BLUEBEARD'S LEGACY

NEW ENCOUNTERS

Arts, Cultures, Concepts

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BLUEBEARD'S LEGACY

Death and Secrets from Bartók to Hitchcock

EDITED BY

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CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter 3

3.1 Set design for a production of *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* by Belá Bartók, 1911, pastel and charcoal on paper, European School (twentieth century). Private Collection, Archives Charmet/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Chapter 4

4.1 Aubrey Beardsley, 'J'ai baisé ta bouche Iokanaan', design for The Climax from Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1891), 1893, line block print, London, Victoria and Albert Museum (E.456-1899).

4.2 Gustav Klimt, *Judith I*, 1901, oil on canvas, 153 × 133 cm, Vienna, Osterreichische Galerie Belvedere. Copyright 2004, Photo Austrian Archive/Scala Florence.

Chapter 5

5.1 Stills from *Barbe-bleue* (Georges Méliès, 1901). (a) *Going into the Forbidden Room*; (b) *Finding the Dead Wives*; (c) *Dreaming*; (d) *You must die*; (e) *The Brothers kill Bluebeard*; (f) *The Godmother unites the resurrected wives and the seven gentlemen*. Reproduced courtesy of the British Film Institute Stills Library, London.

Chapter 6

6.1 Gustave Doré, after illustration to 'La Barbe Bleue', from *Les Contes de Perrault, dessins par Gustave Doré*, ed. J. Hetzel (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1867), engraving, 1893. Private Collection/Roger Perrin/The Bridgeman Art Library.

6.2 Gustave Doré, after illustration to 'La Barbe Bleue', from *Les Contes de Perrault, dessins par Gustave Doré*, ed. J. Hetzel (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1867), engraving, 1893. Private Collection/Roger Perrin/The Bridgeman Art Library.

6.3 Gustave Doré, after illustration to 'La Barbe Bleue', from *Les Contes de Perrault, dessins par Gustave Doré*, ed. J. Hetzel (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1867), engraving, 1893. Private Collection/Roger Perrin/The Bridgeman Art Library.

6.4 Gustave Doré, after illustration to 'La Barbe Bleue', from *Les Contes de Perrault, dessins par Gustave Doré*, ed. J. Hetzel (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1867), engraving, 1893. Private Collection/Roger Perrin/The Bridgeman Art Library.

6.5 (a,b) Stills from *Love from a Stranger* (Rowland V. Lee, 1937). Reproduced courtesy of the British Film Institute Stills Library, London.

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

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SERIES PREFACE

NEW ENCOUNTERS
Arts, Cultures, Concepts

Griselda Pollock

How do we think about visual art these days? What is happening to art history? Is visual culture taking its place? What is the status of cultural studies, in itself or in relation to its possible neighbours art, art history, visual studies? What is going on? What are the new directions? To what should we remain loyal?

New Encounters: Arts, Cultures, Concepts proposes some possible ways of thinking through these questions. Firstly, the series introduces and works with the concept of a *transdisciplinary initiative*. This is not a synonym for the interdisciplinary combination that has become de rigueur. It is related to a second concept: research as *encounter*. Together transdisciplinary and encounter mark the interaction between ways of thinking, doing and making in the arts and humanities that retain distinctive features associated with disciplinary practices and objects: art, history, culture, practice, and the new knowledge that is produced when these different ways of doing and thinking encounter one another across, and this is the third intervention, *concepts*, circulating between different intellectual or aesthetic cultures, inflecting them, finding common questions in distinctively articulated practices. The aim is to place these different practices in productive relation to one another mediated by the circulation of concepts.

We stand at several cross-roads at the moment in relation to the visual arts and cultures, historical, and contemporary, and to theories and methods of analysis. *Cultural Analysis, Theory and History* (CATH) is offered as one experiment in thinking about how to maintain the momentum of the momentous intellectual, cultural revolution in the arts and humanities that characterized the last quarter of the twentieth century while adjusting to the different field of analysis created by it.

