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Article

Blue Chambers, Bluebooks, and *Contes Bleus*: Gothic Terror and Female Deviance in Nineteenth-Century Adaptations of 'Bluebeard'

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Abstract: With its suspenseful atmosphere, mysterious and murderous male protagonist, and magical objects, it is hardly surprising that Charles Perrault's *conte bleu* 'La Barbe bleue' (1697) was the inspiration for numerous Gothic tales in the nineteenth century. Some of these adaptations placed Gothic devices such as the representation of the terror experienced by Bluebeard's latest wife within the broader nineteenth-century cultural discourse on female deviance, and its relations with masculine authority and dominance. By removing from the tale Perrault's warning against female curiosity and imprudence and focusing on the wife's feelings of fear and terror, these adaptations amplify the intrinsic Gothicism of the Bluebeard story, thus providing the female protagonist with a psychological depth that includes, as I demonstrate in this study, a display of a variety of abnormal behaviours. In these Gothic adaptations, the terror experienced by Bluebeard's wife serves as a springboard for the representation of psychological and nervous disorders commonly diagnosed in the nineteenth century such as hysteria, monomania, female depravity, and masochism. Showing the interculturality and intermediality of these themes, this essay analyses rewritings of Perrault's 'Bluebeard' from nineteenth-century Britain, France, and the United States, including Gothic bluebooks, poems, dramas, and short stories.

Keywords: Bluebeard; fairy tales; adaptations; Gothic; terror; supernatural; deviance; perversion; psychiatry; mental illness

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1. Introduction

First published in 1697 in the fairy-tale collection *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités*, Charles Perrault's 'La Barbe bleue' is, from a certain viewpoint, an anticipation of the Gothic tale. Even when considering the relevance of horror motifs and imagery in the fairy-tale tradition before Disney's sanitised versions of tales such as 'Cinderella' and 'Snow White' (see Piatti-Farnell 2018), the peculiar emphasis on a narrative of physical violence and domestic fear in 'Bluebeard' is remarkable. Indeed, it can be argued that the macabre and frightening story of a serial murderer of wives and their doomed relationships makes this fairy tale 'inherently gothic' (Hermansson 2009, p. 52). The scarcity of conventional fairy-tale magic, except perhaps for an enchanted key that cannot be cleaned of the blood of the wives, is another significant feature of 'Bluebeard' which makes it stand out amongst the other fairy tales of Perrault's collection. But a lack of supernatural elements does not necessarily equate with a lack of the sense of the marvellous. As Marina Warner argues (Warner 1995, pp. 242–43), Perrault's decision to give the male protagonist a (un)natural blue beard—in a period when fairy tales were known as *contes bleus* in France, blue tales, and were thus associated with 'the colour of the marvellous and the inexplicable'—enhanced Bluebeard's terrifying characteristics and secretive personality.

With its suspenseful atmosphere, mysterious and murderous protagonist, and a bizarre blue beard, it is hardly surprising that Perrault's 'Bluebeard' was the inspiration for several

Gothic tales in the nineteenth century. Short stories and novellas by well-known authors including Charles Dickens's 'Captain Murderer' (1860), William Makepeace Thackeray's 'Bluebeard's Ghost' (1843), and Anne Thackeray Ritchie's 'Bluebeard's Keys' (1871) are, in different degrees of fidelity, rewritings or retellings of the Bluebeard story. Scholarship has also commonly drawn parallels between 'Bluebeard' and Gothic novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), speaking of the latter as an adaptation of the Bluebeard main motif of a woman's imprudent marriage to an older, wealthier man with a violent past—and a secret chamber (see Pyrhönen 2010).

But the nineteenth century saw the publication of numerous other adaptations of the Bluebeard tale which, although not considered nearly as frequently by critics as the above texts, placed Gothic devices such as the representation of the terror experienced by Bluebeard's latest wife when faced with the manifestation of his violence within the broader nineteenth-century cultural discourse on female deviance, and its relations with masculine authority. Conjugal dominance and control is, indeed, one of the two most important themes illustrated in the original literary tale, which Perrault relates to the wives' act of disobedience when opening Bluebeard's forbidden chamber. The other is curiosity and its inherent dangers, a subject explicitly approached in the first of the two morals included in the fairy tale (Perrault 1967, p. 128), essentially a lesson addressed to women warning them against the pleasures of inquisitiveness. As Maria Tatar argues (Tatar 2004, p. 24), 'Curiosity is coded as a feminine trait, one that has its "attractions"'. In opposition to this first moral, the second (Perrault 1967, p. 129), dedicated to husbands, is not an admonition for violent behaviour and domestic abuse, since Perrault plainly states that 'terrible' men like Bluebeard do not exist anymore, but acts as a reassuring message for women about contemporary conjugal life.

The following pages analyse intermedial and intercultural retellings of Perrault's 'Bluebeard', including examples of 'high' as well as 'low' culture such as the Gothic bluebook, poetry, short fiction, and drama from nineteenth-century Britain, France, and the United States. By removing from the tale Perrault's warning against female curiosity and imprudence and focusing instead on the wife's feelings of fear, these adaptations amplify the intrinsic Gothicism of the Bluebeard story, thus providing the female protagonist with a psychological depth that includes, as I demonstrate in this study, a display of a variety of abnormal behaviours. In these Gothic adaptations, the terror experienced by Bluebeard's wife serves as a springboard for the representation of psychological and nervous disorders commonly diagnosed in the nineteenth century such as hysteria, monomania, female depravity, and masochism. Expanding on Andrew Smith's discussion of deviant masculinities in nineteenth-century sexology, where 'there is an image of the unstable, divided self which is echoed in the Gothic' (Smith 2004, p. 6), I will demonstrate a similar construction of modes of female abnormality in Gothic rewritings of the Bluebeard tale and in psychiatry. I will thus follow Leslie J. Moran's theoretical interpretation of the Gothic as more than a literary genre, considering it as an 'imaginative mode' (Moran 2001, p. 90) which underlies various forms of knowledge and cultural products in the nineteenth century, including medicine and psychology.

