if Schaad is guilty, then there is no suspense, no question remaining to solve; thus, suspense is paradoxically created around this same question. The title
cannot be trusted. Instead, the presupposition that Schaad is guilty by intertextual reference alone becomes the question. Ironically, as Marta Weigel notes in her article on this novel, this is precisely what happens within the fiction: "With its headlines 'Bluebeard in court' (71), the press not only has contributed to the destruction of his reputation, but has also been instrumental in convincing him of his own guilt" (Weigel 591). Furthermore, the intertextual premise is addressed in the trial, as Schaad’s current wife Jutta testifies to this as her own term of endearment:

-Is it correct, Frau Schaad, that you occasionally addressed the accused as Chevalier Bluebeard?
-That is a term of endearment ....
-You think so?
-Felix is chivalrous.
-And what precisely made you think of Bluebeard?
-He once said he already had six wives in his cellar, and I am fully aware that his previous wives are living quite well.
-Except for Rosalinde Z. (91)

Ironically, it is Jutta’s “aleatory intertextuality” that is on trial for this moment: she is asked “what precisely” evoked the intertext and furnishes an answer that is at once sufficient, wholly insufficient, and ironically subversive of the allusion since the majority of Schaad’s wives continue to enjoy good health. Jutta’s justification of the label as a term of endearment is ironically at odds with the prosecution’s interpretation of the term (You think so?). Yet Schaad’s reiterated comment at much of the evidence the trial produced (“there is no common memory”) may also have some bearing on this aspect of intertextual reading. The Bluebeard intertext as parallel is corrupted in Schaad’s deviations from the Bluebeard figure. Also, as Alfred White points out in “Max Frisch Revisited: Blaubart,” the adjective “chevalier” does not derive from the tale’s French tradition even though the numerous wives (commonly seven) do, but
from the “Ritter” of its German versions: “Frisch mentions Perrault … but his reference to the Märchen von dem Ritter…” suggests he is following not Perrault, who does not describe Bluebeard as a knight, but one of the many variations on him. The concept of Bluebeard as a knight is common in the German-speaking world” (467n). Here the Presupposition of guilt through intertextuality is the only universal, since “common memory” is unable in this novel to explain “precisely” of what the intertext consists, let alone which version of him Schaad himself may approximate.

Again, the Presupposition evoked through the novel’s titular reference to the intertext (which is what “precisely” makes the reader think of it) is also an overwhelming feature of the novel’s terse stylistics and perhaps best accounts for the level of readerly involvement (and the ease with which such involvement may be discussed in criticism). Interpellation is certainly effected through other stylistic means, as Weigel summarizes:

Isolated sentences taken from diary entries, from notes, and from letters never mailed, monologues briefly commented upon, and earlier statements—these are all pieces of a puzzle which we must laboriously fit together to yield a biography of Schaad. Because explanatory information is withheld from us, we are forced to read between the lines and fill in the lacunae in the text. These lacunae are often marked only by ellipses. The reader is called upon to continue Frisch’s intellectual game. (Weigel 589, author’s page numbers omitted)

But from the outset of this brief work, the density of presuppositional constructions strongly characterizes a relationship with (or construction of) an implied readership since the novel’s information (clues, evidence, even plot) which is the only “explanatory” context it has, is conveyed in “givens.” In this it shares the stylistic feature of James’ The Turn of the Screw as analyzed by Helen Dry and Susan Kucinkas. Investing the presuppositional constructions with the freight of almost all of
the novel's "new" information overloads the background with what should be assertions of the foreground. The challenge this paradoxically creates (since the background ought to shield its contents from such challenge) is metalinguistic and is another source for the unreliability of the narrator who withholds narration. The specific ambiguities and clues have been elaborated by Alfred White in his article as he traces the different trails of evidence in the novel; it suffices instead here to demonstrate the presuppositional constructions which project such trails of ambiguous "evidence."

The novel begins with the spectre of Presupposition raised through the title: Bluebeard. It opens in medias res, and the trial context must be construed through the presuppositional constructions as through the question and answer mode and the formality of the phrasing of the dialogue. The first line is a question: "—Do you recognize this tie, Herr Schaad?" Schaad's response, "—It has already been shown to me" does not answer the presupposition that he should recognize it because the tie is his (as the prosecution knows and as is revealed almost immediately), but it does answer the question. If the tie has already been shown to him, then he recognizes it from before. The prosecution then provides an assertion of the tie's significance: "—This is the tie used in the strangling, as you know; presumably the victim was already suffocated, but clearly the murderer did not think the sanitary napkin in her mouth was enough, so he also used this tie." The presupposition on the part of this speaker that the murderer is male is rather an assumption, but other presuppositional projections are made to carry the context for this dialogue. There has been a murder, the victim is female, she was suffocated and strangled. Schaad's next assertion, "—I am not the murderer" conveys to the reader that Schaad is a suspect (and so his "recognition" of the tie is important), and since the presuppositions noted above are all "shared givens" between the two speakers (and the phrase "you know" emphasizes this), it also addresses the underlying assumption of the interrogator: that Schaad is the murderer. With the first two questions and two responses, then, the fiction supplies
the central question. The interrogator does not ask Schaad whether he is the murderer, but Schaad addresses the presupposition behind the question of the tie, and thus two competing models of reading are thematized from the outset. While the trial offers a model of reading based on Presupposition (the prosecution already has forensic confirmation that the tie belongs to Schaad), and while Schaad does not challenge the givens of the presuppositional constructions (he neither challenges the pertinent facts nor his knowledge of them), he nevertheless offers a model of reading which subverts this model by addressing the background directly.

