

After Happy Ever: Tender Extremities and Tangled Selves in Three Australasian Bluebeard Tales

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Abstract: This article identifies a critique of popular romance plots through unstable identities and disingenuous narrative perspectives in three Australasian Bluebeard tales. In these works by female writers in Australia and New Zealand, Bluebeard's key tropes of fragmentation, repetition and revelation are used to dismember popular understandings of romantic love. Confronting both the limits of knowledge and the power of story to shape romantic relations, Margaret Mahy, Sarah Quigley and Marion Campbell each in different ways refashion the Bluebeard tale's central images to complicate romantic love as a site of self-realisation. The resulting works ask us to consider how narratives and expectations of romantic love might be better "re-membered" to encourage relations of embodied compassion in contemporary Western culture.

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Introduction: Tending the Bluebeard Tale

"We must tend the myths [...] only in that way shall we survive." Janet Frame (2007, 109)

The Bluebeard tales of Margaret Mahy, Sarah Quigley and Marion Campbell suggest that we use narratives of romance actively, if not often critically or consciously enough, to negotiate our relationships and give shape and meaning to our lives. This is what makes reprising the familiar romantic scripts, particularly the foundational stories of myth and

fairy tale, a vital undertaking. Narrative is not the bearer of ideology in any uncomplicated sense in these works, and the meanings of even so seemingly transparent a text as the fairy tale prove to be highly unstable and adaptable. In these relatively recent works by female writers in Australasia, Bluebeard's key tropes of fragmentation, repetition and revelation are remobilised to challenge the fiction of romantic sufficiency and to complicate the popular representation of romantic love as a site of self-realisation. These writers are not working in a purely critical or revisionist mode, however: their stories partake of the pleasures and seductions of narrative and visual representations even as they challenge popular romantic mythology. If these postmodern Bluebeard tales are riddled with unresolved tensions, then this reflects the conflicted, often contradictory, and yet still central position of romantic love in an apparently post-romantic age.

The Bluebeard fairy tale, written by Charles Perrault in 1697,[1] has many affinities with Gothic romance novels, yet it also lends itself to a critique of popular romance. As several commentators have pointed out (Warner; Tatar), Bluebeard is an anomaly in the fairy tale canon in that it begins where most tales end: with marriage. Bluebeard's secret chamber can be seen as a repository of "the detritus of his failed romances" (Haslem 2003), and reprising the tale, in the texts considered here, amounts to *prising open* the paradoxes in popular representations of romantic love. Beginning where romance narratives tend to finish, unlocking the door of "happily ever after" to reveal a bloody chamber, Bluebeard is apt for examining the complications concealed behind the rather glib final phrase of the classic fairy tale romance.

Bluebeard is a story that female characters in contemporary film and fiction tend to stumble into unawares, as though the narrative were submerged in contemporary culture. The mute adolescent heroine of New Zealand author Margaret Mahy's *The Other Side of Silence* (1995), for instance, suddenly realises that she has been caught in the cage of a certain story: "It was the tale of a bride who was allowed to go anywhere in a house except for one forbidden room[...]" (110). Similarly, in Francesca Lia Block's Bluebeard story, "Bones" (2000), the diminutive narrator is in danger of falling prey to the infamous photographer Derrick Blue: "He took a key from his pocket. I wasn't afraid. I couldn't quite remember the story" (162). With this forgetting in mind, I will briefly summarise the plot of Perrault's Bluebeard tale.

Bluebeard is a very wealthy, mysterious nobleman who wants a wife but his suspect past and repellent blue beard make it difficult for him to find a bride despite his great fortune. He finally convinces a peasant girl to marry him. Shortly after the wedding, Bluebeard announces that he has business to attend to elsewhere. He gives his new bride the keys to every room in his castle and tells her that she can roam freely as long as she doesn't enter one particular small room. Once alone, however, the young wife cannot contain her curiosity and soon finds herself opening the door to the forbidden chamber, where she makes the grisly discovery of the mutilated corpses of Bluebeard's seven previous wives. She drops the key to the chamber in shock, and it becomes stained by the blood and gore on the chamber floor. Bluebeard returns and demands to see the key that betrays his wife's disobedience. As punishment, she must join the other brides in the bloody chamber. Bluebeard prepares to decapitate his wife but her brothers appear with swords drawn, just in the nick of time, and kill the tyrant. The heroine inherits her husband's riches and marries a more worthy man.

Bluebeard is a fundamentally ambivalent tale; it cannot be summed up by Perrault with a single moral like his other tales, but requires two: the first warns wives not to pry, while the second tells husbands that times have changed and they can no longer assume quite the same authority. Fairy tale scholar Marina Warner, in *From the Beast to the Blonde*, notes “the porousness of stories to their tellers’ temper and beliefs” (1995, 255). Bluebeard proves to be highly malleable in the hands of contemporary writers, open to different and even contradictory moral slants.

In her recent study of the Bluebeard tale in the English tradition, Casie Hermansson (2009) points out that references to the Grimms’ Bluebeard variants “Fitcher’s Bird” and “The Robber Bridegroom” have become much more prevalent in feminist revisions of the tale (170). In “Fitcher’s Bird” the wily heroine rescues herself through her own cunning, reassembling the corpses of her sisters in the process. Poetically, she leaves a grinning skull bedecked in bridal finery in her place as she flees the castle disguised as a bird. It is not surprising that this version of the tale has held particular appeal for feminist-oriented writers and artists challenging the classic fairy tale tropes of feminine passivity and victimhood. Though it is Perrault’s better-known tale that is explicitly referenced in the works in this article, their female protagonists clearly have a defiant spirit and, like the Grimms’ heroine, enact various rescues and “re-memberings”.

With its vivid images of domestic violence and relative lack of magical elements, Bluebeard is hardly a bedtime story by modern standards, and it is not surprising that Disney has yet to animate it. But while it may be less immediately visible than more comfortable or comforting tales, Bluebeard remains a powerful narrative in contemporary culture: the secretive man with the dark past and the compulsively curious woman determined to get to the bottom of it is an enduringly popular theme. While the early tale had little to do with love and romance in its current conception, concerned instead with material gain and physical survival, Bluebeard has been used to signify the redemptive power of love, as well as its potential blindness, and contemporary authors are putting yet another spin on the tale’s tropes of fragmentation, repetition, and revelation. The qualities of secrecy and curiosity, while they continue to be symbolically gendered, are no longer attributed to male or female per se, but are instead used to investigate broader problems of romantic love in relation to language, knowledge and self-definition.