And yet in the Gothic adaptations that will be discussed below female deviance also takes on different meanings from those of nineteenth-century psychiatry. I will first analyse Sarah Wilkinson's Gothic bluebook 'Blue Beard; or, Female Curiosity. A Romantic Tale' (1806), where curiosity is treated as a sign of female hysterical behaviour but which, despite Bluebeard's warnings, eventually acts as an emancipating force against the oppressive husband. I will then move on to examine the poem 'Blue-Beard's Closet' (1861) by the American author Rose Terry Cooke, which represents the psychological consequences of seeing the inside of Bluebeard's chamber and the consequent attempts to flee his castle—and escape male domestic violence. The interculturality of these themes will also be studied in French texts, including Alphonse Daudet's 'Les Huit pendues de Barbe-Bleue' (1861) and Marcel Schwob's 'La petite femme de Barbe-Bleue' (1892). The former is a short drama where curiosity is associated with Gothic terror, female deviance, and women's depravity,

but this apparently conservative framework is deceptive and ultimately debunked, as we shall see. Finally, Marcel Schwob's short story builds on Daudet's sexual and deviant aspects, narrating a story that is influenced by the cultural context of masochism and sexual perversions of the time discussed in psychiatric texts such as the seventh edition of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892).

2. Madwomen Escaping Control: Deviance and Terror in Sarah Wilkinson's and Rose Terry Cooke's Gothic Adaptations

Arguably, the first Gothic rewriting of Perrault's 'Bluebeard' is George Colman the Younger's play *Blue-Beard; or, Female curiosity! A Dramatick Romance*, first performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in London in January 1798. The impact of this dramatic adaptation of 'Bluebeard' on nineteenth-century Anglophone culture cannot be overstated. Many aspects of the story and its visual representation would prove immensely popular in the following years: the exotic setting in Turkey, with Bluebeard named Abomelique; the introduction of the unfortunate love story between Bluebeard's wife-to-be, Fatima, and her fiancée Selim; and Gothic devices such as Bluebeard's involvement in witchcraft rituals, a horrific chamber concealing tombs, ghosts, and skeletons, and '*THE PUNISHMENT OF CURIOSITY*' written in blood on the walls of what is now termed the '*Blue Chamber*' (Colman [1798] 1983, p. 192). Noteworthy is also the addition of the character of Fatima's father, Ibrahim, an ambitious, lustful, and ultimately cowardly man whose function in the play is mainly to hinder the marriage between Fatima and Selim and provide comic relief for the story. With its Gothic visuals, it is safe to say that Colman's drama triggered a new wave of interest in the Bluebeard story, and in Bluebeard as an archetypal villain, in Britain and the US. As Barry Sutcliffe argues (Sutcliffe 1983, p. 11), 'the fiendish Abomelique and his Blue Chamber [. . .] are objects and agents of gothic terror of a type still found to be cinematographically valid today'. '*Blue Beard*'s success with audiences', Sutcliffe continues, 'was absolutely prodigious' (40).

That is why a great number of chapbooks and Gothic bluebooks that reworked Colman's drama in short fiction form were published at the beginning of the nineteenth century (see Hermansson 2009, pp. 69–88). One of the most interesting is, I would argue, Sarah Wilkinson's Gothic bluebook 'Blue Beard; or, Female Curiosity. A Romantic Tale', published for the first time in 1806 in London by John Roe and Ann Lemoine as part of the series of chapbooks *Popular Tales, Lives, and Adventures.*[1] Wilkinson's 32-page Gothic romance is inspired partly by Colman's drama but at the same time retains many narrative elements of Perrault's story, in particular towards the end of the chapbook, the Bluebeard tale being 'Corrected and Enlarged by S. Wilkinson' (Wilkinson 1806, p. 3). Like its commercial predecessor the chapbook and its spiritual predecessor the French *conte bleu*, Gothic bluebooks, essentially short tales of terror and/or the supernatural which were often abridgments of popular novels, were inexpensive products for a literate working- or middle-class readership at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But many were also original tales or adaptations that innovatively approached Gothic conventions with an elegant, articulate writing style. As Franz J. Potter claims (Potter 2005, p. 10), the Gothic bluebook was 'not merely a passive inheritor of Gothic subjects and styles from legitimate novels, but instead was a developer and producer of Gothic material that had particular patterns of inflection.' In the English bluebook market, minor (and today almost forgotten) author Sarah Wilkinson was one of the most prolific writers, penning more than 100 tales between 1803 and 1830 (see Potter 2021, pp. 92–109).

On a literary and aesthetic level, the peculiarity of Wilkinson's 'Blue Beard' compared with Colman's play is that most of the visual and theatrical horrors of the latter are substituted by a more psychological approach to terror, which provided Wilkinson with the opportunity to delve deeper into Fatima's fears and mental states. Moreover, Wilkinson removes the character and storyline of melancholic helper Shacabac, concentrating the feelings of terror and dejection in the figure of Fatima, and expands on the premise of the hopeless relationship between Fatima and Selim and its emotional effects on the former.