This thematized model is simultaneously dramatized as the novel’s implied reader is assumed to share information conveyed as presupposed or given in Schaad’s own reflections. Schaad thinks: “It is possible that one or two of my long-time patients have died while I was in detention, and others were obliged to change doctors, which is understandable: ten months is a long time” (10). This is his interpretation of his empty waiting room. The information that he spent ten months in detention, however, is not previously known to the reader, and this background information is required in order to make sense of the narrative’s temporal perspective.

Most often, the presuppositional constructions work both at the thematized level and are simultaneously dramatized as the reader is obliged to unpack the assertions that are assumed to be shared information. An early example of the multiple layers of reading that interact occurs in the testimony of Frau Bickel, the cleaning lady from Rosalinde’s building. She may be presumed to know that Rosalinde was a society prostitute, as she testifies to having been present at some of Rosalinde’s cultured parties. Her testimony is important as she says that she saw Schaad arrive on the day of the murder, although she did not see him leave again. When the interrogator asks Frau Bickel whether she knew of the couple’s previous relationship, her answer reveals a presuppositional reading of the facts:
- You knew that Herr Doktor Schaad and Frau Rosalinde had at one time been married, or did you only learn that later, at the preliminary hearing?
- I had a feeling, somehow.
- One last question, Frau Bickel ...
- He never brought her champagne. (15)

Frau Bickel's second comment here might be inferred as a non-sequitur (despite the ellipsis of an interrupted prosecutor), but it is an example of her reading of the situation the prosecutor has described. It presupposes that Frau Rosalinde's male guests commonly do bring her champagne (a fact not mentioned). Because Schaad did not, Frau Bickel interpreted their relationship to be different and more casual. From this she deduces that they were perhaps formerly married. It is heavily ironic that the figure of the cleaning lady imports connotations of an avid reader of quotidian details since, while her presuppositions can be astute, her testimony, perhaps more than that of other witnesses, can be mitigated by a number of perceived irrelevancies. Her fixation on the elevator being fixed by her husband is mitigated by her inability to recall the most important detail of whether Rosalinde's door was locked on the day of her murder or not. And it is accordingly in the testimony of Frau Bickel that mention of the man who is ultimately revealed as the murderer is "hidden" away in plain view. In discussing Rosalinde's many guests, she nevertheless gives a portrait of only one guest:

- One of them was Greek; he was actually staying there for a while, a student, bald, but with a black beard. Sometimes he would come into the kitchen, but he couldn't speak German, and he always looked so solemn. Somehow I felt sorry for him. I think he didn't like all that company, so he kept coming into the kitchen to get a drink of water. (14)

So, the murderer is presented after all, with what may pass for a motive: he did not like "all that company," which is a version of the same motive ascribed to Schaad: jealousy at his wife's occupation as hostess. His beard is likewise in plain view, but it is black
and not in the least figurative, and is overlooked. As the “expert testimony” of the
psychiatrist says of Schaad, he allows himself to be “led astray by surmises” (73) and
this is the dramatized theme of the novel. It is the presuppositional projections of the
otherwise terse sentential constructions that draw attention to Presupposition as a mode
of reading: this is the meta-intertextual challenge of the work.

The distinction between curiosity and intertextual Presupposition in the textual
enigma created for the reader is palpable in Donald Barthelme’s short story,
“Bluebeard.” This distinction and its resulting activity forms the basis of the author-
reader-text dynamic of the didactic detective “game.” Accordingly, Barthelme’s story
furnishes an exemplum of a narrative that “frames” the reader.

“‘Never open that door,’ Bluebeard told me, and I, who knew his history,
nodded” (Barthelme 92). In this, the first sentence of Barthelme’s story “Bluebeard,”
the traditional “enigma” (what is in the room?) is posited obliquely in prohibition as
indeed it is in the fairy tale, and in the next instant is resolved presuppositionally. The
intertext of the title is known and here re-confirmed. The only question that apparently
remains to be answered is whether the wife is nodding acquiescence or will open the
door nevertheless. The next sentence seems to dispel this mystery also: “In truth I had
a very good idea of what lay on the other side of the door and no interest at all in
opening it.” If the wife has no curiosity for a non-existent enigma, what will motivate
the narrative and its thematized reader of Bluebeard’s plot? The third sentence offers
an enigma to the reader (what is the “malaise” from which Bluebeard later suffers?),
but more importantly it implies that this wife outlives Bluebeard, since she can note that
an illness “later claimed him” (92). The story proceeds by situating itself in time (the
year 1910), and enumerating the lavish gifts from the art world with which Bluebeard
presses his suit, until completing this overdetermined seduction with the heroine’s
summation: “In fine, I was taken; I became his seventh wife” (93). The agonism that
will charge the relationship and the story then becomes apparent, and it takes a form
which highlights the presuppositional nature of Bluebeard’s prohibition and the way in which it is incomplete until transgression has ensued. Bluebeard is irritated by her adherence to his “proscription” and becomes obsessed by her lack of obsession or curiosity: “‘Will you never attempt the door?’” (93). Her implicit refusal to be “played out” draws the conditions of the “game” from Bluebeard: when she offers to return the key, he is frustrated: “‘No, no,’ he said, ‘keep the key, you must have the key’” (94). The seventh wife characterizes herself as a woman without interest, who is “not that intelligent” (93), and protests her “ordinariness” (94). She narrates that she “did not know what he meant” by a remark on her peculiarity and “could not for the life of [her] understand precisely” (94) why he is angry with her. While this woman knows Bluebeard’s “history,” she resists reading it as a motivated one.

Ironically, though, the enigma asserts itself with the wife’s realization of her own fixed presupposition and a sudden doubt about its validity. Confirming for the story’s reader that she indeed knew his history in assuming that he has the six female “carcasses” (94) of his previous wives in the chamber (Presupposition reigns until this point), she suddenly questions her conviction, and this seed of doubt is read as a betrayal of “trust”—that Bluebeard is transgressing a marital contract if he breaks from his presupposed text, from that which is known about him:

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? At that moment I became curious, and at the same time, one part of my brain contesting another, I contrived to lose the key, in the vicinity of the gazebo.

