

Telling a Story You Don't Have the Language For:

Exploring Queer Abuse and (Mis)citation in Carmen Maria Machado's
Memoir *In the Dream House*

Word count: 9,030

Lucie Detaille

Student number: 01810388

Supervisor(s): Prof. Dr. Gert Buelens

A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature, English and French

Academic year: 2022 – 2023

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Methodology	5
3. Analysis	9
3.1 Exploring Postmodernism: “ <i>Dream House</i> as Choose Your Own Adventure”: A Case Study	9
3.2 Exploring Folklore and fairytales.....	11
3.2.1 Introduction	11
3.2.2 “ <i>Dream House</i> as Bluebeard”: a Case Study	12
3.2.3 (Mis)citing the “bible” of Folk-literature.	17
3.3 Exploring horror and the Gothic	19
3.3.1 Introduction	19
3.3.2 The house: a dream or a nightmare?	19
4. Conclusion	23
5. Works cited	26

1. Introduction

The theme of domestic abuse is a relatively well-researched topic that has gained a lot of popularity since the #MeToo movement started in 2017. However, even though awareness and circulation of survivor narratives are a shift in the right direction, this movement is still predominantly focussed on white, heterosexual, and female abuse survivors. While a lot of different factors need to be taken into consideration, this is largely due to the misconception regarding the identity of abusers and the types of abuse that can be considered as such. Indeed, although it is commonly believed that the main victims of intimate partner violence, also known as IPV, are women, large-scale community surveys (e.g., Anderson, 2004; Henderson, Bartholomew, Trinke, & Kwong, 2005; Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007) have shown that “violence within couples is more bidirectional in nature and that women use as much violence as men” (Slootmaeckers & Migerode 296). However, as Slootmaeckers and Migerode state, it is crucial to underline that “there is still a difference in the physical effects of the violence due to power and size differences, shown in evidence that women suffer disproportionately more physical injuries” (296).

But this important research still largely erases one of the largest populations of IPV survivors, namely, queer women. A study by Breiding et al. in 2014 found that when examining sexual orientation relating to IPV statistics, 43.8% of lesbian women, and 61.1% of bisexual women experience IPV in their life, compared to 35% of heterosexual women. Additionally, the type of abuse people commonly label as such is vastly limited to “physical violence”, whereas “psychological abuse” is actually the most common type of abuse between partners, be they queer or not, and is often seen as “more disturbing and injurious than the physical brutality” (Follingstad 440). These horrifying numbers make it even more alarming that so little representation has been given to the topic of IPV in relationships between women in the media and in the literary field. Books like *I Hope We Choose Love* (2019) by Kai Cheng Thom and *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) by Bernardine Evaristo have shined some light on the subject in recent years but, other than that, these narratives seem almost absent from the literary field.

In the prologue of her memoir *In the Dream House*, Carmen Maria Machado argues that the reason for this absence in literature is that queer women who write about IPV, inscribe themselves into what Saidiya Hartman calls “archival silence”. Machado defines this concept as the process by which “stories are destroyed [or] never uttered in the first place; either way, something very large is irrevocably missing from our collective histories.” (2). In other words, these narratives are not sparse because of a lack of stories, but rather, because of the conscious act of silencing the voices that tell them. In her memoir, Machado’s persona “speak[s] into the silence” (4), by telling the story of an abusive relationship with a volatile woman, without “having the language for it”, she resorts to citing others. In the memoir, each chapter is an exercise in style where Machado takes aspects from an array of different literary traditions but slightly transforms them to fabricate her own narrative. This is reflected in the titles of the chapters: “*Dream House as American Gothic*”, “*Dream House as Unreliable Narrator*”, and “*Dream House as Bildungsroman*”. In this paper, I argue that by citing but also slightly misciting distinct literary genres, conventions, and techniques, the narrator in Carmen Maria Machado’s *In the Dream House* constructs a narrative that can more accurately encapsulate the complex nature of queer intimate partner abuse.

To prove my point, I will first explain Judith Butler’s concept of “citationality” and why it will serve as my primary entry point for the analysis of Machado’s text. Then, I will explore three of the most prominent genres that are cited in the memoir by applying Butler’s theory to distinct chapters of the book to look at the functioning and the effects of (mis)citing. Firstly, I will look at the postmodern homodiegetic you-narration and the case study of the chapter “*Dream House as Choose Your Own Adventure*”, in the first part of this paper. In the second part of my analysis, fairy tales and folkloric elements will be explored by looking at the chapter “*Dream House as Bluebeard*” and the footnotes that mention the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* throughout the entirety of the text. Lastly, I will analyse horror aspects by breaking down the extensive use of the “house” metaphor and its implications for the text.

2. Methodology

Before delving into the framework for my analysis, it is important to dwell on the genre of *In the Dream House*. This memoir could be read from a psychoanalytic perspective as a type of practice of “abjection” for the author, as theorized by Julie Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* from 1980. Machado could have written the book as a therapeutic way to get rid of her “abject” i.e., the torment and physical reality of the traumatic experiences of living with an abusive partner that have been left in her body. The very act of writing the book could have been an “act” of abjection for Machado, who through writing, was able to expulse the reason for the disruption of the self. While this reading of the text is certainly valid and can coexist with mine, I will personally analyse *In the Dream House* in another way, through a queer and feminist studies perspective. It has been established that the study of memoirs has long been “a basic tenet of feminist research” (Spelman 44) as it was one of the only ways to explore women’s histories because the lived experiences of women have often been excluded from dominant literature (Purvis 283). This is even more relevant for research on memoirs about IPV between women, as this subject so often falls victim to “archival silence”. Maya Krishnan even goes as far as to say in her review of the book entitles “Dream House as Politics, Dream House as Art” that because of this, “*In the Dream House* can be read as a case study in confronting hermeneutical injustice”.