In Wilkinson's tale, vague and ambiguous expressions concerning Bluebeard and his past marriages are used as literary devices not only to build tension before the opening of the Blue Chamber, but also to characterise Fatima's mental instability when she is faced with the prospect of a life without her true love, Selim, and with a terrifying, blue-bearded husband who 'has been married nineteen or twenty times already [. . .] and all his wives die very suddenly' (Wilkinson 1806, p. 10). To heighten the sensations of unease and dread, Wilkinson introduces into the Bluebeard tale Gothic tropes such as a derelict and isolated castle in the countryside where, strangely, all of Bluebeard's previous wives died shortly after the wedding. This castle is attended by two servants with an otherworldly appearance, namely a grotesque old woman 'who greatly resembled one of the three furies' and an old man 'that looked like a wizard' (23). Wilkinson writes:

> all these wives [. . .] were buried in so private a manner, that no person ever remembered to have seen a funeral come out of his house: and, what was still more remarkable, all of these ill-fated females expired at one particular house [. . .] in the country, [. . .] to which he [Bluebeard] always conducted his brides a short period after their marriage. These circumstances naturally gave rise to a great deal of curiosity, and a variety of conjectures. (4)

This history acts as background to Bluebeard's courting of Fatima and attempt at impressing her father with a lavish display of his wealth. Wilkinson describes Fatima's apprehensive state of mind when wooed by Bluebeard with recurring expressions including 'terror', 'fears', 'agony of tears', 'grief', 'fears', 'terrors', 'with fear and trembling' (7–8). Especially after Selim is captured by Bluebeard's agents for trying to elope with Fatima and she is forced to marry Bluebeard while feeling 'more dead than alive' (19), the narrator concentrates on Fatima's deteriorating mental health. Bluebeard's bizarre and oppressive conduct after their marriage greatly worsens her condition. When Fatima learns that she must go to the castle where the other wives perished without her sister Irene, alone, she implores Bluebeard to let Irene come with her, but his constant refusal pushes her to the edge of her sanity:

> Fatima had violent hysteric fits, and roared and tore her hair like one distracted, saying she would rather die than go into the country without Irene; and, indeed, her attendants thought she would expire every moment, her grief was so violent. (22)

In the early modern period and still at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the term 'distracted' was used to represent 'a common symptom of [. . .] extreme cases of mental disorder. The widely used term meant "Deranged in mind; crazy, mad, insane"' (Neely 2004, pp. 2–3). Suffering from this 'indisposition' which lasts for three days (Wilkinson 1806, p. 22), Fatima is described by Wilkinson as a hysterical madwoman. In early nineteenth-century medicine, hysteria was considered to be a nervous disorder characterised by sudden, violent fits, mainly affecting women because of their delicate constitution and weak temperament (Hare 1991, pp. 40–42). The relation between nervous temperament and mental derangement was a subject often discussed in medical treatises of the time. In *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, for instance, Thomas Trotter (Trotter 1807, p. 184) describes a hysterical patient who, in a similar manner to Fatima, 'falls down, often in violent agitations and convulsions, with loud screams, and looks expressive of horror' after a 'surprise, a fright, or whatever excites strong and sudden emotions'. In other case studies, Trotter discusses the 'delirium and temporary insanity' (283) that some nervous patients experienced, such as a woman who, upon hearing a line of poetry that reminded her of her dead son, 'was immediately thrown into violent hysterics, that had nearly proved fatal' (284). According to Trotter, nervous disorders can have 'moral causes': they can be the result of morbid psychological states such as 'abject depressions of spirit' which 'produce watchfulness, or unrefreshing sleep' and 'impair the appetite', eventually provoking hysterical fits, 'spasmodic [. . .] complaints' (88). Indeed, dejection, sleeplessness, and lack of appetite are all features of Fatima's hysteria, as will be shown later.[2]

Fatima's delirium, caused by her hysteria, is only temporary. Her characterisation as a hysteric is part of her broader representation—following traditional gender norms—as a beautiful damsel in distress, sensitive and vulnerable, a victim of the male violence of Bluebeard but also of her father and eventually saved by her hero-lover, Selim. But Wilkinson's Gothic romance also constantly displays, throughout its narration, Fatima's rebellion against both paternal and conjugal authorities. Building on the Bluebeard theme of marital insubordination and yet distancing itself from Perrault's moral teachings on female curiosity and rashness, Wilkinson's 'Blue Beard' represents various facets of female rebellion against masculine oppression. When she discovers that her father has stipulated a marriage contract with Bluebeard, she decides to secretly elope with Selim, without telling her sister because Irene would remain with their father and 'she [is] unwilling to involve her [Irene] in any act of disobedience that would incur the resentment of her father' (Wilkinson 1806, p. 16). Fatima is thus aware of the risks associated with her rebellious deed; and yet, she still does it. Fatima's father also underestimates her willingness and determination, not to mention her physical prowess, to escape her arranged marriage to Bluebeard. In the scene of elopement with Selim, in order to reach the terrace, she must climb the garden walls, an action that puts into question her previous characterisation as a fragile and passive woman—while challenging male expectations of female submission as well. With an overt ironic tone, Wilkinson (17) writes how Fatima's father, 'in the plenitude of his wisdom, never supposed it likely for his daughter to scale the walls of his garden, to get rid of the man she hated, and obtain him she loved'. In the aforementioned passage describing Fatima's hysterical reaction to the news of her upcoming trip to the isolated castle, she first seems to accept Bluebeard's orders ('though she [feels] a great deal' of reluctance (21)), but when she is told she must go alone, she rebels against her husband, acting hysterically. Wilkinson (21) frames the description of Fatima's hysteria in the following manner: 'This fresh command was too much for the gentle Fatima to comply with silently: indeed, it would have aroused the feelings of Patient Grizzle herself, and caused her to rebel against conjugal authority'. This transformation of Patient Grizzle or Griselda, protagonist of Perrault's tale 'Griselidis' (Perrault 1967, pp. 15–50) and symbol of female obedience and submission in marriage, into a rebellious figure entails a subversion of the role of the passive heroine of the fairy-tale tradition. Fatima's hysterical attack forces Bluebeard to let her sister accompany her to the castle, as according to Bluebeard granting this request 'was the only way to get her [Fatima] into the country' (Wilkinson 1806, p. 22), a decision that would later be key to Fatima's salvation and contribute to Bluebeard's demise. Wilkinson's feelings against male abuse of power, and the necessity for wives to disobey violent and oppressive husbands with any means at their disposal, including hysterical behaviour, are plain.