I had trusted my husband to harbor behind the door nothing more than rotting flesh, but now that the worm of doubt had inched its way into my consciousness I became a different person. (94)
Indeed, the wife becomes a different person in her characterization also, for she now reveals to the reader that she has had first three, then a further eleven duplicate keys cut at the local locksmith’s. She is having an affair with a chaplain. She has given a machine gun to a Mexican revolutionary who will later become her lover, and she evades Bluebeard’s suspicions of this matter with skill. She similarly evades the reader’s presuppositions which she has fostered in her self-characterization with just such subversive wiles. Finally, Bluebeard presents her explicitly with the “conundrum” his prohibition and prescribed transgression implicitly encode: “‘You must open the door, ... even though I forbid it’” (96). Bluebeard’s plot is frustrated, and his inability to contain this wife is a breach of his law allowing a narrative element to destabilize his control over the text. Indeed, by not opening the door as he has prescribed, this wife is questioning the foundations on which his prohibition stands: “‘Why then do you say I must open it?’” (96).

The divergence of curiosity and Presupposition is evinced through this interplay, but the two part company even more dramatically at the story’s end. While the story suspends confirmation that the door will indeed be opened, and the “‘exhibit’” (96) behind it viewed, until the last short paragraph (simultaneously reasserting the province of Presupposition in Bluebeard’s story), it presents the contents of the chamber as an absurdity that could not have been presupposed:

my intense curiosity about the contents of the prohibited chamber exerted the stronger sway. I turned the key in the lock and plunged through the door.

In the room, hanging on hooks, gleaming in decay and wearing Coco Chanel gowns, seven zebras. My husband appeared at my side. “Jolly, don’t you think?” he said, and I said, “Yes, jolly,” fainting with rage and disappointment.… (97)

Seven zebras might conceivably hide, encoded, in black and white print on a page— even in Coco Chanel gowns, which are traditionally black with white trim. And this,
the denouement that baffles, and the open-ended ending of ellipses, does nothing to assuage the incipient curiosity sparked by the presentation of a true enigma for which this surreal revelation must stand as an alternative. The heroine/narrator is offered a choice of resolutions and chooses that which has been presupposed by the intertext: what is in the chamber? The alternative is proffered in the form of a numerically encoded message (is this reader a spy?) from the Finance Minister. This message is given its full enigmatic representation in Barthelme’s text: “930177 1886445 88156031 04344979,” and it is signed “EVERLAST,” in accordance with the tenure of this enigma. The reader of Barthelme’s story might readily adopt the confessed reaction of the wife, “rage and disappointment” at the choice of the overdetermined zebra over the codebook to which the reader does not, unlike the wife, have access. So who, ultimately, is this reader who receives telegrams for which a codebook—which she also has—is required?

What is this message, and what is its context? The unresolvable enigma which creates an alternative to the presuppositions of Bluebeard’s intertext displaces the overdeterminations of the intertextual realm with a genuine ambiguity. At the same time, Presupposition has been dramatized in two ways. The contents of Bluebeard’s chamber are an impossible “solution” to the “enigma” of what the chamber might contain, both quoting Bluebeard’s plot and at the same time altering it by providing a genuine, unpresupposed secret in the chamber. Instead, the spectacle is a bizarre simulacrum emptied of all possible pre-texts. Further, the entire issue of the chamber is displaced again by the late introduction of a new enigma which has not been presupposed through textual constructions and its metafictively intertextual gesture. The wife receives a message in code for which another text, an intertext, in the handlebars of the bicycle, is required to decode. The activity of detection is thematized, but also metafictively dramatized in the very impossibility of obtaining a solution to this intertextual mystery.
Meira Cook’s short story, “Instructions for Navigating the Labyrinth” (1993), exemplifies in the most overt, metafictional way the operations of feminist intertextuality (and, hence, the operations of intertextuality and of dramatized Presupposition) in a contemporary Bluebeard fiction. The story not only bares its own intertextual devices, but uses these exposed devices to entrap its reader in a misreading through Presupposition. The reader’s role as co-conspirator in intertextual ensnarement is crucial to the story. The text poses as a mystery with an enigma at its core, thereby casting the reader as a detective whose role is to distinguish narrative facts and clues from “red herrings” and to discover its solution. Yet the central mystery of the story is to discover whether there is indeed a mystery since, despite the credos of detective fiction outlined early on, the mystery is not readily apparent. The story also proffers the Bluebeard story (which is never named) as an intertextual clue for reading it, and this is the greatest presuppositional “red herring” of all. It is only at the point that the ever-fraying “lead” snaps altogether in this textual labyrinth that the unreliability of textual constructions themselves are revealed and with this the limitations of Presupposition as an intertextual hermeneutic. Nevertheless, the metafictional “instructions” inform against the text throughout the story, characterizing the paradoxical tensions of the text: to trick and to teach.