This memoir exists in a liminal space between fiction and non-fiction. Similarly to what Audre Lorde affirms in her memoir *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, this memoir can be seen as a “bio mythography”. The term coined by Lorde denotes the combining of history, biography, and myth in a memoir or biography. For Lorde, a memoir can never be a real account of events in an author’s life, which would be a fallacy. On the contrary, romanticizing and mystifying lived experiences can only enhance a book and make it more valuable when done in a good way. While it is important that the events that are recalled in *In the Dream House* gain more attention, it is the stylistic experimentation and fragmentation and the form of Machado’s memoir that makes it a valuable text for my analysis. What I will explore in this paper is how the author tells her story and more specifically why she does it in this particular way.

But to comprehend how Machado's text functions, the framework for my analysis, Judith Butler's theory on "citationality" needs to be explained. Butler's work is foundational in various respects when examining themes of gender and sexuality, not only in literature but across many disciplines. More tangibly, her understanding of Derrida's notion of "citationality", has been highly influential. She describes citationality as a "queer strategy of converting the abjection and exclusion...[of] sexed and gendered identities into political agency" (Butler 91). For Butler, "reinscriptions, or re-citations" as she calls them in her book *Bodies That Matter*, "constitute the subject's agency within the law" (Butler 34). In other words, by citing a text, but altering the original to some extent, in order to reappropriate the source, it is possible for someone to gain a - small or large - degree of freedom. For the purpose of this analysis, the legal scope of Butler's theory will be extended to the literary field. As stated in the introduction, IPV in lesbian relationships, while acquiring some interest in recent years, is seldom a subject in literature. This leaves authors and particularly people writing memoirs about topics that are almost not present in the literary canon, without templates. Like in a legal case, they cannot cite people with mutual experiences so have to appropriate established conventions and genres.

In addition, there could be a dual need to legitimize the memoir. Firstly, the almost "over" exploration of styles and motifs in the different chapters of the book could be a way to legitimize the memoir itself within the literary landscape. Making it "literary" enough since it tackles firmly established genres and conventions in order to deconstruct them. But it could also be larger than the literary scope of this book. There could also be a need to be heard, not as a writer, but as a battered queer woman. Machado even explicitly addresses the reader with the question "Do you see now? Do you understand?" (162), which sounds like a cry for legitimacy, not for her literary status, but for the topic of her memoir. This is even more likely as the abuse Machado suffered in her relationship with her ex-girlfriend, while at times becoming physically violent, was mostly psychological in nature. Therefore, having textual accounts of what happened to her could help her in the search for legitimacy and acknowledgment. Seen from this angle, the entire book could serve as the material trace of evidence of the relationship that practically never

left a physical trace on Machado's body. After the relationship has ended, the narrator reflects on her time in the Dream House and urges for exactly that, evidence.

"You'll wish she had hit you. Hit you hard enough that you'd have bruised in grotesque and obvious ways, hard enough that you took photos, hard enough that you went to the cops, hard enough that you could have gotten the restraining order you wanted. Hard enough that the common sense that evaded you for the entirety of your time in the Dream House had been knocked into you." (257)

Furthermore, "queering" traditional literary genres through citation and thus also miscitation, can be a way of reclaiming the space from which one was excluded, in this case, the literary canon, and creating new conventions. Since, the practice of (mis)citation can be, as Sara Ahmed claims in her blog post "Making Feminist Points", "a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies". And with queer women's erasure in the archive, their bodies need all the "reproducing" they can get through (mis)citation.

Additionally, it is important to note that the identity of the abuser and the nature of the relationship in Machado's specific case- which was briefly explored in the introduction - challenges our common (false) conception that domestic abusers are mainly male. This complexity aligns with Butler's elaborate views on gender in *Gender Trouble* with it not being "a fact of nature, but produced by discourse and performativity" (Butler 13). Indeed, the abuser being a "woman in the Dream House", as the narrator calls her throughout the book, fits into reductive stereotypes about the roles of lesbian women. The abuser in the memoir is described as "boyish" (84), making her fit the label of "butch" or "masc" lesbian. This feeds into the harmful belief that in butch/femme lesbian relationships, butches are predetermined to be the abusers since they use "male privilege" granted by their masculine appearance to "smuggle the patriarchy into lesbian utopia" (Chu 2). However, gender expression has no direct correlation to gender roles within a relationship

(even in heterosexual relationships). Moreover, even the narrator in the memoir dwells upon this issue in the chapter “*Dream House as Equivocation*”. She concludes that claiming that this issue of gender expression in IPV between women should not simply be tossed aside by straight society as being “simply, complicated” (231). But rather, this “issue” stems from the inability of society as a large to acknowledge that abuse can also happen by the hand of and between women. The “essential truth” is that “Women could abuse other women. Women have abused other women. And queers needed to take this issue seriously, because no one else would” (231).

Furthermore, the abuser not having a name other than “the woman in the Dream House”, while securing anonymity for Machado’s ex-girlfriend, also gives her a type of “universality”. This could be anyone and this could happen to anyone, even in a relationship between two women. This is also reinforced by the use of the pronoun “you”, which is deployed to address both the reader and Machado’s past self in the book. I will explore this stylistic device in more detail in the part about postmodernism of this paper. But, naming her “the woman in the Dream House” also emphasizes the fact that this abuser is a “woman”. So, the gender of the abuser makes the use of Butler’s theory all the more productive for the analysis of this memoir.

As a side note, before delving into my analysis, it is important to emphasize that as Machado puts it best “the last thing queer women need is bad fucking PR” (153). This book and the analysis that I am conducting are in no way meant to ostracize queer women. On the contrary, analysing lesbian and bisexual women’s full array of complexities, even their morally bad ones, is extremely valuable. An exclusively good representation of a group of people and only analysing their positive aspects can also be harmful. To better clarify what is meant by this, I cite an argument Machado foregrounds in her chapter about queer villains in *In the Dream House*.