In the 1970s–1990s, the necessity, or the intrusion, according to your position, was Theory: a mythic concept with a capital T that homogenized vastly different undertakings. Over those decades, research in the arts and humanities was undoubtedly reconfigured by the engagement with structuralist and poststructuralist theories of the sign, sociality, the text, the letter, the image, the subject, the postcolonial, and above all, difference. Old disciplines were deeply challenged and new interdisciplines—called studies—emerged to contest the academic field of knowledge production and include hitherto academically ignored constituencies. These changes were wrought through specific engagements with Marxist, feminist, deconstructionist, psychoanalytical, discourse and minority theory. Texts and authors were branded according to their theoretical engagements. Such mapping produced divisions between the proliferating theoretical models. (Could one be a Marxist, and feminist, and use psychoanalysis?) A deeper split, however, emerged between those who, in general, were theoretically oriented, and those who apparently did without theory: a position easily critiqued by the theoretically minded because being atheoretical is, of course, a theoretical position, just one that did not carry a novel identity associated with the intellectual shifts of the post-1968 university.

The impact of 'the theoretical turn' has been creative; it has radically reshaped work in the arts and humanities in terms of what is studied (content, topics, groups, questions) and also how it is studied (theories and methods). Yet some scholars currently argue that work done under such overt theoretical rubrics now appears tired; theory constrains the creativity of the new generation of scholars familiar, perhaps too familiar, with the legacies of the preceding intellectual revolution that can too easily be reduced to Theory 101 slogans (the author is dead, the gaze is male, the subject is split, there is nothing but text, etc.). The enormity of the initial struggles—the paradigm shifting—to be able to speak of sexual difference, subjectivity, the image, representation, sexuality, power, the gaze, postcoloniality, textuality, difference, fades before a new phase of normalization in which every student seems to

bandy around terms that were once, and in fact, still are, challengingly difficult and provocative.

Theory, of course, just means thinking about things, puzzling over what is going on, reflecting on the process of that puzzling and thinking. A reactive turn away from active engagement with theoretical developments in the arts and humanities is increasingly evident in our area of academe. It is, however, dangerous and misleading to talk of a post-theory moment, as if we can relax after so much intellectual gymnastics and once again become academic couch-potatoes. The job of thinking critically is even more urgent as the issues we confront become ever more complex, and we now have extended means of analysis that make us appreciate ever more the complexity of language, subjectivity, symbolic practices, affects and aesthetics. So how to continue the creative and critical enterprise fostered by the theoretical turn of the late twentieth century beyond the initial engagement determined by specific theoretical paradigms? How does it translate into *a practice of analysis that can be consistently productive?*

This series argues that we can go forward, with and beyond, *by transdisciplinary encounters with and through concepts.* Concepts, as Mieke Bal has argued, are formed within specific theoretical projects.[1] But, Bal suggests, concepts can and have moved out of—*travel from*—their own originating site to become tools for thinking in the larger domain of cultural analysis their interplay produces, a domain that seeks to create a space of encounter between the many distinctive and even still disciplinary practices that constitute the arts and humanities: the fields of thought that puzzle over what we are and what it is that we do, think, feel, say, understand and live.

Our series takes up the idea of 'travelling concepts' from the work of Mieke Bal, the leading feminist narratologist and semiotician, who launched an inclusive, interdisciplinary project of cultural analysis in the 1990s with *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis* and *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*.[2] In founding the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (ASCA), Bal turned the focus from our accumulating theoretical resources to the work—the practice of interpretation—we do on cultural practices, informed not only by major bodies of theory (that we still need to study and extend), but by the concepts generated within those theories that now travel across disciplines, creating an extended field of contemporary cultural thinking. Cultural analysis is theoretically informed, critically situated, ethically oriented to 'cultural memory in the present'.[3]

Cultural analysis works with 'travelling concepts' to produce new readings of images, texts, objects, buildings, practices, gestures, actions.

In 2001, a Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History was founded at the University of Leeds, with initial funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, to undertake what it defines as a *transdisciplinary* initiative to bring together and advance research in and between distinct but interrelating areas of fine art, histories of art and cultural studies: three areas that seem close and yet can be divided from one an other through their distinguishing commitments to practice, history and theory respectively. Founded at a moment of emerging visual studies/visual culture contesting its field of studies with art history or inventing a new one, a moment of intense questioning about what constitutes the *historical* analysis of art practices as a greater interest in the contemporary seemed to eclipse historical consciousness, a moment of puzzling over the nature of research through art practice, and a moment of reassessing the status of the now institutionalized, once new kid on the block, cultural studies, CentreCATH responded to Mieke Bal's ASCA with its own exploration of the relations between history, practice and theory through a exploration of transdisciplinary cultural analysis that also took its inspiration from the new appreciations of the unfinished project of *Kulturwissenschaft* proposed by Aby Warburg at the beginning of the twentieth century. Choosing five themes that are at the same time concepts: hospitality and social alienation, musicality/aurality/textuality, architecture of philosophy/philosophy of architecture, indexicality and virtuality, memory/amnesia/history, CentreCATH initiated a series of encounters (salons, seminars, conferences, events) between artists, art historians, musicologists, musicians, architects, writers, performers, psychoanalysts, philosophers, sociologists and cultural theorists. Each encounter was also required to explore a range of differences: feminist, Jewish, postcolonial, politico-geographical, ethnic, sexual, historical. (See <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/cath/ahrc/index.html>)