The story is a metanarrative blueprint. Its title, direct addresses and cautions to the Reader, embedded examples of riddle solving, metaphors of magician sleight of hand trickery, discussion of the tenets of detective fiction formula, metacritical “asides” on the unfolding story, and the postmodern typography of a shattered mosaic (that is the invitation to anagrammatic reconstruction, according to Lachmann’s model of intertextuality) all establish a metalinguistic level from which to challenge the secret that the text itself is hiding in sight. The Bluebeard intertext is invited but never confirmed, so that the blind spot created by the presupposition of this intertext (in which Bluebeard alone is the murderer) can be a result only of readerly interpolation.
The typography of the story, with short paragraphs or even single phrases offset from one another by blank spaces contributes to the metanarrative import. It is unclear whether the text is the outline of the labyrinth or whether it is a thread guiding the reader through and around the labyrinth of blank spaces. In either case, it is the complementary structure of the text and its spaces which combine to create the labyrinth of meaning in Cook’s story. Alternatively, the segments of text may be viewed as blocks which have been juxtaposed but not cemented: the intertext of Bluebeard’s castle has been imported, piecemeal, into this story, and the text’s refusal to assemble it again results in the holes and trapdoors that are interpellations for the reader’s co-construction. The physical act of reading across these gaps also complements textual meaning with the meaning of the gaps, which may signal deferral and punctuation of the text as the fragments introduce disorienting shifts in tone, voice, style, and content. This creates the dimensional planes of the story, whereby the bridges and trapdoors make this “Bluebeard” text a labyrinth-castle of snakes and ladders. It is a typographical expression of the text-between, and also figures the shattered tessera awaiting reconstruction (another version of the liminal).

Lucien Dällenbach writes of the *mise en abyme* at the surface level of the text:

...there is no reason in principle why the textual *mise en abyme* could not extend to (a) aesthetic theory; (b) an aesthetic debate; (c) a manifesto; (d) a creed; (e) an indication of the purpose assigned to the book by the author or by the book itself—as long as this theory, debate, manifesto, credo or goal are... adopted sufficiently obviously by the text to allow the metatextual reflexion to operate as “instructions” to enable the reader to perform his/her task more easily; imitating, as if in a mirror, the actions of a reflection; reading the work in the way it wants to be read. (Dällenbach 99-100)

Cook’s story raises the *mise en abyme* to the level of surface reflexivity and “instructions” to the reader that warn against the *mise en abyme* being created. If the
story is both “instructions” and “labyrinth,” the double bind is clear. And as Rawdon Wilson wrote of the godgame, the reader is able to transform a weak (configurative) labyrinth into a strong (conceptual) one through the act of reading; it is such a labyrinth that is outlined here. In the realm of detective fiction, however, the labyrinth is emblematic: in the postmodern or anti-detective story the labyrinth is doubled as it is here. In “At the Heart of the Maze,” in The Perfect Murder: A Study in Detection, David Lehman writes:

The avid reader of mysteries wills himself into the very maze from which, during the course of reading, he will try to escape. ... The author is the Daedalus of the plot, who creates both the maze and the means by which it can be escaped. . . .

This double impulse is at the heart of the postmodernist maze: The love of artifice and the intolerance of it are simultaneous, and the writer tries to duplicate that simultaneity by giving you an experience and its negation at once. You are led to the heart of the maze, where you do confront a Minotaur—though when you look at it up close, you can tell it’s just a clumsy piece of stage machinery. (198)

As this use of space between texts indicates, getting into this particular labyrinth involves the realization that the Reader was never outside it. The mise en abyme is working on all levels, calling into question the “metatextual” plane that is working against the text too. The title of the story encapsulates the paradoxes, as it points to the means by which the labyrinth has already been entered even as it describes a means to escape it. The illusion of movement from outside to inside is effected here in the movement from “instructions” implying a perspective from above or outside the text, to “labyrinth” that is the text, whereby “navigating” is the act of reading between the two. Similarly, the question “How do you enter the labyrinth?” which is the first “line” of the story is rhetorical—and because it is rhetorical, or textual, it is a trap that is
answered with the mode of address which follows: “Reader turn left ...” (107). As soon as the reader is identified as the addressee inside the text, the predetermined encoding of this space is clear. Ironically, this is the paradox of the intertextual key that is being dramatized: it is a hermeneutic key which in these metaintertextual fictions is necessarily learned from and then applied to textual constructions.

The textual devices dramatize the activity of reading this story. The brief syncopation of rhetorical question and answer, and the absence of regular punctuation, serve to disorient the reader. The reader, newly arrived in this labyrinth, looks for textual prompts creating context. The cautionary tone (the text warns the reader not to be too bold) underlines the sinister nature of the text. In Margaret Atwood’s *Murder in the Dark*, “The Page” similarly counsels caution:

> If you decide to enter the page, take a knife and some matches, and something that will float. Take something you can hold onto, and a prism to split the light and a talisman that works, which should be hung on a chain around your neck: that’s for getting back. (Murder in the Dark 45)

The text in these characterizations is dangerous and deceptive territory. The first complete paragraph of Cook’s story that provides thematic information also brings with it an apparent thread or “something to hold onto.” This is, of course, the Bluebeard intertext, familiar even in an overtly revisionist cast. The thematic evocation of the intertext is achieved allusively, through reference to several narrative elements from the fairy tale. The first paragraph begins: “These are the facts.” This connotes detective fiction, but also the need for the Reader to have information with which to proceed. The facts are “the embalmed corpses of seven women their throats slit are found in a sealed basement in a house ...”: the distinctive figure of “seven” dead women is immediately correlated with the women’s fate, “throats slit,” recalling Perrault’s “La Barbe Bleue.” The next sentence, “Her name is Annah her husband is away ...” contributes to this evocation of the Bluebeard story, the name of the sister,
and the figure of the “husband” which is so crucial to the intertext. The fact that the husband “is away” announces the time of discovery. That this husband deals in “razor blades” and “knives” can only (thus far in the story) seem to correspond retrospectively with the “slit” throats of the dead women in his basement. Thus, by his timely absence and by his line of business the unnamed husband is evoked as Bluebeard. Further details of the conditions of revelation are then offered and include the “fact” that the wife “has disobeyed her husband” so that the condition of transgression is now apparent. Finally, the prohibition that apparently confirms the intertext’s identity is reported in indirect speech whose origin is unclear but may be ascribed to the husband: “Annah beware never enter the basement…”

Yet the discourse and narrative dramatization of the detective process is interesting as there does not appear to be any doubt as to the identity of the intertext or of the murderer for whom the intertext is named. Instead, however, the detection through reading and by compilation of correspondences between select narrative elements is directed towards piecing together the unnamed intertext which appears simply to confirm the identity of a guilty husband. It is notable that the intertext appears in reverse, already turned inside out. Instead of presenting prohibition, transgression and discovery, here discovery (narratively) precedes transgression, and both precede prohibition.