“We deserve to have our wrongdoing represented as much as our heroism, because when we refuse wrongdoing as a possibility for a group of people, we refuse their humanity” (50-51)

3. Analysis

3.1 Exploring Postmodernism: “*Dream House* as Choose Your Own Adventure”: A Case Study

To further illustrate how Butler’s theory can be applied to the memoir and to make the “citationality” that has been explained previously, more tangible, I now turn to the chapter “*Dream House* as Choose Your Own Adventure”. In this fragment of the book, the reader is made to feel trapped in a cycle of domestic abuse, similar to the one the narrator is experiencing, through the very structure of the chapter itself. Many of the techniques used in this chapter to create this effect can be traced back to the postmodern literary tradition. While postmodernism is not a monolith, a lot of overlap exists throughout the whole genre, and occurrences of this overlap can be found in this chapter. Accordingly, my analysis will focus on the (mis)citations of specific postmodern literary devices, namely: addressing the reader and metalepsis on the one hand, and metafiction and its reflexivity on the other.

The first striking “citation” of postmodernism in this seemingly interactive chapter is the usage of the second-person pronoun “you”. According to Irene Kacandes, this postmodern tradition of addressing the reader in this way is a strategy of the narrator that “tr[ies] to put the reader in the text” in order to presumably “efface the boundary between fiction and reality” (Kacandes 139). Throughout the memoir thus far, the second-person narration was already present when relating to the persona Machado creates for herself but, in this chapter, there is a shift when the reader is also addressed as “you”. This results in metalepsis, a standard device in postmodernist writing. An example is: “Did you think that by flipping through the chapter linearly you’d find some kind of relief? Don’t you get it? All of this shit already happened, and you can’t make it not happen, no matter what you do” (197). Here, an instance of metalepsis occurs “in Gérard Genette’s sense: a stand-in for the real reader enters the storyworld, while a version of the novel we are reading is embedded, paradoxically, within itself” (Caracciolo and Ulstein 3). Similarly, a potentially linear reader that simply reads the pages chronologically is confronted with the words “you flipped here because you got sick of the cycle. You wanted to get out. You’re smarter than me” (194). By

“offering us a certain invitation that we find ourselves repeatedly encountering and constantly refusing” (Kacandes 142) Machado, by addressing the reader directly, makes us complicit in her thought processes as an abused woman trapped in the cycle. This results in a certain closeness with the narrator and evokes sympathy for Machado’s persona that did not have the option to “get out of the cycle”.

So, it is clear that Machado uses the postmodernist technique of metalepsis by addressing the reader directly. But she plays with citationality and departs from postmodernism when she blurs our understanding of the “you”. For example, the “you” the reader by now is used to shifts to “me”, like in the last example given. Sometimes the “you” is the reader, while at other times it is clear that “you” refers to the protagonist in the past, for example when the abusive partner says, “You’re such a fucking cunt, you never take responsibility for anything” (191). By making the second-person pronoun so ambiguous, Machado plays with conventions and makes the reader experience confusion and a loss of control. So, by citing but also slightly misciting postmodern traditions the author can portray the abuse with more intricacy.

Another technique that Machado borrows from postmodernism and that goes hand in hand with metalepsis is metafictionality (Caracciolo and Ulstein 3). By “troubl[ing] the border between the real and the fictional” (Caracciolo and Ulstein 3), in this chapter through a play on time and verbal tenses for example, Machado reflects on her past self. She tells the reader “you’re smarter than me”, the “me” in this instance is her present self that is addressing the reader directly. By doing this, the reader is explicitly trapped into the protagonist’s trauma spiral. And while it seems that the reader can make choices like “If you tell her to calm down, go to page 191” or “if you apologize profusely, go to page 190” (189), in the end, the first option was never an option in the first place since on page 191 we are met with “Are you kidding? You’d never do this”. This emphasizes the metafictional and reflexive aspect but erases the reader’s semblance of control over their choices.

Moreover, the chapter closes on page 203: “That’s not how it happened, but okay. We can pretend? I’ll give it to you, just this once.”. In the end, the reader, once again, has no choice, just like the abused

woman does not have a choice. By not leaving any choice to the reader, Machado traps the reader in a loop and slightly miscites the “freedom” of choice that seems to be the norm in postmodernist narratives. Eventually, the choices the reader makes end up highlighting the absence of any form of choice or control the protagonist is left with. This proves, once more, that by (re)citation Machado is able to depict (queer) intimate partner abuse in a better way, here namely, to show the cyclic nature of it.

So, to conclude, by using Judith Butler’s reading of “citationality” and applying it to Machado’s *In the Dream House*, I have demonstrated that with the tension between citing and misciting postmodern conventions, the author is able to represent abuse in a more nuanced way. In the chapter “*Dream House as Choose Your Own Adventure*”, it was argued that metalepsis and metafiction convey the lack of control and the cyclic nature of being in an abusive relationship. By (mis)citing, Machado creates agency for the persona she has created in her memoir who is able to gain some sense of control, even if it is only over the reader.

3.2 Exploring Folklore and fairytales.

3.2.1 introduction

Let us now explore another of the genres or narrative structures in this next part about folklore and fairy tales *In the Dream House*. There are many ways in which the book engages directly or indirectly with the fictional trope of folk tales and fantastical elements. For example, there are references to Lewis Carroll’s 1865 *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, when Machado’s persona cries a “pool of tears [of] nine feet high” (220) after “the woman in the dream house” breaks up with her over Skype. Alice is once more evoked when the nameless narrator shrinks “small, and then even smaller” (224) on a visit to the Art Institute of Chicago. In another chapter “*Dream House as Folktale Taxonomy*” (38-39), *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen is referenced in order to talk about the dangers of breaking silence. Additionally, an original fairy tale “The Queen and the Squid” (232-235) was added to the memoir as a means to talk about email encounters that happened in the author’s real life, but that could not be reported

that way since the emails were subjected to copyright laws. Machado herself describes the fairy tale as a “tool that I used to do the thing I wanted to do” in an interview with Passages North. Even though this implies authorial intent, it is also a way for the author to show how the narrator she has created uses citationality, in this case, vis-à-vis fairy tales, as a “tool” to play with the conventions of literary tropes to portray the complexities of a story of queer interpersonal partner violence. In order to better illustrate how Machado’s persona continuously uses fairy tales in her memoir, I will first focus on another case study, more specifically, one on the chapter “*Dream House as Bluebeard*”, and then I will analyse the copious use of footnotes that pertain to miscitation of folklore and fairytales.