Each book in this new series is the outcome of that research laboratory, exploring the creative possibilities of such a transdisciplinary forum. This is not proposing a new interdisciplinary entity. The transdisciplinary means that each author or artist enters the forum with and from their own specific sets of practices, resources and objectives whose own rigours provide the necessary basis for a specific practice of making or analysis. While each writer attends to a different archive: photography, literature, exhibitions, manuscripts, images, bodies, trauma,

and so forth, they share a set of concerns that defy disciplinary definition: concerns with the production of meaning, with the production of subjectivities in relation to meanings, narratives, situations, with the questions of power and resistance. The form of the books in this series is itself a demonstration of such an transdisciplinary intellectual community at work. The reader becomes the locus of the weaving of these linked but distinctive contributions to the analysis of culture(s). The form is also a response to teaching, taken up and processed by younger scholars, a teaching that itself is a creative translation and explication of a massive and challenging body of later twentieth century thought, which, transformed by the encounter, enables new scholars to produce their own innovatory and powerfully engaged readings of contemporary and historical cultural practices and systems of meaning. The model offered here is a creative covenant that utterly rejects the typically Oedipal, destructive relation between old and young, old and new, while equally resisting academic adulation. An ethics of intellectual respect—Spivak's critical intimacy is one of Bal's useful concepts—is actively performed in engagement between generations of scholars, all concerned with the challenge of reading the complexities of culture.

One of CentreCATH's key research strands is *Aurality, Musicality, Textuality*. During the opening years of the twenty-first century, CentreCATH collaborated with Opera North on a series of events that focused on the theme of sexuality and music. A production of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (dir. Daniel Slater, 2004), which cast the eponymous heroine as a femme fatale and designed the opera as a film noir from the 1940s, was the first occasion for exploring the ways in which cultural analysis and musical performance could be brought into conversation, notably mediated by visual culture and cinema. Another event was created around a production of Strauss's *Salome*, which tracked the relations between Strauss's music, Oscar Wilde's play, and the rich visual archive of representations of Salome in late nineteenth-century art (*Words, Women and Song: The Fatality of Desire in Strauss's and Wilde's Salome*, January 2006). Both these projects allowed us critically to examine the cultural figure of the femme fatale and its underlying proposition that woman and her sexuality can be fatal, deadly, and dangerous, to men. Yet this runs in the face of statistical trends that indicate that women are far more at risk from masculine sexuality than vice-versa. So what about the sexual violence and threat of men?

The third collaboration provided an occasion for such an inversion. It was initiated around a special concert production of Béla Bartók's

opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* at Leeds Town Hall in May 2005. Opera North and CentreCATH organized a transdisciplinary event bringing together scholars of the literary fairy tale, musicologists, film theorists and feminist cultural analysts to explore the diffusion of the Perrault fairy tale, *Bluebeard*, through opera, music, literature and cinema and in specific relation to the cultural condition of Modernity and modernist cultural forms from opera to cinema. This book is the product of that encounter and its incitement to the participating authors to reflect and extend their thoughts into a collective study: *Bluebeard's Legacy: Death and Secrets from Bartók to Hitchcock*.

Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History
University of Leeds 2008

0.1 Sir John Tomlinson as 'Duke Bluebeard' and Sally Burgess as 'Judith' in a concert performance of Belá Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, produced by Opera North, May–June 2005, directed by Richard Farnes. Photograph copyright Bill Cooper.

0.2 Still from *Judith of Bethulia* (D. W. Griffiths, 1914). Reproduced courtesy of the British Film Institute Stills Library, London.