Postmodern Bluebeard tales foreground the act of storytelling and its role in shaping romantic relations: they are self-conscious in their storydom and acutely aware of the power at stake in assuming any kind of authorship. Their (anti)heroines are unable to slip seamlessly into the romance narratives they don’t quite believe in yet long to inhabit nonetheless. Instead, they must negotiate a constant tension between competing selves and stories in the realm of romantic love. Genuine empathy and embodied compassion grow in the cracks of the official love story, while true illumination is most often found in moments of collision with sister selves, the other women in Bluebeard’s chamber, with whom the protagonists inevitably share aspects of their stories and identities. The revelation and recognition of this unbidden kinship is key to breaking with romantic delusion in the works considered here. In the current context, where love is very often experienced as a succession of monogamous relationships, the Bluebeard trope of repetition is especially potent, as Alison Lurie suggests (129). The substitutions of love unsettle a romantic mythology predicated on subjective uniqueness. Confronting the other girls and women who have occupied the same place in the romantic narrative helps to break the spell of

perfect romantic sufficiency, fracturing the self-enclosed world in which the heroine's love fantasy thrives.

Several commentators have pointed to the prevalence of a doubled, ironic first person narrative voice in recent Bluebeard tales. Warner, for instance, notes the tendency for narrators of contemporary feminist fairy tales to adopt a tone of feigned naiveté, employing "the voice of a child who is not a child, whose voice is always doubled, always deceitful, always masked" (1995,193). Voice is at the fore in the works of Mahy, Quigley and Campbell. Like the influential tales of Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Joyce Carol Oates, all of whom return to Bluebeard and its variants repeatedly in their work, these Australasian tales are highly artful accounts disguised as first-person confessionals, employing an often disingenuous intimacy with the reader that questions the power inherent in any act of apparent disclosure. Maria Tatar suggests that the Bluebeard tale turns on "the quest for intimacy through knowledge" (2004, 6). The disingenuous confessional mode enables these authors to play the fine line between knowledge and disavowal in romantic relations, and to interrogate the submerged tension between the supposedly private, unmediated emotional experience of love, and the highly constructed, cultural nature of the love story.

Much has been written on Australasian Filmmaker Jane Campion's acclaimed Bluebeard tale, *The Piano* (1993).[2] The following section will focus on another mute protagonist of New Zealand fiction. Like Campion's Ada, the imaginative and silent heroine of New Zealand writer Margaret Mahy's young adult novel *The Other Side of Silence* (1995), reclaims her voice in the course of her passage through the Bluebeard tale. As in *The Piano*, Hero's voice is literally submerged beneath a sea of competing stories and truth claims; its surfacing requires learning to balance embodied, imaginative and abstract truths in the pursuit of love and self-definition. Like Campion, the late Mahy is one of New Zealand's most awarded and successful creative practitioners but her work, written for children and young adults, has received far less critical attention. Her portrayal of the power of story to shape human relations is rich and nuanced, as the following section aims to demonstrate.

Refusing to sing in the cage of story: Margaret Mahy's *The Other Side of Silence*

As in many postmodern Bluebeard tales, voice (and voicelessness) is at the heart of Mahy's *The Other Side of Silence*. Mahy, who died in 2012, produced some of New Zealand's most popular and influential Young Adult fiction. *The Other Side of Silence* is a Bluebeard story dealing with the problematic nexus of love, story and self-definition in the deceptively simple first-person narrative voice characteristic of contemporary fairy tales. It is a coming-of-age story about finding one's way in the thicket of love and family life, amidst a disorienting swirl of competing stories about who and how to love.

Hero, the third child in a large family of loud talkers and powerful thinkers, stopped speaking three years before the action of the novel begins. Electively mute, Hero wields the power of *withholding* speech in a family dominated by oppressive eloquence and endless argument. Hermansson points out that now, "[e]ven in juvenile literature, postmodern self-reflexivity is the norm" (159); Hero's very name suggests the novel's self-consciousness

about the power of story to shape identity. The novel celebrates the power of stories, from the academic text to the fairy tale, to transport and transform even as it warns that this power can equally circumscribe and maim. Recognising this power, Hero chooses to withhold her words; yet she remains, in the heart of her silence, “a word child” (4), living out private stories on her own terms. These terms change abruptly, however, when she falls from her fantastical flights in the tree tops into a tale so twisted that only her schooling in *Old Fairy Tales* could have prepared her for its unfolding.

Eva Illouz asserts that the postmodern romantic condition is characterised by “*the blurring of the boundary between the real and its representation*” (1997, 15, emphasis in original). This blurring, key to the three Bluebeard tales examined in this article, is treated most explicitly in Mahy’s novel. Hero imagines being turned into a book, and while she would prefer *The Jungle Book*, “I would probably have been turned into *Old Fairy Tales*, which was the book everyone read me when I was small” (8). She uses this book for “divination” and her familiarity with it lends a sense of inevitability to the novel’s unfolding. She remarks of the Credence house and garden into which she tumbles: “it seemed as if I had been working my way towards it from the very first time anyone ever told me a story” (14).

All of the female characters in this tale are intoxicated by the power of story. “Real life is what you are supposed to watch out for, but an invented life, lived truly, can be just as dangerous” (3), Hero observes at the beginning of the novel. Hero’s mother Annie is a successful academic and best-selling author of books on how to raise brilliant children. Hero’s older sister Ginerva, for many years a poster-girl for her mother’s theories, ran away from home, returning during the course of the novel battered almost beyond recognition by her new career as a stunt car driver. The main Bluebeard figure in this tale is Miss Credence, the “deeply strange” neighbour into whose story Hero falls. Miss Credence lives as her father’s ghost, haunting his huge, decrepit estate. Like all Bluebeard figures, Miss Credence is deeply private, and she is so enthralled by Hero’s silence that she offers her a job clearing her neglected house and garden. Miss Credence is the daughter of a former Vice Chancellor of the University, “a world figure in the field of symbolic logic” (85), whose influence she cannot escape but whose power she can never inhabit, though she wears his academic gown, smokes his cigarettes and stalks cats with his old hunting rifle.