3.2.2 “*Dream House as Bluebeard*”: a Case Study

For this case study, I will focus on the chapter “*Dream House as Bluebeard*” (66-67) which is one of the most striking examples of (mis)citation of folklore but also of Machado’s play with citationality throughout the memoir. In this analysis, I will look at how Machado uses the tale of Bluebeard and cites it but also slightly miscites it and rewrites it to construct a narrative that encapsulates the complex nature of queer intimate partner abuse.

In order to comprehend how Machado’s narrator plays with citationality in her version of the story of Bluebeard it is crucial to understand Perrault’s original story of Bluebeard: *Barbe Bleue* first published by Barbin in Paris in 1697 in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*. In Charles Perrault’s version, an extremely wealthy but horrifying, blue-bearded man marries a young girl who is disinclined to marry him since the many women he married before her were never found again. However, after meeting him for the first time, she warms up to him and his big house. Before leaving for a long journey, Bluebeard gives her the keys to every room of the house. She is free to roam every one of these rooms except for the study, for which she also had a key, of course. With her new husband out of sight, the new bride is unable to keep her curiosity at bay and opens the door of the study, where she is met with a horrifying scene: all of Bluebeard’s murdered wives. Even though she tries to control herself and keep her discovery a secret, upon

her husband's return he finds blood on the key, and her insubordination is revealed. Bluebeard wants to punish his newly wedded wife but fortunately, she is rescued by her older brothers who kill Bluebeard (Perrault 96-99). In the closing lines of his tales, Perrault highlights - in verse - the moral lesson that can be learned from his text. The moral claim for *Barbe Bleue*, in short, is that curiosity and temptation should be kept under control and that [women] should obey their husbands (Perrault 99). It is because of this emphasis on morals, which even gets a separate mention in the closing lines, that besides the examination of the effects of Machado's (mis)citation of the tale, I will also look at the change in morality.

To look at the change in morality in this adaptation of Bluebeard, it could be fruitful to look at other adaptations of the tale. Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" (1979) and Margaret Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg" (1983), like Machado, both transform Perrault's tale, departing from a feminist angle, which gives rise to a diverging morality from the original tale. These are but two of the innumerable feminist retellings of the tale, which is unsurprising since the moral of the story "scolds women for their inquisitiveness, which does not make sense since the story has just given the female protagonist the upper hand and a happy perspective after her husband's death, thus justifying that her curiosity was salutary", but more dangerously, his moral also "undermines the gravity of the husband's murderous intent by exonerating his male contemporaries of any possible inheritance of Bluebeard's sadistic traits" (Juez 8), making him an exception as the "supernatural" violent character that could never be a real man since he has a blue beard. And this is also precisely what Machado criticizes in the story. The narrator adds "Some scholars believe that Bluebeard's blue beard is a symbol of his supernatural nature; easier to accept than being brought to heel by a simple man. But isn't that the joke? He can be simple, and he doesn't have to be a man" (67). Here, the narrator critiques this aspect Brigitte Juez touches upon, namely, that Bluebeard is an exception both because of his beard and his violence. But the narrator in *In the Dream House* also inserts another critique of not just Perrault's story and moral but also "scholars" and by extension society as a whole who is so reluctant to comprehend that domestic abuse in relationships between women is very real and must be taken seriously.

But, contrary to Machado's retelling, Brigitte Juez argues that Carter and Atwood's narrators, "give an active voice and room for development to their female protagonists" which in turn "confers them a complexity of character that is remarkable no longer for their weaknesses, but for their wittiness and agency within their own experiences" (Juez 6). Making of the protagonist, i.e., the wife, a feminist "warrior", ready for revenge. I would also argue that in these retellings, the narrator's choice to give Bluebeard's wife agency actually makes the character of the wife herself defy Perrault's original moral since she no longer needs to keep her curiosity under control. Instead, she is rewarded for standing up for herself and reclaiming the power that was taken from her by her brutal husband. In these two retellings, you could say that the moral has shifted from "do not be so curious" to "do not let your husband have all the control over you, it could be dangerous". However, in the chapter from *In the Dream House*, the wife never obtains agency or ever really looks for it. When looking at the morality of this retelling it is clear that the dangers of curiosity are not really the main moral that could be taken away from this retelling. Instead, a discussion or rather a portrayal of the inner psychological processes of a "battered woman" is being pushed forward. More specifically it is the tension between staying silent and suffering the consequences and saying something and suffering the consequences that are at the forefront of this tale. The decision to stay quiet and deal with how her husband is behaving towards her is described as "mak[ing] logical sense" (67), but this "logic" is a very particular kind, namely, that of an abused woman in a very traumatic and distressing circumstance. So, in this Machadoian retelling, the moral deals with the dangers of breaking the silence of domestic abuse, while at the same time dealing with the exact opposite, namely, the dangers of staying silent.

So, when analysing how this moral on the dangers of silence/self-advocacy is being brought about in this tale, it is important to look at who is being criticized. Is this some type of victim blaming where the narrator is judging her "past self"? I would argue that it is not the case since, even though it is emphasized how the wife does not react to all the horrible things that are happening to her, it is the husband's actions

that are really foregrounded as the cause. The pronoun “she” is only ever used in a passive sense, making the husband the object of all the harm:

“When he told her her footfalls were too heavy for his liking, (...) when he fucked her while she wept (...) when he suggested she stop speaking, (...) when he left bruises on her arm (...) when he spoke to her like she was a dog or a child” (67).

