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The Tales of Bluebeard's Wives: Carmen Maria Machado's Intertextual Storytelling in *In the Dream House* and "The Husband Stitch"

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Abstract: This paper examines the gothic fairy tale in Carmen Maria Machado's memoir *In the Dream House* and short story "The Husband Stitch" with a focus on Bluebeard's insistent presence and the interweaving of reality, gothic horror, and fairy tale. In the memoir, Machado restages her experience of queer intimate partner violence in the form of a gothic fairy tale as "The Queen and the Squid", reminiscent of the tale of Bluebeard's latest wife. By including gothic fairy-tale elements in the autobiographical text, Machado blurs the boundaries between the fictional and non-fictional realm, between her story and that of Bluebeard's latest wife, thereby rewriting the tale for a queer context. The annotation of the memoir using Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* further superimposes the fairy tale onto *Dream House*. Machado's short story "The Husband Stitch" is a gender-aware inversion of "Bluebeard". The reappearance of the tale throughout Machado's work reveals the persistence of abusive behavioral patterns in relationships to the present day. Machado's intertextual storytelling blurs the lines between autobiographical events and the tale of Bluebeard's latest wife, creating a shared narrative universe of experiences of women who have dealt with their own iteration of Bluebeard.

Keywords: gothic; fairy tale; intertextual storytelling; Carmen Maria Machado; memoir; *In the Dream House*; Bluebeard; The Husband Stitch



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1. Introduction

Carmen Maria Machado's first short story collection *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017) has been described as "steeped in folklore and urban legends" (Campbell 2019, p. 302).¹ Particularly, the tale of Bluebeard's latest wife surfaces noticeably often in her short story "The Husband Stitch" as well as in the memoir *In the Dream House* (2019). "Bluebeard",² Charles Perrault's French tale from the collection *The Tales of Mother Goose*, is dated to 1697. The titular character is a castle owner who sets a single rule for his new wife: He forbids her to open one specific door while granting her access to the rest of the palace and providing her with the keys and detailed directions to the locked chamber. When he leaves the castle, the wife sets out to explore the forbidden room. Behind the "closet-door" (Perrault [1889] 1965, p. 291), she finds the murdered bodies of the previous wives who have disobeyed Bluebeard's arbitrary rule before her. Upon this gruesome discovery, "the key . . . fell out of [the wife's] hand" (p. 292) and into the blood, which stains it magically and permanently. After Bluebeard returns and the bloody key gives away the wife's violation of the rule, he announces that she should "take the place among the [murdered] ladies" (p. 293). The latest wife delays her death until her brothers come to her rescue. She becomes the owner of the estate and remarries after Bluebeard is killed. The tale's numerous retellings in the literature, i.e., Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" (1979), Helen Oyeyemi's *Mr. Fox* (2012), and Nalo Hopkinson's short story "The Glass Bottle Trick" (2000) show its continuous cultural significance. Among numerous filmic retellings are Catherine Breillat's *Bluebeard* (2009) and, bringing to the fore aspects of race and gender

while displaying Bluebeard-like dynamics in intimate relationships, such as in Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017). Bluebeard has inspired opera pieces, such as Paul Dukas' *Ariadne and Bluebeard* (1899) and Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* (1911) as well as songs bearing the title "Bluebeard" by Gravenhurst and the Cocteau Twins, as Casie [Hermansson](#) (2009, p. x) points out. The many retellings are a comment on and criticism of the reproduction of abusive behavioral patterns in relationships that evoke the figure of Bluebeard, along with the heteronormative and patriarchal ideals he embodies to this day. The reappearances of the tale throughout Machado's texts rework such Bluebeardian conceptions of violence through a queer and contemporary lens. Why does the tale of Bluebeard's latest wife and various iterations of her story occupy Machado's memoir and the short story "The Husband Stitch" so persistently?

[Machado's](#) (2017b) intertextual storytelling merges traditional fairy tales with her own experiences of intimate partner abuse and connects women's stories with each other to create a shared narrative universe. In this article, I explore the fairy and folktales that run together in Machado's short story and memoir, laying a focus on Bluebeard's continuous presence and the interweaving of reality, gothic horror, and fairy tale. The narrator in "The Husband Stitch" states that "stories have this way of running together like raindrops in a pond. Each is borne from the clouds separate, but once they have come together, there is no way to tell them apart" (p. 16). [Laura Hubner](#) (2018) states that the "bringing together of different fairy tales and fairy-tale versions creates new meanings that the fusion with gothic adds to in complex and magical ways" (p. 39), reminiscent of the narrator's comment of stories running together "like raindrops". Fusing both gothic and fairytale conventions in "The Husband Stitch", as well as combining fiction with non-fiction in *Dream House*, are two more instances of "running together" that are worth examining in Machado's boundary-blurring writing. In the chapter "Dream House as American Gothic", Machado further frames her memoir as a gothic text.

Machado writes the tale of Bluebeard into her work using retellings such as "The Husband Stitch", the fairy-tale chapter "Dream House as the Queen and the Squid", and her essayistic comments on Bluebeard and intimate partner violence in her memoir. As [Katarzyna Więckowska](#) (2020) states, "[i]n Machado's narrative universe, stories repeatedly turn into other stories and proliferate to uncover otherness in the known" (p. 83). Machado draws on the same fairy tales of abused and silenced women throughout her work and thereby shows the need to continue (re-)telling and critically examining these tales in light of the ongoing violence against women in real life. By merging these tales across her texts, [Machado](#) (2019) shows that they are not isolated. Rather, the act of including women's stories that "[have] gone before" (p. 280) and combining them with fairytale iterations allows for the creation of a literary universe of interwoven narratives. To show how Machado's intertextual storytelling creates a connection between women's stories of their respective Bluebeard, the upcoming part of this article is dedicated to outlining points of overlap and tension between the gothic and the fairy tale, followed by a reading of "The Husband Stitch" as a retelling that strongly draws on "Bluebeard", and finally, examining how *Dream House* incorporates the tale and blurs the lines between the fairy tale and autobiographical writing.