Simultaneous with the thematic negotiations between the focus text and the allusions to an intertext is the discursive negotiation with the fairy tale genre. The revisions of this story are overt: the elaboration of details never provided in the fairy tale recontextualize it in contemporary realism. So the corpses are discovered in a “sealed basement” in a house “on the outskirts of a city.” Once the intertextual evocation has been established, revisionist disparity appears to have elastic bounds which do not snap the intertextual trace. The profile of the husband as a travelling salesman seems incongruous, but still tenable. The name “Annah” for the wife does
not discredit her casting in this role. Having introduced the intertext, the story seemingly admits of almost any variation on it. Similarly, the discovery “at the noon hour” is a Riffaterrean syllepsis, in that it is a phrase resonating both in the focus text and the intertext by virtue of a discursive correspondence (or, in this case, their incongruity in both texts). The archaism of the phrasing as well as its fairy tale quality signals an “ungrammaticality” in the focus text which has now established its contemporary setting. Yet by the same token, it inverts the morphological “fée” time in fairy tales, which is the midnight hour. Again, the strategy of reversal is in effect, and the familiar in both texts is being simultaneously defamiliarized by virtue of their relationship. The emphasis on detail that has been achieved by textual devices is then reaffirmed by two statements, offset from this paragraph and from one another. The first offers a critical comment on a detail presented in the paragraph: “Seven women! One for every day of the week?” This metacritical aside both reiterates the number of women, stressing its importance, but the exclamation punctuating the noun phrase as well as the subsequent interrogative phrase creates a new metatextual voice from a site of critical distance from the narrative, which, crucially, reads the narrative from within. This voice interjects black humour while translating the fairy tale crime into literally quotidian terms, unfamiliar only by relation to this context. Yet a later comment confirms the intertextual mode of reading and encourages the reader to actualize the connection, verbalizing the presuppositional directive Riffaterre argues is an intertextual principle of the focus text:

... he gave Annah the keys to all the rooms.

Except one.

You know the rest. (108, my emphasis)

The text self-reflexively offers itself as a model upon which it may also comment, and the terms of this self-reflexivity are intertextual. These are the mechanisms by which the fairy tale intertext is allusively evoked, recontextualized, and
thereby revised. Similarities interplay with differences from the outset; the use of an intertext as an intertext requires that the two texts enter into immediate negotiation with one another. Yet until this point in the narrative its intertextual evocation of the Bluebeard story and its revision is largely thematic in nature. Until this point in the story, its revision is therefore not different in nature from, for instance, that of Thackeray’s short story, “Bluebeard’s Ghost.”

The next textual fragment signals the importance of “clues,” but also warns that not all clues are “purposeful.” Facts are now complemented with clues, both of which are to be read and interpreted carefully. The thematic narrative line is increasingly disrupted both by interspersed fragments which form their own narrative lines connected by leitmotifs and repetition, but also by the elaboration of domestic realism which describes the history of the marriage, coffee making, carpet beating, and the husband’s allergy to dust. Infrequent elements of the Bluebeard story are still offered: the keys given to Annah and the singular nature of the prohibition of “great consequence” among them. In addition to these elements, there is the tantalizing abbreviation of the husband’s name to “B.” This serves further to confirm the intertext, but obscures a “clue” in the motivation offered for the abbreviation: “we will call him B on account of a crime that has been committed in his house and the innocents that must be protected.” A murderer is no innocent whose own name must be withheld to protect him, and other members of the household, Annah and the servant Beliah, have been named in turn. Extrapolating “Bluebeard” from this minimalist abbreviation and other “evidence” of uxoricidal character emblematizes one danger of overdetermined intertextual reading, or enforcing a strict one to one correlation between Cook’s text and its alleged intertext. “B” is a trapdoor in Cook’s story castle, his absent name is a synecdoche for intertextual misreading as an invitation to metonymy informed by Presupposition.
The baring of these thematic elements as devices of intertextual engagement is complemented in even more metatextually reflexive terms by embedded fragments commenting directly or analogously on the unravelling story, and by the stylistic form these fragments combine to create. Characteristic of all of these fragments is a didactic impetus concerned with reading and misreading. Clearly, each embedded fragment informs the whole, each is another implicit "clue" to the way in which the intertext is also to be read. Dependent upon the text, the reader cannot be extricated from the linguistic terms which create an intertextual syntagm that includes the Reader and where solutions are in the same language which provides the clues. Similarly, the riddles, detective structure and magic tricks are not discrete examples but merely embedded emblems for, as well as elements of, Cook's whole story. Reading in this story must be concerned always with two levels simultaneously: that of the text and that of intertextuality.