This critique of the abuser is only reinforced by the increasing severity of the man’s actions. What also makes me think that this is absolutely not a case of victim blaming is the softness and empathy the narrator shows to the wife but by extension also to herself. In the closing lines, she states “sweet girl, sweet self, look how good you are; look how loyal, look how loved” (67). This once more emphasizes the need for validation, protection, and the traumatic response of a woman who is being abused. This is her “logic”. At the same time, this logic is shared with the reader as we get a closer look at Machado’s persona’s own mental state and functioning.

The narrator mirrors herself and her experiences to her wife and her mental processes by comparing herself explicitly “as I have” (66), but also does so in more indirect ways. For example, when citing a list of things “Bluebeard” has done to his wife, the list gets progressively detailed and cruel but also progressively adds elements from previous fragments of the book. The reader knows that the woman in the Dream House was told by her abusive girlfriend to “stop speaking”, and left “bruises on her arm”, which are also present in this list, making the comparison between Bluebeard’s bride and the narrator of the memoir extremely striking. With the narrator’s own insertion into the story of Bluebeard, and thus the miscitation of a familiar story to tell this “unfamiliar” narrative, the reader is brought closer to the narrator’s experiences. This is even more likely as it is assumed that the reader will know the story of Bluebeard, as little context is given for the story. The narrator even states that “we all know that was just the beginning” (66), implying that “we” as readers, are also informed on the ending of the fairytale. Moreover, bringing her tale closer to the

stories people know, gives the narrator legitimacy in the experience of being a queer domestic abuse survivor which is so often overlooked and pushed aside. This also shows a type of fear, of the narrator also of the wife in the tale of not being believed when making the extremely difficult step to break the silence.

By misciting and inserting herself into the story of Bluebeard and giving legitimacy to her experiences, the narrator is also able to portray the complex psychological state of mind and the dangerous cycle of silence of abuse victims. This specific passage reflects the contradicting idea that domestic abuse survivors are stuck on that they stay silent in order to stay safe when they are not safe in the relationship as it is, to begin with. Even though there should be some nuance added since breaking the silence might actually be a greater danger to their physical well-being.

But, contrary to Machado's retelling, Brigitte Juez argues that Carter and Atwood's narrators, "give an active voice and room for development to their female protagonists" which in turn "confers them a complexity of character that is remarkable no longer for their weaknesses, but for their wittiness and agency within their own experiences" (Juez 6). I would also argue that in these retellings, the narrator's choice to give Bluebeard's wife agency makes the character of the wife herself defy Perrault's original moral. She no longer needs to keep her curiosity under control. Instead, she is rewarded for standing up for herself and reclaiming the power that was taken from her by her brutal husband. In these two retellings, you could say that the moral has shifted from "do not be so curious" to "do not let your husband have all the control over you, it could be dangerous".

By contrast, while Machado also rewrites the story from a feminist angle, Machado's retelling has entirely different and even contrasting effects. In "*Dream House as Bluebeard*," the protagonist never gains agency, stands up for herself, or even seeks revenge. Rather, the very particular state of mind of the distressed wife stuck in this abusive relationship is depicted.

So, to conclude, altering or misciting this specific fairytale, "queers" the narrative since the story of Bluebeard is used as a "tool" as a means to, firstly, bring readers closer to the narrator's traumatic experiences by mirroring her to the protagonist of a familiar fairytale. And through this comparison to a

well-known story, the narrator's legitimacy is also established for both the reader and her. And lastly, through the (mis)citation of the story of Bluebeard, the text portrays the complex psychological distress and so-called "logical thinking" that prevails when having to deal with an abusive partner. There is a tension between wanting to break the silence and step out of the vicious, cyclic nature of domestic abuse, and trying to preserve one's "safety". Which is tragically ironic since the victims are not safe, to begin with.

3.2.3 (Mis)citing the "bible" of Folk-literature.

One of the most striking things in this memoir is the abundance of footnotes. These footnotes all cite and refer to the same text: the *Motif-index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* by Stith Thompson. This six-volume catalogue of motifs is considered a standard tool for the analysis of folk literature. The volumes are split up into 23 thematic categories, which makes it easy for the person using the index to find the correct label for a specific example. For example, the entry E102. Resuscitation by magic liquid contains the following subentries: E102.1. Resuscitation by magic milk and E102.2. Resuscitation by sprinkling ambrosia. A lengthier example is entry C423. Taboo: revealing the marvelous, which includes the subentries C423.1. Taboo: disclosing source of magic power, C423.2. Taboo: speaking of extraordinary sight, C423.3. Taboo: revealing experiences in other world, C423.4. Taboo: uttering secrets heard from spirits, C423.5. Taboo: revealing sacred mysteries, and C423.6. Taboo: telling children about lake monster. The categories Machado cites the most often in the entirety of the book are the types C (Motifs of Taboo) and T (Sex), which is unsurprising since these themes relate directly to the experiences of abused women. This is one of the ways the text uses the existing archive but slightly miscites it in order to serve Machado's narrative. For example, the narrator labels all the times that silence is imposed on her by referring to motif types S163: "Mutilation: cutting (tearing) out tongue" (38) and type C420.2, "Taboo: not to speak". The references to praised literary conventions in the text could be seen as "a means to build context around her story and find her experience mirrored in a dominant archive" (Rosell 52). In other words, by playing with standard conventions, the narrator speaks into the archival silence.

“Amalgamating pre-existing contexts becomes the vehicle through which to devise a new approach to tell this story” (Rosell 55). What also needs to be noted though, is that the narrator’s references to taboo motifs in the footnotes do not stop after the break-up with “the woman in the Dream House. Meaning that even though she might have escaped physically from the horrifying intimate partner abuse that happened in the Dream House, leaving the house mentally is not that simple. And it is precisely this metaphor of the “house” that will be discussed in the last part of my analysis.