2. The Gothic and the Fairy Tale: Overlap and Tensions

While the connection between the gothic and the fairy tale seems unexpected at first, "the fairy-tale and the gothic are not as disparate as we might assume, particularly in terms of structure and plot, and many of the tales teeter on the brink of the gothic, with only a change in 'sensibility' needed to tip their almost identical plots into the other mode" ([Hirst](#) 2018, p. 3). Connections between the fairy tale and the gothic have been made by [Lucy Armitt](#) ([1998] 2009) in her entry "Gothic Fairy-Tale" in *The Handbook of the Gothic*, by [Laura Hubner](#) (2018) in *Fairytale and Gothic Horror: Uncanny Transformations in Film*, and, from a feminist point of view, [Gilbert and Gubar's](#) ([2000] 2020) deconstructivist reading of fairy tales as gothic in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the*

Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. Early connections between fairy tales and gothic horror can be established, as the two have been interwoven from their roots in oral traditions and were first recorded during the late romantic movement, originating in Europe and traceable to Germany (Rothmann [1978] 2014, p. 156). German writer Clemens Brentano collected folk songs in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805–1808) and encouraged the brothers Grimm to collect German fairy tales, which were published as *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812).³ The gothic “shares with romanticism an interest in deep emotion, dreams, and sometimes magic” (Crow 129). Interweaving the fairy tale and romanticism’s darker side, German writer E.T.A Hoffmann, inspired by English gothic novels like Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and M.G. Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), wrote the well-known Schauermärchen (gothic fairy tale) *The Sandman* (1816). An example of gothic children’s tales is *Der Struwwelpeter* (1844) by Heinrich Hoffman. Following Sue Short (2007), the gothic and the fairy tale share “the possibilities and pleasures offered by a fictional domain in which many rules cease to apply” (p. 22). Fairy tales characteristically have archetypal characters and “[concern] a prohibition and its transgression” (Hermansson 2009, p. 3), a formula traceable in both “Bluebeard” and “The Husband Stitch”. Tensions arise from the unification of the gothic and the fairy tale as one denies the narrative resolution that is a key constituent for the other: a “final sanctuary” is typically denied in gothic tales (Hubner 2018, p. 2). Hirst (2018) summarizes that “[as] Marina Warner argues, fairy-tales ‘do not leave open prickly possibilities, or enter unnegotiated areas of the unknown’ (Warner 1994, p. xvi) and, as Derek Brewer emphasises, their endings, if not happy, are yet ‘closed’ (1998 [sic Brewer 1988])” (p. 2). The closed ending, however, is opposed to the gothic’s tendency to leave its narrative strings untied. This tension is mirrored in Machado’s practice of combining fiction and non-fiction in her memoir, incorporating tales like “Bluebeard” and using violence against women as a common point of departure in her narratives and autobiographical writing. While Lucy Armitt ([1998] 2009) states that “reading fairy-tales . . . [is a way] to resolve real-life dilemmas” (p. 135), rewriting real-life issues as fairy tales also offers possibilities for portraying issues from a fantastical perspective, if not necessarily for resolution. In “The Husband Stitch”, the narrator addresses the recipients directly and apologizes for the lack of narratological conclusion: “If you are reading this story out loud, you may be wondering if that place my ribbon protected was wet with blood and openings, or smooth and neutered like the nexus between the legs of a doll. I’m afraid I can’t tell you, because I don’t know. For these questions and others, and their lack of resolution, I am sorry” (Machado 2017b, p. 31). *Dream House* ends with Machado’s (2019) ruminations on where to end her story (p. 275). The lack of clear resolution is one of the more gothic traits of Machado’s stories.

Both violence and abuse are common themes in fairy tales and gothic tales, as can be seen in Carter’s “The Bloody Chamber” and Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s *Mexican Gothic* (2020) as well as Margaret Atwood’s *Lady Oracle* (1976), which include fairy tales in their gothic novels. This convention dates back to the Victorian era, as Campbell (2016) points out in her analysis of “Bluebeard” and “Beauty and the Beast” in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). Gilbert and Gubar ([2000] 2020) also point to the fairy-tale structure of the novel’s plot (p. 399). The inclusion of fairy tales is useful as “fairy tale structures, roles and narratives of the ‘real’ world help to universalize the historically specific, while the elasticity of the fantasy world enables unspeakable or taboo subject matter to be addressed” (Hubner 2018, p. 10). The unspeakable has initially been defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1975) as the taboo of male homosexuality. Violence in intimate relationships appears to be a taboo subject matter as well, as Machado has difficulty communicating her abuse to the people around her and finding accounts of other queer abusive relationships, extending Kosofsky’s definition of the term. The gruesome discovery of not a queer closet but a closet of murdered wives is a secret that elicits a reaction of unspeakable horror in Bluebeard’s wife as well.

Following the *Motif-Index*, Machado (2019) points to the motif of the locked chamber in the chapter “*Dream House as Bluebeard*” as “The one forbidden place (forbidden chamber)”, type C610 and C611 as well (p. 66). In *Dream House*, such a forbidden place manifests as the result of the abuse and her partner forbidding her to talk about it with others. Machado (2019) gives a tour around the house in Bloomington, where “all the boys who liked you as a girl” (p. 14) occupy the driveway and in the kitchen, lovers from “OkCupid, Craigslist” (p. 15) await. In front of the bedroom, she says “don’t go in there” (p. 16), implying that like Bluebeard’s closet, the room hides a gruesome secret. In her case, the secret is an abusive partner and a story of domestic violence that, for the time being, stays behind closed doors. According to Gero Bauer, “[t]he closet, in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, developed as a small, but important room where books or rarities were kept, and which could serve as a place of devotion or private reading for male and female members of a household” (Bauer 2016, p. 20) and “became the most private space of the house, where the person having access to it kept their secrets” (p. 21). Justine Sargent points to Gero Bauer’s reading of the closet as the male homosexual secret, by “[reading] Bluebeard’s chamber as a homosexual ‘closet,’ explicating the connection between ‘the metaphorical ‘closet’ of modern homosexuality’ and ‘actually localisable spaces of secrecy—literal closets’ (Bauer 2016 qtd. in Sargent 2022, p. 6). While in Machado’s (2019) *Dream House*, closeted sexuality is thematized as well, surfacing as her worry about coming out to a Republican uncle (p. 239), the more prominent closet hides the truth about the intimate partner violence in her relationship, exemplified by Machado’s initial silence around and unwillingness to acknowledge the issue.

For a Bluebeard plot, “corpses in the closet” are a necessary constituent (Tatar 2004, p. 12). Corpses seem similar enough to the skeletons in the idiomatic closet, indicating that a person has a secret that would change one’s opinion about them in a negative manner. Following Sedgwick’s definition in *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), the skeletons represent “a private or concealed trouble in one’s house or circumstances, ever present, and ever liable to come into view” (p. 65). In Bluebeard’s case, this holds true. Bauer connects secrecy around queerness with Bluebeard’s disclosure of it: “Just as the late nineteenth century ‘open secret’ of homosexuality denies what it is, but says that it is there, Bluebeard cannot name the contents of his ‘closet,’ indeed fears it, but must speak about it, and, hence, repeatedly risks its disclosure” (Bauer 2016, p. 11). Bluebeard’s secret closet appears as a physical space in the tale, while the queer closet is more of an interior space. Tatar, however, suggests a reading of Bluebeard’s castle as “an architectural embodiment of its owner’s mind” (Tatar 2004, p. 53). Portraying architectural space as a mirror of a worsening state of mind is common in psychological gothic literature, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), a short story that portrays a woman’s confinement in marriage and domestic expectations.