The self-reflexive aside on detective fiction's formula evokes the context of detective fiction, yet the mystery remains unclear. Doubt as to the identity of the killer is nevertheless planted here, since the intertext, while familiar as idiom, is not "unrecognized." The metacritical nature of Cook's paragraph may best be considered by first recalling an excerpt from Roger Caillois, writing on "The Detective Novel as Game":

... in order to create difficulty, the writer must keep the killer's identity hidden; in order to give the reader some chance of identifying the killer, the writer must at least present him as a character. This double obligation is the origin of the writer's contradictory duties: he must provide the elements of a solution which he also renders difficult and surprising. (Caillois 7)

The excerpt from Cook's short story addresses this same issue, but from within the fiction working through such doubleness:
For a satisfying mystery mix two parts enigma to one part necessity. That is, the murderer must be known to the reader but unrecognized until one heartbeat before the moment of plot where suddenly identity must seem as familiar as idiom. It is as unsatisfactory that the murderer be outside the reader's field of reference as it would be if the murderer's identity were obvious from the first scene. This is a complicated business this contract between reader and writer ... An example will be given, presently. (108)

Similarly, Cook's riddle of the snowman is rendered self-reflexive to an extraordinary degree. A riddle is by nature a self-reflexive, metalinguistic form. The story interweaves the riddle of the snowman, prefaced as follows: "This is the example, see if you can solve this problem" (109). Following as it does on the promise of an "example" to be given presently, the riddle adopts the context of detective fiction, and with the (overdetermined) hunt for the solution, the reader is cast as the linguistic detective. "Three objects lie in a field it is spring: two stones, a red scarf, a raw carrot. Something has happened some event whose genesis if only known would render each object in the narrative perfect and necessary." This is the "problem." After several narrative detours, the reader is offered a directive to think of the problem in negative terms: "Think of it this way: if the scarf were not red, the stones not paired, the carrot not raw, think of the time the place the season ..." (110). The last feature in this list of directives is again reiterated within a parenthetical enclosure which recontextualizes it as a clue: "This is a clue—it is spring the snows have melted. That was a clue" (110). Finally, the "answer" to the "problem" is given: "The snows have melted the rains have come (where are all the snowmen of yesteryear?) Nothing remains in the gushing fields of last year's snowmen but the stones-for-eyes, the carrot-nose, the red-scarf" (111). In this case, the solution to the riddle is metalinguistic: a "solution" remains of the "dissolution" of the snowmen of winter. The snowman has dis-solved, leaving only the clues to the (riddle's) solution left behind. Similarly, the text removes Bluebeard
and his story from the text, leaving clues to their passing, and forces a detective reconstruction in terms of narrative: “Some thing has happened some event whose genesis if only known would render each object in the narrative perfect and necessary” (109). Deductive reasoning has been tutored in a narrative context, yet the “redness” of the scarf is only “perfect and necessary” as it corresponds to a cliché of the snowman. Accordingly, the redness of the scarf is identified as a red herring: “Question: what is the significance of the scarf being red? / Answer: red is the colour of winter scarves and red herrings” (111). The riddle of the snowman has been incorporated into the formula of detective fiction (and even of murder mystery: “where are the snowmen of yester-year?”). Cook’s story elements are all perfect and necessary, but some are facts, some are clues, and others are red herrings. The Bluebeard intertext is all three combined in this story, particularly so after the “story” of red-herrings (“This is the story of a red-herring so you will recognize one the next time it swims past” [111]): “punchline: red-herrings come in assorted colours” (113).

Another interwoven emblem is that of the magic trick. To cite Roger Caillois again, this analogy may again be encompassed within the context of the detective hermeneutic: “The pleasure one gets from a detective novel is not that of listening to a story, but rather that of watching a ‘magic’ trick which the magician immediately explains” (Caillois 4). Here, Cook thematizes the magic trick and the role of audience presupposition in conspiring to be tricked:

Allez-oop!

The magician waves his hands and a coloured ball disappears.

Where is the ball? Allez-oop!

Another ball disappears with a wave of his hands, they are tightly closed now, where is the ball?

In your hand, the audience roars.
Allez-oop! Another ball disappears, his hands are buttoned shut and bulge slightly.
In your hands, in your hands!
The magician opens his hands. They are empty.
(Allez-oop!) (108-9)
The slight bulges in the magician’s hands may be analogous to the textual suggestion that courts readerly Presupposition: Cook’s story (where the author is the magician) invites the presupposition that the Bluebeard intertext is present when in fact it has been evoked and then made to disappear. The phrase “Allez-oop” is repeated twice more, forming another parenthetical enclosure for a phrase which addresses the moment at which the trace on the intertext snaps: “Allez-oop! This is the point where analogy breaks down allez-oop!” (112). This sentence recalls an earlier statement in the story: “At some point all analogies break down. This is not the point” (109). At the time of this earlier assertion the noun “point” may be ambiguous, serving in the second assertion as a comment about the relevance of the first assertion (the first assertion is not the point), or alternatively the story warns that the break with analogy is impending but has not yet arrived. In this instance, it foreshadows the point where analogy does break down. The immediate context for this break with analogy is the thread chasing various herrings into the realm of nonsense. However, in the realm of herrings (red or otherwise) this too may create a misleading context for the “point,” whereby Presupposition of the Bluebeard intertext in this fiction is an analogy that must break down. Again, the narrator-magician reveals with one hand while the other hand conceals.

It is misleading that the association with the “Reader” associates the protagonist “Annah” as a potential victim merely by virtue of the analogous address to each. The imperative: “Annah beware never enter the basement” (107, 108, 112) becomes “Reader beware never enter the basement…” (109, 113). The denouement
is, however, as promised: unrecognized but "familiar as idiom." Even as the simile is rendered in metalinguistic terms, so the solution to this (inter)textual mystery is a metalinguistic imperative to the Reader. The story ends after "B's" unexpected return home: "Once a woman called Annah lived there with her husband and an old servant named Belia. No longer. Only two people live in the big house now and it is rapidly becoming far too much work for one woman" (114). The presupposition is, of course, that Annah has been murdered by her husband. There are no longer two women, although one does remain. As Belia is the servant, the implication is that she is the one doing the housework. A final, two-line exchange subverts this fiction, however: "Why not hire another servant, asks B. / Good help is hard to come by, my love, replies Annah." Annah is unharmed, but Belia no longer lives there. It now seems probable that Annah killed her. Annah is after all the "keeper of the stuffed animals" inherited from her father-in-law, the taxidermist. Possibly, however, Belia killed the seven women, and Annah kills her in self-defence (she "hears the razorblades in [Belia's] voice"). The actual identity of the killer matters less than the fact that it most likely not "B," and Annah is not the victim. Analogy has broken down; Presupposition has failed the Reader as the intertextual thread to hang on to in Cook's self-confessing labyrinth. The metalinguistic challenge that the story self-reflexively advocates: "Analyze." The key is intrinsically double, operating both at the level of thematic content (Annah lies) and simultaneously at the reader's experience of the text as a hermeneutic directive for textual engagement (analyze). Analysis is key to escaping the tyranny of the intertextual models of reading as theorized; analysis separates the reader from story.