Under the spell of her dead father’s disdain for anything but the highest order of abstract thought, and desperate to protect his reputation, Miss Credence has secretly locked her “substandard” illegitimate daughter in a chamber in the tower. Chained to her bed, the unspeakable secret at the heart of her mother’s tale of romantic abandonment, Jorinda Credence is Hero’s abject symbolic sister. Incarcerated for all of her eighteen years, Rinda claws and gnaws at her own flesh, screaming “dreadful, silent screams” (159). It is only by passing through Bluebeard’s chamber and bringing this “terrible twin” (141) to light that Hero can rescue herself (assisted by Sam, her love interest) and reclaim her voice.

Hero immediately recognises the inevitability of what she finds in the forbidden chamber (protected, in this contemporary tale, by a security system rather than a key): “As soon as I actually saw Rinda I wondered why I had not known all along that it was she who was up there, waiting for me like a terrible kind of twin” (141). In contemporary female-penned Bluebeard tales, as noted, recognising the suffering of one’s sisters is critical to breaking with abuse and finding one’s own power. It enables the heroine to view her predicament in broader, cultural terms, the first step in empowering her to change these

terms. Rinda Credence has been rendered silent and invisible because she doesn't fit her mother's story of intellectual brilliance. Underlining this sisterly doubling, Miss Credence has painted a picture of her damaged daughter as Ginerva, Hero's sister, from a photograph in a newspaper article lauding Ginerva's childhood genius, before Ginerva broke free from *her* mother's story of intellectual brilliance. It is this painting that reveals Miss Credence as a Bluebeard figure to Hero, well-versed as she is in the old tales, and sends her on the search for the forbidden chamber.

Acutely and ambivalently aware of the shaping power of story, the sisters in this novel go to extreme lengths to avoid being circumscribed by the stories of those around them. Hero opts for self-imposed silence, while Ginerva embraces dangerous physical extremes that keep her in the body and the moment, free from her mother's "prodigy" mythology. Story is powerful, but it is not monolithic, Hero discovers. Crucial to her survival of the Bluebeard tale is Hero's belated realisation that the bars on the windows where she and Rinda are held are not steel but flimsy painted wood: "I had been looking at the idea of a cage, rather than a real one" (156). It is a symbolic cage, a cage of story and expectation, though the consequences of such conceptual prisons can be real enough.

Hermansson observes of contemporary Bluebeard: "[t]he story is not only *about* Bluebeard; the story *is* Bluebeard" (160), and in Mahy's novel, the trap is the tale itself. When Hero falls into Miss Credence's garden, Credence immediately gives Hero a new fairy tale name, which is also her daughter's: *Jorinda*, from the Grimms' 'Jorinda and Joringel'. "The name was a leash that could be used to twitch me into place," Hero realizes (23). Hero senses that her fairy tale tendencies have been turned against her: "I don't belong in this story, I kept thinking over and over again. I don't have to give in to it" (85). And later: "my secret story had somehow broken free, and was twisting back on me with its jaws open" (127). But if Hero can't control her story, then nor can her captor: "Miss Credence was still a storyteller of a sort, but I knew she wasn't in charge of the story any more. The story was in charge of her" (85). Stories are never entirely in the service of the teller, the novel suggests, and they can turn from comfortingly familiar to oppressive in the blink of an eye. You have to know the tricks, Mahy suggests, "tend the myths" (as Frame puts it), pay attention to the old stories that have serious consequences, even, or especially, if they are operating just beneath the surface of our consciousness. Hero both loves and fears the battered books that have been handed down from her parents through her siblings to her. The stories call to her: "*Make me true*, they would say to me over and over again. *Make me true*" (30). But if narrative is so volatile, so open to different turns, therein lies opportunity, Hero discovers. Once she gets her fictional bearings and regains some agency, her curiosity, initially a compulsion in classic Bluebeard fashion, becomes an assertive call to action. She is then able to repeat *actively*, rather than passively[3]: "it wasn't enough just to *be* something magical. I must *do* something magical. I must push the story on" (138).

Houses in Bluebeard tales are often symbolic extensions of their occupants' psyches. The stagnancy and secrecy of the forest-shrouded Credence mansion is in stark contrast to the transparency of Hero's family home, which is perpetually under renovation and wide open to the world. The Credence mansion is a shrine to the late Professor's brilliance. Hero intuits the way his intellectual arrogance undermined his relationships. She perceives the gown worn by the Professor, and now by his daughter, as a kind of defence against the *uncertainty* of intimacy: "He must have felt comfortable behind a fence of long, black

folded" (89). In typical Bluebeard fashion, the Professor is as wealthy as he is isolated. Once his wife—despised as an intellectual inferior—dies, the house becomes lifeless.

On first entering Credence mansion, Hero encounters a photograph of "Professor Credence, smiling across a dead stag which was stretched out at his feet" (82). His daughter copies his posturing with the cats she shoots, but Hero observes that Miss Credence's expression more closely resembles the stag's. Mahy critiques an academic authority that reduces the wild, messy aliveness of the world to something *dead* certain, something pinned and final. In postmodern renditions Bluebeard very often seeks a kind of fixing rationality that oppresses the other. American novelist Lydia Millet's *Bluebeard* (1998), for instance, kills because the unruly bodies of his wives debase the romantic ideal. Bluebeard often appears as an erudite puritan, an aesthete, a collector, or an obsessive in popular culture, as Warner notes (1995, 269); there are many examples of this in the serial killer genre, most famously perhaps *The Silence of the Lambs* (Harris, 1988). The ultimate meaning of the other can be fixed only in death in these contemporary takes on the Bluebeard tale, and the quest for definitive knowledge in the name of love is figured in images of physical suffering and psychic fragmentation.

In *The Other Side of Silence*, Miss Credence is so deeply entrenched in her father's mythology of academic brilliance above all else that she can escape only by shooting herself in the head. And the head is where the problems happen in this novel, as Mahy depicts the attachment to rigid categorical knowledge or excessively abstract thought as an obstruction to loving relationships. If, as Tatar suggests, the Bluebeard tale turns on "the quest for intimacy through knowledge" (2004:6), then in Mahy's fictional world some ways of knowing are more apt for intimacy than others.