The expectation for the “domestic space [to] function as promised” (Junker 2019, p. 11), namely as a safe space, is often undermined by violence inside the home. It fails to do so for many women and girls, as the 2022 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s (2022) report on “Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls (Femicide/Feminicide)” exemplifies. It states that “[v]iolence against women and girls is the most pervasive human rights violation” and that “in 2021, around 45,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by intimate partners or other family members” (p. 3). The report concludes pointedly that “the most dangerous place for women and girls is their home” (p. 28). The pervasiveness of intimate partner violence helps explain the proliferation of Bluebeard-like narratives in the contemporary literature to explore abuse in the home, such as is the case in Machado’s *Dream House* and “The Husband Stitch”.

Throughout the contemporary era, gothic writers have been voicing their concerns regarding the misleading “idealization of the [heteronormative] home” (Ellis 1989, p. ix) as a domestic paradise in the shape of literary haunted houses in which violent relationships take place. The idealization invokes a sense of gothic confinement in the heteronormative trajectory of women’s lives. These fairy-tale imaginations are exposed as dysfunctional

along with the houses through the use of the gothic in *Dream House*. Through Machado's queer perspective, her fiction and non-fiction contest the traditional and heteronormative concept of femininity, which "[is] enshrined in cultural fairy tales" (Wisker 2016, p. 21). In contemporary rewritings, alternative foci of the fairy tale are revealed. Machado centers her protagonist's desire in "Husband Stitch", queerness in *Dream House*, and criticism of violence and manipulation in the home in both texts. These contrast with society's narratives promising fairy-tale lives in dream houses. Machado's (2019) titular *Dream House* stands in for fairy-tale imaginations of the ideal queer relationship. Not only does the house promise a dream life, but it also stands in Bloomington, a city whose "name is a promise" (p. 74) as well. While searching for a house to move into, one of the possible places is described as "a fairy tale" (p. 43) due to the seemingly perfect couple living in it. The mother is "[stirring] a bowl of batter" while "children . . . [are] clutching [her] skirt" (p. 43). The conception of the fairy-tale life is also influenced by heteronormative ideals that collide with the non-normative polyamorous relationship Machado thinks about at that point. Sedgwick's (1990) assertion that "the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption . . . erects new closets" (p. 68) in the context of Machado's own non-normativity not only becomes applicable to her queer relationship but also to the new kind of closet erected for Machado when she discovers her partner's psychologically violent side and then hides this behavior from the outside world, creating secrecy around the topic in her own life temporarily before speaking out.

As the fairy tale is often concerned with a broken home and violence, the parallels to the gothic haunted house and focus on familial relations become evident. In both the gothic and the fairy tale, the home is often a significant site. According to Armitt ([1998] 2009), it commonly turns from a seemingly ideal home to a haunted one: "[T]he alluring façade of hearth and home gradually [shift] into an imprisoning structure containing unheimlich secrets and the textual encoding of latent desires" (p. 135). This "gradual shift" occurs in Machado's memoir and the "latent desires" Armitt addresses surface as the desire for pleasure and knowledge in "The Husband Stitch",⁴ and the desire for her partner in *Dream House*. Much like the Dream House, Bluebeard's castle is not the place of safety it is made out to be but rather a site haunted by violence. The protagonists' partners in Machado's texts are uncannily revealed as abusive and their homes, in extension, as sites of confinement. Armitt ([1998] 2009) points to Gilbert and Gubar's feminist readings of traditional fairy tales as recontextualizations of the "discourse of female enclosure" (p. 135). The "female enclosure" is relevant to the multiple layers of spatial confinement, i.e., in Bluebeard's castle, as well as the entrapment in social structures of a wife as her husband's property, the entrapment in a manipulative relationship in *Dream House*. Ann Tracy points to a woman's "struggle to acquire, not become, [her husband's] property" in the domestic setting of female gothic novels, like those by Ann Radcliffe (Tracy [1998] 2009, p. 173). As Armitt ([1998] 2009) states, "[i]t is predominantly through the discourses of feminism and psychoanalysis that our understanding of the Gothic fairy-tale emerges" (p. 135). A link between the psychoanalytical uncanny, feminist perspectives, and the gothic that features so prominently in Machado's literary work can be established. This combination of elements can be found in feminist retellings in the shape of gothic fairy tales, such as Rebecca Solnit's *Cinderella Liberator* (2019) and Kalynn Bayron's *Cinderella Is Dead* (2020) as well. Adding the constituent of gothic horror to the fairy tale "enables us to talk about what otherwise might feel taboo" (Tatar 2012, p. xix).

Machado frames her memoir as a gothic text and draws heavily on haunted-house conventions, using the domestic realm to communicate experiences of violence and trauma: "We were not married; she was not a dark and brooding man. It was hardly a crumbling ancestral manor; just a single-family home . . . No moors, just a golf course" (Machado 2019, p. 87). Machado points to "marrying a stranger" and "woman plus habitation" as the main constituents of American gothic, stating that in fact in her case, "it was 'woman plus habitation,' and [her partner] was a stranger because something essential was shielded" (p. 87), much like the husband's need to possess his wife in "Husband Stitch" is revealed

only later on. The shielded parts are their respective abusive character traits that are hidden in Bluebeard's figurative chamber. In "The Queen and the Squid", the shielded part is the zoo, in which the queen keeps her previous animal lovers. While Machado positions her memoir within the tradition of the gothic, these are also important constituents of the fairy tale that can be traced in "Bluebeard" and "Husband Stitch" as well, establishing a similarity between the fairy tale, the gothic and real-life issues.

3. "The Husband Stitch" as an Inversion of Bluebeard's Tale

"The Husband Stitch" is the opening story of Machado's short story collection *Her Body and Other Parties*. On the surface level, Machado's "The Husband Stitch" appears to be a retelling of the tale about a girl with a ribbon around her neck. This tale is of unknown origin but seems to have emerged during the French Revolution. Washington Irving's "The Adventure of a German Student" from *Tales of a Traveller* (1824) is a notable version of the girl-with-a-ribbon tale, in which the falling off of the woman's head indicates an execution by guillotine (Solomon 2022, p. 123). Alexandre Dumas's "La femme au collier de velours" (1851) is a later version of the story. I use Alvin Schwartz's retelling "The Green Ribbon"⁵ from the children's collection *In a Dark, Dark Room and Other Scary Stories* (1984) for my analysis. Upon the ribbon's undoing, protagonist Jenny's head falls off which leads to her subsequent death. "The Husband Stitch" is also a story about a young woman who sets a rule to protect her green ribbon while she explores her sexual desires with a young man, whom she eventually marries and has a son with. Like the narrator, other women have ribbons wrapped around different parts of their bodies as well. The protagonist describes it as "a bother" (Machado 2017b, p. 27), as constant attention must be paid so that the ribbon does not loosen. Upon closer examination, however, Machado's short story also bears striking similarity to Perrault's "Bluebeard". While "Bluebeard" and "The Green Ribbon" are separate tales in folkloric history, in Machado's literary universe, these stories come together and seem to refer to and inform each other in "The Husband Stitch".