It is also important to note the effect of defamiliarization that the extensive footnotes bring about for the reader. Clara Rosell stresses “the importance of this physical act of checking footnotes, of straying from the main body of the text to focus on smaller script at the bottom of the page, about a certain happening” (52). The reader is almost forced to take a step back and analyse the text in the same way that the narrator is reflecting on her past self. However, at the same time, the footnotes are also one of the only ways, except for emotional coherence, that the book forms one cohesive entity. Since, with all the fragmentation in the timeline, mental state, genre, and style, it is difficult to find stability in this memoir, these footnotes help bind it all together.

Additionally, it is interesting to see that in the acknowledgments of *In the Dream House*, the author chooses the words “my fairy-tale ending” (283) to talk about her life after the abusive relationship. Even though this is the author’s voice and less the persona that the author has created that was the narrator in the book, they are undeniably linked. This positive depiction of fairytales is in stark contrast with how fairy tales have been used in the rest of the memoir. While a “fairy-tale ending” is now seen as an ideal, the traumatic events of the memoir have largely been portrayed through the (mis)citation of gruesome fairytales. It is unclear if this specific choice of words needs to be read as a continuation of the text before the acknowledgments but, what is certain is that this addition hints at an even more complex approach to the (mis)citation of genre fiction. Fairytales and folk literature in this specific case.

So, in conclusion, I have thus, once more, applied Judith Butler’s concept of citationality to the memoir in order to discover the functioning of Machado’s text. When looking at the footnotes in *In the*

Dream House, it was argued that they build context for Machado's experiences in order to mirror them to the dominant archive. This, once more, is linked to the issue of the legitimacy of both the literary status and the lived experiences of battered women (as seen supra). Moreover, the footnotes, and more specifically the play on citationality in those footnotes, defamiliarize the reader who must consciously read the small script at the bottom of the page, which nudges them to reflect on the text alongside the narrator.

3.3 Exploring horror and the gothic.

3.3.1 intro

For the last part of my analysis, I will now explore (mis)citations of the gothic genre and horror in Carmen Maria Machado's memoir, the genre this author is actually the most famous for. Her short story collection *Her Body and Other Parties* was published in 2017, two years prior to the publication of *In the Dream House* and has themes relating to horror and gothic. Similarly, Machado's memoir has a dark undertone that extends to more than just the subject matter of the book. The formal features and conventions of both horror and gothic, which will be used interchangeably in this paper because of their many shared characteristics, are what make this memoir fit the genre(s). Houses are one of the most prominent motifs in horror and gothic literature. From haunted houses to mansions, authors have a field day using this common trope. But what is it that makes houses so appealing to them? The house metaphor is a very adequate tool to make the reader uneasy and to create an uncanny mood within the text. This is because often familiar aspects from the home, or the home itself, are made unfamiliar.

Another aspect that makes the house metaphor especially significant in a story about IPV is the concept of "dislocation". Machado explains that it is incredibly common for victims of domestic abuse to move to a new house, as the events begin to unfold. Unknowingly, victims are "uprooted from [their] support network" (81) and left alone and "made vulnerable by her circumstance, her isolation" (81). With her only ally being the abuser, she is left completely powerless with at the centre of their problems a house they cannot escape. Just like in this type of situation "the setting does its work" (81) in the book. The reader

is also made to feel trapped in a house. Additionally, the setting being a house is also quite straightforward since most types of abuse happen inside the home. Let us not forget IPV has long been called “domestic” abuse for a reason.

As a side note, it should also be added that the use of the house metaphor and the prevalence of (mis)citations of horror could also be done because of the intrinsic nature of the topic. It could be argued that the only possible way to tell such a violent and horrifying story, is to tell through the violent and horrifying genre that is horror.

The choice for the prevalence of the house metaphor in *In the Dream House* can also be explained in isolation to the horror aspect of it. In Jason Bryant’s article “The Meaning of Queer Home: Between Metaphor and Material”, it is also demonstrated how the American “queer subjectivity” arose in relation to the notion of the “queer home”. Shaping a personal memoir that is heaving with such “queer subjectivity” through the use of the house metaphor is a natural continuation of the “citationality” present around the subject.

It is also important to note that “queering” the genre of the gothic is nothing new. William Hughes and Andrew Smith argue in *Queering the Gothic*, an anthology they edited, that “Gothic has, in a sense, always been ‘queer’” (1). Since they reason that “the genre, until comparatively recently, has been characteristically perceived in criticism as being poised astride the uneasy cultural boundary that separates the acceptable and familiar from the troubling and different” (1). Therefore, the gothic, or by extension, the genre of horror in its entirety, is the perfect “tool” or a way for Machado to tell the story of the narrator that is also at a crossroad between what she knows is abuse and the love for her abuser. It is unsurprising then that to tell a queer story, Machado mostly gravitates towards an already established queer genre. In this genre, the author is less forced to miscite and to “queer” the standard conventions since they already are, in their essence, queer. However, it is still valuable to look at how Machado navigates the genre in her memoir because even though the “citationality” in those fragments of the book is less a case of “misciting”,

the way Machado uses and plays with the genre can still give us a more complete understanding of how references to common literary genres and tropes function in the text.

3.3.2 The house: a dream or a nightmare?

In order to look at the how horror cited in Machado's memoir, I will not conduct a case study on a specific chapter of the book, instead I will explore the "house metaphor" in the entire memoir. This metaphor is very explicitly present from the very beginning of the book. While it is the physical setting for the events that happen in the book, it is way more than that. Even though at the very beginning of the book the narrator goes out of her way to establish that the "Dream House" is "not a metaphor" (7). It is even the title of the chapter "Dream House as Not a Metaphor". But after reading the entirety of the book, it becomes very clear to the reader that it is in fact very much a metaphor. So why then would the narrator go to such lengths to say that it is not? First of all, telling the reader that something is not what they it is, already brings a type of uneasiness to the story. Stating that "the dream house is real" (7), makes the reader question the reliability of the narrator but at the same time, since this is an autobiographical work, the reader has no choice but to accept this statement as true. Because the events that happened did actually happen and the "Dream House" did exist, even though it may not have been called intimate partner violence at the time. Additionally, Machado's persona also establishes the mood of the entire book by stating that the Dream House is "as real as the book that you are holding in your hands, though slightly less terrifying" (7). By labelling the book as "terrifying", the reader gets a set of expectations that this is going to be a scary book, dealing with a difficult subject. This is, in a way, also a way to inscribe the book in the genre of horror. Even though, like mentioned before, this still remains a memoir.