That is why when the theme of curiosity finally enters the picture towards the end of the tale—first appearing at page 25—with a narrative that draws on both Perrault's and Colman's different storylines, it does not have the same significance or moral implications as in Perrault's tale or Colman's drama. Indeed, although in his *Blue-Beard* Colman is arguably more interested in the entertaining values of the story than in displaying the immorality of female curiosity, misogynistic statements concerning women's talkative nature and inherent curiosity abound (see for instance Colman [1798] 1983, pp. 185–86). Moreover, incarnated in women, curiosity is represented as Bluebeard's veritable antagonist capable of 'endanger[ing] the life of Abomelique' (193). In other words, despite his villainous status, curiosity's lethal features provide Bluebeard with a reason to violently defend himself against it—and to kill his inquisitive wives. As Barbara M. Benedict writes (Benedict 2001, p. 133), in Colman's play 'woman's innate prying is portrayed as man's burden'. In Wilkinson's 'Blue Beard', on the contrary, besides being a necessary plot device to bring about Fatima and Selim's final reunion, curiosity is treated as an expression of female deviance and associated with Fatima's hysteria and nervous temperament. In a similar manner to her previous hysterical episode, Fatima reacts—and rebels—hysterically when

given a command that must be obeyed, in this case Bluebeard's prohibition to visit the Blue Chamber:

> The more she reflected on Blue Beard's words, the more curious and uneasy she grew; and this business so much agitated her, that she wept till she was quite ill, and could eat no dinner. Nay, she could not get a wink of sleep the whole of the next night, but lay reflecting whether she should indulge her curiosity or not. (Wilkinson 1806, pp. 25–26)

Torn between obedience and insubordination, in the grip of curiosity and hysteria, Fatima chooses rebellion, opening the forbidden Blue Chamber and finding 'various instruments of murder [...] and a vast number' of decayed corpses, those of Bluebeard's previous wives 'assassinated with the most cruel tortures' (27). This hysterical act of disobedience is significant because it eventually results in Fatima's liberation and empowerment. It leads her to discover Bluebeard's macabre secret of being a sadistic murderer, and consequently to reunite with—and marry—Selim while also inheriting Bluebeard's fortune. Fatima's agency, however, depends on the emotional energy available to her through hysterical behaviour and inquisitiveness. In other words, hysteria and curiosity, forms of female deviance in the oppressive patriarchal world of the Bluebeard tale, are the price Fatima must pay for her agency and rebellion against male domestic abuse. Bluebeard is finally defeated in combat by Selim who comes to the rescue helped by Irene but also by 'three or four infernal spirits' that cast Bluebeard into the flames of a furnace sinking into the ground (31), an image that, in its hellish symbolism, finally reveals the demonic nature of Bluebeard. Wilkinson's 'Blue Beard' ultimately anticipates the representation of domestic oppression, conjugal rebellion, and female deviance narrated through a Gothic adaptation of the Bluebeard story of works including Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.[3]

A similar portrayal of marital violence and its psychological—and pathological—effects on Bluebeard's last wife can also be found in Rose Terry Cooke's 'Blue-Beard's Closet'. One of the most anthologised poems of an author who is still critically understudied, 'Blue-Beard's Closet' was first published by the New England writer Rose Terry Cooke—as Rose Terry—in her 1861 collection *Poems*. The poem has been described as portraying the 'domestic gothic', the miserable and terrifying life of married women in the nineteenth century, 'woman's story, the "true", if gothic, "fairy-tale" that followed Sleeping Beauty's awakening' (Bennett 2003, p. 127). The terror of Bluebeard's wife is expressed by the obsessive repetition of *'The chamber is there!'* as the ending line of each of the poem's seven stanzas, a recurring image that takes control of the mind of the female protagonist in every situation of her daily life. Speaking directly to Bluebeard's wife, the opening stanza may be interpreted as a friendly voice that urges her to act after seeing the gruesome content of the forbidden chamber, which in turn becomes a constant presence in her thoughts in the form of the persistent refrain:

> Fasten the chamber!
> Hide the red key;
> Cover the portal,
> That eyes may not see.
> Get thee to market,
> To wedding and prayer;
> Labor or revel,
> *The chamber is there!* (Cooke 1998, p. 154)

The successive two stanzas portray the wife while undertaking everyday tasks such as discussing works of art and listening to music, unsuccessfully attempting to forget about the chamber and its intruding thought: 'When harp and viol/Thrill the soft air, /Comes a light whisper: /*The chamber is there!*' (155). The refrain concretely takes the form of a whisper, but it is unclear whether this should be interpreted as her inner voice reminding her of the chamber; she is imagining it in a sort of auditory hallucination; or it is a supernatural presence, perhaps the collective voice of Bluebeard's dead wives warning

her of the dangers of her transgression. Being surrounded by a 'darkness' (155) which is as much visual, that of Bluebeard's gloomy palace, as it is emotional, the whispered refrain is unquestionably frightening for the poetic subject. However, this voice also seems to be urging and directing the wife in her effort to flee Bluebeard's palace and its domestic horrors:

Silence and horror
Brood on the walls;
Through every crevice
A little voice calls:
'Quicken, mad footsteps,
On pavement and stair;
Look not behind thee,
The chamber is there!'

Out of the gateway,
Through the wide world,
Into the tempest
Beaten and hurled,
Vain is thy wandering,
Sure thy despair,
Flying or staying,
The chamber is there! (155)

In the first of the above stanzas, the paradoxical contrast between the 'silence' of the walls and the 'little voice' coming out of the very same walls is disconcerting, expressing the wife's confusion as to whether she can hear those (in)human sounds in reality; indeed, the source of the voice continues to be unnervingly unclear. The last stanza shows that, while she has managed to go 'Out of the gateway' and escape ('Flying') the palace, still she has been 'Beaten and hurled' and, as a result, she will never be able to evade the thought of the chamber even when 'wandering' away from Bluebeard. This concluding stanza resolves the ambiguity of the *helping* voice in demonstrating that it has a psychological—and perhaps also a hallucinatory—origin. Existing on a psychological level, the chamber and its domestic terrors—the corpses and the collective voice of the previous wives—will always exist in the mind of the female protagonist. In this poem, the wife's original inquisitiveness about Bluebeard's chamber is, literally, turned into an obsession. The Bluebeard motif of female curiosity that calls and lures the wife into the forbidden chamber is transformed into a hallucinatory refrain that urges the wife to flee Bluebeard's palace after her transgression, which is to say, to continue disobeying, while also haunting and condemning her to psychological suffering. As Karen L. Kilcup writes (Kilcup 1998, p. 99), 'Enclosed in the domain of blood, madness threatens Bluebeard's wife. [. . .] Cooke underscores the terrors women feel in marriage: men dominate women not only by cohabiting but by inhabiting them'.