The rules of the writerly game are provided; the story comprises both "instructions" and examples for tutored reading. The facts and the clues form an actualized or dramatized detective narrative whereby the reader is taught how to read, exploiting the metafictional devices which permit the text to demonstrate the terms in
which it demands to be read. Part of this process involves demonstrating the elementary deception of unquestioned familiarity with the intertext in spite of the text’s own tenets. This fiction delineates the threshold of the text, the point at which sameness and difference and text and reader must enter into a negotiation. Revisiting intertextuality theory (in a quotation from Smaranda Vultur) through the lens of Cook’s meta-intertextual fiction brings a new reading to a straightforward statement:

... le processus du discours intertextuel—base constitutive du texte en tant qu’espace de transformation de textes—implique le maintien à l’état de tensions (et non la neutralisation) des relations d’opposition entre le paradigme et le syntagme, entre la fermeture et l’ouverture d’un texte, entre structure et structuration, dictionnaire et encyclopédie, lecture linéaire et lecture tabulaire, convergence et divergence. (Vultur, “À propos” 78)16

This description of the spatial and temporal tensions of intertextuality playing across and through the text is now commonplace in the context of other, standard comments on intertextuality. However, it is now possible to read these tensions as a constant negotiation between the text and the reader through Presupposition: a negotiation between textual cues and de-automatized, analytical resistance.

16“... the process of intertextual discourse—constitutive foundation of the text as a space of textual transformation—implies the maintenance of tensions (and not the neutralization) of oppositional relations between paradigm and syntagm, between closure and openness of a text, between structure and structuration, dictionary and encyclopedia, linear and tabular reading, convergence and divergence.”
Conclusion

I am sending back the key
that let me into Bluebeard’s study¹

But is [s]She
who opens a door and
[s]he
who closes it
the same being?²

The Bluebeard story and feminist intertextuality are mutually informative.

While feminist intertextuality is in no way restricted to its use of the Bluebeard intertext, this practice nevertheless forges self-definition through such use. The Bluebeard story metafictively dramatizes relations in the literary triad–author, reader and text–and does so in gendered terms. Moreover, the contrasting relation between the nature and effects of Bluebeard’s plot and the revisionist activity of the triumphant heroine offers a paradigm for two modes of literary activity. Bluebeard’s own style of intertextuality is based on repetition without revision, reflecting a prescriptive vision of his female reader as a fixed, presupposed function and artefact. The “escape artistry” effected through intertextual revisionism not only contrasts Bluebeard’s “death artistry,” but also reflects through dialogic quotation the gained knowledge of both its restrictive constructions and its constructedness. The Bluebeard story, which introduces Bluebeard’s plot to a larger context, also introducing difference for the first time, is thus already meta-intertextual. Feminist intertextuality defines itself as a theory-in-literary-practice, as a revisionist activity using the knowledge of analogy in order to foreground the principle of difference or the process or metamorphosis. The restrictive plots which presuppose the female reader and her acts of reading are as

¹Sylvia Plath, “Bluebeard,” from the uncollected juvenilia (pre-1956) (lines 1-2, and repeated at 7-8).

²Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space (224). Earlier on the same page Bachelard makes the Bluebeard reference explicit: “Is there one of us who hasn’t in his memories a Bluebeard chamber that should not have been opened, even half-way? Or ... that should not even have been imagined open, or capable of opening half-way?”
Bluebeard’s plot to Bluebeard’s wives. These plots are further dangerous to the reader in that they pass under the guise of “intertextuality” and, hence, by standard definition, of difference. Feminist intertextuality applies the gained knowledge of the Bluebeard story—that repetition is not synonymous with revisionism, and that analogy is not benign—to intertextual processes and to the ways in which these have been theorized in recent decades. Renée Van Raamsdonk’s comment, that Bluebeard’s protean portraiture “reflects attitudes and reactions to the story behind the legendary figure” (73) may be reread in this present context. Intertextual use of the Bluebeard story reflects a preoccupation with the narrative aspects of the story behind the figure. Feminist intertextual use of the Bluebeard story further reflects contemporary preoccupations with the status of the gendered reader and of the intertextual reader. This is manifested through feminist intertextuality’s foregrounding of Presupposition as literary theme, as textual construction, and as theoretical tenet.

The female reader is drawn into Bluebeard’s fixed plot as a functional necessity, to play it out and to be played out by it in turn. Once inside the text, this reader is prescripted by the very terms of the plot, presupposed in her role in every degree. She learns only the fixity with which she is viewed by and reflected within the plot, integral to (but because a part of) the work of art. This reader reads only that she is not required. “She” is already there, performing the function of a plot device; the reader is literally a place-holder in Bluebeard’s plot. The reader is an object of, not a subject in, the script, and she sees herself there as déjà lu. She is reflected as the functional artefact—the women’s corpses—that signifies an homogeneous “community of readers.” The nature of Presupposition in Bluebeard’s plot may be considered emblematic of the way Presupposition functions for the intertextual reader.