PREFACE

Griselda Pollock

To be sure, music's beauty is often overwhelming, its formal order magisterial. But the structures graphed by theorists and the beauty celebrated by aestheticians are often stained with such things as violence, misogyny and racism. And perhaps more disturbing still to those who would present music as autonomous and invulnerable, it also frequently betrays fear—fear of women, fear of the body.

Susan McClary[1]

JUDITH
(She frees herself from his embrace.)
Open the seventh and last door!
(He remains silent.)
I have guessed your secret, Bluebeard.
I can guess what you are hiding.
Bloodstain on your warrior's weapons,
Blood upon your crown of glory.
Red the soil around your flowers.
Red the shade your cloud was throwing.
Now I know it all, oh, Bluebeard,
Know whose weeping filled your white lake.
All your former wives have suffer'd,
Suffer'd murder, brutal, bloody.
Ah, those rumours, truthful rumours!

Béla Bartók[2]

Susan McClary's path-breaking feminist intervention into musicology, *Feminine Endings*, first published in 1991, opens with her own, authorial, identification with the character of Judith, in Béla Bartók's opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, composed in 1911 and revised for performance in 1918. The libretto was written by one of the founders of emerging film theory, Béla Balázs, based on a play he had written in 1910 (0.1). In the Balázs/Bartók opera, Judith, the current wife of the enigmatic, powerful, and bearded Duke, is a figure of defiant and persistent curiosity who must confront the entwining of sexuality and violence in the fortress-home of her husband which is itself an allegory for a modern, anxious masculinity.

In the course of this psychologically, as well as musically, modernist opera (explored fully in this volume by David Cooper in Chapter 3), Judith, whose evocation of the defiantly brave, Biblical Jewish heroine, Judith, Carl Leafstedt has argued is extremely significant (0.2), traverses the seven-chambered interior of the Duke's castle-home.[3] This modern Judith does not discover a single, secret chamber filled with all her bloodily murdered predecessors, as does the final wife in Charles Perrault's *Contes du Temps passé* of 1697 titled simply 'La Barbe Bleue' ('Bluebeard')—the early modern tale that could be said to have initiated the modern cycle of engagements with this story of secret chambers and deadly husbands. Nor does she find the murdered corpses of her predecessors in any of the many rooms she investigates. Instead, behind a series of doors that she obliges the Duke to open for her, Judith discovers, according to McClary, 'those aspects of Bluebeard that he wishes to claim—his wealth, strength, political dominion, love of beauty and so forth'.[4] Yet, citing the passage in the libretto used here as an epigraph, McClary points out also that Judith discerns traces of blood—signs of violence and suffering—on all these glorious and glittering things for which the Duke wishes her to adore him. The penultimate door opens onto the deepest and unspeakable secret: his pain, vulnerability and fears. It is a lake of tears. Behind the final door, and seemingly connected to the previous discovery/revelation, Judith does come upon three former wives, imprisoned in a kind of suspended animation, decked with all their husband's wealth, not actually dead but effectively mortified. Judith's fate is to join them in this ultimate chamber of silence and darkness that hides and houses the Duke's impossible loneliness—the result of his inability to withstand the curiosity of women in their desire to understand a beloved other. Judith's interrogative gaze perhaps stands for an emerging, and modern,

demand for genuine reciprocity in marriage to displace the ancient destiny of the woman in a phallocentric culture who is cast only as the mirror reflecting man's material glory and social presence. Thus, the Duke—masculinity—becomes, in effect, the real secret chamber within the fortress. 'He' is hiding behind the façade that is but his projected, externalized, armour-image.

If the theme of the femme fatale is based on the pairing of a beautiful and alluring surface that disguises a dangerous and horrifying—castrated and castrating—interior, cultural tales that deal with what is threatening in masculinity, rare as they are, disclose what Lacan called the phallic *parade* as opposed to the feminine *masquerade*. Beyond both *parade* and *masquerade*, however, lies the threat posed by a more searching feminine curiosity that Laura Mulvey has positively defined as feminine epistemophilia—the desire for knowledge that might expose subjectivity's fragile foundations on a phallic illusion, or, as Julia Kristeva has phrased it, on the illusoriness of the phallus.[5] Stephen Heath elucidates the absent phallus behind Lacan's *parade*:

> No one has the phallus but the phallus is the male sign, the man's assignment; so [Moustapha] Safouan talks about his benefit in having 'the attribution of the penis to his person'. The man's masculinity, his male world, is the assertion of the phallus to support his having it. To the woman's masquerade there thus corresponds male display (*parade* is Lacan's term), that display so powerfully described by Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas*: 'Your clothes in the first place make us gape with astonishment … every button, rosette and stripe seems to have some symbolical meaning.' All the trappings of authority, hierarchy, order, position make the man, his phallic identity: 'if the penis were the phallus, men would have no need of feathers or ties or medals … Display [*parade*], just like the masquerade, thus betrays a flaw: no one has the phallus.'[6]

By identifying herself as feminist investigator of the masculine fortress of the Western musical canon with the intrepid curiosity of Judith, Susan McClary does not want, however, to succumb to her fate: like all the previous women by whose curiosity the Duke has felt himself betrayed, Judith is silenced by the man who cannot bear such a scrutiny of his mortality and prefers to live alone rather than see inside himself, past the façade that is masculinity's *parade* and protective armour. Analysis of any kind, curiosity to know the inside, becomes

the problem that this figuration of the feminine poses for a masculinity that shores itself up against investigation and punishes she who would know his inner, human truth in all its human ambiguity. Feminist or feminine, the linkage between sexuality, curiosity and violence is complexly woven together in, and revealed by, this modern version of Bluebeard, which, in its stark simplification of the confrontation between the Bluebeard husband and Judith, between masculinity and femininity, has prompted this new collection of studies by established and emerging scholars who must also negotiate their relations to their own positionalities in, as well as the implications of culture's narratives of, sexual difference which we find encoded for us in those fascinating cultural forms that we know as fairy tales.

With roots worldwide in oral storytelling, what in English is known as the fairy tale, in French as *conte des fées* and in German as *Märchen*, has very little to do with fairies. While myth and legend, equally deeply embedded in cultural memory and storytelling, are the stuff of epic tales of heroism and tragedy that often contribute to formation of national or cultural identities and 'mythic' histories, stories of origins of dynasties, peoples, cultures and practices, the fairy tale also serves, according to cultural analysts, social purposes. But these are different from the epic uses of myth. In its sociological aspect, the fairy tale is often associated with socially marginal, oppressed, struggling characters or situations. Its stories deal with ordeals and dangers that can be read as indications of actual social and economic struggles or as psychological dramas of coming of age, or of negotiating sexual initiation, or even as existential portraits of human dilemmas and propensities for good or evil. The space of the fairy story is, however, the space of the unexpected, the fabulous—derived, of course, from the Latin term for story itself: *fabula*. It is the space of magical changes, unexpected possibilities, and, above all, transformations that come about through strange acts and equally powerful words, incanted, declared, or simply said. Both explicable in terms of the struggle to negotiate the social and historical conditions in which often powerless people (classes, genders) find themselves and in terms of inner psychological struggles experienced across generation and class, the fairy story touches upon the realm of the fantastic and marvellous rather than that of destiny, fate, and hence, tragedy or the epic.

The fairy story is, perhaps, a view of the world and society from below, from its often powerless margins, where the imaginative recasting of the possible world allows us to glimpse anxiety, longing, danger,

resilience and hope in the face of power, written in different forms, transcoded into stories that intend to create another, parallel universe where animals talk and humans fly, or to re-order the world, setting it upside down, or yet again to retell the actual world with the possibility of negotiating perhaps not social and economic change, but the rage, fear or danger in it. The conflict between those interpretations that read fairy stories in terms of telling us something of the social and historical conditions and those that read it in more structural and perhaps psychoanalytical terms converge in this particular form of cultural narrative and imagination that dramatizes particularly human emotions in relation to ordinary, everyday transactions that relate specifically to questions of the sex–gender system.