I read "The Husband Stitch" as a gender-aware inversion of Bluebeard's tale, which allows one to see the tale in a new light, one that does not punish the wife's curiosity but the husband's cruelty, as Maria Tatar (2004) criticizes: "The homicidal history of the husband often takes a back seat to the disobedience of the wife" (p. 20). In Machado's (2017b) short story, it is the female protagonist who gives her boyfriend "two rules: he cannot finish inside of me, and he cannot touch my green ribbon" (p. 7). After their marriage and the revoking of the first rule, her now husband insists continuously upon having a right to her body until she gives in and allows him to undo the ribbon, knowing that her head will fall off. While she is the one to set the rules in this story, it is crucial to her survival that they are not broken. She is also the one to suffer the consequences of their breaking, as the wives in "Bluebeard" typically do, turning the power dynamics in Perrault's tale on their head. Although the motives of the rule makers, namely the wife's protection of her own life in "Husband Stitch" and Bluebeard's arbitrary test and assertion of his power, are opposite, the outcome is the same. In both cases, the breaking of boundaries will cost the woman's life, making it seem almost as if no matter what she does, she will have to die in the end. While the wife's rule in "Husband Stitch" is designed to keep her alive, Bluebeard makes clear how replaceable his new wife is by leading her to find all the women he has already killed and replaced in the aftermath of their murder.

Story elements specifically from "Bluebeard" and "The Green Ribbon" have been combined before, leading to an interesting perspective on how these compare to Machado's version. In Emily Carroll's graphic story collection *Through the Woods*, the comic *A Lady's Hands Are Cold* (2014), a woman is sent to her new husband's castle, where maids wrap a ribbon around her neck. She hears a voice, finds a decapitated woman, and uses the ribbon to connect the woman's head back to her body, thereby reviving her. In "The Bloody Chamber", Carter ([1979] 2015) also combines Bluebeard's single rule with a "wedding gift [that] clasped around [the wife's] throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like

an extraordinarily precious slit throat" (p. 6), foreshadowing cruelty through the piece of jewelry that invokes the imagery of a severed neck.

Not only does "The Husband Stitch" merge two popular tales, but the narrator is also a storyteller herself, referencing and comparing her own experiences as a desiring young woman to that of women from folktales. On the collection's paperback cover, the imagery of the green ribbon is merged with that of "Real Women Have Bodies", another short story in the collection, by portraying the head and skinless neck of a woman, with the ribbon floating around it loosely. The neck can also be interpreted as the constraining bust of a dress, the garment that features prominently in "Real Women Have Bodies", restrains a woman's body and symbolizes confinement and control, similar to Carter's ruby necklace and the frequently appearing ribbon. Changing the conventional short-story and fairy-tale collection's subheading from *and Other Stories* to *and Other Parties* further comments on the claim to a woman's body other people, particularly their husbands, feel they have. Another meaning of the subheading invites a reading of women's bodies as parties. As the title of Machado's "The Husband Stitch" makes abundantly clear, the protagonist's body is treated as a site of pleasure and enjoyment. The husband stitch is an additional stitch added after "an episiotomy, of no value for the baby or the mother, but done in order to further the husband's pleasure" (Hood 2020, p. 1001). The focus on the husband's enjoyment becomes clear in the conversation between him and the doctor about "that extra stitch" that is rumored to make intercourse more pleasurable (Machado 2017b, p. 17). The wife is made out to be her husband's property to be altered according to his wishes.⁶ Machado's short story thus complicates the trope of women's suffering due to men's sense of entitlement over their bodies and the disrespect for their bodily autonomy. *Dream House*, as a counterexample, shows that while thoughts of women as property are often gendered, such controlling dynamics can also be present in queer relationships.

Machado states that abusers are not necessarily coded physically as such by attributes like blue facial hair, "which made [Bluebeard] so frightfully ugly that all the women and girls ran away from him" (Perrault [1889] 1965, p. 290). Machado (2019) further comments that "[s]ome scholars believe that Bluebeard's blue beard is a symbol of his supernatural nature; easier to accept than being brought to heel by a simple man. But isn't that the joke? He can be simple, and he doesn't have to be a man" (pp. 66–67), indicating that another woman can also behave in an abusive way as is the case in *Dream House*. While Bluebeard is presented as a tyrant, the husband in "The Husband Stitch" is described as "not a bad man . . . And yet —" (Machado 2017b, p. 30) e still pushes the boundaries of his wife's bodily autonomy and is ultimately responsible for her death. He becomes increasingly inconsiderate of his wife's boundaries, catching her unaware: "I don't realize that his hand is sliding down the back of my neck until he is trying to loop his fingers through the ribbon" (p. 20). After she distances herself, he commands her to return but she refuses, afraid that he will touch her ribbon again (p. 20). He continues to play with the ribbon in her sleep. The untying of the ribbon is revealed as bringing him sexual pleasure⁷: "When I wake up, my husband is kissing the back of my neck, probing the ribbon with his tongue. My body rebels wildly" (p. 30), indicating her discomfort that he fails to notice or take seriously and to act without her consent. When she defends herself, he feels rejected: "I wedge my elbows in his side, and when he loosens from me in surprise, I sit up and face him. He looks confused and hurt, like my son the day I shook the can of pennies" (p. 30), mirroring their son's childlike behavior. The narrator notices that "[r]esolve runs out of me . . . I look at the face of my husband, the beginning and end of his desires all etched there" (p. 30). The ribbon has become the husband's fixation and the epitome of his lust.

In this story, father and son become the "other parties" the short story collection's title hints at, claiming ownership of the narrator's body. The day after this incident, the narrator's son mirrors the father's overstepping behavior, a sign that the father has passed the sense of entitlement on to his son: "[O]ur son touches my throat and asks about my ribbon. He tries to pull at it" (Machado 2017b, p. 21). She forbids him to touch the ribbon realizing that "[s]omething is lost between us, and I never find it again" (p. 21). Initially,

when the son “touches [her] ribbon, [...] [it is] never in a way that makes [her] afraid” (p. 18). Her son considers the ribbon “as part of me, and he treats it no differently than he would an ear or a finger. It gives him delight in a way that houses no wanting, and this pleases me (p. 18). He develops a curiosity about the ribbon, that is, for the moment, unthreatening: “Our son is twelve. He asks me about the ribbon, point-blank . . . I assure him that he’ll understand when he is grown” (p. 27) before he displays the same threatening insistence as his father.