It is crucial that reading and reflecting occurs on the threshold of the restrictive textual plot, just as the story becomes revised and its imprisoning structures ultimately reversed at this point. Reading is widely characterized in contemporary criticism and
theory as a border operation and, moreover, “inter”-textuality is characterized as a
relational process occurring “in between.” Terminology describing this space between
diffs greatly in the two areas, however. While reading theory offers tropes of the
frontier, boundaries, border crossing, border traffic, and the “contact zone,”
intertextuality theory offers a vocabulary of enmeshment. With the move away from
considering intertextuality as the relationship between texts to a consideration of the
“interface zone” of negotiations between the reader and the text, the threshold becomes
a powerful spatial metaphor. It is in this border zone, where the reader enters the text
(and vice versa), that subjectivity has been described as dissolving and transmuting to
become the “implied reader” (or authorial and narratorial audience) and other such
textualized constructs. In order to enter the text, the reader is directed to collude with
the presuppositions of the text governing not simply how it demands to be read, but by
whom. It is in fact here, in the space between, that Presupposition performs the work
of Bluebeard in making the reader uncanny to herself. She is “unheimlich,” or “un-
home-like,” in Bluebeard’s castle-text.

Like the uncanny, Presupposition is visible or palpable only in its
constructions: the structures which encode a matrix of effects. It is demonstrable that
this occurs not simply as a narrative theme, but as a theoretical tenet. In “Literary
Competence,” Jonathan Culler writes: “The ideal reader is, of course, a theoretical
construct, perhaps best thought of as a representation of the central notion of

3These are prominent, for instance, in the titles of Maggie Humm’s book Border Traffic.
Humm writes: “This book rests on the proposition that there is a specifically gendered approach to
boundary crossing that for women is best characterized by its rhetorical ambidexterity. This is the
ability to handle, while simultaneously refusing to touch, all of the master language which is a
technique for concretising ‘difference’” (7). Schwab quotes Mary Louise Pratt’s use of the “contact
zone” metaphor (Schwab 42). Schwab writes: “If we are willing to acknowledge boundaries between
texts and readers and see interpretation as a kind of border operation or negotiation, the issue of
interpretive power or violence may be focused more sharply” (8).
acceptability” (111). It is apt to recall Elizabeth Freund on the subject of a community of readers and the “acceptability” that this presupposes: “the appeal to the imperialism of agreement can chill the spines of readers whose experience of the community is less happily benign” (Freund 110-11). The “imperialism of agreement” is represented by Presupposition, on several levels. Presupposition is effected through analogy, “guaranteeing” intertextuality at the level of the text alone. Introducing the reader requires collusion with Presupposition in order to read intertextually. As Peter Rabinowitz states in “‘What’s Hecuba to Us?’: The Audience’s Experience of Literary Borrowing,” “we must—as we read—come to share [the authorial audience’s] characteristics if we are to understand the text” (244). Rabinowitz’s argument is founded on the premise that “Unconsciously, this is what all competent readers do.” In such an argument, the “audience’s experience” is a foregone conclusion:

... I shall be inquiring into the ways an artist’s technical procedures contribute to the work’s effects: specifically, the way that the new work uses the audience’s knowledge of the original. (Rabinowitz 243).

The premise is thus circular, since the “audience’s knowledge” is here analogous to “an artist’s technical procedures,” and both are manifested as “the work’s effects”—guaranteeing Rabinowitz’s thesis. Presupposition thereby erases the reader from consideration in theories which claim to be founded on the activity of reading, as much as in theories attempting to account for readers deficient in competence. In such theories, intertextuality is nevertheless also guaranteed; the reader is a fiction of the theory as much as of the text.

Strategies of resistance to this imprisoning text which are founded on reading “against the grain” (Mills 13) have been similarly subsumed. The Presuppositional “imperialism of agreement” encompasses this notion, since oppositions and negatives are also presuppositions of any proposition. Thus, Chris Christie’s objection that reading against the grain is still a reading (and a reader) positioned by the text is equally
the case in the intertextual weave: to read other-ways is still to read along the text’s chains of likeness, but by another route. Instead, Kay Boardman proposes a reader who is perhaps one celebrated in feminist intertextuality, whom she names the “renegade reader”: [she] who makes active use of the gap in the signifying process and produces alternative readings of the text” (208). For such a reader, the interface zone is not then an anteroom to the text in which subjectivity transmutes on its way towards the text. It is also not a zone of uncanny reflection, across which the text projects its image of the reader-as-artefact in order to prompt such transmutation. Instead, it is a site of critical activity and analysis, and an ongoing negotiation with the terms of the text and with the possibilities the text does not express or actively suppresses. Instead of a community of readers, this is the site of the tale-telling community and of metamorphosis outside the walls of Bluebeard’s castle.

This is also the site where feminist intertextuality locates itself, thematizing and dramatizing this activity in between Bluebeard’s plots and potential readers. Feminist intertextuality performs the work of the revisionist heroine, exposing the circularity of monologic plot repetition and harnessing the fairy tale potential for metamorphosis. Locating itself on the thresholds between, feminist intertextuality is—like Humm’s formulation of border traffic—“a literature of transgression” (Humm 9). As Humm says of feminist literature in general, “[it] is a dynamic response to the urgent threat of patriarchal closure and the abandonment of metanarratives” (60). Feminist intertextuality is a dynamic, dialogic engagement with intertextuality’s own enclosures of and foreclosures on the gendered reading subject, providing a metanarrative on the monologic aspects reencoded by the theoretical metanarrative of intertextuality.

Considering the use of the Bluebeard story across a range of metafictional narratives reveals certain recurrent and pronounced preoccupations: with its use of Presupposition in perpetuating Bluebeard’s monologic intertextual imperialism, its artistic use of the *mise en abyme* both to constrain and then to unleash signification,
and its use of the enigma-solution as a circular double bind. These are the
preoccupations by which feminist intertextuality also distinguishes itself. Through its
use of the Bluebeard story to revise intertextuality from the inside-out, feminist
intertextuality tells on the metanarrative: it is so, it was so, and here is the hand to
show.
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