In our collection, we are focusing on one particularly grisly but fascinating story that became part of the modern canon of the literary fairy tale at the end of the seventeenth century: that of a murderous husband, an old and socially powerful figure, a man with a beard, a man marked facially by his potent masculinity and his class privilege: his *blue* beard and, in some versions that make him an aristocrat, his blue blood.[7] It is also the story of a virginal and defenceless young woman pitted against him as his last, in some versions, eighth wife—moving beyond the special number seven. In the Bartók opera, it is the equally symbolic number three. The story stages this final confrontation that will challenge the secret vices of the serial killer and end the reign of terror. The story hinges on the *prohibition* uttered by the *father/husband* about using a *key* to enter a *secret chamber*: the chamber being so often a metaphor for the hidden interior and sexuality of woman, the key functioning as a masculine sign, the phallus that the woman should not herself insert to gain knowledge. In this story, however, the interior of the man—his psychic space—is further suggested in an interesting reversal. Like Eve in Biblical legend, the eighth wife must transgress the prohibition not to enter the secret chamber since the two—prohibition and transgression—are a co-dependent pair. Her discovery is, however, horrific. In the room she encounters a collection of dead women: her predecessors. This discovery forewarns her of the fate awaiting her too. Occurring within the narrative, however, the discovery opens the history that the room encodes to possible redirection and to a different outcome. Not a repetition of the same—another dead wife—but a change is located in this young, defenceless, usually mute, but curious bride. The key is, however, the give-away. It becomes stained with the blood of the dead wives and thus the latest wife's transgression is

exposed, in blood, to Bluebeard when he unexpectedly returns. Shed but also irremovably staining blood introduces a counter-colour, transgressively associated not only with death, but with the female body, with menstruation, defloration and childbirth. This has led many to see the tale as a exemplary patriarchal story of the dangers of female curiosity which blames the woman for her seeking for knowledge and links this tale with that of the Hebrew Eve and the Greek Pandora.[8]

There are various outcomes of this tale as we know it from Charles Perrault's seventeenth-century formalization of collected stories into published editions that initiated the literary genre of the fairy story in elite and later bourgeois culture. Our book is not so much concerned with the origin of this tale, or of fairy tales themselves, complex and fascinating as that history is.[9] We are focusing on the resilience and endless fascination exercised by this one particular tale which has a number of themes: adult sexualities—men's and women's; initiation, repetition, curiosity, marriage and its dangers. These leave their origin in the Perrault textualization of the tale to find different forms of telling in theatre, cinema, visual art and opera at the beginning of the twentieth century when, in particular, cinema emerged to claim at once the ability to document the world and the capacity to become the engine of the marvellous and the fantastic.

In her introduction, editor Victoria Anderson draws on her recent monographic research to demonstrate how the key themes of the Bluebeard tale have haunted so much of Western women's literature in varied ways running through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (*Jane Eyre* to the *Story of O*). She invites us to consider why the structures and possibilities of certain folkloric tales (perhaps inspired by actual and horrific events such as recorded serial wife-murderers like the late medieval Gilles de Rais or the early twentieth century Henri Landru) become such repeating motifs through which dissident women writers negotiate, in rewriting in their own imaginative texts, the already patriarchally freighted literature, the enigmas of their subjectivities and sexualities under a phallocentric order. Victoria Anderson furthermore draws on contemporary feminist literary and cultural studies to review the gender politics of Perrault's late seventeenth-century writing of his *contes* while also plotting out the legacy of these murderous gender politics with which women writers and filmmakers up to Jane Campion have had to do battle.

David Cooper offers a theoretically sophisticated and searching musicological analysis of the operatic rewriting of the tale in the work of

Balázs and Bartók in 1911 while Michael Hiltbrunner analyses the earliest cinematic rendering of the Bluebeard story, drawing closely on Perrault's tale, by the spectacular cineaste Georges Méliès in 1901. Ian Christie explores a truly transdisciplinary exchange by his contextual reading of the great British director Michael Powell's mature cinematic translation of a German staging of Bartók's opera in 1963, drawing our attention to the specificity of each medium in which the telling of the tale produces its own new experience, situating us each through its particular processes in relation to the seemingly inexhaustible possibilities for interpretation offered by that form of cultural memory that we call the fairy tale. Linking literature and the textuality of the operatic libretto, Victoria Anderson undertakes a critical feminist reading of the negotiations of sexual and ethnic difference—Jewishness—in the Bartók/Balázs text.