In true fairy tale fashion, Hero falls in love with the teenager who helps to rescue her from Bluebeard's chamber, though she remains the hero of the story rather than Sam. There is more power in being the author of a tale than in being its hero, though, as Hero recognises. The majority of the novel is told in the first person, and the reader is privy to all the things that Hero doesn't say to the people around her. But the novel's brief fifth part takes place in the third person, three years after the main action of the novel. The now fifteen year old Hero has just completed the novel that details her passage through Bluebeard's chamber. In the continuing tussle between concealment and disclosure characteristic of the Bluebeard tale, Hero's hidden novel draft is discovered and read by her parents against her wishes. Her mother delightedly declares Hero "a writer" and prepares to send the book to a publisher. Hero is not so sure. She decides to take the advice of *Old Fairy Tales* once more: "Tell your sorrows to the old stove in the corner" (181). She burns the manuscript, deletes the electronic copies, and goes running with Sam, who reminds her gently that there's more to life than thinking. Sam shows her that she can transform herself not only through flights of fantasy and intellectual brilliance, but through flights of physical being. Like the wily third sister of "Fitcher's Bird," Hero finds freedom in a winning combination of cunning, imagination and daring physical action.

Hero is suitably ambivalent about the power she assumes in authoring Rinda's story (her symbolic sister is slowly being rehabilitated to speak, under the fascinated academic eye of Hero's mother Annie). Closing the book, we realise that, in keeping with the disingenuous narrative style Warner cites, the tale we have just read is Hero's story, the one she has supposedly destroyed. And so the irresistible lure of story wins out, but only

when integrated with embodied empathy, compassionate engagement and critical awareness.

The Other Side of Silence explores the need to balance privacy with transparency, solitude with connectedness, and to reconcile inner and outer worlds. The power of stories to shape relationships is not inherently positive or negative in this novel, but it is profound. Opening these relationships to transformation is not a matter of exchanging fiction for reality, imaginative knowledge for empirical or vice versa. The Bluebeard trope of revelation and the tale's characteristic play of repression and disclosure bring to light the hidden stories at the hearts of the characters' various identities, breaking them up that they may be better "re-membered" in respect of the physical world and the freedoms and desires of other people.

Love's double-trouble: substitution and successive selves in Sarah Quigley's 'North of the Lights'

In New Zealand author Sarah Quigley's Bluebeard story "North of the Lights" (1998), the themes of seriality and repetition, the doubling of husband and wife in pursuit of knowledge, and a playful, self-reflexive narrative voice work to question the wisdom of staking one's sense of self in fairy tale romance plots.

'He kept his ex-wife in a teapot above the stove' (8). The opening line of Quigley's short story, the first in her collection *having words with you*, signals its play on the Bluebeard tale. It is a *photograph* of his ex-wife, but this is enough to unmoor the female narrator Greta from the imagined certainties of her marital relations. In this story, Bluebeard's wife is an illustrator of children's books who spends her days in the world of fairy tale, while her journalist husband Alec prides himself on his hard-nosed rationality. Alec is arrogant and indifferent, but there is little evidence that he is still infatuated with his first wife Isobel, nor has a horrific fate befallen her. In fact, the photograph confronts Greta with the fraudulent nature of her own identity, the aspects of herself that she has repressed in order to marry her husband:

The past that I had buried ten fathoms deep, hastily, furtively, wiping my hands clean: or so I thought. But Isobel saw the remains of clay beneath my fingernails: she, with her sharp and shining eyes. (11)

In this Bluebeard tale, both husband and wife have a "secret" past, and each constructs the other in terms of deceptive surface and secretive interior. Cristina Bacchilega emphasises the doubled structure of the Bluebeard tale in her study *Postmodern Fairy Tales* (111). Bluebeard seeks to test his wife's loyalty and obedience by giving her the key that she is forbidden to use, and reveals her to be the treacherous creature he suspects her of being. She betrays him to penetrate the secret chamber because she likewise suspects him of concealing his true identity, and finds him to be the monster she feared. Both are rewarded, in a sense, by having their worst suspicions confirmed. Postmodern Bluebeard tales such as Quigley's depict a romantic mythology that diminishes the other to a prop in a personal

drama, an idea to assuage an imagined lack, or an aspect of the anticipated fulfilment of the self.

Hermansson notes that in contemporary renditions, “Bluebeard’s wife insists on her rights to access patriarchal institutions, now to include her husband’s own mind” (158). In Quigley’s story, the probing in which Bluebeard’s wife engages is on one level a valid and vital curiosity, a pragmatic approach to love and marriage. But this can easily tip over into a violation of the other’s inner world, as the compulsion to investigate and scrutinise the other helps to create the hidden horrors that it reveals (in the Bluebeard story, first wife notwithstanding, this is quite literally the case). Moreover, the urge to know the other *completely* is driven by the need to shore up one’s own identity, reliant, as it is in Quigley’s tale, on a fiction of perfect romantic sufficiency. In “North of the Lights”, Greta has attempted to entirely remake herself in her marriage to Alec, but after the revelation of Isobel, Greta can no longer pretend that either she or her husband is a clean slate.

I was a fraud. My partnership with Alec was one in which my weaknesses were rigorously ignored in the hope that they would vanish. And for a time it worked. Even I believed I was one of life’s predators, one of those red-lipped girls with reckless eyes. I pruned my past without compassion, severed my bleeding toes to cram them into my chosen slipper. (12).

Ann Snitow (1979/1996) observed in her seminal study of popular romance fiction that it is characteristic of classic romance narrative, and indeed of the fairy tale, that the privileged couple be removed from the flow of life and time, as well as from other social bonds, existing in pristine isolation (195-7). There are only two characters in this story: Greta and Alec. And Isobel, but she exists primarily as a symbol in their relationship. Greta’s “happy ever after” can be sustained only in the total absence of history and social context. When Isobel finally appears in person late in the piece, dropping in to pick up some papers, the game is finally up for Greta, who is forced to confront the fact that Isobel, in herself, isn’t the problem. The problem is Greta, and all the relationships she has “negated” in order to marry her husband: “sister, daughter, friend. And self” (12). Isobel, bearer of history, context and materiality, ruins the romantic plot and inadvertently sends Greta back to herself.

In another aspect of the doubling of Bluebeard and his wife, the revelation of Alec’s secret is equivalent to the revelation of Greta’s own. “Isobel” unleashes all the messiness and complication that each has in their own way denied. Greta has sustained the fiction of romantic sufficiency through the very fairy tale images (Bluebeard, Cinderella, Red Riding Hood) that are now turning on her, undermining her romantic assumptions. Like Hero in Mahy’s tale, Greta discovers that the fairy tale images that are her bread-and-butter are volatile, open to different and even contradictory messages. These tales are never entirely contained by the intentions of their creator, but may speak much more than she would like to hear. Alec, for his part, seeks control, or “absolute mastery,” as Greta puts it, of all that is unknown and uncertain, through a framework of rigid rationality that is untouched by his wife’s increasingly bizarre behaviour.