In Cooke's 'Blue-Beard's Closet', the refrain is expression of the wife's fixed idea of the horrors of the chamber and the domestic violence perpetrated by Bluebeard. Placed within its contemporaneous cultural context, it can thus be interpreted as a poetic adaptation of the mental disorder called 'monomania', a term widely employed in early nineteenth-century psychiatry to indicate 'an idée fixe, a single pathological preoccupation in an otherwise sound mind' (Goldstein [1987] 2001, pp. 155–56). This disease was first identified in the 1810s by the French alienist Étienne Esquirol, who in his *Mental Maladies. A Treatise on Insanity*, first translated into English in 1845, describes monomania as a pathological obsession, 'attention [. . .] [which] become[s] fixed upon a single subject' to the extent that 'All reasonings and determinations, are derived from this all-absorbing idea' (Esquirol 1845, p. 24). Most interesting are Esquirol's examples of auditory hallucinations in monomaniacs, which are represented in a manner similar to Cooke's Gothic depiction of hallucinatory voices

that are heard passing through walls by the female subject and perceived as alternatively friendly and menacing, following her everywhere she goes. Esquirol writes:

> There are insane persons who hear voices speaking very distinctly [...]. *These voices* [...] penetrate walls and pavements; they pursue and fatigue, those who hear them, day and night. [...] They take the accent and tone of a relative, a friend, a neighbor, or an enemy. The make proposals [...]. They advise to actions. (23)

Linked with female disobedience against the archetypal oppressive man of the fairy-tale tradition, Bluebeard, monomania in Cooke's 'Blue-Beard's Closet' and hysteria in Wilkinson's 'Blue Beard' are Gothic literary adaptations of nineteenth-century nervous and mental diseases, forms of psychological deviance which are turned by these female writers into means of rebellion and empowerment for their female protagonists.

3. Gothic Terror as Female Desire: Masochism and Deviance in Alphonse Daudet's and Marcel Schwob's Decadent Adaptations

In the nineteenth century, the concept of psychological deviance, juxtaposed to an idea of normalcy equated with sanity and soundness of mind, is not limited to mental or nervous disorders such as hysteria and monomania. As Michel Foucault has demonstrated in his mapping of the historical medicalisation of abnormality, in early nineteenth-century psychiatry deviance moved from the broad categorisation of madness, of insanity as mental derangement to include the numerous sexual perversions identified by the *fin de siècle* (Foucault 2003, in particular pp. 132, 167–68). Although as Elaine Showalter claims (Showalter 1993, p. 320), at the end of the nineteenth century 'hysteria was still popularly and medically conjoined with female deviance', at that time the classification of sexual deviations signified the expansion not only of the categories of male abnormality, but of female deviance as well. Echoing the evolving medical and popular discussions on deviance and depravity, the French Decadent adaptations of the Bluebeard tale that will be analysed in the following pages combine a Gothic approach to terror with a masochistic display of female desire and male violence.

First published in 1861 in the Parisian magazine *Revue fantaisiste* and subsequently included in his 1862 collection of 'scenes and fantasies' entitled *Le Roman du Chaperon-rouge*, Alphonse Daudet's 'Les Huit pendues de Barbe-Bleue' ('The Eight Hanged Wives of Bluebeard') is a somewhat misleading and ambiguous text. Interpreted literally, it is a story that bears a similar moral to Perrault's 'Bluebeard', cautioning women against indulging their curiosity and sinful behaviour. But the hyperbolic representation of the consequences of female depravity—thus called in the text, as we shall see—and the exaggerated punishments for the wives' petty vices lend the short drama an ironic quality which puts into question any warning against immorality uttered by the character Bluebeard. In this play composed of five scenes, probably never intended by Daudet to be performed, and set in medieval times, Bluebeard is a seventy-year-old count who has just married fifteen-year-old Éveline. In the opening scene, Bluebeard is portrayed as a religiously zealous man in the act of praying, seeking absolution for what he deems to have been his 'destiny', namely strangling his previous seven wives (Daudet 1862, p. 130). At this early stage of the story, the contrast between the sexual repression of Bluebeard, who forces himself not to touch his latest wife before having received forgiveness by the pope in Rome, and the sensuality and desires of Éveline (but also of the previous wives) is evident. Éveline is first introduced while braiding her hair in her room, in front of the mirror, '*half-dressed*'[4] ['*mi-vêtue*'] (133). When she tries to embrace Bluebeard, he flatly refuses (138). However, unlike the serial murder Bluebeard, Éveline is depicted as a good-natured and sensitive character who does not care about Bluebeard's old age and ugliness, aiming—perhaps with a hint of sarcasm—to 'love him with all her soul' ['l'aimer de toute [s]on âme'] (133). This second scene also introduces a Gothic element of terror caused by supernatural agents. While they are praying together, Bluebeard and his wife hear seven separate lugubrious screams coming from a derelict turret of the castle, described by the count as coming from 'The spirit