Why, however, did the Bluebeard story incite so many retellings and dramatizations in Germany at the beginning of modernism? This is the topic of an extensive analysis by Mererid Puw Davies in her book-length study, from which a special and focused exploration has been written specially for this volume. The examination of such repetitions with differences is the topic of the chapter by one of the leading analysts of the fairy tale and of the Bluebeard story in particular, Maria Tatar. Tatar reminds us that any story is reinvented in every telling. The Bluebeard variations across literature and cinema thus performatively excavate and produce anew insights into some of its core problematics: fidelity and infidelity, repression, curiosity and repetition.[10] As story, the tale has the potential for change in retelling, its 'transformative energy' not only guaranteeing 'survival' but also a rich 'after-life' which Tatar herself tracks through novels such as *Jane Eyre* to films by Hitchcock (*Notorious*, 1946) and Jane Campion (*The Piano*, 1993). Tatar insists that in dealing with Bluebeard now, in the light of feminist sensibilities, we must be equally alert to the meanings of both the husband-figure and the wife-figure and their varying possibilities to negotiate the nexus of issues thrown up by the tale in each culturally and historically transformed retelling. Following in the same vein, and exploring the wife-position as the locus of complex psychological motivations, Elisabeth Bronfen provides an extended, in-depth, psychoanalytically informed film analysis of just one such cinematic transformation of this material, also mentioned by Tatar, the film *Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang, 1947). Indicating, by lengthy and close analysis of just one text, the density of any one cultural text, Bronfen's work on the cinematic staging of the

themes of the Bluebeard tale is taken up by Griselda Pollock. She reverses the cultural mytheme of the femme fatale to draw attention to the existence of the *homme fatal*. In a series of films referencing the Bluebeard tale in different ways from the 1940s to the 1970s, Pollock argues that such Hollywood films negotiate the challenge to masculinity posed by the Bluebeard figure who seemingly reveals a disturbing link between masculinity and violence, by rendering the serial murderer a pathological deviant and homicidal monster. His crimes are, however, really incited by an originary, traumatic encounter with a woman, who returns as the hidden femme fatale to exonerate this terrible exception, the serial murderer.

Thus we come back to the question of who and what is the centre of this story that so many have wanted to tell again: does it not lead us to reflect on masculinity as the psychological puzzle of desire linked to violence? Or does it serve to make us think about femininity as the psychological puzzle of a curiosity that becomes dangerous only within patriarchal culture? Or, yet again, does it simply stage yet again the enigma of sexual difference itself in the field of the heterosexual, social contract: marriage? Does the non-unitary story, extending across and reinvented by its many retellings in so many different forms of cultural narrative and regimes of representation, reveal some of the disturbing and contradictory psychic structures underpinning heterosexual subjectivities? Or is the narrating itself a structure that allows for endlessly renewed social and historical materials to find imaginative form through the limitless potential of its highly symbolic and freighted elements, the old powerful man, the powerless virgin-bride, the secret chamber, the bloodied key, curiosity, and above all the terrifying interlacing of power and violence?

In her twelve-minute film *Bluebeard* (2007), contemporary artist Alice Anderson has radically revisited and reworked the theme by staging it as the tale of a lonely, blue-bearded princess who falls in love with a young boy still too closely attached to his mother (0.3). Maud Jacquin writes of the work in her preface to the book edition:

> In Alice Anderson's film adaptation of Charles Perrault's literary tale, *Bluebeard*, she explores this notion of passage, emphasizing the violence of the transformations engendered by the loss of innocence. This is the way she modifies the original meaning of Bluebeard. A comment on forced marriage and the mysteries of sex becomes an illustration of the wrench that is the separation

0.3 Still from *Bluebeard* (Alice Anderson, 2007), 12 minutes, English, French subtitles, colour, 16/9, sound 5.1, Anna Leska Films, Paris-Brest Productions, HBOX. Courtesy Yvon Lambert Gallery, Paris.

> with the mother, returning to an omnipresent theme in her work. Spilt blood is not that of defloration but of the cutting of the connection joining child and mother. The classic symbol of Bluebeard, the blood-stained key evoking soiled virginity, is replaced by two sharp tools, scissors and a razor. By establishing a visual and symbolic parallel between these instruments, the artist reveals an essential affinity between Bluebeard and the apprentice. In Anderson's tale, they both manifest this sexual indifferentiation that is the mark of a troubled identity, both are victims of the mother's betrayal and abandon and carry their indelible trace, the blue of the beard for one, the wound of the cord for the other.[11]

Our collection explores what happens to the charged elements of this tale when they are creatively worked over by the specificities of different cultural and aesthetics forms in the modernist century across literature, drama, music, visual art, cinema. How do formal elements of language, music and the visual image performatively rework their unstable pre-text to render it, each time, a new screen on which new elements characteristic of emerging Modernity's struggles with gender