In Schwartz’s (1984) story, protagonist Jenny explicitly asks Alfred to untie the ribbon on her deathbed. Earlier on in the story, Alfred asks about Jenny’s ribbon repeatedly, once when they are children and again after they have married; however, he does not make an effort to touch or untie it (pp. 27, 29). While in Schwartz’s version, Jenny allows her husband to undo the ribbon on her deathbed on her own terms (p. 32), Machado’s (2017b) narrator indulges her husband’s probing, while she is still a young mother: “Do you want to untie the ribbon . . . is that what you want of me?” (p. 30). Machado depicts the husband as a much more forceful man who makes her feel guilty: “‘A wife,’ he says, ‘should have no secrets from her husband’” (p. 20). She clarifies that “[t]he ribbon is not a secret; it’s just mine” (p. 20) and asks “Am I not allowed this one thing?” (p. 21) for herself, the one thing on which her survival depends. Her question indicates that her husband feels entitled to all of her and is possessive over her body to an extent that leads to her death: “[w]ith trembling fingers, he takes one of the [ribbon’s] ends. The bow undoes, slowly, the long-bound ends crimped with habit . . . The ribbon falls away. It floats down and curls on the bed, or so I imagine, because I cannot look down to follow its descent. My husband frowns, and then his face begins to open with some other expression—sorrow, or maybe preemptive loss. My hand flies up in front of me—an involuntary motion, for balance or some other futility—and beyond it his image is gone” (p. 30). The narrator seems to be removed, as if numbed by the husband’s relentless nagging, which results in a feeling of loneliness: “As my lopped head tips backward off my neck and rolls off the bed, I feel as lonely as I have ever been” (p. 31), commenting of how alone she is in the experience of being a woman.⁸ In “The Husband Stitch”, Machado combines the story of “The Green Ribbon” with that of “Bluebeard”. In an inversion of Bluebeard’s tale, it is the female protagonist who sets a rule to ensure her survival. The husband’s insistence on untying her ribbon and breaking her rule critically points to his entitlement and disrespect of her bodily autonomy that ultimately leads to her death.

4. A Critical Examination and Rewriting of “Bluebeard” in *Dream House*

Like “The Husband Stitch”, many other contemporary retellings of fairy tales incorporate gothic horror to point out discriminatory and marginalizing mechanisms as social criticism. In *Dream House*, Machado inverts this trend by restaging her experience of queer intimate partner violence in the form of a gothic fairy tale. Machado’s queer gothic memoir⁹ draws on “Bluebeard” in particular; however, in different ways than the “Husband Stitch”. As her memoir is about an abusive relationship with another woman¹⁰ who seeks to control Machado in several ways and uses psychological violence¹¹ to manipulate her, the parallels to Perrault’s violent tale become evident. References to “Bluebeard” surface throughout the memoir, most strikingly in the chapter “*Dream House as the Queen and the Squid*”, a fairy-tale retelling of the psychological violence Machado has experienced. The tale addresses an abusive relationship between a queen and her squid lover, whom the queen neglects after a period of affection towards her. As a result of the neglect, the squid discovers that the queen has a zoo in which she keeps her former discarded animal lovers, very much like the decapitated wives in Bluebeard’s chamber. Machado also includes an essayistic chapter titled “*Dream House as Bluebeard*”, which critically examines the tale. The memoir is made up of short fragmentary chapters, each with a title in the form of “*Dream House as [something other]*”, examining the relationship through a different lens each time. Machado draws on various genres and perspectives to tell and retell the story of her violent relationship, resulting in a multitude of stories that ultimately run together into

the overarching narrative of her relationship as indicated by the introductory quote from “The Husband Stitch” and establishing a sense of communality between women’s stories of intimate-partner abuse.

By including gothic fairy-tale elements in the autobiographical *Dream House*, Machado blurs the boundaries between genres, the fictional and non-fictional realm, and rewrites the tale of Bluebeard’s wife for a queer context. The parallels between Machado’s memoir and fairy tales become evident through her annotation of *Dream House* using Stith Thompson’s (1955–1958) *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, superimposing the fairy tale onto the memoir as a whole and pointing to numerous instances of overlap in her story and tales which are not traditionally queer. While this may be true for fairy tales, the gothic, on the other hand, is increasingly contextualized as traditionally queer. In *Queer Gothic*, George Haggerty (2006) argues that “[g]othic fiction offered the one semirespectable area of literary endeavor in which modes of sexual and social transgression were discursively addressed on a regular basis” (p. 3). Paulina Palmer (2012), in *The Queer Uncanny*, states that the gothic “has traditionally focused on deviant forms of sexuality” (p. 11) and builds on Hughes and Smith’s (2009) argument that the “[g]othic has, in a sense, always been ‘queer’” (p. 1). Hughes and Smith expand the definition of the gothic’s queerness to formally and stylistically different work apart from its sexual transgressiveness.

The heteronormative stories Machado compares her own experiences to are listed in the chapter “*Dream House as Folktale Taxonomy*”. In it, Machado (2019) addresses silences and practices thereof in traditional folktales, i.e., Hans Christian Andersen’s “Little Mermaid” (1845), interweaving her own experiences of being silenced when her partner tells her “You’re not allowed to write about this [abusive behavior]” (p. 47). This shows the pervasive presence of this issue in Western storytelling and genre traditions. In contrast, the narrator in “The Husband Stitch”, as well as Machado through the act of writing a memoir, become unsilenced and counter-act this convention of women’s silencing by telling their stories and drawing on and referring to other women’s narratives (Machado 2017b, p. 161), creating what Mary Angeline Hood (2020) calls a “feminist epistemology”. Hood (2020) argues for the value of storytelling and urban legends in alternative forms of knowledge production as they appear in Machado’s “The Husband Stitch” as experiential wisdom relevant to women’s everyday lives (p. 989).

Machado inserts the fairy tale into her entire memoir using Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index*, pointing to numerous instances of overlap in her autobiographical text. This index is a classification system for fairy- and folktales, cataloging recurring motifs in predominantly European tales, and is used for comparative analysis. Thompson’s index is organized in several steps: first, from A–Z to narrow down a broad topic such as category B “Animal”, if one wanted to categorize Machado’s tale “The Queen and the Squid”, followed by the subcategories B600–B699 “Marriage of person to animal” and landing on B620 “Animal suitor”. The first annotation in her memoir is “Omens in love affairs”, classified as Type T3, when Machado’s partner tells her “We can fuck . . . but we can’t fall in love” (Machado 2019, p. 23). In doing so, Machado creates a continuity between autobiographical events and fictional story motifs.