of evil' ['L'esprit du mal'] which moves about in that part of the castle, and which only the pope can remove by performing an exorcism (136–37). Éveline is visibly terrified: 'Oh! I'm scared!' ['Oh! j'ai peur!'] (137). Yet, surprisingly, these seven evil spirits are none other than the corpses of Bluebeard's previous wives, killed and then hanged in the 'blue' turret (139) for trivial reasons linked to their supposed capital vices and depravity. Each representing a cardinal sin, the wives were murdered by Bluebeard for banal things such as oversleeping (sloth, 140); having letters sent to her under the name of 'madame de Barbe-Bleue' (pride, 141); or letting a soldier putting her garter back on (lust, 141). All these sinful actions and portrayals of female deviance pale when compared with Bluebeard's crimes. This contrast is enhanced by the gruesome recollection in Scene 3 of Bluebeard's serial killings by strangulation with a cord, and the wives' description of the count as a monstrous man with such expressions as 'the old monster' ['le vieux monstre'] (140), 'the savage Bluebeard' ['le farouche Barbe-Bleue'] (139–140), 'the horrible man' ['l'horrible homme'] (141). The only discordant voice among the dead wives is that of the second spouse who is envious of Éveline's young age and innocence (thus embodying envy, 140), and predicts that the latter will join them soon because Éveline personifies curiosity, the 'king of female vices' ['le roi des vices féminins'] which contains all the other capital sins (143).

And indeed, soon enough Éveline peeps into the blue chamber. But unlike Perrault's 'Bluebeard', this is no forbidden chamber, as Bluebeard never prohibits Éveline from visiting the haunted turret, nor does he give her any magical key that should not be used. Éveline does not commit any transgressive or prohibited act—being a woman, her nature is transgressive and deviant in itself. Her immorality is connected to her curiosity, 'the king of female vices', which leads her to the turret and, as a result, she is corrupted by the *evil spirits* of the wives, taking up all their cardinal sins in the process. Alongside vice, curiosity is associated with Éveline's terror and portrayed with Gothic imagery: after visiting the blue chamber, she spends a 'terrible night' ['affreuse nuit'] slowly advancing in 'dark, damp hallways' ['des couloirs obscurs, humides'] and feeling, in the gloom, 'horrible nightly beasts' ['affreuses bêtes de nuit'], finally exclaiming: 'Brrr! I'm still trembling because of it' ['Brrr! j'en suis encore frissonnante'] (Daudet 1862, p. 144). These images of horror and evil in Scene 4 serve to introduce the subsequent display of Éveline's newfound sins. As Bluebeard outlines in his condemnation of her capital vices in Scene 5, among other things she stays in bed until midday, sweetens her coffee with three pieces of sugar, and has an intimate discussion with Bluebeard's page (150). It is difficult not to notice Daudet's ironic tone in this ludicrous inventory of Éveline's sinful practices. Daudet's irony is particularly manifest in Éveline's bizarre description of how she suddenly acquired, as if through a sort of demonic possession, all of the wives' vices:

> Curiosity goes a long way; as for me, it led me to the blue chamber, and as soon as my key had turned twice in the lock, I felt corrupted like a company of harquebusiers.
>
> [La curiosité mène loin; moi, elle m'a conduite jusqu'au salon bleu, et dès que ma clef a eu fait deux tours dans la serrure, je me suis sentie corrompue comme une compagnie d'arquebusiers.] (150)

Éveline's admission of depravity builds on the above discrepancy between the gravity of the wives' crimes and the magnitude of Bluebeard's punishment—however, in its absurdity, it also reveals Éveline's masochistic desire to be killed by Bluebeard: 'Kill me, Monsignor; because I told you, I am terribly depraved' ['Tuez-moi, monseigneur; car, je vous l'ai dit, je suis terriblement dépravée'] (151). After the murder of Éveline, the drama ends with Bluebeard telling Éveline's sister Anne not to bother climbing up to the castle's tower since, unlike Perrault's original literary tale, no one will come to help Éveline, this being Bluebeard's 'warning' to female readers of the story (151).

Existing critical analyses of this play have focused more on the wives'—and especially Éveline's—supposed perverse behaviour, and Bluebeard's rightful punishment, than on Bluebeard's cruelty itself. For instance, Jean de Palacio (1993, p. 128) claims that 'There

was [. . .] a moral reason for hanging them [Bluebeard's wives], and Bluebeard is at the same time justified by the desire to purge the earth of the vices that infect it. [. . .] It is the most systematic view of the "*Bluebeard*" tale' ['Il y avait [. . .] pour les pendre une raison morale, et Barbe-Bleue s'en trouve du même coup justifié, par le désir de purger la terre des vices qui l'infectent. [. . .] C'est la vision la plus systématique du conte de "*Barbe-Bleue*"']. Indeed, at face value the story is a representation of inherent female immorality and deviance, as Éveline's masochistic request of violent death appears to confirm, as well as a commentary on women's pretended piousness and decency. However, the irony resulting from the contrast between the wives' trivial sins and Bluebeard's punitive actions, which are much eviler and more sinful, coupled with his religious belief in the moral and spiritual absolution for his crimes, subvert the traditional message of the Bluebeard tale. A comparison with other works written by Daudet in the early 1860s, at the time of publication of 'Les Huit pendues de Barbe-Bleue', shines a light on what I believe is the drama's antireligious and epicurean stance against notions of temperance and restraint. As Anne-Simone Dufief has demonstrated (Dufief 2014, pp. 399–403), while following a Bohemian lifestyle, in the years 1858–1862 Daudet wrote texts that denounced 'inhuman' religious dogmatism towards female sensuality, condemned religion's moralism which forced women to behave against their (sinful) nature, and celebrated love unencumbered by religious preoccupations. Daudet's Bluebeard play proceeds on this ideological path: while it indeed portrays woman's behaviour as immoral, deviant, and transgressive of the (religious) norm, it does so through the lens of religious intransigence, which has established that even the tiniest fault of woman, and all the instances of female materialistic indulgence, must be considered evil and sinful. Both the wives and their petty vices are ultimately victims of the disciplinary violence of Bluebeard, agent of religious moralism and dogmatism.