With the tone being set for the rest of the memoir from these first lines, the reader slowly makes their way into the Dream House with the narrator. This is what can be called the "storyworld" of the narrative. At first, Carmen's persona is happy and excited to go live inside the Dream House. She even makes jokes about "U-Hauls-on-the-second-date-lesbians" (124) but living with a the volatile "woman in

the dream house” soon turns incredibly ghastly. She abuses and scars Carmen physically but mostly psychologically at an increasing rate after her move to the house. The narrator starts getting scared of her girlfriend but this manifests itself through a fear of the different rooms in the house. She starts avoiding rooms like the bedroom from which her present reflexive self warns her from “don’t go there” (16). After having lived with the woman and the abuse for a long time and the book has progressed a lot, the narrator dwells on the question “What does it mean for something to be haunted?” (146) in a chapter entitled “*Dream House as Haunted Mansion*”. The conclusion of this passage goes as follows:

“You were the sudden, inadvertent occupant of a place where bad things had happened. And then it occurs to you one day, standing in the living room, that you are this house’s ghost: you are the one wandering from room to room with no purpose.” (147)

Since the Dream House has been established as a haunted mansion in the title of this chapter and the entirety of the book is full of references to the gothic, it is quite natural that this haunted mansion would be in need of a ghost. But is, as is stated in the quote above, the abused woman really the ghost of this house? There seems to be a tension between who is haunted by the house but also who is the ghost. Even though the narrator suggest here that she is the ghost of the house, I would argue that is in fact the abuser that is haunting her, making of her, the “house’s ghost”. So, even though it is usually distinct texts or genres that the narrator is misciting, I would argue that this passage could be seen as a miscitation of herself. This is reinforced by the fact that after the split, the narrator keeps being haunted by the woman in the Dream House as she keeps imagining “where she might be”. She comes up with possibilities: “threatening [her] in the bedroom, weeping for [her] in the living room, pledging [her] undying love in the office” (242). So, even after her violent partner has left, she is still haunted by her. By Misciting the text, itself, the narrator plays with the conventions of the literary genres, and touching upon tropes like the

“unreliable narrator”. However, misciting herself in the memoir could also be, once again, one of the ways that Machado portrays a mentally instable and traumatised abuse victim.

So, to conclude, it has been shown how the house metaphor is a particularly valuable one for the type of narrative that Machado is presenting in her memoir. Not only because of the prevalence of the metaphor in the horror and gothic canon, but also because of the queer aspect of Machado’s narrative. Then, I argued that by misciting herself this time Machado still plays with narrative genres and tropes, like the unreliable narrator for example.

4. Conclusion

So, in this paper it was argued that in Carmen Maria Machado’s memoir *In the Dream House*, citations but also miscitations of distinct literary genres, conventions, and techniques, constructs a narrative that accurately encapsulates the complex nature of queer intimate partner abuse. By using Judith Butler’s concept of “citationality”, I analysed the references to postmodernism, folklore and fairytales and horror, to look at the effects of the fragmented exploration of narrative genres in the memoir. Firstly, postmodernist citations were analysed by conducting a case study on the chapter “Dream House as Choose Your Own Adventure”. From that analysis, it was concluded that through metalepsis and meta fictionality the reader is made to feel trapped in a cycle of domestic abuse, similar to the one the narrator is experiencing. By addressing the reader directly with the pronoun “you”, the reader is granted a more complex look into the narrator’s mental processes as a queer woman experiencing IPV. Additionally, through the metafictional character of the chapter, the text offers a reflexivity throughout the whole text. By giving the reader a false sense of choice and then completely stripping away any possibility of free will, the reader is made to feel exactly like the narrator; trapped. It is more specifically through playing with the conventions of postmodernism and through misciting some aspects, that the text is able to create this cyclic and oppressive effect.

Secondly, folklore and fairytales were explored through first analysing the chapter “Dream House as Bluebeard” and then also looking at the references to the *Motif-index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* by Stith Thompson. The case study of (mis)citations of Bluebeard resulted in the observation that the morality of the story was changed in the memoir and that the miscitation bring readers closer to the narrator’s traumatic experiences by mirroring her to the protagonist of a familiar fairytale. By making the unfamiliar familiar, the text portrays the - often irrational - thought patterns of a woman dealing with IPV. Additionally, mirroring of Bluebeard and Machado’s own abuser, an entry point to the archive is created that allows for a more diverse representation of IPV. In other words, through misciting Perrault, the abuser’s identity as a woman is affirmed and reclaimed. Meanwhile, the extensive footnotes that refer to Thompson’s Motif-index of Folk Literature serve another purpose. First, the act of reading these copious notes defamiliarize the reader which makes them think and reflect with the “present tense” narrator. Additionally, it was also concluded that to refer to this “bible” of folk literature, gave Machado legitimacy in both literary status and in the trauma of experiencing IPV in a queer relationship.

Finally, the gothic and horror were explored in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of the “house metaphor” in the memoir. By shifting from dream to nightmare, the Dream House slowly begins to become more than just the setting of the book. It becomes an extended metaphor for all the trauma that has trapped itself inside the narrator’s mind and body. Extending from the metaphor of the house, the metaphor of the abused woman being “haunted” by her partner and their violence is also established. To concluded you could say that sometimes the best way to tell a horrible story, is to cite and miscite from “horrible” literary genres, namely, horror.

The analysis of miscitations within three genres in this paper, resulted in a more complex understanding of the functioning of the text but also of the narrator’s personal mental state.