Machado (2019) further includes her own classification of narrative elements in the chapter “*Dream House as Folktale Taxonomy*” (pp. 38–39). In it, she distills the narrative elements of women’s silences and practices of silencing in popular folktales, then weaves these elements into her own experience. Machado establishes the connection between women in fairy tales and herself: “Sometimes your tongue is removed, sometimes you still it of your own accord. Sometimes you live, sometimes you die. Sometimes you have a name, sometimes you are named for what—not who—you are. The story always looks a little different, depending on who is telling it” (p. 39). She is silenced on several levels by her partner who tells her not to talk and write about the abuse. In the chapter, Machado parallels these experiences with women’s suffering and silences in three folktales: “In Hans Christian Andersen’s story, the Little Mermaid has her tongue cut out of her head” (p. 38). She adds visceral detail in her description by including the common experience of cutting

a sinewy piece of meat: “[T]he witch takes the muscle of her tongue and cuts through the tissue. If you have ever sliced a pork chop with a shitty Ikea knife, you know what it was like—that sawing, that rocking back and forth, slick and squeaky give of the muscle, the white marbled fat” (pp. 38–39). The Little Mermaid trades her voice for legs, a process “as painful as knives slicing open her tail” (p. 38), reminiscent of the gory detail the mother provides in the stories she tells her son in “Husband Stitch”, who cuts the flap between his skin to confirm the searing pain: “the sensation of fins to feet being anything less than agonizing he rejects outright after cutting his hand with a pair of scissors” (Machado 2017b, p. 26). The narrator has given instructions to sever a piece of skin a few pages before in anticipation of the Little Mermaid’s tale: “give a paring knife to the listeners and ask them to cut the tender flap of skin between your index finger and thumb. Afterward, thank them” (p. 16). Machado’s taxonomy continues with “The Wild Swans” in which “Eliza is a princess who is silent for seven years . . . Then, there’s the Goose Girl, whose identity, title, and husband are stolen by a treacherous maid, and who cannot speak of her plight for fear of her life” (Machado 2019, p. 38). These three tales exemplify how common the motif of silenced women is in tales. The taxonomy can be expanded to include classic tales such as the story of Philomela’s rape and subsequent removal of her tongue in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which has been retold in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. Machado inserts herself into the taxonomy chapter, adding her story to the popular tales of silenced women. The lines between Machado’s autobiography and the fairy tale blur increasingly over the topic of the inability to leave the confinement of the respective place and entrapment in the respective relationship by dissecting the tale of Bluebeard, reverting to non-realism to communicate her experiences and including the fantastic as a speculative mode beside the gothic.

The difficulty of leaving the abusive partnership is shown when Machado stays in the abusive relationship until she is “always anxious and vibrating like a too-small breed of dog” (Machado 2019, p. 12) because she has “forgotten that leaving is an option” (p. 204). In “*Dream House as Man vs. Self*”, Machado implores a dog to leave the house, leaving the door open: “She could have run. The door was open. But it was as if she did not even know what she was looking at” (p. 136). Machado focuses on how unaware one can be of the option to leave a space or current state: She recounts nightmares she had as a child, when “hiding was all [she] could do; there never seemed to be the possibility of opening the door and going out into the world beyond the house” (p. 253). This feeling is enhanced by the “closed doors; but also windows sealed against the sound, drawn curtains, silent phones” (p. 86) of the domestic realm, ongoing exposure to abuse makes the situation seem inescapable. This uncanny link between privacy and secrecy that is so crucial to gothic texts emerged “in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, [when] a modern notion of domestic privacy, crucially dependent on the emergence of the new European middle classes, first came into being” (Bauer 2016, p. 16). In “*Dream House as Set Design*”, which is written like a description of a scene in a play, there is “A front door [facing] the street, but this door will remain closed” (p. 83), using a back door to enter the house instead, showing that the house itself becomes the forbidden chamber that people from the outside cannot enter in order to not find out about the violence inside. Entering through the front door would mean acknowledging the abuse. However, impending signs of violence on display are the “bottle of men’s cologne shaped like a headless torso” (p. 83) combined with “weirdly dull knives” (p. 84) and “dead things watching over [them]” (p. 57) in a sexual fantasy Machado has with her partner. This sense of inescapability is mirrored in “The Queen and the Squid”: In line with Bluebeard’s wife’s desire to explore, after the queen starts neglecting her lover, “the squid decided to gambol about the palace. She found her way to a mop bucket and wheeled herself around the corridors, enjoying the silence . . . [finding] herself at the end of a hallway, before a very strange and heavy door” (p. 233). It leads to the room that holds the queen’s garish secret. The squid does not set out to break a rule, as the queen has not set any. The door to the secret chamber in Machado’s fairy tale does not appear to be locked, making it seem like the queen is not too preoccupied or

suspecting of the squid to find it, nor do the animals in the zoo seem able to leave: “The smell [in the room] was terrible. Not the organic stench of death but the wine-dark depths of sorrow—thick and bitter” (p. 233), specifying that the animals are not dead but rather in desolate circumstances. The unlocked door then lets the suspicion arise that the entrapment of the animals inside might be psychological too, like Machado’s.

Machado elaborates on the psychological entrapment in the critical chapter “*Dream House as Bluebeard*” which precedes the retelling of “The Queen and the Squid” in the memoir. It opens with the lines: “Bluebeard’s greatest lie was that there was only one rule: the newest wife could do anything she wanted—anything—as long as she didn’t do that (single, arbitrary) thing; didn’t stick that tiny, inconsequential key into that tiny, inconsequential lock” (Machado 2019, p. 66). Machado parallels her psychological abuse and her survival of it with the wife’s experience: “we all know that [the rule, the key] was just the beginning, a test. She failed (and lived to tell the tale, as I have)” (p. 66). Machado compares her survival to that of the newest wife, tying Bluebeard’s arbitrary rulemaking and conditions to her partner’s controlling behavior.

In a way, Machado writes a continuation of the Bluebeard tale, as if to draft and develop the squid tale that follows later in the memoir: “[B]ut even if she’d passed [the initial test] . . . there’d have been some other request, a little larger, a little stranger, and if she’d kept going—kept allowing herself to be trained, like a corset fanatic pinching her waist smaller and smaller” (Machado 2019, p. 66). Machado fabulates how the story would have continued if the wife had not disobeyed his rule, concluding that Bluebeard would have continued to test her, his requests growing increasingly horrendous: “[T]here’d have been a scene where Bluebeard danced around with the rotting corpses of his past wives clasped in his arms, and the newest wife would have sat there mutely, suppressing growing horror, swallowing the egg of vomit that bobbed behind her breastbone” (p. 66), culminating in a stupor as “he did unspeakable things to the bodies (women, they’d once been women) and she just stared dead into the middle distance, seeking some mute purgatory where she could live forever” (p. 66). This “mute purgatory” is a fate the wife would then share with the other silent women in classic fairy tales: “The Little Mermaid”, “Goose Girl”, and “The Wild Swans”, stories Machado addresses in her folktale taxonomy.