Daudet's description of the masochism of Éveline can be juxtaposed with another French Decadent retelling of the Bluebeard tale, one written thirty years later, namely Marcel Schwob's short story 'La petite femme de Barbe-Bleue' ('Bluebeard's Little Wife'). First published under this title in a November 1892 issue of *L'Écho de Paris*, then included in the 1894 *Le Livre de Monelle*, and finally retitled 'La Voluptueuse' ('The Voluptuous One') in 1903 for the publication of *Le Livre de Monelle* in the collection *La Lampe de Psyché*, this tale expands on Daudet's illustration of the masochistic tendencies of Bluebeard's wife, amplifying them in her pursuit of fear and terror. Perhaps surprisingly considering the above context of perversion and deviance, the protagonists are two unnamed children, a boy and a girl, playing the Bluebeard's story. After acting out a few stories for boys, the girl proposes to play fairy tales because it is almost night and she wants to be frightened 'for real' (Schwob [1894] 2002, p. 327). Taking control of the choice of tale and showing a feeling that is both sexual and violent, she suggests they play Sleeping Beauty since, as she tells him, in order to wake her 'You'll have to kiss me really hard' (Schwob 2016, p. 85) ['Il faudra m'embrasser très fort' (Schwob [1894] 2002, p. 327)]. The boy makes up an excuse to not kiss her (Schwob [1894] 2002, p. 327), expressing a shyness which will accompany him throughout the tale and will soon turn into mere passivity. This is the first instance in the story of inversion of the traditional gender and sexual roles of fairy tales. The fact that she proposes to act out the Bluebeard story (327), with all its violence, terror, and examples of female disobedience, is another signal of her intention to subvert established fairy-tale narratives of women's inaction and remedy the absence of feminine (sexual) desire.

What follows is a dialogue in which the girl's voice dominates the narration and the boy's not only is almost silent, but most significantly silenced. She plays both roles, the wife *and* Bluebeard, telling the boy what to do and say and thus combining, in her behaviour and feelings, the wife's terror and Bluebeard's aggressiveness: 'Okay, now you're gone and I disobey right away. "Oh! How horrible! Six murdered wives!" I faint [. . .]. Go back to being Bluebeard. Do the mean voice' (Schwob 2016, p. 86) ['Là, maintenant, tu t'en vas et je désobéis tout de suite. "Oh! l'horreur! six femmes assassinées!" Je m'évanouis [. . .]. Tu reviens en Barbe-Bleue. Fais la grosse voix' (Schwob [1894] 2002, p. 328)]. If as

seen above in Wilkinson's tale Bluebeard sadistically enjoys killing and torturing his wives with 'various instruments of murder', in Schwob's story it is 'Bluebeard's Little Wife' who perversely relishes in minutely describing the dead bodies of the wives, as if she were reliving and re-enacting Bluebeard's murders herself. Her macabre enjoyment is evident in her series of questions: 'How did he kill them? Did he cut their throats and hang them in the dark room? And the blood ran down off their feet onto the floor?' (Schwob 2016, p. 87) ['Comment les tuait-il? Il leur coupait la gorge, et il les suspendait dans le cabinet noir? Et le sang coulait par leurs pieds jusque sur le plancher?' (Schwob [1894] 2002, p. 328)]. Indeed, the relationship between Bluebeard and his wife exists on an imaginary level; it is, after all, just the girl's fantasy. But her masochistic longing for violence and fear takes on a different, more adult signification when she reveals that she wants this game, this fairy tale, to become reality: 'you'll cut my throat like for real, won't you?' (Schwob 2016, p. 87) ['tu me couperas la gorge comme pour de vrai?' (Schwob [1894] 2002, p. 328)]. She fantasises about the cruel death of the last wife, about being subjected to the ferocious will of Bluebeard, appropriating—hence becoming able to control and dominate—the violence perpetrated on the wives. As George Trembley writes (Trembley 1969, p. 67), in this tale terror 'is not suffered, but sought. The victim voluntarily becomes a victim' ['n'est pas subie, mais recherchée. La victime se fait volontairement victime']. The sexual connotations of this game are plain, not only in its (second) title, 'The Voluptuous One', but most notably in the closing section, where the wife's display of sensuality and her search for sensations of terror and pain are eventually joined:

> you have to kill me, my little Bluebeard, and kill me really, really hard!' She knelt down. [...] Slowly, with her eyes closed and lashes fluttering, [...] she offered the down on her nape, her neck, and her voluptuously tucked shoulders to the cruel blade of Bluebeard's saber. 'Oh, ooh!' she cried. 'This is going to hurt!' (Schwob 2016, p. 88)

> [il faut me tuer, mon petit Barbe-Bleue, me tuer bien fort, bien fort! Elle se mit à genoux. [...] Lente, les yeux clos et les cils frémissants, [...] elle tendait le duvet de sa nuque, son cou, et ses épaules voluptueusement rentrées au tranchant cruel du sabre de Barbe-Bleue.—Ou... ouh! cria-t-elle, ça va me faire mal!] (Schwob [1894] 2002, pp. 328–29)

In 'La petite femme de Barbe-Bleue', the inversion of the characteristic power dynamics of the Bluebeard story results in the male protagonist being subjugated, even emasculated, by his fictional wife who controls all the aspects of the narration and, in her deviant desire, forces him to terrify her. Of course, from a literal point of view this is simply an innocuous game played by children. And yet this framework gives Schwob the opportunity to introduce masochistic desires in the *innocent* world of childhood imagination and fairy tales, controversially associating the fantasies of a child with female deviance. Moreover, the focus on the central role of imagination in the expression of masochistic desires reveals a similar understanding of masochism to its psychiatric definition at the time. The 'perverse' features of this tale found in the girl's masochistic and sexual longings have been the subject of recent scholarship (see Lhermitte 2002, pp. 178–81; Pernoud 2016). I believe, however, that a closer comparison with what was arguably the most discussed work on sexual deviations in the early 1890s, Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, can reveal further analogies between fairy-tale and medical representations of masochism and terror.