The destabilizing effect that the discovery of Isobel has on Greta’s identity is greatly exacerbated by the fact that she has staked her identity entirely in her marriage, severing anything that doesn’t fit. Alec’s relentless rationality renders him opaque and

impenetrable, much like Ed in Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg" (1986), to both the reader and his wife. This is especially problematic because, having stripped herself of history, family, friends, Greta's sense of self is completely contingent on her husband:

Through the mating of our possessions, my new identity had been born. I had created a brave new nature for myself, with fragments chipped from my lover's side.

Biblical overtones? Perhaps. My trade, as I have said, is with legends, myths, fairytales. Alec's lay in facts: a warning in itself, had I stopped for one moment in my brave new directionless stride. A journalist and a children's illustrator, a gingerbread villa in Thorndon: highly suitable, happy ever after. But stories today demand more sophisticated endings. (9)

Along with a self-reflexive nod to the reader, whose complicity is foregrounded in contemporary Bluebeard, as Hermansson notes (160), in the marriage of Greta and Alec we again see staged the contest of knowledge that marks the Bluebeard tale. Greta's husband, like most postmodern Bluebeards, deals in precision, bending the material world and indeed his own marriage to his will, wilfully blind to anything that doesn't fit his rationalist paradigm. Lying awake at night, worrying about Isobel and what she means, Greta observes of Alec:

In sleep he lost the absolute mastery he had over the physical world. His fingers, so deft in the daylight hours and in the long slow evenings when they wielded a pen with the ruthlessness of a surgeon – these fingers would now twitch loosely on my skin. (8)

The image of a surgeon ruthlessly cutting resonates with images used by Mahy and others to evoke the perceived aggression of definitive truth claims and the violence of categorical language. Hero observes of her brother working on his MA thesis: "I came to imagine the poor fact lying there, panting and helpless, and Athol ruthlessly fixing it in his notebook, not so much with the point of his pen as with a skewer of words" (27). Quigley's "ruthlessness of a surgeon" again calls to mind the opaque heart surgeon husband of "Bluebeard's Egg", and the famously severed finger in Campion's *The Piano*. Roland Barthes[4] and Angela Carter[5] both also depict a lover performing a figurative dissection of the other in the name of love and knowledge.

As noted, in contemporary Bluebeard tales, the lover's quest for knowledge is undermined by their anxious solipsism: they seek not to *discover* the other but to confirm pre-existing romantic expectations in which they are already heavily invested. An inquisitional approach to romantic relations is both necessitated and thwarted by the fact that the other is so central to one's own identity, as is clearly the case for Quigley's narrator. The attempt to catalogue and fix the other in the service of one's own desire or identity is Bluebeard's death-dealing quest and a trap the heroine must evade, even while she is prone to doubling her husband by demanding the assurances on which her self-identity rests. Again, Greta and Alec are doubled in their attempts to lay definitive claim to

one another. If Alec has a scalpel-like precision, Greta wonders: “how could I plant my stake in his heart without seeming insecure, possessive, a grasping imperialist?” (12).

Contemporary Bluebeard tales such as Quigley’s playfully expose the epistemological unease that frequently underlies and undermines romantic aspirations of unity and transparency. They may use different tools, but both Greta and Alec cut, reduce, contain the potential complexities of their relationship, and so their union is very fragile. It takes no more than a photo of an ex-wife to render it untenable. The story ends with Greta on an evening bus heading North, leaving her husband, returning to the muddy roots of her own history. Greta “confesses” to the reader that she is not Greta at all, but “Margaret McArdle from Palmerston North. [...] There, I’ve said it. My secret is out” (12). These little asides to the reader create a disingenuous intimacy that mocks our expectations of transparency and disclosure, while Alec himself remains “in the dark”. In keeping with the theme of confounding certainty, Quigley complicates our identification with, and our access to, her protagonist, just as Greta herself is denied access to her husband’s inner world.

Bluebeard’s wife doubles not only her husband’s secret past and his aggressive approach to love-through-knowledge, she also impersonates his impenetrability. “I was equally pleased at the conviction of my own disguise. Spiky, glittering, I caught and reflected back his self-sufficiency” (10). This “hardness” is a performance Greta finds impossible to sustain, but it doesn’t matter much to Alec, as long as she remains installed in his “gingerbread villa”. He taunts her, knowingly or not, with her structural *secondness*:

“Isobel used to say that too. Old Isobel. Christ, we had some fights.” His gaze raked the dim room like the beam of a lighthouse, picked out the golden teapot. I wonder now why I had no premonition of my fate as his lean fingers extracted the curling photo. Curiosity was all I felt as I stood at Bluebeard’s door. (10)

At this moment of revelation, Greta’s marriage, her very sense of self, is compromised: “Alec released Isobel from her circular prison and my own incarceration began” (1998:10). Like “the Second Mrs de Winter” in Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938), whose earnest efforts to create a loving marriage are mocked by the ghost of the first wife whose irreverence and unruliness represents all that has been repressed to create such a union, Greta is haunted by Isobel. “[N]ow that Isobel had seen the outside world, she was no longer content to stay in the darkness” (11).

In his seminal treatise on romantic love, *A Lover’s Discourse* (1978/2002), Barthes notes: “The lover painfully identifies himself with some person (or character) who occupies the same position as himself in the amorous structure” (129). The power of a mere *photograph* of the first wife to undermine Greta’s own identity speaks to a problem at the intersection of the dominant humanist model of integral selfhood and current romantic mythology that the Bluebeard tale is apt to address. Cultural theorist Dominic Pettman calls this problem “the trauma of the second love” (29). Through its repeated destruction and reformulation of the romantic couple, Bluebeard renders the loved object infinitely substitutable, challenging the romantic ideal of the singular merging of souls. The sheer number of bodies in Bluebeard’s chamber, as much as their dismembered state, threatens the sense of a unique and integral self. As Warner notes: “the seriality of the dead wives also marks their anonymity, their interchangeability, the failure of stable subjectivity”

(1995, 271). The serial aspect of the Bluebeard tale, in more recent renditions, highlights the threat posed to the identities of both lover and beloved when confronted with love's tendency to *repeat*. No matter how many assurances one demands from a romantic partner, this suggests that it is ultimately impossible to avoid the fact of one's somewhat contingent position in the romantic narrative. Pettman continues:

It is this *inherent interchangeability* which lies at the brutal heart of the lover's discourse. The fact that almost every text produced in its name insists otherwise only serves to highlight the power of denial needed to keep such knowledge at bay. (27)

We are confronted with this fact more frequently than ever in contemporary culture, where we are very rarely the first love, even if we are lucky enough to be the last, and a culture of successive monogamous relationships may be one reason for the renewed interest in the Bluebeard tale in recent decades (Lurie 129).[6]

In Quigley's story, Greta lacks the necessary "power of denial" to sustain the fiction of her marital identity: "Once Isobel had exposed me there didn't seem much point in going on with my life" (12). Confronted with the fraudulence of her romantic persona and the losses she has sustained to maintain the fiction, Greta is cut off from her creative life, unable to create the characters for her illustrations: "How could they live when their identities depended on mine, and I no longer had one?" (12). She is also divorced from her embodied self: "Barefoot, I could not feel the grass beneath my feet" (13). She takes to bed: "Invalid in both senses of the word" (13). In true Bluebeard fashion, Alec grows strong in inverse proportion to his wife's languishing. She feels his "casual kisses" (13) robbing her last vestige of strength.

As observed, in Bluebeard tales both old and contemporary, a traumatic and illuminating encounter with Bluebeard's former wives is key to breaking the spell of a suspect marriage or ending a period of romantic delusion. In Quigley's tale it is indeed Isobel herself who breaks the stasis and sets Greta free, sends her back in search of Margaret. The abrupt fall of romantic idealisation into material reality that Isobel's visit represents turns out to be exactly what Greta needs. If Isobel's symbolic presence was incapacitating, her physical presence has precisely the opposite effect, bringing Greta back to her "senses", in both senses of the word. Isobel's "thick ankles" humorously suggest both the end of idealisation and Isobel's groundedness, a refreshing contrast to the narrator's capacity for fantasy. Isobel's ankles anchor *Greta* to the earth again and to her own body; as she watches Isobel leave she feels "the hot boards scorch [her] feet" (15).

The substitutions of love, particularly unsettling in the context of a contemporary romantic mythology predicated on subjective uniqueness, helps to explain how the Bluebeard tale retains its currency, and why it cuts so deep. In contemporary versions of the tale the trope of repetition undermines the ability of romantic union both to complete the self and to guarantee the self's uniqueness. Confronting Isobel, Greta has to relinquish the fantasy of her marital identity, her perfect romantic sufficiency, and recognise that she is, quite literally, an "other woman".

Tender Extremities: unravelling romantic love as self-identity in Marion Campbell's *Not Being Miriam*

Slipping between first and third person narration, between genuine disclosure and disingenuous confessional, and indeed between different versions of the self, Mahy and Quigley challenge romantic aspirations of transparency and unity. They problematize the search for definitive knowledge in the name of love by presenting identity as an unstable construct created by many overlapping and competing stories. Australian writer Marion Campbell pushes this notion even further. Campbell takes the Bluebeard themes of fragmentation, repetition and revelation played out with witty fairy tale simplicity in Quigley's short story and adds further layers of complexity, crafting a compelling exploration of the damage done in the struggle for subjective affirmation in and through romantic union.

As in "North of the Lights," a photograph of an idealised first wife is pivotal in *Not Being Miriam* (1988). In another instance of the doubling of Bluebeard and his wife, Elsie dismembers a huge photograph of Miriam, the beloved first wife, which her abusive and sentimental husband keeps in the closet. She wraps the strips of photograph around herself like bandages, making literal the way she has been brutalised by the image of an idealised former love. Campbell's novel deals with the overlapping lives and identities of Bess, Lydia and Elsie, three Australian women of different ages, ethnicities and socio-economic situations. It charts their struggles for distinction, recognition and self-identity within the limited frameworks and entrenched mythologies of their romantic relationships, relationships that, while seemingly subsidiary to these women's considerable talents and desires, continue to be their main point of reference.

Campbell's quite radical and political novel suggests, even more strongly than the preceding works, that roles in romantic plots, while they are always gendered, have a complex and unstable relation to the biological sexes of the participants. Bess, whom we first encounter as a young girl in Campbell's novel, initially struggles for self-definition in an intense and passionate relationship with her younger sister Cassandra. Bess wants to be an actress. So does Cass, and she refuses to stay in the supporting roles her older sister assigns her. While Cass grows up to make her living as an actress, Bess settles for teaching drama. But she is always acting, and her identity is self-consciously tenuous and provisional.

Throughout the novel, Bess's, Lydia's and Elsie's identities shift and merge, overlapping with each other and underpinned by the fictional, mythological and historical women with whom they identify. Ariadne is the "A" to the sisters' "B" and "C". Bess discovers the Classical Adriadne at a young age, in a rage at her romantic abandonment by her childhood crush Peter, who prefers the blonde, pretty Cass. "This is who Bess can be. Ariadne who learnt the plan, drugged the guards and gave the thread. Who knew" (15). But if Ariadne knows, then Cassandra does too. And it is Cass that Bess guards jealously, not Peter, who is peripheral, an object traded between sisters. Cass is self-contained and Bess experiences Cass's opacity as a threat to her own identity. Expressing the constant tension between disclosure and secrecy that marks the Bluebeard tale, Bess wants to dissect Cass, to "ransack her sister for her secret" (23).

It is Cass, and later Lydia and Elsie, who have the crucial relation to Bess's own identity, just as relationships with former wives and sister selves are key in Quigley's and Mahy's stories. Yet it is the romance narrative that frames these relationships and a ubiquitous romantic mythology that turns the wheels of story. While these inter-female relationships seem to run deeper in *Not Being Miriam*, it is the love relation that is the lynch pin of identity. Bess absorbs this lesson as a young girl, in her identification with Ariadne, who is in the *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* under A for Abandonment. Ariadne is her abandonment by Theseus, and so she barely exists.

Bess's identity is informed by the feminist politics of her era and education, but perhaps more profoundly shaped by the obsessive iteration of one particular classic love story. This is the story of their Aunt Mamie, which Bess and Cass act out every day after school for years. This story turns out to be a fabrication, a consolation for Mamie, a working-class beauty flattered into a Bluebeard marriage with a very wealthy, controlling and secretive man. Mamie's attachment to her love story is enduring, and the end of the novel finds her re-enacting it in her nursing home, confused old people stammering through the lines she used to assign to her nieces. But, unlike Bess, Mamie knows it is a fiction.