In a chapter on that reflects on the style of the memoir, the persona Machado has created for herself states “I broke the stories down because I was breaking down” (172). This quote directly ties in with my conclusion in two respects and can thus be read in two ways. First, what Machado’s narrator did in this memoir was a conscious choice of almost “over” exploring literary conventions and genres and “breaking [them] down”, which resulted in a rich and complex portrayal of intimate partner abuse in a relationship between two women. By “breaking down” and “queering” the literary canon, the narrator creates “agency” for herself and for the type of narrative that she is representing. But secondly, this quote can also be read as the mental trauma, which led the narrator to “break down” in a psychological sense, that was inherited by the abuse and that shines through. It is because of the narration through citation and miscitation that this complex psychological torment is made more tangibly for the reader. Additionally, it is important to also note that the fragmentation of the memoir into so many different genres as a whole, also has a defamiliarization effect on the reader. This, once again, mirrors the “fragmented” and chaotic state of mind of a IPV survivor trying to cope with what has happened to her.

Even though the analysis of the allusions to postmodernism, fairy tales and horror has been proven quite fruitful, a plethora of other genres and literary styles can be found in Machado’s memoir. Further research could expand on the wild array of genres that are present in *In the Dream House*. The fact that Machado’s memoir can also be read as “Bildungsroman” was not touched upon because of the scope and the focus of this paper but could be valuable to analyse, since it could explain the power imbalance between the women in the Dream house. Furthermore, a comparative approach to other memoirs and books that tackle this little represented subject of IPV in relationships between women could give a more complex view on how exactly “citationality” is used in these types of narratives overall, and not just in Machado’s books.

5. Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. "Making Feminist Points". *Feministkilljoys*. (2013)

Anderson, Kristin L. "Perpetrator or victim? Relationships between intimate partner violence and well-being." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64.4 (2002): 851-863.

Breiding, Matthew J. "Prevalence and characteristics of sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence victimization—National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011." *Morbidity and mortality weekly report. Surveillance summaries (Washington, DC: 2002)* 63.8 (2014): 1.

Bryant, Jason. "The meaning of queer home: Between metaphor and material." *Home Cultures* 12.3 (2015): 261-289.

Bussey-Chamberlain, Prudence. "'Every lover is a destroyer': queer abuse and experimental memoir in Melissa Febos' *Abandon Me* and Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House*." *Prose Studies* (2023): 1-20.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Taylor & Francis, 2011.

Butler, Judith. *Gender trouble*. routledge, 2002.

Caracciolo, Marco, and Gry Ulstein. "The Weird and the Meta in Jeff VanderMeer's *Dead Astronauts*." *Configurations* 30.1 (2022): 1-23.

Durfee, Alesha. "The use of structural intersectionality as a method to analyze how the domestic violence civil protective order process replicates inequality." *Violence against women* 27.5 (2021): 639-665.

Evaristo, Bernardine. *Girl, Woman, Other: A Novel (Booker Prize Winner)*. Grove Press, 2019.

Follingstad, Diane R. "Rethinking current approaches to psychological abuse: Conceptual and methodological issues." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 12.4 (2007): 439-458.

Henderson, Antonia JZ, et al. "When loving means hurting: An exploration of attachment and intimate abuse in a community sample." *Journal of family violence* 20 (2005): 219-230.

Howard, Jennifer. Interview by Krys Malcolm Belc. *Passages North*, 16 Sept. 2020, <https://www.passagesnorth.com/passagesnorthcom/2019/9/16/the-aboutness-an-interview-with-carmen-maria-machado>. Accessed August 14 2023.

Juez, Brigitte Le. "Curiosity Killed The... Woman: Modern Rewritings of "Bluebeard" in Literary Representations of Marital Abuse." *Transcultural Negotiations of Gender*. Springer, New Delhi, 2016. 3-13.

Kacandes, Irene. "Are you in the text?: The "literary performative" in postmodernist fiction." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13.2 (1993): 139-153.

Krishnan, Maya. "Dream House as Politics, Dream House as Art." Review of *In the Dream House*, by Carmen Maria Machado. *The Oxonian Review*.

Le Juez, Brigitte. "Curiosity Killed The... Woman: Modern Rewritings of "Bluebeard" in Literary Representations of Marital Abuse." *Transcultural Negotiations of Gender: Studies in (Be) longing* (2016): 3-13.

Long Chu, Andrea. "On liking women." *N Plus One* 30 (2018)

Lore, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Penguin Classics, 2018.

Machado, Carmen Maria. *In the dream house: A memoir*. Strange Light, 2019.

Machado, Carmen Maria. *Her Body and Other Parties: Stories*. Graywolf Press, 2017.

Perrault, Charles, "La Barbe Bleue." 1697. *Mémoires, Contes et Autres Oeuvres de Charles Perrault*, edited by Charles Athanase Walckenaer, Ligarán Éditions, 2016, pp. 96-99.

Purvis, June. "Using Primary Sources When Researching Women's History from a Feminist Perspective." *Women's History Review* 1.2 (1992): 273-306.

Rosell Castells, Clara Jane. "'The Dream House was never just the Dream House:' Unhousing, Domestic Abuse, and Archival Silence in Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* (2019)." (2022).

Slootmaeckers, Jef, and Lieven Migerode. "Fighting for connection: Patterns of intimate partner violence." *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy* 17.4 (2018): 294-312.

Spelman, Sinéad. "Carmen Maria Machado's Memoir 'In The Dream House': Exploring Same-Sex Female Intimate Partner Abuse Through Literary Tropes." *DEARCADH*: 42.

Thom, Kai Cheng. *I hope we choose love: A trans girl's notes from the end of the world*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2019.

Thompson, Stith. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature, Volume 4: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk Tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*. Vol. 4. Indiana University Press, 1955.

Whitaker, Daniel J., et al. "Differences in frequency of violence and reported injury between relationships with reciprocal and nonreciprocal intimate partner violence." *American journal of public health* 97.5 (2007): 941-947.