Psychopathia Sexualis was first published in 1886 in its original German, but the topic of masochism was only introduced in its sixth German edition in 1891, after the term was coined by Krafft-Ebing for his 1890 stand-alone study *Neue Forschungen auf dem Gebiet der Psychopathia Sexualis.* Before becoming subject to medical investigation, instances of masochistic practices had been widely represented in late nineteenth-century literature, including in French Decadent texts. Works by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the Austrian writer from whom Krafft-Ebing derived the term 'masochism', were available in French translation from the early 1870s. As Kanshi Hiroko Sato argues (Sato 2009, p. 36), 'What-

ever he wrote, the forms of masochistic fantasy were always present; and much before the French translation of *La Vénus à la fourrure* was published in 1902, Sacher-Masoch's fascination with the dominatrix was already well-known in France'. In his seventh edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, translated into English in 1892, Krafft-Ebing himself (Krafft-Ebing 1892, p. 123) admits that 'The latest "decadent" literature of France and Germany is [. . .] largely concerned with the themes of sadism and masochism', while also affirming that 'Of late the subject has been given much attention' by psychiatrists in their treatises (122).

Whether or not Schwob was familiar with Krafft-Ebing's work at the time of writing 'La petite femme de Barbe-Bleue'—and he could have been, speaking German fluently since the age of ten (Gauthier and Gefen 2002, p. 1263)—illustrations of masochism had already found a way in literary works and in the cultural world of the period. Most notably, the classification of masochism in the seventh edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* bears a resemblance with its portrayal in Schwob's Bluebeard adaptation. In the subchapter 'The Association of Passively Endured Cruelty and Violence, with Lust—Masochism', Krafft-Ebing explains the connections between sexual gratification and a yearning to be a victim of violence. His characterisation of masochism as a fantasy played out in a person's imagination recalls, I would argue, what has been described above as the girl's attempt to re-create her fantasies of being scared, dominated, and hurt:

> the individual affected, in sexual feeling and thought, is controlled by the idea of being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex [. . .]. This idea is colored by lustful feeling; the individual affected lives in fancies, in which he creates situations of this kind, and often attempts to realize them. (Krafft-Ebing 1892, p. 89)

Kraftt-Ebing (114) also specifies that in some cases the masochist may desire a violent death, but he is quick to point out that this is simply a longing, only occurring in the mind of the person: 'In its extreme consequences, masochism must lead to the desire to be killed by a person of the opposite sex [. . .]. When [. . .] the whole structure of masochistic ideas is purely psychical, in the imagination of such individuals, even the extreme may be reached'. For the sake of comparison with Schwob's short story, it is interesting to observe that although almost of all the case studies discussed are of men, Krafft-Ebing considers masochism as a feminine perversion. More precisely, he postulates that the reason for the lack of female cases of masochism is simply that in women 'modesty and custom' (139) repress the expression of sexual perversions. However, given the submissive role of woman in a sexual relationship, and more generally in society, masochism must be viewed as the greatest manifestation of female deviance: Krafft-Ebing (140) classifies it as 'a pathological degeneration of the distinctive psychical peculiarities of woman'. What is even more fascinating for the present analysis is that the only case study of female masochism in *Psychopathia Sexualis* is that of a woman who had a desire to be whipped when she was a child, and 'the masochistic desire was here present in the mind of a child' (139).

As a Decadent writer, with the character of 'Bluebeard's Little Wife' Marcel Schwob perhaps aimed to represent a *femme fatale* with a deviant and perverse imagination, who desired to be dominated but was in fact able to subjugate one of the cruelest men in literary and popular culture, Bluebeard. But her expression of masochistic longing and voluntary search for ways to be afraid participate, willingly or not, in the rebellion against male dominance seen in the nineteenth-century adaptations of Perrault's 'Bluebeard' analysed in this essay. These rewritings and retellings shift the focus of the story from the explicit cautioning against female curiosity and indiscretion of Perrault's tale to more profound investigations of the wife's feelings of fear and terror, which are represented as deviant female features similar to nervous and mental disorders of the time such as hysteria, monomania, and masochism. However, despite the evident parallels with abnormal behaviours as clinically represented in nineteenth-century psychiatry, the Gothic adaptations of the Bluebeard tale discussed above turn female deviance into a tool for transgression against masculine and marital oppression. In its various expressions seen in this study, female deviance is not only a consequence of masculine violence, but it is most importantly a form

of rebellion against male authority and control which ultimately empowers one of the most oppressed female characters in the fairy-tale world: Bluebeard's wife.

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Notes

1. This collection of tales was first published in four volumes in 1805–1806, to which two other volumes were added in 1810. Given the particularity of this collection of chapbooks, where readers could themselves bind the tales in any order they wished and even add newer prints to complete the set (Potter 2021, pp. 63–65), I think it is necessary to point out that the version I consulted is the one held by the Bodleain Library, the University of Oxford, and reproduced in microfiche by the University of Michigan as part of the *Opie Collection of Children's Literature*. In this version of *Popular Tales*, Wilkinson's 'Blue Beard' is in the third volume.
2. It is thus unsurprising that in 'The Pathetic History of Crazy Jane', another Gothic bluebook included in the collection *Popular Tales, Lives, and Adventures* together with 'Blue Beard', Wilkinson focuses the narration on a hysterical and mentally deranged female character. When learning about the deception and duplicity of her lover Henry, 'Violent hysterics seized on her [Jane's] fragile form' (Wilkinson 1805, p. 16), and after that incident she 'was doomed to linger out her existence a hapless maniac' (17).
3. Interpreting, of course, the *madwoman* Bertha Mason Rochester as Jane Eyre's deviant and rebellious double, as Gilbert and Gubar have posited (Gilbert and Gubar [1979] 2000, pp. 359–62).
4. Unless specified otherwise, all translations are my own.

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