In the following passage, it is unclear whether Machado is still solely talking about Bluebeard’s latest wife as she seems to insert herself into the tale:

Because she hadn’t blinked at the key and its conditions, hadn’t paused when he told her her footfalls were too heavy for his liking, hadn’t protested when he fucked her while she wept, hadn’t declined when he suggested she stop speaking, hadn’t said a word when he left bruises on her arms, hadn’t scolded him for speaking to her like she was a dog or a child, hadn’t run screaming down the path from the castle into the nearest village pleading with someone to *help help help*—it made logical sense that she sat there and watching him spinning around with wife Number Four, its decaying head flopping backward on a hinge of flesh. (Machado 2019, p. 67)

She states that “[Bluebeard’s wife] hadn’t blinked at the key and its conditions”, much like Machado looks past the warning signs when her partner tells her “I don’t want to be like [her violent father] . . . but sometimes I worry that I am” (Machado 2019, p. 65). Bluebeard’s wife “hadn’t paused when he told her her footfalls were too heavy for his liking, hadn’t protested when he fucked her while she wept” can be paralleled with “That night, she fucks you as you lie there mutely, praying for it to be over, praying she won’t notice you’re gone” (p. 198). The wife “hadn’t declined when he suggested she stop speaking” like Machado goes silent: “You do not realize how much you sing until she tells you to stop” (p. 120). Bluebeard’s wife “hadn’t said a word when he left bruises on her arms”. Machado’s partner’s “grip goes hard, begins to hurt” (p. 64) and leaves a bruise on Machado’s arm. Bluebeard’s wife “hadn’t run screaming down the path from the castle into the nearest village pleading with someone to *help help help*”, similar to Machado’s isolation in the Bloomington neighborhood: “the world might have been an island”, leaving her

to rely on her partner, her “only ally, which is to say she has no ally at all” (p. 81). In this scene, one can see how Machado’s experiences blend with those of Bluebeard’s wife. Machado also adds the wife’s thoughts to Bluebeard’s tale, already starting to rewrite the tale, which later becomes “The Queen and the Squid”: “This is how you are toughened, the newest wife reasoned. This is where the tenacity of love is practiced; its tensile strength, its durability. You are being tested and you are passing the test; sweet girl, sweet self, look how good you are; look how loyal, look how loved” (p. 67). At the end of this chapter, Machado appears to be addressing her former self.

In the chapter “*Dream House as the Queen and the Squid*”, Machado, on the one hand, reimagines the story of Bluebeard’s wife, and on the other, restages her abusive relationship in the form of a fairy tale, drawing on similar motifs and translating it for a queer and contemporary context. Machado states the following about incorporating fiction in her memoir: “[N]on-realism can be a way to insist on something different. It’s a way to tap into aspects of being a woman that can be surreal or somehow liminal—certain experiences that can feel, even, like horror” (Machado 2017a, n.p.). The simple language and sentence structure used in the fictional translation breaks the complicated topic of abuse down to simpler terms, allowing for a revisiting of Machado’s relationship. The tale begins with a description of a lonely queen, who “summoned all of her counselors, who then summoned all of the personages in the land so she could find a companion of her very own” (Machado 2019, p. 232). The possessive “very own” feels like an omen of how the tale will evolve, adding the aspect of an all-encompassing sense of property and setting the readers up for an eerie undercurrent from the start.

The beginning of the tale bears extensive parallels to Machado’s biography. When the counselors present “a squid, with no small amount of pomp and pageantry” (Machado 2019, p. 232) to the queen, she is initially “utterly delighted” as “[t]he squid was everything she had ever wanted: pearlescent and damp, sinewy and intelligent. The squid, in turn, was delighted with her own new situation” (p. 232). Similar to Machado’s initially harmonious relationship, “[a]t first their friendship was a magnificent one”, “a companionship defined by its tenderness, and the two were unspeakably happy” (p. 232). While Bluebeard’s latest wife eventually thinks her husband “not to have a beard so very blue, and that he was a mighty civil gentleman” (Perrault [1889] 1965, p. 290), he is not at any point perceived as a desirable or lovable husband. The road trips described at the beginning of the memoir have their parallel scenes in the fairy tale, when the queen and the squid “traveled to the edges of the kingdom, and the squid would bring the queen beautiful baubles from tiny sea caves at the coast. The queen took the squid to visit distant dignitaries” (Machado 2019, p. 232).

The squid had, “from afar, admired the queen, and could hardly believe the queen had chosen her as her own” (Machado 2019, p. 232). The squid’s disbelief mirrors Machado’s own struggle with feeling worthy of her partner’s love as “a weird fat girl” (p. 26) perfectly, feeling “lesser than” (p. 48) and “lucky” that her girlfriend “looked past arbitrary markers of social currency” (p. 26). After a while, the partner shows disdain about Machado’s appearance: “She sees your¹² qualities, and you should be ashamed of them. . . . You’re not sexy, but she will have sex with you” (p. 208). Similarly, in the fairy tale, the queen eventually “grew bored of her companion” and starts mistreating her, leaving “the squid locked outside her study, and the squid would sit upon the dry, cool stones praying she would be returned to her bowl before her skin turned to paper” (pp. 232–33), “[flipping] the squid over and drop little pieces of trash into her gnashing beak” and “[scrubbing] whatever surface the squid touched, scolding her for her thoughtless mess” (p. 233). Machado’s partner also behaves cruelly: She touches her “in a way that is not filled with love, and [Machado does not] know what to do. *This is not normal*” (p. 64). The partner throws objects at Machado and chases her after a fight. When Machado locks herself in the bathroom, the partner “[hurls] herself against [the door]” (p. 144). Machado’s partner announces that she has fallen in love with another woman (p. 215). After the squid has seen the zoo, she too “saw that the queen was cavorting with a bear” (p. 233), causing her pain: “The squid, as you know, has three hearts, and all of them broke over and over in her

time with the queen" (p. 233). The three hearts seem to signify the many chances of trying again and of concessions made when in a bad relationship.