Highlighting the fact of one's contingent place in the love story, the characters in *Not being Miriam* play a kind of musical chairs within the romantic narrative. And, as Bess, Elsie and Lydia in their different ways discover, there is always someone left standing when the music stops. Bess's identification with her role as the handsome stranger who sweeps her beautiful young Aunt Mamie off her feet in Florence is intensely passionate; "sick," her sister says. Years later, Bess's Italian husband abandons her and takes their son, and so Bess switches places within the romantic narrative, identifying even more deeply with Ariadne. Bess is also the Other Woman: for Lydia, with whose husband Harry she has an affair, and for Elsie, whose husband's beloved first wife she uncannily resembles. Structurally speaking, Bess is Miriam, even as she identifies with Elsie, the next door neighbour whose pain she inhabits through a radically destabilising form of empathy, a transformational self-becoming-other that she has never achieved in her romantic relationships. Passionate identification with other experience, which we encounter first as child's play in *Not Being Miriam*, becomes a dangerous undertaking with very real consequences.

In Bess's connection to Elsie, empathy is a kind of contagion. Bess comes to inhabit, not Elsie per se, to whose history and specificity she is a genuine stranger, but Elsie's conflicted place in the romantic narrative: "Sliding back toward sleep, Bess finds Elsie anyhow, embodies her. Her veins become knotted, tumescent" (88). Bess both fears and desires this loss of self.[7] Lying on her couch next door, she feels her loss of boundaries mirrored in her surroundings: "Like a bad cosmetics job on a burns victim, she feels the house as if it's her own tissue stretched almost beyond endurance" (85). Domestic space is charged with significance in Bluebeard tales. Like Quigley's Greta and Mahy's Miss Credence, Bess shuts herself away in a house that was once a place of pride and union but falls into sickly stasis, out of the flow of love and life.

Bess becomes Elsie becomes Miriam. Bess becomes Miriam through Elsie's painfully ambivalent gaze:

The poster-sized photo of his Poor Late Beautiful Wife is still there all right. Bess rocks with Elsie's shame. She winces with recognition. She hasn't refused from Elsie the mixture of awe and worship she offers. Miriam in that foggy enlargement could be Bess. Spitting or bloody splitting image do they say? Elsie asked. [...] Bess loses herself tracing out these features. Hers. The Other Woman's. Bess loses herself finding Elsie's pleasure, Elsie's pain. She contracts back to something like a reclining hologram of Miriam, the Late. (89)

If Ariadne is Bess's mythological forebear, it is the second Mrs de Winter with whom Elsie identifies. Semi-literate, Elsie hasn't read the novel, but she watched the film again and again as a girl. Raised in poverty, Elsie knows that economic and romantic dependence are intertwined: in Hitchcock's film, as in Aunt Mamie's story, the great wealth of the Bluebeard figure and the material security he offers propels the romantic plot and drives his wife's compulsion to make the marriage work despite so many misgivings.[8] But even as a girl, Elsie intuits that material dependence is only part of the picture. Married to a man who abuses her children, Elsie's mother pleads:

Else, for all our sakes, I've got ter make a go of it this time. Otherwise where would we... what would we...

Else could have said it for her. She can answer it too. What you do is you get a job. Else will get a job. They needn't be trapped. She's not going to be forced to stick with a man if he turns nasty like Stan. What is it that's made him go nasty? He was young and happy in the marriage photo. (95)

You get a job. And Elsie does. But Elsie's mother is dependent on Stan for her sense of self, and it is this subjective dependence that her mother cannot relinquish and that compels her to make such shocking sacrifices to "make a go of it". Elsie, despite her youthful insight and defiance, ends up playing out her mother's familiar script. Love songs go around and around in Elsie's head – "Love was just a glance away. A warm embracing dance away" (132) – alternating with self-loathing: "Slut, she says to the dressing-table mirror. Bleedin fat cow" (132).

Elsie's husband Roger, like Stan, cruelly disregards both Elsie and her children. But this, it seems, she can tolerate. What is intolerable is his continued romantic devotion to his first wife, so jarringly at odds with his treatment of Elsie. She endures daily reminders that she is not the "real" wife of Roger Miller, and in a world where identity is vested in the marriage plot, this means she is nothing at all. Elsie lives in the shadow of the idealised former love, Miriam's poster-sized image ill-concealed in the closet behind Roger's trousers. Like all of Bluebeard's wives, Elsie's curiosity is compulsive: she can't stop looking at Miriam.

Miriam had the finest skin, not a flaw, not a single flaw. Always says everything about Miriam twice. He still puts the notice in the In Memoriam column every year [...]

And I've made a home with another,
Deep at heart, I'm still your lover.

[...]

How suddenly, that's what she was: *another*. And I've made my home with *another*. Fancy Roger talking about himself like that too. Well. Now the scissor traces out loops on the skin of the photo, on the skin of how she looked. [...] As an old woman she probably would've got a profile like Punch, nose jutting down to the chin (105- 106).

But Roger's romantic idealisation is perfectly maintained by Miriam's absence, fed by the tragedy of her premature death. Miriam robs Elsie of her rightful place in the romantic narrative, and thus of her own identity. In desperation, Elsie even tries the famous line from *Rebecca* on her husband – "I'm Mrs Miller now" (133) – but it predictably fails to have the desired effect. "My bloody arsehole you are!" Roger rages (133).

Elsie's lack of identity, a fact published by Roger in the newspaper every year, is the fact through which Bess enters Elsie and inhabits her pain, which is also of course Bess's own. To stop Roger beating Elsie, Bess strikes him with a snow dome of the Eiffel tower, a relic from his first marriage that he keeps on the dresser, killing him poetically with an emblem of his hypocritical romanticism. Despite the myriad material problems in their relationship, it is the symbolic gesture of cutting up Miriam, and Roger's consequent rage, that destroys their marriage and ends Roger's life.

In this penultimate scene the three women finally come together. Lydia sits in a taxi on the street, hearing the screams at Elsie's house and seeing Bess run next door to intervene. Imaginatively, Lydia inhabits Bess inhabits Elsie, as these strange unbidden sisters haunt each other in and through their unhappy marriages. Their complex interconnectedness grows like an invasive vine through the romantic framework, disturbing the love story, the official narrative which gives explicit shape and meaning to their lives. In a final slippage of identity, after Bess goes to prison for manslaughter her sister Cass moves into her house and resumes the (condescending but quite successful) project of Elsie's "liberation".