The squid leaves the castle and "[w]hen the queen discovered that her squid was gone, she was enraged" (Machado 2019, p. 233). Her manipulative side shows in the letter she subsequently writes to the squid: "My dearest creature, . . . I love you, and I will *always love you*. The fact that you refuse to come to my chambers, even just as a companion and not as a lover, stills my heart. . . . I have, as I hope you would agree, behaved *honorably* and *beyond reproach*. . . . I would have thought that you—intelligent creature that you are—would know better" (pp. 233–34). The queen fabricates a story and puts it in a written letter to create evidence of her good intentions. She writes a second letter, going so far as to propose marriage: "Come back to me and I will pledge myself to you" (p. 235). Machado also receives such messages from her partner ranging from sorrowful to angry and insulting (p. 242). When her partner tells her "I cannot be an attentive girlfriend while I love someone else", Machado states that "it is over for good" (p. 228). The squid replies to the queen to end their relationship, "[lamenting] the use of her ink for such an exhausting and pointless purpose" and leaves town after filing her letter: "My queen . . . 'your words are very pretty. And yet they cannot obscure the simple fact that I have seen your zoo'" (p. 235). The story ends the same way it began, leaving unresolved whether the queen continues to attract lovers and whether the tale circularly repeats itself: "Here is a story I learned from a bear: There was a queen and she was lonely again" (p. 235). The bear and the squid, however, survive, like Bluebeard's latest wife, possibly indicating an end to enlarging the zoo, even if there is no indication that it ceases to exist. The ongoing existence of the queen and her zoo appears to be a comment on the lingering presence of chambers that bear violent secrets and therefore, in turn, that Bluebeard, in various shapes, continues to exist and therefore shows the persistent presence of abusive and controlling relationships.

5. Conclusions

The insistent reappearance of Bluebeard throughout Machado's work is symbolic of the reproduction of abusive behavioral patterns in relationships in society. By merging multiple stories and drawing on the same tales in both her short stories and memoir, Machado creates a narrative universe that shows that these are neither isolated stories nor tales of the past. Instead, stories about the abuse of women are still present, showing the insistent presence and perseverance of Bluebeard's tale but also establishing a legacy of women's stories, of fairy tales retold from new perspectives as well as their critical examination in the memoir. The horrors described in it are a real-life issues, as demonstrated by Machado's interweaving of her story with the tales of other women, and her retelling autobiographical experiences as the fairy tale of the queen and the squid. The narrator in "The Husband Stitch" also connects other women's tales with her own, expanding the narrative universe and passing on her knowledge to her readers before her death. Reality, gothic horror, and fairy tale interweave as the horrors of intimate partner violence become apparent through Machado's blurring of the fairy tale with her own experiences. Intertextual storytelling and the use of fairy-tale elements offer a form of communication that looks at reality from another angle and insists on the surreal gothic experiences of women in their everyday lives. Merging the fairy tale, the gothic, and autobiography allows for a simultaneous rewriting, criticism, and pointing out of the similarities between "Bluebeard" and real-life intimate partner abuse from a queer contemporary perspective. In doing so, queer gothic epistemologies that take into account the lineage of women who dealt with their own Bluebeard are created.

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Notes

- ¹ Campbell focuses particularly on “Real Women Have Bodies” and compares it to “Cinderella”. She typifies Machado’s story as an enchanted or animal bride tale.
- ² For this article, I refer to the translated version of Perrault’s ([1889] 1965) tale from Andrew Lang’s *The Blue Fairy Book*. Casie Hermansson (2009) describes “the Bluebeard fairy tale . . . [as] a nexus of variants related by themes: curiosity, forbidden chambers, punishment, wife murder. The smallest core of tale variants that have influenced the English tradition consists of Perrault’s “La Barbe bleue”, Grimms’ “Fichters [sic] Vogel” (“Fitcher’s Bird”) and “Der Räuberbräutigam” (“The Robber Bridegroom”), and the main English variant itself (predating Perrault), “Mr. Fox”. (p. 3). Crucial scholarship on “Bluebeard” includes Shuli Barzilai’s *Tales of Bluebeard and his Wives from Late Antiquity to Postmodern Times* (2009), Casie Hermansson’s *Bluebeard: A Reader’s Guide to the English Tradition* (2009) and Maria Tatar’s *Secrets Beyond the Door: The Story of Bluebeard and His Wives* (2004).
- ³ Hermansson (2009) states that “[t]he Grimms’ *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen* . . . contributed two more principal variants in addition to “Blaubart”, the German version of Charles Perrault’s tale” (p. 5). These variants are “Fitcher’s Bird” and “The Robber Bridegroom”. Perrault’s tale “was in fact omitted from editions following 1812 for the very reason that it was considered to be Perrault’s and not an ‘authentic’ older tale” (chp. 1).
- ⁴ Hood (2020) addresses both desire and women’s epistemology in Machado’s short story collection in the paper “Desire and Knowledge: Feminist Epistemology in Carmen María Machado’s ‘The Husband Stitch’”.
- ⁵ Other retellings include Ann McGovern’s contemporary “The Velvet Ribbon” from the collection *Ghostly Fun* (1970) and Judith Stamper’s 1977 retelling in the collection *Tales for the Midnight Hour*.
- ⁶ The preoccupation with property and women as their husband’s property are prominent themes in gothic literature.
- ⁷ In an art class, the protagonist encounters another woman with a ribbon around her thigh to whom she feels attracted (Machado 2017b, p. 22). Like her husband, she cannot free herself from the sexual component of the ribbon, when she tells her husband of this woman: “I even describe the details of her ribbon, releasing an extra flood of shame” (p. 23).
- ⁸ Loneliness is a persistent theme in retellings of “Bluebeard”: In Carter’s ([1979] 2015) “The Bloody Chamber”, the narrator states that entering “[i]nto marriage, into exile . . . I knew . . . that, henceforth, I would always be lonely” (p. 7). In *Dream House’s* fairy tale, the story also begins and ends with a lonely queen: “There was a queen, and she was lonely again” (Machado 2019, pp. 232, 235), indicating that the queen had felt this way many times before and, more importantly, suggests that she has mistreated many lovers, indicating a different sentiment from the one of loneliness in the other stories.
- ⁹ The term *gothic memoir* is used by Donna Lee Brien (2015). I define Machado’s work as a queer gothic memoir as it is a literary work that combines queer autobiographical content with gothic conventions.
- ¹⁰ At the time of writing the memoir, Machado identifies as “more or less cis-gendered” (Machado 2019, p. 279).
- ¹¹ Psychological violence has only recently been recognized as a form of intimate partner abuse (Maiuro 2001, pp. ix–x) and while some studies include it under the umbrella of IPV (intimate partner violence), others separate it from physical abuse (Gover and Moore 2021, p. 11). The history of recognizing and counteracting violence against women is recent in general: The endeavor to make it punishable by law became a concern from the 1960s onwards, initiated by family violence activists (Gover and Moore 2021, p. 9). In 1994, U.S. Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which posits the first government intervention “in what was previously considered a private ‘family issue’ occurring behind closed doors” (p. 9).
- ¹² Machado uses second person narrative in *Dream House* to address her self from the past, which allows her to distance herself from it but further reveals a fragmented self (Machado 2019, p. 12).

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