If Mahy and Quigley critique a grasping, fixing knowledge of the other, implying the oppressiveness of this search for certainty, then Campbell questions "the quest for intimacy" through knowledge of another kind. Critic Toril Moi notes, and Bess discovers, that the empathetic, merging knowledge sought as perfect union "is not knowledge at all but confusion" (432).[9] The failure of perfect knowledge or communion is not the failure of love, however; it may be, as philosopher Emmanuel Levinas asserts, "precisely what nurtures love" (103). A gifted physicist, Lydia knows "the danger of certainty" (115), and that there is "no matter only tendencies" (113). The increasingly punning, poetic and fragmented language as the novel progresses evokes more open, multivalent and fluid ways of approaching love relations: "I'll underpun their purpose, sound the lisp as a way of saying, whisper monstrosities[...]" (137).

The punning on "tender", in particular, playfully critiques demands for singular certainties in the realm of romantic relations. "Tender" insists on meaning more than one thing at once, in a way that is poetically appropriate for the novel's complex deconstruction of romantic mythology. Love is legal tender in *Not Being Miriam*. If for Lydia, sitting in her

taxi, things are “only tending to happen” (113), Elsie knows that flesh is real enough. She knows that the wisdom of the body is worth something: “Somewhere the things she knows will count. [...] She can pick what’s fake. And she can trust her hands. Her fingers practically think” (96). A *certain* kind of love is associated with death, in this multivalent tenderness. Elsie asks the butcher if his meat is tender. “Tender love? he says. Tender, you’re asking if it’s tender. Why it’s tender as a woman’s heart. On pay day” (131).

Bess like/as Ariadne is stranded at the novel’s end, “beached in the sway between am/am not”. But this place of deep uncertainty and several selves is preferable to being “mythaken, fixed in constellation” (137) the novel implies. Limited categorical knowledge is associated with sight, while tentative and truly tender connection is a touching of extremities, a connection that respects difference and distance and leaves space for the shifting seasons of the self. These tender extremities are the feet of Quigley’s Greta, anchoring her to the earth and to an embodied self built from sedimentary layers of muddy history and connectedness. They are the “blind fingers” (181) of Mahy’s Hero, working beyond the privileged sense of sight and its association with unequivocal truth. *Not Being Miriam* leaves Bess/Ariadne, feeling her way back, to her body and her roots: “I found the fissures with my fingers, I was sightless in reply” (139). And while it may not rely on the conventional romantic coupling, self-realisation in these tales is never a solo journey, but one undertaken with a chorus of sisters and shadow selves.

Conclusion

There is an opera written by Maurice Maeterlinck (*Ariane et Barbe-bleue*, 1901, opera composed by Paul Dukas in 1907) in which Ariadne attempts to rescue Bluebeard’s wives. The rescue fails because the brides prefer to remain captive in the castle of mythology, but the story suggests the malleability of myth and the porosity of its boundaries. The Bluebeard tales of Mahy, Quigley and Campbell propose not a rejection of fictionalised romantic relations in favour of an (equally mythic) unmediated embodied experience of love, but rather recognise the limiting nature of many stories that currently shape (although never entirely condition or contain) our expectations and experiences of love. They challenge us to open these stories up to both critical scrutiny and creative reconfiguration.

New Zealand writer Janet Frame observes: “we must tend the myths, [...] only in that way shall we survive” (109). Perhaps in these renewed Bluebeard tales, however, the less-than-tender myths of romantic love are not so much tended as tenderised. The relentless repetition that marks both romance and violence in the Bluebeard tale, and the phenomenon of this tale’s perpetual retelling, implies the importance of re-entering and manipulating the stories that mould romantic experience. These Australasian writers treat romantic myth and fairy tale as a bundle of loose ends, threads that suggest the many possible re-entry points into the labyrinth of human intimacy.

[1] Marina Warner (1995) discusses the way in which literary fairy tales evolved from folk tales with heterogeneous oral origins and primarily female tellers.

[2] Both Maria Tatar (2004) and Cristina Bacchilega (1997) write on *The Piano* as an exemplary postmodern Bluebeard tale.

[3] In Stephen Benson's terms: 'narrative itself is always a remembering or a retelling, yet when generic norms become static the repetition is passive. It is only by drawing out other submerged, partially silent narrative voices that we can seek to hear the conflict and tension that lie beneath the surface, to repeat actively rather than passively, and thus generate change' (1996:109).

[4] 'To scrutinize means to search: I am searching the other's body, as if I wanted to see what was inside it, as if the mechanical cause of my desire were in the adverse body (I am like those children who take a clock apart in order to find out what time is). This operation is conducted in a cold and astonished fashion; I am calm, attentive, as if I were confronted by a strange insect of which I am suddenly no longer afraid' (2002:71).

[5] 'When I'd first loved him, I wanted to take him apart, as a child dismembers a clockwork toy, to comprehend the inscrutable mechanics of its interior. I wanted to see him far more naked than he was with his clothes off. It was easy enough to strip him bare and then I picked up my scalpel and set to work. But, since I was so absolutely in charge of the dissection, I only discovered what I was able to recognise already, from past experience, inside him. If I ever found anything new to me, I steadfastly ignored it. I was so absorbed in this work that it never occurred to me to wonder if I hurt him' (1996:72).

[6] Like other fairy tales, Bluebeard's fortunes wax and wane depending on its ability to speak to current social circumstances. Tatar identifies a spate of Bluebeard-themed films in the 1940s, for example. The tale was being used in this era, she suggests, to play out the anxieties provoked by husbands returning from World War Two, having acquired bloody and unspeakable pasts in the course of their war service which made them strangers to their wives (2004:90).

[7] The Bluebeard tale, Tatar notes, is particularly apt for showing us how our fears and desires are deeply intertwined (2004:10).

[8] Even Hero, in Mahy's novel, reflects: 'I was trapped by my own silence and the lure of an extra twenty dollars' (1995:90).

[9] 'In the very moment the knower merges with that which is known, both entities are abolished as such. In this way imaginary knowledge undercuts all other forms of knowledge, blurring all boundaries and dissolving all definitions in its way' (Moi, 1999:432).

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